

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S PAINTER PAINTINGS:
*GIOTTO PAINTING THE PORTRAIT OF DANTE, FRA PACE,
AND ST. CATHERINE*

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Paintings of artists in the process of painting a picture constitute a genre whose origins in Western European art lie at least in part in the tradition that St. Luke was not only an evangelist and a physician, but also an artist who painted portraits of the Virgin Mary. Despite the complete absence of biblical support for this tradition, St. Luke became in the Middle Ages the patron saint of artists and, as a result, pictures of him at work on a portrait of the Virgin proliferated, especially in late Medieval and early Renaissance Netherlandish paintings produced under the auspices of the artists' Guild of St. Luke. During his trip to Paris and Belgium in the fall of 1849, Dante Gabriel Rossetti probably saw at least one such painting,¹ and he certainly knew the engraving of the theme that serves as a frontispiece in William Young Ottley's *Italian School of Design* (1823).² He probably also knew from Ford Madox Brown that the German Nazarenes, whom Brown visited in Rome in 1845-46, styled themselves the Brethren of St. Luke (*Lukasbund*). With its emphasis on the connection between art and religion, the theme of St. Luke-as-painter was bound to appeal to Rossetti in the period of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (1848-53), so it is not at all surprising that in the first of his three "Old and New Art" sonnets of 1848-49, "St. Luke the Painter" (1849), he enjoins contemporary artists to "Give honour unto Luke Evangelist; / For he it was (the aged legends say) / Who first taught Art to fold her hands and pray" (*House of Life* 74.1-4) and that sometime before 20 September 1849 he made a design for a picture of "St. Luke preaching with ... pictures of Christ and the Virgin" (W.M. Rossetti, *P.R.B. Journal* 15). William Michael Rossetti regarded the "Old and New Art" sonnets as "perhaps the best manifesto ... in writing" of