

ROBERT BUCHANAN AND THE FLESHLY CONTROVERSY:

A RECONSIDERATION

by

CHRISTOPHER DAVID MURRAY

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Department of

English

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date

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ABSTRACT

The importance of Robert Buchanan's onslaught upon Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Poems in 1871-2 has never been minimised by the poet's biographers. This crucial episode undoubtedly contributed to Rossetti's death ten years later. Buchanan's criticism also raises the question of the poetry's "fleshliness", with which all Rossetti students eventually have to come to terms. Some critics consider him to be a romantic, trying to express his apprehension of the eternal to be found behind natural phenomena; others see him, as Buchanan saw him, as a man vainly trying to etherealise man's basest drives, a sensual materialist masquerading as a spiritual idealist.

Buchanan's indictment has been said to be clearly representative of "the 'classical' or conservative school of criticism." Swinburne's Poems and Ballads, published in 1866, had shocked many. It was widely known that Rossetti had been one of the major influences upon the younger poet, and Buchanan expressed the outrage many felt at the immorality of the more mature, and thus more reprehensible, Rossetti. Buchanan's manner and tone were adopted to impress readers with his judicious impartiality, even though personal animus certainly inspired his criticism. Buchanan despised Rossetti's effeminacy, his lack of sanity, his lack of humanity, even; he despised his introspection, his

effete luxuriation "in his own exquisite emotions." While such objections are virtually the same as those made against Keats, Buchanan did subscribe to the romantic belief that the sincere expression of some clearly perceived truth gave poetry its distinguishing characteristic of "spiritualization." To him, Rossetti's insincerity was the most patently obvious thing about his work. Thus it can be seen that Buchanan used both classical and romantic criteria to achieve his purpose.

Buchanan, on the one hand, and Swinburne and William Michael Rossetti, on the other, had been exchanging polemical broadsides for at least five years prior to 1871. The thesis traces the origins and the course of the controversy, and presents salvoes by both Buchanan and Swinburne which have hitherto gone unnoted. Rossetti had not figured in the controversy before, but it was Buchanan's harsh review of William Michael's edition of Shelley that prompted the poet to organize the critical reception of Poems in the first months of 1870. This fact, until recently, has received scant attention in other accounts of the controversy, but this "working the oracle", besides giving Buchanan another stick with which to beat Rossetti, must have made the anticipated attack all the more deadly when it finally came. The continuation of the controversy after Rossetti's breakdown in June 1872 is described, as is the reluctant involvement in it of Walt Whitman, a poet whom both sides

admired greatly.

To assess what validity that attack may have had for Rossetti, a close textual collation has been made between the "fifth" edition of Poems, that reviewed by Buchanan in the Contemporary Review of October 1871, and subsequent republications of the poetry. It is clear that Rossetti did revise several poems because of the views that Buchanan represented. The omission of the sonnet "Nuptial Sleep" from subsequent collections has long been known to be directly attributable to Buchanan's attack.

The thesis ends with a brief account of Buchanan's literary career from 1871 until his death in 1901. A confirmed mutineer and controversialist, he gradually lost credit as a poet worthy of serious consideration, and now his work has found a neglect that it may not totally deserve.

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INTRODUCTION

Robert Buchanan's attack on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Poems, "The Fleshly School of Poetry - Mr. D.G. Rossetti," published over the pseudonym "Thomas Maitland" in the Contemporary Review for October 1871, has long been seen as the beginning of a crucial episode in the poet's life. It is beyond question that Buchanan's elaboration of the original article into the pamphlet, The Fleshly School of Poetry and other Phenomena of the Day, led to the poet's attempted suicide in the first week of June 1872. The outlines of the episode are clear, but much of the detail has been obscure, and the significance of the controversy has not been clearly established.

George Storey has, for example, given a masterly description of "Robert Buchanan's Critical Principles" (PMLA, LXVII December 1953, 1228-1232), but no one has closely examined Buchanan's notorious review to find out just how these principles are articulated in this particular instance. Professors Houghton and Stange see Buchanan writing in the "so-called conservative or 'classical' tradition of criticism" but do little to elaborate their remark.¹

¹It is to be found in a footnote to their reprint of Buchanan's article in Victorian Poetry and Poetics, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 888. All subsequent quotations in this thesis taken from Buchanan's review will be followed in parentheses by the appropriate page number in Houghton and Stange.

John A. Cassidy's "Robert Buchanan and the Fleshly Controversy" (PMLA, LXVII March 1952, 65-93) has been regarded as the best treatment of the subject since it first appeared, but it does not incorporate the discovery of a possible cause of the feud: Moxon's rejection in early 1866 of Buchanan's edition of Keats in favour of Swinburne. Much important material has been published since 1952, the Rossetti and Swinburne Letters being but two obvious examples; so Cassidy's research needs updating. The present writer has had access to the Angeli and the Penkill Collections at the University of British Columbia, and these, too, throw much light on details of the controversy that have long been forgotten.

Cassidy does point out (p. 71), however, the important fact that Rossetti organized the critical reception of his Poems out of fear of attack by Buchanan. But neither he nor any other historian of the controversy seems to see the significance of this. Ironically, Buchanan himself made much of the "chorus of eulogy" that greeted Poems, using it as incontrovertible evidence of the existence of the "mutual admiration school of poetry," but he seems never to have suspected that it was his anticipated "drop of gall" that caused the "ocean of eau sucrée" in the first place (see below, pp. 50-3). It was just this anticipation by Rossetti of the attack that made its effect on the precarious mental balance of its victim the more deadly; and the attack's repetition and elaboration six months later could only convince the

paranoid Rossetti that he had been stealthily stalked by a man awaiting the moment when his practically defenceless quarry would be most vulnerable. The original attack, coming as it did after the idyllic, and artistically productive, summer spent by Rossetti with Janey Morris at Kelmscott, could scarcely have occurred at a more inopportune time for the poet; and it is no exaggeration to say that never again was Rossetti to be as happy as he had been in that summer of 1871.

Rossetti was right to anticipate Buchanan's attack, but he was quick to attribute its motivating force to envy, envy at the "success" Poems had so quickly attained, and this is why so much effort was devoted by Rossetti and his friends to uncovering the identity of "Thomas Maitland;" once the review was shown to be the work of a fellow-poet, its personal motivation could be taken for granted. Buchanan's envy has been the standard explanation for his attack ever since. No one is more scathing in his treatment of Buchanan than Rossetti's biographer, Professor Doughty, and he is in a line that stretches back to Sidney Colvin, Theodore Watts-Dunton and Edmund Gosse. Buchanan's motivation was, in part at least, personal. William Michael Rossetti had once called him "a poor and pretentious poetaster" (see below, p. 38), and Swinburne had made some unnecessarily unkind remarks about Buchanan's poet-friend David Gray (see below, p. 42). Buchanan bided his time awaiting the opportunity for revenge,

which came not only with the publication of Poems but with the publication of William Michael's edition of Shelley in late 1869. Buchanan admitted in a letter to Robert Browning, written in March 1872, that it was Swinburne's slur on Gray's poetic ability that had aroused "the one instinct for recrimination" in him (see below, p. 43); but it is that same letter which states that he saw "the main cause" as "righteous and just." Personal motivation undoubtedly added an unfortunate edge to Buchanan's criticism of Rossetti's poetry, but it was a sincere articulation of certain principles that Buchanan never altered, and this fact needs to be remembered. Buchanan genuinely believed that he was rooting out a bed of nettles from the garden of English poetry (his figure), and to this extent he was prompted by a love of literature and a desire to keep it pure.

One obvious way of gauging the validity of Buchanan's objections to Rossetti's poetry is to examine to what extent they were valid for the poet himself, to find out how the poetry was revised for subsequent publication. The fifth "edition" of Poems (the edition which Buchanan reviewed) has therefore been collated with the new edition of Poems and Ballads and Sonnets published in 1881, before a wider view of the attack's validity is taken. Buchanan's charge that Rossetti admired form for form's sake and had little concern for a poem's meaning or, for that matter, its relevance to the concerns of its readers, has supported the view linking Rossetti

and the Aesthetes; and this aspect, too, of the controversy is examined.

The thesis ends with a brief review of the effect of the whole affair on Buchanan's reputation. Before 1872, he was regarded as a poet of real merit by such critics as William Hepworth Dixon, George Henry Lewes, and Richard Holt Hutton. After that date, his poetic aspirations were no longer seriously considered, and he turned to novel-writing and churning out the popular plays of the last ten years of his life; he failed to achieve what many felt he should have achieved. Few of his poems have found their way into anthologies of English, or even Victorian, poetry. One of the results of the Fleshly Controversy is that the passions it aroused have long obscured the merits of a man who has yet to find his true place among the poets of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER I

i

THE CRITICAL CONTEXT OF "THE FLESHLY SCHOOL OF POETRY"

Robert Buchanan's review of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Poems has always had much significance for the biographer of the poet. His critic, too, has had to come to terms with the charge of fleshliness, and has frequently overstressed the poet's mystical ethereality as a result. Quite naturally, it is with Rossetti in mind, either his life or his poetry, that a reader comes to examine this episode of nineteenth century literature. Perhaps some new insights into the value of this controversy may be gained, if it is approached from a rather different point of view.

One such approach would be that taken by Cassidy: to view the affair from Buchanan's side, and see what it meant to his life and art. Cassidy's first redressing of the balance was invaluable, but it was not unbiassed, though it may well be regarded as the first necessary step towards impartiality. Another approach would be to try to ignore the strong personalities of the protagonists and to try to see what each represents. The controversy is not just one more round in the never-ending struggle between artist and Philistine, or between mystic and materialist, or romantic and classic, or even between a gifted individual and society, yet it contains elements of all of these. But the lines are

not clearcut. Rossetti was in some ways as Philistine, as materialist, as conformist even, as Buchanan ever was. Buchanan, on the other hand, was an artist himself, a mystic who saw himself throughout his life as a revolutionary. Professors Houghton and Stange do provide a useful point of departure, however, with their observation that Buchanan is clearly representative of the "so-called 'classical' or conservative school of criticism" (see above, p. 1); and this study will begin by assessing the validity of placing "The Fleshly School of Poetry" in such a category.

Buchanan, by the time he came to review Rossetti's Poems, had been a journalist for ten years and was particularly adept at assuming whatever posture and tone he felt suitable for a particular purpose. When writing unsympathetic reviews, probably because such reviews invariably hinged on an ethical question, he assumed the necessary attributes of a judge. Indeed, in his review of Swinburne's Notes on Poems and Reviews (Athenaeum, November 3rd, 1866, pp. 564-5), he described true literary critics in terms of high court judges, men who could calmly and fairly assess the merits of any publication, with as dispassionate a regard for the truth as is ever to be found in a court of law. In "The Fleshly School of Poetry," the use of the first person plural and the urbane and assured tone seem to indicate Buchanan's attempt to give his review an air of impartiality, which, in this particular case, he may well have known that he lacked. He sees himself writing

in a tradition, which stretches back at least as far as Samuel Johnson; and much of the force of his critique comes from the writer's air of assurance that the values implicit in his judgments are those of his most responsible and enlightened contemporaries, and also of the best of their predecessors. Not only should an enquiry into the nature of Buchanan's criticism help to place this encounter in the context of the critical thought of the nineteenth century, but it may help to explain why Rossetti should have found it so damaging.

That it should faithfully reflect man's universe is the first requirement ever demanded of art. Rossetti's

deep-seated indifference to all agitating forces and agencies, all tumultuous griefs and sorrows, all the thunderous stress of life, and all the straining storm of speculation (p. 890)

disturbs Buchanan very much, as his somewhat turbulent rhetoric shows. Buchanan sees the archaic and pseudo-mystical medievalism of Rossetti's poetry as an effete, not to say effeminate, withdrawal from the overwhelming concerns of his age. Buchanan does not ask for didactic utilitarian poetry, but the spiritual and intellectual turmoil of Victorian England affected him deeply, and he strove, as did so many of his contemporaries, to find those beliefs that could restore some meaning to human existence. It is small wonder that he should decry Rossetti's retreat so bitterly. After all, Matthew Arnold himself had said of the great English Romantics that their besetting fault was that "they

did not know enough," that they were ignorant of "the best ideas current" in their time, which made a "thorough interpretation of the world," art's true function, impossible.¹ How much less had Rossetti attempted than Wordsworth, Byron or Shelley. That Rossetti has "nothing particular to tell us or teach us" (p. 891) is but the first of several severe indictments.

Closer to the neo-classical tradition in criticism, possibly, than the stipulation that art be relevant is Buchanan's concern for the effect that poetry has on its audience. After quoting Samuel Johnson's remark that "'It is always a writer's duty to make the world better . . .,'" M.H. Abrams goes on to say:

The pragmatic orientation, ordering the aim of the artist to the nature, the needs, and the springs of pleasure in the audience, characterized by far the greatest part of criticism from the time of Horace through the eighteenth century.²

Buchanan, of course, sees Rossetti using all his estimable talents for an end absolutely opposite to that of Dr. Johnson; he is trying to make the world worse. Rossetti's audience, says Buchanan, consists of those "young gentlemen with animal faculties morbidly developed by too much tobacco and too little exercise" (p. 896). The corrupt is calling to the

¹"The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864) reprinted in Houghton and Stange, p. 524.

²The Mirror and the Lamp (New York: Norton, 1958), pp. 20-21.

corruptible. Writing of the sonnet "Nuptial Sleep," where a "full-grown man, presumably intelligent and cultivated, [is] putting on record for other full-grown men to read, the most secret mysteries of sexual connection," Buchanan says such revelation "is simply nasty." But "Nasty as it is, we are very mistaken if many readers do not think it nice." Rossetti's popularity is due to his shameless obtrusion of these "most secret mysteries . . . as the themes of whole poems" (p. 891). He is guaranteeing his financial success by this base pandering to the lowest instincts of men, and is thereby making his contribution to the widespread moral decline of the English people. Laughable as this may appear to-day, one can be certain that it struck a sure response in many a Victorian bosom.

Buchanan's assurance of such a response is implicit in the loaded language he uses to describe his impression of the poetry, which shares with Rossetti's painting

the same thinness and transparence of design, the same combination of the simple with the grotesque, the same morbid deviation from healthy forms of life, the same sense of weary, wasting, yet exquisite sensuality; nothing virile, nothing tender, nothing completely sane; a superfluity of extreme sensibility, of delight in beautiful forms, hues and tints (p. 890)

Rossetti's lack of manliness, lack of sanity, lack of humanity even, is stressed elsewhere in the review. Whether the work of a skillful rhetorician (as one suspects) or of a man supremely sure that his values are those of his contemporaries, the review is written very much in the same

spirit as the great onslaughts of men like Gifford, Jeffrey, Croker, Lockhart, Wilson and Macaulay on the Della Cruscans, Wordsworth, Keats, Leigh Hunt, Tennyson and Robert Montgomery respectively. Like them he feels little need to define his terms. In traditional criticism where order, moderation and good sense prevail, and such terms as 'morbid,' 'healthy,' and 'sane' mean the same to everyone, the effort required for such definition would be superfluous. Buchanan shares with the great critics of previous generations, or, better, emulates, their majestic, authoritative and worldly tone to convey a conservative, somewhat rigid, and limited view of art's purpose and function.

Buchanan establishes a further link between himself and such predecessors by his description of Rossetti and his friends as the Fleshly School of Poetry. Fifty years before in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Lockhart had grouped Leigh Hunt, Shelley and Keats into "The Cockney School of Poetry", and had found in Keats an insanity similar to that Buchanan finds in Rossetti. Similarly, Jeffrey, a rather more judicious man than Lockhart or Croker, called Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey "The Lakers," a name which enjoyed some vogue at the time. Buchanan's reference to the Della Cruscans—and elsewhere he referred to the Fleshly School as "latter-day Della Cruscans" (see below, p. 70)—seems to suggest that he considered himself a latter-day Gifford, who would, like Gifford, earn enduring fame for the eradication

of this noxious new growth from the garden of English poetry. It is one of the ironies of an episode full of ironies that Buchanan achieved only enduring notoriety, and that he is remembered solely, now, for his attack on Rossetti. His work, therefore, has found an oblivion that it does not completely deserve.

As further evidence of his "classicism," it should be noted that Buchanan rejects, as did Arnold before him, the romantic prescription that "'A true allegory of the state of one's own mind . . . is . . . the highest thing that one can attempt in poetry.'"³ A dramatic monologist of some talent himself, and therefore not likely to make the simple error of seeing each dramatic utterance of a poet as a true expression of that poet's feelings and beliefs, Buchanan nevertheless sees only the thinnest of disguises of Rossetti's true personality in all the individuals figuring in his poems:

Mr. Rossetti is never dramatic, never impersonal—always attitudinizing, posturing, and describing his own exquisite emotions. He is the Blessed Damozel . . . , he is "heaven-born Helen, Sparta's Queen," whose "each twin breast is an apple sweet" [Buchanan seems to have been obsessed by this unmentionable part of female anatomy]; he is Lilith the first wife of Adam; he is the rosy Virgin of the poem called "Ave," and the Queen in the "Staff and Scrip;" he is "Sister Helen" melting her waxen man; he is all these [women be it noted], just as surely as he is Mr. Rossetti soliloquizing over Jenny in her London lodging, or the very nuptial person writing erotic sonnets to his wife. (p. 891)

³Preface to Poems, 1853, reprinted in Houghton and Stange, p. 490.

Objective truth to nature has been sacrificed for the lamentable, effeminate, luxuriation in "his own exquisite emotions." It is no wonder that Rossetti, his brother William Michael, and Swinburne should have been horrified at the prospect of Buchanan editing Keats⁴ for the Moxon Miniature Poets series. "A mind insensitive to certain forms of beauty" is the way a critic, disposed to be sympathetic, described the Scot.⁵ It is this neurotic self-absorption of Rossetti that really goads Buchanan's sense of righteousness to greater heights of indignation. "'Nothing'" he quotes an unidentified writer as saying "'in human life is so utterly remorseless—not love, not hate, not ambition, not vanity, as the artistic or aesthetic instinct morbidly developed to the suppression of conscience and feeling'" (p. 894).

William Gaunt is right to see the Fleshly Controversy as the first round, in England, of the Art for Art's Sake

⁴Keats he once described as third-rate because he had little "humour or human unction;" because his subjects "were vague, insubstantial, and often . . . grossly morbid;" and because he was "overshadowed by false models, involving a very retrograde criterion of poetic beauty." The parallels between his remarks on Rossetti and these on Keats are sufficiently plain for one to conclude that Buchanan's objections to Rossetti's poetry were consistent with views expressed elsewhere. "Prose and Verse," A Poet's Sketch Book (London: Chatto and Windus, 1883), p. 176.

⁵Lafcadio Hearn, Pre-Raphaelite and Other Poets, ed. John Erskine (London: Heinemann, 1923), p. 387.

controversy.⁶ Buchanan represents just those attitudes to art—particularly art's capacity for moral instruction—that the Aesthetes were to fight against. The bourgeois morality and the stern righteousness of men like Buchanan (Macaulay, Carlyle and Ruskin being other examples) were bound to become the butt of the irreverent new generation of artists. The ranks of Philistia were closing against the marauders from Bohemia. Gaunt's observation does, however, perpetuate the mistaken view of Rossetti that Buchanan first advanced: that he is to be seen, in the development of aestheticism, as the disciple of Keats and an inspiration to Wilde, a view which is based, essentially, on a misreading of his poetry.

However neo-classical some of Buchanan's strictures might be, he held some beliefs which cannot be categorized in that way. One preconception that he brought to the writing and study of poetry was his belief that the sincere expression of some clearly perceived truth gives poetry its distinguishing characteristic of "spiritualization." It is because he saw poetry as the "spiritualization of the materials of life" that Buchanan came to misunderstand Rossetti's work. Vision and sincerity, Buchanan held, are necessary for true poetry, for if the poet's vision (or insight) is sincerely expressed then the result is beautiful. The ideas are those of George

⁶The Aesthetic Adventure (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1957), pp. 53ff.

Henry Lewes;⁷ but Buchanan subscribed to them and helped propagate them.⁸ But to spiritualize the materials of life, to exalt matter, is materialism. It becomes a question, presumably, of what material one wishes to exalt. Rossetti chose the wrong subject, did not see it clearly, wrote for the wrong purposes, and, therefore, produced bad poetry. There seems no awareness on Buchanan's part that great poetry might originate through the expression of some inner vision, in the attempt to give bodily form to immaterial things, and this is the fundamental error in his assessment of Rossetti's achievement for which Buchanan paid so dearly.

Buchanan's insistence on sincerity is common to nearly all critics contemporary with him. The idea goes back to Wordsworth. "Poetry," says Buchanan, "is perfect human speech." "The soul's speech and the heart's speech are clear, simple, natural, and beautiful, and reject the meretricious tricks" (p. 895) of a Rossetti. Wordsworth says much the same thing in an early letter (as, of course, he does in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads), when he asks "Whom must poetry please?" His reply shows obvious parallels to

⁷Lewes published a series of articles on literary criticism in the Fortnightly Review, which were collected by Fred N. Scott and published under his editorship as Principles of Success in Literature (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1891).

⁸They are to be found in an essay called "The Poet, or Seer," published in David Gray and Other Essays (London: Sampson, Low and Marston, 1868).

the main outline of Buchanan's case against Rossetti:

I answer, human nature as it has been [and ever] will be. But, where are we to find the best measure of this? I answer, [from with] in; by stripping our own hearts naked, and by looking out of ourselves to [wards men] who lead the simplest lives, and most according to nature; men who have never known false refinements, wayward and artificial desires, false criticisms, effeminate habits of thinking and feeling, or who having known these things have outgrown them.⁹

The concern for sincerity derives, says Abrams, from the shift of aesthetic theory away from the Aristotelian concern for the truth to nature of the action described, away from the concern for the effect of literature on its audience, to the interest in the "impulse within the poet of feelings and desires seeking expression."¹⁰ Leigh Hunt, J.S. Mill, Carlyle, Ruskin, Lewes and Matthew Arnold ("the essential condition for 'supreme poetical success' was 'the high seriousness which comes from absolute sincerity'"¹¹) each made their concept of sincerity central to their literary criticism. That it was a moral judgment some recognized (for Lewes the principle of sincerity was the moral criterion, the principle of vision the intellectual criterion and the principle of beauty, obviously, the aesthetic criterion).¹² That it was fundamentally impressionistic, none of them seemed to

⁹Letter written by Wordsworth, in 1802, to Christopher North, quoted by Abrams, p. 106.

¹⁰Abrams, p. 22.

¹¹"The Study of Poetry," Houghton and Stange, p. 547.

¹²Lewes, p. 35.

recognize. Speaking of the poetical treatment of a subject beyond the critic's experience the critic can only say "It rings true," or the opposite. For Buchanan, Rossetti's poetry rang very false indeed.

Insincerity, says Buchanan, is the one constant of Rossetti's work. More concerned with the sound of his poetry than with its sense, Rossetti considers "poetic expression . . . greater than poetic thought" (p. 889). From this concern for expression come the archaic affectations of prosody and diction with which the poetry abounds. Having no authentic and individual vision of his own, Rossetti is driven to assimilation and imitation of the work of others. Here Buchanan lists the major "sources" of Rossetti's poetic inspiration: Tennyson, the two Brownings, and himself. "He has the painter's imitative power developed in proportion to his lack of the poet's conceiving imagination," says Buchanan. His verses, therefore, are not "art, though [they] are all art" (p. 891), and "all look as if they had taken a great deal of trouble" (p. 893). It is small wonder that Rossetti should have found this review so debilitating. As further "proof" of the poet's hypocrisy, Buchanan unkindly refers to Rossetti's well-known aversion to the public exhibition of his paintings and wonders that he should wish, in poems like "Nuptial Sleep," to parade "his private sensations before a coarse public" and to be "gratified by their applause" (p. 891). All in all, the review contains at least thirty

direct or indirect references to Rossetti's falseness, his hypocrisy, and his insincerity.

Essentially Buchanan's critique is an elaboration of his lifelong belief that "immoral writing [proceeds] primarily from "insincerity of vision" (Pamphlet, p. 70). Having decided that Rossetti is immoral, he tries to show that he is insincere. Yet the implications of several of his statements run contrary to his purpose. For example, in the passage quoted above (p. 12), he says that Rossetti is always "describing his own emotions." Here it is not Rossetti's insincerity, however, that is at issue—it is his effeminacy (an easy and, in those days, a damning point to make). Buchanan's distaste for Rossetti's poetry seems to derive not from the poet's "insincerity"—the complexity of this issue he never recognizes—but from the poetry's revelation of Rossetti's personality.

In summary, it may be said that Buchanan's criticism is a curious amalgamation of both classical and romantic criteria. His seemingly over-riding concern for sincerity is made subservient to his demand that a work be moral—it is Rossetti's fleshliness that Buchanan wanted to establish once and for all. That such men as Cardinal Manning, Lord de Tabley, and, apparently, Tennyson and Browning shared Buchanan's opinions (Jay, p. 163), even though they may have disliked the way in which they were expressed, seems to indicate that he had managed to articulate certain of the prejudices of his time quite successfully.

