

John Ruskin and His 'Witch of Sicily', Amy Yule

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Abstract John Ruskin's visit to Sicily in the spring of 1874 is largely neglected in the main biographies and generally regarded as a mere adjunct to the more significant purpose of his trip to Italy in that year, studying the work of Botticelli and other Old Masters first in Florence and at Assisi, and then in Rome. The ten-day break from study between 20 and 30 April, apparently at the casual invitation of slight acquaintances, Colonel and Mrs Henry Yule, then living in Palermo, has tended to be seen as an unimportant interlude, even though it does represent the furthest point in Europe (and therefore the world) to which he ever travelled. Recent research has uncovered a good deal more about his hosts in Palermo, and especially their daughter Amy, who begins to emerge as one of the forgotten, but not least important, figures in Ruskin's later personal life.

Keywords John Ruskin. Yule family. Travel. Sicily. Palermo.

Writing to Ruskin on 15 January 1867, Margaret Bell, Headmistress of Winnington School, Cheshire, where he was a patron and regular visitor between 1859 and 1868, referred to a "most interesting letter" received from Mrs Yule "about a year ago", promising "to send me her daughter's photograph – since which time I have heard nothing. Where is she now?"¹ From this the inference has been drawn that Amy Frances Yule, only child of Colonel Henry and Mrs. Anna Maria Yule, had been a pupil at the School, and that this must have provided the connection. Four brief references to 'Amy' in letters from Ruskin to Miss Bell in May 1865 seem to corroborate this, although Van Burd, in a footnote in the *Winnington Letters*, cautiously points out that there was another pupil called Amy there in the early 1860s (Amy Webster).² Ruskin may have hoped that Amy Yule would become a pupil, perhaps even offering financial support, but this can only remain speculation without further evidence.

¹ Burd 1969, 599.

² Burd 1969, 548.

By her own account this was not where she and Ruskin first met. We have Ruskin's word that Amy was a lively correspondent - hers were "the loveliest letters" he ever received, he told his close friend Susan Beever³ - but only two seem to survive (in the Rylands Library at Manchester University and the Houghton Library at Harvard).⁴ In the earlier of these, dated 26 November 1868, Amy writes from Palermo, in a frank and flirtatious way, teasing Ruskin by correcting his impression that she was nineteen:

I have so much to learn in many ways before I can carry off with dignity the grandeur of nineteen years. I am only *seventeen*, having been ten when I first saw you at Geneva, nearly seven years ago.⁵

She was indeed born in London in 1852 (and christened at Holy Trinity, Paddington, on 17 November), which fixes such a meeting at the time of the winter of 1862-63 which Ruskin spent in Switzerland.

Amy herself is even more helpful, in a remarkable aside and footnote buried within a biographical memoir of her father, perhaps not surprisingly hitherto overlooked in the Ruskin literature. Henry Yule was born in Inveresk, near Edinburgh, in 1820 - just a year younger than Ruskin - and enjoyed a successful career as an army man in India, seeing active service in the Anglo-Sikh wars of 1845-46 and 1848-49, and forming friendships with the successive governors-general Lords Dalhousie and Canning. A writer of extensive reports, as well as *A Narrative of the Mission to Ava* [Burma] (1858), he retired from the army in 1862, thereafter devoting himself to historical geography. Apart from co-authoring *Hob-*

son Jobson (1886), the publication for which he is still remembered is an edition of *The Travels of Marco Polo*, published in 1871, and it is in a later version of this - the so-called Yule-Cordier Edition of 1903 - that Amy's extremely detailed memoir appears, dated 1902. Speaking of his return from India, she writes:

Nor did Yule [her father] find any suitable opening for employment in England, so after two or three months spent in visiting old friends, he rejoined his family in the Black Forest, where he sought occupation in renewing his knowledge of German. But it must be confessed that his mood both then and for long was neither happy nor wholesome. The winter of 1862 was spent somewhat listlessly, partly in Germany and partly at the Hotel des Bergues, Geneva, where his old acquaintance Colonel Tronchin was hospitably ready to open all doors. The picturesque figure of John Ruskin also flits across the scene at this time. But Yule was unoccupied and restless, and could neither enjoy Mr. Ruskin's criticism of his sketches nor the kindly hospitality of his Genevan hosts.

