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'By Winding Paths and Varied Slopes': John Ruskin's Non-fiction Prose and the Transformation of the Nineteenth Century Elegy

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Bethann R. Bowman entitled "'By Winding Paths and Varied Slopes': John Ruskin's Non-fiction Prose and the Transformation of the Nineteenth Century Elegy." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Amy C. Billone, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

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“'By Winding Paths and Varied Slopes': John Ruskin's Non-fiction Prose and the Transformation of the Nineteenth Century English Elegy”

A Dissertation Presented for
the Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Bethann R. Bowman
August 2012

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DEDICATION

For Chris- all the love.

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I would like to express my gratitude to my major professor, Amy Billone, whose advice, support, and knowledge of nineteenth-century literature I treasure. Thank you especially for encouraging me to "make myself happy" by working on a project that I love. I would also like to thank Arthur Smith whose creativity and passion as a scholar and poet have guided and inspired me throughout my graduate career. Lisi Schoenbach and Gregor Kalas provided insightful criticism for which I am deeply appreciative.

For every successful graduate student career, there is another graduate student who deserves equal credit. For me, that graduate student (now, Professor of English at Emory & Henry College) was Nicole Drewitz-Crockett. A few years after completing the Master's degree together, she convinced me to return to graduate school for the doctorate. For bringing survival supplies to our South Stadium office during comp weekends, for shopping days, laughter and friendship, and for reading thousands of words I have written over the years, I will always be grateful to her. And for welcoming me into their home (and feeding me!) during the final year of my dissertation study and for much delight, I am thankful to her husband Brad and their beautiful son Ethan.

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For believing in me at every step of my education and for being proud of me when I didn't know how to be proud of myself, I am more grateful than I can say to my mother, Cecilia Murphy. Your journey and triumph over adversity have allowed me to walk through many doors I would not otherwise have even known were there. To my sister, teacher, and friend Bridget Riley, thank you for proofreading, wise advise, and for reminding me what amazing possibilities are born of teaching and learning from young people. To my sister, Gena Jeffery, and my extended family, I am likewise grateful, especially Tom and Sheila Sass whose generous gift allowed me to purchase the E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn edition of John Ruskin's complete works—a dream come true.

Finally, and with all the love I can offer, I wish to acknowledge Christopher Sass, the source of my inspiration and the joy that makes my life happy and rich. It is a pleasure to dedicate this work to you.

ABSTRACT

In this work I explore how the non-fiction prose of John Ruskin contributes to the transformation of the poetic genre of elegy in mid-late Victorian England. I argue that in this period, the elegy undergoes a shift so dramatic that its generic elements are no longer confined to poetry. I place and question the changes occurring in the Victorian elegy in part by my study of Peter Sacks' seminal text *The English Elegy* (1985). In contextualizing my argument, I also consider more recent genre studies of the elegy by Stuart Curran, Erik Gray, Elizabeth Helsinger, Jahan Ramanzani, and Karen Weisman.

The hybrid nature of Ruskin's non-fiction prose embodies not only his debt to the genre of poetic elegy but his willingness to transform the elegy into an expression truly representative of the multiplicity of Victorian life. Jahan Ramanzani's *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* claims that the "anti-elegy" is fully developed only in the twentieth century and ultimately argues that the "aggressive dislocations of elegiac codes" causing our own unease with consolation are unique to the modern elegy. What Ramanzani's study fails to recognize is the complexity and multiplicity of forms present in the Victorian elegy *before* Thomas Hardy. The framework of my dissertation allows us to explore how John Ruskin's understudied and under-theorized non-fiction prose operates as a field for the germination of hybrid forms and offers a new lens through which to understand Ruskin's body of work.

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'By Winding Paths and Varied Slopes': John Ruskin and the Transformation of the Nineteenth Century Elegy

[T]he times are pregnant with change…the nineteenth century will be known to posterity as the era of one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved the remembrance, in the human mind, and in the whole constitution of human society.

-John Stuart Mill,
The Examiner

Writing almost exclusively in non-fiction prose addressed to middle and working class audiences, John Ruskin's works—over two hundred publications—address and embody the diverse interests of the Victorian age. They cover a dizzying array of fields ranging from the preservation of art and architecture to the social injustices of England's labor and economic system. In addition to his serious study of art, architecture and economics, Ruskin also made valuable contributions to the fields of geology, botany, literature, mythology, historical and natural preservation, and music. It is no wonder that the imprint of his mind affected individuals as diverse as Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Oscar Wilde, Octavia Hill, William Morris, Leo Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, D. H. Lawrence, and Mahatma Gandhi. Although John Ruskin can be a challenging writer to study, the rewards for a modern reader are substantial. We are well-suited to imagine the experiences of Victorians who, like Ruskin, had come of age in a time before railroads or steamboats only to find such mechanization an inextricable thread in their daily lives. We can imagine what Victorians must have felt watching scientific discoveries and technological innovations re-shape their understanding of the world. Deeply conceptual as well as practical, the dramatic changes—technological, religious, scientific, social and economic—taking place in England during the second half of the nineteenth century are

so widely known and so frequently discussed by literary scholars as to seem cliché. They are not the primary interest of this study; however, as suggested by the epigraph from J. Stuart Mill, it is impossible to overstate the influence of such radical changes on the minds of those living in Victoria's England and therefore the connectedness of such changes in Ruskin's work. It is this kinship to Victorians, based in the rapidity of technological and cultural change, which makes Ruskin's work, particularly his prose elegies, remarkably relevant and insightful to the twenty-first century reader.

Elegies, in any age, offer themselves as liminal spaces in which we may confront death, see "mortality transformed into the desired goods of heaven or artistic perpetuity," and ultimately renew society through the "veneration of its ancestors" (Brady 5). The liminal quality of the elegy as well as the genre itself, however, is dramatically affected by the context surrounding it. The renewal typically expected for society through elegy is only possible if consolation is possible, and as I argue in chapter one, consolation no longer holds generic strength in Victorian poetics. John Ruskin's non-fiction prose responds to an emasculated poetic genre by providing a rich and textured variation of elegy in prose. In exploring how Ruskin's non-fiction prose takes on the work once done exclusively by verse, I want to stress the winding nature of this path. That is, we will arrive at understanding only by probing apparent inconsistencies and contradictions. To offer one example, Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* illustrates clearly the basic paradox of elegies; they are "at once idealistic representations which seek to immortalize their subjects, and critical responses to the decadence of the age" (Brady 5).

Even while offering the "ritualized praise" commonly used by seventeenth-century elegists to "improv[e] their readers morally," Andrea Brady observes that elegists

also clearly "display a versatility which makes them morally suspect" (5). Such paradox and ambiguity enter into all discussions of elegy. Elegies are, among other things, attempts to mourn the dead, suffer loss, defer the finality of death, and preserve both the grief and the life lost—all by committing words to the page. When Ruskin looked at the crumbling medieval architecture of Murano, Venice, or Verona, when he witnessed water pouring down the walls of the Arena Chapel at Padua and bricklayers destroying frescoes in the Campo Santo, or when he faced the pollution of the English countryside and the mechanization of the English cityscape, his impulses certainly included preserving treasures of the past for posterity and offering critical insights on the decadence of the age. As elegists before him, Ruskin wrote in part to "improv[e] [his] readers morally;" he also, like elegists before him, wrote to mourn and to find consolation.

Consequently, my study proposes that Ruskin's non-fiction prose works, especially *The Seven Lamps of Architecture, The Stones of Venice,* and *Fors Clavigera* represent a radical variation of the elegy, which operates in the Victorian period as a field for the germination of hybrid literary forms. Emerging theories of hybridity, such as those explored in U.C. Knoepflmacher and Logan D. Browning's 2010 collection *Victorian Hybridities: Cultural Anxiety and Formal Innovation* suggest that the innovation of forms in the Victorian period are born of intensifying cultural anxieties previously assigned to modernist writers. I argue that in this period, the elegy undergoes a shift so dramatic that its generic elements are no longer confined to poetry. Understanding how and when non-fiction prose assumes a function formerly restricted to poetry is of paramount importance in current Victorian scholarship.

In *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern* (1999), Dinah Birch quite notably contends that "Joyce, Pound, Eliot, Woolf, and their inheritors could not have written as they did if Ruskin had not written as he did... [Ruskin] developed a vehicle that could combine what he had learned from the tradition of European culture with the expression of the alienated and disaffected voice, adrift amidst the disintegration of culture" (187). Admittedly, Birch's claim, as most claims of influence, is intuitive rather than evidential, but her recognition of Ruskin's radical experiments in prose leads in the right direction. In this study, I take up the valuable question of hybridity as it affects the genre of elegy in the Victorian period. More specifically, I use the nature of hybridity and the myriad forms possible in such a fluid literary phenomenon to explore the dominant pattern of elegy in John Ruskin's understudied, under-theorized non-fiction prose.

Recent studies of the elegy have emphasized the development of the "anti-elegy" and the disappearance of consolatory language in modern elegies. For example, in *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (1994), Jahan Ramanzani claims that the "anti- elegy" is fully developed only in the twentieth century and ultimately argues that the "aggressive dislocations of elegiac codes" causing our own unease with consolation are unique to the elegy after Thomas Hardy (6). Ramanzani's study, while interesting and useful, fails to recognize the complexity and multiplicity of forms present in the Victorian elegy *before* Hardy. The hybrid nature of Ruskin's prose embodies not only his debt to the genre of poetic elegy but also his willingness to transform the elegy into an expression truly representative of the multiplicity of Victorian life. My study is thus fundamental in filling a gap in Ruskin scholarship.

To do so, I assume a set of generic parameters[1] that remained fairly stable in the English elegy until at least the mid-nineteenth century; however, I also want to note the complexity of generic categories and definitions. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines genre as "a particular style or category of works of art; especially, a type a literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose." Definitions by genre theorists, such as Carolyn Miller, are less routine; Miller champions a definition of genre as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (159). This definition gives genre a more explicitly social context. Such an emphasis reminds us of the public function elegies held in antiquity, but it does not simplify the dialectic at work between the public and the private or between the performer and the audience in the nineteenth century. Miller's definition also calls attention to the ongoing work we are all doing as readers, writers, and critics of literature—that is, the work all literate cultures have done and hopefully will continue to do for a long time to come.

A brief exchange from Friedrich Schelegel's *Dialogue on Poetry* (1800) reveals the vexed and unfinished debate surrounding the question of genre:

> **Amalia.** I always shudder when I open a book where the imagination and its works are classified under headings.
>
> **Marcus**. No one expects you to read such despicable books. Yet, a theory of genres is just what we lack. And what else can it be but a classification which at the same time would be a history and theory of

[1] Standard lists of these for the English elegy include pastoral setting, invocation of the muse, anger over the death, procession of mourners, use of repetition and refrain, use of pathetic fallacy, catalogues of flowers and animals, musical performance, move toward consolation, and images of resurrection (Sacks 2, Kennedy 13).

literature? (Schlegel 77)

Amalia and Marcus represent the extreme positions regarding genre at the opening of the nineteenth century. Participating in a literary symposium, Amalia and Marcus are responding to a talk they have just heard on "The Epochs of Literature," which offered a history of poetry from Homer to Goethe. The talk is organized by chronology and genre; it recounts the origin and development of various genres, such as the drama, elegy, and idyll.[2] In Schegel's *Dialogue*, Marcus takes the view that the lecture should have contained "a more explicit theory of the kinds of poetry… [a classification] which at the same time would be a history and a theory of literature" (77). Amalia, on the other hand, finds such a system tedious and frustrating. She wants to abandon classifications that create narrow conceptions and a "dangerous, roundabout way" of thinking about literature. In his introduction to *Modern Genre Theory* (2000), David Duff asserts "that few concepts have proved more problematic and unstable than that of genre" (1). Describing genre as a "basic assumption of Western literary discourse [which has shaped] critical theory and creative practice for more than two thousand years," Duff importantly points out that the repeated questioning of genre's meaning began only comparatively recently (1). Even after the turn of the twentieth century, Henry James confidently wrote of the "law" of "kinds" in literature: "Everything…becomes interesting from the moment

[2] I am indebted to David Duff's discussion of Schlegel in his wonderful study *Romantic Uses of Genre* (2009) for pointing me to this material. See especially his introduction (1-23) and chapter two, "Romantic Genre Theory" (58-94).

it has closely to consider…the law of its kind. 'Kinds' are the very life of literature, and truth and strength come from the complete recognition of them" (310).[3]

Placing the works of John Ruskin's non-fiction prose against the poetic and generic changes of the greater body of Victorian literature reveals a much closer relationship between the age's poetry and prose. Scholars have long noted a relationship, for example, between the elegy and the nineteenth century novel growing out of their kindred alienation and sense of mourning without consolation.[4] However, non-fiction prose has not garnered the same attention. In her 2006 *Recent Studies in the Nineteenth Century*, Elizabeth Helsinger wrote that out of the 218 books published that year, "No studies concentrate specifically on the non-fiction prose writers" (*SEL* 926). While the elegy and non-fiction prose may seem a strange pairing, considering them in tandem is crucial to understanding Ruskin's prose as a radical variation of elegy. In fact, I consider this revised critical framework necessary for a more profound understanding of the generic morphing and expansion so characteristic of the late Victorian and early modern period in British literature.

My study is structured in two parts. The first chapter deals with the historical and generic framework of the English elegy and the shifts occurring within the genre as the nineteenth century approaches. More specifically, chapter one, "Conventions and Critical Context: The Elegy in Nineteenth Century England," explores the influence and innovation of Milton on Romantic elegists, particularly Shelley and Keats. *Adonais* and

---

[3] James wrote this in 1908 in the preface to *The Awkward Age*.

[4] See for example, E.D.H. Johnson's *Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry*, especially his chapter "Tennyson: The Two Voices," 3-70.

Keats's odes reveal the shifting sands of poetry based on mimesis and open up new avenues of expression, which will be fully exploited in the Victorian period. The chapter then moves from a consideration of elegy and the elegiac in Romanticism to a consideration of Victorian poets Tennyson, Arnold, and James Thomson, offering critical analysis of *In Memoriam*, "Thyrsis," and *The City of Dreadful Night*.

Victorian poets deviate in varying degrees from the consolation-centered pattern established by Milton and even from versions of that pattern earlier in the nineteenth century by Romantic poets such as Percy Shelley. Like the elegies before them, Victorian elegies reveal much about the consolations and anxieties available to their authors and acceptable to their audiences. *In Memoriam,* for example, sold sixty thousand copies within months of publication, and went through thirty editions during the author's own lifetime (Rosenberg 51).

Arguably, one of the watershed moments for the genre, Tennyson's *In Memoriam* exploits the conventions of elegy while also expanding them. Clearly indebted to the classical genre of elegy in its use of the conventions, *In Memoriam*'s length and tone stretch the form to its outer limits and point to a process of grief that will require new forms of expression. As we will see even more clearly in Ruskin's non-fiction prose, it is fair to ask what the shift in form is telling us about the shift in content of daily life in Victorian England. Is the classical form of the pastoral elegy, alive in Milton's *Lycidas* (or reflected in Shelley's *Adonias*), still a potential site for the grief of an industrialized and increasingly modern nation?

While elegiac conventions certainly exhibit continuity over the centuries, I argue that the fundamental logic of the elegy changes in the Victorian period. Whereas the loss

in *Lycidas* and *Adonais* is mourned and the lost one re-created by the poet-mourner, the losses in the poetry of Arnold, Thomson, and, I would argue, even Tennyson, are continually occurring. The end is really the middle; that is, the losses are less easy to identify and they are ongoing. Among the most dominant of fascinations and worries to be born during the Victorian period were questions over the origin of life and the necessarily subsequent questions about God and death.[5]

Although the Victorian elegy shares characteristics with elegies of ages past and with those still being written today, the multiplicity and variety that enter the genre during the Victorian period make it possible for us to re-evaluate the relationship between poetry and prose as well as claims about modernity's effect on it. In addition to discussing the history of elegy, chapter one looks backward to the work of the Romantic poets and forward to their connections with Ruskin and the Victorian elegy. Analyzing the greater changes to nineteenth century poetry, brought on largely by the work of William Wordsworth, allows us to understand how the "pastoral landscape" so essential to the Romantic period shapes Victorian elegies. While Wordsworth has no elegy as well-known as Shelley's *Adonais*, his work as a whole continues Milton's efforts to expand the visibility of the poet. *The Prelude*, generally considered Wordsworth's highest poetic achievement, signals an even more dramatic shift in emphasis where poets

[5] Scientific studies about the origin and development of human life and its relationship to the larger universe circulated in the 1830's and culminated in Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). Darwin's theories of human development beginning in lower species challenged the dominant Christian views of the period on many fronts. The concept of the Great Chain of Being-- in which all organisms have a designated and fixed place-- is destroyed. The Bible's "literal truth" is also undermined because the timetable needed for such evolution would make the world much older than theologians estimated based on Biblical timetables. Finally, if Darwin's theories of evolution are true, Victorians must face themselves as a relatively new (and thereby less central) species and the result of a somewhat random process called natural selection rather than an all-powerful God.

and conventions are concerned. Indeed, Wordsworth's focus on his own growth as a poet makes possible a re-conceptualization of the role of the poet. As many critics have pointed out, however, the Wordsworth poem most Victorians knew best was, in fact, not *The Prelude* but *The Excursion* (1814). Nevertheless, when *The Prelude* was published after Wordsworth's death in 1850, its effects were wide spread in the remaining half century of the Victorian period.

The second part of my study takes John Ruskin's works as a central illustration of the generic expansion from poetic to prose elegies in the Victorian period. Chapter two, "Architecture as Elegy in John Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*" traces the failure of the most widely accepted convention of the consolatory elegy and explains where Ruskin finds its replacement. Constructed as a largely imagined and nostalgic stage from which the poet as a performer can excel at the work of mourning, the pastoral setting is ubiquitous in the tradition of the poetic elegy. Thus, Ruskin's treatment of this convention in his prose elegies is ground-breaking. His elegies reveal the generic weakness of this convention by foregrounding the pastoral landscape itself as a central subject of loss. What Timothy Morton points out about "environmental elegy" is true of Ruskin's elegies long before the concept of environmentalism exists: "What seems like a poetical analogy…turns out to be the most radical content of an elegy: the very environment that is used as a backdrop for expressions of grief. What happens when this backdrop becomes the foreground?" (253).

Primarily, the landscape is a representation of what has been lost *and* the loss itself. Peter Sacks describes this phenomenon in the history of elegy as the loss of the objective correlative for loss itself. He writes that elegists have "slipped away from

mourning, which finds an appropriate way of symbolizing loss, back into melancholia, which has no way of redressing woe. This transforms the work of mourning to the work of sheer suffering…" (83). Sacks was not considering the work of Ruskin, but it is striking to note that this very claim has been made about Ruskin's late work.[6] Suffering many personal losses and struggling with mental illness near the end of his life, Ruskin understandably grows melancholy at times. Nevertheless, his elegies are remarkable for their determination to redefine consolation when the traditional consolations of Nature and God empty out.

I thus read Ruskin's writing on architecture as prose elegies; in order to demonstrate the advantages of this approach, I offer elegiac readings of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice.* Focusing on Ruskin's private and public mourning, chapter two examines Ruskin's deep and abiding anxiety over the ruin of the English and Italian landscapes, both natural and architectural. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice* function simultaneously as elegies for the lost pastoral and the replacement for it. What I term the "lost pastoral" thus refers to both the loss of power in the poetic genre of pastoral and the topographical loss of pastoral landscapes. Much as Wordsworth finds consolation in memory after youth has passed, Ruskin believes in the potential of architecture to reflect the history of the human soul and its connection to the natural world. It is, therefore, capable of performing at least partial reparation for natural losses:

We are forced, for the sake of accumulating our power and knowledge, to

[6] See Cardinal Manning's remark quoted on page 12 of this introduction. Such interpretations of Ruskin's late work have continued into our own time as well.

> live in cities: but such advantage as we have in association with each other is in great part counterbalanced by our loss of fellowship with Nature. We cannot all have our gardens now, nor our pleasant fields to meditate in at eventide. Then the function of our architecture is, as far as may be, to replace these; to tell us about Nature; to possess us with memories of her quietness; to be solemn and full of tenderness, like her, and rich in portraitures of her; full of delicate imagery of the flowers we can no more gather, and of the living creatures now far away from us in their own solitude. (9.411)

For Ruskin, the lost pastoral is not truly lost if we can but make a careful and accurate rendering of Nature's beauties and forms in our architecture.

The third and final chapter, "Elegiac Synthesis: Action as Consolation in *Fors Clavigera*," reads four of the letters from *Fors Clavigera* as prose elegies. These letters- addressed to the "working men" of Great Britain from January 1871- December 1884- reveal the way in which Ruskin seeks, participates in, and encourages action as consolation. These letters maintain Ruskin's assumption that the natural world contains the blueprints not only for architecture but for social interaction of all types. With these elegies, Ruskin is attempting to redirect the values of his culture. Complex, multi-layered, and at times self-obsessed, *Fors* has traditionally been considered an example of Ruskin's most "conservative" work as well as evidence of the isolating eccentricity of his later years.[7] Cardinal Manning summed up the experience of reading *Fors* as "like

[7] Ruskin's letters are considered "conservative" specifically in their habit of holding up the past as the standard for action and combating modernization.

listening to the beating of one's heart in a nightmare" (36. lxxxvi). Such a view held widespread sway throughout the twentieth century and still colors much of the scholarship on Ruskin today. Even sympathetic readers of Ruskin, such as Gary Wihl, claim that while much of Ruskin's work is brilliant, the "failure of [his] multiple meanings to cohere" predominates (155). My approach to reading Ruskin's work in the tradition of elegy, albeit his own radical variation of it, can provide that sense of lost coherence.