ROBERT WILLIAMS BUCHANAN

Robert Buchanan was born in Staffordshire on August 18, 1841. His Scottish father was a disciple and friend of Robert Owen, the socialist, and, although an atheist, on questions of ethics he was a stern Puritan, and in this the son resolutely followed his father. In 1850, the family moved to Glasgow, where Robert Buchanan senior became proprietor and editor of three socialist newspapers. His son attended school and the University of Glasgow, where he developed a particularly close friendship with an aspiring young poet, David Gray; at this time he also published some of his own immature poems. On the financial failure of the father in 1860, both young men decided to seek their literary fame and fortune in London.¹³ Gray soon developed a tubercular condition there, and, despite all the generous help of Richard Monckton Milnes, by this time his patron, died in Scotland in December 1861. Buchanan, never shy or backward, struck up

¹³Buchanan tells the poignant story of the friends arranging on the day before their departure to meet at the Glasgow railway station. There were two main stations from which trains left for London. On the day, Buchanan went to one, Gray to the other. Each thought his friend had changed his mind, yet each boarded for London, where they met by chance (after Gray had already developed a bronchial condition through sleeping outside) several weeks later. "David Gray." David Gray and Other Essays.

literary friendships with William Hepworth Dixon, John Westland Marston, George Henry Lewes, Thomas Love Peacock, Charles Dickens and Robert Browning, as well as Milnes. He embarked on a career in journalism; and, with the help of such influential friends and after two years of hardship and poverty, he began to publish poems, fiction and reviews in the literary periodicals while earning his living as a newspaper reporter. He married Mary Jay in 1861, who died childless, after long being an invalid, in 1882. Buchanan was devoted to his wife, and she to him, but her perpetually delicate condition may well have thwarted impulses in a passionate and energetic man that were later to find expression in his writings.

In 1863, Buchanan published a collection of "pseudo-classic" poems, Undertones, written, he admits, under the influence of Peacock (Jay, p. 103); and in one of them, a sympathetic critic was to say much later, he "touched the high-water-mark of his poetical achievement."¹⁴ The critical response was slight but encouraging. About the second edition, published a year later, Dixon in the Athenaeum was enthusiastic, and the Illustrated Times saw Buchanan's intelligence, workmanship and dramatic power as "almost

¹⁴The poem is the epilogue, "Mary on Earth," dedicated to his wife. The critic, a co-author of some of Buchanan's plays, was Henry Murray, in Robert Buchanan and Other Essays (London: Wellby, 1901), p. 73.

unequaled in the half-century." In 1865, he published Idyls and Legends of Inverburn, dramatic monologues in a homely Scots idiom much closer to Buchanan's true bent, poems praised by Lewes for their lack of "showy poetical graces," and for the poet's independent, individual style, poems which "as his soul becomes larger will become richer," and which proclaimed Buchanan as "a man of original genius" (Fortnightly Review, I, June 1865, 455). Such praise did not help the sale of his poems enough for Buchanan to live off his poetry, and he continued his career in journalism.

Having acquired a knowledge of Danish, he was sent by the Morning Star to Schleswig-Holstein as a war correspondent to cover Bismarck's invasion in the spring of 1864. He went on to Copenhagen where he met Hans Christian Andersen (Jay, p. 101). He published his own translations of old Danish ballads, and wrote scholarly essays on the subject. Unfortunately, his training in journalism and his need to make money fostered in Buchanan a facility for writing what people wanted. Even Harriett Jay, his sister-in-law, adopted daughter, and biographer, talks of "the ignoble potboiling" of this period of his career (p. 157), and his last years were to see him capitalizing on this facility in his production of a string of popular successes on the London stage. Arthur Waugh, who was by no means unsympathetic to Buchanan, talks of habits ingrained when any journalistic work was better than none, which led him to work "upon lines

which he saw elsewhere successful, and in which he knew he could himself succeed most easily."¹⁵ This did not affect his early poetry, but it almost certainly affected his criticism, as the review of Swinburne's Poems and Ballads in the Athenaeum was to show.

In 1866, Buchanan published London Poems, which is seen by many to be his best work. The locale of his dramatic monologues has moved south, and again he displays a real talent, which shows the influences of both Wordsworth and Dickens, for the poetical treatment of men and women of humble origin ("coster mongers and their trulls" sneered Swinburne later). Writing of people spiritually maimed by their environment, Buchanan achieves the simplicity and purity of style which characterizes his best work, and only occasionally slips into the sentimentality which characterizes his worst. The poems received an enthusiastic reception. The Month found them "healthy, bright and genial" despite the poet's dark and uninviting subjects. Referring to the favourable impression made by Buchanan's two previous volumes, and to the recent publication of Poems and Ballads, it continued, "He has not flashed upon us with the meteor brilliancy of Mr. Swinburne—a brilliancy which seems already to have become somewhat lurid—but his advance has been gradual and decided, and appears to promise some very high achievements" (V,

¹⁵"Robert Buchanan," Reticence in Literature and Other Papers (London: Wilson, 1915), p. 156.

October 1866, 424). Others joined the chorus of praise. The Morning Star remarked on the poems' "realism being so pre-Raphaelite," which probably increased William Michael Rossetti's acknowledged distaste for the poetry he saw quoted approvingly in such reviews (Some Reminiscences, II, 523). The Illustrated Times talked of "the prospect of a very great poet."¹⁶

Suddenly overcome by dislike for London, "Babylonia" as he described it in his "Preamble" to Idyls and Legends of Inverburn, and suffering from fits of depression caused in part by his father's death in 1866, Buchanan moved to Oban in the Highlands soon after his London Poems were published. Twenty-five years old and only six years after he had left Glasgow, he could view himself with some complacency as he settled in Scotland. His poetry, much creditable newspaper work, and some articles of more serious intent had established him as a talented newcomer in the literary world. His poetry displayed his sympathy for the under-privileged, and was commended for the poet's purity of diction and his gift for rhythm. His prose showed some learning (though frequent errors of fact betrayed a certain carelessness) and a real ability for writing forceful and readable English. His critical memoir on David Gray won wide acclaim for its

¹⁶The remarks of the Morning Star and Illustrated Times are to be found in the publisher's puffs for London Poems in the advertisements at the back of David Gray and Other Essays.

simplicity and sincerity, and for its author's talent for narration.

Buchanan was now generally regarded as one of the brightest of the new generation making its way up Parnassus. Publishers began to approach him with offers of worthwhile work. Moxon's, in 1865, asked him to prepare an edition of Keats for their Miniature Poets series, and paid him £10 for his labour, only to reject it and offer the project to Swinburne (see below, p. 32). Three years later he did edit Henry Wadsworth Longfellow for Moxon's Popular Poets.

There were signs, however, that Buchanan was not one of the most equable members of his generation. His triple-barreled, but anonymous attack on Swinburne in the fall of 1866 might have caused his more judicious readers, if they had detected its authorship, to reconsider the young man's sense of proportion, a question already raised by the extent and variety of Buchanan's potboiling activities. There were, also, two other episodes in Buchanan's literary career at this time that might have caused him to be seen in a different light.

In 1868, Sampson Low and Marston handed him a poorly-written manuscript of the life of J.J. Audubon, the celebrated American ornithologist, to prepare for publication. Buchanan's characterization of Audubon as vain and proud in The Life and Adventures of Audubon the Naturalist (1868) outraged his widow; and the publication, in 1897, of Audubon, and his Journals by the granddaughter, Maria Audubon, was the family's

avowed attempt to set the record straight.¹⁷ There seems little doubt that Buchanan was not sympathetic to his subject, that his relative ignorance of bird lore and his interest in Audubon's adventures rather than his achievements detracted from his treatment of the great naturalist. But the book was a success and gave Audubon a wider circle of admirers than a more scholarly work might have done.

Buchanan managed to offend another sensibility at this time, and to provide an interesting prelude to the more fateful attack on Rossetti. In David Gray and Other Essays he expressed his dislike for Matthew Arnold's luxuriation in his loss of faith in his poetry when there were so many other positive things he could be doing and writing about. In two letters to the Spectator in reply to a review of David Gray, Buchanan called Arnold "a thin egotist, faintly inflated with intellectuality;" "a trifler, a theorist, who has only half lived, and therefore sees only one side of human life and thought" (Spectator, February 15, 1868, p. 197); "a dilettante;" and guilty of "self-inflated egotism and retrograde perfection" (February 22, 1868, p. 227). Arnold, in a letter to his mother, described Buchanan, not inaccurately, as a "clever,

¹⁷The story of Buchanan's publication of Audubon is told by Francis H. Herrick in Audubon the Naturalist, 2 Vols. (New York: Dover, 1968), I, 22. The family's attempt was not wholly successful since Buchanan's Life was re-issued in Dent's Everyman edition.

but raw and intemperate, Scotch youth."¹⁸ He saw this onslaught as being motivated by Buchanan's suspicion that it had been Arnold who had severely, but anonymously, criticized his London Poems. Thus Rossetti was not the first to see Buchanan's intemperate remarks to be personally motivated, and Buchanan was beginning to establish a reputation for belligerence and malice which could do him no good.

Buchanan's faults, however, were mainly on the surface. He was vain: his work is full of allusions to himself and his poetry; and the very speed of his success could only convince him that the world shared his own high estimate of his abilities and achievements. He was self-righteous, and saw himself as one of the stronger moral bulwarks against which the waves of licence would have to batter. For, as Henry Murray says, one must "keep in mind one pregnant fact regarding Buchanan;" it was his "innate tendency and cultivated habit to look almost entirely at the ethical value of any literary work." To him "'a Poet was Prophet and Propagandist or nothing.'"¹⁹ He was not slow to condemn unethical behaviour of any kind, and it must have been for this reason that with no one, outside his family, did he ever stay for long on friendly terms. Brought up a puritan, he

¹⁸Letters of Matthew Arnold, ed. G.W.E. Russell, 2 Vols. (London: Macmillan, 1895), I, 389.

¹⁹Murray, op. cit., p. 9.

was not an ascetic, for his mother denied him none of his material needs. Thus he ever had tastes likely to prove expensive. From his father he inherited a love of speculation that was ultimately his ruin. Yet he was ever a puritan, and his inflexibility of mind, his incapacity to see more than one side to a question, and his forthrightness once his mind was made up could only make him appear a bigot. Nor was he slow to judge, though slow to reconsider an opinion. He was inclined to be chauvinistic, with his occasional travels only bolstering his insular British sense of superiority. He had the quick temper, the long memory of the Scottish clansmen from whom he sprang. He was a fighter, and when he fought he used any weapons to win. Adverse criticism of his poetry he affected, like Swinburne, not to be concerned about. Yet unfair criticism, as he considered it, went far in providing the motivation for his attack on Rossetti. He could attack him, too, for the chorus of praise that greeted Rossetti's Poems, being unmindful of the fact, apparently, that his own early poetry was most praised by friends like Lewes or Dixon and his employer, the Morning Star.

On the positive side, Buchanan was generous and warm-hearted; remembering his own privations in London, he helped struggling artists in all fields all his life; his poetry and novels are full of his sympathy for the oppressed and downtrodden. He prided himself on his manly outspokenness; no feeling of obligation ever restrained him from giving his

opinion (often when it was not wanted); but he was loyal and had a profound sense of justice, as his championing of David Gray amply demonstrates. He was sincere and honest: he really believed that he was prompted by altruistic motives in the Fleshly Controversy. "The main cause," he wrote to Robert Browning in March 1872, "is . . . righteous and good."²⁰ The greatest testament to the man's qualities, says Robertson Nicoll, is the fact that he could have been loved by three such fine women as his mother, his wife and his adopted daughter. Nicoll makes it clear that, in his opinion, to love Buchanan was no easy feat.²¹

Buchanan's weakness was that he did not know himself as well as he might, though in times of quiet introspection he could admit his failings openly and honestly. When caught up in the heat of battle, his strong emotions betrayed him into making statements that do not bear rational inspection. Not unintelligent, he was not an intellectual. "He was open," says William Michael Rossetti, rightly, "to the imputation of being 'ill-conditioned'—irritable, litigious, self-assertive, and when roused into ire, not duly scrupulous" (Some Reminiscences, II, 525). There is a story, apparently true, that he stormed after some unfortunate editor, who had not

²⁰T.J. Wise, A Swinburne Library (London: Privately published, 1925), p. 69.

²¹W. Robertson Nicoll, A Bookman's Letters (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), p. 324.

accepted some of his work, brandishing a shillelagh and bent on physical chastisement—it was a misunderstanding, it later transpired, and the editor had accepted the piece. He was, surprisingly for someone who failed to appreciate the mysticism of Rossetti, a mystic. His Book of Orm, published in 1870, contains dark northern visions and dreams, which attempt to illustrate the dilemma of the man who has lost his God. Lewes and other sympathetic critics deplored this strain in Buchanan. Having been brought up in his father's Godless world, Buchanan discovered Christianity in his teens, and was, until the late eighteen-sixties, an ardent believer. But the harshness of a God who could gaze stonily on the vast extent of human misery raised doubts in him that were never laid. For a man as dogmatic as himself such doubts were debilitating, and he swung from periods when he could accept all to periods of the most profound melancholy. Certainly this agnosticism mellowed Buchanan and tempered later in his life his militant moral zeal.

There seems little doubt that Buchanan shared the sexual problems of many of his contemporaries. Everyone who knew her speaks very highly of his wife's character and accomplishments; and photographs of her show her to be a typical, demure Victorian female. As early as 1866 (five years after her marriage) she was so incapacitated by rheumatism that she had to be carried from room to room (Jay, p. 125), and she died childless after a long illness. Buchanan's writing, as many have noted, displays "a mind itself diseased, obsessed with

deep inhibitions, unnaturally familiar with a long tradition of scatological literature."²² It seems reasonable to suggest that Buchanan saw and attacked in Rossetti's poetry tendencies which he recognized and feared in himself. He may even have envied, perhaps unconsciously, Rossetti's rumoured sexual successes.²³ If this is so, in this, as in much else, he appears thoroughly Victorian. A complex, confused man struggling with many opposing impulses, and ever trying to conform outwardly with the concerns of his contemporaries while ever trying to articulate them, Buchanan with his hypocrisy, self-righteousness and intolerance, can be seen as the embodiment of just those attributes least likely to be sympathetic to great art. If he felt this paradoxical state of affairs, he never acknowledged it.

²²J.H. Buckley, The Victorian Temper (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 162.

²³Evelyn Waugh seems to make this suggestion in the rather ambiguous description of Fanny Cornforth, who was "by nature coarse and soulless, and no doubt rumours of Rossetti's prolonged connection with her gave colour to the attacks levelled against him by Robert Buchanan in 1871." "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Centenary Criticism," Fortnightly Review, CXXIII (May 1928), 602. Professor Fredeman suggests that for Rossetti himself, though possibly for no one else, Buchanan's attacks contained allusions to Rossetti's association with Janey Morris; this important article will be discussed on p. 122. "Prelude to the Last Decade: Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the Summer of 1872," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, LIII (Autumn 1970), 75-121.

CHAPTER II

THE ANTECEDENTS TO "THE FLESHLY SCHOOL OF POETRY"

Robert Buchanan took his first tilt at Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites in his novelette "Lady Letitia's Lilliput Hand," which was serialized in Temple Bar in the first four months of 1862. Since there is no record of Rossetti's reaction, it may be assumed that its mild satire of a Pre-Raphaelite painter went unnoticed; and the portrait bears as much resemblance to Millais as it does to Rossetti:

Unfortunately for his devotion to art, he had too much pocket money, and could do as he pleased. His friends were rich people, and he had money: indeed he had first studied art simply as an amateur, and it was only after a hard fight that he was allowed to become a professional artist, a "trade" which his friends considered extremely low (IV, March 1862, 555).¹

Rossetti was mourning the death of his wife Elizabeth in the previous month and would have paid little attention to what was, after all, one of the many petty gibes that he and his friends had had to endure. It is general, fashionable, and incidental, not being at all central to the fiction in which it is found. The gibe tells a little of its author, perhaps; but that there was no reaction to it is scarcely surprising.

The first reference to Buchanan by any of the Rossetti

¹David Gray, Buchanan's friend, had died in December 1861, so for Buchanan if for no one else, this description of the leisured rich would have had very bitter overtones.

circle is made by Swinburne in a letter to William Michael dated January 4th, 1866. In it Swinburne tells of his own work in preparing his edition of Byron's poetry for the Moxon Miniature Poets series, and continues:

An illustrious Scotch person by the name of Buchanan had done, it seems, a like office for Keats, and received £10 in return. This sum the publisher is willing to lose, and to cancel the poor devil's work, if I will do Keats instead on those terms: and won't I? and wouldn't I gratis? This forthcoming Scotch edition of Keats, who hated the Scotch as much as I do (Scotus I consider Northumbrian by adoption and Scotch no longer) has long been a thorn in my side: and apart from the delight of trampling on a Scotch Poetaster, I shall greatly enjoy bringing out a perfect edition of Keats . . . (Lang, 95).

Swinburne's edition of Keats never appeared, and neither did Buchanan's; Swinburne went to some lengths to ensure that Buchanan would not think that the publisher's decision had been engineered by himself (Lang, 96). It is fitting that it should be Swinburne who relishes the prospect "of trampling on a Scotch Poetaster," for it was Swinburne who waged most of the warfare in the ensuing controversy, and it was Swinburne's work which attained the greatest merit in the controversy while simultaneously plumbing the deepest depths of bad taste. It was his delight in invective that answered Buchanan's penchant for moral polemic; had there been no Swinburne there would have been very little response from the Rossetti brothers to give nourishment to the Scot's appetite for feud. Swinburne's description of Buchanan suggests that he appears to have been acquainted with his name and work for some time,

but implies that William Michael might not have heard of him. Such was not the case. It is a curious irony that it should be a Rossetti, and more ironic that it should not be the much more volatile Dante Gabriel, but the staid, respectable, and unemotional William Michael, who should reply:

I confess a peculiar abhorrence of Buchanan, and satisfaction that his Caledonian faeces are not to bedaub the corpse of Keats.²

It is interesting, too, that it should also be William Michael who established the scatological nature of the exchanges that were to take place between the Rossettis, Swinburne and their intimates for the next ten years. Much later he explained his public slur on Buchanan's poetic ability (see below pp. 38-9) as being "the opinion which I then truly entertained, founded upon extracts from Buchanan's poems cited in laudatory reviews . . ." (Some Reminiscences, II, 523). It can be seen that this "peculiar abhorrence" was based upon the man's work and was not personal since William Michael goes on to say, "Of Mr. Buchanan himself I had no knowledge, and am not conscious of having ever seen him" (Ibid., 525). Dante Gabriel's comment to Swinburne is more restrained than his brother's, but the opinion of Buchanan's literary abilities is the same:

. . . the puddling of Keats with Buchanan is a

²Quoted by George Storey, "Robert Buchanan's Critical Principles," p. 1229, from Georges Lafourcade, Swinburne's Hyperion and other Poems (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928), fn. pp. 30-1.

fearful thought. In fact it is very seriously to be regretted as a good selection of Keats was needed (Doughty-Wahl, 663).

That the feeling was mutual was to be only too amply demonstrated in the next few years; and, if T. Earle Welby is to be believed, Buchanan "was looking for opportunities for reprisal" as a result of this episode.³

With its sensuality, paganism, and blasphemy, Swinburne's Poems and Ballads burst upon the placid Victorian literary scene in the late summer of 1866. The notoriety of such poems as "Anactoria," "Dolores," or "Faustine" was heightened by the knowledge that Swinburne had been compelled to withdraw from Moxon's (and, quite possibly, thereby leave the projected Keats) and be republished by the disreputable John Camden Hotten. John Morley's sincere outrage at the poetry, recorded in the Saturday Review (August 4th, 1866), was matched by Buchanan's somewhat less sincere and unsigned review in the Athenaeum of the same day. Buchanan, four years Swinburne's junior, adopted a patronizing tone calculated to reflect very faithfully the sense of moral shock that many must have felt on first reading Poems and Ballads. Attributing Swinburne's poetic excesses to the faults of youth and, it must be noted, possible "evil advisers," Buchanan chastises him for being "deliberately and impertinently insincere as an artist," ever the cardinal sin in the Scot's aesthetics. The

³Back Numbers (London: Constable, 1929), p. 153.

poems "are unclean, with little power; and mere uncleanness repulses. Here in fact we have Gito, seated in the tub of Diogenes, conscious of the filth and whining at the stars" (Athenaeum, August 4th, 1866, p. 137). Swinburne's letters record his "quasi-venereal enjoyment" at such abuse, with its implications concerning his suspected homosexual proclivities and its display, always a hallmark of Buchanan's invective, of a good knowledge of the more salacious parts of classic literature. The article also lists the more disreputable haunts of nineteenth century Europe (Holywell Street, the parade at Brighton, and the Jardin Mabille) and writers of nineteenth century literature (Alfred de Musset, George Sand, and Victor Hugo), and, besides Petronius, refers to Ovid and Boccaccio with a relish soon to be recognized as characteristic of its author.

Not content with this onslaught on Swinburne, which is certainly directed as much at the man as at his work, Buchanan betrayed for those who penetrated the identity of "Caliban" further animosity towards the poet in "The Session of the Poets" published over that pseudonym in the Spectator six weeks later. Having hinted in the review at one of Swinburne's reputed weaknesses he lampoons others, using the poet's favourite anapests:

Why, just as the hour of supper was chiming,
 The only event of the evening occurred.
 Up jumped, with his neck stretching out like a gander,
 Master Swinburne, and squealed, glaring out thro'
his hair,
 "All Virtue is bosh! Hallelujah for Landor!
 I disbelieve wholly in everything!—There!"

With language so awful he dared then to treat 'em,—
 Miss Ingelow fainted in Tennyson's arms,
 Poor Arnold rushed out, crying "Soecl' Inficetum!"
 And great bards and small bards were full of alarms;
 Till Tennyson, flaming and red as a gypsy,
 Struck his fist on the table and utter'd a shout,
 "To the door with the boy! Call a cab! He is tipsy!"
 And they carried the naughty young gentleman out.
 (Spectator, XXXIX September 15th
 1866, 1028).

Buchanan described himself in the poem as "looking moony, conceited, and narrow"; his vanity could never exclude him from a list of the major contemporary poets, and his prudence might have seen this as a useful disguise. Caliban's identity was soon established,⁴ as was the authorship of the review of Poems and Ballads in the Athenaeum.⁵

Having been attacked by men of some stature, and always relishing the opportunity for controversy, Swinburne published his defence of Poems and Ballads, Notes on Poems and Reviews, in early November, 1866. He refused to concede that he or his work could in any way be affected by unfavourable reviews; yet he called his critics "vultures" and his times "an age of hypocrites," claiming his poetry to be genuine and sincere, and that he, unlike Byron or Shelley, had not "openly and insultingly mocked and reviled what the English

⁴C.K. Hyder, Swinburne's Literary Career and Fame (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. 95.

⁵Swinburne referring to Buchanan's review of Notes on Poems and Reviews mentioned seeing "R.B. the second in the Asinaeum" in a letter to William Michael, dated November 12th, 1866 (Lang, 163).

of their day held most sacred."⁶ The question his detractors seem to be asking, he said, though this was not true of Buchanan,⁷ is "whether or not the first and last requisite of art is to give no offence" (Notes, p. 20). Swinburne, as was to become characteristic of his prose on whatever topic, peppered his reply with incidental gibes, the best known being his gratuitous, and funny, description of "Faustine" as being "the reverie of a man gazing on the bitter and vicious loveliness of a face as common and as cheap as the morality of reviewers . . ." (Notes, p. 15), another being the splendid "crumb of advice" to his critics (Notes, p. 20), and lastly one, to which Buchanan was to reply later, referring to the "hoarser choir" of idyl-writing imitators of Tennyson:

We have idyls good and bad, ugly and pretty; idyls of the farm and mill; idyls of the dining-room and the deanery; idyls of the gutter and the gibbet. If the Muse of the minute will not feast with "gigmen" and their wives, she must mourn with costermongers and their trulls (Notes, p. 22).

If such remarks roused Buchanan's ire, he did not show it in his review of Swinburne's defence, which opens with a legal metaphor in which Swinburne is seen in the dock as an offender against morality while Buchanan and his fellow-critics are

⁶Notes on Poems and Reviews (London: Hotten, 1866), pp. 6,7. Hereinafter referred to as Notes.

⁷Buchanan in a recent essay, "Immorality in Authorship" (Fortnightly Review, VI, September 15th, 1866), had said, and his review of Swinburne's poetry is consistent, that "immoral writing proceeds primarily from insincerity of vision" (p. 296).

"the unbiassed officials who calmly state their case against him" (Athenaeum, November 3rd, 1866, p. 564). The mere fact that Buchanan should feel he needs to establish his objectivity might be interpreted to mean that he knew he lacked it. However that may be, the tone of his article is not as hostile, even if it is just as uncompromisingly righteous as the original review. It ends:

Mr. Swinburne's truculent pamphlet, however, will not prevent us from hoping to see the author in a better frame of mind, and winning that public testimony of universal esteem which is always ready to be awarded as the crown of the pure, the sincere, and the inspired poet (Athenaeum, November 3rd, 1866, p. 565).

Two weeks later William Michael published his pamphlet, Swinburne's Poems and Ballads: A Criticism. Its opening sentence contained a deprecatory remark about the recent success of London Poems, and is the first blow aimed at Buchanan by any member of the Rossetti circle in public:

The advent of a new poet is sure to cause a commotion of one kind or another; and it would be hard were this otherwise in times like ours, when the advent of even so poor and pretentious a poetaster as a Robert Buchanan stirs storms in teapots (p. 7).

William Michael later defended this rather unfortunate, and uncharacteristic, remark—Cassidy melodramatically and infelicitously terms it "the stiletto blow of a meddling and treacherous bystander" (Cassidy, p. 69)—as being the result of reading Buchanan's poetry that critics had cited in their reviews as praiseworthy (see above, p. 33); he also admitted that it was written as an answer to "The Session

of the Poets" with its "gratuitous" attack on Swinburne, which "rumour—since then confirmed by himself⁸—ascribed . . . to Mr. Buchanan." William Michael also conceded that he has "more than once been told by friends" that Buchanan's animus against his brother "should be regarded as a vicarious expression of resentment at something which I myself had written" (Family Letters, I, 294-5). That this is true is confirmed by Buchanan's admission in Latter Day Leaves, reprinted in his sister-in-law's account of the controversy, that from the moment he read William Michael's pamphlet he considered himself "free to strike at the whole Coterie, which I finally did, at the moment when all the journals were sounding extravagant paeans over the poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti" (Jay, pp. 161-2). There is little doubt that well-meaning William Michael materially contributed to Buchanan's belief that there was a coterie of poets who sharply resented his criticism more than that of others; and that he was the butt of their gossip, too, also was drawn to Buchanan's attention ("the voice of calumny whispered that insults had been heaped upon his own friends and sympathizers" (Jay, p. 159).⁹ William Michael's pamphlet was not all

⁸William Michael is referring, here, presumably, to Buchanan's admission of its authorship which he made in court in June 1876.

