Letters to Janey

by R.C.H. Briggs

JANE BURDEN was seventeen when she met Dante Gabriel Rossetti in an Oxford theatre in October 1857. On 29 April, 1859, at St Michael's at the Northgate in Oxford, she married William Morris. When she died in January 1914 her personal possessions included letters to her from both men. In 1939 these were presented to the British Museum by Dr Robert Steele, literary executor of Jane Morris' second daughter, May. The letters from William Morris to Jane, catalogued with the remainder of the material and press-marked Add. MS 45, 338, have been available for study since 1946. But the letters from Rossetti were offered to and accepted by the Museum with the restriction that they should not be open to public inspection until fifty years after Jane Morris' death. The expiry of the restriction, on 27 January, 1964, was preceded by much speculation about the contents of these letters.

There is no lack of Rossetti letters. But these particular letters possessed a special fascination. It had long been apparent, indeed it was apparent to their contemporaries, that some special relationship existed between Janey, as she was familiarly known,

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1 According to J. W. Mackail, Life of William Morris, OUP ed. 1950, i, 149, it was Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones who first met Jane Burden. Lady Burne-Jones, in her Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones, 1904, i, 168, states that Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Arthur Hughes and William Morris were all at the theatre together when the meeting took place.

2 The wording of the Trustees' Minute recording the Museum's acceptance of the gift was such as to lead some writers to suppose that the letters would not be open to inspection until fifty years after the death of May Morris in 1938.

3 See the select bibliography in A Victorian Romantic, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, by Oswald Doughty, 1960, p. 694. The most recent addition to the corpus of Rossetti's published letters is Mrs L. M. Packer's The Rossetti-Macmillan Letters, 1963. A comprehensive edition of Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, prepared by Professor J. R. Wahl and Professor Doughty, will shortly be published at the Clarendon Press.
and Rossetti. The conspiracy of silence of writers intimate with these two aroused the curiosity of later investigators. Sir Henry Hall Caine, who, as a young man of (amply realised) literary ambitions, was the close companion of Rossetti in his last months, disclosed in 1928 that Rossetti, in an extremity of depression during the long night journey on their return from Cumberland, had revealed himself as a 'man who, after engaging himself to one woman in all honour and good faith, had fallen in love with another, and then gone on to marry the first out of a mistaken sense of loyalty and a fear of giving pain'—with disastrous consequences. Caine also disclosed the intimate friendship of Janey and Rossetti. Signora Helen Rossetti Angeli, whose first study of her uncle appeared in 1902, published an important biography in 1949 in which she saw no reason to doubt Caine's account. Professor Oswald Doughty offered the

4 For close on thirty years after the death of Gabriel, William Michael Rossetti conscientiously edited his brother's literary remains, producing over a dozen volumes, many of them stout, without ever referring to the association. Lady Burne-Jones and J. W. Mackail, Morris' biographer, were equally silent. F. G. Stephens, Rossetti's friend and the regular reviewer of his paintings, was so circumspect that in his Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1894 (p. 74), he affected to discern a reference to Miss Alexa Wilding in the sonnet, 'The Portrait', in which Rossetti expressed his exultant infatuation for Janey. Nothing was revealed in the posthumously published Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his Circle, 1904, of H. Trefry Dunn, Rossetti's studio assistant. T. Watts-Dunton never achieved his long contemplated definitive biography. H. C. Marillier, whose Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An illustrated memorial of his life and art, 1899, remains the most comprehensive and useful picture book on the subject, was wholly discreet. May Morris was understandably reticent in discussing the intimate lives of her parents and said little about her mother's relations with Rossetti. But she chose as frontispiece for Vol. V of The Collected Works of William Morris, Rossetti's first painting of Janey, completed in 1868, with its Latin inscription equivalent in meaning to the concluding line of 'The Portrait'—'They that would look on her must come to me'. Rossetti's 'Water-Willow' is the frontispiece for Vol. IV.

5 Recollections of Rossetti, 1928, pp. 141 and 200. Caine also quotes, p. 220, Rossetti's comment on somewhat different circumstances: 'To marry one woman and then find out when it is too late, that you love another is the deepest tragedy that can enter into a man's life.' Caine's Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1882, published four months after Rossetti's death, was silent on these matters.

6 Easter Art Annual, 1902.

7 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, His Friends and Enemies.
most elaborate investigation to date of Rossetti's tragic entanglements in his biography also first published in 1949. He considered it 'not improbable in the light of later events' that Rossetti and Janey had fallen in love when they first met in Oxford, but that Rossetti, feeling morally bound to Elizabeth Siddal, had encouraged Janey to accept Morris, and noted that Rossetti founded his prose-tale, The Cup of Water, upon a similar situation (p.369). Professor W. D. Paden's study of the painting 'La Pia de Tolomei' provides a succinct survey of the background to the present letters.

It was possible that the material now available for inspection would establish the precise nature of the relationship; in the event, it does not. Certainly the letters show that Rossetti was in love with Jane Morris. For the student of Rossetti they are essential reading and the student of Morris will not find them without interest, but they offer little more than was already available about the mystery of the woman's undoubted fascination for the two men.

