

"To another land":  
AN ANALYSIS OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S "MOONSHINE"

The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, edited by William Michael Rossetti and published ten years after the poet's death, reveals more of his intentions for the interpretation of her life and work than it does of her own. The "Memoir" preceding the poetry urges us to see Christina Rossetti as a saintly but unintellectual woman who was not interested in struggling with life's complexities, a woman who made the "mistake" of withdrawing from the world. William Michael regrets his sister's "overscrupulous" nature and then concludes rather categorically: "Her temperament and character, naturally warm and free, became 'a fountain sealed'."<sup>1</sup> This judgmental and somewhat condescending tone is also reflected in his handling of the poems. Certain ones are left out entirely, others are changed, often without any indication that changes have been made, and the collection as a whole is arranged according to his own system of divisions, which is not chronological as would seem most reasonable.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most striking examples of the bias of this edition is the placing of "Moonshine," a brief but beautifully wrought ballad, in the section entitled "Devotional Poems," where it appears between "St Elizabeth of Hungary" and "I Look for the Lord." "Moonshine" is a posthumously published poem, and thus we have no earlier textual evidence to indicate under which general heading the poet herself might have placed it. Since "Moonshine" and "St Elizabeth of Hungary" were both written on June 16, 1852, they are justifiably placed together, but there are two other poems which come before "I Look for the Lord" (Sept. 28, 1852): "Books in the Running Brooks" (Aug. 26, 1852) and "The Summer is Ended" (Sept. 11, 1852). Both of these are placed in a section her brother entitles "General Poems"; but the first is actually more devotional than "Moonshine," since it explicitly states a desire to accept God's will.<sup>3</sup> It would seem more reasonable to reverse the placement of the two, for "Moonshine" has no overt reference to God or Christ. In fact, it owes more to the secular sources of ballad and romance than it does to devotional literature.

By placing "Moonshine" among the devotional poems, William Michael obviously hoped readers would see the male-figure, who takes the fair maiden on a sea journey, as Christ leading the soul to heaven. It is difficult to measure the extent of his success, since so few of Rossetti's biographical critics discuss the poem or even mention it, but there is some slight indication that earlier readers were willing to follow William Michael's lead. Although recognizing the ballad style of the poem, Dorothy Margaret Stuart, in her 1930 biography, places