⁹Swinburne's and Rossetti's letters are full of excretory and execratory references to Buchanan, one of the more memorable being Swinburne's on the discovery that it was Buchanan who had reviewed William Michael's Shelley (see below, pp. 47-8), (Lang, 343).

eulogy of Swinburne's poetry, and, although in answer to Buchanan, he goes to some lengths to indicate the genuineness of Swinburne's poetic passion, some of his judgments still being sound, he may have given Buchanan some ammunition for his main attack of 1872.¹⁰ Certainly this pamphlet seems to have diverted Buchanan's ire from Swinburne to the Rossettis, whom Buchanan regarded as having been responsible for the course that Swinburne's talent had followed.

Buchanan, however, may have taken one more swing at Swinburne and William Michael at the end of this early round of the controversy in "Mr. Swinburne, his Crimes and his Critics" in the Eclectic Review for December 1866. And if this anonymous review was not written by Buchanan, it substantiates, at least, the statement that in his attack on the Fleshly School, he was only saying what many others believed to be true. It implies the existence of a coterie with the opening remark that Notes on Poems and Ballads must have been "a woeful disappointment" to "all those prophets" who had announced it to be a latterday "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" (p. 494), and flatly states that the "unmeasured and coarse scurrility" of Swinburne's pamphlet would encourage no one to read his poetry. The reviewer gives the opening

¹⁰In Swinburne's "mighty intoxication of poetic diction . . . he forgets the often still nobler office of self-mastery and reticence" (p. 20); later William Michael bluntly pronounces, as Buchanan was to do, Baudelaire's influence on Swinburne to be "a bad one" (p. 46).

sentence of William Michael's Criticism as evidence of the contemptible nature of the work of such "an admiring and ridiculous critic" (p. 495), then quotes Buchanan's Athenaeum article quite liberally (something Buchanan would be very capable of doing) before returning to the question of the morality of Swinburne's work. He concedes the poet's "extraordinary genius"—Buchanan never did disguise his admiration for Swinburne's technical virtuosity—but deplores the fact that he has "no sense of the moral sublime." Essentially he is a pagan, "deficient in moral sensibility," worshipping sensuality, believing in the body but with no sense whatever of its inherent divinity ("Michael Angelo, and Canova, and Flaxman believed in the body; but to them it was the Shechinah of the soul," p. 496). The writer, surely Buchanan, says at one point: "We would fain dwell a little on Mr. Swinburne's schoolmasters, the minds which seem to have influenced his, but we will not" (p. 504). No doubt Rossetti and Baudelaire would be those "schoolmasters," also, perhaps, the diabolist, Milnes (who introduced Swinburne to de Sade's Justine).

A return blow, possibly inadvertent though hardly likely to be, that hit Buchanan particularly hard, came in Swinburne's review of "Mr. Arnold's New Poems" a year later. Referring to Wordsworth's doctrine that poetic inspiration was more important to a poet than the mastery of poetic technique, Swinburne wrote:

There is no such thing as a dumb poet or a handless painter. The essence of an artist is that he should be articulate. It is mere impudence of weakness to arrogate the name of poet or painter with no other claim than a susceptible and impressionable sense of outward or inward beauty, producing an impotent desire to paint or sing. The poets that are made by nature are not many; and whatever "vision" an aspirant may possess, he has not the "divine faculty" if he cannot use his vision to any poetic purpose. There is no cant more pernicious to such as these, more wearisome to all other men, than that which asserts the reverse Such talk as this of Wordsworth's is the poison of poor souls like David Gray (Fortnightly Review, II, October 1st, 1867, 428).¹¹

When Buchanan showed this to Richard Monckton Milnes, Gray's patron as well as Swinburne's friend, Milnes "was much surprised and vexed, and said . . . : 'O he (Swinburne) did this to annoy me!" Buchanan, once Swinburne's intention of annoying anyone was suspected, probably thought the target to be himself, and called the comment "most ill-timed, offensive and cruel"; vowing then and there to avenge it if ever the opportunity should occur (Jay, p. 161). It must have seemed to him that his enemies, as he now saw them, were going out of their way to goad him, and few men have been more irascible, more easily baited, than Robert Buchanan. A fitting, and, one might have thought, sufficient, riposte appeared four years later in Buchanan's footnote to a review of another gifted Scottish poet struck down in his youth:

¹¹When Swinburne republished this essay in Essays and Studies (1875) the reference was amplified by a footnote, which, much later, Buchanan erroneously designated as the first cause of his anger at the fleshly school.

Mr. Algernon Charles Swinburne, author of "Atalanta in Calydon," went some years ago far out of his way to call David Gray a "dumb poet"—meaning by that a person of great poetical feeling, but no adequate powers of expression. So many excellent critics have resented both his impertinence and the unfeeling language in which it was expressed, that Mr. Swinburne is doubtless ashamed enough of his words by this time When Mr. Swinburne and the school he follows are consigned to the limbo of affetuosos, David Gray's dying sonnets will be part of the literature of humanity ("George Heath, the Moorland Poet," Good Words, March 1871, p. 175).

A year later, in a very revealing letter to Robert Browning, which gives Buchanan's justification for his attack on Rossetti, Buchanan concludes, concerning this particular aspect of his motivation:

In the whole morale of the affair I will only plead guilty to one instinct of recrimination. When these men, not content with outraging literature, violated the memory of the poor boy who went home from me twelve years ago to die, I made a religious vow to have no mercy; and I have had none. Thus far I have been revengeful. The main cause is nevertheless righteous and good.¹²

Buchanan was just the kind of man to fight another's cause even more fiercely than he might fight his own; he was also quite capable of elaborating a rationale for behaviour and attitudes which were basically irrational. The deep wound to his ego caused by William Michael's calling him a poetaster was forgotten in his fervour to protect David Gray's name from Swinburne's slander.

¹²For the source of this letter see footnote on p. 28, above.

In early February 1868, to return to the chronological exposition of the controversy, William Michael published his edition of Poems of Walt Whitman, and there, as if to placate an enemy already seen to be dangerous, and certainly demonstrating William Michael's absolute impartiality when it came to the truth (or fear at involving Whitman's name in the imbroglio), he took some trouble to acknowledge the fact that Robert Buchanan was one of the very few "more discerning" critics to appreciate Whitman's poetry, who had written an "eulogistic review" which should be listed among the few favourable notices of Whitman in England.¹³ It is another of the ironies of the controversy that Buchanan and the Rossettis should, quite separately, have been such warm supporters of Whitman's poetry in England at a time when his reputation in America was not at all high. But Whitman, at least until the pamphlet of 1872, seems to have been regarded as neutral ground; no evidence has been discovered of an unfavourable review by Buchanan of William Michael's edition, and in The Fleshly School of Poetry he seems to commend William Michael for excising the fifty lines of fleshly poetry that Whitman had written (p. 97).

¹³"Walt Whitman" was originally published in the Broadway, and was reprinted in David Gray and Other Essays, pp. 201-220. It should also be noted that Hotten, William Michael's publisher of Whitman, in his announcement of the new work uses Buchanan's name with those of William Michael and M.D. Conway as evidence of the growing admiration for the American poet (Athenaeum, February 1st, 1868, p. 182).

Later in that same month, Buchanan published David Gray and Other Essays, and this too was relatively mild in tone. It did contain a reference to Swinburne's Notes on Poems and Reviews (see passage quoted on p. 37 above), and, with a certainty that betrays his vanity (or his paranoia) Buchanan assumed he was the target of the lines he quotes:

A gifted young contemporary, who seems fond of throwing stones in my direction,¹⁴ fiercely upbraids me for writing "idyls of the gallows and the gutter," and singing songs of "coster-mongers and their trulls."¹⁵

Since Buchanan is here attempting to establish his point that any subject could be suitable for poetic treatment, and since it suited him to distort Swinburne's comments on the imitators of Tennyson's manner to read as a criticism of Buchanan's choice of matter, his remarks here are necessarily curtailed. But that Buchanan could see Swinburne's comments as a fierce attack on himself is highly illuminative of the man with whom Swinburne and William Michael were dealing, a man almost as sensitive to criticism as Dante Gabriel Rossetti himself. That they recognized this fact, William Michael's Preface to Poems by Walt Whitman seems to indicate.

There would also seem to be no mistaking Swinburne's intentions in a letter to Buchanan dated January 26, 1869, though Buchanan could well have considered himself to be the

¹⁴The plural seems to indicate that Buchanan considered Swinburne's slur concerning David Gray in "Mr. Arnold's New Poems" to be intentional.

¹⁵"On My Own Tentatives," David Gray and Other Essays, p. 291.

victim of Swinburne's irony. In the mildest possible language, for him at least, Swinburne regrets that he received a ticket to Buchanan's reading of his own poetry the previous day, too late to avail himself of the invitation. He ends by saying (a little curtly perhaps) that he is "none the less obliged to you for the attention, though I have missed the pleasure of hearing you read. Believe me, yours sincerely, A.C. Swinburne" (Lang, 286A).¹⁶

For over two years, then, neither Swinburne nor the Rossettis had given any public offence to Buchanan, and had apparently been quite civil to him. Buchanan, however, had lost none of his original animosity, as his review of William Michael's edition of Shelley clearly indicates. It also shows that Buchanan had changed his target, and was aiming at those he felt had influenced Swinburne so evilly. Miss Jay's statement that Buchanan knew himself to be the victim of a whispering campaign (Jay, p. 159), must also be borne in mind when this next episode is described. For with it, two very insecure men, alike in some ways, poles apart in others, were about to become more and more closely bound to each other in mutual hatred and disgust, and were about to begin a kind of weird, macabre, and fatal dance where each anticipated the

¹⁶ Buchanan, to raise funds, had projected a series of poetry readings in 1869 of which this was the first. They met with some critical (Buchanan being favourably compared with Dickens by the Examiner) and financial success, but, because of his nervous condition at the time, the strain was too great, and he had to give up the idea (Jay, p. 158).

other's move, and then could point to that move as evidence of his opponent's depravity.

William Michael Rossetti's Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley appeared in January, 1870, and received at the hands of the anonymous reviewer of the Athenaeum (January 29th, 1870) a particularly severe appraisal. Buchanan was, of course, the reviewer, and he was bent on making Shelley's editor look as incompetent a fool as he possibly could. According to the Scot, William Michael lacks the necessary "impartiality and discrimination" to be Shelley's biographer, the necessary "taste both in conception and phraseology" and the necessary critical acumen to be Shelley's editor. Buchanan regrets the inclusion of the poet's juvenile "trash" in the edition, and betrays his prurience by quoting in full one of Shelley's schoolboy compositions in Latin, and then saying, "It is no satisfaction . . . to know that Shelley, when he was a schoolboy, was guilty of false quantities, execrable Latinity and bad taste." Buchanan deplores the textual corrections made, which, for lack of authentic MSS "must be purely conjectural, and the careful reader will find that Mr. Rossetti is anything but a trustworthy interpreter" (p. 155). He ends a long review by suggesting that William Michael "has mistaken his vocation as undertaking the role of commentator," and that only for future editors and "readers who are fond of textual criticism" will the work "have a certain value" (p. 156). Buchanan supports his argument

throughout with ample quotations from text and notes; it is to all appearances a not unjust review, if unnecessarily personal. However, the following week, William Michael complained to the editor that readers of the review might receive the impression that textual emendations of a dubious nature had been made wholesale; such was not the case (Athenaeum, February 5th, 1870, p. 197). Given the opportunity to reply to William Michael's objections to his critique, Buchanan was not the man to miss an opportunity to restate his views, but in so doing he more clearly displayed the animus behind them. Using language reminiscent of William Michael's "so poor and pretentious a poetaster" of three years before, and thus revealing the root causes of his malignity, Buchanan wrote that it was William Michael's "pretension as a critical commentator" that had been considered, and

We thought we had distinctly expressed our opinion that a conjectural revision of Shelley's poems must be untrustworthy for want of MSS. and of a sufficient criterion; that the corrections introduced into Mr. Rossetti's text are not always convincing; and that many of those which he suggests but does not incorporate in the text are such as to raise grave doubts of his capabilities as a critic of poetry (Athenaeum, February 5th, 1870, p. 198).

It is quite probable that it was this rough handling that prompted William Michael to urge his brother to ignore Buchanan's criticisms of his poetry eighteen months later. It is also quite probable that it was this exchange that terminated Buchanan's four-year association with the Athenaeum,

because by December 30th, 1871 Buchanan could roundly accuse its editor of being partial to the Rossettis, and declare that "for every one who reads your journal, a dozen will read my reprinted criticism, and will be able to see you in your true colours" (p. 887).¹⁷

One effect that Buchanan's virulent reply to William Michael certainly did have was to alarm Dante Gabriel Rossetti, now just about to publish his own poetry for the first time. It is small wonder that he was apprehensive of the reception that his work might receive at the hands of a Buchanan.

¹⁷It will be remembered that he reviewed Poems and Ballads in its columns, and it should be pointed out that he was responsible for a fairly acute review of The Ring and the Book in the journal in 1868.

CHAPTER III

i

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF D.G. ROSSETTI'S POEMS

In his Preface to the Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael says that Poems was "for some considerable while . . . hailed with general and lofty praise, chequered by only moderate stricture or demur" (p. ix); in his well-known letter to Thomas Hall Caine, Buchanan refers to his attack on Poems as "a mere drop of gall in an ocean of eau sucrée."¹ For obvious reasons, both these estimates of the critical reception of the poetry are not quite accurate. Indeed, nearly every one of Buchanan's strictures had been made by someone else before appearing in the famous article. Certainly other hostile reviews were expressed in milder language than Buchanan's, but talk of "eau sucrée" or "general and lofty praise" is a distortion of the facts.

It is, however, an understandable distortion. Rossetti did take great pains to ensure the early favourable reception of Poems. This his brother ever sought to deny, but Rossetti's "working the oracle," probably the most well-known example of it in the nineteenth century, has long been reasonably well documented. What has been often overlooked, and never given its due prominence in accounts of the controversy, is

¹The letter is given in full in Hall Caine's Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Elliot Stock, 1882), pp. 71-2.

the fact that Rossetti did this in an attempt to muzzle Buchanan.² Several of Rossetti's letters written in February 1870 (two months before Poems' publication) talk of the need to drown out Buchanan's anticipated "spite" with a chorus of praise. A letter to Swinburne (February 14) puts the matter clearly (and coarsely—the scatological language of the Rossetti circle when discussing Buchanan never varied):

By the bye I expect the B-B-Buchanan to be down upon me of course now in The Athenaeum, and am anxious to time my appearance when it seems likely that friends can speak up almost at once and so just catch the obscene organ of his speech at the very moment when it is hitched up for an utterance, and perhaps compel the brain of which it is also the seat, to reconsider its views and chances (Doughty Wahl, 923).

In a letter to his publisher, F.S. Ellis, written on the same day, Rossetti repeated himself practically word for word hoping "to keep spite at bay . . . if a few good men were in the field at the outset" (Doughty-Wahl, 924).

Why Rossetti could be so sure that Buchanan would attack him is not clear; that he thought that the Scot could be muzzled in this way seems a little naive; and Buchanan would have been flattered had he known that the "ocean of eau sucrée" had been inspired by him. It certainly gave him,

²Doughty does not even mention Buchanan by name when giving Rossetti's reasons for organizing the reception for Poems despite his access to, and earlier publication of, some of Rossetti's letters indicating that this is the truth (p. 443). Cassidy does mention it but makes little of it (p. 71).

ironically enough, another stick with which to beat Rossetti.³ The immediate cause of Rossetti's fear was the knowledge that it was Buchanan who had anonymously reviewed William Michael's edition of Shelley in the Athenaeum at the end of January, 1870. But Rossetti might have imagined that this would have eased the Scotsman's intemperate feelings against the coterie. One may surmise that he knew better. Buchanan's desire to stifle the source of a new school of poetry was no secret, and such an ambition had probably reached the ears of Rossetti.⁴ It is also quite possible that Rossetti's overwrought imagination saw potential enemies under every bush, and that at this time Buchanan had no intention of reviewing Poems. The fact that he did review it, very harshly, some time after publication (when Rossetti might have imagined

³Professor Fredeman, in the article cited, quotes an unpublished letter written by William Bell Scott as saying, "Robert Buchanan's attack was in consequence of so many laudatory notices having been planted by G. himself before publication." Scott, of course, is not entirely accurate, but his was a reasonable enough assumption concerning Buchanan's motivation, which his own later remarks justify (Jay, p. 162).

⁴One recalls Rossetti's letter to Tennyson on the publication of Poems and Ballads, where he denies that he was the source "of the qualities" in Swinburne's poetry which displeased Tennyson, and goes on to assert "that no one has more strenuously combated" "the wayward exercise" of Swinburne's genius than himself (Doughty-Wahl, 693).

In his biography of Richard Monckton Milnes, James Pope-Hennessy quotes a letter of Buchanan's to Milnes, dated April 1871, where the Scot deplores "the 'vile set' which Swinburne had 'got among': 'slaves who flatter and pollute him,' wrote Buchanan of the P.R.B., 'mean crawlers on the skirts of literature.'" Monckton Milnes: The Flight of Youth (London: Constable, 1951), fn., p. 133.

himself to have achieved success relatively unscathed) must have added considerably to Rossetti's paranoid conviction that he was the victim of a ruthless and stealthy enemy who had unrelentingly hunted him down for at least eighteen months.

It was, then, the desire to drown out Buchanan's anticipated attack that prompted the "chorus of eulogy" (Buchanan's phrase) which began, a little precipitately (as Rossetti feared it would), with Sidney Colvin's review in the Pall Mall Gazette of April 21, 1870, four days before Poems was published by F.S. Ellis. Colvin was to review it again, twice, in the Westminster; and ranged ready were Swinburne in the Fortnightly; Morris (who had been somewhat reluctant) in the Academy; John Skelton in Fraser's; Joseph Knight in the Globe, Sunday Times, and Graphic; Dr. Gordon Hake in the New Monthly; and H.B. Forman in Tinsley's. W.B. Scott failed to secure the North British, but G.A. Simcox was reported to be sympathetic. The Athenaeum, Buchanan's pitch, caused some concern to Rossetti until it was discovered that Dr. Westland Marston would do its review of Poems. In North America even, E.C. Stedman was enlisted in Putman's. There were such loopholes as the Spectator, the Quarterly, Blackwoods, the Saturday, and the Contemporary, but Rossetti wanted to ensure a predominantly favourable reception for his work, and in this he succeeded.⁵

⁵Most of the reviews are to be found in Ghose, as indicated by page references wherever they are quoted in the text. Ghose is not accurate, nor particularly representative in his selection, so wherever possible (as is the case with Swinburne or Colvin) the original review is used.

Swinburne's panegyric in the Fortnightly (VII, June 1870, 551-579) is one of the most fulsome in the language. He did indeed "cut it fat," as he promised the apprehensive Rossetti he would (Lang, 345). He flatly states, as if he knew what Buchanan's objections would be, that there are no poems "so rich at once and so pure" as Rossetti's (553), and then unhesitatingly compares Rossetti's sonnets with those of Shakespeare, finding Rossetti's to "have a nobler fulness of form, a more stately and shapely beauty of build; they are of purer less turbid water than the others are at times" (554). Of "The House of Life," Swinburne says, "In all the glorious poem built up of all these poems there is no great quality more notable than the sweet and sovereign unity of perfect spirit and sense, of fleshly form and intellectual fire" (557).⁶ For twenty-eight pages the alliterative, assonant, richly imaged language pours out, with no hint that Swinburne might have any reservations whatever about Rossetti's art. He anticipates Buchanan's charges that the poetry was not relevant, and gives a spirited defence of art for art's sake (at a time when he had already decided to leave that phase of his own career behind him, Lang, 149), with this discussion of "Jenny" (for him the best poem of all):

⁶ Swinburne uses the adjective fleshly several times in his review; one can reasonably surmise that it was here that Buchanan found the word, and the enduring notoriety of having it associated with his name in the Oxford English Dictionary.

Its plainness of speech and subject gives it power to touch the heights and sound the depths of tragic thought without losing the force of its hold and grasp upon the palpable truths which men often seek and cry out for in poetry, without knowing that these are only good when greatly treated, and that to artists who can treat them greatly all times and all truths are equal, and the present, though assuredly no worse, yet assuredly no better topic than the past. All the ineffably foolish jargon and jangle of the criticasters about classic subjects and romantic, remote or immediate interests, duties of the poet to face and handle this thing instead of that or his own age instead of another, can only serve to darken counsel without knowledge: a poet of the first order raises all subjects to the first rank, and puts the life-blood of an equal interest into Hebrew forms or Greek, medieval or modern, yesterday or yesterage. Thus there is here just the same life-blood and breath of poetic interest in this episode of a London street and lodging as in the song of "Troy Town" and the song of "Eden Bower;" just as much, no jot more (572).

If Swinburne's review set the tone for Rossetti's friends, none could overlook (to the extent that he could) some of the difficulties the poetry presented to the average reader. The younger poet could praise Rossetti's style for its "sweet lucidity and steady current," for its "fulness of living thought and subtle strength of nature" (553), but, for Colvin, it lacked "joyful and genial simplicity" and was one of the major obstacles to a wide appreciation of Rossetti (Westminster, XLV, January 1871, 91). One of the first questions to be discussed by all of Rossetti's friends was this obscurity. For Swinburne, even, the darkness of Rossetti's poetry "is as a deep well-spring at noon may be, even where the sun is strongest and the water bright" and derives from the representation in the poetry of "the innermost

recesses of the poet's character" (553). For Colvin, some fortitude was necessary to penetrate this darkness, but "the determined reader will almost always find . . . that this is the obscurity not of emptiness or confusion, but of closeness and concentration" (Pall Mall Gazette, from the advertisements at the end of the 5th edition of Poems). For Stillman, the difficulty of the poetry, "almost a riddle to the unlearned," was due to "the subjectivity of his treatment" (Putman's Magazine, Ghose, p. 121). Forman agreed, saying that "The House of Life" was difficult because it grew "under the fitful influences of a varied life on a mature man's whole being" (Tinsley's Magazine, VII, 1871, 153). Rossetti's symbolism and mysticism posed particular problems, and his friends' reviews devoted much space to unraveling this relationship. For Morris, the poet's mysticism was successful not because it turns "human life into symbols of things vague and misunderstood" but because it gave "to the very symbols the personal life and variety of mankind." It is this realizing mysticism which provides the inspiration for the sonnets of "The House of Life," "which, though . . . not free from obscurity, the besetting vice of sonnets, are nevertheless unexampled for depth of thought and skill and felicity of execution . . ." (Academy, Ghose, p. 117). Forman, too, cites Rossetti's great power for "realizing mental phenomena" (Tinsley's, p. 154). But it was Colvin who went furthest in his discussion of this crucial aspect of Rossetti's art. "The propensities of [his] imagination," he

wrote, are such "that the thoughts, events, facts, feelings of whatsoever kind . . . are apt to come before him not simply or as they by themselves are, but by the circuitous way of personification, or if not that, at any rate of concrete figure and symbol." Rossetti's mysticism is of such a kind that he believes "of all things insubstantial or transitory that they have behind them essences solid and enduring" (Westminster, p. 73).

Much of these reviews contain flat assertion with little attempt at justification. Colvin (Pall Mall Gazette) wrote of Rossetti's "immense proficiency . . . in the technical art of poetry; his unsurpassed command of lyrical metre, melody and diction." Skelton asserted (Fraser's, Ghose, p. 116) that his "imaginative vision has given special qualities to Rossetti's work, such as coherence, directness, simplicity, concentration and insight" On the ever popular question of the poet's sincerity, of which Buchanan was to make so much, Dr. Hake (New Monthly, from the advertisements at the back of the 5th edition of Poems) could praise the poetry's "masculine earnestness," which bore "the mark of suffering" and was thus "a fitting study for all who under affliction need strength, under trial, resignation." Stillman (Putman's, Ghose, p. 122) asserted that "There is no affectation and no willing weakness . . . in [Rossetti's] art." Forman (Tinsley's, p. 150), rather ponderous himself, found "a weight of earnestness in every page and a burden of

bestowed care in every line." Colvin, too, in Swinburnian terms (Westminster, p. 70), commended Rossetti's "flaming personal sincerity," which, with their "first-hand emotion," were the "most obvious" qualities of the poems; while Swinburne himself, not to be outdone, declared that a "more bitter sweetness of sincerity was never pressed into verse than beats and burns here under the veil and girdle of glorious words" (p. 554).

Besides those hinted at in the very diction of the reviews, occasional flaws were found in the poetry. Forman considered "Dante at Verona" hardly as compressed as it might be. And Colvin, along with his strictures about Rossetti's over-elaborate style, noted the lack of thought about "outside things" of a poet, who may be too "individualistic" and too little "concerned with the many" (pp. 91-2). It should be pointed out that Colvin could be more objective than Rossetti's other friendly reviewers because his Westminster article appeared eight months after Poems, when Buchanan's threatened attack was no longer so potent a factor.

There were, as might be expected, friendly reviews by those outside the immediate Rossetti circle; almost all of them, however, hint at problems, if not failures, in the poetry. One such was by Westland Marston (friend to both Rossetti and Buchanan) in the Athenaeum, who sympathized with Rossetti's view that "the lawful province of Art [is] almost unlimited" and commended his originality (Ghose, p. 112).

