

# *“The first centre and circle of future life-work”: Ruskin and France*

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Cynthia Gamble and Matthew Pinette, *L’œil de Ruskin, L’exemple de la Bourgogne* (Les Presses du Réel, 2011), 240 pp., 23 illustrations, €28.00 cloth.

Having traveled extensively around Great Britain and the Continent from a young age, John Ruskin developed strong emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual connections with many of the places he visited. For Ruskin, beloved cities, towns, mountains, and rivers were not merely favorite retreats, but an essential part of his life story; his autobiography, *Praeterita*, is in large part a record of the places that shaped him. Keith Hanley suggests that for Ruskin, the Alps, Italy, areas of the English countryside generally and Brantwood in particular, embodied aspects of the Holy Land, from which Ruskin emerged as “a missionary, bringing the good news to the British people” (185). Ruskin’s love of Venice, that “Paradise of cities” (35.296)<sup>1</sup> whose principal church he described as “the central building of the world” (9.38), is particularly well known. Ruskin returned to Venice again and again, studying its history, art, and architecture, immersing himself in its atmosphere, and seeing its material and moral decline as a warning for England. *The Stones of Venice* records, in both word and image, his intimate knowledge of the city’s material and spiritual fabric. Though Ruskin knew and loved other Italian cities as well – Florence, Lucca, Pisa, for instance<sup>2</sup> – he is most enduringly linked to

Venice, remembered as its greatest advocate and defender. As Henry James conceded, “Among the many strange things that have befallen Venice, she has had the good fortune to become the object of a passion to a man of splendid genius, who has made her his own, and in doing so has made her the world’s” (3).<sup>3</sup> A memorial plaque at the Pensione Calcina, where Ruskin often lodged, reads as follows:

*John Ruskin  
Lived in this house, 1877  
High Priest of Art  
In our Stones and in our San Marco  
In almost every monument of Italy  
He sought at one and the same time  
The craftsman’s soul and the soul of the people.  
Every marble, every bronze, every canvas  
Each of these things proclaimed to him  
That beauty is religion  
If the virtue of man inspire it  
And the people’s reverence accept it.  
The Council of Venice, In Gratitude  
January 26, 1900*

Ruskin had similarly strong feelings for the Alps. As Emma Sdegno observes, “Ruskin substantially contributed to the myth of the Alps that shaped the imagination and travel habits of the Victorians” (32). Ruskin deeply loved the Alps: he drew them, walked and climbed in them, studied their geology, and came close, at one point in 1863, to building an Alpine home. The sight of the Alps was, he recounted, “not only the revelation of the beauty of the earth, but the opening of the first page of its volume” (35.116). As at Venice, there is in Chamonix a memorial plaque dedicated to Ruskin and bearing his likeness. Sdegno rightly argues that “within his massive corpus is a composite work devoted to [the Alps]” (32). In his diary for 1841, Ruskin names Venice and Chamonix “my two homes of earth” (35.296), a sentiment he appears to confirm in *Praeterita*, where he declares that had he not gone to Venice when he did, he would have written

*The Stones of Chamouni* [sic] rather than *The Stones of Venice*. Yet in an earlier chapter of *Praeterita*, Ruskin informs the reader that "there have been, in sum, three centres of my life's thought: Rouen, Geneva, and Pisa" (35.156). And what of Oxford, the Lake District, Edinburgh, and London? One could go on multiplying these examples, tracing the profound influence of place upon Ruskin's life, work, and character. The words he uses to describe his first journey to the Continent in 1833 might stand for all his subsequent travels as well: "We did not travel for adventures, nor for company, but to see with our eyes, and to measure with our hearts" (35.119). For Ruskin there were places that, once seen and felt, remained forever a part of him.

The purpose of the present essay is to consider Ruskin's relationship with France and to highlight a recent French publication that explores its importance to his life and work with insight and understanding. Cynthia Gamble, who has written extensively about Ruskin and France (and to whose work we will return later), observes that France is "interwoven into his writings on art, architecture, landscape, history, culture and politics" (79). Ruskin's affection for France developed early and endured. His first visit to Abbeville in 1835 was, he later claimed "entrance [...] into immediately healthy labor and joy" (35.156), while the first sight of Rouen and its Cathedral "and the following journey up the Seine to Paris, then to Soissons and Rheims, determined [...] the first centre and circle of future life-work" (35.158). While in the French Alps on an 1840-41 Continental tour, Ruskin recorded his powerful response:

I woke from a sound tired sleep in a little one-windowed room at Lans-le-bourg, at six of the summer morning, June 2nd, 1841; the red aiguilles on the north relieved against pure blue – the great pyramid of snow down the valley in one sheet of eastern light. I dressed in three minutes, ran down the village street, across the stream, and climbed the grassy slope on the south side of the valley, up to the first pines. I had found my life again; – all the best of it. What good of religion, love, admiration

or hope, had ever been taught me, or felt by my best nature, rekindled at once; and my line of work, both by my own will and the aid granted to it by fate in the future, determined for me. (35.297)

Ruskin returned frequently to the French towns that he loved, observing in 1868 that he knew Abbeville well enough to write a *Stones of Abbeville*. As his editors Cook and Wedderburn observe,

To Ruskin, France, almost more than Italy, was his second country. He knew the French language, and was fond of its literature; his early love had been a French girl, and he still had many friends in Paris; he had the artist's eye for the charm of French landscape, and the very air of France came to him as if from Paradise; the architecture and the illumination of France in the Middle Ages were very dear to him; from France, as he often said, could lessons best be learnt in chivalry, and in the graces of civilised life. He was at all times, therefore, a warm advocate of a good understanding between England and France. (18.xxii)

Maintaining Turner's primacy in *Modern Painters* as a painter of French landscape, Ruskin demonstrates his own intimate knowledge and love of the French countryside:

[...] but of the fact I am certain, that for grace of stem and perfection of form in their transparent foliage, the French trees are altogether unmatched; and their modes of grouping and massing are so perfectly and constantly beautiful, that I think, of all countries for educating an artist to the perception of grace, France bears the bell; and that not romantic nor mountainous France, not the Vosges, nor Auvergne, nor Provence, but lowland France, Picardy and Normandy, the valleys of the Loire and Seine, and even the district, so thoughtlessly and mindlessly abused by English travellers as uninteresting, traversed between Calais and Dijon; of which there is not a single

valley but is full of the most lovely pictures, nor a mile from which the artist may not receive instruction; the district immediately about Sens being perhaps the most valuable, from the grandeur of its lines of poplars, and the unimaginable finish and beauty of the tree forms in the two great avenues without the walls. (3.237)

Ruskin had a particular admiration for medieval France, which came to play a rhetorical role in several of his books as the type of a noble society uncorrupted by modern materialism. "I believe," he wrote in 1853, "the French nation was, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the greatest in the world" (12.42). In a series of 1873 Oxford lectures published as *Val d'Arno* (1874), Ruskin maintained that "France is everlastingly, by birth, name, and nature, the country of the Franks, or free persons; and the first source of European frankness, or franchise" (23.116). He pursued this idea in *Fors Clavigera* Letter 43 (1874) "The Chateau Rouge: – French Freedom." While the English clamor for liberty, Ruskin argues, "the French knew what the word meant, before you. For France, if you will consider of it, means nothing else than the Country of Franks; – the country of a race so intensely Free that they for evermore gave name to Freedom" (23.116). The name of the Franks, Ruskin declares, becomes the word for virtue, and gives to English 'frankness' and 'franchise.' Letter 43 pairs with the following letter, "The Squirrel Cage, English Servitude," the two together intended to illustrate "not the English freedom of insolence [...] but pure French openness of heart" (28.114). Ruskin similarly underscores the contrast between past and present in *The Bible of Amiens* (1880), his idiosyncratic 'history of Christendom.' Part travel guide, part history lesson, the book is also a tribute to a city that according to Ruskin was once "the Venice of France" (33.25). Reading the story of the early Frankish kings in the city's cathedral and landscape, Ruskin draws the reader into a past that he suggests might offer valuable lessons in the present. As Proust recognized, *The Bible of Amiens* is not one of "those books which we write on matters we have studied in order to talk about them" (14), but was instead rooted in affection and memory. It was

about “things upon which Ruskin meditated continually, those things which therefore express most profoundly his thought; that the gift he was making to you was one of those which are the most precious to those who love, and which consist of objects one has used a long time oneself, and only for oneself, with no intention of ever parting with them” (14).

