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POTENTIAL MEDIATION ROUTINES AND FEAR
OF SPIRITUAL REGRESSION IN DANTE GABRIEL
ROSSETTI'S THE BLESSED DAMOZEL (1847-1881):
A LITERARY AND PICTORIAL ANALYSIS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The imparadised woman in *The Blessed Damozel* undergoes a traumatic transition -from longing to desperation- in a setting seemingly indifferent to her plight. The multiple perspectives and influences in the poem have received sustained attention from critics -and progressively drawn its interpretation away from strictly linear or derivative views. The bond between the verbal and the visual dimensions in this work -resulting from Rossetti's execution of two companion oils between 1871 and 1881- has not always received the same amount of attention from researchers, who have sometimes disregarded the dual nature of these works by leaning more on the original literary piece or one of the corresponding visual renditions. Combining poetic exegesis and pictorial analysis, we seek to reassert the functional relevance and iconic status of the damsel within the dominant percipient's vision: the failed communication routine between her and the earthly lover does not ruin her mediatory aspirations, but puts her -tellingly- on the verge of spiritual regression through incapacitating anxiety. Seemingly defeated, she refers, like an emblem, to realities beyond herself: the eclectic reuse of constituents in devotional art contributes to the creation of an artistic - rather than purely religious- message concerning the conflict between faith and scepticism, the limitations of our human senses when

attempting to grasp God's nature and, more specifically, the dissonance between Divine and human love. Rossetti seems to address and redefine the latter, in fact, as an inviting way of questioning the post-mortem separation between body and spirit, which he prefers viewing as a supernatural fusion of both components –an unavoidable step prior to the mystical experience of meeting God.

2. DEVELOPMENT

The initial version of *The Blessed Damozel* was completed several weeks before Dante Gabriel Rossetti's nineteenth birthday on 12th May 1847. In November that same year, it was included in the compilation *Songs of the Art Catholic*, sent for feedback to William Bell Scott, who labelled the young artist as a precocious genius while also praising his imagination and mastery at rhythm (McGann 2021). Two decades later, Rossetti would claim that the poem was "fully mature when first written" (Knickerbocker, 1932, p. 486; Sanford, 1938, p. 485), seemingly overlooking the not too numerous -but relevant- modifications it underwent since its publication in February 1850 at *The Germ*, the short-lived literary magazine of the Pre-Raphaelites. This is the earliest surviving form of the poem. Its popularity grew steadily over the years, especially after receiving positive criticism from Tennyson and the Brownings. The republication of the text in 1856 at *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* provided a basis for the 1870 edition, which, having added more modifications, may be seen as a *definitive* version, despite the minor alterations spotted in the 1873 and 1881 volumes of Rossetti's poetry (Peterson, 1973).

Rossetti's dual orientation (as a painter and poet) was not too clear to those outside his closest circle of friends and acquaintances. Most mid-Victorians saw him as a poet -his fame being on par with that of his sister Christina. The retrospective exhibitions held shortly after his death in 1882 brought to the spotlight his extensive pictorial production, until then mainly aimed at private collectors (Marsh, 1992 (1989), p. 25). This also marked a turning point in the treatment of the most controversial aspects in his private life as a commercial 'lure' to

capitalize on a variety of reproductions in the form of engravings and platinotypes. Interestingly enough, the poem, which laid the foundations of Rossetti's poetic fame and inspired not only a moving musical score by Debussy (1889) but also a variety of colourful visual renditions (Burne-Jones, 1857; Kenyon Cox, 1886; Byam Shaw, 1895), gives voice to feelings of frustration, anxiety and "perpetually unfulfilled desire" (Mahoney, 2010, p. 231) while also addressing the limits of perception, the irretrievability of the past, or the breach between reality and what is hoped for.

Rossetti composed the poem at a period of personal and professional instability: his father had to leave his teaching post at Trinity College due to his deteriorating health, and the whole family teamed together to compensate for the lost income. The young Gabriel, who had enrolled at the Royal Academy School and was still hesitant between becoming a poet or a painter, received funds from his aunt, Charlotte Polidori, to continue his studies, but he could not avoid feeling guilty and frustrated about his inability to help. He often turned to reading as a way of escape, and it was *The Raven* which seemingly sparked the composition of *The Blessed Damozel* (McKillop, 1919; Doughty, 1949; Bentley, 1982; Marsh, 1999; Treuherz, Prettejohn & Becker, 2003). In Rossetti's own words, Edgar Allan Poe "had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth" (Hall Caine, 1882, p. 284), and so he was determined to focus on the wistful longing of an imparadised woman -i.e. to "give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in Heaven" (Marsh, 1999, p. 23; Doughty, 1949, p. 34-36). Rather than an aim in itself, this link provided a valuable starting point for Rossetti's own creative hook. Additional hypotheses about potential sources and influences have foregrounded the quality of his literary input and provided evidence of his eclecticism. Indeed, Rossetti did not write in a vacuum: he deliberately chose the ballad form he recalled from Scott's *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-1807), Coleridge's *Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), Keats' *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (1819) or Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* (1832) and rendered tribute to an antiquarian style which fitted the mediaeval atmosphere that he wanted to capture. McGann nonetheless suggests that Rossetti