The Saturday Review praised the "great beauty" of the sonnets and found "Sister Helen" to be the masterpiece of the book since it united "in a very noble manner the two great qualities of the higher poetry—passion and imagination," but only to find Rossetti's thoughts and expressions to be frequently "exotic and far-fetched", "reminding us of the orchid-house rather than of the garden or even of the conservatory" (Ghose, pp. 127-8). Simcox, anonymous in the North British, also appreciated the "beauty of the verses, . . . their wide range of subject, their narrow and appropriate music, their lyric fire, their lofty tone, and their high level of uncommon perfection;" but, for him, the very qualities of the poetry would ensure its limited popularity (Ghose, p. 126). The Broadway, which frequently published Buchanan's work, showed its impartiality by admiring the pictorial quality of the poetry, finding the sonnets to be the "most characteristic poems," whose words, "loaded with meaning," need "not so much the logical understanding as the poetic mind to be fully understood." After noting the Platonism in Rossetti's love-poetry, the critic drew attention to "the realistic touches of the most earthly sort" to be found in "Jenny" and "A Last Confession," evidence of the truth of the old adage that "to the pure all things are pure" (Ghose, p. 125. Ghose does not indicate that the review from Old and New, Boston, which he also quotes, is merely a republishing of the original Broadway article.) The Western Lakeside

Monthly of Chicago saw this sensuous element in the poetry inevitably deriving from Rossetti's pictorial skill; the poetry is sensuous only, however, for "sensuousness becomes sensuality if moral culture is neglected and that is not the case with Rossetti" Earlier in this review "The House of Life" was unkindly, and wittily, seen to be as "artificial as an architect's plans" (Ghose, pp. 138-9). Artificiality, irrelevance, immorality and its lack of intellectual content were the main objections of those critics ranged against Rossetti's Poems. Minor blemishes, became, for them, insurmountable obstacles to any claim by Rossetti to be called poet.

The hostile reviews began as early as May 26, 1870, when Alfred Austin suggested in the Standard that Morris and Swinburne were part of a "pious conspiracy" to puff the book (excerpts of their reviews were used liberally by Ellis in his advertising), "since business is nowadays everything." After castigating the difficulty and lack of spontaneity of poetry too obviously born of "laborious pains," after deploring Rossetti's subjection to the influence of the Vita Nuova, the critic ended where he began with the advice that Rossetti rely "not too strongly on people who do not criticize" (Ghose, p. 118).

In June, an anonymous critic in the Contemporary (XIV, 480-1) found a fusion of "flesh and spirit" in the poetry, and its style suggesting "affectation, reticence, or literary cynicism." (This review has been ascribed to Buchanan and

will be discussed more fully with his known reviews.) The Spectator also noted Rossetti's "injurious tendency to elaboration and to excess of literary decoration," and concluded that the degree of success Poems would attain rested on the question of "whether or not there be not too much art in proportion to the intensity of feeling," essentially Buchanan's criticism, if expressed much more mildly. There were several poems like "The Blessed Damozel," "Jenny" and "A Last Confession" of "rare power," but a large number were "strained, manneristic, elaborated beyond nature" (June 11, 1870. Ghose, p. 131).

In July, the American reviews began to appear, and with them came the first charges of immorality. In the Nation (XI, July 14, 1870, 29-30), the pictorial quality of the poetry was stressed; as was the "affectation" and "essential falseness and weakness" of a style that unsuccessfully masks Rossetti's inadequacies of expression, possibly because "he has no great amount of thought to express." Talking of "Nuptial Sleep," the critic saw it as evidence of Rossetti's "clean indecency . . . , a sort of deliberate hovering between nudity and nakedness," which was "as low as Mr. Rossetti ever gets" (p. 29). To the reviewer in the Atlantic (XXVI, July 1870, 115-118), who also found "no great intellectual powers" in Rossetti's "mystic and devotional pictures," and found "numbers of affectations, . . . not all his own;" "Nuptial Sleep" was quite offensive and considered to be "too few removes from Mr. Whitman's alarming frankness" concerning

sexual matters (p. 117).

Blackwood's for August (CVII, 178-183) contained such a harsh review that Rossetti was convinced that it was born of the malice of a rival poet, if not of the publisher turned down in favour of Ellis, and at one stage even suspected Morris of having written it (Doughty-Wahl, 1063-5). It was Mrs. Oliphant, the novelist, who called the details contributing to the "pretty picture" of "The Blessed Damozel" "curiously earthly and commonplace." "The fleshly imagination of the musing maiden . . . is . . . the most strangely prosaic conception of heaven we have ever met in poetry." After concluding that the "blessed damozel is of the earth, earthy,"⁷ the writer goes on to deplore the use of archaic refrains in "Troy Town" and "Eden Bower," and finds the book unmemorable. She describes a feeling many must have had on reading Rossetti: "A confusing sense that he ought to have done better, or that we ought to have felt more deeply, is upon us as we read" (p. 183).

In the North American Review for October, J.R. Dennett (whom Cassidy wrongly identifies as J.R. Lowell⁸), in a lengthy critique which Buchanan was to quote freely, again attacked Rossetti for his affectation, "his sentiment in excess, and

⁷An expression which crops up again and again in the controversy; "Dennett" in the next review, for example, uses it.

⁸Algernon C. Swinburne (New York: Twayne, 1964), p. 136. Rossetti thought that Lowell had done the Nation review. (Doughty-Wahl, 1064).

excessive sensibility," and admired the "warmth and vividness of the imagery that embodies his feelings and desires" only to deplore the fact that "of thought and imagination" the poetry contains "next to nothing" (p. 474). For Dennett, the poetry embodied too much of Rossetti's essentially false medievalism and was too little concerned with "the breathing life around him." Buchanan, of course, made the same charge against the poetry and found in this review the idea that even in dramatic pieces like "Sister Helen" the "substratum" is essentially subjective—Rossetti decking himself in his "favourite medieval dress" (pp. 474-5). The poetry's undue sensuousness is continually stressed, the love expressed in it, "if never quite mere appetite, being never, on the other hand, affection" (p. 476).

One of the last hostile reviews, published after Buchanan's first onslaught upon Rossetti, is to be found in one of the most influential of the British periodicals: the Quarterly (CXXXII, January 1872, 59-84). The obscurity, the lack of unity of the "House of Life," the laborious picturesqueness, the gross profanity in "Love's Redemption" of using the sacramental bread and wine as love imagery, the strain and elaborateness of the diction are all once again pointed out; so, too, is the poet's incapacity to come to terms with contemporary themes, as demonstrated by the "cheap display of affected sentiment and impotent philosophy" of "Jenny."

Interspersed as they were among the favourable reviews,

such harsh judgments Rossetti could afford to ignore; though his letters show that several of them did wound him, and subsequent "editions" of Poems did contain tacit acknowledgment of their validity (and here it should be noted that Rossetti did make textual changes in the sixth "edition" of 1872, which are to be found in the Appendix). The Nation (p. 30), for example, had deplored the footnote to "My Sister's Sleep" in which Rossetti pointed out that he had anticipated Tennyson's use of the In Memoriam stanza by several weeks; in the 1881 edition the footnote does not appear. Feeling quite secure about his poetry's success, Rossetti could write to F.J. Shields in August 1870 that

The book has prospered quite beyond any expectations of mine, though just lately signs of depreciation have been apparent in the press (Blackwood to wit), I am only surprised that nothing of a decided kind in the way of opposition should have appeared before. However I have also been surprised (and pleasantly) to find such things producing a much more transient and momentary impression of unpleasantness than I should have expected . . . (Doughty-Wahl, 1065).

Rossetti had another year to wait for "something of a decided kind in the way of opposition," but when it came it destroyed his professed equanimity very swiftly.

BUCHANAN'S ATTACKS ON ROSSETTI

It is never easy to be sure of anyone's motivation for a certain act, at times not even of one's own. In the case of Buchanan's attack on Rossetti, however, there is too much evidence of his ill will for it to be doubted. In the pamphlet he could declare that, "I reject altogether the insinuation that my criticism was based on private grounds. I do not know Mr. Rossetti, have no grievance against him, and I can quite believe that in private life he is a most exemplary person" (p. 67), which last remark does seem ironic, and must have appeared so to Rossetti. Privately then, and publicly later, he did admit that something more than the love of literature coloured his writing. But in his letter to Robert Browning (see above, p. 43), a man he respected and for whom he would try to put the causes for "The Fleshly School of Poetry" in the best light possible, Buchanan pleaded "guilty to one instinct of recrimination," that of repaying Swinburne for his slur on David Gray in "Matthew Arnold's New Poems." In "Latter Day Leaves," quoted extensively by his biographer, he cited Swinburne's "fierce" Notes on Poems and Reviews and William Michael's calling him "a poor and pretentious poetaster who was causing storms in teacups [sic]" as sufficient cause to consider himself "free to strike at the whole Coterie, at the moment when all the journals were sounding extravagant paeans over the poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti" (Jay, pp. 162-3).

While the animus that Swinburne had aroused with his reference to Gray may not have been recognized by Rossetti and his friends, William Michael was aware that his remark had helped to inflame the Scotsman (see above, p. 39), and William Bell Scott knew that it was the "planting" of the "extravagant paeans" over Poems that also irked him.⁹ In public, Rossetti, Colvin, Forman and Swinburne could attribute envy to Buchanan at Poems' success, and they could cite Buchanan's lurking behind a pseudonym (a major tactical error) as evidence of his impure motivation, in private they were probably aware (with Scott) that there were valid causes for his animus.

There is one further element to Buchanan's criticism which claims recognition. It was devoted to proving Rossetti to be an artificial, insincere versifier; a poetaster, in fact, though Buchanan never used the word to describe him. Buchanan bent all his considerable energy to ensuring that the poetic advent of the brother of the author of that very damaging remark was to be just as tempestuous as it had been said to be for the author of London Poems. Buchanan attacked Poems on five different known occasions, and there is evidence that he wrote "Coterie Glory," "Fleshing the Fleshly" and even, "Mr. Buchanan and the Fleshly Poets" (all of which will be discussed below) besides others. Whether Buchanan meant to cause another storm in a teacup or not, Harriett Jay does say that his yielding "to the temptation to be smart and funny at the

⁹See above, footnote 3, p. 52.

expense of a clique whose antics were, to his thinking at least, highly absurd" (p. 159) was one of the reasons for his attack. No one has ever seen this as a comic episode in English literature, because, presumably, of its tragic results. But Buchanan, using a pseudonym known to his assailants and writing just before the pamphlet appeared, could write that "The Mutual Admiration School of Poetry is scarcely read out of London, and produces no impression whatever on the public; the fact being that sensualists and spooneys are not so common as some critics persist in telling us" ("Criticism as One of the Fine Arts," Saint Paul's Magazine, X, April 1872, p. 389). Here is Buchanan minimizing Rossetti's significance as a poet assuredly, but also implying that he himself did not take this affair as seriously as he is supposed, and he claimed, to have taken it. Since it is the purpose of this thesis to examine the effect rather than the intent of Buchanan's attack, this beguiling question will be set aside after the caveat is recorded that Buchanan, a man not devoid of humour, may have been, and may continue to be, misunderstood.

Playful or not, Buchanan's malicious intent cannot be denied. Once it is affirmed, however, the whole criticism is thrown into question. When one makes so tenuous and impressionistic a principle as "sincerity of vision" the touchstone of one's aesthetics, it is only too easy to find in the poetry of those one dislikes a remarkable lack of this essential requirement. After allowance is made for Buchanan's animus, and it invests every accusation of falsity, hypocrisy

and insincerity with which these attacks abound, it remains to his credit that they were not invalidated by spite. For many people Rossetti remains a fraud¹⁰, and Buchanan did raise a question, that of the sensuality of Rossetti's poetry, with which all of its serious students have to come to terms.

It is entirely likely, as has been noted, that Rossetti had heard rumours that Buchanan considered him to be the source of a dangerous new development in English poetry (in the pamphlet he refers to Rossetti as "the gentleman who is formally recognized as the head of the school," p. 31), and that any attacks on Swinburne and William Michael were but minor skirmishes preparatory for a full-blooded assault on the enemy's too vulnerable centre. An early testing of that vulnerability might have been the anonymous review of Poems, which is ascribed to Buchanan,¹¹ that appeared in the Contemporary for June, 1870. Here are the first references to the "school to which Rossetti belongs;" to the "circumstances of culture and personal influence which conspired to produce a book like Poems; to the sensuous vividness" (albeit "fused into white light by spiritual suggestion") which "runs through all the poems" (p. 480) and shows the "fusion of 'flesh' and

¹⁰The most recent, and outspoken, being Geoffrey Grigson in his review of Professor Doughty's Life in Encounter, XVII (November 1961), 68-72.

¹¹By S.N. Ghose, where Professor Fredeman found it. The Wellesley Index cites Professor Fredeman in its ascription to Buchanan.

'spirit' which belongs to the school;" and to a "quality in the style which it would be wrong to call affectation, or reticence or literary cynicism; but yet there is something in it which suggests all these names" (p. 481). This review had no apparent effect on Rossetti, since he remembered it, two months later, as being useful for the further puffing of his Poems in the continuing war he saw himself waging.¹² If Buchanan did not write the review (in the pamphlet he says that he read Rossetti's poetry for the first time in the summer of 1871, p. 56), he would have endorsed it completely. Nine months later he expressed his objections to the Rossetti circle very clearly indeed.

This time, however, the attack appeared over Buchanan's name in a review of "George Heath, the Moorland Poet" (Good Words, March 1871, 170-177), the first of five known assaults. Referring to Keats, Robert Nicoll and David Gray, Buchanan writes,

Genius, music, disease, death—the old, weary, monotonous tune, have we not heard enough of it? Not yet. It will be repeated again and again and again, till the whole world has got it by heart, and its full beauty and significance are apprehended by every woman that bears a son. At the present moment it comes peculiarly in season: for England happens to be infested by a school of poetic thought which threatens frightfully to corrupt, demoralise,

¹² His letter to F.S. Ellis, dated August 19, 1870 (Doughty-Wahl, 1064), has a postscript beginning

I think it would be time to quote something new as well as old when advertising, to make head against the foe. The Westminster and North British have been civil, though short. So also I think was the Contemporary, but that I have not by me.

and render effeminate the rising generation; a plague from Italy and France; a school aesthetic without vitality, and beautiful without health; a school of falsettoes innumerable—false love, false picture, false patriotism, false religion, false life, false death, all lurking palpable or disguised in the poisoned chalice of a false style. Just when the latter Della Cruscan school is blooming out in the full hectic flush of mutual admiration which is the due preliminary to sudden death, just when verse-writers who never lived are bitterly regretting that it is necessary to die, and thinking the best preparation is to grimace at God and violate the dead,¹³ it may do us good to read the old story over again
(pp. 170-1)

There is no record of Rossetti ever having seen this, and Swinburne's letters do not show that he did then, though he did quote from it in Under the Microscope.¹⁴ Here, in parvo, is Buchanan's whole case against Rossetti. Six months later it was to be expanded into the notorious article in the Contemporary, which was itself, a year later, incorporated into the notorious pamphlet with whole chapters devoted to the corruption and demoralization of Victorian England.

Since "The Fleshly School of Poetry," the second of his assaults, has already been examined in the first chapter of this thesis, and its validity will be discussed in the last, little more need be said of it here. Its iteration and reiteration of the poet's insincerity must have caused Rossetti

¹³A reference to Swinburne's remarks about David Gray in "Matthew Arnold's New Poems," see Chapter II, p. 42, as Buchanan's later footnote in this article makes clear.

¹⁴C.K. Hyder, Swinburne Replies (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1965), pp. 7 and 75.

serious annoyance; though in a letter to his publisher he said of the review that "For once abuse comes in a form that even a bard can grin at without grimacing" (Doughty-Wahl, 1177). For all the poet's disclaimers this repetition and elaboration of the objections of others coupled with Buchanan's own was by far the most damaging, at least potentially, of any review that Rossetti had yet suffered. The poet's lack of originality to the point of plagiarism; his delight in archaic form and diction for their own sake to the detriment of the honest expression of the "truths of the soul;" the tortured laboriousness that gives Rossetti's poetry none of Swinburne's "genuine spontaneity;" the "mature" poet's proselytizing in the service of the evil of fleshliness; never before had any indictment of Rossetti's Poems been as comprehensive; and never before had such charges been expressed so forcefully.

What reduced the review's potential for destroying Rossetti's reputation as a poet, and what makes it, for the cynical, even more representative of Victorian prudery than it is of Victorian righteousness, is its tone. Buchanan's overstatement, his straining rhetoric and his over-insistence on Rossetti's insincerity seem to be the devices of someone who protests too much; and, worse, behind them was to be seen evidence of an unpleasant side to Buchanan's character. The pamphlet was much more self-revelatory, as will be seen, but in the article, the repetition within five lines of a catalogue of Rossetti's females' behaviour—they "bite, scratch, scream,

bubble, munch, sweat, writhe, twist, wriggle, foam, and slaver . . ." (p. 893)—betrays a certain relish and imaginative power, which, for the acute observer at least, were becoming marked characteristics of its author.

One of the first aspects of the Contemporary article that fascinated Rossetti and his friends was the identity of the "Thomas Maitland" whose name was appended to it, and the first printed reactions to the attack centred on this unfortunate issue. Sidney Colvin, a new member of the Rossetti circle, once the identity of Maitland had been established, was reported in the Athenaeum (December 2, 1871) to be preparing a reply to the article, "by Thomas Maitland, a nom de plume assumed by Mr. Robert Buchanan." A week later, in language calculated to goad Buchanan into revealing himself, Colvin denied any intention of so doing. On December 16, Buchanan publicly admitted authorship of the article, but denied that he had used a pseudonym (which he swore on oath, four and a half years later, that he had not added to the article), and added that Alexander Strahan, the publisher of the Contemporary, "is best aware of the inadvertence which led to the suppression" of his name. Unfortunately, Strahan, in a letter printed immediately above Buchanan's, denied that Buchanan was the author: "You might with equal propriety, associate the article with the name of Mr. Robert Browning, or of Mr. Robert Lytton or any other Robert." The editor of the Athenaeum dryly noted that "Mr. Buchanan's letter is an edifying commentary on Messrs. Strahans'"; and, deploring both parties'

complacent attitude to the pseudonym, continued; "we prefer, if we are reading an article by Mr. Buchanan, that it should be signed by him, especially when he praises his own poems; and that little 'inadvertencies' of this kind should not be left uncorrected till the public find them out." With that remark, Buchanan's association with the Athenaeum ended, if it had not four issues earlier.¹⁵ On December 19th the Pall Mall Gazette summarized the correspondence in the Athenaeum and in so doing referred to the Contemporary article as "this fierce onslaught of a poet upon his brethren of the craft" (p. 4). Gradually the attempt to discredit Buchanan by attributing his motivation to wounded vanity and envy began to gain ground. On December 23rd, Strahan wrote to the Pall Mall Gazette and, saying nothing to clarify the question of the use of the nom de plume, tried rather lamely to deny that his apparent denial of Buchanan's authorship in his letter to the Athenaeum was intended as such. Strahan did express his concern, as well he might, that the question of the pseudonym was being used by Rossetti and his friends "to divert attention from the main issue—the merits of the Fleshly School of Poetry" (p. 3). On December 30th, Rossetti himself published "The Stealthy School of Criticism" (see below, p.100) in the Athenaeum, again

¹⁵Besides Swinburne's Poems and Ballads and William Michael's Shelley, he had reviewed The Ring and the Book in its pages. On November 25, 1871 its review of The Drama of Kings had playfully suggested that Buchanan's love of repetitions, alliterations and such devices was evidence "that a Swinburne school is growing up" (p. 683).

making much of the pseudonym, and attributing "malicious intention" to the Scot (p. 793). On December 30th Buchanan wrote again to the Athenaeum, denying that he had praised his own poetry and repeating that the pseudonym "was affixed to my article when I was far out of reach—cruising on the shores of the Western Hebrides" (p. 887), this last being the inadvertency which had led to Strahan's act, presumably. Buchanan forfeited much sympathy by the petulant tone of his letter: "It is in vain perhaps, to protest against the comments of such a judge as you, but for every one who reads your journal a dozen will read my reprinted criticism, and will be able to see you in your true colours." In December, Temple Bar (XXXIV, 99-100) came out solidly in support of Buchanan. Drawing attention to the Contemporary article, the writer agreed wholeheartedly with the views there expressed: "Mr. Rossetti and his admirers have been told a few wholesome truths. There is in all the writings of this school a flesh-
liness, which is meant to be natural, but is exaggerated and unwholesome One little ballad with the tearful ring in it, one single song where we can feel that the poet is thinking more of what he says than of how he says it, is worth a cartload of these volumes."

To Rossetti's defence came Richard Hengist Horne who inserted a preface to the ninth edition of Orion, which appeared before the end of 1871 (Rossetti wrote to his publisher on December 31 for a copy of it, Doughty-Wahl, 1204), deploring Buchanan's article as the latest evidence of Victorian

asceticism, and concluding, "Are we gravely to be told, at this day, that the flesh and the devil are almost cognate terms, and that the spirit and the devil never cause men to commit evil deeds?" (Ghose, p. 166). In February 1872, Henry Buxton Forman, went again to the help of his embattled friend in "The 'Fleshly School' Scandal" (Tinsley's Magazine, X, 89-102). Beginning with a motto from Shelley ("As a bankrupt thief turns thief-taker in despair, so a disappointed author turns critic"), Forman devotes much of his space to Buchanan's "meaningless and unmitigated spite" (p. 89), and the question of the pseudonym; he correctly forecasts that Buchanan "has now gained for his name an unenviable notoriety that is likely to stick to him for the rest of his career" (p. 90). After suggesting that it is "a gross mind" that sees "Nuptial Sleep" as a record "of the most secret mysteries of sexual connection" (p. 94), Forman turns to the poetry and shows a deep appreciation and knowledge of Rossetti's work. One by one he refutes Buchanan's charges, with his defence of the offending passage in "A Last Confession" being particularly just (p. 97). He deals with the question of the derivative nature of Rossetti's art, and concludes with a brief but persuasive defence of preraphaelite prosody. The only complete answer to the Scot is then marred by further reference to his "virulent personal animus" enshrined in his "indecent and scurilous farce" (p. 102).

S.N. Ghose notes (p. 158), very perceptively, that "the probable author" of "Coterie Glory" (Saturday Review, February

24, 1872, pp. 239-240) was none other than Robert Buchanan himself. There is much in the article to support the idea. There are several turns of phrase that have Buchanan's ring to them (for example, in the Contemporary article he talked of Rossetti "parading his private sensations before a coarse public," here he talks of the "coarse climate of public exhibition"); the "Pre-Raffaelites" are likened, once again, to the Della Cruscan school; the writer refers blandly to medieval and Renaissance literature as being the new school's inspiration; again Buchanan (if he it was) describes literary criticism in legal terms. The tone of the article is restrained, as befits a periodical known for its scholarly objectivity, with the writer calmly tracing the regression of a critic to a fanatic, the rejection of critical analysis in favour of the blind faith of a believer, and stating that such is the case of those who so immoderately praised Poems. The writer then turns to Forman's recent defence of Rossetti, (this, too, can be seen as evidence of Buchanan's authorship) which, he claims, is more damaging than Buchanan's attack (a typical self-disparaging remark) since it comes from "'that worst of enemies, your worshipper'" (p. 240). Buchanan, not at all uncharacteristically, names himself several times in the article, and, appended a large quotation from "Coterie Glory" to the pamphlet.

Before the pamphlet appeared, though probably after he had written it, Buchanan made his third and fourth attacks on Rossetti. In "Tennyson's Charm" (Saint Paul's Magazine, X,

March 1872, 282-303), he elaborated upon his objections to Rossetti's diction. After seeing a chance to reiterate his main objection to Rossetti and his friends—"Georges Sand, Baudelaire, and all the latest school of French novelists (not to speak of their feeble imitators of the so-called Fleshly School of Poetry), are didactic writers . . . didactic in the service of Passion and Vice" (p. 295)—he then goes on to write of Tennyson's "recent imitators . . . eagerly gathering up and wearing the meretricious finery he threw away, with writers like Mr. Dante Rossetti . . . Latinising our mother-tongue in drawl after drawl of laboured affectation." At this point he gives a long footnote listing several examples of Rossetti's latinate diction ("Death is a seizure of 'malign vicissitude;' a kiss 'a consonant interlude' of lips; a moan 'the sighing wind's auxiliary;' the sky 'soft-complexioned'") concluding, "Here is Euphues come again with a vengeance, in the shape of an amatory foreigner ill-acquainted with English, and seemingly modelling his style on the 'conversation' of Dr. Samuel Johnson" (p. 298). In two references totalling a bare one hundred words, Rossetti's artificiality is again emphasized with this incongruous collection of 'influences' on "the amatory foreigner."¹⁶ Nowhere else did Buchanan express his objection to Rossetti's vocabulary quite so succinctly,

¹⁶Cassidy says that, with this article, Buchanan's "main object was patently to repair the slight on Tennyson" in the Contemporary (p. 80).

and for one contemporary, G.M. Hopkins, whose poetry is noteworthy for its Anglo-Saxon diction, it must have been particularly valid.

The fourth attack, quite possibly written when Buchanan had seen the pamphlet through the press and was heartily sick of the whole business, was that quoted above (p. 67), 'Walter Hutcheson's',¹⁷ "Criticism as One of the Fine Arts." Truly Buchanan declares that while criticism "may delay a reputation, it cannot kill it," and, on the same page as his reference to the "Mutual Admiration School of Poetry's" lack of impact outside London comes an impassioned appeal for an end to all unsigned criticism! Later, with unconscious irony (?), he deplores critics assuming "the editorial tone," and to those thereby "declining self-revelation, or are unpleasant when revealed may be added, in modern times, the names of Mr. Lewes¹⁸ . . . and the Duke of Argyll" (p. 394). Could such a remark come from a man unaware of how unpleasant he revealed himself to be in his own criticism?

