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Library Notes

Ten Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the W. Hugh Peal Collection

Joseph H. Gardner

For someone who disliked writing letters and avoided the chore as much as possible, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Plate I) produced a surprisingly large body of correspondence. The most complete edition of the artist-poet's letters runs to four volumes containing over 2,600 items; when it appeared it was universally attacked for leaving out almost as much as it included. Nine of the unpublished letters are now in the University of Kentucky Libraries' Special Collections Department as part of the wealth of materials relating to the Pre-Raphaelite movement in the W. Hugh Peal Collection. Together with a tenth letter that has been published, they cover a span of some fifteen years and represent Rossetti in a wide variety of relationships and activities.

The earliest dated letter shows Rossetti's characteristic generosity and helpfulness toward his friends and fellow artists. In it we find him taking time out from his own work to check proofs for the Norwich born painter and illustrator, Frederick Sandys (1829-1904):

1. To George Dalziel

G. Dalziel, Esq.

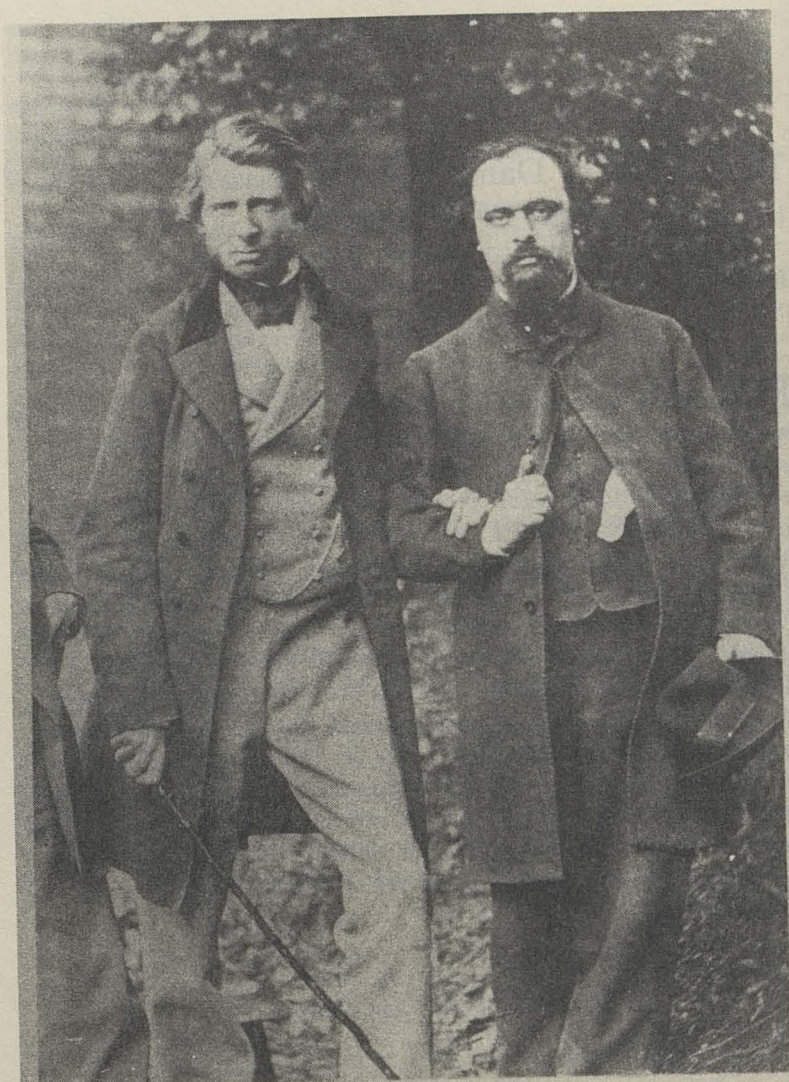
4 Oct /61

My dear Sir

Many thanks for the proofs of Mr. Sandys' drawings, which seem almost as finely cut as they are finely drawn—especially the lovely snowpiece.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully



W & D. DOWNEY
PHOTOGRAPHERS



57 & 61 GREGORY STREET
LONDON S.W.