On rejoining his wife and child at Mornex in Savoy, Yule found the health of the former [his wife] seriously impaired. During his absence, the kind and able English doctor at Geneva had felt obliged to inform Mrs Yule that she was suffering from disease of the heart, and that her life might end suddenly at any moment. Unwilling to add to Yule's anxieties, she made all necessary arrangements, but did not communicate this intelligence until he had done all he wished and returned, when she broke it to him very gently. Up to

³ Ruskin to Susan Beever, Assisi, 14 April 1874; *Works*, 37: 94.

⁴ The letter at Harvard (Houghton Library, Yule papers) is dated 7 November 1871 and is chiefly of interest in confirming regular correspondence: "When I go up the mountain [Etna], I will peep over the edge of the Crater, and shall perhaps find vast accumulations of singed paper lying about with "dear Amy" on one, and "I am satisfied you never get my letters" on another".

⁵ Rylands Library, Manchester University, EngMS 1258/74.

this year Mrs Yule, though not strong and often ailing, had not allowed herself to be considered an invalid, but from this date doctor's orders left her no choice in the matter.⁶

This last passage has implications for Ruskin's relationship with Amy, considered later; the footnote she provides here is of great interest:

I cannot let the mention of this time of lonely sickness and trial pass without recording here my deep gratitude to our dear and honoured friend, John Ruskin. As my dear mother stood on the threshold between life and death at Mornex that sad spring, he was untiring in all kindly offices of friendship. It was her old friend, Principal A.J. Scott (then eminent, now forgotten), who sent him to call. He [Ruskin] came to see us daily when possible, sometimes bringing MSS of Rossetti and of others to read aloud (and who could equal his reading?), and when she was too ill for this, or himself absent, he would send not only books and flowers to brighten the bare room of the hillside inn (then very primitive), but his own best treasures of Turner and W. Hunt, drawings and illuminated miscellanea. It was anxious solace; and though most gratefully enjoyed, these treasures were never long retained.⁷

Revelations indeed: details of Ruskin's activities at Mornex are frustratingly few, nor has it been previously noted that he had taken so many of his favourite possessions to comfort him – illuminated manuscripts as well as watercolours by Turner and William Henry Hunt. The connection with Alexander (known as Sandy) Scott is also informative: “theological dissident and educationist”,

as he is described in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, he was the first Principal of Owens College (the forerunner of Manchester University) and a friend of Thomas Carlyle, F.D. Maurice and George MacDonald. He also nearly became the first editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, declining the appointment at a late stage in favour of Thackeray (and thereby narrowly avoiding becoming the editor of *Unto this Last*). Ill health was a factor in this, and it was on a holiday on Lake Geneva that he died in January 1866, aged 60. Teasing out these interrelationships, it is perhaps most likely that Ruskin knew him through George MacDonald, and that Scott knew from him that Ruskin could provide comfort to the Yules at Mornex in 1862.

The letter of 1869 from Amy was written from Palermo, where the Yules had pitched up in October 1864 (not 1863, as the Library Edition has it). In the years since the meeting with Ruskin at Mornex they had made a peregrination full of Ruskinian echoes: via Chambéry to Turin and Genoa, Bagni di Lucca, Venice and Verona. One can only wonder how much this itinerary might have owed to Ruskin's recommendations. From Palermo, Yule published *Cathay and the Way Thither* in 1866, and began work on his great edition of Marco Polo. Amy gives a description of his daily routine:

It was his custom to rise fairly early; in summer he sometimes went to bathe in the sea, or for a walk before breakfast; more usually he would write until breakfast, which he preferred to have alone. After breakfast he looked through his notebooks, and before ten o'clock was usually walking rapidly to the library where his work lay. He would work there until two or three o'clock, when he returned home, read the *Times*, answered letters, received or paid visits, and

⁶ Memoir of Sir Henry Yule 1903, 1: lvi.

