

The Matrilineal Heritage of Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti by Azelina Flint. New York: Routledge, 2022. 240 pp. ISBN 9780 367514402. \$170; paperback \$48.95.

Azelina Flint's *The Matrilineal Heritage of Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti* is a comparative study that places Christina Rossetti alongside the American nineteenth-century writer Louisa May Alcott in terms of their religious beliefs. Flint is particularly invested in Rossetti's and Alcott's approaches to female literary creativity through the lens of their separate religious communities, especially in relation to their forging of a "spiritual authority" based on what she terms their matrilineal heritage, or the direct theological influence of their mothers and sisters. The book argues that both writers began their writing careers by identifying with patrilineal influences but moved increasingly towards affiliating with their female heritage. The book focusses especially on the influence of devotional practices and life writing and argues that both helped to shape a specifically female mysticism as a counterpoint to patriarchy. This approach owes much to important scholarship on Christina Rossetti's devotional praxis and female community, especially studies by Mary Arseneau, Elizabeth Ludlow, and Dinah Roe. Flint, however, claims a difference from previous critics, through uncovering Rossetti's "theology of renunciation" in relation both to "the feminist potential of the Trinity" and the "theology of renunciation" as "an act of resistance," which Flint throws into sharp contrast with what she terms the insistent individualism that characterizes both Pre-Raphaelitism and Transcendentalism. The juxtaposition of the two women writers is a striking and interesting choice, because Flint contends that, although they wrote in different genres and had different religious, aesthetic, and publication contexts, both Alcott and Rossetti blended female communities with mysticism to create a feminist devotional praxis.

Flint also offers her own feminist praxis as a lens through which the writers are analysed. The Introduction frames the methodology in terms of Flint's personal faith, blending her own lived experience as a scholar whose personal Christian devotion directly inflects the argument, especially about female religious community and mysticism. The author then proceeds to present the method as well as the topic in terms of the art of the Christian iconographer, who works through specific devotional stages in the act of making as the material and spiritual are blended. "I will connect each aspect of this scholarship to a stage in the icon-painting process," says Flint, and "thus, like the pilgrim's meditation before the icon, my study is the devotional witness of these matrilineal communities, my own matrilineal inheritance." Acknowledging the risks inherent to such an approach, Flint adds: "Instead