

Virgin and Child with John: Ruskin's Typical Romance

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Neither Madonna-worship, nor Lady-worship of any sort, whether of dead ladies or living ones, ever did any human creature any harm [...]. (Ruskin, *The Bible of Amiens*, 33.164)

How dangerous it is to be called John [...]. Anything may happen to a person called John. (Oscar Wilde, *Letters* 1177)

[N]ihil acque in animo habuit quam ut reverentiam, veritatem, justitiam, sanctitatem inculcaret. [Besides, he had no design but to inculcate reverence, truthfulness, fairness, sanctity.] (The public orator's remembrance of Ruskin at Encaenia 1900, 35.l)

In 1990, Van Akin Burd published a critical edition of some of Ruskin's correspondence – letters from Venice at Christmastide, 1876. Recently, Ruskin's scholarly readers have been mentioning, but been unsure what to do with, the strange encounter that the letters detail: Ruskin, in town to study Carpaccio's frescoes of St. Ursula, suddenly had visions of St. Ursula herself in which she spoke to him, through the frescoes, accompanied by the spirit of Rose La Touche, who had died in May 1875. As Ruskin would later express it, in shy periphrasis: "I [...] experienced [...] conditions of spectral vision and audit" (33.198).

These visions are not, as some have argued, mere distractions for Ruskin in his later work; still less are they simply pathological. In trying to fathom the relationship between Rose and the saintly virgin Ursula, and why he is receiving messages from them, Ruskin turns back to a theological concept he learned in youth, the concept of “types.” Developing his own typological theory, Ruskin comes to see Ursula as a type – a sort of prefiguration – of Rose, Rose in turn being a modern incarnation of St. Ursula. Ruskin, meditating on these two holy virgins, comes ultimately to nothing less than a new vision of history, in which all modern people (and not just Rose) are called to re-instantiate the exemplary lives of the medieval saints. In a distinctive body of writings that have as much in common with liturgy as with his earlier art theory and social criticism, Ruskin attempts to convert his readers to what he characterizes as a childish belief in the saints. At the same time, in his pedagogical projects at Oxford, Whitelands College, and elsewhere, Professor Ruskin seeks to bring the girls of England to resemble St. Ursula and Rose La Touche. This double project – to bring a certain childishness into English devotion, and to bring Rose back into his own life – we might call Ruskin’s typical romance.

In tracing this romance, we should expect to discover some new connections among the works of various scholars who have touched on Ruskin’s later years. The author’s Ursuline encounters are often noted – only, as distractions. They are, apparently, something we must acknowledge, but which we would not dwell upon. Sara Atwood, for example, in an article about pedagogy, finds herself having to account for the odd way that Ruskin’s education writings keep getting waylaid by St. Ursula and Rose:

As Ruskin’s identification of Ursula with Rose intensified, a subtext began to emerge in his analysis of the saint’s legend, and of Carpaccio’s painting. [...] Yet the personal subtext in no way detracts from Ruskin’s use of Carpaccio’s painting, or of numerous other associative images, as teaching tools. (126-27)

Here, Atwood would rather talk about something else – she *knows* Ruskin would rather talk about something else, something more instructive – but Ursula keeps getting in the way. Happily, Ruskin still manages to get his pedagogical points across – but have the spirits really been exorcized? Tim Hilton, in his well-known biography of our author, goes so far as to find Ursula not only an annoyance but a psychiatric symptom:

[Ruskin] began [in late 1876] the association of St. Ursula with Rose La Touche. [...] There are many differences between the legendary life of St. Ursula and the actual life of Rose La Touche. Consciously or unconsciously, Ruskin wished to bring them together; and in doing so, in the later autumn and winter season of 1876, he lost control of his rational mind. (342-43)¹

The perceptive Francis O’Gorman is more helpful here, but still leaves a few things unsaid:

[I]n Venice, [Ruskin] experienced a “‘miraculously’ (literally) happy” succession of events, leading him to believe that miracle [i.e., the miraculous], indeed, was real, and that Rose’s spirit, bound up in his mind with the figure of St. Ursula in Carpaccio’s *Il Sogno di Orsola* in the Academia, had led him through the Sea City. (278-79)

O’Gorman persuasively argues that, after this Venetian encounter with a virgin-martyr, the author felt driven to create new works that would vindicate the claims of the supernatural, in the teeth of late nineteenth-century scientists’ positivistic narratives of the cosmos. O’Gorman, though, does not actually lay out *how* Ursula helps Ruskin to articulate such vindications. I think we can say exactly how.

In one of his last lectures, Ruskin suggests that St. Ursula is a “type” of Rose La Touche (33.507). And if we look into the meaning of this word, “type,” we will find it at the heart of Ruskin’s pedagogical enterprise, to which Atwood has so helpfully drawn our attention. Also, if we begin to think in terms of types, we will find just how right O’Gorman is. For not only does Ruskin’s encounter with St. Ursula mark a turn towards the su-

pernatural in the later writing; not only does Ursula drive Ruskin to vindicate the miraculous, in a few texts about the sciences – but Ruskin's Ursuline turn inaugurates an entire late period in which his compositional method, his rhetorical invention, is driven by the identification of types.

It is through this mechanism of the type that Ruskin did what Atwood says he did, critiquing contemporary pedagogy and developing his own. It is through the type that Ruskin did what O'Gorman says he did, attacking secularizing narratives of human being. And indeed, anyone interested in the discursive tools that Victorians found for coping with the emerging power of scientific narratives, can enjoy the story of Ruskin's typical romance.

