

## THE ROSSETTI ARCHIVE AND IMAGE-BASED ELECTRONIC EDITING

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A Problem of Image

From a traditional scholar's point of view, an ideal scholarly edition of a literary work would marry the respective virtues of facsimile editing and critical editing. A good facsimile edition gives a meticulous reproduction of some single text or textual subset of all textually relevant documents. A good critical edition reproduces (in coded and abbreviated form) the complete set of textually relevant documents in an order that exposes their structural and historical relations.<sup>1</sup> In either case, the editing is grounded in primary textual materials since all agree on the absolute value of these materials (in both a semantic and a documentary point of view).

These two editorial procedures have always been pursued separately for one simple but profound reason: the editing of the documents has been (perforce) executed within the limits of a book format. This means that scholarly analysis will function at the same level as the material to be studied. The critical edition aspires to a higher level of study but its paper-based format checks the flight of that aspiration.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of electronic texts, and in particular the more recent development of image-editing technology, has completely altered the traditional situation, as Peter Robinson recently suggested: "One can now conceive an electronic edition. . . in which the texts are linked both to manuscript images and transcriptions and to dictionaries, concordances, and indices by links that fashion themselves anew" according to need.<sup>3</sup>

This remark forecasts a marriage of facsimile and critical editing. As Robinson immediately adds, however, while there has been much talk *about* such editions in recent years, "as yet, no such edition has actually appeared" (285). The problem lies in the scholar's need to work closely with original materials, which in an electronic environment means working with digitized images. To this point in time such images have not been able to be "read" electronically.

As Robinson implies in his discussion, projects of this kind have to date been structured around a core set of character-based electronic texts. If original