There seems to be no criterion for determining at what time of life a poet may be expected to accomplish his best work. There have been some who have, as it were, come into this life with their poetic fancies on the dead run and thus have been able to accomplish an immortality for themselves in an incredibly short time. Such singers were Marlowe, Cowley, Chatterton, and Keats. The rule, however, for the average poet seems to involve patient striving towards maturity. In spite of this fact it remains the habit of certain critics to dismiss with the title of precocity all early poems the subtle perfections of which are not readily to be explained. Perhaps it is easier to see the finger of God than to recognize the hand of Art. This point of view in criticism has frequently led to misinterpretation, if not of the poet’s work as a whole, at least of that part of it which is supposed to represent his first efforts.

From the time when Rosetti’s poetry first became an object for critical study, to the present day, “The Blessed Damozel” has furnished peculiar pleasure to those who delight in bandying the term genius. Thus Stopford Brooke in writing of this poem, says: “He was only twenty when he wrote it, and his art is as true and fine in it as in the best of the later sonnets, so swiftly does genius grow to its full height”. Hall Caine, before this was written, had said, “Perhaps Rossetti never did anything more beautiful than this little work of his twentieth year”. Others, finding it difficult to think of “The Blessed Damozel” as less than a prophecy, have made it illustrate the idea that “in his imaginative adventures Rossetti was always casting the horoscope of his life”. “In considering the poem of ‘The Blessed Damozel’,” says A. C. Benson, “the thought that the poem was written in early youth must always be attended by a certain wonder” And later another commentator with reference to this poem and “The Portrait”, says: “How

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1 Four Victorian Poets (N. Y., 1908), p. 184.

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strangely and sadly prophetic these poems appear to be! Written in his youth, they would seem to belong rather to the lonely years of his later life".\(^5\) Finally, A.D. Waller, the most recent student of this poem, rejects the theory of Rossetti's prescience but states that "'The Blessed Damozel', written before maturity had begun to confuse the aspirations of adolescence, has a calm perfection of its own... Recollection and imagination... have harmonized all inconsistencies, and made the poem lovelier in its subtle simplicity than anything Rossetti was afterwards to achieve".\(^6\)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ably seconded by his admiring brother, William Michael, has implicitly and explicitly fostered this notion that "The Blessed Damozel" represents a mysteriously precocious achievement. The poet prefixed the following announcement to the first edition of his poems in 1870: "Many poems in this volume were written between 1847 and 1853. Others are of a recent date, and a few belong to the intervening period. It has been thought unnecessary to specify the earlier work, as nothing is included which the author believes to be immature". This advertisement was repeated in the edition of 1881. Though this is a legitimate statement, it violates one of the articles in the trinity of truth, asserting, as it does, the truth and nothing but the truth, and yet, as we shall attempt to show, evading the whole truth. To be specific, Rossetti, without purposing a misrepresentation of facts, implied that such poems as "The Blessed Damozel", "The Portrait", "Ave", and "Staff and Scrip" were intellectually and poetically mature when first written. In the case of "The Blessed Damozel" he went so far as to tell Hall Caine that he had written it when eighteen and to add the surprising clause, "and have altered little since".\(^7\) With brotherly enthusiasm William Michael bolsters this idea in an expansive way, averring that "not as a translator only but also as an original poet, Rossetti's faculty was fully developed by 1847. One proof of that suffices—that he wrote 'The Blessed Damozel' before 12 May of that year, or in the nineteenth year of his age".\(^8\)

The primary purpose of this article is to show, by an examination of the numerous alterations through which "The Blessed Damozel"

\(^7\) Recollections, p. 125.
passed, that the perfect round of the poem, either as to content or form, was not realized until many years after the poem was first conceived. A further purpose is to prove that Rossetti in this poem has not cast the horoscope of his life, but rather that he has, by subtle and successive revisions, coloured the texture of the poem with biographical touches. Incidentally it may be noted that several writers have recognized the fact that "The Blessed Damozel" underwent a great deal of editing. William Sharp even compiled a list—inaccurate in detail—of the various readings of the poem. No one, however, has attempted to explain the significance of the changes in relation to the development of Rossetti both as man and as poet. A third object is to examine the influences on this poem.

Beginning with the third of my purposes, it is well to remember at the outset that Rossetti did not want to be regarded as an imitator, even, as we shall see, of his beloved Dante. Indeed his desire for originality has to a great extent circumvented the success of those critics who have a keen eye for parallel passages and who are determined to find imitation in the work of a young poet. It is necessary to mention a few of the "influential" poets who have been brought forward by various writers as having contributed this or that quality to the poem we are considering. Rossetti, himself, specifically called attention to the debt he owed Poe's "Raven". "I saw", he told Hall Caine, "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 yearning of the loved one in heaven". The very fact that the American poet sent him off this earth to find a scene for his poem, renders vain any endeavour to discover further analogies between "The Raven" and "The Blessed Damozel".