borrowed this ballad form from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Poet's Vow* (it makes full sense, then, that he should provide an autograph of *The Blessed Damozel* –in the Pierpont Manuscript– as a gift to the Brownings in 1855) (see (Rossetti Archive, 2008) and Peterson, 1973)

Already in 1972, Brown complained that Rossetti's poem had long been "entombed in a shroud of misunderstanding" (273) and that it could not be reduced to a sum of influences and conjectures about its 'sources'. In the early 1980s, Rees claimed that it could not be assessed in derivative terms, as a reversal of Poe's composition, and that it went beyond a mere change of viewpoint (1981, p. 63). In Burch's view (1979), whatever Rossetti's primal inspiration was, his medieval landscape of light and beauty is far from the land of shadows in Poe's work. A 2009 article by Mesa-Villar tackled the influence that Rossetti's 'mystical maiden' profile received from Poe, added that the lady in *The Blessed Damozel* cannot be identified as Lenore, and claimed that her position rather seems to carry an echo of Nesace in *Al-Aaraf* (1829), where the Boston-born writer also explored the possibility of reuniting two lovers in the afterlife (148). Again, though, there could be no complete identification between these two female referents. The debate on possible influences has persisted for well over a century: McKillop highlighted a set of similarities with Philip Bailey's *Festus*, such as certain lexical choices, a few patterns in the description of Heaven and the claim that "sentimental passion is absolutely valid on all levels of being" (1919, p. 97). On his part, Knickerbocker (1939, p. 489-490) perceived an echo of Dante's *Paradiso* in Rossetti's description of Heaven but acknowledged that the removal of one stanza in the 1856 edition weakened this effect. In Bentley's view (1982), numerological clues and the intense amorous bond between the male and female referents in the poem may remind readers of Dante, but one should not forget that Rossetti himself criticized Leigh Hunt's allusion to his 'Dantesque heavens' (Megroz 1929, p. 169) and replied that his aim was to create a gothic (i.e. mediæval-esque) atmosphere. According to Marsh (1999, p. 503) and Cibelli (2010, p. 99) the hybrid setting and circular patterns in the poem carry an echo of Sandro Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* (1501), one of Rossetti's favourite paintings.

Critics also disagree over whether the poem was constructed in a linear or multi-perspectivist fashion, and how this determines who the dominant percipient is –i.e. the visionary poet, the imparadised woman or the earthbound lover. Supporters of a more narrative reading (Doughty, 1949; Bentley, 1982) see the first of these as the main agent, transcending the limits of human perception and so granting readers access to the unseen glories of Heaven (Piasecka 2014, p. 74). As Bose explains, the perceptual process starts when he “locks onto the damozel” in the first lines of the poem. Two male speakers would therefore be found (1995, p. 152). Meanwhile, those who view the poem as an exercise in perspective (Lauter, 1958; Brown, 1972; Spector, 1973; Leng, 1990) see the earthbound lover as the main conscience, and so everything would be generated by his unattainable desire to bring her back to life (Lauter, 1958, p. 346; Mahoney, 2010, p. 220). The poem would therefore begin with the poet’s own identification as a bereaved lover who in the attempt to depict “what remains stubbornly distant” (Mahoney, 2010, p. 220), creates a fantasy within another fantasy. Both male entities are a continuum of the same persona (Bose, 1995, p. 152).

