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N O T E

A New Rossetti Letter

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winded enough in my attempt to suggest that there may indeed have been this brilliant interval, short in the long lives of both artists, when it seems that they may have shared a mutual vision.

Since this has been, of necessity, a speculative argument, I will welcome any expressions of disagreement or fragments of enlightenment which anyone cares to offer, either to me personally or through the pages of *Blake Newsletter*. I will, naturally, be delighted if anyone can add any information about the short period when I believe that the ideals and imaginations of the two artists actually coalesced.

THOMAS L. MINNICK: THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

#### A New Rossetti Letter

I recently had the good fortune to buy an unpublished holograph letter by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. As it concerns Blake and Mrs. Anne Gilchrist, it may be of interest to the readers of the *Blake Newsletter*. On a folded sheet of mourning note-paper Rossetti wrote:

59 Lincoln's Inn Fields  
Wednesday

My dear W. Ireland

I am very sorry I cannot manage to be with you so early as 7, either today or tomorrow, so must decline your kind invitation to dinner, but shall be very glad to come a little later tomorrow evening, and will take the liberty of bringing my brother if he can come--say at half past 8. He, as well as I, wrote the other day to Mrs. Gilchrist, but the letters, being directed to Earl's Colne, have not perhaps yet reached her. We shall both be very glad to see her again & go over Blake business by word of mouth. I am very sorry to have delayed answering but was not sure till now which evening I could come. With kind remembrances to Mrs. Gilchrist

I am yours very truly

D G Rossetti

The paper is watermarked "1860"; the envelope is lost.

Although the note is undated, the address implies that it was written between the end of April, 1862, and 24 October of the same year, the only time when Rossetti lived at 59 Lincoln's Inn Fields.<sup>1</sup> He had moved there when, after Lizzie's death in February, Chatham Place became unbearable and when a few weeks' stay on Newman Street proved unsatisfactory. These several months in 1862 were

filled with projects and excursions which helped to distract Rossetti from his grief. The completion of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1863) was one such project and is certainly the "Blake business" to which the letter alludes.

After Alexander's death from scarlet fever, Mrs. Gilchrist moved her children to Earl's Colne, sometimes called "the garden of Essex," her mother's home, her own home for most of her early and middle life, and the home of her ancestors since the Norman Conquest.<sup>2</sup> But like Rossetti the recent widow had her periods of depression, and they also made her restless; in late August, for example, she wrote to her sister-in-law, ". . . Colne is intolerably painful to me, and I quite pine to get back to my quiet cottage among the dear Surrey hills . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Apparently Rossetti had written to Earl's Colne, then learned, probably through a dinner invitation from Mr. Ireland who lived in Chelsea, that Mrs. Gilchrist had moved for a while. I suspect she was visiting the Irelands who had been her neighbors on Great Cheyne Row. (She and Alexander lived at no. 6; Thomas Carlyle and his wife lived at no. 5, next door; and later in 1862 Rossetti himself moved to nearby 16 Cheyne Walk.) Mrs. Isabella Ireland had offered help tending the children who were also sick with "Scarlatina" when their father died.<sup>4</sup> "Mr. Ireland" appears in several of Rossetti's letters from this period, usually as a source of materials for Rossetti's projected memoir of Alexander Gilchrist.<sup>5</sup> But Rossetti names him "W. Ireland" while Herbert H. Gilchrist, writing his mother's memoir, calls him "Edwin."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps he had a familiar name ("Winnie"?). Perhaps Rossetti's pen or memory slipped. Or perhaps Herbert Gilchrist, the only source for "Edwin," misremembered: he was five years old and seriously ill when his family left Chelsea.

A final word. This note is one of several written to arrange a meeting between Anne Gilchrist, Dante Rossetti and, occasionally, William Michael Rossetti. There are almost as many letters postponing meetings or apologizing for missed ones. In fact, the direct evidence that the Rossettis saw much of Mrs. Gilchrist in the process of bringing the *Life of Blake* to publication is slight. What William Rossetti wrote of Alexander Gilchrist characterizes the relationship, in 1862, between Dante and Anne: ". . . I cannot remember that I saw him more than once or twice again. We were both busy men, and one casualty or another kept us apart."<sup>7</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>So Oswald Doughty in *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 307, 310. But Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, eds., give 22 October as the date Rossetti left; see *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), II, 458.

