

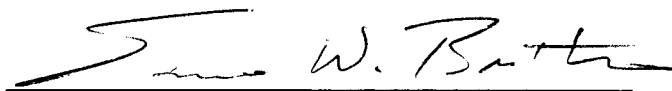
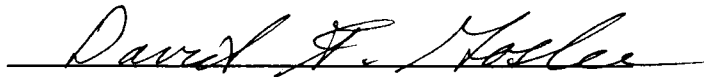
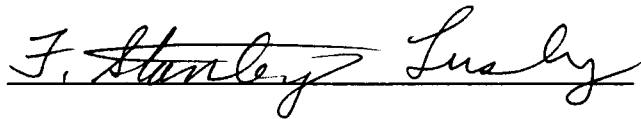
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Paula Wood Brown entitled "Sublimations of the Sublime: Boundaries of Romanticism in Modern Painters." I have examined the final 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.



Dr. Allen Dunn, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

SUBLIMATIONS OF THE SUBLIME:
BOUNDARIES OF ROMANTICISM IN MODERN PAINTERS

A Dissertation
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines John Ruskin's reaction against and within Romantic aesthetics. Specifically, it analyzes Ruskin's rejection of the rhetoric of the sublime even as he covertly fashions his own sublime mode of expression. Ruskin reacts against the Wordsworthian model because of its egotism and its problem with the pathetic fallacy, substituting for Wordsworth's humanization of nature a more scientific, critical and objective perspective. Yet Ruskin ultimately undermines his own scientism in volume one by revealing the limitations of human perception in contemplation of the infinite and mysterious recesses of nature. The gap which Ruskin uncovers between the knowledge which scientific inquiry yields and that which the intuitions of the infinite suggest is bridged by his own Wordsworthian effusions, creating a particularly Ruskinian sublime.

Ruskin's classification of the sublime under the rubric of the beautiful, the powerful and the imaginative is another of his efforts to reject Romantic aesthetics and revert to eighteenth century notions of the continuity between the beautiful and sublime as order, unity and purity. The association of the beautiful with the sensuous, however, popularized by Edmund Burke, increased the difficulty of Ruskin's task. The penetrative imagination, a faculty which is supposed to reveal beauty, reveals, instead, the failure of perception and thus, the negative sublime. Penetrative imagination is symbolized as the serpent, the double of the sensuality of beauty it opposes.

The later volumes of Modern Painters widen the gap between the scientific emphasis on patient, painstaking observation of physical fact and the mythological understanding of the factual world of nature. This gap is signified by the indeterminacy of the overdetermined images of the cloud and the serpent. In these later volumes, as well, an anti-Germanic rhetoric intensifies. Ruskin's growing hostility towards German aesthetics is another reaction against Romantic subjectivism as well as against Evangelical pieties Ruskin felt he had outgrown.

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INTRODUCTION

Ruskin's five volumes and more than two-thousand pages of Modern Painters painstakingly demonstrated the varied aesthetic, classical, historical, and scientific acumen that raised Turner's art above that of the seventeenth century landscapists, convincingly defending a new Romantic landscape style of heightened detail, variety, energy and delicate gradation of distance than Claude or Poussin with their narrow beauties of tone and classical subject matter could generally hope to represent. Yet Ruskin seemed oddly impervious to the Turner renowned to later times as a revolutionary artist of the sublime, preferring instead to defend him on the basis of his fidelity to truth and beauty. Why, in a prolonged defense of an artist famed more for depictions of jagged mountain, tumultuous sea, thunderous avalanche and vortexes of storm than for tranquil evenings or pastoral quiet, would Ruskin invoke the authority of the aesthetic of Beauty and ignore the more appropriate authority of the Sublime?

The open acknowledgment of the beautiful at the expense of the repression of the sublime is central to Modern Painters. Because Ruskin's own discussions of the sublime are abbreviated in Modern Painters, this topic has not received the full attention it deserves. George Landow believes that the term *sublime* as it is used in Modern Painters has meaning in the early chapters of the work, but by volume five becomes so broad and comprehensive a term that it loses that meaning.¹ Gary Wihl views related terms, such as *imagination*, as similarly inconsistent and

¹"Ruskin's statement that 'impressions of awe and sorrow' are at the root of the sensation of sublimity (7: 119) suggests that, like [Richard Payne] Knight, he believed all emotions, gentle as well as extreme and violent, were sublime" (Landow 209).

contradictory.² My intent, however, is not merely to expose the contradictions of Ruskin's terminology, but to question how Ruskin squeezed Romantic language through a manipulation of the rhetoric of the sublime into a form which constituted an implicit criticism of it. Neither of the two full-length books that have been written on Modern Painters--Gary Wihl's Ruskin and the Rhetoric of Infallibility and Geoffrey deSylva's John Ruskin's Modern Painters I and II: A Phenomenological Analysis--attempts to explain the function of the sublime in the text in any extended way. Neither critic includes the full five volumes of Modern Painters in his analysis. I believe that despite Ruskin's changing perspectives on art and religion, the repetition of certain motifs throughout the text suggests that Modern Painters does have in its entirety certain recurring preoccupations which are worked through in increasing complexity.

Wihl and deSylva, as deconstructionist and phenomenologist, respectively, may be described as taking opposite views on the significance of Modern Painters. Wihl's approach is unusual in its serious appraisal of Ruskin's arguments about the nature of truth in volume one, although Wihl claims that Ruskin contradicts his initial propositions, unfaithful both to his "epistemological" vocation and his Modernist attitude (intermittently maintained) that language is ultimately self-referential and circular. Geoffrey de Sylva, in contrast, seriously considers the text's aesthetic quality by showing how Ruskin's moments of insight correspond to a Heideggerian moment of "Being-with." Elisabeth Helsinger (author of the more general Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder) also points out the beautiful unity in Ruskin's language of different faculties of the mind, the "ways in which visual art

²Ruskin's admittance that contemplative imagination involves fancy (the 'relation of indistinct impressions through metaphors or synecdoche) contradicts his own earlier claims that "the definiteness of verbal knowledge. . . interfered with the modifying power of the imagination" (Wihl 76).

can be 'read' for symbolic meaning" (2,3). According to deSylva, Ruskin's language manages to bridge the gap between sensory perception of the "earth" and mental constructions of the meaning of those perceptions, so that experiencing a painting or a mountain was a process which language could both capture and communicate fully, without residue or excess, in a language which was as alive as Turner's, as alive as the spoken word. Or as Elisabeth Helsinger said from a more reader-response angle:

for Ruskin the Turner painting does not convey emotion through visual unity of impression, stimulating dream or reverie. Rather it guides the mind through a temporal process of imaginative association which is inseparable from a temporal experience of tracing formal visual relationships, especially of light and color. Painting, like poetry, has become not just the occasion for mental process but the embodiment of it (189).

Although I find the phenomenological approach in general more appealing than Wihl's version of deconstruction, I still feel that both are incomplete descriptions of Modern Painters.

The main difficulty with Wihl's interpretation, as I see it, is the initial premise that Ruskin was first and foremost an epistemologist. As Ruskin said in defining truth in Modern Painters: "the truth of nature is part of the truth of God; to him who does not search it out, darkness, as it is to him who does, infinity" (1:14). The struggle with the sublime is a struggle with the place of religion in the world of modernity. It is impossible to do justice to Ruskin's work by ignoring his religious beliefs, much as modern critics may be embarrassed by them. As C. Stephen Finley notes in Nature's Covenant: Figures of Landscape in Ruskin, the "caricature" of Ruskin the "rabid" Evangelical, fostered by Ruskin's own frequently violent denunciations of his early religious beliefs, is

at once reductive and absurd, of works that are difficult and visionary. And this caricature has had an enduring influence in the

reading and reception of his work. Ruskin is unjust, and in the deepest sense unkind to himself, when his late fulminations upon rabid Protestantism conceal the consistent and self-critical engagement of the young Ruskin with the resources of his theological tradition and immediate religious environment. (3)

Finley sees Ruskin as

a Jacob, werestling in a dream that matters. . . his life. . . a struggle with what Gadamer has called the 'tyranny of hidden prejudices,' and we might well expect him to turn away and turn back to his religious sources, to go and come, to play the part of both sons in the narrative of the Prodigal Son, one dutiful and pious, the other rebellious and apostate. (3)

The religious aspect of Ruskin's life cannot be either ignored or underestimated. But it must be treated carefully, all the same. The older Ruskin who caricatured the younger had discovered something fundamentally wrong with the Evangelical perspective: its narrowmindedness, neurosis about sensuality and obsession with continual struggle and self-transcendence. There was something tragic about the way Ruskin was trapped within his old Evangelical formulae even as he clinically defined its limitations. Finley redirects attention to the religious factor in Ruskin's prose and suggests that Ruskin's attitude towards it is fundamentally ambiguous. I propose to develop the implications of Ruskin's tangled attitude, his "turning away and turning back" to both his religious and literary predecessors.

The factor of failure is what is lacking in the phenomenological interpretations. Modern Painters is essentially tragic, both in the sense that it *does* fail in its religious mission to integrate truth, beauty and duty, as well as in the sense that it creates a painful and heroic self-consciousness about that necessary failure as well as about the shortcomings of nature and art. Ruskin slowly develops a capacity to linger over the concept of failure by developing exceedingly

complex images overdetermined in meaning. In the early volumes his response to an object of sublime terror, for example, tended to follow a rather mechanical symbolic formulae he had learned in the school of Evangelicism. By classifying certain terrifying mysteries of experience as experiences of the *infinite* or the *divine*, he was able to assert some sort of intellectual control, which, by the late volumes, could no longer satisfy--the consolations of a richer, more mythic interpretation became necessary rather than the glibness of abstract formulae. This process of exposing oneself to a dangerous thought in order to exercise power over it is part of the sublime process.

Yet Ruskin contested the sublime by renaming it as the beautiful or the imaginative, and he criticized it as a source of moral degradation, omitting proposed chapters on it in Modern Painters (which chapters editors Cook and Wedderburn later incorporated into the appendixes of volume two and volume five). For all that, the sublime still fascinated him. So it is the absence of the promised sections on the sublime which I find to be an intriguing riddle of Modern Painters. As Harold Bloom says, "We must see the object, the poem, as in itself it really is not, because we must see not only what is missing in it, but why the poem had to exclude what is missing" (Agon 18).

Harold Bloom provides a helpful but limited strategy for analysis here. I believe that Ruskin's suppression of the sublime is part of his attempt, in Bloomian vocabulary, to "usurp" strong Romantic influences (Agon 17), particularly Wordsworth. Ruskin strove to attain a harder, more truthful, more scientific and prosaic approach to nature than Wordsworth had, waging a battle against what he called in volume four of Modern Painters the "pathetic fallacy." Yet the anti-selfconsciousness of the Victorian era, as well as its extravagant hero-worshipping, precludes an exclusively Romantic bias in analyzing the personality of Ruskin.

Modern Painters, like Praeterita, represses the confessional urge, especially of Ruskin's disastrous romantic entanglements. Ruskin "forgets," in his autobiography, any memory of his unfortunate marriage or his infatuation with Rose la Touche. Similarly, in Modern Painters, the physical aspect of aesthetics, which Ruskin (in contrast to Burke) associates with the sublime, is also "forgotten." Since Ruskin associates the desires of the body with the idea of the sublime, the theory of the sublime becomes repressed, assuming only a tame and secondary role to the theory of beauty. Ruskin's reaction against the sublime is a reaction against his precursors, but it is also a reaction against the purely expressivist and confessional mode of discourse these precursors embodied.

The organization of the following chapters of this dissertation is premised on the concept of the return of the repressed, fear-inspiring object of the body and the sublime. Edmund Burke had defined as sublime the state of "our minds upon escaping some imminent danger, or on being released from the severity of some cruel pain" (32). By volume two of Modern Painters, Ruskin also associated a certain impure kind of sublime experience with the painful, dangerous and terrible,³ viewing evil and sin as the worst varieties of this sublime, specifically the sin of the flesh. Ruskin's critiques of the sublime, when they do appear in their abbreviated forms, frequently juxtapose it with a body twisted, deformed or tortured. He who delights in the sublime, Ruskin maintains, feels a morbid fascination with the "body of this death," or with carnal sin. In the early volumes, Ruskin equated the sublime

³Although Landow and Helsinger argue that in the second volume of Modern Painters Ruskin distinguishes the sublime from the beautiful, it is necessary to remember that it is only an inferior type of the sublime experience which is so sharply distinguished. Ruskin says in volume two that "it will readily, I believe, be admitted that many things are sublime in the highest degree, which are not in the highest degree beautiful, and vice versa; i.e. that the two ideas are distinct, and one is not merely a particular form of the other. It will also, I believe, be admitted on reflection that nothing can be perfectly sublime without being in some degree or way beautiful, and nothing perfectly beautiful, without being in some degree sublime" (2: 369).

more simply with the body; soon he refined this as the sins of the flesh; later still with the morbidity of Evangelical and Romanist religions which forbade the pleasures of the flesh. He returns to the topic several times.

Ruskin's struggle against what Gadamer has eloquently called the 'tyranny of hidden prejudices'--the prejudices of his Evangelical upbringing--is also the record of a deep psychological wound. Ruskin's fear of the body, expressed in anti-scientific, anti-materialistic, anti-Germanic diatribes, endlessly repeats the trauma of that wound. As Thomas Weiskel has pointed out, when the libido is denied its customary expression through the beautiful, sensuous and material, and is channelled instead into a higher, transcendent power, "an aggressive impulse" is generated "which must in turn be sublimated by an increased identification." Repetition-compulsion and "melancholia" are typical of those with a "deep spiritual investment in the negative sublime" (96).

Working from this hint of Weiskel's, the first chapter attempts to show Ruskin's negative sublime in its simplest form in volume one as a tension between the sensuous and scientific perspectives and the spiritual intuitions of the infinite which repeatedly transcend both. Although in volume two Ruskin still defines the source of such inspiration (of both the sublime and the beautiful) as the divine, perfect and unified (reverting, typically, back to eighteenth century notions of the beautiful as order) the associations of the beautiful with the sensuous (popularized by Burke) force Ruskin to distinguish continually between the sublime and the beautiful. Penetrative imagination (the faculty that is supposed to reveal beauty) reveals, instead, the failure of perception and thus the negative sublime. Penetrative imagination is symbolized as the serpent, the double of the sensuality of beauty it opposes. The later volumes of Modern Painters (described in chapter three) widen the gap between the scientific emphasis on patient, painstaking observation of

physical fact and the mythological understanding of the factual world of nature. This gap is signified by the indeterminacy of the overdetermined images of the cloud and the serpent. Chapter four again examines Ruskin's compulsion to return to certain images and ideas. Ruskin's troubled relationship with his Evangelical and Romantic precursors is symbolized in his continuing prejudice against and antagonism to the Germanic, which term constitutes a complex of aversions: the excesses of revolutionary Romantic subjectivism and of Evangelicalism.

Ruskin's problematic relationship to the Romantics is due at least partly to his ambivalence about the value of the sublime. Though Ruskin reacted against Wordsworth, he also praised him extravagantly and prefaced every volume of Modern Painters with a quotation from the Excursion. But Wordsworth is only one of the heroes of the text, of which Turner is only the most obvious; Tintoretto, Michelangelo, Fra Angelico, Thomas Carlyle, Sir Walter Scott, Dante, Shakespeare and Homer are some others. Ruskin believed that "All great art is praise. . . So far from art's being immoral in the ultimate power of it, nothing but art is moral: life without industry is sin, and industry without art, brutality" (5:463). In summing up his own attitude to Turner, Ruskin wrote that "my own admiration of him was wild in enthusiasm," even though this master "regarded it far less than censure. . . he could not make me at that time understand his main meaning; he loved me, but cared nothing for what I said, and was always trying to hinder me from writing, because it gave pain to his fellow artists" (5:453). Turner's genius is so impressive that no one but Turner can possibly understand him; he is "inexplicable," "intensely kind," "nobly true," and ultimately dies in despair at being misunderstood and reviled. Hearty praise of genius (therefore) is the moral

duty of a responsible critic. It just happened that Ruskin was incapable of admiring Turner for the right reasons.⁴

In surveying the multitude of influences upon Ruskin, I do not believe that our understanding is much broadened by defining Ruskin's epideictic rhetoric as either flattery or simple self-assertion. It is instead a complex attempt to assert his own genius without rebellion, in a way that is ultimately indistinguishable from emulation of deeply admired predecessors. Ruskin's admiration of his precursors ranges from extravagant, self-abnegating worship (of genius) to heartfelt praise (of merely highly gifted human beings), lukewarm compliments (of influential contemporaries who would be insulted had they been ignored), or simple liking (of talented but humble artists of animals such as Landseer). If all praise of important precursors is defined, as Harold Bloom tends to define it, as disguising an attempt to usurp or overthrow the precursors, then this wide spectrum of possible responses is denied, and all praise becomes a lie. This definition of falsehood only defers a more practical (and interesting) question, however: what types of praise lie the least?

Ruskin's rebellion with the past and with past masters is most significant in his relationship to the German school of philosophy and painting, his dislike of Kant, Schiller, and the Nazarenes and his grudging partial approval of Durer. His comparison of Durer with Turner in order to demonstrate the superiority of Turner is curiously inconclusive.

⁴Ruskin initially underrated Turner's classical compositions, and always underestimated his debt to and admiration of such artists as Claude and Poussin. Furthermore, Ruskin tended to read more scientific and mimetic purpose into Turner's paintings than has been customary in modern times. Turner's works tended to be more cynical and irreligious (at least in the conventional sense) than Ruskin at least initially wished to believe. Ruskin had several conversations with Turner in which the great master refused to divulge either certain secrets of his craft or personal meanings of some works (such as *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet*) which Ruskin found puzzling.

As Thomas Weiskel points out in The Romantic Sublime, "In the sublime moment, dualism is legitimated and intensified. The beautiful intimates reconciliation, however precariously and ambiguously; the sublime splits consciousness into alienated halves" (48). Ruskin's complicated personality, as well as the ambitious sweep of Modern Painters, ensures this division of consciousness, a division which, like the crevasses upon the glaciers he loved to sketch in Switzerland, revealed doubts and inner conflicts only thinly disguised by the forceful rhetoric so often interpreted as dogmatism. Henry James, as John Rosenberg says, "saw into the heart of the matter with clinical precision" when he visited Ruskin in 1869:

In face, in manner, in talk, in mind, he is weakness pure and simple. I use the word, not invidiously, but scientifically. He has the beauties of his defects; but to see him only confirms the impression given by his writing, that he has been scared back by the grim face of reality into the world of unreason and illusion, and that he wanders there without a compass and a guide--or any light save the fitful flashes of his beautiful genius.

Yet Rosenberg adds that this weakness had a "vitality" which was extraordinarily resourceful in "shaping great art out of great illness" (150-151). This is the function of the rhetoric of the Ruskinian sublime, as I see it. Although Ruskin's personality was flawed by his religious upbringing, he managed to transform the wound of the body into a triumph of the will. As C. Stephen Finley says, the rhythms and repetitions of Ruskin's work are not merely, as R.H. Wilenski claimed, evidence of manic-depression, but a deeply intellectual and moral attempt to exercise control over the past by living it again and again.

CHAPTER ONE

A More Scientific Romanticism

Afloat, even twenty yards from the shore. . . every wave around us appears vast, every one different from all the rest; and the breakers present, now that we see them with their backs toward us, the grand, extended, and varied lines of long curvature which are peculiarly expressive both of velocity and power. Recklessness. . . is manifested in the mad, perpetual, changeful, undirected motion, not of wave after wave, as it appears from the shore, but of the very same water rising and falling. Of waves that successively approach and break, each appears to the mind a separate individual, whose part being performed, it perishes, and is succeeded by another; and there is nothing in this to impress us with the idea of restlessness, any more than in any successive and continuous functions of life and death. But it is when we perceive that it is no succession of wave, but the same water, constantly rising, and crashing, and recoiling, and rolling in again in new forms and with fresh fury, that we perceive the perturbed spirit, and feel the intensity of its unwearied rage. The sensation of power is also trebled; for not only is the vastness of apparent size much increased, but the whole action is different; it is not a passive wave, rolling sleepily forward until it tumbles heavily, prostrated upon the beach; but a sweeping exertion of tremendous and living strength, which does not now appear to *fall*, but to *burst* upon the shore; which never perishes but recoils and recovers. (1: 563)¹

This passage enacts in miniature the vast Ruskinian sublime. One must view the waves from precisely "twenty yards from the shore" because it is not merely the waves but the position and predisposition of the viewer which determines the truth of the sea. The perspective from the shore suggests only the certainty of death; the view from the sea grants a certain ambiguous immortality. Shore truth is of a perishing body, individual, isolated and confused; sea truth is the collective spirit defying death. Viewed impassively from the shore, the sea is merely a succession of passive waves which perish without tragedy because without the

¹all references to Modern Painters are taken from the standard Cook and Wedderburn edition of the thirty-nine volumes. The volume numbers I use correspond not to the series number, but simply to the five volumes of Modern Painters.

"restlessness" signifying individuality, but approached more closely, even from within--both as sea within the mind or as mind-within sea--metamorphoses into a powerful, enraged, "perturbed spirit." Each wave, which had before been sharply distinguished from its neighbor--inexorably yet mechanically moved shorewards, separate, isolated, yet identical to all the other waves--becomes suddenly indistinguishable from the sea itself, just as Ruskin, in describing the "restless" scene, infuses himself into an indeterminate collective force. The turning point of the passage midway through begins with the word "death," the threat of which is overcome by a feint of the mind repositioning itself within the scene--by moving within deep waters--and it is at this moment when we step outside ourselves that we feel the immortality that "never perishes but recoils and recovers." The boundaries blur between the observer and the observed as well as between nature's transitory forms, and this moment of obscurity and confusion becomes not simply a compelling insight into the limitations of the habitual, divisive, analytic, logocentric mode of seeing from the "shoreline," versus the dangerous yet "true" phenomenological participation in the ocean itself, but also a catalyst for the sublime identification with an eternal power, though marred by rage and weariness.

This is only one passage out of many in Modern Painters I which enacts the drama of the marriage of self and nature, and it is by no means uncommon in Romantic poetry, a major influence (via Wordsworth especially) on Ruskin. What is rather odd is that this paragraph as well as all the other volcanic passages of churning energy in Modern Painters I are embedded within a very deliberate and restrained discourse on truth--not on the sublime, mind you, nor on the powerful, nor even on the imagination. Modern Painters I focuses levelly on the defense of J.M.W. Turner on the basis of his *truth to nature*, and so the whole volume carefully and regally moves from a definition of truth in the opening pages, to a

consideration of artistic truths (of tone, chiaroscuro, space) to an explanation of natural truths (of sky, light, earth, water, vegetation) and finally of Turnerian truth itself.

All this sounds as if Ruskin believed that art should be imitative, or at least selectively imitative, as Sir Joshua Reynolds advocated in his Discourses when he said that art must "supply the natural imperfection of things" by copying only their best characteristics (244). This tradition was popular in the picturesque school at the turn of the century. In justifying Turner in volume one through some sort of a correspondence theory of truth to nature, Ruskin seems to situate himself within a classical-empirical tradition rather than an expressivist Romantic framework. Yet if Turner has been remembered for genius, it is not because he continued in the eighteenth century tradition of beautiful idealistic landscape painting, but because he founded a modern way of viewing landscape as an end in itself rather than a backdrop for sporting nymphs bearing serious morals from Classical tales, or as a record of geological truths. Ruskin's impassioned descriptions of the expressive power of Turner stands apart from his admiration of Turner's truth to nature. In an effort to reconcile both empiricist and vitalist impulses, Ruskin reverts to the pre-Romantic experience of the sublime as an experience religious, scientific or beautiful. The sublime when it is actually directly addressed is either is subordinated to notes on the grotesque, or is finally left unpublished, only later to be relegated to an appendix to the second volume by Ruskin's editors. I believe that Ruskin's own voice gains a greater resonance and power than it could otherwise have had largely *because* of this suppression. In other words, Ruskin must translate the discourse of the sublime into a discourse of truth in order to create his own unique post-Romantic version of the sublime. My intent is not simply to demystify Ruskin's rhetoric of transcendence, for as Paul de Man says,

"demystification is the most dangerous myth of all", but to suggest how the repression of the sublime, or the "radical blindness" de Man refers to, is necessary for Ruskin to illuminate the limitations of the Romantic sublime mode.

Truth as Ruskin defines it (our sensitivity to the delicate nuances of nature) is indistinguishable from power (our partial awareness of our inability to be fully aware of and sensitive to nature), yet power is unaware of itself as such.² This statement is not willfully paradoxical in intent; it is simply an argument that Ruskin's ideas of power are central to his idea of truth, though he prefers not to emphasize this relationship. This link of truth and power is true of the text as a whole as well as of the initial passage of this chapter. The movement from observation of nature to immersion within it, culminating first in confusion and then in a sense of illimitability and infinity as the mind classifies and defines what it apprehends, is a move to empower the self. Ruskin advised young painters to

go to Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no thought but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instruction, rejecting nothing, selecting nothing and scorning nothing, believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth. (1: 624)

Only then might they trust to their imagination and memories to "take up the scarlet and the gold" and "give reins to their fancy" (624). The most powerful artist imaginatively is the one who has been the most observant of physical fact.

Attentive observation is vital in developing a true imagination, as it is a foundation without which nothing may be thought at all.³ The thought of a great painter who

²An idea of power, Ruskin claims, is formed when we "see it in action." We only see power in action as it is "achieving" and not as it is "achieved." Sensations of power are thus always apprehensions of imperfection. Ideas of power are "dependent upon execution." Execution depends upon knowledge of truth, but to be true to nature is to be mysterious, for nature is ultimately mysterious—to acknowledge the final mystery of what one actually apprehends (and not what one has falsified or clarified through denial or projections) (1: 118, 122-123)

³Thus, Ruskin makes the eighteenth century "mechanical theory of literary invention" the foundation of his aesthetic theory, which must nevertheless rise above it. Ideas are derived from

has painstakingly laboured with nature and developed an authentic imagination is inevitably obscure rather than clear, not composed of equations, such as a statement like "the wave is there," but rather negative statements like "the wave is not there," for as Ruskin explained, mere imitation involves no discrepancy between sign and signifier, and thus, as mere equation, is nothing less than mechanical tautology or false suggestion of certainty. Greatness involves inevitably a discrepancy between art and nature to force both a visceral and intellectual response from the viewer, and thus, through this effort, to give a sensation of great power. Ruskin insists that either poetry or painting which makes simple imitative "mechanical" statements without attempting to represent the indeterminacy of the wave has not truly represented nature's obscurity, an obscurity, he intones solemnly, which is "dark with abundant meaning." In discussing truths of art such as tone and chiaroscuro as well as in explaining truths of nature such as sky, water, earth, and vegetation, Ruskin's structure, like the waves he describes, disguises its essential singleness of purpose. The real topic of all these various truths is the truth of the sublime--of infinity and power--yet each section must begin with a denial of power in an astoundingly painstaking, curiously passive reception of information of natural forms, (one feels certain, for instance, that Ruskin actually measured the difference of wave effect from shore to land one day) to build gradually from this empirical foundation into a vast scientific system which, taken to its utmost limitations, is still found insufficient to account for the full intuition of nature. The failure, though satisfying in its suggestion of infinity, creates the necessity for another stab at Truth, which culminates again in a realization of failure, which again sets in motion more effort, more definitions,

images which are formed from sense impressions. "In Hume's locked internal world, the differentia between sense impressions and ideas is the greater 'force and vivacity' of the former." This theory was "pervasive in eighteenth-century discussions of the mind" (Abrams 160).

more failure: evidence, like the sea Ruskin describes, of the restless "unwearied rage" of a "perturbed spirit."

I have assumed, up to this point, that the sublime is a simple term interchangeable with words like "power" and "infinity," but as so defined it fails to adequately explain its own complex psychological mechanism. A tautological substitution of "power" for "infinity" begs as many questions as it answers, necessitating finer distinctions. These may be suggested most carefully by observing the way Ruskin both adopted and rejected Wordsworthian strategies of the Romantic Sublime. Blithely ignoring Ruskin's own professed distaste for German Metaphysicals,⁴ I will show how this passage and others closely parallel Kant's definition of and Wordsworth's enactment of the "negative" sublime (Weiskel's term). Finally, by analyzing the obsessive, repetitive patterns of Modern Painters I in general, I hope to demonstrate how Ruskin both emulated and undermined this moment.

Kant's description of the sublime movement perfectly fits the movement of the Ruskinian sublime. It is

a feeling of inadequacy of. . . the imagination for presenting the ideas of a whole, wherein the imagination reaches its maximum, and

⁴Ruskin disapproved of Germans of any stripe, regardless of whether they were metaphysical philosophers, poets or painters. Modern German art was, he declared (not *too* indecisively) a "school of mud" (1: 351). Germans in general were too idealistic, as opposed to the naturalistic English school. Of Kant in particular, Ruskin sniped humorously that "I have often been told that anyone who will read Kant, Strauss and the rest of the German metaphysicians and divines, resolutely through, and give his whole strength to the study of them, will, after ten or twelve years labour, discover that there is very little harm in them; and this I can well believe; but I also believe that the ten or twelve years may be better spent" (3: 424-5). It is recorded in the Ruskin family letters that John James Ruskin (Ruskin's father) familiarized himself with a volume of Friedrich Schiller's in 1832, and that Ruskin had been subjected to some dinner conversation about the same theoretician of the Kantian sublime in 1837, so he was definitely knowledgeable in some sense about German thought before he published the first volume of Modern Painters (260). Ruskin read Carlyle first in 1841, was first influenced by him between '43 and '46, and met him in the late '40's (Cate, 231, 232, 234).

in striving to surpass it, sinks back into itself, by which, however, a kind of emotional satisfaction is produced. (Kant 91)

Thus, as Thomas Weiskel in The Romantic Sublime has pointed out, there are a series of steps: (1) the mind (reason or the superego) purposes to present an idea of a whole; (2) the imagination naturally fails to accomplish the impossible task it has been assigned; (3) the representation of the "whole" (of something very vast, such as the sea, or sky, for example) becomes subjective. Instead of describing nature the mind sees itself in nature; (4) and in consequence receives its emotional reward: intuition of the noumenal, of a divine essence which represents the whole, because "the bare capability of thinking this infinite without contradiction requires in the mind a faculty itself supersensible" (Kant 93). This experience of the noumenal is the experience of a "supersensible destination." As Weiskel points out, reason ("comprehension" in Kantian terms or "superego" in Freudian) frames the imagination so that it is sure to be perceived as failing. The superego shamelessly uses the senses and the imagination in order to realize itself "freshly in an attitude of awe" (41).

