

D. G. ROSSETTI, A. C. SWINBURNE
AND R. W. BUCHANAN.
THE FLESHLY SCHOOL REVISITED: II

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Robert Buchanan read *Poems* in the summer of 1871.⁴⁹ Living the life of a country gentleman, though not, as his letters show, quite being able to afford it,⁵⁰ he was by now a relatively successful man of letters, spending most of his time at Aban in Argyllshire. With the clear and avowed intention that it should be anonymous, Buchanan wrote "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti".⁵¹ In it he refers several times to Swinburne's review, ironically echoing Swinburne's description of Rossetti's thought being "too sound and pure to be otherwise dark than as a deep well-spring at noon may be" (p. 553), by stating that Rossetti's mind was "like a grassy mere, broken only by the dive of some water-bird or the hum of winged insects, and brooded over by an atmosphere of insufferable closeness..." (p. 337). Buchanan was not daunted by the challenge to judge Rossetti's art, since it allowed him to point out that he had "shrunk from publicly exhibiting his pictures", and, judging from their photographs, "he is an artist who conceives unpleasantly, and draws ill" (p. 336); and, later, "He has the painter's imitative power developed in proportion to his lack of the poet's imagination" (p. 342); thus he is an excellent copyist, even plagiarizer. The main outline of Buchanan's argument need not be rehearsed again, especially since, for Rossetti, the most important feature of the article was its authorship. In September Buchanan sent it to Alexander Strahan, the publisher of the *Contemporary Review* and

⁴⁹ This he declares to be so in his pamphlet (p. 56). In June 1870, however, the *Contemporary Review* published a brief notice of *Poems* (pp. 480-1) of which both the style and content are similar to Buchanan's of the following year, and thus this has been tentatively assigned to him by W. E. Fredeman and the *Wellesley Index*, i. 227.

⁵⁰ Even now, a year after Browning had helped get him a Civil List pension of £100, he was still borrowing money from him and Lord Houghton, as he had done for several years.

⁵¹ *Contemporary Review*, October 1871, pp. 334-350.

the publisher of Buchanan's works since 1865. The article was returned to him when in proof with his name appended to it. Buchanan returning the corrected proof, deleted his name, and told Strahan that he wished the article to be anonymous. Strahan replied that James Knowles, the editor, objected to anonymous articles, and that, therefore, Buchanan's name should stand. Buchanan "then telegraphed to Mr. Strahan to suppress the article altogether or publish it without any name whatever".⁵² Strahan, however, appended the name "Thomas Maitland"⁵³ after it had left Buchanan's hands. This crucial act was thus taken without Buchanan's knowledge or approval, he being now out of touch, cruising in his yacht among the Hebrides, and he only knew of the pseudonym when the article appeared.

Rossetti read the advertisements for the October issue of the *Contemporary* while still at Kelmscott, and was thus not taken by surprise by the pseudonymous onslaught, though its tone must have been somewhat unnerving. Affecting an indifference he almost certainly did not feel—"For once abuse comes in a form that even a bard can manage to grin at without grimacing", he wrote to his publisher F.S. Ellis (DW, 1177)—Rossetti worked hard to discover who Maitland could be. On asking Sidney Colvin,⁵⁴ he received this reply on 7 October:

⁵² This account follows evidence and Buchanan's testimony given in court during his suit against Peter Taylor on 29 June 1876, as reported in the *Standard*, 30 June, p. 6, and does not run counter to W. M. Rossetti's statement that he had definite evidence to show that Buchanan had been urged to sign the article and had refused (*Memoir*, i. 294).

⁵³ Professor C. K. Hyder (*Swinburne Replies*, p. 8), with Professor Cassidy (pp. 74-5), follows Swinburne in his apparent assumption that, since Buchanan was much more likely than Strahan to have known of the connection between George Buchanan (the sixteenth-century Scottish divine and tutor to Mary Queen of Scots and her son James) and Thomas Maitland, he must have been lying about this aspect of the matter. Quite apart from all the evidence to the contrary, Strahan published Charles Kingsley's "George Buchanan, Scholar", in his *Good Words* in December 1868, and thus would certainly have known Maitland's name and its suitability. (Ironically, Kingsley ends his essay with a castigation of the immorality, attributable to French influences, of the contemporary English novel (p. 736)).

⁵⁴ With some disingenuousness Colvin, in his description of his association with the poet, flatly asserts that "it is not true, as has been said that [Rossetti] took undignified pains to ensure that reviews of *Poems* were favourable"; but he does concede, which has never received adequate attention, that he did have a role in the hostile reception prepared for Buchanan's pamphlet, though he

No—I don't know where that blatant beast in the *Contemporary* was raised (it can't be Maitland of *The Pilgrim and Shrine*),⁵⁵ the ignorant and discourteous skunk, with his "sub-Tennysonian" gammon and imbecile personalities? I want Appleton to print a note jumping on his dirty carcase as it deserves.

Charles Appleton, the editor of the *Academy*, being temporarily away, Colvin on his own authority inserted a paragraph in reply to the *Contemporary* which was rather less than Rossetti had asked for. W. M. Rossetti recorded this displeasure in his *Diary* for 17 October (p. 115); Appleton evidently did not wish to be too partisan in the matter,⁵⁶ and may well have disapproved of Colvin's first overt provocation to Buchanan:

A curious instance of the obsolete vituperative style in criticism appears in the October number of the *Contemporary Review*, a periodical happily less known for such eccentricities than for very respectable services in the field of latitudinarian Christianity. The paper in question, called the *The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti*, by a Mr. Thomas Maitland, shows more acrimonious personal discourtesy, founded on more grotesque literary misapprehension than it would have been easy to suppose possible. Until the writer has learned to correct his manners he cannot expect a hearing for his opinions. (*Academy*, 15 October 1871).

Rossetti did enlist the aid of others: F. S. Ellis, Frederick Locker, Simeon Solomon (who had been cited in the article as a Fleshly painter), and Swinburne. Buchanan's identity was tentatively established and then confirmed. Having heard it from Locker, Ellis had written by 17 October that Buchanan was their man

declines sole responsibility: "In this matter again I did my best, together with a group of other ardent friends and admirers, and this time by the master's desire and request, to stand by him and make things as hot for his assailant as we could" (*Memories and Notes* (London, 1921), p. 72).

The implication that Colvin was active solely in praising *Poems* and damning the pamphlet should be questioned, for no one was more active in discovering who Maitland was, and in urging editors to expose Buchanan and Strahan and thus support Rossetti. Colvin's words and actions directly provoked Buchanan's fateful decision to revise and enlarge his article.

⁵⁵ Edward Maitland, who published *The Pilgrim and the Shrine* in 1868, had a brother, Thomas, Rossetti later discovered, and wrote to Frederick Locker to confirm that he was not their man on 15 November (Letter at Harvard University).

⁵⁶ See W. B. Scott's letter to Alice Boyd of 20 October 1871 (*Bulletin*, liii. 113).

(DW, 1178); Swinburne corroborated this in a letter to W.M. Rossetti six days later, having heard from Solomon that Knowles himself had identified Buchanan (Lang, ii. 161). Rossetti had by now begun what he called his *Epistle to the Philistines* (DW, 1181), which may have been temporarily interrupted owing to a misunderstanding between Solomon and Swinburne, who wrote to W.M. Rossetti on 27 October to deny that Buchanan was "in this instance the scavenger of his own coprolitic matter", and also to announce the genesis of what was to become *Under the Microscope* (Lang, ii. 164-5). Even as late as 11 November, there was still doubt as to Buchanan's authorship, though two days later Swinburne could assure D.G. Rossetti, with Locker guaranteeing it, "the identity of R. with T." (Lang, ii. 170); but even then Rossetti insisted on hearing first-hand from Locker that this was so.⁵⁷ Perhaps the energy expended on establishing this was in some measure Rossetti's justification for writing his lengthy reply to Buchanan. Had Buchanan signed his original attack, or couched it in different terms, perhaps Rossetti would have written a denunciatory private letter (as he did, without sending it, on the publication of Buchanan's pamphlet the following May). His sense of honour demanded that he publicly answer Buchanan; his brother, among others, as his *Diary* shows, wisely advised him to maintain a dignified silence; his close friend the bellicose Swinburne on 13 November urged Rossetti to take issue with Buchanan:

If I were not as thoroughly convinced that the thing is in itself worth doing and desirable to be done as I am of your power to do it supremely well, I would say so; as it is, I trust you will at once carry it through (Lang, ii. 170).