The material is in the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum, and comprises one hundred and twelve complete and two incomplete letters to Jane, and one to William Morris, some lines of doggerel to accompany a book and a letter sent with two dormice presented by Rossetti to Jenny and May Morris, two drawings (of a wombat) by H. T. Dunn, Rossetti's studio assistant, a press cutting from the Athenaeum for 5 October, 1878 and a prescription from Rossetti's physician, Dr J. Marshall.

8 The second edition (OUP 1960) is very little revised. It is curious that Professor Doughty, whilst commending in his second edition (p. 468) Mr R. D. Macleod's effusion, Morris without Mackail, does not mention Mr E. P. Thompson's indispensable biography, William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary, 1955, and has allowed his reference to the inaccessibility of Morris' letters (p. 459) to stand in view of Mr Philip Henderson's important edition The Letters of William Morris to his Family and Friends, 1950. See also Times Lit. Supp. 1951, pp. 357, 421, 517, 533, 565.

9 Register of the Museum of Art, University of Kansas. Vol. 2, No. 1. November 1958. Copies may be obtained from the Society by members not resident in North America, price 4s.

10 Containing F. G. Stephens' description of 'A Vision of Fiammetta.'

11 Some of the letters obviously belonging to this series have at some stage of
It has been divided into four parcels. Letters covering the
period of ten years from 6 March, 1868 are contained in the
packet whose reference is Add. MS 52, 333A. The next packet
in chronological sequence is Add. MS 52, 333B, which runs
from 19 April, 1878 to 2 August, 1879. Then follows Add. MS
52, 332A, 13 August, 1879 to 19 July, 1880: and lastly Add.
MS 52, 332B, 2 August, 1880 to 4 October, 1881.

The dating of the letters has, for the most part, been taken
from the postmarks on the envelopes, also preserved, which
contained them, since Rossetti usually noted only the day of the
week. In some instances the dating appears to be erroneous,
especially about September 1878. The letters, which are all
written in ink, are mostly on fly-sheets of 8vo Whatman paper
with, in the early years, a die-sunk letter-heading, save when
Mrs Morris was abroad, when Rossetti would write to her on
thin ‘foreign paper’ as he termed it. The envelopes are mostly
small (2 ½ × 4 ¾ ins.) and are often sealed with Rossetti’s
monogram. The hand-writing becomes larger in later years—
starting with a rough average of about five words to a line,
twenty-four lines to a page, and ending with four words to a
line, seventeen lines to a page, save for that on the ‘foreign
paper’ which is much more compressed.

The writing contains many flourishes; the cross-bar of the t,
the tail of the y, the loop of the d when these letters end a
word frequently joining up to the next word. The slope is
about fifty degrees to horizontal. The writing, after 1878,
becomes progressively harder to read but is only occasionally
indecipherable. When s is doubled Rossetti invariably uses the
long form of that letter. The punctuation is careful, and full
use is made of exclamation and query marks. Rossetti sometimes
abbreviates, using &:, wd, shd, cd, abt, Bd. Dml. There are few
corrections.

Rossetti’s character and condition are reflected in these
letters. The early ones talk of visits and visitors, the later ones
are plainly the letters of a recluse. The tone of all of them is
affectionate. The dominant theme is Rossetti’s obsessive concern
for Mrs. Morris’ health. The whole correspondence amply

the sorting become detached from the remainder and are to be found under
other British Museum references. Thus Add. MS 45, 353 ff. 19 and 23; see
also, in the Department of Prints and Drawings, case 200 B.3* f. 5.
confirms Signora Angeli’s comment: ‘There is hardly a letter of Rossetti’s in which he alluded to Mrs Morris which does not speak anxiously of her health, nor from her to him (of the few known to me) that is not concerned with it’ (p.209). Throughout there is much in the letters about painting and the difficulties of painters, about buyers and exhibitions, about poetry and publishing. Some of the sonnets Rossetti sent to Janey are here.¹²

There are interesting comments on contemporaries. Thus, Ruskin whose ‘nasty venomous state ... anything will excite now’ (4 September, 1880): Charles Fairfax Murray, ‘a meritorious though cocky little cove’ (16 November, 1880); ‘A French idiot named Manet, who certainly must be the greatest and most uncritical ass who ever lived’ (10 February, 1881). Of Samuel Butler, author of Erewhon, which he had never read, he confesses: ‘What I chiefly remember of him is that he had eyebrows which were exactly like two leeches stuck on his face’ (6 September, 1878). The very last paragraph in the collection concerns a young poet and admirer of Rossetti; ‘I saw the wretched Oscar Wilde book, and glanced at it enough to see clearly what trash it is. Did Georgie say that Ned really admires it? If so, he must be gone drivelling’.¹³ (4 October, 1881).

