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John Ruskin and Nineteenth-Century Education

Edited by
Valerie Purton
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Chapter 5

'A VERY PRECIOUS BOOK': RUSKIN’S EXEGESIS OF THE PSALMS IN ROCK HONEYCOMB AND FORS CLAVIGERA

Emma Sdegno

The work of Ruskin’s that focuses most clearly on books, on how to read, on what to read and how books should be disseminated is Sesame and Lilies (1865). The first of the three Sesame lectures, ‘Of Kings’ Treasuries’, concerns a project for the institution of public libraries that was finally to materialize ten years later in Bibliotheca Postuma, one of the many collective and educational enterprises undertaken for the Guild of St George. In this chapter I will examine Ruskin’s edition of the four classic volumes that comprise his ‘Shepherds’ Library’, concentrating particularly on Rock Honeycomb, an edition of a selection from the Sidney Poacher, and placing it within the context of his long-term interest in the Book of Psalms as a whole. Of the Holy Books, the Psalms, in which the Word is specifically and uniquely both a collective and a personal form of prayer, was a ‘very precious book’ for Ruskin. It repeatedly served him during the 1870s, a decade during which he was meditating on and testing his views on language, on poetry, on art and on man’s wider spiritual search. I shall focus especially on his ideas on translation as a development of a hermeneutic approach he had practised in Sesame, as a means of bringing life to a text. I shall subsequently refer to some Fors Clavigera letters of the same years, where his method of reading the Psalms in depth is applied also to human experience and to his own life, and sense is clarified through a process of expansion that provokes searching reflection. Ruskin’s massive and constant reference to the Bible and his application of Scripture to contemporary life have been recently explored by Zoe Bennett, who convincingly casts Ruskin as one of the leading ‘Practical Theologians’.

Bennett’s perspective is particularly relevant to my reading of Ruskin’s role for the Psalms in Fors Clavigera, as
lived with her father, and where Ruskin found a very poor library of cheap books of no interest to little girls (28.236). This romantic narrative, to which the editors of the Library Edition refer as the genesis of the project, should be taken not literally, but for the multilayered resonance typical of Ruskin remarked on by Dinah Birch; the semantic spectrum of the word 'shepherd' includes rural life as well as the figures of the religious guide, bishop, priest and pastor often directly referred to in the letters of these years. Ruskin had been reflecting upon this repeatedly in his writings ever since 'Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds', that controversial essay of 1851 the implications of which were broader and more complex than he had realized, and which were to surface often in his later works. Significantly in 1875 he republished this essay, announcing it in his January Fere in the context of a discussion on the prophetic office of priests (28.236), as a violent attack on the pious, and particularly on evangelicals, whom he frequently denounced in his later works – including Rock Honolulu.

In the mid-1870s Ruskin was revising his former evangelical positions in the direction of an ecumenical inclusiveness, and through his works aimed at broadening the horizons of his readers’ minds also. To this end he compares texts, also commissioning translations from archive materials from his pupils. After finishing work on Rock Honolulu in the summer of 1876, he was to spend the autumn and winter writing the Guide to the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice and St Mark’s Rest, works that fulfilled a need to voice and come to terms with forms of high religious praise, devotion and sacrifice, such as those he found in the stories of early saints and martyrs, and in their translations into words and paintings, such as Jacopo da Varignana’s Golden Legend and Vittore Carpaccio’s cycle of paintings of the life of St Ursula.