Further and final corroboration of Buchanan's authorship came in a letter from James Knowles to Sidney Colvin, which he sent or gave to Rossetti by 29 November.⁵⁸ Sending copies to Franz Huffer ("Fancy editor, publisher and critic leaguering together for a

⁵⁷ Letters dated 15 and 16 November at Harvard University.

⁵⁸ In his *Diary* for that date William Michael wrote. "Gabriel has seen a letter written by Knowles, Editor of the *Contemporary Review*, saying point-blank that the article on Gabriel is by Buchanan: so this matter it finally set at rest. The letter raises some objections to the article, and favours the idea of a counter-article to be inserted in the *Contemporary*; a bungling and sneaking sort of compromise" (p. 132).

shabby trick like this and then going about afterwards calling each other cowards to outsiders" (DW, 1186, where in error the letter is dated 2 November), and Swinburne ("Are these creatures conceivable who lay their frightened heads together in this way, and when caught at it scatter like a wasp's nest and set to calling each other cowards to outsiders?" (DW, 1195)), Rossetti here suggests, with his echo of Buchanan's "solemn league and covenant" (*Contemporary Review*, p. 335), the beginnings of his conviction of a conspiracy developing to persecute him. Whatever passed between Strahan and Knowles, Buchanan certainly did not confer with Knowles and dealt solely with Strahan.

Once it was common knowledge, among Rossetti's intimates at least, that Buchanan was indeed their enemy, Norman MacColl announced in the *Athenaeum* on 2 December, that Colvin was preparing an answer to Buchanan, who was now publicly named as author of "The Fleshly School of Poetry". Colvin had not authorised this announcement and his indignant denial to Rossetti, "Damn the *Athenaeum*! Do you see that note, how on earth it can have got there I am absolutely at a loss to conceive", finds pale reflection in the *Diary* (p. 134). In the *Athenaeum* the following week Colvin coolly declared, with cutting irony, that there was "nothing instructive" about Buchanan's reprehensibly "tempered" article "but its authorship" (9 December 1871, p. 755).

This is the point at which a relatively minor event in the checkered history of journal criticism escalated into one of the most unfortunate yet bizarre episodes in the entire history of English literature. By the time it had worked its course, a poet, whose work in the previous ten years had won him acclaim from several important critics, Robert Buchanan, had become a "confirmed mutineer", whose career never fulfilled its early promise. For Rossetti the effects of the next few months were even more disastrous, causing him to try to take his own life in June 1872, and to break off friendship with most of the major contemporary literary figures, not to mention that with Swinburne, and to live the next ten years allowed him as a semi-invalid, his health permanently shattered. The bizarre element, which has not yet received its proper attention, resides in Buchanan's resolve, evidently made some time in the new year of 1872, to make the poetic advent of the brother of the man who had called him a "poor and pretentious poetaster" as tempestuous as his own, five years earlier,

had been said to be. If the original article in the *Contemporary Review* is included, and also the two angry letters to the *Athenaeum* in December, Buchanan attacked Rossetti in print before Rossetti's collapse on 2 June 1872 on at least *seven* separate occasions; the present writer, in fact, believes the number to be *nine*—using two pseudonyms (both known to Rossetti), his own name four times, and writing anonymously three times. Two of these attacks were reviews of his own pamphlet, one of which subsequent critics have cited as representing the civilized and impartial view of responsible contemporary journalism to Buchanan's tasteless and evidently hypocritical excesses. Under such circumstances a stronger man than Rossetti would have considered himself set upon by a cunning and malevolent enemy intent on hounding him out of the society of decent men.

This moment is crucial in the Controversy because Buchanan lost his temper at Colvin's "insolence", and, incensed that the valid critical questions he had raised about Rossetti's verse should become lost in a wrangle about the use of the pseudonym, he vowed to expand and republish the article over his own name. Strahan's adoption of the pseudonym had been a tactical error and had given Buchanan's enemies an effective stick, wielded no more powerfully in the Controversy than by that notable flagellant Swinburne, with which to beat him: that his review was animated by the envy of a failed and cowardly poetaster at the aesthetic and popular success of a true poet. On 11 December, he wrote to the *Athenaeum* acknowledging that he "certainly wrote" the article, but "had nothing to do with the signature. Mr. Strahan, publisher of the *Contemporary Review*, can corroborate me thus far, as he is best aware of the inadvertence which led to the suppression of my own name". Then followed his vow, though preferring "not to resuscitate so slight a thing..., to republish the criticism, with many additions but no material alterations" in his name, "The grave responsibility of not agreeing with Mr. Rossetti's friends as to the merits of his poetry" thus being transferred with "all fitting publicity" to his own shoulders (*Athenaeum*, 16 December 1871, p. 794). If Rossetti felt any grudge at Colvin provoking such a response, Colvin's letters do not reflect it. They record only glee at the fools critic and publisher had made of each other. For Strahan's earlier letter denying Buchanan's authorship, saying that the article might "with equal propriety" be associated with "the name of Mr. Robert Browning,

or of Robert Lytton, or of any other Robert", was now published above Buchanan's, with MacColl printing this response:

It may be only a matter of taste, but we prefer, if we are reading an article written by Mr. Buchanan, that it 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.⁵⁹

Buchanan's anger had caused him to lie, and to lie in a particularly obvious way. He would have been more truthful, though less honourable, to have said that "Mr. Strahan is best aware of the inadvertence that led to the publication of the article, in this state at least". But, accusing Rossetti of being cowardly in not letting his verse find its way to the reader without vigorous puffs from his friends, Buchanan could hardly say at this stage that he had wished either to publish his review anonymously or not at all. Even a casual reader of the article would soon conclude that it was clearly intended to be published anonymously, and thus Buchanan had never signed it, so his name could not have been suppressed. Rossetti himself, coming to just that conclusion, tried to use Ellis (as he was using Colvin) to fight his battle and wrote to him wishing that he would send over his name a letter Rossetti had written to the *Athenaeum* reminding its readers of Buchanan's earlier instance of referring to himself while "covertly attacking another poet" (DW, 1201). Not unnaturally, Ellis refused. Swinburne's scornful disbelief "that a review article alternating between covert praise of himself and overt abuse of his superiors was only through the merest 'inadvertence' not issued in [Buchanan's] own name", is recorded in *Under the Microscope* (Hyder, pp. 82-3). By this unfortunate error Buchanan had delivered himself up unto his enemies. For them he became, as Professor Doughty in his first reference has it, "a liar in grain" (p. 449), and has remained so in every account of the Controversy since.

On 19 December the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the editor of which, Frederick Greenwood, was sympathetic to Rossetti but who had not met him, published a brief synopsis of the controversy which concluded:

Mr. Buchanan has never lacked boldness, and we are glad to see that, while confessing to the authorship of the article, he is able to add that he

⁵⁹ W. M. Rossetti and his brother both considered Buchanan's reference to his own verse to be "depreciatory" rather than otherwise (DW, 1178 and 1179).

had nothing to do with the signature. We suppose, therefore, that he either did not see a proof sheet of the paper, or that the name of Thomas Maitland was accidentally substituted for his own after the proof had left his hands (p. 4).

This disingenuous statement Rossetti attributed to Colvin, thinking perhaps it was designed to elicit further revelations from Strahan or Buchanan, but he replied the same day to the effect that "it *wasn't* me at all in *Pall Mall*. Strahan and Buchanan gibbet each other so beautifully that I almost regret anything more should have been added—even matter so valuable as that of your letter" ("The Stealthy School of Criticism").⁶⁰ Rossetti evidently did want more added. On 20 December Colvin told him of a proposed letter to Strahan to be published either by Greenwood in the *Pall Mall Gazette* or by Knowles in the *Contemporary*. Greenwood was apparently inclined to handle the matter himself, Colvin being "disposed to leave it in his hands rather than let [his] name be brought any more within a mile" of Strahan's and Buchanan's. Knowles, reported Colvin, returned a "feeble shuffling answer, to the effect that everything both at first and afterwards was done in opposition to his urgent advice, but declining... a public disclaimer of their procedure and denial of their lies". Colvin's apparent reluctance to become publicly involved in this matter evidently brought him a rebuke from Rossetti soon to be typical, that he was losing heart and his loyalty faltering. On the next day Colvin began:

I mustn't have you think there is any falling off in the warmth of my interest either in behalf of *you* or of justice. It is a matter of judgement; and my deliberate judgement is that both of your causes will be served by waiting until Strahan and Buchanan have come out with their mature and final concoction. It is after that that truth shall have its "last word", and set its heel on them...

