



# VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University  
VCU Scholars Compass

---

Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2010

## DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI AND THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE: ENVISIONING AESTHETIC BEAUTY AND THE PAST THROUGH IMAGES OF WOMEN

Carolyn Porter  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

© The Author

---

Downloaded from

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/113>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).

© Carolyn Elizabeth Porter 2010

All Rights Reserved

“DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI AND THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE:  
ENVISIONING AESTHETIC BEAUTY AND THE PAST THROUGH IMAGES OF  
WOMEN”

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

CAROLYN ELIZABETH PORTER  
Master of Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2007  
Bachelor of Arts, Furman University, 2004

Director: ERIC GARBERSON  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
August 2010

## Acknowledgements

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to many individuals and institutions that have helped this project along for many years. Without their generous support in the form of financial assistance, sound professional advice, and unyielding personal encouragement, completing my research would not have been possible.

I have been fortunate to receive funding to undertake the years of work necessary for this project. Much of my assistance has come from Virginia Commonwealth University. I am thankful for several assistantships and travel funding from the Department of Art History, a travel grant from the School of the Arts, a Doctoral Assistantship from the School of Graduate Studies, and a Dissertation Writing Assistantship from the university. I am also greatly indebted to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for a generous Graduate Fellowship, which enabled me to fund dissertation research.

Many individuals have shaped my thinking throughout this project, and to them I offer sincere thanks. Jerome McGann, University of Virginia, and Mark Samuels Lasner, University of Delaware, both graciously sacrificed their time to discuss all things Rossetti with me. My research at several institutions would not have been possible without the help of kind and knowledgeable museum and library staff. Specifically, I would like to thank Rebecca Melvin Johnson at the University of Delaware Special Collections; Margaretta S. Frederick and Rachael Di Leteurio at the Delaware Art Museum; Sabrina Abron at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; and

Mitchell Merling at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. I am especially grateful to the members of my dissertation committee, who have each spent so much time guiding me through this arduous endeavor. I am particularly indebted to my advisor, Eric Garberson, who has been an incomparable guide.

Much of what I have worked for in my academic career is contained in the following pages. I consider getting it all down a personal accomplishment but not one that would have been possible without the unquestioning support of my amazing family and my companion, Jay. To them, I offer thanks and all my love.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Abstract.....	vii
Introduction: Rossetti, the Renaissance, and the Representation of Beauty .....	8
Chapter	
1 THE RENAISSANCE IDEALIZED: HISTORY’S BEAUTY IN <i>FAZIO’S MISTRESS</i> .....	38
<i>MISTRESS</i> .....	38
Part One: Rossetti’s “Bodily” View of Art in the 1860s .....	39
Part Two: Rossetti and the Aesthetic Past .....	46
Part Three: <i>Fazio’s Mistress</i> : Beauty Past, Beauty Present.....	79
2 THE RENAISSANCE PORTRAYED: IDEAL BEAUTY AND PORTRAITURE IN <i>BOCCA BACIATA</i> .....	92
Part One: Rossetti’s Images of Women and Questions of Portraiture.....	93
Part Two: Aestheticism, Portraiture, and the Renaissance .....	102
Part Three: The Real and Ideal in <i>Bocca Baciata</i> .....	125
3 THE LYRICAL RENAISSANCE: AESTHETIC COLOR IN <i>THE BLUE BOWER</i> .....	140
<i>BLUE BOWER</i> .....	140
Part One: Lyrical Color in <i>The Blue Bower</i> .....	142
Part Two: The Glamorous Venetians: Dangerously Debauched Color ....	158
Part Three: The Reclamation of Color in <i>The Blue Bower</i> .....	170
4 THE FATAL RENAISSANCE: THE PERILOUS BEAUTY OF <i>LADY LILITH</i> .....	183
<i>LILITH</i> .....	183

Part One: Rossetti's <i>Lady Lilith</i> and the <i>femme fatale</i> .....	185
Part Two: Danger and Beauty: the Genesis of <i>Lady Lilith</i> .....	196
Part Three: Absorption and Aesthetic Experience in <i>Lady Lilith</i> .....	209
Conclusion: Rossetti and Questions of Aesthetic Historicism.....	218
Bibliography.....	225
Vita .....	243

## Abstract

This dissertation examines Dante Gabriel Rossetti's knowledge and interpretation of the Italian Renaissance during the 1860s. I argue that there is a relationship between Rossetti's Aestheticism and his understanding of the Italian Renaissance and that this relationship is visibly manifested in his images of women from the period. In Victorian England, Aestheticism and the philosophy of beauty for its own sake became increasingly popular throughout the 1860s. I challenge the idea that Aestheticism and an interest in Renaissance art are mutually exclusive aspects of the artist's work. Rossetti's images of women expressed both his understanding of Renaissance art and the central place of beauty in painting. Based upon Rossetti's interpretation of Renaissance art and poetry, his criticism, and the criticism of his peers, this dissertation argues that the beauty of women in Rossetti's paintings came to stand for the beauty of art. Rossetti's paintings promoted sensual Aesthetic experience in their conflation of formal and female beauty. Using the historically idealized conventions of female portraiture, Rossetti created images of women that privileged Aesthetic beauty over narrative or moral meaning. His use of vibrant, rich color, a quality he and his peers inexorably associated with Venetian Renaissance painting, revealed the connection between Renaissance art and his Aestheticism. Color helped to define his paintings of women as examples of beautiful, sensuous painting. For Rossetti, the representation of alluring, beautiful women was the most powerful way to express the experience of Aesthetic beauty as intoxicating, sensual, and even morally ambiguous.



## INTRODUCTION: ROSSETTI, THE RENAISSANCE, AND THE REPRESENTATION OF BEAUTY

For decades Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) has been a figure of intense interest in studies of Victorian art and literature, but many explanations of his work remain deceptively underdeveloped. Accounts of his painting frequently marginalize the crucial role that Italian Renaissance art and literature played in the development of his Aestheticism during the 1860s. I explore Rossetti's profound engagement with specific aspects of historical tradition, namely painting and poetry relating to themes of women's beauty, and discuss the ways certain aspects of tradition affected Rossetti's own representation of women's beauty from the 1860s. My discussion focuses on four half-length paintings of women produced between 1859 and 1869: *Bocca Baciata*, 1859 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston); *Fazio's Mistress*, 1863 (Tate Gallery, London); *The Blue Bower*, 1865 (The Barber Institute, Birmingham); and *Lady Lilith*, 1869 (Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington). The convergence of Rossetti's enthusiasm for the Renaissance and engagement with Aestheticism are evident in these images of women. I argue that Rossetti's conception of the past and his Aesthetic philosophy were not disparate threads of his career but can and should be viewed as related aspects of his production. In his representations of beautiful women, which served as the vehicle for his expression of Aesthetic beauty, the connection between historical tradition and

Aestheticism is clearly and ultimately revealed.

### Part One: The Argument

I consider Rossetti's paintings of women as early but foundational examples of Victorian Aestheticism.<sup>1</sup> I have three primary reasons for considering Rossetti's work as Aesthetic and for concentrating specifically on his images of women, the dominant subject within his production throughout the 1860s. First, considering Rossetti's images of women as examples of Aesthetic painting more clearly identifies Rossetti's place within a movement that has resisted definition and clarify what is generally considered a transitional phase of his career. Second, I wish to define more concretely the relationship between the representation of beautiful women and beauty in Aesthetic painting. This connection is particularly strong in Rossetti's work during the 1860s, a time when the Aesthetic philosophy of beauty for its own sake was often expressed through images of women. Finally, I wish to stress the association between Aestheticism and historical tradition in Rossetti's images of beautiful women. This reading enlarges the existing understanding of Rossetti's work as Aesthetic but also of

---

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Prettejohn foregrounds both the 1860s and Rossetti's work in her recent study of Aestheticism, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007): 201-231. In recent scholarship on Rossetti, the term "Aesthetic" has been used to describe his work from the 1860s: D.M.R. Bentley, "Making an Unfrequented Path of Art His Own: Dante Rossetti's Paintings in the Aesthetic Mode," *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 17 (Spring 2008): 21-35; and Ileana Martin, "Rossetti's Aesthetically Saturated Readings: Art's De-Humanizing Power," in *Art and Life in Aestheticism: De-Humanizing and Re-Humanizing Art, the Artist, and the Artistic Receptor*, ed. Kelly Comfort (Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 42-61.

Aestheticism itself by reconciling two seemingly problematic and unrelated issues – the representation of women and the past.

Definitions of “Aestheticism” encompass several conflicting philosophies, historical figures, geographies, and chronologies. Among the most common are the Parisian literary philosophy of *l’art pour l’art* most often associated with Victor Cousin (1792-1867), Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867); a style of English painting, prose, or poetry that privileges formal beauty and even abstraction over narrative and moral content, of which James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) is a frequently cited example; and, later in the nineteenth century, Aestheticism was used to describe a program of harmonious interior design. Often, aspects of the term are collapsed into one simplified definition intended to encompass the entire period.<sup>2</sup> Complicating matters is the fact that two major branches of scholarship, literary and art historical, define Aestheticism differently, which has led to increased confusion.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> In his survey of the Aesthetic Movement, Lionel Lambourne frustratingly does not provide a cohesive statement regarding what Aesthetic philosophy is; see *The Aesthetic Movement* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996): 10-25. Prettejohn is more specific and acknowledges the difficulty in trying to define the early movement: *Art for Art’s Sake*, 1-9. Variations in interpretation, regarding the chronology, philosophy, geography, and key historical figures of Aestheticism can be found in two literary studies of the movement: Leon Chai, *Aestheticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); and Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: the Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996). Both authors conceive of the 1860s as the point of Aestheticism’s literary conception, but according to both, visual manifestations of Aestheticism only came later in the century.

<sup>3</sup> Putting aside obvious issues of medium, major deviations in chronology and geography arise in literary and art historical studies. The literary movement is often

For the purpose of this study, “Aestheticism” refers to the celebration of beauty alone as the sole purpose of art among artists and writers in England beginning in the early 1860s. There is much evidence to suggest that this principle of beauty for its own sake originated in the English interpretation of eighteenth-century German aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> Although some work has been done to reveal such crucial connections, I do not attempt to elaborate further upon the relationship between English Aestheticism and continental aesthetics. My primary purpose is to establish the importance of women’s beauty as a vehicle for the expression of Aesthetic beauty and to demonstrate the link between the Aesthetic use of women’s beauty and the Aesthetic interpretation of past tradition.

My discussion of Aesthetic beauty is limited to a fairly finite chronological, geographical, and conceptual framework: English painting, poetry, and art criticism from the 1860s dealing with the representation of beauty without utilitarian, moral, or narrative function form the basis of this study. Beauty, in various forms, was the

---

linked with French Romanticism of the 1820s and 1830s, while visual studies rarely cite examples earlier than 1860. England has played a large role in both branches of study but more so among art historians, among whom architectural history and the decorative arts tend to dominate the history of Aestheticism. Perhaps the most striking difference between literary and visual histories is the role of narrative. Art historians have been quick to point out the absence of narrative in Aesthetic painting, but this has not been a major aspect of Aestheticism for literary historians. For the representative literature, see the previous note.

<sup>4</sup> On the connections between German aesthetics and English philosophy and Aestheticism, see John Wilcox, “The Beginnings of *l’art pour l’art*,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 6, no. 4 (June 1953): 366-375; and especially chapter 1 on Coleridge and Kant in Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea, Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought 1800-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 27-66.

ultimate preoccupation of Aesthetic artists, writers, and critics.<sup>5</sup> My focus is on the link between Aesthetic beauty, which was seen as an independent, or autonomous, quality of art, and the Aesthetic interpretation of beauty in art and poetry from the Renaissance. Rossetti and his associates privileged a type of beauty that was autonomous and distinctly sensual, erotic, and, I argue, feminine. The contemporary terms used to describe this type of visceral Aesthetic beauty were “bodily” and “fleshy,” and I use them as well to stress the connection between the Aesthetic pursuit of sensual beauty and an art that was embodied by beautiful women.

Scholars generally afford the 1860s a great deal of importance as a time of transition between Rossetti’s association with Pre-Raphaelitism in 1850s and Aestheticism in the 1870s. The transitional 1860s are cast as a time when Rossetti experimented with increasing eroticism, sensuality, and frank representation of the female form eventually leading to his more serious alignment with Aestheticism. Such interpretations are based on the seemingly logical, and empirically-driven, conclusion that the appearance and subject matter of his work changed significantly around 1859 toward a more sensual form of representation, which led him to focus almost

---

<sup>5</sup> The topic of beauty in art is one of almost insurmountable size and complexity. My specific use of the term here builds upon the formulation of “pure beauty” put forward by Prettejohn (*Art for Art’s Sake*, 17-28). Her analysis deals with the complex relationship between English criticism, specifically in the writing of Algernon Charles Swinburne (37-69), and the notion of beauty that developed from both eighteenth-century German aesthetics and nineteenth-century French literary criticism, both of which had a profound effect on the development of Victorian Aestheticism. I will here be relating the ideas of autonomous, free (or “pure”) Aesthetic beauty with concepts relating to women’s beauty from the Renaissance. I discuss these ideas in more detail in chapter 1.

exclusively on images of women by the end of his career in the early-1880s. Scholars consider Rossetti's general shift in medium, from watercolor to oil, and subject matter, from Dantean narratives to images of women, significant in defining the 1860s as a period of transition from one phase to another.<sup>6</sup> *Bocca Baciata* is considered the key image in Rossetti's transition from moralizing, narrative Pre-Raphaelite scenes to the glossy, sensuous images of women that characterized the 1860s. Watercolors like *Dante Meeting Beatrice in Paradise* (1853-4, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) are often juxtaposed to *Bocca Baciata*, which scholars have positioned as the first in a series of erotic and vaguely historical images of women.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Opinions vary widely between the disciplines of art and literary history. Art historians have been much more reluctant than literary scholars to accept Rossetti's post-1860s work within serious studies of his *oeuvre*. For a representative example of the stance that continues to dominate visual studies of Rossetti's work, see the standard monograph by Alicia Craig Faxon, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989): 148-156. Literary historians including David Riede have provided an argument and framework for including the later visual and poetic work in a cohesive reading of Rossetti's *oeuvre*. See Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1983). In addition, attitudes about the direction of Rossetti's career have changed over time as disciplinary boundaries have become less distinct. Art historians still tend to favor the earlier periods of Rossetti's career, but new interest in literary studies and in Aestheticism have led to more searching readings of Rossetti's later work. Prettejohn's recent examination is a representative example (see note 1).

<sup>7</sup> Prettejohn challenges the idea that the 1860s were a transitional decade and argues that the beginning of mature Aesthetic painting be situated in the 1850s. My study is aligned with hers in this fundamental approach to the history of Aestheticism in Victorian painting. For Prettejohn's contention and her analysis of work by Rossetti and John Everett Millais from the 1850s, see *Art for Art's Sake*, 11-35. David Riede was one of the first scholars to present the argument that Rossetti's paintings from the 1860s be understood as Aesthetic rather than Pre-Raphaelite in *Limits of Victorian Vision*, 233-263.

The works under investigation here are not treated as transitional or as examples of a dramatic developmental shift in Rossetti's *oeuvre*. Instead, they are discussed as part of the artist's ongoing involvement with the past and exploration of women's beauty, which he began as a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) in 1848. Rossetti's association with the PRB is not a primary concern in this project, but the similarities between Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism establish a framework for examining the relationship that Aestheticism maintained to past artistic tradition.

"Pre-Raphaelite" and "Aesthetic" are often used interchangeably to describe Rossetti's work, but the two modifiers have very different connotations. Unlike the term "Aestheticism," the term "Pre-Raphaelite" refers to a specific group of English artists who shared a clearly identifiable set of principles. It is important to distinguish historical Pre-Raphaelitism from a number of styles commonly called Pre-Raphaelite, some of which are only tangentially related to the actual Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Though Rossetti's paintings of the 1860s are frequently referred to as "Pre-Raphaelite," the term is imprecise and, for Rossetti at least, it was more or less a defunct style after the group disbanded in 1854. Referring to his paintings of women as "Aesthetic" emphasizes the type of beauty in his works – sensual and feminine– and also the nature of his engagement with Italian Renaissance tradition.<sup>8</sup> Both aspects of Aestheticism

---

<sup>8</sup> A small but established body of literature exists connecting the PRB to artists *before* Raphael. For example, see the cogent description of how the PRB used the techniques of the Old Masters in Alison Smith, "Revival and Reformation: The Aims and Ideals of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood," in *Pre-Raphaelite Painting Techniques: 1848-1856*, eds. Joyce H. Townsend, Jacqueline Ridge, and Stephen Hackney (London: Tate Publishing, 2004): 9-27. For more on the ways in which Early Renaissance art and

are distinct from Pre-Raphaelitism.

In saying that Rossetti's expression of Aesthetic beauty was feminine, I mean that he conflated the representation of women's beauty and the beauty of art. Throughout this project, images of women and women's beauty play central roles in both Rossetti's work and the works of those artists and poets whom he admired. Rossetti confirmed the importance of women's beauty in his work through his choice of subject matter, translations, and correspondence. The paintings under investigation here are connected through their use of beautiful women as both the overt subject and primary conveyer of meaning. I do not wish to suggest that there is *one* interpretation available for the women in Rossetti's paintings. However, the one I pursue is that these beautiful women can be understood to represent beauty in an abstract way. In discussing beauty and the representation of beautiful women, I refer in a literal way to women who were (and might still be) considered beautiful. In many instances, however, I refer to the beauty of the image, its style, or of a specific aspect of its creation, such as color. Historically, visual beauty in images of women was associated with and even conflated with the beauty of the women represented.

---

artists figured into the initial discourse surrounding the PRB, see Robyn Cooper, "The Relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Painters before Raphael in English Criticism of the Late 1840s and 1850s" *Victorian Studies* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1981): 405-438. Additionally, Flavia Dietrich has examined Pre-Raphaelite access to Early Renaissance art in "Art History Painted: The Pre-Raphaelite View of Italian Art: Some Works by Rossetti," *British Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2000): 61-69; and along the same lines see Gail S. Weinberg, "'Looking Backward': Opportunities for the Pre-Raphaelites to see 'Pre-Raphaelite' Art," in *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: The Anglo-American Enchantment*, Margaretta Frederick Watson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997): 51-62.



The beautiful women in Rossetti's paintings were a means by which he and his peers could represent and discuss Aesthetic beauty and also the beauty that they associated with the past. First, Rossetti arrived at a form of representation that alluded to specific traditions of poetry and painting, including the sonnet tradition associated with Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) and paintings like Titian's *Woman with a Mirror* (oil on canvas, ca. 1514, Musée du Louvre, Paris). Rossetti had a complex understanding of the separate histories of fourteenth-century Florentine poetry and sixteenth-century Venetian painting, but he collapsed these distinct histories to create his uniquely Aesthetic interpretation of the past. His paintings of women were visually and conceptually aligned with the past, and the women in his images took on the symbolic weight of this association. Second, in the 1860s there was an identifiable pattern among artists and critics in which Renaissance art was placed in an analogous relationship with the provocative qualities of contemporary art – its sensuousness, eroticism, moral ambiguity, and femininity. Aesthetic assessments of Rossetti's work from the 1860s align his paintings of beautiful women with the representation of autonomous beauty and with a specific type of beauty associated with the Renaissance. In both instances, the beauty of women was the visual and textual vehicle through which Aesthetic beauty was conveyed.

Moving beyond pointing out instances of an artist and his influences, my project emphasizes the foundational importance of Renaissance art and poetry in shaping Rossetti's images of beautiful women during the 1860s. Establishing Rossetti's familiarity with and his understanding and interpretation of Renaissance painting and

poetry is a primary task in this study. I use “Renaissance” to indicate the historical category under formation in nineteenth-century England as opposed to present art-historical and historical conceptions. Though I do engage with selected twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship dealing with women’s beauty in the Petrarchan tradition of lyric poetry and painting, I am primarily concerned with establishing the Victorian perception of and engagement with the past as a means of better understanding art of the 1860s.<sup>9</sup> I establish that Rossetti had an intimate knowledge of and keen interest in Renaissance poetic and pictorial traditions and investigate how his conceptual understanding of the Renaissance functioned within his representations of women and Aesthetic beauty.

Rossetti used the term “*renaissance*” to describe a geographically Italian phenomenon associated chronologically with the early sixteenth-century.<sup>10</sup> Rossetti’s interpretation of this period was fundamentally related to the Aestheticism of his paintings in the 1860s, which privileged the representation and appreciation of beauty. Thus, the type of beauty represented often superseded the strictly chorological

---

<sup>9</sup> For a succinct analysis of the inherited historiographic interpretations of the “Renaissance” from nineteenth-century writers including Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897), see Claire Farago, “The Renaissance Today: What is at Stake?” in *Renaissance Theory*, eds. James Elkins and Robert Williams (New York: Routledge, 2008): 69-93.

<sup>10</sup> Rossetti did not capitalize the word Renaissance and he also set it in italics. A good example of Rossetti’s use of the term *renaissance* can be found in his introduction to Part I of *Early Italian Poets* (1861) in his discussion of Guido Cavalcanti’s “Ode to Love.” See William Michael Rossetti, ed., *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti 2* (London: Ellis and Scrutton, 1886): 14-15. The passage will be discussed in further detail in chapter 1.

definition of the Renaissance that predominated during the Victorian period, and Rossetti compared certain early examples of poetry, like Boccaccio's lyric poetry, to the paintings of sixteenth-century Renaissance artists. For Aesthetic artists and writers, representations of beautiful women were the most powerful source of sensual, autonomous beauty from any period. Rossetti's understanding of the Renaissance, specifically female portraits and Petrarchan poetry, led him to create a very distinctive and sensual form of painting.<sup>11</sup> Letters, diaries, and published criticism reveal that he and his peers associated his paintings' provocative imagery with similarly perceived qualities in certain types of Renaissance art, like Titian's *Woman with a Mirror*. Such qualities include overt sensuality and the suppression of moralizing narrative – two hallmarks of Aestheticism. Not surprisingly, there was a connection between the way Rossetti and his peers viewed his work and the way they understood the art of the past. In essence, the Renaissance represented, for Aesthetic artists and writers, a previous version of their own principles.

---

<sup>11</sup> Rossetti's role as a translator of thirteenth and fourteenth-century Italian poetry exposed him to a broad range of lyric tradition, both before and after the time of Petrarch. The *stilnotivsti* (*Dolce Stil Novo*) are credited generally with first using vernacular language, courtly style, and subjects dealing with love and female beauty, all of which were later developed in the work of Petrarch, and much later, the Romantic poets in England. See the history and analysis in Frede Jensen, ed. and trans., *Tuscan Poetry of the Duecento. An Anthology* (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1994): xi-xlv. The sonnets in Petrarch's *Il Canzoniere* were composed between 1327 and 1368. While Rossetti did not actively translate Petrarch's works, a version of Petrarchism, or the particular style and ideal of female beauty in Petrarch's poetry, characterizes Rossetti's poetry and paintings.

## Part Two: The State of Research

The narrative of Rossetti's life and career and the meaning of his paintings of women have been under construction since the nineteenth century. The current project endeavors to dismantle aspects of the established narrative in order to investigate Rossetti's engagement with art of the past. Primarily, I mean to dispense with the frequent theme in accounts of Rossetti's work that his interest in Renaissance art was more or less superficial. Instead, I discuss Rossetti's use of Renaissance source material in terms of its conceptual implications for his work, as both images of women and examples of Aesthetic painting.

Rossetti's painting and poetry from the 1860s have been the focus of numerous studies, though no full-length study has investigated his understanding of the Italian Renaissance in relation to his Aestheticism. The most highly regarded authorities in the field, including Jerome McGann and Elizabeth Prettejohn, have always acknowledged Rossetti's admiration of certain Renaissance artists – namely Venetian painters like Titian – though neither fully explains Rossetti's place in the nineteenth-century understanding of the Renaissance as an historical period.<sup>12</sup> McGann's comprehensive online archive of Rossetti's works, pictorial and poetic, includes scholarly commentaries detailing production, reception, and analysis of each work.

Overwhelmingly, the commentaries for paintings produced during the 1860s rehearse

---

<sup>12</sup> Jerome McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game that Must be Lost* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000): 105-142.

superficial details about Rossetti's interest in Venetian painting.<sup>13</sup>

There is an increasing impulse to incorporate Aestheticism within a history of Modernism, and it has been difficult for many scholars to fully reconcile the status of Aestheticism as an avant-garde movement within early Modernism with the Aesthetic relationship to historical tradition. Pettejohn has recently analyzed Rossetti's preoccupation with Venetian art at some length, but she does so in the context of establishing the avant-garde status of his Aesthetic paintings *vis à vis* French contemporaries including Édouard Manet (1832-1883). Her primary objective is to relate Rossetti to a history of European Modernism and, like McGann, she does not provide an in-depth analysis of his engagement with the past.<sup>14</sup>

While many aspects of Pettejohn's study are foundational to my assessment of

---

<sup>13</sup> Jerome McGann, ed., "The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive (RHA)," [www.rossettiarchive.org](http://www.rossettiarchive.org), is the standard source of critical interpretation across Rossetti's textual and visual *oeuvre*. All of Rossetti's works from the 1860s can be viewed by choosing the option to "sort chronologically."

<sup>14</sup> Pettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 201-231. Pettejohn's previous publications on Rossetti also address Venetian painting but treat it rather superficially in terms of stylistic influence rather than cultural and conceptual significance: Pettejohn, "Beautiful Women with Floral Adjuncts," in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, eds. Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Pettejohn, and Edwin Becker, Exh. Cat. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003): 51-109. Several focused studies that analyze the historical record of Rossetti's interest in art of the past exist but none is a lengthy investigation and all seek to establish a more or less factual account of Rossetti's interaction with source material. For example, see Alastair Grieve, "Rossetti and the Scandal of Art for Art's Sake in the Early 1860s," in *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, ed. Elizabeth Pettejohn (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999): 17-35; Diane Sachko MacCleod, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Titian," *Apollo* 121 (January 1985): 36-39; and Leonée Ormond, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Old Masters," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 32, no. 2 (2006): 153-68.

Rossetti's work, I ultimately discuss problems that she does not fully address in her account of Aestheticism. Prettejohn argues that Aestheticism was excluded from the discourse of Modernism beginning with Roger Fry (1866-1934) and Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) and continuing in current scholarship.<sup>15</sup> Her argument concerning the Modernist exclusion of Aesthetic painting, poetry, and criticism, is supported by documentary evidence and secondary literature dealing with the individual circumstances of Aesthetic writers like Walter Pater (1839-1894).<sup>16</sup> According to

---

<sup>15</sup> Prettejohn perhaps overstates the harshness of Roger Fry's antagonism toward Aestheticism. He was indeed more or less sympathetic toward Whistler and Rossetti, whom he praised in "Mr. Whistler," *The Athenaeum* (25 July 1903): 133-4. Other Modernists, including T.S. Eliot and Greenberg, were infamously critical. Eliot's account of Walter Pater accused *The Renaissance* of propagating "confusion between life and art which is not wholly irresponsible for some untidy lives." Eliot, "Arnold and Pater," in *The Eighteen Eighties*, ed. Walter de la Mare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930): 392. Prettejohn discusses the issues of Modernism throughout *Art for Art's Sake*, but for the gist of her argument, see 1-9; and 26-27. And for further explanation of her position on Fry's criticism, see "Out of the Nineteenth-Century: Roger Fry's Early Art Criticism, 1900-1906," in *Art Made Modern: Roger Fry's Vision of Art*, ed. Christopher Green, Exh. Cat. (London: Courtauld Institute of Art, 1999): 31-44. In addition, she has also argued that Pre-Raphaelitism be incorporated into a history of Modernism in the same way that French Realism has. For this argument, see Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000): 11-13; and 37.

<sup>16</sup> There was indeed a dramatic movement away from Aesthetic philosophy among early Modernist writers, critics, and artists. This phenomenon has been particularly well analyzed in literary histories and interdisciplinary gender studies that examine the perceived relationship between effeminacy, homosexuality, or femininity and Aestheticism among Modernists who sought to establish a separate identity. The "anxiety of influence," a theory developed by Harold Bloom, established a foundation for interpreting the Modernists' dismissal of their predecessors: *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). More recently, scholars have extended their examinations to more specific cultural and historical investigations of individuals. For an excellent example, see Paul Barolsky, *Walter Pater's Renaissance* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press,

Prettejohn, Aesthetic painting is demoted in relation to contemporary French painting and has been intellectually and philosophically devalued because of its exclusion from a history of Modernism. Prettejohn makes the assumption that Modernism, at least her conception of it,<sup>17</sup> is best equipped to accommodate the sophistication that she claims for Aestheticism, and she is not alone in arguing for the inclusion of Aestheticism with Modernism.<sup>18</sup>

---

1987): 155-168; and Lesley Higgins, "No Time for Pater: the Silenced Other of Masculinist Modernism," in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, eds. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2002): 37-54.

<sup>17</sup> "Modernism" defies attempts at a singular definition, a point that Susan Stanford Friedman makes elegantly in "Definitional Excursions: the Meanings of *Modern/Modernity/Modernism*," *Modernism/Modernity* 8, no. 3 (2001): 493-513. Disciplinary discrepancies, ideological differences, and inconsistent usage of the terms "modern," "modernity," and "modernism" all account for a lack of agreement about what these words mean. Prettejohn does not clarify her usage of the terms "Modernism" and "modern," so one must assume that she refers to the primarily art-historical conception of Modernism, which is oriented geographically and chronologically toward early-twentieth-century French art. The specifically art-historical notion of the Modernist trajectory, from Manet to Jackson Pollock, implies increased flatness and increased abstraction. For further discussion of this and other problems with the art-historical engagement with theories of "modernism," see Charles Harrison, "Modernism," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 188-201.

<sup>18</sup> Like Prettejohn, two earlier studies have endeavored to incorporate Aestheticism into a history of Modernism. David Peters Corbett includes Rossetti's work with Pre-Raphaelite painting in his history of English Modernism: *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848-1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004): 37-81. His study focuses on the visual qualities of painting, and his history of Aestheticism reflects that specific emphasis by privileging the early abstract works of Whistler. Corbett's conception of Aestheticism is heavily influenced by formalism and his assessment virtually ignores the cultural importance of Renaissance tradition and gender (83-127). Jessica Feldman's assessment of Aestheticism attempts to create a theory of Modernism based on Rossetti's work. She embraces many of the peculiarities of Victorian Aestheticism – its femininity,

When Prettejohn and others position Aestheticism as a Modernist movement, the sophistication with which Rossetti and his peers engaged with the past is greatly marginalized. Accounts of Victorian Modernism have attempted to divorce Aestheticism from its problematic ties to historical tradition in order to make it more “modern.” The primary conception behind the terms “modern” and “avant-garde,” when used to describe Rossetti’s work, is the assumption that he was doing something *new*.<sup>19</sup> Such assumptions run counter to the historical actuality that Rossetti and many of his associates were actively concerned with artistic tradition. Though I view Aestheticism and Rossetti’s paintings as examples of fundamentally progressive and innovative painting, the relationship they maintain to canonical Modernism is highly problematic and unsettled. Because I am exploring Rossetti’s relationship to the past, I do not intend to argue in favor of incorporating his work into a history of Modernism, though this is a critically important avenue of future research.

Connections to Modernism have obfuscated problems of gender and the

---

domesticity, eclecticism, and, to a lesser extent, its historicism – in order to make her argument, and in doing so avoids depriving Aestheticism of its contemporary context at the expense of its Modernism. See *Victorian Modernism: Pragmatism and the Varieties of Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 66-122.

<sup>19</sup> The terms “modern” and “avant-garde” are often used interchangeably to describe Rossetti’s work even though the terms signify different concepts, visual principles, and even chronologies depending on the circumstances in which they are used. In most instances, scholars mean to indicate that Rossetti’s work was progressive, transgressive, or even subversive. In addition to the sources from note 18, see Jerome McGann, “Medieval versus Victorian versus Modern: Rossetti’s Art of Images,” *Modernism/Modernity* 2, no. 1 (1995): 97-112.



representation of women's beauty in Aestheticism, which remain inseparable from the Aesthetic relationship to historical tradition. In her foundational study of beauty in Aesthetic poetry, painting, and culture, Kathy Psomiades argues that images of women were a fundamental aspect of disseminating Aesthetic ideology.<sup>20</sup> My study of Rossetti's images of women owes a significant debt to Psomiades' analysis of images of beautiful women, but I depart from her, as from Prettejohn, in a notable way. She bases her investigation on the theoretical premise that Aestheticism was an avant-garde movement. She aligns the Aesthetic motivations for representing the female form with the corresponding impulses assigned to other groups classified as avant-garde. While her study is extremely sensitive in the way it connects the representation of women to painting and poetry, she does not fully consider connections to historical tradition in her assessment of the Aesthetic avant-garde.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> See in particular the introduction in Psomiades, *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997): 1-22. Prettejohn and Psomiades have both identified images of beautiful women as a key aspect of Aesthetic painting and poetry, but neither has fully integrated Aesthetic images of women into a larger history of representation. While Prettejohn briefly accounts for the importance of *Stil Novo* poetry, her analysis of *Bocca Baciata* in *Art for Art's Sake* locates the painting within a contemporary context: "...a renunciation of the moral responsibilities so often enjoined upon painters by mid-Victorian art critics, in favour of the visual pleasure of art and female beauty in combination" (42; 220-222). Psomiades views the images of women as representative of contradictions within Aestheticism; namely the tension between masculinized "high art" and the feminized sphere of domestic space and mass culture (2-3).

<sup>21</sup> Psomiades builds her argument for the avant-garde status of Aestheticism (10-12) using the work of Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Though Psomiades acknowledges many of the problematic aspects of Bürger's text, she ultimately accepts its validity as a basis for her investigation of Aesthetic gender ideology. In her examination of the

The beauty of Rossetti's female figures has been a topic of frequent discussion since the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> Since the 1980s, feminist scholars in particular have pursued questions relating to beauty, identity, and the roles of artist and viewer. Griselda Pollock's analysis of Rossetti's paintings from the 1860s established a theoretical standard for succeeding investigations. She argued that in his images of women the model's beauty was conflated with the image of her beauty. The result, according to Pollock, was a loss of identity for the individual women in the paintings and a cultural fixation on images of beauty. Pollock assiduously avoids ascribing Rossetti authorship of his own works. In her attempt to avoid valorizing the author "Rossetti," she only briefly mentions the relationship of his work to the broader history of women's beauty in art, including sixteenth-century Venetian painting. She argues instead that the paintings are psychologically motivated cultural productions of the

---

concept of "avant-garde," Ann Gibson points out the multiple and conflicting definitions of avant-garde in cultural studies. See "Avant-Garde," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, 202-216. Similarly to Feldman's theory of Victorian Modernism, Gibson demonstrates the availability of "anti-avant-garde" strategies that both appropriate and subvert the existing notions of the avant-garde. Gibson's comments refer specifically to issues in contemporary art, but her ideas are potentially applicable to Rossetti, whose work does not fit within the standard art-historical notion of avant-garde.

<sup>22</sup> Contemporary criticism, much of which will be discussed in the following chapters, discusses women's beauty in Rossetti's work in a highly metaphorical way. When Frederic W. H. Myers wrote an account of Rossetti's posthumous exhibition at Burlington House in 1883, he rhapsodized, "The most direct appeals, the most penetrating reminiscences, come to the worshipper of Beauty from a woman's eyes." Myers, "Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty," reprinted in *Critical Essays on Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. David G. Riede (New York: Macmillan, 1992): 49.

Victorian period.<sup>23</sup>

My study makes a theoretical and methodological departure from Pollock's reading, which has largely dominated the feminist approach to Rossetti's work since the 1980s. Pollock provides a necessary corrective to the overly biographical and laudatory nature of Rossetti studies, but her conclusions have precluded further comparisons of the two periods and aspects of representation undertaken in my analysis of Rossetti's work – Renaissance and Victorian and women's beauty and the beauty of art – on the assumption that such comparisons would give authority to Rossetti.<sup>24</sup> As a central figure in Aestheticism, Rossetti's work was connected to significant trends as they pertained to painting, poetry, and criticism. Though my approach focuses on a single figure, it pursues questions of representation and meaning in images of women through time, across periods and geographies, and between media. In exploring Rossetti's

---

<sup>23</sup> Pollock's influential revisionist account of Rossetti's work coincided with a major exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite art at the Tate Gallery in 1984. She co-authored an article with Deborah Cherry that questioned the mythology of greatness that surrounded Rossetti: Cherry and Pollock, "Patriarchal Power and the Pre-Raphaelites," *Art History* 7, no. 4 (Dec 1984): 480-495. Her later essay examines the question more thoroughly and appeared in 1988 as part of the first edition of *Vision and Difference*. For the issues discussed above, see specifically, "Woman as Sign: Psychoanalytical Readings," in *Vision and Difference*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003): 169-174.

<sup>24</sup> After listing several major trends in Rossetti scholarship, including the discussion of Venetian "influence" in Rossetti's work, Pollock states that, "...Each [explanation] constructs an intentional author for the works, a Rossetti who then deposits his philosophical interests, painterly concerns or personal quirks and political fears in the pictures. Meaning becomes an extricable facet of the artistic personality who created the paintings" (174). Like Pollock, I do not wish to privilege Rossetti or his individual influences. His images of women reveal a larger cultural phenomenon of historical engagement that produced a distinctive type of beauty.

relationship to the Renaissance, his status and influences are not privileged; rather, the example of his work provides a richer understanding of the cultural, historical, and artistic conditions from which Victorian Aestheticism and Aesthetic representations of women emerged.

In order to contextualize Rossetti's images of women within the Renaissance traditions with which he was engaged, this study moves beyond the typical parameters of scholarship on Victorian art. Many scholars have investigated the ways in which images of women and women's beauty functioned in Renaissance art and literature. The ideas of several are elaborated upon in the following chapters. Patricia Simons, Philip Sohm, and Elizabeth Cropper have investigated aspects of women's beauty in painting, poetry, and art criticism during the Italian Renaissance.<sup>25</sup> Among the qualities of representation discussed in their works are the formation or suppression of female identity in poetry and painting, the relationship between poetic and pictorial representations of women, and the association of the beauty of women and eroticism with the art of painting. Their studies provide applicable means (feminist, critical, historical, interdisciplinary) for interpreting Rossetti's paintings of women from the 1860s in which the Renaissance was of such importance.

In particular, the work of Cropper, who has written extensively on the beauty of

---

<sup>25</sup> Patricia Simons has demonstrated the many complexities inherent in female portraits from the Renaissance in her essay "Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women," in *Languages and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): 263-311. Phillip Sohm, "Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia," *Renaissance Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 759-808.

women in the Renaissance and its function in poetry and painting, provides a framework for understanding an aspect of the connection Rossetti's paintings had to previous tradition. Rossetti's paintings, original poetry and writing, and poetic translations reveal that he was steeped in a centuries-old tradition of poetry, painting, and art criticism in which, as Cropper has shown, similar language was used to discuss the beauty of women and works of art. Cropper's initial observations were based on the relationship between fourteenth-century Petrarchan love poetry, which established an ideal of physical and spiritual beauty for women (encompassing qualities of *grazia*, *vaghezza*, *leggiadria*, and *aria*), and later paintings of women, art criticism, and treatises on female beauty.<sup>26</sup>

Images of beautiful women were at the nexus of the *paragone*, or competition, between the sister arts of poetry and painting in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, according to Cropper. The written "image" of the beloved in sonnet form led eventually to painted portraits based upon the poetic ideal. The images of beautiful women, as

---

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Cropper's work on the subject of female beauty in the Renaissance is quite extensive, but on the issues discussed above see the seminal article "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, *Petrarchismo*, and the Vernacular Style," *Art Bulletin* 58, no. 3 (Sept 1976): 380; 383-386. Sohm has addressed some of the same problems pertaining to gendered language and criticism that Cropper raised in her 1976 article: "Gendered Style," 761-773. Treatises on female beauty include such works as Agnolo Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, trans. and ed. by Konrad Eisenbichler and Jacqueline Murray (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). Firenzuola's treatise (written in the form of a dialogue) enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in nineteenth-century England even though it was not translated into English until the end of the century. *Grazia*, *vaghezza*, *leggiadria*, and *aria* are translated by Eisenlichler and Murray (xxxviii) as grace, charm, elegance, and air, as in the sense of a certain ethereal manner of comportment; see also David Summers, "Aria II: The Union of Image and Artist as an Aesthetic Ideal in Renaissance Art," *Artibus et Historiae* 10, no. 20 (1989): 15-31.

well as the appreciation of them, were shaped by the conventions of lyric love poetry. Representations of women not only fit the Petrarchan ideal of beauty, but appreciation of the images fit the Petrarchan model of admiring the beauty of a beloved woman. Sixteenth-century art criticism, too, adopted the conventions of lyric poetry to describe the features of painting, style, or even specific works, like portraits of beautiful women.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the language of art criticism had a double meaning. It referred both to the beauty of the woman represented but also to the beauty of her representation.<sup>28</sup>

Cropper's ideas suggest a new means of interpreting Rossetti's paintings of women, which share many stylistic and conceptual features of the Petrarchan ideal in Renaissance painting and poetry. It would be historically inaccurate to claim that Rossetti understood the Renaissance in precisely the way that Cropper does or even in the way that most art historians do today. Rather, the visual, thematic, and conceptual connections between Rossetti's work and Renaissance poetry and painting indicate that he was participating in a self-consciously historical tradition of representing women's

---

<sup>27</sup> Cropper, "The Beauty of Women," 176; 179-182. For further reading on female portraiture in the Renaissance, as well as a demonstration of the prevalence of Cropper's ideas, see David Alan Brown, ed., *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, Exh. Cat. (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001). Additionally, see Sohm, "Gendered Style," 760-761.

<sup>28</sup> See especially Cropper, "The Place of Beauty in the High Renaissance and its Displacement in the History of Art," in *Place and Displacement in the Renaissance*, ed. Alvin Vos (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1995): 190-203; and by the same author "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986): 171-181; 190.

beauty that was related to what Cropper describes. His paintings and critical activity during the 1860s cement the notion that Renaissance ideals of Petrarchan beauty were not only relevant among Aesthetic artists and critics but that their understanding of such beauty played a key role in the development of Aestheticism.

While many have cited beauty as the primary motivating force of Aestheticism, the precise meaning of “beauty” has remained vague. Prettejohn’s account of Aestheticism includes her interpretation and analysis of the philosophical foundation of Aesthetic beauty.<sup>29</sup> It was not her primary objective to explain how Aesthetic beauty relates to a history of representing beautiful women. That is a primary way in which my study expands upon hers and existing examinations of Rossetti’s Aestheticism and images of women. Scholars have found no satisfactory explanation for why Rossetti, and other Aesthetic artists, repeatedly chose beautiful women as the subject of their paintings during the 1860s.<sup>30</sup> In my interpretation of Aesthetic beauty embodied by a beautiful woman, I draw a theoretical connection to Elizabeth Cropper’s analysis of women’s beauty in Renaissance art. In this way, Rossetti’s perception of Renaissance tradition allows for a reading of his paintings as images of beautiful women that represent the beauty of art.

For the most part, connections to the past like those I make here have been

---

<sup>29</sup> Prettejohn, *Art for Art’s Sake*, 18-27.

<sup>30</sup> Though many scholars have questioned the place of beauty in Rossetti’s work, two of the most relevant to the present study include Pollock, “Woman as Sign,” 167-172; and Psomiades, *Beauty’s Body*, 2-8, who have located the “beauty” of Rossetti’s paintings in their representation of beautiful women.

mostly ignored in assessments of Aestheticism; however, there is a small and growing body of literature that establishes the Victorian engagement with an understanding of the Italian Renaissance. J. B. Bullen and Hillary Fraser have both addressed the question of how the Italian Renaissance was understood and interpreted by writers and artists during the 1860s, and their work is crucial to my own study.<sup>31</sup> Recent publications have emphasized the place of public and private patronage in knowledge about Renaissance art in nineteenth-century England.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s, England sought to establish itself as the preeminent collector of and source for scholarship about the Renaissance. Thus, it is important to understand the privileged place that Renaissance art held for Rossetti, but also, more generally, within the contemporary art scene.

---

<sup>31</sup> J. B. Bullen, *Continental Crosscurrents: British Criticism and European Art, 1810-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 120-143; and *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and Hillary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992). Though the following are older and more general, they remain standard historiographic accounts of the nineteenth-century view of the Renaissance: John Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance: The Growth of Interest in its History and Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954); and Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought. Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948).

<sup>32</sup> Though she does not specifically take up questions concerning the collection of Renaissance art, Diane Sachko Macleod provides essential data regarding the collection of Old Master paintings in the 1860s by figures including Frederick Richards Leyland (1832-1892) and William Graham (1817-1885) in her study *Art and the Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 382-489. A recent volume of essays, *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, eds. John E. Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), more directly indicates the place of Renaissance art in Victorian cultural life.



Rossetti's knowledge of the past is well documented in a variety of primary sources, and despite the fact that the vast majority of these items have been published or made available through McGann's online archive, scholars continue to underestimate the importance of historical tradition in his work. Auction records reveal large book and photograph collections and establish his interest in thirteenth- to sixteenth-century Italian poetry, literature, and art. Many documents that pertain to the 1860s including paintings, letters, notebooks, sketches, and original poetry all demonstrate Rossetti's understanding of Renaissance art and poetry as well as his Aesthetic principles in relation to female beauty. Nineteenth-century art criticism, particularly that of Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) and Frederic George Stephens (1828-1907), plays an essential role in establishing the larger Aesthetic understanding of the Renaissance and Rossetti's images of women.<sup>33</sup>

A number of relevant sources from the Renaissance had a direct bearing on the type of beauty in Rossetti's paintings of women: significantly, Rossetti had access to or was familiar with all of them. Lyric poetry, which Rossetti translated, but which also informed Renaissance portraits of women, is analyzed throughout the chapters. Several sixteenth-century portraits of women, such as Titian's *Woman with a Mirror*, also

---

<sup>33</sup> The following are some of the standard editions that I use throughout the study: William E. Fredeman, *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002-2005); Jan Marsh, ed., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Collected Writings* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000); Jerome McGann, ed., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Collected Poetry and Prose* (New Haven; London: 2003); Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, eds., *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne* 5 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1925).

feature prominently in my discussion. Sixteenth-century art criticism, including Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1568), is used to document the Aesthetic exposure to Renaissance traditions of gendered language and representation described by Cropper.<sup>34</sup>

### Part Three: The Shape of the Argument

My project is not a comprehensive overview of Rossetti's production during the 1860s but is rather a highly focused set of studies centering on specific works that exemplify four principal themes: Aesthetic historicism, portraiture, color, and the *femme fatale*. In order to advance its central argument, that Rossetti's engagement with the Renaissance is a distinctive aspect of his images of women from this period, the dissertation draws heavily from both previous scholarship and primary sources. With the exception of Aesthetic historicism, the themes I have chosen to explore all have important precedents in the Renaissance that set a standard for nineteenth-century art, and all appear in pivotal Aesthetic paintings in Rossetti's *oeuvre*. Each chapter explores how images of beautiful women and historical precedent functioned together to create a representation of Aesthetic beauty.

Chapter 1 argues that the beauty of women served a double purpose by

---

<sup>34</sup> In addition to Rossetti's translations from the 1861 edition of *Early Italian Poets* (reprinted in Marsh, *Collected Writings*), I have also consulted Jensen, *Tuscan Poetry of the Duecento*; Thomas P. Roche, Jr., ed., *Petrarch in English* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Firenzuola, *Beauty of Women*; and Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, ed. Robert Linscott and trans. Gaston DuC. De Vere (New York: The Modern Library, 1959 [1568]).

representing Rossetti's interpretation of the past and Aesthetic beauty. I begin by establishing Rossetti's "bodily," or sensual, conception of art in the 1860s, which was fundamentally linked to his understanding of the Renaissance. Rossetti's knowledge of the past extended well beyond the typical rehearsal of details offered in studies of his work, and his perception of the past was part of larger cultural and critical tendencies in the 1860s. He had access to a variety of materials, including poetry, paintings, and literature from the Renaissance and his knowledge played a significant role in forming his "bodily" Aestheticism. While there has been an effort to describe the view of the Renaissance in earlier periods, like Romanticism, no lengthy investigation exists for Aestheticism. I present my interpretation of Aesthetic historicism, or the Aesthetic tendency to use historical tradition in a significant way to advance contemporary ideas. While historicism itself is not unique, the Aesthetic perception of Renaissance art and poetry, and the way in which this perception was incorporated into the philosophy of beauty for its own sake, distinguishes Aesthetic historicism. Swinburne's criticism of contemporary and Renaissance art illustrates the importance of this type of beauty in the Aesthetic perception of the past. Finally, I demonstrate how *Fazio's Mistress* (1863), perhaps the most openly historical of Rossetti's Aesthetic paintings, brings together Aesthetic principles and historical allusion through the image of a beautiful woman.

