Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “The Blessed Damozel” (1847; 1850)

The blessed damozel lean’d out
From the gold bar of Heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters still’d at even;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary’s gift,
For service meetly worn;
Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn.

Her seemed she scarce had been a day
One of God’s choristers;
The wonder was not yet quite gone
From that still look of hers;
Albeit, to them she left, her day
Had counted as ten years.

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

It was the rampart of God’s house
That she was standing on;
By God built over the sheer depth
The which is Space begun;
So high, that looking downward thence
She scarce could see the sun.
It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth
Spins like a fretful midge.

Around her, lovers, newly met
‘Mid deathless love’s acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their heart-remember’d names;
And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames.

And still she bow’d herself and stoop’d
Out of the circling charm;
Until her bosom must have made
The bar she lean’d on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.

From the fix’d place of Heaven she saw
Time like a pulse shake fierce
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still strove
Within the gulf to pierce
Its path; and now she spoke as when
The stars sang in their spheres.

The sun was gone now; the curl’d 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.

(Ah sweet! Even 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,
Strove not her steps to reach my side
Down all the echoing stair?)
“I wish that he were come to me,
   For he will come,” she said.
“Have I not pray’d in Heaven?—on earth,
   Lord, Lord, has he not pray’d?
Are not two prayers a perfect strength
   And shall I feel afraid?

“When round his head the aureole clings,
   And he is cloth’d in white,
I’ll take his hand and go with him
   To the deep wells of light;
As unto a stream we will step down,
   And bathe there in God’s sight.

“We two will stand beside that shrine,
   Occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps are stirr’d continually
   With prayer sent up to God;
And see our old prayers, granted, melt
   Each like a little cloud.

“We two will lie i’ the shadow of
   That living mystic tree
Within whose secret growth the Dove
   Is sometimes felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes touch
   Saith His Name audibly.

“And I myself will teach to him,
   I myself, lying so,
The songs I sing here; which his voice
   Shall pause in, hush’d and slow,
And find some knowledge at each pause,
   Or some new thing to know.”

(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?)
“We two,” she said, “will seek the groves
Where the lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose names
Are five sweet symphonies,
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret and Rosalys.

“Circlewise sit they, with bound locks
And foreheads garlanded;
Into the fine cloth white like flame
Weaving the golden thread,
To fashion the birth-robes for them
Who are just born, being dead.

“He shall fear, haply, and be dumb:
Then will I lay my cheek
To his, and tell about our love,
Not once abash’d or weak:
And the dear Mother will approve
My pride, and let me speak.

“Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,
To Him round whom all souls
Kneel, the clear-rang’d unnumber’d heads
Bow’d with their aureoles:
And angels meeting us shall sing
To their citherns and citoles.

“There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me:--
Only to live as once on earth
With Love,--only to be,
As then awhile, for ever now
Together, I and he.”

She gaz’d and listen’d and then said,
Less sad of speech than mild.--
“All this is when he comes.” She ceas’d.
The light thrill’d towards her, fill’d
With angels in strong level flight.
Her eyes pray’d, and she smil’d.
(I saw her smile.) But soon their path was vague in distant spheres:
And then she cast her arms along the golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands, and wept. (I heard her tears.)