⁷ Memoir of Sir Henry Yule 1903, 1: lvii.

then resumed work on his book, which he often continued long after the rest of the household were sleeping. Of course his family saw but little of him under these circumstances, but when he had got a chapter of *Marco* into shape, or struck out some new discovery of interest, he would carry it to his wife to read. She always took great interest in his work, and he had great faith in her literary instinct as a sound as well as sympathetic critic.⁸

This, then, was the background for the intelligent seventeen-year-old whose letter of 1869 told of her obvious frustration, trapped between an invalid mother and a Casaubon-like father with his head buried in tales from Tartary. "You ask about my studies", she wrote, telling Ruskin of her knowledge of Italian and French, then of her instinct for - of all things - Geology, even encouraged by her mother to take "lessons from the Geologist lecturer at this University". This may have derived from being a kinswoman of Sir Roderick Murchison, twice President of the Geological Society. No wonder that Ruskin had apparently, in 1865, offered to "bring her up". The only other known letter from Amy - fleetingly cited by Van Burd in a footnote - is of January 1905, when at the age of 52 she sent a curiously belated letter of condolence to Joan Severn, Ruskin's cousin and only close relative.

That most generous offer of 1865 was infinite comfort to my mother and me at a time when comfort was sorely needed. I would not willingly say anything that should ever seem to cast reflection on my Father, but with all his fine qualities, he was not a man intended, I should think, for the parental role. Also he certain-

ly had - even to the very end of his life - an almost morbid dislike to facing unwelcome facts or looking ahead. So my brave little mother had for the most part to bear her burdens alone, and I am afraid - indeed I know - that she spent many, many weary night-watches anxiously thinking out the future (the future she knew she would not see) of her undeveloped slow-coach. For 'slow-coach' I was and still am.⁹

So we see that no longer is Ruskin's invitation to visit Palermo something deriving from mere casual acquaintance. He was reinvigorating one of those alarmingly passionate friendships with bright young women, in this instance one whom he might once have considered a possible ward, perhaps an adopted daughter, or in the context of 1874, and her age, which he thought to be nineteen, even a possible rival in his affections to Rose La Touche, who had dismissed him from her life in the summer of 1872.

He expressed mixed feelings in a letter written to Susie Beever from Assisi on 14 April, complaining of having to break off work to go to Rome, then Naples.

My witch of Sicily expects me this day week, and she's going to take me [on] such lovely drives, and talks of 'excursions' which I see by the map are thirty miles away. I wonder if she thinks me so horribly old that it's quite proper. It will be very nice if she does, but not flattering. I know her mother can't go with her; I suppose her maid will. If she wants any other chaperone I won't go. She's really very beautiful, I believe, to some people's tastes, (I shall be horribly disappointed if she isn't, in her own dark style,) and she writes, next to Susie, the loveliest letters I ever get.¹⁰

⁸ Memoir of Sir Henry Yule, 1: lx.

⁹ Memoir of Sir Henry Yule, 1: lx. Amy Yule to Joan Severn, 12 January 1905; Morgan Library, New York, MA 3451. At the time of Burd's reference the letter was in the collection of Helen Viljoen (Burd 1969, 549).

¹⁰ Ruskin to Susan Beever, Assisi, 14 April 1874 (*Works*, 37: 94).

A very similar missive, also dated 14 April, was sent to Joan Severn, enclosing a "pretty" letter "from my Sicilian witch"¹¹ Jeanne Clegg rightly identifies 'the witch of Sicily' as Circe of classical legend, the enchantress of whom Ruskin had written in *Munera Pulveris* - "no daughter of the Muses, but of the strong elements, Sun and Sea"¹² - but this was not necessarily his invented nickname for Amy. That letter of 1869 had ended "Ever your affectionate little old friend, Amy" - and here one can't help but imagine a giggle and a twinkling eye - "little old" sounds very grand, like a witch-fairy in a story book". Was she really so worldly wise, acting the enchantress and knowing exactly how to stimulate her potential rescuer's imagination? Maybe not: this was also the exact date of George MacDonald's fairy tale *At the Back of the North Wind* (serialized between November 1868 and November 1870), a more likely - and more innocent - source of such a soubriquet.