9 D. G. R. A Record and a Study (London, 1882), p. 339. There is a limited discussion of the variants in an article by R. L. Tyrrell, "Revision of 'The Blessed Damozel'", Academy (1904), 70: 356. Also the edition of "The Blessed Damozel" printed by T. B. Mosher (1901), Portland, Me., contains all the variants of the published versions.


11 See, however, Kurt Horn's discussion of this point in Zur Entstehungsgeschichte von Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Dichtungen (Bernau, 1909), pp. 12-14. He quotes these lines from "The Raven","Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore,
and concludes that "Rossetti führt nun vom Standpunkt des 'distant
Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel"

Rossetti certainly did not intend to throw critics off the track of his true sources. He was doubtless thinking, not of the first drafts of "The Blessed Damozel", but of the subsequent versions in which he had bent every effort to make the poem completely his own. Feeling—rightly, I think—that his labours were successfully carried out, he honestly disclaimed, by inference, all influences save that of Poe. To prove that he was essentially correct in this opinion is the purpose of the following brief review of what different commentators have had to say concerning the influence of various poets on "The Blessed Damozel".

William Sharp suggests Coleridge. Joseph Knight also thinks of Coleridge and calls attention to Musset's Chanson de Fortunio as furnishing a parallel—a dubious one—for a pair of Rossetti's lines. A. C. Benson sees in the poem a suggestion of "The Ancient Mariner". It is possible to feel the inspiring ghost of William Blake hovered near. It is not difficult to think of Christopher Smart as having furnished his bit. Mégroz points to Cuillo D'Alcamo's "Lover and his Lady" as having provided the meter and rhythm for this poem. All of these are minor claims, for the most part representing individual impressions. With these should probably be ranked the claim for Goethe.

The cases for Dante, Shelley, and Keats are more important because they are definitely documented with parallel passages. One might expect Dante's influence to be the greatest of all. It is well to recall, however, Rossetti's reaction to Leigh Hunt's observation that the heavens of "The Blessed Damozel" are Dantesque. Apparently this remark struck a sensitive spot in Rossetti, for when called upon by his Aunt Charlotte to explain the term 'Dantesque' as applied to his poems, he replied: "Where Hunt, Aidenn' aus die 'sainted maiden' (oder 'blessed damozel') in seiner Dichtung ein". Obviously this adds very little to Rossetti's own statement of the case.

12 See Life of Rossetti (London, 1887), p. 116. The lines he attempts to match are: Musset—Qu'elle est blonde
   Comme les blés.
   Rossetti—Her hair that lay along her back
   Was yellow like ripe corn.

13 Rossetti (N. Y., 1904), p. 115.


15 See Family Letters, I, 122-123.
K. L. Knickerbocker 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 are written in a kind of Gothic manner which I suppose he is pleased to think belongs to the school of Dante'.

Recent critics have been inclined to question the sincerity of this statement. I see no valid reason for impugning this testimony. It is safe to say, in any case, and fairly easy to prove that, no matter how much like Dante the first versions of Rossetti's poem were, the later redactions are made definitely less Dantesque. This may well represent a perfectly conscious effort on Rossetti's part. Therefore, Rossetti himself—who knew his Dante well enough to be a good judge in such a matter—probably thought, after he had revised his poem, that what he had allowed to stand was proof against the charge of having borrowed from the great Italian poet. But sometimes poets are mistaken. Kurt Horn, followed by A. D. Waller, has attempted to demonstrate Rossetti's specific indebtedness to Dante. Let us examine, briefly, the findings.

Reducing "The Blessed Damozel" to its components, we may consider the relation each part bears to Dante's work. First, there is the general situation of a loved maiden gone to heaven. Very likely this comes from the Vita Nuova. It should be remembered though, that Rossetti said he put his maiden in heaven because of the surpassing quality of Poe's treatment of earthly longing. Secondly, there are the conceptions of the main characters, the Blessed Damozel herself and her lover. Kurt Horn says that "Rossettis Blessed Damozel heisst Beatrice . . . die liebliche Jungfrau aus Dante's Jugendwerk". But Waller, though he is attempting to strengthen the belief in Dante's influence, admits that "in any case, our Damozel is unlike Dante's Beatrice" for "she seems to be overcome by a nostalgia della terra"; whereas Beatrice is a true creature of heaven. The lover on earth in "The Blessed Damozel" certainly has nothing in common with Dante unless it is an "idealisation of love, and the corresponding self-abasement of the lover". Later, in an analysis of the revisions of Rossetti's poem, we shall attempt to show that this idealization of love and self-abasement of the lover is in Rossetti essentially.

