FESTUS AND THE BLESSED DAMOZEL

According to Hall Caine, Poe's *Raven* suggested to Rossetti the central idea of *The Blessed Damozel*. "I saw," said Rossetti, "that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and I determined to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearnings of the loved one in heaven." However, *The Raven* must have been merely a point of departure for Rossetti; in so far as the poem can be reduced to sources at all, we must look elsewhere than to Poe.

The relation of the poem to Dante can be treated summarily. It can be inferred from what Rossetti himself says that Dante is not the prime source: "When Hunt in his kind letter speaks of my Dantesque heavens, he refers to one or two of the poems the scene of which is laid in the celestial regions, and which I suppose he is pleased to think belong to the school of Dante." Certain details are in the manner of Dante. Yet, Italianate as the poem seems to be, it owes more to Italian painting than to Italian poetry. Pater's luminous comment certainly exaggerates the indebtedness to Dante:

"One of the peculiarities of *The Blessed Damozel* was a definiteness of sensible imagery, which seemed almost grotesque to some, and was strange, above all, in a theme so profoundly visionary. The gold bar of heaven from which she leaned, her hair yellow like ripe corn, are but examples of a general treatment, as naively detailed as the pictures of those early painters contemporary with Dante, who has shown a similar care for minute and definite imagery in his verse; there, too, in the very midst of profoundly mystic vision. Such definition of outline is indeed one among many points in which Rossetti resembles the great Italian poet, of whom, led to him at first by family circumstances, he was ever a lover."

In or about the year 1845 a young American, Charles Ware, first made Philip James Bailey's *Festus* known to Rossetti. The poem,


3 Kuhns, p. 212.

4 *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style*, pp. 215-216.

5 *Family Letters*, I, p. 89.
W. M. Rossetti tells us, "was greatly relished, read again and again." It was in fact one of the poet's rather miscellaneous youthful enthusiasms, and seems to have definitely influenced the development of *The Blessed Damozel*. One of the cardinal doctrines of *Festus* is that sentimental passion has claims absolutely valid on all levels of being, in heaven or on earth. The following passage, among others, may be taken as illustrative of this doctrine:

> Nothing will stand whose staple is not love;  
> The love of God, or man, or lovely woman;  
> The first is scarcely touched, the next scarce felt,  
> The third is desecrated; lift it up;  
> Redeem it, hallow it, blend the three in one  
> Great holy work.

Furthermore, over and over again Bailey adverts to the situation of the lover on earth or in hell and the beloved in heaven, in order to show how sentimental passion may penetrate the cosmos, and he treats the situation sometimes from the point of view of the lover below, sometimes from the point of view of the beloved above. In an early scene Lucifer says:

> But I have oft times heard mine angels call  
> Most piteously on their lost loves in Heaven;  
> And, as I suffer, I have seen them come;  
> Seen starlike faces peep between the clouds,  
> And Hell become a tolerable torment. (p. 38)

Here, as in Rossetti, the beloved maiden looks out and down from heaven upon the wretched one below. And again:

> This is a song supposed of one—  
> A fallen spirit—name unknown—  
> Fettered upon his fiery throne—  
> Calling on his once angel-love,  
> Who still remaineth true above. (p. 194)

One stanza of this song reminds us, however remotely, of the "ten years of years" and the "autumn fall of leaves" in the fourth stanza of *The Blessed Damozel*.

> Oh! many a cloud  
> Hath lift its wing,
And many a leaf
Hath clad the spring;
But there shall be thrice
The leaf and cloud
And thrice shall the world
Have worn her shroud,
Ere there's any like thee,
But where thou wilt be. (p. 195)

Festus and one of his loves, Angela, meet in “Another and a Better World,” and the same theme is treated at length from the point of view of the longing maiden in heaven. The following lines may well have had a direct influence on The Blessed Damozel:

**Festus.** . . . Shall I
Ever come here?

**Angela.** Thou mayest. I will pray for thee,
And watch thee.

**Festus.** Thou wilt have, then, need to weep. (p. 172)

**Angela.** But love can never die; from world to world,
Up the high wheel of heaven, it lives for aye.
Remember that I wait thee, hoping, here.
Life is the brief disunion of that nature
Which hath been one and the same in Heaven ere now,
And shall be yet again, renewed by Death.
Come to me when thou diest!

