

John Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Religious Imagination

Sheona Beaumont and Madeleine Emerald Thiele (eds.)

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Contributor information and abstracts

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Introduction (Chapter 1), pp.1-48

'All Great Art is Praise' John Ruskin

Sheona Beaumont and Madeleine Emerald Thiele

Extract available to download at <https://www.visualtheology.org.uk/vt-book-2/>

The editors introduce Ruskin's religious imagination in the compelling terms of a 'still, small voice', raised in praise. In this, the collectively vibrant contributions of Pre-Raphaelites both close to Ruskin and those later inspired by his writings are *sacre conversazioni*: paintings, stained glass, engraving, relief sculpture, and daguerreotypes, all speak a language of buoyant visual theology. The editors argue that this language is richly Scriptural and poetic, whose Christian charge may illuminate modern concerns of ecology, beauty, theophany, preservation, and even social reform in dynamic ways. As such, the contributors whom the editors introduce in turn, are shown to hold new and extended conversations, drawing faith and aesthetics into dialogue with new ways of seeing and thinking.

Dr. Sheona Beaumont is an artist and writer working with photography. She was Bishop Otter Scholar (2017-2020) with the Diocese of Chichester and King's College London, and her doctorate on the Bible in photography was completed at the International Centre for Biblical Interpretation, University of Gloucestershire. Her monograph *The Bible in Photography* is forthcoming with Bloomsbury in 2023. She has written for several journals, held artist residencies in various ecumenical settings, and her artist books include *Eye See Trinity* (2016) and *Bristol Through the Lens* (2011). She is co-founder of Visual Theology, whose first edited publication with Madeleine Emerald Thiele was *Transforming Christian Thought in the Visual Arts* (Routledge, 2021).

Madeleine Emerald Thiele is an art historian whose research examines Tractarian aesthetics and the angelic form within British art c.1840s–1900s. Madeleine has presented papers internationally, taught at the University of Bristol, written reviews for the *Victorian Web*, and taught at Marlborough College Summer School. She was also the Visual Arts Editor for the journal *Harts & Minds* throughout its lifespan. She is the author of 'John Roddam Spencer Stanhope and the Aesthetic Male Body: A Pre-Raphaelite Response to Ideas of Victorian Manliness', in *Thomas Carlyle and the Idea of Influence*, ed. by Kerry, Paul (USA: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018). She is co-founder of Visual Theology, whose first edited publication with Dr. Sheona Beaumont was *Transforming Christian Thought in the Visual Arts* (Routledge, 2021).

Chapter 2, pp.51-71

Earth and Heaven: Ruskin on Dirt, Work, and Beauty

Flora Armetta

This chapter considers John Ruskin's (1819-1900) view of stone as a material that reflects a divine presence and order. Armetta reveals how Ruskin's musing upon the Gothic cathedral in *The Stones of Venice* is a worshipper's surest means of encountering God, as it points the way towards heaven. His discussion of stones, and the labour of shaping them, can be found

in other writings by Ruskin as an extended appreciation of earthy materials, including earth itself: that is to say, dirt, and work that is dirty. Using English paintings from the 1850s and 1860s, and extracts from Victorian literature, Armetta engages with critical and philosophical writings by Ruskin, and twenty-first century critical readings of Ruskin and his contemporaries. She argues that the radical value for dirtiness, so contrary to the Victorian ideal of cleanliness, becomes for Ruskin an insistence on the transforming power of God at work in His creation.

Flora Armetta holds a BA in Art History and Theatre from Tufts University and PhD in Victorian Literature from Columbia University. She has written on art and literature for *The New Yorker*, *American Arts Quarterly*, *Victorian Network*, and other publications. She was a lecturer for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and she has taught courses in the classics of Western literature at Columbia and for Classical Academic Press. Armetta was Assistant Professor of Arts and Humanities at Guttman Community College, New York City, before relocating to Pennsylvania with her family, where she co-runs an arts ministry with her husband, Robert Armetta. She is Assistant Professor of English at Central Penn College.

Chapter 3, pp.73-100

Ruskin's Venice: Embracing Sacred Fragments of Imperfect Beauty

Madeleine Emerald Thiele

John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1851 - 1853) is testament to the architectural and artistic achievements of both the city and Ruskin. His mission to document the buildings was his response to the damaging restorations occurring from the 1840s onwards. Using paintings of Ca' d'Oro and St. Mark's Basilica, along with some seldom discussed daguerreotypes, this chapter illuminates Ruskin's sympathetic attempt to capture the city's 'fleeting beauty'. His images are contrasted with those of John Wharltton Bunney (1828-1882) and Frederic, Lord Leighton (1830-1896). Ruskin's dissipating watercolours and radical daguerreotypes promote the expressive qualities of Venice's architecture as a form of imperfect beauty. Underlying this concept was Ruskin's preference for architectural preservation, as opposed to restoration. His mission, then, was to ensure the stones of Venice were understood as beautifully imperfect, and to do so by illuminating the *sacra conversazione* between the past and the present.

Biography as above.

Chapter 4, pp.101-125

'Those are Leaves': Ruskin's Analogical Imagination and the Pre-Raphaelite Theology of Nature

Alison Milbank

This chapter establishes the framework of Ruskin's metaphysics through the way in which he conceives the relationship between God and the natural world. It examines his reading of Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* to argue that Ruskin derives from it the doctrine of analogy, by which the divine and creatures are ontologically distinct, yet related by virtue of their direct creation and participation in God. Milbank uses the image of the leaf and Ruskin's drawings of foliage, and his writing on 'Leaf Beauty', in order to explore how this metaphysics works in practice. She also argues how modes of analogy between natural forms demonstrate the interdependence and reciprocity of Hooker's vision of the created order. Ruskin's appreciation of Pre-Raphaelite leaf-painting is attributed to his engagement with analogy, which, Milbank argues, also lies behind his criticism of their work.

Alison Milbank is Professor of Theology and Literature at the University of Nottingham, UK, and her most recent monograph is *God and the Gothic: Religion, Romance and Reality in the English*

Literary Tradition (2018) and she is currently working on a genealogy of Anglican writing about nature in art, poetry and natural philosophy. She has written several articles about Ruskin, who is also a central figure in her *Dante and the Victorians* (1998). In her role as Canon Theologian at Southwell Minster, she has been closely involved in study and interpretation of 'The Leaves of Southwell,' the cathedral's important carvings of foliage, which will be the subject of a forthcoming edited volume of essays.

VISUAL INTERLUDE I (Chapter 5), pp.129-139

Sounds and Visions at The Chapel of St Michael and All Angels

Sheona Beaumont and Mark Dean

The Chapel of St. Michael and All Angels, Marlborough College, is the neo-Gothic setting for a schema of angels in sound and sight. This piece considers the cycle of paintings by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope (1829-1908), and a video and performative art work by Mark Dean which took place in the Chapel in 2019. The occasion, a Service of Rededication, gave fresh opportunity for the place and act of worship to be considered in relation to Pre-Raphaelite interest in angels.

Sheona Beaumont (bio as above)

Mark Dean is an artist and Anglican priest, currently working as a chaplain to University of the Arts London, and coordinator of Arts Chaplaincy Projects. Dean made his first looped video work in the 1970s while studying photography and painting; in the 1980s he began working with musical loops in bands and as a DJ; he eventually combined these practices in the methodology for which he became recognised as a video and sound artist. Dean has exhibited nationally and internationally since the 1990s, with work represented in museum collections in the UK and abroad; recent projects have included liturgical events and choreographic collaborations in addition to gallery installations.

Chapter 6, pp.143-164

Ruskin, Rossetti, and the *Sacra Conversazione* of Colour

Elizabeth Helsinger

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's (1828-1882) watercolours posed for John Ruskin (1819-1900) a test case for the validity of his responses to colour. Was colour, as eighteenth-century English philosophers argued, secondary to form, suspect for its sensual appeal? Or was it, as Ruskin had proposed in the second volume of *Modern Painters*, part of a typological language signifying redemptive love? His excitement over colour in the Old Masters in Italy, and his ambivalence regarding the harshly realistic colours of the English Pre-Raphaelites, changed when he discovered Rossetti's watercolours of Dante and the Virgin Mary. Rossetti, Ruskin wrote, was the moving genius behind 'the sternly materialistic, though deeply reverent, veracity, with which alone, of all schools of painters, this brotherhood of Englishmen has conceived the circumstances of the life of Christ'. Rossetti's colour led Ruskin, almost despite himself, to accept colour as a moral and emotional force in the *sacra conversazioni* of old and new art.

Elizabeth Helsinger is the John Matthews Manly Distinguished Service Professor Emerita, in the Departments of English, Art History, and Visual Arts, University of Chicago, USA. She is the author of numerous books and articles on nineteenth-century literature and the other arts, including *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder* (1982), *Rural Scenes and National Representation* (1997), *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts* (2008), and *Poetry and the Thought of Song* (2015). Her *Conversing in Verse: Conversation in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry* is forthcoming from Cambridge in 2023.

She has held fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Humanities Center (twice); and is a co-editor of the journal *Critical Inquiry*.

Chapter 7, pp.165-187

'The Loveliest Traditions of the Christian Legend': Ruskin, Burne-Jones, and the Imaging of the Cross

Katherine Hinzman

John Ruskin (1819-1900) was an early mentor of Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), at the time he left theological study at Oxford to pursue art in 1853. This chapter, in considering Ruskin's idea that Burne-Jones 'harmonised' his art with 'the Christian legend', argues that theological questions underpinned the two men's ideas; specifically, how art could be shaped by the cross of Jesus. Focussing first on Burne-Jones' early education and subsequent reception of Ruskin's writing, Hinzman explores Ruskin's and Burne-Jones' respective reactions to William Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* (1851-1853). Hinzman examines how the two men imagined the role of the cross, not only in Christian theology but in art. The image of Christ, as imagined by Burne-Jones, illustrates how he used the cross as his pattern for a supernatural art. Arguably, Ruskin's religious imagination provides an insight into his dialogue with Burne-Jones, and illuminates Burne-Jones' wider vision for his art.

Katherine Hinzman has recently completed her doctoral studies at the University of York, UK, under the supervision of Professor Elizabeth Prettejohn. Her dissertation, entitled 'Love Between Worlds: Edward Burne-Jones and the Theology of Art', focusses on Burne-Jones' theological background and analyses his artwork as it employs theological themes, methods, and concepts. She has organised lecture series and seminars in the UK and USA, particularly as they relate to Catholic theology and the arts, and a conference on Burne-Jones in tandem with Tate Britain's 2018-19 exhibition. She is currently writing articles, book reviews, and an upcoming publication on Christian European art in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and is teaching as a Visiting Assistant Professor of History at Benedictine College.

Chapter 8, pp.189-215

Crystal Balls: Visions of Creation in the Art of Burne-Jones

Suzanne Fagence Cooper

This chapter considers the series of images of The Days of Creation made by Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) from 1859 to 1895. These included stained glass designs, book illustrations, presentation drawings and watercolours. It offers a range of sources from medieval manuscripts, accessible via the Bodleian Library collections, and the new work of John Hungerford Pollen for the University Museum, Oxford. It also looks at John Ruskin's (1819-1900) commentary on these works by Burne-Jones in his *The Art of England* lectures and his 1877 review of the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition. It considers Ruskin's antipathy towards the use of microscopes, and argues that Burne-Jones' treatment of the Creation story presented the process within the concept of a lens, crystal ball, or other amplifications of the visual experience. In doing so, he challenged both Ruskin and the evidence-based scientific discussions that emerged in response to the publication of Darwin's *On The Origin of Species* (1859).

Suzanne Fagence Cooper is a writer and curator with expertise in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British art and culture. She spent twelve years at the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum, researching the Victorian collections, and completed her doctorate in 2005. She is an invited lecturer for the Arts Society and Cunard voyages. Fagence Cooper was a research curator for *Ruskin, Turner & the Storm Cloud* (2019). Her introduction to Ruskin's work and legacy, *To See Clearly: Why Ruskin*

Matters was published in 2020, and her latest book is *How We Might Live: At Home with Jane and William Morris* (2022).

VISUAL INTERLUDE II (Chapter 9), pp.219-230

A World Without Ceiling: Mary Watts's 'Language of Symbols' at Limnerslease

Lucy Ella Rose

This piece focuses on Mary Watts's (1849-1938) gesso ceiling designs at her Surrey studio-home 'Limnerslease', showing how she developed a unique symbolic iconography that celebrates cultural diversity and divinity in its widest sense. It uses her largely-unpublished diaries to shed light on her views on John Ruskin (1819-1900), religion, spirituality and aesthetics, offering insight into an understudied Arts and Crafts masterpiece that preceded her celebrated Watts Chapel, Guildford.

Lucy Ella Rose is Lecturer in Victorian Literature at the University of Surrey, UK. She is author of the book *Suffragist Artists in Partnership: Gender, Word and Image* (EUP 2018), focused on Mary and George Watts as well as Evelyn and William De Morgan. Rose works on neglected women in nineteenth-century creative partnerships, revealing the cultural importance of these figures and their literary and visual productions.

Chapter 10, pp.233-255

Victorian Exodus: Visualising the Old Testament in *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* (1881)

Madeline Hewitson

Although incomplete, twenty years overdue and a commercial flop, the Dalziels' Bible Gallery (1881) remains one of the most significant compendiums of Victorian illustration. Rather than the story of Christ, which dominated British religious art, the Dalziels' illustrations are drawn exclusively from the Old Testament, making it a wholly unique iteration of the Victorian illustrated Bible genre. This chapter considers its use of Old Testament source material, previously marginalised in British Protestant visual culture, and explores the ways the illustrations answer Ruskin's call to stimulate religious art in a new direction. The Exodus narrative - which is central to the Abrahamic faiths - and its patriarch and prophet, Moses, are given centre-stage in this chapter. Through the Dalziels' Bible Gallery version of the exodus, this chapter reveals the ways in which the Old Testament represented a distinct category of religious art for artists with renewed social relevance in the nineteenth century.

Madeline Hewitson is a research assistant at the Ashmolean Museum working on the ERC-funded project, *Chromotope: the 19th century Chromatic Turn*, as well as an exhibition on Victorian colour opening in late 2023. She completed her doctorate in History of Art from the University of York in 2020. Her research focuses on British Orientalist visual culture and representations of the Holy Land in Victorian art. This chapter forms a part of her most recent project 'The First Covenant: Victorian Art and the Old Testament, c. 1850-1897' which is funded by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

Chapter 11, pp.257-281

Heaven on Earth: Evelyn De Morgan's Rejection of Materialism

Sarah Hardy

Evelyn De Morgan's richly iconographic canvases embody her approach to navigating the complex religious landscape of the late-nineteenth century. Where De Morgan's paintings

draw inspiration from the Bible, they have previously been understood in the tradition of history painting. Moreover, her allegorical depictions of hope and salvation are well-established in the literature as a visual manifestation of her own Spiritualism. Hardy argues that neither of these classifications can account for De Morgan's visual engagement with the Christian virtue, charity. The rejection of material wealth and the embracing of poverty can be seen in her *The Marriage of St. Francis and Holy Poverty* (1905), a theme which became an important motif for her. Through social commentators John Ruskin (1819-1900) and W. R. Greg (1809–1881), Hardy fleshes out the religious tensions De Morgan was responding to, examining how she visually represented her hopes for their resolution through her Christian Socialist tendencies.

Sarah Hardy has been Director of the De Morgan Collection since 2018, following roles in collection and exhibitions management at the National Gallery and British Library. Sarah has curated exhibitions such as 'Sublime Symmetry: The Mathematics Behind William De Morgan's Ceramic Designs', and 'Evelyn De Morgan: Artist of Hope' and written the exhibition catalogues for both. In 2022, Sarah contributed chapters to *Evelyn & William De Morgan: A Marriage of Art and Crafts* and *Pre-Raphaelite Women*. Sarah is currently working on the exhibition 'A Marriage of Art and Crafts: William and Evelyn De Morgan' with Delaware Art Museum, it is the first major retrospective of the De Morgan's work in the USA. Sarah is also a Trustee of the William Morris Society.

Chapter 12, pp.283-308

Art on Sundays: Henrietta Barnett and the Whitechapel Fine Art Loan Exhibitions

Lucy Hartley

This essay offers an account of the Whitechapel Fine Art Loan Exhibitions (1881-1898). I focus on the role of Henrietta Barnett (1851-1936), which, while generally overlooked in critical literature, was crucial to the success of the Exhibitions. How were artworks, primarily contemporary paintings and principally by Pre-Raphaelite artists, used to teach the poor? What kind of knowledge was disseminated from the pictures, and by whom? And which pictures proved the most popular, and why? I shall argue that what Barnett publicised as 'pictures for the people' constituted an ideal and a practice. It was an ideal that art could proffer a solution to the problem of poverty in the metropolis in the 1880s and 1890s, with implications for the nation; and it was a practice that rested on the object lessons in (and of) pictures, with consequences for the Church of England.

Lucy Hartley is Professor of English at the University of Michigan. She is the author of two monographs: *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (2001) and *Democratising Beauty in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Art and the Politics of Public Life* (2017); and she is the editor of *The History of British Women's Writing, 1830-1880: Volume Six* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). She is currently working on a book about the Whitechapel Exhibitions as well as two related books: on Henrietta Barnett as a social activist and on poverty and the literature of crisis.