17 Ibid., II, 38. The other poem which Rossetti thought might contain a hint of "Dantesque heavens" could have been either "Ave" or "The Portrait".

18 Ibid., p. 18.

different from what it is in Dante. (See foot-note 41.) Thirdly, there is the heaven of “The Blessed Damozel”. It is Dantesque in only one stanza and that stanza was eliminated in the second published version of the poem. Fourthly, there is the Rossettian cosmos which is definitely unlike the conception of Dante. Surely one goes beyond the limit of legitimate parallels when one compares, as Kurt Horn and Waller do, the following passages. In the first, Dante, with Beatrice in the eighth sphere, looks back from whence he came and says,

\[
\text{Col viso ritornai per tutte equante}
\le
\text{le sette spere, e vidi questo globo}
\text{tal, ch’ io sorrisi del suo vil sembiante.}\]

Waller compares this with these lines in “The Blessed Damozel”:

\[
\text{as low as where this earth}
\text{Spins like a fretful midge.}
\]

Fifthly, there is the symbolism of the lilies, the white rose, and the seven stars. As Waller points out, Rossetti’s use of these could have been prompted by his knowledge of the Bible. Sixthly, there is the idea that “lovers retain their human warmth even ‘in l’alto cielo’”. This, says Waller, is not from Dante but from one of the other early Italian poets, probably Cino da Pistoia. But this is not an unusual idea. One recalls Milton speaking through Raphael:

\[
\text{what if Earth}
\text{Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein}
\text{Each to other like more than on Earth is thought!}
\]

And Browning’s lines are still more specific:

\[
\text{O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,}
\text{And with God be the rest.}\]

Finally, no one has ever said that the style of “The Blessed Damozel” resembles Dante’s. It is significant that, in spite of persistent searching for them, not one passage from Dante finds a definite verbal parallel in “The Blessed Damozel”.

The extent of Shelley’s influence as evinced in the relation between “Queen Mab” and “The Blessed Damozel” is very slight even if all that is claimed for it by Horn, followed by Waller, is

\[\text{20} \text{Paradiso, 22, 133-135.}
\]
\[\text{21} \text{Paradise Lost, V, 574-576.}
\]
\[\text{22} \text{Prospice.}\]
K. L. Knickerbocker

granted. In Shelley's poem, from "overhanging battlements" can be seen the universe,

    Countless and unending orbs
    In mazy motion intermingled.23

The earth is

    a little light
    That twinkled in the misty distance.24

Rossetti may have remembered these passages. To find a parallel for the first quotation one must go to the intermediate version of "The Blessed Damozel" which appeared in The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine in 1856. Here occur the lines,

    And still she bow'd above the vast
    Waste sea of worlds that swarm.

The similarity of the second quotation to Rossetti's "fretful midge" is not significant. When Rossetti's maiden looks at the earth from a place beyond the farthest star, it is impossible it should seem more than a "little light" or a "midge". The poet might be expected to imagine that for himself.

Mr. Hill Shine has found two indications of Keatsian influence in "The Blessed Damozel". He points to the resemblance between Endymion, II, 810-821 and "The Blessed Damozel", ll. 84-85, 91-94, 103-106. The relationship between these passages may be accidental,25 but it seems possible at least that the lines from Endymion aided Rossetti in realizing part of the situation in his poem. Mr. Shine's citation of a parallel in descriptive phraseology is much less convincing. The lines from "The Eve of St. Agnes"—

her vespers done
Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one—

are quoted as having suggested this realistic, Pre-Raphaelite touch in "The Blessed Damozel",

    And still she bowed herself and stooped
    Out of the circling charm;
    Until her bosom must have made
    The bar she leaned on warm.26

23 II, 73-74.
24 II, 83-84.
25 See A. D. Waller, op. cit., p. 133.
26 See "The Influence of Keats upon Rossetti", Englische Studien, 61: 194
Rossetti’s “The Blessed Damozel”

I suppose it must remain a matter of opinion whether or not a poet as sensuous as Rossetti was, needed a suggestion as to the effect of “maidens’s bodily temperature” on “precious metals or jewels”. I prefer to think of this as at least a dubious parallel.

