

From Ruskin's Amiens to Proust's Venice Reflections on the Diapered Screen

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Abstract The paper focuses on the first of Ruskin's two translations into French, *La Bible d'Amiens* (published in 1904, followed by *Sésame et les lys* in 1906), and on how Proust reshaped Ruskin's work in his lengthy introduction and copious footnotes. Proust chose to translate *The Bible of Amiens* in order to acquaint a French readership with Ruskin's only full-length study of France and French Gothic architecture, and also because Ruskin considered the work to be representative of his entire 'system'. This paper examines how Proust appropriates Ruskin's text, making it his own through the addition of his invasive critical apparatus. The fact that Proust started to work on *La Bible d'Amiens* when he was in Venice in 1900 casts an Italian hue on his version, which emphasizes the parallels Ruskin drew between the Venice of Picardy and the Queen of the Adriatic.

Keywords John Ruskin. Marcel Proust. The Bible of Amiens. La Bible d'Amiens. French Gothic architecture.

Summary 1. Translating Ruskin's Stones of Amiens. – 2. Reflections of Ruskin's Italy in Proust's Novel.

...those blessed days when with a few other disciples "in spirit and in truth" of the Master we went about in Venice in a gondola, listening to his predication at the water's edge, landing at each of the temples that seemed to rise from the sea, proffering the object of his description and image of his very thought, imparting such light to his books, as to-day sheds on them their immortal lustre.¹

The spirit and cadence of the epigraph could be ascribed to Ruskin, though in fact the lines were written originally in French, by Marcel Proust, as a footnote to his translation of *The*

¹ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 245-6: "...ces jours bénis où, avec quelques autres disciples 'en esprit et en vérité' du maître, nous allions en gondole dans Venise, écoutant sa prédication au bord des eaux, et abordant à chacun des temples qui semblaient surgir de la mer pour nous offrir l'objet de ses descriptions et l'image même de sa pensée, pour donner la vie à ses livres dont brille aujourd'hui sur eux l'immortel reflet". This footnote by Proust is from the translation of Nordlinger 1955, 61.

Bible of Amiens. The possible confusion about their authorship illustrates the formative role Ruskin played in Proust's writing and how he not only translated Ruskin texts but also transposed his texts into his own.

Proust discovered Ruskin in November 1893 when the first translated extracts of his work were published in the *Bulletin de l'Union pour l'action morale*. One of them ends with Ruskin's bidding in *St. Mark's Rest*:

Qu'aucun vrai disciple de moi ne soit « Ruskinien » pour toujours ; qu'il suive, non pas moi, mais l'impulsion de sa propre âme et la direction de son Créateur.

No true disciple of mine will ever be a 'Ruskinian'! – he will follow, not me, but the instincts of his own soul, and the guidance of its Creator.²

Proust appears to rewrite that quotation in the preface to his translation of *Sesame and Lilies*:

Et c'est là, en effet, un des grands et merveilleux caractères des beaux livres (et qui nous fera comprendre le rôle à la fois essentiel et limité que la lecture peut jouer dans notre vie spirituelle) que pour l'auteur ils pourraient s'appeler "Conclusions" et pour le lecteur "Incitations". Nous sentons très bien que notre sagesse commence où celle de l'auteur finit, et nous voudrions qu'il nous donnât des réponses, quand tout ce qu'il peut faire est de nous donner des désirs.

And there, indeed, is one of the great and marvellous features of beautiful books (and one which will make us understand the role, at once essential and limit-

ed, that reading can play in our spiritual life) which for the author could be called "Conclusions" and for the reader "Incitements". We are fully aware that our wisdom begins where that of the author ends, and we would like to have him give us answers, when all he can do is give us desires.³

Reading Ruskin instilled in Proust the desire to write, and this excerpt from his preface to *Sésame et les lys* (1906) shows how he reworked and overwrote Ruskin's texts.

Proust translated and heavily annotated two volumes of Ruskin's works: *The Bible of Amiens* (the French version was published in 1904), followed two years later by *Sesame and Lilies*. Before embarking on his *À la recherche du temps perdu*, he also penned two pastiches of Ruskin's style as a means of ridding himself of its influence. This paper will focus on his first translation and how he rewrote Ruskin's text by adding a preface of nearly a hundred pages and numerous footnotes such as the one cited above. A disciple of Ruskin's, Proust used his work as a framework on which to construct his *œuvre*. This study will examine how Proust's voice harmonized with the voice of the Master while revealing how he struck chords of dissonance in a vain attempt to silence the Ruskinian resonance in his work.

The subtitle of this paper – "reflections on a diapered screen" – echoes Ruskin's use of the term: according to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, it was originally the name of a textile "woven with patterns showing up by opposite reflections from its surface, and consisting of lines crossing diamond-wise, with the spaces filled up with parallel lines, leaves, dots etc."⁴ The word is also used to refer to the ground pattern in a painting or on a

² Works, 24: 371. French translation from *Bulletin de l'Union pour l'action Morale*, 15 November 1893, 48 (emphasis in the original).

³ Proust 1971, 176. Unless otherwise specified, translations are made by the Author.

⁴ SOED 1973, 1: 541.



