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To these contributions, I would add that such engagement might also help us to develop strategies for enabling our students to adopt ‘big picture’ perspectives. It seems to me that we put our students at a great disadvantage by not teaching them to look and to think in this way. In failing to do so, we seriously limit their capacity to consider the consequences of scientific research.

We should engage the modern science student, as part of our curriculum, to explore the possible consequences of current cutting-edge research. We should enable our students to think carefully about whether the questions scientists are asking are the right questions to ask. To put the point another way, I strongly believe that it should be an integral part of every scientist's training to imagine the future and to engage in ‘big picture’ thinking. Furthermore, I believe that it is incumbent on the modern university to provide the educational ‘tool-kits’ to enable students to do so. If we do not, I fear that we shall less and less see beauty at any scale and that we shall do more and more stuff and passively accept the future we are given.

These are, I think, concerns Ruskin would have shared. Thankfully, they are also concerns his thinking can help us to address.

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Why Science Needs Philosophy’, *PNAS* 116.10 (2019), 3948–52 (p. 3949).

## ROSSETTI'S WEAK APOCALYPSE

*Professor Emma Mason*

This essay develops some ideas outlined in my book, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith* (2018), which traces an ecological love command in her writing.<sup>1</sup> Central to Christian theology, the love command is based on Jesus's instruction to his followers: ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you’ (Matthew 5.44).<sup>2</sup> I suggest that Rossetti developed Jesus's emphasis on love as an animating, lived and communal necessity into an ecological idea in which all things (human, divine, vegetal, animal and mineral) are conceived and related to as part of one body or creation. Rossetti's Anglo-Catholicism was the foundation of her poetic reimagining of this entangled creation, itself part of a divine cosmos in which all things are interconnected. My book argues that this entanglement is created and kept in flux by grace, the basis of kinship between things. I argue here that Rossetti posits grace as the force behind creation that will transition this time (earthly time) into the post-apocalyptic new time of the New Jerusalem. I show in the book that part of her anxiety was that humans were not connected enough to grace, and so were the only species that threatened to block the apocalypse. As an Anglo-Catholic and part of the Tractarian Oxford Movement, she believed that humans can ‘top up’ their grace through the sacraments and good works. But she is also clear that nonhuman life forms were always already graced and had never broken from grace because they lack the capacity for deliberate cruelty and so comprise a perfected nature that serve as an example of how to live. She thus sees plants and animals as already divinised and part of the divine body, and so ready for the coming of the end of the world. Part of her project as a theological writer and religious poet is to encourage humans to interact with the nonhuman in communion with the divine.

<sup>1</sup> Emma Mason, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Victor Paul Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1972).

It is odd that Rossetti was not at the front of the ecocritical queue lined up in the current environmental turn in the humanities. Although obvious contenders like Wordsworth, John Clare and Ruskin have been widely included in volumes about ecology, Rossetti has not (although critics like Lynda Palazzo, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, Todd O. Williams, Nathan K. Hensley, and Serena Trowbridge do recognize a proto-environmentalism in her writing.)<sup>3</sup> It is also strange that Christianity has not been fully considered in relation to ecocriticism in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary studies, especially given its rich ecological history recently highlighted by Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical, 'On Care for Our Common Home'. One obstruction to thinking about ecology through Christianity has been the question of the apocalypse, an event which has often been read as the unfolding of and therefore validation of environmental destruction. For many readers, Cormac McCarthy's vision in *The Road* (2006) of a devastated landscape in which devolved humans enact horrific forms of behaviour in order to survive conjures the consequences of the apocalypse. Another compelling example is Jason Taylor's art installation, *The Rising Tide* (2015), comprised of four horsemen of an environmental apocalypse located on the shore of the South Bank in London who sink and reappear with the ebb and flow of the river. Twisted industrial versions of mythological hybrids – the figures have the body of a horse and the head of an oil pump – Taylor's horsemen provide a sharp critique of the mutations of climate change and the damaging effects of industry on the environment.