Weiskel elaborates on this basic Kantian model by differentiating between the positive and negative sublime moments, two different kinds of "aphasia" or incomprehension. The first is the inability to make metaphoric substitutions, the second the inability to draw a continuous, linear narrative. In the latter case the grammar and syntax break down into a meaningless jumble, the progress of the story grinds to a halt; time appears to stand still. In the former metaphorical aphasia (negative sublime), one becomes unable to spatially substitute one name for another. I feel that this differentiation of two different modes of the sublime is problematic because metonymy is actually only a process of substitution itself. I agree with Harold Bloom that "the supposed critical distinction between metonymy

and metaphor. . . has become a shibboleth for weak interpreters" (Bloom, Deconstruction 11). However, I do think that the sublime moment may be *stretched*; that is, the aphasia may be sometimes extremely difficult to overcome, and recovery may afford, consequently, only a very limited satisfaction.⁵

The inadequacy of the imagination is concomitant with the fear of the unknown. The moment of fear and failure may be seen in the Ruskinian wave passage when the calm, detached description of nature as other fails and intuitions of isolation, chaos and death momentarily overwhelm the discourse. When it is resumed, its tone has become more subjective and passionate. From this moment, Ruskin describes himself rather than the sea, or the sea in himself, and the movement inward has its reward: its promise of a "supersensible destination."

Weiskel emphasizes the movement from unconsciousness to consciousness in this paradigm of the sublime. We are unconscious of the role of reason as instigator, yet self-conscious of the "discovery of its provenance" (41). In applying the Kantian model to Wordsworth, he shows that the greatness of the sublime experience depends on the "strength of usurpation" over sense--the stronger the commitment to sensation or imagination which is usurped, the stronger the sensation of power of our "comprehension" in overcoming it. Finally, in Wordsworthian poetry, Weiskel maintains, the sublime experience is expressed in the movement from the imaginative to the symbolic.

These last few points are necessary to make a valid comparison between the method of Ruskin and that of the idol of his youth, Wordsworth, the poet

⁵Weiskel's discussion of Wordsworth's "hidden presence which cannot be signified" (29) except by hinting suggestively of it in terms of his past and future experience of the same hidden presence is a case in point, although I don't care for his insistence that this is an instance of the metonymical or positive sublime, as Wordsworth does not always call the mysterious experience "my hidden presence which cannot be signified," but substitutes other names for it like "a sense sublime," a "motion," or a "spirit."

mentioned more than any other in Modern Painters (Hewison 18). The effect of Ruskin's sublime hinges upon the strength of the role he assigns to sense-- empiricism may be a better word-- as well as the repression of the motive of his search for the truth of nature: the volume claims a certain scientific disinterestedness. Considering the vital role Wordsworth assigns to a Nature who molded his character as a child through the ministrations of beauty and fear, his failure to describe nature is marked, for as Weiskel says, "Wordsworth was not. . . not a descriptive poet. . . if indeed a poet can be descriptive [at all]" (174). The Prelude's structure circles around moments from childhood experience "unremembered" yet still obsessively clung to: compelling, meaningful, yet not fully expressible symbolically in words. They are images comprehensible to the imagination and to desire, yet not so to reason, and as such, they appear as mysterious, indeterminate intuitions which must be somehow translated into symbolic determinacy, yet they cannot be, for if "the images so projected into the field of Wordsworth's past were to lose their opacity and become the transparent signifiers of an invisible world, the soul would "remember" what she felt and have nothing left to pursue "(174). Wordsworth addresses not nature but "Ye presences of Nature in the sky/ and on the earth! Ye visions of the hills!/ And souls of lonely places!" (I 464-6). Wordsworth addresses a humanized presence mediating between himself and nature, but not nature herself. In other words, Wordsworth begins with intuitions of immortality only to circle back to it later on. This moment of origin of self is somehow pregnant with knowledge of nature.

In contrast, Modern Painters initially denies or represses any poetic, subjective, imaginary involvement or motivation at all, focusing upon the facts and analysis of mountain, sky and water, until the moment when Ruskin is surprised (yet somehow inevitably surprised) into a very similar intimation of immortality.

Nor does he claim to translate the imaginary to the symbolic, but merely to translate symbolic systems--art or nature or common symbolic language--into each other, using his close scientific observation of natural or artistic phenomenon as the foundation of translation.

I am not arguing that Wordsworth had no pretensions of scientific disinterestedness himself, of course, but Ruskin carried Wordsworth's own search for real as opposed to ideal nature to greater lengths. From Wordsworth Ruskin learned to value a closer appreciation of an unidealised nature in the name of science and truth. Wordsworth had written in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads that both truth and science were the companions to poetry, that

Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge: it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science. . . Poetry is first and last of all knowledge. . . the remotest discoveries of the chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed. (259-260)

Yet, as Robert Hewison said in John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye, although Wordsworth

had called for a direct apprehension of the external world, free of preconceived ideas. . . [he]. . . wanted to get rid of these preconceptions in order to heighten the personal experience of communion with self and the Nature spirit. Science stressed the universal significance of the natural world, and Ruskin preferred the objectivity of the scientist to the subjectivity of the poet. He was later to say of Wordsworth: 'he could not understand that to break a rock with a hammer in search of a crystal may sometimes be an art not disgraceful to human nature.' (20)

I want to take Hewison's point a few steps farther. Science is important to Ruskin--terribly important--but ultimately it takes the fall his conscience has foreordained for it. Its tumble from the heights catalyzes his sublime moment.

Every volume of Modern Painters is preceded by this quotation from the

Excursion:

Accuse me not of arrogance,. . .
 If, having walked with Nature,
 And offered, far as frailty would allow,
 My heart a daily sacrifice to Truth,
 I now affirm of Nature and of Truth,
 Whom I have served, that their Divinity
 Revolts, offended at the ways of men,
 Philosophers, who, though the human soul
 Be of a thousand faculties composed,
 And twice ten thousand interests, do yet prize
 This soul, and the transcendent universe,
 No more than as a mirror that reflects
 To proud Self-love her own intelligence.

The obvious meaning of these lines is that Ruskin claims brotherhood with Wordsworth on the basis of their common knowledge of and service to nature. "Philosophers" who describe themselves rather than nature are guilty of arrogance. The scientists of truth are guided by nature and her laws. Yet this obvious meaning is made obscure by Wordsworth's syntax following "philosophers, who though. . .". This obscurity reveals a fundamental anxiety about such easy divisions between self and nature. The soul must be prized, yet not narcissistically. The transcendent soul transcends mere self-love because (this seems to be the assumption) the self is composed of a portion unique to itself as well as a soul which it shares with nature which includes but also is larger than this self. The soul is not the self, it seems. Just what in nature is prized--the self or the soul of it? How is one to tell the difference?

Ruskin shared Wordsworth's anxiety about the authenticity of the experience of nature, and was just as eager to prove it by "scientific" means. But in Ruskin's case, this meant that the Poetic response had to be made unauthentic, too revealing of the individual "self" rather than the "soul" of nature. So Wordsworth

himself, at the moment he is most admired, is made to appear somehow outdated.

When Ruskin defines the purpose of Modern Painters I he delays the role of the imagination in the observation of nature so that the sublime leap into self description, when it does finally, belatedly, occur, is trebled in power. The stronger the commitment to the senses, the more powerful the sensation of their overcoming is bound to be, and the more powerful the sensation of their failure when they have seen and interpreted so much which is still inadequate to the intimation of immortality.

Wordsworth's falsification of reality is not simply a consequence of his unique identity as a poet--it simply follows from his poetic status in general. Thus, if the critic, whose function it is to speak the truth, assumes a poetic rhetoric, he is guilty of misrepresentation, not simply of nature, but of art as well. And the great artist who completely overpowers critical resistance in his time and thereafter "tyrannizes" in his "patriarchal excellence" over the generations of critics and artists who follow. At the very beginning of Modern Painters I Ruskin discusses the problem of public misreading of Turner caused partly by the entrenched power of timid critics cowed by past glory. "The mindless copyist studies Raffaele, but not what Raffaele studied" (I 83). Great artists of the past exert a tremendous pressure on those critics of today to praise only them and their copyists. Only a few great men (artists and critics) can break free of patriarchal tyranny to judge fresh original talent justly:

It is my purpose, therefore, believing that there are certain points of superiority in modern artists. . . which have not yet been fully understood, except by those who are scarcely in a position admitting the declaration of their conviction, to institute a close comparison between the great works of ancient and modern landscape art; to raise, as far as possible, the deceptive veil of imaginary light through which we are accustomed to gaze upon the patriarchal work;

and to show the real relations, whether favorable or otherwise, subsisting between it and our own. (83)

This passage, in which Ruskin explains the motive for Modern Painters, reveals more than one anxiety of influence. There is the *expressed* distaste for the blind copyist of Rafael, for example. Ruskin always revered the three great Renaissance painters--Michelangelo, Leonardo, Rafael--but felt that their brilliance could only blight young talent. Yet there is another anxiety too, for different fathers and different tyrannies--the poetic tyranny which casts a "deceptive veil of imaginary light" upon the past, mistranslating it to the readers of the present. Rather than casting an imaginary veil (like the false poets and critics do) over the language of nature or art, Ruskin proposes to simply translate one language (modern, avant garde, Turner) into that of another (discourse on and of the traditional and ancient).

After pointing out these two essential errors: of "philosophers" who see themselves in nature and of "patriarchal tyranny" which casts a deceptive veil over the merit of original art, Ruskin moves deliberately and analytically to distinguish the five sources of ideal pleasure in art: ideas of power, imitation, truth, beauty, and relation. Two of these ideas are quickly disposed of: power and imitation, imitation because of its ignobility (it suggests no idea of power, showing no discrepancy) and power because in treating the other ideas, one necessarily treats power, which, Ruskin declares, is just another word for excellence. But it is not just another word for excellence, because in defining it earlier he had said that power always involved an idea of discrepancy between reality and representation. After defining the word in such an interesting way and admitting its pervasiveness in his system, it seems strange that Ruskin forgets the idea of power from this moment on. What is powerful involves discrepancy between the potential which it suggests and the actual effect which inevitably falls short of this idea. A rapid

sketch which exhibits a sure dexterity of hand suggests an idea of power, for example. Yet--this is extremely important--the rapid sketch of the master suggests the idea, whereas the sketch of a novice or mere dilettante suggests only how clever he is. The first must be incomplete because of the breadth of vision. The second chooses incompleteness to suggest his own power of execution. What this means is that the effect of failure as success--the sublime--may be faked--it may be unauthentic. The best way to guarantee the authenticity of the sublime is through labour, techne, science. The sublime effect must be earned. Mystery cannot be valued for the sake of obscurity but for the sake of complexity. In addition, any one who *seeks* a sublime effect must fail to produce it, just as any who seek a poetic effect through elevation or artificial diction must fail in poetry. The sublime cannot be produced--it simply occurs.

The idea of truth, Ruskin's favorite idea in volume one, as he laboriously sets out to prove Turner's atmospheric, marine and mountain effects as faithful to nature, itself soon degenerates into an idea of power. It is Ruskin's intent to demonstrate how limited human ideas of truth collapse under the weight of nature's actual complexity. But Ruskin fails to see and to acknowledge this insight as an insight of power--his own power, especially, to intuit this discrepancy between the fact and the intuition. Truth is described as the most important quality of all because

nature is so immeasurably superior to all that the human mind can conceive, that every departure from her is a fall beneath her, so that there can be no such thing as an ornamental falsehood. All falsehood is a blot as well as a sin, an injury as well as a deception.
(138)

Truth, then, measures what is by definition "immeasurable." Truth can only be true by sincerely indicating its own failure to comprehend a complexity it cannot see but only dimly intuit, too intricate ever to untangle. Truth which is unfounded upon experience of inadequacy in the face of infinity is merely "ornamental." "The truth of nature is part of the truth of God; to him who does not search it out, darkness, as it is to him who does, infinity" (141). The darkness of infinity is different from the darkness of chaos. We know this because of the process of seeking itself and in our exhaustion of the senses.

Truth is a balancing act between sensation, intellectualizing and moralizing; a compromise between what is seen and known and loved. Without "the energy and passion of our moral nature" mere intellect and physical perception would be dulled. On the other hand, we must be open to the infinite variety nature offers or we only see what we have seen before, and only love what is familiar. This is the failure of the art critics of the day who could not appreciate Turner because of "patriarchal tyranny."⁶ Finally, and most importantly, we must be true to what we love: Turner is most profound in his depiction of scenes which remind him of "home": he paints English scenes best. On the other hand, great art must represent something "outside" the artist; it never "perpetrates the ill-digested fancies of idle hours" (202).

These requirements--that the artist love, see and know what he paints--threaten to contradict one another at every turn, because when he loves what is familiar he is often blind to foreign beauties; and when he remembers what it is he knows, he cannot see the infinite variety nature offers with every new cloud on the

⁶"... centuries may elapse before fair comparison can be made between two artists of different ages: while the patriarchal excellence exercises during the interval a tyrannical, perhaps even blighting influence over the minds, both of the public and of those to whom, properly understood, it should serve for a guide and example" (1: 83).

horizon. Nevertheless, Ruskin believed that a balance was possible, a balance dynamic and restless between the dim intuition of the unified soul of nature and its multitude of forms.

The love Ruskin associates with nature is a love, he repeatedly insists, of something other than oneself. Any sign of redundancy is a sign of arrogant self-reliance, as is an easy dexterity which draws attention to the artist rather than the object depicted. If a painter loves what he sees he will invariably attempt to depict something beyond his powers. The main fault of the seventeenth century landscapists was that they found one great truth--the truth of a single twilight tone--and stuck with it monotonously through countless paintings, never daring to turn back to nature as a truly loved source of new ideas. Turner alone attempted the "imperceptible, multitudinous symmetrical refinement of nature," the half-perception of the imperceptible, and thus highlighted his own failure and love of a nature beyond him.

Nature is not a mechanism; it cannot be comprehended completely by intellect or senses. It may be experienced through the intuition of power in certain discrepancies, though Ruskin does not admit that the truth of nature is such. Another extreme to avoid in representations of nature is false emotion, or what may be termed the vulgar sublime. Enthusiasm would have been the Eighteenth century term for this. An example is given in *Salvator Rosa*:

Salvator, a man originally endowed with far higher power of mind than Claude, was altogether unfaithful to his mission, and has left us, I believe, no gift. Everything he did was evidently for the sake of exhibiting his own dexterity; there is no love of any kind for anything; his choice of landscape features is dictated by no delight in the sublime, but by mere animal restlessness or ferocity. (185)

Ruskin's certainty about *Salvator's* inadequacy in the department of the sublime is rather curious given the fact that in the eighteenth century *Rosa* had been regarded

as the sublime artist par excellence: Horace Walpole, describing a journey over the Alps in 1739, wrote "precipices, mountains, torrents, wolves, rumblings--Salvator Rosa." To the eighteenth century, Rosa was thought something of a delightful savage:

The nineteenth century discovered a new Rosa: the fearless champion of the autonomy of artistic genius, the critic of a decadent society, and the patriot, who supposedly joined his fellow-citizens in their revolt led by Masaniello against the Spanish overlords of Naples (Kitson 7)

Rosa's art, according to Michael Kitson, depicted "brutalized" rather than ideal beauty, a nature "hostile, desolated and barren, a wilderness of harsh rocks and spiky, shaggy trees," though, according to Kitson, Rosa was a painter of "awesome mysteries" who yet based his wildest imagining on "actual experience of Nature," who wrote of a mountain scene that

there is a strange mixture of savage wildness and domestic scenery, of plain and precipice, such as the eye delights to wander over. . . . O God! how often have I sighed to possess, how often since called to mind, those solitary hermitages which I passed on my way!-- How often wished that Fortune had reserved for me such a destiny!. . . I saw at Terni. . . the famous waterfall of the Valino on the river Rieti; an object to satisfy the boldest imagination by its wild beauty. . . (Kitson 15).

This is the man Ruskin dogmatically claimed to be unable to take delight in nature. Hardly anyone *but* Rosa was taking any pleasure at all from such wild scenes in the seventeenth century. It wasn't that they were simply unfashionable--they had yet to be discovered as objects of pleasure until Rosa started to paint them. Ruskin's criticism of Rosa was as harsh as it was partly because Rosa's reputation was so solid that cracking it required heavy blows. Partly too, the polemic strips away the disguises of a shallowness which art historians still criticize today. As Kitson says, "often Rosa drops the pretence of making a philosophical statement

and chooses subjects merely for their obscurity and potential for creating a sensation (13). But more than the over-reaction, and more than the true critical acumen contemporary art historians echo, Ruskin's shrillness disguises a fundamental insecurity about the difference between the obscurity of great art and the muddiness of little art.

It is Ruskin's insistence that landscape must signify the will of God which has earned his rhetoric the reputation for dogmatism or "infallibility," to use Gary Wihl's term. Ruskin sounds at times like a dogmatist in his confidence in his ability to "prove" the presence of God in nature:

There is not a moment of any day in our lives, when nature is not producing scene after scene, picture after picture, glory after glory, and working still upon such exquisite and constant principles of the most perfect beauty, that it is quite certain it is done for us, and intended for our perpetual pleasure. (I 343-4)

The footnote which is appended to this passage gently mocks Ruskin's youthful certainty:

At least, so I thought when I was four and twenty. At five and fifty, I fancy that it is just possible there may be other creatures in the universe to be pleased, or,--it may be,--displeased by the weather. (I 343-4)

Evaluations of the sublimity of Salvator Rosa are intricately tied in with the notion that the variety, infinity and ultimate obscurity of nature reveals the greater glory of a mind which created it all: God. It is Ruskin's uncertainty about whether this obscurity really does mean something which leads him to dogmatize not just about God in nature but about love in Salvator. Any aesthetic which values the obscurity of the sublime must face the problem of the authenticity of the sublime moment. Anxiety about this authenticity has a long history, exemplified best, perhaps, in

John Dennis' praise of enthusiastic passion over "vulgar passion." The latter has an easily understood source (such as anger at insult). Enthusiasm, on the other hand, is caused by "meditation" rather than some easily verified external source; it is powerful abstractly and metaphorically. The most powerful source of admiration and terror (two enthusiastic passions) is religious. Dennis prefers the enthusiastic to the vulgar passion in art because he believes the obscurity and abstraction of its source somehow authenticates it by elevating it to a more spiritual range. The difficulty in Modern Painters: how to defend a faith in the authenticity of the sublime moment?

Ruskin's method of circumventing this problem is a mixture of scientific and Evangelical labour, keen, hands-on observation and hard work, with a cyanometer in one hand and a pencil in the other. The transcendence of nature in the sublime moment must be earned painstakingly and slowly. All of Modern Painters stresses the necessity of incessant "walking, drawing, collecting, listing," of nature, as Robert Hewison says (20). C. Stephen Finley claims that Ruskin, like Carlyle, saw work as a virtue which could "be man's resolution for a spiritual crisis" (60). Throughout the five volumes of Modern Painters, Ruskin emphasizes that the artist is obligated to work at understanding the world before he may play imaginatively with what he knows (1:334), that it is only by constant "climbing and mole-like piercing" and not by "sitting on the central throne" that one may attain a cultivated appreciation of nature and art (2:179); that the artist must "rise up actively on the earth,--learn what there is in it, know its colour and form, and the full measure of it," in order to earn the right to make a statement like "heaven is bright." (4:53); that "the right of being obscure is not one to be lightly claimed; it can only be founded on long effort to be intelligible. . ." (4:95); and that "noble art-

mystery. . . is reached only by intense labour" (4:95).⁷ Ruskin's labour of observation and classification rather than more aggressive experimentation has been viewed as an Aristotelian version of the scientific endeavor, more common in the early part of the nineteenth century than later on. The main sections of volume one on sky, water and earth repeat a painstaking collecting of evidence which is amassed into a scientific system which is repeatedly, compulsively "trumped" by intuitions of infinity, only to be repeated again and again, laboriously re-enacting the labour of the previous sections. In sections on the truth of various parts of nature, Ruskin typically begins by focusing upon tiny or seemingly irrelevant details. This emphasis both vividly displays his impressive powers of observation and manages to imply that poetic transcendence of such precise accumulation of data is unsought. In other words, Ruskin favors a Wordsworthian emphasis on synecdoche, and by such preference reveals his own humble and genuinely scientific bent as well as (at his best) providing the unconscious motive for the sublime leap which later defines nature as ultimately mysterious.

Ruskin is not always successful in his flights into the rarified air of the sublime, however. At times his motivation becomes too self-conscious; he sets up his own powers of observation of nature too clearly as inadequate before he even begins to describe the scene in front of him, so that when the eye and the imagination fail the failure seems inevitable. At times the gap or aphasia hardly opens before it is satisfactorily classified in Evangelical terms as an experience of the "divine." And sometimes the facts themselves seem to be less descriptive of the scene than of a frame of mind, providing little contrast between impressions of the

⁷Any critic like Ruskin who deeply admired the Pre-Raphaelites and Gothic architecture must be fascinated by intricate work which displays the sort of power attainable only through intensive labour.

senses and ideas of the mind. Two representative sections, one which fails and the other which succeeds, ought to clarify what I mean, section II chapters 1 and 2, "Of The Truth of Tone," and "Of Truth of Colour"; and Section V "Of the Truth of Water."

The section on the truth of tone begins with a comparison of Poussin and Claude to Turner. Ruskin admits that the seventeenth century masters were indeed masters of tone, but argues that Turner had the "only scientific or truthful system" because his tone was lighter and therefore allowed for more detail and variety. Though his tree in the middle distance may lack the requisite pitch against the sky it would have in nature, it still "has precisely as much as it possibly can have, to leave it the same proportionate relation to the objects near at hand" (265). Moreover, the finer gradations of shade allow for a better depiction of distance. Turner saw an immensely detailed world which he refused to oversimplify by darkening his palette. Ruskin discloses the fact at the beginning of this section that nature is an immensely complex system which art cannot possibly be expected to fully represent, that in order to depict the truth of one idea, it is necessary to sacrifice the truth of another--that, in short, art is doomed to failure (though Turner has chosen to work harder at failing than his contemporaries). This is the Kantian first moment of the negative sublime when reason, knowing the ultimate failure of the imagination to represent the infinite, plunges ahead anyway, but notice how self-conscious Ruskin is of his intention to fail. Nature's

deepest shades are void spaces from which no light whatever is reflected to the eye; ours are black surfaces from which, paint as black as we may, a great deal of light is still reflected, and which, placed against one of nature's deep bits of gloom, would tell as distinct light. Here we are, then, with white paper for our highest light, and visible illumined surface for our deepest shadow, set to run the gauntlet against nature, with the sun for her light, and vacuity for her gloom. . . (261)

Though both Turner and the ancients are doomed to failure, however, Turner's failure is not as profound as the others because it is not so mechanical or technical as the classical response to nature was. Turner actually *observes* nature rather than painting by formula. Ruskin shows this most vividly and sublimely by comparing his own experience of an actual scene in Italy to Poussin's and Turner's representations of that scene. Ruskin shows how he actually took notes on the scene which Turner and Poussin describe. In the sublime moment Ruskin's own experience of nature rather than any of the precursors--Poussin the classicist, or Wordsworth or Turner the Romantics--takes precedence. Poussin had painted a landscape called Aricia or "sometimes Le or La Riccia" which Ruskin harshly criticizes for having

two-and-thirty bushes, of very uniform size, and possessing about the same number of leaves each. These bushes are all painted in with one dull opaque brown, becoming very slightly greenish towards the lights, and discover in one place a bit of rock, which of course would in nature have been cool and grey... and which. . . in [this picture] is consistently and scientifically painted of a very clear, pretty, and positive brick red. . . ." (278)

Contrast this "portrait" of a landscape with Ruskin's own portrait of the *real* scene:

Not long ago, I was slowly descending this very bit of carriage road [going through this area] the first after your leave Albano, not a little impeded by the worthy successors of the ancient prototypes of Veiento. It had been wild weather when I left Rome, and all across the Campagna the clouds were sweeping in sulphurous blue, with a clap of thunder or two, and breaking gleams of sun along the Claudian aqueduct lighting up the infinity of its arches like the bridge of chaos. But as I climbed the long slope of the Alban Mount, the storm swept finally to the north, and the noble outline of the domes of Albano, and graceful darkness of its ilex grove, rose against pure streaks of alternate blue and amber; the upper sky gradually flushing through the last fragments of rain-cloud in deep palpitating azure, half aether and half dew. The noonday sun came slanting down the rocky slopes of La Riccia, and their masses of entangled and tall foliage, whose autumnal tints were mixed with the

wet verdure of a thousand evergreens, were penetrated with it as with rain. I cannot call it colour, it was conflagration. Purple, and crimson, and scarlet, like the curtains of God's tabernacle, the rejoicing trees sank into the valley in showers of light, every separate leaf quivering with buoyant and burning life; each, as it turned to reflect or to transmit the sunbeam, first a torch and then an emerald. Far up into the recesses of the valley, the green vistas arched like the hollows of mighty waves of some crystalline sea, with the arbutus flowers dashed along their flanks for foam, and silver flakes of orange spray tossed into the air around them, breaking over the grey walls of rock into a thousand separate stars, fading and kindling alternately as the weak wind lifted and let them fall. Every glade of grass burned like the golden floor of heaven, opening in sudden gleams as the foliage broke and closed above it, as sheet-lightning opens in a cloud at sunset; the motionless masses of dark rock--dark though flushed with scarlet lichen, casting their quiet shadows across its restless radiance, the fountain underneath them filling its marble hollow with blue mist and fitful sound; and over all, the multitudinous bars of amber and rose, the sacred clouds that have no darkness, and only exist to illumine, were seen in fathomless intervals between the solemn and orbéd repose of the stone pines, passing to lose themselves in the last, white blinding lustre of the measureless line where the Campagna melted into the blaze of the sea

Tell me who is likest this, Poussin or Turner? Not in his most daring and dazzling efforts could Turner himself come near it.
.. (279-280)

Notice that the passage begins on the same fatalistic note that the previous chapter had hammered home: the infinity of nature and the inability of the human senses to register it all. The passage begins with an intuition of chaos which metamorphoses into God's tabernacle. Heaven's fire is absorbed by the foliage, the floor of the forest burns; then turns to waves and finally stars and the sea. There is a circular movement from meaningless obscurity of chaos to one "dark with abundant meaning," while the imagery reflects this thematic circularity by moving from sky to earth and back again to sky. Ruskin has also moved away from the scientific technique of the previous chapter to a more poetic one here and himself assumed the role of the precursor whose experience must be reflected by the artist, rather than the other way around.

Section III begins with the same realization of failure that section II did:

"The sea never has been, and I fancy never will be nor can be painted; it is only suggested by means of more or less spiritual and intelligent conventionalism. . . ."

(499). This self-conscious statement, however, is followed by rich details on the nature of water: that shade on water is not darkness on light but "a space of an entirely different colour, subject itself, by its susceptibility of reflection, to infinite variation of depth and hue" (503); that "horizontal lines are often not reflected on rippled water (508); that the transparency and reflective power of water are in reverse ratio; that the greater the distance from water the greater the reflectivity of it ; that bright objects are more prominently reflected, whereas dark objects allow bottom to be seen, except, that is, in muddy water where true shade actually was possible (499); that every ripple on the sea on a sunny day reflects a minute image of the sun (503), that the "local colour of the water depends in great measure on light reflected from the bottom," (504) and so on. Ruskin quotes an entry from his diary about the "green colour" of the water on the Rhone which he compares with an entry he had previously made about the waters in Venice, once again to show his readers that he was there, measuring and calculating and being undeniably true to nature in the most scientific sense of the word. This section corresponds in function to the section on Poussin in the previous section, though Ruskin would argue, of course, that the bad science of Poussin, mechanical as it is, fails to reveal any essential love for nature. The fact remains, however, that Poussin's art is described only to be undercut as too intellectualized, and so is Ruskin's own version of science. But in the second example, Ruskin's detailed and loving attention to specific facts is much more prominent than it was in the previous example, providing a greater contrast for a later mysticism. The only way, as Ruskin says in this section, to ensure authenticity of aesthetic effect is a "constant

and eager watchfulness, and portfolios filled with actual statements of water-effect, drawn on the spot and on the instant" which is more important than "the most extended optical knowledge" (509). There follows an extended comparison between licences certain painters may take and still be sublime versus mechanical means others such as Canaletto employ which only insult the truths of Venice and her canals. Finally the paintings of Turner are described, concluding with Slave Ship and Snowstorm: Steamboat off a harbour's mouth making signals, in shallow water, and going by the lead. Towards the conclusion the description of the sea I began the paper with is given, which repeats the sublime movement once again.

