

# PRELUDE TO THE LAST DECADE: DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI IN THE SUMMER OF 1872

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## *Introduction*

### I

IN March of 1883, Theodore Watts-Dunton published in *The Nineteenth Century* an article entitled, "The Truth About Rossetti".<sup>1</sup> It was a promising title but a disappointing, and essentially dishonest, performance, for Watts-Dunton, like so many of Rossetti's closest friends and family, was committed to a view of the painter-poet that virtually excluded criticism and accepted only those "truths" which reflected creditably on the idealized Rossetti whom he hoped to convey to posterity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> xiii (March 1883), 404-23. Although Watts did not change his name to Watts-Dunton until 1896, the expanded form is used throughout this paper and abbreviated TWD. All names which recur with some frequency in the notes are abbreviated: AB (Alice Boyd), FMB (Ford Madox Brown), HTD (Henry Treffry Dunn), GGH and TGH (George Gordon and Thomas Gordon Hake), WM and JM (William and Jane Morris), CGR, DGR, WMR (Christina Georgina, Dante Gabriel, and William Michael Rossetti), WBS (William Bell Scott). AP and PP refer respectively to manuscripts in the Angeli or Penkill Papers at the University of British Columbia. For several works to which frequent reference is made, abbreviations are provided in initial entries; subsequent citations appear internally in the text.

<sup>2</sup> TWD wrote an obituary of DGR in the *Athenaeum*, no. 2842 (15 April 1882), pp. 480-2; reprinted in *Old Familiar Faces* (London 1916), pp. 69-76. Writing to his son George on 12 May 1882, TGH says, "Watts was here yesterday and a more typical dog-cad I have not seen within the memory of self. He is now living on the bones of Rossetti. . . . The lies he has told about Rossetti in print and talk give him a place in fiction" (unpublished letter in Hake Papers, British Museum, Add. MSS. 49,466, Packet 7).

Writing to AB on 13 June 1882, WBS discussed the flurry of literary activity following DGR's death: "Watts was here yesterday after dinner in a state of simmer—I might say boiling over, about Sharp and Caine having prepared themselves as rival acrobats to write books about DGR! He says Gabriel on his death bed begged him to let no one else write 'a Life'—to write it himself—if it was necessary. He had prevailed on Caine to be quiet, but suddenly the other hanger-on whom as Watts says 'I have brought a little into notice, and

With William Michael Rossetti's assistance, Watts-Dunton sought to establish a myth about Rossetti: to project an image of a maligned and misunderstood genius who stood outside the pale of human weakness and who met and conquered myriad adversities; of a poet and painter of inestimable quality and incomparable aesthetic influence whose generosity and encouragement of men of lesser talent was without parallel; of a man whose single flaw was his uxorious devotion to an ideal of beauty symbolized by a deceased spouse to whom he rendered the supreme sacrifice of committing his creative self to her coffin, and who, because of the torments of his dedicated existence, died before his time.<sup>1</sup>

who was seeing me daily and hourly', has, without mentioning his intention, got Macmillan to commission him a book of 300 pages as the intimate friend of the deceased! and then Caine says, 'Well! if *he* does it I shall too!' It seems DGR has written whole bundles of letters to Caine some of them six or eight pages long! Watts is cut out of the game and in despair. 'Rossetti has fallen among the Philistines' is his commentary, 'and I can't help him!' Sharp, as I think I mentioned in a former note came here and announced to me his having undertaken a book on the 'Character of DGR's art and poetry and its influence on English art and literature.' I was astonished as you may suppose. After a few moments I said, his influence on Art was simply *nil*—that in fact no one had seen any of his paintings except his private friends. He had no reply. The cause of all this interest in Gabriel's painting is really his secretiveness and the *curiosity* of the public to see what has been kept dark. I hope the revelation will not break up the charm" (unpublished letter in PP).

<sup>1</sup> Oswald Doughty lays the blame for what he calls "the absurdly romantic Rossetti legend" on Hall Caine and TWD, "Rossetti's acolytes in his last, declining years", who, "having largely invented the legend [of 'a darkly brooding, mysterious, mystical, poet recluse, a Byronic hero who was also a *Vates Sacer*, a Poet-Seer'] in Rossetti's lifetime, now vigorously propagated it after his death" (*Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 4 vols., ed. O. Doughty and J. R. Wahl [Oxford 1965-67—abbrev. DW], i, xix).

Writing to AB on 3 July 1882, WBS forewarned her that William Sharp might pay a visit to Penkill seeking material for his book on DGR. "I have talked over the matter with Watts, and he understands the propriety now of letting him try to make his performance decently good. . . . It was a wish to make Sharp understand DGR's intention of only printing privately, and giving the due importance to the Penkill period of incubation, made me show him the vol. of proofs. . . . We need not be extra polite to him, but it is just as well to have the true history of poor Gab's connection with Penkill described in his book, which, however badly done it may be, will be the best that may ever be written." As to Sharp himself, WBS writes: "He turns out not to be an

In the years immediately following Rossetti's death, Watts-Dunton guarded jealously his designation as official biographer, but the book that he promised never appeared, and in its stead William Michael Rossetti, half apologetically, in 1895, produced his *Memoir* of his brother.<sup>1</sup> Invaluable for the documentary

imposter like Hall Caine, but to be in Society as much as I am—and invited by Watts & Swinburne to hear the latter read his new poem just about to be published.” TWD's hospitality towards Sharp was clearly a recognition of a *fait accompli*: “At the first moment Watts was furious. He had evidently made up his mind that no one shd. touch the DGR subject and that some day he wd. make up an appearance in *grand tenu* [sic], poet and critic being worthy of each other. But that [he] sees is past praying for. You will find in the Academy I send with this that another unknown man is on the way with some sort of essay! DGR his Work and Influence!! which last has been exactly zero, as nobody but the two or three purchasers ever saw his pictures, and had it not been for our persuasion that time he thought he was going blind, to take up his poetry again, he would not have appeared as a poet” (unpublished letter in PP). A week later, WBS had read the “new little book about DGR . . . by someone no one knows”—actually W. E. Tirebuck, an acquaintance of Hall Caine's. Of this first book in the field, WBS was charitable: “Eloquent in its way, and good, yet wholly in the dark about the real character of D.G.” (unpublished letter in PP, dated 10 July 1882). In a letter to WMR on the 24th, TWD made no attempt to hide his dissatisfaction: “I told Stock of the immense folly of printing such a baby-like product as that of the ass Tirebuck or whatever else is his damned name. A lot of fellows will scribble about him [DGR] and vulgarize his name” (unpublished letter in AP).

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i of *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir* (London—abbrev. *FLM*). Hall Caine, who denied that his *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London, 1882) was a biography, staked TWD's claim in the Preface to his volume, the publication of which he regarded as “in some sort a trust”: “It was always known to be Rossetti's wish that if at any moment after his death it should appear that the story of his life required to be written, the one friend who during many of his later years knew him most intimately, and to whom he unlocked the most sacred secrets of his heart, Mr. Theodore Watts, should write it, unless indeed it were undertaken by his brother William” (p. vii). WMR, overtly conscious of the philadelphic fallacy, was not inclined, “now or hereafter”, as he wrote in the Preface to his first book on DGR (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* (London, 1889—abbrev. *DGRDW*), to put himself forward as the biographer of his brother: “I agree with those who think that a brother is not the proper person to undertake work of this sort. An outsider can do it dispassionately, though with imperfect knowledge of the facts; a friend can do it with mastery, and without much undue bias; but a brother, however equitably he may address himself to the task, cannot perform it so as to secure the prompt and cordial assent of his readers. His praise will only pass muster as a brother's praise; and his dispraise, even if extreme and pushed to the point

material that they do provide, the *Memoir* and other biographical writings<sup>1</sup> of William Michael Rossetti are avowedly censored. “ ‘ Have you told everything, of a substantial kind, that you know about your deceased brother? ’ ” he queried himself in the Preface of the *Memoir*, assuming for the moment the role of a hypothetical and curious reader. “ My answer shall be given beforehand, and without disguise : ‘ No ; I have told what I choose to tell, and have left untold what I do not choose to tell ; if you want more, be pleased to consult some other informant ’ ” (*FLM*, i, xii). William Michael was not so much dissembling as judicious in presenting the life facts of his brother, and, while he did not subscribe to the whitewashing designs of Watts-Dunton, he only managed to limn a partial and anaemic version of the real man. It would be unfair to suggest of his writings that they obscure more than they reveal, but it is certain that his treatment leaves many questions unanswered ; and it is doubtless true that his overt acknowledgement that there was more to tell than he chose to reveal challenged subsequent biographers to scour the back alleys and cul-de-sacs of Rossetti’s life for the truth about him.<sup>2</sup>

of captiousness, keeps the taint of consanguinity. It runs more chance of being censured as unkind than of being frankly accepted as impartial ” (x-xi). Six years later, however, when Hall Caine’s prediction that, owing to TWD’s “ immersion in all kinds and varieties of life, ” “ years (perhaps many years) may elapse before such a biography is given to the world ” (pp. vii-viii) proved accurate, William Michael overcame his instinctive objections. Explaining that he should still prefer that TWD, “ rather than myself, should be the biographer, writing a *Memoir* to accompany the *Letters* ”, he admitted tacitly that he had tired of waiting : “ Doubtless he saw reason for not producing his *Memoir* so soon as I had been expecting it, . . . but circumstances have proved too strong for me, and I submit to their dictate ” (p. ix-x). In a letter-review of *FLM* (*Spectator*, lxxiv, no. 3539 [25 April 1896], 596-7), TWD declared that he had not abandoned his intentions to write Rossetti’s biography.

<sup>1</sup> For WMR’s writings see W. E. Fredeman, *Pre-Raphaelitism : A Bibliocritical Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965—abbrev. *Pre-Raphaelitism*), Section 38, and Index. Besides the abbreviations already established for WMR’s works, the following will be employed : *RRP* (*Ruskin : Rossetti : Pre-Raphaelitism*, 1899), *SR* (*Some Reminiscences*, 1906), *RP* (*Rossetti Papers*, 1903).

<sup>2</sup> Answering the “ critics in the press ”, especially TWD, “ who seem to consider that, if I had been less candid, and had painted the portrait of my brother with more varnish upon it, I should have been a less incompetent and more laudable biographer ”, WMR in the Preface to *RRP* (pp. vii-viii), took the

For several reasons, Rossetti has always incited curiosity. His natural secretiveness and reclusiveness led in his lifetime to a speculation that after his death was only intensified by the outright obscurantism of so much of the writing about him. In addition, Rossetti belongs to that class of creative artist, along with Poe, Byron, and the Brontës, whose very inscrutability serves as a magnet to biographers. This class, sufficiently complex as personalities, gives away almost nothing about themselves, either in the public pronouncements of their recorded statements and conversations or in the private confidences of their letters, however confessional they may seem to be on the surface. For such artists no amount of documentation ever seems adequate, and biographers, sensing that understanding must lie elsewhere, turn inward upon themselves to find, inevitably, a fiction that somehow is stranger than truth. Persistent panegyric has also put biographers on the scent, as it were, of those closets in which reside the unexposed skeletons of Rossetti's life. William Bell Scott, whose own revelations about Rossetti in his *Autobiographical Notes* led to his posthumous character assassination, wrote to W. M. Rossetti on 20 November 1885 :

Watts did excellently in his paper called "The Truth About Rossetti" and I suppose has done so in the Encyclopedea, but<sup>1</sup> I am not of the opinion that the persistence of a friend writing eulogiums does good. You will observe that in no

opposite stance : "What I said of Dante Rossetti was said with affection and admiration, if also with straight-forwardness ; and several truths were stated in a mild tone, not because I wished to force them upon public attention, but because they had previously been stated by other persons in an acrid tone. If I care myself to read anything at all about a man, I like to know what he really was, and, when I become the informant, I like my reader to do the same. An important personage does not in the long-run suffer by our understanding what were his faults, blemishes, or weaknesses ; he thus becomes more human to us, and therefore more endeared. A photograph with the wrinkles burnished out is always a bad photograph, and a foolish-looking one. The readers (or critics) of my memoir of Dante Rossetti may be pretty sure that, if they feel concerned for his good name, I feel much more so." That truth is relative and that the whole matter revolves on a question of emphasis is clearly suggested in William Michael's concluding sentence, and by the subsequent controversy with WBS culminating in the reactions to the posthumous revelations in the *Autobiographical Notes* (2 vols., London, 1892—abbrev. *AN*). As a biographer, WMR occupies a point midway between the reserved candor of WBS and the reverential hypocrisies of TWD. See the reprint of TWD's review of *DGRDW* in *Old Familiar Faces*, pp. 77-97.