Portraiture has long been a problematic category in discussions of Rossetti's work, but more than any other type of painting from the 1860s, his portraits of women express his "bodily" notion of Aestheticism. By Rossetti's accounts, the category functioned fluidly – meaning that an individual work could function as a portrait and a

different type of image depending on who was viewing it and under what circumstances. Chapter 2 examines *Bocca Baciata* (1859), an important work for its allusion to Renaissance portraits of women and its status among Rossetti's paintings as a sensual, erotic representation of a woman. Rossetti's letters, notebooks, drawings, paintings, poems, and prose of the period suggest that his understanding of female portraiture was far more complex than previous scholars have allowed. Whereas earlier interpretations of Rossetti's portraits have placed a high value on their qualities of likeness, Rossetti understood certain portraits to have a more metaphorical dimension related to ideal female beauty. Particular images of women, from contemporary art and the past, blurred the line between the representation of beauty and specific likeness, yet all fit within Rossetti's understanding of portraiture. The way in which Rossetti applied his understanding to paintings of women may partially account for the difficulty scholars have had in considering his images as portraits. Beyond its stylistic similarity to Renaissance portraits, *Bocca Baciata* demonstrates a conceptual resonance within Aestheticism to idealized female beauty from Renaissance traditions of poetry and painting. In verse and on canvas, Renaissance portraits of women frequently slip between the real and the ideal. Rossetti's paintings, always done from life, are subject to a related conflation of the model's appearance and the artist's idealization of her beauty and obfuscation of her identity. The woman represented is at once herself – a link to the present – but also used to represent an idealized, and historicized, image of the past.

A distinctive characteristic of Rossetti's paintings of women from the 1860s is their expression of autonomous beauty. This is one of the defining qualities that

distinguishes them from Pre-Raphaelite and other previous traditions of English painting and aligns them with Aestheticism. Chapter 3 begins with an examination of the relationship between color and the image of a beautiful woman in *The Blue Bower* (1865). In the painting, narrative subject matter is greatly diminished in the pursuit of autonomous, sensual Aesthetic beauty. The critic Frederic George Stephens, who wrote about the painting in 1865, compared *The Blue Bower* to Venetian painting, lyric poetry, and music. The painting of a woman playing a musical instrument was at once elevated by its use of musical imagery and color as a subject in itself, but color was equally connected with the representation of sensual, “bodily,” and feminine beauty. Color was inexorably linked to Venetian painting and its perceived sensuality and femininity in English art criticism. Venetian Renaissance painting was deeply embedded within the developing critical discourse of Aestheticism in the 1860s. In particular, paintings like Giorgione’s *Pastoral Concert* (oil on canvas, 1508-9, Musée du Louvre, Paris) captured the Aesthetic ideal of sensual, lyrical composition in which meaning and beauty were synonymous.

Some critics, including Swinburne, understood the Aesthetic beauty of Rossetti’s paintings to be all consuming. Chapter 4 discusses *Lady Lilith* (1869), which presents an image of a sensual, alluring, and beautiful woman, who threatens the viewer by virtue of her intoxicating beauty. Typically heralded as a quintessential example of the nineteenth-century *femme fatale*, *Lady Lilith* does not fit comfortably within existing visual or literary stereotypes from the 1860s. The painting more closely resembles Rossetti’s other sensual images of women from the 1860s. While the woman

represented in *Lady Lilith* is physically idealized, her character is morally ambiguous in that she appeals to the viewer (her lover) through “bodily” means alone. The type of beauty in *Lady Lilith* bespeaks the importance of Petrarchan tradition and the value of women’s beauty in the formation of Aesthetic experience as all-consuming and potentially dangerous.

Rossetti’s images of women demonstrate that the Renaissance was critical from the earliest phases of Aestheticism. Just as importantly, he used women’s beauty to embody his relationship to artistic and poetic tradition. Inevitably, I leave several important questions unanswered. Specifically, Are my observations about the 1860s applicable to Rossetti’s career as a whole? To what extent did the Renaissance affect the other artists around Rossetti? And was the beauty of women used frequently by Aesthetic artists and writers to express abstract ideas about beauty, or was this tendency specific to Rossetti? In my concluding remarks, I address these questions as a means of offering a new direction for future inquiries into the nature of Aesthetic historicism and images of women.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE RENAISSANCE IDEALIZED: HISTORY'S BEAUTY IN *FAZIO'S MISTRESS*

Rossetti's knowledge of and engagement with Italian Renaissance art and literature during the 1860s are manifested in his images of women, which represent the embodiment of Aesthetic beauty. The confluence of historicism and Aestheticism in Rossetti's images of women is far from coincidental. Additionally, the meeting of past and present in images of beautiful women signified the Aesthetic desire for more sensual forms of representation. The beauty of women, from the past and present, came to stand for this new Aesthetic desire. Rossetti's *Fazio's Mistress*, based upon a fourteenth-century *canzone* by Fazio degli Uberti and Titian's *Woman with a Mirror*, demonstrates the dual role of beauty in Rossetti's Aestheticism. The beauty of the woman represented is connected to historical tradition and an idealized conception of the past. Her beauty also functions as a vehicle for sensual, autonomous Aesthetic beauty.

Though some problematic issues in Aesthetic painting and criticism of the 1860s have been addressed in recent scholarship, a number of questions remain regarding the relationship between Aestheticism and artistic traditions of the past. Among Rossetti and his peers, the developing concept of Aestheticism was coupled with an increasingly vivid interest in artists, poets, literature, and historical figures from

the Renaissance. Aesthetic engagement in Renaissance tradition was manifested in a variety of ways including painting, poetry, and art criticism in the 1860s. As the Pre-Raphaelites had done in the 1840s and 1850s, Aesthetic artists and writers used historicism to advance their philosophy of autonomous beauty. Rossetti's engagement with tradition extended beyond inspiration; his understanding of the Renaissance was fundamentally related to his conception of Aesthetic beauty.

*Fazio's Mistress* (1863) is a key example of Rossetti's work that demonstrates both his engagement with the past and his "bodily" Aestheticism. The composition and subject of the painting are frequently compared to Titian's *Woman with a Mirror*; however, the complexities of its textual and visual connections with Renaissance images of women's beauty have yet to be fully explored. In *Fazio's Mistress*, the image of a beautiful woman functions as a representation of Aesthetic beauty. Though Rossetti and the artists and poets whose work he admired were separated by centuries, the representation of beautiful women in each case remains strikingly similar. Rossetti's paintings were not simply imitative of Renaissance masters but rather deeply engaged in a tradition of using images of beautiful women to embody and represent the beauty of art itself.

#### Part One: Rossetti's "Bodily" View of Art in the 1860s

Rossetti had wide exposure to a number of contemporary artists and writers in addition to an excellent, if now undervalued, knowledge of art history and literature. Rossetti's roles as poet, translator, and occasional critic are inseparable from his role as



a painter.<sup>35</sup> Rossetti's enthusiasm for the past is a key element in understanding any of his roles throughout the 1860s. His Aestheticism, specifically in favor of a sensual, erotic, feminine, and autonomous beauty, was intimately connected with his interpretation of the Renaissance and past traditions of representing the beauty of women.

Sensuality and corporeality were important components of Rossetti's concept of Aesthetic beauty. Rossetti referred to this quality of beauty as "bodily," and Swinburne even used the term "fleshy" to describe the sensuality of Rossetti's work, which has always figured prominently in assessments of his Aestheticism.<sup>36</sup> These terms encapsulate everything sensual, vital, visceral, and erotic about Aesthetic beauty.

---

<sup>35</sup> An early study of Rossetti's library postulated a close relationship between his creative endeavors and his role as a critic: Albert Morton Turner, "Rossetti's Reading and His Critical Opinions," *PMLA* 42, no. 2 (June 1927): 465-491.

<sup>36</sup> Since the nineteenth century, the sensual quality of Rossetti's work has been readily recognized in criticism. For example, Robert Buchanan's infamous attack on Aestheticism singled out Rossetti as the leader of the "Fleshy School" of poetry ("The Fleshy School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti," *Contemporary Review* 18 [1871]: 334-350). Buchanan appropriated the term "fleshy" from Swinburne's earlier praise of Rossetti's sensuousness and beauty of language ("The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," *Fortnightly Review* 7 [1870]: 551-579). Under Buchanan's pen, the word is strictly an insult, meaning overly-erotic and sexual subject matter and treatment. Later authors, including Psomiades and J.B. Bullen, have investigated the implications – economic, sexual, moral, social, and formal – of "fleshiness" in Aesthetic painting and poetry. Psomiades is specifically engaged with the economic exchange between Aestheticism and bourgeois Victorian culture in which women's bodies featured so prominently. See *Beauty's Body*, 58-93. Bullen interrogates the social and cultural implications of "fleshy" representation within several discourses including psychology, disease, and gender. For his discussion of Rossetti's work, see *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998): 49-109; and 110-135.

Equally, they indicate the increasing distance placed between Aesthetic art and art that placed a high value on moralizing and story-telling to generate meaning. Aestheticism was almost wholly centered on the representation of beauty, and the beauty of women was a powerful means to express the “bodily” beauty of art. The way in which Renaissance art and poetry and images of beautiful women intersected to form this concept of beauty is of utmost importance for gaining a new understanding of Aestheticism as a whole. Throughout the 1860s, Rossetti praised the work of Italian Renaissance artists. He did so directly, by comparing their work to those by peers he admired, and, most importantly, by making laudatory allusions to past masters in his own productions. Through these comments about the past, Rossetti made some of his most important statements about sensuality in art, color, and the importance of painting without narrative or morality.

In the early 1860s, Rossetti made two trips to Paris. His actions and comments on these occasions reveal that he favored distinctly sensual contemporary art and that the Renaissance figured prominently into this point of view. While his remarks are frequently cited as evidence of his new enthusiasm for Venetian painting in the 1860s, scholars largely eschew the question of how his understanding of Renaissance art related to his images of women and understanding of Aesthetic beauty.<sup>37</sup> In the 1860s,

---

<sup>37</sup> By far, the most sophisticated analysis of this episode in Rossetti’s career is still found in the standard account by Macleod, “Rossetti and Titian,” 36-39, in which she describes the artist’s engagement with Venetian art and compares him with Manet. Her account serves as the basis for the most recent comparison in Prettejohn, *Art for Art’s Sake*, 208-222. While these two scholars begin to discuss the complexity with which Rossetti navigated visual tradition and contemporary art, their accounts are relatively

all aspects were fundamentally connected. In 1864, Rossetti left London with the stated purpose of viewing a retrospective exhibition of Eugène Delacroix's (1798-1863) paintings. While in Paris, he saw a number of other things, about which he commented readily. He wrote opinionated letters to several of his correspondents, including his brother William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919), the poet Algernon Swinburne, and fellow artist Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), reiterating the same sentiment. Of his exposure to contemporary French art, Rossetti observed in a letter to George Rae (1817-1902):

I have benefited decidedly by my trip, and feel quite set up. French art is mostly in a state of real decomposition, quite calculated to put English artists on their mettle to make a good run for the lead. A few things of surprising merit are to be seen here and there. I have been specially delighted with the works of one Millet, whose name (Gallicé) is curiously identical with that of our best English painter.<sup>38</sup>

Rossetti's admiration for Jean-François Millet (1814-1875) as well as Delacroix was tempered by his derogatory assessment of Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) and Édouard Manet. Rossetti's friend, the painter Henri Fantin-Latour (1836-1904), escorted him personally to their studios. His subsequent letters characterized contemporary French art as "lazy," "a solid stink," and "a beastly slop."<sup>39</sup>

---

brief.

<sup>38</sup> Rae was a prominent patron of Aesthetic art and of Rossetti's work in particular. For the letter to Rae, written on November 16, 1864, see Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 213-14, 64.159.

<sup>39</sup> For the assessments of the "French School" as "lazy," "a solid stink," and "a beastly slop," see the following letters respectively: to WM Rossetti on November 8, 1864, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 207, 64.153; to Burne-Jones on November 18, 1864

If the contemporary art that Rossetti saw in Paris was so objectionable, then one is left to consider what direction he might have considered most appropriate for contemporary art in England. Rossetti's attitude is in many ways representative of a larger change since the late 1850s in what he and others viewed as a more intellectually and visually fulfilling form of art making and artistic philosophy. French art was visually unsatisfying, or at least most of the contemporary examples that Rossetti encountered, though Delacroix was an important exception. Delacroix was known for his vivid, erotic, sensuous renderings of Romantic literature. Rossetti's attraction to Delacroix, instead of Manet and Courbet, is not terribly surprising given his attraction to Aesthetic beauty.

Rossetti offered an important clue about his visual, literary, and critical preferences during an earlier trip to Paris in 1860. While there, he made repeated visits to see Paolo Veronese's *Marriage at Cana* (oil on canvas, 1563, Musée du Louvre,

---

(*ibid.*, 214-15, 64.160); and to Swinburne on November 18, 1864 (*ibid.*, 214-15, 64.161). Rossetti's criticism of Courbet was softened by a small degree of admiration. In the letter to his brother, he stated that "C. was away but I saw various works of his – by far an early portrait of himself about 23 or 24 resting his head on one hand. It is rather hard and colourless but has many of the fine qualities of a Leonardo. His other works are great in parts and are all most faulty." Rossetti's assessment of Manet was biting and emphasized his objection to Manet's technique (from the letter of 8 Nov to WM Rossetti): "[The] incredible new French school – people painted with 2 eyes in one socket through merely being too lazy to efface the first and what not... Fantin took me to see a man named Manet who has painted things of the same kind." For further reading about Rossetti's reaction to Manet's work, see Robin Spencer, "Manet, Rossetti, London, and Derby Day," *The Burlington Magazine* 133, no. 1057 (April 1999): 228-236. Ross King has analyzed this episode in Rossetti's correspondence in order to argue that the French Impressionists represented a shockingly new form of avant-garde painting: *The Judgment of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that Gave the World Impressionism* (New York: Walker & Co., 2006): 144-150.

Paris) in the Louvre.<sup>40</sup> Writing to the poet William Allingham (1824-1889) a few weeks after his return, Rossetti offered a revealing insight regarding his feelings toward the picture. Rossetti's comment was initially prompted by his reaction to a poem by Allingham:

I am anxious about the Sawdust Poem, but am not sure that the product is better adapted for wholesome spiritual bread than it is for the bodily. Sawdust more or less is the fashion of the day – Hunt's wooden puppet-show of enlarged views instead of Veronese's flesh, blood, and slight stupidity. Give me the latter however – or even Millais's, when Veronese's is not to be had. But O that Veronese in Paris!<sup>41</sup>

Rossetti's statement to Allingham revealed what he understood as a dichotomous cleft between the "spiritual" and "bodily" in poetry and art. The term "sawdust," which Rossetti used as colloquial shorthand to mean low, humble, and prosaic, indicated a conservatism that, though fashionable, was far from his liking. Rossetti's illustration of the contemporary English rage for "sawdust" was his former Pre-Raphaelite brother, William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), whose paintings of biblical and historical subjects remained popular with middle class Victorian buyers. The alternative to Hunt's stiff "wooden puppet-show" pictures, according to Rossetti, was the corporeal, flesh-and-blood master of color, Veronese. Veronese's *Marriage at Cana* represented the vitality,

---

<sup>40</sup> Rossetti's exact statement is that he had gotten, "several good looks" at the painting and that it is "the greatest picture in the world." See the letter to WM Rossetti, June 9, 1860, *ibid.* 2, 298, 60.13.

<sup>41</sup> The "Sawdust Poem," by Allingham is *Lawrence Bloomfield in Ireland* (1864). For the excerpt from above, a brief textual history of the poem, and Fredeman's explanation of Rossetti's use of the term "sawdust" (as "humble"), see the letter and note 1 from July 31, 1860, *Correspondence* 2, 306-7, 60.24.

sensuality, and *beauty* lacking in Hunt's work.

After his trips to Paris in 1860 and 1864, Rossetti made a fairly clear set of distinctions about what he thought constituted successful art and poetry, what he saw as the proper direction of these two arts, and which figures, both contemporary and historical, were the most important in charting the new course of contemporary English art. The anecdote of Rossetti's visits to the Paris studios of Courbet and Manet indicate that he was unimpressed with French art. In 1860 he favored a more "bodily" conception of painting that was lacking in contemporary French painting. In his comparisons between French and English art in 1864, he gave a significant measure of respect to the work of John Everett Millais (1829-1896), but his comments to Allingham indicated that it was Veronese, the sixteenth-century Venetian and not the nineteenth-century Englishman, that truly embodied the sensual ideal of art. It was the work of Veronese (and presumably other sixteenth-century Venetian masters) that was the model for a new direction in art, not "sawdust."

The concept of "bodily" beauty runs throughout Rossetti's images of women and Aestheticism. More specifically, his term "bodily" worked to link his notions about beauty with that in previous periods of art. In Aestheticism, the *type* of beauty superseded time and place, so that Veronese and Rossetti, for example, revered the same "bodily" beauty. The term is in no way self-explanatory and was certainly meant to be euphemistic if not purposefully vague. Like Swinburne's related term "fleshy," used to describe Rossetti's paintings and poems, Rossetti's "bodily" stood for a constellation of related ideas surrounding the representation of women's beauty,

eroticism, and sexuality. The notion of “bodily” beauty was inexorably linked to the femininity of Aesthetic beauty, which had its basis in the interpretation of historical precedent. While Rossetti used sensual and erotic representation in his work, it was typically in the pursuit of more abstract meaning. Of course, this does not negate the cultural and moral implications of his “bodily” beauty, but his Aestheticism was not overtly unmoral.<sup>42</sup> The elusive meaning of “bodily” that I wish to stress here is the one connected with Rossetti’s images of women. Rossetti’s idea of “bodily” beauty finds its clearest form in the embodied beauty of his paintings. Images of women served as a powerful vehicle to express the “bodily” beauty of art – past and present – because they metonymically encapsulated the core of sensual Aesthetic experience.

#### Part Two: Rossetti and the Aesthetic Past

Rossetti’s knowledge of the past was premised upon his understanding of certain types of Renaissance art and poetry as examples of “bodily” beauty, and this interpretation is significant in interpreting his Aestheticism. During the 1860s, Rossetti maintained a vital interest in and engagement with the past. His contact with specific source material affected his work in identifiable ways, but the nature of his enthusiasm for the Renaissance extended beyond visual correspondence. For Rossetti, the Aesthetic notion of beauty for its own sake took the form of sensual images of women

---

<sup>42</sup> Some who consider Aestheticism a more subversive cultural phenomenon would not agree with my position, and there is evidence to support an alternate reading of Rossetti’s work. For example, see Bullen’s psychoanalytic reading of “male desire” in Rossetti’s paintings from this period in *Pre-Raphaelite Body*, 110-148.

that were integrally related to the Aesthetic interpretation of the Renaissance tradition of idealizing women's beauty. In Aestheticism, the function of women's beauty was doubled to stand for an idealized past and the beauty of art.

*Rossetti's Knowledge and Understanding of the Italian Renaissance*

Rossetti had a profound, enduring, and documented enthusiasm for the Italian Renaissance. His images of women are conceptually linked with his understanding of the past as sensual and based upon the poetic conventions of beauty and love. Until now, scholars have taken disparate comments, incidents, and inferences and constructed a disjointed view of Rossetti's attraction to the past.<sup>43</sup> My findings suggest instead that Rossetti's enthusiasm for the Renaissance intensified in proportion with his attraction to Aestheticism. In order to fully explicate Rossetti's innovative historicism, it is necessary to articulate his *understanding* of the Renaissance and his perception of women's beauty in Renaissance art and poetry.

Though many agree that England played a formative role in defining the "Renaissance" through collecting, historical writing, and more creative endeavors like Swinburne's and Pater's critical writings, Rossetti's contribution to the Victorian discourse on Renaissance art has been downplayed in current and past scholarship.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Beyond sources already mentioned throughout the chapter and introduction, also see Elizabeth Ellen DeSchryver, "The Reinvention of the Italian Renaissance Artist in the Victorian Imagination" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1996): 95-114. DeSchryver argues that Rossetti attempted to claim the "authority of the Renaissance" by appropriating the identity of its artists in his pictorial and literary work.

<sup>44</sup> The most recent volume dealing with issues of Victorian interpretations of the



The neglect is perhaps due to the fact that Rossetti never traveled to Italy. Initially, it seems logical that his knowledge of Italian art would have been hampered by his lack of direct contact. However, his correspondence suggests that he had seen the major works of the Italian Renaissance either in reproduction or in person in London and Paris and that he was familiar with nineteenth-century art-historical accounts of the Italian Renaissance.<sup>45</sup> In addition, not enough attention has been paid to the wider context in which Rossetti viewed and understood Renaissance art during the 1860s. In 1864, for example, both his brother and Swinburne traveled to Florence, likely providing him with accounts of the artwork encountered on their journeys.<sup>46</sup> Even though Rossetti

---

Renaissance scarcely mentions Rossetti's role within the context of the Aesthetic taste for Renaissance art: *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance* (2005). Two exceptions are Hilary Fraser, who discusses Rossetti's poetic contribution (along with Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth and Robert Browning, Swinburne, and George Meredith) in terms of its creative relationship to Renaissance traditions, namely Dantean and Petrarchan sonnet forms. See Fraser, *Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, 134-178.

<sup>45</sup> The same volume that largely ignores Rossetti's contribution to the Victorian discourse on Renaissance art provides the necessary evidence to demonstrate that Rossetti could have had access to works of Italian art through reproduction. See especially Graham Smith, "Florence, Photography and the Victorians," in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, 7-32. Rossetti's awareness of the photographic reproductions and catalogues discussed in Smith's essay is confirmed by his correspondence. In 1864, he wrote to his mother to tell her about some photographs of early Italian masters that he had purchased while in Paris. In 1865, he recommended Crowe and Cavalcaselle's illustrated history of Italian art to one of his patrons who planned to travel in Italy. For these letters, see Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3 208-9, 64.154; and 237-8, 65.1, respectively.

<sup>46</sup> A new volume begins to remedy the problem of Rossetti's isolation from his peers by examining simultaneously all of the Rossettis' professional and personal activities: Alison Chapman and Joanna Meacock, *A Rossetti Family Chronology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For an account of what each family member was doing

never traveled to Italy himself, the historical record reveals that his enthusiasm along with that of others was a highly motivating force providing a steady flow of information and access to Renaissance art and poetry.

Rossetti had substantial firsthand contact with Renaissance art before and during the 1860s. Beginning in 1848, Rossetti traveled to Paris four times where he viewed the collection of the Louvre. The Renaissance artists he encountered there included Sandro Botticelli, Titian, Paolo Veronese, Giorgione, Raphael, and Leonardo da Vinci to name only a few. The Louvre afforded ample opportunity to view significant works of art by the “Old Masters.” Perhaps the most acclaimed example, even in the nineteenth century, was the *Mona Lisa* (oil on panel, 1503-5). Other works of renown included Giorgione’s *Pastoral Concert* (oil on canvas, 1508-9), Raphael’s portrait of Isabel de Requesens (oil on panel, 1518), and of course Veronese’s *Marriage at Cana*.<sup>47</sup> Rossetti’s trips to the Louvre and his encounters with Renaissance art affected him deeply as his comments about Veronese suggest. Rossetti returned to Paris in the 1850s and twice during the 1860s. On each trip to Paris he visited the Louvre and shared his impressions with a variety of correspondents.<sup>48</sup>

---

during July 1864, the month of William’s trip to Italy, see in that volume: 167-168. Swinburne traveled to Florence in the spring of 1864. See especially his letter to Lord Houghton describing works in the Uffizi from March 31 in Cecil Y. Lang, ed., *The Swinburne Letters* 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974): 96-99.

<sup>47</sup> In the nineteenth century, *The Pastoral Concert* was thought to be by Giorgione. The Raphael portrait was widely believed, until quite recently, to be an image of Joanna of Aragon.

<sup>48</sup> See Kenneth R. Ireland, “A Kind of Pastoral: Rossetti’s Versions of Giorgione,”

In London, Renaissance art as well as information about the art, artists, and history of the period were equally accessible. The National Gallery undertook a major campaign led by its director Charles Locke Eastlake (1836-1906) beginning in 1853 to acquire Renaissance paintings from Italy. The National Gallery collected many works by Botticelli and Venetian artists, and English artistic identity was soon aligned with specific Italian Renaissance traditions.<sup>49</sup> Public efforts on a national scale to collect and display works by Renaissance artists were widely recognized by artists and critics. Rossetti purchased his own Botticelli painting in 1867, *Portrait of a Lady (Smerelda Brandini)* (tempera on panel, 1470-75, Victoria and Albert Museum, London), marking the intersection of public excitement and Aesthetic enthusiasm for the Renaissance.<sup>50</sup>

---

*Victorian Poetry* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1979): 303-315. The author provides an excellent recapitulation of Rossetti's correspondence with his brother William while on his 1848 trip to Paris. In addition, Ireland analyzes Rossetti's impressions of Giorgione in the Louvre and his sonnet about Giorgione's painting.

<sup>49</sup> The most recent account of the National Gallery's collecting ventures in Italy during this period can be found in Donata Levi, " 'Let Agents be Sent to all the Cities of Italy': British Public Museums and the Italian Art Market in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, 33-53. Levi describes the English desire to create a national identity based upon the collection of specific types of Renaissance art. Also see J.B. Bullen's analysis of the importance of Venetian art in the history of the Royal Academy and National Gallery in *Continental Crosscurrents*, 120-143.

<sup>50</sup> For more information on Rossetti's acquisition of the Botticelli portrait, see Gail S. Weinberg, "D.G. Rossetti's Ownership of Botticelli's 'Smerelda Brandini,'" *The Burlington Magazine*, no. 146 (2004): 20-26. A good contextualization of the privileged place Botticelli's painting held for Rossetti and his peers in the 1860s can be found in Michael Levey, "Botticelli and Nineteenth-Century England," *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23, no. 3/4 (Jul – Dec, 1960): 299-305; and, more generally, in Weinberg, "Ruskin, Pater, and the Rediscovery of Botticelli," *The Burlington Magazine*, no. 129 (1987): 25-27; and Adrian Hoch, "The Art of Alessandro

Though British public collections like that of the National Gallery had gained recognition by the 1860s, private collections still outweighed public collections in importance and quality in Britain.<sup>51</sup> Two of the most important private collectors of Renaissance paintings in Victorian Britain were two of Rossetti's most loyal patrons throughout the 1860s: William Graham (1817-1885) and Frederick Richards Leyland (1832-1892).<sup>52</sup> Leyland had a considerable collection of Renaissance art, which was often praised in the nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> It is possible that Leyland's dual interest in the Italian Renaissance and contemporary art attracted him to Rossetti's images of women in the first place. The contents of his collection (works by Botticelli, Palma Vecchio, and Bernardino Luini, to name only a few) reflect the specific interests of

---

Botticelli through the Eyes of Victorian Aesthetes," in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, 55-75.

<sup>51</sup> For an explanation of the ways in which private individuals rather than public institutions dominated Old Master collecting in the Victorian period, see Holger Hoock, "Old Masters and the English School: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Notion of a National Gallery at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century" *Journal of the History of Collections* 16, no. 1 (2004): 1-18.

<sup>52</sup> Macleod has discussed Graham and Leyland's collecting practices in her *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, 267-325. Her focus is on their contemporary rather than Renaissance art collections, though at the end of the nineteenth-century both aspects of their collecting were equally well known and admired.

<sup>53</sup> Much of what is known today about Leyland's collection of Renaissance art, including its status, was recorded in a short article by the art critic Theodore Child, "A Pre-Raphaelite Mansion," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 82, no. 487 (Dec 1890): 81-99. Also see Vinita Sundaram, "Frederick Richards Leyland: Patron and Collector of Art" (M.A. Thesis, University of California, Davis, 1983) and the catalogue of paintings auctioned after Leyland's death in 1892: *The Valuable Collection of Ancient and Modern Pictures of Frederick Richards Leyland, Esq., Deceased* (London: Christie's, 28 May 1892).

Aestheticism. The Graham and Leyland collections afforded Rossetti the opportunity to view paintings and drawings by Renaissance artists in the intimate setting of an Aesthetic home and, in these instances, alongside his own work.

In addition to seeing their works, Rossetti gained his knowledge and understanding of Renaissance artists by reading about them in a variety of sources. Between his book collection and that of his brother, an established art critic and translator, Rossetti had access to the major art historical texts of the Victorian period.<sup>54</sup> Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* had been available in English translation since 1850, though Rossetti could have easily read it in Italian and indeed owned an earlier edition.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> I am grateful to Mark Samuels Lasner for suggesting the connection between the Rossettis' reading habits. In addition, he graciously provided me with access to his personal copies of auction records documenting the sales of William and Christina's book collections, which both contain books that once spent time in DG Rossetti's library. The two catalogues are *An Extensive Old Country Library, Part III: Books on the Fine Arts, William Michael Rossetti* (London: Henry Sotheran & Co., n.d.); and *Books from the Libraries of Christina, Dante Gabriel, and William Michael Rossetti*, ed. W.E. Fredeman (London: Bertram Rota, 1973). I will refer to these catalogues by seller.

<sup>55</sup> Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's treatise on art had been available in English as early as the late-sixteenth century: Lomazzo, *A Tracte Containing the Artes of Curious Paintinge, Carvinge, and Buildinge* (Oxford: J. Barnes for R. Haydocke, 1598). In 1850, an English edition of Vasari was published in London by H G. Bohn. It was translated by Mrs. Jonathon Foster and edited by Jean Paul Richter. Part of Vasari's text had been available a century earlier, but it was accompanied by other material: *Choice Observations upon the Art of Painting: Together with Vasari's Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, from Cimabue to the Time of Raphael and Michael Angelo: With an Explanation of the Difficult Terms*, trans. by William Aglionby (London: printed for R. King at the Prince's-Arms in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1719). In 1873, Rossetti wrote to his brother requesting a better edition of Vasari. It is nearly certain that he had a working knowledge of Vasari well before 1873. The letter has not been published with the rest of Rossetti's correspondence, but it can be accessed through the RHA: William Michael Rossetti, ed., "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with in

Another foundational text, especially for Victorian art history and criticism, was John Ruskin's multi-volume *Modern Painters*.<sup>56</sup> Ruskin's text, which included information about specific artists, movements, styles, and general statements regarding Ruskin's aesthetic theories, voiced stringent opposition against the sensuous appeal of certain types of Renaissance art.<sup>57</sup> The Rossettis owned Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake's translation of Franz Kugler's *Handbook of Painting: The Italian Schools* (1842) and Anna Jameson's *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* (1845), two highly popular texts in English on the subject of Italian painting.<sup>58</sup> In 1865, W.M. Rossetti acquired *A New*

---

Introduction," <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/pr5246.a43.vol2.rad.html> RHA (Accessed May 6, 2009). Listed among the books in his studio at the time of his death was a two-volume edition: *Opere di Giorgio Vasari* (Florence: Passigli, 1832). Volume one consisted of the *Lives (Porzione delle vite dei piu ecceleni pittori, scultori e architetti)*. For this and the other contents of Rossetti's studio library at the time of his death, see *16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. The Valuable Contents of the Residence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London, T.G. Wharton, Martin and Co., Auctioneers, July 5-7, 1882): 23-26.

<sup>56</sup> *Modern Painters* eventually existed in many volumes and several editions. I refer here to volume one of the fifth edition (1851) because of Rossetti's familiarity with this particular text, as confirmed by an inventory of his library. WM Rossetti made an inventory of his brother's library in 1866, and among its contents he listed Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, 5 vols. (1851-1860). See the original inventory (currently held by the University of British Columbia) and transcription on the RHA: McGann, ed., "Library of D.G. Rossetti," RHA, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/dgrlibrary.rad.html> (Accessed: February 16, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> For Ruskin's moralizing view of the Renaissance, especially of Venice, see Bullen *Pre-Raphaelite Body*, 95-104; *Continental Crosscurrents*, 144-165; and "Ruskin, Venice, and the Construction of Femininity," *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 46, no. 184 (Now 1995): 502-520. Also see the discussion of Venetian painting in Robert Hewison's probing study of *The Stones of Venice in Ruskin on Venice: "The Paradise of Cities"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009): 241-277.

<sup>58</sup> Franz Kugler, *A Handbook of the History of Painting, from the Age of Constantine the Great to the Present Time*, trans. Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake, ed. Charles Locke

*History of Painting in Italy* by John Crowe and Giovanni Cavalcaselle (1864), which was popularly known as the “new Vasari.” Rossetti used this name when he recommended it to his patron George Rae. In their history of Italian painting, Crowe and Cavalcaselle expanded upon Vasari’s basic biographical framework, but they attempted to depart from his overly subjective judgments about art.<sup>59</sup> It was by reading these popular texts on Italian art, from Vasari to Crowe and Cavalcaselle, that Rossetti gained access to information about the past but also came to view the Renaissance and Aestheticism analogously.

Photography played a critical role in forming Rossetti’s knowledge of Renaissance art. Though his interest in photography has been recognized generally, the extent to which he used photography to gain access to examples of Renaissance painting has been virtually ignored. Upon his death, Rossetti’s collection of art

---

Eastlake (London: John Murray, 1942). Kugler’s *Handbook of Painting* was very popular in Victorian England, and WM Rossetti acquired a two-volume 1855 edition of Eastlake’s translation (Sotheran, 105). Anna Jameson, *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters, and of the Progress of Painting in Italy from Cimabue to Bassano*, 2 vols. (London: Charles Knight & Co., 1845). David Ludley has argued that Rossetti’s knowledge of Jameson can be confirmed by his early sketches after her text: “Anna Jameson and D.G. Rossetti: His Use of Her Histories” *Woman’s Art Journal* 12, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1991-1992): 29-33. Additionally, Quentin Bell cites Rossetti’s marginalia and notations in the artist’s copies of her texts, but his copies are not longer extant. See Bell, “The Pre-Raphaelites and their Critics,” in *The Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, ed. Leslie Parris (London: Tate Gallery, 1984): 11.

<sup>59</sup> J.A. Crowe and G.B. Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting in Italy, from the Second to the Sixteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1864). For WM Rossetti’s ownership of the book, see Sotheran, 98.

photography, that is photographic prints of works of art, numbered in the hundreds.<sup>60</sup>

Despite never traveling to Italy, he knew many people who did: his brother, Swinburne, and the art dealer – and for a time his studio assistant – Charles Fairfax Murray (1849-1919). Each, but Murray especially, aided Rossetti in acquiring photographs of paintings in Italian collections.<sup>61</sup>

Italian literature and poetry also formed a significant portion of Rossetti's knowledge about the past and shaped his perception of "bodily" beauty in the Renaissance. Accounts of Rossetti's artistic and writing career tend to foreground his interest in Dante. He immersed himself deeply in Dante and the *stilnovisti* while preparing for his 1861 translations of their works in *The Early Italian Poets*.<sup>62</sup> Despite the profound and formative effect Dante's poetry had on him, his namesake did not completely define Rossetti's knowledge of Italian literature. Rossetti read widely among Italian poets and writers, but specifically he owned many works by Petrarch and Boccaccio.<sup>63</sup> Whereas Dante had disappeared into near obscurity until English

---

<sup>60</sup> Over 230 autotypes of Italian Renaissance painting, sculpture, and architecture were listed in the sale of Rossetti's estate in 1882: *Valuable Contents*, 21-22.

<sup>61</sup> David B. Elliot, *Charles Fairfax Murray: The Unknown Pre-Raphaelite* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 2000): 31.

<sup>62</sup> Rossetti's *Early Italian Poets* was one of the first comprehensive English translations of its kind. Though his style is no longer in favor, his text is still unsurpassed in its breadth. For further reading on Rossetti's role as a translator, see Elizabeth Gitter, "Rossetti's Translations of Early Italian Lyrics," *Victorian Poetry* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1974): 351-362; and McGann, "Medieval versus Victorian," 97-112.

<sup>63</sup> "The Library of Rossetti" (RHA) lists many works by Boccaccio and Petrarch that appear in later auction records. Some of Boccaccio's works in Rossetti's library in 1866 include *Il Filostrato* (n.p., 1789); *Amorosa Visione* (Giolito, 1549); *Rime* (n.p.,



Romantic poets resurrected him, Petrarch and Boccaccio had enjoyed relative popularity in England since the sixteenth century. In Victorian England there was an especially enthusiastic revival of Petrarchism, or Petrarchan style in poetry, literature, and art criticism. Nineteenth-century audiences were particularly taken with the myth of Petrarch's unrequited love for his beloved Laura. Petrarch's ideal of female beauty, though descended from Dante's, had a distinctly physical dimension that appealed to nineteenth-century readers.<sup>64</sup>

Rossetti's library was full of texts that informed his interest in Petrarchism.<sup>65</sup>

Petrarch's sonnets on love and women's beauty formed a conceptual basis for

---

1802); *Opere*, 6 vols. (Florence: n.p., 1723-4); *Il Decamerone* (Giolito, 1550); and *La Fiammetta* (n.p.: n.d.). Rossetti owned two collections of Petrarch's poetry comprising his political works and love sonnets: *Rime di F. Petrarca*, ed. Nicola Giosafatte Biagioli, 2 vols. (Parigi: Presso l'editore, 1821); and *Il Canzoniere* (n.p., 1821).

<sup>64</sup> For further information on Petrarch's revival in nineteenth-century England, including semi-fictional biographical accounts of the poet and his beloved, and the status of Petrarch among the Victorians, see Eduoardo Zuccato, *Petrarch in Romantic England* (Hampshire; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): 126-156. Zuccato addresses the Romantic revival of Dante in his introduction (ix-xiv). Also see Martin McLaughlin, "Nineteenth-Century Biographies of Petrarch," in *Petrarch in Britain: Interpreters, Imitators, and Translators over 700 Years*, eds. Martin McLaughlin, Letizia Panizia, Peter Hainsworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 319-340. The association between Petrarchism and love was especially strong in English lyric poetry. William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden describe the historical basis of this association in *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1989): 157-189.

<sup>65</sup> Texts listed in "The Library of Rossetti" (RHA) that support his interest in sixteenth-century Petrarchism include Ariosto, Sanazzaro, and Della Casa, *Canzonieri*, 3 vols (Parnaso Italiano: n.p., 1787); Ludovico Dolce, *L'Areino ovvero Dialogo della Pittura; con l'aggiunta della Lettere del Tiziano* (Milan: n.p., 1863); Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Rime col Comento di G. Biagioli* (n.p., 1821); and Lorenzo de Medici, *Poesie Volgari, col Comento dell'Autore* (Aldus, 1554).

succeeding generations of Italian authors, including Agnolo Firenzuola (1493-1545), whose dialogue *On the Beauty of Women* (1548) discusses the physical and spiritual beauty of women in distinctly idealized terms. Rossetti owned a copy of Firenzuola's dialogue,<sup>66</sup> in which a young man, Celso, describes to a group of four women what constitutes ideal beauty in women. Celso provides the women, who each embody an aspect of the ideal, with a carefully detailed description of how individual features combine to create ideal beauty. The ideal beauty has many specific physical characteristics, from the rosiness of the cheeks to the goldenness of the hair, but in order to embody complete perfection a woman must also have intangible qualities such as "grace," and "elegance."<sup>67</sup>

Rossetti's understanding of the Renaissance was significantly informed by his position toward "bodily" beauty. For Rossetti, painting and viewing images of beautiful women was a potentially sensual, even erotic, experience. Representations of beautiful

---

<sup>66</sup> Firenzuola enjoyed a degree of popularity during his lifetime and thereafter due to the provocative nature of much of his work. Today, his dialogue on the beauty of women is widely recognized as one of the most important aesthetic texts of the sixteenth century. See the introduction to the Eisenblicher and Murray translation, *On the Beauty of Women*. Firenzuola's dialogue was not translated into English until the late nineteenth century. Rossetti owned Firenzuola's collected works in which the dialogue on women's beauty was included: Angolo Firenzuola, *Opere*, 3 vols. (Florence: n.p., 1723). For documentation of Rossetti's ownership, see "The Library of Rossetti" (RHA).

<sup>67</sup> Rossetti's interest in *Stil Novo* treatises on decorum and comportment likely stimulated his interest in Firenzuola's dialogue on women's beauty. Rossetti translated Francesco da Barberino's (ca. 1264-1348) sonnets from his two treatises on male and female decorum: *Documenti d'Amore* and *Del Reggimento e dei Costumi delle Donne*. For Rossetti's ownership of these texts, see *The Valuable Contents*, 24. Also see his introduction to Barberino's poetry reprinted WM Rossetti, *Collected Works*, 240.

women served as the ultimate embodiment of the sensuousness of art from all periods, and the admiration of women's beauty was the perfect enactment of the "bodily" Aesthetic experience. The worship of female beauty was also fundamentally related to the Petrarchism of lyric poetry, painting, and art criticism in which a woman's beauty provided the means of visual and critical appreciation.

### *Aestheticism's Relationship to the Past*

Rossetti's understanding of the past was part of a larger Aesthetic conception of the Renaissance. As with Rossetti's work, the Aesthetic ideal of beauty for its own sake was highly dependent upon sensuous embodiment in the form of a beautiful woman, whether in prose, poetry, or paint. Aesthetic artists, critics, and writers expressed their aims for the autonomy of art and the supremacy of beauty through a complex negotiation of the history and artistic traditions of the Renaissance. The Aesthetic emphasis on beauty is crucial to understanding the Aesthetic attraction to and understanding of the Renaissance during the 1860s. In England, the Italian Renaissance had long been a subject of interest, and this continued to be the case in the Victorian period. However, the historical instability of the Renaissance in nineteenth-century thought opened it to many interpretations; among them was the Aesthetic vision of the past as an earlier version of itself.

The Italian Renaissance had been a topic of serious interest in Britain long before the 1860s. Aesthetic historicism was the culmination of a long-standing enthusiasm for the Renaissance that began during the Romantic period at the end of the

eighteenth century.<sup>68</sup> John Hale's comprehensive study of the English zeal for Italian art and literature argues that the Renaissance had held a privileged place among Northern writers and artists since the early sixteenth-century. Hale documents the persistent presence of the Renaissance in English historical thought and suggests that the English sought to emulate their Italian counterparts.<sup>69</sup> While some Victorian artists and writers desired the veneer of history, none, including Rossetti, was merely trying to imitate art of the past. Rather, Rossetti's desire for "bodily" beauty provides a conceptual basis for his historicism.

While debate continues today about what the Renaissance was, the nature of the discussion in the nineteenth century was quite different. Emerging connoisseurial, art-historical, and institutional structures in the mid-nineteenth century established many things that scholars take for granted today, at least on a superficial level, such as periodization, terminology, chronology, and the identification of major historical

---

<sup>68</sup> Two studies that begin to address the relationship of Aesthetic writers and Renaissance thought do so within the broader scope of Romanticism. The first, Ferguson's *The Renaissance in Historical Thought*, does not directly address Aestheticism as a separate intellectual movement but rather incorporates its position toward the Renaissance within broader Romantic attitudes in literature and art (113-132). While he does not specifically discuss the Renaissance, Mario Praz does address the Romantic use of historical subject matter in his discussion of the "exoticist" paradigm in literature. See *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970): 210-211; also see my discussion of Praz in Chapter 4.

<sup>69</sup> Though Hale's study was published some time ago, it still stands as the most exhaustive investigation of the topic: *England and the Italian Renaissance*, 84-168.

figures.<sup>70</sup> As Bullen and others have demonstrated, nineteenth-century authors used the modifiers “Renaissance” and “medieval” with varying degrees of chronological specificity, if they used them at all.<sup>71</sup> In studies like those by Kugler, Jameson, and Crowe and Cavalcaselle, the Renaissance was treated with a fairly high degree of chronological and geographical specificity. Though none of these contemporary authors uses the term “Renaissance,” they each described a virtually identical phenomenon: a revival of art and culture focused in Florence, Rome, Milan, and Venice that took place at the turn of the sixteenth century.<sup>72</sup> A common feature among these texts is their

---

<sup>70</sup> The historiography of the Renaissance in the nineteenth century is a major focus of Ferguson’s *The Renaissance in Historical Thought*. He emphasizes Jacob Burckhardt’s considerable influence in nineteenth-century Renaissance historiography (179-252). Bullen, who examines a related topic in *Myth of the Renaissance*, specifically de-emphasizes Burckhardt in favor of lesser known histories by Victor Hugo, John Ruskin and Walter Pater.

<sup>71</sup> In his introduction to *Myth of the Renaissance*, Bullen identifies the many ways in which the Renaissance was identified during the nineteenth century. Each signified a different temporal and even moral conception of the past (1-2). The Renaissance did not necessarily have to be named in order to be the subject of discussion, as Bullen argues in his examination of George Elliot’s *Romola* (1863), a novel that takes place in fifteenth-century Florence (208-238). Also see Janet Cox-Rearick, “Imagining the Renaissance: The Nineteenth-Century Cult of Francois I as Patron of Art,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50 (1997): 207-50. Cox-Rearick’s article deals specifically with the question of periodization in the nineteenth century as demonstrated in French Romantic painting and historical writing about the Renaissance. Her comments are applicable to Victorian artists and writers, who relied heavily on continental histories of art, such as Jules Michelet’s *Renaissance* (1855).

<sup>72</sup> The period in question begins with Leonardo and ends with the death of Raphael. Kugler refers to it as the “highest period of development in modern art:” *Handbook of Painting*, 173-175. Though Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s text ends with the beginning of the sixteenth-century, they still refer to this period as the “great Revival,” and spend considerable time discussing earlier revivals, including the paintings of Giotto: *A New History of Painting*, vi.

emphasis on beauty as a defining quality of Renaissance art. Jameson goes as far as to distinguish two schools that emerged late in the fifteenth century: the allegorical and the school representing “beauty for its own sake” (her phrase).<sup>73</sup> In particular, Victorian authors identified Venetian artists like Giorgione and Titian with beauty in Renaissance art.<sup>74</sup>

Rossetti and his peers were familiar with the standard histories of the Renaissance and they drew heavily from them in forming their perception of history. However, the Aesthetic understanding of the past was largely imaginative, based on a sensibility of shared beauty, and not wholly grounded in factual information. Bullen has argued a related point in his examination of Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (first published in 1873). Pater’s history of the Renaissance, which included essays on Winckelmann, Leonardo, and Joachim du Bellay, was based in his understanding of Aesthetic philosophy. His essays were connected through their conceptual, rather than chronological, development.<sup>75</sup> Rossetti understood the Renaissance as a chronologically distinct period in the sixteenth century, but the beauty from that period was applicable to other times, including his own.<sup>76</sup> As for Pater,

---

<sup>73</sup> In Jameson, see her discussion of Filippo Lippi and Angelico da Fiesole in which she explains the “great schism of modern art,” building upon Kugler’s conception of the period: *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* 1, 110-111.

<sup>74</sup> See Kugler on Titian in *Handbook of Painting*, 360. See Jameson on Giorgione in *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* 2, 215.

<sup>75</sup> Bullen, *Myth of the Renaissance*, 273-298.

<sup>76</sup> See in particular the passage from *Early Italian Poets* reprinted in WM Rossetti, *Collected Works*, 14-15.

beauty superseded chronology, and the essential quality of Renaissance art and literature (i.e. its beauty) could be shared across time. The sensuous quality that Rossetti observed in Veronese's painting is one that he commented upon in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Florentine poetry that he translated for his *Early Italian Poets*. In the Aesthetic perception of history, the notion of shared beauty centered upon the sensuous, erotic, feminine quality that came especially from paintings of women. For Rossetti, this was "bodily" beauty and he aimed to capture it in his own paintings.

