

# THE CONSUMING AESTHETIC OF DANTE ROSSETTI'S "THE ORCHARD-PIT" AND *BOCCA BACIATA*

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After the sale of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting *Bocca Baciata* (fig. 1.; 1859) to George Boyce, Rossetti's friend Arthur Hughes imagined that the new owner of the painting would "kiss the dear thing's lips away" (qtd in *Correspondence* 2:278n2). Hughes's image of Boyce consuming the painting he had purchased raises the twin concerns of this essay: the tension between the aestheticism of Rossetti's "floral" portraits of the 1860s and Victorian discourses of consumerism, expressed in this case with an overly literal metaphor of consumption.<sup>1</sup> *Bocca Baciata* has conventionally been understood by art historians as a "landmark in the emerging Aestheticism of the post-Pre-Raphaelite era" due to the emphasis in the portrait on "sheer visual delight as an end in itself" (Bryant 96). If the women depicted in these "floral" portraits are undoubtedly objects of desire as traditionally perceived in the aesthetic sense, this essay will re-situate the painting in mid-Victorian discourses of consumerism – within economies at the same time literary, consumer, and sexual. By reading *Bocca Baciata* alongside Rossetti's literary and editing activities, in particular the relationship between the marketplace of desire imagined in his sister Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin Market," and his own re-imagining of that market of desire in "The Orchard-Pit" ballad from the same decade, this article suggests ways of reading Rossetti's portraits as deeply engaged with emerging consumer economies.

In the early 1860s Rossetti had been intimately involved with the publication of *Goblin Market and other Poems* (1862), his sister's first collection of poetry. Not only did he solicit publication of the work on his sister's behalf, which he negotiated with Macmillan through 1861; he contributed illustrations for the title page and frontispiece, designed the binding, and suggested revisions on the proof copies of the poems, which he