<sup>1</sup> TWD's article in the 9th edn. of the *Britannica*.

case has any other laudatory writing about our dear G. appeared. Robert Buchanan's attack was in consequence of so many laudatory notices having been *planted* by G. himself before publication.<sup>1</sup>

Scott's account of his intimate friend in the *Autobiographical Notes* was neither scurrilous nor misrepresentative; his fault in the minds of his assailants, principal among whom were Swinburne and Watts-Dunton,<sup>2</sup> was that he dared to expose to scrutiny facets of Rossetti's life and personality that proprietary interests had managed to keep buried for a decade. Scott was neither spiteful nor ungenerous in his comments about Rossetti, and the view that he was motivated by "sub-conscious jealousy, combined with a growing awareness of his own failure to achieve eminence",<sup>3</sup> is simply not borne out by surviving records. To the contrary, Scott consciously suppressed a considerable amount of information at his disposal which would have reflected unfavourably on his life-long friend. His portrait of Rossetti is often distorted, and memory on many occasions plays him false, but the Rossetti recreated in the *Autobiographical Notes* has a flesh and blood reality, with all its strengths and weaknesses, that is too frequently missing from familial accounts. The fact is that Scott knew Rossetti better than most of his acquaintances and more intimately than many in his own family. From 1864, when Scott moved from Newcastle to London, he was frequently in Rossetti's company, and between 1868 and 1872 he was the painter-poet's closest confidant, privy as few were to the secrets of Rossetti's life. Unlike so many Rossetti devotees who were unable or unwilling to reconcile sides of Rossetti's personality and character which they judged reprehensible, Scott accepted the contradictions in Rossetti's complex nature, even when he did not understand or agree with them. And, as he was realistic about his own limitations,<sup>4</sup> so he recognized those of his friend.

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, Durham University Library.

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of the critical controversy following the publication of *AN* see W. E. Fredeman's *A Pre-Raphaelite Gazette* (BULLETIN *xlvi*-*xlix* (1967)), pp. 41-52.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Rossetti Angeli, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies* (London, 1949—abbrev. *HRA*), p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> WBS' original title for his autobiography—*Pictor Ignotus*—employed the rhyming nickname given him by DGR in his limerick beginning, "There's a

That he almost never dissembles is clearly indicated by his frank discussions of Rossetti's artistic and personal shortcomings in his correspondence with William Michael. Scott's propinquity to Rossetti and his genuine affection for him made him more rather than less critical of his friend's artistic weaknesses<sup>1</sup>; and there is every likelihood that his revelations in the *Autobiographical Notes* were intended in part to offset the extremes of adulation of the Rossetti cult.

When Scott learned in 1885 that W. M. Rossetti was foolish old Scotchman called Scotus, / Most justly a *Pictor Ignotus* " (*AN*, ii, 188). He was, he says, "an absentee, a somnambule," who thought himself "an old man at forty": "introspection was my pleasure and my curse; action was hated by me . . ." (*AN*, i, 3). That he recognized that his importance lay not so much in his artistic and poetic productions as in his associations with the great and near great inspires much of the *AN* and is confirmed by many passages in his correspondence. As an old man, for instance, he writes on 27 September 1887 to WMR, "For myself I never was among the well known men in London, and never tried to be . . ." (unpublished letter in *AP*). The sentence quoted is also used by Lona Mosk Packer in her *Christina Rossetti* (Berkeley, 1963—abbrev. *LMP*), p. 344. In the five excerpts from the unpublished letters of WBS to WMR which Professor Packer and I have used in common, the emphasis is consistently and diametrically opposite. She sees WBS' letters as examples of feigned "disinterested impartiality" and accuses him of "striking out in all directions", "like a wounded animal in his lair" (pp. 378-9), a kind of prelude to his "ill-natured attack upon Gabriel throughout the autobiography" (p. 378). Subsequent references to quotations in *LMP* are given following the manuscript citation.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Minto, the editor of *AN*, acknowledges in WBS what is probably best described as a lack of tact—"He simply could not praise what he did not honestly admire" (ii, 333). But Minto categorically denies that WBS possessed a "grudging spirit", or that he was unjust or uncharitable in his judgements of his fellows. His evaluation of DGR's talents was perfectly consistent; he considered him supreme as a poet but as an artist deficient in technique. And the strictures that he makes on DGR's art in a letter to F. G. Stephens (dated 16 December 1885) are exactly those articulated in *AN*, in his letters to WMR, and in the Preface to *The King's Quair* (1887): ". . . Ellis, who has had some experience in the sale of Gabriel's pictures prognosticates that Graham's sale will be a failure as far as DGR's pictures go. The truth is, as you know, our friend never taught himself to draw—his consciousness of this was one reason for his persistence in not exhibiting—and he fell into the habit of simply reproducing his model, peculiar upper lips, spatulus fingers or anything else. To me it is clear he will live by his poems not by his pictures" (unpublished letter, Bodleian Library, MS. don. e 86, fol. 112). The same passage is quoted in part in Rosalie Glynn Grylls's [Lady Mander] *Portrait of Rossetti* (London, 1964—abbrev. *RGG*), p. 124.

projecting a biographical and literary study of his brother, he was enthusiastic but cautious in his response :

What a charming book you might produce about him, abandoning any hack literary assistance! The personality of Gabriel with all its weaknesses and delusions was a perfect individuality, and the most fascinating I have met. . . .

I have a strong feeling too that such a book written on the lines I mean would be a labour of love. The place he must take in poetry (in painting too, but more doubtful) makes it certain that a true picture of his nature as exhibited in his life, is necessary to avoid the lies and revelations that have been poured out by half-enlightened writers about Shelley, Byron, and others and warrant[s] such a treatment. If your dear mother wd. dissent from this, delay your work. But to give only one side of him by letters to his family you must see is only like Mrs. Stow's *Sunny Memoirs* with alas! the infernal unrevealed story beneath, and I know Dear G. had a curious way of never touching in his letter-writing on the all important state of his mind in relation to any malady he might labour under, and from various things I have observed, I think, neither in writing nor viva voce, was he confidential to the members of his own family.

The letters will make a great volume or volumes, and exceedingly interesting and worthy publication ; he was very fond of letter writing, and wrote his only good prose offhand in that way ; but still I shd. like to test the biographical value of his home letters.<sup>1</sup>

Although the correspondence between Scott and W. M. Rossetti between 1885 and 1887 is incomplete,<sup>2</sup> it is clear from surviving

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter in AP dated 22 October. The early date of this letter puts into perspective the patience and restraint of WMR in waiting for the biographical muse to settle on TWD.

Several letters in AP confirm the fact that WMR was considering the publication of his brother's letters, with a memoir by TWD, within a few months of DGR's death. The intent was obviously to offset the productions of Hall Caine and William Sharp, whose *Recollections* and *Dante Gabriel Rossetti : A Record and a Study* both appeared in 1882. But the letters waited interminably on TWD's memoir. As late as 1892, he wrote to WMR : " I'm extremely anxious to see what I have written about G. in print now." But WMR's disillusionment by this time precluded any optimistic expectations ; on the reverse side of TWD's letter he noted that on 31 July he had written to his publishers, Ellis and Elvey, suggesting that they write direct to TWD informing him that unless a substantial portion of his manuscript was " in the printers' hands by 1/1/93, we shall regard the project as lapsed, and shall do whatever we think fit apart therefrom " (unpublished letter in AP dated 23 July 1892.)

<sup>2</sup> Among the WBS papers in the Troxell Collection, now at Princeton, are some twenty letters from WMR to WBS. At the time of writing, the collection has not been catalogued and cannot be consulted. Some indication of the scope of the WBS papers (over 650 letters to WBS in all) is provided by the Sotheby catalogue of the Morse Sale (11 March 1952, Lots 185-186). Another forty-three letters from WMR to WBS were purchased by the Library of Arizona State

letters that William Michael was not receptive to Scott's concern for candour. Scott writes on 19 July 1887 :

I was truly delighted to have your letter with it genial air of the old time pervading it. Except my own brother David, who was my tyrant and occasionally bully,<sup>1</sup> no friend was so much to me as Gabriel, and still I must say, these two men are in the history of my life the two great and able men I have known. I had to write my brother's life and I tried to convey a picture of the hero sufficiently sad and yet sufficiently noble. I tried to make a biography that was a work of art, and had my subject been, as Gabriel would have admitted in a similar treatment, romantic and even mystical I fancy the book wd. have made a greater impression. As it was, however, I have had in the course of years, many evidences to prove it (the memoir) a work of lasting interest. I thought you had a chance of doing something of an extraordinary kind with poor dear G's biography but you misunderstood me, I think. Except that, I have given you no reason to suppose me deficient in affectionate regard for Gabriel.<sup>2</sup>

On 28 July 1887, Scott wrote acknowledging receipt of William's edition of Dante Gabriel's *Collected Works* (published in 1886). "As for your own writing in the edition," he concluded, "I look upon it as an admirable and lovable piece of work, but not representing Gabriel. That touches the old subject between us, so I say no more."<sup>3</sup> When William took issue with this view,

University in 1968. Although these letters cover a span of years between 1850 and 1880, Professor Nicholas Salerno assures me they contain no references to Rossetti's illness of 1872. Considering the extent of the correspondence from WBS to WMR (over 150 letters at Durham besides those in AP), a sizable number of letters from WMR to WBS must still remain unlocated.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *AN*, i, 262: "The two men I have known whose influence over those about them has been most overpowering have been my brother David, who never used this influence for his own advancement, and D.G.R. . . . who is a master in the use of it, and I hope will continue to be so in a professional way. . . ."

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter in AP; LMP, p. 378.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; LMP, p. 379. The day previous WBS had written to TWD concerning Joseph Knight's *Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London, 1887): "I have had some interesting correspondence with W.M.R. caused by my sending him a copy. Perhaps you know I think his line of treatment of Gabriel's personality and social life quite a wrong line. He knew my view of what he was doing and getting others to do, long ago, as I advised him soon after D.G.R.'s death to make a true history of him, a work of Art for History to preserve, an advice which he did not approve of. The letters that have lately passed between us refer to that advice. I think we are now better friends than we have been" (quoted by LMP, pp. 378-9). The advice given to WMR must refer to WBS's letter of 22 October 1885, quoted above; if so, it may well be that there was no exchange of letters between the pair during the twenty months between October 1885 and WMR's letter of July 1887.

Scott decided further discussion was futile, but he was unable to resist a final analysis, which is at once interesting and revelatory :

Regarding the difference between your views of how we should write of D.G.R.'s history or internal nature I fancy no good would come of either talking or writing. But of the two talking would be best certainly. Did you read a review of Knight's book in the Academy? The impression evidently made on the mind of the dear creature who had written the little article was that the author of the Ballads, the Sonnets, Jenny, and every other powerful poem, was the most amiable, innocent, purist of the generation. I fancy your views have been adopted from F.M.B. who so delights in secrets and even in conspiracies, that a few more added to his collection are an addition to the pleasure of life to him!<sup>1</sup>

It was perhaps William Michael's unwillingness to provide a full and impartial account of his brother that led Scott to attempt his own portrait in his autobiography, and less than a year later he writes William for permission to reprint Gabriel's Kelmscott correspondence relating to the publication of *Poems*.<sup>2</sup> The per-

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter in AP dated 9 August. Interestingly, WMR tends to support WBS's view. Discussing DGR's conspiratorial fantasies after the publication of Buchanan's attack, WMR writes: "Most of his friends, myself included, combated these ideas. I question whether his closest confidant, Madox Brown, did so with adequate energy, for he himself, though reasonable and clear-headed, was of a very suspicious temper in professional matters, and held himself and his immediate circle to be not a little ill-used" (*FLM*, i, 305; *LMP*, p. 379). Professor Packer's conclusion that "the attack upon Brown was quite gratuitous" does not seem to be borne out by WMR's comment.

<sup>2</sup> "I have a series of letters from Gabriel, a complete series of short or long letters all about the poetry he was writing, some about my poetry at the time, all written in about 5 months, I think, from Kelmscott after the publication of his vol. 1871 when in excellent spirits, just before his going up to town when his bad illness began. In the whole of these letters no reference is made to anything external to his immediate surroundings and interests in his work (painting not so much as poetry), and the whole give a vivid picture of the care he exercised in elaborating his verse. All these letters wh. literally touch nothing else than his (or in small degree on my) poetry, I have a desire to give to form a chapter by themselves, and I want you to allow me to print them. My book, if it ever becomes a book, may or may not be printed while I live, but I must have these letters if possible. I have an extraordinary similar series of Mr. Hunt's all written from Jerusalem, letters of great length on religious matters, also showing his character at great advantage, but not as an artist as Gabriel's do in his case, but still exceedingly interesting. He remembers the writing of these, and has given me permission to make a chapter of them, only leaving out references to people private or other friends, wh. of course I shall take care to do. In Gabriel's letters there is not a proper name mentioned in the whole set, or if there is, I can

mission, though given readily, must have been made with reservations, for Scott writes on 16 August 1888, " I shall take care that nothing offensive to anyone is printed in them, as indeed there is nothing in them of that character scarcely, and the little there is I shall excise ".<sup>1</sup>

The reticence that is apparent in William Michael's writing on his brother is only occasionally noticeable in the manuscripts which he marked for eventual publication.<sup>2</sup> One such, and a tantalizing instance, occurs in a letter from Scott written 23 January 1889 :

I understand you and Watts are going to come out with an analysis of Gabriel's sonnets and other works. Do you think he stands in need of friends still? It is a pity if he does, and will not benefit by a eulogy, I fancy. Do you mean to . . . At this point five or six lines have been cut from the letter, which recommences,

. . . rhetorical and elaborated. Knight said very cleverly they shd. be called the *House of Love* not the *House of Life*.<sup>3</sup>

The offending passage cannot be reconstructed, but it is clear that Scott was curious about the way in which the two exegetes would present the details surrounding the composition of Rossetti's sonnet sequence.