Other scholars such as John Rosenberg, Dinah Birch, and Judith Stoddard are less willing to dismiss *Fors Clavigera*. For example, Birch's critical attempt to analyze *Fors* focuses on Ruskin's "diversity of method and intentions" and on the paradoxical nature of *Fors* as both "public and private, self-effacing and self-involved" ("Multiple Writings" 175). Such a stimulating investigation of Ruskin's multiplicity supports my broader thesis that his non-fictional prose is transformational to the genre of elegy; however, it overlooks the patterns and coherence that co-exist with Ruskin's formal innovations as well as the continuity his work from the 1870 and 1880s shares with his earlier work. I see the continuity in *Fors Clavigera* as more compelling than its disorder; indeed, *Fors* functions as a microcosm of sorts which operates to reveal Ruskin's commitments to a world lost and a world rebuilt, though necessarily on a new order. Loss and death are more than themes running through the letters; they make visible the pattern of elegy that accumulates in individual letters and in the work as a whole.

While no age can claim death as its own, the nineteenth century provides a unique moment in human history to study loss and grief. Distinctions between private pain and public grief blurred during the Victorian period. Expectations for mourners to perform

their grief publicly rose as the people of England watched their Queen respond to loss. When Prince Albert died in 1861, Queen Victoria had him entombed in five coffins, never emerged from mourning attire, and insisted that her husband's clothes and hot water be laid out in his bedroom every night until her own death forty years later.

One of my essential contentions in this project is that reading John Ruskin's non-fiction prose through a lens focused on the dominant pattern of elegy in his work allows us a more accurate and richer view of that work. It also provides a clearer image of the Victorian obsession with death and the period's pervasive sense of loss.

Chapter One:

Conventions and Critical Context: The Elegy in Nineteenth Century England

The issue is not just that we grieve, nor when we grieve. The issue is not just why we grieve in poetry, nor how the beautiful song of poetry capitulates to or conspires with the task of weeping. These and more.

~David Baker
"Elegy and Eros: Configuring Grief"

In *American Elegy* (2007) Max Cavitch asserts that "Every elegy is a love poem." While not a singular definition, it is nonetheless a deep truth we must keep in mind when thinking of the elegy's generic implications. At the center of a genre that evolves geographically and generationally into multiple subspecies, the relationship between loss and love, which necessarily involves the connection between the past and the present, remains the defining feature of what we have come to think of as elegy. A poetic form in continual flux, the nineteenth-century English elegy exhibits the rich texture and variety accumulated in the genre's long history. Elegists of this period select, compile, copy, exclude, and add to this composite tradition. The term "elegy" comes from the Ancient Greek word "elegos" which could be used to denote the singing of a mournful song to the accompaniment of a wind instrument or to reference the particular rhythm of an elegiac couplet formed by joining the verses of elegiac hexameter and elegiac pentameter (Nagy 14). From the tradition of singing songs of lament to performing the "civic seriousness" of elegy at public festivals, the elegy has, since its Greek origins, had wide-ranging appeal with both personal and public functions (40). [8] In both cases, the ancient tradition of elegy is rooted in ceremony, in sacred and complex rituals that intervene in and reflect

[8] Martin West argues that the earliest elegies "had no name because they had no single function" (2).

the belief system and social practices of Greek society. Definite markers of this dual heritage persist in the nineteenth century elegy as vestiges, which John Ruskin revives, I assert, in his radical handling of the genre.

Despite variations and revisions as it passed from Greece to Rome and eventually to England, the elegy remained a locus in which it was possible to seek the past and trace it to the present. The elegiac meter continued to be used in literary and funereal epigrams when translated into Latin, but the elegy accumulated other reference points during its transport to Rome, such as that of erotic love poetry. Multiple uses of Greek and Roman elegy are helpful reminders when examining the elegy's historical development in England, which crystallized in the sixteenth century with the pastoral elegies of Phillip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. The conventions established for the English elegy at this time included: the invocation of the muse, pastoral contextualization, anger over the death, a procession of mourners, use of repetition and refrain, use of pathetic fallacy, catalogues of flowers and animals, the language of consolation, and finally, images of resurrection (Sacks 2, Kennedy 13).

The expression of loss, which underwrites the elegy in our own age, has been with us since the genre began. The elegy experienced wide swings in popularity throughout its history in England, enduring dramatic changes in both form and content. It has expanded, sometimes absorbing other genres, sometimes being absorbed, sometimes rising in the form of the past only to reveal a reinterpretation made possible by the present. In fact, for a genre with such a seemingly solid history, the definition of elegy is strangely elusive. Certainly, we can list the conventions and trace the changes from

period to period and country to country, across the centuries. What I attempt to do in this study is much more focused in scope. I am interested in the transformation of the genre in England during the nineteenth century, particularly the mid-late Victorian period and more particularly, the elegy as manifest in the non-fiction prose of John Ruskin. In order to track this, I began my research by asking how poetics as a whole responded to the cultural and historic changes of the Victorian period. Prompted by the discovery that elegiac expression increasingly dominated the poetry and prose of the period, I began to ask more questions about the elegy itself: How was the Victorian elegy different from its predecessors? How was it similar? What about the poets themselves had changed? What about the audience?

From the Anglo-Saxon elegy *The Wanderer* to Robert Henryson's medieval elegy *Robene and Makyne* to Milton's famed *Lycidas,* the elegy functions to express loss. I want to stress, however, that until the nineteenth century in England, the sense of loss was felt *by* particular individuals *for* particular individuals. That is, an elegy was written largely as a response to a *specific* loss, what Stanley Plumly calls "a love poem of grief" (32). By the early seventeenth century, after only a century of English elegy, the form itself had become too rigid, too predictable. Flooded with formulaic examples, the genre appeared doomed to disappear or to continue only in its dullness. Only Milton's reinvigorating revision of the genre in *Lycidas* (1638) allowed for new growth. Although *Lycidas* indeed mourns a particular individual, Milton's virtuoso rehearsal of the elegy's conventions within the poem forces a shift in attention from the dead individual to the performer of his lament. Milton is foundational here because his innovations predate the larger paradigm shift of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in which the

measure of poetic value moves from mimetic to expressive criteria.[9] The elegy follows this trajectory in part by the expansion of content from poetry dealing with a specific loss—a death—to a form which addresses loss in a much broader sense.[10] This greater sense of loss shapes meaning and allows poets the freedom to create what David Duff terms an 'expressive poetics,' and which I describe as variation and latitude in content but also in form.[11]

The poetic conventions, as we shall see, no longer hold the generic strength to effectively fulfill their end goal of consolation. Rather than the occasion of Edward King's death in the seventeenth century or John Keats's in the early nineteenth, or Arthur Henry Hallam's, the elegy becomes an expansive way to process the emotion of loss.[12] The period's unprecedented speed and types of technological, scientific, religious and social change birthed losses new to the nineteenth century, enabling- or at times forcing- a variety of cultural transformations. A genre thought to be dying in England prior to

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[9] M.H. Abrams identifies this shift in his seminal study *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Critics since Abrams have continued to trace the implications of this large paradigm shift. See, for example, Stuart Curran's *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*.

[10] Scholars, such as David Duff, have identified this shift from mimetic to expressive poetics, but what I add to this conversation is a consideration of how the form changes as the context of loss itself changes. No one has discussed non-fiction prose elegies as a place this expressive poetics can inhabit.

[11] See Duff's fascinating study, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, published in 2009 by Oxford University Press. I would also like to note that Coleridge describes elegy as "the form of poetry natural to the reflective mind" (*Table Talk*, 23 Oct. 1833), which fits in nicely with Duff's "expressive poetics."

[12] George Henry Lewes wrote a review *In Memoriam* in *The Leader* remarking that *Adonais* was a superior poem to *Lycidas*: "The comparison is not here of genius, but of feeling. Tennyson sings a deeper sorrow, utters a more truthful passion, singing truly, gains the predominance of passion over sentiment" (qtd in Gray's Introduction to *In Memoriam*, 111).

Milton's revival of it with his famous elegy, *Lycidas*, was once again in need of new life by the Victorian period.

As I suggested in the introduction, a shift in the nature of loss itself introduces changes not only in the substance of poetry but in its forms as well. The thematic focus of Victorian elegy is clearly and dramatically altered from its predecessors. Formal changes are also visible but not nearly so obvious. For example, Tennyson's treatment of nature as "red in tooth and claw" startles the reader of *In Memoriam* even more than the poem's extraordinary length of 133 stanzas (unprecedented in the genre of elegy). Similarly, in a wide range of Victorian poetry, we are so overcome by the emotional reconfiguration of loss that the formal consequences of such reconfiguration seem a distant secondary concern. The prose elegies of John Ruskin exemplify the urgency of reading form as primary. In the case of Ruskin and the nineteenth century poets "leading up to" him or writing as his contemporaries, it urgent to distinguish between organic and evolutionary developments in the genre of elegy.

Ultimately, I claim Ruskin's prose elegies not as a link in the evolutionary chain to the elegiac in modernist and postmodernist writing but as an organic outgrowth of cultural response to a generalized sense of loss. Before examining Ruskin's elegies in detail, [13] I survey the larger Victorian poetic community. Pursuing a greater understanding of the general emotional reconfiguration of loss in Victorian poetics by addressing its evidence in the elegies of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, and

[13] I will do this explicitly for Ruskin's works *The Seven Lamps of Architecture, The Stones of Venice, and Fors Clavigera* in chapters two and three.

James Thomson prepares us to read the changing expressions of grief writ large in the prose elegies of John Ruskin.

In fact, performing a small-scale genre study of *In Memoriam*, "Thyrsis," and *The City of Dreadful Night* is foundational work for understanding John Ruskin's prose elegies, which I treat in chapters two and three of this study. Repositioning the performance of lament from the private to the public venue, Ruskin opens an elegiac discourse with his audience, thereby pushing the genre beyond its poetic constraints. As we shall see, especially in chapter three, audience participation in the performance enables a consolation no longer possible in the conventions of elegiac poetry.

Although English elegists continued to celebrate and mourn the dead in the two centuries following the publication of *Lycidas*, the precepts of the genre were already exhausted again by the mid nineteenth century. In fact, it is my contention that the most celebrated elegy of the Victorian period, *In Memoriam*, displays the conventions of elegy only as identifying markers, largely empty of meaning but useful as a way to categorize the poem and then reconstruct the definition of elegy.[14] Tennyson wanted to keep the frame of the building while gutting the interior. I will explore this in greater detail after a look back at how Milton revived and expanded the genre in the seventeenth century.

Milton's *Lycidas* (1638) ties itself to the tradition of pastoral elegy, specifically the work of Theocritus and Virgil: "O fountain Arethuse, and thou honored flood, /

[14] My interpretation is shared by Tennyson scholars such as David Shaw and John Rosenberg. Other scholars, such as Harold Bloom and George Landow read Tennyson's poem as ultimately reinforcing societal standards even while responding to enormous social, scientific, and religious change. Still others fall somewhere in between. Erik Gray, for example, represents a middle ground of scholars who see the significance of Tennyson's skepticism but believe the "final movement toward consolation" at the end of the poem.

Smooth-sliding Mincius, crowned with vocal reeds, / That strain I heard was of a higher mood" (85-87). The Arethusa, a fountain in Sicily associated with Theocritus, and Mincius, a river in Lombardy, associated with pastorals of Virgil, anchor Milton's generic intention and situate him to be speaker of that past as well as poet-prophet to the future. *Lycidas* reveals Milton simultaneously reviving a mode, expanding the visibility of the poet, and foregrounding poetic ambition. Milton was certainly not alone in this attempt; Spenser and later Renaissance poets saw the mastery of the pastoral mode as a necessary step to a great poetic career. However, Milton is "superior to his tradition by calling attention to the artificiality of its conventions" (Pigman 112).

While Milton's conventional pastoral scene of shepherd singing contests offers an image of human life in harmony with the seasons and processes of nature, Milton also uses motifs from the pastoral funeral elegy, especially the questioning of destiny for a promising life (that of his friend, Edward King) cut short. An important shift occurs between the poetry of Spenser and Milton; unlike Spenser's conclusion that human frailty prevents comfort from the resurrection, for Milton, there is no conflict between mourning and faith (Smith 38). Milton's questioning leads to a final reassurance of heaven for Lycidas and perhaps more importantly, a reassurance of Milton's own status as a national poet.

Nils Clausson has argued that in addition to *Lycidas*, Percy Shelley's *Adonais* (1821) and Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis" (1866) make up the three great English elegies. If the number were limited to only three, I would argue that *In Memoriam* (1859) is more deserving than "Thyrsis"; yet, in a century when so many poets self-consciously reject the constraints of generic tradition, Percy Shelley's formal elegy, *Adonais*, on the death

of John Keats, and Matthew Arnold's seemingly classical "Thyrsis," for Arthur Hugh Clough, deserve close attention. Shelley's opening, "I weep for Adonais—he is dead! / O, weep for Adonais!" is a near translation of the Greek poet Bion's "Lament for Adonis" (on whom the figure of Adonais is partially based) as well as an elegy much indebted to *Lycidas*. We see, for example, the accusing invocation to a muse: "—Where wert thou might Mother, when he lay / When thy Son lay, pierced by the shaft which flies / In darkness? Where was lorn Urania / When Adonais died? ..." (10-13). Morning, the ocean, the mountains, the wind, and even the birds participate in the grief of Adonais's death, and the conventional procession of "mountain shepherds" along with a host of poets and mythological mourners appear in stanzas 30-35. The generic markers continue in the turn from grief, "He will awake no more, oh never more!" (190), to consolation, "Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep" (343).

Shelley neatly reveals his debt to Spenser and Milton and the elegiac tradition as a whole, but it is important to note how Shelley's version of the elegy may also be read as anti-elegiac. *Adonais*, like *Lycidas*, ends with the consolation that Adonais is transformed into "Light," "Beauty," and "Benediction" and his soul is now the "star" that "Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are" (461). However, the poem's hesitation toward consolation, even arguably its collusion with Death, stretch this Romantic elegy beyond the generic conventions Shelley employs so well and link it in interesting, yet subtle, ways to the elegies we think of as ushered in by late Victorian and early modernist poets.

As Peter Sacks observes, poetic fluctuations during the Romantic period created all manner of "strange hybrids" that challenged and / or rejected generic definitions and poetic categories (145). From autobiographic epics and "lyrical ballads" to urban sonnets

and poetic dramas, Romantic poets as a group certainly pushed against the limits of genre. While William Wordsworth is not known as one of the century's great elegists, the Lucy poems, the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," and long sections of *The Excursion* expose his substantial and underappreciated experimentation in the elegiac mode. As David Duff points out in his compelling study *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (2011), second generation Romantic poets simultaneously embraced and resisted labels of genre, accepting generic conventions in order to change them. And yet, the genre of elegy appears to be an exception to this rule. That is, when adopting the role of elegist, Romantic poets generally don the conventional garb.

Percy Shelley, for example, sets out explicitly to recall the pastoral elegy of old in his *Adonais* for John Keats. Nearly every critical evaluation of *Adonais* mentions the text's "extraordinary traditionalism" (Ulmer 435).[15] But what makes *Adonais* remarkable is its foregrounding of a dramatic dialogue between the new and the old. That which has been recalled is promptly recast. Ruskin inherits this Romantic tendency although it is less apparent in prose than in the predetermined constraints of verse. From the initial publication of *Adonais* critics have debated whether the final movement of the poem is toward consolation or directly away from it. William Ulmer has explained the two

[15] For other examples of commentary on *Adonais* as intentional representative of literary tradition, see Peter Sacks who remarks, "Perhaps no one since Milton and Spenser had so closely reengaged the origins of the genre." (147); for connections to Milton and the claim that "*Lycidas* is the most important model for *Adonais*,"see Richard Cronin's *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* (169). William Ulmer discusses many other examples in his "*Adonais* and the Death of Poetry" published in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol.32 No. 3 (Fall 1993): 425-451. Many more critics, from Harold Bloom to J. Hillis Miller have weighed in on the poem's influences and trajectory.

potential poles as absorption and apocalypse.[16] That is, either Keats's soul experiences a kind of "absorption" into Nature or there is no life after death, no meaning, and no possibility of hope for the dead or the mourner.

Most significantly for my reading of Ruskin's deployment of elegy, it is useful to see in *Adonais*, as Ulmer does, the possibility of "explor[ing] this predicament" precisely because Shelley "employs the elegy as a perspective on all poetic forms" (17). What Ruskin achieves in *The Stones of Venice*, and even more radically in *Fors Clavigera*, is an enlargement which not only takes in such a vast perspective but manages to multiply its reverberations in a variety of forms. The fact that *Adonais* suggests both of these extremes reveals the transition of power from conventional elegiac resolution towards an expressive, often ambiguous, poetic stance- a move initiated earlier in the Romantic period by Wordsworth's practice.

In her seminal study *Bearing the Dead* (1994) Esther Schor describes the impact of Wordsworthian philosophy as expressed in his *Essays on Epitaphs* when she writes, "the significance of epitaphs [for Wordsworth] has shifted from a metaphysical register to a cultural one" (178). According to Wordsworth's poetics, an epitaph "ought not to give us images of the dead, but rather a 'tender haze or a luminous mist'…" (Schor 181). Schor goes on to theorize that, in Wordsworth's schema, "Generality is not merely to be emphasized; it is to subsume particularity" (181). This is quite a compelling analysis on its own, and particularly useful in terms of my theme here because it articulates the sense

[16] Ulmer aligns himself with Paul De Man in reading *Adonais* through the lens of apocalypse, which renders death "a displaced name for a linguistic predicament" (81).

of loss as a widespread and generalized feeling, which I have identified in Ruskin's Victorian elegies, rather than a response to specific, individual deaths.[17]

Without being a strict *structural* model for Ruskin's own response to grief, Wordsworth's poem *The Excursion*[18] provides a language of pervasive loss that Ruskin espouses and develops. In fact, this poem is so important to Ruskin that his epigraphs for all five volumes of *Modern Painters* are taken from it. A short excerpt from Book I of *The Excursion* substantially illustrates the linguistic connection between the two writers:

> Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind
> That what we feel of sorrow and despair
> From ruin and from change, and all the grief
> The passing shews of Being leave behind,
> Appeared an idle dream, that could not be
> Where meditation was. (48)

The Old Man's speech above actually begins with "Be wise and cheerful" because the Wanderer is crestfallen after hearing the sad story of Margaret's life and death. The decay of Margaret's cottage is a powerful reminder of the Old Man's grief at her death, but it is

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[17] In describing *Essays on Epitaphs*, Schor interprets Wordsworth's move as "placing the particular in the service of illustrating general moral truths" and, as her study begins in the Enlightenment, she asserts that Wordsworth is really working out the Johnsonian implication of an analogy between biography, epitaph, and history (183). I certainly agree with her that *The Excursion* identifies these "three discursive forms." In addition to Ruskin's choice of epigraphs for Modern Painters which I discuss above, explicit references to Wordsworth and Ruskin occur throughout Ruskin's work.

[18] Ruskin, in an exaggerated manner characteristic especially of his youth, proclaimed of *The Excursion* that its "most magnificent comprehensive and faultless majesty" made it the crown of all Wordsworth's work (Letter to Reverend Walter Brown in 1843- see E.T. Cook & Wedderburn 4.390). In his defense, other major critics of the nineteenth century—Coleridge & Hazlitt among them—also believed it to be a very great work, though they would not deem it "faultless" (Bate 2).

to a sense of general sadness that the Wanderer succumbs. The Old Man is successful in rousing the Wanderer's spirits before he takes again to the road "in happiness" (48). More than four decades after the publication of *The Excursion*, Ruskin does not come to the same "conclusion," as it were, that the Old Man and the Wanderer reach at the end of Book I; however, his identification with the pervasive sense of loss against which the Wanderer must struggle permeates his writing and helps to shape the elegiac pattern I see visible throughout his work.

Wordsworth's impact on the poets and poetic developments of the nineteenth century cannot be overstated. Nor can the early and lasting impression of Wordsworth's poetry on the vision of Ruskin be denied. But there are other significant links between Ruskin's elegies and changes to the genre originating earlier in the century during the Romantic period. Beyond the most famous and most common Romantic elegies we have already discussed, we have also to examine the odes of John Keats.

As many scholars have noted, Keats's odes figure as an important bridge between Romanticism and the development of the Victorian elegy. Both Keats's odes and the examples of elegies we have seen so far address an idealized figure, one which is present in the ode and absent in the elegy. Nevertheless, Keats's odes are elegiac in tone as the opening lines of "Ode to a Nightingale" illustrate: "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense…" (1-2). Glorying in the permanence of a bird "not born for death," Keats is also mourning the weariness, fever, and fret (23) that come with living in a mortal realm

> where men sit and hear each other groan;
> where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,

Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow

And leaden-eyed despairs…" (24-28)

We can interpret the deaths implied here as Keats's brother's death or his own, but the poem does not name a specific loss as a typical elegy would do. Nevertheless, the sense of loss coloring each of the odes reveals the shifting nature of his form. At times, this loss causes pain even in its anticipation of death.

We recognize Keats's accompanying possibility of pleasure with this pain as a melancholy that offers only brief escape. The closing stanza of "To Autumn" provides such an example:

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?

Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—

While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,

And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn

Among the river sallows, borne aloft

Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;

And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;

Hedge crickets sing; and now with treble soft

The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;

And gathering swallows twitter in the skies. (23-34)

Beauty and pleasure unquestionably enter into the poet's description of the closing autumn day, yet the questions and the strain of sorrow will outlast them. The wailing

choir of gnats and the full-grown lambs that mourn will persist. Each autumn, each close of day contains an elegy for spring and youth.

