For George Levine,
Upon your retirement,
With great affection and admiration
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The Countess, by Gregory Murphy, at the Samuel Becket Theater, off Broadway, New York, 1999.


Modern Painters, Santa Fe Opera, July 1995.


“Scene from ‘Jack in the Box’ at the Drury Lane Theatre.” The Illustrated London News 64 (January 10, 1874): 28.
This is my second book on John Ruskin. As a PhD candidate at Rutgers long ago when I decided I wanted to do a dissertation on Ruskin, I went to my favorite professor, George Levine. I had arrived at graduate school a few years earlier already knowing how to write about poetry and novels; it was George who set my mind ablaze with the realization that one could read non-fiction in the same way. Naturally, I assumed that George would be pleased.

"Ruskin!" He paused, concerned. "Ruskin is a quagmire."

Undeterred, I went to Daniel Harris, another prominent Victorianist at Rutgers. George and Daniel generally disagreed on intellectual matters. I assumed that this would be no exception.

"Ruskin!" he said, surprised. "Ruskin is a morass."

I suppose that they were right. Sixteen years and a dissertation, multiple articles, and two books later, I’m still stuck on Ruskin. No doubt what worried my professors was that in trying to write about someone so prolific and contradictory, I might never finish the degree. Happily, I didn’t get bogged down, then or since. Nevertheless, it’s true that I have not yet and may never extricate myself. Ruskin still fascinates me.

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Ruskin’s Life on Stage” from *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time*, ed. Christine Krueger (Ohio UP, 2002: 79–94).

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Introduction
Unstable as Water

On the eve of the twenty-first century, two new hit shows featuring the Victorian author John Ruskin as a major character played to enthusiastic audiences in New York and San Francisco. It was the year 2000, centenary of the nineteenth-century British writer’s death. But a fever for anniversary trivia alone could not have triggered Ruskin’s sudden theatrical eminence. One of these plays, Greg Murphy’s *The Countess*, had opened off Broadway in 1999 to become the longest-running new production of that season. The other, Tom Stoppard’s prize-winning *The Invention of Love*, had previously premiered in 1997 at the National Theatre in London.¹ Even an opera based on Ruskin’s life had debuted in 1995.² Before this, the last puff of general public awareness about Ruskin had been the cheap and ubiquitous Ruskin Cigar, gone since the 1950s. Now, decades of middle-brow neglect abruptly ended. Suddenly, John Ruskin was a star.

But what kind of a star? These entertaining—even excellent—shows still playing regionally all over the United States create for present-day audiences a perverse, ineffectual, repressed effete who exists primarily as a favorable contrast to our currently more liberated selves. The distorted view of Ruskin’s life on stage helps us establish our contemporary identities as superior, an ignominious utility he shares with the rest of Victoriana. But in what other ways, beyond providing fodder for theater-going self-complacency, is thinking about Ruskin and performance useful
now? *Performing the Victorian* answers this question by examining Ruskin’s own ideas about theater, his conflicted understanding of identity as the result of performance rather than essence, and his fascination with all processes of performance and change. In addition to considering how contemporary theater presents Ruskin for us now and how Ruskin viewed theater and performance then, this study reintegrates Ruskin’s social and aesthetic critique (including his theater criticism) with the enigma of his sexuality. Unknowable, it can be seen as a dissident force that ruptures our settled concept of identity based on a polarity of sexual orientations.

John Ruskin’s radical social criticism helped to establish the English Labour party, famously motivated Gandhi to transform his life, and justified more progressive education for middle-class women and working men. He is even better known as the chief champion of the artist J. M. W. Turner, the most erudite advocate for the Gothic revival in architecture, and the theoretical inspiration for both the Pre-Raphaelite and the Arts and Crafts movements. Throughout these various accomplishments, his influential art and architecture criticism always carries explicit social critique. Perhaps he is best known among writers and critics as a delicious prose stylist whose word paintings were excerpted from weighty treatises for sale in diminutive gilt-edged gift volumes as examples of sheer beauty well into the twentieth century. The once-revered Victorian sage now symbolizes a repressed and outmoded Other to contemporary culture, which defines itself partly in reaction to a mis-remembered Victorian past. This representation of Ruskin appears not only in the theatrical productions mentioned above but also in much Victorian scholarship and the work of second-wave feminist literary critics. Even the unreadable cipher of Ruskin’s sexuality has made him easy to stereotype and dismiss. *Performing the Victorian: John Ruskin and Identity in Theater, Science, and Education* counters that popular and scholarly appropriation of Ruskin as the prime example of Victorian stodginess and stultifying patriarchy by showing how fundamentally Ruskin destabilizes categories of identity in much of his writing, but particularly in works on theater, science, and women’s education in the second half of his career. This is also the first book on Ruskin and theater in his own day or on theatrical representations of Ruskin in ours.

*Performing the Victorian* extends the work of my previous book, *Ruskin’s Mythic Queen: Gender Subversion in Victorian Culture*. There I argue that, although Ruskin’s often-quoted “Of Queens’ Gardens” is typically seen as the quintessential statement glorifying Victorian women’s constrained domestic sphere, his richly mythopoetic prose offers an alternative dis-
course that surprisingly yields the tools to escape fixed categories of gender. In contrast to Coventry Patmore’s *The Angel in the House*, Ruskin’s essay provides an ideal of active queenship (based partly on Queen Victoria) that redefines the domestic sphere much more broadly. Myth, with its cultural cachet and myriad examples of bodily transformation, supplies the opportunity for gender subversion not only in Ruskin’s mythography, but also in the works of other nineteenth-century authors. Besides placing Ruskin’s use of myth into historical context, *Ruskin’s Mythic Queen* shows how he feminizes language by placing it under the control of the Greek goddess Athena.

*Performing the Victorian* builds on this earlier work, concentrating now on Ruskin’s understanding of theater and performance rather than on his ideas about myth; it argues that Ruskin destabilizes all identity classifications, not just the gender divide. While most Victorianists recognize that viewing Ruskin as merely old-fashioned ignores his originality and revolutionary significance, they do not generally go far enough in acknowledging Ruskin’s inventive subversion of basic categories, both ontological (such as gender, nation, race, species, and self) and epistemological (such as animal, vegetable, mineral, art, science, theater, and even life). Ruskin not only pushed social reform and aesthetic innovation—changing the course of art, literature, and politics for both the Victorians and the Moderns—but also presaged postmodern and poststructuralist conceptions of a fluid subjectivity. Ruskin, once in every anthology of literary theory, has all but disappeared, while his contemporaries and students, such as Pater and Wilde, remain. *Performing the Victorian* intervenes in current criticism to demonstrate Ruskin’s usefulness as a theorist today.

Part of Ruskin’s reputation as an unrepentant prude surely stems from the 142-year-old story, corroborated by Ruskin himself, that he presided over the 1858 burning of Turner’s drawings “of the most shameful sort—of the pudenda of women” (Harris 400) in order to protect the great artist’s reputation, having concluded that Turner would only have drawn them “under a certain condition of insanity” (Warrell “Exploring” 2003, 7). But Ian Warrell, curator at the Tate Gallery in London, has recently concluded that the supposedly burnt drawings remain intact at the Tate. Far from having torched them, Ruskin had merely tucked them away in an elaborate cataloging system. The news of Ruskin’s not having destroyed the drawings made major newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic in December 2004 and January 2005. Warrell speculates that Ruskin might have deceived the world in order to save the drawings and to protect those responsible for their safety, in response to the 1857 Obscene Publications
Act, which could have resulted in the curators’ prosecution for holding pornography. Besides rescuing Ruskin from a reputation as an over-zealous, art-burning, Puritanical ultra-censor, Warrell’s discovery puts Ruskin in the position of playing the expected role of prude in order to safeguard art and those responsible for it. From our current perspective, that means that Ruskin was already “performing the Victorian.”

Ruskin certainly recognized his own role-playing, warning readers in Fors Clavigera, “If I took off the Harlequin’s mask for a moment, you would say I was simply mad” (The Works of John Ruskin 28. 513). He also noticed both the function of theater to help establish identity and the ways in which the self forms through other kinds of performance. Because theater best illustrates Ruskin’s notion of identity as performed, Performing the Victorian focuses on Ruskin’s recurrent writing about theater as it appears throughout his enormous oeuvre. Sprinkled in books as celebrated as Modern Painters (1843–1860) and as obscure as Love’s Meinie (1873–1881), Ruskin’s theatrical metaphors and examples drawn from his frequent attendance at the theater illustrate his points about social justice, aesthetic practice, and epistemology. Employing opera, Shakespeare, pantomime, puppet shows, French comedies, melodrama, minstrel shows, juggling acts, and dance to tease out a variety of issues seemingly unrelated to the stage, Ruskin displays fascination with performed identities that cross gender and other boundaries. These discussions are obviously of particular relevance in Ruskin’s writing on drama and spectacle, but they also reveal the primacy of performance to his understanding of science and education.

A professional critic of painting and architecture rather than of the performing arts, Ruskin might seem more likely to display a static theory of ontology and of epistemology than a dynamic one. But his organic vision of architecture and his belief in painting from nature are both dynamic; ideas of movement, change, and metamorphosis drive his understanding of identity, of existence, and of knowledge. Ruskin’s stressing organicism might suggest an unfolding of an innate or true nature, a stance at odds with a notion of identity constructed through performance; yet they have the crucial similarity of change. In other words, in a critic whose most celebrated and most voluminous discourse is about solid, unmoving things (such as paintings and buildings) as opposed to ephemeral time-bound things (such as theater), the use of kinesis everywhere to picture stasis reveals Ruskin’s view that everything is in flux. A good example comes in his fascination with glaciers, which he sketches, paints, describes, studies, and publishes geological discourses upon throughout his life. As Kate Flint
points out, it is the movement, the liquid behavior of solid ice, that
entrances Ruskin and brings him to write about them in Deucalion
(1875–1883). The paradoxical allure of fluid characteristics in solids
prompts Ruskin to write about crystals in Ethics of the Dust (1866) as well:
just as glaciers flow, so do minerals before they crystallize, another exam-
ple of change in stasis. Likewise Ruskin’s girl students at the progressive
Winnington school, whom he identifies with crystals throughout the
Ethics of the Dust, flow randomly by his direction about the playground
before coalescing in pre-arranged dances to form crystalline shapes. In the
same vein, theater provides the most vibrant example of how something
seemingly immovable—a person’s core or essence—similarly shifts and rei-
fies with each performed iteration.

Reuben’s Curse

Ruskin even describes himself as “unstable as water” (28.275). He uses the
words in a pleasantly self-deprecating fashion. Having just shown a fac-
simile of his awkward childhood handwriting, he pokes fun at himself, call-
ing attention to the misshapen letters as “evidence . . . of the incurably
desultory character which has brought upon me the curse of Reuben,
‘Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel’” (28.275). To prevent anyone
from thinking that he is too harsh on his child-self, he goes on merrily:
“But I reflect, hereupon, with resolute self-complacency, that water, when
good, is a good thing, though it be not stable; and that it may be better
sometimes to irrigate than to excel” (28.275). Certainly, Ruskin’s affinity
for water is of long standing: he wrote three chapters in Modern Painters
II on how water is represented and what it represents. Ruskin’s invocation
of Reuben closes the notorious (and disingenuous) memory of his toyless
childhood, in which he claimed he had nothing to amuse himself but
examining the intricate patterns of his carpet. In this same section of both
Fors and Praeterita, Ruskin vividly recalls “the most radiant Punch and
Judy” puppet set, given to him for his birthday by his Croydon aunt but
confiscated and disposed of by his evangelical mother, who disapproved of
all kinds of theater. While in these early memories Ruskin sees instabili-
ty as largely positive, elsewhere he is less sanguine about suffering from
what we might now call Attention Deficit Disorder. Ruskin even consid-
ered the phrase “Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel” for his epitaph,
feeling mightily displeased with his difficulty in sticking to one task.

But there is much more to the words Ruskin claims for his identity than
he elaborates on here. The phrase “unstable as water” comes from a passage in Genesis, in which Jacob calls his sons to him as he lies dying. It is the moment the men have long awaited, knowing that their father will bless them. Jacob says to Reuben:

Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou Wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch. (*Genesis* 49:3–4)\(^6\)

Given that this quotation from the Bible tells of how Jacob curses his oldest son Reuben for incestuously sleeping with Jacob's wife (*Genesis* 35:22), one might expect Ruskin's describing himself as "unstable as water" to be an insult. Ruskin ignores the Oedipal transgression that causes Jacob to curse Reuben precisely when and where his son might have expected a blessing, at his father's death-bed, symbolically the very bed that Reuben defiled.\(^7\) Yet Ruskin's characterization of his creative contributions as stemming from his being "unstable as water" seems unconscious of this aspect of the story.

Two things make Ruskin's omission worthy of note. First, Ruskin knew the Bible as well as anyone and far better than most, having, as a child, read it aloud with his mother chapter by chapter every morning after breakfast, from beginning to end and over again, leaving nothing out, not even the "hard names, numbers, or Levitical law" (28.318). Thus one must presume that, in however limited a way he uses the phrase "unstable as water" in this discussion of his own identity, he knows its full Biblical context. Second, while we can safely assume that Ruskin never went to bed with his mother, he never went to bed with anybody else either. The great transgression of Ruskin's sex life was that of inactivity, and all of his romantic relationships remained unconsummated. As a result (or as the cause), his deepest reciprocal emotional attachment to any woman was to his mother. While I do not want to wallow too deeply in Freudian analysis of a man who has been dead for over a hundred years, Ruskin's obliviousness—or sublimation—of the passage's connection to Oedipal incest seems striking. It is almost irresistible to point out that the instability of water as a shaky foundation for character (Ruskin's and everyone else's) is connected at heart with sexual transgression, which, in Ruskin's case, is sexual purity.

Tim Hilton reports that Ruskin understood the curse as negatively describing his difficulty completing projects (2000, 154). John Rosenberg
goes farther and reads the quotation as representing Ruskin’s increasingly unbalanced mind, culminating in his final madness (147). I would like to take the image farther still to suggest that “unstable as water” articulates the ontological and epistemological instability that Ruskin also expresses through metaphors of performance, as this book shows. Certainly Ruskin’s psychology and sexuality bear not only on his personal identity but also on his views about identity formation.