This analysis of the poetic influences which have been thought to have contributed to the making of “The Blessed Damozel” has, I think, made it clear that Rossetti was remarkably successful in avoiding anything that might be called imitative. No one has ever been more careful to shun a possible charge of plagiarism. When William Michael sent a poem of his, “Mrs. Holmes Grey”, to his brother for comment, Gabriel’s answer contained, first of all, an indication of the similarity existing between two lines of Keats’s “Eve of St. Mark” and the opening of the younger Rossetti’s poem. He then proceeded to gentle admonition: “Though of course the statement of a fact from observation cannot even be a reminiscence of what has been done before, still I think it is perhaps as well not to have at the very outset a line which some people might manage to draw conclusions from”.27

Lucy Rossetti, wife to William Michael, committed the error of transmitting a manuscript copy of “The White Ship” to her father for perusal and received a rebuke from the author of the poem, couched as follows: “It occurs to me to write you a line as to the White Ship. I was most happy that it should be sent to your Father, but I think it very needful it should not be shown to others. I find the ideas and even phrases of poetry get so soon caught up that a thing shown in manuscript is actually liable to charges of plagiarism when it appears, owing to what it has already furnished others”.28 And in this vein he continues for another full paragraph. Perhaps the most significant instance of this sort of sensitiveness occurs in relation to Browning. It may have an indirect bearing on Rossetti’s strange interpretation of “Fifine at the Fair” as being a premeditated slur on him.

Writing to his brother a few months prior to the publication of the first edition of his poems, Rossetti says: “There is a very vexatious point connected with this sonnet [“The Choice”] which

and 202 (1926-27). The italics above are Mr. Shine’s. The verbal ‘parallel’ was pointed out before by Miss Villard in her pamphlet, The Influence of Keats on Tennyson and Rossetti (St. Etienne, 1914), p. 69 ff.

27 Family Letters, II, 64. Letter dated 8 October, 1849.

was one reason for my thinking of omitting the three. The idea, 'They die not, never having lived', is identical with the one at the close of Browning's 'In a Gondola'. I know that I had never then read that poem, and that on first reading it this annoying fact struck me at once; but then this is not known to the world. The point is just what is wanted and not possible to alter. There is a similar case in the 'Nocturn' . . . 'Lamps of an auspicious soul' stood in my last correction (made long ago) 'pellucid', which is much finer. But lately in the Ring and the Book I came on pellucid soul applied to Caponsacchi, and the inevitable charge of plagiarism struck me at once as impending whenever my poem should be printed. There is also in the Ring and the Book 'Pale frail wife' which interferes in the same way with 'pale frail mist' of my "New Year's Burden", also of course written long before. But this I left".29 The scholar who drudges away hours only to obtain a result already neatly summed by another investigator, may feel sympathy for Rossetti. Any poet would have been vexed under the circumstances. For this poet who in his rambles about Penkhill—the postmark of the letter from which the above passage was taken—had looked with "unnatural fascination" into the black granite depths of a chasm as if it beckoned to an easy freedom from a too burdensome life, any irritation was capable of being magnified into distortion.30 But this was a particular affront. The parallels in Browning's poetry that Rossetti noted in the letter to his brother quoted above were exposing him to a charge which, from the first to the last of his life, he most feared. And he had hit squarely upon one of the most soul-rankling points of attack in Buchanan's Fleshly School of Poetry in which he is described as an "emasculated Browning". Only a slight mental twist was needed after this to give Rossetti reason to regard Browning as his sworn enemy.

29 Ibid., II, 210. Letter dated 27 August, 1869. There are two other references to the sonnet referred to in this letter. The sonnet is the first of the three in a sequence called The Choice, included now as 71, 72, and 73 of The House of Life. See letters to William Michael dated respectively 21 August, 1869 and 15 September, 1869. In the latter, Gabriel in a postscript says: "I still have a grudge to the three sonnets called The Choice. Do you feel sure they ought to be in?" "Pellucid soul" gave way to "translucent soul".

30 This story of Rossetti's temptation is told in Rossetti, His Life and Work by Evelyn Waugh (N. Y., 1928), p. 181.
That twist seems to have been supplied with ample motivation by "Fifine at the Fair"\textsuperscript{31}.

Perhaps I have strayed far in my attempt to show that Rossetti was ever on the \textit{qui vive} to detect in his own work any signs of imitation. That is why it is safe to say that correspondences found between his work and that of other poets are generally to be considered accidental—as was the case with the Browning parallels. For one may be sure that the more keenly Rossetti felt the presence of an influencing genius, the more carefully he disguised his promptings. "His vivid, intense individuality burnt up the possibility of imitation"\textsuperscript{32}.