One of the major functions shared by the Bibliotheca Pistorum volumes is that of being a spiritual guide. This is self-evident in Xenophon’s Economist, a long-neglected work on household management, in Sir Herbert Edwardes’s life as a Christian military officer in the Punjab, as well as in Goethe’s ‘Ulrich the Farm Servant’. At first sight, this purpose does not seem to be directly shared by Rock Honolulu, the preface of which speaks of it as a music book for the children of St George’s Schools: ‘Every child should be taught from its youth, to govern its voice discreetly and dexterously, as it does its hands; and not be able to sing should be more disgraceful than not being able to read or write’ (28.107–8). Closer examination, however, shows Bibliotheca Pistorum, and particularly Rock Honolulu, to be connected to Soame and Lisias by links of a linguistic as well as a thematic nature. In particular, Ruskin’s analysis of Milton’s Lycidas’ lines 108–131, on bishops ‘blind mouths’, seems to resonate with passages in Rock Honolulu and in the letters of Fere Clarges of the years 1875–76. As I shall try to show in this chapter, the lines shine through
Ruskin's textual exegesis of the Psalms, and his reflections on the language of the Priest-Shepherd.

Like most of Ruskin's works, *Rock Homersum* cannot be considered independently, as if it were complete and self-sufficient. Not only is it unfinished — it was meant to be followed by a second volume — but also and more importantly it is strongly connected to other works Ruskin was writing at the time, and particularly to *Poe Cognata*. These letters, with their multiple overlapping patterns that disappear and intertwine with one another, provide an expansion of and a commentary on the Psalms, bringing them into the present time by means of examples that do not so much make plain as offer readings that displace and force reflection.

*Rock Homersum* was issued in June 1877, and directly engaged Ruskin as editor and commentator. It reveals involvement with a text that had grown over a long period of time and given unusually definite form to Ruskin's pervasive reading of the Bible and the Psalms. The book fits within the educational project that informs the mid-1870s, when Ruskin was focusing on the act of translation and ways of recovering the sense of an original.

Ruskin's preface to the version of Xenophontos' *Economia* he had subscription from two of his pupils closes with remarks on translation as a form of education that required a slow, careful lingering on words of a kind that had lately become outdated. He introduced his pupils' work starting from considerations about contemporary university education, the aim of which had 'entirely changed' (31.29). Ruskin recollects 'the ancient methods of quiet study', complaining that 'for discipline and intellect [...] there had been substituted hurried courses of instruction in knowledge supposed to be peculiarly profitable', and saying that the work of the two translators had been taken from their 'useful time' for their personal but not professional benefit (Ibid.). But Ruskin's words on the educational value of translation were to take on broader implications in his work as editor of the *Sidney Psalter*. In Ave 15 (September 1872), he explores the interconnectedness of language and ethical values within the scope of exegesis of Holy Scripture. Modern 'confusion between honest people and rogues', says Ruskin, originates from 'the orthodox Evangelical expression' for all men as 'worms', and 'is a result of peculiar forms of vice and ignorance [...] which belong to the Evangelical sect as distinguished from other bodies of Christian men; and date therefore, necessarily, from the Reformation' (27.650). He justifies this sour statement in a detailed explanation of this 'confusion':

They consist especially of three types: First, in declaring a bad translation the 'Word of God'. Secondly, reading of this singular 'Word of God', only the bits they like, and never taking any pains to understand even those. Thirdly, evidently refusing to practise even the very small bits they do understand, if such practice happens to go against their own words — especially money — interests (Ibid.).

That Ruskin had the Psalms in mind two years before starting work on the *Sidney Psalter* is evident from his insistence here that, the Book of Psalms was 'a very precious book', even though it was not the 'Word of God' but 'the collected words of very wise and good men' (Ibid.). In the same letter Ruskin refers to Sidney as a 'sphere' of his own time, whose love and religious poetry were one thing, and whose life and manners challenged Victorian and evangelical morality. 'How very wrong, you think', he rhetorically wonders, that the lovers of *Astrophil and Stella* were both married (27.654).