Keats's odes both complicate the notion of genre in the Romantic period and provide a point of comparison for my argument about Ruskin's role in re-shaping the nature of the Victorian elegy. The ode itself is a hybrid form operating perhaps in the mode of elegy if not adopting its generic markers. Like the elegy, the ode is an ancient genre going back to Pindar (representative of the 'greater ode') and Horace (the 'lesser ode'), which had preserved certain stylistic expectations. With the exception of the sonnet form, no genre of poetry had

> traditionally depended more heavily on the kind of ostentatious linguistic artifice Wordsworth had in mind when he spoke of 'poetic diction'…No-where, in fact, was one more likely to find displayed the whole panoply of rhetorical devices— exclamation, periphrasis, hyperbole, parallelism, and a hundred other amplifying techniques—by which poets had been taught, in the *Arts of Poetry* and their rhetorical handbooks to 'build the lofty rhyme.' (Duff 202-203) [19]

Yet in Keats's hands, the ode is not a rendering of these formal criteria. In investigating the shifting status of the ode in the decades leading up to Romanticism, Norman Maclean, Ralph Cohen, and other literary historians have generally noted a serious decline in the ode prior to the Romantic period. As evidence of the genre's exhaustion, they point to

[19] The 'poetic diction' quotation within Duff's quotation is from Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and the second quotation, "build the lofty rhyme" is Milton's phrase in *Lycidas* (line 11).

the many parodies of the ode being written at this time and posit that Romantic poets were thus interested in the ode merely as a genre they could transcend or transform.

In some ways, Keats responds more to the influence of Milton and Spenser than Wordsworth or Coleridge, though his rendering of shared subject matter is unique. In the case of Wordsworth and Coleridge, who no doubt do influence Keats, a central movement identified by M. H. Abrams as "out-in-out," accounts for the poet's journey from observation of the outer, natural landscape inward to the landscape of the human mind and spirit and finally back out to the newly imagined landscape, which this process has created.[20] However, this is not the movement in Keats's odes.

Keats's central concerns do not involve returning to a particular landscape or scene, as do Wordsworth's in "Tintern Abbey"; nevertheless, the figures in Keats's odes do have strong associations with the past. One clear example comes through the figure of the nightingale with its voice "heard / in ancient days by emperor and clown" or by "the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home, / she stood in tears amid the alien corn" (64; 66-67). In the spring of 1819 (in the same journal letter that included the *Sonnet to Sleep*), Keats wrote about "endeavoring to discover a better sonnet stanza than we have" (qtd. in Norton 789). It is no coincidence that the sequence of Keats's "great odes" begins around this same time with the "Ode to Psyche." Experimenting with the structure of the sonnet and testing the limitations of its conventions clearly led Keats in a new direction. The more spacious form of the ode allowed him to write "leisurely" and create a text that

[20] See M.H. Abrams's essay "The Greater Romantic Lyric."

"reads more richly" (Keats, Letter April 30, 1819).[21] I find that the most troubling of the sonnet's restrictions for Keats was the conventional move toward resolution in the sonnet's close. Keats's concept of negative capability, foundational to Ruskin's experiments, expresses and prefigures the blurring of generic forms that proliferates throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century.

An elegy such as Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis" looks again like the last breath of a dying form, but a more interesting and historically coherent approach to the poem allows us to consider the exciting process of generic transformation taking place in this apparently classical pastoral elegy. It is fair to ask if the classical form of the pastoral elegy could still credibly be written well past the middle of the nineteenth century. Arnold, so much a classicist and yet deeply influenced by Romanticism, deliberately oscillates between the pastoral elegy and what M.H. Abrams calls the greater Romantic lyric. Arnold's variations and deviations from the traditional patterns of pastoral elegy are not failures to write successfully in the genre but, as Nils Clausson posits, an attempt to "fuse classical elegy with modern lyric" (177). Arnold's urgency to fuse his love of the classical poetic past and unease about the Victorian urban present make more sense when we see what extensive experiments Tennyson had already initiated in the genre.

T. S. Eliot claimed that the greatness of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1859) was not in the consolation it offered but in the "quality of its doubt" (25). And like Shelley's *Adonais*, it would be easy to demonstrate how *In Memoriam* exploits the conventions of the pastoral elegy. Instead I am more concerned with how, while highly

[21] Keats is speaking specifically of Psyche here.

conventional, the poem "strains the generic seams of elegy" (Rosenberg 41). At nearly 3,000 lines, its length alone demands a category separate from earlier examples of elegy. Consisting of 133 separate sections of varying length bound by the single distinctive stanza form, *abba*, and the theme of loss, *In Memoriam* not only took seventeen years to complete but narrates a three-year-long mourning period. It is as John Rosenberg describes, "a slow, winding procession that, like mourning, circles back upon itself even as it progresses" (41). The remarkable length, content, and format certainly go where nothing in the genre of English elegy has gone before.

Tennyson's innovations, even apparently simple ones such as length, have an accumulative affect--for Tennyson as a mourner, for his Victorian audience, for the genre of elegy, and for our greater understanding of Ruskin. Another of Tennyson's remarkable innovations in the way he handles time in *In Memoriam.* The formal iambic tetrameter quatrains often have the quality or slowness of something out of Time:

> Be near me when I fade away
> To point the term of human strife,
> And on the low dark verge of life
> The twilight of eternal day. (50. 13-16)

Tennyson's reader must pay particular attention to the way time moves in these lines but also in the poem as a whole. Such attention to the passage of time adds layers of meaning to the time which elapses in the spaces between lines and stanzas throughout *In Memoriam*. Thus, Tennyson's handling of time is one of the elegy's many accumulative effects. I speak of the accumulative effect of *In Memoriam* in order to emphasize

Tennyson's contributions to the genre as additions. Elegy as accumulation and addition becomes even more compelling in Ruskin's hands.

With specific references to new discoveries in geology, astronomy, and evolutionary science, *In Memoriam* is often regarded as a time capsule of Victorian philosophical and religious ideas. Although we can learn a great deal about the scientific advances of the time by reading *In Memoriam*, that is not why Victorian audiences held it so dear nor why we are still moved by reading it today--over one hundred and fifty years after it was first published. One of the qualities of an elegy is that it gives us permission to mourn loss, even to elevate suffering. The very conventions of the elegy establish it as an art form that draws for the poet-mourner, as well as for the reader, new outlines of acceptable grief and sets requirements for success both as a mourner and a poet. Tennyson erects Victorian scaffolding on the elegy's already existing structure-- building into each level a way to access the other levels. Therefore Tennyson's allusions to the generic conventions of the elegy serve to point readers beyond the boundaries of the genre. His poem is new essentially because it questions the usefulness of social conventions while probing the formal conventions of the elegy. Ruskin, responding to similar questions regarding form, creates elegies that spill over the boundaries so often that the boundaries are obliterated.

Phrases that have become cliché in the twentieth century, as well as some that were already conventional sentiment in Victorian England, serve an important function within the text of *In Memoriam*; for example, "'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all" binds the audience by its shared experience of loss. On the other hand, the conventional moments of *In Memoriam* spread throughout the poem are

threads weaving together an extraordinarily unconventional garment. Thus, early in the poem when Tennyson sets himself and Hallam in a thicket surrounded by the ringing of "many a flute of Arcady" (23.23-24), he acknowledges the connection of this generic convention and moves beyond it.

As Erik Gray points out, Tennyson at times "imitates classical pastoral elegy," but uses the pastoral conventions "sparingly" (Introduction 19). Gray does not remark, however, on why Tennyson makes the choice to both engage the generic tradition and distance himself from it. And Tennyson's seemingly contradictory choice highlights an important place for investigation. Unlike Spencer and Milton, Tennyson's "pastoral" is not a setting in which the elegy can be performed. It is the record of a process—a process deeply interfused with narrative and time –a record which brings the reader close to the mourner. The poem's present-ness thus refuses the consolation of a complete mourning in some distant Arcadia.

Tennyson's refusal to let go of his dear friend Arthur Henry Hallam alone does not, on its own, account for the wild popularity of this elegy when it was published in 1850; however, Tennyson's desperation and commitment to mourning tapped into a public emotion. Elegy is by definition public and private, yet *In Memoriam* expresses more public anxiety and more intensely private grief than the typical Victorian elegy. The poet voices questions here that many are afraid to ask: "Are God and Nature then at strife / That Nature lends such evil dreams? (55.5-6). If Nature is "careless of a single life" (55.8), what does it mean to live or die, or mourn for that matter?

The anguish of the voice crying out "O life as futile, then as frail! / O for thy voice to soothe and bless! / What hope of answer, or redress? / Behind the veil, behind

the veil." (56. 25-28) is Tennyson's voice addressing Hallam and Queen Victoria's addressing Prince Albert; it is the voice of Dora Greenwell and Emily Dickinson seeking Elizabeth Barrett Browning at her death in 1861. For all his "stretch[ing]" of "lame hands of faith," Tennyson can only "faintly trust the larger hope" that there is a God in Heaven and more importantly, that he will see Hallam there someday (55.16, 20). The consolatory language of the closing stanzas that would have us smile "knowing all is well" (127. 20) and accept a faith that "comes with self-control" and the knowledge that "the truths that never can be proved" will only come when we die is never as believable as the gripping doubt that runs throughout the poem. While, as Erik Gray points out, it does "exhibit an overall movement towards consolation," the legacy of *In Memoriam* is its fragmentation, unevenness, and intense questioning of faith. These characteristics find extreme expression in the writings of John Ruskin, whose response to loss further expands the elegiac tradition (286). Like *In Memoriam, The Stones of Venice and Fors Clavigera* remind us that the genre of elegy responds to social as well as poetic codes of mourning.

The authors and works I have discussed thus far are leaders of literary change and have been read by scholars and critics continuously since the nineteenth century. I now turn to a much lesser known Victorian poem, James Thomson (1834-1882). His work is incredibly useful in attempting to understand the cultural shifts directing a move toward an expressive poetics in elegy, a move I see recurring in John Ruskin's elegies. Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* first appeared anonymously in Charles Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* from March- May, 1874. While some subscribers of the *Reformer* complained that a secularist periodical was "not the place for the publication of

so gloomy a view of the spiritual lot of virtuous atheists," *The City of Dreadful Night* gained favorable comment from prominent writers such as George Eliot, George Meredith, Phillip Bourke Marston, and William M. Rossetti (Paolucci 11).[22] Unfortunately, the most common reading of the poem today is as a record of atheistic despair by a poet who can only see emptiness as a replacement for all he has lost.[23]

As Thomson's Victorian reviewers recognized, *The City of Dreadful Night* has literary merit as a meditation inspired by Dante's hell and a commentary on the Italian poetry of pessimism by Giacomo Leopardi. It is, in George Saintsbury's words, "a work of extreme beauty…singularly melodious in expression, dignified and full of meaning" (qtd. in Paolucci 432). In the midst of well-known elegies, *The City of Dreadful Night* clearly illustrates the larger social situation of the culture from which they were all born. While Thomson may not be a touchstone poet of the period, his anxieties are Victorian. His absolute turn from consolation in *The City of Dreadful Night* is admittedly more extreme than Tennyson's and his expression of grief almost too intense.

While not adopting the elegy as a form, *The City of Dreadful Night* figures a landscape we must learn to navigate if we are to understand the diverging paths of elegy in the Victorian period and its expansion into the non-fiction prose of John Ruskin. In order to fully appreciate the important connections to this lesser known work, substantial summary and quotation aid my analysis.

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[22] For a fuller discussion of initial critical reviews, see Henry Salt's biography of Thomson, pages 78-81.

[23] See, for example, Dick Sullivan's article "Poison Mixed with Gall: James Thomson's The City of Dreadful Night" on the Victorian Web at *www.victorianweb.org/authors/thomson/city1.html.*

About loss and grief, hopelessness and death, unbelief and human suffering, *The City of Dreadful Night* examines the progress of men moving through a real unreal city. That is, the city is not named as London. It is no place and yet real to the narrator who, unlike men who adopt the consolation of faith, cannot wake from it as from a dream. And one wants to wake from it because in the city, the pilgrim narrator must wander aimlessly looking for hope. But without hope, finding it will be impossible, and without obtaining a tiny measure of hope, the narrator cannot enter a Hell that demands all who enter must abandon hope. In the poem, those approaching Hell's gates must literally cast off their burden of hope as payment for entry. Far from the dream of Keats that leaves sweetness with its sadness, Thomson's vision is relentless in its desolation. Within the city's "precincts vast" lie "Great ruins of an unremembered past, / With others of a few short years ago / More sad…" (*Proem* 39; 37-39); street lamps burn continuously as there is no day to interrupt the darkness. Brooding, possibly mad, wanderers in this place drift quietly about murmuring to themselves (I. 65-70).

The narrator decides to follow one of these "shadowlike and frail" creatures because "he seemed to walk with an intent" (II. 1-2). Hoping to have found a guide as Dante did, it turns out that the narrator has simply come upon the shadowy being's eternal route: he goes first to what was once a holy cemetery, described now as a "tower that merged into the heavy sky" surrounded by tombs, and murmurs to himself "with dull despair / Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air" (II. 11- 12). The ghostly figure travels on through "weary roads without suspense" until he reaches a villa at which he gazes, muttering with "a hard despair / Here Love died, stabbed by its own worshipped pair" (II. 17-18). A "squalid house" is the next stop at which the figure gazes, whispering

with “a cold despair / Here Hope died, starved out in its utmost lair” (II. 23-24). When the mysterious figure begins again to travel the route, he returns to the place where Faith died. At this point, the narrator realizes he is following someone doomed continually to make a “drear pilgrimage to [the] ruined shrines” of Faith, Hope, and Love (II. 28).

The political and financial optimism of the Victorian age co-exist with intense anxiety as we have already seen played out in Tennyson’s elegy for Hallam. Thomson exposes this anxiety in one of the most powerful moments of *The City of Dreadful Night*. The pilgrim narrator asks the figure he has been following “When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed, / Can Life still live? By what doth it proceed?” (II. 29-30). The answer is the poem’s first chilling image:

> As whom his one intense thought overpowers,
> He answered coldly, Take a watch, erase
> The signs and figures of the circling hours,
> Detach the hands, remove the dial-face;
> The works proceed until run down; although
> Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go. (II. 31-35)

A faceless clock running on without revealing the time is particularly eerie to a Victorian world moving forward without the security of meaning. Revelations in science and advances in technology proceed, but the implications they bring for society cannot yet be known. Meanwhile religion “run[s] down,” unsettled by Darwin, corruption, and controversy. This operating clock stripped of its function is an image of the “Death-in Life” character of the City of Night. Its inhabitants must also grieve with no hope of consolation.

In canto four, we meet a much more dramatic personality than that of the shadowy figure in canto two. This is the lover who has lost his beloved to death. The loss causes him such extreme pain that he goes mad. Raging against all the good things on earth as well as against heaven and hell, he sings his grief in a song that signals the Victorian movement away from consolation:

> As I came through the desert thus it was,
> As I came through the desert: All was black,
> In heaven no single star, on earth no track;
> A brooding hush without a stir or note,
> The air so thick it clotted in my throat;
> And thus for hours; then some enormous things
> Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings:
>
> But I strode on austere;
> No hope could have no fear.
>
> As I came through the desert thus it was,
> As I came through the desert: Eyes of fire
> Glared at me throbbing with a starved desire;
> The hoarse and heavy and carnivorous breath
> Was hot upon me from deep jaws of death;
> Sharp claws, swift talons, fleshless fingers cold
> Plucked at me from the bushes, tried to hold:
>
> But I strode on austere;
> No hope could have no fear. (IV. 6-24)

Nine stanzas more begin with the refrain "As I came through the desert thus it was," but hope and fear return to the lover when he glimpses "a woman with a red lamp in her hand, / Bareheaded and barefooted on that strand; / O desolation moving with such grace!" (64-66) As he nears the figure, he sees that "a large black band sign was on her breast" and "a broad black band ran down her snow-white shroud" (IV. 82-83). Only then does the lover see that the lamp his dead beloved carries is no lamp: "That lamp she held was her own burning heart, / Whose blood-drops trickled step by step apart" (IV. 84-85).

In the next stanza the lover who is not dead but trapped in the City of Night meets his dead beloved and she embraces what the lover calls "that corpse-like me" and takes him away:

> …they were borne
> Away, and this vile me was left forlorn;
> I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,
> Or cleanse that brow, or wash those two apart:
> They love; their doom is drear,
> Yet they nor hope nor fear;
> But I, what do I here? (IV. 100-106)

A "reunion" of the living and the dead is thus only a kind of death for the living. And this version of death is more unsatisfactory because it leaves the "vile me" behind. Just when it seems the poem can grow no more bleak, the inhabitants of the city are gathered together to hear a "sermon" from its priest. His good news for his "melancholy Brothers" comes in the form of a discovery he has made after searching "the scope of all our

universe, with desperate hope / To find some solace for your wild unrest" (XIV. 34-35): "There is no God; no Fiend with names divine" (XIV. 40). The "good" news is that all "our wretched race" will run its course and die. The universal laws to which man has bowed were never specially made for man; the ultimate message to his "shadowy congregation" is that if you cannot bear your brief life, "you are free to end it when you will, / Without the fear of waking after death" (XIV. 83-84). The "River of Suicides," introduced in canto twenty-nine, is a logical next step on this journey that ends not with consolation but with "renewed assurance / And confirmation of the old despair" (XXII. 83-84).

While Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* is not itself an elegy because it performs no work of mourning, it speaks to the concerns Victorian elegies address. As I discussed in the introduction, Jahan Ramanzani's important work with twentieth century elegy claims that Hardy develops for the modern elegy a "poetics of melancholic mourning." But such an assertion depends upon Victorian elegists like Tennyson, Arnold, and Swinburne subordinating questions of faith to their larger "poetics of trust" (67). In putting forth Hardy's "ironic elegies for the nineteenth century, its queen, its soldier, and its God," Ramanzani means to suggest that Hardy is "reinspect[ing] the pious 'Hope' that had traditionally concluded elegies, as well as the fiction of individuality that had constituted the elegiac mourner and mourned one" (67). The problem, as we can clearly see in *The City of Dreadful Night*, is that the fiction of individuality has already been exposed.

The darkness in Thomson's work is beyond Tennyson's darkness only in degree; both reveal a desperate need for mourning that offers consolation. Tennyson's final

move in the poem is toward it, but the "consolation" he offers is largely that offered by Nature. Hallam, like Keats in Shelley's *Adonais*, can become a part of the earth (see stanza 54). Not so for the pilgrim narrator or the other inhabitants of the City of Night. Longing for "senseless death," one of the them expresses his inability even to seek comfort saying, "Speak not of comfort where no comfort is, / Speak not at all: can words make foul things fair? / Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss: / Hush and be mute envisaging despair" (XVI. 39-42). This voice is finally answered by the "pulpit speaker" who proclaims again that "life itself holds nothing good for us, / But it ends soon and nevermore can be" (XVI. 49-51). Thus, the pulpit speaker offers a kind of replacement for consolation in the knowledge that we will go out of the world and be as unaware of the world as before we were ever in it.

Thomson empties out the potential of Romantic consolation in canto seventeen by setting up a tribute to the moon which "triumphs through the endless nights" and the stars that "throb and glitter as they wheel" only to tear it down in a mockery of Wordsworth: "And men regard with passionate awe and yearning / The mighty marching and the golden burning, / And think the heavens respond to what they feel" (XVII. 1-2; 5-8).[24] Judging the "spheres eternal" to be nothing but a "grand illusion," the pilgrim narrator resists the move toward a consolation made possible through nature. Unlike Shelley and Tennyson, whose elegies still offer a measure of consolation in the natural order, Thomson's move in *The City of Dreadful Night* is distinctly and finally away from God

[24] I have found no evidence of other scholars noting this mockery of Wordsworth, but it seems clear to me that Thomson means to. The stanza following this gets similar stabs in at other Romantic poets, or at least well-known images associated with them, "the fairy lakes" of Keats, for example.

and nature. Ultimately, Thomson represents a world of loss in this poem, so vast because it is a loss of all the good things of that world. *The City of Dreadful Night*, composed, like *In Memoriam,* over many years before its publication, illustrates, even more vividly than *In Memoriam,* the "cinematic sweep through time" and the accumulation of loss. We will see this kind of permeating loss, historical rather than personal, again in John Ruskin's non-fiction elegies.

Part Two:

Primary Works & Critical Interpretations of Texts

Chapter Two

Architecture as Elegy in Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*

Discourse about the past has the status of being the discourse of the dead. The object circulating in it is only the absent, while its meaning is to be a language shared…by living beings. Whatever is expressed engages a group's communication with itself through this reference to an absent party that constitutes its past. The dead are the objective figure of an exchange among the living.

~Michel de Certeau [tras. Conley]
The Writing of History

The Seven Lamps of Architecture and *The Stones of Venice* constitute what scholars generally refer to as Ruskin's "major architectural works." As many have observed, Ruskin's understanding and critique of architecture is directed by his sense of the natural; his judgments are based not only on the material realities of the buildings but also their symbolic significance. While scholars such as Robert Hewison and Michael Wheeler have shown that Ruskin's architectural writing is intricately connected to the tradition of Romanticism, I assert that they are elegies moving in an unexpected trajectory.[25] In fact, I posit that Ruskin's work on architecture functions simultaneously as an elegy for the lost pastoral and the replacement for it. As aforementioned, "lost pastoral" refers to the loss of power in the poetic genre of pastoral *and* to the

[25] As I have shown in chapter one, Ruskin's thought was deeply influenced by the values of the Romantic movement. It is important to note, however, that English Romanticism was heavily indebted to German figures such as Goethe and Schiller. Goethe too saw Gothic architecture as "analogous to nature and thereby in a special relationship with the divinity" (Swenarton 4). Cathedrals, for example, were physical expressions of this relationship to Goethe, rising like "tall, sublime, wide-spreading trees of God, which with a thousand branches, millions of twigs, and leaves as the sands of the sea, proclaim to the country round about the glory of the Lord" (Goethe 364). Ruskin encountered German ideas about art and architecture through Coleridge and Carlyle and a variety of other sources; see Mark Swenarton's chapter "Ruskin and 'The Nature of Gothic'" in *Artisans and Architects*, pages 1-32 for a discussion of these sources.

topographical loss of landscape during the Victorian period. Much as Wordsworth finds consolation in memory after youth has passed, Ruskin believes in the power of architecture to perform reparation for these losses:

> We are forced, for the sake of accumulating our power and knowledge, to live in cities: but such advantage as we have in association with each other is in great part counterbalanced by our loss of fellowship with Nature. We cannot all have our gardens now, nor our pleasant fields to meditate in at eventide. Then the function of our architecture is, as far as may be, to replace these; to tell us about Nature; to possess us with memories of her quietness; to be solemn and full of tenderness, like her, and rich in portraitures of her; full of delicate imagery of the flowers we can no more gather, and of the living creatures now far away from us in their own solitude. If ever you felt or found this in a London street,—if ever it furnished you with one serious thought, or one ray of true and gentle pleasure,—if there is in your heart a true delight in its grim railings and dark casements, and wasteful finery of shops, and feeble coxcombry of club-houses,—it is well: promote the building of more like them... (9.411)

For Ruskin, architecture, in its right representation of nature, can and should serve as a replacement for the lost pastoral.

