

ROSSETTI'S "PORTRAIT(S)":
THREE NEW DRAFTS OF A ROSSETTI POEM

Florence S. Boos and Mark Samuels Lasner

Three hitherto unknown drafts of Dante Rossetti's "On Mary's Portrait" (later "The Portrait"),¹ recently acquired by the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection at the University of Delaware Library,² raise a number of intriguing scholarly questions. The most obvious question is of their temporal placement among known extant drafts and trial printed copies marked for revisions (see Appendix 1: "List of Drafts and Suggested Sequence"), but others pique the eye in more immediate ways. What, for example, are we to make of the crossed-out title "~~On Jane's portrait which I painted six years ago,~~" or the word "Rubbish" scrawled in an unknown hand on what appears chronologically to be the second of the three ("Portrait in the Library [1]")? Or the fact that three stanzas have been excised from the first manuscript ("Portrait [A]") and added to the collection of loose folios which constitute the mostly later third manuscript ("Portrait in Library [2]"), as well as the obsolete stanza numeration imposed on that third manuscript?

Added to the already known manuscript drafts, printed trial copies marked for revisions, and the final 1870/1881 version, the 'new' versions of the poem fill out ten stages of its development and furnish a palimpsest of evolving style and interwoven revisions, from an early stage in which the poet focused on specific recollections to a final version, composed two decades later, which evokes a sense of loss consoled by art, dream, and wistful memory.³

Rossetti had published *The Early Italian Poets* (a volume of Italian translations) in 1861, but the *Poems* constituted his first volume of original verse when it appeared in April 1870. Since the summer of 1869 he had devoted much of his time to its preparation, assembled a series of intermediary proofs and trial books as he revised, and in some instances corrected more than one copy of these intermediate versions. Trial proofs were prepared for him on or about 20 August (the Penkill Proofs), 12 September (the A Proofs), 20 September (the A2 Proofs), and 3 October (the First Trial Book).⁴ None of these trial proofs or volumes included versions of "On Mary's Portrait" or "The Portrait."