

# Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* (1859) and the Ideals of the Early Phase of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement

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## پوخته

ئەم لیکۆلینە وەپە دەربارەى *Bocca Baciata* "لیوی ماچکراو" (۱۸۵۹) ی Dante Gabriel Rossetti دانتي گابریل رۆزیتیه (۱۸۸۲-۱۸۲۸) که کاریکی هونەری دووانەییە (تابلۆیەکی هاویپچکراو بە شیعریکەو). لە نیوان کارە هونەرییە دووانەییەکانی تریدا *Bocca Baciata* "لیوی ماچکراو" بە یەکیک لە بەرھەمە دەرکەوتوو و بەناوبانگەکانی رۆزیتیی دادەنریت که بەھایەکی شەھوانییە ھەبە. ئەم تووژینە وەپە لە بواری بزووتنە وەى Pre-Raphaelite پیش-رافاییل و لە چوارچۆیەى ھزری ئەدەب و هونەری نیوہى سەردەمى حوکمپرانى شازنە فیکتۆریا دا گرنگی خۆی ھەبە. ھەروەھا ھاوبەشى دەکات لە نیوان سنووری بزووتنە وەى Pre-Raphaelite پیش-رافاییل و Symbolism ھیماگەری تابلۆ و شیعەر لە نیوہى سەردەمى حوکمپرانى شازنە فیکتۆریا دا لە ئینگلتەرا. ئەم تووژینە وەپە وەلامى ئەم پرسیارانە دەداتەوہ: تا چ رادەبەک "لیوی ماچکراو" ی رۆزیتیی بە خالی وەرچەرخان دادەنریت لە هونەری بریتانی و ستایلی شیعری شاعیر خۆیدا؟ چۆن وینەى ژن لە سەردەمى یەکەم و دووہمى بزووتنە وەى پیش-رافاییل دا گوزارشت کراوہ؟ بنەما فکرییەکانی بزووتنە وەى پیش-رافاییل لە چوارچۆیەى پرنەسیپەکانى John Ruskin چۆن رەسکن چى بوون؟ ئایا *Bocca Baciata* "لیوی ماچکراو" ی رۆزیتیی پابەند بوو بەو بنەمایانە وە یان پیچەوانەیان بوو؟ بۆچی؟ بە کارھینانی تیوری Symbolism ھیماگەرایى بۆ شیکردنە وەى تابلۆکە و ئەو شیعەرى که بۆى نوسراوہ لە کۆتایی لیکۆلینە وەکەدا دەگەینە ئەو ئەنجامەى که تا رادەبەکى زۆر ئەم کارە هونەریە دووانەییەى رۆزیتیی *Bocca Baciata* بە خالیکی وەرچەرخان دادەنریت ھەم لە هونەری بریتانی و ھەم لە ستایلی شیعری رۆزیتیی دا که لە خوداوەندیکى رۆحییە وە گۆرا بۆ کالییەکی شەھوانى. ھەروەھا لیکۆلینە وەکە ئەوہش پوون دەکاتەوہ که تابلۆ و شیعەرەکانى رۆزیتیی بە خالی گۆران دادەنرین لە ستایلی شیعرو هونەری بریتانی نیوہى سەدەى نۆزدەبەم دا. ئەنجامەکانى ئەم لیکۆلینە وەپە بۆ خۆبندکاران و تووژەرانى بواری خۆبندنى کلتورى و ئەدەبى و بەشەکانى ئینگلیزى لە زانکۆکان و خۆبندنى ئەدەبى بریتانى و میژووی هونەر بەسوودن.

## المخلص

هذا البحث حول *Bocca Baciata* (شفاه قبلت) (۱۸۵۹) لدانتي كابريل روزيتي (۱۸۸۲-۱۸۲۸)، وهو عمل فني مزدوج (لوحة مرفقة بقصيدة). تعد *Bocca Baciata* (شفاه قبلت) من بين الاعمال الفنية المزدوجة الأخرى وهي من احدى الأعمال البارزة والشهيرة لروزيتي والتي تمتلك قيمة غرائزية. هذا البحث تدور حول حركة قبل-رافاييل، في اطار فكر الادب والفن في منتصف عصر الحكم الملكي للملكة فيكتوريا، والتي لها أهميتها الخاصة و تشارك أيضا حدود حركة قبل-رافاييل والسيمائية Symbolism واللوحه في الشعر، في نصف فترة حكم الملكة فيكتوريا في انكلترا. يجيب البحث عن الأسئلة الآتية باستخدام النظرية السيميائية لتحليل اللوحه والقصيدة التي كتبت لها: الى أي مدى يعتبر

