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# Proust's Ruskin: From Illustration to Illumination

*Le Ruskin de Proust : de l'illustration à l'illumination*

Emily Eells

The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion,—all in one.  
(Ruskin V, 333)

- <sup>1</sup> In France, Ruskin is read and appreciated through the prism of his eminent translator and exegete, Marcel Proust. For Proust, Ruskin's texts were an optical instrument offering an informed, illuminating view of the world. The first trace of Proust's interest in Ruskin makes that point explicitly: he wrote to his mother from Évian-les-Bains in the autumn of 1899, asking her to send him La Sizeranne's *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté*,<sup>1</sup> so that he could then see the Alps through the eyes of the master (Proust 1976, 357).
- <sup>2</sup> In an article published in the wake of Ruskin's death, Proust extolled Ruskin's power to enlighten both senses of 'to instruct' and 'to shed light on'. He echoes Ruskin's elegy of Turner—'every day that he lies in his grave will bring some new acknowledgment of his power; and through those eyes, now filled with dust, generations yet unborn will learn to behold the light of nature' (Ruskin XII, 128)—when he writes of Ruskin: 'Mort, il continue à nous éclairer, comme ces étoiles éteintes dont la lumière nous arrive encore, et on peut dire de lui ce qu'il disait à la mort de Turner : "C'est par ces yeux, fermés à jamais au fond du tombeau, que des générations qui ne sont pas encore nées verront la nature"' (Ruskin-Proust 77). Proust's appreciation of Ruskin marks a turning point in his career. On the eve of the millennium, he abandoned the draft of his novel *Jean Santeuil* (which was not published until over thirty years after his death) in favour of a project on Ruskin and cathedrals. The decisive impact reading Ruskin had on him is evident in a letter he

wrote to Marie Nordlinger, the English-speaking friend who would later help him with his translations:

*Je travaille depuis très longtemps à un ouvrage de très longue haleine mais sans rien achever. Et il y a des moments où je me demande si je ne ressemble pas au mari de Dorothee Brook [sic] dans Middlemarch et si je n'amasse pas des ruines. Depuis une quinzaine de jours je m'occupe à un petit travail absolument différent de ce que je fais généralement, à propos de Ruskin et de certaines cathédrales. (Proust 1976, 377).*

- 3 Proust draws a parallel here between his own work and Edward Casaubon's painstaking, sterile attempts to compile a 'Key to All Mythologies' in George Eliot's novel. He pinpoints the moment in the narrative when Casaubon's wife, Dorothea, fears she will have to devote her widowhood to 'sorting what might be called shattered mummies, and fragments of a tradition which was itself a mosaic wrought from crushed ruins (Eliot 469). Reading Ruskin rescued Proust from pursuing work that was 'already withered in the birth like an elfin child' (Eliot 469). More importantly, it inspired him to envision a vast, new, dynamic literary project 'in search of lost time'. The first stage was the '*petit projet*' referred to in his letter to Marie Nordlinger, which took the form of a two-part article on Ruskin published in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* on 1 April and 1 August 1900. That, in turn, laid the foundations of his multivolume novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*. 'Foundations' has to be the right word since he explicitly compared its construction to that of a cathedral. Ruskin's text furnished Proust with building blocks for his own work, creating an intertextual relationship comparable to the compounding of different elements he commended in Lombardic architecture:

[T]here is something to my mind more majestic yet in the life of an architecture like that of the Lombards, rude and infantine in itself, and surrounded by fragments of a nobler art of which it is quick in admiration and ready in imitation, and yet so strong in its own new instincts that it re-constructs and re-arranges every fragment that it copies or borrows into harmony with its own thoughts . . . (Ruskin VIII, 195).

- 4 Proust's prose resonates with Ruskinian overtones, harmonizing into a 'perfect organization' like 'the stone carved by other hands and in other ages, wrought into new walls' by the Lombardic builders (Ruskin VIII, 195). In the parallel Proust drew between Ruskin and Turner, he spelt out that he was rewriting Ruskin's words, thus producing a kind of literary stratification. He layered his texts with quotations in the same way that Venetian architects built pillars of variegated stones, as Ruskin points out with reference to the Basilica of St Mark's in *The Stones of Venice*:

the first broad characteristic of the building, and the root nearly of every other important peculiarity in it, is its confessed incrustation. It is the purest example in Italy of the great school of architecture in which the ruling principle is the incrustation of brick with more precious materials. . . . (Ruskin X, 93)

- 5 As 'incrustation' is characteristic of the way Proust incorporates Ruskin's text into his own, the term could be used to define their intertextual relationship. In his *Avant-Propos* to his translation of *The Bible of Amiens*, Proust likens Ruskin's integration of Biblical quotations into his text to the Venetian practice of inserting sacred sculptures and precious stones from the Orient into their monuments (see Collier 158–59). He uses the French verb '*intercaler*' to describe the analogous processes: '*Ruskin, par voie de citation mais bien plus souvent d'allusion, fait entrer dans la construction de ses phrases quelque souvenir de la Bible, comme les Vénitiens intercalaient dans leurs monuments les sculptures sacrées et les pierres précieuses qu'il rapportaient d'Orient*' (Ruskin-Proust 12). As in architecture, where marble is used as a coating to conceal the layer of brick beneath it,

textual incrustation is the superimposition of one text over another. The same term is also used to refer to ornamentation on the surface of the wall and is thus applicable to quotations in literature which are signalled by punctuation or highlighted by acknowledgement of the source.