Too often an effort to think seriously about Ruskin’s unconsummated marriage to Effie Gray and his later love for the adolescent Rose La Touche has resulted in an overt focus on pathology. Both scholarship and popular staging have speculated on what could have caused Ruskin to reject his bride on their wedding night and every night thereafter for six years. As interesting and revealing as such studies focusing on Ruskin’s nocturnal omissions are, it is his odd sex life that provokes continued interest, not because of his later mental illness, but instead because it does not fit into current paradigms that define people within a polarity of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Neither homosexuality nor bisexuality, figured as oscillating between homo- and heterosexual behavior, unsettles people as much as Ruskin’s enigmatic transgression against the dominant ideology of sex and its available identities. While some consider Ruskin’s intense love of Rose and his teaching at the Winnington school for girls to make him a pedophile, the truth is that we know almost nothing of what Ruskin’s sexual feelings were, or even if he had any. Of his sexual actions, if they took place, we know virtually nothing either. Critics, biographers, playwrights, librettists, students, teachers, and curators all seem nonplused by his aberrant inactivity as we cast about for an appropriate identity label based on sexual orientation. Ruskin’s transgressive behavior of mysterious inactivity skews or queers our expectations and operates as a kind of sexual dissidence. The function of Ruskin in literary criticism at the present time could be to create a current of fresh ideas about sexual identity, to irrigate—if not inseminate—through what one is tempted to call non-performance theory.

As we will see in the remainder of this book, for Ruskin everything seemingly stationary continually shifts, like water. His fascination with the natural world is largely an enchantment with evolution masked as metamorphosis. He loves glaciers for their motion in apparent fixity. Hard rocks flow before they crystallize. Ruskin’s affection for theater and most particularly for pantomime is largely delight in its potential to realize fantastical transformations; indeed, the transformation scene for which Victorian pantomime is so famous is always his favorite. His devotion to
girls’ education is a dogged attempt to channel what he knows to be their inevitable but unpredictable patterns of development. In his characterization of himself as unstable as water, without a permanent base or solid core, Ruskin notes an ever-changing fluid self, one that always has the potential to crystallize through performance of an action, then to melt back again. As we will see in his writing on theater and his use of theatrical and performance metaphors in his other works on education and science, this mutability is the volatile foundation of all existence.

**Terms of Performance**

In this book I use the words *identity, subjectivity, and self* almost interchangeably. Other critics, such as Regenia Gagnier and Donald Hall, have pointed out that the terms *identity* and *subjectivity* are not synonymous; an elegant way to describe the difference is to say subjectivity is identity plus a critical self-consciousness of how identity is constructed (Hall 2004, 2–3). Ruskin’s own word is *self*: For him *identity* usually suggests correctly naming a plant or mineral, while *subjectivity* means the opposite of *objectivity*, as he explains in his definition of the pathetic fallacy, where he derides the vocabulary of German philosophy (5.204). While acknowledging the usefulness of the term *subjectivity* as one that designates this linguistic foundation of the self or subject and heightens readers’ awareness of identity as constructed rather than essential, I find that *identity* does the job just as well, once we establish that identities result from social factors, that the supposed core of being exists more extrinsically than intrinsically.

How does Ruskin’s understanding of the self fit into this postmodern insight? As the following chapters will show, he reluctantly recognizes the instability of the self, both predicated by and undermined by processes of performance. As he invokes the theater to make important points about society, education, science, art, and the theater itself, Ruskin reacts anxiously when confronting performances that blur boundaries between basic categories of existence, such as gender, species, and the difference between animate and inanimate objects. At the same time, he continually undermines those distinctions in his writing and performances. In addition, Ruskin’s theatrical qualities as lecturer and even as audience underscore the importance of identity performance.

Judith Butler’s ground-breaking insights have been most influential in driving contemporary discussions of gender construction as the result of
performance. In Butler’s philosophy, performances of gendered acts cite previously performed gendered acts, which further reinforce existing gender paradigms—while also allowing for change through altered performances for later citation. While in Gender Trouble and Bodies that Matter Butler considers all kinds of gendered acts, her points apply clearly to the theater (as she discusses in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”), because theater supplies both stereotyped characters that reinforce existing gender distinctions and a range of others that subvert them. Theater, in which live performers may recreate a realistic portrayal of contemporary life or may just as easily produce the illusion of fantastical bodies unthought of before, is part of a system that molds and remolds genders, and if genders, then all aspects of identity and embodiment. It is one of the “regulatory schemas that produce intelligible morphological possibilities” (Butler 1993, 14) that can be revolutionary as well as repressive in its constitution of norms.

Janelle Reinelt reminds us that for Derrida, theater—like all language—is iterable; its iterability makes theater not only a language but also both a metaphor for and an example of how gender comes into being through repeated performance. Even more pressingly relevant to Ruskin, for whom—as we will see—process is more vital than product, gender only maintains existence if it is continually performed. As Elin Diamond explains, “It’s not just that gender is culturally determined and historically contingent, but rather that ‘it’ doesn’t exist unless it’s being done” (4). This is finally the point of Judith Butler’s recent book title Undoing Gender. It is in this sense of reiterated performance producing identity that I use performativity and performance in Performing the Victorian; however, performance encompasses acting, singing, dancing, and juggling before an audience as well as ritualized reiteration of behaviors that constitute identity. Theatricality I reserve for moments of discussion that suggest a heightened awareness of a performance experience’s artifice and its effect on an audience. Of these words, Ruskin, of course, only uses performance, which for him often means “accomplishing” or “doing.” But as we have just seen from Diamond and Butler, performing gender and (un)doing gender are the same thing.

Identity and Work

Ruskin’s reluctant recognition that identity is performed rather than innate obviously differs from Matthew Arnold’s understanding of a core or
“genuine self,” to quote his poem “The Buried Life.” It also differs from Thomas Carlyle’s and George Eliot’s idea that we are what we do, that our work defines us. The difference between them and Ruskin lies in Ruskin’s reliance on process rather than product. For Carlyle and for Eliot, it is work that matters; accomplishing something means being someone. For example, by the end of *Middlemarch*, Eliot’s Dorothea marries Ladislaw, taking on a more traditional role than she imagined for herself when she married Casaubon to help find the Key to all Mythologies. We read that what matters finally is her incalculably diffusive influence in her new job as Ladislaw’s wife. She gives up a fortune in order to take on that task, her goal being not only love but also usefulness. While Eliot recognizes society’s control over the development of women’s subjectivity (Hall 2004, 46–49), she nevertheless maintains that within limits we can remake ourselves through work.

For Ruskin, in contrast, what makes us who we are is not just our utility (and certainly not our money, clearly not Eliot’s contention either). In *Unto this Last*, Ruskin influentially announces that “there is no wealth but life” (17.105), and, for Ruskin, life is transformation, dynamism, change, metamorphosis, performance. Norman Anderson and Margene Weiss point out that for Ruskin “being or selfhood” is “a state of becoming” (12). We exist in performing not solely through a Calvinist “work while there is day” notion of labor that Carlyle proclaims in *Sartor Resartus* (and that, at a fundamental level, binds all three of these Victorian sages together), but also through reiteration of acts that shape us for the moment and only for the moment, thus requiring continual reiteration. Thus it is the process of work, not the product or good result or incalculable influence or Carlyle’s anti–self-consciousness deriving from work (which so impressed John Stuart Mill), that differentiates Ruskin’s notion from the others’ we-are-what-we-do mentality. A better way of explaining it might be to say we are what we are doing.

Perhaps Ruskin’s particular obsession with the teenage Rose and his appreciation of young girls in general is a profound vision of the fleeting quality of existence and a fascination with the temporality of beauty, which exists only in the moment that it is appreciated. In other words, the point for Ruskin is not a lascivious warning to virgins to get busy gathering rosebuds because life is short, but instead a rueful recognition that life consists entirely of change. Each moment even of a young girl’s life so far is already over, and each new moment is also already over, and so on. For example, Ruskin wistfully remarks to the Winnington girls that Rose, with whom he has just visited, is growing and changing so rapidly, that “I shan’t
see her again for ever so long . . . and then she’ll be somebody else—children are as bad as clouds at sunrise—golden change—but change always” (Hilton 2000, 21; Burd 1969, 312). This is different from a carpe diem philosophy because the point is not to seize the day for pleasure because soon we will die or at least lose our bloom, but rather to recognize that all we think of as fixed and permanent is in reality constantly changing.25

The insight Ruskin offers is the kind of aesthetic criticism we associate with Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, whom Ruskin influenced. The notions of a fin-de-siècle transgressive identity may be more solidly Victorian than we are used to thinking, at least as far as Ruskin is concerned. We see this in Ruskin’s writing not only about art and architecture, but also about science, education, theater, and so on, as he expresses his fascinated uneasiness over universal flux. For instance, evolution clearly unnerves him, so he explains it by way of mythic metamorphosis instead of natural selection. The example of identity transformations on stage, which stand for transformations in life, causes anxieties far different from the solace and comfort of self-knowledge that Carlyle paradoxically draws from the anti-self-consciousness of labor. Eliot seeks identity for Dorothea from purposeful intellectual effort, but Ruskin cannot find identity in work alone because the work—art, acting, writing, building, teaching, or learning—requires a viewer, an audience, a reader, a tourist, a student, a teacher. In other words, because it is the result of performance, identity for Ruskin is a fundamentally social phenomenon.26

Identity built through performance requires an audience to reify it as well as other performers to model it. Dinah Birch has hinted that, after his father John James Ruskin’s death, Ruskin changed his career from writer to lecturer, from focusing on the written product to the performed experience (2002, 127). Although Ruskin subsequently brought out those lecture series as books, the point is that his published lectures, such as Sesame and Lilies and The Eagle’s Nest, and his published open letters, such as those in Time and Tide and Fors Clavigera, are as close to performed conversation as possible in a written form. After 1864, for Ruskin all writing aspires to the condition of performance.

What Follows

In the chapters that follow, we will see that, for Ruskin, belief in a stable self falters when confronted with the theater’s manifest purpose in entertainment through role-playing, with scientific evidence of change through
evolution, and with education’s point in fostering improvement. Finally, turn-of-the-twenty-first-century performances portray a fictive Ruskin’s sexual repression in order to establish current identities as more advanced and more liberated than the Victorians; in contrast, concurrent portrayals of Oscar Wilde create in him an example of gay existence for contemporary audiences to use in building present-day identities. However, a closer glance at Ruskin’s enigmatic sexuality emphasizes the constructedness of our own dominant sexual ideology that establishes subjectivities within a narrow bipolar paradigm of homo- and heterosexuality.

Chapter 1, “‘Mechanical Sheep’ and ‘Monstrous Powers’: John Ruskin’s Pantomime Reality,” delineates Ruskin’s ideas about the theater, which he attended voraciously, often going several times a week. For him, theater best exemplifies the pliability of the self: actors construct alternative identities on stage, highlighting the ways in which we all perform our parts in life. Ruskin sees theater serving many conflicting purposes: it offers amusement, role models to imitate, skillful artists to appreciate, and an abundance of popular culture examples that he uses in his most prominent works to make important points about social justice. Moreover, pantomimes boast fantastically beautiful transformations that Ruskin views as a truer vision of reality than the poverty, pollution, and misery he finds outside the theater in the streets of London. For Ruskin, the theater creates a heightened ontological state in which existence is more real even for the audience than in non-theatrical spaces. But paradoxically, Ruskin is unnerved by the permeability of identity boundaries he observes in theatrical performance. His descriptions of operas, plays, and pantomimes reveal a surprisingly pronounced ambivalence toward staged performance from Modern Painters IV (1856) to Fors Clavigera (1871–84). His remarks generally focus on performance moments that blur identity boundaries, including divisions between races, species, and the categories of reality and fantasy, but most particularly the gender divide. For example, in his book Time and Tide (1867), Ruskin criticizes several instances that both attract and disturb him: a crossed-dressed pantomime of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves in which a cigar is not just a cigar, a juggling act by a Japanese family in which nationality and species categories collapse, and a serpentine dance by a teenage girl. Each of these examples flouts divisions between gender, race, nationality, and species. Ruskin fiercely yearns for adamantine boundaries; yet their portrayal on stage as fluid, along with his own alternately fascinated and horrified depictions of metamorphosis, shows how strongly if reluctantly he recognizes the instability of all orders of identity and epistemology.
Chapter 2, “‘Pretty Frou-Frou’ Goes Demon Dancing: Performing Species and Gender in Ruskin’s Science,” shows how in four scientific books, *The Eagle’s Nest* (1872) on reconciling art and science, *Love’s Meinie* (1873–1881) on ornithology, *Proserpina* (1875–1886) on botany, and *Deucalion* on glaciology (1875–1883), Ruskin creates a feminine science. Throughout these works, he uses theatrical examples as a vehicle to articulate the performative quality of all existence. As a by-product of his effort to devise a new kind of scientific inquiry based on principles different from his contemporaries, he undermines the gender hierarchy that partially constitutes Victorian science. A respected member of the Royal Geological Society, Ruskin attacks violent and intrusive aspects of science that have been gender-coded as masculine; he offers instead a gentle and more passive approach based on quiet observation, corresponding to stereotypically feminine characteristics, constituting the identity of “scientist” both as feminine and as a good audience, appreciating nature’s performance. Ruskin also casts women as participants in scientific study, appealing to authorities they would know and using arguments designed to appeal to them. More surprisingly, Ruskin revises Darwinian evolution, which depends upon deadly competition for resources and for females, into a mythic principle of metamorphosis that he identifies as feminine. The shape-shifting of one species into another suggests to Ruskin not the species’ origin, as it does for Darwin, but rather a natural language that Ruskin teaches. Ruskin also rewrites Linnaean taxonomy, based on a hierarchy of male over female parts of flowers, into a system of moral classification that privileges the female. The new system takes its nomenclature from the names of Shakespeare’s heroines, suggesting that even plants perform their place in Ruskin’s botany, where art and science merge. By identifying women with their object of study, Ruskin demolishes the walls between scientist and specimen. Traditional classifications evaporate: non-human species are named according to their behavior instead of their form; science fuses both with art and with ethics.

Chapter 3, “Playground and Playhouse: Identity Performance in Ruskin’s Education for Girls,” demonstrates that Ruskin’s plan for the education of girls is not only far more progressive than he is generally credited with, but also a script for identity performance. In his best-seller *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), in his crystallography textbook for girls *Ethics of the Dust* (1866), and in his letters to the real-life girls whom he lectured at the liberal Winnington school, Ruskin considers how young women should be educated to take on their gendered duty. Critics justly complain that part of Ruskin’s aim in improving women’s education is to make them more
suitable companions for future husbands; however, this expressed goal
cannot explain the very rigorous improvements he proposes (and helped
to implement at the Winnington School). As I have already shown in
Ruskin’s Mythic Queen, rather than nullifying Ruskin’s suggestions for
reform, this slippage between Ruskin’s theory and practice undercuts his
stated goal and hints at the instability inherent in his gender classifications.
Indeed, he erases gender from student identity. He subverts divisions and
hierarchies by couching all the mineralogy lessons in Ethics of the Dust in
the form of Socratic dialogues; these playlets de-center his own authority
and question the notion of identity. Ruskin questions what a “self” is and
provokes the girls into wondering if crystals are alive. Likewise, by pre-
senting education as performance, Ruskin hints that the roles the girls
learn to play both in their classroom theater and in life are malleable.
Ruskin undermines distinctions between animate and inanimate, teacher
and student, performer and audience, lecturer and listener as radically as
he subverts the distinctions between genders and species in his scientific
and theatrical writings. The girls learn that, just like the crystals with
which their teacher links them so strongly, their seemingly essential selves
only appear to be stable, but instead flow—unstable as water—before
crystallizing; they can re-crystallize differently in the future.

In chapter 4, “Ruskin and the Wilde Life: Self and Other on the
Millennial Stage,” we shift from considering Ruskin’s ideas about theater
to considering theater about Ruskin—and his friend Oscar Wilde. The
chapters preceding this one argue that, for Ruskin, identity and indeed all
ontological and epistemological categories are in flux. Yet the Ruskin that
we know from current theatrical representations erases the multivalent
Ruskin that his own contemporaries revered as a sage or reviled as a radi-
cal. These productions include David Lang and Manuela Hoelterhoff’s
opera Modern Painters (1995), Gregory Murphy’s off-Broadway success
The Countess (1999), and Tom Stoppard’s critically acclaimed The
Invention of Love (1997), which also showcases Oscar Wilde. Thousands
of theater-goers, viewing Ruskin’s repression as prototypically Victorian,
learn only self-complacency, a point that James Kincaid has made about
current uses of other Victorians, such as Charles Dickens (Epstein
129–32); other Victorianists, such as James Eli Adams, have also noted this
about Victorian culture more generally (1999, 126).27 Instead of present-
ing Ruskin’s revolutionary art, architecture, or social criticism, contempo-
rary enactment of John Ruskin as a stage character satisfies our most
caricatured expectations of Victorian culture, giving us a foil against which
to define ourselves as more progressive, more feminist, more liberated. The
historical Ruskin’s unreadable sexuality makes labeling him to our advantage very easy. As a stage character, Ruskin becomes our stodgy Other.

In recent depictions, Oscar Wilde, however, becomes an equally stereotyped model, but for emulation instead of rejection. In addition to The Invention of Love (and others), two more plays appeared during the same years as those about Ruskin: Moisés Kaufman’s brilliant Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde (1997) and David Hare’s The Judas Kiss (1998). Audiences identify profoundly with representations of Wilde as a gay icon, locating in him the possibility of a public homosexual existence; nevertheless, as with Ruskin, these theatrical representations flatten out the historical Wilde, largely ignoring his art, his aesthetics, his concern for social issues, and significant aspects of the biographical record in order to make room for his utility in constructing current identity categories based on sexuality. Yet each of these powerfully poetic critics describes a fluid, performed self that contrasts vividly with the fixed types now appearing on stage. Likewise, both offer social critique that could question the efficacy of these very plays. All of these plays offer examples of what happens when life writing and criticism become theater, raising important theoretical questions about performance, identity, and realism. Based on an unexamined assumption that our own modes of being must be more expansive and pliable than the nineteenth century’s, fin-de-millennium theatrical representations of Ruskin and Wilde offer a set of static identity labels that constrain contemporary audiences more rigidly than does the flexible prose of either Ruskin’s or Wilde’s Victorian writing.

The Conclusion, “Queering Ruskin,” analyzes Ruskin’s sexuality in more detail, particularly regarding his scandalously unconsummated marriage and his much discussed relationship with the young girl Rose La Touche. It questions current constructions of identity based on sexuality, which the anomaly of Ruskin’s desire resists; Ruskin’s unusual sex life suggests a postmodern queering of the heterosexual/homosexual/bisexual triad. “Queering Ruskin” does not argue that Ruskin is gay, but rather points to the transgressive effect of Ruskin’s sexuality on our rigid set of identities based on recognized sexual orientations. The verb to queer does not mean to out, but rather to ask that we look from an alternative perspective, to recognize how something not-fitting proves the inadequacy of existing paradigms.28 Although queer has expanded in meaning as an identity label since its reclamation by gay activists in the 1980s from the status of slur, the primary synonym for queer is still strange. Everyone knows Ruskin’s sexuality is odd; the point is that seriously confronting Ruskin’s strangeness—rather than dismissing it and disposing of it as pathology—
unsettles our own polarities of gender and sexuality. Ruskin’s concern over
the instability of gender, nation, race, and species distinctions in the the-
ater and enacted in science and education broaden our own recognition of
gender identity as performed. Instances of identity performance unnerve
Ruskin; he recoils in purple prose that has echoed across time. Ruskin’s sex-
uality unnerves us; we register our worry in derision that eclipses his sig-
nificance and utility.

As a preeminent Victorian polymath, the multi-talented Ruskin exem-
plifies the man of many masks. Mary Ann Caws points to Ruskin’s claim
in *Praeterita* (35.457) that he was “no orator, no actor, no painter,” but of
course she argues correctly that he’s all three (27). He slips in and out of
his myriad roles as author, artist, art critic, art historian, architecture schol-
ar, social critic, economic prophet, collector, museum curator, professor,
school teacher, geologist, botanist, ornithologist, old lecturer, passionate
moralist, mad governess, Victorian sage, and the Master of St. George’s
Guild. His variable identities illustrate the shape-shifting he writes about
in his theater writing, his scientific studies, and his educational efforts. As
he performs for the students of Winnington, he not only transforms them
from girls into rocks, snakes, and birds, he also transforms himself. Such
shifting identities do not appear in current theatrical representations of
Ruskin, which marginalize him as the ultimate sexual Other who deflects
sexuality from life onto art. In other words, Ruskin’s primacy in Victorian
aesthetics makes him the perfect foil to establish postmodern identities not
only as sexually and socially more liberated, but also as somehow more gen-
ue, because in contrast to Ruskin’s sublimation into artifice, present-day
sexualities seem direct and unmediated. But this view—aside from its
overly simplified inference about both current and Victorian sexualities—
obscures Ruskin’s radically metamorphic vision in which the ostensible
core identity is as mercurial as any, because it too is established through
reiterated acts.
Throughout this book I have touched repeatedly on the issue of Ruskin’s sexuality. As I conclude my argument that Ruskin’s writing shows a reluctant recognition of identities as performed rather than innate, I would like to address the enigma of his sexuality directly. At the beginning of the twenty-first century in the western world, sexuality and identity have become almost synonymous. People commonly are labeled or label themselves in conversation by sexuality: “I’m straight,” “. . . a lesbian,” “gay,” “bi-,” “queer,” or, most recently, “metrosexual,” all variations on a theme of sexual polarity. Amazon.com lists literally hundreds of books on sexual identity, while the homo/hetero opposition so dominates our thinking that no other possibilities enter America’s consciousness as it watches *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Even bisexuality is perceived more as an oscillation between homo and hetero than its own subject position.1 What Ruskin’s apparently unusual sexuality offers us now is a vehicle to talk about how completely we circumscribe and limit our identities within the current homo-/hetero-/bi-sexual triad. Foucault and many other sex historians have proven that the identities of homosexual and heterosexual are late nineteenth-century discursive inventions2; Derrida and deconstruction have taught us to distrust the hierarchies inherent in such definitions through linguistic bipolarity. Both Ruskin’s writing and his biography afford an opportunity to enlarge this limiting discourse of dichotomies. While occasionally critics suggest that Ruskin may have been homosexual without realizing it, most have not really known what to make of Ruskin’s unsatisfied desire, other than to snicker or to diagnose a pathology.3 And so I say the *enigma* of Ruskin’s sexuality because, even though some recent books and articles have speculatively and pejoratively labeled Ruskin a
pedophile, in fact we know virtually nothing of his sex life other than that he had none, at least not with his wife of six years.

The recent scholars and critics using the term pedophile to describe Ruskin employ it even though they agree that we have no hint of molestation (Hilton 2000, 438; Robson 40). However, pedophile does not simply mean “one who loves children” and has never been analogous to Anglophile or bibliophile, suggesting instead predatory sexual feelings or actions. The most concrete detail that might seem to confirm this charge of pedophilia is that Ruskin proposed marriage to the very slender eighteen-year-old Rose La Touche when he was forty-seven; they had met eight years earlier when he became friends with her family. He became increasingly fond of her in intervening years. While today such a mismatched (if not quite May–December) courtship may provoke raised eyebrows and snorts of disgust, it was not that unusual in 1866. The eighteen-year-old Rose postponed giving a definitive answer to Ruskin’s proposal for three years, until she would reach the age of twenty-one (when legally she could marry whomever she pleased), apparently not because of her own youth or Ruskin’s middle age, but because, as an evangelical Christian whose father had been converted and baptized by the famous Mr. Spurgeon, she—and her parents—disapproved of Ruskin’s religious doubts. Nevertheless, by way of encouragement, Rose sent her lover “a copy of Elizabeth Sheppard’s Charles Auchester (1855), a novel in which teenage, musical heroines are wooed by much older men” (Hilton 2000, 100). Never approving a match for their daughter with the infidel Ruskin, the La Touches only broke off the delayed engagement entirely when they received a damning letter from Ruskin’s ex-wife (probably charging that he was impotent), not because they felt that the mid-life Ruskin’s having begun to fall in love with their teenage daughter some time in the few previous years was wrong or sick or particularly inappropriate due to their age difference.

It is of course Effie’s description of their wedding night that has provoked the most speculation about Ruskin’s desires or his scandalous lack of them. In a famous letter written after the fact to defend her own course of action in leaving the unconsummated marriage after six years, Effie states that Ruskin declared on their first night together that, when he saw her naked, he was disgusted with her person (Lutyens 1967, 156); later Ruskin agreed himself that he had found her not formed to excite desire (Lutyens 1967, 191). So critics and scholars, playwrights, librettists, and anyone who has ever heard the tale since, have wondered exactly what form would excite his desire. Once they hear about his tragic love of Rosie, the most frequently suggested figure is that of the prepubescent girl.
Ruskin’s commitment to teaching at Winnington also adds fuel to this fire, although again there is no evidentiary whisper of molestation, or even of his ever having made a student there feel uncomfortable. Many of the Winnington students maintained long friendships with Ruskin after he stopped lecturing at the school (Hilton 2000, 133). The principle evidence of pedophilia Catherine Robson offers in *Men in Wonderland* is textual analysis of the imagery Ruskin uses to describe the girls at the progressive school, which she sees as manifesting fantasies “that would appear to confirm everyone’s worst fears about Ruskin’s delight in the beauty of little girls” (40). She points to passages in his prose describing little girls made up, as she describes it, of “endless gazing and coquettish conversations; kisses, laps and wriggling; the breathless excitement of the playroom; little fingers and buttons; most of all, perhaps the wetness of those eyes” (40). Robson’s summary of Ruskin’s language regarding his friendships with the Winnington girls brims with sexuality, but I am not sure that it is Ruskin’s. The last comment that Robson describes is intended to indicate Ruskin’s erotic view of the girls’ “wet eyes, round-open,” “eyes all wet with feeling” (qtd Robson 4); yet these lines appear in a letter Ruskin writes to his octogenarian mother describing the Winnington students as they listened to music. While we cannot know Ruskin’s unconscious thoughts, clearly he himself did not expect his elderly parent to interpret his description sexually. More importantly, if such wet eyes were evidence of his particular sexual attraction to girl-children, they should only appear in reference to young girls; yet Ruskin uses this description in other contexts. For example, in the same group of letters, he refers to Alfred Tennyson’s “half wet half open sparkling eyes” when the poet was also visiting the school (*Winnington Letters* 150). No one has yet insinuated Ruskin’s attraction to the aging poet laureate. I can offer many more examples of what Robson evocatively calls the “world of soft and flexible moistness” (40) beyond his descriptions of little girls. The term *pedophile*, in our common understanding based on daily newspaper revelations of physical and psychological violations by “pedophile priests,” coaches, teachers, scout leaders, and so on, surely involves more than vivid prose in a lushly descriptive style.7

Whatever Ruskin’s sexuality was or was not, it did not involve molesting children.8 Nevertheless, for a number of readers, Ruskin’s obvious pleasure in the company of active, playful, intellectually eager girls bears no construction other than that of sexual perversity. The question is, why? The scenario in which children delight in dressing Ruskin, already fully clothed, in a backwards overcoat (the small fingers and buttons remarked upon above) becomes sinister for Robson in a way it probably would not have if we had
never known that his marriage to a robustly adult woman remained unconsummated. It is this lack of sexual activity that provokes us. As shocking as the reason for Ruskin’s annulment was to the Victorians, the scandal of no sex is so incomprehensible to us now that it requires a pejorative term. All entertaining speculation aside, we will never really know why Ruskin rejected Effie on their wedding night and avoided physical involvement with her during the rest of their marriage. More uncomfortably, we will never know exactly how young Rose was when Ruskin first fell in love with her, since he wrote the apotheosis of Rose-as-child that appears in his autobiography long after he had proposed to her, long after her death as a mentally ill young woman of twenty-six, and even after he had himself slipped into periods of insanity in which he confused her with St. Ursula. Indeed, we do not even know if, for Ruskin, being in love involved sexual feelings at all. All we know is that his love life does not fit any patterns we are familiar with now, when we expect people to be either heterosexual or homosexual, or to complete the dialectic, bisexual. Ruskin, who never had sex with anybody (as far as we know), disrupts this neat paradigm.

I won’t spend more time defending Ruskin from this charge for which there is no support and of which his contemporaries felt no hint; my real point in raising the issue is that the concern over what to call him stems from our very contemporary need to label people according to their sexuality. To the extent that such labels might promote acceptance and understanding of self and others, they are surely a good thing. But why do we feel the need to ascertain and to judge Ruskin’s sexuality? Why do we need to define it in order to define him? How, ultimately, is that useful? In the theatrical representations discussed in chapter 4, Tom Stoppard, Greg Murphy, David Lang, and Manuela Holterhoff see Ruskin as someone who deflects the sexual onto the aesthetic, and for each of them this makes him tragically unfulfilled, even sick. While such characterization makes for satisfying entertainment in the theater, it misses the truly radical possibilities inherent in an aberration of such interest. Ruskin’s sexuality supplies “resistance to regimes of the normal,” Michael Warner’s definition of queer (xxvi). Ruskin’s missing desire becomes a perversion that subverts; in Jonathan Dollimore’s terms, it is a “transgressive agency,” “a perverse dynamic [that] denotes certain instabilities and contradictions within dominant structures” to the point of “sexual dissidence” (33). In the sense of queer as looking aslant or as any “disruptive desire” (Hall 2003, 16). Ruskin’s strange or mysterious sexuality highlights what is missing in our current paradigm and presses us to admit that we have reified into a fixed identity that which is basically a performed one.
In a sense, for contemporary readers Ruskin’s lack of sexual performance is a lack of identity performance. The fact that Ruskin does not fit into the sexual identities that we acknowledge now, and indeed caused a scandal of inactivity in his own day, gives us an opportunity to consider what is wrong with the our whole mode of classification.\textsuperscript{10} Although we may think of postmodern identities as more fluid and more generous than previous eras’, the oddity of Ruskin’s case exposes that our seeming welter of possibility is in fact sharply limited after all. So, despite the promise of this chapter’s title, rather than queering Ruskin, I want to suggest that Ruskin queers us.

Not only does the cipher of Ruskin’s sexuality subvert rigid notions of identity, but also and more importantly, so does the uncomfortable focus on performed identity in his writing about theater, science, and education. This nineteenth-century thinker offers twenty-first-century readers a radical take on the instability of epistemological and ontological categories as he grapples with his own anxiety about how they shift. I don’t want to argue a cause-and-effect relationship, that Ruskin’s transgressive sexuality prompted him to undermine identity categories. But his usefulness today stems in part from his rupturing our neatly bipolar sexual paradigms just as he dislocated Victorian notions of a core identity based on essence rather than performance. Theater provides the best venue for Ruskin to express his concern with the self because it manifests the malleability of identities as they are performed on stage. For Ruskin, theater provides entertainment and escape; it also offers pedagogical examples to imitate; more importantly, it is a great art form requiring skill and talent that demand appreciation from an aesthetically attuned and sympathetic audience. As popular culture, theater supplies a wealth of illustrations for Ruskin to use to make points of all kinds in his lectures and books. More importantly, transformation scenes in pantomime create a universe of fantasy metamorphosis that permits the manifestation on stage of a truer reality than that which exists off stage. In this heightened ontological state, the actors and the audience exist more intensely than anything in the brutal world outside the theater, always in such terrible need of repair. But unnervingly for Ruskin, theater also routinely provides examples of the permeability of boundaries he recognizes as porous but would just as soon see as unbreachable. Ali Baba, his forty thieves, and their forty friends played by girls ungirling themselves by smoking cigars; a Japanese juggler re-creating his English audience by balancing on a pole unnaturally, like a monkey; a young girl’s dancing like a snake or an insect: these examples all flirt with the evaporation of divisions between gender, race, nationality, and
species. While Ruskin vehemently wants such borders to be permanent and intrinsic, his discomfort over their depiction on stage as fleeting and performed, along with his own despairing descriptions of the shifting margins of existence throughout his writing, show how strongly he recognizes the instability of all categories of identity and knowledge.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Ruskin’s writing about science. While grappling with his reactions to Darwin’s theory of evolution through natural selection, coming to understand its validity while wishing it were not so, Ruskin imagines a science based on myth in which metamorphosis occurs through symbolic rather than competitive value. He uses examples drawn from the theater repeatedly to provide the only vehicle to express adequately the performative quality of all existence. The shape-shifting that turns one species into another and teaches evolution to Darwin tells Ruskin nothing of species’ origin but only of meaningful correspondences between them as each signifies something else in a natural language that Ruskin imagines luminously apparent to everyone who learns to read it. This kind of observation distinguishes Ruskin’s science as a gentle, passive, meticulous scrutiny that constitutes the identity of a feminized scientist, who not only performs in this non-competitive and non-exploitative manner in scientific research, but who also reacts to the performance of nature as a good audience should, with an astute and sympathetic reception. Ruskin feminizes science more directly by encouraging women to become scientists, by encouraging men to accept women as scientists, by writing science textbooks for girls, by teaching girls and women a variety of sciences, by quoting non-traditional authorities they would recognize and feel comfortable with, and finally by reorganizing Linnaeus’s taxonomy according to girls’ names from Shakespeare’s plays, suggesting that in a sense the flowers play their part in nature’s spectacle. By identifying women ever more closely with the subject they study, Ruskin breaks down the barriers between observer and observed, between scientist and specimen. He subverts all ontological and epistemological classifications as even non-human species are identified by how they act rather than how they look, and as science merges with ethics. By focusing on the significance of an aesthetic manifestation of form in the moment rather than a search for origin as revealed by form over time, Ruskin erases the conventional boundary between science and art.

The maturation of children into adults through education is another kind of unsettling metamorphosis that fascinates Ruskin. Ruskin tells us that clouds, flowers, and children change before our eyes, that they exist as they are only for a moment, literally. Knowing that children will in large
part become what their parents teach them to be, Ruskin writes urging a more progressive plan of education for girls and puts his ideas into effect when lecturing at the Winnington school. In demanding equal education for girls, Ruskin erases gender from student identity, a surprising move in the famous essay “Of Queens’ Gardens,” often seen as the quintessential statement of Victorian claustrophobic idealizing of women and mythologizing their separate sphere. Even more radically, in *Ethics of the Dust* Ruskin dramatizes a world in which, far from being innate, identity is performed. In that book, Ruskin interrogates the meaning of the word “self” and suggests that even inanimate things play themselves in a universal spectacle that observers enjoy and learn from. In using the dialogue form for these lectures, Ruskin abdicates the role that the Old Lecturer would seem to have on the platform stage. By decentering his own authority as lecturer, Ruskin subverts the traditional hierarchy in education and theater, splintering the paired identities of teacher/student, performer/audience, lecturer/listener, and so on. As the girls learn mineralogy, mythology, and ethics, they also learn that, like crystals, their core or essential selves only appear to be stable; really they are a confluence, fixed into a particular pattern by a moment in time. Identified with living crystals, the girls demonstrate in these playlets that distinctions between animal and mineral, between human and rock, are as vague as those between species, between nations, and between genders that we have seen Ruskin explore in his writing on theater and on science.

Ruskin’s inventive wildness evaporates completely from the theatrical performances of Ruskin’s life that the late twentieth century has brought us, which ignore his radicalism in order to depict him as tragically emaciated in love, at best displacing erotics onto aesthetics, at worst deformed in his desire for an ideal woman to the point of rejecting and restricting real ones. The simmering dislocations of our seeming reality that attract and disturb Ruskin disappear from these depictions of Ruskin as Other, the repressed Victorian prude against which we, in most stereotypical fashion, can construct our own contemporary identities as progressive, liberated, healthy, and sane. This is standard fare for the current but erroneous image of Victorian sexuality, as noted by many scholars, but Ruskin’s case seems particularly egregious considering the gap between his importance for Victorian culture and his popular perception now. These depictions of Ruskin are in direct contrast to depictions of his contemporary Oscar Wilde, whose function in concurrent plays is as the premiere model of gay identity. Ironically, one could argue that the preponderance of Wilde’s life experience is (anachronistically) more heterosexual than Ruskin’s: unlike
Ruskin, Wilde passionately and pleasurably consummated his nuptials, fathered two children with his satisfied bride, remained married twice as long, and reacted with agony (rather than Ruskin’s relief) when his wife left him (Hunt 235; Ellmann 486). Obviously my point is not to re-label Wilde as straight, but to emphasize that acknowledging Ruskin’s unknowable sexuality as outside our present set of identity categories throws the instability of our other seemingly settled categories into greater relief. Excellent theater in their own right, these fin-de-millennium productions construct a Ruskin and a Wilde for today’s spectators that masks the very aspects of their insights that are most postmodern: in Ruskin’s case, his vision of the self that—to his own fascinated distress—is as permeable, fluid, and performed as any current gender theorist’s.

Our postmodern identities defined through sexual orientation would be very foreign and indeed distasteful to Ruskin, particularly since whatever his sexuality was would not fit into our current paradigm. But if poststructuralist gender theories, particularly those of Judith Butler, have lasting impact, then Ruskin’s concern over the fluidity of gender (as well as nation, race and species) on stage and enacted in science and education help expand our understanding of gender identity as performed. Examples of identity performance rattle Ruskin; he records his reactions in purple prose that has resonated across centuries. Ruskin’s sexuality rattles us, and we record our discomfort in puerile ridicule that obscures his profound utility.

One way in which Ruskin is genuinely useful as a theorist today is in terms of something one might call ethical aesthetics. Another way to talk about this is that Ruskin’s approach—like current cultural studies approaches—requires social justice. Elin Diamond points out that “cultural studies seeks to link the humanities, social sciences, arts and political economy” (1996, 6); this is precisely what Ruskin does. Yet Ruskin values beauty in itself, however difficult that is to define. From a postmodern perspective that inherits both an “art for art’s sake” mentality that celebrates the art object divorced from its context and a historicist perspective that recognizes ways in which notions of beauty are the result of social construction, Ruskin’s insistence on the identity of aesthetics and social justice must give us pause. Ruskin’s theories of theater, performance, and pantomime truth resonate with his theories of art, architecture, and political economy, intriguing us not because he has the answers, but because he raises questions that still haunt us.12 He is a formalist who nonetheless insists that architecture built under circumstances that exploit the worker is necessarily inferior and degraded art. He is a passionate social critic whose lan-
guage and preoccupation with beauty not only imply a detached and
escapist aestheticism but also surely help institute it. More than a litany of
paradoxes, this set of complications suggests that Ruskin—as much as
Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Wilde, or Brecht—grapples with issues of
aesthetics, ideology, identity, and social conscience that confront us now.
Ruskin's resistance to easy answers can never reconcile ideal beauty with
the reality of class relations, aesthetics with sexuality, self with construc-
tion of self. Nevertheless, he shows how a serious mind recognizes that in
the pleasures and anxieties of theater reside a continually transforming
power, that in the destabilizing effect of performance lies the potential for
the realignment of beauty and justice.
NOTES

Introduction

1. The original production of *The Invention of Love* won the Evening Standard Theatre Award, 1997.

2. In 1995 the Santa Fe Opera premiered a widely reviewed opera about Ruskin called *Modern Painters* with music by David Lang and libretto by Manuela Hoelterhoff.

3. In his autobiography, Gandhi describes how reading Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* caused in him “an instantaneous and practical transformation“ (299). His determination to live the principles he found in this book resulted in his immediately founding the Phoenix Settlement based on its concepts, which he carried back with him to India many years later (298–310).

4. Most prominently, Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*, but also many other excellent critics, including Deirdre David.

5. An indication of interest in Ruskin and gender is Yale’s edition of *Sesame and Lilies* (2002) in its “Rethinking the Western Tradition” series, which reprints Ruskin’s important lecture on women’s roles and girls’ education, “Of Queens’ Gardens,” as well as new criticism on it. Several other excellent pieces on Ruskin and women’s education have appeared recently, such as in Shuman’s *Pedagogical Economies* (2000), Green’s *Educating Women* (2001), Birch’s volume of essays *Ruskin and Gender* (2002), and Robson’s *Men in Wonderland* (2003); however, none takes a performance approach. My own *Ruskin’s Mythic Queen* (1998) concentrates on Ruskin’s writing about women and mythology rather than broader identity performance.

6. In addition to *Sesame and Lilies*, see *The Queen of the Air* (about the Greek goddess Athena) and *Ethics of the Dust* (about the Egyptian goddess Neith).

7. These include John Keats, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, George Eliot, Max Müller, Andrew Lang, and Jane Ellen Harrison.

8. I argue that uses of myth in twentieth-century feminist theory and gender studies continue in Ruskin’s vein. Mine was the first book-length study on Ruskin and gender; it remains the only monograph on that topic to date.
9. This story created a stir in both The Guardian and The New York Times. See Warrell 2003. My thanks to Pallavi Rastogi for pointing out the Times article and to the VICTORIA listserv, moderated by Patrick Leary, for the piece in the The Guardian.

10. Hereafter, all citations of Ruskin will be from the the standard library edition of Ruskin’s works in thirty-nine volumes, Cook and Wedderburn edition (1903–12), unless otherwise indicated. Parenthetical citations will include only the volume and page, separated by a period.

11. Ruskin’s fascination with the theater, which he attended avidly and wrote about often in works on other subjects, is perhaps most usefully understood as part of his attraction to the heightened reality he derives from all forms of critical experience. That is, for Ruskin the whole universe plays itself for us to enjoy and to learn from; as an appreciative audience, we analyze and interpret. Nothing really exists unless it is performed and observed.

12. Thanks to Dan Novak for bringing this chapter in Kate Flint’s book to my attention.


14. He contradicts his depiction of a toyless childhood in the very same text, in which he attributes his having developed a good architectural sense to the benefits of a large, elaborate set of building blocks.

15. Perhaps Ruskin was inviting comparison with John Keats, who wanted his gravestone to read only “Here lies one whose name was writ in water.”

16. Biblical quotations come from the Authorized King James version.

17. Metaphorically so: Reuben slept with Bilhah, his concubine stepmother, not with his blood mother, Leah.

18. He alludes in letters to a habit of masturbating (Hilton 2000, 135–36; Simpson 1982, 33) by saying that he shares Rousseau’s weakness, which was well known.

19. See Dollimore’s Sexual Dissidence and Dellamora’s Victorian Sexual Dissidence.

20. See Gagnier’s Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920 for a seminal treatment of subjectivity in regards to Victorian autobiography, including Ruskin’s Praeterita. As Gagnier explains, the “post-structural conception of subjectivity claims that the I, the apparent seat of consciousness, is not the integral center of thought but a contradictory, discursive category constituted by ideological discourse itself (10).

21. Each of these terms comes freighted with decades of complicated, multivalent usage. Their distinctive nuances are important intellectually and even politically, but I have chosen words that behave the most flexibly, absorbing connotations from more specialized terms while retaining the resonance of plain English. But no matter which of these terms I use, I operate under the post-Foucauldian and post-Derridaean assumption that our identities or subjectivities are socially constructed, that is, that we are who we are because language and discourse constitute us within an overarching framework of possibility.

22. Bodies that Matter stirs up the sex/gender distinction to argue for the linguistic and performative construction of the sexes as well as genders (since there is
no access to the notion of biological sex except through discourse, which inevitably shapes our only way of thinking about it. The construction of seemingly natural divisions of gender (and sex) is “a temporal process” of establishing and destabilizing norms through reiteration:

As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. (Butler 2003, 10)

Even more stringent a statement of the effect of reiterated performance to create and to subvert identity than in *Gender Trouble, Bodies that Matter* pushes past naturalized gender polarity to subvert perceptions of biological difference through the lens of performance as a kind of discourse.

23. This calls for me to address what I mean by *performance, performativity,* and *theatricality.* These three words are a fashionable part of critical discourse in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and their histories are even more complicated than *identity, subjectivity,* and *self.* Erika Fischer-Lichte defines *theatricality* in severely semiotic terms: actors are entirely replaceable by other actors in their parts, making the actors signs that represent other cultural signs outside the performance, so that theatrical signs are “always signs of signs”; the experience of theatricality provides consciousness of this doubling (88). In “The Politics of Discourse: Performativity Meets Theatricality,” Janelle Reinelt defines *theatricality* somewhat differently, seeing more divergence between the text-based experiences of spectators in a theater-like setting suggested by the term *theatricality* and the particular instances of bodies engaged in temporal action suggested by the term *performance,* only to complicate the distinction. W. B. Worthen in “Drama, Performativity and Performance” also usefully synthesizes the multiple threads of discussion about performativity. Beginning with linguistic theorist J. L. Austin’s definition in *How to Do Things with Words* of a performative speech-act as one that in itself performs an action (as in the oft-quoted example of a judge pronouncing a couple to be married), Worthen travels through John Searle to speech-act theory’s appropriation by post-structuralist theorists, such as Eve Kosofksy Sedgwick, who (influenced by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Derrida) join Judith Butler in her idea from *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* that gender is constituted through reiterated performance of gendered acts. In *Performance and Performativity,* Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick pull together diverse theatrical and philosophical uses of *performativity,* pointing toward their amalgamation in performance studies (1995, 2–6). Lynn Voskuil provides a useful critique in both her essay and book entitled *Acting Naturally.*

24. In *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity,* James Eli Adams argues that Carlyle, Arnold, Newman, Pater, and Wilde depict “intellectual vocations as affirmations of masculine identity” (2). He does not include Ruskin. Instead, Adams reads Ruskin’s definition of gentlemanliness as due to heredity, bodily breeding, and physically innate qualities, citing passages from
Modern Painters V (7.343–45) to prove it (167–68). Yet, as Adams points out, the key characteristic of gentlemanliness for Ruskin is “touch faculty” or the power of responding with great sensitivity (like a mimosa plant, which curls away at a touch, as Ruskin explains in “Of Kings’ Treasuries”). Curiously, Ruskin sees this characteristic best cultivated in women, but wants to promote it among men. Thus, Ruskin won’t work for Adams’s list not because Ruskin defines identity as innate but rather because Ruskin redefines masculinity as feminine.

25. Intellectual history usually credits Pater, in his celebrated “Conclusion to The Renaissance,” with the Victorian articulation of such Heraclitan flux, but Ruskin has already done it obliquely over and over in his writing about art, architecture, education, science, and culture. However, Ruskin is deeply disturbed by the disorienting temporality he describes, whereas Pater appears both to revel in it and to offer an antidote—the aesthetic mode of appreciation.

26. This is like Hegel’s notion of self-consciousness that “never exists in isolation” (Hall 2003, 51).

27. See also Kucich and Sadoff.

28. See Donald Hall’s Queer Theories for an excellent introduction to these ideas.

Chapter One

1. Despite the puppet show’s immense popularity, Ruskin particularly disliked the violence of Punch and Judy. The entertainment pervaded Victorian culture generally, and Ruskin’s life was no exception. In Praeterita Ruskin tells of how when he was a small child, his Croyden aunt pitied his supposedly toyless existence and gave him a beautiful Punch and Judy set. Though his mother thanked the aunt, as soon as the relatives had left, she removed it (35.20). Nevertheless, the image of Punch and Judy permeates Ruskin’s work and even his dreams; he describes one in which the Judy puppet “seemed to bruise under the blows, so as to make the whole as horrible and nasty as possible” (Diaries 2.684). On a curious biographical note, Ruskin refers to himself as Punch and his cousin Joan as Judy (Winnington Letters 705); one of his real-life Winnington school friends, Lily, who writes him for many years, also refers to Joan as Judy (Winnington Letters 694).

The traditional puppet show’s plot is violent and misogynist: Millett reacts with understandable disgust to the way in Sesame and Lilies Ruskin misrepresents Bill Sykes’s brutal murder of Nancy in Oliver Twist as a mutual battery; Ruskin compares it to Punch and Judy’s beating each other before Punch kills Judy (Millett 100). Though space does not allow analysis of Punch and Judy here, the puppets’ significance for Ruskin deserves further treatment.

2. See David Reide for a discussion of the self in Arnold’s poetry.

3. See Meisel for a fascinating look at stage “realizations” of well-known art works.

4. Throughout his life, Ruskin’s mother objected to the theater, having “the strictest Puritan prejudice against the stage” (35.176). His father, however, liked it (he even performed in amateur theatricals in his youth), and frequently took
Ruskin as a child. As an adult, Ruskin often went despite his mother’s dislike for it, but only if she gave her permission—which she must have given routinely (19.xxxvii note). For a discussion of Ruskin’s memory regarding his mother’s admiration of his father’s remarkable beauty as he performed in “high, black feathers,” including its gender ambivalence, see Birch, “Fathers and Sons” (148–49).

5. Ruskin’s diaries prove his voracious theater attendance, but rarely give much description of the plays, operas, or pantomimes he has seen, usually recording only the name of the entertainment or theater or principal actor, with an occasional brief note, such as “delicious acting” (Diaries 2.707) or “rubbish” (Diaries 3.964) or “saw the vilest thing last night ever put on stage in my hearing or sight” (Diaries 3.990). He mentions actors Charles Macready, the Bancrofts, Madge Kendall, Ellen Terry, Henry Irving, and many others by name. His letters also bring in Rachel: he dislikes her even more than Ellen Terry, whom he compares unfavorably to Mrs. Kendall in a way that suggests that Ellen Terry’s un-ladylike actions compromise her (Diaries 3.693), though he admits Terry is an excellent actress (Diaries 3.1044).

Another clue to Ruskin’s theater-going habits resides in the letters of his many friends. For example, Oscar Wilde reports having gone with Ruskin to a performance of The Merchant of Venice with Henry Irving as Shylock on September 28, 1879. After the play, Wilde went on to a ball given by John and Effie Millais. “How odd it is,” Wilde remarks on the juxtaposition of events: the “Millais ball” celebrated the marriage of the daughter of Effie Gray and John Everett Millais’s obviously consummated marriage. The oddity of going from the play with Ruskin, whose six-year marriage with Effie was never consummated, to a ball given by Ruskin’s former wife and former protegé struck Wilde even 23 years after the Ruskins’ annulment (The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde, 84–85).

6. There has been very little published criticism on Ruskin and the theater other than my own previous essays; no article like Gatens’s or Correa’s on music, for example. There is one essay by Tally on Ruskin’s impact on scenic design. Because Kate Newey and Jeffrey Richards are working on a major multi-year project at Lancaster University’s Ruskin Program called “Ruskinian Theatre: the Aesthetics of the Late Nineteenth-Century Popular Stage,” we should expect more publications soon on Ruskin’s influence on Victorian theater and beyond. In his paper “Ruskin and the Theater,” Richards points out the extent of Ruskin’s interaction with Henry Irving. He extends that research in his paper “John Ruskin, Wilson Barrett, and the Toga Play.” Both should see print before long.

Shakespeare’s influence on Ruskin has merited discussion by numerous critics, such as Auerbach in Woman and the Demon. Most of Ruskin’s sustained analyses of Shakespeare in his published Works center on the literary texts rather than on the performance experience. But in letters and diaries, Ruskin often briefly remarks on a particular actor or actress in a Shakespearean role (37.28, 30.341, 34.545, 37.303) or on an aspect of a production (Diaries 2.760).

7. See also Parker and Sedgwick.

8. For a detailed explanation of how Ruskin simultaneously establishes and subverts gender dichotomy in the 1860s, see Weltman’s Ruskin’s Mythic Queen, which analyzes his three most significant texts on women and myth: “Of Queens’ Gardens,” the Ethics of the Dust, and The Queen of the Air. Especially through his
notion of queenship and his admiration for the goddess Athena, Ruskin blurs the gender boundaries he appears to uphold.

9. See Booth’s *Theatre in the Victorian Age* for a clear, brief account of stock characters and lines of business. I am indebted to Jennifer Jones Cavenaugh for pointing out to me that while Victorian pantomime may blur gender boundaries, Victorian stock characters only strengthen types.

10. This indictment is particularly damning for actresses, since women are already associated traditionally with lying and mutability.

11. For Wilde’s idea of life imitating art, see his essays “The Critic as Artist” and “The Decay of Lying.”

12. See Ruskin’s *The Queen of the Air* (19.358–60) for several examples of the tension between his acknowledgment of the accuracy of Darwin’s work and his disgust with scientific interest in origin at the expense of symbolic meaning.

13. Ruskin often uses theater, which exemplifies what excites popular imagination, to chastise the public for some moral failing. For instance, in *Modern Painters IV*, Ruskin describes his distress over the audience’s pleased reaction to horror, as in the actresses putting on the death mask (6.397), and in *Ariadne Florentina*, Ruskin describes an Italian play about boiling children as an example of people’s love of death and horror (22.410). He also believes that immoral intent invalidates skill, resulting in bad art: in *The Eagle’s Nest* he describes a dance depicting Hell at the Gaiety Theater in this context (22.133), as we shall see in chapter 2. It contrasts to the positive dream of an opera set in hell in his diary (*Diaries* 3.783).


15. Ruskin wants as always to move them to despise the pollution and loss of jobs brought on by an increasingly industrialized culture, and to make changes that improve conditions in the environment and the work place. He hopes that since the audience adores the performance, they can be roused to value the workers and the land. He makes the same point when writing about the picturesque in *Modern Painters* (7.268–69). See Landow for a discussion of Ruskin’s concern about the aesthetics of poverty (235–36).

16. Later in *Fors*, Ruskin makes a related comment, pointing out that the money that two young women whom he sees at the opera spent on tickets to operas so that they could hear good singing might have been better spent teaching the poor to sing (25.269). His choice of young women for this example suggests several things about his attitude toward women: he assumes that their more highly cultivated feelings are more responsive (as he hopes in “Of Queens’ Gardens”); he wants them to act as moral guides to men in their example of charity and self-denial; finally, he implies that the young women attend the opera out of a frivolous attempt to pass unfulfilled time, whereas men attending the opera seek a legitimate mode of relaxation in reward for hard work.

17. He makes the same point in several different places (18.97), most notably decrying the “mimicry compassion” opera arouses in us, “wasting the pity and love” we feel in a pleasurable response to the theater instead of on repairing social ills (29.269).
18. Auerbach goes farther and links theatricality itself with Woman: “this demonic, elusive spirit of performance . . . is female” (1990, 12); “the spirit of play is perceived by patriarchal culture as demonically female” (1990, 118n).

19. Ruskin’s secular parable here reminds us of the irony of appropriating the tragic circumstances of Alpine peasants for our own pleasure. Metropolitan theater-goers still recognize this feeling: for example, those attending a production of Les Misérables when it first opened on Broadway in 1987 (before the current Disneyfication of Times Square) surely picked their way with some discomfort around local homeless people before handing over their then exorbitant $60.00 tickets to watch the simulacra of French homeless people sing beautifully for two and a half hours on a Manhattan stage. Twenty years later, fans paying $100.00 a seat for Rent may feel similar twinges of conscience. Ruskin begins by complimenting the “good and kind people, poetically minded” (6.390) in the audience, careful to include himself in first person plural, inviting his readers to imagine themselves, ourselves, there, before nudging us all toward a guilty recognition of our own hypocrisy.


21. Non-British readers will want to know that British pantomimes are not silent, mimed performances, but rather spectacular song-and-dance, pun-filled entertainments most typically associated with the Christmas season, borrowing from music hall shows, interacting with the audience, drawing on conventional bits, employing innovative stage machinery and lighting effects, and using popular comedians from other stage genres. Pantomime is often affectionately referred to as “panto.”

22. Here Ruskin ignores the material lives of the actors as working men, women, and children. He is not always unaware of their needs. In Praeterita he tells of how when he was a young man, his mother, concerned that he had squandered 100 pounds “on grapes, partridges, and the opera,” gave him five pounds “to make peace with Heaven” in a donation to churches. Instead, he gave it to an “overworked ballerina in Turin” because she “did her work well always; and looked nice,—near the footlights” (35.498). But he seems surprisingly unaware of performers as laborers. Elsewhere in Fors Ruskin advises young women not to become postal workers instead of taking care of children or sewing (27.536), but he never offers a like injunction against acting as one of the five hundred extras in a pantomime. Others did take note of children’s stage labor. For example, in 1867 The Illustrated London News reports that “hundreds of poor families” “yearly depend on this incidental gain . . . of a few shillings” when they “let their children be hired” as imps or fairies in Christmas pantomimes (December 7, 51.608). In contrast, Ruskin accepts amusement from the “Arcadias of Pantomime” (27.256) with surprisingly little thought of how little the huge pantomime casts earn, or how dangerous their working conditions had become with gas flames licking at diaphanous costumes on a crowded stage. Later, in the early 1880s, Ruskin learned more about the lives of performing children through his friendship with the young Webling sisters, whose public poetry recitations he esteemed (34.545–46). He entertained them in his home (Diaries 3.999) and corresponded with them (Hilton 2000, 428). For more
information about this relationship, see Webling. My thanks go to Dinah Birch for making this and many other connections for me.

23. In *London Labour and the London Poor*, Henry Mayhew interviews street performers, including Punch and Judy men. But while Ruskin identifies the performers inside the theater with his notion of a heightened and more beautiful reality, his relationship with Punch and Judy street performance is far more conflicted. He both relished it as entertainment and despised it because of its violence. See note 2 for more about Ruskin’s feelings about Punch and Judy.

24. Dickens’s own fascination with, involvement in, and influence on the theater has been well researched. Among others, see MacKay, Glavin, and Vlock.

25. For another example, see note 13.

26. It also may seem to resemble Aristotle’s notion that mimesis is a distillation of the real, but for Ruskin theatrical truth is not merely imitative (3.103); it is in some sense originary.

27. The fairy-tale ending Ruskin imagines is, predictably, both radical and conservative. He points out that “in all dramatic presentations of Little Red Riding Hood, everybody disapproves the carnivorous propensity of the Wolf. . . . But once outside the theater, they declare the whole human race to be universally carnivorous—and are ready to eat up any quantity of Red Riding Hoods, body and soul, if they can make money by them” (28.53). And yet while he readily points to a solution that would protect the poor from the wolfish hunger of capitalism, he does not do as well in regards to gender politics: he envisions a world in which “nobody advises Cinderella to write novels instead of doing her washing” (28.53). Nevertheless, Rachel Dickinson interprets this passage as empowering women by emphasizing that Cinderella has a choice; what impresses Ruskin is that her choice is usefulness.

28. The *Ethics of the Dust* has 1866 on its title page, but actually came off the press in December of 1865.

29. For information on the popularity of Victorian pantomime across classes, see Booth. Ironically, Ruskin’s love of theater generally and fairy tale pantomime particularly becomes lost in his posthumous status as a dull aesthete. A 1908 reviewer of the pantomime *Pinkie and the Fairies* envies children’s ability to see fairies while grownups are doomed to talk of Turner and quote Ruskin (Davis 2006).

30. The huge numbers here are not exaggerated, although the sense of proliferation is the result of Ruskin’s humor. Booth gives the number of thieves and their followers in the 1886 production of *Ali Baba and The Forty Thieves* at nearly five hundred (35).

31. Cook and Wedderburn point out six separate passages sprinkled throughout the *Works* in which Ruskin denounces tobacco as a curse (17.334n). It would surely horrify Ruskin to know that from the 1890s to the 1950s, popular John Ruskin cigars were manufactured and sold widely in America. The box sported at times a pink-cheeked, genial portrait, at times a gaunter, more Cubist likeness of the cigar’s namesake. The double irony of a cigar named for Ruskin is that not only is it a vile tobacco product, but also it was a very cheap cigar, using inferior tobacco and poor quality paper. See Dearden (128) for additional information.
32. See “Of Queens’ Gardens” (18.109–144) for Ruskin’s fullest explanation of women’s role as moral guide of men.

33. Although several male Victorian critics express anxiety about actresses playing male roles (for example, Archer decried an 1894 all-female production of *As You Like It*), Powell analyzes their discomfort either as over the actresses’ usurpation of the male playwright’s intention or as over the artistic insignificance of the cross-dressing (28).

34. For a psychoanalytic interpretation (and a concise history) of transvestism in Victorian pantomime, see David Meyer. See also Laurence Senelick.

35. Although the spectacle of women performing with cigars provokes Ruskin, women performing jobs more practically associated with men sometimes prompts his admiration. For example, in *Academy Notes* he admitted that Lady Elizabeth Butler’s much sought-after paintings of military scenes completely disproved his earlier mistaken notion that women can’t paint battles (14.308). See Marsh (1994) and Nunn for more information about Ruskin’s recognition and encouragement of women artists. He also admired the skill of female iron workers who succeed precisely where he previously thought women would fail (29.173–75). My thanks to George Landow for bringing this point to my attention.

36. He readily carried himself back, however, indulging in the show at least twice, according to entries in his diary. Tim Hilton speculates that this was only in hopes of catching a glimpse of Rose, who was visiting London at that time (2000, 117).

37. In Letters IX and X, Ruskin includes a brief mention of a performance of the can-can in Paris that evokes his most extreme reaction of all, calling it the “Chain of the devil” and the “Cancan of Hell” (17.359). He describes it as “perfect dancing, as far as finish and accuracy of art and fullness of animal power and fire are concerned,” but he rejects the can-can as unmitigated evil, with “the object of the dance throughout being to express in every gesture the wildest fury of insolence and vicious passions possible to human creatures” (17.358).

38. The serpent metaphor and the images of vibration here prefigure Ruskin’s famous description of the serpent in *The Queen of the Air*, where the snake (along with the bird) symbolizes the goddess Athena. As he gives her more and more power (not only wisdom and war, but also air, metaphor, and finally language), this most masculine of goddesses becomes for Ruskin the ideal woman. See Weltman, *Ruskin’s Mythic Queen* (149–65).

39. For additional discussion of serpent imagery in Victorian culture, see Auerbach’s *Woman and the Demon* and Dijkstra.

40. Ruskin’s concern with taste, audience, and class might well bring up the question of how Ruskin compares and contrasts with Pierre Bourdieu; for consideration of Bourdieu and the Victorians, see Gagnier (1991).

41. That this is a digression is clear: not only do Cook and Wedderburn leave it out of their introductory outline, but also Ruskin himself admits in Letter XI that he has “allowed” himself “to be led into that talk on theaters” (17.368).

42. In addition to the theater dreams discussed in this chapter, such as the Punch and Judy show, the young girl with the Arabian keys, and the opera set in hell, Ruskin records dreaming about the Christy Minstrels, dance, theaters with
dwarves, anxiety about performing his own lectures (Diaries 2.690, 3.867, 3.1075, 2.688), and other moments.

43. For an analysis of the simianization of the Other in Victorian literature, see Elsie Michie.

44. The dreamed keys also mean much more than this, recalling keys mentioned throughout Ruskin’s oeuvre. One example is his well known close reading of “Lycidas” in Sesame and Lilies: there one key unlocks heaven; the other, prison (18.75). This dream may also reveal Ruskin’s anxiety about evolution and declining religious faith. Equally significant here is the key of Fors Clavigera, one meaning of which Ruskin explains as Fortitude with the key to the “gate of Art and Promise” (27.xx). See also Caws for a psychoanalytic, biographical reading of this dream, focusing on Ruskin’s relationship with his father.


46. For a study of the relationship between aesthetics, ethics, and economics in Wilde as well as Mill and Ruskin that deals precisely with the categories of the good, the true, and the beautiful, see Gagnier’s The Insatiability of Human Wants. Nunokawa also mentions Wilde’s reconciliation of ethics and aesthetics (3).

Chapter Two


2. He urges readers to take the same humble approach to books in Sesame and Lilies (18.63–64).

3. Spear characterizes Ruskin’s late science as “deliberately archaic and Linnaean in conscious opposition to Darwinism” (51). Rosenberg goes further and calls these late works of natural history “deliberately unscientific” “pseudoscience” (181). Ruskin provides plenty of support for this position, especially in the bitterness of his attacks on the ideas of Darwin and Tyndall, but Ruskin’s attitude toward science is more complex than these comments suggest. Robert Hewison explains Ruskin’s science as contemplative (177). Fitch explores Ruskin’s science as expressions of his mythology. Fitch details Ruskin’s increasing rage against the “scientific mob” (28.532) as he seeks through his works on Natural History a “general system for the interpretation of the sacred everywhere” (599) and makes a “deliberately anti-scientific effort to read and reclassify natural forms as living myths” (601). Birch also sees Ruskin’s science as a mythic alternative to materialism (1981, 173–94). Likewise emphasizing the mythic elements of Ruskin’s science, Sawyer claims that Ruskin is not so much anti-science as he is distinguishing “between good science and bad science, that is, between two competing myths”: these are, in Ruskin’s terms, “savoir vivre” and “savior mourir” (1985, 270). Sawyer points out that Ruskin’s science is a precursor of the ecology movement (1985, 272). Likewise, Kirchhoff analyzes Ruskin’s ambivalence
toward science and the radicalism of his effort to create a system that allows the student to know nature without dominating it (1977). See also O’Gorman (1999). All these positions have influenced my own, but none explores the constitutive role gender plays in Ruskin’s science.


5. In *The Queen of the Air*, Ruskin puts the natural hieroglyphic code “wholly under the rule of Athena” (19.345), his ideal of womanhood and the most masculine Greek goddess whose incorporation of phallic symbols in her Medusan shield blurs the gender dichotomy Ruskin elsewhere upholds. Ruskin makes signification itself feminine by identifying what he calls Athena’s formative power as that which weaves the linguistic connection between every hieroglyphic signifier and its signified. Ruskin identifies Athena’s formative power as the Holy Spirit. In “Ruskin and the Matriarchal Logos,” Sawyer points out that Athena becomes the Law, “Logos as present, full, and female” (140). I argue that as Logos, Athena does not simply reign over the “‘Words’ of God,” she is actually the Word itself (*Ruskin’s Mythic Queen* 161–62). Furthermore, Ruskin argues that for the Greeks, Athena literally is the air, including “the air carrying vibration of sound” (19.328). He figures sound as the serpentine sine (or sign) wave, carrying speech (*Ruskin’s Mythic Queen* 163). Please see chapters 6 and 7 of *Ruskin’s Mythic Queen* for the complete argument.

6. Anne Mellor offers quotations with comparable imagery from Isaac Barrow, Robert Boyle, and Henry Oldenberg. For nineteenth-century examples, see Keller (56–72) and Easlea.

7. For readers unable to visit the museum, an excellent virtual tour is available at their website: http://www.thegarret.org.uk/

8. See Kirkup and Keller (73); Haraway (292); Paxton (171–73); Fausto-Sterling (179–87); Russett *passim*; Tuana *passim*.

9. See Tuana (35–50) for a clear overview of this issue.

10. Indeed that notion goes back at least as far as Aristotle (Schiebinger 55).

11. See Jed Mayer for more on Ruskin’s response to vivisection.

12. Ruskin records in his diary: “the dreadful Frou-Frou. (The best view of Venice I ever saw on stage.) Gives me much to think of.” He complains the next day that he is still ill from it (*Diaries* 2.719). In a celebrated 1880 production also at the Gaiety Theatre, Sarah Bernhardt portrayed the unfortunate Gilberte.

13. The word comes down to us through later use of the name Frou-Frou in the operetta *The Merry Widow* and the musical comedy *The Gay Parisienne*, etc., and pictorial representations of a frou-frou skirt in theatrical posters.

14. Ruskin does not so far feminize science as to imagine its giving life: the nineteenth century construes that as monstrous usurpation, as in *Frankenstein*. For two salient readings of *Frankenstein* as feminist critique of nineteenth-century science, see Robin Roberts (1–40) and Mellor.

15. See Birch’s “Ruskin’s Authorities.”

16. Schiebinger points out that botany was considered the most appropriate science for ladies in the nineteenth century, citing several prominent examples of women botanists (36).

gender analyses, see Sawyer’s “Ruskin and the Matriarchal Logos,” Dellamora (116–29), and Emerson (207–28).

18. For McClintock, “The ultimate descriptive task, for both artists and scientists, is to ‘ensoul’ what one sees, to attribute to it the life one shares with it; one learns by identification” (Keller 1983, 204).

19. See Shuman for a powerful analysis not only of Ruskin’s but also of several other important Victorians’ attitudes toward competitive examination.

20. The two men enjoyed cordial personal relations, both loving the beauty of the Lake District (25.xlvi). For important analyses of the relationship between Ruskin’s science and aesthetics as they relate to Darwin, see Jonathan Smith (20–33) and George Levine (forthcoming 2008).

21. That the sexual aspects of both these arguments should be the very one that Ruskin dislikes should not surprise us. Yet Ruskin couches his rejection of sexuality in birds and plants as an aesthetic rather than prudish repugnance.

22. Although the trout may not seem a likely image to link with domesticity, in the recent opera Modern Painters, which is based on Ruskin’s life, an ensemble piece about stewed trout foreshadows the failure of John and Effie’s marriage. See chapter 4 for more on this opera.

23. See Kristeva’s “Woman’s Time” for the classic exploration of this issue.

24. Ruskin specifically identifies the capacity for change as feminine, labeling it unflatteringly “caprice” later in Proserpina (25.485). “Caprice” becomes sinister as a characteristic of serpentine vines, which snake their way up poles and wind around tree trunks, choking them. Ruskin identifies the honeysuckle (despite its pretty flowers and rich scent) strictly as a parasite (25.527), declaring that “a serpent is a honeysuckle, with a head put on” (26.306). Ruskin stresses the capricious femininity of these plants: “The reason for twining is a very feminine one—that it likes to twine” (25.485). He had more gallantly turned caprice into a feminine virtue in “Of Queens’ Gardens,” where he explains his quoting Verdi’s La donna è mobile to be a compliment to women’s adaptability in helping others: women “must be wise . . . with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service—the true changefullness of women” (18.123).

25. Darwin also personifies nature as feminine; however, his quite effective but conventional rhetorical device is an analogy that allows him to explain natural selection in familiar terms of breeders’ artificial selection of traits. He does not mean that nature selects as an intelligent agent. In fact, he dismisses the notion of agency implied in his personifying nature, explaining that he only uses such metaphors for brevity and convenience (Beer 69).

26. Ruskin uses Shakespeare to discuss the relationship of art to science before Proserpina. In The Eagle’s Nest, Ruskin invokes the Bard not for his heroines’ names but for the man himself. After briefly quoting A Midsummer Night’s Dream for “a faultless and complete epitome of the laws of mimetic art” (22.152) to express the idea that the best art is but a shadow, he turns the tables on his favorite dramatist. Having examined what Shakespeare would say “as a teacher of science and art,” he asks what we can learn from Shakespeare “as a subject of science and art” (22.154). This is meant to be fun for his students: first he enumerates the chemical compounds that would constitute the poet, then how many...
vertebrae, then considers “that he differs from the other animals of the ape species by being more delicately prehensile in the fingers, and less perfectly prehensile in the toes.” Moving from chemistry and anatomy to natural history, Ruskin discusses more individual aspects of England’s greatest writer: “the color of his eyes and hair, his habits of life, his temper, and his predilection for poaching” (22.154). Of course his point is that such a reductive approach to the study of Shakespeare is hardly satisfying. Finally he arrives at his conclusion that the more art involved in a particular branch of science, the more valuable that science is.

27. So in addition to Ruskin’s having conceived of an Ethics of the Dust (or of the Mineral), here we have an Ethics of the Vegetable.

28. Ruskin abhors a botanical science that privileges the arrangement of the flowers’ least significant parts from an aesthetic perspective, their pistils and stamens, and relegates to less significance what to Ruskin are obviously more important features, their beautiful petals or heady fragrance.

29. Especially in the second volume of Proserpina, Ruskin increasingly drifts into autobiography. Apropos of the self-revelatory document he produces, Ruskin asserts that real botany is biography (25.253). He means by this that flowers should be studied like people, “where and how they live and die, their tempers, benevolences, malignities, distresses, and virtues” (20.101). Such personification is at one with Ruskin’s approach to all science and myth-making, but the implication remains that through his botany, we can read Ruskin’s life. This also implies that just as science is ontological for women, so it is for Ruskin himself. This is not the first time he assigns himself a feminine role; see Birch’s essay, “Ruskin’s Womanly Nature” as well as my own Ruskin’s Mythic Queen.

30. For example, Ruskin first describes 12 Orders based on Greek mythological names, then supplements them with 16 more, arriving at 28 orders (25.348–58). In Hortus Inclusus, the number is 25 (37.288). Ruskin’s inconsistency parodies the inconsistency he objects to humorously in the scientific authorities whose work he revises.

31. In French feminist terms, Ruskin reveals the inadequacy of Lacan’s Symbolic order, represented by the language Ruskin inherits from Linnaeus.

32. Another way of seeing “systematic desystemitization” is as an example of “l’écriture feminine.” Proserpina demonstrates several defining characteristics: fragmentation, instability, irrationality, multiplicity, myth, humor, shifting prose styles, and emphasis on process, flux, and circularity. See both Kristeva, “Woman’s Time” and Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa.”

33. For a fuller explanation of the ways in which Ruskin feminizes language in The Queen of the Air, see Weltman (Ruskin’s Mythic Queen 149–65).

34. For example, each plant has two parts, one above and one below ground: “one part seeks the light; the other hates it. One part feeds on the air, the other in the dust” (25.218). Just as bird and snake represent the eternally opposed elements of air and earth, in plants these elements also coexist without coalescing. Ruskin carries the comparison further, and makes the root into a serpent: “a root contorts itself into more serpent-like writhing than branches can; and when it has once coiled partly around a rock, or stone, it grasps it tight, necessarily, merely by swelling” (25.221). Ruskin’s insistence on the double nature of the plant, divided above and below the dirt line, is itself unstable, as he leaps from the dust to the
air, pointing out the resemblance between the earthly root and the clasp of a bird’s claw (25.219).

35. Ruskin details the serpent as a symbol of degeneration or devolution at length in The Queen of the Air. Evil change manifests itself through the snake, which brings “dissolution in its fangs, and dislocation in its coils” (19.362–63). Athena wields this destructive force as a corollary to her formative power. It is the same power we have already seen in “Of Queens’ Gardens,” where women are praised for the capacity to change. It is the same power we saw in the water leaves whose variability so delights Ruskin. It is the same power that Ruskin recoils from when he calls it “caprice” in women or in strangling vines. “Serpent nature” and “serpent charm” corrupt flowers in the order he calls “Draconidae” (19.372). For example, the foxglove and snapdragon “decorate themselves by spots, and . . . swollen places in their leaves, as if they had been touched by poison. . . . The spirit of the Draconidae . . . enters like an evil spirit into the buttercup, and turns it into a larkspur” (19.376–77). The serpent quality metamorphizes one originally good species into an evil one, so that in Ruskin’s botany snapdragons and gladioli are subverted irises.