Wisely saying that "they must not be treated, except very sparingly, to so much consideration as is implied in the notice of honest men", Colvin hoped to have the opportunity for "proper editorial dressing of the entire dish" when the proposed pamphlet appeared, and considered that Greenwood would do it well having

⁶⁰ This had, of course, been published in the *Athenaeum* on 16 December, above Buchanan's and Strahan's letters and was "The more serious portion of that much longer reply" which Rossetti had had set in type and still hoped to publish in its entirety as late as 31 December (DW, 1204).

the double weight in a conclusive condemnation coming from outside any reserves originally concerned [i.e. Colvin himself], and *not* coming from any one personally known to [Rossetti]—personal friendship in my own case giving to some of their venomous gibberish just that semblance of plausibility which it is desirable it should lack with all else.

Rossetti need not have worried that things were not going his way. On 23 December Greenwood published Strahan's rather inconsequential reply to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in which he still did not accept direct responsibility for the article or the pseudonym, and declared that the "now notorious article will shortly be published in separate form", that "the question raised as to the use of pseudonyms may possibly be discussed in the introduction" to this pamphlet, and that the question raised by this particular pseudonym "must not be allowed to direct attention from the main issue—the merits of *The Fleshly School of Poetry*" (p. 3). Writing to the *Athenaeum* the same day for publication one week later, Buchanan showed that, even with a week to reconsider his actions, he had once again allowed himself to be provoked, this time by the editor's note in the issue of 16 December. Angrily denying that he had praised his own poems and promising MacColl 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", he declared that Strahan's "vindication of the *nom de plume*" seemed to him "complete". He reiterated unequivocally that the pseudonym was affixed to the article when he "was far out of reach—cruising on the shores of the Western Hebrides", and concluded with another gibe at Rossetti: his article merely recorded "the experience, almost novel to the public in this instance, of a person who had not the honour of Mr. Rossetti's personal acquaintance" on reading his verse. Once again MacColl appended a provocative note, which began "We cannot compliment Mr. Buchanan on his temper or his accuracy", and ended:

We doubt if one out of the enormous number of readers on whom Mr. Buchanan is modest enough to count, will discover that a writer who accuses Mr. Rossetti of copying him, and classes himself along with Mr. Matthew Arnold, is not praising his own poems. As Mr. Strahan has taken refuge in the columns of a contemporary, we must decline to follow him; but Mr. Buchanan must be easily contented if Mr. Strahan's "vindication" satisfies him (*Athenaeum*, 30 December 1971, p. 887).

Rossetti found the threat of Buchanan's pamphlet most distracting, and his brother concedes that his insomnia probably

worsened in the next few months, but he should have found comfort in Colvin's next and most important gesture of loyalty: "It's settled with MacColl that I'm to review the pamphlet as suggested if it comes out", though "it was far from certain" that the pamphlet would indeed appear (9 January 1872). Colvin's letters almost relish the prospect of the pamphlet; in his way he was as bellicose as Swinburne, and in his way he was just as responsible as Swinburne for the disaster that followed. Certainly Swinburne offered much provocation to Buchanan, certainly W.M. Rossetti gave Buchanan some cause with his one unfortunate remark to attack D.G. Rossetti, but it had been Colvin's letter to the *Athenaeum* on 9 December 1871 that had precipitated Buchanan's decision to publish the pamphlet, and it was Colvin's promise that he had arranged for its hostile reception that may have finally unwrung Rossetti.

He did have other friends than Colvin, and one of them, H. B. Forman, wrote "The 'Fleshly School' Scandal" toward the end of December, possibly at Rossetti's instigation, certainly doing what Rossetti wanted done—"making things as hot for his assailant as possible". Citing Buchanan's "meaningless and unmitigated spite", Forman was the first to promote what has become the standard explanation for his actions, that in the "extremity of his pique" at his own failure Buchanan "pushed about libellous misrepresentations... to depreciate others and exalt himself" (*Tinsley's Magazine*, X (February 1872), 89) and correctly prophesied that he had "now gained an unenviable notoriety that is likely to stick to him for the rest of his career" (p. 90). Forman then went on to discuss pseudonyms and the particular use of Thomas Maitland, quoting extensively from Colvin's letter to the *Athenaeum* of 9 December, and citing Buchanan's obvious lie about the inadvertence that led to the suppression of his name and Strahan's attempt to foster the belief that Thomas Maitland had really written the article in their letters to the *Athenaeum* a week later (p. 91).

As a tacit admission of the validity of one of Buchanan's principal charges, and blaming Ellis, perhaps, for his share in giving ammunition to the enemy, Rossetti wrote to his publisher on 31 December: "I long ago said how unwise I thought it to be for ever reprinting the two notices by Morris and Swinburne, and I am still sure of this". He went on to recommend those by Colvin and Forman, and, though making these concessions to Buchanan,

or rather, because he was making them, Rossetti immediately took the offensive, telling Ellis to advertise *Poems*' sixth edition as "'just ready' to show we have advanced so far into the bowels of Robert-Thomas". One extensive campaign was denied him, however, when he was told by Ellis that his counsel considered a jury would not find for him in an action brought against Buchanan's article, and might find for Buchanan should Rossetti publish his pamphlet, since that would be a "personal matter" (DW, 1204 and note).

In the first days of the new year the *Quarterly Review* also attacked Rossetti, and Swinburne and Morris, in an unsigned article, "The Latest Development in Lyrical Poetry", written with an asperity worthy of Buchanan. Rossetti devoted some time to discovering that W. J. Courthope was its author, while assuring Dr. Hake that his friends' impression of the effect adverse criticism had on him was quite false (DW, 1205). Most significant in the Rossettis' response is William Michael's opinion that "either Gabriel or Morris (which of the two is not clearly defined) avows himself an atheist: this might deserve some attention" (*Diary*, p. 152). Criticism of the verse, however harsh, could indeed be accepted by the Rossettis, criticism of the man or his religious beliefs "might deserve some attention". It was the *ad hominem* element of Buchanan's pamphlet four months later that so disturbed Rossetti, not the criticism of his verse.

The war was carried to Buchanan in February with the publication of Foreman's "The Fleshly School Scandal" in *Tinsley's Magazine*. Rossetti may have believed that Buchanan could be stifled this way, but in truth he was not to be so easily daunted (and, like Swinburne, would have despised such a man). Indeed, Buchanan saw the first half of the article as further evidence of the incapacity of Rossetti's friends to discuss the critical points raised and their ruthless insistence on mounting personal attacks upon himself.

Rossetti received further support on 4 February when Colvin, ever ready to fight his friend's battles, wrote "Do you know that I have a courteous, but I think not stingless, rod in pickle for the Quarterly Reviewer?" And, as a hint where such a rod may be found, he continues "also that on talking with Greenwood, I find him a *much* readier and more vehement ally as against Strahan-Buchanan than I had anticipated? If only they will produce the reprint, but I fear they are white-livered after all".

Matters did not run all Rossetti's way in the new year, indeed he may have begun, with the *Quarterly Review*, to see the tide turning against him, for on 24 February the *Saturday Review* published "Coterie Glory". A reply to Forman's article but also, as its title suggests, a response to the way in which Rossetti's reputation as a poet had been secured, the article has been attributed to Buchanan, and while Rossetti may also have so attributed it, it is improbable that Buchanan wrote it. What is important is that so far as Rossetti was concerned Buchanan *could* have written the article, and that he, or those with similar objections to Rossetti's verse or reputation, were becoming more forceful in their denunciation. Buchanan quoted a large part of this article as an appendix to his pamphlet (pp. 94-5), and (while, much later, guilty of the reverse) he would not have issued his own work claiming it to be that of another in such a context (using a pseudonym is a rather different matter); and his biographer cites this article too as being independent, and thus welcome, support (Jay, p. 163). The most telling evidence that Buchanan did not write it is to be found in his first letter containing a reference to the Controversy to Browning on 4 March which suggests that he had only just seen Forman's article, probably through reading "Coterie Glory". This important letter also contains Buchanan's attribution of blame to Strahan for ascribing the *Contemporary* article to Thomas Maitland:

Altho' I have been lingering in London I have had no time to write you till now. It appears that the friends of Mr. Rossetti, not content with every diabolical attempt to blacken my character, are diligently endeavouring to make out that I have tried to injure you; and, indeed in "Tinsley's Magazine", one of these insects stings as follows:

'Have you seen', wrote our friend—(we were at the seaside, and had seen nothing but waves and petticoats for a long time) 'have you seen the article called *The Fleshly School*, etc., in *The Contemporary*? Of course you were angry (you ought to have been, and to *be*) with the so-called critique on Rossetti, with a side east-wind at several others. It was grimly amusing to me to notice *the willingness to wound, and yet the afraidness to strike, that characterised the writer's allusions to Browning*. 'Who', continued our friend in his innocence, 'is Thomas Maitland?'

