



---

## Symbolic and Imaginative Depths in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Poetry: An Analysis of Pre-Raphaelite Themes

**Ms. Elakkiya Ravi**<sup>1</sup>

Assistant Professor, PG Department of English, Nilgiri College of Arts and Science, The Nilgiris.

ravielakkiya6594@gmail.com

**Ms. Nisha Sivakumar**<sup>2</sup>

PG Department of English, Nilgiri College of Arts and Science, The Nilgiris.

nishasivakumar912@gmail.com

---

### ARTICLE DETAILS

**Research Paper**

**Accepted:** 28-02-2025

**Published:** 14-03-2025

---

**Keywords:**

*Dante Gabriel Rossetti, word mining, Pre-Raphaelite, symbolism, imagination, spirituality, nature, Coleridge*

---

---

### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the symbolic language and imaginative constructs within Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry through a word mining approach, focusing on key themes like spirituality, nature, and love. By analyzing recurrent words and symbols, such as the "damozel," "stream," and "angel," the study highlights Rossetti's fusion of visual and poetic elements, influenced by Pre-Raphaelite ideals. Using S.T. Coleridge's theory of imagination, this paper unveils how Rossetti's poetic language bridges earthly and ethereal realms, offering a layered interpretation of his thematic concerns in the Victorian context.

---

**DOI :** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15030502>

---



Dante Gabriel Rossetti is considered to be the most mystical and often dwells in his own world of imagination, both in his poems and paintings. His bliss was very much in association with his imagination. In Rossetti's words which he said to William Sharp states, "I do not wrap myself up in my own imaginings, it is they that envelop me from the outer world whether I will or not". (414). According to John Heath Stubbs, Rossetti was an "explorer of the subconscious of subtle states of mind between waking and sleeping"(156). To Rossetti poetry was a medium to vent out his emotions. He had a world of his own. Where only he and his consciousness were very much alive. The poetic imagination, was very much alive in the case of Dante. According to Nicolette Gray, "the tenseness of a moment of realization, the whole being of a man absorbed into his consciousness, man as he seems most completely alive and himself". (24). Rossetti's poems were more often emblazoned with the poetic devices and his poems are, more often, subjective than objective in nature.

The themes Rossetti had dealt with did not consist of anything innovative, instead he chose to explore what was already known. He dealt with more of nature, spirituality and people. People around him were more or less his subjects of the poetry. The very first poet who inspired Dante Gabriel Rossetti was Dante Alighieri, with his Beatrice. Alighieri's Beatrice had a compilation of divineness for she was the unrequited love of Dante Alighieri. For Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddal was the muse.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poems dealt with "intellectual ideas" (99), the Medievalism and Platonism. Medievalism might have been used by Dante intentionally because it seems to be overdosed in his poems. In the words of Doughty,

The medieval element is somewhat superficial in nature since Rossetti was extremely conscious of trying to be medieval. The Platonic element, however is evident in Rossetti's search for the ideal women who would represent absolute Beauty, Truth and Goodness. (19)

Further he also states, "Rossetti's conception of the 'poetic' soul, as he tried to live his myth, his ideal vision amidst the frustration of the outer world, of reality. Thus, it is evident that the intentions of the poet were to bring the ethereal impact to the worldly being" (100-101). He wanted to create a portrait of, may it be through the painting or poems, to interpret the literary notions of an ideal beauty, truth and goodness combined with truth via a living female. Throughout his life, Rossetti was in search for his perfect blend of divinity and Platonism. He did not abandon any of his art, though, in some cases, he was not satisfied with the output or not. He waited for them to attain the state of being both realistic and



symbolic. Arthur Symons says, “Part of what hypnotizes us in his work is, no doubt, that sense of personal tragedy which comes to us out of its elaborate beauty; the eternal tragedy of those who have lived the absolute in beauty too well, and with too mortal a thirst.” (206). In this sense, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was an absolute Pre- Raphaelite. According to Oswald Doughty,

everyday reality had little appeal for Rossetti. His fine painting, found, dealing with a more or less contemporary subjects, prostitution and the fallen women, was never completed. When he did concentrate on the clear rendering of some object, it was to give reality to his dream world, to make it more tangible. This concentration is perhaps, one of the more unsettling aspects of Rossetti’s art and is similar to the half- awake, half- asleep world in the poetry of John Keats. (21)

These objects were of personal favorite to Rossetti and they were of very important too. His poems are filled with objects, objects that can be interpreted to literary images which possess more nature than just being a motif. He has even created an airless atmosphere, a unique space of his own which are evident in many of his poems like “The Blessed Damozel” and “The Bride’s Prelude”.

