

William and Lucy: The Other Rossettis by Angela Thirlwell. New Haven: Yale UP, 2003. xiii, 392 pp. + 30 colour plates, 110 b/w illus. ISBN 0-300-10200-3. \$45.00.

Since 1965, when William Fredeman recognized William Michael Rossetti in his pioneering bibliocritical study as the “catalyst of the Pre-Raphaelite movement,” significant scholarly work has been done on this once-obscure figure. Roger W. Peattie led the way with his 1966 dissertation, “William Michael Rossetti as Critic and Editor, Together with a Consideration of His Life and Character,” a number of articles, and the splendid *Selected Letters of William Michael Rossetti* (1995). But there has been as yet no full-length biography of William Rossetti, usually cast as the helpmate of his brother, Dante Gabriel. Now Angela Thirlwell has written a joint biography of William Rossetti (1829-1919) and his wife Lucy (1843-94), daughter of Ford Madox Brown, whom she calls “two atypical Victorians” whose marriage linked two major Pre-Raphaelite families. Instead of employing the conventional chronological method, however, she has chosen to present “spots of experience” in thematic chapters, on the model of Lytton Strachey. The result is a readable, if flawed, collage of information on a complex and accomplished couple.

A strength of this study is the abundant new visual material. Chapter 1, “Portraits,” collates all the known images of William and Lucy. The very number of images of William is surprising, and they support Thirlwell’s efforts to establish him as handsome, sensuous, and worldly. William had an easy presence as painter’s model and photographer’s subject, with a dandy’s sense of style. Lucy, for her part, was something of a celebrity in her youth as an “aesthetic beauty,” yet she was a less natural model than William. The glamour of the pastel portrait produced by Gabriel as a wedding present in 1874 is not borne out in subsequent portraits and photographs, which show her devolution into an ordinary-looking matron.

Thirlwell also presents valuable new evidence of the artistic accomplishments of both William and Lucy. It is especially enlightening in the case of William, usually dismissed as the only non-artist among the PRB. In Chapter 4, “Pre-Raphaelite,” we see a dozen pencil portraits of friends and family that establish William as a working artist in the 1850s with sufficient talent to carry out Pre-Raphaelite principles of truth to nature. Lucy’s career is explored fully in Chapter 5, “Artist.” At age 24 she began serious study in her father’s studio, along with half-siblings Cathy and Oliver, in a competitive regimen that very likely included drawing from the nude male model. Lucy and Cathy worked on Madox Brown’s paintings, and Lucy developed into a more-than-competent Pre-Raphaelite painter herself. Thirlwell is at pains to explicate the narratives of *Romeo and Juliet in the Tomb* (1870), *The Fair Geraldine* or *The Magic Mirror*; *Cornelius Agrippa showing the Fair Geraldine in a Magic Mirror to*