Since Cassidy (pp. 78-80) gives much contemporary reaction to both article and pamphlet, it is unnecessary here to repeat

¹⁷In a letter to Rossetti, dated April 27, 1872, Sidney Colvin, preparing the reception for the pamphlet, declares that he has "set rods in pickle for the Fortnightly Review, Athenaeum, Saturday, Daily News, and Pall Mall; and there shall not be a whole bone left in the Buchanan-Maitland-Hutcheson skin" Angeli, A-41.

¹⁸This is very probably a repayment to Lewes for the snub received from him in Regent's Park (Cassidy, p. 81), and, if so, shows Buchanan's "instinct for recrimination" once again.

accusation and counter-accusation. It would seem that both sides were well-supported, and such an article as "Novelties in Poetry and Criticism" (Fraser's Magazine, n.s. V, May 1872, 588-596) provides a reasonably well-balanced view of the state of the controversy at this time, saying of Rossetti that "though he is often artificial, fantastic, and wilfully obscure, he has a real power which cannot be explained away by calling him fleshly, sub-Tennysonian, or any other names" (p. 596).

The publication date of The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day is not known. It was advertised for immediate publication before the end of April, 1872; and Rossetti had seen it by May 15 when William Michael noted in his diary that "This little book of Buchanan's seems likely to create a good deal of hubbub." Rossetti's own inner turmoil began with the statement on page one of the Preface indicating that the attacks made on Buchanan since the Contemporary were "the inventions of cowards, too spoilt with flattery to bear criticism." This accusation of cowardice was one of the major reasons for Rossetti's breakdown three weeks after first seeing it. Despite his disclaimers about any knowledge of Rossetti's "private life,"¹⁹ possibly inserted to avoid legal repercussions, Buchanan then proceeds to give a rich description of contemporary

¹⁹The comment from "Tennyson's Charm," quoted on page 77, demonstrates Buchanan's lack of personal knowledge of Rossetti, even if it does not dispel the impression that Rossetti's "amatoriness" and his "foreignness" were equally repugnant to the Scot.

Bohemia, implying that it is inhabited by Rossettis, Swinburnes and even Arnolds ("their religion is called culture, their narrow-mindedness is called insight," p. 6). He also repeats statements made in the Contemporary about "the self-control and easy audacity of actual experience" of a man chronicling "his amorous sensations," with heavy stress, again, on Rossetti's "maturity": he is "far too self-possessed to indulge in the riotous follies of the author of 'Chastelard,' and infinitely too self-conscious to busy himself with the dainty tale-telling of the author of the 'Earthly Paradise'" (p. 31).²⁰

On the question of the fleshliness in Rossetti's poetry, Buchanan quotes from Rossetti's defence of the sonnet "Love-Sweetness" in "The Stealthy School of Criticism"—

For here all the passionate and just delights of the body are declared—somewhat figuratively, it is true, but unmistakably—to be as naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times (Buchanan's italics).

—in order to land hard on the one unfortunate word in Rossetti's statement with a footnote saying, "My complaint precisely is, that Mr. Rossetti's 'soul' concurs a vast deal too easily" (p. 58). Later Buchanan raises the question of "what [Rossetti]

²⁰ Buchanan had a very high regard for William Morris's gift for narrative poetry, and only included his name in his first general indictment because he knew that he was one of the Rossetti circle. Elsewhere he says: "Now of all contemporary poets, with perhaps the exception of Mr. Morris, Longfellow is the best teller of stories" Preface to Buchanan's edition of The Poetical Work of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (London, Moxon, 1868) p. ix.

means by the soul;" and fears "from the sonnet he quotes, that he regards

the feeling for a young woman's person, face, heart, and mind, as in itself quite a spiritual sentiment. In the poem entitled "Love-Lily" he expressly observes that Love cannot tell Lily's "body from her soul"—they are so inextricably blended. It is precisely this confusion of the two which, filling Mr. Rossetti as it eternally does with what he calls "riotous longing," becomes so intolerable to readers with a less mystic sense of animal function (p. 69).

Always hyper-sensitive to any criticism, Rossetti must have considered such remarks highly personal and very damaging for all their lack of real understanding of the poet or his work.

Damaging the pamphlet undoubtedly was to Rossetti, but it did Buchanan little good too. His style, his carelessness, his revealing asides, and his knowledge of erotic literature give new insights into his own psychological problems, perhaps, but did not encourage a sympathetic reading by his peers. As literary criticism, too, the pamphlet adds little of any real value to what Buchanan had written before. With its publication can be charted that point in his career as a serious man of letters when his hard-earned reputation began to wither.

The first chapter is devoted to a survey of poetry written in England under the influence of Amour Courtois, a "fever-cloud generated first in Italy . . . finally, after sucking up all that was most unwholesome from the soil of France, to fix itself on England, and breed in its direful shadow a race of monsters whose long line has not ceased" (p. 10). "Poor old" Donne, Davies, Carew, William Drummond, the two

Fletchers, Habington, Crashaw (the accompanying remark: "a Rossetti of the period with twice the genius and half the advantages" gives some idea of Buchanan's ignorance of both Crashaw's and Rossetti's lives), Suckling, Browne ("the Elizabethan Keats"), all were tainted by the epidemic that culminated in Cowley (p. 13). The antidote of eighteenth century classicism practically cured the disease but a "fresh importation of the obnoxious matter from France" (p. 15), the writings of Charles Baudelaire, caused it to break out again. There follows a chapter on Baudelaire's influence on Swinburne with which few of Buchanan's older readers would have disagreed: "All that is worst in Mr. Swinburne belongs to Baudelaire. The offensive choice of subject, the obtrusion of unnatural passion, the blasphemy, the wretched animalism, are all taken intact out of 'Fleurs de Mal'" (p. 22). Buchanan even quotes from Baudelaire's first poem ("Au Lecteur") "Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère!" (p. 23), apparently unaware that it was precisely to the Buchanans of this world that the poem was directed. He concludes with a statement on Baudelaire which is consistent with his views on Rossetti (and which again indicates Buchanan's rather Philistine scorn for introspection):

Here I must leave the writings of Charles Baudelaire only observing in conclusion that, in spite of their seeming originality, they belong really to the Italian school in so far as they are the posings of an affected person before a mirror, the self-anatomy of a morbid nature, the satiated love-sonnets of a sensualist who is out of tune with the world and out of harmony with the life of man (p. 29).

Buchanan, after expressing his belief that Swinburne "is obviously capable of rising out of the fleshly stage altogether" (p. 31), then turns to "the head of the school," ("who avows his poems to be perfectly 'mature,' and who has taken many years of reflection before formally appealing to public judgement"). The Contemporary article follows almost verbatim, after which comes Buchanan's response to "The Stealthy School of Criticism," which is little more than a new assortment of fleshliness culled from "The House of Life." Flat assertion follows flat assertion:

Sonnet VII, "Love's Lovers," is meaningless, but in the best manner of Carew and Dr. Donne; and the same may be said of Sonnet VIII, "Passion and Worship." Sonnet IX, "The Portrait," is a good sonnet and good poetry, despite the epithets of "mouth's mould" and "long lithe throat." Sonnet X, the "Love Letter," is fleshly and affected, but stops short of nastiness. Sonnet XI is also innocuous. Sonnets XII to XX are one profuse sweat of animalism, . . . (p. 60).

At one point Buchanan contradicts what he has said earlier concerning poetic subjects, "which any writer may be fairly left to choose for himself" (pp. 46-7), when he deplores the "persistent choice of subjects repulsive in themselves and capable of fleshly treatment." He cites, with as lurid a description of each as is necessary to 'prove' his point, "Jenny" ("a production," he had already said, which was "suggested" to Rossetti by Buchanan's own "quasi-lyrical poems"), "Eden Bower," and "Nuptial Sleep" as rather flimsy evidence of this persistence (p. 68).

In "Pearls from the Amatory Poets" Buchanan gives his

principal criterion for judging poetry once again:

The morality of any book is determinable by its value as literature—immoral writing proceeding primarily from insincerity of vision, and therefore betokened by all those signs which enable us to ascertain the value of art as art. In the present case the matter is ludicrously simple; for we perceive that the silliness and insincerity come, not by nature, but at second hand; Mr. Rossetti and Mr. Swinburne being the merest echoes—strikingly original in this—that they merely echo what is vile, while other imitators reproduce what is admirable (p. 70).

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to showing some close, some far, and many non-existent, parallels between the earlier English poets and the Fleshly School. It is little more than a compilation of English erotic verse; having drawn the reader's attention to Carew's "The Rapture" in his discussion of the "House of Life," Buchanan here recommends Donne's eighteenth elegy to the reader fascinated by Swinburne's "Love and Sleep, as known by the Moderns" (p. 76). He then turns to the "slovenly and laboriously limp" diction characteristic of Rossetti's poetry, and gives copious examples of it, using it to prove his thesis "that insincerity in one respect argues insincerity in all" (p. 81).

The last chapter, "Prospects of the Final Degradation of Verse," returns to the snake of sensualism of London, 1872, and contradicts what Buchanan said a month earlier in "Tennyson's Charm," if not the entire pamphlet, by saying:

Now God forbid that I should charge any living English poet with desiring to encourage debauchery and to demoralise the public. I believe that both Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Rossetti are honest men, pure according to their lights, loving what is beautiful, conscientiously following what inspiration lies within them (p. 83).

No longer cold-bloodedly trying to promote passion and vice, Rossetti and Swinburne are merely misguided men who know not what they do. As an afterthought, strengthening the impression that the chapter was written hastily, Buchanan brings one last charge against Swinburne and Rossetti by saying that they "use Verse as the vehicle of whatever thoughts are too thin or too fantastic . . . to stand without the aid of rhythmical props" (p. 88). Notes appended to the pamphlet quote various reviews supporting Buchanan's contentions, and an attempt to justify his championing of Whitman, since he realized that he was open to the charge of being inconsistent by his support of another "fleshly" poet when castigating Rossetti and Swinburne.

What detracted from such validity as was to be found in the pamphlet, and what made its publication probably the greatest mistake of Buchanan's career, was its fleshly tone, the obvious enjoyment Buchanan derived from writing it. His imagination carried him away. The situation described in the sonnet XXI, "Parted Love," is, for example, the lover "despairingly waiting" for his lady who "has retired to get breath and arrange her clothes" (p. 61). On the next page, in his gleeful hunt for the fleshly, Buchanan concedes, "we get nothing very spicy till we come to Sonnet XXXIX." "Eden's Bower" is found to be concerned with "the general arts of fornication" (p. 68). Such transparent hypocrisy is laughable (possibly intentionally so), and Rossetti's friends made the most of it. But behind Buchanan's description of the "Leg disease" afflicting London,

behind his "Pearls from the Amatory Poets," behind the whole Fleshly Controversy is discernible the diseased imagination of a sick man. "No one can be better aware," admits Buchanan, of the insidious allure "of the charm of writers like Baudelaire" (p. 20), and his really wide knowledge of erotic European literature attests to the fact. Talking of the rampant sensuality of his time, and prostitution in London at this time was particularly rife, he says, "Look which way I will, the horrid thing threatens and paralyzes me" (p. 2). Or again, describing "the models of the female Leg" everywhere displayed, he sees "the whole definite article as far as the thigh, with a fringe of paper cut in imitation of the female drawers and embroidered in the female fashion!" (p. 3). Again, "The Leg, as a disease, is subtle, secret, diabolical. It relies not merely on its own intrinsic attractions, but on its atrocious suggestions. It becomes a spectre, a portent, a mania" (p. 4). While he may have been trying to be funny at times in the pamphlet, here, surely, is a sick man fighting something he finds frightening in himself, putting on record evidence of his own unnatural attitudes to sex. "To the pure all things are pure" is an adage that was used several times in this controversy; it was Buchanan's own impurity that detected the impurities in Rossetti's poetry; and his contemporaries were not slow to point this out. Claiming to articulate a healthy attitude to sensualism, Buchanan was not mentioning the unmentionable so much as he was advertising it in a particularly meretricious and self-revelatory way. It was as

much this distasteful side to his character as it was the effects of his attack on Rossetti that contributed to the decline of Buchanan's reputation after 1872.

One of the earliest reviews of the pamphlet, "Fleshing the Fleshly," appeared on the front page of the Echo for March 18, 1872. Joseph Knight (friend and biographer of Rossetti and, later, the editor of Notes and Queries) suspected then, and 'confirmed' a few weeks later that its author was none other than Robert Buchanan.²¹ As the title would suggest, the personal nature of the controversy was played up in a most lurid way: "In order to bear tamely the charges and insults hurled pell-mell at the heads and hearts of Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Rossetti, they would really need to be the veriest aestheticised simulacra of humanity Mr. Buchanan seems to think them;" Buchanan's conviction that England is at the mercy of a conspiracy to work its moral downfall is then ridiculed as having little basis in fact (a view not inconsistent with that in "Criticism as One of the Fine Arts"); but then Buchanan's criticism is described as "uninstructed and unjust," "unnecessarily offensive" (this after the writer's own comments quoted above?), and his practice of quoting passages out of context producing "a grosser and more exclusively sensual impression" in the pamphlet than they do in that original

²¹In a letter from Ford Madox Brown to William Michael, dated June 17, 1872, Brown writes "I opened a letter from Knight to Gabriel this morning stating that he is now convinced RB himself wrote the article in the Echo." Angeli Papers, A-147.

setting. The critic concludes that the continental (Buchanan's chauvinism once again?) "Platonic passion for the flesh is a phase of sentiment" not likely to last long in England. Whether Buchanan's or not, this article was considered by Rossetti to be his work, and, as will be shown, its effect on the poet was disastrous.

A week later, the Athenaeum refused to discuss "a worthless and discreditable treatment of what might have been a perfectly just and interesting question of criticism" (p. 651), and devoted all its space to a history of the controversy, fixing very definitely Buchanan's responsibility for the use of the pseudonym ("Aliases so taken up and dropped again are really proper to only one class of the community"), and restating the view of Rossetti and his friends that the "significant part" of Buchanan's "performance is not its matter, but the circumstances of its authorship and publication." There follows a personal attack on Buchanan far stronger than anything the Scot wrote of Rossetti (but to be exceeded by as great a margin again when Swinburne produced Under the Microscope a month later). Buchanan's "intolerable grossness," his "wonderful instinct" for the salacious, "the astonishing force and relish" of his vocabulary, his good memory for the "coarser improprieties" of sixteenth and seventeenth century verse, are all pointed out at the risk of increasing the pamphlet's sales to the "'pimpled clerks' it affects to denounce" (p. 650).

On June 1, 1872, the Saturday Review also began "Mr. Buchanan and the Fleshly Poets" with a history of the controversy, but hoped that "the personal question at issue" in it should be forgotten so that the critical question alone could be settled. The reviewer repeats, in stronger language, the objections in "Coterie Glory" to "the unwholesomeness . . . of the mutual admiration" in which the school "appear to live move and have their being." But he, too, finds Buchanan to suffer "from a morbidly quick and sensitive perception of unsavoury suggestions" and not to appear "to have cultivated with much success the poet's faculty of looking at the best and purest side of things" (p. 700). All this having been said the critic then launched into a direct and telling assault on Rossetti and his poetry, reiterating Buchanan's ideas in a remarkably Buchananlike tone:

. . . honest plainness of speech is not the characteristic of the Fleshly School, any more than simple straightforwardness of thought. It is their sickly self-consciousness, their emasculated delight in brooding over and toying with matters which healthy, manly men put out of their thoughts, not by an effort, but unconsciously, by a natural and wholesome instinct—it is, in short, their utter unmanliness which is at once so disgusting, and, so far as they exercise any influence, so mischievous. And on the whole we are not sure that Mr. Rossetti's poetry is not more mischievous in its way than Mr. Swinburne's. In the latter there is at times a fitful breeziness from out-of-doors, while with Mr. Rossetti the shutters seem to be always closed, the blinds down, there are candles for sunshine, and the atmosphere is of a close heavy kind that reminds one alternately of the sickroom and the conservatory . . . (p. 701).

Whether all these onslaughts were Buchanan's handiwork or

not, their effect on their victim could scarcely have been greater if they had been what Rossetti considered them to be: the calculated and cold-blooded hounding of the poet to his grave. For anyone who did not know him, such paranoia might have been unthinkable, and Rossetti's reaction out of all proportion. A study of his life shows him to have been particularly susceptible to hostile criticism, and what little resistance he might have been able to mount was very much undermined by his deterioration since the death of his wife in 1862.

CHAPTER IV

i

ROSSETTI'S REACTION TO BUCHANAN'S ATTACKS

To someone like Buchanan, who afterwards admitted that he had never seen Rossetti, the object of his attack might well have appeared to be a normal man enjoying all the fruits of the recent success of his poetry. Reports of the prices his paintings were fetching, too, would have contributed to the impression of a happy, successful and secure man; for Buchanan (who had suffered very real privation in his early days in London) shared with Rossetti the view that success is in large part measurable in terms of money. Rossetti's successes in another area probably gave colour, as Evelyn Waugh says, to Buchanan's attack (he did call him an "amatory foreigner"); appearing in his poetry as a platonist with ethereal views of women, in private life Rossetti was "an unromantic sensualist" living with "an apparently soulless woman," Fanny Cornforth.¹ Waugh might have mentioned Rossetti's liaison with Janey Morris, which seems to have been consummated at this time, but F.M. Ford does, for the imaginative, round out the picture by saying: "He lived his life as it came; satisfied his desires as they came and let the natural effects ensue from natural causes."²

¹See above, p. 23 and footnote.

²Rossetti: A Critical Essay on his Art (London: Duckworths, n.d.), pp. 153-4.

Rossetti was not only enjoying a sexual freedom that his traducer quite possibly envied, but he was enjoying it absolutely uncensored, and this could well have galled the Scot. Intimate knowledge of Rossetti's character, or of his art, Buchanan did not have; and it is doubtful if it would have been a moderating influence on his criticism if he had had it. He assumed, if he cared about it, that Rossetti was no more susceptible to criticism, however harsh, than anyone else associated with the arts. Such was not the case.

Ever since his childhood, Rossetti had always been somewhat isolated from his fellows. Living a withdrawn inward life, happy enough in his family, he did not often play games with other children, and was often moody and uncommunicative. His interests outside painting and poetry were always remarkably limited. He was twenty-two before the opposite sex held any attraction for him, and it was then that he fell in love with his future wife, Elizabeth Siddal. Subsequently his overthrow of his mother's puritanical ethic was total. He became chronically lazy and incapable of sustaining the discipline and self-denial necessary to acquire the technical skill of a master artist. Very early in his career did he demonstrate his pathological sensitivity to criticism. The vehemence of the response to his, Holman Hunt's and Millais' exhibition in 1851 put him into a state of "indolence and instability"³ that

³Evelyn Waugh, Rossetti: His Life and Works (London: Duckworths, 1931), p. 48.

lasted for several months. After that harrowing experience he never submitted pictures to the Royal Academy, and rarely displayed them publicly; even his patrons having to promise no public exhibition of his work as a condition of purchase. The work itself, in its emphasis on form, stability and harmony, in its aspiration to the eternal tranquillity of some otherworld of the spirit, seems a rejection by the artist of the gross, hurlyburly, imperfect world which was Victorian England. A born leader, all his life Rossetti was surrounded by men who admired him if they did not worship him, and, as a result, he had very little experience of harsh criticism to prepare him for the trial ahead. Nevertheless by 1870, he was so inhibited, so alienated from his fellow men⁴, so unsure of his pictorial gifts, and so extravagant in his personal life, that he spent much of his time painting lucrative replicas of successful canvases.

One serious impediment to artistic productivity was the onset of insomnia, which William Michael dates at 1867 (DGR as Writer, p. 157). Unable to rest and unable to work, Rossetti's life was overshadowed by depression. In 1869 he began to lose his sight, a psychic and symbolic failure, that Rossetti was convinced had physical rather than psychological origins. At Penkill in August 1869, he had come very close to

⁴William Michael puts Rossetti's being "too isolated" above his pride and sensitivity as the major contributing factor to his deterioration at this time (DGR as Writer, p. 157).

taking an apparently deliberate fall down a steep cliff. To cure his insomnia he took sedatives, and began to drink heavily, and it was in 1869 that he began to take chloral hydrate, which did stupify him sufficiently for him to achieve some kind of sleep.⁵ Says Professor Fredeman (in the article cited p. 30),

In a man of Rossetti's melancholic and reclusive temperament, phlegmatic and lethargic metabolism, and sedentary and irregular habits, the drugs tended only to exacerbate the complaints they were taken to relieve. But whether his ills were real or imaginary, symptomatic or causal, the effects were palpable and devastating.

The beginning of Rossetti's decline, the accentuation of basic character traits known since his childhood, can be seen to derive from the emotions arising from his wife's death in 1862. Since the truth of that event has yet to be established, it is impossible to know what Rossetti's true emotions were concerning it. Grief at her death, or remorse at his own unconcern or unawareness of her true condition on that fateful night, complicated by guilt because of what he actually did and fear of the censure (or worse) that he would suffer if the truth were known, these or some combination of these, exacerbated by other contributors to neurosis (his relationship with Janey Morris being a good first choice), could have been enough to debilitate the most stoic and unimaginative of men. Such emotions would

⁵R.D. Altick makes the interesting observation that chloral taken with Scotch as a chaser results in synergism: each intensifying the other's effect, "so that the result to Rossetti's mental and physical health was far more insidious than it would have been if he had taken [each] separately." The Scholar Adventurers (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 262.

have been further complicated by the gnawing sense of inadequacy that Buchanan's charge of cowardice, as he understood it, certainly made apparent. The fear of failure, of public opprobrium, which had dogged and incapacitated Rossetti from his earliest years, became, not unreasonably, the paranoid conviction (much supported by Ford Madox Brown's assurances that this was indeed so⁶) that he was the victim of an organized conspiracy. Anticipated as it was, Buchanan's attack went far to confirm him in his belief.

As might be expected of a man congenitally lazy and racked by the psychological handicaps described, Rossetti, never strong physically, was in a greatly weakened state by 1871. There is an ominous entry in William Michael's Diary (for November 29, 1871), which suggests some physical debility that is not mentioned so early in the biographies:

G troubled me not a little by telling me that he spat blood to-day; and this not for the first time, as the same thing had occurred at Kelmscott.

Another debility, only mentioned in recent biographies (for Paul Franklin Baum it held all the mystery of my Uncle Toby's wound), was the hydrocele with which he had been afflicted since 1866.

Despite all these handicaps and afflictions, in October 1871, Rossetti could return to London after as idyllic and artistically productive stay at Kelmscott as he could have

⁶In William Michael's Diary (May 26, 1872), Brown is reported as saying that "a dead set at all artists and men of our connection" was behind Buchanan's attack.

wished; he had not been in better form for a long time. But a storm was about to break over his head that would set back his poetic ambitions ten years and which was going to leave him a broken man. To William Bell Scott on October 2 (Doughty-Wahl, 1174), he wrote that he was "getting into the poetic groove" and, at this rate, would have "another book ready by the end of three months." A little later, and not in any way to be construed as the reason for Rossetti's leaving Kelmscott, as Doughty's editing of this letter in the Life (p. 486) would indicate, comes this unconsciously ironic comment:

I see by advertisements I figure as the first victim in a series (I presume) under the title of the 'Fleshly School of Poetry' in the Contemporary Review for October but haven't seen it yet.

When Rossetti did see the article, he could write to Ellis claiming that "For once abuse comes in a form that even a bard can manage to grin at without grimacing," but Scott's reaction gives a better idea of its impact, calling it "ferocious . . . the most deadly attack on the morality of the set and school that could be penned. Nothing like it has been done in criticism in late years" (Letter to Alice Boyd, October 20, Penkill, P2-71). The tone of Rossetti's letters at this time indicates that he was not unduly upset by the article, however. William Michael stresses that his brother was "displeased, indignant, perhaps incensed, and disposed to 'give as good as he got;' but still not seriously wounded or deeply mortified, so far as the Contemporary article went" (Family Letters, I, 299). Against this must be set, when allowances for the

notorious inaccuracies and malice of the work are made, Scott's later statement in Autobiographical Notes (p. 169) that the article was "like a slow poison" gradually impairing what little inner balance Rossetti still retained. Scott talks of one of the great geniuses of the age "visibly breaking down under the paltry infliction of an article." He recalls a midsummer (an obvious inaccuracy) party when Rossetti, the last to arrive, burst into the room "shouting the name of Robert Buchanan, who, it appeared he had discovered to be the writer" of the distracting piece. Playing this episode down (Family Letters, I, 297-298), William Michael does not deny that it took place or that this kind of behaviour was typical of Rossetti at this time. In fact Rossetti was apt to fly out of control at the least check to his desires, especially when in the company of his intimates; and it became part of Dr. Marshall's effective treatment that he should, in the summer of 1872, be looked after by relative strangers as much as possible. It is probably just to say that Rossetti was not greatly upset by the article, but the persistence of his search for its author does indicate that he was perturbed.

