

Posudek na diplomovou práci Lindy Fořtové “The Visual Aspect of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Poetry”

vedoucí práce: PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M.A.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti once said, “Colour and meter, these are the true patents of nobility in painting and poetry, taking precedence of all intellectual claims.” These words testify to the fact that looking for the pictorial in his poetry is not surprising but actually in the logic of things. The sister arts go hand in hand in the work of this Pre-Raphaelite poet and painter, whose three poems (The Blessed Damozel, The Card Dealer and My Sister’s Sleep) utilize strategies and techniques of representation similar to painting. The range of Rossetti’s pictorial techniques extends into prosody and “the evocative power ... to visualize the poetic images and colours” (page 2). This is the premise that Linda Fořtová starts from and proceeds to prove. Her thesis is painstakingly researched (the bibliography is impressive), intelligently structured (although there is an imbalance – The Blessed Damozel gets by far most attention, about 70 pages, twice as much as any of the other two texts), and written in nearly flawless idiomatic English. Nevertheless, in its attempt at comprehensiveness, possibly too much detail and minutiae are included into the main body of the thesis (background information, repetitions, interpretations which include long summaries of other critical sources etc.) Thus it becomes a veritable encyclopedia of the vast array of allusions, sources for images, possible interpretations of symbols etc. The individual contribution then gets rather lost in the overall bulky structure. Yet, the positives outweigh the negatives – the thesis compiles and evaluates its critical sources as it inspiringly interprets its poetic material. With the following reservation: a bit of pruning or at least abbreviating would have helped to create a more organized impression. Thus, for example, the lengthy passage on names in The Blessed Damozel ultimately becomes dreary and convoluted, begging the question what all this play with letter and sound (!) is actually good for. Indeed, it seems that here, the most valuable is Vogel’s brief observation on page 56.

Proceeding from beginning to the end of the thesis, I have a few comments and some questions:

Page 9 – the footnote about the influence of Thomson’s picturesque inspired a question about the relation of *ut pictura poesis* and the picturesque. Can the student respond at the defence?

Page 16 – analysis of the toilet scene in *The Rape of the Lock*: one more comment – it is the *indiscriminate* positioning of the objects, i.e. their relation to each other, their lying side by side that creates meanings - trivializes the significant and provides layers of ironies (e.g. the Bible among patches and puffs, or, animals – even those of great size and strength – transformed into combs).

The explication of possible derivations for the word damozel is truly extensive, but lacks one omission: its relation to damsel.

Page 32 – the impression of stillness (referred to in the thesis as “under water”) is actually created already in ll. 3 and 4 (waters stilled at even).

Blessed need not imply a Catholic heaven. Must the word imply beatification as a first step to canonization? Cannot it be consecrated, holy, blissfull?

The saintly image of the Damozel is made much of at first. It is only later (page 67) that mention is made of the physicality of her depiction in the poem. It seems to me that the bodily and physical looms much higher in the painting. The “stunner” face recalls a much more earthly kind of passion than heavenly reverie.

Page 44 – Dryden was not an eighteenth century poet. He died in 1700.

Page 50 – the suggested pronunciation of Gertrude is highly irregular and controversial. If the rest of the names have stress on the first syllable, why not read the name as such too? Amphibrach creates a similar anomaly as the inclusion of a two-syllable word. Is there any source for this pronunciation?

Page 67 – Can we also not “read” the painting from top to bottom as a four strata structure? The topmost being not the damozel but the celestial lovers?

For all the explanation provided, the last poem indeed stands out as different in its approach to the pictorial. As Linda herself says, it utilizes the visual rather in more filmic ways as a “series of scenes”, a “micro-movie”.

Page 145 – I would suggest that the poem actually does not start with the moment of Margaret’s death. Although sleep has the poetic connotations of death, it seems that she really falls asleep and the mother looks at her sleeping, taking care not to wake her up with candlelight. Margaret dies in her sleep. Linda seems to suggest this later but strikingly keeps on talking about the first line meaning death.

My questions above are concerned rather with the minutiae and not with any fundamental issue expressed in the thesis. Therefore, I fully recommend it for defence with the preliminary mark of excellent (**v ý b o r n ě**).

V Praze dne 4.9.12

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