The first packet falls into five groups: letters of 1868, 1869 and 1870, part of a letter written in 1875, and those of 1877 and early 1878. Rossetti had made several portrait drawings of Janey at Oxford in 1857 and 1858. It seems to have occurred to him that she might again serve as a model in the summer of 1865, for in July he arranged to have taken the photographs of her, posed by him, which are now at the Victoria and Albert Museum.¹⁴ The Morrises were already planning to leave Red

¹² Fair copies of these were presented to the Bodleian Library in 1939 and form the subject of Professor J. R. Wahl’s study, The Kelmscott Love Sonnets of D. G. Rossetti, 1954.

¹³ Wilde was friendly with Burne-Jones. Rossetti’s comment confutes Hall Caine (Recollections of Rossetti, 1928, p. 148) concerning Rossetti’s reaction to the copy of his first poems which Wilde sent, ‘bound in parchment and, I think, inscribed in gold. This was Oscar Wilde, and I remember Rossetti’s quick recognition of the gifts that underlay a good deal of amusing affectation.’ Wilde read D. G. Rossetti’s Family Letters (1895) in gaol and commented: ‘Rossetti’s letters are dreadful. Obviously forgeries by his brother,’ Letters of Oscar Wilde, 1962, p. 520.

¹⁴ The letter of 6 March 1868 accurately dates the study for the head of ‘La
House and in November 1865 removed to 26 Queen Square to live over the business of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in which Rossetti was a partner. By the end of the year he had made several drawings of Janey and in the following June (1866) began the painting of her in the blue dress now at Kelmscott Manor.

In 1867 he was troubled by failing sight and by insomnia. Fear that painting might cease to be possible for him, the example of Morris, who had begun to publish verse again in 1867, and, most of all, the inspiration of Janey, turned Rossetti’s thoughts again to poetry. He continued to paint, however, and the first three of the letters, of March and May 1868, convey a sense of excitement as he prepares for his paintings of Janey as ‘La Pia’. At this period Rossetti was often seen in the company of Janey.

In the autumn of 1868 his sight was at its worst, and Rossetti, now claiming that he ‘ought never to have been a painter, but a poet instead’, composed several sonnets and refurbished others, sixteen of which he published under the title ‘Of Life, Love and Death’ in the *Fortnightly Review* for March, 1869. His sight improved, however, and in the following spring and summer he was preoccupied with the painting of Janey as Pandora.

In the summer of 1869, Janey again fell ill and was advised to take the cure at Bad Ems in Hesse-Nassau. Morris accompanied

Pia’ and the commencement of the painting itself. Janey seems to have suggested the embroidery mentioned by Swinburne in his description of the painting in 1868, and later excluded. (Letter of 7 May 1868.)

15 Victoria and Albert Museum, Reserve Case F.F.1. Rossetti’s brief letter of 5 July 1865, informing Janey of the arrangements for the photography, appears to be the first of his letters to her that survive.

16 According to her friend Lady Burne-Jones (Memorials i 299) Janey as early as the beginning of 1866 fell so much out of health that she ceased to attend the evenings at which ‘the merriment of our youth was revived . . . (though) . . . the men never ceased to meet regularly’. Yet Janey’s presence at social functions in the company of Rossetti is well authenticated. See Doughty, pp. 453-6.


her. The next letters in the packet, written between 21 July and 7 September, 1869, were all sent to her there, save for an anxious one to Morris when a letter from Janey was slightly overdue.

His letter of 30 July contains a clear confession of his love for Janey and an expansive observation on the triangular situation which had developed. ‘The more he loves you’, wrote Rossetti of Morris, ‘the more he knows that you are too lovely and noble not to be loved: and, dear Janey, there are too few things that seem worth expressing as life goes on, for one friend to deny another the poor expression of what is most at his heart. But,’ he added confidently, ‘he is before me in granting this and there is no need for me to say it’. The letter ends ‘All love to Topsy from your loving Gabriel’.

With his letters at this time, Rossetti sent several caricatures of Morris and Janey, some of which are now in the Print Room at the British Museum.19 With that of 14 August, 1869, Rossetti included what he termed a ‘diaphragmic diagram’, explaining, ‘Conceive if your cure were now to proceed so rapidly that there remained a glut of surplus baths, and Topsy were induced to express a thanksgiving frame of mind by that act which is next to godliness!’ Evidently, Janey rebuked him, for in his next letter (23 August, 1869) Rossetti ‘most humbly’ apologised for ‘the too naked truth of my last historical portrait’, and in his next letter, of 30 August, 1869, he concludes: ‘Give my love to the dear old thing and bear in mind how much you are loved by Your affectionate D. Gabriel R.’

No letter in the collection contains any reference to Rossetti’s recovery of the poems that he had impetuously placed in his wife’s coffin in 1862 and now desired to publish. The mental disturbance which the exhumation caused him may account for the gap of over four months after the letters of 11 September, 1869.

