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**RUSKIN'S RESPONSES TO AUTHORITY:
A SHIFTING FOUNDATION FOR *THE STONES OF VENICE***

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A Thesis in the Department of English

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of
the Requirements of the
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ABSTRACT

RUSKIN'S RESPONSES TO AUTHORITY: A SHIFTING FOUNDATION FOR *THE STONES OF VENICE*

ROBERT HAMILTON

John Ruskin existed in a world filled with contradictions and inconsistencies. He was trained to believe in and respect authority; he was also trained to believe in himself as a genius and an authority on the world around him. Ruskin, depending on the subject matter he was addressing, moves freely within *The Stones of Venice* in response to his perceived position and his relationship to authority.

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Introduction

The Stones of Venice is a massive work; its depth and detail are overwhelming. An exhaustive study of it would be a gargantuan task requiring, in Ruskinian terms, the taking of a lot of pains. While the pains are well worth the taking, the focus of this study will be on Ruskin's development in a middle-class, Protestant, English family that is both typical and atypical in terms of Victorian standards, and on how the experiences of his upbringing and personal circumstances are evidenced in his adult life, and in *The Stones of Venice*. This study has evolved out of a consideration of the work as a whole. A special emphasis is placed on the much anthologized "The Nature of Gothic", not for the usual reasons, but because it is well known, and because it is an epitome of many of the issues that are the subjects of this inquiry, and more particularly because his thoughts, as he developed his thesis for this portion of the work, are detailed in the letters he was writing at the same time. This passage is not being isolated from the text; it is being considered in context, and as representative of the whole. This passage, in fact, invites special consideration because it condenses so much of the overall character of the work into a relatively small segment.

"The Nature of Gothic" is typical of a trend in Victorian non-fiction. Its popularity, as a subject for

anthology, is derived from Ruskin's interest in the conditions of England, and in Tory politics. Ruskin turned away from purely "aesthetic" subject matter to comment on the very real and pressing problems of the day. The aesthetic impulse in Ruskin was always clouded with moral, social and religious concerns. He had recognized in Venice a subject on which he could write in order to enhance his literary reputation, and to realise a monetary return on his endeavours. But, his vision was blurred by cultural concerns that rose from a Victorian sense of morality.

There was a

notorious prudery, which extended, of course, to all language--ordinary speech as well as print--and to pictures and sculptures revealing more of the human body than many people were prepared to admit existed. Indelicacy was almost as much to be deplored as blasphemy. (Altick, p.193)

Ruskin was able to clothe his own dislike of sensuality as a general response to the mood of the day.

When he moved into social commentary, he approached the contemporary situation in England from a perspective that entirely denied the aesthetic. That is to say, in a simplistic either/or approach, he suspended his study of art and architecture to deal exclusively with social problems. Hough credits Ruskin with being the first writer to attribute a "passion for nature and [a] romantic admiration

for the past to the blank ugliness of nineteenth-century England" (p.xiii-xiv). Although he had never read Marx, Ruskin had a sense of the workers' problems that approached the Marxist perspective. He was concerned with the alienation of the modern workman and with the possibility of a social revolution. (The Chartist Demonstration had taken place on his wedding day, and was one of the excuses his parents had offered for their refusal to attend his wedding.) Ruskin was a Tory who believed in a stratified society, and thought that there could be peace between the classes if the workman was given the right to express himself in his work, regardless of how inferior his station.

The Victorian concept of morality was extended to include an interest in the conditions of the working class.

In the nineteenth century life among the masses became for the first time a serious concern of the classes above them. The fundamental question of human values it raised engaged the minds of numerous Victorian social critics. (Altick, p.35)

Girouard says that it became a matter of conscience--coinciding with a renewed interest in chivalry--for the privileged to help those less fortunate. Ruskin's brand of socialism caused him to be "passionately concerned about the condition of the working classes", "he believed in a ruling class, but wanted it to be so altruistic, noble and free from self-interest that people would freely accept its rule" (p.250).

Considering the problems of the present in terms of the past enabled Victorian writers to achieve "a distancing effect by transferring a Victorian situation to some earlier era" (Altick, p.43). The Gothic revival in architecture was one outcome of this phenomenon and resulted in a new trend of what was considered tasteful (Briggs 1959, p.299). The emphasis placed on the free use of the workman's abilities--a characteristic of Gothic construction--introduced a new concept to nineteenth century thinkers:

the nature of art is determined by the condition of the man who produced it. Gothic is different from Renaissance art because in the former the workman is a free man, in the latter he is a slave.

This then caused a reconsideration of the Victorian worker who "is not even a slave but reduced to the status of a machine" (Hough, pp.88-9). But the acknowledgement of moral superiority implicit in the Gothic style created a problem of its own. The essence of Gothic is religious. Ruskin undertook to prove it owed "nothing to the historic church". He says, in talking of "a style sometimes ignorantly called Italian Gothic,"

This corruption of all architecture, especially ecclesiastical, corresponded with, and marked the state of religion over all Europe,--the peculiar degradation of the Romanist superstition, and of

public morality in consequence, which brought about the Reformation. (*Works*¹ v7, p.23)

Ruskin developed a Protestant and naturalistic interpretation of Gothic (Hough, p.88), in which the emphasis was shifted from religion to the status of the workman.

From September 1851 until June 1852 John Ruskin was in Venice. Effie was there, too. Volume I of *The Stones of Venice* had been published earlier in 1851, and Ruskin was researching and writing volumes II and III. This was a pivotal period in his life, a time when he was the most sensitive towards the expectations of his parents, and when he was concerned with his public, those people who could support and further his reputation as a scholar and a commentator on the world. And truly, his scope of interest encompassed a world. The fact that he had a reputation did not surprise him; he had confidence in himself. There was no doubt at all in his mind that there was great value in his ideas and in his vision of the world. The public's not buying his work, work that he took great pains to complete for the edification of his public, was, for him, an indication of stupidity; not seeing what he saw was a

¹ All references to *The Stones of Venice* have been taken from *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, New York: Thomas P. Crowell & Co., referred to in the text as *Works*.

display of ignorance. Dissension caused him to feel frustration and anger. He even confessed to momentary lapses in self-confidence, but always his ego reasserted itself, and he forged ahead, doing what he knew was best for the public that would form, ultimately if not immediately, his body of believers and supporters.

During this time away from his parents, he remained dependent on them in a complex manner that belied his true status as a married, thirty-two-year-old gentleman of means. He was an often-published author; he was the son and heir of a well-to-do family. He had completed an Oxford degree, and he had an established literary reputation. But, instead of establishing himself in his own right, he retained his childhood ties to his parents.

Much of the middle section of this study relies on the daily (and sometimes more frequent) letters that Ruskin wrote to his father during his sojourn in Venice. His many levels of dependency on, and his complex relationship with, his parents show through clearly and unmistakably. His physical well-being is of vital concern, and he was capable of going into great detail, finding the time and patience to prepare a chronology of perceived distress, actual complaints, medical consultations, and prescribed remedies and his responses to them. This history is laughable in its detail. It is also sad. The amount of time and energy he put into detailing his physical complaints is reminiscent of

the thoroughness with which he approached his work. It is true: his parents inquired of his state of health, but the complexity of the response, the thoroughness of the physical self-analysis, is truly Ruskinian. The letters not only address the mundane details of his health, they expand on his dependency on his father for money for his and Effie's daily living expenses, and his reliance on his parents to locate and furnish a home for him and Effie in England. He would have rather lived with his parents, but Effie would have strenuously objected. She would have rather lived in London where she had access to friends and society. The compromise: they would live as close as possible to Denmark Hill, but in a separate residence, so he could have easy access to his parents and Effie could be easily ignored! Ruskin's attitude to his wife, as evidenced in his letters, is reminiscent of the attitude of an older and superior brother to a younger sister: someone to be pampered to a degree, spoiled within limits, but hardly to be taken seriously. The woman in Ruskin's life was his mother; indeed, she remained the only Mrs. Ruskin.

John James and Margaret were the centre of Ruskin's world as much as he was the centre of theirs. He continued to look to them for guidance and emotional support, but, in his favour, he did feel free to accept or reject their advice. He discussed his religious beliefs with his father, and through him with his mother. He discussed his work with

his father, who was also his literary agent. He explored ideas and explained new levels of understanding both in relation to his Biblical studies and to his Venetian studies with his father. John James felt at liberty to advise, criticise and even to nag his son, who felt free to lecture his parents in turn.

Although they employed a similar rambling, disjointed letter-writing style, John James and Ruskin communicated with each other effectively, but misunderstandings did occur. When Ruskin attempted to rectify something he said that he considered misconstrued, he belaboured the point, and if he considered it necessary, he was capable of defending himself against a perceived wrong or misjudgment to an extent that would seem unwarranted. Especially in religious matters there is a sense that he was protesting too hard when he was taken to task by his father--perhaps a foreshadowing of the fact that changes that were to come were already in the works; a seed of doubt in his faith had been planted in his mind, and the guilt was so great that he not only hid it, he had to vehemently deny its existence.

Authority worked within Ruskin on a variety of levels. He believed in the authority of God, the father, and through Him, in the authority of John James, his father. Within the larger Victorian context, he believed in the authority of the "boss" who stood in as the father in the world order that had evolved out of the Industrial Revolution. He

retained his belief in a social order based on class structure. Superiority could be the result of birth or ability; kingly authority was inherited, authority granted on merit was a natural ascension for a gifted individual.

As a person of genius, Ruskin perceived himself to be an authority, with a unique ability to see what others could not. As an authority, he adopted a recognizable stance. At times he spoke in the voice of a prophet; he sermonized when he was teaching a truth. At other times he spoke in the voice of a teacher; he lectured when he had knowledge to impart. But, at still other times, he was defensive, and apologetic. And through it all his authority was subject to the approval of other rival authorities.

Ruskin was learning as he was going. He was making new discoveries as he went along, as he was writing, and after he had already published volume I. His literary voice belied this; he employed the language of a qualified expert, giving no indication that his facts were educated guesses, and unfounded beliefs, that could possibly be wrong, or incomplete. To read *The Stones of Venice* is to hear an assured, authoritative voice; to study *The Stones of Venice* in depth presents opportunities to doubt and to refute the pontifications of this self-styled authority. He tried to disguise, with language and tone, the fact that he was not always on very secure ground. When a statement is given in no uncertain terms as a fact, it is easy to accept as fact.

To dispute the words of a prophet is tantamount to blasphemy. To doubt the words of a scholar-teacher is anarchy. Ruskin wanted to be read, believed and respected. He wanted to be supported in his position without question, and he highly resented the stupidity of dissenting critics. But he never lost sight of John James: his biggest supporter, his toughest critic, and his father.

In order to understand Ruskin as he appears in *The Stones of Venice* it is necessary to consider who and what he was. The influences that played on him in very early life are well documented. His personal life, during the period when he was writing the second and third volumes he, himself, has recorded in his daily correspondence with his father, and in his autobiography. His most successful major work, *The Stones of Venice*, reflects the personality that developed through childhood experiences, and is clearly shown in his letters.

A lot has been said about *The Stones of Venice*, and its place in a literary canon. It follows many of the conventions of its time, and successful arguments can be put forth about its place. It has an autobiographical element inasmuch as it reflects the nature of its author, thinly disguised as a Victorian Sage. It is a travel history of Venice; in fact, it says of itself that it is a repository of a Venetian past that does not have long to live. It is

an Englishman's explanation of a foreign and (seemingly) inferior culture, offered for the benefit of other Englishmen, but also for the benefit of the people of Venice who were witnessing, on a daily basis, the rape of their city by a dominant European power. It is phallogocentric, perhaps overly so, because of the sexual failings (and frustrations) of its writer, who at the same time was exercising his patriarchal rights. The vision of the fallen woman, and her ultimate punishment, are recurring themes throughout the text.

There are varying tones and overtones within the work. When Ruskin writes from a position of strength, he is the prototypical sage. But Ruskin does not always write from a position of strength; he adopts both offensive and defensive positions, depending on the surety of the foundation from which he is building his argument. To identify some of the many postures of Ruskin, it is necessary to consider his language and his tone. He oscillates in *The Stones of Venice* from the position of absolute authority, to acknowledging and accepting authority, to defending himself against perceived authority.

Culler says that, "we have learned that we need not believe a text when it tells us just what it means or how it functions" (p.9). Ruskin's tone can and does belie what the text tells us. What is the root of the difference? In *Structural Poetics*, Culler says,

To ask of what an author is conscious and of what unconscious is as fruitless as to ask which rules of English are consciously employed by speakers and which are followed unconsciously. (p.118)

Pease says that, "the term 'author' raises questions about authority and whether the individual is the source or the effect of that authority" (p.106). With Ruskin, it is not an either/or question: he is both, and frequently, at the same time. Through his imaginative powers he has a genius that makes him the authority. He is also granted authority by his very position in Victorian society. But, through his response to the Bible, and to the concept of paternal authority, he is the effect. God, the father, is an image that is superimposed on the biological father. As Sennett describes it in *Authority*,

Foremost among the pastiche pictures of authority in the 19th Century was the image of a father, a father from a more kindly and stable time, superimposed on the image of the boss. (p.51)

Ruskin had no "boss"--he writes to and for those who do, and those who are. He most definitely does, however, have an earthly father to whom he pays the same kind of homage as he pays his heavenly father.

Chapter 1: The Child

To divorce Ruskin the man from Ruskin the child is impossible. To consider what he wrote, without considering the influences that continued to play on him throughout his life, is to take it out of context. To grasp the meaning of the influences on his childhood, it is necessary to briefly consider the parents who played such important roles in his development and growth, and to whom he paid fidelity to the end of their lives, although his devotion was not totally blind or without rebellion.

Margaret Cox (nee Cock) was thirty-seven when she married her cousin John James Ruskin. "She was by nature pious: seriously believing ... in the unchanging laws of her God", while the thirty-three-year-old John James was "dark-eyed, romantic, a poetry lover" (Hilton, p.2). Margaret had received her early education at an academy that offered a "dainty education" designed to prepare young ladies for suitable employment--such as the position she was offered as companion to her aunt, John James's mother. There, during her thirteen-year stay,

Margaret ... applied herself to her own improvement. Dr. Thomas Brown, later Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, was a family friend. He had been a mentor of John James's in his younger days and now was glad to

advise Margaret on her reading. She taught herself Latin and even a little Hebrew. But ... she found her greatest comfort in the Bible.
(Hilton, p.6)

During this period, John James was working in London where he "discovered that he had the temperament of a businessman" (Hilton, p.4). This temperament coexisted with an interest he had displayed at school in the classical authors, and with an artistic talent that he had pursued briefly. His formal education was interrupted early; "when he was sixteen [his father] insisted that he should go to London to begin a career in trade", an order that he resented, but obeyed (Hilton, p.1).

Both Margaret and John James had experienced childhoods that, if not dominated by, were directed by an Evangelical² faith. John James's maternal grandfather was a minister. His mother relied on her religion "to sustain her during the tribulations of her marriage" to John James's father. Her faith was shared by Margaret (Hunt, p.9). If John James was not an overt Evangelical, he was certainly sympathetic to the beliefs of his mother and his wife.

² Apparent discrepancies in spelling and capitalization result from the fact that I have remained faithful to the texts being quoted. For my own part, I have adopted the British standard for spelling. Ruskin frequently omitted the "niceties" from his letters and often (but not always) does not distinguish titles of publications. I have quoted his letters as they are published.

The Evangelical movement had developed in the late 1700's as a reaction to increasing rural poverty. It embodied attitudes that condemned the "contemporary morality and materialism that developed during the course of the century", and it was "the carrier of new attitudes inside the Church of England".

Members of the movement pursued their religion as fervently as those they were criticizing pursued profit, power or pleasure: men and women, high as well as low, bishops as well as squires, had to be 'saved'. (Briggs 1983, p.176)

Briggs quotes Young as saying, as a result of the efforts of the Evangelists,

'By the very beginning of the nineteenth century, virtue was advancing on a broad invincible front'; indeed, the Evangelicals were to claim a share in the eventual defeat of Napoleon's armies on the ground that [they] had provided a moral armour for the nation. (1983, p.176)

Briggs also points to the irony of a situation that developed: missions of Evangelicals could be directed primarily to the poor, as was the case with that of John Wesley, while others were directed to "the great". Some of Wesley's converts "became materially rich as they followed the new gospel" (1983, p.176). This, indeed was the case with John James and Margaret Ruskin.

Wesley's influence on Evangelicals was pervasive and his interests ran in many directions. In 1783, he was preaching, in his *Sermon on the Education of Children*, the doctrines on child rearing that had been promulgated by his own mother fifty years earlier. Her concept, like that of many of the lower-middle class, was rooted in the seventeenth century Puritan belief "of the innate depravity of children and ... the need and the incentive for an unremitting and stern effort to break the child's will and so repress his impulses to sin". Susanna Wesley advocated that,

'When turned a year old, and some before, they [children] were to be taught to fear the rod and cry softly, by which means they escaped the abundance of correction they might otherwise have had, and that most odious noise of the crying of children was rarely heard in the house'. 'In order to form the minds of the children, the first thing done is to conquer their will and bring them to an obedient temper'. 'Whenever a child is corrected, it must be conquered', for this provides 'the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education'.

The object of this discipline "was to please God and to bring up the next generation to internalize the same strong sense of piety and duty" (Stone, pp.293-4). Susanna

Wesley's methods included both reward and punishment, and her intentions were, at the least, honourable.

She devoted her life to them [her children], teaching them religion and the three Rs six hours a day. It was her policy to reward them for goodwill and effort, even if the results were unsuccessful, thus encouraging them to try their very best.

Her approach was "strict" and "intrusive", but also it was "supportive, rational and predictably consistent".

The result of this upbringing was the adult John Wesley, a compulsive perfectionist, with a persistent desire to conform to authority, but with an overwhelming sense of his own role in history as one of the chosen of God. (Stone, p.294)

These words could describe the adult John Ruskin as easily as his mother's spiritual mentor.