As I believe there is no limit to the malicious misinterpretation of these people, I want to know if his lie has reached you? What you think of it?

Strahan's use of a pseudonym was a blunder, tho' honestly enough meant. The necessity for the flaying these men have received is shown in by [*sic*] their diabolical private conduct. Instead of taking their punishment like men, they are using every effort to blacken their critic.

But all I want to know is have they been saying anything to Robert Browning directly or indirectly? and what does Robert Browning think of it? If by any possible combination of circumstances, you for one moment fancy that I have ever criticised you insincerely—"been willing to wound, yet afraid to strike"—I should like to know it. I know how misconceptions grow.

Buchanan concludes with a reference to an article, published in his name, "Tennyson's Charm",⁶¹ which appeared in *Saint Pauls* for March 1872. Swinburne read it⁶² and doubtless Rossetti did too, for in it he suffered "side eastwinds" of some ferocity:

I hold however that Georges Sand, Gautier, 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 of an unmistakable description, just as didactic, in their own way, as Richardson and Cowper in England, or Augier himself in France, the only difference being that *they* are didactic in the service of Passion and Vice (p. 195).

The principal attack on Rossetti comes in a passage in which Buchanan is evidently trying to make amends for any slight Tennyson may have felt in the references to him in the original attack. In a peroration on Tennyson's "recent imitators...eagerly gathering up and wearing the meretricious finery he threw away long ago" with writers like Rossetti "Latinising our mother tongue in drawl after drawl of laboured affection", Buchanan in a footnote printed his most cogent criticism yet of such diction:

Thus, with Mr. Rossetti, 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*', etc., etc. 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).

Even with Buchanan's entire letter to Browning now available (dated only March 1872), of which all but the opening paragraph was first published by T. J. Wise sixty years ago, it is by no means certain that Browning actively encouraged Buchanan in his attacks on Rossetti. The letter begins:

⁶¹ Altered, it appeared as part of "Tennyson and Heine" in *Master-Spirits* (London, 1873).

⁶² He uses the phrase "amatory foreigner" in *Under the Microscope*, p. 86.

My Dear Browning,

I am delighted to hear you say what you say, and have only to ask forgiveness for troubling you with a matter so contemptible. Of one thing I was certain: that these men would poison even your mind if they could.

The letter is important for giving Buchanan's personal justification for his attack on Rossetti: "When these men, not content with outraging literature, violated the memory of [David Gray], I made a religious vow to have no mercy; and I have had none". Buchanan's own persecution complex is evident both in his relief that Browning had not joined Rossetti's cause, as was not the case with G. H. Lewes and George Eliot (Jay, pp. 109-110), and with his reiteration, in both letters, of "these men", which shows Buchanan to see himself as battling against an unscrupulous, powerful and highly homogenous group.

That Rossetti was not unduly perturbed by the paper war he had been engaged upon since the previous October is shown by his resolve, recorded in the *Diary* for 21 March, to republish *Early Italian Poets* (p. 182). For a time, at least, Rossetti was quite willing to take the offensive and would scarcely court the further agitation and anguish another book would bring unless he felt reasonably secure. It was Buchanan who showed some signs of wishing to drop the matter.

In early April, with the pamphlet probably at the printer, Buchanan, over the signature of "Walter Hutcheson" (which, as Colvin's letter of 27 April indicates, was known to Rossetti and his friends to be Buchanan's current pseudonym), published "Criticism as One of the Fine Arts" in *Saint Pauls*.⁶³ During the course of this argument in favour of signed criticism—the value of criticism depending upon the reader's knowledge of the mind, experience and values of the critic—Buchanan, sufficiently aware of how his personality coloured his criticism, evidently weary of the Controversy, and even perhaps regretting having gone so far, wrote 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 spoonneys are not so common as some critics persist in telling us" (p. 389). Here is Buchanan minimising Rossetti's influence as a poet and directing his favourite gibe at him once again, but also implying that he

⁶³ Reprinted with certain deletions in *Master-Spirits*, pp. 1-17.

himself did not take the affair as seriously as he is supposed, and as he claimed, to have done.

While Rossetti certainly found Buchanan's attack of October 1871, the skirmishes in the *Athenaeum* in December, and the prospect of the original attack enlarged in Buchanan's pamphlet, disturbing or even annoying, and though he set the date for the beginning of this "cursed state of things" as his birthday, 12 May (DW, 1241), it was probably a few days earlier than that when the unease of the previous months deepened into his fearful anticipation of Buchanan's next assault. This process may have begun with Colvin's letter to him of 27 April, in which he was invited to see "the scoundrel Buchanan trumpeting himself in an ornamental cover designed by the author."⁶⁴ Instantly I have set rods in pickle in 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". The next day William Michael accurately recorded the journals enlisted in this new cause by Colvin (p. 193); and the increasing frequency of references to Buchanan's pamphlet in the *Diary* (the correspondence is scanty at this time) suggests Rossetti's deepening apprehension. On 3 May Swinburne's return to *Under the Microscope* is recorded, as is the important information that "he has read [it] to Gabriel", who "thinks it talented, but its tone somewhat exceptionable, as showing too intimate an acquaintance with the minutiae of the hostile writings" (p. 194).

Another unwelcome and perhaps unexpected attack appeared anonymously in the May issue of *Fraser's Magazine*, of which Rossetti's old friend William Allingham was sub-editor. "Novelties in Poetry and Criticism" appraised the verse of Rossetti, Swinburne and Morris judiciously and fairly but placed it in a lower category than that of "those masters whom we can honour with a more unreserved affection" (p. 596). Such an appraisal Rossetti may well have taken as a personal attack upon himself by an intimate,⁶⁵ but he was only a few days away from

⁶⁴ In this context Buchanan's letter of 28 November 1873 to the American poet and critic, E. C. Stedman, should be cited: "Such a mildew has seized our English poetical plants, that we *must* cast our eyes abroad; for here the lily and the rose seem dead, and only houndstongue and deathnettle survive" (Collection of W. E. Fredeman).

⁶⁵ Seeing Rossetti socially at least in October 1871 (*Bulletin*, liii. III),

one of the most savage yet bizarre of all literary onslaughts, and thus whatever deleterious effects this may have had on him were soon subsumed by those much more harmful.

Either the day before or the day after Rossetti's birthday on Sunday, 12 May, Buchanan's pamphlet was published.⁶⁶ When Rossetti read it, is not certain, but on Wednesday he took it to his brother, who wrote on that day that Gabriel

seems sufficiently untroubled by it—save as regards one phrase on Page 1, 'cowards', which is intended to apply to him more than anyone else. As to this he had scribbled a denunciatory letter to be sent to Buchanan, which 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.⁶⁷ (pp. 198-9)

William Michael omits mention of other damaging statements in the pamphlet, statements which no sensitive Victorian would wish said of him in public, and which most scholars have noted in previous accounts of the Controversy. Among others, Professors Doughty and Fredeman have looked very closely at "Nuptial Sleep", "The Blessed Damozel" and "Jenny" for evidence of what might have been most wounding in Buchanan's survey of them. They, and others, have found covert allusions to Rossetti's association with Janey Morris, to his marriage to Elizabeth Siddal, and to the scandalous recovery of the manuscripts, in support of which last the Dobbs adduce further evidence of Buchanan's cunning.⁶⁸ Such critics are on the right path, for it was the personal nature of Buchanan's attack that Rossetti found so repugnant. He was indeed perturbed by the charge of cowardice, for this was the first overt statement of what had been implicit in Buchanan's every reference in the previous nine months to the way *Poems* had been received in the press.

Allingham may be presumed to be another casualty of the Controversy. The *Wellesley Index* makes no attribution for this article (ii. 487).

⁶⁶ Strahan advertised it as "published" in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 14 May (p. 16).

⁶⁷ He may have said this to his brother, but he could hardly have believed it. The passage in the pamphlet which gives Buchanan's reasons for its publication concludes that the counter-attacks on himself "are the inventions of cowards, too spoilt with flattery to bear criticism" (pp. v-vi).