Victorian poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, right, with the writer and critic John Ruskin, photographed by W. & D. Downey, London, W. Hugh Peal Collection, University of Kentucky Libraries.

Sandys, who studied at the Norwich School of Design, began exhibiting in 1851. He met Rossetti in 1857 and soon fell under his spell and into his circle. One of the most skillful of Pre-Raphaelite illustrators, Sandys received commissions from *The Cornhill Magazine*, *Once a Week*, and *Good Words*, as well as from several book publishers. The "lovely snowpiece," entitled "The Little Mourner" (Plate II), was one of two designs he supplied for Robert A. Willmott's anthology, *English Sacred Poetry* (1862). His friendship with Rossetti, which lasted twelve years, ended in acrimony when Rossetti, with considerable justification, accused Sandys of plagiarizing his designs.

George Dalziel (1815-1902) and his brother Edward (1817-1905) were the leading wood engravers of the day, doing work for a number of the Pre-Raphaelites. Rossetti's opinion of them was not always as high as this letter suggests. In 1855 he had given them his design for an illustration of William Allingham's poem "The Maids of Elfen-Mere." Although Burne-Jones called the design "the most beautiful drawing for an illustration I have ever seen," the Dalziels could make neither heads nor tails of it. "How is one to engrave a drawing that is partly in ink, partly in pencil, and partly in red chalk?," George fumed. Rossetti, in turn, accused Dalziel of making "an incredible mull" of it. Two years later, when Rossetti was working on his celebrated contributions to the Moxon *Tennyson*, he again ran afoul of the Dalziels. "It is a thankless task," he wrote William Bell Scott; "After a fortnight's work my block goes to the engraver, like Agag, delicately, and is hewn to pieces before the—Lord Harry! . . .

O woodman, spare that block,
O gash not anyhow;
It took ten days by clock,
I'd fain protect it now.

Chorus: wild laughter from Dalziel's workshop."

One well-known form of Rossetti's generosity was his lifelong efforts to further the careers and find commissions for his fellow artists. One painter to benefit from Rossetti's endeavors was the Indian born Valentine Prinsep (1838-1904). The two first met when the twenty-year-old Prinsep, a pupil of G. F. Watts, journeyed to Oxford to join in what became known as the "Jovial Campaign," the efforts of a group of artists led by Rossetti to decorate with



“Child, if thou speak to them,
They will not answer thee;
They are deep down in earth—
Thy face they cannot see.”

The Little Mourner, by Frederick Sandys, prepared by the prominent wood engravers George and Edward Dalziel for Robert A. Willmott's anthology, English Sacred Poetry (1862).

frescoes the newly built Oxford Union. The efforts were unsuccessful: none of them knew how to work in the medium, and they ended up sloshing as much paint on each other as on the walls. A celebrated caricature by Edward Burne-Jones shows William Morris, coated with paint and plaster, glaring in frustration at the Union's ceiling over the caption "*O Tempera, O Morris!*" Rossetti teased Morris, who was nicknamed "Topsy," for his inability to figure out the perspective needed for wall and ceiling paintings:

Poor Topsy has gone
To make a sketch of Miss Lipscombe,
But he can't draw the head,
And don't know where the hips come.

When Morris solved the problem by hiding all but the heads of his figures behind bright yellow sunflowers, Rossetti satirized the effort by promptly covering his own with scarlet runner beans. "What fun we had in that Union," Prinsep wrote years later. "What jokes! What roars of laughter!" After the end of the "Jovial Campaign," Prinsep went to Paris where he studied in the same studio with James Abbott McNeill Whistler and George DuMaurier, the latter eventually using him as the model for the character Taffy in *Trilby*:

2. To H. L. D. Ward

14 Chatham Place
[29th Jan^y 1862]
Wednesday
My dear Ward:

I find that Mr. Prinsep, of whom I spoke to you & of whose talents I have a very high opinion, will be happy to undertake the portrait if it is wished he should do so. His address is

V. C. Prinsep, Esq
46 Upper Charlotte St
Fitzroy Square

I write to him again with this to ask his terms, and also what days would suit him in case it were wished to visit his studio now, to which I dare say he would not object.