We find traces of Ruskin's extraordinarily deep reading of the Psalms also in his unpublished diaries of the mid-1870s. The year 1875 was one in which he took a special interest in the Psalms, as is testified by the massive notes in his MS diaries dating from June to August 1875, all left out of Joan Evans's edition. Starting from 3 June, he transcribed daily, for 15 days, the Collects from the Lincoln Psalter, a 14th century illuminated manuscript in Latin. He thus wrote down 16 different complete prayers from the Psalms. Mid-1875 was a particularly dramatic period for Ruskin. Rose La Touche, the girl he was desperately in love with, died that May. Her presence throughout the writings that follow is pervasive. It is particularly significant to find in the diary entries from 8 July notes taken daily from what he called the 'Blue Psalter', a precious old manuscript in Greek that, as an inscription testifies, he had given as a present to Rose, and which had been given back to him shortly after her death. The fact that he would daily transcribe passages from prayers in the book that had belonged to Rose encourages us to see this as a spiritual practice particularly and personally meaningful for Ruskin. In the months following her death he would interpret objects belonging to Rose as 'messages' charged with symbolic and metaphysical meanings.

The diary notes also certainly testify to a wish to appropriate an ancient form of Christian practice. The whole month of July is occupied in daily writing down prayers from the Greek Psalter, and from 29 July to 5 August he copied each day from a French book of hours of one of its seven daily prayers starting from Prime and ending with Compline. References to the Psalms in 1873–76 *Poe* as well as to his own annotated edition of the *Sidney Psalter* appear in 1877, whose preface was finished on 27 July 1876, should be considered as part of this daily reading and religious meditation. What these unpublished notes demonstrate is Ruskin's interest in early forms of prayer, an interest that fits within his broader research in the origins of Christian worship in art. These are mainly collective, community forms of devotion; the prayer Ruskin transcribes most frequently is the Collect, the one in which
Of the Psalter’s 150 Psalms, Ruskin published 44, including 11 by Mary, accompanying the text with a commentary comparing the English to the Greek and Latin versions. In his introduction and notes on single Psalms he lays down principles of translation that provide insights into his practice. Close mutual relations between the acts of making poetry and that of translating are foregrounded, carefully observed, and tested. ‘The main use’ of his edition ‘to modern readers’, he says, depended on their ‘fully understanding [...] the manner and melody of these ancient paraphrases’ (31.114).

Ruskin probably knew Dante’s words in The Cannocchial about the inevitable failure of all attempts at translating the Psalms, the impossibility of rendering the melodic and rhythmic components he calls ‘il legame musicale’, the musical connection. ‘And this is the reason why’, says Dante, ‘the verses of the Psalter are without the sweetness of music and harmony, for they were translated from Hebrew into Greek, and from Greek into Latin, and in its first translation all their sweetness perished.’ Dante’s idea of translation was typically medieval. Ruskin seems to agree with him when he says English versions had generally failed to render meaning because they missed the music. But he believes it was possible to recast poetry in another language, as Sidney’s endeavour demonstrated. For Ruskin, Sidney’s version rooted Hebrew in English forms. As such it was not an individual act, but rather the outcome of a collective national enterprise. Ruskin seems to draw our attention to the way these paraphrases had enlarged the boundaries of the English language when he says that if the original is rough and harsh, Sidney does not use ‘gentile language’, but ‘any cowboy or tinker’s words, if only they help him to say precisely in English what David said in Hebrew’ (31.116–17). The faithful translator follows the register of the original, even though apparently inappropriate, upsetting and puzzling. He thus forces uncouth terms into the language, infusing English, and its religious language in particular, with new vigour.

To get closer to the original is also to gain perspicacity and greater clarity of expression, qualities attained, explains Ruskin, by applying the principle of parallelism that informed the original. This is the pattern Sidney restored and onto which he wove his amplificative ‘illustrations’. Translation reveals latent and ambiguous meanings by making them intelligible.