What, then, is a type? The term comes from Christian scriptural exegesis. In typological reading, the scriptures are understood to refer not only to their own immediate historic situation, but also allegorically to every moment of time, before and after. Ruskin's later diaries are full of examples where he, upon rising, opens his Bible to a random place, and meditates upon the meaning of the verse before him; he sees its words as wisdom that will prepare him for the tasks of the day (see, e.g., *Brantwood* 904). In his later works, Ruskin, by drawing on a typological understanding of history, invites his audience to see themselves as enacting Christian history, repeating the lives of saints who themselves rehearsed biblical truths in a post-biblical era. Pre-eminently, Ruskin holds up the typical lives of the Virgin Mary, the virgin-martyr St. Ursula, and St. John the Baptist (the boyhood friend of Christ).²

We know from *Praeterita* how Ruskin was brought up with exemplary clerical training by his mother (e.g., 35.40-44), but the precise mechanism of this clerical training was typology. It is not just that Ruskin grew up memorizing the Bible. George Landow has reminded us that Ruskin, at the age of nine, was set to summarize typological sermons. Landow recalls not only the importance of scripture, inherent in Evangelical thought like that in which Ruskin was reared, but the Evangelical injunction – common for example in the “famous tracts of Bishop Ryle, which Ruskin later recommended to others” – that we must read the “Old” Testament typologically, “with Christ continually in view” (334).³

Typological reading places the Incarnation of Christ at the founding center of history, so that the Incarnation orders and gives meaning to all that went before it, and all that may come after. We might visualize Christ's typical effect on time as of a cross marked in the center of a page. If everything left of the cross is past, and everything to the right future, and we fold the paper over, just at the center line of the cross, we find "past" and "future" disappear as such – each "future" moment finding itself connected to some moment from the "past," and vice versa, in a space whose contours are determined by the Incarnation. The truths of the Hebrew Bible are always being spoken anew in the ministry of the Nazarene, always resonating in the lives of the medieval saints and of the modern Christians.

An epitome of how Ruskin puts such typology to conversional work in his later writings may be read in how he says his late mother's name. In many of his later works, Ruskin thinks about the holy, conversional power of his mother, Margaret, who had died in 1871. Margaret Ruskin is a pattern, for she presided over the house in peace, and, reciprocally, taught and modeled ethics for life in the world. Meditating upon her typological name, Ruskin finds emblems of her example throughout nature. In *Proserpina*, Ruskin says that "we" should really call the daisy by its French name of "marguerite," or, if in Latin, *margarita*.⁴ For one thing, this naming will recall for "us," he says, the conversional example of various saints with this name. And Margaret's flower also reminds "us" of the superabundant sacrifice that is a mother's, and God's, giving "us" our daily bread and then some: "the tiny scatterings and sparklings of the daisy on the turf may remind us of the old word 'Margaritae,' for the minute particles of the Host sprinkled on the patina" (25.314).⁵

Having spoken of the living plants of the earth in *Proserpina*, Ruskin then turns, in its companion volume, *Deucalion*, to the earth's living stones. Here, the name "Marguerite" means "pearl." In what Ruskin tells us is the best medieval Christian heraldry, that of the French in the late Middle Ages, the names of stones are often used to blazon colors – "Marguerite," for many harmonizing reasons, being used to mean "gray." "Marguerite" – gray – is the color of "the abatement of the light, the

abatement of the darkness.” “Marguerite” – the gray before the dark, or dawn – pre-eminently refers therefore to “Patience, between this which recedes and that which advances”; therefore it is “the colour of the turtle-dove, with the message that the waters have abated [Genesis 8]”; and if it is the color of the dove, then it is “the colour of the sacrifice of the poor [again, a dove; Leviticus 12] – therefore of humility.”

Marguerite colors your life with that patient humility by which you come within the pearl gates of Heaven, says Ruskin: “and because, through this virtue [i.e., humility, “poverty of spirit”], open first the gates of Paradise [Matthew 5:3], you are told that [...] every several gate [of heaven is] one of pearl [Revelations 21:21]” (26.187). Ruskin enshrines his saintly Margaret in a scriptural shrine of pearl, and calls us to emulate worshipfully the virtue of patient humility embodied by her. Ruskin’s typological homiletics draws us into a complex of texts in which Margaret’s truth resonates synchronically, from water-girt Ararat to St. John’s Patmos, to another island, far in the north, where Margaret Ruskin was born. We move from Genesis to Revelations, through the medieval cultus of the saints, to Ruskin’s present day.

Typology does not seek to change the “literal” truth of events. While it does look for Christ in the utterances of the Old Testament, it never sacrifices those scriptures’ “original,” literal interpretation. Moses, to take another example, is always “just” Moses; but in being Moses, he looks ahead, through the Exodus, to a Christian salvation. The whole of Moses’ life but prepares him to die upon Pisgah, so that he can comfort Christ at the Transfiguration, and speak to him of the nobility of dying well (6.462-66; the entire “Mountain Glory” chapter here in *Modern Painters 4* is a sermon on Moses at the Transfiguration). And indeed the point of all scripture, for Ruskin, is to move *us* toward Christian action. Here is a typical prayer from Ruskin’s favorite prayer-book, discussed at length below, the “St. Louis” Psalter (34.218): “O God, who gave the law to Moses on the summit of Mount Sinai, and through thy holy angels miraculously brought to that same place the body of thy blessed virgin-martyr, Catherine: grant that, with her merits and intercession, we might

ourselves be strong enough to win through to that mountain which is Christ."⁶ Moses' mountain is St. Catherine's mountain, and is also Christ, in our own present and future.

Landow is right to remind us of the importance of typology in Ruskin's thought; Ruskin himself insists on it. But Landow speaks as if Ruskin's typological imagination derives *entirely* – without remainder – from Ruskin's Evangelical upbringing.⁷ Any and all survivals of typological discourse in the later Ruskin become for Landow just that – mere vestiges of some Dissenter hermeneutic that the author had learned from the cradle. Certainly the late Ruskin never forgets his mother; but rather than reject his mother's teaching, the late Ruskin turns Evangelical typology on its head, letting the Low-Church Margaret Ruskin inspire his interpretation of Catholic virgins, from St. Margaret of Antioch to St. Margherita da Cortona (see, e.g., 25.314). And as is readily apparent from the Marian writings of the late *Fors* letters, from the work on the Madonna porch in *The Bible of Amiens*, as from other writings discussed below, the late Ruskin finds in the Roman sanctorale a rich source of typological understanding. Ruskin sees the medieval saints' lives participating in the typological fulfillment of Christian history today. Ruskin's late works combine to develop a typological liturgy which he hopes will bring the childishness of Christ back into England, even while summoning the saintly spirit of Rose back to life.