Neither the first nor the second of these readings lacks problems, though: the narrative reading seems to overlook an occasional overlap or “point of intersection” (Leng, 1990, p. 14) between the visionary poet’s and the earthly lover’s voices. However, this could be the result of a not-fully-perfect implementation of perspective on Rossetti’s part, or an attempt to use this entity as an ‘off-screen voice’ guiding viewers from the heavenly to the earthly realms and from the damozel’s conscience to that of her lover. This dilemma might be solved by stating that the lines attributed to the poet and the ones dealing with the lady’s reverie correspond in fact to the earthly lover. This two-fold entity would nevertheless put into question the relevance of the damozel’s perspective, since her words would be other than her own, and she would therefore remain merely a voiceless icon, a fabrication of the earthbound lover’s mind, trying to reconstruct a beautified image of her lost beloved. While this stands in consonance with the reality of a bereavement process, we also believe that this would get in open conflict with the original idea that Rossetti aimed at focusing on the damozel’s

perspective as a counterpoint to the one found in Poe's *The Raven*—that is, on the lady's own hopes, rather than her partner's. Indeed, the whole poem and its related universe is the creation of a male mind—Rossetti's—but, accepting the whole of it as stemming from the male lover seems to corner the lady's relevance in the poem. Supporters of the perspectivist reading claim that the inclusion of the predella, featuring the earthbound lover, in the companion painting is proof that Rossetti saw this character and the visionary poet as the same person. However, this stance seems to ignore that Rossetti's original plan did not include the predella, which was added at the request of his patron, William Graham (Marsh, 1999). As first executed by the artist, the painting could support both readings—and, in fact, the damozel seems to stand at the centre, both in the poem and the painting, seemingly as *vero icono* of adoration.

Our paper examines the disruptive effect that the contradictions of afterlife experience have on Rossetti's damozel as a tool enabling him to trigger reader reflection on the possibility of bridging the gap between body and soul, which he saw as the highest form of perfection—of the sort attributed to God in religious discourse. When we first set eyes on her, she is leaning on one of the balustrades of Heaven, seemingly indulging in the vistas of the immense void separating Heaven and earth. In keeping with the 'antiquarian flavour' that he wanted to attain (Knickerbocker, 1932, p. 500), Rossetti chose the Anglo-Norman noun *damozel* and the Catholic adjective *blessed* (Bentley, 1982, p. 32). The absence of her earthly name could be seen as a way of casting an air of mystery upon her, suggesting a current lack of identity, or signalling the assumption of a new one—'simply' as a blessed being: a righteous, virtuous lady almost verging on sanctity, with the ability of interceding for others (i.e. her earthly lover, for instance), and rewarded with eternal bliss. Rossetti probably borrowed the idea from Swedenborg: once in the "spiritual world, (s)he drops (her) baptismal name, and the name of (her) family and is named according to quality" (Stanley, 2003, p. 121). The term also draws a link to the Virgin Mary, whom the damozel sees as a close, sympathetic entity, a source of inspiration and a model to follow. As McGann puts it, the damozel is "a reworking of the *figura* of an enthroned Madonna" (2000, p. 155). Her deep blue eyes and white

garments carry an echo of Marian colours, and her crown of stars may also remind readers of the Queen of Heaven. Concerning floral adjuncts, the poem mentions a white rose (standing for charm and wisdom) as a gift from the Virgin Mary, and Rossetti's choice of the lily as the damozel's floral emblem carries a dual meaning: as a symbol of beauty, purity and majesty (Kirkby, 2011, p. 129-131), it reinforces the connection between the two; however, being also a symbol of mystical surrender to God's will (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994 (1969), p. 609) it draws a sharp contrast with the damozel's bitter resignation at the end of the poetic piece.

Rossetti's conscious act of borrowing and variation provided an air of legitimacy, a supportive scaffold, and enough freedom to claim the resulting female construct as his own. Another link is established with the *donna angelicata*: like Beatrice or Fiammetta, the damozel has parted from this world before her time but has also left behind a trail of brilliance inviting her earthbound lover to become a better version of himself. Quoting Waller, Knickerbocker (1939, p. 489-490) nonetheless claims that, unlike Beatrice, the damozel is "neither unaware of her lover, nor does she pretend to be". If we regarded her and her reverie merely as a product of the earthbound lover's mind, her final defeat would epitomize, in Dijkstra's terms, a 'Patmorean fantasy of total masculine control' over an utterly dependent angelic creature (1986, p. 19). In this case, the damozel would indeed exist only in his fantasy, but her qualities would still excel his own. We should not forget either that Rossetti's focus seems to be not so much on the male lover's feelings, but on the imparadised woman's plight. Probably out of her own initiative, she adopts a mediating role to "build a bridge between humanity and the divine [...] to intercede on behalf of those longing to transcend the limits of human existence" (Ready, 2008, p. 152). This would clearly justify the label 'blessed' attached to this female entity. Her apparent failure does not stem from her lack of compromise or effort, but from her lover's disbelief, self-sabotaging (rather than 'self-abasement') and inability to follow her example. It is precisely this and the (equally) apparent indifference of the guardian angels at the celestial court that boost up her anxiety and fear of nonexistence. Without faith,

her iconic function in this private religion bringing together the principles of body and spirit would have no sense, and neither would Rossetti's programmatic plan without the support of his audience. She is therefore afraid of falling into oblivion due to a lack of compromise on part of the one she held as her main supporter.