I shall see you on Friday evening if I do not hear from you before, and am yours truly

Harry Leigh Douglas Ward (1825-1906) was an assistant in the Manuscripts Department of the British Museum, where he edited a three-volume edition of medieval romances from the museum's collection. His position and his special interest in romances would make him a likely acquaintance of Rossetti's from well before the year 1862.

Another letter from roughly the same period shows Rossetti extending the same kind of aid to his studio assistant, Walter John Knewstub. Knewstub (1831-1906) first came under Rossetti's influence in 1862, when Rossetti, at Ruskin's urging, agreed to teach a class at the London Working Men's College. Knewstub, who had established a minor reputation for his caricatures, humorous drawings, and genre scenes, dropped out of the Royal Academy Schools to become Rossetti's pupil and unpaid assistant for the next four years, setting up and preparing canvases, arranging clay figures, modeling, running endless errands, and helping in preparing the copies of paintings that provided Rossetti with a loathed but much needed source of income. (William Rothenstein, who married Knewstub's daughter, even claimed that Knewstub painted the replicas entirely, Rossetti simply signing and disposing of them—a charge Rossetti's correspondence tends to refute). Despite Rossetti's many attempts to further his career, Knewstub struggled throughout his life with poverty and poor health, and never achieved the recognition he perhaps deserved.

3. To W. J. Knewstub

[1862-1864]

My dear Knewstub

I send you on this, brought me by W. Taylor whom I know not if you know but who has seen some things of yours here. It refers to a job of decoration work, involving original design of some playful sort I believe.

I really don't know whether it would suit you or be

compatible with your doing that David for me which I shall be boring you with soon. But the idea will do for a seaside walk which I hope may profit you some other ways. We can talk about it when I see you.

I also thought of your acquaintance Crome, if it should not suit you. But do you know his line?

Your

The "David" referred to is *The Seed of David*, a triptych Rossetti produced for Llandaff Cathedral. He had received the commission in 1856, but given his notorious penchant for procrastination, did not deliver the painting until 1864. Vivian Crome, who had a minor reputation as a flower painter, lived near Rossetti in Cheyne Walk. M. Warrington Taylor (1835-1870) was manager of the firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., with which Rossetti was associated and for whom he produced several designs. This note to Knewstub, written on a torn scrap of paper, is decorated by a pencil sketch showing Rossetti, characteristically lounging on a sofa, having tea with his housekeeper, model, mistress, and lifelong friend, Fanny Cornforth (Plate III).

On at least one occasion Rossetti turned his willingness to help other artists into a good will gesture benefiting his own career:

4. To J. Aldam Heaton

[Postmark 22 July 1864]

Sunday

My dear Heaton:

I shall be very glad to look at your picture if it is worth your while to take the trouble of bringing it here on Tuesday—say about 3:30 if that suits you, or else 12 noon. I am afraid verbal advice is all I can give. It would be not the least use you seeing me paint for a few hours, unless it happened to be just some piece of work done right off within that time, which seldom happens in a picture. Processes are gradual with me. Thus this is not feasible.

I need not be writing more, as I'll hope to be seeing you so soon, and with kindest remembrances to Mrs. Heaton
Am ever yours



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, right with Fanny Cornforth, drawn in pencil on a letter of Rossetti to W. J. Knewstubb. W. Hugh Peal Collection, University of Kentucky Libraries.

