because Hester and Dimmesdale have not yet given Boston its due need. Pearl does so, and is no longer required to languish there but is permitted to mingle the morality which Boston has imposed upon her with the materiality which Boston unhealthily denies.

For *The Scarlet Letter* to have lived up to the theory of romance's ethical demands, then, its Boston would have to have been much more like the Salem which Hawthorne saw from his windows. He did not regret, he tells us, his initial entrance into his duties as Surveyor of Customs. Because he had worked at Brook Farm, mingled with Channing and Thoreau, and been influenced by Emerson and Longfellow, it was a healthy thing for him to get into active life. The Inspector was a necessary antidote for Alcott. He tells us this immediately before expressing his sense of his inability to write a good book about the life around him, in order to absolve the daily activity of the custom house from responsibility for its apparent sterility, a responsibility which, he believed, actually resided in his perception of it. *The Scarlet Letter* disappoints him because the materiality of the life in it is, ultimately, too close to an objectification of the hidden lives of its characters so that his interpretation of the actual and the imaginary is not matched by its ethical counterpart.

This supposed shortcoming of *The Scarlet Letter* explains why Hawthorne's subsequent romances took the direction they did. After his first full-length work, the historical past ceases to be the scene in which Hawthorne set his work, because he wished his scene to provide more of the materiality which entered into his view of the good life than it did in *The Scarlet Letter*. The past, of course, remained an important element of that good life, and, therefore, of the romance's subject-matter, but it was subordinated to the demands of the immediate world of the work, and shaped but did not constitute it. The living are very much in control of *The House of the Seven Gables* as its reaches its resolution.

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The Narrator of "The Blessed Damozel"

"The Blessed Damozel" has for so long been etherealized as the expression of "longing of the [dead lady] in heaven for her lover
on earth”¹ that one is tempted merely to bow reverently before this apotheosis of the poem and pass quietly on. But if, as Lafcadio Hearn suggests,² Rossetti wished only to portray a sad maiden awaiting her lover in heaven, why did he introduce that earthly lover as the “I” character? What function does the ostensible narrator serve if this is simply a tale of maidenly woe? To regard the earthly lover’s comments as nothing more than artificial devices of contrast or dramatic pathos admits a serious structural weakness into the poem by implying that the parentheses serve no truly integral function. I believe a clearer view of the nature and the shortcomings of “The Blessed Damozel” can be achieved by recognizing that they are not only organic, but that they present the true nucleus of the poem.

W. M. Rossetti in his *Memoir* furnishes an insight into the genesis of “The Blessed Damozel”:

In 1881 Rossetti gave Mr. Caine an account of its origin, as deriving from his perusal and admiration of Edgar Poe’s *Raven*. “I saw” (this is Mr. Caine’s version of Rossetti’s statement) “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.” Along with *The Raven*, other poems by Poe . . . were a deep well of delight to Rossetti in all these years.³

Even assuming Caine’s version of Rossetti’s thirty-four-year-old recollection to be accurate, we need not accept it as the definition of the poem’s subject. We have no more reason for adopting Rossetti’s perhaps imagined, certainly memory-hazed notion of his poem’s origins than we have for accepting Poe’s rationalization of the composition of “The Raven.”

But the evidence certainly shows that Rossetti did associate Poe with “The Blessed Damozel.” The aesthetic principle underlying Rossetti’s poem is very likely Poe’s:

The death . . . of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such a topic are those of the bereaved lover.

(“The Philosophy of Composition”)

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² “This is the story of a woman in heaven, speaking of the man she loved on earth. She is waiting for him. She watches every new soul that comes to heaven, hoping that it may be the soul of her lover. While waiting thus, she talks to herself about what she will do to make her lover happy when he comes, how she will show him all the beautiful things in heaven, and will introduce him to the holy saints and angels. That is all.” *Ibid.*
³ *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Boston, 1895), I, 107.
The second part of this dictum is often ignored, but it is actually the keystone of Poe’s poetics: the death of beauty—Lenore, Ulalume—furnishes merely the situation for many poems, while the true subject is the mental state of the bereaved lover, the progress of disenchantment or delusion in the mind of the speaker.

The parenthetical comments in “The Blessed Damozel” chronicle just this type of disintegration of rationality. Immediately after the opening picture of the Damozel, the lover bemoans his loneliness and permits a first tempting suggestion of supernatural direct contact with her to creep into his mind. Rationally he rejects the hoped-for miracle as illusion; he is still willing (or able) to accept the evidence of his senses as final (ll. 19-23). But seven stanzas later he wonders if other natural phenomena—bird’s song and bells—cannot actually be what he dreams they are—her voice, her step (ll. 61-66). Now he does not reject outright the whisperings of delusion; he has passed from initial rational disbelief to chimerical hopefulness.

When we next hear him directly he has fallen victim to his desires and is actually talking with the imagined presence of his love: “Alas! We two, we two, thou say’st! (l. 97). The splinter of irrepressible yearning has swerved his mind from its groove, and it madly flies through a land of vision drawing even the senses after. When we hear him at poem’s end he sees not leaves but “her smile;” he hears not bells and a bird’s song but “her tears.” The passage of the lover from sane doubt of his vision to irrational belief is completed.