While Ruskin’s love of French history, architecture, and “the French air and the French landscape” (19.xxxviii) persisted throughout his life, he regretted what he saw as the corruption of France’s medieval values. “The Latin for franchise is *libertas*,” he went on to say in *Val d’Arno*, “but the modern or Cockney-English word, liberty, – Mr. John Stuart Mill’s, – is not the equivalent of *libertas*; and the modern or Cockney-French word *liberté*, – M. Victor Hugo’s – is not the equivalent of franchise” (23.116). Ruskin felt that nineteenth-century France, like modern England, had largely abandoned the qualities that had once made it great. Characteristically, he used contrast to make this point as well, setting the vulgar modern *grisette* against the frankness of Gothic France. Under “republican instruction” (28.116), Ruskin declared, Franchise had been debased. Writing to his mother from Abbeville in 1868, Ruskin was delighted to find the weather lovely and the town “little spoiled yet” (19.xxxviii), but was “saddened by another kind of disorder – France is in everything so fallen back, so desolate and comfortless compared to what it was twenty years ago – the people so much rougher, clumsier, more uncivilized – everything they do, vulgar and base. [Yet] remnants of the old nature come out when they begin to know you” (19.xli). In 1874 he observed that “the French are not what they were! No; nor the English, for that matter; probably we have fallen the farther of the two: meantime the French still retain, at the root, the qualities they always had” (28.112). Drawing lessons about thoughtful stewardship, useful work, and social justice from Jean-Francois Marmontel (1723-1799), in *Fors Clavigera* Ruskin remarked on the wisdom expressed by this “Frenchman of the old school, before the Revolution [when] worldly-wise Paris went on her own way absorbing property and men” (27.303), thus preparing the way for modern insolence.

In *The Bible of Amiens*, Ruskin reprints a long extract from Alphonse Karr's *Grains de Bon Sens*, a book "full of magnificence [...] by a man utterly after my own heart, who has been saying in France, this many a year, what I also, this many a year, have been saying in England, neither of us knowing of the other, and both of us vainly" (33.50).<sup>4</sup> Karr may not have known of Ruskin, but other Frenchmen did: the first French article about Ruskin, signed simply "J.C." appeared in 1856. It was not complimentary, describing Ruskin as having "an inquiring mind, a brilliant style, false reasoning, facts badly presented, and discourteous language" (qtd Autret 12) and rejecting many of the fundamental principles of his art criticism. The piece, though largely negative and inaccurate, nonetheless marked the beginning of French interest in this English advocate of France. As Jean Autret observed in his 1965 study of Ruskin and the French,

To have become a prophet in his own country was not [Ruskin's] only claim to glory. His fame extended across the Channel into France, (a vast distance psychologically if not geographically). Up to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the exchange of ideas between England and France had deteriorated almost into insignificance. The French were nationalistic to the point of chauvinism, and paid little attention to any new ideas from beyond their own borders, particularly those coming from Nordic and Puritan England. With the indifference of stay-at-homes they ignored their insular neighbors. It was Englishmen visiting France who gradually began to interest the French in the trend of English thought. (11)

Writing about the Pre-Raphaelites in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in January 1859, Raffaele Monti described Ruskin as eloquent but haughty. In 1860 and 1861, J.A. Milsand published the first serious appraisal of Ruskin in France: two articles in the *Revue des deux Mondes* later issued in book form as *L'Esthétique anglaise* (1864). Milsand drew attention to Ruskin's love of nature, his moral aesthetic, his focus on the artist's

imagination, and his concept of Christianity as personal responsibility. Yet he ultimately found Ruskin's judgments narrow and was dissatisfied with his emphasis on truth to nature (Milsand called this Ruskin's "*idée fixe*" [qtd Curtin 103]). As Laurence Roussillon-Constanty argues, Milsand "again and again describes the English temperament and disposition as the antithesis of the French rational turn of mind and sees Ruskin as displaying the strengths and weaknesses of the English nation at large" (136).

Other French critics, such as Ernest Chesneau, René Menard, and Hippolyte Taine objected to what they took to be Ruskin's insistence on attention to detail at the expense of invention and imagination, a surprising misunderstanding of Ruskin's ideas. In *Notes sur l'Angleterre* (1890), Taine characterized Ruskin as "a Protestant man of the North" (qtd Autret 20) and went so far as to accuse him of failing to appeal to the visual sense (Autret 20), a charge that reads as absurd for anyone familiar with Ruskin's teaching. In 1901 Jacques Bardoux argued that in Ruskin the sensible element was stronger than the rational, leaving him "incapable of strong deduction, without method and lacking the scientific spirit" (76),<sup>5</sup> yet recognized the special quality of his intelligence, noting that "he thought by visions and expressed himself by images" (2).<sup>6</sup> In 1909 André Chevrillon arrived at a deeper understanding of the interplay of the spiritual and rational in Ruskin's thinking. He was the first to focus on what he called Ruskin's mysticism, the belief in a world animated and connected by the energy of life. Ruskin's mysticism, Chevrillon argued, "is an élan of sympathy toward the eternal force, the energy of life which produces externally all the forms and all the harmony of the world" (88).<sup>7</sup>