In comparing these two concluding passages with the previous, early description of Aricia, one notes a difference in the sublime effects generated. The Aricia passage seems almost canned in comparison, as if Ruskin knew before he was carried away by the beauty of the scene exactly how, at what speed, and where he would be carried. Its staginess is caused by the knowledge, stated initially and without preamble, that the chaos wasn't really chaos at all but infinity, and thus a nice, comfortable sort of chaos, nameable and classifiable. His "crystalline sea" and "golden floor of heaven" seem to be poetic and biblical rather than actual experiences. Ruskin is too self-conscious that he is gearing himself up for a sublime experience, anticipating an answer to a question hardly even posed and an uncertainty scarcely felt. In addition, his comparison of his perception of the scene and Poussin's seems egotistic, and his protestation that no one could adequately represent such a glorious scene from nature rings hollow, as one is naturally certain that Ruskin knows his own description elegantly completes its task.

Snow Storm, in contrast, begins thus:

Few people, comparatively, have ever seen the effect on the sea of a powerful gale continued without intermission for three or four days and nights; and to those who have not, I believe it must be unimaginable, not from the mere force or size of surge, but from the complete annihilation of the limit between sea and air. The water from its prolonged agitation is beaten, not into mere creaming foam, but into masses of accumulated yeast, which hang in ropes and wreaths from wave to wave, and where one curls over to break, form a festoon like a drapery from its edge; these are taken up by the wind, not in dissipating dust, but bodily, in writhing, hanging, coiling masses, which make the air white and thick as with snow, only the flakes are a foot or two long each: the surges themselves are full of foam in their very bodies, underneath, making them white all through, as the water is under a great cataract; and their masses, being thus half water and half air, are torn to pieces by the wind whenever they rise, and carried away in roaring smoke, which chokes and strangles like actual water. Add to this, that when the air has been exhausted of its moisture by long rain, the spray of the sea is caught by it as described above. . . and covers its surface not merely with the smoke of finely divided water, but with boiling mist; imagine also the low rain-clouds brought down to the very level of the sea, as I have often seen them, whirling and flying in rags and fragments from wave to wave; and finally, conceive the surges themselves in their utmost pitch of power, velocity, vastness, and madness, lifting themselves in precipices and peaks, furrowed with their whirl of ascent, through all this chaos; and you will understand that there is indeed no distinction left between the sea and air; that no object, nor horizon, nor any land-mark or natural evidence of position is left; that the heaven is all spray, and the ocean all cloud, and that you can see no farther in any direction than you could see through a cataract. Suppose the effect of the first sunbeam sent from above to show this annihilation to itself, and you have the sea picture of the Academy, 1842, the Snowstorm, one of the very grandest statements of sea-motion, mist, and light, that has ever been put on canvas, even by Turner.

Though Ruskin's experience of the storm scene is very similar to that of the Aricia passage, he does not in this instance hasten towards a poetic or religious classification of it. The experience and the metaphors are more specific. The sea becomes mountain precipice, atmosphere, smoke and mist, but these transformations are all at a similar level of specificity. The metaphors are unstable, ("mist" and "foam") unlike the "infinity" (suggesting rational grasp) or "heaven" (religious assurance) of the previous passage; they show specific details about the

sea. The assurance offered in this instance is cool and objective. Chaos may not be infinity here, but it is still precisely observed and described. The metaphorical substitutions in the latter passage lack the exuberance and ambitious reach of the previous ones, seeming more like tautologies or descriptions (mist is like smoke which is like foam which is like yeast. . .), only very subtly suggesting the power of the controlling intellect in ordering the scene.⁸

This description provides a necessary foundation for the expressive and imaginative Slave Ship which transcends description of fact. Snow Storm, Ruskin believed later, was "a good study of wild weather; but, separate from its aim, utterly feeble in comparison to the few words by which any of the great poets will describe sea, when they have got to do it" (570). Ruskin means by this statement not that any fine poetic description of the sea is superior to any fine painting of the same subject (which Read appears to think Ruskin egotistically implies) but that any inspired, imaginative and "noble" painting of the sea must be superior to one which is merely faithful to the facts--which has laboured without inspiration. Snow Storm, one might say, describes an aporia (a mist and indeterminacy between air and sea defying stable meaning) which Slave Ship, a painting describing the after effects of storm and the evil it inflicted, finally interprets. Slave Ship is an example of a "noble" product of the artist's mind which captures the *essence* of the storm rather than its mere appearance.

This is Ruskin's interpretation of Slave Ship:

⁸I disagree here with Richard Read's argument in a recent article in Image and Word that this passage is religiously didactic and that Ruskin could not understand Turner's Romantic subjective sublime aesthetic because he was blinded by eighteenth century mimetic notions that "the Sublime in writing. . . is no more than a description of the Sublime in Nature"(312). Read believes that Ruskin was not trying to defend Turner so much as undercut his mastery of painting by Ruskin's own word-mastery. I don't buy this argument for several reasons: Ruskin took Turner's poetry quite seriously; he believed that painting and literature were interchangeable forms of poetry (Landow 43); Ruskin worshipped the older man as a unique genius and noble intellect throughout his life.

... the noblest sea that Turner has ever painted, and, if so, the noblest certainly ever painted by man, is that of the Slave Ship, the chief Academy picture of the Exhibition of 1840. It is a sunset on the Atlantic, after prolonged storm; but the storm is partially lulled, and the torn and streaming rain-clouds are moving in scarlet lines to lose themselves in the hollow of the night. The whole surface of the sea included in the picture is divided into two ridges of enormous swell, not high, nor local, but a low broad heaving of the whole ocean, like the lifting of its bosom by deep-drawn breaths after the torture of the storm. Between these two ridges the fire of the sunset falls along the trough of the sea, dyeing it with an awful but glorious light, the intense and lurid splendour which burns like gold, and bathes like blood. Along this fiery path and valley, the tossing waves by which the swell of the sea is restlessly divided, lift themselves in dark, indefinite, fantastic forms, each casting a faint and ghastly shadow behind it along the illumined foam. They do not rise everywhere, but three or four together in wild groups, fitfully and furiously, as the under strength of the swell compels or permits them; leaving between them treacherous spaces of level and whirling water, now lighted with green and lam-like fire, now flashing back the gold of the declining sun, now fearfully dyed from above with the undistinguishable images of the burning clouds, which fall upon them in flakes of crimson and scarlet, and give to the reckless waves the added motion of their own fiery flying. purple and blue, the lurid shadows of the hollow breaker are cast upon the mist of night, which gathers cold and low, advancing like the shadow of death upon the guilty ship as it labours amidst the lightning of the sea, its thin masts written upon the sky in lines of blood, girded with condemnation in that fearful hue which signs the sky with horror, and mixes its flaming flood with the sunlight, and, cast far along the desolate heave of the sepulchral waves, incarnadines the multitudinous sea. (572)

One of Gary Wihl's criticisms of this description is its inaccuracy: the storm, he says, is obviously drawing nigh; it is not over with. Ruskin should have been more observant of the facts, as he admonished his readers so often to be. I believe, however, that Ruskin's interpretation of the this painting fits into the context in which he places it in Modern Painters. Slave Ship is superior to Snow Storm because it is an exceptionally powerful work of imagination, in contrast to Snow Storm which is merely a good study of wild weather. Ruskin's prose, just as Slave Ship's brush strokes, abandons the description of atmospheric effects after its long

labour in that field and responds imaginatively to the essence of the scene. We as readers have already experienced the storm in reading the previous description; we are now ready to interpret its meaning. Were Ruskin at this climactic moment to try to describe a storm coming on when he had just finished describing a full-blown storm, the expectations of the reader would be disappointed. Slave Ship moves from the previous study of nature to an indictment of the evil of mankind, who are the authors of the storm, creating it, signing the sky with blood and "incarnadining the multitudinous sea." The evil of nature only reflects the evil of the slavers who corrupt it. The body of the sea is tortured by the storm just as the bodies of the slaves are tortured by the slavers, and nature's ferocious rending of these bodies after they are cast from the ship, the frenzied feeding of the fish on the dismembered arms and legs, all seem to reflect and be caused by this evil.

The sublime conclusion of the study of storm effects thus asserts the power of the ego over the vastness and uncontainability of nature (as it did in the *Aricia* sketch) but what makes this description powerful is that the egotistical thrust is so ambiguous and threatened (not merely disguised). The mind controls nature, but in horrible and disgusting rather than pleasing ways. Ruskin, as he and Wordsworth say at the beginning of each volume of Modern Painters, has "walked with Nature/And offered, far as frailty would allow,/My heart a daily sacrifice to Truth" but now he sees that "their Divinity/Revolts, offended at the ways of men." The slavers who cast their slaves overboard in order to outlast the storm do not merely offend against human nature, they literally wound the sky, which the masts pierce and rake in bloody streams. The effort to enslave nature, then, at the moment that nature is being interpreted and contained by Ruskin's analysis, is condemned. In other words, the sublime is critiqued even as it is performed.

The reader as well as Ruskin has to earn moments of poetry through immersion in prose and prosaic facts. That is one reason why it is not possible to really condense Modern Painters satisfactorily, taking out all the "dull" parts on wave reflection or cloud movement, because they constitute the labour, both of the reader and the author, to understand the natural world and to discipline responses to it.

CHAPTER TWO

The "Goddess Calypso"

Modern Painters as a whole may be viewed as two dogmatic declarations besieged by a host of qualifications and reservations: the claims, stated most forcefully in volumes one and two, that art must be true to nature, and that art must do good, respectively. Ruskin never retracted these beliefs, for he always felt that they ought to be true, even if, strictly speaking, they didn't always apply, and Ruskin was always determined to do his duty as high priest of culture. He gradually began to grapple with a number of troubling propositions, however: that representations of psychological or human truths were more important than the recording of scientific, geological truths; that evil rather than good constituted the normal experience; that therefore the purist school of art as represented most faithfully by Fra Angelico was less true than the naturalist school of Turner; and finally, that Turner himself was to be primarily admired not so much as a faultless recorder of natural fact, but as the despairing voice of protest against a materialist Victorian society.

Setting aside for the moment considerations of the effectiveness of the rhetoric of Ruskin's sublime, this chapter will focus on the sources of the sublime object itself. Ruskin defines this source as simultaneously generative of the beautiful, as mystically divine, perfect, good, unified, infinite and mysterious. This object, as it reconciles different faculties of the mind and unifies the mind's perception of nature, constitutes a return to eighteenth century notions of Beauty as a deep, abiding plan of order in the world. The late eighteenth century association of the beautiful with the sensuous, however, forces Ruskin to continually distinguish between the sublime and the beautiful, reinstating the former as the basis for the latter. Ruskin ultimately needs the dynamism of dualism more than the

vision of reconciliation. Penetrative imagination (the faculty that is supposed to reveal beauty) reveals, in fact, the failure of description and, hence, the sublime. Penetrative imagination is symbolized by the serpent, the mirror-image of the sensuality it supposedly transcends.

At its most basic level, volume two argues that the beautiful is the good.¹ As the sublime by the nineteenth century was no longer fully integrated with the good and the beautiful, it must have seemed to Ruskin to have only a tangential relationship to the subject of this volume. Thus, Ruskin subsumes it under the category of typical beauty, which accordingly expands to include such qualities as infinity, mystery and vastness, although these qualities are "tamed" as George Landow says, so that it is possible to imagine them promoting the good. In this volume, as in Addison's work on aesthetics, the sublime is often encoded as the great or elevated, as "anything which elevates the mind," or "the effect of greatness upon feelings (1: 128). Since all great art elevates the mind, all great art is sublime. Landow claims that the sublime by being so inclusive a term and by changing meaning through the five volumes gradually ceases to be a very clear and imposing category in Modern Painters,² but of course this opinion is exactly what Ruskin would have gladly endorsed as his intention from the beginning, for Ruskin

¹This is the view which all commentary on Modern Painters has emphasized. As Cook and Wedderburn say, volume two "sets forth the spiritual as opposed to the sensual theory of art." In Ruskin's words, the volume expresses "the first and foundational law respecting human contemplation of the natural phenomena under whose influence we exist, that they can only be seen with their properly belonging joy, and interpreted up to the measure of proper human intelligence, where they are accepted as the work and the gift of a Living Spirit greater than our own" (2: xlv).

²George Landow's The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin, though certainly the best analysis of Ruskin's aesthetic theory presently available, interprets Ruskin's attitude toward the sublime in a way too reflective of what I see as Ruskin's own partial understanding. "Ruskin's statement that 'impressions of awe and sorrow' are 'at the root of the sensation of sublimity (7.119) suggests that, like [Richard Payne] Knight, he believed all emotion, gentle as well as extreme and violent, were sublime. . . ." (209). Also, "In view of the fact that Ruskin used these two terms in so many ways, it seems necessary to conclude that he not only reversed his earlier position, finally deciding that the sublime was a distinct aesthetic category, but also that like previous writers, he used the sublime as an embracing aesthetic category in which he placed all forms of pleasing emotion: sorrow, grief, pain, horror, terror, awe, admiration. . . ." (211).

wished to be read as reacting against the sublime excesses of the Romantic poets.³

The beautiful is the category under which Ruskin insists upon classifying sublime or "great" experience. Critics have tended to largely restrict their analysis of Ruskin's sublime to those places in Modern Painters which actually discuss it (the sections on the grotesque and the picturesque, for example) not upon Ruskin's large and unwieldy sections on the beautiful.⁴ Focusing mainly upon volume two, I will argue that the classifications of typical beauty and penetrative imagination in particular grow out of the agonistic tensions within the sublime experience. For example, typical beauty as Ruskin defines it is characteristic "of divine attributes" of nature (2: 64), which are (as largely enumerated above) the qualities of infinity, unity, repose, symmetry, purity, and moderation.⁵ The power to apprehend the

³To what degree, precisely, Ruskin bought into Romantic notions of the self and nature is open to debate. Critics do seem agreed, as Harold Bloom says, that Ruskin critiqued Romanticism "from within" in order to save "the Romantic program of humanizing nature from extinction through excessive self-indulgence" (Ringers 181). C. Stephen Finley points out that Ruskin "accommodates romantic nature to the covenant theology of the reformed tradition" (28). Elisabeth Helsinger adds that "though Ruskin identifies himself as a romantic, he defines a critical attitude--and with it, a prose style--formed in opposition to his romantic model" (42).

⁴That is not to say that these critics have not noted Ruskin's subsuming of the sublime under the beautiful. An unsigned review in the Foreign Quarterly of July 1846 (vol. 37, 380-416) applauds Ruskin's reclassification: "The Sublime we have said is included by the writer in Beauty; and properly so. His Typical Beauty is to great extent intended as a substitute for it. Burke's idea that the sense of the Sublime is based in dread is well-confuted." Ruskin, however, went too far, in this critic's mind, in attempting to "wipe it [sublimity] out of the vocabulary, or allow it only a very general use in the study, not of natural objects, but of the human mind" (Ruskin, Critical 83). Also, George Landow remarks that "Ruskin's opposition of beauty to sublimity appears most clearly . . . in the sections on typical beauty in which Ruskin discusses the beauties of order." The infinite, for example, one of the qualities of typical beauty, is beautiful only in a "tame" way, "such as its incorporation in variety and in curved lines." The expression of infinity which is "dependent on our own imperfections" may be sublime, but it cannot be beautiful (205, 206). Landow argues that Ruskin in Modern Painters 2 finally acquiesced to Burke's distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, but I believe that Ruskin is still trying to reconcile these two aesthetics, partly because of the way Ruskin still insists upon classifying sublime qualities under the beautiful, and partly because Ruskin still maintains that "nothing can be perfectly sublime without being in some degree or way beautiful. . ." (2: 369) I am investigating these oppositions (or reconciliations?) along the same lines Landow sketched out, though emphasizing similar rather than dissimilar qualities of the sublime and beautiful, especially how the *desire to tame* (discipline) is essential to both qualities but stronger in the sublime.

⁵Ruskin in 1883 objects to his earlier terminology and methodology in his section on typical beauty: "the proper subject of inquiry is now taken up, a little too hurriedly. The word "typical" might also have been better chosen; especially since it has lately been used so often to signify representative examples of things. It means here any character in material things by which they

beauty of these ideal qualities depends upon whether or not the self apprehending them is itself ideal (moderate, restrained, pure, etc). Yet even this moment of repose in which the ideal self contemplates the ideally beautiful is itself defined by a process of struggle and purification. In this struggle, the self resists itself and the superficial appearances of the object are destroyed in order to reveal its essence. The sublime as Ruskin defines it is merely an extension of (or contiguous with) the beautiful. Thus, as the beautiful is undermined by agonistic tension, so is this contiguous sublime (as Ruskin defines it). Yet these agonistic tensions are themselves characteristic of the sublime movement as Kant, Weiskel and Bloom define the negative sublime--a qualified, self-conscious and melancholic moment of triumph.

The negative sublime which underlies and undercuts the beautiful protects the self from the dangers of sensuousness and self loss. This antagonism of the sensuous and beautiful to the spiritual and sublime was typical of the later eighteenth century aesthetic theories. In chapter one the rather obsessive repetitions of this pattern of spiritual triumph over the sensual and imaginative faculties confirmed Ruskin's power over nature in a way characteristic of late-Romantic prose. Ruskin's sublime moment, it was there argued, became especially intense because of his investment in the sensuous, factual realm, an investment viewed, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as typical of the experience of the beautiful rather than the sublime. Schiller, for example, states that the sublime "affords us an egress from the sensuous world in which the beautiful would hold us forever captive," and that it shows "man has a greater need beyond living and securing his welfare, and quite another destiny than to comprehend the phenomena

convey an idea of immaterial ones" (2: 76). The other type of beauty is vital: "the appearance of felicitous fulfillment of function in living things, more especially of the joyful and right exertion of perfect life in man" (2: 64).

that surround him," which scientific and utilitarian precedent (as well as *aesthetic* in the strict sense of the term) stodgily enjoins him to do (Sublime 201, 205). As an example of the sensuous allure of the beautiful which the stern discipline of the sublime rescues us from, Schiller tells the story of Ulysses and Calypso:

The beauty displayed by the figure of the Goddess Calypso enchanted the brave son of Ulysses, and by the power of her charms she long held him captive on her island. For a long time he believed he was worshipping an immortal divinity, yet he lay only in the arms of lust--but suddenly a sublime impression overcame him in the guise of Mentor: he cast himself into the waves, and was free. (Sublime 202)⁶

Because of Ruskin's powerful investment in the beautiful (the world of sense), I implied in chapter one that his overcoming of their Circean grip seemed all the more impressive, though Ruskin still holds on to the hope that she is a goddess, or that a marriage might make her honest.

Burke too tended to reduce the beautiful to the sensuous manifold which the sublime self rejects as unworthy. The beautiful, he claims, is "that quality. . . in bodies by which they cause love" (83). The beautiful relaxes the body for a pleasurable experience, whereas the sublime nerves and tenses it for battle.⁷

⁶Yet Schiller reacts against Burke, who as he (Schiller) complains in the fifteenth of his Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man, "makes beauty into mere life" (Adams 422). "Beauty, as the consummation of his [Man's] humanity, can. . . be neither exclusively life nor exclusively form" (421). In his examples of the beautiful and in his descriptions of the limitations of the beautiful, however, Schiller implies, as in the Calypso passage, that the beautiful is nearer to "mere" life than the sublime, which contemptuously casts it aside as weakness. Beauty's "earthly wings" cannot take us beyond "the world of sense" though beauty may "lighten the shackles of necessity and with gaiety and jocularly lead us up to the dangerous places where we must act as pure spirit and cast off everything physical. . ." (Schiller, Sublime 197).

⁷Burke believed that terror and pain were closely connected to the experience of the sublime. The cessation of pain, for example, causes "delight," which is a sublime feeling. By cultivating pain in small to moderate doses a person overcomes the bodily tendency to inertia, which "disables the members from performing their functions" and "takes away the vigorous tone of fibre which is requisite for carrying on the natural and necessary secretions" (122). "Braced and strengthened" by "labour" and "surmounting of difficulties, an exertion of the contracting power of muscles" which "as such resembles pain" strengthens both physical and mental power. The smooth and sweet objects characteristic of the beautiful relax and weaken the body and spirit (137-140).

Though Burke qualifies his reduction of the beautiful to the erotic, adding that "the love of the beautiful does not involve desire for possession" or "violent and tempestuous passion" (83) he explicitly affirms that the beautiful arises from the feeling which is "directed to the multiplication of the species." Burke appears to be describing a sort of passive voluptuousness Victorians especially would associate more with the female than the male experience. The sublime passion necessarily involves the desire to overmaster, whereas the beautiful passion gratefully and gracefully acquiesces.

At any rate, if Burke did not see the two aesthetic modes as mere varieties of passion, modern interpreters of the sublime such as Weiskel appear to view the contiguous sublime as not different in kind but in degree from the beautiful, only a more deeply sublimated, intensified and individualized version of it. In the negative sublime, on the other hand, the libido, denied its more decorous and tame expression in the love of the beautiful, is channelled instead into an identification with a higher, god-like, patriarchal power. In wishing to master the unmasterable, the self attempts like Oedipus to both destroy and tyrannize over the figure of the father. Quoting Freud, Weiskel says that

after sublimation the erotic component no longer has the power to bind the whole of the destructiveness that was combined with it. . . . the identification [with the father] which neutralizes the terrifying threat releases an aggressive impulse which must in turn be sublimated by an increased identification. Obsession (repetition-compulsion) and melancholia do tend to be characterological features of those personalities with deep spiritual investment in the negative sublime" (96).

The sublimation of the erotic drive expresses itself, Weiskel says, as "aggression" and "cruelty." The "violent rapture" Burke associated with the beautiful, once robbed of the "rapture" only becomes more "violent." The guilty repression of

violence weakens the ego and requires in consequence further sublimations to recompense its sense of loss. By criticizing itself the mind proves that it is powerful enough to destroy its own self-esteem repeatedly and still survive. Paradoxically, the suicidal movement of the sublime displays its own incredible vitality--its will to be, as Schiller would say, the being that "wills" rather than the being that "must." ⁸

Scattered criticism of both Burke⁹ and Schiller throughout Modern Painters makes all too clear Ruskin's careful perusal of these precursors. He was deeply conscious of the traditional association of the beautiful with instinctive, sensuous and sensible pleasures. This association (not surprisingly) he denied. The humanist mission of Schiller to reconcile the human (which the beautiful enables us to be) as well as the "daemon" (which the sublime enjoins us to become) (210-211) Ruskin doubtless shared, eager to claim that the highest beauty fades imperceptibly into the highest sublime.¹⁰ Yet if the beautiful is not as Schiller and Burke define it, what is it exactly that Ruskin is reconciling with the daemonic?

"The sexual instinct is entirely excluded from consideration throughout the argument of this essay" said Ruskin at the beginning of volume two, because "I take no notice of the feelings of the beautiful which we share with flies and spiders" (2: 63). The human body, along with its instincts, cannot be a beautiful object

⁸"All other things 'must'; man is the being that wills" (Sublime 193).

⁹Yet see 1: 128: "I am fully prepared to allow of much ingenuity in Burke's theory of the sublime" and 2: 109, in which Ruskin says Burke was "the first English writer who used his common sense and reason on this subject" (of proportion and beauty): "the essay on the sublime and beautiful is, like all his writing, extremely rational and forceful; and deserves most careful and reverent reading" This latter quote was a footnote added in 1883, as were many in volume two. Ruskin liked to think of himself as carrying the Burkean torch of empiricism to even greater lengths than Burke had. I argue this is something of a pose, but one which Ruskin believed in deeply. Cook and Wedderburn take Ruskin's admiration of Burke at face value.

¹⁰"It will readily, I believe, be admitted that many things are sublime in the highest degree, which are not in the highest degree beautiful, and vice versa; i.e. that the two ideas are distinct, and one is not merely a particular form of the other. It will also, I believe, be admitted on reflection that nothing can be perfectly sublime without being in some degree or way beautiful, and nothing perfectly beautiful, without being in some degree sublime. . ." 2: 369

because of its fallen nature. Ruskin makes this position even more emphatic in this "Evangelical burst of flame upon the corruption of human nature," as Ruskin sardonically called this passage from the perspective of his old age:

No longer among the individuals of the race is there equality or likeness, a distributed fairness and fixed type visible in each; but evil diversity, and terrible stamp of various degradation: features seamed by sickness, dimmed by sensuality, convulsed by passion, pinched by poverty, shadowed by sorrow, branded with remorse: bodies consumed with sloth, broken down by labour, tortured by disease, dishonoured in foul uses: intellects without power, hearts without hope, minds earthly and devilish; our bones full of the sin of our youth, the heaven revealing our iniquity, the earth rising up against us, the roots dried up beneath, and the branch cut off above; well for us only, if, after beholding this our natural face in a glass, we desire not straightway to forget what manner of men we be. (2: 176)

The beautiful is not sexual desire or any sublimation of it. The beautiful is not the opposite of the vast and infinite sublime either, for the vast is no more "wonderful. . . than what we insolently call littleness" (2: 91). Beautiful objects have the quality of unity and repose as well as vastness, infinity, and mystery, qualities both formal and unformulizable, emphasizing Ruskin's attraction on the one hand to the quantifiable and concrete and on the other to his instinct to transcend the sensuous manifold. Proportion is one characteristic of beauty which Burke had mistakenly discounted. He had been wrong to suppose that "there is no value or agreeableness in constructive proportion," or that "since no one proportion is better than another, that proportion is of no value in determining the beauty of objects (2: 105, 108). Ruskin wished to identify himself closely with the empiricism of Burke and a "common sense" and classical philosophy in which the harmony, unity and repose of an object contemplated with a disciplined, calm, "earnest, loving, and unselfish" disposition (2: 57) had been seen as the experience of the beautiful. Yet Ruskin (also like Kant) denied that the mind recognized the

beautiful object in any predictable or formulaic way. This proper attitude to art Ruskin called *theoretic* rather than *aesthetic*, because he objected to the associations of aesthetics with mere sensation, although he distanced himself from the Germanic school of Kant by insisting that his *theoria* included more fully what Kant would have derided as a mere "charm" (indicating impure rather than pure beauty) of "bodily sensation" (57).¹¹ Ruskin adopts here an Aristotelian idea in order to justify his appreciation of the senses: the category of the theoretic both avoids and embraces the perceptions of the body by valuing some sensations such as vision and hearing higher than the corruptible senses of touch and taste. Vision is the superior sense because excessive pleasure in looking at something can never be deemed intemperate; overindulgence in taste, however, leads to gluttony, and in touch, to voluptuousness¹² (2: 43). Ruskin *wished* to be thought more empirical

¹¹Ruskin compares his "theoria" to the German "anschauung" in volume two of Modern Painters (57), but a footnote appended in 1883 states that "I have not the least idea, now, what the "anschauung" of the Germans is; and whatever it may be, beg my pupils to have nothing to do with it." In a footnote added to this footnote (!) the indefatigable editors Cooke and Wedderburn insert a most helpful quote from Love's Meinie, ch. iii, explaining from a less peevish Ruskin's perspective that the reason that theoria and anschauung are not compatible is that anschauung "does not (I believe) include bodily sensation, whereas Plato's theoria does, so far as is necessary, and mine, somewhat more than Plato's." Ruskin's reading of Kant (if this is the shady German he refers to) seems compatible with the view Wimsatt and Brooks take in Literary Criticism: A Short History, in which they describe Kant's idea of beauty as severe; it related.. . almost exclusively to the formal, decorative, and abstract: to Greek designs, foliation on wallpaper, arabesques (things which 'mean nothing in themselves'), music without words. The charms of direct sensuous pleasure might fuse with beauty, and beauty might be combined with perfect natural forms and purposive human artifacts. . . but in neither of these cases was beauty pure. . . . It is worth noting that here was a system which conceived Homer and Shakespeare as less aesthetically pure than wallpaper (372).

Ruskin's irrational antipathy to this ascetic view of the beautiful which he shares (despite all protestations) will be dealt with at length in chapter four.

¹²As Finley points out, Ruskin was much influenced by Calvinist-Wesleyan doctrine. Wesley believed that natural man was a "mere atheist" and that "children were, foremost, afflicted by 'natural atheism,' an atheism chiefly apparent in their innate capacity to enjoy and to love nature. Thus, the 'wise parent' was impelled to break their will because it could lead them to two damning desires: the 'desire of the flesh' and the 'desire of the eyes,' Children desired first to enjoy earthly happiness, to experience what gratified the outward senses, such as taste or touch. More inimical to their spiritual well-being was the complementary 'desire of the the eyes': the 'propensity to seek happiness in what gratified the internal sense, the imagination, either by things grand, or new, or beautiful" (79). So Ruskin's insistence on the purity of the faculty of vision, in his full awareness

than the empiricist Burke had been, even going so far as to defend the beauty of dogs (attacked by Burke as rather ignoble beasts), and to assert that the horse, the eagle, the lion and man were definitely the noblest animals, and could be proven so by analysis of proportions. Yet ultimately the detection of beauty depends upon the moral condition of the perceiver, and a truly ethical and theoretic interpretation can occur only after the imagination and understanding have digested and interpreted the scene before it (2: 34-36). Thus, in effect, the mind views the images and ideas instilled by the conscience (or God, as Ruskin was careful to say). Without God's grace (here's another Evangelical twist to the theory) one could not possibly hope to be granted visions of beauty.

The beautiful, therefore, by a disciplined surgery on incoming sensuous data, becomes a species of what contemporary theory would term the sublime. Instead of the beautiful undergirding the structure of the aesthetic, the sublime becomes the true source and foundation of art. The human mind reacts to the corresponding mind in nature (an *idea*, as Schiller was fond of saying in Naive and Sentimental Poetry) rather than to inchoate sensuous impressions. By the discipline of temperance "we shall bring the faculty of taste itself to its maximum of sensibility," Ruskin claims in volume two (56).¹³ What then is left to the sublime? How is it *different* from the beautiful?