While the modern paraphrase will put in anything that happens to strike his fancy, to fill the flag-end of a stanza, but never thinks of expanding or illustrating the matter in hand, Sidney, if the thought in his original appears to him pregnant, and partly latent, instantly breaks up his verse into framer and fuller illustration; but never adds a syllable of any other matter, to fill even the most hungry gap of verse. (31.117)
Ruskin points at Sidney's Psalter as a poetic illustration and clarification that ultimately reveals what had been dim and mysterious in the original and had been often obscured by subsequent versions. By translating the Hebrew word into his own language, the English poet becomes thus a prophet-like figure. And the prophetic function seems to be implied in the Rock Hebrew collection, from which Ruskin states he had omitted components in which 'there was no manifest gain' (31.118). The Sidney Psalter is a poetical and musical amplification of the word of David - whose paternity of the whole work Ruskin does not question - and translation proves to be a stage in progressive revelation of that word. Indeed, Ruskin points out that the value of the Psalter rests also on its theological accuracy, that its educational relevance is also ethical and religious. This relevance had, however, been lost in modern times, as a result of confusing transpositions into English of the precise Hebrew terms corresponding to 'vice' and 'virtue', 'piety and 'atheism', a problem that, as we have seen, he had also tackled in 1875 in a letter 35 of Ret Clergy, where he attributes this confusion to post-Reformation evangelicism. The snare of misinterpretation also occurs, almost systematically, in the Book of Common Prayer, whose 'explanatory argument' that introduces - and obscures - each Psalm flattens and deviates from its original sense.

Whereas in the preface Ruskin had laid down the principles that more or less fit within his broad romantic view of translation, in the commentaries on individual Psalms he is much more objective and focuses on specific choices made by the poet. He praises Sidney, but often notes flaws, either questioning his authorship or attributing them to his youth and lack of experience of a sense of doom (Psalm 1) or of being forgotten by God (Psalm 11). Interestingly, his comments on the Psalms generally attributed to Sidney are thick with references to shortcomings, while the Psalms from number 44 on, which are attributed to Mary, are all almost always described as excellent. This is yet another implicit demonstration of his unacknowledged appreciation of them. If in Rock Hebrew Ruskin 'hoped to reromanticize his readers to the roots of authentic Christian spirituality [...]',31 as Andrew Tate maintains,31 he does so by reviving not only the Psalms' religious and ethical messages, but also their language, their musical and poetic qualities in the process of transmission of the original word, ultimately considering Psalms as an. In a well-documented but neglected essay, J. C. A. Rachmull points to the novelty and relevance of Ruskin's operation in reviving the Sidney Psalter, seeing it as 'crucial to our understanding of the development of metaphysical poetry, but also to our appreciation of Hopkins's study of Miltonic prosody and the evolution of his own self-styled "spring rhythm".32 Rachmull, who also published an edition of the Sidney Psalter,33 appreciates Ruskin's notes as well as the essay 'On Sidney's Metres' that praises Rock Hebrew, and praises the precise fidelity with which the Sidney Psalter penetrates through the often-turbid prose of the Coverdale and Geneva Bibles to extract the very accent of the Hebrew Psalms'.34 Rachmull points out that between 1865 and 1875 authors as various as Ruskin, Patmore, Hardy, and Hopkins 'independently through study of medieval Latin hymns, old French canticles, or Elizabethan psalmody [...] rediscovered the harmonic importance of stress in English poetry',35 attributing it a 'strictly religious character'.36 The roots of modernism should, he argues, be reconsidered in the light of the influence that this set of new texts brought to end-of-century English literature.

In maintaining the ground-breaking importance of Ruskin's edition of and commentary on the textuality of the Psalms, Rachmull's essay focused extensively on the sound and musical qualities to which Ruskin's edition of the Psalms sensitized his audience. His commentaries seem to offer further hints at the modernity of Ruskin's thinking on the process of translation that are worth exploring. However typically unsystematic, they are once again pioneering. Ruskin's work on the Sidney Psalter is the outcome of a complex cross-referencing between the Coverdale, Geneva, the Book of Common Prayer, The Septuagint and Latin versions, a philological enquiry that led him to new readings. In their lengthy exegetes Victorian commentators - such as Spurgeon's comprehensive The Treasury of David - did not question the translation tradition, relying on Coverdale and the AV. Ruskin, on the other hand, treads a still largely unexplored interpretative path, trying to recover the original sense from careful reading and comparison of versions.38 He does not talk about the Sidney Psalter as translations, but as paraphrases. In this he seems to subscribe to a definition of paraphrase given by Dryden: unlike metaphor and imitation, it is 'a translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not strictly followed as his sense, and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered.'37 Ruskin attributes to Sidney's paraphrases something more when he describes the translation process as the final stage of a reformed act of interpretation.

