

Linda Fořtová, *The Visual Aspect of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Poetry*

Opponent's Report on M.A. Thesis

In her extended M. A. thesis the student pays attention to the specific problem of representing the visual in the poetry of D. G. Rossetti, the major representative of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This is a very significant topic as the nineteenth-century art, inspired by the expressive theories of Romanticism, focused on the effects of art and beauty (or aesthetic qualities) on the human mind, especially in their complex, synthetic or synesthetic nature. Blending of the verbal and visual was a central issue for Pre-Raphaelite praxis, which was especially exemplified in Rossetti's work.

The opening part of the thesis deals with the rise and development of the Horatian idea of *Ut Pictura Poesis* and its relevance for nineteenth-century aesthetic thought. The student includes not only Lessing's famous study, but also other conceptions, such as the ekphrasis. It would be advisable, however, to discuss the difference between the ekphrasis and *Ut Pictura Poesis* in a more profound way. Ekphrasis implies metarepresentation and thus interpretation of interpretation, which is a different concept than blending of different artistic means of representation. The analytical parts of the thesis do not include "The Portrait", the most famous ekphrastic poem by Rossetti, where the issue of representation is presented in a highly ambiguous way.

The very core of the thesis consists of three chapters in which three Rossetti's poems are analysed: "The Blessed Damozel", "The Card Dealer", and "My Sister Sleep". Here the student provides a very detailed formal analysis of their texts, paying attention especially to the poet's treatment of colours and sounds. Her approach is truly meticulous: she tries to extract meanings from every detail. It is true that Pre-Raphaelite poetry was heavy with symbolism and that a close scrutiny is more than justifiable, as many critical sources prove. On the other hand, there is always a pitfall of mere speculation, which may be clearly off the mark. Some passages, I'm afraid, verge on this. For instance, when the student ventures to transpose Rossetti's lines to colours or music, one indeed wonders about the relevance of it. More so when the pronunciation of Gertrude's name (in a line from "The Blessed Damozel") is queerly adapted to fit a dubious theory (by the way, the regular modern pronunciation is not [ger 'tru:d], as stated on p. 50, but ['gə:tru:d]). Moreover, the passage devoted to the formal analysis of this crucial stanza mixes up sounds and letters promiscuously.

Detailed discussions of central motifs digress to examples of similar strategies found in other poets' texts (the relevance of this may also sometimes be questioned, as with Southey's

“Cataract of Ladore”). In the Pre-Raphaelite context such interpolations are pertinent indeed, if carefully selected. So e.g. the discussion of gems and jewels is supported in such a way, yet again some qualification must be added: the student compares enumerations of precious stones in Rossetti with the enumeration of fruits in his sister's poem “The Goblin Market”, stressing a similar aesthetic effect but forgetting the fundamental difference between these objects – could she explain this? In the Pre-Raphaelite context the difference seems significant.

These somewhat problematic points were selected to show that analytical work must be subjected to critical discipline. While many parts of the thesis manifest the student's ability to read Pre-Raphaelite poetry insightfully, other passages show that the student was not always able to keep her speculative mind at bay. The art of selection is also a proof of highly developed critical mind; not all the ideas we have may prove valuable after reconsideration. This reservation is, however, not meant to discredit the thesis. The student's effort is still amazing, her acquaintance with critical sources exemplary and her devotion genuine. I recommend her M.A. thesis for the defence and suggest the grade of excellent (**v ý b o r n ě**).

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