Figure 1 John Ruskin, *The Ducal Palace, Venice*, 1835. In *Works*, 35: Pl. 8, facing 182. Scanned image and text by George P. Landow. <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/ruskin/drawings/14.html>

wall, for example when Ruskin describes the façade of the Ducal palace in Venice and its “the diaper pattern of the red and white marbles represented as a bold paneling in relief”.⁵ That quotation comes from the passage in *Praeterita* in which Ruskin relates his first visit to Venice and the drawing he did of the Doge’s Palace when he was seventeen, where the diaper pattern is evident [fig. 1]. Proust, who claimed to know *Praeterita* by heart, would have noted Ruskin’s use of the term “diaper”. Equally, he would have picked up the two instances when Ruskin used the word in his description of the Byzantine art and mosaics of the Basilica of St Mark’s in Venice:

Hence arose the universal and admirable system of the diapered or chequered background of early orna-

mental art. They are completely developed in the Thirteenth century, and extend through the whole of the fourteenth, gradually yielding to landscape and other pictorial backgrounds [...]. The whole space of the brick wall was considered as a background; it was covered with stucco, and painted in fresco, with diaper patterns.⁶

Venetian diapering provides a suggestive image of how, on the one hand, Proust constructed a kind of mottled screen through which we read Ruskin’s *Bible of Amiens* today and how, on the other hand, Proust made Ruskin’s works into a kind of patterned screen onto which he projected his multi-volume novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*). He first uses the term *dia-*

⁵ *Works*, 35: 182.

⁶ *Works*, 11: 26.

pré in its opening volume, when his young narrator reflects on his childhood reading:

Dans l'espèce d'écran diapré d'états différents que, tandis que je lisais, déployait simultanément ma conscience, et qui allaient des aspirations les plus profondément cachées en moi-même jusqu'à la vision tout extérieure de l'horizon que j'avais, au bout du jardin, sous les yeux, ce qu'il y avait d'abord en moi de plus intime, la poignée sans cesse en mouvement qui gouvernait le reste, c'était ma croyance en la richesse philosophique, en la beauté du livre que je lisais, et mon désir de me les approprier, quel que fût ce livre.

In the sort of screen dappled with different states of mind which my consciousness would unfold at the same time that I was reading, and which ranged from aspirations hidden most deeply in myself to the completely exterior vision of the horizon that I had, at the bottom of the garden, before my eyes, what was first in me, innermost, the constantly moving handle that controlled the rest, was my belief in the philosophical richness and beauty of the book I was reading, and

my desire to appropriate them for myself, whatever that book might be.⁷

Proust explains here how reading sets in motion a dynamic between the depth of the self and the outside world, and in this passage the diapered screen seems to be placed both at the back of the reader's mind's eye and on the horizon in front of his lifted eyes. The reader's desire to appropriate the philosophic wealth and beauty of the book he is reading simulates Proust's own experience of reading Ruskin. In a working version of this passage, Proust makes the link with Ruskin explicit by spelling out the book title *The Bible of Amiens*. In the same rough draft, he associates the book the young narrator is reading with other Ruskinian allusions – its “paysage montagneux d'eaux vives” (the mountain landscape with its flowing streams), the “grappes de fleurs” (the clusters of flowers) and the “collines boisées” (the piny hills) – which all figure in Ruskin's evocation of the Jura at the beginning of “The Lamp of Memory”, the penultimate chapter of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.⁸ The formative experience of reading is thus imprinted with Ruskin's texts, testifying to the fundamental importance they had on Proust.

1 Translating Ruskin's Stones of Amiens

The Bible of Amiens is an important, late contribution to Ruskin's work on the Gothic architecture of Northern France, an area which, “dull as it seems to most travelers”, was to him “a perpetual Paradise”.⁹ Proust managed to persuade the *Mercure de France* to publish his

French translation of the volume, stressing in a letter to its editor the importance of acquainting a French readership with what Ruskin had to say about their country and culture:

⁷ Proust 1913-1927, 1: 83. The quoted translation is from Lydia Davis (Proust 2002, 86).

⁸ The manuscript passages from Cahier 29 f° 82 r° are transcribed in Proust 1913-1927, 1: 753. Proust borrows from Robert de La Sizeranne's French translation of Ruskin in La Sizeranne 1909, 6-8.

⁹ *Works*, 6: 419.

Je prétends que si l'on ne devait traduire qu'un Ruskin, c'est celui-là ne fût-il pas le plus beau qui devrait être publié. Parce que c'est le seul qui soit sur la France, à la fois sur l'Histoire de France, sur une ville de France et sur le Gothique français. [...] Enfin vous savez que Ruskin le considérait comme tout à fait représentatif de son système.