Even while Aesthetic artists and writers built upon previous accounts of the Renaissance, they deviated from popular conceptions of the past in significant ways. Hilary Fraser argues that Victorian views of the Renaissance were ideologically motivated and often related to contemporary artistic philosophies, including those of the Royal Academy and the Pre-Raphaelites. Different versions of the past were used to advance very diverse agendas. As it struggled to maintain its hegemony as the governing body of art in Britain, the Royal Academy (RA) advanced a mainstream version of the Renaissance in which Raphael represented the pinnacle of achievement and was the ideal model for artists.<sup>77</sup> When the PRB attributed merit to artists *before*

---

<sup>77</sup> Hilary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992): 1-4; 43-47; and 91-97. The enduring legacy of Raphael in the RA was nearly unquestioned until the presidency of William Etty, who preferred Venetian Renaissance painting for its color. Etty is largely credited with establishing a tradition of the "English nude" and with introducing the appeal of color to academic painting. By the 1860s, middle class Aesthetic patrons and viewers associated Etty's work with aristocratic taste and bad morals. Upon viewing a female nude by Rossetti (an anomaly in Rossetti's *oeuvre*), a favored patron accused him of "Ettyism." See the letters to

Raphael in 1848, they attempted to validate their dismissal of academic principles and signaled their engagement with a specific understanding of history. The Pre-Raphaelites valorized artists including Giotto, and Masaccio, and Hans Memling. Many of the members also consulted illuminated manuscripts, stained glass, and tapestries, and a distinct medievalism characterized their relationship to the past.<sup>78</sup> While Aesthetic artists and writers did not dismiss earlier periods, there was a marked shift in interest toward *Raphaelite* art – not Raphael *per se*, but many of his contemporaries including Michelangelo and Titian. The Aesthetic strategy was related to that of the PRB - to subvert the existing academic structure through historicism – but their historicism privileged what they viewed as the sensual beauty of sixteenth-century artists.

In many instances, the Renaissance served as a conceptual touchstone in western history to which historians and artists could attach ideas about contemporary art and literature. The nineteenth-century version(s) of the Renaissance proved highly adaptable to such transformation. Bullen has argued that fictional and historical “myths” of the Renaissance, many of them conflicting, were part of the historiographic

---

George Rae from 27 and 29 September 1864 regarding *Venus Verticordia* (1868), Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 194-195. For further reading on the connections between Etty, Venetian art, and the nude, see Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality, and Art* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1996); and Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999): 281-282.

<sup>78</sup> Pre-Raphaelite medievalism is a topic of great interest in both visual and literary histories of the movement. See Deborah Gail Schizer, “Eroticizing the Middle Ages: Gender and Sexuality in Pre-Raphaelite Medievalism (Ph.D Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1994). Though her study makes no significant distinction between Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism, it is nonetheless an engaging examination of medievalism in the works of several Victorian authors including Rossetti.



process in the mid-nineteenth century. Bullen's study of Victorian historical writing is premised on the idea that historical writing and literature about historical figures involved inherently varying degrees of mythologizing or fictionalization. His observation is especially true for Aesthetic writers in Victorian Britain, including Swinburne, for whom Renaissance history and art were ideas open to imaginative interpretation.<sup>79</sup>

In the 1860s there was a particular version of the Renaissance that gained currency among Aesthetic artists and writers, including Rossetti and Swinburne. The Aesthetic understanding of the Renaissance was indeed a form of "myth," though Bullen does not articulate an Aesthetic "myth" within the visual field or Rossetti's work. The Aesthetic "myth" of the Renaissance in Swinburne's criticism and Rossetti's paintings drew heavily upon Romantic literary models. In Romantic literature, such as Victor Hugo's play *Lucretia Borgia* (1833) and Gautier's *Italia* (1852), Renaissance Italy was constructed as a passionate, violent, and even immoral historical period.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> See in particular Bullen's introduction in *Myth of the Renaissance* (1-16) for his explanation of contrasting "myths" in the nineteenth century and the argument that these myths speak to a connection between contemporary culture and the past. Also see Bullen's chapter "The Renaissance Revised: England in the 1860s," which investigates the period of Aestheticism under review here (239-272). In his examination of early Aestheticism, Bullen analyzes the critical writing of Swinburne and John Addington Symonds (1840-1893).

<sup>80</sup> Bullen explains with more subtlety the "Romantic" view of the Renaissance that I refer to here. See the chapter "The Renaissance among the French Romantics," in *Myth of the Renaissance*, 59-90. Additionally, see his discussion of Pater's interest in Gautier's construction of Renaissance Italy (289-291). Ferguson also refers to the Romantic construction of the Renaissance in *The Renaissance in Historical Thought*, 115-132.

Aestheticism continued this Romantic conception of the past in many significant ways. For writers and artists like Swinburne and Rossetti, Renaissance Italy and its art and poetry represented an earlier version of what Aestheticism was in the nineteenth century. Italian artists, full of genius and passion, produced art that was exquisitely beautiful.<sup>81</sup> Comments about Renaissance art reveal that Aesthetic critics were not as concerned with the actual circumstances of production (i.e. commission, technique) as they were with the beauty of the object itself and the reaction the object engendered within its viewer. The experience of art was about the appreciation of beauty, and for the Aesthetic critic and artist a specific kind of beauty typified Aesthetic experience, unhindered by moral or narrative considerations. The beauty had an explicitly physical character, and its appreciation a notably sensual dimension.

Swinburne's critical writings demonstrate the interconnectedness of the Aesthetic understanding of the Renaissance and "bodily" beauty. He perfectly expressed contemporary Aesthetic philosophy; he also typified the Aesthetic view of the past.<sup>82</sup> Most importantly, he joined them together through the description of

---

<sup>81</sup> Aesthetic artists and writers viewed all of the above qualities as positive; however, John Ruskin used the sensuality of the Renaissance to argue in favor of the Middle Ages as a model for contemporary artists. See Bullen, "Ruskin, Venice, and the Construction of Femininity," 502-520.

<sup>82</sup> In studies of Victorian Aestheticism, Swinburne is generally viewed as a leading figure in the movement. His criticism of William Blake (1868), in which he first used the phrase "art for art's sake," has received the most attention. For Swinburne's importance as an exponent of Aesthetic style through his prose, see Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 37-69; Catherine Maxwell, *Swinburne* (Devon, UK: Northcote, 2006): 81-96; and David G. Riede, *Swinburne: A Study of Romantic Mythmaking* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978): 14-40. Additionally, see the excellent analysis of

beautiful women in art. Based on his study of the Uffizi collection in 1864, Swinburne wrote an account of his observations that was eventually published by *The Fortnightly Review* in July 1868.<sup>83</sup> His essay “Notes on the Designs of the Old Masters at Florence” and comments about Rossetti’s work published during the same time in 1868<sup>84</sup> reveal a dynamic relationship between past and present.

The words “Aestheticism” or “Aesthetic,” not to mention the phrase “art for art’s sake,” do not appear anywhere in Swinburne’s essay; so, it hardly seems plausible that his account of viewing the Uffizi drawings could somehow function as a statement (much less a notable one) about Aesthetic philosophy.<sup>85</sup> However, Swinburne connected his essay with contemporary art in two ways. First, he framed his discussion of the artists’ work in terms of the beauty it produced and the effect that such beauty

---

Swinburne’s prose style and evocation of serpentine female beauty in his “Old Masters” essay by Østermark-Johansen, “Swinburne’s Serpentine Delights: The Aesthetic Critic and the Old Master Drawings in Florence,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24, no. 1 (2002): 49-72.

<sup>83</sup> The full text of Swinburne’s essay is available in Gosse and Wise, *Works* 5, 155-195. All quotations and citations provided here are from this edition. Parenthetical citations are used for subsequent references to and quotations from the text.

<sup>84</sup> The criticism of Rossetti’s work was an independently published pamphlet entitled *Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1868* (London: James Camden Hotten, 1868). WM Rossetti and Swinburne authored the pamphlet together. Swinburne primarily discussed Rossetti’s paintings, which did not appear in the RA exhibition. Quotations are from the Gosse and Wise edition (*Works* 5, 196-216) and are hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>85</sup> Prettejohn has argued that critics and poets like Swinburne need not have explicitly used the term “aesthetic” to be aware, in varying degrees, of continental philosophy: *Art for Art’s Sake*, 3-6. Wilcox has demonstrated effectively the connection between German and French aesthetics and Swinburne’s eventual interpretation and understanding of “art for art’s sake,” in “Origins of *l’art pour l’art*,” 366-375.

had on the viewer. Second, he made selected comparisons between Renaissance artists and contemporary English artists, thereby drawing a connection between the nature of beauty, past and present.

An especially problematic area for Aesthetic criticism and painting was the difficulty in defining what was beautiful, the thing represented or the manner of its representation.<sup>86</sup> For Swinburne, the two constantly overlap. Swinburne's most revealing passages deal with images of beautiful women, whose beauty is variously tragic, terrible, graceful, and exquisite. Beauty in images of women from the history of art was a powerful source of meaning in Aesthetic art and criticism. On one hand, images of beautiful women produced such meaning because there was a long tradition of associating the beauty of women with abstract ideas. In particular, Elizabeth Cropper has demonstrated the complex meanings ascribed to representations of beautiful women in the Renaissance. On the other, the Aesthetic preoccupation with beauty poised writers and artists in the 1860s to conflate the beauty of women represented in art and the beauty of the art itself. The fluid Aesthetic conception of the past allowed writers and artists to subsume earlier representations of female beauty into their own. Images of beautiful women created in the past had equal resonance in the present by virtue of the beauty represented within them. If Renaissance images of women were relevant for Aestheticism, then they were also subject to the same slippage as contemporary art.

Swinburne's speculations on types of beauty in the Uffizi drawings and their

---

<sup>86</sup> Prettejohn makes a related point in her discussion of beauty in *Autumn Leaves* by Millais in *Art for Art Sake*, 16-17.

correlation to artistic greatness have a direct bearing on contemporary Aesthetic philosophy. He states that the purpose of his “Old Masters” essay is merely to record his impressions upon viewing a “sacred deposit” of drawings arranged hastily by Vasari (155). Swinburne provides a partial inventory of the many artists’ works he encountered in the Uffizi basement, but he chooses only a few for special praise on the basis of the particular type of beauty they embody. The essay begins with the “imaginative,” “mysterious,” and “intelligent” masters Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Andrea del Sarto. Michelangelo is singled out:

Before the majesty of his imperious advent the lesser kings of time seem as it were bidden to rise up from their thrones, to cover their faces and come down...[His drawings’] tragic beauty, their inexplicable strength and wealth of thought, their terrible and exquisite significance, all the powers they unveil and all the mysteries they reserve, all their suggestions and all their suppressions, are at first adorable merely. Delightful beyond words they...exalt the mind with a strange and violent pleasure which is the highest mood of worship; reverence intensified to the last endurable degree (157-158).

According to Swinburne, Michelangelo’s defining quality is his “majesty” among “lesser kings.” By emphasizing Michelangelo’s intellectual power and artistic ability, Swinburne was eloquently restating the Vasarian notion of Michelangelo’s greatness. But Swinburne’s description of Michelangelo’s “tragic beauty” amplifies the established nineteenth-century description of the Renaissance and ventures into a more imaginative realm characteristic of the Aesthetic “myth” of the past.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> The established nineteenth-century view was far from one-dimensional. Michelangelo was held in high esteem in the RA as a model for his skills as a draughtsman, painter, and sculptor, which largely reflected Vasari’s characterization of the artist. He appears frequently throughout Sir Joshua Reynolds’ *Discourses on Art*, but see in particular *Discourse II* in which Michelangelo is compared to other

From the time of Giorgio Varsari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* into the nineteenth century, there existed divergent assumptions about Italian Renaissance art that affected the perceived development of Renaissance art as a whole. The distinction between *disegno* (drawing) and *colore* (color) and the assumption that certain artists and "schools" best exemplified one aspect of art or the other dominated interpretations of artists' works for centuries. In the late seventeenth century, the *disegno-colore* debate entered into the French Academy by way of the Rubenists and Poussinists. *Disegno* was associated with the intellectualism of Florence, while *colore* connoted the more sensual art of Venice.<sup>88</sup> When Swinburne referred to the "strength and wealth of thought" in Michelangelo's drawings, he was consciously making a reference to the tradition of associating Florentine artists with the intellectual quality of their work.

---

Renaissance artists including Raphael and Titian: *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975): 25-37. By the mid-nineteenth century, Michelangelo's popularity had started to decline within some factions. Kugler and Jameson still maintained his genius, but in those texts, as with Reynolds' *Discourses*, Raphael was heralded as the apogee of Renaissance achievement in the arts. See Kugler, *Handbook of Painting*, 199-215; and Jameson, *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* 2, 30-65. Østermark-Johansen has examined the complex Victorian conception of Michelangelo's art and poetry. For her discussion of his drawings in Victorian criticism, see *Sweetness and Strength: the Reception of Michelangelo in Late Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998): 65-139.

<sup>88</sup> I can only refer briefly to a topic of great depth and complexity, and others have dealt more thoroughly with these problems. For example, on the status of color versus design in Victorian art, see Bullen, *Continental Crosscurrents*, 120-143. For further reading on the *disegno-colore* debate with regard to gender in the Renaissance, see Fredrika Jacobs, "Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: *Femmina, Masculo, Grazia*," *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (Mar 2000): 51-67; and Sohm, "Gendered Style," 759-773.

Swinburne's interpretation of Michelangelo also contributes to the imaginative Aesthetic "myth" of the Renaissance. The "tragic beauty" of Michelangelo's works suggests an emotional dimension leading toward grandness, and Swinburne goes on to clarify the effect by noting that they elicit "strange and violent pleasure" and the "highest mood of worship." Michelangelo's drawings elicit Swinburne's "worship," but ultimately the drawings are worthy of his worship because of their "tragic beauty." For Swinburne, beauty creates meaning for the work of art and affects the viewer profoundly. In Michelangelo's drawings, the effect is one of sublime pleasure created by his genius and the "tragic beauty" of his art.

Beauty acts as the unifying quality in Swinburne's discussion of Michelangelo's antithesis, the Venetians:

It is not by intellectual weight or imaginative significance that these Venetians are so great. That praise is the proper apanage [sic] of the Milanese and the Roman schools – of Michel Angelo and Leonardo. Those had more of thought and fancy, of meaning and motive. But since the Greek sculptors there was never a race of artists so humbly and so wholly devoted to the worship of beauty. This was enough for them; and for no other workman (182-183).

Swinburne's comments perpetuate the popular notion that Venetian artists were only concerned with the pursuit of beauty in art. Rossetti, too, adhered to this assumption, as his comments about Veronese's "slight stupidity" reveal. Descriptions of Giorgione and Titian frequently employed the terms "poetic" and "romantic" to describe the subjects and technique of Venetian painting.<sup>89</sup> But Swinburne goes even further by

---

<sup>89</sup> These descriptions were especially popular in characterizations of Giorgione's pastoral and historical subjects. See Kugler, *Handbook of Painting*, 354-356; and Jameson, *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*, 215-224.

suggesting that freedom from intellectual concerns allowed Venetian artists to create art that was concerned with beauty only. His construction of the Venetian “worship” of beauty is strikingly like that of Aestheticism. Venetian art expressed an essential emotionalism, as Swinburne’s description of Giorgione elaborated:

With all the deep sweet tragic colour, the divine oppression of a delight whose eyes grow sorrowful with past thought and future dream – “large discourse, looking before and after”; with all the pathos of pleasure never translated as in his pictures but once, in Keats’s “Ode to Melancholy”; the adorable genius of Giorgione, like the beautiful mouth of Chaucer’s mistress, is always “most glad and sad” (186).<sup>90</sup>

What others perceived in the past as a detriment Swinburne inverted to become a key attribute.

The description of beauty in Swinburne’s characterization of Michelangelo and the Venetians is fundamentally poetic in its structure. The relationship between literary genre and the Aesthetic “myth” of the Renaissance is significant for it determined how and which Renaissance artists emerged as the most appropriate predecessors of contemporary artists like Rossetti. Swinburne separates Michelangelo and the Venetians into two poetic modes: the tragic and the lyric.<sup>91</sup> Swinburne compares

---

<sup>90</sup> “Melancholy” was a recurring attribute of Giorgione’s personality and painting in Victorian literature on Renaissance art (see previous note). In the context of Romantic and Aesthetic “myths” of the Renaissance, melancholy has an important connection to poetry and originality, both of which feature prominently in narratives of Giorgione’s life. Also see Walter Pater’s famous comparison of poetry, music, and Venetian painting in his 1877 “The School of Giorgione,” reprinted in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): 102-122.

<sup>91</sup> For a brief definition and historical analysis of poetic genre, see Raymond Chapman, “Lyric” and “Tragedy,” in *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, eds. Tom



Michelangelo's "tragic" allegorical drawings to the tragedies of Aeschylus and Shakespeare, defining them as intellectually elevating, heroic, and divinely magnificent (158). Conversely, the Venetian drawings of landscapes, music making, and portraits evoke an enigmatic and melancholy mood like that expressed in lyric poetry.

Swinburne even makes a direct comparison between Giorgione and the Romantic poet John Keats (1795-1821). There was an especially strong connection between lyricism and Victorian Romanticism, which saw an intense revival of the form.<sup>92</sup> There was also a foundational connection between the representation of beauty and lyric poetry, which originated as a method of professing love and admiring the beauty of women. Though Swinburne praises both Michelangelo and the Venetians, the Venetians were especially important because of the analogous relationship between their art and the art of lyric poetry that praised the beauty of women. It is hardly surprising that Aesthetic artists and writers would have connected these two traditions and associated them with their own philosophy of beauty for its own sake.

---

McArthur and Feri McArthur (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 632; and 1049-1050, respectively. For further reading on interpreting and differentiating the major genres (lyric, epic, and drama), see William Elford Rogers, *The Three Genres and the Interpretation of Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983): 9-76.

<sup>92</sup> Early histories of English poetry characterize Romanticism as a crucial time of lyric revival: Felix E. Schelling, *The English Lyric*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1967): 149-263; and Edward Bliss Reed, *English Lyrical Poetry, from Its Origins to the Present Time*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1967): 347-509. An excellent contextualization of the lyric form in Victorian poetry can be found in Matthew Rowlinson, "Lyric," in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, eds. Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman, and Anthony H. Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002): 59-79.

The Aesthetic preoccupation with beauty extended equally to Renaissance and contemporary art, and striking parallels exist between Swinburne's descriptions of the two. Within months of his "Old Masters" essay appearing in *The Fortnightly Review*, Swinburne and WM Rossetti published a pamphlet on the 1868 Royal Academy exhibition. Swinburne's section, focusing primarily on works shown outside the RA, was entitled "Notes on Some Pictures of 1868." After discussing the work of James Whistler (1834-1903) and Rossetti, Swinburne proclaims:

Wide and far apart as lie their provinces of work, their tones of thought and emotion, the two illustrious artists of whom I have just said a short and inadequate word have in common one supreme quality of spirit and of work, coloured and moulded in each by his individual and inborn force of nature; the love of beauty for the very beauty's sake, the faith and trust in it as a god indeed (215).

Swinburne then further elaborates the importance of beauty for these contemporary artists but also for the history of art as a whole. His comments apply equally to the creation and appreciation of beauty:

No good art is unbeautiful; but much able and effective work may be, and is. Mere skill, mere thought and trouble, mere feeling or mere dexterity, will never on earth make a man painter or poet or artist in any kind....The worship of beauty, though beauty be itself transformed and incarnate in shapes diverse without end, must be simple and absolute; hence only must the believer expect profit or reward (216).

Prettejohn has demonstrated the connections between, as well as significant departures from, Kant's definition of the "beautiful," as subjective and free from judgment, and the Aesthetic concept of beauty manifested in Swinburne's criticism.<sup>93</sup> She concludes that

---

<sup>93</sup> Prettejohn relies heavily on Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in order to construct her notion of "free beauty" for Aestheticism. The strengths of her argument are best

an especially important area of convergence and departure is in Swinburne's assertion that "no good art is unbeautiful." Though it was not radical to associate "good art" with beauty throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Prettejohn argues that Swinburne's concept of beauty was unimpeded by moral concerns, which did determine the beauty of art for many of his contemporaries.<sup>94</sup> According to Aestheticism, the success of art was dependent upon its representation of beauty *alone*.<sup>95</sup>

Rossetti and Whistler, like certain Renaissance artists, fit Swinburne's conception of how art should function. Like the Venetians, Rossetti and Whistler worshipped beauty above all else. In privileging beauty as the most important quality

---

expressed in the tension she finds between the artist's desire to represent "free beauty" and the actual viability of "free beauty" in works of art: *Art for Art's Sake*, 17-20.

<sup>94</sup> Prettejohn states that Swinburne believed art should serve no moral function (46-48), though she argues that he did not view art as amoral. John Ruskin's moral judgments, particularly as they pertained to the sensuality of the Renaissance, have been analyzed deftly in Bullen, *Myth of the Renaissance*, 123-155. Additionally, see Bullen's interpretation of Swinburne's critical and creative writings concerning Renaissance subjects as a departure from Victorian moral values (255-272).

<sup>95</sup> Swinburne explained this idea most clearly in his essay on William Blake (1868):

Art for art's sake first of all, and afterwards we may suppose all the rest shall be added to her (or if not she need hardly be overmuch concerned); but from the man who falls to artistic work with a moral purpose, shall be taken away even that which he has – whatever of capacity for doing well in either way he may have at starting. . . . Once let art humble herself, plead excuses, try at any compromise with the Puritan principle of doing good and she is worse than dead. Once let her turn apologetic, and promise or imply that she really will now be "loyal to fact" and useful men in general (say by furthering their moral work or improving their moral nature), she is no longer of any human use or value.

McGann and Sligh, eds., *Poems and Prose*, 380-381.

of art, Swinburne established an atemporal relationship with artists and poets in the past that shared the Aesthetic “worship” of beauty. In his two essays from 1868, the historical borders are porous and references to contemporary and Renaissance art flow easily between them. In the “Old Masters” essay, he makes comparisons of Michelangelo to William Blake (162), Lippino Lippi to Burne-Jones (169), and Mantegna to early Rossetti (179). Conversely, in the “Pictures” essay, Swinburne makes analogous comparisons: George Frederic Watts to Michelangelo (200), Baron Henri Leys to Titian (202), and George Hemming Mason to Donatello (203).<sup>96</sup> Swinburne’s project was not so much an historical as an imaginative one, though the line was certainly blurred.

Swinburne’s essays privileged the beauty in images of women. It was images of beautiful women that elicited the Aesthetic conflation of the beauty of women and the beauty of art. The “Old Masters” essay begins with Swinburne’s impressions of Leonardo’s drawings in the Uffizi. As a general comment, Swinburne characterizes Leonardo’s work as full of “indefinable grace and grave mystery” (156). These qualities are manifested among the “Fair strange faces of women full of dim doubt and faint scorn; touched by the shadow of an obscure fate; eager and weary as it seems at once, pale and fervent with patience or passion; allure and perplex the eyes and thoughts of men” (156-157). The “grace” and “mystery” that characterize Leonardo’s

---

<sup>96</sup> Rossetti employed a similar strategy in his correspondence when he compared Burne-Jones to the Venetians: letter to Charles Elliot Norton from 9 January 1862, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 2, 438-444, 62.3.

work (and the beauty of his art) as a whole apply in particular to his images of women. The same slippage occurs in Swinburne's description of Michelangelo: his work has "tragic beauty," "terrible and exquisite significance," and produces "strange and violent pleasure" (157-158). Michelangelo's images of women produce in Swinburne a "tragic attraction" for they are "fairer than heaven and more terrible than hell" (159). In his "Old Masters" essay, Swinburne repeatedly conflates the beauty of the artist's work with the beauty of the women represented within it by using the same descriptive language to illustrate them both.<sup>97</sup>

Swinburne's characterization of women's beauty in Renaissance art is analogous to his characterization in contemporary art. Swinburne's discussion of Rossetti's paintings in the "Pictures" essay similarly conflates the concepts of women's beauty and Aesthetic beauty. According to Swinburne, Rossetti is an artist who has "the love of beauty for the very beauty's sake" (215). Rossetti's love of beauty for its own sake manifests itself in images of beautiful women, which each represent a different aspect of beauty ("sensual," "spiritual," "divine," 211-215). As in his descriptions of Leonardo and Michelangelo, Swinburne blurs the distinction between the depiction of beautiful women and the representation of beauty. In both essays, Aesthetic beauty takes on a distinctly feminine embodiment in the form of a beautiful woman who represents the particular genius, power, and beauty of each artist's work.

Swinburne's criticism was strikingly provocative, yet scholars have not fully

---

<sup>97</sup> Swinburne repeats the trope in his discussion of Filippo Lippi (164), Botticelli, Lippino Lippi (see the comments about Simonetta, 169), and Andrea del Sarto (193).

considered how he, as a representative of Aestheticism, was engaged in traditional poetic and critical conventions of portraying women's beauty in art.<sup>98</sup> The conflation of the language used to describe the beauty of women with the language used to describe art extends back to the sixteenth-century. Cropper has argued that the description of women's beauty in lyric poetry from the time of Petrarch contributed significantly to the language used to describe beauty later in the sixteenth century. For example, a term such as *grazia* (grace) appeared commonly in Petrarch's lyric poetry: "...Graceful she moved, with more than mortal mein,/In form an angel: and her accents won/Upon the ear with more than human sound." Petrarch uses "graceful" to describe an idealized, beautiful woman: Laura.<sup>99</sup> Later in the sixteenth-century, *grazia* was used to describe the beauty of women in treatises on women's beauty. In his dialogue *On the Beauty of Women*, Firenzuola, in the voice of Celso, describes the importance of "grace:"

Thus we must believe this splendor comes from a mysterious proportion and from a measure that is not in our books, which we do not know, nor even imagine, and is, as we say for those things we cannot express, a *je ne sais quoi*. To say it is a ray of love, or some other such quintessential thing, though this be

---

<sup>98</sup>Here I should distinguish between scholars who examine the characterization of women in Swinburne's work, particularly studies of the *femme fatale*, and those who have discussed the broader historical implications of his representation of women's beauty. Østermark-Johansen has begun to investigate the link between the beauty of women in the critical prose of Pater and Swinburne and Petrarchism, but her findings refer primarily to Pater's critical writings: "Serpentine Rivers and Serpentine Thought: Flux and Movement in Walter Pater's Leonardo Essay," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30, no. 2 (2002): 455-482.

<sup>99</sup> Cropper, "On Beautiful Women," 380; 385. The lines are from an anonymous nineteenth-century translation of Petrarch's sonnet "He Paints the Beauties of Laura, Protesting His Unalterable Love [*Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi*]," *Petrarch in English*, 217.

learned, subtle, and ingenious, nonetheless, does not reflect the truth. It is called grace because it makes the woman on whom this ray shines, in whom this mysterious proportion is diffused, grateful, that is, appreciated; as do the graces given for benefits received, that make he who gives them feel grateful and appreciated.<sup>100</sup>

“Grace” was equally used to describe the representation of beautiful women in painting as well as the style of the painters who made the images. Vasari’s description of Leonardo adopts Firenzuola’s notion of “grace:”

...Nature was pleased so to favor him, that, wherever he turned his thought, brain, and mind, he displayed such divine power in his works, that, in giving them their perfection, no one was ever his peer in readiness, vivacity, excellence, beauty, and grace.<sup>101</sup>

The ultimate representation of Leonardo’s grace was his portrait of Mona Lisa del Giocondo, which Vasari describes in careful detail. As Vasari describes the beauty of the woman in the *Mona Lisa*, Cropper argues, he enacts the lyric (Petrarchan) tradition of praising the beloved. He also blurs the boundaries between the beauty of the painting, the beauty of the woman represented within it, and the beauty and grace of Leonardo’s style.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, 35.

<sup>101</sup> Vasari, *Lives*, 193. Sohm has persuasively argued in favor of Vasari’s Petrarchism and specifically his familiarity with and use of Firenzuola’s dialogue. In particular, see Sohm, “Gendered Language,” 759-773.

<sup>102</sup> For Cropper’s discussion of Vasari’s analysis of Leonardo and the *Mona Lisa*, see “On Beautiful Women,” 390. For the passage in Vasari, see *Lives*, 203-204. For further analysis of Vasari’s place in the Petrarchan tradition, see Liana De Girolaini Cheney, “Vasari’s Interpretation of Female Beauty” in *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, eds. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998): 177-182; and in the same volume Mary Rogers, “The Artist as Beauty,” 93-103. For analysis of the vexed issue of Leonardo’s “grace,” see Fredrika Jacobs, “Leonardo,

In many ways, Swinburne and Rossetti were indebted to the tradition of representation and criticism that Cropper describes. Like Vasari, Swinburne used the Petrarchan language of women's beauty to describe the beauty of art. His description of Leonardo employed the terms "grace" and "mystery," which applied equally to the artist's work and his female ideal. Swinburne slips easily between the "grace" and "mystery" of Leonardo's art and the corresponding qualities in his images of women. Swinburne enacted a similar critical posture toward Rossetti's paintings of women, which themselves engage with Renaissance and Petrarchan models.

Part Three: *Fazio's Mistress: Beauty Past, Beauty Present*

Rossetti's understanding of the Renaissance was inherently linked with his concept of "bodily" beauty, and in his work, "bodily" beauty was manifested in images of beautiful women. For Rossetti, the beauty of art was often conflated with the beauty of the woman represented within the painting itself. Such conflation allowed Rossetti's images of beautiful women to stand for the abstract idea of beauty, which related to the past. The beauty of the women in Rossetti's paintings served a double purpose. First, Rossetti's allusion to the past connected his images to the Aesthetic position toward Renaissance art as sensual and full of beauty. Just as Swinburne associated the beauty of Renaissance art with the beauty of women, Rossetti's allusions employ the same concept. Second, the beauty of women in Rossetti's images has a distinctly "bodily"

---

*grazia*, and the gendering of style," in *Leonardo da Vinci and the Ethics of Style*, ed. Claire Farago (New York: Manchester University Press, 2008): 119-145.



quality. His Aesthetic alignment allowed him to view beauty in a particularly abstract way: beauty alone was the only true subject and purpose of art. *Fazio's Mistress* (1863) exemplifies his engagement in and interpretation of women's beauty based upon Petrarchan tradition.

*Fazio's Mistress* readily demonstrates Rossetti's historicism and as such it connects the representation of a beautiful woman and the past in a foundational example of Aesthetic painting. Scholars frequently use the image to demonstrate their claims of Rossetti's interest in the past. Diane Sachko Macleod's study of how Venetian art influenced Rossetti's style employed *Fazio's Mistress* as its central example.<sup>103</sup> Studies like Macleod's, and more recently Prettejohn's, have been guided by the notion of stylistic influence. A problem inherent in this notion is the tendency to draw superficial conclusions from visual evidence alone. Such problems are characteristic of analyses of Rossetti's work that only seek to point out its visual similarities to Venetian art. Rossetti's historicism and his decision to represent "bodily" beauty as a beautiful woman are represented in the conceptual connections among *Fazio's Mistress*, the Aesthetic perception of the past, the established English understanding to the Renaissance, and Rossetti's own ideas about beauty.

---

<sup>103</sup> Macleod, "Rossetti and Titian," 36-39; On the RHA, McGann suggests that *Fazio's Mistress* can be read as a "kind of allegory of the trajectory of Rossetti's artistic career." According to McGann's reading, *Fazio's Mistress* represents the three distinct phases of Rossetti's career: early Dantean, transitional Venetian, and mature Aesthetic. Rossetti's ideals from each period meet in one image; the theory is, however, premised on the notion that Rossetti's *oeuvre* is subject to the divisions that McGann discerns. McGann, ed. "Fazio's Mistress, Collection Introduction," RHA, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s164.raw.html> (Accessed May 5, 2009).

*Fazio's Mistress* was typical of Rossetti's commissions in the 1860s: a nearly life-sized, bust-length image of a woman similar to but not specifically based on sixteenth-century Renaissance portraits, commissioned by a wealthy Victorian businessman, who then displayed the work in his home. In the fall of 1863, Rossetti took on such a commission from a businessman by the name of William Blackmore. Blackmore had seen a drawing in Rossetti's studio, and from the drawing he commissioned *Fazio's Mistress*.<sup>104</sup> The finished painting depicts a woman attending to her toilette. She is surrounded by an array of objects including a brush, a comb, and an ointment jar sitting upon the ledge in front of her. The folds of her dressing gown are gathered about her exposed shoulders. A noticeable flush has crossed her lips and cheek. Voluminous waves of auburn hair cascade through her fingers as she pauses from looking at her reflection in the mirror. Her world is enclosed and enticing to the viewer. She is an island of beauty unto herself. Like the woman depicted within it, the painting itself is beautiful. A handmade golden frame engraved with the title along the bottom edge encases the rich colors and textures of the painting. Upon gazing at the painting, the Aesthetic viewer was prompted to stop and admire every detail of the woman's beauty and every sumptuous detail of the painting. Together, they created a sensual effect - a "bodily" beauty of art, wherein the body of a beautiful woman and a

---

<sup>104</sup> Rossetti had begun the painting by late October. See his first mention of the painting in a letter to Ellen Heaton on 25 October 1863, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 83, 63.95. When the painting was near completion, Rossetti wrote to Blackmore to offer him the drawings that had induced him to commission *Fazio's Mistress* (16 November, 87, 63.100).

beautiful painting become one and the same.

The title *Fazio's Mistress* drew on two sources, both of which emphasized its relationship to the Renaissance and the beauty of women. First, on the back of Rossetti's photograph of Titian's *Woman With a Mirror* he inscribed the title "Titian's Mistress," by which the painting was commonly known in the nineteenth century.<sup>105</sup> Though he did not acquire the photograph until his 1864 trip to Paris, he had seen the painting on his other trips to the Louvre and knew of it from his reading of popular texts on Italian painting. The title "Titian's Mistress" implies a particular interpretation of Titian's painting as an image of the artist's beautiful and alluring beloved. Second is the title of a fourteenth-century *canzone* that Rossetti translated for his 1861 edition of *The Early Italian Poets*. The poem, "His Portrait of His Lady, Angiola of Verona," by Fazio degli Uberti, describes the poet's pleasure upon viewing the beauty of his beloved. Two lines from the poem were inscribed on the frame with the title: "I look at the crisp golden-threaded hair/Whereof to thrall my heart, Love twists a net."<sup>106</sup>

Many scholars have noted the similarity between *Fazio's Mistress* and sixteenth-century Venetian paintings of women gazing at mirrors and dressing their hair. Based

---

<sup>105</sup>Grieve, "Scandal," 25. The original print is currently located in the University of East Anglia Library, Special Collections, YA1882. Though the inscription on the back of the photograph is thought to be in Rossetti's hand, there is a possibility that it was inscribed by his studio assistant. See Kugler's discussion of this painting, which he refers to as "Titian's Mistress:" *Handbook of Painting*, 366

<sup>106</sup> These lines are Rossetti's translation from Fazio's *canzone*. They are quoted in a letter describing the frame to the patron William Blackmore from November 19, 1869, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 88, 63.101.

on Rossetti's knowledge of Titian's painting through photographs and visits to the Louvre, this comparison has been frequently rehearsed with due justification.<sup>107</sup> *Fazio's Mistress* resembles *Woman with a Mirror* but it is neither a rote copy of Titian's composition nor of his early technique. Both paintings show women with mirrors, touching their hair, with exposed shoulders. There is a correspondence between the costume donned by Rossetti's model, Fanny Cornforth (1835-1906), and Titian's model, but the women are represented in different positions - one sitting, the other standing. The most notable difference is the male figure in Titian's painting. He holds a convex mirror *behind* the woman grasping her blond hair. In *Fazio's Mistress* these details have been altered to depict a woman with auburn hair and flaming lips gazing at herself in a mirror.

Rossetti, very familiar with Titian's paintings of women (not to mention those of Giorgione, Palma Vecchio, Botticelli, Luini, and others), likely referred to them as compositional models. However, an element neglected in such stylistic comparisons is what the use of Renaissance models *meant* to Rossetti. It is not enough to identify that he used historical sources, which is evident; it is necessary to identify how he understood the past and manifested that understanding in his painting in order to create an Aesthetic work of art. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Rossetti had a particular understanding of the sensuousness of Renaissance art. Like Rossetti's

---

<sup>107</sup> The list of sources is too abundant for a single footnote, but the fullest and most recent analysis can be found in Prettejohn's discussion of Rossetti in *Art for Art's Sake*, 209-222.

description of Veronese's "flesh, blood, and slight stupidity," Titian's images of beautiful women represented "bodily" beauty. Images of women represented the sensuousness of art, the erotic *frisson* between lover and beloved, and the Aesthetic experience of viewing beauty.

In 1869, Rossetti expressed some trepidation about the title *Fazio's Mistress* and he decided to rename it "Aurelia." Scholars have taken this to mean that his ideas about the painting, and therefore art in general, had changed significantly over the six year period between the completion of the picture and its renaming. Rossetti wrote to the second owner, George Rae, about *Fazio's Mistress*:

As for "Fazio's Mistress" she ought to be re-named. It was always an absurd misnomer in a hurry, & the thing is much too full of queer details to embody the poem quoted which is a 13<sup>th</sup> [sic] century production. Do have the writing on the frame effaced and call it anything else. "Aurelia" would do very well for the golden hair.<sup>108</sup>

Rossetti's desire to rename the image seems to be proof that he started to view his painting, and art, in a less historical and perhaps more modern way. The title "Aurelia" appears to elide the direct connections among the painting, Titian's image, and Fazio's *canzone* by emphasizing the visual effects of the image. Derived from the Latin word for "golden,"<sup>109</sup> "Aurelia" also emphasizes the unique physical attribute (abundant

---

<sup>108</sup> Letter to George Rae from August 21, 1869, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 4, 240-241, 69.132. On the RHA, McGann notes that the source for "Aurelia" might have been Gérard de Nerval's 1855 novella of the same title, which was inspired by Dante's *Vita Nuova*. McGann, ed. "Fazio's Mistress, Collection Introduction," RHA.

<sup>109</sup> "Aurelia" was a popular female name in ancient Rome. For example, Julius Caesar's mother was named Aurelia Cotta.

golden hair) of the woman in the painting. Rossetti's attempt at renaming *Fazio's Mistress* suggests that he felt some belated ambivalence about his engagement with historical sources, as if they somehow muddied his original intention. However, during the creation of the painting in 1863 he reported that he was making a painting of a "lady plaiting her golden hair," that was "chiefly a piece of colour."<sup>110</sup> His description of the painting in 1863 as being primarily about "golden hair" and color does not deviate significantly from his later conception of it in 1869. Even the lines of Fazio's poem that were inscribed on the frame refer to the woman's golden hair. This evidence suggests that Rossetti's Aestheticism was readily apparent in his interpretation of historical sources, including Fazio's *canzone* and Venetian painting.

Historicism contributed to Rossetti's Aestheticism, yet many scholars who consider his work to be avant-garde or modern suppress this connection. The notion of historicism and Aestheticism were not, and are not, mutually exclusive, even if they have been cleaved apart in the present discourse of Aestheticism.<sup>111</sup> Prettejohn has considered the way in which Rossetti's engagement with Venetian art made his work modern by suggesting that it subverted Victorian sexual propriety and the representation of women. She argues that two characteristics of his work, compressed compositional space and vibrant color, both gleaned from studying Venetian art, combined to create a

---

<sup>110</sup> Letter to Ellen Heaton, from October 25, 1863, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 83, 63.95.

<sup>111</sup> See my discussion of the problematic placement of Aestheticism in Modernist discourse and the imprecise usage of the terms "modern" and "avant-garde" in the introduction.

“modern” style. She compares the effect of Rossetti’s work, its content and visual qualities, to Manet’s allusions to Venetian painting. Both painters, she claims, affected a form of social critique and formal innovation through their use of historical sources.<sup>112</sup> But Rossetti’s paintings are not just a critique of modern life, and, arguably, Prettejohn’s reading of Manet’s work is a narrow one. Rossetti’s paintings, including *Fazio’s Mistress*, are deeply engaged with historical precedents in more than visual ways. The criticism they provide is as much about contemporary life as it is about the past. It is important to remember that the Aesthetic notion of history was distinctly imaginative and thus the historicism of Rossetti’s paintings distinguished them as progressive. The correspondence was not based on visual recognition alone but on the idea that Aesthetic artists and writers recognized their own “worship” of beauty in the Renaissance.

Despite his protestations to his patron, Rossetti was always working within past traditions of art and literature. The hesitation he expressed to Rae was perhaps not merely on account of the historical references within *Fazio’s Mistress* but rather the mixture of old and new. The recognizable Victorian model was posed and dressed like one of Titian’s models, but she equally embodied a fourteenth-century poem. While Rossetti apparently came to view this mixture as conceptually confusing, his comments cumulatively reveal that his ultimate vision of the painting and his understanding of his source material coalesced around a type of beauty, consistently represented by a

---

<sup>112</sup> Prettejohn, *Art for Art’s Sake*, 209-215.

beautiful women, that was shared among Fazio's *canzone*, Titian's painting, and his image.

The lines that Rossetti chose to emphasize from Fazio's *canzone* describe the physical beauty of the poet's beloved. In its entirety, Fazio's *canzone* provides a full description of both his beloved's appearance and her less tangible qualities, such as virtue. A larger portion of Rossetti's translation, which appeared in *The Early Italian Poets*, illustrates the two components necessary for ideal beauty:

Behold if any picture can compare  
With her just limbs, each fit in shape and size,  
Or match her angel's colour like a pearl.  
She is a gentle girl.  
To see; yet when it needs her, scorn can rise.  
Meek, bashful, and in all things temperate,  
Her virtue holds its state;  
In whose least act there is that gift express'd  
Which of all reverence makes her the worthiest.<sup>113</sup>

Throughout the remainder of the *canzone*, Fazio describes his beloved's divine coloring and proportions in minute detail: golden hair, beautiful mouth, spacious forehead, white teeth, red lips, cleft chin, large arms, long fingers, and so on. In the sixteenth century, Firenzuola and others adopted the *stilnovisti*'s canon of attributes to describe their ideal of beauty as outlined in his explanation of proper coloring in women:

There ought not to be an abundance of different colors in one and the same part, but a different color in different parts, according to the variety and needs of these different parts; somewhere white, as in the hands, somewhere fair and vermillion, as in the cheeks, somewhere black, as in the eyelashes, somewhere red, as in the lips, somewhere blonde, as in the hair. This then, my ladies, is not

---

<sup>113</sup> The excerpt is from Rossetti's translation reprinted in Marsh, *Collected Writings*, 70-72.



the definition, but an exposition of the definitions of beauty.<sup>114</sup>

Fazio's *canzone*, Firenzuola's dialogue, and Rossetti's painting share the same idealized representation of women's beauty. Though the *canzone* and dialogue emphasize a relationship between physical and spiritual beauty, the sensual aspect of beauty seems to have appealed to Rossetti in 1863. He was attuned to the description of women's beauty in Fazio's *canzone*, which he had identified as the poet's best work. Rossetti referred to the "particularizing" description of beauty in the poem as a "triumph," going further to say that "...The victor [Fazio] would deserve to receive his prize at the hand of a peerless Queen of Beauty, for never was beauty better described."<sup>115</sup> The comment praises both the description of beauty in Fazio's *canzone* and the beautiful subject of the poem. However, the two are far from separate. Rossetti's interpretation was aligned with the larger Aesthetic interpretation of Petrarchism in lyric poetry, literature, and art criticism from the Renaissance. Like Swinburne, Rossetti conflated the physical and sensual qualities of women's beauty when discussing the beauty of art and poetry.

When Rossetti called his painting "chiefly a piece of colour" in 1863, he drew a connection between the beauty of the woman represented in the painting and the beauty of the painting itself. The color of the painting *is* the very same color of the woman within it. It is a study of exposed flesh and falling hair. In his choice of lines from

---

<sup>114</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, 15.

<sup>115</sup> See Rossetti's introduction to Part II of *Early Italian Poets* reprinted in WM Rossetti, *Collected Works*, 242.

Fazio's poem, and even in the new title "Aurelia," Rossetti indicated repeatedly that the painting's beautiful color was connected with a woman's beauty. Moving beyond this comparative point, color had a double resonance in Victorian discourses on art. It was associated with Venetian painting and such associations tended to be very polemical, as earlier discussions of Rossetti and Swinburne's views of Venetian art indicated. Within Aestheticism, color signified the "bodily" beauty of art.

Considering its various implications, Rossetti's statement that *Fazio's Mistress* was "chiefly a piece of colour" was hardly a passing remark. It suggests that Rossetti was purposefully trying to involve himself in the established and ongoing critical discourse about the merits of color versus design in works of art. By emphasizing the role of color, he also emphasized the Venetian quality of his work, as sumptuous color had become nearly synonymous with Venetian style in Victorian art criticism.<sup>116</sup>

Rossetti's emphasis on color in the painting, instead of moral or narrative meaning, is in keeping with the ideals of Aestheticism. The fact that Venetian painting could serve as a model for contemporary art is highly significant. *Fazio's Mistress* is not a painting that depends on religious, moral or narrative content for its meaning. Its ultimate subject is derived from beauty alone; specifically, Rossetti's image conflates the beauty of the painting with the beauty of the woman within it.

Like Fazio's *canzone*, Rossetti's "Queen of Beauty" in *Fazio's Mistress* is

---

<sup>116</sup> I discuss this connection in further detail in chapter 3 in which I examine the criticism of Joshua Reynolds and John Ruskin. Also see the emphasis on color in Kugler, *Handbook of Painting*, 351-352; and Jameson, *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* 2, 183.

equally about the description of beauty as a subject in itself. All aspects of the painting are designed to engender the appreciation of a woman's beauty and the related appreciation of a beautiful painting. Accoutrements of beautification surround and adorn the model: brush, comb, ointment jar, mirror, jewelry, and hair ornament. Each refers to the appreciation of beauty, which is the ultimate subject of the painting. Rossetti's technique and choice of color also draws the viewer's attention to aspects of her beauty, particularly in his emphatic rendering of her red hair, rosy cheeks, and crimson lips.

The conventions in *Fazio's Mistress* and Rossetti's method of painting originate from the lyric representation of women's beauty and idealized Renaissance portraits of women. Cropper argues that the emphasis on women's beauty in lyric poetry provided the motivation for later "non-narrative" images of women in the Renaissance, or the representation of women outside the context of biblical, mythological, and historical narrative contexts. She refers specifically to mostly static description of beauty in early poems like Fazio's *canzone*:

I look at the amorous beautiful mouth,  
The spacious forehead which her locks enclose,  
The small white teeth, the straight and shapely nose,  
And the clear brows of a sweet penciling.<sup>117</sup>

The conception of women's beauty and the appreciation of it that originated in lyric poetry in the thirteenth century had a direct effect on the development of images of women in succeeding centuries. Women in paintings like Titian's *Woman with a*

---

<sup>117</sup> Rossetti's translation from Marsh, *Collected Writings*, 70.

*Mirror* depend on the conventions of beauty described in Fazio's poem and repeated in countless others. Though Fazio's poem and Titian's painting may have been inspired by real women – or not – they rely on conventions of representing beautiful women.<sup>118</sup>

Rossetti's painting, like Titian's and like Fazio's poem, makes use of the historical conventions of women's beauty, as he understood them as an Aesthetic artist, poet, and critic. Though he used a known model, Fanny Cornforth, as was his typical practice, her appearance nevertheless conforms to a conventional type. Like Rossetti's other portraits, *Fazio's Mistress* is distinctive in this way. The fact that such conventions are aspects of historical tradition should not preclude them from being considered as an essential element of Rossetti's Aestheticism. The conventions of Renaissance representation that Rossetti used in his work were the basis from which he developed his own sensual, non-narrative images of women.

The qualities shared among Rossetti's paintings of women from the 1860s are their emphasis on beauty and overt historicism. Both qualities are embodied in the beautiful women within them. The women in the paintings play a crucial role in creating meaning in the pictures, which are ultimately concerned with beauty as an end in itself. For Aestheticism, the representation of beautiful women was a fundamental means to express ideas about Aesthetic beauty. In moving forward, I examine the critical place of portraiture in Rossetti's images of women from the 1860s.

---

<sup>118</sup> Cropper, "The Beauty of Women," 181; and "On Beautiful Women," 386-391.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE RENAISSANCE PORTRAYED: IDEAL BEAUTY AND PORTRAITURE IN *BOCCA BACIATA*

In Rossetti's critical and creative writing, the idea of "portrait" was highly varied, at times referring to an actual individual and at others attached to an entirely metaphysical concept such as the "soul." This chapter examines the adaptability of Rossetti's conception within a history of female portraiture in which individual identity was displaced in the depiction and appreciation of female beauty. Renaissance portraits of women are key in this history of representation for they established a dynamic between a real subject and idealized representation, which functions equally in Rossetti's paintings. I connect Rossetti's preference for representing beauty over identity to the past and show it to be a distinctive quality of his Aestheticism. The issues of portraiture in Rossetti's paintings relate directly to the representation of women's beauty in his work prior to and during the 1860s. In *Bocca Baciata* (1859), three aspects of portraiture combine to create an image that has proven difficult for many to consider as a portrait, though questions of portraiture have been part of the discourse surrounding the image since its creation. These three aspects are specificity (the real woman represented), sensuality (the "bodily" qualities of beauty), and idealization (the ideal aspects of beauty).