Clearly the poem is, as it were, framed by these parentheses; but more than that, the picture of heaven and the Damozel is presented precisely as the bereaved lover we have seen in the parentheses would envision it. The vision can be regarded entirely as the grieving and lonely lover’s projection, embodying his physical earthly preoccupations mingled with normal religious and spiritual ideals: the lady is pictured as she appeared upon earth—but a day dead, warming the gold bar with her physical presence; heaven is seen as a corporeal place of peace and permanence, with distinct geographical relationships to the lover’s bitter and mutable earth; the life after is viewed primarily as a time for reunion of lovers.

On the borderline of delusion, the lover transmutes his longing for heaven into the Damozel’s powerful yearning toward earth. And, desire and suggestion having breached the levees of rationality, the lover permits himself to be swept into imagining his lady’s words. As his sensory impressions had been converted into voices and steps, so
his own thoughts turn into the Damozel's speech; he projects into her mouth a combination of his own desires and his own fears. The lover tries to separate his fear from his hope by restricting doubt to his own mind, where it may interrupt the happy vision (ll. 97-102), but not permitting it to intrude into his imagined lady's speech, where it will destroy all. Fear does, however, creep into the vision (e.g. ll. 72, 102), and when the Damozel reaches her request to Christ (ll. 127-132), in effect the lover's request through her—the pure maiden's—mediation, the tone has grown desperate as anxiety effaces the brief hope.

The melancholy which by now pervades the poem is not merely that of temporary separation to be assuaged by eternal bliss, but that of serious doubt of bliss. The lover mistrusts his qualifications for heaven, perhaps even disbelieves the heaven he wishes exists, and his projection of the lady of course reflects these doubts. The key final passage, which Hearn "explains" as the lady's disappointment that the angels do not now bring her lover's soul, cannot be so simply and happily glossed. The last lines are bitter and sad, they leave one depressed and hopeless; and they conclude the poem by focussing upon the central subject—the earthly lover. The Damozel has put on a false front for the angels, smiling as a soul in heaven should, as her lover hopes she can. But left alone she is no longer able to maintain the front and collapses into the tears which lie at her heart and at the heart of her dreamer. His delusion, now complete, no longer can support a wish-fulfilling vision of heaven, but dissolves into anxious tears utterly and morosely terrestrial.

We can see how the entire poem, not merely the parentheses, is concerned with the bereaved lover's mind. "The Blessed Damozel" carries Poe's examination of the deluded lover to the point at which the delusion—the Damozel in heaven—is presented as the reality, and the reality—the grieving lover—as a passing, shadowy parenthesis.

This perhaps extreme statement does, I believe, have the virtue of focussing our attention on the poem's true core: the dramatic picture of delusion. Such an analysis also helps silence charges of sentimentality and vulgarity. Such failings have been located not in the vehicle but in the tenor as it was conceived by critics like Hearn—the "sentimentality" of the sad maiden and the "vulgarity" of a too-corporeal heaven are really products of interpretation, not of the poem itself.

The view I have proposed does, however, open "The Blessed
"Damozel" to another kind of complaint. In looking at the whole piece, I fear it must be admitted that consistency in tone and direction are perhaps more apparent in the analysis than in the poem. Rossetti, like his speaker, evidently became fascinated with the lady's sad speech and concentrated more upon its pathos than upon its correlation with the narrator's state of mind. Thus he failed to formulate the poem consistently either as a Poesque study in delusion or as the story of a sad spirit in heaven. That the core of the poem is dramatic, I think we have seen; that the drama tends to be eclipsed by the bright vision of the Damozel, I think we cannot finally contradict.  

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Fall and Winter in Frost

The basic analogical implications of fall and winter have provided Robert Frost with a ready-made scale upon which to play innumerable metaphorical variations. His recurrent use of imagery from these seasons indicates a pattern of form and theme in which the end-seasons reveal what Kenneth Burke calls "implicit equations" and "associational clusters." And we may, by examining this fall-winter pattern, as Burke points out, "find . . . what goes with what within this cluster, what kinds of acts and images and personalities and situations go with his notions of heroism, villainy, consolation, despair, etc."  

Almost one-third of Frost's total poetic output employs fall or winter imagery. (Of only twenty-three spring or summer poems, eight have end-season overtones, and another four are concerned with mowing which may be considered analogous to the fall harvest.)

Frost's most common device for using the seasons is an outer-inner weather metaphor. The outer, the seasons and their particular aspects, reflects the inner, man's psychological and spiritual state. The changes signified in fall and the struggles imaged in winter frequently find resolution in an ironic action or an epigrammatic decision. In "Will-

4 I wish to thank Professor William C. DeVane of Yale University for his kind aid and encouragement in the development of this paper.
5 Philosophy of Literary Form (Baton Rouge, 1941), p. 20.
6 Based on examination of Complete Poems (New York, 1949). All page references are to this volume.

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