

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S
"FOR AN ANNUNCIATION, EARLY GERMAN":
EINFÜHLUNG, INSPIRATION, AND SIGNIFICANCE

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In 1847-48, while studying painting at the Royal Academy Schools in London, Dante Gabriel Rossetti gathered together a collection of his poems under the title "Songs of the Art Catholic" and sent them to Leigh Hunt and to William Bell Scott, two poets whose work he admired. According to his brother William Michael, the title "Songs of the Art Catholic" was intended "to suggest that the poems embodied conceptions and a point of view related to pictorial art – [and] also that this art was, in sentiment though not necessarily in dogma, Catholic – mediaeval and unmodern" (661). In essence, the programme of the poems, which included early versions of such well-known pieces as "The Blessed Damozel," "My Sister's Sleep," and "Ave" (under the title "Mater Pulchrae Delectionis"), was to transfer ideas about how paintings are conceived and perceived into poetry, the aim being to produce poems that would have the power of visual representations to draw the viewer/reader into the situations, events, emotions, and mental feeling – the "sentiment" – that they depict or describe. Much later in his career as a poet and painter, Rossetti would make a related observation in relation to "Ave": "Art" – by which he apparently meant both poetry and painting – "identifies herself with all faiths for her own purposes: and the emotional influence here employed demands above all an inner standing-point" (qtd in W.M. Rossetti, "Notes" 661).

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Although the phrase "inner standing-point" was first used by Rossetti in a note to "Ave" that he considered including in *Poems* (1870), the procedure that it denotes is operative in his work almost from the outset. A good example of the procedure in operation is the opening of "The Blessed Damozel," where the Damozel is described in a way that simultaneously creates a picture in the mind's eye of the reader and reflects the response of her earth-bound lover, who famously speculates on the effect of her bosom on the "bar" over which she leans: