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**Reading Ruskin in the garden:
the designed landscape at Brantwood
(1871-1900)**

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Abstract

John Ruskin's garden at Brantwood in the Lake District is an autobiographical synthesis of ideas manifest through landscape, embracing political thinking, artistic aesthetic, floral memory, and a sheltered vision of nature. This thesis explores Ruskin's garden thematically through the lens of his published works to extrapolate the thinking behind the garden, and is structured around four key texts. *Praeterita* (1885-89), Ruskin's autobiography, is a platform for analysing the influence of art, nature, memory and place on his approach to gardening, translating established notions of beauty and the picturesque in his woodland aesthetic. His botanical book, *Proserpina* (1875-86), offers a framework for examining Ruskin's idiosyncratic approach to science, and charts his botanical thinking in relation to mythology, morality and cultural concepts. *Hortus Inclusus* (1887), a collection of letters from Ruskin to his Lakeland neighbour Susanna Beever, presents a platform for discussing the role of gardening friends as inspiration, support and stimulus to Ruskin's garden-making. The 'garden enclosed' of the title prompts analysis of his quest for shelter by interpreting his urge to 'nest' and 'lie down' in the landscape as a biophilic response to nature. Lastly, Ruskin's polemical social writing in *Fors Clavigera* (1871-84) is the springboard to evaluate experiment in the garden, in the repurposing of barren land for cultivation, a practice central to the principles of the Guild of St George. By mapping a biographical study of diaries, correspondence and life writing onto the landscape, this thesis offers a new reading of the garden, addressing the correlation between gardening and writing as an underexplored facet of Ruskin scholarship, and revealing the significance of Ruskin's garden, garden-making, and gardening friendships to his late works.

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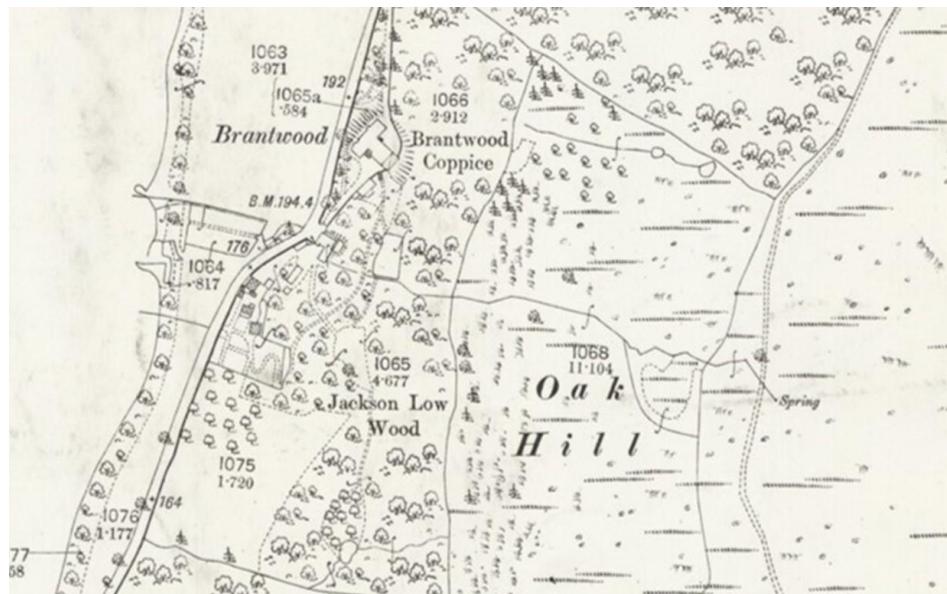


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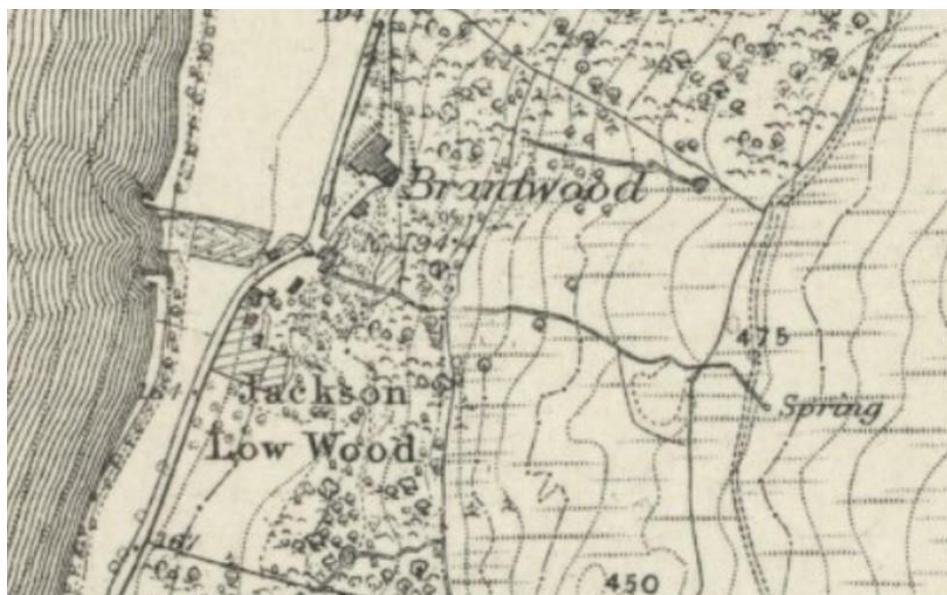


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Introduction

At Brantwood, his home on the shores of Coniston Water in the Lake District, John Ruskin was both a gardener and a writer. By examining his interventions in the landscape through the lens of the books he was writing, this thesis brings a new perspective to understanding both Ruskin's garden and his late works. Combining literary analysis with the disciplines of garden history and cultural geography opens up a hitherto unexplored area of Ruskin scholarship. The thesis is structured on the framework of four books by Ruskin, each of which serves as a platform for the thematic exploration of a strand of Ruskin's gardening. *Hortus Inclusus* (1887) is a selection of letters sent by Ruskin to his friend Susanna Beever (1805-93), a Lakeland neighbour, gardener and amateur botanist, offering insight into his thinking on plants, community, and the shelter of landscape. *Fors Clavigera* (1871-84), written as a series of monthly letters addressed to 'The workmen and labourers of Great Britain', was a vehicle for the direct expression of Ruskin's political economy and land management proposals.¹ *Proserpina* (1875-86) and *Praeterita* (1885-89) were similarly published in instalments while Ruskin was living at Brantwood, the former his book on botany, and the latter his autobiography.² These works are all epistolary in nature, and share the fragmented, specific and targeted reasoning of Ruskin's thinking; close study illuminates his garden praxis and theoretical ideals, while the reflection, reassessment and nostalgia of his late work expresses the accumulation of five decades of writing and thinking on art, aesthetics, morality, society and political economy.

As a writer who gardened, Ruskin is part of a long tradition of writers, poets and artists who gained inspiration from their gardens, the designed landscape featuring for them as character, setting or muse. Writing from a hut in her garden allowed Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) the 'space to spread my mind out in' that she craved, while for

¹ *Hortus Inclusus: Messages from the wood to the garden sent in happy days to the sister ladies of The Thwaite, Coniston by their thankful friend John Ruskin*, ed. by Albert Fleming (Orpington: George Allen, 1887). Later editions have additional material, and occasional reference is made in this thesis to the 3rd edn (London: George Allen, 1902). The text of *Fors* is taken from *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, Library Edition, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903-12), Volumes 27-29. All subsequent references to this edition are given by volume and page number, e.g. *Works* 25.531.

² *Proserpina* is reproduced in *Works* 25 which includes two chapters (Volume II, Chapters X and XI) not published in the run of part-publication. *Praeterita* is reproduced in *Works* 35, together with accompanying *Dilecta*.

other authors, the gardens they created inspired their literary output: Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) wrote her poem ‘The Garden’ from her tower in the garden at Sissinghurst, and Beatrix Potter (1866-1943) penned her children’s tales amid the flora and fauna of Hill Top.³ The poetry of William Shenstone (1714-63) has afforded a less celebrated legacy than his garden, but both were rich in allegory and represented a shared creativity expressed in dual media.⁴ It was this synthesis of garden and literature that was the tangible product of Ruskin’s time at Brantwood, where his garden was imbued with the same autobiographical detail as his books, charting his thinking simultaneously through designed landscape and written word. This creative symbiosis suggests a new approach to Ruskin whereby analysis of his garden is employed to illuminate a new perspective on his published work.

The garden at Brantwood has been subject to some scholarly research: by John Illingworth in his paper ‘Ruskin and Gardening’ (1994), and by David Ingram in his book, *The Gardens at Brantwood* (2014).⁵ What follows builds on these existing studies to present a picture of the garden laid out by Ruskin, and goes further to extrapolate the relationship between writing and gardening, illuminating the causal links between designed landscape and Ruskin’s late works. Ruskin’s garden-making has been largely bypassed by scholars: it is rarely drawn attention to in biography, nor does it feature significantly in discussion of his artistic practice, or analysis of his societal message, all of which have tangible links to the landscape of Brantwood. Nor has Ruskin’s gardening been recognised to play a role in the narrative of nineteenth-century gardens: Brent Elliott in his seminal *Victorian Gardens* (1986) references Ruskin’s impact on other gardeners and garden commentators of the period through his writing on art and aesthetics, but makes little of Ruskin’s own practical garden-making.⁶ As demonstrated below, Ruskin was an idiosyncratic gardener, whose

³ Anne Olivier Bell, ed., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3 (London: Hogarth Press, 1980), p.107 (5 September 1926); Christina Hardymon, *Literary Trails: Writers in their Landscapes* (London: National Trust, 2000), pp. 164-5, 193-203, and 208-9.

⁴ Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain 1760-1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), p. 51; Miles Hadfield, *A History of British Gardening* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 201-4.

⁵ John Illingworth, ‘Ruskin and Gardening’, *Garden History*, 22, 2 (Winter 1994), 218-33; David S. Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood: Evolution of John Ruskin’s Lakeland paradise* (London: Pallas Athene and The Ruskin Foundation, 2014).

⁶ Brent Elliott, *Victorian Gardens* (London: Batsford, 1986).

landscape interventions were based on a personal synthesis of art, literature, mythology and memory to create a garden aesthetic unrelated to the trends of contemporary gardening.

The nature of Ruskin's gardening renders it necessary at the outset of this thesis to address the question of whether the garden at Brantwood can legitimately be labelled a garden at all. There was no unifying design, no outward appearance of the deliberate positioning of plants to create an ornamental effect, and a harmony with nature that blurred the boundaries between 'wild' and 'gardened'. Ruskin's interventions in the landscape took the form of a series of defined spaces, bounded by natural or man-made geographical features and linked by paths, each space characterised by a separate purpose or intent (Figure 3). He shaped the steeply sloping hillside to his own aesthetic, a synthesis of nature and culture, imbued with mythology, and informed by appreciation of art: this aesthetic permeated the practical as well as the ornamental areas of the garden, and biographical detail can be read into its idiosyncrasy. Gardened spaces were developed in tandem with Ruskin's thinking on subjects ranging from rocks and fish to political economy and materialist science, the diverse subject-matter united by an underpinning belief in the rewards of physical labour which saw Ruskin engage in practical work himself and direct working parties in a communal iteration of his principles for the betterment of society, expressed in his writing and through the Guild of St George. Within this conceptual framework, Ruskin's landscape interventions and gardening praxis were underpinned by a philosophy centred on his aesthetic sensibility and his social and moral principles. What separates the concepts of 'garden' and 'landscape' in Ruskin's approach is the application of human intervention to a designed purpose, whether that be to invoke memory of people or places, to celebrate the wonder of nature, or to grow culinary crops. Ruskin's woodland, for example, has the outward appearance of a 'natural' space, inhabited by indigenous plants, its rugged topography cut through by long-established streams. Its definition as 'garden' centres on the way Ruskin has deliberately and decisively shaped the area to conform to his own aesthetic by pruning trees, encouraging the self-seeding of local plants, moving stones from the streams, clearing undergrowth to reveal rocks, and introducing paths. The woodland is a designed space, conforming to Ruskin's ideal of beauty and imbued with personal

resonance; the ornament comes not from patterns of flowers or a layout contrived from published garden theory, but from an appreciation of natural form and an idiosyncratic application of art, held in an unnatural state of stasis like a painting. Ruskin's garden cannot be placed neatly in the continuum of garden history or categorised in the theory of the picturesque or wild gardening, nor can it be seen to respond to contemporary garden trends; placing the garden within a traditional conceptual framework serves only to emphasise its idiosyncrasies.

Nineteenth-century gardens and gardening

Ruskin expressed disapproval of the practice of horticulture, and distanced himself from the gardening profession, despite gardening being considered an art form from the early nineteenth century. The landscape designer Humphry Repton declared in 1808 that, '[g]ardens are works of art rather than of nature', placing the garden within the remit of the art critic.⁷ By mid-century, when Ruskin was becoming publicly recognised as a critic, horticulture was a rising profession and garden style a topic of debate in the many journals and magazines proliferating the market. Ruskin did not engage with public debate in the horticultural press, and his contact with gardening professionals was limited to specific botanical enquiries rather than discussions of style. In his early treatise, *The Poetry of Architecture* (1837), Ruskin endorsed garden typologies that complemented the architecture of domestic buildings relative to historical era, location and climate, and *Modern Painters* (1843-60) offered his thoughts on plants and trees, analysed as independent from a garden setting. Despite encouragement from friends, there is no evidence that Ruskin subscribed to any of the horticultural magazines: his cousin Joan Severn arranged with his friend, the artist and gardener, Frank Miles for Ruskin to see copies of *The Garden* in c. 1878 and 1885, but he recorded no endorsement of the proposal.⁸ Nor did Ruskin contribute to the horticultural press; articles in his name appeared in *The Garden*, but they were passages reproduced from his published work rather than original material.⁹ In

⁷ Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, p. 10.

⁸ Royal Horticultural Society Lindley Library MS GB 803 WRO/2/129, letter to William Robinson from Frank Miles, n.d. [c. 1877-79]; RHS MS GB 803 WRO/2/181, letter to William Robinson from Joan Severn, 18 April 1885.

⁹ Richard Bisgrove, *William Robinson: The Wild Gardener* (London: Francis Lincoln, 2008), p. 97.

Modern Painters, however, Ruskin cited an article in the *Journal of the Horticultural Society* to evidence his observations on the habitats of wild plants, and in the opening pages of *Proserpina* he quoted from *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, albeit a copy several decades old.¹⁰

Ruskin's reading on gardens and plants can be superficially gauged by examining the books he owned. In *The Library of John Ruskin* (2012), James Dearden assembled a catalogue of Ruskin's books, compiled from extant collections, as well as from details gleaned from Ruskin's own catalogues and his correspondence, diaries and account books; from sales catalogues and correspondence with booksellers and collectors; and from contemporary published sources such as *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (1903-12), referred to subsequently as the *Library Edition*, and W. G. Collingwood's *Ruskin Relics* (1903). Although not a definitive list of books owned by Ruskin, Dearden's catalogue gives an indication of Ruskin's reading. In his essay 'John Ruskin and his books', Dearden details not only the volumes that Ruskin owned, but the manner in which he used his books – for example, rebinding, adding marginalia, cutting pages – suggesting that his library was treated as source material for his research.¹¹ Further details of Ruskin's gardening bibliography can be gleaned from Collingwood's description in *Ruskin Relics* of the layout of his bookcases at Brantwood, which includes many volumes of natural history, encompassing botany, geology and mineralogy, reflecting Ruskin's preoccupations at Brantwood.¹² The quantity of botanical books was documented by Ruskin, who informed readers of *Proserpina* that 'I have one entire bookcase and half of another, and a large cabinet besides, or about fifteen feet square of books on botany beside me here, and a quantity more at Oxford'.¹³ Collingwood emphasised Ruskin's preference for older natural history books over modern science, describing the botanical books as 'not very modern', the geology as 'mostly out of date', and the more recent volumes as having 'uncomplimentary scribblings in their margins'.¹⁴ This is confirmed in Dearden's

¹⁰ Works 4.171 and 25.199.

¹¹ James S. Dearden, *Further Facets of Ruskin: Some Bibliographical Studies* (Bembridge: privately published, 2009), pp. 213-23.

¹² W. G. Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics* (London: Lbster and Company Ltd, 1903), pp. 181-91.

¹³ Works 25.370.

¹⁴ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 188.

catalogue, which lists works by Alexander von Humboldt, James Sowerby, William Curtis, Johann Goethe, Gilbert White, Carolus Linnaeus, Philip Miller, Thomas Bewick and John Gerarde, all of whom were active in the eighteenth century or earlier. Of the nineteenth-century naturalists, Ruskin owned works by Charles Darwin, William Linton, John Tyndall, John Lindley, William Hooker, and Louis Figuier. The botanical reference material available to Ruskin in his library was considerable, and is evidenced in his references to various botanical sources in *Proserpina*. Dearden's catalogue lists thirty-seven volumes of Sowerby's *English Botany* (1790-1814), six volumes of Baxter's *British Phaenogamous Botany* (1834-43), forty-eight volumes of Curtis's *Botanical Magazine* (1787-1821), nineteen volumes of *Flora Danicae* (1761-1883, complete set), nine volumes of Lecoq's *Géographie Botanique* (1855), as well as Parkinson's *Theatrum Botanicum* (1640) and Curtis's *Flora Londinensis* (?1817-1828), which included around five hundred plates.

Although there were many scholarly botanical volumes in Ruskin's library, and archaic gardening manuals by John Evelyn and Francis Bacon, contemporary garden writing was under-represented. Of the popular garden writers of the nineteenth century, Ruskin is known to have owned John Loudon's *Encyclopaedia of Gardening* (1822), *Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum* (1838) and *Encyclopaedia of Plants* (1855), Jane Loudon's *The Ladies' Flower Garden* (1841) and William Robinson's *Alpine Flowers for English Gardens* (1875). The works of contemporary garden writers such as Shirley Hibberd, H. E. Milner, Thomas Mawson, John Sedding, Edward Kemp, Reginald Blomfield and Gertrude Jekyll were not represented on his shelves, yet all were writing about the laying out of gardens at a time when Ruskin was himself beginning to shape the landscape at Brantwood. However, the absence of garden books in Ruskin's library cannot be interpreted as indicative of his lack of reading on the subject. Dearden's research indicates that Ruskin acquired books because they were of interest to him as a reader rather than as a collector, and would sell or give away volumes when they were no longer of use to him.¹⁵ It is possible, as Ingram has suggested, that garden

¹⁵ Dearden, *Further Facets of Ruskin*, p. 214.

books from Ruskin's library were removed for her own use by Ruskin's cousin and companion, Joan Severn, herself a keen gardener.¹⁶

Although not engaged with the popular horticultural press, Ruskin was a member of the Horticultural Society (renamed Royal Horticultural Society under the patronage of Prince Albert in 1861) as well as the provincial gardening society near Brantwood, the Ulverston Horticultural Society, suggesting some involvement at a local as well as national level.¹⁷ When sharing his accounts for January and February 1876 in *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin listed subscriptions to the following learned societies: 'Athenaeum, Alpine Club, Early English Text Society, Horticultural, Geological, Architectural, Historical, and Anthropological'.¹⁸ This list does not encompass the full range of his membership – for example, he was also a member of the Meteorological Society, the Mineralogical Society and the Metaphysical Society – and does not imply involvement beyond the paying of fees; in fact, Ruskin was scathing of the activities of both the Alpine Club and the Horticultural Society, bemoaning the ambition to scale summits in the former and the lack of managerial transparency in the latter.¹⁹

Ruskin's allegiance to the Horticultural Society is again questioned in the notes for his catalogue of Turner's drawings published in 1878, in which he mocked the practice of horticulture and the society's new garden, declaring provocatively: 'And what sums do not we spend on our hot-houses! and has not the Horticultural Society built itself beautiful arcades; and has it not always the Guards and the Rifles to play beautiful tunes in honour of Horticulture?'.²⁰ The profession, and in particular the practices of hybridisation and selective breeding, was derided in *Modern Painters II*, in which Ruskin referred to 'the delight of horticulturists in the spoiling of plants'.²¹ This

¹⁶ David S. Ingram, 'Wild Gardens: the Robinson, Ruskin and Severn Correspondence', *Ruskin Review and Bulletin*, 10, 1 (2014), p. 44.

¹⁷ Works 28.528 (February 1876): 'I am myself a Fellow of the Horticultural Society'; The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre, Lancaster University, T144, letter from Ruskin to Jackson, 25 March 1876: 'Here are fifty pounds for you – please pay out of it my subscription to Ulverston Horticultural Society £5'.

¹⁸ Works 28.560.

¹⁹ Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Later Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 252 and 309; for Alpine Club: Works 18.22-23 and *Ruskin and Gender*, ed. by Dinah Birch and Francis O'Gorman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 4; for Horticultural Society: Works 28.528.

²⁰ Works 13.519.

²¹ Works 4.161.

was an abbreviated reiteration of his outrage at the practice of horticulture, conferred on the readers of *The Poetry of Architecture* in his assertion that,

[a] flower-garden is an ugly thing, even when best managed: it is an assembly of unfortunate beings, pampered and bloated above their natural size, stewed and heated into diseased growth; corrupted by evil communication into speckled and inharmonious colours; torn from the soil which they loved, and of which they were the spirit and the glory, to glare away their term of tormented life among the mixed and incongruous essences of each other, in earth that they know not, and in air that is poison to them. The florist may delight in this: the true lover of flowers never will.²²

Ruskin's views were published in 1837, just as the fashion for colourful bedding schemes was taking a popular hold on gardening in Britain, and ran counter to public opinion.²³ His cause was later taken up by William Morris, who echoed Ruskin's phrasing in a lecture published in 1885 in which Morris railed against the unnatural colours of hybridised plants which proved 'that even flowers can be thoroughly ugly'.²⁴ Ruskin's ire was centred on the use of non-native plants, raised in glasshouses and unnaturally modified by hybridisation, then planted out in conditions incompatible with their original habitat; his message was that plants should be revered for their natural appearance in their natural setting. This was the approach taken by Ruskin at Brantwood, forty years after he penned his youthful opinion of the flower garden, and the sentiment was reiterated in 1882 in his mature reflection in *Proserpina* that 'I believe no manner of temperance in pleasure would be better rewarded than that of making our gardens gay only with common flowers; and leaving those which needed care for their transplanted [sic] life to be found in their native places when we travelled'.²⁵ Similarly, on Ruskin's botanising trips on the Continent, plants were

²² Works 1.157.

²³ Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, pp. 123-34.

²⁴ William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art: Five Lectures Delivered in London, Birmingham and Nottingham* (London: Ellis and White, 1885), p. 127.

²⁵ Works 25.451.

appreciated as integral to their environment, belonging to an interconnected ecosystem of both ecology and beauty.

Ruskin's distaste for bedding plants was imbued with a deeper sentiment: the crux of his argument with horticulture was rooted in morality. In *Modern Painters II*, he described how the practice of gardening robbed a plant of its moral worth by taking away the context in which it functioned:

many plants are found alone on a certain soil or subsoil in a wild state, not because such soil is favourable to them, but because they alone are capable of existing on it [...] Now if we withdraw the plant from this position, which it hardly endures, and supply it with the earth, and maintain about it the temperature, that it delights in [...] we shall indeed obtain a magnificently developed example of the plant, colossal in size, and splendid in organization; but we shall utterly lose in it that moral ideal which is dependent on its right fulfilment of its appointed functions. It was intended and created by the Deity for the covering of those lonely spots where no other plant could live; it has been thereto endowed with courage and strength, and capacities of endurance[.]²⁶

When Ruskin looked at the plants growing in his woodland at Brantwood, he saw not only the beauty of colour and form, but human nature in microcosm. His perception of plant character formed the basis of his botanical system in *Proserpina*, and this perspective on plants can be extrapolated to suggest Ruskin's approach to gardening had little to do with superficial aspects of layout and design, or horticultural technique: he was investigating the human condition by equating plants with moral virtue.

Ruskin's philosophical penetration of plants distinguishes his garden-making from the 'wild gardening' popularised by the horticulturalist and journalist William Robinson at the same time as Ruskin was shaping his woodland at Brantwood.²⁷ In his book *The Wild Garden* (1870), Robinson set out his theory whereby nature was

²⁶ Works 4.171.

²⁷ For a discussion of the concept of the wild garden, see Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, pp. 194-96 and Bisgrove, *William Robinson*, pp. 71-83.

enhanced to picturesque effect in a garden setting. Robinson's concept centred on the principles of ecological harmony and the picturesque, bringing neglected areas on the periphery of gardens into the designed landscape by improving natural beauty through the introduction of selective planting. Both native and non-native species were embraced, the choice determined by the plant's inherent suitability to the environment. Naturalisation was the intended outcome, both in terms of ecology and visual effect. Intervention was discreet, with the resulting landscape appearing 'natural' despite the planting being contrived, and not necessarily endemic to the region. The wild garden was conceived as self-sustaining, with the succession of seasonal growth blending in a cycle of decay and renewal, eliminating the need for the accepted horticultural practices of watering, fertilising, pruning or replanting, essential to maintain the high artifice of formal ornamental displays of summer bedding. Despite superficial similarities, Ruskin's approach was intrinsically different from Robinson's. Ruskin recognised the inter-connectedness of natural groupings rather than imposing plants on one another in manmade harmonies; although Robinson celebrated nature and promoted the virtues of common plants, Ruskin's respect for the integrity of nature transcended Robinson's secular appreciation. Whereas Ruskin's approach to plants, in Dinah Birch's appraisal, 'incline[d] to devotion', there was no spiritual meaning in Robinson's landscapes: he offered a practical solution to gardeners and advocated the beauty of neglected plants.²⁸

The ideological correlation between Robinson and Ruskin has been analysed by Anne Helmreich, and Richard Bisgrove has identified Ruskin's writing as an inspiration to Robinson's practice.²⁹ David Ingram has studied the extant correspondence in the Lindley Library to determine the extent of the relationship between the two men, concluding that it was more likely to have been Severn, rather than Ruskin, who was influenced by Robinson.³⁰ The correspondence reveals that Severn and a mutual

²⁸ Dinah Birch, 'Ruskin and the Science of *Proserpina*' in *New Approaches to Ruskin: Thirteen Essays*, ed. by Robert Hewison (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1981), p. 148.

²⁹ Anne Helmreich, 'Re-presenting Nature: Ideology, Art, and Science in William Robinson's "Wild Garden"', in *Nature and Ideology: Natural Garden Design in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture, 18 (1997), pp. 81-111; Bisgrove, *William Robinson*, p. 99.

³⁰ Ingram, 'Wild Gardens'. The correspondence has been re-catalogued since publication of this paper; the references given below are from the new catalogue.

friend, the artist Frank Miles, attempted to arrange a meeting between Ruskin and Robinson, which may have taken place in 1878; Severn was ‘anxious this meeting should not if possible fall through’.³¹ In a letter to Robinson, Miles urged him to send Ruskin a copy of *The Wild Garden* together with some selected copies of *The Garden* as Ruskin was ‘very keen to make beautiful a bit of bog at Brantwood that has hitherto only grown thistles’.³² The correspondence implies that Ruskin had not read Robinson’s publications, and that the relationship was encouraged by friends, rather than instigated by Ruskin. Having been made aware of Robinson’s work, Ruskin directed a horticultural query to him concerning glasshouse cultivation, which was subsequently reproduced in *Proserpina*, suggesting that Ruskin was more interested in Robinson’s horticultural expertise than his gardening theories. Although Severn arranged for copies of Robinson’s newspaper *The Garden* to be sent to Brantwood in 1885, there is no evidence that Ruskin read them, and by this time his gardening activities were drawing to a close.³³ His gardener, Dawson Herdson, was reported by Severn as being ‘in a seventh heaven of delight with each number’, suggesting that Severn may have intended the publication for Herdson, with whom she was working on her own garden schemes.³⁴

The correspondence demonstrates that, despite being given the opportunity, Ruskin did not enter into discussion with Robinson on garden style, reflecting his wider reluctance to engage with contemporary garden debate. Similarly, he did not develop an acquaintance with Gertrude Jekyll, author of *Wood and Garden* (1899) and several other garden publications, who designed gardens from the 1880s featuring naturalistic groupings of plants and favouring old-fashioned varieties. Mavis Batey notes that Jekyll attended Ruskin’s Oxford lectures, and Betty Massingham states that Jekyll met Ruskin in 1869, when they discussed housing conditions with Octavia Hill, and they met again in Venice.³⁵ Furthermore, Illingworth states that Arthur Severn’s elder sister

³¹ Ibid, p. 41 and n. (RHS MS GB 803 WRO/2/180, letter to William Robinson from Joan Severn, 3 June [1878]).

³² RHS MS GB 803 WRO/2/129, letter to William Robinson from Frank Miles, n.d. [c. 1877-79].

³³ Ingram, ‘Wild Gardens’, p. 31 (RHS MS GB 803 WRO/2/181, letter to William Robinson from Joan Severn, 18 April 1885).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mavis Batey, *The Historic Gardens of Oxford and Cambridge* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 161; Betty Massingham, *A Century of Gardeners* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 79.

Mary was friends with Jekyll, so their social circles would have overlapped.³⁶ There is no evidence to record any relationship between Ruskin and Jekyll, strengthening the argument that Ruskin was not interested in taking an active part in nineteenth-century garden debate.

Historical garden tradition

Ruskin's lack of engagement with contemporary gardening trends is mirrored in his disinclination to follow the picturesque tradition of the eighteenth century, despite the Romantic example of William Wordsworth imbued in the Lakeland landscape. The term 'picturesque' came into use in the early eighteenth century, used when referring to a landscape appropriate for pictorial depiction, possessing suitable subject, a balanced composition and conveying the depth of near, middle and far distance.³⁷ The paintings of Claude Lorrain and Gaspar Poussin exemplified the idealised scenery that inspired landscape designers such as William Kent in his work at Claremont, Chiswick and Stowe in the 1730s. By the second half of the eighteenth century, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was the unrivalled exponent of the picturesque landscape, his extensive earth-moving, tree-planting and manipulation of water shaping the parkland of noble houses throughout England and Wales, including Chatsworth, Blenheim and Luton Hoo. Brown's designs were often overlayed onto existing formal gardens, replacing the straight lines, formality, drama and symmetry of the Baroque with the smooth expanses of grass, serpentine lakes and clumps of trees that came to typify the English garden. By the end of the eighteenth century, debate was fuelled by those – including William Gilpin, Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price – who argued that 'picturesque' embodied a more varied, rugged and spectacular landscape than the smooth perfection of Brown's undulating valleys. Malcolm Andrews exemplifies the complexity of the concept in his observation that, 'Uvedale Price's *An Essay on the Picturesque* [1794] added the definite article and elevated an unassuming adjective into an aesthetic concept of bewildering contentiousness'.³⁸ The Picturesque had

³⁶ Illingworth, 'Ruskin and Gardening', p. 229. See also Bisgrove, *William Robinson*, p. 101.

³⁷ For more on the picturesque, see Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque* and Tom Williamson, *Poite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1995).

³⁸ Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p.viii.

become landscape theory, inextricably tied to art and literature, as well as to Romantic notions of heightened emotion and sublimity. Landscapes such as Hawkstone Park and Hafod were designed to provoke feelings of awe and dread in their precipitous paths, bridged abysses, echoing caves and densely-planted trees: the sublime elements manipulated the senses to a particular way of feeling, while the picturesque composition encouraged a particular way of looking.

The picturesque has been identified in Ruskin's garden: Illingworth alludes to Ruskin's early familiarity with the work of the classical landscapists Claude, Poussin and Salvator Rosa, seen on visits to the Dulwich Picture Gallery, arguing that, together with his interest in early Italian artists such as Botticelli, this painterly tradition shaped Ruskin's view of the ideal landscape. He further asserts that by creating winding paths to hidden views and clearings within the woodland, Ruskin was following picturesque garden tradition, echoing the romance of Wordsworth rather than the classicism of Claude, although he identifies Ruskin's 'reverence for antiquity' as bonding him to Claudian ideals.³⁹ The influence of Botticelli, noted by Illingworth, is developed in this thesis as a central element of Ruskin's gardening, demonstrating that Ruskin's artistic specificity reached beyond the broad sense of the picturesque designed landscape to model an idiosyncratic woodland aesthetic whereby the landscape was shaped to idealise a painting, subverting the traditional notion of composing the landscape to conform to the painterly Claudian tradition. In his woodland, Ruskin recreated the mood and scenery that he admired in the paintings of Botticelli, his landscape shaped by him to embody in stasis the actual painting, forming an ekphrastic representation rather than a loose emulation of style and subjectivity. Ruskin's garden did not reflect painterly composition; his own sketches depict horizonless studies of paths and rocks, more photographic snapshots than artfully layered landscapes (Figure 7). The idiosyncratic aesthetic developed by Ruskin in his garden is a fusion of Botticellian ekphrasis, the inner truth that he identified in the work of Turner, and the many layers of cultural and literary allusions embodied in biographical detail.

In addition to the framework of garden theory, Ruskin's landscape interventions at Brantwood can be contextualised within local gardening tradition. The Lakeland

³⁹ Illingworth, 'Ruskin and Gardening', p. 229.

designed landscape was dominated by the Romantic tradition of Wordsworth, exemplified in the garden at Rydal Mount, eight miles north of Brantwood, where Wordsworth lived from 1813 until his death in 1850. When writing to his father about his visit to Rydal Mount in 1847, Ruskin made no mention of the garden, with its steep slope above the house carved into a series of terraced walks, focusing instead on the view from the mountain above.⁴⁰ The Romantic tradition is embedded in earlier designed landscapes, including Rydal Hall adjacent to Wordsworth's home, where the Grot, or grotto, was built in 1668 by Sir Daniel Fleming and designed as a place to frame and enjoy the spectacular Rydal Falls, and is one of Britain's earliest examples of a viewing station. Wordsworth wrote about the grotto in his poem 'An Evening Walk' (1787-9), stimulating the nascent tourist desire for the picturesque which created a way of looking at the Lakeland landscape to emphasise sublimity and romance.

As the nineteenth century progressed, picturesque landscapes gave way to high Victorian formality, then a less structured planting style became prevalent towards the end of the century. By the time Ruskin settled in the Lakes, larger estates in the environs of Brantwood, such as Monk Coniston, a mile to the north, Holker Hall, fifteen miles south, and Muncaster Castle, twenty miles west, were overlaying picturesque gardens with exotic plantings of trees and ornamental shrubs newly introduced to Britain from the Americas and Himalayas. The arrival of the railway in the 1840s facilitated the development of a new type of house and garden, created by incomers such as the newly rich Midland industrialists who brought fashionable urban taste in architecture and gardens to the Lakeland vernacular. Keen to impress their status on society through architecture and garden design, many of the new villas of the 1880s and 90s were built in the fashionable arts and crafts style, surrounded by a garden created in tandem with the house, featuring terraces, pergolas and sundials and fashionably planted following the advice of designers such as Thomas Mawson, who established a nursery and garden design company in Windermere in 1885.⁴¹ Janet Waymark asserts that Mawson's first major commission in the Lake District was orchestrated by Joan Severn, offering further evidence of her connection to

⁴⁰ Works 36.70 (23 March 1847).

⁴¹ Janet Waymark, *Thomas Mawson: Life, Gardens and Landscapes* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2009), pp. 21-23.

horticultural circles, suggested above in her correspondence with Robinson.⁴²

Illingworth notes that Mawson ‘claimed to be a disciple of Ruskin’, yet there is no evidence that they ever met, despite being Lakeland neighbours.⁴³ The arts and crafts gardens of Mawson and his contemporaries were designed to grow out of the landscape in their use of vernacular materials, but they did not blend into the landscape, and the introduction of non-native plants for ornamental effect further emphasised their artificiality. Just as Ruskin’s gardening can be visually equated to wild garden theory, his work at Brantwood shares some superficial elements of arts and crafts style. The ethos of embracing vernacular materials echoes Ruskin’s use of local stone in his walls and paths, and the notion of allowing plants to grow freely and abundantly is evident in Ruskin’s approach. However, as this thesis demonstrates, Ruskin’s gardening penetrated deeper than style, and inspiration was not drawn by him from local or national gardening trends, or from the gardens he visited; it was associative resonance in gardens and landscape that shaped Ruskin’s garden-making, rather than any direct influence of layout, planting or taste.

Garden visiting

Ruskin rarely gave direct opinions on gardens and designed landscapes; however, his attitude to the designed landscape can be extrapolated from sources such as his commentary on the picturesque expressed in passages of *Modern Painters* (1843-60) and *The Poetry of Architecture* (1837), and through analysis of his recorded reactions to gardens visited at home and abroad. Ruskin did not express interest in visiting gardens, and records of garden visiting are circumstantial rather than descriptive; in 1879, he admitted to his friend Fanny Colenso that he had ‘seen many gardens in many countries’, yet he left very little record of his impressions of these designed landscapes.⁴⁴ It is often what Ruskin fails to mention about the gardens he visits that is telling of his attitude to the designed landscape: he is seemingly unmoved by the set-pieces of eighteenth-century landscaping, by the grandeur of the Renaissance, or by

⁴² Ibid., p. 23.

⁴³ Illingworth, ‘Ruskin and Gardening’, p. 229.

⁴⁴ Olive Wilson, ed., *My Dearest Dora: Letters to Dora Livesey, Her Family and Friends 1860-1900 from John Ruskin* (Windermere: privately published, 1984), p. 104 (letter to Fanny Colenso, 29 July 1879, copied by Dora Livesey).

ostentatious Victorian display. As a man of strongly-voiced opinions on many subjects, by recording neither praise nor derision, his indifference signifies a lack of engagement with the concept of the garden as an art-form. To probe the nature of Ruskin's indifference to the designed landscape and to furnish context for his garden-making at Brantwood, the following analysis introduces Ruskin's reaction to the gardens encountered on his travels in Britain and abroad.

The Ruskin family excursions around Britain emulated the eighteenth-century tourist by encompassing visits to stately homes such as Chatsworth and Hampton Court, where the coach and horses would drive sedately through the designed landscapes of great estates, allowing passengers to appreciate the setting of the house within its grounds.⁴⁵ Ruskin wrote later of these visits that 'I thus saw nearly all the noblemen's houses in England [...] The galleries and gardens of England were beautiful to see'.⁴⁶ Although the Ruskins' principal object was to view the paintings hanging in the galleries of the houses – which Ruskin credited as a source of his career in art criticism – the designed landscapes through which they drove would have given Ruskin an early impression of the picturesque. The landscape approach to great houses such as Blenheim was a subtle exercise in the display of grandeur through a series of orchestrated glimpses and managed vistas, designed to manipulate the senses to create a feeling of awe, culminating in the architectural magnificence of the house itself.⁴⁷ The complementarity of architecture and landscape was recognised by Ruskin from an early age, expressed in his essay 'The Poetry of Architecture', published when he was nineteen.⁴⁸ His exposure to art and designed landscape through the taste and enterprise of his parents thus had an important bearing on Ruskin's understanding of the manipulation of nature to picturesque effect, and his awareness of the capacity to create sensation through landscape. These threads were woven in subsequent years into the garden at Brantwood where an idiosyncratic artistic intention was expressed in the woodland, offering Ruskin's own interpretation of the picturesque.

⁴⁵ Works 35.316.

⁴⁶ Works 27.170 (October 1871).

⁴⁷ Ruskin visited Blenheim to look at the pictures while studying at Oxford: see Works 1.493 n. and 35.198.

⁴⁸ Works 1.5-188.

In his later travels within Britain, Ruskin reserved praise for designed landscapes which made the most of their natural setting. In May 1876, five years after purchasing Brantwood, he wrote to his botanist friend, Daniel Oliver (1830-1916), of a visit to Rokeby Park, near Greta Bridge in County Durham, home of the Morritt family: 'I have been this morning – May 4th – through the grounds of Rokeby – the most enviable I ever entered, not excepting Fountain's Abbey [sic], which is wonderful'.⁴⁹ The early nineteenth-century garden seen by Ruskin at Rokeby made the most of dramatic natural topography. The River Greta cut through cliffs, and paths crossed picturesque bridges, leading to an artificial cave carved into the precipice, offering a sublime viewing platform. Walter Scott was inspired by this landscape in his poem 'Rokeby', dedicated in 1813 to J. B. S. Morritt, and published with illustrations by Turner in 1831. This offered a reason for Ruskin's visit, along with the appeal of the famous 'Rokeby Venus' by Velasquez which formed the highlight of the family's collection of paintings. Thus Ruskin's delight at the landscape was mediated by the romance of Scott's poem and Turner's paintings, providing a familiarity through imagery before he had seen the actual landscape, and predisposing him to respond favourably to it. Furthermore, Ruskin included Turner's watercolour *The Junction of the Greta and Tees at Rokeby* in his teaching collection at Oxford University in 1870, describing it as a 'faultless example of Turner's work at the time when it is most exemplary'.⁵⁰ Ruskin praised Rokeby alongside the landscape of Fountains Abbey, which also featured a sublime riverside walk enhanced by designed viewpoints positioned along a steep bank, leading ultimately to the prized vista of the ruined abbey. The landscape at Rokeby was coveted by Ruskin ('the most enviable I ever entered'), suggesting that now that he was himself a landowner, his garden-visiting had progressed from admiration to a desire to possess. Within the limitations of scale, Ruskin's designed landscape at Brantwood can be read in the framework of Rokeby; it was after his visit to Rokeby in 1876 that he began work on the steep path up to the Precipice Rock and enhanced the flow of his stream into a rushing cascade, both features sharing the sublimity of the Rokeby landscape and the romance of Scott's poem.

⁴⁹ The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre, Lancaster University, MS T30, 4 May 1876.

⁵⁰ Works 21.11 (Ruskin Art Collection at Oxford, Standard Series No. 2).

Ruskin offered few specific comments on the gardens he visited, either those of his friends or ‘famous’ gardens on the tourist circuit that he visited while travelling abroad. The garden of Isola Bella, one of the Borromean Islands on Lake Maggiore in Italy, was an attraction to tourists in the nineteenth century as it is today, famed for its theatricality and island setting. On an early visit to the Continent, Ruskin travelled to Lake Maggiore and recognised the scene depicted by Turner in his vignette for Roger’s *Italy*, the book that kindled Ruskin’s profound regard for Turner’s work. The vignette depicts in the foreground the balustrades and flowerpots of the formal terraces which constitute the garden of Isola Bella, the excess of which Ruskin contended in *The Poetry of Architecture* has resulted in ‘paltriness’.⁵¹ Quoting in *Praeterita* from his diary of July 1844, Ruskin revealed his sadness at the laziness of the Italian people, as a result of which ‘the gardens [...] are foul as dunghills. The Isola Bella is fast going to decay’, although the ‘flowers and foliage’ remained beautiful despite the decrepitude of their setting.⁵² Ruskin visited Isola Bella in 1849, and recorded three further visits in his diary of July 1858, noting how he ‘read the book of the *Purgatorio* on pride, with the motto “Humilitas”, woven in proud ironwork before me, with a coronet over it, at the principal balcony of the garden’, seeming to mock the symbolism of the garden rather than explore the ideas behind it.⁵³ The garden at Isola Bella was a theatrical display of wealth and prestige, the site of sumptuous parties redolent of sensuality and ostentation, clearly displaying none of the humility of the motto, as Ruskin wryly observed. In recognising the disconnect between symbolic and actual intent, Ruskin revealed his understanding of the layering of symbolic significance in a garden, where more than one meaning – including conflicting meanings – could be expressed simultaneously. This symbolic multiplicity is evident at Brantwood: for example, the superficial sporting purpose of the tennis lawn is layered with an aesthetic imagery and a mythological spirituality, with each meaning co-existing in the same space.

⁵¹ Works 1.86 and n.

⁵² Works 35.331.

⁵³ *The Diaries of John Ruskin*, 3 vols, ed. by Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-59), p. 536 (11 July 1858).

On his frequent visits to Lake Maggiore, Ruskin sketched the landscape, including the islands.⁵⁴ Isola Madre, like its sister island Isola Bella, was famed for its eighteenth-century garden but there is no record of Ruskin visiting the garden: his interest in the Borromean Islands centred on their contribution to the beauty of the landscape setting, rather than the designed landscapes shaped onto the islands themselves. That the beauty of the wider landscape had made a significant and lasting impression on him is evident in *Praeterita*, in which Ruskin reflected:

I call the Lago Maggiore district the Eden of Italy; for there are no solfataras there, no earthquakes, no pestiferous marsh, no fever-striking sunshine. Purest air, richest earth, loveliest wave; and the same noble race that founded the architecture of Italy at Como.⁵⁵

Here, Ruskin defined his appreciation of the landscape by its lack of natural adversity: the absence of the scourge of volcanoes ('solfataras'), of agents of disease and natural disaster, render it akin to Paradise. This was not a landscape of drama and the sublime, rather it was possessed of the Edenic qualities that Ruskin saw at Brantwood, prompting his exclamation to Joan Severn in September 1871 when first seeing the view from his garden: 'Anything so lovely as the view from my rocks was to day – I haven't seen since I was at Lago Maggiore!'.⁵⁶ Echoes of this sentiment are expressed by Ruskin in his recollection in *Praeterita* of family visits to Coniston where 'the view of the long reach of lake, with its softly wooded lateral hills, had for my father a tender charm which excited the same feeling as that with which he afterwards regarded the lakes of Italy'.⁵⁷ The sense of a shared aesthetic with his father of Lakeland views added a layer of associative meaning to Ruskin's appreciation of the landscape. The gardens on the islands of Lake Maggiore were unmemorable, but the landscape was a

⁵⁴ For example, *Isola Madre, Evening*, watercolour, 1845; (verso) *Isola Madre and the Mountains above Laveno, from above Baveno on Lago*, pencil, ink, ink wash and bodycolour, 1845, Ruskin 1996P0870; recorded in *Catalogue of Ruskin's Drawings*, Works 38.259.

⁵⁵ Works 35.331.

⁵⁶ Rachel Dickinson, *John Ruskin's Correspondence with Joan Severn: Sense and Nonsense Letters* (Cambridge: Legenda, Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2009), p. 140 (13 September 1871).

⁵⁷ Works 35.95.

treasured recollection, and one that was linked in Ruskin's aesthetic to the landscape around Brantwood. On his summer trip the year after buying Brantwood, Ruskin again visited Baveno and Isola Madre on his way from Venice to Geneva, allowing him to reconnect with the landscape with renewed significance.⁵⁸

Ruskin's admiration of views motivated visits to other gardens in Italy. When staying in Verona from May to July 1869, he made several visits to Giusti, a Renaissance garden renowned for its statues and cypress trees.⁵⁹ He recorded that he '[d]rew little bit of cypress in Giusti Gardens', suggesting that he was studying close details of the planting; he appeared more interested in the view *from* the garden than the layout of the garden itself.⁶⁰ This view was memorable to Ruskin: several years later, in 1884, he asked Frank Randal to draw 'some views from the Giusti Gardens, or what other high sites you can get leave to work from'.⁶¹ The value to Ruskin was the elevated position with views over Verona. This act of looking out from a garden is evident in a diary entry from June 1870 when Ruskin was staying in Florence and noted: 'See sunset from Galileo's garden'.⁶² The garden itself is significant only as the location for the view. Other recorded visits to gardens focussed on the natural aspects of the designed landscape. At the Borghese Gardens in Rome in 1874, Ruskin commented on the wooded areas: 'Gardens, indeed! they're more like Windsor Forest', and admired the nocturnal scene after the hay had been cut when nightingales were singing, showing appreciation for the rural quality of the scene rather than the gardened landscape.⁶³ Significantly, he had stumbled across the garden by accident rather than having any deliberate intention to visit, stating 'I got into them by mere chance last night as I was exploring'.⁶⁴ Ruskin found the ceaseless activity of the fountains at the Borghese Gardens overbearing, particularly after the day of rain he had endured, preferring the calmness of the informal areas and ungardened spaces. Similarly, at Fontainbleau, near Paris, Ruskin recorded his 'savage dislike of palaces and straight gravel walks', capturing his distaste for the formality and symmetry of French

⁵⁸ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 728 (16 and 17 July 1872).

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 668-73 (6 and 20 June, 12 July).

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 670 (6 June 1869).

⁶¹ Works 30.lxxi.

⁶² Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 697 (28 June 1870).

⁶³ Works 23.xxxvi-xxxvii.

⁶⁴ Works 23.xxxvi.

gardens.⁶⁵ On other occasions, gardens offered a useful setting for a walk: for example in Geneva in August 1856, Ruskin recorded ‘Walk in botanic garden with Father and Mother’.⁶⁶ The emphasis on instruction rather than ornament in a botanic garden corresponds with Ruskin’s educational ideals, although his pleasure in encountering plants in their natural habitat on botanising expeditions was absent in the manicured order beds of an urban garden.

This overview of Ruskin’s garden visiting, together with the preceding account of the Lakeland gardens in the immediate vicinity of Brantwood, offers context for Ruskin’s garden-making, but serves mainly to demonstrate that Ruskin was gardening beyond the influence of contemporary design philosophy. His aesthetic approach was founded on an appreciation of Botticelli and Walter Scott, his planting choices rooted in memory and association. The outward influences on his gardening stemmed not from horticulture, but from political economy, social morality, and materialist science. The ills of industrialisation were addressed by Ruskin in his garden ‘experiments’ in sustainability, while the threat of modern science was encapsulated in his attitude to flowers. To understand Ruskin’s approach to gardening, his attitude to science requires introduction; its idiosyncrasy has been variously described by modern critics as ‘wantonly unscientific’, ‘ill-digested’, ‘confused and at times deranged’, and ‘not science but play’.⁶⁷

Ruskin’s science

In the course of the nineteenth century, the focus of science had changed from empirical observation of the natural world to the study of isolated individual disciplines; the microscope and dissection had superseded observation and field study, and theorising and deduction had supplanted the mere recording of facts. This resulted in an epistemological separation of science and art, which Ruskin sought to

⁶⁵ Works 35.314.

⁶⁶ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 519 (21 August 1856).

⁶⁷ Frederick Kirchhoff, ‘A Science against Sciences: Ruskin’s Floral Mythology’, in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. by U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), p. 247; Wilfrid Blunt, *The Art of Botanical Illustration* (London: Collins, 1950), p. 231; Richard Mabey, *Weeds: How vagabond plants gatecrashed civilisation and changed the way we think about nature* (London: Profile Books, 2010), p. 162; John D. Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass: A portrait of Ruskin’s Genius* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1963), p. 181.

redress. He presented his approach in three books published following his move to Brantwood, each based on close observation of nature: *Proserpina* (1875-86) deals with botany, *Deucalion* (1875-83) geology, and *Love's Meinie* (1873-81) ornithology. Each book was published in parts and can be seen as the culmination of decades of observation and contemplation of the natural world, but also as a reaction to the current of modern scientific thinking. As Robert Hewison has observed, Ruskin was aiming 'to put back what the scientists of his day appeared to be leaving out': the imaginative response to nature.⁶⁸ Ruskin's self-appointed role as facilitator on the path to knowledge is recognised by Francis O'Gorman, who identifies Ruskin's ambition 'to present himself as the interpreter of a divinely fashioned nature in which moral truths are persistently articulated to those who have the eyes to see them'.⁶⁹

The theorising of modern science threatened the certainty of Ruskin's beliefs. He was troubled by the association between sexuality and destruction at the heart of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, and refuted Darwin's claim that nature was a fight for survival between species, with survival the ultimate goal. O'Gorman asserts that it was the notion of continuous flux that troubled Ruskin, who remained steadfastly attached to abiding truths, constancy, and irrefutable knowledge.⁷⁰ Mark Frost claims that Ruskin was more troubled by the ideas presented by Darwin in *The Descent of Man* (1871) than in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and that '[a]fter Darwin, nature seemed to harbour malefic influences in a way it had never done before for Ruskin'.⁷¹ Nicolette Scourse identifies a sea-change in thinking that could no longer be reversed: 'Now spiritual consolation in studying nature was gone. Botany and all the natural sciences presented instead a terrifying mirror of a world of chance, competition and change'.⁷² Added to this destabilisation, Ruskin was deeply troubled by the scientific departure from the knowable to the unknowable. In February 1885 in a letter to Oliver Lodge, Professor of Physics at the University of Liverpool, he revealed

⁶⁸ Robert Hewison, "'Paradise Lost': Ruskin and Science' in *Time and Tide: Ruskin and Science*, ed. by Michael Wheeler (London: Pilkington Press, 1996), p. 40.

⁶⁹ Francis O'Gorman, "'The Eagle and the Whale?': Ruskin's argument with John Tyndall' in *Time and Tide: Ruskin and Science*, ed. by Michael Wheeler (London: Pilkington Press, 1996), p. 48.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁷¹ Mark Frost, "'The Law of Help': John Ruskin's Ecological Vision, 1843-1886' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southampton, 2005), pp. 20-21.

⁷² Nicolette Scourse, *The Victorians and their Flowers* (London: Croome Helm; Portland: Timber Press, 1983), p. 181.

his physical disquiet when contemplating the notion of the theory of kinetic gases: 'I was sick and giddy and could eat no dinner. I can't read any books upon it, nor do I ever concern myself about anything I cannot see, touch, or feel with my heart'.⁷³ Ruskin's visceral reaction reveals the extent to which his confidence in the authority of empirical knowledge was undermined by the theorising of modern science, which he was increasing less able to ignore.

With the destabilising influence of science, Ruskin's nature studies at Brantwood were not the work of quiet retirement that they might at first appear. His work on natural history – botany in particular – was imbued with the subverting influence of materialist science, and overlaid with personal associations of people and place, inducing despondency, regret and sorrow, as well as joy. This biographical approach to botany is extended to Ruskin's garden-making to illuminate the meaning embodied in the landscape, revealing aspects of the character of its creator from an angle hitherto unexplored in Ruskin scholarship. Biographical threads are woven through the garden, and an understanding of Ruskin's life – revealed by him in *Praeterita* and *Fors Clavigera*, in diaries and letters, and interpreted by others in biographies – is essential to understanding his gardening, both as an expression of his ideals, and a response to people and place.

Biographical approach

There have been many biographies written on Ruskin, reflecting cultural changes which shaped attitudes towards Victorian public figures. In order to reflect the more recent reappraisal of Ruskin's contemporary significance, this thesis draws mainly on the biographical detail presented by Tim Hilton in his works, *John Ruskin: The Early Years* (1985) and *John Ruskin: The Later Years* (2000), while also being informed by Andrew Ballantyne's *John Ruskin* (2015), Kevin Jackson's *The Worlds of John Ruskin* (2011), and John Batchelor's *John Ruskin: No Wealth But Life* (2000). None of the modern biographers afford any significance to Ruskin's gardening.

The *Library Edition*, edited by Cook and Wedderburn, gathers in thirty-nine volumes Ruskin's published writing and lectures along with edited correspondence,

⁷³ Oliver Lodge, 'Mr Ruskin's Attitude to Science', *St George*, 32, 8 (October 1905), pp. 286-87.

letters to the press, unpublished fragments, juvenilia, Ruskiniana and documents relating to the Guild of St George. The introductions to each volume offer biographical context for the work that follows, which has informed the interpretation of aspects of Ruskin's garden-making in this thesis. Cook was a journalist and admirer of Ruskin, and in 1899 was appointed editor of *The Garden*, a popular horticultural weekly paper.⁷⁴ He was thus editing a gardening publication while simultaneously immersed in collating, editing and writing biographical introductions to Ruskin's work. This concurrence suggests that Cook may have been open to an understanding of Ruskin's gardening: as someone who knew both about gardening and about Ruskin, he was well placed to assess Ruskin's garden-making in relation to trends in nineteenth-century horticulture. The comments made in the *Library Edition* relating to gardens are therefore deemed to be authoritative and considered. This is tempered by the assertions of scholars who have questioned the presentation of Ruskin's life in the *Library Edition*, suggesting that his political and religious views have been misrepresented, and personal details expunged at the behest of Severn.⁷⁵

The *Library Edition* can be viewed alongside two biographical works by W. G. Collingwood, who had first stayed at Brantwood in the summer of 1875 as a student, working with Wedderburn on a translation of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* and returned in later years to a role as Ruskin's secretary and geological assistant, becoming a trusted friend and neighbour, and ultimately a helper and protector as Ruskin's faculties dwindled. In 1893 he wrote *A Life of John Ruskin*, with the endorsement of Ruskin and the editorial restrictions of Severn, and in 1903 published *Ruskin Relics*, offering a more personal insight by including 'all the little incidents, the by-play of life, the anecdotes which betray character'.⁷⁶ This is the only biography to focus specifically on Ruskin's garden-making. Collingwood was himself involved in the construction of parts of the garden, notably the harbour and the moorland garden, and, although his account is 'lovingly told', and therefore not entirely impartial, he was

⁷⁴ Hadfield, *History of British Gardening*, p. 370. Cook was joint editor with Gertrude Jekyll from 1899 to 1902 when he was appointed sole editor.

⁷⁵ Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years 1819-1859* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. xi-xii; Helen Gill Viljoen recommended that the *Library Edition* should not be used as a source by Ruskin scholars.

⁷⁶ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 3.

a qualified observer and his reading of the garden was formed by intimate acquaintance with the landscape.⁷⁷ The eight-page chapter entitled ‘Ruskin’s Gardening’ offers a valuable interpretation of Ruskin’s intentions in the landscape from the perspective of a loyal friend attuned to Ruskin’s scholarly as well as his spiritual thinking. Each of the other thirteen chapters that make up the book have titles beginning ‘Ruskin’s ...’ followed by a noun, for example ‘Ruskin’s Music’ and ‘Ruskin’s Bibles’. By choosing the gerund form in ‘Ruskin’s Gardening’, Collingwood asserted Ruskin’s active participation in the physical creation of the garden, while implying perceptively that the ethos behind the intention was more revealing than the actual manifestation on the ground. Collingwood’s interpretation of Ruskin’s garden praxis is accompanied by descriptions of layout and planting, as well as illustrations, which form a reliable source from which to reconstruct the physical landscape.

The importance of understanding Ruskin’s life story to comprehend his work is emphasised in the preface to the *Library Edition*:

His personality was very marked; he was a man of many moods. It is impossible to understand aright the works of this author without following also the moods of the man. But again, Ruskin’s life is contained in his writings. [...] Thus, as one reads him through, one gets his biography—the facts of his life, the history of the development of his mind. We have his pen-work from the age of seven or eight to the age of seventy. In him, more perhaps than in any other writer, the style is the man, the Works are the Life.⁷⁸

The simplicity of this reasoning belies the complexity of Ruskin’s character. In his inaugural lecture to the Cambridge School of Art, Ruskin described ‘matters [of] any consequence’ as ‘three-sided, or four-sided, or polygonal’, and commented that the ‘trotting round a polygon is severe work for people in any way stiff in their opinions’.⁷⁹ To Ruskin, an open mind and an active imagination were essential guides to the

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Works 1.ix.

⁷⁹ Works 16.187. For analysis of Ruskin as a polygonal thinker, see Sandra Kemp, ‘Ruskin and the Polygon’, BAVS Talks 2019, University of Liverpool, 8 May 2019, <<https://bavs.ac.uk/videos>> [accessed 27 June 2019].

attainment of universal truth, which must be approached from many angles to penetrate the full depth of meaning. Furthermore, the life experience that informed such thinking frequently presented further events that prompted a change of mind: Ruskin posited that one should not be satisfied to have ‘handled a subject properly till [you] have contradicted yourself at least three times’.⁸⁰ In *Modern Painters V*, he explained that his changes of opinion were not a matter of whimsy but the result of careful thinking: ‘All true opinions are living, and show their life by being capable of nourishment; therefore of change. But their change is that of a tree – not of a cloud’.⁸¹ As this thesis demonstrates, Ruskin’s garden-making reflects the steady growth of wisdom in his mature thinking, expressing the culmination of a lifetime’s revision or confirmation of opinion, and offering a new perspective on his late works.

Sources

The four works which provide the thematic framework for this thesis – *Praeterita*, *Proserpina*, *Hortus Inclusus* and *Fors Clavigera* – are augmented by textual reference to several other works by Ruskin to illustrate the polygonal thinking of his career. His early writing in *The Poetry of Architecture* (1837) provides the most complete exposition of his attitude to the laying out of gardens, views which remained unchanged in later life. The seminal works of *Modern Painters* (1843-60) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53) have been mined for references to gardens and plants; however, their value to understanding Ruskin’s approach to gardening is found more in what they reveal about aesthetics, moral truth, and the value of working in harmony with nature. Ruskin’s focus on nature study at Brantwood is expressed in *Proserpina*, but also in his ornithological work *Love’s Meinie* (1873-81), and his geological studies *Deucalion* (1875-83) and *Yewdale and Its Streamlets* (1877). Each has yielded scope for analysing Ruskin’s attitude to modern science, and the observations he undertook in the garden as research. His meteorological work, *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884), took observation a stage further by equating the weather with the moral decline of society. Ruskin’s expression of the plague cloud encompassed the nightmare vision of his declining mental health and, read in conjunction with his

⁸⁰ Works 16.187.

⁸¹ Works 7.9.

diaries from this period, it is evident that the garden played a role in the manifestation of the malignant side of nature. Published just before Ruskin's identification of the plague cloud, *The Queen of the Air* (1869) is salient for its exposition of the relationship between myth and science, but also for the copy at The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre at Lancaster University, annotated by Rose La Touche, which preserves the flowers and leaves she pressed between the pages.⁸² This tangible expression of Ruskin and La Touche's language of flowers underlines the significance of the plants growing at Brantwood in their symbolic use as a means of communication. The multiplicity of subjects in Ruskin's oeuvre used as sources for his gardening reflects the polygonal approach that Ruskin himself advocated. Added to the texts above, insight on gardens and gardening has been found by studying Ruskin's letters to the press (compiled as *Arrows of the Chase* in 1880), his Master's Reports to the Guild of St George, and in his fairy tale *The King of the Golden River* (1851).

This thesis has also been informed by primary sources in the form of letters and diaries, some examined in holograph, others as edited collections. Paintings and drawings by Ruskin, particularly nature studies, have been used as evidence of his observational use of the garden, and his way of looking at flowers. Paintings of Brantwood offer valuable glimpses of the garden as an entity within the landscape; furthermore, works by Collingwood, Arthur Severn and Laurence Hilliard offer the artistic interpretation of people who knew the garden, and Ruskin, intimately. Extant objects connected to Ruskin's gardening activities, including his billhook and his apiary equipment in the collection of the Ruskin Museum, Coniston, offer a tangible connection to his active participation in garden labour, while in the books from his library, annotation, cutting and re-ordering of pages provides valuable evidence of the cognitive process of his botanical classification.

Research undertaken for this thesis on the physical layout of the garden is informed by cartographic analysis, while sales particulars from 1932 have contributed descriptions of Ruskin's garden with subsequent augmentation by Joan Severn.⁸³ The

⁸² Ruskin, 1996B3044.

⁸³ Ruskin's landscape interventions are shown on the Ordnance Survey 25-inch series Lancashire IV.8, surveyed in 1888 and published in 1890, and the OS six-inch series Lancashire IV, surveyed in 1889 and published in 1892; sales particulars: Ruskin MS 74, Knight, Frank and Rutley, auction 20 July 1932.

garden in its present form has the layers of Severn's garden as well as those of a visitor attraction, with new paths created to facilitate access, a car park superseding the kitchen garden, and new plantings. Ruskin's garden can be discerned in the hard landscaping of paths, steps, bridges and walls. The structure of the zig-zag and moorland terracing survives, as does the harbour wall, the ice house and the footprint of the Professor's Garden, although the bee house has been reconstructed. The streams, pond, reservoirs and waterfall are still active, and the levelled tennis court remains in the wood.⁸⁴ Visual and textual evidence has been considered while walking the landscape, both within the boundary of the garden, and in the wider landscape. Cartographic survey and fieldwork have verified the physical elements of Ruskin's garden and brought clarity to the relationship between the land and its inhabitants, and this thesis draws on the methodology of cultural geography to explore the concepts of 'pastoral' and 'natural', and the impact of rural industry on landscape and community. Walking the landscape has enabled appreciation of the emotional stimuli of landscape and views, explored within the conceptual framework of biophilia, and simulating Ruskin's haptic experience of walking has offered insights into his observational methodology when studying geology, botany and meteorology. Surveys of neighbouring properties, including The Thwaite, Monk Coniston, and Wordsworth's garden at Rydal Mount, have provided context for Ruskin's garden-making and traced potential horticultural influence. In crafting this research with an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of source material – encompassing art history, garden history, literature, geography, economic history, botany, geology, and the history of science – Ruskin's own concept of polygonal thinking has been followed, augmented by biographical analysis of the lived experience that shaped his gardening.

Descriptions of the garden at Brantwood

Contemporary descriptions of the garden are mostly incidental to published accounts of Ruskin's life at Brantwood, or gleaned from epistolary evidence. The editors of the *Library Edition* rely on Collingwood's *Ruskin Relics* for much of their description of the garden, together with accounts of contemporary visitors, including Coventry Patmore

⁸⁴ My thanks to Howard Hull, Sally Beamish and the gardeners at Brantwood for access to the garden, information about the restoration, and insights into Ruskin's gardening.

(1875), Georgiana Burne-Jones (1873), and Violet and Venice Hunt, the daughters of Alfred Hunt (1873), supplemented by extracts from Ruskin's diaries.⁸⁵ Wedderburn, co-editor of the *Library Edition*, published personal accounts in the popular press of Ruskin's life at Brantwood, first in 1877 and again in 1881.⁸⁶ His articles reflect the impressions of one familiar with Ruskin's domestic life, but lack the aesthetic insight which imbues Collingwood's description in *Ruskin Relics*. His co-editor, Cook wrote the accompanying text to Emily Warren's watercolour paintings of significant places in Ruskin's life, published in 1912 as *Homes and Haunts of John Ruskin*.⁸⁷ In the final chapter of this book, entitled 'Brantwood', Cook begins by emphasising Ruskin's fascination with mountain culture, issuing from childhood and remaining throughout his life, then draws parallels between former owner of Brantwood William Linton's management of the land and Ruskin's subsequent garden work, recognising a continuance of practice and ethos in 'woodcutting and agricultural experiments', 'artistic work', political 'propaganda', and in the increase of acreage.⁸⁸ Of Warren's watercolours, a view of Brantwood from the lake is used as the frontispiece to the volume, but there are no illustrations of the garden, although the gardens of Ruskin's childhood homes are illustrated, as well as those of the houses he rented in Mornex in 1862.

Warren and Cook were admirers of Ruskin, as was Hardwicke Rawnsley, one of Ruskin's students at Oxford who settled at Wray, near Brantwood, in 1878, later moving to Allen Bank in Grasmere. His book, *Ruskin and the English Lakes* (1901) reveals an understanding of Ruskin's spiritual attraction to the Lake country, mirrored in his own endeavours to protect the beauty of the landscape under the auspices of the Lake District Defence Society, and later the National Trust.⁸⁹ Augusta Wakefield was another acolyte who presented a romanticised view of life at Brantwood in an article in *Murray's Magazine* (1890), describing Ruskin's art treasures before noting

⁸⁵ Works 23.xxiv-xxvii.

⁸⁶ Works 23.xxvii n.2: Alexander Wedderburn, 'Celebrities at Home, No. LIV. Professor Ruskin at Brantwood', *World*, 29 August 1877; 'A Lake-side Home', *Art Journal*, November and December, 1881.

⁸⁷ E. T. Cook, *Homes and Haunts of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen and Company Ltd, 1912).

⁸⁸ Cook, *Homes and Haunts*, p. 208.

⁸⁹ Graham Murphy, 'Rawnsley, Hardwicke Drummond (1851–1920), Church of England clergyman and conservationist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 17 September 2015, Oxford University Press, <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37884>> [accessed 23 August 2019].

aspects of the garden, including the views, harbour, moorland, Professor's Garden and potting shed. Frederick Sessions featured Ruskin in his *Literary Celebrities of the English Lake District* (1905), as well as Linton and the Beever siblings of The Thwaite. In his description, he stated that, 'Ruskin created order and beauty out of the wilderness, with a rose-garden and a garden for wild flowers'⁹⁰ suggesting that he was not familiar with the ethos of Ruskin's gardening, and may have been describing Severn's gardens rather than Ruskin's. He also mentioned 'a water-works on the fell', commenting that 'the construction of his reservoir and conduits [show] that hydraulics and engineering are not best done by untrained enthusiastic amateurs'.⁹¹ The account by Elbert Hubbard published in *Little Journeys to the Homes of Good Men and Great* (1894-1908), and partly reproduced as 'Ruskiniana' in the *Library Edition*, ends with a description of Ruskin leading the author through the garden along a path towards the lake, where Ruskin 'called our attention to various varieties of ferns that he had transplanted there'.⁹² The fragmentary garden details given in these contemporary accounts have been analysed to piece together an impression of the garden in Ruskin's lifetime.

Of more recent commentators, Paul Peacock described Ruskin's garden at Brantwood in *Country Life* to celebrate the restoration of parts of the garden in 2003.⁹³ James Dearden's book *Brantwood: The Story of John Ruskin's Coniston Home* (2009) offers an introduction to the history of the estate, focussing on the thirty years of Ruskin's occupancy, while also tracing the late eighteenth-century origins of the house, and continuing the story to include public opening in 1932 and subsequent restoration.⁹⁴ In *The Gardens at Brantwood* (2014), David Ingram has presented a detailed survey, illustrated with contemporary and archive images, in which he weaves together a description of the garden with historical sources to illuminate Ruskin's intentions.⁹⁵ Ingram's combination of botanical, historic and literary knowledge offers

⁹⁰ Frederick Sessions, *Literary Celebrities of the English Lake District* (London: Elliot Stock, 1905), p. 70.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Works 34.673-74; Elbert Hubbard, *Little journeys to the homes of good men and great*, Memorial edition (New York and Chicago: Wm H Wise and Co., 1916), p. 100.

⁹³ Paul Peacock, 'Walk in Ruskin's Footsteps', *Country Life*, 5 June 2003, pp. 166-69.

⁹⁴ James S. Dearden, *Brantwood: The Story of John Ruskin's Coniston Home* (Coniston: The Ruskin Foundation, 2009).

⁹⁵ Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*.

a perspective on Ruskin's landscape hitherto unpublished, and his scholarship has opened up avenues of research, some of which are progressed in this thesis. Sally Beamish, who was Brantwood's head gardener from 1988-2018 and the driving force behind the garden restoration, wrote an article focussing on the interpretation of Ruskin's moorland garden, in which she summed up the essence of Brantwood:

Brantwood was one of the first, and perhaps the truest of Wild Gardens; it was also an intellectual's garden, where theory and concept could be put to the practical test. Within its bounds, ideas on social reform, sympathetic land management, art and allegory were woven into the Lakeland landscape.⁹⁶

Beamish and others have named parts of the garden, as Ruskin himself appears not to have given names to specific areas, instead using inconsistent nomenclature, or simple markers such as the 'garden by stream', the 'new garden', or 'strawberry rock'.⁹⁷ Several of the modern names are taken from Collingwood's description in *Ruskin Relics*, including 'Zig-Zaggy' and the 'Professor's Garden'. For ease of identification, modern names are used here to identify parts of the garden where a historic name is lacking. The term 'garden' applied to Brantwood is used to refer to the entirety of Ruskin's landscape, incorporating moorland and woods, as well as the cultivated areas of kitchen garden. Similarly, Ruskin's 'garden-making' refers to all his landscape interventions: civil engineering and waterworks, as well as planting and pruning. The terms 'wild' and 'wilderness' are used with caution, referring to ungardened spaces rather than pristine landscape, the slopes of Ruskin's garden having been managed for centuries for coppice, pannage, charcoal-burning and other rural industry.⁹⁸ Ruskin's own use of the terms 'wild' and 'natural' is analysed in his usage in relation to the garden. An antonym of 'wild' in landscape terms is 'pastoral': an adjective used by Ruskin to mean both land for grazing livestock and an idealised

⁹⁶ Sally Beamish, 'Brantwood – Home of John Ruskin', in *Thinkglobal Cityscape Landshape Symposium, Windermere, 2000*, ed. by Laurie Short (Carlisle: Cumbria College of Art and Design and WWF-UK, 2001), p. 143.

⁹⁷ *The Diaries of John Ruskin*, 3 vols, ed. by Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-59), p. 757 (10 September 1873) and p. 760 (28 September 1873).

⁹⁸ For an account of historic land management at Brantwood, see Fiona Loynes, 'The Historical Context of Brantwood and Ruskin at Brantwood' (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), Ruskin T120.

version of country life, sometimes conflating the two meanings, as in his comment that the view from his window was ‘entirely pastoral and pure’.⁹⁹ The loaded meaning of both ‘pastoral’ and ‘pure’ in this context is scrutinised below. The *Oxford English Dictionary* is used when probing specific meaning, and the *Oxford Companion to Gardens* (2001) is used to define terms used in relation to gardens, such as cottage gardening and the picturesque.¹⁰⁰

The first chapter of the thesis is framed by the curated episodes of his life that Ruskin chose to recount in his autobiography *Praeterita*, published in parts from 1885 to 1889. The role of memory and association revealed in the geography of his life culminated in the landscape Ruskin shaped around him at Brantwood, where flowers, rocks, clouds and views evoked memories of people and place. This echoes the theme of reflection and remembrance in *Praeterita* where the sub-title, ‘Outlines of Scenes and Thoughts Perhaps Worthy of Memory in my Past Life’, modestly presents the curated composition of the book; it was Ruskin’s intention to share with his readers the events in life that formed and informed his published work, rather than a conventional chronological and fact-based autobiography. His statement that, ‘I would write what either I had pleasure in remembering or felt it a duty to remember’ reinforces the notion of pedagogical obligation that motivated all Ruskin’s writing, believing that by describing the formative experiences that prompted his work, he would facilitate a deeper understanding of his meaning.¹⁰¹ His intention was to be candid and personal in the pursuit of this goal, determining that the book would be ‘more useful if it showed the innermost of me’.¹⁰² Although partial and necessarily subjective, Ruskin’s own endorsement of the value of *Praeterita* in promoting understanding offers justification for approaching his landscape through autobiography in this chapter. This approach will both set the scene for the themes

⁹⁹ Works 4.8.