Now, as was pointed out earlier in this article, "The Blessed Damozel" is not a static thing to be reckoned among Rossetti's juvenilia. The maturing of the poet's mind is reflected in the revisions of this poem. Whereas the "\textsc{Fundamental Brainwork}"—as Rossetti might have called it in vociferous tones—is apparent in the first version that is still accessible, the subtle identification of Rossetti as the earthly lover in the piece is lacking—an identification which it is possible to make in later versions. As we shall show, there are a number of other significant changes that reflect the deepening and widening of the poet's experience.

To begin with, there are extant five distinct versions of "The Blessed Damozel". The earliest of these is a manuscript of the poem in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City\textsuperscript{33}. As yet this version remains unpublished\textsuperscript{34}. The first redaction of the poem occurred in 1850 just preceding the publication of the poem in the Pre-Raphaelite manifesto, \textit{The Germ}. In addition to numerous minor changes, five completely new stanzas were added at this time. Later Rossetti considered a great number of these alterations ill-advised and, consequently, went about the job of altering his

\textsuperscript{31} For a detailed account of the Browning-Rossetti relationship see, in this issue of \textit{Studies in Philology}, Professor DeVane's interesting article on "The Harlot and the Thoughtful Young Man". What I have said may be taken as supplementary to his more thorough-going study.

\textsuperscript{32} Stopford Brooke, op. cit., p. 161.

\textsuperscript{33} My thanks are due to Miss Belle da Costa Greene, Director of the Morgan Library, for permission to consult this manuscript.

\textsuperscript{34} I have been informed that the Morgan Library intends to sponsor an edition of "The Blessed Damozel" which will include besides reprints of the versions of the poem known hitherto, a facsimile of the Morgan manuscript.
alterations. The second set of revisions was made with a view to re-publication in 1856 in The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine. In extent and significance these rank as of first importance. The overhauling given the poem in 1869 brought it practically to its present form. The fifth stage consisted of some slight changes affecting some half-dozen lines. In all, every stanza in the poem, save one, was revised in some manner. Only by remembering that the final form of "Jenny" contained but fifty lines of the original draft, can one understand what Rossetti meant when he said "The Blessed Damozel" had been "altered little" since he first wrote it.

In order to discuss these diverse emendations with some degree of clarity it is necessary to specify certain heads under which the various changes fall. We shall be guided by principles which Rossetti professed as having guided him in making the corrections to his poems. The lodestar of his revisions is indicated in a prose article written in 1871, less than a year after the publication of the first volume of his original poems. "Above all ideal personalities", he says, "with which the poet must learn to identify himself, there is one supremely real which is the most imperative of all; namely, that of his reader." Rossetti practised this principle consistently and ever kept the practical needs of his readers in mind. This renders paramount the necessity of making not only the plan of the whole poem clear but also of making the details cling together with perfect coherence. In the case of "The Blessed Damozel" there was never any difficulty as to the general idea meant to be conveyed. There were, on the other hand, some alien elements in single verses and stanzas.

A parenthetical word may be said here concerning the Morgan manuscript. The fact that it exists is, I believe, generally unknown.

55 Stanza 18. Almost every one of Rossetti's poems was subjected to this sort of painstaking revision, yet Waller says "Self-criticism was not among the many gifts the gods lavished upon Rossetti"! Op. cit., p. 129.

56 The letters of Rossetti to his brother, written between 21 August and 21 September, 1869, have been particularly valuable in establishing Rossetti's criteria for self-criticism. Letters to Swinburne and others are also illuminating in this respect. See Mr. T. J. Wise's Catalogue of the Ashley Library, vol. IV, and A Swinburne Library. The Introduction to P. F. Baum's edition of The House of Life (Cambridge, 1928) contains an interesting sketch of Rossetti's method of composition.

William Michael states that “no [manuscript] copy appears now to be extant”, and none of the commentators seem to be cognizant of any form of the poem earlier than the 1850 or _Germ_ version. The manuscript consists of a single sheet of bluish-grey paper measuring 12 15/16 x 7 15/16 inches. The poem is written on one side of the paper in two parallel columns and is spaced so as to fit exactly the single sheet. The reverse is blank. At the foot of the right-hand column appear the initials ‘D. G. R.’ and the date ‘1847’. The manuscript is a fair copy, there being only occasional signs of erasure and no evidence of revision, such as words or lines struck through.

The poem itself consists of twenty stanzas. This is the shortest of versions that are known. Only 70 of the 120 lines in the manuscript are retained without change in _The Germ_ (1850); whereas in _The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine_ (1856) 86 lines of the first version are carried over intact. Three lines more from this first text were restored to the final redaction. It is apparent simply from these statistics that Rossetti’s rules of composition included one admonishing him to discard but not to forget what he discarded. He hoarded lines in true Popesque fashion; yet he always knew when to sacrifice single lines or whole stanzas for the good of the total effect of the poem—something Pope knew less about.