John Aldam Heaton (c1830-1897) was a well-to-do Yorkshire manufacturer and amateur artist who had already established himself as one of Rossetti's more reliable patrons. In addition to buying several of Rossetti's drawings and watercolors, he had also commissioned two portraits, one of which involved what might be called an instance of artistic wife-swapping. Heaton requested a replica of *Regina Cordium*, for which Rossetti's wife had originally sat, with his own wife's head replacing Elizabeth Siddal's. Rossetti was happy to oblige.

Although the letter shows Rossetti anxious to maintain cordial relations with his patron, its slight curtness of tone is explained by its being written during one of the many periods of depression in Rossetti's life. Still brooding over his wife's suicide two years earlier and forced to work constantly, despite lethargy and depression, to meet his debts, he lost his usual sociability. Devoting himself to long stretches of solitude, he stood at his easel for days on end, going without meals or snatching food as he painted. So while he was willing to take the time to critique Heaton's efforts, he was hardly in the mood to give painting

demonstrations. Heaton eventually abandoned Yorkshire and business to devote himself full time to art, achieving some success as a decorative painter in the 1880s.

As the letter to Heaton shows, Rossetti's reputation as a shrewd, careful, and calculating businessman is well deserved. After 1851 he rarely exhibited his work in public, preferring to sell directly from his studio, and earning the envy of his fellow artists for the amount of money he was able to extract from his patrons. (He made it his custom, for example, to set his prices in guineas rather than pounds, a practice few of his colleagues had the courage to follow.) Despite his preference for direct commissions and his desire to avoid dealers, it was inevitable that, sooner or later, he would cross paths—and swords—with Jean Joseph Ernest Theodore Gambart.

Ernest Gambart (1814-1902) was born in Belgium and settled in London in 1840. Beginning his career as a publisher and importer of foreign prints, he later made a substantial fortune as the most influential and powerful art dealer in Victorian England. By arranging exhibitions, negotiating commissions, and buying completed works, he did much to bolster the reputations of such Pre-Raphaelite artists as Ford Madox Brown, Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais—and Rossetti. Directing his attentions toward the new wealth of the industrial Midlands, he developed a knack for selling paintings at high prices, considerably more than he himself had paid the artist. The tradition that he bought Rossetti's *The Blue Bower* for 200 guineas and sold it for 1,500, for example, still persists. Actually, Gambart received only £500 for the painting, but a mark-up of nearly 250% remains notable, nevertheless. One can understand the painter George Boyce's characterizing Gambart as "that vampire." Rossetti put it in the manner of Edward Lear:

There is an old he-wolf named Gambart;
Beware of him if thou a lamb art.
 Else thy tail and thy toes
 And thine innocent nose
Will be ground by the grinders of Gambart.

Yet Rossetti was also shrewd enough to recognize that he, too, benefited from Gambart's inflated profits, which allowed him to raise his own asking prices in direct sales and commissions. So, while he did not originate the rumor of *The Blue Bower's* having

fetches 1,500 guineas, he did help spread it around.

Despite the usefulness of each to the other, the vast differences in their personalities and business methods made their relationship inevitably rocky. Gambart's biographer describes them as circling each other like two wary boxers, a simile whose aptness is borne out by the following letter:

5. To Ernest Gambart

1st Jan 1867

My dear Gambart,

Periods of general crisis confuse the imaginations of men, and this must account for the ideal suggestion to an artist that he should return £100 received on a clear bargain which he is ready to complete. However, as there seems to have been some slight misconception in M. Lefevre's report of our interview today, let us see whether we can make things square without appealing to poetic fancy.

When I made you an offer of a head supplementary to the *Fiammetta*, I first showed you the little *Christ's head*, and this you were disposed to entertain, had I not myself expressed an unwillingness to let it go into the market, as not expressing my execution at its best.