One obvious difference is that the sublime seems to disturb Ruskin, whereas the beautiful does not. So distressing was the subject to Ruskin that he never included his full descriptions of the sublime in Modern Painters. One of the most interesting of the characteristics of Ruskin's sublime, given Weiskel's

that the "desire of the eyes" constituted a sin from a more orthodox perspective, was a decidedly daring move.

¹³Ruskin's 1883 footnote to this claim: "Alas, for all this fine talking, I never took pains enough to learn from my father to be a good judge of wine; an unfilial folly of which I daily repent,---- with such a sense of its cruelty and absurdity as--I need not try to express, since it would not be believed."

description of the aggression and guilt arising from the sublimation of the sensuous experience, is Ruskin's intense awareness of the sublime experience as a kind of exercise in embarrassment, signifying shame and weakness rather than strength. In the appendix to chapter two (inserted by editors, as I have mentioned in the introduction) Ruskin specifically defines the sublime poet through a parable about evil:

A healthy and practical farmer, meeting a viper in his field, regards it simply as one of the creatures ranged under the general term of "vermin" it--throws it over the hedge out of his way, and proceeds on his walk--whistling. A sick and sorrowful poet, meeting the same creature, pauses--watches, follows, irritates it--takes a strange pleasure in looking into its eyes, and hearing it hiss; and measuring the concentric circles of its prepared coil. Presently it uncoils itself and glides away. The youth watches the waving of the long grass over its body--proceeds to wade through said long grass for half an hour after it, half-fascinated and wishing to be bitten. Goes home, and dreams of it, intensified into a fiery serpent by his mistress's last frown--rises utterly ill and miserable, and writes "Lamia". . . .¹⁴ It will follow from these general considerations, that so far as a mind of pure make, and powerful imagination is either (1) affected by a noble, but doubtful and faithless compassion for the agony of the world--or (2) by remorse for carnal sin, and by a weakness of the body, that it will be liable to fits of fear, and correspondent vision of terrible things, which will also probably be intense, animated and acute, in proportion both to the vigor of its invention, and to its own intrinsic hatred of all death and evil; the things which have the nature of either, or the "body of this death" appearing more ghastly and vivid to the man in proportion to the separation of his own noble nature from them; and thus, unless we could find great men with no moral failing, and subject to no bodily distress, we must be prepared to find them occasionally creating pieces of horror in their work, which at first sight it will be difficult to distinguish from the perpetual and base horror of wicked men. If we do not find them doing this, unless as I said, we supposed them perfect and like the angels, we may be sure they are disguising something from us--hiding their fear, and not speaking from their hearts--in other words, that they are verily not great men, though we thought them so. (2: 380)

¹⁴I have deleted about ten lines in which Ruskin asks the reader whether the poet's action has any good purpose, and answers his own question by saying that unless the product of serpent-watching is "Lamia" or something similar, then "the young or old visionary had far better have concurred at once in the farmer's views on the subject of vipers."

This passage reveals an astonishing though at least partly unconscious understanding of the whole cyclic movement of the sublime experience I have just described: the unsatisfied desire for the mistress is translated into art; the visions of the poet are more intense as the desire is more deferred (visions which protect against longing and also intensify it); guilt for "carnal sin" ensues, along with doubt and fear about the validity of the hatred of this sin as a subjective or objective phenomena. The poetic act of imagination reveals him to be a superior human being compared to the farmer, because the poet can see and be sympathetic to those who are miserable and sinful--but the risks of such compassion too often outweigh the benefits, as the poet is lured through sympathy with errant behavior into transgressive acts himself: Ruskin elides the initial fascination with the final horror. "The body of this death," Ruskin says, is "more ghastly and vivid to the man in proportion to the separation of his noble nature from them." What is the *body of death*? The line is a quotation from Romans, which I now quote with its context:

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans vii: 21-25)

Thus there is a strange reversal of the later eighteenth century association of the beautiful with temperate Epicureanism and passionate aesceticism with the sublime. Whenever the body appears as a focus in a work of art, it is a sublime object, for it is that which is fear-inspiring and taboo, tensing rather than relaxing, to use Burkean language. Yet the body may not be ignored like some sort of obscene joke, for once it is equated with evil it must be properly confronted and overcome in

order to demonstrate the ascendancy of the mind over it.¹⁵ To fight the dragon is an act worthy of St. George, one of Ruskin's personal heroes and patron saints. It is necessary to expose the serpent's evil periodically because it reveals weakness--it reminds us that we are creatures of the flesh, the "dragon-children" as Ruskin calls himself and his audience at the end of volume five, rather than the children of the spirit. But still--it is daemonic to repeatedly humiliate oneself this way. The conscious will towards self-abasement is itself a contorted effort to attain the perspective of God-like awareness of human limitation. This particular turning is what might be termed the sublime consequence of the evangelical doctrine which directed Ruskin since early childhood to "rise up in the morning with the purpose that (please God) the day shall not pass without its self-denial. . . Let your very rising from your bed be a self-denial; let your meals be self-denials" (Rosenburg 113). As Ruskin said himself in volume four, the purpose of the artist is to continually sacrifice himself to something greater: in the genius of imaginative power "the vanity and individualism of the man himself are crushed, and he becomes a mere instrument or mirror" (4: 44). Not surprisingly, the symbol of this process in its entirety, circularity and nontranscendent failure becomes the serpent, an animal towards which Ruskin felt an uneasy fascination.

The obsessive repetition of the serpent motif reveals both Ruskin's effort to attain supreme control over himself, which he had defined as characteristic of the beautiful, as well as his ultimate failure in doing so, showing the recurrence of desire itself. The serpent is both the "law of God" of the "inward man" as well as the "law of sin." Insofar as it symbolizes sin, it is a sublime and terrifying idea. In

¹⁵Though the context in Romans shows that Paul is powerless in his efforts to combat sin, and though Ruskin as Evangelical believed at the time he wrote Modern Painters 2 that individual effort alone could not save anyone from evil and damnation, Ruskin did not believe that one should ever cease in the constant struggle for self-perfection. Even in Ruskin's fulminations upon the "corruption of human nature," he was at least, he said in an 1883 footnote, "quit of the folly of hoping for redemption except in personal effort" (2: 177).

the early volumes these laws are anchored in the realm of the divine and of nature which are both beyond human control, necessitating a certain measure of acceptance and resignation to inevitable imperfection. In the later volumes, especially, as Ruskin internalizes the laws as human, it seems possible to control them by will. Thus a normal submission to law gradually turns into a willful and increasingly uncontrollable self-opposition.¹⁶

The most vital function of the imagination was to reveal the essence of a thing, what Ruskin, quoting Romans, referred to as the "inner man" of the law. Purity and imagination were the two vital or *essential* characteristics of the sublime poet Ruskin outlined in the appendix to volume two. There are three types of imagination: associative, contemplative and penetrative.¹⁷ The penetrative imagination is a pure, single apprehension rather than the combination of images

¹⁶Marc A. Simpson's "The Dream of the Dragon: Ruskin's Serpent Imagery" in The Ruskin Polygon: Essays on the Imagination of John Ruskin has some insight into Ruskin's serpent obsessions, although Simpson views the recurrence of the motif purely as neurosis, whereas I see it having an important historical and aesthetic significance as well, signifying Ruskin's compulsion to undermine the foundations of the beautiful and the contiguous sublime by the agonistic tensions of the negative sublime. Simpson observes that the snake is sometimes described as innocuous, but more often is "disturbing," and he views the serpent in the Lamia passage as symbolic of sin, misery, darkness, and horror (22, 23). In Queen of the Air (1869) the serpent image represented the "accepting, generative, and purifying power of the earth" (24), but also (in Ruskin's words) "the grasp and sting of death." The "antagonism to the serpent was. . . a feeling which became ever more violent as time passed" (24). Simpson also remarks that the story of Genesis probably contributed to Ruskin's association of the serpent with original sin, death and sensuality (26). Ruskin also often associated women with vipers (27) suggesting that Millais paint his wife dressed in "natural ornaments" of snake jewelry, but the image is also "self-referential and masturbatory" (33). This interpretation Simpson supports convincingly with quotations from Ruskin's diary, in which he records some of his more disturbing snake-dreams.

¹⁷Ruskin in his 1883 introductory chapter to section II of volume 2, *Of the Imaginative Faculty*, writes that though there is "less to be corrected or condemned than in the previous chapters" there is "far more, were it conveniently now possible, to be supplied." He claims that this section on the imagination is impractical, describing the anatomy of imagination without ever helping anyone develop imaginative faculties. "I have . . . examined at tedious length the various actions of human conception and memory, without helping any one to conceive, or to remember; and, at least in this part of the book, scarcely touching at all on the primary questions (both moral and intellectual) how far the will has power over the imagination." The most *important* aspect of imagination (which Ruskin feels he has neglected) is "the degree in which all of them (powers of the imagination) are subject to the control of the will, and liable to disease through the absence of direction and discipline." (2: 219-222) Of course, Ruskin did not forget to include in the form of the serpent the symbol of his discipline and vigilance against the waywardness of the imagination, but unfortunately the serpent simultaneously represents desire as well as discipline against desire.

which characterizes the associative imagination, as it often approaches too near fancy to be represent the noblest form of aesthetic effort (249).¹⁸ Ruskin defines this penetrative imagination as the sympathy the poet feels with the object represented and his capacity to convey the essence of the thing: the heat of fire, for instance, rather than its nonessential qualities such as "smoke or cinders" (250). To illustrate his meaning, Ruskin compares a passage describing the sun from Paradise Lost with another from the Inferno. The passage from the Inferno is this:

. . . The sun
Now all the western clime irradiate changed
From azure tinct to white; and, as I passed,
My passing shadow made the umber'd flame
Burn ruddier (250)

Here are the corresponding lines from Milton:

As when the force
Of subterranean wind transports a hill

¹⁸Interestingly, Ruskin refuses to call his own obsession with law and essence (which the penetrative imagination supposedly reveals) as "metaphysical": "The works of metaphysicians will afford us [in discovering the quality of imagination which sets it apart from all other functions of the mind and from its superficial manifestations] in this most interesting inquiry, no aid whatsoever. They who are constantly endeavoring to fathom and explain the essences of the mind are sure, in the end, to lose sight of all that cannot be explained (though it may be defined and felt); and because, as I am about to show, the essence of the Imaginative faculty is utterly mysterious and inexplicable, and to be recognized by its results only, the metaphysicians . . . miss it altogether, and never reach higher than a definition of Fancy by a false name" (2: 224). The associative imagination combines images of sense; it has a "regarding" and "combining" function, calling up images "apposite or resemblant." It makes pictures "interesting," "impressive," "instructive," "captivating," and "entertaining." As such the associative imagination is modelled on eighteenth century empiricist notions of the imagination, mirroring nature. The imagination in general, however, is capable of "vision" and "prophecy"; it is "single" and "penetrating" (227). This is the active, agonistic and Romantic angle in Ruskin's theory of the imagination, similar to Coleridge's primary imagination, though not synthetic as much as combative. The contemplative imagination, finally, combines qualities of the penetrative and associative; it describes the essence of things (as does the penetrative) but it blurs things as well, retaining "sublimity and impressiveness. . . while the sensual offensiveness is withdrawn," depriving "the subject of material and bodily shape" (290-1). Though it combines several essences in one, it is not the external shapes which it combines (as does the associative imagination) ; it takes the "abstract being" of one form and images that essence in another form. (291-2) This contemplative imagination may have interesting similarities with Coleridge's secondary imagination, which reconciles different functions of the mind with each other, making the mind more self-conscious.

Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side
 Of thundering Aetna, whose combustible
 And fueled entrails, thence conceiving fire,
 Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,
 And leave a singed bottom all involved
 With stench and smoke: such resting found the sole
 Of unblest feet (249)¹⁹

Ruskin criticizes Milton for excess of detail concerning "externals." "We feel rather the form of the fire-waves than feel their fury. . . and the fuel, sublimation, smoke and singing seem to me images of partial combustion," (250) whereas Dante's sun, its "pure white, hurtling, formless flame" displays a more powerful imagination by capturing the essence of sun-ness. This power of essence-trapping Ruskin calls

the highest intellectual power of man. There is no reasoning in it; it works not by algebra, nor by integral calculus; it is a piercing pholas-like mind's tongue, that works and tastes into the very rock heart; no matter what be the subject submitted to it, substance or spirit, all is alike divided asunder, joint and marrow, whatever utmost truth, life, principal it has, laid bare, and that which has no truth, life, nor principle, dissipated into its original smoke at a touch. The whispers at men's ears it lifts into visible angels. Vials that have lain sealed in the deep sea a thousand years it unseals, and brings out of them Genii. (2: 251)

Ruskin's description of the role of the penetrative imagination eerily echoes his definition of the sublime as the necessary confrontation of the serpent, except that now the serpent is the noblest function of the mind, which burrows through the earth of experience to discover its vital essence. The penetrative imagination whose function was to reveal the classically integrated essence of man, at once sublime,

¹⁹In 1883 Ruskin dismissed these and other examples of the penetrative imagination as "six pages of metaphor which. . . mean, in all, little more than that the best authors express the mind, more than the person or manners, of men or heroes." It is only five pages into the chapter on penetrative imagination that Ruskin of 1883 interjects with an approving footnote: "Some sense at last!" (2: 253).

beautiful, ordered and unified, reveals instead the self-opposing, dualistic tensions of the negative sublime.

The imagination does not just slink into holes in the rock, though, it also, like the dragon of antiquity, guards piles of gold (and perhaps a virgin or two?) it finds there: it is "the open sesame of a huge, obscure, endless cave, with inexhaustible treasure of pure gold scattered in it; the wandering about and gathering the pieces may be left to any of us, all can accomplish that; but the first opening of that invisible door in the rock is of imagination only. . . ." (252). This rather loaded sexual imagery is made finally even more explicit by two of the finest examples Ruskin says he can find of the penetrative imagination: "That day we read no farther" of Francesca di Rimini, and the "He has no children" of Macduff (252). On first sight the two quotations do not seem to have much in common. The first more famous quotation describes the beginning of the love affair between Francesca and Paolo, the brother of Francesca's husband. They were reading of the first kiss of Lancelot and Guinevere when they stopped, unable to go any farther. The story of their fall into love is told, of course, from the perspective of their position in hell later on. The second quotation comes from the lips of Macduff when he hears that his wife, children and servants have been cruelly massacred by Macbeth. Malcolm urges him to "Be comforted:/ Let's make us medicines of our great revenge, /To cure this deadly grief." Macduff responds, "He has no children. All my pretty ones?/ Did you say all? O hell-kite? All?" Though the content of each quote is vastly different (falling in love is nothing like hearing about the massacre of all your relatives) both lines impart a stunning or silencing effect on the imagination. The penetrative imagination, you will recall, is to impart the essence of whatever it wants to represent--in the case of Paolo and Francesca, forbidden love, in the case of Macbeth, intense grief. Both

Shakespeare and Dante represent these intense emotions as blanks. Macduff continues to ask the same stupid question again and again. He mutters "he has no children" as if he reports on another's condition, not his own. On the one hand, the ego sets the imagination up in order to display its inadequacy in representation: one function of the penetrative imagination is to repress desire; on the other hand, the image of repression--the blank or silence--like the image of the serpent, is itself symbolic of desire which because of its emptiness (blankness) wishes to be filled.

The penetrative imagination reveals the essence of the impure sublime rather than the perfections of the beautiful. The imagination is the serpent which constantly devours itself. The serpent repeatedly images forth the destruction of the serpent. In the early volumes Ruskin emphasizes the importance of the beautiful and marginalizes the sublime. In the later volumes in discussions on the grotesque, the gloom of the mountains and the pessimism of Turner, Ruskin faces the problem of evil more squarely, determined to define it as precisely as possible and to minimize its power. Though he came to realize the importance of the sensuous experience of art more and more clearly in his appreciation of the Venetians, earlier derided as decadent, he never truly redefined evil as uncontrolled idealism, always convinced in some vital way of its origins in the flesh.

Were Ruskin to admit that the sublime rather than the beautiful inspired the poet, he would have to also admit that the morally pure artist was necessarily inferior to the sublimely, nobly sick Keats. The beautiful he had defined as "theoria," the moral insight granted by a sort of divine dispensation, and the greatest beauty, he had maintained, was also the greatest sublimity. In order to believe himself an authentic perceiver of either, Ruskin denied that his criteria or perspective were ultimately subjective or Romantic or that mere self-knowledge provided ultimate knowledge of the world at large. In the appendix to volume two,

remember, Ruskin had decided there were two kinds of sublime: the noble representation of the "agony of the world" (though "faithless" of course) and the supposedly less-than-noble depiction of the artist's own "weakness of body" and "remorse for carnal sin." Such confessions, though honest, revealed a fundamental problem with this sort of second-rate artist (the sentimentally morbid Keats could never be the naive Homer's equal). This problem with Keats was that he was too stained by the iniquities of the world to ever be granted the beatific visions the truly initiated were.

Thus, the battle with the serpent signifies to Ruskin's consciousness the struggle against someone *else's* sin in the cheerful certainty of victory, for if the hero is worthy of the contest to begin with he would not be self-divided and tormented but calm and whole.²⁰ One must have power with humility: one must wield a power which is not agonizingly self-aware, sentimental or self-conscious, as Keats' romantic character is self-conscious. The ego destroys the imagination without recognizing the act even as it is pictured in the repetition of self-destructive images. Ruskin projects the object of his own self-hatred of the body onto the sublime or the natural before destroying it. The danger of this sort of unselfconscious aggression is only too obvious, of course, such as Ruskin's early attacks upon the sublime, as well as his prejudice against German idealism and pagan and Catholic idolatry (which he was very near to himself), and his later turn against science and materialism (dealt with in the next chapter).

Modern Painters, in other words, is a kind of exorcism of spirits. Ruskin continually turns upon himself and casts out one form of prejudice and hatred after another, aware at some deep level that he is unable to accept the world of the body, of gross matter and banal fact, and attempting to broaden his perspective and make

²⁰This is the problem with the Evangelical school as Ruskin later saw it--its propensity to view its own flock as saved and everyone else as damned.

whole his personality. What dooms him to failure in each strenuous attempt is the evangelical dogma, instilled so early and so unconsciously true to him that he never questions it, is that humanity is composed of only two groups--good and evil--and that acceptance of the world or worldliness may be attained only at the cost of accepting evil. In 1883, for example, after one particular burst of evangelical fervor of the second volume, he notes that it is not necessary to believe the story of the fall in order to gain benefit from this section, but that one must believe in some way that sin entered into the world. Here Ruskin believes his perspective has broadened and that he has repudiated evangelicism. Yet his belief in sin and evil as sensuality and his insistence upon the dichotomy between the good (spirit) and the evil (flesh) still marks him as caught in the web of his old beliefs.

Interestingly, Ruskin's description of the evils of the body is often expressed in imagery identical to the praise of the most spiritual and pure qualities. This is true, for example, of the chapter on typical beauty, in which Ruskin argues that repose is "the most unfailing test of beauty" and that "all great art is great in proportion to the appearance of it" ²¹(2: 117). In supporting this statement he criticizes the *Laocoon*, whose "convulsions" he finds particularly disturbing, and praises Michael Angelo's supposedly more restful (?) depiction of the *Plague of the Fiery Serpents* on the Sistene Chapel (better known as the *Brazen Serpent*).

Since it is Virgil's account of Laocoon's unmerited destruction by the gods which Ruskin refers to in analyzing the sculpture, I shall quote the scene in Virgil's words as translated by Pope. Laocoon, having warned the Trojans against accepting the wooden horse, is not obeyed because it is not ordained that the Trojans should win the war:

²¹ Ruskin's 1883 footnote to this statement: "This is wildly overstated; and the rest of the paragraph is nearly pure nonsense. . ."

And had not Heaven the fall of Troy designed,
 Or had not men been fated to be blind,
 Enough was said and done t'inspire a better mind.
 Then had our lances pierced the treacherous wood,
 And Ilian towers and Priam's empire stood. (60)

Since the gods have ordained that Troy must fall, however, Laocoon is sentenced to be strangled to death by water serpents, whose eyes were filled with "bloody streaks," whose bellies burn the sea, and whose jaws "sputtered flame." They twine around the two sons of the priest first, but as he runs to help them, they encircle his body and throat. Laocoon's "roaring fills the flitting air around" as he "labors at the knots," but the serpents eventually destroy him in spite of his struggles. The "general cry/ Proclaims Laocoon justly doomed to die." (66) The sculptors, in contrast to this bloodthirsty description, rather modestly depict the father moaning rather than shrieking, with extensive coils of a single serpent surrounding him and his two sons. The younger is near death and has become languid. The elder is about to free himself from a single coil around his ankle. The serpent has buried his fangs in the hip of the father.

By the time Ruskin wrote about the *Laocoon* it had become a stock piece of sublime art. Its "sublime tragedy" had often been contrasted often with the "harmonious beauty" of the Apollo Belvedere (Janson 201). Goethe, Lessing and Winckelman had all written in praise of it, Goethe praising in particular its quality of "repose despite violent movement." "The suffering of Laocoon excites terror, indeed, in the highest degree, while the situation of the dying son. . . excites pity, and that of the elder son. . . fear, yet at the same time hope for his escape. Hence, Laocoon exhausts his subject in so far as he represents and arouses all possible gradations of sentiment. The ages of life are also finely graded. . . " (Bieber 27). Winckelmann had argued that the sculpture had represented extreme suffering in

which "appears the tested spirit of a great man who wrestles with necessity and wishes to check and suppress the outbreak of his emotions" (Bieber 22). Finally, Lessing had pointed out the formal beauties of the piece: the reason, for instance, that Laocoon does not shriek against the tormenting biting and crushing of the serpents is that in sculpture "a merely wide opening of the mouth is a hollow that produces the most repulsive effect in the world" (Bieber 23). Also, of course, a mere moan instead of a shriek indicated more resoluteness of character and depth of sublimity.

What does Ruskin have to say about all this? He criticizes the line as "meagre" and the tortures as "contemptible." "Sublimity" is "entirely absent in the death of the Dardan priest." "I suppose that no group has exercised so pernicious an influence on art as this; a subject ill-chosen, meanly conceived, and unnaturally treated, recommended to imitation by subtleties of execution and accumulation of technical knowledge"(119-120). The reason that he gives is that the sculptors obviously did not know the *essence* of serpenthood, that is, that they lacked what Ruskin (you will recall) defined in volume two as "penetrative imagination", wherein an ideal sculptor recognizes and portrays an ideal essence of the object:

For whatever knowledge of the human frame there may be in the *Laocoon*, there is certainly none of the habits of serpents. The fixing of the snake's head in the side of the principal figure is as false to nature as it is poor in composition of line. A large serpent never wants to bite, it wants to hold; it seizes therefore always where it can hold best, by the extremities, or throat; it seizes once and for ever, and that before it coils; following up the seizure with a cast of its body round the victim, as invisibly swift as the twist of a whip-lash round any hard object it may strike: and then it holds fast, never moving the jaws or the body; if the prey has any power of struggling left, it throws round another coil, without quitting the hold with the jaws. If Laocoon had had to do with real serpents, instead of pieces of tape with heads to them, he would have been held still, and not allowed to throw his arms or legs about.

Ruskin concludes by roundly condemning Virgil as well for excessive bloodthirstiness in his descriptions. "In fact, Virgil has missed both of truth and impressiveness in every way" (2: 120-121), though that is not to say that serpents in general, in essence, are not characterized by both venomousness and crushing ability, and that a "healthy imagination" would not picture particularly nasty serpents in this manner. Still, "in Virgil it is unhealthy operation of the imagination which destroys the verity both of the venom and the crushing, by attributing impossible concomitants to both; by supposing in the poison an impossible quantity uselessly directed, and leaving the victim capability of crying out, under the action of coils"(2:121).

As a contrast to the Laocoon's completely unsatisfactory depiction of beauty and sublimity, Ruskin mentions another serpentine extravaganza: *The Plague of the Fiery Serpents*. This spandrel of the Sistine Chapel depicts the salvation of the chosen people by Moses from the serpent plague. According to Numbers 21: 5-9, as punishment for the doubt and complaints of the Israelites, the "Lord sent mighty serpents among the people, and much people of Israel died." Moses pleads with the Lord on behalf of the survivors, and is divinely instructed to make "a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." Moses does this, and the worshippers of the brazen serpent do indeed survive. On one side of the spandrel the tormented writhe in the coils of the serpent plague in a confused, surging heap; on the other the saved gaze tranquilly up at the centrally located pole bearing the brazen serpent.

Recall that Ruskin's criteria for evaluating the *Laocoon* and the *Plague* is repose: Laocoon lacks it, he claims, whereas the fiery serpents have it. Yet both sculpture and painting clearly contrast states of repose with states of violent and

turbulent action: Laocoon makes vigorous efforts to free himself, whereas the youngest son languishes. The fiery serpents contort their victims into almost unbelievable positions (one has to really *study* the painting to figure out where all the arms and legs go), while Moses and his true children virtuously contemplate the one true serpent of the Lord. Although this portion of the painting is serene, the total effect is of tension between good and evil rather than of reconciliation between the two. Ruskin must have meant another kind of repose than that depicted in the texts he perused: perhaps he was contemplating the psychological reaction of the viewer. That Ruskin felt more calmed and cheered by Michael Angelo is hardly surprising given that the *Laocoon* represents unmerited and meaningless evil triumphant, indeed, fated by the gods; but the *Plague* a clear and decisive reward for virtue and punishment for transgression. Ruskin reacts more vigorously to the subjective associations the two texts hold for him than to their purely formal qualities of repose, appearing to forget (or to have never known), in his rather excited condemnation of Virgil's representation of the Laocoon episode, that the sculptors pre-dated Virgil and thus differed in their interpretation of the scene. Much of the excess of screaming and the flying venom and so forth are absent in the sculpture. *Laocoon's* effect is still by today's standards, as Janson says, "somewhat calculated and rhetorical. . . a display of virtuoso technique" (201) but properly restored and compared fairly to Virgil's description and to the baroque style in general, it is not (to a calm viewer at any rate) "pernicious," "unnatural," "ill-chosen," "meagre," "contemptible," or "meanly conceived" (120). Ruskin would appear to be reacting, therefore, to the content rather than the formal excellences of the piece, which given his argument that only art which has the formal quality of repose is good, seems rather disingenuous. Furthermore, his claim as serpent-expert to know that true serpents of the anaconda-type always hold

and never bite--his claim, that is, that the work is not true in a rather crude mimetic way--is so shaky he is forced to qualify it, admitting that both holding and biting *are* "essential" qualities of serpents in general, but that if the serpent was a true and effective representative of his killer tribe, Laocoon simply wouldn't have the time to be writhing around so much and bellowing out. But strangely, Laocoon isn't screaming at all--it is only Virgil's priest who does. Ruskin's claim that works of art must be truthful in this sense seems almost to parody his careful studies of nature in the first volume.

It is because Ruskin's evaluations of art are more often than not based upon a serious and calm study of nature that blindness such as this becomes interesting. His response to Laocoon is too aggressive given the provocation: *Laocoon* is not simply unsuccessful, baroque or excessive, it is offensive and evil; the *Plague* is not simply successful, it is a triumphant display of victory over evil. Most revealing is the manner in which the victory occurs, in which one sort of serpent defeats another. Again we discover the serpent who consumes himself, or more properly the serpentine imagination which creates a serpent to destroy another serpent. The divine imagination separates the chosen from the damned before destroying them, but guiltily reveals in its imagery that the one is actually the mirror-image of the other. Even as Ruskin condemns and distances the evil of the world, his fascination with this sort of imagery betrays his unconscious realization that the projection is actually only that--a projection of his own uneasy fascination with the body. In the hostility, repression, projection and guilt of this cycle we see all of the components of the obsessive-compulsive negative sublime.²² In viewing the repetition of the serpent motif in this way, one does not merely reduce Ruskin's

²²The cross which Michael Angelo's brazen serpent hangs upon is actually in the shape of a T, a symbol which Richard Payne Knight had claimed in his *Worship of Priapus* (1789) (a book which, according to George Landow, Ruskin knew about) symbolized "creation and generation, before the church adapted it as a sign of salvation" (Messman 49).

prose to an exposure of neurotic symptoms, but (hopefully) gains some insight as well into the complex tensions of Ruskin's mind, the ongoing battle between the reconciliations which the eighteenth century had offered between the sublime and the beautiful as opposed to the acceptance of an ongoing conflict between them.

Ruskin's descriptions of the true working of the imagination repeatedly incorporate the triumph over the figure of the serpent. One of the most famous is the comparison of the false, Roman griffin and the true medieval Lombardic griffin from the third volume. The Medieval griffin represents the true ideal of griffinhood because it embodies its "essential" characteristics: the repose and kingly indifference of the lion as well as the vigilance of the eagle. The medieval artist was able to seize these ideal qualities because he himself knew repose, vigilance and grace. In choosing to represent the serpent, "a poisonous winged dragon," as the object of vigilance and source of evil which the griffin holds under its paws, Ruskin again undercuts this state of repose in which the sublime and beautiful are contiguous, revealing an inner agonistic conflict (145). The mouth of the griffin is both beak of eagle and teeth-maw of the lion (the most characteristic qualities of each beast) but the leonine and the bird-like qualities meld together so imperceptibly that there is something eagle-like in the paws and something indolent and feline in the lift of the beak. In other words, the parts from the two different creatures are not soldered together in a patchwork-fashion--a new beast results from the true, visionary Lombardic imagination. In contrast, the Roman artist creates a monster out of spare parts, tacking a bird's beak onto a horse's neck, and resting an effeminate lion's paw on a flower, ultimately creating an "ornamental" griffin. The Lombardic griffin, then, may be seen as an example of the penetrative imagination, which captures the essence of griffinhood; the Roman is an example of associative, of trial and error repeated until some sort of

flimsy composition is attained. The recurrence of the destroyed serpent signifies the struggle undergirding the apparent unity and repose of the composition.