I believe that if only one Ruskin volume were to be translated, it should be this one, even if it is not the most beautiful. Because it's the only one about France, that is about French history, a French town and French Gothic. [...] Finally, you know that Ruskin considered it as perfectly representative of his system.¹⁰

By 'system', Proust is probably referring to the conclusion Ruskin reaches at the end of *The Bible of Amiens*: "the Life, and Gospel, and Power of [the history of Christianity], are all written in the mighty works of its true believers [and] the simplest, completest and most authoritative in its lessons to the active mind of North Europe, is this on the foundation stones of Amiens".¹¹ As the editors of the Library Edition explain, Ruskin's aim was to revisit "some passages of early Christian history, in order to illustrate the spirit which lit the Lamps of Christian Architecture".¹²

Proust read *The Bible of Amiens* in Venice in the spring of 1900, and even inscribed the name of his hotel and his room number in his copy.¹³ He probably started on the project of translating it during that stay in Venice

which would explain why the critical apparatus he added to the translation has an Italian hue. Notably when he annotates Ruskin's third chapter entitled "The Lion-Tamer" about St Jerome, by adding a long passage from *St Mark's Rest* describing the Carpaccio frescoes depicting the life of the patron saint of translation. He echoes Ruskin's following instructions:

let your boatman take you across to San Giorgio Maggiore; there you can moor your gondola under the steps in the shade, and read in peace, looking up at the pillars when you like¹⁴

in his advice about where to read *The Bible of Amiens*:

Le meilleur endroit pour lire ce chapitre est l'église San Giorgio dei Schiavoni à Venise. On prend une gondola et dans un calme canal, un peu avant d'arriver à l'infini frémissant et miroitant de la lagune on aborde à cet "Autel des Esclaves" où on peut voir (quand le soleil les éclaire) les peintures que Carpaccio a consacrées à saint Jérôme.

The best place to read this chapter is the church of San Giorgio dei Schiavoni in Venice. You should take a gondola and, in a tranquil canal, a little before reaching the sparkling, shimmering expanse of lagoon, you will come to the "Shrine of the Slaves" where you will be able to see (when the sun illuminates them) Carpaccio's paintings related to St Jerome.¹⁵

¹⁰ Proust 1976, 3: 180.

¹¹ *Works*, 33: lx.

¹² *Works*, 33: lviii.

¹³ Proust's copy of *The Bible of Amiens* in the 1897 edition published by George Allen (London) is held in the *Département des Estampes* of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*. Proust wrote "Hôtel de l'Europe, 61" on the flyleaf of his copy.

¹⁴ *Works*, 24: 208.

¹⁵ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 219.



Figure 2 Notre-Dame d'Amiens. Photograph of a detail of the southern portal. Amiens. © Wikimedia Commons

Ruskin presents Amiens in relation to Venice, playing on its nicknames 'the Venice of France' and 'the Venice of Picardy' and, as Proust notes, illuminating the stones of northern France with a "un reflet magique d'Italie" (a magical reflection of Italy).¹⁶ At the beginning of the volume, Ruskin wonders what distinguishes the light and air in Amiens:

Why should this fountain of rainbows leap up suddenly here by Somme, and a little Frankish maid write herself the sister of Venice, and the servant of Carthage and Tyre?¹⁷

He further questions how the "Frankish maid" is related to her Venetian and classical counterparts. Ruskin focuses on the statue of the Virgin in the southern portal, "the pretty French Madonna" who is a native of Amiens, quarried from the local stone [fig. 2]. He uses the French word for a maidservant to characterize her as a "little white-capped Amienoise soubrette".¹⁸ A symbol of French Christianity, she supplanted Joan of Arc and represented "a merrier faith for France",¹⁹ though headed, according to Ruskin, towards the guillotine of the French Revolution. She typifies the Nurse-Madonna, or Madonna in decadence, traditionally represented by Raphael, but exemplified as "a good French type" here. At this point in his translation, Proust in-

tervenes in a footnote to add this quotation from *Modern Painters*:

the crowned Queen-Virgin of Perugino sank into a simple Italian mother in Raphael's Madonna of the Chair.²⁰

Ruskin had taken issue with Raphael who no longer considered art to be at the service of religion but used a religious subject as an excuse for his paintings, which he expressed in this chiasmus:

In early times art was employed for the display of religious facts; now, religious facts were employed for the display of art.²¹

According to Ruskin, this was emphatically not a "healthy change".²² Proust's footnote pointing to this assessment of Raphael exemplifies how he accentuated the Italian component of Ruskin's volume on Amiens, producing a multi-faceted text reflecting in various directions.

In addition to cross-referencing Ruskin's works, Proust also compiled a kind of encyclopedia of British culture so that his readers would understand Ruskin's references. He annotated his own copy with a question-mark next to the name 'Greatheart' indicating that it needed to be identified,²³ and added a footnote spec-

¹⁶ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 62.

¹⁷ *Works*, 33: 26-7.

¹⁸ *Works*, 33: 27.

¹⁹ *Works*, 33: 128.

²⁰ *Works*, 5: 78. Translated by Proust in footnote 2: Ruskin-Proust 1904, 323-4.

²¹ *Works*, 5: 77, emphasis in original.

²² *Works*, 5: 78.

²³ The annotation is made in Proust's copy, page 31 (see fn. 12).

ifying that he was a character from Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.²⁴ Similarly, he annotated Ruskin's reference to Thomas More:

Décapité en 1535, sur l'ordre de Henri VIII, pour avoir refusé de prêter le serment de suprématie.