¹⁰⁰ <<https://www.oed.com>>; *Oxford Companion to Gardens*, ed. by Geoffrey Jellicoe and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰¹ *The Letters of John Ruskin to Lord and Lady Mount-Temple*, ed. by John Lewis Bradley (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964), p. 383 (letter to Georgina Cowper-Temple, 31 January 1886).

¹⁰² Ibid.

explored in subsequent chapters, and analyse the foregrounding of Ruskin's personal aesthetic expressed in the garden.

By 1885, when the first part of *Praeterita* was published, Ruskin's gardening projects had been either accomplished or abandoned, and the landscape remained for enjoyment of the simple pleasures of nature: mountain views, flowering plants, rocks, the gushing stream, sunrise and sunset. The quiet, uncontroversial landscape of Brantwood is embodied in the writing of *Praeterita*. Publication of the book stalled due to mental illness and was eventually abandoned unfinished; the projected chapters covering the later years of Ruskin's life at Brantwood remain unwritten.¹⁰³ Further evidence of Ruskin's last years has been suppressed. Towards the end of his life, and particularly as a result of periods of mental incapacity, Ruskin was guided by those close to him who endeavoured to safeguard his reputation, as well as protect their own interests. Charles Eliot Norton, long-standing friend and appointed literary executor, and Severn, who stood to inherit Ruskin's property, were both keen to prevent Ruskin revealing intimate details of his life that had the potential to damage his public standing. The force of their intent was apparent in the bonfire lit at Brantwood after Ruskin's death, onto which were thrown his love-letters to Rose La Touche along with hers to him.¹⁰⁴ The loss of much of the written evidence of Ruskin's emotive core focusses investigation elsewhere; the quest for insight has hitherto seldom led to the garden but it is here that much can be revealed of Ruskin's praxis and his mature preoccupations. This chapter suggests new ways in which the garden can be read as an assimilation of Ruskin's artistic and political thinking.

Relating his thinking on plants to his subsequent life-writing in *Praeterita*, Ruskin stated in 1870 that, 'what we especially need at present for educational purposes is to know, not the anatomy of plants, but their biography—how and where they live and die, their tempers, benevolences, malignities, distresses, and virtues'.¹⁰⁵ This 'biography' of plants was to take published form in *Proserpina*, which informs the focus of Chapter Two. Ruskin conceived the book as a basic 'grammar' to help people,

¹⁰³ The unwritten chapters have been constructed from diary entries and other sources in Bernard Richards, *The Field Under the Wood: John Ruskin at Brantwood (being Chapter 15 of Praeterita Continued)* (Oxford: privately published, 2008).

¹⁰⁴ Works 35.lxxvi.

¹⁰⁵ Works 20.101.

especially young people, to learn about plants. He was concerned about the lack of accessible botany books and wanted to preserve the wonder of nature that he felt was being eroded by the processes of materialist science, and return instead to the fundamentals of curiosity, observation and reverence. Published in parts sporadically from 1875 to 1886 and unfinished, the fragmentary nature of Ruskin's writing projects an inherent urgency to convey the botanical observations that he had been amassing over a lifetime of study, and the book combines dated fragments of text with current thinking and tangential passages on mythology, children's literature and morality. This chapter argues that *Proserpina* belongs more to the genre of biography than botany, its positioning by Ruskin as a basic textbook fogged by obfuscating references to mythology and literature, its science diluted by anthropomorphism and covert messages conveyed in an idiosyncratic language of flowers. A book about flowers has obvious relevance to a study of the garden, and by analysing Ruskin's botanical journey – a journey that culminated in his garden at Brantwood – the influence of people, place, culture and science is translated from page to landscape.

The significance of *Proserpina* to a study of the garden is twofold. Firstly, it sets out Ruskin's plant preferences and shows how Brantwood was used as an observatory for botanical study and the formulation of Ruskin's alternative science. Secondly, its covert references to Rose La Touche exemplify the intertwining of Ruskin's thoughts on plants with his preoccupation with La Touche, placing her as a central, if absent, figure in the garden. Ruskin met La Touche in 1858, and came to hope she would become his wife. She was deeply religious, often seriously ill, and her parents strongly objected to her relationship with Ruskin; through turbulent times of deep joy, pain, torment and anguished waiting, Ruskin suffered for this obsessive love. La Touche died in 1875 at the age of twenty-seven, and Ruskin's years at Brantwood were dominated by thoughts of her. By decoding the symbolism of *Proserpina*, this chapter explores the extent to which Ruskin's obsession is inherent in the garden, in planting choices and in La Touche's absent presence.

A covert link with La Touche is hidden in plain sight in the title of *Proserpina*. Ruskin conceived the name of his botany book several years before publication, writing in a letter to Georgina Cowper-Temple in 1869, 'I think the name of my flower book is fixed, now – Cora Nivalis (or perhaps Cora Nivium) (*Proserpine of the Snows*). An

introduction to the study of Alpine and Arctic Wildflowers'.¹⁰⁶ The reference to arctic flowers was jettisoned from the published work, along with the snowy 'Nivalis' of the title, with Ruskin choosing to focus on plants familiar to him from his own observations of nature, when travelling in the Alps and in Britain. He also revised his reference to the Greek goddess Cora, choosing ultimately to use the Roman name Proserpina as his title. The semantic resonance of the title is extrapolated in this chapter, exposing not only La Touche's name concealed within the word, but the appositeness of the title in relation to the dual nature of rose and thorn identified by Ruskin in her character. The mythological connotations also allude to La Touche: Proserpine, Proserpina, Cora, or Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, abducted while gathering wild flowers in the meadows of Sicily by Hades, god of the underworld, and forced to reside with him, only returning to earth temporarily each year, recognised in the coming of spring. Proserpina is therefore associated with flowers and with springtime, but also with death and the underworld. After his mental breakdown in 1878, Ruskin equated his own experience to his botanical mythology when he wrote: 'Returning, after more than a year's sorrowful interval, to my Sicilian fields, – not incognisant, now, of some of the darker realms of Proserpina', embedding another layer of personal meaning in his choice of title.¹⁰⁷

In keeping with the move towards autobiography and tone of reminiscence in Ruskin's late works, nostalgia is evident in the subtitle of *Proserpina: Studies of Wayside Flowers while the air was yet pure among the Alps and in the Scotland and England which my father knew*. Not only was Ruskin memorialising his father, he was also lamenting the encroachment of industrialisation on his favoured landscapes, with its accompanying pollution, both atmospheric and moral. His topographical nostalgia continued in the text, referring to trees in the landscape as 'giving immovable shelter, – in remaining landmarks, or lovemarks, when all else is changed', reflecting the inextricable ties between landscape, memory and belonging.¹⁰⁸ The wild flowers that

¹⁰⁶ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 234 (21 October [1869]). The title is stated again in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton dated 17 November 1869: 'It is to be called Cora Nivalis, "Snowy Proserpine". An introduction for young people to the study of Alpine and Arctic wild flowers' (*The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, ed. by John Lewis Bradley and Ian Ousby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 180).

¹⁰⁷ Works 25.338.

¹⁰⁸ Works 25.219-20.

Ruskin admired on his tours to the Alps, Scotland and England are the flowers featured in *Proserpina*, not the exotic plants being introduced to Britain from abroad, or the ornamental hybrids popular in Victorian gardens. These, too, are the plants that feature in the garden at Brantwood.

Ruskin's move to Brantwood – allowing for 'rest, and the power of slowly following some branch of natural history or other peaceful knowledge' – was instrumental to the process of assembling his botanical research into publishable form, providing time, focus, and an inspiring landscape full of flowers.¹⁰⁹ Brantwood offered Ruskin fertile ground for the botanical observation that underpins *Proserpina*, and from his landscape he learned about plants. This chapter assesses the role of the garden as observatory in the development of Ruskin's idiosyncratic science, providing the observational authority that guided his botanical study against the current of contemporary science, and facilitating the development of ecological thinking through a recognition of the relationship between plants, landscape and weather. The empirical knowledge gained through observation was supplemented by Ruskin's library of botanical books and the expertise of his friends, including Pauline, Lady Trevelyan (1816-66), Susanna and Mary Beever (1802-83), and Maria La Touche (1824-1906). The extent to which these friends collaborated with Ruskin on the content of *Proserpina* is explored in this chapter, charting the development of his botanical thinking and examining how his knowledge of botany affected the plant ethos of his garden. The chapter addresses the notion of authority in Ruskin's work, and questions whether he was as confident in his own authority as his published work suggests.

The significance of one of these botanical friends – Susanna Beever – is explored further in Chapter Three in the context of her role as advisor to Ruskin on gardening matters, and as exemplar of an ideal existence embedded in the local environment and its landscape tradition. Susanna, or Susie, Beever was a Coniston neighbour who lived at The Thwaite, two miles by road, and less by boat, from Brantwood. From the start of their acquaintance in 1873 until her death in 1893, Ruskin corresponded with Beever, and a collection of their letters was published in 1887, edited by Albert Fleming, an admirer of Ruskin and Companion of the Guild of St George. The selection

¹⁰⁹ Bradley and Ousby, *Norton Letters*, p. 65-66 (26 August 1861).

and publication of the correspondence was endorsed by Ruskin, who wrote a preface to the book and conceived the title, *Hortus Inclusus*, the meaning of which – ‘a garden enclosed’ – conveys a relationship founded on a shared interest in gardens, plants and nature, but also hints, by reference to the biblical *hortus*, at the sheltering protection within the garden boundaries that Ruskin found at both Brantwood and The Thwaite. The allusion to refuge in landscape, identified in the title and in the content of Ruskin’s correspondence with Beever, provides the platform in Chapter Three for an analysis of Ruskin’s relationship with his Lakeland home through notions of biophilia and shelter. Ruskin’s frequent references to ‘nesting’ in the landscape at Brantwood – referring, for example, to ‘my own nest-garden’ – are explored here in relation to concepts of place, belonging and nurture, revealing Brantwood as both sanctuary and torment in the oscillations of Ruskin’s mental health.¹¹⁰ It is argued that Ruskin’s intimate bond with his home landscape, represented in the associative resonance of his garden interventions, was shaped in part by the practical and ideological inspiration of friends.

This chapter shows that the qualities Ruskin admired in Beever – her attachment to place, her unpretentiousness, her innate respect for flora and fauna, her simple faith – were drawn from the character of the landscape and represent the simple, pastoral self-sufficiency that was fundamental to the ideals of Ruskin’s Guild of St George, which was evolving into a formal entity in the early years of their friendship. Beever’s quotidian demonstration of what one critic has termed ‘sufficiency’, places her as a significant exemplar of the principles Ruskin was advocating for the Guild.¹¹¹ Given that Ruskin was tormented by disappointment at the lack of impact of his societal message, Beever offered validation of his convictions; as this chapter argues, her sympathetic friendship bestowed not only a balm to Ruskin’s ego, but the living endorsement of his dogma at a time when failure was increasingly apparent in his endeavour.

Beever was a gardener, with a knowledge of horticulture and botany that extended to local floral tradition, with Ruskin describing her as ‘deeply versed in plant-lore’.¹¹² She was also a woman of deep learning, her erudition expressed in her

¹¹⁰ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 745 (25 April 1873).

¹¹¹ Vicky Albritton, ‘Ruskin’s Sufficient Muse’, *The Eighth Lamp: Ruskin Studies Today*, 8 (2013).

¹¹² *Works* 33.xxii.

contribution to botanical studies, in her published collection *A Book of References to Remarkable Passages from Shakespeare* (1870), and in Ruskin's compliment: 'I believe you know more Latin than I do, and can certainly make more delightful use of it'.¹¹³ Her mastery of Latin and Shakespeare enabled her to penetrate the sophistication of Ruskin's plant nomenclature, as well as offering stimulating neighbourly company. While Ruskin staunchly denied taking advice from anyone, it is argued here that, directly and indirectly, the garden at Brantwood benefited from the horticultural skill of Beever, was shaped by her knowledge of Lakeland flora, and took inspiration from elements of landscape design at The Thwaite.

It is coincidental that several of the strands of thought occupying Ruskin on his arrival at Brantwood chimed exactly with Beever's interests: flowers and plants, birds, the creation of a garden. In this chapter, an analysis of the correspondence published in *Hortus Inclusus* reveals details of Ruskin's practical gardening and the nature of his landscape interventions; this leads into an exploration of the epistolary subtext that exposes the influential aspects of Beever's character on Ruskin's approach to gardening. Ruskin described Beever as 'one of my dearest friends', and their correspondence reveals a shared affinity with the natural landscape, an appreciation of the flora and fauna of the Lakes, and a sympathy of character which has been largely overlooked in Ruskin scholarship.¹¹⁴ The enduring value of their friendship is manifest in the graveyard of St Andrew's Church in Coniston where Ruskin and Beever were buried side-by-side.

Beever was an exemplar and an ally, with Ruskin professing to her that, 'you are exactly in sympathy with me in all things'.¹¹⁵ A decade later, Ruskin expressed a similar sentiment to another friend, Maria La Touche, to whom he acknowledged, 'you see with my eyes and more, and feel as I feel'.¹¹⁶ After the tortuous years of his

¹¹³ Beever contributed material to William Baxter, *British Phaenogamous Botany*, 1834-43, and J.G. Baker, *Flora of the English Lake District*, 1885; Susanna Beever, *A Book of References to Remarkable Passages from Shakespeare* (London: Bull, Simmons and Co., 1870); Works 38.201 (letter to Beever, 1876).

¹¹⁴ *Frondes Agrestes: Readings in 'Modern Painters', chosen at her pleasure, by the author's friend, the younger lady of the Thwaite, Coniston*, ed. by Susanna Beever (Orpington: George Allen, 1875), p. v (Ruskin's preface).

¹¹⁵ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 22 (25 June 1874).

¹¹⁶ *The Letters of a Noblewoman (Mrs La Touche of Harristown)*, ed. by Margaret Ferrier Young (London: George Allen and Sons, 1908), p. 117 (9 June 1886). A handwritten copy of this letter is included in a

relationship with her daughter Rose, Ruskin was reunited with La Touche in the 1880s, and their correspondence from this period is dominated by references to plants and flowers growing at Brantwood and in La Touche's garden at Harristown in County Kildare. Ruskin had established a network of gardening friends who shared his unconventional approach to garden planting, favouring wild flowers and natural topography, and gardening with ecological empathy, cognisant of the intrinsic value of landscape. This chapter examines the contribution of Ruskin's gardening friends to his landscape interventions at Brantwood, scrutinising the gardens of his Lakeland neighbours, as well as those of friends further afield, and analysing the extent to which Ruskin's garden-making was influenced by their emotional support, attitude to nature, approach to gardening, horticultural aptitude, and botanical knowledge. In addition to the significant contributions of Beever and La Touche, the impact of the gardens of Pauline Trevelyan at Wallington, Mary Hilliard at Cowley Rectory, and Georgina Cowper-Temple at Broadlands are assessed, alongside Lakeland neighbours Dora Livesey at Kelbarrow, Julia Firth at Seathwaite Rayne, and Albert Fleming at Neaum Crag.¹¹⁷ Ruskin's increasing dependency on the support of Severn is explored in relation to her interest in gardening, her impact on the planting at Brantwood, and her role as facilitator in the sharing of plants and seeds among Ruskin's network of gardening friends.

Chapter Four returns to the principles of the Guild of St George, exemplified above by Beever, in an exploration of Ruskin's political economy as manifest in his gardening at Brantwood. The chapter takes *Fors Clavigera* as its foundation, Ruskin's 'letters to the workmen and labourers of Great Britain', published in ninety-six monthly instalments from 1871 to 1884. It is through *Fors* that we can ascertain most clearly Ruskin's practical intentions for his garden; the didacticism of his writing is translated into the ideas that formed the harbour, Professor's Garden, Zig-Zag terraces

copy-letter book (Ruskin MS B20), dated 9 June 1883; the letter can confidently be dated to 1883 from its contents.

¹¹⁷ Georgina Cowper-Temple was sometimes referred to as 'Georgiana' by her contemporaries and by subsequent authors. She used the spelling 'Georgina', and this spelling was used on her gravestone (James Gregory, *Reformers, Patrons and Philanthropists: the Cowper-Temple Family and High Politics in Victorian Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), p. 1 n.). She became Lady Mount-Temple in 1880 but is referred to as Georgina Cowper-Temple throughout this thesis for simplicity.

and Moorland Garden. This chapter unravels the complex meaning behind the title of the book: the notions of Fors, Fortitude and Fortune resonate through Ruskin's life at Brantwood, from his reasons for buying the estate to his silent last decade there, and find practical expression in the garden. Allied to this is Ruskin's focus on the concept of purposeful labour, which is assessed to demonstrate the importance to him of the manner in which gardening projects were executed. It is argued that the moral value of purposeful labour was more relevant to Ruskin than the quality of the actual result, with ethical integrity and aesthetic outcome privileging practical accomplishment. This is mirrored in other endeavours instigated to effect societal change. The Hinksey Road diggings and purification of the river at Carshalton are identified as two examples of Ruskin's projects which parallel and inform his gardening at Brantwood, connected physically to the garden by the people involved and the sharing of plants. This work constructs Brantwood as the hub of a social enterprise limited only by Ruskin's time and energy. The treatment of the people employed by Ruskin as gardeners or enlisted to carry out his social projects is newly assessed in relation to the gardening advice given in *Fors* and Ruskin's own approach to horticulture. In particular, Ruskin's attitude to the use of glasshouses is evaluated, and his contradictions explored. By connecting the societal aims expressed in Ruskin's writing with his gardening practice, this chapter argues that studying the garden – particularly the failure of the garden – is a route to understanding Ruskin's mature thinking.

The concurrency in 1871 of the publication of *Fors* and the formation of the Guild of St George with the purchase of Brantwood highlights the preoccupations of Ruskin's thinking while laying out his garden. The availability of land facilitated an intermediary step in the translation from thought to page: the sixteen-acre estate offered opportunity for Ruskin to trial his own ideas of land management and sustainable agriculture, his small-scale interventions comparable to the self-sufficient livelihood encouraged by the Guild and promoted in *Fors* as a means to save Britain from moral failure. This chapter identifies Brantwood as both the means of piloting his social philosophy and the catalyst of his ideas. Ruskin used the garden to demonstrate his principles of sustainable agriculture, clearing an area of moorland to raise cereal crops and fruit trees, and cultivating a small plot now known as the Professor's Garden to establish what could be done in a cottage garden with limited means and industrious

labour. His gardening is assessed against the concept of 'experiment', a term often used indiscriminately by scholars and commentators to describe Ruskin's cultivation of the moor. An analysis of Ruskin's definition of the term and its application to his work re-evaluates his exercising of social and political theory in the garden.

In addition to his agricultural work, Ruskin instigated civil engineering schemes and waterworks at Brantwood in his harbour, terraces, reservoirs, waterfall and icehouse; these projects are assessed in the context of his large-scale proposals for water management in the valleys of the Alps in the 1860s, which enlarged upon the juvenile digging and stream-making of his childhood gardening, and expressed the central notions of his political economy. The extent to which the practical agricultural and construction projects at Brantwood had a direct bearing on the confidence of Ruskin's political economy is examined, with particular focus on the correlation between the ultimate failure of the moorland garden and Ruskin's awareness of his failure to effect social change, offering a new angle on scholarship by connecting Ruskin's gardening to the societal ideals expressed in *Fors*.

Fors offers understanding of the practical aspects of Ruskin's gardening; read in combination with the aesthetic interpretation from *Praeterita*, the botanical analysis of *Proserpina*, and the advice of sympathetic gardening friends in *Hortus Inclusus*, a picture emerges of the ideas that shaped the garden, offering a new interpretation of the significance of the published writing. By taking a thematic route in this thesis, the interdisciplinary nature of Ruskin's thinking is translated into his garden-making, probing the complex assimilation of biography, botany, ecology, aesthetics and political economy that is the garden at Brantwood. Each chapter builds understanding of the landscape by analysing specific interventions and extrapolating embedded ideology. Conceptual threads that run through the garden are identified as they interweave and overlap, the significance of notions of belonging, memory and shelter building through the study as the themes of each chapter are examined. Just as an understanding of 'the moods of the man' is necessary to interpret Ruskin's writing, so too can his character be read in the garden. By assessing the symbiosis of writing and gardening, this thesis offers a new perspective on both.

Chapter One – *Praeterita*: memory and aesthetics

This chapter navigates the biographical aspects of Ruskin's gardening praxis through the lens of his own life-writing, focussing on his memoir *Praeterita* to explore the theme of 'things remembered'. Virginia Woolf asserted that in *Praeterita*, Ruskin's 'words lie like a transparent veil upon his meaning'.¹ It is the contention of this chapter that the garden at Brantwood is a similarly 'transparent veil' on Ruskin's thought and, by penetrating the surface of the landscape, truths fundamental to Ruskin's thinking are exposed. In its transparency, the veil does not obscure: the obfuscation comes from the complexity of Ruskin's empirical knowledge and the formative events that shaped his character. It is this that he seeks to elucidate in *Praeterita*, explaining in his preface that the memoir will help the reader to understand his work by understanding 'the personal character which, without endeavour to conceal, I yet have never taken pains to display'.² By unlocking meaning through an exposition of his sensibility, Ruskin not only illuminated his corpus of written work, but exposed the thinking which underpinned his gardening. *Praeterita* is therefore a valuable key to understanding Ruskin's approach to the garden. More significantly, as a new angle from which to penetrate Ruskin's thinking, it is argued here that an understanding of the garden can unlock meaning on both Ruskin's character and his oeuvre through the recognition of central concepts in the designed landscape. It is in the identification and interpretation of these concepts that this thesis aims to contribute to scholarship.

Praeterita is a selective autobiography, published in parts from July 1885 to July 1889, when the project was abandoned due to Ruskin's failing health. Of the three projected volumes, the first two were completed and issued as bound volumes in 1886 and 1887, while the third was abandoned after publication of the fourth chapter and only issued as a bound volume after Ruskin's death. To supplement and expand on the text of the autobiography, Ruskin planned to issue an accompanying volume entitled *Dilecta*, but this too was abandoned before completion. Manuscript notes remain with

¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Ruskin', in *The Captain's Deathbed and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1950), p. 51.

² *Works* 35.11.

fragmentary text and chapter outlines from which can be gleaned some of Ruskin's intentions, among them a chapter entitled 'General Life at Brantwood – illness' which was to form the eleventh chapter of the third volume.³ Tim Hilton identifies further plans listed in Ruskin diaries, including a final chapter entitled 'The Field Under the Wood' which, 'is unexplained, but may have introduced the reader to the quiet countryside around Brantwood'.⁴ Although this title could refer to the geography of Brantwood, the emphasis on the 'field' is inconsistent with other evidence pointing to the greater significance to Ruskin of the moor and woodland on the Brantwood estate, and to the importance of the mountain topography beyond. The editors of the *Library Edition* captioned Ruskin's 1860 drawing of the walled orchard at Denmark Hill, 'The Field Behind the House', and it may have been this garden, associated with youthful memories, to which he was planning to return in his autobiographical reminiscence.⁵ Whether the projected chapter would have provided an insight into Ruskin's landscape interventions at Brantwood remains unknown.

The significance of landscape is evident in the structure of *Praeterita*, in which Ruskin constructed a scaffold of memory and place. Keith Hanley observes that the chapter titles of *Praeterita* express 'symbols of a personal geography', with landscape providing a platform for revelation whereby 'an actual scene becomes a metaphor for a state of realised selfhood'.⁶ Although Brantwood is not featured among the remembered landscapes of Ruskin's life in *Praeterita*, the cultural and biographical resonance afforded to mountains, views, and geomorphology can be translated into the Lakeland landscape. Francis O'Gorman has observed that Ruskin's autobiographical self was created by memories constructed around place, which reflect an inwardness through which the reader is taken on an intimate and unglossed journey through Ruskin's life.⁷ A parallel journey can be taken through his garden, and this chapter provides the gloss to interpret the autobiographical layers of meaning captured in the design and planting of the landscape. Ruskin's gardening also informs

³ Works 35.605-42.

⁴ Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 507.

⁵ Works 35.402f. (Plate XXVIII).

⁶ Keith Hanley and Rachel Dickinson, *Journeys of a Lifetime: Ruskin's Continental Tours* (Lancaster: Ruskin Library, Lancaster University, 2008), p. 6.

⁷ John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2012), p. xv.

our understanding of *Praeterita* by mirroring the despondency of his mature reflections. Elizabeth Helsinger's assertion that in *Praeterita* Ruskin 'measures his achievements [...] and concludes he is a failure' chimes with his sense of despair following the abandonment of his final gardening project on the moor, where his drained, ordered and cultivated terraces were given over to nature, just as the formative experiences of his life were given up to posterity, both garden and memoir having an afterlife beyond his control.⁸

Ruskin's explicit intention in his autobiography was to link his formative experiences to the ideas expressed in his published writing, stating unequivocally: 'How I learned the things I taught is the major, and properly, only question regarded in this history'.⁹ The anecdotal and digressive manner in which Ruskin tackled his self-imposed 'question' offers scope to inform a study of his garden-making, through direct references to childhood gardening and descriptions of the family gardens at Herne Hill and Denmark Hill, and indirectly through topographical, floral and aesthetic reminiscences. While the lack of a chronological narrative and divergence from conventional biographical form clouds Ruskin's narrative, his approach gives us the tools with which to penetrate the surface of events and actions, and make sense of his work through an understanding of his character. As O'Gorman has noted, '*Praeterita* asks the reader to distinguish between being and doing, between what a man has made and what has made him'.¹⁰ This interpretation applies not only to understanding Ruskin's published oeuvre but also to the understanding of his garden-making, in which is embedded layers of biographical meaning.

The focus on formative experience recounted in an unfinished episodic narrative has resulted in a work that does not elucidate all of the significant relationships in Ruskin's life: some people may not have fit the remit of the autobiography, defined above, or he may have planned to include them in an unwritten chapter, or material for inclusion may have been censored by those wishing to protect his reputation. Therefore, the fact that someone is not featured in *Praeterita*, or is only mentioned

⁸ Elizabeth K. Helsinger, 'The Structure of Ruskin's *Praeterita*', in *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography*, ed. by George P. Landow (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979), p. 87.

⁹ Works 35.368 n.

¹⁰ *Praeterita*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman, p. xxi.

incidentally, cannot be read to indicate their insignificance. Evidence from diaries and correspondence reveals the importance of several marginal, or unmentioned, figures in the autobiography with whom Ruskin shared an empathy with the natural world, or more specific botanical interests, and had a bearing on his approach to the garden at Brantwood. Susanna Beever, Mary Hilliard and Maria La Touche were companions and correspondents in the Brantwood years and were all gardeners with whom Ruskin discussed plants. Daniel Oliver, John Lubbock and Oliver Lodge were among several scientists with whom Ruskin instigated a professional correspondence that developed into friendship, their expert knowledge contributing to the formation of his botanical ideas. W. G. Collingwood first met Ruskin as an undergraduate and became one of his most loyal supporters and a Lakeland neighbour, sharing his interest in geology and astronomy, and, with Ruskin's assent, wrote the biography *A Life of John Ruskin* (1893). The sympathetic support given by these individuals may not have constituted a formative impact within the limits of Ruskin's autobiographical project, or his pen may have fallen silent before he had time to acknowledge them. The impact of these people on Ruskin's landscape design, his botanical studies and his gardening practice is assessed elsewhere in this thesis. Taking Ruskin's lead from *Praeterita*, this chapter examines the formative influence of parents, childhood homes, and aesthetic sensibility on Ruskin's landscape ideal, and analyses his motivations for settling at Brantwood at a stage in his life when decisions were not limited by financial, familial or professional ties: he had the freedom to live anywhere. The pervasive impact of his unsettling relationship with Rose La Touche is explored in relation to topographical and botanical associations in the landscape, while her absent presence is shown to influence Ruskin's woodland aesthetic, alongside the artistic and cultural influence of Turner, Botticelli and Walter Scott, informing an analysis of Ruskin's idiosyncratic application of the picturesque.

Formative gardening experiences

Ruskin moved to 28 Herne Hill in 1823, when he was four years old, and lived there until 1842 when the family moved to a larger and more genteel house nearby at 163 Denmark Hill. On his father's death in 1864, Ruskin took over the lease at Denmark Hill and lived there with his mother until he sold the house in 1872 and moved to

Brantwood. His connection with the neighbourhood continued as Ruskin had given the house at Herne Hill, the lease of which had been retained by the family, to his cousin on her marriage to Arthur Severn in 1871. Joan Severn kept Ruskin's old nursery for him to use when he was in London and it was in the comfort of these familiar surroundings that he wrote the preface to *Praeterita*.¹¹ Dated May 1885, these introductory words, dedicated to the memory of his parents, were written with the spring blossom furnishing his view from the window, the significance of which is hinted at in the title of the chapter describing Ruskin's early gardening: 'Herne Hill Almond Blossoms'. Ruskin delayed a full explanation of the reference to blossom until the final paragraph of the chapter, in which he wrote:

the unalloyed and long continuing pleasure given me by our fruit-tree avenue was in its blossom, not in its bearing. [...] So that, very early indeed in my thoughts of trees, I had got at the principle given fifty years afterwards in *Proserpina*, that the seeds and fruits of them were for the sake of the flowers, not the flowers for the fruit. The first joy of the year being in its snowdrops, the second, and cardinal one, was in the almond blossom,—every other garden and woodland gladness following from that in an unbroken order of kindling flower and shadowy leaf; and for many and many a year to come,—until indeed, the whole of life became autumn to me,—my chief prayer for the kindness of heaven, in its flowerful seasons, was that the frost might not touch the almond blossom.¹²

This passage reveals that Ruskin's mental wellbeing was mapped onto the seasonal progression of vital floral beauty, hinging on the predictable emergence of flower and leaf. The 'cardinal' status of the almond blossom clearly states its primary significance as seasonal affirmation, and hints at a religiosity in Ruskin's annual reverence for its flowering, the purity of the blossom diametrically opposed to the cardinal sins of the flesh. In *Proserpina*, Ruskin associated pure spring blossom with the girlish innocence of Rose La Touche, and in his preference for flower over fruit is an implicit rejection of

¹¹ Works 35.11-12.

¹² Works 35.50.

the sexual union necessary to produce the fruit. Ruskin's most intimate thoughts about La Touche are bound up in his veneration of blossom, which had its basis in the childhood Eden of Herne Hill.

In the final chapter of *Praeterita*, Ruskin returned to these memories of La Touche under the blossom at Herne Hill, writing:

I draw back to my own home, twenty years ago, permitted to thank Heaven once more for the peace, and hope, and loveliness of it, and the Elysian walks with Joanie, and Paradisiacal with Rosie, under the peach-blossom branches [...] and I have been sorrowful enough for myself, since ever I lost sight of that peach-blossom avenue. "Eden—land" Rosie calls it sometimes in her letters.¹³

In a curious blending of past and present, La Touche is alive in Ruskin's recollection of the scene, her letters referred to in the present tense, while Ruskin's mourns the actual trees of his former home. La Touche was an absent presence at Brantwood, in life and in death, and the floral association of the almond avenue at Herne Hill was epitomised in the wild blossoms at Brantwood. In his garden on the moor, Ruskin planted fruit trees in a landscape deliberately evocative of a literary paradise.

Collingwood explained Ruskin's intention to 'make the moor a paradise of terraces like the top of the purgatorial mound in Dante' and, when the project was abandoned, he noted that, '[t]he apple-trees grew, but untended; they still blossom'.¹⁴ The trees blossoming unseen on the moor chimed with the resigned despondency of Ruskin's admission that 'the whole of life became autumn to me', an observation of his advancing age and an intimation that the hope implicit in spring was overshadowed by La Touche's death. Richard Mabey has recognised the cognitive importance of seasonal repetition, such as the coming of swifts and spring blossom, in his assertion that,

The re-enactment of seasonal weather events, of that proper order of things that anchors us not just in the present moment but in the long rhythms of our

¹³ Works 35.560-61.

¹⁴ W. G. Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 44.

lives, breaks down too often for comfort [resulting in] the tarnishing of childhood memories, [...] dashed hopes and lost moorings.¹⁵

The associative claim of the seasons on mental wellbeing is enhanced by the layering of personal resonance; by linking nature with emotion in the tangible form of blossom, Ruskin unintentionally condemned his mature years to a continuous cycle of mental disturbance as the happy certainties of youth gave way to ‘lost moorings’, disappointment, and bereavement.

The importance to Ruskin of blossom as an annual affirmation (with connotations both positive and negative), shaped by the significant events of life as the years passed, shows the lasting impact of the garden at Herne Hill on his mature landscape ideal. Ruskin’s praeteritan thinking on gardens was imbued with nostalgia but also reveals the association between plants and people that imparts meaning to the garden at Brantwood, and captures formative ideas which were later expressed in landscape interventions. While the garden at Herne Hill shaped his botanical thinking and gardening ethos, its layout and planting had little relation to Ruskin’s garden at Brantwood. It was his mother’s garden, tended by her with help from an ‘old gardener’ who assisted on one day each week.¹⁶ The garden was described by Ruskin in *Praeterita*:

It had front and back garden in sufficient proportion to its size; the front, richly set with old evergreens, and well-grown lilac and laburnum; the back, seventy yards long by twenty wide, renowned over all the hill for its pears and apples, which had been chosen with extreme care by our predecessor, (shame on me to forget the name of a man to whom I owe so much!)—and possessing also a strong old mulberry tree, a tall white-heart cherry tree, a black Kentish one, and an almost unbroken hedge, all round, of alternate gooseberry and currant

¹⁵ Richard Mabey, *Turned Out Nice Again: On Living with the Weather* (London: Profile Books, 2013), p. 45.

¹⁶ Works 35.59.

bush; decked, in due season, (for the ground was wholly beneficent,) with magical splendour of abundant fruit.¹⁷

This garden, with its profusion of blossoming fruit trees, is depicted in a painting by Arthur Severn (Figure 4). Both painting and prose emphasise the dominance of the garden trees, and in his acknowledgment of his debt to the former owner who planted the fruit, Ruskin confirmed that these trees were the catalyst for his later thinking and the source of his early floral delight. The gooseberry bushes had an association with



Figure 4: H. S. Uhrlrich, *The Garden at Herne Hill*, wood engraving from a drawing by Arthur Severn, Plate V, Works 35.36f.

Ruskin's father, on whose birthday the young Ruskin 'was always allowed to gather the gooseberries for his first gooseberry pie of the year, from the tree between the buttresses on the north wall of the Herne Hill garden'.¹⁸ This very specific garden memory, defined in time by the date of his father's birthday (10 May), in place by the exact bush from which the fruit was harvested, and in sensation by the first taste of the seasonal fruit, indicates that there were a number of external prompts to garden memory for Ruskin. The gooseberry bushes mentioned by Collingwood in his description of the garden at Brantwood were growing, not in the kitchen garden with

¹⁷ Works 35.35-36.

¹⁸ Works 28.390.

culinary crops, but in the gardens created by Ruskin for his own use, their visible presence laden with personal significance.¹⁹

As a child, Ruskin spent hours in the garden in the afternoon once his lessons were complete.²⁰ His memory of these times indicates that his indifference to horticultural practice was formed at an early age:

Constantly [...] in the garden when the weather was fine, my time there was passed chiefly in the same kind of close watching of the ways of plants. I had not the smallest taste for growing them, or taking care of them, any more than for taking care of the birds, or the trees, or the sky, or the sea. My whole time passed in staring at them, or into them. In no morbid curiosity, but in admiring wonder, I pulled every flower to pieces till I knew all that could be seen of it with a child's eyes; and used to lay up little treasures of seeds, by way of pearls and beads,—never with any thought of sowing them.²¹

Ruskin's childlike wonder at flowers remained the focus of his botanical enquiry in maturity, setting him apart from both horticulturalists and scientists. By 'watching' plants, Ruskin was inviting the revelation of botanical truth through the imagination, rather than seeking answers in invasive scientific enquiry. As Dinah Birch has noted, 'Ruskin's scientific method inclines to devotion rather than analysis'.²² It was reverence for nature that fostered Ruskin's desire to observe plants rather than to intervene in their natural growth. This is further expressed in his preference for collecting seeds as objects of individual beauty, like 'pearls and beads', with the intention of admiring rather than planting them; to Ruskin, nature was the gardener. At Brantwood, he saw what nature had planted in his garden, and watched it grow. Introduced plantings mainly centred on his agricultural schemes, or were instigated by associative memory of people and places, such as the 'narcissus of Vevay' described below.

¹⁹ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, pp. 36-39.

²⁰ Works 35.57.

²¹ Works 35.59.

²² Birch, 'Ruskin and the Science of *Proserpina*', p. 148.

Spending time in the garden at Herne Hill did not prompt Ruskin to an enthusiasm for amateur gardening, despite the example set by his mother who, he recalled, ‘finding her chief personal pleasure in her flowers, was often planting or pruning beside me’.²³ Collingwood noted that although Ruskin took pleasure in flowers, ‘I never remember him potting and grafting and layering and budding’.²⁴ Ruskin’s practical ambitions in the garden were those of the engineer rather than the horticulturalist, and the zeal for physical labour evident in Ruskin’s activities at Brantwood was present in his early years, along with the often inadequate outcomes. In *Praeterita*, Ruskin described his attempts to help the gardener by ‘sweeping and weeding’ in which he ‘was discouraged and shamed by his always doing the bits I had done over again.’ He continued, ‘I was extremely fond of digging holes, but that form of gardening was not allowed. Necessarily, I fell always back into my merely contemplative mind’.²⁵ Ruskin’s self-proclaimed humiliation of his inadequacy in practical work did not dampen his enthusiasm. The accumulated ideas and energy of the preceding decades were given an outlet at Brantwood where Ruskin began work on the garden with his own hands on his first visit, burning weeds and moving stones long before the house was habitable. He explained in *Praeterita* how he had taken opportunities throughout his life to engage in physical labour when they arose, despite early setbacks:

the ambitions in practical gardening, of which the germs, as aforesaid, had been blighted at Herne Hill, nevertheless still prevailed over the contemplative philosophy in me so far as to rekindle the original instinct of liking to dig a hole, whenever I got leave. Sometimes, in the kitchen garden of Denmark Hill, the hole became a useful furrow; but when once the potatoes and beans were set, I got no outlet or inlet for my excavatory fancy or skill during the rest of the year.²⁶

²³ Works 35.36.

²⁴ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 31.

²⁵ Works 35.59.

²⁶ Works 35.425-26.

Horticultural digging for the cyclical sowing of crops was too limiting for Ruskin's ambition, as evidenced in the kitchen garden at Denmark Hill; he wanted a project that would be physically satisfying and long-lasting.

The passage continues with a recollection of the satisfaction gleaned from a scheme instigated by Ruskin while staying at the shooting lodge of a friend at Crossmount in Perthshire in 1847. Looking for an alternative to the shooting parties, which he found distasteful, Ruskin decided to 'set myself, when the days were fine, to the laborious eradication of a crop of thistles'.²⁷ He explained:

The thistle-field at Crossmount was an inheritance of amethystine treasure to me; and the working hours in it are among the few in my life which I remember with entire serenity—as being certain I could have spent them no better. For I had wise—though I say it—thoughts in them, too many to set down here (they are scattered afterwards up and down in *Fors* and *Munera Pulveris*), and wholesome sleep after them[.]²⁸

At Crossmount, Ruskin was working with purpose: he had set himself a task which he believed to be worthwhile, and was motivated by nothing but his own ambition. The 'serenity' of the activity was retrospective, and Ruskin's mature recognition of the contentment and satisfaction gained from worthwhile labour is represented in the principles of the Guild of St George, as well as his manual projects in the garden at Brantwood, where he had the opportunity to rekindle the 'wise [...] thoughts' of his early experience. The physical concentration of manual labour freed his mind for higher contemplation, and Ruskin asserted that 'the foundation of all my political economy was dug down to, through the thistle-field of Crossmount'.²⁹ This weighty claim emphasises the importance to Ruskin of purposeful outdoor work, and the application of manual labour to liberate thought can be read in Ruskin's wood-chopping at Brantwood: physical labour with a practical purpose that occupied the body while freeing the mind. While Ruskin's study offered a link to the landscape

²⁷ Works 35.425.

²⁸ Works 35.426.

²⁹ Works 35.429.

through its mountain views, the garden provided a tangible outdoor location for contemplation, with Ruskin claiming, ‘all best thought comes to me when I’m in open air’.³⁰

The solitary nature of his childhood gardening pursuits prefigured Ruskin’s later work at Brantwood, recognised by him in the shared metaphor of the shipwrecked Robinson Crusoe and the lone robin. Looking back to his life in the garden at Herne Hill when he was seven years old, Ruskin described how he ‘began to lead a very small, perky, contented, conceited, Cock-Robinson-Crusoe sort of life’.³¹ The portmanteau of the literary characters of Cock Robin and Robinson Crusoe links the enforced isolation of the castaway to the companionable, yet solitary, bird. The adjectives used by Ruskin to describe his younger self – ‘perky, contented, conceited’ – match the character of a robin, suggesting he identified with the bird. Rachel Dickinson has noted Ruskin’s fascination with robins at Brantwood in the 1870s – both with living creatures and mounted specimens – culminating in a lecture on ‘The Robin’ given at Oxford in 1873.³² The propensity of the robin to be found observing human activity in the garden – appearing as companionable and curious, yet alone – draws parallels with Ruskin’s own character, from only child to secluded bachelor. Ruskin described his solitary garden labouring as ‘Robinson Crusoe work’ and revealed to Severn in 1873 that ‘I am not unhappy at all now, but have a great feeling of intense loneliness – like Robin Crusoe [sic]’.³³ Just as he had carefully watched the flowers at Herne Hill, ‘staring at them, or into them’, Ruskin watched the birds at Brantwood, observing behavioural traits and anthropomorphising their character as it mirrored his own.³⁴ The literary conflation ‘Robin Crusoe’ represented the resigned loneliness of a character powerlessly in exile (the castaway Robinson Crusoe) yet yearning for close human company (the robin), a role in which Ruskin recognised himself in relation to Rose La Touche.

³⁰ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 259 (letter to Georgina Cowper-Temple, 6 February 1870).

³¹ Works 35.37.

³² John Ruskin’s Correspondence with Joan Severn: *Sense and Nonsense Letters*, ed. by Rachel Dickinson (Cambridge: Legenda, Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2009), p. 162 n. 3. ‘The Robin’ was published as Part One of *Love’s Meinie* in 1873.

³³ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 173 (20 April 1873) and p. 162 (4 February 1873).

³⁴ Works 35.59, quoted in full above.

Fascination with water

Memories of La Touche underpin Ruskin's civil engineering experiments with the manipulation of water at Brantwood, although their origins can be traced back to the childhood ambition revealed in *Praeterita*, in which Ruskin admitted that 'ever since first I could drive a spade, I had wanted to dig a canal, and make locks on it, like Harry in Harry and Lucy'.³⁵ The young Ruskin read Maria Edgeworth's *Harry and Lucy Concluded Being the Last Part of Early Lessons* (1825) in which the children Harry and Lucy learned about science through domestic activities, and was inspired both to imitate their pursuits and to write his own 'Harry and Lucy' story, reproduced in *Praeterita*.³⁶ The desire to 'dig a canal' was one of the justifications for leaving Herne Hill for the larger premises of Denmark Hill in 1842. This project was never realised, but Ruskin revealed that 'the bewitching idea never went out of my head, and some water-works [...] were verily set aflowing—twenty years afterwards'.³⁷ The enduring notion of these 'water-works' was returned to in the closing pages of *Praeterita* in which Ruskin recounted walking with La Touche and Severn in the garden,

by the little glittering stream which I had paved with crystal for them. I had built behind the highest cluster of laurels a reservoir, from which, on sunny afternoons, I could let a quite rippling film of water run for a couple of hours down behind the hayfield, where the grass in spring still grew fresh and deep [...] And the little stream had its falls, and pools, and imaginary lakes. Here and there it laid for itself lines of graceful sand; there and here it lost itself under beads of chalcedony. It wasn't the Liffey, nor the Nith, nor the Wandel [sic]; but the two girls were surely a little cruel to call it "The Gutter"! Happiest times, for all of us, that ever were to be[.]³⁸

La Touche visited Denmark Hill at Christmastime in 1865, and the preparation for the day was described by Ruskin in a letter to Pauline Trevelyan: 'I had such a trimming up

³⁵ Works 35.317.

³⁶ Works 35.52-55.

³⁷ Works 35.318.

³⁸ Works 35.560-61.

of the garden for her to see it – She stole two crystals from the bottom of my primrose pool'.³⁹ By 'trimming up' his garden, Ruskin was seeking to impress La Touche, and the crystal lining of the pool was perhaps intended to appeal to her teenage sensibilities. The naming of the 'primrose pool' was surely also an homage to 'Rose', her name embedded within its appellation. This semantic allusion was frequently deployed by Ruskin, not least in the title of his botany book *Proserpina*, and is analysed in Chapter Two. The realisation of Ruskin's 'bewitching idea' in the garden at Denmark Hill reveals the complexity of his gardening ambition and his idealised vision of the garden, which had become interwoven with his obsession with La Touche. The reality of Ruskin's artificial stream – referred to by the girls as 'The Gutter' – fell short of his imaginary vision, but it is the vision that Ruskin remembered in *Praeterita* in his description of its 'falls, and pools, and imaginary lakes'. Ruskin's later artificial interventions in the streams and pools at Brantwood were a renewal of his idealised conception of flowing water, based on his study of geology and memories of La Touche, and firmly rooted in his childhood preoccupations with water engineering. Two days after his first visit to Brantwood, Ruskin recorded in his diary, 'lake calm. Minnows at shore. I build a little port, as in old times', offering a direct link between his practical endeavours at Brantwood and memories of childhood pursuits.⁴⁰

Geology was Ruskin's first interest as a boy; as Hilton notes, 'John James [Ruskin] was fond of saying that his son had been an artist from childhood but a geologist from infancy'.⁴¹ Ruskin's enthusiasm in his return to this subject in the Brantwood streams is clear in a letter to his physician, Dr Parsons, in which he explained: 'I couldn't come yesterday for weather – can't today for the water, which is all so wonderful that I want to study the streams, and must really not lose the chance – I never saw them like this before'.⁴² This direct topographical study of geology in relation to the flow of water can be traced from Ruskin's stream at Herne Hill, through his projected water engineering schemes in the Alps (examined in Chapter Four), to his work in the garden at Brantwood. Of the locations presented by E. T. Cook as Ruskin's 'Homes and

³⁹ Virginia Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship: John Ruskin's Letters to Pauline Trevelyan 1848-1866* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1979), p. 251.

⁴⁰ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 711 (14 September 1871).

⁴¹ Hilton, *Early Years*, p. 17 (source quoted in Works 26.xxvi).

⁴² Ambleside, Armit Library, MS 380 3.2, 3 September 1875.

'Haunts', the flow of water links one home to another: Scottish rivers, Alpine streams, Venetian canals, Italian lakes, Coniston Water.⁴³ The three rivers to which Ruskin compared his stream at Denmark Hill – the Liffey, the Nith and the Wandle – each sustained strong associative significance, and further evidence Ruskin's link between water and memory. The Liffey flowed through the La Touche estate of Harristown in County Kildare; the Nith, running through Dumfriesshire, has associations with the literature of Ruskin's favourite Walter Scott; and the Wandle was forever linked to his mother and Ruskin's happy early years with his Croydon relatives.

Ruskin's interest in the movement of water and its topographical and geological effect on the landscape was manifest in his manipulation of the stream at Brantwood which ran down the steep slope from the moor and culminated in a waterfall opposite the door to the house, before being channelled under the drive towards the lake. This waterfall is depicted in a painting by Laurence Hilliard of 1885, which shows the cascade in full spate in a winter landscape where evergreen laurel bushes give way to spindly silver birch further up the open hillside (Figure 5). The full extent of the waterfall would have been clearly visible and audible to anyone leaving the house, and the landscape would have been animated by its wild torrent. When less rain fell on the hills, the flow of water abated, and the cascade diminished to a trickle, reflected in Ruskin's assessment on arrival at Brantwood that, 'the stream [...] (they say) [is] ceaseless – all I know is, after a week's dry weather there isn't much of it left'.⁴⁴ Unaccepting of nature's course, Ruskin built a reservoir in a tank on the hillside above, creating a head of water that could be released to flow down the waterfall, imitating the hydraulics at the nearby slate mines. Alexander Wedderburn recounted an outing with Ruskin specifically timed to witness the spectacle of this water engineering: 'we went to Langdale, where there are water-works, with sluices occasionally opened, found out the day, and went over to the Inn there for a night, so as to get up early and see the water come down'.⁴⁵ Collingwood confirmed that Ruskin had 'a keen

⁴³ E. T. Cook, *Homes and Haunts of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen and Co. Ltd, 1912).

⁴⁴ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 317 (20 September 1871). On a visit to Brantwood in February 2018 the cascade was flowing, but on a subsequent visit in June 2018 there was no water in this stream, confirming Ruskin's assessment of the intermittent flow.

⁴⁵ Works 35.317 n.



Figure 5: Laurence Hilliard, *The Waterfall at Brantwood Door*, 1885, in W. G. Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics* (London: Isbister and Company Ltd, 1903), p. 33.

admiration for the civil engineer'.⁴⁶ He also recognised the playfulness of the waterfall, stating, 'it was a favourite entertainment to send up somebody to turn the water on and produce a roaring cascade among the laurels opposite the front door'.⁴⁷ Ruskin's eagerness over these inventions can be traced to the delight in practical construction fostered by the activities of the fictional Harry and Lucy in the imagination of the seven-year-old Ruskin.⁴⁸ Furthermore, contrived as it was for dramatic effect, the augmentation of the waterfall can be read as a deliberate statement of picturesque intent, echoing the rugged landscapes in the high mountains of the Lake District and the Alps visited by tourists in search of the sublime. In the

⁴⁶ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 43.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Works 35.317.

manipulation of nature, Ruskin was exercising his childhood delight in water engineering while building a stream to match the ideal of his imaginary vision.

Ruskin's waterworks at Brantwood were also focussed on practical projects. He was obliged to divert the stream at the back of the house that was seeping through the walls on his arrival at the dilapidated property, and was undeterred when building the Lodge in 1872 in the path of a stream, diverting the flow of water into a culvert under the foundations, where it still flows today. Ruskin's draining and reservoir-building on the moor, as well as his harbour-building at the lake, exemplify further extensions of his childhood forays into water engineering. Furthermore, the link between water and wellness, and the power of water to transform a landscape or a community by its presence or absence, is evident in Ruskin's proposals for irrigation schemes in the Alps, and in his construction of wells and water fountains for societal benefit.⁴⁹ Water, in its many forms – flowing, reflecting, cascading, frozen – was clearly integral to Ruskin's gardening vision, both aesthetic and practical. As discussed below, the presence of water was a principal criterion in Ruskin's choice of a place to settle, yet his pleasure when finding a stream running through his estate at Brantwood was tempered by the realisation that the flow was not as consistent as he had hoped, lamenting to Severn in February 1873, 'Stream! we're nearly reduced to dipping out of the lake for tea! no rain for three weeks'.⁵⁰

Gardening at Denmark Hill

The absence of a natural stream at Denmark Hill was noted by Ruskin as the main drawback to the property: 'the house itself had every good in it, except nearness to a stream', emphasising the importance of flowing water to his domestic ideal.⁵¹ His parents' decision to move less than a mile along the ridge from Herne Hill to Denmark Hill was prompted by a desire to reflect the family status through property. The semi-detached house with its walled garden at Herne Hill was superseded by a detached

⁴⁹ See Paul Dawson, 'John Ruskin, Fulking and the water supply', *Friends of Ruskin's Brantwood Newsletter* (Spring 1996), p.7 on Fulking fountain, and Mark Frost, *The Lost Companions and John Ruskin's Guild of St George: A Revisionary History* (London: Anthem Press, 2014), pp. 75-80 on Margaret's Well at Carshalton.

⁵⁰ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 165 (18 February 1873).

⁵¹ Works 35.379.

home set within seven acres of grounds, representing a move from what John Loudon described in *The Suburban Gardener* as a Fourth Rate dwelling to a property verging on his definition of First Rate.⁵² Loudon's book was published in 1838, just four years before the move to Denmark Hill, and represents contemporary suburban taste. The Ruskins, like so many other rising professional families, wanted to demonstrate their social standing through architecture and land, and present a home suitable to the status of clients and friends. The garden at Denmark Hill was described by Arthur Severn as, 'a very beautiful one with a field and cows and the view from the house in summer time might have been in the heart of the country, not a house to be seen and everything growing in the most luxuriant way'.⁵³ Severn focusses on the pastoral elements of the garden, but the fashionable components of nineteenth-century horticulture were also present: hothouse flowers, pot plants, camellias, azaleas and a shrubbery were mentioned in accounts of the garden, and a painting by Emily Warren shows colourful flowers around a veranda and heated conservatory to the rear of the house (Figure 6).⁵⁴ Ruskin's description in *Praeterita* praises both the pastoral and the garden elements of the Denmark Hill landscape:

half of it in meadow sloping to the sunrise, the rest prudently and pleasantly divided into an upper and lower kitchen garden; a fruitful bit of orchard, and chance inlets and outlets of woodwalk, opening to the sunny path by the field, which was gladdened on its other side in springtime by flushes of almond and double peach blossom.⁵⁵

This description of the 'pleasant', 'fruitful', 'sunny' garden bears none of the eloquence Ruskin expended on descriptions of natural landscapes; deeper resonances are only

⁵² John Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1838), pp. 170-71. A First Rate garden had a lawn or pleasure ground, a separate kitchen garden, a park or farm, a long entrance drive, stable offices, and was over ten acres in extent. Denmark Hill conformed to this description but was only seven acres in extent.

⁵³ *The Professor: Arthur Severn's Memoir of John Ruskin*, ed. by James S. Dearden (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1967), p. 67.

⁵⁴ See Works 27.196 and 35.317; W. G. Collingwood, *The Life of John Ruskin*, 2 vols (London: Methuen and Co., 1893), I, p. 134; Cook, *Homes and Haunts*, p. 16f.

⁵⁵ Works 35.379.

suggested in his allusions to sunrise and blossom, both indicative of hope and watched for daily or seasonally by Ruskin.



Figure 6: Emily Warren, *Ruskin's House on Denmark Hill*, watercolour, c. 1900, in E. T. Cook, *Homes and Haunts of John Ruskin* (London, George Allen and Company Ltd, 1912), p. 16f.

When remembering his former gardens, happy childhood memories of Herne Hill dominated Ruskin's thoughts of Denmark Hill. The grander premises were never the domus of his remembered childhood home, illustrated when, after describing the material advantages of the move to Denmark Hill, Ruskin wrote,

But, for all these things, we never were so happy again. Never any more 'at home'. At Champagnole, yes; and in Chamouni,—in La Cloche, at Dijon,—in Le Cygne, at Lucerne. All these places were of the old time. But though we had many happy days in the Denmark Hill house, none of our new ways ever were the same to us as the old: the basketfuls of peaches had not the flavour of the numbered dozen or score; nor were all the apples of the great orchard worth a single dishful of the Siberian crabs of Herne Hill.⁵⁶

This reminiscence indicates Ruskin was feeling nostalgia for the garden at Herne Hill from his early twenties. The move to Denmark Hill marked the passing of 'the old time' and the family traditions associated with their modest life, when pleasure was gleaned from simple things. Ruskin's implied regret at the pretensions of their

⁵⁶ Works 35.318.

supposed gentility parallels his mature thinking expressed in *Fors* and is explicit in his move to Brantwood, where he returned to the simple pleasures of cottage life to which his family belonged, and that he remembered in childhood visits to his poorer relations in Perth and Croydon.

Life at Denmark Hill changed after the death of Ruskin's father in March 1864, when Ruskin inherited the property and became head of the household, and his young cousin Joan Agnew was invited to be companion to his widowed mother. In the month following his father's death, Ruskin was already making improvements to the garden: early evidence of the importance to him of garden ownership, and the ability to control and shape the landscape to his own design. He described his alterations to Cowper-Temple:

I have been laying down turf, where mould was, under a fruit wall, that I may always walk there and look at the blossoms at ease: and I've been paving a bit of gravel walk with new pebbles [...] I've got into a course of investigation of Currant blossom, which seems to me about as vast a subject as I am fit for yet, and I like meandering about among the bushes in the afternoons[.]⁵⁷

Ruskin's landscaping was for practical rather than aesthetic effect, allowing access to his favourite parts of the garden, as well as facilitating his botanical study of blossom, a 'vast' subject encompassing not only botany but associations of hope and renewal, mythology and, by this time, his love for Rose La Touche. The 'meandering about among the bushes' hints at contemplation and meditation rather than serious study, reflecting Ruskin's imaginative approach to science, as well as his intended use of the garden. A few months later, in a letter to Trevelyan, herself a keen gardener, Ruskin revealed a more horticultural approach to his garden plans, describing the varieties of plants he intended to grow in the glasshouse, as well as:

wild roses in masses all round the garden and I've planted twenty peach and almond trees alternately – down the walk where they'll catch the spring

⁵⁷ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, pp. 33-34 (mid-April 1864).

sunsets – and I'm going to lay on a constant rivulet of water and have watercresses and frogs and efts and things.⁵⁸

The introduction of roses in large groups in all areas of the garden is a horticultural expression of Ruskin's obsession with Rose La Touche. The emphasis on 'wild' varieties can be read as a playful reference to La Touche's character, but also chimes with Ruskin's aversion to hybridised plants and prefigures his privileging of common varieties of flower in the garden at Brantwood. The peach and almond trees have an implicit reference to blossom in the mention of spring, and the allusion to 'spring sunsets' reveals that the interventions in the garden, planned in the depths of winter, were envisaged to create picturesque effect in combination with the weather, where pale blossom would be tinged with the radiance of the setting sun. The 'constant rivulet of water' followed Ruskin's vision of a ceaseless stream, which incorporated amphibian life as well as aquatic plants; the unbounded realms of his imagination are reflected in the limitless 'and things'. Ruskin was gardening in partnership with the elemental forces of nature, indicating an ecological interconnectedness in his thinking on landscape and an intimate knowledge of the geography of his garden space which foreshadowed his gardening at Brantwood.

While accommodating nature at Denmark Hill, Ruskin was working within the established framework of an ornamental garden, and his gardening extended to the artificial environment of the glasshouses. His letter to Trevelyan continued:

I've quantities of things to show you – perhaps even I shall have some flowers to amuse you – for I'm getting all the *old* ones that will grow under our glass – and I daresay you'll find some forgotten ones, prettier than present favourites. I've given the gardener carte-blanche in ixias – amaryllis's – gladiolus's – and the lily and flag tribes generally – every thing that he can get and grow, he's to have.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 242 (15 December 1864), original italics.

⁵⁹ Ibid., original italics.

While he was growing plants for ornamental use, Ruskin deliberately eschewed the modern varieties typical in a Victorian suburban garden in an attempt to revive ‘forgotten’ flowers. He did not impose limitations on his gardener’s plant choices beyond the stipulation that the flowers were not modern – by which he meant hybridised. This horticultural partiality echoes Ruskin’s attitude to modern scientific practice, evident in his reliance on ‘old’ botanical books for reference. The use of glasshouses as a growing space represents the friction between Ruskin’s curiosity of plants and flowers and his distaste for modern methods of botany and horticulture. In *The Poetry of Architecture*, the teenaged Ruskin, employing a nosism, informed his readers that, ‘[w]e have always disliked cylindrical chimneys, probably because they put us in mind of glasshouses and manufactories’.⁶⁰ In this statement, Ruskin equates the produce of the glasshouse to that of the factory, with homogeneous commodities mass-produced to meet the tastes of the market and fulfil a year-round expectation of supply, and the resulting effluent belched from the despised chimneys. Even at this early stage in his thinking, Ruskin was linking horticulture with manufacture. His association was through architecture but the underlying inference is of the societal harm implicit in modern methods of production. Ruskin’s distaste for glasshouse architecture was to find expression in his antipathy towards the Crystal Palace, erected in 1854 within sight of his home at Denmark Hill, and described by him in *Praeterita* as ‘possessing no more sublimity than a cucumber frame between two chimneys’.⁶¹

The road to Brantwood

The increasing urbanisation of his home was an impetus to leave; however, in the decade leading up to the purchase of Brantwood in 1871, Ruskin had already begun to think seriously about moving out of the family home. When considering alternatives to Denmark Hill, he had the opportunity to live anywhere he chose, the enormity of the choice restricting his ability to decide. The analysis below evaluates the options considered by Ruskin, and constructs a paradigm of his ideal landscape. Ruskin’s ultimate settling at Brantwood and subsequent garden-making is then examined within the framework of this ideal. Hints of his motivation for finding a new home are

⁶⁰ Works 1.59.

⁶¹ Works 35.47.

given in *Praeterita* and, supplemented by disclosures in letters to friends and diary entries, a picture is built of Ruskin's impetus for change, tracing his choice of Brantwood to notions of memory and place.

Nearly a decade before buying Brantwood, Ruskin wrote to Trevelyan, declaring with intent that, 'I must have a house of my own somewhere'.⁶² This decision was partly to do with ownership and the desire to be 'master of my own house and ways [...] which at only six years short of fifty – it is time to be', but it also indicated the breakdown of Ruskin's relationship with his father.⁶³ His antagonism conflicted with feelings of filial duty, and was becoming exacerbated by daily contact, as Ruskin bemoaned:

we disagree about all the Universe, and it vexes him – and much more than vexes me. If he loved me less – and believed in me more – we should get on – but his whole life is bound up in me [...] This form of affection galls me like hot iron – and I am in a state of subdued fury whenever I am at home which dries all the marrow out of every bone in me[.]⁶⁴

The mental torture Ruskin described was also having a physical effect on his health. Having sought respite in the Alps, he confessed, 'I could not go home. Every thing was failing me at once – brain – teeth – limbs – breath – and that definitely and rapidly'.⁶⁵ Ruskin's father was apprised of his son's intention to find an alternative to the family home, confirming to Trevelyan in 1861 that, '[h]e has intended having a house abroad for many a year'.⁶⁶ That this intention took so long to come to fruition, and did not take place until after his father's death, is symptomatic of the complexity of the filial relationship, with Ruskin balancing feelings of guilt with compulsion, and admitting: 'I'm very sorry for them at home as they will feel it at first – but no course was possible but this, whatever may come of it – I trust they will in the issue, be happier'.⁶⁷ The

⁶² Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 188 (20 July 1862).

⁶³ Ibid., p. 193 (17 August 1862).

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 188 (20 July 1862).

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 193 (17 August 1862).

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 191 (16 August 1862).

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 193 (17 August 1862).

complex position was elucidated by the editors of the *Library Edition*, who wrote that Ruskin,

had more and more come to feel the homelessness of his own home. He was no longer understood by his parents, nor could he enjoy their sympathy. His religious heresies grieved his mother; his economic, his father. The more he loved them—and no parents ever had a more affectionate and dutiful child—the more he felt the bitterness of the estrangement.⁶⁸

The divergence of opinion between Ruskin and his parents on such fundamental matters as religion and politics was a confrontation circumvented by separation, yet distance prompted feelings of guilt and ingratitude. The search for a home was therefore propelled by evasion and tinged with betrayal.

It was initially to the Alps that Ruskin began to look for a home of his own, writing gloomily to his friend Charles Eliot Norton in May 1862: ‘To-morrow I leave England for Switzerland; and whether I stay in Switzerland or elsewhere, to England I shall seldom return. I must find a home – or at least the Shadow of a Roof of my own, somewhere; certainly not here’.⁶⁹ Ruskin felt a sense of belonging in the Alpine landscape, explicit in his use of quotation marks to enclose the word ‘home’ in a letter to Sir Walter Trevelyan, in which Ruskin referred to his departure from Paris for the Alps later the same year: ‘to morrow evening I hope to be far on my way “home”’.⁷⁰ Roger Cardinal identifies the Alps as a ‘pivotal reference’ for Ruskin, integral to his aesthetic sensibility and ‘an emblem of sublimity and purity, as well as a touchstone of authenticity’.⁷¹ Many other scholars have identified locations to which Ruskin felt a strong affinity and which influenced his thinking, including Edinburgh, Oxford, Venice, and northern France, as well as the Alps and the Lake District; this multiplicity of personal geographies may have hindered Ruskin’s ability to find the ideal location in

⁶⁸ Works 17.Ixxiii.

⁶⁹ Works 36.407.

⁷⁰ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 203 (16 December 1862).

⁷¹ Roger Cardinal, ‘Ruskin and the Alpine Ideal’ in *Ruskin in Perspective: Contemporary Essays*, ed. by Carmen Casaliggi and Paul March-Russell (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), p. 160.

which to settle.⁷² Wherever he was destined to live, the language used by Ruskin to describe his departure implies a cutting of ties and a search for stability, writing from Mornex, ‘I’ve lain down to take my rest at last, – having rented experimentally a month or two of house – preparatory to fastening down post and stake’.⁷³ As he metaphorically tethered himself to the landscape, Ruskin belied a need for permanence and belonging. His articulation of a desire to lie down in the landscape is a recurring idiom in his search for a home, revealing a biophilic desire that is further probed in Chapter Three.

Landscape was the dominant factor in Ruskin’s choice of home, with topography, weather, views and the presence of moving water essential components. He was thinking about landscape not only as environmental setting but as potential for garden-making – putting his mark on the land and creating something to suit his specific needs and tastes. This is evident in his response to the locations he was considering. In a rented cottage at Mornex on the Salève, Ruskin recorded in his diary in September 1862: ‘Begin work in garden of small house’, and later the same month: ‘Desperately hot; watching Allen at work in garden. Sate [sic] afterwards in shade examining flowers’.⁷⁴ These entries reveal Ruskin’s desire to make a garden with his own hands and with the labour of others, and hint at his botanical use of the garden in ‘examining flowers’, rather than admiring them for aesthetic pleasure. That the need to make a garden was rooted more deeply in Ruskin’s psychology is suggested on a subconscious level in his record of a dream in August 1867 which began, ‘I was laying out a garden somewhere’.⁷⁵ Ruskin was looking for a home, but he was also looking for somewhere to make a garden. His childish enthusiasm for gardening at Herne Hill, and the urgency with which he embarked on his gardening projects at Mornex and Brantwood – each begun within days of taking possession of the property – reveal

⁷² See, for example, Keith Hanley, ‘Edinburgh-London-Oxford-Coniston’ in *The Cambridge Companion to John Ruskin*, ed. by Francis O’Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 17-31 and Cook, *Homes and Haunts*.

⁷³ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 192 (17 August 1862).

⁷⁴ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 569 (16 September 1862) and p. 570 (27 September 1862). The ‘small house’ and the larger villa rented by Ruskin in Mornex are illustrated by Emily Warren in *Homes and Haunts* (pp. 142f. and 144f.); both gardens are shown surrounded by colourful flowers and the walls festooned with climbing plants. Warren’s pictures were painted after Ruskin’s death, and therefore depict the gardens forty years after he worked on them, and cannot be relied on as evidence of Ruskin’s gardening.

⁷⁵ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 628 (9 August 1867).

Ruskin's eagerness to make his mark on the landscape and engage in practical outdoor labour.⁷⁶

Despite this eagerness and his vociferously-expressed desire to live apart from his parents, Ruskin procrastinated for many months over the choice of a suitable home in the Alps. His father's death in 1864 moderated the impetus for his decision, obliging him to attend to his mother's needs while still seeking a home of his own. He was uncompromising about details, mainly relating to the landscape setting rather than the built accommodation; this privileging of landscape over domestic comfort was sustained in the purchase of Brantwood, where the house he purchased was uninhabitable.⁷⁷ Writing from Mornex in August 1862, Ruskin reported that, '[t]his house will not do for me – it is in a village – and there's no clear stream near', and later in October 1862 stated, 'if I could only find a house to my mind, it would amuse me to arrange things in it – but I have not yet been able: all the houses here abouts are on the molasse sandstone, which I have made a vow against'.⁷⁸ These exacting topographical requirements were matched by strict preferences for climate and air quality, and Ruskin took practical steps to assess the suitability of differing regions. In 1861 he planned to stay in the Savoy, stating that 'I mean to stay there as far into the winter as I can in order to try the climate, with view to house in Switzerland'.⁷⁹ The prevailing weather was not to his liking in Mornex, from where he wrote in the spring of 1863: 'I must for permanence get more among the hills – out of the north wind and above all – out of the way of Geneva workmen and students – who get out here on the Sunday'.⁸⁰ Solitude was clearly also a stipulation.

Ruskin was considering the merits of his ideal landscape many years before buying Brantwood, staying in various houses in the Alps and exploring the topography

⁷⁶ The 'small house' at Mornex was acquired to provide additional space a few weeks after Ruskin arranged the rental of a larger property on 14 August 1862 which already had an established garden; his gardening of the smaller house therefore began soon after he had taken possession (Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 192 and p. 193 n.).

⁷⁷ The house was described by Ruskin as 'dilapidated' (Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 139 (12 September 1871)) and required repairs to the roof before he could move in (Dearden, *Brantwood*, p. 17).

⁷⁸ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 195 and p. 199. Ruskin objected to molasse because its deposits dirtied streams; his preference was for clear water.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 176 (10 October 1861).

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 209 (February or March 1863).

of the landscape, climate and amenities of the area. His deliberations resulted in the purchase of Alpine land upon which he planned to build himself a simple dwelling:

I want to settle things if possible, before coming home this time. I wrote yesterday to a lawyer, offering to buy, if I could get it – the entire top of a barren crag 5000 ft above sea, and the top of a pasture-ravine leveling [*sic*] down from it southwards and westwards, and build a chalet in a place I've long loved – and have watched this spring carefully to see how the snow lay – or rather did *not* lie, which was as I hoped.⁸¹

Ruskin was eventually dissuaded from this plan by the reasoning of his father and other concerned friends on the impracticalities of access and building on the site.⁸² He gave his own account in *Praeterita* of the many schemes he entered into while pursuing his ambition to settle in the Alps, first buying land in Chamonix, then negotiating a sale on the Brezon, before being tempted by a semi-ruined fourteenth-century castle near La Roche: 'I was in treaty again and again for pieces of land near the chain of Mont Blanc on which I thought to establish my life'.⁸³ All of these schemes came to nothing.

Ruskin's quest for a home spread opportunistically from the Continent to Ireland and Wales, the former chosen to be closer to Rose La Touche whose family lived in Harristown, County Kildare. After a visit to Dublin in May 1868, he wrote,

Tomorrow, the sea will be between us again – and I shall be very dead-hearted. But I am soon coming back to Ireland, to stay with Froude in Kerry, and indeed I hope to be often there (The people are so nice.) – and – if she wishes it to live there. I mean to keep as near her now always as I can.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 212 (7 April 1863), original italics.

⁸² See Hilton, *Later Years*, pp. 62–63; *Works* 17.Ixxii-lxxvi.

⁸³ *Works* 35.436.

⁸⁴ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 163 (25 May 1868).

The pronouns in the passage point to the persistent influence of La Touche. Ruskin described his travels in Ireland, where friends assisted him in his search for a suitable property:

I went sixty-five miles in an Irish car yesterday [...] into county Wicklow to look at a house which I wanted to get there – But it was variously unfit, – the drive was wonderful, – through wildernesses of hawthorn in bloom – and over mountain ground blazing with gorse [...] Lily is going to take me to see a house which she thinks will do better, north of Dublin, and we are to have a wild ramble over the rocks.⁸⁵

Ruskin was clearly attracted to the Irish landscape but, as in the Alps, no property fulfilled his exacting criteria. The complex situation with La Touche and his fluctuating feelings of love and resentment further complicated his decision to settle in Ireland. Two years later, Ruskin, still uncertain of his relationship with La Touche, was toying with the idea of living in Wales, writing to William Cowper-Temple in June 1871: ‘I have heard of a house in Wales which I think may do for me – whatever does or does not happen [with regard to La Touche] – it is very small – but has a little land, and a stream’.⁸⁶ Whichever country Ruskin was considering for a home, however fluctuating his circumstances and emotions, his requirement for land, moving water, mountains and rural isolation was unchanging. The Welsh scheme was interrupted the following month by Ruskin’s collapse into serious illness while staying at Matlock, shortly after which he bought the estate at Brantwood in the Lake District without prior viewing or any apparent investigation.

The serendipity of the offer of Brantwood for sale at the time of Ruskin’s illness and subsequent quest for shelter is recounted by the editors of the *Library Edition*, who illuminate the role of fate, or ‘Fors’, in Ruskin’s decision-making:

Among the recollections of early years which crowded in upon Ruskin during his illness was one which ‘Fors’ was presently to drive in with the hammer of

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 162 (19 May 1868).

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 291 (1 June 1871).

fortunate occurrence. His mind had gone back to his boyhood's days when he had stayed—then as now—at Matlock, and had thence gone on to the Lake Country:—

‘I weary for the fountain foaming,
For shady holm and hill;
My mind is on the mountain roaming,
My spirit’s voice is still . . .
I weary for the heights that look
Adown upon the dale.
The crags are lone on Coniston . . .’

So he had written as a boy, and now it seemed to him that only by the shores of that deep-bosomed lake could he find peace and refreshment. At the very moment W. J. Linton, the poet and woodengraver, was seeking a purchaser for his house at Coniston[.]⁸⁷

The juvenile poetry quoted in part above was written by Ruskin in 1833 in response to a yearning for mountain landscape not fulfilled that year by the annual family holiday, which took him to the coast at Hastings and Dover. Rather than recollecting the previous year’s visit to the Welsh mountains and the dramatic landscape of Snowdonia, Ruskin cast his mind back further to memories of the Lake District, ‘his first and last mountain-love’.⁸⁸

Ruskin knew the area around Brantwood from his childhood tours of England with his parents. He spent a rainy day at the Waterhead Inn at the northern end of Coniston Water on 6 July 1830, recorded both in his journal and in his ambitious 2212-line poem, *Iteriad; or, Three Weeks Among the Lakes*, begun in 1830.⁸⁹ In 1837, Ruskin sketched Coniston Hall and the mountain range beyond from the lakeshore below

⁸⁷ Works 22.xx; this poem is also quoted by Cook in *Homes and Haunts*, p. 206 with similar analysis.