Late in life, Wesley acknowledged that although

Only one parent in a hundred had the resolution to go through with it, he insisted on the need to 'break the will of your child, to bring his will into subjection to yours, that it may be afterwards subject to the will of God'. (Stone, p.294)

Margaret had the resolve; she was the one in a hundred. It

is difficult to speculate on whether or not Margaret had heard Wesley's sermon, or if she was exposed to the writings of Hannah More, a middle-class educational reformer who repeated Susanna Wesley's ideas, and who, in 1799, wrote that,

[I]t is a 'fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings, whose little weaknesses may perhaps want some correction, rather than as beings who bring into the world a corrupt nature and evil dispositions, which it should be the great end of education to rectify'. (Stone, p.294)

Stone interprets More's words to conclude that,

It seems at least likely that the lower-middle classes never accepted the Lockean view of the child as the *tabula rasa* upon which society could imprint its image, much less the Rousseauesque theory that he was born naturally good. They always knew about Original Sin and acted accordingly, using a combination of physical force and moral manipulation that varied from family to family. (p.294)

Whatever her source of beliefs in child rearing, Margaret was armed and ready when her son was born!

John Ruskin was born in 1819.

From the outset he had direct experience of the

truce English society had contrived between God and Mammon which enabled both to receive due reverence. Commercialism--the relentless pursuit of new levels of material prosperity characteristic of the aspiring middle classes--determined the daily life of his father, to which he was witness. More powerfully still came evidence from his mother's daily behaviour of that other imperative urge of the times, the need to affirm the strict claims of religion and the prospect of a life to come. (Abse, p.13)

Ruskin was born into a family and a life that was filled with contradictions and inconsistencies on a range of fronts.

Sawyer synthesizes the many stories of Ruskin's childhood into a succinct account:

In his parents' life the struggle with sin and the struggle with poverty were both won by effort and denial. But the child born into wealth and leisure had to divide his allegiance between a religious ideology that professed duty, work, and a contempt for sexuality and a social ideology that located self-affirmation in the symbols of material wealth. Deeper even than these cultural contradictions were the contradictions of a narcissistic parental love. Overencouraged for

every effort yet overregulated by an anxious watchfulness, Ruskin was both prematurely an adult and too long a child, bred up to be at once a great man and the instrument of his parents' wishes. This family romance, so to speak, suffered no serious intrusions: marked out for a special but undefined destiny, John had little way of understanding who he was concretely--in regard, for example, to others of his age--and so remained overconfident yet uncertain, forever afterward preferring relationships of carefully defined subordination. Throughout life he remained haunted by his primal relationship with parents to whom he could not entirely submit and from whom he could never free himself, bound as he was to the dream of a sheltered and protected past, the gifts of which could be enjoyed only by relinquishing the changing world without--the world of independence and struggle and failure and a slow passage toward inexorable loss. (p.20)

While this account may seem to oversimplify a complicated childhood existence, and the complex resulting individual, it does ring true. Nevertheless, it presents a psycho-analytical reading of Ruskin that is perhaps a too pat explanation for the wide variety of contradictions and complications evident in his work.

Until 1837, when he entered Oxford, Ruskin was educated "at home, with tutors or in small schools", a fact that Hunt deduces was John James's deliberate search for an alternative to his own upbringing (p.15). Bloom downplays the father's influence on his son's education:

He appears to have been a weaker character than his fiercely Evangelical wife, whose rigid nature dominated the formative years of her only child's life, and who clearly was responsible for the psychic malforming that made John Ruskin's emotional life a succession of disasters. (p.1)

John James deferred to Margaret on the form that Ruskin's education was to take, and she followed the tenets of her beliefs. "Every day of his life as soon as he could read, which he was able to do before he was five, his mother set him to study the Bible". Abse goes on to say that this was not unusual in a middle-class nineteenth-century English home.

For the Evangelicals the Bible was the repository of absolute truth about the universe, the direct revelation of God to men. Thus it naturally followed that it was obligatory for them, shunning the idea of a mediator as they did, to read the Bible for themselves. Margaret applied an 'intensity of concentration' to this practice that was less common. (pp.23-4)

Wilenski, who is a harsh critic of Ruskin's early years, says,

He was undoubtedly a prodigy with a brain that was exceptionally mobile and easily excited. Into this brain his mother forced, brutally, the text of the Bible day by day; and then his father made him listen to long extracts from the poets.

Wilenski sees Margaret as "a stupid bigot and bully" who was "always intemperately narrow-minded and dogmatic" (p.42)³. But, in Hilton's view, Ruskin's childhood was neither overly harsh nor deprived.

Margaret Ruskin, deeply attached to the son she had been lucky to bear at her age, spent more time with her child than was common in a similar 1820's household. Margaret would do anything for him, but she was totally unyielding on matters of right and wrong. (p.12)

Recent studies of the Ruskin family correspondence refute much of what has been written about Margaret and have changed the understanding of Ruskin's childhood. Hilton

³ In a footnote in *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, Landow calls Wilenski's study "a cruel and inept attempt at a psychological biography" which "frequently appears more an essay in character assassination than a prolegomena to the study of Ruskin's work" (p.142n). Bell says, "Wilenski examines Ruskin's work and also his psyche with a new, frank, and perceptive freedom" and that he is "fair and dispassionate" (p.127). It is valuable to see the extremes with which Margaret may be judged in terms of her relationship with her son.

says,

Margaret Ruskin had the happiness of youth when she was forty. The long years of loneliness and waiting ... could be forgotten. All her life Margaret was silent about those years. She had earned her happiness and there was no reason why she should dwell on the way in which she earned it. She delighted in her child and in running her home: she delighted in her love for her husband.

(p.10)

These two pictures of Margaret, the harsh and unbending bigot, and the happy, well-adjusted, youthful-like wife and mother are both true pictures. Her response to her husband was one thing, and it does not automatically follow that her response to her son would ape it. For better or for worse, she followed the Evangelical, lower-middle-class norm for raising, educating and disciplining her son.

Ruskin's autobiography, *Praeterita*, written late in his life and published in instalments between 1885 and 1889, when mental illness curtailed it, is, according to Abse, "an act of licensed creation rather than a scrupulous record" (p.11). Sawyer says, Ruskin "was ... forever reconceiving the legend of his own childhood, which he projected onto both the personal and the historical past" (p.20). Ruskin says of his early years that,

My mother's general principles of first treatment were to guard me with steady watchfulness from all avoidable pain or danger; and, for the rest, to let me amuse myself as I liked, provided I was neither fretful nor troublesome. But the law was, that I should find my own amusement. No toys of any kind were at first allowed. (*Praeterita*, pp.18-19)

But, Sawyer refutes this as one of the "inaccuracies and distortions" found in the book.

Ruskin presents his boyhood chiefly as a pattern of release and restraint--the release of childhood vacations and romping by paradisal meadows and streams and the restraint of the Herne Hill regimen, with its well known images of denial: the fruit in the garden that it was forbidden to touch, the child sitting at evenings in a niche tracing the patterns of the carpet, and above all the severe figure of Margaret Ruskin, instructing the boy in daily Bible lessons and struggling three weeks over the emphasis on a particular syllable of verse.... We know now from the family letters that the real situation was more complicated; there were toys and companions after all and, in the boy's own letters, a greater exuberance and variety of pleasures than we would

expect from the studious and complacent child of
Praeterita. (Sawyer, p.21)

There is also truth in *Praeterita* that depends on
 perception:

My mother having it deeply in her heart to make an
 evangelical clergyman of me forced me, by steady
 toil, to learn long chapters of the Bible by
 heart; as well as to read it every syllable
 through ... about once a year. (pp.13-14)

There can be no doubt that she wanted the best for her son.

The Bible, Margaret's great solace in the years of
 her unhappiness, became the first principle of her
 son's serene childhood. Through it, he was taught
 to read and to remember. (Hilton, p.13)

Margaret wanted him to be able to avoid the sense of
 inferiority that Ruskin maintains she suffered, in
 "cultivated society", as a result of "the defects in her own
 early education" (*Praeterita*, p.26).

Clearly *Praeterita* cannot be completely trusted, but
 neither can it be completely disregarded. The opening pages
 offer, if nothing else, an identification of a self-
 awareness of some of the external influences that played on
 Ruskin, the writer. He names Walter Scott and Homer as his
 "own two masters".

I had Walter Scott's novels, and the Iliad,
 (Pope's translation), for my own reading when I

was a child, on week-days: on Sundays their effect was tempered by Robinson Crusoe and the Pilgrims Progress. (p.13)

By this admission, it is evident that the Bible was not the only reading the young Ruskin was permitted--but it was the most important, not only in the mind of his mother, but in retrospect, in his mind too. "I had, however, still better teaching than theirs (Scott's and Pope's), and that compulsory, and every day of the week" (p.13). There were times of exception to the daily Bible readings, when the family was travelling or visiting the Scottish relatives. These periods could be protracted and significant breaks in the routine of the budding scholar. Ruskin was not, as a child, constantly adding to his knowledge. There were periods of time that permitted him to catch up with himself --times when he was able to exercise and develop other powers and skills, and to reflect on his reading. Prodigy that he was, he was not single-minded even as a child. And, the world was coming to him in a variety of ways.

Praeterita goes on to say,

Walter Scott and Pope's Homer were reading of my own election, but my mother forced me, by steady daily toil, to learn long chapters of the Bible by heart ... and to that discipline--patient, accurate, and resolute--I owe, not only a knowledge of the book, which I find occasionally

serviceable, but much of my general power of taking pains, and the best part of my taste in literature. (pp.13-14)

This "taste" is not as much a taste in reading material as it is a taste for the language and style of the Bible.

From Walter Scott's novels I might easily, as I grew older, have fallen to other people's novels; and Pope might, perhaps, have led me to take Johnson's English, or Gibbons', as types of language; but, once knowing the 32d of Deuteronomy, the 119th Psalm, the 15th of 1st Corinthians, the Sermon on the Mount, and most of the Apocalypse, every syllable by heart, and having always a way of thinking with myself what words meant, it was not possible for me ... to write entirely superficial or formal English.
(p.14)

The implications in this passage are that Ruskin identified himself as an original thinker, particularly about the meaning of words, that he recognized an authority in the language of the Bible as well as its message, and that he made a conscious decision to write in language that he considered more attuned to his ideas than "superficial or formal English".

Early in life Ruskin explored more than one writing style, and more than one genre. The influence of his

father's love of poetry encouraged him to write verse. The influence of his mother's love of the Bible encouraged him to write sermons. Ultimately any conflict he experienced in working in these two extremes resolved itself: what finally emerged was the vision of the poet couched in the language of the prophet. The fact that he was writing poetry is well documented; a poem he wrote in 1828 was published in 1830. When he was twelve or thirteen he was writing sermons on the Pentateuch; there are five little booklets of sermons which

provide the only contemporaneous record of the religious beliefs with which Ruskin had been indoctrinated during his boyhood and the quality of his response to this teaching. (Burd, p.2)

Nineteen completed sermons and rough drafts of two more are contained in the books. They are original sermons,

not to be confused with the abstracts which he and his cousin ... would compile of the sermons they heard that morning in Beresford Chapel ... they are little more than fragmentary notes. (Burd, pp.1-2)

The Sermons, and a preliminary unpublished analysis of them by (the late) Helen Viljoen are the basis of an essay by Burd that considers Ruskin's childhood faith. Viljoen identifies in the Sermons a central concept and five major themes that Ruskin explores; in her introduction she says,

the Sermons develop the thesis that out of all embracing knowledge, God gave laws and dealt with

man in society antedating profane history so that
instant needs were met by words and acts
foreshadowing future events and containing
instruction timelessly immediate. (Burd, p.2)

To the young Ruskin, the Bible was the literal truth and his Sermons were "the living faith of the boy, eloquently spoken through his very script" demonstrating "the reasonableness of his religious faith 'without questioning his assumption that the whole truth of God was contained in his beliefs'" (Burd, p.3).

The first of the main themes in the Sermons is Ruskin's "belief in the truth and proper study of the Bible".

A 'book of divine origin' 'drawn by the pen of inspiration', ... each word is an expression of Divinity as represented by the Old Testament Jehovah. The 'signs and wonders' recorded in the Bible are there for our instruction. The study of the text should be conducted 'line upon line, and precept upon precept', as the guide which God gave us, 'the very ground of our faith'--to be 'unqualifiedly' accepted....

Although we must accept on faith those parts of the Bible 'placed above our comprehension', the Old Testament provides evidence 'capable of providing the perfect truth of those statements'. (Burd, p.4)

Ruskin is advocating the acceptance of the literal truth of the Bible; a lack of understanding is the result of improper study because the evidence needed to support the tenets of the Bible are there: "the more we thus examine and meditate upon the Bible, 'the more we shall believe in the sanctity of its origin and the wisdom of its author'" (Burd, p.4).

Ruskin's second theme develops the concept that the Bible is, as well as a source of truth, "a history of mankind not otherwise available". The Sermons analyse this history following "the Creation and Fall, a period of wickedness and violence".

Ruskin's account of this early history testifies to what he had called his early 'active analytic power' as he searches for answers to difficult questions. Words ... must be precisely defined.... The how's and why's seem incessant.... 'The Sermons served to express and to satisfy his own inquiring mind, ... perhaps too highly trained for his own good when he was, at the most, thirteen'.

The third major theme found in the Sermons "is Ruskin's perception of God as Father and of the Son as sacrifice". He had made an association between his biological father and his heavenly father, "children are to be taught to reverence their earthly parents, must they not then much more be taught to reverence their heavenly parent"? Ruskin

describes the transfer of a sense of duty from the parent to God as an easy one; the God he envisions is

'a kind and faithful Creator' who always watches over the welfare of his people, nevertheless this Father can be a God of wrath and 'irresistible power' when 'obstinately braved'.

In the Bible passages dealing with "the ceremonial laws set forth in Leviticus", Ruskin identifies "the law of sacrifice as the foundation of Mosaic economy".

The sacrifice of a lamb 'pure ... a male without blemish' on whose head the penitent places his hand 'in order to communicate the load of his sins and his wickedness to the animal' is a harbinger of a later economy in which man may find atonement through God's sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice, according to Mosaic law, must be appropriate. The highest of God's creations, man, would not be appropriate for this later economy because the Almighty had created him, along with the other creatures of nature, by fiat. The only choice was the Father's only son who could make atonement for our sinfulness, not necessarily for any particular sin, but for 'the wickedness of the carnality itself, which was continual and which required continual offering'.

In Ruskin's reading, man is not forced by the law to

sacrifice at the altar, but with disobedience comes selfishness, pride, passion and obstinacy--the characteristics of transgressors. Ruskin says, in the Sermons, that there is no substitute for the pleasure and satisfaction to be found in obedience. He loved to travel, but said "throughout these changes of scene we carry our native depravity" (Burd, pp.5-6).

The Sermons' fourth theme is identified by Viljoen as "obedience as an Ideal of Conduct". This concept fell out of Ruskin's analysis of the "Mosaic ideals of personal and social behavior". These Sermons embody the young Ruskin's views on matters like truthfulness, lust, prayer, church attendance, observance of the Sabbath, war, benevolence v. selfishness as a social principle, the qualities of a nation's greatness.

In Viljoen's opinion, the Sermons that deal with this topic are "rewardingly suggestive to those concerned with Ruskin's childhood as the seed-bed from which came his later thought and vision". Obedience, of all the ideals of conduct, receives the greatest attention from Ruskin, "especially obedience to parents".

To only the Fifth Commandment does Ruskin devote a full sermon. God phrased his ordinance 'honour' rather than 'obey thy parents' inasmuch as godless parents might command ungodliness. This injunction 'tells, with increased power, upon

children who have Christian parents', Ruskin asserts. Unless these parents make a demand against right, which Ruskin finds 'almost impossible' to conceive, their children should obey them, 'not only to please them, but as an act of obedience to a higher parent.... Such obedience is the foundation of all the harmony of society'.

Included in Ruskin's idea of parental obedience is the submission of a child's thoughts.

When 'children first begin to think, they generally begin to assert independence of judgement, this is a very strong example of human depravity and it must be checked at once'.

Very early in life Ruskin recognized and advocated obedience to parental authority--which he extended to kingly, then Godly authority,

'how can we expect those to be able to govern, who have never been governed?' No one can doubt ...

'that a constant submission to the parents' authority, would terminate in a better state of the nation'. (Burd, pp.7-8)

The fifth theme, Viljoen maintains, is indicated by the rough drafts of two Sermons that were never written.

"Confronted with the need to analyse the many penalties of disobedience ... the young Ruskin seems to lose heart and

fails to develop his notes". Viljoen's conjecture as to why the Sermons were left incomplete is based on the fact that the chapters of Deuteronomy on which the final Sermons are based, 27 and 28, when "read with any feeling of identification ... can become terrifying". They are filled with curses that "come with a cumulative power ... that can reach the core of conscience and consciousness". Burd says that "Ruskin's notes reveal his struggle to justify the details of the many restrictions". The evidence shows that Ruskin tries to deal with the concept of punishment, but he just leaves off (Burd, pp. 8-9).

In a very delicate manner, and discreetly placed in parentheses, Bell writes, "we know that from childhood he [Ruskin] had been addicted to auto-erotic practices" (p.131). At a time when masturbation was severely frowned upon, Ruskin indulged. Stone traces "official attitudes towards masturbation" (p.318) to gain "insight into attitudes and towards adolescent sexuality in general" (p.319). The harsh entreaties against the practice in the middle ages had given way to a more relaxed attitude by the seventeenth century.

[I]t would seem that in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries even the most Calvinistic of children, brought up in fear of hell-fire, nevertheless were not too deeply disturbed by the problem of handling their early impulses ... and

that medical theory, parental pressure, and moral lectures on the subject had not yet begun to approach the intensity ... of repression [of] the late eighteenth [and] nineteenth ... centuries.

(p.320)

Frank discussions "about the terrible moral and physical dangers of masturbation" started to appear in about 1710. They warned of dire consequences for practitioners, including impotency.

In 1764 the internationally celebrated Swiss Dr Tissot weighted in with a learned medical treatise on the subject, which gave the problem the dignity of full authoritative medical recognition. His argument was ostensibly not moral but scientific, the old theory of the dangers from excessive loss of seminal fluid, on the subject of which he assembled an impressive list of authorities from Hippocrates to Galem to Boerhaave. He cited allegedly authentic cases of masturbating youths ... falling victims to lassitude, epilepsy, convulsions, boils, disorders of the digestive, respiratory or nervous systems, and even death. All he could suggest as remedies were low diet, short sleep, vigorous exercise, and regular bowel movements, but he seems in fact to have regarded the habit as more or less incurable. (Stone, pp.320-1)

The symptoms listed and the remedies proposed take on special interest when they are compared to the health problems experienced, and the remedial actions taken by Ruskin, as he detailed them in a letter to his father. This will be looked at more fully in the following chapter.