Ruskin had focused on this practice in a key meta-critical essay in Sensus and Libros, where he described the workings of language as an act of translation essential to the construction of meaning. In the first Sensus lecture, 'Of Kings' Treasures', he had famously offered a superb example of hermeneutic reading in his exegesis of Lyricus II, 108-31, an exegesis that connects the Sensus lecture to Rock Hebrew in various ways. In Milton's pastoral monody these lines, attributed to St. Peter, contain an extended invective against corrupt bishop-pastors. Ruskin selects and magnifies the passage as both thematically and linguistically significant - the two levels being tightly interconnected. Milton's lines on the subject of corrupt and true bishops,
dense with theological significance, are investigated and questioned word-by-word in an interpretation that tends to dissipate partisan sectarian readings:

First, it is not singular to find Milton assigning to St. Peter not only his full episcopal function, but the very types of it which Protestants usually refuse most passionately? His - mitred Aticks Milton was no Bishop-lover; how comes St. Peter to be - mitred? - Two tiny keys he here. Is this, then, the power of the keys claimed by the Bishops of Rome? [...] Do not think [...] Milton means what he says; [...] for though not a lover of fake bishops, he was a lover of true ones; and the Lakepolice is here, in his thoughts, the type and head of true episcopal power. [...] Puritan though he be, he would not blot it out of the book because there have been bad bishops, nay, in order to understand him, we must understand that verse first. (18.70)

Then his famous excavation into the 'blind mouth' oxymoron in L. 113 is explained with the vigour of an equation: 'Those two monosyllables express the precisely accurate contraries of right character, in the two great offices of the Church — those of bishop and pastor' (18.72). Ruskin exercises his interpretative skills on the poem's dense interlinguistic fabric, and invites the reader to ponder carefully every word, discover its etymological roots, mining and bringing its gold to the surface. He aims at broadening the reader's cultural horizons, and at the same time puts the interpreter in a 'submerged' position: 'go to the author and find his own meaning rather than yours', he urges the reader, 'watching every accent and expression, and putting [yourself] always in the author's place, annihilating [your] own personality, and seeking to enter into him, so as to be able assuredly to say, - Thus Milton thought, not - Thus I thought, in mis-reading Milton. And by this process you will gradually come to attach less weight to your own' (18.75). If in his Lyside reading Ruskin had united the knot of the 'blind mouth' oxymoron, grounding his hermeneutic act on the original sense of the words in the author's sense - 'as the gold, say, dug out of the mine - in Book Honeycomb he fingers on the way that gold is brought to light and wrought into the rich fabric of Sidney's Psalms.

Ruskin repeatedly gives instances of Sidney's use of amplification, a widely recognized stylistic feature of his translations. Numerous amplificatory passages refer to contemporary England; others, significantly, to plainness of speech as a feature of God's word, as in Psalm 5, where 'make thy way straight before my face' (L8) in the AV becomes

Guide me, in thy justice; be my guide!  
And make thy ways to me more plainly known,  
For all I need, that with such foes do bred: (R 22-24)

Plainness and clarity are also features of Sidney's theological language. Ruskin points out that the value of his Psalter rests also on its theological accuracy, implying that poetry, music and faithfulness to the original are all to be preserved in translation. This can be attained by faithful transposition of the original meaning of words, while obscurity is the deceitful language, typical of that employed by modern political economists.