Ruskin's devotion to the divine Child is, furthermore, *conversional*, consisting in getting others to act, to convert words into deeds. Ernst Ralph Hintz, a medievalist, has helpfully encapsulated Christian *conversio* as "a return to the correct practice of charity and a renewed vigilance in upholding it" (89). Ruskin, the art history professor, sees art as a primary mode of conversion, and recommends the copying of devotional art like Carpaccio's. Ruskin commissions devotional art to be reproduced cheaply so that *Fors* readers can use the photographs in at-home drawing lessons, written by himself (28.445-47). He donates copies of devotional art to Oxford and to girls' schools, to be copied. In a continuous conversional praxis, he endows competitions at girls' colleges (discussed further below) in which an especially virtuous student,

elected by her peers, is awarded a prize (30.336-47).⁸ Ruskin's express goal is to reproduce the virginal body of the devout Rose and the earlier virgin-martyrs whom she typified. But for Ruskin, such girls and the veneration of them will help to bring the English into the proper attitude of Christian devotion.

Before continuing to trace Ruskin's conversional project, though, let us get over one obstacle. Students of Ruskin's diaries know that his Ursuline devotion existed in conflict with what he characterized as diabolical lust for the flesh of Rose – as for example in the diary passage where he is confronted by a “Devil,” who mockingly quotes at him St. Paul's injunction to “crucify the flesh” (*Brantwood* 92-93). Because we have read James Kincaid's famous *Child-loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, we have learned how to get past some of our own day's peremptory ignorance about “child-loving,” and to begin to grapple with the complex valencies which child-loving can have in Victorian texts. I can guess, for example, that Kincaid would caution against any knowing, twenty-first-century attempt to “see through” Ruskin's Ursuline devotion as a mere “sublimation” of a “real,” physical love for the girl.

But in fact *Child-loving* does not study Ruskin, nor the one adorable Child who so preoccupied Victorians, from Dickens on down – the child Christ. Ruskin's relationships with girls – Victorians' relationships with children – are difficult for us to read because we forget that these relationships had theological weight. In reading Ruskin's late typological works, we might discover ways to engage with the writings of other Victorians whose thinking on desire was informed by Christianity. Ruskin's Christianity represents – and is meant by him to represent – a theory of desire, and a rule for our physical lives, contrasting in significant ways with pagan discourse of the *fin de siècle* – pre-eminently, Walter Pater's. Yet for all that, Ruskin's virginal Christianity itself represents a non-heteronormative disposition of the body.

Ruskin is very interested in theorizing desire, and, judging from the diaries, he seems aware of the sexual dimension that his adoration of virgins can always carry with it. If we come to Ruskin ready to diagnose

him, we will find that he has already diagnosed himself. But Ruskin was arguing for *gnosis*, not diagnosis. For him, as for the medievals he assiduously studied, Christianity was a sexology.⁹ And the desires that interested Ruskin were virginal; the bodily practices which he sought to inculcate were devotional. In Christian devotion, he found what for him was the best and proper language in which to frame theories of desire. Ruskin organized his thinking around the exemplary, desirable bodies of Mary Virgin and of the other virgin-saints. The best way to love them, he said, was physically to copy their sacred images, with an eye toward making one's own life part of their adoration of the Christ-child.

Ruskin's adoration of the virgins was vitally related to his unrealized marriage with Rose La Touche. But because of the deeply spiritual contours of their relationship, it should be clear at once that to focus on the liturgical turn in Ruskin's later writing is not to ignore the erotic dimension in Ruskin's thought. On the contrary, it is in the context of prayer that we best begin to read Ruskin's devotion to Rose. Ruskin's liturgical turn dates from his Ursuline visions, but his interest in visions dates from the death of Rose the previous year, and he speaks of Ursula as a "type" of Rose (see, e.g., 33.507). In using the word "type," Ruskin makes a very specific claim.

Ruskin's late writings do not just happen to mention girl-saints and the Christ-child: they comprise, they perform, a liturgy meant to effect England's sanctification, ritually reuniting not only the girls of England but all Ruskin's readers with that "sanctity of childhood," formerly adored, he says, by medieval Christians (33.338). As part of this project, Ruskin promotes the cult of virginal art among art students. In his last Oxford lecture, Ruskin presents the ladies of Somerville College with a copy he has made of a Carpaccio (*Figure 1*). It is a detail of the head of St. Ursula, from the Venetian's painting of *St. Ursula's Dream*. Ruskin is donating the work in the hope that it will in turn be studied by Oxonians – copied again, in a continuing devotional praxis. Ruskin then proceeds to lecture on St. Ursula, framing the donation within a typological discourse. He hopes that the young women of Somerville will learn to live through the painting – "even to live as little Ursulas" (33.507).



Figure 1: Ruskin's copy of a detail of Victor Carpaccio's *Dream of St. Ursula*. Somerville College, Oxford. (Hewison 264)



The Virgin and Child with St. John
From the picture by Fra Filippo Lippi

Figure 2. The first in Ruskin's 1875 series of "lesson photographs," used as the basis for his published drawing-lessons. The painting, by Fra Filippo Lippi, is called *Virgin and Child with Two Angels*. Ruskin calls it *Virgin and Child with St. John*. (28.xx, 445-447, and frontispiece)

To my ear, Ruskin's next comments here comprise a Christian typological critique of another Oxonian, Walter Pater, who had previously held up for secular veneration *La Gioconda*. Ruskin has his own Italian painting for us to consider.¹⁰ "There never was such a face as hers in the world," Ruskin says of Carpaccio's virgin.