His companion and courier on this trip, a "delightful old German" named Klein - Frederick Crawley seems to have been left at Naples - fought for the luggage while Ruskin observed the sails of the local boats,

such jaunty little things ... just like the sprucest little thin-winged moths, with their wings all fresh-brushed and combed.¹³

He had written ahead asking Amy for rooms to be arranged at the Hotel de France, apparently in the old Cala port area of the city, but it would seem that this letter was on the same boat, so there was no word from

the Yules, who may not have known exactly when to expect him. First impressions of Palermo were not favourable: "A town built of large stones of the colour of mud; with an iron curled balcony to every window, and everybody's shirts - chemises - petticoats - and bedclothes hung out over them to dry". A quick visit followed to the Cathedral - also "the colour of mud" - to which he would return.

Then I asked for the 'English garden' which, when I arrived at it, down a street twice as long as the largest in Turin, I found to be about the size of Hyde Park; and that the English trees of which it consisted were chiefly palms, Indian fig, orange and lemon, the manna tree, the pepper tree, here and there a little sprig of Indian rubber and castor oil and stone pines.

This piece of sightseeing might seem an odd choice, were it not that the Giardino Inglese was the home address of the Yule family - presumably a house within the gardens.¹⁴

Acquiring a carriage and a 'valet de place' - we hear no more of Klein in the letters - Ruskin also found (presumably in the hotel) a 'commissioner' who knew Colonel Yule. Up at half past five on Wednesday 22nd, he was annoyed to find "smoke fog over all the hills, looking exactly like the atmosphere of a summer's morning in Euston Square".

I am in a terribly bad humour, the *black* cold wind having actually pursued me here, - the only difference from London being the scorching and dangerous heat in the middle of the day.¹⁵

¹¹ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 14 April 1874 (*Works*, 37: 94).

¹² *Munera Pulveris* (1872) (*Works*, 17: 213).

¹³ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 21 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 121.

¹⁴ The Giardino Inglese "had for a length of time been their place of abode" (Yule obituary 1890).

¹⁵ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 22 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 123.

Henry Yule called first thing – closely followed by the British Consul, to the consternation of the hoteliers, “quite appalled at my sublimity”. In 1874 this was George Dennis, diplomat and archaeologist, author of *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (1848) and Murray’s *Handbook for Travellers in Sicily* (1864). It is hard to imagine Ruskin being unaware of this, and it also transpires that Dennis had the friendship and professional support of Charles Newton, Keeper of Antiquities at the British Museum, fellow student with Ruskin at Christ Church, Oxford, and brother-in-law of Arthur Severn, Joan’s husband.¹⁶ It is probable that the Consul was not merely paying his respects to a distinguished visitor.

Before the day was out Ruskin had made his first excursion with Amy to Monreale, with permission to take her to Messina, if he liked ... “I don’t like at all taking Amy to Messina”, he told Joan, “another long tiresome twelve hours of steamer, instead of getting to my work”.¹⁷ But this would be the only practical way of seeing Sicily’s finest sights, Mount Etna and Taormina, given the condition and safety of Sicilian roads (banditry being rife well into the 1890s). A gloss on this is provided by an account of life in Palermo in 1881 written by Mary Paley Marshall, wife of the Cambridge economist Alfred Marshall. As she recalled,

those were the days of brigands,so one was restricted to the town for walks. It was indeed possible to go to Monreale three miles off, for armed police were stationed all the way within shouting distance, but

in every other direction there was a chance that one might be briganded and a piece of ear forwarded to friends with a message that more would follow unless a large ransom were paid.¹⁸

Amy herself, or at least her situation, Ruskin found rather troubling.

I am grieved ... by finding much that is wrong, in Amy’s position, towards her father, who seems to me to deserve better of her. ... I shall give Miss Amy a lecture on behaviour to parents – in the plural.¹⁹

Of their excursion to Monreale, just a few miles south of Palermo, he says little, remarking more on the flora and fauna – “my goodness, how the lizards flashed among the rocks” – than of the great twelfth-century Cathedral with its delightful Gothic cloister and vast Byzantine mosaics. In these he noticed just two things: the blue iris growing wild on the rocks outside appearing within the decoration of the arches, and the subject of “The King presenting the temple to the Virgin – an angel sustaining it, flying forward underneath”. Despite the bad humour he had confessed to Joan that

I have learned three or four inestimable truths, by coming to Sicily.

First – and not least – not to despise even the worst darkness of England – or storms of Coniston – as evils of a baser climate. That accursed wind takes them all over the earth, and the orange groves are all blight-

¹⁶ George Dennis (1814-1898), Charles Newton (1816-1894); a plaster cast of the bust of Newton by J.E. Boehm was presented to the National Portrait Gallery by Amy Yule in 1895.

