

“MY SOUL ANOTHER ECHO THERE”:
ROSSETTI’S “THE PORTRAIT” AND EKPHRASTIC
DISAVOWAL

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*Quella beata Beatrice che gloriosamente mira nella fascia die colui qui est per omnia
soecula benedictus.*

– Dante, *Vita Nuova*

On 17 October 1847, the nineteen-year-old Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote to Robert Browning to confront him with the discovery of *Pauline* amid volumes of forgotten poetry in the British Museum. Amazed at Rossetti’s recognition of his authorship, Browning admitted his responsibility for what in the 1888 preface to the final edition of his poetry he called his youthful “eyesore.”¹

The opening lines of Rossetti’s “On Mary’s Portrait Which I Painted Six Years Ago” (1847) suggest the poet/painter’s admiration of Browning, vaguely echoing as they do the opening lines of “My Last Duchess” (1842):

Why yes; she looks as then she looked;
There is not any difference;
She was even so on that old time
Which has been here but is gone hence.
Gaze hard, and she shall seem to stir;
Till the greenth, looking shadier
As her white arm parts it and cleaves,
Does homage with its bowing leaves.
And yet the earth is over her.
It seems to me unnatural
And a thing to wonder on,
As though mine image in the glass
Should tarry when myself am gone. (1-13)

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