

## The Blessed Damozel Symbols, Allegory and Motifs

### The Gold Bar of Heaven (Symbol)

In the poem, the damozel is standing at the edge of Heaven as it dangles over the cosmos, looking down on Earth. She is described as leaning over the bar in the first stanza: "The blessed damozel lean'd out / From the gold bar of Heaven" (1-2). The bar is mentioned again midway through the poem, as the speaker muses that she must have made the gold bar warm from her body heat: "Until her bosom must have made / The bar she lean'd on warm" (45-6). Finally, the gold bar appears again at the end of the poem: "And then she cast her arms along / The golden barriers, / And laid her face between her hands, / And wept" (141-4). The damozel leans against the "gold bar" because she wants more than anything else to be closer to her lover on Earth.

This bar that separates Heaven from everywhere else is a symbolic gate and prison. It keeps the damozel in and keeps her lover out. The damozel can never leave heaven and time passes so slowly for her that she feels trapped. Her lover cannot join her, and he might never be able to. The gold bar serves as the symbolic obstacle between them. The substance that makes up the "gold bar" is also worth noting—gold implies wealth and luxury on one hand, but it is also an unyielding metal on the other. The double-meaning of metal suggests that in "The Blessed Damozel," the inside of Heaven is beautiful for everyone allowed in it, but that there will be no concessions about who gets access.

### The Color White (Symbol)

We know from the Stanza II that the damozel is wearing a white rose that was given to her by the Virgin, and the scene with the Virgin Mary suggests that everyone else in Heaven wears white, too. The damozel describes the Virgin's process of making clothing with her handmaidens: "Circlewise sit they, with bound locks / And foreheads garlanded; / Into the fine cloth **white** like flame / Weaving the golden thread" (109-112). As a general rule of thumb, the color white is symbolic for purity. Additionally, in Stanza XIII, while trying to convince God to let her lover join her, the damozel paints the picture of her beloved in white, which implies that this color is regularly worn in Heaven. While the "blessed damozel" appears to have been accepted into heaven (as is evident by the gift of the white rose) it becomes increasingly unlikely throughout the poem that the same opportunity will be extended to her lover.

### Stars (Symbol)

Stars appear several times in "The Blessed Damozel," always linked to the damozel herself. In Stanza I, she is wearing exactly seven stars in her hair, while in Stanza IX her voice is likened to the sound of the moving stars, which is repeated again in Stanza X. The stars, therefore, are symbolic for what the damozel has become for her lover on Earth—a star that he knows is always there, watching over him. Furthermore, when the damozel first appears in the poem, it seems to be daytime, since the damozel feels like she has been there for what has felt like a day to her: "Herseem'd she scarce had been a day / One of God's choristers" (13-4).

However, we know that time *has* passed, since it is nightfall at the end of the poem: "She ceas'd. / The light thrill'd towards her, fill'd / With angels in strong level flight" (135-7). Once nightfall has passed, the damozel's lover can feel her again—see her smile and witness her tears. This underscores the damozel's symbolic weight as a star, which is only visible at night. Additionally, the phrase "seven stars" is a Biblical symbol that signifies unity with the Christian God. The seven stars are mentioned in Revelation 1:16 and Amos 5:8.

## **Music (Motif)**

Music as a symbol for God is of great importance in "The Blessed Damozel," so much so that its symbolic power runs throughout the entire poem. The symbolic power of music begins in Stanza III, when the speaker refers to the damozel as one of "God's choristers" (14)—one who sings his songs. When the damozel finally begins to speak, her voice is linked to a song, showing how much she has already been integrated into Heaven, having fully become one of God's point-people there. In Stanza XVI, the damozel explicitly states that she will teach her lover the songs that are sung in Heaven and that he will learn to know God through singing them. In the same stanza, she also implies that singing these songs lets one share God's wisdom and knowledge. Mary's handmaidens are also likened to "sweet symphonies" (106), emphasizing the superior and respected position that Mary holds in Heaven. In Stanza XXI the musical image celebrated in Heaven is displayed as angels playing their instruments and singing. Music in general in the poem is symbolic for the peace and harmony in Heaven. Everything is centered around music; every ceremonial rite that the damozel lists goes back to it in some sense (even the Tree of Life is singing for the dove it contains). In this way, the presence of God is most often perceived through music.

## **Fire (Symbol)**

Fire appears in different shapes and forms, some fairly subtle, others very obvious; however, the underlying symbolic value that fire has stays the same throughout the poem, namely as the only pain that can be felt in Heaven. In Stanza VII all those souls coming to Heaven and reuniting with their loved ones are described as little flames burning the damozel and hurting her as she yearns for her beloved as well. In Stanza XIV, fire appears again in the subtle form of oil lamps (which burn as well) that stand on a shrine to appeal to God. Here, fire appears again as something unpleasant that the praying soul standing in front of the shrine wishes God to help with, and the prayers are burned in the fire (and thus sent to God with symbolic pain and effort). Once more, fire is mentioned in Stanza XIX, where Mary's handmaidens are making white clothes for children that have died at birth, using flames to make golden decorations. This connection between fire and death, especially a very tragic and innocent death, further emphasizes the symbolic value of fire as Heaven's only pain.