His letters of 31 January and February 1870 are perhaps the most demonstrative of Rossetti’s feeling for Janey in the whole collection; they express frustration and love, wonder and worship. ‘For the last two years’, he wrote on 31 January, ‘I have felt distinctly the clearing away of the chilling numbness that surrounded me in the utter want of you; but ... it comes too

19 Case No. 200 B.3*.
Resolution; or, The Infant Hercules.

'Resolution; or, The Infant Hercules.' Caricature in pen and ink by D. G. Rossetti. Reproduced by permission of Signora H. Rossetti Angeli and the Trustees of the British Museum. Dated 14 August 1869. Reduced to approximately four-fifths actual size.
late'. In the next letter he wrote, 'No one else seems alive at all to me now, and places that are empty of you are empty of all life'. On 18 February, in a letter addressed to 'Dearest, kindest Janey', he confessed, 'To be with you and wait on you and read to you is absolutely the only happiness I can find or conceive in this world, dearest Janey'. And shortly afterwards, in April, at Scalands near Robertsbridge, they were together and alone.

Between the letter of 5 March, 1870 and that of 19 November, 1877 Rossetti published his poems, spent an ecstatic summer with Janey at Kelmscott which provided the pastoral background for his painting of her, 'Water-Willow', and where Janey's health seems to have improved as much as his own, and suffered the tribulation of the attack on his poetry by Robert Buchanan which had such a disastrous effect on his state of mind.

A few months of insanity, and an attempt to end his life were followed by a return to Kelmscott. There he spent the

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20 The poems were published at the end of April 1870. Rossetti lavished much care on the appearance of the book and made a design which was gilt embossed on dark blue covers. Apart from the large paper copies he had twelve copies printed on Whatman handmade paper, bound in white buckram with the gilt design, and endpapers with a pattern of similar design. Strangely, the copy which Rossetti inscribed for Janey was of the ordinary edition and not one of the twelve special copies.

21 Or 'bitter-sweet' as Professor Doughty, perhaps more accurately, describes it, p. 537.

22 'She is benefiting wonderfully and takes long walks as easily as I do,' he wrote to his mother and, to William Bell Scott, 'having developed a most triumphant pedestrian faculty which licks you hollow, I can tell you.' Doughty, pp. 472, 475.

23 The Fleshly School of Poetry by Thomas Maitland (alias Buchanan) first appeared in The Contemporary Review, October 1871, and was republished, expanded as a pamphlet in May 1872.

24 'It is a simple fact that, from the time when the pamphlet had begun to work into the inner tissues of his feelings, Dante Rossetti was a changed man, and so continued to the end of his life.' Family Letters, ed. W. M. Rossetti, i, p. 307.

25 'All, I now find by experience, depends primarily on my not being deprived of the prospect of the society of the one necessary person,' he wrote to Ford Madox Brown shortly before his return to Kelmscott. Doughty, p. 528.
next two years, mainly in the company of Janey. In July he left the place, never to return. In the autumn of that year the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. began to break up and the partnership was formally ended in March of the following year. Rossetti's share of the proceeds of the dissolution he gave to Janey.  

The few surviving pages of the letter of 1875 are almost wholly concerned with Rossetti's strange drawing of 'The Sphinx'.

Twice only after the long sojourns at Kelmscott were Janey and Rossetti together again, when she visited him for a fortnight at the end of 1875 at Aldwick Lodge, near the sea at Bognor, and again in March 1876.

Although they were so much together in the seventies, Rossetti certainly wrote Janey letters which are not here. In a letter to William Rossetti of 15 August, 1872, Janey referred to one from Gabriel which 'showed no sign whatsoever of his late distressing illness ... I have had many from his hand of a far more depressing kind'.

When the letters of the earlier period are compared with those of the later, a change in the relationship of the two correspondents is apparent. The later letters have an autumnal quality. Those from 19 November, 1877 to 19 April, 1878 were sent to her at Bordighera. Rossetti, though on the point of doing

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26 His possessiveness carried him to the length of extracting from Nolly, the son of Ford Madox Brown, the only painting of Janey done by Morris, the so-called 'La Belle Iseult', now in the Tate Gallery (Angeli, p. 111). 'My wish to possess it,' he explained disingenuously, 'is solely as an early portrait of its original, of whom I have made many studies myself.' (Doughty, p. 566.)

27 There are several references to this money, some of which was invested and seems to have enabled her to winter abroad, and some borrowed by Rossetti (18 March 1878; n.d. August 1878; 6 September 1878; 12 February 1880; 17 May 1880). On 15 July 1881 he wrote: 'I am enclosing the dividend and wish to tell you that there are about £300 of your money still immediately available. More of what I owe you should come as soon as you needed it, unless my chances failed altogether, of which there seem to be no special signs now!'


29 Rossetti's letter to George Hake of 30 April 1876 gives explicit instructions for his cremation and for the burning of letters. British Museum, Ashley 1413.
so several times, never visited Italy, and, despite the added inducement, did not seek to do so during the winters Janey spent there. Nor did he join his second favourite model, Marie Stillman, and her family, abroad, though strongly pressed by her to do so (19 December, 1877). From now to the end of his life, financial embarrassment condemned him to steady toil at the easel, interrupted only by the leaden listlessness that sometimes afflicted him. He went out little and saw few friends.  