For Rossetti, however, the apocalypse is reparative not destructive, and looks forward to a New Jerusalem in which all things are reconnected in the divine body. She joined John Ruskin in proposing that the 'whole Earth' was sacred, not just the Church, and followed

<sup>3</sup> Lynda Palazzo, *Christina Rossetti's Feminist Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, 'Teaching Victorian Illustrated Poetry: Hands-on Material Culture', *Victorian Review*, 34 (2008), 43–61; Todd O. Williams, 'Environmental Ethics in Christina Rossetti's *Time Flies*', *Prose Studies*, 33 (2011), 217–29; Nathan K. Hensley, 'Christina Rossetti's Timescales of Catastrophe', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 38 (2016), 399–415; Serena Trowbridge, "'Truth to nature": The Pleasures and Dangers of the Environment in Christina Rossetti's Poetry', in Laurence W. Mazzeno and Ronald D. Morrison (eds), *Victorian Writers and the Environment: Ecocritical Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 63–78.

his fear that separating daily life from the 'holy' humans risked splitting their 'houses' and 'hills' from faith.<sup>4</sup> For Ruskin, only the imagination has the capacity to transform the everyday world into the new Jerusalem by granting humans the ability to perceive and see a world under threat as redeemed and renewed. Rossetti also sought to reimagine the apocalypse in her 1892 study of John's vision, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse*, which works through each verse of Revelation through prose and poetry. My argument is that Rossetti prepares for the end of the world by advocating a weak approach to existence, one through which the believer can access the grace that will transition earth into the new time. Grace is also that which opens the gate for God to re-enter the world and initiate the New Jerusalem. I explore this weakness by discussing how she reads Revelation, and then outline her investment in that which already embodies weakness – most obviously the figure of Jesus, but also other-than-human things like plants. I also explore how she draws on the biblical account of Jesus's weakening in the event of *kenōsis* or Christ's emptying of his divinity in the incarnation. To help me make this case, I draw on Gianni Vattimo's work on weak thinking and *kenōsis*, as well as Jürgen Moltmann's work on the end of time to show how Rossetti anticipates and welcomes the New Jerusalem through a rejection of 'strong' thinking or faith and an embrace of weakness and patience.<sup>5</sup>

### A burnt-out world

The resonance of Revelation as a prophecy of destruction, mutation and drought leading to a burnt-out world in which there is 'no more sea' (Revelation 21.1) was powerful for Rossetti. She was painfully

<sup>4</sup> John Ruskin, 'Traffic', in *The Crown of Wild Olive: Three Lectures on Work, Traffic, and War* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1866), in E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds), *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903–1912), vol. 18 (1905), pp. 433–58 (p. 442). Hereafter all references to the Library Edition are cited parenthetically by volume and page number.

<sup>5</sup> Christina G. Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1892); Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti (eds), *Weak Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1996), p. 282.

aware of the inequities of the period, and was a vehement campaigner for animal rights, worked for a shelter for fallen women and contributed to charitable foundations to protect children and those without a living wage. Rossetti also implicitly criticised a society founded on structures and strategies beholden to what she called ‘the almighty dollar’.<sup>6</sup> In Jesus’s outright rejection of money and belongings Rossetti saw a refusal of both the logic of modernity and the commodification of creation as a resource to be mined and sold. Yet despite the political campaigning that marked the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century, little changed for those groups most vulnerable to a society driven by money. Rossetti turned to the apocalypse as that which would finally arrive to destroy, not the earth, but the ‘signs of the times’ – materialism, consumption, greed, wealth, power and cruelty – that threatened to destroy it.<sup>7</sup> Revelation thus announced the beginning of a new and shared perspective on reality, a promise that God would enter into creation in order to renew it from within.

All that was required of creation was that it be prepared to become the new kingdom of God through a loving communion with itself. As the only species that considered the rest of creation subservient to it, the human threatened to break this communion, Rossetti wrote, by ‘rehearsing and forestalling on a minor scale the last awful days’, and in doing so delaying the joy and grace of the Second Advent.<sup>8</sup> She reimagined the teachings of Revelation in *The Face of the Deep* to guide her reader back into a shared creation in which divine, human and nonhuman were joined in one communion. In this new creation God would reside ‘with men’ in a habitat that she described as urban – ‘for Londoners, for Parisians, for citizens of all cities’ – but also rural, adorned with violets, snowdrops, lilies, honeysuckle and thorns.<sup>9</sup> The city of God would not transcend the material world like some kind of fetishised and edenic pastoral, nor would it become a mechanised metropolis. Rather, Rossetti argued, God’s kingdom was of earth, revealed as a New Jerusalem in which all things participate equally. Renewed and restored, the new creation, she wrote, would promote

<sup>6</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 272.