- 6 An eloquent example of Ruskinian incrustation in Proust's narrative occurs during the young narrator's first lesson in aesthetics. We learn that his grandmother gives him reproductions of an artwork depicting particular places rather than simple photographs of them because she wants to add an aesthetic layer to the scenes (Proust I, 40). She presents him with a view of Chartres cathedral painted by Corot and one of Vesuvius painted by Turner. In the case of Vesuvius,<sup>2</sup> there are three and not two layers because Proust knows Turner's view of Vesuvius thanks to Ruskin. Although it is doubtless a coincidence, the picture was also a founding piece in the aesthetic education not only of Proust's young narrator but also of Ruskin since *Vesuvius Angry* was the first Turner he saw, reproduced in *Friendship's Offering*.<sup>3</sup> He later owned it, calling it 'a glorious thing—all sparkle and whizz' (Ruskin I, 445), and used it in his lectures to make the point that the power of landscape art is dependent on human sympathy (Ruskin XXII, 13–15).
- 7 Proust's reference to Turner's view of Vesuvius is one of the numerous examples of how he incrustated his text with decorative gems gleaned from Ruskin, frequently not acknowledging his source. Several substantial, well-informed studies have established 'the influence of Ruskin on the life, ideas and work of Marcel Proust' (Autret 1955). They have uncovered the Ruskinian 'textual reincarnations' in Proust's narrative (Leonard 1993), the pages of which are stamped with 'a Ruskinian watermark' (Bastianelli 2017). My objective here is to concentrate on how Proust responded to the images in Ruskin's works, reworking them in his writing in a process which transformed Ruskin's illustrated texts into his own illuminated books. I will address this question by focusing on two aspects of the question, organized around two notions that Ruskin defined with his signature idiosyncrasy: 'reciprocal interference' and 'the noble grotesque'.<sup>4</sup> I propose to relate Ruskin's definition of those notions in turn to a discussion of his illustrated books and a study of two figures endowed with iconic status both in his work and in Proust's: Giotto's Charity in Padua, and the impish character sculpted on the façade of Rouen cathedral.

## The Illustrated Book: Reciprocal Interference

- 8 Ruskin's term 'reciprocal interference' is used here to point to the reciprocity at work in the Proust-Ruskin intertextual relationship. Ruskin calls it a magnificent principle, 'for it is an eternal and universal one, not in art only, but in human life' (Ruskin XI, 22–23). Ruskin relates reciprocal interference to the way we use colour and considers it to be a general principle. I propose to apply it to the visual dimension of the complex interaction between Ruskin's and Proust's works. If 'incrustation' can be used to refer to intertextuality generally, 'reciprocal interference' can be adopted to designate intermediality, or the interaction of the visual and the verbal.
- 9 Ruskin first engaged in the dynamics of word and image thanks to the gift of the illustrated edition of Rogers's poems on Italy, which he received from his father's friend, Mr Telford. He claimed that the work mapped out the 'entire direction of [his] life's energies' (Ruskin XXXV, 29), an allusion, perhaps, to the magnetic power that

attracted him to Italy but also to his life-long preoccupation with the interplay of word and image. Turner did the majority of the illustrations accompanying Rogers's poems including the one on Florence which opens with these lines [see Figure 1]:<sup>5</sup>

Of all the fairest Cities of the Earth  
None is so fair as Florence. 'Tis a gem  
Of purest ray; and what a light broke forth,  
When it emerged from the darkness! Search within,  
Without; all is enchantment! 'Tis the Past  
Contending with the Present; and in turn  
Each has the mastery.

Figure 1. *Florence*



Drawn by J. M. W. Turner and engraved by Goodall. c. 1830. Steel engraving, 2 1/4 x 3 3/8 inches. From *Italy, a Poem* by Samuel Rogers. Image scan and text by George P. Landow. <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/turner/graphics/1.html>

Figure 2. Gentile Bellini, *Procession of the True Cross*



Gallery of the Academy, Venice.

- 10 The poem points to the traction between the present and the past that Turner's picture seems to put to rest in his peaceful depiction of the city seen from the hills. He maps a place in the present perfect mode where the past fuses harmoniously with the present. Another illustration in the volume which undoubtedly captivated Ruskin's attention is the engraving of Saint Mark's based on Bellini's *Procession of the True Cross* (erroneously attributed to Titian in the first edition of Rogers's *Italy*).<sup>6</sup> The picture is central to Ruskin's preoccupation with church architecture and how the Word with a capital W was translated into image to make it legible to an illiterate public. The Bellini painting [see Figure 2] was valued by Ruskin as documentary evidence of what the façade looked like when it was still 'illumined by the lovely series of mosaics' (Ruskin XXIV, 285). Proust knew the Bellini painting thanks to the reproduction in Ruskin's *Guide to the Academy: Venice* and cited it in the first volume of his novel, *Du côté de chez Swann*, as an illustration of how time had passed. He has the narrator refer to a copy of it given to him by his grandmother, associating it with the recollection of the country town of Combray before it had undergone renovation: its image is etched on his memory just as Bellini's painting records what the portico of St Mark's looked like several centuries earlier:

*[ma rêverie] a d'ailleurs pour ces reconstitutions des données plus précises que n'en ont généralement les restaurateurs : quelques images conservées par ma mémoire, les dernières peut-être qui existent encore actuellement, et destinées à être bientôt anéanties, de ce qu'était le Combray du temps de mon enfance ; et parce que c'est lui-même qui les a tracées en moi avant de disparaître, émouvantes – si on peut comparer un obscur portrait à ces effigies glorieuses dont ma grand'mère aimait à me donner des reproductions – comme ces gravures anciennes de la Cène ou ce tableau de Gentile Bellini, dans lesquels l'on voit en un état qui n'existe plus aujourd'hui le chef-d'œuvre de Vinci et le portail de Saint-Marc.*  
(Proust I, 164)

- 11 If the symbiotic relationship of word and image in Rogers's *Italy* fuelled Ruskin's life energies, the pictures of Florence and Venice also generated tensions between past and present putting into play the dynamics which characterize the works of both Proust and Ruskin.

Figure 3. Ruskin, Traceries from Caen, Bayeux, Rouen, and Beauvais



R. P. Cuff, engraver 1855 Plate III, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* in *Works*, 8.88. Scanned image and text by George P. Landow. <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/ruskin/drawings/7lamps3.html>

- 12 Ruskin was a consummate draughtsman who drew illustrations to make his points visually. Plate III of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*<sup>7</sup> [See Figure 3] shows how he combined architectural precision with an aesthetic design, arranging six examples of tracery to present them as one composition. Ruskin goes beyond a simple taxonomy in his striking use of backlighting which shows how the light is sculpted by the window frames. He presents these examples as superlative, quintessential examples of French Gothic architecture:

the attention is kept fixed on the forms of the penetrations, that is to say, of the lights as seen from the interior, not of the intermediate stone. All the grace of the window is in the outline of its light; and I have drawn all these traceries as seen from within, in order to show the effect of the light thus treated . . . (Ruskin VIII, 88-89)

- 13 This is the kind of illustration which prompted Proust to compare the precision and details of Ruskin's drawings to those of a lepidopterist classifying different species of butterfly: '*Les dessins qui accompagnent les écrits de Ruskin sont à ce point de vue très significatifs. Dans une même planche, vous pourrez voir un même motif d'architecture, tel qu'il est traité à Lisieux, à Bayeux, à Vérone et à Padoue, comme s'il s'agissait des variétés d'une même espèce de papillons sous différents cieus*' (Ruskin-Proust 65). Proust is quick to add that Ruskin is never coldly cerebral in his classification of architectural motives, as he was particularly sensitive to how the light played on them: '*Mais jamais cependant ces pierres qu'il a tant aimées ne deviennent pour lui des exemples abstraits. Sur chaque pierre vous voyez la nuance de l'heure unie à la couleur des siècles.*' (Ruskin-Proust 65)

- 14 The lengthy preface in which Proust makes this point is a prominent example of how the translator's interference enhanced the original. Proust further colours Ruskin's text when he compares the modulation of the sunlight projected onto the façade of the cathedral in Amiens at different times of the day with the series Monet painted of Rouen cathedral:

[...] quand vous voyez pour la première fois la façade occidentale d'Amiens, bleue dans le brouillard, éblouissante au matin, ayant absorbé le soleil et grassement dorée l'après-midi, rose et déjà fraîchement nocturne au couchant, à n'importe laquelle de ces heures que ses cloches sonnent dans le ciel et que Claude Monet a fixées dans des toiles sublimes où se découvre la vie de cette chose que les hommes ont faite, mais que la nature a reprise en l'immergeant en elle, une cathédrale, et dont la vie comme celle de la terre en sa double révolution se déroule dans les siècles, et d'autre part se renouvelle et s'achève chaque jour, - alors, la dégageant des changeantes couleurs dont la nature l'enveloppe, vous ressentez devant cette façade une impression confuse mais forte. (Ruskin-Proust 32)

- 15 Proust's poetic reference to Monet's works illustrates Ruskin's point that a cathedral is situated in a particular moment of both historic time and time of day. Ruskin used his drawing 'Amiens, Jour des trépassés, 1880'<sup>8</sup> as a means of emphasizing how a cathedral is located in a particular place. The drawing evokes the gloomy November day and the scene depicted shows how the cathedral partakes in the beauty of the place where it was built. Proust points out that:

cette gravure de La Bible d'Amiens [...] vous prouvera mieux que tout ce que je pourrais dire, que Ruskin ne séparait pas la beauté des cathédrales du charme de ces pays où elles surgirent, et que chacun de ceux qui les visitent goûte encore dans la poésie particulière du pays et le souvenir brumeux ou doré de l'après-midi qu'il y a passé. (Ruskin-Proust 67-68)

- 16 Proust goes on to question whether truth has been sacrificed for the sake of beauty: 'La gravure Amiens, le jour des Trépassés [sic], semble mentir un peu pour la beauté. Est-ce la perspective seule, qui approche ainsi, des bords d'une Somme élargie, la cathédrale et l'église Saint-Leu ?' (Ruskin-Proust 66) He hints that the artist's imagination is at play here, meaning that the drawing is not just a topographical record of town-planning but an impression of the scene.

- 17 A particular form of reciprocal interference results from editorial constraints giving re- editions and translations a different physical appearance from the original publication. Proust praised Cook and Wedderburn's Library Edition for augmenting the number of illustrations, which he thought were 'magnifiques' (Proust 1979, 42). Ruskin was at pains to illustrate his texts, as evidenced by the various images of the Madonna in *The Bible of Amiens*. In the chapter entitled 'Interpretations' he defines three types of Madonna, the first being 'the Madonna Dolorosa; the Byzantine type, and Cimabue's' (Ruskin XXXIII, 165); the other two are the Queen Madonna and the Nurse Madonna. The Madonna Dolorosa is not represented in Amiens though she figures as the frontispiece of Ruskin's volume.<sup>9</sup> He describes her as 'the noblest of all; and the earliest, in distinct popular influence' (Ruskin XXXIII, 165) and leaves the reader to make the link with his drawing of the Cimabue Madonna in Assisi reprinted at the beginning of the book. This is an example of the kind of inconsistency Proust noted between Ruskin's text and his images. Ruskin, he said, did not always stick to his own agenda as, for instance, when he placed an extraneous image from a medieval psalter in a text on Giotto's works in Padua with no explanation whatsoever. He finds Ruskin's choice 'un peu singulier' as it partakes in the 'disposition originale, on peut presque dire humoristique, de son esprit' (Ruskin-Proust 13). His attention seems to wander, meaning that '[il manque] toujours au programme indiqué' (Ruskin-Proust 13). Ruskin is more coherent in his comparison of



the Queen and Nurse Madonnas, which he makes only in writing in the first edition, while expressing hope that subsequent editions will provide illustrations to prove his point:

An admirable comparison will be found instituted by M. Viollet-le-Duc . . . between this statue of the Queen-Madonna of the southern porch and the Nurse-Madonna of the transept. I may perhaps be able to get a photograph made of his two drawings, side by side: but, if I can, the reader will please observe that he has a little flattered the Queen, and a little vulgarized the Nurse, which is not fair. (Ruskin XXXIII, 165)<sup>10</sup>

- 18 According to his wishes, these images were added to the library edition which also contained numerous photographs of the quatrefoils as well as a close-up of the face of the Nurse Madonna known as the *Vierge Dorée*. Proust seems to lift this photograph straight off the page of Ruskin's volume and then redevelops it in the dark room of his memory when he writes that it was a melancholic reminder of his visit to Amiens where the sun at first regilded her face with its rays but then seemed to plunge it into a bath of silver at twilight: '*Dans ma chambre [...] une photographie de la Vierge Dorée prend la mélancolie d'un souvenir. Mais n'attendons pas que, suivi de son cortège innombrable de rayons et d'ombres qui se reposent à chaque relief de la pierre, le soleil ait cessé d'argenter la grise vieillesse du portail, à la fois étincelante et ternie*' (Ruskin-Proust 28).
- 19 *The Bible of Amiens* was published in the library edition in 1908, in other words four years after Proust's translation. Cook and Wedderburn drew on some of Proust's annotations in their critical apparatus of this volume and acknowledge in particular that they knew Émile Mâle's work on medieval French architecture thanks to him. This volume of the library edition thus offers explicit evidence of reciprocal interference at work, as many of Proust's notes have been translated and appended to Ruskin's text.
- 20 Proust's French translation was published without illustrations but he succeeded in illustrating it figuratively in his numerous footnotes and copious cross-referencing. One example of how Proust completes the picture concerns the statue of King Herod in the Madonna's porch on the Western façade of Amiens cathedral. Ruskin refrains from full disclosure when his eye scans from the full-length statue of Herod standing in the line of kings to the row of quatrefoils below depicting the Biblical stories associated with him, thus passing over the sculpture underneath Herod's feet. Proust fills in the gap by quoting what Émile Mâle had to say about the image Ruskin ignored and knocks Herod off his pedestal in his description of an emaciated, decrepit king taking a bath designed to soothe the pains caused by venereal disease. Proust's footnote cites Mâle who points out how the sculptor has ingeniously managed to depict the passing of time, contrasting the upper image of Herod as a young king in command above with that of a worm-eaten, dependent old man in the frame below: '*L'imagier d'Amiens a donc eu une idée ingénieuse en mettant sous les pieds d'Hérode triomphant le vieil Hérode vaincu; il annonçait l'avenir et la vengeance prochaine de Dieu*' (Ruskin-Proust 328). Proust's footnote to Ruskin's work shows how he projected his own images into the otherwise unillustrated text.
- 21 Although the first volume of Ruskin's work to be translated into French, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, reprints all the original engravings done by Ruskin, editorial restrictions prohibited reproducing the images in most of the following volumes in French. This was the case not only for Proust's *Bible d'Amiens* but also for the French translations of *The Stones of Venice* and *St Mark's Rest*. The other early French editions negotiated the copyright issue by commissioning photographers to illustrate the texts: for example, the photographs taken by the Venetian photographer Alinari were

reproduced in *Les pierres de Venise* in place of the original illustrations.<sup>11</sup> In his review of the translation, Proust regretted the substitution but he commented favourably on the ‘*photographies vivantes et artistiques de M. Alinari*’ (Proust 1971, 522). One can only guess what he thought was ‘dynamic and artistic’ about them, given that the conventional shot of St Mark’s Square has neither of these qualities. However, the photograph of the Rialto captures an atmospheric everyday scene which might have prompted his praise. The perspective embracing the bridge at a slant and stretching back to the church tower in the background is striking, as is the play between light and shade.

- 22 A photograph from the French translation of *St Mark’s Rest* may well be behind an example of how a sensory impression can trigger an experience of Proustian involuntary memory.<sup>12</sup> In one of his notebooks, he jotted down how a photograph of Saint-Mark’s revived memories of the Grand Canal bathed in the noon-time sun. The photograph shows the unevenly paved floor on which Proust’s hero trips, recalling Ruskin’s description of the mosaics in the Basilica of Murano where: ‘we feel giddy at the first step we make on the pavement, for it, also, is of Greek mosaic, waved like the sea’ (Ruskin X, 62). A footnote in the library edition adds that the same sensation is experienced at St Mark’s, the very place where Proust sets the scene. He outlines the mechanics of involuntary memory in his rough note: ‘*c’est telle inégalité des dalles du baptistère de St Marc (photographie du Bap[tistère] de St Marc à laquelle nous n’avions plus pensé, nous rendant le soleil aveugla[nt] sur le canal.*’<sup>13</sup> In the final version, the photograph of the mosaics on the Baptistry floor is replaced by the uneven paving stones in the courtyard of the Guermantes’ mansion in Paris. In this case, the illustration in the French translation of Ruskin’s book is no longer a decorative incrustation, it is an actual, concrete stone which makes the narrator trip, thus provoking a flood of sensory memories.
- 23 The network of inextricably enmeshed text and image characterizes the Proust-Ruskin intertext and exemplifies how reciprocal interference is mutually enriching. That network contains numerous nodal points linking the verbal and the visual whose significance I would like to tease out by considering them as examples of the ‘noble grotesque’.