Bocca Baciata (شفاه قبلت) لروزييتي نقطة تحول في الفن البريطاني والأسلوب الشعري للشاعر نفسه؟ كيف عبرت عن صورة المرأة في المرحلة البدائية لحركة قبل-رافاييل؟ ماذا كانت الأساسيات الفكرية لحركة قبل-رافاييل في إطار أساسيات جون راسكن؟ و هل Bocca Baciata (شفاه قبلت) لروزييتي كان ملتزما بتلك المبادئ والأساسيات أم كان عكسها؟ ولماذا؟ وفي نهاية البحث نصل الى النتيجة التي تقول بأن هذا العمل Bocca Baciata (شفاه قبلت) لروزييتي تعتبر نقطة تحول في الأسلوب الشعري و فن روزييتي والتي تحولت من آلهة روحية الى سلعة شهوانية. ويوضح البحث أيضا ان لوحات وأشعار روزييتي تعد نقطة تغيير في الأسلوب الشعري والفن البريطاني في نصف قرن التاسع عشر. تنفع نتائج هذا البحث الطلبة والباحثين في مجال الدراسات الثقافية والأدبية وقسم اللغة الأنكليزية في الجامعات ودراسة الأدب البريطاني وتاريخ الفن.

### Abstract

This paper is about Dante Gabriel Rossetti's (1828-1882) double work of art *Bocca Bacciata* (1859) that is a double work of art (a painting attached to a poem.) Among Rossetti's other double works of art, *Bocca Baciata* (1859) is remarkable for its intensely sensual quality. This paper is significant in the field of the Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literary Movement in the context of mid-Victorian art and literature. It will contribute to both fields of Pre-Raphaelitism and Symbolism of the mid-Victorian paintings and poetry in England. This paper answers the following questions: to what extent was Rossetti's *Bocca Bacciata* identified as a turning point in British Art and his own poetic style? How images of women were depicted in the first and second phases of the Pre-Raphaelite movement? What were the Pre-Raphaelite principles according to John Ruskin's theory? Did Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* follow those principles or oppose them? Why? Using the theory of Symbolism to analyze both the poem and the painting we will reach to the findings of the paper that to a great extent the double work has been regarded as a shift from a spiritual muse to a sensual object. Also, the study provides a clearer understanding of the way Rossetti's paintings and poems became a turning point in the nineteenth-century British Art and his own poetic style. The findings of this study would be beneficial for the students and researchers of the literary and cultural studies, departments of English, British Literature studies and art history.

Keywords: *Pre-Raphaelite literary and art movement double works of art symbolism The Kissed Mouth*

### Introduction

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) was regarded as the most effective and flamboyant young artist member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He was predominantly famous for his double work of art (painting attached to a poem). Among them *Bocca Baciata* (1859) was remarkable for its intensely sensual quality. The painting had been considered as a shift from a spiritual approach to a sensual stimulus. Also, the poem attached to the painting is quite significant for its sensual imagery. On the back of the painting, Rossetti wrote a line from his sonnet, 'The Kissed Mouth' forming the poetic part of this double work art. Boccaccio's *Decameron* became the catalyst for Rossetti to write the sonnet and, hence, to make the double work of art. Boccaccio's story is a notable approach that ultimately shows human desire. Similarly, Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* is remarkable for its sensual stimulus. The study, first begins with a brief account of how the Pre-Raphaelite ideals had been shown within Ruskin's moral principles of British Art. Second, the study explores how images of women were portrayed in the first phase of the Pre-Raphaelite literary and art movements. In this section, the focus will be on the idea of Victorian depiction of women on a spiritual ground. Next, the study will identify image of women in the second phase of the Pre-Raphaelite movement regarding Victorian Sexualities. As a theoretical ground, the theory of symbolism will be applied on both the poem and the painting to show the significance of Rossetti's



*Bocca Bacciata* and its reception within contemporary critics. Finally, the study will end with the findings and the list of resources.

#### 1. Pre-Raphaelite Ideals and Ruskin's Aesthetic Theories of Art in Victorian Era

The term Pre-Raphaelite has occupied a considerable position within Victorian art and literature. It refers to both literature and art of the mid-nineteenth century England. It has originally initiated when a group of English artists, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais founded "The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood" in 1848. Later, they were joined by William Michael Rossetti, James Collinson, Frederic George Stephens and Thomas Woolner. The aim of this brotherhood was to restore the academic style of painting by a return to simplicity, the truthfulness of nature, and "spirit of devotion". These were part of the distinguishing features of the Italian painting prior to the time of Raphael (1483-1520) and painters of high Italian Renaissance (Abrams 243). The established style of The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was identified by flatness and superficiality resulting from evenly applied strokes of bright-colours. Pursuing Ruskin, they often portrayed an idealized depiction of nature truthfully and combined it with typological symbolism.

The dominant artistic models of the Victorian age were classical. In an essay *The Victorians: Art and Culture* (2010) Richard J. Evans states that the education of the upper and middle classes had predominantly given attention to Latin and Ancient Greek. He argues that young students had been led to pursue classical values through poetry, history and the art of classical authors (*Pre-Raphaelite Women* 2008). Regarding the visual art, The Royal Academy, which was founded in 1768, established its contemporary educational and academic system to observe Classical methods and principles. Accordingly, students were guided to examine and pursue the artistic styles of great Classic pioneers. In doing so, they followed the basic principles and analysis of classical ideals of beauty that had been remarkably embodied through the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man (*Pre-Raphaelite Women* 2008).