Stone says that,

The late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century epidemic of hysteria on the subject ... coincided with the rise of Evangelical doctrine and the growing sense of horror and shame about sex that was current at that time. (p.321)

It is impossible to know to what extent, if any, Ruskin was indoctrinated with a sense of wrong doing. He must have been aware of the prohibition placed on his habitual self-gratification, and he must have anticipated retribution. In light of his unsuccessful grappling with the concept of punishment, it seems reasonable to assume that he expected the worst.

Ruskin's childhood was a period of extremes. It was a time of freedom and constraint, of reward and punishment, in an uneasy balance, where the boundaries were erratically established as he went along; he never knew when he was transgressing until it was too late. Then retribution was swift and harsh. Punishment, its concept and its justification, remained problematic for him throughout his life. He learned to lash out in defence of himself

following periods that are easily perceived as being too lax. It would seem evident that his adult uncertainty and insecurity were direct results of his childhood experiences.

When Ruskin entered Oxford he was entering a wholly new world. He was leaving behind, if not his mother, at least the trappings of his childhood. He was moving into the world where his father fully expected him to excel; he was entering, not only the world of higher education, but the world of high society embodied by the sons and heirs of upper-class England. What had been a typical early education for the son of a pious middle-class family was also typical in comparison to that of some of his new peers. Stone says,

in noble families, there was a growing practice of educating the children at home, according to the advice of Locke, who recommended a private tutor in order to avoid the crude and vulgar rough and tumble and the strong temptations to vice of a public boarding school. (p.273)

Only the highest aristocracy continued to send their sons away to school, sometimes at an age as young as seven, throughout most of the eighteenth century. But, for the most part, the sons of the elite were withdrawn from grammar schools and universities because of a "fear of moral contamination from other boys, especially boys of lower social status" (Stone, p.273).

The similarities between the early education of Ruskin and the majority of his university associates ended with home education. Stone says, "this rise of education in the home meant that teaching methods became less brutal and authoritarian" (p.273). In 1798, mothers were told that,

'the first object in the education of a child should be to acquire its affection, and in the second to obtain its confidence.... The most likely thing to expand a youthful mind ... is praise'. (p.274)

According to the evidence examined by Stone, this advice was followed in many of the upper-class households, and frequently to an extreme that indicated "that parental authority had in some cases been virtually abdicated" (p.276). "But there were clearly differences of opinion on this subject even among the most affectionate of parents" (p.275). Margaret was one of the dissenters from popular belief in placing affection over authority. While she was an affectionate parent, she nonetheless retained her position of power. Still, while Ruskin's early experience with authoritative power may have been atypical, it was not unique.

Four months before his father's death in 1864, Ruskin wrote to him blaming him for making him (Ruskin) the man he was. This passage, taken from the December 16, 1863, letter, is quoted by Bell, in support of the thesis that

"father and son became estranged and even embittered"
towards each other:

You fed me effeminately and luxuriously to that extent that I actually now could not travel in rough countries without taking a cook with me!-- but you thwarted me in all the earnest fire and passion of life. About Turner you indeed never knew how much you thwarted me--for I thought it my duty to be thwarted--and it was the religion that led me all wrong there; if I had had courage and knowledge enough to insist on having my own way resolutely, you would now have had me in happy health, loving you twice as much (for, depend upon it, love taking much of its own way, a fair share, is in generous people all the brighter for it), and full of energy for the future--and of power of self-denial: now, my power of duty has been exhausted in vain, and I am forced for life's sake to indulge myself in all sorts of selfish ways, just when a man ought to be knit for the duties of middle life by the good success of his youthful life. No life ought to have *phantoms* to lay.

(p.85)

Ruskin, here, is displaying a trait that was typical of him: he was laying the responsibility for his self-perceived short-comings at the feet of another, and further, he was

blaming his childhood and early-manhood responses to authority for his (present-day) problems. He is suggesting that had he been denied by his father, he would have accepted, and learned self-denial. As a result of this not happening, he is "forced" to "indulge" himself in adult life.

Ruskin's ability to deny personal responsibility manifests itself throughout his life and work. This thesis will be explored more fully in later chapters with reference to the specific period of time during which he worked on the second and third volumes of *The Stones of Venice*, and when parts of that text are examined. At this point, it is telling to consider the blame that he laid on his father, and on his mother's religion, for his failings as a (fulfilled) man. His father died four months after this letter was written, but Margaret lived for another seven years. Bell describes her later years:

she was always a tyrant; as she grew older she grew even more despotic and cantankerous. Ruskin invariably accepted her public rebukes, however unreasonable, with the gentle and submissive deference of an affectionate son: but he very sensibly arranged, by foreign travels and English excursions, that his temper should not be tried too continually. (p.86)

Even while laying blame, Ruskin was consistently the son who

responded to, and (publicly) accepted, parental authority. Avoidance rather than disobedience, or even self-exertion, became his ploy for dealing with maternal authority. And presumably, Margaret's criticisms were further and continual attempts to thwart the wilful actions of the child who was always overtly evident in her son's personality.

At what point does a child become a man? Stone suggests that, during the nineteenth century, marriage was the absolute declaration of independence from parental authority, and while a married son could remain financially dependent on a father, the dependence was in the form of a settlement that could supply a non-accountable income. On his marriage, at age 29, Ruskin received, from his father, £10,000, the income from which could provide a comfortable life. John James also promised additional funds to meet his son's special expenses incurred while he pursued his work (Rose, p.52). But in Ruskin's case, emotional independence did not accompany his new status, nor for that matter did financial independence, because his and Effie's life style could not be supported by his income, and his extra needs were always a factor in his relationship with his father. At the time of Ruskin's divorce, after detailing the family's complaints against Effie and her "extravagance" to a friend, John James said to his son, "'We shall have to pay for it--but never mind we have you to ourselves now'" (Rose, p.89). There was a strong drive within all three Ruskins to

maintain a family unit of three that was closed against all intruders. This would place Ruskin firmly, and for all time, in the role of the child.

As he entered adulthood, Ruskin was undoubtedly confused. While there had been variety in his childhood, there had been no balance. He says,

my judgement of right and wrong, and powers of independent action [here he inserts a footnote to emphasise *action* as opposed to *thought* where, he says, he was too independent] were left entirely undeveloped; because the bridle and blinkers were never taken off me.... [T]he ceaseless authority exercised over my youth left me, when cast out at last into the world, unable for some time to do more than drift with its vortices. (*Praeterita*, p.40)

Ruskin's choice of metaphors is interesting. Included in their aspirations for their son, Margaret and John James wanted him to move into high society. Did he see himself pulling them along after him, as he blindly entered new territory filled with distracting and unnamed terrors? Did he see himself as the "sacrificial lamb", sent on ahead to clear the path for his parents to follow in relative safety? And did he, once he achieved a level of prominence, see himself adrift in foreign waters without the security of his parental anchor to give him solace in times of stress? In

fact, Ruskin was never "cast out", as long as his parents lived, they lived for him, and he for them, at as close a proximity as he could manage.

Chapter 2: The Man

The influences playing on the adult Ruskin were many and varied, and were working on a variety of levels. This must have played havoc with the ego of a solipsist of his calibre. There is no single path to follow through the labyrinth of any mind. The interplay of a life-time of learning and experience creates confusing, convoluted passages that do not all lead to a single outpouring of the self. There are too many false starts and dead ends, and too many new threads come from where?--and join a mainstream that results in, on the one hand the individual, and on the other a work of art. For one is not necessarily the extension of the other because a conscious or unconscious effort is made by one to disguise the true nature of the other. But not always. Sometimes the expression in art is the truest representation of the individual because it removes the barriers that the individual hides behind, and lays bare the inner self. But it is not as clear cut as that, either. There are degrees of self-exposure that work between the poles of self and art and each artist and each work of art is placed somewhere on a continuum that runs between objectivity and subjectivity. And it is impossible to divine where exactly a work is placed because it is impossible to know where objectivity gives way to the subjectivity of (early or late, conscious or unconscious) influences.

Ruskin was schooled by his mother in the Bible, and it was without a doubt, a primary influence. Abrams discusses the place of the Bible in the lives and work of the Romantic writers, and adapts a quotation that he takes from Blake into the succinct, "the Bible was the great code of art" for writers who had been "steeped in Biblical literature and exegesis" and who "explicitly undertook to translate religious doctrine into their conceptual philosophy" (1971, p.33).

We pay inadequate heed to the extent and persistence with which the writing of Wordsworth and his English contemporaries reflect not only the language and rhythms but also the design, the imagery, and many of the central moral values of the Bible. (1971, p.32)

Ruskin was a Romantic, albeit an emotional, rather than actual, contemporary of Wordsworth, and so he had not only the Bible to guide him, but he had Wordsworth and the other great Romantic writers as well. He was free to follow in their footsteps as the inheritor of their visions.

The burden of what they had to say was that contemporary man can redeem himself and his world, and that his only way to this end is to reclaim and to bring to realization the great positives of the Western past. When, therefore, they assumed the visionary persona, they spoke as members of

what Wordsworth called 'One great Society.../The noble Living and the noble Dead', whose mission was to assure the continuance of civilization by reinterpreting to their drastically altered condition the enduring humane values, making whatever changes were required in the theological systems by which these values had been sanctioned. Chief among these values were life, love, liberty, hope and joy. (Abrams, 1971, pp.430-1)

To Ruskin, "sight" was everything, along with the abilities to understand and to clearly express what had been seen (Abrams, 1971, pp.375-6).

As the mind is a maze, so must be the writing that discusses the myriad influences that play on it. It is beneficial, at this point, to veer off and consider what Abrams calls the "great positives of the Western past". Bell says that Ruskin "loved Venice, but he did not love Venetians". He was not able to accept them on their own terms, even though he was the interloper invading their city. Nothing had prepared him for the "enthusiastic vulgarity" of the people or the place, which "must have seemed very strange and shocking to an aesthetic and devout Anglo-Saxon". He lacked "the strength of sympathy that could enable him to understand the cheerful, superstitious hedonism of the Italians" (p.45).

Ruskin's inability to accept the "southern

bondieuserie" (Bell, p.45) was based on more than devotional or even on denominational differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants. As an industrial-political entity, England had isolated itself from the rest of the world, for it alone was wrestling with the "problems and anxieties of success" that evolved out of the Industrial Revolution.

The result was that Britain, absorbed and energetic in her own business, looked on the Continent as a different, an inferior world. The discipline of industry had led not to the loosening but to the affirmation of moral principal. That one Englishman was equal to six of any other nationality was an idea firmly implanted by Trafalgar and Waterloo. Great wealth, hard work and a strict régime combined to increase this feeling of superiority. (Gaunt, p.19)

Italy was regarded as a nation of past glory that was unable to survive in a modern world, and the Italians were seen to have been a part of the process of decline of their homeland.

Ruskin's affair with Italy began in earnest when he received a copy of Rogers' *Italy* for his thirteenth birthday. His edition was complete with forty-nine engravings, most of which were illustrations commissioned by

Rogers from Turner and Stothard.

Rogers' *Italy* takes its place among those semi-fictionalized travelogs, sometimes in poetry, sometimes in prose, that are precursors of the later guidebooks.... They contained little ... of definite and reliable practical information ... but they offered amusement, the companionship of a cultivated sensibility, and, for the non-traveller, the vicarious thrill of the unknown and the picturesque. (Alexander Bradley, p.2)

Much of Rogers' book is written in blank verse, some in prose, and many of the sections "are fairly straightforward topographical descriptions of particular Italian sites noted for their natural beauty" (p.3), but other sections

are concerned exclusively with literary or historical association, which constituted much of the interest in remote places for ... the nineteenth century sensibility. (p.3)

Prior to Ruskin's work, there were "three separate stages in the English Literary response to Italy" (Alexander Bradley, p.3) The first is "the eighteenth century rationalist view", where "only the classical past is esteemed" and experience is tailored to "suit the mental equipment of the classically educated gentleman making the journey". The modern Italy and Italians are despised, and "Catholicism is ... the basest idolatry and superstition".

It had to be believed, in order to maintain this arrogant stance, that the mantle of empire had passed to England, and that the Gentlemen-travellers themselves were therefore the true inheritors of Rome. Non-classical Italy is hardly noticed, and if noticed, rejected. (p.3)

The second stage, occurring near the end of the eighteenth century, used "visions of Italy and Italians" in "the service of the sensational and mysterious". Italy was seen as "the ideal hunting ground for passion, intrigue and suspense". Gothic writers did not concern themselves with authenticity, theirs was an imagined

Italy of Machiavellian counts in their Apenne retreats, lovelorn maidens incarcerated in sadistic nunneries, of extravagant and passionate bandits, living by the serenade and the stiletto, who always turned out in the end to be of noble birth. (pp.3-4)

The third stage, where Alexander Bradley places Rogers' *Italy*, is a view of "a more sophisticated 'romantic' *Italy*". Here "a wider and more intelligent appreciation for its color and atmosphere" is blended with a "nostalgia for its vanished glories" and with "a sense of the dramatic interplay between northern and southern mores" (p.4).

The great Romantic poets found inspiration in Italy. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats, lived in,

explored, wrote about, and in Keats' and Shelley's cases, even died in Italy. Theirs was "the presentation and representation of Italy in English literature before Ruskin, the stuff of his youthful notions of the country" (Alexander Bradley, pp.4-5).

In *Praeterita*, [Ruskin] wrote 'my Venice, like Turner's, had been chiefly created for us by Byron', and of Byron, 'He taught me the meaning of Chillon and Meillerie, and bade me first seek in Venice ... the ruined homes of Foscari and Falier'. Later, predictably enough, a more sober and scientific Ruskin was a little embarrassed by his youthful enthusiasms, and was anxious to temper them. (p.5)

"Ruskin can be seen initiating the fourth stage in the English literary conception of Italy". As a reaction against the romantic excesses of an earlier time, Ruskin wrote to his father, "'The Venice of modern fiction and drama is a thing of the past ... a stage dream which the first ray of daylight must dissipate into dust'" (Alexander Bradley, p.5). He evoked "a more thorough scholarship and greater historical understanding" of the country. Ruskin credited Rogers' *Italy* with influencing the "'entire direction'" of his "'life's energies'". It brought together Turner and Venice so that they "were wedded in his mind, not inappropriately, for Turner himself had a love of Italy,

particularly Venice (p.5).

There has been a thread running through this chapter that should be picked up now, and followed, not because it will signify a way through the labyrinth, but because it is another complication to add to the puzzle. This idea has been presented as both an English sense of personal superiority to, and an English dislike (hatred) of, the others. This is easily transposed to a Ruskinian sense of personal worth working hand in hand with a Ruskinian dislike of, or even fear of, the unknown, and more specifically of the foreign to personal belief and experience. One way of grappling with the foreign is to define it in terms of the familiar, to interpret it in terms of the self.

In discussing what he terms "Orientalism", Said says that knowledge is associated with supremacy:

Knowledge ... means surveying a civilization from its origins to its prime to its decline--and ... it means *being able to do that*. Knowledge means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant. The object of such knowledge is inherently vulnerable to scrutiny; its object is a 'fact' which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in a way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically stable. To have such knowledge of a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. (p.32)

Said extends this thought to, "since we know it ... it exists as we know it" (p.32). Ruskin initially knew Venice through the books he had read. With the assistance of Rawdon Brown, a historian known chiefly for his work on Venice, who taught him the methodology of historical research, in 1849 Ruskin gained access "to libraries and galleries, private scholars, owners of houses or paintings he wanted to see" (Alexander Bradley, p.32). He had a number of handicaps to overcome, apart from his lack of training in systematic research; Brown was able to make up for them: Ruskin "spoke little or no Italian; he disliked Italians; he was socially graceless".

Of particular usefulness was the introduction to Giambattista Lorenzi, sub-librarian at St. Mark's Library, where Ruskin did most of his research into the chronology of the Ducal Palace, upon which so much of the argument of *The Stones of Venice* depends. (pp.32-33)

Ruskin brought, naturally, his prejudices to his studies.

It is undeniable that Ruskin worked hard throughout the entire project of *The Stones of Venice* to 'personalise' things as far as possible, partly by emphasizing, perhaps over-emphasizing, what he saw as close parallels between England and Venice. (p.35)

All the while that Ruskin was soaking up thoughts,

ideas and traditions of English thought, Biblical traditions and modes of self-expression, he was being most directly and most profoundly influenced by his mother and father. The only exceptional element of parental influence is that with Ruskin it lasted well into adulthood, and that he felt some alarm, even anxiety, when he realized that his view of the world was veering away from that of his parents. This realization came, according to Alexander Bradley, at age twenty-seven, during the last trip the three took together before Ruskin's marriage, and brought about "if not exactly a gulf between, at least a recognition on both sides of how far the developing tastes of the son had removed him from the world of his parents" (p.25). As Ruskin's taste in art and architecture matured,

a deeply bred anti-Catholicism struggled hard within [him] with an admiration he could not suppress for works of art created by Catholic artists in a Catholic society. How to admire Italian churches while despising the Italian Church, that was his problem, and the virulence of his attacks on the Italian people reflects that tension. It is also possible that a more devious Ruskin is, in part at least working hard to keep his parents happy. (Alexander Bradley, p.23)

In his essay entitled "Notes on the Construction of *The Stones of Venice*", Hewison contends that there are "two

versions of [the work]--Ruskin's and his father's, which exist uncomfortably side by side within the same covers" (p.143). His argument is based on a comparison of the letters the two wrote to each other during Ruskin's second stay in Venice when he was researching volumes II and III, and the original manuscript. The fact that Ruskin was sending the manuscript to his father, frequently a page at a time, is easily traceable in John Bradley's volume of Ruskin's letters to his father. John James's letters to his son, while unpublished, were made available to Hewison, who deems them "vital": they "enable us to see the pressure John James was putting on his son" (p.140). To make his point, Hewison quotes from the letter that expresses John James's "response to Napoleon III's coup d'état at the end of 1851":

Pretty work in Paris--a Kingdom to be scrambled for or played for or battled for--I have a taste for Despotism & see no way in which a Country torn into fragments--can be again united but under an Iron Despotism--but civil War is feared--I am so partial to Despotism that I am tired of Radicals Socialists & Communists & mobs & equality & fraternity private liberty I find may be enjoyed & very delightfully a la John Lewis at Grand Cairo. (p.141)

John James's was a forceful personality, and he expected to

be agreed with by his son. He exercised his influence over all aspects of his son's life, and not only his view of politics. A battle was brewing, a "battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads" (Bloom, p.11).