**Festus.** I will, I will.

**Angela.** Then, in each other’s arms, we will waft through space,
Spirit in spirit, one! or we will dwell
Among these immortal groves... (p. 173)

Even so does the Damozel pray, and weep, and long for her lover to come, and hope to

“lie i’ the shadow of
That living mystic tree.”

In the next scene, a mundane “Party and Entertainment,” Festus soliloquizes about his lost love. The following lines are worth quoting:

And, while thou leadest music and her lyre,
Like a sunbeam holden by its golden hair,
May I, too, mingling with the immortal choir,
Love thee, and worship God! what more may soul desire? (p. 200)

And loving as we two have loved
In spirit and in heart,
Whether to space or star removed,
God will not bid us part. (p. 202)

Of phrasal borrowings—or parallels—I have noted the following instances:

Bailey,

... She spake as with the voice
Of spherical harmony... (p. 253)

Rossetti,

... And now she spoke as when
The stars sang in their spheres.
Her voice was like the voice the stars
Had when they sang together.

Bailey,

... The sun's light
Floweth and ebbeth daily like the tides. (p. 63)

Rossetti,

Below the tides of day and night
The flame and darkness ridge...

I have before quoted a stanza from Bailey that faintly suggests
Rossetti's fourth stanza:

To one, it is ten years of years.
... Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she leaned o'er me—her hair
Fell all about my face. ...
Nothing: the autumn fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.

Compare also

... the thoughts of other days
. . . . . . . . .
Are falling gently on the memory
Like autumn leaves distained with dusky gold. (p. 296)

This simile is perhaps implicit in Rossetti's lines.

Two more rather remote parallels may be added here:

Bailey, Earth fluttered like a dead leaf in the blast. (p. 333)

Rossetti, ... the curled moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf.

Bailey, God's Son
Laid o'er the black abyss a bridge of light. (p. 394)

In Rossetti, ... the rampart of God's house

By God built over the sheer depth
The which is space begun
... lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.

Whether or not we admit direct verbal borrowing here—and I think the probability in some of the cases cited is very strong—it is evident that Rossetti's central idea is found highly developed in Bailey, and moreover that both poets use on occasion the same kind of cosmic imagery, visualize the interstellar spaces in much the same way. In Rossetti there is indeed a decorative use of religious imagery which is not found in Bailey, and also a studied curiousness and simplicity which is utterly alien to Bailey's turgid and grandiose style. *The Blessed Damozel* is invincibly original, and nothing that has been said here should be construed to mean that Rossetti's poem is not worth all the forty thousand lines of *Festus* put together. But it seems clear to probation, I think, that even though *The Raven* gave Rossetti the initial suggestion for the poem, and even though his Italian background gave him a certain amount of detail, his enthusiastic study of *Festus* markedly influenced his formulation of the central idea and the imagery by which he developed it.

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**AD IMPRIMENDUM SOLUM**

Before the evolution of a definite system of allowance of publication of books in England, and of a method of recording copyright in the registers of the Stationers' Company of London, it was customary to secure for certain works royal grants, or patents. It has been assumed that these were both allowances for publication and guarantees for the exclusive enjoyment of a property. The possession of such a patent was, in the early sixteenth century, frequently announced by the printing of the whole patent or, more commonly, a portion sufficient to show that a particular sort of royal privilege had been granted *ad imprimendum solum*. This phrase, so frequently met with in early sixteenth century books, has usually been taken to indicate a sole, or exclusive, printing right. But Mr. Alfred W. Pollard has recently proposed a new interpreta-