Since all hostile criticism was seen by Rossetti and his circle to be motivated by spite, and since Buchanan's resentment of the coterie was well known, to establish him as the pseudonymous writer was to be able to attribute to him the most obvious motivation, envy, envy at Rossetti's remarkably swift success; and therefore it was all-important to identify Thomas Maitland positively before any kind of retaliation could be

made. By October 20, Ellis had assured Rossetti that "that gross humbug Bobby Buchanan" (Doughty-Wahl, 1181, n.) was indeed the culprit; but William Michael, knowing that Buchanan was so concerned about reports of Swinburne's ill health as to send round a specialist for him, doubted that the Scot could be so solicitous of the health of anyone on whom he was launching so vicious an attack (Doughty-Wahl, 1178, n). This episode does seem to indicate that Buchanan did not see his attack as personal, that Buchanan must have liked Swinburne, and may have wanted to establish a friendship with him. This last suggests another motivation for his attack: jealousy at being excluded from what was, apparently, one of the choice inner literary worlds of the time (such a feeling animates Buchanan's earliest onslaught on the group, "Lady Letitia's Lilliput Hand.").

Despite Ellis's letter of October 20, Maitland's identity was not firmly established for another month. Owing to a misunderstanding, Simeon Solomon was reported to deny that Buchanan was their man. After many rumours, it was not until a letter by Knowles (the editor of the Contemporary Review) was seen by Rossetti in late November that the question was finally settled (Diary, November 29), and it was another two weeks before Buchanan publicly acknowledged his handiwork.

Ever since October 20th, however, Rossetti had been engaged in several literary attempts to give as good as he got. Says Scott in his letter of that day already quoted: "G makes rhymes without end on author and publisher" of the article.

The rhymes ranged from limericks⁷, of which there are several still extant, to a parody of Tennyson's "The Sisters" entitled "The Brothers" (being, presumably, Maitland and Buchanan), which was, according to William Michael, "a very good hit" (Diary, December 25) but was therefore open to legal action.⁸ In his Diary (October 21) William Michael noted that Gabriel was "minded to write and print a letter castigating Buchanan." On October 27, Scott reported that Gabriel was "enditeing [sic] a pamphlet" (Penkill, P2-71), but William Michael notes four days later that it was unfinished, and on November 20 that Gabriel "did not feel any great ardour to completing it." Once Buchanan had been forced into the open, Rossetti quickly completed the pamphlet and it was partially printed by November 29, only for Ellis to reject it for publication on the advice of his lawyer. "The Stealthy School of Criticism" William Michael describes in his Diary for December 16 (the day of its publication in the Athenaeum, 792-4) as "being the more serious portion of

⁷This was to appear on the title-page of Rossetti's proposed pamphlet:

As a critic, the Poet Buchanan
Thinks Pseudo much safer than Anon.
Into Maitland he's shrunk,
Yet the smell of the skunk
Guides the shuddering nose to Buchanan. (Doughty-Wahl, 1181)

⁸The only accessible stanza of a poem still extant, but which this writer has not found, is that which Professor Doughty quotes in the Life. Buchanan is "gloating over his miserable conduct":

In our Contemptible Review
I stuck the beggar through and through
(Oh Robert-Thomas is dread to see) (p. 486).

the rejoinder which he had written to Buchanan." It was a reasonably measured and dignified reply. Rossetti does insist a little too much on Buchanan's "malicious intention" and the ludicrous idea that one poet could possibly judge another's work impartially; this personal nature of Buchanan's criticism is stressed by the persistent repetition of synonyms for 'attack' and 'attacker,' as well as by the title. Unlike the Athenaeum six months later (see above, p. 88), Rossetti then went on to answer Buchanan's main indictments, a tacit admission of their force and validity, which some of his friends and his brother (Diary, passim), still smarting from Buchanan's riposte of two years before, felt was bestowing more notice on Buchanan than he was worth. Thus it is to Buchanan's credit that he elicited from Rossetti one of his few published prose statements on his poetry. Sensitive to Buchanan's main charge, Rossetti, grandly vague, defended "Nuptial Sleep" as being a "sonnet-stanza" in a greater poem, "embodying, for its small constituent share, a beauty of natural universal function, only to be reprobated in art if dwelt on . . . to the exclusion of those other highest things of which it is the harmonious concomitant" (p. 793). Offending passages in "A Last Confession," "Willowwood, I," "Eden Bower" and "Jenny" are most carefully explained. The most important statement in the article is Rossetti's claim to "take a wider view than some poets or critics, of how much, in the material conditions absolutely given to man to deal with as distinct from his spiritual aspirations, is admissable within the limits of Art, . . ."

(p. 793). And it is on the strength of this one statement (besides his poetry, of course) that for many of the younger generation of artists Rossetti became the leader of that burgeoning new movement in the art world: l'art pour l'art.

Since the issue of the Athenaeum (December 16, 1871) which contained "The Stealthy School of Criticism" also contained the letter from the Scot admitting his authorship of "The Fleshly School of Poetry" and threatening to republish it in an expanded form, Rossetti immediately resolved, on the publication of Buchanan's pamphlet, to produce his own extended reply (Diary, December 17). That Rossetti had been reluctant to go as far as he did in his paper war with Buchanan is indicated by Sidney Colvin's refusal to answer Buchanan's article, probably in his long article on Rossetti's work to be published the following month. After defending himself from possible charges of lack of loyalty, and saying that any further effort should be saved until the appearance of Buchanan's "mature concoction," Colvin ends by suggesting that friends of Rossetti coming to his defence give to Buchanan's "venomous gibberish just that semblance of plausibility which it is desirable that it should lack with all else" (Angeli, A-41, n.d.). Five months later Colvin organized the warm reception of Buchanan's pamphlet (see above, p. 78), possibly because he was aware of how much damage had been done to Rossetti by this episode.

There are, of course, many gaps in the knowledge of Rossetti's condition in the spring of 1872; and the exact date

of the publication of Buchanan's pamphlet is uncertain. In his Diary for May 15, William Michael reports that his brother came round to see him with Buchanan's book:

He seems sufficiently untroubled by it—save as regards one phrase on p. 1, "cowards," which is intended to apply to him more than anyone else. As to this he scribbled denunciatory letter to be sent to B, wh. he showed me. I advised him not to send it; indeed I consider that this word "cowards" has, where it comes, almost as little meaning as relevancy, and cannot be understood to convey any substantial charge of want of courage, physical or even moral.

The article in the Echo, "Fleshing the Fleshly," three days later, with its suggestion that if Rossetti and Swinburne did not answer Buchanan's "insults and charges" "they would really need to be the veriest aestheticised smulacra of humanity Mr. Buchanan seems to think them," perturbed the poet a good deal, all the more when it was suggested and later "confirmed" that Buchanan was its author.⁹ By this time, apparently, Rossetti's hold on himself was so insecure that he seriously consulted his brother on the advisability of challenging Buchanan to a duel (Doughty, p. 509). On June 1, instead of coming out solidly in support of him as he had been assured by Colvin that it would, the Saturday Review in its discussion of Buchanan's pamphlet repeated many of Buchanan's charges in language no less measured than the original (see above, p. 89). The damage

⁹Rossetti's perturbation is chronicled in his brother's Diary for Monday, May 20. William Michael "strenuously urged G to think and see as little of these matters as he can; and above all to take no steps"

that these reiterated charges of "unmanliness" inflicted on the hypersensitive poet is attested to by his collapse the next day, and Professor Fredeman has persuasively argued that this was indeed the final blow for Rossetti. Convinced that his very manhood was in doubt, and convinced that there really was a wide-ranging conspiracy to hound him into the grave, Rossetti "allowed himself to get worked" into "a nervous and distressed condition" on June 2, 1872. Rossetti's state did not dull his business instinct since he sold a picture for £735 (a price, "which is truly very large," said William in his Diary) on that Sunday morning, and only then succumbed to the pressures that the controversy had brought to a head.

As Professor Doughty points out, there was much evidence to support Rossetti's belief that he was the victim of persecution, and that, even by his intimates. He had suspected, quite wrongly, that Morris had written the unfavourable review of Poems in Blackwood's the previous summer (Morris' motives being not hard to find); and Hunt and Woolner, friends of very long standing, had "virulently" criticized some of Rossetti's water-colours (Doughty, p. 512). Browning, once Rossetti's idol, and certainly privy to, and sympathetic with, Buchanan's views of Rossetti's work, was now no longer much admired by the younger poet, possibly, as Doughty suggests, because rumours of his siding with Buchanan had reached Rossetti (pp. 515-6).¹⁰ Rossetti long ago had felt the need to convince

¹⁰Browning's letter to Isabella Blagden, written in June 1870, anticipates Buchanan's objections to Rossetti's poetry

Tennyson that it was not his own influence that had led to Swinburne's poetic excesses (see above, p. 52), and the list of those disenchanted with Rossetti, swelled as it was by those who found his surliness and lack of manners unattractive (traits induced partly by Rossetti's fear of the world's hostility), could range much further. His neighbours at Cheyne Walk, for example, objected to the presence of the poet's menagerie (with its sounds and smells), and Rossetti's subsequent recovery was marked by his very distinct aversion to returning there.

The general outline of the sequence of events following

and uses the same word as an example of his faulty prosody: Yes,—I have read Rossetti's poems—and poetical they are, —scented with poetry, as it were—like trifles of various sorts you take out of a cedar or sandal-wood box; you know I hate the effeminacy of his school,—the men that dress up like women,—that use obsolete forms, too, and archaic accentuations to seem soft—fancy a man calling it a lily,—lillies and so on; Swinburne started this, with other like Belialisms,—witness his harp-player, etc. It is quite different when the object is to imitate old ballad-writing, when the thing might be; then, how I hate "Love," as a lubberly naked young man putting his arms here and his wings there, about a pair of lovers,—a fellow they would kick away in reality.

Letters of Robert Browning, ed. Thurman L. Hood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), pp. 137-8.

William C. de Vane gives further evidence of Browning's agreement with Buchanan's main objections when he quotes from Domett's diary where Browning's hatred of all affectation is recorded, as his derision for "'the cant'" about the "'delicate Harmony'" of "Jenny's" rhymes, and his addition to Buchanan's parody of them (Houghton and Stange, p. 896) of the lines:

But grog would be sweeter

And stronger and warmer, etc.

"The Harlot and the Thoughtful Young Man: A Study of the Relation between Rossetti's Jenny and Browning's Fifine at the Fair," SP, XXIX (July 1932), 482.

that fateful Sunday has long been known. Medical advice was immediately sought, and Dr. Hake's house at Roehampton was recommended as a change of scene. Rossetti's paranoid delusions increased in frequency and intensity.¹¹ On the night of June 8, Rossetti heard a voice which, said William, "twice called out at him a term of gross and unbearable obloquy" (Doughty, p. 520); he then proceeded to drain a bottle of laudanum and went into a coma. His brother, driven close to the point of insanity himself, called the Rossetti family to Roehampton, fearing the worst. The poet recovered sufficiently to return with Ford Madox Brown to his home at Fitzroy Square; and it was the loyal Brown who disagreed with the physicians' potentially disastrous recommendation that Rossetti be placed

¹¹W.B. Scott's letter to Alice Boyd of June 8, 1872 is the best contemporary account of the poet's condition at this time: At first his disease was simply wounded egotism and monomania about the pamphlet and its author, by and by his constant cry was that he could not fight, he had no manhood and would have to die of shame. It seems the word 'cowards' is used in the pamphlet, and some papers have accused the school of poets as unmanly and so on. His next delusion, because we now all saw that he was suffering under delusions, even physical delusions, was that a conspiracy was formed to crush him. Browning's new book came with an affectionate word from Browning in the front of it, and Gabriel, although at first touched by this even to tears, soon began to find allusions to himself in it, and then Browning was his greatest enemy, determined to hunt him to death. The next step was decisive, he declared the walls to be mined and perforated by spies, and that all he did and said was known to the conspirators Immediately the medical men were gone, Gabriel swore they too were in the conspiracy . . . (Penkill, P2-4). "Browning's new book" was Fifine at the Fair, which could very well have contained some of Browning's real objections to Rossetti's fleshliness as Professor de Vane argues in the article cited.

in an asylum (and with which recommendation William Michael had agreed) and whose "common-sense" treatment for his friend was ultimately adopted under Professor Marshall's supervision (Penkill, P2-9). A further change of scene was decided upon and Rossetti's sojourn in Scotland began under the eyes of George Hake and Brown (soon replaced by William Bell Scott), William Michael being so overwrought that the doctors considered his presence to be eill-advised. With an ordered daily regimen, Rossetti gradually improved, and his reading and conversation dexterously led away from dangerous topics, Rossetti gradually recovered the desire to paint, and with the onset of autumn came the urge to return to Kelmscott, the scene of his productive period a year before. In late September, he went straight there only spending an hour or two in London en route, and there he was joined by Janey Morris shortly after his arrival.

Psychologically and physically crippled (concomitant with his breakdown was a hemiplegia, which left him lame for several months), Rossetti never fully recovered from the ill-effects of the summer of 1872. It is fair to say that to Buchanan must go the blame for bringing to a head a process of deterioration that Rossetti had undergone for several years before he published his poetry. Thus it is fair to assume that Buchanan's action hastened the death of the poet in February 1882, and that whatever the immediate cause of Rossetti's death, it was his materially weakened condition that allowed the poet to succumb to his final ailment so easily.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE CONTROVERSY

For the remainder of the year the controversy swirled on past the now indifferent Rossetti, with Swinburne¹² taking up arms again with the publication in early July of Under the Microscope. Rossetti, in May, had thought "it talented, but its tone somewhat exceptionable, as showing too intimate acquaintance with the minutiae of the hostile writings" (Diary, May 3), but he did "seem to agree," three weeks later, that it would give reviewers something other than Buchanan's production to talk about, but "enjoined Swinburne to say little or nothing about himself" in it (Diary, May 21).¹³ According to Professor

¹²Swinburne had suffered a rather tactless and independent attack at the hands of Mortimer Collins in his novel Two Plunges for a Pearl, which had been serially published from January to November 1871 in London Society. Collins was an intimate of Buchanan's but he was also a friend of Bertram Payne of Moxon's with whom Swinburne had fallen out. In the character Reginald Swynfen, Swinburne's weakness for alcohol was lampooned as was his pride of birth ("good family" was cited by Swynfen as being the one indispensable requisite for becoming a good poet). The exchange of letters between Swinburne and Rossetti concerning this shows Swinburne not to be very much concerned and Rossetti to be the epitome of common-sense (Lang, 408 and 410, Doughty Wahl, 1187, 1189).

¹³On the important question of the rift that developed between Rossetti and Swinburne at this time (they never met after Rossetti's breakdown), there is something new to be added. Despite the injunction not to, Swinburne did mention Rossetti by name at least twice in Under the Microscope, and referred to him several pages times, and to let the following stand (and to repeat it a few pages later), after Rossetti's attempted suicide, displays an unfortunate lack of tact on the part of the younger poet:

Hyder, "Swinburne's contemporaries largely ignored" Under the Microscope (Swinburne Replies, p. 12); it created much less stir than had Buchanan's much inferior pamphlet two months earlier. Probably the literary world had tired of the controversy; or it may have considered that Buchanan's attack did not merit such attention; or, finally, Swinburne's reply might have been thought far too savage for its purpose. It is, without doubt, one of the best pieces of sustained invective in the language, worthy to take its place with Swift's and Pope's work of the previous century. Since Swinburne affected never to be touched by hostile criticism (a pose he never abandoned), he approaches several examples of recent anonymous criticism with the objectivity of a scientist examining the lowest forms of life. Over half the pamphlet is devoted to Alfred Austin's recent comparison of Tennyson with Byron in Poetry of the Period, which includes Swinburne's delineation (only after carefully stating that it is his admiration for the poet that prompts such remarks, and not, as he will later charge Buchanan, his envy) of Tennyson's major failure in *Morte d'Albert*, as he delighted in calling the Idylls of the King;

It is long since Mr. Carlyle expressed his opinion that if any poet or other literary creature could really be "killed off by one critique" or many, the sooner he was so despatched the better; a sentiment in which I for one humbly but heartily concur.

C.K. Hyder, ed., Swinburne Replies (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. 37. All subsequent quotations from Under the Microscope will be taken from Hyder.

Professor Lang's statement on this question remains the best short summary of what is known and can reasonably be conjectured concerning it (Lang, fn. 421).

to a discussion of Whitman's poetic merits that gives ample indication of Swinburne's later celebrated reversal of opinion on the American; and to a few disparaging remarks about Lowell's "Thanksgiving Ode" ("wooden verse sawn into unequal planks and tagged incongruously with tuneless bells of rhyme torn from the author's late professional cap" (p. 68)). Interspersed throughout are to be found occasional and incidental gibes at Buchanan of truly biting wit.¹⁴ When Swinburne's whole attention is focussed on the Scot, savage irony results. Peppared with damaging references to Buchanan's lately published Drama of Kings, the Fleshly School of Poetry, his letters to the Athenaeum, his poetry, and his essays, Swinburne scourges the "polyonymous moralist" for his insincerity, malevolence, envy, ignorance, vanity¹⁵, and the pernicious habit of praising his own work.¹⁶ Buchanan's conduct

¹⁴In a footnote obviously referring to Buchanan's statements on the Fleshly School's prosody and deploring another critic's ineptitude on the same topic concerning Walt Whitman, Swinburne says he could wish this discussion "away, consigned to the more congenial page of some tenth-rate poeticule worn out with failure, and now squat in his hold like the tailless fox he is, curled up to snarl and whimper beneath the inaccessible vine of song" (p.64).

¹⁵"Time may have hidden from the eye of biography the facts of Shakespeare's life . . .; but none need fear that the next age will have to lament the materials for a life of Buchanan," is one of Swinburne's milder comments on the Scot's lifelong habit for prefacing his work with autobiographical anecdote (p. 75).

¹⁶"It is really to be regretted that the new habit of self-criticism should never have been set till now All students of poetry must lament that it did not occur to Milton for example to express in public his admiration of "Paradise Lost." It might have helped support the reputation of that poem against the severe sentence passed by Mr. Buchanan on its frequently flat and prosaic quality" (p. 74).

is likened to that of Laberius Crispinus in Jonson's Poetaster, "whose life is spent in the struggle to make his way among his betters by a happy alternation and admixture of calumny and servility" (p. 73); and the Scot is left in the last paragraph, stripped of all human dignity, an innocuous, "though very ugly," serpent, doomed "to go upon its belly and eat dust all the days of its life" (p. 87). One of Swinburne's less happy gibes, especially when it is remembered that it was a similar reference to Gray that prompted the Scot's vengeance in the first place, refers to the "versicles of one David Gray, a poor young poeticule of the same breed as his panegyrist (who . . . died without giving any sign of future distinction in the field of pseudonymous libel)" (p. 75); the bad taste of such remarks might explain the pamphlet's failure to reach a second edition.

After such a drubbing Buchanan tried to give as good as he got, but "The Monkey and the Microscope" (Saint Paul's Magazine, XI, August 1872, 240; Cassidy, pp. 82-3) is about as ineffective as its title might suggest. Forty lines of doggerel name-calling of the most puerile kind, it may show Buchanan's capacity for retaliation, his dogged indestructibility, but it surely demonstrates his folly in paying so much notice, and of such dismal worth, to a production which had gone ignored by nearly everyone else.

The feud continued with Buchanan, apparently¹⁷ being forced

¹⁷See Cassidy, p. 81, who follows Jay, p. 164.

to publish his Saint Abe and his Seven Wives and White Rose and Red anonymously to escape the vehement scorn of reviewers incensed at the effect that Buchanan's criticism was known to have had on Rossetti. Just who these reviewers were is not absolutely certain. Edmund Gosse, Simcox, Colvin, Forman, Skelton, and Knight probably subscribed to the continuation of this ugly business; and Swinburne's letters continue often to refer to Buchanan, often most derisively and scurrilously.¹⁸ The derision found its way into print three years later, with Swinburne making at least three separate assaults on Buchanan in 1875, beginning with the publication of The Works of George Chapman.¹⁹ In his Introduction, Swinburne describes the hero of one of Chapman's plays as being one "who assumes the mask of as many pseudonyms as ever were assumed by a prudent member of the libellous order of rascally rhymesters to vent his villainies in shameful society" (p. xxiii). Later there is mention of a "scribbling Scot of the excremental school of letters" (p. xxvii), and of the dirty tactics of a "verminous

¹⁸In an important letter to Theodore Watts (as he then was), dated December 12, 1872, Swinburne gives his real reason for writing Under the Microscope as being "the examination of certain critical questions of the day regarding Byron, Tennyson, and Whitman;" his attention to Buchanan being motivated by "affection for a friend rather than . . . personal irritation." Swinburne "could not but recognize the deplorable truth that the vilest of living scribblers had power to inflict grave annoyance and serious suffering on one of the noblest and to me dearest among men and poets" (Lang, 449).

¹⁹Published in London by Chatto and Windus in 1875.

pseudonymuncule . . . who may prefer for one rascally moment the chance of infamy as a slanderer to the certitude of obscurity as a scribbler" (p. xxxiv). Buchanan testified that he saw these remarks when called to the stand in the case of Taylor vs. Buchanan.

In 1875, also, Swinburne republished his critique of Matthew Arnold's poetry (see above, p. 41) in Essays and Studies.²⁰ As an obvious attempt to goad the Scot he added a scurrilous footnote to his previous slighting reference to David Gray in which he accused the dead poet of plagiarising from "such obscure authors as Shakespeare and Wordsworth," and, because of "the grievous harm done by false teaching and groundless encouragement," not being strong enough to know his own poetic weakness (p. 153). It was this amplification of his original gibe at Gray that Buchanan wrongly remembered much later to be the original impetus for the Contemporary article. As Cassidy says: "One point which cannot be doubted is Buchanan's assertion that the note enraged him to the point of desiring revenge" (p.83).

In the summer of 1875, an anonymous poem entitled Jonas Fisher: A Poem in Brown and White was published. Repeating, in a verse of a quality and style not unlike Buchanan's (at its worst), most of that Scot's reservations about the state of contemporary England, and particularly about the effeminate immorality of contemporary English poets, the long poem could very easily have been seen as Buchanan's work. It was, however,

²⁰Published by Chatto and Windus, 1875.

that of James Carnegie, Earl of Southesk. Swinburne assumed Buchanan to be the author, and celebrated his latest opportunity to revile him with this:

He whose heart and soul and tongue
Once above-ground stunk and stung,
Now less noisome than before,
Stinks here still but stings no more

(The Examiner, November 20, 1875, p. 1304).

A week later Swinburne, in an anonymous review, ascribed Jonas Fisher to either Buchanan or the devil, but concluded that the former must be its author. This Buchanan denied in the Athenaeum of December 4. On December 11, in the Examiner, there appeared a long letter entitled "The Devil's Due" and signed "Thomas Maitland," in which Buchanan was again named as the author and was castigated as the "multi-faced idyllist of the gutter," the letter ending with a parody of Buchanan's and Strahan's letters to the Athenaeum in December 1871, in which they had attempted to justify the original use of the pseudonym. Knowing that the author of this was Swinburne, who was not affluent, and hoping to damage him seriously by showing him to be a man of straw, the irate Scot sued the owner of the Examiner, Mr. P.A. Taylor, M.P., for the large sum of five thousand pounds; the case coming to court at the end of June, 1876. After three days of charge and counter-charge, in which much of the history of the controversy was traced, in which Buchanan's own poetry was read in court and pronounced fleshly, in which the judge condemned the fleshly tone of Buchanan's attacks on the school but also stated that much of the school's poetic production should never have been written ("if all of it was

consigned to the fire to-morrow the world would be very much better," Times, July 3rd, 1876, p. 5), the jury found for Buchanan, but awarded him a paltry £150 damages. Expressing a view of the matter that many must have shared, G.A. Sala summed it up as a "dismal case," made the more so by a "wordy barrister holding up to public odium" Swinburne, O'Shaughnessy, Morris ("the Ariosto of our age") and Rossetti ("the wondrous painter . . . and the author of a number of exquisite sonnets which . . . 'Time will not willingly let die'") (Illustrated London News, LXIX, July 8th, p. 42).²¹ Rossetti for the duration of the trial lay low at Bognor Regis, fearful that he might be subpoenaed and brought back into the centre of the sordid business. With this case overt hostilities ceased, Swinburne, so far as can be ascertained, never referring to Buchanan in print again.

One of the unfortunate back eddies of the controversy results from the ironical fact that both sides of it were very active in promoting Walt Whitman's critical acceptance, at a time when the American's poetic reputation was not high. Of the Scot's part in this Harold Blodgett says: "Literary history will count it one of Buchanan's highest honours that he recognized Whitman's genius early and fought lustily for Whitman's recognition."²² It was Buchanan, however, who brought the

²¹The following Monday (July 8th, 1876) the Pall Mall Gazette published a cockney poem (by H.D. Traill) of no great merit pointing up the moral of the whole affair (Cassidy, p. 88).

²²Walt Whitman in England (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1934), p. 76.

American's name into the controversy (as was noted in chapter II, William Michael was very careful to point out Buchanan's contribution to Whitman's cause in the late sixties in his preface to Poems of Walt Whitman), because he was aware of the apparent inconsistency in championing Whitman while attacking Rossetti. To The Fleshly School of Poetry Buchanan appended a lengthy note explaining the difference between the "imitative and shallow" fleshly poets and the "outrageously original and creative," spiritually pure and healthy, bard (p. 96). Buchanan deplores the "fifty lines of a thoroughly indecent kind" in Whitman's work, but such "sheer excess of aggressive life" is to be found in Shakespeare, Aristophanes, Rabelais and Victor Hugo among others (p. 96); he continues:

It is in a thousand ways unfortunate for Walt Whitman that he has been introduced to the English public by Mr. William Rossetti, and been loudly praised by Mr. Swinburne. Doubtless these gentlemen admire the American poet for all that is best in him; but the British public, having heard that Whitman is immoral, and having already a dim guess that Messrs. Swinburne and Rossetti are not over-refined, has come to the conclusion that his nastiness alone has been his recommendation. All this despite the fact that Mr. William Rossetti has expurgated the fifty lines or so in his edition (p. 97).

It is entirely possible that Swinburne's later change of opinion concerning Whitman's poetic merit can be attributed, in part, to these remarks.