Ruskin presents himself to the world through his writing as, at various times, a teacher, a father, a clergyman, a prophet. He believed himself to be intellectually superior to most people. One of the recurring themes in his letters to his father is his self-perceived place in the world order. Much more than the English attitude of superiority in the world, he knew what he had been told about himself by his parents when he was a child, and he believed it and reinforced it. He was a genius. He could see more clearly, he could see farther, he could interpret what he saw and he could describe his vision in a way that was clear and understandable to anyone who had the wit to read and follow his arguments step by step.

When he felt called upon to defend his work, his manner or his approach, he cites his own genius. On reading a favourable review of *The Stones of Venice I* that was printed in the *Ecclesiologist* in August 1851, he wrote to his father:

I have today your note with enclosed
Ecclesiologist, which is very satisfactory. I
 always think the reviews read very well when they

quote *me*, and say nothing themselves. (John Bradley, p.35)

There is an underlying seriousness to this comment that belies any attempt at humour that may be recognized in it. Ruskin truly enjoyed his own words, and placed himself high in the literary hierarchy. Late in November, he described his reading to his father:

I have been rejoicing this morning in a bit of Wordsworth, and some Milton. Pope is very wonderful--but turns sour on the stomach. We have got Tennyson also--and *The Antiquary*, and I was reading some of my own *Seven Lamps* last night with great satisfaction. It is a fine book. (John Bradley, p.67)

His confidence, however, flagged while he was working on *The Stones of Venice*; he reported that

I am happy to say, recovering some confidence in myself, as I get the whiphand of my book--I see so much of interest coming out of it that I have no doubt of its success. (John Bradley, p.199)

His self-doubt is rooted in the on-going criticism being offered by John James. While his response to external criticism is one of anger at, and criticism of, the critic, his response to his father's comments is one of self-justification, mollification and finally acceptance. This pattern can be followed in the letters-to-the-*Times* episode.

On March 6, 1852, he wrote to his father that,

These news from England are really too ridiculous and I can stand it no longer. I am going for three days to give the usual time I set aside for your letter to writing one to the Times--on Corn Laws--elections--and education.... [I]f you like to send it--you can--if not--you can consider it written to you. (John Bradley, p.212)

By March 9th, "I have only got a scrap of my Times letter ready, which I enclose". But now, in his mind, it has taken on a greater significance; there is an assumption on his part that it will be published: "perhaps I shall be able to send tomorrow as much as it may be likely they will insert at once" (p.215). By the next day, "letter" had become "letters" inasmuch as he had ready four pages of the "first" letter. On March 11th he sent a new opening for the second letter along with instructions to his father to send it "immediately" to the *Times* (p.216). The next day he forwarded the last of the second letter "which ... may if you approve, be sent to the Times" (p.217). In his next letter, Ruskin wrote, "I don't know whether you have found my Times letters worth sending--or whether the Times will put them in, but I rather hope so"--and here is the start of the self-justification process:

I want to be able to refer to them in the future.

I was a mere boy when the present design for the

houses of parliament was chosen--but I saw in an instant it was vile--I did not say so in print--because I felt that no one would care for a boy's opinion but I heartily wish now that I had then written to the Times--and could now refer to my then stated opinion. In like manner, I hope the Times will put these letters in, for twenty years hence, if I live, I should like to be able to refer to them--and say, 'I told you so, and now you are beginning to find it out'. And that would give me some power, then, however little it may be possible to do at present. I have kept these letters as plain and simple as I could ... I only wanted to get at the principle. (John Bradley, pp.218-19)

It seems as though he has some inkling that his father will not approve of the letters, so he has added a justification for them: his own future "power". There is the sense that if all else fails, his father will rally to, not the defense of, but the furtherance of Ruskin's position as an observer of, and commentator on, the times.

On the 15th of March, Ruskin says he was finishing his letters to the *Times* (John Bradley, p.219) and on the 18th he enclosed "half of my final letter"; of it he says, "I think this letter will amuse you--even if you do not send it to [the] Times", and he promised the rest would come within

a day or two (p.223). On the 22nd, Ruskin received John James's first response to the letters: it seems that he was trying to let his son down easy; because he knew Ruskin's response to criticism, he based his reservations on it. Ruskin accepts, with seeming good grace, his father's argument, but tries to refute it:

I had your nice letter of 16th, 17th, with mention of received first parts of letters, and of your waiting before sending them--in order to consider whether I should not be too sensitive about replies. Now, to replies or abuse to things of this kind, I should be utterly insensible.

Ruskin supplies further justification, both for his reaction to critical reviews and for wanting his letters published.

I write a letter in a few mornings--which any man, who has given a few mornings to the subject--has a right to say what he thinks of, and welcome. But when I give ten year's hard work, and that at the best of my life--to a subject--and a poor idiot--who not only has never worked an hour at it--but could not understand it if he worked a century--sits down deliberately to hinder me as far as in him lies--from doing any good--I am provoked--.... I don't think less of myself, but I am provoked and worried--and therefore I say not to send any more critiques-- But you don't find me sitting

down to answer those I received--much less should I engage in a paper war in the Times.

To reinforce his argument, he returns to his former point.

These three letters I want to be able to refer to twenty years hence--people may call them as futile as they like now. I know also how much is said on the subject. When every mouth out of (I know not how many millions of men there are in England) is talking on the same subject it is likely the truth will be occasionally said, and occasionally admitted:

His superior ability to see the truth and to express it comes into play.

Everything true has been said millions of times, but as long as it is mixed up with falsehood, it will be the better of extraction. Whatever I read of public press shows me the *confusion* of men's heads on simple matters-- Those three letters do not profess to say anything new.... But they profess to give ... rules in a simple and clear form, and are likely to be useful, as far as they may be attended to, more than a library full of treatises on political economy. If people say they are common truths--let them act upon them--if people suppose them all wrong--there is the more need of them. (John Bradley, pp.227-8)

Ruskin's feelings are clear: his letters are not only worthy of print, they are necessary for the edification of those less visionary than himself. They will prove themselves valuable, at the very least, with time. He feels that it requires his kind of genius to cut through the rhetoric of the times and to present a clear, concise set of rules for the betterment of all.

John James was not amused. The information came to Ruskin through his mother in the guise of her concern for John James, and in his March 29th letter, Ruskin wrote

I had yesterday your nice long letter from Leeds-- but was sorry to hear from my mother that you were annoying yourself because you did not agree with me, and I am sorry that in the midst of your labour in travelling I have caused you the additional work of these long letters.

Margaret must have known exactly which string to pull in order to mollify Ruskin--he immediately backed down on his insistence that his letters be published: "Keep mine until I get home and then we will talk about them" (John Bradley, p.231).

Almost a month later, he had totally capitulated on the matter of the letters. On April 26th he wrote,

I found the other day by accident a bit of MS of the letter which you would not let me send about the Pre-Raffaelites--the second to the Times,

which I re-wrote at your request, cancelling the original draft of it. I am amazed to find how *ill* it now reads to myself, and how right you were in refusing to let it go, so that I am quite ready to trust in your disapproval of the others to the Times--indeed I am very thankful already ... that the attack on the ministry did not appear.

His surrender is prefaced by an acknowledgement that in a previous instance John James had been right to edit his son's work, and the same good judgement could be recognized in the current instance of censure. Ruskin goes on in his letter to display an uncharacteristic modesty in light of his father's ability: "It is rather painful to me however to find how unequal I am, at times and how little I can judge of what I write, as I write it". But his surrender is not a total one: he must make one more stab at it, and the modesty was but fleeting. He continues his letter by saying,

I have not any more notice--in any of your letters, of the last on education, which you seem at first to have been much pleased with. I liked that, myself--and some time or other I must recast it in some way, for I want to have at our present system--I don't know anything which seems to me so much to require mending. (John Bradley, p.262)

He must have been flogging a dead horse; references to his

letters to the *Times* disappear from his letters to his father. But the issue did not die. He did recast it, in *The Stones of Venice*.

From his study of the other side of the correspondence between father and son, Hewison says that in

explaining the reasons for this censorship [they] give a full picture of his political views and comment on the political figures of the day. John James disapproved of his son's remarks about Disraeli and his son's advocacy of higher income tax, but in one area there was surprising agreement between father and son.

But, even when he agreed with his son, John James had to protect his business interests against any harm that letters to the *Times* over the Ruskin name could produce. "Already, he writes in the same letter, he has lost clients in Ireland because of his and his son's anti-Catholic views" (John Bradley, p.146).

At those times when he knew that he was on more solid ground, Ruskin was not adverse to instructing his father. In a role reversal he portrayed himself as a father-image, with exasperated patience, instructing a son/student who did not understand an assignment. The tone is scolding, sarcastic and offensive:

Thank you for notes and trouble about Turquoise--
but you do not seem yet to have got at the real

point--the origin of the name-- I know what the stone is; it is a phosphate of alumine, coloured with copper. I believe its resemblance to or occurrence in bones to be altogether accidental: But the question is--why--and when was it first called Turquoise-- *Turque*--is French for Turk, and Turquoise is the regular derivative-- Turkish: So *Turchi* is Italian for Turks, and *Turchino* regular derivative-- Turkish. But why do they call *blue Turchino*: and why do the French or anybody else-- call the *blue stone*--turquoise? (John Bradley, p.86)

Embodied in this passage is anger and frustration along with an unwarranted display of knowledge. In another letter he reassured John James that

I am quite sure you need not fear Gold for a long time to come-- But I begin to think that people in general know as little of the true principles of commerce as they do art (p.91)

and he proceeded to lecture him, as though he was one of "those people", ignorant of the true principles.

Ruskin's letter writing style aped that of his father, and for the most part they seemed to understand each other, but misunderstandings did arise. In the portion of John James's letters quoted above, the broken sentence structure is the model for Ruskin's structure when his thoughts travel

faster than he was able to record them. In the introduction to his volume of letters, John Bradley writes,

John Ruskin cannot be counted among the great letter writers of the English tradition.... He lacks the restraint and devotion to the letter as a form of literature.... [H]e sweeps rapidly from one subject to the next, seldom pausing to find the perfect word or phrase. His mind teemed with too many activities to permit hesitation over the niceties of letter writing. Moreover, his high-strung nature ... was not prone to calculated reflection. (p.xi)

Although Ruskin was referring to literary critics when he wrote,

It is very curious that when an author is misunderstood at all, he is almost always quoted as meaning the exact contrary of what he did mean (John Bradley, p.176),

less than a month later he tells his father, "You seem to misunderstand my half objections to it", a house John James had chosen for Ruskin and Effie to live in on their return from Venice, "you seem to think I did not think it large enough--but I thought it too large" (p.211). This was a small misunderstanding that did not warrant further mention. But, when his sense of religious duty was called into question through misunderstanding, his response was greater

than the perceived injustice would seem to demand.

Early in their stay in Venice, Ruskin wrote to his father on a Sunday, mentioning that Effie was at church, a German service, "her knowledge of that very disagreeable dialect enabling her to get a Protestant service from which I am debarred" (John Bradley, p.37). He did go on to elaborate on his observance of the sabbath, but he had been misunderstood. John James reported the problem as Margaret's, to which Ruskin replied,

you did quite right to tell me my mother was grieved--but either I must have written very carelessly--or you interpreted rather hastily--for surely my mother does not want me to go to a service which I cannot understand a word of-- At least such an observance of form, for form's sake, is more than the Minister himself--who lunched here last week--and who I should think attaches as much importance to his own sermons as most people --expects of one-- Surely I said very distinctly that Effie went to her German protestant service?

He continues to explain that his only other choice would be to attend Mass, to which he says he goes "as often as need be" (John Bradley, p.79). His explanation is long, drawn out and defensive--too much so, and he even draws in a reference he makes to attending church in *The Stones of Venice*, in effect quoting himself on his beliefs. But even

then, he cannot leave the matter alone. His next letter opens with an abbreviated explanation of what he meant in the original letter, on the chance that the explanation was lost along the way. Two weeks later, after having obviously been reminded of what the first letter said, he takes total responsibility for the misunderstanding, "it was no wonder you thought we didn't go to church--from the way in which I had written" (p.97). The offending word must have been "debarred", an example of his inattention to the words he used in his letters.

This habit was not one that Ruskin was able to recognize in himself. He repeated in his letters that he weighs every word he writes, and in fact maintains that critics do not appreciate this element in his writing. Words and their meanings hold special interest for Ruskin. In his Bible study with his mother, the importance of individual words had been emphasized; he retained an interest in them and in their use. This enabled him to develop a somewhat unique vocabulary. An Evangelical looked on pleasure as approaching sin. Ruskin found pleasure in his work, and this created a conflict for him. To him, work should be the opposite of pleasure--but so is pain. In Ruskin's writing work is referred to as "pain" or a derivative of it. In a single letter he used pain as a synonym of work and as an antonym of pleasure (John Bradley, p.144-5). In *The Stones of Venice*, both the effort that

went into the research and writing and the areas that were left undeveloped are described in terms of pain.

All the evidence points to the fact that Ruskin loved to travel with his parents when he was a child. He enjoyed summers in Perth visiting his aunt and cousins, he saw "all the high-roads, and most of the cross ones, of England and Wales and a great part of the lowland Scotland" starting when he was four or five years old (*Praeterita*, p.15). Ruskin's after thought of these trips was one of pleasure, and he describes the preparations for his first trip to the continent in 1833 as, "two or three weeks of entirely rapturous and amazed preparation" (*Praeterita*, p.69). Of the trip itself, he wrote that,

it had excited all the poor faculties that were in me to their utmost strain, and I had certainly more passionate happiness, of a quality utterly indescribable to people who never felt the like, and more in those three months, than most people have in all their lives. (*Praeterita*, p.70)

Certainly, this trip left a strong impression, whether or not the memory of it grew with time into the description offered in *Praeterita*. But, in 1852, his memory was different: he wrote to his father late in January, "I never liked travelling", but his complaint is about the means not the end, "my hope was at one time to live in Switzerland, but not to travel much". He evokes his poor health to

justify this announcement, and then goes on to say,

Wherever my home is, I shall stay much more quietly than you might think. Indeed I never was a rambler in the common sense-- My delight was always to stay in places that I loved; and I am sure that neither my mother or you ever recollected my wishing to leave any place when I was comfortably settled among hills. (John Bradley, pp. 144-5)

On the 5th of February he justified and modified what he had said:

As to travelling, there is no doubt the playing courier was very bad for me. But to take my own place in a diligence, and stay in it having nothing to do with changing horses, will I believe be rather good for me than bad, so that you need not fear the coming home for me--

The homesick young man thought nothing would or could interfere with his pleasure in going home to his parents. (To his great disappointment, discomfort and displeasure, something did!)

-- Much less the travelling again with you. I wish you and my mother to do exactly in this

‘ While they were packing for their trip to England, Effie’s jewellery was stolen. They were kept in Venice during the inquiry and their departure was delayed from the 13th to the 30th of June.

matter as you think will be most pleasurable for yourselves: and I should really find it difficult--if you were to consult only my good or my pleasure--to tell you how to decide--

But he does weigh the argument in his own favour, and to really press his point, he brings his mother's potential ill health into it.

I shall be just as happy hearing my mother read a little to me in the study--and going with you to exhibitions as I should be walking at Vevay or Lucerne: but I want you to consider whether in other years, we may not be happy at home, while my mother's strength for travelling may be considerably diminished. (pp.164-5)

From Venice, home, his parents' home, looked enticingly comforting and welcoming to him, and like a spoiled child he played his father to achieve his own ends.

Arising out of this letter, and Ruskin's plans for the future is the question: where is Effie? Effie is an appendage, her presence is acknowledged, but as an after-thought. In his earliest letter describing his distaste for travel, he referred to his plans to meet his parents in Switzerland on his way home from Venice. He described what he envisions will be his response to the Alps, because his health will not permit him to walk extensively, or climb, on them:

This Spring--in Switzerland with mama and you-- I shall walk with you only--or Effie--and be with you all day, going on a little with my book--and looking on the Alps as inaccessible. (John Bradley, p.145)

Effie is firmly placed in position after himself, his father and his mother.

The influence of sex, and how it affected his marriage, has generated a lot of interest. His attitudes towards women in general, his mother, and most specifically Effie, hold some of the keys necessary for entering a fuller understanding of *The Stones of Venice*, and for that reason it is necessary to delve into at least a cursory study of the relationship between Ruskin and Effie. To discuss anyone's sex life is dangerous unless there is complicity on the part of the subject. To discuss it postmortem is even more dangerous because the innocent cannot deny, nor can the guilty assent (or deny even harder!). The subject is stuck with whatever label is designated by social norms, based on childhood experiences, positive evidence and pure speculation. It may be even more difficult to divine what goes on in a private bedroom than in a mind (closed or otherwise). That being said, nothing went on in Ruskin's bedroom, at least while Effie was present, unless of course exhibitionism is to be added to the list of his sexual interests, and for that there is no evidence other than her

accusation that he performed unnatural acts. If he was not an exhibitionist and she was not a voyeur (even of the keyhole variety), perhaps nonperformance is unnatural enough to justify her charge. However, Victorian sexual norms were, in themselves, justification enough for a celibate marriage--and such a union, while not common, was not unique to the Ruskins junior.

Ruskin's attitude towards Effie, indeed towards women in general, was caught up in his overall vision of the world.

He was trained from infancy to regard the world as a place in which he was protected and restrained, where kindness and cruelty were calmly and invariably handed down from above, in which he must always be ruled by a united triumvirate consisting of his mother, his father and his God.

Profoundly religious, he continued to regard the universe as a monarchy in which the relation of God to man, of man to man and of man to woman must be that of the parent to the child. (Bell, p.133)

Much of the trouble in Ruskin's life was derived from his inability to "live on equal terms with anyone". "He loved to help, to guide, to protect" the young, and "when he encountered superior merit he bowed low before it" (Bell, p.135). Women never gained the status of "superior merit"

in his estimation, so his attitude towards them remained not only patriarchal but paternalist. "Ruskin is in the best and worst sense of the word paternalist. The monarch must care for his people and, if need be, punish them with hideous severity" (Bell, p.133).