## Part One: Rossetti's Images of Women and Questions of Portraiture

Rossetti's paintings of women seem to proclaim a degree of veracity. The features of his models are rendered in precise and careful detail, an ostensible testament to multiple sittings and interaction between the artist and model. Yet at the same time, Rossetti's paintings hardly ever show the women engaged actively in the production of personal or historical identities. Instead, his images conform to a type of idealized and conventionalized representation of women in which the depiction of beauty supersedes that of personal identity.<sup>119</sup>

In Rossetti's paintings there is a tension between the detailed rendering of the woman shown and the idealized manner of her representation. It is a tension that generates a duality in the images. On one level, the viewer recognizes the model's features; and on another, the woman shown stands for an abstract idea, such as beauty, rather than herself. Rossetti and his friend and patron, George Price Boyce (1826-1897), considered *Bocca Baciata* a portrait of Fanny Cornforth, who modeled for the painting. However, the allusion to Boccaccio's *Decameron* in the title *Bocca Baciata*, or "the mouth that has been kissed," and Cornforth's historical costume obscure her

---

<sup>119</sup> I refer specifically to Rossetti's paintings of woman in which they are not engaged in any activity or their contemporary identity has been actively obscured (i.e. when they are shown as an historical figure). The drawings of Elizabeth Siddall painting, drawing, and reading, while rare, are obvious exceptions. For contrast to images of Cornforth, see *Elizabeth Siddall* (1854, pencil and pen, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) and *D.G. Rossetti sitting to Elizabeth Siddall* (1853, pen and ink, Birmingham City Art Museum), which are both accessible on the RHA.

identity.<sup>120</sup> Depending on who was looking at the painting and under what circumstances, the image conveyed a variety of meanings, most of which had nothing to do with Cornforth's personal identity aside from her physical appearance as mediated by Rossetti. Nonetheless, the tension between the detailed and idealized representation of her and the lack of tangible information about her identity was apparent for all viewers, regardless of whether they knew her personally or not. Rossetti acknowledged the tension in *Bocca Baciata*. In discussions of the painting around the time of its creation, Rossetti called it in some cases a "portrait" and in others a "picture." When he used the word "picture" to describe the painting, it seems that he was trying to describe an idealized female type and the beauty of Venetian painting rather than Cornforth's individual features. In other words, the more general term "picture" referred to the conceptual framework of the painting, while "portrait" referred to its immediate (and perhaps private) subject: Cornforth's likeness and personal identity, which merged in the painting.

In order to describe the tension in Rossetti's images of women and particularly in *Bocca Baciata*, scholars have engaged the concept of portraiture with varying degrees of critical effectiveness. Scholars invoke portraiture for a number of reasons, but the most often cited is that the images represent a recognizable, living person with whom Rossetti had a relationship. For some, this basic definition of portraiture has

---

<sup>120</sup> The line "Bocca baciata non perde ventura, anzi [sic] rinnova come fa la luna, Boccaccio," was inscribed on the back of the painting by someone other than Rossetti – probably Boyce. Julia Crespi, dossier on *Bocca Baciata*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (folder 1, compiled 2003).

been sufficient to include the paintings under that label. Others, who claim that portraits record something essential about identity, find the term “portrait” inappropriate for Rossetti’s idealized images of women. A middle ground also exists, and an entire battery of more nuanced terms has been suggested to situate Rossetti’s images within a range of more traditional portraits and historical forms of representation. But none has fully reconciled how portraits functioned within Rossetti’s Aesthetic practice in the 1860s and specifically how the representation of women’s beauty in Rossetti’s work both conformed to and departed from larger trends within the history of art.

The practice of painting from life is at the root of the unqualified use of the term “portrait” in discussions of both Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic painting produced from the 1850s to 1870s.<sup>121</sup> In her study of Pre-Raphaelite portraiture, Andrea Rose bases her use of the term “portrait” on the premise that Pre-Raphaelite artists painted scrupulously from people they knew – friends, family, and lovers – and that artists of succeeding generations continued the practice. The relationship between model and artist is manifested in the image and it is an important part of the portrait, for artists would not maintain such intimacy with a professional model. Intimacy and truthfulness, she argues, are defining characteristics of Pre-Raphaelite portraiture and are what separate it

---

<sup>121</sup> For some painters this was more important than others. To paint *Christ in the House of his Parents (The Carpenter’s Shop)* (oil on canvas, 1849-50, Tate Gallery, London), Millais spent three weeks sleeping in the workshop of a local carpenter. Though committed to painting from life in most cases, Rossetti was not the realist that Millais was. For an explanation of Pre-Raphaelite technique and a more qualified view of the various painters’ fidelity to nature, see Pettejohn, *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 135-163.



from other types of British or continental practice.<sup>122</sup>

Though Rose accepts Rossetti's paintings of women from the 1860s as portraits, she finds their idealization difficult to reconcile with earlier Pre-Raphaelite truthfulness: "But these portraits are the worst." She goes on to say, "It is all vague and gestural. A cloak of beauty is thrown over the spiritual emptiness."<sup>123</sup> Rose's harsh criticism is more an indictment of Aestheticism – its sensuality and amorality – than of Rossetti's paintings in particular.<sup>124</sup> Even though Rossetti's paintings do not fulfill Rose's notion of moral and spiritual value, which early Pre-Raphaelitism does, they still conform to

---

<sup>122</sup> Andrea Rose, *Pre-Raphaelite Portraits* (Somerset: Oxford Illustrated Press, 1981): 10-11; 13-14. Rose's observations, while largely anecdotal, do point to a few key similarities between some Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic portrait practices. Academic painters in Britain and France used paid models for historical works, but the PRB generally turned to friends and family, which has led some scholars to call representations such as Millais' *Ophelia* (modeled by Elizabeth Siddall) a "portrait." While commissioned portraits were extremely popular in the British art market, the PRB resisted taking formal commissions from wealthy clients. It should be noted, however, that Rossetti used both hired models (e.g. Alexa Wilding) and personal acquaintances while also creating commissioned portraits (e.g. portrait of Ellen Heaton as *Regina Cordium*). For more on portrait practice in England, see by Marcia Pointon, "Portrait! Portrait! Portrait!," in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibition at Somerset House, 1780-1836*, ed. David H. Solkin, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001): 92-109; and *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Robin Simon addresses some related problems in *The Portrait in Britain and America* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1987): 28-31. On modeling in France during the 1860s, see Susan Waller, "Realist Quandaries: Posing Professional and Proprietary Models in the 1860s," *The Art Bulletin* 89, no. 2 (June 2007): 241-265.

<sup>123</sup> Rose, *Pre-Raphaelite Portraits*, 7.

<sup>124</sup> A highly negative view of Aestheticism characterized a great deal of scholarship in the twentieth century. A large and sophisticated body of scholarship has developed around this historiographic issue. For further reading, see Higgins, "No Time for Pater," 37-54; and Harold Bloom, "Coleridge: The Anxiety of Influence" *Diacritics* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 36-41.

the basic tenet of portraiture as she defines it: a truthful likeness, however “gestural,” of a woman who was an intimate acquaintance of the artist.

Rose’s text, written in the early 1980s, is representative of an enduring understanding of and attitude toward Rossetti’s images of women in relation to the concept of portraiture. However, Griselda Pollock has challenged such standardized interpretations of Rossetti’s work in which his personal relationships are the focus of analysis. In particular, she objects to referring to his images of women as portraits at all: “The portrait documents an individual’s presence and, only in recent times, appearance, inscribing by the same token social status and place. The drawings by Rossetti offer no location except the blank page.”<sup>125</sup> Opposed to Rose, Pollock’s definition of a “portrait” is designed to undermine Rossetti’s artistic and biographical authority. If portraits are supposed to inscribe aspects of identity, such as time and place, and in some cases appearance, then Rossetti’s paintings of women as literary and idealized characters, painted in costumes and surrounded by flowers, are destined to be, as she says, “*not* portraits.” For Pollock, Rossetti’s paintings efface qualities of personal identity and thus cannot be considered as records of the model’s individuality. They are instead beautiful objects in which a woman’s beauty is conflated with the beauty of her image.<sup>126</sup> Further, they eroticize the female image. Of *Bocca Baciata*,

---

<sup>125</sup> Pollock, “Woman as Sign,” 168-169. While initially focused on drawings of Elizabeth Siddall, Pollock’s reading of Rossetti’s work expands to include *Bocca Baciata* and many of his key paintings from the 1860s.

<sup>126</sup> Pollock, “Woman as Sign,” 169.

Pollock proclaims, it is “not a female figure but a fragment,” referring to the visual and conceptual emphasis on the mouth as an almost neurotic metonymy of female sexuality, male desire, and Victorian anxiety about women’s bodies.<sup>127</sup>

Despite Pollock’s conviction that the concept should be avoided in discussions of his work, portraiture exists as a constantly evolving theme in Rossetti scholarship. Susan Casteras has suggested a number of qualified terms in a series of essays dealing with Pre-Raphaelite portraiture and Rossetti’s paintings specifically: “accidental portraits,” “coincidental portraits,” and “latent portraits.”<sup>128</sup> Such terms are intended to clarify the status of figures in Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic paintings as recognizable likenesses of known individuals rendered in the guises of biblical, historical, or literary characters.<sup>129</sup> Casteras argues that Rossetti’s paintings from the 1860s differ from earlier Pre-Raphaelite productions in their level of psychosexual intensity, but they are

---

<sup>127</sup> Pollock, “Woman as Sign,” 178.

<sup>128</sup> Casteras makes no significant distinction among the three types listed above. She also refers to the images as “friendship portraits,” which have a history in continental art (the Nazarenes, for example) that she does not fully explain. For “accidental portraits,” see “The Double Vision in Portraiture,” in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Double Work of Art*, ed. Maryan Wynn Ainsworth (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1976): 12; for “coincidental portraits,” see “Pre-Raphaelite Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty,” in *The Pre-Raphaelites in Context*, ed. Malcom Warner (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1992), 27; and for friendship and “latent portraits,” see *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites*, 140.

<sup>129</sup> For further reading on the Pre-Raphaelites and Victorian standards of beauty, including those associated with contemporary medical discourse, see the earlier study by Stephanie Grilli, “Pre-Raphaelite Portraiture 1848-1854” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1980).

still a form of portraiture – that they are “hybrids of the real with the fantastic.”<sup>130</sup> Casteras’ conception of portraiture makes allowances for idealization in Rossetti’s images whereas Rose finds that aspect of the paintings troubling. Pollock sees the images as too idealized and too detached from time and place to be considered portraits.

In the work of Rose, Pollock, and Casteras, one finds the major problems and proposed conclusions of the portraiture debate surrounding Rossetti’s images of women. The ideas of likeness and verisimilitude have been very important in building a case for portraiture in Rossetti’s work. Like the more general discussion of portraiture, the notion of likeness is premised upon Pre-Raphaelite naturalism and the intimate relationship between artist and model, which is often historically dubious.<sup>131</sup> In the scholarly literature, portraiture is too often used to mean accurate visual representation, and it is pitted against the ideal qualities of beauty in Rossetti’s paintings of women. Pollock only alienates these two aspects from one another and from portraiture by choosing to focus on the lack of identity in the paintings. Casteras attempts to bring the real and the ideal together in her description of Rossetti’s “hybrid” portraits, but the portrait-like aspects of Rossetti’s paintings are ultimately “accidental,” “coincidental,” and “latent.” They are real women posing as some beautiful, idealized “other” and the

---

<sup>130</sup> Casteras, “Pre-Raphaelite Portraiture,” 145.

<sup>131</sup> A key example is Rossetti’s relationship with Fanny Cornforth. A recent biographical study has reevaluated many assumptions about Cornforth, including her illiteracy and career as a prostitute, and her relationship with Rossetti: Anne Drewery, Julian Moore, and Christopher Whittick, “Re-presenting Fanny Cornforth, the Makings of an Historical Identity,” *The British Art Journal* 2, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 3-15.

portrait is a by-product of the viewer's recognition of the model.

Until recently, questions about the place of Renaissance tradition in Rossetti's understanding of portraiture have been virtually absent. Elisabeth Helsinger has used the phrase "portrait-like" to describe Rossetti's representations of beautiful women, which were, as she argues, "much influenced" by the work of Titian. As I have already shown, the effect of Titian's painting on Rossetti's work during the 1860s went much further than simple stylistic influence. Helsinger attempts to draw a deeper connection between Rossetti's practice of creating paintings and corresponding poems and Titian's *poesie*.<sup>132</sup> In most cases, Titian's *poesie* were large-scale, mythological paintings created for his patron Phillip II.<sup>133</sup> However, Helsinger selectively applies the term to Titian's work using it to describe *Woman with a Mirror* as a "single figure *poesia*," an idea adapted from Rona Goffen's study of Titian.<sup>134</sup>

While Helsinger is absolutely correct to point out the connection between Rossetti and Titian as well as the relationship between Rossetti's portraits and poetry, there are two problems with her analogy. First, the imagery of the *poesie* traditionally

---

<sup>132</sup> Helsinger's discussion of *poesie* runs throughout her chapter "Portraits and *Poesie*": *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008): 144.

<sup>133</sup> For further reading on the significance and meaning of poetry and the *poesia* in Titian's *oeuvre* see David Rosand, "Ut Pictor Poeta: Meaning in Titian's *Poesie*," *New Literary History* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1972): 527-546).

<sup>134</sup> Helsinger's primary understanding of *poesie* and the foundation of her analogy between Rossetti and Titian is based on her reading of Rona Goffen's *Titian's Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997): 75. Helsinger's misunderstanding of *poesie* is related to her desire to explain poetic subject matter in single-figure portraits of women. See note 3 in Helsinger (295-296).

comes from Ovid's mythology, and not from portraiture or what Helsinger refers to as "portrait-like" imagery. The *poesia* is best described as a multi-figure, narrative painting, like *Diana and Actaeon* (1556-59, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh).<sup>135</sup> The poetic connection that I pursue is to lyric poetry and specifically the representation of women's beauty within the *paragone* of poetry and painting. Second, by suggesting that Rossetti's paintings are *poesie* and only "portrait-like," Helsinger elides their connection to the non-narrative representation of women's beauty in lyric tradition. Rossetti's paintings are part of this tradition, and it is an essential aspect of his Aestheticism.

Moving forward, "likeness" and idealization in Rossetti's images should be investigated as conventions of a *type* of representation and not a result of it. *Bocca Baciata* could function as a portrait even when no one recognized the model. The aspects of portraiture within the image, encompassing a broad range of naturalism and idealization, complicate the portrait status of the image, but they do not disqualify it from consideration. The concept of portraiture is a necessary and revealing consideration in the discussion of Rossetti's images of women. However, there has been too much emphasis on explaining how Rossetti's images of women depart from accepted types of portraiture and not enough attention to portraiture as a concept. The conventions of portraiture, as well as the interpretations of those conventions, are

---

<sup>135</sup> James Lawson has discussed the representation of narrative themes in Titian's *poesie*: "Titian's Diana Pictures: The Passing of an Epoch," *Artibus et Historiae* 25, no. 49 (2004): 49-63.

specific to a particular time and place. Rossetti's understanding of portraiture, particularly female portraiture, was more flexible and fluid than current scholarship allows. In his own paintings and those he admired from the past, the conventions that determined portrait status were not attached exclusively to the representation of individuality or identity as such but to specific markers that facilitated associations to such concepts as beauty and art. Therefore, determining what these conventions were and how they were applied is a crucial element in discussing images of women and Aesthetic beauty in Rossetti's work.

#### Part Two: Aestheticism, Portraiture, and the Renaissance

The relationship between beauty and identity in Rossetti's images of women is by no means straightforward and his usage of the term portrait is far from transparent. Rossetti's critical and creative prose establishes that he did not understand portraiture as a fixed category, especially with regard to images of women. I do not wish to recover Rossetti's *intention* to create portraits of women, but rather his perception that different standards applied to different types of images, particularly paintings of beautiful women. His perception of different standards led him to create images of real women based upon highly idealized and metaphorical ideas related to Aesthetic beauty. There has been no individual examination of Rossetti's engagement with traditions of portraiture, and the way in which his paintings of women both conform to and depart from traditions of female portraiture has not been clearly explained. The highly contextual nature of portrait conventions is not usually recognized in discussions of Pre-

Raphaelite or Aesthetic portraiture.<sup>136</sup> This is not the case in more recent general surveys of portraiture in which scholars have argued that portrait conventions are specific to a particular time and place. It was not just images of women from the Renaissance but specifically portraiture that fueled Rossetti's representation of ideal Aesthetic beauty.

*Rossetti's Understanding of Beauty and Individual Identity in Female Portraiture*

All too frequently, scholars have let their own narrow understanding of portraiture as a convincing likeness made from life dictate how they relate to Rossetti's understanding of portraits or "portrait-like" imagery. In 1871, Rossetti published a notice honoring the Irish painter Daniel Maclise (1806-1870), which stands as one of his most revealing, yet least discussed, statements on portraiture. Rossetti's notice entitled "Maclise's Character-Portraits" was published in the *Academy*, a journal of erudite literary and art criticism.<sup>137</sup> Maclise enjoyed some fame as a member of the

---

<sup>136</sup> There have been some very sophisticated analyses of the concept of portraiture in scholarship on both Victorian and Aesthetic art in which the idea is presented as a variable rather than a monolithic category. See in particular the section on "reading faces" in Victorian art by Margaret D. Stetz in *Facing the Late Victorians: Portraits of Writers and Artists from the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007): 12-13; and also the Aesthetic tension between idealized and literal representation in David Riede, "Apocalyptic Portraits" *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 4 (Fall 1995): 65-76.

<sup>137</sup> The essay was published first in the *Academy* 2 (15 April 1871): 218-219; and again in William Michael Rossetti, ed., *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 2 (London: Ellis, 1886): 506-511. In all the following quotations, pagination is from the later publication. It is probable that Rossetti composed the essay at least a year before it was published. WM Rossetti dated the essay to sometime in 1870 (See McGann, ed., "Maclise's Character Portraits, Collection Introduction," RHA,



Royal Academy and even amongst progressive academics, including the early Pre-Raphaelites. He was best known as a history painter, though his commercial success was secured by a series of portraits of literary luminaries from the Romantic era. The lithographic portraits were done throughout the 1830s and printed in the pages of *Fraser's Magazine*.<sup>138</sup> Rossetti's discussion of Maclise concerns these portrait lithographs.

Rossetti's notice describes his views about the different types of portraiture and implies that this difference manifested itself along gendered or at least stylistic lines. His views were representative of presiding British attitudes about portraiture in that he differentiates portraits from history painting and makes further divisions within portraiture itself. Rossetti does not denigrate portraiture as harshly as some of his peers but he does recognize its commercial value, which had only increased during the

---

<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/36p-1870.raw.html> [Accessed February 24 2010]), but it could have been written as early as 1869. Rossetti mentions the readers of the *Academy*, which was established in 1869 (511). He also claims to know of no published works about Maclise (506-7), but one was put into production shortly after the artist's death in 1870: James Dafforne, *Pictures by Daniel Maclise, R.S.A. with Descriptions and a Biographical Sketch of the Painter* (London: Virtue and Co., 1871).

<sup>138</sup> There was a recent retrospective of Maclise's work in Cork, Ireland. More information about his life and work can be found in *Daniel Maclise, 1806-1870: Romancing the Past*, ed. Peter Murray, Exh. Cat. (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 2008). The portraits printed in *Fraser's Magazine* from 1830-1838 were reprinted as a group later in the nineteenth century: William Bates, *Maclise Portrait Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters with Memoirs Biographical, Critical, Bibliographical, Anecdotal, and Illustrative of the Literature of the Former Half of the Present Century* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1883).

Victorian period.<sup>139</sup> In portraits of men and women, he stresses different qualities that were in keeping with the contemporary interpretation of portrait imagery.

After making laudatory mention of Maclise's career as a history painter, Rossetti proceeds to the artist's portraits, which he describes initially in a seemingly straightforward manner:

I suppose no such series of the portraits of celebrated persons of any epoch produced by an eye and hand of so much insight and power, and realized with such a view to the actual impression of the sitter, exists anywhere; and the period illustrated possessed abundant claims to a worthy personal record (507).

In his description of Maclise's lithographs, Rossetti draws a connection between the "insight" (genius, artistry, skill) of the artist and his ability to capture a corresponding quality in his "impression" of the "celebrated persons" who sat for him. Maclise's portraits are generally successful, in Rossetti's view, because they combine artistic skill, the sitter's essence, and true likeness. Veracity ranks high in Rossetti's initial assessment of Maclise's portraits, which he claims produce "the impression of absolute trustworthiness, as in a photograph" (508).

The explanation of portraiture that Rossetti presents at the beginning of his essay is the most simple: Maclise's photographic likenesses are improved by a great artist who captures the greatness of his subject. Inner character and distinctiveness are

---

<sup>139</sup> The commercial value of portraiture in Britain is a topic of great breadth that would take much time to develop fully. For a good overview of the RA's position toward (and dilemma in dealing with) portraiture as both a genre and a commercial venture, see Pointon, "*Portrait, Portrait, Portrait!!!*," 92-96.

important aspects of the portraits Rossetti describes early in the essay.<sup>140</sup> He discusses several examples in detail, but his description of Maclise's portrait of Thomas Carlyle (lithograph, 1833, National Portrait Gallery, London) is representative of his interpretation of a "direct portrait:"

As for our still living glory, Carlyle, the picture here given of him, in the simple reserved strength of his earlier life, convinces us at once of its priceless fidelity. Fortunately this portrait is one of the most carefully modeled and engraved, and is a very beautiful complete piece of individuality. This, no doubt, like some others, that this is a direct portrait for which the original actually stood... (508).

The "original" refers presumably to Carlyle (1795-1881) himself, making the "direct portrait" one done from *direct observation*. Not only is the portrait a convincing likeness of Carlyle, reproducing him with "fidelity" so that the readers of *Fraser's Magazine* might believe that he really had posed for the portrait, but Maclise also managed to capture Carlyle's "individuality." The vagueness in Rossetti's phrasing suggests that it is both Carlyle's individuality and Maclise's artistic "individuality," or the autonomy of the work of art, which has been inscribed in the portrait of this great man.

The transcription of likeness and inscription of genius do not completely define Rossetti's understanding of portraiture with regard to Maclise's work. He explains that Maclise did not draw all his subjects from life, so that likeness is not typical of all the character-portraits: "...Many, on the other hand, are reminiscences, either serious or satirical, of the persons represented" (508). The term "reminiscences" implies the roles

---

<sup>140</sup> These include portraits of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb, and Thomas Carlyle (508).

of memory, whimsy, or even invention, in constructing an image of the subject who was not present. Though Rossetti distinguished the two types – the “complete piece of individuality” of the direct observation from the “reminiscence” – both are *portraits*. For some time in British portraiture, questions of likeness had been what Marcia Pointon has called a “relative matter.” Depending on where the portrait was seen, who viewed it, and whom it represented, likeness was a flexible concept for audiences in early and mid-nineteenth century Britain.<sup>141</sup>

Rossetti treats the “reminiscences” in a noticeably different way. Before discussing any single portrait, he makes a statement about the whole group:

Both in rendering of character, whether in its first aspect or subtler shades, and in the unfailing knowledge of form which seized at once on the movement of the body beneath the clothes and on the lines of the clothes themselves, these drawings are on an incredibly higher level than the works of even the best professional sketchers (509).

The emphasis shifts away from likeness, greatness, and individuality and toward the visual qualities of the images. Rossetti denies the specificity of the “characters” in favor of describing the visual appeal of Maclise’s work.

After a few cursory examples, which Rossetti analyzes in terms of “style” (his term), he addresses the only portrait of a woman discussed at length in the essay:<sup>142</sup>

Of course, as in all cases of clear satisfaction in art, the gift of beauty, and no other, is at the bottom of the success achieved. I have no room to point to many instances of this, but may refer to one; namely the rendering – whimsical, as in

---

<sup>141</sup> Pointon, “*Portrait! Portrait! Portrait!*,” 105.

<sup>142</sup> Rossetti mentions two other portraits of women but only in passing: Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Harriet Martineau. Both were published in 1833.

the spirit of the series, yet truly appreciative – of that noble beauty which in Caroline Norton inspired the best genius of her long summer day (509).

Like Carlyle, Caroline Norton (1808-1877) was a renowned political writer of the early Victorian period, but there is a significant difference between Rossetti's description of Carlyle's and Norton's portraits (*Caroline Norton*, lithograph, 1831, National Portrait Gallery, London). As Rossetti shifts to Norton's portrait, he comments that "beauty" is the most important aspect of art, and the appreciation of beauty is an essential aspect of artistic success and enjoyment. His example of Maclise's artistic success is his portrait of Norton, which, above all other qualities, captures her beauty. In Rossetti's description of the portrait, a "whimsical" reminiscence of its subject, it is beauty that matters above all else.

Rossetti's emphasis on beauty as a personal attribute and visual quality in Norton's portrait stands in contrast to his description of Carlyle's portrait as a "very beautiful complete piece of individuality." The modifier "beautiful," which implies the rendering of the portrait and the romantic attitude of the subject, is ultimately attached to the phrase "complete piece of individuality" (i.e. the direct portrait of the male writer). It is the individual represented, not the beauty of the work of art that is most important. In contrast, Rossetti's use of "beauty" in reference to Norton's portrait refers both to her physical appearance and the visual qualities of art. In his discussion of Norton's portrait, Rossetti makes no significant distinction between the beautiful person represented and the beautiful mode of Maclise's representation of her.

From Rossetti's treatment of Norton's portrait, one can gain a revealing but not entirely complete view of his understanding of female portraiture. Rossetti did not hold

“whimsical” portraits, specifically portraits of beautiful women, to the same standard of likeness and individuality as he did portraits of great men. They presented instead opportunities for stylistic appreciation and metaphorical reflection. In the broader context of the Victorian understanding of female beauty in portraits, Rossetti’s reading of Norton’s portrait as a “successful” representation of beauty did not deviate substantially from established modes of interpretation.<sup>143</sup> However, Rossetti’s description of Norton’s portrait is indicative of the crucial place of women’s beauty within his Aestheticism. Rossetti’s use of portraits to represent Aesthetic beauty is indicative of contemporary associations of female portraits with abstract ideals including beauty. In “Hand and Soul,” a short story first published in 1850 and for a second time in 1869, Rossetti used a woman’s portrait to represent beauty and artistic creativity.<sup>144</sup> Though the image in the story is not expressly identified as a portrait, it is

---

<sup>143</sup> Rossetti’s view of beauty in women’s portraiture was part of larger Victorian collecting and exhibition practices at institutions as large as the National Portrait Gallery. After being established in 1856, the National Portrait Gallery built a collection of so-called “beauty portraits” as a complement to the portraits of historical figures that comprised the remainder of the collection. In her study of the gallery’s early history, Lara Perry has argued that women’s portraits played a significant role in collapsing the appreciation of female and visual beauty: *History’s Beauties, Women and the National Portrait Gallery, 1856-1900* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2006): 90-109.

<sup>144</sup> “Hand and Soul” was composed in 1849 and published in *The Germ*, no. 1 (Jan 1850): 23-33. It was subsequently revised and republished in *The Fortnightly Review*, no. 7 (Dec 1869): 692-702. For a history of the revisions and publications, see Mark Samuels Lasner, “A Bibliographical Essay on ‘Hand and Soul’” RHA, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/lasner001.rad.html> (1997); and by McGann, ed., “Collection Introduction: Hand and Soul,” RHA, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/46p-1849.sa76.raw.html> (Accessed 24 February 2010). The quotations here are from the 1850 version of the story reprinted in Marsh, *Collected Writings*, 47-58. Rossetti’s 1869 revision corrected historical inaccuracies throughout the story, but the structure of

conceptually connected with his reading of Maclise's portrait of Norton by the personification of art, or beauty, through a beautiful woman. In both cases, whether or not the portrait refers to a specific individual is incidental in the conception of female portraiture.

“Hand and Soul,” narrated by a nineteenth-century English connoisseur, relates the story of a thirteenth-century artist named Chiaro dell’Erma. The narrator recounts Chiaro’s love of art from early childhood. As a boy, Chiaro was dedicated to creating art from nature, and as he grew older his “extreme longing after a visible embodiment of his thoughts” only increased (48). As a young man, he went to Pisa to study with the greatest artist of his day. Although this master accepts him, Chiaro is ultimately disappointed by the great artist’s “lifeless” paintings and resolves to go his own way in pursuit of artistic fame and renown. He works obsessively for three years and eventually garners fame. However, fame does not satisfy his desire to obtain the “physical embodiment” of his thoughts, so in frustration he abandons working from nature altogether. Instead, he creates paintings based solely on his faith in God, but his work grows cold and abstract; consequently, his fame begins to wane. One afternoon, Chiaro observes a festival processing through the streets of Pisa. In a church that sits directly across from the window of his room, Chiaro witnesses a bloody battle. Murals that he painted in the church, allegorical frescoes of Peace, are splattered with blood. Chiaro realizes that his art is unable to move its viewers—his allegory of Peace could

---

the plot remained the same. See McGann and Lasner for further detail.

not prevent violent discord.

Following his realization, Chiaro experiences a crisis of artistic faith. In a fit of frustration and doubt, he has a vision of a beautiful woman who appears in his room. She speaks to him and says, "I am an image, Chiaro, of thine own soul within thee. See me and know me as I am. Thou sayest that fame has failed thee, and faith failed thee...I am suffered to come into thy knowledge" (53-54). She further instructs, "...Take now thine Art unto thee, and paint me thus, as I am, to know me...Do this; so shall thy soul stand before thee always, and perplex thee no more" (55). Chiaro paints his vision solemnly but with haste and then collapses in exhaustion. The story closes with an epilogue in which the contemporary narrator describes his amblings around the galleries of the Pitti Palace in Florence. There, he sees a peculiar painting, which, after some inquiring, he discovers to be the picture of Chiaro's "soul," inscribed with the phrase: *Manus Animam pinxit*. It is the narrator who provides the Latin title, which translates as "hand paints the soul." In a footnote, still in the voice of the fictional narrator, Rossetti states that the Pitti catalogue identifies Chiaro's painting as a "Figura Mistica," which he describes as a peculiar image of an ethereal woman in a green cloak (57).

"Hand and Soul" has been frequently interpreted as an artistic manifesto, particularly of Pre-Raphaelitism, but it should be read in two ways. In the context of its original composition, written the same year Rossetti joined the PRB, the most important aspect of the artistic philosophy it espouses is fidelity to nature.<sup>145</sup> This fits well with

---

<sup>145</sup> For more detailed readings of "Hand and Soul" as an artistic manifesto, see especially D.M.R. Bentley, "Rossetti's 'Hand and Soul'" *English Studies in Canada* 3



early Pre-Raphaelitism and the microscopic naturalism practiced by its members. When re-examined in light of the later phases of Rossetti's work, as the story was being revised for publication in 1869, the concept of fidelity to nature is not as applicable as the idealization that characterizes his paintings. Although Rossetti continued to work from nature, naturalism eventually became a means to produce a desired effect rather than an end in itself (i.e. creating an image of beauty rather than capturing the beauty of nature). His representations of women's beauty as ideal and all-encompassing has its roots in "Hand and Soul" in which a painting of a beautiful woman represents the pinnacle of artistic creation.

In both Rossetti's interpretations of female portraiture, of Chiaro's portrait of his soul and Maclise's portrait of Norton, the beauty of art is manifested in the image of a beautiful woman. A woman's beauty stands for Aesthetic beauty, whether it is the beauty of the work itself or the soulful passion that inspired it. For Rossetti, aspects of portraiture were not limited to photographic likeness and the inscription of individuality (i.e. greatness, genius, personal achievement). Rather, the female portraits discussed here represent beauty and eschew personal identity. In most cases, Rossetti used the same approach in his own paintings of women.

---

(1977): 445-57; and David Riede's discussion of the story in *Limits of Victorian Vision*, 34-41. The dominant view is that "Hand and Soul" corresponds to Rossetti's earlier artistic philosophy. A more extended explanation of this position, including historiography, can be found in McGann, "Hand and Soul," RHA.

*Portraits of Women and Portraying Aesthetic Beauty*

Rossetti's conception of female portraiture was an important Aesthetic quality of his paintings; equally, historicism played a crucial role in his Aestheticism. Portraits of women from the Renaissance including marriage portraits, portraits of courtesans and unknown beautiful women, and allegorical portraits, as well as the conventions of lyric poetry that informed them, fundamentally shaped Rossetti's Aesthetic paintings during the 1860s. An understanding of the place that beauty has held in portraits of women is necessary for appreciating the idealized nature of women's beauty in Rossetti's portraits. In order to understand more fully the Aesthetic meaning of his images, one must acknowledge first that the definition of portrait is specific to a time and place, though past traditions can be transferred through the process of allusion; second, it is also advantageous to recognize the fluid way in which portrait imagery has been used to represent abstract concepts such as beauty throughout time.

When Griselda Pollock stated that Rossetti's images of women are "*not* portraits" she was partly correct. She was right in that the images, for the most part, do not present the usual markers of personal identity that one would expect to see in a Victorian portrait. These include indications of class, such as proper attire, occupation, marital status, and any other individual interests including reading or writing.<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>146</sup> Though portraits varied widely in appearance, function, and media throughout the Victorian period, the qualities listed above are a few of the identifying elements in both men and women's portraits that were legible and expected among audiences during the mid- to late-Victorian period. For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see the introductory essay by Stetz in *Facing the Late Victorians*, 7-21.

Pollock expects these things from a *true* portrait, and Rossetti's paintings of women fall short. They are idealized, historicized, fantasy versions of the real women who posed for them and thus they fail to fulfill her requirements of portraiture. Pollock employs a definition of portrait that was not universally applicable during the Victorian period. Though Rossetti's paintings do not conform to Pollock's expectations of portraiture, for men or women, her remark unfairly excises them from a history of women's portraits in which identity was often conflated with beauty. Conversely, the term portrait cannot be applied uncritically to Rossetti's images of women as it has been in the past. Even among authors who have examined aspects of portraiture in Rossetti's paintings, the concept of portraiture and its status as an historical construct are frequently left unanalyzed. Recent investigations of portraits argue for a more contextual understanding of portrait imagery in recognition of the ways in which portrait conventions vary throughout time, from place to place, and among art and non-art media.<sup>147</sup> Rossetti had a multi-dimensional understanding of portraiture. In particular, his conception that a woman's portrait represented the essence of Aesthetic beauty does not comport completely with the notion that portraits should represent individuality and identity.

Pollock's and Rossetti's differing use of the word "portrait" is plausible if one

---

<sup>147</sup> In addition to Stetz' examination of Victorian portraiture, which focuses on aspects of visual culture, see the more general studies by Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 11-14; and Eric Garberson, "Portraits, Categories, and Identity" (manuscript), 1-34, to whom I offer my sincerest thanks for his permission to read and cite the article before its publication.

realizes that portraits are subject to the contextualizing factors of the culture in which they were produced. There is no one definition or type of portraiture that is representative of all periods and places in western art, and expectations and functions of portraiture have always been highly variable. Eric Garberson has recently argued that considering portraiture as a fixed category is problematic because visual cues and conventions that establish an image as a portrait change significantly over time and from place to place. Rather than providing a highly specific definition of “portrait,” he argues that it is more productive to consider how portrait conventions function in a given period, especially among images that might have remained on the margins of more traditional conceptions of portraiture.<sup>148</sup>

Garberson and others have questioned what a portrait actually is and their answers, though significantly different in detail, all define portraits quite broadly as types of imagery that establish a relationship between the person represented and the manner of their representation. For example, Richard Brilliant claims that “Portraits reflect social realities.” In other words, portraits act as documents of the social conventions from a particular time and place.<sup>149</sup> The person represented is shown in his or her social role as prescribed by period-specific conventions including clothing, pose,

---

<sup>148</sup> Garberson, “Portraits,” 15-16.

<sup>149</sup> Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991): 11-15. An additional, highly focused study that pursues a similar view of portraiture as a social document can be found in Craig Harbison, “Sexuality and Social Standing in Jan van Eyck’s Arnolfini Double Portrait,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 249-291.

and props. Brilliant maintains that portraits constitute a separate genre through their claims to truth via likeness, even if the likeness portrayed is of an idealized type.<sup>150</sup> Garberson argues that portraits may represent a particular person (alive, dead, or imagined) but that their truth claims are independent of actual likeness. In his expanded definition of “portrait,” Garberson explains the ways in which portraits represent the “person portrayed” within specific conventions that convey various meanings. These conventions, including pose, composition, and the inclusion of revealing details about the person portrayed, induce viewers to understand a particular image as a portrait. Portrait conventions can prompt viewers to see a particular portrait as representative of an abstract concept like beauty instead of a specific person.<sup>151</sup> The idealizing function of portrait conventions in images of women is crucially important in understanding how Rossetti’s paintings relate to a history of female portraiture.

The use of portraits to convey concepts like beauty is a quality that connects images of women from various periods. Paintings, including *Bocca Baciata*, have skirted consideration as portraiture even though they conform to portrait conventions specific to the period in which they were produced as well as recognizable conventions from past traditions. Historically, many portraits of women have endeavored to show more abstract qualities including beauty or virtue. Such traditions extend back to at least

---

<sup>150</sup> Both West and Brilliant assert that portraits claim veracity through likeness, and this relationship between an image and an actual individual sets portraiture apart as a separate genre of visual art. See Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 7-11; and West, *Portraiture*, 11.

<sup>151</sup> Garberson, “Portraits,” 25.

fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy.

In her recent survey of portraiture, Shearer West argues that portraits of women from the Renaissance illustrate female exclusion from more typical aspects of masculine identity like professional potential and educational achievement.<sup>152</sup> For West, the representation of identity is a crucial component of what determines the portrait status of an image.<sup>153</sup> The history of female portraiture that West provides suggests major differences between representations of men and women throughout time; primarily, her conclusions imply that portraits of women have a different standard of identity than those of men and have consequently been more open to idealization in order to represent abstract concepts, including beauty.

Though portrait conventions are frequently contextual, they can be shared across time; and in some cases, images share certain qualities by way of allusion. Rossetti's images were directly affected by the conventions of female portraiture from the Renaissance in which beauty played a major part in producing meaning. Portraits like

---

<sup>152</sup> West's argument can be found in the beginning of the chapter entitled "Gender and Portraiture," in *Portraiture*, 145-155. In her description of artists' use of idealization and allegory in female portraits, she uses an example by Rossetti for comparison to a Grand Manner portrait by Joshua Reynolds (152-154). The work by Rossetti is *Beata Beatrix* (oil on canvas, 1862-1870, Tate Gallery, London). For a more detailed account of the nature and functions of female portraiture in Renaissance Italy, see the essay by Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Portrait of the Lady, 1430-1520," in *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, ed. David Alan Brown, Exh. Cat. (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001): 63-87.

<sup>153</sup> West goes on to say that "identity" can point to any number of things including profession, age, gender, and personality. These aspects of identity change depending upon who is depicted in the portrait and when and where the portrait was created. West, *Portraiture*, 11-13.

*Bocca Baciata* represent a connection to the past partly by representing a woman in great detail but also by allowing her to remain anonymous to the viewer. Both conventions of portraiture frequently signified the representation of female beauty and the beauty of painting in Renaissance portraits of women. As Cropper has argued, the allegorical place of female beauty in portraiture is largely due to the conventions of lyric poetry. Alluding to these poetic conventions and their related visual manifestations, Rossetti created an Aesthetic female portraiture that merged the real and ideal.

As West's study suggests, problems of interpretation often arise over questions of meaning, purpose, and identity in portraits of women from the Renaissance, particularly among those that remain unidentified or appear overtly sensual. Some of the problems originate from the period of the Renaissance, but others, such as the classification of certain images as portraits while others remain on the margins, are endemic to later periods in which the category "portrait" became more closely aligned with the specific personal identity of the individual portrayed. Patricia Simons questions the current understanding of portraiture as a category of images and the degree to which this understanding corresponds to Renaissance expectations of female portraiture. She stresses that the traditional understanding of portraiture in art-historical literature implies an inherent correlative relationship between the portrait status of an image and the known identity, or individuality, of the person depicted. She also notes that some images of women have historically presented a serious problem regarding this requirement of portraiture. In the Renaissance, a woman might be painted for her

physical beauty alone and the portrait could derive meaning from her beauty; thus aspects of her identity beyond this are not included in or necessary for the production and subsequent appreciation of the image as a portrait. According to Simons, this anonymous quality did not preclude such images from consideration as portraits in the Renaissance and should not exclude them from such consideration now.

Simons broadens the vocabulary with which to discuss female portraiture by providing a list of alternative sorts of imagery that, in the Renaissance, were also considered as portraits of women. Among them she includes the allegorical portrait, erotic representation, the portrait-in-guise, and images that combine all of these.<sup>154</sup> A comparison of Titian's portrait of Isabella d'Este (oil on canvas, 1534, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) and another image by Titian simply titled *La Bella* (oil on canvas, 1536, Palazzo Pitti, Florence) illustrates this point. The two images share many sixteenth-century Venetian pictorial conventions including a slightly-turned, three-quarter view of the body, compressed and indeterminate pictorial space, dark background, opulent dress, styled hair, abundant jewels, and idealization of the face and body. In the Isabella d'Este portrait, the historical identity of the subject was recorded, and today much is known about her. In the case of *La Bella*, no record exists of who

---

<sup>154</sup> For all of the above see Patricia Simons' essay "Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women," in *Languages and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Allison Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): 283-288; 291-2. A student of Simons, Monika A. Schmitter has explored the "ideal" portrait type in Botticelli's images of Simonetta Vespucci, a figure of great interest in nineteenth-century Britain: "Botticelli's Images of Simonetta Vespucci: Between Portrait and Ideal" *Rutgers Art Review* 15 (1995): 33-57.



the woman in the portrait was.<sup>155</sup> Despite the fact that it was commissioned in old age and copied from an earlier portrait, the image of Isabella d'Este is generally considered a portrait. Some scholars have been troubled by the anonymity in *La Bella*, and, complicating matters, *La Bella* appears in documents from Titian's studio as both a "picture" and a "portrait." According to Simons, the portrait of Isabella d'Este and *La Bella* share a virtually identical sort of idealization, and post-nineteenth-century attitudes regarding individuality and identity and their place in portraiture have impeded the consideration of *La Bella*, and countless images like it, as portraits.<sup>156</sup> Images of anonymous beautiful women challenge many definitions of portraiture, like Pollock's, because they depend on cues of idealization rather than individuality.

An important convention of Renaissance portraits of women, of all kinds, was the simultaneous idealization and specific representation of a woman who may or may not have existed. Simons refers to this convention as "anonymous referentiality" or the

---

<sup>155</sup> The comparison continues in a robust discussion of primary sources. For a more fully elaborated comparison of *La Bella* and the portrait of Isabella d'Este, including a brief historiography of the images, see Simons, "Idealization," 268; and Cropper, "The Beauty of Women," 176-179. For more on the conventions of sixteenth-century Venetian portraits of women, as well as portraits of beautiful women generally in the Renaissance, see Luke Syson, "Belle: Picturing Beautiful Women," in *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer, Exh. Cat. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press: 2008): 246-254.

<sup>156</sup> Partly based on documentary evidence from early sixteenth-century Venice and partly on her observations regarding the visual category of "Beauty" pictures (her term), Cathy Santore has argued that images such as *La Bella* should not be considered as portraits. Her argument takes for granted that a single definition of portraiture governed the production of all imagery by painters including Titian and Palma Vecchio. See "Picture versus Portrait," *Source: Notes from the History of Art* 19, no. 3 (2000): 16-21.

means by which portraits suggest both that they represent a specific person and conceal significant details about who that person is.<sup>157</sup> In *La Bella*, the name of the woman is not known today nor was it likely known in the sixteenth century, but knowing it is beside the point, Simons argues. The naturalistic rendering of the image suggests that it was based on an actual woman. There are very few markers of identity beyond dress, hair, and jewels, all of which relate to her beauty. Simons argues that it was this quality of anonymity in naturalistic images of beautiful women that made them especially attractive. Although the women represented remain anonymous, as in *La Bella*, they do suggest a connection to a real person, even if it is only an imagined connection. It is an important “cue,” to use Garberson’s term, which prompts the assumption of truth but does not guarantee any real relationship between the woman represented and an actual woman. Instead, “anonymous referentiality” was a means by which Renaissance portraits of women established themselves as portraits *and* created the desired element of idealization. Simons’ model of “anonymous referentiality” provides a crucial link between Renaissance portraits of women and Rossetti’s in the nineteenth century in which a high degree of naturalism refers to but does not reveal anything about the woman portrayed.

Though *Bocca Baciata* was discussed as a direct likeness in letters between Boyce, the patron, and Rossetti, for other viewers it had a quality of “anonymous

---

<sup>157</sup> Simons, “Idealization,” 291.

referentiality.”<sup>158</sup> Whether or not all viewers knew Fanny Cornforth was not as important as the way in which the image prompted a portrait response from its viewers. Cornforth was not identified by name, but the painting still elicited the expectation that it was made from a real person. Naturalism and close cropping around the face and shoulders acted as formidable portrait cues, having been associated with portraiture for centuries. Certain other conventions are shared with Titian’s *La Bella* and *Portrait of Isabella d’Este*, which tended to be bust-length or slightly longer, sumptuously painted, and full of luxurious details. Like the women in Titian’s portraits, Rossetti painted Cornforth in an ambiguous setting with her figure drawn close to the picture plane.

I have already discussed how the conventions of lyric poetry (i.e. *Stil Novo*, Petrarchan, and Neo-Petrarchan) provided the impulse for what Cropper has called “non-narrative images of women.”<sup>159</sup> She also connects the conventions of lyric poetry with idealization in female portraits. Lyric poetry about women’s beauty, including Rossetti’s translation of Fazio’s *canzone* “His Portrait of His Lady,” are characterized by conventions of idealized physical and spiritual representation, which they manifest through a number of specific features. Though Fazio’s mistress is named as a specific person, she is described as an idealized type. Typical of poetic convention, the beloved

---

<sup>158</sup> A letter from Rossetti to Boyce describes the degree of “likeness” achieved as being greater than in any previous work: Fredeman, *Correspondence* 2, 5 September 1859, 269-271, 59.35. In his references to the work, Boyce refers to the painting exclusively as a “portrait of Fanny,” suggesting that her image was especially important. See Surtees, *Diaries of George Price Boyce*, 27.

<sup>159</sup> Cropper, “The Beauty of Women,” 181. Also, see the discussion of *Fazio’s Mistress* in chapter one.

has golden hair, rosy lips, fair skin, and a sweet disposition.<sup>160</sup> Fazio asks the reader to appreciate the beauty of her body and soul:

Behold if any picture can compare  
With her just limbs, each fit in shape and size,  
Or match her angel's colour like a pearl.  
She is a gentle girl.<sup>161</sup>

Cropper argues that many painted portraits of women in the Renaissance, such as *La Bella*, are in fact composite images displaying the ideal parts of many women, based upon such poetic conventions.<sup>162</sup> Like Renaissance artists, Rossetti created portraits of women based in conventions of poetic idealization. Though based upon the features of real women, they nonetheless conform to an ideal of female beauty. In making this connection between the real and ideal, his portraits fundamentally represent his idea of Aesthetic beauty.

---

<sup>160</sup> Cropper explicates the relationship between the conventions of representing women's beauty in lyric poetry and their significance in the *Petrarchismo* of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in "On Beautiful Women," 374-376; and 386-388.

<sup>161</sup> From Rossetti's translation of Fazio's poem for *Early Italian Poets* (1861). Marsh, *Collected Writings*, 70-72.

<sup>162</sup> See Cropper, "On Beautiful Women," 380-386. For more about the connections between literary conventions and female portraits in the Renaissance, see Mary Rogers, "The Decorum of Women's Beauty: Trissino, Firenzuola, Luigini and the Representation of Women in Sixteenth-Century Painting," *Renaissance Studies* 2, no. 1 (Mar 1988): 47-8; 50-1. Cropper has cautioned against making generalizations about women's portraits that lead to misapprehension of their relationship to poetic tradition. For example, one cannot assume that all female portraits from the Renaissance are based upon poetic conventions, though many are. Also, to assume that artists frequently painted their mistresses or only painted women because they were beautiful denies the importance of poetic tradition in these paintings. Cropper's discussion can be found in "The Beauty of Women," 181.