Considering the length and intimacy of the friendship between W. M. Rossetti and Scott, the extent of their correspondence, and the frankness of Scott's opinions about Dante Gabriel expressed in his letters to William Michael, there can have been little to surprise in the *Autobiographical Notes*. That there was not may explain the temperance of William's response compared

leave it out, only he was in the happiest humour at that period, and has no inferences as far as I remember at all to anybody" (unpublished letter in AP, dated 6 July 1888). Although in the Prologue of *AN*, WBS says that he is writing in 1877, he was obviously working on the autobiography until the time of his death in November 1890.

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter in AP, LMP, p. 379.

<sup>2</sup> In three volumes—*Preraphaelite Diaries and Letters* (1900), *RRP* (1899), and *RP* (1903)—WMR brought the editing of his family's papers to 1870. His intention, as he says in *SR* (1906) was to continue the compilation at least through the death of CGR, and he accordingly marked for editing, sometimes with long attached notes, many of the manuscripts and letters in AP.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter in AP. The reference is to *DGRDW*; it should be noted that TWD did not collaborate with WMR in the publication of this volume.

with that of Swinburne and Watts-Dunton. "I will not conceal from you, dear Miss Boyd", William wrote on 17 September 1894,

that there are some things about Gabriel in that book of Scott's *Reminiscences* wh. I do not regard as either kind or friendly, or even fair; yet this does not substantially affect the feeling wh. I always did & always shall entertain for Scott. Christina has not read the book—knowing that it contains matter wh. she wd. not like, and with wh. she prefers to remain unacquainted.<sup>1</sup>

Significantly, in this letter, William Michael does not question the accuracy of Scott's revelations, though in his published response he couched his objections in other terms, asserting that "some of his statements . . . are, according to my view of them, unkind, unhandsome, inaccurate, and practically incorrect or misleading".<sup>2</sup> Scott's treatment of Rossetti, though a corrective to William Michael's and Watts-Dunton's, is actually no less reticent. The fact is that none of the biographers of Rossetti, from Hall Caine to Lady Mander, has told the whole truth. The bowdlerizations of the protective biographies have given way to the sensational speculations of modern examinations—indeed there is a cause and effect relationship between the two extremes—but even in combination the forty book-length studies of Rossetti, sixteen of which are full-scale biographies, have not succeeded in presenting a convincing account of Rossetti the man and artist.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter in the National Library of Scotland. Hostile to WBS because of what she assumes to be his perfidious treatment of CGR, Professor Packer regards the AN (which CGR seems, in fact, not to have read) as the "final hurt" that humiliated CGR by forcing her to realize "that all her life she had loved an unworthy man" (LMP, p. 388). Of the AN Professor Packer has only scorn (see *ibid.* p. 387).

<sup>2</sup> *Academy*, xiii, no. 1074 (3 December 1892), 499. Though in his *Memoir* of DGR, WMR does not openly denounce WBS's AN, he draws frequently on the work to expose its many errors of fact, chronology and interpretation. The closest he comes to open castigation occurs in his summary of WBS's account of an interview with DGR in late 1881 (see AN, ii. 305-6 and *FLM*, i. 366-7). Professor Packer quotes (LMP, pp. 387-8) from the Stephens Papers (Bodl. MS. Don. e 76) a letter from F.G. Stephens to WMR (dated variously in the text and notes 5 and 10 December 1895) that might almost be a direct answer to WMR's appraisal of AN. While the letter is not without its bias, it is relevant in establishing the general reponse to WBS's autobiography. The reader must decide for himself the justice of Stephens's assertions.

<sup>3</sup> For a listing and discussion of these volumes see *Pre-Raphaelitism*, Section 25, and the same author's chapter on "The Pre-Raphaelites", in *The Victorian*

Whether the persistent lacunae in Rossetti's biography are owing to a conspiracy of silence, to Rossetti's own sense of privacy, or to the disappearance of certain vital records, the paradox of writing about him is that in the face of such a wealth of documentation there remain so many areas for which there is virtually no illumination. Three such, which have been the subject of continued speculation, are the circumstances surrounding the death of Elizabeth Siddal, his relationship with Jane Morris, and his mental and physical decline, culminating in his attempted suicide and collapse in the summer of 1872, from which biographers are unanimously agreed he never completely recovered. These are not the only three aspects of his life which have been inadequately treated,<sup>1</sup> but they are crucial because of a certain incremental element in their sequentiality, and because in one way or another they all relate to the single most important episode in Rossetti's life—to the publication of his *Poems* in 1870.

## II

Documentary resources are seldom adequate to the needs of the biographer, who must try, too often from scant evidence and *Poets: A Guide to Research*, ed. F. E. Faverty, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, Mass., 1968). Because so many of the Rossetti biographies have been merely reiterative reworkings of the known facts of his life, the publication of the Doughty-Wahl edition of the letters was an event long anticipated by Rossetti scholars. The expectation that documentary evidence finally would be accessible to put several ghosts to bed, alas, has not been realized, partly owing to the incompleteness of the edition (which does not, for example, contain the letters to Jane Morris), and partly because so much of the documentation depends on collateral materials in manuscript sources which have been unknown to, or unconsulted by, earlier biographers. The standard biography is unquestionably Oswald Doughty's *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London, 2nd. ed. 1960—abbrev. Doughty). The most ambitious recent studies are Lady Mander's life (RGG); Jacques Savarit's psychological biography, *Tendances mystiques et esoteriques chez Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Paris, 1961); Gale Pedrick's *Life with Rossetti* (London, 1964), an account of DGR's relationship with HTD; G. H. Fleming's *Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (London 1967); and David Sonstroem's *Rossetti and the Fair Lady* (Middletown, Conn., 1970).

<sup>1</sup> The full extent of his association with various friends, such as WBS, remains to be explored; the underlying reasons for his separation from other friends, such as Hake and, even more, Swinburne, have not been satisfactorily expounded; and the story of his relationship with his patrons, forming a singularly unpleasant narrative, has never yet been fully recounted by biographers.

incomplete records, to piece together a living fabric from the frayed ends and tattered remnants of a long disused and disintegrated garment. Even when day records are accessible, in the form of diaries, letters and personal reminiscences, the re-created life, because it lacks the dimensional realism of multiple perspective, falls desperately short of that truthful mark which must be maintained as the biographical ideal. By themselves, or even cumulatively, facts do not constitute biography, but without them that selectivity based on insight and interpretation, which characterizes the best biographies, cannot begin to be exerted.

The summer of 1872 has already been indicated as one of the grey areas of Rossetti's life, a period for which only the outlines have been sketched in. The bare facts—that in June he experienced a crisis which led to a state of semi-madness, to an abortive suicide attempt, and to a period of forced recuperation in Scotland before he resumed occupancy of Kelmscott—were related by William Rossetti in his *Memoir*, which has provided the basis for most subsequent accounts. Little if anything new has been added by later biographers to William's skeletal narrative of the period, which he referred to as " ' the parting of the waters ' in Dante Rossetti's life " (*FLM*, i, 303). The climactic importance of the events of this summer have certainly not gone unnoticed or unstressed by biographers, but chronologically the period is something of a void, the emptiness of which allows, or perhaps even encourages, speculation about three important questions: What actually happened? Why did it occur? What were the short- and long-range consequences of the events?

These questions have not been answered with precision in the past because the necessary documentation has not been available. Recently, however, two separate groups of manuscripts among the Penkill and Angeli Papers at the University of British Columbia have been brought together, and from them the summer of 1872 can be fully and firmly reconstructed. The seventy-two letters, preserved in a packet marked " To be Destroyed ", in the Penkill Papers are from and to William Bell Scott. Nineteen are written by Scott to his mistress, Alice Boyd ; another twelve are her replies to him. The remaining forty are from nine

correspondents, among them Thomas Gordon Hake and his son George Gordon (19), W. M. Rossetti (7), Ford Madox Brown (5), Jane Morris (3) and Dante Rossetti (2),<sup>1</sup> with single letters from Letitia Scott, Henry Treffry Dunn, Mrs. Maenza, Mr. Marshall (Rossetti's physician), and William Graham. All relate directly to Rossetti's illness. The fifty-seven unpublished letters in the Angeli Papers, complementing those in the Penkill collection, are mainly to William Michael Rossetti from the Hakes (41), Ford Madox Brown (6), and H. T. Dunn (6); but there are four other letters relating to the illness, including a very important draft copy of a letter from T. G. Hake to Jane Morris. In addition, there are two significant groups of correspondence on the illness (totalling 22 letters) in the Hake Papers in the British Museum, and in W. B. Scott's letters to W. M. Rossetti in the Durham University Library. In all, then, there survive just over 150 unpublished letters which, combined with another fifty-five in printed sources, make it possible to reconstruct this three-and-a-half month period of Rossetti's life with an accuracy and a diversity of point of view that is seldom possible.

Even with such wealth of material, it must be admitted that the documentation is not complete. From the Penkill Papers, first-hand accounts of Rossetti's condition are given in Scott's letters from London and Stobhall, and in the Hakes' and others' progress reports to him after he returned to Penkill. Corroborative and further accounts are contained in the letters from the Hakes to William Rossetti in the Angeli Papers. But internal evidence indicates that more than a hundred letters are unlocatable. What is chiefly missing from the total mass of surviving manuscripts are those letters which would clarify William's rather ambiguous role in the whole circumstances of this important summer of his brother's breakdown. Constant reference is made in the correspondence to his letters, but for the entire period between 2 June and 27 September only fourteen (out of a minimum of 36) have been located. Half, to Scott, are in the Penkill Papers; of the six to George Hake (now in the British Museum),

<sup>1</sup> A letter from DGR to WBS written on 24 September after his recovery is indicated as being in the packet of letters relating to DGR's illness but the letter was missing when the packet was discovered in 1963.

four were written after 19 August, when Thomas Gordon Hake wrote William :

... I return Mrs. Morris' letter—hers to me is much the same but I have burnt it together with all yours and all other letters on the subject of this illness. *Yours* I should under other circumstances have been sorry to part with. (Letter 138).

William Rossetti's side of the correspondence would, of course, round out the narrative of the summer in a significant way by providing the family response which can only be deduced from hints in the replies of the principals. Its destruction is a great loss, but the extant manuscripts contain more than sufficient raw material for a new chapter in the life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

The main purpose of this study is to provide within a running commentary a selected edition of the correspondence dealing with Rossetti in the summer of 1872. Not all letters are equally valuable, obviously, and there seems no advantage in giving the complete text of a letter when it contributes little to the narration of events. Some letters, because they merely duplicate information provided elsewhere, are not utilized. The letters are arranged chronologically without regard to the manuscript or printed source from which they derive. In general, however, only unpublished letters are quoted at any length. For reasons of economy, headings, salutations, and closes are not given; all other omissions are indicated by ellipses. The letter numbers provided in the text refer to the Calendar in which complete details concerning sources are schematized. Full documentation is provided, however, for quoted material, including unpublished letters, not bearing directly on the summer of 1872, which are not included in the Calendar. In general, transcriptions are *verbatim et literatim*, but obvious errors, such as misspellings have been silently corrected, and some punctuation, including capitalization, has been regularized for clarity.

While the subject of this study is the summer of 1872, and half the paper consists of the letters relating to it, the intent, as the title suggests, is to place this critical period within a context which incorporates both the major forces which led to Rossetti's breakdown and the influence of the crisis on Rossetti in the last decade of his life. For this reason, the study commences with a

lengthy background examination and concludes with a brief section treating the aftermath of the episode.

### *Background*

#### I

Sunday, 2 June 1872, was, William Michael Rossetti says in his *Memoir*, “one of the most miserable days of my life” (i, 307). The culmination of a long month of crises, schemes and machinations, which included the collapse of Christina on 14 May, the publication of Buchanan’s *Fleshly School* pamphlet, and various rebuttals planned by Dante Gabriel, Madox Brown, and Swinburne, 2 June inaugurated a sequence of events, the seriousness of which William’s diary entry only barely suggests :

Was all day with Gabriel at Chelsea. A day of extreme distress & anxiety, on acct. of the nervous & depressed condition into wh. G. has allowed hself to get worked. Scott came round, & as usual acted in a spirit of the truest & kindest friendship.<sup>1</sup>

Recalling the day two decades later, William was more forthright concerning his initial response :

From his wild way of talking—about conspiracies and what not—I was astounded to perceive that he was, past question, not entirely sane. . . . I was dismayed to find my brother an actual monomaniac. I, who had known him from infancy, had never before seen or surmised the faintest seed of insanity in him. . . . On that fatal 2 June, and for many days and months ensuing, I was compelled to regard my brother as partially insane, in the ordinary sense of that term. (*FLM*, i, 307, 309)

That he was uncomfortable in retrospect with his on-the-spot assessment of his brother’s condition is also part of William’s *Memoir* narrative :

It was only after an interval of time, and as I had opportunity to compare and consider the opinions expressed by medical men and others well qualified to judge, that I came to the conclusion that he never had been and never became thus insane at all, but was on the contrary the victim of chloral, acting upon strained nerves, mental disquiet, and a highly excitable imagination—all these coupled with a grievous and fully justified sense of wrong. For many years past my conviction has been that hypochondria, consequent upon the over-dosing with chloral and alcohol—this, and not anything dependent upon constitutional

<sup>1</sup> WMR’s unpublished diaries are in AP ; subsequent references will be identified by entry date and not footnoted.

unsoundness of mind—was the real secret of my brother's frenzied collapse. . . .