<sup>7</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 243.

<sup>8</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 349.

<sup>9</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, pp. 480–81.

‘Absolute unanimity amongst all creatures’, and evolve a ‘love of kindred’ for the ‘whole human family’ into an all-inclusive ‘fellow-creaturely sympathy’.<sup>10</sup>

### New Jerusalem via grace

Rossetti rejected the idea of the end of time as a schism in which the saved were raptured into another time and space. For her, the apocalypse opened creation to a new and expanded way of thinking and being driven through the indwelling of God in the whole of creation. She believed the process by which God re-enters the world to initiate it into new life was driven by grace: only ‘by grace’, she wrote, can human life ‘expand’ from its ‘concentrated’ being into a state of ‘delighted welcome’ of diverse and emergent others.<sup>11</sup> Like Aquinas, Rossetti understood grace as ‘prevenient’ because she believed it ‘came before’ creation and so brought something from nothing, generating the universe from its first outward rush, and then animating all beings and substances in it.<sup>12</sup> Such a conception of grace accords with Ruskin’s statements in ‘The Mystery of Life and its Arts’, wherein he describes grace as the basis of vitality itself, ‘more precious than the rain’ and that which drives the soul as well as existence (18.147). In its prevenient form, grace was both the deep from which all things are generated eternally without beginning or end, and also the expression of God’s gathering of creation’s diversity into his being.

She wrote in *The Face of the Deep* that the ‘more we think over these diversities’, the more ‘we may discern something common underlying all that is individual’ – a grace that is regenerated by the interaction of the human, nonhuman and divine.<sup>13</sup> As the expression of a God who empties himself into his creation, grace also frees things of their subjective needs and desires to join them in love for each other. But grace is also God’s weakening influence in the world, one that energizes things by gentling them together. Only by becoming weak can the human, nonhuman, and divine ready themselves for the renewal of

<sup>10</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, pp. 189, 185, 201.

<sup>11</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 185.

<sup>12</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 547; see Peter Groves, *Grace: The Cruciform Love of God* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012), p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 118.



earth at the end of time. Weakness is thus the basis of a new kind of post-apocalyptic being that allows things to live in kinship with each other, rather than in endless competition or division. As she wrote in her commentary on Revelation 1.8, God deliberately ‘formed us weak’ through his ‘preventing’ (prevenient) ‘grace’.<sup>14</sup>

It was apparent to Rossetti, however, that while the divine and the nonhuman were implicitly weak, the human was incredibly resistant to the idea of weakness. The best examples of a graced state of weakness were in fact nonhuman, and that humans should learn how to become weak by reflecting on their being. One of her favourite biblical passages reworked across many poems was Matthew 6.28: ‘Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin’. These lines from Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount instruct the human believer to ‘consider’ or reflect on the lily. Like the ‘fowls of the air’, the lilies are examples of beings that teach through a connection with the world founded on their refusal to exploit the land that sustains them – they specifically do not sow, reap, toil or spin in relation to the earth. As a plant, the lily is also a model of that weakness that founds the apocalypse in which the New Jerusalem might arrive.

### Plant-thinking

Plants have recently become of profound interest to philosophers, not least those who work on consciousness. Plant neurobiology, or the study of vegetal being, has reversed previous notions of plants as a kind of deficient animal by identifying movement and responses to stimuli in botanical life forms. The intelligent plant can communicate, sense and self-direct, indicating that it thinks and so has being. Michael Marder is a leading voice in critical plant studies, and he argues in his seminal *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (2013) that plant thinking is ‘non-ideational’. Plants have non-intentional consciousness in which they think, not about themselves, but outward in multiple directions at once. The mimosa or sensitive plant, for example, responds to touch or absence of light because it stores nonrepresentational memories. Where humans remember what has appeared in the light, plants keep the memory of light itself. ‘Plant-thinking’ thus thinks with rather than for or about. In Marder’s words:

<sup>14</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 25.