Ten years have passed since her death, but these seem to her like a few days: at this transitional stage, her mind partly operates as it did on earth (Swedenborg 1900, p. 281-282) and her memories stir up unresolved feelings about her lover's absence. This is particularly noticeable when compared to the interaction and communication routines between other imparadised beings or, in later versions of the poem, the embracing and kissing of newly-met couples before mounting up to God like tongues of fire. In keeping with Swedenborg's theory of soul mates, both lovers feel unable to make progress due to this lack of co-presence. This crisis is reflected in the symbolic value of number seven, which stands for "a fresh start after a cycle has completed [...]" but also indicates the passing from the known to the unknown" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994, p. 859, 862). For Rose, her dissatisfaction carries not only sacrilegious but also macabre overtones (1981 (1977), p. 44). The damozel seeks to ease her sorrow through an ideal vision of their potential future together, but this reverie disconnects her from her surroundings and distracts her from the certainty of Divine Contemplation.

The male lover is transformed into a faithful devotee who, like a pilgrim, receives a set of white clothes -indicative of purification and moral renewal. They subsequently stroll through the Celestial gardens in God's loving sight, a scene that Bentley regards as "tangibly physical", "quietistically spiritual" and imbued with palatial overtones (1982, p. 40). Offering another connection with Patmore's ideal, the damozel is rendered as a patient and truly reliable spiritual guide instructing the inexperienced male in the ways of Heaven. The main objection lies in the fact that everything is but the result of imagination. Not even her seemingly confident assertion "all this is when he comes" can conceal her actual instability and doubts. To this may be added her partner's disbelief in the possibility of a future reunion, which deals a severe blow to both her function and the supporting structure of her

reverie. In Leng's view, the lover acknowledges her superiority, but this also intensifies his inferiority and renders him unable to "make the leap of faith necessary to reunite with the Damsel" (1990, p. 15). Meanwhile, the damsel also experiences an identity crisis: her yearning puts her on the verge of spiritual regression, since her past life on earth and her lost lover capture her attention in a more definite manner than her surroundings -and, more tellingly, God's presence. The intensity of her vision increases her warmth, which tellingly smothers her lilies under the pressure of her bosom against the golden barriers of Heaven. According to Riede, the poem emphasizes the relevance of human love against the strength of its powerful celestial imagery (1992, p. 90).

The damsel's intense feelings and strong determination finally manage to pierce the void between both settings and establish a fleeting connection with the earthbound lover, who perceives an echo of her voice in the song of a bird, and the sound of her foot in the ring of a bell (Mahoney, 2010, p. 240). Their melodic sweetness cannot conceal the erotic nature of the image that pops up in the male lover's mind: leaning over him (not over the golden bars of Heaven) she lets her fetishized auburn tresses fall around his head, creating a protective sanctum that Spector describes as a "sheltered and shadowed space" (1971, p. 445). Gitter sees it as a tent or cocoon of totemic qualities (1984, p. 942). For Leng, it does not only "activate simultaneous processes of aesthetic and erotic unification (providing) a reciprocal state of ideal conjunction" but also "defines the world of its inhabitants not in terms of a barrier, but as an inclusive natural frame" (1990, p. 14-15).

Despite her effort, this call to wholeness fails to elevate her lover, strengthens his bonds to the past and even threatens to drag her down into spiritual regression. On top of that, it puts the focus on earthly physicality and sensuousness, rather than on her spiritual experience in Heaven. This is further reinforced by the angels spotted near the end of the poem: their radiant light is taken as a sign that her prayer has been granted but, as soon as their course changes towards remote spheres, the damsel falls prey to despair, sticks her arms out of the gilded bars of Heaven (more like a prison than a safe haven) and cries inconsolably. In Swedenborgian terms, these guardian angels are reminding her of the need to redirect the ways of her thought (Stanley 2003, p. 106, 114).

