PREFACE

The idea for collecting essays on Christina Rossetti originated during the MLA Convention in Los Angeles, December 1982. Catherine Cantalupo, a recent Ph.D. from Rutgers, had organized a special session on Rossetti's devotional poetry and invited me to participate. Soon after arriving at the convention, however, I learned that Cantalupo was too ill to attend. Although we had only exchanged letters and spoken a few times on the telephone, her death in 1983 was a loss I felt in an unexpectedly personal way. With the concurrence of the other participants on that panel (Jerome McGann and Barry Qualls), I have therefore dedicated this volume to the memory of Catherine Cantalupo. Thanks to the editorial work of her husband, Charles, and of her thesis supervisor, Barry Qualls, it has been possible to include work by her in the collection. This essay shows us what Rossetti scholarship lost with her death.

The essays gathered here attempt a genuine reevaluation of a writer who the contributors believe has been unjustly neglected. The topics are diverse and the critical approaches varied. Rossetti is here addressed with the kind of serious attention almost entirely missing from writings on her work since the late nineteenth century, an attentive attitude well illustrated by the perceptive observations of Arthur Symons in the passage that provides the epigraph for this volume. For the convenience of the reader, the book is divided into three parts. I believe, however, that the division also serves to stress some important facts about Rossetti and her career. The first part addresses Rossetti's achievement as a major Victorian poet. In general, her

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poetry has eluded the attention of modern critics: these essays reveal the hidden complexity and consummate craftsmanship of her art. Furthermore, neither her work in prose (including her writings for children and her devotional writings) nor her cultural significance as a woman artist has received adequate treatment. The second group of essays demonstrates that the dimensions of her achievement are wider than has been assumed (and that the drama of her personal life, as seen in the new letters, was more intense). The third part builds upon the premises of the first two and focuses on Rossetti's struggle with other writers, both predecessors and contemporaries, to claim her own place in the Victorian literary world. The book as a whole illustrates that she achieved a position very different from that to which she has traditionally been relegated, and that our inherited image of her as an isolated, retiring spinster is, we are now beginning to realize, utterly inadequate.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the British Library and Imogen Dennis for permission to quote from manuscripts of Rossetti's poems and to Yale University Library and Princeton University Library (Troxell Collection) for permission to quote from unpublished letters by Rossetti.

A number of people have been very helpful in the preparation of this volume. First of all, I thank my wife, Margo Swiss, who suggested the possibility for this kind of collection in the first place. I am also much indebted to Jerome McGann, whose kind encouragement to proceed then gave me the needed impetus to undertake the project. Bernhard Kendler of Cornell University Press has been a congenial and responsive editor. Martha Linke did outstanding editorial work, for which all the writers are grateful. Finally, William Whitla has given me "all good counsel" on many important occasions. In fact, all the contributors have cooperated in so many small ways it would be trespassing on the reader's patience to recite them. I simply wish to thank the authors for their support.

DAVID A. KENT

Toronto, Ontario