In defending Turner's imagination as truly penetrative, Ruskin gives as example his *Jason* from the Liber Studiorum. In this representation of Jason's confrontation with the dragon there is

no far forest country, no secret path, nor cloven hills; nothing but a gleam of pale horizontal sky, that broods over pleasant places far away, and sends in, through the wild overgrowth of the thicket, a ray of broken daylight into the hopeless pit. No flaunting plumes nor brandished lances. . . no more claws, nor teeth, nor manes, nor stinging tails. We have the dragon, like everything else, by the middle. We need see no more of him. All his horror is in that fearful, slow, griding [sic] upheaval of the single coil" (II 259-260)

The imagination, here as in the passage from Dante and Macbeth, consists of concealing as well as representing: the imagination which exposes its own inadequacy; the language which represents its own limitations of expression; the lovers who cannot speak of their desire and the painter who chooses to represent darkness in which the eye fails--all are obsessive repetitions of the brazen serpent who destroys the serpent of the plague.

I have connected the destructive and manic tendencies of this cycle of the negative sublime to Evangelical roots, but the cycle becomes more insistent and destructive in the later, less religious volumes than in the former, pious ones. In addition, in focusing upon the Evangelical origins of Ruskin's sublime moments I have read volume two as if Ruskin had not at the time that he wrote or revised it distanced himself from his childhood beliefs. As I have tried to indicate through copious footnotes from Ruskin's footnotes from the 1883 revision, it is difficult to read even volume two as quite so naive and un-selfreflexive. Ruskin has reservations, as I have indicated above, from everything from his previous

evangelicism to his definition of typical beauty and his analysis of imagination. "A mere piece of pious insolence," he sneers after one passage, and the insults simply pile up, page after page: "the literary art and pedantry of it, employed to express the most solemn of truths in a tinkle that shall be pleasant to the ear, are now very grievous to me"; "This last paragraph is heedlessly and insolently written"; "Too fast and far again! by much; the impetus of phrase running away with me. See the mischief of fine writing" ; "all this. .. much too emphatically put"; "An entirely unwarranted assertion, made evidently without reflection, and on hearsay. . . just as unnecessary as it is insecure"; "untrue, I am sorry to say, in both clauses of the sentence. It is very possible to love grasses and ferns without loving God. . . ; "This third paragraph, again, is mostly nonsense. . ." ; "A grievously ill-chosen example!"; "Wrong"; "Extreme nonsense, I grieve to see--and say, and what is worse, unguarded nonsense"; "The whole chapter is stupid and useless"; "I am glad to see that even in this Evangelical burst of flame upon the "corruption of human nature," I was at least quit of the folly of hoping for redemption except in personal effort. . ."; "Assumption again, and of the unblushingest" ; "Nonsense again"; "Untrue again, in the sweeping negation. . .".²³ One has a feeling, in reading Ruskin, of continual qualification of feeling and statement. Ruskin never truly revised his early work to accord better with his later, broader frame of mind because public criticism of his former self was another exercise in humility and self-overcoming (and also because he became increasingly incapable . And in the appendix to volume two, later incorporated into volume three, Ruskin admits not just to sin's ultimately unknowable quality, but to its equally unknowable source:

The horror which springs from the guilty love of foulness and sin, may be often mistaken for the inevitable horror which a great mind must sometimes feel in the full and penetrative sense of their

²³2: 46, 83, 86, 91, 92, 110, 148, 154, 168, 173, 174, 177, 176, 242, 247.

presence;--how, finally, the vague and foolish inconsistencies of undisciplined dream or reverie may be mistaken for the compelled inconsistencies of thoughts too great to be well-sustained, or clearly uttered. (III 140)

Also in the appendix to volume two, later added to the main body of volume five, Ruskin says:

I pause as I write--long and resultless. Unless one were oneself all that one should be, how can one say, or imagine, what the thoughts of others should be? I cannot tell, of any pain that I have felt, of any delight that I have enjoyed, how far I grieved or rejoiced rightly. But this at least I know,--that whether we rejoice or grieve, we ought all of us to gain more and more insight into the facts of the life around us; and that those facts are, to our human sight, more than terrible. Assume what theory you will about the world;--and still, so far as the vision of the world so constituted is granted to you, it must be a frightful one:--the best that you can believe is that in compensation for the evil of it, there shall one day be greater good; but believing this, still the good is unseen, evil is seen. Try at least to see it. Whatever is to be the final issue for us there ought surely to be times when we feel its bitterness, and perceive this awful globe of ours as it is indeed, one pallid charnel house,--a ball strewed bright with human ashes, glaring in its poised sway to and fro beneath the sun that warms it, all blinding white with death from pole to pole. (II 376)

Ruskin no longer pretended that the perception of beauty was dependent upon the artist's or perceiver's moral rectitude. Indeed, it is impossible, he now believes, to distinguish between pure and impure delight in beauty. It has now become more imperative than ever to discover and accept the "facts." But now the facts have become overwhelmingly disgusting and horrifying. "Try at least, to see it [the good]," he says, but in the next sentence he fails to do just what it was he had pleaded for, providing a most discouraging model: whatever the "issue," he says, we cannot fail to detect the fact that the world is ultimately only a "pallid charnel house." The passage is remarkable for the discrepancy between the feeble message of hope and the recognition of the hard finality of death, as well as for the

discrepancy between its cynicism and the idealistic tone of most of the second volume. The ultimate "issue"--any sort of afterlife--has become meaningless in the immediate context of death and suffering.

There is a tension carefully built up within volume two which undermines the repose of its ideal of the beautiful and the sublime, creating a negative sublime out of the contiguous. On the one hand, the style of volume two was modelled after the "serious, quiet, earnest and simple manner" of Hooker (Ruskin's words). The Church of England Quarterly described this style as "solemn," the Foreign Quarterly Review thought it both mature and modest, and the North British Review believed it to be "full of truth and goodness, of power and beauty" (2: xl, xli). On the other hand, the derisive jibes of the later footnotes, written plainly and pointedly, in almost a common speech ("nonsense!", "At least I was *quit* of the folly.. ."), echo the contrast between the ideal self and essence which are undermined in their embrace by the recurrence of the figure of the serpent, which disciplines the spirit by reminding it of the sins of the flesh. The serpent, like the 1883 notes, is agonistic. Its essential quality, as Ruskin, would say, is to bite and to hold, not to circumvent the essence of the question which, in the section on imagination and in the section on beauty, is discipline, but to continually and painfully and self-consciously show how an apparently disciplined explanation of the art of discipline has not thoroughly disciplined itself.

In the late '50's, after having spent a summer studying Veronese in Turin, Ruskin wrote to his friend Charles Eliot Norton that "to be a first-rate painter--you mustn't be pious; but rather a little wicked, and entirely a man of the world" (262). John Dixon Hunt, one of Ruskin's biographers, believes that Ruskin was thinking of

Turner's obscene drawings, discovered at the National Gallery.²⁴ He now realized that the "old man's soul had been gradually crushed within him, leaving him at the close of his life weak, sinful, desolate." The astonishing passages on Turner's *Garden of the Hesperides* and *Apollo and the Python*, which would embody this new, personal response of Ruskin's toward his "earthly master," and which would form the climax of the last volume of Modern Painters, were already perhaps taking shape before he left England in 1858. (260-263)

The account of Ruskin's unconversion before the painting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba has been often told, how after hearing a squeaking idiot preach to a handful of louts and old women that they are the only saved in the world, he reported that

Myself neither cheered nor greatly alarmed by this doctrine, I walked back into the condemned city, and up into the gallery where Paul Veronese's Solomon and the Queen of Sheba glowed in the full afternoon light. The gallery windows being open, there came in with the warm air, floating swells and falls of military music, from the courtyard before the palace, which seemed to me more devotional, in their perfect art, tune, and discipline, than anything I remembered of evangelical hymns. As the perfect colour and sound gradually asserted their power on me, they seemed finally to fasten me in the old article of Jewish faith, that things done delightfully and rightly, were always done by the help and in the Spirit of God. . "that day, my evangelical beliefs were put away, to be debated of no more. (Praeterita vol III, ch.I)

Ruskin in this passage paradoxically affirms that the aesthetic insight he experienced in the Turin gallery "fastened" him in an article of ancient Jewish faith even as it seemed to destroy his evangelicism, language that implies that his renunciation of faith is only a sublimation into a more original, more valid experience of salvation. Ruskin was "born again" to a higher purpose than before.

²⁴ Turner died in 1851 after drawing up a will appointing Ruskin as one of the prime executors. This will was contested by his relatives, and Ruskin soon resigned because he was reluctant to be involved in a Chancery lawsuit. After several years a compromise was finally achieved, Ruskin became actively involved again in sorting, classifying and analyzing the tons of drawings and paintings Turner had left behind. Among these were the obscene drawings which Ruskin promptly burnt. (Hunt 255-260)

The mental strain of such experiences and such expectations naturally had severe psychological repercussions, because even though Ruskin repudiated the narrowness of evangelicism belief, he could not shake his suspicion that he had also sacrificed his status as one of the chosen and had willingly become one of the damned. It would seem that after abandoning his Evangelicalism and after gaining some sort of insight into its evils, Ruskin's later work would not repeat his old obsessions, but as Rosenberg has observed, "The danger inherent in forsaking such a faith was that one might retain the anxieties and guilts of one's childhood years after abandoning the belief that one was saved" (113). The immense guilt he felt in turning away from the religion he had been brought up in created new impetus for self denial and sacrifice and only intensified the necessity for a harsher, more suicidal form of the negative-sublime compulsions. Thus in the last two volumes, the figure of the serpent grows into cosmic proportions: the people of England are all children of the Dragon and the sky and the land have been poisoned by the fumes of the dragon-breath. This is the subject of chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

The Limitations of Science

It seems strange to me, said Cleanthes, that you, Demea, who are so sincere in the cause of religion, should still maintain the mysterious, incomprehensible nature of the Deity, and should insist so strenuously that he has no matter of likeness or resemblance to human creatures. The Deity, I can readily allow, possesses many powers and attributes of which we can have no comprehension; but, if our ideas, so far as they go, be not just and adequate and correspondent to his real nature, I know not what there is in this subject worth insisting on. . . . how do you mystics, who maintain the absolute incomprehensibility of the Deity, differ from sceptics or atheists, who assert that the first cause of all is unknown and unintelligible?

(David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* 31)

The Deist Cleanthes wishes to argue a posteriori that nature is made according to rational principles as a useful and ideal environment for human beings, and that only a wise, benevolent human-like creator of the world would order it so. The Mystic Demea, horrified by Cleanthes' lack of a priori proofs and alarming assumption of familiarity with God, responds indignantly that the term "*anthropomorphic* is an appellation as invidious, and implies as dangerous consequences, as the epithet of *mystic*. . ." (31). Hume brilliantly demonstrates through the quarrelling of these two Christians the sadly unchristian foundations of their belief: the idolatry and stupidity of Demea in worshipping something he cannot describe or even envision; the arrogance of Cleanthes' anthropomorphism.

Both the deist and the mystic, arguing at cross-purposes that either reason or intuition proves the existence and describes the nature of God, emerge weakened from their confrontation with Philo, the skeptic. Had deist and mystic allied against the common foe, their arguments would have both gained and lost power. Each would yield any claim to certainty of knowledge of God and assume a limited role in determining such problematic objects of knowledge. Deism would document the

limits of understanding and find evidence in partial understanding; mysticism would find in these limits an intuition; both, contrapunto, would constitute the language of the sublime. This adulterated discourse can still make an argument for the necessity of some sort of diminished belief, even if it is only the certainty that one way of expressing the inexpressible is earned whereas another is not. The sublime asserts the power of the individual in objective knowledge and in the naming of something (by using the powers of the intellect) which object is acknowledged *through the act of naming* itself as unnameable (which mysteriousness is known by intuition). The universe, that is, may be defined as a cloud or as infinity, words which self-consciously reveal their own inadequacy in the face of mystery while simultaneously naming and thus allowing the self to assert power and knowledge over the unknown. In the early sublime, neither voice is allowed full expression; what is cloudy and uncertain remains so because this state of ignorance has been richly earned by the vigorous efforts of the rational and sensuous faculties; the mysteries of nature are meaningless outside the intricate tangle of fact and law in nature. In the later version of Ruskin's sublime, mystical intuition and the symbolic, mythic forms which express such intuitions take precedence over the Platonic--immanent forms of the more classical and Deist perspective. Gradually, the seamless continuity between the form the world assumes and the meaning it imparts become separated, resulting both in a more mystical as well as a more symbolic language: the language of myth.

In the first chapter I discussed how in volume one the strength of the sublime moment (the assertion of the ego over an object of fear and awe) depended upon the dialectic between the empirical, scientific persona and that of the mystic and priest who acknowledges the final undecidability of such an object, asserting power in discovering that he knows that he cannot know. This certainty of

indeterminateness is generally expressed through the generic Romantic or Evangelical catch-phrases such as "infinity" or "divine mystery."

These words paradoxically express everything and nothing about the self and the world. They admit ignorance while also triumphantly asserting the intelligence of the self who at least can clearly recognize ignorance. Volume three and the last half of volume five of Modern Painters widen the gap between the scientific emphasis on patient, painstaking observation of physical fact and the symbolic meaning of a complex mythology (which supposedly interprets the physical nature of the world). This gap is signified not by such words as "infinity" or "mystery" so much as by complex, over-determined images. Two images, especially, become complicated: that of the serpent and the cloud. These signify indeterminacy primarily because so many meanings gradually accrue to them that they eventually, like Milton's God, become dark with excess of light. The serpent is the nexus of the anxieties of each of Ruskin's personas: the fear of the scientist of contemporary, materialist geological trends; the fear of sensuality and of Hell, and of the sublime itself. Yet the serpent does not merely image forth anxieties; it recategorizes them as ultimately mysterious by signifying too luxuriously and uncontrollably, finally becoming transformed and identified with the primitive elements of earth, fire and cloud, a concrete example of the indeterminacy before laconically termed the "infinite." The cloud, in turn, comes to signify a beautiful and divine dispensation, a terrible mystery, a necessary veil between the human and the natural, and finally, a serpentine evil.

The second chapter described Ruskin's compulsion to return to the eighteenth century ideal of beauty as the principle of order underlying the diversity and energy of natural phenomena, although the beautiful proved problematic because of its associations with the sensuous. Because of these distasteful

associations Ruskin was forced towards a dialectic of sorts between integrative beauty and agonistic sublime. In this restless movement between the beautiful and the sublime, the very image of the beautiful, integrative and imaginative became both symbolic of and undermined by the sublime drama of tension and self-opposition.

This chapter continues to explore Ruskin's regression to and final qualified rejection of eighteenth century ideals. If the world is an ordered and rational place, as all five volumes continue at least sporadically to claim, then not only is it beautiful, it is at least partially explicable in scientific terms. Therefore, the duty of the naturalist and the artist is to study nature scientifically or empirically. Like the beautiful, however, the scientific has limitations which become apparent in the later volumes. It becomes, Ruskin feels, too specialized, too limiting of the full human experience, the play of the separate faculties of the mind which define the self and give it value. In order to preserve the quality of the cultured self against both the impersonal assimilations of the classically beautiful and the mechanization of science, Ruskin again resorts to the self-opposing, agonistic quality of the sublime.

Part of Ruskin's reaction against new science involves an attempt to redefine the real, placing it on a symbolic as much as a physical or sensuous plane.¹ As Ruskin redefines the real in psychological and mythical terms, he refuses to render up his claims to scientific rigor, however. It is Ruskin's effectiveness in

¹Elisabeth Helsinger argues that in *Modern Painters* 5 "what enables us to reanimate myth and symbol. . . is not belief in biblical revelation but accurate, imaginative perception of concrete phenomena to which myth or symbol originally or literally refer" (262). Ruskin refuses "to abandon naturalistic reference and landscape feeling as the basis of a symbolic language fitted for current critical use"(263). I argue that Ruskin's refusal to abandon his old empiricist foundation-building grows increasingly problematic in the later volumes, and the sections on myth and symbol are more effective because they constitute a self-conscious retrenchment from a more naive realist point of view of the earlier volumes. Helsinger's interpretation does suggest how Ruskin successfully invested a mystical, religious response to nature with the aura of "naturalism," however, and I do not doubt that much of even the late observations of nature are painstaking and accurate. Yet they are also in many respects more anxious and defensive than before.

persuading his reader of the scientific reality of the poet's, child's, or primitive's symbolic interpretations of nature that allows his mysticism to grow vivid and disorienting. For Ruskin's negative sublime--which underlines boundaries between the physical and the mental, literally spelling out the difference between a sensuous and logical apprehension of fact--becomes, as his argument depends increasingly upon myth, more negative than before because of his increasing alienation from the natural world. Ruskin's adaptation of the myth of the Garden of Hesperides to explain how well people of ancient times understood the nature of cloud and storm is a more fanciful and alienated understanding of nature than his previous comparison of cloud effects in nature and in certain paintings of Turner. Yet Ruskin's increasing fascination with myths of origin is also fundamentally tied in with his repression of the erotic (as well as his alienation from a scientific and industrialized world) and his search for a more pure nature of antiquity than the one available in the present. We can see Ruskin's growing alienation, internalization and desire for an original unity in his search through history and myth in the later volumes of Modern Painters.

The increasing materialism and specialization of the new science of the nineteenth century was one factor in Ruskin's increasing alienation from the natural world. Another was his own implicit eroticization of the body of nature in Modern Painters itself. Both forms of materialism resulted in a reaction towards mysticism, towards the language of Demea rather than Cleanthes. This mysticism reveals in the form of symbolic mythology a deeper alienation from nature and a stronger negative sublime than before.

I. The Old Science and the New

In the early 1840's, when Ruskin began to publish the first volumes of Modern Painters, his scientific perspective did not seem so outmoded as it appeared by 1860, when he published volume five. Ruskin followed the lead of geological theorists of the last part of the eighteenth century such as Benedict de Saussure, William Buckland and James Forbes rather than wholeheartedly embracing a newer school which Lyell had ushered in in 1830 with the publication of the first volume of the Principles of Geology. Throughout volume four, Ruskin positions himself as the no-nonsense scientist (as a matter of fact, throughout the whole of Modern Painters he sees himself this way, though in the later volumes he struggles to accept the harshest, most difficult truths--the finality of death). This role is implicit in Ruskin's terminology of "fact," in his criticism of Forbes for not measuring precipices correctly, (4: 287), in numerous attacks on subjective responses to natural phenomena (4: 202-3), as well as scorn for those "pseudo-scientists" who try to pass off their inaccurate methods as the true science. He claims that the true poet is a true scientist. The criteria for one are perfectly applicable to the other. On the one hand, Ruskin argued in volume one that "It may generally be observed that whatever has been the result of strong emotion is ill-seen unless through the medium of such emotion, and will lead to conclusions utterly false and perilous, if it be made a subject of cold-hearted observance, or an object of systematic imitation" (179). On the other hand, in volume four Ruskin also argued that the "pathetic fallacy" is a poetic flaw. Poets of the second order (Keats, Tennyson) perceive wrongly because they feel so strongly. The great poets of the first order (Homer, Shakespeare) perceive rightly in spite of strong feelings (even these poets are sometimes overmastered by passion, but their failing is justified) (209). Great

scientists are poets of the first order, Ruskin implies, because they perceive nature correctly but also love her (3: 385). A scientist is not simply a third-rate poet.²

This vision of science reflects the influence of Ruskin's favorite humanist geologists of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As a boy, Ruskin had read Robert Jameson's System of Mineralogy and Manual of Mineralogy and as a young man had studied under William Buckland in Oxford, one of the most famous geologists of the day (Hewison 22). Both mentors were followers in some sense of Abraham Werner, the Neptunist who argued that the formation of the earth could be explained by reference to the biblical flood. William Buckland, a diluvialist, modified this Neptunism with a strong dose of catastrophism, believing that although the earth is generally ruled by invariable laws like a clock, occasionally the mechanism breaks down and the prime mover sets things right by a catastrophe or two--flood, earthquake, volcanic explosion, etc. The diluvialist and Neptunist theories were warmly received by the established Church of England between 1800-1830 for obvious reasons. This was the golden age of geology wherein theology and science bolstered and benefited each other in a warm symbiotic relationship. Geology was considered to be one of the healthiest and most pious of fields (Gillispie 26, 104-106).

As a direct heir of this golden era, Ruskin objected to the divisions advances in the field gradually generated between the disciplines of theology, poetry and science. He felt alienated by the increasing specialization of the scientific discourse of the nineteenth century in which humanist science was gradually being purified of

²Concerning the type of scientist Ruskin was, Helsinger says, "Ruskin's beholder . . . does not practice the ordinary Baconian empirical "science of Essence" but a new science of the aspect of things, as well as of their nature, and it is as much a fact to be noted in their constitution, that they produce such and such an effect upon the eye or heart. . . as that they are made up of certain atoms or vibrations of nature" (64). That is to say, Ruskin as a well-rounded humanist was interested as much in the subjective, moral, or psychological effect on the "beholder" or reader of nature as nature itself.

human and subjective values. Scientific discourse in the eighteenth century had contained significant strains of the rhetoric of the sublime found in Ruskin's texts, whereas that of the nineteenth century became, in Ruskin's word, "materialistic."

One scientist Ruskin felt a life-long admiration for was Benedict de Saussure, whose Voyage Dans Les Alpes mingled poetic and scientific observations in a seamless narrative of exploration. Saussure describes almost in one breath experiments half way up Mont Blanc to boil water (unsuccessful) and his wonder at the scene below: "it appeared to me I had outlived the universe, and that I saw its corpse stretched at my feet" (681-2). Ruskin's prose also combines experimentation on nature, (often with a passionate exhortation to his audience to make similar experiments if they truly want to understand just what he is referring to), with poetic responses to the same phenomena. He makes similar analogies as Saussure: "Ground is to the landscape painter what the naked human body is to the historical. . . " (1: 425-427). Such metaphors often mingle a mechanistic, eighteenth century deist view with Romantic organic philosophy. In the words of Henry More, a deist whom Ruskin sometimes echoes, the mountains are made for utilitarian purposes, to distill salt water and to provide minerals, and they are hard and skeletal in contrast to the soft flesh of the rest of the earth in order to carry out these functions of the body. It is "unskillfully alledged against nature that all the earth is not soft molds, as it would be that any animal is not flesh, but that there is blood also and bones" (Nicholson 120). In More, as in Ruskin and Saussure, the land is viewed simultaneously as an ordered, principled body which operates under physical laws perfectly understandable to human experiments with distillation and condensation, but it is also somehow transcendently, mysteriously human, guided by spiritual laws as well, in this case the empirical and moral law of "usefulness."

Yet the unified view of nature of More, Saussure, Buckland, Werner and Ruskin was being outmoded by new discoveries and publications. Men such as Lyell and others of the "elite" like "Whewell and Babbage, Henslow, Sedgwick, De Morgan, John Herschel, Holland, P.M. Reget, and Mary Somerville" had insisted "on mastering all that was known and could be known" (Paradis and Postlewait 3). In this respect they resembled Ruskin, de Saussure and Forbes. But after mid-century "science and scientific institutions emerged in their modern manifestations in Great Britain" (Schweber 4). A primary characteristic of this science was a specialization in materialism--what could be verified by experiment--rather than in moral or poetic speculation. Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment in general furnished an admirable example of objective inquiry:

Hume and his intellectual descendents, by their empirical concerns, their empirical method in philosophical inquiry and their sceptical humanism, the modesty of their claims for human intelligence, their historicism, and their materialism, were the bridge from the old to the new episteme. (Schweber 9)

Perhaps the single most important influence upon this reversion to a rigorous empiricism was George Lyell's Principles of Geology (1830-1835). Past geological events should be judged simply by observation of current phenomena, and the geological events of the present suggested to Lyell a law of uniformity, in which forces of eruption and erosion, flood and drought, ice and fire, balanced and canceled each other out so that the earth could not be described as evolving, progressing or decaying from some hypothetically different (and unprovable) land of the past. Lyell's influence was enormous. He converted his former teacher (and Ruskin's old mentor) William Buckland in 1836, as became obvious when Buckland published Geology and Mineralogy Considered with Reference to Natural Theology, in "which his virtual abandonment of Deluge Geology was made public"

(Dean 117). Adam Sedgwick, a distinguished geologist and clergyman, also recanted when he "defended a vague form of natural theology, but outspokenly denounced the whole endeavor of scriptural or Mosaic geology" (117).

Aestheticians like S. T. Coleridge were also not slow to endorse the new ideas. In 1840 the publication of Coleridge's Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit

undermined a decade of attempts to reconcile geology and the Bible by introducing German textual criticism into England. We should be guided by the essential message of our sacred writings, he argued, and not by the 'imperfections of knowledge' in some less inspired passages. Real Christianity, said Coleridge, in no way requires uncritical acceptance of 'the hydrography and natural philosophy of the Patriarchal sages' (Dean 119).

Other publications contributed to the air of change in geology, marking it as a field of daring, radical inquiry. In 1844 Robert Chambers published his Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation which explained (as other texts before had suggested) the progression of complexity of fossil remains in different sediments in terms of a law of evolution, thus allowing for change in nature (which the Neptunists had accounted for) as well as uniformity (which Lyell maintained). In 1859, of course, one year before the publication of the last volume of Modern Painters, Charles Darwin published the Origin of Species, which provided a scientifically valid version of the speculative ideas of Chambers.

All of the volumes of Modern Painters came out after Lyell's Principles, which gradually became widely accepted. Modern Painters 2 came out in 1846, two years after Chambers' text; Modern Painters 5 after the Origin of Species. Lyell seriously undermined the authority of the Bible in scientific matters, delivering "the *coup de grace* to the deluge" and depriving "catastrophism . . . of its most popular catastrophe," although he argued that his theory was actually more pious than the previous ones had been, by emphasizing the unvarying law of God

rather than divine interventions which could only suggest that the laws did not always apply (Gillispie 140, 143). The habit of treating the history of the earth (Geology) as a subtext of the study of the origins of the earth (Cosmogony) Lyell also denounced. Like James Hutton, Lyell believed that there was no origin and no end to the earth (Gillispie 125).

These advances in geologic science dismayed Ruskin. In 1851, in a letter oft quoted as epitomizing of the toppling of Victorian faith before the advances of geological theory and speculation, he wrote to his friend Henry Acland that "if only the Geologists would leave me alone, I could do very well, but those dreadful Hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of Bible verse" (Landow 266). Ruskin had begun to pit science against faith (at least intermittently) in the early '50's. The last three volumes all show how Ruskin tended towards a more subjective and idealistic position as a result of the chink of those hammers. Ruskin analyzed nature increasingly second-hand through the eyes of artists and poets rather than (as in volume one) through the viewer who imagines he can attain a pure objective truth.

In volume three, for example, (1856), Ruskin explains his intention to abandon the systematic approach of the first and second volumes to merely "examine the various success of artists, especially of the great landscape-painter [Turner] whose works have been throughout our principle subject, in addressing those faculties of the human mind, and to consider who among them has conveyed the noblest ideas of beauty, and touched the deepest sources of thought (18). This volume, in accordance with its declaration to focus on the mind's view of nature rather than nature itself, is roughly split into two sections: an investigation of idealism (Turner is now viewed as a naturalist idealist rather than as realist, as in volume one) and a comparison-contrast of different age's views of landscape

(classical, medieval, modern). Volume four continues to worry at epistemological questions before launching into the body of the text on the question of the nature of the "firmament" and "dry land." The Biblical word choice here is no accident; Ruskin means to view the earth and sky as the ancient Hebrews might have seen them rather than as a modern or materialist-empiricist would. In this text, Ruskin explains that his "task" is to discover "as far as possible what the proper effect of the natural beauty of different objects *ought* to be on the human mind" (?). Volume five, as volumes three and four had done, returns once more to the problem of the mind's perception of nature, of the land, sky and sea, trying to improve upon former insights. The first part discusses the *beauty* of clouds and vegetation (already partially covered in previous sections such as volume one's discussion of the *truth* of clouds). Ruskin returns again to with the problems of both truth and beauty. The final section of volume five explores "ideas of relation," by which Ruskin means symbolism, especially as it is employed in myths about nature.

Each volume contains observations on both the natural and the human. Volumes four and five are each roughly split between these topics. Ruskin liked to build an empiricist foundation for his aesthetic speculations. First he established certain truths and facts about nature; then he critiqued artists for their ability to mirror these truths. The later volumes have the same structure, but the sections on nature are less foundational because they focus on not what *is* seen, but what *ought* to be or *has* been seen in nature or on a moral or aesthetic perspective which in the initial volumes would have been delayed. Or, adopting M. H. Abrams terminology one could say that in these late volumes the function of the artist is presented not as a mirror but as a lamp.³ In the final result, the real becomes indistinguishable from

³Though this is perhaps too great an oversimplification. I agree with Helsinger that "Despite Ruskin's romantic interest in the role of associative imagination, he always insists that perception is obtaining information about a world out there. To forget this, and adopt a wholly phenomenological model of vision, is to pervert the function of sight" (240). The fact remains,

the mental perception of things; mental, moral and physical law become inseparable.

As the scientific foundations of the world of art are undermined, Ruskin experiences a crisis not only of faith but of identity. Nature no longer appears to offer evidence for Biblical descriptions such as the flood; it no longer offers evidence chiefly of divine order and mercy; its geological record offers no hope of progression nor memory of past glory. In short, it no longer mirrors and reinforces the ideal which Ruskin could aspire to. A gap opens between the observed facts of nature and nature's meaning and significance to the self. Ruskin responds aggressively to this alienation. First, he insists upon the sacredness of certain places in nature which science may not touch. The self may in the mystery, incomprehensibility and infinity of such places find a comforting image of itself in which to rest. This technique ultimately fails because of the rapidity of scientific progress--what seemed mysterious and inexplicable a decade or even a year ago may be perfectly clear and logical today, and only a specialist could stay on top of the latest developments. Second, Ruskin rehabilitates and redefines the "primitive" Greek and Hebraic attitudes towards nature as more natural and real than modern scientific perspective. Through the Greeks, Ruskin hopes to recapture his own youthful, Wordsworthian sense of a lost plenitude and wholeness in nature which is ultimately more real, more essentially the *natural* part of nature, than the partial and specialized view of the scientists.