The place of women's portraits in Renaissance points to the importance of idealized female beauty within the history of art and poetry. Cropper stresses this point in her discussion of the *paragone*, or competition, between the sister arts of painting and poetry, which was intimately linked to both painted and poetic representations of beautiful women. The *paragone* was essentially a competition to establish which medium provided the "truer" representation of aesthetic ideals. The poet "painted" with words, while the painter provided an illustration of the poet's words.<sup>163</sup> When Fazio said of his lady "Behold if any picture can compare," he called attention to his beloved's beauty but also issued a challenge to the painter to match the beauty he had created with his words. The representation of female beauty in poems like Fazio's was at the center of the challenge, which painters took up in portraits like *La Bella*. Portraits of beautiful women were at the nexus of the *paragone* because the woman represented could be both the object of the poet/painter's desire and her portrait a beautiful object for contemplation. As such, the appreciation of a woman's portrait (the beauty of the woman represented) came to function as a synecdoche for the appreciation of grace (*grazia*) and elegance (*leggiadria*) in painting.<sup>164</sup>

---

<sup>163</sup> *Paragone* existed between visual mediums (sculpture and painting) and within painting (between *disegno* and *colore*). Cropper's observations are specific to the *paragone* of painting and poetry. The Renaissance *paragone* is a topic of immense depth and complexity. For a helpful overview of the painting-poetry *paragone* in the Renaissance, see Dorigen Caldwell, "The *Paragone* between Word and Image in *Impresa* Literature," *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 63 (2000): 277-286.

<sup>164</sup> The terms *grazia* and *leggiadria* derive from the description of women's beauty in poetry, but were adopted into the language of later art criticism in the sixteenth-century. Cropper's discussion of the *paragone* can be found in "The Beauty of Women," 175;

Rossetti's portraits function in an analogous manner by emphasizing "bodily" beauty, which encompassed both the sensual beauty of women and the sensual qualities of art. The beautiful women in his paintings draw significantly from poetic convention despite their naturalistic relationship to real models. *Bocca Baciata* and its related images engage with cues of portraiture based on idealization and beauty. Pollock's denunciation of the paintings as "*not* portraits" underscores her discomfort with the notion that a woman's beauty can be conflated with the beauty of her image and still be called a "portrait." As Cropper and Simons point out, this is precisely how female portraiture was understood in the Renaissance. It is equally how Rossetti understood female portraiture in the context of his Aestheticism in the 1860s.

### Part Three: The Real and Ideal in Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata*

*Bocca Baciata* is a diminutive painting – less than 13 by 11 inches without its substantial frame – that depicts Fanny Cornforth against a background of marigolds. She wears a dark blue dress trimmed with gold, which is unbuttoned to expose the edge of her slip. She gazes longingly to the left, permitting the viewer to admire her wavy auburn hair, rosy lips, long white neck, and floral adornments. The elements of the painting itself – the colors, the facture, and the composition, and even the title, engraved on the frame – establish the sensuousness of the image. The painting seems at first like

---

190-1; her ideas about the relationship between poetic conventions and the visual representation of desire through female beauty, see "Place of Beauty," 190-194; and for the idea of synecdoche as a trope for framing the allegorical place of female beauty in painting, see "The Beauty of Women," 176.

the precious image of a beloved woman; its small size, the care with which each feature and attribute of the woman's features are rendered proclaim the specialness of the image. And yet she is not identified by anything but the engraved title "Bocca Baciata" ("the mouth that has been kissed"). The specificity of her likeness prompts the viewer to read the image as a painting of a real person, but her anonymity increases the idealized quality of her representation.

*Bocca Baciata* uses the image of a real woman to convey a set of essentially abstract ideas. By engaging with likeness, sensuality, and idealization, *Bocca Baciata* conveys the idea that a beautiful woman can represent the abstract ideal of beauty. "Likeness" refers to the specific woman represented, or at least the aspects of her representation that suggest the image was made from a real woman. Though Fanny Cornforth was recognizable and significant to both the artist and patron, she was not recognizable to all who viewed the painting. The convention of naturalistic appearance was apparent to other viewers even when it was not attached to a specific person. In its use of likeness, the painting prompted the appreciation of Aesthetic beauty and the beauty of the woman portrayed, regardless of her specific identity. Through his choice of medium, composition, costume, props, and title, Rossetti created a particularly sensual or "bodily" image. Allusions to the past were essential in both the conceptual and stylistic development of the painting, and Rossetti's association between sensuality and the Renaissance was developed during its creation. The woman portrayed in *Bocca Baciata* is also an idealized type. Rossetti's ideal was based on poetic convention but also on the Aesthetic desire for beautiful, autonomous painting.

*Bocca Baciata in the Context of Rossetti's Aesthetic Practice*

*Bocca Baciata* is an image of unrivaled importance in Rossetti's *oeuvre* because most scholars consider it the painting upon which his transition to Aesthetic philosophy hinges.<sup>165</sup> Alicia Faxon Craig characterizes *Bocca Baciata* as the first of Rossetti's "Venetian style" paintings. The term "Venetian style" refers partly to the way in which the image is painted - sensuously, with deep color, and in oils - and partly to the subject, a bust-length image of a beautiful woman.<sup>166</sup> Jerome McGann also refers to *Bocca Baciata* as a "breakthrough" in technique and "character."<sup>167</sup> For Pollock, the erotic representation in the painting is indicative of a change in Rossetti's work but more importantly of the sexualized manner in which women were represented, "fragmented," and consumed in art of the period.<sup>168</sup> J.B. Bullen has taken Pollock's assessment a step further by calling *Bocca Baciata* a "celebratory" image of desirable female sexuality. Bullen argues that Rossetti's Dantean watercolors do not privilege erotic desire and sensuality in the same way as his paintings after *Bocca Baciata*.<sup>169</sup> Even Prettejohn argues that *Bocca Baciata* represented a "startling" difference from Rossetti's previous works in its subject but especially in its formal orientation away

---

<sup>165</sup> Surtees offers the term "turning point" to describe *Bocca Baciata* in her *Catalogue Raisonné* 1 (68), codifying a common trope in examinations of Rossetti's work.

<sup>166</sup> Faxon Craig, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 148-158.

<sup>167</sup> McGann, *Game*, 116.

<sup>168</sup> Pollock, "Woman as Sign," 177-178.

<sup>169</sup> Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, 89-92.



from Pre-Raphaelitism. She positions the painting as a work of crucial importance for Aestheticism for its distinctive disruption of accepted modes of Victorian sexual propriety. Prettejohn interprets these aspects of the painting as distinguishing qualities of its modernity and in this way connects it to the larger scope of Rossetti's Aesthetic practice.<sup>170</sup>

Scholars are right to note that from 1859 on images of women began to dominate Rossetti's work, but it is perhaps more appropriate to view the painting as part of broader changes in representation and conception that occurred over a number of years and not in terms of a single "breakthrough" in 1859. Viewing *Bocca Baciata* as a turning point diminishes the way in which the beauty of women had come to function in Rossetti's *oeuvre* both formally and conceptually throughout the 1850s. Focusing too intently on the importance of a single painting has also obscured the way in which his paintings are connected to other traditions and categories of painting. In a way, *Bocca Baciata* was the culmination of a number of previous experiments in female portraiture, which increasingly dominated Rossetti's output in the second half of the 1850s.<sup>171</sup>

While the painting is significant for its relationship to Rossetti's larger Aesthetic

---

<sup>170</sup> For her discussion of *Bocca Baciata*, see Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 38-43.

<sup>171</sup> Taking into account works in all mediums (watercolor, pen, ink, oil, and pencil) Rossetti produced around 82 female portraits from 1850 to 1859. He produced 144 from 1860 to 1869. I have taken into account only non-family, single figure portraits, but among those I have considered full-length, bust-length, head only, and more imaginative compositions, like *Bocca Baciata*. Whereas the full-lengths and bust-lengths number roughly the same in the 1850s, this is not the case in the 1860s when he produced approximately 29 full-lengths and 115 bust-lengths.

practice, it does not represent a crucial shift in Rossetti's formal or conceptual representation of women. The conventions used in *Bocca Baciata* were present in Rossetti's portrait paintings and drawing as early as the mid-1850s.

By the time Rossetti painted *Bocca Baciata* for his friend George Price Boyce in 1859, he had already made numerous bust-length female portraits based on Renaissance prototypes. The Aesthetic portraits that characterized Rossetti's work beginning in the mid-1850s were based on real women but were highly idealized, conventionalized and related to visual and poetic traditions from the past. In both *Elizabeth Siddall* (1854, watercolor, Delaware Museum of Art, Wilmington) and *Ruth Herbert* (1858, watercolor, Delaware Museum of Art, Wilmington) Rossetti explored the relationship between formal and female beauty like that in Renaissance portraits. The elegant sweep of hair, long and graceful neck, and the delicate features of each face stand out against softly modeled backgrounds. The portrait of Siddall has a jewel-like brightness while the portrait of Herbert is rendered in subtle shades of yellow and shimmering gold. Each is imbued with an ample sensuality resulting from the tactility of the medium. In each portrait, the woman's appearance and her beauty stands as her primary source of identity; and in each, female beauty prompts the appreciation of the visual qualities of the image. Both portraits represent an exploration of female beauty and stylistic elements— color, contour, and texture – as subjects in themselves.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> An anecdote from Boyce's diary suggests a possible relationship between drawings like these and lyric poetry that praised women's beauty, which proliferated in Rossetti's *Early Italian Poets*. In late spring 1858, Boyce described an evening spent perusing some of Rossetti's drawings while the artist read aloud his translations of the "early

Rather than being the point of conception, *Bocca Baciata* was the painting in which Rossetti crystallized a successful formula of female portraiture and formal innovation based on past models. It is a subtle but significant distinction. The painting corresponds to a direction his work had already taken, which is not often acknowledged. In *Bocca Baciata*, every aspect of Rossetti's work did not change radically. The watercolor portraits of Siddall and Herbert demonstrate the existence of the single figure prototype as early as 1854. Such an approach allows for deeper analysis of the conventions of ideal beauty in the painting while still recognizing its importance in Rossetti's *oeuvre*.

#### *The Aesthetic Portrait of Ideal Beauty*

The relationship between *Bocca Baciata* and its viewers was based upon the appreciation of beauty – both of the woman represented and of the painting itself. The connection between the appreciation and representation of beauty in women's portraits was related to the processes of visual and sensual pleasure associated with Aestheticism. Those who viewed *Bocca Baciata* in Rossetti's studio and on public display were well aware of the conventions from the Renaissance that had informed it.

As Rossetti was adding the finishing touches to *Bocca Baciata*, Edward Burne-Jones returned from a six-week trip to Florence with many drawings and painted copies

---

Italian sonnets." Boyce does not specify exactly what he saw or heard, but even a basic inventory of Rossetti's drawings and translations confirms the prevalence of women's portraits. See the entry for 22 May 1858 in Virginia Surtees, ed. *The Diaries of George Price Boyce* (Norwich: Real World, 1980): 23.

of Renaissance paintings, including sketches of *La Bella* and other women's portraits.<sup>173</sup> Rossetti wrote admiringly of Burne-Jones' sketches to his regular correspondents.<sup>174</sup> *La Bella* was a highly lauded image in Victorian accounts of Titian's career.<sup>175</sup> It is likely that accounts of *La Bella*, and Titian's female portraits in general, made an impression on Rossetti as an example of "bodily" beauty in painting. When Burne-Jones, Swinburne, and Boyce viewed *Bocca Baciata* in Rossetti's studio or, later, at the Hogarth Club during the winter of 1860, they did so with full knowledge of the Renaissance conventions that had informed it.<sup>176</sup>

The tension between anonymity and "referentiality" or likeness was also among Rossetti's chief concerns in the creation of *Bocca Baciata*. He expressed this concern by linking the painting with the example of Renaissance portraiture and by continually referring to the image as both a "portrait" and "picture." *Bocca Baciata* was for

---

<sup>173</sup> The drawings themselves are in a notebook currently held by the Fitzwilliam Museum. John Christian describes in detail the works that influenced the development of Burne-Jones' work around 1860 in his article "Burne-Jones Studies" *The Burlington Magazine* 115, no. 839 (Feb 1973): 100-109; see in particular n. 32 (106) for the list of works made on Burne-Jones' two trips to Italy in 1859 and 1862.

<sup>174</sup> For example, see the letter to William Bell Scott of November 13, 1859: Fredeman, *Correspondence* 2, 277, 59.43. Rossetti owned many autotypes of Titian's works and other Venetian artists from the Uffizi. Specific items are not listed, nor are the dates of acquisition for the photographs. See *Valuable Contents*, for a complete list.

<sup>175</sup> Kugler praised Titian's ability as a portrait painter, particularly his portraits of women. Among the "most beautiful," is *La Bella: Handbook of Painting*, 366.

<sup>176</sup> The most thorough account of the Hogarth Club's membership, exhibition history, and status as a progressive institution in the Victorian art community remains that of Deborah Cherry, "The Hogarth Club: 1858-1861" *The Burlington Magazine* 122, no. 925 (April 1980): 237-244.

Rossetti an opportunity for stylistic innovation, which was the attitude he expressed to several of his correspondents:

I have painted a little half-figure in oil lately which I should like you to see, as I have made an effort to avoid what I know to be a besetting fault of mine...that of stipple in the flesh. I have succeeded in quite keeping it at a distance this time, and am very desirous of painting, whenever I can find leisure & opportunity, various figures of this kind, chiefly as a rapid study of flesh painting.

In one instance then, *Bocca Baciata* was an opportunity to study painted “flesh” – the very incarnation of “bodily” beauty in painting. But in the same letter to William Bell Scott (1811-1890), Rossetti shared with his friend the underlying basis for his studies of “flesh”: the visual qualities of portraiture as demonstrated particularly by Renaissance painters. Of Renaissance portraits, Rossetti proclaimed, “Even among the old good painters, their portraits & simpler pictures are almost always their masterpieces for colour & execution; and I fancy if one kept this in view, one might have a better chance of learning to paint at last.”<sup>177</sup> Rossetti’s comment implies an analogy between portraits and beautiful painting: portraits and “simpler pictures” present opportunities for masterful color and execution. They offer such opportunities because they are not overly concerned with the complexities of narrative and the burden of moralizing for the viewer. They are concerned with painting and representing beauty only. Though Rossetti’s description of *Bocca Baciata* to Scott does not identify it as a portrait *per se*

---

<sup>177</sup> I interpret Rossetti’s phrase “old good painters” to mean “Old Masters.” “Old Masters can be interpreted widely, but for my purposes, I understand Rossetti’s meaning to be in keeping with the definition of Renaissance in use throughout the project. Letter from November 13, 1859 to Scott, Fredeman, *Correspondence 2*, 276-277, 59.43.

the formal description that he provides indicates that he conceived of the painting as an image based upon the qualities (“execution”) of Renaissance portraits.

In his correspondence with Boyce, Rossetti attempted both to promote and obscure the portrait status of *Bocca Baciata* through his discussion of Cornforth’s likeness. His statements support the recurrent theme in his concept of portraiture, present in “Hand and Soul” and his notice on Maclise, that women’s portraits were open to multiple interpretations. In a letter from early September 1859 describing the status of the painting after the initial commission, Rossetti used the terms “portrait” and “picture” to describe *Bocca Baciata*; the first to denote “Fanny’s portrait” and the second later in his letter to characterize the advanced state of the “picture” itself. After the painting was near completion in October, Rossetti wrote to Boyce with a specific request:

I would be thankful if you would avoid particularizing with regard to the *portrait* when showing it to friends – also with regard to price as you will see that it is a picture which I could not do again for a stranger on the same terms [emphasis Rossetti’s].<sup>178</sup>

The terms “portrait” and “picture” suggest the dual way in which Rossetti viewed the painting. Throughout his correspondence with Boyce, Rossetti’s use of the term “portrait” was linked specifically with Cornforth’s likeness. The meaning of his usage in these instances is fairly specific, whereas his usage was more general in others: for

---

<sup>178</sup> Both letters are from Fredeman, *Correspondence* 2. For the letter concerning the initial commission and description of the painting, see the letter to Boyce from September 5, 1859, 269-271, 59.35. For the letter in which Rossetti expresses his concern about the “portrait” aspects of the image, see the later letter to Boyce from October 10, 1859, 272, 59.37.

example, Maclise's "character-portraits," which were not exclusively done from life, or Renaissance portraits like Burne-Jones' copy of *La Bella*. Conversely, the term "picture" appears to refer to the image, or at least the Aesthetic qualities of the image, in its entirety. It should be noted, however, that even as Rossetti modified his language, he created an image in which recognizable, historical portrait conventions conveyed meaning through a woman's beauty. Even when he chose to obscure her identity, his original stylistic decisions, based upon the assumption of "truthfulness" with which Cornforth's appearance was rendered, were not negated. Both aspects of the image, its rendering of a specific woman's features and attention to the qualities of the painting itself, inform its meaning as a statement of Aestheticism. Its function as a *portrait*, even if not of an identified person, was important in this regard because of the high esteem in which Rossetti held portraiture generally as a type of image both formally and conceptually.

Many responses to *Bocca Baciata*, both positive and negative, were in reaction to its sensual appeal. There was an overlap between the sensuality viewers perceived in the portrayal of the figure and the sensuality of the painting as a work of art. After viewing it at the Hogarth Club, Swinburne praised *Bocca Baciata* in a letter to Scott: "I daresay you have heard of [Rossetti's] head in oils of a stunner with flowers in her hair, and marigolds behind it? She is more stunning than can be decently expressed."<sup>179</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> Scott was familiar with the painting since Rossetti had mentioned it to him a month earlier. See Swinburne's letter to Scott from December 16, 1859 in Cecil Y. Lang, *The Swinburne Letters* 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-1962): 27.

Swinburne articulates the various conventions of the portrait that acted as powerful cues of sensuality: the flowers, the hair, the rendering in oils, and, most of all, the unidentified “stunner.” Though Swinburne probably knew Cornforth, her identity was not as important as her beautiful appearance because it was her physical appeal that defined the beauty of the painting. Holman Hunt’s infamous excoriation of the painting made essentially the same point in his comparison of her coarse beauty to the “gross sensuality” of Rossetti’s painting:

Most people admire [*Bocca Baciata*] very much and speak to me of it as a triumph of our school...I will not scruple to say that 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 Customs house from France even after the establishment of the most liberal conditions of Free Trade. I would not speak so unreservedly of it were it not that I see Rossetti is advocating as a principle mere gratification of the eye and if any passion at all – the animal passion to be the aim of Art – for my part I disavow any sort of sympathy with such notion if Art could not do better service than dress up the worst vices in the garb only deserved by innocence and virtue.<sup>180</sup>

What Swinburne found alluring and pleasurable in *Bocca Baciata*, Hunt found comparable to French pornography. The widely divergent opinions about the painting emerge from the central problem in Aestheticism concerning the moral function of art. For Hunt, there was no question that art served a moral purpose from which “mere gratification of the eye” was largely excluded. But for Aesthetes like Rossetti and Swinburne, moralizing was not an aspect of the visual and conceptual framework in paintings like *Bocca Baciata*.

---

<sup>180</sup> Hunt’s quote is from a letter to Thomas Combe from 12 February 1860 reprinted in Surtees, *Catalogue Raisonné* 1, 69.



The idea of sensuality in itself acted as link between the beautiful woman portrayed and the “bodily” beauty of her representation. “Bodily” beauty, meaning full-bodied, fleshy, colorful execution, was especially applicable to Venetian portraits, which served as one of Rossetti’s primary stylistic and conceptual models in the creation of *Bocca Baciata*. By the time Rossetti made his painting, these conventions from the Renaissance were understood in a distinctly sensual, even erotic, way. When Rossetti described the initial composition to Boyce in September, he noted that it had taken on a “rather Venetian aspect.”<sup>181</sup> When he shared his ideas about his own painting and Renaissance portraits with Scott in November, this is likely what he had in mind. The “Venetian aspect” of the painting referred to Rossetti’s technique, which he described in great detail to Boyce and Scott, as well the convention of portraying a beautiful woman. Cornforth was consciously rendered in the guise of a Venetian “half-length” (Rossetti’s term), which worked to obscure her identity within the image and to increase the anonymous appeal of woman portrayed. As Swinburne and Hunt’s comments reveal, there was not a clear distinction between the sensuality of the woman represented in the painting itself and the appreciation it engendered. The fact that no clear distinction existed is a significant concern for Aestheticism and in particular for artists like Rossetti for whom images of women and Renaissance painting contributed directly to his philosophy of Aesthetic beauty.

Though based on the “likeness” of a specific woman, the sensuality of *Bocca*

---

<sup>181</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence* 2, 269-270.

*Baciata* is related to the highly idealized nature of women's beauty in the painting. This is not to say that Rossetti did not reproduce a recognizable "likeness" of Cornforth but that he did so within the historical conventions of representing female beauty. His decision to make historical allusions a crucial part of his Aestheticism had a direct bearing on his peers' responses to the painting as "stunning," "sensual," and even "revolting," for *Bocca Baciata* represents a particular interpretation of idealized portrait conventions that privileges "bodily" beauty in order to represent Aesthetic beauty.

Though the title comes from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, *Bocca Baciata* relates in a more general way to Rossetti's understanding of lyrical conventions of idealizing women's beauty. In an appendix to his *Early Italian Poets*, Rossetti included several sonnets by Boccaccio, "chosen for their beauty alone."<sup>182</sup> Two of the sonnets concern Boccaccio's beloved, Maria d'Aquino, or Fiammetta ("the little flame"), and a third describes three women waiting for their lovers. The description of female beauty in Boccaccio's sonnets is highly specific yet remains conventional. In the poem, "Of his last sight of Fiammetta," Boccaccio expounds upon the beauty of his beloved:

Round her red garland and her golden hair  
I saw a fire about Fiammetta's head;  
Thence to a little cloud I watched it fade,  
Than silver or than gold more brightly fair;  
And like a pearl that gold ring doth bear,  
Even so an angel sat therein, who sped  
Alone and glorious throughout heaven, array'd  
In sapphires and in gold that lit the air.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>182</sup> The appendix is not reprinted in Marsh; see WM Rossetti, ed., *Collected Works* 2, 228-229.

<sup>183</sup> WM Rossetti, *Collected Works* 2, 229-230.

As Cropper has noted, there is a relationship between lyric poetry that elaborates women's beauty and paintings that elicit a similar response of desire for a beloved or beautiful woman. Parts of the female body are isolated and idealized, representing not just desire but the nature of beauty. Like Fazio, who rhapsodized the beauty of his beloved's fair skin, golden hair, and angelic temperament, Boccaccio compares Fiammetta's skin and hair to a glittering array of precious metals and gems.<sup>184</sup> In keeping with lyric tradition, Cornforth is represented with a similar array of attributes corresponding to her "bodily" charms: a white rose next to her creamy flesh and a golden ornament in her shining hair. These analogies heighten the already idealized nature of her pink lips, blushing cheeks, and pale blue eyes. Rossetti's image is not simply a painting of Cornforth; it is an idealized portrait of a woman whose beauty has been isolated and manifested in the representation of her face and hair. Pollock's assessment of the painting as a "fragment," while not intended to relate *Bocca Baciata* to Petrarchan tradition, identifies Rossetti's mechanism of idealization. In her examination of lyric conventions, Cropper has argued that beauty is a similarity that supersedes individuality.<sup>185</sup> *Bocca Baciata* evinces this similarity of beauty. Cornforth's beauty is like that of Boccaccio's Fiammetta or Fazio's beloved because Rossetti represents her as a beautiful ideal, not as herself.

---

<sup>184</sup> For further reading on the significance of comparisons between aspects of women's beauty and jewels, metals, and flowers, see Rogers, "The Decorum of Women's Beauty," 47-74.

<sup>185</sup> Cropper, "The Beauty of Woman," 176.

Rossetti had a particular interpretation of lyrical idealization, which he often conflated with the sensual, “bodily” beauty of art. Of Boccaccio’s sonnets, he noted the “beauty of colour (to our modern minds, privileged to review the whole pageant of Italian Art,) might recall the painted pastorals of Giorgione.”<sup>186</sup> Boccaccio’s sonnets and Giorgione’s pastorals shared a similar “beauty of colour” and they functioned equally through their “beauty alone.” By connecting Venetian art and lyricism in this way, Rossetti articulated the important place of female beauty in his vision of autonomous Aesthetic beauty. Further, it was portraiture that provided the impulse for realizing this vision. The “bodily” beauty of Rossetti’s female portraits was inexorably linked to their “Venetian aspect,” which Rossetti and his peers associated in various ways with color, lyric poetry, and music. Next, I discuss the significance of Venetian painting in Rossetti’s conception of *The Blue Bower* and the Aesthetic criticism of the painting from the 1860s.

---

<sup>186</sup> WM Rossetti, *Collected Works*, 229.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE LYRICAL RENAISSANCE: AESTHETIC COLOR IN *THE*

#### *BLUE BOWER*

The implied connection between a woman's appearance and the qualities of painting was an essential aspect of Rossetti's Aestheticism during the 1860s. The same connection featured prominently in the Aesthetic understanding of Renaissance art and in comparisons between contemporary English and Renaissance artists in criticism of the 1860s. Color played a key role in connecting Aesthetic painting to art of the past, specifically that of the Venetian Renaissance. By examining *The Blue Bower* (1865), I establish how historical debates about the merit of color and Venetian painting gave rise to the distinctly Aesthetic construction of color as the most important element of painting. In his contemporary description of *The Blue Bower*, Frederic George Stephens characterized both the autonomous nature of color, which he compared to lyric poetry and music, and its more sensual quality embodied by a beautiful woman. In this way, the painting represents the nuanced conception of color and Venetian art held by Aesthetic artists and critics in the 1860s, and it points to a process of historical construction and emulation in which the Venetian Renaissance was an essential component.

The connections between color and Venetian painting drawn in three interconnected and foundational texts of art criticism – Varsari's *Lives*, Sir Joshua

Reynolds' *Discourses on Art*, and John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* – established an English attitude toward the place of color in painting. Vasari's *Lives* propagated a dichotomy of color and design that had a profound effect on later English art criticism. As a quality of oil painting, color had been associated with Venetian artists since the Renaissance. Reynolds and Ruskin transformed Vasari's devaluation of color to produce an increasingly moralized view of Venetian painting by the mid-nineteenth century. In their discussions of color, Aesthetic critics like Stephens addressed the negative critical discourse about Venetian painting and used its terms to their advantage.

Rossetti participated both directly and indirectly in each of the debates described above. In its use of color, *The Blue Bower* participates actively in the construction of the past through the reclamation of Venetian color as a statement of Aesthetic purpose. Rossetti expressed his sensibility of shared beauty with a particular type of artist and painting from the Renaissance. Venetian color, Venetian composition, Venetian artists, and so on, have persisted as a consistent theme in discussions of *The Blue Bower*, but Rossetti's understanding of Venetian art has not been thoroughly explained nor has it been comprehensively related to *The Blue Bower*. In *The Blue Bower*, Rossetti equated the beauty of color to poetry, decorative objects, music and a beautiful woman. Like his other works, *The Blue Bower* uses female beauty to refer to the whole of Aesthetic beauty, and, in this case, to the synaesthetic appeal of beauty to the senses. The combination relies on the simultaneous isolation of color as an autonomous visual element, capable of producing meaning and beauty in itself, and its historical and

literary associations with the sensual beauty of the female body. When the two aspects are collapsed, painting can be interpreted as feminine. The nature of this combination was an essential part of the Aesthetic understanding of Venetian color.

Part One: Lyrical Color in *The Blue Bower*

Rossetti referred to *The Blue Bower* as a work of color during its production in the spring and summer of 1865, calling it an “oil picture all blue.”<sup>187</sup> His stray comments about a painting done on speculation were few but revealing, for they connect the work to his larger Aesthetic practice and other works like *Fazio’s Mistress* (“chiefly a piece of colour”) and *Bocca Baciata* (a “rapid study of flesh”). Each painting was a dual experiment in the beauty of women and the beauty of paint. Rossetti’s decision to make a painting about color would have been inseparable from associations with Venetian painting and his Aestheticism, but without sustained interest in Aesthetic historicism the complex allusion to color in the painting has been diminished in current scholarship. The tiles, the instrument, the flowers, even the enticing woman, each support the arrangement of carefully chosen blues, greens, and

---

<sup>187</sup> Rossetti’s discussions of the painting in his correspondence were uncharacteristically brief and few. The first mention of *The Blue Bower* as being done in “all blue” and on speculation for his dealer was to Ford Madox Brown, 18 April 1865, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 284, 65.66. Ernest Gambert was the dealer to whom Rossetti sold the work for £210 in October 1865. In November Rossetti heard, though he likely started the rumor, that the painting had been resold for £1500. For the letters that discuss the painting in this regard see also in Fredeman: to Henry Francis Polydore, 15 November, 346-348, 65.163; to George Price Boyce, 19 November 1865, 348-349, 65.165; and to Gambert on 19 and 20 December, 360-362, 65.181, 65.182. After seeing it at a dinner party, Boyce referred to the painting in his diary on 2 May 1865 as a “splendid picture of Fanny on a background of blue tiles,” Surtees, *Boyce Diaries*, 42.

complements of vermillion and rose. The painting is an outright appeal to the senses. Just as the notes of instrumental music harmonize in the mind, the complements of color in *The Blue Bower* produce a harmonious chord in the mind's eye. The whole process of chromatic harmony hinges on the overtly sensual woman at the center. Embedded in the color matrix of the painting, she produces the imaginary music that metaphorically isolates the painted color. Rossetti, and by extension his Aesthetic associates, sought to proclaim the power of color as a crucially expressive and sensual quality of painting, but also to rescue it from its lesser status as a second-rate visual element. Even as it strives for release from the material and physical, color is tied to the woman's sensual beauty. In a painting about color, color offers no simple message.

In the past decade, scholars have placed *The Blue Bower* centrally in Rossetti's *oeuvre* as one of his most Aesthetic paintings, yet no comprehensive study of it exists. Shorter studies of the work have emerged due to its central inclusion in two major international exhibitions and increased interest in Victorian collections of decorative art.<sup>188</sup> However, these studies have focused on discrete themes from the painting rather than taking a more holistic view of its production. A limited number of studies have examined the place of Venetian painting and color in nineteenth-century England, but

---

<sup>188</sup> *The Blue Bower: Rossetti in the 1860s*, ed. Paul Spencer-Longhurst (London: Scala Publishers, 2000); and *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn, Edwin Becker, and Julian Treuherz (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003). In the introductory essay of *The Blue Bower* (8-17), Spencer-Longhurst provides what is probably the most comprehensive analysis of the painting aside from that offered on the RHA, but it is by no means a full account of the work.



*The Blue Bower* has not been a major aspect of these investigations.<sup>189</sup> By incorporating *The Blue Bower* into the broader range of discussions surrounding the English, and specifically Aesthetic, engagement with Venetian painting I wish to provide a more comprehensive understanding of why and how the image contributed to contemporary debates about color.

Despite having been lauded as a pinnacle of Rossetti's Aestheticism in the 1860s, the relationship of *The Blue Bower* to contemporary Aesthetic views remains obscure. In part this is because recent exhibition catalogues present "Aestheticism" as an eclectic mix of elements of which Rossetti's painting is a representative example. Paul Spencer-Longhurst's entry from *The Blue Bower: Rossetti in the 1860s* (2000) lists several seemingly unrelated qualities, suggesting the formula of Aestheticism long associated with the painting:

While taking its title from contemporary literature, *The Blue Bower* owes much to sixteenth-century Venetian portraits of courtesans by Titian and his circle, in whom Rossetti was much interested in the early 1860s. It outshines such works, however, in its overall sensuousness, colour harmonies and rich, decorative patterns. Evidently intended as an object of beauty in its own right and lacking any narrative content, the picture is an early instance of 'art for art's sake,' anticipating the ideas of the Aesthetic Movement.<sup>190</sup>

---

<sup>189</sup> J.B. Bullen and, more recently, Elizabeth Helsinger have investigated the role of color in painting, poetry, and criticism. By Bullen, see *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, 95-102; "Ruskin Venice and the Construction of Femininity," 502-520; and "Whoring after Colour: Venetian Painting in England," in *Continental Crosscurrents*, 120-137. Helsinger's interpretation of the Pre-Raphaelite use of "lyrical" color provides an alternative reading to the one I offer here. She considers the empirical traditions of Isaac Newton, John Locke, and John Ruskin in forming the Pre-Raphaelite conception of "pure" color. See her extended examination of William Morris and color in poetry in *Poetry and the Pre-Pre-Raphaelite Arts*: 55-118.

<sup>190</sup> Spencer-Longhurst, *The Blue Bower*, 50. Spencer-Longhurst's oblique reference to

Spencer-Longhurst identifies the usual list – tangential links to literature, Venetian art, color harmony, and “art for art’s sake” – but he does not offer any sort of over-arching explanation for why those different aspects of the painting belonged together in the 1860s. A partial explanation, though hardly satisfying, was provided in the catalogue for *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (2003) in which the elements are described as “a kind of compendium of the interest in decorative art of Rossetti and his circle at this date.” The catalogue entry goes on to state that although done in the “Venetian mode,” the painting is “resolutely non-historicist” resulting from its essentially imaginative mix of objects and setting.<sup>191</sup> Each catalogue ascribes an element of eclecticism to the painting that is then transferred to the “Aestheticism” to which the painting belongs. Larger themes and attempts at ascribing a cohesive meaning to the painting are ultimately not pursued in either instance. As a result, the historical subtlety of Rossetti’s allusion to Venetian painting has not been explored seriously as a source of meaning in a painting that is

---

“contemporary literature” is undoubtedly points to Rossetti’s poem of a related title, “Song of the Bower” (1870). According to WM Rossetti, The poem was composed around 1860, which has led scholars to connect it to many of Rossetti’s paintings from the 1860s. Most common is the connection between *Bocca Baciata* and “Song of the Bower,” discussed at length on the RHA: <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1860.s114.raw.html> (Accessed 15 March 2010). The poem, which describes the sensual experience of female beauty and love, is not specific to any single painting but is rather representative of the *type* of beauty that characterized Rossetti’s work.

<sup>191</sup> Prettejohn, Becker, and Treuherz, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 190. While briefly alluding to the use of Venetian color and musical imagery in the painting, Allen Staley refers to *The Blue Bower* as a “one-of-a-kind product of Rossetti’s ‘chinamania,’” thus also denying the integration of its visual elements and historicism into a cohesive reading: “Pre-Raphaelites in the 1860s: I, Rossetti,” *The British Art Journal* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 14-15.

about color. Equally troublesome, the fundamentally historical nature of Rossetti's painting is cast aside in both catalogues as superficial visual allusion.

A variety of more focused studies have elucidated discrete themes from *The Blue Bower*. Toshio Watanabe has investigated the historical basis of Rossetti's inclusion of Japanese and Chinese objects in this and other works. Watanabe has discussed both the musical instrument (*koto*) and the tiles, but his purpose was not to relate the inclusion of these objects to Rossetti's investment in Aesthetic metaphors of color.<sup>192</sup> Kirsten H. Powell has endeavored to differentiate the symbolic and metaphorical uses of music in Rossetti's work. Her study suggests important differences among Rossetti's visualization of music throughout his career. In early works like *Borgia* (watercolor, 1851, Carlisle Museum and Art Gallery), Powell argues, the sensuality of music is moralized. *Borgia* features the infamous and putatively murderous Lucrezia Borgia mindlessly playing a lute while her brother, Cesare, smells a rose nestled in her hair. Rossetti symbolically manifested the sensuality of the scene in the form of a crouching ape in a red cap and coat to the right of Lucrezia. The music making and ape symbolize the base desires of the family. Powell observes that throughout the 1850s Rossetti's use of musical subjects became increasingly

---

<sup>192</sup> Toshio Watanabe, "Pre-Raphaelite Japonisme? Enthusiasm for and Ambivalence Towards a New Culture," *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 2-7. Much attention has been focused on the tiles and instrument in the painting. Spencer-Longhurst's introductory essay in *The Blue Bower* provides some information: "*The Blue Bower*," 10-12; and for a more detailed account see Henry Johnson, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Japan: The Musical Instrument Depicted in *The Blue Bower* and *A Sea Spell*," *Music in Art* 3, no. 1-2 (Fall 2005): 145-155.

metaphorical and less symbolic and moralized. She concludes that *The Blue Bower* represents an Aesthetic interest in the synaesthetic interaction between painting and music. The *koto* from the painting is no longer extant, but Rossetti owned several exotic instruments for the express purpose of painting them rather than hearing them played. In *Borgia* and *The Blue Bower*, neither instrument is being played in a manner that would produce music, which was typical of Rossetti's musical paintings, suggesting that his depiction of music was almost entirely metaphorical.<sup>193</sup> Though Powell does not specifically make the claim in her study, Rossetti's use of music (even at its most symbolic) was always metaphorical – always about the nature of sensuous visual experience.<sup>194</sup>

Recently, Elizabeth Prettejohn, J.B. Bullen, and D.M.R. Bentley have discussed the contemporary reception of *The Blue Bower* and the nature of Rossetti's Aestheticism in relation to Victorian views about Venetian art and color. In her discussion of Rossetti's Aestheticism, Prettejohn does not examine *The Blue Bower* at length. However, she does consider Venetian color in her interpretation of Rossetti's

---

<sup>193</sup> Kirsten H. Powell, "Object, Symbol, and Metaphor: Rossetti's Musical Imagery," *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 16-18; 21-23. Powell is the only author to have examined the place of musical imagery throughout Rossetti's entire career. Her study remains a standard work on this topic. To her credit, it should be mentioned that Powell's reading of *The Blue Bower*, though very brief, is the only one to pursue seriously the idea that the painting is a metaphor for sensory experience.

<sup>194</sup> Diane Sachko Macleod has examined the metaphorical value of music in examples of Rossetti's work from the 1870s, including his Wagnerian libretto entitled "Doom of the Sirens." See "Rossetti's Two Ligeas: Their Relationship to Visual Art, Music, and Poetry," *Victorian Poetry* 20, no. 3/4 (Autumn/Winter 1982): 89-102.

Modernism. She argues that Rossetti's allusion to the past was a commentary on contemporary art and, in the instance of Venetian painting, Victorian propriety. My approach differs in its focus on the process by which Aestheticism appropriated and transformed the critical discourse of Venetian painting in the 1860s and on how the Aesthetic position toward color is manifested in *The Blue Bower*.<sup>195</sup> Although Rossetti's painting has not played a large role in his scholarship, J.B. Bullen's studies establish the nuanced place of color in England during the 1860s. Bullen has examined the ways in which English art criticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries moralized and feminized color and Venetian painting through the use of gendered language.<sup>196</sup> Bullen has been especially successful in revealing the ways in which aspects of Renaissance tradition, such as Venetian color, were manipulated through criticism in order to serve contemporary purposes. Bentley's analysis of Rossetti's Aestheticism extends from his explanation and interpretation of F.G. Stephens' contemporary analysis of *The Blue Bower*. Bentley argues that Stephens' Aesthetic criteria should serve as a basis for

---

<sup>195</sup> For Prettejohn's assessment of Rossetti's "Venetian" style, which includes *The Blue Bower*, see *Art for Art's Sake*, 209-222; a somewhat more detailed reading of *The Blue Bower* can be found in her catalogue essay, "Beautiful Women with Floral Adjuncts" in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 79; 190. Like, Prettejohn, Jessica Feldman has sought to connect Victorian Aestheticism to the larger tradition of European Modernism. In her examination of Rossetti's *Monna Rosa* (oil on panel, 1867, Private Collection), Feldman argues that the construction of intimate, Aesthetic spaces served as a signifier of Victorian Modernism. Though it is not the one I pursue here, her work offers a promising direction for explaining further the many elements on display in paintings including *The Blue Bower*. See Feldman, "Modernism's Victorian Bric-a-brac," *Modernism/Modernity* 8, no. 3 (2001): 453-470.

<sup>196</sup> Bullen addresses various periods of English criticism and questions surrounding color in three separate studies (see earlier note).

interpreting Rossetti's work in the 1860s. His argument differs from my own in that he does not position Venetian painting or the beauty of women prominently in his assessment of Stephens' (and presumably his own) Aesthetic criteria.<sup>197</sup>

Stephens' account of *The Blue Bower*, published in *The Athenaeum* in 1865, eloquently describes the Aesthetic position toward color and offers a point of reference from which to begin an inquiry into the reasons – historical, stylistic, and conceptual – for making a painting about color.<sup>198</sup> During his tenure as the fine arts editor of *The Athenaeum* (astonishingly, lasting from 1851-1901), F.G. Stephens published numerous articles about contemporary and Renaissance art.<sup>199</sup> In the 1860s, views on art in *The Athenaeum* were decidedly more favorable to Aestheticism when compared with more conservative publications like *The Times* and *The Art Journal*.<sup>200</sup> Stephens' short notice

---

<sup>197</sup> Specifically for the discussion of *The Blue Bower*, see Bentley, "Paintings in the Aesthetic Mode," 21-26. I am indebted to Bentley for drawing attention to Stephens' incredibly valuable text upon which my own parallel reading is based.

<sup>198</sup> Frederic George Stephens, "Mr. Rossetti's Pictures," *The Athenaeum*, no. 1982 (October 21, 1865): 545-546.

<sup>199</sup> Stephens was an important voice in Pre-Raphaelite, Aesthetic, and literary criticism. For more on the nature of his critical opinions and his career as the fine arts editor at *The Athenaeum*, see Diane Sachko Macleod, "F.G. Stephens, Pre-Raphaelite Critic and Art Historian," *The Burlington Magazine* 128, no. 999 (June 1986): 398-406; and "Mid-Victorian Patronage of the Arts: F.G. Stephens's 'The Private Collections of England,'" *The Burlington Magazine* 128, no. 1001 (Aug 1986): 597-607.

<sup>200</sup> A good overview of the relationship between Victorian journals during this period can be found in George P. Landow, "*The Art Journal*, 1850-1880: Antiquarians, The Medieval Revival, and the Reception of Pre-Raphaelitism," *The Pre-Raphaelite Review* 2 (1979): 71-76. More information about each of the periodicals mentioned above can be found on a website maintained by Landow and Brown University: <http://www.victorianweb.org> (Accessed 10 September 2009).

from 1865 concerned three unfinished works by Rossetti, who had been a close friend since their mutual membership in the P.R.B: *The Blue Bower*, *Venus Verticordia* (oil on canvas, 1868, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery, Bournemouth) and *The Beloved* (oil on panel, 1865, The Tate Gallery, London). The painting Stephens considered the most “original” was *The Blue Bower*, which formed the center of his analysis.

Despite being seen by relatively few people, *The Blue Bower* was surprisingly central in the Aesthetic construction of color. Stephens’ article established a standard trope of Aesthetic criticism – the comparison of painting to poetry and music – nearly twelve years before Walter Pater’s significantly more famous “School of Giorgione” (1877), which referred to Rossetti’s poetry and painting.<sup>201</sup> Additionally, the notice went a long way to publicize a favorable, and distinctly Aesthetic, reading of Rossetti’s painting, which went directly from a dealer to a private collection. Although Rossetti apparently had no direct input in the composition of the article, the point of view it expressed was evidently a shared one. His letters after the article’s publication suggest that he found Stephens’ characterization flattering and accurate, calling it a “full and friendly” account, only criticizing minor inaccuracies and editorial cuts.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>201</sup> “The School of Giorgione” is reprinted in *The Renaissance*, ed. Donald Hill, 102-140. In reference to Giorgione’s *Pastoral Concert*, Pater remarks that the work recalls the “subject of a delightful sonnet by poet whose own painted work often comes to mind as one ponders over these precious things” (114). Rossetti had written and published a sonnet on Giorgione’s painting in 1850.

<sup>202</sup> For Rossetti’s letters to Stephens, see Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 21 October 1865, 338-339, 65.147; and 22 October 1865, 339, 65.148. On October 21, Rossetti objected to the statement that he had “lately to some extent resumed oil painting,” which he identified as a factual error. By the next day, he had been convinced that

Throughout Stephens' description of *The Blue Bower*, color plays a starring role and appears at every stage of his exposition of what constitutes beautiful painting. Stephens begins by characterizing the desired visual effect of painting as "melodious," like the "inherent beauty" of a lyric poem. For Stephens, color was the most powerful means by which to achieve such an effect, and contemporary painting found its closest parallel in this regard in Venetian painting, which possessed the same relationship to color and subjects that were "nothing if not lyrical" (545). He goes on to state that paintings were to be without subject or at least that subjects were subordinate to visual effects. The evocation of music and the representation of resplendent, harmonious color were powerful means by which to isolate Aesthetic experience and eschew the moralization typically associated with narrative subjects. Finally, and most importantly, color had the capacity to represent both sensual and autonomous beauty in *The Blue Bower*, signaling a critical aspect of the Aesthetic conception of color and Venetian art.

Stephens' description of *The Blue Bower* begins with his assertion that painting should produce an effect on the viewer by purely visual means rather than through its subject, an effect he compares to lyric poetry:

Of [*The Blue Bower*], as of others, we must premise that it is of the nature of a lyrical poem, which aims at effect quite as much by means of inherent beauty and melodious colouring as by the mere subject, which is superficial. Titian and Giorgione produced lyrics of this sort in abundance; many of their pictures are nothing if not lyrical. In this direction English Art has not yet ventured far. Mr. Rossetti long ago saw the road which was thus presented, and pursued it to a

---

someone other than Stephens (an editor) wrote the offending line while removing others. Rossetti wrote a letter to the editor in response to Stephens' notice regarding the "oil painting" remark specifically (31 October 1865, 341, 65.152).



most felicitous result (545).

Stephens' point about the lyricism of Rossetti's painting is that it communicates through the same effect as lyric poetry: beautiful "color," inherent beauty, and superficial subject. In the Aesthetic interpretation of the arts, poetry was not exalted or elevated as being *better* than painting as it had been in the eighteenth century; rather, lyric poetry represented an analogous charm and ineffable beauty found in certain examples of painting, both past and present. Conceived broadly, lyric poetry was the form for the individual expression of emotion. The subjects of lyric poetry were widely varied, but as expressions of personal emotion, they frequently focused on themes of love and nature.<sup>203</sup> As an Aesthetic painting, Rossetti's image of a woman playing a musical instrument manifested the essence of lyricism as beauty for its own sake.

In order to illustrate the lyricism of *The Blue Bower*, Stephens compares Rossetti's image to the lyric paintings of Titian and Giorgione. Stephens was not alone in associating the Venetians with lyric poetry and color, both of which were popular Aesthetic analogies in the 1860s. As a point of reference, Rossetti had compared Boccaccio's sonnets to Giorgione's "pastorals," calling Boccaccio's "charm" and

---

<sup>203</sup> The history of lyric poetry is infinitely more complex than I have generalized here. A good brief account can be found in Schelling, *The English Lyric*, 1-8; Reed, *English Lyrical Poetry*, 1-13; and Chapman, "Lyric," 632; For the predominance of these qualities in Victorian lyricism, see Robinson, "Lyric," 59-65. Additionally, Helsinger has argued that the Pre-Raphaelite emphasis on color in lyric poetry was a means to evoke visual and emotional experience. She argues that lyric color in Pre-Raphaelite poetry is connected to the forceful, pure colors of medieval stained glass, tapestries, and illuminated manuscripts. See *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts*, 55-86.

“beauty of colour” very much like the painter’s works.<sup>204</sup> His comments, discussed previously in connection with Boccaccio’s sonnets on female beauty, suggest the underlying Aesthetic understanding of Venetian painting as lyrical, both through subject matter and the evocation of charm and beauty. When Rossetti wanted to praise Giorgione’s *Pastoral Concert*, he did so in the form of an original lyric poem, “A Venetian Pastoral, by Giorgione” (1850, 1870). His sonnet captures the singular beauty of Giorgione’s painting, suggesting both its sensual appeal and its lyricism:

Mournful with complete pleasure. Her eyes stray  
In distance; through her lips the pipe doth creep  
And leaves them pouting; the green shadowed grass  
Is cool against her naked flesh; Let be:  
Do not now speak unto her lest she weep, -  
Nor name this ever. Be it as it was –  
Silence of heat, and solemn poetry.<sup>205</sup>

Rossetti does not attempt to provide a narrative for the painting, ascribing neither meaning nor consequences to the actions of figures in the image. Rather, his sonnet evokes the lyrical mood of the painting by emphasizing its emotional tenor, its evocative representation of flesh, and its verdant hues. Swinburne observed the same quality in Giorgione’s drawings, describing them years later as “sorrowful” and

---

<sup>204</sup> W.M. Rossetti, *Collected Works* 2, 228-229.

