

*Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith* by Emma Mason. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018. xvi, 212 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-872369-1. \$39.95.

Emma Mason's *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith* is an illuminating revisionist study of particular interest to readers concerned to understand how religious faith, despite mounting challenges from Enlightenment skepticism, motivates vibrant proto-ecological thinking in the nineteenth century. This is the third title in a new Oxford series, *Spiritual Lives*, edited by Timothy Larsen – a series that features biographies of eminent men and women whose fame is not necessarily based on a religious contribution per se, but whose lively engagements with religious and spiritual questions are nonetheless worthy of new investigation. The series thus aims to “recast important figures in fresh and thought-provoking ways,” a remit that Mason fulfills conscientiously and successfully.

Conforming to the biographical conception of the series, Mason divides her study into four chapters arranged chronologically to highlight the eco-theological phases of Rossetti's life, but first, in the framing introduction, she is at pains to revise earlier representations of Rossetti as “an apolitical writer,” lacking in erudition and with “no interest in scholarship.” In Mason's recasting of her, Rossetti is in fact a politically active public intellectual: an abolitionist, critic of empire, and impassioned anti-vivisectionist whose spiritually motivated respect for all beings underlies her proto-environmentalist consciousness. Rossetti is, furthermore, highly learned: a frequenter of the British Museum's Reading Room, absorbed by diverse scholarly pursuits, and possessed of an impressive intellectual range that she masks behind a cultivated reticence easily misinterpreted as self-effacement.

Within the context of an already lively current debate about Rossetti's contribution to Victorian environmental thought, Mason's stated aim is “to identify an ecotheological reading of grace as the foundation for Rossetti's faith and politics.” “Grace” is the key term here. As we come to learn in subsequent chapters, grace is definable as “that through which the material is entangled irrevocably with the divine,” a “materially redemptive energy” that is “extended to all nonhumans” and connects all creatures in a “kinness of nature.” In the concluding chapter, it is “an apocalyptic as well as loving energy” that Mason deems “green” by virtue of its power to cleanse, unify, and erase such distinctions as validate all forms of abuse. In other words, “grace” for Mason's Rossetti is not a special gift bestowed exclusively on humanity and thereby authorizing diverse forms of anthropocentrism. It is in fact a divine blessing extended to all, human and non-human, animate and inanimate.

Other key terms and phrases established in the introduction include “weak