Take the sweetest you can find in your college gardens, and none will be so sweet. Nor in any Phyllis that you know will you find such twisted hair as hers – twisted like that of all Venetian girls in memory of the time when they first made their hair into ropes for the fugitive ships at Aquileia. You will never see such hair, nor such peace beneath it on the brow – the peace of Heaven, of infancy, and of death. (33.507)

In other words, Ursula's face is like that of the Christ-child in great paintings, bespeaking at once infancy, martyrdom, and resurrection, synchronically. "No one knows who she is or where she lived," Ruskin continues:

She is Persephone at rest below the earth; she is Proserpine at play above the ground.¹¹ She is Ursula, the gentlest yet the rudest of little bears; a type in that perhaps of the moss rose, or of the rose (*spinosissima*) with its rough little buds. She is in England, in Cologne, in Venice, in Rome, in eternity – living everywhere, dying everywhere [...]. (33.507)

In the place of Pater's undead lady – "like the vampire, she has been dead many times" – Ruskin calls us to adore the resurgent martyrdom of a Christian virgin, whose existence resonates typologically across time, whose life is "everywhere" through her saintly intercessions and through our own conversional response to her. "England" is the place that Ursula sets out to evangelize; "Cologne" is the depository of her relics, the symbol of her martyrdom, of her conversional testimony; "Venice" is where Carpaccio paints her, and where Ruskin creates a copy of Ursula's head, which he now gives to Oxford scholars to be copied, in a continuing *conversio*; "Rome" is the seat of that

Church which is devoted to Mary, Queen of Virgins. It is because Ursula is in *these* places that she is available "everywhere," her deeds and her cultus making her world-famous and sanctifying the world. Because her life is typical – pointing back to an earlier Virgin of the flowers, Persephone, and pointing ahead toward Rose La Touche, and to ourselves, if we like – this girl is "in eternity."¹²

Ruskin's devotion to the saints is conversional, rooted in their power to bring "us" into Christian action, today. At the university-level, Ruskin prosecutes this conversional project through art-lectures and art-donations. But he works through other pedagogies also. Publicly, he issues his "lesson photographs," images to be copied by art students for their own instruction. He begins of course with a painting by Fra Filippo Lippi (*Figure 2*), which he calls *Virgin and Child with St. John* (28.xx, 445-47, and frontispiece). The Virgin and Child are actually with two angels, *not* with John. But they are conversionally present through the art-lessons of John Ruskin, converter of England. "You," he says to the workers of England, should begin by copying the pearl necklace of the Virgin (28.447). Practice it "over and over again," "and in time – perhaps – you may prove able to draw [...] an Ionic capital; and a Parthenon, and a Virgin in it; and a Solomon's Temple, and a Spirit of Wisdom in it; and a Nehemiah's Temple, and a Madonna in it" (28.447). The progress of art is the progress of the types of Mary. Ultimately, an especially talented artist, a British Lippi, might even give the impression of the Virgin and Child not only as having been real in Antiquity, but as living realities now, in English rooms (28.446).

We are forcibly reminded here that this is *not* the Ruskin of the middle period, when "the Virgin" of the Parthenon would have been unequivocally Athena, an impersonal image of wisdom, as in *The Queen of the Air* – not a type, not Christian. A great deal of the best Ruskin criticism has concerned itself with Ruskin's middle period, in which he used mythological images as teaching tools. These mythological images could include not only deities but indeed saints – as in the great dialogue of St. Barbara and the Egyptian goddess, Neith, in

Ethics of the Dust (18.316-20). Dinah Birch in her well-known *Ruskin's Myths* is especially helpful to us in understanding this Ruskin. But the later Ruskin, after his Ursuline conversion, is writing paraliturgical texts, and to follow their reasoning we have to be willing to think typologically.

For those of “us” who would live saintly lives – who would be “companions of St. George” in modern England – Lippi’s painting, available through a modern photographic reproduction, must “be our first domestic possession in works of art; [...] No. 1 in our household catalogue of reference” (28.447). The Virgin and Child, with John, invite the readers of *Fors* to the conversional experience of creating Christendom. This is the work incumbent upon the “workers of England” to whom Ruskin addresses the letters of *Fors Clavigera*. This is the lesson for today in Ruskin’s liturgy.

There is no line between Ruskin’s art-pedagogy and the bodily practices of Christianity that he seeks to inculcate. Ruskin, as mentioned earlier, also sponsors Christian contests at girls’ schools. At a number of such institutions all over England, he endows an annual prize for whatever virtuous maiden the students shall elect their “Rose Queen”: the prize being a set of his complete works (for the Queen to give away to her friends) and a pendant for herself – specifically, thorned roses in wrought gold, forming a cross (30.336-47). He oversees the design of several rosy crosses which, meant to be worn on the body of a girl, literally embody his typical romance. Ruskin attempts to bring the Christ-child back to Christianity, to summon the girls of England to saintly action, and, through the communion of the saints, to bring back his Rosy girl.