<sup>205</sup> Marsh, *Collected Writings*, 22. Also see the stylistic analysis of this poem in Ireland, “A Kind of Pastoral,” 303-315. Though Ireland does not specifically address the question of lyricism as a quality of painting, he does analyze the distinctly non-narrative aspects of Rossetti’s sonnet, which was composed and published early in the artist’s career (1850).

comparing them to the lyric poetry of Keats and Chaucer.<sup>206</sup>

In the Aesthetic comparison of lyric poetry and painting, the historical connection between lyricism and music was an important one. Classically, lyric poetry was associated with music and even during the vernacular transformation of lyric in the courtly style of the *stilnovisti* and Petrarch, forms like the *canzone* and sonnet were read aloud. The association between color and music aided in the description of color's beauty as a visual element independent of subject matter and narrative. Stephens praises the allusion to music in the painting for leading the viewer toward an appreciation of its color relationships:

Beyond this, so infinite is the work, there is nothing to suggest subject, time, or place. Where we thus leave off, the intellectual and purely artistic splendour of the picture begins to develop itself. The music of the dulcimer passes out of the spectator's cognizance when the chromatic harmony takes its place in appealing to the eye (546).

The analogy between imagined musical notes and the chromatic harmony of Rossetti's painting was an essential quality of the Aesthetic approach to lyrical painting.<sup>207</sup>

Stephens fastidiously describes every hue, tint, and shade throughout the canvas in an

---

<sup>206</sup> Swinburne, "Old Masters," 186.

<sup>207</sup> Rossetti painted *The Blue Bower* during a period of increased interest in the relationship between color and music. Rossetti's friendships with Whistler, Fantin-Latour, and Alphonse Legros, who shared his interest in color and music, provide a potentially fruitful direction for future research. For a concise explanation of the relevant themes of painting and music in Rossetti's work, which I do not pursue at length here, see Macleod, "Rossetti's Two Ligeas," 89-102; and for a more general exploration of music and painting in the late nineteenth-century consult Philippe Junod, "The New *Paragone*: Paradoxes and Contradictions of Pictorial Musicalism," in *The Arts Entwined: Music and Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Marsha L Morton and Peter L. Schmunk (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000): 23-46.

attempt to enliven and excite the senses through his ekphrastic *tour de force* but also to isolate color and emphasize its ability to generate non-narrative meaning: “The green and chestnut-auburn, the pallid roses of the flesh, and the firmamental blue of the background, are as ineffable in variety of tint as in their delicious harmony” (546). By asking the viewer to focus on the visual qualities in the image, Stephens suggests that color functioned independently of narrative or moral imperative and emerged as a *subject* in itself.

*The Blue Bower* achieves its lyrical effect largely through its use of color, which Stephens credits with creating an autonomous, sensual beauty. Stephens’ characterization of the lyrical effect of color runs counter to established aesthetic discourse about the hierarchy of the arts in which color (as an aspect of painting) appealed to the senses and poetry appealed to intellect. For example, in the *Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant makes a distinction between music and the art of color, which appeal through “mere sensations,” and the intellectual appeal of poetry.<sup>208</sup> In Stephens’ estimation, color is capable of appealing to both the senses and the intellect,

---

<sup>208</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* in *Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music*, eds. and trans. John Stevens and Peter le Huray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 220-221. Stephens’ comments about the interconnected nature of painting, poetry, and music grew out of an incredibly rich late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century aesthetic discourse in England and continental Europe. A few scholars, including Prettejohn and Wilcox, have begun to investigate these connections in the broader context of Aestheticism, but Stephens’ knowledge and understanding of aesthetic discourse remains vague. While they warrant further investigation, I do not have time to develop fully those connections. For further general reading on the topic of Aesthetic criticism and continental aesthetic philosophy, see Prettejohn, *Art for Art’s Sake*, 209; Wilcox, “Beginnings of *l’art pour l’art*,” 360-377; Powell, “Rossetti’s Musical Imagery,” 21-23; and Helsinger, *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts*, 99-109.

and his assessment of the *Blue Bower* reveals a key component of how Aesthetic writers and artists interpreted contemporary painting generally. Beauty in painting (*via color*) appealed to the mind *through* the senses. In Stephens' rearranging of aesthetic criteria, there is no fatal conflict because one type of beauty is not better than another. As long as beauty is the primary pursuit, the criteria of Aestheticism have been met. In this way, lyric poetry and Venetian painting are so satisfying as examples of "beauty," for Aesthetic critics interpreted beauty to be the primary purpose of each.

Stephens' comparison of Rossetti and the Venetians depended on a particular interpretation of historical tradition and Aesthetic beauty. Swinburne made a similar comparison only a few months earlier, stating that "[Rossetti's] pictures of the year are magnificent; they recall the greatness, the perfect beauty and luxurious power of Titian and Giorgione."<sup>209</sup> The significance of both Swinburne and Stephens choosing to compare Rossetti with Titian and Giorgione is meaningful for what it reveals about Rossetti's position as a painter in the 1860s as well as the place of Venetian painting during the same period. The description of Venetian painters in Aesthetic criticism involved a process of pulling from established art-critical discourse and shaping contemporary concerns. Venetian painters came with an established set of associations involving the most fundamental debates about painting since the Renaissance. To invoke their names in criticism was to position oneself or one's friend within those

---

<sup>209</sup> Lang, *Swinburne Letters* 1, 103. Rossetti's pictures of 1864 that correspond to Swinburne's letter include several watercolors: *Monna Pomona* (Tate Gallery, London), *Morning Music* (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), and *Woman Combing Her Hair* (Private Collection).

debates and to contribute to or reconfigure them in a meaningful way. Although Rossetti was not making paintings that exactly mimicked specific sixteenth-century Venetian techniques or compositions, he had, according to Swinburne and Stephens, revived the *spirit* of Titian and Giorgione. The comparison to Rossetti was not just about *style* or *subject*; it was about something less tangible, which was the complex beauty of color.

In the Aesthetic construction of Venetian painting, color was associated with the more autonomous qualities of art, like those attributed to music, which Stephens expressed in his final description of *The Blue Bower*:

The woman is beautiful in no common way; but her air more powerfully entrances us to sympathy with her act of slowly drawing luxurious music from the strings, so that the eyes and the ear of fancy go together. Then we have the marvelous fleshiness of the flesh; the fascinating sensuousness of the expression, which is refined, if not elevated, by the influence of the music. The wealth, no less than the cunning combination and ample variety of the colour, will delight the student and those who are content to receive a picture in the spirit which is proper to the highest form of Art, whether it be developed in painting, sculpture, music, or architectural design (546).

Stephens' description praises the role that color plays in the sensuous expression of female flesh but equally states that the woman's image has been elevated through its comparison to music. Stephens refers to variety of color as a "cunning combination," and his observation reveals the duality of color within the painting: the sensual, even erotic, ability of color to appeal to the senses and the simultaneous role of chromatic harmonies as the ostensible subject of the painting. Stephens claims that the depiction of music, as the only identifiable subject, allows the true subject – chromatic harmony – to develop fully in the viewer's mind (546). Stephens makes no claim for the narrative or

moral power of color in *The Blue Bower*. Rather, chromatic harmony is repositioned as an autonomous aspect of visual experience that is capable of standing alone as a subject of painting.

### Part Two: The Glamorous Venetians: Dangerously Debauched Color

Rossetti's choice to make a painting about color and Stephen's decision to promote this decision in his assessment reveal a fundamental way in which historical discourse affected the direction of contemporary art. Since the Renaissance, color was much more than pigment on canvas. Color was associated with debates about painting, poetry, and women's beauty. From the time of Vasari's *Lives* and Ludovico Dolce's response to it, *Aretino*, color was inexorably linked with Venetian painting. In the writings of Joshua Reynolds and John Ruskin, Venetian color was characterized as seductive and alluring, continuing the feminine gendering of critical language established in the Renaissance. As an Aesthetic contribution to the discourse of color, *The Blue Bower* and Stephens' criticism adopted the feminized terms of color and Venetian painting. Rather than denigrating them, Rossetti's painting openly celebrates the womanly qualities of color and thus signals an important acknowledgement of difference: not between himself and the past, but between himself and those of his contemporaries who continued to denigrate color.

The way in which nineteenth-century critical language about color coalesced around the subject of beauty, particularly sensual (i.e. vital, sensorial, even erotic) beauty, closely paralleled terms used for and against Venetian painting during the sixteenth century. To an extent, negative attitudes toward Venetian painting, which

characterized color as the lesser, feminized counterpart of Roman and Florentine *disegno*, became more codified by the nineteenth century. Specifically, Vasari's dismissive language regarding color and Venetian painting was incorporated into the criticism of Reynolds and Ruskin in their arguments against Venetian color. When Rossetti and his peers defended Venetian painting, they presented a purposefully subversive reclamation of the feminine aspects of painting and beauty associated with color.

Vasari's preference for the analytical, *disegno*-based style of Florence and Rome tended to manifest itself in a denigration of Venetian color, to which other critics, like Ludovico Dolce (1508-1568), responded by championing Venetian painters.<sup>210</sup> In Vasari's lives of Giorgione and Titian, color is unequivocally linked with Venetian painters as a characteristic element of their style. Vasari established a connection between Giorgione and Titian that went beyond their relationship as master and pupil to include their methods, in particular their approach to drawing and color. Giorgione's technique, which Titian then followed, was far from ideal:

...He used to set himself before living and natural objects and counterfeit them as well as he was able with colors, and paint them broadly with tints crude or soft according as the life demanded, without doing any drawing, holding it as

---

<sup>210</sup> Ludovico Dolce's dialogue on painting, *L'Aretino*, was published in 1557. An English translation is available: Mark W. Roskill, ed. and trans., *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). Rossetti's view of Renaissance and contemporary debates were possibly affected by Dolce's text, which he owned in its original form: Dolce, *L'Aretino ovvero Dialogo della Pittura; con l'aggiunta delle Lettere del Tiziano* (Milan: 1863). The copy listed here is documented as being bound with an edition of Boccaccio in two locations. First, Bertram Rota, 5; and second, "Library of D.G. Rossetti," n.p.



certain that to paint with colors only, without the study of drawing on paper, was the true and best method of working, and the true design (397).

According to Vasari, Giorgione preferred to paint directly from life, depicting his subjects with color only, a quality of the artist's work that Vasari aligned with his inner spirit (210). However, Vasari is not at all approving of the foregoing method, which skips the crucial step of drawing. Drawing reinforced skills of design and invention, which could not be learned by painting with color from nature. Vasari states his objection in terms of a dichotomy of color and design:

...By drawing on paper, you come to fill the mind with beautiful conceptions, and learn to counterfeit all the objects of nature by memory, without having to keep them always before you or being obliged to conceal beneath the glamour of coloring the painful fruits of your ignorance of design, in the manner that was followed for many years by the Venetian painters, Giorgione, Pordenone, and others, who never saw Rome or any other works of absolute perfection (398).

In Vasari's estimation, color is a means of concealing painterly inadequacy or a lack of true perfection.<sup>211</sup> Though it may produce sensual delight, in the case of Giorgione's harmonies, manipulations of flesh, and cunning images of nature, color is no substitute for design – the real substance of art.

Vasari's accusation that Venetian color is "glamorous" implied its status as a type of beautiful concealment. Phillip Sohm has argued that art criticism of the

---

<sup>211</sup> David Rosand has argued that the surface quality of Titian's oils was responsible for the first revolution in oil painting, and offers an expanded interpretation the "surface beauty" of Titian's color, which Vasari denigrated: Rosand, "Titian and the Eloquence of the Brush," *Artibus et Historiae* 2, no. 3 (1981): 85-96. Also see Mary Pardo's argument that artifice and eroticism were essential elements of the visual experience of Venetian painting: "Artifice as Seduction in Titian," in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, and Images*, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 55-89.

sixteenth century, notably Vasari's *Lives*, was deeply affected by vernacular literature dealing with women's beauty. Sohm notes that Vasari's criticism shares specific terms and conventions of representing women's beauty with Firenzuola's *Dialogue*, summarized briefly in the first chapter.<sup>212</sup> In describing the different qualities that comprise ideal beauty in women, Firenzuola's *Dialogue* provided an analogy for Vasari, who was searching for a means to articulate ideal beauty in art. Sohm contends that Vasari partly derived his juxtaposition of "glamorous" color and its opposite – "true design" – by adopting the negative connotations of certain terms typically associated with the beauty of women, including *vaghezza* (charm). Firenzuola endeavored to present "charm" as a positive, though somewhat indefinable quality, but it was traditionally viewed with ambivalence precisely because of its lack of definition, which likely affected Vasari's alignment of color and the notion of superficial adornment.<sup>213</sup> Color alone was deceptive and incapable of producing the higher order of ideas associated with design. Certain attributes of women's beauty transferred into the discussion of Venetian painting, and it transformed into a gendered style associated

---

<sup>212</sup> Sohm argues convincingly that the format, structure, and language of Firenzuola's dialogue acted as a model for Vasari's *Lives*. For the section on Vasari and Firenzuola in Sohm, see "Gendered Style," 759-773. Sohm builds upon early and foundational observations made in Cropper's article "On Beautiful Women," which explained Firenzuola's importance in sixteenth-century art criticism (375; 383-386).

<sup>213</sup> Sohm provides a detailed historical and critical analysis of *vaghezza* (766-769) and other terms of women's beauty adopted in Vasari's text. In Firenzuola's dialogue, which Rossetti owned, color is an essential element of female beauty (15). See my discussion of the relevant passage of Firenzuola's text in chapter one. Firenzuola describes charm (*vaghezza*), as "a beauty that attracts and sparks the desire to contemplate it and enjoy it," though its relationship to virtue is complex (36-37).

with the representation of harmonious color and softly modeled flesh.

Vasari's *Lives* had a profound effect on the perception of Venetian painting and the juxtaposition of color and design in the succeeding centuries after its publication. In England, the Vasarian point of view had an especially public platform in the figure of Joshua Reynolds, whose *Discourses on Art* propagated many of Vasari's biases.<sup>214</sup> Reynolds' *Discourses* continued and enlarged the gendered discourse of Venetian painting and color by addressing it to young English art students within the course of their studies at the Royal Academy. Reynolds' views, while anathema to the young members of the PRB including Rossetti, were nonetheless pervasive and foundational in establishing an institutionalized attitude toward Venetian color in England.

In his Fourth Discourse, Reynolds describes the respective merits of color and design using the Venetian and Roman schools as historical examples to illustrate his version of the "grand style" in painting. His point is seemingly basic and extends Vasari's distinction between the glamour of color and the intellectual rigor of design. According to Reynolds, the primary difference between the Venetians and the Romans is the ennobling quality of Roman painting resulting from the painter's mental exertion. Reynolds' characterization of this distinction is significant for the value he assigns to the intellectual substance of art:

The value and rank of every art is in proportion to the mental labour employed

---

<sup>214</sup> A copy of Reynolds' *Discourses on Art* was sold in an auction of books after William Michael Rossetti's death. The book was inscribed to him from Thomas Woolner (a fellow Pre-Raphaelite). See Sotheran, 113. It is almost certain that DG Rossetti would have had access to his brother's copy.

in it, or the mental pleasure produced by it. As this principle is observed or neglected, our profession becomes either a liberal art, or a mechanical trade. In the hands of one man it makes the highest pretensions, as it is addressed to the noblest faculties: in those of another it is reduced to a mere matter of ornament; and the painter has but the humble province of furnishing our apartments with elegance (57).

In Reynolds' dichotomous model, successful art is both the product of cerebral conception and appreciation; it transcends its material medium and functions by virtue of its idea, like its sister liberal arts poetry and music. "Mechanical" art is void of lofty ideas and is instead bound by the constraints of its materiality. It can serve no better purpose than to decorate a room or to provide ornamentation. Like Vasari's assessment of Venetian painting as glamorous, concealing beneath its surface beauty a lack of reason and substance, so too does the "ornament" and "elegance" of Reynolds' mechanical painting mask its dearth of "mental labour."

In his examination of color in English criticism, Bullen has considered the many meanings of "ornament" in the context of Reynolds' view of Venetian painting. Bullen proposes that "ornament" was a euphemism through which the feminization and moralization of color was propagated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>215</sup> The term connoted everything negative that Vasari had already argued against color, especially the notion that "ornament" was a quality of surface beauty that stood in opposition to loftier qualities of design. Ornamentation, like color, did not lack beauty

---

<sup>215</sup> In *Continental Crosscurrents*, Bullen traces the development of Venetian color beginning with Reynolds and ending with Charles Eastlake, the director of the National Gallery beginning in 1853. Rossetti plays a very minor role in his discussion, which focuses primarily on the treatment of color in academic discourse. For his discussion of Reynolds and the term "ornamental," see 124-126.

*per se*, but it was not beauty with depth. Reynolds makes the distinction especially clear when he states that the value and rank of art is determined by its ennobling power, and that mere “ornamentation” is never the source of any such edification.

In addition to promoting the Vasarian position toward Venetian painting, Reynolds’ Fourth Discourse codified the place of color in his conception of a “grand style” in painting. The Venetian example was used as an admonition from the proper usage of color, which was demonstrated in the examples of the Roman and Florentine schools with their “distinct and forcible colors.” Color, while necessary, should not distract from ideas:

Perhaps these distinct colours strike the mind more forcibly, from there not being any great union between them; as martial music, which is intended to rouse the nobler passions, has its effect from the sudden and strongly marked transitions from one note to another, which that style of music requires; whilst in that which is intended to move the softer passions, the notes imperceptibly melt into one another (61-62).

The soft chromatic effects of Venetian painting strike directly at the emotions rather than the intellect, according to Reynolds’ musical analogy. Chromatic harmony was a sign of intellectual weakness (“softer passion”), or a feminized charm and elegance. Such harmonies were the presiding characteristic and appeal of Venetian painting. Using Vasari’s basic framework, Reynolds creates a sharp distinction between the acceptable and unacceptable use of color in painting. When color is used forcibly, like martial music, in support of an idea, it is successful. When it is harmonious, appealing only to the senses, it becomes nothing more than glamorous beauty with no purpose.

In addition to restricting color, history painters, like those of the most revered schools, achieve the grandest manner through “Poetical” analogy (59-61). In referring

to the poetic qualities of painting, Reynolds was drawing a connection between poetry and painting in order to elevate the status of ideas in history painting. The classical genres of epic and drama were most crucial in forming Reynolds' conception of how grand poetic narrative could provide ennobling ideas for painting. History painters used subjects from classical poetry, literature, and mythology to inform their work in an attempt to capture a spirit of grandness. The notion is analogous to Vasari's distinction between painting from nature and drawing frequently in order to gain the power of invention. The *ideas* for painting were *within* the painter. Intrinsic, and presumably ennobling, ideas such as these needed no extraneous detail or ostentatious coloring to make them appealing. In Reynolds' conception of the "grand style," color that was too harmonious and too glamorous detracted from poetic ideas.

Reynolds was unwilling to reconcile what he called the "seducing" qualities of Venetian color with the lofty ideas of Roman and Florentine painting. For him, captivation with Venetian painters (particularly Veronese and Tintoretto) was liable to "debauch the young and inexperienced" (67). Bullen has argued convincingly that Reynolds' choice of metaphor to describe Venetian color was markedly feminine and sexual.<sup>216</sup> I would argue further that in his distinction between the "grand style" of

---

<sup>216</sup> Bullen, *Continental Crosscurrents*, 127-128. For further reading on the continued discussion of "debauched" color in the writing of William Blake, Henri David Fuseli, and John Opie, see the discussion in Bullen (121-131). Ironically, Swinburne and Rossetti both noted Blake's power as a colorist while comparing him to Michelangelo. For example, Swinburne paraphrased Rossetti's point of view in his private correspondence with the artist Seymour Kirkup (1788-1880):

Some of [Blake's works'] effects in colour, notwithstanding Blake's scorn of

English academicism and those who might be “seduced” by color, Reynolds constructed a moralized view of the past. The harmonious, “ornamental” color of Venetian painting was feminine and represented a deceptive, shallow lack of seriousness.

While Vasari and Reynolds were standard figures of art-historical reference for Rossetti, his direct contact with John Ruskin make the critic’s views especially relevant to Rossetti’s Aestheticism. Though Ruskin was fundamentally opposed to Reynolds, particularly in his belief that artists should work first from nature rather than by means of idealization,<sup>217</sup> their positions on Venetian painting have important points in common. In addition, Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* provided an opening for the eventual acceptance of color as a means of visual communication in itself, though he ultimately did not pursue that line of thinking himself.<sup>218</sup>

---

colourists, are so exquisite and inventive that Rossetti, who in common with all great and good artists now among us admires him at his best almost beyond words, told me once that he regarded Blake as a positive discoverer of new capacities [and po]wers even in mere executive colouring.

The excerpt is from a letter to Kirkup, July 1864, Lang, *Swinburne Letters* 1, 102. Swinburne’s comparison of Blake to Michelangelo occurs in his “Old Master’s” essay (162) where he was referring to the effect of “tragic beauty” in Michelangelo’s drawings.

<sup>217</sup> Reynolds refers to idealization, or deviation from fact, in history painting as “poetic license” (59-60). These deviations are necessary in order for the painter to “compensate for the natural deficiencies of his art” (60).

<sup>218</sup> See chapter one for the discussion of Rossetti’s familiarity with and ownership of *Modern Painters*. Quotations are from volume one of the fifth edition (1851). My interpretation of Ruskin’s text is aimed at showing both its connections with previous discourse and the difference between his views on color and those of Aesthetic writers and artists. In her recent examination, Helsinger offers an alternative to my reading of Ruskin’s negative view of color in *Modern Painters*. She emphasizes Ruskin’s praise of morally “pure” color (66; 91-96). She does not fully consider Ruskin’s position within

In *Modern Painters*, Ruskin based his distinction between successful and unsuccessful painting on the ability of images to promote what he referred to as the “expression” of ideas. Similar to but distinct from Reynolds’ “ennobling thoughts” and Vasari’s “beautiful conceptions,” Ruskin’s “expression” represents a call for the marriage of thoughtful ideas and “perfect form.” “Expression” connoted the communication of thought and depth through visual means. Alone, neither ideas nor form creates an entirely satisfactory picture, though it would be better for a painting to rely on ideas than on pure visual effects. Paintings that lacked ideas were merely “decorative” or “ornamental” and of no more value than the frame surrounding the painting (9-11). While Ruskin privileged the place of ideas in painting, he allowed that a balance could be achieved in the integration of ideas and technique, which, in this case, included color – with a considerable caveat. For Ruskin, color, like other visual aspects of painting, could contribute to “expression” as long as it promoted thought. However, color, unlike other aspects of painting, was flawed by its unreliability. In this way, Ruskin continued the familiar Vasarian demotion of color.

Ruskin outlined seemingly empirical terms with which to reframe but still retain the entrenched bias against color (66-70). Building upon the Enlightenment theories of

---

the context of Vasari’s or Reynold’s admonitions against color in Venetian painting, but instead interprets his view of color as almost entirely positive. Additionally, Hewison relates the treatment of Venetian painting in *Modern Painters* to that in *The Stones of Venice*, in which Ruskin expressed a more positive attitude toward aspects of Venetian painting. However, Hewison is careful to stress the prevalence of moral and religious judgments throughout Ruskin’s massive and complex critical *oeuvre: Ruskin on Venice*, 241-277.



John Locke (1632-1704), Ruskin claimed that color affects perception in an observably different way than “form,” which he defines as light, shape, and outline.<sup>219</sup> Form is inherent to an object and immutable; thus, regardless of the observer’s individual perception, aspects of form remain the same. Conversely, color is a variable quality in objects (i.e. it changes with light, time, movement, and so on), and so it is an unstable quality that depends upon an individual’s perception of it. Color is only capable of producing a sensory effect, rather than knowledge, because it is not an inherent part of objects. Though two people might agree on the color of something, they do not see it in the same way (67-68). Ruskin’s empirical explication of color’s flaw is oblivious to its own irony: that qualities of “form” are equally open to questions of differing perception in the *viewer*. Despite the empirical terms of his argument, the premise is basically the same as it had been since Vasari’s *Lives* and Reynolds’ *Discourses*. Unlike form, color was unreliable as a means to express great ideas. Ruskin builds upon Vasari’s glamour and Reynolds’ seduction, and he transforms color into a mercurial, dubious, and untrustworthy quality of painting.

Ruskin shared earlier concerns about the ability of color to lead young students astray and even to distract seasoned professionals from the serious work of “expression.” Ruskin’s discussion of Venetian landscape states his position with

---

<sup>219</sup> The theory of “primary and secondary qualities of bodies” from Book II of John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) states that the primary quality of objects is “utterly inseparable” from the object. The secondary quality acts upon the senses. Color, according to Locke, is a secondary quality that is not really part of the object but rather our perception of it.

marked urgency: "...The young and inexperienced painter could run no greater risk than the too early taking of [Titian, Giorgione, and Tintoretto] for teachers..." (78).

Ruskin's warning to the "young and inexperienced" mirrors the language used in Reynolds' Discourse, which invokes the metaphor of sexual initiation and corruption. Ruskin, like Reynolds and Vasari before him, promoted the notion that Venetian painters led young and old alike away from the more thoughtful aspects of visual experience.<sup>220</sup>

Ruskin's qualms about Venetian painting and color were equally based in his moralized view of beauty. For Ruskin, beauty was a quality of things endowed naturally by God. The ability to recognize and the decision to appreciate (divine) beauty was an inherently moral act (25-27). Ruskin warned students of painting against following the Venetian model because Venetian painters imbued their landscapes with "peculiar" emotion rather than the "universal love of nature," or appreciation for God's creation. For Ruskin, the virtuosic, harmonious coloring in Venetian canvases served no better purpose than to create an emotional impression of nature rather than to capture the truly divine beauty of the landscape. This criticism returns to Ruskin's distinction between color and form: color was not inherent in the object portrayed and its beauty was

---

<sup>220</sup> The complexity of Ruskin's engagement with Venetian painting and the historical construction of the Venetian Renaissance have been the topic of several excellent investigations by Bullen. Bullen argues that although Ruskin warmed to Venetian painting after the late 1850s, he retained his moralized view of color and beauty. See "Ruskin Venice and the Construction of Femininity," 502-520; *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, 95-102; *Myth of the Renaissance*, 123-155; and *Continental Crosscurrents*, 144-165.

superficial and changeable rather than universal. *True* beauty was the moral province of immutable form, and the painters who imbued their ideas with the visual “perfection” of form achieved the ultimate *expression*.

Though Ruskin gives color a somewhat more sympathetic place in *Modern Painters*, he relied on the constructs maintained and adapted through Vasari’s *Lives* and Reynolds’ *Discourses* to denigrate and feminize Venetian painting and color in painting. The ideal role of painting in all three cases was to convey thoughts and ideas to the viewer and, in all instances, the superficiality and mutability of color acted as an impediment. None of these figures preferred design or “form” for precisely the same reason, but each contributed to and perpetuated the notion that harmonious, glamorous, emotional color was somehow unfit for serious painting. Just as it had its detractors, color had its defenders. Negative attitudes were a powerful motivating force on many generations of artists in and out of the RA including those associated with Aestheticism.

### Part Three: The Reclamation of Color in *The Blue Bower*

*The Blue Bower* and its reception represent the ways in which an Aesthetic artist and critics worked within the existing discourse of color surrounding Venetian painting to proclaim their ideal of beauty for its own sake. Staking such a claim produced historical identities meant to conform to contemporary artistic philosophy. Rossetti and his peers endeavored to chart an alternate historical path that reoriented notions and attitudes toward the past. In the process, crucial assumptions about particular artists, including Titian and Giorgione, were reassessed in the Aesthetic writing of history to promote a new set of priorities governing the valuing of artists and their work. *The Blue*

*Bower* represented a view of the past that maintained many of the feminized stereotypes of Venetian painting, but it equally reinterpreted those negative stereotypes in a way that privileged the beauty of color as the pretext for subjectless painting, or the representation of beauty for its own sake.

Three aspects of Vasarian discourse are reinterpreted, or reclaimed, in *The Blue Bower*, simultaneously relating it to the negative discourse of color and charting a new Aesthetic trajectory for the historicism of beauty for its own sake. First, the notion that color was merely “ornamental” surface distraction – “glamorous” beauty – is materialized in Rossetti’s painting. Jewel-like tones adorn the surfaces of a stunning array of *decorative* objects laid out in a manifestation of color’s ostensibly greatest detriment. In *The Blue Bower*, “ornament” is a celebration of surface but it likewise brings objects into being. The second major problem with color follows naturally: its “ornamental” conceit conceals the painter’s lack of “expression,” “ennobling thoughts,” or “beautiful conceptions.” Due to the way Rossetti and his peers viewed Venetian painting, color was fully capable of standing alone as a form of “expression.” The lyricism of Rossetti’s painting connected it with Venetian precedent and allowed for the autonomous “expression” of harmonious color. The third and most prominent aspect of Vasarian discourse is the feminization of color. *The Blue Bower* embodies the feminization of color and Venetian painting in its image of a sensual, beautiful woman. Rossetti’s conception of “bodily” beauty was essentially a rejection of the moral considerations in Reynolds’ and Ruskin’s characterization of color and art. Instead, *The Blue Bower* is a confirmation of the necessity of sensuality in painting and the role of

color in achieving that result.

A distinctive feature of *The Blue Bower* is Rossetti's juxtaposition of an array of material ornamentations and decorations in the painting to the notion of color as "ornament" and "decoration." The blue tiles that Stephens claimed lent the painting its title are perhaps the clearest example of a decorated surface within the painting. The painted surface of the canvas creates one level of "ornamentation" through its bright patterned hues of blue and white. The illusory surface of the painted tiles forms a decorative surface in conjunction with the physical surface of the paint. The "glazed" blue and white tiles cover the wall, lending a further level of adornment to the glazing of the colors themselves. The ornamental tiles dominate the entire space created within the realm of the painting. The bower becomes a private world in which decorated surface reigns supreme. But every surface, from the instrument to the woman's body, is adorned with "ornamentation" in the form of decorative inlay, jewels, and flowers. Surfaces are visually significant in the painting: bright areas of color sit on the surface of the canvas creating the appearance of flesh, petals, patterns, and shimmering silk. The attention to surfaces, literal and figurative, suggests a deliberate engagement with the notion that color masked ideas beneath a beautiful *surface*, the common thread throughout Vasari, Reynolds and Ruskin. Rossetti's position toward this belief, as manifested in *The Blue Bower*, neither disputes the surface beauty associated with color nor its ornamental and decorative qualities. Instead of using these qualities to represent the lesser attributes of color, *The Blue Bower* is a carefully designed articulation of ornamental color in all its forms.

For Rossetti and his friends, “ornamental” color and the “decorative” function of painting existed as part of a valuable relationship, whereas the opposite was true for Reynolds and, to some extent, even Ruskin.<sup>221</sup> Swinburne’s “Designs of the Old Masters” uses the dichotomous terms of art-critical debate in order to revalue Venetian art within Aesthetic priorities by proclaiming that “The drawings of Titian and Giorgione are indeed the chief decorations of the [Uffizi].”<sup>222</sup> The Aesthetic meaning of “decoration” and “decorative,” when applied to works of art, meant their handling (shading, line, color, and subject) as well as their function as objects of beauty. Swinburne’s statement that drawings by two Venetian masters were “chief decorations” might rightly be interpreted as a cunning turn of phrase taking into account the contemporary associations, both positive and negative, with the term “decoration.” Previous generations periodically devalued “decoration” as a type of painting lacking in ideas as well as the incorporation of paintings into the broader scheme of interior

---

<sup>221</sup> Reynolds’ comments at the beginning of his Fourth Discourse are aimed directly at the decorative aspects of painting, in terms of technique and function. It would seem that Rococo painters, who incorporated paintings within interior design schemes, were the intended targets of his derogatory remarks against decorative painting (57). Ruskin’s position is less clear than Reynolds’ though he privileges ideas above technique. In explaining the requirements of “expression,” Ruskin discounts pure ornament as no more necessary than the “frame or glazing.” From this statement one can interpret Ruskin’s dismissal of the decorative aspects of painting, if not its decorative function as well, at least as expressed in *Modern Painters* (9). It would be unfair to characterize Ruskin’s view of the decorative arts as entirely negative, which it was not. See, for example, his “The Two Paths: Being Lectures on Art and Its Application to Decoration and Manufacture, Delivered 1858-1859” (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1859).

<sup>222</sup> Swinburne, “Old Masters,” 181.

design, but Aesthetic artists embraced the practice of harmonious “decoration.”

Whistler’s infamous paintings in the “Peacock Room,” (1876-1877, Freer Gallery, Washington DC) designed around his *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* (oil on canvas, 1863-1864, Freer Gallery), stands as probably the best-known example of this practice.<sup>223</sup>

The tiles in *The Blue Bower* contribute to the overall color scheme of the painting, but they also create a harmonious interior space within the image. The imaginary space is reliant upon pattern, decoration, and color for unity and cohesion. The compositional principles applied within the painting are those used within actual Aesthetic interiors of the period in which objects, including paintings, were meant to harmonize with their surroundings.<sup>224</sup> Rossetti’s awareness of these particular design principles can be demonstrated by the arrangement of his own home as well as the interactive function he promoted for his paintings. He referred to *Monna Vanna* (oil on

---

<sup>223</sup> The “Peacock Room,” or *Harmony in Blue and Gold*, was begun as a project to redesign the dining room of Frederick R. Leyland. The room is an excellent example of the renewed interest in the “decorative” aspects of painting during the Aesthetic period. For a thorough history of the room, as well as an examination of Aesthetic “decoration,” see Linda Merrill, *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>224</sup> A large portion of research devoted to British Aestheticism has focused on the design of interiors. A general introduction that explains some basic concerns of interior decoration is Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement*; in particular see chapter three “A Dissonance in Gold and Silver,” 48-65; and chapter eight “E.W. Godwin, ‘First of the Aesthetes,’” 152-171. In these chapters, Lambourne uses the example of Whistler’s “Peacock Room” and Godwin’s architectural and furniture designs to discuss the principles governing Aesthetic harmony in domestic spaces. A more specific examination of Rossetti’s paintings from the 1860s and their function within Aesthetic interiors can be found in Psomiades, *Beauty’s Body*, 94-133.

canvas, 1866, Tate Gallery, London) as a highly successful example of “room decoration” and also made custom frames and curtains to show his paintings to their best advantage within patrons’ existing decorative schemes.<sup>225</sup> These actions evince a conscious attempt to incorporate paintings within the harmony of a carefully designed domestic interior. A painting, while a focal point, was still part of a whole that included handmade rugs, curtains, wallpapers, ceramics, and so on, all of which were chosen to contribute to the harmonious effect of the whole. The notion that a painting was a “decoration” or “ornamentation” within this scheme was not an insult if the ultimate goal was achieving *decorative harmony*.<sup>226</sup> His own house, recorded in anecdotal detail by his studio assistant Henry Treffly Dunn, displayed a variety of objects ranging from

---

<sup>225</sup> The comment about *Monna Vanna* was addressed to a potential patron, John Mitchell on 27 September 1866: “I have a picture close to completion – one of my best I believe, and probably the most effective as a room decoration I have every painted,” Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 472, 66.158. *The Beloved* (1865-1866) provides ample evidence of Rossetti creating a painting meant to harmonize with its environment. Begun slightly before *The Blue Bower*, *The Beloved* was also conceived in terms of color relationships. Rossetti expressed some frustration when he could not find models with precisely the right skin tone to sit for the various figures: letter to George Rae, 19 March 1865, 271-272, 65.47. After the painting was complete, Rossetti designed a frame and gave specific instructions for constructing a rail and curtain system to incorporate the painting into its new home. He went so far as to provide advice about the color of the curtain fabric so as to enhance his painting and the surrounding space: letter to Mrs. Rae, 15 March 1866, 409, 66.54.

<sup>226</sup> Helsinger explores the dual role of color in creating a harmonious painting and interior space in her examination of William Morris’ designs and poetry: *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts*, 117-118. She argues that the color imagery of Morris’ poetry found an analogy in the principles of his applied designs during the 1850s and 1860s. Though focused primarily on discussing Morris’ work, Helsinger does provide an expanded analysis of color within Victorian criticism, further connecting it with applied design and poetry.



Chinese pottery to Venetian mirrors (*Dining Room, No. 16 Cheyne Walk*, gouache, 1882, National Portrait Gallery, London). Even in his own home, artwork was carefully chosen to fit a particular space and interact with other objects in the room to create a unified environment.<sup>227</sup> Pattern, texture, and “ornament” from a variety of sources - East and West – were brought together in order to produce a harmonious space, like the imaginary realm of *The Blue Bower*. Paintings were part of the decorative scheme in Aesthetic interiors and color, more than “ennobling thought” (i.e. narrative or moral subjects) determined how successfully they were integrated into a balanced, unified space. While still an element of the surface, “ornament” was reclaimed as an essential element of Aesthetic harmony, as well as beauty, in *The Blue Bower*.

The primary objection that Reynolds and Ruskin leveled against color was its essentially sensual quality: concealing a lack of ideas beneath a beautiful surface. Ideas were most easily conveyed without the distraction of harmonious, subtle color. The Aesthetic position toward the dichotomy of color and form, with its associated notions of distraction and “expression,” retained the basic framework that had been in place since Vasari’s *Lives*. Color and form remained, for the most part, mutually exclusive elements of painting. In *The Blue Bower* and Stephens’ interpretation of it, color was invested with its own purpose and meaning. Rossetti addressed the problem of making a

---

<sup>227</sup> Jessica Feldman has endeavored to recoup a history of Victorian Modernism in which the domestic interior space serves as a bridge from Romanticism to early-twentieth-century Modernism: “Modernism’s Victorian Bric-a-brac,” 453-471. Using Rossetti’s house at Cheyne Walk (and his representations of his house in his paintings), Feldman argues that Rossetti brought poetry, painting, applied art and domestic space together, thereby enacting domesticity, a distinctive aspect of Victorian Modernism.

painting with “expression” by elevating color to its own subject. By isolating color, Rossetti’s painting became wholly sensual and demonstrated the Aesthetic notion that beauty was its own purpose and justification.

The term “expression” is essential to understanding the historical and visual value of color in *The Blue Bower*. Stephens used it to describe the “colour and delicacy of expression” in the painting (545). An important point of reference for Stephens and Rossetti was Ruskin’s use of “expression,” which encompassed technical perfection and abundance of ideas within one image (9-10). Reynolds had also earlier employed the term in his Fourth Discourse in reference to the depiction of idealized emotional states (60-61). While Stephens praises *The Blue Bower* for its technical perfection, he identifies color specifically as contributing to the overall “expression” of the painting. Stephens’ use of the term “expression” is closest to Ruskin’s, though for Stephens the “expression” of ideas is distinctly lyrical (i.e. of the nature of a lyrical poem as opposed to the grand narratives of epic and drama). Unlike the earlier discourse surrounding “expression,” the Aesthetic construction of lyrical painting created a space for sensual beauty and color as a type of “expression.”

If *The Blue Bower* is dependent upon color for “expression,” as Stephens proposes, then “ennobling thoughts” are not an aspect of what make it a successful painting. It appeals directly to the senses, which initiated a response in the “intellect,” a term Stephens uses in order to differentiate the cerebral process of appreciation from the moral development of “taste” described in Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* (25-27). In describing the appreciation of beauty (endowed in objects by God), Ruskin

differentiates between the cultivation of “taste” and the execution of “judgment.” The former is a moral act done in accordance with the laws of beauty, which God determines for man. The latter is a purely intellectual act, which can be performed by anyone regardless of whether he or she has “good taste” and an appreciation of “true” beauty. For Stephens, the appeal of *The Blue Bower* is intellectual, meaning not connected with taste or moral judgment. This Aesthetic point of view, shared by Rossetti, was a purposeful move away from Ruskin’s moralized view of beauty.

Any claims for the independence of chromatic harmony, from Stephens or within *The Blue Bower*, were tied to the sensual qualities of color, which had earned it the label of “ornament” and excluded it from “expression.” To use Stephens’ phrase, Rossetti’s musician “powerfully entrances” the viewer with her sultry gaze and the slow motion of her fingers over the instrument. The complementary play of red, pink, green, turquoise, and creamy flesh defines the features of her ideal form, which is incorporated into the chromatic harmony of the painting. In a very fundamental way, the very same colors that define *her beauty* are the same colors that define the *beauty of the painting*.<sup>228</sup> Rich, vibrant, harmonious color was an essential element in representing both her sensual feminine beauty and the “bodily” beauty of painting. Rossetti’s

---

<sup>228</sup> My argument regarding Rossetti’s painting and the criticism surrounding it is further supported by evidence regarding the increasingly important role of color in women’s fashion among those involved with Aesthetic dress reform throughout the 1860s to 1890s. There was considerable overlap between the choice of pigment in paintings and display of color on women’s bodies in contemporary fashion. See Alison Victoria Matthews, “Aestheticism’s True Colors: The Politics of Pigment in Victorian Art, Criticism, and Fashion,” in *Women and Aestheticism*, eds. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999): 172-191.

touchstone for this visual turn of phrase was Venetian painting, and the visual cue was color. As with the concepts of “ornament” and “expression,” *The Blue Bower* engages with the historically feminized nature of color through an inversion of negative terms. By creating a painting that centered upon a beautiful woman, Rossetti accepted the existing feminization of color and increased it in his vision of the sensual embodiment of color.

The feminine, “bodily,” conception of color in *The Blue Bower* was developed in relation to Rossetti’s understanding of Venetian painting during the 1860s. Recall Rossetti’s comments to William Allingham about Veronese’s *Marriage at Cana* in the Louvre: “Sawdust more or less is the fashion of the day – Hunt’s wooden puppet-show of enlarged views instead of Veronese’s flesh, blood, and slight stupidity.”<sup>229</sup> Rossetti’s distinction between Hunt and Veronese underscores how he was using color, for what purpose, and the role his particular interpretation of history played in shaping his Aesthetic philosophy.

Hunt, like the other Pre-Raphaelite painters, used vibrant colors in an ostensibly Venetian manner. Perhaps more so than any other contemporary paintings, aside from Turner’s landscapes, Hunt’s images fit Ruskin’s definition of “expression” by combining “ideas” – moral, literary, and religious subjects – with perfect technique including the use of Venetian color.<sup>230</sup> *The Awakening Conscience* (oil on canvas, 1853,

---

<sup>229</sup> Fredeman, *Correspondence* 2, 306-7, 60.24. Also see the discussion of the exchange between Allingham and Rossetti in chapter one.

<sup>230</sup> In order to achieve luminous colors like those in Venetian paintings, the Pre-

Tate Gallery, London) incorporates moralized subject matter with the bright, luminous colors of Venetian painting. However, the subject of the image, a woman's moral awakening from a life of debauched pleasure, attempts to elevate the sensory experience of color. The claustrophobic, red interior in *The Awakening Conscience* displays a virtuosic rendering of patterns, textures, and hues, but each betrays a shameful lack of virtue. *The Awakening Conscience* represents erotic and sexual experience in its image of a Victorian gentleman and his mistress. But ultimately, the painting leads the viewer toward a revelation of the woman's redemption from her waywardness. No detail escapes this reading: the cat with a bird in its mouth, the fallen glove, the unraveling woolen tapestries – each a symbol of her “fallen” soul. Her redemption is written on her face as she looks up from her lover to the open window onto a lush, verdant garden.<sup>231</sup> Color is used throughout the painting to increase the moral critique by inviting a “debauched” sensory response and quickly rebuking it with a scene of

---

Raphaelites employed a painting medium called “copal,” a glossy varnish derived from natural resin. In particular, Hunt believed that copal was similar to the medium used by the Venetians during the Renaissance. Copal allowed the Pre-Raphaelites to build up layers of shiny, intense color. For more information on the medium as well as Hunt's other working methods including preparatory sketches, choice of canvas, and painting methods, see Stephen Hackney, et. al., “Pre-Raphaelite Methods and Materials,” in *Pre-Raphaelite Painting Techniques*, 51-75.

<sup>231</sup> The “fallen woman” is a standard trope of Pre-Raphaelite art. See the standard study by Lynda Nead: “The Magdalene in Modern Times: The Mythology of the Fallen Woman in Pre-Raphaelite Painting,” *Oxford Art Journal* 7, no. 1 (1984/1985): 26-37. For a more detailed analysis of *The Awakening Conscience* that focuses on aspects of the interior decoration and symbolism, see Prettejohn, *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, 94-98.

personal awakening.<sup>232</sup>

Rossetti's criticism of Hunt is a complaint about the deadness of his paintings. The comment refers equally to the quality of painting and subject matter, but both are related to color and sensuality. Hunt's painting does not *lack* color; it just deadens color by moralizing it along with the sensual femininity associated with it. Where Hunt's painting lacks life, Veronese's work abounds in exuberance for "flesh" and "blood." Again, Rossetti's assessment of Veronese is directed as much at technique as it is at his subject. Although *The Marriage at Cana* represents a religious feast, Veronese's unrestrained depiction of skin, fabrics, hair, jewels, and exotic animals appealed to Rossetti as a celebratory triumph of painting, for which its "stupidity" was no obstacle to appreciation. For Rossetti, painting needed to affect the viewer on a visual and sensual level and it need not act as a moral prescription. Representing a beautiful woman was a particularly potent way in which to express the sensual experience of painting.

Color was an essential element in Rossetti's sensual representation of beautiful women and the manifestation of beauty for its own sake in painting. Rossetti's particular interpretation of Venetian painting and color is represented by the way in

---

<sup>232</sup> Kate Flint's excellent analysis of *The Awakening Conscience* explains several possible readings of the image based upon Ruskin's review of the painting after its debut at the RA in 1854. Though the painting presents a seemingly "moral" narrative, it created a scandal upon its display. While I have chosen to emphasize the "moral" reading of the painting, it is necessary to point out that the sexual innuendo of the painting was shocking to contemporary audiences even if that was not Hunt's intent. See Flint, "Reading *The Awakening Conscience* Rightly, in *Pre-Raphaelites Reviewed*, ed. Marcia Pointon (New York: Manchester University Press, 1989): 45-65.

which embodied feminine sensuality, expression, and ornament are brought together in *The Blue Bower* to create a cohesive statement about the place of color in painting. *The Blue Bower* is not a copy of a specific Venetian painting but refers visually to the critical terms that had been used to exclude Venetian painting from consideration as “great art.” For Rossetti, as well as Swinburne and Stephens, Titian and Giorgione fit contemporary notions of beauty for its own sake as the proper focus of painting. As a visual reclamation of the terms and methods used to denigrate color and Venetian painting, it proclaimed an innovative Aesthetic point of view and interpretation of the past.

Images of women were a primary way that Rossetti explored the problems of Aesthetic experience throughout the 1860s. *The Blue Bower* creates an analogy between autonomous, sensuous beauty and the beauty of color using the Aesthetic association between lyric poetry and color. Rossetti’s images of women also evoked a type of beauty that can be characterized as sensuous yet morally ambiguous. Next, I examine *Lady Lilith* (1869) and discuss how the nature of threatening femininity was both related to and an innovation upon “bodily” representation and the Petrarchan ideal.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE FATAL RENAISSANCE: THE PERILOUS BEAUTY OF *LADY LILITH*

Rossetti and his contemporaries were actively involved in producing a version of the Renaissance relevant to their own Aesthetic concerns. Rossetti's conception of an alluring, yet subtly dangerous, female ideal is typified by *Lady Lilith* (1869), which he created during a period of intense Aesthetic interest in the Renaissance. The painting is frequently compared to paintings by Titian on stylistic grounds, yet little work has been done to connect Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* with the larger context of collecting and criticism that shaped Aesthetic knowledge about and enthusiasm for Renaissance art and poetry.<sup>233</sup> Scholars often discuss *Lady Lilith* as a *femme fatale*, but the nature of threatening beauty in the painting is complex and ambiguous. While some ideas about dangerous women originated in earlier periods, others were the result of imaginative

---

<sup>233</sup> Virginia's Allen's investigation is by far the most comprehensive: "One Strangling Golden Hair: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Lady Lilith*," *The Art Bulletin* 66, no. 2 (June 1984): 287-290. The anachronistic comparison of Pater's infamous history of Renaissance art (1873) to Rossetti's *femmes fatales* also works to obscure Rossetti's understanding of the Renaissance at the time he conceived *Lady Lilith* in 1866. See, Riede, "Apocalyptic Portraits," 65-76, who argues that Pater based his conception of Leonardo on Rossetti. Østermark-Johansen has examined Walter Pater's essay on Leonardo da Vinci (1869). Her analysis of "fatality" argues that Pater uses language to create a serpentine effect in his prose. While she does not address Rossetti specifically, her study offers an alternative to my generalization about the importance of Renaissance art within the broader study of Aestheticism. See, "Serpentine Rivers and Serpentine Thought," 455-482.



invention on the part of Rossetti and his peers. Beyond pointing to instances of historical reference in *Lady Lilith*, I argue that his interpretation of “bodily” beauty in Petrarchan lyricism led him to create an ideal that emphasized sensuality over moral virtue. In order to represent the nature of Aesthetic experience, Rossetti uses the image of a beautiful woman, but her image embodies the peril of that experience. Her beauty stands for the eternally sensuous arrangement of paint on canvas that threatens to absorb the viewer into a realm of visual pleasure.