From this point onward I shall assume in good faith (and my reader can part company with me if he chooses) that my brother's fantasies were those of a hypochondriac, not a madman; and that the hypochondria was directly due to the chloral, but without leaving out of account those other incentives of which I have just spoken. Meanwhile, whatever the cause, his mind was truly not a sound one. (*FLM*, i, 309-310)

It is all too easy—as so much writing on Rossetti testifies—to become hopelessly enmeshed in post-mortem diagnoses of the physical and psychological ailments that plagued Rossetti from about 1866 until his death. The temptation is always present for the biographer to extend his childhood phantasies and “play” doctor or psychoanalyst with his subject. In Rossetti's case it has proved almost irresistible, and Helen Rossetti Angeli is unquestionably right in her assessment of Rossetti's appeal:

It is a singular fact that the Rossetti in whom immediate posterity has shown the liveliest interest is not the painter of the youthful years of Pre-Raphaelite enthusiasm, whose work and personality helped to mould the art history of his time; nor yet the mature artist of the central and productive period, the genial and even jolly Rossetti, hub and magnet of a brilliant circle; but the hypochondriac, and at times maniacal invalid of the last decade, more particularly in the relapses of his illness. (*HRA*, p. 226)<sup>1</sup>

Because of the morbid interest in the pathological Rossetti, it is difficult to deny Mrs. Angeli's corollary that the factual “history of his health and disturbances” assumes “special importance”. However, it can be argued that in devoting so much attention to Rossetti's case-history, unsupported by corroborating contemporary medical accounts, biographers have spent a disproportionate amount of time and space on taxonomical details which do little to explain a crisis of the magnitude of the collapse of

<sup>1</sup> Studies such as those by L. J. Bragman in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* (1936) and Macht and Gessford in *The Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine* (1938)—both of which deal with Rossetti's drug experiences (see *Pre-Raphaelitism*, 25.88 and 25.90)—and S. C. Dyke's “Some Medical Aspects of the Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti”, in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* (1963) should be distinguished from the lay diagnosis of biographers, though it should be added that none of these accounts is a satisfactory clinical analysis, because the medical commentators, like the biographers, are forced to draw their conclusions from impressionistic and unscientific evidence. Among the biographers most prone to psychoanalytical or physiological reconstruction are Doughty, Savarit, and W. D. Paden in his monograph on *La Pia* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1958).

1872. Whether that breakdown took the form of madness or hypochondria is ultimately irrelevant. Climaxing what was the most creative literary period of Rossetti's life, the summer of 1872 was both a culmination and a commencement; and in its transitional position, it provides a key to understanding the involved motivations and conflicts that characterize his later years.

## II

The immediate causes of the breakdown were numerous and exceedingly complex. William Rossetti's assessment, that it "was the result of the triple combination [of] insomnia, chloral, and the *Fleshly School of Poetry* in its pamphlet form" (*DGRDW*, p. 160), must be regarded as only partially correct for it disregards other forces which were equally, if less obviously, working to undermine the delicate poise of Rossetti's equilibrium; and it fails to account for the complicated interplay of these forces, which worked in combination to produce a collapse that had such permanent and disastrous consequences.

The decade between 1862 and 1872, one of the most crucial in Rossetti's life, is well documented. Commencing with Elizabeth Siddal's death on 11 February 1862, it was to prove for Dante Gabriel a period of hard work, difficult adjustment, mental strain, and physical decline. For several years, he was haunted by those "poignant memories and painful associations" connected with the death of his wife that his brother says "were his portion; and he was prone to think that some secret might yet be wrested from the grave" (*FLM*, i, 255). That "secret," inextricably bound up with his wife's suicide and attendant feelings of guilt on Gabriel's part, was sought on many occasions, during which (as WBS reported) "Gabriel's wife is [said by WMR to be] constantly appearing (that is, rapping out things) at the seances at Cheyne Walk—!"<sup>1</sup> As late as the two visits to Penkill (in 1868 and 1869), Rossetti was harassed by ghosts from the past, and Scott's descriptions of his friend's conduct in the *Autobiographical Notes* provide ominous foreshadowings of events in the summer of 1872.

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter in PP, dated 3 October 1865.

All accounts of Rossetti agree that this was a decade of intense psychological distress ; it was also one of progressively deteriorating health, marked by insomnia, failing eyesight, and general physical debilitation. Of the several recorded maladies from which he is known to have suffered, only the "complaint" which William did not care to define (the hydrocele) and which was little more than a recurring nuisance and inconvenience, can be categorically identified as organic. The medical authorities Rossetti consulted about his eyes diagnosed his trouble as stemming from "general overstrain and nervous upset" (*FLM*, i, 265). The synergetic "cure" for insomnia which Rossetti adopted—chloral followed by neat whisky chasers—proved to be the most deleterious influence in his life after 1870. A depressant of the most insidious sort, it provided, as another chloral user knew only too well, "only deathlike stupefaction without restorative power" and led to "suicidal despondency".<sup>1</sup> In a man of Rossetti's melancholic and reclusive temperament, phlegmatic and lethargic metabolism, and sedentary and irregular habits, the drug tended only to exacerbate the complaints it was taken to relieve. But whether his ills were real or imaginary, symptomatic or causal, the effects were palpable and devastating.

Paradoxically, the decade was one of extreme creative productivity, though, at least in the first eight years, in painting rather than poetry. It was as a painter that he flourished following his tragic loss. During the first half of the decade, Rossetti secured a network of private art patrons who not only established his reputation as an artist but who also provided him with a dependably ready, if lamentably and continually inadequate, income.<sup>2</sup> Commissions outdistanced output on many occasions,

<sup>1</sup> Ernestine Mills, *The Life and Letters of Frederic Shields* (London, 1912), p. 123. If Shields's biographer is correct, it was FMB who recommended chloral to the artist in 1868, from a prescription given to him by W. J. Stillman, who introduced Rossetti to the drug in 1870. In an article entitled "Rossetti and Chloral", in the *Academy* (19 March 1898), Stillman disclaimed responsibility for Rossetti's addiction. See also his chapter on Rossetti in *The Autobiography of a Journalist* (Boston, 1901).

<sup>2</sup> Writing to his uncle Henry F. Polydore in August 1871, Rossetti said: "To your enquiries about my prospects I may reply simply that I make lots of money (for a poor painter), and never have a penny to fly with" (DW 1156).

and he seems habitually to have been in arrears financially. The sixties were the years of *Beata Beatrix*, *Venus Verticordia*, *How They Met Themselves*; *The Beloved*, *Sibylla Palmiferra*, *Joli Coeur*, *Rosa Triplex*; *La Pia* and the beginnings of *Dante's Dream*. They were also, after 1867, years in which increasingly the face of Jane Morris was reintroduced into his paintings—"a face created to fire his imagination and to quicken his powers—a face of arcane and inexhaustible meaning" (*FLM*, i, 244). Of course, she was, as biographers have long known—and as William Michael certainly knew—more than a face to Rossetti. An object of idealized beauty, she became for him in the sixties as much an obsession as Elizabeth Siddal had been in the green days of Pre-Raphaelitism. Their surviving letters leave little doubt concerning the nature of their attachment; reciprocated love is the surface emotion, though the letters are hardly at all relevatory of intimacies exchanged or private experiences shared. Despite occasional demonstrative outbursts, Rossetti's letters are mostly perfunctory, filled with details of his social activities, his works, his dealings with his patrons and models, urgent queries about Janey's ever-delicate health and recommended nostrums for various ailments—"intimate rather than passionate", as R. C. H. Briggs says of the later letters. From all reports, Jane's letters to him are even more reserved.<sup>1</sup>

Because Janey's advancement from model and friend to model and mistress is not recorded indelibly in the letters or in other sources, biographers and critics have been tempted into speculation. Before 1964, there was always the hope and the expectation that the reserved letters from Rossetti to Jane in the British Museum would resolve the ambiguity. When they failed to do so, there remained only the old biographical mainstays to fall back upon—Hall Caine's revelations, based on a reported conversation with Rossetti himself; Morris's often-quoted letter to Mrs. Coronio relating to the "horrors" from which his first

<sup>1</sup> In the Troxell collection, now at Princeton. *The Letters of Jane Burden Morris* were privately printed for copyright purposes in 1965 by Mrs. J. C. Troxell, who, together with John Bryson, is preparing an edition of the Rossetti-Jane Morris correspondence. Few of Jane Morris's letters have been published; one is in RGG (Letter 135), another was printed by Sir Sydney Cockerell (*TLS*, 6 July 1951).

Icelandic jaunt had protected him, in those months when Rossetti and Jane resided together in the domestic isolation of the newly-acquired Kelmscott<sup>1</sup>; and, of course, *The House of Life*, which until recently has always been regarded as little more than a biographical source-book.<sup>2</sup>

Human curiosity being what it is, biographers have always assumed the worst—or the obvious—and then sought justification in the poetry or painting, in their own capacity to intuit the situation by reading between the lines of available correspondence, or perhaps even in a perverse kind of wish-fulfilment. “The tone of the 1868-69 letters is purely friendly with no hint of emotion. It is in 1869-70 that they change,” wrote Lady Mander, “culminating in the Ems period”:

From these it would appear that he fell in love with Janey during her sittings in Tudor House, or, as I prefer to interpret it (not inconsistently with Hall Caine’s version), Rossetti then came to realise that it was she he had loved all the time and should have tried to marry years earlier. His letters show him disappointed that he never had the opportunity to prove his love, whether by sexual intercourse or by setting up house together permanently is not clear. (RGG, p. 236)

“If there was a secret and tragic passion between Rossetti and Jane Morris,” Mrs. Angeli observes, “the secret was well kept” (HRA, p. 210). Certainly it was well kept by William Michael and the family after Rossetti’s death, but during the summer of 1872, Jane was considered by William, by Brown, by Scott, and the Hakes as one of the principal contributing causes

<sup>1</sup> Morris and Rossetti jointly leased Kelmscott in May 1871. In the beginning of July, Morris settled Jane and the children in the manor and returned to London, departing for Iceland on the 6th. Rossetti took up residence there on the 12th. For Morris’s letter (of 25 November 1872) see Philip Henderson’s edition (London 1950), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> The extravagant biographical exploitation of this poem is discussed at length in W. E. Fredeman’s “Rossetti’s ‘In Memoriam’: An Elegiac Reading of *The House of Life*”, *BULLETIN*, xlvii (1964-65), 298-341. Subsequent commentary has concentrated more on literary problems: see Henri-A. Talon, “D. G. Rossetti comme peintre-poète dans *La Maison de vie*”, *Etudes Anglaises*, xix (1966), 1-14, and the same author’s monograph, *D. G. Rossetti: The House of Life: Quelques aspects de l’art et des thèmes* (Paris, 1966); J. L. Kendall’s “The Concept of the Infinite Moment in ‘The House of Life.’” *VN*, no. 28 (1965), pp. 4-8; Robert D. Hume, “Inorganic Structure in *The House of Life*”, *PLL*, v (1969), 282-95, in part a response to Fredeman’s reading of the poem.

of their charge's condition, and various schemes and measures were adopted to keep him from this source of agitation.<sup>1</sup>

The truth is that the "secret" which is not exposed in the letters and which lies buried beneath the artifice of *The House of Life* was not so well kept during Rossetti's lifetime as many commentators, including Mrs. Angeli, have supposed, though there is no doubt that an interdiction was imposed following Rossetti's death. William makes no reference to it whatsoever in any of his writings on his brother. Nor is it strange that he confided nothing of the affair to his diary. He was after all recording his own, not his brother's, life; and when crisis touched him, he frequently suspended entries as he did in the summer of 1872. If Caine can be believed, Rossetti must have confided to him at least something of the liaison, but, whether by his own volition or as a result of family pressure, Caine was a model of discretion in recording the episode.<sup>2</sup> As late as 1928, Paul F. Baum, in his edition of *The House of Life*, refrained from a specific identification of the New Beloved in the poem; and it was only in Doughty's biography that she was given a name and the relationship projected in detail. Even then it was hotly contested by Sir Sidney Cockerell, an intimate friend of both Morris and his wife. Later

<sup>1</sup> As later argument will demonstrate, it is almost certain that Rossetti's breakdown in the summer of 1872 was in part owing to his sense that Buchanan's attack was in some way linked to a knowledge of his and Jane Morris's relationship. Geoffrey Grigson, in reviewing Doughty in *Encounter* (November 1961), was the first to suggest a hidden motive behind Buchanan's onslaught: "I suspect that Buchanan's attack was in reality supported on a fairly exact knowledge of Rossetti's fleshly and a little crawly relationships" (quoted by Henderson, *William Morris* [London, 1967], p. 373). That his guardians saw fit to isolate him in Scotland may have been an attempt to remove him from her influence. In a letter to WMR written from Trowan on 17 September 1872 (DW 1229), informing him of his resolve to return to Kelmscott on the following Monday (23rd), DGR says: "Wherever I can be at peace there I shall assuredly work; but all, I now find by experience, depends primarily on my not being deprived of the prospect of the society of the one necessary person." WMR deleted the latter half of this passage when he published the letter in *FLM* (ii, 257). Doughty quotes it no less than three times within a space of ten pages (pp. 528-38).