¹⁷ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 22 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 125.

¹⁸ Marshall 1947, 33-4.

¹⁹ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 22 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 125.

ed here, by the same storms that made me ill passing the Cenis.

Secondly, I gathered today the small blue iris, wild, on the rocks of Monreale, within half a mile of the Greek mosaics which represent it – and am now certain – matching the flower fresh gathered with the visible sea beyond Palermo – that Homer's *violet*-coloured sea, meant – as I have said it did, *iris*-coloured, and that the hitherto called 'violet' crocus of the Greeks were of *this* flower – the blue fleur-de-lys.

Thirdly. In the dustiest streets of Palermo, or, at least, as dusty as well could be, I saw a group of serious players at bowls – but the bowls were – oranges! I thought this a very characteristic bit of street scene.

Fourthly, I've seen Indian fig [prickly pear] in perfection as a rock plant – covering heights like Yewdale crag with masses of its blue-green leaves, fixed like painted bronze.

Fifthly, I've seen the tomb of Frederick II, and knelt at it! and am going to draw it to-morrow – God willing.²⁰

On Thursday 23 April – St George's Day, as "Amy reminded me in time" – Ruskin kept his appointment with the Royal Tombs in Palermo Cathedral, managing a number of studies despite the distraction of a disfigured Cathedral menial and a young priest sitting behind him – an anecdote related in a later Oxford lecture (*Ariadne Florentina*).²¹ He may have begun the fine watercolour forming part of his teaching collection at Oxford and later presented to the Ashmolean Muse-

um, probably finishing it on his return a few days later, on the 29th.

He saw Amy again on St George's Day, perhaps on the drive he notes in his diary "to glorious view in evening, past Moorish bridge".²² He learned that she was a good swimmer, "and can fence, and shoot", but was shocked to learn that her mother,

of all the odd mothers ... never would let Amy read the Bible! Amy enquired timidly about it of me – just as I should of a Turk about the Koran – but she made Amy learn to swim – to fence – and the *musket* exercise!²³

This may have had something to do with Mrs Yule's experience of being in Palermo when it was bombarded by the Italian fleet during a local insurrection in 1866: "cheerfully remarking that 'every bullet has its billet", Amy noted in her memoir, "she remained perfectly serene and undisturbed".²⁴ That it was St George's Day caused Ruskin's mind to wander back to another St George, the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni in Venice, which he left in 1872 to hasten back to England to see Rose La Touche. "If I had not let Connie & Mrs Hilliard delay me on the Simplon", he mused to Joan, "when I left St George's Chapel to come to her, she would have married me; and all would have been well". Instead, here he was with his young witch of Sicily:

My goodness – if only R[ose] had learnt [swimming, fencing and shooting] instead of Bread from heaven,

²⁰ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 22 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 123-24. Crossing the Mont Cenis Pass over the Alps on 4 April Ruskin had noted in his diary "pouring rain, cold, and ... black fog".

²¹ *Ariadne Florentina* (1872); *Works*, 22: 409-10.

²² *Diaries* 1959, 785, entry for 26 April 1874; probably the 12th-century Ponte dell'Ammiragli.

²³ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 23 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 126-7.

²⁴ Memoir of Henry Yule 1903, 1: lix.

and would enjoy her drive with me as Amy did today; – you never saw a girl so happy!²⁵

At five o'clock on Friday 24 April, he and Amy – possibly with the good Klein on one side and a maid on the other – took a "huge steamer" for Messina, arriving early the following morning. Ruskin slept on a sofa in his berth without undressing, so as to witness dawn and the crossing of the whirlpool Charybdis, which he found quite exciting:

With windy sea – and under any volcanic action increasing the rush of water – the place must have been so dangerous to small Greek boats as entirely to justify the myth. ... We're going on to Taormina at one o'clock ... [by train from Messina] ... but there's no fear of banditti or anything else – except just the slightest chance in the world of being swallowed up – town and all if Etna were to get suddenly hungry ... but really I've so little taste for playing at priesthood that I don't expect the fate of Korah – besides that poor little innocent Amy who forms my 'company' – may protect my wicked selfie.²⁶