In *Lady Lilith*, total absorption in women’s beauty replaced the more measured appreciation of the Petrarchan female ideal, which praised both moral and physical beauty. The concept of Aesthetic “absorption” is drawn from contemporary criticism, that of Algernon Swinburne, and has a specific meaning in the context of Aesthetic experience and appreciation. First, absorption refers to the state of the viewer and of the figure represented in the painting. In *Lady Lilith*, the woman represented is absorbed in her own beauty, which leads the viewer to a similar state of absorbed appreciation. Second, Aesthetic absorption is distinctly related to the appreciation of feminine, “bodily” painting. This type of painting, represented by *Lady Lilith*, was almost overwhelmingly beautiful. These two qualities of Aesthetic absorption distinguish it from the prevailing understanding of the term developed by Michael Fried.<sup>234</sup> Petrarchan and *Stil Nuovo* poetry that praised the beauty of women established

---

<sup>234</sup> Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): 7-70. Fried defines absorption as a quality within the painting itself, not the viewer (10). Though he briefly mentions some Italian examples, his examination is predominantly French and designed

a foundational precedent for the appreciation of women's beauty as the metaphorical appreciation of other types of beauty (i.e. the beauty of poetry or the beauty of painting).<sup>235</sup>

### Part One: Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* and the *femme fatale*

The abundant golden hair and coldly fixed expression of the woman in *Lady Lilith* have elicited numerous critical appraisals since the painting was completed in 1869.<sup>236</sup> In the nineteenth century, associates described Rossetti's painting as an appealing yet enclosed, self-absorbed, ideal beauty. The perceived danger in *Lady Lilith* issued from the narcissism of the alluring female figure, whose beauty beckoned to the viewer like a siren upon the rocks. The woman in the painting, originally

---

to provide an evolutionary history of Modernism in which the "absorption" in French painting around 1760 represented an anti-Rococo sentiment (35). Fried spends virtually no time discussing the implications of images of erotic and alluring women in his study of absorption (58-61).

<sup>235</sup> I refer specifically to my discussion in chapter one of poetic and pictorial traditions involving the representation and appreciation of female beauty.

<sup>236</sup> The date of completion for *Lady Lilith* is most frequently given as the winter of 1868, when Rossetti wrote to the patron of the work, Frederic Richards Leyland, on January 16, to tell him that the work was nearly finished. However, Rossetti wrote again on May 5, 1869 to say that some repainting had just been done to the bottom drapery, presumably on the chair, and the work was not officially delivered until the later in the spring. Delayed delivery of this kind was typical of Rossetti's Leyland commissions. I will use the date of final completion and delivery: 1869. For the letters, see Fredeman, *Correspondence* 4, 16, 68.2; and 179-80, 69.54, respectively. For a record of the production, see the extensive entry on "Lady Lilith" in the "Double Works" section on the RHA (<http://www.rossettichive.org/docs/s205.rap.html> [Accessed 13 March 2010]), as well as the catalogue entry "*Lady Lilith*," in *Waking Dreams: The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites from the Delaware Art Museum*, ed. Stephen Wildman (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 2004): 186-188.

modeled on Cornforth, gazes at herself in a small hand mirror.<sup>237</sup> She is completely absorbed in her preening and pays no attention to the viewer.

*Lady Lilith* has maintained a prominent, though I would argue problematic, place in current literature that analyzes and defines the Victorian *femme fatale* as a beautiful and seductive, though morally corrupt, woman who actively seeks to destroy the lives of men. For decades, scholars from a range of disciplines and methodological perspectives have found cause to single out the supposedly threatening, dangerous representation in *Lady Lilith* as indicative of an important change in images of women in Aesthetic painting. Virginia Allen argues effectively that “*femme fatale*” is a twentieth-century label used to describe nineteenth-century art and literature based upon evidence that the term *femme fatale* did not appear frequently in English until the beginning of the twentieth century. The phrase might have been used in nineteenth-century France as early as 1854, but Allen’s observation remains relevant for studies of English art and literature.<sup>238</sup> This is not to say that others around Rossetti, namely Swinburne, were not creating more clear examples of the *femme fatale* that correspond

---

<sup>237</sup> In 1873, the face was repainted and replaced by the features of Rossetti’s professional model, Alexia Wilding. A watercolor replica of *Lady Lilith* (1867) with Cornforth’s features is currently in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

<sup>238</sup> For definitions of the *femme fatale*, see in particular: Virginia Allen, *Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon* (Troy: Whitston, 1983): vii-2; and Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 208-216. For usage of the term in mid-nineteenth-century France, see, Elizabeth Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006): 3.

to the above definition,<sup>239</sup> but the problem of terminology remains a pertinent one. Though recognizable now, the French phrase was not used among Rossetti and his peers, and the current concept of “*femme fatale*” does not fully accommodate the more nuanced qualities of danger and beauty in the *Lady Lilith*.

The negative associations of the *femme fatale* have led to frequent, and often reductive, comparisons between the dangerous and threatening aspects of *Lady Lilith* and the spiritual aspects of beauty in a painting of the same period, *Sibylla Palmifera* (1870, oil on canvas, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight). George Rae commissioned *Sibylla Palmifera* in 1866 shortly before Rossetti’s first meeting with Frederick Richards Leyland. It was Rossetti who first suggested the connection between *Lady Lilith* and *Sibylla Palmifera*, even offering Leyland a copy to complement *Lady Lilith*. Rossetti created many dual representations of women using pairs of portraits and corresponding poems, but the duality within *Lady Lilith* has been obscured by its connections to *Sibylla Palmifera*.<sup>240</sup> Neither painting is a

---

<sup>239</sup> See, for example, the poem “Dolores,” by Swinburne in *Poems*, 119-130. Swinburne’s use of *femme fatale* imagery is a popular topic in the large body of literature dealing with the writer’s work. For a good introduction, see Praz, *Romantic Agony*, 223-48; Allen, *Femme Fatale*, 115-156; Anthony H. Harrison, “The Swinburnean Woman,” *Philological Quarterly* 58 (1978): 90-102; and Catherine Maxwell, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001): 178-221.

<sup>240</sup> See the letter to Leyland from 9 April, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 421, 66.74. By 1868, Rossetti had connected the paintings conceptually, though he seems to have been motivated economically as well (*Correspondence* 4, 190, 69.67). When Swinburne published his review of Rossetti’s unfinished works in 1868, he described both paintings and the two poems associated with them, “Body’s Beauty” and “Soul’s Beauty.” It is primarily from the poems that scholars have discerned such divergent

straightforward representation of good or evil. It is far from clear that he thought of his representations of women as purely evil or spiritually pristine. What they share is a similar emphasis on the beauty of women. Rossetti's visual representation of Lilith is alluring and seductive, but it can hardly be considered destructive. *Lady Lilith* and the two poems associated with the painting, "Body's Beauty" (1868, 1870, 1881) and "Eden Bower" (1869, 1870, 1881), present images of Lilith ranging from passively seductive to aggressively destructive, yet they have led scholars to read the overall figure of Lilith as a *femme fatale*. The representation of female beauty in these works is complex, often contradictory, and frequently ambiguous.

In several pioneering studies, scholars have interpreted the relationship of the *femme fatale* to the major intellectual and artistic movements with which Rossetti was directly or tangentially associated – Romanticism, Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism – and in nearly all instances *Lady Lilith* has featured prominently in their investigations. Though the painting holds a prominent position today as a *femme fatale*, it is not an entirely comfortable one, for it occupies a liminal space between a familiar, well defined type of dangerous woman and a more ambiguously threatening female ideal germane to the Aesthetic understanding of the work in the 1860s. In order to fully characterize the female ideal and dangerous beauty in *Lady Lilith*, it is necessary to understand that the past was more than just an allusion.

Although he does not focus on Rossetti's work, Mario Praz's foundational text,

---

meaning in each painting. For an analysis of the poems and paintings along these lines, see Helsinger, *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts*, 154-164.

*The Romantic Agony*, created a basis from which later studies of Rossetti's painting and the Victorian *femme fatale* proceeded. Praz' detailed literary analysis provides a historical lineage of the Victorian *femme fatale*, but it also suggests the reasons and mechanisms behind the development of the trope. Several salient points from Praz' discussion of the *femme fatale* have remained vital to the debate about Aesthetic images of women. First, Praz argues that the historical construction of the *femme fatale*, which extends back to ancient literature, existed because it was partly based on fact: real dangerous women were reimagined in literature throughout history. Praz pursues his observation through comparative analyses of a broad range of texts. However, his notion that the *femme fatale* is based on a reflection, even an imaginative one, of historical fact is an assertion that feminist scholars, including Virginia Allen, have sought to revise through their socio-historical examination of literary texts and works of art.<sup>241</sup> Second, Praz argues that notable examples of the *femme fatale* existed before the nineteenth century, but that the "complete form" is inexorably identified with Romanticism specifically. Praz describes the major features of the treacherous female type that developed fully at the height of Romanticism in French, German, Russian, Spanish, and English literature: she is murderous, seductive, vampiric, exotic, and,

---

<sup>241</sup> Praz' argument is worth quoting in part so that the paradox of his subtlety and heavy-handedness is not lost. According to Praz, the *femme fatale* can be traced back to ancient mythology and has its basis there because "mythology and literature are imaginative reflections of the various aspects of real life and real life has always provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female characters" (199).

above all, beautiful.<sup>242</sup> Third and last, Praz draws a connection between a projection of the self into history and what he calls the “exoticist” tendency in Romantic literature. The Romantics, in pursuit of sensual, tangible aesthetic experience, sought examples of expression from the past, which they then emulated and molded into an exoticized and idealized fantasy. The *femme fatale* is an important component of the exoticist’s repertoire because of her existence throughout time in the figure of such debauched and violent women as Cleopatra and Lucrezia Borgia.<sup>243</sup> To illustrate this point, Praz uses Swinburne’s description of Michelangelo’s *Cleopatra* (black chalk and pencil, 1533-1534, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) from his “Old Masters” essay to demonstrate the Romantic preoccupation with conjuring a type of “unrestrained, imperious, cruel beauty,” that typified the Romantic *femme fatale*.<sup>244</sup> While Praz identifies the use of the past as an important aspect of the “exotic” Romantic (i.e. Aesthetic) construction of

---

<sup>242</sup> Praz identifies the primary characteristics and examples of the *femme fatale* (201-219) that formed the foundation of later studies, including Virginia Allen’s more focused *Femme Fatale*.

<sup>243</sup> Praz presents his “exoticist” construction as the dialectical complement to the “mystic,” or one who seeks inspiration outside the visible world in sources such as the divine. The mystic denies the pleasure of sensual aesthetic experience whereas the exoticist makes a point to seek it out. For the exoticist, the source of such pleasure comes from recreating a sensual and vibrant version of the past as a form of contemporary expression (210-211).

<sup>244</sup> In fact, Swinburne is given preference over Baudelaire in Praz’ study, which marks a distinctive turn in the study of Swinburne’s work. Praz argues that the women in Swinburne’s poetry, stories, and criticism represent a very “complete form” of the *femme fatale* (223-48). Within his oeuvre, Praz identifies Swinburne’s “Old Master’s” essay as one of the most “influential” contemporary examples of the *femme fatale* (249-252). Swinburne and Baudelaire frequently have been linked in subsequent studies. See the analysis by Patricia Clements, “Strange Flowers: Some Notes on the Baudelaire of Swinburne and Pater,” *Modern Language Review* 76, no. 1 (Jan 1981): 20-30.

the *femme fatale*, he ultimately does so in a very general way:

The influence of the crime-stained Renaissance of the Elizabethan dramatists, the gory Middle Ages of the Pre-Raphaelites, and, shortly afterwards, of Gautier's orgiastic Antiquity and Baudelaire's grim Modernity; finally the Ate of Greek Tragedy, the implacable doctrine of the Old Testament, and the cruel nihilistic hedonism of Sade – all these were sources which flowed easily into one single stream and found a natural bed in a mind such as Swinburne's, which was predisposed to receive them.<sup>245</sup>

My argument regarding the Aesthetic emphasis on dangerous women in the work of Rossetti and Swinburne adds specificity to Praz' more general claim by elucidating the relationship between Renaissance tradition and Aesthetic experience.

Virginia Allen's study of the *femme fatale* builds upon the foundation of Praz' text and expands its arguments in several important ways. Like Praz, Allen's study is primarily literary, though she expands her scope to encompass visual art, including two chapters devoted to Rossetti and his relationship Swinburne. A further distinction of Allen's text is her feminist methodology, particularly regarding the idea of the "Eternal Feminine," or the duality of good and evil associated with idealized femininity in Romantic literature, which was an equally pivotal concept for Praz.<sup>246</sup> She takes issue with Praz' argument that the *femme fatale* can be traced back to antiquity as well as his unsupported claim that the type of representation is based in reality. She investigates the historical, social, cultural, and sexual aspects of the *femme fatale*, while Praz limits his scope considerably by examining the literary works in near isolation (though, to be fair,

---

<sup>245</sup> Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 228.

<sup>246</sup> *Das Ewigweibliche* ("the Eternal Feminine") is a notable theme of Goethe's *Faust*, which established the concept in Romantic literature.



that was his stated intention).<sup>247</sup> Allen argues that the *femme fatale* is an archetype rooted in deep-seated sexual anxiety. She further contends that anxiety related to dark aspects of the “eternal feminine” resulted in the creation of the *femme fatale*, which was a stereotype specific to the nineteenth-century. Although hers is not one I pursue, Allen’s formulation of the psychological basis for *femme fatale* imagery is a frequently cited concept, both directly and indirectly, in discussions of Rossetti’s work.<sup>248</sup> The historical case that she provides to support her claim is more suggestive than affirmative. For example, she implies that the general Victorian anxiety about the New Woman and suffrage contributed to Rossetti’s imagery in *Lady Lilith*. Though the connection is plausible, the evidence to substantiate or repudiate Rossetti’s support of women’s issues is equivocal.<sup>249</sup>

---

<sup>247</sup> See Allen’s preface and first chapter in *Femme Fatale*, and specifically vii-x; and 1-11. Compare to the discussion of the classical roots of the *femme fatale* in Praz, *Romantic Agony*, 199-200.

<sup>248</sup> For the specifics of Allen’s argument on this matter, see *Femme Fatale*, 6-10. For evidence of Allen’s effect on the direction of scholarship, see Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 174-175; Casteras, “The End of the Century and Conflicting Fantasies of Femininity,” in *Writings about Art*, ed. Carole Gold Calo (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1994): 181-193; and Bullen, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Mirror of Masculine Desire,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 21, no. 3 (1999): 329-352.

<sup>249</sup> Virginia Allen, “One Strangling Golden Hair,” 285-294. Allen’s claim that Rossetti associated Lilith with the New Woman relies heavily upon two documents. The first is a letter that he received in 1869 from a writer at *The Athenaeum* relating Lilith to contemporary feminism. See the letter from Ponsonby A. Lyons, which W. M. Rossetti dated to around November 1869: William Michael Rossetti, ed., *Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870: A Compilation by William Michael Rossetti* (New York: Schribner’s, 1903): 483-486. The second is a letter from Rossetti to the amateur poet and physician Thomas G. Hake from 21 April 1870 in which Rossetti discusses *Lady Lilith* and refers to the idea of the feminine “perilous principle.” Fredeman, *Correspondence* 4, 449-451,

In describing the place of *Lady Lilith* within Aestheticism and the history of the *femme fatale*, Allen and others have distinguished between the fatality in Rossetti's painting and earlier types of representation, including Renaissance images of women.<sup>250</sup> Such a distinction is premised upon the idea that the true *femme fatale* is a uniquely nineteenth-century invention. Allen demarcates nineteenth-century fatal representations from earlier examples of simply "erotic" paintings of women by artists including Titian, Rubens, and Boucher.<sup>251</sup> In her analysis, and particularly in her distinction between erotic and fatal representations of women, Allen does not account for the way in which the *femme fatale* of Victorian artists was greatly affected by frequent contact with, enthusiasm for, and creative interest in the Renaissance. The Aesthetic interpretation of the Renaissance provided formidable examples of dangerous women. Arguably, Praz was entirely correct in his identification of dangerous women in art and literature since at least the Renaissance.<sup>252</sup> Allen's distinction between erotic and fatal representation

---

70.110. I do not wish to act as an apologist for Victorian misogyny in its many forms; however, Rossetti does not seem to have been a stringent activist for or against women's rights during the 1860s. His visual and textual works and relationships with women throughout this period were subject to the prevailing codes of Victorian femininity, sexuality, and morality, though they do not always conform to them. Many scholars have investigated this issue on a modest scale (e.g. Bullen, *Pre-Raphaelite Body*), but a lengthy study is past due.

<sup>250</sup> Allen, "One Strangling Golden Hair," 287-288; Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 218-220.

<sup>251</sup> Allen, *Femme Fatale*, 10-11.

<sup>252</sup> Duality, paradox, and "fatality" have a long history in images of women, and many instances can be found in representations of women in Renaissance art and literature. For example, see the discussion of paradox in Renaissance literature in Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton

provides a false sense of linear history in the representation of women, and it does not account for Aesthetic attitudes toward Renaissance painting and poetry. Allen's distinction also obscures the possibility that artists in the nineteenth century could have viewed a Titian, such as *Woman with a Mirror*, as both dangerous and erotic.

More effectively than any other scholar, Allen has argued that the *femme fatale* was integral to the development of Aestheticism and she has also established an important place for *Lady Lilith* within that relationship. She draws an explicit connection between the appearance of the *femme fatale* and the theoretical development of Aestheticism, or, more generally, the sensual aspects of "art for art's sake" associated with art and literature in France and England. According to Allen, the *femme fatale* was representative of a larger shift in artistic theory associated Aestheticism, which, she argues, questioned the academic and mimetic basis of art. The quintessentially avant-garde, non-academic basis of the *femme fatale* (i.e. in the representation of her body and sexuality) make her an important metaphor of Aestheticism. There are many examples of academic painting that refute Allen's claim about the avant-garde and non-mimetic basis of the *femme fatale*, but her connection between the representation of women and Aestheticism remains relevant in current scholarship.<sup>253</sup>

---

University Press, 1966): 3-40. Specific types of women manifested this perceived paradox and duality. A good explanation of this tendency can be found in Elena Ciletti, "Patriarchal Ideology in the Renaissance Iconology of Judith," in *Refiguring Women: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, eds. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991): 35-70.

<sup>253</sup> Allen presents part of her argument with regard to Baudelaire and part in reference to Victorian Aestheticism. For each part of her argument, see, respectively, *Femme*

Building on Allen's study of *Lady Lilith*, Kathy Psomiades, Christopher Greger, and David Riede have all examined Rossetti's place in creating an Aesthetic female ideal. Most notably, Psomiades has argued that the beauty of women, of which the *femme fatale* was a subset, was a primary visual mechanism of Aestheticism. The representation of a beautiful woman in *Lady Lilith* generated cultural, sexual, and political meanings, but it formed the primary Aesthetic meaning as well, though each aspect is far from distinct. Greger goes beyond Allen and Psomiades by claiming that the *femme fatale* was the ultimate manifestation of Aestheticism's "masochistic" ideology. In short, the representation of dangerous and threatening women reveals a complex relationship between Aestheticism and what Greger characterizes as patriarchal Victorian literature. Riede endeavors to incorporate Rossetti's ideal of female beauty into Praz's conception of the *femme fatale*. Riede argues that Rossetti's portraits of women offer a vision of beauty that can be interpreted as a metaphor of artistic genius threatened by itself.<sup>254</sup>

---

*Fatale*, 80; and 141. There are many examples of artists who worked almost wholly within traditional academic structures and still share much in common with nonacademic Aesthetic artists, like Rossetti. Sir Frederic Leighton is perhaps the best-known example, and Prettejohn discusses his work at length in *Art for Art's Sake*. Frederic Sandys too showed work frequently at the RA and other institutional venues. His *Medea* (1868) is discussed in detail in Swinburne and WM Rossetti's pamphlet of the same year, and it is useful to compare the critical treatment of academic and non-academic Aesthetic painting.

<sup>254</sup> Psomiades' excellent study of *Lady Lilith* relates the work to the original context of its display at Leyland's Prince's Gate mansion and can be found in *Beauty's Body*, 94-133. For a concise synopsis of the argument in *Beauty's Body*, also see the short article by Psomiades: "Beauty's Body: Gender Ideology and British Aestheticism," *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 1 (Autumn 1992): 31-52. See also Greger's introduction in

I value the excellent work of the scholars just mentioned, yet my departure is a\* means of understanding of *Lady Lilith* as at least partially rooted in Rossetti's interpretation of the Petrarchan ideal. *Lady Lilith* represents a subtle mix of danger and beauty, which informed Rossetti's interpretation of Petrarchan tradition. Equally, the Aesthetic interpretation of the Petrarchan model, in which sensual beauty is admired and idealized, served as a basis for visualizing the problem of Aesthetic experience without moral restraint. In *Lady Lilith*, Rossetti accomplished this by painting the intoxicating, all-consuming beauty of a woman.

#### Part Two: Danger and Beauty: the Genesis of *Lady Lilith*

*Lady Lilith* presents a subtle display of threatening imagery, apparent in the associated poems and several studies produced between 1866 and 1869.<sup>255</sup> The precise nature of the term *femme fatale* and its origins in Rossetti's painting are open to multiple interpretations, but none have satisfactorily addressed the ambiguous mix of alluring and dangerous beauty in *Lady Lilith*, so focused have they been on considering the painting an example of a destructive *femme fatale*. Rossetti's interpretation of female portraiture from the Renaissance and Petrarchan poetry served as a basis of his ambiguously dangerous female type. The woman portrayed in *Lady Lilith* attracted and

---

"Aestheticism and the Femme Fatale" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1998): 1-44; and Riede, "Apocalyptic Portraits," 65-76.

<sup>255</sup> During this period, Rossetti produced approximately eight studies and one replica of the painting. Each known study is illustrated on the RHA: McGann, ed., "Double Works Exhibit, Body's Beauty," <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/2-1867.s205.raw.html> (Accessed 14 March 2010).

mesmerized through her beauty alone. She was dangerous, but in an entirely passive manner. In this way, her beauty and its effect on the viewer stood for the effect of “bodily” beauty in Aesthetic experience.

*Lady Lilith* is a sensual display of female flesh and flowers. She sits placidly at the center of the canvas upon a luxurious fur-lined coat drawing a comb through the glistening waves of her hair. Golden strands catch the light that shines over her fair skin. She is surrounded by intoxicating blossoms – a red poppy on the right, a branch of white roses behind her, and foxgloves on the left.<sup>256</sup> Two mirrors feature prominently in the painting. Lilith clasps one in her left hand and gazes intently at her own reflection as she tends to her tresses. The second appears in the upper left-hand corner of the image and reflects an Edenic summer landscape. Her loveliness beckons, even drives the viewer to distraction, but she does nothing overtly *terrible*. She certainly does not appear destructively fatal like typically vengeful *femmes fatales* of Romantic myth and history – Salome, Cleopatra, Lamia, and so on. The woman in

---

<sup>256</sup> Though the “language of flowers” has proven to be a fruitful analytical tool in Rossetti’s work, I will not pursue it at length here because others have dealt thoroughly with the flower symbolism in *Lady Lilith*. Traditional analysis has interpreted the flowers according to Victorian iconographical standards, which themselves have older roots in the Renaissance: the white roses representing the coldness of the soul, the red poppy representing sleep and death, and the foxglove representing paralysis and death. For a more lengthy analysis on this topic, see the work of Sarah Phelps Smith in “From Allegory to Symbol” Rossetti’s Renaissance Roots and His Influence on Continental Symbolism,” in *Pre-Raphaelite Art in Its European Context*, 65; as well as “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith* and the Language of Flowers,” *Arts Magazine* 53, no. 6 (Feb 1979): 142-145. For an expanded analysis that suggests mythological and biblical connections of the flowers within the painting, see the commentary on the RHA as well as Allen, “One Strangling Golden Hair,” 291, in which she also associates the roses with Venus.

*Lady Lilith* is seemingly not the actively destructive, morally corrupt *femme fatale* that appears in the descriptions of Praz and Allen. That is due in part to Rossetti's compositional choices – the blousy body, languid movement, full and fragrant blooms – that are more intoxicating than threatening; it is due equally to the obscurity of Lilith's legend, both today and in the 1860s. Her fatality exists within an otherwise typical image in Rossetti's *oeuvre* – that of a buxom, flaxen-haired, scantily clad, embowered woman.

In Talmudic tradition, Lilith was the first wife of Adam. God created Lilith and Adam simultaneously, and as Adam's equal she refused to submit to his dominance, relinquishing her rights to live in the Garden of Eden. From that point in Lilith's legend, various myths conceive of her in different ways. A common nineteenth-century myth of Lilith featured her banishment to Hell, where she consorted with demons and transformed into a succubus, or a night demon preying on the souls of men. One of the atrocities for which this "Queen of Demons" was most infamous was absconding with newborn infants.<sup>257</sup>

Rossetti's act of titling is the only thing that connects *Lady Lilith* directly with

---

<sup>257</sup> Most nineteenth-century accounts of Lilith were drawn from analyses of the Talmud and folklore. There does seem to have been increased interest in her legend during the Victorian period, but the subject of *Lady Lilith* was not overtly recognizable to contemporary audiences, as evidenced by Rossetti's need to explain the painting. For example, see his letter to Hake (*Correspondence* 4, 449-451). For an expanded contextualization of the "Lilith" subject during this period, see Katharine M. Briggs, "The Legends of Lilith and of the Wandering Jew in Nineteenth-Century Literature," *Folklore* 92, no. 2 (1981): 132-33; and by the same author, "Folklore in Nineteenth-Century English Literature," *Folklore* 83, no. 3 (1972): 194-209.

the Talmudic Lilith, whose name traditionally indicated a hairy demon and translates from Babylonian as “screech owl.”<sup>258</sup> Were it not for the fact that Rossetti had the title and a sonnet, “Lady Lilith” (now known as “Body’s Beauty”), engraved on the frame surrounding the painting, the allusion to Lilith would have been indecipherable to most viewers. Evidence to support Rossetti’s knowledge of Talmudic tradition exists, but his encounters with such literature occurred well after the initial commission of *Lady Lilith* by Frederick Richards Leyland in 1866.<sup>259</sup> It is considerably more likely that his conception of the painting, including his ideas about sensual and dangerous images of women, owe more to sources outside biblical literature, and that the title “Lady Lilith” was more incidental than literal.

Scholars, most notably Virginia Allen, have argued that Rossetti was more likely to have gained his early knowledge of Lilith from nineteenth-century literature and that his conception of her as a *femme fatale* was deeply rooted in the Romanticism.

---

<sup>258</sup> Briggs, “Legends of Lilith,” 132. The first naming of Lilith (identifying her as a different figure entirely than Eve) occurs in Isaiah 34:14.

<sup>259</sup> Virginia Allen has argued that Rossetti’s historical knowledge and conception of Lilith was garnered from secondary sources, including John Kitto, *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature, 3rd Edition, Enlarged and Improved*, ed. William Lindsay Alexander, et. al (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1864): 834-5; however, she does not establish firmly when or if Rossetti used this source. For Allen’s explanation of the connection between Rossetti and Kitto, see *Femme Fatale*, 137; and note 61, 154. At the time of his estate sale, Rossetti owned a different two-volume work by Kitto, which Allen does not mention: *The Pictorial History of Palestine and the Holy Land, Including a Complete History of the Jews* (London: C. Knight, 1844), and while that work does not illustrate scenes from Genesis, it further bolsters her claim. Also see the letter to Rossetti from Ponsonby A. Lyons (see previous note). It seems fair to say that Rossetti was interested in the biblical figure of Lilith when he was composing the poem “Eden Bower” (1869), but his knowledge before that point is difficult to establish.



Lilith makes a fleeting but impressive appearance as a beautiful witch in Goethe's *Faust, Part One* (1808). Rossetti had long been interested in the characters and themes of *Faust*, but his decision to conceive of his work as a "Lilith" subject coincided with his renewed interest in Lilith's cameo in the play.<sup>260</sup> Her short scene establishes one of the most important attributes in Rossetti's representation of her – her glorious hair:

Faust: Who is that?  
Mephistopheles: Mark her well! That's Lilith.  
Faust: Who?  
Mephistopheles: Adam's first wife.  
    Of her rich locks beware!  
    That charm in which she's paralleled by few;  
    When in its toils a youth she does ensnare,  
    He will not soon escape, I promise you.<sup>261</sup>

This passage appears in a notebook that Rossetti used regularly between 1863 to 1869 and confirms his interest in Goethe's conception of Lilith at the time he was imagining his own. At some point during this period, Rossetti obtained a copy of Percy Bysshe Shelley's (1792-1822) translation of *Faust* as well as Goethe's original text in German.

---

<sup>260</sup> Allen gives special emphasis to the figure of Lilith in her history of the *femme fatale*. See her analysis of *Faust* and comparison of Rossetti and Goethe in *Femme Fatale*, 21-22; and 128-134, respectively. Further explanation is provided in Allen, "One Strangling Golden Hair," 285-294. Tantalizingly, Allen notes that *Faust* was performed in London in 1864, the year some assert Rossetti conceived of his painting and poem, "Body's Beauty." In her *catalogue raisonné*, Surtees suggests that work began on the painting as early as 1864 (116-118). After reviewing Rossetti's correspondence, the curatorial files at the Delaware Art Museum, and the evidence available on the RHA, I am not yet convinced by the assertion of the early date. I have not found any secure mention of the picture until 1866, when Rossetti offered the painting to Leyland: see the letter to Leyland, 9 April 1866, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 421, 66.74.

<sup>261</sup> Quoted in Allen, *Femme Fatale*, 21. Allen quotes from J. W. von Goethe, *Faust, in Two Parts*, trans. Anna Swanwick (London: George Bell and Sons, 1879).

Rossetti recorded the above passage in German, Shelley's translation, and then his own translation in his notebook.<sup>262</sup> The evidence supports the notion that Rossetti's Lilith

---

<sup>262</sup> The notebook in question is *Notebook I* (1863-1869, Duke University Library): 5. The document is also available on the RHA: McGann, ed., "Notebook Pages (*Notebook I*, Duke Library), Textual Transcription," <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/nb0002.duke.rad.html> (Accessed 14 March 2010). The translations and transcriptions are worth providing here because, as Allen notes ("One Strangling Golden Hair," 291), variations in Rossetti's own translation alter the meaning of the exchange slightly, making his own translation of Mephistopheles' statement about Lilith more emphatic and threatening.

Rossetti's transcription of Goethe:

Wer ist denn das?  
Betrachte sie genau:  
Lilith ist das.  
Wer?  
Adam's erste Frau.  
Nimm dich in Acht vor ihren schönen  
Haaren,  
Vor diesem Schmuck, mit dem sie einzig  
prangt!  
Wenn sie damit den jungen Mann  
erlangt,  
So lässt sie ihn sobald nicht wieder fahren

Rossetti's transcription of Shelley's translation:

F. Who is that yonder?  
M. Mark her well. It is  
Lilith.  
F. Who?  
M. Lilith, the first wife of Adam.  
Beware of her fair hair, for she excels  
All women in the magic of her locks:  
And, when she winds them around a  
young man's neck,  
She will not ever set him free again.

Rossetti's own translation of the final statement by Mephistopheles:

was not strictly biblical, but emerged from a variety of sources.

In *Faust*, Goethe offers a glimpse of Lilith as an intoxicating beauty, as a seductress who catches her victims in the glimmering web of her hair. The emphasis on Lilith's siren-like beauty developed into a crucial component of Rossetti's painting as well as his two poems dealing with the subject. "Body's Beauty" and "Eden Bower" expand upon Rossetti's conception of the Lilith subject by offering a new dimension of fatality to her character and actions that does not exist in his original visual representation. In "Body's Beauty," the poem inscribed on the frame of the painting, Lilith is described as a "witch" with "enchanted hair."<sup>263</sup> The sonnet does not narrate the story of Lilith but rather the danger of her eternal and irresistible beauty, which "Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,/Till heart and body and life are in its hold."<sup>264</sup>

"Eden Bower," composed in 1869 after "Body's Beauty" and the conception of *Lady Lilith*, does more to narrate the story of Lilith, and it is from this later poem that

---

Hold thou thy heart against her shining hair,  
If by thy fate she spread it once for thee.  
For when she nets a young man in that snare,  
So twines she him he never may be free

<sup>263</sup> The poem inscribed on the painting, "Lady Lilith," differs only slightly from the later published versions (in line 11, "soft-shed fingers" was changed to "soft-shed kisses"). The earliest published text, quoted directly from the frame, can be found in Swinburne's description of Rossetti's work in his *Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition*, 211-213. Also see the commentary provided for "Body's Beauty" on the RHA.

<sup>264</sup> Marsh, *Collected Writings*, 314.

scholars have drawn their strongest evidence of Rossetti's preoccupation with the threatening, destructive form of the true *femme fatale*.<sup>265</sup> "Eden Bower" describes Lilith's conflict with Adam, expulsion from Eden, and her transformation into a serpent, her primordial, original form. In snake form, Lilith enters Eden and tempts Eve out of vengeful spite. The poem ends on an ominous note – an allusion to the birth of Cain and Abel, whose bloody rivalry was largely over Lilith in Talmudic tradition.<sup>266</sup> "Eden Bower" not only presents a more destructive version of Lilith, it also demonstrates Rossetti's eventual contact with a more historical account of her legend. In 1869, Rossetti produced a startlingly provocative study of a nude woman embracing a large serpent (*Eden Bower*, pen and ink on paper, Private Collection). The image provides ample contrast to *Lady Lilith*, in which no such act of bestial seduction confronts the viewer

Examining *Lady Lilith* as a group with poems "Body's Beauty" and "Eden's Bower" falsely exaggerates the danger of the image. Certainly, "Body's Beauty" is engraved below the painting, and a relationship is implied, but the painting and poems must also be considered as distinct forms of representation. The painting was begun

---

<sup>265</sup> Marsh, *Collected Writings*, 259-264. Considering the nature of the poem's subject, it is difficult not to view the Lilith of "Eden Bower" as what Allen calls a "full blown" *femme fatale*, or one actively seeking danger. If, in fact, this were the consistent imagery throughout each of the poems and the painting, as well as an additional six studies and one water color replica, then that would be another matter entirely. As it stands, however, the representation of Lilith presented by the group of pictorial and poetic images is overwhelmingly one of self-absorbed but less actively dangerous beauty.

<sup>266</sup> Marsh, *Collected Writings*, 264. For the Cain and Abel rivalry over Lilith, see Briggs, "Legends of Lilith," 132.

before either poem, and its relationship to other aspects of female beauty is more varied than current discussions have acknowledged. The poem “Body’s Beauty” does not function as a mere verbal explanation for *Lady Lilith* (and vice versa).<sup>267</sup> The representation of danger and beauty throughout the visual and textual productions is far from monolithic. Within *Lady Lilith* and the poems, two aspects of her danger emerge: first, Lilith’s passive ability to draw men to her through beauty alone; and second, her actively threatening sexual prowess and hair. Each invokes a metaphor of sexual attraction and seduction and relies equally on female beauty to convey meaning to the viewer/reader. The first aspect represents a relatively passive mode of representation and admiration whereby the viewer is drawn to Lilith’s beauty (and the beauty of the painting). The last two are active, aggressive, and destructive and comprise the accepted aspects of *Lady Lilith* as a “full blown” *femme fatale*.

The imagery of Lilith’s hair provides a good starting point for illustrating the ambiguous danger of *Lady Lilith* and its relationship to past representations of women. In *Lady Lilith*, her most dangerous quality is her vanity and her most threatening action the admiration of her gorgeous, cascading hair. The hair itself is mesmerizing but so is the imaginative relationship between Lilith’s appreciation of her hair and the viewer’s appreciation of it. Unlike the Lilith poems or even the vision of Lilith in *Faust* in which the hair is an actively destructive weapon that traps, ensnares, and strangles, the painted

---

<sup>267</sup> See two recent interpretations of just this sort of interconnected textual/visual meaning in *Lady Lilith*: Martin, “Aesthetically Saturated Readings,” 51-55; and Helsing, *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts*, 156-162.

hair in *Lady Lilith* attracts but does no obvious harm.<sup>268</sup> The danger, if it can be called that, is much more subtle.

The origins of *Lady Lilith* and the importance of hair offer important clues about Rossetti's early conception of the painting in relation to his ideal of "bodily" beauty. When Rossetti responded to Frederick Leyland's request for an original commission in early April 1866, he had apparently begun the painting already or at least had the idea in mind as indicated by his description of the work: "It's colour chiefly white and silver, with a great mass of golden hair."<sup>269</sup> Though he worked steadily on the painting starting in April, it was not until August that Rossetti used the title "Lady Lilith" to describe it in his correspondence with Leyland or anyone else. Until then, and even after, he referred to the painting as a "hair picture," and a "Toilet picture," drawing an implied connection to his earlier images of women combing their hair, including *Fazio's Mistress*.<sup>270</sup> To rejoin my discussion of the earlier painting from the first

---

<sup>268</sup> In Victorian literature, the image of golden hair was used repeatedly to symbolize beauty, seduction, and murderous destruction. In Rossetti's work, the image recurs in his drawing of Keats' *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (1855). For a comprehensive analysis of how Rossetti and his contemporaries adapted the imagery of golden hair from English folklore and European Romanticism, see Elizabeth G. Gitter, "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," *PMLA* 99, no. 5 (Oct 1984): 936-954.

<sup>269</sup> Rossetti's description of the painting is in his first letter to Leyland, 9 April 1866, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 421, 66.74.

<sup>270</sup> Rossetti's use of the formal title occurred in a letter to Leyland after he visited Rossetti's studio to view the painting and paid for it in full: letter of 3 August 1866, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 457-457, 66.136. To James Smetham on 1 August 1866, Rossetti referred to *Lady Lilith* as "my picture with the hair" (*ibid.*, 456, 66.133. To John H. Trist on 23 April 1866 and Frances Rossetti on 24 August 1866, Rossetti called the painting a "Toilet picture" (*ibid.*, 426-427, 66.84.1; 462-464, 66.144, respectively).

chapter, *Fazio's Mistress* was titled after Rossetti's translation of Fazio degli Uberti's *canzone* about the poet's beloved, Angiola of Verona. The most striking lines of the *canzone* are the first, which read: "I look at the crisp golden-threaded hair/Whereof, to thrall my heart, Love twists a net."<sup>271</sup> Rossetti's translation dates from 1861, predating his notebook entry about Goethe by at least two years.

Rossetti's description of *Lady Lilith* as a "Toilet picture" underlines the conceptual connection to Venetian painting and the representation of feminine, "bodily" beauty like that in *Fazio's Mistress*, *Bocca Baciata*, and *The Blue Bower*. The seductive quality of watching a woman comb her hair is literally enacted in Titian's painting, in which a male figure holds a mirror for the lady caressing the strands of her hair. The viewer shares in his visual enjoyment. For Rossetti, who thought of the painting as a representation of Titian's "mistress," the scene was highly erotic.<sup>272</sup> The painting was erotic because of its subject, a beautiful woman, but also because Rossetti believed her to be artist's lover. For Rossetti, the painting was a record of Titian's admiration of and desire for his mistress' sensual beauty.

*Lady Lilith* was produced during a time in which Rossetti, his friends, and his

---

<sup>271</sup> Marsh, *Collected Writings*, 70. In her 1984 article, Allen noted the compositional similarities among Titian's *Woman with a Mirror*, *Fazio's Mistress*, and *Lady Lilith*. She also introduced the lines of Uberti's *canzone* but merely as a source of similar imagery (the hair) to that in Goethe's *Faust*. My contention is that the Renaissance sources deserve their own further analysis. Allen, "One Strangling Golden Hair," 287-291.

<sup>272</sup> Refer to the discussion in chapter one of Rossetti's photograph of Titian's painting bearing the inscription, "Titian's Mistress" as well as other Victorian attitudes regarding this important work.

patron actively pursued works from and knowledge about the Renaissance. His exposure to Renaissance art during the time he worked on *Lady Lilith* (1866-1869) was much broader than just Fazio's *canzone* and Titian's portrait, indicating his intense engagement with the past. He and his friends regularly sought out exhibits, private dealers, and shops where Renaissance art was on display.<sup>273</sup> A mutual friend of Rossetti and Swinburne, Charles Augustus Howell, acquired a (supposed) Tintoretto at an auction in 1866, and Rossetti expressed his delight at seeing the work in person.<sup>274</sup> Rossetti also attempted to acquire works by Renaissance artists and did so successfully when he purchased Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady (Smerelda Brandini)* in 1867.<sup>275</sup> Perhaps most important was Rossetti's relationship with Leyland, the patron who commissioned *Lady Lilith*, and who was quickly becoming one of the preeminent

---

<sup>273</sup> Just before securing the commission from Leyland, Rossetti wrote to FG Stephens, who regularly wrote articles on Renaissance art for *The Athenaeum*, to say he had seen a female portrait by Sebastiano del Piombo in a shop: 12 March 1866, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 407-408, 66.51. On 3 April, he asks GP Boyce to go examine a Velazquez landscape that he was thinking of purchasing in another shop (*Correspondence*, 416, 66.67). In a letter to Burne-Jones on 7 May, he claimed to have a Velazquez, Carpaccio, Leonardo, and Luini to show the artist (*Correspondence*, 435, 66.96). While on a restive visit to Penkill Castle, Rossetti reported to his brother that he had seen "many things worth seeing" including a Botticelli, a Carpaccio, and "heads" by Titian, Moroni, Bellini, and Velazquez: 26 September 1868, *Correspondence* 4, 103-104, 68.137.

<sup>274</sup> See the letter to Howell from 17 June 1866, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 3, 450, 66.119.

<sup>275</sup> On 22 March 1867, Rossetti wrote to Howell to ask him to purchase the Botticelli on his behalf (*Correspondence*, 518, 67.41). Nine days later, he wrote to thank Howell's wife, Catherine, for sending him a new frame for the "medieval lady's portrait" (*Correspondence*, 520, 67.45). In April he apparently had some heavy restoration work done on the painting, indicated in his letter to Henry Merritt (*Correspondence*, 523, 67.51).



collectors of Italian Renaissance painting and works by Aesthetic artists.<sup>276</sup>

Traditions from the Renaissance (visual and literary) played a formal and *conceptual* role in the type of female beauty represented in *Lady Lilith*. It is the conceptual nature of Rossetti's engagement with Renaissance art and poetry that has been lacking from assessments of his version of the *femme fatale*. Though other factors certainly affected the development of the painting, it is crucially important to view the work in terms of its relationship to what was a vital element of the Aesthetic environment of the 1860s. If *Lady Lilith* is understood as a group with Titian's *Woman with a Mirror*, Fazio's *Mistriss* and Fazio's *canzone*, then another image emerges than the one currently depicted in *femme fatale* scholarship. The type of woman represented in this reordered conception of *Lady Lilith* is self-absorbed, enclosed, but not threatening in an active way. In all cases, the lady in question does not acknowledge the viewer/reader. She contemplates her own thoughts, her own environment, and her own beauty. The viewer/reader is drawn to her by virtue of her beauty but also her contemplation of herself, which is absorbing. This type of woman is dangerous in her own way because her beauty is consuming, but she does not actively seek to destroy her lover (i.e the viewer/reader). It is the danger of becoming as absorbed as she in her

---

<sup>276</sup> Rossetti's relationship with Leyland began as austere professional but quickly warmed into a lasting and important friendship that resulted in many of Rossetti's most well known commissions after 1866. Rossetti visited Leyland's Elizabethan estate, Speke Hall, in 1868, where he likely saw Leyland's growing collection of Renaissance paintings. For background on the personal and professional relationship between Rossetti and Leyland, see the introduction in *The Rossetti-Leyland Letters: The Correspondence of an Artist and his Patron*, ed. Francis L. Fennell Jr. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1978): ix-xxxii.

beauty that persistently plagues the viewer/reader. Though different from the current conception of the *femme fatale*, this more ambiguously dangerous female ideal is more in keeping with Rossetti's interpretation of past tradition and the role of women's beauty in Aesthetic experience.

### Part Three: Absorption and Aesthetic Experience in *Lady Lilith*

The connections between *Lady Lilith* and Renaissance art and poetry align the painting, to a certain degree, with a version of idealized female beauty present throughout centuries of representations. *Lady Lilith* represents the Aesthetic interpretation of the Petrarchan ideal. By emphasizing "bodily" beauty in images like *Lady Lilith*, Aesthetic artists and writers reimagined a foundational historical ideal in order to represent their concerns about contemporary art. The significance of connecting *Lady Lilith* with the Petrarchan ideal goes beyond enriching the current interpretation of Rossetti's representational choices. The connection suggests a new way to consider the fundamental expression of Aesthetic experience in paintings of women.

The Petrarchan ideal praised physical perfection and moral virtue – an important duality that was broken down into specific characteristics like those that appear throughout Fazio's *canzone*. The closing lines of the *canzone* justly describe the balance between moral and physical perfection:

That since the first fair woman ever made,  
Not one can have display'd  
More power upon all hearts than this one doth;  
Because in her are both  
Loveliness and the soul's true excellence :-

And yet (woe's me!) is pity absent thence?<sup>277</sup>

The very last line suggests that Fazio's lady is without pity for his longing and desire. In the lyric construct of Petrarchism, the poet's longing for his beloved and unfulfilled desire resulted in the creation of an idealized portrait of an unobtainable (i.e. unrequited, dead, or simply imagined) woman.<sup>278</sup>

Visual representations of women from the Renaissance often corresponded to the earlier poetic ideal, whether the portrait was of a wealthy patrician woman, like Rossetti's Botticelli portrait of Smerelda Brandini, or a completely allegorical fantasy portrait, such as his *Ideal Portrait of a Woman (Simonetta Vespucci)* (1480-1485, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt).<sup>279</sup> The portrait of Smerelda Brandini represents a patrician woman, but with many of the idealized features described in Fazio's *canzone*. Golden hair, fair skin, rosy lips and cheeks, high forehead, penciled brows, and straight nose are readily shared between the *canzone* and the portrait. The Botticelli portrait, like the *canzone*, also gives many indications of its subject's virtue. In the portrait, likely made a short time after marriage and in accordance with custom of the time,

---

<sup>277</sup> Marsh, *Collected Writings*, 70-72.

<sup>278</sup> For a very succinct overview of how the female ideal of vernacular poetry changed from the early *Stil Novo* poets to Petrarch's love poems in the mid-fourteenth century, see Victoria Kirkham, "Poetic Ideals of Love and Beauty," in *Virtue and Beauty*, 49-61. Elizabeth Cropper has argued that the "presence" in portraits of women from the Renaissance is really an "absence" based upon the imaginative construction of idealized female beauty in Petrarchan poetry: "Beauty of Woman," 175-190.

<sup>279</sup> For conventions of female portraiture in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and how those conventions relate to the Petrarchan ideal, see Woods-Marsden, "Portrait of a Lady," in *Virtue and Beauty*, 63-87; and Syson, "Picturing Beautiful Women," in *Art and Love*, 246-254.

Smerelda Brandini wears her hair up because to wear it down after marriage would have been considered licentious. Her decorum also extends to the clothes and jewelry that adorn her body. These items were likely part of her dowry, and in similar portraits of the period women wore them as a material manifestation of familial honor.<sup>280</sup>

In the Aesthetic appreciation of art, the Petrarchan model of viewing and praising the beauty of women served as a means to express the pleasure and peril of Aesthetic experience. In Rossetti's interpretation of early Italian poetry, there is a tension between the poet/artist's attraction to a real woman, and his desire to produce a beautiful work of art. A parallel tension applies to the Aesthetic viewer, who understands the immediacy of embodied beauty in the work and remains in constant danger of being consumed in his appreciation of the work *as art*. For Rossetti and other members of his circle, specific aspects of the Petrarchan ideal remained intact, but others were emphasized to create a more sensual type of female beauty that can be included under the label *femme fatale*. Idealized physical characteristics like alabaster skin, full lips, and copious golden locks, directly connect Rossetti's paintings to the early poetic ideal and its visual manifestation in the Renaissance. It almost goes without saying that *Lady Lilith* has much more in common with Titian's *Woman with a Mirror* than it does with Botticelli's portrait of Smerelda. However, all three images derive their ideal of physical beauty from poetic convention. Rossetti chose to emphasize

---

<sup>280</sup> For a discussion of how issues of decorum and the contents of the dowry related to the symbolism of women's portraits, see Woods-Marsden, "Portrait of the Lady," 64-68; and Everett Fahy, "The Marriage Portrait in the Renaissance, or Some Women Named Ginevra," in *Art and Love*, 17-27.

sensuality in his representation of female beauty by focusing on unbound hair and exposed flesh. It is the moral ambiguity of *Lady Lilith*, and the corresponding response it elicits from the viewer, that signals this Aesthetic interpretation of Petrarchan tradition.