Language and Labour: The Psalms in Fors Clavigera

Ruskin rightly notices amplification as a major feature of Sidney's translations, and amplification is also one of his own major rhetorical strategies. It is in *Fors Clavigera* that we find his most virtuoso expansions. In some of the letters he wrote in the mid-1870s, extended readings of Psalms are placed within the frame of his larger discourse on education, work, art, community life. In these letters he draws ethical and social lessons from episodes of contemporaneous life, combining them with sacred and literary sources in a typically overlapping, hyperbolic and provocative manner. The hazardous nature of such associations in *Fors*, a text that is both 'multiple' and 'seamless', has tended to obscure the soundness of his interpretations and the care with which he searches for meaning. *Fors* 53, issued in May 1875, illustrates this well. In this letter Ruskin provides an extended analysis of and comment on Psalm 8 in which he sifts through different versions of the text and brings to light unpredictable yet convincing connections to labour, education and the purposes of the Guild of St George. Zoé Bennett, in her study of Ruskin's 'practical theology', has described this method as a 'hermeneutic of immediacy', 'laying alongside, by analogy without mediation'. Juxtaposition of texts does not aim 'primarily [...] to prove a particular prescriptive point or to trump other texts: he is working by resonance and analogy to open up our imagination and provoke involvement. The letter starts by mentioning a correspondent who had put it into his 'mind at once to state some principles respecting the use of the Bible as a code of law, which are vital to the action of the St. George's Company in obedience to it' (28.319), and who makes two important comments on Psalms 119 and 8, comments to which I shall dedicat the rest of this chapter.

The whole of letter 53 can be read as a thorough reflection on language. The reference that sets the key is to St. Mark's Gospel (14:11-12) where Jesus says he uses parables to talk about the 'mystery of the Kingdom', 'so that, hearing they might not understand', and plain speech only to his disciples (28.326). Ruskin interprets this notion of obscure language not as implying a divine purpose within an eschatological plan, but as totally dependent on its addressees. In other words, God's teachings are only 'mysterious' and
find, it seems to me, various implicit references to Spurgeon’s *The Treasury of David*, a commentary on the Psalms that appeared weekly from 1865 to 1885. Spurgeon’s reference in this context and in relation to his attack on evangelicalism bears a hidden reference to Rose’s *Teahe*, in my view, as it was this fundamentalist preacher who had converted Rose’s father to Baptist Evangelicalism in 1863 and nurtured the religious zeal that had devastating effects on Rose.22 Of verse 2, “Out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger”, Ruskin says that the translation in the *Book of Common Prayer* failed to clarify its sense and was confused by misleading examples. The sense of the verse is that the strength and power of children are all in their innocence, an innocence that allows them to recognize Christ as in Matthew xxii.1. Contemporary readings of the Psalm— and here the reference to Spurgeon’s commentary seems to be clear, though veiled — interpreted it by reporting “amazing instances of the testimony” of children’s self-sacrifice and martyrdom.23

A further emphasis concerns in verse 3 the use of the verb ‘ordained’ for Latin ‘fundare’, meaning ‘to found’ or to set the foundations, to place the stars and the moon firmly in space. On the whole we can say that his version points to the extraordinary nature of God, and at the same time to a language that is not abstract and hierarchial, but physical and rooted in experience. Thus ‘mindful’ in verse 4 does not imperfectly render the sense of ‘look on’, ‘watch’, ‘visit’ in the original. The image of God that Ruskin provides is more ‘fleist’ and closer to man, the most fragile creature in the universe and the one closest to God.