Still, while this may be believed to underline her diminishing powers and stress the gap between the past she longs for and her disappointing present and future, her defeat is partly an appearance. The problem lies not in the patience required, but in the lack of certainty about the sort of mystical encounter that she craves for. Without it, she would be ‘condemned to’ -rather than ‘blessed by’- excessive spiritualization, oblivion and indifference towards her initiative. As Gelpy puts it, the real danger lies in “an unfulfilled wish for union” (1974, p. 4). The answer does not stem only from the ‘harmonious alignment’ between man and woman as it was once on earth: this provides the basis for a true fusion of opposites (Bornay 1990, p. 128) that resembles the flaming peak of alchemic sublimation -or “mercurial amalgam” (1982, p. 443) in Bentley’s view- once in Heaven. The process calls for the sacralization of human love, “the transfiguration of the erotic through the mystical” (Armstrong, 1993, p. 247) and the resulting tongues of fire which are seen mounting up to God may be read an inversion of the Pouring of the Spirit in Pentecost. Since this is viewed as a precondition to attain Divine Contemplation, this form of love is seen, in this double work, as an intrinsic part of one’s due orientation towards the deity.

Rossetti executed two companion paintings between 1871 and 1881 on the basis of the increasingly sensuous (and sensual) depiction of Heaven in the poem published in 1870, eight years after the death of his wife and one after her infamous exhumation to retrieve the manuscript that he put in her coffin as an act of self-inflicted penance for failing to save her life. These events, often lumped together with additional instances of distortion, speculation and sensationalism, have long tarnished Rossetti’s reputation and Siddal’s perception by a part of the critics (Evelyn Waugh’s *Rossetti* (1928), Leigh Hunt’s *The Wife of Rossetti* (1932), Elizabeth Bronfen’s *Over her Dead Body* (1992)) and the public. To keep distance with reductively biographical readings, it’s worth noting that neither the poetic piece nor the companion oils were executed as memorial tributes to his deceased wife, and that the only possible connection with her lies in the motif of longing for a deceased one, which already provided the basis for the poem three years before Rossetti and Siddal first met. Our objection, however, does not alter the fact that the meaning of this and other works in Rossetti’s creative

corpus surely changed for him throughout the years, due to the course of his life experience (Bentley, 1982, p. 33). While his wife's absence did not provide the basis for the paintings or the poem, the idea of a future encounter in Heaven, or the "continuum between life and after-life" (Bose, 1995, p. 151) must have provided some solace for his loss.

It is not by chance that the companion oils completed between 1876 and 1879 should imitate the structure and atmospheric mood of devotional art. The first of these, known as 'Fogg version', was commissioned in 1871 by William Graham. The subsequent replica, purchased by Frederick Leyland, included a few variations. In compositional terms, the centrality of the damozel is framed through the combination of upward-pointing and downward-pointing triangles (maybe providing an echo of the Hermetic motto 'as above, so below') guiding our gaze towards the earthly setting displayed in the predella and the elevation towards God in the upper section of the painting. She is presented as a mediatory figure presiding over a stratified process of self-improvement: the stages in it are marked by the horizontal lines defined by the golden rail and the rose wall in the background. The guardian angels found nearby, hold palm leaves as emblems of sanctity (Ash, 1997 (1995), p. 22) and leadership (Treuhertz, Prettejohn & Becker, 2003, p. 192).

Rather than restricting the damozel's movements, the painting shows them as supportive presences reinforcing her ultimate meaning. The circular patterns described by the reunited couples in the background provide a dynamic impression of unity and wholeness, thus drawing a contrast with her loneliness and air of expectancy. The connection to the Virgin Mary reappears through the lilies she holds; the poppies that Rossetti included only in the visual rendition bear a dual orientation: they point towards her reverie and the certainty of death. To Mancoff, the combination of white and red roses foregrounds the alignment between human and sacred love which the poem deals with (36). It is therefore worth noting McGann's view that the missing star in the damozel's crown of stars (six in the companion painting versus seven in the original poem) may establish a connection with Merope, the lost Pleiad (2003, p. 377). Marsh nonetheless claims that a visitor to Rossetti's studio asked him about this 'missing star', to which the painter-poet replied that it was "round her head" (1999, p. 506-507), maybe in the

attempt to hide this connection or because this was not his intention in first place.