⁸⁸ Works 2.3 n.

⁸⁹ *A Tour of the Lakes in Cumberland: John Ruskin’s Diary for 1830*, ed. by James S. Dearden and Van Akin Burd (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990); *Iteriad; or, Three Weeks Among the Lakes*, ed. by James S. Dearden (Newcastle: Frank Graham, 1969). See also Works 2.286-315 for an abridged version of *Iteriad*.

Brantwood, an early recognition of the superiority of the prospect from this position, and anticipating his subsequent appreciation of the view.⁹⁰ His affinity with the landscape of the Lake Country is well known, particularly his declaration that, '[t]he first thing which I remember, as an event in life, was being taken by my nurse to the brow of Friar's Crag on Derwent Water', a salient recollection stated in *Modern Painters III* in 1856 and later repeated in *Praeterita*.⁹¹ Ruskin also knew Turner's painting *Morning among the Coniston Fells*, first exhibited in 1797. The landscape depicted by Turner is fondly described by Ruskin in the catalogue to his collection, written from Brantwood in 1878:

As I write the words [...], I raise my eyes to these Coniston Fells, and see them, at this moment imaged in their lake, in quietly reversed and perfect similitude, the sky cloudless above them, cloudless beneath, and two level lines of blue vapour drawn across their sun-lighted and russet moorlands, like an azure fesse across a golden shield.⁹²

To live within the reality of Turner's vision of landscape beauty may have been a motivating factor in Ruskin's decision to buy Brantwood; the misty bands of colour and intense light in his description of the actual landscape are evocative of Turner's rendering of mist, sunrise and natural drama of which Ruskin was appreciatively familiar. That it was the landscape rather than the accommodation and amenities that drew Ruskin to the area is clear from his diary, where brief entries recording his initial visit to the property describe his exploration of the lake and mountains and his activities on his estate, while the uninhabitable state of the house is afforded little significance. Writing in 1873 in an essay entitled 'Home, and its Economies', Ruskin identified the role of memory in his move to Brantwood and the comfort of familiarity: 'There are modes of the love of our country which are definitely selfish, as a cat's of the hearthrug [...] For instance, I have bought for my own exclusive gratification, the

⁹⁰ Ruskin Museum collection, Coniston; reproduced in Dearden, *Brantwood*, p. 14.

⁹¹ Works 5.365 and 35.94.

⁹² Works 13.406.

cottage in which I am writing, near the lake-beach on which I used to play when I was seven years old'.⁹³

The sudden decision to buy Brantwood following Ruskin's serious illness at Matlock was precipitated by a significant change in domestic circumstances arising from the marriage in April 1871 to Arthur Severn of his cousin Joan Agnew, who had lived at Denmark Hill with Ruskin and his mother since his father's death in 1864. Ruskin's beloved old nurse, Anne Strachan, who was also a long-standing member of the household, had recently died and his mother was herself close to death, a condition of which Ruskin would have been aware when he took the decision to purchase Brantwood; she died three months later in December 1871.⁹⁴ Unburdened by the complicated filial duty and parental repression that had impeded his previous attempts to leave home, Ruskin was free to make his own decisions. He was also devoid of the companionship of family and household and was in a state of tension over his relationship with La Touche; his early biographers observed, 'this year was a dark one in the chequered story of his romance'.⁹⁵ The move to Brantwood was, therefore, prompted by serendipity in the timely offer of the house, but was underpinned by Ruskin's regret at his lack of filial devotion, his loss of family and close friends, his unfulfilled love for La Touche, his growing involvement in social justice, and his attempt to find sanctuary from the horror of mental illness.

Ruskin's arrival at Brantwood

That he had finally found a home at Brantwood is expressed in several letters to friends sent by Ruskin on his first visit to the property. His need for rejuvenation is apparent in his repeated emphasis on the sanctity of rest and pure air, writing to George Richmond on 15 September 1871: 'The air agrees with me wholly – and I am resolved at once to rest here, as having at last found a home'.⁹⁶ On the same day, he wrote to Norton: 'Here I have rocks, streams, fresh air, and, for the first time in my life, the rest of the purposed *home*', reiterated on 1 November: 'In Cumberland I merely

⁹³ Works 17.558.

⁹⁴ Works 22.xviii.

⁹⁵ Works 22.xx.

⁹⁶ John Ruskin Papers, University of Manchester Library, GB 133 Eng MS 1246.

breathe and rest'.⁹⁷ Ruskin's relief is evident in his focus on the purity and simplicity of his new surroundings. On 12 September 1871 he recorded in his diary the simple statement: 'First visit to my house'.⁹⁸ After inspecting the rocks, stream and moorland, he delayed his planned departure for Scotland and began the practical work that was to occupy him over the following two decades, recording: 'First day's work clearing garden. See weeds burnt in twilight'.⁹⁹ For the next five days Ruskin continued to work in his garden, clearing the bed of the stream, cutting wood and burning debris. As he familiarised himself with the landscape in his charge, he was able to enjoy a '[q]uiet walk on my own lawn at sunset'.¹⁰⁰ Finally, at the age of fifty-two, he was the owner of property of his independent purchase.

The idealism of Ruskin's earlier attempts at house-buying had been diluted by a pragmatism borne of necessity and the desperation of mental breakdown. He was content with the house and land he had purchased, but was realistic about his situation and recorded in his diary that he was 'resolved to make the best of this, at last'.¹⁰¹ To his close friend Georgina Cowper-Temple, Ruskin expressed both his contentment and his disappointment with Brantwood, writing to her on 20 September 1871 during his initial flurry of gardening activity:

I am at work in my *own* little garden among the hills, conscious of little more than the dust of the earth – more at peace than of old, but very low down. I like the place I have got. The house is just the size I wanted; the stream, not quite, but (they say) ceaseless – all I know is, after a week's dry weather there isn't much of it left, now. I have some real rocks and heather, some firs and a copse, and a lovely field, with nothing visible over the edge of its green waves but the lake and sunset – when the sun is there to set, which, thanks to Lancaster smoke, he no more always is than at London. "Brantwood, Coniston

⁹⁷ Works 37.35 (15 September 1871). See also Bradley and Ousby, *Norton Letters*, p. 238 where 'purposed *home*' is transcribed as 'proposed *home*', original italics; Works 37.40 (1 November 1871).

⁹⁸ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 711.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 712 (15 September 1871).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 712 (16 September 1871).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 711 (14 September 1871).

"Lake, Ambleside" will find me (within a day or two) for three weeks to come (and always hereafter somehow).¹⁰²

The italics of 'my own little garden' are Ruskin's, emphasising the momentous significance of his situation, and reflecting the finality of his decision to settle. The permanence of his resolution is reflected in the closing parenthetical statement, which expresses a contented stability in his chosen environment, tempered by a sense of resignation in the diminished stream and polluted sunset. Ruskin was scarred by his earlier breakdown, and this letter hints at the role the weather was to play on his mental state during the latter years of his life, with the industrial pollution of the northern furnaces threatening to engulf the moral as well as the physical landscape.

Although Ruskin was quick to begin to shape his landscape into a garden, making the property into a home, his optimism was tempered by resignation and a cautious hope that the restful landscape would bring him peace. That landscape could provide the shelter and mental quietude for which he strived was recognised in a letter to Cowper-Temple, written in 1869, in which Ruskin stated, 'I am so sick for rest that only the quiet, grey, old gentleness of leaf and sky are good for me'.¹⁰³ It was not the vital, vibrant force of nature that would afford healing, but the calm, monotonous permanence of the landscape. Ruskin reiterated his desire for physical and spiritual therapy to his friend Henry Acland in the weeks before arriving at Brantwood, avowing, 'I am now going to attend to my health as the principal thing, until I can lie down in Coniston Water'.¹⁰⁴ The quasi-religious propensity for connectedness to the landscape echoes Ruskin's biophilic urge to find healing in nature.

The details of the purchase of Brantwood have been described by Hilton and other biographers.¹⁰⁵ In his memoir, *Memories* (1895), William Linton, the owner of Brantwood from 1852 to 1871, recalled his impression of Ruskin and the details of the sale transaction:

¹⁰² Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 317 (20 September 1871).

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 196 (17 April 1869).

¹⁰⁴ Works 22.xvii (5 August 1871).

¹⁰⁵ See Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 212-13; Kevin Jackson, *The Worlds of John Ruskin* (London: Pallas Athene and The Ruskin Foundation, 2011), pp. 106-7; H. D. Rawnsley, *Ruskin and the English Lakes* (Glasgow: John MacLehose and Sons, 1901), pp. 30-34; Collingwood, *Life of John Ruskin*, II, pp. 112-13.

Ruskin I saw but once, then by appointment in the shop of Ellis, the bookseller, in King Street, Covent Garden: a very pleasant meeting. The purchase of Brantwood was pleasantly arranged in a couple of letters. But I knew of him not only through my admiration for his writings (admiring him as The Poet, beyond all verse-makers of his time, and for the keen political insight of his at first so much misunderstood book, *Unto This Last*), but farther as a man of the noblest nature.¹⁰⁶

It is not clear why Linton approached Ruskin with the offer of Brantwood; he was evidently an admirer of Ruskin's work and character, but did not know him well and was clearly not sycophantic in his praise. Ruskin's publishers Smith, Elder and Co. had published Eliza Lynn Linton and William Linton's *The Lake Country* in 1864, and may have suggested Ruskin's potential interest in Brantwood. It is possible that G. W. Kitchin, who rented Brantwood in the summer months following Linton's emigration to America in 1867 and knew Ruskin from Oxford, had suggested that Ruskin might be interested in the property.¹⁰⁷ It is noteworthy that Linton, a poet himself, admired Ruskin for his poetry more than his prose, but not surprising that it was Ruskin's works of political economy that drew his respect: Linton was a radical, republican and 'political agitator'.¹⁰⁸ Linton's background contributed to Ruskin's sense that his move to Brantwood was controlled by a higher authority:

There certainly *is* a special fate in my getting this house. The man from whom I buy it—Linton—wanted to found a 'republic' – printed a certain number of numbers of 'the Republic' – like my *Fors Clavigera!* and his printing press is still in one of the outhouses – and 'God and the People' scratched deep in the whitewash outside. Well, it won't be a republican 'centre' now – but whether

¹⁰⁶ W. J. Linton, *Memories* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1895), p. 166.

¹⁰⁷ Kitchin was Censor of non-collegiate students at Oxford at the time and later wrote *Ruskin in Oxford and Other Studies*, 1904. See M. C. Curthoys, 'Kitchin, George William (1827–1912), scholar and dean of Durham', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 25 May 2006, Oxford University Press, <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34342>> [accessed 19 July 2018].

¹⁰⁸ Cook, *Homes and Haunts*, p. 207.

the landed men round will like my Toryism better than his Republicanism, remains to be seen.¹⁰⁹

The gardens created by Linton to support his self-sufficient lifestyle formed the basis of Ruskin's garden-making, although by the time Ruskin arrived at Brantwood, Linton's garden was described as 'desolate'.¹¹⁰

The house at Brantwood was in a similar state of desolation when Ruskin purchased the property, described by Ruskin on his first visit in a letter to Joan Severn as 'dilapidated and rather dismal', and later in *Fors* as 'a mere shed of rotten timber and loose stone'.¹¹¹ Regardless of its state of repair, the house conformed to Ruskin's ideal of a Westmoreland Cottage, as described by him over thirty years earlier in *The Poetry of Architecture*: 'It is small in size, simple in form, subdued in tone, easily concealed or overshadowed'.¹¹² The humble appearance of Brantwood, its vernacular materials and functional design, appealed to Ruskin who was keen to forgo the grandeur of his stately suburban villa in Denmark Hill for simple cottage life, in keeping with the ideals promoted in *Fors Clavigera*. He did not appear alarmed by the uninhabitable accommodation, and wrote in good humour to Severn: 'For the house itself! Well – there *is* a house, certainly, and it has rooms in it, but I believe in reality nearly as much will have to be done as if it were a shell of bricks and mortar'.¹¹³ The letter continued, '[m]eantime – the first thing I've to do is to build a wall up one side of my six – not five, acres of moor'.¹¹⁴ Ruskin's compulsion to construct a boundary wall is indicative not only of his landscape priorities and pride of ownership but of an inherent insecurity. Enclosed by a cloistering wall, Ruskin was defining his territory and creating the shelter of the medieval *hortus conclusus*, the symbolic and biblical resonance of which is explored in Chapter Three. The construction of a boundary wall suggests isolationism; Ruskin was physically separating himself from the affairs of others to focus on his own work and wellbeing.

¹⁰⁹ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 140-41 (14-15 September 1871), original italics.

¹¹⁰ *Works* 23.xxix.

¹¹¹ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 139 (12 September 1871); *Works* 29.101.

¹¹² *Works* 1.49.

¹¹³ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 141 (14-15 September 1871), original italics.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, original italics.

'the finest view I know'

Ruskin's longing for mountain landscape can naturally be interpreted as a desire to view the landscape as well as live in it. Dickinson demonstrates that '[t]he appeal of Brantwood as an ideal, restful domus lay in the landscape which embraced it and which could be seen from within it'.¹¹⁵ With the image of the prospect from the lakeshore fixed in his mind since his sketching expedition of 1837, Ruskin purchased Brantwood on the strength of this remembered ideal, and in September 1871 he stood in the same position on the lakeshore, turned, and sketched in watercolour the view in the opposite direction, depicting his house nestled in the steep wooded landscape.¹¹⁶ Ruskin's correspondence in the weeks following his first visit to the house reflects his privileging of view over other aspects of the property, writing to Severn, 'The view from the house is finer than I expected, the house itself dilapidated and dismal', to Norton, 'I think, on the whole, the finest view I know in Cumberland or Lancashire, with the sunset visible over the same. The house – small, old, damp, and smoky-chimneyed', and to Lord Avebury, 'A mere nook of turf above a nest of garden, but commanding such a piece of lake and hill as can only be seen in England'.¹¹⁷ The view across the lake from Brantwood was widely recognised for its fine prospect and was celebrated in a local landmark identified by Eliza Lynn Linton, in *The Lake Country* (1864), as 'Wordsworth's seat, where the great poet sat pronouncing this the best view of the lake and the Old Man'.¹¹⁸ The cultural significance overlaid on the view is paralleled by Ruskin's epigrammatic quotation from Wordsworth on the title page of *Modern Painters*, an appropriation signalling to Dixon Hunt, 'Ruskin's fellow feeling with a poet who respected the accumulated memories and experiences of landscape'.¹¹⁹

In an interview with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, published in 1884, Ruskin is reported to have extolled the wonder of the vista from the windows of Brantwood, rejoicing

¹¹⁵ Rachel Dickinson, "'A Glass Picture': A Window into Ruskin's Aesthetic" in *Ruskin in Perspective: Contemporary Essays*, ed. by Carmen Casaliggi and Paul March-Russell (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), p. 204.

¹¹⁶ John Ruskin, *Brantwood from the Edge of the Lake*, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 1871, Ruskin 1996P0882.

¹¹⁷ *Works* 37.35 (12 September 1871); *Works* 37.35 (14 September 1871); quoted in Cook, *Homes and Haunts*, p. 209.

¹¹⁸ Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Lake Country* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1864), p. 265.

¹¹⁹ John Dixon Hunt, *Viewfinders* (Kendal: Abbott Hall Art Gallery, 1980), p. 19.

when the sun came out to reveal ‘the full beauty of the view’ and encouraging his interviewer to ‘[c]ome and look at it from the dining-room: it is finest from there’, before contradicting himself when entering his bedroom with the statement: ‘[f]rom this room you will get the finest view of all of the lake’.¹²⁰ The projecting turret window, added by Ruskin to his bedroom, opened up a panoramic view of mountains, lake and sky, its glazed sides facilitating immersion in the landscape. Dickinson relates the architectural form of this window to the ideal ‘outlook aperture’ described by Ruskin in *The Stones of Venice* as ‘an external semi-tower, having true aperture windows on each side of it’.¹²¹ The dining room window, also designed by Ruskin and added as an extension to the domestic accommodation in 1878, comprised seven arches suggestive of the tenets of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.¹²² By referencing his earlier works in the form of these windows, Ruskin was embodying his principles of architectural truth within the material structure of his home, and seeing the landscape framed by the physical iteration of his ideals. The use of domestic architecture as a manifestation of creed mirrors Ruskin’s work in the garden, where his social, political and artistic thinking can be read in his landscape interventions.

Before Ruskin came to Brantwood, Linton had also sought to enhance the framed views from the interior of the house by adding a bow window to the study which opened up the view to the full reach of the lake. This was one of the few alterations made to the house during Linton’s tenure, and indicates the value he placed on the view, considering the inadequacy of the domestic arrangements for a family of seven children. A vignette engraved by Linton for his book *Claribel and Other Poems* (1865), depicts the wintry view from this window with Linton’s book propped against the pane.¹²³ Linton captured the separation between domestic comfort and sublime landscape, the glass of the window becoming the liminal space through which the viewer must pass to experience the poetic sentiment. Linton sent a copy of this book to Ruskin with the inscription ‘John Ruskin with the author’s best respect’.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ M. H. Spielmann, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 April 1884, quoted in Works 34.668-69.

¹²¹ Dickinson, ‘A Glass Picture’, p. 205; Works 9.218.

¹²² Dearden, *Brantwood*, p. 20.

¹²³ Reproduced in Dearden, *Brantwood*, p. 13; W. J. Linton, *Claribel and Other Poems*, (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1865), title page.

¹²⁴ James S. Dearden, *The Library of John Ruskin* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2012) p. 204.

Ruskin's dining room had windows facing both west and south: the large bay window commanding a view of the lake was likely to be the window referred to in the *Pall Mall Gazette* above, while the arched windows offered a prospect to the south. Of this vista, Ruskin wrote in 1884 that, '[f]rom my dining-room, I am happy in the view of the lower reach of Coniston Water, not because it is particularly beautiful, but because it is entirely pastoral and pure'.¹²⁵ The privileging of purity in landscape over such aspects as beauty, sublimity and the picturesque – together with Ruskin's association of purity with the pastoral – connects human activity to the environment, and renders society responsible for the spiritual wholesomeness of the view, through the pastoral tradition. Ruskin's ideal landscape was not wilderness but countryside animated by evidence of human activity. Writing to Severn in 1873 after a walk on the Coniston fells, he admired a landscape in which there were 'no human creatures to be seen for miles – but sound of water, and the pleasant sense of inhabited land below and in the distance – and one's own little housie glittering on the other side of the lake'.¹²⁶ Ruskin's 'own little housie' – a personal domain surrounded by cloistering walls offering isolation from outside intrusion – was nestled within a protective landscape in which the *genius loci* was embodied in pastoral gentleness and the comforting omnipresent traces of human habitation.

The house at Brantwood, as refashioned by Ruskin, was outward-looking, designed to be seen from, rather than to be seen. The domestic comfort within the rooms was enhanced by the presence of the landscape in framed apertures, the windows forming picturesque compositions. Ruskin, when questioned why at Brantwood 'there is no attempt whatever to secure harmonies of colour, or form, in furniture', declared in 1883 that, 'I am entirely independent for daily happiness upon the sensual qualities of form or colour; that, when I want them, I take them either from the sky or the fields, not from my walls'.¹²⁷ The sense of looking out from the interiors was essential to Ruskin for his experience of the 'sensual qualities of form or colour', which could readily be found through his windows.

¹²⁵ Works 4.8.

¹²⁶ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 162 (31 January 1873).

¹²⁷ Works 4.8. Ruskin was responding in the preface to his revised edition of *Modern Painters* to questioning by 'the aesthetic cliques of London'.

In Ruskin's outdoor spaces, however, his approach to views was inward-looking. The garden was *part* of the awe-inspiring landscape, not a platform from which to admire distant expanses of it. This is an important factor in understanding Ruskin's gardening praxis. The Professor's Garden, Ruskin's private plot, was surrounded by trees, its beauty derived from the variety of colour and form in the cottage garden plantings and the lichen on the wall. His stone seat was positioned with its back to the panorama of lake and mountain, allowing for contemplation of the stream gushing over the rocks. The tennis court was constructed on a hillside promontory, yet the view was screened by spindly trees, and his pond reflected the sky above rather than the landscape around. Even the zig-zag terraces – which afford a fine prospect when looked out from – were designed to be ascended, with the gaze fixed upwards on the wooded hillside. Paintings by Arthur Severn and Ruskin depict paths within the woods, showing an enclosed landscape with no horizon (Figures 7 and 20).¹²⁸ In contrast, the areas of the garden developed by Joan Severn in the 1880s and 90s were designed to capture and exhibit the view. Severn's terrace in front of the house is depicted in a watercolour by Arthur Severn in which a trellis of roses borders the lawn, with the lake and mountains beyond. In the foreground can be seen the shadow of the observer, admiring the landscape from the balustraded balcony constructed in 1905 for the passive admiration of the vista.¹²⁹

Ruskin subverted the conventional garden principle of utilising the borrowed landscape to enhance the beauty of the garden by maintaining the inward, meditative focus of his woodland as the core of the landscape. The magnificence of the view was integral to the garden environment, not merely scenery, view or background, but the natural topography of Lakeland, encompassing nothing less than the majesty of creation. Ruskin's inward-looking interventions in the garden allow for the contemplation of nature on a micro scale within the macro context of the wider landscape.

¹²⁸ For example, Arthur Severn's *The Woodland Garden at Brantwood*, n.d., Ruskin 1996P0796, and *Beck Leven Running into the Lake*, n.d., Ruskin 1996P0498, and Ruskin's *Path at Brantwood*, n.d., Ruskin 1996P1171.

¹²⁹ Arthur Severn, *Brantwood, Rose Terrace in Front of House, and Lake*, watercolour, 1905, Ruskin 1996P0502; reproduced in Dearden, *Brantwood*, p. 28.



Figure 7: John Ruskin, *Path at Brantwood*, pencil, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, n.d., Ruskin 1996P1171. Reproduced by kind permission of The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre.

Although he did not exploit the borrowed landscape in his garden-making, there are many paintings depicting the outward view from Ruskin's landscape, by Severn, Collingwood, Hilliard, Godwin, Warren and others; the prospect was celebrated for its picturesque qualities by artists, poets and tourists alike. Collingwood used the view across the lake from the moorland at Brantwood for the front cover of his *Book of Coniston* (1897) and, as mentioned above, Wordsworth accorded the view particular praise.¹³⁰ In his description of Ruskin leading guests through his landscape, Wedderburn hinted in 1877 that Ruskin was seeing more than the picturesque when he looked out from Brantwood:

the place is gladly shown; and a walk is taken up the grass paths cut through the woods, with seats placed where the views are best, to look out over mountain and lake, and be taught, maybe, in the rich colours and fleecy clouds, the utter rightness of Turner[.]¹³¹

¹³⁰ W. G. Collingwood, *The Book of Coniston* (Kendal: T Wilson, 1897).

¹³¹ Alexander Wedderburn, 'Celebrities at Home LIV: Professor Ruskin at Brantwood', *World*, 29 August 1877, quoted in *Works* 23.xxx.

The siting of seats at pre-determined viewing points is a typical feature of a picturesque designed landscape, often with the view deliberately concealed from sight before a moment of spectacular reveal, designed to heighten the emotion of the spectator and accentuate the grandeur of the scene.¹³² There is no evidence that Ruskin mediated the relationship between landscape and viewer through a designed landscape shaped specifically for engagement with the view, although Wedderburn suggested a pedagogical motive for showing a particular view whereby Ruskin could explain ‘the utter rightness of Turner’. According to Wedderburn, the seats were placed not for simple admiration of the view but to facilitate a disposition on Ruskin’s criticism of the picturesque expressed in *Modern Painters*, in which Turner was praised for his ability to transcend the superficiality of landscape painting. The picturesque painter, according to Ruskin, merely conformed to a set of compositional ideals, whereas Turner expressed the connection between the outer form of the landscape and its inner truth.¹³³ Ruskin followed this Turnerian principle in the ecological underpinning of his garden-making; his interventions are carefully considered against the backdrop of rural industry, native planting, vernacular materials, and natural topography to expose the inner truth of the landscape. This is a key element of Ruskin’s garden praxis, linking it to artistic and cultural concepts, as well as to the foundations of his political economy.

The art critic in the garden

This analysis can be further developed to demonstrate that the principles of Ruskin’s architectural writing are embedded in the garden at Brantwood. In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), Ruskin promoted the principle of Truth in the honest use of materials and structure, exemplified in the garden where walls and steps were simply built with stones found nearby, and indigenous plants were encouraged to grow, rather than introduce species incongruous to the locale. When a workman constructed a deliberately rustic wooden bridge, Ruskin ordered that it be rebuilt more

¹³² For a discussion of the layout of eighteenth-century designed landscapes in relation to aesthetics and sensation, see Hadfield, *History of British Gardening*, pp. 197-210, and Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, pp. 50-56.

¹³³ For a discussion of Ruskin and the picturesque, see Robert Hewison, *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 30-53.

solidly to fulfil its function honestly.¹³⁴ That a building should be handcrafted, expressing the freedom of the maker, is central to Ruskin's tenet of Life, which is translated in the garden into the visibility of the human hand in the work of nature, embodied in Ruskin's tools with his billhook and joy in digging. The principle of Beauty, expressed in architecture in the creation of ornamentation drawn from the divine forms of nature, is expressed in gardening by showing the floral wonders of creation to their best advantage. Ruskin planted spring bulbs next to his precipice rock and narcissus along the edge of his stream, recognising that plants are made beautiful by their surroundings; he described a fern that 'enjoys itself extremely on the top of my garden wall, but would not be the least obliged to me for putting it into a flower border'.¹³⁵ The principle of Memory and respect for cultural tradition is embodied in Ruskin's sympathy with Lakeland custom, the pastoral tradition of the land, and the simple life he recognised in neighbours such as Susanna Beever. The cultural memory of the land is overlaid with a biographical layering of memory in the planting at Brantwood, where people and places are remembered in symbolic plants. By mapping Ruskin's gardening onto his established principles of architecture, the 'rules' which comprise the Ruskinian ideal can be translated between disciplines, demonstrating his polythematic approach. These threads are interwoven through this study of the garden, their significance extrapolated in subsequent chapters.

An examination of Ruskin's art criticism similarly elucidates his approach to gardens. His own artistic upbringing had been shaped by the picturesque; he was taught to draw by Copley Fielding and J. D. Harding, and was an admirer of the work of Samuel Prout.¹³⁶ From his drawing masters and his own critical observation of paintings, Ruskin recognised the artistic vocabulary of the picturesque: the rules and tricks employed to create a pleasing composition. He believed that beauty was intrinsic to nature, and the artistic trickery of the painter belied the truth of the landscape as it had been divinely created. In *Praeterita*, Ruskin shared an epiphany revealed when drawing an aspen tree by the side of the road at Fontainebleau in 1842,

¹³⁴ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 36.

¹³⁵ Works 25.527.

¹³⁶ Hewison *The Argument of the Eye*, pp. 37, 39 and 48.

effecting what Robert Hewison has identified as a ‘Romantic-religious experience of nature’.¹³⁷ Ruskin suddenly comprehended that,

all the trees of the wood (for I saw surely that my little aspen was only one of their millions) should be beautiful—more than Gothic tracery, more than Greek vase-imagery, more than the daintiest embroiderers of the East could embroider, or the artfullest painters of the West could limn,—this was indeed an end to all former thoughts with me, an insight into a new silvan world. Not silvan only. The woods, which I had only looked on as wilderness, fulfilled I then saw, in their beauty, the same laws which guided the clouds, divided the light, and balanced the wave.¹³⁸

Ruskin saw in nature a beauty that filled him with divine awe, realising the lines he drew “composed” themselves, by finer laws than any known of men’.¹³⁹ That the intrinsic forms of nature could be more beautiful than works devised by humankind in an attempt to create beauty exposed the pre-eminence of the divine power of nature, working to laws unfathomable to worldly minds. By employing the language of art in the term ‘composed’, Ruskin related nature to painting and denoted the ascendancy of the natural picturesque over the painted picturesque. As Hewison has observed, ‘[i]n this mystical moment of identification between self and nature the poet’s imagination, the geologist’s observation and the preacher’s vision seemed to come together’.¹⁴⁰ Ruskin was drawing on the Romantic vision of a powerful nature in which the self is subsumed by the elemental, and this deep affinity with nature informed his thinking on the picturesque. Immediately after this epiphany he began writing *Modern Painters*, presenting his criticism of picturesque landscape painting. It is this intrinsic connection between self and the ‘laws’ of nature and art that provides the conceptual framework of Ruskin’s gardening at Brantwood.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

¹³⁸ Works 35.314-15.

¹³⁹ Works 35.314.

¹⁴⁰ Hewison, *The Argument of the Eye*, p. 41.

Ruskin's understanding of the picturesque in landscape painting was shaped by Turner and marked by the replacement of 'neatness and precision' with ruin and 'disorder'.¹⁴¹ In *Modern Painters*, Ruskin identified the importance in Turner's compositions of what Turner – and Ruskin – described as 'litter':

Turner devoted picture after picture to the illustration of effects of dinginess, smoke, soot, dust, and dusty texture; old sides of boats, weedy roadside vegetation, dung-hills, straw-yards, and all the soilings and stains of every common labour. And more than this, he not only could endure, but enjoyed and looked for *litter*, like Covent Garden wreck after the market. His pictures are often full of it, from side to side; their foregrounds differ from all others in the natural way that things have of lying about in them. Even his richest vegetation, in ideal work, is confused; and he delights in shingle, débris, and heaps of fallen stones. The last words he ever spoke to me about a picture were in gentle exultation about his St. Gothard: 'that *litter* of stones which I endeavoured to represent'.¹⁴²

Ruskin did not translate into landscape design Turner's admiration for 'litter' and the depiction of picturesque truth, although he did recognise that this compositional 'litter' could be put to effect in a designed landscape, such as Pauline Trevelyan's garden at Wallington in Northumberland. Writing to Trevelyan in December 1864, while making plans to remodel the garden at Denmark Hill after his father's death, Ruskin declared, 'if I were as littery as you and as fond of weeds, *I'd* have clock-leaves and everything in a mess, too'.¹⁴³ Although Ruskin may have been humorously chiding his friend's taste, he was demonstrating an awareness of the aesthetic of the garden at Wallington, underpinned by his appreciation of Turner's 'littery' landscapes. Ruskin's determined response suggests that he had envisaged his own garden in relation to that of Trevelyan, and his rejection of 'litter' at Denmark Hill was a considered aesthetic judgement. The Turnerian background to Ruskin's appreciation of the picturesque has

¹⁴¹ Works 6.9.

¹⁴² Works 7.377-78, original italics.

¹⁴³ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 242 (15 December 1864), original italics.

implications for understanding his designed landscape at Brantwood, where unfettered nature was disciplined, trees shaped by Ruskin's billhook, and 'heaps of fallen stones' assiduously removed from the stream. Ruskin's landscape aesthetic was not derived from this aspect of Turner's compositions; as discussed below, Ruskin looked not to the picturesque but to the Renaissance for an artistic paradigm in his woodland garden.

The picturesque theory of the late-eighteenth-century promoted by William Gilpin, Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price related to designed landscape rather than painting.¹⁴⁴ The theorists advocated the translation of landscapes depicted by seventeenth-century masters such as Claude Lorrain into the actual landscapes of country estates, capturing 'that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture'.¹⁴⁵ By the nineteenth century, picturesque designed landscapes created by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and his contemporaries had reshaped much of the estate parkland of England, effectively creating idealised landscapes, based on paintings, which provided eminently suitable compositions for successive artists to paint.¹⁴⁶ Turner capitalised on the aristocratic taste for the picturesque – both framed and actual – in commissions such as that by Lord Egremont at Petworth where Turner's framed landscapes hanging on the walls replicated the view through the windows of Brown's designed landscape.¹⁴⁷ Ruskin's appreciation of Turner's landscape painting is therefore mediated by the picturesque theory that shaped the designed landscape.

Ruskin was aware from his youthful experience of drawing that picturesque effect could be derived from horticultural planting. The combination of leaf colour and form in different species of tree had struck him when sketching in a churchyard, which he expressed in a letter to *The Architectural Magazine* in December 1838:

¹⁴⁴ William Gilpin, *Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, made in the year 1772, on several parts of England; particularly the mountains, and lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland* (London: R. Blamire, 1786); Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London: T. Payne and J. White, 1805); Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; and on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape* (London: J. Robson, 1796).

¹⁴⁵ William Gilpin quoted in Hewison, *The Argument of the Eye*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁶ For a discussion of artistic composition of designed landscape, see Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1995), pp. 148-50.

¹⁴⁷ Christopher Rowell, *Petworth House, West Sussex* (London: National Trust, 2002), pp. 86-87.

I like your paper on churchyards very much; but I wonder you have not noticed the weeping willow among your list of trees. In the churchyard which I think the most unaffected and beautiful in Britain, that of Peterborough Cathedral, [...] the pale green of the weeping willow is exquisitely used among the darker tints.¹⁴⁸

This was a precocious suggestion for a nineteen-year-old to make to the editor John Loudon, an eminent horticultural writer who was to design cemeteries in the 1840s, and wrote *On the Laying Out, Planting and managing of Cemeteries* (1843). The weeping willow may have produced a picturesque effect in contrast to the evergreens of the churchyard, but the practical Loudon was dismissive of the use of deciduous trees – and moisture-loving willows in particular – amongst graves because of the unhygienic debris created, although he allowed that weeping varieties of trees were of suitable habit and stature in a memorial landscape.¹⁴⁹ Notwithstanding his horticultural naivety, Ruskin recognised that the juxtaposition of trees of different species could create picturesque effect in a landscape. His description of the churchyard as ‘unaffected’ points to his preference for natural over designed landscape, even in youth, although in describing the trees as ‘exquisitely used’ Ruskin implies human intervention was necessary to create the effect, prefiguring the benign control of nature he was later to exercise at Brantwood.

The youthful Ruskin also anticipated the reverence for woodland which his mature self valued at Brantwood. In the *Poetry of Architecture* (1837), Ruskin recognised parallels between human and sylvan aging, identifying woodland as a landscape of remembrance where history was embodied within the trees themselves, declaring that a tree was possessed of ‘memory: it is always telling us about the past, never pointing to the future’.¹⁵⁰ This sentiment chimes with Ruskin’s preoccupation with reflection and reassessment during his years of woodland gardening at

¹⁴⁸ Works 1.245-46.

¹⁴⁹ J. C. Loudon, *On the Laying Out, Planting and managing of Cemeteries* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1843).

¹⁵⁰ Works 1.68.

Brantwood: writing *Praeterita*, reading over diaries, reissuing editions of his books, and remembering the lives of those he had loved and lost. He continued:

the chief feeling induced by woody country is one of reverence for its antiquity. There is a quiet melancholy about the decay of the patriarchal trunks, which is enhanced by the green and elastic vigour of the young saplings; the noble form of the forest aisles, and the subdued light which penetrates their entangled boughs, combine to add to the impression; and the whole character of the scene is calculated to excite conservative feeling.¹⁵¹

Ruskin did not see the promise of subsequent generations in woodland. The saplings reminded him of the antiquity of the veteran trees rather than the life and growth ahead of them, and the benign patriarchy of the woodland ecosystem was a metaphor for the conservatism of the feudal principles at the heart of his political economy. His conclusion that '[t]he man who could remain a radical in a wood country is a disgrace to his species' echoes the opening sentence of *Praeterita* in which he declared himself to be 'a violent Tory of the old school', demonstrating an early epistemological link between landscape and politics.¹⁵² Ruskin's 'old school' was grounded in the literature of Walter Scott, respect for rural tradition, and adherence to feudal values: it is this conservatism that links his reverence for woodland to his political ideology.

It has been suggested by David Ingram that Ruskin's interest in the geological formation of the mountain landscape may have played a role in his appraisal of view, with the craggy outcrops and undulating corries of Wetherlam, across the lake from Brantwood, interesting not for their picturesque composition but for what they reveal about the geology of the land.¹⁵³ Ruskin's many studies of mountains confirm that his fundamental interest was in the geological shaping of landscape; his sketches reveal the complexity of clefts and glacial shaping, and the daguerreotypes of mountains taken at his instruction likewise focus on capturing details of structural form rather

¹⁵¹ Works 1.69.

¹⁵² Works 1.69 and 35.13.

¹⁵³ Pers. comm. 23 October 2017.

than artistry of composition (Figure 8).¹⁵⁴ The intense study and intrinsic understanding of mountains was recognised by Ruskin in Turner's paintings, stating in *Modern Painters I* that 'Turner [...] is the only painter who has ever drawn a mountain, or a stone; no other man ever having learnt their organisation, or possessed himself of



Figure 8: Frederick Crawley, *Chamonix, Aiguille Verte and Aiguille du Dru*, daguerreotype, 1854, Ruskin 1996D0074 RF Dag74. Reproduced by kind permission of The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre.

their spirit'.¹⁵⁵ It was the 'organisation' and 'spirit' – the inner truth – of the mountain that Ruskin observed when he looked at his view from Brantwood, seeing beyond painterly composition to regard what can be termed the geomorphological picturesque.

The Old Man of Coniston – the peak framed by Ruskin's windows and dominating the landscape to the west of Brantwood – is one of the few mountains in England which can be seen from foot to summit in its entirety, thus giving Ruskin unlimited

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, *Alpine Landscape*, n.d., pencil with ink wash, Ruskin 1996P1685; *Study of Mountains*, 1860, Ruskin 1996P2037; *Summit of Mont Blanc, from Chamouni*, 1851, watercolour sketch, Ruskin 1996P1389; Frederick Crawley, *Chamonix, Aiguille Verte and Aiguille du Dru*, daguerreotype, 1854, Ruskin 1996D0074 RF Dag74.

¹⁵⁵ Works 3.252.

opportunity to contemplate mountain structure and rock formation. In his lecture, 'Yewdale and its Streamlets', delivered in 1877, Ruskin alluded to the constant presence of the mountain in his view:

And it chances that my own study window being just opposite this crag, and not more than a mile from it as the bird flies, I have it always staring me, as it were, in the face, and asking again and again, when I look up from writing any of my books,—'How did I come here?'¹⁵⁶

The silent and incessant question posed by the landscape is presented by Ruskin as a challenge, interrupting his thinking on all subjects, not only the geological studies of *Deucalion* (1875-83). In the 1870s Ruskin was publishing works as diverse as *Ariadne Fiorentina* on wood engraving (1873-6), *Love's Meinie* (1873-81) on ornithology, *Val D'Arno* (1874) on Tuscan art, *Proserpina* (1875-86) on botany, *St Marks Rest* (1877-84) on the history of Venice, as well as *Fors Clavigera* (1871-1884) with apparently limitless scope. His complex religious and scientific questioning suggests the mountain landscape framed within Ruskin's view was both inspiring and troubling; moreover, he asserts that his thinking on the elemental forces of nature and the foundation of being was to be found in all his writing.

Such thinking was at the core of Ruskin's gardening. He showed reverence for nature while also endeavouring to control its vital processes, and his divine wonder at the form of plants would not stray into the curiosity of scientific investigation. The certainties of God's creation were replaced by doubt when evolutionary theory began to gain credence, undermining all certainty. Ruskin looked for assurance in mythology, literature and art, reflected in the aesthetic of his woodland garden. The following examination of Ruskin's woodland maps his interventions onto specific artistic and literary models to trace the biographical path of his aesthetic from source to landscape expression, encompassing his planting and use of topography to shape a landscape ideal. While the formative instruction of Maria Edgeworth's Harry and Lucy books pervaded Ruskin's practical gardening activities, his sophisticated plant nomenclature

¹⁵⁶ Works 26.254.

was steeped in Shakespearean references, and his agricultural model was shaped by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. These literary threads are discussed in Chapters Two and Four respectively; meanwhile, Ruskin's woodland can be read as an ekphrastic recreation of the character and timbre of a Renaissance painting or a novel by Walter Scott, the distinctive mood of art, poetry, prose and music infused with personal resonance. Some literary and artistic references are provided explicitly by Ruskin in *Praeterita*, or revealed in diaries and letters, and elucidated by perceptive commentators such as Collingwood, while others are veiled in Ruskin's prose or vested in the symbolic planting of the garden.

Ruskin's woodland aesthetic

Collingwood described Ruskin's woodland garden as 'an oasis in the North-country farmer's neighbourhood', praising Ruskin's ability to raise the aesthetic of an area formerly the site of rural industry to a landscape in which 'Decamerons might have been told'.¹⁵⁷ The notion of the garden as an arcadian retreat, appropriate for the narration of medieval tales, is exemplified by Collingwood in the unlikely setting of the tennis lawn. The court had been created for the benefit of Ruskin's guests; he took no interest in sport yet was willing to introduce frivolity into his woodland for the enjoyment of others. Ruskin may also have been motivated by the challenge of levelling the site, approaching the creation of the tennis court as a civil engineering project and an exercise in manual labour, the work being carried out by 'the young people who were to play tennis on the ground when it was levelled'.¹⁵⁸ Ruskin's physical contribution to the project is evidenced in his diary, where he recorded that alongside the study of rock cleavages for *Deucalion*, he did 'a good deal of practical cleavage in cutting out the lawn-tennis ground'.¹⁵⁹ The abrupt change of visual tone, from flowering woodland to tennis court, is noted by Collingwood, and it is one of the paradoxes of Ruskin's gardening that he chose to site an area for games within his

¹⁵⁷ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 39.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin together with selected related letters and sketches of persons mentioned*, ed. by Helen Gill Viljoen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 172 (28 May 1879).

wood.¹⁶⁰ The location was impractical for access, being some distance from the house and with no space for storage of equipment, either for play or maintenance. The steep woodland offered an unpromising locale, with trees to remove, ground to level and grass to grow to provide a suitable playing surface, and the loss of balls down the slope must have frequently hindered play.¹⁶¹

Collingwood maintained that the tennis court was indicative of Ruskin's treatment of his woodland, adding a 'refinement of feeling' that turned 'a tennis-ground into a Purist painter's glade'.¹⁶² This description is explained in relation to Ruskin's appreciation of Sandro Botticelli, whose work he had studied on continental visits in 1872 and 1874, and lectured on in 1874.¹⁶³ The woodland on Ruskin's estate had been coppiced for centuries for charcoal and the bobbin industry, but Collingwood explained that,

When Ruskin came to Brantwood he would have his coppice cut no more. He let it grow, only taking off the weaker shoots and dead wood. It spindled up to great tall stems, slender and sinuous, promising no timber, and passed the age for all commercial use or time-honoured wont. Neighbours shook their heads, but they did not know the pictures of Botticelli, and Ruskin had made his coppice into an early Italian altar-piece.¹⁶⁴

Ingram illustrates the form of the spindly branches of Ruskin's Botticellian aesthetic with an image of *The Ascent to the Heaven of Fire* (c. 1490) from Dante's *Divine Comedy* in which Botticelli depicted a screen of slender trees, evoking Collingwood's description of '[t]he tall, thin saplings [which] have run up higher and higher all round the green: on one side you look through their veil to the long expanse of lake; on the

¹⁶⁰ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 39.

¹⁶¹ Tennis was played on the tennis lawn, as noted by Ruskin in his diary of 4 October 1886, and the surface remains today perfectly level, although mossy and prone to flooding. OS mapping shows that a tennis court was created on the meadow between the house and the lake around 1900, which would have been a more convenient location.

¹⁶² Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 39.

¹⁶³ Works 23.265-79, 'The Aesthetic and Mathematic Schools of Art in Florence', lectures delivered at University of Oxford, Michaelmas term 1874, Lecture VIII 'Botticelli'.

¹⁶⁴ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 35.

other, up the dark wooded hill'.¹⁶⁵ In the landscape around the tennis lawn, Ruskin shaped a Botticellian scene, veiling the view of the mountains and recreating the dappled shade of Primavera's woodland glade. In this context, Ruskin's landscape interventions can be seen as a manipulation of art into an idiosyncratic ekphrastic picturesque, whereby the landscape is created to idealise a painting: the landscape becomes the picture. By evoking the classical mythology of Botticelli's oeuvre, exemplified in paintings such as *Primavera* (c. 1480), Ruskin bestowed allegorical meaning on his woodland, alluded to by Collingwood in his statement that, 'you would not be surprised to see goddesses appear out of the green depths'.¹⁶⁶

Ruskin may have had more than mythology in mind when bringing Botticelli into his woodland. He confided to Norton in 1875 that 'really the one thing that I physically want is one of those Graces out of Botticelli's picture of the Spring. I can't make out how that confounded fellow was able to see such pretty things – or how he lived among them'.¹⁶⁷ Ruskin's 'physical' desire hints he was thinking about a real incarnation of the 'Graces' whilst marvelling at Botticelli's artistic skill. Hilton suggests that Ruskin's obsession with Botticelli's figure of Zipporah, which he spent a fortnight copying from a fresco in the Sistine Chapel in 1874, mirrored his obsession with Rose La Touche, the figure in the painting becoming a 'symbolic substitute' for La Touche: 'lovely, distant, an icon, immortal'.¹⁶⁸ Jeremy Melius goes further, identifying an erotic yearning in Ruskin's approach to copying the picture: 'a self-conscious attempt to materialise desire'.¹⁶⁹ The painting was hung by Ruskin in the drawing room at Brantwood, while the vision of the lithe figure of Zipporah was at home in the Botticellian scenery created for her in the woodland, immortalising the 'goddess' imagined by Collingwood emerging from the 'green depths'. Botticellian tropes were also seen by Ruskin in the clouds above his landscape, recording on 4 August 1877, 'a quite exquisite Italian sky to south with divinest jewels of white cirri – and a long riband like a renaissance angels sash – or Botticelli madonnas, flying up high to the

¹⁶⁵ Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, p. 45; Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 39.

¹⁶⁶ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 35.

¹⁶⁷ Bradley and Ousby, *Norton Letters*, p. 353 (13 February 1875).

¹⁶⁸ Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 276.

¹⁶⁹ Jeremy Melius, 'Ruskin's Copies', *Critical Inquiry*, 42, 1 (Autumn 2015), p. 83.

zenith'.¹⁷⁰ The landscape of Brantwood inspired memories of Botticelli's work, which were in turn imposed on the woodland to maintain the aesthetic ideal.

Ruskin was aware of the impermanence of the landscape aesthetic he was striving for in his woodland. The cycle of coppicing would have resulted in dramatic changes in the landscape with trees cut back to stumps every ten years, removing the leafy shelter and encouraging the growth of wild flowers in the open soil below, then as the poles of the trees grew higher the understory would die back and the woodland return to green shade. To maintain the mystical stasis of a Botticellian scene, Ruskin was obliged to continually prune his trees, an activity built into his routine at Brantwood, recorded in his diaries and described by Collingwood:

To keep his forest at this delightful point of mystery, his billhook and gloves were always lying on the hall table, and after the morning's writing he would go up to the Brant (steep) Wood and chop for half an hour before luncheon. It was not the heroic axe-work of Mr Gladstone, but such pruning as a Garden of Eden required to dress it and to keep it.¹⁷¹

The cessation of the physical effort of pruning and chopping would result in an inevitable departure from Ruskin's aesthetic as nature took over. He was not gardening for posterity, instead he was contriving a landscape for his own immediate gratification, kept in a state of stasis. Given the inevitability of seasonal change, the unpredictability of weather and the fluidity of nature, his task was impossible.

The ornamentation of nature was admired by Ruskin when it concurred organically with his ideal of beauty, such as the rocks he found concealed in his steeply sloping woodland. The slow-growing mosses and lichen on the unmoving surface of the rock conformed more readily to his paradigm of natural stasis, and corresponded to the aesthetic model of his many watercolour studies of rock forms (Figures 9 and

¹⁷⁰ Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 38; Ruskin may have had in mind Botticelli's *Madonna of the Magnificat* (1481).

¹⁷¹ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 36; for Gladstone's tree-felling see H. C. G. Matthew, 'Gladstone, William Ewart (1809–1898), prime minister and author', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 19 May 2011, Oxford University Press, <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10787>> [accessed 22 June 2018].



Figure 9: John Ruskin, *Study of Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlas*, lampblack, bodycolour, pen and ink over graphite on paper, 1853, © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, WA.RS.REF.089.

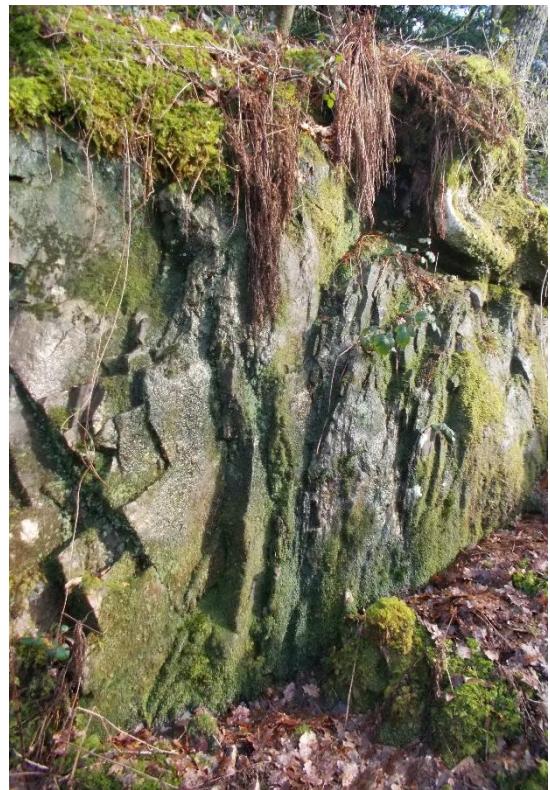


Figure 10: The 'precipice rock' at Brantwood (author photograph).

10).¹⁷² In the spring following his move to Brantwood, Ruskin wrote to Joan Severn: '[Downs, the gardener] and I together – have found a new Rock – in the wood where I never had been and its going to be prettier than anything else in Brantwood', expressing his pleasure in the landscape, but also his desire to improve its natural beauty.¹⁷³ Six years later, in the spring of 1879, Ruskin recorded in his diary: 'making the path up under "precipice-rock"', and a few days later, 'worked well on rocks in wood'.¹⁷⁴ This may have been the rock he and his gardener discovered in 1873. His desire to make it 'prettier' was fulfilled with the help of Severn, evidenced in his diary: 'Joanie, on Saturday, completed the planting of my lovely little garden of Hyacinth and

¹⁷² For example, *Study of Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlas* (1853-54), Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford; *Study of Moss, Fern and Wood-Sorrel, upon a Rocky River Bank* (1875-79), Guild of St George collection; *Rocks and Ferns in a Wood at Crossmount, Perthshire* (1847), Abbot Hall Art Gallery; *Ferns on a Rock* (1875), Ruskin 1996P2007.

¹⁷³ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 171 (25 March 1873).

¹⁷⁴ Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 164 (13 March 1879) and p. 166 (23 March 1879).

Anemone, under my “precipice” rock'.¹⁷⁵ The fact that Severn ‘completed the planting’ suggests that the work may have been started by Ruskin and continued by Severn under his direction, remaining ‘my lovely little garden’ and ‘my “precipice” rock’ (my italics). This is one of the few instances where Ruskin described named plants being introduced to a specific area of the garden. Bluebells (Ruskin’s ‘Hyacinth’) and anemones are likely to have occurred naturally in the woodland habitat, and may have been transplanted from another area of the wood to create his landscape vision for the ‘precipice-rock’.¹⁷⁶

The rock formed part of the wooded hillside above the pond and the tennis lawn, which was being constructed as the planting on the precipice was completed. These features were linked by paths with steps made from local stone. The intrusion in the landscape was softened by the irregular shaping of the steps and the absence of edging materials, as depicted by Ruskin in his watercolour sketch *Path at Brantwood* (Figure 7).¹⁷⁷ In making the ‘precipice’ accessible by the construction of a flight of steps, Ruskin was taming the wildness of his woodland and diluting the sublimity of nature. His stated intention to make the rock ‘prettier’ – achieved by foregrounding with dainty flowers – suggests that the sublime landscape of the Romantic poets was not a factor in Ruskin’s aesthetic. In a designed landscape such as Hackfall in Yorkshire or Hawkstone Park in Shropshire, both laid out in the eighteenth century to exhibit and enhance the sublime features of the landscape, the route around the garden was conceived to engage the visitor in an emotional journey of implied danger, fear and surprise, culminating in an impressive vista, scaling the precipice and looking beyond.¹⁷⁸ At Brantwood, Ruskin’s path leads to the base of his ‘precipice-rock’ (which is, in fact, no more than three metres high, with Ruskin himself admitting, ‘I must find some less grand name’), obliging the visitor to encounter the rock face-to-face, and experience not the sublimity of the craggy landscape, but the beauty of the lichen and

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 169 (22 April 1879).

¹⁷⁶ It is likely, although not conclusive, that Ruskin was using the Scottish name ‘wild hyacinth’ to mean bluebell. See Richard Mabey, *Flora Britannica* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), p. 412.

¹⁷⁷ John Ruskin, *Path at Brantwood*, pencil, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, n.d., Ruskin 1996P1171.

¹⁷⁸ See Patrick Eyres, ‘Hackfall: a sublime landscape’, *New Arcadian Journal*, 20 (1985).

moss clinging to the fissured surface.¹⁷⁹ Ruskin was highlighting the beauty of nature close-up, using his garden to show us how to see.

If Ruskin's landscape was not ideologically linked to eighteenth-century Romanticism, neither was it connected to the nineteenth-century concept of wild gardening. Vicky Albritton asserts that Ruskin 'appreciated the new wave of wilderness gardening', popularised by William Robinson in *The Wild Garden* (1870) but, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, there is little evidence that Ruskin engaged with contemporary trends in horticulture.¹⁸⁰ Although not influenced by his work, aspects of Ruskin's gardening chime with Robinson's ideas, such as the notion of allowing plants to grow without intervention in a situation matching their natural habitat, rather than conforming to the requirements of the formal garden, or the artificiality of the glasshouse. This approach is reflected in Ruskin's comment: 'I believe my gardener, albeit wise, does not quite know how greatly he might gratify some of his pinks by letting them droop out of a cleft of crag, instead of fattening and propping them in garden luxury, till they split their corsets, and lose all grace and retenue'.¹⁸¹ Robinson's belief, asserted by Anne Helmreich, that nature was 'the sole source of all true design' echoes Ruskin's approach to gardening.¹⁸²

Although Robinson promoted the use of garden plants such as roses and lilies in cultivated areas, the planting of the wild garden offered status to species considered by horticulturalists to be weeds, and compelled gardeners to think about plant beauty in terms other than ostentatious floral display. Mabey has observed that Robinson's theory 'highlighted just how tenuous the boundary was between the province of weeds and the theatres of cultivation'.¹⁸³ Ruskin nurtured the plants that were naturally thriving in his woodland, rather than contriving to embellish natural areas with introduced plantings as advocated by Robinson, and in so doing made a garden of wild flowers. He respected natural beauty where he found it, instructing his gardener in 1876 to '[s]end me word exactly what you have done about the fishpond; you know I don't want any digging high up, near the wall; the primroses grow so beautifully

¹⁷⁹ Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 164 (13 March 1879).

¹⁸⁰ Vicky Albritton, 'Ruskin's Sufficient Muse', *The Eighth Lamp: Ruskin Studies Today*, 8 (2013), p. 70.

¹⁸¹ Works 25.527.

¹⁸² Helmreich, 'Re-presenting Nature', p. 86.

¹⁸³ Mabey, *Weeds*, p. 170.

round that [?gravelly] bit'.¹⁸⁴ Ruskin's intimate, seasonal knowledge of the woodland allowed him to work in partnership with nature to create his aesthetic vision.

While primroses brought natural beauty to the woodland slopes, Ruskin considered other areas to have been less favourably endowed by nature. He wrote to Susanna Beever in 1874: 'The fishpond stream is very doleful, and wants to dance with daffodils if they would come and teach it'.¹⁸⁵ Ruskin's phrasing implies an invitation to the flowers to establish themselves, rather than direct intervention by planting them, further suggesting an approach to gardening in collaboration with nature. The daffodils were significant as a reminder of Alpine meadows, and Ruskin commented that the narcissus in his garden were 'half tame, half wild, they are as lovely as Vevay'.¹⁸⁶ The 'tame' narcissus suggests that Ruskin augmented the 'wild' plants with additional plantings in a deliberate evocation of a remembered landscape, lyrically described in *Modern Painters III* as 'principal among the gifts of the northern earth [...] White narcissus (red-centred) in mass, on the Vevay pastures, in sunshine after rain'.¹⁸⁷ These were not the 'golden daffodils' celebrated by Wordsworth, growing in drifts on the lakesides and planted in the field below Rydal Mount, but the white narcissus of the Alps, incongruous in the Lake Country.¹⁸⁸ This explains Collingwood's rhetorical question in *Ruskin Relics*: 'Who but he would have planted his field with narcissus, scattered thinly among the grass, to surprise you with a reminiscence of Vevey?'.¹⁸⁹ The non-native narcissus may well have surprised visitors to Brantwood, but the flowering was intended by Ruskin not for the recognition of others, but as a personal mnemonic of a favoured landscape. Collingwood's question belies his ignorance of contemporary garden debate: in 1870, Robinson had described the naturalised daffodils planted in his meadow at Gravetye Manor in West Sussex as, 'a picture such as one might see in an Alpine valley', and exhorted his readers to grow plants from

¹⁸⁴ Ruskin MS T144, letter from Ruskin to Jackson, 25 March 1876.

¹⁸⁵ *Hortus Inclusus: Messages from the wood to the garden sent in happy days to the sister ladies of The Thwaite, Coniston by their thankful friend John Ruskin*, ed. by Albert Fleming (Orpington: George Allen, 1887), p. 21 (17 July [1874]).

¹⁸⁶ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 746 (27 May 1873).

¹⁸⁷ *Works* 5.284.

¹⁸⁸ Wordsworth planted daffodils in 'Dora's Field' in memory of his daughter who had died from tuberculosis in 1847.

¹⁸⁹ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 39.

other countries as ‘living souvenirs’ of remembered landscapes.¹⁹⁰ This example demonstrates the concurrency of Ruskin’s landscape ideal with elements of contemporary garden style, although Ruskin himself was apparently unaware of, and indifferent to, any theoretical convergence.

The associative value of the landscape assumed an additional physicality when Ruskin was no longer able to travel to the Alpine landscapes that had sustained him throughout his life. In 1882, he wrote with autobiographical candour in *Proserpina*,

it is only now that I am old, and since pleasant travelling has become impossible to me, that I am thankful to have the white narcissus in my borders, instead of waiting to walk through the fragrance of the meadows of Clarens; and pleased to see the milkwort blue on my scythe-mown banks, since I cannot gather it any more on the rocks of the Vosges, or in the divine glens of Jura.¹⁹¹

This passage was written following a bout of incapacitating mental illness and reflects Ruskin’s recognition that the Alps existed to him now only as memory, prompted by the landscape he had shaped and planted. (He did, in fact, travel to France, Switzerland and Italy again on a final tour in 1888.) Ruskin brought back living specimens of plants from his continental tours and planted them at Brantwood, writing to Beever in 1887 that ‘I have some anemones from Florence which are marvellous in their exquisitely nervous trembling and veining of colour’.¹⁹² The purchase of Brantwood gave Ruskin the opportunity to plant floral souvenirs in his own landscape, creating a facsimile of Alpine slopes and propagating vital memories. That Ruskin associated the Lake Country with his favoured Alpine landscapes is evidenced in his preface to *Frondes Agrestes* (1875), in which he defined the landscape around Coniston as ‘the Unter-Walden of England’, referring to the forest canton of Switzerland. His diaries evidence the capacity of the Lakeland landscape to stimulate Alpine memories, particularly in weather effects, writing after walking in the fells: ‘the sun glinting down the slopes and through the woods, reminding me of Thun and happy

¹⁹⁰ William Robinson, *The Wild Garden* (London: John Murray, 1870), p. 19 and p.10.

¹⁹¹ Works 25.451.

¹⁹² Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 383 (14 February 1887).

days there', 'Rosy light in clouds in descending, like Alps', and 'afternoon sun rays like Simplon'.¹⁹³ Ruskin's treatment of the garden as a floral and topographical surrogate reveals the personal geography of memory: in his final decades, Brantwood assumed the role of understudy to the Alps.

Ruskin's reminiscences in *Praeterita* were enriched by the landscape of Brantwood. The garden created to embody the idiosyncratic aesthetic explored in this chapter expressed the culmination of a lifetime's thinking on art, natural history, mythology, and truth, allowing Ruskin's intellectual biography to be read in his garden, alongside the selected events he chose to share through his own life writing. Just as Ruskin traced the origins of his thinking on art and political economy to formative life experiences in *Praeterita*, this chapter has mapped the sources of his garden-making and landscape aesthetic. His associative thinking about plants and people was carried with him until given expression in his own garden at Brantwood, where he had the opportunity to continue his juvenile gardening practice. His early explorations in the manipulation of water, digging holes and observing plants came to fruition, and it has been demonstrated that his solitary habit of practical work, developed in idle hours in the garden at Herne Hill, sustained him through periods of mental instability in later life, and can be traced in the development of his ideas on purposeful labour which took shape as a practical expression of his political economy.

The assertion in this chapter that the outdoor space at Brantwood was crucial to the development of Ruskin's ideas has impact on the scholarly study of his writing. The garden offered space for quiet contemplation, opportunity for manual labour to liberate thought, space for practical experimentation to develop ideas, scope for observing nature, and a landscape to capture and harbour associative memory. Ruskin's productivity at Brantwood, his study of natural history, his reassessment of earlier writing, and his autobiographical reminiscence can all be linked to the landscape, through memory, association and sensation. The eagerness with which Ruskin began gardening at Brantwood – and at Denmark Hill, when the property came under his ownership – has contributed to the assertion that a garden of his own was the fulfilment of Ruskin's enduring need to shape the landscape. In tracing his quest

¹⁹³ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p.745 (27 April 1873), p. 755 (23 August 1873), p. 744 (21 April 1873).

for an ideal home, Ruskin's specific landscape paradigm is identified to encompass mountain topography, geology and flowing water, centred on notions of purity, shelter and immutability, while his seemingly impulsive decision to buy Brantwood has been revealed as the culmination of past impressions, present distress, and future expectation, setting the scene for further exploration of the garden.

Chapter Two – *Proserpina*: botanical thinking

Ruskin had been studying flowers for most of his life: identifying plants carved onto medieval stonework, mounting pressed flowers on the pages of his rudimentary flora, analysing artists' methods of drawing foliage, learning the anatomy of flowers through detailed drawing. Following his move to Brantwood, he began work on *Proserpina*, his botany book, published in parts from 1875 to 1886, and spanning his active gardening years. This chapter evaluates the role of the garden in Ruskin's botanical study, revealing how his plant observations aided the development of his botanical thinking and fostered a confidence in his own authority in the face of contradictory evidence from modern science. The garden at Brantwood is presented as the culmination of a botanical chronology, imparted on the pages of *Proserpina* but also read in the idiosyncratic planting. *Proserpina* is here presented as a blend of botany and biography which is mirrored in the garden, Ruskin's obsession with Rose La Touche prominent in both.

As a platform for the examination of Ruskin's botanical thinking, *Proserpina* is much more than a book about plants. Tim Hilton describes it as 'a meditation on life and death', Howard Hull as 'an astonishing, if broken, multi-dimensional masterpiece'.¹ Mark Frost labels it 'wilfully anti-scientific', Richard Mabey asserts it is 'confused and at times deranged', and Dinah Birch recognises in it 'the principles of a moral vision'.² Wilfrid Blunt encapsulated the alluring provocation of Ruskin's writing in *Proserpina*, stating, 'in spite of its untidy diffuseness, its irritatingly didactic tone and its ill-digested science, [it] remains the most stimulating book ever written about flowers'.³ The critical consensus is that *Proserpina* is idiosyncratic: a work founded on an alternative authority to mainstream science, displaying both genius and absurdity. It is in Ruskin's distinctive logic that the roots of his value-system are found, revealing moral principle

¹ Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 310; Howard Hull, 'Geographer of the Soul: John Ruskin's "Fairy Books of Science"', *Ruskin in Perspective*, ed. by Carmen Casaliggi and Paul March-Russell (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), p. 231.

² Mark Frost, "'Of Nature's own free doing": Ruskin's work in the woods', *John Ruskin: the Brantwood Years - An international symposium held at Lancaster University, 18-10 July 2000: A collection of some of the papers read at the symposium* (Lancaster: Lancaster University, 2001), p. 13; Mabey, *Weeds*, p. 162; Birch, 'Ruskin and the Science of *Proserpina*', p. 142-43.

³ Blunt, *The Art of Botanical Illustration*, p. 231.

through botany. *Proserpina* is a key source for understanding Ruskin's gardening, revealing his flower preferences, his observational methodology, and his preoccupation with La Touche, while also illuminating his mature reflections on science, mythology, ecology and morality.

Before turning to the real and mythological significance of La Touche which permeates both *Proserpina* and the garden, the role of the garden as observatory is explored. To place Ruskin's thinking in the context of contemporary scientific endeavour, his botanical study is chronicled over his career. This provides the necessary background to the argument that Ruskin's botanical thinking culminated in his garden at Brantwood. In *Proserpina*, Ruskin presented his botanical classification – 'Systema Proserpinæ' – conceived to counter what he perceived as the mistakes of modern science in its reliance on invasive techniques, microscopical analysis, and sexual structures.⁴ His accompanying nomenclature rectified the misuse of Latin and looked to myth, literature and feminine characteristics to describe attributes of flowers. John Rosenberg recognised this approach 'was not science but play', describing Ruskin's natural history books as 'trivia of great charm'.⁵ Ingram points to Blunt and Stearn's analysis of *Proserpina* as presenting a certain logic to the non-botanist in Ruskin's attempt to simplify botanical study; their assertions reflect the view of other plant taxonomists that Ruskin's classification was a step too far, stating: 'had he stopped here all would have been well; but he was rash enough to enter the lists himself with a new system of classification which, though poetic enough, was too laughable to be taken seriously by men of science'.⁶ As is shown below, by deliberately distancing himself from modern science, Ruskin was effectively condemning the acceptance of his proposed system, while asserting that the authority of his botanical work, founded on myth rather than science, revealed different truths, and opened a nobler route to understanding the natural world. In opposing the separation of culture and science, Ruskin's outlook differed from professional botanists. His holistic approach to the study of plants is defined by Frost as 'ecological', observing that

⁴ Works 25.473.

⁵ Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass*, p. 181.

⁶ Blunt, *The Art of Botanical Illustration*, p. 231; quoted by Ingram in his conclusion to *Flora of Chamonix 1844: an album of pressed flowers and plants collected and annotated by John Ruskin*, ed. by David S. Ingram and Stephen Wildman (London: Pallas Athene, 2019).

'Ruskin refused to sever his scientific work from his views on culture and society, and could not accept that science could exist in gloriously impartial and uninvolving isolation'.⁷ Albeit unconvincing in the context of modern science, by drawing on mythology and cultural tradition, Ruskin reassessed the significance of the link between nature and the imagination. This chapter demonstrates that, although Ruskin's botanical study was the assembly of a lifetime's work, his ideas came to fruition at Brantwood with the opportunity afforded for the close observation of plants in their natural habitat and an immersion in the rhythms of nature. As such, the garden became an observatory in the sense of a 'place set apart for [...] observations of natural phenomena', where Ruskin wondered at the marvels of botany, as well as those of astronomy, meteorology, geology and ornithology.⁸

The garden as observatory

As a child, Ruskin recalled time spent in the 'close watching of the ways of plants [...] staring at them or into them'.⁹ His 'watching' was the observation not of form or physiology but of the 'ways of plants': a study of character and behaviour which penetrated the vital essence of the plant. Ruskin recognised that to study a flower in this way revealed the relationship of plants to their environment, an ecological awareness lost in the microscopical study of plant anatomy:

A flower is to be watched as it grows, in its association with the earth, the air, and the dew; its leaves are to be seen as they expand in sunshine; its colours, as they embroider the field, or illumine the forest. Dissect or magnify them, and all you discover or learn at last will be that oaks, roses, and daisies, are all made of fibres and bubbles; and these again, of charcoal and water; but, for all their peeping and probing, nobody knows how.¹⁰

⁷ Mark Frost, "'The Law of Help': John Ruskin's Ecological Vision, 1843-1886" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southampton, 2005), p. 13.

⁸ 'observatory, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2019, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/129889> [accessed 10 August 2019].

⁹ *Works* 35.59.

¹⁰ *Works* 35.430.

Ruskin identified an innate pointlessness in materialist science, noting that ‘peeping and probing’ through the lens of a microscope exposed the structure of a plant but was unable to explain the mystery of its creation. Furthermore, he believed that modern scientific theory inhibited the study of nature and felt, as Andrew Ballantyne deduces, ‘blinded by rather than informed by theory’.¹¹ This distrust of scientific methods and concepts was outlined by Ruskin in *Modern Painters IV* (1856), two decades before the publication of *Proserpina*:

I was quite sure that if I examined the mountain anatomy scientifically I should go wrong [...]. Therefore [...] I closed all geological books, and set myself, as far as I could, to see the Alps in a simple, thoughtless, and untheorizing manner; but to see them, if it might be, thoroughly.¹²

He had studied geological books, just as he had botanical books, and found them an impediment to understanding his subject, which was achieved only by observation; the need to ‘see [the mountains] thoroughly’ (my italics) corresponded to Ruskin’s ‘close watching’ of plants. As Birch has noted, ‘When the authority of his own eyes and that of a botanical author seem to be in conflict, [Ruskin] has no hesitation in preferring the former’.¹³

That Ruskin was using Brantwood to facilitate his botanical observations is clear from the frequent references in *Proserpina* to plants growing in the garden. For example, in Part III he described a wilderness in ‘a bit of my own brushwood’, he wrote in Part VIII of the milkwort, ‘one thing I have ascertained of it, lately at Brantwood’, and in Part IX he noted the ‘honeysuckle in my own wood’.¹⁴ Being surrounded by the wild plants he was describing in *Proserpina* contributed to detailed analysis of their character, growth pattern and habitat, observations that could not be made from the illustrations in botanical books. Ruskin was using his garden as an observatory, not as a laboratory in the way that Charles Darwin did at Down House, where Ruskin visited in

¹¹ Andrew Ballantyne, *John Ruskin*, Critical Lives Series (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), p. 159.

¹² Works 6.475, original italics.

¹³ Dinah Birch, *Ruskin’s Myths* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 187.

¹⁴ Works 25.293, 456, 485.

1868.¹⁵ Ruskin was aware of Darwin's experiments with plants in his garden; Jonathan Smith perceives that in *Proserpina* Ruskin 'dwells at length on many of the same plants (such as the primrose, sundew, cyclamen, and butterwort) featured by Darwin', thus making implicit comment on Darwin's work through their differing approach to studying flowers.¹⁶

Ruskin was prompted to examine particular flowers by his friend Maria La Touche who, after visits to Brantwood in the 1880s, had formed a comprehensive knowledge of the plants growing in the garden. In an epistolary discussion of the 'links' between species, La Touche suggested to Ruskin: 'Can there be a Link between creatures so different as Columbines and ferns? If so you have it growing in your harbour, a large plant of *Thalictrum* Something'.¹⁷ In alerting Ruskin to the meadow-rue (*Thalictrum*) in his harbour, La Touche promoted the use of Brantwood as a resource for botanical insight, and demonstrated the botanical knowledge and observational intellect which underpinned her contribution to *Proserpina*, revealing her tacit influence on Ruskin's thinking. The exposition of their discussion on 'links' appeared in Part VII, issued in 1882, and evidenced Ruskin's use of his garden in formulating ideas on the relationship between species.¹⁸ His observational approach sometimes led to surprising conclusions, such as the association of moss with pineapple; the logic of his argument is expounded in the first part of *Proserpina*.¹⁹ Throughout the book, Ruskin stressed the importance of basing knowledge on the study of actual plants, urging his readers to 'run out and gather a true violet, and its leaf'.²⁰

Ruskin's methodology resembled that of the amateur naturalist rather than the materialist scientist, emulating the observational recording of Alexander von Humboldt described in his *Personal Narrative* (1814-29) or Gilbert White in *The Natural History of Selbourne* (1789), the former admired by Ruskin for its 'sensitive quietness', the latter

¹⁵ See Michael Boulter, *Darwin's Garden: Down House and the Origin of Species*, (London: Constable, 2009).

¹⁶ Jonathan Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 167.

¹⁷ Ruskin MS L107, n.d.

¹⁸ See Works 25.402-4.

¹⁹ Works 25.209-10.

²⁰ Works 25.403.

for its ‘proper manner’.²¹ In his diary of 24 May 1884, Ruskin documented the floral change from spring to summer at Brantwood, noting: ‘I counted twenty-seven plants of the Giulietta, just now, in two square yards of the tawny moorland moss, each plant with four or five blossoms of the deepest lapis-lazuli, set off against the pure gold of the tormentilla scattered beside them’.²² Ruskin’s blending of art and science in his botanical observation is presented here in his collecting statistical data alongside discerning the contrasting colours of flowers. This was a methodology unchanged since youth: Ruskin’s record of his continental tour of 1835 was, according to the editors of the *Library Edition*, ‘almost entirely concerned with geological and other scientific observations’, with occasional ‘digress[ions] from the rigour of geological observation to picturesque description’, in which the young Ruskin admired the contrast of ‘green fields’, ‘red rocks’ and ‘snow, beautiful and bright’.²³ The cyanometer which Ruskin brought with him ‘to measure the blue of the sky’ confirms his adoption of scientific methodology to systematise his observations of nature, while his aversion to microscopical study was based on the belief, stated in *Praeterita*, that, ‘the use of instruments for exaggerating the powers of sight necessarily deprives us of the best pleasures of sight’.²⁴ The cyanometer allowed Ruskin to discern and record with exactness what he had seen with his eyes and knew to be true, in contrast to the scientists who used microscopes to penetrate the unknown and furnish their theories of what might be. Ruskin’s observational methods allowed him to see natural forms in the context of their surroundings, observing plants, birds, mountains and skies in their entirety, and as living entities, growing and changing as a vital part of the landscape.