Jeanne Clegg, not unreasonably, interpreted this as a reference to Cora, often used by Ruskin as an alternative name for Persephone. However, it is spelled Korah in the letter, not Cora, and Ruskin's reference can be identified as a Biblical one, to Korah the Levite who was punished for his rebellion against Moses and challenge to the priesthood of Aaron,²⁷ when the earth opened and swallowed him up. An obscure incident, one might think, even allowing for the Biblical familiarity inculcated by his

evangelical mother, but there is another simpler explanation for this being in his mind – *The Punishment of Korah* figures in one of the scenes by Botticelli on the walls of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, which Ruskin had probably just looked at on his way down from Assisi, in preparation for work on his large-scale watercolour copy of *Zipporah*.

Sunday 26 April was a red-letter day, as he was finally to witness a scene he had imagined when a boy of ten, in 1829 writing a poem entitled *Etna*, presumably based on historical accounts of its eruptions:

On old Sicilia's isle a mountain roars
In sounds re-echoed from Italian shores.
[...]
Etna is quiet; but it leaves a scene
That well may fill with fear the hearts of men²⁸

"This morning at ½ past 4", the diary tells, "saw dawn on Etna: the most impressive and dreadful scene I ever yet saw in life".²⁹ He penned a long and detailed description for Joan, accompanied by a sketch. The drama of the sight seems to have shaken Ruskin out of his melancholy: "I have got out of the power of the *black* wind at last", and he was able to relish his visit:

Fancy; since yesterday morning at five o'clock, I have seen Charybdis – the rock of Scylla – the straits of Messina – Messina itself, now the second city in Sicily – the whole classical range of Panormus on one side – Calabria on the other – and – a line of coast unequalled in luxuriance of beauty – every crag of it

²⁵ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 23 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 127. For the rift with Rose La Touche in 1872, see Hilton 2000, Ch. 15, '1872'.

²⁶ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 25 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 127-8.

²⁷ "Book of Numbers", Ch. 16.

²⁸ *Works*, 2: 278.

²⁹ *Diaries*, 1959, 785; entry for 26 April 1874.

crested with Moorish or Saracenic or Norman architecture wholly new to me - a Greek theatre the most perfect in Europe, now visible on one side of the valley beneath my window - and Etna on the other.³⁰

Ruskin's diary tells that he took Amy to see Etna on Monday 27 (having risen again at half past four), as well as going "all over [the] theatre with old cicerone".³¹ The next day he witnessed a memorable sunrise for the third and last time:

Where [the smoke] rose from the crater - it was in close, pure, thunderous masses of white, which took the rose of sunrise exactly as a thundercloud would - a white one, - while the rest of the mountain was still dark on the sky -: and on the opposite side, the sun rose - so as to shine exactly through one of the arches of the Greek theatre - so that on the one hand, there was Etna in full flush of sunrise - on the other, a Greek building standing up against the light - and the Apolline beams piercing it as if with Apollo's own presence - a glory as of a statue of fire beneath the arch.³²

They left Taormina at 7, stopping for breakfast and lunch at Messina before continuing back at 5 in the afternoon, "poor wee Amy very sorry to go home - me think". In Messina there was just time for another "wonderful sight": at Amy's prompting they visited an apothecary's shop "that had remained unchanged since the fifteenth century ... and for that *alone*, I would have come to Sic-

ily. I never thought to see such a thing in this world". A diagram in the letter picks out the counter, "in exquisite Florentine mosaic of Sicilian marbles; top and sides all inlaid; no duke's drawing room in Blenheim or Chatsworth can show grander marble work" and three projecting wooden presses, "exquisitely designed & carved, holding the more precious or poisonous drugs in glass vases - Venetian - close set on tiny shelves ... the wood in places mouldered away; but no abbots chair in a Cathedral chancel could be more beautiful than each of these three presses".³³ The overnight passage brought them back to Palermo early on Wednesday 29. Ruskin stayed on deck until ten o'clock, "watching the Lipari Islands, first against a sunset like Turner's Polyphemus one, and then in the moonlight".³⁴ He got little sleep, "the moonlit sea rushing past the cabin window".