Indeed, Ruskin is frustrated by architects who are always trying to "invent new styles" and improve nature. He condemns, especially, the attempts of Greek architects to "improve" or "order" a wave (9.407-409) and defends himself against the charge that he would have humans build nothing since they cannot improve upon nature: "Is there, then

nothing to be done by man's art? Have we only to copy and again copy, for ever, the imagery of the universe? Not so. We have work to do upon it; there is not one of us so simple, nor so feeble but he has work to do upon it. But the work is not to improve, but to explain..." (409). And so, the architecture, as embodiment of the fittest relationship between man and the natural world, is made to speak the explanation. As I will show, Ruskin takes the work of explanation, the work of observing and expressing what is good and beautiful in nature, seriously. And even beyond applying a sense of morality, Ruskin's treatment of architecture is invested heavily in history.

Since the genres of elegy and architecture share as their most important function the embodiment of the past, I focus in this chapter on John Ruskin's mourning, both private and public, over the landscapes of his youth and his deep and abiding anxiety over the ruin of the English and Italian landscapes, both natural and architectural. Although I too focus primarily on *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853), I also consider Ruskin's earlier and lesser known architectural treatise, *The Poetry of Architecture* (1837-38). This work contains in skeletal form the architectural issues and concerns Ruskin engages repeatedly and more fully as his career develops.

Likewise, his remarks about architecture in lectures and various publications during the 1870s and 1880s are significant as they show his continued commitment to architecture.[26] I thereby further expose and explain the elegiac discourse underpinning Ruskin's architectural writing. Pursuing such a claim demands a recognition of

[26] I do not wish to adopt, as so many scholars have done, a reductive model of Ruskin that "shapes Ruskin's career as passing over, in middle life, from an early concern with pastoral nature to a maturer grasp of social responsibility" (Finley 91).

continuity in Ruskin's work which challenges the traditional scholarly treatment of his work as fragmented and periodic. Hence, a clear understanding of Ruskin and of the developments of elegy are at stake here. Reading *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and, more significantly, *The Stones of Venice,* as elegies, necessitates the critical reinterpretation of the genre as a whole as previously established in this study. Indeed, pursuing the logic of elegy, which I have found to recur throughout Ruskin's work, links his early writing on architecture and painting to his late works on social, political, and economic writing. Additionally, it provides us a pattern against which to compare the broader developments in the genre.

Ruskin's first extended study of architecture appeared as a series of articles in Loudon's *Architectural Magazine* in 1837-38. Still an undergraduate at Christ Church, Ruskin called his first architectural treatise *The Poetry of Architecture: or, The Architecture of the Nations of Europe Considered in Its Associations with Natural Scenery and National Character* (1837-38). The kernel of Ruskin's later architectural thought is recorded here during his excursions to rural England, France, Italy, and Switzerland. This text, written when Ruskin was nineteen, gives us an idea how his initial views on architecture relate to landscape and to society as a whole since his earliest responses to the intersecting losses in art and nature are tangled up with the cultural anxieties and the pervading sense of loss enveloping his age. He argues that the natural or "noble scenery" of the earth belongs to everyone and those "few to whom it temporarily belongs" are obligated to preserve the visual integrity of the scene (1.131). Ruskin's insistence that the best foundation for good architecture is in the natural world explains, in part, his turn to a pastoral tradition when considering how best to mourn the

contemporary losses of ancient architecture.

The Poetry of Architecture is a fitting title for Ruskin's first collection of essays on architecture. Many scholars admit the poetic quality of Ruskin's prose; Clive Wilmer observes, in fact, that in Ruskin's case it is appropriate to claim some of the same behaviours for poetry and prose (21). Beyond this, I assert that non-fiction poetic prose changes what is possible in traditionally poetic genres. A helpful point Wilmer stresses, however, is how "the manipulation of verbal rhythms, the intensity of focus of a loved object and the deferral of a conclusion are all used in Ruskin's prose to enact a reality thereby made to seem timeless and immortal" (22). Certainly a discussion of the timeless and immortal setting, or "reality" as Wilmer names it, reveals how important it is to understand elegy and its use of the pastoral.

Further, Brian Hanson finds that the "metaphysical values hymned in *The Poetry of Architectur*e -of memory, antiquity, morality, and nature's order—had to be made incarnate and architecture, unique among the arts in its embodiment of the spiritual within the physical, was the obvious path to achieving this. Even in the commercial centres of the nation, architecture could begin to represent these higher values" (Hanson 149). Ruskin often focused on such "higher values" claiming fourteen years later in the first volume of *The Stones of Venice* that sometimes there are "more valuable lessons to be learned in the school of nature than in that of Vitruvius" and that a "fragment of building among the Alps is singularly illustrative of the chief feature… necessary to the perfection of the wall veil" (9.85-86). Ruskin proceeds to describe a group of natural rock walls, "one of them overhanging; crowned with a cornice, nodding some hundred and fifty feet over its massive flank, three thousand above its glacier base, and fourteen

thousand above the sea,—a wall truly of some majesty, at once the most precipitous and the strongest mass in the whole chain of the Alps, the Mont Cervin." This mountain illustrates Ruskin's principle that the "best buildings" are those which take their forms from nature. His personal and extensive study of European buildings from the Doge's Palace to St. Mark's reveals the vital importance he places on the intersection between seemingly disparate entities.

The central concerns of *The Poetry of Architecture* grow from Ruskin's search for indigenous models of architecture that would "illustrate...that unity of feeling" found in "the architecture of nations...as it was connected with the scenery in which it is found, and with the skies under which it was erected" (1.9). Only in an intersection of the natural world and man's response to it, evident in the building of his own habitation and places of worship, can architecture achieve the status of art. In the final volume of *Modern Painters* (1860), written nearly three decades after *The Poetry of Architecture*, Ruskin is still envisioning architecture in natural terms and Nature as the best architect. In a discussion of trees and their parts Ruskin writes, "The elementary structure of all important trees may, I think, thus be resolved into three principal forms: three-leaved; four-leaved, and five-leaved. Or, in well-known terms, trefoil, quatrefoil, cinqfoil" (7.33).

Ruskin associates the shapes of these types of leaves (which are, of course, also designs) with correlating types of trees-- the trefoil with the rhododendron, the quatrefoil with the horse-chestnut, the cinqfoil with the oak-- and reminds the reader there is a significant connection between "beautiful architecture and the construction of trees" (7.33). If the reader will only look at "the meaning of the trefoil, quatrefoil, and cinqfoil, in Gothic architecture, he will see why I could hardly help thinking and speaking

of all trees as builders" (7.34). The importance of place and the role of nature in shaping architecture, first introduced in the early essays which comprise *The Poetry of Architecture,* remained guiding forces throughout Ruskin's life. He would never again visit a place without considering its architecture.

As Ruskin prepared the "serious work" of writing *The Seven Lamps of Architecture,* he was also experiencing the violent disorder of the 1848 revolutionary upheavals in Europe on both personal and national scales. Married in April of 1848, Ruskin and his wife, Effie Gray, had to postpone their wedding tour to Switzerland. Unrest in the form of street riots erupted in Milan, Venice, and other cities in Italy while in France unemployment and political tensions, combined with large scale poverty, created equally dangerous conditions there. England felt the shock waves of European revolutions and recognized the potential for violence in the newly organized Chartist movement.[27] The "hungry forties," as the decade became known in England, deeply agitated Ruskin who linked the crisis in architecture and nature to the crisis in culture. Touring the Lake District with Effie in 1848, he writes, "I should be very, very happy just now but for these wild storm-clouds bursting on my dear Italy and my fair France...these are not times for watching clouds or dreaming over quiet waters, more serious work is to be done" (36.86).

The Seven Lamps was, according to Gill Chitty, "the only form of direct action [Ruskin] could take" as well as "an expression as the mid-century approached of his anxieties about the future of culture and society" (37). Throughout 1848 Ruskin

[27]Chartists protested generally against lack of representation in the government and social inequalities in England.

continued to attempt travels abroad and was able to begin a three-month tour (August-October) of Normandy which ended in Paris. Although Ruskin was currently working on the third volume of *Modern Painters*, he deferred that work in order to "[obtain] as many memoranda as possible of medieval buildings in Italy and Normandy, now in process of destruction, before that destruction should be consummated by the Restorer or the Revolutionist" (8.3). These memoranda would become *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, a "polemical work written for a particular moment in time and reflecting its author's concern with immediate social and economic issues" (Chitty 38) and, I would add, an elegy recording Ruskin's specific losses and, more importantly, the *process* of loss. Were it not for the possibilities of architecture to convey our "human voice...from the grave," there might be no consolation in Ruskin's elegy.

Instead, architecture for Ruskin could reflect the best of humanity. It does, after all, translate the beautiful lines of nature into a lasting form. According to Ruskin, architects should be "sent to our hills…[to] study there what nature understands by a buttress and what by a dome" (8.16). In *The Seven Lamps* Ruskin repeatedly appeals to his reader to believe and make possible the consolation of nature in a time fraught with cultural upheaval:

> The idea of self-denial for the sake of posterity, of practising present economy for the sake of debtors yet unborn, of planting forests that our descendants may live under their shade, or raising cities for future nations to inhabit, never, I suppose efficiently takes place among publicly recognised motives of exertion. Yet these are not less our duties; nor is our part fitly sustained upon the earth, unless the range of intended and

> deliberate usefulness include, not only the companions but the successors of our pilgrimage. … Men cannot benefit those that are with them as they can benefit those who come after them; and of all the pulpits from which human voice is ever sent forth, there is none from which it reaches so far as the grave" (8.232-33).

Because all works of art are most justly measured by the test of their "majesty" over time, Ruskin pleads, "[W]hen we build, let us think that we build forever" (8.233).

In *The Seven Lamps,* Ruskin defines a "forever" architecture as "the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man, for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure" (8.27). Noting the difference between "architecture" and "building," Ruskin identifies seven lamps corresponding to the seven moral or spiritual principles of sacrifice, truth, power, beauty, life, memory, and obedience. For Ruskin, architectural design expresses man's relationship to nature:

> Indeed, there is nothing truly noble either in colour or in form, but its power depends on circumstances infinitely too intricate to be explained, and almost too subtle to be traced. And as for these Byzantine buildings, we only do not feel them because we do not *watch* them; otherwise we should as much enjoy the variety of proportion in their arches, as we do at present that of the natural architecture of flowers and leaves. (9.154)

Ruskin provides the figure below to allow the reader to test his claims.

Leaf Group ***Fig. 6***

Ruskin asserts that:

> any of us can feel in an instant the grace of the leaf group, *b*" because "that grace is simply owing to its being proportioned like the façade of St. Mark's; each leaflet answering to an arch,—the smallest, at the root, to those of the porticos. I have tried to give the proportion quite accurately in *b*; but as the difference between the second and third leaflets is hardly discernible on so small a scale, it is somewhat exaggerated in *a*. Nature is often far more subtle in her proportions. (9. 154)[28]

Describing the abuses of ornate scrolls and "festoons of flowers as architectural decoration," Ruskin argues that "unnatural arrangements are just as ugly as unnatural forms; and architecture, in borrowing the objects of Nature is bound to place them...in such association as may befit and express their origin" (8.151). When Ruskin deems a Corinthian capital beautiful, it is because it "expands under the abacus just as Nature would have expanded it" (8.151). Here we begin to glimpse how architecture functions as elegy and as the replacement for a lost pastoral landscape. Describing vine-leaves carved on an archivolt in St. Mark's, Ruskin names what is possible if artists will follow natural laws: "...we may yet receive the same kind of pleasure which we have in seeing true vine-leaves and wreathed branches traced upon golden light; its stars upon their

[28] Figure 6 comes from the page 154 of the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (*Works* 10.154).

azure ground ought to make us remember, as its builder remembered, the stars that ascend and fall in the great arch of the sky; and I believe that stars, and boughs, and leaves, and bright colours are everlastingly lovely..." (10.117).

To Victorians excited by design manuals,[29] Ruskin's constant admonition to them is to remember that "As natural form is varied, so must beautiful ornament be varied. You are not an artist by reproving nature into deathful sameness, but by animating your copy of her into vital variation" (23. 105). The machines of the industrial age might be able to produce "absolute accuracy," but as the process would not vary, the forms could not be organic. In response to a correspondent enthusiastic about the new artistic techniques made possible through new machinery in 1877, Ruskin replies that the machines will "never draw a snail shell…All beautiful lines are drawn under mathematical laws organically transgressed, and nothing can ever draw these but the human hand" (29.81).

Architecture for Ruskin, as for A.W. N. Pugin before him, represents the values of the builder and the society as a whole. In the following excerpt, Ruskin explains why bad architecture is dangerous as a symptom of something else: "But I believe no cause to have been more active in the degradation of our national feeling for beauty than the constant use of cast-iron ornaments...I feel strongly that there is no hope of the progress of the arts of any nation which indulges in these vulgar and cheap substitutes for real

[29] The text of *Floriated Ornament* is such a design manual. It contained a series of thirty one designs which Pugin took "from nature itself." Like Ruskin, Pugin valued medieval designers rather than those of the Renaissance. Pugin also believed the greatest decorative elements were taken from the structure of plants and other natural forms. Ironically, Ruskin denounced Pugin's "production" of designs and scorned the use of such a manual.

decoration" (8.86-87). In Ruskin's view, substitution and imitation are the mistakes of modern architects who "fancy they are speaking good English by speaking bad Greek" (1.168). Unlike those architects, Ruskin's elegiac writings on architecture model the values he wishes builders to espouse.

Furthermore, Ruskin relates architecture to poetry in order to explain why sometimes we choose "rigid laws of line" and other such "formalisms": Regularity is

> attractive to uneducated eyes, owing to their manifest compliance with the first conditions of unity and symmetry; being to really noble ornamentation what the sing-song of a bad reader of poetry, laying regular emphasis on every required syllable of every foot, is to the varied, irregular, unexpected, inimitable cadence of the voice of a person of sense and feeling reciting the same lines, -not incognizant of the rhythm, but delicately bending it to the expression of passion, and the natural sequence of the thought. (6.332-33)

According to Ruskin, "doggerel ornamentation" can be enjoyed only by those "who have been educated without reference to natural forms; their instincts being blunt, and their eyes naturally incapable of perceiving the inflexion of noble curves" (6.333).

To demonstrate the inflexion of noble curves, Ruskin includes the drawing "Abstract Lines" (see Plate VII below) in his chapter "Material of Ornament" in the first volume of *The Stones of Venice*. These "abstract lines" are what Ruskin calls the "most frequent contours of natural objects" (9.266); if properly translated to architecture, they will reveal the link between man and nature. Line *a b* is a curve formed by the surface

of a small glacier (near Chamouni); line *d c* is "part of the flank of the chain of the Dent d'Oche above the lake of Geneva"; line *h* is taken from a branch of spruce fir but placed upside down by Ruskin "in order that the reader may compare its curvatures with *c d*, *e hg*, and *i k*, which are all mountain lines" (9.268). The mountain lines represent specific mountain locations: *e g* is a southern edge, five hundred feet in length, of the Matterhorn; *i k* is the slope from the summit of the Aiguille Bouchard to the valley of Chamouni, three miles in length; *l m* is the line from a willow leaf Ruskin traced by laying it on paper; *q r,* the leaf of the Alisma Plantago; *s t* the side of a bay-leaf, etc. (9.266).

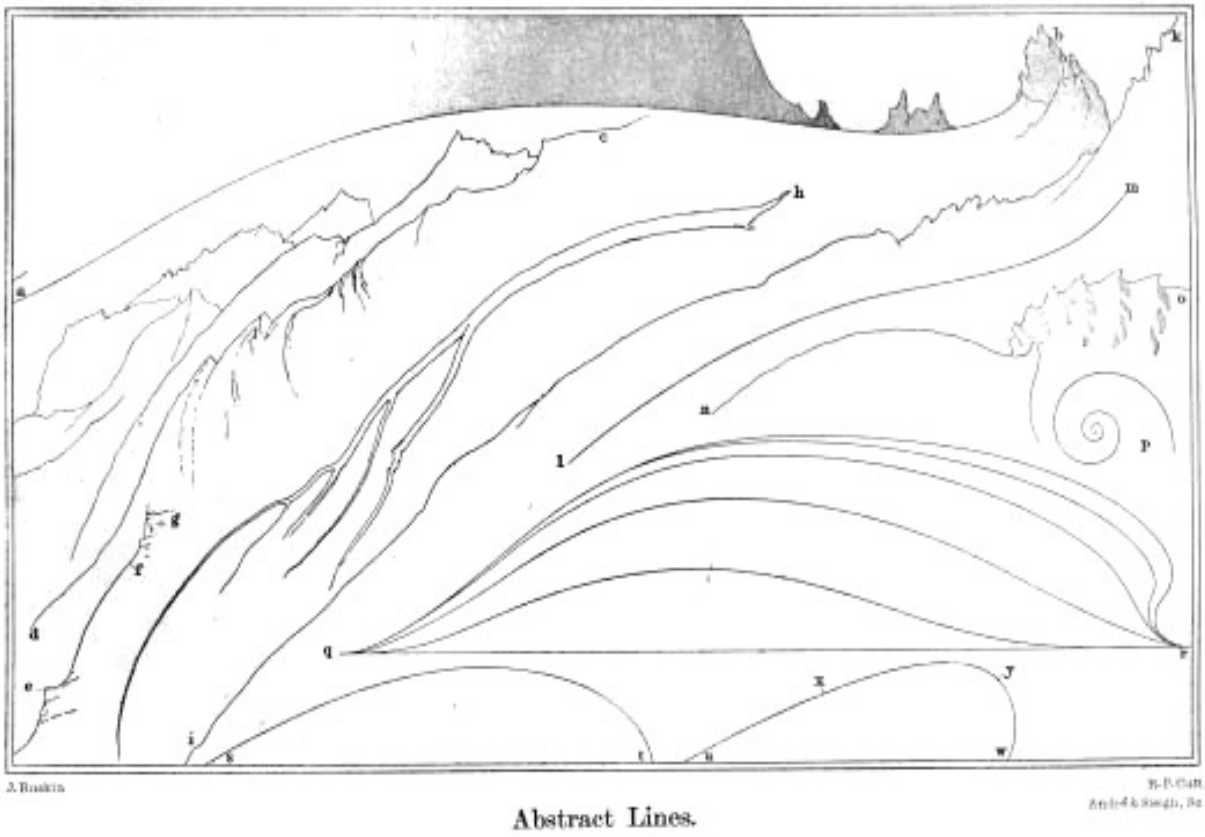

Plate VII from *The Stones of Venice*, Volume I

Thus the beauty expressed in these forms is derived from abstract qualities in nature, which reflect the divine; when translated to architecture, such forms and proportions can link man to nature and therefore to God.[30]

While it is necessary to first track Ruskin's core beliefs about nature and architecture, in order to establish the reach of his influences and those he influenced, there remains much to explore in understanding how *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice* function as part of what I argue is the elegiac discourse of Ruskin's writing. In the opening pages of *The Stones of Venice* Ruskin confesses that his endeavor is "to trace the lines of this image [Venice] before it be for ever lost, and to record...the warning which seems to me uttered by every one of the fast-gaining waves, that beat like passing bells, against THE STONES OF VENICE" (17). Readers are rightly struck by the ominous "warning," by the feeling of impending doom which accompanies the image of this beautiful city in decline.

But it is Ruskin's purpose "to trace" and "to record" that deserves most attention here. It is impossible to trace lines if the image is already gone. Ruskin's writings on architecture certainly convey messages about social morality, a point for which there is scholarly consensus. However, these architectural writings also express a commitment, less often noticed, to Ruskin's intense interest in decaying but not yet decayed structures which are tied to the possibilities inherent in a "found pastoral." Echoing the frustrations of his age, Ruskin remarks in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*, "I do not wonder at what men Suffer, but I wonder often at what they Lose. We may see how good

[30] For a wonderful explanation of how this organicism developed over the course of Ruskin's career, beginning in *Modern Painters* II, see Robert Hewison's *Ruskin on Venice*, 137-155.

rises out of pain and evil; but the dead, naked, eyeless loss, what good comes of that?" (10.178.)

To consider exactly this, Ruskin published his three volume study of architecture, *The Stones of Venice* in the years from 1851-1853. The first volume, subtitled "The Foundations," continues the work begun in *The Seven Lamps*.[31] Although the first chapter, "The Quarry," introduces us to Venice and establishes its importance as place and symbol, the remainder of volume one focuses on the principles of architecture and examines the construction and decoration of architecture rather than describing the city of Venice itself. Chapter titles such as "The Roof Cornice," "Form of Aperture," "The Wall Veil," "The Pier Base," and "The Cornice and Capital" give the reader a sense of the specific detail Ruskin examines here. The second volume, subtitled "The Sea Stories," looks at examples of Byzantine and Gothic architecture in Venice and traces the transition from Byzantine architecture to Gothic architecture.[32] Detailed studies of buildings such as the Ducal Palace and St. Mark's reveal important moments in the city's architectural history. Focusing on the arches of windows and doorways as the "most distinctly traceable" elements of a building, Ruskin's argument throughout *The Stones* is appropriately visual.