The preoccupations and perplexities of the painter loom large in these later letters. Methods of working are disclosed. Many of the paintings are referred to by name, others simply as ideas. Rossetti shrank from exhibiting his pictures: he refused the space offered to him by the Grosvenor Gallery in 1878. 'Yet I do wish to come out somewhere and somehow' he wrote to Janey (27 February, 1878). When she urged him to master his fears, he pointed out that a lifelong abstinence from exhibiting had made him 'perhaps over-anxious', and that an unfavourable result would damp the enthusiasm of 'the few who remain to help me'. He was, he confessed, haunted by the idea of the discouragement she would feel if he had a public failure at his age (5 March, 1878).

There are many references to buyers and their peculiarities. Cyril Fry, the fashionable photographer, who paid Rossetti his highest price, two thousand guineas, because he wished to exhibit the painting (Janey as Venus Asariste), was stigmatised as 'the horrid Fry' (19 April, 1878). A young Mr Turner of Manchester, who receives one brief mention in Doughty, is spoken of by Rossetti as his strongest patron of the later years when F. R. Leyland, William Graham and others became disillusioned with his procrastination. Rossetti recognised the importance of getting works into Manchester 'where the principal buyers are'. For this he allowed Turner to exhibit one of his 'Proserpines' and even, though 'mortal sorry', parted with 'the Kelmscott picture' (19 December, 1877). Only when driven by necessity would Rossetti sell original drawings of Janey (21 March, 1881), but necessity often beckoned in his last years.

\[30\] Shields, Watts-Dunton and, when in England, Fairfax Murray were his only regular visitors, apart from his brother William. (4 September 1880.)

\[31\] Doughty, p. 543.
Models and sittings are recurring themes in the letters, Rossetti was always on the alert for possible sitters. 'What sort of a looking girl is she? What height? and what age?' he enquired (12 March, 1880). 'By the bye, Dunn told me there was a girl like May in the room when he called on you . . . I could give her some sittings' (2 December, 1877). By 1877 there were, he maintained, only two models, Janey and Marie Stillman, who were of any value to him. 'Pictures from common models folk will not buy from me, witness the Gretchen' (19 December, 1877). But in later years, when Janey was not always available, he adopted the method of working out some of his drawings of Janey as pictures using 'any native at hand' for the 'mere surface and light-and-shade of the flesh'. The walls of his studio were covered with drawings of her (19 December, 1877 and 18 March, 1878).

The letters are not free from traces of envy at the success of friends. Thus, of Burne-Jones, 'No doubt you know that he has bought a mansion near Brighton. He appears to be culminating' (10 February, 1881): and of Fairfax Murray, 'That youth is getting cocky again on some small success he has had lately' (10 November, 1880). But much more evident is his generosity. He was ever ready to help those in misfortune even in the midst of his own adversity. Several of the letters describe his efforts to sell the pictures of his friend, J. Smetham, when that painter lapsed into a prolonged state of melancholy (10 February, 1878 and 27 February, 1878).

Throughout the letters Morris is in the background and occasionally moves into the forefront, as when Rossetti writes to him anxiously enquiring about the progress of Janey's cure at Bad Ems (August 1869), or when he is required to review Rossetti's Poems. The references to Morris are always friendly and, in the early correspondence, affectionate; but Rossetti's old condescension to the erstwhile disciple he had so powerfully influenced persists to the end, as in his reference to the 'enormous democratic obesity of Top' (15 July, 1881). In occasional direct comparisons he makes between Morris and himself, Rossetti shows much insight. Thus he contrasts Morris' poetic faculty, with its abundant outpouring, to his own painful revisionary process (30 August, 1869), or Top's 'wholesale orders in philanthropy' with his own individual form of charity, 'the retail trade being beneath a true humanitarian' (1 April, 1878). The comment which
Mackail attributed to Rossetti, ‘Did you ever notice that Top never gives a penny to a beggar’ is echoed in another of these letters, ‘I suppose Top never gave one farthing to Keats’s sister, but then he writes long epistles on every public event’ (2 August, 1879). How little in touch he was with Morris’ activities may be seen from his reference to ‘Top’s Ancient Monument Society’ (4 Semptember, 1880). In the later letters he often prophesies a Parliamentary career for Morris (10 February, 1878; 27 February, 1878; 5 June, 1879; 15 July, 1881).

Morris also saw clearly the difference between them: ‘I can’t see how it was that Rossetti took no interest in politics but so it was . . . The truth is he cared for nothing but individual and personal matters . . . but the evils of any mass of people he couldn’t bring his mind to bear upon’. These letters amply confirm this comment. Politics are laughed off: ‘You don’t really consider me a Tory do you?’ he enquired when Janey presumably endorsed Hall Caine’s classification of him in a lecture on Politics and Arts. ‘He never talks politics’, Rossetti observed approvingly of Hall Caine himself. The happenings of the world at large receive very little mention in the letters, even when Rossetti was himself caught up in them. Thus, at the time of the assassination of Czar Alexander II, he became much alarmed at the proposed publication of his brother’s ‘Democratic Sonnets’ and wrote (12 April, 1881) urging caution, both to his brother and to his sister-in-law (British Museum, Ashley A3892). But there is no mention of his fears in these letters.