The two most famous interpreters of Ruskin in France were (and in many ways remain) Robert de la Sizeranne and Marcel Proust. La Sizeranne's *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté* appeared in 1897 and became, in its many editions, the most widely read book about Ruskin in France. La Sizeranne offered an account of Ruskin's life and work, tracing the development of his ideas, his use of language, and the nature of his contribution to art history. Roussillon-Constanty writes that La Sizeranne's knowledge of English art and art history, and his sympathy

with Ruskin's aesthetics, "helped the French audience reconcile the various facets of Ruskin's writings into one coherent whole; second, his intuition concerning Ruskin's contribution and legacy to art history has been proved right by French contemporary critics" (139). La Sizeranne, while not entirely uncritical, was an enthusiastic admirer, referring to Ruskin as "the Prophet of Beauty," and declaring that "Ruskin is like a river. He is like a flame. He never repeats himself, he is constantly renewed, yet he remains himself" (qtd Autret 32). La Sizeranne engaged with Ruskin's ideas, analyzing their genesis and development and trying to show "how Ruskin could be placed within the context of French history of art" (Roussillon-Constanty 139).

Proust published translations of *The Bible of Amiens* (1904) and *Sesame and Lilies* (1905), providing a preface and notes for each. While Proust was no doubt interested in *The Bible of Amiens* because of its focus on French history and architecture, it appealed to him on a deeper level as well; unsurprisingly, Proust was drawn to the role of memory and imagination in Ruskin's work. In his Preface to *The Bible of Amiens*, Proust writes that he "would like to give the reader the desire and the means to spend a day in Amiens on a sort of Ruskin pilgrimage [...] We visit the place where a great man was born and the place where he died; but does not he inhabit even more the places he admired above all others, whose beauty is the very thing we love in his books?" (9).

Roussillon-Constanty points to a continuity between the initial reception of Ruskin in France and "ideas that still circulate about his writings" (141). Modern French critics have certainly been influenced by the early French interpreters of Ruskin, but they are also familiar with English-language criticism; Ruskin studies today is increasingly international in character and benefits from a lively cross-fertilization of ideas and approaches. One recent French study of Ruskin provides a particularly fitting illustration of this tendency: *L'oeil de Ruskin, L'exemple de la Bourgogne* by Cynthia Gamble and Matthieu Pinette is the result of a collaboration between two scholars, one English, one French, who together bring a wealth of expertise to their subject. We learn

in the introduction that the book is not only the result of many years of discussion, research, and travel, but “Il est aussi le fruit d’une longue amitié et d’une collaboration harmonieuse et peu commune, chacun inspirant l’autre” [It is also the fruit of a long friendship and a harmonious and unusual collaboration, one inspiring the other] (9).<sup>8</sup> Cynthia Gamble specializes in the work of both Ruskin and Proust. Visiting Fellow of the Ruskin Library and Research Centre and for many years Chairman of the Ruskin Society, she has written extensively about Ruskin in both French and English. Her books include *Proust as Interpreter of Ruskin* (2002), *‘A perpetual Paradise’: Ruskin’s Northern France* (2002), and *John Ruskin, Henry James and the Shropshire Lads* (2008). She has contributed a chapter on Ruskin’s travels in France and Belgium to the recently published *Cambridge Companion to John Ruskin* (2015). Matthieu Pinette is *conservateur en chef du patrimoine* and has held posts at the museums of d’Autun, Besançon, and Amiens. At Amiens he curated the exhibition *Ruskin-Turner, Dessins et voyages en Picardie romantique* (2003) in collaboration with Cynthia Gamble and Stephen Wildman (director of the Ruskin Library, Lancaster). He is now in charge of the medieval château de Germolles in Burgundy. Gamble and Pinette’s intention in *L’oeil de Ruskin* is to explore the importance of Burgundy to Ruskin’s aesthetic, intellectual, and emotional life. As they observe:

L’amour de John Ruskin pour la Bourgogne ne s’est jamais démenti. Il s’y est rendu maintes fois entre 1833 et 1888. Il aimait son art et son architecture, riches et variées [...] et ses paysages avec ces coteaux qui produisent quelques-uns des vins les plus fins de France auxquels Ruskin était particulièrement attaché. Tout cela constituait un vaste laboratoire et une source de richesses pour ses écrits et illustrations, et lui donnait de plus un plaisir immense. (7)

[John Ruskin always loved Burgundy. He returned many times between 1833 and 1888. He loved the rich and varied art and architecture [...] and the landscapes whose

hills produced many of the best French wines, to which Ruskin was particularly devoted. It was all a vast laboratory and a rich source for his writings and drawings, and it gave him the most immense pleasure.]

Before commenting on what's inside *L'oeil de Ruskin*, I'd like to devote some attention to the material object, for this is a handsome and well-produced volume. Design matters in a book about one of the most perceptive and influential art critics of the nineteenth century (and an accomplished artist in his own right) and it is clear that care has been taken to make this book an aesthetic object. The paper is of a high quality, particularly well-suited for reproducing the images that complement the text. Yet while the paper is fine, it isn't weighty; the book sits lightly and comfortably in one's hands. The black and white cover design – white boards printed with only a minimal amount of black ink – gives the volume a spare, yet stylish appearance; this study of 'Ruskin's eye' has been made to appeal to the reader's eye as well. The focal point of the cover is a small sketch, done in black ink and barely larger than a postage stamp, printed just beneath the title. Though rapidly made, it is an effortless exercise in perspective. Economical, confident lines direct the viewer's gaze between two high, confining walls toward the dark arch of a railway tunnel. Just as one's eye is drawn to the tunnel, so the tunnel, its blackness accentuated by the white ground, seems to recede into the cover of the book, inviting the reader in.



The simplicity of the sketch lends it a timeless quality; it might have been made only yesterday, dashed off on a notepad or buffet-car napkin. In fact, it was drawn by Ruskin in his diary entry for 12 September 1856, in which he noted that while he was unable to obtain a photo of the front of Notre-Dame in Dijon, he was "offered, at the principal shop – two of the

‘souterrain de Blaisy’ consisting of this kind of thing” (qtd 120). At the bottom of the diary page, Ruskin added (likely at a later date), the following note: “Railroads against Gothic” (qtd 120). Though we might be tempted, anachronistically, to see his sketch as strikingly “modern” and minimalist, it was in fact a derisive commentary on a world in which the railway had seemingly supplanted the cathedral as a source of wonder. It makes a particularly fitting cover illustration, representing as it does the convergence of Ruskin’s aesthetic and critical vision.

Gamble and Pinette begin with an account of Ruskin’s life, character, and principles. He was, as they rightly acknowledge, “un homme à facettes,” (11), whose complex personality and passionate, often controversial, ideas have often been misunderstood or dismissed by critics who found caricature easier than thoughtful engagement. Gamble and Pinette note Ruskin’s intellectual independence, his indignant rejection of conventional ideologies and practices, and his strong convictions. They underscore the importance, in all that he did, of his habit of close observation and attention to detail – his eye – and of his ability to draw connections between ideas, works of art, and historical periods. The authors know that there can be no Ruskin in a nutshell; his protean nature resists classification and his willingness to reassess his own ideas and positions (what some have disparaged as a tendency to contradict himself) makes it difficult to point to a monolithic ‘Ruskinian philosophy.’

The authors emphasize the importance of drawing for Ruskin as a means of documenting those landscapes, buildings, and works of art that were at risk of being lost to development, war, or neglect (Ruskin, like his admirer William Morris, protested against the frequently damaging ‘restoration’ of art and architecture). Yet drawing was also a means of understanding the natural world and our place in it. As Gamble and Pinette write: “une plume, un brin d’herbe, une feuille permettent de discerner le monde, de comprendre l’univers et d’approcher, à travers eux, le génie de la Création” (23) [In a feather, a blade of grass, a leaf one could discern the world, understand the universe, and approach, through them, the genius of Creation]. Ruskin saw the Divine in nature (although later in life

he also came to see a darker side of the natural world), but he was also interested in the scientific perspective. As his writings and drawings demonstrate, Ruskin was an accomplished amateur geologist, a student of botany and mineralogy, and a keen observer of the weather. He maintained a lasting interest in science and scientific developments, although he was troubled by what he saw as the mechanistic, dehumanizing aspect of modern science (what he called "the glacial cold of selfish science" [19.236]).