⁶⁸ Brian and Judy Dobbs, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Alien Victorian* (London, 1977), p. 191.

There was in the pamphlet another, rather more insidious, repetition of that charge coupled with a yet more scandalous accusation that scholars have not yet noted: for Buchanan hints with no great subtlety at Rossetti's adultery with Janey Morris. Buchanan's biographer long ago suggested that he was attempting to be "smart and funny" when attacking the Fleshly Poets, and the opening chapter of his pamphlet and his own role in reviewing his own work support the contention. Buchanan was attempting to destroy the fleshly school in a manner not unlike that used by W.E. Aytoun to demolish the Spasmodics eighteen years earlier.

With his epigraph⁶⁹ Buchanan signals his intention, for it is taken from that episode in *Martin Chuzzlewit* for which Dickens himself gave the appropriate context and reading: "Showing that Old Friends may not only appear with New Faces, but in False Colours: That People are prone to Bite: and that Biters may sometimes be Bitten" (heading to Chapter XXVII). Thus Buchanan's first chapter is not to be read seriously; Buchanan is conceding that he, too, may be an "infernal humbug", and warning that in this particular "leg-piece" (an early example of a "leg-pull") will come a particularly nasty thrust. Buchanan had written dramatic monologues of some merit, in one of which, "The Scottish Eclogue", published in 1867, there speaks someone similar to the persona Buchanan adapted for this new passage of arms. Now credited with having coined the term "dramatic monologue" when reviewing *The Ring and The Book*, and giving another hint, perhaps, of the right reading of this passage, Buchanan cited Tennyson's "Maud" in both article and pamphlet, with whose speaker, too, Buchanan appears to share the jaundiced view of contemporary morality. This is not to say that Buchanan did not sincerely deplore Rossetti's influence on contemporary art, but he did recognize what figure he cut in the business and wanted to anticipate the charge of hypocrisy that he was in fact bringing against Rossetti. Above all, he wanted the world to know that Rossetti for all the ethereal beauty of his verses was leading a reprehensible private life. If Buchanan envied Rossetti anything, he envied him that.

⁶⁹ "Shakspeare's an infernal humbug, Pip! I never read him. What the devil is it all about, Pip? There's a lot of feet in Shakspeare's verse, but there ain't any legs worth mentioning in Shakspeare's plays, are there, Pip?... Let us have plenty of leg pieces, Pip, and I'll stand by you!"

Thus the references to the "female leg" are a means for Buchanan to "get at" Rossetti at his most vulnerable point, and a means to do so without giving his enemy the option of litigation. In the course of his amusing description of the symptom of the sensuality gripping London he writes:

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. Turn your eyes to the English stage. Shakespere is demolished and lies buried under hecatombs of Leg! Open the last new poem. Its title will possibly be this, or similar to this—'Leg is Enough'.

The passage of which this is a part (and the whole pamphlet), J. H. Buckley cites as displaying "a mind itself diseased, obsessed with deep inhibitions, unnaturally familiar with a long tradition of scatological literature"; and so said some contemporaries, and so said, perhaps, Buchanan himself. Yet there is a method in this madness; this passage contains a "subtle, secret, diabolical" hint that Buchanan, as far as the outside world was concerned, knew whereof he spake. For William Morris's "last new poem" curiously entitled "Love is Enough" was at this very time in manuscript, had been read to this friends, and was to be published in December. Buchanan is here signalling to Rossetti and his intimates that he well knew their affairs.

The word is used advisedly, for the next paragraph begins

If popular writers are to be credited, there is running rampant in English society a certain atrocious form of vice, a monster with two heads—one of which is called Adultery, the other Dipsomania—and these two heads, blind to all else in the world, leer and ogle at each other (p. 4).

The "atrocious suggestion" becomes plain. What could be clearer, though not open to litigation, of course, than this reference to the adulterer D. G. Rossetti and the dipsomaniac A. C. Swinburne, his twin objects of attack in the pamphlet, and their grotesque mutually admiring relationship? Here effectively disguised as the diatribe of a sick man (a further shift to avoid litigation) is an eminently sane man, possibly envious of Rossetti's sexual, but not his poetic, successes and at his effrontery in so publicly proclaiming them, letting Rossetti and others know just how ironic his later disclaimers were: "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).

Buchanan thus placed Rossetti in a dilemma to which there was no honourable or easy solution. Reminded constantly by Buchanan, and his own conscience⁷⁰ that he was a coward, he was now given something very real to be frightened of: public exposure, scandal and disgrace, because of his affair with Janey Morris. Thus with extreme ingenuity Buchanan caused Rossetti to be fearful of a very real threat, all the while conscious of how fearful and thus how despicable he was. Locked in to this terrible spiral of cause and effect, Rossetti manfully endured the pamphlet and its review in the *Echo* and did not break until reading the *Saturday Review*. Having no idea where or when the unscrupulous Buchanan, or the spirit of Buchanan which was beginning to become all-pervasive, would stop persecuting him, he broke. Little understanding of aberrant mental conditions is needed to see why he found *Fifine at the Fair* to be conveying covert attacks on himself, nor for that matter, *Under the Microscope*.

Thus, as Geoffrey Grigson surmised twenty years ago, Buchanan's attack was "supported on a fairly exact knowledge of Rossetti's fleshly and a little crawly relationships".⁷¹ It did not, however, end, much to Rossetti's intense mortification, with the appearance of the pamphlet. For Buchanan evidently resolved to do for the Fleshly School what W. E. Aytoun had done for the Spasmodics. Whereas Aytoun wrote a review of the non-existent "Firmilian" quoting liberally from his parody, Buchanan wrote his pamphlet in part as self-parody, mocking the sexual preoccupations of anyone posing as a moralist on such matters and then proceeded to review this self-parody in the urbane manner of "one-half London".

If it is quite consistent for Buchanan to run the risk, as has been his lot ever since, of being misconstrued in order to attack Rossetti; it is also quite consistent that he should be one of the first to tell the world of his own folly. He was quite capable, as Rossetti and Swinburne well knew, of denigrating himself while attacking others (to their knowledge he had done this in "The

⁷⁰ He called himself a "sneak", albeit playfully, several times, e.g. F. M. Hueffer, *Memories and Impressions* (London, 1911), p. 23, and W. B. Scott, *Autobiographical Notes*, ii. 188.

⁷¹ *Encounter*, xvii (November 1961), 69.

Session of the Poets" and in the *Contemporary* article). He had been publicly ridiculed by the editor of the *Athenaeum* for his conceit when boasting that for every reader of his journal a dozen would read the pamphlet. To this end he wrote its review in the *Echo* for Saturday, 18 May, "Fleshing the Fleshly". Only by using a paper like the *Echo* (the first half-penny newspaper), on a Saturday, and on the front page, could Buchanan, who rarely made idle threats, make good his boast. Rossetti at the time considered the review to be Buchanan's work; Joseph Knight writing to him a month later was "convinced" that this was so (*Bulletin*, liii. 283); and William Michael, using language identical to that used in his correct attribution of the *Quarterly* article to W. J. Courthope, so attributed it in 1895 (*Memoir*, ii. 306). In his subsequent histories of the Controversy Buchanan did not deny the attribution, which has recently been confirmed by Professor A. Q. Morton using modern stylometric analysis.⁷² Thus it should stand.

Since this review is not easily accessible, it is published in full as an appendix to this paper. Significant in it is Buchanan's by now habitual self-denigration: he accuses the writer of the pamphlet of conjuring "this 'super-sensualist' community" of Bohemians "out of his own imagination"; had things come to the state Buchanan describes surely "a prophet of heavier calibre" than he would have been sent to rectify them.

Most wounding in "Fleshing the Fleshly", as William Michael noted, was the charge that Rossetti and Swinburne must be the "veriest aestheticised simulacra of humanity" Buchanan considered them if they did not respond to his charges; Rossetti correctly took this to mean that they were cowards (*Memoir*, ii. 306). Buchanan, like many others since, invariably saw the aesthetes to be less than manly men, hiding their true and unpleasant natures and beliefs behind the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, who, in their quest for perfect artistic form, sacrificed their best instincts to their worst, thus suppressing "conscience and morality" (he had said the same in his letter to Browning of 7 December 1870, quoted above). Behind the many charges of affectation and insincerity in the pamphlet, and there are over fifty, is the implication that Rossetti and Swinburne have not the

⁷² A paper covering this more technical matter will be published shortly. I am much indebted to Professor Morton for his kind and speedy assistance.

courage to be true to themselves. This is one of the two main factors in the pamphlet that Rossetti found so damaging and what "perturbed" him a good deal when reiterated in the *Echo*. William Michael's *Diary* records the various proposals to counter Buchanan, and, after noting his, and his brother's, awareness of his provocative remark five years earlier, ends his entry for 21 May with recording the conclusion that publishing Swinburne's pamphlet "expressing some general critical views, and taking up Buchanan's attack as well, but without saying anything directly or in detail about Gabriel...would be a good move". The latter had already "enjoined Swinburne to say little or nothing about Gabriel himself" (pp. 201-2).