The foregrounding of art in Ruskin’s botanical observations is evident at a practical level in his own sketches and paintings. As Louise Pullen has shown, Ruskin ‘described his own instinct to draw as a means of seeing thoroughly and connecting with the world around him’, or, as simply put by Blunt: ‘He drew flowers that he might come to know them better’.²⁵ By ‘watching’ plants, Ruskin’s drawings went beyond

²¹ Humboldt: Ruskin T30, letter to Daniel Oliver, 3 March 1873; White: *Works* 25.19.

²² *Works* 25.xliii.

²³ *Works* 1.xxx-xxxi, quoting Ruskin’s 1835 diary.

²⁴ *Works* 35.152 and 430.

²⁵ Louise Pullen, *John Ruskin: The Power of Seeing*, (London: Two Temple Place, 2019), p. 18; Blunt, *The Art of Botanical Illustration*, p. 232.

structural form to capture the essence of a flower, portraying character and relation to the environment, and perceiving veracity of feature, colour and form. In presenting works from his Turner collection together with a selection of his own paintings, exhibited at the Fine Art Society in 1878, Ruskin wrote in the catalogue entry for his painting *Old Sketch of Gneiss*: ‘I have been promising myself these last thirty years to do one bit of rock foreground completely, with its moss and lichen inlaying; but the golden brown of the moss always beat me. I may yet do it, I think, in a measure, if I can only get some peace’.²⁶ The admission that ‘the moss always beat me’ chimes with the opening chapter of *Proserpina*, written in 1868, in which Ruskin lamented that, at age forty-nine, he did not ‘know what “moss” is’.²⁷ His inability to portray moss successfully in his painting was a consequence of his lack of understanding of the functioning of the plant. A passage from *Modern Painters V* (1860), confirmed that Ruskin’s incapacity to ‘know’ moss extended to expression in prose: ‘No words, that I know of, will say what these mosses are. None are delicate enough, none perfect enough, none rich enough’.²⁸ His belief that he ‘may yet do it’ in watercolour, coupled with his assertion in *Proserpina* that, ‘I will know what moss is, if possible, forthwith’, betrays Ruskin’s patient endurance with botanical study over decades of observation, painting and thinking.²⁹ The study of flowers was not a scientific discipline to be accomplished and finally known and understood; botany, to Ruskin, was a recognition of the wonder of nature.

The observation of living plants at Brantwood was supplemented by more invasive study in an attempt to understand processes not satisfactorily explained in Ruskin’s library of botanical books. In a note at the beginning of a chapter of *Proserpina* entitled ‘Science in her Cells’, Ruskin explained that publication had been delayed ‘in order to complete the promised clearer analysis of stem-structure; which, after a great deal of chopping, chipping, and peeling of my oaks and birches, came to reverently hopeless pause’.³⁰ The availability of living material for extensive arboreal study gave Ruskin the opportunity physically to investigate processes such as the

²⁶ Works 13.524.

²⁷ Works 25.207.

²⁸ Works 7.129.

²⁹ Works 25.207.

³⁰ Works 25.483.

movement of sap through a tree. The microscopical analysis of cells described in botanical books had failed to provide conclusive evidence, so Ruskin looked to the trees growing in his woodland for answers, observing the structure of the whole living organism rather than analysing its constituent parts. The invasive ‘chopping, chipping, and peeling’ clarified some of the confusion inherent in the botanical books Ruskin consulted, but ultimately ended in ‘reverently hopeless pause’. He urged his readers to persevere in their study ‘so as to attain, in due time, to reverent hope’.³¹ Ruskin’s semantics are echoed by Birch in her assertion that, ‘[r]everence, rather than speculation, is the proper response of the natural scientist’.³² The reverence Ruskin alluded to was a respect for the pursuit of knowledge as well as for the nature on which the knowledge was founded. M. M. Mahood takes a different stance in her approach to reverence of nature, arguing that, ‘[t]he onlooker has a sharper sense of a plant’s vitality when he is aware of the beautifully ordered biochemical processes taking place within its tissues,’ seeing beauty in the processes revealed by materialist science.³³ By distancing himself from science, Ruskin could not access the inner beauty of plants recognised by Mahood; he deliberately limited his comprehension of natural processes to retain his sense of wonder. Howard Hull has penetrated the fundamental tenet of Ruskin’s scientific investigation in his recognition that, ‘[t]here was a world of difference between seeking to deduce the laws of life, and seeking, as Ruskin did, to deduce the laws *for* life’.³⁴

The Proserpina myth and Rose La Touche

Ruskin sought certainty and permanence amidst the destabilisation of science, turning to mythology for truth. In *Proserpina*, he attempted to re-order a world gone astray, with the premise that, ‘Proserpine and Deucalion are at least as true as Eve or Noah; and all four together incomparably truer than the Darwinian theory’.³⁵ By placing myth and religion on an equal platform in his hierarchy of truth Ruskin bolsters the enduring authority of mythology, presenting it as more believable than the ideas of

³¹ Ibid.

³² Birch, ‘Ruskin and the Science of *Proserpina*’, p. 148.

³³ M. M. Mahood, *The Poet as Botanist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 153.

³⁴ Hull, ‘Geographer of the Soul’, p. 217, original italics.

³⁵ Works 26.98-99.

modern science, and an established code that scientific theory could not dispute. Ruskin's attraction to the mythology of Proserpina has been analysed by Alan Davis, who draws parallels between the filial relationship of Persephone and Demeter (Proserpina and Ceres in the Roman retelling of the Greek myth) and that of Rose La Touche and her mother Maria, representing the mother and daughter divided.³⁶ Proserpina was abducted by Hades and taken by him to the underworld, while her mother searched for her; she was only allowed to return to earth temporarily each year, the end of her cyclical separation marked by the coming of spring. The significance of blossom to Ruskin is bound up in the mythology of Proserpina as the embodiment of springtime, linking Ruskin's thinking on Proserpina with his garden practice through the memory of almond blossom in his childhood garden in spring, his planting of narcissus at Brantwood, and the comfort of seasonal floral repetition. Frederick Kirchhoff suggests that Proserpina's story held a mirror to Ruskin's own life: the vacillations of his mental state reflected in Proserpina's fluctuations between the earth and the underworld.³⁷

Myth was frequently employed in nineteenth-century nature writing to evoke images of nostalgia and idealism, as Nicolette Scourse has observed, while Beverly Seaton demonstrates the link between myth and morality in Victorian flower books.³⁸ While myth was useful to Victorian writers as an allegorical route to moral instruction, Ruskin went further, evoking the Proserpina myth as central to his thinking, providing the authority of his botanical system and underpinning the truth of his observation. Ruskin's declaration: 'Proserpina be judge' was directed at both botany and society.³⁹ This is captured in Phyllis Catsikis's assertion that, '[i]n Ruskin's botanical discourse, moral nature is based upon his belief in a ruling Spirit in nature (Ceres/Proserpina) which judges and rewards both plants and humans'.⁴⁰ This was the heart of Ruskin's 'heathenism', identified by Rose La Touche in her reading of *The Queen of the Air*

³⁶ Alan Davis, *Ruskin and the Persephone Myth* (Lancaster: Ruskin Library, 2007), p. 10.

³⁷ Kirchhoff, 'A Science against Sciences', p. 255 n.

³⁸ Nicolette Scourse, *The Victorians and their Flowers*, p. 39: for example, Shirley Hibberd and Philip Henry Grosse referenced classical Greek mythology in their nature writing, particularly Flora, Ceres, Cupid and Pan; Beverly Seaton, 'Considering the Lilies: Ruskin's "Proserpina" and Other Victorian Flower Books' in *Victorian Studies*, 28, 2 (Winter 1985).

³⁹ Works 25.436.

⁴⁰ Phyllis Catsikis, '"A brilliant burst of botanical imagination": Proserpina and the nineteenth-century evolution of myth' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2009), p. 33.

(1869) as a fundamental barrier between them.⁴¹ Ruskin's adherence to the authority of Proserpina over the word of God was based on a belief stronger than his desire to please La Touche: he would not denounce his creed to secure her fidelity. In a complex layering of allusion, Proserpina represented both the corporeal form of La Touche and Ruskin's spiritual separation from her.

La Touche died in 1875, while Ruskin was writing *Proserpina*, and his idolisation of her, as well as his grief, regret and disillusionment are captured in its pages. The context of Ruskin's obsession with La Touche is fundamental to penetrating the meaning of *Proserpina*, underpinning his mythological construction, botanical nomenclature and classification of plants by character. Ruskin's botany is a veiled paean to her, in life and in death, and is connected to his gardening by linking the flowers of memory and association with the actual flowers of the garden. By examining the significance of La Touche in Ruskin's botanical writing, the concomitant significance in his gardening is revealed, and the influence of her absent presence in the landscape of Brantwood forms the basis of this chapter.

In addition to the mythological layering described above, *Proserpina* was a conduit through which Ruskin could communicate with La Touche, after he was forbidden by her parents to correspond with her by letter. Covert messages can be read into Ruskin's passages on botany, and the very title of the book is a direct etymological reference to her. The aptness of the name is explained by Ruskin in a letter to Georgina Cowper-Temple, in which he questioned his confidante: 'Do you see what Proserpine spells – if you take P (for pet) – and R – (next the Rose) – away from it?'.⁴² That La Touche's name is hidden in plain sight in the title of *Proserpina* has been noted by scholars, but a deeper, and more significant, etymological presence can be inferred.⁴³ By removing the initial P and the second r, as Ruskin instructs, what remains is 'Ros-Epine'.⁴⁴ Translating from French, this becomes Rose-Thorn, and brings together the dual aspect of La Touche's character that frustrated their

⁴¹ *The Queen of the Air*, copy annotated by Rose La Touche, Ruskin 1996B3044.

⁴² Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 234-35 (21 October 1869).

⁴³ For example, Birch, *Ruskin's Myths*, p. 175, and Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 110.

⁴⁴ This is how Ruskin capitalises the name in his letter to Cowper-Temple.

relationship, a semantic motif described by Davis as ‘bitter word-play’.⁴⁵ When writing to Ruskin, La Touche is referred to by Cowper-Temple as ‘the Thorny girl’, confirming this phrase was a signifier employed by Ruskin.⁴⁶ By encompassing the Rose-Thorn epithet in the title of his book, Ruskin covertly dedicated his work to La Touche, not only in name, but as a literary representation of the essence of their relationship.

The duality of Ruskin’s feelings towards La Touche is reflected in the symbolism of rose and thorn, echoing the transgression of the binaries of love and hatred, hope and disappointment, trust and betrayal that characterised their relationship. The thorns of the title can be understood to represent the factors inhibiting Ruskin’s relationship with La Touche, including her own strident religiosity which clashed with Ruskin’s beliefs and impeded her marrying a man who could not love God above her, a position which Ruskin would not denounce. The actual thorns which impede the picking of a rose became the metaphorical thorns which prevented Ruskin touching his Rose, hinting at his sexual equivocation. In *Proserpina*, Ruskin stated that thorns and thistles ‘prick our fingers when we touch them; for they are not at all meant to be touched, but admired’.⁴⁷ Ruskin wrote to Cowper-Temple, entreating her with his thorny metaphor not to relay any unwelcome news of La Touche: ‘Don’t send any thorns [...] They get in, and fester’.⁴⁸ The unwelcome nature of the thorn is explicit in the Garden of Eden, where thorns grew after Adam and Eve were exiled, imposing a lasting punishment in the labour required to banish them to make the ground fertile for cultivation.⁴⁹ Mirroring the biblical allegory, Ruskin laboured for the rest of his life after he was exiled from La Touche, the thorns of their relationship festering in his mind and impeding the fertility of his thinking. The title *Proserpina*, therefore, has eponymous semantic and symbolic links to Ruskin’s relationship with La Touche.

Ruskin had associated Proserpine with La Touche since at least the spring of 1866, when he made an arrangement to meet Burne-Jones with the caveat, ‘I’ll come

⁴⁵ ‘épine, feminine noun: thorn, prickle’ <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/french-english/épine>> [accessed 18 May 2018]; Davis, *Ruskin and the Persephone Myth*, p. 47.

⁴⁶ Ruskin L7.613, letter to Ruskin from Cowper-Temple, n.d.

⁴⁷ *Works* 25.287.

⁴⁸ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 242 (December 1869).

⁴⁹ Genesis 3. 18: ‘Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee’, King James Bible online, <<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-3-18>> [accessed 10 September 2019].

[...] Proserpine permitting'.⁵⁰ Thus, when Ruskin commissioned Burne-Jones two decades later to paint a portrait of Proserpine to hang at Brantwood, the artist would have been aware of the deep personal significance of his subject.⁵¹ In 1869, Ruskin again referred to La Touche as 'Poor little Proserpine', and in 1872 his mythological allusion was more explicit, stating despondently: 'I suppose she'll die [...] and I shall go down and try to drag up Persephone', evoking a metaphorical visit to the underworld of Hades.⁵² Ruskin was not alone in appropriating the mythology of Proserpina: artists, poets and writers employed the symbolism in their work, and Margot Louis recognises that 'Ruskin's own deeply personal vision of the goddess owes much to both Swinburne and Rossetti', referring to Algernon Charles Swinburne's poem 'Hymn to Proserpine', published in his infamous *Poems and Ballads* (1866), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting, *Proserpine* (1874).⁵³ Louis asserts that Ruskin was haunted by Shakespeare's reworking of the myth of Proserpina in *The Winter's Tale*, and she draws parallels between Ruskin's Proserpina and the evocations of others: '[I]ike Rossetti's, Ruskin's Cora is imprisoned forever; like Swinburne's, she figures a death without meaning and without resurrection'.⁵⁴

Ruskin met Swinburne in 1865 – possibly through his friendship with Swinburne's supporter Pauline Trevelyan, or through Burne-Jones to whom Swinburne had dedicated *Poems and Ballads* – and he acquired the manuscript of 'Hymn to Proserpine' shortly afterwards.⁵⁵ As Louis observes, 'Swinburne's Proserpine poems had made a deep impression on Ruskin, who wrote in a letter, "I've got the original MS of the Hymn to Proserpine, and wouldn't part with it for much more than leaf gold"'.⁵⁶ The poem laments the displacement by Christianity of the pagan gods but asserts that

⁵⁰ Works 36.504. In n. 1 the editors cite Lady Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, I, pp. 299–300: "'Proserpine' is Miss Rose La Touche". See Birch, 'Ruskin and the Science of *Proserpina*', pp. 145–48 for an analysis of this quotation, including the link between Proserpina, flowers and Rose La Touche.

⁵¹ Birch, *Ruskin's Myths*, p. 176, n. 9; the painting was commissioned but never completed.

⁵² Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 236 (24 October 1869); letter to Rev Tyrwhitt, 29 Sept 1872, quoted in Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 247.

⁵³ Margot Louis, *Persephone Rises, 1860–1927: Mythography, Gender, and the Creation of a New Spirituality* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 40.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ruskin may have made the acquaintance of Swinburne through Pauline Trevelyan whose estate at Wallington bordered that of the Swinburnes at Capheaton Hall; Trevelyan was a supporter of the young Swinburne (see Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 95).

⁵⁶ Louis, *Persephone Rises*, p. 40, quoting a letter to Edward Coleridge dated 12 September 1866.

Proserpine will prevail, therefore imparting precedence to mythology over Christianity. The overtly blasphemous content of the poem was deemed distasteful by respectable Victorian society, and the work was condemned for its decadence. Although Ruskin did not openly condone Swinburne's anti-establishment stance, which would have alienated many of his readers, he clearly placed great significance on the acquisition of the manuscript of Swinburne's poem, equating its value with that of gold. Ruskin's tacit sympathy with Swinburne's subversive views on mythology is evident in *The Queen of the Air*, in which Ruskin asserted that 'Christianity has neither superseded, nor, by itself, excelled heathenism'.⁵⁷ This passage was marked by La Touche in her copy of the book with the word 'oh' pencilled in the margin, expressing her consternation; her opinion on the text was recorded in her inscribed exclamation: 'if it was not quite so heathenish!'.⁵⁸ Ruskin's heathenism penetrated his botanical thinking: in his plant classification system introduced in *Proserpina*, he granted mythology an equal standing with Christian tradition.

At the time of his acquaintance with Swinburne, Ruskin had been reunited with La Touche and was optimistic about their future together. Later, Ruskin succumbed to an acceptance of their inevitable irreconcilability, and Proserpina represented, as Louis describes, 'a disintegration of the self that Ruskin himself was beginning to experience in his repeated breakdowns'.⁵⁹ However, in 1866, when Ruskin was first associating La Touche with Proserpina, this gloomy reckoning was several years away, and Ruskin was revelling in his present happiness and full of hope for the future. The repeated refrain of Swinburne's poem reflected this optimism: 'But I turn to her still, having seen she shall surely abide in the end; / Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and befriend'.⁶⁰ The triple-identity of 'Goddess and maiden and queen' mirrors Ruskin's lexicon in relation to La Touche: she is the goddess Proserpina, the maiden in her virgin purity, and the personification of Ruskin's 'Queen of the Air'. Echoing the cadences of Swinburne's verse, Ruskin wrote of La Touche, 'And now – I will take her –

⁵⁷ Works 19.418.

⁵⁸ Marginalia in *The Queen of the Air*, p. 197 and title page, Ruskin 1996B3044.

⁵⁹ Louis, *Persephone Rises*, p. 40.

⁶⁰ 'Hymn to Proserpine' in Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads* (London: J.C. Hotten, 1866), p. 83.

for Wife – for Child, – for Queen – for any Shape or fellow-spirit that her soul can wear, if she will be loyal to me with her love'.⁶¹

In addition to textual reference to the rose, the title page of *Proserpina* bore a visual representation of the flower. On the lower area of the page, above the publisher's imprint, was printed a cluster of roses, copied from Botticelli's *Primavera* of c. 1470, and reversed on the woodcut. Ruskin had studied Botticelli, and lectured on his work at Oxford in 1872 as part of a series on the Florentine Schools of Engraving.⁶² *Primavera* – a representation of the return of spring – was a superficially appropriate image to be associated with the title page of a botany book, and each part of *Proserpina*, published between 1875 and 1886, bore this mark. However, Ruskin had begun using the rose cipher in 1871 on the publication of *Fors Clavigera*, also published in parts, with each part bearing the rose motif on the title page. The rose therefore had meaning beyond its association with the Proserpina myth. Ruskin explained to the readers of *Fors Clavigera*:

And first, for their little vignette stamp of roses on title-page. It is copied from the clearest bit of the pattern of the petticoat of Spring, where it is drawn tight over her thigh, in Sandro Botticelli's picture of her, at Florence. I drew it on the wood myself, and Mr. Burgess cut it; and it is on all my title-pages, because whatever I now write is meant to help in founding the society called of 'Monte Rosa'.⁶³

The society of Monte Rosa was defined by Ruskin as part of his fledgling St George's Company and comprised people devoted to the cultivation of land and the education of others. Like the snow-capped mountain itself (the highest peak in Switzerland), the followers of Monte Rosa were engaged in the 'guiding of pure streams and rain to the places where they are needed', both physically and metaphorically.⁶⁴ That Ruskin associated Monte Rosa with Rose La Touche, beyond the eponymous connotation, is

⁶¹ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 139 (March 1868).

⁶² Published separately in 1875 and then as Lecture VI in *Ariadne Florentina* in 1876, Works 22.422-60.

⁶³ Works 28.371.

⁶⁴ Works 28.296.

evident in a letter to Cowper-Temple, written from the Alps in 1869 in which he remembered a previous visit in 1862 at a time when his relationship with La Touche was in its early stages: ‘The last time I saw Mont Rosa – R was writing to me beseeching letters to be taken into favour again’.⁶⁵ From the time of their first meeting in 1858, the influence of La Touche is evident in Ruskin’s association of her with landscape and botany.

The rose insignia used on the title page of *Proserpina* can be read as a paratextual reference to La Touche, adding a layer of private significance to the meaning explained by Ruskin publicly in *Fors Clavigera*. Davis suggests that the association of La Touche with Botticelli began in Florence in 1874 when Ruskin received a letter from her after a two-year hiatus in their correspondence, but the use of the rose motif by Ruskin pre-dates this event by three years.⁶⁶ Ruskin’s woodcut of the roses in Botticelli’s *Primavera* had been copied from a photograph, although his diary confirms he did paint a study from the original painting when in Florence in 1874: ‘[w]orked on *Logic*, main head; then on flowers of my book vignette – Botticelli’s’.⁶⁷ In his study of the roses from the original painting, which at 10x12cm is around life size, Ruskin copied every detail exactly, except for the colour of the roses, which he painted blue rather than their original, and naturalistic, pink.⁶⁸ David Ingram suggests that the difference in colour could be explained by the fact that Ruskin made his copy before the painting was cleaned so the original colour could have been distorted.⁶⁹ He also notes the significance of blue as Ruskin’s favourite colour, seen in the stock he always wore. This preference was acknowledged by La Touche when she wrote: ‘I chose blue (some of St. C’s [Ruskin’s pet name] ultra marine) because it looks the deepest most abiding colour’.⁷⁰ Ingram perceptively alludes to the symbolic use of blue roses to denote the impossible, the flowers not existing in nature.⁷¹ The blue rose as symbolic of impossible love – a theme embraced by Rudyard Kipling in his poem ‘Blue Roses’

⁶⁵ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 217 (11 August 1869), original italics.

⁶⁶ Davis, *Ruskin and the Persephone Myth*, p. 46.

⁶⁷ Works 21.37 n.; Evans and Woodhouse, *Diaries*, p. 808 (3 September 1874).

⁶⁸ Ruskin’s watercolour is held at The Ruskin, 1996P1168.

⁶⁹ Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, p. 89.

⁷⁰ Letter from La Touche to Cowper-Temple, 9 November 1866, quoted in Van Akin Burd, ‘More letters from Rose La Touche’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 65, 2 (Spring 1983), p. 65, original italics.

⁷¹ Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, p. 89.

(1887) – offers a visual emblem of Ruskin's emotional predicament.⁷² By positioning the rose cipher at the front of his published work, Ruskin was both dedicating the work to La Touche and making a public statement, hidden in plain view, of the tortured state in which he was writing. Privately, he claimed that in prohibiting his relationship with La Touche, her parents not only hurt him but, by preventing him from working, they also conspired,

to hurt hundreds through him – for there is not a day of my life which is not deadened in all usefulness – because Rose can't write to me. I am going to do my book on botany – and every word of it will be dead and lifeless – for ever – compared to what it would have been[.]⁷³

The rose motif can be read as a veiled declaration to his readers of Ruskin's perceived inadequacy; the placement of the cipher marking the awareness of a seminal shift defined in relation to his preoccupation with La Touche. The vignette may have begun as a symbol of the ideals of the society of Monte Rosa but, concomitant with Ruskin's cessation of the use of the name in connection with the Guild of St George, the motif took on a new significance in his reappropriation of Botticelli's roses as the blue roses of impossible love. Melius identifies an 'eroticised specificity' in Ruskin's copying of the motif from the upper thigh of Botticelli's figure, 'abstracted from the body to float flat on the nonspace of the printed page', although he does not explicitly connect this eroticism to La Touche.⁷⁴

In addition to the covert paratextual references to La Touche in *Proserpina*, Ruskin used the book to communicate directly with her through clandestine messages which conveyed meaning to her beyond the comprehension of other readers.

Referring to La Touche and the writing of *Proserpina*, Ruskin revealed in a letter to his friend Susanna Beever shortly after La Touche's death in May 1875 that, '[t]here were

⁷² The poem was originally published in 1887 with the title 'Misunderstood' and was published in 1890 as 'Blue Roses'; later versions of the poem have an additional verse. Given Ruskin's close friendship with Burne-Jones (Kipling's uncle), and the additional verse being published after Ruskin's death, it is possible that there may be a connection between the poem and Ruskin's relationship with Rose La Touche.

⁷³ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 159 (15 May 1868).

⁷⁴ Melius, 'Ruskin's Copies', pp. 73-74.

many little things going to be said in it, which nobody but she could have understood'.⁷⁵ In using his published text as a vehicle to connect with La Touche, Ruskin consciously diminished the tenor of his writing, the plurality of his audience reduced to the focus of one reader. He began using his books as a means of covert correspondence when the usual routes of communication were closed to him by the intervention of La Touche's parents. In 1869, Ruskin wrote to Cowper-Temple of his forthcoming volume *The Queen of the Air*, stating, 'I've done the best I could – the very best I could – with this book that chance set upon me. There's a word or two here and there – which only ρ will understand'.⁷⁶ Here, Ruskin used the Greek ρ (rho) as an abbreviation for Rose, echoing his use of φιλη (Philè) to address his correspondent.⁷⁷ La Touche did read the book, and sent Ruskin a copy annotated with her brief comments, cited above, mainly relating to theological doctrine and Ruskin's apparent 'heathenism'.⁷⁸ The significance of La Touche placing dried flower specimens between the pages is discussed below. Hilton asserts that the early letters of *Fors Clavigera* (1871-84) were an attempt by Ruskin to communicate his good character to La Touche, although there is no evidence that she read them.⁷⁹ Hilton also quotes from a letter written by Ruskin to Mary Gladstone in which he confessed that *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), was written 'to please one girl', inferring that the girl was Rose La Touche.⁸⁰ Rosenberg reads a different message in *Sesame and Lilies*, suggesting that it was written to 'chide Rose for breaking his heart', while he asserts that in *The Ethics of the Dust* (1866) Ruskin was warning La Touche against 'the abandonment of the mind to religious theory' and the need for her to 'enter into the faith of others, and to sympathise'.⁸¹ Ruskin was using his published writing from the 1860s onwards as an opportunity to commune with La Touche: eulogising, chastising and wooing her. *Proserpina* was borne of this obsession. Her death in May 1875, one month after publication of the first part, transformed the focus from missive to memorial.

⁷⁵ Ruskin L108, letter to Beever, 28 May 1875.

⁷⁶ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 197 (17 April 1869).

⁷⁷ Ruskin began using 'φιλη' (beloved one) to address Georgina Cowper-Temple in 1866 when she became his confidante in matters relating to La Touche, see Bradley, p. 9 and p. 101 n.

⁷⁸ Ruskin 1996B3044.

⁷⁹ Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 216.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 231.

⁸¹ Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass*, p. 164 and p. 163.

Ruskin's language of flowers

La Touche's death is marked by Ruskin in *Proserpina* in a passage on hawthorn blossom, dated to the day of her death. Ruskin used sensual language to compare the blossom to a young girl, and described the fully opened flower which 'extends into the perfect rose'.⁸² Contextual evidence confirms Ruskin's association of La Touche and hawthorn: he drew two hawthorn leaves in his diary next to the date of her death, wrote to Susanna Beever that, 'I've just heard that my poor little Rose is gone where the hawthorn blossoms go', and to Thomas Carlyle that, 'the little story of my wild Rose was ended, and the hawthorn blossoms, this year, would fall – over her'.⁸³ The imagery of thorn and blossom represented Ruskin's relationship with La Touche: the thorns of impediment and the blossom of youthful innocence. Her death brought to Ruskin the sorrow and betrayal of Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, often depicted carrying a hawthorn twig, and Jesus's death on the cross, his crown of thorns a twisted wreath of hawthorn.⁸⁴ In folk tradition, the hawthorn was associated with death through its scent of decay.⁸⁵ Thus, in traditional, religious and idiosyncratic symbolism, the hawthorn was an apposite signifier of Ruskin's relationship with La Touche. Three years later, Ruskin was still musing on the same imagery, and wrote in *Proserpina*, 'And now I must go out and see and think—and for the first time in my life—what becomes of all these fallen blossoms, and where my own mountain Cora hides herself in winter; and where her sweet body is laid in its death'.⁸⁶ His intention to 'go out and see' suggests that Ruskin was looking for answers to botanical and metaphysical questions in the garden.

Throughout *Proserpina*, the boundaries between botany and biography are blurred, and Ruskin's thinking about plants is inextricably linked to reflection on his own life. This is evident in a passage on the poppy in which Ruskin described the flower's characteristic of shedding the formative leaves which had protected the petals

⁸² Works 25.302.

⁸³ Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 304; letter to Beever quoted in Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 304; Works 37.168.

⁸⁴ See Mabey, *Flora Britannica*, p. 209. A painting of Adam (oil on panel, 1613) by Hendrick Goltzius at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, depicts Adam holding a sprig of hawthorn. My thanks to David Ingram for showing me this image and for guiding me to the symbolic significance of hawthorn.

⁸⁵ Marcel de Cleene and Marie Claire Lejeune, *Compendium of Symbolic and Ritual Plants in Europe*, I, p. 298; Mabey, *Flora Britannica*, p. 212.

⁸⁶ Works 25.371.

while in their bud. These he described as the ‘nurse or tutor leaves’ which the poppy cast away to become,

the finished picture of impatient and luxury-loving youth,—at first too severely restrained, then casting all restraint away—yet retaining to the end of life unseemly and illiberal signs of its once compelled submission to laws which were only pain,—not instruction [...] When the flower opens, it seems a deliverance from torture: the two imprisoning green leaves are shaken to the ground; the aggrieved corolla smooths itself in the sun, and comforts itself as it can; but remains visibly crushed and hurt to the end of its days.⁸⁷

Birch has identified the correlation between Ruskin’s description of the poppy and ‘the cramped conditions of his own upbringing’, yet the passage could equally apply to La Touche and her ‘compelled submission’ to the strictures of her parents, whose ‘imprisoning’ influence separated her from Ruskin.⁸⁸ The flower has a further semantic association with La Touche, with Ruskin noting in *Proserpina* that Gerard referred to the poppy as the ‘corn-rose’.⁸⁹

As well as using flowers as metaphor, Ruskin associated living plants with people, inciting sensations both positive and negative. From Matlock in 1871, Ruskin wrote: ‘I have been all the morning on a rocky hillside covered with wild roses and *creeping St John’s wort*. It’s very humiliating to me, it is so very low all round the feet of the roses’.⁹⁰ The nominative association of the plants in relation to their behaviour inflicted Ruskin with a painful reflection of his demeaning conduct towards La Touche. A decade later, the landscape at Brantwood was offering a more sanguine recollection of her: ‘her pet flower, *anagallis tenella*, a capricious thing like herself, and wholly uncultivable, has come in gushes all round the rock edges of my new moorland garden’.⁹¹ The bog pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) was already associated with La Touche (‘her pet flower’) but it was the habit of the living plant to grow where it chose

⁸⁷ Works 25.260.

⁸⁸ Birch, ‘Ruskin and the Science of *Proserpina*’, p. 149.

⁸⁹ Works 25.279, my italics.

⁹⁰ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 299 (27 July 1871), original italics.

⁹¹ Bradley and Ousby, *Norton Letters*, p. 469 (2 August 1883).

that prompted Ruskin's memory of her character, and pleasure that the plant had chosen to inhabit his moorland garden. Memories of La Touche were evoked by another living plant when Ruskin travelled to Gretna Bridge a year after her death. When he explored the ruins of Brignal Chapel, Ruskin found the stones festooned with Ivy-leaved Toadflax, the plant known to him as Erba della Madonna and especially assigned to him in the floral symbolism he shared with La Touche.⁹² He described 'the window and wall so overgrown with my own Madonna herb that,— one would think the little ghost had been at work planting them all the spring'.⁹³ This demonstrates the tangible link between flowers and La Touche, and indicates that Ruskin was receptive to the interpretation of their floral symbolism; the landscape was redolent with reminders of her, at Brantwood and elsewhere.

Ruskin's self-identification with Erba della Madonna can be traced to his research for *Modern Painters* in Venice, where he described the living plant growing on the steps of the church of Madonna dell'Orto, inside which a painting by Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano depicted the plant growing on the wall over St Peter's shoulder.⁹⁴ Ruskin was pleased with the juxtaposition of vital and representational plant, returning to this motif in *The Stones of Venice*, in which the Erba della Madonna was included in his architectural illustration to emphasise the age and continuity of the ruined stonework.⁹⁵ Mahood relates Ruskin's identification with the plant to this encounter in Venice in 1841, while Mabey equates the association with 'his signature plant' to Ruskin's 1876 stay in Venice when he recorded drawing Erba della Madonna on the stonework of St Mark's.⁹⁶ In 1868, Ruskin stated that the Erba 'was always considered as *my* plant at Harristown', suggesting La Touche (and possibly also her mother) made a link between the living plant growing in the garden at Harristown and an aspect of Ruskin's character.⁹⁷ In a letter sent to Cowper-Temple following her visit to Harristown in 1866, Ruskin wrote, 'I liked my little flower – only please don't call it

⁹² Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 134.

⁹³ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 370 (3 May 1876).

⁹⁴ Works 3.175. Erba della Madonna is mentioned again in *Modern Painters III* in relation to Bellini's use of the plant to adorn ruined walls, Works 5.167. Mahood describes the plant as growing at the saint's feet (Mahood, *The Poet as Botanist*, p. 151), but it is clearly growing on the wall, as Ruskin himself states.

⁹⁵ Works 11.336.

⁹⁶ Mabey, *Weeds*, p. 143.

⁹⁷ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 156 (14 May 1868), original italics.

“toad flax” – It is the “Erba della Madonna” of the Venetians.⁹⁸ His response suggests that Cowper-Temple had brought back a flower of the Harristown Erba for Ruskin, perhaps as a gift from La Touche. Ruskin’s insistence on relinquishing use of the common name in favour of the colloquialism, and emphasising the Venetian origins of his association with the plant, grounds the relevance to Ruskin’s early writing, with the Harristown link supplementing a layer of meaning relating to his relationship with La Touche.

While living plants in the landscape were floral reminders to Ruskin of people and place, dried flowers and leaves were sent from La Touche as a means of communication, using an idiosyncratic language of flowers with meaning independent of the established floral code popularised in Victorian flower books. This language of flowers has been studied by Elliott and Scourse, analysing the sentimental association of flowers with moral attributes that fuelled an industry in books and stationery, and stimulated poetry and illustration.⁹⁹ La Touche was following the principles of this system, but her floral associations were personal to her relationship with Ruskin. The coded meaning of these missives was specific, and not always understood by their recipient. In May 1868, she sent a brief note to Ruskin stating that she was forbidden by her parents to correspond with him, enclosing, as Ruskin described, ‘Two rose-leaves [...] One larger than the other’.¹⁰⁰ The significance of the coupling and sizing of the leaves remains unexplained: Hilton assumes that she was sending ‘her love’, while Leon suggests the rose leaves were ‘for consolation’.¹⁰¹ The following day, Ruskin received another enigmatic floral message from La Touche in a parcel containing:

a large cluster of the Erba della Madonna, in bloom [...] enclosed in two vineleaves and in the midst of it, two bouquets, one a rose half open, with lilies of the valley, and a sweet scented geranium leaf, – the other a pink, with lilies of the valley, and a green and white geranium leaf.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 94 (6 October 1866).

⁹⁹ Brent Elliot, ‘The Victorian Language of Flowers’, *Occasional Papers from the RHS Lindley Library*, 10, (April 2013), 3-94; Nicolle Scourse, *The Victorians and their Flowers*.

¹⁰⁰ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 155 (13 May 1868), original italics.

¹⁰¹ Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 134; Derrick Leon, *Ruskin: The Great Victorian* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 400.

¹⁰² Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 156 (14 May 1868).

Ruskin's specific description of the condition of the flowers – one 'in bloom', another 'half open' – and the colour, scent and number of leaves suggests that all these factors were relevant to the message, in addition to the symbolism of the plant itself. The sophistication of the unwritten communication perplexed its recipient, with Ruskin asking Cowper-Temple for elucidation: 'This second bouquet puzzles me and confuses the message – do you think it could be meant for Joanna, or, what does the pink mean in flower-language'.¹⁰³ Ruskin concluded that both bouquets were intended for him, and recorded a few days later that, '[t]he flowers are drying beautifully – only one can't press massive rosebud and pink', indicating that both were being carefully preserved.¹⁰⁴

Ruskin was unable to reply to these floral messages as La Touche was forbidden to receive his letters, but he had corresponded with her on previous instances using the language of flowers. In 1861, he had sent her a specimen of oxalis, its tripartite leaves representing the trinity, to which she replied with a shamrock, reinforcing the message with an Irish slant.¹⁰⁵ Van Akin Burd has noted several instances of plant material being sent by La Touche to her friends as symbolic messages, representing her 'poetic instinct to emblematize nature'.¹⁰⁶ She sent to Cowper-Temple rose petals 'as a sign of her love', an ivy leaf 'as a symbol of her trust' and a geranium leaf as 'a token of steadfast piety'.¹⁰⁷ La Touche had also sent Ruskin geranium leaves, again carefully preserved by Ruskin, evidenced in his letter to Cowper-Temple: 'I have put the little geranium *leaf* – (The *flower* knew it was not for me and fell) with some other geranium leaves you know of'.¹⁰⁸ Whether Ruskin wanted to be reminded of her 'steadfast piety', or whether their floral iconography conveyed some other meaning, he clearly cherished the flowers La Touche sent him. Hilton describes a rosewood box in which Ruskin placed various relics associated with her, including her drawing of 'Madonna weed', which he took with him when travelling, suggesting that mementoes such as dried flowers took on a talismanic form to Ruskin, especially after La Touche's death.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 161 (19 May 1868).

¹⁰⁵ Davis, *Ruskin and the Persephone Myth*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁶ Burd, 'More Letters', p. 70.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 63, 64, 67.

¹⁰⁸ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 179 (8 December 1868), original italics.

¹⁰⁹ Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 333.

A poignant example of floral communication survives in La Touche's copy of Ruskin's *The Queen of the Air*, which she sent to Ruskin in 1869, described by him as 'all marked over with her writing' (Figure 11).¹¹⁰ Ruskin was puzzled by the meaning of plant material tucked by La Touche between the pages, and still in place today, appealing again to Cowper-Temple for explanation: 'if you could form any guess what she meant by sending that book – (there was a bit of my own weed – and a single rose-leaf (*green leaf only*) laid together in the page about the Dioscoridae'.¹¹¹ In fact, the

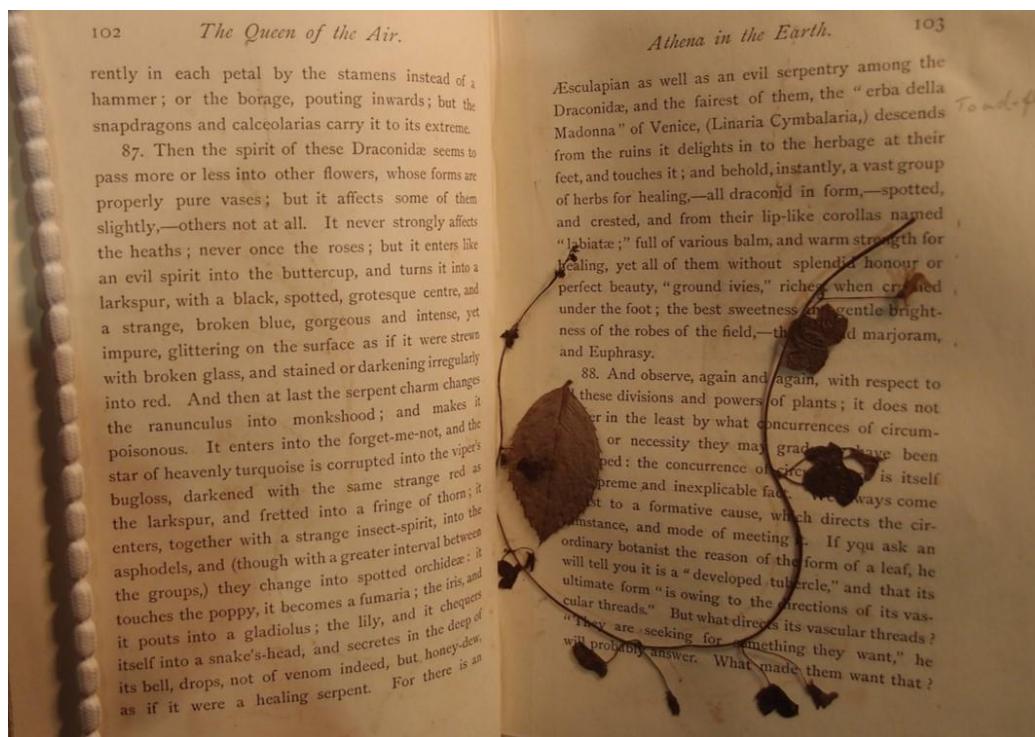


Figure 11: John Ruskin, *Queen of the Air*, 1869, annotated by Rose La Touche, plant material pressed between pages of text relating to the Draconidae, Ruskin's classification of plants described by him as 'serpentine or dragon-like', and therefore relating to 'Lacerta' (lizard), Ruskin's pet name for La Touche's mother.¹¹² La Touche may have been urging Ruskin to forgive her mother, as Mahood suggests, or she may

¹¹⁰ Ruskin 1996B3044; Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 251 (9 January [1870]).
¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 236 (24 October 1869), original italics.

¹¹² It is assumed that the plant specimens remain in their original position. The reference in Ruskin's letter to Cowper-Temple to 'Dioscoridae' may be an error of transcription, or it may be that the plants have been moved from the page on which Rose placed them. However, there is no reference to 'Dioscoridae' in *The Queen of the Air*.

have been showing unity with Ruskin by placing her flower (the rose) next to his (the Erba della Madonna) on the page where he wrote of ‘the “erba della Madonna” of Venice, (*Linaria Cymbalaria*)’, to which she added in the margin in pencil: ‘Toad-flax’.¹¹³ On another page, she placed two rose petals next to Ruskin’s quotation from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* on the light of paradise, ‘Rosa sempiterna’, perhaps suggestive of her undying love.¹¹⁴

It is clear that Erba della Madonna had a symbolic significance to La Touche in her relationship with Ruskin, but the flower was also used by Ruskin in areas unconnected to her. In a letter sent from Venice to Dora Livesey at the time of her marriage to Edward Lees in 1877, Ruskin enclosed a wedding present of a locket and stipulated that, ‘in the little locket, I mean you to carry a little drawing of my Venetian Madonna-weed, when I’ve time to make one for you, but it shall be growing on Brantwood rock’.¹¹⁵ Here, the Venetian origins of the plant are recognised, but its significance is transferred to Brantwood in Ruskin’s specification that the drawing must be made from his own home-grown plant. Rather than enclose a portrait in the locket, Ruskin employed plant symbolism to represent himself, offering a personal reminder of his presence in Dora’s life at a time when she was pledging herself to another man. It is possible that Dora may have been cognisant of the significance of Erba della Madonna in relation to La Touche, and recognised the drawing as a token from Ruskin of her sympathetic understanding of his emotional state. Regardless of the intended meaning of the gift, Ruskin’s association of specific plants with people and with the landscape of Brantwood confers a layer of imaginative significance on his approach to botany beyond the scope of science. Ruskin’s botanical study was built on his reverence for nature and natural curiosity for flowers, but was grounded in a knowledge of botanical science derived from books and the expertise of friends, and formulated over the course of a lifetime of close observation.

¹¹³ Mahood, *The Poet as Botanist*, p. 171; *The Queen of the Air*, Ruskin 1996B3044, p. 103 (Works 19.377).

¹¹⁴ *The Queen of the Air*, Ruskin 1996B3044, p. 93 (Works 19.370); *The Divine Comedy*, XXX.124.

¹¹⁵ *My Dearest Dora: Letters to Dora Livesey, Her Family and Friends 1860-1900* from John Ruskin, ed. by Olive Wilson (Windermere: privately published, 1984), p. 102.

A chronology of Ruskin's botanical thinking

Ruskin informed his readers in the introduction to *Proserpina* that he began his study of Alpine botany in 1842, dismissing a desultory entry in his diary of 27 March 1841 during a period of ill health in Italy, in which he noted: 'Have taken up botany'.¹¹⁶ In fact, he had been 'botanizing' since childhood, evidenced in his poem *Iteriad* (1830-31), the following lines composed when he was eleven or twelve: 'Now surveying a streamlet, now mineralizing, – / Now admiring the mountains, and now botanizing'.¹¹⁷ The commencement of earnest botanical study in 1842 coincided with Ruskin's impetus to defend the work of Turner, a notion that grew into the five-volume *Modern Painters* (1843-60) and compelled him to set aside botany in favour of art and architectural criticism. While he may not have focussed specifically on botany, Ruskin did not entirely relinquish his botanical studies while working on *Modern Painters*; in fact, much of the material in chapters on trees and vegetation was dependent on detailed botanical research. Ingram and Wildman note the close and empathetic observation of natural forms in their account of Ruskin's research for *Modern Painters* in which he 'analysed in detail the accurate portrayal of plants and trees, placing great emphasis on the relationship between their underlying anatomy, physiology, growth and development, and their ultimate shape and form'.¹¹⁸

Similarly, Ruskin found when working on *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53) that in order to fully understand the carving of medieval craftsmen, he needed to identify the plants and flowers represented on the stonework. For help, he turned to his friend Pauline Trevelyan, a patron of the Pre-Raphaelites and amateur botanist, whose acquaintance he had first made in 1847. In 1853, Ruskin asked Trevelyan for assistance in finding a flower form that matched the profile of a capital in St Mark's, Venice; her suggestion of a magnolia was subsequently used in Plate X of the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (Figure 12).¹¹⁹ Ruskin needed robust botanical

¹¹⁶ Works 25.204; Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 169.

¹¹⁷ Dearden, *Iteriad*, p. 113; Works 2.291.

¹¹⁸ David S. Ingram and Stephen Wildman, *Ruskin's Flora: The Botanical Drawings of John Ruskin* (Lancaster: Ruskin Library and Research Centre, Lancaster University, 2011), p. 14.

¹¹⁹ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, pp. 40-41 and n.; Works 10.164f. Plate X; Ruskin acknowledged Trevelyan's assistance in providing magnolia flowers from her garden at Nettlecombe in Somerset (stated erroneously as 'Devonshire') Works 11.271 fn.

knowledge to communicate his conviction that medieval craftsmanship was inspired by beauty, as he explained:

I do not say that the forms of the capitals are actually taken from flowers, though assuredly so in some instances, and partially so in the decoration of nearly all. But they were designed by men of pure and natural feeling for beauty, who therefore instinctively adopted the forms represented, which are afterwards proved to be beautiful by their frequent occurrence in common flowers.¹²⁰

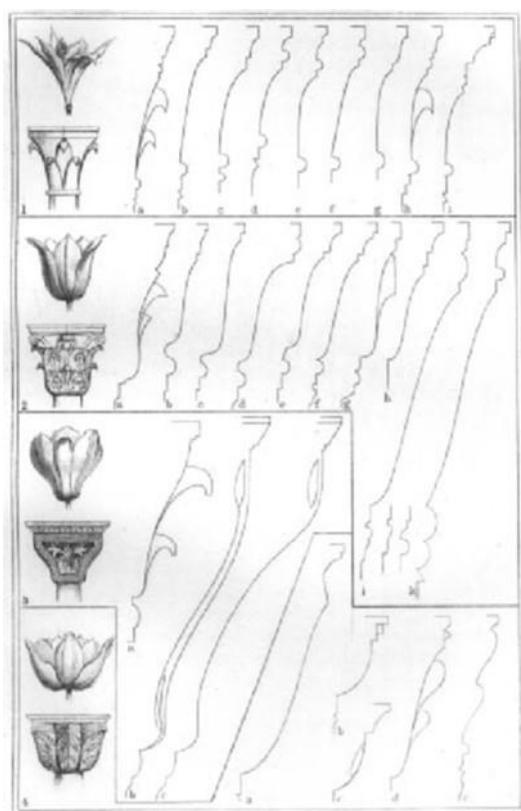


Figure 12: *The Four Venetian Flower Orders*,
photogravure from line engraving of drawing by John
Ruskin, Plate X, *Stones of Venice*, II, Works 10.164f.

While the application of botany to artistic and architectural truths was demonstrated by Ruskin in *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*, his artistic construction was paralleled by a systematic approach to the subject, modelling the methodology of the amateur naturalist rather than the scientist. In 1844, on a visit to the Alps, Ruskin compiled his *Flora of Chamouni*, a bound volume comprising pressed

¹²⁰ Works 11.271.

flower specimens interleaved with prose descriptions documenting details of the altitude and environment in which the plants were found.¹²¹ To the twenty-five-year-old amateur botanist, enthusiasm overtook scientific rigour, and, although Ruskin appears to have set out to produce a flora modelled on scientific examples, his lack of discipline was exposed in his imprecise data and mis-identification of species. The descriptions of specimens included admissions such as, ‘I was so fatigued when I came down that evening that I fell asleep in writing, and never noted the exact localities’; one specimen ‘had lost its number when I unpacked it’, while another was not marked with a geographic location ‘nor do I remember its exact locality’.¹²² Many geographical locations were unrecorded or in doubt, despite Ruskin’s formative attempts to link habitat with growth patterns and distribution. His imprecise terminology – one specimen was gathered ‘on the left of the glacier’ – and hazy recollections – ‘I found this plant, either in the thicket at the bottom [of the aiguille du Midi], near the glacier des Bossons, which I rather think, or else in the open meadows just above’ – do not conform to a scientific methodology or allow for precise and meaningful analysis of data.¹²³

Writing his descriptions in the *Flora of Chamouni*, Ruskin foreshadowed the prose style of *Proserpina*, written over thirty years later. He was unable, or unwilling, to separate fact from experience when observing nature, imposing a biographical layer on his science. For example, the following description had no botanical significance, but was important as a ‘reminiscence’:

Gathered the same day, merely as a reminiscence (for the plant is everywhere abundant on the higher hills) of the place where we rested – lying plunged over head and ears in masses of the Alpine rose, under a grey bit of rock, which kept off the sun, and from a cleft in which tinkled a rivulet which we stopped with

¹²¹ Ruskin MS 65. The flora has been studied by David Ingram, and is the subject of his forthcoming book, *Flora of Chamonix 1844: an album of pressed flowers and plants collected and annotated by John Ruskin*, ed. by David S. Ingram and Stephen Wildman (London: Pallas Athene, 2019). Ruskin used the old spelling ‘Chamouni’, although ‘Chamonix’ was also current in the nineteenth century. Turner used the same spelling in his *Mere de Glace, in the Valley of Chamouni* (1803), as did Shelley in his poem, *Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni* (1816). In the forthcoming book, the publishers have substituted the modern spelling in Ruskin’s title.

¹²² Ruskin MS 65, *Flora of Chamouni*, pp. 36, 32, 35.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 29 and 37.

some moss into a little crystal pool, and drank like horses; and then slept to the singing of it, the vision of the Mont Blanc a great white throne floating before ones eyes as they closed entangled among the burning purples of the rhododendron.¹²⁴

Ruskin's experience of botany was visceral: he lay 'plunged over head and ears' in leaves and blossom, touching wet moss, drinking clear water, and sleeping with the sights and sounds of the environment vivid in his mind's eye. His perception of the Alpine Rose was bound up in this biophilic experience, and his imaginative response to the plant could not be separated from its material properties.

The contextualisation of herbarium specimens in the *Flora of Chamouni* illustrates Ruskin's fusion of systematic methodology with lived experience that characterised his idiosyncratic science. Ruskin's *Flora* is also indicative of the paucity of reference material available to suit the process of his botanical study, prompting him to devise his own. *Proserpina* was written to provide a basic 'grammar' on botany, identified as lacking by Ruskin in the course of his own various attempts to acquire botanical knowledge. He did not claim to have worked his subject through to completion: what he offered readers was a guide to the process of botanical enquiry, modelled in part on the children's books by Maria Edgeworth enjoyed by him in his youth. In her introduction to *Harry and Lucy Concluded: Being the Last Part of Early Lessons* (1825), Edgeworth stated her intention 'to exercise the powers of attention, observation, reasoning, and invention, rather than to teach any one science, or to make advance beyond first principles. The essential point is to excite a thirst for knowledge'.¹²⁵ This aim was fulfilled in the young Ruskin. He wrote his own version of *Harry and Lucy Concluded* when he was seven years old, in which Harry uses a scientific instrument to measure the electrical charge in a sequence of clouds. After gathering his data, Harry's imagination takes over, and he sees forms in the clouds which he relates to a mythological 'witch of the waters of the Alps'.¹²⁶ Ruskin was

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

¹²⁵ Maria Edgeworth, *Harry and Lucy Concluded: Being the Last Part of Early Lessons* (London: R. Hunter; Baldwin, Craddock and Joy, 1825), p. ix-x.

¹²⁶ Works 35.52-55.

clearly inhabiting the role of Harry (Lucy was left behind in the first sentence), and in this story, reproduced in *Praeterita* as a significant childhood memory, the genesis of his intrinsic linking of science and myth is evident, and the role of the imagination in scientific interpretation is introduced. The formative impact on Ruskin of Edgeworth's approach to science was lasting, and he credited her influence in both *Praeterita* and *Proserpina*. Walter Scott's admiration for her novels, acknowledged in his preface to *The Waverley Novels* in 1829, may also have enhanced Ruskin's mature esteem for Edgeworth, as his appreciation of Scott grew.¹²⁷

Despite the inspirational introduction to science offered by Edgeworth's *Early Lessons*, Ruskin was impeded from childhood onwards in his quest for botanical knowledge by the failings of books. Reflecting on his early botanical investigations in the family garden at Herne Hill, Ruskin lamented that 'while there were books on geology and mineralogy which I could understand, all on botany were then,—and they are little mended now,—harder than the Latin grammar'.¹²⁸ When compiling material for *Modern Painters*, Ruskin again found books inadequate for his purposes, and admitted in a letter to Trevelyan in 1860 to being 'foiled' by scientists:

I have had more difficulty also than I expected in obtaining as much clue to simple matters in botany, as was required for my account of vegetation form, and in investigating such things as I wanted, for myself – I was led continually further into detail than was of any use, before I knew it. In many respects I am entirely foiled – finding things on which I supposed scientific men were entirely agreed – still in dispute.¹²⁹

One of the 'simple matters in botany' to which Ruskin referred in the letter was the functioning of vascular cambium in wood which, he stated in 1860, 'seems still far from anything like clear interpretation'.¹³⁰ By 1885, when he published a chapter in

¹²⁷ W. J. McCormack, 'Edgeworth, Maria (1768–1849), novelist and educationist.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 January 2008, Oxford University Press, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8476>> [accessed 15 November 2018].

¹²⁸ Works 35.61.

¹²⁹ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 141 (February-March 1860).

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Proserpina entitled ‘Science in her Cells’, Ruskin was no closer to finding the answer in his botany books, and instead resorted, as noted above, to ‘a great deal of chopping, chipping, and peeling of my oaks and birches’ to investigate how sap flowed through the cells of trees.¹³¹ At the end of the chapter, after pages of discourse on the inadequacy of scientific method, terminology and reporting, Ruskin concluded,

I think in this case, it was desirable that the floods of pros-, par-, peri-, dia-, and circumlocution, through which one has to wade towards any emergent crag of fact in modern scientific books, should for once be seen in the wasteful tide of them; that so I might finally pray the younger students who feel, or remember, their disastrous sway, to cure themselves for ever of the fatal habit of imagining that they know more of anything after naming it unintelligibly, and thinking about it impudently, than they did by loving sight of its nameless being, and in wise confession of its boundless mystery.¹³²

In this passage from the penultimate part of *Proserpina*, Ruskin relinquished not just scientific methodology, but science itself. His conclusion to a lifetime of botanical study was to recommend a return to the ignorance of childlike wonder, where truth could be penetrated by looking and loving, unimpeded by the wrongness of modern science. This brings us back to the garden at Brantwood, where Ruskin’s advice was based on a simple pleasure in observing plants, gained ‘by loving sight of [their] nameless being’.

The inadequacy of modern scientific books was a subject raised frequently by Ruskin in the pages of *Proserpina*, where he expressed his frustration with the confusing nomenclature offered in botanical books, the presentation of unclear or contradictory information, and the lack of basic factual explanation. Some works were recommended above others, such as John Lindley’s *Ladies’ Botany* (1834), John Loudon’s *Encyclopaedia of Plants* (1855) – which Ruskin described in parenthesis as ‘a most useful book, as far as any book in the present state of the science *can* be useful’ – and Asa Gray’s *Introduction to Structural and Systematic Botany* (1858), referred to by

¹³¹ Works 25.483.

¹³² Works 25.497-98.

Ruskin as ‘the best technical book I have’.¹³³ Even the book written by his friend Daniel Oliver, Keeper of the Herbarium at Kew Gardens, and described publicly by Ruskin as ‘an excellent little school-book on botany – the best I’ve yet found’, was ultimately deemed inadequate.¹³⁴ As Ruskin explained privately to Oliver, ‘none of the books – even your own – ever tell me the exact thing I want [...] I have to complain of its telling me what I don’t want’.¹³⁵

In his search for botanical authority, Ruskin looked to trusted historical sources, casting his net wide to include the classical Greek physician Dioscorides, the medieval herbalist John Gerard, John Evelyn’s seventeenth-century *Sylva, or a Discourse on Forest Trees* (1664), and Maria Edgeworth’s *Harry and Lucy* children’s books.

Collingwood described Ruskin’s extensive collection of botanical books as ‘not very modern’, mainly dating from the eighteenth century or before, and including,

the nineteen massive folios of ‘Floræ Danicæ Descripto’, the twenty-seven volumes of the old, old *Botanical Magazine*, with the beautiful plates of Sowerby, the three dozen volumes and index of Sowerby’s ‘English Botany’, the six volumes of Baxter’s ‘Island Plants’, the nine volumes of Lecoq’s ‘Géographie Botanique’, and so forth.¹³⁶

While these volumes pre-dated the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century, and would have been considered outdated by contemporary botanists, their illustrations offered timeless depictions of plants and flowers which were invaluable to Ruskin. The privileging of image over text was hinted at by E. T. Cook in his analysis of Ruskin’s library that ‘his scientific books were sometimes out of date, but nearly always artistic’.¹³⁷ Accurate and naturalistic representations of flowers were of more value to Ruskin as a foundation for his botanical study than the work of modern scientists, perceived by him to be based on theory rather than truth. The *Flora Danica*, published from 1761, and containing 3,240 hand-coloured engravings, was particularly

¹³³ Works 25.483; 25.203; 25.209.

¹³⁴ Works 25.255. Ruskin was probably referring to Oliver’s *Lessons in Elementary Botany*, 1874.

¹³⁵ Ruskin T30, letter to Oliver, 5 June 1875.

¹³⁶ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 188.

¹³⁷ Works 34.699.

praised by Ruskin for the veracity of its illustrations, and several of the woodcuts in *Proserpina* were copied from it.¹³⁸ Ruskin bought the first ten volumes of this work (containing 600 plates) from the bookseller Quaritch in 1866, and commended it in a letter to the amateur naturalist Sir Walter Trevelyan, stating, 'I never saw such lovely flower drawing, nor anything near it'.¹³⁹ Over a decade later, Ruskin shared his appreciation of the plates with another amateur botanist, Mary Beever, enthusing over 'the lovely artistic skill'.¹⁴⁰ This praise was in contrast to the illustrations found in modern botanical books about which Ruskin lamented to Oliver:

I am also concerned with the art; and Figuier's is the only book of all I have seen, (purchasable by ordinary pockets), in which the cuts are drawn by a man who could draw! Dresser – Grinder – Balfour – Lindley, etc are all one more horrible than the other.¹⁴¹

The paucity of accessible, high-quality botanical illustration was addressed by Ruskin in *Proserpina*, for which he commissioned work from George Allen and Arthur Burgess, with many of the engravings taken from his own drawings of plants growing at Brantwood.¹⁴² The quality and clarity of the illustrations in *Proserpina*, in contrast to the fragmentary nature of the text, was deemed by Ruskin to be 'of permanent value' to his readers.¹⁴³ Ruskin's authority on the subject of book illustration was recognised by the amateur plant collector and artist George Maw, who contacted Ruskin in 1868 requesting recommendations for a suitably skilled artist to engrave geological specimens, and Ruskin was 'heartily glad' to put George Allen at his service.¹⁴⁴ Maw sought advice again in 1880 when seeking an engraver to work on his monograph on the crocus. Ruskin's response indicated his knowledge of the capabilities of artists

¹³⁸ Ingram and Wildman, *Ruskin's Flora*, p. 39; *Works* 25.316.

¹³⁹ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 594 (23 July 1866): 'Got Danish Flora at Quaritch's'; Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 262 and n. (4 August 1866).

¹⁴⁰ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 71 (20 January 1879).

¹⁴¹ Ruskin T30, letter to Oliver, 31 May 1876; the book to which Ruskin refers is Louis Figuier, *Histoire des Plantes*, 1865, recommended in *Proserpina* for its illustrations (*Works* 25.483).

¹⁴² Ingram and Wildman, *Ruskin's Flora*, p. 37.

¹⁴³ *Works* 25.205.

¹⁴⁴ RHS Lindley Library MS MAW/1/324, letter to George Maw, 8 June 1868.

working in the field, as well as the expense involved in printing from a woodblock.¹⁴⁵ His skill was in his discernment of ‘the difference between attentive drawing [...] and the mere copying of each flower’, which allowed a true representation of the character of a plant beyond its physical form.¹⁴⁶

Illustrations were a vital tool in Ruskin’s attempt to formulate his own botanical classification system. In 1855, while continuing to work on *Modern Painters* (volumes III and IV were published in 1856), Ruskin was thinking seriously about botany. He explained the motivation for his project to Jane Carlyle:

During my [...] studies of Horticulture I became dissatisfied with the Linnæan, Jussieuan, and Everybody-elsian arrangement of plants, and have accordingly arranged a system of my own; and unbound my botanical book, and rebound it in brighter green, with all the pages through other, and backside foremost—so as to cut off the old paging numerals; and am now printing my new arrangement in a legible manner, on interleaved foolscap. I consider this arrangement one of my great achievements of the year.¹⁴⁷

The ‘botanical book’ to which Ruskin referred was the six volumes of William Baxter’s *British Phaenogamous Botany* (1834-43), which Ruskin rearranged by separating the illustrations from the descriptions and rebinding the plates together with his own manuscript pages. The volumes are extant in the collection of the Guild of St George, and their role in the botanical chronology of Ruskin’s thinking has been analysed by David Ingram.¹⁴⁸ At this stage in his thinking, Ruskin maintained the established genus and species binomials for each plant, but grouped them into his own system of classes, namely Foils, Bells, Hoods, Grasses and Waywards.¹⁴⁹ The plates were rearranged in Ruskin’s bound volumes to reflect this new grouping, and interleaved pages contained

¹⁴⁵ RHS MAW/1/327, letter to George Maw, 21 April 1880.

¹⁴⁶ Works 25.205 n.

¹⁴⁷ Works 5.I.

¹⁴⁸ David S. Ingram, ‘Ruskin’s Botanical Books: A Survey of Re-ordered and Annotated Second Edition Volumes of *British Phaenogamous Botany* (W. Baxter, 1834-43) and *English Botany* (J.E. Smith, and J. Sowerby, 1832-1840)’, *Ruskin Review and Bulletin*, 12, 1 (2016), 18-50; revised version with colour illustrations published as a monograph by the Guild of St George (2016). Original volumes in Museums Sheffield, Collection of the Guild of St George, CGSG06160.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

Ruskin's notes with cross-references to the descriptions in the other volumes. Further cross-references to illustrations in *Flora Danica*, purchased by Ruskin in 1866, suggest he returned to the project several years after the initial re-ordering of the books, indicating the fragmentary nature of his focus on botany. Ingram describes the re-ordering project as 'a step on the road to *Proserpina*', but one in which the sophisticated nomenclature of Ruskin's later botanical work is undeveloped.¹⁵⁰ The names allotted to Baxter's plates in Ruskin's ordering system have their origin in medieval England, recognised by Ingram as 'derived from a world of knights, dragons, monks, bells, sailing ships, hoods and bonnets', in contrast to the references to classical mythology and Shakespearean heroines to be found in the nomenclature of *Proserpina*.¹⁵¹ By devising his own plant orders, and grouping the illustrations around his system, Ruskin created a reference book for the furtherance of his own research, the necessary 'step on the road' that would allow him to develop his thinking to the next level.

Around the time Ruskin began to assemble his fragmentary pieces of botanical study into publishable form as *Proserpina* in 1875, he embarked on another re-ordering of a botanical work: J. E. Smith and J. Sowerby's *English Botany* (1832-40). Ruskin took the first seven volumes, which dealt with flowering plants, and again separated the illustrations from the descriptions, and bound them together with *The London Catalogue of British Plants*, edited in 1874 by H. C. Watson.¹⁵² The catalogue was a numbered list of British flowering plants, arranged by genus and species, to which Ruskin appended a hand-written alphabetical list of each plant with cross-references to both the description and the plate, facilitating easy reference of information, illustrations, and modern scientific nomenclature. Ruskin was therefore responding to his own frustration, expressed in the introduction to *Proserpina*, at the inadequacy of botanical books which he found necessitated a laborious and often fruitless search for information. The reordered Sowerby can be seen as an essential reference tool for Ruskin to formulate his own classification, particularly through the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁵² Ruskin's re-ordering could have taken place at any time after the publication of Watson's catalogue in 1874, but it is likely that it coincided with the initial publication of *Proserpina*. Original volumes at Museums Sheffield, Collection of the Guild of St George, CGSG06152.

illustrations, while enabling fact-checking against existing scientific knowledge and nomenclature.

Ruskin's botanical classification expressed the desire for order evident in his cataloguing of minerals, books and paintings. He was satisfying an intellectual challenge, while at the same time introducing a new way of looking at a subject, just as he did with Venetian architecture in *The Stones of Venice*. When assessing Ruskin's approach to science, Oliver Lodge perceived the value of close observation which Ruskin applied to every discipline: 'the same minute accuracy of observation and patience of study which he bestowed on the pediment of a pillar or the tracery of a window – were equally available when dealing with the outlines of mountain ranges, and with such productions of Nature as crystals, or leaves, or feathers, or clouds'.¹⁵³ In fact, the real value of Ruskin's approach was that he made connections *between* the disciplines: a cognitive plasticity identified by Sandra Kemp as 'polygonal', offering a blend of art and science that paved the way to a new perception of the world.¹⁵⁴ Kemp applies Ruskin's rendering of concepts as 'three-sided, or four-sided, or polygonal', a notion introduced by him in a lecture in 1858.¹⁵⁵ Interdisciplinary thinking was the key to unlocking the imaginative realms that would lead to revelation: Ruskin's thinking followed the freedom of natural philosophy rather than the straightjacket of modern science. Guided by his admiration of Alexander von Humboldt, Ruskin applied the principles of close and sustained observation equally to natural history, art, and architecture, discerning a connectedness between natural and cultural history.

In Part VIII of *Proserpina*, published in 1882, Ruskin reiterated the need for the botanical reform which had prompted him to cut up and rebind his books, reflecting that, '[i]t has only been the later discovery of the uselessness of old scientific botany, and the abominableness of new, as an element of education for youth [...] that have compelled me to gather into system my fading memories, and wandering thoughts'.¹⁵⁶ While acknowledging the inadequacy of his own botanical writing, Ruskin promoted

¹⁵³ Lodge, 'Mr Ruskin's Attitude to Science', p. 280.

¹⁵⁴ Sandra Kemp, 'Ruskin and the Polygon', BAVS Talks 2019, University of Liverpool, 8 May 2019, <<https://bavs.ac.uk/videos>> [accessed 27 June 2019].

¹⁵⁵ Works 16.187 (Inaugural Address to the Cambridge School of Art).

¹⁵⁶ Works 25.455-56.

his fragmentary and wayward studies above the vulgarities of modern science and the frustrations of trying to make sense of outdated authorities. The compulsion to publish a book appropriate to curious young minds reflects the sense of duty which characterised Ruskin's writing, from his defence of Turner in *Modern Painters* (1843-60) to his moral warning to society in *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884). In his later years at Brantwood, the pressing need to convey his thoughts while he was still able was foremost in Ruskin's mind, with the self-knowledge of his incapacitating mental illness and recurrent anticipation of death casting a shadow, and eliciting the sense of urgency and incompleteness of his late work.

It was under this shadow that Ruskin gathered his thoughts on botany.

Proserpina is a compilation of fragments of botanical work accomplished by Ruskin over many decades, presented to reveal the 'process and progress' of his study with recourse to friends, professionals and reference books.¹⁵⁷ Although Ruskin had a large garden at Denmark Hill, his move to Brantwood opened the possibility of communing with a natural landscape quite apart from the urban development and pollution of London, a notion encapsulated in his letter to Norton on the purchase of his new home, in which he wrote 'I have simply light and air [...] and ground in which flowers will grow'.¹⁵⁸ Brantwood offered the opportunity for observing wild plants and resuming the study of natural history which had hitherto been overtaken by more pressing subjects.

Botanical friends

Ruskin's botanical impetus was further boosted by his serendipitous meeting in 1873 with amateur botanists Susanna Beever and her sister Mary, who lived at The Thwaite in Coniston, just over a mile from Brantwood. His relationship with Beever was one of several botanical alliances, some arising with established friends, such as Pauline Trevelyan and Maria La Touche, others forged by Ruskin specifically for gleaning botanical instruction, such as Daniel Oliver and Oliver Lodge. Selected correspondence between Ruskin and Beever, Trevelyan, La Touche and Lodge has been published, and transcripts of his correspondence with Oliver are held at The Ruskin. However, there

¹⁵⁷ Works 25.216.

¹⁵⁸ Works 37.40 (1 November 1871).

has been no critical analysis of these friendships in relation specifically to botany or gardening, and this chapter offers a new perspective on the significance of these figures in their direct contribution to *Proserpina*, and in their influence on Ruskin's gardening praxis. The contribution of each is assessed below, beginning with Susanna Beever who, as a Lakeland neighbour, was able to offer practical support to Ruskin's botanical endeavours, as well as expertise on local flora. Ruskin's friendship with Beever is charted in the selection of letters published in 1887 as *Hortus Inclusus*, which reveals a shared affinity with natural history, ecology and Lakeland cultural tradition. While Chapter Three deals with Beever's influence on Ruskin's gardening and her role offering support, shelter and companionship, she was also a significant figure in his botanical studies, offering inspiration and encouragement, and providing factual content for *Proserpina*. After making Beever's acquaintance, Ruskin expressed his wish 'to join with you in joy over crystals and flowers', reflecting their shared interest in botany and geology, and the pleasure they afforded each other in the study of nature.¹⁵⁹

It is clear from the published letters that Ruskin's correspondence and conversation with the Beever sisters often focussed on botany. Ruskin's approach to the older women was not didactic. He revelled in sharing his delight in the study of flowers with likeminded friends whom he regarded as intellectual equals, loaning them botanical volumes, and acknowledging that he learned much from them, stating that, 'I never come to the Thwaite but you and your sister tell me all kinds of things I don't know, and am so glad to know'.¹⁶⁰ This lively engagement with botany was both an education to Ruskin and an impetus to pursue his botanical studies: the garden at The Thwaite, through which Ruskin walked to call at the house, was stocked with Lakeland flora which Ruskin could observe, just as its inhabitants abounded in botanical expertise from which he could learn. The Beever sisters had earned a modest reputation for their botanical knowledge, evidenced in their contribution to scholarly publications, including Baxter's *British Phaenogamous Botany* (1834-43). In a letter to Beever, Ruskin expressed his delight when he found an illustration of a pearlwort in his copy of Baxter with the accompanying published text:

¹⁵⁹ Works 37.290.

¹⁶⁰ Works 37.202.

The specimen of this curious and interesting little plant from which the accompanying drawing was made was communicated to me by Miss Susan Beever. To the kindness of this young lady, and that of her sister, Miss Mary Beever, I am indebted for the four plants figured in this number.¹⁶¹

Baxter's work was published in 1834-43, when Beever was indeed a 'young lady' (b. 1805); she was still contributing to botanical volumes in later life, evidenced by Collingwood who revealed that, 'in the latest *Flora of the English Lake District*, by Mr J. G. Baker F.R.S (1885), the name of "Miss Beever" occurs again and again'.¹⁶² In the years when Ruskin was writing *Proserpina*, Beever was actively involved in recording species in the locality of Brantwood, demonstrating her expertise in local flora.¹⁶³

That the sisters piqued Ruskin's curiosity on botanical matters is hinted at in his response to a specimen of starflower (*Trientalis*) sent from The Thwaite:

I must leave letters, books and all to work on that lovely *Trientalis* which Mary sent me. It has a peculiar set of trine leaves which Linnaeus noticed and named it for – modern botanists have no notion of it. I think both Mary and you will be deeply interested in seeing it worked out.¹⁶⁴

Through their engagement with botany, the Beever sisters inspired Ruskin to botanical study above the competing demands of 'letters, books, and all'. Their pervasive enthusiasm and intelligent curiosity may have contributed to Ruskin's motivation to work on *Proserpina*, and the sisters offered an opportunity for serious botanical discussion not available in Ruskin's immediate household. He shared the progress of his botanical thinking with the sisters, explaining the idiosyncratic logic of his classification system, and seeking their intellectual opinion on his new botanical

¹⁶¹ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 58.

¹⁶² W. G. Collingwood, 'Memoir of the Author' in John Beever, *Practical Fly Fishing founded on nature* (London: Methuen and Co., 1893), p xiii.

¹⁶³ Beever contributed records of locations and descriptions of plant species to Baker's work, mostly in the environs of Coniston.

¹⁶⁴ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 108 (n.d.) (revised 3rd edn., 1902; this letter was not included in the 1st edn.).

ordering.¹⁶⁵ When asking, ‘Susie, please tell me whether I may not separate these lovely pearlworts wholly from the spergulas’, Ruskin addressed Beever as his intellectual superior, and when he continued, ‘and tell me how the spergulas scatter their seeds, I can’t find any account of it’, he recognised the authority of her observational knowledge of plants, tacitly acknowledging her capacity for information was of more value than his library of botanical books.¹⁶⁶ Whether *Proserpina* would have been an inferior work without the authority and encouragement of the Beever sisters is a matter of speculation, but their presence unquestionably afforded a fertile environment for floral study at the very time when Ruskin was assembling his botanical material into publishable form. The Beevers’ significance is evident not only in their botanical knowledge, but in the example they set of botanising in their garden, learning about plants by growing them and observing their qualities and habit. At The Thwaite, gardening activity and botanical study were linked in the same way as at Brantwood.