## Resurrecting Ruskin’s Symbols and Allegories: The Noble Grotesque

- 24 In the section of *Modern Painters* entitled ‘Of the True Ideal: Thirdly, The Grotesque’, Ruskin writes: ‘The third form of the Grotesque is a thoroughly noble one. It is that which arises out of the use or fancy of tangible signs to set forth an otherwise less expressible truth; including nearly the whole range of symbolical and allegorical art and poetry.’ (Ruskin V, 132) This wide-sweeping definition embraces the two figures which have a symbolical function in both Ruskin’s and Proust’s writing, and which Proust knew thanks to the reproductions in Ruskin’s works: Giotto’s Charity in Padua and the little sculpted figure on the façade of Rouen Cathedral which Ruskin describes as ‘vexed and puzzled in his malice’ (Ruskin VIII, 217. See Figures 4 and 5). The term grotesque comes from ‘*pittura grottesca*’ or images found in the grotto and is used to refer to decorative painting or sculpture in which portions of human and animal forms are fantastically interwoven with flowers and foliage. While the figure in Rouen corresponds to this definition, Giotto’s vices and virtues can only be considered as

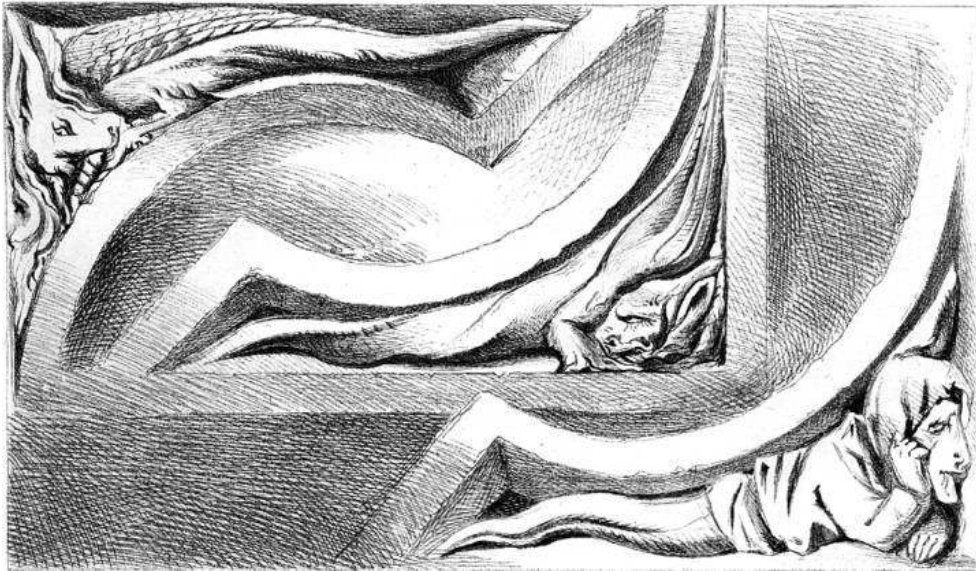
grotesques in the sense that the artist sometimes fuses animal forms with the human to convey a vice while transposing the requisite fantastic element into a divine presence. This is the case with the pair opposing Charity and Envy, where Envy's rapacious greed is depicted in her claw-like hands. The fantastic is present in both the flames of hell engulfing Envy's feet and in the angel in the top right-hand corner of Charity.

Figure 4. Giotto Charity



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<https://www.wikiart.org/en/giotto/charity> CHARITY

Figure 5. Sculptures from the Bas-reliefs of the North door of the Cathedral of Rouen



Drawn by John Ruskin and engraved by R. P. Cuff. 1855. 4 x 6 7/8 inches. Plate XIV, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* in *Works*, 8.217. Scanned image and text by George P. Landow. <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/ruskin/drawings/7lamps14.html>

- 25 For Ruskin, Charity was an allegorical figuring uniting the literal and the figurative. In keeping with his definition of the grotesque, this figure encompasses the whole range of symbolical and allegorical art and poetry. He makes it into an example of how a work of art is the product of a place, in the same way that a cathedral is indissociable from the site where it was built by contrasting the representation of Charity in the northern clime of Amiens with that in the south in Padua: ‘the ideal Charity of Giotto at Padua presents her heart in her hand to God, and tramples at the same instant on bags of gold, the treasures of the world, and gives only corn and flowers, that on the west porch of Amiens is content to clothe a beggar with a piece of the staple manufacture of the town’ (Ruskin XXXIII, 486). Ruskin returns to the figure in the seventh letter of *Fors Clavigera*:
- [Giotto’s] Charity tramples upon bags of gold—has no use for them. She gives only corn and flowers; and God’s angel gives *her*, not even these—but a Heart. Giotto is quite literal in his meaning, as well as figurative. Your love is to give food and flowers, and to labour for them only. (Ruskin XXVII, 130)
- 26 He later realized that he had misinterpreted the relationship between the giver and the receiver. His revised reading is quoted in the footnote: ‘I do not doubt I read the action wrong; she is *giving* her heart to God while she gives gifts to men’ (Ruskin XXVII, 130).
- 27 Ruskin uses Charity and Envy to illustrate the lessons he addresses to the workers in *Fors Clavigera*.<sup>14</sup> They figure in the context of Ruskin’s discussion of the Paris Commune, where he explains war in the following terms: “Invidia,” jealously [*sic*] of your neighbour’s good, has been, since dust was first made flesh, the curse of man; and “Charitas,” the desire to do your neighbour grace, the one source of all human glory, power, and material Blessing’ (Ruskin XXVII, 126). Charity is presented as an allegorical figure representing Ruskin’s first lesson in this context: ‘You are to do good work, whether you live or die. . . . Mind your own business with your absolute heart and soul; but see that it is a good business first. That it is corn and sweet peas you are producing, —not gunpowder and arsenic’ (Ruskin XXVII, 129).

28 He positions the illustrations of Charity and Envy at the beginning of his letters as 'ornaments' explaining that, if his lessons are heeded, they will in time become better than ornaments. They will surpass their decorative function and take on more significance than simply the emblematic. 'I have said little to you yet of any of the pictures engraved—you perhaps think, not to the ornament of my book. Be it so. You will find them better than ornaments in time' (Ruskin XXVII, 129–30).