When discussing Ruskin as a critic and social thinker, Bell says that,

somewhere in Ruskin's nature there was ... an element of cruelty, a vein of thought and feeling completely at variance with the predominant form of his personality. (p.132)

This same characteristic is evident in his relationship with Effie, towards whom "he assumes the character of a schoolmaster" (p.136). When he finally acknowledged, in 1853, that his marriage was in trouble, Ruskin said "'When we married, I expected to change *her*--she expected to change me. Neither have succeeded, and both are displeased'" (Rose, p.82). Bell believes that when Ruskin said, "I never disobeyed my mother ... I have honoured all women with solemn worship" (p.136), he was being sincere, but as the rift with Effie grew, he maintained that, "His pity and polite behaviour to her were adopted ... because he considered it a duty to be kind to one 'so unhappily diseased'" (Rose, p.84). Ruskin was charging Effie with insanity.

It is hardly surprising that Ruskin never consummated

his marriage. The transfer from long-time masturbation to copulation is not an easy one (Stone, p.308), even when there are no other influences at play. With Ruskin there were other influences. Rose studied the relationship between Ruskin and Effie in some detail, and within the Victorian context. She argues that since Ruskin was

allowed no playmates because his status-conscious parents wanted neither to be guilty of social climbing nor to have their son play with children of families beneath them, he reacted strongly to the few who got by his parents' screen. (p.53)

Effie was not the first girl he had responded to, but he had known her since "she was a child", who would stay at his parents' house while travelling between her home in Scotland and school in England.

[O]n one such visit, in 1846 ... John developed a fancy for her. That the fancy developed into a passion suggests the depth of his need for a companion and the activity of his imagination.

(Rose, p.53)

Whether or not Ruskin ever loved Effie is, perhaps, after all has been said, a moot point. He was infatuated with her and they were married.

Ruskin's attitude towards marriage and sexual activity was, to a large extent, that of his mother augmented by protestant Christianity and the Bible. To understate the

situation, it was problematic for him. Ruskin is placed solidly in the Victorian era, but his mother was a major influence on him, and she was of a much earlier time. The combination of events that delayed her marriage resulted in a child born late in her life. Ruskin was the result of a "missed generation", as though he was raised by grandparents, and any tempering influence an intervening generation would have had was lost to him. He was an emotional product of the eighteenth century, turned loose in the nineteenth century, without a secure foundation other than his parents, themselves.

Stone's work, which covers the period 1500 to 1800, is most appropriate for this study because Ruskin's attitudes were rooted in the beliefs of a generation once removed from himself and his age. Stone says, "There are certain features of sexual behaviour which were peculiar to Western man ... in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (p.308). He identifies these characteristics as marriage ten years or more after sexual maturity, the "imposition on the sexual drive of an ideological gloss known as romantic love", and "the predominance of a religion--Christianity--which has always been more or less hostile to sex as pleasure or play" (pp.308-9).

Whether or not Margaret and John James expected or even wanted Ruskin to marry is debatable; they did not want him to marry Effie. In 1854, Ruskin told Effie "that his

marriage to her was the greatest crime he had ever committed, because he had acted in opposition to his parents" (Rose, p.84). His parents had avoided the wedding, using a "fear of violence" during the Chartist demonstration as their excuse, but, in fact, "they had never planned to attend their son's wedding" (Rose, p.51). Their objection could have been directed towards Effie, herself, a non-spectacular match for their famous son, or towards the idea of breaking up their family circle of three, but

without the immediate blessing of the senior Ruskins, who were not only their twenty-nine-year-old son's sole source of financial support but also his most intimate friends, John Ruskin was married to nineteen-year-old Euphemia Grey.

(Rose, p.52)

A scant six years later, "the elder Ruskins were determined to get rid of [Effie] in order to have John to themselves" (p.83).

The Ruskins had arrived in Venice on September 1, 1851, and planned to stay until the following June, but by December Ruskin and John James were thinking about his return home.

The question respecting my plans is not a little difficult.... But I am very sure that I ought not to live far from you and my mother: and therefore wherever it is necessary that you should be, I

will henceforward live somewhere near you. Not in the same house--that would cause dispeace between Effie and my mother--if not between Effie and me. Dispeace between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law is hardly remarkable, and even the idea of two mistresses in one house is the basis for rivalry, but Ruskin's motives were self-centred. He detailed the work he intended to do on his return to England and emphasized his need for quiet and comfort, and economy, and therefore,

I do not speak of Effie in this arrangement--as it is a necessary one--and therefore I can give her no choice. She will be unhappy-- that is her fault--not mine--the only regret I have, however is on her account--as I have pride in seeing her shining as she does in society--and pain in seeing her deprived, in her youth and beauty, of that which 10 years hence she cannot have-- The Alps will not wrinkle--so my pleasure is always in store--but her cheeks will; and the loss of life from 24 to 27 in a cottage at Norwood is not a pleasant thing for a woman of her temper-- But this cannot be helped. (John Bradley, p.106)

Ruskin's concern is not that of a husband: he wanted Effie to retain her physical desirability. She was a separate entity, outside his immediate family, and she needed her appearance to assist her in finding happiness.

During their stay in Venice, Rose says,
without consciously pushing Effie onto other men,
John may have welcomed it when another came along
to take her off his hands, to relieve any guilt he
felt at leaving her alone, and to revive his
flagging interest in her. For his liking for his
wife increased in proportion with his admiration
of her new admirer. (p.76)

This could work well in both ways: Ruskin always respected critics who liked his work, and considering his desire to mold and school Effie into the type of wife(?), woman, he wanted, he may well have felt some pride of achievement (and ownership) when she was admired, and took some additional interest in those who acknowledged her beauty and grace.

Ruskin returned to his thoughts of going home in his next letter, and carried them along at great length:

I believe the *proper* thing would be for me and Effie to live at Denmark Hill as long as you stay there--while I am working on my two books--only I am afraid Effie would succeed in making my mother and you both uncomfortable--if she chose--that you could not bear it. You would both get angry, and I fear the thing is impossible. But I have not been thinking of it lately--and hardly know: I could do perfectly well--and if you and my mother could treat Effie with perfect coldness--if she

was late for dinner, let her have it cold--without comment or care--and if she chose to be out late at night--let her own maid sit up for her--content--so long as she did not set the house on fire--that she was either out or in, I believe all might go perfectly well. Effie would not be more uncomfortable than in the cottage at Norwood--and I should save money.

He was asking his parents to adopt his attitude towards his wife: to treat her with detached interest because she had the ability to disrupt the peacefulness of the Ruskin home. He anticipated his parents' reaction to his advice and elucidated his reasoning:

You may say this would not be altogether as it should be-- No--but nothing in this world, that ever I have seen, is or can be--altogether as it should be--and the more I see of it, the more I find that people commit two errors in judging of others.

Here surfaces the lecturer, the observer who has unique sight; and here his parents are being told that because they do not understand the entire situation they are not in a position to make judgements based on what they see:

First, they are not careful enough to determine what is wrong and right: secondly in what they believe or know to be wrong, they judge too

harshly--without allowing for the weakness or temptations which they do not themselves feel-- I say--first they are not careful enough to determine what *is* wrong--that is all the world's first error--there is actually no fixed code by which they test conduct--but they endure willingly in one what they abuse violently in another: and then--when they once make up their mind that there is a wrong--they do not allow enough for different natures.

True to form, when he was on shaky ground, Ruskin protested too much. In the preceding he appears to be self-defensive, and in retrospect it is easy to understand why. But then there is the classic Ruskin shift, in this case, a shift of blame, from himself for permitting what seems to be an odd relationship with his wife, to his wife, for her neglect of her duty to her husband.

There is indeed no question but that Effie is wrong--but--for want of the Fixed and understood code of right and wrong--it is impossible in the present state of her conscience--to convince her of it.

Could it be that Effie was turning the tables on him and demanding to know why he, as her husband, was neglecting his duty to her? Certainly he was conscious of this fact, as well as the fact that their lives were in the public domain:

Her duty is not determinable by an established law--and probably the world is nearly equally divided in its opinion respecting us--one half of it blaming me for neglecting her--the other half blaming her for neglecting you.

This is really an unexpected shift, because Ruskin has removed himself from the situation. This ploy, evident in *The Stones of Venice*, was used by him even when he was writing for a limited, private, captive and supportive audience. But the crisis passed and he reintroduced himself to the text, first as a spectator, "Then in the second place, we are always too little disposed to allow for different nature and education", and then again as a participant:

It may literally be as impossible for Effie to live solitary⁵ without injury, as for me to go into company without injury: I feel--because I am older, that there is wrong in my case-- She does not yet feel that there is wrong in hers: I at 21 was just as self-willed as she is--fretted myself nearly to death--tormented both you and my mother into grey hairs--yet never would allow that I was

⁵ Hindsight gives this phrase interesting shades of meaning. How can "live solitary" be the opposite of going "into company" when in fact the idea is for Effie to live with the three Ruskins? Then again, as long as she remained with Ruskin, Effie would live the solitary life of a neglected wife.

wrong-- Allow for difference of education and Effie's 23 may well be rated as correspondent to my 21; And I recollect perfectly well that no good was ever done me by any scolding, however well deserved.

Just at the time when he seemed to be starting towards a point of excusing Effie for her youthful and unsophisticated personality, he attacks again,

Scolding only does good to good people--or people in a good state. Bad people--or people in a bad state--can only be benefitted by Kindness--or letting alone.... Therefore I am always either kind or indifferent to Effie-- I never scold-- simply take *my own way* and let her have hers.

Then he turns her into a pet, a favoured child to be pampered, and accepted with patience, despite the fact she is spoiled:

--love her, as it is easy to do--and never vex myself-- If she did anything wrong--gambled--or spent money--or lost her character--it would be another affair--but she is very good and prudent in her general conduct--the only way is to let her do as she likes--so long as she does not interfere with *me*: and that, she has long ago learned-- won't do.

His advice to his parents reasserted itself: they will be

able to live together if they leave Effie alone. For accepting Effie and her ways, Margaret will be rewarded, she will have the pleasure of seeing her son "happy and busy". Appealing to Margaret's Evangelical creed would surely have a good effect on his argument. Her present-day suffering would end with a "heavenly" reward!

Effie will mope wherever we are as long as we are quiet--but mope she must: I told her fairly what sort of a person I was before I married her--and she must do as well as she can with her bargain.

(John Bradley, pp.109-10)

Ruskin had once again distanced himself from the situation. He had the vision to anticipate what the future would be like with Effie and for Effie, but he was responsible neither for the making nor the outcome of it. In many ways, he regarded himself as the innocent bystander. Effie's conduct is in spite of his warning her of what to expect. Any problem his parents experienced with Effie would be their problem--he had warned them! He had put it in writing, and if need be, he could say in future years, "I told you so".

Effie did in fact maintain some influence over her husband, but when assenting to her wishes he was as conscious of his own public appearance as of hers. Ruskin cancelled plans to travel to England alone, leaving Effie in Venice because "it would not be right to leave her so long

by herself" (John Bradley, p.116). But Ruskin consistently wrote of saving his parents from her and her ways,

The travelling with Effie is just what I wanted to save you by your meeting us, for she is slow and must stop to lunches, and cannot rise early--and in fact--would not fit with our ways of doing the thing. (John Bradley, p.137)

When Ruskin had a point to make, he could not resist belabouring it: in this case Effie was not one of them and never would be.

Ruskin's health was an on-going concern to him and to his parents, and was another point of contention between Effie and the Ruskins.

Effie observed that when John was with her and she refrained from inquiring about it, his health was fine, but that when his parents asked how he was, he would start to cough, giving his father the chance to say, 'that cough is not going away--I wish you would take care'. (Rose, p.62)

In a detailed report that Ruskin wrote on the state of his health--he says in response to his father's request for "a full and particular account of my health" (John Bradley, p.168)--he presented a chronology that began in 1844, "the healthiest period of my life" (p.168), and continued to the present, "I am certainly better than when I came to Venice" (p.172), covering an eight-year period, with references to

an even earlier time. His main complaints, he says, are "my stomach and my circulation" (p.168), then he adds "nerves" (p.170), and goes on to say, "I have always been nervous about two things, paralysis, and disease of heart" (pp.170-1). According to this letter, the doctors who were consulted could find nothing physically wrong with him (pp.169-73).

When he was even slightly ill, Ruskin was nursed and babied by his mother. During a stay with his parents at Denmark Hill, he and Effie caught colds at different times. Ruskin's came first, and

Effie wrote about it to her mother. 'John's cold is not away yet but it is not so bad as he had with us and I think it would go away with care if Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin would only let him alone. They are telling him twenty times a day that it is very slight and only nervous, which I think it is. At the same time they talk constantly to him about what he ought to do, and in the morning Mrs. Ruskin begins with "don't sit near these towels John they're damp" and in the forenoon "John you must not read these papers until they are dried"'.
(Rose, p.62)

Margaret believed herself to be a skilled medical practitioner, but "Effie was convinced that all the old folks' fussing about John did more harm than good and that

some of their remedies were positively dangerous" (p.62). Effie fought Margaret on Ruskin's treatment, but he sided with his mother, against her.

Later, when Effie became ill with a severe cold and fever, "again Mrs. Ruskin was challenged to exercise her medical skill, but this time her prescription was 'no coddling'", and Effie was expected "to fulfil unimportant social obligations when doing so cost her great pain". Rose says,

Who was really sick, and who was just being indulged and thereby made worse was clearly a vexing issue. Each family thought the other had produced a spoiled child who used illness as a way of getting attention. Could it be that both were right? John, like his parents, thought Effie was carrying on--needlessly, petulantly nourishing ill humor rather than genuinely being sick. (Rose, p.63)

Ruskin judged Effie by himself, by his own actions, but the issue is more complicated than that.

Ruskin expected to be ill. He knew what would come of his "auto-erotic" practices; religious and medical tracts were filled with dire warnings. His concerns and (perceived) symptoms reflected, if not all then certainly many of, the medical problems that Dr. Tissot had cited as the result of habitual masturbation (Stone, pp.320-1).

Ruskin's faith in both medical science and religious teaching reflected his mother's. He not only accepted, he truly believed in what was written, in the guise of learned studies, about the prognosis for masturbating men. The cures for masturbation suggested by Dr. Tissot were incorporated into Ruskin's daily regime, "low diet, short sleep, vigorous exercise, and regular bowel movements" (Stone, p.321). Ruskin faithfully reported to his father that he had incorporated these remedies to help him overcome his perceived ill health, but he did not describe the actual problem, only the results he expected. And, it would seem Dr. Tissot was correct when he judged "the habit to be more or less incurable" (Stone, p.321). Ruskin could not expect to be cured, and saw ahead of himself a lifetime of ill health that would eventually lead to death. This long-term fear of the inevitable, alone, would be enough to cause his descent into madness.

Ruskin regularly wrote to his father about his on-going Bible studies and newly acquired levels of understanding. Frequently his father would be his sounding board--he would allow his ideas to develop in the course of a letter. Ideas that he was able to air in this fashion would frequently reappear in later letters, and would show up in *The Stones of Venice* to greater or lesser extent. In mid-November he wrote, "I have just been reading the 62nd Psalm, which has I

think profound reference to the inner feelings of the Great and Small in all times". Ruskin had found Biblical authority to justify his (and his father's) belief in a classed society and he wanted to share his new-found insight.

Through quoting and interpreting the Psalm and the prayer book, he is able to build an authority for the divine ordinance of kings, and against democrats and revolutionists:

To put him out whom God will exalt thus teaching them [the people] that the inequality of which they complain is a divine institution--then--they give good words with their mouth, but curse with their heart--another great democratic characteristic, and then a further appeal to God for his defense against them.

Ruskin notes that the first of the Psalm is devoted to David addressing the "Upper classes", but he "presently addresses these lower classes with a changed tone" admonishing them, according to Ruskin, to, "Put your trust in *Him*--in God--at all times ... put not your trust in princes nor any child of man", and to look to God for the redress of wrongs. David tells the people "that the whole controversy between high and low is vain-- Surely men of low degree are vanity---and men of high degree are a *lie*".

Strong, that--rather, out of a King's mouth, then comes a parenthetical charge to the rich not to

trust in oppression--nor set their heart on riches ... and then a final charge to the poor who may think or know themselves injured, that they must not rise up against power, for all power finally belongs to God--and that they are to look to Him--for with Him is no abuse of power, and He will assuredly give them what they ask for--'a good day's wages for a good day's work'.

Ruskin was pleased with his new-found understanding, its obvious connection to his own views, and its relevance to contemporary society:

Understood in this way, one sees the connection of clauses ... and its entire meaning. If one reads it detached, one does not see how 'rendering to every man according to his work', is characteristic of God's mercy.

I think that the 9th verse is not often enough quoted nor considered. It is evidently one of the pieces of the Bible which are to *Balance* the passages much more often quoted on the other side. (John Bradley, pp.59-60)

Ruskin's Bible study had given him the security he needed to pursue his ideas on the inequality of men in general⁶ and

⁶ In his letter of 30 March 1852, he writes, I have thought for three years back over all the points to which you allude respecting election. I should be very glad if it were possible to keep the common people from thinking about government--but

on the relationship between "boss" and labourer.

Hewison makes a detailed study of John James's influence on *The Stones of Venice*. Through Ruskin's many references to his prose in the letters to his father, it is evident that John James was concerned about the marketability of the work--and that he had his son on the defensive. Hewison says,

I do not wish to exaggerate this point (John James may even have been right). The very first piece that Ruskin sent back was the description of the journey through the alleys of Venice to St.

Mark's, and this delighted his father--but even

here there is evidence of censorship. (p.143)

Hewison compares Ruskin's hand-written manuscript to the published text of this passage. A cut-and-paste job had been done on the original, passages had been crossed out and new, or connecting phrases, had been written over top of them. Hewison concludes that what was offensive to John James had been removed. The passage on St. Mark's,

is just one example of John James's editorial

control of the text, and there are other passages

since the invention of printing it is not ... the only question is how to make them of exactly the proper weight in the state and no more.

He is developing an idea, that was to be a part of his second letter to the *Times*, that would give greater voting power to the upper class--which naturally included him and his father (John Bradley, p.233).

with comments by John James in pencil in the margin and with strikings-out in the text. Some of these Ruskin obeyed; others he ignored.

(p.145)

The changes that Hewison notes are in content, but the tone of the passage, the style and the language remain Ruskin's, minus some of the description.