Ruskin made use of the sisters’ practical horticultural skills in his research for *Proserpina*, requesting in 1876: ‘Please, can your sister or you plant a grain or grains of corn for me, and watch them into various stages of germination? I want to study the mode of root and blade development, and I am sure you two will know best how to show it me’.¹⁶⁷ This practical assistance echoes the botanical support sought in former years by Ruskin from Pauline Trevelyan, whom he met in 1847 and remained on intimate terms until her early death in 1866. Trevelyan was an amateur botanist, and was acquainted with notable figures including John Henslow, Professor of Botany at Cambridge University, and Jane Loudon, the author of popular gardening books for women. Her husband, Sir Walter, was interested in all branches of science, including the more radical fields of phrenology, phonetics and total abstinence. Ruskin had capitalised on his friendship with Trevelyan in his research for *The Stones of Venice*, and in 1853 he devised a system identifying plants found on medieval carvings. Ruskin proposed to send Trevelyan specimens of leaves and flowers in dated envelopes corresponding to his sketches, to which she was instructed to reply with the name of

¹⁶⁵ For example, Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, pp. 56-60 (1st edn.).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 59.

¹⁶⁷ Works 37.202.

the plant and any other relevant botanical information. Ruskin's candid admission of botanical ignorance reflects not a lack of understanding of plants, but an unfamiliarity with nomenclature:

I am making some studies of plants for architectural purposes in which I again want some help from you – for I have no one of whom I can ask the name of the commonest plant – or rather, I am ashamed to ask their names because they are so common – and go on in total ignorance from day to day [...] I daresay some day I shall send you a dandelion – or something as common – but pray don't think I do so in jest – as I really don't know the right name of anything that grows.¹⁶⁸

In these early stages of his botanical studies, Ruskin presented himself as a willing pupil, accepting his deficiency and eager to learn from those with greater knowledge. A year later, Ruskin's correspondence with Trevelyan introduced his own system of plant classification, suggesting that he was dissatisfied with the fundamental nature of the botanical information she conveyed to him, or that he wanted to learn modern nomenclature only as a means to discredit it. The disparity between recognised botany and Ruskin's idiosyncratic approach highlights his alienation from the scientific community, a self-imposed distancing that effectively condemned his botanical systematics from the outset. In September 1854, Ruskin appealed to Trevelyan:

I shall want you to help me a great deal, when I get my plans organized – and with my flowers, directly; – I have got a book by Lindley on Botany which tells me larkspur and buttercups are the same thing – I don't believe it; and won't – and of course – it doesn't tell me the name of any of *my* flowers.¹⁶⁹

This statement reveals the genesis of Ruskin's re-classification of the botanical orders, exemplified by his pulling apart the pages of Baxter a few months later and rearranging

¹⁶⁸ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 52-53 (30 August 1853).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 90 (24 September 1854), original italics.

them according to his own system. Ruskin's refusal to accept the judgements of modern science (John Lindley was at this time one of the most respected figures in botany and horticulture) was non-negotiable, and the tenor of stubborn, yet amicable, rebuttal continued throughout his correspondence with Trevelyan, herself an advocate of progressive materialist science.¹⁷⁰ Ruskin further distanced himself from the scientific community in his emphasis of '*my flowers*', suggesting that the very subject matter under discussion was different – and personal – to Ruskin.

The botanical thinking that would eventually take published form in *Proserpina* can be traced in Ruskin's letters to Trevelyan throughout the 1850s until her death in 1866, revealing that she was not only a source of information but a sounding board for ideas. In Trevelyan, Ruskin had found a sympathetic, informed and non-judgemental respondent to his alternative botanical system, despite a lack of scientific accord. It is clear from their correspondence that Trevelyan argued against Ruskin's unscientific systematics: when he presented his 'idea of a Botanical-reference-book founded on colours', Trevelyan gave advice which prompted Ruskin to respond: 'I will reconsider my plan about the flowers but I am not at all put out of conceit of it'.¹⁷¹ Ruskin did not dismiss Trevelyan's advice outright, and recognised the flaws of his colour system, admitting 'I should be terribly puzzled by the patchwork creatures – tulips and suchlike, and I will look at what you call the natural system'.¹⁷² Through a knowledge of the botanical work of others, established from books and friends such as Trevelyan, Ruskin was able to formulate his own system. He considered the merits of the 'natural system' (the classification published by Antoine Laurent de Jussieu in opposition to the artificial system devised by Linnaeus) and addressed its perceived inadequacies in his own system. Although emphasising his wholesale dismissal of the work of others, Ruskin's wide reading on the subject can be inferred from his statement to Jane Carlyle in 1855, cited above: 'I became dissatisfied with the Linnæan, Jussieuan, and

¹⁷⁰ Richard Drayton, 'Lindley, John (1799–1865), botanist and horticulturist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 21 May 2009, Oxford University Press, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16674>> [accessed 28 March 2019].

¹⁷¹ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 53 (30 August 1853) and p. 58 (6 September 1853).

¹⁷² Ibid.

Everybody-elsian arrangement of plants, and have accordingly arranged a system of my own'.¹⁷³

Ruskin persisted with his colour system, and presented Trevelyan with his botanical classification in 1855. This was presumably the re-ordered volumes of Baxter, or work based on the re-ordering; the dating of the correspondence cited unites the two references, as does Ruskin's class of 'Tiresomes' which corresponds to the 'Waywards' in the re-ordered Baxter. Ruskin wrote to Trevelyan:

I have a great piece of Plant work which I want you to do for me – I have arranged my Plants on my new colour System – and I want you to tell me if it is all right – I found the colour would not do quite – so I took in form as well – and patched up a classification system between the two – I found it was still necessary at last, however, to have a large class called 'Tiresomes', which were plants who didn't know their own minds about anything – but I am sure people will learn botany a great deal faster on my plan.¹⁷⁴

Ruskin's stated purpose – to facilitate 'faster' and more accessible botanical learning – appeared to sacrifice scientific method in favour of ease of understanding, reflected in his reference to a 'patched up' system, and his ready admission of flaws. Sir Walter Trevelyan was unimpressed by Ruskin's endeavour, and recorded in his diary: 'Sent back to Ruskin his proposed system of plants with notes shewing [sic] its unscientific and illogical nature'.¹⁷⁵ In response, Ruskin explained that the help he required of Pauline Trevelyan was for her to use her knowledge of flowers to check the assigned plants were ascribed to the appropriate category within his system ('I believe I have put some water plants among land ones, and so on'), rather than to comment on the system itself.¹⁷⁶ He stated unequivocally: 'You can't mend my *system* – so you need not try – I only want you to help me in carrying it out'.¹⁷⁷ Thus Ruskin's botanical

¹⁷³ Works 5.I.

¹⁷⁴ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 107 (25 September 1855).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 110 n.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 110 (January 1856).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., original italics.

collaboration with Trevelyan was limited to the facts of identification and naming; the underlying principle of classification was Ruskin's territory alone.

The lexical choices in Ruskin's correspondence with Trevelyan on matters of botany were playfully confrontational, and his antagonistic stance against materialist science remained unchanged throughout the long duration of their friendship. In 1865, Ruskin declared to her his intention to 'turn botany upside down', echoing a reference to his 'upside-down botany' in an earlier letter.¹⁷⁸ Together with his declaration in 1866 that he was 'trying to make out some more of your nasty botanical scientific names, that I may upset them all', it can be inferred that Ruskin intended to reinvent botanical classification and nomenclature by turning science on its head, not building on the work of others but beginning anew.¹⁷⁹ His work on the re-ordering of botanical books shows the stages of Ruskin's thinking on reinventing first the classes of plants (in his re-ordered Baxter) then the naming of species (facilitated by the re-ordering of Sowerby). The result of over two decades of botanical deliberation is expressed in *Proserpina*, a book which shows both the process and the product of Ruskin's thinking on plants.

Trevelyan died in May 1866 and by August of that year Ruskin was directing his botanical enquiries to her bereaved husband, Sir Walter, clearly in need of someone to take her place as his botanical correspondent.¹⁸⁰ Ruskin had conversed with Professor Richard Owen, Superintendent of Natural History Collections at the British Museum, in the early 1860s, but confessed to Trevelyan that he had 'misled me', a statement construed by Virginia Surtees to relate to botanical nomenclature in Ruskin's research for *Modern Painters*.¹⁸¹ In 1871, Ruskin established a more satisfactory relationship with another professional, Daniel Oliver, Keeper of the Herbarium at Kew Gardens, who offered the same combination of botanical knowledge and patience that Ruskin had found in Pauline Trevelyan. In 1876, he referred to him as 'my botanical friend, good Mr. Oliver of Kew'.¹⁸² Just as with Trevelyan, Ruskin's botanical discussions with

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 248 (May 1865) and p. 192 (17 August 1862).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 252 (25 February 1866).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 262-64.

¹⁸¹ Works 36.363 (letter to Owen, May 1861); Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 162-62 (1 January 1861) and p. 164 n.

¹⁸² Works 25.331.

Oliver were mainly epistolary, and the two men did not meet in person until February 1875.¹⁸³ In addition to his botanical expertise, Oliver was a proficient artist, as Trevelyan had been, suggesting that he may have possessed a sympathetic appreciation of aesthetics lacking in other scientists Ruskin had encountered.¹⁸⁴ Ruskin presented himself to Oliver as a deficient and willing pupil, just as he had done to Trevelyan two decades earlier, signing off a letter in 1876: 'Ever your grateful and troublesome and knownothing pupil'.¹⁸⁵ This self-deprecating approach allowed Ruskin to pose the basic questions of the non-scientist, but it also indicated Ruskin's awareness of how much of botany he was yet to learn. That he considered the information received from Oliver as accurate amid a corpus of confusing and unreliable sources is clear from Ruskin's statement, 'I sent at once for the book you name to me as authoritative – but I don't want more *authorities* than you'.¹⁸⁶ Ruskin was in need of a trusted botanical authority to formulate his own system in which he reinterpreted the known facts of botany. Trevelyan initially fulfilled this role, then Oliver, whose surviving correspondence with Ruskin continues until 1877, by which time publication of *Proserpina* was underway. Oliver's contribution to Ruskin's botanical work was publicly acknowledged in *Fors Clavigera*, in which he was described by Ruskin in February 1877 as: 'the friend who is helping me in all I want for *Proserpina*'.¹⁸⁷ The Beever sisters were, from 1873, a serendipitous supplement to Ruskin's botanical knowledge: intelligent companions with whom to enjoy discussion of botany, offering inspiration and stimulus.

To this category of botanical friend can be added Maria La Touche. Ruskin's relationship with La Touche was complicated by his love for her daughter Rose, which caused a rift in their friendship in 1862. They were reconciled by 1881, when La Touche visited Ruskin at Brantwood following his mental breakdown that spring, and their subsequent correspondence throughout the 1880s is characterised by references to the flowers, gardens and landscape of their respective homes, La Touche at

¹⁸³ Ruskin T30, letters to Oliver, 3 and 11 February 1875.

¹⁸⁴ Works 25.xlvi. See Works 19.xlv for an account of Charles Darwin's disinterest in Ruskin's Turner collection.

¹⁸⁵ Ruskin T30, letter to Oliver, 25 April 1876.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 31 May 1876, original italics.

¹⁸⁷ Works 29.31.

Harristown in County Kildare, and Ruskin at Brantwood. Ruskin praised La Touche's understanding of botany, and flattered her in his claim that, 'There's more natural history in your little finger than in all my books'.¹⁸⁸ In *Praeterita*, Ruskin publicly acknowledged La Touche as 'miles and miles my superior' in not only 'botanical knowledge', but in 'perception of plant-character'.¹⁸⁹ It was in this latter branch of sympathetic botanical understanding that La Touche was most in tune with Ruskin's thinking, reiterated by him privately when he wrote to her: 'indeed and in truth there is *no* one who can help me as you can, for you see with my eyes and more, and feel as I feel'.¹⁹⁰ Whereas others had helped with clarification of botanical fact and scientific theory, La Touche shared Ruskin's affinity with 'plant-character' and understood his attempts to penetrate the essence of flowers from observation of the aspect of their outward form. A letter from La Touche, quoted at length by Ruskin in Part X of *Proserpina*, reveals the similarity of their approach to botany.¹⁹¹ The quoted passage shows that La Touche readily adopted Ruskin's idiosyncratic terminology, for example in her reference to 'minx plants', which was a response to Ruskin's request to '[s]end me some stories of minx-flowers'.¹⁹² The connections she made between different plants based on their behaviour, and the anthropomorphism of her plant observations, are reminiscent of Ruskin's writing, such as her comment that a plant 'stood on tiptoe'.¹⁹³ Just as Ruskin did, La Touche linked plants to memories of people, and assigned moral characteristics to flowers, for example, her description of the coleus: 'However gaudy the leaves, the blossoms seem determined to assert with great pride their conspicuous humility'.¹⁹⁴ Ruskin's decision to include this letter, apparently quoted verbatim, demonstrates his complete agreement with La Touche in her assessment of the plants she described.

In the second part of *Proserpina* issued following Ruskin's reconciliation with La Touche (Part VIII, published May 1882), he added a footnote stating, 'When I have the

¹⁸⁸ Ruskin MS B20, copy-letter book, 4 February 1883.

¹⁸⁹ *Works* 35.527.

¹⁹⁰ Ferrier Young, *Letters of a Noblewoman*, p. 117 (9 June 1886), original italics. A handwritten copy of this letter is included in a copy-letter book (Ruskin MS B20), dated 9 June 1883; the letter can confidently be dated to 1883 from its contents.

¹⁹¹ *Works* 25.523-25.

¹⁹² Ruskin MS B20, copy-letter book, 29 May 1885.

¹⁹³ *Works* 25.524.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

chance, and the time, to submit the proofs of *Proserpina* to friends who know more of Botany than I, or have kindness enough to ascertain debateable things for me, I mean in future to do so'.¹⁹⁵ It is clear from comparing the published text with the extant correspondence between Ruskin and La Touche, that she was one of the 'friends who know more of Botany than I' to whom he referred. That Ruskin sent proofs of *Proserpina* to La Touche is confirmed in a letter from 1883 in which she acknowledged, 'I've read all the proofs you sent me', and in 1885 Ruskin wrote to La Touche: 'I've sent you the first proofs of part of next Pros. [...] – you can correct all you see wrong'.¹⁹⁶ The help that La Touche provided extended beyond factual correction, and her contributions to the content and production of *Proserpina* can be judged as collaboration. Ruskin urged La Touche between issues that 'you can always be going on making notes for me', suggesting that the information she provided was an integral aspect of Ruskin's research.¹⁹⁷ Her observational notes were supplemented by drawings which Ruskin also used, both for research and for publication, evidenced in his letter to La Touche: 'All that you sent me is invaluable, and I'm sending your sketch of *Salvia* to be engraved'.¹⁹⁸ He continued, affirming his deference not only to her botanical authority, but to her opinion on flower form: '[I] will take your views of hood and cloak entirely. We shall have plenty time to get this number quite right'.¹⁹⁹ Ruskin's use of the pronoun 'we' implies joint endeavour. He was more explicit on the nature of their collaboration in a letter from this sequence in which he stated, 'I have a good many retouches to give the next *Proserpina* but I think, between us it will come pretty'.²⁰⁰

Following La Touche's visit to Brantwood, during which their shared interest in botany was renewed, Ruskin wrote: 'perhaps I might see you at Brantwood again this year [and if not you will still] help me about birds and flowers – which I shall expect you always to write half the chapters about now'.²⁰¹ Ruskin's teasing reference to the

¹⁹⁵ Works 25.422 n.

¹⁹⁶ Ruskin MS L107, letter to Ruskin from La Touche [1883]; Ruskin MS B20, copy-letter book, 29 May 1885.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 8 July 1885.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., June [1885].

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 16 June 1885.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 4 June 1883.

extent of La Touche's contribution to his work can be evaluated against the lengthy quotation from her letter which appeared in Part X of *Proserpina*, and does indeed constitute almost half the chapter.²⁰² Ruskin alluded to his work on 'birds and flowers', indicating that La Touche's contributions were also directed towards the ornithological study *Love's Meinie*, published erratically in parts from 1873 to 1881. Margaret Ferrier Young, editor of La Touche's letters, refers to notes made by La Touche for *Love's Meinie*; both references post-date the issue of the final part of *Love's Meinie*, and suggest that Ruskin was still actively working on further parts of this publication.²⁰³ Similarly, the final part of *Proserpina* was issued in July 1886, although Ruskin's correspondence with La Touche confirms that he aspired to continue his botanical work in collaboration with her, writing from Sandgate in April 1887, '[a]nd we may do some Proserpina together yet! you and I'.²⁰⁴ La Touche's collaboration can be read as a factor in Ruskin's belief in his capacity to continue working in the late 1880s, despite his failing mental health. His autobiography *Praeterita* was published in parts from 1885 to 1889 and, together with the proofs of *Proserpina*, La Touche was sent 'the first clean revise of the autobiography' for her 'advice and help before printing'.²⁰⁵ Ruskin was seeking La Touche's authority not only on botany and ornithology, but on the presentation of his own life story. Her intellectual influence on his thinking at this period, particularly considering the earlier turbulence in their relationship over her daughter Rose, is an area which would merit further study beyond the scope of this thesis.

The botanical help offered to Ruskin by Maria La Touche contributed not only to the pages of *Proserpina*, but to the planting of the garden at Brantwood, and the correspondence between them is inextricably tied to their experience of gardening at Brantwood and Harristown. Ruskin knew the Irish garden from earlier visits to see Rose, but did not return after his reconciliation with the family. La Touche visited Brantwood in 1881, 1883 and 1885, and her correspondence with Ruskin reflects their shared knowledge of the flora of Brantwood. There was a temporal overlap between

²⁰² Ruskin's text, excluding footnotes: 2619 words, direct quotation from La Touche's letter: 1124 words, *Works* 25.513-25.

²⁰³ Ferrier Young, *Letters of a Noblewoman*, p. 117 n. (9 June 1886).

²⁰⁴ Ruskin MS B20, copy-letter book, 14 April 1887.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 19 May 1885.

Ruskin's botanical friendships with La Touche and with his neighbour Susanna Beever, and the intertwining of these relationships built around gardens and flowers formed a nexus at Brantwood where both Ruskin and Joan Severn were, in different ways, contributing to the flora of the landscape. These gardening connections are explored in Chapter Three, together with the impact of other significant figures in Ruskin's later life whose stimulus can be discerned in his approach to gardening.

As has been shown, Ruskin did not align his work with current horticultural trends and did not attempt to penetrate professional horticultural circles. When in search of elucidation on horticultural matters, however, Ruskin directed his questioning towards William Robinson, editor of the popular magazine *The Garden*, founded in 1871. In a chapter of *Proserpina* entitled 'Of Wildness in Flowers', Ruskin was keen to discern the reasons for the difference in appearance of a flower growing in his glasshouse with another of the same species growing in its natural habitat, and quoted a letter received from Robinson in response to 'an inquiry of mine' on this subject.²⁰⁶ Ruskin replied to Robinson, 'I can only be sure, in *Proserpina* of the description of the wild flower – you must answer for the potted ones', indicating the limit of his botanical interest.²⁰⁷ This was reiterated in print when Ruskin admitted that varieties of plant 'induced by horticulture [...] will not be acknowledged by *Proserpina*'.²⁰⁸ La Touche and Severn were both interested in modern cultivars, evidenced in their own gardening choices, and Ruskin was able to use their knowledge to his advantage, telling La Touche, 'I've nothing to do with garden flowers, but please find out if those bright sages are cultivated or foreign'.²⁰⁹ Ruskin's recourse to knowledgeable friends and professionals demonstrates his unwillingness to investigate aspects of horticulture that he found distasteful or uninteresting, but which were necessary to complete his botanical understanding.

Professional authority was also sought by Ruskin from Daniel Oliver in the correction of proofs for *Proserpina*. In June 1875, he acknowledged Oliver's contribution: 'I am so very grateful for your pencilling etc [...] awful mistake, etc,

²⁰⁶ Works 25.533.

²⁰⁷ RHS MS GB 803 WRO/2/175, letter from John Ruskin to William Robinson, 5 July 1885.

²⁰⁸ Works 25.349.

²⁰⁹ Ruskin MS B20, copy-letter book, 27 May 1885. Ruskin may have been referring to coleus.

corrected with thanks'.²¹⁰ The nature of the error redacted by Oliver is unknown, but it would appear that without such counsel, Ruskin's botany would have been liable to derision for its factual inaccuracy, setting an unconvincing foundation for the presentation of his botanical system. The reception of his work concerned Ruskin, and he relied on Oliver's professional advice, evidenced in his invitation to give counsel: 'I send you the soiled last press of next *Proserpina*, for really it is too imprudent to come out without giving you time to caution me'.²¹¹ Given that Ruskin had vowed to 'turn botany upside-down' and had little regard for the opinion of scientists, the advance proofs may have been a respectful means of forewarning Oliver of his intention to publish material acknowledged as controversial. Oliver's correspondence with Ruskin was sustained into the late 1870s, but had ceased by 1886. Yet in September 1886, Oliver wrote to George Allen, Ruskin's publisher, to inform him of 'a grave mistake' in the recently issued Part X of *Proserpina*, in the 'confusion of Betony and Hedge Wound-wort', explaining that he addressed his letter to Allen as 'I never trouble Mr Ruskin now with a letter'.²¹² Oliver clearly took an interest in *Proserpina*, and was sufficiently engaged in Ruskin's endeavour to call attention to factual error. Ruskin's botanical knowledge had previously been called into question in his criticism of Charles Allston Collins's painting *Convent Thoughts*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1851, in which he wrongly identified an aquatic plant as *Alisma Plantago* (water plantain), and in his mis-identification of cornflower as 'corn-cockle' in his own painting on a pillar at Wallington.²¹³

Ruskin's confusion in the identification of botanical species, and the necessity of founding a classification of 'tiresomes', was not mirrored in the thoroughness of his research into the underlying etymology of his proposed plant names. He asserted that, '[t]he classification is always given as tentative; and, at its utmost, elementary: but the nomenclature, as in all probability conclusive'.²¹⁴ Ruskin's connection to

²¹⁰ Ruskin T30, letter to Oliver, 11 June 1875, original italics.

²¹¹ Ibid., n.d.

²¹² Works 25.516 n.

²¹³ Elizabeth Deas, 'The Missing Alisma: Ruskin's Botanical Error', *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 10 (Autumn 2001), pp. 4-13; Raleigh Trevelyan, *A Pre-Raphaelite Circle* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1978), p. 132.

²¹⁴ Works 25.15 (introduction to *Love's Meinie*, where Ruskin refers to 'the recast methods of classification adopted in this book, and in *Proserpina*').

Oxford University allowed him access to expert knowledge, and he frequently consulted Henry Liddell, Dean of Christ Church and co-author of the celebrated *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1843), on matters relating to ancient language and mythology.²¹⁵ This professional expertise added authority to Ruskin's botanical system, and, while working on the first part of *Proserpina* in May 1884, he wrote to Liddell, 'I am entirely grateful for the secure, and otherwise by me wholly unattainable, knowledge'.²¹⁶ The reference to a 'digamma' in Ruskin's enquiry to Liddell – a letter from the early Greek alphabet, obsolete in classical Greek – indicates the scrupulous accuracy that Ruskin sought when naming plants, revealing his intention to penetrate the origin of language to bond semantic truth to floral character in his nomenclature. The idiosyncratic logic of Ruskin's botanical thinking can be charted in his correspondence with Liddell, demonstrated in a letter from November 1878:

Meantime, will you please help me with a word, in a thing I'm busy about, and that is worrying me. My new botanical names of the great Floral Families are all to be Greek derivatives, either in the form *idæ* or *ides*, but I'm not quite sure of myself in manufacturing them. I mean the *idæ* to signify relation either of race, Rhodoidæ, or to some protecting power, Artemidæ, and the *des* (Naiades, Hesperides, Pleiades), groups expressive only of personal character and relation among the flowers themselves.²¹⁷

Ruskin was seeking authority on the linguistic formation of his 'Greek derivatives' to avoid the misuse of classical language he had scorned in modern scientific nomenclature. The list of names presented to Liddell for scholarly approval corresponds with the twelve orders listed by Ruskin in Part V of *Proserpina* in a chapter entitled 'Genealogy', in which the 'Master-names' use 'pure Greek'.²¹⁸ This chapter, issued in January 1879, expounded the logic of Ruskin's nomenclature outlined to Liddell a few weeks earlier, expanding on the thinking which led to classification

²¹⁵ See Works 37.99 n. 'Ruskin would often consult the Dean on matters where wide classical knowledge was needed'.

²¹⁶ Works 37.99.

²¹⁷ Works 25.xl (18 November 1878).

²¹⁸ Works 25.353, original italics.

according to ‘race’, ‘protective power’ and ‘personal character and relation’. Ruskin explained, for example, that the ‘Pleiades’ were so-called ‘[f]rom the habit of the flowers belonging to this order to get into bright local clusters’, emulating the constellation named for the seven sisters of Greek mythology.²¹⁹

Ruskin’s meticulous accuracy in the classical derivation of his nomenclature is balanced against the subjectivity of the names he conceived. His nomenclature was based on mythology, literature, anthropomorphism, morality and euphony, taking account of a plant’s perceived character as well as its outward form. In renaming *Dianthus* – necessary because of ‘bad Greek’ – Ruskin looked to the jagged form of the petals and nominated *Clarissa* as a suitable alternative based on the pleasing onomatopoeia of the word, the ‘issa’ reminiscent of the cutting of a petal with scissors.²²⁰ Other names reflected Ruskin’s personal interests and were given special titles, for example, ‘the wild strawberry, because of her use in heraldry, will bear a name of her own, exceptional, “*Cora coronalis*”’, translated as *Proserpine* of the Crown.²²¹ It was not only ‘bad Greek’ that was eliminated from Ruskin’s nomenclature, he also objected to names based on the reproductive parts of plants which were ‘founded on some unclean or debasing association, so that to interpret them is to defile the reader’s mind’.²²² Ruskin’s projected readership was both young and female, and therefore innocent of the notion of plant or animal reproduction integral to the theories of materialist science. In disregarding this aspect of science, Ruskin limited the usefulness of *Proserpina* as a study of botany, and his avoidance of sexualised language necessitated the renaming of accepted anatomical terminology. In *Proserpina*, ‘ovary’ is renamed ‘treasury’, removing the association with sexual reproduction and instead repurposing the notions of abundance and fertility introduced in the bountiful Treasure Valley of Ruskin’s fairy tale, *The King of the Golden River* (1841). By rejecting the terminology of materialist science, Ruskin devised a botanical system that was both accessible to innocent minds and flourished in the realm of the imagination; Proserpina herself, as Birch has noted, represented

²¹⁹ Works 25.354.

²²⁰ Works 25.355.

²²¹ Works 25.352.

²²² Works 25.201.

the innocence of maidenhood.²²³ In so doing, Ruskin was protecting his own ego, and absolving himself of the need to confront the disquieting topic of sexuality.

The confidence with which Ruskin placed his botanical naming over that of others is displayed in a letter to Oliver, in which Ruskin denounced the work of contemporary science and claimed that,

modern botanical nomenclature is *absolutely* ephemeral. It *cannot* last above ten years or more – it is entirely unscholarly – and it is founded on imperfect knowledge, hastily and competitively fitted with names. It is in many ways disgusting and cannot be translated to girls. In my Oxford schools, I introduce a terminology which is classical: graceful as far as I can make it so, and founded on eternal facts.²²⁴

Considering Oliver was an eminent botanist who, in 1884, was awarded the Royal Society's royal medal for 'Investigations in the Classification of Plants, and for the great services which he has rendered to Taxonomic Botany', Ruskin was brazen in his criticism.²²⁵ Howard Hull has demonstrated Ruskin's awareness of the role of culture in nomenclature, observing, '[a]s Ruskin understood, plant names represent a dynamic process reflecting the intellectual priorities and world-picture of the generations that produce them'.²²⁶ That Ruskin deemed the current system 'ephemeral' while proposing his system to be 'eternal' suggests a disassociation of his perceived enduring truth from the transience of cultural process. His system was not to be reckoned by modern standards and was based on a higher authority; he challenged his readers to let 'Proserpina be judge'.²²⁷ Ruskin's privileging of cultural truth over scientific authority is recognised by Birch in her observation that Ruskin 'characteristically links

²²³ Birch, 'Ruskin and the Science of *Proserpina*', p. 147.

²²⁴ Ruskin T30, letter to Oliver, 19 January 1875, original italics.

²²⁵ Geoffrey Cantor, 'Oliver, Daniel (1830–1916), botanist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, Oxford University Press, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/54095>> [accessed 22 June 2017].

²²⁶ Hull, 'Geographer of the Soul', p. 224.

²²⁷ Works 25.436.

the myths, literature and history of the Greeks, the Bible, and Shakespeare in a web of associations and allusions. This is the authority of *Proserpina*'.²²⁸

Despite this confidence in the authority of his nomenclature, when thanking Liddell for his assistance with Greek etymology, Ruskin hinted at his awareness of the likely public reception of his botany: 'I am very thoroughly grateful for your kindness in looking over these proofs; and more than happy in your indulgence to them. I felt as if they might seem to you only a form of continuous fantasy remaining from my illness'.²²⁹ That Ruskin recognised Liddell's 'indulgence' of his idiosyncratic system, and acknowledged the capacity for his work to be misconstrued as the product of insanity, reveals an awareness of the response to his 'upside-down botany', founded on imaginative rather than scientific truth.²³⁰ Although complex in its gestation, Ruskin's system was founded on a logical structure, which he intended to form the basis of further learning. He explained to his readers: 'I believe that when once the general form of this system in *Proserpina* has been well learned, much other knowledge may be easily attached to it, or sheltered under the eaves of it'.²³¹ This methodology had echoes of Ruskin's drawing lessons. In *The Elements of Drawing* (1857), he urged his students to first learn to draw a white sphere, then build on this artistic competence to achieve greater proficiency.²³² Ruskin intended simplicity – declaring to Oliver, '[m]y great aim is *almost* childish simplicity' – but his logic defied his critics.²³³ Mabey describes *Proserpina* as 'a confused and deranged attempt' at plant taxonomy, while Mahood asserts that 'its confusions are those of a mind that was both alienated and failing' and its contents 'bewilder and disappoint the reader,' and Birch concludes that, '[t]he new scheme of botanical nomenclature eventually came to confuse even its author'.²³⁴ Decades of research, observation and reasoning had produced a science that was ultimately not fully comprehensible even to Ruskin himself, who admitted in

²²⁸ Birch, *Ruskin's Myths*, p. 188.

²²⁹ Works 25.xl-xli, letter to Liddell, [1878].

²³⁰ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 192.

²³¹ Works 25.359.

²³² Works 15.14.

²³³ Ruskin T30, letter to Daniel Oliver, 28 January 1875, original italics.

²³⁴ Mabey, *Weeds*, p. 162; Mahood, *The Poet as Botanist*, p. 148; Birch, 'Ruskin and the Science of *Proserpina*', p. 153.

Proserpina that ‘I get into confusion by not always remembering my own nomenclature’.²³⁵

Kirchhoff asserts that *Proserpina* is an essentially flawed exposition of a botanical system in which Ruskin’s prose lacked the confident didacticism of *Modern Painters* and *Fors Clavigera*.²³⁶ In his divergence from the conventional Linnaean system of botanical classification and dismissal of the study of reproduction in plants, Kirchhoff identifies Ruskin’s ‘inability to sort out the differences between innocence and sexlessness’, which represented a failure to create a convincingly viable alternative to the systems offered by science.²³⁷ The moral and botanical mythology created by Ruskin is deemed insufficiently persuasive by Kirchhoff to ‘not merely resist but to undo’ the separation of science from nature, and Seaton concludes that his system was ‘logically impossible’.²³⁸ Birch sees strength of character, rather than failure, in Ruskin’s radical approach to science writing in *Proserpina*, stating that Ruskin’s ‘book on botany is pre-eminent among his final acts of defiance’.²³⁹ She demonstrates that the importance of Ruskin’s science writing was in his refusal to accept the direction in which modern science was leading, and in his confident presentation of an alternative way to approach the study of nature: ‘He believed that materialism had mortally degraded a discipline which had become little more than the inquisitive rapacity of self-interest. The enduring value of Ruskin’s rival venture into scientific writing lies in its dissent’.²⁴⁰

The editors of the *Library Edition* defended Ruskin’s attitude to science, presenting his approach not as dissent but as the misunderstood engagement of an artist confronting scientific discipline, explaining that *Proserpina* was

not a scientific treatise; it did not pretend nor desire to be so. Ruskin was not in reality so contemptuous of modern science, as his attacks on some of its methods, pretensions, and professors might lead a hasty reader to suppose. He

²³⁵ Works 25.474.

²³⁶ Kirchhoff, ‘A Science against Sciences’, p. 258.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid, p. 256; Seaton, ‘Considering the Lilies’, p. 281.

²³⁹ Birch, ‘Ruskin and the Science of *Proserpina*’, p. 144.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 143.

was not so ignorant or narrow-minded as to suppose that there was no proper place for the science which classifies and analyses, in accord with, or in the effort to discover, origins and essences [...] Ruskin's attitude was simply that this was a kind of science which did not interest him, and which he never pretended to study, but that there was another kind of science which, for purposes of general education, he held to be more important, which appealed to him as a lover of the beautiful in art and nature, and in which he could claim to give some light and leading [...] Proserpina gives us the botany of the poet and the painter.²⁴¹

This defence is echoed a century later by Ingram in his study of the ideas leading to Ruskin's botanical classification, of which he concludes, 'it is precisely because they are the botanical thoughts of Ruskin the *artist*, not the scientist, that they are so interesting'.²⁴² Ruskin's angle on science was both artistic and idiosyncratic and, as Cook and Wedderburn point out above, he was not 'ignorant or narrow-minded' in his approach. Ruskin recognised that 'the separation is every day widening between the man of science and the artist', believing that true understanding came not from the invasive methods of materialist science but from human powers of observation.²⁴³ Mahood suggests a paradox in Ruskin's attitude to science inherent in the struggle between his belief in the mystery of nature and his desire to understand natural processes, arguing that, 'Puritan and Fundamentalist by upbringing, he combines a strong dread of the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge with a passionate curiosity about organic structures that lie beyond the reach of everyday observation'.²⁴⁴ It was with this combination of dread and curiosity that Ruskin approached the natural world, his learning both shaped and limited by his observational methods.

This discussion serves to highlight the complexity of thought that contributed to Ruskin's rejection of materialist science, and how his botanical thinking was connected to many other strands of thought, and ultimately took expression in his garden-making. Ruskin's methodological reliance on observation, together with an

²⁴¹ Works 25.xliv.

²⁴² Ingram, *Ruskin's Botanical Books*, p. 73, original italics.

²⁴³ Works 26.116.

²⁴⁴ Mahood, *The Poet as Botanist*, p. 155.

appreciation of the interconnectedness of natural and cultural systems, reveals him as an ecological thinker, long before the term was fully understood. His curiosity about plants, nourished since childhood, was given expression when Ruskin had the space of his own garden to use as an observatory. The intellectual conundrum of his botanical classification system was worked out and expressed in *Proserpina* from the landscape of Brantwood. As this chapter shows, the presence of botanical friends provided impetus and assistance, but it was the abundance of flora at Brantwood that presented the inspirational stimulus and opportunity for detailed observation that fuelled Ruskin's writing, prompting him to declare enthusiastically to Susanna Beever that, 'I'm scarcely able to look at one flower because of the two on each side, in my garden just now'.²⁴⁵

While writing *Proserpina*, Ruskin admitted to Mary Beever that, 'I meant to do the whole book very differently, but can only now give the fragmentary pieces as they chance to come, or it would never be done at all', suggesting that the structure of the book was not as he had initially conceived.²⁴⁶ Ruskin attributed this divergence to the practical complexities of developing a new system of plant classification, but emotional trauma was also taking its toll. The writing of *Proserpina* was interrupted by bouts of mental illness, before Ruskin abandoned publication in 1886. Working on *Proserpina* and botanical study was considered to be a suitable occupation while recovering from mental illness at Brantwood, not likely to lead to heightened emotion, as Ruskin's biographers explained: 'the "quiet labour" which he felt to be necessary to him was at first chiefly found in studies of flowers'.²⁴⁷ The 'quiet labour' of botany was clearly undone by the inexorable association of flowers and memory, with the garden serving as both respite and torment. Birch asserts that Ruskin was unable to complete the projected chapters of *Proserpina* because of his ongoing suffering over the death of Rose La Touche, her inextricable bond with flowers and the mythology of Proserpina overturning any solace to be found in contemplating nature.²⁴⁸ Ruskin's eschewal of botanical study to evade self-destruction precipitated by his feeling for La Touche must

²⁴⁵ Works 37.245 (2 May 1878).

²⁴⁶ Works 37.287 (8 June [1879]).

²⁴⁷ Works 25.xxviii.

²⁴⁸ Birch, 'Ruskin and the Science of *Proserpina*', pp. 153-54.

also have permeated his enjoyment of the garden. As this chapter shows, La Touche was intimately entwined in Ruskin's thoughts on flowers, and the previous chapter has demonstrated her role in the aesthetic of the woodland at Brantwood, populated by her absent presence. The garden is therefore a place from which to unravel Ruskin's complex relationship with La Touche, scholarly understanding of which is impeded by the absence of almost all their correspondence. It is by offering this new angle from which to scrutinise their relationship that this thesis can reassess an enigmatic, yet crucially significant, aspect of Ruskin's life.

Chapter Three – *Hortus Inclusus*: gardening friends

While Ruskin did not engage with popular horticulture or identify with the emerging ranks of amateur gardeners, many of his friends were interested in gardening, either as practitioners or garden owners. As has been noted, he was familiar with their gardens from regular visits – in some cases extended sojourns – and was given unsolicited horticultural advice and plant material from sympathetic and knowledgeable friends. Ruskin was not acquainted with them *because* they were gardeners; it is asserted here that his gardening friends were an indirect stimulus to Ruskin’s garden-making, and this chapter examines their impact through plant choices, garden features, horticultural advice, and the example of their own gardens. The friends evaluated here have been selected from evidence which indicates an involvement in gardening or an interest in garden plants, or from their status as garden-owners. Apart from some of his Lakeland neighbours, Ruskin’s gardening friends were women: this reflects nineteenth-century societal expectations, but can also be seen as an aspect of what Birch refers to as ‘Ruskin’s “Womanly Mind”’.¹ The empathetic, confidential nature of his female friendships was fertile ground for a mutually understood approach to gardening; it was in the garden, as this thesis demonstrates, that Ruskin’s innermost self was exposed. These relationships are treated here as distinct from the botanical support Ruskin derived from friends, or upon which he subsequently built friendships, analysed in Chapter Two. The practice of gardening and appreciation of gardens is here separated from the study of botany and its theoretical application to art and morality. Although there is an overlap between botanical and gardening friendships – for example Pauline Trevelyan and Susanna Beever – a distinction can be drawn between solicited and unsolicited help. Ruskin asked his friends for botanical assistance in the naming of plants and the elucidation of scientific processes; gardening advice was never consciously sought. This chapter extrapolates from evidence in letters and contemporary accounts the

¹ Dinah Birch, ‘Ruskin’s “Womanly Mind”’, in *Ruskin and Gender*, ed. by Dinah Birch and Francis O’Gorman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 107-20. For an account of the rise of amateur gardening as a suitable occupation for women in the Victorian era, see Sue Bennett, *Five Centuries of Women and Gardening* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2000), pp. 82-107.

tangible and intangible influence of friends on Ruskin's approach to gardening, highlighting a hitherto unrecognised significance of his social circle.

Hortus Inclusus offers a pertinent starting point for the scrutiny of Ruskin's gardening relationships. The book is a collection of his correspondence with Susanna Beever, a Lakeland garden-owner, and has been mined for details relating to plants, garden style, and empathy of approach. A further strand of Ruskin's relationship with his neighbour is encapsulated in the title he chose for the book, meaning 'a garden enclosed', embraced here as a platform from which to explore notions of shelter and place, drawing on the concept of the biblical *hortus* as an earthly paradise. At Brantwood Ruskin found the shelter of a restful domus, both physical and mental. This chapter argues that his response to the landscape shows a biophilic impulse, expressed in his urge to 'lie down' in the land, and embodied in his frequent and specific references to 'nesting' in the landscape.

The subtitle of *Hortus Inclusus* is imbued with further meaning: 'Messages from the wood to the garden sent in happy days to the sister ladies of The Thwaite, Coniston by their thankful friend John Ruskin'. Ruskin referred to Brantwood as 'the wood' and The Thwaite as 'the garden', separating the two landscapes both linguistically and conceptually. The Thwaite, deriving its name from the Norse dialect and defined as 'a piece of ground cleared from forest', was a cultivated space, circumscribed by boundaries of hedge and wall, and fulfilling the biblical sanctity of the *hortus conclusus* in the physical sense as well as the divine.² Ruskin likened The Thwaite to the Garden of Eden in his preface to the book, describing 'a Paradise in which [the Beever sisters] knew the names and sympathised with the spirits of every living creature that God had made to play therein, or to blossom in the sunshine or shade'.³ In contrast, Brantwood, literally meaning 'steep woodland', was contrived by nature and embodied the untamed spirituality of the forest.⁴

In addition to the letters to Beever edited by Albert Fleming in *Hortus Inclusus* (1887), this chapter draws on epistolary evidence in edited collections of the

² 'thwait(e), n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/201596>> [accessed 6 August 2017].

³ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. viii.

⁴ 'Brant is an old Norse word meaning "steep"', Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, p. 25.

correspondence between Ruskin and several of his gardening friends.⁵ In *Letters from A Noblewoman* (1908), Margaret Ferrier Young presents a selection of letters to and from Maria La Touche, including correspondence with Ruskin and Joan Severn. The letters are accompanied by a memoir of La Touche and six of her poems, and the volume includes illustrations, including three photographs of her house and garden at Harristown. The correspondence between Ruskin and Georgina Cowper-Temple, who superintended the gardens at Broadlands and was Ruskin's primary confidante in his relationship with Rose La Touche, is collected and edited by John Lewis Bradley in *The Letters of John Ruskin to Lord and Lady Mount-Temple* (1964), and that of Ruskin and Pauline, Lady Trevelyan, an amateur botanist who gardened at Wallington, in Virginia Surtees' *Reflections of a Friendship* (1979). An edited volume, *My Dearest Dora* (1984) presents Ruskin's letters to Dora Livesey, whom he had known since she was a schoolgirl and who became a Lakeland neighbour, moving to Kelbarrow in Grasmere in 1878 and establishing a garden there. *John Ruskin's Correspondence with Joan Severn: Sense and Nonsense Letters* (2009), edited by Rachel Dickinson, comprises a selection of the extensive extant correspondence held at The Ruskin, accompanied by an introduction illuminating Ruskin's relationship with Severn. Dickinson extrapolates from the epistolary evidence a shared language and baby talk, attesting to a close relationship in which Ruskin's deliberate disempowerment of self in the domestic sphere allowed him to negotiate the societal and professional demands of the public domain.⁶ By relinquishing adult responsibility to Severn, Ruskin was able to pursue his childhood interests at Brantwood, returning mentally and physically to his youthful pursuits of playing with water, observing plants and studying rocks.

The epistolary expression of Beever's garden in *Hortus Inclusus* is complemented by the detailed contemporary description of the layout and planting at The Thwaite given by William Tuckwell in his book *Tongues in Trees and Sermons in Stones* (1891). The book was dedicated to Beever, and the inclusion of her garden as an example of

⁵ Fleming stated in his introduction to the book that Beever gave him 'a parcel containing nearly two thousand of these treasured letters' (p. ix). Many of the letters reproduced in *Hortus Inclusus* are held at The Huntington JR1-873, where there is also correspondence between Beever and Fleming. Further correspondence between Ruskin and Beever is held at The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre, Lancaster University, and in the Collingwood family archive at Cardiff University Archives/Prifysgol Caerdydd.

⁶ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, pp. 19-32.

the ‘Garden Enclosed’ was based on the reputation gleaned by the popular success of *Hortus Inclusus*. Tuckwell’s text is accompanied by two engravings of the garden, one showing the house nestling into the wider mountain landscape, the other a depiction of two stone seats, providing evidence for the evaluation of a similar feature at Brantwood. Tuckwell’s account is drawn on by Vicky Albritton and Fredrik Albritton Jonsson in *Green Victorians: The Simple Life in John Ruskin’s Lake District* (2016), in which they assess several of the peripheral characters in Ruskin’s circle who were influenced by his principles and beliefs, including Beever and Fleming. Their research on the relationship between Ruskin and Beever offers insight into Ruskin’s social thinking, with Beever identified as an exemplar of self-sufficiency, sharing Ruskin’s reverence for nature and promotion of traditional craft skills. Beever’s simple, regional and non-intrusive way of living – termed ‘sufficiency’ by Albritton – was captured in Ruskin’s admission to her that, ‘you really represent the entire Ruskin school of the Lake Country’.⁷ Beever’s affinity with nature extended to an awareness of ecology and the interdependence of natural processes, with nature providing a model for her own sufficiency, expressed in a letter to Ruskin in which she contrasted the economy of nature with that of industrial capitalism:

The horse-chestnuts, have thrown away the winter coverings of their buds, and given them to that dear economical mother earth, who makes such good use of everything, and works up old materials again in a wonderful way, and is delightfully unlike most economists, – the very soul of generous liberality.⁸

Albritton and Albritton Jonsson contend that Beever was a ‘crucial figure in Ruskin’s final decades’, providing ‘a concrete model for the ideal of the sufficient life’.⁹ This chapter presents Beever as an influential figure in Ruskin’s gardening, and expands Albritton’s notion of the ‘sufficient muse’ to view Beever as an exemplar of Ruskin’s

⁷ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 84 (24 September n.d.).

⁸ Ibid., p. 160 (10 April n.d.).

⁹ Vicky Albritton and Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, *Green Victorians: The Simple Life in John Ruskin’s Lake District* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 72.

social thinking, *confirming* the practical veracity of the principles underpinning the Guild of St George rather than *inspiring* them.

John Hayman has researched the publication history of *Hortus Inclusus* with reference to the correspondence held at The Huntington in California, revealing the inaccuracies of Fleming's editing and detailing further material suppressed by the publishers relating to Ruskin's relationship with Rose La Touche. Hayman concludes that Fleming amalgamated letters from different periods, was careless in his transcription, and frequently omitted dates. The published correspondence is therefore unreliable, although when compared with letters reproduced in the *Library Edition*, and those surviving in holograph at The Ruskin, a more accurate survey can be made. Hayman's paper recognises the importance to Ruskin of his relationship with Beever in terms of their sympathetic understanding and the emotional support provided by their frequent contact, but does not relate the significance of the friendship to Ruskin's treatment of the landscape at Brantwood. Beever's interest in the natural world is underplayed, with Hayman considering Ruskin to have 'valued her more as a naturalist with a whimsical touch than as an incisive critic', overlooking Beever's significant role as a botanist, gardener and ornithologist, and the influence she had on Ruskin's garden-making.¹⁰

There is evidence that Ruskin did afford value to Beever's wisdom: he kept her book on Shakespeare by his bed, and invited her to choose a selection of passages from *Modern Painters*, published as *Frondes Agrestes* (1875).¹¹ Ruskin stated in the preface to this work that, 'I have printed her selections in absolute submission to her judgement', recognising that Beever would present in the passages from his early writing, 'what may be right and true of those youthful thoughts', and demonstrating his trust in her sympathetic discernment.¹² Her selections focus on natural history, with chapters entitled 'The Sky', 'Streams and Sea', 'Mountains', 'Stones', and 'Plants and Flowers', illuminating her love of nature and, as Albritton asserts, 'the link

¹⁰ John Hayman, 'John Ruskin's *Hortus Inclusus*: The Manuscript Sources and Publication History', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 52, 3 (Summer 1989), p. 368.

¹¹ Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 100 (22 February 1878): Beever's *Remarkable Passages in Shakespeare* (1870) is recorded as being among the treasured possessions on Ruskin's dressing table at the time of his mental breakdown.

¹² *Frondes Agrestes*, p. vi; Works 37.108 (letter to Beever, 12 June 1874).

between sufficiency and natural history' which represented Beever's interest in 'the ethics of consumption'.¹³ An aspect of value to Ruskin in his friendship with Beever was her role as a conduit to quotidian life, living a simple yet purposeful existence in tune with nature and tradition. Her opinion was useful to him as it offered the opportunity to reach out beyond his own empiricism. Beever expressed sympathy with Ruskin's approach to nature, but did not always have empathy with his outlook. When the 'plague wind' began to trouble Ruskin in the 1880s, affecting his mental health and his behaviour towards friends, Beever expostulated in a letter to Fleming that, 'I am quite sick of Brantwood weather', suggesting her support was bounded by her own sensibilities, and was not the unqualified devotion found in other confidantes, such as Cowper-Temple.¹⁴

Ruskin had entreated Beever in 1874 'to write me just what comes into your head, and ever to believe me your loving J. R.'.¹⁵ However, the following year he wrote with contradictory selfishness to Cowper-Temple that,

I've a dear *old* lady, some three or four times as old as you (the one that chose my Modern Painters rubbish) – who simply would write from morning to night if I would let her more indeed (by ever so much) about me than herself, but still, always because *she* wants to write, not because I need her letters [...] She sometimes is – well it's the cruellest thing I ever said – but she sometimes is – tiresome – I've to read a long letter after my eyes are tired.¹⁶

Although perhaps written to reassure Cowper-Temple of his allegiance, this evidence questions Ruskin's fidelity to Beever. The callousness of this remark made in the early years of their relationship can be qualified by Ruskin's later claim that Beever was 'one of the few true loves left'.¹⁷ The letters published in *Hortus Inclusus* must therefore be read as a selective and edited narrative of Ruskin's relationship with Beever, expressing their shared wonder of nature but omitting the candour of their disputes.

¹³ Albritton and Albritton Jonsson, *Green Victorians*, p. 83.

¹⁴ Albritton, 'Ruskin's Sufficient Muse', p. 80 (n.d. c. 1887).

¹⁵ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 4 (14 April 1874).

¹⁶ Ruskin MS B20, copy-letter book, 30 May 1875, original italics.

¹⁷ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, pp. 92-93 (13 September 1882).

Much of the playful nature of the correspondence evident when viewed in holograph is also missing from the published letters, such as Ruskin's variously signing his letters 'your lovingest Cat', 'Puss', 'Professor Grimalkin' and 'Fido', with reference to Beever's pets.¹⁸ As a published collection, the letters sent from Ruskin to Beever offer an unparalleled insight into his mature approach to nature, and his thinking on flowers and landscape, supplying an epistolary companion to his garden-making at Brantwood.

Lakeland gardens

Ruskin's awareness of the garden tradition of the Lake Country is evident in his record of visiting gardens such as Muncaster and Rydal Mount.¹⁹ Ruskin did not typically record descriptions of garden layout and planting: his attention focussed on the outward view of the surrounding landscape rather than the inward view of the designed garden space. However, in the immediate neighbourhood of Brantwood, the gardens of friends were afforded more attention and commentary. Their planting and design offered exemplars of stylistic execution and horticultural possibility in a Lakeland setting, and Ruskin's familiarity with these gardens may have imparted an unconscious bias in his own garden-making.

The garden at Lanehead, a mile to the north of Brantwood on the lakeshore and home of W. G. Collingwood, was of import to Brantwood in the last decade of Ruskin's life, when his garden-making was at an end. Dearden states that rhododendrons were brought from Lanehead to Brantwood in the 1890s, probably at the instigation of Joan Severn.²⁰ Although Collingwood's association with Brantwood had begun in 1875 as a student and was formalised when he was appointed 'geological surveyor and draughtsman' in 1881, he did not permanently settle in the area until his marriage in 1883, after which he rented Gill Head in Windermere before moving to Lanehead in 1891.²¹ Of more consequence to Ruskin's garden-making was the garden of Dora Lees, née Livesey, a former pupil of Winnington Hall befriended by Ruskin in 1863, who lived and gardened at Kelbarrow in Grasmere from 1878 to 1888. In July 1879, Ruskin

¹⁸ Hayman, 'John Ruskin's *Hortus Inclusus*', p. 366.

¹⁹ Works 35.xxxiii and 36.70.

²⁰ Dearden, *Brantwood*, p. 24.

²¹ Jeremy Collingwood, *A Lakeland Saga: The Story of the Collingwood and Altounyan Family in Coniston and Aleppo* (Ammanford: Sigma Leisure, 2012), p. 24.

described the garden to Fanny Colenso, another pupil from Ruskin's Winnington cohort, with typical hyperbole:

I have just come in from a morning walk in Dora's garden, which is without exception and without comparison, the loveliest I have ever seen in my life – and I was sixty last February; and have seen many gardens in many countries. But luxuriant roses, mixed with heather and grass like the meads of Avon – with rocks as grey as the top of Scafell, and with all the divine landscape through every glade and at every turn – I never saw the like of it yet.²²

The elements of the garden singled out for praise by Ruskin correspond to the landscape at Brantwood and reinforce the associative aspect of Ruskin's landscape appreciation. Roses were significant as a reminder of Rose La Touche, and the heather and grass which evoked memories of the Avon meads were redolent of the moorland of Brantwood, 'bright with heather and bracken'.²³ The rocks were allied to the summit of the nearby mountain of Scafell, offering a tangible link to the vista of 'divine landscape' captured in the prospect from the garden 'at every turn'. Ruskin admired the natural elements of the garden – the plantings and the rocks – and looked beyond the designed landscape to the mountain setting. It was the association of the garden with the wider landscape that secured Ruskin's praise.

Ruskin's laudatory account of the garden and setting of Kelbarrow echoed his description of the garden at Monk Coniston, the estate of James Garth Marshall situated at the head of Coniston Water and frequently crossed by Ruskin when walking the landscape.²⁴ Marshall had improved the grounds by introducing exotic conifers to his woodland and damming a stream above the house to create a picturesque series of tarns. Ruskin recorded in his diary in February 1873: 'divinest walk through sunny peaceful glades of Mr Marshall's, to the rocks above his tarn: quite, I am certain, one of the finest views in Europe (admitting heather and rock to be lovely) – having those

²² Olive Wilson, ed., *My Dearest Dora: Letters to Dora Livesey, Her Family and Friends 1860-1900 from John Ruskin* (Windermere: privately published, 1984), p. 104.

²³ Works 25.xxxvii.

²⁴ James Garth Marshall died in 1873 when the property passed to his wife Victoria until her death in 1875 when Victor Marshall inherited the estate.

in perfection, and lake, sea, and vale besides'.²⁵ An equivalence can be traced in Ruskin's parallel admiration of the 'glades', 'rocks' and 'heather' in both gardens, together with the 'divine' and 'divinest' of his descriptive lexicon. In both gardens, Ruskin's praise of the wider landscape and outward views was coupled with a disregard for the gardened space, reflecting his disinterest in horticulture and garden design.

Other friends and acquaintances whom Ruskin visited in the neighbourhood of the Lake Country included Fleming at Neaum Crag in Loughrigg and Julia Firth at Seathwaite Rayne in Ambleside. Fleming, a disciple of Ruskin who founded the Langdale Linen Industry with Marian Twelves, as well as editing *Hortus Inclusus*, had an eighteen-acre woodland garden with panoramic views of Langdale. Firth was an early Companion of the Guild of St George whom Ruskin had engaged to translate Jeremias Gotthelf's *Ulric, the Farm Servant* (1841), a task with which Ruskin was closely involved between 1885 and 1888.²⁶ The garden at Seathwaite Rayne was set above a wooded gill, and it was through Firth that Ruskin may have visited the garden at nearby Eller How, home to plantsman and botanist Henry Boyle.²⁷ Ruskin does not record his impressions of these gardens in his diary and no direct influence can be supposed. However, by visiting gardens in the neighbourhood of Brantwood, Ruskin was building awareness of local garden taste, as well as encountering plants that thrived in the Lakeland climate.

The Thwaite

Close to Brantwood, and neighbouring the Monk Coniston estate, was The Thwaite, at the time of Ruskin's arrival home to the three Beever sisters, Susanna (d. 1893), Mary (d. 1883) and Margaret (d. 1874). Ruskin's encounter, in 1873, with Susanna Beever was serendipitous, coming as it did when both his garden and the Guild of St George were being established. The former was influenced by Beever's knowledge of plants and horticulture, her vernacular style of gardening offering a pervading stimulus, while

²⁵ Evans and Whitehouse, *Dairies*, p. 739 (23 February 1873).

²⁶ Works 32.343 and 32.xxxiv. Ruskin wrote to Firth of the nuances of the translation that, 'We'll have a talk over it', suggesting they visited one another to discuss the matter in person.

²⁷ See Clara Boyle, *A Servant of the Empire* (London: Methuen, 1938), p. 20: 'Henry had much in common with Ruskin; they were real friends and often met for long chats at Mrs Firth's at Seathwaite'.

the latter advocated a way of life in tune with Beever's simple existence. Just as Ruskin's moorland garden was instigated as confirmation that his land management proposals for the Guild would be a practical success (discussed in Chapter Four), Beever's life confirmed the satisfaction and personal reward that could be gained by rejecting capitalism, and returning to the simple life based on rural tradition and moral wholesomeness promoted by the Guild. Beever was named an early Companion of the Guild, reflecting her support for Ruskin's endeavour. This chapter establishes Beever as not merely a supporter, but a living exemplar of Ruskin's ideals, evidence of the Guild's potential to have a meaningful and lasting impact on society.

Before turning to Beever's significance on Ruskin's social thinking, her influence on his gardening is assessed by examining her garden ethos and horticultural prowess. Although, as will be shown, Ruskin was adamant that he did not accept advice about his gardening practice, it is nevertheless clear that Beever was influential in the design and planting at Brantwood through the example of her own garden, her knowledge of Lakeland plants, and her familiarity with horticultural tradition. Positioned at the head of Coniston Water, The Thwaite commanded views southwards across the lake to Brantwood and west towards the summit of the Old Man of Coniston, and was sheltered to the north by the precipitous profile of Yewdale Crag. As with other gardens, Ruskin did not describe the layout or planting of The Thwaite, although flowers growing there were often the subject of his correspondence with Beever. He recorded his appreciation of the garden, describing his physical experience of the landscape to Beever: 'I wandered literally 'up and down' your mountain garden – (how beautifully the native rocks slope to its paths in the sweet evening light, Susiesque light!) – with great happiness and admiration, as I went home'.²⁸ Ruskin was a frequent visitor to The Thwaite, rowing across the lake from Brantwood and ascending through orchard and terraces to reach the house. The necessity of passing through the garden on foot afforded a familiarity with the planting in all seasons; Ruskin would have known Beever's garden as intimately as his own. The planting at The Thwaite was described in detail by William Tuckwell, educational reformer and promoter of allotments. He declared Beever's garden was, 'in conception and arrangement unlike

²⁸ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 86 (24 September 1884). The dating of this letter may be among the mistakes made by the editor Albert Fleming, discussed above.

any garden outside the realm of dreams', his fulsome praise suggesting The Thwaite was superior to the gardens of other amateur horticulturalists.²⁹

Tuckwell described a steeply terraced slope with a central path flanked with flowers, an orchard, a kitchen garden bordered by flower beds, an Alpine garden and 'a wild garden left to judicious overgrowth of ferns and wood-plants'.³⁰ Ordnance Survey mapping confirms aspects of the layout described by Tuckwell, showing the garden extending to the east and south-east of the house.³¹ Beever's 'periwinkle bank diversified with ivy-clad tree-stumps' and the 'outcrop of native stone planted here and there with rock-plants' are redolent of the wild gardening advocated by William Robinson in his book *The Wild Garden* (1870).³² Beever's garden was a blend of formal terracing, hedges and pathways softened by the informal planting of native species and 'old-fashioned' varieties. The species listed by Tuckwell include common plants such as 'Bitter-vetch, Barren-wort, Trillium, [and] endless varieties of Saxifrage', growing alongside cottage garden varieties including 'mignonette, sweet peas, marigold, Virginia stocks, double daisies, damask roses, [and] pretty "Bride" gladiolus', the prevalence of wild flowers and native species in tune with Ruskin's floral preferences.³³ Some of the plants named by Tuckwell were favourites of Ruskin and described as such in *Proserpina*, including gentians, anemone and narcissus. The 'Erba Madonna' (ivy-leaved toadflax), ascribed by Ruskin as 'my own Madonna herb' – and significant in his private language of flowers – featured among the 'wood-plants' recorded by Tuckwell growing in the 'wild garden'.³⁴ Despite the seemingly unexceptional nature of the planting, Tuckwell stated that 'nothing is "common" at the Thwaite', suggesting that Beever was an accomplished plantswoman.³⁵ She requested specific varieties of plants and seeds from gardening friends and, while Albritton asserts that she was not keen to engage with commercial nurseries to buy plants, the orders placed by Beever to a nursery on the French Riviera indicate her awareness of

²⁹ William Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees and Sermons in Stones* (London and Orpington: George Allen, 1891), p. 109.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 109-110.

³¹ OS 25-inch series, Lancashire IV.4 (Coniston), surveyed 1888, published 1890.

³² Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees*, p. 109.

³³ Ibid., pp. 109-10.

³⁴ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 370 (3 May 1876); Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees*, p. 110.

³⁵ Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees*, p. 110.

the availability of specific plants and her willingness to go to some lengths to obtain the varieties she wanted.³⁶ The profusion of flowers described by Tuckwell is corroborated in two watercolours painted in 1882 and 1891 by Collingwood (Figures 13 and 14), who described the planting as incorporating ‘rarities domesticated among old cottage-favourites’.³⁷ Beever’s garden presented Ruskin with a showcase of local flora, growing harmoniously alongside cultivated varieties in an informal, yet ornamental, composition.



Figure 13: W. G. Collingwood, *Miss Beever's Garden at The Thwaite*, watercolour on paper, 1882. Reproduced by kind permission of The Ruskin Museum, Coniston, CONRM.2018.41.

The layout and planting of the garden at The Thwaite appears to have been conceived by Beever, the garden described as ‘her garden’ by Tuckwell.³⁸ By the time he was writing, Beever’s siblings had died and she was sole mistress of The Thwaite, which may account for the attribution, and it is possible that Beever was continuing the work of others. The family employed a gardener, Harry Atkinson, whom Beever described as ‘invaluable’.³⁹ Her own practical gardening was bounded by the limits of gentility, and Albritton claims she was brought up to believe it unladylike to stoop, so

³⁶ Beever made two orders to a nursery in Hyères, mentioned in a letter to Tuckwell dated 21 February 1891, Albritton, ‘Ruskin’s Sufficient Muse’, p. 75 n. 84.

³⁷ W. G. Collingwood, ‘Memoir of the Author’ in John Beever, *Practical Fly Fishing founded on nature* (London: Methuen and Co., 1893), p. xiii.

³⁸ Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees*, p. 112.

³⁹ Albritton, ‘Ruskin’s Sufficient Muse’, p. 72. Quoted from a letter from Susanna Beever to William Tuckwell, 14 March 1892.



Figure 14: W. G. Collingwood, *Miss Beever's Garden at The Thwaite with stone seats and pump*, watercolour on paper, 1891. Reproduced by kind permission of The Ruskin Museum, Coniston, CONRM.2018.42.

would not bend down to weed.⁴⁰ Her practical gardening was also limited by ill-health: Tuckwell described her in 1891 as being ‘wheeled round her garden’, and the deterioration of her vision, necessitating the avoidance of bright sunlight, was versed into a poem by Collingwood, published in 1885.⁴¹ As an experienced plantswoman with an established garden, Beever had capacity to give horticultural advice to Ruskin, developed through practical experience, observation, reading, and from the example of her gardener. However, her well-meaning attempts to recommend plants to Ruskin resulted in chastisement, recounted with contrition by Beever:

I was so absurd as to propose some old fashioned plants to you – *really* in the simplicity of my heart – and only thinking how nice they would be, (for I am so fond of them myself) – but when you said, (rather awfully –) “If you will manage my garden” I was in the Valley of humiliation in a moment – and felt most wretchedly small! – and felt too that I had *seemed* officious! – There now you have it all! – but I was very unhappy – and vexed with myself.⁴²

⁴⁰ Albritton and Albritton Jonsson, *Green Victorians*, p. 79.

⁴¹ Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees*, p. 111; W. G. Collingwood, *A Book of Verses* (Kent: George Allen, 1885), p. iv, extract from ‘To Miss Susanna Beever’: ‘Ah! but what can May devise / To delight your weary eyes? / Wearying of your hermitage, / As a song-bird of its cage; / Shut from May and all her shows, / With your window curtained close, / Leaving but a hand-breadth free / For the laurel’s greenery, / For the azure hills and lake / To peep in on you, and break / That sad gloom where you must shun / The violence of the unwelcomed sun’. This may be the origin of Beever’s sobriquet, ‘The Owl of The Thwaite’.

⁴² Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 399 (n.d. c. 1875), original italics.

Ruskin's 'awful' response to Beever's suggestion underlined his unwillingness openly to accept unsolicited advice or interference in his garden-making, yet he may have yielded privately to the horticultural expertise of his friends, as demonstrated in this chapter.

Beever was in tune with Ruskin's desire to foster the natural landscape, and her suggestions were sensible of the aesthetic he was creating at Brantwood. In 1874, she advised on a horticultural methodology to encourage wild plants to self-seed, acknowledging Ruskin's desire to garden in harmony with nature, and cognisant of the fact that imitating nature by human intervention often resulted in a degree of artificiality which she could help him avoid. While he was in Italy in 1874, Beever wrote to Ruskin:

Do you ever send home orders about your Brantwood? I have been wishing so much that your gardener might be told to mix quantities of old mortar and soil together, and to fill many crevices in your new walls with it; then the breezes will bring fern seeds and plant them, or rather sow them in such fashion as no human being can do. When time and the showers brought by the west wind have mellowed it a little, the tiny beginnings of mosses will be there. The sooner this can be done the better.⁴³

Beever's advice echoed Ruskin's own words from nearly four decades earlier, in his description of a Westmoreland cottage in *The Poetry of Architecture* (1837): 'there is no foppery about it; not the slightest effort at any kind of ornament, but what nature chooses to bestow; it wears all its decorations wildly, covering its nakedness, not with what the peasant may plant, but with what the winds may bring'.⁴⁴ This equivalence of thought indicates a shared approach to garden planting, and a mutual accord with nature over artifice. Beever's empirical knowledge of the Lakeland environment informed her advice to encourage 'the breezes' and 'the west wind' to sow, in Ruskin's words, 'what the winds may bring', and evoked a shared appreciation for Shelley in her allusion to his 'Ode to the West Wind' (1819). In Ruskin's absence from Brantwood,

⁴³ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 163-64 (1 May [1874]).

⁴⁴ Works 1.48.

Beever recognised the incongruity of the ‘new walls’ constructed around the garden. Her advice was a practical suggestion to stimulate the natural aesthetic she shared with Ruskin, but one that would require patience to allow nature to unfold, hence her recommended urgency. Beever followed this bold advice with the contrite statement: ‘Do not think Susie presumptuous’, suggesting that the desire to help Ruskin achieve his vision for the garden outweighed her fear of his disapproval at her interference.⁴⁵

Beever’s horticultural usefulness to Ruskin was recognised in the provision of plants for the garden at Brantwood. Apparently at Ruskin’s request, Beever wrote in 1875 that,

I have been in the garden, and got up some little seedlings of ‘*Geranium lucidum*’ – There will be plenty more in a little while but at present the remaining ones are too much infants to be removed – *one* of these tiny plants will be enough for *one* crevice in the wall. The dear little *Sedum* (you *must* think it a darling) will like a situation like that in which the ‘*Erba*’ is.⁴⁶

The supply of plants from The Thwaite to Brantwood listed by Beever are all wall-loving species, and suggest that she and Ruskin had continued their conversation regarding the softening of the new walls with local plants, concluding that the natural sowings of the ‘west wind’ should be supplemented with plantings sourced from Beever’s garden.⁴⁷ In 1879, Beever was again credited with providing plants for Brantwood, this time supplying cranberries for the moor. Ruskin ‘expressed thanksgiving to Susie and to the kind sender of the luxuriant plants’, suggesting Beever had sourced the plants using her local knowledge and they had been gathered at her request by someone else, referred to by Ruskin as ‘the finder of the little dainty things’.⁴⁸ That the cranberries were subsequently associated with Beever in Ruskin’s memory is evident in his appreciative remark: ‘I have never had [a] gift from you, dear

⁴⁵ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 164 (1 May [1874]).

⁴⁶ Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 398 (n.d. [1875]), original italics.

⁴⁷ *Geranium lucidum* (Shining Cranesbill), *Sedum* and *Cymbalaria muralis* (Ivy-Leaved Toadflax or ‘*Erba della Madonna*’) are all species found growing on walls in the Lake District.

⁴⁸ Works 37.280 (letter to Beever, 5 May 1879).

Susie, more truly interesting and gladdening to me, and many a day I shall climb the moor to see the fate of the plants and look across to the Thwaite'.⁴⁹

The passage of plants between friends was noted by Tuckwell when he wrote of 'the lavender and rosemary which always found their way from the Thwaite to Brantwood'.⁵⁰ He may have been erroneously referring to a letter from 8 June 1882, published in *Hortus Inclusus*, in which Ruskin wrote to Beever: 'You always have things before other people; will you please send me some rosemary and lavender as soon as any are out?'.⁵¹ This letter was sent from Herne Hill while Ruskin was working on *Proserpina*, and the plants were to be sent to London, rather than Brantwood, to facilitate his research. Nevertheless, Albritton states that 'plants and seeds were exchanged between Ruskin, William Tuckwell, Beever and others' and, as will be shown later in this chapter, letters from Maria La Touche evidence the sharing of plants within a wider network of gardening friends.⁵²

At a time when many gardeners were experimenting with exotic introductions and filling their gardens with hybridised bedding plants, the garden at The Thwaite displayed an affinity with local floral tradition and planting in keeping with the natural environs and prevailing climate. As noted in Chapter Two, Beever contributed to J. G. Baker's *Flora of the English Lake District* (1885), providing the author with details of plants found and identified by her in the environs of Coniston. An interest in the recording and conservation of Lakeland flora is further evidenced in Beever's desire to create a garden of indigenous plants at The Thwaite: 'a scheme long entertained, the collection within a single enclosure of the more characteristic or rare Lake plants'.⁵³ The parochialism of this vision chimed with Ruskin's interest in recording plants in relation to environment, as evidenced in his *Flora of Chamouni*, and reveals an ecological awareness of the relationship between plants, environment and culture. While Beever promoted the concept of a living museum of Lakeland species planted deliberately 'within a single enclosure', Ruskin encouraged plants that were already growing in his landscape to flourish in their chosen place, and celebrated the discovery

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees*, p. 109-10.

⁵¹ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 82 (8 June [1882]). Also reproduced and dated in *Works* 37.398.

⁵² Albritton, 'Ruskin's Sufficient Muse', p. 75.

⁵³ Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees*, p. 112.

of favourite species in his woods and moor. Conservation of rare species may have been an aspect of Beever's endeavour, but she was also motivated by an appreciation of what Albritton describes as the 'effortless beauty in common plants'.⁵⁴ Ruskin expanded on this notion in the final sentences of *Proserpina*, in which he reflected on the contrast between wild plants, growing for their own sake, and cultivated plants which existed to be picked and admired:

Now, this I call a rightly wild flower, entirely resenting being gathered,—dying virtually the moment you take it from its rock,—beautiful exceedingly, for the rock's sake and its own, not ours; nor for any beast's, nor worm's, nor midge's, nor aphid's [...] Practically as yet never seen by human eyes[.]⁵⁵

Ruskin described a vital growing plant, put on earth not for the edification of humankind, as natural theology decreed, but existing independently of conscious purpose, its beauty present whether or not it encountered 'human eyes'. Written in August 1886, this passage represents the mature thinking of Ruskin in the context of his own relationship with nature, bypassing the troubling science of natural selection and the complex web of ecology, and settling on the simple pantheistic nobility of beauty in the landscape. Ruskin's floral consensus is the culmination of the attitude to nature expressed in the correspondence of *Hortus Inclusus*. Viewed as such, it is therefore possible that Beever played a role in shaping, or defining, Ruskin's thinking on his relationship with nature and divinity.

From The Thwaite, Beever offered a new perspective on Ruskin's garden. She was able to see Brantwood from her window, observing the light and shade in differing climactic conditions with the physical detachment of distance. On an April day, Beever wrote to Ruskin: 'Brantwood looked so very nice this morning decorated by the coming into leaf of the larches. I wish you could have seen them in the distance as I did: the early sunshine had glanced upon them lighting up one side, and leaving the other in softest shade'.⁵⁶ Beever's affinity with Ruskin's garden is evident in her imaginative

⁵⁴ Albritton and Albritton Jonsson, *Green Victorians*, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Works 25.534-35.

⁵⁶ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 159 (10 April n.d.).

projections of the natural activity at Brantwood as she looked towards it, writing that, 'I can see your violet field from this window. How sweetly the little limpid stream would *tinkle* to-day; and how the primroses are sitting listening to it and the little birds sipping it!'.⁵⁷ Likewise, Ruskin could have seen The Thwaite from his study window as he worked, and from the turret adjoining his bedroom, offering a physical link to their shared ideals.