36. In Deucalion’s “The Iris in the Earth,” Ruskin matches the colors of real gems to the colors in heraldry, which traditionally carry moral significance.

37. Similar poor sisters are incarnated as feeble florets in “Of Queens’ Gardens” (18.142).

38. For further discussion of metaphor and signification in Ethics, see Weltman (Ruskin’s Mythic Queen 124–27).

39. Another way that Ruskin both feminizes flowers (which previous botanists had already proven to be male, female, and hermaphrodite) and demonstrates their startling kinship across all rational lines of demarcation is his assertion that they are crystals (25.250). He describes the young violet that “glows like painted glass” (25.393), an image he uses earlier with even more striking effect about the poppy—the flower he associated most tightly with Persephone—as painted glass: “it is a flame, and warms the wind like a blown ruby” (25.258). Likewise Athena’s bird “glows with air in its flying, like a blown flame: it rests upon the air, subdues it, surpasses it, outraces it;—is the air” (19.360), “the rubies of the cloud, that are not the price of Athena, but are Athena” (19.361). He has already feminized crystals in The Ethics of the Dust. In this set of images, birds, poppies, crystals, and the goddess all come together. Disciplinary categories dissolve—ornithology, mineralogy, and botany are one.

40. Although Ruskin claims in Deucalion to ground his science in old-fashioned Natural Theology, the religion he describes is belief in a vague, unnamed “Spiritual Power” (26.334). While the method of Natural Theology depends on revealing resemblances throughout creation to demonstrate the existence of a single creator, Ruskin’s mode of noticing similarities among virtually all things tends to be not so much morphological as mythological: such similitude is useless for the argument from design. As Sawyer has suggested, Ruskin’s Ruling and Judging Spiritual Power is more Athena’s “Matriarchal Logos” than the God of Ruskin’s evangelical youth (Sawyer 1990).
Chapter Three

1. It is the second of the three essays in those editions that include “The Mystery of Life and Its Arts” as the third essay in *Sesame and Lilies*. Earlier editions included only paired essays: “Of Kings’ Treasuries,” which presents the need for men with financial means to establish and endow public libraries, and “Of Queens’ Gardens,” which argues for an expanded role for women by redefining the domestic sphere to include substantial duties outside the home and for a rigorous girls’ education to prepare them for this task. The book was Ruskin’s best seller in his own life; Cook and Wedderburn record that it sold over 160,000 copies by 1905 (18.5). Ruskin’s most popular work in America, it was often taught in high school well into the first third of the twentieth century (Helsinger et al. 96).

2. In two of the lectures he identifies himself as the author of *Modern Painters*.


4. “Of Kings’ Treasuries” is full of interesting instances of identity performance. It encodes interactive moments of audience reaction, focusing the reader’s attention on the essay as a performed lecture. Ruskin furthermore castigates his audience for wanting particular careers because of the identity labels (“my Lord” or “Captain”) that go along with them rather than the chance to make a contribution. He also denigrates the theatricality of religion and bemoans that “[t]he justice we do not execute, we mimic in the novel and on the stage; for the beauty we destroy in nature, we substitute the metamorphosis of the pantomime,” yet another example for our discussion in chapter 1. Helsinger describes Ruskin’s position regarding the submissiveness of the permeable self in terms that resemble Keats’s notion of “negative capability,” in which an author such as Shakespeare is able to empty himself of identity and live in the characters that are created (2002, 116).

5. Other nineteenth-century authors use the word *subjectivity* in this sense, as did Coleridge and Martineau (*Oxford English Dictionary*); Ruskin uses the word *subjectivity* only once in the complete *Works* (5.204), meaning the opposite of objectivity rather than “identity.” He does use “identity” as “self” once in the *Works*, in a letter to the poet W. C. Bennett, thanking him for a book of his poems. In reference to having just read Bennett’s poem “Toddl ing May,” Ruskin says, “I am terribly afraid of being quite turned upside down so as to lose my own identity, for you have nearly made me like babies” (36.144). Every other use of the word “identity” is in regards to identifying properly a flower, artist, chemical, etc.

6. Examples span the centuries, from the amused response of the *Victoria* reviewers in 1865 to Jan Marsh’s astute analysis in 2002 (153).

7. See Bauer on Ruskin’s egalitarian plans for boys and girls in the Utopian St. George’s guild schools (85). Peterson argues for Ruskin as “champion of women’s . . . educational reform” (102). Nord likewise points out that Ruskin allies himself with “those who wanted to reform women’s education” (2002, xxi). She also complicates Ruskin’s position by pointing out that “the graceful, educated cultivated woman is also a ‘production’ of culture, likened to a monument or work of art” (2002, xxii). But, most importantly, she points out that *Sesame and Lilies* proves that for Ruskin “the question of gender—of the natures of femininity and
masculinity—lay at the heart of social reform” (2002, xxiii). See also Birch (2002), Koven, Lloyd, Marsh, Pierce, Shuman, and Weltman (1992) for various analyses of Ruskin’s ideas about women’s education.

8. Burd makes this point: “Like Plato, he gives first place to physical exercise and second place to intellectual experiences that will develop a woman’s natural instincts for justice and love” (1969, 479).

9. Georgiana Burne-Jones believed the Winnington School to be “one of the first in which the girls were taught to play cricket” (Burd 1969, 37). They also bowled hoops, played croquet, blind man’s bluff, prisoner’s base, and swung on a rope “fifteen feet from a high bank” (Burd 1969, 37); Ruskin (and Ned Burne-Jones) approved and joined in many of these games.

10. Using the same rhetorical strategy as with physical education, Ruskin urges happiness as the path to loveliness. He assumes his auditors already recognize their daughters’ virtue, innocence, and charm; his advice will help them preserve those qualities.

11. See Yeates for an alternative and intriguing analysis of how Ruskin views censorship for girls.

12. “Neither Bowdler’s, Chambers’s, Brandram’s, nor Cundell’s ‘Boudoir’ Shakespeare” meets Carroll’s standards for expurgation (497).

13. Hagstotz, Phegley, and Yeates select Ruskin’s banishing the modern magazine and novel as an example of his restriction of girls (“Keep the modern magazines and novel out of your girl’s way,” he says in the same essay (18.130)), but he does exactly the same for boys. In Fiction, Fair and Foul, he objects not to depictions of sexuality but to representations of a diseased society (34.376). For either male or female readers, Thackery is most damaging “among all writers whatever of any people of language” (34.588). The prejudice here is against modern Realism rather than against the mental capacity or moral fiber of women. With the exception of a few favorites, Ruskin characterizes the modern novel as the “gelid putrescence . . . of modern infidel imagination (34.281). Further evidence that this indictment has nothing to do with sexuality or orthodox Christianity is that Byron is high on Ruskin’s list of must-reads for all people.

Hilda Hagstotz’s influential early study on Ruskin’s educational theories, largely sympathetic to Ruskin’s position in other areas, oddly misconstrues his suggestions for a girl’s course of reading. Hagstotz says that for Ruskin, girls’ reading “should be supervised and restricted even more than that of a boy,” with “neither books from circulating libraries nor modern magazines and novels to be permitted’ (262). This simply is not what Ruskin says. He specifically calls for girls to have the run of their families’ libraries, without restriction or censorship. He prefers that girls read intellectually challenging books that may contain things not normally considered fit for young girls by the Victorians:

Without, however, venturing here on any attempt at decision how much novel reading should be allowed, let me at least clearly assert this,—that whether novels, or poetry, or history be read, they should be chosen, not for their freedom from evil, but from what good they possess. (18.130)
That these last two phrases refer to Ruskin’s disdain of censorship or bowdlerization becomes even more apparent when we examine the original wording here: editions one through four read “. . . not for what is out of them, but for what is in them” (18.130).

14. Ruskin likens girls to flowers that need the open air, so parents must not shutter them; to fawns in the field who know the bad weeds from the good better than adults, and whom the occasional nettle will never harm. This is in contrast to boys, who must be chiseled into shape (18.130–31). See Peterson for parallels to Jameson here.

15. This idea provokes Millett to poke fun at Ruskin and accuses him of a misogynist Rousseauian bent. Certainly Rousseau’s ideal education for women is deliberately inferior to his ideal education for men, and Ruskin does speak admiringly of Rousseau in private letters of the period (18.lxii). But his admiration is not aimed at Rousseau’s plan for the education of Sophie.

16. See Margot Louis’s much-needed intervention in the scholarship on nineteenth-century mythography, arguing that “deep religious impulses” toward “greater spiritual diversity” rather than “counter-religious secularization” or an argument that “pagan myth was a distortion of Christianity” animated much of the work” (355). See O’Gorman for Ruskin’s Egyptology (2003).

17. Emily Davies, the Victorian advocate of women’s education, astutely critiques the Victorian concept of complementary spheres in The Higher Education of Women (1866) as an aesthetic theory of human behavior that “gratifies the logical instinct; and many persons, hastily taking for granted that it is the only conception of the relations between men and women which recognises real distinctions, assume it to be the only one which satisfies the craving for harmony and fitness” (13). As Janet Howarth suggests in her introduction, Davies may have been alluding to Sesame and Lilies (published the preceding year) when she made this remark; surely it is fitting that Ruskin’s theory of human behavior be characterized as an aesthetic one. But Davies specifically mentions Coventry Patmore’s ideal, quoting from Victories of Love (sequel to The Angel in the House), rather than from any of Ruskin’s texts on women’s role in society. And although Ruskin founded no women’s colleges, Davies found him an ally when she sought signatures for the “Memorial respecting Need of Place of Higher Education for Girls,” sponsored by Emily Davies and the London Schoolmistresses’ Association and presented to the Schools’ Inquiry Commission in 1867 (187). As mentioned above, he also lectured women college students at Cambridge, the Whitelands, Cheltenham, and of course Oxford; there he readily spoke at the two women’s halls, Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall, and gave additional lectures for “the bonnets.”


19. For a detailed comparison of the two figures, angel and queen, in which I show how much more practically and politically powerful Ruskin’s image is than Patmore’s, see chapter 6 of my Ruskin’s Mythic Queen.

20. See Millet and Sonstroem in particular.

21. Later, Rose would hold Ruskin painfully in limbo regarding his marriage proposal to her when she was 18. She asked him to wait three years for her answer, partly in order to be able to respond without parental control at the age of 21, but also partly to consider the discrepancies in their beliefs. The quasi-engagement
ended when Ruskin’s ex-wife Effie, now married to Ruskin’s protégé, painter John Everett Millais, wrote to Rose’s parents, probably stating not only that her never-consummated marriage to Ruskin had been annulled due to his incurable impotence—a condition he denied—but also that she would publicize that reason for the annulment, should Ruskin and Rose become engaged. See Hilton (2000, 135), Koven (176), and Burd (1979, 112–13) for various explanations of what Effie wrote. I will discuss this further in the next chapters.

22. Ruskin did propose different practical life-skill training for boys and girls in the St. George’s guild schools on top of their gender-neutral academic subjects, notably domestic arts for the girls and sailing for the boys (22.143).

23. Shuman rightly notes that girls also often read Sesame and Lilies. Nevertheless, the audience constructed within the text itself is made of parents.

24. Shuman also points out this statement (176).

25. See Peterson for Ruskin’s debt to Anna Jameson regarding this pedagogical view of Shakespeare’s heroines (88–94).

26. Some critics discuss Plato’s dialogues as plays (see Blondell). Jonas Barish’s The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice is the seminal study on the history of anti-theatricality and its manifestations in Victorian culture. Ruskin writes approvingly when he finds out that the girls have been studying Plato by listening to a performance of the dialogues “dramatically and feelingly & amusingly read” (Winnington Letters 383).

27. See Reinelt.

28. Shuman analyzes this passage as an example of an anti-examination (172).

29. See Weltman (Ruskin’s Mythic Queen 139–44).

30. Ibid., 170–212.

Chapter Four

1. Michael Schiavi identifies several critics for whom Wilde is a gay martyr (401).

2. An award-winning off-Broadway musical concerning Wilde was also mounted during the period covered by this article: A Man of No Importance (2002), based on the 1995 film of the same title, premiered at Lincoln Center Theatre, with music by Stephen Flaherty, lyrics by Lynn Ahrens, and book by Terrence McNally. It ran for three months.

3. See James Dearden, Facets of Ruskin (128) for this and many other surprising details of Ruskiniana.

4. Foucault describes the broader cultural phenomenon of which this is a part in “We ‘Other Victorians,’” The History of Sexuality (6–7).

5. There have been many plays and movies about Wilde. Robert Tanitch lists sixty-one twentieth-century productions depicting Wilde’s biography, including within the last ten years the major film Wilde (1997) starring Stephen Fry and the quite interesting The Secret Fall of Constance Wilde (1997), which precisely coincides with three plays about Wilde that I discuss in this chapter. Michael Schiavi points not only to some of the most famous in the past thirty years: Feasting with

6. Wilde’s plays are virtually always in production somewhere. Also, several new plays that draw heavily on Wilde’s work have come out in the last few years, including Ravenhill’s Handbag (1998), which rewrites The Importance of Being Earnest, and the dreadful film A League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (2003), in which Dorian Gray appears.

7. See Bristow’s “A Complex Multiform Creature”: Wilde’s Sexual Identities” for a succinct overview of scholarship on the complexity of labeling Wilde’s sexuality (195–204). In De Profundis, Wilde analyzes how first Bosie’s imposition and then his own imprisonment robbed him of the conditions for creating art, the ultimate agony for an artist (especially Wilde 876–79); there also he mourns the greatest loss of his children (900).


9. Although Gregory Murphy cites first the popular semi-academic book Parallel Lives by Phyllis Rose and then Pre-Raphaelites in Love by Gay Daly as his original inspiration, the bulk of relevant documents are published in Lutyens’s Millais and the Ruskins. The most notorious and highly improbable episode in Parallel Lives happily does not appear in Murphy’s account: Parallel Lives contends that the sight of Effie’s naked pubis horrified her sheltered bridegroom, whose image of the naked female form supposedly derived from the hairless or at least adroitly covered private parts shown in Renaissance paintings and classical sculpture. In the play, the question of just what Ruskin found repellent about Effie on their wedding night remains a mystery, a solution which succeeds dramatically and holds true historically. Nevertheless, the tale continues to dog Ruskin’s reputation. For example, an Arts and Entertainment special on the History of Sex (August 1999) repeats the Freudian “Medusa’s Head” explanation, and a lively VICTORIA
listserv debate on the question lasted for weeks in the spring of 2006. However, no evidence supports the story; some refutes it. See Hilton 1985, 114–19; 2000, 135.

10. This mimics nineteenth-century melodrama, in which hissing the villain was part of the entertainment. However, at The Countess, the gasps were spontaneous, not relying on a tradition of audience participation. The dialogue and circumstances in this play rely on realistic conventions rather than melodramatic.


12. See both Olney and Mandel.


14. For the legal status of Victorian women, see Vicinus, Helsinger et al., and Shanley.

15. For example, Elin Diamond discusses the limits of dramatic realism and mimesis, ultimately indicting them because they reinscribe the dominant culture they depict: “Naturalizing the relation between character and actor, setting and world, realism’s project is always ideological, drawing spectators into identifications with its coherent fictions. . . . [R]ealism surreptitiously reinforces (even where it argues with) the social arrangements of the society it claims to mirror” (393). Other feminist theater critics who denounce realism as a genre include Jeanie Forte, Sue-Ellen Case, and Jill Dolan. Many debate this anti-realist position, including Helene Keyssar, J. Ellen Gainor, and Judith Barlow. While I disagree that realist theater inevitably inscribes the ideology it portrays, *The Countess* creates a heroine bound within a patriarchal vision of womanhood.

16. *The Countess* relies on twentieth-century Americans’ sense of British Victorians as so proper that spoken dialogue pulled from written forms does not seem stilted—at least, not to a New York audience. London critics of the West End production complain precisely of this, however (Marlowe).

17. Murphy, Interview, February 28, 2000. Murphy is not the only author whose goal is to vindicate Effie. See Lloyd, whose object is “to rescue” Effie from her husband’s shadow (1999, 86).

18. The creators made her younger, no doubt, to emphasize overtones of pedophilia that surround discussion of Ruskin’s relationship with Rose.


20. See Demastes’s Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition.

21. For example, the opera sets the child Rose’s first appearance in 1878, in the midst of artist James Whistler’s libel suit against Ruskin, when the critic’s men-
tal health was already crumbling; not only is 1878 twenty years after Ruskin and Rose actually met, but also it is three years after the quite grown up Rose had in fact already died.

22. See Levine’s *Boundaries of Fiction.*

23. I am indebted to Jennifer Jones Cavenaugh for this point.

24. The cacophony is created by a brilliant scene in which Ruskin’s parents, John James Ruskin and Margaret Ruskin, sing a quartet with the young couple Effie and Ruskin about stewed trout, a favorite dish of young John’s that his mother serves and wants Effie—who is utterly disgusted—to learn to cook.

25. By having the groom call his womanly ideal an “angel,” the libretto confuses Ruskin’s idealization of women with Patmore’s, which was in fact much more conservative than Ruskin’s. For a full explanation of this distinction, see Weltman’s *Ruskin’s Mythic Queen*, 103–23.

26. The tomb of Ilaria di Caretto, by Jacapo della Quercia, at Lucca. This quotation actually comes from Ruskin’s letter to his father on May 6, 1845, reprinted by Cook and Wedderburn as a note to Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* (4.122n).


28. For sources on how Ruskin contributed to women’s advancement, see chapter 3.

29. Besides the testimony of the freshman Labour MPs mentioned in the Introduction, another example of Labour’s admiration for Ruskin is that the Trade Unions founded Ruskin College at Oxford in his memory.

30. At times the opera seems a medley of Ruskin’s greatest hits (17.105, 34.40).

31. David Lang related this incident to the “Giving Voice to *Modern Painters:* John Ruskin—His Life and Times” Symposium directed by Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, Santa Fe Opera, July 29, 1995. Although the annulment was granted on grounds of incurable impotence, Ruskin denied that he was impotent and claimed that he could prove it (Lutyens 1967, 192).

32. The director of the 1997 world premiere in London in at the National Theatre was Richard Eyre; director of the 2000 American premier at San Francisco’s American Conservatory Theater was Carey Perloff; director of New York’s 2001 Lincoln Center Theater’s Broadway premiere at the Lyceum Theater was Jack O’Brien. Other performances include the Guthrie Theater in Minnesota (2000), Wilma Theater Philadelphia (2000), Court Theatre in Chicago (2000), La Jolla Playhouse (2001), Alley Theatre in Houston (2002), and university performances.

33. A body of scholarly criticism has already appeared on Stoppard’s latest play, including Bormeier, Brater, Bull, Hesse, Muller-Muth, Sammells, Schiavi, and Zeifman.

34. In a speech that closely follows Ruskin’s text, the subsequent witty dialogue undercuts its rhetorical effect:

Ruskin: There is a rocky valley between Buxton and Bakewell where once you may have seen at first and last light the Muses dance for Apollo and heard the pan-pipes play. But its rocks were blasted away for the railway, and now every fool in Buxton can be at Bakewell in
half an hour, and every fool in Bakewell at Buxton.
Pater (at croquet): First class return.
Jowett: Mind the gap. (14–15)

Just in case anyone chances to feel moved by Ruskin’s aesthetic or ecological concern, Stoppard deflates the moment with funny double-entendres regarding the game of croquet and British railroad journeys. Ruskin’s environmentally conscious aesthetics degrade into querulous irascibility.

35. When Stoppard’s Ruskin expresses concern about morality, it is not regarding ethical treatment of labor but a diatribe against the “moral degeneracy” and “unnatural behavior . . . under the baleful protection of artistic licence” known as aestheticism (Stoppard 9–10). This is a surprisingly inaccurate interpretation of Ruskin’s position as the champion of aestheticism and the Pre-Raphaelites, although it does echo Ruskin’s complaint about Whistler.

36. This vision of Wilde’s notion of the contrast between Pater and Ruskin echoes Ellmann’s (47–52). Yet Wilde always attributed to Ruskin great sympathy rather than severity, and his admiration of Ruskin is aesthetic rather than moral. See, for example, this passage from “The Critic as Artist”:

Who cares whether Mr. Ruskin’s views on Turner are sound or not? What does it matter? That mighty and majestic prose of his, so fervid and so fiery-coloured in its noble eloquence, so rich in its elaborate symphonic music, so sure and certain, at its best, in subtle choice of word and epithet, is at least as great a work of art as any of those wonderful sunsets that bleach or rot on their corrupted canvases in England’s Gallery; greater indeed, one is apt to think at times, not merely because its equal beauty is more enduring, but on account of the fuller variety of its appeal, soul speaking to soul in those long-cadenced lines, not through form and colour alone, though through these, indeed, completely and without loss, but with intellectual and emotional utterance, with lofty passion and with loftier thought, with imaginative insight, and with poetic aim; greater, I always think, even as Literature is the greater art. (Wilde 1028)

37. See also Sinfeld (5) for a round-up of scholars supporting Wilde’s statement to this effect and the opinion of Bartlett, who disagrees.

38. Again, Sinfeld deals with these points more generally (5).

39. Here Stoppard echoes Wilde’s comment in De Profundis that “I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me” (Wilde 912–13), in which he refers to his own time, not ours.

40. Often examined together, criticism on these plays includes essays by Ertman, Griffin, Salamensky, and Schiavi.

41. As Ed Cohen points out, the documentary evidence Hyde relies on are not trial transcripts but newspaper accounts of the trials so that the level of mediation here is very high as well (4).

42. Schiavi jokes that the “Wildean narrative . . . is necessarily The Worst Coming-Out Story Ever Told” (403).
43. Victorian women often enjoyed a warm appreciation for physical love, even most famously (and to non-Victorianists often most surprisingly), from Queen Victoria herself. See her private writing about Prince Albert in Helsinger et al. See also Mason’s two excellent books on the topic, as well as both Walkowitz and Russett.

44. Tanich’s book collecting other representations of Wilde’s life appears in note 5 above. Other representations of Ruskin’s marriage include the fourteen-minute 1994 film The Passion of John Ruskin, directed by Alex Chapple, with Mark McKinney as Ruskin and Neve Campbell as Effie, focusing primarily on the pubic hair issue. Gregory Murphy has also completed a screenplay and entered negotiations for a movie version of The Countess. Mrs. Ruskin, a play by Kim Morrissey, directed by Jaqui Somerville, premiered September 12, 2003 at the Warehouse Theatre in Croydon, outside London. Noticed by Time Out: London and The Stage, it covers much of the same ground as The Countess, but focuses more on Ruskin’s relationship with his mother; it also dramatizes Tim Hilton’s speculation that perhaps the secret horror of Ruskin and Effie’s marriage involved Ruskin’s masturbating in the marriage bed. Mrs. Ruskin includes Effie’s nine-year-old sister Sophie as a character, allowing for a plot revolving around pedophilia; the historical Sophie did visit the Ruskins, but there is no historical basis for the scenario depicted here. Ruskin’s marital troubles have also appeared in other media: on Sunday, September 8, 1968, BBC’s Radio Four transmitted a radio play called Millais and the Ruskins, based on Lutyens’s book of the same title, written by Thea Holme and covering much the same ground as Murphy’s more fully realized drama. This radio play was the sequel to a previous radio dramatization of Lutyens earlier book, Effie in Venice, similar to Millais and the Ruskins in its use of letters and diary entries to tell her story. In addition, Ruskin’s famous skill as a lecturer has prompted actor Paul O’Keefe to perform recreations of Ruskin’s lectures, including an 1853 Edinburgh lecture, the 1858 Cambridge School of Art Address, and the 1854 Bedford lecture “Traffic” (thanks to Stephen Wildman for confirming this information). Besides all these staged versions of Ruskin, every installation of Ruskin’s art or of the artists whom Ruskin influenced or championed—and there have been dozens of such exhibits in the last fifteen years—is another version of Ruskin consumed by the contemporary public. Just a few of the most important exhibits have been the major Ruskin show at the Tate Gallery in London in spring 2000, commemorating the centenary of Ruskin’s death; likewise the smaller but extremely impressive show at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York; and another at the Yale British Art Center. In 1995, a large exhibit came to Phoenix and Indianapolis, highlighting Ruskin’s championship of women artists. Other major exhibits have appeared in Italy, France, and Japan, with scholarly conferences devoted to Ruskin occurring throughout English-speaking countries, plus Russia, Japan, and Italy. Permanent exhibits and small museums dedicated to displaying Ruskin exist all over the world: each of these presents yet another Ruskin. Finally, every Ruskin scholar, critic, or biographer creates Ruskin anew.

Conclusion

1. See Hall and Pramaggiore, Bisexualities. Despite the potential queering effect of bisexuality on the hetero/homosexual binary, the term itself poses a problem
in registering its potential to open up this discourse “for it inescapably encodes bina-
rism” (11).

2. See Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, and Lesley Hall, and William
Peniston, Pederasts and Others.

3. For discussion of Ruskin’s homosocial desire, see Bristow 2002 and

4. The Oxford English Dictionary shows the first use of pedophile in 1949; its
use in the mid-twentieth century seems as connected to predation as now. This ini-
tial instance cited is “a sadistic pedophile” (11: 58).

5. Other so-called evidence Hilton cites is the textual sensuality Ruskin uses
in his 1865 word-painting from The Cestus of Aglaia describing the half-naked ten-
year-old “sand-girl” of Turin he had seen in 1853 (1985, 253–354), but even
Hilton admits that the passage is “not erotic,” but rather that Ruskin sees the girl
as a sculpture in a “pictorial setting” (2000, 86–87). Indeed Ruskin’s fascination
with the remembered visual image of the girl is in the artistic contrasts she pre-
sents of light and dark, skin and dirt, stillness and motion. Helsinger elaborates on
the serpentine significance of this figure (Helsinger 2002, 134–35).

Unlike Robson, Hilton presents Ruskin’s association with the Winnington girls
as altogether positive, both for Ruskin, whose interactions there helped him “to
define his future role as critic of Victorian society,” and for the inhabitants of the
school, where “many stories attest to his generosity” (2004, 4). He also points out
that half the girls were between sixteen and nineteen years old, many university
aged, complicating the whole question of pedophilia regarding his affection for that
population of students (2000, 6).

6. See Seth Koven (176) and Burd (1979) for an explanation of this
hypothesis. We do not know the exact contents of the letter Effie wrote to Mrs.
La Touche and that she in turn showed to her daughter, but we do know that Rose’s
parents forbade her to write to her quasi-fiancé afterwards, and that Mrs. La
Touche specifically refers to having procured copies of the annulment papers in
her expression of outrage at Ruskin. The couple continued to communicate
through mutual friends, and the obedient Rose circumvented the letter of parental
decree by sending her lover symbolic flowers, books, and rose petals, even while
avoiding written correspondence. See Hilton for speculations about masturbation
rather than impotence as the damaging marital secret that Effie revealed (2000,
135). However, it is of Thomas Carlyle and his wife Jane that Frank Harris tells
precisely the same story (210). I am indebted to George Landow for reminding
me of that connection.

7. The alliterative phrase “pedophile priests” has been cavalierly bandied
about by the press in recent years, particularly in 2002, appearing in papers
around the world (such as New York Times, Washington Post, Pravda, The Times
of London, and the Cincinnati Post). I quote this phrase to emphasize just what
pedophile means in common parlance. I do not mean to suggest in any way that
priests are more likely to be pedophiles than any other group, nor do I mean to
emphasize the abuses of a few over the excellent pastoral qualities of the many.

Culture for discussion of J. M. Barrie and Lewis Carroll. Kincaid does not include
John Ruskin in this study on pedophilia in the Victorian imagination.
9. Hilton quotes suggestive letters written when Rosie was fifteen and just before in which Ruskin describes how he feels that he “can no longer make a pet of her” (2000, 50, 53). From context he seems to mean that he can no longer ask her to play childish games, including teasing for (chaste) kisses to cure a headache, as had been their custom. That he loved her devotedly when she was fourteen is without question. What is up in the air is the kind of love he felt and what we can make of his grief and/or confusion over the loss of the child friend as she becomes a woman. But no longer being able to make a pet of her could also mean that this is when Ruskin begins to have particular feelings for Rose that go beyond the friendship described famously in *Praeterita* with the little girl who wrote charming, intellectually precocious letters to her “St. Crumpet”; his own developing desire as well as increasing impropriety would make such play impossible. Again, while a teenager of fifteen or even perhaps fourteen is awfully young, these letters date his attraction (if that’s what it was) to a period beyond what Robson implies and even what Hilton indicates. If mere attraction to a teenager were enough to label middle-aged men pedophiles, then a lot of men would be in trouble.

10. The discussion of sexuality and performance (or lack of it) inevitably raises the question of Ruskin’s ability to perform sexually. If he were indeed impotent, as Effie claimed in the annulment proceedings and which Ruskin vehemently denied in a letter never presented in court, that surely would have had some impact on his sense of himself as a man; either way, thinking in terms of sexual performance complicates what it means to perform one’s identity.

11. In addition to those already mentioned, see James Eli Adams, John Maynard, and Andrew Miller.

12. These should be among the “the big questions” that “have dropped out of Anglo-American philosophy,” that interest Elaine Marks, as well as Joe Moran and Donald Hall (qtd Hall 2004, 4).


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