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Harlakenden Gilchrist, ed., *Anne Gilchrist: Her Life and Writings*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), pp. 2<sup>nd</sup>9.

<sup>3</sup>The cottage was Brookbank, at Shottermill near Haslemere. This is the home Anne Gilchrist let to George Henry Lewes and George Eliot in 1871 where they read her husband's life of Blake and where, in a study lined with Blake drawings and engravings, George Eliot wrote the second part of *Middlemarch*. Gilchrist, pp. 155-56, 215-19.

<sup>4</sup>Gilchrist, pp. 101, 107, 114.

<sup>5</sup>Doughty and Wahl, II, 441, 452, 454, 455.

<sup>6</sup>Gilchrist, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup>"Prefatory Notice" in Gilchrist, pp. ix-x. I wish to express my appreciation to Mrs. Imogen Dennis, of Oxford, England, for her kind permission to publish this Rossetti letter.

JEROME J. McGANN: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Staging *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

In May 1970 *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* was presented in a stage version at the University of Chicago. The production was the work of Cain's Company, a group formed a few years before at the university with the first complete stage presentation of another great Romantic text, Lord Byron's *Cain*. But whereas *Cain*, though a closet drama, retains at least the formal qualities of a stage play, Blake's poem had to be converted wholesale into theatrical forms.

Yet the poem's drastic insistence upon extending the boundaries of perception seemed to recommend an attempt at stage dramatization. The work of adaptation took about four months, during which time it quickly became apparent that the greatest obstacle to a successful stage version was, paradoxically perhaps, the vigor of Blake's own language and visual perceptions. One had constantly to resist the inclination simply to transfer the various "scenes" in the poem to the stage. Blake's poem has a powerful visual quality, but that quality is so involved with the nature of his language as such that the conception of a theatrical representation was constantly being thwarted by the words of the poem.

In the end, the language of the poem was reduced to a schematic minimum so that the entire work of elaborating the poem's basic ideas and attitudes would be rescued from language and transferred to theatre. On the other hand, the skeletal form of the poem was preserved almost exactly in the play: the only major change was the precise repetition of an early scene (plates 5-6) at a later point in the play. The stage version thus preserved Blake's pattern of a series of scenes in

## THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL



A DRAMATIC ADAPTATION OF THE POEM BY WILLIAM BLAKE  
PRESENTED BY CAIN'S COMPANY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
ROCKEFELLER MEMORIAL CHAPEL, FIFTY-NINTH AT WOODLAWN  
MAY 8 9 10 11 12 8:30 PM TICKETS TWO DOLLARS AT THE BERGMAN GALLERY  
5811 ELLIS CHICAGO 60637 M13-0800 X4137

which awareness is expanded in a variety of ways until an apotheosis becomes both the possible and even inevitable result.

The play differed from the poem in two other noticeable ways. In the first place, Blake himself was made the central character, and all the scenes occurred in direct or oblique relation to him. The decision to make Blake a visible character did not seem a distortion of *The Marriage*, but a theatrical representation of the intensely personal character of the poem itself.

In the second place, while the text of the play was basically a reduced text of the poem, it incorporated as well some passages from Blake's other prose and poetry. The adaptation included nothing which does not appear in Blake's own collected works, and of course all the interpolated passages (e.g., excerpts from "The Lamb" and "The Tyger") were only chosen if they would clarify aspects of the *Marriage*.

In adapting the poem, much time was spent inventing new, specifically theatrical representations for the ideas and conflicts in the poem. Yet no attempt was made to cast these translations into any terms which were not highly "poetical," ritualized, and dreamlike. The recent London adaptation of a Blake world, *Tyger*, seems to me to have failed precisely because Blake's powerfully concrete abstractions were poured into stylized realistic forms, on the apparent (and incorrect) assumption that any current appeal of Blake's strange visions requires a sort of Pop Art or Camp style. The principle which held throughout the Chicago production of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, on the contrary, was much more literal-minded.