Aside from affinity with nature and planting wisdom, a tangible relation between the gardens of The Thwaite and Brantwood can be found in physical elements of landscaping. The pond that Ruskin created by damming a stream at the southern edge of his woodland shares features of shape and purpose with the pond at The Thwaite, suggesting Ruskin may have drawn inspiration from it or used it as a model to facilitate his own intent. Constructed by Beever's brother John, the pond is to the north of the house, at the highest point of The Thwaite garden and set apart from the gardens to the east of the house described by Tuckwell. It was designed for the observation of fish: a practical contribution to John Beever's amateur pursuit of fly-fishing. In his 'Memoir of the Author' which prefaced the posthumous 1893 edition of John Beever's *Practical Fly-Fishing Founded on Nature*, Collingwood recounted:

Behind the Thwaite House Mr Beever made a big pond by damming a little rivulet which flows down from the Guards Wood; and he stocked his pond with fish of various kinds. Once a year he caught each member of his water-colony, and examined it to see how it was grown.⁵⁸

Around the time Ruskin's garden-making commenced, he was considering the subject of his lectures for the 1872 spring term at Oxford. The editors of the *Library Edition* reveal a connection between Ruskin's professorship and his gardening in their account of his intentions:

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 157 (14 April 1874), original italics.

⁵⁸ John Beever, *Practical Fly Fishing Founded on Nature* (London: Methuen and Co., 1893), p xvii; originally published in 1849 under the pseudonym 'Arundo' (Latin for 'fishing rod').

He had at first proposed for his next lectures three more on Landscape and then three on Fishes. He had been working on the classification of fishes and their artistic ‘points’ somewhat fully, as his note-books show, and the course on fishes was to have been a particularly good one. [...] When it came to the point, however, the subject of fishes was put aside[.]⁵⁹

Ruskin did not fulfil his intention to lecture on fish in 1872, but the pond at Brantwood may have been part of his research, facilitating the observation, classification and measurement of fish stocks, following the example set by John Beever at The Thwaite. Although the lectures on fish were ‘put aside’, Ruskin’s work on ichthyology can be seen as part of the revival of his studies in natural history that marked his years at Brantwood, during which he published books on botany, ornithology, geology and meteorology.

It is possible that the pond at Brantwood was a natural, or existing, feature in the landscape prior to Ruskin’s interventions. His diary of July 1873 recorded, ‘Worked at fishpond stream’, and a few days later he was ‘cutting way through overgrown wood below fishpond’, suggesting that the pond was an existing feature to be navigated within a neglected landscape.⁶⁰ Ruskin’s repeated use of ‘fishpond’ rather than ‘pond’ implies that the pond may have been created by a previous owner for the purpose of stocking fish, or that Ruskin had identified his own intention to use the pond for this purpose. In August 1873, he recorded ‘chopping wood with Arthur Thomas, in garden of wood, by fishpond’ and then ‘cutting fishpond round in wood’.⁶¹ Ruskin was actively shaping the landscape around the pond, as well as the pond itself, as part of his initial phase of work in the garden. The pond surviving in the woodland is described by Ingram as ‘an almost circular mirror’, suggesting its aesthetic quality was derived from the reflection of trees, flowers and sky.⁶² In *Modern Painters I*, Ruskin had observed that ‘the surface of water is not a mockery, but a new view of what is above it’, perceiving that the reflection of trees close to the surface mirrored the underside of

⁵⁹ Works 22.xxv-xxvi.

⁶⁰ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 749 (8 and 11 July 1873).

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 752 (3 and 6 August 1873).

⁶² Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, p. 59.

the leaf, while the onlooker saw the upper surface.⁶³ The divergence between the view and its reflection in the surface of the pond would have been apparent in the mirroring of flowers and leaves. Bluebells grow around the pond in spring, and Ruskin enlivened the area with narcissus in 1874, reasoning to Beever that the ‘fishpond stream is very doleful, and wants to dance with daffodils if they would come and teach it’.⁶⁴ The pond also mirrored the sky, bringing the variance of colour and cloud from the upper canopy to the surface of the woodland floor, and supplementing the stillness of the wood with a shifting celestial image.

Contemplation of water in the woodland was further promoted by a stone seat facing a stream that cascaded down the slope to the north of the fishpond stream. With its back to the panorama of lake and mountains, the positioning of this seat facilitated the inward consideration of water through sight and sound; Ruskin recorded ‘sitting above on my stone-seat by stream’ in his diary in September 1872.⁶⁵ Much of Ruskin’s labouring in the garden involved clearing stones from his streams, and Collingwood stated that, ‘[h]e used sometimes humorously to complain of the trouble it cost him to keep the beck clear of stones, and he could deduce you many a lesson in geology on the way its rivulet filled, rather than deepened, its bed’.⁶⁶ Together with a ‘fact of importance’ recorded in Ruskin’s diary in 1844 when he observed a ‘kind of thunder’ occasioned by the passage of stones down the torrent of an Alpine stream, it is clear that the movement of stones through flowing water was a geological process of sustained interest to Ruskin, deduced by listening as well as seeing.⁶⁷ His study of geology was concerned with the living landscape, an approach apparent in his lecture on ‘Yewdale and its Streamlets’, presented to the Kendal Literary and Scientific Institution on 1 October 1877, and subsequently published as Chapter XII of the first volume of *Deucalion*.⁶⁸ Ruskin protested that scientists only concerned themselves with studying the past formation of mountains and streams, rather than observing the movement and geological constitution of streams in the present. This standpoint

⁶³ Works 3.542.

⁶⁴ Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, p. 59; Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 21 (17 July [1874]).

⁶⁵ Evans and Whitehouse, *Dairies*, p. 732 (21 Sept 1872).

⁶⁶ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 36; for example, see Evans and Whitehouse, *Dairies*, p. 712: ‘Work in garden clearing spring’ (16 September 1872), ‘Worked in bed of my little stream’ (19 September 1872).

⁶⁷ Evans and Whitehouse, *Dairies*, p. 292 (25 June 1844).

⁶⁸ Works 26.243-66.

reflected his belief that science should be based on lived experience, and hints at his discomfiture at the evidence from the fossil record which was probing the foundations of religious certainty in the literal truths of the Bible. By basing his geological study on the observation of streams and on mineral, rather than fossil specimens, Ruskin was able to occupy an intellectual territory not troubled by materialist science.

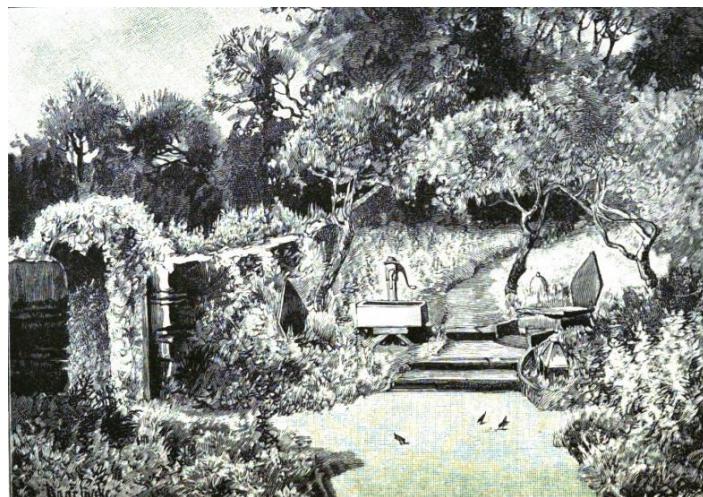


Figure 15: *The Garden of the Thwaite*, engraving, in William Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees and Sermons in Stones* (London and Orpington: George Allen, 1891), p. 110f.

The stone seat upon which Ruskin may have reflected on his living study of geology bears a striking resemblance to a pair of seats in the garden at The Thwaite. Ingram and Dearden each recount the apocryphal tale that, following Ruskin's admiration of the seats, Beever's gardener was sent to Brantwood to construct a similar seat for Ruskin.⁶⁹ The seats are illustrated by both Collingwood and Tuckwell (Figures 14 and 15) and are described by Tuckwell as, 'two slate seats, made by the deft gardener's hand, glorified by Mr. Ruskin as "deeply interesting thrones of the ancient abbots of Furness"'.⁷⁰ Tuckwell was quoting from a letter Ruskin sent to Beever in which he recounted:

I came indeed upon what I conceived to be – discovered in the course of recent excavations – two deeply interesting thrones of the ancient Abbots of Furness, typifying their humility in that the seats thereof were only level with the ground

⁶⁹ Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, p. 53; Dearden, *Brantwood*, p. 21.

⁷⁰ Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees*, p. 109-10.

between two clusters of the earth; contemplating cyclamen, and their severity of penance, in the points of stone prepared for the mortification of their backs[.]⁷¹

The archaeological provenance playfully attributed by Ruskin to the seats epitomised the friends' shared interest in local history. Ruskin had visited Furness Abbey, situated twenty miles to the south of Brantwood, in November 1871, when he 'admir[ed] the Abbey all the morning' and, although the seats do not replicate any actual structures at the Abbey, the land around Coniston was once owned by the monks, and Ruskin's likening of the seats to monastic relics acknowledged the continuance of Lakeland historical tradition in Beever's garden.⁷² Her humble observation of nature from the low vantage point of the seats replicated the 'humility' of the 'ancient Abbots', the stooping flowers of the cyclamen praying for forgiveness in personification of the repentant monks at prayer. Ruskin's designation of the seats as 'thrones' imparted a nobility to Beever's reverence for the flora and fauna of her locality, exemplifying the approach to the study of natural history promoted in Ruskin's writing.

The strong visual connection between the seats in both gardens (Figures 16 and 17) is enhanced by a shared motive in their idiosyncratic orientation: Beever's to observe avian visitors to her bird bath, Ruskin's to observe the geology and flora of his stream.⁷³ Elements of Beever's garden were contrived specifically for the indulgence of her interest in watching birds. The seats provided a vantage point for observing birds encouraged to 'take their bath in a specially constructed lavatory beneath the pump', and fruit was grown to attract birds to the garden, with Tuckwell asserting that, '[f]ruit-trees there are in abundance; but for the birds, not for the mistress'.⁷⁴ Beever's interest in ornithology chimed with Ruskin's preoccupation at the time of their initial acquaintance, having lectured on 'The Robin', 'The Swallow' and 'The Chough' at

⁷¹ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 86 (24 September 1884). The dating of this letter may be among the mistakes made by the editor Albert Fleming, discussed above.

⁷² Works 27.183.

⁷³ There are three stone seats extant at The Thwaite: the two depicted by Tuckwell and a third further up the path that runs between them. Each seat has a slightly different construction and no model has yet been found as the source of their design.

⁷⁴ Tuckwell, *Tongues in Trees*, p. 112 and p. 110.



Figure 16: Stone seat, Brantwood (author photograph).



Figure 17: Stone seat, The Thwaite (author photograph).

Oxford in the spring of 1873.⁷⁵ Her peacock's feathers offered an artistic challenge, and a painting of a peacock's feather by Ruskin hung in Beever's drawing room.⁷⁶ Their shared interest in botany and nature extended to geology, and Ruskin sent various specimens from his mineral collection to The Thwaite.⁷⁷ Their discussion of natural history had an intellectual rigour, but also a humorous delight in the anthropomorphism of birds, animals and flowers, with Ruskin entreating Beever to, '[n]ever hurt your eyes by writing; keep them wholly for admiration and wonder'.⁷⁸ His intention was 'to join with you in joy over crystals and flowers in the way we used to do when we were both more children than we are'.⁷⁹ Ruskin described Beever, thirteen years his senior and sixty-eight years old when they met in 1873, as one who

⁷⁵ 'Three Lectures on English and Greek Birds as the Subjects of Fine Art', March to May 1873, published in parts as *Love's Meinie* (1873-1881), with a lecture on 'The Dabchicks' that was not delivered (*Works* 25.1-186).

⁷⁶ Collingwood family archive, Cardiff University Archives/Prifysgol Caerdydd, GB 1239 462, photograph n.d.

⁷⁷ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, pp. 64-65 (4 February [1879]).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 100 (n.d. [?1879]).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

'saw, and felt, and believed all good [...] with the acceptance and the hope of a child'.⁸⁰ The appeal of Beever's character, and the state Ruskin yearned for at Brantwood, was the childish wonder extolled by him in the third volume of *The Stones of Venice*, where he advocated, 'seeing with the large eyes of children, in perpetual wonder, not conscious of much knowledge, – conscious, rather, of infinite ignorance, and yet infinite power; a fountain of eternal admiration, delight, and creative force'.⁸¹ This was the route to understanding Ruskin aspired to promote in *Proserpina*, his book on flowers written in the years when he was a regular visitor to The Thwaite. He recognised the 'perpetual wonder' in Beever's delight in the simple pleasures of observing nature, and together they looked at the world around them through 'the large eyes of children'. With Beever, Ruskin took the part of an active, curious, playful child, matching her character with his.

Ruskin's biophilic response to nature

For Ruskin, engagement with natural history offered not only an intellectual stimulus but a visceral connection, a biophilic response to the environment.⁸² Ruskin connected with what Mahood identifies as a flower's 'air of vital happiness', rejoicing in the intrinsic vigour of a plant and experiencing a tangible empathy with natural forms.⁸³ His response to floral beauty, geology, seasonal repetition, and the rising and setting of the sun evoke the mental comfort derived from an innate affinity with the natural world, yet Ruskin's ecological interconnectedness extended beyond biophilia into a desire to become nature, evidenced in his quasi-religious propensity to physically lie down in the landscape, as seen in his longing to 'lie down in Coniston water' during his mental breakdown in 1871.⁸⁴ Ruskin's statement echoes the language and cadences of the Bible, associating the landscape of Brantwood with the spiritual security of Psalms, 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures' and Proverbs, 'thou shalt lie down, and

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. ix. See also Works 37.87 n. 1: 'Ruskin [...] in writing to his aged friend frequently indulged in the pretence that she was still a little girl'.

⁸¹ Works 11.66.

⁸² As defined in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, ed. by Stephen R. Kellert and Edward O. Wilson, (Washington DC: Island Press, 1993), p. 20.

⁸³ Mahood, *The Poet as Botanist*, p. 154.

⁸⁴ Dearden, *The Professor*, p. 47.

thy sleep shall be sweet'.⁸⁵ This sentiment was similarly expressed by Ruskin in earlier years when, anticipating a visit to the Alps in 1849 after an absence of three years, he recorded in his diary: 'a moment which I had looked forward to, thinking I should be almost fainting with joy, and should want to lie down on the earth and take it in my arms'.⁸⁶

Ruskin experienced moments of epiphany when lying down in the landscape: he was 'lying on the bank' at Fontainebleau when he recognised the beauty in trees which represented 'the bond between the human mind and all visible things', and his revelation of 'the pure and right sense of the word BEAUTIFUL' came when 'lying, one dark July evening, on a mossy rock beside the fountain of the Brevent, in the valley of Chamonix'.⁸⁷ Such life-changing moments often arose from a physical engagement with mountain landscape, where Ruskin's communion with the environment was a stimulus to perception. In her study of nineteenth-century responses to mountains, Ann Colley recognises that 'Ruskin understood that the haptic and optic are not autonomous but work together. To touch, to observe, and to move one's feet over stones were all part of the act of seeing and comprehending'.⁸⁸ In fact, Ruskin's walking and handling of the mountain went beyond the haptic to an immersive submission of self to nature. He wrote to his father from the Alps on a sunny day in 1863 that '[t]his afternoon at four o'clock I was lying all my length on the grass on the precise and exact summit of the Salève', and in his *Flora of Chamouni* Ruskin recorded, 'lying plunged over head and ears in masses of the Alpine rose'.⁸⁹ In blending his physical presence with the landscape by 'lying all my length' and being 'plunged over head and ears', Ruskin was becoming nature, just as in his study of botany he penetrated the intrinsic being of a plant, not merely its physical form. This inevitably led to the internalisation of perceptions of floral beauty, and Ruskin became inflicted with self-pity at the inherent mystery of nature. Encounters with flowers at Brantwood became tainted with an inability to contend with the simple purity they

⁸⁵ Psalms 23. 2 and Proverbs 3. 24 (King James Bible); quoted with other examples in Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 212.

⁸⁶ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 374 (30 April 1849); quoted by Ruskin in *Praeterita* (Works 35.438).

⁸⁷ Works 35.314, 35.315, 4.365 and 4.363.

⁸⁸ Ann C. Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 154-55.

⁸⁹ Works 36.434 (12 February 1863); Ruskin MS 65, *Flora of Chamouni*, 1884, p. 8.

expressed. He wrote: 'I believe that there is often something in the spring which weakens one by its very tenderness; the violets in the wood send one home sorrowful that one isn't worthy to see them, or else, that one isn't one of them'.⁹⁰ Ruskin's mental weakening is mirrored in his perception of nature, expressing a biophilic supplication to become the plant itself, an echo of his desire to become the landscape in his yearning to 'lie down in Coniston Water', the blending of human and non-human attesting to his longing to experience the innocent moral virtue he recognised in vegetal forms. This biophilic response to the landscape sheds light on Ruskin's mental instability, and is expressed in its opposing, negative form in his interpretation of the plague cloud, in which nature conspired against him and inflicted moral retribution on humankind.

The recuperative capacity of the landscape at Brantwood was expressed by Ruskin again physically lying on the ground: in 1880, he wrote to Beever, 'I do really very good work in the mornings – but by the afternoon I'm quite beaten and can do nothing but lie about in the wood'.⁹¹ Ruskin recognised the value of the sanctuary offered in the physical landscape and flora of Brantwood and The Thwaite, and in the comforting solace of his relationship with Beever. He craved the refuge of his home environment when travelling, writing from Perugia in 1874, 'The chief flowers here are only broom and bindweed, and I begin to weary for my heather and for my Susie', and from Sallenches in 1882, 'I must soon be seeking shelter at Brantwood and the Thwaite'.⁹² Ruskin confessed to Beever from northern France in 1880 that he was 'sadly longing for Brantwood', and had 'made a little sketch of the lake from above the Waterhead which goes everywhere with me', exposing a yearning for the cherished landscape they shared.⁹³

Ruskin shared with Beever another aspect of his biophilia, revealing an anthropomorphic sympathy with nature, both animate and inanimate. Shortly after their first meeting in 1873, Ruskin wrote to Beever in response to a letter from her which mentioned kissing flowers:

⁹⁰ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 97 (n.d.)

⁹¹ *Hortus Inclusus*, ed. by Albert Fleming, 3rd edn, (London: George Allen, 1902), p. 106. This letter was not included in the first edition.

⁹² Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 21 (17 July [1874]) and p. 83 (13 Sept [1882]).

⁹³ Ibid., p. 71 (29 August [1880]) and p. 72 (3 September [1880]).

Yes, that is very sweet about the kissing. I have done it to rocks often, seldom to flowers, not being sure that they would like it. I recollect giving a very reverent little kiss to a young pine sapling that was behaving beautifully in an awkward chink between two great big ones that were ill-treating it.⁹⁴

This admission is indicative of Ruskin's playful relationship with Beever; it also reveals not only an affinity with animate nature in plants and flowers, but a sympathy with the inanimate in rocks and stones, and a respect for the ecological interplay between species and their environment. When writing this letter to Beever, Ruskin overlooked an event recorded in his diary nearly thirty years previously while in Geneva on his way to the mountains, where he 'found a root of the star gentian, and kissed it as a harbinger of the Alps', kissing the plant in anticipatory celebration of the alpine landscape to come.⁹⁵ This act was a physical manifestation of what Collingwood referred to as Ruskin's 'mountain worship', described as a 'love of mountain scenery' which 'was something beyond his control'.⁹⁶ Collingwood's suggestion of an unconscious impulse foreshadows the modern notion of biophilia, his assertion that Ruskin's mountain worship 'may have been an inheritance [...] from remote ancestry' chiming with the current hypothesis that the biophilic impulse is genetic, deriving from the survival instincts of our forebears.⁹⁷ The uplifting sensation felt by Ruskin in the presence of mountains was confirmed by Arthur Severn who accompanied Ruskin on a tour of Italy in 1872 and commented that, 'the Professor was in the best of spirits, as he always was when the Alps were close at hand'.⁹⁸

Hortus Inclusus symbolising shelter and nesting

The desire to be present in the landscape, to embrace and be subsumed by natural forms, exposed a deep, quasi-religious connection to place which is reflected in the title Ruskin chose for the collection of his letters to Beever: *Hortus Inclusus*. Ruskin

⁹⁴ Works 37.76 (17 December 1873).

⁹⁵ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 275 (1 June 1844).

⁹⁶ Collingwood, *Life of John Ruskin*, I, p. 42.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 52; see Roger Ulrich, 'Biophilia, Biophobia, and Natural Landscapes' in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, pp. 73-137.

⁹⁸ Dearden, *The Professor*, p. 52.

supplied the title with specific reference to ‘Solomon’s Song, 4.12’.⁹⁹ Examining this quotation in the King James Bible, with which Ruskin was familiar from his childhood lessons with his mother, reveals a meaning beyond the traditional association of an enclosed garden with the Virgin Mary and the annunciation.¹⁰⁰ The verse to which Ruskin referred reads: ‘A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed’.¹⁰¹ The passage is interpreted in biblical commentaries as an allegory of the mystical marriage of Christ and his church, but the familial language may also have seemed appropriate to Ruskin as representing his relationship with Beever. Although she wanted to treat Ruskin as a son – stating in 1874, ‘I think you can understand me when I say that I have a great fund of love, and no one to spend it upon [...] Cannot I be a sort of second mother to you?’ – Ruskin saw Beever in the role of a sibling, declaring in 1875 that ‘you [...] may be the best of sisters to me’.¹⁰²

The reference in the Song of Solomon to ‘a spring shut up, a fountain sealed’ resonates with Ruskin’s desolation at the death of Rose La Touche in 1875, which he likened to the ‘seal of a great fountain of sorrow which can now never ebb away’.¹⁰³ This adds a layer of idiosyncratic complexity to the title, associating La Touche with Ruskin’s thoughts on the garden, and evidencing her permeating influence on his work. The enclosure of the *hortus inclusus* can be interpreted as shielding the garden from the pollution of the outside world, protecting it from physical, spiritual or psychological contamination. Michael Wheeler asserts that Ruskin turned to Thomas Scott’s commentary (1788-92) for explanatory notes on biblical texts.¹⁰⁴ The *Comprehensive Commentary on the Holy Bible* (1834-38), which includes Scott’s notes, described the garden in this passage as ‘enclosed for safety; a hedge of protection is made about it, which all the powers of darkness cannot either find or make a gap in’.¹⁰⁵ Ruskin was

⁹⁹ Ruskin MS L5/1/4, letter from Ruskin to Susan Beever, ?March 1887. See also letter from Ruskin to George Allen, 8 March 1887, quoted in Hayman, ‘John Ruskin’s *Hortus Inclusus*’, p. 372.

¹⁰⁰ For the *hortus conclusus* in garden history, see Jane Brown, *The Pursuit of Paradise: A Social History of Gardens and Gardening* (London: Harper Collins, 2000), pp. 50-55.

¹⁰¹ <<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Song-of-Solomon-4-12>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

¹⁰² Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 167 (15 May [1874]), original italics; p. 31 (26 January 1875).

¹⁰³ Works 24.xx, quoting a letter to John Brown, 18 June 1875.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Wheeler, ‘Ruskin and his contemporaries reading the King James Bible’, *The King James Bible after Four Hundred Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences*, ed. by Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 242.

¹⁰⁵ *The Comprehensive Commentary on the Holy Bible: Containing the Text According to the Authorized Version; Scott's Marginal References, Matthew Henry's Commentary, Condensed, But Retaining Every*

seeking protection from the ‘powers of darkness’ throughout his years at Brantwood, beginning with the mental illness in 1871 which prompted his purchase of the property, through periodic bouts of insanity, and sorrow on the death of La Touche, culminating in a decade of silence.

Ruskin’s quest for security, both physical and mental, was expressed by him in the notion of ‘nesting’. In the months immediately following his move to Brantwood, he made reference in his diary to ‘my own nest-garden’ and ‘my own little nest’, wrote privately of his ‘little nested garden’, and publicly of ‘my little nested dale of the Yew’.¹⁰⁶ His ‘nest’ was not the secure, comfortable space within the walls of the house, but the garden sheltered within the surrounding landscape. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a nest as a ‘place in which a person (or personified thing) lives or finds rest; [...] a receptacle in which a thing is held or nestles snugly’, and includes the specific mineralogical definition of ‘[a]n isolated and now usually small or compact deposit of a mineral or metal occurring within another formation’.¹⁰⁷ In geological terms, Ruskin’s garden was the compact deposit residing within the larger formation of the Lakeland valley, a part of the landscape, but a separate entity enclosed within it. Expanding on the definition, a nest affords shelter from the environment and guards against predators, is a place of security, comfort and nurture, and is somewhere to keep safe what is precious. Ruskin’s ‘nest-garden’ was physically enclosed by sheltering walls and trees, but also afforded spiritual protection in beneficent nature, refuge to nurture ideas, and sanctuary to harbour cherished memories of people and places.

In an inversion of the ornithological anthropomorphism he shared with Beever, Ruskin built himself a nest, creating a sheltered space where he could settle safely with a wife. The editors of the *Library Edition* recount a letter from Ruskin to La Touche,

Useful Thought; the Practical Observations of Rev. Thomas Scott, with Extensive Explanatory, Critical, and Philological Notes, Selected from Scott, Doddridge, Gill ... and Many Other Writers of the Scriptures ... with Numerous Useful Tables and Neatly Engraved Family Record, ed. by William Jenks, Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, 5 vols, (Brattleboro', Vermont: Brattleboro' Typographic Co., 1834-38), III (1837), p. 294.

¹⁰⁶ Evans and Whitehouse, *Dairies*, p. 745 (25 April 1873); p. 750 (17 July 1873); *Works* 37.35: letter to Charles Eliot Norton (15 September 1871); *Works* 26.246: ‘Yewdale and its Streamlets’, first delivered as a lecture and published pamphlet in 1877, then published as Chapter XII of *Deucalion*.

¹⁰⁷ ‘nest, n.’ *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/1262532> [accessed November 2018].

'written from Brantwood, when Ruskin was first settling in his new home', in which 'he wonders whether Rosie will ever give him the happiness of welcoming her there'.¹⁰⁸ La Touche never went to Brantwood, but Ruskin's wish that she should join him there resonates with his description of the peaceful domus set out in a lecture given at Oxford in March 1872, and published later that year in *The Eagle's Nest*, in which he pictured, 'a cottage all of our own, with its little garden, its pleasant view, its surrounding fields, its neighbouring stream, its healthy air, and clean kitchen, parlours, and bedrooms. Less than this, no man should be content with for his nest'.¹⁰⁹ Matching this description, Brantwood fulfilled Ruskin's ideal as the 'nest' of marital domestic comfort.

After La Touche's death in May 1875, Ruskin spent the summer at Brantwood and continued his work in the garden. He was looking to the future, and noted in his diary that he was, 'planning improvements in the woods with Downes'.¹¹⁰ But by the autumn he had left Brantwood and did not return until a brief visit the following May, followed by a lengthy sojourn in Venice. When in England, he stayed in his rooms at Oxford and at Herne Hill, as well as vacillating between the homes of friends such as Mary Hilliard at Cowley Rectory in Middlesex, Constance Oldham at Lucastes in Haywards Heath, and Georgina Cowper-Temple at Broadlands in Hampshire. Brantwood had lost the domestic attraction of the 'nest', its shelter and comfort replaced by the landscape of Broadlands. Ruskin wrote to Norton in October 1875:

You are the first person I write to from my new home. The Temples have given me a room here for my own [...] and say they will be generally good to me and take care of me; so I [...] am making myself comfortable in my new nest, – a cloudless sunset giving me its good omen, over the sweet rivers and woods.¹¹¹

Ruskin's 'new nest' at Broadlands was accompanied by the mothering protection of Cowper-Temple, who was one of several women whom Ruskin referred to with filial

¹⁰⁸ *Works* 35.lxxvi.

¹⁰⁹ *Works* 22.263.

¹¹⁰ Evans and Whitehouse, *Dairies*, p. 852 (9 July 1875).

¹¹¹ Bradley and Ousby, *Norton Letters*, p. 366 (6 October 1875).

submission as ‘Mama’, ‘Mamie’, ‘Grannie’ or ‘Di Ma’.¹¹² Ruskin, to continue his ornithological analogy, was no longer the builder of the nest, but the hatchling being incubated within it. Another epithet used by Ruskin to address Cowper-Temple connected her sympathetic understanding and emotional protection to a treasured landscape: in 1870, he began to address his letters to her with the salutation ‘Dear Isola’, in reference to Isola Bella on Lake Maggiore, a landscape Ruskin associated with Brantwood.¹¹³

In this position of childlike simplicity, Ruskin was absolved from the responsibilities of ownership and management. He wrote again to Norton that,

I have been resting a little at Broadlands, where [...] they are very affectionate to me, and it is a great relief to me to be where I’ve nothing to manage, and can go out in the garden without being asked what is to be sown, or cut – or sold, or bought, or burnt, or manured, or drained – or fenced, or carted, or, something or other that I don’t know half so much about as the blackbirds.¹¹⁴

Having longed for a home of his own, Ruskin was clearly overwhelmed by the responsibilities of garden management incumbent on him at Brantwood, and spent his time at Broadlands in cognitively undemanding outdoor activities such as ‘sweeping grass in morning with gardeners’ and ‘picking up sticks and tying faggots’.¹¹⁵ The ‘sweet rivers and woods’ of Broadlands eventually lost their appeal. Reflecting on this period in 1887, Ruskin wrote to a friend:

Some eight or ten years since, I accepted the quietest corner of the great house at Broadlands – and got so far nested there as to send for my child’s books from Brantwood. But in time I got tired of looking out upon a Park and of the walks in the flats above Southampton Water, and became a wanderer again.¹¹⁶

¹¹² These women included Mary Hilliard and Joan Severn.

¹¹³ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 252 (mid-January 1870).

¹¹⁴ Bradley and Ousby, *Norton Letters*, p. 368 (30 October 1875).

¹¹⁵ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 865 (9 and 13 October 1875).

¹¹⁶ Wilson, *My Dearest Dora*, p. 114 (letter to Edward Lees, 19 October 1887).

In the featureless landscape of the Hampshire coast, Ruskin longed for mountains and rugged nature, tiring of the improved parkland of Broadlands. Rather than return to Brantwood, he resumed his peripatetic circuit of friends' houses and visits to the Continent until halted by a serious attack of mental illness in early 1878, after which he settled quietly at Brantwood.¹¹⁷ Ruskin was eventually to see Brantwood as a 'nest' again, evidenced in a letter to John Lubbock in 1887 in which he described his home as 'a mere nook of turf above a nest of garden'.¹¹⁸

Home landscapes of Ruskin's friends

The gardens of Ruskin's Lakeland neighbours were familiar to him from making local calls, and formed part of the geography of his life at Brantwood. When staying with friends further afield, he was exposed to many approaches to garden design, his wide circle of friends encompassing gardeners with spaces from window boxes to sweeping parkland, incorporating formal and informal styles, and native and exotic planting. Ruskin made little comment on these gardens, although he must have recognised that garden style can reveal much about the taste and aspirations of the owner, serving as an expression of personality and status. At Broadlands, Ruskin spent time participating in outdoor work, as evidenced above, but his impressions of the layout and planting of the garden remain unrecorded. The house was set within a picturesque landscape designed by William Kent and subsequently improved by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in the eighteenth century, and William Nesfield, the designer of formal gardens and parterres, was commissioned by the Cowper-Temples to lay out a terrace with a pool and parterre to the south of the house in 1868-75.¹¹⁹ This formal area would have been under construction during the years when Ruskin was visiting, and is indicative of the fashionable – and status-conscious – taste of his friends. Nesfield's parterres typically used coloured gravel and low box hedging to produce a highly contrived design, modelled on the French *parterre de broderie*, which was the antithesis to

¹¹⁷ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 972.

¹¹⁸ Works 38.590 (14 June 1887).

¹¹⁹ Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England, Broadlands, entry number 1000166, <historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000166> [accessed 17 June 2019].

Ruskin's gardening at Brantwood.¹²⁰ The parkland setting of which Ruskin 'tired' was a feature of other grand houses he visited, such as Hawarden Castle in Flintshire, where Ruskin stayed as the guest of William Gladstone and his daughter Mary in 1878, and Wallington in Northumberland, the home of Lord and Lady Trevelyan, where Ruskin visited prior to Lady Trevelyan's death in 1866.

The parkland at Wallington gave way to ornamental woodland on either side of the house, developed in the 1820s and augmented by Lord and Lady Trevelyan, who introduced conifers in the 1850s.¹²¹ The Trevelyans preferred informality to the high Victorian fashion for architectural gardening exemplified in the work of Nesfield, and there were no formal parterres or terracing at Wallington. A painting attributed to Sarah Acland of Lady Trevelyan sitting next to a pond in a woodland enhanced by foxgloves and ferns depicts a landscape more akin to Ruskin's approach to gardening (Figure 18). Raleigh Trevelyan notes that Trevelyan 'particularly loved the wishing-well in the West Wood, which became very overgrown in her lifetime', suggesting her preference for the lack of neatness which Ruskin had identified as 'littery' in his

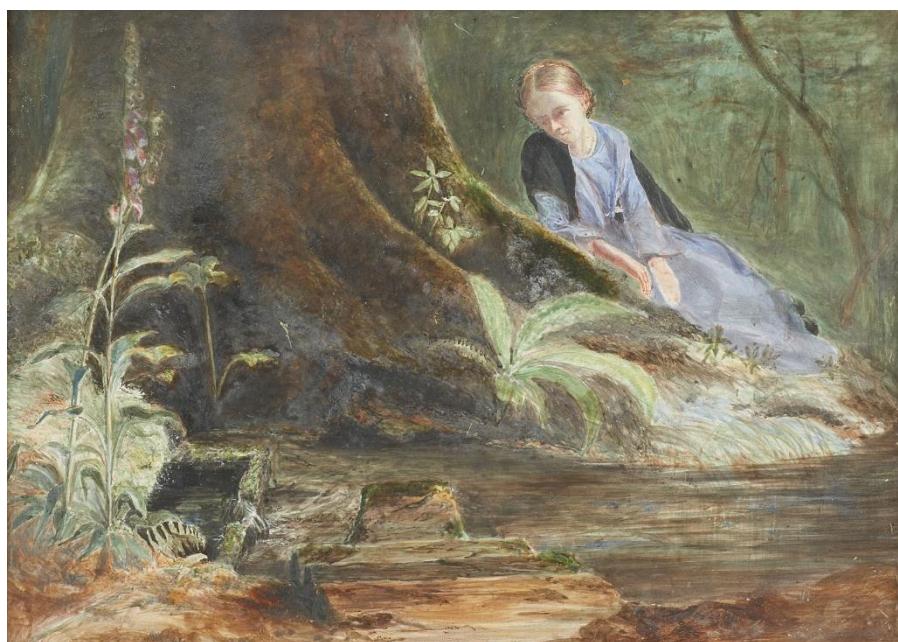


Figure 18: Sarah Acland, *The Maid of Wallington Well*, watercolour on paper, c. 1845, NT 584400 © National Trust/Donald Bovill and Susan McCormack.

¹²⁰ See Brent Elliott, *Victorian Gardens* (London: Batsford, 1986) pp. 138–40, and Shirley Rose Evans, *Masters of their Craft: The Art, Architecture and Garden Design of the Nesfields* (Cambridge, The Lutterworth Press, 2014), pp. 67–77.

¹²¹ *Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England*, Wallington, entry number 1001054, <historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001054> [accessed 17 June 2019]; Raleigh Trevelyan, *Wallington, Northumberland* (London, The National Trust, 1994), p. 83.

appreciation of Turner's landscapes, discussed in Chapter One.¹²² In 1864, Ruskin had teased Trevelyan by remarking on her garden style: 'if I were as littery as you and as fond of weeds, *I'd* have clock-leaves and everything in a mess, too – but *my* stream will be tidy. – If I want any nettles in the dry places, you can spare me some, I daresay – I never knew any so fine as yours – anywhere'.¹²³ This comment reveals Ruskin's distinction between wild flowers and weeds in his delineation of 'tidy' and 'littery' gardens. In *Proserpina*, Ruskin expanded on this distinction in his observation that the wild pansies growing at Brantwood were prone to 'having rather a weedy and littery look, and getting into places where they have no business'.¹²⁴ In Ruskin's garden aesthetic, Trevelyan's permissive approach to the natural growth of wild plants went beyond what he would tolerate.

On his initial visit to Wallington in 1853, Ruskin had yet to form this view of the garden, describing it as 'beautifully kept'.¹²⁵ In a letter to his father, he enthused:

This is the most beautiful place possible – a large old seventeenth-century stone house in an old English terraced garden, beautifully kept, all the hawthorns still in full blossom: terrace opening on a sloping, wild park, down to the brook, about the half a mile fair slope; and woods on the other side, and undulating country with a peculiar Northumberlandishness about it – a faraway look which Millais enjoys intensely.¹²⁶

Ruskin's appreciation of the wild Northumberland landscape was enhanced by the opportunity to share the view with John Everett Millais, who was accompanying Ruskin and his wife Effie on a tour of the north country, culminating in their notorious stay in Glenfinlas, during which Millais and Effie fell in love.¹²⁷ The extent to which Ruskin's notion of landscape was tainted by memory and association is evident in the contrast between his early description of Wallington and his account in *Praeterita*, published

¹²² Trevelyan, *Wallington*, pp. 83-84.

¹²³ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 242 (15 December 1864), original italics.

¹²⁴ *Works* 25.396.

¹²⁵ *Works* 22.xix (23 June 1853).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ See Hilton, *Early Years*, pp. 184-90.

three decades later, following the untimely death of Lady Trevelyan and Millais' involvement in the failure of his marriage. Ruskin remembered Wallington in undistinguished terms:

An ugly house enough it was; square set, and somewhat bare walled, looking down a slope of rough wide field to a burn, the Wansbeck, neither bright nor rapid, but with a ledge or two of sandstone to drip over, or lean against in pools; bits of crag in the distance, worth driving to, for sight of the sweeps of moor round them, and breaths of breeze from Carter Fell.¹²⁸

The divergence between contemporary account and reminiscence demonstrates the intimate correlation between Ruskin's empathy with landscape and his emotional wellbeing, in which intensity of feeling had the power to supplant memory. Whether due to negative associations or aesthetic preference, Ruskin's view of the Northumberland countryside chimed with his later impression of the Hampshire landscape of Broadlands, complaining to his father from Wallington in 1863 that, 'the country is utterly dull to me and I can't bear walking in it'.¹²⁹ A letter from Ruskin to Lady Waterford written at the same time expanded on his notion of an ideal landscape, which was to be found in humble elements overlooked for their beauty, identified in a Northumberland garden nearby: 'the winding path – the streamlet beneath – and the warm red wall of [the] trim kitchen-garden – it was just like the beginning of a new novel of Sir Walter's'.¹³⁰ The paths, streams and walls of this scene graced the landscape contrived at Brantwood by Ruskin, whose imagination had been nourished as a child by the works of Walter Scott. As Keith Handley observes, the promise of childhood was captured for Ruskin in Scott's novels; this memory was then evoked by him in the landscape.¹³¹ Beever, in tune with Ruskin's ethos, recognised this allusion when she looked across the lake to Brantwood and perceived that 'the trees looked like spirits of the wood, which you might think would melt away like the White

¹²⁸ Works 35.458.

¹²⁹ Virginia Surtees, *Sublime and Instructive: Letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden and Ellen Heaton* (London: Michael Joseph, 1972), p. 51 n. 4 (13 August 1863).

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 51 (16 August 1863).

¹³¹ Handley and Dickinson, *Journeys of a Lifetime*, p. 52.

'Lady of Avenel', citing Scott's novel *The Monastery* (1820).¹³² Based on the landscapes in which they lived, of Ruskin's close friends – Cowper-Temple, Trevelyan and Beever – it was Beever who was most in sympathy with Ruskin's thinking on nature, landscape and imagination.

Ruskin was bereft at Trevelyan's sudden death, just two years after that of his father. As John Batchelor has noted, 'Although she was only three years his senior, Pauline [Trevelyan] became increasingly parental in relation to Ruskin'.¹³³ Their correspondence was animated by a teasing humour, but Ruskin did not employ the pet names and terms of endearment which characterise his letters to Joan Severn, Beever, Cowper-Temple and others. Ruskin treated Trevelyan with the respect of a son rather than the helplessness of a child. She was a parent-figure from whom he was willing to accept guidance, despite his statement in *Praeterita*: 'not that I ever took her advice!'.¹³⁴ Ruskin was fundamentally unwilling to admit to following advice, but evidence presented by Paul Wilson reveals that, at least on one occasion, Ruskin did alter his published opinions on the advice of Trevelyan. In a letter to her in 1855 Ruskin admitted, 'I did as I was bid' after she had counselled him against the controversy of aligning his religious views with those of Alexander von Humboldt.¹³⁵ Trevelyan was clearly willing to speak candidly to Ruskin, evidenced in a conversation related by him to his father in 1863:

She and I got into some divinity discussions, until she got very angry, and declared that when she read me, and heard me, at a distance, she thought me so wise that anybody might make an idol of me, and worship me to any extent, but when she got to talk to me, I turned out only a rag doll after all.¹³⁶

¹³² Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 159 (10 April [1874]).

¹³³ John Batchelor, *Lady Trevelyan and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006), p. 165.

¹³⁴ *Works* 35.457.

¹³⁵ Paul Wilson, "'Over Yonder are the Andes": Reading Ruskin Reading Humboldt', *Time and Tide: Ruskin and Science*, ed. by Michael Wheeler (London: Pilkington Press, 1996), pp. 73-74.

¹³⁶ *Works* 12.xxxiv (17 November 1863).

This parental, even paternal, positioning of Trevelyan makes sense of Ruskin's curious description of her in *Praeterita* as 'a monitress-friend in whom I wholly trusted'.¹³⁷ Her judgement was valued by Ruskin to the extent that he allowed her to monitor his actions and check him when necessary, holding a position of feminine authority identified by Dickinson in Ruskin's recognition of women's 'knowledge, wisdom and power'.¹³⁸

Following Trevelyan's death, Ruskin came to rely on her sister Mary Hilliard for support, stating in 1872 that Hilliard 'is now my chief comfort, and helps me in all sorts of ways'.¹³⁹ Hilliard featured prominently in Ruskin's later life; she and her children were frequent visitors to Brantwood, and Ruskin regularly stayed as her guest at Cowley Rectory near Uxbridge. Ruskin valued her company away from home too, taking her and her daughter Constance with him on his continental trips of 1870 and 1872, sharing his favoured landscapes, as well as the memory of Lady Trevelyan, who had died while travelling with Ruskin on a similar tour in 1866. Hilliard was to fulfil some aspects of the role her sister had played in Ruskin's life, as he admitted in what was to be his last letter to her before her death from tuberculosis in 1882: 'I do not know how much you have been to me, and always will be, for I cannot fancy what I should have been, without Pauline and you, always holding me up and holding me straight – when my foot slipped most – and my way became dark'.¹⁴⁰ Hilliard provided maternal consolation to Ruskin – 'holding me up' – but also continued the parental influence identified in her sister when 'holding me straight', likening her support to the horticultural staking of a vulnerable plant to brace against adversity and encourage upright growth. By hinting at the 'dark' times in his life when her support was most needed, Ruskin revealed the intimacy of their friendship. Hilliard was a supportive presence at Brantwood, along with her daughter Constance (Connie) and son Laurence (Lollie), who worked as Ruskin's secretary from 1876 to 1882. After Hilliard's death, and that of her husband shortly afterwards, her unmarried children settled near

¹³⁷ Works 35.457. The term 'monitress' is used by Charlotte Bronte in *Jane Eyre* in a similar context (Penguin Classics, 1985, p. 294).

¹³⁸ Rachel Dickinson, 'Of Ruskin, Women and Power', in *Persistent Ruskin: Studies in Influence, Assimilation and Effect*, ed. by Keith Handley and Brian Maidment (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 53-66.

¹³⁹ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 263 n. 1, quoting a letter to John Brown.

¹⁴⁰ Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 588 (13 May 1882).

Brantwood and became part of Ruskin's Coniston circle of neighbours.¹⁴¹ The sudden death of Laurence Hilliard in April 1887 had a deleterious effect on Ruskin's mental and physical health; according to Collingwood, it 'undoubtedly turned the balance, and intensified weakness and worry into illness of many months' duration'.¹⁴²

Although Hilliard does not appear to have had the same extent of botanical knowledge as her older sister, she took delight in her garden, writing to Ruskin, 'our garden is a most lovely sight full of flowering shrubs in their greatest beauty and profusion and the Wisteria like a perpetual lilac fountain all over the house'.¹⁴³ Ruskin took advantage of her knowledge of garden plants, evidenced in a letter written from Florence in August 1874 to his housemaid Kate Raven. Hilliard was visiting Brantwood when Ruskin conveyed the request: 'Please tell Jackson [the outdoor steward at Brantwood] to be very watchful of any hints Mrs Hilliard may give him for the planting of the new garden,— choice of autumnal flowers etc'.¹⁴⁴ Rather than asking Hilliard for advice himself, Ruskin contrived to benefit from her gardening experience indirectly, at a time when he was commencing work in the garden at Brantwood and in need of horticultural expertise. Gardening friends such as Hilliard, Beever and Maria La Touche provided a useful source of 'hints', and their gardens offered an example to Ruskin of horticultural possibility.

Maria La Touche's garden was well known to Ruskin from visits in the 1860s, before their relationship deteriorated over Ruskin's desire to marry her daughter Rose. While the contribution made by La Touche to Ruskin's botanical studies is analysed in Chapter Two, this chapter focusses on her impact on his gardening, through her landscape aesthetic and knowledge of plants. La Touche gardened at Harristown, in County Kildare, on the banks of the River Liffey, where she nurtured wild plants in informal areas, but also adhered to a more conventional arrangement of flower beds and florists flowers, describing her 'biggest oval bed' in which grew pinks and pansies,

¹⁴¹ Ethel and Frederick Hilliard moved to Low Bank Ground with Laurence in 1883 then lived at Tent Cottage from 1884 to 1908. Constance married William Churchill in 1880 and settled in Reigate. See Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, pp. 587–90.

¹⁴² Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 101.

¹⁴³ Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 461 (12 May 1882).

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Francis O'Gorman, "I am often thinking of you": Ruskin, Brantwood and Kate Raven', *Notes and Queries*, cont. ser., 246, n.s., 48, 2, (June 2001), p. 147.

as well as noting such plants as sunflowers, double red poppies and 'Love in a Mist'.¹⁴⁵ The gardens in close proximity to the house were artfully formal, in keeping with fashionable taste – La Touche declared she had 'invented a new pattern for the flower-beds before the windows' – while the outlying areas were treated in a more natural manner.¹⁴⁶ A photograph of the rock arch at Harristown (Figure 19) depicts a rustic stone tunnel, constructed as part folly, part bridge, covered in ivy, and surrounded by rockwork planted with ferns. It may have been on the rock arch, or on another wall, that 'Erba della Madonna' (ivy-leaved toadflax) grew, the plant that, according to Ruskin, 'was always considered as *my* plant, at Harristown'.¹⁴⁷ In 1868, as discussed in Chapter Two, Rose La Touche sent Ruskin a 'large cluster of the Erba della Madonna' as a symbolic message when she was forbidden to write to him, presumably gathered in the environs of Harristown. Ruskin did not explain the origins of this floral association, but its likely derivation was formed in the garden at Harristown on the attribution of plant habit to personal character.



Figure 19: *The Rock Arch at Harristown*, in *The Letters of a Noblewoman (Mrs La Touche of Harristown)*, ed. by Margaret Ferrier Young (London: George Allen and Sons, 1908), p. 64f.

¹⁴⁵ Ruskin MS B10, letter from La Touche to Ruskin, n.d. [?1883].

¹⁴⁶ Ferrier Young, *Letters of a Noblewoman*, p. 142 (letter from La Touche to Ferrier Young, April 1893).

¹⁴⁷ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p.156 (14 May 1868), original italics.

Ruskin's reverence of place was shared by Maria La Touche: she saw landscape as more than a view, averring, 'I hate "scenery". The fields and hills are not backs of theatres'.¹⁴⁸ As in Ruskin's aesthetic, the landscape setting was intrinsic to La Touche's approach: not a mere backdrop, but the medium through which the garden was appreciated. The deep personal connection to nature, expressed by Ruskin in his biophilic response discussed above, was shared by La Touche, who reflected in old age that,

I love a wood quite frantically. I could almost say that I owe all that makes me happy, all that taught me what I care to know, all that helped me to hope and endure, to the woodland influences I was reared among. The Wood was church, school, playground, museum, and theatre to me, then a solitary child. But I always had pet trees, personal friends everywhere; and I have them here – the beeches I can see from my bed, and the cedars on the lawn.¹⁴⁹

The admission that trees were 'personal friends', dependent upon for happiness, hope and endurance aligns La Touche's character with that of Beever; these two women were in sympathy with Ruskin's mature attitude to nature and each gardened with an individuality expressed in their reverence for the environment.

The deliberate planting of wild flowers in garden settings at Brantwood, The Thwaite and Harristown reflected a landscape aesthetic not widely appreciated at the time. La Touche wrote of the reaction to her planting speedwell, pinks and Herb Robert that '[e]verybody laughs at my gardening – but not so much as I laugh at theirs'.¹⁵⁰ Ruskin and his gardening friends were in a horticultural minority, encouraging each other in their joint appreciation of the wild plants considered by their contemporaries as weeds, or belonging beyond the boundary of the garden. The divergence from horticultural norms was recognised in La Touche's comment that 'all my things would be called weeds by gardeners', to which she added with characteristic anthropomorphism, 'I pull up the things I don't care for, and leave those I like, and I

¹⁴⁸ Ferrier Young, *Letters of a Noblewoman*, pp. 48-49 (letter to Severn, June 1878).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 180 (letter to a relative, 17 March 1903).

¹⁵⁰ Ruskin MS L110, letter to Severn, 2 June n.d.

throw discarded plants into the river, which conveys them (I always hope) to some future state, where they will root or seed themselves, and be happy'.¹⁵¹ La Touche gardened with a fondness for plants, exhibiting the favouritism Ruskin showed in *Proserpina* (referring, for example, to his 'pet lily') when writing about her gardening practice, such as: 'I've put poultices of *old* dead leaves and peat all around the roots of my best friends to keep out the frost'.¹⁵² The idiosyncrasy of her horticultural approach and planting choices was recognised by La Touche when describing her garden 'playground', stating, '[t]he great objection to it is that the gardener plays there as well as me! Gardeners are regular Kill-joys'.¹⁵³

Setting themselves apart from conventional horticultural circles, the friends formed a nexus of gardening expertise centred on Brantwood, involving the exchange of horticultural wisdom and of plants and seeds. Following her first visit to Brantwood in 1881, Ruskin wrote to La Touche, 'I am so glad you found things to gather here, and enjoyed yourself', indicating Ruskin's willingness to give plants, and La Touche's to receive them.¹⁵⁴ The correspondence reveals a flow of plants and seeds between Brantwood and Harristown. La Touche wrote to Severn in 1878: 'Here's the poppy seed for you', referring to a 'wild red poppy' sent with the intention of prompting Ruskin's memory when the seeds flowered, evidenced in her wish that, 'I hope next year, he will be reminded of Lacerta'.¹⁵⁵ La Touche's use of the pet name Ruskin assigned to her suggests that she and Ruskin were reunited by this time, and their mutual willingness to impart self through the medium of flowers – transplanted or seeded into each other's gardens – demonstrates the enduring value of their friendship. While red poppies from Harristown were sent to Brantwood, La Touche wrote from Harristown, that 'the yellow pops from Brantwood are quite at home and have colonised here', perhaps suggesting that Ruskin would also be 'quite at home' with La Touche.¹⁵⁶ She expanded the list of cherished plants crossing to Ireland in a letter to Severn, writing that, '[s]everal of the dear Brantwood things are doing well,

¹⁵¹ Ferrier Young, *Letters of a Noblewoman*, p. 70 (letter to Severn, August 1880).

¹⁵² Works 25.197; Ruskin MS L107, letter to Ruskin, 14 November n.d., original italics.

¹⁵³ Ferrier Young, *Letters of a Noblewoman*, p. 64 (letter to Severn, June 1879).

¹⁵⁴ Ruskin MS B10, 22 July 1881.

¹⁵⁵ Ferrier Young, *Letters of a Noblewoman*, p. 51. 'Lacerta' was Ruskin's pet name for Maria La Touche.

¹⁵⁶ Ruskin MS L107, 8 May n.d.

specially the Veronicas and the tiny white pinks – and the white herb Robert is naturalised here now'.¹⁵⁷

Beever was also sending plants to Harristown, a network established through mutual gardening interest rather than personal connection, as the women would not have met until La Touche visited Brantwood in 1881. In 1878, La Touche wrote to Severn, 'I've been looking out anxiously for the box of plants ever since Miss Beever's letter and yours came. Now I am happy. Please thank Miss Beever for her kindness,' and again in 1879, 'I can't thank you and Miss Beever enough for all the lovely plants', naming 'wild anemones', 'yellow poppies', 'oak-ferns' and 'precious sedums'.¹⁵⁸ On her visit to Brantwood in the summer of 1883, La Touche was impressed by the cultural life of the Lake District:

The people seem either to belong to the world of art and literature, or else to the, perhaps, better world of quiet home-life – gardens, fields and kindly genuine intercourse with one another. [...] I've seen no end of lovely flowers and plants. I hope to bring home some.¹⁵⁹

La Touche was not only transplanting the actual flowers, but their symbolic evocation of the pastoral, communal, unaffected existence of the country people. Of Ruskin's garden, she commented that, '[t]he Professor's garden is in great beauty; he has lovely Irises and a terra-cotta coloured Columbine, which I never saw before', indicating her discerning knowledge of plants.¹⁶⁰ To complement Ruskin's 'lovely Irises', the following year she sent a 'grassy iris' which she 'found [...] in a very old-fashioned garden belonging to a cousin of mine in Kildare'.¹⁶¹ La Touche tentatively identified the plant as *Iris Ruthenica*, but was let down, as Ruskin frequently was, by the information in her botany books, and was unable to offer a firm identification. Five years later, Ruskin declared to La Touche that, 'I lay awake nearly all last night planning

¹⁵⁷ Ruskin MS L110, 2 June n.d.

¹⁵⁸ Ferrier Young, *Letters of a Noblewoman*, p. 51 and p. 64.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 91-94 (letter to Ferrier Young, 20 July 1883).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 98 (letter to Severn, June 1884).

a new number of *Proserpina* upon Iris Ruthenia [sic] [...] and I've been all the forenoon in the garden playing at hide-and-seek with it'.¹⁶²

Through La Touche, Ruskin was presented with new plants of botanic and aesthetic interest, and the introduction of living specimens to the garden at Brantwood demonstrates La Touche's tangible influence on Ruskin's gardening. The plants she sent were intended to evoke shared memories, to please Ruskin's taste, and to offer botanical challenge; her enduring interest in the garden was that of a plantswoman and gardening friend. Even before she was reconciled with Ruskin, La Touche was curious about his garden, requesting of Severn: '[w]hen you get to Brantwood tell me of some of the things that grow'.¹⁶³ Nearly two decades later her interest in the plants at Brantwood persisted in her enquiry: 'I wonder much if the grassy Iris I sent you a few years ago flourished?'.¹⁶⁴ Ruskin was keen to share his garden with such an attentive friend, enticing her with descriptions of the landscape to '[c]ome as soon as ever you can – the heath is going to be wonderful this year', and declaring: 'I wish you would come to see the lovely cascades of down-lace – cobwebs – and crystals – all twined and netted over jellies of grass and candies of heath and sugar-conserve of moss and barley-sugar of fern'.¹⁶⁵ Other close friendships formed in the Brantwood years showed a shared affinity with the aesthetic appreciation of gardens: Francesca Alexander and Kate Greenaway were both artists interested in flowers.¹⁶⁶ Alexander was praised by Ruskin for her 'perfect penmanship [and] her knowledge of the flowers she draws', while his letters to Greenaway evidence floral conversation.¹⁶⁷

The figure who cemented this network of gardening friends was Joan Severn, herself a keen gardener. The gardens she created at Brantwood, before and after Ruskin's death, show a more conventional taste for exotics such as azaleas and rhododendrons, and her grass terrace had its formal structure softened by luxuriant

¹⁶² Works 37.611-12 (8 June 1889).

¹⁶³ Ruskin MS L110, [1876].

¹⁶⁴ Ferrier Young, *Letters of a Noblewoman*, p. 141 (letter to Severn, 5 March 1893).

¹⁶⁵ Ruskin MS B20, copy-letter book, 8 July 1885; Ruskin MS B10, 22 July 1881.

¹⁶⁶ Ruskin met Alexander in Florence in 1882, and Greenaway in 1883, although they corresponded from 1880.

¹⁶⁷ Works 34.669; Works 36.480-81 (31 March 1884).

planting typical of the Edwardian garden.¹⁶⁸ However, Collingwood defined Severn as one ‘who loves and understands flowers’, a description which places her within the gardening circle of Ruskin, Beever and La Touche.¹⁶⁹ The extent to which Ruskin shared his gardening ambitions and reflections with Severn is an unexplored area of scholarship, and the gardening expertise of Severn has only been studied in any depth by Ingram.¹⁷⁰ The epistolary evidence quoted above attests that Severn was part of the gardening network centred on Brantwood, and played a role in bringing together Beever and La Touche, yet, as Ingram asserts, she did not share Ruskin’s ‘intellectual approach’ to gardening.¹⁷¹ Severn’s expertise in garden design and planting has been overlooked; her talent was recognised by La Touche, who praised Severn’s involvement in the design of the garden at Slieve-na-man, near Dublin, where La Touche moved in 1905, stating, ‘[s]he was so keenly sympathetic and helpful [...] She has thought out all sorts of plans to make my little garden a bit of Paradise. She has given us heaps of plants, and is sending us more’.¹⁷² Severn was someone, like Beever, Hilliard and La Touche, to whom Ruskin could have turned for horticultural advice. Rather than learning from his gardening friends, Ruskin deliberately eschewed horticulture and instead took nature as his guide.

Ruskin’s refusal to take advice consolidates the evidence that his approach to gardening was entirely idiosyncratic, an argument that has been building through this thesis. His friends brought support, stimulus and sympathy, but the principles and praxis were Ruskin’s own. Stylistic influences of gardens he visited had no impact at Brantwood: Ruskin’s inspiration arose from the *character* of the gardening friends who shaped the land, rather than the gardens they created. Just as Ruskin’s garden encompassed his thoughts on art and science, mythology and literature, political economy, and his lost love, so too did the personalities of Beever, La Touche and Trevelyan permeate their gardens. Ruskin was stirred by his friends’ alliance to place: the ‘Northumberlandish-ness’ of Wallington, the rough Irish character of Harristown,

¹⁶⁸ See David Ottewill, *The Edwardian Garden* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁶⁹ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁰ Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, pp. 73-83.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁷² Ferrier Young, *Letters of a Noblewoman*, p. 229 (letter to Mrs Hubert Burke, November 1905).

the ‘pride of English Shepherd Land’ that permeated The Thwaite.¹⁷³ This bonding with home landscape is the nexus of Ruskin’s biophilic urge to nest and rest, to belong in, and be shaped by, the environment – a quality he coveted in his friends. Whether Ruskin achieved this sense of belonging is a truth shrouded in the unknown of his final decade, spent in silence in the landscape of Brantwood. The evidence presented above offers a route to understanding the significance to Ruskin’s garden-making of the people who surrounded him, in memory, correspondence, and presence. Ruskin’s complex relationship with Maria La Touche deserves further scholarly attention. It was through a shared interest in gardens that they were reunited at Brantwood, and this chapter has shown the significance of their mature friendship on Ruskin’s gardening, added to earlier evidence of their collaboration on *Proserpina*. Susanna Beever has been largely overlooked by scholarship. The analysis above of her garden and character builds on Albritton’s notion of her role as the embodiment of a Lakeland ideal, and readdresses the import of her friendship on Ruskin’s mental wellbeing. It has been demonstrated here that her practical gardening example had a tangible influence on the landscape at Brantwood; her reverence for local environmental tradition bridges the practical and aesthetic aspects of Ruskin’s gardening encompassed in his aspirations for the Guild of St George, addressed in the next chapter.

¹⁷³ Works 22.xix; Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. vii.

Chapter Four – *Fors Clavigera*: landscape ‘experiments’

Published in ninety-six monthly instalments from 1871 to 1884, *Fors Clavigera* offers a window on Ruskin’s thinking over most of his active years at Brantwood.¹ Each part took the form of a letter addressed to ‘the workmen and labourers of Great Britain’, an authorial form in which the tone of Ruskin’s writing shifted from the lyricism of his early work towards a polemical didacticism that challenged the moral authority of capitalism. W. G. Collingwood captured the mood of Ruskin’s writing in his assertion that, ‘[t]o read *Fors* is like being out in a thunderstorm’, while Cardinal Manning described its message as ‘like the beating of one’s heart in a nightmare’.² Ruskin explained the obscure title in his first letter, stating that “‘Fors’ is the best part of three good English words, Force, Fortitude, and Fortune,’ while *Clavigera* denoted ‘Club-bearer, Key-bearer, or Nail-bearer’, each possible meaning of the latter corresponding to one of the meanings of the former.³ The complexity of the title reflects the scope of the work: Ruskin was delivering a moral lesson to the nation, but also carrying out ‘a task imposed on him by destiny and necessity’, in Clive Wilmer’s astute interpretation.⁴ The ‘necessity’ of Ruskin’s writing is assessed by Rosenberg, asserting that *Fors* was an outlet for Ruskin’s societal fury, essential for his mental relief, and suggesting, ‘it was far more imperative for him that the letters be written than that they were read’.⁵ This chapter argues that the ultimate failure of Ruskin’s gardening projects compounded his disappointment that his message was unheard and unheeded, and precipitated his mental decline.

As the mouthpiece of the Guild of St George, *Fors* expressed Ruskin’s social and moral vision for the nation, and was largely autobiographical in character. Drawing on scholarly research by James Dearden and Stuart Eagles, and the reappraisal of its impact in Mark Frost’s revisionary history, this chapter assesses the role of the Guild in

¹ There was a hiatus in publication between 1878 and 1880 due to illness, and the following instalments up to 1884 were irregular.

² Collingwood, *A Life of John Ruskin*, II, p. 117; Works 36.lxxxvi, letter to Ruskin, 21 October 1873.

³ Works 27.27-28.

⁴ Clive Wilmer, *Commentary on Ruskin’s ‘Fors Clavigera’*, <<https://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartsboard/shop/wilmerc/cmmntryf.htm>> [accessed 4 July 2019].

⁵ Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass*, p. 188.

Ruskin's garden-making, revealing ideological and temporal parallels.⁶ In July 1871, Ruskin described in *Fors* the purpose of his proposed St George's Fund as 'dressing the earth and keeping it'.⁷ Two months later he purchased the Brantwood estate where he was able to put his principles into action. The resolution of the Guild was also a manifesto for the garden at Brantwood: 'we will ascertain the absolute best that can be made of every acre. We will first examine what flowers and herbs it naturally bears; every wholesome flower that it will grow shall be sown in its wild places, and every kind of fruit-tree that can prosper; and arable and pasture land extended by every expedient of tillage'.⁸ This plan was realised stage-by-stage in Ruskin's own garden, with Brantwood offering the opportunity for practical action that had been lacking in his life as artist, poet, art critic, writer, and dutiful son.

The Guild of St George originated as the St George's Fund, established by Ruskin with the intention of raising money to buy land which could be cultivated by working people, offering an alternative to industrialised processes and a model of rewarding manual labour. Supporters of the Guild were enrolled as Companions and encouraged to follow Ruskin's example and pay a tithe to the fund. His agricultural model of physical self-sufficiency was supplemented by intellectual nourishment in the form of regional museum collections and the publication of selected works of literature, chosen to give working people and their families the means to do their work well, with satisfaction, understanding and agency. To translate theory into practice and silence his detractors, Ruskin laid bare his own financial and domestic situation on the pages of *Fors*, giving the reader access to his annual accounts, describing his means and household, and reproducing his Master's Reports from the Guild. This transparency provides practical details of his gardening at Denmark Hill and at Brantwood, his garden staff and expenses. The advice and opinions given to his readership reveal Ruskin's attitude to horticulture at a time when he was himself engaged in the creation of a garden.

⁶ James S. Dearden, *John Ruskin's Guild of St George* (Bembridge: The Guild of St George, 2010); Stuart Eagles, *After Ruskin: The Social and Political Legacies of a Victorian Prophet, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Mark Frost, *The Lost Companions and John Ruskin's Guild of St George: A Revisionary History* (London: Anthem Press, 2014).

⁷ *Works* 27.142.

⁸ *Ibid.*

The communal spirit of Ruskin's garden projects at Brantwood paralleled the undergraduate road-building scheme Ruskin had instigated at Ferry Hinksey in 1874, and can be seen as an exemplar of the rewards achieved by purposeful labour. This was a central tenet of *Fors*, defined by Ruskin as the 'wise moral management of mind and body', whereby physical effort yielded a useful outcome as well as affording cognitive rest. This chapter explores Ruskin's gardening as the practical exposition of the principles set out in *Fors*. Purposeful labour was practiced in Ruskin's cottage garden and his kitchen gardens, and is also embedded in projects involving his household and visitors, including the construction of the harbour, tennis lawn and reservoirs on the moor, and in the engagement of children in gathering firewood. With an understanding informed by *Fors*, Ruskin's garden-making is presented here as conceptually distinct from ornamental gardening, and it is argued that the moral purpose guiding Ruskin engaged horticulture as a means of landscape redemption, far beyond the superficiality of conventional garden practice. Ruskin's landscape cultivation has been classed by both contemporary and recent critics as 'experiment'. This assessment is reappraised here to argue that Ruskin was gardening for confirmation of his secure convictions, rather than to speculate on the credibility of his approach.

Beginning with an appraisal of Ruskin's application of Guild principles to his garden, this chapter will illustrate the spiritual continuum of garden ethos from the previous owner, William Linton, to Ruskin's ethical gardening practice. The cottage gardening of both men is assessed against the artifice of the nineteenth-century ornamental cottage garden and the moral truths expounded in *Fors*. Ruskin's vociferous denunciation of glasshouse horticulture exposes a dichotomy between words and deeds, following the construction of glasshouses in the kitchen garden at Brantwood. This chapter examines Ruskin's contradictory approach to horticulture under glass, and the correlation to his art teaching, social enterprise and botanical investigation. Picking up the thread introduced in Chapter One, the concept of purposeful labour is analysed in Ruskin's communal gardening projects at the harbour and moor, revealing that the principles of the Guild of St George were at the core of Ruskin's garden practice. This doctrine was applied to landscape projects outside the garden, and the tangible links between these schemes and Brantwood are explored in

their shared planting and ethos. As a work of wide-ranging scope and candid autobiographical content, *Fors Clavigera* offers a serialised insight into Ruskin's preoccupations while creating his garden: this chapter interprets the intent of his message in the landscape of Brantwood.

Slaying the dragon of industrialisation

Ruskin used the pages of *Fors Clavigera* to set out his intention to combat the effects of industrialisation and reverse the spread of capitalism, an ambition described by Rosenberg as a 'nobly ludicrous attempt to slay the dragon of industrialisation', hinting at the reception received by Ruskin to his proposals.⁹ His vision for a society based on feudal patriotism, domestic happiness, and reward from honest labour was to be achieved by means of the St George's Fund, as explained in *Fors* in May 1871:

the object of such fund being, to begin, and gradually—no matter how slowly—to increase, the buying and securing of land in England, which shall not be built upon, but cultivated by Englishmen, with their own hands, and such help of force as they can find in wind and wave.¹⁰

Ruskin's concern for the spoliation of the countryside is embedded in his plan to improve the moral and physical state of the working people, advocating a return to the simple agricultural methods of a pre-industrial age in keeping with English pastoral tradition. That Ruskin undertook to protect the natural landscape from encroachment of building but not from change of use to agriculture is indicative of his rural ideal, expressed a decade earlier in *Unto This Last* (1860), in which he asserted that, '[n]o scene is continually and untiringly loved, but one rich by joyful human labour; smooth in field; fair in garden; full in orchard; trim, sweet, and frequent in homestead; ringing with voices of vivid existence'.¹¹ This bucolic vignette was the 'pleasant sense of inhabited land' that Ruskin recognised when looking across the lake towards

⁹ Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass*, p. 196.

¹⁰ Works 27.95.

¹¹ Works 17.111.

Brantwood.¹² If his vision was to come to fruition – and he acknowledged it would be a gradual process – the English landscape would be dominated by pastoral and agrarian land management, continuing the agricultural tradition that had been halted by industrialisation and rural population upheaval of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The repurposing of wild land for agriculture was expressly intentioned by Ruskin, who wrote in a statement on the work of the Guild of St George in 1882 that, '[t]his Guild was originally founded with the intention of showing how much food-producing land might be recovered by well-applied labour from the barren or neglected districts of nominally cultivated countries'.¹³ Ruskin's example on his own moorland demonstrated the distinction between 'barren' ground which could be cultivated and natural areas which should be left untouched, subjectively delineating separate aesthetics for wild and pastoral beauty, and sanctioning their coexistence.

The use of his own garden to expound his social ideal emphasised the domestic nature of Ruskin's undertaking. He was concerned with the notion that working life should be underpinned by the firm foundation of a comfortable home: a place of physical and mental nourishment. In response to the ideals laid down in *Fors*, a correspondent questioned Ruskin's personal commitment to his principles, citing his frequent sojourns abroad and apparent lack of settled home as evidence that he did not practice what he preached. Ruskin's published rejoinder used his garden to articulate his adherence to home, despite the lack of family grounding occasioned by the death of his parents and illness of the woman he hoped to marry. He wrote in the January 1875 instalment of *Fors*,

I have, under these conditions, done the best thing possible to me—bought a piece of land on which I could live in peace; and on that land, wild when I bought it, have already made, not only one garden, but two [...]; not that without help from children who, though not mine, have been cared for as if they were.¹⁴

¹² Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 162 (letter to Severn, 31 January 1873).

¹³ Works 30.45.

¹⁴ Works 28.246.

The creation of a garden was the underpinning marker of home in Ruskin's justification, not the building of a house. The ownership of land, the repurposing of that land from wild to cultivated, and the joint venture with children are all exemplars of the teaching of *Fors* applied in practice by Ruskin at Brantwood. His stated desire for 'a piece of land on which I could live in peace' echoes the assertion in his 1864 lecture, 'Of Queens' Gardens' that, '[t]his is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace', and connects Ruskin's social thinking with his personal quest for domestic shelter, explored in Chapter Three.¹⁵

The gardeners employed at Brantwood participated in the physical and philosophical manifestation of Ruskin's garden ideals. Dawson Herdson was a 'north-country man', employed as head gardener at Brantwood from 1871 until his death in 1899.¹⁶ His obituary records his fidelity to Ruskin's approach, stating that '[w]hatever the instructions might be, Herdson carried them out well and cheerily [...] No matter whether the work eventually ended in failure – his master's directions were carefully carried out', confirming that he participated freely in Ruskin's idiosyncratic horticultural methodology.¹⁷ David Downs (or Downes) had been gardener to the Ruskins at Denmark Hill since the late 1850s, and was brought to Brantwood by Ruskin, the other seven gardeners having been redeployed at Herne Hill (which was gifted to Joan and Arthur Severn on their marriage in 1871).¹⁸ Downs was valued by Ruskin for more than his horticultural expertise and, as Tim Hilton and Mark Frost have both observed, he was involved in much of Ruskin's St George's work, overseeing projects and contributing the practical competence lacking in his master, although he did not become a Companion of the Guild.¹⁹ When Ruskin instigated a street-sweeping scheme at Church Lane, St Giles's in London in 1872, Downs was sent to superintend the work of the sweepers; he was involved in the purification of a stream at Carshalton, begun in 1872 and continuing over succeeding years; he was assigned to

¹⁵ Works 18.122.

¹⁶ Dearden, *Brantwood*, p. 25.

¹⁷ 'A Link with Brantwood: Dawson Herdson and John Ruskin', *Westmoreland Gazette*, 1899. My thanks to James Dearden for alerting me to this source.

¹⁸ Dearden, *The Professor*, p. 67.

¹⁹ Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 180; Frost, *The Lost Companions*, p. 72.

manage the diggers at Hinksey in 1874 while Ruskin was abroad; and in 1878 he was sent to Totley to manage farmland acquired by the Guild.

Ruskin was keen to educate and reward his gardener and had brought Downs with him when travelling – to Keswick in 1867, to Abbeville in 1868 ‘to make a study of French market gardening’, and to France and Italy in 1870.²⁰ That Ruskin valued Downs as a skilled disciple rather than simply a member of staff is evident in his decision to delegate control in projects of such personal importance. When appointing Downs to take charge of the ailing farm on the Guild’s land at Totley, Ruskin stated that,

in all matters respecting the management of the land, he [Downs] is to have whatever authority I could have myself, if I were there, and deserves it much better, seeing he knows more about the business, and understands my mind, by this time, having lived twenty odd years with me, besides taking care of me when my mind was nobody knew where.²¹

Downs was to remain at Totley until his death in 1888, carrying out St George’s work with competence in Ruskin’s stead. Given the time assigned to other projects, Downs was only working at Brantwood intermittently in the early years of Ruskin’s garden-making, and help for Herdson was sought locally. Letters from Ruskin in the 1870s gave instruction on gardening matters to Ezekiel Jackson, who was employed as outdoor steward until August 1878, and Ruskin was paying a weekly wage to Thomas Hersey whom he described as ‘our old under-gardener, now rheumatic, and as little able to earn his dinner as I am myself’, indicating he was continuing to endow an old retainer, as well as hinting at his own practical inadequacy.²²

The respect for skilled labour and honest work, identified by Ruskin in gothic craftsmanship in *The Stones of Venice* (1853), informed his perception of the dignity of

²⁰ Hilton, *Later Years*, pp. 123, 138, 180; Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 276.

²¹ Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 580.