Now you had once, some time ago, put your price on this head at £20, though, in the event of an amateur wishing to have it, my own price would have been 40 or 50 guineas, I myself suggested painting you a better supplementary head than this, but had not the least idea, as I then pointedly explained, of making it more important in size or quantity of material. I distinctly said it should be *Just such a head as that*, only a female and more finished in style. Thus, should you prefer sticking to our bargain of that day, I will send you the head I have now nearly done, of a circular form and of the size of the *Christ*, (which I now find on measurement to be 9 inches exact,) and *without any extra payment whatever*, though if I understand your note rightly, M. Lefevre misconceived me to say that I should then claim £20, which price I mentioned as the one at which you had once estimated the *Christ*.

The fact that, in drawing this head, an action of hands

suggested itself to me, has nothing to do with our bargain; only it led me to propose that (*solely in the event of your preferring such plan*) I should finish the picture with hands to the size of the panel—15x12 inches, at a moderate extra price. Such moderate extra price (to be received by me on delivery of the picture) would be £40,—I could not do it for a penny less.

Thus the 2 pictures—*Fiammetta* and this one with hands &c added,—would cost you £40. It is entirely for you to decide whether you prefer receiving this little picture in a circle of 9 inches for nothing, or in a square of 12x15 inches for £40. I can show it you, if you chose, any day except tomorrow & Thursday.

Ever yours,

The comic reference to "periods of general crisis" probably alludes to turmoil over the Second Reform Bill, a "crisis" the notoriously apolitical Rossetti would have taken little interest in. Leon Lefevre (c1843-1915) was Gambart's nephew and assistant. Rossetti was perhaps willing to let the *Fiammetta*, a portrait of Boccaccio's mistress, go so cheaply because he had produced it by cutting a head out of an abandoned canvas called "*Hist*," said *Kate the Queen* and repainting it. The "little *Christ's head*," for which Edward Burne-Jones had sat, was done in 1858 as a study for *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee*. Gambart took it, leaving the female head "with hands &c" in Rossetti's studio where it evolved into *Joli Coeur*.

The jocular tone covering a hard-nosed insistence is characteristic of Rossetti's dealing with Gambart. Even in moments of crisis Rossetti could treat Gambart with satiric good humor. In 1861, when the relationship was at its most strained, Rossetti received a commission from Morris's firm to design seven stained glass windows for St. Martin's Church, Scarborough. Choosing the Parable of the Husbandmen as his theme, Rossetti incorporated Gambart into several designs. In one he holds a large stone, ready to chuck it at the landlord's servant. In another he is shown, knife in hand, preparing to stab the landlord's son in the back. In the final cartoon for the series he is being led off in chains over the caption from *Matthew 21:41*: "He will miserably destroy those miserable men." Shackled on either side of him are William Morris and Algernon Swinburne.

Rossetti's generosity extended not only to his fellow painters, but fellow poets as well. When he was sixteen, he had come across a verse tragedy by T. G. Hake entitled *Valdarno, or the Ordeal of Art-Worship*. William Michael Rossetti recalled that the poem "seethed in my brother's head." Hake (1809-1895) was a physician whose avocation of writing was as important to him as his medical practice. *Valdarno* was followed in 1866 by a volume of poems, *The World's Epitaph*, which Rossetti admired as much as he had the earlier verse. When the two men eventually met in October 1869, the friendship they formed was permanent and mutually beneficial. Rossetti advised Hake on his poetry, designed the cover for one of his volumes, and wrote laudatory reviews of his works for the *Academy* and the *Fortnightly Review*. Although Hake scratched Rossetti's back in return by reviewing his 1870 volume of *Poems* in the *New Monthly*, his primary service to him was medical, not literary. When, in June 1872, Rossetti suffered a severe mental breakdown, Hake took him into his house in Roehampton and later accompanied him to Scotland for a six weeks' convalescence. "I walked with him by day, I sat with him by night," Hake recalled in his *Memoirs*. William Michael Rossetti deemed Hake "the earthly Providence of the Rossetti family in those dark days."

The following letter concerns Hake's work in progress, which appeared under the title *Parables and Tales* in 1872.