Beheaded in 1535, under Henry VIII's orders, because he had refused to swear supremacy to him.²⁵

Proust was clearly targeting a French audience, not only filling in the gaps in their knowledge but also making them feel at home with the translation by punctuating it with references to their culture. He is so invasive that his notes often outweigh Ruskin's original text, as is the case on page 320 of the translation. Footnote one about the sculpted calendar is a lengthy extract from Mâle's *L'Art religieux du XIII^{ème} siècle en France* (French Religious Art of the Thirteenth Century). It is one of Proust's numerous "translator's notes" which frequently quote Mâle, thus framing Ruskin's text with a French critical apparatus. Mâle's emphasis on the humanity of the sculptures at Amiens resonate with Ruskin's own values:

Tout cela est simple, grave, tout près de l'humanité. Il n'y a rien là des Grâces un peu fades des fresques antiques : nul amour vendangeur, nul génie ailé qui moissonne. Ce ne sont pas les charmantes déesses florentines de Botticelli qui dansent à la fête de la Prima-

vera. C'est l'homme tout seul, luttant avec la nature ; et [l'œuvre est] si pleine de vie, qu'elle a gardé, après cinq siècles, toute sa puissance d'émouvoir.

All of that is so simple, earnest, and close to humanity. There is nothing of the somewhat insipid Graces of ancient frescoes: no Cupid gathering grapes, no winged genius harvesting. Neither are there Botticelli's charming Florentine goddesses dancing to celebrate Spring Awakening. It is man alone, fighting against nature, and the art work is so full of life that after five centuries, it has kept all its emotive power.²⁶

The footnotes on the opposite page of Proust's translation²⁷ pursue the idea that the sculptures reflect their location, focusing on the sculpted calendar of the months of the year coupled with the signs of the Zodiac above them. Proust again cites Mâle to make comparisons between the sculptures of Amiens cathedral and those of other French cathedrals, creating a kind of temporal calendar which maps their locations. In note three, he comments that in the month of March, "il n'est plus permis de rester au coin du feu" (sitting at home by the fire is no longer allowed), so the workers are depicted in the vineyards. The variation in climate between the regions accounts for the different stages in the agricultural cycle: in Chartres, the vine is being pruned, whereas in Amiens, the peasant is digging [fig. 3]. Proust cites Mâle's indication that there were vineyards in Amiens in the Middle Ages, even though they are not there anymore.²⁸

²⁴ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 129.

²⁵ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 181.

²⁶ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 320. Proust is quoting from Mâle [1898] (1948), 157.

²⁷ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 321.

²⁸ Mâle [1898] (1948), 149.



Figure 3 Notre-Dame d'Amiens Cathedral, Northern Porch. Detail of Zodiac signs and months of the year. From left to right: Aries, Taurus, Gemini (above); March, April, May (below). © Wikimedia Commons

In their edition of Ruskin's text, Cook and Wedderburn borrow that note from Proust²⁹ which, as well as several other references they make to Mâle, intensifies its French dimension.

Proust also refers to French painters, thus making the peritext he adds to Ruskin's original a kind of diapered screen decorated with French motifs. He recounts his Ruskinian pilgrimage to Amiens, revealing how the effects of the journey and the weather on the day he visited the cathedral modified his view of the cathedral. In this way, he seems to be following the precept Ruskin defines in *Modern Painters* when he writes:

If a painter has inventive power he is to treat his subject in a totally different way; giving not the actual facts of it, but the impression it made on his mind [...]. Now, observe, this impression on the mind never results from the mere piece of scenery which can be included within the limits of the picture. It depends on the temper into which the mind has been brought, both by all the landscape round, and by what has been seen previously in the course of the day.³⁰

Proust's sensitivity to how the light played on the cathedral's façade partakes in Ruskin's own preoccupations though he illustrates his point with reference to an artistic movement unknown to Ruskin, namely French Impressionism. Proust focuses on how the aspect of the cathedral changes at different times of day, invoking the notion of the colour of time which he equates with Monet's series of views of Rouen cathedral. This passage from Proust's introduction to his translation of *The Bi-*

ble of Amiens also pinpoints what Ruskin sees as an almost organic relationship between the cathedral and its natural setting, as Proust noted:

Ruskin ne séparait pas la beauté des cathédrales du charme de ces pays où elles surgirent.

Ruskin does not separate the beauty of cathedrals from the charm of the countries where they loom.³¹

Proust's remark on the light reflecting on the stones reads as a poetic definition of Monet's series depicting the façade of Rouen cathedral, where

Sur chaque pierre vous voyez la nuance de l'heure unie à la couleur des siècles.

On every stone you can see the shade of the hour blended together with the colour of the centuries.³²

Ruskin's work inspires Proust to write this passage of poetry in prose:

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 ca-

²⁹ *Works*, 33: 163, fn. 5

³⁰ *Works*, 5: 32-3.

³¹ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 68.

³² Ruskin-Proust 1904, 65.

thédrale, 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.

