
Foreword

Emma Sdegno

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

This volume is a record of the bicentenary conference held in Venice on 7-9 October 2019, a conference organized by the Departments of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies (DSLCC) and of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage (DFBC) of Ca' Foscari University Venice in partnership with the Department of Art History and Archaeology (UFR ALC) of the University of Rennes 2. The occasion came at the end of a particularly generous and festive year, with events following one after another in Pau (France), in London, Venice, Verona, Florence, Lucca and Rome, and closing in December at the Huntington Library, San Marino (California), among them two major exhibitions, one in the Doge's Palace in Venice (March-June 2018), the other at Two Temple Place in London (January-April 2019). All this took place just before the coming of the pandemic that has tragically changed our habits and desires, establishing other priorities and putting more urgent concerns on the agenda. The essays gathered here were delivered in a period in which scholars could still travel freely, talk to unrestricted audiences, and get together in regenerating conviviality. In collecting and reorganizing them for publication, our intellectual effort and excitement at re-encountering familiar thoughts and provocative insights are inextricably intertwined with a host of recollections that the present situation renders at once remote and even more urgent and timely.

The topic of the conference was conceived in the aftermath of Britain's divisive vote to leave the European Union, and when the date of the British departure still looked as though it would proceed straightforwardly and imminently, which it did not. It was these expectations that inspired our call for papers for a conference whose title "A Great Community: John Ruskin's Europe" echoed a sentence in a 1857 lecture later published in a volume entitled *A Joy For Ever*. In that lecture Ruskin energetically defended what he saw as a distinctive European culture and spirit, a defence that in his later works would become more and more forthright and complex. It was this challenge that our bicentenary celebrations in Venice aimed to meet. Like individual nations, Europe is an "imagined community", "constructed through

widely-accepted ‘narratives’.¹ In the map of the continent Ruskin drew and re-drew repeatedly in the course of his life, boundaries shift continuously, so that – as Denis Cosgrove has brilliantly pointed out – he sometimes presents Europe as “a single cultural entity against which England and Britain is contrasted, sometimes focusing on its diverse and conflicted ‘nations’, sometimes making Europe stand for the whole ‘globe of earth’, across which world historical forces contend and collide”.²

In the impressive map Ruskin drew as a ten-year-old child in 1829 [fig. 1], Britain appears hazy and faraway, while Europe is fairly neat and in close focus, bearing names written clearly and encircled within the blue lines he particularly enjoyed drawing, as he recollected in old age.³ To the young John Ruskin Europe was mainly a place of romantic poetry and picturesque views, a place of imagination and desire. In 1825, when he was aged six, his family had ventured to travel as far as Paris and to Belgium to visit the field of Waterloo; his second journey to the Continent, the first to comprise also Germany, Switzerland and Italy, would take place in 1833. Twenty-two more visits to the Continent followed, the last, that of 1888, ended in Venice, where the last words of his diary were written.

It was to discuss this both dim and detailed map that scholars from different disciplines, countries, outlooks were invited to meet in Venice in October 2019. All readers of Ruskin feel at times the frustration of meeting with the limitations of their fields, and a major aim of the conference was to favour interdisciplinary dialogue. If

a community of scholars can be beneficial for the study of Ruskin, this is especially so as regards Ruskin’s Europe. A variety of competences and approaches was thus thought to be a vital starting point for an enquiry into his polymath European researches. This collection of essays is therefore both a celebratory occasion and a challenge, as challenging are all Ruskin’s works. Programmatically multi-disciplinary as whole, it is composed of papers that variously explore relationships, ranging from comparative translation (Eells, Tizot), to history of reception (Cerasi, Eagles, Frank, Kawabata, Pilutti Namer, Rempfort), and of collectionism (Agazzi), to Ruskin’s relations with contemporaries (Paribeni and Pedone, Sdegno, Wildman), to his own reception of European culture (Sandrini), encompassing Islam (Zaman). Through this variety of perspectives and field-crossing a Ruskin eminently relational stands out, also in the sense of establishing spatial connections between places,⁴ through an ever-expanding comparative method (Hélar, Reichler), where the road (Hélar, Hull) and the bridge (Tucker), prove to be intriguing and as yet utterly unexplored icons. The net of relationships becomes even more closely interwoven on the theoretical level, as Ruskin’s thought enters wider western discourses involving aesthetics (Frangne), and the theories and practice of architecture and conservation (Abreu, Morezzi). That this multivocal approach may open new paths in Ruskin scholarship is among the auspices of this volume.

In 2018 Europe was among the core concerns of a series of studies recognizing the crucial importance of place,

¹ Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London; New York: Verso, [1983] 2006. Heffernan, M. *The Meaning of Europe. Geography and Geopolitics*. London; New York: Arnold, 1998, 2.

² Cosgrove, D. “Ruskin’s European Visions”. *Geography and Vision. Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World*. London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008, 136.