Plant-thinking neither grasps its object—it has none!—nor impassively freezes in sheer inaction but instead operates by the multiplication of extensions, by contiguity with and by a meticulously adumbrated exposure to that which is materially thought in it.<sup>15</sup>

That is – plants respond to their environment relationally rather than appropriatively: they perceive and move without ego or identity and always grow towards the other. They depend on one another for nourishment, but do not indiscriminately consume whatever is around them, taking and giving only what is needed. The plant is also significant to Marder because it exists in a slower time frame than humans. Vegetal time is gradual and hospitable and so contrasts with human time, what Marder calls the ‘temporality of capital’, and what Jesus calls toiling and spinning.<sup>16</sup> Like the rest of the nonhuman world, plants already exist in a time that resembles the post-apocalyptic time of the New Jerusalem. As they are always already in grace, they never lose connection to it, and so have no need of the grace ‘top ups’ humans receive in sacraments. Plants must simply wait until humans have caught up to their model of being as unfolded in the New Jerusalem.

### Self-emptying

While Rossetti urges her readers to turn to the specificities of the non-human world as models of graced being, she is also interested in Jesus’s own weakening or self-emptying as outlined in II Philippians. As the believer is incorporated into Christ through the action of grace in the sacraments, so Christ becomes part of creation by emptying himself into the world and so divinising it:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. (II Philippians 2.5–7)

This passage is the scriptural basis for *kenōsis* and weakness. The term *kenōsis* was revived in the nineteenth century as part of Anglo-

<sup>15</sup> Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 159.

<sup>16</sup> Marder, *Plant Thinking*, p. 183.

Catholicism's return to early Christian tradition. Kenōtic models of the Incarnation became increasingly popular as a way to reconcile the historical Jesus with his being in the Trinity, especially in relation to contemporary theories of evolution.<sup>17</sup> Legatees of Anglo-Catholic theology such as Charles Gore and John Richardson Illingworth argued that evolution was evidence that grace was required to 'complete' species 'perpetually undergoing transmutation'. In completing or perfecting the human in the image of God, grace enabled the self-emptying movement of *kenōsis* to soften its ego and individualism and so introduce 'a new species into the world – a Divine Man transcending past humanity'.<sup>18</sup> For Rossetti, the emergence of this divine human through *kenōsis* enabled a deification of all things that levelled creation in a subversion of hierarchical taxonomies. Through Christ's adoption of the 'form of a servant', she wrote in *Seek and Find*, the things of creation are redeemed from an outsider status 'as aliens' to become 'members of the sacred household', in which 'happiness consists now as of yore in choosing, doing, suffering, God's will'. Only by 'following in the steps of that Divine Son Who for our sakes, took upon Him the form of a servant (Phil. ii. 7)', she noted, is the believer predisposed to await the new creation alongside others from all denominations as part of one 'Catholic' or universal church.<sup>19</sup>

An example of the way Rossetti conceptualises *kenōsis* in her poetry is through her references to the 'lowest' or 'last' place. Her poem, 'The Lowest Place' (1863), is often anthologised and read as a validation of an ethic of submission:

Give me the lowest place: not that I dare  
 Ask for that lowest place, but Thou hast died  
 That I might live and share  
 Thy glory by Thy side.  
 Give me the lowest place: or if for me  
 That lowest place too high, make one more low

<sup>17</sup> See David Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis Explored and Defended* (London: SCM Press, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> J. R. Illingworth, 'The Incarnation in relation to Development', in Charles Gore (ed.), *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (London: John Murray, 1890), pp. 179–214 (pp. 195, 207).

<sup>19</sup> Rossetti, *Seek and Find*, pp. 146–47.

Where I may sit and see  
 My God and love Thee so.<sup>20</sup>

Like the idea of weakness, being in the lowest place is an uncomfortable idea for many critics. Some even criticise this poem as elevating a mode of passivity already imposed on women under the guise of sacrifice. But, as the idea of *kenōsis* implies, the lowest place gives you access to the first place: 'But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first' (Matthew 19.30), and the poem includes her appeal to be raised to the same place as God. The poem is in fact a prayer for weakness in anticipation of meeting God face to face in new time where God is neither first nor last but rather both: 'Alpha and Omega' (Revelation 1.11). In being both beginning and end, God renounces a strong egoic thinking of the world built on dualisms and hierarchies.

