

## THE MYSTERIES SURROUNDING DANTE ROSSETTI'S ILLUSTRATIONS FOR *THE EARLY ITALIAN POETS*

Dennis T. Lanigan

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's translations for *The Early Italian Poets* were primarily worked on between the years 1845 and 1849, although, as was typical with his work, he did revise them from time to time (Marillier 7, 71). From as early as 1856 he had planned to illustrate the edition, and on about 12 August of that year he wrote to the scholar and editor Frederick James Furnivall about his ambitions concerning these illustrations:

The book I have some prospect of getting shortly under weigh, is my collection of translations from the poets before Dante in which I might possibly include the *Vita Nuova* & some other things by Dante, but as yet unillustrated, as the etchings would be on a large scale & require a length of time to execute which I have not to give them at present. Even the work I speak of however has yet to be finished & got together. (*Correspondence* 2:132)

Later Rossetti considered reproducing his illustrations in the form of wood engravings. On 28 December 1859 he wrote to William Smith Williams, the publisher's reader for Smith, Elder & Co., about two wood engravings: "The only thing I can still do is to renew my offer made lately (and to carry out which would give me the most real pleasure) i.e. to make two drawings on wood for the work – a frontispiece & vignette Title" (*Correspondence* 2:279-80). A wood engraving must have been executed because a few early proof copies of *The Early Italian Poets* exist that have an engraving of *The Rose Garden* bound in as either a frontispiece or as a preliminary title page.<sup>1</sup> Examples include the Tinker copy at the Beinecke Library at Yale that at one time belonged to Harry Marillier, and the T.J. Wise volume at the British Library that had originally been given by Rossetti to Algernon Swinburne.<sup>2</sup> Other copies in public collections thought to have included a wood engraving as a frontispiece have proven to be incorrect. Neither the copy in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University nor the one in the John Henry Wrenn Library of the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas at Austin is illustrated. There are, however, copies with a bound-in