²² Ruskin MS T144, letters from Ruskin to Jackson, 25 March 1876 to 8 August 1878: the final letter enclosed a cheque and mentioned a ‘new situation’. Jackson is mentioned in a letter from Ruskin to Kate Raven, 30 Aug 1874, quoted in O’Gorman, *Notes and Queries*, p. 147; Works 28.631.

the gardening profession. In his December 1871 instalment of *Fors*, Ruskin declared that the nobility of the gardener was revealed in the example of the life of Jesus:

—borne first by witness of shepherds, in a cattle-shed, then by witness of the person for whom He had done most, and who loved Him best, in the garden, and in gardener's guise, and not known even by His familiar friends till He gave them bread—could it be told us, I repeat, more definitely by any sign or indication whatsoever, that the noblest human life was appointed to be by the cattle-fold and in the garden; and to be known as noble in breaking of bread?²³

The simplicity of outdoor work, the humbleness of tending God's flora and fauna, the connection to nature: this was what Ruskin admired in rural life, and the qualities he equated with the character of Jesus when appearing to his disciples as a gardener. Echoes of the Bible are evident in Ruskin's listing of the 'essential and eternal divisions of the Labour of Man' nearly a decade later in *Fors*, in which gardeners are recorded fourth below shepherds, fisherman and ploughmen, articulating the fundamental importance to human life of the people who cultivated the land and harvested its bounty.²⁴ In assigning status to agriculture, Ruskin was implicitly rejecting industrial systems and the capitalist economy; however, his idealisation of agricultural work overlooked the privations faced by many rural labourers who would not have recognised Ruskin's privileged view of their daily toil. The implicit connection between the nobility of gardeners and the principles of the Guild of St George is reflected in Ruskin's treatment of his own garden staff. Their honesty, dedication and loyalty were confirmation of the credibility of Ruskin's societal ideal; when their horticultural predilections deviated from the tenets of the Guild – as was the case in their preference for gardening under glass – Ruskin was forced to question the authority of his principles, the consequences of which are discussed below.

²³ Works 27.218-19.

²⁴ Works 29.409-10 (letter 89, September 1880).

Linton's gardening: the spiritual continuum of a cottage garden

William Linton, from whom Ruskin bought Brantwood, had worked the land to maintain a self-sufficient lifestyle for himself and his family of seven children, setting an agricultural precedent for the garden. In his memoir, published in 1895, Linton described his agrarian management of the land:

At Brantwood I rented a garden between the house and the Lake, and had another small garden patch, with bees, reached by steps to above the height of the house [...] I had the use of a horse, and kept two cows, a pig, pigeons, and poultry (an occasional pheasant would breakfast with my chickens), and some twenty sheep; my cows pasturing in two fields between the house and Lake (two fields rented with the garden), my sheep feeding on the fell, which rose some three or four hundred feet steeply, directly behind the house, the side of the fell covered with copse wood, young oak, and hazel. On one part, not so brant (i.e., steep), I felled the larger oak, barked it (much with my own hands), and sold the bark; then, perhaps for the first time ever done, had an acre or more ploughed, and corn and garden stuff raised upon it.²⁵

By the time Ruskin arrived at Brantwood, Linton's garden was overgrown, but Ruskin adopted the areas Linton had cleared and repurposed them for his own agricultural endeavours. The 'small garden patch' became the Professor's Garden and the 'not so brant' area of woodland, cleared and ploughed by Linton, became a terraced area of kitchen garden, now known as Zig-Zaggy. Ruskin's gardening of these areas is examined below. The husbandry of animals described by Linton does not appear to have been continued by Ruskin, except for keeping bees. In 1881 Ruskin added a stable and coach house to the outbuildings, but the horses were maintained for pulling a carriage rather than a plough.²⁶

The working of the land, combined with lengthy walking expeditions in the surrounding countryside in company or alone, provided a spiritual sustenance for Linton, inferred in his conclusion to the description above: 'It was a life worth

²⁵ Linton, *Memories*, p. 132-33.

²⁶ Dearden, *Brantwood*, p. 23.

having'.²⁷ Linton's response to the land was consistent with Ruskin's ideals for the Guild of St George; both were seeking spiritual rather than monetary reward for honest labour. There were other similarities between the two men that are worth exploring beyond their superficial coincidence. Linton had edited and printed his radical pamphlet *The English Republic* (1851-55) at Brantwood, its tone similar to Ruskin's polemical *Fors Clavigera* (1871-84), largely composed in the study at Brantwood. Both publications failed to have the societal impact their authors sought. The two men were also engaged in botanical study, Ruskin on his textbook *Proserpina* (1875-86) and Linton on his monograph *The Ferns of the English Lake Country* (1865), each using their own drawings from nature to illustrate their subject. Both men wrote poetry, and both walked in open countryside to nurture their thinking. Just as Ruskin entertained eminent guests at Brantwood, such as Charles Darwin, Sir John Lubbock and Edward Burne-Jones, Linton was friends with many 'vigorous young Radicals' and intellectuals.²⁸ According to biographer Frederick Sessions, Linton was 'a man of penetrating intellect, erratic and versatile genius, impulsive generosity, and little common-sense', a description equally applicable to Ruskin.²⁹ These similarities of character and enterprise suggest Ruskin and Linton were each drawn to the landscape of Brantwood for many of the same reasons: rural quietude, spiritual sustenance, proximity to nature, a simple existence to foster higher intellect, and to reap the rewards of purposeful labour. The desire to create an imprint on the landscape and mark the toil of their personal endeavour was a key part of their response to the land, expressed in the shared phraseology of their life-writing; Linton stripped the bark from trees 'with my own hands' and Ruskin cleared a path through the woods 'with my own hand'.³⁰ Ruskin and Linton saw more in the Lake Country than the Romanticism of Wordsworth and the landscape tourists who followed in his wake, both inhabiting the landscape with a visceral intensity that went beyond sensation.

Despite this personal connection to the land, Ruskin does not appear to have given specific labels to areas of his garden, and Linton's 'small garden patch' is now

²⁷ Linton, *Memories*, p. 133.

²⁸ Frederick Sessions, *Literary Celebrities of the English Lake District* (London: Elliot Stock, 1905), p. 39.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Linton, *Memories*, p. 132; Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries* p. 745 (25 April 1873).

named the Professor's Garden. Ruskin was known as 'The Professor', in reference to his election to the position of Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University, a post he held from 1869-79, and again from 1883-85. However, the use of this title in relation to the cultivated plot in the woods appears to be of more recent origin, based on Collingwood's description of 'the Professor's little private garden'.³¹ The title given by Arthur Severn to his painting of this area is *The Woodland Garden at Brantwood* (Figure 20), whereas Ruskin referred to it in 1881 simply as 'my flower and fruit garden'.³² In 1873 Ruskin described the plot as 'my own nest-garden', and when distinguishing between the streams on his property, he described 'my fishpond stream rather than [...] the bee-house one', suggesting the garden next to the stream was characterised by its beehives, and had no other identifying name.³³



Figure 20: Arthur Severn, *The Woodland Garden at Brantwood*, oil on canvas, n.d., colour reproduction in *Works 25* frontispiece.

³¹ Collingwood, *Life of John Ruskin*, II, p. 200.

³² *Works 25*.396.

³³ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 745 (25 April 1873); Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 21 (letter to Beever, 17 July 1874).

In Linton's time, the elevated position of his 'small garden patch' afforded 'a view across the Lake to the "Old Man" and Coniston Crags under Wetherlam'.³⁴ This area is now enclosed by trees, their growth obscuring the panorama beyond. From contemporary accounts, Ruskin appears to have allowed his plot to become enveloped by the surrounding woodland, evoking the shelter of the medieval *hortus conclusus*. Collingwood stated it was to be found 'in the heart of the wood', while in 1890, Augusta Wakefield described '[a] sudden little green cultivated place in the middle of tall nutwood', implying that the garden was hidden by trees. Ordnance Survey mapping from the same year confirms the garden was surrounded by deciduous woodland.³⁵ As well as the enclosing trees, the plot was bordered by physical geography on all sides: a stone wall to the east, a stream to the south, and wooden palings to the north and west. These boundaries may have been constructed by Linton in an attempt to prevent access by horticultural pests such as rabbits or deer; however, Ruskin built a bridge over the stream and thus breeched its defences, and the fence depicted in Severn's painting does not appear to be animal-proof. Ruskin's boundary was more symbolic than practical, denoting the sheltered *hortus conclusus*, and providing a sense of security and seclusion, separating the domestic from the wild. The privacy signified by the enclosed status of the garden is supported by Collingwood's references to Ruskin's 'private plot' and 'the Professor's little private garden'.³⁶

The private nature of this area is inferred in descriptions of the garden, in which it is portrayed as Ruskin's exclusive domain. Wakefield described 'Ruskin's own garden [where] the Professor permits no other toil than his own', and this claim is repeated by E. T. Cook in *Homes and Haunts* (1912) and in his biographical introduction to the *Library Edition*.³⁷ Collingwood – a reliable narrator of Ruskin's life – casts doubt on the authenticity of this assertion in his account of 'the Professor's little private garden, which he is *supposed* to cultivate with his own hands'.³⁸ As Ruskin was frequently

³⁴ Linton, *Memories*, p. 132.

³⁵ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 32; A. M. Wakefield, 'Brantwood, Coniston: John Ruskin's Home', *Murray's Magazine*, 8 (November 1890), p. 603; OS 25-inch series, Lancashire IV.8 (Coniston; Torver), surveyed 1888, published 1890.

³⁶ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 32; Collingwood, *Life of John Ruskin*, II, p. 200.

³⁷ Wakefield, 'John Ruskin's Home', p. 603; Cook, *Homes and Haunts*, p. 210; *Works* 25.xxxvii.

³⁸ Collingwood, *Life of John Ruskin*, II, p. 200, my italics.

away from Brantwood for extended periods, it is possible that he left instructions for his gardeners to tend this area in his absence to prevent his flowers and fruit from becoming choked by weeds. Whether or not others assisted Ruskin in the practical maintenance of his garden, his diary records that he did carry out practical work there himself.³⁹ Collingwood's comment that the garden was '[a]bout as large as a cottager's kitchen-garden' suggests that Ruskin was planting in the manner of a 'cottager', and that his gardening of this area can be read in terms of the self-sufficient lifestyle promoted by the Guild of St George.⁴⁰

The notion of a 'cottage garden' has changed over time, and it is worth exploring the sociological context as it relates to Ruskin's gardening. The origin of the cottage garden lies in the production of useful foodstuffs by the labouring population; the garden would have been used for raising livestock as well as growing culinary and medicinal plants, and was essentially practical in purpose.⁴¹ Many cottagers would have struggled to subsist, living in unsanitary conditions with no welfare protection against illness and incapacity, their garden essential to the survival of their family. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, John Loudon, in his *Encyclopaedia of Gardening in Britain* (1822), described a more ornamental aspect to the labourer's garden, containing flowers as well as fruit and vegetables. His suggestions for the planting of the cottage garden included 'a rose and honeysuckle on the porch', elements which were to become quintessential aspects of the twentieth-century conception of the style.⁴² By the 1870s, when Ruskin was laying out his garden, the societal reaction to the mass-produced uniformity of industrialised goods was reflected in garden style. The formal patterned massing of brightly-coloured bedding plants was rejected in favour of a more traditional form of British gardening, and cottage gardens were emulated in the informal planting of old-fashioned varieties of flowers. As Brent Elliott has observed, the cottage garden of the late nineteenth

³⁹ For example, Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 745 (25 April 1873).

⁴⁰ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 32.

⁴¹ See Twigs Way, *The Cottage Garden* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2011).

⁴² John Claudius Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening: Comprising the Theory and Practice of Horticulture, Floriculture, Arboriculture, and Landscape Gardening; Including All the Latest Improvements; a General History of Gardening in All Countries; and a Statistical View of Its Present State; with Suggestions for Its Future Progress in the British Isles* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822), p. 1203.

century was based on a spurious notion of English tradition, fabricated by the Victorians and uncritically adopted by later generations.⁴³ The cottage style of planting was carefully contrived in its artless simplicity, defined in the *Oxford Companion to Gardens* (2001) as comprising formulaic elements such as ‘an archway of clipped yew’, ‘a piece of topiary’ and ‘honeysuckle’.⁴⁴

The pointless artifice of the fashionable cottage garden style was an example of the lack of moral truth that Ruskin derided in contemporary society; the garden was a parody of the original, adopting its ornamental features while ignoring the sustenance-based necessity of its origins. At the same time as cottage gardening was becoming a popular ornamental style, Ruskin was promoting a pre-industrial model of wholesome domestic gardening practice akin to the cottage garden described by Loudon in 1822:

the labourer finds his garden the most useful and agreeable object; by supplying a part of his food, affording an agreeable source of recreation, and presenting an opportunity of displaying his taste in its cultivation. [...] Besides, he has that most desirable object, something that he can call his own [...] In a moral and political point of view, cottage-gardens are of obvious importance; by attaching the cottager to his home and to his country, by inducing sober, industrious, and domestic habits; and by creating that feeling of independence which is the best security against pauperism.⁴⁵

The importance of land ownership to Ruskin is covered in Chapter One in an analysis of his quest for permanence and stability in his landscape paradigm. Here, Loudon recognised the value to the working man of ‘something that he can call his own’, referring not only to the possession of land, but to the reward resulting from the labour expended in producing the crops grown on it. The instinct to own land is identified by Loudon as being ‘an object of ambition from the earliest ages of the world’, together with the desire to procreate.⁴⁶ The ownership of land is a prerequisite

⁴³ Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, p. 230.

⁴⁴ *Oxford Companion to Gardens*, ed. by Geoffrey Jellicoe and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 128-29.

⁴⁵ Loudon, *Encyclopaedia*, p. 1203.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

to the creation of a garden, and a garden offers the possibility to nourish a family, granting fundamental human needs and offering the permanence and stability sought by Ruskin.

Ruskin's own cottage garden followed Loudon's description of a typical planting of mixed fruit and flowers enclosed within a wall, fence or hedge. Collingwood described an 'espalier of apples and a little gooseberry patch and a few standard fruit trees and some strawberries, mixed with flowers' and creepers on the walls, to which Wakefield adds daffodils and cherry blossom in spring.⁴⁷ The vegetables listed by Loudon are not described in contemporary accounts of the Professor's Garden, and it is likely that Ruskin confined crops of cabbages, potatoes and carrots to his kitchen garden. The wild plants grown by cottagers for medicinal purposes, and listed in William Salisbury's *The cottager's companion, or, a complete system of cottage horticulture: intended to instruct the industrious poor of Great Britain in the art of cottage gardening* (1817), may have been grown intentionally by Ruskin but remained unidentified by commentators. Plants identified by Salisbury as useful crops – such as dandelion, fat-hen, stinging nettle and wood sage – growing among the fruit and flowers of the Professor's Garden could easily have been dismissed by others as weeds. In his 'private plot' Ruskin grew plants that pleased him: strawberries for their taste, gooseberries as a reminder of his father and his garden at Herne Hill, cherry blossom for memories of Rose La Touche, and his favourite wayside flowers; wild saxifrage, violet and rock strawberries are mentioned growing there in *Proserpina*.⁴⁸

As well as flowers, Loudon included provision for 'two or more beehives' in his description of the cottage garden.⁴⁹ The bee-house in the Professor's Garden – a stone structure to house wicker bee boles, described by Collingwood as an 'old-fashioned penthouse' – was probably a relic from Linton's garden, described above as a 'small garden patch, with bees'.⁵⁰ Ruskin's apicultural equipment is extant in the collection of the Ruskin Museum in Coniston, and bee-keeping can be seen as part of his cottage gardening. In addition to the practical activity of the harvesting of honey, the bees

⁴⁷ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 36; Wakefield, 'John Ruskin's Home', p. 603.

⁴⁸ Works 25.396-97.

⁴⁹ Loudon, *Encyclopaedia*, p. 1186.

⁵⁰ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 36; Linton, *Memories*, p. 132.

provided a vital example of Ruskin's societal ideals, living within a peaceful hierarchical structure in which industrious workers united their efforts for the good of the community. The solidarity of bees was emblematised on the insignia of the Co-operative movement, founded in 1872 and contemporaneous with both the commencement of *Fors Clavigera* and Ruskin's work on the Professor's Garden. The purposeful example of the bees was tempered by their association with evolutionary theory; that flower beauty was purely designed for attracting insects was an uncomfortable concept to a natural theologian. Ruskin was 'made so miserable' when he read in a paper by John Lubbock that 'insects, chiefly bees, entirely originate flowers; that all scent, colour, pretty form, is owing to bees; that flowers which insects don't take care of, have no scent, colour, nor honey'.⁵¹ Ruskin countered this theory with his own logic: 'It seems to me, that it is likelier that the flowers which have no scent, colour, nor honey, don't get any attention from the bees,' suggesting that he was able to combat the negative potency of science with reasoning based on observation.⁵²

The Professor's Garden was suited to the observation of plants and bees, as well as offering a site to partake in cottage gardening, a place to dig and labour, and a private retreat enclosed in the wooded landscape. The position of the garden was determined by Linton's original layout, and its size may have suggested its suitability as a cottage garden, but the overgrown aspect of the surroundings determined the enclosed aesthetic retained by Ruskin, despite the encroachment of trees on the light necessary for plants to flourish. The planting may have been influenced by the flowers Ruskin saw in the gardens of his neighbours, and he may have introduced aspects of the cottage gardens seen on continental travels; Loudon mentions the fine example of the garden husbandry of the Swiss peasantry in his *Encyclopaedia* (1822).⁵³ The opportunity for focussed physical work was a motivating factor for Ruskin to buy land of his own. His solitary toil in the Professor's Garden was a recognition of the benefits of purposeful labour to body and soul, fundamental to the ideals of the Guild of St George, as well as vital to his own physical and mental wellbeing.

⁵¹ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 103 (letter to Beever, n. d.).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Loudon, *Encyclopaedia*, p. 53.

The rewards of purposeful labour

Contributing to his St George's work, Ruskin's manual labouring served the practical purpose of tidying his woodland and providing fuel for his domestic fires. In November 1877, he informed the readers of *Fors* that, 'I have been very busy clearing my wood, and chopping up its rotten sticks into faggots'.⁵⁴ He continued with an explanation of his rationale: 'I am highly satisfied with the material results of this amusement; and shall be able to keep the smoke from my chimneys this winter of purer blue than usual, at less cost'.⁵⁵ This statement underpins the superficial 'amusement' of wood-chopping with an implicit rejection of the products of industrialisation, by replacing mined coal with home-grown wood. The financial savings arising from such manual labour would benefit the pocket of the labourers to whom Ruskin addressed his writing, but the 'cost' was also a moral expense. The 'purer blue' of Ruskin's woodsmoke contributed to both the actual purity of the air and the implicit purity of societal morality, the sense of the word used when referring to the landscape of Brantwood as 'entirely pastoral and pure', and in the subtitle of *Proserpina: Studies of Wayside Flowers while the air was yet pure*'.⁵⁶ The example set by Ruskin in his garden at Brantwood therefore combined specific practical activity with sweeping economic polemic.

As well as its material benefits, Ruskin's manual labour contributed to his physical and mental wellbeing. His diary of January 1872, written from Denmark Hill, illustrated the therapeutic solace of digging when intellectual work was impossible: 'Down early to-day, but giddy: not fit for work. Went into garden and dug, before lunch'.⁵⁷ Ruskin recognised the complementary nature of mental and physical work, and each had its place in his routine at Brantwood. He worked in his study in the morning, writing, cataloguing and corresponding, but confided to Susanna Beever that this work 'makes me fit for nothing in the afternoon but wood-chopping'.⁵⁸ The intellectually undemanding physicality of wood-chopping brought cognitive rest, the corporeal exertion quietening the mind.

⁵⁴ Works 29.273.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Works 4.8 (Preface to the re-arranged edition of *Modern Painters*, 1882).

⁵⁷ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 717 (5 January 1872).

⁵⁸ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 59 (n.d.).

Ruskin was not merely responding to the physical demands of his body by balancing mental with physical work, but was modelling his daily routine on the heroic life of Walter Scott. In July 1876 Ruskin wrote in *Fors*:

Sir Walter Scott's life, in the full strength of it at Ashestiel, and early at Abbotsford, with his literary work done by ten, or at latest twelve in the morning; and the rest of the day spent in useful work with Tom Purdie in his woods, is a model of wise moral management of mind and body, for men of true literary power; but I had neither the country training of body, nor have the natural strength of brain, which can reach this ideal in anywise. Sir Walter wrote as a stream flows; but I do all my brain-work like a wrung sponge, and am tired out, and good for nothing, after it. Sir Walter was in the open air, farm-bred, and playing with lambs, while I was a poor little Cockney wretch, playing, in a dark London nursery, with a bunch of keys.⁵⁹

Ruskin saw an 'ideal' in Scott's daily life to which he aspired, but was unable to fulfil in the urban setting of his London home. He needed access to woodland to emulate the 'useful work' of Scott's afternoon labour. Ruskin's move to Brantwood can be seen in the context of his admiration for Scott's 'true literary power' as an attempt to rectify the deficiencies of his urban upbringing and find mental and physical strength in rural life.

His modelling of the 'wise moral management of mind and body' extended to the Oxford undergraduates W. G. Collingwood and Alexander Wedderburn whom Ruskin had invited to Brantwood in 1875 to work on a translation of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. Collingwood wrote that, while they were employed in translating from the Greek all morning, '[w]e dug and built every afternoon', working to build a harbour on the lakeshore.⁶⁰ Following Scott's model, Ruskin encouraged the students to appreciate the value of purposeful physical labour as a stimulus to intellectual rigour, and when he lauded the result of their translation as 'exemplary as an unselfish piece of youthful labour devoted to an honourable end', he could equally have been

⁵⁹ Works 28.644-45.

⁶⁰ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 9.

commending their parallel effort on the harbour.⁶¹ Ruskin had selected *The Economist of Xenophon* as one of the texts to be included in his *Bibliotheca Pastorum* (1876-85), or shepherd's library, a collection of literature recommended for the moral instruction of followers of the Guild. The ancient text was included for its notable definitions of wealth and government, but mainly for what Ruskin described as its description of 'the ideal of domestic life'.⁶² In the setting of Brantwood, where Ruskin was crafting his own domestic template, the content of the book offered a further layer of meaning to his model. The students were following the example established by Scott, and expounded by Ruskin, to exert 'moral management' through the balance of intellectual and physical work to 'an honourable end', and concurrently learning the lessons of Xenophon on how to achieve domestic happiness.

Ruskin was concerned to illustrate to his Oxford students the 'dignity of labour', later described by Collingwood as 'an object-lesson in ethics, the first rudiments of human fellowship, which branched upwards into all the moralities'.⁶³ This Ruskin sought to demonstrate by practical example, and in March 1874 he gathered a group of undergraduates to make improvements to a road in the village of Ferry Hinksey in Oxfordshire, with the intention of draining the waterlogged track, smoothing the ruts, and planting wild flowers on the banks.⁶⁴ According to one of the 'diggers', as they became known, Ruskin's principle was 'that we should be working at something that would do good to other people, at something by which we might show that in all labour there was something noble'.⁶⁵ The work continued for two months but the road remained unfinished, mainly due to lack of leadership from Ruskin. Although the Hinksey Road project was a practical failure, Stuart Eagles argues that its success lay in the awareness engendered in the undergraduates of their position and their responsibility to society. By giving the privileged students the opportunity to carry out physical work using picks, shovels and wheelbarrows, Eagles asserts that Ruskin's intention was to stimulate respect for the skills of the working populace, with the

⁶¹ Works 31.30.

⁶² Works 31.28.

⁶³ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 9.

⁶⁴ See Works 20.xli for a letter from Ruskin to Henry Acland outlining his proposals to the landowner.

⁶⁵ Oscar Wilde, *Essays and Lectures*, 4th edn (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1913), p. 193.

result that the undergraduates would carry out their future duties as landlords and employers with respect and empathy.⁶⁶

An empirical awareness of the nobility of physical labour was an aspect of the harbour-building project at Brantwood, which can be seen as an extension of Ruskin's ideal for the Hinksey Road diggers, and was carried out by two of the students involved in the diggings. In both these schemes, it was the principle and practice rather than the ultimate result that interested Ruskin; he frequently abandoned his projects when their principle had been established, regardless of the realisation of an accountable outcome. Less than two years after the road-building commenced, Ruskin recorded in his diary: 'road cut up, all going to ruin that we did there', and the students' work on the harbour at Brantwood was curtailed as time ran out, with the harbour eventually being completed by a professional stonemason.⁶⁷ Eagles compares the failure to create a useable road at Hinksey to Ruskin's 'toppling dry stone walls', leaking reservoir and 'imperfect icehouse' at Brantwood, recognising the experimental aspect of Ruskin's idealism and his practical inefficiency: it was the principle of the undertaking, not the actual result, that mattered.⁶⁸

The ideals of the Guild of St George were embedded in the working-party of undergraduates at Hinksey, just as they were in the construction projects at Brantwood. Ruskin expressed a hope that the diggers would 'band together, one day, and go out in a kind of Benedictine brotherhood to cultivate waste places and make life tolerable in our great cities for the children of the poor'.⁶⁹ His hope that the undergraduates would form a benevolent fellowship based on their formative experience at Hinksey encapsulated Ruskin's belief that Oxford men had the potential to influence society. His aspiration that they would cultivate areas of urban waste echoes the principle of repurposing barren areas of countryside central to the aims of the Guild of St George, and grounds Ruskin's thinking of this period in his gardening projects.

⁶⁶ Stuart Eagles, *After Ruskin: The Social and Political Legacies of a Victorian Prophet, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 108.

⁶⁷ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 883 (6 February 1876).

⁶⁸ Eagles, *After Ruskin*, p. 108.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 114.

Eagles perceived a further facet to Ruskin's work at Hinksey, asserting that 'the diggings provide[d] the opportunity to explore the flora of the countryside, and it would be a mistake to see them solely as a social experiment'.⁷⁰ One aspect of the project that is generally overlooked is Ruskin's intention to 'sow the banks with the wild flowers that ought to grow on them' to achieve through botany what he described as 'the sanctification of useful purpose by affectionate grace-giving or decoration'.⁷¹ The societal aspirations of Ruskin's vision were enhanced by the creation of beautiful 'decoration' in the form of native plantings of wild flowers. Ruskin was working on his botany book *Proserpina* (1871-86) at the time of the diggings, with the aim of promoting the close observation of plants in their natural habitat to inspire awe and wonder. He was concerned that people, especially young people, should foster a reverence for the nature of their immediate environment, and by focussing on 'wayside plants' he intended 'to describe, without theorizing or much thinking, the little plants of one's own home-fields, and gradually teach others to do the same'.⁷² By bringing his students to the countryside and sowing wild flower seeds Ruskin was facilitating botanical observation in the fields and hedgerows of local environs, offering explicit teaching of botany alongside an implicit lesson in societal understanding.

The correlation between Ruskin's gardening and the Hinksey Road project is made explicit by Collingwood in his description of activities at Brantwood: 'we were marshalled with pick and spade every fair afternoon to the "Board of Works", as we called it; and the old game of the Hinksey diggings was played over again'.⁷³ The 'Board of Works' encompassed the whole household, including family, employees, visitors, and children. The communal fellowship of the enterprise is captured in a silhouette drawn by Ruskin in c. 1881, based on contemporary Alpine postcards, which depicts a procession of workers, led by Ruskin, toiling up a slope carrying tools in readiness for work (Figure 21). Such work parties were not restricted to Ruskin's own estate; when staying with the Cowper-Temples at Broadlands, Ruskin coerced the guests into practical work, as recounted by Georgina Cowper-Temple:

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 108.

⁷¹ Works 20.xli (letter to Henry Acland, 28 March 1874).

⁷² Ruskin T30, letter to Daniel Oliver, 3 March 1873.

⁷³ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics* p. 43.

He set us all to manual work! He himself undertook to clean out the fountain in the garden, and made us all, from Juliet [the Cowper-Temples' adopted daughter] to Mr Russell Gurney, pick up the fallen wood and make it up into bundles of faggots for the poor!⁷⁴



Figure 21: John Ruskin, silhouette, n.d. Reproduced by kind permission of Brantwood Trust.

Ruskin's lessons on the value of purposeful labour were extolled by practical example to friends, family and students, as well as written in the pages of *Fors Clavigera* and embedded in the principles of the Guild. His message was directed not only to 'the workmen and labourers of Great Britain' but to the aristocracy (the Cowper-Temples became Lord and Lady Mount-Temple in 1880) and to his own household. St George's work was at the heart of Ruskin's thinking during his years at Brantwood, and his gardening projects demonstrate the centrality of political economy to his mature work.

This is evident in the first of Ruskin's projects at Brantwood. The harbour was conceived as a practical necessity; Collingwood remembered that before its construction, 'the boats were exposed to the big waves from the south-west storms, and it was an almost daily task for the gardeners to keep them aground on the shore and to bale them'.⁷⁵ Ruskin's treatment of the harbour suggests that he considered it to be part of the garden, and its hard-landscaping methodology was shared with other

⁷⁴ Works 36.c, quoted from Lady Mount-Temple, *Memorials*, 1890.

⁷⁵ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 9.

garden features, such as the terraces, boundary walls, bridges and paths. In a letter to Severn, dated February 1873, Ruskin declared: 'I began building my boathouse this afternoon! Rather, digging my harbour [to replace an] old bad one'.⁷⁶ He could have employed one of the local builders working on his house to build him a harbour, but instead set to work himself, recording in his diary of April 1873, '[I]ate in evening harbour-digging' and '[w]ading in lake to shape harbour'.⁷⁷ The ambition of the harbour project reflected Ruskin's enthusiasm for civil engineering and water management and was a substantial undertaking, requiring skill in planning, surveying and practical construction, as well as many hours of labour, acknowledged in a letter to Severn in April 1873: '[t]he harbour will be a beauty, but will take me, as near as I can guess of my Robinson Crusoe work, till the year 1880, before it is done'.⁷⁸ He recognised the enormity of his solitary task, but remained confident of a successful result.

A few days after writing these words, Ruskin had enlisted practical help, noting in his diary, '[w]orked with Burgess and Downes on harbour: found it much nicer in company than alone'.⁷⁹ Arthur Burgess was a wood engraver and draughtsman employed by Ruskin and described by him as possessing 'gifts of mechanical ingenuity and mathematical intelligence in the highest degree precious to me', while David Downes was Ruskin's gardener brought with him to Brantwood from Denmark Hill.⁸⁰ Both men would have had skills to contribute to the project, although practical expertise was not a prerequisite for involvement; as the work progressed over ensuing months, Ruskin solicited help from his household and visitors, regardless of their strength or proficiency. For example, in June 1873 he was assisted by his eight-year-old god-daughter Venice Hunt and her parents, the artist Alfred William Hunt and novelist Margaret Raine Hunt, and in September 1873, Arthur Severn, artist and husband of Joan, was working with him at the harbour.⁸¹ In the *Stones of Venice*, Ruskin had recognised the complexity of building with stone, and noted that

⁷⁶ Ruskin MS L38, 18 February 1873. The harbour as it exists today matches a sketch plan in this letter, but no boathouse appears to have been built.

⁷⁷ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 742 (6 April 1873) and p. 743 (13 April 1873).

⁷⁸ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 173 (20 April 1873).

⁷⁹ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 745 (25 April 1873).

⁸⁰ Works 14.351.

⁸¹ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 747 (2 June 1873) and p. 757 (9 Sept 1873).

craftsmanship was tuned through practical experience. His encouragement of amateurs to emulate the work of skilled craftsmen can be seen as a democratisation of opportunity, whereby privileged men, as well as women and children, could experience the fulfilment of purposeful manual labour not normally open to them, as well as learning to appreciate the skill of the labouring classes.

In October 1873, Ruskin used the stonework of his harbour to illustrate an Oxford lecture on Tuscan architecture, candidly exposing his own practical inability while praising the superior skill of his helper. He informed his students that,

I have been building a little pier into Coniston Lake [...] Under the dextrous hands of a neighbour farmer's son, the pier projected [...] My own better acquaintance with the laws of gravity and of statics did not enable me, myself, to build six inches of dyke that would stand.⁸²

As Ruskin lauded the usefulness of practical experience over theoretical knowledge, he implicitly elevated the worthy sensibility of the labouring classes. In his lecture, Ruskin went on to assert that 'natural instinct' governed the decoration of good architecture, demonstrated in his harbour by turning the lichen-encrusted stones to face outwards.⁸³ In *Proserpina*, Ruskin noted that 'the chief use of lichens is for silver and gold colour on rocks', suggesting that colour contrast was integral to his garden aesthetic, and his watercolour studies of lichen on rocks indicate a profound appreciation of the minutiae of this natural harmony (Figure 22).⁸⁴ In this sense, Ruskin's use of lichen was akin to ornamental planting; nature was allowed to prevail, but under his aesthetic direction. The stones of the harbour wall were treated with the same attention to detail as the rest of the garden, setting a precedent for beauty in the functional as well as the ornamental.

Even with the help of his neighbour's son, the harbour remained unfinished, and for a month in the summer of 1875, work resumed in earnest with Collingwood and Wedderburn's afternoon labouring. According to the account in the *Library Edition*,

⁸² Works 23.86.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Works 25.214.

[t]hey enclosed a small piece of the lake and then deepened it, to allow of the boats coming in, and also built steps up the bank to the garden path. Ruskin often joined them in the harbour making; and though, later on, a local mason was called in to finish the work and make an inner harbour, the work of the Oxford diggers still stands.⁸⁵



Figure 22: John Ruskin, *Study of Foreground Material: Finished Sketch in Watercolour from Nature*, watercolour and bodycolour over graphite on paper, n.d., © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, WA.RS.RUD.133.

It is clear that many hands were involved in the harbour project. Ruskin's directorship was informed and mediated by the practical skills of others, and the exercise of making was as valuable as the finished result. The importance of the collaboration is evident in Ruskin's request to his professional stone mason to preserve the handiwork of the students, later recounted by Collingwood: 'he bade them leave three of my steps standing as monument to that summer's doings, and there they are to this day'.⁸⁶ Ruskin was attracted by the communal nature of labour, both as demonstration of his political ideals and to counter the loneliness of his 'Robinson Crusoe work'. However, this communal enterprise must be seen in the context of his earlier experience at Crossmount in 1847, discussed in Chapter One, where solitary work was the key to enlightenment. The difference between the child digging contentedly alone in the

⁸⁵ Works 23.xxiv.

⁸⁶ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 9.

garden at Herne Hill and the mature man seeking company while building walls at Brantwood represents a paradigm shift in Ruskin's approach to practical work, suggesting that the desire for higher intellectual contemplation through manual work had been subsumed by insecurity, and the need for companionship was driving Ruskin's work as much as the ideal of communal enterprise. St George's work offered catharsis as well as moral instruction.

Kitchen Gardening and Glasshouses

The practical work of the kitchen garden was the domain of the garden staff rather than Ruskin, forming part of the essential apparatus of the household. The ideology of sufficiency chimed with the principles of the Guild, and it is demonstrated here that Ruskin constructed terraces for cultivation, illustrating the Guild's aim to repurpose barren land. The kitchen garden at Brantwood was based on the structural framework left on the landscape by Linton's livestock. His sheep grazed on the fell and his cows pastured the fields by the lake, while the pigs, poultry and pigeons, described above, would all have required structural shelter in the form of outbuildings, as well as winter lodging for the cows. It is probable that the agricultural buildings used by Linton were located in the area to the south of the house that was to become Ruskin's new kitchen garden, created in the early 1880s to accommodate the needs of his growing household, as the Severns and their children began to spend more time at Brantwood. In the adjacent sloping woodland, cleared by Linton to grow crops and known as Cornfield Bank, the surviving venerable apple trees suggests that part of this area was used as an orchard in an extension to the productive growing space.⁸⁷ Linton appears to have used the 'garden between the house and the Lake' as a kitchen garden.⁸⁸ This may be the area described in *Ruskin Relics* in Collingwood's account of Ruskin's gardening:

[a]nd in the old garden below, though he did not create it, you can trace his feeling in the terraced zigzag of paths, hedged with apple and the cotoneaster

⁸⁷ Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, p. 80.

⁸⁸ Linton, *Memories*, p. 132.

which flourishes at Coniston, and filled in with sloping patches of strawberry and gooseberry.⁸⁹

Ordnance Survey mapping from the late 1880s records this roughly rectangular garden as walled with a central path, marked to denote a garden area interspersed with orchard trees.⁹⁰ The garden slopes gently towards the lake, which may explain Collingwood's reference to a 'terraced zigzag of paths' which would accommodate the contours of this 'old garden'. The name 'Zig-Zaggy' is now given to the series of terraces built by Ruskin into the steeply sloping woodland to the south of the house on part of Linton's Cornfield Bank, referred to by Ruskin in a letter to Joan Severn, using their shared baby language: 'me's making zig-zaggys all up my garden, for oo to walk up without any tubble'.⁹¹

This terrace was one of the first projects undertaken by Ruskin on his arrival at Brantwood, planned in tandem with work on the harbour. His diary of 22 April 1873 recorded: 'enjoyed myself, harbour-digging and planning garden terraces'.⁹² Ruskin's design for the terraced garden is preserved in two letters to Joan Severn, dated March and April 1873, that contain annotated sketches and a cross-section of the structure, providing evidence that Ruskin had a distinct scheme in mind before beginning work on the ground (Figure 23).⁹³ He may have taken inspiration from the agricultural terracing of Alpine slopes, and there are echoes of the Zig-Zag at Selbourne, created by the naturalist Gilbert White, whom Ruskin admired. Ruskin described his proposed garden in the present tense, suggesting that it existed in his imagination with the confidence that it would soon exist in reality: 'there's a steep walk up the middle, with steps at the terraces – and the terraces zigzag, and [looping pen strokes] is Brantwood'.⁹⁴ In fact, the central path was not built – perhaps because it would have necessitated some complex geometry to facilitate the intersections of walls and path on the gradient – but, aside from this, the garden shown on the Ordnance Survey map

⁸⁹ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 39.

⁹⁰ OS six-inch series, Lancashire IV, surveyed 1889, published 1892.

⁹¹ Ruskin MS L38, March 1873.

⁹² Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 744.

⁹³ Ruskin MS L38.

⁹⁴ Ruskin MS L38, letter from Ruskin to Severn, March 1873, original italics.

of 1888 shows the layout of paths as envisaged by Ruskin in his sketch (Figure 24). The second letter to Severn, written the following month, details further features of the garden, including the provision of 'fruit trees on trellis against wall', a 'little gravel walk' flanked on one side by a 'little flower border' and on the other by a 'sloping grass bank', and, above them, a 'grass terrace six feet wide'.⁹⁵ In the letter, Ruskin informed Severn: 'I'm going out to lay out terraces in new garden', indicating that work was beginning at this date.

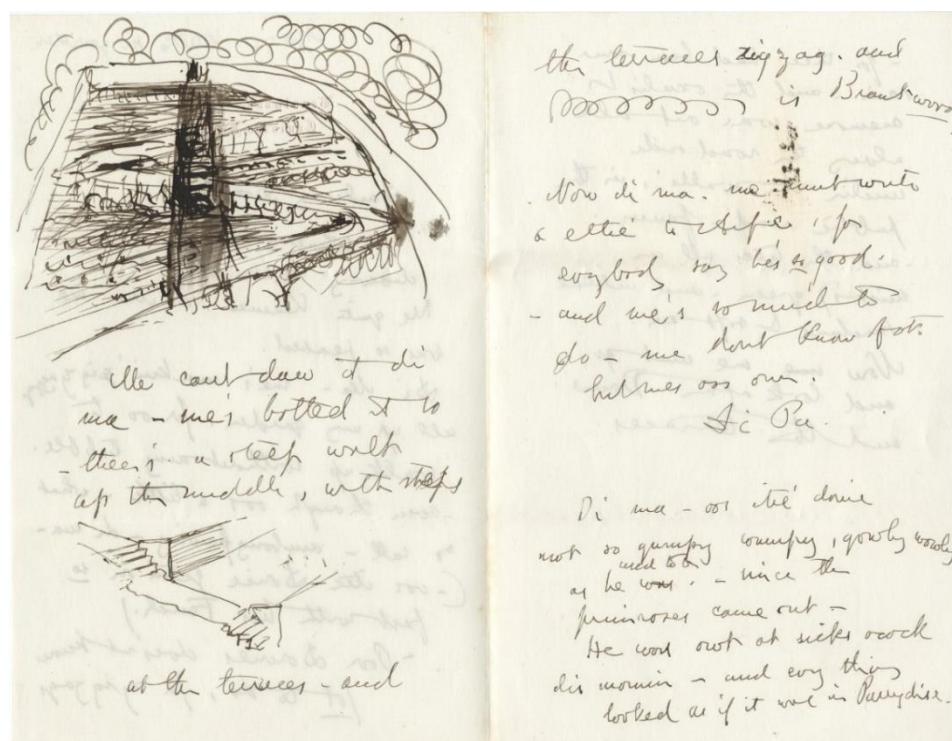


Figure 23: Letter from John Ruskin to Joan Severn, March 1873, Ruskin MS L38.
Reproduced by kind permission of The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre.

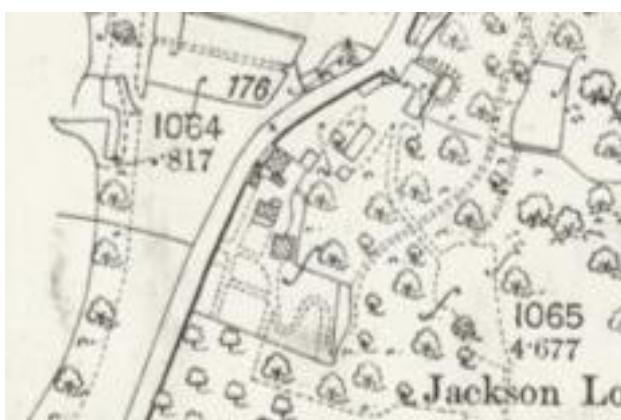


Figure 24: Ordnance Survey 25-inch series, Lancashire IV.8, surveyed 1888, published 1890. Reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland.

⁹⁵ Ruskin MS L38, April 1873.

The construction of this terraced garden was reported to the readers of *Fors* in accounts of Ruskin's domestic expenditure. He described how he 'cut and terraced a kitchen garden out of the "steep wood"', and detailed his expense in 'surrounding, with a costly wall six feet high, to keep out rabbits, a kitchen garden, which, being terraced and trim, my neighbours say is pretty'.⁹⁶ These statements make clear Ruskin's intention that the terraces were to be used for culinary crops; he referred to both the terrace and the old garden near the lake as his 'kitchen garden'. The additional land given over to culinary production in the 1880s was in the level area below the terrace and appears to have been an extension to the terraced kitchen garden, rather than an entirely new garden. It is likely that this area was the site of Linton's agricultural buildings and was repurposed when the stables and coach house were constructed nearby, with the 'old garden' given over to ornamental planting. Utilitarian crops were typically grown alongside flowers in the kitchen garden, as in the cottage garden, and there may have already been an ornamental aspect to Linton's 'old garden' – the structure of which was retained by Ruskin – particularly as the route to the harbour passed through it. This is confirmed by Ruskin in June 1881 in a description in *Proserpina*: 'I go down into my kitchen garden, where the path to the lake has a border of pansies on both sides all the way down, with clusters of narcissus behind them'.⁹⁷

Whether the terraced garden was actually used for culinary crops, stated in *Fors* as Ruskin's intention, is unclear; at the time of its conception, he would have had little need for an extensive kitchen garden – described by him as sixty feet long – considering he could make use of the old kitchen garden by the lake, and he was spending much of the year away from Brantwood, either travelling or lecturing at Oxford.⁹⁸ The purpose of the terrace may have originated in the technicality of its construction, rather than the product of its planting, the area serving as a model kitchen garden structure. Ruskin recorded roses and strawberries growing in 'the higher garden' in 1879, and in an article on Brantwood published in 1877, Wedderburn described a garden 'made lovely with standard roses and terraces of grass', which may

⁹⁶ Works 29.101 (letter 76, April 1877) and 28.203 (letter 48, December 1874).

⁹⁷ Works 25.396.

⁹⁸ Ruskin MS L38, letter to Severn, April 1873: 'Height of entire slope about sixty feet, I think'.

have been the terraced garden.⁹⁹ Together with the descriptions of flower borders, trellises, and lawns annotating Ruskin's sketch, the textual evidence suggests the terraced kitchen garden was more ornamental than functional, the only culinary plants being strawberries and fruit trees.

By the early 1880s, Ruskin had expanded his kitchen garden to satisfy the needs of his growing household, which included Joan and Arthur Severn and their children for much of the year, as well as concomitantly increasing numbers of servants and guests.¹⁰⁰ They would have needed to grow fruit and vegetables, as was usual in Victorian households, particularly in the rural isolation of the Lake District. The extension of the railway to Coniston in 1859 facilitated the importation of fresh produce to the area, but residents would have grown their own crops to ensure supply and variety, and for reasons of economy. In August 1883, Ruskin wrote to his doctor of the bountiful produce being harvested from his garden:

Joan being away, and the garden supplying sundry dainties – and also, I having been of late much impressed by the arguments of vegetarians, my diet at present consists chiefly of green peas – gooseberries – melons, – cucumbers, and wedding cake! If you think that's all right – I've no more to say – but I send you a sample of the garden produce for your own judgement.¹⁰¹

Ruskin's expressed interest in vegetarianism connects his thinking to that of the communal agricultural experiments following similar principles to the Guild of St George. While his friend William Cowper-Temple claimed that vegetarianism was 'one of the courses to the Kingdom of Heaven', Ruskin may not have been convinced by this argument, and teased Henry Swan, the Curator of the Guild's museum, for being vegetarian.¹⁰² Ruskin's reference to melons and cucumbers indicates that he was growing culinary produce under glass, an aspect of horticulture that he had previously vociferously denounced, urging the readers of *Fors* in 1873 to, '[h]ave nothing to do

⁹⁹ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 979 (17 April 1879); Works 23.xxix.

¹⁰⁰ Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, p. 70.

¹⁰¹ Armit 380 27.2, letter to Dr Parsons, 17 August 1883, original italics.

¹⁰² Van Akin Burd, *Ruskin, Lady Mount-Temple and the Spiritualists – an episode in Broadlands history* (London: Bentham Press for Guild of St George, 1982), p. 6; Works 30.xliv.

with greenhouses, still less with hothouses'.¹⁰³ He cited the expense of building and maintaining a glasshouse and its equipment as a practical explanation for his disapproval, emphasising the health benefits of gardening outdoors and the educational benefits of learning about native plants rather than exotics, warning that, '[t]he greenhouse [...] will tempt you into clippings and pottings and pettings, and mere standing dilettantism in a damp and over-scented room, instead of true labour in fresh air'.¹⁰⁴ Written in October 1874, this statement was underpinned by Ruskin's personal experience of labouring at Brantwood, where he recorded working with purpose 'with my own hand', a vital example of the values expressed in *Fors*.¹⁰⁵ The wholesome benefit of the 'true labour' of outdoor work is emphasised in the contrast between the 'fresh air' of the garden and the 'damp' atmosphere of the glasshouse, suggestive of decay and disease, both physical and moral.

Ruskin had assured his gardener in 1876: 'I'll do everything I can to make the garden nice,— always excepting greenhouses and cinders'.¹⁰⁶ Despite this pledge, and his overtly negative opinion of glasshouses held since childhood and expressed in print, the kitchen garden at Brantwood contained more than one glasshouse, evidenced in photographs, and in a painting by Collingwood in which the glasshouse roofs are visible through the trees (Figures 25 and 26). An Ordnance Survey map of 1888 indicates several structures within the curtilage of the kitchen garden developed by Ruskin that can be identified as glasshouses or cold frames (Figure 24). The glasshouses were likely to have been constructed in 1881-82, following the building of the adjacent coach house and stables, around eight years after Ruskin's advice in *Fors* to '[h]ave nothing to do with greenhouses'. The apparent hypocrisy is explained by Collingwood:

When the first glass-house went up, he used to apologise for it to his visitors; it was to please Mrs Severn; it was to grow a few grapes for his friends; he did not believe in hot-houses: and he would take you up the steps he had contrived at

¹⁰³ *Works* 27.646.

¹⁰⁴ *Works* 28.182.

¹⁰⁵ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 745 (25 April 1873).

¹⁰⁶ Ruskin T144, letter to Jackson, 25 March 1876.

the back of the house and point out the tiny wild growths in their crannies, as he led the way to his own private plot.¹⁰⁷



Figure 25: Photograph of Joan Severn in the garden at Brantwood.
Reproduced by kind permission of James Dearden.

Ruskin had not relinquished his opinion of glasshouses, but was willing to compromise 'to please Mrs Severn'. This is an important indicator of Ruskin's gardening relationship with Joan Severn, whose taste in planting and gardening rationale fundamentally differed from Ruskin's, yet they shared the same physical space.¹⁰⁸ A further justification for the Brantwood glasshouses can be found in the weather. Ruskin wrote in his 1881 Master's Report to the Guild of St George, 'I have myself allowed my gardener more glass to guard his plants and himself during our six months' long winter than I ever thought permissible till I had twice seen the beds devastated by the frosts as fatally as by a flood'.¹⁰⁹ Ruskin's idealism of gardening outdoors was tempered by practical concern for his gardener and the experience of losing plants to the harshness of the climate. This uncharacteristic horticultural practicality had an

¹⁰⁷ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁸ Severn's gardens are described by Ingram in *The Gardens at Brantwood*, pp. 79-83.

¹⁰⁹ Works 30.39-40.



Figure 26: W.G. Collingwood, *Brantwood from the Lake*, watercolour, c. 1900, Ruskin 1996P0160.
Reproduced by kind permission of The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre.

underlying foreboding, hinted at in Ruskin's diluvial reference. His eschatological fear of the malevolent weather, materially manifest in the failure of his garden plants, can be read in relation to pollution, industrial spoliation and his vision of the plague cloud.

Although Ruskin had allowed the glasshouses to be built, and recognised the need for his gardener 'to guard his plants and himself' from the climate, he nevertheless continued his disdain for the 'dilettantism' of flower gardening expressed above in *Fors*, complaining to Susanna Beever that, 'I've to rout the gardeners out of the greenhouse, or I should never have a strawberry or a pink, but only nasty gloxinias and glaring fuchsias'.¹¹⁰ Ruskin's need to 'rout' his staff suggests an ideological conflict in which the gardeners favoured the 'clippings and pottings and pettings' of tending to Joan's exotic plants over nurturing the common species grown outdoors by Ruskin. This horticultural behaviour was not concordant with Ruskin's idealised image of the 'essential and eternal' labour of the gardener, discussed above, and to find that his own gardeners did not heed the didactic warning in *Fors* expressly directed to 'the

¹¹⁰ Works 37.368-69 (12 July 1881).

workmen and labourers of Great Britain' would have been a blow to Ruskin, representing the failure of his social message on home ground and suggesting a wider lack of impact of his pedagogy.

Ruskin's justification that the glasshouse was used to 'grow a few grapes for his friends' indicates the usefulness of a productive glasshouse in the supply of fruit and vegetables for visitors to the Brantwood table. One of the glasshouses served as a vinery, and space under glass was allocated to citrus fruit, evidenced in Ruskin's query to Maria La Touche on the Riviera: 'How long are you to be among the orangegroves? I've had half a dozen ripe out of my own greenhouse'.¹¹¹ The produce at Brantwood may have inspired Ruskin to consider the educational possibilities of glasshouse horticulture as part of his St George's work to improve the lives of working people. In 1875 he questioned Daniel Oliver, Professor of Botany at Kew Gardens, on the subject:

One of the many things I want to ask you about is the kind of hothouse which could be established, by every leading squire near his town or village, or a simple museum of grocer's shop supply – Tea – coffee – rice – pepper – spice in general – oranges – figs – lemons – almonds – cocoanuts – all growing – a little ricefield green – in its time – and everything spicy and useful (except tobacco!) No curious plants or out-of-the-way things, but *beds* of these. One can't see oranges on one tree, and the almond blossoms are all nipped – in the open air now. I should like every possible peach and almond in a quarter of a mile of pink – safe.¹¹²

Ruskin was considering the viability of establishing a series of glasshouses to function as provincial living 'museums', educating people about the plants used to produce beverages such as tea and coffee, and other imported foodstuffs in common use. His aim was not to inspire wonder in the fascination of 'curious plants' – such as the species being gathered by plant hunters and advertised by nurseries at flower shows in the late nineteenth century – but to instil understanding of the growth and appearance of economic plants. Oliver's reply may have highlighted the horticultural

¹¹¹ Ruskin MS B20, copy-letter book, 5 December 1881.

¹¹² Ruskin T30, 16 January 1875, original italics.

difficulties in creating the differing climactic conditions necessary to exhibit cultivated beds of coffee, rice and coconuts in a provincial glasshouse, and Ruskin does not appear to have taken the scheme further. Ruskin's horticultural naivety is clearly apparent in his proposal, but his awareness of the effect of climate and fluctuating weather patterns on cultivation is evident in his observations of fruit scarcity and damaged blossom, the preposition 'now' implying a recent alteration of conditions. To Ruskin, who valued blossom for its symbolic and associative claims on his wellbeing, as well as its beauty, a glasshouse could be put to good use to preserve these precious flowers.

The use of glasshouses as an opportunity for the study of both botany and weather was embedded in another scheme proposed by Ruskin for the Guild. In his 1882 'General statement explaining the nature and purposes of St George's Guild', Ruskin wrote of a plot of land purchased near Sheffield where 'I have further the intention of putting some part of the ground under glass, and of cultivating, for botanical study, any beautiful plants which may in their tropical forms illustrate the operation of climate in our own familiar English species'.¹¹³ Ruskin's interest in exotics in their relation to native plants is echoed in *Proserpina* where, in a chapter exploring the differences between wild and cultivated plants, he reproduced a letter from the horticulturalist William Robinson written in July 1885 in reply to a query from Ruskin about 'the orange lilies which are living with the cactuses in my greenhouse'.¹¹⁴ Although Ruskin may not have grown the lily with the intention of specific investigation, it was by encountering the flower in his glasshouse that he was prompted to further study. The possessive 'my greenhouse' suggests that Ruskin was not as apologetic as Collingwood claimed, and some of the plants raised in the glasshouses were likely to belong to Ruskin rather than Joan Severn. Ruskin's mention of cacti chimes with an earlier reference to the garden at Denmark Hill where he informed Severn in 1869 that, 'I've been making Downes buy Cacti – and all the Green House is one mass of Prickles'.¹¹⁵ Ruskin's study of cacti may have related to his art

¹¹³ Works 30.49.

¹¹⁴ Works 25.532-33. For explanatory notes on this letter, see David Ingram, 'Wild Gardens: the Robinson, Ruskin and Severn Correspondence', *Ruskin Review and Bulletin*, 10, 1 (2014), p. 32.

¹¹⁵ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 127 (24 November 1869).

criticism rather than botanical interest. Years earlier, he used the cactus as an example in his chapter ‘On Vital Beauty’ in *Modern Painters II*, and he remarked on the colours of sunset in a lecture delivered in 1854 that, ‘it was curious to notice how, in the cactus speciosissimus and some other flowers, the purple, passing from scarlet, rarely, if ever, touched crimson’.¹¹⁶ This perceptiveness stemmed from the careful ‘watching’ of plants begun in childhood and later facilitated by the glasshouse. Ruskin’s use of glasshouses for botanical study, his wider promotion of them for botanical education, and his acceptance of them in his garden at Brantwood marked a change of direction from his earlier warnings of their moral degeneration and ugliness.

The apparent contradiction between word and deed in Ruskin’s approach to glasshouse horticulture can be explained by distinguishing the separate functions of the glasshouse. Growing plants to educate people on the origins of foodstuffs was acceptable, as was growing plants for observation, whether scientific or artistic (such as Ruskin’s lilies and cacti). Raising exotics to satisfy the whim of rich landowners to fill their parterres with tender bedding plants or their tables with tropical fruit was not. The production of exotic and out-of-season crops, viewed by many Victorians as a marvel of modern convenience and a measure of prestige on the finest tables, was derided by Ruskin in *Fors* as the ‘vile and gluttonous modern habit of forcing [that] never allows people properly to taste anything’.¹¹⁷ Ruskin’s ire was directed at the greedy demand for a year-round supply of produce, facilitated by modern methods of horticulture, which not only physically dissipated the flavour of the food, but denied the gustatory anticipation of fruit and vegetables as they came into season. Writing towards the end of his tenure at Denmark Hill, Ruskin urged the readers of *Fors* to join him in no longer having ‘any fuel wasted in making plants blossom in winter, for I believe we shall, without such unseasonable blossoms, enjoy the spring twice as much as now’, suggesting that forcing fruit under glass was the family practice at Denmark Hill, as it would have been in all wealthy households.¹¹⁸ In the kitchen garden at Brantwood, Ruskin conceded to the construction of glasshouses for culinary provision, while continuing to eschew their use for the cultivation of hothouse plants, evident in

¹¹⁶ Works 4.152 and 12.504.

¹¹⁷ Works 28.182 (Letter 46, October 1874).

¹¹⁸ Works 27.196 (Letter 11, November 1871).

the tension between his preference for native plants and Joan Severn's use of ornamental species.

The Moorland Garden: 'new worlds to conquer'

The concept of cultivating produce was taken by Ruskin beyond the kitchen garden wall in his most complete practical exposition of the principles of the Guild of St George: the moorland garden. Ruskin's aim was to repurpose a piece of waste ground to grow food crops. The underlying ambition underpinning his utilitarian scheme is analysed below, tracing a path from his water management plans in the Alps to the Lakeland mountainside, with a projected application to any barren ground. His intentions were spelled out in his 'General statement explaining the purposes of St George's Guild', issued in February 1882, which merits quoting at length:

But in the neighbourhood of my own village of Coniston there are many tracts of mountain ground at present waste, yet accessible by good roads, and on which I believe the farmers or landlords would gladly see some labour spent to advantage. This autumn, therefore, I have begun, on my own ground, the kind of work which it has been my own chief purpose for the last twenty years so to initiate. Leaving the emergent crags, the bosquets of heath, and the knolls of good sheep pasture untouched, as well as the deeper pieces of morass which are the proper receptacles of rainfall and sources of perennial streams, I have attacked only the plots of rank marsh grass which uselessly occupy the pieces of irregular level at the banks of the minor rivulets, and the ledges of rock that have no drainage outlet. The useless marsh grass, and the soil beneath it, I have literally turned upside-down by steady spade labour, stripping the rock surfaces absolutely bare (though under accumulations of soil often five or six feet deep), passing the whole of this loose soil well under the spade, cutting outlets for the standing water beneath, as the completely seen conformation of the rock directed me, and then terracing the ledges, where necessary, to receive the returned ground. I am thus carrying step by step down the hill a series of little garden grounds, of which, judging by the extreme fruitfulness of the piece of the same slope already made the main garden of Brantwood, a season or two will

show the value to my former neighbours, and very sufficiently explain the future function of St. George's Guild in British mountain ground of ordinary character.¹¹⁹

An illustration in *Ruskin Relics* depicts the artful synthesis of the natural and the man-made in Ruskin's assimilation of bare rock and stone walling that forms the aesthetic of the garden (Figure 27). The General Statement made clear the illustrative and exemplary function of Ruskin's garden projects to 'sufficiently explain the future function of St George's Guild', including not only the 'series of little garden grounds' on the moor, but the terraced kitchen garden and the Professor's Garden lower down the hill in the 'main garden'. Ruskin's confidence in the success of the moorland garden is clear; by declaring it the basis upon which rested the fundamental principles of the Guild of St George, he was hinging the future success of the Guild on the positive realisation of his moorland reclamation scheme.



Figure 27: *Ruskin's Moorland Garden* in W. G. Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics* (London: Isbister and Company Ltd, 1903), p. 41.

¹¹⁹ Works 30.50-51.

Ruskin worked only on the ‘rank’ and ‘useless marsh grass’ and was careful to preserve the aesthetic of his moor. As was made explicit in a pamphlet on the principles of employment, written in 1868, his intention was not to encourage others to destroy the beauty of unspoilt countryside, upon which he placed immense value, but to reclaim wasteland: ‘Not our mountains nor moorland. Our life depends on them, more than on the best arable we have’.¹²⁰ The nominal boundary between land which could be ‘attacked’ and that which must remain ‘untouched’ was based on a geological and diluvial study of the topography (‘the proper receptacles of rainfall and sources of perennial streams’), a personal aesthetic (‘bosquets of heath’) and a respect for traditional pastoral usage (‘good sheep pasture’). The ambiguity and subjectivity of this definition is captured in Collingwood’s description of Ruskin’s methodology on the moor:

The problem was to take advantage of whatever useful features the site afforded without destroying its native charm. [...] Just as a portrait-painter studies to pose his sitter in such a light and in such an attitude as to bring out the most individual points and get the revelation of a personality, so Ruskin studied his moor, to develop its resources.¹²¹

Whether the artistic and scientific nature of this judgement could be understood and replicated by anyone but Ruskin is questionable. His exhortation to landowners ‘in the neighbourhood of my own village of Coniston’ to repurpose ‘mountain ground’ suggests that he was confident that such development would not spoil the character of his cherished home landscape. Ruskin’s privileging of pastoral over wild countryside has been previously noted in relation to views. This sentiment is also expressed in his exhortation to readers in *Unto this Last* (1860) to value ‘the wild flower by the wayside, as well as the tended corn; and the wild birds and creatures of the forest, as well as the tended cattle’.¹²² In Ruskin’s landscape ideal, human culture existed in felicitous harmony with nature, the former promoting enjoyment of the latter. This

¹²⁰ Works 17.545.

¹²¹ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 40.

¹²² Works 17.111.

was the ecological union that Ruskin sought to achieve in his apparently incongruous re-appropriation of natural landscape for agricultural use.

Collingwood offers a further justification for Ruskin's appropriation of nature: he was following the pastoral Lakeland tradition where '[a]ll the green fields and farms of the dalesmen were once made out of such ground'.¹²³ Far from being 'natural', the landscape was 'as Nature made it after the original wild growth of oak and birch and holly had been cleared away by the charcoal-burners and sheep-farmers of past centuries'.¹²⁴ Collingwood recognised Ruskin's work as continuing the culture of the land initiated by monastic acquisition in the twelfth century for iron-smelting and wool production, whereby the landscape was shaped by coppice, grazing, pannage, charcoal-burning and enclosure.¹²⁵ While it has been demonstrated in Chapter One that Ruskin was willing to sacrifice the rural tradition of coppicing to achieve his aesthetic ideal in the woodland, both Albritton and Sara Haslam have asserted that Ruskin extolled the simple sustainability of the landscape represented by rural industry.¹²⁶ There remains an equivocal balance between bucolic fulfilment and rural spoliation in Ruskin's premise for the repurposing of land, open to misinterpretation when implemented by his followers.

Ruskin's description of the preparation of the moorland into 'little garden grounds' is supplemented by other evidence to provide an account of what was grown on the drained and terraced hillside. The contemporary descriptions of the grounds of Brantwood list cranberries, apples, cherries and corn, to which can be added Ruskin's intention to grow 'good vegetables'.¹²⁷ Ruskin had twice attempted to establish cranberries on the moor, first in 1879 prior to the land being drained. The communalit of the planting was recounted to Susanna Beever who had sourced the plants: 'The whole household was out after breakfast to-day to the top of the moor to plant cranberries'.¹²⁸ The planting is assumed to have failed as Ruskin declared in

¹²³ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 40.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ See Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, pp. 25-30.

¹²⁶ Albritton and Albritton Jonsson, *Green Victorians; Sara Haslam, John Ruskin and the Lakeland Arts Revival, 1880-1920* (Cardiff: Merton Priory Press Ltd, 2004).

¹²⁷ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 43; Works 25.xxxvii-xxxviii; Works 30.40 (Guild of St George, Master's Report, 1881).

¹²⁸ Works 37.280.

1881, while the digging and draining of the moor was in progress: 'I'm having another grand try for cranberries'.¹²⁹ Apple and cherry trees flowering on the moor are depicted in a painting by Collingwood, and in 1903 he wrote in *Ruskin Relics* that 'the apple-trees grew [...] they still blossom'.¹³⁰ There is some disparity in the identification of the cereal crop, with Ruskin mentioning in 1881 'the new oat field on the moor' and in 1884 the need 'to take care of my wheat', whereas other commentators describe the crop non-specifically as 'corn'.¹³¹ The superficial similarity of these cereal crops may have led to confusion in distinguishing between them by amateurs, or different plantings may have been trialled on the moor. Ruskin's inconsistency in identification of his crop suggests that the actual harvest was largely irrelevant: the exemplary nature of the planting was to show that such useful crops could be grown.

The genesis of Ruskin's work to repurpose the moorland can be traced from his childhood water-works in the garden at Herne Hill to his practical proposals for water management schemes in the Alps in the 1860s. The connection to Alpine mountain terracing and land reclamation was made by a commentator at Brantwood in 1890, who observed that, 'Mr Ruskin tried hard to show that such places could be utilised here after the manner of the Swiss'.¹³² Ruskin was familiar with the cultivated landscapes of the Alps from his frequent continental travels, and as the focus of his writing moved from art criticism to political economy he began to devise land management schemes to improve the lot of the peasant population by controlling the flow of water to increase agricultural opportunity. While staying among the mountains at Mornex in 1862-63, Ruskin was writing articles for *Fraser's Magazine* (collectively published under the title *Munera Pulveris* in 1872) which introduced his ideas on political economy. His observations of the living and working conditions of the local peasantry, coupled with his youthful trials in controlling the flow of water with locks and sluices, were instrumental in the formation of his practical water management schemes.

¹²⁹ Ruskin MS B10, letter to Maria La Touche, 5 December 1881.

¹³⁰ W. G. Collingwood, *The Orchard at Brantwood*, oil on canvas, 1904, Brantwood Trust; Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 44.

¹³¹ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 108 (21 July [1881]); Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 213 ([May] 1884); Works 25.xxxvii-xxxviii; Wakefield, 'John Ruskin's Home', p. 602.

¹³² Wakefield, 'John Ruskin's Home', p. 602.

Ruskin proposed that by damming streams in the mountains of France and Italy, the valleys could be irrigated and cultivated by peasants to create a means of self-sufficiency and improve the rural economy.¹³³ Prefiguring his later land purchases for the Guild of St George, Ruskin negotiated with local bureaucrats to buy land in the Alps upon which to demonstrate his ideas, as set out in a letter to Lady Trevelyan in June 1863:

I bought just before leaving the Savoy about a square mile of Mont Blanc – 2000 feet above Chamouni – with quantities of weeds and stones upon it – and a torrent – (and I want to buy a glacier above) and I'm in treaty with the mayor and Common-Council-men of Bonneville for the whole top of the Brezon – which is a nice cliff about 1000 feet high, with nothing on the top of it but lichen. These purchases are in illustration of my political Economy. I wanted a big stone too, near Mornex, but couldn't get it.¹³⁴

Ruskin's attempts to purchase the land were thwarted and his plans to build a house in the Alps were unrealised. However, the principle was still active in his imagination and, returning to the Alps in 1869, he found the Valais landscape 'entirely devastated by its rivers'.¹³⁵ He saw the opportunity to apply his knowledge of water management on a large scale to remedy the problem of inundation and relieve the economic hardship of the peasantry, and declared confidently to Joan Severn: 'I know perfectly how all this might be prevented: and believe the best thing I could do in the rest of my life would be to begin the redeeming of this great valley of the Rhone'.¹³⁶ A few days later, he returned to the subject, restating his ability to ameliorate the devastation:

The whole upper valley of the Rhone, sixty miles long and two wide, with three or four miles of hill on each side—say some 700 square miles of land—is a mere hotbed of pestilence (marsh fever), and barren of all food, owing to the ravages

¹³³ Works 17.550-52.

¹³⁴ Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*, p. 214.

¹³⁵ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 110 (letter to Severn, 6 May 1869).

¹³⁶ Ibid.

of the river. Now I see perfectly how this could be prevented, and it only needs a little good engineering, and employment of idle hands, to turn the entire valley into a safe and fruitful and happy region.¹³⁷

Ruskin's juxtaposition of the 'pestilence', 'barren[ness]' and 'ravages' of the valley with his 'good', 'safe', 'fruitful' and 'happy' solution is mediated by his ability to 'know perfectly' and 'see perfectly'. The repeated employment of the adverb 'perfectly' accentuates the moral righteousness of his undertaking, as well as the faultlessness of his vision, perfect in the sense that a crystal is perfect in clarity and purity.¹³⁸ The simplicity of the solution appears naïve when considering the practical execution and scale of Ruskin's engineering proposal, but in the simple opposition of good and evil, the plan has visionary cogency. To Ruskin, if a scheme was underpinned by ethical integrity it would indisputably lead to practical success. His aim of 'redeeming' the landscape emphasises the moral substance of his economic intentions; by putting 'idle hands' to work he was able to redeem both the people and the landscape, bringing productivity and goodness to both. The predicted happy ending to the scheme was prefigured in the 'Happy Valley' of Ruskin's fairy tale *The King of the Golden River* (1841).

The fundamental principles of the Guild of St George are evident in Ruskin's scheme; the redemption of landscape and society were synonymous in the moral imperative to repurpose barren land for the good of mankind. He continued his letter to Severn with an insight critical to the understanding of his work at Brantwood, which was to commence two years later: 'Now, nothing in mere farming or gardening would interest me enough to keep my mind engaged in work in the open air; but here is a motive, and an employment which will last to the end of my days'.¹³⁹ Ruskin had no interest in horticulture as a pastime: the superficiality of 'mere' gardening lacked the moral purpose that would stimulate him to action. Ruskin may have created gardens at Brantwood, but he was not a gardener. Horticulture was co-opted as part of a much

¹³⁷ Works 36.566-67.

¹³⁸ 'In a manner morally or religiously perfect; righteously [...] In a way that is perfect or faultless in form, style, or manner': 'perfectly, adv.' *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140733>> [accessed 25 February 2019].

¹³⁹ Works 36.567.

greater scheme of landscape redemption, exemplifying the crux of his mature thinking embedded in the principles of the Guild and in his idiosyncratic aesthetic. This ‘motive’ and ‘employment’ did indeed occupy Ruskin to the ‘end of my days’ and is integral to the understanding of his landscape interventions in his final decades at Brantwood.

Ruskin’s plan for the Alps can be read as a forerunner to the formation of the Guild of St George, evidenced in a letter of May 1869 to Georgina Cowper-Temple in which Ruskin referred to the same irrigation scheme he had outlined to Severn:

I know this can be done [...] I’ll come back here directly; buy a small piece of hillside;- get what help I can from English sagacity – and set to work to show what I mean. Then – if I can redeem and show certain command, over a little piece, – it will be time to explain, aloud, what human strength and patience can do for it all. [...] I will get my bit of land in a healthy spot, – but half of it barren: and I will redeem it to beauty [...] Well, I am fifty – and cannot climb them as I could once. But, I think I can conquer them yet – and in a better way.¹⁴⁰

Ruskin’s certainty in the scheme was reiterated, while his intention to create a small-scale practical example of his methodology indicates he recognised the need to provide evidence of success to his detractors. The Alpine land was not purchased, and the method not proven, but Ruskin used the mouthpiece of *Fors Clavigera* to ‘explain, aloud’ his intention for landscape redemption, and the establishment of the Guild of St George allowed him the legal framework to buy land in Britain upon which his principles could be enacted. The work on the moorland at Brantwood belongs to this methodology, where the need to ‘command’ and ‘conquer’ the landscape to ‘redeem it to beauty’ is evident in Ruskin’s desire to achieve mastery over nature, a sentiment echoed in Collingwood’s assertion that Ruskin ‘went higher up the hill for new worlds to conquer’.¹⁴¹ His anthropocentric approach is based on stewardship of the land rather than forced submission to human motives, his interventions designed to work in harmony with the topography and native flora, while imposing a subjective view of beauty.

¹⁴⁰ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 199-200.

¹⁴¹ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 40.

Gardening for societal good

Projects instigated by Ruskin outside the garden, but contemporary with its creation, reveal the correlation between Ruskin's St George's work and his gardening. He sought to instil his principle of converting barren ground to productive use at the local school in Coniston, outlining to Susanna Beever the plan he had made with the schoolmaster, Mr Brocklebank, to create a garden for the pupils to work in, and at the same time seeking the assistance of her gardener, Harry:

[W]ould you please ask Harry to look at the school garden? I'm going to get the boys to keep that in order; but if Harry would look at it and order some mine gravel down for the walks, and, with Mr Brocklebank's authority (to whom I have spoken already), direct any of the boys who are willing to form a corps of little gardeners, and under Harry's orders make the best that can be made of that neglected bit of earth, I think you and I should enjoy hearing of it.¹⁴²

The particular use of a 'neglected bit of earth' connects this small-scale project with Ruskin's aims for the Guild. In addition, the promotion of school gardening sits alongside his aim in *Proserpina* to encourage children to observe the flowers and plants growing around them, supported by his invitation to local children to come to Brantwood to learn about wild flowers in both the landscape and the 'best picture-books in Brantwood library'.¹⁴³

The school project has echoes of Ruskin's work at Carshalton in Surrey where, since 1872, he had been attempting to clear a much-loved length of the River Wandle that had become polluted with domestic refuse. As at Hinksey, an integral aspect of the scheme was the planting of flowers, the floral 'decoration' envisaged to enhance the social good. Ruskin appealed to Daniel Oliver of Kew, for advice on suitable planting, requesting that instruction be given to David Downs, who had again been enlisted to help with St George's work:

¹⁴² Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 95 (26 November 1886).

¹⁴³ Works 32.286-87 (*Christ's Folk in the Apennine*, 1887-89).