Arnold perceives this dominant model of the age as a moral pathway on which the young students had been guided. He regards the classical literary and artistic masters as sources of morality. He states:

"It has always seemed to me one of the great advantages of the course of study generally pursued in our English schools that it draws our minds so continually to dwell upon the past. Every day we are engaged in studying the languages, the history, and the thoughts of men who lived nearly or more than two thousand years ago; if we have to inquire about laws or customs, about works of art or science, they are the laws, customs, arts, and sciences, not of existing nations, but of those whose course has been long since ended" (*Pre-Raphaelite Women* 2008).

Here, Arnold confirms the age's attempt to follow the classical principles within a moral frame. Accordingly, these principles needed to be taught through the teachings of religious principles.

Having been one of the leading English art critics of the Victorian era, John Ruskin (1819-1900) was hugely influential to the Victorian British Art. His philosophical contribution to art was predominantly moral. His principles contained certain rhetorical ideas of moral notions in the head of the university graduates who tackled one or more of the popular attitudes of literature, philosophy, theology and art. In his *The Victorian Morality of Art: An Analysis of Ruskin's Esthetic* (1932) Henry Ladd confirms that Ruskin's approach to address fine art has been framed within moral justifications. Ladd writes:

"The range of emotions which Ruskin admitted into fine art was limited by moral prejudices. But his use of the term moral had a special significance that no mere description of proper emotion or respectable feelings can entirely convey. In a profound sense beauty was emotional; and because all emotions were supposed to fall under a moral faculty, beauty was moral. Yet, art held many kinds of ideas: like nature, art was a spiritual treasury; it was the greatest human record of virtues. A moment's reflection upon the traditions which formed Ruskin's inheritance will illuminate the fact



that in discussing ideas, content and subject matter he was following a conventional road of esthetic speculation” (Ladd 167).

Therefore, Ruskin’s ideas concerning beauty were rather moral. For him beauty in art must necessarily be given some aspects of human morality and behavior.

It is worth noting that the prevailing subjects of art during the Victorian era were religious. These issues step-by-step changed to portraiture, historical allegory and natural landscapes. These changes brought about new theoretical strategies to the artistic realm. These new justifications attempted to make artistic taste more acceptable. A certain limitation had been set to those works whose subject matters were less religious. Thus, new premises of the new approaches of beauty and taste raised new analysis and judgments into “religion, religion into morals, morals into esthetics” (Ladd 167).

However, Ruskin reversed this sequence. Altering the order of the concept, he set his argument from esthetics back to morals. Through his criticism, he explained the “esthetic representation of natural truth” (Ladd 168). In his belief, only through authentic perception of beauty the artist is able to reveal the true face of God’s creativity by means of nature. This truthfulness of art needed to be represented within beauty itself. Therefore, for him truth and beauty in art must necessarily be given some aspects of human morality and behavior. Thus, it was beauty that urged him to argue the morals.

Ruskin’s contribution to fine arts through moral prejudices led to the idea that moral sense offered an authentic and acceptable “Righteousness” to the artists and critics. Ruskin believed that the language of art must indicate something valuable and precious to human life “besides being in itself ethically good” (Ladd 169). Ladd goes on stating:

“Art by the very nature of its content, its potent forms, its human expressiveness, must involve a theory of moral value. Considering the traditional subject matter alone, it seemed axiomatic that art could not be separated from human work and festivity, from the serious thoughts and the gay thoughts of people living in a society. It was obvious that art reflected the good and the true and was useful thereby” (Ladd 169).

Thus, Ruskin’s perception of beauty was emotional. He dealt with beauty as a subject to different range of feelings that must involve moral values. Likewise, art should also involve righteous assessments.

The Pre-Raphaelite painters were impressed by Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*. It was published between 1843 and 1859 in five volumes. In *Modern Painters* Ruskin criticised against Claude for his lack of truthfulness when representing nature. “The conscientious artist must go to nature...rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing. But these studies, he insisted, were referred to a great end, -sought for the sake of the inestimable beauty which exists in the slightest and least of God’s works” (Wilton 157).

One could notice that there was a certain dualism in the Pre-Raphaelite ideals. The movement had previously announced its indulgence with strategies of Medieval Art and Romantic endeavor of medieval history. Nevertheless, the purpose of the movement was to eliminate the intricacy of the academic history of painting. Thus, the Pre-Raphaelite painters produced their artistic products applying explicitly modern subject matter. This can be derived from Wilton’s notice that much of the characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite products have been about modern life. Ford Madox Brown’s *Work* (1852-5) is a true depiction of the contemporary London society (Wilton 158). The painting is a brilliant portrayal of manual workers’ lives during labor. The artist truly observed the condition of human life. Every item in the painting is arduously pictured. Tim Barringer believes Brown’s *Work* to be the most complex of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings. He writes:

“Even the dogs contribute to Brown’s social analysis. A pugnacious puppy in the foreground, a working dog who kills rats for the navvies, is confronting the middle-class lady’s lapdog, which has distributed a pile of sand. A shaggy mongrel belongs to the urchins in the foreground, sharing their social status, while at the rear, a hunting dog can just be discerned, in front of its aristocratic mistress’s horse, gasping in the heat”(Barringer 98). See Appendix, Figure (1).



