

D. G. ROSSETTI'S DANTIS AMOR

To Janet Camp Troxell

Descriptions of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's disheveled studio and eccentric working habits have come down to us through the correspondence of the artist's mentor, Ruskin, and several of his close associates. There are accounts of drawers brimming with drawings of Elizabeth Siddal and tables cluttered with partially completed works. It is not, therefore, surprising that an unknown drawing for Dantis Amor (Fig. 1) has been found on the verso of the 1864 finished watercolor The Gate of Memory in the Janet Camp Troxell Collection, New Haven, Connecticut.<sup>1</sup> We can deduce from a letter Rossetti wrote to Mrs. M. D. Conway (October 17, 1875) that the Dantis Amor sketch had been pasted face down onto a white mount when the artist sold the work of the obverse to the dealer Ernest Gambart.<sup>2</sup> This must have been before April 1, 1871, the date the Conways acquired the work from the Gambart Sale.<sup>3</sup> Most likely, the Troxell study has remained hidden from public view since that time. In any case, it has never been recorded in the Rossetti literature.

One purpose of the present article is to do so. But the discovery also prompts one to investigate more fully the formal evolution of Rossetti's conception of Dantis Amor and its enigmatic iconography. There are now six known versions of the subject, ranging from sketch to finished painting. As to format, they fall into two main categories: Square, on the one hand; narrow and vertical on the other.

The Troxell Dantis Amor (14 5/8 x 11 3/8 inches) is done in pencil on a somewhat yellowed cartridge or watercolor paper. It appears to have been cut down on the left and right sides and possibly at the bottom, presumably when the sheet was laid down before 1871; a horizontal ruled line bounds the composition at its upper edge. As for the original shape of the drawing, one may theoretically expand the width to suit the nearly square format of a painted version of the same subject (dated 1860) in the Tate Gallery, London (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> At the center of both the pencil sketch and the oil version is Amor, the pilgrim of the Vita Nuova, holding a sundial and bow and arrow. His bold, flat figure separates the head of Christ, sun-enshrined on a banner in the upper left-hand corner, from the face of Beatrice, which is framed by the roundel of the moon afloat in starry heavens and set in the lower right-hand corner of the scene.

The Tate painting was to have been the central panel of a triptych planned for a cabinet in William Morris' Red House, Bexley Heath (reconstruction, Fig. 3).<sup>5</sup> This version of Dantis Amor was left un-