When you see the western façade of Amiens for the first time, blue in the mist, dazzling in the morning, drenched and lusciously gilded in the afternoon sun, rosy and already coolly nocturnal at sunset, at whatever hours its bells chime in the sky, and which Claude Monet has immortalized in his sublime canvasses, where this man-made creation reveals its life but which nature has reclaimed by immersing it in her, a cathedral, whose life, like that of the earth with its double revolution – unfolding over the centuries while renewing and completing itself every day –, then, releasing it from the changing colours in which nature envelops it, you will experience in front of this façade a confused but strong impression.³³

While the comparison he made with Monet was in keeping with Ruskin's artistic sensitivities, the analogy Proust drew between Ruskin and Gustave Moreau is strikingly heterogeneous given Moreau's mystic, oneiric, mythological qualities. Proust first drew the parallel in his article published in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* on 1 April 1900 and then repeats it in his preface to the translation of *The Bible of Amiens*:

Comme “Les Muses quittant Apollon leur père pour aller éclairer le monde”, une à une les idées de Ruskin avaient quitté la tête divine qui les avait portées et,

incarnées en livres vivants, étaient allées enseigner les peuples.

Like “The Muses leaving Apollo their father to go and enlighten the world”, one by one Ruskin's ideas had left the sublime head which had borne them and, embodied as living books, had gone forth to instruct the people.³⁴

The comparison is highlighted by its prominent position at the beginning of Proust's article, next to a photograph of Ruskin. At first sight, it is an incongruous juxtaposition: on the one hand, we have the portrait of the dour, earnest sage of Coniston and on the other, the languorous, homoerotic figure of Apollo [fig. 4]. Proust's image of the diffusion of Ruskin's weighty tomes as the diaphanous female muses surrounding Apollo is equally incongruous.

Proust himself questioned the pertinence of the comparison between Ruskin and Moreau, though he justified it on the grounds that both attached importance to symbolism, Moreau in his practice of art for art's sake, Ruskin as a devotee of the religion of beauty:

Il n'y a certes pas lieu de comparer Ruskin à Gustave Moreau, mais on peut dire qu'une tendance naturelle, développée par la fréquentation des Primitifs, les avait conduits tous deux à proscrire en art l'expression des sentiments violents, et, en tant qu'elle s'était appliquée à l'étude des symboles, à quelque fétichisme dans l'adoration des symboles eux-mêmes, fétichisme peu dangereux d'ailleurs pour ces esprits si attachés au fond au sentiment symbolisé qu'ils pouvaient passer d'un symbole à l'autre, sans d'être arrêtés par les diversités de pure surface.

³³ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 32.

³⁴ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 48.



Figure 4 Gustave Moreau, *Les Muses quittant Apollon, leur père, pour aller éclairer le monde*. 1868. 292 × 152 cm. Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau



Figure 5 Gustave Moreau, *Le jeune homme et la Mort*. 1865. 215.9 × 123.2 cm. Cambridge (MA), Fogg Art Museum

There are no grounds for comparing Ruskin to Gustave Moreau, but one may say that a natural tendency, developed through familiarity with the Primitives, had led both to proscribe the expression of violent feelings in art, and, in as much as this was applied to the study of symbols, to proscribe a certain fetishism in the worship of symbols themselves, not a very dangerous fetishism for minds so attached in reality to the feeling symbolized that they could pass from one symbol to another without being hindered by superficial diversity.³⁵

Proust draws on Moreau's symbolism elsewhere in the preface when he makes *The Young Man and Death* [fig. 5] into an image of Ruskin's senile insanity:

à l'extrême vieillesse, la pensée déserta la tête de Ruskin, comme cet oiseau mystérieux qui dans une toile célèbre de Gustave Moreau n'attend pas l'arrivée de la mort pour fuir la maison.

in very old age, thought deserted Ruskin's head, like the mysterious bird in a famous canvas by Gustave Moreau which does not wait for the arrival of death to flee from the house.³⁶

Picturing Ruskin as Moreau's ephebic young man standing at the door of the kingdom of death and crowning himself with Apollo's laurel leaves would indeed be surprising but Proust's attention here is focused on the bird taking flight which he reads as a symbol of Ruskin's mental state.

Proust had also associated Moreau with Ruskin's work in the preparatory notes of the preface to his translation.

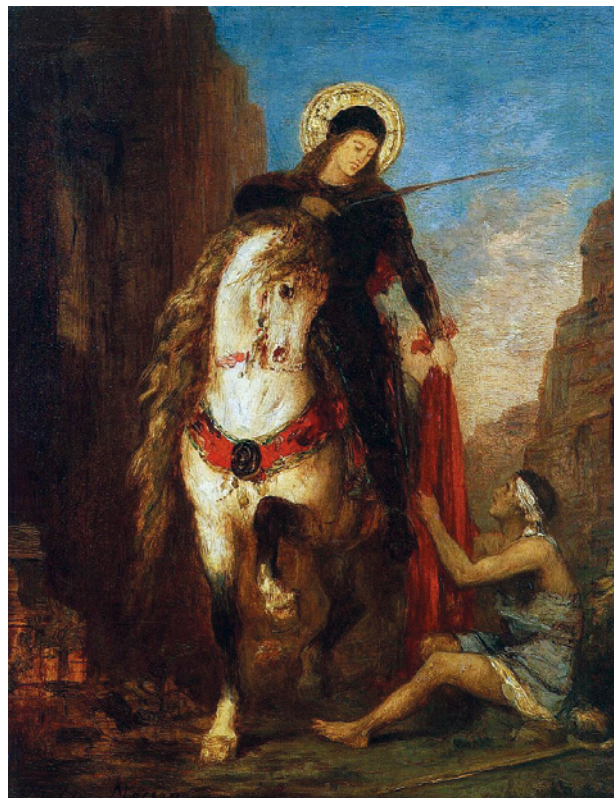


Figure 6 Gustave Moreau, *Saint Martin partageant son manteau*. 1882. Private Collection. © Wikimedia Commons

³⁵ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 64.