I am going now to ask your help in a matter of great interest to me; I have got leave to make, if I can make that share of a clear spring at Carshalton pretty with flowers: – I want to plant and tend, what will be sweet and fresh at the shallow water's edge, – and make the village children consider it their garden. May my gardener, who has carteblanche as to expense in the matter, come and receive some instruction from you as to the best plants he can choose?¹⁴⁴

In both the Coniston school garden and the cleansing of the Wandle, Ruskin sought the help of a gardener to manage the project. The impetus for the schemes stemmed from Ruskin, but all the practical work was left to professionals, even the selection of plants. Frost has suggested that the work at Carshalton, despite Ruskin's initial setbacks, was ultimately successful because he allowed the Tylor family, particularly Isabella Tylor, to locally manage the project.¹⁴⁵ It was Ruskin's intention for the children to not only enjoy the garden but, as at the school in Coniston, to be given responsibility for its cultivation, instructing that the area be divided into plots and 'each entrusted to the care of a village child'.¹⁴⁶

Ruskin related in *Praeterita* his deep familial connection to the Wandle; the pollution of its waters saddened him not only by representing human folly but by defiling his childhood memories. He wanted to clear the stream of the 'heaps of dust and slime, and broken shreds of old metal, and rags of putrid clothes' that had been cast into its waters, to plant flowers on the banks and to restore the well from which the stream flowed as a memorial to his mother.¹⁴⁷ His work to clear the stream at Carshalton of refuse began at the same time as his work to clear his woodland at Brantwood of dead sticks, each project offering cleansing and renewal. In his *Fors* letter in May 1871, Ruskin wrote of the essential elements of life, identified (and capitalised to denote their semantic status) as 'Pure Air, Water and Earth'.¹⁴⁸ The conceptual correlation between Brantwood and Carshalton is strengthened by the organic bond of shared planting. Ruskin sent hampers of living ferns from Brantwood

¹⁴⁴ Ruskin MS L31, 27 November 1872.

¹⁴⁵ Frost, *The Lost Companions*, pp. 75-80.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., quoted on p. 79.

¹⁴⁷ *Works* 18.386.

¹⁴⁸ *Works* 27.90.

to line the banks of the Wandle, providing a physical connection between present (Ruskin's life at Brantwood) and past (Ruskin's memory of his mother), a connection that would flourish into the future. The physical contribution from Brantwood extended to rocks and stones, sent in 1873 by rail, and supposed by Frost to be intended for the memorial well.¹⁴⁹ Ruskin was offering in the rocks a tangible and lasting part of himself to the memory of his mother, literally building his new life at Brantwood into memories of former days, the sense of renewal in the pure water of the well resonating with the notion of baptism as Ruskin began anew at Brantwood. Memory, memorial and praeterita were as much a part of Ruskin's work at Carshalton as the physical elimination of pollution, and this sense of looking back while connecting to the present and the future was integral to Ruskin's gardening at Brantwood, and was embedded in the principles of the Guild of St George.

Experiment or exemplar?

The confidence of Ruskin's landscape imperative at Brantwood and elsewhere is implicit in the notion of 'conquering' the land, discussed above. It is therefore incongruous that Ruskin's land management at Brantwood was frequently referred to as experimental. In 1890, an article in *Murray's Magazine* concluded a description of the moor with the comment 'the experiment failed'; the *Library Edition* of 1903 observed that 'the planting of corn was his first experiment'; Collingwood described the remains of the moorland garden in 1907 as a 'fragment of an experiment'; and *Homes and Haunts*, published in 1912, condescendingly stated that Ruskin 'amused himself with many tiny experiments in reclamation and irrigation'.¹⁵⁰ The terms 'experiment' and 'experimental' have also been embraced by recent scholarship to describe Ruskin's gardening.¹⁵¹ The following investigation into what Ruskin meant by the term 'experiment' is a long overdue attempt to redress the misconception of his

¹⁴⁹ Frost, *The Lost Companions*, p. 78.

¹⁵⁰ Wakefield, 'John Ruskin's Home', p. 602; Works 25.xxxviii; Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 44; Cook, *Homes and Haunts*, p. 212.

¹⁵¹ For example, see Keith Hanley, 'Edinburgh-London-Oxford-Coniston' in *The Cambridge Companion to John Ruskin*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 28; Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, p. 64; Albritton and Albritton Jonsson, *Green Victorians*, p. 43.

garden projects as exploratory, and demonstrate that Ruskin's work was undertaken with authority rather than speculation.

In his November 1871 instalment of *Fors*, Ruskin wrote confidently of the certain success of his proposals, expressed specifically to encourage others to invest financially in St George's Fund. He asserted,

I have before noted to you, indeed, that, in a broad sense, nobody has a right to have opinions; but only knowledges: and, in a practical and large sense, nobody has a right even to make experiments, but only to act in a way which they certainly know will be productive of good. And this I ask you to observe again, because I begin now to receive some earnest inquiries respecting the plan I have in hand, the inquiries very naturally assuming it to be an 'experiment', which may possibly be successful, and much more possibly may fail. But it is not an experiment at all. It will be merely the carrying out of what has been done already in some places, to the best of my narrow power, in other places: and so far as it can be carried, it must be productive of some kind of good.¹⁵²

By contrasting the relation of opinion to knowledge with that of experiment to action, Ruskin grounded his practical work in truth. The confident rhetoric of his statements, 'it is not an experiment at all' and 'it must be productive' was deliberately forceful and intended to persuade, but at the same time hints at an exasperation that others did not comprehend the logic of his intention. In this passage, Ruskin rejected the term 'experiment' because of its association with success and failure: these concepts were not in question. The abstract truths upon which Ruskin's land and water management schemes were founded – centring on goodness, moral value and societal worth – were confidently translated into certain practical success because of their grounding in truth, the passage concluding with Ruskin's assertion that his St George's work would be carried out, 'certainly, and not experimentally'.¹⁵³

Ruskin was still expounding this message in June 1877 when he wrote in *Fors*:

¹⁵² Works 27.195.

¹⁵³ Works 27.198.

the very gist and essence of everything St. George orders is that it shall not be new, and not an ‘experiment’; but the re-declaration and re-doing of things known and practised successfully since Adam’s time. [...] Is the earth new, and its bread? Are the plough and sickle new in men’s hands? Are Faith and Godliness new in their hearts? Are common human charity and courage new? [...] Your political cowardice is new, and your public rascality, and your blasphemy, and your equality, and your science of Dirt.¹⁵⁴

Ruskin equated the old with truth, goodness and pastoral tradition, and the new with injustice, profanity and progress. St George’s work was the continuation of a tradition that had been halted by industrialisation and, just as the Pre-Raphaelites had returned to the medieval artistic tradition before the advent of classicism, Ruskin was advocating the return to a pre-industrial era untainted by the wrongs of progress and modern science. From this starting point rooted in the values of the past, he believed society could be cleansed of the stain of capitalism and industrialisation.

Ruskin’s antipathy to the techniques of materialist science and its associated terminology may also have prejudiced his linguistic choices. The term ‘experiment’ was tainted by Darwinian conjecture into subjects that Ruskin believed should remain unknowable, a belief reflected in his assertion in 1883 that, ‘the proper power of Faith is to trust without evidence, not with evidence’.¹⁵⁵ Rather than using a controlled experiment to determine the probability of a hypothesis, as a scientist would, Ruskin’s ‘experiments’ validated a known truth, and as such were, as Ruskin asserts, ‘not an experiment at all’. His dismissal of the scientific methodology of experiment is confirmed in a letter to the physicist Oliver Lodge in 1885, in which Ruskin implored: ‘But please – let us waste no time in hypotheses – I never made but one in all my life, and that was wrong. I only want to know what *is*’.¹⁵⁶ Ruskin’s erroneous hypothesis was not explained; his mention of it served to reinforce the perceived pointlessness in such theorising.

¹⁵⁴ Works 29.133.

¹⁵⁵ Works 33.330 (from Ruskin’s Oxford lectures: Lecture IV ‘Fairy Land’, 1883).

¹⁵⁶ Oliver Lodge, ‘Mr Ruskin’s Attitude to Science’, p. 291, original italics.

Ruskin's contradictory use of the term 'experiment' further compounds the misconception of his meaning in relation to landscape work. In his December 1874 *Fors* letter, Ruskin described the construction of his terraced kitchen garden at Brantwood alongside accounts of his cleansing of the River Wandle at Carshalton, his street sweeping at St Giles's, and his establishment of a tea shop in Paddington. These schemes were referred to collectively by Ruskin as 'some few experiments with money of my own'.¹⁵⁷ He went on to admit that 'the results, for the present, are not altogether encouraging'.¹⁵⁸ Here, the use of the term 'experiment' is validated in its connection to the failure of the projects, which was excused by Ruskin as a result of his inability to personally supervise the work: 'In all these cases, however, I can see that I am defeated only because I have too many things on hand: [...] meantime, I learn the difficulties which are to be met, and shall make the fewer mistakes when I venture on any work with other people's money'.¹⁵⁹ Ruskin contradicted his earlier confidence expressed to readers of *Fors*, whose concern that his experiments 'may possibly be successful, and much more possibly may fail' was proved valid.¹⁶⁰ Again, his rhetoric is crafted to encourage financial contributions to the Guild, his honesty calculated to reassure potential donors.

As has been demonstrated, Ruskin was advocating the repurposing of barren land from the early 1860s in the Alps, and formally presented his proposals through the establishment of the Guild of St George and in the monthly letters of *Fors Clavigera* from 1871. The purchase of Brantwood in 1871 with its sixteen acres of wood and moorland gave Ruskin ample opportunity to 'experiment' with repurposing barren land on his own estate. His work on the moor did not begin until 1881, when other St George's projects, such as the farms at Totley and Bewdley, were already underway. Ruskin had sent his gardener to Totley in 1878 to manage the failing project, confident that Downs's adherence to Guild principles would achieve the anticipated success of the farm. The commencement of work on his own moorland, a decade after Ruskin had launched the principle of land reclamation for productive

¹⁵⁷ *Works* 28.203.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Works* 28.205.

¹⁶⁰ *Works* 27.195.

sufficiency in *Fors*, can be seen as an attempt to validate existing ideas, rather than to experiment with new ones. In his Master's Report of 1881, Ruskin confidently stated, 'I have at last taken myself in hand the small bit of moor which overtops my wood, and by the time these lines are read to the members of this meeting, everything that has been recommended in *Fors* will be there done'.¹⁶¹ Ruskin was demonstrating adherence to his own principles, and reinforcing the authority of his land management proposals to garner support. The following year, after groundwork on the moor was complete and crops sown, Ruskin's convictions remained unabated: 'I do not doubt that the results of the experiment, even in this first year of sowing, will be more than enough to justify my doing so with confidence'.¹⁶² The 'experiment' was 'justif[ied]' by its anticipated success, of which Ruskin had no 'doubt'.

The work to repurpose the barren land on the Brantwood moor was the practical expression of the political economy that Ruskin believed to be his most important duty in life. From his position of 'perfect' confidence, the failure of the moorland project represented the defeat of Ruskin's assumed ability to conquer nature, and called into question the truths upon which he had grounded his proposals for a better society. The news came as a bitter blow, and Ruskin wrote to his gardener for an explanation of this unforeseen and bewildering outcome: 'I am vexed at having no word from you about the one thing I care about most – the *moor*. Mr Collingwood tells me everything has failed. Will you please tell me to what extent and as far as you know, why'.¹⁶³ Rather than validate the ideals he had been promoting for two decades, Ruskin's work on his own land served to overthrow his certainty in both his ability and beliefs. When the work on the moor broke down, Ruskin was forced to confront his failure to mediate social and political change. He was already aware that his message was not being heard: he was unable to reach the audience of 'workmen and labourers' to which *Fors Clavigera* was directed, and little support was forthcoming for the Guild of St George beyond his own circle of friends. The ventures in sweeping streets and selling tea outlined above had been abandoned, the cleansing of the Wandle had come up against obstacles from the authorities, and the Hinksey Road diggings had not

¹⁶¹ Works 30.39-40, original italics.

¹⁶² Works 30.51.

¹⁶³ Ruskin MS L82, letter to Dawson Herdson, 13 December 1882, original italics.

achieved any practical result. Even Ruskin's long-established authority in art and architectural criticism was being called into question. He lost a libel case brought by the artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler in 1878, contributing to the resignation from his chair as Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford, and in the preface to the 1874 edition of *The Stones of Venice*, he lamented that his promotion of gothic architecture had led to the misapplication of his principles in the building of railway stations and public houses, labelling them 'the accursed Frankenstein monsters of, *indirectly, my own making*' in a letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette*.¹⁶⁴ As Marcus Waite has acutely observed, it was not the failure of his authority that dismayed Ruskin, but the failure of his God-given task to teach people right from wrong.¹⁶⁵

The moorland garden was not the only gardening scheme at Brantwood to founder. Just as the moor had failed to flourish, so the ice house failed to store ice. Ruskin had built an ice house in the sloping woodland to the north-east of the house, possibly with the help of quarry workers from Coniston. The complex egg-shaped chamber was excavated by hand and lined with bricks, with a passage leading from the hillside.¹⁶⁶ The engineering work involved in the project was an extension of Ruskin's fascination with the manipulation of water. However, the ice house had a social function and can be grouped with Ruskin's St George's work, as noted by Collingwood:

[T]he ice-house – tunnelled at vast expense into the rock and filled at more expense with the best ice; opened at last with great expectations and the most charitable intent – for it was planned to supply invalids in the neighbourhood with ice, as the hothouses supplied them with grapes; and revealing, after all, nothing but a puddle of dirty water.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, letter dated 15 March 1872, published 16 March 1872, original italics. Quoted in Jon Newman, *Lost in Herne Hill: South London Walks* (London: Thamesis, 2017), p. 13-14.

¹⁶⁵ Marcus Waite, 'Nature's Uses: Ruskin on Trusteeship and Environmental Economy', paper presented at *Ruskin, Science and the Environment*, University of Oxford Museum of Natural History, 8 February 2019.

¹⁶⁶ R. G. David, 'The Ice-houses of Cumbria', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, 2nd ser., 81 (1981), pp. 140-42.

¹⁶⁷ Collingwood, *Life of John Ruskin*, II, p. 199-200.

The ‘great expectations’ remained unfulfilled, just as they did on the forsaken moorland. Very few of Ruskin’s projects at Brantwood were seen to a successful conclusion, either because work was abandoned, or the result did not fulfil the intended function. In addition to the failure of the ice house, the tennis lawn proved unsatisfactory and was relocated to the meadow below the house; the harbour, worked on over many months by Ruskin and his friends, was made viable and completed only when skilled labour was employed; the earth barrier conceived by Ruskin to contain the reservoir on the moor had to be replaced by a concrete wall with the strength to hold water. Elsewhere, his strawberries rotted, streams dried up and crops were eaten by rabbits. If these projects had been conceived as ‘experiments’ in the scientific sense, their failure would have been integral to the formulation of a new hypothesis and seen as a positive part of the process of research. Ruskin embarked on his projects as the realisation of a ‘perfect’ truth: failure was unforeseen, implausible and devastating.

The outcome of these projects was far from Collingwood’s interpretation of Ruskin’s intention to create ‘a paradise of terraces like the top of the purgatorial mount in Dante’, or ‘Parrydise’ as Ruskin playfully described his garden.¹⁶⁸ It has already been suggested that Ruskin’s enjoyment of his garden was marred by floral association with Rose La Touche; together with the evidence in this chapter that failure of his landscape interventions equated to the failure of his social teaching, this signals the contribution of the garden to Ruskin’s mental degeneration, a premise explored further in the Conclusion. Ruskin was grappling in his garden with issues that concern us today – fluctuating weather patterns, the demand for out-of-season produce and the ethics of consumerism, the need for wild flowers in cultivated spaces – highlighting the continued relevance of the Guild of St George, and to some extent vindicating the ideas mocked or misunderstood by his contemporaries. The utopian vision of the Guild was played out in the landscape of Brantwood, where communality of labour formed part of daily life, from constructing the harbour to levelling the tennis court, building walls to removing tree stumps, collecting wood and bundling it together for

¹⁶⁸ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 44; Ruskin MS L38, letter to Joan Severn, March 1873.

domestic fires – activities combining practical outcomes with physical and spiritual rewards for those involved.

Brantwood has been presented as an outlet for the expression of Ruskin's aesthetic, a playground for his childhood delight in the manipulation of water, a botanical observatory, and a sheltering nest. This chapter adds a further strand to the function of the garden in the application of Ruskin's principles for the betterment of society, casting the landscape in the role of ideological exemplar, and offering a lens through which to re-appraise Ruskin's ambition for the Guild.

Conclusion

This thesis has presented the garden at Brantwood as an autobiographical synthesis of Ruskin's ideas manifest through landscape, exploring his artistic aesthetic, floral memory, political thinking, and sheltered vision of nature through the lens of his published works. The late works, written at Brantwood and mostly published in instalments, form an autobiographical account of Ruskin's preoccupations while creating his garden, and a close reading has translated the ideals articulated in print into the substance expressed in landscape. The thematic explorations of memory and aesthetics, botanical thinking, gardening friends, and landscape 'experiments', which form each chapter, unite to establish a cohesive picture of Ruskin's gardening intent. This facilitates a reassessment of the significance of garden-making in influencing Ruskin's writing, thinking and relationships in his mature years, offering a new perspective on familiar scholarly territory. The correlation between gardening and writing – recognised in the work of authors from William Shenstone to Rudyard Kipling – is a concept hitherto underexplored in Ruskin studies, and this thesis therefore offers an original contribution to scholarship.

This research has shown that Ruskin produced no comprehensive treatise to publicise his views on the garden, unlike his widely-disseminated work on art and architecture. Ruskin rarely gave direct opinions on gardens: although he told a friend he had 'seen many gardens in many countries', he left little record of his impressions of these designed landscapes, and accounts of garden visiting are circumstantial rather than descriptive.¹ His thoughts on gardens and gardening are, however, to be found in his writing on art and political economy, on mythology, morality, and material science; his attitude to the designed landscape has been extrapolated from sources such as his commentary on the picturesque expressed in passages of *Modern Painters* and *The Poetry of Architecture*, and through analysis of his opinions on wild and cultivated flowers in *Proserpina*. Even in this limited public exposition of garden opinion, little insight is given by Ruskin into his own garden-making. It has been demonstrated here that it was the associative resonance in gardens and landscape that shaped Ruskin's

¹ Wilson, *My Dearest Dora*, p. 104 (letter to Fanny Colenso, 29 July 1879, copied by Dora Livesey).

idiosyncratic approach, rather than any direct influence of layout, planting or taste, and that ownership of land gave Ruskin the opportunity to express a distinctly subjective aesthetic in his garden. It is here that analysis of his life writing has exposed the biographical depth of his gardening, extrapolated in the study of *Praeterita* and *Hortus Inclusus*, which formed the substance of Chapters One and Three, and in the autobiographical passages of *Proserpina* and *Fors Clavigera*, which informed the themes of Chapters Two and Four.

In *Praeterita*, we learned that a childhood spent in the garden did not instil in Ruskin a predilection for horticulture; his fascination was always with the plants themselves, rather than their ornamental arrangement or practical cultivation. This is evident in *Proserpina*, where flowers are celebrated in their wild forms, and endowed with moral as well as aesthetic values. Ruskin's unwillingness to position himself in the sphere of nineteenth-century horticulture is integral to an understanding of his idiosyncratic gardening. The stylistic trends, fashionable new plants, and progress in horticultural techniques bypassed his approach to gardening. Early notions of the value of gardening as a practical pursuit, described in *Praeterita* and reiterated in *Fors Clavigera*, indicate that gardening was endowed with a nobility, expressed through purposeful manual labour and affinity with the earth. Ruskin recognised this harmony with nature in his friend Susanna Beever; their correspondence in *Hortus Inclusus* is permeated with a sympathetic understanding of the ecological connectedness of land, Lakeland culture, agricultural tradition, flowers and birds. As with his approach to art and architectural criticism, to social justice, and to ideals of personal sufficiency, Ruskin's attitude to gardening was based on truth to nature, honesty of intent, and moral worth.

Philip Kerrigan has observed that, 'the garden, since it is composed largely of the very material, that is nature, on which religious and ontological beliefs were founded, could not but itself be rich in religious and ontological meaning, even if such meanings were not consciously contrived into the layout of the garden'.² It follows that Ruskin's strict Evangelical upbringing, his 'unconversion' and subsequent unorthodoxy, and his later pantheistic belief in a divine wisdom suffused his gardening. This thesis has

² Philip Kerrigan, 'Resisting Darwin: the natural theological design philosophy of Gertrude Jekyll', *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, 9, 4 (2009), p. 315.

broached the impact of religion on Ruskin's garden-making through discussions of the corrosive influence of science on his natural theology, the biblical allusion of the *hortus conclusus* in his quest for shelter, and his eschatological fear of the power of nature. A further route to penetrating the religious significance of the garden is through the works of Dante, relied on by Ruskin throughout his life as 'mental quinine', and frequently referenced in his writing.³ The extent of Ruskin's collection of Dante's books denotes their importance; the catalogue of his library includes fifteen entries for Dante Alighieri, and further translations by Longfellow, D. G. Rossetti and W. M. Rossetti are listed separately.⁴ The editors of the *Library Edition* note that, 'the words, images, and thoughts of Dante are much interwoven with Ruskin's text', and Alison Milbank asserts, 'there is no work of Ruskin's without overt and submerged Dantean reference, from conversations on mineralogy for schoolgirls, to critiques of political economy'.⁵ A 'submerged' reference in Ruskin's landscape was hinted at by Collingwood when he described the garden as, 'a paradise of terraces like the top of the purgatorial mount in Dante', suggesting that Dante's heavenly vision was embedded in Ruskin's garden-making as well as his writing.⁶ Consideration of how Dante's poetic landscapes are translated into the woodland at Brantwood has scope to further extrapolate the spiritual motivation underpinning Ruskin's gardening.

Aside from his religious ambivalence, a study of Ruskin's garden presents many paradoxes, reflecting the polygonal thinking that has pervaded the themes of this thesis. Through the Guild of St George, Ruskin advocated the return to rural tradition and sustainable agricultural management to counter the ills of industrialised society, yet at Brantwood, where the woodland had been managed for coppice and charcoal-burning since monastic times, Collingwood tells us, 'he would have his coppice cut no more'.⁷ By privileging aesthetics over practicality, Ruskin diluted his social message. It is ironic that the rural craft industry of the Lake District was revived in Ruskin's name by his followers, including the linen-making of Marion Twelves, Annie Garnett's

³ Works 26.224.

⁴ Dearden, *The Library of John Ruskin*, pp. 87-89, 206, 283-84.

⁵ Works 27.xxxviii; Alison Milbank, 'Ruskin and Dante: Centrality and De-centring', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 73, 1 (1991), p. 120.

⁶ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 44.

⁷ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 35.

spinning workshop and Arthur Simpson's woodcarving classes, while Ruskin himself was neither involved nor setting an example on his estate.⁸ Ruskin's presence in the Lakes drew not only his disciples, following his teaching in their pursuit of rural tradition, but tourists, flouting his objection to the extension of railways and the spoliation of landscape by the creation of hotels and tea gardens.⁹ Ruskin recognised that in praising the mountain beauty of his favoured Alpine and Lakeland landscapes, he had unwittingly contributed to the tourist spoliation of the places most precious to him. In his own landscape, Ruskin was gardening with nature, but maintained an anthropocentrism that reinforced his ultimate authority. The paradox of his fusion of nature and culture within the defined limits of the garden is highlighted by Hewison in his observation that, 'while the garden retains an essential connection with nature, by controlling nature, it becomes part of culture'.¹⁰ This is the paradox of all 'natural' gardens, and is perhaps one of the reasons Ruskin set himself apart from the 'culture' of horticulture. His contempt for growing out-of-season fruit and exotic plants under glass – borne of a disapproval not only of the product but the 'dilettantism' of the gardener in its production – was tempered by the glasshouses he built in the kitchen garden at Brantwood, for which, Collingwood tells us, 'he used to apologise'.¹¹ This is an example of Ruskin 'trotting round a polygon', deliberating the problem from various angles, and opting for compromise.¹²

A further paradox lies at the heart of Ruskin's inner struggle. He had come to Brantwood for rest and nature study, recommended by his doctors but also recognised as essential by Ruskin himself. As early as 1861, he wrote to Norton: 'The one thing I need seems to be for the present rest, and the power of slowly following some branch of natural history or other peaceful knowledge'.¹³ On settling at Brantwood, Ruskin described his situation to Joan Severn as 'a sort of ideal life now, so quiet and far

⁸ These, and other, followers of Ruskin who established and promoted Lakeland crafts on Ruskinian principles, including 'Ruskin Lace', are examined by Jennie Brunton in *The Arts and Crafts Movement in the Lake District: A Social History* (Lancaster: Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster, 2001), and Sara Haslam in *John Ruskin and the Lakeland Arts Revival, 1880-1920*.

⁹ 'We shall have nothing left soon but the railway station and hotel garden to enjoy ourselves in': letter to the editor, *Pall Mall Gazette*, March 26, 1885, Works 34.580.

¹⁰ Robert Hewison, *Ruskin and his Contemporaries* (London: Pallas Athene, 2018), p. 330.

¹¹ Works 28.182; Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 32.

¹² Works 16.187.

¹³ Bradley and Ousby, *Norton Letters*, p. 65 (26 August 1861).

away', and declared to Dora Livesey that 'Brantwood is good for me'.¹⁴ The recuperative capacity of Brantwood lay in the garden. The cognitive positivity of purposeful labour has been analysed in this thesis in the context of Ruskin's manual gardening, and the potential for flowers to promote wellbeing is clear. After a mental breakdown in 1878, Ruskin declared to Henry Acland that, 'the flowers—oxalis and primroses with wood hyacinths —are to-day in my wood, enough to make an old stick chirp, let alone a cricket', and in his diary he described the simple pleasures of his garden: 'a little reading of Chaucer in my own wood on the foxglove path'.¹⁵ The associative value of plants had a powerful effect on Ruskin, evidenced in a letter of thanks to Susanna Beever, in which he stated: 'You could not possibly have sent me a more delightful present than this Lychnis; it is the kind of flower that gives me pleasure and health and memory and hope and everything that Alpine meadows and air can'.¹⁶

But, as Louise Pullen has noted, '[t]he wonders of nature confounded as much as consoled him': Ruskin's association of flowers with people and places brought sorrow as well as hope, and doubts cast by materialist science induced destabilising unease.¹⁷ The landscape was permeated with the associative resonance of loss, evidenced in Ruskin's admission that, '[s]ometimes the flowers make me much more sad than the wind and rain: and the distant views always make me think of my father in his grave', and, thinking of Rose La Touche, 'the very beauty of the heavens and earth only torments me now [...] because there is the dead wild rose always in my sight'.¹⁸ Ruskin's association of blossom with La Touche has been discussed, particularly its veiled associations with innocence and death in *Proserpina*; here, it is not only flowers but the entirety of 'heavens and earth' that blighted Ruskin's enjoyment of nature. There is no doubt that his tumultuous relationship with La Touche had a deleterious effect on Ruskin's health: he described an obsession that 'wastes and parches me' and 'mortified the springs of life', her death the 'seal of a great fountain of sorrow which

¹⁴ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, pp. 159-60 ([January] 1873); Wilson, *My Dearest Dora*, p. 87 (14 May 1873).

¹⁵ Works 25.xxviii (1 May 1878); Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 977 (15 September 1878).

¹⁶ Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, pp. 97-98 (n.d.).

¹⁷ Pullen, *The Power of Seeing*, p. 38.

¹⁸ Works 37.66 (letter to Joan Severn, 20 April 1873); Hilton, *Later Years*, p. 251, quoting letter to Georgina Cowper-Temple, [Spring 1873].

can never now ebb away; a dark lake in the fields of life'.¹⁹ The allusion to water, first the desiccating aridity of desire, then grief pooled in permanent sorrow, chimes discordantly with Ruskin's playful manipulation of water in his garden.

The promise of quiet botanical study to instil wellbeing was countered by the malevolent forces of nature, most evident in the weather and its destructive effects. The comfort of sheltering mountains and rural quietude was lost, and Ruskin felt betrayed by the nature that was supposed to heal him. In 1873, he declared: 'Nature herself traitress to me – whatever Wordsworth may say', alluding to the poet's assertion that 'Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her'.²⁰ This perceived treachery unhinged Ruskin from the security of his beliefs, admitting two years later that, '[t]he deadliest of all things to me is my loss of faith in nature. No spring—no summer. Fog always'.²¹ The affirmation that Ruskin derived from seasonal repetition and the daily rising and setting of the sun was denied him by the phenomenon he identified as the 'plague cloud', stating that 'a dark sky is assuredly a poisonous and depressing power [...] and the total loss of comfort in morning and evening sky, the most difficult to resist of all spiritual hostility'.²² E. T. Cook tells us that after buying Brantwood, Ruskin 'put to a corner of his own bedroom a windowed turret whence he could see, as at that time he never failed to do, the dawn on the hills and lake from almost every side', confirming the significance to Ruskin of sunrise and sunset.²³ Nature, by her dark skies, blighted this daily spiritual affirmation, with humankind implicated through the industrial pollution of the cloud. Ruskin was helpless to effect change: the solution to the moral decline embodied by the plague cloud was spelled out by his teaching, but no-one was listening. Rosenberg has argued that Ruskin's 'periods of greatest insanity cluster around spells of bad weather'.²⁴ The evidence presented in this thesis adds the devastating consequence of the failure of the garden – a tangible outcome of 'bad weather' – to the impact of the environment on Ruskin's

¹⁹ Bradley, *Mount-Temple Letters*, p. 60 (February 1866) and p. 195 (6 March 1869); Works 37.168 (letter to John Brown, 18 June 1875).

²⁰ Bradley and Ousby, *Norton Letters*, p. 273 (15 January 1873); William Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*, lines 122-23.

²¹ Works 37.161 (letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 13 February 1875).

²² Works 34.9; Fleming, *Hortus Inclusus*, p. 91 (n.d.).

²³ Cook, *Homes and Haunts*, p. 209.

²⁴ Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass*, p. 215.

sanity. Natural forces contributed to the downfall of Ruskin's attempts to manipulate and constrain the flow of water, and the weather devastated his planting. His diary recorded the scene in the garden:

Diabolic clouds over everything: and looking over my kitchen garden yesterday, I found it one miserable mass of weeds gone to seed; the roses in the higher garden putrified into brown sponges, feeling like dead snails; and the half-ripe strawberries all rotten at the stalks.²⁵

Ruskin's diaries from Brantwood are riddled with bleak references to the weather, describing the 'sulphurous chimney-pot-vomit of blackguardly cloud', the 'demon-blackness' of the skies, which were 'sooty and furious' and 'of the very worst fiendish sort'.²⁶ The weather affected his physical as well as his mental health, leaving him 'horror-struck and hopeless', 'tired', and 'shivery and valueless'.²⁷ The physical linking of weather and health – recognised by Rosenberg as 'a morbid heightening of sensibility' or 'hyperesthesia' – parallels the biophilia identified in Ruskin's response to the landscape discussed in Chapter Three, and suggests that the impact of witnessing the malevolence of the weather in his own garden, and being powerless to resist its destructive force, strengthened the debilitating effect of the plague cloud.²⁸ Whereas artists such as Whistler and Monet took aesthetic inspiration from fog in their cityscapes of London, and Dickens employed it with dramatic effect in his novels, to Ruskin, the all-consuming plague cloud represented spoliation and an end to consolation in nature. The contamination seeped into his appreciation of the garden, evidenced in his disconsolate admission: 'I've nearly given up caring about flowers, it's so miserable to see them in the plague wind'.²⁹

Ruskin's self-banishment from Brantwood in the 1880s, following bouts of insanity and discord with Joan Severn, may have been prompted in part by a desire to

²⁵ Evans and Whitehouse, *Diaries*, p. 979 (13 August 1879).

²⁶ Viljoen, *Brantwood Diary*, p. 192 (13 August 1879), p. 294 (30 January 1883), p. 307 (26 February 1883), and p. 188 (3 August 1879).

²⁷ Ibid, p. 301 (11 February 1883), p. 294 (30 January 1883), p. 289 (15 January 1883).

²⁸ Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass*, p. 183.

²⁹ Ruskin MS B20, copy-letter book, letter to Maria La Touche, 4 May 1884.

escape a landscape tainted by painful association and corrupted by ‘diabolic’ weather. He did not relish ‘the sense of being half a ghost in the turret room at Brantwood’; the very room he had designed in spiritual affirmation of the rising sun presented itself as a prison with a panorama of a plagued sky.³⁰ The editors of the *Library Edition* confirm that Ruskin’s gloomy prediction was realised: at the end of his life, he ‘sat silently in the turret-room’, his thoughts unrecorded.³¹ Ruskin’s senses may have been dulled by the effects of opium, which could have been the ‘tonic’, ‘sedative’ and ‘syrup’ that he referred to in his letters to Dr Parsons when requesting ‘some more terrifying and some more sleepifying – mysterious compounds’.³² This medication contributed to what Ruskin described as, ‘a quite unconquerable feeling of idleness’, which impeded any attempts to garden: ‘going up the steps at the back of the house must be thought twice on – before I attempt it and the ascent to the moor, a Herculean task’.³³ Despite this, the *Library Edition* records that in the final decade of life, ‘[h]e could still garden a little’, although by this time, Ruskin was sharing his gardened space at Brantwood with Joan Severn.³⁴

Severn, and her husband and children, began to spend more time at Brantwood as Ruskin’s health declined, the house increasing in size over the years to accommodate them. As her residence became more permanent, Severn began to make a lasting impression on the landscape. The gardens designed by her in the 1890s, planted in conjunction with Dawson Herdson, Ruskin’s head gardener, reflected the contemporary taste for rhododendrons and azaleas, and overlaid an exotic, ornamental layer onto Ruskin’s natural harmony. Severn’s plantings did not impinge on the distinct areas gardened by Ruskin, but were positioned alongside them. The incongruous effect on the landscape prompted Ruskin to quip that the blazing colours of the azaleas on the hillside looked like ‘the bank blowing up with dynamite’.³⁵ Their gardening relationship can only be speculated, mainly because the epistolary evidence diminished while they shared a house. Ruskin described his early interventions in the

³⁰ Wilson, *My Dearest Dora*, p. 114 (17 October 1887).

³¹ *Works* 35.xliii.

³² Armitt 380 17.2, 26 December 1879, and 380 36.2, n.d.

³³ *Ibid.*, 380 37.2, n.d.

³⁴ *Works* 35.xli; Severn’s gardens are described by Ingram in *The Gardens at Brantwood*, pp. 73-83.

³⁵ Dickinson, *Sense and Nonsense*, p. 230 (7 June 1886).

garden to Severn with anticipatory eagerness of her reaction, expecting her to ‘both keem and dump [scream and jump]’ with delight when she visited.³⁶ Severn’s judgement of Ruskin’s gardening is unrecorded, but their difference in taste is hinted at by Collingwood, who described Severn’s gardens as ‘the perfect blend of detailed interest and picturesque beauty [...] But they are not Ruskin’s gardens’.³⁷ Severn was described as ‘devoted to gardening’, yet her creative activity appears to have commenced only when Ruskin’s ceased, suggesting the implausibility of gardening the landscape together, and reinforcing the assertion of this thesis that Ruskin’s landscape was created with an ethos personal and unshared.³⁸ Further research would build on Ingram’s examination of Severn’s gardens to unpick the significance of the cousins’ gardening relationship and shed light on Ruskin’s final years at Brantwood: a changing attitude to the garden offering a lens through which to view his state of mind.³⁹

Severn’s plantings turn the discussion back to the context of nineteenth-century gardening, presented in the Introduction as an evidential overview to attest that Ruskin was not influenced by contemporary garden style. However, many of the writers and professional gardeners involved in the debate claimed to be influenced by Ruskin, which places him within the sphere of gardening comment, despite his self-exclusion. Ruskin’s essay, ‘The Nature of Gothic’, published in *The Stones of Venice*, was cited by several garden writers as integral to the development of their thinking. J. D. Sedding, a founder member of the Art Workers Guild, followed Ruskin’s teaching in his promotion of vernacular planting and natural ornament in *Garden-Craft Old and New* (1891), and William Morris, who expressed his opinion of formal garden style in his lecture, ‘Making the Best of it’, published in *Hopes and Fears for Art* (1885), echoed Ruskin’s distaste of the flower garden as ‘an ugly thing’ in his condemnation of lurid bedding plants as ‘ugly’.⁴⁰ Morris also adopted Ruskin’s phraseology in his description of the rose as ‘the queen of them all’: in *Proserpina*, Ruskin referred to the ‘dominant’ flower of each species bearing a girls’ name as ‘the Queen’, including “Rosa Regina,”

³⁶ Ibid., p. 172 (6 April 1873).

³⁷ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 32.

³⁸ ‘A Link with Brantwood: Dawson Herdson and John Ruskin’, *Westmoreland Gazette*, 1899.

³⁹ Ingram, *The Gardens at Brantwood*, pp. 73-83.

⁴⁰ Works 1.157; Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art*, p. 127.

“Rose the Queen” (the English wild rose), and allotted ‘a separate queendom’ to blossom.⁴¹

The outspoken and influential garden writer William Robinson has been discussed in Chapter One where his theory of wild gardening was evaluated against Ruskin’s woodland aesthetic. Bisgrove asserts that Robinson was influenced by Ruskin’s ideas in *Modern Painters*, and suggests that Robinson’s phraseology was shaped by the cadences of Ruskin’s prose.⁴² It is through Robinson that we learn that another gardener who shaped the course of garden style well into the twentieth century was a reader of Ruskin: Gertrude Jekyll wrote to Robinson without apology: ‘I will return your “Proserpina” tomorrow, I have kept it longer than I might but it was too enjoyable to let go early’.⁴³ Jekyll attributed the colour combinations of her hardy flower borders to the composition and dramatic colour contrasts in Turner’s paintings, particularly *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839), praised by Ruskin.⁴⁴ Both Robinson and Jekyll had much in common with Ruskin aside from gardening, not least their promotion of the use of wood over coal in domestic hearths, an idea proposed by Jekyll and publicised by Robinson in *My Wood Fires and Their Story* (1917), which chimes with Ruskin’s own practice at Brantwood. While garden-makers followed the principles set out in Ruskin’s writing, the immediate influence of his gardening was, according to Collingwood, unrecognised amongst his peers. In *Ruskin Relics* (1903), Collingwood claimed that, ‘[t]o him, his rock gardens were a joy for ever; and in his working years he set an example of Lake-district landscape-gardening which still, for all I know, remains unfollowed’.⁴⁵ However, Illingworth asserts that the rock garden established in 1904 by Charles Hough at White Craggs in Loughrigg was created in the pattern of Brantwood, and on similar terrain.⁴⁶ White Craggs was, in turn, to influence plant collector Reginald Farrer’s rock garden at Ingleborough Hall in Clapham,

⁴¹ Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art*, p. 125; Works 25.351; Works 36.480-81 (letter to Kate Greenaway, 31 March 1884).

⁴² Bisgrove, *William Robinson*, p. 99.

⁴³ RHS GB 803 WRO/2/77, letter from Jekyll to Robinson, n.d. [c. 1875-96].

⁴⁴ Richard Bisgrove, ‘The colour of creation: Gertrude Jekyll and the art of flowers’, *Journal of Experimental Botany*, 64, 18 (2007), p. 5787. For an illustration of Jekyll’s colour sequence set against *The Fighting Temeraire*, see T. H. D. Turner’s preface to Jekyll’s *Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden* (Woodbridge: Antique Collector’s Club, 1982), p. 12.

⁴⁵ Collingwood, *Ruskin Relics*, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Illingworth, ‘Ruskin and Gardening’, pp. 225-26.

Yorkshire, celebrated in his book *My Rock Garden* (1907). Illingworth hints at the significance of Joan Severn's name appearing some years later in the Ingleborough visitor book.⁴⁷ Further research into the hitherto unrecognised impact of Ruskin's garden as a stylistic example would improve our understanding of his legacy, particularly in the Lake District, supplementing scholarship on the impact of his doctrine on rural industry and craft tradition. Gardens such as Allen Bank in Grasmere, home of Ruskin's follower and biographer Hardwicke Rawnsley, and Albert Fleming's home at Neaum Crag in Loughrigg, would merit further study.

David Ingram, from the privileged position of both Ruskinian and botanist, has observed that Ruskin's interventions in the landscape at Brantwood would have increased the wild flower diversity, his digging turning the earth to break the dormancy of buried seeds and offering a habitat for seeds brought by wind, bird or animal. The woodland glades, ponds, steps and terraces shaped by Ruskin created new habitats for ferns, mosses, bog and Alpine plants to colonise.⁴⁸ Whether Ruskin comprehended the impact of his gardening on the delicate balance of the ecosystem is unclear. Mark Frost has identified Ruskin's ecological thinking, and his 'premise that a holism operated in the natural world which forged unbreakable bonds between humanity and environment', but did Ruskin recognise that the plant diversity at Brantwood, valued by him to observe, draw and venerate, was in part the natural consequence of his own gardening?⁴⁹ By sending plants from one garden to another – a practice identified in Chapter Three as taking place between Brantwood, The Thwaite and Harristown, and in Chapter Four from Brantwood to Carshalton – Ruskin was sharing his aesthetic pleasure in plants, but also potentially disturbing the natural balance of the ecosystem. The 'Veronicas and the tiny white pinks and the white herb Robert' from Brantwood recorded by Maria La Touche as happily flourishing in the Irish climate at Harristown, or the ferns sent from Brantwood to the banks of the Wandle at Carshalton, may now be identifiable as naturalised species in these regions, demonstrating a tangible and lasting aspect of Ruskin's garden influence.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 226.

⁴⁸ Ingram, *Flora of Chamonix*, conclusion.

⁴⁹ Frost, 'Of Nature's own free doing', pp. 13-14.

⁵⁰ Ruskin MS L110, letter from Maria La Touche to Joan Severn, 2 June n.d.

Ruskin's ecological thinking is a thread running through this study, from the natural ecosystem of the landscape to Ruskin's own web of ecologies, woven into his woodland aesthetic, associative planting, language of flowers, and biophilic response to nature. His personal geography of memory and place has been mapped onto the garden, where his ideas were finally given substance. It has been shown that the shelter and succour Ruskin derived from the landscape was compromised by nature's betrayal through an anthropocenic shift, and in the doubt cast by material science on the unchanging certainties of life. Yet Ruskin was still able to appreciate the wonder of nature's mystery, accepting without question the majesty of creation and the insignificance of humankind. In 1887, he reflected in an unpublished chapter of *Proserpina*:

We are to live happily, like children under a dome of blue glass, with pretty glittering gems in it, that rise and set. And we are also to know, like grown men, and to endure in humility, the sorrowful knowledge, that the dome is immeasurable; and that we, and all our lives, and all our nearest worlds, are the servants and satellites of one vague speck in its luminous infinitude.⁵¹

This knowledge was founded on Ruskin's fellowship with his environment, acquired through the close observation and quiet contemplation of nature, and the interface of soil, vegetation, rain and sun found in his garden. Ruskin's gardening was not a marginal activity: it was a route to understanding the universe. His work on the landscape was a means of expressing fundamental precepts which, in turn, reveal innermost character. This thesis has demonstrated the value of viewing Ruskin's published opinions on subjects such as art, architecture, science, education and political economy alongside his approach to gardening, extrapolating the ideas encompassed in the designed landscape of Brantwood, and interpreting Ruskin's thinking and writing in new ways.

⁵¹ Works 25.531 (added as Volume II, Chapter X in the *Library Edition*).

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Appendix

Caroline Ikin, '**Diabolic clouds over everything': an ecoGothic reading of John Ruskin's garden at Brantwood**', in *EcoGothic Gardens in the Long Nineteenth Century: Phantoms, Fantasy and Uncanny Flowers*, ed. by Sue Edney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2020)

John Ruskin's vision of the plague cloud – the 'Diabolic clouds over everything' recorded in his diary in 1879 (Evans and Whitehouse 1959: 979) – is a fitting metaphor for his gardening at Brantwood, his home near Coniston in the Lake District. Ruskin bought Brantwood in 1871, aged 52, and lived there until his death in 1900, his final decade passed in the seclusion of mental infirmity. He was seeking shelter in the remembered landscape of his childhood but was ultimately faced with a seemingly malevolent nature mirroring his declining mental health. Although Ruskin experienced moments of peace and contentment in his Lakeland home, and his output of writing never slackened pace until the final decade, his later years were riddled with personal disappointment interspersed with bouts of extreme mental instability.

An ecophobic tension arose from, and contributed to, Ruskin's destabilisation: his reverence for nature was spoiled by the new facts of materialist science, the skies were sullied by the poisonous pollution of industry, and his mountain landscape was haunted by the memory of loved ones, an absent presence signifying unfulfilled love, betrayal and regret. His work in the landscape embodied personal and professional obsessions, and a Gothic reading of Ruskin's garden gives a new perspective on the destabilisation and decay of his final decades. By stripping away the anthropocentrism of the Gothic and examining the role of the environment in the construction of Ruskin's fear and oppression, the framework of ecoGothic provides a useful context through which to examine Ruskin's response to the landscape. Employing the language of ecocriticism, particularly Simon Estok's concept of ecophobia (2018), this chapter offers a reading of Ruskin's attitude to nature – manifest in his mature writing and in the garden at Brantwood – as a contribution to ecoGothic discourse. The manner in which Ruskin shaped, and was shaped by, his garden will be examined

through the lens of the literary Gothic and the ecoGothic, and in relation to Ruskin's own Gothic paradigm.

Ruskin had reappropriated the concept of Gothic in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1853), in a chapter entitled 'The Nature of Gothic', in which he assigned meaning beyond the standard literary tradition characterised by tropes such as fear, horror, decay and the uncanny. Although ostensibly dealing with architecture, Ruskin's definition encompassed the nature of democracy and the temperament of the northern workers who created the great edifices of Gothic buildings. Importantly, Ruskin reversed the negativity and villainy associated with the pointed arch in Gothic literature by ennobling the form and praising the imagination of its creators. As Richard Adelman has noted, Ruskin reimagined what had been seen as 'signifiers in gothic fiction of human degradation and depravity into an expression of human completeness' (2017: 153-4). Ruskin celebrated the 'restlessness' and the 'strange disquietude of the Gothic spirit' which in his assessment represented animation and freedom, rather than degradation (*Works* 10.214). Ruskin's Gothic was as much an expression of his political economy as it was representative of art and aesthetics, yet the 'disquietude' of both the Ruskinian and the literary Gothic persists in his garden and the two aspects can be explored in parallel.

Domesticating Gothic from the garden

It was in a context of despondency and disappointment that Ruskin moved to Brantwood: his household in London had broken down over the preceding decade with the deaths of his parents and his former nurse, and the marriage of his ward, leaving the family home empty. Ruskin was also troubled by his obsessive relationship with Rose La Touche whom he had hoped to marry but was hindered by her parents' opposition and her own fluctuating uncertainty. After a serious mental breakdown in 1871, Ruskin purchased Brantwood without having seen the house, and decided to make the Lake Country his permanent abode, his first home independent of his parents. Ruskin was seeking shelter at Brantwood; it was not merely physical escape from the noise and pressure of London society and work, but represented a desire to be subsumed in the landscape. He longed to 'lie down in Coniston Water' (Dearden 1967: 47), his language echoing the healing rhythms of the Psalms (23. 2) but also

hinting at a biophilic urge to become one with nature, to seek the eternal peace of the watery depths of the lake. He craved the familiar topography of remembered family holidays amid mountains, both in the Lake District and in the Alps, a geography intrinsic to Ruskin's wellbeing and sense of belonging. This reliance on the beneficence of nature was to be Ruskin's undoing: by offering himself to the landscape he allowed the malevolent potency of the environment to penetrate his consciousness. As in Gothic discourse, where nature 'appears to participate in a language of estrangement rather than belonging' (Smith and Hughes 2013: 2), Ruskin's attempts to find solace in the landscape of home were thwarted, leading ultimately to alienation from the nature he had once revered.

From the outset, Ruskin attempted to shape Brantwood into a place of belonging, shelter and nurture, a sentiment captured in his epithet: 'my own little nest' (Evans and Whitehouse 1958: 750). On taking possession of his sixteen acres of woodland and moor, Ruskin immediately began working the landscape to make a garden; his diary records chopping dead branches, burning weeds and cutting paths on his first days at his new home (Evans and Whitehouse 1958: 712). This work was part physical therapy, part practical fulfilment of the garden ideology that Ruskin had been assimilating since childhood. In the years that followed he finally had the opportunity to indulge his fascination for the manipulation of water, resulting in ambitious projects to create a harbour, pond, reservoir, cascade and icehouse. Ruskin made a garden of his woodland, enhancing the beauty of rocks and streams, and creating a series of paths to connect the garden spaces and access the beauty of the topography, while cultivating areas of moorland as a model of sustainable agriculture. Pockets of the land had been used for kitchen gardening by previous owners, the rest managed for coppice, pannage, charcoal-burning and other rural industry; the landscape that Ruskin took as the blank canvas for his garden was neither 'natural' nor 'wilderness', having been shaped by centuries of civilisation. In halting the human presence of rural industry, and letting the coppiced trees grow into spindly, Botticellian forms, Ruskin was showing nature both mastery and reverence, freeing the landscape from the domination of industry whilst imposing his own, equally dominant, aesthetic.

This control of nature mirrored the feudal ideals of Ruskin's political economy, an anthropocentric hierarchy that refused to recognise the imperatives of nature.

Ruskin sought to perfect an ideal vision of Botticellian beauty in his landscape, the stasis of a picture within the cyclical flux of nature, an otherness pertaining more to the world of allegory than reality. He would have liked to arrest the blossom on the trees, stating in his botanical study *Proserpina* that, ‘the flower is the end of the seed,—not the seed of the flower’ (*Works* 25.250); floral beauty was the purpose of the plant, and flowers existed for human delight. To maintain this paradoxical natural stasis, Ruskin walked his landscape with billhook in hand, pruning trees to arrest their fecundity, removing stones washed down his stream from the moor above. He tamed the sublime by laying a path to his precipice rock and surrounding it with spring bulbs, by positioning a seat from which to comfortably contemplate the gushing stream, and by planting a cottage garden sheltered by trees. The harbour offered a safe haven on the lake, the wild moor was drained and cultivated with utilitarian crops, and the drama of the waterfall was made into an entertainment by a sluice gate released on command to surprise visitors with an unexpected cascade. Through these interventions, Ruskin attempted to domesticate the Gothic from his garden by eliminating the potential for fear, oppression, horror and disorder, and constructing instead a landscape of calm, shelter and order. The aesthetic of his contrived landscape was doomed to failure, given the inevitability of seasonal change, the unpredictability of weather, the fluidity of nature, and the limitations of Ruskin’s own vigour.

Destabilisation and distress

Ruskin’s domination of nature was tempered by his moral opposition to materialist science. In *The Poetry of Architecture*, published in 1837 when he was eighteen years old, Ruskin expressed his distaste at the fashion for exotic bedding plants, a view which remained unchanged in later life and which gives an ideological framework through which to view his approach to the garden:

A flower-garden is an ugly thing, even when best managed: it is an assembly of unfortunate beings, pampered and bloated above their natural size, stewed and heated into diseased growth; corrupted by evil communication into speckled and inharmonious colours; torn from the

soil which they loved, and of which they were the spirit and the glory, to glare away their term of tormented life among the mixed and incongruous essences of each other, in earth that they know not, and in air that is poison to them. (*Works* 1.156)

This passage is revealing in the context of Gothic as a condemnation of monstrosity in plant hybridisation. Ruskin derided the human disregard for the laws of nature in the self-serving Promethean quest for progress which had resulted in the creation of monstrous plants of unnatural colour and proportion, fashioned to meet the desires of humankind regardless of moral consequence. His later scepticism of materialist science and Darwinian theory is foreshadowed in his youthful attitude to the application of modern science, particularly the ‘evil communication’ of the hybridists’ methodology: a reference to sexual reproduction, which was a subject problematic to Ruskin throughout his life. With the underpinning of this complex and idiosyncratic logic, Ruskin’s preference for plants tended towards native species growing in their own climate in harmony with their surroundings. The paradox of this ‘natural’ aesthetic was that Ruskin had to master, tame and control nature to achieve it.

Ruskin’s book on botany, *Proserpina*, published in part form from 1875 to 1886, reflects the mature, post-Darwinian synthesis of his views on exotic plants and hybridisation, offering an approach to science infused with myth, literature and wonder. In *Proserpina*, Ruskin illustrates his notion of ‘distressed wildness’, expressing an otherness akin to the Gothic construct of wilderness as an inhabited space that ‘subverts human reason and logic’ (Smith and Hughes 2013: 121). Ruskin offers an example of a neglected area at Brantwood in which,

I had to cut my way into it through a mass of thorny ruin; black, bird’s-nest like, entanglement of brittle spray round twisted stems of ill-grown birches strangling each other, and changing half into roots among the rock clefts; knotted stumps of never-blossoming blackthorn, and choked stragglings of holly, all laced and twisted and tethered round with an untoachable, almost unhewable, thatch, a foot thick, of dead bramble and rose, laid over rotten ground through which the water soaked

ceaselessly, undermining it into merely unctuous clods and clots, knitted together by mossy sponge. (*Works* 25.293)

The language of this passage is riddled with images of death and obstruction, vegetative beauty impeded by the wanton abandonment of nature. This is a disorienting vision of nature, where stems change into roots and solid ground is effectively eliminated. Human passage is impeded by inhospitable vegetal layering, suggesting the eventual annihilation of humanity as nature regains control. This Gothic outcome is confounded by Ruskin's celebration of the vitality of nature, concluding the passage with the assertion that all will be well if nature succumbs to the moral superiority of humanity. Ruskin's dual handling of the Gothic is demonstrated in the triumph of the Ruskinian Gothic notion of individual freedom of expression over the tropes of literary Gothic evident in the disorientating decay of the thicket. He concludes:

It was all Nature's *free doing!* she had had her way with it to the uttermost; and clearly needed human help and interference in her business; and yet there was not one plant in the whole ruinous and deathful riot of the place, whose nature was not in itself wholesome and lovely; but all lost for want of discipline. (*Works* 25.293, emphasis original)

Ruskin is struggling with an ecophobic response to nature: at once celebrating its vitality and condemning its destructive agency. Estok equates the inherent anthropocentrism of human attitudes to nature with ecophobia, arguing that 'control of the natural environment, understood as a god-given right in western culture, implies ecophobia [just as] as animal exploitation implies speciesism' (2009: 5-6). Ruskin's professed confidence in the human ability – and moral right – to 'discipline' nature is representative of a Victorian natural theology in which anthropocentrism was held as a conviction to counter the tide of evidence presented by materialist science. That humankind was no longer the dominant centre of nature, but merely an incidental element within a powerful web of developing ecosystems – the notion of ecological

humility central to ecocritical theory – was destabilising to Ruskin and his contemporaries brought up in the Evangelical tradition.

The publication of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) and the growing acceptance of the materialist approach to science corrupted Ruskin's view of nature, inflicting an ecophobic horror that struck him to the core and shattered the security of his belief in the unchanging permanence of nature. Ruskin's subsequent frightening vision of a vicious, competitive world, constantly in a state of flux offers a contrasting perspective to his earlier celebration of restlessness in the spirit of Ruskinian Gothic, outlined above. Ruskin was deeply troubled by the departure from the knowable to the unknowable – the uncanny dissolution of certainty – and his destabilisation was manifest in physical illness; Ruskin confessed to Oliver Lodge, Professor of Physics at the University of Liverpool, with whom he was corresponding on the kinetic theory of gases, that he was 'sick and giddy and could eat no dinner' (O'Gorman 1996: 57). As Ruskin's certainties were undermined, his relationship with nature became more complex, reflecting his internal struggle for truth.

Mythology, symbolism and nightmare

To this pervasive environmental unease and disorder was added the destabilising Gothic horror of nightmare. In periods of mental illness, the intensity of Ruskin's dreams compelled him to relocate his sleeping quarters to escape the tangible terror of his visions. He often dreamed of serpents, to which he attached a complex symbolic power: a base symbiosis of earth and death (Hilton 2000: 128-9). Writing in *The Queen of the Air* in 1869, Ruskin described the mythic potency of the serpent:

It is a divine hieroglyph of the demoniac power of the earth,—of the entire earthly nature. As the bird is the clothed power of the air, so this is the clothed power of the dust; as the bird the symbol of the spirit of life, so this of the grasp and sting of death. (*Works* 19.363)

The serpent of Ruskin's nightmares was born of the earth, inhabiting the land and strengthened by the evil inherent in its realm, a symbol of the malevolence of nature.

However, Ruskin's treatment of myth was clearly separated from his material view of the natural world, stating that the 'horror is of the myth, not of the creature' (*Works* 19.362). When disturbing 'a good sized viper' in the process of cultivating his moorland garden in 1881, Ruskin reported that, 'we've put him with a few comfortable sods under him, and a glass over him, in the greenhouse, and he's made himself a hole and gone to sleep' (Lancaster, Ruskin Library (RL), MS B20). Despite the element of physical danger in a venomous snake, Ruskin welcomed the creature, made it 'comfortable' in his garden domain, and referred to it as his 'guardian serpent': the corporeal snake in his garden posing no associative resemblance to the deathly serpent of his mythology. Ruskin's contradictory response to real and symbolic nature allowed him to see nature as both a source of goodness and a source of evil, with divine innocence bestowed on the material flora and fauna and diabolic malevolence on the corresponding mythological constructs. Estok reminds us that nature is itself morally neutral; the construct of evil is relative to our human imagination (2009: 7). Ruskin's imaginative use of mythology empowered him to see the evil in nature; it was the breakdown of this duality, or the blurring of real and imagined, that resulted in the contested nature manifest to Ruskin in the horror of nightmare and mental degeneration. Ruskin's subsequent panic at the 'Diabolic clouds' witnessed in the skies above him, explored later in this chapter, is indicative of the distortion of real and imagined evil in his collapsing rationality.

To counter these troubling thoughts, Ruskin sought certainty and permanence amidst the destabilisation of science, industry and the very origins of humanity, turning to mythology for truth. He could no longer compete with the increasing proofs of science exposing the mutability of species, just as he was unable to prevent the spread of capitalist greed, or his horror of industrialisation, but it was within his intellectual power to impose order on the natural world through his own system of plant classification, centred on the moral aspects of flowers, mythology, and the innocent wonder of nature. In *Proserpina*, written in parallel with the creation of his garden, Ruskin attempted to re-order a world gone astray, with the premise that, 'Proserpine and Deucalion are at least as true as Eve or Noah; and all four together incomparably truer than the Darwinian theory' (*Works* 26.98-9). Ruskin hedged his language carefully to avert accusations of blasphemy, but by placing myth and religion

on an equal platform in his hierarchy of truth he hinted at the vulnerability of his religious faith and his need to find solid ground following the disintegration of the biblical certainty taught at his mother's knee.

Ruskin's struggle for assurance amid the destabilisation of his convictions led him towards spiritualism, in which he hoped to find peace through communion with his beloved Rose La Touche. The turbulent years of his obsession with Rose had oscillated between hope and despair and by the time the news of her death reached him in May 1875, Ruskin was resigned to a life without her. Rose had been an absent presence in Ruskin's life for years before her death, and was memorialised in treasured letters and pressed flowers which took on talismanic form to Ruskin. His friend, Georgina Cowper-Temple, who had acted as intermediary and confidante in Ruskin's relationship with Rose, introduced him to spiritualism, and it was at her home in December 1875 that Ruskin experienced the revelation for which he had hoped when the manifestation of Rose appeared to him in the drawing room at Broadlands (Burd 1982: 26). Believing he had been visited by the spirit of Rose that winter afternoon, Ruskin was thereafter open to her presence. In May 1876, he explored the ruins of Brignal Chapel at Gretna Bridge where he found the stones festooned with ivy-leaved toadflax, the plant known to Ruskin as 'erba della Madonna' and especially assigned to him in the floral symbolism he shared with Rose (Hilton 2000:134). He described 'the window and wall so overgrown with my own Madonna herb that,—one would think the little ghost had been at work planting them all the spring' (Bradley 1964: 370). The ghost of Rose was a benign presence in the landscape, communing with Ruskin through flowers in an ecoGothic dialogue. The deadened fragility of the pressed flowers preserved by Ruskin as a reminder of the corporeal Rose can be juxtaposed with the vital fecundity of the animate flowers inundating the ruin at Gretna, the vital spirit overcoming the weakened body at last.

The duality of Ruskin's feelings towards Rose is reflected in the symbolism of rose and thorn, echoing the transgression of the binaries of love and hatred, hope and disappointment, trust and betrayal that characterised their relationship. In Ruskin's complex floral iconography, the rose represented more than the traditional attributes of beauty and love, and he often equated Rose with the leaves rather than the flower, perhaps in reference to the serrated edges, sharp like the daggers of betrayal. The

thorn's capacity to wound, to draw blood from those who sought to grasp and hold it, mirrors Ruskin's painful pursuit of Rose, his 'thorny girl' (RL, MS L7.613). The thorns on any plant in the garden at Brantwood would serve as an uncanny reminder of the betrayal Ruskin suffered when Rose failed to keep her promises. In *Proserpina* Ruskin described the state of his woodland, but he could equally have been describing his inner turmoil: 'The leaves had all perished, and the bending saplings, and the wood of trust;—but the thorns were there, immortal, and the gnarled and sapless roots, and the dusty treacheries of decay' (*Works* 25.294). The vital green lifeforce of the plants had succumbed to death, like Rose, but the dry and twisted roots and the thorns remained forever, an 'immortal' provocation of the memory of Rose's betrayal. Ruskin's use of the word 'treacheries', relating to his earlier reference to the 'wood of trust', welds the language of his bitterness to nature, hinting at his mounting ecophobia in the perceived malevolence of the ungardened vegetation.

The destructive agency of nature

Ruskin's destabilisation is further exposed by his intensifying discomfort in the garden in which he had invested the hope of shelter and quietude. Alongside the fragmentation of his certainties of science, religion and domestic fidelity came the failure of Ruskin's gardening projects, his worthwhile intentions foundering in the inhospitable environment. The complex oval ice house, intended to bring succour to local people as well as to provide for his household, leaked and was abandoned. The harbour walls, which were constructed as much in illustration of the rewards of manual labour as to shelter boats, had to be reworked, and the currents of the lake continually washed in silt. The tennis lawn, created by digging out stumps and levelling an elevated area of woodland, was relocated to a more convenient position below the house. These interventions, engineered in the landscape by Ruskin, failed ostensibly due to a combination of practical ineptitude and lack of foresight, but the contribution of the environment to their downfall should not be overlooked.

Ruskin's attempts to intercede in the natural cycle of the seasons suggests naivety in the face of the power of natural forces and their disregard for human enterprise. He persisted with the ceaseless task of removing rocks washed from the moor into his woodland stream and constructed a reservoir to feed his waterfall when

the stream dried up, thinking to circumvent nature with human ingenuity. No amount of intellectual resourcefulness could elude the environmental forces determining the vitality of animate nature, however, and Ruskin was tormented and perplexed when his plantings began to fail, writing to his gardener in 1882 while away from Brantwood,

I am vexed at having no word from you about the one thing I care about most – the moor. Mr Collingwood tells me everything has failed. Will you please tell me to what extent and as far as you know, why. (RL, MS L82)

Ruskin's work on the moor on the high slopes at Brantwood was an attempt to repurpose a barren landscape for agricultural use, draining the bog into reservoirs, building terraces among the rocky outcrops, and planting wheat and fruit trees. In Ruskin's ideology, embodied in the principles of the Guild of St George and on the pages of *Fors Clavigera*, this was the route to moral salvation. Exemplified by the model at Brantwood, Ruskin could instruct 'the workmen and labourers of Great Britain' (*Works* 27.iix) to follow his lead and arrest the tyranny of capitalism and the moral degeneration of the nation. When the crops on the moor perished, Ruskin was forced to confront his failure to mediate social and political change, a failure provoked by the negative forces of nature. The intention to work in harmony with the land was now replaced with an ecophobic opposition to natural imperatives.

The anxiety expressed in Ruskin's reaction to his gardener at the outcome of the moorland experiment reflects his helplessness in the face of raw nature and a growing sense that the environment was conspiring against him. Ruskin blamed the weather for the degradation of his garden, placing specific culpability on the sky. He recorded in his diary in August 1879:

Raining in foul drizzle, slow and steady; sky pitch-dark, and I just get a little light by sitting in the bow-window. Diabolic clouds over everything: and looking over my kitchen garden yesterday, I found it one miserable mass of weeds gone to seed; the roses in the higher garden putrified into brown sponges, feeling like dead snails; and the

half-ripe strawberries all rotten at the stalks. (Evans and Whitehouse 1959: 979)

Damp and darkness were held responsible by Ruskin for the mortification of his garden, and the ‘miserable mass of weeds’ mirrored his own wretchedness. He had not only looked at his rotting plants, but touched them, deliberately and viscerally experiencing their decay. His strawberry crop had been arrested in the liminal state between immaturity and ripeness, a half-state of unfulfilled potential useless to plant or human, while weeds had flourished and seeded with the portent of more weeds to come. Ruskin’s ‘Diabolic clouds’ echo the ‘Diabolic pow’r’ of Milton’s serpent in *Paradise Lost* (IX 95) and suggest that Ruskin ascribed the malevolence of the weather to the influence of the Devil upon the sky, an influence that encompassed ‘everything’. Just as he had identified the ‘demoniac power of the earth’ in the serpent in 1869, quoted previously, a decade later Ruskin was again seeing malevolence in nature, this time not as a symbol, but as a very real manifestation of evil.

The ‘plague-cloud, sooty and furious’

The ecophobic resonance of clouds is expressed by Ruskin in c. 1885 in a letter to his neighbour Susanna Beever, in which he states:

But for all of us, a dark sky is assuredly a poisonous and depressing power, which neither surgery nor medicine can resist. The difference to me between nature as she is now, and as she was ten years ago, is as great as between Lapland and Italy, and the total loss of comfort in morning and evening sky, the most difficult to resist of all spiritual hostility. (Fleming 1887: 88)

Ruskin’s admission of his diminished consolation in nature can be read in tandem with his obsession with clouds. Born of childhood curiosity, Ruskin’s interest in meteorology had intensified to a significance more spiritual than scientific. It is telling that when Ruskin arrived at Brantwood to find a small cottage in a state of dilapidation – ‘a mere shed of rotten timber and loose stone’ (*Works* 29.101) – his instructions to

his builder included the construction of a glazed turret on the corner of his bedroom. Standing in this projecting space, Ruskin would have been surrounded by the panorama of the sky, witness to the effects of dawn, dusk, storm and sun; however, the positive affirmation derived from experiencing the sunrise and sunset was negated by the growing malevolence of the sky. The environment, from an ecoGothic perspective, had become a source of oppression in the dark clouds and sullied air, and Ruskin's earlier comfort in the quiet wonder of nature was overtaken by fear of the storm cloud.

This response to the sky was expressed in two lectures given by Ruskin at the London Institution in 1884 which were subsequently published as *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*. The book begins with Ruskin's meteorological observations in which cloud patterns are described and categorised, but readers are soon aware that Ruskin's purpose was a moral rather than a scientific message. The change in the skies, recorded by Ruskin over several decades of cloud-watching, signified a moral imperative. The environment was punishing humanity for the intrusion of industrial pollution on the climate, but also warning of the apocalyptic consequences of the degeneration of morality brought about by capitalist greed. Such eschatological fears had been troubling Ruskin throughout his years at Brantwood: in 1874, a decade before his thoughts on the corrosive influence of the storm cloud were made public, Ruskin wrote to Beever:

There is nothing now in the year but autumn and winter. I really begin to think there is some terrible change of climate coming upon the world for its sin, like another deluge. It will have its rainbow, I suppose, after its manner—promising not to darken the world again, and then not to drown. (Fleming 1887: 7)

Environmental collapse as the punishment for human transgression was recognised by Ruskin in the dark skies of the late nineteenth century as a reverberation of Mosaic tradition. He appeared resigned to the inevitability of this environmental judgement and its aftermath, reflecting his own helplessness; the loss of spring and summer

would leave only the Gothic darkness of autumn and winter, robbing Ruskin of blossom and hope.

Through an ecoGothic lens, the weather is central to the construction of Ruskin's dread: both the origin and the manifestation of his horror. The 'plague-cloud, sooty and furious' was fuelling his destabilisation, and his diary entries over successive months at Brantwood in 1883 reveal an internalised correlation between his mental and physical well-being and the state of the sky: 'tired – chiefly however by this demon-blackness', 'black fog and cold – I shivery and valueless', 'I am utterly horror-struck and hopeless about the weather', 'steady south plague wind of the bitterest, nastiest, poisonous blight, and fretful flutter – I could scarcely stay in the wood for the horror of it' (Viljoen 1971: 289-306). The weather was clearly infesting Ruskin's thinking and being, and his reference to the 'plague-cloud' and 'plague wind' suggests that the infestation carried the threat of epidemic or pandemic capacity. Ruskin's biblical language again hints at judgement and apocalypse, but his panic is rooted in the anthropocene.

The Gothic language of blackness, horror, plague and demon was not restricted to Ruskin's personal diary. In May 1884, he confided to his friend Jane Simon with ecophobic intensity:

The 'Bad Time' is fearfully impressed on me by the sky, all through this May. Worse than ever before. Never a moment of purity or peace. Seldom sun. It shines fitfully to day, with angry wind. I am thankful, but more frightened. (RL, MS L99)

Ruskin's fear of the weather mirrored his fear of mental illness, his experience of the 'bad time' an agonising episode with the inevitable threat of recurrence. The abrupt sentences recounting his impression of the sky embody the restlessness of Ruskin's mind, his thoughts as fitful as the sunshine that troubled him. This restlessness again echoes Ruskin's earlier thoughts on the Gothic spirit, which he identified in *The Stones of Venice* (1853) as being shaped by the weather, the hardship of the climate determining the 'wolfish life' of the northern worker (*Works* 10.187). The imperfection of the stonemason whose hands were too cold to grip his tools was

deemed by Ruskin to be an expression of nobleness, and a truthful response to his conditions (*Works* 10.240). By the time Ruskin was reflecting on the weather at Brantwood in the 1880s, the climate was exerting an influence that was not to be celebrated, but to be feared.

Added to the Gothic blackness of the plague cloud, the physical manifestation of industrial pollution in the sky was a visual reminder to Ruskin of the moral blight of capitalism. In his 1883 preface to a rearranged version of *Modern Painters* (originally published in five volumes from 1843 to 1860), Ruskin's mature reassessment reveals the capacity of pollution to contaminate the purity of mind which he formerly derived from the landscape:

the slightest incident which interrupts the harmony of feeling and association in a landscape, destroys it all to me, poisoning the entire faculty of contemplation. From my dining-room, I am happy in the view of the lower reach of Coniston Water, not because it is particularly beautiful, but because it is entirely pastoral and pure. Were a single point of chimney of the Barrow iron-works to show itself over the green ridge of the hill, I should never care to look at it more. (*Works* 4.8)

The privileging of purity in landscape over such aspects as beauty, sublimity and the picturesque – together with Ruskin's association of purity with the pastoral – connects human activity to the environment, and renders society responsible for both the spiritual wholesomeness of the view, through the pastoral tradition, and for its reverse: the capitalist corruption of pollution staining the skies a few miles to the south and threatening further encroachment. What is not explicit in Ruskin's preface, but is apparent to any visitor to Brantwood, is that the view Ruskin described is framed by a window of his own design, the seven Gothic arches of which mirror the seven principles of Gothic architecture expounded in his 1849 book, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. Ruskin's thoughts on the imminent spoliation of his landscape by pollution are therefore literally framed by his thoughts on the character of Gothic. Industrialisation and capitalism had blighted the soul of architecture and were now threatening to do the same to nature.

Return to nature: the garden abandoned

Ruskin's capacity to garden the landscape at Brantwood was determined by his fluctuating mental illness, his debility characterised by the languid ambivalence of intoxication. Throughout the 1870s and 80s Ruskin employed a local doctor, George Parsons, who administered what Ruskin refers to variously as 'sedative', 'syrup' and 'that tonic', and from whom he requests 'some more terrifying and some more sleepifying – mysterious compounds', suggesting that he was under the influence of opiates (Ambleside, Armit Library, MS ALMS 380 36.2). Ruskin admits to Dr Parsons that he feels,

a quite unconquerable feeling of idleness, which seems to possess me more and more every day – the more I submit to it the worse it is. The less I do – the less I want to, the more I sleep the more I can; going up the steps at the back of the house must be thought twice on – before I attempt it and the ascent to the moor, a Herculean task. At this moment – I'm as sleepy as can be[.] (MS ALMS 380 37.2)

That Ruskin was overcome by the apathy of opium addiction offers a plausible reading of his final decade at Brantwood, where he was seldom seen or heard, and his garden was left to return to nature. The bouts of mental illness which had increasingly inflicted Ruskin in later life had become more frequent and more violent, and his family and friends sought to subdue his unpredictable temperament and protect his reputation (Hilton 2000: 569-584).

Whether by his own weakness and addiction or by the prohibition of his protectors, Ruskin neglected the landscape in his last years at Brantwood, allowing it to succumb to the decay of abandonment, and surrendering responsibility for its care to others. For centuries the land had been usefully managed, initially for subsistence farming and rural industry, then for Ruskin's aesthetic pleasure. Now, Ruskin's own absent presence in the garden placed it in a liminal state of non-garden, his trees freed from the bonds of their imposed stasis, his streams filling and emptying as the seasons dictated, and his agricultural experiments given over to nature. Ruskin's biographer W. G. Collingwood described the moorland garden:

the whole has been left to Nature again. The apple-trees grew, but untended; they still blossom. The cherries have run wild and are left to the birds. The rough steps from the rock-platform to the orchard terrace are disjointed, and fern is creeping though the grass.

(Collingwood 1903: 44)

In Ruskin's absence, nature had regained control, fauna taking advantage of the harvest and flora gradually removing the trace of human passage through the garden, following its own purposeful trajectory. Ruskin was alienated from his garden, his otherness manifest in the rewilding of the landscape while he became a bystander to his thwarted ambition, witness to the dissolution of his gardened space. Ruskin's loss of agency reflects the insignificance of human intervention in the biocentrism of ecoGothic, and the role of the environment in the construction of fear and oppression is foregrounded in the failure of Ruskin's gardening endeavours to combat the malevolence he saw in plants, flowers and 'Diabolic clouds'.

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