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Thomas J. Wise and the Trial Books of Rossetti's *Poems* (1870)

The influence of Thomas J. Wise on our general knowledge of Rossetti and on our particular concept of the evolution of *Poems* (1870) remains enormous. Consequently, it is essential to sort fact from fantasy, in the 106 pages given to Rossetti scattered among 5 of the first 9 volumes of the *Ashley Library Catalogue*. The continuing prestige of this compilation requires no illustration beyond its continuing demand in both its original form and as reprinted by Dawsons. On these 106 pages, and on many unnumbered plates facing them, are reproductions, transcriptions and competent, precise descriptions of over a thousand Rossetti items: manuscript poems, autograph letters, books, pamphlets, proofsheets, drawings, photographs, diaries, and Rossettiana. Some of these are now lost except as preserved in the ALC, and many are unique, although a few are fakes (though not worthless ones). Despite the 1934 Carter-Pollard disclosures and their continuing aftermath, knowledgeable Rossetti students and collectors have regarded the ALC as indispensable.

The only comprehensive Rossetti bibliography ever attempted, compiled in 1931 by the late John B. Gregory,¹ remains unpublished but far from insignificant. The author, who communicated with Wise as the outstanding expert of the day on Rossetti bibliography, cites him and his ALC as being in some matters more authoritative than William Rossetti's *Bibliography of the Works of D. G. Rossetti* published (at the urging of Wise)² in 1905. Professor W. E. Fredeman's *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study* (1965), the standard bibliography of an en-

tire movement in literature and art, is usually also cited as the definitive bibliography of D. G. Rossetti, but Fredeman himself does not advance this claim: he described Gregory's work as "the most complete bibliographical study of Rossetti" available but added that "a full-dress bibliography of Rossetti has not yet been undertaken".³

Wise never completed a full-length bibliography of Rossetti as he did with his other favourite "moderns" when he had acquired a sufficient amount of their work: the reasons for this will be explored in this essay. Nevertheless, Wise was a devoted admirer of Rossetti and he caused a number of pamphlets to be made up primarily from letters in his collection to be printed "for private circulation". The pamphlets focussed on different aspects of the poet-painter's life: his marriage to Elizabeth Siddall; his friendship with and estrangement from Swinburne; the exhumation of his MS poems from his wife's grave; his views on Keats and Chatterton. Through these pamphlets, and by virtue of his familiarity with William Rossetti, Swinburne, Theodore Watts-Dunton, Sir Edmund Gosse, H. B. Forman, Charles Fairfax Murray and others who claimed intimacy with Rossetti, Wise gradually became known as the leading authority on Rossetti's life and letters, especially after the death in 1919 of William Rossetti.

In 1928, the centenary of Rossetti's birth, a young scholar named Oswald Doughty wrote timidly to the Great Panjandrum seeking enlightenment in his exploration of various dark corners in Rossetti's biography, particularly R's relations with Mrs. William Morris (Janey) as they influenced the com-