Both William Michael and Buchanan maintained contact with Whitman in the next few years, and worked independent of each

other to promote Whitman's cause.²³ Seeing a notice in the Athenaeum (March 11, 1876) which reprinted the principal points of an article in the West Jersey Press outlining Whitman's rejection by the American literary establishment and the poet's subsequent penury, Buchanan leapt to his defence in a typical manner. On March 13, he expressed his "English indignation," in a letter to the Daily News (p. 2), at the "determined denial, disgust and scorn" of the American publishers, editors, and writers, Buchanan using Whitman's "mostly sharks" to describe the publishers and similar abuse for the others. He continued:

As Christ had His crown of thorns (I make the comparison in all reverence), and as Socrates had his hemlock cup, so Walt Whitman has his final glory and doom though it comes miserably in the shape of literary outlawry and official persecution.

Buchanan ended by urging the establishment of a committee to collect subscriptions for at least 500 copies of Whitman's complete works. The letter stirred up a storm on both sides of the Atlantic. William Michael, ever ready to help Whitman no matter in whose company, corroborated Buchanan's statements in a letter to the News the following day.²⁴ M.D. Conway wrote

²³Professor Fredeman possesses a letter from Buchanan to the American poet and critic E.C. Stedman, dated November 28, 1873, in which Buchanan blandly states that "I think I may claim credit for having won Whitman what tardy honour he is getting here"

²⁴Swinburne's characteristic comment to William Michael on this matter cannot be overlooked: "Du reste, you must allow me to observe that it gives us a pleasing foretaste of the millennial period to see the lion (yourself) lying down (not with the lamb but) with the skunk." After referring to the "American 'eagle' and the Hebridean polecat," he calls a recent treatise by

in the New York Tribune (April 26) that he was "compelled to deny Mr. Buchanan's gross exaggerations." Whitman himself wrote to William Michael (May 5): "I do not approve Conway's letter . . . , an insult to Mr. Buchanan through me . . . every point in B's March 11th letter to the News, is well taken, & true without exception particularly all about the American critics, publishers, editors, "poets" & even what he says about my "impoverishment" is much, much nearer the truth, than Mr. Conway's and Lord Houghton's rose-colored illusion varnish" ²⁵ At the end of several letters from Whitman to William Michael, he politely asks him, if it is convenient, to show them to Buchanan, which, it can be assumed, they never were. And Whitman did write a short note of gratitude to Buchanan direct. ²⁶ For a while the Scot ran an independent subscription service for the American, but eventually, because of the hostility engendered by Taylor vs. Buchanan, was forced to give it up. On January 8th, 1877 he wrote to Whitman that because "the tone adopted by certain of your friends here became so unpleasant . . . I requested all subscriptions etc. to be paid over to Rossetti, and received no more myself." ²⁷ There

Whitman on poetry, "the most blatant bray of impotent and impudent ignorance I ever heard except from the throat of Bavius Buchanan or Maevius Maitland" (Lang, 729).

²⁵ Walt Whitman: The Correspondence 1842-1885, Edwin H. Miller, ed., 3 vols. (New York: New York University Press, 1961), III, 44.

²⁶ Op. cit., 36-7.

²⁷ Op. cit., fn. 64.

can be little doubt that Buchanan had materially assisted the American, and had also given him much support and encouragement when few others did.. But it was probably best for Whitman that William Michael remained his chief lieutenant in England, since Buchanan's gift for making enemies would sooner or later have handicapped the cause. Buchanan's last gesture for Whitman was his letter to President Cleveland of June 13th, 1885 asking, in vain, for a government pension for the aged poet.²⁸

Cassidy is unable to go much beyond Jay (p. 167) in his search for a reason for Buchanan's attempt to make amends to Rossetti, six months before the poet's death, with his inscription to God and the Man. Both attribute it to the Scot's discovery of Rossetti's state of health, and a sense of remorse that he might unwittingly have contributed to it. And, as Cassidy says, "in 1881 Buchanan was a very different man from the neurotic and psychotic disputant of 1871 and 1872" (p. 88). The novel was dedicated:

To An Old Enemy

I would have snatch'd a bay leaf from thy brow,
 Wronging the chaplet on an honoured head;
 In peace and charity I bring thee now
 A lily flower instead.

Pure as thy purpose, blameless as thy song,
 Sweet as thy spirit, may this offering be;
 Forget the bitter blame that did thee wrong,
 And take the gift from me!

²⁸ Letters of William Michael Rossetti concerning Whitman, Blake and Shelley, Clarence Gohdes and Paull F. Baum, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1934), fn. p. 105.

In his Diary for January 6, 1882, William Michael calls these lines "a handsome retraction for past invidious attacks"; and notes the ironical fact that "G thinks the verses may really be intended for Swinburne," but Hall Caine and Watts-Dunton convinced him to the contrary.²⁹ After Rossetti's death, Buchanan affixed two further stanzas in the second edition of the novel (August 1882) addressed to "Dante Gabriel Rossetti." In his preface, Buchanan, who since "The Monkey and the Microscope" had not indulged in any further literary action against the Fleshly School so far as can be discovered, made one more retraction in which he praised Rossetti's "exquisite work." He admitted, for the first time, his lack of objectivity with a remark concerning the "incompetency of all criticism, however honest, which [is] conceived adversely, hastily, and from an unsympathetic point of view"; he ended by regretting that he should have ever ranked himself with the Philistines, encouraging "them to resist an ennobling and refining literary influence" He took "melancholy pleasure" from the fact that Rossetti understood and accepted the spirit of the dedication, as he had been informed by Hall Caine.

Having thus fully and handsomely admitted his error, Buchanan became once again the victim of continuing obloquy as the hastily written lives of Rossetti began to reach the market. In one of them, however, Hall Caine's original version of

²⁹Thomas Hall Caine, Recollections of Rossetti (London: Cassell, 1928), p. 226.

Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Elliot Stock, 1882), he was given the opportunity to defend and justify his attack on the poet which he did at some length, and it was here that he said that when the Contemporary article was published "the newspapers were full of panegyric; mine was a mere drop of gall in an ocean of eau sucrée." Buchanan gives as his motivation for the paper war that followed the reception given to his attack, "which turned irritation into wrath, wrath into violence." Of Swinburne's three onslaughts in 1875 he says: "if you compare what I have written of Rossetti with what his admirers have written of myself, I think you will admit that there has been some cause for me to complain, to shun society, to feel bitter against the world; but, happily, I have a thick epidermis, and the courage of an approving conscience." Later, he makes "full admission of Rossetti's claims to the purest kind of literary renown, and if I were to criticize his poems now,³⁰ I should write very differently. But nothing will shake my conviction that the cruelty, the unfairness, the pusillanimity, has been on the other side, not on mine" (fn. pp. 71-2).

All that is necessary to bring the Fleshly Controversy up to date is to point out that with every biography of Rossetti came a discussion of Buchanan's attack, and in every discussion envy, malice and baser motives were attributed to the Scot.

³⁰ On July 1st, 1882, Buchanan wrote to the Academy that Rossetti "never was a fleshly poet at all; never, at any rate, fed upon the poisonous honey of French art."

The process began with Joseph Knight in 1882, when he wrote of "this curiously unprovoked and unjustifiable attack" and categorically stated that Rossetti's early demise was caused by it.³¹ Cassidy gives a good summary of what Buchanan had to bear in his lifetime (pp. 90-3). After Jay, whose version of the controversy was praised for its moderation and justice, his has been the only account written from Buchanan's point of view, and has been hailed by Jerome H. Buckley, and many others, as an admirable review of the causes and consequences of the controversy.³² Since Buchanan's death in 1901,³³ no one has been harsher with him than Rossetti's latest biographer. Professor Doughty ascribes "jealousy, journalistic motives of self-advertisement and monetary gain" to Buchanan, calls him "a vulgar hypocrite," and concludes: "Low in mind, low in taste, low in breeding, and as an apostle of morality, evidently insincere; such was Buchanan" (p. 499).

Professor Fredeman, however, in the article cited, does achieve an objectivity in his most detailed history of this crucial period in Rossetti's life that the more partisan

³¹Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Walter Scott, 1887), p. 140.

³²The Pre-Raphaelites (New York: Random House, 1968), p. xxvi.

³³When Buchanan died, William Michael was asked by the Morning Leader, presumably because of the old animosities, to do an obituary of him, an invitation to write abuse (as he saw it) that he refused. Roger William Peattie, William Michael Rossetti as Critic and Editor (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, London University, 1966), p. 558, fn. 146.

Doughty and Cassidy lack. Citing much unpublished material, principally William Michael's Diary and William Bell Scott's letters, Professor Fredeman carefully examines the events that led up to Rossetti's breakdown in June 1872, and concludes that its causes could lie in the "differences between Buchanan's Contemporary article and the later pamphlet" (p. 116). These differences could have suggested to Rossetti that Buchanan knew of the recovery of the poetry in manuscript from Elizabeth Siddal's grave; and that he was hinting that Rossetti's "affair with Jane Morris was public knowledge" (p. 119). Certainly, to a man in Rossetti's preternaturally weakened condition, many of Buchanan's remarks could have been further envenomed by ironic undertones designed for his victim's ear alone.

There still remain questions that need answering. How, for example, was Rossetti so sure that Buchanan was going to attack him? Was his certainty the beginnings of his paranoia or did he know something now obscured by time? Was Buchanan's attack tongue-in-cheek? And was he outmanoeuvred when his enemy deliberately took it seriously, even when he knew that Buchanan was being less than sincere? Did Buchanan ever meet William Michael or Swinburne? On the last question Cassidy speculates a little, but there is no evidence to suggest that the antagonists did meet. Cassidy does not discuss the validity of Buchanan's criticism, and how it modified contemporary attitudes to Rossetti, and it is to an examination of these related questions that the last chapter of this thesis will be devoted.

CHAPTER V

THE VALIDITY OF BUCHANAN'S CRITICISM

Had his motivation been more altruistic than it was, had his criticism of Rossetti's poetry been less coloured by personal animosity than it was, Buchanan could have produced, paradoxically enough, a much more telling indictment of the poetry than he did. His whole argument rests somewhat too precariously on the premise that Rossetti is a sensual poet, that he is didactic in the service of vice. Buchanan charged him and his friends with being "bound by solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art;" and of valuing "poetic expression" higher than "poetic thought," thereby implying "that the body is greater than the soul" (Houghton and Stange, p. 889). Having read the poetry with this conclusion already formed, Buchanan could see Rossetti's archaisms of form, his quaint medieval or obscure Latinate diction, and his imitation of Tennyson and the Brownings (not to mention himself) as insincere shifts of manner reflecting the basic immorality of matter. In his rather simplistic, and much too sweeping, view, "insincerity in one respect argues insincerity in all, and where we find a man choosing worthless subjects and affecting trashy models [in this particular context Buchanan is referring to Cowley, Donne and Crashaw], we may rely on finding his treatment, down to the tiniest detail, frivolous, absurd, and reckless" (Pamphlet, p. 81). Why did Buchanan think that

Rossetti was basically insincere? Because, he must have felt, no man could honestly promote vice. Buchanan had come to believe that man was basically good, therefore anyone denying the fact was a hypocrite. Thus it was crucial to his much too simple argument that Rossetti was shown to be fleshly; once that was satisfactorily proved all the rest followed.

Unfortunately for Buchanan, the age in which he lived needed little more than the righteous assertion of such a charge for many people to accept it. Despite much available ammunition Buchanan really did not make even this aspect of his case as well, or as honestly, as he could have done.

Buchanan was not the first to detect a certain unsavouriness in Rossetti's poetry; as has been noted in Chapter III, some of Rossetti's friends, long before they knew of the furor that Buchanan was to cause, declared that Poems was not fit for the drawing-room table.¹ Later J.A. Symonds, not a person lightly given to such objections, deplored Rossetti's lack of taste being brought to the reader's attention by the "habitual emphases of his style to details which should have been slurred over. His defined incisive way of writing fixes the mind repulsively on physical images and 'poems of privacy.' The effect is vulgar

¹This could be part of the reason why Colvin and the rest were at such pains to attack Buchanan's use of a pseudonym; it was an ad hominem attempt to portray Buchanan as an envious fellow-poet in order to divert attention away from an argument whose central validity they had already tacitly admitted. Buchanan played into their hands by allowing Rossetti's friends such an eminently plausible offence; and, to avoid the same charges later, he was forced to publish the hurriedly written pamphlet in his own name, when surprise and credibility were all but lost.

and ill-bred. We shrink from it as from something nasty . . ." (Macmillan's Magazine, XLV, February 1882, 327). If so well-known a denizen of Bohemia as Symonds could deplore the lack of reticence in Rossetti's sonnets, the typical Victorian's reaction can easily be imagined. One of Buchanan's failures was that in his blanket indictment he did not pick his examples of Rossetti's fleshliness as carefully as he might have done, and in overstating his case he lost the ear of many who had reached similar conclusions concerning this aspect of the poetry. There is some truth, however, in Buchanan's assertion, supported in remarkably similar language by Symonds, that Rossetti's love-poetry seems the record of actual experience when compared with that of Swinburne, which he saw as the relatively harmless product of the over-heated emotions of an imaginative youth. Buchanan was apparently trying to isolate Rossetti as one of the deplorable influences on the gifted, and, Buchanan felt, superior, younger poet; he was trying to find in Swinburne's generally acknowledged master the source of his animalism (see Buchanan's letter to Monckton Milnes quoted above, footnote 4, p. 72).

Sensuality there undoubtedly is in Rossetti's poetry, but not to the extent, or of the nature, that Buchanan claimed. Isolated phrases are as objectionable, from the Victorian point of view, as many declared them to be; and Buchanan is quite possibly right in attributing this to Rossetti's gift for seeing things vividly, and giving in his poetry the telling (and Pre-Raphaelite) detail, that might or might not be so easily apprehended in a pictorial representation of the same subject,

but which in poetry is never missed:

Yet still their mouths, burnt red,
Fawned on each other where they lay apart.
(*"Nuptial Sleep," Poems*, p. 193)

Above the long lithe throat
The mouth's mould testifies of voice and kiss.
(*"The Portrait," Poems*, p. 197)

Buchanan's other examples of Rossetti's fleshliness, those from "A Last Confession," "Willowwood, I," and "Eden Bower" (Houghton and Stange, p. 893), if not literally depicting what Buchanan saw them to depict—and here conscious dishonesty seems to be the only explanation for his use of them for his purpose—nevertheless do support his main, if somewhat vague, contention that "the fleshly feeling is everywhere." In Rossetti's defence, it should be said that in any poet who deals almost exclusively with the relation of the sexes there is bound to be detail capable of supporting such a generalization. But when Buchanan looks at whole poems, the evidence adduced is not very convincing. Of "Jenny," after saying that neither the subject nor the poetic treatment of that subject were objectionable in themselves (on both of which counts he was later to contradict himself, Pamphlet, p. 68), and apparently unaware of the admissions he was making, he can only conclude that he found it "fascinating less through its human tenderness than because it, like all the others, possessed an inherent quality of animalism" detectable in the poem's "whole tone [which], without being more than usually coarse, seems heartless" (p. 894). Of "The Blessed Damozel" he makes the potentially illuminating observation (one which Pater

was to make) that it is placed first in Poems because it is "a key to the poems which follow" (p. 891); and he quotes this stanza (using his italics), but fails to make even the most elementary points concerning its sensuality:

And still she bowed herself and stooped
 Out of the circling charm;
Until her bosom must have made.
The bar she leaned on warm,
 And the lilies lay as if asleep
 Along her bended arm (p. 892).

There are many things that could be seen to be fleshly in "The Blessed Damozel," but he does not italicise these lines for the reference to female anatomy contained therein (he did that with "Troy Town"); nor even to deplore (as he must have deplored) the rhyme of "charm," "warm," and "arm;" but merely in order to say that "they are quite without merit, and almost without meaning" (p. 892). Of the blasphemous suggestion that the damozel is pining away in heaven of physical longing for her earthbound lover, there is not a word; of the too, too, solidly fleshly conception of the damozel, there is not a word; nor does Buchanan make anything of the apparent inconsistency of other souls being "like thin flames" while she is so solidly corporeal. Buchanan did have a case to make against Rossetti, but, in his frantic search for surface indelicacies and in his blanket denunciations of poems not containing these indelicacies, he failed to produce as coherent an argument as he could have done, and he failed, too, to remind the reader that much of Rossetti's poetry is not open to these objections. That they do have some validity, however, is shown by Rossetti's revisions of the poetry for publication in 1881.

On the question of fleshliness, Rossetti was particularly sensitive, as the history of "Jenny," and his remarks concerning that poem in "The Stealthy School of Criticism," show. The best way of gauging his opinion of the validity of Buchanan's charge is by trying to estimate the extent of its effect on his poetry. To this end a close textual comparison has been made between the "fifth" edition of Poems (that reviewed by Buchanan in October 1871) and the new edition of Poems and Ballads and Sonnets which appeared in 1881. In the course of this collation, some seventy-one changes were discovered which can be classified under three headings: those attributable to Buchanan's criticism; those that may be attributable; and those that clearly are not. An appendix has been provided which gives both original and emended version of every line of poetry (or title) that was changed, and also the degree of probability that such a change is to be attributed to Buchanan's attack (see below, pp. 160-171). In the last category may fairly be placed the different order of the poems, the use of the "Sonnets for Pictures, and other Sonnets" to make up the later "House of Life," and those emendations that Rossetti was continually making in Poems from 1870 until his death. For the purposes of this collation any change in a line of poetry is regarded as one change, whether it be an alteration in punctuation or the substitution of several new words; the insertion of a new stanza or stanzas (as is the case with "Sister Helen"), or the substitution of one stanza for another (as is the case with "Sudden Light"), also constitute one change.

Only one alteration can be attributed with any degree of certainty to Buchanan's criticism: the omission of the sonnet "Nuptial Sleep" from the later version of "The House of Life." There are fourteen emendations which may be attributed to Buchanan's criticism, two of which are not involved in the question of the poetry's fleshliness, however; and there are fifty-six which do not appear to be related to Buchanan's more specific charges. For example, the obscurity of "Sister Helen" is clarified by the addition of a stanza ("'Three days ago, on his marriage morn, Sister Helen, He sickened and lies since then forlorn'"), and many of the emendations clearly add force and clarity, several making such a contribution through the use of alliteration (e.g., the alteration in "A Last Confession," p. 68; or that in "The Stream's Secret," p. 156); and such changes as the substitution of "steel" for "blade" in the last line of "A Last Confession" (p. 83) with its suggestion of chill, precision, and finality are improvements that any poet might make.

About the omission of "Nuptial Sleep" from the later version of "The House of Life" there is little that needs to be said; it is the one emendation directly attributable to Buchanan's attacks, as William Michael's footnote in its first authorized republication after Rossetti's death verifies.² The poem, cast in the third person, unlike those before and after it, does not seem that

²W.M. Rossetti, ed., The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti with Illustrations from his Pictures and Designs (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1904), II, 232.

much more unwholesome than "The Kiss" or "Supreme Surrender." It is certainly the one sonnet that Buchanan persisted in calling fleshly, and it is undoubtedly very sensual, as Rossetti half admitted in "The Stealthy School of Criticism," but it is a pity he suppressed it, for it is not the pure animalism Buchanan considered it to be. The Scot was almost as outspoken, and certainly allowed his imagination full rein, in his objections to the affected diction and sensuality of "The Kiss:"

. . . in sonnet IV another and higher stage is reached, for the lady gives her lover a "consonant interlude" (which is the Fleshly for "kiss"), and —"somewhat figuratively, it is true, but unmistakably"—proceeds, as a mother suckles a baby, to afford him full fruition;—

I was a child beneath her touch (!),—a man
 When breast to breast we clung, even I and she,—
 A spirit when her spirit lookt thro' me,—
 A god when all our life-breath met to fan
Our life-blood, till love's emulous ardours ran,
Fire within fire, desire in deity.
 (Pamphlet, p. 59)

Yet Rossetti stuck to his guns, and did not alter this poem at all.

Probably the best way to treat the fourteen changes which may be attributable to Buchanan's attack is to examine those resulting from specific objections, and then to look at those that obviously reduce a poem's sensuality, even if Buchanan did not specifically object to the passage emended.

Buchanan was not the only person to deplore the blasphemy of the second sonnet of "The House of Life," "Love's Redemption," nor was he, of course, the only one to find "Nuptial Sleep"

revolting;³ for the purposes of this textual examination one could almost substitute "Mrs. Grundy" for Buchanan's name; it is not only Buchanan's criticism in itself but the view it represents that is here being examined, but he did criticize the sonnet twice in the pamphlet. On page 59, in answer to Rossetti's observation that "Nuptial Sleep" is a sonnet-stanza of a larger whole, Buchanan re-asserts that the sonnet sequence is "flooded with sensualism from the first line to the last." He then quotes Rossetti as saying that the love of the first sonnet, "Bridal Love", is a "creature of poignant thirst And exquisite hunger," and goes on to suggest that the sacrament of the next sonnet, "Love's Redemption," is an obvious metaphor for "the act of sexual connection" (as he puts it on page 78), rather than, which was undoubtedly Rossetti's intention, suggesting the mystical nature of the communion of twin souls. The emended version of the sonnet, with its four alterations eliminating the blasphemous use of the sacrament but stressing the religious nature of the love by the substitution of the word "testament", is less objectionable, but not as satisfactory, for, as Paull

³Buchanan later said that "Tennyson avowed to me viva voce that he considered Rossetti's sonnet on 'Nuptial Sleep' the 'filthiest thing he had ever read'" (Jay, p. 162). William Michael's Diary does record his being told by Frederick Locker that Tennyson "speaks of some of G's sonnets as the finest in the language" (November 24, 1871). But neither this nor Francis T. Palgrave's statement that "'The passion and imaginative power of the sonnet 'Nuptial Sleep' impressed [Tennyson] deeply'" (quoted by William Michael, op. cit., 234 from Hallam Tennyson's Memoir, II, 505) explicitly deny Buchanan's version of Tennyson's opinion.

Franklin Baum says, "the sestet fits the earlier form of the sonnet better than its later version."⁴

In Sonnet VI, "Supreme Surrender," "harvest-field" was substituted for "fallowfield" in the opening lines:

To all the spirits of love that wander by
 Along the love-sown fallowfield of sleep
 My lady lies apparent; and the deep
 Calls to the deep; and no man sees but I.

Buchanan quotes these lines (p. 60) to give the impression that Rossetti is here glorying in his possession of the naked, conquered female (the fertility of the critic's imagination not being in doubt). "Fallowfield", though italicised with the remainder of the second line, where "the whole business of love is chronicled in sublime and daring metaphor" (p. 60), Buchanan does not examine closely. Presumably he saw the female (very clearly!) as asleep, exhausted from lovemaking, and "lovesown", meaning impregnated, doubtless. The possible sterility of "fallowfield" he does not consider. Certainly Rossetti's alteration does change the emphasis, for "fallow" suggests that with sleep past the field will again be tillable, whereas "harvestfield" suggests sleep as the result of lovemaking with less suggestion of further activity (perhaps there is some hint, too, of the poet's own chronic insomnia!), that the sleep is a period not for regeneration but of fruition.

Buchanan drew attention (p. 60) to "the long lithe throat" and "the mouth's mould" as examples of fleshliness in "The

⁴Dante Gabriel Rossetti, The House of Life, ed. Paull F. Baum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 69.

Portrait." Not altering the second, Rossetti changed the first to the grandly vague and melodious "enthroning throat" (which William Michael glossed as "columnar"), thereby going from the extreme of realism to the extreme of meaningless poeticality, and demonstrating in this one alteration two of his most characteristic faults.

Continuing his eager search for, and triumphant discovery of, fleshliness, Buchanan flourished, with his usual italics and exclamation marks, another metaphor pursued "to the very pit of beastliness" in Sonnet XXXIX, "Vain Virtues:"

Virgins . . . whom the fiends compel
 Together now, in the snake-bound shuddering sheaves
 Of anguish, while the scorching Bridegroom leaves
Their refuse maidenhood (!) abominable! (p. 62)

Rossetti changed "the scorching bridegroom" to "the pit's pollution," so, presumably, he could see the force of Buchanan's objection, even to the possible extent of subconsciously remembering Buchanan's own word; but "Their refuse maidenhood" he did not alter. The rather unfortunate "garbage" (of the ninth line) was much improved by the substitution of "tribute."

Another change in that series of sonnets (from XII to XX) that Buchanan called "one profuse sweat of animalism" (p. 60), is to be found in sonnet XV, "Winged Hours," where "contending kisses" (line 8) becomes "contending joys" in the later edition, thereby reducing what little sensuality the sonnet contained.

Two changes that may be attributed, in part at least to Buchanan's remarks, are the alterations of the burdens in "Eden Bower." The Scot did say that "Mr. Rossetti is great in 'bowers'"

(p. 63), and had castigated the use of a refrain as being "of a piece with other affectations" of the Fleshly School in the original article. Rossetti altered the rather ugly chimes of "bower," "flower," "bower," and "hour" of the original to the more economical "Sing Eden Bower!" and "Alas the hour!" of the later version.

Of those changes that cannot be directly attributed to any specific remark by Buchanan, but which, nonetheless, reduce the sensuality of the poetry, a particularly obvious one is the substitution of a new stanza in "Sudden Light." The original stanza, picturing lovers lying together and the poet expressing the hope that in further incarnations they would repeat the same love-experience, is replaced by a much less effective stanza beginning with the awkward "Has this been thus before?", and a less closely realized and rather rhetorical rendering of the original thought.

Other no less important changes are to be found in the seventh stanza of "The Blessed Damozel." "Amid deathless love's acclaims" certainly reduces the potential of the poem for erotic interpretation and goes to support its Platonic theme of the absolute permanence of true love, as does the replacing of "Their virginal chaste names" of the fourth line of this stanza by "Their heart-remembered names," with its rather different emphasis.