The secret of how perfect articulation was achieved in the final text of “The Blessed Damozel” is revealed to a great extent by an analysis of the individual stanzas which were added to and deleted from previous versions. We have first, then, to consider the six new stanzas which were sprinkled into the redaction of

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38 _Family Letters_, I, 156.

39 The fact that this poem is initialled in this manner as early as 1847 creates a problem not easily solved. William Michael—who may well be mistaken—states that it was 1849 before Rossetti changed his name from Gabriel Charles to Dante Gabriel. Why then should the poet have used the initials ‘D. G. R.’ if he actually produced this manuscript of “The Blessed Damozel” in 1847? Many explanations are possible but all will, I believe, prove hypothetical until more facts are unearthed. It will perhaps suffice to say here that the manuscript is certainly genuine and that the text apparently represents the earliest extant version of the poem. For William Michael’s statement concerning Rossetti’s age when he changed his name, see _Family Letters_, II, 47.
Only two of the six were retained in subsequent editions of the poem. The remaining four were omitted from the version of 1856. The first of these was removed from between stanzas 6 and 7 of the poem as it appears in the Collected Works. It was evidently removed, not because it was bad poetry, but because it contradicts an important idea in the poem as a whole. It read:

But in those tracts, with her, it was
The peace of utter light
And silence. For no breeze may stir
Along the steady flight
Of seraphim; no echo there
Beyond all depth and height.

The idea of heaven as a vacuum of silence clashes with such phrases as "God's choristers", "angels ... shall sing", and the whole conception of heaven as an anticipatory state of spiritualized gossip. In addition, as Waller has suggested, this stanza recalls strongly the final cantos of The Divine Comedy—a reason sufficient for its removal. Two of the other omitted stanzas came after 16. They were discarded completely in 1856 and Rossetti restored the stanza for which these two had been substituted in 1850. These six verses are of much subsequent interest and will be dealt with in a moment. In 1869 a more mature conception of the idea embodied in these two stanzas from the Germ was concentrated into six lines and thus re-instated. They read in 1850 as follows:

(Alas! to her wise simple mind
These things were all but known
Before: they trembled on her sense,—
Her voice had caught their tone.
Alas for lonely Heaven! Alas
For life wrung out alone!

Alas, and though the end were reached? . . .
Was thy part understood
Or borne in trust. And for her sake
Shall this too be found good?—
May the close lips that know not prayer
Praise ever, though they would?)

40 William Michael has preserved a record of the addition of only four of these stanzas. See Pre-Raphaelite Diaries (London, 1900), pp. 250-251.
41 Waller compares—op. cit.—very curiously, I think, this last stanza with a Ballata which Rossetti translates as follows:

Even as an angel, up at his great height
Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel"

The fear of the earthly lover that his scepticism will prevail against a union with the one gone on before, is an answer to the Damozel's lines:

Have I not prayed in Heaven?—on earth
   Lord, Lord has he not pray'd?

It was possibly the tinge of moralizing apparent in lines 2 and 3 of the second stanza which caused Rossetti to substitute these verses:

   (Alas! we two, we two, thou say'st!
      Yea, one wast thou with me
      That once of old. But shall God lift
      To endless unity
      The soul whose likeness with thy soul
      Was but its love for thee?)

This was added in 1869. Consequently it must be remembered that "The Blessed Damozel" who had been a boy's poetic conception originally, had passed into the beautiful reality of Elizabeth Siddal by 1856, and had then been metamorphosed into a conscience-stricken dream of a guiltless and wronged wife by 1869. One must feel a cry of personal anguish in the line,

   Alas! we two, we two, thou say'st!

quite foreign to the first three versions of the poem.

The train of circumstances which first linked Elizabeth Siddal with the figure of "The Blessed Damozel" is queer and fascinating. In 1856 Rossetti had reached the peak of his affection for his enchanting model. Her loveliness was a kind of genius. It was more. With it she embodied even an advance on the Poesque con-

Standing amid the light,
   Becometh blessed by only seeing God:
So, though I be a simple earthly wight,
   Yet none the less I might,
Beholding her who is my heart's dear load,
   Be blessed and in the spirit soar abroad.
Such power abideth in that gracious one.