The school where Ruskin himself got most involved was Whitelands Training College. Whitelands was under the administration of his friend, the Reverend Canon John Faunthorpe, and it was here that Ruskin was best able to put his liturgy into practice as a lived ecclesiology. The Whitelands ceremony is quite explicit about re-inscribing the contemporary girls of England as virgin-saints. Prior to the investiture, everyone

attends a service in St. Ursula's Chapel – a church fitted up by Ruskin himself, and ornamented with stained-glass windows by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, featuring St. Ursula and other holy virgins. I have not found any reference to this chapel in modern Ruskin criticism. The Roman Catholic periodical, *Merry England*, which ran from 1883 to 1895 – the creation of Wilfred Meynell and his wife, the celebrated poet, Alice Meynell – featured an article on Ruskin's chapel, giving a first-hand account of it in some detail. As the original chapel no longer stands, this description is especially valuable.¹³

St. Ursula, with all her legendary meanings, looked down from her stained glass window at the kneeling company. As princess, or as saint and martyr, she is commemorated on the carved finials of the seats [...]. As I looked from symbol to living reality, I once again recognized the power of the Master [i.e., Ruskin], who more than any other man has *linked together the truths expressed in Christian art with the living truth of pure and orderly and diligent life*. (Bishop 73, emphasis added)

Bishop deliberately repeats herself, "living [...] life," to emphasize the ethical, the conversional dimension of Ruskin's art-pedagogy. Ruskin's work had, according to this contemporary, helped to "link" art and life in a particular way – with the link that Christians call *conversio*.

After service in the Ursula-chapel, in the action of investing his Rose Queen with a cross-amulet, Ruskin conversionally re-enacts a scene from the life of another virgin, St. Geneviève – on whose feast day Rose La Touche had been born:

on his way to *England* from Auxerre [to refute some heretics], St. Germain passed a night in [Geneviève's] village, and among the children who brought him on his way in the morning [...] noticed this one – wider-eyed in reverence than the rest; drew her to him, questioned her,

and was sweetly answered, That she would fain be
Christ's handmaid. And he hung round her neck a small
copper coin, marked with the cross. Thenceforward
Geneviève held herself as "separated from the world."
(33.56, Ruskin's emphasis)

In Caxton's *Golden Legend* (which Ruskin knew and in various places cites), St. Germain holds up St. Geneviève's conversional example: "of her good life and conversation many shall take ensample, that they shall leave their sin and shall convert them to God, and shall live religiously, by which they shall have pardon and joy perdurable." Whitelands is a teacher-training college, and Ruskin's goal at the school was to send forth virgins who would help convert England.

Ruskin's conversional response to St. Germain – and to St. Geneviève, and to St. Ursula – stands as an excellent synecdoche for the conversional project that shapes all of his late work. Ruskin would many times place a cross upon the girls of that England which St. Germain had saved from heresy. The cross upon the breast of a blossoming girl transforms our image of the Crucified into that of a Child, allowing us to see in children images of Christ, and in Christ images of the childish. The ornament of the rosy cross both crucifies and embellishes the body of the girl; it reinscribes Christian devotion within a practice of lived virginity; but this *virginitas* signals "girlhood" and is always girlish. The ballots at Whitelands childishly asked the virgins to vote for the "likeablest and lovablest" lass to be their Queen (Bishop 74).

Unsurprisingly, Ruskin's rosy crosses proliferated, blooming not only in his public works but also in his published writings. In his lecture on heraldry, "The Iris of the Earth," Ruskin used the visual field of the escutcheon to bring himself into visual communion with Rose La Touche. Ruskin's father had designed his son's arms with "three crosses crosslets gules," with an eye toward the lad becoming a minister (35.391-92). (Visually striking, Ruskin's three "gules" crosses shine out from a white chevron on a black field.) In his later years, Ruskin declared that the real meaning of these crosses lay in their reference to

Rose. He explained that the crosses' color, "gules," should be understood as "rose-color" (26.183). Similarly, for his *Bibliotheca Pastorum* series – a sort of "Everyman's Library" – Ruskin asked Burne-Jones to design a sort of logo, a rosy cross (see the frontispiece to Volume 31). Ruskin's crosses are rosy because his Christianity is very much wrapped up with his love for Rose, and his love for Rose is shaped and informed by Christian devotion to the saints and scriptures. The rosy cross is not just an *emblem* of Ruskin's work, but *part* of his work – the work of reinscribing England within a saintly typology that will bring the Child near.

So of course it is for schoolchildren that Ruskin edits, for the *Bibliotheca*, *Rock Honeycomb: Broken Pieces of Sir Philip Sidney's Psalter* (31.103-318). "I have thrown all other appointment aside for the moment, in order to get this edition of Sir Philip Sidney's Psalter prepared for school service" (31.107). Here, in *Rock Honeycomb*, Ruskin's paraliturgical writing gives way to actual public prayer. The book shows us in condensed form what Ruskin sought to achieve in his late work. Ruskin saw *Rock Honeycomb*, as psalter, becoming a foundational part of Ruskinian pedagogy. Music – sung music – he says in his preface, must be the "first element" of "St. George's education":

All perfectly rhythmic poetry is meant to be sung to music, and all entirely noble music is the illustration of noble words. The arts of word and of note, separate from each other, become degraded; and the muse-less sayings, or senseless melodies, harden the intellect, or demoralize the ear. (31.107)

Singing music develops the intellect and refines the ear. What England needs are Christian bodies performing the liturgy: not uninspired lips, nor disembodied melodies, but conversional prayer. Ruskin calls upon his readers to be more than readers – to sing a new psalm. "[I]f ever Old England again becomes Merry England, the first use she will make of her joyful lips, will be to sing psalms" (31.106-7).

Ruskin quotes the New Testament letter of James: “Is any among you afflicted? – let him pray. Is any merry? – let him sing psalms,” saying: “The entire simplicity and literalness of this command of the first Bishop of Christendom cannot, of course, be now believed, in the midst of our luxurious art of the oratorio [...]. But the command is, nevertheless, as kind and wise as it is simple [...].” (31.106). Christianity, Ruskin says, is summed up in children’s liturgical singing. To celebrate this liturgy is the command of the great bishop, the kinsman of Christ. Under his command, Ruskin edits the psalter. The singing children will bring closer the Word who came as a Child. The psalter is a “good spell,” as Ruskin liked to call the gospel (34.196-97), which can recover the holiness of England’s children. Chanting bodies will perform perfect praise.