Here, Barringer's interpretation goes far beyond the limit of humanity. He juxtaposes animals with human beings within similar social classes. Similar to the working class laborers, who have demolished their lives under heavy toils and canyons, the working dog parallels his owner's living condition. The same interpretation is placed for the lapdog and the hunting dog as well that characterize social status of contemporary society. Furthermore, this diversity of the social life status is portrayed via placement of the items. The painting is regarded as a complex representation of social hierarchy. That is to say, the artist places the high class aristocratic on the top and the poor at the very bottom. This is also true for placing the dogs within same social hierarchy (Barringer101).

Depicting modern life through this Pre-Raphaelite painting has been achieved via technical methods. The painting confirms dreadfulness and intenseness of labor through its use of colours. Wilton admits that the painting's brilliant color is a true evidence for "the effect of hot July sunlight...because it seems peculiarly fitted to display work in all its severity" (Wilton 158).

Thus, it can be concluded that the Pre-Raphaelite movement was one of the artistic movements that purposed to reform the British art during the reign of Queen Victoria. Following the pre-eminent ideals of the critic of the era, John Ruskin, the movement had achieved grand reputation. In *100 Pre-Raphaelite Masterpieces* (2011), Gordon Kerr numerates the philosophy of The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as follows:

1. "To have genuine ideas to express.
2. To study nature attentively; so as to know how to express them.
3. To sympathize with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote;
4. And most indispensable of all, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues" (Kerr 8).

The movement's chief purpose was to create a new and modern image of nature using subjects from Medieval and Renaissance art. They wanted to create new subjects that inspired both heart and mind. Through their works they attempted to show fidelity towards nature and depict it in an idealized way. Thus, depicting the medieval artistic culture was a means to represent spiritual and creative truthfulness that the Pre-Raphaelites thought it was missing.

## 2. Image of Women in the Early Decade of Pre-Raphaelite Movement

Women in the Pre-Raphaelite paintings had special forms which were different from the conventional Victorian ideals of women. Rossetti and Burne-Jones depicted women as strong, powerful and capable of using her beauty to seduce and destroy men. Moreover, physical features of the Pre-Raphaelite women were different. For instance, Rossetti's muses had distinctive features with full lips, long red wavy hair and strong long hands. Burne-Jones models, however, were thin, tall and had neither feminine nor masculine features (*The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 2018).

In the early phase of the movement, women were mostly depicted in the Pre-Raphaelite paintings as spiritual figures. Rossetti's *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-9) was a brilliant work that deliberately adopts as archaic technique. The use of thin golden haloes inscribed with names of Mary, St. Anne and St. Joshim proves the use of such style. Rossetti uses certain symbols to portray Virgin Mary before Christ's birth. In doing so, he adopts devices from medieval art to achieve particular effects. The painting is rich of Christian symbolism. Barringer writes:

"Just as striking for the Victorian viewer would have been the elaborate use of symbols, referring to the character and future life of the Virgin...It reveals that the red cloth draped over the ledge symbolizes Christ's robe during his passion, thus prefiguring the death of the Virgin's son. Suddenly we become aware of the cross formed by an ivy-clad trellis above the red cloth- areal object but also a symbol of the crucifixion. In the garden, the dove encased in a golden mandorla is a traditional symbol of the Holy Spirit" (Barringer 8).

In this painting, Rossetti regards the Virgin Mary as the "highest type of female virtue" (*The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 2018). Rossetti had previously stated publicly that

the Virgin “was a symbol of female excellence ... [to be taken] as its highest type” (Pearce 31). In the painting, she is seated with her mother St. Anne. She is embroidering a lily on the tapestry, and tended by an angel. The painting is remarkably rich in the use of religious symbols. Both the lily vase placed on a pile of books and the lily that Mary is embroidering are considered symbols of purity. The vine signifies the truth, and the lamp is for piety (*The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 2018). On the left, the child angel stands beside a pile of books; each of a different colour. They “represent the three theological virtues and three of the four cardinal virtues (Justice being omitted) - gold for Charity, blue for Faith, green for Hope, buff for Prudence, white for Temperance and brown for fortitude” (*The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 2018).

In *Woman, Image, Text: Reading in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (1991) Lynne Pearce discusses Rossetti’s passion to combine both visual and verbal in a single text. She indicates that it was an attitude that Rossetti worked on (Pearce 35). Thus, she draws our attention to Rossetti’s double sonnets which has been published in his *Complete Poems* as “Poems for Pictures” in the frame of *The Girlhood*:

I

This is that blessed Mary, pre-elect  
 God's Virgin. Gone is a great while, and she  
 Was young in Nazareth of Galilee.  
 Her kin she cherished with devout respect:  
 Her gifts were simpleness of intellect  
 And supreme patience. From her mother's knee  
 Faithful and hopeful; wise in charity;  
 Strong in grave peace; in duty circumspect.  
 So held she through her girlhood; as it were  
 An angel-watered lily, that near God  
 Grows, and is quiet. Till one dawn, at home,  
 She woke in her white bed, and had no fear  
 At all, - yet wept till sunshine, and felt awed;  
 Because the fulness of the time was come.