<sup>2</sup> In at least one instance, WMR was successful in censoring Caine's *Recollections*—in the matter of certain comments concerning Oliver Madox Brown made by DGR. See W. E. Fredeman, "Pre-Raphaelite Novelist Manqué: Oliver Madox Brown", *BULLETIN*, li (1968-9), 33, n. 1.

commentators—notably Paden, Wahl, Lady Mander, and Briggs<sup>1</sup>—have assumed it, believing where they could not prove.

Propinquity is all, and given the frequent encounters between Rossetti and Jane Morris—the months at Kelmscott, modelling visits to Tudor House, extended sojourns at Scaland and elsewhere, with or without Morris—all of which are recorded in the published correspondence, what really surprises is the paucity of preserved suspicion, scandal, or even gossip about the nature of their friendship. The letters relating to the summer of 1872 have already been said to contain frequent references to Mrs. Morris and to her important role in Rossetti's breakdown; but even they give no hint as to its actual nature. There does survive among the Penkill Papers, however, in the letters between Scott and Alice Boyd, evidence which clearly establishes the common-knowledge aspect of the relationship and which characterizes the nature of it less equivocally than any documentation which has so far been uncovered. In all likelihood, more direct evidence will never come to light. The combined efforts of the Rossetti and Morris families have been amazingly successful in covering the traces, and in the wake of official reticence a century-old passion is almost impossible to recreate.

There are those who may argue that it is not even desirable. However, in the interest of biographical truth, several purposes may in fact be served. Beyond the immediate one of putting into a truer context the breakdown of 1872, the principal reason

<sup>1</sup> Paden's *La Pia* and RGG's biography have already been cited; see also J. R. Wahl's *The Kelmscott Love Sonnets of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Capetown, 1954) and R. C. H. Briggs's "Letters to Janey", *JWMS*, i, no. 4 (summer 1964), 3-22. Briggs concludes his article with the comment: "The nature of Janey's stimulus for Rossetti is a mystery which these letters do nothing to solve, but that the stimulus was real and essential for him they established beyond doubt" (p. 22). In the first report of the letters (*TLS*, 30 January 1964), Lady Mander summarized their revelations: "The long-awaited letters answer none of our questions. More important, there remain Rossetti's sonnets and his pictures for which Jane Morris was the model" (p. 96). A similar attitude is expressed in her biography. What might be called the question that dares not speak its name was candidly and succinctly put in a recent Flemish article by Raymond Brulez (*Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift*, 1965), who bemoans the fact that the letters are "composed almost entirely of recommended remedies and recipes" (*AES*, September 1966, p. 450). His title epitomizes a whole school of contemporary biographers.

for exposing the Rossetti-Jane Morris relationship is to settle once and for all the question that has overwhelmed so many biographers and derailed so many critics, especially of *The House of Life*. To those who will be inclined to discredit the source—and W. B. Scott is one of the most abused figures of the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>—the “evidence” will be regarded as more of the same kind of scandal-mongering about Rossetti that they find in the *Autobiographical Notes*. Some response to this objection has been advanced already at the beginning of this paper; beyond that, there are the letters themselves, which require some brief description. The more than 500 letters from Scott to Alice Boyd in the Penkill Papers cover a span of years from the outset of their friendship (in 1859) to Scott’s departure from London in 1885. The nature of their own relationship was so intimate that the letters are perfect reflectors, revealing a side of Scott not always apparent in the *Autobiographical Notes*. Filled with warmth, humour, and affectionate banter, the letters are gazettes of Scott’s London activities during those spring and fall breaks when Alice was not in London or he at Penkill. Professional activities are reported, dinners and other social engagements described, domestic details discussed, and the comings and goings of friends recounted. So secure is their friendship that there is no need for dissembling, and the letters are as ingenuous as any documents imaginable. Comfortable habituality and shared knowledge inform the topics discussed, so that the letters have a credibility unusual in correspondence. As formal evidence, the letters of course are often no more than hearsay or opinion; but as living documents they are primary sources of great value.

Although Scott moved to London from Newcastle in 1864, and his letters from that date contain almost daily references to Rossetti, there is no mention of the liaison with Jane Morris earlier than 1868, following Rossetti’s first visit to Penkill Castle, where, according to Scott, Rossetti, despondent over his failing eyesight, brought out many of the “fearful skeletons in his

<sup>1</sup> See the Introduction to this paper for a full discussion of WBS and DGR. Few commentators miss the opportunity of castigating WBS; ACS’s review of the *AN*, entitled “The New Terror” (*Fortnightly Review*, December 1892), is the most scathing denunciation of WBS ever written.

closet . . . for his relief and my recreation ” (*AN*, ii, 108). Gabriel returned with Scott to London on the 3rd of November (not September as in *AN*), and Scott reported the return journey to Alice the next day, concluding his letter with the postscript : “ Gabriel is to come round here to tell me how he feels when he gets set before a canvas again in his own studio.”<sup>1</sup> On the 14th, he tells Alice about two dinner parties, one at Brown’s where Gabriel was present, the other at Gabriel’s with Swinburne there :

Strange to say Gabriel has never yet touched a brush or tested his powers of seeing, nor has he gone to a doctor. Indeed he says he knows his eyes are no better and he is afraid of finding them worse, so he refrains from trying. Is it not queer with his habits? He is otherwise quite well & gets up later than ever. Brown & he sit till 5 in the morning. As to Algernon, he was very weak and done-for. When he arrived he did not seem the least tipsy, but at dinner he asked for champagne, & drank nearly all the bottle himself. Shortly after he succumbed into lethargic tipsyness, and only showed a sign of life by asking for a hansom. The impression on all of us was that he is breaking down, sad to say.<sup>2</sup>

In his second letter to Alice, a week earlier (9 November), occurs the first reference to Jane Morris.

I have just got your two notes. How good of you to write me all the news, and to make ready to come down. Only you must not go again so early as you say, the month of April is the worst of all I think for dreariness either in town or country, besides you will not be able to see any exhibitions. I have a number of visitors of the uninteresting sort, and Gabriel came on Saturday evening. He was in lowish spirits when he came, but cleared up about 1 o’c before he left. He had some wine of the country, and asked to have a bottle, only forgot to take it when he went away. Olaf made the most tremendous row when he came, and as he was standing by my studio’s fire he trod on the beast’s tail and Olaf seized him by the foot and fairly bit through his boot. By and bye my friends will keep out of my way on account of this dreadful dog, who is after all harmless as a lamb except when trodden on.

I have been to South Kensington and find them prepared to do as I wish in the matter of the windows, only with some delay as “ My Lords ” have again to be consulted, owing to the change in the proposed execution of the work. I wish to do them direct on the glass, instead of making a painting on calico and some time hence transferring the same to glass. My little pictures have been seen by Brown, who is enthusiastic about the rainy day,—strange to say, it will be the one most thought of. Gabriel had not tried painting, nor seen any doctor, nor seen the sweet Lucretia Borgia. I have now come to the conclusion—often when we meet a person in a new place after a few days cessation a new light breaks on

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter in PP dated 4 November 1868.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* To AB, DGR wrote : “ I saw Swinburne once since my return. I think he saw me twice, but simultaneously ” (DW 796).

one—that the greatest disturbance in his health and temper, and both are extremely different from what they were, is caused by an uncontrollable desire for the possession of the said L.B. Letitia was there on Friday to see an Altar Cloth and was the first to inform her of Gabriel's return, he having refrained from going as he understands they are watched. Even Mrs. Street had spoken to Letitia about Gabriel being so fond of Mrs. Top. . . .<sup>1</sup>

On the 17th, Scott wrote that there was “nothing new about Gabriel. He will dine here on Wednesday next, 25th, with Lewes, Morley, the *Morrises*, including *Jeanie* and *her sister*”.<sup>2</sup> The evening, as he reported it in his letter of the 26th, was both successful and interesting :

I have just got your note, and must wait patiently till Monday, when your dear sweet face will smile upon me again.

I have really forgot the time, that is within half an hour, of the arrival of the train, so if you don't see me waiting don't be disappointed, but most probably I shall be there. I write just to give you another note, and to tell you how the dinner party went off yesterday. Gabriel came an hour before under the impression you wd. have arrived, and he wd. have an hour's talk with you before others came. Lewes turned up shortly after. He is a host of himself in conversation, and Burges with whom I have got acquainted since reading his article, is capital for a dinner party. Morley is very quiet, but Morris was in great spirits and altogether it was quite a successful evening. Gabriel sat by *Jeanie*, and I must say acts like a perfect fool if he wants to conceal his attachment, doing nothing but attend to her, sitting side-ways towards her, [and] that sort of thing. Mrs. Linton sat opposite and I shall be surprized if she did not see anything interesting. Also Mrs. Morris' sister. However, I have concluded they (G. & J.) will not go further than they have gone. She is certainly the most remarkable looking woman in the world, and *in expression* lovely. Of course a woman under such

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. DGR's account of his encounter with WBS' dog is recorded in DW 796; Mrs. Street is the wife of the architect George Stuart Street, with whom Morris was for a time employed. Of WBS's mural paintings for *The King's Quair*, DGR wrote to AB on 9 November 1868: “The rainy one looks very fine and Old Brown says it is as fine as any David Cox” (DW 794).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Lewes is George Henry Lewes (1817-78), journalist and common-law husband of George Eliot; *Jeanie* is WBS's common spelling for JM; Morley is John Morley (1838-1923), the critic, editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, who succeeded Lewes in 1867; *her sister* is Elizabeth Burden, Bessy, who lived with the Morriszes and who became an instructress in the Royal School of Art Needlework in the 1870s (see P. Henderson, *William Morris*, p. 61). In his letter to Mrs. Coronio of 25 November 1872, already cited, WM wrote: “I have been a good deal in the house here—not alone, that would have been pretty well—but alone with poor Bessy. I must say it is a shame, she is quite harmless and even good, and one ought not to be irritated with her—but O my God what I have suffered from finding [her] always there at meals and the like!” (Henderson, p. 135.)

circumstances, before people, is a sealed book, still I think she is cool. As to Gabriel he forgets everyone else. When we went down, although it was my part to take Jeanie, G. got her arm in his in a moment, then abandoned her as hurriedly for the nearest other lady, Morris looking at him all the time. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Neither of these letters concerning Rossetti and Jane Morris contains any hint of the sensational ; nor are they gossipy in the ordinary sense of the term. It is obvious that Scott is not revealing to Alice a situation with which she is unfamiliar, but that he is giving her a progress report on an occurrence that she has known about for some considerable time. The matter-of-factness of the letter and the absence of moral comment reflect at once the mutual concern of Scott and Alice for the welfare of their friend.

By 23 October 1871, the date of Scott's next letter on Rossetti and Jane, the circumstances had obviously completely altered. The intervening two years and the heightened propinquity afforded by the Kelmscott ménage, coupled with Morris's timely hegira to Iceland, had worked the inevitable and the pair had almost certainly gone "further than they had gone" when Scott wrote in 1868. There is a brief reference in a letter of 24 May 1869 to Scott's having visited Gabriel, who was "in the dumps, not painting on either day, but lounging about the room shouldering everything with his hands in his pockets, because Janey was ill and unable to come".<sup>2</sup> That fall, Rossetti had again accompanied Scott to Penkill for a stay of a month's duration, during which he was correcting the proofs for his privately printed *Poems* and, amid concerted poetic activity, entertaining thoughts of self-destruction. The famous episode of the chaffinch with all its portentousness that "something is going to happen to me" may have led to his resolve to disinter his manuscript poems from his wife's grave, a venture that was accomplished by early October.<sup>3</sup> Between then and October of 1871, he was involved with the

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter in PP. Burges is William Burges (1827-1881), the architect; Mrs. Linton is the wife of the poet and engraver, William J. Linton.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> There is some disagreement regarding the date. See especially Janet C. Troxell, *Three Rossettis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), chap. 7. The funeral company's account, rendered to C. A. Howell and dated 5 October, was not receipted until 29 December.

various stages of his volume and with its reception in the press<sup>1</sup>; and he was still in the throes of one of his most intense periods of poetic creativity. In the spring of 1870 (March-May) Rossetti was residing at Barbara Bodichon's house at Scalands, Robertsbridge, which she had lent to W. J. Stillman, where Jane Morris, then at Hastings, visited him on several occasions, sometimes with her husband. As Rossetti's letters show, he reserved a house (Glottenham) in the vicinity for the summer; but after his return to London with the Morrises on 10 May (see DW 1022) he apparently abandoned the idea (see DW 1067). Scott, writing to Alice about a dinner party at Rossetti's on 28 September, informed her that "Gabriel has at last, as he did not see any chance of getting away to the place he had taken near Mad. Bodichon's, given it up after keeping it on all summer! His picture he considers getting on satisfactorily, but he will not show it. Perhaps he could not manage to get the 'hollow-chested matron' out to that neighbourhood."<sup>2</sup>

Around 5 October 1871, Rossetti left Kelmscott, and Jane returned to London to join Morris, who had come back from Iceland in early September.<sup>3</sup> When Scott arrived in London from Penkill on the 10th, he was immediately launched into a series of dinner parties that afforded topics for several letters over the next fortnight. That of 23 October—a particularly long letter—contains the most compelling evidence yet uncovered concerning the nature of Rossetti and Jane Morris's relationship. The implications, if not the authoritativeness, of this letter are unambiguous:

Dearest,

Your note this morning broke off abruptly at the top of the third page. You must have quite forgot to finish it, and as you complain in it of having a bad headache, I immediately sit down to write you hoping that there is not very much wrong and that at least you will be able to read my note when it reaches you and that it may assist in amusing you.