One possible explanation for the Aesthetic emphasis on “bodily” beauty in the Petrarchan ideal is grounded in Rossetti’s belief that poetic inspiration was drawn from real life experiences. His interpretation was extended to the notion that Beatrice, Laura, and other idealized women were based ultimately in historical reality and the poet’s actual experiences, which the poet then made into the subject of his work.<sup>281</sup> If Rossetti judged past poetic traditions in this way, then he is likely to have found certain examples of textual and visual material more erotically charged, particularly if he believed them to be based upon actual encounters. Rossetti’s interpretation does not accord with current interpretations of Dante, Petrarch, and the other poets mentioned here, nor was his thinking totally consistent with a general Victorian understanding of the period. Rossetti’s desire to see these encounters and these women as *real* was not just eccentric or inaccurate but a purposeful decision to view the past with the terms of

---

<sup>281</sup> For example, see Rossetti’s description of the lives of Dante, Boccaccio, and others in the introductions to Part I and II of *Early Italian Poets*: reprinted in WM Rossetti, *Collected Works* 2, 1-29; and 233-244. In many instances, Rossetti refers to experience as historical realities. For example, he interprets Dante’s *Vita Nuova* as the “Autobiography” of Dante’s youth (1). Rossetti further explained his position to Dr. Thomas Hake, an amateur poet, who later took an interest in *Lady Lilith*. Rossetti’s comments were made in the context of a critique of Hake’s poetry in which characters named Petrarch and Laura appear. Rossetti criticized Hake’s allegorical use of the names because Rossetti believed them both to be actual historical figures. See the letter to Hake, 18 Oct 1869, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 4, 306-308, 69.185.

Aesthetic experience that privileged “bodily” beauty.<sup>282</sup> The intensity of actual exchanges between poet/lover and artist/model were transferable through time to the contemporary reader/viewer. And it was easier to identify the ambiguous moral status of a *real* woman than an imagined one. For example, Fazio’s *canzone* describes the ideal balance of physical perfection and virtue, but it is the beauty without pity of the “Queen of Beauty” that multiplies into grotesque manifestations of vanity, seduction, and destruction in Rossetti’s representations of Lilith in paint and verse.

An important aspect of the Aesthetic interpretation of the Petrarchan ideal was physical perfection often accompanied by motifs of death, decay, eroticism, or moral corruption. “Bodily” beauty and moral ambiguity distinguished Aesthetic interpretations from certain historical models, though Renaissance artists also created images of dangerous women. The trend applies equally to contemporary paintings by Aesthetic artists and Aesthetic histories and criticism of art. Praz’ concept of Romantic “extoticism” begins to account for the Aesthetic interpretation of the Petrarchan ideal. Rossetti’s interpretation of the Petrarchan ideal in *Lady Lilith* manifests itself in her voluptuous body, golden hair, fair skin, and delicate features. But she is surrounded by symbols of her inner nature: mirrors and flowers of death, suggesting that encounters with her are intoxicating but lethal.

---

<sup>282</sup> The prevailing view today that Beatrice and Laura were imaginary or largely metaphorical constructions was developing during the nineteenth century. The Victorians had a particular preoccupation with the debate over whether these women were indeed real. For further reading, see Zuccatto, *Petrarch in Romantic England*, 126-156.

In describing Michelangelo's *Cleopatra* in 1868, Swinburne utilized a similar duality of "bodily" beauty and moral depravity to describe a subject "fairer than heaven and more terrible than hell:"

Her eyes are full of proud and passionless lust after gold and blood; her hair, close and curled, seems ready to shudder in sunder and divide into snakes. Her throat, full and fresh, round and hard to the eye as her bosom and arms, is erect and stately, the head set firm on it without any droop or lift of the chin; her mouth crueller than a tiger's, colder than a snake's, and beautiful beyond a woman's. She is the deadlier Venus incarnate...<sup>283</sup>

Like a twisted version of Fazio's adoring portrait of his ideal beloved, Swinburne's image depicts the terrible beauty of Cleopatra, part by slithering part. Though Swinburne's Cleopatra represents a more actively dangerous version of the *femme fatale*, he and Rossetti both return to a related form of the Petrarchan ideal.

In the Spring of 1868, Swinburne consulted with Rossetti about his plans to publish a pamphlet about that year's Royal Academy exhibition. Swinburne and Rossetti's brother, William, had the idea to include a section, penned by Swinburne, on unexhibited works by Rossetti and Whistler. Rossetti requested that Swinburne visit his studio so that he could advise him on the state and subject of unfinished works, including *Lady Lilith*, which later featured prominently in Swinburne's account of his friend's "great works" of 1868.<sup>284</sup> Swinburne's interpretation of and response to *Lady*

---

<sup>283</sup> Swinburne, "Old Masters," 159-160.

<sup>284</sup> In late April, Swinburne and W.M. Rossetti met the publisher J.C. Hotten, who suggested the project and eventually published it. On 18 May, Rossetti wrote to Swinburne asking him to view *Lady Lilith* at his studio: Fredeman, *Correspondence* 4, 68-69, 68.92. Presumably, Swinburne complied with Rossetti's request because his review mentions several mostly unfinished works including *La Pia* and *Beata Beatrix*,

*Lilith* underscores how the appreciation of female beauty was connected to early poetic traditions and articulates the nature of absorbing Aesthetic experience.

Swinburne's praise of *Lady Lilith* is effusive and highly descriptive, opening with an inventory of her sensual appeal:

Clothed in soft white garments, she draws out through a comb the heavy mass of hair like thick spun gold to fullest length; her head leans back half sleepily, superb and satiate with its own beauty; the eyes are languid, without love in them or hate; the sweet luxurious mouth has the patience of pleasure fulfilled and complete, the warm repose of passion sure of its delight (211-212).

Like his description of Michelangelo's *Cleopatra*, written within just months of the RA pamphlet,<sup>285</sup> the nature of Swinburne's description of Lilith's beauty is distinctly Petrarchan in nature. The portrait of Lilith that Swinburne paints through his fantastic prose is beautiful but incredibly sensual. She is not evil, like Cleopatra – a woman erupting into snakes – but is rather connected with the “bodily” beauty of the painting.

Swinburne's description of Lilith's heady, intoxicating beauty melds easily into an analogy between the beauty of the painting and the fundamental place of beauty in art itself:

---

which Rossetti mentions in his letter.

<sup>285</sup> Because Swinburne traveled to the Uffizi almost four years before he published his account of the drawings there, it is difficult to know when exactly he began to compose his “Old Masters” essay. Nonetheless, it is clear that he was actively involved in the publication of his essay in the Spring and Summer of 1868, at the same time he was writing his comments about Rossetti's work. Swinburne wrote to WM Rossetti on 18 May (incidentally, the same day that Rossetti asked him to come to his studio) to ask his advice about the price he had been offered by *The Fortnightly Review* to print the “Old Masters” essay. See Lang, *Swinburne Letters* 1, 298-299, no.264. The “Old Masters” essay was eventually published in July.



The sleepy splendour of the picture is a fit raiment of the idea incarnate of faultless fleshy beauty and peril of pleasure unavoidable. For this serene and sublime sorceress there is no life but of the body; with spirit (if spirit there be) she can dispense (46).

For Swinburne, and presumably for Rossetti, *Lady Lilith* embodied the Aesthetic pursuit of sensuous beauty without narrative or moral meaning. The connection between Aesthetic beauty and the body, specifically the female body, is clear from Swinburne's use of the term "fleshy," which would later be appropriated in sharp criticism of Rossetti's work.<sup>286</sup> In Swinburne's description, the term is meant to indicate the rendering and appreciation of a distinctly physical form of beauty. His description of her beauty is a celebration of precisely this "fleshy" quality. The celebration of physicality is an important part of the Aesthetic interpretation of Petrarchan tradition, but unlike the earlier ideal, Lilith is imbued with physical beauty alone. Swinburne denies her, and art itself, the dual quality of "spirit."

Swinburne's praise of *Lady Lilith* is ultimately about the experience of viewing a beautiful painting and about the ways in which a painting functions as a metaphor, or "idea incarnate," of the problems of Aesthetic experience. *Lady Lilith* also embodies the "peril of pleasure unavoidable," which seems only appropriate for a subject that celebrates the visual appeal of exposed flesh, flushed skin, and poppy blossoms. Most significantly, Swinburne articulates the idea that the painting, as a representation of art itself, provides an overwhelming sensation of pleasure. The intensity with which

---

<sup>286</sup> Specifically, Robert Buchanan appropriated the term "fleshy" in his infamously vituperative attack on Aestheticism in 1870: "The Fleshy School of Poetry," 24-39. See the discussion in chapter one.

Aesthetic artists and writers described the beauty of women, suggests the appreciation of an ideal that encompassed both danger and beauty. Swinburne's further description of *Lady Lilith* illustrates this point:

Of evil desire or evil impulse she has nothing; and nothing of good. She is indifferent, equable, magnetic; she charms and draws down the souls of men by pure force of absorption, in no wise willful or malignant; outside herself she cannot live, she cannot even see: and because of this she attracts and subdues all men at once in body and in spirit. Beyond the mirror she cares not to look, and could not (46).

Lilith does not actively cause harm, but neither is she morally virtuous. Rather she passively attracts men through the power of "absorption," or the mesmerizing quality of her "fleshy" beauty. Manifested in *Lady Lilith* is the visual "peril" between worshipping the "faultless fleshy beauty" of a woman's body and the faultless pleasure of admiring a beautiful painting.

## CONCLUSION: ROSSETTI AND QUESTIONS OF AESTHETIC HISTORICISM

The conclusions reached in this study establish a relationship among Rossetti's representations of women, his interpretation of the past, and his engagement with Aestheticism during the 1860s. Most importantly, Rossetti's images of women from the 1860s embodied beauty in female form and presented a particular, sensual interpretation of the past. "Bodily" beauty acted as the link between his Aestheticism and engagement with Renaissance art and poetry. Rossetti's understanding of female portraiture was key in creating an image of Aesthetic beauty as feminine and sensual. It was his interpretation of lyric conventions of idealization that led him to collapse images of women's beauty with the beauty of painting. Color was the defining element in Rossetti's pursuit of sensual, autonomous painting. In images of women, Rossetti simultaneously eroticized and elevated color by inverting the negative terms of existing critical discourse surrounding Venetian painting. Finally, Rossetti represented the moral ambiguity of Aesthetic experience through images of all-consuming, absorbing female beauty.

Several questions remain unanswered after this examination of Rossetti's paintings. Necessarily, my analysis has been highly focused on specific examples to demonstrate the relation between Rossetti's engagement with the past and his images of women, but it is reasonable to question the enthusiasm of Rossetti's historical

engagement throughout the broader context of his career. A related problem arises from Rossetti's relative isolation in this study from the countless other Aesthetic artists who engaged with the past in various ways. One would be right to wonder if the Renaissance was as foundational for others as it was for Rossetti. Most importantly, my discussion of Rossetti and the contemporary criticism of his work confirm the importance of women's beauty in his work, but the extent to which this tendency applied to Aestheticism as a whole, and degree to which it was connected to Aesthetic historicism remains less clear.

My examination of Rossetti's work has focused on a few examples from the 1860s, but my argument for his historical engagement is applicable in many cases throughout his career, which began in the late-1840s and lasted until his death in 1882. It would be problematic to argue that Rossetti's engagement with Petrarchism and sixteenth-century Venetian painting monopolized his career, for this simply was not the case. His views changed over time with changing attitudes about contemporary art and the interpretation of history. As a young Pre-Raphaelite, he was enamored of Giotto, Hans Memling, and medieval art.<sup>287</sup> He explored this interest in visual and textual form, imagining the meeting of Dante and Giotto in Florence (*Giotto Painting the*

---

<sup>287</sup> Rossetti's early exposure to and knowledge about Pre-Raphaelite tradition has been the subject of several studies, including Dietrich, "Art History Painted," 61-69; and Ormond, "Rossetti and the Old Masters," 153-168. Fraser, too, has analyzed Rossetti within the Pre-Raphaelite engagement with the past: *Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, 112-115.

*Portrait of Dante*, pen and ink, 1852, Tate Gallery, London).<sup>288</sup> In this drawing, Giotto creates Dante’s portrait as Cimabue looks on from the right. Dante looks away from Giotto to Beatrice, who passes below him in a procession of women. The drawing presents a complex array of artistic “inspiration.” Cimabue has his eyes fixed on his pupil’s work – the old guard looking to the new. Giotto looks to his subject, representing the shift toward painting from life. Dante looks to Beatrice, both his earthly and divine inspiration. In a pendant to the drawing of Giotto painting Dante, Rossetti created an image of Giorgione painting a beautiful woman (*Giorgione Painting*, pen and ink, ca. 1853, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery).<sup>289</sup> The drawing shows Giorgione painting from life (seemingly a confirmation of Vasari’s account) while three figures huddle around his easel in apparent awe. Giorgione’s inspiration is of a distinctly sensual kind, compared with Cimabue, Giotto, and Dante. Rossetti’s awareness of and enthusiasm for Venetian art increased throughout the 1850s and 1860s, along with the Aesthetic principles of his own painting. In the 1870s and 1880s Rossetti’s enthusiasm for Renaissance artists extended to Michelangelo and the artist’s relationship Vittoria Colonna. Rossetti conceived of Michelangelo and Vittoria

---

<sup>288</sup> In 1852 Rossetti began a watercolor of the same subject, but it was never completed. Inscribed below the drawing are six lines from Dante’s *Purgatorio* (Credete Cimabue nella pittura/ Tener lo campo; ed ora ha Giotto il grido,/ Sì che la fama di colui s’oscura./ Così ha tolto l’uno all’altro Guido/ La Gloria della lingua; e forse è nato/ Chi l’uno e l’altro caccierà di nido.) and two from *La Vita Nuova* (Vede perfettamente ogni salute/ Chi la mia donna – tra le donne – vede.)

<sup>289</sup> There is a third drawing in this series done around the same time: *Fra Angelico Painting*, pen and ink, ca. 1853, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery.

as the quintessential Platonic (and Petrarchan) lovers, a theme he immortalized in a sonnet, “Michelangelo’s Kiss” (1881).<sup>290</sup> Rossetti’s preoccupation with and conception of Michelangelo was largely in keeping with a particular Aesthetic interpretation of the artist as a great genius and admirer of beauty.<sup>291</sup>

Rossetti was not alone in his engagement with the past. Though not every Aesthetic artist and writer engaged with Renaissance tradition, the navigation of historical convention within Aestheticism was considerable but frequently marginalized in assessments of the movement. I have discussed most of the notable exceptions to this generalization already, particularly as they pertain to the assessment of Rossetti’s work. However, my conclusions about Rossetti’s paintings suggest connections to the work of other artists and emerging directions in the scholarship of Aestheticism. Several studies have examined Edward Burne-Jones’ engagement with Renaissance painting during the 1870s and 1880s, at the height of his career. Liana de Girolami Cheney has argued that his knowledge of and interest in sixteenth-century Mannerism in works such as *Phyllis and Demophöon* (gouache on paper, 1870, Birmingham City Museum and

---

<sup>290</sup> Rossetti’s sonnet “Michelangelo’s Kiss” was published in *The House of Life* (1881). See the poem reprinted in McGann, ed., *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 168. After his brother’s death, W.M. Rossetti also collected notebook entries for two proposed subjects involving Michelangelo. The descriptions are just fragments from Rossetti’s notebooks kept throughout the 1870s, according to W.M. Rossetti. The first subject describes “Michelangelo unburying the Laocoon,” and the second corresponds to Rossetti’s sonnet: “Michelangelo at the deathbed of Vittoria Colonna.” He never executed visual works for either subject. The fragments are reprinted in a later edition of *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. W.M. Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911): 638.

<sup>291</sup> See in particular Ostermark-Johansen’s analysis of the way in which Aesthetic critics interpreted Michelangelo as a Petrarchan lover in *Sweetness and Strength*, 141-171.

Art Gallery) had a profound effect on his Aestheticism.<sup>292</sup> Burne-Jones traveled extensively throughout Italy, making copies of Renaissance paintings for John Ruskin throughout the 1860s, and there is much potential for further development in the research of Burne-Jones' interpretation of the past during this early period of his career. The most academic representative of Aestheticism, Frederick Leighton, was also deeply involved with historical precedent. Like Burne-Jones, Leighton traveled to Italy to study the works of Renaissance artists. Unlike Burne-Jones, and Rossetti for that matter, Leighton's paintings, like *Pavonia* (oil on canvas, 1858, private collection) evince the high polish of distinctively *Raphaelite* tradition. To a limited extent, connections to academicism, Raphael, and classicism have been incorporated into the discussion of Leighton's work, but ostensibly non-academic Aestheticism still tends to dominate scholarly investigations.<sup>293</sup> His engagement with the Renaissance was a

---

<sup>292</sup> Cheney, "Edward Burne-Jones' *Andromeda*: Transformation of Historical and Mythological Sources," *Artibus et Historiae* 25, no. 49 (2004): 197-227. Burne-Jones' nudes have also proven a fertile ground for investigation of his interest in Renaissance artists, including Botticelli and Michelangelo. Also see Alison Smith, "The Pre-Raphaelite Nude," in *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: The Anglo-American Enchantment*, ed. Margaretta Frederick Watson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997): 77-94.

<sup>293</sup> Elizabeth Prettejohn has led the charge in changing attitudes about Leighton's place within Aestheticism and the perception of Aestheticism as both academic and avant-garde. See the details of this argument in "Leighton: The Aesthete as Academic," in *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000): 33-52. Additionally, see two essays, one by Prettejohn, in an excellent volume that explores the complexity of Leighton's engagement with Renaissance tradition within the RA: Robyn Asleson, "Renaissance: Aestheticizing History Painting," in *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity*, eds. Tim Barringer and Elizabeth Prettejohn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999): 89-110; and by Prettejohn, "The Apotheosis of the Male Nude: Leighton and Michelangelo," 111-134. Additionally, see the comparisons made

revival of Raphael, whereas for Rossetti and Burne-Jones the Renaissance represented freedom from Raphael. All three artists remain “Aesthetic” in their interpretations of the past, as varied as they are. As I have argued throughout this study, the Aesthetic construction of history was imaginative, though it was hardly monolithic.

A unifying characteristic within Aestheticism is the representation of women’s beauty, something several others, including Psomiades, Prettejohn, and Greger, have argued in various ways. My examination of Rossetti suggests an historical basis in Petrarchan tradition and Renaissance painting for the metaphorical appreciation of female beauty. I understand this relationship as fundamental in the generating the philosophy of autonomous beauty in Rossetti’s work, but I do not think it is limited to his images women or the criticism associated with them. For example, the specific model that I discuss with regard to Rossetti, Swinburne, and Stephens is also readily apparent in the writing of Walter Pater, whose Aesthetic engagement with the Renaissance is significantly more established in current studies.<sup>294</sup> Pater’s famous description of the *Mona Lisa*, published first in *The Fortnightly Review* (1869), recalls both Swinburne’s description of *Lady Lilith* and Michelangelo’s *Cleopatra* in its imagery of ideal yet dangerous beauty:

The presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what

---

among the academic and non-academic Aesthetic paintings of Leighton, Rossetti, and George Frederic Watts in *GF Watts Portraits: Fame & Beauty in Victorian Society*, ed. Barbara Bryant, Exh. Cat. (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2004): 29-30.

<sup>294</sup> See in particular Barolsky, *Walter Pater’s Renaissance*; and Prettejohn’s account in *Art for Art’s Sake*, 255-280.



in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all “the ends of the world are come,” and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed!<sup>295</sup>

Pater’s description of the *Mona Lisa* shares with Swinburne’s criticism a similar interpretation of Renaissance art, and he too uses the image of a woman’s beauty to describe the ideal, though troublesome, experience of Aesthetic beauty. Much excellent work has been done on Pater’s criticism of Renaissance art as a leading figure of Aestheticism, and several studies have highlighted the important connections between the early phase of Aestheticism, investigated here, and Pater’s late-Victorian manifestation.<sup>296</sup> Future research will continue to explore the relationship among these figures and the fundamental place of women’s beauty in the representation of Aesthetic beauty.

---

<sup>295</sup> Walter Pater, “Leonardo da Vinci,” in *Walter Pater: Three Major Texts (The Renaissance, Appreciations, and Imaginary Portraits)*, ed. William E. Buckler (New York: New York University Press, 1986): 150. Rossetti and Swinburne both praised Pater’s analysis of Leonardo. After reading Pater’s essay in *The Fortnightly Review*, Rossetti wrote to Swinburne: “What a remarkable article that is of Pater’s on Leonardo! Something of *you* perhaps, but a good deal of himself too to good purpose,” 26 November 1969, Fredeman, *Correspondence* 4, 323-324, 69.204. Swinburne responded two days later with the affirmation, “I liked Pater’s article on Leonardo very much. I confess I did fancy there was a little spice of my style as you say, but much good stuff of his own, and much of interest,” 28 November, Lang, *Swinburne Letters* 2, 58.

<sup>296</sup> Ostermark-Johansen examines the connection between Swinburne and Pater in “Serpentine Rivers and Serpentine Thought,” 455-482. Additionally, see the discussion along the same lines in Bullen, *Myth of the Renaissance*, 287-293.

## Bibliography

## Bibliography

- 16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. The Valuable Contents of the Residence of Dante G. Rossetti, July 5 to 7.* London: T.G. Warton Martin & Co., 1882.
- Allen, Virginia M. "‘One Strangling Golden Hair’: Rossetti’s Lady Lilith." *Art Bulletin* 66, no. 2 (June, 1984): 285-94.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon.* Troy: Whitston, 1983.
- An Extensive Old Country Library, Part III: Books on the Fine Arts, William Michael Rossetti.* London: Henry Sotheran & Co., n.d.
- Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer. Exh. Cat. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Art Made Modern*, ed. Christopher Green. Exh. Cat. London: Courtauld Institute of Art, 1999.
- Ashton, Rosemary. *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought 1800-1860.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Asleson, Robyn. "Renaissance: Aestheticizing History Painting." In *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity*, ed. Tim Barringer and Elizabeth Prettejohn, 89-110. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Barolsky, Paul. *Walter Pater’s Renaissance.* University Park; London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987.
- Bell, Quentin. "The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Critics." In *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, ed. Leslie Parris, 11-22. London: Tate Gallery, 1984.
- Bentley, D.M.R. "Making an Unfrequented Path of Art His Own: Dante Rossetti’s Paintings in the Aesthetic Mode." *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 17 (Spring 2008): 21-35.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dante Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith*, *Sibylla Palmifera*, ‘Body’s Beauty,’ and ‘Soul’s Beauty.’" *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 13 (Fall 2004): 63-74.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Rossetti's 'Hand and Soul.'" *English Studies in Canada* 3 (1977): 445-457.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Coleridge: The Anxiety of Influence." *Diacritics* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 36-41.
- The Blue Bower: Rossetti in the 1860s*. Paul Spencer-Longhurst. Exh. Cat. London: Scala Publishers Limited, 2000.
- Briggs, Katharine M. "The Legends of Lilith and of the Wandering Jew in Nineteenth-Century Literature." *Folklore* 92, no. 2 (1981): 131-40.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Folklore in Nineteenth-Century English Literature." *Folklore* 83, no. 3 (Autumn, 1972): 194-209.
- Brilliant, Richard. *Portraiture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Buchanan, Robert. "The Fleishy School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti." In *Critical Essays on Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. David G. Riede, 24-39. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1992.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Michael Shaw, trans. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Bullen, J. B. *Continental Crosscurrents: British Criticism and European Art, 1810-1910*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Mirror of Masculine Desire." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 21, no. 3 (1999): 329-352.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ruskin, Venice, and the Construction of Femininity." *The Review of English Studies* 46, no. 184 (Nov 1995): 502-520.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Caldwell, Dorigen. "The Paragone between Word and Image in *Impresa* Literature." *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 63 (2000): 277-286.

Casteras, Susan P. "Pre-Raphaelite Portraiture: A Strangely Disordered Vision." In *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: the Anglo-American Enchantment*, ed. Margaretta Frederic Watson, 139-148. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The End of the Century and Conflicting Fantasies of Femininity." In *Writings about Art*, ed. Carole Gold, 181-193. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Pre-Raphaelite Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty." In *The Pre-Raphaelites in Context*, ed. Malcolm Warner, 13-35. San Marino: Huntington Library, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Double Vision in Portraiture." In *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Double Work of Art*, ed. Maryann Wynn Ainsworth, 9-35. Exh. Cat. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1976.

Chai, Leon. *Aestheticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Chapman, Alison and Joanna Meacock. *A Rossetti Family Chronology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Chapman, Raymond. "Lyric." In *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, eds. Tom McArthur and Feri McArthur, 632. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Tragedy." In *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, eds. Tom McArthur and Feri McArthur, 1049-1050. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Cheney, Liana De Girolami. "Edward Burne-Jones' Andromeda: Transformation of Historical and Mythological Sources." *Artibus et Historiae* 25, no. 49 (2004): 197-227; 231.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Vasari's Interpretation of Female Beauty." In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, eds. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, 179-187. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998.

Cherry, Deborah. "The Hogarth Club: 1858-1861." *The Burlington Magazine* 122, no. 925 (April 1980): 237-244.

- Cherry, Deborah and Griselda Pollock. "Patriarchal Power and the Pre-Raphaelites." *Art History* 7, no. 4 (Dec 1984): 480-95.
- Child, Theodore. "A Pre-Raphaelite Mansion." *Harpers New Monthly Magazine* 82, no. 487 (Dec 1890): 81-99.
- Christian, John. "Burne-Jones Studies." *The Burlington Magazine* 115, no. 839 (Feb 1973): 92-109.
- Ciletti, Elena. "Patriarchal Ideology in the Renaissance Iconography of Judith." In *Refiguring Women: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, eds. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari, 35-70. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Clements, Patricia. "Strange Flowers: Some Notes on the Baudelaire of Swinburne and Pater." *Modern Language Review* 76, no. 1 (Jan., 1981): 20-30.
- Colie, Rosalie. *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.
- The Complete Writings of Dante Gabriel Writings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive* [database online]. Jerome McGann, ed. Charlottesville, University of Virginia, 2008. Accessed 18 March 2010. Available from <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/lasner001.rad.html>; Internet.
- Cooper, Robyn. "The Relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Painters before Raphael in English Criticism of the late 1840s and 1850s." *Victorian Studies* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1981): 405-438.
- Corbett, David Peters. *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848-1914*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004.
- Cox-Rearick, Janet. "Imagining the Renaissance: The Nineteenth-Century Cult of Francois I as Patron of Art." *Renaissance Quarterly* 50 (1997): 207-50.
- Crespi, Julia. Curatorial Dossier on *Bocca Baciata* (Folder 1, Compiled 2003). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
- Cropper, Elizabeth. "The Place of Beauty in the High Renaissance and its Displacement in the History of Art." In *Place and Displacement in the Renaissance*, ed. Alvin Vos, 159-205. Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance

- Portraiture.” In *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, 175-190. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, *Petrarchismo*, and the Vernacular Style.” *Art Bulletin* (1976). 374-394.
- Crowe, John and Giovanni Cavalcaselle. *A New History of Painting in Italy, from the Second to the Sixteenth Century*. 3 Vols. New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1980 [1864].
- Daniel Maclise, 1806-1870: Romancing the Past*. Peter Murray, ed. Exh. Cat. Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 2008.
- Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, eds. Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn, and Edwin Becker. Exh. Cat. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003.
- Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Double Work of Art*, ed. Maryann Wynn Ainsworth. Exh. Cat. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1976.
- DeSchryver, Elizabeth Ellen. “The Reinvention of the Italian Renaissance Artist in the Victorian Imagination.” Ph.D. Diss., Northwestern University, 1996.
- Dietrich, Flavia. “Art History Painted: The Pre-Raphaelite View of Italian Art: Some Works by Rossetti.” *British Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2000): 61-69.
- Dowling, Linda C. *The Vulgarization of Art: the Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996.
- Drewey, Anne, Julian Moore, and Christopher Whittick. “Re-Presenting Fanny Cornforth: The Makings of an Historical Identity.” *British Art Journal* 2, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 3-15.
- Elliot, David B. *Charles Fairfax Murray: The Unknown Pre-Raphaelite*. New Castle: Oak Knoll, 2000.
- Elliot, T.S. “Arnold and Pater.” In *The Eighteen Eighties*, ed. Walter de la Mare, 385-392. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930.
- Facing the Late Victorians: Portraits of Writers and Artists from the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection*. Margaret D. Stetz, ed. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007.

- Fahy, Everett. "The Marriage Portrait in the Renaissance, or Some Women Named Ginevra." In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer, 17-27. Exh. Cat. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Farago, Claire. "The Renaissance Today: What is at Stake?" In *Renaissance Theory*, eds. James Elkins and Robert Williams, 69-93. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Faxon, Alicia Craig. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. New York; London; Paris: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1989.
- Feldman, Jessica. *Victorian Modernism: Pragmatism and the Varieties of Aesthetic Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Modernism's Victorian Bric-a-brac." *Modernism/Modernism* 8, no. 3 (2001): 453-470.
- Fennell, Francis L. Jr., ed. *The Rossetti-Leyland Letters: The Correspondence of an Artist and His Patron*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1978.
- Ferguson, Wallace K. *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948.
- Firenzuola, Angolo. *On the Beauty of Women*. Konrad Eisenbichler and Jacqueline Murray, trans. and eds. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992 [1548].
- Flint, Kate. "Reading *The Awakening Conscience* Rightly." In *Pre-Raphaelites Reviewed*, ed. Marcia Pointon, 45-65. New York: Manchester University Press, 1989.
- Fraser, Hilary. *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy*. Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992.
- Fredeman, William E., ed. *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Vols. 1-7. Cambridge, UK; Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2002-2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Books from the Libraries of Christina, Dante Gabriel, and William Michael Rossetti*. London: Bertram Rota, 1973.
- Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Definitional Excursions: the Meanings of *Modern/Modernity/Modernism*." *Modernism/Modernity* 8, no. 3 (2001): 493-



513.

- Fry, Roger. "Mr. Whistler." *The Athenaeum* (25 July 1903): 133-134.
- Garberson, Eric. "Portraits, Categories, and Identity." Unpublished Manuscript. Manuscripts are in the possession of the author and Carolyn Porter, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia.
- GF Watts Portraits: Fame & Beauty in Victorian Society*. Barbara Bryant, ed. Exh. Cat. London: National Portrait Gallery, 2004.
- Gibson, Ann. "Avant-Garde." In *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff, 202-216. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Gitter, Elisabeth. "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination." *PMLA* 99, no. 5 (Oct., 1984): 936-54.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Rossetti's Translations of Early Italian Lyrics." *Victorian Poetry* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1974): 351-362.
- Grieve, Alastair. "Rossetti and the Scandal of Art for Art's Sake in the Early 1860s." In *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn, 17-35. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- Goffen, Rona. *Titian's Women*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Gosse, Edmund and Thomas James Wise, eds. *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Prose Works*. Vol. 5. New York: Russell & Russell, 1925.
- Grilli, Stephanie. "Pre-Raphaelite Portraiture, 1848-1854." Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1980.
- Hackney, Stephen, et. al. "Pre-Raphaelite Methods and Materials." In *Pre-Raphaelite Painting Techniques: 1848-1856*, eds. Joyce Townsend, Jacqueline Ridge, and Stephen Hackney, 51-75. London: Tate Publishing, 2004.
- Hale, John. *England and the Italian Renaissance: The Growth of Interest in Its History and Art*. London: Faber and Faber, 1954.
- Harrison, Charles. "Modernism." In *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff, 188-201. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

- Helsing, Elizabeth. *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Hewison, Robert. *Ruskin on Venice, "The Paradise of Cities."* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009
- Higgins, Lesley. "No Time for Pater: The Silenced Other of Masculinist Modernism." In *Transparencies of Desire*, eds. Lesley Higgins, Laurel Brake, and Carolyn Williams, 37-54. Greensboro: ELT Press, 2002.
- Hoch, Adrian S. "The Art of Alessandro Botticelli Through the Eyes of Victorian Aesthetes." In *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, eds. John E. Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen, 55-85. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.
- Hook, Holger. "Old Masters and the English School: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Notion of a National Gallery at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century." *Journal of the History of Collections* 16, no. 1 (2004): 1-18.
- Ireland, Kenneth R. "A Kind of Pastoral: Rossetti's Versions of Giorgione." *Victorian Poetry* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1979): 303-315.
- Jacobs, Fredrika. "Leonardo, *grazia*, and the Gendering of Style." In *Leonardo da Vinci and the Ethics of Style*, ed. Claire Farago, 119-145. New York: Manchester University Press, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: *Femmina, Masculo, Grazia.*" *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (March 2000): 51-67.
- Jameson, Anna. *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters and of the Progress of Painting in Italy from Cimabue to Bassano*. 2 Vols. London: Charles Knight, 1845.
- Jensen, Frede, ed. and trans. *Tuscan Poetry of the Duecento. An Anthology*. New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1994.
- Johnson, Henry. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Japan: The Musical Instrument Depicted in *The Blue Bower* and *A Sea Spell.*" *Music and Art* 30, no. 1-2 (Fall 2005): 145-53.
- Junod, Phillippe. "The New *Paragone*: Paradoxes and Contradictions of Pictorial Musicalism." In *The Arts Entwined: Music and Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Marsha L. Morton and Peter L. Schmunk: 23-46. New York; London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000.

- Kerrigan, William and Gordon Braden. *The Idea of the Renaissance*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- King, Ross. *The Judgment of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that Gave the World Impressionism*. New York: Walker & Co., 2006.
- Kirkham, Victoria. "Poetic Ideals of Love and Beauty." In *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, ed. David Alan Brown, 49-61. Exh. Cat. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Kugler, Franz. *A Handbook of the History of Painting, from the Age of Constantine the Great to the Present Time, Part I: The Italian Schools*. Lady Eastlake, trans. Charles Eastlake, ed. London: John Murray, 1842.
- Lambourne, Lionel. *Victorian Painting*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Aesthetic Movement*. London: Phaidon, 1996.
- Landow, George P. "The Art Journal, 1850-1888: Antiquarians, The Medieval Revival, and the Reception of Pre-Raphaelitism." *The Pre-Raphaelite Review* 2 (1979): 71-76.
- Lang, Cecil Y, ed.. *The Swinburne Letters*. 2 Vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-1962.
- Lantham, Richard A. *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1991.
- Lasner, Mark Samuels."A Bibliographical Essay on Hand and Soul." *The Complete Writings of Dante Gabriel Writings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive* [database online]. Jerome McGann, ed. Charlottesville, University of Virginia, 1997. Accessed 18 March 2010. Available from <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/lasner001.rad.html>; Internet.
- Lawson, James. "Titian's Diana Pictures: the Passing of an Epoch." *Artibus et Historiae* 25, no. 49 (2004): 49-63.
- Levey, Michael. "Botticelli and Nineteenth-Century England." *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Instituitues* 23, no. 3/4 (Jul – Dec 1960): 291-306.
- Levi, Donata. "'Let Agents be Sent to all the Cities of Italy': British Public Museums and the Italian Art Market in the Mid-Nineteenth Century." In *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, eds. John E. Law and Lene

- Østermark-Johansen, 33-53. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.
- Ludley, David A. "Anna Jameson and D. G. Rossetti, His Use of Her Histories." *Women's Art Journal* 12, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1991-2): 29-33.
- Macleod, Diane Sachko. "The 'Identity' of the Pre-Raphaelite Patrons." In *Re-framing the Pre-Raphaelites: Historical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Ellen Harding, 7-26. Aldershot: Scolar, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Art and the Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Mid-Victorian Patronage of the Arts: F.G. Stephens's 'The Private Collections of England.'" *The Burlington Magazine* 126, no. 1001 (Aug 1986): 597-607.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "F.G. Stephens, Pre-Raphaelite Critic and Art Historian." *The Burlington Magazine* 128, no 999 (June 1986): 398-406.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Titian." *Apollo* 121 (January 1985): 36-9.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Rossetti's Two Ligeas: Their Relationship to Visual Art, Music, and Poetry." *Victorian Poetry* 20, no. 3/4 (Autumn/Winter 1982): 89-102.
- Marsh, Jan, ed. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Writings*. Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2000.
- Martin, Ileana. "Rossetti's Aesthetically Saturated Readings: Art's De-Humanizing Power." In *Art and Life in Aestheticism: De-Humanizing and Re-Humanizing Art, the Artist, and the Artistic Receptor*, ed. Kelly Comfort, 42-61. Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Matthews, Alison Victoria. "Aestheticism's True Colors: The Politics of Pigment in Victorian Art, Criticism, and Fashion." In *Women and Aestheticism*, eds. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, 172-191. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1999.
- Maxwell, Catherine. *Swinburne*. Devon: Northcote, 2006.
- McGann, Jerome, ed. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Collected Poetry and Prose*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game that Must be Lost*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Medieval versus Victorian versus Modern: Rossetti's Art of Images." *Modernism/Modernity* 2, no. 1 (1995): 97-112.
- McGann, Jerome and Chris Sligh, eds. *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Major Poems and Selected Prose*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- McLaughlin, Martin. "Nineteenth-Century British Biographies of Petrarch." In *Petrarch in Britain: Interpreters, Imitators, and Translators over 700 Years*, eds. Martin McLaughlin, Letizia Panizzia, and Peter Hainsworth, 319-340. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Merrill, Linda. *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Myers, Frederic W. H. "Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty." In *Critical Essays on Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. David G. Riede, 46-57. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1992.
- Nead, Lynda. "The Magdalene in Modern Times: The Mythology of the Fallen Woman in Pre-Raphaelite Painting." *Oxford Art Journal* 7, no. 1 (1984/1985): 26-37.
- Ormond, Leonée. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Old Masters." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 32, no. 2 (2006): 153-168.
- Østermark-Johansen, Lene. "Serpentine Rivers and Serpentine Thought: Flux and Movement in Walter Pater's Leonardo Essay." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30, no. 2 (2002): 455-482.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Swinburne's Serpentine Delights: The Aesthetic Critic and the Old Master Drawings in Florence." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24, no. 1 (2002): 49-72.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sweetness and Strength: the Reception of Michelangelo in Late Victorian England*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998.
- Pardo, Mary. "Artifice as Seduction in Titian." In *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, and Images*, ed. James Grantham Turner, 55-89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Pater, Walter. *Walter Pater: Three Major Texts (The Renaissance, Appreciations, and Imaginary Portraits)*, William Buckler, ed. New York; London: New York University Press, 1986.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. Donald L. Hill, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980 [1893].
- Perry, Lara. *History's Beauties: Women and the National Portrait Gallery, 1856-1900*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- Pointon, Marcia. "Portrait, Portrait, Portrait!!!" In *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibition at Somerset House, 1780-1836*, ed. David H. Solkin, 92-109. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Pollock, Griselda. *Vision and Difference*. 2d ed. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Powell, Kirsten H. "Object, Symbol, and Metaphor: Rossetti's Musical Imagery." *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 16-29.
- Praz, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*. Angus Davidson, trans. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Prettejohn, Elizabeth. *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Beautiful Women with Floral Adjuncts." In *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, eds. Julian Treuherz, Elizabeth Prettejohn, and Edwin Becker, 51-109. Exh. Cat. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Modernism of Frederic Leighton." In *English Art 1860-1914, Modern Artists and Identity*, eds. David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry: 31-48. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Leighton: The Aesthete as Academic." In *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd, 33-52. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Walter Pater and Aesthetic Painting." In *After the Pre-Raphaelites, Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn, 36-58. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Out of the Nineteenth Century: Roger's Fry Early Art Criticism, 1900-

- 1906.” In *Art Made Modern*, ed. Christopher Green, 31-44. Exh. Cat. London: Courtauld Institute of Art, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “The Apotheosis of the Male Nude: Leighton and Michelangelo.” In *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity*, ed. Tim Barringer and Elizabeth Prettejohn, 111-134. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Fatal Attraction.” *Tate: The Art Magazine (U. K.)*, no. 13 (Winter 1997): 30-5.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rossetti and His Circle*. London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997.
- Psomiades, Kathy Alexis. *Beauty’s Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Beauty’s Body: Gender Ideology and British Aestheticism.” *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 1 (Autumn 1992): 31-52.
- Reed, Edward Bliss. *English Lyrical Poetry, from Its Origins to the Present Time*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1967.
- Reynolds, Joshua Sir. *Discourses on Art*. Robert R. Wark, ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975 [1797].
- Riede, David G. “Apocalyptic Portraits.” *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 4 (Fall 1995): 65-76.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision*. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Swinburne: A Study of Romantic Mythmaking*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978.
- Roche, Thomas P. Jr., ed. *Petrarch in English*. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- Rogers, Mary. “The Artist as Beauty.” In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, eds. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, 93-103. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “The Decorum of Women’s Beauty: Trissino, Firenzuola, Luigini and the Representation of Women in Sixteenth-Century Painting.” *Renaissance Studies* 2, no. 1 (Mar. 1988): 47-88.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Sonnets on Female Portraits from Renaissance North Italy.” *Word & Image* 2, no. 4 (Oct-Dec. 1986): 291-305.

- Rogers, William Elford. *The Three Genres and the Interpretation of Lyric*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Rosand, David. "Titian and the Eloquence of the Brush." *Artibus et Historiae* 2, no. 3 (1981): 85-96.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ut Pictor Poeta: Meaning in Titian's *Poesie*." *New Literary History* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1972): 527-546.
- Rose, Andrea. *Pre-Raphaelite Portraits*. Somerset: Oxford Illustrated Press, 1981.
- Roskill, Mark W., ed. and trans. *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2000 [1557].
- Rossetti, William Michael, ed. *Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870: A Compilation by William Michael Rossetti*. New York: Schribner's, 1903.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. 2 vols. London: Ellis and Scrutton, 1886.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Library of D.G. Rossetti." (1866) *The Complete Writings of Dante Gabriel Writings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive* [database online]. Jerome McGann, ed. Charlottesville, University of Virginia, 2008. Accessed 5 May 2010. Available from <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/dgrlibrary.raw.html>
- Rowlinson, Matthew. "Lyric." In *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, eds. Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman, and Anthony H. Harrison, 59-79. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.
- Ruskin, John. "The Two Paths: Being Lectures on Art and Its Application to Decoration and Manufacture, Delivered 1858-1859." London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1859.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Modern Painters*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol 1. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1851.
- Santore, Cathy. "Picture versus Portrait." *Source: Notes on the History of Art* 19, no. 3 (2000): 16-21.
- Schelling, *The English Lyric*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.
- Schizer, Deborah Gail. "Eroticizing the Middle Ages: Gender and Sexuality in Pre-Raphaelite Medievalism." Ph.D. Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1994.



- Schmitter, Monika A. "Botticelli's Images of Simonetta Vespucci: Between Portrait and Ideal." *Rutgers Art Review* 15 (1995): 33-57.
- Simon, Robin. *The Portrait in Britain and America*. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1987.
- Simons, Patricia. "Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women." In *Languages and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown, 263-311. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Smith, Alison. "Revival and Reformation: The Aims and Ideals of the Re-Raphaelite Brotherhood." In *Pre-Raphaelite Painting Techniques: 1848-1856*, eds. Joyce Townsend, Jacqueline Ridge, and Stephen Hackney, 9-27. London: Tate Publishing, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Pre-Raphaelite Nude." In *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: The Anglo-American Enchantment*, ed. Margaretta Frederick Watson, 77-94. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality, and Art*. Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1996.
- Smith, Graham. "Florence, Photography and the Victorians." In *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, eds. John E. Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen, 7-32. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.
- Smith, Sarah Phelps. "From Allegory to Symbol: Rossetti's Renaissance Roots and His Influence on Continental Symbolism." In *Pre-Raphaelite Art in Its European Context*, eds. Susan P. Casteras and Alicia Craig Faxon, 50-65. London: Associated University Presses, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* and the Language of Flowers." *Arts Magazine* 53, no. 6 (Feb 1979): 142-145.
- Sohm, Phillip. "Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia." *Renaissance Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 761-773.
- Spencer, Robin. "Manet, Rossetti, London, and Derby Day." *The Burlington Magazine* 133, no. 1057 (April 1999): 228-236.
- Staley, Allen. "The Pre-Raphaelites in the 1860s: I, Rossetti." *The British Art Journal* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 5-16.

- Stephens, Frederic George. "Mr. Rossetti's Pictures." *The Athenaeum*, no. 1982 (October 21, 1865): 545-546.
- Summers, David. "Aria II: The Union of Image and Artist as an Aesthetic Ideal in Renaissance Art." *Artibus et Historiae* 10, no. 20 (1989): 15-31.
- Sundaram, Vinita. "Frederick Richards Leyland: Patron and Collector of Art." M.A. Thesis, University of California, Davis, 1983.
- Surtees, Virginia, ed. *The Diaries of George Price Boyce*. Norwich: Real World, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné*. 2 Vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.
- Swinburne, Algernon Charles. "The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti." In *Critical Essays on Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. David G. Riede, 15-23. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1992.
- Syson, Luke. "Belle: Picturing Beautiful Women." In *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer, 246-254. Exh. Cat. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Toshio, Watanabe. "Pre-Raphaelite Japonisme? Enthusiasm for and Ambivalence Towards a New Culture." *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 2-7.
- Turner, Albert Morton. "Rossetti's Reading and His Critical Opinions." *PMLA* 42, no. 2 (June, 1927): 465-91.
- The Valuable Collection of Ancient and Modern Pictures of Frederick Richards Leyland, Esq., Deceased*. London: Christie's, 28 May 1892.
- Vasari, Giorgio. *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. Robert N. Linscott, ed. Gaston DuC. De Vere, trans. New York: The Modern Library, 1959 [1568].
- Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, ed. David Alan Brown. Exh. Cat. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Waking Dreams, The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites from the Delaware Art Museum*. Stephen Wildman, ed. Exh. Cat. Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 2004.

- Waller, Susan. "Realist Quandaries: Posing Professional and Proprietary Models in the 1860s." *Art Bulletin* 89, no. 2 (June 2007): 241-265.
- Weinberg, Gail S. "D. G. Rossetti's Ownership of Botticelli's 'Smerelda Brandini.'" *The Burlington Magazine*, no. 146 (2004): 20-26.
- \_\_\_\_\_. " 'Looking Backward': Opportunities for the Pre-Raphaelites to see 'Pre-Raphaelite' Art." In *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: The Anglo-American Enchantment*, ed. Margaretta Frederick Watson, 51-62. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ruskin, Pater, and the Rediscovery of Botticelli." *The Burlington Magazine*, no. 129 (1987): 25-7.
- West, Shearer. *Portraiture*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Wilcox, John. "The Beginnings of *l'art pour l'art*." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 6, no. 4 (June 1953): 366-375.
- Woods-Marsden, Joanna. "Portrait of the Lady, 1430-1520." In *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, ed. David Alan Brown, 63-87. Exh. Cat. (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- Zuccato, Edoardo. *Petrarch in Romantic England*. Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

## VITA

Carolyn Elizabeth Porter was born on August 1, 1983 in Seneca, South Carolina, United States, where she retains citizenship. In 2004, she earned her Bachelor of Arts from Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina. She completed her Master of Arts in art history in 2007 at Virginia Commonwealth University. Several papers related to the dissertation were presented at conferences: “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Venus Verticordia* and the Avant-Garde Nude,” presented at the 2008 Cleveland Symposium, “*Au Naturel*: Studying the Representation of the Nude in Art,” February 2008, Cleveland Museum of Art and Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio; “Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Aestheticism, and Synaesthesia,” presented at the Southeastern College Art Conference, October 2007, Charleston, West Virginia; and “Portraying Women: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Works of the Early 1860s,” presented at the New Scholars & New Ideas Symposium, March 2006, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. She has taught courses in survey art history and nineteenth-century art at Virginia Commonwealth University since 2006 and has also taught Visual Language courses at the South Carolina Governor’s School for the Arts and Humanities, Greenville, South Carolina.