II

These are the symbols. On that cloth of red  
 I' the centre, is the Tripoint, - perfect each  
 Except the second of its points, to teach  
 That Christ is not yet born. The books (whose head  
 Is golden Charity, as Paul hath said)  
 Those virtues are wherein the soul is rich:  
 Therefore on them the lily standeth, which  
 Is Innocence, being interpreted.  
 The seven-thorned briar and the palm seven-leaved  
 Are her great sorrows and her great reward.  
 Until the time be full, the Holy One  
 Abides without. She soon shall have achieved  
 Her perfect purity: yea, God the Lord  
 Shall soon vouchsafe His Son to be her Son (Pearce 35).

In the above sonnets, Rossetti depicts the early life of the Virgin in her house with her parents before Jesus was born. He portrays a biblical text through his painting; and thus portrays his painting through his sonnets. His arduous signification of each of the religious symbols is outstandingly placed.

*Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1849-50) is another Pre-Raphaelite painting in which Rossetti depicted women in a religious manner. In this painting, Rossetti revitalizes both the style and spirit of the



early Renaissance art (Pearce 42). The painting represents the Annunciation whose narrative prolongs his *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-9). Rossetti quite arduously hints at the bright areas of colour and light surfaces of the frescoes. The brilliant depiction of the painting suggests the Virgin's purity. Although Rossetti's purpose was to revive the pure world of the Medieval ages, the representations of faces of the Virgin and Angel Gabriel are extremely modern (Barringer 42). Rossetti's portrayal of women through the image of the virgin is purely religious. However, different attitudes suggest that several items in the painting stand for sexuality. Barringer states:

"The improbably small, haloed dove, representing the holy spirit, and the half-hearted fire burning at Gabriel's heels, are not sufficient to convince the viewer that this is a spiritual, rather than a sexual, encounter" (Barringer 42).

Furthermore, the chosen dress of the Virgin and the angel within their corporeality make the painting unlikely to seem completely medieval. Rossetti depicted the Virgin with a flesh-and-blood angel in nightgowns. This witnesses the idea of sexuality in the painting, though the overall painting alludes to spirituality and religion.

It is worth stating that these two paintings of Rossetti have been distinguished among other paintings he drew in the early years of forming the Brotherhood. Lynne Pearce claims that both Rossetti's *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* possesses a special priority among his other paintings. She states:

"Not only are these Rossetti's earliest paintings, they are also his most prototypical: this is 'Rossetti' at his most Pre-Raphaelite, his most medieval, his most idealist, his most spiritual. They are also 'Rossetti' at his most Victorian, his most conventional, his most misogynists" (Pearce 31).

Here, Pearce places the true depiction of Rossetti's early career in tradition of Pre-Raphaelite art. Though, Rossetti was the most unorthodox and unconventional among the Brotherhood, these two paintings were regarded as his most Pre-Raphaelite approach towards religion. Therefore, within the early phase of the movement, image of woman had been depicted rather religiously and spiritually. These two instances by Rossetti certainly reinforce this notion. However, this can only be applied to the early phase of the movement, since his later approaches to the visual art confirm a different career towards the Pre-Raphaelite ideals.

### 3. Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* (1859) and the Turning Point of British Art

In the late 1850s Rossetti met Fanny Cornforth, originally Sarah Cox, who later became his model, mistress and housekeeper. Rossetti had become fascinated by her physical sensuality and fleshy body from their first encounter. She reminded him of the Renaissance Courtesans painted by Titian, Vecchio and Venerose.

*Bocca Baciata* (1859) modeled by Fanny Cornforth, has been read as Rossetti's shift from the public context of the early Pre-Raphaelite ideals towards modernity. In an essay *A Soul of the Age: Rossetti's Words and Images, 1848-73*, David Peters Corbett (2009) states that images of women that are self-reflexive have been widely debated. He writes:

"The self-reflexivity of the paintings of women who, in the words of F.G Stephens are amorously, mystically or moodily lost in dreams, or absorbed by thoughts too deep for words, which Rossetti began to make in the very late 1850s and 1860s, has been extensively commented upon" (Giebelhausen & Barringer 92).

Moreover, in the belief of Elizabeth Prettejohn these images emphasize modern representations of femininity and "with images of self-sufficiency and sexual power to achieve metaphors for art's independence from conventional morality" (Giebelhausen & Barringer 92).

Thus, the question is whether the visual realm tackling the meaning of the world and the spiritual concepts offered by the Pre-Raphaelites were of certain significance to Rossetti's course of progression or not?