Besides Swinburne, Colvin was also to take up the offensive and his promise of January was fulfilled on 25 May, when the *Athenaeum* published his review of Buchanan's pamphlet. But in fulfilling it he may have caused Rossetti much apprehension (if not terror) when discussing the opening paragraphs and their description of the "Leg-disease". Colvin did see this as an attempt to entertain, but Buchanan's inability to "stop short of intolerable grossness", his "wonderful instinct" for the salacious, which found expression in "a vocabulary of astonishing relish", gave the cue to subsequent readers of the pamphlet and directed attention away from Buchanan's real targets in the passage. Just as Forman had done in February, Colvin began by describing the process by which the author of the "peevish attack" in October had come to lie about the pseudonym, establishing once and for all that Buchanan lied when saying that his name was not suppressed, and adding, for the first time (which scholars have accepted as true in itself), that "so far from being the result of any inadvertence whatever, had been due to his own express motion and desire, urgently reiterated from a distance and at the last moment" (p. 650), Colvin then proceeding to make sure that his readers were fully aware of the implications of his statement.

Attributing Buchanan's attack to envy, and repeating what he had said in the *Athenaeum* on 9 December "that the significant part of the performance is not its matter, but the circumstances of its authorship and publication", Colvin, not caring to consider the larger question of just what those circumstances were, castigated Buchanan, as well he might, for all the ignorant blunders of his criticism, the spelling mistakes and obvious errors of fact and of opinion, and denounced the "childish assumption", to which

Buchanan reverts "again and again", that the poetry of Swinburne and Rossetti "has been studied with pleasure, and spoken of with admiration by none but the personal friends of the writers" (p. 651). Including Swinburne's verse makes Buchanan's charge a little ridiculous; delete it and Colvin, writing anonymously, makes his own contribution, yet again, to its validity.

While heartened by this evidence of Colvin's loyalty, and referring to Joseph Knight's role in identifying Buchanan as the writer in the *Echo*, Rossetti in a letter to Knight recorded his resolution to hold himself aloof from the hubbub:

You may be sure that these monstrous libels—both the pamphlet and its press results—cause me great pain, but I have been in doubt what course to take till this evening, when it seems clear to me that I have the right to adopt a tone raising me above the question. I have no part in insult or violence, and cannot be involved because their atmosphere is raised around me.⁷³

Dated only "Monday night" the letter was probably written on 27 May, and the decision that evening may have been taken at William Michael's house, whom he had visited on that date (*Diary*, p. 204). Rossetti's use of the passive voice in the last sentence may suggest some acknowledgment of Swinburne's role, among others', in producing an atmosphere of "insult or violence"; for Swinburne and *Under the Microscope* had been his particular concern earlier in the day.

His resolve was short-lived. Only a few days later he may have concluded that Colvin had betrayed him, as indeed he had, for on Saturday, 1 June, in a journal that Colvin had promised him was "his", appeared yet another attack the more devastating for being totally unexpected. The notice of Buchanan's pamphlet in the *Saturday Review* of that date precipitated Rossetti's decline into paranoia. Either he saw the review to be the work of Buchanan,⁷⁴ or that the writer had allowed himself to be persuaded that Buchanan's views, however unpleasant their expression, were in essence correct. Either one man was mercilessly hounding Rossetti out of society or he had begun to persuade others to join him, "a

⁷³ Joseph Knight, *Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London, 1887), pp. 141-2.

⁷⁴ In "Criticism as One of the Fine Arts" Buchanan did write a brief parody of a *Saturday Review* notice, and the overwrought Rossetti may have seen this, after reading "Mr. Buchanan and the Fleshly Poets", to be Buchanan's way of telling him that he was going to attack him in the *Saturday*.

conspiracy was forming against him" as, years later, Swinburne remembered him saying.

Read now, the review of the pamphlet seems to be quite predictable for a journal of the *Saturday's* reputation. The writer liked neither Rossetti's verse, which has never been remarkably popular, nor Buchanan's criticism of it, which, again, is scarcely an unexceptionable position to take. Rossetti, having greatly exercised himself of late to find Swinburne only to discover that he was suffering another bout with delirium tremens, may have detected another Buchanan thrust when, like Colvin in the *Athenaeum*, the writer drew particular attention to Buchanan's leg fixation but hinted at Swinburne's disease too, as if suggesting that each man was as culpable as the other for the course the Controversy was taking:

But now he is fascinated by a horrid thing which threatens and paralyses him. He sees it on every side—in the street, on the stage, in books, on canvas. It is, he goes on to tell us, Legs. There is a well-known form of disease in which the patient is pursued by beetles or snakes, or other nasty things, always swarming before his eyes, on the floor, the walls, the roof. Mr. Buchanan is haunted by legs (p. 701).

The entire paragraph, ending in the author's surprise that "Mr. Buchanan does not see that in making these confessions he exposes himself to an obvious retort" from Rossetti and his friends, "To the pure in spirit all things are pure", can easily be seen to be Buchanan's ironic self-depreciation at work. But when the writer turns to Rossetti, the denunciation shows how well Buchanan articulated the general distaste for aesthetic poetry (the author even uses this term for Rossetti and his circle), for if he did not write this it certainly appears as though he did:

For our own part we think the old-fashioned notions are the best, and that there are some subjects which poets and artists had better let alone, or which, at least, they are justified in touching only when they have a distinct and important moral purpose in view, and not mere dalliance and sport. Honest plainspeaking is an excellent thing in its way, and possibly the world might be better for a little more of it. But 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.

Colvin had promised Rossetti more, much more, than he could deliver. Not only was the *Saturday Review* devastatingly hostile, but Colvin failed to review the pamphlet in the *Fortnightly* (for which journal he was principal reviewer at his time); nor were there the promised notices in the *Daily News* or *Pall Mall Gazette*. Noting the increasingly personal nature of the dispute, and fearing it might end, as of course it did, in the law-court, editors were shying away from it.⁷⁵ The *Saturday*, ironically, seems to be the last journal of note to have reviewed Buchanan's pamphlet. Had Rossetti but known it the storm was in fact almost over.

"Mr Buchanan and the Fleshly Poets" undoubtedly triggered Rossetti's collapse the day after it appeared; and it seems altogether likely that W. B. Scott's description, written at least five years later, of a midsummer dinner party,⁷⁶ records the moment when Rossetti's paranoia became uncontrollable, the moment when he realized that Buchanan, either in person or at the very least in spirit, was behind the current attack, which was just one of the many he could now expect, all containing covert allusions to Swinburne's affliction or his own irregular life, as each journal in turn considered Buchanan's diatribe.

CONCLUSION

Only through his recension of the Controversy can the factors influencing Rossetti's decision, apparently taken on 3 or 4 July

⁷⁵ Swinburne was dismayed at the scant response to *Under the Microscope* (Lang, ii. 259).

⁷⁶ "Hopelessly confused chronologically" the account has usually been assumed to be referring to a dinner party in October 1871, which assuredly took place, though two other descriptions surviving do not even suggest Rossetti's aberrant behaviour, which is not consistent with other descriptions of his conduct at that time. The first is to be found in Scott's letter to Alice Boyd (*Bulletin*, liii. 111-112) and the other in Edmund Gosse's letter to his father (*The Life and Letters of Edmund Gosse*, ed. Evan Charteris (London, 1933), p. 36). Scott's published description is remarkably insistent on dating the dinner when "midsummer of 1872 was drawing on", after Alice Boyd had left London for Penkill (which occurred according to William Michael's *Diary* on 21 May, p. 201), it being Scott's custom to have such dinner parties "in the season" before he left for Penkill. If the single word "*Saturday*" is substituted for "Contemporary" in his account, and if "days" is substituted for "weeks" in the last sentence, then only Scott's assertion that "From this time [Rossetti] occupied himself in composing a long reply..." becomes quite out of place (*Autobiographical Notes*, ii. 171-2).