6. To Thomas Gordon Hake

16 Cheyne Walk

12 May 1871

Dear Dr. Hake

I am very sorry to have neglected your letter so long, but must lay it to the charge of a certain big canvas which has to atone for all my sins at present, & perhaps considers itself worst used of all. I expected to have reached Brown's and seen you there, but somehow did not, to my disappointment.

I think a volume of *Parables* a good idea, but should I think hardly be inclined to give it for chief title the name of one already published. I should I think be disposed to call the book "Modern *Parables*." But this of course is a question for deep consideration. The publisher may perhaps know best.

I shall be hoping to see you somehow ere long, and am wearying for a change & beginning to fancy that my work when done smacks of weak health.

About the illustrations to your book, I should be afraid of causing delay if I thought of undertaking it, as such things are apt to outlast all the ides and calends with me when I am busy.

I should think Brown would be likely to entertain the publishing proposal if mentioned to him.

With kindest remembrances

Everyone's

Thanks for the new No. of H.W.W.

Hake had already published a collection entitled *Madelaine, with Other Poems and Parables*, hence Rossetti's uneasiness about the reuse of the word "parables." Although he declined to provide illustrations for the new volume, he did produce a floral design, based on Gerard's *Herbal*, for its binding. Ford Madox Brown also turned down the commission, which then went to another member of the Rossetti circle, the painter Arthur Hughes. The postscript refers to Hake's novel, *Her Winning Ways*, which was appearing serially in the *New Monthly Magazine*. The "big canvas" is *Dante's Dream*. A replica of an earlier watercolor, it was commissioned by William Graham (1816-1885), M.P. for Glasgow, for £1,575. Although Graham had stipulated that the canvas not exceed 3 1/2 by 6 feet, it soon mushroomed to 7 by 10, Rossetti's largest production. Graham was forced to return it to the artist, having no wall large enough to hold it. It was eventually sold to the city of Liverpool.

By the summer of 1876 Rossetti had dominated the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, led the "Jovial Campaign" at Oxford, married and buried a wife, published two volumes of poetry, painted a host of major oils and watercolors, broken off his association with John Ruskin, established an adulterous relationship with his best friend's wife, and attempted suicide. He had also become addicted to nightly doses of chloral hydrate (known in this country as "Mickey Finn") which he had innocently been introduced to as a cure for the insomnia that plagued much of his life. Yet despite his illness, he continued to be productive with both pen and brush and to express unselfish concern for his family and fellow artists:

7. To Mrs. Holme Sumner

Monday evening

[November 20, 1876]

My dear Mrs Sumners,

Today & tomorrow (Tuesday) would not I believe have been suitable to you for sitting. Either Wednesday or Thursday would suit me preferably, so would you kindly fix which day it shall be? And shall we say 12-30 as the hour, in these very short days? But later of course, if this is too early for you.

Mr. & Mrs. Temple have most generously bought a picture by W. J. Knewstubb—a different one from the one of his which is to be raffled. The price was £50, so between that & the raffle, he will really get a chance, poor fellow, which he needed much in his present state of health.

I saw my sister again yesterday at All Saints' Home, little altered to appearance, & as clear & lively in talk as before. Between this visit & my former one, she had, however, been so reduced as only to be able sometimes to see even her mother for a quarter of an hour in the day. Thus she has rallied a good deal for the moment, but hope is not held out.

Affectionately yours

Georgina Sumner, wife of the Royal Master of Hounds and daughter-in-law of the Archbishop of Canterbury, was one of the great beauties of Victorian England, a veritable "stunner," to use one of the Pre-Raphaelites' favorite terms. She and Rossetti had met the previous summer, when both were houseguests at Broadlands, the Hampshire home of Rossetti's friends and patrons, The Honorable and Mrs. William Cowper-Temple (later Lord and Lady Mount Temple). Writing to his mother Rossetti described her as "beautiful and excellent . . . a great boon for cheerfulness, intelligence, and no less for willingness to sit. She is one of the most beautiful women I ever saw, though now past her youngest, and of the noblest antique Roman type—a perfect Agrippina or Cornelia. I hope to be able to paint something good from her." In addition to a portrait in colored chalks, she also sat for an oil on a Roman theme, *Domizia Scaligera*, undoubtedly the painting referred to here. It was never finished; Rossetti family tradition

says that by the time the sittings broke off, Mrs. Sumner had fallen deeply in love with her portraitist.