The title, *Bocca Baciata*, "the kissed mouth" had been derived from Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Nevertheless, this painting "is an appropriation for Rossetti's private purpose" (Bullen 124). On the back of the painting, he wrote:



“*Bocca baciata non perda ventura, anzi renova come fa la luna*” meaning “the mouth that has been kissed does not lose its savour, indeed it renews itself as the moon does” (Barringer 148). This early Renaissance story by Boccaccio, the fourteenth-century Italian poet, has been a catalyst for Rossetti’s revitalizing of Romantic art. The story is about a certain Alatiel, the daughter of the sultan of Babylon who was formally engaged to the King of Algrave. On her way to visit the king to marry him, she is shipwrecked in the Majorca Sea. All are drowned except Alatiel and some of her serving maids. They are rescued by a nobleman who makes them his own property. He eventually has his way with Alatiel and takes her virginity. He then makes her his mistress. The nobleman’s brother falls in love with Alatiel. In an attempt to have her, he kills his own brother and kidnaps the girl. This scenario of abduction and kidnapping Alatiel repeats many times in the course of the story. In the course of her adventure, she eventually obtains excessive sexual experience. She then reaches to Cyprus from where she manages to go back to her father, the Sultan. Finally, via the help of a cunning friend, she is able to make her father learn that she had been performing good works in a Christian convent while she was away. The Sultan believes his daughter and asks the King of Algrave to rearrange the marriage. Alatiel marries the king in the end as his virgin bride. Despite of having considerable sexual experience, the bride joins the king as a pure and innocent virgin (Bullen 89). Boccaccio’s story is a remarkable approach that remarks on aspects of human desire. In the story, Alatiel is remarkably attractive and “has an overwhelming physical effect on the men with whom she comes into contact” (Bullen 89). She apparently lacks the ability to verbally communicate with the men. This is because she knows no other languages except her own. Her gorgeousness educes the sense of lust upon those whom she comes into contact. Other than reaching to its end, this lust pays attention to nothing else including bloodshed and kidnapping (Bullen 125).

Similar to Boccaccio’s text, the female figure in Rossetti’s *Bocca Baciata* represents human desire. The painter painted his mistress Fanny Cornforth as an object whose power over men is purely sexual. Having being juxtaposed with Alatiel, Fanny shares one important characteristic with her. She gained considerable sexual experience in the course of her life before she comes to Rossetti. Yet, for Rossetti, the most significant site of her is her vigorous and voluptuous mouth. Keeping Boccaccio’s line in mind “the forbidden kiss of the adulteress is not poisoned and deadly, it seems but promises renewed delight” (Barringer 148). Moreover, the Pre-Raphaelite critic Griselda Pollock argues that “the mouth as ruby wound can function as a displaced sign of female sexuality, her genitals” (Bullen 125). It can be noted that in Boccaccio’s story Alatiel’s genitalia are considerably energetic as well as Fanny Cornforth’s. Due to her excessive sexual experience, no doubt also genitalia of the model of *Bocca Baciata* are extremely active. However, considering Fanny’s lips, Rossetti’s eponymous *Bocca Bacciata* might be rather straightforward. Bullen writes:

“In directing attention to Fanny’s mouth both in the image and in the title [Rossetti] may have been celebrating the special pleasure, oral sex that she offered him. It is unlikely that Lizzie with her limited sexual experience would have known of this variation. As a dollymop, however, Fanny, may well have been asked for this favour in the past and would not have been reluctant to comply” (Bullen 125).

This quote suggests that due to her excessive sexual experience, Fanny, more than Lizzie seemed to be more willing and prepared for having such physical intimacy between her and the painter-poet.

Furthermore, as Paul Spencer-Longhurts (2000) indicates, the style of this oil painting is Venetian. “The painting has taken after all a rather Venetian aspect” (Barringer 149). This has been acknowledged by Rossetti when George Price purchased it. Spencer-Longhurts goes on stating that this style includes “both the costume and the succulent flesh, painted rapidly so as to avoid the painstaking techniques of early Pre-Raphaelitism” (Spencer-Longhurts 36). Venetian style has much paid attention to ostentatiously mastery in coloration and painting technique of the sixteenth-century. Painters as Titian, Venerose, and Giorgione were among the Venetian painters whose mastery in opulent coloration, color that merely allures to Venetian style, as Bullen indicates, has



been accused of “moral significance for the Victorians” (Bullen 125). This is due to the fact that Venetian society was recognized by its “sexual license.” Thus, Rossetti’s career from 1860s onward had gained much popularity via the use of this style.

One of the visual elements in the painting which bears a significant symbolic meaning is the woman’s hair. Since biblical days, a woman’s hair had been considered “her glory” (*Pre-Raphaelite Tresses* 2008). Nevertheless, further researches relating to the Victorian ideals have been made on the reason why a woman’s hair made such a sensual and erotic image in the Pre-Raphaelite art. In *Stunner: The Fall and Rise of Fanny Cornforth* (2006) Kristy Stonell Walker writes:

"Loose hair was seen rarely in Victorian society and had two connotations. A child could wear her hair down, but as soon as she aspired to be a woman, or more essentially a 'lady' her hair was strictly pinned up. To be seen loose-haired was a pleasure reserved for her husband, in the bedroom. It's not a coincidence that the act of pinning up hair is called 'dressing' hair "(Walker 19).

