

OSCAR WILDE'S  
APPRECIATION OF DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S  
*BALLADS AND SONNETS* IN AN UNPUBLISHED REVIEW

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In a critical account of Oscar Wilde's character, Theodore Watts-Dunton claimed that "Among all the artificial fibres in Wilde's constitution ... there were three genuine strings: his affection for his mother, his admiration of Rossetti, and his worship of Swinburne" (174). Though Watts-Dunton, the close friend of Swinburne, was undoubtedly biased, he does speak to the depth of Wilde's admiration for the poet and artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti came to represent different ideals for Wilde at different points in his career: first, a path-breaking genius at the start of Wilde's career; next, a representative of a venerable but outdated circle when Wilde tried to distinguish himself from the Pre-Raphaelites; and last, a tragically misunderstood and underappreciated figure when Wilde himself was being persecuted. Though his appreciation would develop alongside the events of his life and his aesthetic philosophy, Wilde maintained this admiration as both an archetype of the true artist and an ideal to which Wilde himself might aspire.

In this introduction to my transcription of draft notes that Wilde intended as a review of Rossetti's *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881), I first describe the condition of the manuscript, transcribe and paraphrase its contents, and then attempt to date it based on textual evidence and Wilde's relationship with Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite circle. The rough draft of notes was not published in Wilde's lifetime; Joseph Bristow and Rebecca N. Mitchell published it for the first time in 2015 as Appendix B in their important book *Oscar Wilde's Chatterton: Literary History, Romanticism, and the Art of Forgery*. However, when they did so, they left many unanswered questions, including specific dating and ordering of the pages. I provide my own transcription and attempt at ordering here below. In doing so, I hope to better situate this draft in Wilde's body of work. For all that Wilde deeply admired Rossetti, his own reviews were limited to critical defences of the poet's legacy<sup>1</sup> rather than centring on the details of his literary works; thus, it is this piecemeal draft that