Ruskin's travels around Great Britain and in continental Europe helped to foster his love of landscape, art, and the natural world. These journeys began during his childhood; John James Ruskin's successful work for the wine trading firm of Ruskin, Telford, and Domecq required annual customer visits, which doubled as Ruskin family holidays. The family traveled by coach, a mode of transport that Ruskin continued to favor as an adult, much preferring the opportunity it offered for immersion in the landscape to the loud hurry of the railway. In words that add a further layer of meaning to his sketch of the tunnel at Blaisy, Ruskin declared that "Going by railroad, I do not consider as travelling at all; it is merely 'being sent' to a place, and very little different from becoming a parcel" (5.370).

Gamble and Pinette trace each of Ruskin's nineteen journeys to Burgundy over the course of fifty-five years (1833-1888), examining the drawings he made, his impressions of people, landscape, and architecture, and the ways in which Burgundy influenced his work. A chronology of these visits is included at the back of the book, along with a list of the towns Ruskin visited, with corresponding dates. The authors draw heavily on Ruskin's diaries and letters, as well as his published work (they also cite the manuscript of John James Ruskin's diary of 1833-46, marking the first time that this source has been translated and published in French). Ruskin's first experience of Burgundy was at age 14 in 1833, during his first continental journey. On this early visit, his impressions were largely shaped by the work of Samuel Prout and J.M.W. Turner. As the authors note, during Ruskin's 1843 tour of Burgundy, "C'est le temps ideal pour confirmer à Ruskin la beauté turnerienne de cette partie de la Bourgogne"

(59) [This was the ideal time to confirm for Ruskin the Turnerian beauty of this part of Burgundy]. In *Modern Painters*, published the same year, Ruskin wrote that “Of this kind of beauty Turner was the first to take cognizance, and he still remains the only, but in himself the sufficient, painter of French landscape” (3.237). Turner’s pictures would continue to play an important role in his feelings for both continental landscape and architecture.

Gamble and Pinette describe Ruskin’s powerful response to his first view of the Alps: “C’est une revelation, quelque chose de presque biblique et religieux [...] À jamais Ruskin sera passionné par les montagnes, après cet instant déterminant” (41) [This was a revelation, almost biblical or religious [...] Ruskin would always be passionate about mountains after that decisive moment]. Ruskin made sketches on this journey, as he would during all his subsequent travels. A number of his drawings, spanning the long years of his relationship with Burgundy, are reproduced in this volume, including one of his earliest sketches, *Vue de l’église Saint-Michel à Dijon*, made in 1833. In *Praeterita* Ruskin singles out this piece from many “flying scrawls” as being “worth register and preservation” (35.80). In later life he kept it with him at Brantwood; it was shown after his death at the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours (1901) and again at Manchester (1904). Ruskin’s fondness for this drawing had as much to do with emotion as with technique, however. As the authors observe, Ruskin remained particularly attached to Burgundy: “La route de Paris aux Alpes, en passant par la Bourgogne, lui deviant si familière qu’elle est une sorte de ‘voie sacrée,’ surtout la dernière partie” (51) [The route from Paris through the Alps, passing through Burgundy, became so familiar to him that it was a sort of “way,” especially the last part – what Ruskin would come to call “the Old Road”]. Of his 1835 sojourn in Burgundy, Ruskin wrote in *Praeterita* that “the Col de la Faucille [...] opened to me in distinct vision the Holy Land of my future work and true home in this world. My eyes had been opened, and my heart with them, to see and to possess royally such a kingdom!” (qtd 55). On his last visit to Dijon, in 1888, he wrote to his cousin Joan (Agnew) Severn of a “walk for

two glorious hours over all my old haunts – from the church I drew when I was fourteen to the balconies you know so well. It's all safe – and lovely and delicious beyond words" (qtd 45).