1872, to end his friendship with Swinburne be properly understood. Neither W. B. Scott, who relayed it to William Michael (in a letter now lost), nor William Michael, who conveyed it to Swinburne, whose eloquent affirmation of his love for his friend does survive (and concludes with his recognition that Rossetti "shrinks", ominous word, from seeing him "as yet", Lang, ii. 178), realized that this decision was irrevocable.

Some time ago Professor Lang (in a footnote to the letter cited above) gave his explanation for the rupture of a "friendship, which is matched in English literary history only by the intimacy between Wordsworth and Coleridge" (i.p. xlv). Certainly, to use his elegant and expressive phrase, the "compulsions of Swinburne's company" would have tried the most placid of temperaments, which Rossetti's assuredly was not; these compulsions were exacerbated by Swinburne's decline into alcoholism, which at times was a source of amusement to Rossetti, at times a source of keen annoyance; for this alcoholism made Swinburne, who prided himself on his integrity, quite incapable of honouring his commitments and thus, for all his prickly assertions to the contrary, unreliable. At the very time of his deepening crisis in late May, Rossetti spent much time and energy trying to find Swinburne and learn of his answer to Buchanan's pamphlet, only to discover he was *hors de combat* with delirium tremens. Later in the summer, which, too, may have helped to make the decision irrevocable, Rossetti would have heard from H. T. Dunn of Swinburne's indiscretion. Already the subject of much gossip, knowledge gleaned thereby Buchanan evidently used in his attacks, Rossetti would have been angered to hear how reports of his condition had proliferated. On 22 July Dunn wrote to William Michael (this being, presumably, H. R. Angeli's source for her version):

I do not think it wise that in the event of Rossetti's returning to town he should come to Cheyne Walk. I believe he ought to be kept away as long as possible...for I hear the most exaggerated accounts floating on all sides of his condition and the most annoying part of the affair is that it is his friends who spread these things about. I was told of somebody, a friend of somebody else being in the Solferino Restaurant and hearing Sandys and Swinburne going over the whole matter at one of the tables.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Gale Pedrick, *Life with Rossetti* (London, 1964), pp. 116-7.

Worse for Rossetti than Swinburne's erratic social behaviour would have been his acute awareness of the fact that he himself had never given direct cause for Buchanan's onslaught, and he would have been less than human if he had not blamed Swinburne, who had given Buchanan much to be angry at, for its virulent and persistent nature. At the end of his life Rossetti considered Buchanan's dedication of *God and the Man* ("To an Old Foe") to be intended for Swinburne and not for himself. This may have been the unconscious expression of what he had come to believe when organizing *Poems*' reception, namely, that Buchanan blamed him, as "acknowledged head of the school", for all Swinburne's excesses whether of conduct or criticism. Whether or not Rossetti knew how wounding to Buchanan were Swinburne's gibes at David Gray in 1868 and 1870, he certainly knew of Swinburne's delight in baiting him and of the meeting in March 1869, and would well remember how Swinburne counselled him to answer Buchanan's pseudonymous attack when cooler heads preferred silence. So far as Rossetti was concerned, Swinburne had provoked and set the tone for the events of 1872, and Buchanan's every repetition of the epithet "fleshly" implied for Rossetti Swinburne's culpability.⁷⁸ William Michael's own contemporary acknowledgement of his blame in the matter, incurred, of course, in his defence of Swinburne, is to be found in his *Diary* (p. 201), and also, perhaps, in his own distraught condition in the summer of 1872.

Rossetti was caught in a dilemma by his intimacy with Swinburne, a dilemma exacerbated by that with Janey Morris. There was between Rossetti and Swinburne a profound difference of temperament of which Buchanan's attack made each man acutely conscious. With his fine aristocratic disdain for public opinion, Swinburne really did enjoy *épatant le bourgeois*, whose spokesman, Buchanan, soon took up his challenge, Swinburne glorying in the subsequent combat. Rossetti, as his letter to Tennyson in 1866 shows, wished to be respectable and considered so; although the subject of much gossip among his friends and in the literary and art worlds also, he tried to lead his Bohemian life discreetly, and was inclined to be fearful of outraging Victorian

⁷⁸ Buchanan enjoyed flinging his acolyte's term back in his face, and, as has long been recognized, found it (and the enduring notoriety of its association with his name in the *O.E.D.*) in Swinburne's review of *Poems*, where it appears four times.

morality, which was for him powerfully embodied and expressed by his mother and sisters. Never seeking the limelight, always shrinking from public exhibition of his pictures or publication of his verse, in May 1872 he found himself and his way of life exposed in a manner more lurid than he could ever have feared he would be. Stronger and saner men than he was would have found the ordeal repugnant and unnerving. To his staunchest friend, Ford Madox Brown, whose "common sense treatment" contributed so much to his recovery, Rossetti turned in his deepening crisis, and on 23 May, when feeling "awfully out of sorts", invited him to dinner, though warning him that if Swinburne were there, who "is quite uncertain always", not to "talk seriously" before him (DW, 1209). Evidently he did not want Swinburne to know just how perturbed he was by Buchanan's continuing attacks, or just how much his conviction that a conspiracy was developing to hound him out of society had grown (a conviction that Brown himself encouraged, *Diary*, 27 May, p. 203). Knowing full well how scornfully Swinburne was apt to despise those who faltered when under fire, Rossetti wanted to preserve Swinburne's illusion about his steadfastness, which he knew was diminishing by the hour.

Perhaps Professor Lang is not quite correct in his most important conclusion: that Rossetti "may well have tortured himself into imagining Swinburne (as he imagined Browning and Dodgson) to be part of a conspiracy against him" (Lang, ii. 178).⁷⁹ If Rossetti could find in *Fifine at the Fair* evidence of Browning's complicity, in *Under the Microscope* Swinburne's least unequivocal statement contains an implication of Rossetti's lack of manliness that needs no imagination to detect and could have come from the pen of Buchanan himself. Having heard the statement read to him when in good health by Swinburne in early May, re-reading it in the first days of July when still convinced of "everything (and everybody...) being in a conspiracy against him" (*Bulletin*, liii. 289), Rossetti could well believe that Swinburne had indeed joined his enemies.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Colvin probably had Swinburne besides himself in mind when describing Rossetti's paranoia: "He harboured torturing suspicions of malice and treachery even against his best-trying friends..." Not without some justification, it would appear (*Memories and Notes*, p. 75).

⁸⁰ Professor Fredeman knows of no communication that would have prompted W. B. Scott's letter to William Michael on 4 July. It seems reasonable

Rossetti did hear Swinburne read *Under the Microscope* to him on 3 May and found "its tone somewhat exceptionable, as showing too intimate an acquaintance with the minutiae of the hostile writings" (*Diary*, p. 194). But this was before *The Fleshly School of Poetry* had appeared, and, quite apprehensive about the manner in which Swinburne would handle Buchanan's latest diatribe, Rossetti tried vainly for several days towards the end of the month to find him, only to establish that he had been in his cups again and *hors de combat* (*Diary*, pp. 203-4). Though Rossetti did not find Swinburne before 28 May, it is possible that he did make contact later that week, and would have seen in manuscript what he had heard Swinburne read.

Since, as Swinburne's letter of 27 October states, his pamphlet was originally based on "certain texts of Ruskin and Carlyle", it can be assumed that the references to these writers in his pamphlet remained virtually unchanged from first draft to publication. Ruskin's text is obvious (Hyder, p. 70) and would have caused Rossetti no concern. Carlyle's comes at the end of the second paragraph and, voicing one of Swinburne's perdurable beliefs and assuredly no afterthought, must have caused Rossetti some pain on 3 May, and a great deal more than pain when next he discovered that the opinion still stood. "It is long since", Swinburne wrote

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 (Hyder, p. 37).

To let this stand in early May, when Rossetti could still affect the indifference Swinburne really did feel and assumed others to feel, is just allowable, but to let it stand and be published thus after Rossetti's collapse in June argues an insensitivity to others bordering on the inhuman. His statement in a later letter that his knowledge (through F. M. Brown) of Rossetti's "grave annoyance and serious suffering...gave at once edge and expansion to his satire" (Lang, ii. 209), merely emphasizes what has already been said: that Swinburne in May 1872 had no idea whatever of what was really happening to the man he considered his closest friend.

to assume that Swinburne sent an early copy of *Under the Microscope* to Scotland before that date (the pamphlet was reviewed on 6 July) advising Rossetti of his proposed visit to the Highlands.