See Collected Works, II, 100. Rossetti's earthly lover is a sceptic and is afraid he cannot overcome his scepticism even though the possible reward might be reunion with his loved one. The lover in the other poem is confident he may become blessed simply by gazing on his "gracious one". If there is a connection here, I fail to see it. This hardly represents on the part of the Blessed Damozel's lover an Italianate idealisation of love and self-abasement of the lover.
ception of poetry—the idea that the death of a beautiful woman strikes the heart of poetry’s best subject-matter—for she represented the more poignant spectacle of beauty in decay. And Rossetti spent his hours sketching his “Guggums” in every conceivable pose until, as Brown records, he had a “drawer full... God knows how many”.42 “The Blessed Damozel” was up for revision before publication in The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine. As recorded above, two stanzas from The Germ were eliminated. This one from the 1847 version took their place:

(Ah sweet! Just now, in that bird’s song
Strove not her accents there
Fain to be hearken’d? When those bells
Possess’d the mid-day air,
Was she not stepping to my side
Down all the trembling stair?)48

As such, these verses have very little significance except as expressing a healthy and somewhat blithe occultism. Thirteen years later, however, they whispered through an unhealthy mind—a mind tainted by sleeping potions, whisky, and haunting memories—and played it a fantastic trick. Rossetti had gone to Penkhill for his health. While he was there he revived an interest in poetry. He wrote some new poems, and attempted to reconstruct, from memory, some old ones that had been buried with his wife. His friends persuaded him to retrieve the interred manuscript, which he did on his return to London. In the meantime he worked on revisions of old poems, among them “The Blessed Damozel”. One day, as Mr. Waugh has it, “Scott and Rossetti were walking in a lane when they came upon a live chaffinch which, far from being afraid of them, exhibited marked signs of friendliness. Rossetti picked it up, and it nestled in his hand and caressed him with its beak. Scott was inclined to make light of the incident, but was checked by Rossetti’s intense gravity as he said, ‘It is the soul of my wife come to revisit me’. He carried the bird back to the castle with the utmost reverence, but what became of it is not recorded. Scott

48 In 1847 the first and last lines of this stanza read as follows:

(Alas! just now, in that bird’s song,
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Upon a silver stair?)
also mentions, however, that at the time Rossetti found the bird, the great bell at the castle gates was violently rung, and was still ringing when the servant arrived and found no one there, or near there." The stanza just quoted from "The Blessed Damozel" must have been linked by Rossetti with this incident. And does not this event find poignant expression in the revision of the last three and a half lines of this stanza, now made to read:

When those bells
Possess'd the mid-day air,
Strove not her steps to reach my side
Down all the echoing stair? 

And does not the preceding stanza, included now for the first time, take on a significance even greater than the remarkable simile it contains?—

The sun was gone now; the curled moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf; and now
She spoke through the still weather.
Her voice was like the voice the stars
Had when they sang together.

In fact, as it appears to us, this poem which had its inception as a form of poetic exercise, had by 1869 become freighted with biographical details. And perhaps he who can say, as Buchanan did say, that "it does not contain one single note of sorrow", simply has not read aright these verses that express more earthly and genuine than heavenly and specious longing.

The fourth stanza to be removed from the 1856 version occurred after 22. It read as follows:

"Yea, verily; when he is come
We will do thus and thus:
Till this my vigil seem quite strange

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44 Rossetti, His Life and Works (N. Y., 1928), p. 151. The Italics are mine.

45 This assumption does not seem to me to be invalidated by the fact that Rossetti wrote to his brother implying that he found the last two lines of the 1856 version of this stanza objectionable because of "stepping" in the first of these followed by "trembling" in the latter. See Family Letters, II, 208.

And almost fabulous;
We two will live at once, one life;
And peace shall be with us.”

The jingling sort of rhythm, the indirection and meaninglessness of the second line, were enough to cause the elimination of the whole stanza. Then, too, the idea of heaven as localized Peace, had changed to a conception of heaven where lovers meet to live as they did on earth. This is further illustrated in the revisions to stanza 22:

Ms. Version (1847) 47
“ There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me:—
Only to live as once on earth
At peace,—only to be
As then awhile, forever now
Together, I and he.”

The Germ (1850)
“ There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me:—
To have more blessing than on earth
In nowise; but to be
As then we were,—being as then
At peace. Yea, verily.

Now note that the 1869 version conveys a subtly different sense through the substitution of “With love” for the “At peace” of the three previous versions. Heaven is a place for lovers with earthly passions; it is not inanely peaceful.

The alterations considered thus far were dictated primarily by events happening in Rossetti's own life. While writing his own love affair—the most important one—into this poem, he at the same time, as has probably been observed, took care of the work from the point of view of the artist. Still to be discussed are a number of relatively minor changes reflecting the zeal for perfection that pervaded the spirit of this poet.

The title for the poem in 1847 was “The Blessed Damsel”. This fact would have delighted those critics who objected to the ‘affectation’ of the word ‘Damozel’. And the first two lines of the first stanza originally read:

The blessed damsel leaned against
The silver bar of Heaven.