29 In Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the image of Charity links two significant places in the novel, Combray on the one hand and the Venuto on the other. A photograph of Charity is given to the young narrator by his aesthetic mentor, Swann, replicating Mr Telford's role in relation to the young Ruskin. Swann nicknames the kitchen-maid working for the narrator's family *la Charité de Giotto* (Proust I, 80) and the narrator rewrites Ruskin's portrait of the figure. He has her trample grapes to press them for wine before handing the corkscrew up to the kitchen:

*Par une belle invention du peintre elle foule aux pieds les trésors de la terre, mais absolument comme si elle piétinait des raisins pour en extraire le jus ou plutôt comme elle aurait monté sur des sacs pour se hausser ; et elle tend à Dieu son cœur enflammé, disons mieux, elle le lui 'passe', comme une cuisinière passe un tire-bouchon par le soupirail de son sous-sol à quelqu'un qui le lui demande à la fenêtre du rez-de-chaussée.* (Proust I, 80)

30 The phrasing shows the process of writing: the narrator takes Ruskin's initial description of the figure standing on large sacks, comparing her to a person trampling grapes, introduced by the phrase 'Comme si', then replaced by 'ou plutôt' just as the next action 'elle tend à Dieu son cœur enflammé' is revised to an enhanced image: 'disons mieux' and the more mundane image of the cook handing up a corkscrew from the basement. Proust subverts Ruskin's lesson of good work by making his Charity the butt of harassment aimed at Françoise, the family's cook. She cruelly forces the kitchen maid to peel endless bunches of asparagus even though the latter suffers from an allergic reaction to them. The figure also marks the division in the divergent paths taken by Swann and the narrator. Swann, the dilettante, falls in love with Odette because of her resemblance with Botticelli's Zipporah, pursuing the path of sterile aestheticism which Ruskin cautions will deaden his critical powers. The narrator on the other hand goes to Padua because he wants to see Charity *in situ*, but once he is there, he marks his departure from Swann's guidance by lifting his eyes to the frescoes Giotto painted above the vices and virtues depicting the lives of Mary and Jesus and the angels doing their acrobatics on the ceiling.

31 Giotto's Charity thus elicits two opposed approaches to art, representing the divide in the two paths Ruskin outlines in his preface to that eponymous work: that of the sterile aesthete embodied by Swann (whose attitude leads to the dead sea according to Ruskin's concluding image to the preface of *The Two Paths*)<sup>15</sup> whereas the narrator engages in the path leading to artistic truth and the immortality of art, an organic development of the faculties which, according to Ruskin in the same preface, culminates in the Mount of Olives.

32 Proust makes the figure in Rouen into an equally powerful symbol of his literary work. The figure exemplifies Ruskin's following definition of the grotesque in *Modern Painters*:

A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and of which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself; the gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of the imagination, forming the grotesque character. (Ruskin V, 132)

33 The figure makes a visual impact, in a moment which Ruskin's prose captures as follows:

the eye of the couchant figure on the right, in its gloomy and angry brooding. The plan of this head, and the nod of the cap over its brow, are fine; but there is a little touch above the hand especially well meant: the fellow is vexed and puzzled in his malice; and his hand is pressed hard on his cheek bone, and the flesh of the cheek is wrinkled under the eye by the pressure. The whole, indeed, looks wretchedly coarse, when it is seen on a scale in which it is naturally compared with delicate figure etchings; but considering it as a mere filling of an interstice on the outside of a cathedral gate, and as one of more than three hundred (for in my estimate I did not include the outer pedestals), it proves very noble vitality in the art of the time. I believe the right question to ask, respecting all ornament, is simply this: Was it done with enjoyment—was the carver happy while he was about it? It may be the hardest work possible, and the harder because so much pleasure was taken in it; but it must have been happy too, or it will not be living. (Ruskin VIII, 217–18)

34 Although the figure is tiny and all but lost in the façade of several hundreds of other figures, for Ruskin it represents the 'very noble vitality in the art of the time' and prompts him to question the worker's well-being: 'Was it done with enjoyment—was the carver happy while he was about it?' Though the figure might look 'wretchedly coarse', for Ruskin it embodies the basic relationship between craftsmanship and happiness. Ruskin's drawing of the figure testifies to the importance he attached to it and Proust notes that he included it as one of the numbered illustrations in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* as it gives form to Ruskin's thought.

35 This figure was the objective of a pilgrimage Proust made to Rouen in the wake of Ruskin's death when he committed the very kind of idolatrous act which he criticized in Ruskin. Proust makes the figure into a symbol for his own literary activity, even anticipating the titles of his work when he wrote in an early draft of one of his articles on Ruskin that he went to Rouen 'à la recherche de la petite figure', persevering until it was 'retrouvée', like past time in his novel. (Proust 1971, 764) The medieval sculptor abandoned the little figure to its natural demise, leaving the stone to wear away with time, as Proust notes: 'L'artiste mort depuis des siècles a laissé là, entre des milliers d'autres, cette petite personne qui meurt un peu chaque jour, et qui était morte depuis bien longtemps, perdue au milieu de la foule des autres, à jamais' (Proust 1971, 125). Ruskin's focus on the little figure brings it back to life, just as Proust's interest in it, as well as that of other readers of Ruskin, will ensure its resurrection (Proust 1971, 127). As Diane Leonard has pointed out, the phrase describing the figure as 'morte depuis bien longtemps' concluding with the words 'à jamais' formulates the question posed during the reflections following the *petite madeleine* episode when the narrator ponders whether the past is dead forever (Leonard 80). The same question addressed with the same cadence ('Il était mort? Mort à jamais?') is also posed at the time of the death of Bergotte, Proust's fictitious author (Proust III, 693). Proust devotes several pages to the figure, illustrating Ruskin's point that the visual makes an immediate impact but it takes a long time to put its significance into words. He apostrophizes the figure using the familiar French form of address 'tu' and discourses on the fundamental question of the immortality of a work of art. The figure stares directly at the spectator, sinisterly out of the corner of its eye, engaging in an exchange of looks with him which seems to bring it to life.