³⁶ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 25.

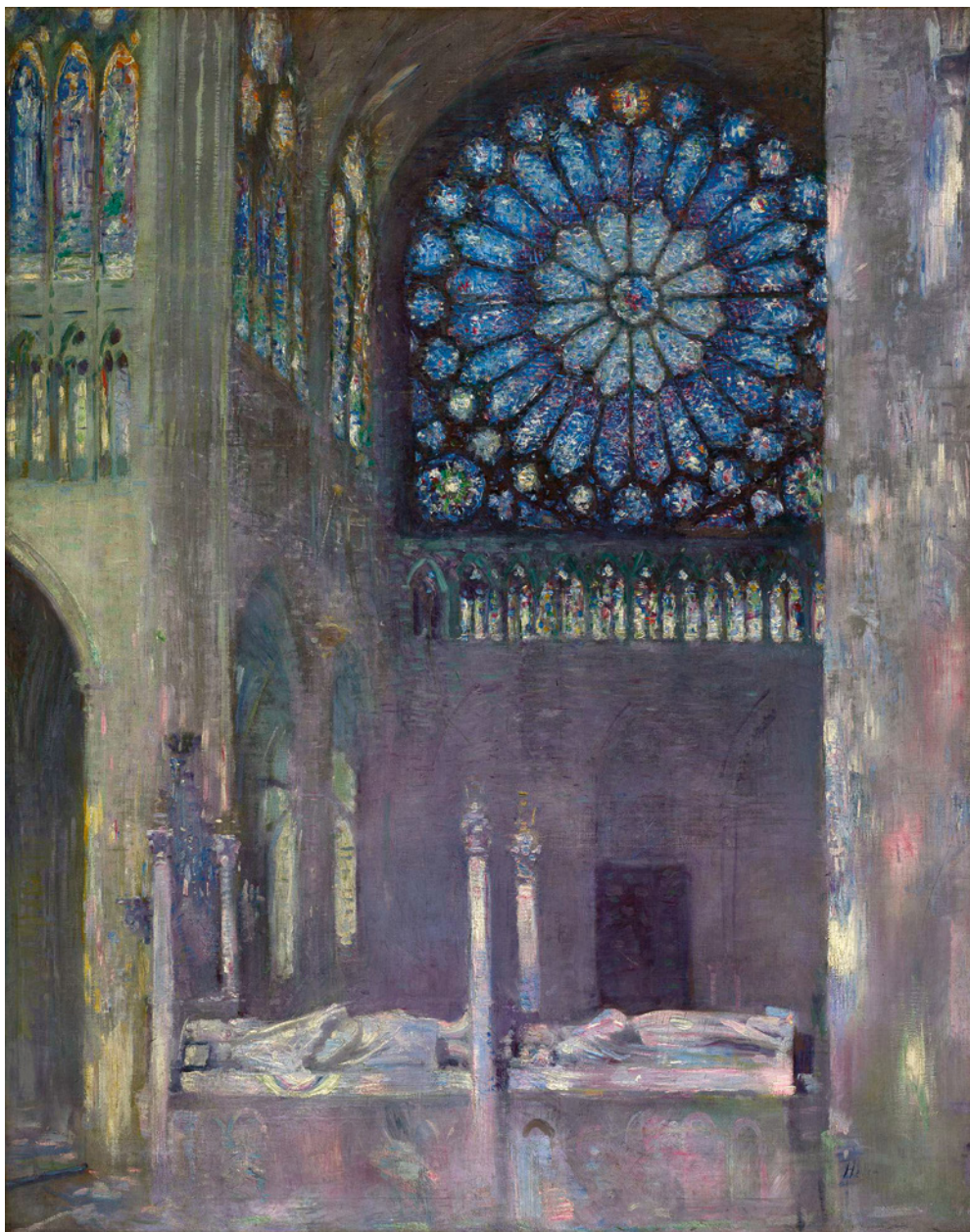


Figure 7 Paul César Helleu (1859-1927),
Intérieur de l'église abbatiale de Saint-Denis.
1891 ca. Oil on canvas, 194 × 155 cm.
Boston (MA), The Isabella Stewart Gardner
Museum. The Athenaeum.
[https://www.gardnermuseum.org/
experience/collection/10732](https://www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection/10732)

Commenting on the passage in which Ruskin relates how St Martin gave a cloak to naked man in Amiens [fig. 6], he wrote that we should go to St. Acheul church to find:

le souvenir de St. Martin auquel Ruskin a consacré des pages admirables que semble illustrer le charmant St Martin de Gustave Moreau.

a reminder of St. Martin about whom Ruskin wrote some admirable pages which Gustave Moreau's charming *St Martin* seem to illustrate.³⁷

Proust's use of the verb *illustrer* (to illustrate), though deleted from the final version, reveals how he drew on French culture to illuminate Ruskin's text, in the sense of "to shed light on".

