

"WOODMAN, SPARE THAT BLOCK": THE PUBLISHED,
UNPUBLISHED, AND PROJECTED ILLUSTRATIONS AND
BOOK DESIGNS OF DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI¹

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With the notable exception of Blake, a few minor Victorian artist-poets such as W. B. Scott and Noel Paton, and an occasional twentieth-century writer like David Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti is almost *sui generis* (in England at least) as a successful practitioner in both arts. From the age of six, he was precociously conscious of his twin talents and sought to apply art in the service of literature (or vice versa). His earliest recorded writing (about 1834) was entitled "Aladdin, or The Wonderful Lamp, by Gabriel Rossetti, Painter of Play-Pictures" (W.M. Rossetti, *FLM* 66); and most of his artistic juvenilia consists of illustrations to literary works – *The Monk*, the *Iliad*, *Faust*, the *Arabian Nights*; the novels of Scott, Mrs. Crowe, and Dickens; and the poems of Edgar Allan Poe. By 1848, when the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded, he was regularly working in both media, but throughout his lifetime he vacillated between the two, tending to work exclusively in one or the other, seldom, after his apprentice years, pursuing them in tandem.

There is considerable evidence that Rossetti regarded himself first as a poet, but the tension between the two sides of his creativity is a prominent aspect of his personality, as two letters, written fifteen years apart, confirm. He confessed to William Allingham in 1854, before his reputation as poet or artist was firmly established: "I believe my poetry and painting prevented each other from doing much good for a long while--and now I think I could do better in either, but can't write for then I sha'n't paint." By 1870, when his translations of the *Early Italian Poets* were a decade behind him, the volume of original *Poems* announced there in 1861 finally published, and his reputation as a non-exhibiting artist firmly secured by a stable of affluent, reliable, and tolerant patrons, it is clear that he not only recognized but accepted the price that compromising his talents had exacted on his artistic identity and integrity. Writing to his new friend, Dr Thomas Gordon Hake, he said:

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