<sup>1</sup> For the fullest account of the various proof and "trial book" stages of *Poems* see J. C. Troxell's "The 'Trial Books' of D. G. Rossetti", *Colophon*, n.s. iii (spring 1938), 243-58.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter in PP.

<sup>3</sup> Morris had made two visits to Kelmscott since his return, one for a period of a week.

In my last I told you of the second dinner party when D.G. & Hüffer came unexpectedly in the evening. Well next evening (Friday evening) I went to Morris to dinner at 6. I asked Gabriel the evening before if he was to be there, and on his answering no, I said "Why, then?" His reply was "Oh I have another engagement." This engagement was actually, Janey at his own house for the night! At Top's there were Jones, Poynter, Brown, Hüffer, Ellis and Green. Of course no Janey. Is it not too daring, and altogether inexplicable? Of course I did not ask Morris after his wife, having been warned before that she was at Chelsea.

After dinner I asked the Scald to let us have the new poem, which he did. It is called "Love is enough," and is "A Masque" that is to say, an interlude performed at a marriage ceremony. It is very delicately and perfectly felt and finished, in a lovely rhythmical verse, with lyrics interspersed, but I confess it had but a vague impression and seemed as a whole to want outline and form. It was a very agreeable dinner party, but I had been so much out and was so tired, I could hardly keep awake. You may say I was scarcely able to judge in that state, and I acknowledge having actually dropt off more than once during the reading. I only hope no one observed me.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from this letter that Scott did not approve of the relationship between the pair, but his objections were almost certainly based on his knowledge of the effects that the affair was likely to have on his friend. His references to Jane may also suggest a personal dislike, for a letter to Alice on 14 December 1872, following Rossetti's recovery, reinforces his earlier appraisal of her coldness :

As to Gabriel, much to my surprise, he is really as sane and as strong as ever he was in his life. Still the doctors say let him stay away from Cheyne Walk, and he finds himself so comfortable there at Kelmscott, having failed to find a place nearer town, after Dunn has been going about for weeks searching, that he has made up his mind to settle there. It is probable he will make a run up to town at Xmas and dine in the family circle, so you may see him that way. The hollow chested (hearted?) matron writes him she will come up to Kelmscott the day after Xmas, and if she does so I suppose he will be off with her.<sup>2</sup>

In part, Scott may have been puzzled by Morris's seeming indifference to the whole situation. In reporting Jane's visit to

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter in PP. The second dinner party is described in WBS's letter to AB on 20 October 1871, quoted below. Guests at Morris's dinner party described in this letter are Edward Burne-Jones, E. J. Poynter, Franz Hueffer and F. S. Ellis; Green is unidentified. *Love is Enough* was published in 1872 (dated 1873).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Written after WBS's visit to Kelmscott in December. DGR spent Christmas of 1872 with his family and was back at Kelmscott by the evening of the 28th.

Gabriel at Cheyne Walk, following his attempted suicide, Scott noted that "on Friday afternoon Jane Morris was taken down to see him by her more than amiable husband . . ." (Letter 18) ; and on one of the mutilated pages of the earliest manuscript of the *Autobiographical Notes*, there occurs the aside : "Topsy is D.G.'s alias for Morris, on whose magnanimity, as every one knows, D.G. depends rather more than his friends care to think."<sup>1</sup> Whatever Morris's feelings may have been, he was no willing partner in a *ménage à trois* ; in time, the irony and frustration caught up with him as well, and after 1874, which saw the end of the Firm and Rossetti's final departure from Kelmscott, the two men whose friendship was launched during the "jovial campaign" of 1857 did not meet again.<sup>2</sup>

### III

The verso of the last Contents leaf in *Poems* (1870) contains the statement that

Many poems in this volume were written between 1847 and 1853. Others are of recent date, and a few belong to the intervening period. It has been thought unnecessary to specify the earlier work, as nothing is included which the author believes to be immature.

Leaving aside cavils of those biographical critics who see the second sentence of this certificate as intentionally dishonest, the statement does indicate Rossetti's essential dilemma in publishing his first volume of poems. As early as 1860, Rossetti was considering the possibility of issuing a collection of his poems, and in *The Early Italian Poets* (1861) there appeared the announcement of a "shortly to be published" volume to be entitled *Dante*

<sup>1</sup> This manuscript notebook is in PP.

<sup>2</sup> To Mrs. Coronio, WM wrote (25 November 1872): "Another quite selfish business is that Rossetti has set himself down at Kelmscott as if he never meant to go away ; and not only does that keep me from that harbour of refuge (because it is really a farce our meeting when we can help it) but also he has all sorts of ways so unsympathetic with the sweet simple old place, that I feel his presence there as a kind of slur on it: this is very unreasonable though when one thinks why one took the place, and how this year it has really answered that purpose : nor do I think I should feel this about it if he had not been so unromantically discontented with it and the whole thing which made me very angry and disappointed" (Henderson, *William Morris*, p. 135).

at *Verona and Other Poems*. After Elizabeth Siddal's death in 1862, however, there is a long silence in Rossetti's letters concerning literary matters. It was only after the re-entry of Jane Morris that he turned again to the writing of verse. Scott has told in the *Autobiographical Notes* how it was at the urging of himself and Alice Boyd that Rossetti should "Live for your poetry" (ii, 108) that his despair over his failing eyesight was somewhat overcome. William Michael in the *Memoir* questions whether the Penkill group could properly be credited with "re-rous[ing] the interest of Rossetti in his poetry, past and prospective" (i, 270) and concludes that "the conception of 'living for his poetry' was decidedly in Rossetti's mind before he went to Penkill in September 1868" (p. 271). In a letter written on 30 November 1868 (less than a month after his and Rossetti's return to town), Scott writes to William :

At Penkill we had most serious talks about the chances of his powers of painting—a matter on which I may write or speak to none but you [—failing]. I tried by every means to make him revise his poetry, but apparently without effect. Now however he is really doing so.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In his letter to WMR dated 22 October 1885 (quoted in part in the Introduction, p. 82), WBS says he would like to "test the biographical value" of DGR's "home letters". In his continuation, he gives WMR the entire background of DGR's *Poems*: "For example when he was here (Penkill) in the autumn of 1868, suffering under the idea of his actually becoming blind, he was induced to turn his attention to his poetry again, principally by my influence, but also by that of Miss Boyd and Miss Losh, when he began to get all the poetry he had either in memory or in printing, arranged and placed in the printer's hands. He began also to write, and next year Autumn 1869 when he came again he had a whole volume in proofs and new pieces better than any of the old, *Troy Town*, *Eden Bower*, & *The Stream's Secret*—all nearly written here. He found he had not enough, even with the new pieces, and added *Hand and Soul* to the poetry. But after all, this was to be only a *Privately Printed Volume*. Now was the struggle: I persuaded him that the volume wd. not be such as he ought to appear with and he immediately left with the intention of saving his buried M.S. volume, wh. he did by means of Tebbs and Howell. Miss Boyd collected various copies of this *Privately Printed Volume* out of the hillock of proofs in his bedroom after he left. Both she and I have copies; did I ever show it you? Next year 1870 his 'Poems' appeared. Having recounted this History, what I want to know is this. How much of all this did he write home, or ever inform you of?" (unpublished letter in PP.)

Significantly, in marking this letter for eventual publication, WMR deleted only the second paragraph—WBS's question. He apparently did not quarrel with WBS's presentation of the facts recounting the history of the evolution of *Poems*.

It seems clear, then, that Scott's claim for influencing Rossetti's decision is not without foundation, though this new resolve to collect his poems was as much owing to the revitalization of his poetic powers, generated by a new inspirational source, as to any external influence. Once committed to the prospect of publishing his poetry, Rossetti was faced with the problem of retrieving his buried manuscripts; for the risk, were he to limit himself to his recently composed poetry inspired by Jane Morris, would be too high, even were this corpus sufficient to make up a whole volume. Since some of his finest pieces were written during his first poetic period, he would, in any case, be reluctant to dispense with them; lacking even fair copies of some of the poems, he had no recourse but to consider their exhumation. After an extended hesitation, Rossetti finally authorized Howell, on 16 August 1869, to superintend the recovery of his poems, "only I have to beg *absolute* secrecy to *everyone*, as the matter ought really not to be talked about" (DW 851). By this date, he had already arranged with the printers Strangeways to set his poems in type, and when he departed on the following day for Penkill he took with him for "tattooing" (DW 853) a set of early proofs. By the end of the first week in October, the manuscripts had been exhumed, and on the 8th he sent a copy of the first "Trial Book" to Miss Losh with the news that he intended "to publish a volume next spring" (DW 880).

For Rossetti the idea of the exhumation was, as he told Howell early on, "a ghastly business" (DW 810), but his main fear seems to have been private censure from his family and friends. Howell had relieved him of personal involvement, but even after Rossetti had received warm assurances from his brother and Swinburne as to the propriety of his action, there was the fear of a wider-spread gossip, that the "truth must ooze out in time": "I have told Jane and Scott and Dunn," Rossetti wrote to William; "It has become known to Morris, Jones, and Watts, through Howell. . . . I have begged Howell to hold his tongue for the future, but if he does not I cannot help it" (DW 883).

The fact of the exhumation does not seem to have distressed him nearly so much as the consequences of any publicizing of the event. Once the possibility had been broached—by Scott

according to Rossetti himself in his letter to William of 13 October announcing the deed (DW 883)—and Rossetti had acclimatized himself to the inevitability, he adopted a reasonably objective view of the whole procedure. His directives to Howell are business-like, and he seems unmoved and emotionally undisturbed by his first examination of the recovered manuscripts. Writing to William on 15 October—a letter William severely edited when he published it in the *Family Letters*—Gabriel gave him a full description :

Yesterday I went to see the book at the Doctor's house. It will take some days yet to dry, and is in a disappointing but not hopeless state. The poem of "Jenny" which is the one I most wanted, has got a great worm-hole right through every page of it in this proportion, [design] destroying much but leaving the edges of the lines [un]destroyed ; so I think on the whole memory will serve to recover it. Nothing else is quite so bad I think, and some (among which I noted various things I already have of course) quite perfect. I could not examine it much, as the greater part still sticks together. I shall not have it here for some days yet. It has a dreadful smell,—partly no doubt the disinfectants,—but the doctor says there is nothing dangerous. I do not think it would be any use giving it to an ordinary transcriber, & propose to take the copying in hand myself, probably with Dunn's assistance for the easier parts. I do not know if you wd have time or inclination to assist in so unpleasant a job. If so, you could do some of the more difficult parts while I did others. We could also call in little Murray who I know would come, though he has not yet been told of it. Thus the whole might be done in a day or two & the original burnt. The best wd be to work all together here.

In a postscript, he says,

You know I always meant to dedicate the book to you. This I shall of course still do, failing only one possibility which I suppose must be considered out of the question.<sup>1</sup>

The "one possibility which I suppose must be considered out of the question" must refer to Jane Morris. That William deleted this postscript is understandable, for it underscores the major conflict for Rossetti associated with the recovery of his buried manuscripts. However he might rationalize the action, however seriously he might like to take his brother's assurance

<sup>1</sup> Published as fragment in DW 886 ; see also DGR's letter to FMB of the previous day (DW 884). Murray is Charles Fairfax Murray, whom DGR met around 1867 or 1868, a painter and later a collector of prominence ; he did in fact assist DGR with the transcriptions (see *SR*, ii, 326). A few pages of the disinterred manuscript still exist.

that in exhuming the manuscripts he had not "retracted the self-sacrifice" (*RP*, p. 473), or Swinburne's concurrence in his own view that "no one so much as herself would have approved my doing this" (*DW* 892), there still lingered the fear that in some sense the action was a desecration. As Mrs. Angeli summarizes Rossetti's dilemma :

There was nothing criminal—nothing disgraceful—in the act. . . . Sentiment about it is a different question altogether. . . . The first to doubt it in his heart was Gabriel himself, a man in certain respects of most sensitive conscience, obsessed in the labyrinths of his mind by that same sense of innate guilt which tormented the most innocent of mortal sinners, his sister Christina : a sense alien to the other two, Maria the saintly devout and William the rationalist. That this sense of guilt gathered and crystalized around the painful memory of the recovery of the Poems was Rossetti's own tragedy. . . . (*PRT*, p. 85)

In a mind so sensitive, the guilt could only have been intensified by the ironies attached to the recovery : as William put it, "under pressure of a great sorrow, you performed an act of self-sacrifice" (*RP*, p. 473) ; now, under the pressure of a new inspiration and an almost certainly stronger love, he wished to terminate the offering. Under the impress of his love, or grief, for Elizabeth Siddal, he had symbolically buried his poetic genius ; now, for Jane Morris, he desired to broadcast it through the publication of his poems. And acknowledgement was "out of the question". Had he but known what lay in store for his published poems, he might have dedicated the volume at the outset, not to his brother William, but "To the anonymous, pseudonymous, and caconominous—to the Ancient Order of Vermin" (*Works*, p. 635).