In the figure below, Plate XIV: "The Orders of Venetian Arches," Ruskin provides evidence of the transition from Byzantine to Gothic architecture. The first five rows represent the changing styles of Venetian windows and the two bottom rows represent

[31] *The Stones of Venice* is an elegy that carries the markers of other genres gaining popularity in nineteenth century England, such as travel literature and the educational guide. In fact, Ruskin prepared versions of *The Stones* specifically for the traveler and the student. Yet it remains foremost an elegy.

[32] The title "Sea Stories" is a reference to the lowest story of Venetian buildings called the sea story.

successive styles of arched doorways. The first row shows a typical Byzantine arch, as can be seen at Palazzo Loredan and its neighbor Palazzo Farsetti, two early thirteenth century palaces located on the Grand Canal. A first row arch consists of a plain rounded arch, similar to Roman arches from antiquity. The second and third rows show the stylistic shift toward full Gothic and the fourth and fifth row show what Ruskin calls the "pure Gothic." Variations on the six key types make up the final rows. Ruskin referred to his studies in Venice as dependent upon the "accumulation of details on which the complete proof of the fact depends" (10.274). And he provides similar detail as proof throughout the three volumes of *The Stones of Venice*.

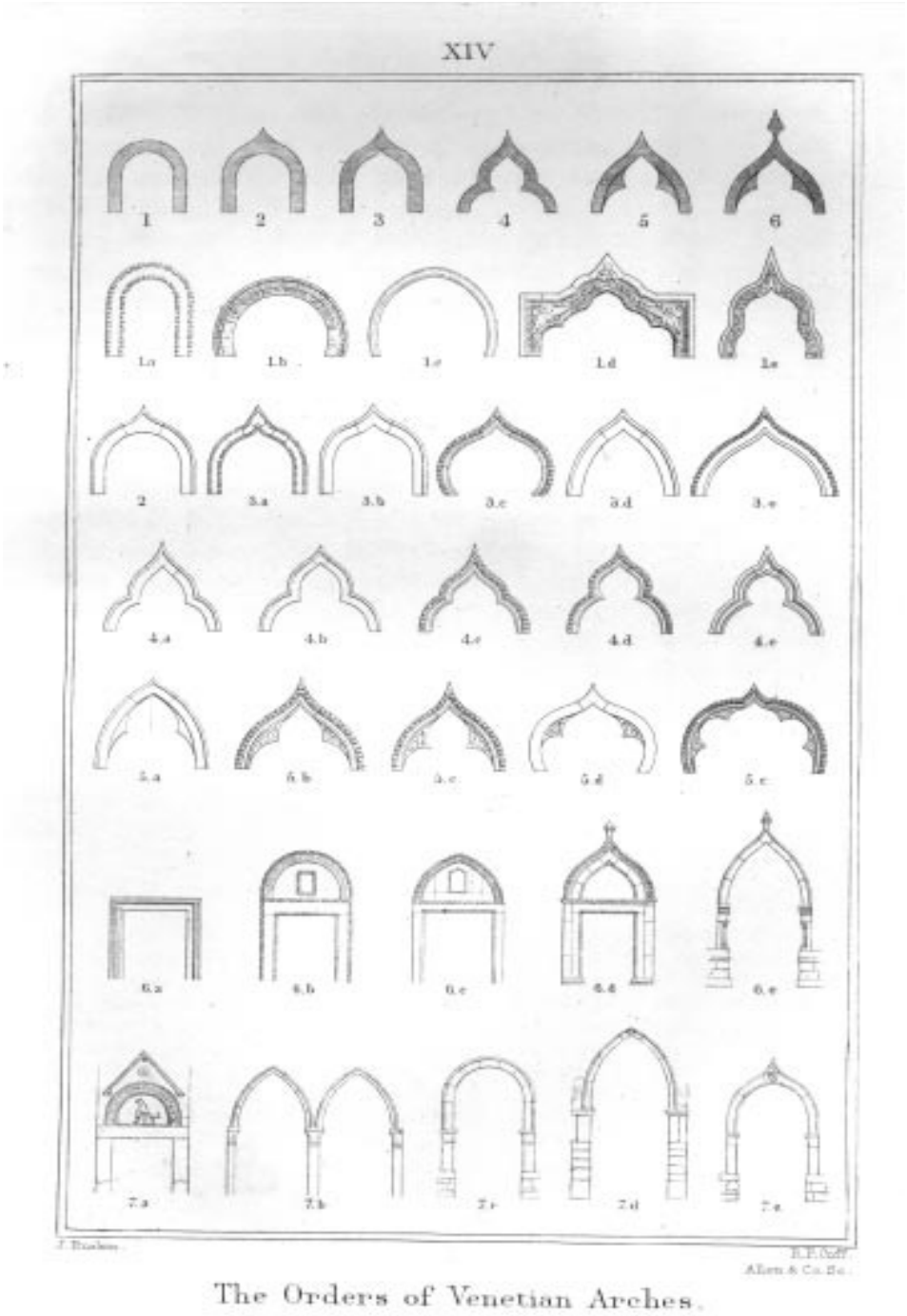

Plate IIV from *The Stones of Venice*, Volume II

The final volume of *The Stones of Venice*, subtitled "The Fall," chronicles the architectural changes during the Venetian Renaissance, a period Ruskin equates with the moral and physical decline of the city. Concentrating most on the mature Gothic phase of Venice's architecture, Ruskin's work is not meant to be simply a history. The tracing of images before they are gone form Ruskin's elegy for what is passing and constitute a work of mourning that uses those same lines as outlines for the future possibilities which the right kind of architecture can provide. As such, it is the foundation which allows for the expansion of the genre we begin to see en masse in the early twentieth century. Jahan Ramanzani claims that "the poetry of mourning…assumes in the modern period an extraordinary diversity and range, incorporating more anger and skepticism, more conflict and anxiety than ever before" (1). Certainly, poetry does create "an important cultural space for mourning" in the twentieth century; however, I maintain that the shift Ramanzani identifies actually occurs much earlier—in the heart of the Victorian period. More importantly, I believe, the elegy is not limited to poetry. Ruskin's lament for the loss of English countryside is angry, skeptical, written out of anxiety and into conflict.

In order to fully see how Ruskin expands the genre of elegy itself, we should also consider the conventions of the elegy to show Ruskin working within that pattern. Beyond the pastoral setting, which I have already established, Ruskin depicts all of nature mourning. As I explained in chapter one, appealing to nature to mourn or the representation of nature as sharing in the universal sorrow is a commonplace almost never absent from the pastoral dirge. For example, in Theocritus, the mountains and trees mourn for Daphnis. Mountains, trees, springs and rivers share in Aphrodite's sorrow for

the lost Adonis, and the flowers flush red with pain in Bion's elegy. All the flowers wither and the trees cast down their fruit for grief at Bion's death in Moschus. Ruskin too notes the damage to building, nature, and humankind when man gives nature cause to mourn: "A fair building is...worth the ground it stands on...nor is any cause whatever valid as a ground for its destruction. If ever valid, certainly not now, when the place both of the past and the present is too much usurped in our minds by the restless and discontented past" (8.246).

Ruskin also makes frequent use of other elegiac conventions, such as the use of repetition and refrain, reiterated questions, the sudden outbreak of vengeful anger, movements from grief to consolation (though Ruskin does this in an extremely unconventional way as we see in chapter three with his collection of public letters, *Fors Clavigera*), and an unusual degree of self-consciousness regarding the performance of the mourner. As I have shown thus far in this chapter, Ruskin moves from grief over the loss of the natural landscape to the consolation of architecture as a record of the past and the hope of the future. I have also indicated how Ruskin's theme of loss repeats throughout his work and deepens over time.

To find examples of many outbreaks of the mourner's vengeful anger, we have only to look through Ruskin's lectures during the 1860s and 1870s or his letters to see unbridled displays. Writing to his friend, Charles Eliot Norton, from Pisa in 1882 regarding the principle of "Liberty of line," which he had taught in "The Nature of Gothic" to be the animating force behind medieval architecture, Ruskin complained that contemporary restorers had no understanding of such craftsmanship:

> Nearly all our early English Gothic is free hand in the curves, and there is

> no possibility of drawing even the apparent circles with compasses. Here [at Pisa], and I think in nearly all work with Greek roots in it, there is a spiral passion which drifts everything like the temple of the winds; this is the first of all subtle charms in the real work- the first of all that is [corrected] out of it by the restorer. Do you recollect...the quarrel we had about the patchwork of the Spina Chapel? I think you will recollect the little twisted trefoil there. Of course in the restoration they've put it square. And it isn't of the slightest use to point any of these things out to the present race of mankind. It is finally tramwayed, shamwayed, and eternally damnwayed, and I wish the heavens and the fates joy over it" (37.414).

Not necessarily constructive outbursts punctuate Ruskin's writings on architecture and much else; however, we are wrong to dismiss these as merely the cranky musings of an old curmudgeon. Read as the vengeful outbursts of a mourner in an elegy, they take on new meaning as part of the work Ruskin is trying to accomplish.

Repetition and refrain work throughout Ruskin's elegies much as they work in biblical texts, alluding to the past as they simultaneously prophecy the future. In *The Stones of Venice*, the language of the fall which will be repeated throughout the three volume work is evident from Ruskin's opening paragraph:

> Since the dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre, Venice, and England. Of the First of these great powers only the memory remains; of the Second, the ruin; the Third, which inherits their greatness,

> if it forget their example, may be led through prouder eminence to less pitied destruction. (9.17)

The rhetorical structure of *The Stones of Venice* is established in what Robert Hewison calls a "triad of societies, one gone, one going, and one in danger of following the other two" (*Ruskin on Venice* 177). Such structural and linguistic repetitions highlight Ruskin's use of the elegiac conventions even though his finished elegy looks so unlike those which have come before.

Necessarily moving, as does the dialectic of elegy, between the past and the present, we see Ruskin's impulse again and again to record "the past." Some scholars claim this is an effort to understand the present; others are less generous and label Ruskin's impulse a nostalgic obsession. Because the impulse manifests itself in so many subjects, at such different periods in Ruskin's life, and at distant intervals along the line of his religious faith continuum, scholars have understandably hesitated to name a point of origin. Because of the hybridity and multiplicity of Ruskin's writings, we are not likely to find a single point of origin for any of his ideas. However, as I suggest, reading a pattern governed by the same logic throughout Ruskin's writings yields the best understanding of them. This pattern is the logic of elegy. At least until Tennyson's 1850 publication of *In Memoriam*, a definite move toward consolation was an established convention of the elegiac genre, but in the Victorian period, the endgame of an elegy becomes uncertain. The resolution possible when the dead loved one is, in a manner, "restored" by a heavenly ideal loses power. The publication of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*, along with Ruskin's dozens of public lectures, however, actively expanded the cultural space for mourning as Ruskin identified the losses occurring

around him.[33]

Architecture for Ruskin thus serves both as a record of the past, man's relationship to history and time, and a connection to the landscape, man's relationship to the natural world. In a chapter from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* entitled "The Lamp of Memory," Ruskin begins with an elaborate and lengthy recollection of the landscape of Champagnole, a village in the Jura, in all its springtime splendor but moves directly to a description of the "four-square keep of Granson" and the surrounding village architecture (8.224). It is significant that Ruskin recalls both landscape and architecture. He claims that architecture is to be regarded "with the most serious thought" because "We may live without her…but we cannot remember without her" (8.224). Classing poetry and architecture together as the "conquerors of the forgetfulness of men," Ruskin claims that architecture includes poetry and is "mightier in its reality" (8.224).

Peter Sacks's definition of elegies as "the literary versions of specific social and psychological practices" (2) is therefore useful in more specifically pinpointing the value of Ruskin's work on architecture. Seeing Ruskin's interpretation of architecture and his impulse to record it in order to preserve the aforementioned relationships allows us to see how *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* not only functions as an elegy but also provides reparation for loss. Although still quite evangelical and fundamental in his Christian beliefs at this early stage of his career, Ruskin did not expect the consolation of a

[33] Ruskin lectured throughout his life, before and after his time at Oxford as Slade Professor of Art. The Edinburgh Lecture series in 1853 focused largely on architecture and demonstrates the intense mourning Ruskin felt during the period he was immersed in architectural efforts. But his discourse of elegy continues in lectures delivered to the Working Men's Institute at Camberwell, to communities gathered in town halls (such as the one in Bradford where he delivered the celebrated "Traffic" lecture regarding the building of a new traffic exchange), and even to students at the Royal Military Academy (1865).

heavenly ideal to intervene in his work of mourning. For while he worked to preserve the ancient architecture he saw crumbling around him, there was yet much else to mourn.

In the years leading up to the 1848 revolutionary upheavals across Europe, the industrial revolution moved quickly, modernizing urban life and "renovating" what seemed out of date—from religious ideology to political systems to buildings which had stood for centuries. The results of such a fierce reshaping of culture raised public anxiety in England, but the source of Ruskin's anxiety was society's apparent disregard for the artistic and architectural legacy of Europe. Even sacred places were not immune to a new order. While it was certainly true that some buildings suffered only from neglect—evidenced by Ruskin's record of rain running down the walls of the Arena Chapel in Padua—others became targets of remodeling. In his travels to Pisa in 1845, Ruskin had seen bricklayers in the Campo Santo knocking down a wall of frescoes. Ignited by a desire to record the architecture he could not otherwise save, Ruskin decided to postpone the writing of *Modern Painters* in order to compile *The Seven Lamps of Architecture.* As Tim Hilton and many others have noted, the architecture being destroyed across Europe held personal associations for Ruskin (Hilton 1. 123).

A partial list, in a note of volume two of *Modern Painters*, records some of the most painful losses: The "magnificent old houses at the corner of the market-place" in Beauvais; mediaeval houses at Tours; "the noble Gothic portal of the church of St. Nicholas" at Rouen; "the wooden loggias...once the characteristic feature of the city" at Geneva. Ruskin's note regarding the losses at Pisa reveals what an excerpted list cannot:

> At Pisa.—The old Baptistery is at this present time in process of being

> "restored," that is, dashed to pieces; and common stone, painted black and varnished, substituted for its black marble. In the Campo Santo, the invaluable frescoes, which might be protected by merely glazing the arcades, are left exposed to wind and weather. While I was there in 1846, I saw a monument to some private person put up against the lower part of the wall. The bricklayers knocked out a large space of the lower brickwork, with what beneficial effect to the loose and blistered stucco on which the frescoes are painted above, I leave the reader to imagine; inserted the tablet, and then plastered over the marks of the insertion, destroying a portion of the border of one of the paintings. The greater part of Giotto's "Satan before God" has been destroyed by the recent insertion of one of the beams of the roof. (4.37-38)

In the face of such sweeping destruction, Ruskin's love of art and ancient buildings drove him to what many neglect to read as a practical action.[34] Long before Ruskin established The Guild of St. George or imagined its Utopian possibilities, Ruskin was "socially" active.[35] The action of capturing and expressing places provided a way for Ruskin to keep them alive. In this manner *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* functions by elegiac logic to delay the moment of death and in so doing to provide reparation.

The publication of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853) are often interpreted as an "interruption" to *Modern Painters*, the five volume work that brought Ruskin early recognition. While it is true that *The Seven*

[34] This was true in Ruskin's own time and in the twentieth century critical evaluation of his work.

[35] See chapter three and the conclusion of this study for discussion of The Guild of St. George.

Lamps and *The Stones of Venice* were written between the second and third volumes of *Modern Painters*, to read them as "some kind of interlude is really to miss the point" (Chitty 31). Ruskin's expansion into architectural writing is an organic one. He was influenced from a very early age by the picturesque tradition of William Gilpin, but his fascination for "ruins" deepens into an understanding of them as living things.

Interestingly, what Lauren Weisengarden says of Gilpin's aesthetic of the picturesque is also true of Ruskin: "The convergence of pastoral poetry and landscape painting...determined his aesthetic ruin. That is, Gilpin extended the pastoral harmony between man and nature to include the ruin and presented both the abstract and realistic attributes of the ruin as signifiers of a building's venerability and as a vessel of moral instruction" (43).[36] The tradition of pastoral poetry presented an imaginative space in which Ruskin could erect the connections between a lost past he mourned and the architectural crises of his day. Absorbing architecture into his discourse, Ruskin finds reparation for grief in the construction of elegy. Much like an architect himself, Ruskin's pattern of writing the elegy is one of building or accumulation.

The elegy is something of a compromise for the mourner, no doubt; he would rather have the stones in place. Writing to his father in 1845, Ruskin admits that

[36] It is worth noting here that what came to be the conventional picturesque in mid-19th century England is not accepted by Ruskin as "true picturesque." In "Of Turnerian Picturesque" in *Modern Painters*, we see Ruskin dismiss this as "a valid aesthetic category." As Hugh Witemeyer writes, "Ruskin's preference was all for the sublime, and he argued that the qualities of roughness, variety, irregularity, and chiaroscuro are in fact qualities of the sublime which connoisseurs of the picturesque mistakenly transfer from mountains, trees, and other sublime natural growths to cottages, ruins, and other objects that are not inherently sublime. He thus defined conventional picturesqueness as a parasitical sublimity, and since it was in his view an entirely superficial effect, he called it also the 'surface-picturesque'. The apprehension of the surface-picturesque involves a failure of the moral-aesthetic imagination, according to Ruskin, for the viewer not only fails to grasp the true nature of what he contemplates, but he also fails to sympathize with the human suffering which ruins and broken cottages so often imply" (142-143).

attempting to draw the cathedral porch in Abbeville, France, is a melancholy undertaking: "I seem born to conceive what I cannot execute, recommend what I cannot obtain, and mourn over what I cannot save" (qtd. in Links 14). But the only choices other than mourning are acceptance or despair. Ruskin neither accepts this destruction nor despairs over it; he writes *The Stones of Venice*. In Ruskin's assessment, the growth of industrial cities threatened the cultural holdings of all of Europe. On a return trip to Venice, the entirely new construct of the railway bridge viewed from Mestre horrified him because it "[cut] off the whole open sea and half the city, which now looks as much as possible like Liverpool at the end of the dockyard wall" (qtd. in Shapiro 37).

While restoration is not possible, preservation – through the reparation elegy provides – is. As I argued in chapter one, no real consolation was possible for Tennyson's lost Hallam, but clearly the poem itself preserves the memory of Hallam and the ongoing process of the poet's loss. It is not the dead Hallam Tennyson mourns but the live one not yet buried. So too Ruskin's interest is in the decaying building, not the one already decayed. Architecture functions in much the same way for Ruskin as poetry does for Tennyson. For the entirely decayed, Ruskin advises his audience to "Accept it...pull the building down...but do it honestly, and do not set up a Lie in [its] place" (8.244). But for the buildings in the process of dying, he says, "Take proper care of [them], and you will not need to restore them." Ruskin's interest in preserving the architectural past is clearly linked to his interest in maintaining moral integrity of form in the present.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that buildings are simply an extended metaphor for Ruskin or merely something he uses in order to illustrate his arguments about society. Architecture both represents and embodies-- is simultaneously literal and

metaphoric, material and spiritual. Ruskin claims that the public has no understanding of the value of its public monuments or of the word "restoration." To them, it means "the most total destruction which a building can suffer: a destruction out of which no remains can be gathered...Do not let us deceive ourselves in this important matter; it is impossible, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture" (8.242). Clearly, Ruskin's discourse is open to and includes the subject of nationalism.

The loss of ancient architecture mirrors the loss of the natural environment happening in Victorian England. Since they are surrogates for nature, the destruction of old buildings is never acceptable to Ruskin:

> certainly not now, when the place of both the past and future is too much usurped in our minds by the restless and discontented present. The very quietness of nature is gradually withdrawn from us; thousands who once in their necessary influence, from the silent sky and slumbering fields...now bear with them even there the ceaseless fever of their life; and along the iron veins that traverse the frame of our country, beat and flow the fiery pulses of its exertion, hotter and faster every house...the country is passed over like a green sea by narrow bridges, and we are thrown back in continually closer crowds upon the city gates. (8.246)

However, while clearly mourning the loss of a pastoral landscape here, Ruskin goes on to offer architecture as the replacement for it in an urban setting saying, "The only influence which can in any wise there [in the city] take the place of that of the woods and fields, is the power of ancient Architecture" (8.246). This comment grows from Ruskin's

discussion of architecture as an extension of the human and a way to build continuity across time: "if men lived like men, their houses would be temples," which would honor our ancestors and "make our dwellings sacred to our children" (8.226). Assessing then the relationship between the material and the spiritual, Ruskin writes,

> And I look upon those pitiful concretions of lime and clay which spring up...out of the kneaded fields about our capital—upon those thin, tottering, foundationless shells of splintered wood and imitated stone—upon those gloomy rows of formalised minuteness, alike without difference and without fellowship, as solitary as similar—not merely with the careless disgust of an offended eye, not merely with sorrow for a desecrated landscape, but with a painful foreboding that the roots of our national greatness must be deeply cankered... (8.226)

Ruskin could see in the decline of the physical the spiritual decay of English culture, and he read in the 'thin, tottering, foundationless shells' of English architecture a warning that his society must make a change and one more dramatic and absolute than they could yet conceive. Although this excerpt sounds like Ruskin is not far from despair, he has yet to write what would become one of the most influential chapters of any nineteenth century text.