36 Proust gave prominence to Giotto's Charity and the figure in Rouen using them to illustrate the second instalment of the article on Ruskin, published in the *Gazette des beaux arts* on 1 August 1900. The picture of Charity is positioned like an illuminated

letter at the beginning of the article and the figure from Rouen cathedral is used as a tailpiece at the end.

- 37 Proust suggests that the first figure is a symbolic embodiment of Ruskin when he concludes the obituary he published in *Le Figaro* 13 February 1900:

*Tel qu'il fut, chrétien, moraliste, économiste, esthéticien : renonçant à sa fortune, donnant la beauté au monde, mais soucieux aussi d'y diminuer l'injustice et donnant son cœur à Dieu, il fait penser à cette figure de la Charité que Giotto a peinte à Padoue et dont Ruskin a souvent parlé dans ses livres, 'foulant aux pieds des sacs d'or, tous les trésors de la terre, donnant seulement du blé et des fleurs, et tendant à Dieu, dans ses [mains], son cœur enflammé'.*  
(Proust 1971, 443–44)

- 38 If the figure of Charity at the beginning of the article is equated with Ruskin's name, it is significant that the figure in Rouen is positioned below Proust's name at the end. As if to suggest Proust's ambivalent relationship to Ruskin, it is looking in the opposite direction of the dragon depicted above it. The figure with its mocking grin has so much vitality about it that it seems to answer the question posed by Proust, namely that a work of art outlives its author.
- 39 These illuminated figures tracing what looks like the first letter of the text and making the author's signature a tail piece at the end can be associated with a peculiar kind of illumination, again as defined by Ruskin. They are Ruskinian grotesques which call on the participation of the spectator or the reader, leaving them to work out the connection between the symbol and its significance. That process results in a form of illumination, apparent in a pragmatic mode in the case of the guide book read on site: its pages shed light on what is being viewed while they in turn become illuminated with the light by which they are read.
- 40 La Sizeranne articulates that process of illumination in his preface to the French translation of *Mornings in Florence*, as he associates Ruskin's guided tours of Florence with an illuminated prayerbook: '*Les matins de printemps qu'on passe à Florence sont comme des enluminures de missel intercalées dans les pages grises et monotones du livre de la vie.*' (Ruskin-La Sizeranne v). Proust will rework La Sizeranne's image by making reading into a process of illumination: as he writes in his preface to his translation of *Sesame and Lilies*, the book becomes a kind of calendar of the past as the pages are lit up and coloured by the circumstances of reading. Reading illustrates the printed page, thus creating a dynamic which corresponds to Ruskin's definition of illumination as a non-pictorial form of writing:

I am striving . . . to revive the art of illumination, properly so called; not the art of miniature-painting in books, or on vellum, which has ridiculously been confused with it; but of making writing, simple writing, beautiful to the eye, by investing it with the great chord of perfect colour, blue, purple, scarlet, white, and gold, and in that chord of colour, permitting the continual play of the fancy of the writer in every species of grotesque imagination. (Ruskin V, 139)

- 41 According to Ruskin, illumination is a kind of iconotext, an intermediary form of expression situated in-between the visual and the verbal. Its medium is chromatic both in terms of colour and in terms of musical chords. The cathedral of Amiens is an iconotext as the sculpture on its façade writes the Bible in stone images. In the same way, the Basilica of St Mark's is what Ruskin calls a 'Book-Temple' where every letter is 'gilded' and 'illuminated every page'. (Ruskin X, 141) He develops a sustained analogy between ecclesiastical architecture and decorated books, using St Mark's as an example: 'the whole edifice is to be regarded less as a temple wherein to pray, than as

itself a Book of Common prayer, a vast illuminated missal, bound with alabaster instead of parchment, studded with porphyry pillars instead of jewels, and written within and without in letter of enamel and gold' (Ruskin X, 112).

- 42 Ruskin's analogy undoubtedly inspired Proust to compare the composition of his novel to the construction of a cathedral, just as Ruskin's image of the mosaics as 'illuminations' of the Basilica-Book (Ruskin X, 129) translated into his image of books which have been read as '*de vastes enluminures*' (Proust IV, 466). He not only studded his text with decorative allusions to Ruskin's text but overlaid it with images drawn from his works. The transformation of Ruskin's illustrated volume into Proust's illuminated novel strikes a chord of colour which, to quote the terms Ruskin used to define illumination, permits the continual play of the writer's fancy in every species of grotesque imagination. In turn, the grotesque required the beholder to complete the picture, relying on the spectator or the reader to make sense of it. Peter Nicholls has emphasized how the grotesque's characteristics of abruptness and discontinuity resonate with modernist poetics (Nicholls 172–73). He also pointed to 'the importance of Ruskin's grotesque' which was 'brilliantly grasped by McLuhan' (Nicholls 172). According to Marshall McLuhan, the way the isolated, still image impacts on the beholder, which left him or her to make sense of the gaps overleapt in haste by the artist's imagination, anticipated Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (McLuhan 266–67).
- 43 Proust's reworking of Ruskin's illustrations corresponds to the latter's peculiar notions of 'reciprocal interference', the noble grotesque and illumination. Furthermore, Proust's use of Ruskinian images fulfils Ruskin's definition of the objective of art itself, namely, to fix '[t]he dimly seen, momentary glance, the flitting shadow of faint emotion, the imperfect lines of fading thought'. In other words: 'what we want art to do for us is to stay what is fleeting, and to enlighten what is incomprehensible, to incorporate the things that have no measure, and immortalize the things that have no duration.' (Ruskin XI, 62) If Ruskin is read in France today, it is because in such powerful statements as this, Ruskin anticipated not only Proust's masterpiece, but the defining characteristics of modernism itself. Indeed, as Ruskin said of Turner in the quotation Proust rewrote in praise of Ruskin, every day Ruskin lies in his grave will shed some new light on his power.