The sensuality and symbolism of the movement are demonstrated through the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, such as “Beata Beatrix” and “Proserpine”. This technical virtuosity was embodied in works such as “Ophelia”, in which nature and melancholy’s beauty were realistically captured. The meticulously detailed compositions of William Holman Hunt, most vividly represented by “The Hiring Shepherd” and “The Awakening Conscience”, articulated moral and religious themes. Therefore, his work symbolized the Brotherhood’s moral and spiritual concerns.

Symbolic elements, including flowers and animals, are the painters’ tools that are used to supply their masterpieces with layers of meaning and double the viewers’ motivation. The major influential Pre-Raphaelite Artists and their Works are Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s, “The Blessed Damozel” which was published in the year 1875, Sir John Everett Millais’, “Christ in the House of his Parents”, published in 1849, and John William Waterhouse’s, “The Lady of Shalott”, published in 1888. Dante advocated the ‘organic theory of poetry’ like S T Coleridge. According to this theory style and manner of a poetry should go hand in hand with that of a matter and substance of a poetry.



Though Dante advocated the organic theory, he much believed in the imaginative faculty of a poet just like any other romantic poet. Dante's poems have a strong foundation built on this powerful faculty of imagination. He believes that this poetic imagination faculty enhances the instinct of a poet and thus boost his prideful identity as a poet and thus ensures the successful exploration of the theme that is selected for the study. This 'Poetic Genius' of any poet is what which gives a poet more personal experiences of the materialistic, spiritual, desired world.

Dante's works examine the relationship of this imagination faculty of a human mind with the human imagination. To Dante, the proper imagination is the most vital function of the conscious brain. This power, according to S T Coleridge, in his *Biographia Literaria*, gives a poet an ability of "the whole soul of man into activity with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity." (cxv). This gives an account of the representing ability, of a poem, of the real people, world and their life, that maybe romantic, philosophical or spiritual.

As to the literary themes evident in Dante' poetry, the scholar considers them to be of a twofold nature. One some occasions, the poet turns to subjects of faith and spiritual contemplations urging to reexamine established views; and the scholar consider this theme relevant in the connection with the work at the Sober Culture. As a central figure in the Pre-Raphaelite movement, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was highly influenced by medievalism and symbolism. In this way, he has interrelations with the visual arts; particularly, Rossetti's primary occupation as a painter played a crucial role in the stylistic features of his poetry. Thus, his poems are marked by the profound effect of Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics that makes his lines filled with various symbols and complex visual images.

In his analogy, Dante use nature reconstruction with further meaning. Rossetti's "House of Life, The Sonnet" refers to a representation of themes concerning transcendence and desire for the world. Notably, the poet sees nature as a realm of allegorical importance. Rossetti exhibits the duality of nature, incorporating the ideas of allure and danger. The two divergent depictions characterize the varying symbolic meanings of nature in the poet's works.

In the poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the damozel, the stream, and spirituality, as natural elements are particularly symbolic. They are the passers of the poets' emotions and the conveyors of their sentiments regarding death, life, beauty, and the unchanging nature of life. The themes directly associated with love and beauty are presented in the works of Dante. Love themes



concern the passion and admiration are greatly expressed through metaphorical nuances. At the same time, artistic examples illustrate various incarnations of beauty, praising it in some cases and exposing the pain behind in others.

Rossetti's approach highlights the transient and bitter beauty and love as associated with longing and loss. Symbolism serves as a link through which the poets impart emotional memory to their works. Dante uses fantastic, celestial imagination and harmonic affiliation with nature in his verses. He also uses sensual and tactile signification; thus, the reader experiences the feelings enclosed in the poems.

### Works Cited

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. Edited by Adam Roberts, Edinburgh UP,

Edinburgh, 2014.

Doughty, Oswald. "Rossetti's Conception of the 'Poetic' in Poetry and Painting," Oxford UP, 1953.

Gray, Nicolette. *Rossetti, Dante and Ourselves*. Faber & Faber. 1947.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. *The Complete Poetic Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. edited by.

William M. Rossetti. Cambridge UP, 1899.

Sharp, William. "The Rossettis." *Fortnightly Review*, 1 Mar. 1886, pp. 414–429.

Stubbs, John Heath. *The Darkling Plain: The study of Later Fortunes of Romanticism in English*

*Poetry from George Darley to W B Yeats*. Eyre and Spottiswoode Publishers. 1950.

Symons, Arthur. *Figures of Several Centuries*. Constable & Co., Ltd., 1916.