We hear more about Ruskin’s own idea of the liturgy in *Praeterita*, when he remembers purchasing the first of many prayer-books he was to acquire.¹⁴

Now that I had a missal of my own, and could touch its leaves and turn, and even here and there understand the Latin of it, no girl of seven years old with a new doll is prouder or happier [...].¹⁵ For a well-illuminated missal is a fairy cathedral full of painted windows, bound together to carry in one’s pocket, with the music and the blessing of all its prayers besides. (35.491)

The missal carries with it not only a set of prayers but an ecclesiology. It bespeaks cathedrals. Indeed, it *is* one. Furthermore, Ruskin’s “missal” is, he specifies, nothing other than a “fourteenth-century hours of the Virgin.” Sliding from “book of hours” to “missal,” Ruskin here comprises his whole collection of illuminated manuscripts within a Ruskinian liturgy, both private as a pocket and public as a cathedral. He ultimately acquires a volume representing “the perfect Church service of the thirteenth century,” his “St. Louis” Psalter (34.218). This psalter is not just a perfect example *of its time*, but perfect altogether – Ruskin saying elsewhere that the thirteenth century represents Christianity at

its spiritual height (see, e.g., 23.47, 33.337-38). And what do we notice about this book? – that it includes between its covers not *only* a psalter but an hours of the Virgin: matins, lauds, prime, etc., all featuring psalms framed by other hymns, Marian antiphons, verses, responses, prayers. This is the best book, because it is designed for the performance of typological liturgy.

It is these Catholic prayer-books that Ruskin will later single out as the "truly *Christian* psalms" (34.218; Ruskin's emphasis). The truly Christian psalter is the one that includes "collects to the Virgin, the Te Deum, and Service to Christ, beginning with the Psalm, 'The Lord reigneth'; and then the collects to the greater individual saints, closing with the Litany, or constant prayer for mercy to Christ, and all saints [...]" (33.491). St. Louis' psalter gives an especially prominent place to one virgin, St. Geneviève, on whose feast day, as we have noted, Rose was born. Geneviève was "the last saint to whom he [the king] prayed on his death bed," just as Ruskin sought his Rose through prayer (33.492). Among such virgins, Ruskin finds good liturgy – a psalter not yet not stripped of the Catholics' "intensely spiritual and passionate utterances of chanted prayer" (34.218), but woven round with prayers to "the women-saints in paradise" (33.492), engaging the psalms in conversational conversation and making them resonate through Christian history.

And what is Christian history? It is, says Ruskin, the history of the Christ-child. Ruskin argues in the *Art of England* lectures that what Christianity gives the world is the childish. The art of Ancient Greece gives no conception of Greek children. It is the medievals who, because they perfect their Christology in the thirteenth century, finally give us in their art something of the child (33.338). And speaking of the coming of the child, Ruskin always puts out a special number of *Fors* on Christmas. He ends the Christmas 1874 number liturgically, with the "joyfullest" of all psalms, Psalm 98, calling it the one essential Christmas psalm, to be sung "by Christ's cradle" even today (28.217): "*Cantate Domino canticum novum*," "Sing to the Lord a new song."

In Ruskin's "St. Louis" Psalter, Psalm 98 is largely absorbed within its historiated initial (*Figure 3*). This "C" is divided, its upper half forming the arc of heaven in which the Lord shines forth in glory, hearing the prayer of a kneeling David. In the lower half of the initial, two monks chant from a psalter on a lectern, singing to the Lord the psalm that David sang, the psalm that calls them to sing, one more time. St. Louis, John Ruskin, and we ourselves encounter this psalm as a picture of monks singing *in imitation of David*; and the song's imperative *cantate* calls us to imitate these singers.

Ruskin would have seen this historiation in his most perfect psalter as embodying the typological structure of liturgy, conversionally embodied in the physical praxis of the worshippers. No "new" song at all – only David's, all over again – but sung anew this Christmas, *encore*, by the cradle of the Child, in person. Likewise, in his own late works, Ruskin is not just calling for a new praise of the Christ-child, he is performing this praise. His "*cantate*" is not just a call, but a prayer and a genuflection – to the Child. Thinking of Psalm 8 – "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise" – Ruskin reiterates how "children, *remaining children*, and uttering, out of their own hearts, such things as their Maker puts there, are pure in sight and perfect in praise" (28.326, Ruskin's emphasis).

Here we might note that, while students of Ruskin's letters have encountered his own occasional use of "baby talk," no one has suggested the particularly strong reason why the author should speak so: he believes in the godliness of the childish. Rachel Dickinson in her critical edition of Ruskin's baby-talk letters simply mentions in passing that Ruskin "equated [...] girls to his idealized unconstrained self: the child [...] who exhibited the intuitive sight of an infant genius or saint" (43). I think we can be more specific: Ruskin worshiped "the sanctity of childhood in unity with that of Christ" (33.338). Such a childish liturgy is what the Church of England lacks today, and what Ruskin is advocating and performing: a liturgy that remembers the Christ-child and Christ's valorization of the childish – both in His choosing to be incarnated as a Child, and in His praise of children during His ministry.