An extravagant concern for Janey’s health pervades the correspondence. To her ‘dear health’ he would, he avowed, ‘sacrifice all else’ (30 July, 1869). The nature of Janey’s infirmity remains something of a mystery, and Rossetti himself refers to

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32 Mackail, Life of William Morris (OUP ed.), ii, 100.

33 ibid.

34 Letters of 23 February 1880 and 19 August 1881. ‘There was a kind of silent acquiescence in the idea that the affairs of everyday life were proscribed. I cannot remember that we talked politics at all, or that a daily newspaper ever entered our doors,’ Hall Caine, Recollections of Rossetti, 1928, p. 147. Rossetti is depicted, ‘precociously manifesting . . . that queer indifference to politics which marked him in his prime and in his decline’, by Sir Max Beerbohm in the frontispiece of his Rossetti and his Circle, 1922.
it as 'a capricious malady' (3 August, 1869). Yet it was real enough and evidently caused him great anxiety: 'All is nothing if you do not mend' he wrote on 10 February, 1878, and two years later, in a letter addressed to 'Dear suffering Janey', 'I had got so nervous and frightened about you that I don't know how I should have got through the night if I had not heard' (3 January, 1880). In the last year of his life, he observed 'Far above all and all-absorbing is anxiety on your account' (15 July, 1881) – an apt comment on the whole correspondence.

Medicaments and advice were issued in plenty; influenza would surely result from her taste for open windows (1 May, 1880); sea air was preferable to the damp atmosphere of Kelmscott (27 August, 1879). Sneez powder and cod-liver oil were recommended (26 July, 1879 and 1 July, 1878), and on one occasion 'Shields' bottle for neuralgia' was despatched post haste (5 June, 1879). On another he sent her chlorodyne (10 January, 1880). Once, when Janey was wintering at Oneglia in 1878, Morris too seems to have become alarmed and pressed Dr Reynolds, her physician, to advise by post, and also arranged a supply of Dr Radcliffe's nostrum of bromide. Rossetti on the same occasion sent her Dr Marshall's prescription for a strengthening iron medicine (19 March, 1878), fortunately remembering in his next letter to warn her of its tendency to destroy the enamel of the teeth (to avoid which it was best taken through a glass tube or through a straw). Undeterred, the lady seems to have taken Dr Marshall's tonic, for on 19 April, 1878 Rossetti expresses satisfaction that she had found it beneficial. After so much anxiety about her health, it is surprising to find that in the late seventies Janey was apparently contemplating – and with Rossetti's approval – a visit to Iceland (18 March, 1879; 21 July, 1879).

Rossetti's solicitude for Janey's health and welfare is well exhibited in the matter of The Retreat, 26 Upper Mall, Ham­mersmith, better known as Kelmscott House. Uncertainty about his tenure of 16 Cheyne Walk had led him to consider alternative accommodation. His first reference to the house is on 2 Decem-

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35 Including Arundel House, Percy Cross, Fulham, once the home of Tennyson's friend A. H. Hallam, 'and Tennyson wrote some of his poetry in the garden; so that those sylvan shades would recognize Top's thunderings of composition' (1 April 1878).
ber 1877. The Morrices were also contemplating a move from Horrington House, Turnham Green, which they now found too small. Rossetti viewed the house on the Upper Mall no less than three times; made enquiries among people who knew it; had Dunn send drawings of it to Janey, and warned her not to discuss it too widely lest Ned (Burne-Jones) 'pounce on it'. He was thus well qualified to advise Janey when Morris became enthusiastic about it, and also reported to her on other possible houses.36

His letter of 19 December, 1877 contained a rather unfavourable report on The Retreat, the garden of which, he was assured, was 'continually being overflowed by the Thames.' By 12 March, 1878 Morris had been over it twice and thought well of it. The drawback for him was 'the dreary room at the back: high, darkish and ugly-windowed: but . . . we might keep hens in it; or a pig, or a cow'.37 Rossetti thought this 'a fine room' (1 April, 1878) and by 18 March Morris had come to think it 'really very handsome'. Presumably Janey wrote to Morris that she had unfavourable reports on the house, for in his letters of 18 March, he defended it strongly. While assuring her that he would not think of it again if she felt she would not like it, he made it plain that he wanted the house. Poor Mrs Morris! Just before her husband's announcement of 2 April, 1878, that he had taken the house, she received Rossetti's dispatch of 1 April detailing disadvantages enough to make any housewife blench: the kitchen was frightful, dark and inaccessible, the then occupants relying wholly on gas-light there; to induce servants to stay would be difficult; the interior was in a frightful condition; the later famous long drawing-room, then George MacDonald's study, was 'fearful to the eye with blood red flock paper and a ceiling of blue with gold stars!'; the place was very damp (Morris thought it exceptionally dry); the garden was a swamp ('The garden is really most beautiful' wrote Morris, 18 March, 1878), and communications were bad. Both men agreed that the excellent stables had possibilities.