47 This also is the version of The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine.
All subsequent versions of the title and of these lines were amended to read as they do in the final edition. Two other lines of the opening stanza gave Rossetti trouble. In 1847 they read:

Her eyes knew more of rest and shade
Than a deep water, even.

Though it is the second of these lines that is obviously weak, Rossetti in 1850 preserved it and changed the first line, now made to read:

Her blue grave eyes were deeper much.

In 1856 he restored the first line of the 1847 version and corrected the second line:

Her eyes knew more of rest and shade
Than waters stilled at even.

Only the most fastidious poet would have thought it necessary to improve such lines by making them more direct, as,

Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even.

He has gained the advantage, too, of Poesque alliteration in the combination “deeper . . . depth”. Another pair of lines that had to await the 1869 redaction before being rounded into perfect form, is that one at the end of the second stanza, which ran:

And her hair, lying down her back,
Was yellow like ripe corn.

The first verse was too prosaic for figurative use. It became regular to the point of rippling—an excellent quality for hair—as,

Her hair that lay along her back.

These two revisions are typical of Rossetti’s efforts to achieve the effect of simple directness and to gain the utmost from the music inherent in meter.

There is one stanza which appears to have teased the poet into tampering with it each time he saw it. It is interesting to observe that he finally had to give the idea contained in it a new twist in order to round it into the form he thought necessary. It is stanza 7. The various alterations are, I think, worth recording.

Manuscript (1847) and Germ (1850)—

Heard hardly, some of her new friends
Playing at holy games,
Spake, gentle-mouthed, among themselves
Their virginal chaste name. [sic]
K. L. Knickerbocker

O. and C. Magazine (1856)—
She scarcely heard her sweet new friends
Playing at holy games,
Softly they spake among themselves
Their virginal chaste names.

Poems (1870)—
Heard hardly some of her new friends
Amid their loving games,
Softly they spake among themselves
Their virginal chaste names.

Collected Poems (1881)—
Around her, lovers, newly met
In joy no sorrow claims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their rapturous new names.

Tauchnitz Edition (1882)—
Around her, lovers, newly met
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their heart-remembered names.

Little comment is needed. It may, however, be noted that "new friends" and "sweet new friends" of the first three versions gave way to "lovers, newly met"; the damozel, as conceived by the earthly lover, could have no friends to make incomplete her yearning. "Holy games" and "loving games" certainly did not connote what Rossetti intended to say. The final form of the last line subtly blends the thought of this whole stanza into the larger conception of the poem. "Virginal chaste names" or "rapturous new names" are not of any interest to one who leans from "the gold bar of heaven"; "heart-remembered names" are.

We may end by glancing at some of the changes of single words. For example, in the first verse of stanza 5 "rampart" is substituted for "terrace"; in the first verse of stanza 6, "It [the sun] lies from Heaven" becomes "It lies in Heaven"; in the first verse of stanza 9, "fix'd place of Heaven" replaces "fixt lull of Heaven"; in the fifth line of stanza 23, "angels in strong level flight" takes the place of "angels in strong level lapse". Each of these revisions represents a twofold effort aiming at greater clarity and greater congruity. "Terrace", representing a sloping surface, is not so congruous with "the gold bar of Heaven" as "rampart"—suggesting a jutting, horizontal surface—is. The sun must be a part of the empyrean; only the earth spins outside
Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel"

the heavenly pale. "Lull" was of a piece with the notion of heaven as a vacuum, which notion, as shown above, caused the elimination of a whole stanza and extensive alterations in several other verses. Even angels could not move in "strong level lapse" since "lapse" means a "slipping or gradual falling".48

It has been my attempt to give some idea of the manner in which "The Blessed Damozel" evolved from its original ingenuous state to its later more sophisticated form. This evolution I endeavored to link with the maturing of Rossetti as a man and as an artist. I believe that Robert Buchanan spoke an unintended truth and compliment at the same time, when he said Rossetti's "poems all look as if they had taken a great deal of trouble".49 One certainly cannot feel that the trouble Rossetti took was in vain. If, as Sharp rightly says, "there is nothing immature in the composition from first to last",50 it is because the composition grew as its author grew. Threading the maze of Rossetti's inward life as a poem, picture, reality, and dream "The Blessed Damozel" may be regarded as the keynote and symbol of this poet-painter's career.

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48 William Michael Rossetti objected to this emendation on the grounds of what he called "the visual impression" conveyed by "lapse". One feels that his brother knew better. See Rossetti Papers, ed. W. M. Rossetti (London, 1903), p. 466.