

D. G. Rossetti and Jude the Obscure

The influence of the visual arts on Thomas Hardy's novels has been the subject of considerable critical comment.<sup>1</sup> His debt to the Old Masters has been duly recognized as a source of suggestive analogy and descriptive shorthand, while his architectural training has been shown to influence his choice of profession for his heroes, his sense of structure, and his detailed description of buildings.<sup>2</sup> The name of D. G. Rossetti seldom appears in connection with Hardy,<sup>3</sup> a situation due presumably to the scarcity of written evidence explicitly linking them. However, this is not in itself sufficient reason for ignoring the possibility of their being meaningfully compared. As F. B. Pinion observes, Hardy's "familiarity with an author (e.g., Crabbe or Fielding) is not always to be gauged by the number of quotations or references."<sup>4</sup>

It would be remarkable if someone with Hardy's early tastes in poetry and painting were quite unaware of, or indifferent to, the works of Rossetti. As one who read Swinburne "as he came out" and carried Poems and Ballads First Series (and a College Library Shelley) around with him in the late 1860s,<sup>5</sup> Hardy was unlikely to remain for long unapprised of Rossetti's talents, at least after the ecstatic response to Poems (1870) in the Fortnightly Review for May of that year.<sup>6</sup> A large proportion of Swinburne's remarks in this review would almost certainly have stimulated Hardy's interest in Rossetti.

The review opens with a defiant stress on the value of Rossetti's "double-natured genius," an emphasis that might comfort or inspire a struggling architect-litterateur like Hardy, or at the very least engage his interest at a time when he was still unsure of his true calling.<sup>7</sup> Swinburne links Rossetti with Shelley as inspired lyricists before emphasizing Rossetti's pre-eminent success in fusing the sensual and the spiritual, an achievement that eludes so many of Hardy's characters, and none more strikingly than Jude Fawley.

It would be misleading to suggest that Shelley and Rossetti were the only influences on Hardy's choice and treatment of this theme. Hardy was to record privately on March 1, 1889 that "In a Botticelli, the soul is outside, permeating its spectator with its emotions. In a Rubens the flesh is without, and the soul (possibly) within" (Life, p. 217). Nevertheless, one can argue for the potential impressiveness for Hardy of Swinburne's emphasis on "spirit and sense together" and the resulting "birth of love, his eucharistic presence, his supreme vision, his utter union in flesh and spirit" (xv, 7, 9) in Rossetti's works. The allusion to lofty precedent in Dante's Vita Nuova indicates a further link between Shelley and Rossetti,<sup>8</sup> while Swinburne's comments on the candid compassion of "Jenny," its command of details at once realistic and symbolic (xv, 33-35), provide an