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## NOTES

1. Robert de la Sizeranne's *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté* was published in Paris by Hachette in 1897. It contains extracts of Ruskin's works translated into French.
2. Turner's *Vesuvius in Repose* and *Vesuvius in Eruption* are reproduced in <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/ruskinlib/Lectures%20on%20landscape> on PDF pages 52/621 and 56/612 respectively.
3. Turner's *Vesuvius in Eruption*, engraved by T. Jeavons, was reproduced opposite page 27 in *Friendship's Offering: and Winter's Wreath: a Christmas and New Year's Present* published in London in 1830 by Smith, Elder. It was used as an illustration of Alkmatwn's 'Il Vesuviano : A Neopolitan Tale'.
4. On Ruskin's notion of the grotesque, see Landow (1985), 45–48.
5. See [http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc\\_100024135011.0x000001\\_120/324](http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_100024135011.0x000001_120/324)
6. See [http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc\\_100024135011.0x000001\\_75/324](http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_100024135011.0x000001_75/324)
7. See <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/ruskinlib/Seven%20Lamps%20of%20Architecture> 140/354
8. See <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/ruskinlib/Bible%20of%20Amiens>, 95/638.
9. See <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/ruskinlib/Bible%20of%20Amiens> 4/638.
10. The library edition reproduces images of the statues side by side. See <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/ruskinlib/Bible%20of%20Amiens> 262/638.
11. See [http://brittlebooks.library.illinois.edu/brittlebooks\\_open/Books2009-08/ruskjo0001pieven/ruskjo0001pieven.pdf](http://brittlebooks.library.illinois.edu/brittlebooks_open/Books2009-08/ruskjo0001pieven/ruskjo0001pieven.pdf) The photograph of St Mark's Square and the Basilica can be seen at 117/452 and the photograph of the Rialto at 81/452.

12. A reproduction of that photograph is on line at <https://www.cairn.info/revue-de-la-bibliotheque-nationale-de-france-2015-3-page-24.htm> (paste the link into the browser). It is the third image in the article.

13. Cf. Proust's *Carnet de 1908*, Manuscript Department of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, N.A.Fr. 16637, f°10 v°. Transcribed by Philip Kolb (Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 60).

14. Giotto's images of *Envy* and *Charity* are reproduced in <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/ruskinlib/Fors> in PDF views 223/2340 and 228/2340 respectively.

15. Jérôme Bastianelli makes this point in his entry on *The Two Paths* in *Dictionnaire Proust-Ruskin*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017, p. 714.

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## ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on Proust's response to the visual component of Ruskin's works, highlighting how the Ruskinian dialectic of word and image gave impetus to Proust's *Recherche du temps perdu*. It borrows terms from Ruskin's works to define their aesthetic relationship: that of 'incrustation', meaning both the way Venetian architects covered brick walls with marble and the way they decorated walls with precious stones, is applied here to define Ruskinian intertextuality in Proust's text, as it involves both textual layering and the use of quotation as ornamentation. Ruskin's concept of 'reciprocal interference' is adopted to designate intermediality and to suggest that Proust not only borrowed from Ruskin's text but enriched it through his translation and annotation of it. Although his translations did not reproduce the original illustrations, his two-part article on Ruskin in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* (April and August 1900) included reproductions of Giotto's 'Charity' and Ruskin's drawing of the sculpted figure from the façade of Rouen cathedral. These two figures are likened to 'noble grotesques' here, as they correspond to Ruskin's definition of an allegorical figure conveying an inexpressible truth through symbolism. My argument here is that Proust appropriated those two illustrations and transformed them into illuminations, in the sense that Ruskin gave to that term in *Modern Painters*.

Cet article examine comment la dialectique ruskinienne du mot et de l'image sous-tend l'œuvre de Proust. Les rapports esthétiques qui lient les deux auteurs sont définis ici en empruntant des termes de Ruskin, à commencer par celui d'« incrustation » qui désigne la façon dont les architectes vénitiens couvraient de marbre les murs de brique ou les décoraient de pierres précieuses. Ici le terme se réfère à l'intertextualité ruskinienne dans les écrits de Proust et implique la superposition d'un texte à un autre mais aussi l'ornementation par la citation. Le concept ruskinien d'« interférence réciproque » s'applique dans cet article à l'intermédialité, mais il est également utilisé pour suggérer que Proust n'a pas seulement soustrait des éléments du texte de Ruskin, il l'a également enrichi en le traduisant et en l'annotant. Bien que ses traductions ne reproduisent pas les illustrations originales, son article sur Ruskin paru en deux parties dans la *Gazette des Beaux Arts* (avril et août 1900) comprend une reproduction de la Charité de Giotto et le dessin que fit Ruskin de la petite figure sur la façade de la cathédrale de Rouen. Ces deux figures sont identifiées aux « grotesques nobles », car elles correspondent à la définition que fait Ruskin de la figure allégorique qui représente une vérité inexprimable à l'aide du symbolisme. Cet article étudie comment Proust s'est approprié ces deux illustrations en les transformant en illuminations, dans le sens que Ruskin donne à ce terme dans *Peintres modernes*.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Ruskin (John), Proust (Marcel), illustration, intertextuality, intermediality

**Mots-clés:** Ruskin (John), Proust (Marcel), illustration, intertextualité, intermédialité

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