Back in Palermo, Ruskin headed back to the Cathedral, his diary recording him "hard at work on Frederick II".³⁵ With rain setting in, he also visited the Archaeological Museum, encountering the celebrated metopes from the great Greek temples (chiefly Temple C) at Selinus (or Selinunte), dating from the seventh century B.C. That was the end of the visit. If Ruskin made any formal, or even informal, goodbyes to the Yules, or indeed to Consul Dennis, no record is known. By the evening of Thursday 30 April he was writing to Joan from on board the *Campidoglio*, between Ustica and the Lipari Islands, with Sicily disappearing "in a line of noble crags"³⁶ as he headed back to Naples, then on to Rome.

³⁰ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 26 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 131.

³¹ *Diaries*, 1959, 785; entry for 27 April 1874.

³² Ruskin to Joan Severn, 28 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 133.

³³ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 29 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 135.

³⁴ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 29 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 134.

³⁵ *Diaries*, 1959, 786; entry for 30 April 1874.

³⁶ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 30 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 136.

Work on Botticelli was resumed over the summer of 1874, Ruskin returning to England in mid October, spending a few days at Chamonix en route. In September Rose had decided to renew contact, even to the point finally of considering marriage, but it was all too late. She was terminally ill, and after a few more or less happy encounters over the winter, he saw her for the last time in February; she died on 25 May 1875 at the age of 27.

Amy could hardly have been much in Ruskin's thoughts during this period, although there was probably correspondence following the visit. Her mother died just a month earlier than Rose, on 30 April 1875, but any feelings of sympathy would have been eclipsed by Ruskin's own devastating loss. Henry Yule returned to live in London, marrying again in 1877 Mary Wilhelmina Skipwith, the daughter of an old friend and twenty years his junior; but she died only four years later. Yule was appointed to the India Council and elected President of the Asiatic Society; he would also have become President of the Royal Geographical Society (of which he was Vice-President) but for his criticism of H.M. Stanley's vigorous activities in Africa. He died in London on 30 December 1889 and was buried at Tunbridge Wells. Musing on the trip, Ruskin had told Joan how he had been

very glad to have seen Etna, which I've to thank Amy for, for if she hadn't begged me to take her, I certainly should not have gone myself: and I have gained invaluable knowledge - To all intents & purposes, I have been in Greece, and seen the Greek sea.³⁷

To one whose knowledge of classical Greek culture was hitherto confined to a visit to Paestum as a youth, and

hours spent in the British Museum, that was an inestimable boon, and left him quite content.

Amy Yule made no further appearance in Ruskin's life, as far as we can tell. Was he ever really serious about her? She was a lively correspondent, but having not met her since she was a girl of ten, and with Rose still in his mind, this seems unlikely. An unusually skittish letter to Susie Beever, written from Florence on 10 April, just ten days before leaving for Sicily, seems to confirm her position, as one among equals. He reported news of Rose via Joan, adding:

There's no fear of Joanie's ever thinking you write too often. Besides - you might send me a letter on the sly, you know - to the Hotel de France, Palermo. It would make my Palermo mistress so jealous, too. *Please* do.

Let me see - how many have I, now, after Rosie. There's first Susie - and then I think this Palermo one, Amy, who's really good as gold, too; and then there's a pretty Flora, at Woolwich [Flora Shaw, daughter of General Shaw, at 22 the same age as Amy] - and then - I felt so terribly out of my depth the other day - all in a minute - with the sister of one of my pet Oxford pupils [Lucy Drewitt, sister of Dawtrey Drewitt], a wild girl after the hounds ... Oh dear - if these good girls would but set themselves to be an example in their own drawing rooms, when they marry, of plain dressing, and charitable deed.³⁸

To Charles Eliot Norton, writing more seriously the day before, he reported that

I am going to Palermo to see a dear good girl, Amy Yule, who has been very lovely in her affection to me these ten years, - I don't mean like R[ose] but a quite

³⁷ Ruskin to Joan Severn, 29 April 1874; Clegg 1986, 133.