#### IV

Rossetti's *Poems* were published on 25 April 1870. The story of their reception—of Rossetti's "work[ing] the oracle" (*AN*, ii, 128)<sup>1</sup>—need not be repeated here. Neither the laudatory

<sup>1</sup> WMR in *FLM* (i, 289 and elsewhere) took issue with WBS's claim that DGR was responsible for the "chorus of praise" that greeted *Poems*, but as his diary entries show, he was all too conscious of his brother's vulnerability in this regard. The facts are indelibly recorded in DGR's letters to F. S. Ellis ; thus, writing

notices in all the major journals nor the successive reprintings necessitated by reader demand compensated for the controversy in which ultimately the poems were to become the central focus. As numerous letters in the Doughty-Wahl edition indicate, Rossetti fully expected to be reviewed adversely by Buchanan.<sup>1</sup> When, following publication, no blast was issued from Buchanan, he was deceived into a state of euphoria by the symphony of eulogy, of which he was himself the principal conductor. As the volume went through successive issues and impressions—mistakenly labelled “editions”—Rossetti suddenly found himself among the vanguard of contemporary poets. Throughout the remainder of 1870 and the first half of 1871, he continued to make minor revisions in the poems and to add to the store of sonnets for *The House of Life* (DW 1150).<sup>2</sup> The fifth “edition” of the *Poems* appeared in January of 1871, and that spring and summer he occupied himself with his review of Hake’s *Madeline* and with his writing and painting. He went to Kelmscott in mid-July, was “Dark-Blued” in September (DW 1165), and glad to learn in the same month that a Tauchnitz edition of his *Poems* was to appear. If he contemplated another volume, as he assured Scott he did not when a notice to that effect appeared in the “Literary Gossip” column of the *Athenaeum* on 12 August, he would soon recant his intention.

On 2 October, in his “last Kelmscott letter” to Scott (DW 1174), there appears the first reference to the *Fleshly* article in the *Contemporary Review*, as yet unseen by Gabriel. So much has been written about this episode in Rossetti’s life that all but to Ellis on 27 March 1870, DGR urges that the bound volume be issued “by the beginning of the last week in April. This is desirable as the reviews on 1st May will thus look a little less like conspiracy than if they appeared the day the book comes out” (DW 963).

<sup>1</sup> See DW 923, 924. “By the bye,” DGR wrote to ACS on 14 February (DW 923), “I expect the B-B-Buchanan to be down upon me of course now in *The Athenaeum*, and am anxious to time my appearance when it seems likely that friends can speak up almost at once and so just catch the obscene organ of his speech at the very moment when it is hitched up for an utterance, and perhaps compel the brain of which it is also the seat, to reconsider its views and chances.” When the *Athenaeum* review appeared, it proved to be by Westland Marston.

<sup>2</sup> The sonnets written in 1871 are published in J. R. Wahl’s *The Kelmscott Love Sonnets of DGR* from fair-copy manuscripts in the Bodley Library.

the barest details can be dispensed with.<sup>1</sup> Much of the confusion concerning Rossetti's own reaction has stemmed from Scott's account in the *Autobiographical Notes* (ii, 171-2), which is hopelessly confused chronologically. Whether Scott's error was owing to a lapse in memory or to the organization of the materials on which he was drawing, his placement of the crisis in 1871 distorts the effect of the article on Rossetti; at the same time, however, his linking of the attack with Rossetti's breakdown is a logical and understandable slip, and there can be no question of misrepresentation on his part. The dinner party described by Scott did in fact occur, but not in "midsummer of 1872". On coming to town (sometime after 5 October 1871), Rossetti read the pseudonymous article, and he wrote in a jocular vein to his publisher, F. S. Ellis:

Have you seen our contemptuous *Contemporary*? What fools we must be! For it seems proved that we are greater fools than the writer, and even I can see what a fool *he* is. For once abuse comes in a form that even a bard can manage to grin at without grimacing. (DW 1177)

By the 17th, Rossetti had learned of Buchanan's authorship from Ellis, to whom he instantly replied that if it were so, he would give himself "a treat and write and print a Letter on Literary Lying (To Thos. Buchanan Esq.)" (DW 1179); to William he promised, "I'll not deny myself the fun of a printed Letter to the Skunk" (DW 1178). It was on the 19th that Rossetti and Hueffer appeared at Scott's dinner party; Scott reported the occasion to Alice the following day:

Now I have to tell you all about our second dinner party last evening, and about the ferocious article on Gabriel in the *Contemporary Review*. This article is really the most deadly attack on the morality of the set and school that could be penned. Nothing like it has been done in criticism of late years. Gabriel pretends to be rather amused than hurt by it, but makes rhymes without end on author and publisher. Every one is asking who the "Robt. Maitland" is, and no one can tell the least about him, but now as you will hear the mystery is solved.

Yesterday Maria & W.M. were invited you know, and I made up a party. After all W.M. could not come, but Littledale in great force and very amusing. Allingham also in his best, Appleton who is a man passibly able to assist in

<sup>1</sup> The fullest account is John A. Cassidy's "Robert Buchanan and the Fleshly Controversy", *PMLA*, lxxvii (March 1952), 65-93; but see also Doughty, book iii, chapter ii.

conversation, and young Gosse who has brought me this most lovely skin of the Arctic Fox, pure white. E.E. is still with us, and Maria came in the highest spirits, her book on Dante being just out, although she has not yet got copies. All went off very well, and after we had gone up to the drawing room, Hüffer came reporting Gabriel's approach. You must know various parties have offered to write replies to the Contm. R. but Appleton in the Academy would not let that paper enter the lists, everyone wanting to hear who this Maitland really is. When G. entered he brought the solution. Maitland is Buchanan, so it is a triumph rather than otherwise—a rival poet under a false name can do little harm, and will most probably go no further. Now that he is found out he cannot write with the same force, so Swinburne and Morris will escape.<sup>1</sup>

On the 27th, Scott wrote to Alice that “[Gabriel] is not only making rhymes against Buchanan, but is editing a pamphlet, which very possibly he will print despite the persuasion of everybody”. Although Buchanan's identity as the author of the article was still unconfirmed as late as 15 November, Rossetti had launched into his pamphlet by the end of the month (see DW 1181). William's advice was that he “print nothing—and generally to leave the whole affair to take care of itself” (DW, p. 1018, n.). By November, Rossetti and Swinburne were exchanging letters on still another attack, that by Mortimer Collins in *Two Plunges for a Pearl*.<sup>2</sup> Fearing a libel action, Gabriel finally abandoned his plans for publishing the pamphlet—which was, however, set in type—and on 16 December there appeared in the *Athenaeum* “The Stealthy School of Criticism”, what William in his diary called “the more serious portion of the rejoinder” (16 December). With Rossetti's article, in the same issue, were letters from Strahan denying Buchanan's authorship and another from Buchanan admitting it, though disclaiming any responsibility for the pseudonym. In his letter, Buchanan exposed his plans for reprinting the article in a separate form, in anticipation of which Rossetti told William that “on Buchanan's making the . . . reissue, [he] will probably forthwith issue the

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter in PP. Guests at this dinner party included Maria Rossetti, William Allingham, Charles Appleton (1841-79), founder of the *Academy*, and the young Edmund Gosse (1849-1928), then unpublished in volume form. E.E. is unidentified, but is probably Miss Epps; Dr. Littledale is twice mentioned in *AN* but not identified.

<sup>2</sup> Collins's novel was originally serialized in *London Society* in 1871. DGR's letters to ACS on the subject were privately printed by T. J. Wise (1921).

whole of his pamphlet as it originally stood . . . with any slight addition which Buchanan's re-issue may demand" (WMR's Diary, 17 December).

The six months intervening between Rossetti's response to Buchanan and his collapse on 2 June are scantily documented. He professed to be unperturbed by the article in the January *Quarterly Review* attributed to W. J. Courthope.<sup>1</sup> Writing to Dr. Hake, he said :

I fear my writing in that way to the *Athenaeum* has given my friends quite a false impression of the effect which adverse criticism has on me. This in the *Quarterly* has simply none whatever, I assure you. I laughed on reading it and laugh in thinking of it. (DW 1205)

The record is not quite so silent as has been stated, however, about this period. Although the correspondence between Swinburne and Rossetti is not extant, the two were doubtless consulting on Swinburne's pamphlet *Under the Microscope*, which was published in July.<sup>2</sup> Rossetti continued to see Scott and Alice Boyd often ; at least twenty evenings together are recorded in Alice's 1872 day-diary, the last on 19 May, the day before she left for Penkill.<sup>3</sup> True to his word, Buchanan "re-publish[ed his] criticism, with many additions but no material alterations, and with [his] name on the title page" (DW p. 1039, n. 1) sometime around the middle of May. William first saw the pamphlet on the 15th, when Gabriel brought it to him together with a "denunciatory letter to be sent to Buchanan", responding particularly to the use of the word "cowards" on page one of the preface (DW, p. 1047, n. 1). William's fear that "this little book of Buchanan's seems likely to create a good deal of hubbub"

<sup>1</sup> "The Latest Development of Literary Poetry: Swinburne, Rossetti, Morris" (pp. 59-84). Buchanan in the notes to the *Fleshly* pamphlet includes a two-page excerpt on "Jenny" from this article.

<sup>2</sup> Swinburne's pamphlet is a scathing attack on Buchanan, but there is virtually nothing concerning the *Fleshly School* controversy and certainly no defence of Rossetti. Whether ACS's incapacity at the time of Buchanan's barrage or his failure to ally himself with DGR in answering Buchanan had any bearing on the rift in the friendship between the two poets is impossible to ascertain ; but from this point all correspondence between the two ceased, and in fact they never met again, unless perhaps at the funeral of Oliver Madox Brown. See Letter 58.

<sup>3</sup> AB's day-diaries from 1859-97 are in PP.

was to prove considerably more acute than Scott's estimation made on the appearance of the article.

Since the sequence of events and the state of Rossetti's mind over the next fortnight are so vital, the following unpublished entries from William's diary are of special importance<sup>1</sup> :

[Tuesday] 21 : . . . Gabriel came in the evening ; somewhat perturbed by an article wh. (as he tells me) has appeared in the *Echo*, reviewing Buchanan's book. Without exactly adopting B's views, it restates them with enhanced unpleasantness of phrase & says that, if Swinburne & Rossetti don't take some notice of the attack, they must be "mere simulchra of humanity." I strenuously urged G. to think & see as little of these matters as he can ; & above all to take no steps at all in the matter—whether by writing anything for publicn., treating the attacks as libels, or otherwise. He tells me that Brown has drawn up a letter to the Editor of the *Athenaeum*, with some view of sending it for publicn. : the gist of it being that the whole affair on B's part is a matter of personal spite, founded on my having called him (in the *Criticism of Swinburne* wh. I published in or about 1865) "a poor & pretentious poetaster." I wd. myself much rather that Brown shd. not send this letter ; 1st. because I consider it to be one more symptom of that camaraderie or coterie feeling wh. Buchanan in especial denounces, not without some reason, & as such impolitic ; & 2nd. because it wd. tumble me willy nilly into the fray. However, rather than thwart G. in case he shd. finally favour Brown's idea, with a view to his own part in the controversy, I said nothing about these counter considerations.—I incline to think (& so informed G.) that, if Swinburne makes up his mind to publish the pamphlet he has been engaged on—expressing some general critical views, & taking up Buchanan's attack as well, but without saying anything directly or in detail about G.—this wd. be a good move : it wd. be the latest word in the dispute, & wd. give reviewers something to talk about more novel than Buchanan's rechauffé, & at least as pungent. G. seems to agree in this opinion to some extent : he has himself enjoined Sw. to say little or nothing about G. himself.

[Thursday] 23 : Gabriel called again. He has been round to Swinburne's, wishing to know what he mt. be doing with regard to his pamphlet ; but learned that S. is again very unwell (thro' the usual cause), & not capable of attending to any business. I had heard much the same yesterday from Solomon. . . . G. understands that Sw.'s father is at present in Italy, where Sw. ought to be joining him soon.

[Monday] 27 : Brown called, . . . wishing more particularly to consult with me as to the Buchanan pamphlet. He was thinking of writing a letter to the

<sup>1</sup> The days of the week in WMR's entries have been corrected. The article in *The Echo*, entitled "Fleshing the Fleshly" appeared on 18 May. In full, the comment quoted reads : "In order to bear tamely the charges and insults hurled pell-mell at the heads and hearts of Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Rossetti, they would really need to be the veriest aestheticised simulacra of humanity." Solomon is Simeon Solomon (1840?-1905), the minor Pre-Raphaelite painter. Swinburne's *Under the Microscope* was published by D. White, 22 Coventry St., W.

Athenaeum, vindicating Gabriel from attack, on general grounds : as I told him, it seems to me that these are the very arguments that ought to be put forward, not by personal friends, but by outsiders—while on the other hand I deprecate anything like a personal defence by friends, wh. wd. only the more go to confirm one of the more substantial heads of Buch's attack—viz : that G., Swinburne, &c, hang together as a coterie for mutual support—Br. seemed to acquiesce in my views to a certain extent ; tho' he is evidently much displeased at what he regards as a dead set against all the artists and men of our connexion, & thinks that " something ought to be done " if they are not to be scouted out of society &c : all wh., in my opinion, goes considery. beyond the real conditions of the case. Much serious talk about matters connected herewith.—Gabriel also called in the evg : he has not yet succeeded in seeing Swinburne, but learns that the latter is again about as usual. If Sw. resolves to produce his pamphlet, Ellis, it seems, is not willing to be the publisher : but he wd. put Sw. in the way of publishing with some one else.—Brown does not (& as far as I can trace, never did) propose to write to the Athenaeum to the effect referred to under 21 May.