Psalm 8 celebrates the wonder of God and the power of man on earth as His creature. Ruskin expands on this, seeing the seal of God as manifest in man’s perceptions and feelings — in the ‘perception of evil’, ‘joy in love’, ‘agony in anger’, ‘indignation in injustice’, ‘glory in self-sacrifice’ (28:330). If men rule the earth according to these feelings, they will be godlike, beneficent and authoritative, and the name of God will become ‘hallowed’ to them, admired and wonderful; but if they forget them they will be false disciples, and will abuse his name, make it ‘unholy and unadmirable’ (ibid.). Ruskin attributes an ethical role to feelings, thus opposing the sense of omnipotence the Psalm had encouraged.24 His reading also avoids a Christological interpretation of famous verse 4: “what is the man that thou art mindful of him?” Many commentators, including C. H. Spurgeon, have seen in that man the figure of Christ.25 Not so Ruskin, who rather transposes the singular to the plural — when men rule the earth rightly [...]” (31:328). Through this shift, men, as a collective body, are the fragile though omnipotent lieutenants of God, as implied in a subsequent reference to the third letter of Pope’s *Essay*
on Man. Pope's passage examines the role of the individual in society, tracing the origins of civilizing institutions, such as government and the class system, in animal life. This occasions reflection on how man may find his way to happiness in this world; by shifting the focus from Pope's concern with the interaction between selfish motivations and altruistic impulses in individuals, Ruskin points out that instinct-based actions lead to good and great works. He privileges instinct over reason and shortens the distance between man, and all living beings. Through Psalm-reading the 
Per letter orients discourse towards education and labour. Ruskin does not take up a Christological reading of the Psalm, for his is a Fallen man. He seizes the sense of the word contained in the Hebrew benadam, that is, man in weakness and fragility, in his existence and historicity. This is also the sense of man in Pope's poem, where the individual detached from his original condition is social. Just as 'cowardice' was the characteristic of all great nations at their beginnings, says Ruskin, that condition could be redeemed through labour – an attitude of devotion and humility exerted in work being 'our first duty'. Only through human labour does the majesty of God pass into men, for it is the essential condition of happiness, 'of our faculties and felicities', of men's full realization 'making men little less than angels' – 'without that labour, neither reason, art, nor peace, are possible to man.'

Labour is also the link connecting man with the lower creatures and the means to 'kindle Spiritual life' (ibid.). Ruskin here adjusts his earlier ideas of work, ideas that had been contradictory and controversial. In Pari Changa and in conjunction with the work experiments promoted by the Guild of St George, his views became more defined and more positive. Commenting on the Pari 53 passage quoted above, P. D. Anthony maintains that it reveals the complexity of his view of work and suggests some reasons why it is an essential part of the process of education; it implies a defence of manual labour and provides the theoretical grounds for Ruskin's attack on machinery. In a subsequent passage Anthony contrasts Ruskin's Gothic with Pater's Renaissance conception of work, saying that 'Ruskin is nearer to a medieval conception of work, that it represents man's imperfection, his animal-like nature as well as his divine aspiration, his grotesque crudity as well as his spirit, his suffering as well as his salvation'. If read in its original context of a commentary on Psalm 8, however, labour is rather a means of connection, drawing a line of continuity through creation. Ruskin's philological reconstruction of the original meaning of the Psalm on the splendour and majesty of God to man terminates with an exaltation of labour. This anticipates subsequent Per letters that touch upon the interconnectedness of manual labour and intellectual work in a cooperative social system. He states this repeatedly in Per's own multiple discourse. In letter 55 Ruskin provocatively imagines 'simple' and 'refined' work not to be divided but 'collated' in individuals of all social classes. Here too he refers to Philip Sidney, hypothetically wondering whether, had he 'been also taught the art of making brooms', time would have been left 'to the broom-makers of his day for the fashioning of sonnets [...] or the reading of more literature'? But it is in the following Per letter that he takes up the subject once more in the form of a childhood recollection during his European journeys. And in this letter the Psalm resounds again, this time leading Ruskin to paint a puzzling self-portrait of himself as a little boy, and to reflect ironically on his own early evangelical upbringing and on the shepherd-bishop that he was expected to become, a little jolly figure, trotting in its easy chair, [...] a living diamond, without which the watch of the world could not possibly go', a kind of Almighty Providence in its first breeches, by whose tiny hands and infant foot the blessings of food and raiment were continually provided for God's Spanish labourers in his literal vineyard; for God's English sailors, seeing his wonders in the deep; for God's tailors' men, aiming in attitude of Chinese Josh for ever; for the diversly appointed wheathers, carpenters, horses and riders, lords and Guzermine-hoats, necessary to my triumphal progress and for my nurse behind in the dickey. And it never once entered the head of any aristocratic person – nor would ever have entered mine, I suppose, unless I had "the most analytical mind in Europe," – that in verity it was not I who fed the nurse, but my nurse me; and that a great part of the world had been literally put behind me as a dickey. – and all the aforesaid inhabitants of it, somehow, appointed to be nothing but my nurses; the beautiful product intended, by papa and mamma, being a Bishop, who should graciously overlook these tribes of inferior beings, and instruct their ignorance in the way of their soul's salvation. (28.393-4)