Proust's reference to Paul Helleu (1859-1927), another French artist outside the corpus studied by Ruskin, again indicates how he wanted to break from the master's influence. Helleu is named in a footnote praising his depictions of the interior of cathedrals³⁸ in which he excelled in capturing the light of the stain-glass windows [fig. 7]. He was one of the models of Proust's fictitious painter Elstir, so his footnote not only recasts Ruskin's text as a work belonging to the aesthetics of the French *fin-de-siècle* but also foreshadows his own work.

Proust attempted in vain to break from Ruskin and tried to purge himself of his influence by parodying his style in his pastiches. He wrote a three-page pastiche of *Modern Painters* as a dedication to Jean Sardou, in the gift-copy of his translation of *Sésame et les lys*. In that unpublished pastiche is titled *Extrait de Ruskin* (Extract from Ruskin),³⁹ Proust compares the portrait of the ded-

icatee bathed in the Parisian evening light to paintings by Turner with the reflection of the sunset on the Salute in Venice. He imitates Ruskin's hyperbolic style and the condescending tone with which he addresses philistine English travelers:

Le plus remarquable Turner que je connaisse représente M. Jean Sardou sortant de l'Odéon dans la lumière oblique d'un de ces glorieux couchants qu'excelle à reproduire le peintre ; comme le jeune savant est placé devant l'entrée des artistes, le naïf spectateur anglais s'imagine que l'uniforme qu'il porte est un costume de théâtre, bien que cela ne soit pas. En réalité il n'est que la matérialisation, en moelleuses apparences de velours cerise, de ces rayons écarlates qui empourprent la Salute dans la Venise voisine et dans Didon à Carthage.

The most remarkable Turner I know depicts Mr. Jean Sardou leaving the Odeon theatre in the slanting sun-rays of one of those glorious sunsets which the English painter excels at reproducing; as the young scholar is positioned in front of the stage door, the naïve English spectator believes that the uniform he is wearing is a theatre costume, though it is not. In fact, it is merely the materialization in soft fabric looking like soft cherry-coloured velvet, of the scarlet rays which bathe in purple the Salute in the Venice nearby and in *Dido at Carthage*.

Through this play of light rebounding between Italy and France, Proust echoes the associations Ruskin establishes between the two countries. As Proust had noted in the

³⁷ Proust 1971, 755. For Ruskin's description of St Martin, see *Works*, 33: 41.

³⁸ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 32.

³⁹ This copy sold at Sotheby's in 2018. See <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2018/livres-et-manuscrits-pf1803/lot.154.html?locale=en>.

preface to his translation of *The Bible of Amiens*, Ruskin's thought moved seamlessly from one country to another, recognizing the unity of Christian art across Europe and highlighting how the architectural treasures of northern France cohere with the "bijoux éblouissants"

(dazzling jewels) of Italy.⁴⁰ Ruskin's achievement, according to Proust, was to have made the dream of the great popes of the Middle Ages a reality: through his appreciation of the arts, he succeeded in creating a "Christian Europe".⁴¹

2 Reflections of Ruskin's Italy in Proust's Novel

Proust's reading of Ruskin is imprinted in his novel and can even be felt in his choice of titles, as Proust's biographer George Painter suggests:

Ruskin had shown himself aware of Time Regained: it was a book whose very title, *Praeterita*, might be literally translated as "Things Past", or "*Temps Perdu*".⁴²

Jérôme Bastianelli has made a similar association between Ruskin's title *The Two Paths* and Proust's paired titles *Du côté de chez Swann* and *Le Côté de Guermantes*:

Selon l'explication qu'il en donne dans la préface, le titre, qui n'est pas sans rappeler "les deux côtés" de Combray, vient de l'objectif que se donne l'auteur : permettre au lecteur de choisir "entre deux types d'études, l'une menant à l'épanouissement, l'autre à l'asphyxie de ses facultés", et d'identifier "l'instant précis de la vie où la voie bifurque, un embranchement menant au mont des Oliviers, et l'autre à la vallée de la mer Morte".

According to the explanation Ruskin gives in the preface, the title, which anticipates the two "paths" in Combray, comes from the objective the author sets: to offer the reader the choice "between two modes of study, which involve ultimately the development, or deadening, of every power he possesses" and to identify "the hour and the point of life when the way divides itself, one way leading to the Olive mountains – one to the vale of the Salt Sea".⁴³

Proust's novel follows Ruskin in tracing the opposing the path of enlightening aesthetics and that of a sybaritic social life.

Recognizing his indebtedness to Ruskin, Proust clearly wanted to mark his departure from him, even degrading him in his novel by associating him with the pass-word to a male brothel.⁴⁴ One of Proust's characters also derides him by dubbing him "Lord John Ruskin" before calling him a "*sombre raseur*" (a deadly bore).⁴⁵ The only other two explicit references to Ruskin are more neutral, namely when he is called upon to motivate the young nar-

⁴⁰ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 61.