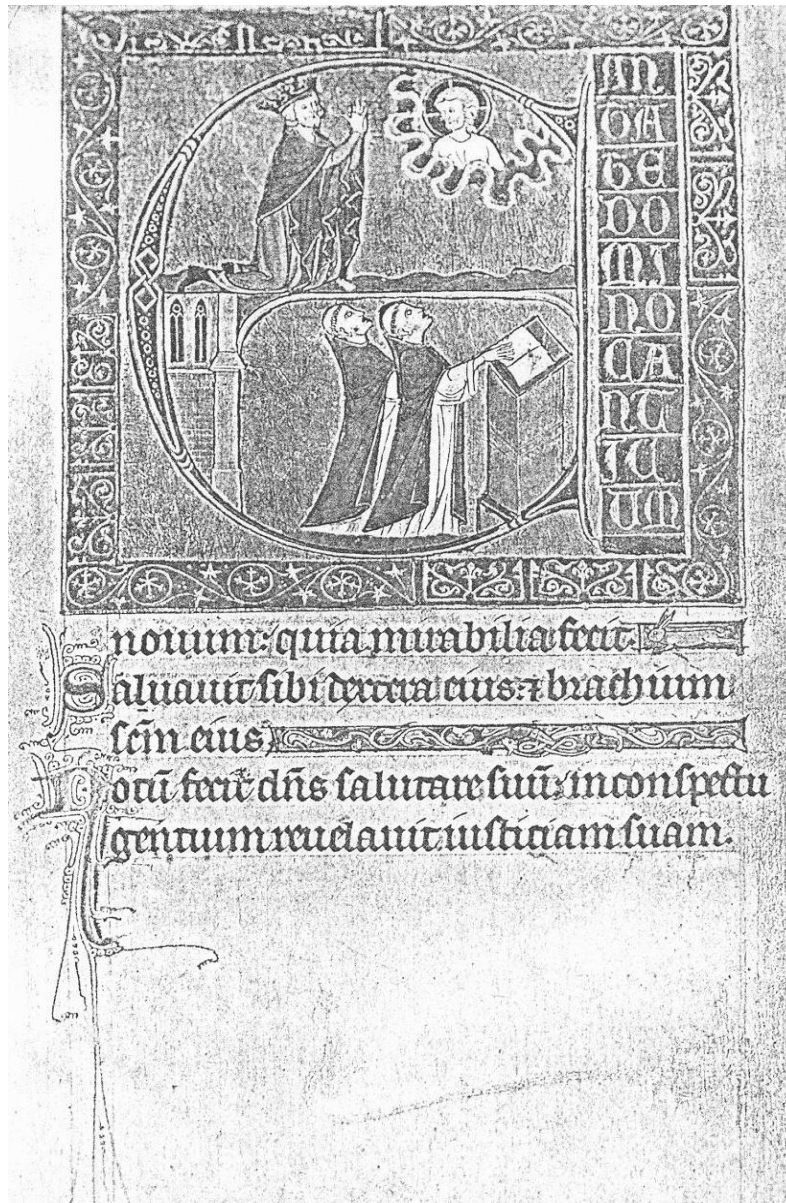


Figure 3: "Cantate Domino canticum novum," folio 107 in Ruskin's "Saint Louis" Psalter. The image is here reprinted from plate 14 in Cockerell.

Fors Clavigera itself ends with a childish scene. Ruskin quotes a letter from Francesca Alexander, the folklorist with whom he was putting together collections of literary sketches of Italian life. Francesca's letter describes a "clumsy" carving of the Virgin Mary venerated by the girls of an Apennine orphanage. Ruskin holds up such clumsiness as the "living rose" of Christian devotion, and contrasts it unfavorably with the respectable Church of England that, in avoiding such "superstition," has lost much of its faith (29.526). In this same vein, in his lecture on Protestantism, Ruskin speaks on two paintings – a Turner, and one of his own copies of the head of Carpaccio's St. Ursula. He praises the "Catholicism" of the Turner, and says, "I now present it to your gallery at Oxford, to be an idol to you, I hope, forevermore."

Turning to the Ursula, he says, "And here is an idol of a girl" (Cook 256). Where the early Ruskin would have wished the Italian painter to repent any idolatry, the late Ruskin calls on England to repent her iconoclasm. The English are guilty of scorning the most holy rose of the childish. Biographically, we could perhaps say that Ruskin means to spurn the English divines whose puritanical doctrines had led to those (in his view mistaken) beliefs that so tortured Rose La Touche herself. But we can also say that Ruskin means here a larger critique of English liturgists who have sought to extirpate anything childish from the Church-service – childish stories of the saints (33.234, 236), clumsy devotions to Mary, the play of typology, the very childishness of the Child.

Ruskin seeks to recover for the British faithful the childishness that he sees to be the pith of lived Christianity. Through typological writings that devoutly valorize the childish, Ruskin is invoking Rose, but also seeking to convert Britain to a new, incarnated prayer that participates in the Virgin's adoration of the Child. This complex of liturgical projects comprises what I have been calling Ruskin's typical romance. In the *Art of England* lectures, Ruskin presents his exemplary image of Christian worship. A "child about three years old" comes with her mother to Ruskin's house, and, entering the Brantwood study, fixes upon Andrea della Robbia's *Adoration of the Child*, which happens to be propped on the

floor.¹⁶ (This relief is later mounted over the fireplace in the study and can be seen there in at least one photograph, Portrait #247 in Dearden.) Ruskin notices that, "though there were many pretty and glittering things about the room which might have caught her eye or her fancy, the first thing, nevertheless, my little lady does, is to totter quietly up to the white Infant Christ, and kiss it" (33.313).

The girl's mouth performs the "perfect praise" celebrated by the psalmist – praise that joins and enacts the Virgin's adoration of the Child. The little girl models the type of conversational response to the *della Robbia* that Psalm 98 calls us to offer in a "new song"; nothing *quite* new, for the girl in the study is only doing what another Virgin has already done. Yet the toddler performs it anew, in what, for her, is the first time. This is the kind of response Ruskin wants his own work to elicit; this is the kind of liturgy he seeks to write. In a *Fors* letter on Sir Walter Scott, Ruskin writes semi-autobiographically of how greatly a writer's workroom influences the writer's work (29.463-64). It is not for nothing that Ruskin collected Marian art around him in his study, where he wrote.