'Let us hope' Morris wrote consolingly 'that we shall all grow


37 ibid.
younger there my dear.' But Rossetti doubted the wisdom of the choice, had gloomy forebodings about the damp even in the following September, just before the Morrises moved in, and advised searching for a drier country resort than Kelmscott to mitigate the dampness of Kelmscott House (6 September, 1878).

The later letters are intimate rather than passionate. They convey Rossetti's gratitude to and dependence on Janey, but lack the underlying excitement with which his burgeoning love for her imbued the earlier letters. When he protests his regard for her, he does so in solemn, almost inscriptive, form. Thus, on one occasion, anxious to dispel a misunderstanding, he assures her of his feeling for her 'far deeper (though I know you never believe me) than I have entertained towards any other living creature at any time of my life' (1 July, 1878).

Rossetti's anxiety to entertain Janey is made very apparent, especially in the later letters, by some rather heavy-handed banter and by many lengthy anecdotes that illumine odd aspects of the period. Thus, the bankrupt Whistler, itemising his etched plates, with a view to their re-purchase, as 'copper at 3/6 a lb.' is detected by his and Rossetti's vigilant patron Leyland (27 August, 1879). Whistler takes his revenge by allowing Howell, Rossetti's agent, to exhibit his caricature of Leyland, 'Portrait of a Creditor' (12 February, 1880). The dubious activities of Charles Augustus Howell were providential for Rossetti in his efforts to enliven the letters. He often apologises for his newslessness, regretting that he cannot announce the hanging of Gladstone (4 September, 1880) or Ruskin (or, in the latter's case 'something equally welcome,' 25 December, 1879), or that he has no 'Howell stories' for her.

'I really couldn't read anything by Auerbach or any other German whatever', Rossetti confessed to Janey on 4 March, 1879, and from the end of that year discussion of books, chiefly biography of the romantic poets, occupies much of the correspondence. As if commenting on this, Rossetti writes: 'I've got to be more of a reader and referrer lately' (3 February, 1880). One reward of this literary study was his discovery that Buchanan's attack on him was greatly plagiarized from two  

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sources in Cottle's *Early Recollections of S. T. Coleridge* (12 February, 1880).

Janey seems to have kept up with this new development, but sometimes found difficulty with Rossetti's verse. 'Do not say poetry is far from you', he wrote after one misunderstanding (12 February, 1880). 'It should be nearest to us when we need it most.'

Occasionally he is sentimental. He kisses her hand-writing (3 January, 1880), rejoices in the thought that her hand has rested on the lines she had written to him (n.d. ? September, 1878), or that her eye will rest on his letters to her (25 January, 1881); a young serving girl recalls to his mind the Janey he first set eyes on (26 July, 1879). Another echo of happier times is in the letters of July and August 1878, when his furniture and belongings left at Kelmscott are discussed. But on at least one occasion he felt so depressed that he was reluctant to see even Janey. The 'Jeremiad,' as he himself described it, of 13 July, 1879, expresses his bitterness and those 'who made apes of themselves and kissed my hands with insane obeisance in early days now ignore or make me a figure of fun;' but, 'you are always faithful and always will be, I know.'

In the following letter (18 July, 1879) he apologised for these melancholy reflections, promising to avoid them in future. But, in a moment of despair, in the next letter (2 August, 1879) he wrote: 'I grow more and more into the weakness of being thankful to anyone who will give me a little praise. Alackaday!' Yet, considering his unhappy experiences, frustrations, material difficulties and deteriorated physical state, these letters are remarkably free from self-pity.

Shortly after this Rossetti began the painting of Janey which he is said\(^\text{41}\) to have liked best—'The Day Dream'. The corres-

\(^{39}\) Cf. a jotting in one of Rossetti's vest-pocket notebooks (British Museum Ashley 1410 (4) f. 11): 'If an isolated life has any sting, it is felt in the absence of those friends who made for years unneeded avowals of obligation and gratitude.'

\(^{40}\) Perhaps a feeling of special thankfulness for her loyalty at this period is betrayed by a change in his form of address. His customary superscription was 'My dear Janey', but all save two of the fifteen letters between 4 March 1879 and 2 August 1879 are addressed to 'My dearest Janey'.

\(^{41}\) Doughty, pp. 608, 619; Angeli, p. 216.
pondence details the progress of this painting more fully than that of any other mentioned, from the announcement of its financially opportune commissioning by Constantine Ionides (3 October, 1879) to its framing a year later (14 September, 1880). This is the portrait, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, of Janey seated in a sycamore tree. It was based on a portrait drawing of her done at Scalands in 1870. Rossetti at first called it 'Vanna Primavera'—Janey in springtime. Janey gave him some sittings, though the rather obtrusive foot was, to his regret, another's. The painting of 'The Day Dream' seems to have steadied and comforted him, though it involved painful indecision and much repainting. There is, during this period, a reference to his writing 'stupidly and disconsolately last time' (15 June, 1880), but that letter is not with the collection. The painting inspired Rossetti's sonnet of the same name. He sent it to Janey and her appreciation of it and of him prompted a very formal avowal of his sentiment for her, closely resembling his protestation of 1 July, 1878: 'I felt deeply the regard so deeply expressed in your last letter... The deep-seated basis of feeling as expressed in that sonnet, is as fresh and unchanged in me towards you as ever, though all else is withered and gone. This you wd. never believe, but if life and fate had willed to link us together you wd. have found true what you cannot think to be truth when—alas!—untried' (27 November, 1880).