⁴¹ Ruskin-Proust 1904, 61.

⁴² Painter 1983, 265.

⁴³ Bastinelli 2017, 714. Quotations from *The Two Paths* (*Works*, 16: 253-4).

⁴⁴ Proust 1913-1927, 4: 411.

⁴⁵ Proust 1913-1927, 2: 99.



Figure 8 John Ruskin, *Ancilla Domini*, frontispiece of *Works*, 7. Drawing from the painting by Fra Angelico. <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/ruskin/drawings/33.jpg>

rator's trip to northern France,⁴⁶ and when the narrator recalls going to the Baptistry of St Mark's to work on Ruskin during his stay in Venice.⁴⁷

Even though he is not named more than four times in the several thousand pages of Proust's text, Ruskin's influence permeates it. One example echoing Ruskin's use of the word 'diaper' is the image of Florence at Easter conjured up by the narrator:

le rêve [...] du printemps le plus diapré [...], celui qui couvrait déjà de lys et d'anémones les champs de Fiesole et éblouissait Florence de fonds d'or pareils à ceux de l'Angelico.

[the dream of] the most dappled spring [...] the spring which was already covering the fields of Fiesole with lilies and anemones and dazzling Florence with golden grounds like those of Fra Angelico.⁴⁸

Proust's use of the word 'diapré' here resonates with Ruskinian overtones as he probably had in mind the diapered screen behind Fra Angelico's Madonna, which he knew thanks to Ruskin's drawing of it, reproduced as the frontispiece in *Modern Painters* volume five [fig. 8].⁴⁹

If Proust's text reflects images from Ruskin in this way, it refracts his prose in the sense that it modifies its sphere of reference. An eloquent example is when Proust

adapts Ruskin's passage in *The Stones of Venice* on how aspects of geology can be related to art and makes it into an image of memory. He first translates the following passage from Ruskin in a footnote to his translation of *The Bible of Amiens*:

The colours of marble are mingled for us just as if on a prepared palette. They are all shades and hues [...], some being united and even, some broken, mixed, and interrupted, in order to supply, as far as possible, the want of the painter's power of breaking and mingling the colour with the brush. But there is more in the colours than the delicacy of adaptation. There is history in them. By the manner in which they are arranged in every piece of marble, they record the means by which that marble has been produced, and the successive changes through which it has passed. And in all their veins and zones, and flame-like stainings, or broken and disconnected lines, they write various legends, never untrue, of the former political state of the mountain kingdom to which they belonged, of its infirmities and fortitudes, convulsions and consolidations, from the beginning of time.⁵⁰

He then highlights the significance of Ruskin's point when he works that quotation into the conclusion of the first part of his novel, *Combray*. He constructs his key passage on memory on an intertext which is Ruskinian

⁴⁶ Proust 1913-1927, 2: 9.

⁴⁷ Proust 1913-1927, 4: 224.

⁴⁸ Proust 1913-1927, 1: 379. Davis' translation from Proust 2002, 390.

⁴⁹ Proust knew the volume on Florence, published in the *Villes d'art célèbres* series in 1906, where the word 'diapré' is also used (Gebhart 1906, 6). The description of the Florentine hills include the anemones – though not the lilies – which flower in Proust's mind's eye: "Vers la fin d'avril, la colline apparaît diaprée, rayonnante ; les amandiers et les pêchers font pleuvoir sur les champs leur neige blanche ou rose ; les anémones, les iris, les œillets, les boutons d'or, les pervenches foisonnent le long des sentiers" (Towards the end of April, the hill has a mottled, radiant look: showers of white and pink snowflakes fall from the almond and peach trees; the pathways abound with anemones, irises, carnation, buttercups and periwinkles).

⁵⁰ *Works*, 11: 38. The footnote is in Ruskin-Proust 1904, 251.

both in essence and in the repetition of such terms as “marble”, “veins” and “colours”:

Tous ces souvenirs ajoutés les uns aux autres ne formaient plus qu’une masse, mais non sans qu’on ne pût distinguer entre eux – entre les plus anciens, et ceux plus récents, nés d’un parfum, puis ceux qui n’étaient que les souvenirs d’une autre personne de qui je les avais appris – sinon des fissures, des failles véritables, du moins ces veinures, ces bigarrures de coloration, qui dans certaines roches, dans certains marbres, révèlent des différences d’origine, d’âge, de “formation”.

All these memories added to one another now formed a single mass, but one could still distinguish

between them – between the oldest, and those that were more recent, born of a perfume, and then those that were only memories belonging to another person from whom I had learned them – if not fissures, if not true faults, at least that veining, that variation of colouring, which, in certain rocks, in certain marbles, reveal differences in origin, in age, in “formation”.⁵¹

Ruskin might not be named here, but Proust has clearly rewritten him in his French text. It illustrates how he built his cathedral of a novel using coloured and veined Ruskinian stones, making his prose radiate with reflections from Ruskin, like the gilt diapered screen in Fra Angelico’s Annunciation.

⁵¹ Proust 1913-1927, 1: 184. Davis’ translation from Proust 2002, 186.

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