

avenues down which we were allowed a glimpse, were not in the end sufficiently explored. The book will not, I believe, commend itself particularly highly to the Stevenson scholar, many of whom might also wish for a more active engagement with some of Stevenson's fictional texts; but it may have more appeal to those who are interested in the political machinations of the missionaries in this area and who may well be surprised as well as enlightened by the surprising degree to which Stevenson responded to both the good and the bad consequences.

I cannot resist adding for the sake of the paperback edition that the Scots word "wame" does not mean home – at least it didn't when this member of the diaspora worked up a healthy appetite as a boy, roaming the beautiful but challenging hills of Aberdeenshire.

**Alan Sandison**

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***William and Lucy: The Other Rossettis*, by Angela Thirlwell. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2003. xiii + 377, 110 b/w illustrations + 30 colour. ISBN 0-300-10200-3. US\$45.00 (hardback).**

William Michael Rossetti's guiding principles for art criticism, probably written down towards the end of the century although certainly developed and adhered to throughout his career, provide a good starting point for this review. After urging the value of first impressions and advising the critic to express an individual opinion regardless of fad or fashion, he says finally, "Be prepared to admit the merit of any & every sort of painting, provided only it is a good thing *from its own point of view*" (122). It would be churlish not to abide by William's temperate and practical advice in critical practice generally. As Thirlwell points out, he "wrote with attitude, but not with cruel destructiveness" (123), and she points to his exemplary even-handedness as an expert witness in the Whistler vs Ruskin case (135). With this in mind therefore, I'll look first at the structure of this biography of "the other Rossettis," which is probably its most distinctive, and sometimes annoying, feature. Thirlwell explains her method at some length in the introduction: eschewing a "linear, chronological biography, I have chosen a 'spots of experience' structure" of thematic chapters which are intended "to build up an impression of both lives, by increments" (1). The obvious allusion to Wordsworth's "spots of time" of *The Prelude* is misleading, however, for Thirlwell does not isolate epiphanic moments which define what the writer is at a particular age. Rather she organises her material into defining aspects (or chapters) of William and Lucy which characterise them over much of their adult lives, such as the artist, the man of letters, the patient, radicals, and so on. In some ways it is exhilarating. I particularly liked the chapter which concentrated on William as the Victorian man with all the paradoxes implicit

in that term: hard-working civil servant (like Trollope) throughout his life, yet irresistibly attracted to the fashionable pursuits of spiritualism and evening séances as well. Even after retirement from his position as Assistant Secretary at the Board of Inland Revenue, he continued to contribute to the work of the Board in a special role for which he was uniquely suited, the valuing of art collections for the purposes of death duties. In this role he was able to travel throughout the country for the next fifteen years. And all the time continuing his literary and critical work, cataloguing and writing up his family's history and contributing substantially to the literary life of London.

Lucy was the talented daughter of Ford Madox Brown and fourteen years younger than William, who was closer in age and interests to her father. In this structure of thematic chapters we see Lucy as competent artist working in her father's studio, as young bohemian, as the radical biographer of Mary Shelley, as the sickly tubercular young woman and sometimes difficult though loving wife and mother, and as an opinionated daughter- and sister-in-law. Throughout this full, even if short, life, she travelled widely, mostly for her health, usually taking the children along with her and keeping up almost a daily correspondence with William at home. I feel though that the picture of Lucy that emerges suffers particularly from one of the main criticisms that I have of Thirlwell's method, and that is repetition. It is inevitable that there will be repetition, because a life cannot be compartmentalised quite as neatly as the method implies. With the consistent pattern of sickliness and volatility that characterised Lucy's adult life, the youthful high spirits and the bohemian freedoms she brought to her marriage with William and that her children remember are forgotten in yet another emphasis on how her ailing body affected the aspect under examination in a particular chapter. Gabriel also recurs regularly, often in repeated anecdotes, almost like the intrusive spectre at the feast of William's life.

Indeed one of my worries about the thematic chapters is that in their completeness they give all the appearance of having started life as discrete essays or conference papers. The chapter on Portraits, for example, was strangely unrewarding, and I wonder whether this was because it had originally a separate origin as an art history paper. Was it inspired, for example, by William's cataloguing of all the known likenesses of Christina in his Memoir attached to the 1904 edition of her poems? The copious illustrations were a delight, but my unease was based mainly on Thirlwell's reading of character from visual media without seeming to take much account of Victorian painterly conventions and photographic practicalities of representation. The method can also be disorienting. It was, for instance, quite disconcerting to move from an elderly William at the interment of Holman Hunt's ashes in St Paul's Cathedral in 1910 to his engagement to Henrietta Rintoul in the 1860s and his marriage to Lucy in 1874 at the beginning of the following chapter (212-13). There is moreover sometimes a significant variation in the weight of material in some chapters. For instance, the chapter on Radicals, after a brief look at the cosmopolitan upbringing of both William and Lucy, only deals,

with William's *Democratic Sonnets* and Lucy's biography of Mary Shelley, whereas the Man of Letters chapter covers William's development as a critic and writer from his earliest days with *The Germ* to the late autobiographical *Some Reminiscences*, and sets out in some detail his huge output all the time he was working at the Inland Revenue.

In addition to her exemplary and wide-ranging recovery of forgotten and unpublished material, Thirlwell relies heavily on William's diaries and correspondence, whereas she doesn't have the same direct entry into Lucy's private self. William therefore emerges as a much more engaging personality with his gentleness, his love of listmaking and cataloguing, his volumes of *Miscellanies*, his completely unsentimental awareness that "I have not an originating mind" (144), even though the reader recognises immediately that his collecting mania is evidence of a different sort of creativity from that of his "genius" siblings. William's life also enables Thirlwell to discuss some important Victorian preoccupations. There is, for instance, a pellucid discussion of the general problems of translation in her discussion of William's translation of Dante.

This is an important book in its retrieval of two overlooked Victorian lives, and above all it is a sumptuous book. It is beautifully produced by Yale University Press on glossy art paper so that the plentiful illustrations in both colour and black and white are able to be incorporated into the text rather than sitting alone in a separate interleaving.

**Barbara Garlick**

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*Discovering Water: James Watt, Henry Cavendish and the Nineteenth-Century "Water Controversy"*, by David Philip Miller. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, May 2004. 330, 8 illustrations. ISBN 0-7546-3177-X. £55.00 (hardback).

The fact that water was a compound and not an element was first discovered in the late-eighteenth century after approximately two millennia of inquiry. The Chemical Revolution of the eighteenth century gave rise to the kind of endeavour that was responsible for creating the supposedly simultaneous scientific discovery of water. David Philip Miller's ambitious and meticulous book, rather than simply seeking to correctly attribute the discovery to either James Watt or Henry Cavendish instead interrogates the curious dispute that the water controversy generated in early nineteenth-century scientific debate in order to ask more fundamental questions about the very nature of scientific discovery.

James Watt (1764-1819), whose surname is best known today as the international unit of power, was a Scottish engineer, inventor and most significantly in the context of Miller's investigations, an autodidact who became famous for his