"The Nature of Gothic," the sixth chapter in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*, inspired men and women of nineteenth century England and America to pursue "good work" that would be creative rather than imitative. This philosophical treatise on the nature of Gothic architecture and its relationship to the workers who made it, and to workers as a whole, connects Ruskin's study of ancient architecture with his hopes for the

future of architecture and society more generally. It is here that he tells us of "a fantastic paradox" that is "nevertheless a most important truth": "…no architecture can be truly noble which is not imperfect" (10.202). The variation so important in nature is also important in man's handling of architecture, and the working conditions of those who build will be reflected in the final structure they erect:

> For since the architect, whom we will suppose capable of doing all in perfection, cannot execute the whole with his own hands, he must either make slaves of his workmen in the old Greek, and present English fashion, and level his work to a slave's capacities, which is to degrade it; or else he must take his workmen as he finds them, and let them show their weaknesses together with their strength, which will involve the Gothic imperfection, but render the whole work as noble as the intellect of the age can make it. (10.202)

For Ruskin, imperfection is "essential to all we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body…a state of progress and change" (10.203). To illustrate the way in which time enters into this perspective of imperfection, Ruskin writes, "Nothing that lives is, or can be, rigidly perfect; part of it is decaying, part nascent. The foxglove blossom,--a third part bud, a third part past, a third part in full bloom,--is a type of the life of this world. And in all things that live there are certain irregularities and deficiencies which are not only the signs of life, but sources of beauty" (10.203). Human imperfection and its record in architecture are clearly bound up with the passage of time here. And a discussion of time is critical to understanding *The Stones of Venice* as elegy capable of offering architecture as a replacement for the lost pastoral. For while Ruskin's interest in

the decaying is ever present, so too is his interest in the nascent.

Not surprisingly, there is little consensus in Ruskin studies about the phase of his writing career dominated by architectural pursuits. In his insightful (and slightly irreverent) essay "Sex and the City—Death in Venice: An Argument about Ruskinian Myth," Robert Hewison reviews the many and varied theories scholars have offered for reading *The Stones of Venice*. He examines the psycho-sexual readings put forth and popularized by "distinguished and serious figures"[37] and rightly expresses skepticism about their claims: "John Rosenberg's admirable and influential *The Darkening Glass*...pays tribute to *The Stones of Venice*, yet also somehow diminishes its achievement. [Rosenberg] says, 'When Ruskin was writing the book in Venice, he was in fact more wedded to the city than to his wife […]. The one marriage was never consummated; the other produced the most elaborate and eloquent monument to a city in our literature'" (38). According to Hewison, Rosenberg's 1961 reading "set in train a series" of critical interpretations in this vein, which is to say, the autobiographical reading. My study incorporates Ruskin's personal experiences without depending upon them for the interpretation of his works.

One charge traditionally brought against Ruskin's writings on architecture in the mid-late twentieth century is the claim that Ruskin only sees architecture in two dimensions and the related claim that Ruskin refused to see buildings structurally or as "construction" (Frankl 561; Evans 141). In his study entitled *Looking at Architecture with Ruskin*, John Unrau attempts to refute both of these charges by examining Ruskin's

[37] Hewison names specifically John Rosenberg, Richard Ellman, Pawl Sawyer, J.B. Bullen, Dinah Birch and Francis O'Gorman.

attention to detail and explaining his understanding of the part in relationship to the whole, as well as emphasizing Ruskin's own distinction between mere building and good architecture. Ruskin asserts that there cannot be "any good architecture which is not based on building, nor any good architecture which is not based on good building; but it is perfectly easy, and very necessary, to keep the ideas distinct, and to understand fully that Architecture concerns itself only with those characters of an edifice which are above and beyond its common use" (8.29).

Unfortunately, Unrau's own aims prohibit him from effectively defending Ruskin against these charges. Describing his book as a survey of "Ruskin's contribution as an observer and analyst of architectural composition" which "deliberately ignores the ethical, religious, and historical theories woven round architecture in his writings," Unrau makes a critical mistake in supposing that one can (or should) extricate the 'ethical, religious, and historical theories' from Ruskin's architectural writings (7). As Unrau points out, Ruskin is himself interested in and capable of fine distinctions—between 'building' and 'architecture' for instance; however, even in such situations, Ruskin reminds the reader that "It may not be always easy to draw the line so sharply..." (8.29). The architectural in Ruskin links directly to the political as does the historical to the social.

Dinah Birch rightly observes that the "active work for social and political reform that dominated Ruskin's later decades is rooted in the same elegiac spirit that had first informed his work on Turner's behalf..." in the first two volumes of *Modern Painters*; however, she is wrong in her assessment that the "transition to a more public and political model of criticism" was a jarring one ("Elegiac Voices" 332). That 'same elegiac spirit'

of the early Ruskin provides us with the lines of a pattern to follow throughout his work. Certainly, Ruskin's pattern is a complex and expanding one. I do not mean to suggest otherwise; however, reading the body of work as if it is written by three separate Ruskins, as Birch does, robs us of the richness that reading Ruskin through the lens of elegy provides. Instead, we can find in Ruskin's work an underlying logic of elegy which reveals the transformative power of grief in the Victorian period and allows us to read the parts of his work—whether art criticism, architectural writing, or autobiography—as intricately connected to one another. Considering Ruskin's writings as elegy allows us to see the tremendous influence his work had in shaping the expressive potential of non-fiction prose.

Chapter Three

Elegiac Synthesis:
Action as Consolation in *Fors Clavigera*

It cannot be denied that the aspect of the world and this country, to those who have faith in the spiritual nature of man, is at this time dark and distressful.

Benjamin Disraeli
~*Preface to his Collected Works (1870)*

Published serially in pamphlet format from 1871-1884,[38] John Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* responds to England's political stance of distancing itself from the foreign responsibilities of the Franco-Prussian war and to the growing poverty and desperation of England's own working class. Ruskin thus addresses the first of his series of ninety-six letters to the "workmen and laborers" of Great Britain. Such an audience had already been sought and addressed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who asked in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) that the workers of the world unite. However, Ruskin's conception of 'workmen and labourers' was wider than theirs.[39] He did not mean only workers in the capitalist system but included in his intended readership any workers who could accomplish useful work, as Ruskin defined 'useful,' or wanted to do so.

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[38] I would like to point out that while the letters were published serially, they were published monthly from 1871-1878, after which Ruskin's illness intervened. From that point on, the letters were published at somewhat irregular intervals until 1884. See Cook & Wedderburn, Vol. 27, xvii.

[39] The extreme version of this argument is Dinah Birch's in her introduction to a new edition of selections from *Fors*. She claims that Ruskin used these terms in the broadest sense. While I agree that Ruskin saw good work as possible for anyone, he actually DID mean to address workmen. I find the rationalization and/or defense of Ruskin's level of difficulty that he wasn't actually writing for whom he said misguided at best and condescending or dismissive at worst. See Birch's intro (xxxiii).

From the first letter, "Looking Down from Ingleborough," we learn that the author's motivation for writing is born of a desire to *do* something –to act rather than merely observe "this state of things": "I will endure it no longer quietly; but henceforward, with any few or many who will help, do my poor best to abate this misery" (27.13). [40] In this chapter I argue that Ruskin's act of writing *Fors Clavigera* is both elegiac and consolatory. What is most noteworthy and original, however, is that in order to achieve successful consolation, Ruskin has to produce a new kind of elegy. The ninety-six letters which constitute *Fors* make the generic rules of elegy unrecognizable, except for those who look very closely. In earlier chapters I suggested that Ruskin was able to transfer his hopes for consolation from the pastoral landscape to the realm of Gothic or 'naturalized' architecture. By the 1870s Ruskin had become so frustrated with the architecture (even the "New Gothic") of his age that he felt that he had not been rightly understood or heeded as an architectural critic. In *Fors Clavigera*, he sees another chance to address the two primary losses which haunt him: the loss of a rural way of life and the loss of human connection to work.

The letters in *Fors Clavigera* build on one another in ways which make it difficult to accurately explicate individual letters. Collecting or revising obscure terms and creating entirely new terms (such as the title, *Fors Clavigera*, itself), which define his purposes and his hopes for the reader, makes Ruskin's dense referential web a serious

[40] The letters began during the Franco-Prussian war. Paris was under siege twice during the time of the first six letters, and as a member of the Mansion House Committee for the relief of starving Parisians, Ruskin was exposed to events of suffering which succeeded in "healing his anger and quickening his compassion" (E.T. Cook, introduction to Vol. 27, page *li*). To Ruskin's horror, English politicians and capitalists were enthusiastic about the war's contribution to the "unexampled prosperity of the country," which did not include the working class.

challenge to a coherent reading of the whole body of letters. Indeed, *Fors* has long been known as a "baffling text."[41] Leslie Stephen, writing shortly after Ruskin's death, dismissed *Fors Clavigera* as "one of the curiosities of literature," calling it a work of "morbid irritability of brain" not worthy of serious attention.[42] Another of Ruskin's contemporaries wrote that *Fors* "is on the very border line that marks off rational discourse from the morbid wanderings of the mind" (Harrison 181). Even early twentieth-century critic R.H. Wilenski surmised that *Fors* can be reduced to a symptom of Ruskin's mental illness (121).

Unfortunately, such dismissive views of *Fors* held sway for most of the twentieth century and have hindered the entrance of this amazing work into the canon of nineteenth century prose. I believe, in fact, that these letters mark the climax of an extraordinary development in the genre of elegy and offer us a pivotal text for understanding the complex relationships between the Victorians and their descendants.[43] In this chapter I focus on the development of Ruskin's elegiac voice in *Fors* and explore the implications of consolatory action it makes possible for Ruskin and his audience.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the logic of elegy works as a dilating consciousness between life and death. It makes the present moment the most pregnant, but that moment maintains concurrently a certain (or seemingly certain) past and an

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[41] Dinah Birch refers to *Fors* in this way in "Ruskin's Multiple Writing: *Fors Clavigera*" (175).

[42] *National Review* 35 (April 1900), 240-255.; reprinted in J.L. Bradley, ed., *Ruskin: The Critical Heritage*, 420.

[43] One of the exciting, though largely uncharted, trends in Ruskin studies today is how his writing influences Modernists. See, for example, the collection of essays by various Ruskin scholars entitled *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern* (Ed. Dinah Birch).

uncertain future. In this way, mourning what is lost preserves the past as present and delays the embrace of a future in which the loss will be complete. Beyond critical emphasis on madness, fragmentation, and disorder, *Fors* has been noted more accurately for its immediacy, for its "directness of address [and] startlingly intimate voice" (Helsinger 117). Elizabeth Helsinger and Judith Stoddart see this as a genuine strength as does Francis O'Gorman who convincingly argues that the serial publications Ruskin comments upon regularly in *Fors* "signify the immediate conditions of its production and constitute potential points of correspondence between *Fors* and its implied readers' other reading activities" (124). O'Gorman's argument is an interesting reading of Ruskin's intentional provocation of audience in order to give the reader a chance to complete the "daunting work" of reading them (128).

Critics such as Jeremy Tambling propose, however, that Ruskin creates only a "fiction of immediacy" in order to show that "everything revolves around himself, and his utterance" (219). In order to support his claim, Tambling points to Ruskin's inclusion of material from other serial publications and what O'Gorman calls "ephemeral authorities" in order to show Ruskin's 'trick' of making himself *sound* objective and truthful ("Approaching Madness" 198; "Ruskin and Particularity" 123). But as we shall see in Ruskin's use of periodical clippings from the *Pall Mall Gazette* included in "Cradle Song" (Letter 24), Ruskin's act of selection is rhetorically honest, if not transparent. That is, Ruskin makes no effort to hide the reasons for his juxtaposition of particular contemporary happenings with the historical or mythological tales in *Fors*. He has brought these particular notices to the public's attention a second time in order to

show them in connection to one another and in order to bring them into participation with his ongoing elegiac discourse.

As I have maintained throughout this study, conventional elegies, even those as innovative and experimental as Tennyson's *In Memoriam,* embody the process of grief and move toward an ending that, in some way, consoles the griever. It is not surprising that some of the most powerful letters of *Fors* are written just after a death in Ruskin's life-- his father, his mother, his great love, Rose LaTouche—but it is with Loss more generally that *Fors* contends. In other words, Ruskin's prose elegies certainly respond to personal loss, revealing Ruskin's own process of grief (as well as the attendant confusion, anger, and anxiety) over individual losses; however, these involve the reader in that grieving process by linking her to the proliferation of loss in their shared society.[44] Reducing Ruskin's work of mourning to the personal, as so many scholars have done when discussing *Fors*, overlooks the complex elegiac reciprocity between Ruskin and his audience as well as the opportunity for consolation it affords both. Part of what makes *Fors Clavigera* unique is Ruskin's ability to gain his readers' participation in a problem he is not at all sure he can solve. Just as in Ruskin's treatment of the lost pastoral landscape from his youth or in his outcry over the loss of ancient architecture, the difficulty with Ruskin's elegies for multitudinous loss is that a final move to consolation appears impossible. That it is instead quite possible compels my scholarly turn toward Ruskin's rhetorical action in *Fors* and the real-world applications enacted beyond its pages.

[44] I would add that twenty-first century readers can relate to a similar proliferation of loss in today's society.

Before explicating particular letters to support my claim, it may be helpful to consider the origin and meanings of *Fors Clavigera* as well as the literary foundations for it. The contrast between what Ruskin's predecessors were attempting to achieve and Ruskin's own goals are apparent when we examine the differences. As Robert Hewison and many others have noted, Thomas Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) provided an important precedent for Ruskin's project of public letters; however, Ruskin had developed a voice independent of Carlyle in his many public lectures during the 1850s - 1860s and in *Time and Tide* (1867), a series of twelve letters addressed to the cork-cutter Thomas Dixon. In the second volume of Ruskin's biography*, John Ruskin: The Later Years* (New Haven, 2000), Timothy Hilton interprets *Fors Clavigera* as "a capacious extension of Carlyle's pamphlets" claiming Ruskin's letters share Carlyle's "recklessness" and display the same "personal torment and… dark abhorrence of the modern world" (187). While it is certainly true that these qualities exist in *Fors*, they do not dominate it. Instead, the active work of *Fors* provides Ruskin with consolation that eludes Carlyle in his contemplations of the 'modern world'. Other nineteenth century non-fiction experiments that are partially analogous to *Fors* include Cobbett's *Political Register* (1802-1835) and Matthew Arnold's *Friendship's Garland* (1871), but as Dinah Birch aptly observes in her introduction to a new selection of letters from *Fors*, these forerunners cannot "match the range of reference and intimacy of tone that characterizes *Fors Clavigera*" (xxxiv). In order to demonstrate this range, we need only turn to the title itself.

Ruskin explains his choice of the Latin title, *Fors Clavigera*, over an English one in the second letter entitled "The Great Picnic" (1 February 1871): "I can only tell you in

part, for the Letters will be on many things, if I am able to carry out my plan in them; and [the] title means many things, and is in Latin, because I could not have given an English one that meant so many" (27.27) We find out that the Latin word "fors" can mean in English "force," "fortitude," or "fortune." Ruskin is not content to reveal only the English translation but lays out for the audience *his* precise usage of them: "'Force' (in humanity), means power of doing good work… 'Fortitude' means the power of bearing necessary pain, or trial of patience… [and] 'Fortune' means the necessary fate of a man: the ordinance of his life which cannot be changed" (27.28). While the multiplicity inherent in these possibilities continues to both excite and frustrate readers of *Fors*, it also allows a space for the fruition of my argument. Signaling its hybridity in the title, Ruskin announces the innovative conception of the work as a whole. While he promises the audience that he will reveal some of what he means in this particular letter ("The Great Picnic"), he also *forces* the reader to wait and see. Thus, the writing of *Fors* allows Ruskin the power of doing good work while the reading of *Fors* allows the audience to develop the fortitude necessary to join the work.

The second half of the title, *Clavigera*, is a combination of two Latin words- "clava" and "gero." Clava means a club; clavis, a key; and clavus, a nail. "Gero" means "I carry" (also the root word for the English word "gesture"), which leads Ruskin finally to say that his word "clavigera" can mean club-bearer, key-bearer, or nail-bearer. For the climax of the title's explanation, Ruskin puts all of these possible meanings together to explain the multiple purposes and personalities the letters will take. The good work of *Fors*- meditation, mourning, and social action- will mean that Ruskin (and his audience) must accept, as part of his work, the pain of fortitude and the direction of his own fate as

well as express the qualities of "Fors, the Club-bearer," "Fors, the Key-bearer," and "Fors, the Nail-bearer."[45] In this way, Ruskin imagines the reader as a kind of co- author who will influence the shape of what ultimately "comes" of the letters. Therefore, the work itself is multiple and discursive and purposefully so.

Multiplying over the years of its composition, one purpose of *Fors* remains clear throughout- to introduce the Guild of St. George, attract supporters for the guild, and report on its charitable work. Although I would disagree with O'Gorman's categorization of the letters as the "organ" of the Guild, it is importantly and certainly that at times. Of more interest to me here is the habit of elegiac discourse with which Ruskin is conditioning his audience. Linda Austin recognizes, as would any casual reader of *Fors*, Ruskin's habit of continual deferral when it comes to fully explaining the Guild of St. George and its workings. But she misinterprets what those deferrals mean.

In a chapter from *The Practical Ruskin* entitled "Leveling Down: Words Proposed and Practical," Austin claims that Ruskin's deferrals of explanation resulted in a devaluation of his word. She writes, "As a result, during the exchange between the writer and readers, the letters fell in value. Subject to the Ricardian law of diminishing returns, they had, like much-tilled land, a decreasing yield, because they were a limited commodity based on a finite meaning. Their source was an aging, sick man at his productive limits" (128). But Ruskin does not write in a system "subject to the Ricardian law of diminishing returns." It is, perhaps, unfair to expect readers—Victorian, modern,

[45] Ruskin further explains that the club-bearer has the strength of Hercules, or of Deed, the key-bearer has the strength of Ulysses, or Patience, and the nail-bearer refers to the strength of Lycurgus, or of Law (27.28).

or postmodern—to follow all of the connecting threads of Ruskin's web, but I believe it is not only possible but necessary to see the shape of the entire web and to trace the lines of patterns within.

Elegiac Anger in "The Great Picnic" and "The White- Thorn Blossom"

In addition to "explaining" the title of the series in the second letter, Ruskin also introduces the angry opening tone common to elegists. Grieving over the lost connection between people and their work, Ruskin openly blames this loss on capitalists like J.S. Mill whose designation in a local newspaper as "the greatest thinker in England" Ruskin ironically repeats (27.33). Ruskin asks an audience so ready to question the motives of squires to consider the motives of capitalist employers and to think for themselves: "Is it necessary, absolutely to look to [others] for employment? Is it inconceivable that you should employ yourselves?" (27.31). Ruskin is angry both with Mill's commodification of labor and with the willingness of the English working class to be employed at anything so long as they are paid. In his view, the worker should want the right kind of work: "If it is only occupation you want, why do you cast the iron? Forge it in the fresh air, on a workman's anvil; make iron-lace like this of Verona then you may have some joy of it afterwards, and pride…But I think it is pay that you want, not work…" (27.37). Of course the worker wants pay; how else is he to survive in a capitalist society? But it is precisely the capitalist society that raises Ruskin's anger and compels him to convince his fellow citizens to question the assumptions inherent in such a system. Distinctions between useless and useful labor are therefore of the utmost importance.

The letter's title, "The Great Picnic," comes from one of the stories Ruskin uses to demonstrate the difference between labor supported by capital (Mill's notion of labor) and labor unsupported by capital (Ruskin's notion of labor). We are told first of a great picnic held by the wealthy who decide to give the leftovers of their sumptuous meal to some nearby ragged, hungry children, but they will only do so on the condition that the children agree to pull each other's hair (for the amusement of the picnickers). Such is labor supported by capital, and in addition to being mean, it is useless. A second illustration of useless labor is drawn from the men, common to the East End of London in late Victorian England, walking about with advertising boards strapped over their heads "one Lie pinned to the front…and another to the back" (27.43). Paid for this "work" of advertising, the men neither produce nor learn anything useful. On the other hand, Ruskin argues that labor unsupported by capital necessarily accomplishes some end result that is useful. He gives the example of idle men being asked to help a man stuck in a ditch with his cart and horses. The bystanders gladly assist the distressed driver, successfully getting driver, cart, and horses out of the ditch and up a hill. Their labor is not supported by capital but clearly accomplishes good work nonetheless.

Ruskin returns to his criticism of Mill throughout the letters of *Fors*, but the criticism is particularly harsh in the first year largely because it coincides with Cambridge's publication of Mill's *Manual of Political Economy* (1871). Three months after "The Great Picnic," in the May letter entitled "The White-Thorn Blossom," Ruskin christens Mill's manual "the Cambridge Catechism" and derides Mill's definition of labor, which states "[Labour is] that which produces utilities fixed and embodied in material objects" (27.64). In a consideration of the individual meanings of these words,

Ruskin deconstructs Mill's definition, claiming that what it really means is "Productive labour is labour that produces a Useful Thing" (27.65). Ruskin concludes that if Mill had simply said what he meant, someone might ask, "'What things are useful, and what are not?'" And since according to Ruskin, "Mr. Mill does not know, nor any other Political Economist going", Mill has simply adopted, and the English citizenry accepted, a convenient if meaningless terminology. In place of 'useful things,' they have substituted 'utilities fixed and embodied in material objects' (27.66). The changes to the English labor system, as indicative of human relationships to nature and to one another, reiterate and prophesy the losses Ruskin mourns over the course of the fourteen year production of *Fors*.

A turn to Ruskin's twentieth letter, "Benediction," allows us to see such mourning in an elegiac form that is quite different from the "architectural writings" of *The Seven Lamps* and *The Stones of Venice* we examined in chapter two; yet it contains the same logic of elegy and further clarifies Ruskin's elegiac discourse. The letter, written during a summer stays in Venice[46] (August 1872), is literally punctuated by the steam whistle of the *Capo d'Istria* interrupting Ruskin as he contemplates the blessings and curses of his era. I begin analysis of it as an elegy by noting the address, "My friends," with which Ruskin opens the letter. A small detail, perhaps, but one which reminds us importantly of audience. Like rituals, "elegies are sociable, uniting communities disrupted by death, promoting civic values or negotiating loyalties and

[46] Locations are important in *Fors*; often Ruskin composes parts of a single letter in multiple locations. Taking in new experiences and translating the relevance of those for his own generation, Ruskin draws attention to place in order emphasize not only the visual elements of landscape but also historical and spiritual resonances particular to individual settings.

allegiances" (Brady 2). Ruskin's elegies, like ancient elegy, suggest the dynamics of a public performance and give the impression "that the poet, like the old minstrel, is addressing a circle of listeners" (Jauss 131).