³ *Works*, 35: xx; *Works*, 13: 502-3.

⁴ A contribution to this line of research is Jeanne Clegg’s “From Dead End to Central City of the World: (re)-locating Rome on Ruskin’s map of Europe”, a lecture given at the British School at Rome on 30 October 2019, forthcoming in *Papers of the British School at Rome* 2021.



Figure 1 John Ruskin, *Map of Europe*. 1829 ca. Drawing. CONRM.1989.540 Map of Europe H Res 3937. Coniston, The Ruskin Museum. “I began to learn drawing by carefully copying the maps in a small quarto Atlas of excellent old fashioned type, the mountains well marked (but not blackened all over like those in the modern Geological Survey), the names clear, not crowded – above all, not run across each other, not to be gleaned, a letter at a time, when one can pick them up. A map of France, and a map of Africa, are examples of many done by the time I was ten years old. These maps were of great delight to me; the colouring round the edges being a reward for all the tediousness of the printed names; the painting, an excellent discipline of hand and eye; and the lines drawn for the mountains and sea a most wholesome imitation of steady engraver’s work” (*Works*, 13: 502-3). This is a note occurring in the catalogue of the exhibition of Ruskin’s “handiwork” held in London at the Fine Art Society in 1878, in which the maps of France and of Africa were exhibited

of myth, and of image in the construction of a European fabric.⁵ Within this significant plethora of works Salvatore Settis's particularly authoritative voice is the one that most directly shares Ruskin's ethos in that it combines high scholarly research with a public engagement in our cultural and environmental heritage on the national and international scales. The convergence of aesthetics, ethics and constitutional legality Settis advocates in *Architettura e democrazia. Paesaggio, città, diritti civili*⁶ was the inspiring motif of the wonderful *lectio magistralis* he delivered at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco on the first day of the conference, and which we are honoured and grateful to be able to publish at the opening of this volume.

Young people are the direct addressees of most Ruskin's works, and as a University event, our conference aimed at directly involving students. Under the excellent guidance of Sandra Zodiaco, language students helped with the organization of the conference, keeping in constant and highly appreciated contact with speakers from abroad. Collateral but closely pertinent to the conference spirit was the event involving secondary school students from the Liceo Artistico "Michelangelo Guggenheim" in Venice-Mestre. In the days preceding the conference British artists Kate Genever and Steve Pool held workshops with these students in which they imagined the future of Europe, making works which were exhibited at the University's Cultural Flow Zone on the Zattere during the conference itself. A few of these are reproduced and commented on in the appendix of this volume, which comprises the collage drawings Kate made during the talks, her unique visual record of the conference (see *Appendix*). We cannot conclude this foreword without presenting our warmest thanks to Architetto Franco Posocco,

Guardian Grando of the Scuola di San Rocco, and the Cancelleria for hosting us in the inspiring space of the Sala Capitolare. We also wish to thank our directors of Department, professors Valle Ojeda Calvo and Antonio Trampus (DSLCC) and Giuseppe Barbieri (DFBC), and the headmistress of the Liceo Guggenheim, professor Cecilia Martinelli, for their help and active support. Special thanks are also due to the administrative staff of the Departments of DSLCC, DFBC, and UFR-ALC for their untiring helpfulness; and to the director and the great team of Edizioni Ca' Foscari for producing this volume so efficiently and smoothly. Many people were involved in the conference and in producing this volume, as speakers, participants, discussants, reviewers, museum curators, and we wish to express warmest thanks for material help as well as intellectual support to Dinah Birch, Luigino Bruni, Enzo Buvoli, Juan Calatrava Escobar, Alexandra Cheira, Jeanne Clegg, Jim Dearden, Irene Favaretto, Sandro Franchini, Flavio Gregori, Pamela Hull, Mary Ann Lancaster, Geraldine Ludbrook, Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, Franco Marucci, Vito Mistretta, Anna Ottani Cavina, Louise Pullen, Sarah Quill, Jolanda Ramos, Laurence Roussillon-Constanty, Baldine Saint-Girons, Jim Spates, Bianca Tarozzi, Liz Waring, Clive Wilmer. The project and this book took shape in many mutual exchanges, marked by intellectual enthusiasm and generosity, among colleagues of different backgrounds and countries: a small and very real European community. My final most heartfelt words of gratitude are for André Hélar, who sowed the first seed of the project, and the co-editors of this volume, Martina Frank, Myriam Pilutti Namer, Pierre-Henry Frangne, who helped bring it to fruit.

⁵ Ossola, C. *Europa ritrovata. Geografie e miti del vecchio continente*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2017. Published in French as *Fables d'identité. Pour retrouver l'Europe*. Paris: PUF, 2018. See also: Charle, C.; Roche, D. (éds). *L'Europe. Encyclopédie historique*. Paris: Actes Sud, 2018.

⁶ Torino: Einaudi, 2017.