Ruskin wanted his father's approval, but he also wanted to fulfil his own vision of what *The Stones of Venice* would be. The letters, again, supply a one-sided view of the situation. Ruskin was defensive and tried to justify his work, his time and the expenditure of his father's money. His idea of the necessity of a large readership appears to be somewhat at odds with his father's, although he was using the work as a forum to display and push his opinions. An audience was necessary to him.

I got (a) letter from Mr. Smith yesterday--very polite and kind as usual, but containing the somewhat unpleasant information that neither the *Stones* nor *Pre-Raphaelism* are selling--I am always 'going to write something that is to carry off the dead weight with it'--and never doing it-- I must really make this second volume as popular as I can and put a few plates in it and pretty ones-- There is no use in writing fine books, if nobody will read them. But I do very much wonder that the

Pre-Raphaelism don't sell--for I don't very often read my own books, after the first look through them when they come out--but that pamphlet tempts me to read it, as if it were a stranger's work--and it seems to me full of interest, and rather amusing too, and I can't imagine why it doesn't sell-- As for my having any reputation--if people won't pay 18 pence for so much of my writing--it is mere humbug. (John Bradley, p.81)

Although they didn't share a common reason for wanting success through sales--they both wanted sales. In a footnote to this letter, John Bradley details the Ruskins' concerns:

The slow sale of *The Stones of Venice* I and the pamphlet, *Pre-Raphaelism*, caused both Ruskin and his father, who was his son's literary agent, some irritation. The elder Ruskin was doubtless disappointed by the small return upon his investment. And Ruskin himself felt he had been dealt with harshly and perhaps unfairly. (p.81fn)

Ruskin, while not always totally agreeing with his father, did respect his judgement, especially in business matters. The value he placed in his father's opinion is summed up in a sentence that closes one of his early letters. In reference to *Modern Painters Volume II*, he says, "I am most thankful you like the second volume so much", but he

continued with a question that must have puzzled him a great deal, "but I thought you had just read it a year ago" (John Bradley, p.15)? What is he asking: had John James, in fact, not read it a year ago or why would John James bother to reread it so soon? There is a tone of insecurity evident in the question.

When John James's responses to manuscript pages were positive, Ruskin replied with pleasure, but also he anticipated some of his father's criticism, and on October 8, 1851, wrote encouragingly about his work: "The book is going on very nicely--and I think will be very interesting" (John Bradley, p.34). By November he had to explain why the second volume was not ready to publish, even in part:

I find that as to printing any of the volume till it is finished, it will be impossible for almost everything I read gives me some little notes to add--and there are perpetual gaps left which cannot be filled up till the book nears the close.

(John Bradley, p.72)

He did feel concern for his father's wish for an interesting book. On December 28th he asked his father to elaborate on something he had said about seeing a difference in Ruskin's writing when he was far away (John Bradley, p.108), and in his own defence, the letter of January 18th tried to explain why the manuscript he was sending from Venice did not have the polish of his published work:

I was reading over some passages of the *Seven Lamps* this evening, and I certainly do not wonder at your finding considerable inferiority in the text I am sending you. I took great pains with most of the *Seven Lamps*, and I recollect--as I read the passages, the labour they cost me--some of them being as highly finished as it is I believe--possible for me to finish prose.

He went on to explain how long he had spent writing *Seven Lamps* compared to the time he felt he was able to spend on his new manuscript, and says, "I don't think my powers are diminished", but

There may however be a little want of spirit in me at present owing partly to the watching my health and partly to the various little mortifications and anxieties which while they do not disturb me in any straight-forward work of inquiry or examination, may perhaps without my knowing it, deaden the tone, and render lax the spring of a written sentence.... But I trust when you see the whole book together, with such retouching as I may be able to give it at home, that you will not think my twelve months in Venice have been misspent.

He then addressed one of his father's constant concerns, sales:

I should say that I have great confidence in producing an impression with it--but my confidence has been now too often disappointed-- I thought all the *Seven Lamps* would have sold within a year after the book was published.

He based this judgement on his sense of self-worth and superior ability,

and though I did not suppose myself to have as many friends as the hare-- I thought there were more than fifteen people in London who would have given a guinea for five drawings with which I had taken all the pains I could. So I will be confident no more, but finish what has cost me thus much labour as well as I can--and then trouble myself as little as I can about it. (John Bradley, pp.141-2)

The responsibility for the lack of sales, it seems, lay with the buying public which was unable to perceive the value of the work being offered to it.

Ruskin did offer other types of explanations to try to silence his father's complaints. It is perhaps both laughable and pathetic to read:

I enclose another sheet of St. Mark's--not particularly interesting I fear, this time. Somehow--it always seems to read ill in George's hand--he gives it a foolish look. (John Bradley, p.90)

And, he did hold out hope that his father's wishes for an interesting book would be realized:

You say you are glad the history--&c--is to come first. I believe in this book, every chapter will contain some opening and closing passages of interest, and the dryer or bony parts, in which the strength of the book consists, will never be so long as to be unmanageable--such pieces, even, as I now send, will not be altogether uninteresting when the plates are at the side, and I think as I read them over that I shall be able to abridge them considerably when the book is quite done. (John Bradley, p.119)

He was trying to appease his father through reassurance, but he was not letting go of his own goals for his book. He knew what he wanted to do and, like a wilful child, he would forge ahead in spite of the sound advice he was offered because he believed in himself.

The Stones of Venice stands out in the Ruskinian canon as one of the most successful works, and one of the most important--not least because,

It is the only one of his books for which he had a predetermined plan, a plan that he largely carried out. It is the only major work in which he began by saying what he was going to say and then, with

minor qualifications, said it. (Hewison, p.131)
 At the same time as Ruskin was the teacher, he was also the student. New inquiries led him off in unforeseen directions --unforeseen even by him.

The turning of my mind to another subject is very useful for a day or two--for in working on the details of my book, I was beginning to lose sight of its general plan and pursuing stray game too far, here and there--the leaving it off a little is like going back to see the effect of a picture: and I see what I ought to leave out, or slur over.
 (John Bradley, p.261)

With *The Stones of Venice* he was able to keep his direction firmly in mind, and he was able to retain control. In mid-January 1852, he wrote to his father in reference to the pages of manuscript he was sending to John James:

I have no doubt as I go over the sheets you are now receiving, that at least one third of their bulk will be evaporated--and the remaining two thirds rearranged and enriched, but I cannot do this until the whole matter of the book is either before me or in my head. (John Bradley, p.135)

While on the one hand he had a firmly stated purpose given in Chapter 1 Volume 1, he was, on the other, still researching and exploring and unsure of the "whole matter of the book". Hewison says,

Anyone reading ... 'The Quarry' cannot, if he or she is at all familiar with the works of Ruskin, fail to be struck by the way in which he firmly states his purpose and makes his propositions plain. And anyone at all familiar with the works of John Ruskin will of course expect him neither to carry out his stated purpose nor to demonstrate the proposition he has laid down. (Hewison, p.131)⁷

That he did was the result of the fact that his discoveries backed up those initial propositions. On February 22, 1852, he wrote that he was resting after "getting my work into its final form--subject only now to contradiction--not to expansion" (John Bradley, p.191). On April 16th he described a happy discovery:

I hope the enclosed pieces of MS will be rather more interesting to you than those you have had lately. They are so to me as finally settling a question which has cost me much trouble to investigate: more perhaps as a victory over difficulties than for the actual value of the results. But it is curious, among the other

⁷ Interestingly, the way he saw himself on this point was summed up in a letter dated 25 March 1852:

It is an immense point for me especially to show people that I will do what I say, and that I neither change my opinions nor my purposes (John Bradley, p.229).

coincidences which offer themselves as I work the thing more completely out, that the first hammer should have been lifted against the old palace, in the very year, from which I have dated the *Visible* commencement of the Fall of Venice, 1424. (John Bradley, p.250)

In contrast to the experience Ruskin was enjoying with *The Stones of Venice* was the experience he described having with *Modern Painters*. Again referring to a letter he wrote to his father, it is possible to see his impressions and feelings following publication of the first two volumes: "When I wrote the first volume of *Modern Painters* I only understood about *one third* of my subject...."

I wrote 2nd volume of *Modern Painters* in the first astonishment of [new understanding,] I then perceived a thousand things that I wanted to know before I could write any more and 1846 and 7 were passed in floundering about, and getting my new self together. (John Bradley, pp. 179-81)

When he wrote volume I of *The Stones of Venice* his ideas were well enough together that he was able to envision, roughly, where the work would take him. And he was pleased when new studies reinforced old conclusions.

I am happy to say ... the book is now coming well together. I see both ends of it in one view which is comfortable, and I am very happy to find that

my farther investigations confirm and fit in delightfully with my first chapter.

Even though volume 1 of *The Stones of Venice* had already been published, he was unsure of what he would meet during the course of his research.

You will see that that first chapter promises three divisions of the main subject: The Greek or Byzantine period, the Transitional period, and the Gothic period--the last mainly represented by the Ducal palace: Now I said at page 4. of Vol 1. that the second period of the career of Venice opened with 120 years--the central struggle of her life, beginning in 1300, finishing in 1418--or--in the next sentence--five years later, i.e. 1423. Now I knew when I wrote this that the Ducal palace was fourteenth century work--but I did not know what I know now that the first stone of it was laid in 1301, the last in 1423!

Of course he did discover some adjustment was necessary--but he felt more than comfortable with that. His pleasure was finding the evidence to support his earlier theories, "I am especially delighted to find my 3rd or Gothic period limited to the very years which in the first chapter I gave for the central struggle of Venetian life" (John Bradley, p.160).

Chapter 3: *The Stones of Venice*

This chapter considers how *The Stones of Venice* reflects its author. That is not to say that it is an autobiography; in fact, while acknowledging many of the self-revelatory elements, an argument is put forth that disputes that theory. Rather than showing something of himself, Ruskin created a "self" that he wanted the world to recognize, and to remember. He used *The Stones of Venice* to eulogize himself; he is buried under the "stones", so far under that all there is of him has not, as yet, been uncovered. In the Biblical sense of the word, "stones" are "testes", and Ruskin perceived himself to be the victim of his own warped sexuality. His stones were dragging him down to the lowest depths, burying him so deeply and for all eternity that *The Stones of Venice* is, and always will be, the figurative repository of his remains.

As has been discussed, Ruskin's mind was a complex maze, with passages leading to different compartments, the contents of which never (fully) integrated. To be sure, there were relationships between compartments, slow seepages, as it were, that formed some connections between various aspects of his personality. But, separate and distinct compartments remained separate and distinct, and this is reflected in *The Stones of Venice* where many seemingly unrelated issues temporarily coalesce through the

strength of his rhetoric.

This chapter approaches *The Stones of Venice* by considering it in terms of three literary types. Autobiography has already been mentioned, and it is the first mode to be discussed. The second is *The Stones of Venice* as a travel history, and the third is Ruskin's didacticism as a Victorian Sage. The format of this chapter may well seem to be as much a labyrinth as was Ruskin's mind. Issues run together, and overlap each other, here as they do in *The Stones of Venice*. An attempt has been made to place each point where it seems to be the most relevant. Relationships to other issues will be obvious, and a directional flow may seem to be lacking, but each aspect of the chapter has been developed in a manner that supports the particular subject that is under discussion. Like a maze, there are forks in the path of inquiry, and after exploring one trail for as far as it goes (or is necessary at the time), it is important to return to the fork and to explore another path.

The Stones of Venice has been called autobiographical, and certainly there is room to argue this point of view.

An autobiography, if one places it in relation to the life from which it comes is more than a history of the past and more than a book currently circulating in the world, it is also,

intentionally or not, a monument of the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition. (Olney, p.35)

But, it must be honest. And *The Stones of Venice* is a lie. It is a recreation of the past in terms of a distinctly different, and far more recent, past in an attempt to build, not a monument, but a mausoleum.

One discovers from certain autobiographies, it comes in the end to the same thing to deny the internal world of the self as to deny the external world of objects (Olney, p.35),

but before any denial, there must be knowledge, because "autobiography begins with self-knowledge" (Olney, p.4) and "knowledge must start ... with the mind and the self" (Olney, p.16). Ruskin's self-knowledge was a chaotic jumble of ideas with no common, solid foundation, and no unifying force. Truths, from various sources, untruths and prejudices fought each other but never melded into a single focused mind that could acknowledge itself. Denial then becomes a defense-mechanism working to save the self from the self, as much as to protect it from outside scrutiny.

The Stones of Venice is not an autobiography any more than *Praeterita* is one. Landow says Ruskin does not define himself in *Praeterita*: "For Ruskin, no such being as economic, aesthetic, or intellectual man exists"; and for Ruskin, the only purpose of *Praeterita* is to show how he

learned the things he taught. "According to him [Ruskin], there exists only the human being, all of whose experiences are interconnected, entwined, relevant" (p.273). But within Ruskin there was no unity of purpose or design; while influences came from endless sources, and in a variety of ways, each retained a distinct character. Ruskin does not talk about growth as a result of new experiences, instead he suggests a mind that is compartmentalized, and while there may be "interconnection", each is "relevant" as a separate entity. The ability to interpret new experience comes from knowledge that is already contained in a compartment.

Foremost in Ruskin's knowledge was the Bible, and through it he came to understand the validity of interpretation:

Interpretation explicitly enters the tale of his life when he relates the importance of his childhood reading of the Bible: 'It had never entered my head to doubt a word of the Bible, though I saw well enough already that its words were to be understood otherwise than I had been taught'.... He soon learned that even the Bible, which evangelicals took as the literal word of God, could not simply be read. It demanded interpretations. (Landow, p.74)

As Abrams notes,

There is the striking tendency of Christian exegetes to read the myriad intervening events as

either echoes or prophecies of the nodal episodes
 --that is as reflections of man's first
 disobedience; as either prefigurations or later
 reminiscences of the Incarnation and Passion; or
 as prefigurations of the ultimate redemption.

(1971, p.35)

The trust of this interpretive method, backward to an
 originating act, or forward to an eschatological end, is an
 organizing principle which, all too conveniently, allows the
 real, but desperate, details to be ignored.

When Ruskin married Effie, is it possible that he was
 grasping at salvation, and when she failed him, his hope for
 redemption died, and with lost hope came a desire, or need
 to punish her for her failure? Could Ruskin have recognized
 within himself his personal fall, dating from the time in
 his adolescence when he first practiced sexual self-
 gratification? In effect, he lost his virginity to himself,
 and his weaker feminine self compelled him to habitually
 repeat his sin, in an on-going androgynous intercourse. His
 masculine self was constantly being drawn down by the
 feminine. If, though, he could transpose this feminine part
 of his nature onto another, he would be left with his
 "virginal" masculine self that could enter into a sexual
 union that was sanctioned by the church and medical science;
 he would be redeemed. His plan to recreate Effie has been
 well documented. Their marriage was never consummated, Rose

says, because the sight of Effie's mature body destroyed for Ruskin the possibility of normal sexual relations (p.56), with her or any woman. The immature, feminine side of his personality forever aligned itself with "other" little girls.

The fact that Ruskin in later life was attracted to very young girls, falling in love at the age of forty with a ten-year-old, supports the conjecture that his image of the ideal female body was immature. (Rose, p.56)

While he was researching and writing *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin knew that his marriage would never be consummated, and that he could expect retribution for his on-going transgression.

Although Effie remained physically faithful to him, Ruskin regarded some of her actions "as forms of misconduct and disloyalty", even though when writing to his parents he claimed to be supporting her independent social life.

That Effie wasn't sexually unfaithful to him didn't of course prevent Ruskin ... from considering her so, or from transposing her mental dissonance into larger, vaguer forms of betrayal. (Ellmann, p.78)

Her real betrayal was her failure to save him from himself. Ruskin's penchant for laying blame on the other, or removing himself from any situation that had the potential to find

him at fault, led him to transpose his feelings towards Effie into a commentary "on the virtues and defects of the feminine character" in *The Stones of Venice*. "To Ruskin Venice is always she ... and the gender is not merely a form of speech but an image to be enforced in detail" (Ellmann, p.79).

Ellmann argues that,

Ruskin distinguishes two stages, with medieval Venice as Virgin and Renaissance Venice as whore. The moment of transition is ... the moment of copulation, and the moment of copulation is therefore the fall. (p.79)

"This makes the metaphorical and dramatic movement of *The Stones of Venice*, the city's degradation from chaste medieval maiden to Renaissance whore, an autobiographical symbol" (Alexander Bradley, p.35). In this respect, it is worth noting that Olney distinguishes "world view" as "a vision held not by the world but of the world" (p.4). Based on his compartmentalized view of the world, and Venice as the location of Effie's defection, Ruskin transferred his feelings for her, and through her to all mature women, onto the city of Venice. "If this seems far-fetched", Alexander Bradley says of Ellmann's "psychologically darker interpretation of events" (p.34),

it is nonetheless undeniable that Ruskin worked hard throughout the entire project of *The Stones*

of Venice to 'personalize' things as far as possible, partly by emphasizing, perhaps over-emphasizing, what he saw as the close parallels between England and Venice. (p.35)

These parallels form the basis of English belief in itself as inheritor of the Venetian mantle of glory.

Ruskin, as has been said, associated the fall with a first experience of coitus: "consummation and defilement were irrevocably united for him in his life and his criticism":

Ruskin's revulsions extended from coupling to begetting to having been begot. He had more trouble than most people in allowing that he was himself the product of his parents' intercourse. (Ellmann, p.80)

Of the questions that arise from this statement, two stand out: first, why, then, did he marry, and second, how did he see his mother? The evidence seems irrefutable that at the time of his marriage, he expected to consummate it. Could marriage, in fact, have been the least of the evils open to him? On the premise that he truly wanted to cure himself (or have Effie cure him), did he feel that he had the strength of character to overcome a revulsion he felt towards sexual intercourse? Was it a case of mind over mind; his fear of damnation over a physical revulsion that was also rooted in his mind?

And what of his mother? Ellmann says, "In Ruskin's mind his mother had immaculately passed from maid to mother without ever becoming a wife" (pp.80-1). The protestant faith had superimposed on the image of the virgin the ideal of the wife, so it is not easy to draw the assumption that Ruskin's distaste was founded in religious doctrine. Nevertheless, Ruskin had reconceived his mother as a virgin (as he had hoped to do with himself?), thereby making it possible for him to pay homage to her. Interestingly, there is a

peculiar and willful juggling with dates throughout *Stones*, dating ... the actual fall of the city with ludicrous specificity and for no very convincing reason, to May 8, 1418, exactly four hundred years before his own conception--his mother's fall from innocence. (Alexander Bradley, p.35)

This calculation is tentatively put forth by Ellmann, and is picked up by Alexander Bradley as a telling fact in the discussion of Ruskin's personal imposition on *The Stones of Venice*.