As Charles Gore noted, *kenōsis* requires an empathetic identification with the powerless, which, in Sarah Coakley's words, necessitates a 'blueprint' for an ideal 'human moral response' that reveals the 'nature' of divinity to be "humble" and "non-grasping".<sup>21</sup> A direct challenge to '*machismo*' and 'worldly power', *kenōsis* impels an ontological change in which 'strength is made perfect in weakness' (II Corinthians 12.9) and all things are emptied of egoic status to harmonize human and nonhuman into co-inherence with God.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, *kenōsis* is a direct request for a specifically *human* vulnerability for Rossetti, in part because the plant and animal already know how to love God without toil or spin, but also because the human is the one species willing to turn away from grace because of a reluctance to become weak.

### Revelation 21.23–24

While Jesus is associated with all species, he is a lamb, a rock, a grain, a vine, water, wine and so on, he comes to earth as human because it is humanity that needs to be taught weakness. Rossetti references Jesus's

<sup>20</sup> Christina Rossetti, *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1866), p. 216.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (London: John Murray, 1891), pp. 159–62; Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 10, 21.

<sup>22</sup> Coakley, *Powers*, p. 10.

*kenōsis* in *The Face of the Deep* to make precisely this point. The reference appears in her reading of Revelation 21.23–24, wherein John states that the New Jerusalem, illuminated by God and the Lamb, has ‘no need’ of sun or moonlight, and that the nations, rulers and kings who turn towards God ‘shall walk’ in this light. Rossetti starts her exegesis by connecting the rule of kings with what she calls ‘strong faith’ – a faith associated with power and control.<sup>23</sup> Her counter to this will to power comes in the form of a poem as well as a prose commentary:

Love builds a nest on earth and waits for rest,  
 Love sends to heaven the warm heart from its breast,  
 Looks to be blest and is already blest,  
 And testifies: “God’s Will is always best”.

Whilst man needs sun and moon he has them: so long as he needs them he will have them. This is a sample of the Providential Bounty lavished upon him without stint or failure; an antidote for his cares and fears, a reassurance of his hope. Which reassurance (so to say) acts both backwards and forwards.<sup>24</sup>

The poem provides the reader with a language of resistance to the history of sovereignty, one Rossetti describes as marked by a ‘tissue of crimes’, and ‘a tangle of unrighteousness’ sustained from ‘giddy pinnacles of dominion’.<sup>25</sup> If a ‘rich man’ finds it hard to ‘enter into the kingdom of heaven’, she wrote, how much more difficult for ‘royal rich men to whom tribute, custom, fear, honour, are due’.<sup>26</sup> But the poem’s focus on love as that which builds a nest on earth and then sends the affective experience of safety within that nest to heaven is a reminder that heaven and earth are connected through grace. The blessing of grace and love is prevenient – it is both blessed and already blessed – and offers a feeling of reassurance to the believer that challenges the linear timeframe in which we normally read apocalypse as an event of end times. Instead of working within the created time of earth, Rossetti reads the reassurance of God’s grace as that which ‘acts both backwards

<sup>23</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 513.

<sup>24</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 513.

<sup>25</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 514.

<sup>26</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 514.

and forwards’. In doing so she glimpses the passing of chronological time into the time of the New Jerusalem, an eternity in which there is no beginning or end, before or after.