This shows how the Victorian viewer had perceived loose hair to be improper and offensive. According to Walker, a Victorian woman should have pinned her hair and no one was allowed to see her loose hair except her husband.

Furthermore, in her *Seeing Through Clothes* (1993) Anne Hollander confirms the significance of the women’s hair for the Pre-Raphaelite art. She states:

"More than at any other time [Pre-Raphaelite] women's hair was important in the nineteenth century...with immediately erotic overtones and a strong connection with real life. Thick and abundant female hair safely conveyed a vivid sexual message in an atmosphere of extreme prudery....Pre-Raphaelite hair, like the Pre-Raphaelite face and body, was one of the truly original images invented by nineteenth-century art. The kinky, thick stuff weights the head and shades the face, as it is also heatedly described as doing in various kinds of Romantic literature. Lines such as Swinburne's "Thou shalt darken his eyes with thy tresses,/Our Lady of Pain" and many more in the same vein parallel the emotional and suggestive--though not so erotic--use of drapery in art " (Hollander72-73).

Thus, in the painting, the women’s loose, luxurious hair with her loosen gown seem to give her a seductive and sensuous depiction of her. This depiction of loose hair within loosen unbuttoned gowns were astonishingly received by prudish Victorian viewers. See Appendix, Figure (2).

Elements of having symbolic meaning other than women’s hair are charmingly depicted in the painting. Although these elements comprise a number of biblical, medieval and renaissance items, the composition of these elements are unlike to what Rossetti presented before. However, all these items within their symbolic meanings have created a new feeling of physical world. Bullen (2011) writes:

“A white rose in that hair alludes ironically to her virginity; an apple for temptation [signifying the Forbidden Fruit] rests beside her, and in the centre of the composition the voluptuous mouth of the title stands out in its rich, pink, fleshliness. She appears in a state of contemplation, placed between the marigolds behind her and the wall in front, and in this state, hair tumbling down, dress open at the front, her whole body is unashamedly available to the viewer...the values of the Middle Ages have given way to those of the Venetian Renaissance ” (Bullen 126). See Appendix, Figure (2).

Bullen examined the painting by attaching meanings to the symbols. He explained each of the white rose, the apple, her voluptuous mouth, her loose hair, the marigold, and her unbuttoned dress depicting both sexual and virginal meanings to the symbols. On one hand, the white rose represents virginity. However, as the painting represented Fanny Cornforth as Rossetti’s mistress, she was undoubtedly not a virgin at the time the painting was made. Therefore, Rossetti depicted her as a virgin muse with no former sexual attachments. Also, the apple as Bullen suggests, symbolically represents temptation and sensual appeal alluding to the forbidden tree. Also, the Victorian interpretation of marigold is “desire for riches and a love charm... Others regard marigolds to be an excellent choice to symbolize beauty and freshness” (*Uncover Hidden Flower Meaning* 2006).

It is worth stating that Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* with its sensual manifestation became deeply troubling to Holman Hunt. In his memoir he recalls the time when he first perceived the painting at the Hogarth Club in 1860. He writes:

"Gabriel... had now completely changed his philosophy, which he showed in his art, leaving Stoicism to Epicureanism... He executed heads of women of voluptuous nature with such richness of ornamental trapping and decoration that they were a surprise, coming from the hand which had hitherto indulged in austerities" (Barringer 148).

Later in 1860, he wrote a letter to the Pre-Raphaelite patron Thomas Combe criticizing the work more openly. He states:

"It impresses me as very remarkable in power of execution- but still more remarkable for gross sensuality of a revolting kind, peculiar to foreign prints, that would scarcely pass our English Custom house from France... I see Rossetti is advocating as a principle the mere gratification of the eye if any passion at all- the animal passion to be the aim of art" (Barringer 148-149).

Barringer clarifies Holman Hunt's criticism on the painting. According to Hunt, Rossetti's new approach to the sensual display of women's head during the age is quite overwhelming. He rather regards such work as a betrayal to the Pre-Raphaelite principles. Further, in his letter to Combe, Hunt regards the double work not only to be sensual; he rather puts it as a piece of art whose aim is of mere animalistic passion.

Furthermore, regardless of what Hunt presented in his erotic *The Afterglow in Egypt* (1854, 1863) he identified Rossetti's work as mere pornography. He found the work offensive. He believed that avoiding the narrative limitations of a painting would lead to create unmoralised visual pleasure of the viewer (Barringer 149). In his eyes, the painting contained uncontrolled sexual attitudes for both woman and men. Thus, for Hunt such an approach by Rossetti was a true betrayal of the moral standards and principles of the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

Further, Rossetti's textual choice made it clear that the work made an erotic position. Using the line from Boccaccio's sonnet, Rossetti made an individual choice to deploy an erotic display when he produced *Bocca Baciata*. Bullen states:

"In Boccaccio's story, and in the picture to which it is linked, sexual experience, far from being morally deleterious, is actually an enhancing virtue. In the *Decameron* the King of Algrave is the beneficiary of the mature sexuality of his new bride, and the pleasure that he has with her is increased by her earlier initiation and sexual career." (*The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry and Criticism* 93)

As Bullen confirmed, sexual experience is being reversely enhanced as virtue. However, D. M. R. Bentley mentions that the double work implies that sexuality "stands outside the nexus of innocence forever corrupted by sinfulness that is evoked by the painting's Christian allusions." Moreover, David Rodgers mentions that the departure is not only from the "morally elevating subjects" of the Pre-Raphaelite principles, but also from the "Arthurian and Dantean subjects" of the mid-to-Late 1850s (*Love for Love, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Bocca Baciata and The Songs of the Bower* Fall 2003).