Ruskin's reference to the Psalms is pervasive. In Per it is not content within the pages of a single letter, but is protracted over various numbers, forming an ongoing discourse with his readers, and with and about himself. A discourse that unfolds dynamically over time on community aims and intimate emotions, the Guild and Rose. As the Psalms are both collective and personal prayers, Ruskin talks through them both of his community of readers, and of to himself. Dinah Birch has maintained that the literary experimental method Ruskin developed in Per 'allowed him to be at once public and private, self-efficacious and self-involved'. It seems to me that the frequent occurrence of the Book of Psalms in these letters should be related also to their uniquely constitutive public and private language.
Notes

1 See Roland Greener, 'Sir Philip Sidney's Psalms, the Sixteenth-Century Psalter, and the Nature of Lyric', Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900, Vol. 30, no. 1, 'The English Renaissance (Winter, 1990), 19–40 (23): 'Tossing gently, the psalms generally belong at the most 'o:persive or performative end of the spectrum that runs from ritual to fiction, for they allow or better, require the reading voice to assume the identity of their repeated speaker'.

2 Zoe Bennetts, Using the Bible in Practical Theology: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

3 For a synthetic account of the stages of this project see 31:8ii-s.


5 John Ruskin, Diary, 1875, RF MS 20, Ruskin Foundation (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University) 6–13.


7 The Poacher and Horse (1775–1300) is now at Brussels, in the Bibliotheque Royale. The catalogue notes say 'That Ruskin called this his "Blue Plater" may indicate in previous binding may also have been blue in color. Written in a bold Gothic hand, 24 loose-leaf shaped miniatures on gold grounds in Calceus, The prayer beginning Ave rose floris / Et revel linguis [fol. 257] no doubt made this MS a particularly appropriate gift for Rose in JRR's eyes [Dearden], [...] Inscribed by Ruskin 'Present with St. C's love, 5 January 1862'. Evidently returned to Brantwood from Rose's La Touche, probably following her death on 26 May 1875. J. A. Dearden, 'John Ruskin the Collector', in The Library, 5th ser., 21 (1996), no. 32. http://dla.library.qub.ac.uk/cocoon/dla/schoenberg/record.html?id=SCHOENBERG,22355. Accessed on 8 February 2017.

8 See in particular, Tucker, 'On atomic explosives', 28–33.

9 John Ruskin, Diary, 1875, RF MS 20, Ruskin Foundation (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University), 19–20.


14 Andrew Tate, 'Sweeter than your Money', 'John Ruskin and the Psalms', The Bibliob of English Studies, 39, no. 1/2, Literature and Religion 2000, 114–25 (123).

15 J. C. A. Rathmell, 'Exploitations and Recoveries', 51.


17 Rathmell, 'Exploitations and Recoveries', 60. Rathmell points out that the use of the Tremellian Bible, enabled Sidney to approximate closely to the original language as well as to perceive the Psalms 'as actually rhetorical poetry', 55.