## Time

I propose that one way to understand Rossetti’s reading of backwards and forwards time is Jürgen Moltmann’s discussion of Christian eschatology in his *The Coming of God* (1995). Moltmann points out that Christian tradition perceives the end of the world in three ways: total annihilation, total transformation or the world’s deification. Anglo-Catholicism works with the latter two: the world is both transformed and then deified. As Moltmann suggests, this does not mean earthly creatures become gods but rather that they are finally one with God through their community with Christ. He brands this an ecofeminist view, one that rejects an anxious masculine eschatology for the dissolution of egos into an “‘everlasting’ matrix of life’.<sup>27</sup> As Moltmann argues, ‘This earth, with its world of the living, is the real and sensorily experienceable promise of the *new* earth’, and ‘mortal life’ the ‘experienceable promise’ of the ‘eternal’.<sup>28</sup> Earthly time thus becomes a transitional time on the way to eternity; Moltmann calls this ‘aeonic time’ or ‘cyclical time, which has no end’. He writes that the ‘direction of hope is not just that God will make all things new’, but that hope will also look ‘to the future of “a new time”, the “abiding aeon” of an “everlasting life” (1 John 1.2)’ in which chronological time has no meaning.<sup>29</sup> This new time interrelates all things, human, nonhuman and divine, and heaven and earth come together.

Notably, Moltmann suggests that the cyclical nature of this new or aeonic time finds analogy both in the ‘regenerating cycles of nature’, the ‘rhythms of the body’ and ‘dance and music’. Rossetti suggests that her readers might comprehend this concept of time through art and poetry. She argued in *Time Flies* that:

Heaven and earth alike are chronometers.  
 Heaven marks time in light, by the motion of luminaries.  
 Earth marks time in darkness, by the variation of shadows.

<sup>27</sup> Moltmann, *Coming of God*, p. 276.

<sup>28</sup> Moltmann, *Coming of God*, p. 279.

<sup>29</sup> Moltmann, *Coming of God*, p. 284.

To these chronometers of nature art adds clocks with faces easily decipherable and voices insistently audible.

Nature and art combine to keep time for us: and yet we wander out of time!

We misappropriate time, we lose time, we waste time, we kill time.

We do anything and everything with time, except redeem the time.

Yet time is short and swift and never returns. Time flies.<sup>30</sup>

Here Rossetti reminds her reader that both heaven and earth exist in time. One measures time through light, the other through darkness. But to understand these two time zones in order to eventually transcend both and enter the new time, humans need some help. Nature already offers a model of the new cyclical, aeonic time, in tidal forces, patterns of sleep, biorhythms of plants, the change in the seasons and so on. But to these chronometers of nature, Rossetti argues, we also have art which gives faces or form to time and makes it audible to us. Poetry in particular seems able to do this, shattering the idea of linear reading and inviting us to consider specific words as if they are little worlds we can lose ourselves in. We can make sense of time at all because art and nature come together to show us how it works in different ways, but of course we waste it, Rossetti writes, and need to learn how to redeem it, that is, swap it for the new time to come.

### *Kenōsis*, or weak thinking

If we return to our passage from *The Face of the Deep* we can see that Rossetti follows her forwards and backwards time with references to *kenōsis* or weak thinking, an alternative to the ‘strong faith’ of kings. I suggest she does this because she believes that *kenōsis* is a cognitive preparation for the reception of this new, aeonic, cyclical time. In other words, earth cannot transition into the new time unless the beings that comprise it are able to think their way into the new time, and they can only do so by letting go of a strong, egoic thinking and embracing a weak thinking modelled in Jesus’s *kenōsis*. She might also have found a model in Ruskin, whom Geoffrey Hill would later call a ‘Fellow-labouring master- | servant’ who finds his ‘lost | amazing crown’ through derision

<sup>30</sup> Christina G. Rossetti, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1885), p. 180.

as well as praise.<sup>31</sup> Like Hill, Rossetti too turns to II Philipians, using a paraphrase of the text to conclude her exegesis of Revelation 21.23–24. In doing so, she shows that it is through weakness that Jesus perfectly incarnates affection and love:

O Perfect Lord Jesus, Who being the Creator wert pleased to abase Thyself to become a Creature, and amongst creatures a dutiful Son, a submissive Subject, and though not a servant of men yet toward Thine own as he that serveth; grant us a faint shadow of Thy humility whereby we too may become dutiful, submission, serviceable. Make us in our several stations affectionate, loyal, helpful, to one another; and in and above all earthly ties, absorb us in self-devotion to Thyself, the Source of our life, the King of our race, the Master to Whom we must stand or fall. For none of which things are we sufficient, but our sufficiency is of Thee. Make us as Mary when she turned and said Rabboni.<sup>32</sup>