Ruskin immediately asks that circle of listeners to consider time: "My friends, -- You probably thought I had lost my temper, and written inconsiderately, when I called the whistling of the Lido steamer 'accursed'" (27.334). Ruskin is referring to the July letter of *Fors* published the previous month. The audience will be expected to consider the relationship between the past and the present throughout this elegy, so it is an appropriate opening. Also important is Ruskin's reminder of two specific benedictions he explained in an earlier letter, which serve to prove it is necessary for the English public to know more about the "contrary states of accursedness and blessedness that Ruskin sets out to define" (Rosenberg 78).[47]

From here, the letter turns to an extraordinary performance. John D. Rosenberg describes the form of the letter as a combination of "sermon and personal letter" that transforms into "a uniquely Ruskinian 'Epistle'" (*Elegy for an Age* 78). While it is true that Ruskin alludes to a biblical text from James regarding blessing and cursing, the performance is unlike a sermon as well. It is, for instance, intentionally divided by Ruskin's dates of composition, which denote a three day period. Certainly, the letter is a personal one as Rosenberg suggests, but it draws on history, current technological innovations in travel and commerce, as well as art. What connects these subjects in

[47] The two specific benedictions are the general one engraved on the bell of Lucca, and the particular benediction "bestowed on the Marquis of B." (27.334). See Letter 18 (27.307) for the blessing on the bell of Lucca and (27.304) for the blessing given to the Marquis.

Ruskin's elegy is what links the parts of any elegy: the theme of loss, the experience of ruin, the process of mourning.

The section of "Benediction" written on the first day asks the audience to move from its understanding of the way churches bless and curse to an understanding of its personal practice of blessing and cursing. Abruptly, Ruskin introduces the "little screw steamer" that is "just passing" as he writes; it has "no deck, an omnibus cabin, a flag at both ends, and a single passenger" (27.335). The audience learns the size of the steamer ("not twelve yards long") and is made to hear the "beating of her screw" which Ruskin writes has been "so loud across the lagoon for the last five minutes, that I thought it must be a large new steamer coming in from the sea, and left my work to go and look" (27.335). The next paragraph opens, "Before I had finished writing that last sentence, the cry of the boy selling something black out of a basket on the quay became so sharply distinguished above the voices of the…gondoliers, that I must needs stop again, and go down to the quay to see what he had got to sell…" These interruptions are significant for many reasons, not least of which is the way they capture the noise and speed of Venice's industrialization. Still, I consider them as elegiac delays. Focusing on the immediacy of the actions taking place around him in this moment, Ruskin allows the interruptions to create a kind of buffer zone where he can rest before taking in the grief of loss which he will experience when he leaves the room and goes down to the quay.

The half-rotten figs Ruskin finds when he reaches the quay and the "blessing"—arguably meaningless—he bestows on the boy selling them bring the audience back to the question of how the interruptions connect to the question of blessing and cursing

Ruskin has asked them to consider. By the close of the first day's writing,[48] Ruskin has informed his audience that it has recently acquired a "habit" of cursing even in "the ordinary course of conversation" and left them with the question of why this is prevalent among them.

Day two, a rather short section, but the one which best illustrates the painful process of mourning Ruskin is performing, examines the principal forms of cursing in English—"God damn your soul"—the curse upon the spirit—and "God damn your eyes and limbs"—the curse upon the physical body. Without warning, Ruskin brings the reader into the moment in which he writes. Like the section from the first day, interruptions delay the performance, but this time, the description is not in the past tense. There is no explanation as the states of blessedness and cursedness proceed together – recorded by Ruskin and quoted here at length – as they happen:

> Again, with regard to the limbs, or general powers of the body. Do you suppose that when it is promised that "the lame shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing"-- (Steam-whistle interrupts me from the *Capo d'Istria*, which is lying in front of my window with her black nose pointed at the red nose of another steamer at the next pier. There are nine large ones at this instant,--half past six, morning, 4th July, --lying between the Church of the Redeemer and the Canal of the Arsenal: one of them an ironclad, five smoking fiercely, and the biggest,--English and half a quarter of a mile long,--blowing steam from all manner of pipes in her sides, and

[48]I suppose it cannot really be called a "close" as the section just ends. Ruskin picks it up the next day with no introduction.

> with such a roar through her funnel—whistle number two from *Capo d'Istria*—that I could not make any one hear me speak in this room without an effort), --do you suppose, I say, that such a form of benediction is just the same as saying that the lame man shall leap as a lion, and the tongue of the dumb shall mourn? Not so, but a special manner of action of the members is meant in both cases: (whistle number three from the *Capo d'Istria*; I am writing on, steadily, so that you will be able to form an accurate idea, from this page, of the intervals of time in modern music. The roaring from the English boat goes on all the while, four bass to the *Capo d'Istria*'s treble, and a tenth steamer comes in sight round the Armenian Monastery)—a particular kind of activity is meant, I repeat, in both cases. The lame man is to leap, (whistle fourth from *Capo d'Istsria*, this time at high pressure, going through my head like a knife) as an innocent and joyful creature leaps, and the lips of the dumb to move melodiously: they are to be blest, so; may not be unblest even in silence; but are the absolute contrary of blest, in evil utterance. (Fifth whistle, a double one, from *Capo d'Istria*, and it is seven o'clock, nearly; and here's my coffee, and I must stop writing. Sixth whistle—the *Capo d'Istria* is off, with her crew of morning bathers. Seventh,--from I don't know which of the boats outside—and I count no more.)
>
> (27.341-342)

Much has been made of this passage and its comparison to modern poetry. The interruptions are not secondary, but primary. They simultaneously delay the performance

of the writer and become it. The working out of what it means to be blessed or cursed grows more complicated for Ruskin and for modernity. Entering the present-ness of the letter, a reader enters into Ruskin's already ongoing elegiac discourse but participates without yet experiencing the consolation both author and audience seek.

The elaborate explanation of blessing depicted in Carpaccio's painting *The Dream of St. Ursula* which follows contrasts sharply with the embodiment of cursed souls Ruskin sees in the two American sisters traveling cross country in a carriage. Like the whistles of the *Capo d'Istria,* they too are simply breaking up time, as it were, and in no very satisfactory way. Ruskin closes the letter with contrasting descriptions of a chapel, St. Mary's of the Thorn in Pisa, as it was in 1840 and as it is as he writes in 1872. In 1840, at six hundred and ten years old, it was "as perfect as when it was built," the "marble of it a tempered glow" and the "sculpture touched here and there with softer shade" (27.349). Ruskin included his drawing of St. Mary's as the frontispiece to "Benediction" with the intention of "show[ing] you what the building was like" (27.349). But in 1872, he witnessed its intentional destruction by an Italian stone-breaker who had been employed to tear down the chapel in order to make room for its more modern replacement.

In the pages of *Fors* Ruskin laments, "And now in 1872, rowing by steam, digging by steam, driving by steam, here, behold, are a troublesome pair of human arms out of employ. So the Engineering missionaries fit them with hammer and chisel, and set them to break up the Spina Chapel" (27.349). Despite the very real pressures of unemployment and revolution, Ruskin finds this a "costly kind of stone-breaking…for Italian parishes to set paupers on!" As we have already seen in Ruskin's architectural

writings, to disregard history and destroy architecture which embodies goodness in men and nature is to curse one's own self and one's society as well. *Fors Clavigera*, governed by the same elegiac logic as that of Ruskin's architectural writings, is quite different in its expression. The underlying patterns are similar, but the medium of *Fors* carries greater urgency for both writer and reader.

In the Cradle about to Break: England at Christmas 1872

Four months later, in the Christmas letter of 1872, Ruskin ends the second year of *Fors* with a haunting "cradle song" for an audience he is no longer willing to address as "My friends" or part from as "faithfully yours" (27.417). Hostile, satirical, yet intoned with genuine distress, "Cradle Song" is sweeping in its span of subjects and difficult to interpret outside of the larger context of *Fors*. What reason has Ruskin to tell the story of the constellations, relate Dante's scheme of Hell's order, investigate the practice of usury[49] in England, lead the reader in a carol by Chaucer, recount the tale of Theseus and Ariadne, AND condemn the sport of rabbit-hunting all in one letter? And why link all of this to a title Ruskin delays explaining for more than half of the letter?

To complicate matters further, Ruskin includes two recent newspaper articles for his audience to consider. The first-- an inquest report for the body of Annie Redfern, aged twenty-eight-- reads like a scene from an Elizabeth Gaskell novel describing the squalor of a nineteenth century working class dwelling. Miss Redfern was "found dead in a cellar at 5, Chicksand Street, Mile End, on the morning of last Sunday" (27.431). We

[49] Ruskin also questions his own motives regarding wealth here.

learn from the remaining article (quoted in full by Ruskin) that she was a fruit-seller who rented a cellar, deemed by the inquest panel as "totally unfit for human habitation," and shared it with her three year old son, who was not found at the scene with her. The reporter speculates that the child has either been devoured by rats or is in a workhouse.

By the time the audience learns that the cradle song Ruskin associates with this incident and the other seemingly random topics is "Hush-a-bye, baby upon the tree top," we are more than a little confused, but shortly the "dawn of intelligence" arrives for us just as it does at some point for children when a nurse sings this not so comforting tune. After all, the next line of the cradle song reveals that "when the wind blows, the cradle will rock," and then the danger is apparent. Ruskin expects us to see a connection between the young dead woman from the *Pall Mall Gazette* article and the old, wealthy, bedridden lady (actually a cousin of Ruskin's) who goes to sleep at night and awakes ten pounds richer because her money is gaining interest at the expense of working class men and women. However, he does not make this connection explicit nor does he say how the "opening" of a circus and other "secular amusements" on Sunday at the Crystal Palace (1870) further emphasize the profoundly disturbing nature of the divide between the rich and poor in English society.

Not long after we have read of Miss Redfern's death due to poverty, Ruskin asks us to consider another article from the same edition of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. This time the subject, even more disturbing, is the chronic and fatal poisoning of infants caused by " 'the extensive practice in manufacturing districts of insidiously narcotizing young children, that they may be the more conveniently laid aside when more lucrative occupations present themselves than that of nursing the baby'" (27.432). Although

Ruskin could have invented such a story to persuade his readers of the deplorable and precarious state of English society in 1872, using a periodical to "present the facts" is more effective. In part, the facts juxtaposed with their ironic introduction (Chaucer's carol requesting the gods grant figs, buttery cakes, honey, oil and wine that the carolers may get drunk and sleep) participate in an elegiac re-casting of the pre-industrial past (notice that the high infant mortality rate is highest in the 'manufacturing districts'). The pre-industrial past is also Ruskin's particular past and the general childhood past of his audience and this angry elegy mourns the loss of the social connection and goodwill Ruskin associated with rural life.

In preparation for the "real life" events recorded in the *Pall Mall*, Ruskin, as he often does in *Fors*, turns to mythology. He summarizes the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, reminding his audience that even though Theseus has been successful in conquering the Minotaur, he will not be reunited with Ariadne. Diana has already killed her in the isle of Naxos; as Ruskin puts it "Theseus returns to Athens alone" (27.428). But things get worse for Theseus, of course, when he forgets to hoist the purple flag his father has given him to raise should he return victorious over the Minotaur. Ruskin interprets this move by Theseus (or rather the move he does not make to exchange the black sail for the purple) not as one due to forgetfulness but as one occasioned by his grief over Ariadne: "Forgot! A sail is so inconspicuous a part of a ship! And one is so likely to forget one's victory, returning, with home on the horizon! But he returned not victorious, at least for Himself;--Diana and Death had been too strong for him. He bore the black sail. And his father, when he saw it, threw himself from the rock of Athens,

and died" (27.429). Seldom does Ruskin tell us so explicitly his meaning, but in this instance he does:

> Of which the meaning is, that we must not mourn for ourselves, lest a worse thing happen to us,--a Greek lesson much to be remembered by Christians about to send expensive orders to the undertaker: unless…they mean by their black vestments to tell the world that they think their friends are in hell. If in Heaven, with Ariadne and the gods, are we to mourn? And if they were fit for Heaven, are we, for ourselves, ever to leave off mourning? (27.429)

Ruskin then completes the telling of the myth: When Theseus arrives on the shore he sends a herald to tell his father he is safe. The herald returns with the news that his father is dead also, and Ruskin's voice enters the story here to lament: "Such welcome has [Theseus] for his good work…In which work he persists, no less, and is redeemed from darkness by Hercules" (27.429-430). Essentially, Ruskin says that Theseus should not mourn for himself but continue with his work in the face of the deaths of his beloved Ariadne and his father *and* concludes that Theseus will never be able to leave off mourning. Hence, the only consolation possible is through the work, and even that must be done without the promise of redemption.

In a roundabout fashion Ruskin moves finally from the good work of Theseus to a contemplation of pleasure in gardens which once were maintained by such work. Another excerpt from a contemporary publication describes the conversion of garden space into "rabbit covers—large patches of rank fern, three or four feet in height, and extending over many acres" (27.435). The resulting "pleasure" is of sportsmen waiting

until “the line of beaters thrash the long ferns with their stout sticks” causing the rabbits to run out in all directions: “The quantity of game thus started was little short of marvelous-the very ground seemed to be alive. Simultaneously with the appearance of the terrified animals the slaughter commenced” (27.435). Operating in a realm where killing anything innocent is defined as pleasure, there can be no easy resolution as the Christmas letter for 1872 closes.

The mourning for an England high up in a rocking cradle expands to mocking (but mocking with a purpose and mocking which remains mourning) as Ruskin pens his most Swiftian ending:

> Of course all this quite natural to a sporting people who have learned to like the smell of gunpowder, sulpher, and gas-tar, better than of violets and thyme. But, puttting the baby-poisioning, pigeon shooting, and rabbit-shooting of to-day in comparison with the pleasures… of Chaucer and his caroling company: and seeing that the present effect of peace upon earth, and well-pleasing in men, is that every nation now spends most of its income in machinery for shooting the best and bravest men, just when they were likely to have become of some use to their fathers and mothers, I put it to you, my friends all, calling you so, I suppose for the last time (unless you are disposed for friendship with Herod instead of Barrabas), whether it would not be more kind and less expensive, to make the machinery a little smaller; and adapt it to spare opium now, and expenses of maintenance and education afterwards (besides no end of diplomacy), by taking our sport in shooting babies instead of rabbits? (27.436)

Ruskin highlights here the inhumanity of an English culture that delights in transforming a garden, previously a place of pleasure, into a place designed to kill innocent creatures (rabbits), which is also done for pleasure.

Similarly, for pleasure derived from profit, though at a distance sufficient enough to seem unconnected, society overdoses and kills its innocent children and neglects those who suffer in poverty. As we have seen in chapter one, elegies of the early to mid-nineteenth century began moving gradually away from the possibilities of consolation or resolution of grief. I assert here that Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* should be read whole and as an elegy that does, finally, offer action as a consolation both to Ruskin and his audience. The close of the December 1872 ("Cradle Song") letter may seem a contradiction. After all, this is the last time Ruskin will sign such a letter to the public "Faithfully yours, John Ruskin." Yet, in this way it anticipates Ruskin's absence and offers the audience what follows a question mark—the space to act, to answer his call to action.

Enacted Beyond Its Pages: The Guild of St. George

Fors Clavigera's participation in a larger elegiac discourse is evident both in Ruskin's writing about and work for the Guild of St. George. This elegiac discourse allows both Ruskin and his audience to practice a more satisfactory consolation than that available within the generic constraints of poetic elegy. It is a mistake to claim, as some critics have,[50] that *Fors* is a failure tied directly to the failure of his "organization," the

[50] See, for example, "Ruskin and Particularity" by Francis O'Gorman.

Guild of St. George. Ruskin never intended the public letters to serve merely as a practical organ for reporting news of the Guild. This is, of course, one of the things they did do, but the greater purpose was to intervene in the thinking lives of the workmen of Great Britain and to establish a discourse wherein Ruskin could grieve what he perceived as the cultural losses of his time and be comforted. The terms of the discourse were genuinely and purposefully undetermined. [51] In this way Ruskin could respond to current issues in the news as well as answer the questions of his audience.[52] In fact, what I am arguing here is that Ruskin, in the absence of consolation, creates his own through a myriad of publications which are also public actions.

The second letter of *Fors* is the first in which the character of St. George is directly referenced. The February 1871 letter closes with St. George's vow: "(1.) To do your own work well, whether it be for life or death. (2.) To help other people at theirs, when you can, and to seek to avenge no injury. (3.) To be sure you can obey good laws before you seek to alter bad ones" (27.44). The next mention of St. George is in the fifth letter, "The White-Thorn Blossom" (May 1871), in connection with Ruskin's proposed St. George's Fund. He calls for others to join him in advancing a better society:

> Are there any of you who are tired of all of this?[53] Any of you, Landlords or Tenants? Employers or Workmen? Are there any landlords,-any

[51] This claim was supported earlier in this chapter when I explicated individual letters, particularly the letter entitled "Cradle Song." See pages 90-95 above.

[52] After the first year of letters, Ruskin began printing and answering some of the questions he received from his readers through the mail.

[53] Ruskin is referring here to the "science of political economy" which he sees as based upon "the desire to defraud" one's neighbors and to live in an industrial society where competition and profit supersede all else.

> masters, - who would like better to be served by men than by iron devils? Any tenants, any workmen, who can be true to their leaders and to each other? Who can vow to work and to live faithfully, for the sake of the joy in their homes? Will any such give the tenth of what they have, and of what they can earn, --not to emigrate with, but to stay in England with; and do what is in their hands and hearts to make her a happy England? (27.95)

It is also in this letter that Ruskin announces he will give ten percent of his net worth to establish St. George's Fund and will subsequently give ten percent of what he can earn to the fund which will buy and secure land in England.[54] This land will be cultivated by Englishmen "with their own hands, and such help of force as they can find in wind and wave" (27.95). Laying out the conditions of his experiment should any agree to help him, Ruskin writes, "We will try to make some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful. We will have no steam-engines upon it, no railroads; we will have no untended or unthought-of creatures on it; none wretched, but the sick; none idle but the dead" (27.96). A reclamation program for the English countryside as well as for the English people, Ruskin's plan is driven as much by grief over the destruction occasioned by "progress" as by hope of what can be. As suggested in his questioning above, he is not at all sure others will respond. If they do not, his plans will "be at an end" (27.96).

Among the specific changes to English life motivating Ruskin to seek consolation in action are the shifts from home economy and communal labor on land to the "modern

[54] Ruskin's initial gift in 1871 was £7000.

science" of economy, as defined by Mill, and machine-centered factory labor. The shift toward modern science extends also to the educational experience of the British public in the form of specialized sciences such as botany, which Ruskin criticizes as too narrow. In order to illustrate his argument, Ruskin tells the story of a friend who has recently attended botany lectures at the British Museum. She reportedly learned that there are "only seven sorts of leaves" and also that "petals were leaves" (27.82-83). Further she recalled the botanist had said that "the object of his lectures would be entirely accomplished if he could convince his hearers that there was no such thing as a flower" (27.83). To so diminish a student's wonder in the natural world in favor of terminology and specialization is both an irresponsible and a sad act to Ruskin.

Modern science also encouraged the invention of new labor-saving technologies that were hailed as harbingers of speed, efficiency, and productivity. Whereas the mainstream trend of public opinion regarded new technology as exciting and useful, Ruskin insisted on questioning the implications and even the usefulness of technologies such as telegraphy and rail travel. Much like Henry David Thoreau in America, Ruskin wonders in the pages of *Fors Clavigera* what point there is "to talk at a distance, when you have nothing to say… [or] to go fast from this place to that, with nothing to do either at one or the other" (27.87). Such powerful mechanizations, Ruskin understands, will lead to such a proliferation of technologies and terminologies that specialization will be unavoidable. Naming the parts rather than seeing the whole, Ruskin worries what will become of British society.

It is, in part, this unsettling worry that drives Ruskin's large-scale education efforts. Educating his fellow citizens about art and architecture since his earliest years as

a public figure, it is not surprising that he continued to instruct others in the 1870s and 1880s. He had lectured widely on art and architecture for two decades, taught drawing at the Working Men's College, published his influential treatise of economy and work in *Unto this Last,* and been elected the first Slade Professor of Art at Oxford in 1869. But, as Stuart Engles points out in *After Ruskin* (2011), the Guild of St. George was the "most direct, and most personal" of all Ruskin's "social interventions" (52). Conceived as a utopian social mission, the Guild, unlike many utopian endeavors, proved to be ground for actual experimentation and reform.

Critical evaluations of the Guild generally pronounce it ineffective, or less generously, a "failure"; however, the social experimentations that grew out of its membership and news of its activities in *Fors* are much more significant than once believed.[55] Even if we simply look at the experiments roundly accepted as failures, such as the Hinksey Road building project, we find that the impact of that project left on the participants makes it at least a partial success. As Slade professor of Art at Oxford, Ruskin used his position as teacher to remind his privileged students of their responsibilities to their fellow citizens and called for their direct involvement in helping to improve their community. One direct application of this was a community service project of sorts to re-design the landscape of the village green of Hinksey and link it to the main road via a new road. Such improvements would beautify a communal space and make work easier for the farmers who had to cross the badly rutted village green in order

[55] The Guild of St. George still exists today. In the conclusion I consider the Guild's legacy in part by describing how Ruskin's vision continues to operate as a result of some of the Guild's programs.

to get to town. In a letter to his friend Henry Acland, Ruskin explained his hopes for this service:

> My chief object is to let my pupils feel the pleasure of useful *muscular* work…that country road under the slope of the hill with its irregular lines of trees, sheltering yet not darkening it, is capable of being made one of the loveliest things in this English world by only a little tenderness and patience in labour. We can get all stagnant water carried away, of course, with the simplest arrangements of all, and we can make… [all] far more beautiful than any college garden can be. (qtd. in Hilton 1.227)

The project was certainly over-ambitious and the work more difficult than Ruskin realized; it was abandoned after a mile of road had been completed. Nevertheless, most of his students supported him. When Ruskin introduced the project to them, one student reported that "When we came away I recall someone saying, 'Well, if he's mad, it's a pity there are not more lunatics in the world,' and this expressed the feeling of all of us" (qtd. in Hilton 1.226).