Ruskin's emphatic defense of nature's essential mystery fails in its purpose precisely because of its tone of certainty. Ruskin fudges the difference between a necessary doubt and open-mindedness vital to scientific progress with a faith in the ultimate mystery of nature which is often inimical to that progress. Volume four,

however, that the later volumes constituted a major shift towards a more phenomenological position, although Ruskin continued to deny any abandonment of scientific pretensions.

for example, begins with a scientifically defensible ethics of doubt about nature: we can never know the truth about her because "if we insist upon perfect intelligibility and complete declaration in every moral subject, we shall instantly fall into misery of unbelief" (4: 89). This argument works two ways: on a deeper level as a religious defense of final mystery, and on a more superficial level as an exhortation to preserve scientific objectivity. Ruskin turns scientific detachment against itself, not only in order to show that some geological theories about crystalline formation are not necessarily true, that one must necessarily keep an open mind and be prepared to accept conflicting explanations, but that all geological theories must necessarily fail to explain certain mysteries. But "misery of unbelief" may arise just as easily from the acceptance of the polysemous quality of objects as from a hopeless insistence upon one meaning which cannot exist. One may insist upon the unintelligibility of the "compact crystallines" which cannot be fully comprehended either in their "aggregations" or "formation," for a "strange and powerful operation" has molded them of which the observer cannot be cognizant (131). But, as Cleanthes said to Demea in the voice of a more detached empiricist, "I know not what in this subject is worth insisting on," if the quality of nature under discussion is truly inexplicable. The instability of the mystical position which he has assumed sometimes creates a tone, as John Rosenberg has pointed out, of "defensive arrogance":

It is very easy for geologists to speak generally of elevation and convulsion, but very difficult to explain what sort of convulsion it could be which passed forward from the edge of one bed to the edge of another and broke the required portion off each without disturbing the rest. Try the experiment in the simplest way: put half a dozen of hard captain's biscuits in a sloping position on a table, and then try as they lie, to break the edge of each, one by one, without disturbing the rest. At least, you will have to raise the edge before you break it; to put your hand underneath, between it and the

next biscuit, before you get any purchase on it. . . conceive, if you can, the sort of hammer that was required to break the 600 feet of rock through in the same way. (4: 194)

In passages such as this Ruskin's mysticism is too obviously both escapist and dogmatic. Because he is emphatic about his own ignorance he undermines his own claim to ignorance. Ruskin asserts that his mysticism has been earned by painstaking "experimentation," but such experiments are play, not impartial science. Perhaps the word "play" is not accurate either, for the urgency of the passage is not playful but anxious and irritable. John Rosenberg's criticism of Ruskin's geology as a combination of "lifelong study of the Alps and pleasant putterings in his kitchen with toast-crumb moraines and glaciers of blancmange" captures the sheer incongruity of Ruskinian science as well as its tone of "defensive arrogance."

Yet Ruskin's refusal to specialize and adapt his language to geological topics was self-conscious and carefully premeditated. His rhetoric translates his regression back to myth and scripture as a kind of expansion of the literal:

In my late lectures, at Edinburgh, I gave much offense by supposing, or implying, that scriptural expressions could have any force as bearing on modern practical questions: so that I do not now, nor do I any more, allude to such expressions as in any wise necessarily bearing on the worldly business of the practical protestant, but only as necessary to be glanced at in order to understand the temper of those old monks, who had the awkward habit of understanding the Bible literally; and to get any little good which momentary sympathy with the hearts of a large and earnest class of men may surely bring to us (?)

The modern worldly protestants do not want to understand the literal truth of the Bible, which Ruskin himself also feels constrained, however ironically, to keep at arm's length. But the passage argues for a sympathy with the literal-minded in order to deal with "modern practical questions" (as if belief in the literal is necessary for practical action) and in order to derive the good which this sympathy with the

earnest old monks "may surely bring to us." "May surely" is a paradoxical way of asserting a claim, a mixture of sureness and uncertainty. Ruskin's obvious nostalgia for a belief in the literal truth of the Bible is interesting, because at this point in his life he was far from taking scriptures literally himself. The reason Ruskin chose this particular word might be that he believed the daily, practical application of the Bible to be grounded in a literal belief in its principles, but also of course because the Evangelical school to which he had belonged would naturally spring to respectful attention upon hearing the word, as they claimed to take every act of the sacred text as having actually, physically occurred at a specific date and place. Ruskin's art tries to convince them that they are less rather than more literal minded than he is--they wish to maintain distinctions between secular and religious spheres in their lives--to keep religion in its place and certainly out of business. They do not literally enact the words of the Bible in their own lives. Moreover, such worldly protestants would (like Ruskin's own mother) feel a deep suspicion of any Popish tendencies. Ruskin tries to transcend the limitations of particular religious creeds as well as to assert the interconnectedness of the religious and practical spheres of human activity.

It should be noted, at any rate, that Ruskin's fascination for nature, originally allowed scientific outlet, eventually found this outlet unacceptable, emphasizing the mysteries rather than the secrets of nature. By retaining the language of science and by continuing to support its values, Ruskin could sometimes infuse humanist disciplines with a scientific flavor, and thus deepen and complicate mythological, poetic and aesthetic criticism. One word especially--fact--Ruskin respected. A scientist, in his mind, faced hard facts stoically. Laws governed the behavior of these facts, laws which, like the inflexible dictates of the

Evangelical God, must be acknowledged and obeyed in order to achieve inner peace and harmony.

II. The Laws of Darkness

In the chapters "Mountain Gloom" and "Mountain Glory" Ruskin emphasizes the virtues of discovering and facing certain facts and laws: the fact of death, and the law that "no good or lovely thing exists in this world without its correspondent darkness" (4: 416). By "darkness" Ruskin means evil; by death he means pretty much the same thing. Ruskin thus is searching for a way to categorize, order and contain evil, which by definition (as chaos, excess, cruelty, etc) resists such containment. It is a difficult and paradoxical task to formulate laws about lawlessness, or discover order in chaos. The law which operates through evil is necessarily (because it is law and law is order) good. Strangely, by functioning as the chief principle of mystery in nature, which remains resistant to scientific mechanization, chaos and evil in nature are necessary in a vital way to Ruskin's whole project of discovery of an undefilable essence which by mirroring the undefinable essence of the self reassures it of its identity. If we cannot find God in nature we must still find Satan--to find nothing at all would confirm our sense of alienation and emptiness. The sublime object which gives this reassurance is the body.

Death is the final fact Ruskin grapples with in "Mountain Gloom." The death of a mistreated cab horse, he says, is "a fact, no dream--no revelation by the myrtle trees by night; and the dust it dies upon, and the dogs that eat it, are facts" (416). The mountain glen, seemingly so pure and serene, is also a place of death and horror:

Far up the glen, as we pause beside the cross, the sky is seen through the openings in the pines, thin with excess of light; and, in its clear, consuming flame of white space, the summits of the rocky mountains are gathered into solemn crowns and circlets, all flushed in that strange, faint silence of possession by the sunshine which has in it so deep a melancholy; full of power, yet frail as shadows; lifeless, like the walls of a sepulchre, yet beautiful in tender falls of crimson folds, like the veil of some sea spirit, that lives and dies as the foam flashes. . . (387).

The Wordsworthian presence which haunts this mountain glen is the spirit of mutability and change, who "lives and dies as the foam flashes," whose dwelling is a "sepulchre," which though shadowy, frail and insubstantial, (not really *there* at all--not a fact) can still possess and transform the scene, acting (in fact) as a fact would act. Ruskin reacts against the pathetic fallacy even as he commits it; his self-consciousness about his sentimentality prevents it from being cloying.⁴ The fiction, though beautiful, does not exist; it is dead. The spirit of death fills the land, the viewer, and natives with its essence. The mountain people are the opposite of the moral, intuitively good peasants of Wordsworthian poetry. No noble savages they, no ideal of rustic simplicity. "The perfect beauty of the ideal must always be fictitious. . . Real shepherdesses must always be rude, and real peasants miserable" (4: 392):

Enter the street on one of those villages, and you will find it foul with that gloomy foulness that is suffered only by torpor, or by anguish of soul. Here, it is torpor--not absolute suffering--not starvation or disease, but darkness of calm enduring; the spring known only as the time of the scythe, and the autumn as the time of the sickle, and the sun only as warmth, the wind as a chill, and the mountains as a danger. . . . No books, no thoughts, no attainments, no rest; except only sometimes a little sitting in the sun under the church wall, as the bell tolls thin and far in the mountain air, a pattering of a few prayers, not understood, by the altar rails of the dimly lighted chapel. . . with the cloud upon them still unbroken--that cloud of rocky gloom. . . unlightened, even in their religion,

⁴As C. Stephen Finley says, "Ruskin's reaction against Wordsworth's 'pathetic fallacy' only 'reinscrib[ed] a tension endemic to his own Wordsworthianism" (121).

except by the vague promise of some better thing unknown, mingled with threatening, and obscured by an unspeakable horror,--a smoke, as it were, of martyrdom, coiling up with the incense, and, amidst the images of tortured bodies and lamenting spirits in hurtling flames, the very cross, for them, dashed more deeply than for others, with gouts of blood. (4: 389)

The mountain people are possessed by a spirit of religious enthusiasm, just as the romantic poet in his ecstatic hymns to nature is possessed. Ruskin makes this connection plain by claiming that enthusiastic religious feeling involves "morbid conditions of the imagination" which have "caused in great part the legendary and romantic forms of belief" (427). Though the "religious visions of the anchorite" are "morbid," he is still to be admired for the "sincerity and depth of emotion" he feels (427).

That enthusiasm (of fanaticism, cruelty, excess) Ruskin calls "impure." *True* religion is pure. The pure in heart apprehend "Mountain Glory" rather than "Mountain Gloom." Again, as in volume two, Ruskin distinguishes between two different kinds of vision or two different kinds of sublime experience. In volume two, remember, the "mind of pure make, and powerful imagination," who is "affected by a noble, but doubtful and faithless compassion for the agony of the world" or who is tortured "by remorse for carnal sin, and by weakness of body" is the one most likely to "fits of fear, and correspondent visions of terrible things" such as "the body of this death" (2: 380). This type is drawn toward the sublime rather than the perfect sublimely-beautiful experience, toward the contemplation of the evil of the serpent. In "Mountain Gloom," Ruskin reverts to the same idea. The Swiss have a sublime capability (as Ruskin had defined the sublime in volume two) "of enduring, or even delighting in, the contemplation of objects of terror--a sentiment which especially influences the temper of some groups of mountaineers" (4: 393). Again this characteristic "involves "at once much that is to be blamed,

and much that is praiseworthy." Again, the element to be blamed is that of "indecenty" ("the body of death" as Ruskin had earlier defined it) or "general fatuity and weakness of mind" although, paradoxically, in its nobler form, it necessarily involves a "fair degree of intellect and imagination." Again, as in the earlier representation of the body as a serpent, the image of the body reappears in the art of such people in a foul shape, dismembered, dislocated, distorted. The Swiss artists too often "delight in blood," torture, and death. The primary difference between the chapter "Mountain Gloom" and the appendix from volume two on the sublime is that by volume four Ruskin had identified the source of the neurotic reaction to nature as religious fanaticism. Under "conditions that cause mountain gloom" Ruskin listed both "Romanist religion" with its habitually bad art and its dwelling on "tortures and penances" as well as "gloomy sects of Puritans" (4: 406,7). As a way for the problem from "being felt in its full force," Ruskin proposes "atheism or dissipation of a large portion of the population in crowded capitals" (4: 406).

This impure-romantic sublime of "Mountain Gloom" Ruskin contrasts with a negative mathematic sublime in "Mountain Glory." By the sheer repetition of numbers the pines on the slopes of the alps become sublime. Vast quantities of flowers, or of any object small and insignificant in itself, becomes impressive and overpowering, ultimately too much for the overburdened mind to process. Turner has discovered that "quantity" rather than "quality" is more important in presenting the great or sublime in mountain scenery. "Redundance" is another word for this "quality," an "infinite redundance" which is never monotonous. Swiss scenery is "mighty" and "picturesque" because of the "aggregation of pine" (4: 351-353). Yet, paradoxically, even the simple glory of massed vegetation may reflect the preoccupations of mountain gloom. The picturesque, for example, Ruskin had

earlier defined as a "delight in ruin," "a sublimity not inherent in the nature of the thing, but caused by something external to it," such as the "ruggedness" of the roof of a mountain chalet, which borrows its appearance of natural decay and erosion from the mountain peaks themselves (4: 9,10). Turner's fondness for aggregation of detailed foreground vegetation sometimes disturbs Ruskin because it reminds him of "wandering luxuriance, associated with decay," unlike the aggregation of the "more solemn and more sacred infinity with which, among the mightier ruins of the Alpine Rome, glow the pure and motionless splendor of the gentian and the rose." The discrepancy between the two kinds of infinity seems at best tenuous--Ruskin creates a plenitude which does not cancel the tensions of the negative sublime, but which simply translates one sort of duality (carnal-spiritual) into another (growth-decay). But Ruskin pretends that this "healthy" and "sacred" infinity is, in contrast to the marred infinity of the ignoble sublime vision, whole and pure. The vision of mountain glory is the intuition of this original purity. The lakes of Switzerland are superior to the sea because they have more repose--they do not merely pause but sleep, dream. The streams "belong to the hills as their undivided inheritance"; they reflect the hills and unify the scene in one continuous whole. At present, Ruskin writes, Switzerland is relatively unsullied, pure and whole, but "the influence of foreigners. . . must necessarily be greater every year" and with them they will bring railroads, hotels, pollution and crowding (4: 455). Against this possibility Ruskin regresses back to the past in a long historical "defense" of the intellect-nurturing power of unspoiled mountain landscape (4: 433-436).

Ruskin's movements in both chapters suggest (despite anti-Wordsworthian rhetoric) a partially Wordsworthian defense strategy. In the first quote, from "Mountain Gloom," nature is both eroticized and distanced. More precisely, nature is distanced because it is eroticized. The mountains are "flushed" in the "strange,

faint silence of possession" of the light, which is the light of vision and of the senses as well as of the sun. The peasants who envision more deeply than others the "gouts of blood" on the cross, spiritualists who see visions which seem frighteningly real, are also the peasants who have no education, who only understand and appreciate tangible things, such as the warmth of a summer's day or the fruits of the scythe and sickle. They have no spiritual idea of spring or summer which transcends these feelings, but they are true mystics for all that. In reacting against the child's, romantic's, or anchorite's physical, impure-sublime response to the body of nature, Ruskin turns in "Mountain Glory" to what he convinces himself is a purer, more spiritual sublime, but which actually represses the erotic and reinscribes a similar tension of body and spirit at another level. Ruskin's myth of plenitude, fullness and original purity of the mountains of Switzerland, soon to be deprived of innocence by the influx of jaded tourists, gambling casinos and tacky architecture, has been already undermined in the preceding chapter, "Mountain Gloom." Ruskin, after destroying the rustic Wordsworthian idyll as a myth and exposing the poverty, cruelty, and ignorance of the original mountain people, contradicts his own assumptions. The creation of the myth of original glory, in Modern Painters 4, happens only as a result of the anxiety of original sin. Ruskin self-consciously exposes the secondary, derivative nature of original plenitude and innocence even as he participates in the myth. As Weiskel says in more classical psychoanalytical terms:

On Freud's own showing, an original narcissism cannot be painful; only its loss could precipitate the disequilibrium and the tension felt as pain. The damming up of libido in the ego is already "in consequence of frustration," and the excess of narcissistic libido is entirely a relative quality. The anxiety of solipsism. . . is a secondary, derivative anxiety, for solipsism is itself a defense against an original anxiety of deprivation. (159-160)

In "Mountain Gloom" Ruskin claims that the original state of a supposedly happy and pious mountain people is actually that of despair and ignorance. In "Mountain Glory" Ruskin claims (paradoxically) that the original mountains of the ancient Greeks and Italians fostered a purity which is not as observable in Switzerland at present. Through the organization of these chapters, Ruskin reveals his inherent suspicion of the Wordsworthian myth of original purity--he protects himself against the desire for a regression back into a mindless poet-peasant-infant by revealing that the desire to regress is actually not a movement backwards at all (towards an original bliss) but away from a repressed desire (the erotic nature of the primitive people and their view of the land). Ruskin shows how the "desire for solipsism" or perfect self-sufficiency is actually only a "secondary, derivative anxiety."

Evidence of a deep ambivalence about a scientific specialization and modern industrialization which both endangered this myth of original perfection and protected Ruskin from inundation in its sensuous plenitude is common throughout Modern Painters. In one such passage on the age of the earth, Ruskin asks whether it has declined or progressed through the ages, whether, as the Bible states, it degenerated since the time of Adam and Eve, or if it gradually became more habitable to the human species. Ruskin chooses to emphasize the decay of the earth:

The hills, which, as compared with living beings, seem "everlasting," are in truth, as perishing as they: its veins of flowing fountain weary the mountain heart, as the crimson pulse does ours; the natural force of the iron crag is abated in its appointed time, like the strength of the sinews in a human old age; and it is but the lapse of the longer years of decay which, in the sight of its creator, distinguishes the mountain range from the moth and the worm. (4: 176-7)

Ruskin asks whether this earth is in its "prime," or whether it is "with all its beauty, only the wreck of Paradise?" He answers by asserting his belief that the earth arose out of a condition "utterly uninhabitable into one fitted for man" and that it will eventually tend "to still greater inferiority of aspect, and unfitness for abode" (4: 177). Ruskin admits that "some geologists" (such as Lyell) advocate a uniformitarian model of earth history--that "while existing eminences are being slowly lowered, others, in order to supply their place, are being slowly elevated; and that what is lost in beauty or eminence in one spot is gained in another." But he adds "I cannot assert to such a conclusion" because of fossil evidence proving that in darkest primeval times the earth "could be tenanted only by lower animals." Thus, the earth "originally was without form and void" (Genesis i,2) and will in the end "be renovated or destroyed" (4: 178).

The earth, as a tormented and trembling ball, may have rolled in space for myriads of ages before humanity was formed from its dust, and as a devastated ruin it may continue to roll, when all that human dust shall again have been mingled with ashes that never were warmed by life, or polluted by sin. (4: 179)

By keeping to some sort of Biblical interpretation, insisting upon the existence of an original "void" of Genesis, Ruskin continues to maintain an ostensible orthodox belief, but he at least inadvertently reveals the dangers of the mysticism he is increasingly forced upon, of the ultimate origin and future of the earth where "gradually the mist gathers, and the footsteps of more gigantic agencies are traceable in the darkness" where the "thunder of the Almighty power sounds louder and louder, and the clouds gather broader and more fearfully" (4: 179). A void (the word Ruskin had used to describe the original state of the earth) is by definition empty or unfilled space, but it is the space which God supposedly inhabited in all His original fullness before creating the universe and splitting elements of Himself

into smaller parts. How does the nihilist definition of the beginning and the end of all things as emptiness differ from this dark mysticism? As Cleanthes would say, "How do you mystics, who maintain the absolute incomprehensibility of the Deity, differ from sceptics or atheists, who assert that the first cause of all is unknown and unintelligible?"

In one sense, Ruskin conservatively reacted against modern trends in geology, as Rosenberg has pointed out. But in another sense Ruskin was more modern than Lyell was, realizing before Darwin the importance of evolution in gauging the history and the future of the species of the earth. The problem with Lyellian geology was that it could not account for change amply demonstrated by the fossil record, which geologists like Richard Chambers, whose Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1844) argued that all species by a few immutable laws had evolved out of a few primitive models, had managed to account for, if in a speculative and pseudo-scientific way. Chambers had argued (using a similar strategy that Lyell had used in defending uniformitarianism) that the *law* under which species evolve and not the *species themselves* is divine. Ruskin, in a parallel move, locates divine presence in volumes 4 and 5 on divine and human law rather than on actual concrete things or facts. Chambers had said:

it is most interesting to observe into how small a field the whole of the mysteries of nature thus resolve themselves. The inorganic has one final comprehensive law, GRAVITATION. The organic, the other great department of mundane things, rests in like manner on one law, and that is,--DEVELOPMENT. Nor may those be after all twain, but only branches of one still more comprehensive law, the expression of that unity which man's wit can scarcely separate from Deity itself. (Gillispie 153)

Ruskin's defines the power or essence of the sublime and the beautiful as being derived from a similar "comprehensive law" which is "scarcely separate from Deity." Gravity, he claims, is

typical of the general tendency to decline or destruction in all things resisted by their vital energies--the idea of ascent being to us usually connected with life and power; of descent, with death and feebleness. The lines of gravitation may thus become awful to us, because they are signs of a fate, or fated power, which nothing can for an instant elude, and which can be resisted only by the force either of inner life or some external aid. [The opposing force is of radiation] which express[es] life and excite[s] in us the sensation of beauty; those of gravitation, which express stability or death, excite in us chiefly the sensation of the sublime. (5: 482)

A mythological belief in the ultimate reality of symbols and laws rather than of facts and things becomes of vital importance to the later Ruskin of the final two volumes in part because of the pressures of science.⁵ Human and natural laws create order out of chaos--they are a vital element of beauty, as Ruskin had himself pointed out in volume II. Ruskin employs the term "law" to signify an empirically earned abstraction based on scientific rigor of method, even as these laws are increasingly framed in symbolic language divorced from a nature they supposedly describe.

⁵Finley explains Ruskin's idealism in terms not of immanent-Platonic or symbolic forms but of divine types, especially those outlined in Calvin's Institutes. Ruskin was heavily influenced both by classical and evangelical readings, but I believe that the later volumes of *Modern Painters* (which Finley does not focus on) display a tendency to revert to classicism, although Biblical typology continued to play a part in Ruskin's symbolism to the bitter end. Of course, both Platonic and evangelical readings of nature emphasize the way its powers symbolize divine law. As Dennis Dean argues, "Theological writers were reduced [around mid-century] to justifying their association of God and nature through increasingly vaguer references to consistency, order, symmetry, and harmony--in short, by postulating a world view in which divinity was no more than natural law" (124). Ruskin's emphasis on law, I believe, is part of this general movement.

III. Myth and the Negative Sublime

The phenomena from which Ruskin abstracts his laws in volume five is increasingly mythological and psychological rather than physical or objective. Ruskin viewed mythology as a treasure-trove of ancient truths, influenced in some respects by the school of Giambattista Vico and the Germans Max Muller, David Friedrich Strauss⁶ and others, although Ruskin would hardly grant the Germans much credit for ingenuity in any matter. The study of mythology was to a great degree a displacement of Evangelicism as well. As Landow says, "Ruskin's studies of mythology, which increasingly occupy his time after he lost his Evangelical faith. . . [show how] he transferred ideas originally derived from Evangelicism to art and to the study of cultural history." Ruskin believed that myth is "founded on constant laws common to human nature" and not that its truths have lost potency over time (404).⁷

Several other scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made the same universal claims for mythology. Max Muller had claimed that all myths enact some sort of worship of the sun. Richard Payne Knight had argued in A Discourse

⁶ Though this is perhaps a hasty generalization. Ruskin would probably have heartily approved of Vico, who believed that from the "first men, stupid, insensate, and horrible beasts, all the philosophers and philologists should have begun their investigations of the wisdom of the ancient gentiles; that is, from the giants in the proper sense in which we have just taken them" (Adams 292). The primitive imagination of these giants is sublime "by virtue of a wholly corporeal imagination," that is, by virtue of the fact that nature is interpreted in Romantic terms as a "vast animate body which feels passions and effects" (292). Strauss Ruskin had disparaged along with Kant in the appendix to volume three of Modern Painters, when he had said that if one carefully read through "Kant, Strauss and the rest of the German metaphysicians and divines" one might ultimately discover that "there is very little harm in them," but one could also spend the ten years of study devoted to them in better, more practical pursuits (3: 435). Muller had argued that the origin of all mythology was solar. As Dinah Birch says, "Ruskin shows an awareness of Muller's methods in an attempt to use etymological grounds to associate [his] theme of storm and rain with other myths." But Muller believed that mythology was a "disease of the language, a 'temporary insanity'" (Birch 41). Birch plausibly contends that Ruskin did not share this view, and that Ruskin's own myth interpretation shows that "the rain, cloud and storm which he discerned in the Medusa cycle of myths were in his view the agents of a powerful moral force" (42).

⁷ This love of myth is true only of the later volumes of Modern Painters, of course.

in the Worship of Priapus and Its Connection with the Mystic Theology of the Ancients (1786) that "men, considered collectively, are at all times the same animals, employing the same organs, and endowed with the same faculties" (Feldman, Richardson 251). The "rites and doctrines" of most or all religions, seemingly so different, would "perhaps, if [they] were equally well understood. . . be found to have the same meaning, and would only differ in the modes of conveying it" (252). At the core of many of the world's mythologies, Knight claimed, is the worship of the creative act, the object of which worship is often the male or female organs of generation. There is "nothing ludicrous or licentious" in primitive phallus worship, Knight observes sternly (253). Landow claims that Ruskin "knew Knight's discussion of the employment of serpent myths and symbols in phallic ritual, his discussion of neoplatonic interpretations of mythology. . . . Ruskin, whose notion of a bivalent natural-moral meaning in myths corresponds to that of recent anthropologists, was well aware of the ambivalent nature of mythic symbolism." Thus, Ruskin interprets the figure of the serpent (Landow continues) as symbolic of fertility, of corruption and of evil (412).

The figure of the serpent is even more paradoxical than Landow suggests, however. As I claimed in chapter two, it is intricately associated in Ruskin's mind both with the sublime (as object of terror) and the body, as well as with agonistic tension itself and self-consciousness. In the later volumes it implies the inherent, undefilable yet also terrible mystery of nature which Ruskin sought as a refuge from the predations of the new, mechanistic science. This characteristic it shares with the clouds, as a kind of necessary fiction. Between "the Burning Light" of the "vacuity," Ruskin announces, and the "earth's gloom of iron substance" veils had to be "spread of intermediate being." "Between the earth and man arose the leaf. Between the heaven and man came the cloud" (5: 141). Cloud, dragon,

leviathan, mystery--all merge into one another in this remarkable passage from volume five:

Or those war clouds that gather on the horizon, dragon-crested, tongued with fire;--how is their barbed strength bridled? What bits are these that they are champing with their vaporous lips; flinging off flakes of black foam? Leagued leviathans of the Sea of Heaven, out of their nostrils goeth smoke, and their eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. The sword of him that layeth at them cannot hold; the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon. Where ride the captains of the armies? Where are set the measures of their march? Fierce murmerers, answering each other from morning until evening--what rebuke is this which has awed them into peace? What hand has reined them back by the way which they came?

I know not if the reader will think at first that questions like these are easily answered. So far from it, I rather believe that some of the mysteries of the clouds will never be understood by us at all. . (5: 135) (Job xii: 18, 20, 26)

The cloud is a monster, a Leviathan, "dragon-crested," a spirit of evil that somehow transcends common notions of good and evil, a god of the "sea of heaven" (messenger of God's wrath) but also a devil which God rebuked: "thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness" (Psalms 74: 13, 14) . The true storm clouds the Greek represented "by the serpents of her aegis; and the lightning and cold of the highest thunder-clouds, by the Gorgon on her shield" (5: 183). The names of the storm clouds are Steino (striated), Eureale (those storms spread over a large space) and Medusa "the most terrible" (184). The medusa cloud "is essentially the highest storm-cloud. . . her countenance turning all who behold it to stone. . . The serpents about her head are the fringes of the hail, the idea of coldness being connected by the Greeks with the bite of the serpent, as with the hemlock" (184). The cloud and

cloud worship are typical of the modern age of doubt and ignorance.⁸ We cannot see the truth as the Greeks so clearly did--and we do not wish to, for like Turner, we worship the mysterious essence of nature rather than her tangible fruits or clear outlines. The serpent is the evil of the body we must transcend. The serpent is the essence of nature. But the transcendence of the ego over the serpent is also the act of the serpent itself, just as the serpent is the essence of mystery as well as the reality of the body. The act of transcendence becomes in Ruskin's explication of the *Hesperides* almost indistinguishable from participation in the sensuous manifold of nature.

Ruskin's explication of Turner's Goddess of Discord in the Garden of the Hesperides is a displaced interpretation of the Evangelical myth of original purity and original sin. The Hesperides myth, like the myth of Genesis, attempts to understand how evil came about from an originally perfect state. Ruskin's interest in classical interpretations of a subject he felt an enduring and even increasing interest in implies that the Evangelical explanation had become insufficient. As in "Mountain Gloom" and "Mountain Glory," and in his anti-Lyellian explication of the evolution of the earth from darkness to darkness, Ruskin continues to insist upon an original unity which returns back into itself, but again the original unity is a "void," "darkness" and "mist" that suggests as much the continuation of an eternal principle of death rather than of life, of gravitation rather than progression, the sublime rather than the beautiful, and of struggle and conflict rather than harmony and repose.