While Jesus is the ideal model of weakness, Rossetti also makes sure to tell her reader that he or she might enter weakness by imitating Mary Magdalene as she is when she meets him in the garden near the tomb. Their encounter is specifically a weak one. Mary does not initially recognize Jesus, and when she does she cannot touch him or hold onto him. But her mode of approach is characteristically gentle; it enacts what Gianni Vattimo calls a weak thinking of the moment. For Vattimo, weak thinking signals the dissolution of the stability of being, a weakening of selfhood and the structures that hold it up that comes with the end of the modern age. As an openly gay Roman Catholic philosopher, Vattimo thinks weakness as a way to refuse power, violence and absolutes, including the metaphysical idea of God. For him, Christianity is a weakening process and mode of surrender that flows into *caritas* or charity through the acceptance of brokenness, crucifixion, defeat and unknowing. Rossetti calls this the ‘submissive Subject’ in the passage, an incarnation of weakness in the human achieved through humility, service, patience and hope.

Rossetti does not romanticise the experience of weakness, however. She states that ‘Experience worketh hope’ and ‘Patience it is which

<sup>31</sup> Geoffrey Hill, *The Triumph of Love* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), section CXLVI.

<sup>32</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 515.



works experience': 'Patience is irksome, experience tedious; but then without hope which is their result life were a living death'.<sup>33</sup> These lines are a paraphrase of Romans 5.3–4: 'but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope'. Yet Rossetti does not use the word tribulation or suffering, and states instead that a life without weak experience, patience and hope is the real tribulation – a living death. The end of the world that is sometimes feared as destruction, chaos and death is available in earthly time, then – that is, right now. It is too easy to read apocalypse as a metaphor of human atrocities, both in the nineteenth century and the time in which we live. But equally, the new time of the New Jerusalem seems also imminently and immanently available in Rossetti's writing, one that begins through the weak thinking and behaviour of the things of creation. Weakly thought, creation already is a paradise, a multispecies kinship in which things flourish through intimacy and fellowship with each other and God. This flourishing is grace for Rossetti, that which was there before time and transitions chronological time into aeonic time. Her apocalypse is a weak one, then, the promise of immediate transformation triggered through the love of things for each other. An interconnected creation in which all things are saved through a mutual love incarnated in the divine body is the defining idea of Rossetti's theology.

<sup>33</sup> Rossetti, *Face of the Deep*, p. 514.

## WEAK THINKING AND BEAUTIFUL PATIENCE

*Dr Jo Carruthers*

Emma's unearthing of Christina Rossetti's ecological focus on the appealing 'weakness' of creaturely life provides a picture of Rossetti's understanding of the human, animal, mineral and vegetal world as enmeshed in a way that offers an invigorating approach to her poetry and writing. In response, I want to extend Emma's focus on weak thinking to explore how Rossetti represents and reconfigures patience. And I take my cue from Rossetti, who typically defies convention in identifying the principal topic of the Book of Revelation not as destruction, judgment or despair, as Emma has already noted, but as *patience*. As Rossetti noted in the prefatory note to *The Face of the Deep*: 'A dear saint [...] once pointed out to me patience as our lesson in the Book of Revelation'.<sup>1</sup> Such patience in the face of apocalyptic future destruction and perfection may easily be interpreted as a passive waiting, but Rossetti carefully and skillfully constructs an active form of patience in her poetry and commentary, one which I think has remarkable resonances with Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton*.

As Emma has outlined, weak thinking is a form of humility: a rejection of egoic, self-sovereignty in preference for 'multispecies kinship', a love for other things and other people. As also highlighted by Emma, Rossetti is pushing to undo the hierarchies of terms of power. Rossetti seems to resist any bifurcation of earth and heaven, and emptiness and fullness, that are (seemingly endlessly) promoted in so many religious commentaries of the period. Instead, in all of her writing, and especially when she invokes the concept of 'patience', she focuses on the 'jars' and 'frets' of everyday life, as seen in one of her many provocations in *The Face of the Deep*:

The patient soul, lord of itself sits imperturbable amid the jars of life and serene under its frets. "Let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be

<sup>1</sup> Christina G. Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1892), p. 7.