

## LOVE FOR LOVE: DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S *BOCCA BACIATA* AND "THE SONG OF THE BOWER"

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Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* (1859) has long been recognized as "a turning point in [his] development as an artist and his final rejection of Pre-Raphaelite teachings and principles" (Rodgers 66). Commissioned by George Boyce and indebted in form and subject to the Venetian bust- and three-quarter-length portraits that Rossetti had come to admire in the wake of Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* (1851, 1853) and *Modern Painters*, volumes 3 and 4 (1856), it depicts Fanny Cornforth in a state of semi-dishabille against a background of marigolds, holding one of the same flowers in her hand and gazing wistfully off into the distance over the viewer's left shoulder. Adorning her luxurious auburn hair on one side is a piece of costume jewellery and on the other a white rose. On the parapet to her left is a ripe apple. *Bocca Baciata* may not be entirely "inscrutable" (Bowness 25) but, taken together, its marigolds – a flower whose name is a compound of (the Virgin) Mary and gold,<sup>1</sup> its white rose – a flower that Rossetti had earlier placed on the chaste "robe" of the Blessed Damozel as "Mary's gift, / For service meetly worn" (*Complete Writings* 7-12),<sup>2</sup> and its ripe apple, which, of course, evokes both the Christian story of the Fall and the classical topos of the Judgement of Paris, send a mixed, even contradictory, message that is only partly clarified by the painting's title, a phrase taken from a line of Boccaccio that is inscribed on its back: "Bocca baciata non perda ventura, anzi rinnova come fa la luna": "The mouth that has been kissed loses not its freshness; still it renews itself even as does the moon" (Surtees 1:68). The implication is that sexuality stands outside the nexus of innocence forever corrupted by sinfulness that is evoked by the painting's Christian allusions. Here indeed is, in David Rodgers's words, a departure not only from the "morally elevating subjects" of Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite days (66), but also from the "Arthurian and Dantean subjects" of the mid-to-late 1850s (Surtees 1:68).<sup>3</sup>