Although, to judge from William's diary entries, Gabriel did not appear unduly distraught, he was within a week of complete collapse. In the *Memoir*, William relates that though Rossetti was " ' put out ' " by the *Contemporary* article, he was " not gravely perturbed " by it ; however,

... when the pamphlet-edition appeared ... with its greatly enhanced virus of imputation and suggestion, he received it in a spirit very different from that with which he had encountered the review-article, and had confuted it in *The Stealthy School of Criticism*. His fancies now ran away with him, and he thought that the pamphlet was a first symptom in a widespread conspiracy for crushing his fair fame as an artist and a man, and for hounding him out of honest society. (*FLM*, i, 305)

Oswald Doughty in his biography fairly questions why the " shock of Buchanan's onslaught " should not have been greatest when the article first appeared " rather than upon its repetition in pamphlet form eight months later " (p. 530). Rejecting the obvious reasons offered by William—alcohol, chloral, insomnia—Doughty identifies two " deeper causes of anxiety," guilt relating to the exhumation of Elizabeth Siddal and a fear of separation from Jane Morris. While these were probable sources of anxiety in Rossetti—though the last is purely hypothetical—neither accounts for the severity of Rossetti's response to the second stage of Buchanan's attack. It has already been pointed out that Rossetti at the time of publication of *Poems* was prepared for a hostile review from Buchanan. By the time it

finally came, Rossetti must have been taken unawares ; certainly he would not have anticipated an attack on moral grounds. Yet, as has been shown, his response to the article was not violent, perhaps because he was so involved with establishing the identity of his opponent and with the composition of his defence ; the whole affair was after all not unlike the storm following the publication of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* in 1866.<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that Buchanan's announced intention to republish the article in expanded pamphlet form must have affected him during the early months of 1872 ; and William is probably correct in his surmise that " he must have got even worse sleep than usual, and must have exceeded more than usual his chloral-dosing and its concomitant of alcohol " (*FLM*, i, 305) during this period.

But even granting these points, and accepting that the pamphlet was merely the proverbial straw that finally made his accumulated physical and psychological burdens unbearable, there must have been some more tangible reason to explain the dramatic effect of the pamphlet on Rossetti, something specific to lead him on the 2nd of June to those delusions of conspiracy which were the outward signs that led his brother to perceive that he was " not entirely sane " (*FLM*, i, 307). The explanation, it would seem, may well lie in differences between Buchanan's *Contemporary* article and the later pamphlet which were sufficient to destroy Rossetti's hold on reality.

In his article,<sup>2</sup> Buchanan had attacked Rossetti on several counts. To the charge of " fleshliness " Rossetti was particularly vulnerable, especially since, as Professor Doughty has shown (p. 488), this quality had been singled out by such critics as Stephens, Colvin, and Swinburne as the hallmark of his poetic and painterly style. Buchanan, of course, ignoring the literal application of the term, drew moral conclusions and depicted Rossetti as the arch-villain of animalism, citing such poems as " Nuptial Sleep ",

<sup>1</sup> John Morley's review in the *Saturday Review* (4 August 1866) is characteristic—essentially an extra-literary review attacking the poems on moral grounds.

<sup>2</sup> Page references are to the reprint of the article in *Victorian Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Walter Houghton and G. R. Stange, 2nd edn. (New York, 1968), pp. 888-98.

“ The Blessed Damozel ”, and “ Jenny ” as exemplars, which he discussed in some detail. Among specific charges laid in the article, there were others, however, which would have been more serious to Rossetti than identifying him among the “ public offenders ” of the fleshly school who were “ gently spreading the seeds of disease ”—particularly Buchanan’s association of him with the “ Mutual Admiration School ” (p. 889); the references made to his reputation as an unexhibited artist and an unpublished poet, “ idolized by his own family and personal associates ” (p. 890); and the claim that he lacked spontaneity, that, apart from fleshliness, which was his only mark of originality, he was “ a poet possessing great powers of assimilation and some faculty for concealing the nutriment on which he feeds ” (p. 893). Always sensitive to obvious borrowing, Rossetti reworked his poems carefully to eliminate echoes; and to be accused of plagiarizing from Browning, Mrs. Browning, Swinburne, and even Buchanan himself, must have infuriated him no less than Buchanan’s labelling the positioning of “ The Blessed Damozel ” as “ accident ” (p. 891) after the severe revisions that preceded the publication of *Poems*. Finally, in reading the personality of the poet into all his productions—“ Mr. Rossetti is never dramatic, never impersonal ” (p. 891)—Buchanan consciously parodied Rossetti’s claims regarding the maturity of the poems in the volume, the point of irony on which he ended the review. After identifying Rossetti as the Blessed Damozel, Helen, Lilith, Sister Helen, and the rest, Buchanan concluded :

he is all these, just as surely as he is Mr. Rossetti soliloquizing over Jenny in her London lodging [“ the usual style . . . occupied by such ladies ” (p. 894)], or the very nuptial person writing erotic sonnets to his wife. In petticoats or pantaloons, in modern times or in the middle ages, he is just Mr. Rossetti, a fleshly person, with nothing particular to tell us or teach us. . . . (p. 891)

Buchanan’s original article occupies only Chapter 4 (and the last paragraph of Chapter 3) in the published pamphlet.<sup>1</sup> The alterations are not great, though the opening paragraph of the article is “ suppressed for its weakness ”, and the point of view is changed throughout from a pseudonymous “ we ” to the first person; other changes involve minor additions and deletions,

<sup>1</sup> Page references are to the first edition of the pamphlet.

and refinements in diction and punctuation. In the pamphlet, the article is set within a broad context of moral decay and spiritual corruption; but more important from Rossetti's point of view are the materials in the Preface and in the new chapter on *The House of Life*, in which Buchanan addresses himself specifically to answering Rossetti's defence in "The Stealthy School of Criticism". Throughout, Buchanan takes pot shots at Rossetti—e.g. his frequent references to the slimness of Rossetti's volume or to Rossetti's "poaching in Mr. Swinburne's French 'Slough of Uncleanliness'" (p. 77), or to his "affected harpsichord melody" (p. 89)—but two additions in the pamphlet were probably sufficient, given the precarious balance of Rossetti's health and mind in the spring of 1872, to push him beyond the brink. Both relate to Elizabeth Siddal.

In the article, there were only two brief references to Rossetti's wife as the inspiration of the poems. The first referred to "The Blessed Damozel", which Buchanan rejected as a "record of actual grief and love . . . the apotheosis of one actually lost by the writer" (p. 892); the second, already quoted, identified Rossetti as "the very nuptial person writing erotic sonnets to his wife" (p. 891). Of course, in castigating Rossetti for chronicling "his amorous sensations" and "putting on record . . . the most secret mysteries of sexual connection" (pp. 890, 891) in "Nuptial Sleep," Buchanan was making veiled allusions to Rossetti's marriage. In the pamphlet, responding to Rossetti's own defence that "the delights of the body . . . are nought if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times" (*Works*, 1911, p. 618), Buchanan opened all stops. He concluded the Preface:

The truth appears to be, that writing, however nasty, will be perfectly sanctified to English readers if it be moral in the legal sense; and thus a poet who describes sensual details may do so with impunity if he labels his poems—"Take notice! These sensations are strictly *nuptial*; these delights have been sanctioned by English law, and registered at Doctors' Commons!" We have here the reason that Mr. Rossetti has almost escaped censure, while Mr. Swinburne has been punished so severely; for Mr. Rossetti, in his worst poems, explains that he is speaking dramatically in the character of *husband* addressing his *wife*. Animalism is animalism, nevertheless, whether licensed or not; and, indeed, one might tolerate the language of lust more readily on the lips of a lover addressing a mistress than on the lips of a husband virtually (in these so-called "Nuptial" Sonnets) wheeling his nuptial couch out into the public streets. (pp. viii-ix)

That Buchanan could have been conscious of the ironic undertones in this passage is unlikely, but it is not difficult to conceive that a man in Rossetti's condition, capable of all sorts of morbid imaginings, might have assumed him to be. When in Chapter 5 Buchanan turned to his analysis of *The House of Life*, which he found a veritable "hotbed" and "lottery-bag" of "nasty phrases" (pp. 58, 66), he introduced—again almost certainly unconsciously—a parallel that must have served to convince Rossetti all the more of his intimate familiarity with the secrets of Rossetti's life :

Having so far complied with Mr. Rossetti's request, and re-examined "The House of Life," I retain unchanged my impression that the sort of house meant should be nameless, but is probably the identical one where the writer found "Jenny." (p. 64)

Open exposure could hardly have been worse ; and Buchanan compounded the imputation and his offence by his final attack (at the end of this chapter) on Rossetti's sincerity, or perhaps his ignorance :

No one can rejoice more than I do to hear that Mr. Rossetti attaches a certain importance to the soul as distinguished from the body, only I should like very much to know what he means by the soul ; for I fear, from the sonnet he quotes ["Love-Sweetness"], that he regards the feeling for a young woman's person, face, heart, and mind, as in itself quite a spiritual sentiment. (p. 69)

If Rossetti saw in Buchanan's works unmistakable signs that news of the recovery of his manuscripts from Elizabeth Siddal's grave had "oozed out" through the careless talk of Howell or others, or that his affair with Jane Morris was public knowledge and that her portrait stood out too prominently in *The House of Life*—and even the similarity of the names Jenny and Janey might have reinforced this conclusion—his violent response to Buchanan's pamphlet is immediately understandable. The collapse is explained and the obsession that there existed a "widespread conspiracy for crushing his fair fame as an artist and man, and for hounding him out of honest society" (*FLM*, i, 305), of which Buchanan's pamphlet was the first symptom, is made comprehensible. That Rossetti saw Browning's *Fifine at the Fair*, when he received his complimentary copy a few days later, in the same context, serves to support this conjecture, for it was

against the personal allusions in Browning's poems that he railed; his niece, Mrs. Angeli, has said that there are in the Epilogue to that poem references which "needed no distortion of the powers of apprehension for [him] to take these verses as bearing a particular message to himself, a very incisive allusion to his own life and loves" (HRA, p. 166).<sup>1</sup> Additional support comes from the article entitled "Fleshing the Fleshly," which appeared in *The Echo* on 18 May. William Michael's reference to it in his diary entry for the 21st is adequate for positive identification; certainly it was not, as Brown says (see Letter 21) and as William doubts, by Buchanan. In his discussion of this article in the *Memoir*, however, William says that the word "coward" or "cowards" in the article "disturbed my brother unduly", and that in his overstrained condition he "consulted me as to whether it might not be his duty to challenge the writer or the editor to a duel" (p. 306). The fact is that neither word appears in this article, which is generally antipathetic to Buchanan's tactic if not totally to his conclusions. What is reiterated, however, is the passage in Buchanan's Preface, though the author of the article refrains from reprinting the "still more pungent sentence" about "wheeling the nuptial couch out into the public streets". By calling attention to one of the principal offending passages in Buchanan's pamphlet, the article—particularly if Rossetti attri-

<sup>1</sup> In his article, "The Harlot and the Thoughtful Young Man", originally published in *SP* (xxix [July 1932], 463-84) and reprinted in *The Browning Critics*, ed. Boyd Litzinger and K. L. Knickerbocker (Lexington, Kentucky, 1965), William C. DeVane argues convincingly that while "Browning meant no attack upon Rossetti's moral character . . . [he] wrote *Fifine* with 'Jenny' in mind" (p. 163). Whether DGR saw *Fifine* as more than simply another accusation of his fleshliness—this time from a friend of long standing—"who can say?" queries DeVane: "Did his over-wrought mind see in those closing lines, in which the young man bids his wife, if he does not return quickly, to 'slip from flesh and blood, and play the ghost again,' a reference to those old rumours about his wife's suicide?" (p. 166). DGR's advance concern with the reception of "Jenny" in *Poems* is well established—see the most recent article on the poem, "Jenny: The Divided Sensibility of a Young and Thoughtful Man of the World" (*SEL*, ix [Autumn 1969], 677-93) by Jules P. Seigel for a convenient survey—and it is true that the poem was singled out by several reviewers, including Buchanan, for attack. It was, however, the conscious linking of "Jenny" and *The House of Life*, with the attendant associations of a brothel atmosphere, that doubtless most revolted DGR.

buted it to Buchanan—could only have fortified his suspicion that he was being victimized by a conspiracy led by his chief assailant.<sup>1</sup>

However interpreted, Buchanan's pamphlet scored the kill, and its timing was critical. "Weak health", Professor Doughty says, "made him a peculiarly vulnerable target for his enemies":

Exhausted by disappointment and overstrain, his nervous system, never robust, had for the last four years shown increasing symptoms of obscure disorder: insomnia, depression, hypersensitiveness, failing sight, loss of self-control, neurasthenic tendencies in short, while his remedies, chloral and spirits, had but intensified the evil. . . . A victim of drug, drink and passion, he was increasingly succumbing to paranoid tendencies, towards anxiety and persecution complexes. . . . At times he relapsed into fits of eccentricity, became increasingly introvert and regressive, preferring solitude and brooding again over his own painful past. (p. 508)

With this summary, the background to Rossetti's breakdown can be concluded. After 2 June he became the care and the burden of his brother and five especial friends who nursed him through the summer and who left behind a full account of his condition and his convalescence.

<sup>1</sup> This article should be compared with that in the *Saturday Review* discussed in the second part of this study which will appear in the next number of the BULLETIN.