The time Ruskin spent in Burgundy influenced not only his vision and understanding, but his work: references to Burgundy's landscape, architecture, and history can be found in *Modern Painters*, *The Stones of Venice*, *The Bible of Amiens*, and *Valle Crucis*. His 1882 lecture on Cistercian architecture focused on the monasteries of Cluny and Citeaux. Over the years, Ruskin was accompanied to Burgundy by various traveling companions: his early visits were made with his parents; during his brief marriage, his wife Effie was with him; while later journeys included friends and disciples such as W.G. Collingwood, Ruskin's future biographer, and the painter Frank Randal. Randal had been engaged by Ruskin to make pictorial records of Burgundian architecture for the Guild of St. George (several fine drawings and watercolors by both Collingwood and Randal appear in the book). Ruskin's 1866 visit, in the company of Sir Walter and Lady (Pauline) Trevelyan, their niece Constance Hilliard, and his cousin Joan Agnew ended tragically, with the death from cancer of Lady Trevelyan. This painful experience, too, would be bound up with his deep feelings for Burgundy.

*L'oeil de Ruskin* includes a chapter entitled "Proust à la recherche de Ruskin," which draws on Cynthia Gamble's research into Ruskin and Proust. In the spring of 1903 Proust traveled through France visiting churches and cathedrals, following the path of both Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc. The authors point to traces of Burgundy in his great novel, hearing "un écho du sanctuaire bourguignon dans l'église 'persane' de Balbec dans *À la recherche du temps perdu*" (172) [An echo of the Burgundian sanctuary in the Persian church in Balbec in *À la recherche du temps perdu*]. His visit to Beaune, they argue, informs the Preface to his translation of *Sesame and Lilies*. In this Proustian interlude the authors provide an excellent overview of Proust's engagement with Ruskin's ideas. It is particularly effective in a book aimed at a French readership, underscoring an important link between Ruskin and one of France's great writers.

Indeed, *L'oeil de Ruskin* is a valuable addition not only to French studies of Ruskin but to Ruskin research generally. Gamble and Pinette manage to condense a great deal of information into this volume, but their writing never feels cursory. They are insightful and sensitive guides, whose knowledge of both Ruskin and Burgundy strengthens their analysis. They have looked at Burgundy through 'Ruskin's eye' and their book is the richer for it. Their readers will be as well.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, ed. Cook and Wedderburn; references are cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Ruskin had conflicted feelings about Rome, however, finding much in it to criticize. Writing to Charles Eliot Norton in 1856, Ruskin dispatches Rome with delightful economy:

I think, perhaps, I abuse Rome more because it is as sour grapes to me. When I was there I was a sickly and very ignorant youth; and I should be very glad, now, if I could revisit what I passed in weariness or contempt; and I do envy you (sitting as I am just now in the Great Western hotel at Paddington, looking out upon a large number of panes of grey glass, some iron spikes, and a brick wall) that walk in sight of Sabine hills. Still, reasoning with myself in the severest way, and checking whatever malice against the things I have injured, or envy of you, there may be in the feelings with which I now think of Rome, these appear to me incontrovertible and accurate conclusions, – that the streets are damp and mouldy where they are not burning; that the modern architecture is fit only to put on a Twelfth cake in sugar (e.g., the churches at the Quattro Fontane); that the old architecture consists chiefly of heaps of tufa and bricks; that the Tiber is muddy; that the Fountains are fantastic; that the Castle of

St. Angelo is too round; that the Capitol is too square; that St. Peter's is too big; that all the other churches are too little; that the Jews' quarter is uncomfortable; that the English quarter is unpicturesque; that Michael Angelo's Moses is a monster; that his Last Judgment is a mistake; that Raphael's Transfiguration is a failure; that Apollo Belvidere is a public nuisance; that the bills are high; the malaria strong; the dissipation shameful; the bad company numerous; the Sirocco depressing; the Tramontana chilling; the Levante parching; the Ponente pelting; the ground unsafe; the politics perilous, and the religion pernicious. I do think, that in all candour and reflective charity, I may assert this much. (36.250)

<sup>3</sup> There is more of grudging concession than admiration in James' declaration; he is mostly critical of Ruskin in this article, sniffing at "the Ruskinian contagion" and remarking that Ruskin's late prose "might be supposed to emanate from an angry governess" (3).

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr 1808-1890, French journalist and novelist.

<sup>5</sup> "Incapable de tout deduction forte, il n'avait ni la méthode, ni l'esprit scientifique" (Bardoux 76).

<sup>6</sup> "[I]ls pensent par visions et s'expriment par images" (Bardoux 2).

<sup>7</sup> "[C]'est un élan de sympathie vers la force éternelle, l'énergie de vie qui produit au dehors toutes les forms et toute l'harmonie du monde" (Chevrillon 88).

<sup>8</sup> Translations from Gamble and Pinette are my own.

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