Rossetti valued the Cowper-Temples not only for their patronage, but also for their many expressions of kindness and care. When Cowper-Temple, stepson to Lord Palmerston and chief commissioner of the Board of Works, bought *Beata Beatrix*, Rossetti rejoiced that it had gone to someone who would "like it for its own sake," adding "It is pleasanter sending a poetic work where it will be seen by cultivated folks, than to a cotton-spinner or a dealer." Mrs. Cowper-Temple he described as "an angel on earth," praising "the noble beauty" of her "Christlike character" in gratitude for her care for him in his illness. The Cowper-Temples' character can also be seen in their willingness to join Rossetti in aiding the impoverished and chronically ill Knewstub, who was not the only painter for whose sake Rossetti organized charity sales.

Maria, the least well known of the four Rossettis, was Gabriel's childhood favorite. "In my boyhood," he once wrote, "I loved Maria better than anyone in the world." Author of an unjustly neglected book on Dante, for which her brother designed the cover, she became a novice in the All Saints' Sisterhood, an Anglican religious order, and was formally admitted at All Saints Home, Regent Street, in 1875. By September 1876 it had become clear that she was dying of cancer, the end coming four days after this letter was written. "How sweet and true a life," Rossetti wrote his mother, "and how pure a death, hopeful and confiding in every last instance."

Another letter written the same evening shows Rossetti with other worries as well:

8. To Theodore Watts-Dunton

[Postmark 21 November 1876]

Monday evening

My dear Watts

I find funds are turning so low that I'll remind you of what we said for as early a date *as possible*.

Hope to see you soon. *Thursday alone* is pre-engaged with me.

Ever yours

After being trained as a naturalist, Theodore Watts (1832- 1914) qualified as a solicitor. Introduced to Rossetti in 1872 by Dr. Hake, he quickly progressed from serving as the artist's legal advisor to becoming one of his closest friends. Through Rossetti he became intimate with many of the leading artists and writers of the late Victorian period, including Swinburne, whom he saved from certain death from drug and alcohol abuse and whom he harbored in his house in suburban Putney for nearly thirty years. In 1896 he changed his name to Watts-Dunton, prompting Whistler's celebrated telegram, "Theodore, What's Dunton?" Encouraged by Rossetti to try his own hand at writing, he was for many years a regular contributor to the *Athenaeum*. His novel, *Aylwin*, one of the greater atrocities ever committed in the name of literature, is a *roman à clef* in which Rossetti appears as the character D'Arcy. Rossetti's note refers to their joint, but unsuccessful, endeavor to lure a wealthy member of London's Jewish community, named Benjamin, into Rossetti's studio, in the hope of receiving his patronage.

Another of the ten Rossetti letters in the Peal Collection is also a brief note, of more interest, perhaps, to autograph collectors than students of Rossetti's life or art. Its occasion and recipient are unknown:

9. To Mr. Jameson

16 Cheyne Walk

Chelsea

Sunday

My dear Jameson:

Fanny is going to call on you tomorrow (Monday) at 3 o'clock.

