

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI AND HENRY TREFFRY DUNN:
PRE-RAPHAELITE INTERIOR PORTRAITS

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The interior of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's house in Chelsea is represented in a watercolour by Henry Treffry Dunn (fig. 1). The words "Cheyne Walk" and "Gabriel's Bedroom" are inscribed on the recto; on the verso William Michael Rossetti has written the date of 1872. Mimicking a convex mirror located parallel to the picture plane, the watercolour should logically reveal the artist's reflection. Though we do not see Dunn's reflection, the mirror conceit invites us to read the painting as representing what the artist saw in the mirror. It serves, in a sense, as a portrait of Dunn, particularly considering its publication within the latter's 1904 memoir, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and His Circle (Cheyne Walk Life)*. There it is captioned "Bed in which Rossetti was born," which frames the painting within Rossetti's biography and allows it to stand for him. By impersonating a convex mirror (an effect exacerbated by the gold frame that echoes the frames surrounding mirrors owned by Rossetti) the watercolour also serves to signify Rossetti's interest in both real and painted mirrors (Prettejohn, *Modern* 72-74; Smith 52). It is thus, indirectly, a portrait of Rossetti the collector and of Rossetti as an artist inspired by the Old Masters. This watercolour has become an interior portrait in a further sense. Today its glazed surface dimly reflects the interior of Wightwick Manor. The scene is dotted with pinpricks of light, subtly warmed by the rose tones of the surrounding Morris & Co. *Wild Tulip* wallpaper, and haunted by the ghostly, distorted reflection of the spectator. Dunn's watercolour, then, is a portrait of Rossetti the man, the artist, the collector, of Dunn, and of the spectator. It becomes each of these portraits through a negotiation of the concept of the interior by establishing relationships to various spaces, including "Gabriel's bedroom," 16 Cheyne Walk (also called Tudor House), Rossetti's interiors in general, and Wightwick Manor. Focussing on two paintings by Dunn and one by Rossetti, I will consider the interior as a form of portraiture,