Ruskin calls himself "Catholic" (see, e.g., Cook 254), but he is not in communion with the bishop of Rome. Nor is he attempting to convert anyone to Roman Catholicism. Instead, Ruskin is using Catholic liturgy and art of the late Middle Ages in order to bring his England into a typological understanding of human being – to convert his audience, in Christian *conversio*, toward a new gospel of lived *caritas* in the nineteenth century. Precisely because the Christianity that Ruskin practices and advocates is through-and-through typological, it need never point us solely to an Ursula or even to a Mary, though for particular reasons he feels these exemplars to be signally useful to us. He himself consults St. Ursula, but Ruskin advises his readers *not* "to expect messages from pretty saints"; he is only "urgent with [his readers] to ascertain clearly in their own minds what they *do* expect comfort or reproof from" (29.385).

Throughout his later projects, Ruskin's devotion to Rose deepens his devotion to the Virgin and Child, even as his Christianity informs his earthly love. In his praise of the childish, Ruskin becomes like some St. John in the

work of an Old Master – pointing to the exemplary Virgin and to the Child. Only, our John sits outside the frame. And really, Ruskin's later teaching can be seen as a quest to destroy such frames completely, as he calls on his hearers, on whomsoever his prophecy might reach, to clear the distance between themselves and that exemplary Virgin and her Boy.

As we continue our readings of Ruskin's later works, Ruskin's pedagogy, Ruskin's science – we will find ourselves forced to think carefully about theology, liturgy, typology. And Ruskin, precisely where he is most Christian, is least heteronormative, recommending himself not only to those interested in Victorian religion, but to those studying Victorian theorizations of desire.

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Notes

¹ W.G. Collingwood, who named one of his daughters "Ursula" (DNB), actually tells us much more about Ruskin's relationship with the saint than does the modern biographer, Hilton (Collingwood 260).

² As early as 1854, Ruskin had commissioned from D.G. Rossetti the *Passover in the Holy Family* (Tate Britain), in which the boy John, though unworthy (John 1:27), loosens the sandal of the boy Christ (33.288 and note, 35.638). There is extensive correspondence about this picture in Volume 36 of the Library Edition.

³ Jeffrey Spear, following Landow, notes the prominence of typology in Ruskin's thinking. Spear's few remarks on the subject are a useful introduction to Ruskin's typology (34-40). But while Spear spends energy showing how *many* were the ways in which the *early* Ruskin used the word "type," Spear does not show how specific and careful the renewed use of that word was to be in the *later* Ruskin.

⁴ This section of *Proserpina* dates from 1876. Larger and larger editions of the first volume of *Proserpina* were issued between 1875 and 1886, as Ruskin added fascicles. And the second volume first saw the light only in the Library Edition (25.191).

⁵ Ruskin's cited source for this glossa is St. John Chrysostom's *Divine Liturgy* (25.314) – the eloquent Chrysostom having been one of the

inspirations for Rose's nickname for Ruskin himself, "St. C." (35.528).

⁶ Folio 207 in Ruskin's "St. Louis" Psalter; plate 37 in Cockerell. "Deus qui dedisti legem moysi in summitate montis synai et in eodem loco per sanctos angelos tuos corpus beate katerine virginis et martyris tue mirabiliter collocasti: tribue nobis quaesumus ut meritis et intercessione ad montem qui Christus est valeamus pervenire."

⁷ Judith Stoddart is another scholar who has mentioned typology as important to Ruskin, but she expressly derives her understanding of Ruskin's typological imagination from Spear and Landow, who, as I have mentioned, do not address the distinct way that typology works in Ruskin's late period.

⁸ The citation here is of an "appendix" to Volume 30 of the Library Edition, an article by E.T. Cook called "Ruskin's May Queens," reprinted from Cook's *Studies*. Along with Bishop's article (see Bibliography), it should interest anyone studying Ruskin's later pedagogical work or liturgy in the British *fin de siècle*.

⁹ For discussions of medieval sexologies, see, e.g., Bernau, Boswell, Holsinger, Ziolkowski.

¹⁰ Robert Hewison, when he himself was Slade Professor, brought out a right handy annotated catalogue of the Tate's exemplary Ruskinian exhibition, *Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites*. Hewison briefly discusses this head of St. Ursula and some related images (261, 264).

¹¹ David Hanson, in a sensitive article, finds this "Persephone" passage and points us to it, but he does not tell us about the precise mechanism that enables Ruskin to connect her to Rose. Ruskin, saying in this same passage that Ursula is a *type*, identifies the crucial mechanism as typology.

¹² Michael Wheeler is clearly aware of typological references in Ruskin (see for example his sensitive reading of Solomon as a type of Christ, 248-50). But Wheeler seems to confine "typology" to the Old Testament's foreshadowings of the New. For Ruskin, the life of a "type" extends back into Pagan writings, and also reaches up through the age of the Church, to today.

¹³ Whitelands has relocated, but still retains a chapel and "the principal decorations to the chapel," including the priceless windows

(Hewison 198). Though now part of Roehampton University, Whitelands has never ceased to celebrate Ruskin's annual "Rose Queen" award ceremony, albeit in a co-educational version since 1986. The "May Monarch," according to the College's website, is "installed in [...] office each year on the second Saturday in May by a visiting bishop at an impressive ceremony in the College Chapel. As an insignia of office, [the Monarch] receive[s] at the hand of the bishop a designer gold cross."

¹⁴ The long article on "Manuscripts" in the general index of the Library Edition is almost entirely taken up with liturgical references.

¹⁵ Catherine Robson, in her well-known study, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*, has a chapter arguing that Ruskin generally gendered childhood itself as feminine. If she is right, it can only make her argument more convincing to note that Ruskin's rhetorical construction of childhood in his later works was centered around the virgin-martyrs. Ruskin's understanding of girlhood is most fully developed in his thinking on *sanctity*. Robson does not spend much time on religion, apart from noting a certain influence of the author's mother in his early Bible-study (108-14). Robson glances at *Praeterita*, but otherwise does not examine Ruskin's late works.

¹⁶ Ruskin attributes the terracotta relief to Luca della Robbia; it is today considered to be the work of Luca's nephew, Andrea.

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