The entire letter from which the statement above was excerpted shows this to be true; and the letter ten years later, also to Watts-Dunton, who had heard all this many times before, written after Swinburne had read T. Hall Caine's *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, shows a sublime egotism and a meanness of spirit that only Swinburnian superlatives could adequately describe:

For myself, if it is really to be received as the truth that such a thing as Buchanan's attack—less in itself than the least of a thousand onslaughts which have never for one hour affected my own peace of mind or impaired my self-reliance and self-respect—is to be charged in its effect on the victim with so fearful a catastrophe as the loss of his wife in so terrible and heart-rending a manner—in that case, remembering the loyal, devoted, and unselfish affection which I lavished for fifteen years on the meanest, poorest, most abject and unmanly nature of which any record remains in even literary history, I cannot say I wonder at the upshot of our relations, but I can most truly say from the very depth of my heart and conscience, 'I am shamed through all my nature to have loved so vile a thing'. (Lang, iv. 310-311)

Hall Caine had hoped, one hundred years ago (though not in his subsequent accounts), that

Sooner or later the story of this literary quarrel will be told in detail and in cold blood, and perhaps with less than sufficient knowledge of the parties concerned in it, or sympathy with their aims (p. 67).

Only now has sufficient material become available for that hope to be fulfilled. Rossetti's character remains elusive: a king among men, expansive, generous, exuding magnetism, yet a recluse, insecure, egotistical and, by 1871, predisposed by insomnia and drug-addiction to withdraw even further and further from the world. Buchanan's is a mass of contradictions, clever yet unwise, vicious yet sentimental, profoundly believing in charity yet earning a reputation for hypocrisy and even hatred that he will now never lose, he indulged in a deadly game with Rossetti and Swinburne. He knew that Swinburne was robust enough to play it; and, knowing little of Rossetti, assumed that he, too, could endure the public exposure this paper war brought him. Buchanan paid dearly for this misjudgment, and never denied that his subsequent reputation was well deserved. Yet Swinburne, acting, for all Buchanan knew, at the behest of his master, had deliberately provoked a notably irascible man, whom even Matthew Arnold had heard was "off his centre". The personal nature of Buchanan's criticism of *Poems*, heightened by the reaction to that

criticism, was a direct result of Swinburne's invidious citing of Gray as an inarticulate artist, by William Michael's poetaster gibe, and by the public reception of *Poems*, epitomised for Buchanan by Swinburne's review. Swinburne's loyalty to Rossetti was matched by Buchanan's to David Gray, and Buchanan is undoubtedly correct in his letter to Browning in March 1872 and his subsequent account of the Controversy (Jay, pp. 160-2) in attributing his animus to Swinburne's unfeeling comment on Gray in 1867. Only one poem of Gray's clearly addresses Buchanan, "The Poet and his Friend", which records a day of resolution that is the "landmark: of his life". With this forever ringing in his ears, it is small wonder that Buchanan eventually took the offensive in what he saw as a righteous and just cause:

But, good friend! we shall fight. Even he who fails
In a great cause is noble. Time will show
The best and worst of it; and while it hails
Some worthy Song-kings of the long-ago,
Perhaps our names will echo with the rest,
And in no feebleness. Meantime, oh fight!
In the thick hurry of the battle press'd,
Clothed on with resolution, the soul's might—
Be Hector or Achilles!—God defend the right!⁸¹

APPENDIX

"Fleshing the Fleshly"

The Echo, London, Saturday, 18 May 1872

They [Mr. Rossetti and Mr. Swinburne] do not quite realise that they are merely supplementing the literature of Holywell-street, and writing books well worthy of being sold under "sealed covers". That is a comparatively mild sentence from the thick pamphlet in which Mr. Robert Buchanan has resumed the attack on what he calls "The Fleshly School of Poetry", which he began in the *Contemporary Review* last October. It is a very pretty quarrel as it stands, and likely enough to break up the monotonous propriety and politeness with which English literary men have been in the habit for many years past of treating one another. In order to bear tamely the charges and insults hurled pellmell at the heads and hearts of Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Rossetti, they would really need to be the veriest aestheticised simulacra of humanity Mr.

⁸¹ David Gray, *The Poetical Works* (Glasgow and London, 1874), p. 126.

Buchanan seems to think them—"the merest echoes—strikingly original in this—that they merely echo what is vile". There is a stormy, and perhaps unavoidable, element of personality in Mr. Buchanan's criticism, which touches that part of the man which is not author. Not only does this censor of contemporary morals accuse the latest of our schools of poets of sensualising the minds of their readers, but we easily gather from what he says that their "fleshliness" is, in his opinion, but a second-hand, affected passion, inspired by the study of scrofulous French literature and our own all but forgotten amatory poets. Mr. Buchanan classes the "St. John's-wood poetry", as he sarcastically designates the productions of this school, with other phenomena of the day—such as the journals extinguished by prosecutions, and the demi-monde, but wholly indecent, photographs exposed in the windows of certain London shops. We are threatened, Mr. Buchanan thinks, with an outburst of sensuality, and he wishes to warn us of our danger. As yet the disease is local, and restricted within a very narrow range. English society is still sound at the core, but an attempt is being made to undermine it, and Mr. Rossetti is the leader of a party of sappers to whom nothing is sacred, who are bent in compassing the moral ruin of their country. It would seem that the mischief all emanated from a heterogeneous body of conspirators, having their head-quarters in London, who are described as "a sort of demi-monde, not composed, like that other in France, of simple courtesans, but of men and women of indolent habits and aesthetic tastes, artists, literary persons, novel writers, actors, men of genius, and men of talent, & c." Of the existence of this secret society we have hitherto been entirely ignorant, and we are sure we are by no means singular in this respect. The probability is, that Mr. Buchanan has conjured up this "sensual super-sensualist" community out of his own imagination. There are unmistakable symptoms of "fleshliness" abroad, in abundance, no doubt, but it is grossly extravagant to speak of the phenomenon as converting "this great City into a great Sodom of Gomorrah, waiting for doom". Things are surely not come to this pass, else we should probably have had a prophet of heavier calibre sent to us than Mr. Buchanan.

Of the historical and purely literary portion of Mr. Buchanan's criticism of Mr. Rossetti's poetry, we shall say nothing further at present than that it is uninstructed as well as unjust. But without doubt he has partially proved the moral and more serious count of the indictment he has drawn up against the latest school of English poets. In doing so, however, Mr. Buchanan has been unnecessarily offensive, and the effect of his strictures will be seriously counteracted by the opposition which his rudeness and violence of manner will excite. Besides, every reader of Mr. Rossetti's poems will feel that the passages quoted by Mr. Buchanan produce a grosser and more exclusively sensual impression in the setting of his pamphlet than they do in their original context. If the originals

were justly liable to be censured as sensual, many of them become absolutely filthy in Mr. Buchanan's handling. It is extremely difficult, we acknowledge, to touch on subjects of this kind without infringing some rule of good taste, but Mr. Rossetti's critic has not exercised ordinary self-restraint and caution. In explaining the reason why, in his opinion, Mr. Rossetti has, up to the present, escaped censure, while Mr. Swinburne has been all along severely chastised, Mr. Buchanan says it would appear that "a poet who describes sensual details may do so with impunity if he labels" his poems discreetly, and that Mr. Rossetti in his worst poems takes the precaution to "explain that he is speaking dramatically in the character of a husband addressing his wife". This was surely sufficiently plain and strong for all reasonable purposes, but Mr. Buchanan goes on to develop the theme in another still more pungent sentence, which, however, we shall not reproduce. One almost suspects occasionally that Mr. Buchanan relishes the denunciation of "fleshliness", if not the "fleshliness" itself. He has certainly posted himself well up in fleshly literature, homegrown and foreign, ancient and modern, and is entitled to be regarded somewhat in the light of a martyr, if he has carefully read through all the naughty French books to which he refers, without any personal pleasure, and with a single eye to the welfare of his fellow-men.

The "phenomenon" to which Mr. Buchanan directs such pointed attention in his brochure is really, to some extent, specially characteristic of the present day. There are among us men in whom the artistic or aesthetic instinct has been morbidly developed, to the suppression of conscience and morality, but they are few and they are uninfluential. The affectation of sensual passion is not a vice that Englishmen are likely to addict themselves to. A Platonic passion for flesh is a phase of sentiment that will have but a limited and ephemeral sway on this side of the Channel.