³⁸ Hayman 1989, 378-9.

simple, lovely, grateful, healthy regard, – and I want to see her[,] for everybody says she's a wonderful creature – and I know her to be so in mind. But there can never be anything to come between R[ose] & me, now, my life is far too broken.³⁹

So what of Amy, his "affectionate little old friend"? Whether she accompanied her father back to England after her mother's death is not known; relations with a stepmother only twelve years her senior might well have proved difficult. Her other known publications, including *A Little Light on Cretan Insurrection* (1879) and the co-authorship, with John Murray, of Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Greece* (1884), suggest a continued life in the Mediterranean. A glimpse of her is provided in a remark by George Dennis, referring to her as "an eccentric creature ... [who] did not deign to pay a call on the British Consul to greet her father's old friend when she was staying by herself in Palermo".⁴⁰

She remained Yule's only child, and would have inherited what the *Dictionary of National Biography* declares to have been a shade under £30,000, no small sum in 1890. Within the next few years she moved to Tarradale House, on the Black Isle near Inverness in Scotland, which had formerly belonged to her kinsman, Sir Roderick Murchison: here she added a walled garden and a library tower. She was elected a Lady Associate of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1895; was a subscriber to the British School at Athens by 1904; a member of the Palaeontographical Society by 1906, and acted as local secretary (for Ross-shire) of the Royal Scottish Arboricultural Society.⁴¹

A lively, intelligent young woman, with an inquiring mind and an interest in geology – and gardening, as she had related in her 1865 letter – and much else besides: she must surely have attracted Ruskin intellectually, and it would seem to the disinterested observer an ideal match. But the near 34-year age difference; the continuing saga with Rose; the shocking revelation of her ignorance of the Bible: these must just have put her out of Ruskin's mind. On her part, this may not have been the case; she never married, and from the letter of 1905 to Joan Severn we learn that soon after her father's death, in or about 1891,

I wrote a long letter to Sir Henry Acland putting on record the dates and circumstances of that good deed [Ruskin's offer of 1865 to bring her up], and asking him if he thought Mr. Ruskin were well enough to care, to communicate the letter or its purport. This letter was registered, and I told him if busy not to write. No answer came, and it was not until several years after that I learnt from his son of Sir Henry's own severe illness and other troubles about that time.⁴²

Again, alas, too late.

The *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* include an obituary, following her death on 24 August 1916, aged 63.

She was a woman of uncommon gifts of mind and heart, of great force of character, and of wide and discriminating generosity. She was a patron of literature, a warm supporter of Gaelic, and a wise friend

³⁹ Bradley, Ousby 1987, 313.

⁴⁰ Rhodes 1973, 116.

⁴¹ Research by Dr Eric Grant into Amy Yule's life has yet to yield a photograph or portrait of her; see 'Miss Amy Yule of Tarradale House, 1852-1916', <http://www.rossandcromartyheritage.org/Community/Muir-of-Ord/Folk.aspx>.

⁴² Amy Yule to Joan Severn, 12 January 1905; Morgan Library, New York, MA 3451. I am grateful to Dr Gill Mawby for supplying a transcript.

of education ... [it ends] As a final proof of her practical love for the advancement of learning, she bequeathed her beautiful home at Tarradale and her valuable library, together with funds for their maintenance, for the use of

students who are in need of a period of rest and change. Sadly, this enlightened idea lost favour with the University of Aberdeen, and the house was sold in 2003: it has now reverted to private ownership.

Abbreviations

Diaries 1959 = Evans, J.; Whitehouse, J.H. (eds). *The Diaries of John Ruskin*. Vol. 3, 1874-1889. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Memoirs of Sir Henry Yule 1903 = *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East. Translated and edited, with Notes, by Colonel Sir Henry Yule, R.E., C.B., K.C.S.L., Corr. Inst. France. Third Edition, Revised Throughout in the Light of Recent Discoveries by Henri Cordier (of Paris) ... with a Memoir of Henry Yule by his Daughter Amy Frances Yule L.A. Scot, Ant. Scot., etc.* 2 vols. London: John Murray.

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<https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/the-ruskin/the-complete-works-of-ruskin/>.

Works, 2: *Poems*. | 17: *Unto this Last, Munera Pulveris, Time and Tide, Other Writings on Political Economy (1860-1873)*. | 22: *Lectures on Landscape, Michael Angelo & Tintoret, The Eagle's Nest, Ariadne Florentina*. | 37: *The Letters of John Ruskin, II (1870-1889)*.

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