The writing of *Fors* was only one of Ruskin's many projects in the 1870s, which Dinah Birch describes as a decade with an "exhausting programme of activities" (Introduction 7). But, as she goes on to point out, these activities were not just a "series of self-contained enterprises." In fact, Ruskin's writing of *Fors* and his teaching at Oxford (and the drawing schools and museums set up for a variety of learners) might look fragmentary, but they are all intricately connected just as the individual letters in *Fors* are parts of a conceptual whole. In these multiple efforts, Ruskin sought to establish in his audience an understanding of responsibility towards the natural world and to each

other. Part of achieving this would mean teaching them how to look toward the past, toward the future and be motivated to act in the present. The writing of *Fors Clavigera*, an ongoing and refractive elegy, both expressed Ruskin's grief and offered consolation to Ruskin and his audience. The word and the action come together in a practical and worthy way to address loss, including the loss of a rural way of life and the loss of human connection to work.

Toward a New Understanding of Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera*

Late twentieth century criticism on Ruskin shifted dramatically enough for scholars, such as John Rosenberg, Tim Hilton, Elizabeth Helsinger and Judith Stoddart, to begin examining *Fors* more seriously but not dramatically enough to study it as a coherent whole. That view too is changing in the twentieth-first century, though the old line still holds weight in current critical conversations about *Fors*. In a 2000 article reconsidering Ruskin's impact, cultural and critical, Helsinger writes of *Fors* that its letters are "brilliantly inventive, fitting form to dizzying leaps of association and shifts in tone, and for those with the patience and knowledge to read them- a moving record of a great though troubled mind thinking out loud, or rather writing out loud" ("Millenial Ruskins" 277). Helsinger also claims that Ruskin "forges a new persona by adopting the license of the madness he knew only too well"—an insightful observation but a dangerous one akin to the age old and still slippery question, "Is Hamlet mad or only pretending madness?" Jeffrey Spear decides finally that in *Fors* Ruskin's "Method became madness" ("Furies" 157). Similarly, Jeremy Tambling claims that

"madness…destroys the text of *Fors* [or at least] destroyed it before it had ended" ("Outside Chances" 218).

In her recent introduction to a new selection of letters from *Fors*, Dinah Birch exaggerates the difficulty of the text as a whole when she remarks:

> After 1860, [Ruskin's] writing increasingly took the form of collections of loosely associated essays or lectures. They are books impatient of regular structure, eager to teach, but not content with routine provision of information. *Fors Clavigera* carries this process so far that it is hard to know whether to call it a single publication or a series of separate works. (xviii)

Still, one must decide. By evading this most crucial distinction, Birch makes it seem that such a distinction is impossible. Similarly, the way she deals with Ruskin's madness is strange—perceptive, but not entirely just. Birch, unable to understand Ruskin on his own terms, attempts an unnecessary defense of Ruskin: "Madness and literary genius are, in any case, hardly strangers, and it takes a dull soul to assume that the one prohibits the other. *Fors* is a work that comes from deep within Ruskin's mind, so it inevitably reflects that mind's disturbance. What it gains is a poetic structure of echoing themes and motifs that, again, connect it with modernist writing" (22).[56] Rather than many "echoing

[56] I agree with much of Birch's criticism on Ruskin. I share, for example, at least part of her reading of *Fors Clavigera* as a "deliberately unfinished and layered" work. I also agree with her assessment that they represent a series of different beginnings rather than a perfected artifact. In contrast to Birch, however, I read the multiple beginnings as originating from the same pattern and therefore not abortive. Birch deserves credit for claiming that *Fors* is "revolutionary in form." (xliv) and constitutes a "new literary discourse." Rather than probing what this "new literary discourse" is or how it works, she concludes, rather disappointingly, that whatever Ruskin is doing turns out to be what "made modernism possible."

themes," I identify the main echoing theme as *loss***,** and what Birch's leaves undefined as simply a "motif," I see as the pattern or logic of elegy connecting the disparate moments and seemingly fragmented discussions throughout Ruskin's letters. Are there moments of incoherence? Yes, but even those make greater sense in the context of grief.

Despite the difficulties and hesitations of some celebrated Ruskin scholars, others tease us and leave open the possibility that *Fors Clavigera* is "Ruskin's masterpiece" after all. I say 'tease' because Tim Hilton announces that *Fors* is indeed "Ruskin's masterpiece" in the opening pages of his authoritative biography of Ruskin, yet he fails to elaborate or defend this bold claim. Hilton remarks merely that "nothing else in our literature so diversely and eloquently displays the continuing life of the mind" (xi).[57] As a result, some scholars are left wondering what value this overlooked painting in the attic might actually have.

Perhaps one of the reasons for new interest in *Fors* is the shift in readership and audience response; in the wake of postmodernism, readers are less disturbed by fragmentation and non-linear thought and more willing to see richness in the many textures of *Fors*. Perhaps it is simply that as a result of reading more than the few most famous letters, critics have begun to identify patterns and are able to trace more than they thought possible. Reading *Fors* as one work, admittedly one built through a process of simultaneous design and construction, allows us to see the frame supporting it more

[57] See Hilton's *John Ruskin: The Early Years* (New Haven, 1985), page x-xi. In fairness to these wonderful Ruskin scholars whose work I have read with interest and appreciation, Ruskin did re-iterate throughout *Fors* that there was intentionally no system to his letters: "By the adoption of the title 'Fors,' [fortune] I meant to indicate the desultory and accidental character of the work" (29.315). However, I read the intentional absence of a 'system' as a crucial absence—a kind of planless plan underwritten by an elegiac logic.

clearly. Beneath the digressions, allusions, inter and extra-textual references, the ninety-six letters of *Fors* adhere to an underlying cohesive logic of elegy producing a work more expansive in its form and more extreme in its handling of grief over time than any of Ruskin's non-fiction prose elegies or, I would argue, *any* nineteenth century elegy.

Conclusion

The Cultural and Literary Legacy of John Ruskin

For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone,
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of the singing of the birds is come
Arise, O my fair one, my dove,
And come

~Song of Solomon
The Canticles (epigraph for Letter 5)

As a Utopian ideal the Guild of St. George was only marginally successful. That is, England did not enact the practices of the Guild as set out by Ruskin on a large scale. But as Ruskin states clearly and repeatedly in *Fors Clavigera*, he did not set out to be a political leader or to found a colony. See, for example, Letter 49 from January 1875:

> If the help I plead for come, we will indeed try to make some small piece of English ground beautiful; and if sufficient help come, many such pieces of ground; and on those we will put cottage dwellings, and educate the labourers' children in a certain manner. But that is not founding a colony. It is only agreeing to work on a given system. Any English gentleman who chooses to forbid the use of steam machinery—be it but over a few acres—or will secure a piece of his mountain ground from dog, gun, and excursion party, and let the wild flowers and wild birds live there in peace;--anyone, I say, who will so command either of these things, is doing the utmost I would ask of him… (28.236-237)

He hoped, in the early years, however, that political leaders would be influenced by his ideas and join the work of St. George's Guild, but in the meanwhile, he resolved to make a beginning and enact his principles on whatever small scale he could. By 1875, the Guild had received its first gift of land, upon which agricultural experiments began.

By 1878 Ruskin had acquired for the Guild a small plot of land near Sheffield for the specific purpose of building a museum for workers. In this museum, companions of the Guild would house its "riches"—art and books—for the benefit of the working class. Here, men and women could come for the education usually denied them in the larger English society. In addition to instruction in drawing and art history, workers could come, free of charge, to learn craft-making skills. Setting up the St. George's Museum at Sheffield was indicative of Ruskin's wider efforts. The museum associated with the Guild was one of Ruskin's pet projects until the end of his life; he filled it with specimens of minerals and gems, paintings, drawings, and books from his own collection. Ruskin insisted visitors be encouraged to inspect and handle the museum's holdings. He also allowed parts of the collection to be lent out to other museums and always conceived of the museum as a place of active learning open to all.

An interesting aspect of this moment in the Guild's history lies in the "other" activities Ruskin was pursuing concurrently. As Slade Professor of Art at Oxford, his influence among undergraduates was substantial. And although not experiments of the Guild per say, the founding of the Ruskin Drawing School and the Hinksey road building project[58] were born of the same motivation and expounded the principles of the Guild. In

[58] This is the same road building project to which I referred in chapter three.

convincing more than 80 undergraduates to take on building a road for the betterment of a poor neighboring rural community, Ruskin, and the Vows of St. George[59] he advocated, made a lasting impact on English culture through the young men who participated. One of the road digging 'Captains,' Alexander MacEwen, later recalled:

> Of the living diggers, some are Oxford dons; some, school inspectors; some, masters of great schools; some, Church dignitaries; and two or three are ministers of state, one in India, one in Africa, and one in Egypt. Some nearer home have reached celebrity, and there are other kindly workers of the sort that Ruskin wished to rear who are satisfied with humble places. Not one of them has reason to regret that for a year or two Ruskin was not only an art critic whose judgments claimed his respect, nor an eccentric enthusiast at whose oddities he had a right to smile, but a Master and leader entitled to obedience by his purity, his wisdom, and his insight into the blunders and capacities of educated men, and his single souled insistence on goodness, mercy, and truth. (qtd. in Cairns 59)

Ruskin's belief in the power of good work to influence the Oxford men who would in turn influence England, is as Stuart Engles succinctly puts it, "the Hinksey project's ultimate justification" (105).

Like the road building work at Oxford, much of the Guild's work was a direct result of Ruskin's programs and personality. Some of this work had far-reaching

[59] There were eight articles of St. George's Vow to which members of the Guild must be loyal. Some of these included trusting in the "nobleness of human nature," laboring for one's daily bread by physical means, and agreeing to be faithful to God, country, and the Society of St. George's Guild. For a complete list see Letter 49 in *Fors Clavigera*.

consequences for the English poor, and indeed, for the poor of other nations as well. One of Ruskin's most influential disciples, Octavia Hill (1838-1912), became a prominent social reformer at least partly through his support. She and Ruskin shared disgust for wealthy landlords who turned a blind eye to the unsanitary conditions of their own properties. With Ruskin's financial backing, Hill began renovating and managing a group of rundown houses and was so successful in her endeavor that she became a leader in housing reform for the London poor.

One of the most popular components of her reform philosophy, and the reason some model London tenements survive to this day, was the development of charitable housing trusts. These trusts would set up affordable and clean housing units for workers and offer their investors a 5% return (Lang 51). Under Hill's leadership, derelict properties were reclaimed and a practical social change enacted both inside England's borders and beyond. According to Michael Lang's study *Designing Utopia*, Hill's approach was copied in New York and Philadelphia. In fact, one of the experiments modeled on Hill's advancements remains in existence today; the Ocatavia Hill Housing Association of Philadelphia continues to offer affordable, desirable housing for the working class (51).[60]

Another influential project Ruskin started in 1880 involved the revival of flax growing and cotton spinning and weaving industries at Laxey. Ruskin established a

[60] Today one property of the Octavia Hill Housing Society in Philadelphia consists of apartments and houses grouped around a walled green common space, which dates from 1748. It is called Workman Place. Once part of a working class neighborhood, it is now surrounded by young urban professionals in the downtown area near the Delaware River. Yet it remains a low cost housing project for workers and testifies to the influence of Ruskin in America. See Michael Lang's chapter "Ruskin's Efforts at Practical Town Planning" in *Designing Utopia*.

water-powered mill to support these activities and named it St. George's Mill. Twenty years later, the mill failed, partly due, ironically, to the durability of its cloth which could not compete in a market of cheaper, more disposable products. [61] Primarily comprised of women weavers, this project encouraged a renewal of rural craft and cottage industry that went on long after St. George's Mill closed.

In addition to Ruskin's direct influence or that of the Guild, there was also a proliferation of programs inspired rather than directed by them. A quite successful venture, Langdale Linen Industry (established 1881), run by Albert Fleming and Marian Twelves, proved what was practically possible by those Ruskin motivated to action. Driven by Ruskin's charge to do and to act, Fleming and Twelves attempted "to leave work memorable and useful to the community" (Haslam 16). Their handmade goods, and those of several satellite women collectives in the lakes, became quite popular and provided steady income to the makers.

Another interesting example of the industrial innovations inspired by Ruskin's philosophy, and representative of dozens more, is that of Hardewick Rawnsley, a graduate of Oxford who had attended Ruskin's lectures and worked on the Hinksey road building project, and his wife Edith. In 1884, they had begun offering wood working and metalwork evening classes to the community of Keswick in Cumbria. As Vicar of St. Kentigern's, Rawnsley had the use of parish rooms for these classes. The responses of both the "local lads" who came to learn and the local community who admired, and purchased, their products were so enthusiastic that eventually, the Keswick School of

[61] See E.T. Cook's *Studies* pages 177-178.

Industrial Arts was born. Stuart Engles provides a long list of the school's products in *After Ruskin*. A few of these included: photo frames, mirrors, clock cases, alter crosses, candlesticks, tables, and lamps (72).

Ruskin's cultural legacy extends also to the preservation of natural and scenic spaces in England. Throughout his life, Ruskin gave crucial support to groups attempting to halt the urbanization of the English countryside and preserve open spaces for the common enjoyment of all. His influence helped shape three societies interested in these goals: the Commons Preservation Society (1865); the Kyrle Society (1881); and the National Trust for Places of Historic Interests and Beauty (1895). Two of the three co-founders of the National Trust were Octavia Hill and Reverend Rawnsley, both of which, as I have shown, were students of Ruskin and openly spoke of their philosophical debt to him.[62]

It is appropriate that such community based work grew out of Ruskin's teachings. His dedication to the education of all—men, women, girls, boys, poor, rich—is evident in so many of his writings and his actions. A longstanding supporter of the workingmen's college movement, Ruskin wrote in *The Stones of Venice*:

> Now the cry for the education of the lower classes, which is heard every day more widely and loudly, is a wise and a sacred cry, provided it be extended into one for the education of all classes, with definite respect to the work each man has to do…[.] I believe every man in a Christian

[62] See Timothy Hilton's *John Ruskin: the Later Years* (2000) for a fuller treatment of these relationships. I want to mention that Rawnsley also led a successful campaign to prevent the building of a railroad in the Lake District, a matter Ruskin had long urged against.

kingdom ought to be equally well educated. (11.262)

What each of the examples provided here illustrates, therefore, is Ruskin's commitment to making a change for the better in his world despite the fact that he could not see all the consequences of that commitment in his lifetime.[63] Even his great literary work of social justice, *Unto this Last*, was condemned as amateur economic theory at the time of its publication in 1860 and was not critically valued until late in the twentieth century. What my study makes clear through an expanded understanding of the elegy is that the Ruskin of these social experiments is the Ruskin we have access to in the entire body of literature he has left us. Through it, we can trace a visionary but coherent trajectory of Ruskin's themes *and* the development of the nineteenth century elegy.

Fors Clavigera represents the culmination of elegiac logic in the work of Ruskin. The continuity we find there is the continuity present in his work all along. And as I have shown in my discussion of *Fors*, his words are acts that go beyond recording the problems of his time. The 'wealth' he seeks is that of life. Whether supporting tea shops designed to allow the working poor to buy tea in small amounts, sponsoring road building projects, hiring street sweepers to keep London neighborhoods clean, gifting a tenth of all his wealth to the St. George Fund, or advising would be farmers, Ruskin's actions clearly illustrate the active role he sought to play in improving the lives of his fellow citizens.

Ultimately, Ruskin's early defense and celebration of J.M.W. Turner's art would become quite prophetic as Ruskin became a great artist in his own right. Indeed, the

[63] I regret that I do not have the space to treat *Unto This Last* here, but there is a great deal of excellent recent scholarship on Ruskin's social economy. See for example, Gill Cockram's *Ruskin and Social Reform: Ethics and Economics in the Victorian Age* (2007).

claim Ruskin once made in *Modern Painters* (1843-1860) regarding Turner's ability to transfigure rather than transpose a landscape is one we can confidently make for Ruskin's writing today. His cultural and literary legacies are, as yet, not fully recognized or understood. But that is changing. I have argued throughout this study that in Ruskin's hands, the nineteenth century elegy is transformed into a genre that can embody an expressive poetics in a multiplicity of prose forms. Although scholars have often used the adjective "elegiac" to describe the tone of Ruskin's work, my reading of his work as an intervention in the genre of elegy is entirely new. I have demonstrated the urgency of reading *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, *The Stones of Venice*, and *Fors Clavigera* as radical variations of the nineteenth century elegy in order to better understand the developments of that genre. And finally, I am confident the longstanding patterns I have identified in Ruskin's work will enable scholars and readers to understand Ruskin in a new way and number, among his many contributions, the transformation of the nineteenth century elegy.

Afterword

"I have often thought of setting down some notes of my life. But I know not how…I cannot judge myself- I can only despise- and pity.[…] In my genius I am curiously imperfect & broken- the best and strongest part of my Life has been one succession of love-sorrow, which I could only describe by giving myself up to do it hour by hour and pain by pain."

~John Ruskin
Letter to C.E. Norton 11 September 1868

Fourteen years after declining Norton's request for an autobiography, Ruskin reconsidered the prospect of writing his life in 1882 and began in 1885. Composed and published in twenty eight episodes from July 1885 until June 1889, *Praterita* is Ruskin's final and unfinished prose elegy. In it he describes his childhood, his travels, and the places he has loved and lived. He writes of the springs of Wandel where he played as a child and the almond blossoms of Herne Hill where he spent many happy days; he writes of natural beauty in the Swiss alps and masterpieces of Italian art in the Campo Santo. Throughout this remarkable memoir, Ruskin determined to hold steady a focus on the memories which it gave him "pleasure to recall." Like Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, *Praeterita* moves in repetitious time, with a narrative direction that is anything but linear. But unlike Wordsworth, Ruskin sets out to separate and record only the joyous in his life. In order to recall and recast the moments of greatest happiness in his life, Ruskin returned to his earlier writings and to the dozens of journals he kept so faithfully through the years. Here he found, and in part re-lived, memories that held much pain and loss. The process of gathering the materials for *Praeterita* exhausted Ruskin and increased his

mental instability to the point that he would have to rest for months at a time after completing an episode for publication.

In the letter he wrote to Charles Norton rejecting the idea of writing his autobiography, Ruskin had understood the difficulty such a process would bring him: "[my] whole life has been a series of delights which are gone for ever—and of griefs—which remain for ever—and my one necessity of strength or of being is to turn away my thoughts from what they refuse to forget" (qtd. In Bradley and Ousby 115). When Ruskin overcame his reservations, he did so with the hope that by limiting his recollections to those which it gave him "pleasure to recall," he could re-write his life apart from the grief he had experienced. The final work does achieve a serenity and calmness of tone that distinguish it from all other of Ruskin's works; it shares with *Fors Clavigera*, however, an unlikely coherence often denied by scholars who focus on *Praeterita* as "contradictory and fractured" (Approaching Madness 122). The 'things gone by' addressed in *Praeterita* cannot be separated from the things left out, and Ruskin's fear that the griefs 'which remain forever' would underwrite any history of his life were well founded. Beneath the serene surface of his final elegy, the cohesive element holding it all together is, in fact, loss.

Unrecorded, but bound up with that which Ruskin would purposely remember, are the profound sadnesses of a failed marriage, quarrels with dear friends, struggles with mental illness, and the loneliness which plagued Ruskin throughout his lifetime. That is, the absences remain.

Ruskin is able, in the close of the heartbreakingly strange final chapter "Johanna's Care," to move from the history of his cousin Johanna's family in Scotland to tales of

Walter Scott to a view of the Founatin of Trevi from Joseph Severn's room where he sketched Joanie as a child. Taken from many sections of Ruskin's chronology, they are nevertheless moments clearly connected in his mind. Joanie stories of her native scenery of the Solway remind Ruskin of Scott's landscapes; Joseph Severn, Joanie's father-in-law, once nursed the sick Keats in Italy and sketched the young Joanie in 1872. Present with Dante under the arches of the Fonte Brande, time collapses in a brilliant final recognition that what is unnamed must still be mourned:

> How things bind and blend themselves together! The last time I saw the Fountain of Trevi, it was from Arthur's father's room—Joseph Severn's, where we both took Joanie to see him in 1872, and the old man made a sweet drawing of his pretty daughter-in-law, now in her schoolroom; he himself then eager in finishing his last picture of the Marriage of Cana, which he had caused to take place under a vine trellis, and delighted himself by painting the crystal and ruby glittering of the changing rivulet of water out of the Greek vase, glowing into wine. Forte Brande I saw last with Charles Norton, under the same arches where Dante saw it. We drank of it together, and walked together that evening on the hills above, where the fireflies among the scented thickets shone fitfully in the still undarkened air. How they shone! Moving like fine-broken starlight through the purple leaves. How they shone! Through the sunset that faded into thunderous night as I entered Siena three days before, the white edges of the mountainous clouds still lighted from the west and the openly golden sky calmed behind the Gate of Siena's heart, with its still golden

words, “Cor magis tibi Sena pandit,” and the fireflies everywhere in the sky and the cloud rising and failing, mixed with the lightening, and more intense than the stars. (35.561-562)

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