As in Eden, the garden of the Hesperides is a flawless paradise. The golden apples of the garden (like the forbidden fruit) are guarded by "the singing nymphs:

⁸As Helsinger says, "The connection between pleasure in terror and absence of firm faith becomes, in Modern Painters 3, part of Ruskin's characterization of the modern temper--the love of clouds and darkness."

the Hesperides who are collectively the “western sun and the western breeze.” The fruit is a symbol of the wealth of the earth and the “source of household peace and plenty.” “But, as a source of household sorrow and desolation, it is watched by the Dragon.” The dragon is the youngest child of Phorcys and Ceto (youngest meaning the most degenerate). Phorcys and Ceto are the children of Nereus, and symbolize the marriage of “the devouring” aspect of covetousness and of secretiveness of heart in the deep places of the sea. They beget the darkening passions, the clouds and storms. The three types of storm clouds are the Graiae, the Gorgons, and the Dragons. The graiae are the “soft rain clouds; the gorgons the “stormy and merciless passions,” and the dragons the volcanic earth storm, the “consuming passion.”

The dragon is defined as a cloud, specifically the "sahara wind" or "Simoon." He is also a child of the body or earth and the mother (the sea). Throughout volume four and five, as I have explained above, the cloud is practically synonymous with infinity and mystery, associated with the aesthetic of the sublime. The dragon is, according to the index of the 39 volumes of Ruskin's collected works, a combination of the lizard and the serpent. The serpent/skeletal figure, again touched on above, is what I have tentatively linked with the shock of new geological discovery as well as of the physical body. This particular dragon (of the Goddess of the Hesperides) represents degenerate skeletal and fossilized matter. That the discoveries of geology are linked to this idea of degeneracy is not surprising:

The strange unity of vertebrated action, and of a true bony contour, infinitely varied in every vertebra, with this glacial outline;--together with the adoption of the head of the Ganges crocodile, the fish-eater, to show his sea descent (and this is the 1806, when hardly a single fossil saurian skeleton existed within Turner's reach), renders the whole conception one of the most curious exertions of the imaginative intellect which I am acquainted with in the arts.(403)

On the physical level, the nymphs signify the pleasant, cool climate which nurtures luxuriant vegetation. On the other hand, the dragon symbolizes the harsh, hot climate of the Saharan wind and storm which threatens cultivation. On the moral level, both the nymphs and the dragon are in addition guardians of the wealth of the earth, fruit given to Juno by the earth on her wedding day. The dragon as Ruskin interprets him is the bad guardian who causes desolation, whereas the nymphs are the good guardians of peace and plenty. The genealogies of both dragon and nymphs help prove this two-sided hypothesis. The nymphs are the daughters of the night and are the siblings of Doom, Fate, Death, Censure, Sorrow, "and the Destinies, and the Spirits of Merciless Punishment" (394). "Was it not well to trust to such keepers the guarding of the golden fruit which the earth gave to Juno at her marriage?" (395). This is a rhetorical question; the reader is expected to assent immediately, despite the rather suspicious genealogy of the nymphs and the fact that in the picture one of them is blithely handing over the apple to the Goddess of Discord, who promptly wreaks havoc with it. Ruskin then returns to the dragon, the real object of interest, the true source of evil as he sees it in the painting.

. . . it seems to me that the main drift of the legend cannot be mistaken; viz., that. . . the Hesperian dragon is the evil spirit of wealth, as possessed in households; and associated, therefore, with the true household guardians, or singing nymphs. Hercules (manly labour), slaying both Geryon and Ladon, presents oxen and apples to Juno who is their proper mistress; but the Goddess of Discord, contriving that one portion of this household wealth shall be ill bestowed by Paris, he, according to Coleridge's interpretation, choosing pleasure instead of wisdom or power;--there issue from this evil choice the catastrophe of the Trojan war, and the wanderings of Ulysses, which are essentially, both in the Iliad and the Odyssey, the troubling of household peace. . . (403-4).

The real question bothering one after reading this interpretation of the apple and the serpent is whether there are true differences between the significance of this myth and the Christian myth. How does the Christian explanation of the origin of evil, for instance, differ from that of the Greek? The painting's representation of events would appear to suggest (along with the Greek view) that the nymphs were poor guardians rather than exemplary ones. In addition, it is the Goddess of Discord, not the dragon, who causes the tragedy of the Trojan war. Thus the Greeks, like the Hebrews, would appear to view (in this instance at least) womanly weakness as the source of much of the trouble in the world. By refusing to acknowledge the representation of the female as the source of the evil of ensuing events, Ruskin appears to recognize the ambiguous power of the earth, of housewives and of maidens as just that--ambiguous, neither inherently good or evil. Yet something rings false in this interpretation. It is as if Ruskin's version of the story of Genesis, after having mentioned the fact that Eve had several brothers and sisters by the names of Death, Doom and Fate, had forgotten to mention that Eve ate the apple first and then tempted Adam. Ruskin cannot see the central action of the picture (he does not contest the action--he simply doesn't see it), and that is the fact that the nymph gives away the fruit she should have guarded to the Goddess of Discord.

So who is this dragon who is the true author of evil? Is he identical to the Hebraic serpent? The most startling difference is that Ruskin's serpent is a child of nature, of the earth and the sea, rather than of the spirit. One of the most frightening aspects of the dragon to Ruskin is the coil, not the bite or the fangs. It is the "hollowness, the coil, which frightens, that Turner captures," Ruskin says thoughtfully in analyzing Turner's Jason dragon (4: 259). In volume five, too, Ruskin quotes from Hesiod that the dragon "'in the secret places of the desert land, kept the all-golden apples in his great knots' (coils of rope, or extremities of

anything) and Hercules came to the Hesperian dome, to the singing maidens, plucking the apple-fruit from the golden petals; slaying the flame-backed dragon, who, twined round and round, kept guard in unapproachable spires' (spirals or whirls, as of a whirlwind-vortex)" (398). The particular shape of the storm (the whirlwind or Simoon) the dragon represents is coil-shaped. If we recall Ruskin's passage about the tormented earth, quoted earlier, we see that it too has the same whirling motion as the serpent-simoon. The earth is a "rolling ball," and the life upon it also spins, uncontrollably, meaninglessly, from darkness to darkness. This coil figure implies false guardianship and containment (usually seen as a female characteristic) as well as the frightening aspect of a continuity or unity in which individual distinctions become blurred and order becomes threatened. Ruskin seems to be somewhat confused at certain points about whether the source of evil is with the dragon (coil or container) or the treasure the dragon guards (the content). At any rate, the coiled figure of the serpent represents the material nature of a life which lives only by its dependence upon other forms of life. The serpent, that is, represents the closed system of a nature which cannot transcend its origins, but must always double back on them, ending wherever it began. It may be seen as the image of relativity or of liminalism, for it blurs distinction between what it contains and what it is, what gives birth and what is birthed. It threatens the privileged position of the subject as well as the spirit. As this symbol of dissolution, it is a sublime figure in Modern Painters, object of fascination as well as fear.

This particular dragon (of the Goddess of the Hesperides) is a literal relic of matter, not just a symbol of it:

The strange unity of vertebrated action, and of a true bony contour, infinitely varied in every vertebra, with this glacial outline;--together with the adoption of the head of the Ganges crocodile, the fish-eater,

to show his sea descent (and this is the 1806, when hardly a single fossil saurian skeleton existed within Turner's reach), renders the whole conception one of the most curious exertions of the imaginative intellect which I am acquainted with in the arts.(403)

The dragon is therefore a complex of meanings: a glacier as well as a fossil, the Simoon, materialism, matter itself, nontranscendent relativism, the chaos and disorder of the universe which has been largely suppressed through Ruskin's emphasis upon the beauty of nature's laws; the projected and disguised image of the female which Ruskin cannot consciously acknowledge in the nymphs. It is female symbol of fullness and containment just as it is a phallic image of desire, both whole and empty.

Thus, the dragon Ladon, although apparently a secondary evil which despoils the original household peace and plenty, is himself symbolic in all his (or her?) hideousness of that original wholeness. Ruskin's search for a myth of original purity through classical sources leads him to the discovery of an initial "void" which is ultimately and mysteriously dark and threatening. But even this discovery has its uses, for it does paradoxically imply a continuing principle or law which tends towards death and destruction, and a law (sublime rather than beautiful, agonistic rather than reconciling) still implies some sort of order and underlying principle in nature, as well as furnishing a kind of enduring myth of identity. We all, Ruskin claims in the apocalyptic ending of Modern Painters, are children of the Dragon; we can trace our descent from him and know ourselves by studying the dark and destructive forces of the storm clouds and the evil of human nature all around us:

Kindreds of the earth, or tribes of it! the "earth begotten," the Chaos children--children of this present world, with its desolate seas and its Medusa clouds: the Dragon children, merciless: they

who dealt as clouds without water: serpent clouds, by whose sight men were turned to stone;--the time must surely come for their wailing.

"Thy kingdom come," we are bid to ask then! but how shall it come? With power and great glory, it is written; and yet not with observation, it is also written. Strange kingdom! Yet its strangeness is renewed to us with every dawn.

When the time comes for us to wake out of the world's sleep, why should it be otherwise than out of the dreams of the night? Singing of birds, first, broken and low, as not to dying eyes, but eyes that wake to life, "the casement slowly grows a glimmering square"; and then the gray, and then the rose of dawn; and last the light, whose going forth is to the ends of heaven.

This kingdom it is not in our power to bring; but it is, to receive. Nay, it is come already, in part; but not received, because men love chaos best; and the Night, with her daughters. . . But it is still our choice; the simoon-dragon may still be served if we will, in the fiery desert, or else God walking the garden, at cool of day (5: 358-360)

CHAPTER FOUR

The German Menace

People are continually accusing me of borrowing other men's thoughts, and not confessing the obligation. I don't think there is anything of which I am more incapable than this meanness, but it is very difficult to know how much one is indebted to other people, and it is always most difficult to explain to others the degree in which a strong mind may guide you, without your having at least unintentionally borrowed this or the other definite thought. The fact is, it is very possible for two people to hit sometimes on the same thought. . . . I entreat you not to think when (if you ever have patience to do so) you glance at anything I write--and when you come, as you must sometimes, on bits that look like bits of yourself spoiled--to think that I have been mean enough to borrow from you knowingly, and without acknowledgment. How much your general influence has told on me, I know not, but I always confess it, or rather boast of it, in conversation about you, and you will see what--considering the way malicious people catch at such confessions--is certainly a very frank one. . . . (*Letter from Ruskin to Carlyle, January 23, 1855*)

Ruskin's relationship to modern German thought, largely via Carlyle and Coleridge, reveals a paradoxical attraction and repulsion to these precursors and authorities which is characteristic of the sublime experience. On the one hand, the Germans represented to Ruskin the excesses of the revolutionary Romantic movement; on the other hand, they symbolized the canting piety typical of Evangelical extremism. Insofar as Ruskin himself was both Romantic and Evangelical, he identified with and admired his literary and religious forefathers; but as he increasingly distanced himself from their influence, he began to feel (by the mid-fifties) a mounting and irrational hostility towards them. Since the time of Longinus, the "imitation and emulation of the great historians and poets of the past," or the "keen desire to break a lance" with one's predecessor, has been associated with the experience of the sublime (Longinus 119, 120). Contemporary

discussion about the sublime as identification with the power and nobility of a great mentor has emphasized, in contrast to Longinus, the inevitable failure of such emulation. Thomas Weiskel's analysis of the compulsions of the negative sublime, one example of such criticism, views it as a succession of moments: first, anxiety before a great force which has the power to harm as much as benefit oneself; second, identification and internalization of the power of this authority or father figure, involving an assumption of the harshness, aggression and dictatorial nature of the imagined threat; and third, an ensuing guilt and repression of said aggression, which leads to an infinite spiral of anger and repression, indicating an imperfect assimilation of the role of the hero and father. (Weiskel 93, 96).

Thus, Ruskin's relationship to the Germans is intricately connected with the aesthetic of the negative sublime. It is the ultimate "failure of the positive identification with the superego" (the dictatorial gesture of the father that orders "Thou shalt") that marks Ruskin's negative sublime, and thus "the delight" of the sublime moment "is never really experienced," only an endless "replay of the precipitating occasion in an involuntary repetition compulsion" (97). Hence, Ruskin returns again and again to the figure of the German, to replay his hostility towards a symbolic precursor towards which he felt an ambiguous identification.

Yet in explaining Ruskin's increasing hostility to German aesthetics one could conceivably confine oneself to a historical approach: perhaps the aggression constituted (as Cook and Wedderburn suggest) a typical naturalistic English antipathy to the unworldly excesses of continental Romantic idealism. I do not believe that this historical approach is sufficient in itself to account for Ruskin's attitude, although it does place Ruskin's aesthetic and personal difficulties firmly in a nineteenth century context, suggesting compelling reasons for Ruskin's

identification of a feared and respected authority with that of an abstract German figure.

After a short period of receptivity to German literature, many Romantics, such as Wordsworth, Hazlitt, and Lamb, reacted against the Gothic, mystical or Jacobin ideas authors such as Schiller, Goethe, and Kant were thought to promote.¹ Schiller's Die Rauber, with its "misunderstood, lonely, outlawed hero and its indictment of tyranny, parental and political," though it had made Coleridge "tremble like an aspen leaf," had left many British readers nervous about its revolutionary implications. In addition, the Germanic style was simply thought to be in bad taste (Ashton 29, 31). Ruskin, one might argue, continued almost mechanically to follow a fashionable distaste for German idealism.

Yet Ruskin's feeling on this matter was stronger and more contradictory than this ready explanation suggests. His own ideas, as earlier chapters have already reiterated, develop implications of Germanic ideas in philosophy, mythology, Biblical exegesis and aesthetics, so either Ruskin was absolutely ignorant of his debt to that particular nation because he had absorbed the ideas of Kant, Schiller, Muller, Strauss and others second-hand through Carlyle, Eliot, and Coleridge, or he was aware to some extent of German ideas but unaware of the degree in which they disturbed or persuaded him. The second option is more convincing. Ruskin mentions Kant and Strauss disparagingly in Modern Painters, and is thus unlikely to have been unaware of their general positions, but as he was not able to understand German, he could hardly have been an expert critic of that nation's literature and philosophy.

¹Hazlitt thought Kant's system "an enormous heap of dogmatical and hardened assertions, advanced in contradiction to all former systems" (Ashton 37). Goethe and Schiller, he claimed, were "incorrigible Jacobins" of the "school of Radical Reform" (Ashton 31).

By mid-century English reaction to German thought had become somewhat more cautious, partly because Carlyle's and Coleridge's philosophical translations eventually created interest and even enthusiasm among some of the next generation, such as George Eliot, who translated Strauss's Leben Jesu. In consequence of her efforts, as well as the British growing awareness of German Biblical and mythological studies in general, German scholars became associated not so much with revolution as with a religious "freethinking," with all the daring implications of the word. "As Goethe had been chosen to stand for the general tendency of German literature to corrupt, so Strauss represented for the British the (long established) study by Germans of Biblical history in its more 'dangerous' conclusions" (Ashton 147). Ruskin probably reacted as much against this stereotype of the Germanic as against any specific philosopher or poet, denying that his own etymological interpretations of scripture, as well as of Greek myth, owed any debt to the methods of Strauss or Muller. Ruskin's attempt to deny the influence of the new German philosophy reveals in its anxious aggression an at least partially unconscious attempt to conceal the revolutionary nature of some of his own ideas by projecting them onto a convenient scapegoat, a scapegoat, moreover, who is also a precursor and source of these very ideas. Ruskin wishes at some level to rebel without suffering the onus of association with the German or revolutionary (ironically, the act of rebellion is against rebellion itself, symbolized by the father). In psychoanalytical language, he not only denies but usurps the authority of his precursor and literary father, himself creating and controlling ideas which are too disturbing in association with the daring freethinking of that nation. It is in such moments of Oedipal aggression, as Weiskel points out, that one (paradoxically enough) views the secondary effect of sublimation and identification with the father (96). In order to be the father oneself, one must first destroy the

original father who forbids that act. The act of creating poetic authority for oneself, as Harold Bloom claims,² necessarily involves an act of rebellion, a striving for the "foremost place." "If it doesn't strive for the foremost place, however implicitly, then it is not art" (Recent 29). This "agon" or "desire to excel" is a Greek rather than Hebraic characteristic. "Every Greek attempted to surpass one another and to surpass anteriority." The Hebraic tradition, on the other hand, was to honor both father and mother (Recent 26-7). Modern Painters offers a Hebraic version of Bloom's "Greek" theory of "anxiety of influence": in the act of renunciation of desire for authority (or in the sublimation of aggression) one achieves ascendance over that precursor. Bloom subordinates this "Hebraic" poetic renunciation or sublimation (or act of sublimity) under a specialized form of rebellion he calls "kenosis":

a breaking device similar to the defense mechanisms our psyches employ against repetition compulsions; kenosis then is a movement towards discontinuity with the precursor. I take the word from St. Paul, where it means the humbling or emptying-out of Jesus by himself, when he accepts reduction from divine to human status. The later poet, apparently emptying himself of his own afflatus, his imaginative godhood, seems to humble himself as though he were ceasing to be a poet, but this ebbing is so performed in relation to a precursor's poem-of-ebbing that the precursor is emptied out also, and so the later poem of deflation is not as absolute as it seems. (Anxiety 14-15)

It is true that acts of humility and obedience may be simultaneously acts of rebellion, but Bloom's insistence upon the latter term elides both intent and act into the final result of that act. My focus is upon the occasional indistinguishability of

²Both Bloom and Weiskel argue that the identification with the father fails, although they appear to focus on different reasons why the failure occurs. Bloom emphasizes the necessity of a pure rebellion which misconstrues the fundamental nature of authority; Weiskel chooses to elaborate on the imperfect assimilation of the role of the father or revolutionary. Bloom shows how the understanding of the predecessor fails; Weiskel how the self fails to live up to its own expectations. My interpretation of Ruskin's problem owes more to Weiskel than to Bloom.

rebellion and obedience in Ruskin's relationship to his precursors in Modern Painters. Ruskin shows how, in order to be the father of oneself, one must destroy the desire for fatherhood--sublimely fail to be a father. An act of obedience to a creed or person, if it is deeply sincere and single-minded, may paradoxically be as revolutionary as a conscious effort to distance oneself from that source. Modern Painters questions the rigid distinction Bloom posits between the terms *obedience* and *rebellion*.³

Ruskin's reaction against Germany is a partially displaced rebellion against both literal and literary forefathers, including (in addition to Kant, Schiller, Coleridge and Carlyle) John James Ruskin and William Wordsworth. However, in his carefully staged contest in volume five of Modern Painters between the English Turner's and the German Durer's nobility of response to evil, Ruskin views the superiority of the English son (Turner) to the German Father (Durer) to be due to the fact that Turner realizes his own impotence against evil, and depicts his inevitability of failure, whereas Durer imagines a heroic stoicism to be possible. To Ruskin, Turner's act of authority over Durer is his self-conscious realization of the limitations of the heroic gesture. Ruskin's identification with Turner's renunciation of the effort to slay the dragon, the desire to become the ultimate hero or to achieve the equivalent of the painters of the past is also his identification with the Evangelical ideals of self-sacrifice, humility and meekness. But the identification with Turner the son also constitutes a rebellion against both

³Concerning Holderlin's relationship to Schiller, his mentor, Bloom quotes Holderlin's question, "the child," "is now dealing with men with whom he will never in all probability be familiar enough to forget their superiority. And if he feels this superiority he must become either rebellious or servile. Or must he?" Bloom answers this question affirmatively. Holderlin achieved poetic mastery, the "foremost place"; thus, even his frank expression of indebtedness to Schiller in a letter written to Schiller is viewed as an Oedipal act of rebellion. (Bloom Deconstruction 17-19). In The Anxiety of Influence Bloom again asserts that "he who lives with continuity alone cannot be a great poet." Poetry involves a "sin against property" that belongs to another; i.e., a stealing of the Promethean fire, a revolution, an "antithetical impulse" against being influenced, being a part of the group, being obedient to others' principles.

Evangelicism and Romanticism, because it implies through this renunciation the victory over the Germanic, which in Ruskin's mind is almost analogous to the fanaticism and enthusiasm of the extreme Evangelical and Romantic character.

The "German" traits Ruskin defined and distanced himself from were characteristic of Romantic subjectivism in general, as well as religious enthusiasm, fanaticism, stylistic obfuscation, and love of mystery for its own sake. Carlyle had popularized a view of Kant which encouraged the English dismissal of him as a rather harmless but boring mystic, which Ruskin shared.⁴ Kant's term *reason*, for example, became "for Jacobi, as for Carlyle and Coleridge, a divinatory instinct penetrating to realms of truth shut off from ordinary intellectual effort" (Harrold 126), whereas for Kant reason could not penetrate such realms at all. Kant held that ideas of reason were merely the product of a "unifying power" acting upon sensory input, and that reason "produces ideas which can never be objectified in experience," such as notions about God, immortality or infinite power. The understanding unifies and orders sensory data; it is empirical and practical knowledge, though it can tell us nothing about transcendental objects such as God. Reason was "no more essential or holy than understanding," nor was understanding understood to occupy a subservient position in relationship to reason (Harrold 136-137). But Coleridge too thought that a Kantian reason was the "best and holiest gift of God and bond of union with the giver. . . the mother of conscience, of language, of tears, of smiles. . . [the] calm and incorruptible legislator of the soul." (Coleridge, *Friend* II: 144)).

Carlyle, in attempting to understand Kant's influence on Schiller, wrote that

⁴"I have often been told that any one who will read Kant, Strauss, and the rest of the metaphysical divines resolutely through, and give his whole strength to the study of them, will, after ten or twelve years' labour, discover that there is very little harm in them; and this I can well believe; but I also believe that the ten or twelve years may be better spent. . . (3: 425)

the air of mysticism was attractive to the German mind, with which the vague and the vast are always pleasing qualities; the dreadful array of first principles, a forest huge of terminology and definitions, where the panting intellect of weaker men wanders as in pathless thickets, and at length sinks powerless to the earth, oppressed with fatigue, and suffocated with scholastic miasma--seemed sublime rather than appalling to the Germans; men who shrink not at toil, and to whom a certain degree of darkness appears a native element, essential for giving play to that deep meditative enthusiasm which forms so important a feature in their character. (Carlyle, Life 108)

Carlyle valued Germanic idealism not because he understood it particularly well and loved it for its own sake, but because it was at least "preferable to Benthamism" (Ashton 93). In accordance with the common association of mysticism and German thought, Ruskin wrote in the appendix to volume three that "I am . . . brought continually into collision with certain extravagances of the German mind, by my own steady pursuit of Naturalism as opposed to Idealism," although Ruskin himself was far from Benthamism and admired the writing of Carlyle (3: 424). In this appendix, Ruskin admits his poor grasp of German thought, but argues (rather strangely) that it is not necessary to be familiar with some things in order to dislike and dismiss them:

someone will perhaps answer that if one always judged thus by the sample,--as, for instance, if one judged of Turner's pictures by the head of a figure cut out of one of them,--very precious things might often be despised. Not, I think, often. If any one went to Turner, expecting to learn figure-drawing from him, the sample of his figure-drawing would accurately and justly inform him that he had come to the wrong master. But if he came to be taught landscape, the smallest fragment of Turner's work would justly exemplify his power. . . . there is, . . . in multitudes of cases, no other way of judging or acting; and the necessity of occasionally being unjust is a law of life,--like that of sometimes stumbling, or being sick. It will not do to walk at snail's pace all our lives for fear of stumbling, nor to spend years in the investigation of everything, which, by specimen, we must condemn. . . .

It has also often been declared necessary to study the German controversialists ["Kant, Strauss, and the rest of the German metaphysicians and divines"] because the grounds of religion "must

be inquired into." I am sorry to hear they have not been inquired into yet; but if it be so, there are two ways of pursuing that inquiry: one for scholarly men, who have leisure on their hands, by reading all that they have time to read, for and against, and arming themselves at all points for controversy with all persons; the other,-- a shorter and simpler way,--for busy and practical men, who want merely to find out how to live and die. Now for the learned and leisurely men I am not writing [but]. . . . For simple and busy men. . . (425-426).

Ruskin, as a "simple and practical man," claims to be writing for "simple and busy men." Again, as I have pointed out in chapters one and two, Ruskin sees himself as a man of science concerned with practical, everyday matters and disciplines rather than as the poet with his wild flights of fancy. Simple busy men do not need to delve into religious "points of controversy," but merely want to learn how to live and die, matters easily learned and taught, though it might appear (to the truly simple-minded critic) easier to learn certain "points of controversy" than to learn how to live and die (a rather tall order). Ruskin reassures his readers (the simple ones, presumably) that he does not

dissuade [them] from meddling with German books because I fear inquiry into the grounds of religion, but because the only inquiry which is possible to them must be conducted in a totally different way. They have been brought up as Christians, and doubt if they should remain Christians. They cannot ascertain, by investigation, if the Bible be true; but if it be, and Christ ever existed, and was God, then certainly, the Sermon which He has permitted for 1800 years to stand recorded as first of all His own teaching in the New Testament, must be true. (3: 426)

This is again a strange argument. Ruskin does not say that the German new criticism is wrong; he says that it is time-consuming and irrelevant and vain to attempt to discover whether the Bible is literally true or not. Then he claims that "if" the bible is true *then it is true*, which is not an alarming conclusion, but somewhat redundant. Ruskin's definition of trueness as enaction of the written word in the present gives some indication as to his meaning here. If people actually

give the commandments of the Bible "fair practical trial" with the exception of "such evidently metaphorical expressions as "cut off thy foot," or "pluck the beam out of thine eye," and still are "not satisfied," then "let them try the German system if they choose" (3: 426).

Ruskin's avoidance of careful study of the Germans suggests that he was worried about the effect a more careful study might have on his faith. Archdeacon Hare's response to Strauss's Leben Jesu is perhaps a more honest expression of an anxiety Ruskin refused to admit as such: "a book which a person can hardly read without being more or less hurt by it. If we walk through mire, some of it will stick to us, even when we have no other aim than to make our way through it, much more when we dabble about in it and sift it" (Ashton 148). Ruskin's avoidance might also be part of his customary attempt to hide a deep attraction to metaphysical speculation in all its dangerous aspects. Ruskin contradicts both his own characterization of himself as simple and practical as well as his antagonistic relationship to the German style in Praeterita, where he claims that Samuel Johnson had saved him

against all chance of being misled by my own sanguine and metaphysical temperament. He taught me carefully to measure life, and distrust fortune; and he secured me, by his adamant common sense, forever, from being caught in the cobwebs of German metaphysics, or sloughed in the English drainage of them. (Praeterita 211)

Ruskin liked to compare German metaphysical systems to vast cobwebs against which, like Arnold's Shelley, he flapped his wings in vain: "The greatest troubles the world has got to deal with" are "metaphysicians" and "philosophers," he reiterates later in the same volume, who "are always entangling *good* and *active* people, and weaving cobwebs among the finest wheels of the world's business." Ruskin again means *German* philosophers and metaphysicians (3: 334), who

entrap unwary scholars with vast and confusing systems of thought, scholars such as himself, although he mercifully has experienced a narrow escape from German discipleship which it is his native bent to pursue. Ruskin appears to link a careful, measured, frugal, cynical or detached attitude towards life and fortune with the best classical British pragmatism, and a prodigal, naive idealism with the Germanic philosophy. The metaphors of expenditure suggest that the English manage to save and husband a limited resource which is squandered by the Germans, who carry enthusiasm to extremes. German artists (presumably the Nazarenes, a group described at more length below) are a "class of men, whose natural instincts lead them to mingle the refinements of art with all the offices and practices of religion," and who are in this matter not merely "indulgent" but "Pharasaical":

Of all the forms of pride and vanity, as there are none so subtle, so I believe there are none more sinful, than those which are manifested by the Pharisees of art. . . . to be proud of our sanctities; to pour contempt upon our fellows, because, forsooth, we like to look at Madonnas in bowers of roses, better than at plain pictures of plain things; and to make this religious art of ours the expression of our own perpetual self-complacency. . . --this I believe to be one of the wickedest and foolishlest forms of human egotism; and, truly, I had rather, with great, thoughtless, humble Paul Veronese, make the Supper at Emmaus a background for two children playing with a dog (as, God knows, men do usually put it in the background to everything, if not out of sight altogether), than join that school of modern Germanism which wears its pieties for decoration as women wear their diamonds, and spreads the dry fleeces of its sanctities between its dust and the dew of heaven (3: 89-90)

Curiously, in line three of the quotation above, the criticism turns from third person to first, occasioning some confusion in the reader as to whether it is Ruskin or the Pharisees who likes to gaze adoringly on Madonnas. Ruskin himself was at this time only recently converted to Veronese and away from Angelico and his frail angels and madonnas. In volume two of Modern Painters Ruskin had valued pious art at the expense of the worldly, so in a certain sense his German stalking-horse is

(in a limited way) a self-conscious project of distancing his present self from his former self by making his past piety a foreign sin of pride. Later in volume three in the section on the pathetic fallacy Ruskin again explicitly associates these flaws with the flaws of the German character. Certain egoists, he claims, believe that

it does not much matter what things are in themselves, but only what they are to us; and that the only real truth of them is their appearance to, or affect upon, us. From which position, with a hearty desire for mystification, and much egoism, selfishness, shallowness, and impertinence, a philosopher may easily go so far as to believe, and say, that everything in the world depends upon his seeing or thinking of it, and that nothing, therefore, exists, but what he sees or thinks of. (3:201-202)

Ruskin concludes by again identifying the "philosophers" who tend towards this egotistical solipsism as "our German friends," and writes a parody of their style in a footnote to underline his contempt for the German confusion of terminology, especially of the words "subjective" and "objective," first popularized by Coleridge, himself immensely influenced by German thought.

German painters as well as philosophers suffered in Ruskin's opinion from deep and incorrigible flaws of character. Modern German art was a "school of mud," he announced emphatically in volume one (351). In volume three Ruskin attacked the Dutch painter Wouvermans as merely "a respectable tradesman furnishing well-made articles in oil paint," guilty of an "inbred vulgarity" and "insensitivity" (3: 364). In a typical vilification of Nazarene art from volume five the contempt and animus remains unchanged, perhaps even deepened. Overbeck's Virgin in the Chapel of Cathedral is "execrable beyond contempt," "the plagiarism of course being cunningly concealed by alterations," "the white, goggle-eyed, paste-faced Virgin, monstrous and ridiculous beyond description" (5: 488).