Rossetti does not focus on the wide gulf separating Heaven and Earth; instead, he is more interested in the damozel's gaze, aimed outside the boundaries of Paradise -and, correspondingly, outside the pictorial space. Only she has access to that privileged perspective, which means viewers need to fill in the existing gaps with their own imagination – nurtured by the information extracted from the poetic piece. This underlines the fact that our access to this vision depends on the inspiration and agency of the visionary artist, and the damozel is likewise identified as his creative soul, which demands the unveiling of the truth inscribed in beauty. Despite the subsequent addition of the predella, the gaze of the earthbound lover does not meet the damozel's to stress her disconnection from those who do not grasp her message (or her actual meaning). The lines from the poem inscribed on the frame (Fogg version) refer to that brief instant in which he feels the presence of the damozel but soon perceives it as a mere illusion and so guides his gaze towards the decaying autumnal setting where he is found. This latter detail is also reflected in the companion painting and his thoughts are counter-balanced by the eternal spring in the terraces of Heaven. As Stanley puts it, “life on earth, subject to the inexorable transition from plenitude to decay is but a bad memory in Heaven” (2003, p. 106).

While the Leyland replica broadly kept the same structure, the damozel occupied a greater space of the painting and the group of reunited lovers was eliminated. Despite a lesser presence of specific details from and connections to the original text, the resulting image is quite effective and does not guide the gaze of viewers as much as the Fogg version. The relocated angels reinforce the idea that the damozel is being observed. The surrounding space lacks the hybridity in the first companion painting and looks more like a tiny corner in the Garden of Paradise. The marked tendency to *horror vacui* (so typically Victorian and so typically Rossettian) in both paintings does not disrupt accessibility or compromise their compositional balance. Still, a sense of theatricality is clearly intensified in the Leyland replica, which reminds viewers not only of devotional art, but also of the façade of a crypt -once again

stressing a sharp contrast between earthly transience and the assurance of eternity in Heaven.

3. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, it is worth considering the damozel's apparent defeat as a form of 'aesthetic martyrdom' not only leading her towards "an empowering transition from humanity to beatitude" (Auerbach, 1982, p. 40) but confirming her role as a mediating (blessed) entity, not regarding the failed communicative attempt (with the earthbound lover) in the poem, but the one established between viewers, the inspired artist, the damozel as a representation of his creative soul, and beauty as a source of aesthetic revelation. In that context, she is consecrated as the cornerstone in an integrative message meant to challenge the "mid-Victorian conception of Heaven" (Rose, 1981 (1977), p. 44), the mainstream Victorian dichotomy between body and spirit, and the barriers between the human and the divine. The sharp differences and tension between "Heaven attainable and Heaven imagined" (Treuhertz, Prettejohn & Becker, 2003, p. 126) allow for further reflection on the dichotomous dualism between spirit and the flesh that the Pre-Raphaelite painter and poet was keen on challenging, as Brown puts it, "by envisioning a reality in which natural and supernatural fuse" (1972, p. 273).

The message is bound to Rossetti's approach to the ultimate concept of beauty, a kind of truth which, in Eco's words, "has to be materialized at all costs" (2004, p. 330) by the artist (seen as the priest in this aesthetic religion). With regards to this, according to Bose, the damozel stands out as proof of the "transcendental power of imagination that triumphs not only over time and space, but also over death itself" (1995, p. 151). As viewers or readers, we gain access to this message after witnessing her breakdown, which is just an appearance in the wider context of the double work of art. The aim is not to attack religious doctrine, but to reuse some elements in its aesthetics to highlight the transcending powers of artistic practice -. Therefore, the damozel's main achievement as a construct is mainly bound to her ability to guide viewers, through her 'aesthetic martyrdom', to an essential truth or mystery inscribed in beauty. Conscious that "the satisfaction of the

desire for union would terminate the desire itself” (Mahoney, 2010, p. 237), Rossetti transfers the productive energy of the reverie -and the “generative form of longing” which provides a basis for the poem (Mahoney, 2010, p. 233)- onto the minds of the audience by means of her lasting, appealing image. Within that context, and so within his programmatic plan, neither does her mediatory role fail to yield fruit, and the concepts of female dependence and romantic rescue are transfigured into leadership (or guidance) and commitment in the dialogue that the double work, once complete, sustains with the audience.

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COLECCIÓN CONOCIMIENTO CONTEMPORÁNEO

DIÁLOGO FRENTE A ESPEJISMO:
ENSAYOS SOBRE PENSAMIENTO Y SOCIEDAD
EN EL MUNDO CONTEMPORÁNEO

Coords.

MANUEL BERMÚDEZ VÁZQUEZ
MARTA ROJANO SIMÓN

Dykinson, S.L.

2024



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EN EL MUNDO CONTEMPORÁNEO

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