One can mention that in *Bocca Baciata*'s sexual fantasy-through the verse and the story- has been set out in terms of the visual image. The sexual visual image has also been deployed into a tactile realm in the verse through the depiction of flesh, hair, apple, flower and jewelry in the painting. Thus, the double edged image- both poetic and visual- depicts a deep emotion and fantasy shared only between the painter-poet and his model.

## Conclusion

It can be stated that the artistic work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti clearly stood apart from his contemporary artists. Through his foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood he destabilized the values of The Royal Academy. His style was characterized by fondness of bright colours, and simple honesty to the nature. Although the Brotherhood endeavored for retrieving the academic



style of painting attributed to the Italian painters before Raphael (1438-1520) and other painters of Italian Renaissance, Rossetti had never completely pursued the Pre-Raphaelite philosophy. His style of painting beginning from the late 1840s until late 1870s proves a change in the way he presented his work. He was, by no means, always considered as having a unique artistic vision among his contemporaries.

Woman had a specific significance for Rossetti. In his youth, his depiction of women was rather spiritual and religious. *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-9) and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1849-50) are the best examples of the representation of women in their highest form. However, step-by-step, this spiritual representation of women was altered in a way that became extremely different from what he had brought to the Pre-Raphaelite generation in 1848. His later portrayal of women completely transcended the idea of religiousness and spirituality. He returned to the oil painting through which he represented sexual desire. The women's luxurious hair, voluptuous red lips, long attractive hands and their alluring attire led to interpret them as mere temptresses. His *Bocca Baciata* (1859) is a true instance to be marked as a turn in his painting attitude. Although it was fairly contradictory to the Ruskinian moral ideals of art during the Victorian era, Rossetti's unique style, i.e. his depiction of women's sensuality was extremely offensive.

*Bocca Baciata* was not only regarded as a turning point in Rossetti's double work, to a great extent the painting was regarded as a turn in British art as a whole. This is due to the fact that the painting, regardless of its sensuality and Venetian style in oil painting, introduced the idea that a painting or a poem "need not be illustrative, sentimental or didactic" (Bullen 127). This suggests that any works of art, whether a poem or a painting needs no narrative constraint. Having applied the theory of symbolism on this double work, it can be stated that it was simply about a woman dressed in Renaissance attire for those who did not know Rossetti. For those who knew him a little, it was about having pleasure from the female body through the painting. However, for those who knew him well, the painting directly referred to depicting sexual pleasure from his model, Fanny Cornforth. The fact that the painting lacked narrative constraints was a good reason for annoying most of the critics which was another reason the work was regarded as a turning point in the British art as a whole. During the Victorian era such idea- subjectlessness- was regarded as offensive and unmoralistic to British art.

Moreover, the poem Rossetti wrote for the painting was regarded as a turning point in his own poetic style and subject matter due to the type of imagery the poem created and the kind of relationship between him and his muse. Previously, Rossetti had not been explicitly known for such shockingly erotic overtones. The verse explicitly creates a sexual visual imagery. Also, without a doubt the subject matter of the poem was quite personal. The theme of the verse alluded to a woman of his acquaintance whose mouth was kissed and did not lose its savour, but it renewed itself like the moon.

Nevertheless, the style Rossetti used in *Bocca Baciata* paved the way for many artists in the 1860s to produce their artistic work using no narratives, texts or pretexts. *Bocca Baciata* has no moral attachments to it, as the Victorians would have liked. It did not follow the principles of the early phase of the Pre-Raphaelite movement according to John Ruskin's theory. Rossetti's selection of the line and the production of painting itself are based on individual credits. This approach by Rossetti became a revolution against conventional artistic principles of British art as a whole during the Victorian era. His works became an aspiration for a second generation of the PRB movement, especially to the works of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones.

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## Appendix



Figure (1) *Work* by Ford Madox Brown, 1852-65

Medium: oil on canvas

Dimensions: arched top, 53 15/16 x 77 11/16 in.

Current Location: Manchester City Art Galleries, UK

Source: *Work*, Ford Madox Brown (1852-65). 2004. Victorian Web. Web. September, 2018.

Link: <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/fmb/paintings/2.html>



Figure (2) *Bocca Baciata* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1859

Medium: oil on panel

Dimensions: 13 1/4 x 12 in.

Current Location: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Source: *Bocca Baciata*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1859). 2011. Rossetti Archive. Web. Jun, 2018.

Link: <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s114.rap.html>