Against poets Ruskin continues his tirade: "It is lucky if in German writers we find even so much as a sentence without affectation" (3: 332). The modern German poet will describe a rapid in a river by evoking memories of "amorous water nymphs and unhappy mariners." The man of "true invention," on the other hand, considers "whether the rocks in the river could have their points knocked off, or the boats upon it made with stronger bottoms" (100). German poets, like the philosophers, are egoistic, which characteristic Ruskin associates closely with more sentimental school of England such as Shelley and Byron.⁵ They are "reflective" or "contemplative" poets inferior to Wordsworth (who is a better representative of the same school), but who, in turn, is second-rate in comparison to Shakespeare, a truly "creative" poet. Ruskin's division of poets into two classes--the "creative" (such as Shakespeare, Homer, Dante) and the "reflective" or "perceptive" (Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson) (3:205)--recalls Coleridge's aesthetic. As Rosemary Ashton says

Coleridge expressed his aesthetic in terms of pairs of opposites: naive, objective, finite, 'classic' versus reflective, subjective, infinite, 'romantic.' Most of the German Romantic theorists also wrote in such terms--the two Schlegels and Jean Paul in particular.. . . In 'Über naiv und sentimentalische Dichtung' Schiller explicitly tells us not to confuse 'naiv' and 'sentimentalisch' with 'classical' and 'modern'. . . . Yet he seems to forget this difference when he takes it for granted that Homer is the norm of the 'naiv' genius. (51)

Schiller had written that "the opposite of the naive sensibility is the reflective understanding" (51). Ruskin too classifies the Romantic, modern poets as "reflective" or sentimental, (meaning egoistically self-conscious in Ruskin's estimation), and contrasts them with a naive group of poets (Homer, Shakespeare,

⁵After criticizing philosophers and metaphysicians and their egoism, Ruskin immediately launches into an attack on the school which is exclusively concerned with "the analysis and description of emotion, headed by the poetry of Byron" (3:334).

Scott). But Ruskin continued to deny or to misunderstand Schiller's or any other Germans' influence, remarking that he always "heartily disliked his Schiller's writings" (Letters II : 277).

Though Ruskin makes a definite effort to raise Wordsworth above the level of the egoistic which Byron and Shelly occupy in his system, Wordsworth gradually slips in his estimation from the first volume of Modern Painters to the last. Though every volume of Modern Painters begins with a quotation from the Excursion, and Ruskin, (in contrast to the popular estimate of Wordsworth today as a poet of the mind rather than of nature) continued to admire this poet for his love of nature (3:355; 3:363-4) and his keen eye (1: 307), Ruskin gradually began to doubt Wordsworth's humility and objectivity before nature:

Byron and Shelley are nearly the same, only with less truth of perception, and even more troublesome selfishness. Wordsworth is more like Scott, and understands how to be happy, but yet cannot altogether rid himself of the sense that he is a philosopher, and ought always to be saying something wise. He has also a vague notion that nature would not be able to get on well without Wordsworth; and finds a considerable part of his pleasure in looking at himself as well as at her. But with Scott the love is entirely humble and unselfish. "I, Scott, am nothing, and less than nothing; but these crags, and heaths, and clouds, how great they are, how lovely, how forever to be beloved, only for their own silent, thoughtless sake!" (3: 343)

The identification of Wordsworth as a "philosopher," an identity that the Germanophile Coleridge was always exhorting him to live up to, is meant, in Ruskin's private nomenclature, as an ominous sign of incipient metaphysical-minded egoism. Ruskin makes this connection plainer by comparing Wordsworth to Goethe (one of the few times the name of Goethe appears) and concluding that

both suffer from "self-complacency"⁶ (3: 332) though Wordsworth, Ruskin insists, is, unlike the Germans, a useful guide through life (3: 425). Like the Germans, however, Wordsworth is "often affected" even "in his simplicity" (3: 332).

It should be clear by this point that Ruskin felt abnormally suspicious and hostile towards German art and philosophy, and that he was only dimly aware of his own self-projections (of his former pious evangelical identity; his former love of Romantic subjectivity) onto them. Ruskin's compulsion to return to the topic many times should also be evident, leading the reader, in turn, to suspect a complex and unconscious obsession with the Germanic. This obsession, I feel, is what makes Ruskin's later contest between Durer and Turner more than a mere painting contest. It is deeply meaningful to Ruskin for reasons unclear even to himself. Turner's relationship to Durer is not a natural question for Ruskin to occupy himself with, because Durer was not primarily a landscape painter in the sense that Cuyp, Claude, Poussin, Salvator or many others were.

If there is any quality which Ruskin felt was typical of the German national character it was the extreme "sentimental" or "reflective" tendency, by which Ruskin meant excessive pride and "self-complacency." Though it is easy to imagine how Ruskin might associate subjective or solipsistic Romanticism with German thought, it is more difficult to imagine how he might justify an attack on these supposedly irreverent, selfish people as smugly pious. Piety is not a strong

⁶"I do not find Scott talking about the dignity of literature, nor Turner about the dignity of painting. They do their work, feeling that they cannot well help it; the story must be told, and the effect put down; and if people like it, well and good; and if not, the world will not be much the worse.

"I believe a very different impression of their estimate of themselves and their doings will be received by any one who reads the conversations of Wordsworth or Goethe. The slightest manifestation of jealousy or self-complacency is enough to mark a second-rate character of the intellect; and I fear that, especially in Goethe, such manifestations are neither few nor slight" (3: 332).

point of Shelley or Byron, the two most "reflective," self-centered and "Germanic" of the English romantics. Ruskin's concept of the *Germanic* did not include a carefully premeditated set of characteristics, but a hodgepodge of impulsive and instinctive antipathies which held in tension two very antithetical drives in Ruskin's psyche: on the one hand, his modernist, radical, metaphysical tendencies, which he was loathe, except intermittently and painfully, to admit; and on the other hand, his conservative piety and Evangelical faith, which by the mid-fifties he wished to believe he had outgrown. Thus, the German is both the boy Ruskin once was and the man he fears to become, constituting both a dependent past and a future revolutionary identity, both of which must be destroyed in order to allow Ruskin to become truly himself. Ruskin's project to overcome the Germanic is his effort to make himself different from his precursors without the violence of overt rebellion.

Ruskin's contest between Durer and Turner in volume five is the culmination of this effort. In this contest the father (Durer) of the modern Pharisaical German school of painting (the Nazarenes) is bested by the son (Turner), representative of the Naturalistic school (Pre-Raphaelite). In order to understand the complex meaning of this contest, it is necessary to understand more about the relationship between the Pre-Raphaelites, with whom Ruskin identified, and the Nazarenes, who symbolized for Ruskin the character of his repudiated and dependent childhood faith. For Ruskin, this relationship of absolute difference repeats that between the English and German reflective poets (between himself and the rebel he covertly wished to be), although, again, it is difficult for the reader to understand why the two schools of art, both apparently deeply pious and naturalistic, should be distinguished so sharply from one another.

The Nazarenes which Ruskin so heartily disliked for their supposedly excessive and Pharasaical piety had formed in Austria in 1809 under the leadership

of Franz Pforr and Friedrich Overbeck with the purpose of fomenting a rebellion against the mindless routine of the art schools of the day. They lived a quasi-monastic existence and wore archaic dress to emphasize their separation from the corrupted modern world. Though the group of six is often represented as being primarily interested in religious and biblical themes, they often chose to depict a range of periods: classical and modern as well as antique. They wished to represent the natural world simply and directly, in the style of Durer and Raphael, not because nature was an end in itself but because they wished to approach "the ideal by means of the real" (Vaughan 169). The PreRaphaelite Brotherhood also (obviously) returned to the art of a simpler age, and also assumed a title which could easily be interpreted as religious or even Catholic. They too claimed that sincerity, simplicity and adherence to nature were absolutely necessary to revitalize modern art. Whereas the Nazarenes believed that truth was derived from Christian authority, however, and that nature was only a step towards an "idealized world," the PreRaphaelites claimed that the ultimate authority was nature herself (Andrews 80). The PreRaphaelite fidelity to nature was at least partially based upon Holman Hunt's enthusiasm over the first volume of Modern Painters, which exhorted painters to observe the phenomena of land, earth, sky and water painstakingly and laboriously. The Nazarenes were "those painters who had sought to revise historical and religious art by a return to the principles of the time and of Durer and Raphael" (Vaughan 163). On the other hand, the PreRaphaelite "Brotherhood," in spite of their name (and like the English in general) routinely criticized any art suspected of "Christian" or "Papist" influences. (Andrews 80).

The PreRaphaelites (defended by Ruskin as pure naturalists) themselves were something tainted by such "Christian," as well as by Roman Catholic archaisms. Many of Holman Hunt's paintings are either overtly Christian,

depicting actual scenes and incidents of the ancient world, such as the *Triumph of the Innocents*, or at least sentimentally moralistic, like the *Light of the World*.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Girlhood of the Virgin Mary* was one of the first PreRaphaelite paintings to be exhibited, as was John Everett Millais' *Christ in the house of his parents*, although this painting was executed in a naturalistic way shocking to the Victorian frame of mind. One of the first meetings of the Pre-Raphaelist group to decide its composition and rules of painting centered around Nazarene models. Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti, Thomas Woolner, James Collinson and F.G. Stephens, in attempting to persuade John Everett Millais to join the ranks (he was the most prestigious of the little group of unknowns), had to approve examples of the sort of art Millais expected them to emulate. These samples consisted of "frescoes in the Campo Santo at Pisa," and ancient "Roman Catholic" contemporary German prints of Joseph Fuhri's "associated with the Nazarenes" which Hunt liked because of their Modernist handling. Apparently, an "archaic" handling of a religious theme was what marked a painting as Roman and therefore suspect; if the technique were "modern" the content could be excused. The whole group applauded Millais' models, their "innocence," "Chaucerian invention" and "unmannered observation" (Watkinson 51).

Other artists closely associated with the PreRaphaelites were even more directly influenced by the Nazarenes. Ford Madox Brown had actually studied the Nazarene method overseas, as had William Dyce, who went to Rome in 1825 and developed a warm friendship with Overbeck (Andrews 80).

Ruskin, however, drew a sharp line between the PreRaphaelites he admired and the Nazarenes he detested, between the man he wished to be and the pious, canting boy he suspected he had been in the past: the first was true to nature; the

second corrupt and impure. The art of the true purist school, best exemplified by Angelico, is indeed "naive" and "innocent," "pure" and "pious." Its shadowless brightness, serene simplicity, and sparkling colour make a "paradise" out of landscape, but the modern German school is merely "soothing" and "pathetic." It could never be "sublime" and could never "state a plain fact" (3: 107). Its piety is "plagiarized" and "conceited" and is based only on a "delicate pride" (3: 109).

In volume five Ruskin contrasts the greatest English painter, Turner, with the greatest German, Durer. This contest is implicitly also a continuation of the tension Ruskin had been intent upon underlining between the PreRaphaelites on the one hand and the Nazarenes on the other, for Durer was the chosen ancestor of the Nazarene school (as the Nazarenes defined themselves), and Turner, according to Ruskin, carried PreRaphaelite naturalistic precision and observation of nature to such an extreme that he eventually lost firmness of lines and forms in mist. Durer's art as Ruskin analyzes it is concerned with the two themes discussed above as central to the "German": individuality and piety. Durer's Death and the Knight and Melancholia represent individual heroism in a battle against evil (a Romantic theme) as well as the possibility of an ethical and self-effacing response to that evil (the Evangelical theme). Durer as Ruskin views him is pre-eminently *German*, and thus apposite to the tensions discussed above as typical of the German poetic and artistic character--he is not a great personality who merely happened to be born in a certain place, but the inheritor of the traditions of Nuremberg. As a native of Nuremberg, Durer had to struggle against the mediocrity of his surroundings, both the architecture, which "has been much overrated" and its "peculiar" character of

self-restrained, contented, quaint domesticity. It would have been vain to expect any first-rate painting, sculpture, or poetry, from the well-regulated community of merchants of small ware. But it is evident they were affectionate and trustworthy--that they had playful fancy and honourable pride. There is no exalted grandeur in their

city, nor any deep beauty; but an imaginative homeliness, mingled with some elements of melancholy and power, and a few even of grace. (304)

This description of Nuremburg, though critical, is more restrained than Ruskin's usual response to anything German. It reminds the reader of Ruskin's descriptions of English scenery (in contrast to the French) as at times hopelessly domesticated and bland. Ruskin makes this connection himself when he states that both English and German cottages derive their chief charm from the steep angle of their roofs (304-305). Ruskin's own father was a merchant of small ware, a simple (though admittedly wealthy) wine merchant. Durer's piety, though unquestionable, emphasized that art "cannot conquer. . . evil, but remains at war with, or in captivity to it" (5: 300). After the reformation, according to Ruskin, artists either turned hedonistically to "Bacchus" and "Dionysus" or they "stood firm" against the onslaughts of impiety. Durer was one of this tiny group. Durer's message of hope to mankind was "work" (represented in *Melancholia*) and "fortitude" (depicted in *Death and the Knight*) (309). Both virtues were bound to appeal to a man like Ruskin raised in an Evangelical home. Durer's faith in work was possible because

Men did their work in his city and in the fields round it. The clergy were sincere. Great social questions unagitated; great social evils either non-existent, or seemingly a part of the nature of things, and inevitable. His answer was that of patient hope; and twofold, consisting of one design in praise of Fortitude, and another in praise of Labour. The Fortitude, commonly known as the "Knight and Death," represents a knight riding through a dark valley overhung by leafless trees, and with a great castle on a hill beyond. Beside him, but a little in advance, rides Death on a pale horse. Death is gray-haired and crowned;--serpents wreathed about his crown; (the sting of death involved in Kingly power). He holds up the hour-glass, and looks earnestly into the knight's face. Behind him follows Sin; but Sin powerless; he has been conquered and passed by, but follows yet, watching if any way of assault remains. On his forehead are two horns--I think of sea-shell--to indicate his insatiableness and instability. He has also the twisted horns of the ram, for stubbornness, the ears of an ass, the snout of a swine, the

hoofs of a goat. Torn wings hang useless from his shoulders, and he carries a spear with two hooks, for catching as well as wounding. The knight does not heed him, nor even Death, though he is conscious of the presents of the last.

He rides quietly, his bridle firm in his hand, and his lips set close in a slight sorrowful smile, for he hears what death is saying; and hears it as the word of a messenger who brings pleasant tidings, thinking to bring evil ones. A little branch of delicate heath is twisted round his helmet. His horse trots proudly and straight; its head high, and with a cluster of oak on the brow where on the fiend's brow is the sea-shell horn. But the horse of Death stoops its head; and its rein catches the little bell which hangs from the knight's horse-bridle, making it toll as a passing-bell. (5: 310-311)

Durer portrays a victory over death as temptation and as destruction, though it is a "sad conquest" (312). "Yet is his strength labour and sorrow," Ruskin says, quoting Psalms xc.10. Durer's answer is "noble" but "imperfect": "This is indeed the labour which is crowned with laurel and has the wings of the eagle. It was reserved for another country to prove, for another hand to portray, the labour which is crowned with fire, and has the wings of the bat" (314). Durer the eagle is ultimately outpainted by Turner the dragon, a beast who has "the wings of the bat" and who (unlike the usual bat) breathes and creates fire. It is Turner the dragon who portrays the dragon and its slayer Apollo, who although he destroys one serpent, is always ultimately faced with others which erupt squirming out of the wounds of the slain beast. Turner, therefore, paints the inevitability of failure to destroy the dragon.

Yet Ruskin believes that Turner is the superior artist, despite his near-despair. Turner had insight into a much more terrible death:

The English death was before his eyes also. No decent, calculable, consoled dying; no passing to rest like that of the aged burghers of Nuremberg town. No gentle processions to churchyards among the fields, the bronze crests bossed deep on the memorial tablets, and the skylark singing above them from among the corn. But the life tramped out in the slime of the street, crushed to dust amidst the roaring of the wheel, tossed countless away into howling winter

wind along five hundred leagues of rock-fanged shore. Or, worst of all, rotted down to forgotten graves through years of ignorant patience, and vain seeking for help from man, for hope in God--infirm, imperfect yearning, as of motherless infants starving at the dawn; oppressed royalties of captive thought, vague ague-fits of bleak, amazed despair.

. . . . Full shone now its awful globe, one pallid charnel-house,--a ball strewn bright with human ashes, glaring in poised sway beneath the sun, all blinding-white with death from pole to pole--death, not of myriads of poor bodies only, but of will, and mercy, and conscience; death, not once inflicted on the flesh, but daily fastening upon the spirit; death, not silent or patient, waiting his appointed hour, but voiceful, venomous; death with the taunting word, and burning grasp, and infixed sting. (5: 387)

This passage refers to a series of Turner's paintings composed as illustrations for his longish poem The Fallacy of Hope, including (according to Cook and Wedderburn) the "Tenth Plague of Egypt" and "Rizpah, the Daughter of Aiah." It is likely that the passage on the burning globe refers to the later Turner's intense abstract studies of the sun and of light, and the reference to Waterloo is a nod towards the obscure "War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet." In the next chapter Ruskin describes Turner's dragon pictures, the Goddess of Discord in the Garden of the Hesperides and his Apollo, in which the venomous worm with the "burning grasp, and infixed sting" ultimately conquers the hero. Turner can portray the dragon but cannot kill him. Like the great painters of the past, he too has "declare[d] the chief worship which lay at the nation's heart; to define it; adorn it. . . Thus in Athens, we have the triumph of Pallas; and in Venice the Assumption of the Virgin; here, in England, is our great spiritual fact for ever interpreted to us--the Assumption of the Dragon." Apollo and the Goddess of Discord in the Garden of the Hesperides show us, according to Ruskin, that there are

no more St. Georges any more to be heard of; no more dragon-slaying possible: this child, [Turner]born on St. George's Day, can only make manifest the dragon, not slay him, sea-serpent as he is; whom the English Andromeda, not fearing, takes for her lord. . .

Yes, Albert of Nuremberg; the time has at last come. Another nation has arisen in the strength of its Black anger; and another hand has portrayed the spirit of its toil. Crowned with fire, and with the wings of the bat (408).

Presumably, the time to which Ruskin refers is a kind of apocalyptic end to nobility and faith, wherein the old art no longer holds true or seems compelling. Turner can create the dragon; to a certain extent he *is* the dragon or "sea-serpent" (the syntax is ambiguous), he is the child of a nation strong in its dragonish "Black anger," who epitomizes its toil.

Turner's superiority clearly arises from his realization of his limitations. Turner's Apollo is less capable of stoic heroism than Durer's knight, but Turner pointedly directs attention to Apollo's and his own incapacity, paradoxically achieving through his act of humility and renunciation a stronger status than his German ancestor. Turner the son has *renounced* as well as *lost* the fortitude of Durer the father. The modern painter has become antihero rather than hero. This theme is the Hebraic variation on the Oedipal myth: the son conquers by emphasizing the inevitability of his status as son and the inevitable victory of forces greater than his own. Ruskin's sublime act is deeply Hebraic as well as Oedipal and Greek. Ruskin shows how one may assert oneself even in the act of self-effacing, drawing strength by an act of apparent weakness. As Harold Bloom would say, "art always strives for the foremost place"; it embodies a continual struggle (*agon*) between the present and the past or "anteriority" (Recent 26-27). But the Hebraic tradition of *agon* is an intensified rather than weakened version of the sublime experience, because (to put it all in Weiskel's terms) the negative sublime cycle is kept in motion by continual repression of aggression, which generates guilt, which leads to greater anger and thus more strenuous self-restraint. It is in the troping of the murder of the father into the murder of the self (by announcing one's own inevitable failure to surpass the art of the past) that one

might say the sublime act occurs. Ruskin attacked the Greek desire to excel which was in himself, the desire to kill the dragon Mammon, by reminding himself that the dragon was unkillable anyway, and that the noblest thing therefore to do was to keep always in sight this inevitability of failure, always striving, however, to overcome it anyway. Keeping always in mind the unbreachable gulf between a limited, feeble human capacity for good and the global "charnel-house" which is the undeniable reality of pain and sin such feeble gestures struggle against --this constant watchfulness is itself a moral act which is sometimes the best that one can do.

CONCLUSION

In emphasizing the struggle and self-division underlying Ruskin's search for an aesthetic of repose, reconciliation and beauty, I have underlined the element of aesceticism in Modern Painters, and consequently, the aesthetic of the sublime. Ruskin's compulsion towards self-perfection was at times dangerously intense and paradoxically self-destructive. Such a portrait of Ruskin is not one of which he himself would have approved, however, as he clearly specified at the end of volume five when he outlined three principal kinds of aesceticism, described his preference for one of them, but then rejected all kinds altogether as ultimately "narrow" and non-humanistic:

Three principal forms of aesceticism have existed in this weak world. Religious aesceticism, being the refusal of pleasure and knowledge for the sake (as supposed) of religion; seen chiefly in the Middle Ages. Military aesceticism, being the refusal of pleasure and knowledge for the sake of power; seen chiefly in the early days of Sparta and Rome. And monetary aesceticism, consisting in the refusal of pleasure and knowledge for the sake of money, seen in the present days of London and Manchester.

"We do not come here to look at the mountains," said the Carthusian to me at the Grande Chartreuse. "We do not come here to look at the mountains," the Austrian Generals would say, encamping by the shores of Garda. "We do not come here to look at the mountains," so the thriving manufacturers tell me, between Rochdale and Halifax.

All these aesceticisms have their bright and their dark sides. I myself like the military asceticism best, because it is not so necessarily a refusal of general knowledge, as the two others, but leads to acute and marvellous use of mind, and perfect use of body. Nevertheless, none of the three are a healthy or central state of man. There is much to be respected in each, but they are not what we should wish large numbers of men to become. . . [Such men] are narrow ones,--so narrow that even all the three together would not make up the perfect man (5: 424).

Ruskin was aware of the dangers of aesceticism and combated it with his religious faith (which involved the concept of original sin and thus the impossibility of all human effort, including aescetic effort, to achieve salvation without grace), his pretensions to science and his defense of beauty, all of which guarded him (for a while, at least) from the excessive and violent repetition-compulsion of the negative sublime experience. Thus, in claiming that the sublime experience, for Ruskin, underlay the experience of the beautiful, I do not mean to insinuate that the beautiful was unimportant or trivial, but to point out that the rhythms of Ruskin's prose are driven by a powerful obsession with self-transcendence, often itself sublimated, denied and disguised in moving and eloquent prose.

In his reaction against the narrowness of the Romantic sublime which constituted a renunciation of beauty and knowledge for the sake of the sensation of power (the subjective and egotistical Germanic-Romantics, in Ruskin's terminology), Ruskin hoped to reconstruct a more approachable and healthy humanist ideal. But to classify his endeavor of reconciliation of the human faculties as a return to the ideal of the Renaissance or of classicism would be a mistake. Ruskin felt that the Medieval mind delighted in "*stability, definiteness, and luminousness*" whereas we, the Modernists, (everyone, presumably, who lived after the Medieval age) "are expected to rejoice in darkness, and triumph in mutability; to lay the foundation of happiness in things which momentarily change or fade; and to expect the utmost satisfaction and instruction from what it is impossible to arrest, and difficult to comprehend." (3: 317). Combined with this acceptance of uncertainty and relativity, this love of clouds and lack of clear faith, is a "love of liberty," an admiration of mountainous landscape, as well as contempt or "general profanity of temper in regarding all the rest of nature; that is to say, a total

absence of faith in the presence of any deity therein." Hence, the Dark Ages were "the bright ages," whereas the modern ages are "the dark ones" (321).

Ruskin resists the temptation to regress uncritically back to an earlier and more perfect time, remarking carefully that the Medieval period was not a perfect or flawless paradise which we should attempt to recreate. But Ruskin did have what T.E. Hulme was later to defend as the "Religious attitude," the feeling that the "absolute values of religion and ethics" could not be expressed "in terms of the essentially relative categories of life," that man is "endowed with Original Sin" and "can never himself be perfect. . . . A man is essentially bad, he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline--ethical and political. Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary" (Hulme 47).

Ruskin believed that the artist revealed the divine in the human as he sacrificed himself for something greater than himself; that is, as he became nothing he became perfect. Hence, the imaginative act is both divine and creative (and thus humanist) as well as self-destructive and sacrificing (religious). It involves the sacrifice of the personality in its reversion to the eighteenth century belief that the vision of the poet is not created but involuntarily remembered. The poet is a vessel or mirror rather than a lamp. Great imaginative effort consists "not in a voluntary production of new images, but an involuntary remembrance, exactly at the right moment, of something they [the artists] had actually seen" (4: 42). The faculty of the imagination is not "false and deceptive" but "most accurate and truth-telling,"

because in its work, the vanity and individualism of the man himself are crushed, and he becomes a mere instrument or mirror, used by a higher power for the reflection to others of a truth which no effort of his could ever have ascertained; so that all mathematical, and arithmetical, and generally scientific truth, is, in comparison, truth of the husk and surface, hard and shallow; and only the imaginative truth is precious. (4: 44)

The creative imagination involves what the eighteenth century described as fancy, the arrangement of images of the memory derived from sensation. The artistic imaginative ability is a kind of catalyst which enables one kind of metal to combine with another to form a new compound (2: 235). Yet Ruskin insists that "this operation"

seizes and combines at the same instant, not only two, but all the important ideas of its poem or picture; and while it works with any one of them, it is at the same instant working with and modifying all in their relations to it, never losing sight of their bearings on each other; as the motion of a snake's body goes through all parts at once, and its volition acts at the same instant in coils that go contrary ways.

This faculty is indeed something that looks as if man were made after the image of God (235-6).

Ruskin's belief that the imaginative faculty functions involuntarily as a catalyst in a chemical reaction recalls T.S. Eliot's description of the "progress of the artist" as "a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality," as well as his claim that the artist quickens, like "a piece of platinum in the midst of two gases" a new expression which is a kind of obedience to an eternal, scientific law. Ruskin's reversion to eighteenth-century descriptions of the imaginative process as a mechanical and automatic combination of ideas derived from sensation and memory clearly foreshadows the Modernist rebellion against Romantic subjectivism, what T.E. Hulme called "the bastard conception of *Personality*" which "blurs the clear outlines of human relations by introducing into them the Perfection that properly belongs to the non-human" (48). On the one hand, although Ruskin acknowledges the limitations of the cult of personality (the artist is a mere catalyst, not an agent), he believes that the very sacrifice of the personal in the creative act is itself the worthiest, the most divine and characteristic element of personality. So Ruskin is both humanist and anti-humanist, Medieval in his insistence upon renunciation but

Modern in his belief in the divine spark within the human which could, through discipline, be quickened into a flame. Although Hulme classified Ruskin as a rather uncritical Romantic, and T.S. Eliot denied Romantic and Victorian influences, Hulme's and Eliot's religious reaction must have had their source in some sort of exposure to Ruskin's ideas. What Ruskin consciously struggled against, however--an easy regression or nostalgia for a state of early perfection, whether of Catholic Medieval Monastery or Swiss Mountain chalet--modernists such as Pound or Eliot tended to enthusiastically and uncritically accept.

Harold Bloom distinguishes the "stoic" and "epicurean" Ruskin-Pater-Wilde-Stevens camp of literary tradition from the Arnold-Eliot camp which "idealizes" poetry, makes it "over-determined" in meaning, hence substituting it for religion and demanding too much from it. In Hulme's terminology, Bloom sees Ruskin as a poet of the Renaissance who celebrates life and its inherent goodness rather than renouncing it, whereas would-be Medievalists like Eliot and Arnold hearken back to a more severe and austere (and sublime, in the sense I have been defining the negative sublime) attitude of transcendence over life. It is true, Bloom says, that Ruskin is a "moral" critic, but this "is true only in Ruskin's own terms, . . . not at all in conventional ones" (181). As proof Bloom quotes from one of Ruskin's 1870 Oxford Lectures:

'You must be in the right moral state, or you cannot have art. . . . For instance take the art of singing, and the simplest perfect master of it--the skylark. From him you may learn what it is to sing for joy. You must get the moral state first, the pure gladness, then give it finished expression. . . .' In this passage the 'right moral state' and 'being good men' are phrases that suggest conventional moral attitudes, yet the only moral state mentioned is that of the skylark, 'the pure gladness.' Behind Ruskin's passage are Wordsworth and Shelley, both in their skylark poems, and in their insistence upon the poet's joy and on poems as necessarily recording the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. . . . It is not, in content, an Evangelical morality, though its fervor stamps it as a displaced version of Evangelicism. . . ." (Bloom, Ringers 175).

The fact that Ruskin lists only one moral state surely cannot imply that he felt there was only one, the state of joy, and that he therefore believed it the duty of poets to chirp like skylarks whatever their mood or circumstance happened to be. If you wish to give the effect of joy, study a skylark, he says. The quotation is of little help in a serious appraisal of Ruskin's definition of morality (as for instance, a study of the meaning of "theoria" would be), other than its suggestion that joy was a duty, a moral obligation, a suggestion which ought sober anyone inclined towards giddiness. Ruskin disapproved of the aesthetic movement of the late nineteenth century, although his work was appropriated by Wilde and Pater. "I would rather teach drawing that my pupils may learn to love Nature, than teach the looking at Nature that they may learn to draw," said Ruskin in the preface to The Art of Drawing (8). Ruskin did not believe in art for art's sake, but art for the sake of something greater than oneself, whether that was nature or God or even other people, although one knew the essence of this divinity by the presence of something divine in the self.

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