Underlying any autobiography is self-knowledge; underlying *The Stones of Venice* is fear, insecurity and anger. Faced with the prospect of his own death and sterility, Ruskin used *The Stones of Venice* to build a mausoleum for himself. The epitaph reads what he wanted the

world to know. Using Ellmann's calculation for the date of his conception, his date of birth is present, too. The date of his death is missing. What is certain, is that it will come as a swift and demanding retribution from God. As "Ruskin cannot bring himself to sketch out 'the steps of her [Venice's] final ruin'" (Ellmann, p.80), he could not predict his own punishment. The only certainty was that it would come, and that concept was always problematic for Ruskin.

With respect to *The Stones of Venice*, Ellmann, citing Wilde, notes a connection between autobiography and non-fiction:

The Stones of Venice will always stand primarily as a work of art criticism. But criticism, as Wilde said, is the only civilized form of autobiography, and it is as a fragment--a large fragment--of Ruskin's autobiography that the book claims an added interest. In novels and poems we take for granted that some personal elements will be reflected, but in works of non-fiction we are more reluctant, and prefer to postulate an upper air of abstraction in which the dispassionate mind contemplates and orders materials that already have form and substance. Yet even the most impersonal of writers, Thucydides, writing about the fortunes of another city, shaped his events,

as Cornford suggests, by preconceptions absorbed from Greek tragedy. Ruskin made no pretence of Thucydidean impersonality, and the influence of his reading of the Bible is manifest rather than latent. But some problems of his own life also were projected onto the Venetian scene. (Ellmann, p.78)

Wilde was arguing that art criticism is a form of "spiritual" autobiography which, rather than recording the physical (and perhaps irrelevant) events of the critic's external life, recorded instead the mental events, and, in particular, the response to a work of art. By displaying taste and temperament, the critic is revealing something of his "being", but not of his "doing". Wilde was forced to mask some of the events in his own life; they were inadmissible in polite society. He could, however, reveal his "true identity" in the "spiritual" realm of art. With Ruskin, there are some differences. Wilde's is a fully self-conscious art, and that is not always the case with Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*. While it may be self-revelatory, it is not consistently or self-consciously autobiographical. Indeed, the work may be seen as an overt (covert?) attempt by Ruskin to hide behind closed doors, or at least to keep various aspects of the self separate from each other, each securely locked in its own compartment. It is not a key to greater understanding of the man, although

it is revealing of some of the attitudes of Ruskin's time and situation.

While he was researching and writing *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin was still professing to be secure with his belief in Evangelical Christianity. In a letter to John James, dated the 28th December (1851), he wrote about his uncertainty for his future, but he did inform his father, and, through him, his mother, that he would not have a career in the church, and that his parents' long-time wish for him would not come to pass:

I always, before, had some faint idea of becoming a clergyman either abroad or at home: but after the experiences I have had of the effects of my intercourse in a casual way with society for the last three years, I have given up all thoughts of it. I can do nothing right but when I am quiet and alone: But still I cannot settle my mind, because I always feel that though I am not fit to be a clergyman, it is my own fault that I am not: i.e. though I don't love people, and am made ill by being disturbed, and am over excited in discussion and so on--I ought to love people more --and ought to like to see them--and to do them good--and I can never tell but some change might come over my religious feelings which would make what is now my poison become my food: I can see

that my natural quiet disposition and highly nervous temperament and excitable circulation are exaggerated the one by selfishness--the other by pride and vanity, and if I could conquer the evil principles, the natural temper and habit of body would be much modified also. (John Bradley, pp.108-9)

As with much of his writing, this passage is packed with ideas that seem to tumble over each other: he uses his health, a matter of on-going interest to his parents, as his defense against entering the church; he lists his sins as ones that overtly contradict his (and his mother's) Evangelical faith. Then he holds out hope that it all may change--surely an olive branch that he knew would mollify his parents and give them hope that they would not have to give up their thirty-plus-year dream for their son. More importantly, his hope was that he would conquer the evil that his parents were unaware of, his "habit of body" that was leading him to damnation.

The Stones of Venice is "the hugest and most exhausting scholarly project [Ruskin] ever attempted". Its "polemical aim" is to prove that the moral temper of a nation is written and may be read in its art.

Like its subject, the book is cacophonous, jumbling styles and aims: the voice grows patient

like a teacher's, rhapsodic like a poet's, and solemn like a preacher's in the course of an exposition that is at once a textbook, a guidebook, a history, an Evangelical tract.

(Sawyer, pp.91-2)

Sawyer supports Elizabeth Helsinger's thesis that the "form" of *The Stones of Venice* "draws upon the body of contemporary travellers' guides in which 'history is approached through travel and travel is experienced as history'" (p.92).

Helsinger defends Ruskin's assertion that the work is a "history" (an assertion that is more often refuted by scholars) because "Ruskin's term history had, for early Victorian readers, meanings with which his own work is in complete accord". Helsinger argues that,

Ruskin's book, shaped to meet a traveller-reader's practical needs and formal expectations, belongs to a loose genre of travel-histories.... Common to all these works is an implicit identification between the activity of the reader exploring history and that of the tourist exploring picturesque landscapes. (p.173)

This places the writer in the position of guide and teacher --leading the tourist and informing the student of history.

Ruskin changed his own attitude towards *The Stones of Venice* when he admitted that "he now saw also the fictional character of the laws of history as set forth" (Wilenski

p.68). Notwithstanding Helsinger's argument, in 1864, he wrote

'There is no law of history ... any more than of a kaleidoscope. With certain bits of glass--shaken so and so--you will get pretty figures, Heaven only knows ... the wards of a Chubb's lock are infinite in their changes. Is the Key of Destiny made on a less complex principle'? (Wilenski, pp.68-9)

Wilenski associated Ruskin's new awareness of his own work "with the collapse of his manic confidence" (p.68). This lends credence to Alexander Bradley's proposition that Ruskin represented a fourth stage of "English literary response to Italy" (p.3). But, as Ellmann commented, it also undermines one of the personalized agendas that he had identified in the work.

This renunciation of historical law was intellectually daring, and emotionally as well, for it meant that he was trying to alter those 'pretty figures' which earlier had enabled him to lock his own conception and marriage into the history of Venice. (p.82)

Ruskin, with time, was able to see more clearly that, in fact, *The Stones of Venice* was a panicked reaction to his own fears. As his faith in Evangelical doctrine had faltered, so had his ability to believe in personal

salvation; hence the fear. Familiarity with his fears caused them to dwindle to the point where he could look more calmly and objectively at the root of his reaction to a time and a place. Venice ceased to represent his own descent into everlasting hell, and his subjectivity was replaced with a new kind of honesty.

In his semi-fictionalized report on Venice, Ruskin moved on from the position of guide/historian to that of critic of contemporary society. George Landow identifies Ruskin as one of the "greatest practitioners" of a "characteristically Victorian literary mode", that of the Victorian Sage, as defined by Holloway.

Works in this mode do not attempt to convince primarily by means of rational, logical argumentation ... they instead imply indirect, poetical, or rhetorical means.

The literature created by the Victorian Sage is

a form of non-fiction that adapts the techniques of the Victorian sermon, neoclassical satire, classical rhetoric, and Old Testament prophecy to create credibility for the interpretations of contemporary phenomena made by a figure, the sage, who stands apart from his audience and society.

The Victorian Sage is, above all else, an interpreter, an exegete, one who can read the

Signs of the Times. His essential, defining claim is that he understands matters that others do not --and that his understanding is of crucial value to those who see with duller eyes. (pp.89-90)

Holloway starts from the assumption that there was, on the sage's part, an "interest of a general or speculative kind in what the world is like, where man stands in it, and how he should live" (p.1), and set against this is a belief that "traditional outlooks and the traditional credos were outmoded" (p.2). Ruskin, by identifying England as the successor to Venetian power, was able to predict England's future, were his warnings to be heeded. The fact that Ruskin's premise was less than sound does not detract from his presentation of "prophetic utterances" (Holloway, p.3). In true sage fashion, he amplified "apparently trivial phenomena" to facts that have important meanings (Landow, pp.89-90). Ruskin also applied this trait in a more literal manner. He was able to see detail in the crumbling stone of the decaying city that others overlooked, or took for granted. This ability to see what others could not in minute architectural detail became the foundation for his much anthologized discussion on the nature of the Gothic workman.

Alexander Bradley identifies two questions that must have deeply disturbed Ruskin. Although he considered the Venetian to be "'far superior to the rest of the Italians'",

he still saw them as base and stupid, so how could "a country peopled by such contemptible creatures" produce great art? "It is a question closely related to the other, and even more troublesome, one--how can a despicable and superstitious faith produce great religious art" (p.23)? He was unable to resolve either question because they drew in too many of his fundamental beliefs in the superiority of England and in Evangelical Protestantism. If, as Abrams says, for the nineteenth century

A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulses of feeling and embodying the combined product of poets' perceptions, thoughts, and feelings (1975, p.22),

then Ruskin's dilemma was caused by the necessity of acknowledging the innate goodness of the creator--Italian and Catholic--when acknowledging the greatness of the creation.

Certainly a deeply inbred anti-Catholicism struggled hard within Ruskin with an admiration he could not suppress for works of art created by Catholic artists in a Catholic society. How to admire Italian churches while despising the Italian Church, that was his problem, and the virulence of his attacks on the Italian people reflects that tension. (Alexander Bradley, p.23)

While Ruskin's religious opinions may well have been in flux, he had by no means abandoned them. He continued to read, study and interpret the Bible and the prayer book. Daily prayers involved all the members of his household. He continued to discover authority in his God and in His relationship to man as it worked its way down through an established hierarchy to the lowest level of common man. He used this formulation in his argument in the "Nature of Gothic"; it will be examined in some detail in a later portion of this chapter. Here, though, there is another path to follow: in his study of the 62nd Psalm, Ruskin detected a change in tone in David's words as he moved his attention from the upper to the lower classes. A change in tone is tantamount to a shift in position in the relationship between speaker and audience. It is a ploy that Ruskin put to good use in *The Stones of Venice*.

Ruskin was sensitive to the voice used by writers. In his letters he twice complained about the readability of sermons written by Mr. Melville and forwarded to him by his parents. On the 5th of January, 1852, he wrote to his father, "We read the sermon on advent, Yesterday-- It must have been very impressive when delivered--but is a little loose in arrangement for reading" (John Bradley, p.125). On February 2nd of the same year, he wrote:

I read yesterday Mr Melville's sermon on the shutting up by the law--but, do you know, I begin

to fear Mr Melville is either falling off--or I am changing my taste-- There is always a good idea somewhere in the sermon--and commonly at the foundation of it, but it is so repeated and turned over and over that I get tired--and there is a great deal, it seems to me, which requires oratorical delivery to make it forceful. Instead of Mr Melville's delivery being really bad, I believe it to be highly studied--and that many a sentence which is nothing in print, becomes a great deal when spoken--partly because really rendered more impressive by his vital energy--and partly because what fault there may be in it--is laid on the score of the delivery. (John Bradley, p.161)

Ruskin was accustomed to an oral tradition of literature. His father's reading aloud to the family helped him to develop an ear for the spoken word. He described the tenor of his father's voice in *Praeterita*, and the type of writing to which it was most suited:

My father was an absolutely beautiful reader of the *best* poetry and prose;--of Shakespeare, Pope, Spenser, Byron, and Scott; as of Goldsmith, Addison and Johnson, Lighter ballad poetry he had not fineness of ear to do justice to. (p.54)

Ruskin claimed the ability to judge what is better spoken

than read, and what difference there can be in presentation. In the role of critic, he identified a major problem that comes with reading what was written to be spoken, but he was not always able to apply the same judgement to his own work. Where he sermonized in *The Stones of Venice*, the impression arises that it would flow better in an oral delivery, but as reading material it is convoluted and repetitious. In the conclusion to *The Stones of Venice* he writes of the act of creating: "it is the whole living creature, body and soul". And, he calls on his audience to give as much of themselves:

I am not to spend my utmost spirit, and give all
my strength and life to my work, while you,
spectator or hearer, will give me only the
attention of half your soul. (*Works* v9, p.181)

He addressed himself to the watching, hearing witness, in terms that would "speak" very well. And because of the repetitious detail he expressed in clear, concise terms, understanding can easily be achieved through hearing.

He was not unaware of this characteristic of his writing, but what may seem a too repetitive pattern to a reader was, to him, a planned approach: "I have always tried to get one step to follow from another in true geometrical series", but not in a straight progression, and the readers who could not follow him were at fault.

People in general call me a bad reasoner--begging
their pardon, because my reasoning is a little too

consistent for them to follow without some pains--
and because if they lose a line--they cannot
recover from it. (John Bradley, p.144)

He overlooked, or ignored, the fact that it was easy to
"lose a line" because the temptation when reading what he
has written in his "patient teacher" voice, and he has gone
over and over any given point, is always to skip ahead. He
highly resented criticism of his work, especially when he
was accused of inconsistency because the fault was obviously
with the receiver:

I could sit down and write a poem--with a good
deal of nonsense in it--in a couple of hours--if a
reviewer said it was nonsense, I felt he had a
right to his opinion and did not care. But when I
work over a volume for two years--and weigh every
word in it--and a dim brained rascal like this of
the Guardian walks up to me and tells me 'half of
my statements are diametrically opposite to the
others', simply because the poor long eared brute
cannot see that a thistle leaf has two sides, it
does worry me considerably, and makes me very
angry, and yet depresses me at the same time.

(John Bradley, pp. 200-1)

The role of a patient teacher is to help the reader under-
stand. Ruskin displayed considerable patience in *The Stones*
of Venice, and true to the role model of a teacher, he

employed techniques to ensure his ideas were being grasped-- techniques he employed to the point of tedium.

These characteristics of Ruskin--guide, teacher, sage--disguise the other side of the man, the "harassed and pathetic young man" (John Bradley, p.xii) who was hiding behind the image of superior judge and authoritative spokesman. In a letter written to his father on September 9, 1851, Ruskin says, "I cannot write with a modesty I do not feel" (John Bradley, p.7). He was actually defending his position as an art critic--but the attitude applies to all areas where he considered himself better informed than the average person. He was the educated arbiter of taste. This feeling of superiority that he applied to his own judgement had been instilled in him. He had been taught that he had a mission to teach; he came to believe it of himself and in himself. Abse quotes John James as writing to ten-year-old Ruskin:

you are blessed with a fine capacity and even Genius and you owe it as a Duty to the author of your Being and the giver of your Talents to cultivate your powers and to use them in his service and for the benefit of your fellow Creatures. You may be doomed to enlighten a People by your Wisdom and to adorn an age by your Learning. It would be sinful in you to let the

powers of your mind lie dormant through idleness or want of perseverance when they may at their maturity aid the cause of Truth and of Religion and enable you to become in many ways a Benefactor to the Human Race. (p.24)

This was a heavy load to carry, but one that Ruskin assumed as his duty to God and to those who didn't possess his vision.

With his superior powers came the dilemma of how to present them to those he wished to educate. In his discussion on the Victorian Sage, Landow says,

The Victorian audience is only willing to pay attention to someone extraordinary and set apart from the majority of men, but any claim that one possesses special insight threatens to drive it away. (p.94)

Ruskin's need for an audience was more than a teacher's need for students; he needed it to fulfil his father's long-standing dream for him. There had to be evidence of an audience, and that meant sales. A large readership would not only give a healthy return on his father's investment, it would prove his father's belief, now shared by Ruskin, that he truly was "a Benefactor to the Human Race".

To maintain his position of superiority, Ruskin placed himself outside the text and above his audience at those times when he wished to criticise contemporary society,

thereby removing any personal claim to the indictments being set forth. He moved freely from the positions of guide and teacher, written in the first person, to the loftier position of father, written in the second person, to the critical stance of judge, written in the third person. "The Nature of Gothic", often referred to as the centrepiece of *The Stones of Venice*, is a good example of how he used this ploy. When defining Gothic architecture, he writes,

I am not sure when the word 'Gothic' was first applied to the architecture of the North; but I presume that, whatever the date of its original usage, it was intended to imply reproach, and to express the barbaric character of the nations among whom that architecture arose. (*Works*, v8, p.155)

Here is the scholar, leading his students in an inquiry that arises out of his study and knowledge. A few pages later, he is still a part of the text but is drawing his audience in with him as he shifts to the first person plural:

But the modern English mind has this much in common with that of the Greek, that it intensely desires, in all things, the utmost completion or perfection compatible with their nature. This is a noble character in the abstract, but becomes ignoble when it causes us ...

("Us": who but the most patient father would involve

himself with something he so obviously disagrees with?)

... to forget the relative dignities of that nature itself, and to prefer the perfectness of the lower nature to the imperfection of the higher.

And then the father becomes sterner, albeit still a part of the text,

And therefore, while in all things that we see, or do, we are to desire perfection, and strive for it, we are nevertheless not to set the meaner thing, in its narrow accomplishment, above the nobler thing, in its mighty progress; not to esteem smooth minuteness above shattered majesty; not to prefer mean victory to honorable defeat; not to lower the level of our aim, that we may more surely enjoy the complacency of success.

(Works, v8, p.160)

Then he removes himself entirely, midparagraph, but keeps his reader in place. First he says,

And this is what we have to do with all our laborers; to look for the thoughtful part of them, and get that out of them, whatever we lose for it, whatever faults and errors we are obliged to take with it. For the best that is in them cannot manifest itself, but in company with much error.

And now comes the pronoun shift, and it looks innocent

enough,

Understand this clearly: You can teach a man to draw a straight line, and to cut one; to strike a curved line, and to carve it; and to copy and carve any number of given lines or forms, with admirable speed and perfect precision; and you find his work perfect of its kind: but if you ask him to think about any of these forms, to consider if he cannot find any better in his own head, he stops; his execution becomes hesitating; he thinks and ten to one he thinks wrong; ten to one he makes a mistake in the first touch he gives to his work as a thinking being. But you have made a man of him for all that. He was only a machine before, an animated tool.