One may conclude that Rossetti did indeed tone down the sensuality of his poetry for its later republication, but on the whole, and considering the poet's noted lack of resolution, he

showed himself to be remarkably steadfast in his refusal to allow Buchanan's criticism to make much impact on his poetry. By 1881, of course, the passions and prejudices inflamed by the controversy had long since died down, but Rossetti was still as susceptible to praise or blame as ever he was, so he might have been expected to bend further before this wind than he actually did. One of the reasons for Buchanan's failure to achieve greater impact on both the poet and its readers was due, one must surmise, to his failure to look deeper into the poetry, and the sources of its inspiration.

Few poets of the first rank have been subject to more debate concerning the true nature and merit of their poetic achievement than has Rossetti. Buchanan's contribution to this debate, and it is a significant one, has been to encourage the tendency to a polarization of the critical response to Rossetti's art. Had he been really concerned to establish the truth about Rossetti, there is much that he could have said more damaging than what he did say; there are major flaws in the poetry. But by seeing those flaws as symptomatic of the poet's basic immorality, Buchanan drew attention away from the valid aesthetic questions the poetry does raise, to the ethical questions so popular with his readers. Had he left such questions to be implied from his delineation of Rossetti's poetic faults, which his lack of subtlety and excess of righteousness left him incapable of doing, his criticism would have made a worthwhile contribution to the understanding of Rossetti's art. But, plunger as he was, Buchanan staked all and lost nearly all. As a result, his

criticism represents the point of departure for the two main schools of thought on Rossetti.

There is much in Rossetti's poetry that is just as artificial, over-elaborate, obscure, or merely melodiously poetical as Buchanan claimed there was. If he had concentrated his energies upon piling example upon example of such faults and devoted less to embellishing essay and pamphlet with theatrical analogy or rhetorical excursions into the history of English and European pornography, and if he could have chosen those examples carefully enough to anticipate most of the objections that Rossetti and Forman raised, then, however dire it might have been (which, surely, was not to drive Rossetti to the brink of the abyss), he would have achieved his purpose. But Buchanan fails to show any real understanding of what Rossetti was about. He did make the cheap and relatively obvious points about Rossetti's diction and prosody, but these flaws were regarded merely as being the superficial blemishes of a patently insincere man. There is often a sense of strain in Rossetti's poetry; and a sense, too, that words like "enthroning" applied to throat (in the sonnet, "The Portrait"), or "auspicious" when used to describe the beloved's soul (in "Love's Nocturn"), subsequently replaced by the much more felicitous "translucent", are being used less for their sense than their sound. Rather than making his crass comments about Rossetti's rhyming and stressing of the last syllables of words like "lily" and "Haymarket", Buchanan, by listening a little more intently, could have recognized this as an attempt at enlivening the patterns of English prosody, at

times very successfully, at other times quite clumsily, as when "untrod," "God," and "cloud" are rhymed in "The Blessed Damozel." The larger question of Rossetti's obscurity demands a much closer scrutiny than the impatient Buchanan could give it. Even a relatively simple poem like "A Last Confession" needs some care to unravel its form and to find the psychological insight embedded in that form. But Buchanan, again, is ready to make the valid enough comment that the dramatic monologue is Browningsque (admission in itself of its complexity) and, after drawing attention to some spurious fleshliness in the poem, let it drop. On the much more complex imagery at the close of such sonnets as "Lovesight" or "Love-Sweetness," Buchanan is silent, which perhaps is just as well; for it is only when Rossetti's imagery permits a sexual interpretation that Buchanan's imagination begins to stir. In fact, there is no recognition whatsoever of the complexity and variety of Rossetti's work; all is reduced to the common denominator of fleshliness, and not even the most obvious characteristics are pointed out. While Rossetti's "breadth of poetic interest" is not, perhaps, much wider than Buchanan said it was, there is a marked contrast in the styles to be found in Rossetti's work; if the sonnets do not appeal, there are the ballads; and there are few critics who would cavil at the grace and simplicity of such lyrics as "The Woodspurge" or "Sudden Light." As a tactical device Buchanan does concede the force and beauty of a phrase here or an image there, but he does not single out one poem for unqualified praise.

In itself Buchanan's criticism is not percipient or thorough

enough to merit much discussion; yet it can be seen to mark a very significant divergence of opinion on Rossetti. Just as the poet's work ranges from the ornate, obscure, and allegorical to the simple, direct, and concrete, so does criticism of Rossetti tend to polarize. One group takes its lead from Buchanan, and, dropping his moral reservations, sees him as one of the first of the aesthetes, one of the first of the decadents, in the history of English literature. The other group, reacting away from Buchanan's crass insistence on Rossetti's materialism, tends to emphasize the poet's mystical spirituality.

Buchanan's statement that Rossetti delighted in form for form's sake (the aesthetic corollary to delight in the body for the body's sake) was one which gained rapid credence in the 1880's. Buchanan had suggested a similar view of the Pre-Raphaelites in "Lady Letitia's Lilliput Hand" as early as 1862, probably because he had heard the literary gossip of the day. Swinburne, after the publication of Poems and Ballads, had talked of throwing over "Gabriel and his followers in art (l'art pour l'art)" in a letter to William Michael (Lang, 149), so that he could give his revolutionary message loud and clear in Songs Before Sunrise. Walter Pater, too, had eulogized William Morris's aesthetic poetry in the Westminster Review (XC, October 1868, 300-312), and it is quite possible that Buchanan had this article (among others) in mind when he talked of the Fleshly School losing "the very facts of day and night" "in a whirl of aesthetic terminology" (Houghton and Stange, p. 889). It was the notoriety, however, of Buchanan's attack that firmly fixed, for the many

not acquainted with Bohemia, Rossetti's leading role in this dangerous new development from across the Channel.

By 1880, when Buchanan was about to withdraw his entire indictment of Rossetti, there were others ready to take up his cry. This particular aspect of it was taken up by Harry Quilter in "The New Renaissance; or, The Gospel of Intensity" (Macmillan's Magazine, XLII, September 1880, 391-400), where he described that new social phenomenon, the Aesthete, and traced its origins back to the Pre-Raphaelites, and its current vogue to the publicizing talents of Swinburne, Pater, and Burne-Jones. The poetry of Rossetti, whose "chief tenet," in an age of deep intellectual unrest and shaken beliefs, was "that nothing was worth doing but 'love'" (p. 397); and the criticism of that poetry, written mostly by friends of the poet, and concentrating solely on its beauty and "not its intellectual burden" (p. 398), also promoted the cause of aestheticism. In a later, more sympathetic article (written after Rossetti's death), Quilter stated quite flatly that "Rossetti will stand less as the painter-poet than as the leader of the great artistic movement of England in the nineteenth century" ("The Art of Rossetti," Contemporary Review, XLIII, February 1883, 201). J.C. Shairp re-examining Quilter's original position repeated in "Aesthetic Poetry: Dante Gabriel Rossetti." Buchanan's charge that Rossetti's "worship of sensuous beauty, for its own sake, is not the growth of a vigorous age, strong in manhood, but is the mark of a late and decadent civilization" (Contemporary Review, XLII, July 1882, 20). Rephrasing much of Buchanan's earlier

indictment, and rephrasing it in language the Scot could well have used himself, Shairp hammered home Rossetti's role in the aesthetic movement, and secured, for the time being, at least, Rossetti's tenuous connection with the rising generation of artists.

Rossetti himself had contributed to that connection by his statement in "The Stealthy School of Criticism" that his view of the subject matter for poetry was probably wider than that of most of his contemporaries, and this was seen as a manifesto by such men as George Moore, Oscar Wilde and John Addington Symonds. Moore, in an altercation with Buchanan of all people, is quoted as calling himself "a true descendent of Rossetti and Swinburne" (Cassidy, p. 91). Wilde, writing in 1882, praises Rossetti's "perfect precision and choice of language, a style flawless and fearless, a seeking for all sweet and precious melodies and a sustaining consciousness of the musical value of each word," all of which was to be "opposed to that value which is merely intellectual."⁵ Symonds stressed, in the same year, that the man in Rossetti "is less important than the artist. It is in his power of presenting pictures to the mental eye, in his command over deliberate effects of words and rhythms, that he shows himself really great," not in his originality of thought or sentiment, of which there is little ("Notes on Mr.D.G. Rossetti's New Poems," p. 326). But whereas the aesthetès saw

⁵"The English Renaissance of Art," The Pre-Raphaelites, Jerome H. Buckley, ed., p. 483.

Rossetti as an amoral poet, F.W.H. Myers, in a perceptive essay published in 1883,⁶ saw Rossetti as the leader of a movement making art a religion, with its worship of beauty being part of the new social impetus not to wealth but to culture; Buchanan's objections had come full circle. Myers' purpose was to stress Rossetti's Platonic desire to "extract the utmost secret, the occult message, from the phenomena of Life and Being," and he answers Symonds by insisting that in Rossetti's love poetry, the lovers have lost the idiosyncracies of individual beings in their mystical union with the infinite, hence thought and sentiment are left far behind. The poet, ultimately, is trying to express the inexpressible. All of this Rossetti would, no doubt, have accepted as a sound reading of his work, and he probably would have commended this eloquent, and Paterian, attempt at justifying aesthetic poetry, though he refused to see himself as the progenitor of the aesthetes. After conceding Shairp's contention that Rossetti's poems do seem to be the "expression of a century which is refining itself into quietism and mellowing into decay," Myers continues:

Yet thus much we may safely affirm,⁷ that if we contrast aestheticism with pure hedonism—the pursuit of pleasure through art with the pursuit of pleasure simply as pleasure—the one has a tendency to quicken and exalt, as the other to deaden and vulgarize, the

⁶"Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty," Essays: Modern (London: Macmillan, 1883).

⁷Part of Buchanan's contribution to the understanding of Rossetti's art being precisely this: that he confused aestheticism with hedonism, as did so many of his contemporaries.

emotions and appetencies of man. If only the artist can keep clear of the sensuous selfishness which will, in its turn, degrade the art which yields it; if only he can worship beauty with a strong and single heart, his emotional nature will acquire a grace and elevation which are not, indeed, identical with the elevation of virtue, the grace of holiness, but which are none the less a priceless enrichment of the complex life of man (p. 332).

There were other reasons, too, why the aesthetes should have admired Rossetti, but they also lead back to Buchanan. The total revolt against the ugly materialism of the nineteenth century implicit in Rossetti's other-worldly mysticism, his withdrawal from the pressing intellectual, political, and social problems of the age, his refusal to participate in the theological and scientific debates that racked his fellow Victorians, these, too, made him especially attractive to the rising generation of artists. Indeed, the things that Buchanan abhorred about Rossetti were just what they admired in him; and, quite probably, it was the fact that Buchanan disliked Rossetti's "irresponsibility" so intensely that made it so attractive to his successors. Oscar Wilde's extravagant and elaborately insincere posturings were designed to antagonize the Buchanans of his day (though a much mellowed Robert Buchanan did write letters to the Times on Wilde's behalf).

Beyond the aesthetes came the Decadent generation, and Barbara Charlesworth has taken Buchanan's position to its extreme in her argument that Rossetti, too, had as his ideal, following Pater's famous counsel first adumbrated in "Poems by William Morris," "the attainment of as many moments as possible of

heightened sensory awareness."⁸ Miss Charlesworth traces Rossetti's disintegration to the valuation of such moments at the expense of his awareness of his own identity, the exquisite moment becoming more important than the self. Plausible though it may be, the argument could never be satisfactorily proved, and sheds little light on the poetry; but it does show how one of the extreme approaches to Rossetti's poetry can, by subtle shading, merge into the other:

The world outside the self to which [Rossetti] looked for a standard was a spiritual, eternal realm of love and beauty. Through the concept of the moment he tried to establish a link between that realm and the mind; his thought was that in a state of heightened perception the consciousness recognizes in objects and persons the spiritual reality of which they are a reflection.⁹

Just as Buchanan's insistence on Rossetti's sensuality found a ready response in later generations, so, in reaction to that insistence, has there been a tendency among critics, especially Rossetti's champions, to emphasize his spirituality. This is the central critical question that Buchanan's attack raises. Is Rossetti's art really an insincere etherealization of the physical (as Buchanan and many others see it, Geoffrey Grigson being the latest) or is it a mystic's attempt to give a local habitation and a name to the shadowy visions of the poet's imagination (as Rossetti's admirers see it)? It is a question

⁸Barbara Charlesworth, Dark Passages (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. xv.

⁹Charlesworth, p. 17.

that defies easy solution.

With any poet, especially one so conscious of the physical world as a painter and so noted an admirer of feminine beauty as Rossetti, part of his very stock in trade is to elevate physical phenomena to the level of richly suggestive symbol. "The Woodspurge" is a perfect example of this aspect of Rossetti's art; and, possibly, "The Honeysuckle" (one wonders that Buchanan's rich imagination did not make anything of that suggestive little poem), with its more clearly sensual overtones, is an even better example of it. To the extent that Rossetti uses such things as these flowers to symbolize his emotions, and thus imbue the physical world with some kind of real significance for himself, he is like any other romantic poet. But the world of the sonnets, of "Love's Nocturn" and "The Stream's Secret," is a very different one from that of most modern poets. Buchanan did not understand it, disliked it and called it names; but there can be little doubt that it was in these intensely subjective poems that Rossetti was following the true bent of his Dantesque nature, and was trying to express the evanescent inner experience of a withdrawn, highly imaginative, and sensitive man. What has to be remembered is that it is feminine beauty which provides the entry into this world; just as it did for Dante. It has long been recognized that it was Rossetti's "conception of ideal beauty, as revealed in womanhood, and the poet's ardent longing for this ideal, which form the transcendental basis for all his

creations."¹⁰ Rossetti follows his great namesake in his sublimation of his physical passion and his elevation and etherealization of his spiritual longings for an otherworld; but for Rossetti, unlike Dante, that otherworld is essentially pagan. The basis of Rossetti's poetry is the Platonic search for one's soulmate, not the progressive exaltation of love from the physical to the spiritual to the divine, which characterizes its development in Dante's masterpiece. However, it is almost an act of faith to see Rossetti in these terms; for the Buchanans, the Waughs, and the Grigsons of this world, Rossetti's very earthly associations with coarse and soulless creatures like Fanny Cornforth, or with the only apparently soulful ones like Janey Morris, this mysticism is just the pretentious window-dressing of a calculating hypocrite.

Humphry House has given one of the most balanced statements of the mystical view of the poet: "It is more important to say of Rossetti that he had some power of making spiritual things and the details of religious myth concrete, than that he had an etherealized apprehension of the physical."¹¹ But it is hard to see "the details of religious myth" being any more than part of the elaborate but extraneous décor of Rossetti's poetry, and this statement does not touch the real sources of Rossetti's mysticism, which do have their origin in the delight of nothing

¹⁰ Franz Hueffer in the Tauchnitz edition of Poems by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. xxxi, quoted by Paull Franklin Baum, The House of Life, p. 26.

¹¹ All in Due Time (London: Hart-Davis, 1955), p. 157.

more ethereal than the female body.

There is a middle ground in this debate which seems to be the most tenable point from which to probe this difficult question. Theodore Watts-Dunton in "The Truth about Rossetti" (Nineteenth Century, XII, March 1883, 404-423) sees him as "spiritualizing the flesh," combining the sensuality of classicism with the sense of the mystery behind physical phenomena of romanticism. His view of the great movements in art of the last three centuries may be too simplistic, but his appreciation of Rossetti's purpose (possibly shared, or modified, by Swinburne) does come closest to being the most valid:

To eliminate ascetism from romantic art, and yet to remain romantic, to retain that mysticism which alone can give life to romantic art, and yet to be as sensuous as the Titians who revived sensuousness at the sacrifice of mysticism, was the quest, more or less conscious, of Rossetti's genius (p. 412).

Robert Buchanan, in a criticism not really intended to throw light upon Rossetti's poetry so much as to cast aspersions on the poet's character and thereby raise suspicions concerning the poet's true aims, was not perceptive enough nor painstaking enough to articulate the real problems Rossetti's art poses. But his attack is one of the major facts in the poet's life and work, one with which all Rossetti's students have to come to terms. From it stem the two main branches of Rossetti criticism; and it is only by some accommodation of both views, common enough once if Watts-Dunton is at all representative of the enlightened criticism of his time, that further insights into Dante Gabriel Rossetti's artistic achievement are to be made.

CONCLUSION

The Fleshly Controversy marked the turning point in Robert Buchanan's career. Hitherto, he had been seen as worthy of serious consideration as a poet of undoubted merit. The passions engendered by the Controversy forced him to publish his work anonymously for several years to avoid the bitter censure that it was bound to draw from the friends of Rossetti, who were outraged at the effects the attack had had on the poet. The Controversy brought to the surface, for all to see, the Scotsman's "instinct for recrimination" (as he described it), and he became a confirmed rebel thereafter. He seems to have had skirmishes with most of the leading literary lights of his day: George Moore, William Archer, George Bernard Shaw, Rudyard Kipling, Edmund Yates (an old friend and one time employer), and George Henry Lewes. His need for money to repay gambling losses caused him to write over fifty plays for the London stage of the 1880's and 1890's, some of them major popular successes performed by the leading actors of the day. Buchanan seemed to lose sight of his youthful and idealistic poetic ambitions, and seemed, after 1872, not to take his poetic gifts as seriously as once he did. He did nurse, however, the ambition to succeed Tennyson as Poet Laureate, and ballads such as that of "Judas Iscariot" or "The Lights of Leith" (which Rossetti apparently enjoyed), and narrative poems such as "Phil Blood's Leap" or "The Wedding of Shon Maclean" received wide acclaim,

and are usually listed as being among Buchanan's best work. If he no longer took his poetry as seriously as he once did, it may be partly explained by the fact that nearly all the critical bastions were manned by a really virulent enemy (there were exceptions, James Ashcroft Noble being one). It may be fanciful to suggest that it was Buchanan's angry frustration at not being admitted to the magic inner circle of the leading younger poets of his day (he was quite friendly with Tennyson and Browning) that helped to prompt his attack; he could not join them, so he fought them. There can be no question that with the attack he lost whatever reputation he had laboriously and honestly earned. After it he was a poetic outcast, and his work did not find its way into the anthologies of English poetry, invariably prepared by those who sympathized with Rossetti, that began to reach the market in the 1880's. Buchanan died in 1901, a financially and spiritually broken man. It would be a sentimental exaggeration to claim that the Controversy crippled him, as it did Rossetti—his was too robust a character for that—but it did bring him ill-repute thus blighting a promising career in poetry. Now that the passions of the Controversy have burnt low, perhaps a re-examination of this unread poet might bring some works of real merit back into the light of day.

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APPENDIX

A Textual Comparison between the 5th "edition" of
Poems and the new edition of Poems, and
Ballads and Sonnets in 1881.

On the lefthand side of the page is the 1871 version, on the right the 1881 emendation. The pagination on the right refers to Poems, 1881, unless preceded by B and S, which indicates that the revised version is to be found in Ballads and Sonnets.

The column of numbers in the centre of the page refer to the degree of probability that the alteration can be attributable to Buchanan's attack: 1 indicating that it is definitely attributable (as in the case of the omission of "Nuptial Sleep"), 2 indicating that it is probably attributable, and 3 indicating that the alteration is not considered to be the result of Buchanan's criticism.

"The Blessed Damozel"*

Heard hardly, some of her new friends	3	Around her, lovers, newly met
Amid their loving games	2	'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves		Spoke evermore among themselves
Their virginal chaste names; (p.3)	2	Their heart-remembered names; (p.5)
We will step down as to a stream, (p.4)	3	As unto a stream we will step down, (p.6)

"Love's Nocturn"

Some whose buoyance waits not sleep, (p.9)	3	Some that will not wait for sleep, (p.96)
Lamps of an auspicious soul (p.10)	3	Lamps of a translucent soul (p.97)
One dull breath against her glass (p.14)	3	One dull breath against her glass; (p.101)
And to dreamland pine away. (p.14)	3	And to dreamworld pine away. (p.101)

"Eden Bower"

(Eden bower's in flower.)

2

(Sing Eden Bower!)

(And O the bower and the hour!)
(pp.31-40)

2

(Alas the hour!)
(pp.82-91)

"Ave"

That day when death was sent to break
(p.45)

3

That day when Michael* came to break
(p.49)

*A Church legend of the Blessed Virgin's
death.

The cherubim, arrayed, conjoint, (p.45)

3

The cherubim, succinct, conjoint, (p.49)

"The Staff and Scrip"

'Who owns these lands?' the Pilgrim said.
(p.47)

3

'Who rules these lands?' the Pilgrim said.
(p.34)

An extra stanza is inserted after that
ending: No Messenger. (p.52)

3

The Queen is pale, her maidens ail;
And to the organ-tones
They sing but faintly, who sang well
The matin-orisons,
The lauds and nones. (p.39)

"Jenny"

Flung in the whirlpool's shrieking face (p.109)	3	Flung in the whirlpool's shrieking face; (p.115)
With Raffael's or Da Vinci's hand (p.119)	3	With Raffael's, Leonardo's hand (p.125)
Three extra lines are inserted after: Your pierglass scrawled with diamond rings. (p.123)	3	Your pierglass scrawled with diamond rings; And on your bosom all night worn Yesterday's rose now droops forlorn But dies not yet this summer morn. (p.129)

"The Portrait"

Yet this, of all love's perfect prize, (p.127)	3	Yet only this, of love's whole prize, (p.133)
At night-time these things reach mine ear, (p.130)	3	At night-time these things reach mine ear; (p.136)

"Sister Helen"

An extra stanza is inserted after that ending: <u>And they and we, between Hell and</u> <u>Heaven!</u> (p.137)	3	'Three days ago, on his marriage-morn, Sister Helen, He sickened, and lies since then forlorn.' 'For bridegroom's side is the bride a thorn, Little brother?' (O Mother, Mary Mother, <u>Cold bridal cheer, between Hell and Heaven.</u>) (p.14)
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For three days now he has lain abed, (p.137)	3	Three days and nights he has lain abed, (p.15)
<u>A word ill heard, between Hell and Heaven!</u> (p.139)	3	<u>What word now heard between Hell and Heaven?</u> (p.17)
'He sees me in earth, in moon and sky, (p.139)	3	'In all that his soul sees, there am I, (p.17)
<u>Earth, moon and sky, between Hell and Heaven!</u> (p.139)	3	<u>The soul's one sight, between Hell and Heaven!</u> (p.17)
<u>Oh, never more, between Hell and Heaven!</u> (p.140)	3	<u>No, never joined, between Hell and Heaven!</u> (p.17)
<u>No more, no more, between Hell and Heaven!</u> (p.140)	3	<u>Not twice to give, between Hell and Heaven!</u> (p.17)
A further six stanzas introducing the bride are inserted after: <u>The way is long, between Hell and Heaven!</u> (p.142)	3	(pp.20-21)
An extra stanza is inserted after: <u>The naked soul, between Hell and Heaven!</u>	3	(p.23)

"Stratton Water"

As wan as your towers be to-day, (p.148)	3	As wan as your towers seem to-day, (p.28)
And it's there I'll wed with ye.' (p.150)	3	And it's there you'll wed with me.' (p.30)

"The Stream's Secret"

Still shoot the dead leaves down? (p.156) 3 Still shoot the dead drift down? (p.105)

"My Sister's Sleep"*

*This little poem . . . 'In Memoriam.'
(p.169) 3 Footnote omitted

"One Girl"

(p.186) 3 title became "Beauty (Sappho)"
(B and S, p.288)

The House of Life

"Bridal Birth"

When her soul knew at length the Love it 3 When her soul knew at length the Love it
nursed (p.189) nurs'd (B and S, p.164)

Now, shielded in his wings, (p.189) 3 Now, shadowed by his wings, (B and S, p.164)

"Love's Redemption"

(p.190) 2 title became "Love's Testament"
(B and S, p.165)

Unto my lips dost evermore present 2 Unto my heart dost evermore present
The body and blood of Love in sacrament; 2 Clothed with his fire, thy heart his
testament;

"The Choice"

I

They die not,—never having lived,—but
cease; (p.223)

3

They die not,—for their life was death—
but cease; (B and S, p.233)

III

Miles and miles distant though the grey
line be, (p.225)

3

Miles and miles distant thought the last
line be, (B and S, p.235)

"Vain Virtues"

Of anguish, while the scorching bride-
groom leaves

2

Of anguish, while the pit's pollution
leaves

Night sucks them down, the garbage of the
pit,

2

Night sucks them down, the tribute of the
pit,

To gaze, but, yearning, waits his worthier
wife, (p.227)

3

To gaze, but, yearning, waits his destined
wife (B and S, p.247)

"The One Hope"

Ah! let none other written spell soe'er
(p.238)

3

Ah! let none other alien spell soe'er
(B and S, p.263)

"Sudden Light"*

A new stanza is substituted for this one:

Then, now,—perchance again!

O round my eyes your tresses shake!

Shall we not lie as we have lain

Thus for Love's sake,

And sleep, and wake, yet never break the
chain? (p.244)

2

Has this been thus before?

And shall not thus time's eddying flight

Still with our lives our love restore

In death's despite,

And day and night yield one delight once
more? (p.242)

"The Passover in the Holy Family"

What shadow of death the Boy's fair brow
subdues (p.266)

3

What shadow of Death the Boy's fair brow
subdues (p.266)

"Lilith"

(p.269)

3

title became "Body's Beauty" in The House
of Life

Draws men to watch the bright net she can
weave, (p.269)

3

Draws men to watch the bright web she can
weave (B and S, p.240)

"Sibylla Palmifera"

(p.270)

3

title became "Soul's beauty" in The House
of Life (B and S, p.239)

"Venus"

(p.271)

3

title became "Venus Verticordia"