Once only, in August of the following year (1881) did he fear he discerned a cooling of her affection for him, when, instead of coming for a sitting, Janey went off to Kelmscott. With melancholy dignity he wrote: 'Up to your last stay in Italy, you evinced the old deeply-prized interest in me and my doings—even up to our last interview. I have not the least claim on your consideration; but if you withdraw it, it is the only one of many withdrawals which will go to my heart. The rest passed by unheeded.' Happily she reassured him, for on 19 August, 1881 he

42 Doughty, p. 619, is evidently mistaken in asserting that Rossetti was in some anxiety to find a purchaser after the completion of the picture.

43 Rossetti gave much anxious consideration to the flowers in Janey's hand. Supposing that the arrival of a bunch of snowdrops was an indication of her preference, he promptly painted them in, only to discover that they were not hers. The finished painting has the honeysuckle which she did send him.
wrote: 'Your letter is a great comfort to me, as the removal of your long interest in me would be the only thing I could not bear at all.'

The letter of 4 September, 1881, written from Fisher Place in the Vale of St John, Cumberland, to which Rossetti went with Hall Caine in vain pursuit of restored health, is six months before his death. It is inconceivable that he wrote her no more, but whatever he wrote is not here.

The de-restricted material at the British Museum does not include any of Janey’s letters to Rossetti. The earlier ones were undoubtedly destroyed. Some of those for the years 1878–81 survive and are in the United States. Signora Rossetti Angeli has commented that 'They display a deep affection for Rossetti, and above all, the serene consciousness of his devotion to her. They are not the letters of a happy woman . . . though not devoid of a certain vivacity of observation and a playful touch here and there.' Rossetti’s letters afford no reason to suppose that Janey had anything more than a deep affection for him.

Janey’s own comment on Rossetti is preserved at the British Museum in an illuminating letter she wrote to Theodore Watts-Dunton at the time of the Burlington Fine Arts Club retrospective exhibition in 1883:

So many thanks for sending reviews. I suppose one must regard them as praising the works. But how they would have enraged the painter himself . . .

I agree heartily with those who consider the early work the best, but I think the same might be said of most men’s works; there is a freshness, an interest in everything, a wealth of invention that is seldom seen except in the production of the

44 See footnote 29.


46 Angeli, pp. 209, 211.

47 Add. MS 45, 353/30.
few first years of manhood, and all this without questioning the sanity of a man. That Gabriel was mad was but too true, no one knows that better than myself, but that his work after 1868 was worthless (as Gosse has the impudence to assert) I deny.

I don’t know why I am writing all this to you, but I feel that I want to talk to someone about him.

The letters to Janey of Morris and Rossetti reveal the independence of the one and the increasing dependence of the other. Long ago, Morris had painted and drawn and composed poetry under her inspiration, but even then had found something remote and unattainable.

But most times looking out afar
Waiting for something, not for me.
Beata Mea Domina!

he had written in The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems. Whatever in Janey had quickened him in the earlier years had certainly ceased to do so by the later sixties. That he regretted his loss of her his writings of the period show clearly enough. There is nothing in the present letters, if indeed anything exists or ever existed, to suggest that Rossetti was responsible for that loss. Nor do they in the least invalidate Mr E. P. Thompson’s suggestion that Janey’s strange passivity and melancholy self-absorption was what caused the failure of the marriage. That Morris and Janey remained on affectionate terms to the end is confirmed by his letters and by the observation of G. B. Shaw.

Morris adored Jenney [sic]. He could not sit in the same room without his arm around her waist. His voice changed when he spoke to her as it changed to no one else... Their harmony seemed to me to be perfect.

For Rossetti, as his letters show, Janey was indispensable as a model, as an object of love, and as a vision. Circumstances and social convention (for Rossetti was more sensitive to convention

48 Published 1858 and dedicated to Rossetti. Watts-Dunton recalled that before his first meeting, at Kelmscott, with Morris, Rossetti warned him not to talk about The Defence of Guenevere. The Athenaeum. 10 October 1896.

49 William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary, p. 198.

50 The Observer, 6 November 1949.
than Morris) left him also, in his relationship with Janey, with a sense of loss.

The nature of Janey's stimulus for Rossetti is a mystery which these letters do nothing to solve, but that the stimulus was real and essential for him they establish beyond doubt. This truth he himself expressed in one of his diminutive notebooks:

My world, my work, my woman, all my own -
What face but thine has taught me all that art
Can be and still be nature's counterpart?

'A lady on a couch.' Pen and ink drawing, by D. G. Rossetti. 6½ x 8 inches. Dated 29 November 1870.

51 British Museum, Ashley 1410 (2) f. 29.

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