Yours very truly,

Commentators on Rossetti's career occasionally take him to task for surrounding himself with literary "small beer," pointing to his friendships with such poetasters as Dr. Hake, Watts-Dunton, and William Allingham, author of the immortal line "Ringting! I wish I were a Primrose." (A character in Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* characterizes Allingham as part of the "belles-litter" that surrounded Rossetti.) Yet these friendships were of great importance to Rossetti himself and a major spur to his own poetic

creativity. Indeed, although he wrote poetry from the 1840s until his death in 1882, the bulk of his verse was produced in two, relatively short periods of intense creative activity, during both of which he felt himself nourished and encouraged by his literary friendships. Writing was, for Rossetti, almost a communal act; to be able to share his poetry with his friends was a prerequisite of his Muse. Swapping sonnets was his favorite pastime, as the following hastily written letter, dating from the summer of 1871, shows:

10. To Arthur O'Shaughnessy

Friday

Dear O'Shaughnessy

(Do let's drop Mist'ers!)

Will you look in Monday at 3 (nor later but rather earlier) & bring Nettleship—as I see you write from his place. I'll show you both my big picture—indeed I was going to write N about it. Then I hope you'll both stay dinner & you can read me a poem after & I've got a new one to read you. If a dark day however it's no use coming before 6 to dinner, as I can't show picture in the dark.

Ever yours

Love to N. Ask him to bring any designs that are portable. If both can't come Monday we'll fix new day.

O'Shaughnessy (1844-1881), poet and dreamer, was a herpetologist who worked in the zoological department of the British Museum. Tall, slight, and frail (the poet John Payne called him "a thread-paper of a man"), he was said to be a natural son of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, author of both *The Last Days of Pompeii* and the celebrated sentence "It was a dark and stormy night." Like many young poets, O'Shaughnessy was greatly impressed by Rossetti's 1870 volume of poetry, so much so that he sought the older poet's acquaintance by sending him a copy of his own first book, *Epic of Women*. The two became friends even though, as Rossetti told Jane Morris, "O'Shaughnessy was certainly not inspiring, poor fellow, as a companion. He had a particular *Ah!* which served for recognition of most speeches addressed him." O'Shaughnessy went on to publish three more volumes of verse,

all of them written, to Rossetti's amusement, in violet ink.

John Trivett Nettleship (1841-1902) was best known for his paintings of exotic animals, which he exhibited at the Royal Academy and elsewhere from 1871 until his death. He also received several commissions to paint in animals on other artists' canvases. The pigeons in Henry Holiday's *Dante and Beatrice*, for example, are from his hand. Unusually athletic for a member of Rossetti's circle, he was a skilled amateur boxer and avid mountain climber. Like Rossetti's, his interests included literature as well as art; his *Essays on Robert Browning's Poetry* (1868) went through three editions. His eldest daughter married Augustus John. The "big picture" is *Dante's Dream*, which Rossetti completed and had framed in June 1871.

Ever since Oswald Doughty set the style some forty years ago, it has been fashionable to think of Rossetti as a morbid psychotic, half-crazed by drugs, lust, and guilt, lurching around his studio pawing at his models. The Rossetti that emerges from these letters is a quite different sort of chap: concerned for his artistic colleagues and always generous on their behalf; delighting in his friends as they delighted in him; and taking pleasure in sharing what Nabokov calls the "aesthetic bliss" of artistic creation. We also see him as a skillful businessman dealing carefully and successfully with both patron and dealer; a man with a keen sense of humor; one who is capable of being touched by the kindness of others, and who is deeply attached to his family. The self-portrait created by these letters is made all the more convincing by their having been written over a fifteen-year period and addressed to highly disparate audiences for a great variety of purposes. One suspects that the Rossetti represented in the University of Kentucky's W. Hugh Peal Collection is closer to the man than the one conjured up by critical cliché.

NOTES

These letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti have been printed by kind permission of Mrs. Imogen Rossetti Dennis. The standard biography remains Oswald Doughty's *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 2nd. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), although Rosalie Glynn Gryll's *Portrait of Rossetti* (London: MacDonald, 1964) provides, perhaps, a more balanced portrait. Four volumes of Rossetti's letters were edited by

Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-67). Virginia Surtees's *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) is definitive. William E. Fredeman provides an indispensable guide to the Rossetti circle in *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965).