Then the shift becomes complete. With the second person pronoun comes a new tone that denotes the responsibility of the other, and the reader is on his own:

And observe, you are put to stern choice in this matter. You must either make^a a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both.
(*Works* v8, p.161)

The distance Ruskin has achieved in this passage places him

^a In the *Works* the word here is "made"; in other editions it is "make". I have opted for the grammatically correct choice.

well above the foolish: he knows what is to be done, but will the child-reader accept it? Finally, the shift is made to the third person: it is an indictment,

It is verily this degradation of the operative into a machine, which, more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nations everywhere into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling for a freedom of which they cannot explain the nature to themselves. (*Works* v8, p.163)

From his position, outside and above not only the text, but also the reader, Ruskin can see the problem, its causes and its solution.

In order to avoid any possibility of his ideas or himself being rejected by his audience, Ruskin takes his readers with him outside the text, to witness the results of contemporary problems that he assures them, are not caused by their indifference:

Never had the upper classes so much sympathy with the lower, or charity for them, as they have this day, and yet never were they so much hated by them: for, of old, the separation between the noble and the poor was merely a wall built by law; now it is a veritable difference in level of standing, and there is pestilential air at the bottom of it.

Then the teacher reasserts himself with a reassurance that the perceived problem is not (solely) the result of the middle-class reader's actions--the lower class is falling down in its responsibility:

I know not if the day is ever to come when the nature of right freedom will be understood, and when men will see that to obey another man, to labor for him, yield reverence to him or to his place, is not slavery. It is often the best kind of liberty,--liberty from care. (*Works* v8, pp.163-4)

Ruskin's personal view of life, based on his own experiences has been brought into play: to obey a master is to find freedom--to subject the individual will to that of a greater authority will, in fact, give life a noble meaning.

Ruskin turns his advice into a parable:

The man who says to one, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, has, in most cases, more sense of restraint and difficulty than the man who obeys him. The movements of the one are hindered by the burden on his shoulder; of the other, by the bridle on his lips: there is no way by which the burden may be lightened.

Ruskin, again through a pronoun shift, brings himself back into the text, but in an entirely different position. He is no longer the authority, but subjected, along with his

reader, to authority.

But we need not suffer from the bridle if we do not champ at it. To yield reverence to another, to hold ourselves and our lives at his disposal, is not slavery; often, it is the noblest state in which a man can live in this world. (*Works* v8, p.164)

Ruskin's Evangelical indoctrination is coming to the fore: all men are subservient, not only to earthly masters but to God, and His will must be obeyed in order to gain His favour.

In all ages and in all countries, reverence has been paid and sacrifice made by man to each other, not only without complaint but rejoicingly; and the famine, and peril, and sword, and all evil, and all shame, have been borne willingly in the causes of masters and kings; for all these gifts of the heart ennobled the men who gave, not less than the men who receive them, and nature prompted, and God rewarded the sacrifice.

Ruskin's thoughts take an abrupt shift here. Obedience is rewarded, but he doesn't deal with disobedience and its punishment; instead he looks at the masters, his readers, and at contemporary society:

But to feel their souls withering within them, unthanked, to find their whole being sunk into an

unrecognized abyss, to be counted off into a heap of mechanism, numbered with its wheels, and weighed with its hammer strokes;--this nature bade not,--this God blesses not,--this humanity for no long time is able to endure. (*Works* v8, pp.164-5)

There will be a retribution; a price must be paid, but what it is and when it will be demanded are concepts that Ruskin, typically, steered clear of. There was no doubt that punishment would follow, and its source would be divine; only time would tell, and little time at that.

Ruskin believed in a society based on social class, a concept that O'Reilly maintains evolved out of England's Industrial Revolution.

Class ... is not a thing, but a relationship between people. It is a relationship which can arouse feelings of solidarity or hostility, of rightness or wrongness [It is] the relationship in which they [groups of people] stand to their surroundings, both human and inanimate. (pp.10-11)

The two largest classes were the rich at the top and the poor at the bottom of the social scale (Altick, p.15). Social mobility was possible (that is not to say easy or frequent). Briggs quotes Mill as saying, "The most important distinguishing feature of 'modern life' was the fact 'that human beings are no longer born to their place in

life ... but are free to employ their faculties ... to achieve the lot which may appear to them most desirable'" (1959, p.405). This attitude is not reflected by Ruskin. In *Modern Painters* he says, a gentleman is "a man of pure race"--well bred as an animal may be well bred. The higher social classes have retained an understanding of this, but the lower classes "hold a falsehood,--namely, that race is of no consequence. It being precisely of as much consequence in man as it is in any other animal" (p.251). It takes more than ability and accumulated wealth to make an upper class gentleman; it takes breeding.

In his discussion on ornamental architecture in "The Nature of Gothic," Ruskin identifies three distinct classifications (or personalities): there is the past along with elements of the present at its worst, there is the best of the present, and there is a revolutionary future. These classifications are linked to ethos: he identifies servile ornament with the slaves of long ago, as well as the serfs of a more recent past in England. The group is comprised of those people who recognized the superiority of others and did their bidding without interjecting anything of their own personalities. This is also the position of the assembly-line factory worker, the assembly-line being one of the worst results of the Industrial Revolution. Ruskin equates what he calls constitutional ornamentation with the pure concept of England's constitutional monarchy, where each

individual is permitted self-expression, but also accepts his position within the class structure. (These are seeming contradictions that Ruskin saw working in harmony with each other.) Revolutionary ornament represents the idea of change for the sake of change. Revolution means the destruction of the existing order, and destroys, along with everything else, the good. Another sure way of destroying society in Ruskin's view is to introduce true equality for all. Ruskin maintains that national unity comes from a hierarchical social structure. Victorian England will be the best of times if each individual recognizes and accepts a position in the structure.

Ruskin criticizes Victorian England for, in fact, enslaving its working class, and for demanding the type of perfection that only automation can give. He is calling for the owners, or the bosses, to allow their workers a level of personal freedom and expression in their work. This, he says, is preferable to higher profits or perfect uniformity in production. He is asking workers to recognize their subservient position in society and to take pride in the allegiance and productivity they can offer their betters. He is proposing what he sees as an improved way of structuring English society, based on a free voice for all men, while, at the same time, bringing in a feudal-like structure of class. Industrialized England, to Ruskin, was approaching a level of perfection (in finish) indicative of

a declining society. Giving a freer voice to the people, in the form of self expression, would guarantee the survival of a very comfortable existence for the factory owners, and the nobility. By accepting a position that is somewhat less than equal to that of their betters, the members of the working class would have the type of protection they require for a happy existence that is based on hard work.

In a rare admission of fallibility that was uncharacteristic for a sage, "I have had great difficulty in defining Gothic", Ruskin wrote to John James. His problem was that he was working with a concept that was imprecise. He recognized the "Nature of Gothic" as an important element in his work and one that would please his father/agent. He used his letter to explore an approach to his dilemma, and to clarify his thoughts:

To define an architectural style is like defining a language--you have pure Latin--and impure latin in every form and stage --till it becomes Italian and not Latin at all.

Figurative language was the typical approach of a sage to elucidate a thought (Holloway, p.14), and to develop a metaphor must have seemed like the obvious way to achieve a thorough understanding of the idea he needed to express, and a way of sharing his understanding with his readers. But, it is hard to imagine Ruskin working comfortably with this particular metaphor. First of all, he did not speak

Italian, and second, although he was accustomed to judging the spoken word, he was far more familiar with the visual than with the auditory. Ruskin's goal in defining Gothic was to

show that the greatest distinctive character ... is in the workman's heart and mind--but its outward distinctive test is the trefoiled arch, not the mere point. Gothic is pure or impure according to the prominence and severity of this arch. (John Bradley, p.192)

Obviously language, alone, was not going to work as a way of explaining his idea and presenting a clear, definitive definition. So he reapproached his subject, this time applying the idea of "shade" to something he truly understood: colour. Even so, he was trying to apply the definite to the indefinite and thereby lost the precision evident in his writing at those times when he could display his sure knowledge, whether it was founded on fact or fiction!

When he approached this point in *The Stones of Venice*, he was still in a position where he did not feel his authority and he expressed this when, after telling his readers that he would give "an idea, at once broad and definite, of the true nature of Gothic architecture", he admitted, with all the humility of a sage, to the difficulty he was experiencing. He justified his problem, however, by

claiming that he was facing the same difficulty "which would be encountered by anyone" who attempted to meet the same challenge. He knew that he was on shaky ground because he did not have a definition that could be carved in stone, as it were. The metaphor he settled on was a description of the varying shades of colour that would be experienced when combining the visual properties of heather and a dead oak-leaf to form red. He used the third person to develop his idea; it was the other person who attempted the definition, "He might say, the color which is mixed with yellow in this oak-leaf, and with the blue in this heather, would be red, if you had it separate". The reader has been drawn into the discussion: the imprecise definition is strictly between the other person and "you". Ruskin was in no way involved. His voice did resurface when he asserted what Gothic is not, "pointed arches do not constitute Gothic, nor vaulted roofs, nor flying buttresses, nor grotesque sculptures" (*Works* v8, p.152). He could be precise when he defined what Gothic is not, and he was back on sure footing.

He detached himself from problems in his writing in the same manner as he detached himself from the problem of Effie. He treated them coldly and at a distance that belied his responsibility for them. He was not a participant in these situations, but an observer of them, and he was capable of inserting his superiority by judging those who he had deemed to be responsible for the problems. In the same

fashion that he, from his height, could recognize that Effie was the author of her own problems, so could he recognize the problem and inadequacy of a writer who attempted to define the nature of Gothic. But, it just was not his problem.

In his letters, after he had been taken to task, he mounted a defense that omitted nothing that may have furthered his cause. He started from a position of defense and turned it into an attack. He was aggressive when it came to protecting himself. This aggression surfaced in *The Stones of Venice* through his language and tone when he made a statement that he knew was open to question. He did not want to be doubted, so he called on a recognized authority to lend weight to his pontifications. The voice of authority that he recognized as the greatest was the Bible, and he saw no reason to doubt that his readers and his critics would respond in the same manner as he did to that authority. His language in *The Stones of Venice* is often commented on: he sermonized to the extent that he belaboured his point. The more unsure he was of himself, the harder he preached.

Ruskin's judgments and perceptions were moulded by "the legacy of a puritanical upbringing [that] led him to distrust aesthetic experience, and to stress its intellectual and moral implications" (Fishman, p.24). Even after he had broken with his parents' faith, he retained a

prose style that was founded in the Biblical.

The extent of his departure from orthodoxy is obscured, to some extent deliberately, to avoid hurting his parents; to some extent accidentally by his continued use of Biblical language. (Hough, p.28)

Much of the weight carried by Ruskin's argument lies in his authoritative style; his purely subjective ideas seem rooted in the wisdom of a prophet.

Like other Evangelicals of his time Ruskin believed in the absolute authority of the Bible: and the habit of testifying in season and out of season by using the words of Holy Writ remained with him long after he had ceased to believe that they had any supernatural power. (Hough, p.30)

As a mode of expression during the Victorian period, Biblical language was not uncommon,

Many readers no doubt regard Ruskin's religious tone as a sort of stucco front of Biblical phraseology imposed upon beliefs held on other than religious grounds. But the connection is actually far more organic; nor is it a matter of trying to accommodate evangelical piety. The attempt to find a connection between art and religious experience is a major preoccupation. (Hough, p.24)

For Ruskin, the situation was much more complicated. Embodied in any connection between art and religion was his growing doubt and confusion about his anti-Catholic beliefs. But still, when, as a sage, he needed to apply a basis to his reasoning, he resorted to what he knew to be the final authority: the Bible.

There is an innocence--or naivety--underlying *The Stones of Venice*. The fears that caused him to build such a mausoleum--the stated ones, that the city would soon be lost, and the private ones of his own mortality--also weaken any solid foundation his work may have had. To blatantly manipulate recorded history shows a disregard for the future. But that did not matter because Venice had no future, nor did he. As his definition of Gothic works best from a negative perspective, the story of Venice is told from a negative point of view that is veiled by the strong absolute of Victorian confidence. The work is legitimized by its conformity to convention: no new trails were blazed in form or style or even language. *The Stones of Venice* is a personal testament to disease, decay and death resulting from the flagrant disregard of God's ordinances. Only embracing faith, with all its strictures, would save the damned. Venice was beyond redemption. Ruskin was falling fast. England still had hope.

Conclusion

John Ruskin lived in a world structured by and on authority. To him,

Any revolutionary notion of freedom from authority was contradictory nonsense, a prescription for disaster and an explanation of current disorder in society. (Anthony, p.29)

All men, in Ruskin's view, had their place, and those with superior abilities should guide the others. Each individual's place should be suited to his abilities, and society should be structured in a manner that recognizes inequalities (pp.28-9). In the 62nd Psalm, Ruskin recognized the correctness of his stance. He shared Plato's view, that "the counting of heads is not likely to secure wisdom or justice in government" (p.30). In one of his letters to the *Times*, Ruskin discussed universal suffrage as a means of creating anarchy, but "by my measure, one man of parts and rank would outweigh in voting a whole school of the mob" (John Bradley, p.232). He was echoing Plato's view that the wisest and best educated citizens, educated "in principles of truth and justice", were in a better position to rule than the "majority of the unwise and ill-informed"; government and leadership is based on justice, authority and obedience (Anthony, p.30). Ruskin was educated on the principles of truth and justice: God's truth and God's

justice. Divine truth is accepted and believed in through faith. Divine justice is punitive; it must be expected and it can only be endured through faith. When faith fails, but sure knowledge of God's retribution remains, divine justice means punishment without hope of redemption.

Ruskin was balking against surging independence, on more than one level, the kind of independence that comes with age and is (or should be) tempered by maturity and wisdom. At times he wanted to break away from the fetters; at others he strengthened the bonds between himself and authority, as represented by his father. He wanted his father's support, and he wanted to explore his own developing social conscience. The two did not mesh. Financial support he would have as long as he needed it, and, as it turned out, long after, but ideological support was something else. He defied his father's edict to leave politics alone. If he could not have a forum in one medium, he would have it in another; what was not said in the *Times* was said in *The Stones of Venice*. When the break developed between father and son, it was too severe and for the wrong reasons. It was a case of Ruskin defending himself, in his typical fashion, against an anticipated retribution for his transgression of denying authority its due.

The stated purpose of *The Stones of Venice* is to preserve the past; its other obvious purposes are to guide,

to teach, to criticise and to showcase the ability of the visionary who could see what others could not. Its hidden purpose is to build a testament in honour of the man it will (logically and illogically) survive. Ruskin's confidence in his ability to achieve what he set out to do is rooted in his belief in himself. He brought his own past with him: his background cannot be removed from *The Stones of Venice* anymore than it can be removed from him.

It is difficult to read *The Stones of Venice* and to not think, especially with the aid of hindsight and the help of countless biographers and volumes of explanations, analyses and assumptions, that it is, in many ways, autobiographical. But autobiography implies conscious self-knowledge. If Ruskin, on a conscious level, was aware of what he was doing, he would have been perpetuating that which was abhorrent to him; he would have been lying. The truth in *The Stones of Venice* is mainly an innocent truth, because Ruskin believed what he said just as he believed that he was the person to say it.

At times he protests with vigour: is Ruskin justifying his own life? At times he does as he says the noblest workman must do: is Ruskin pointing to himself as the model? At times he calls on himself as the ultimate authority: is he writing a critique of the critic? Ruskin draws his reader in and then on. He does what he says in the conclusion that any great artist must do: he gives just

enough to allow the imagination to take over and do the rest. But, he also goes to the opposite extreme, doing what he warns will happen--he ruins his work. In building to the point of "just enough"--or to any point beyond that--he lays his arguments, stone by stone, and then says "we have"--assuming, and never doubting, that his readers have bought into his arguments, and have supplied, individually, the necessary detail to legitimize them, thereby making his readers his coconspirators in the condemnation of nineteenth century England and in the celebration of a time six centuries earlier. At those other times when he belabours a point, to the point of utter tedium, he was on less than solid ground. He supplies all he can to disguise the fact that he is unable to supply the "line or two" that are really the only requirements to stimulate the imagination of the body and soul that share with the totality of the artist. He struggles to prove, not his argument, but himself.

The Stones of Venice opens many doors, and there is no way of truly and rightly shutting them. As much as the adult Ruskin reflected the many influences playing on the child Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* reflects the many different aspects of the personality that created it. He used what he saw. He drew from all sources; he usurped what he wanted, and made it his own. His mother's voice, harsh and unrelenting, echos throughout. His own voice

reverberates, as his pulpit grows taller, with superstition and supposition, getting louder as his lack of syllogism is cloaked in the language of authority and the forms of convention. He presents a travel-history with the surety of a sage. His father's convictions and confidence, the downfall of this wife, his disappointments and pleasures, his birth, his death, it is all there. His past is guiding the present and creating his future as a memory. The reality of his future, as he knew it would be, was too dreadful to contemplate, until it, too, became the past, and he could see more clearly that the truth of *The Stones of Venice* was a reactionary one. Reaction is never a sure foundation on which to build a testament.

Ruskin had a personal and private agenda that he blatantly pursued in the name of art. He displays his fears and his strengths, his respect for authority, and his demand for respect, openly, in the language and tone of his varying moods. There can be no separation of the many compartments that make up Ruskin, nor can there be in *The Stones of Venice*. These play off each other as his position shifts.

It is fitting to give the final word to Ruskin, and that word comes from the conclusion to *The Stones of Venice*. It is Ruskin at his finest: talking of art as he understood it, but not necessarily as he practiced it:

[O]ne of the main functions of art, in its service to man, is to rouse the imagination from its palsy

... and the art that does not do this is false to its duty, and degraded in its nature. It is not enough that it be well imagined, it must task the beholder also to imagine well; and this so imperatively that if he does not choose to rouse himself to meet the work, he shall not taste it, nor enjoy it in any wise. Once that he is well awake, the guidance which the artist gives him should be full and authoritative: the beholder's imagination must not be suffered to take its own way, or wander hither and thither; but neither must it be left at rest; and the right point of realisation, for any given work of art, is that which will enable the spectator to complete it for himself, in the exact way the artist would have him, but not that which will save him the trouble of effecting the completion. So soon as the idea is entirely conveyed, the artist's labour should cease; and every touch which he adds beyond the point when, with the help of the beholder's imagination, the story ought to have been told, is a degradation to his work. (*Works* v9, p.182)

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