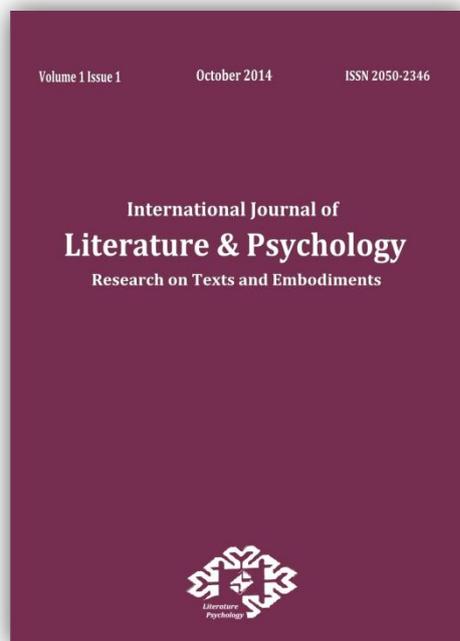


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Ruskin, Burne-Jones, and Mythological
Embodiments of the Pain of Absence**

Cristina Pascu-Tulbure

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Author:

Cristina Pascu-Tulbure is a researcher of Victorian Literature, Art, and Culture. Her major areas of interest are nineteenth-century aesthetics, the work of John Ruskin, and the relations between Victorian literature and the visual arts. She has reviewed for and published articles in *The Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society*.

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In Search of Persephone: Ruskin, Burne-Jones, and Mythological Embodiments of the Pain of Absence

Cristina Pascu-Tulbure

Abstract

The personal and intellectual friendship between John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98) is well documented up to the mid-1870s, when the evidence of keeping regularly in touch grows scarcer and the critic's patronage of the artist becomes less prescriptive. But the relative lack of hard evidence testifying to their enduring friendship after this date is misleading. As Ruskin and Burne-Jones grow older, traversing difficult periods of emotional and artistic uncertainties, they continue – and even take this process to new levels – to find both solace and new energies in each other's work. I discuss particular areas of the friends' imaginary worlds where they explored ideas, motifs, and scenarios, which finally crystallized into coping mechanisms designed to alleviate Ruskin's despair over his unfulfilled love for the young Irish girl, Rose La Touche (1848-75) who, he hoped, would one day be his wife. The unifying principle of these explorations is the myth of Persephone, re-visited and re-interpreted by Ruskin in *Modern Painters II* (1846), *Munera Pulveris* (1862-63), *The Queen of the Air* (1869), *Fors Clavigera* (1871-1884) and *Proserpina* (1875-86). Burne-Jones responded to his friend's re-interpretations in the *Legend of Good Women* tapestry 1863 series from which the drawings of *Chaucer Asleep*, *Amor and Alcestis*, and *Hypsipyle and Medea* were developed, *The Wine of Circe* (1869), various versions of *The Rape of Proserpine* (1883-84), the design for the Whitelands hawthorn cross (1883), and the *Briar Rose* series (1871-90). The artist's responses suggest not only an empathic participation in his friend's dealings with personal loss, but also a desire to construct symbolic representations inspired by it; An artistic performance carried out in the hope that visualization and different perspective could offer a solution to break the obsessive hope-and-despair cycle which blighted Ruskin's emotional sanity to the end of his days.

Key Words: Beauty, Burne-Jones, despair, emotional, loss, love, pain, painter, Ruskin.

The tremendous – and, at times, rather forceful – impact that John Ruskin (1819-1900) put on the early career of Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), helping the painter to find new directions away from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's mannered Pre-Raphaelitism (developing his own distinctive artistic idiom) is well documented. The subtler, yet equally strong influence Ruskinian thought exercised, beginning with the 1870s, on Burne-Jones's *opus magnum* and artistic manifesto, *The Briar Rose* series (1864-1895), is a less familiar territory. I showed elsewhere¹ that, in the context of the intellectual and personal friendship between critic and artist, the later versions of *The Briar Rose* emerge as both a modern artistic statement which challenges, even as it acknowledges, Ruskin's teaching, and as a direct response to Ruskin's agony over the loss of Rose La Touche (1848-1875), the woman he hoped “would have been [his] wife.”²

The sources which feed into *The Briar Rose* are multiple and diverse. They include Ruskin's work on mythology; his interpretation of Jacopo della Quercia's fifteenth century funeral monument for Ilaria di Caretto (Lucca Cathedral) and of Vittore Carpaccio's *Dream of St Ursula* (1495, Accademia, Venice); and, of course, Burne-Jones's own personal anxieties about losing the affection of his friend Frances Horner and undivided attention of his daughter Margaret, both of whom got married in the 1880s. But *The Briar Rose* was also

shaped by Ruskin's and Burne-Jones's concurrent attempts to make sense of personal loss through the symbolism of sleep, death, and revival, which slowly crystallized around the myth of Persephone, or Proserpine, as Ruskin preferred to call her. The bold statement which *The Briar Rose* makes about the nature of art and the condition of the modern artist partly owes its vigour to the fact that Burne-Jones finally conceived the series as an alternative to the myth of Persephone. This was his debt of profound friendship to the critic and patron, whom he could no longer bear to see tormenting himself with visions of temporary happiness – forever in the shadow of loss.

The Briar Rose could only achieve its final form when Ruskin and Burne-Jones had explored the myth of cyclical death and revival to the bitter end. In the process, inhabited many scenarios through which they attempted to come to terms with the loss or absence of a loved one. The idea embodied in the Persephone myth, that youth and beauty contain – even before they peak – the germ of death and destruction, helped Burne-Jones through the heartache of his affair with artist and model Maria Zambaco. But here, I am mostly concerned with how Ruskin attempted to reconcile himself with the loss of Rose, at times either too ill or too intolerant to return his love. I also read the coping mechanisms Ruskin's and Burne-Jones's imaginations developed to meet and contain Ruskin's emotional rollercoaster.

In 1862, Ruskin had been closely following the progress of Burne-Jones's career for eight years – and decided it was time for his protégé to interest himself seriously in the art of Italy, as the only way forward for a good artist. So Ruskin took Burne-Jones with him to Italy, instructed him where to look and what to study, and commissioned him to make various copies of Italian masters. Burne-Jones remained forever in Ruskin's debt for this trip. On his return from Italy, he promised Ruskin “drawing after drawing [...] when they happen to be pretty.”³ His promise acknowledged not only his gratefulness to his patron, but also a conviction he had harboured ever since he had decided to become a painter instead of a clergyman: that beauty has an intrinsic power to move, to lift and to heal.

Burne-Jones did not only share Ruskin's taste in art in the early 1860, but also his interest in classicism and mythology. The artist gradually added to his existing ideas about the beneficial power of beauty, Ruskin's notions of how to represent, in practice, its moral dimension. Ruskin's theory crystallized in the concept of “Constant art,” first discussed in *Modern Art*, a lecture he gave in 1867 at the British Institution. “Constant art,” wrote Ruskin,

represents beautiful things, or creatures, for the sake of their own worthiness only; they are in perfect repose, and are there only to be looked at. [...] It is what they are, not what they are doing, which is to interest you. [...] All the greatest work of the Greeks and all good portraiture of every age is of this kind.⁴

Given Ruskin's interest in the development of Burne-Jones's career, and the tasks he had set him during the Italian journey, we can assume that discussions about beauty and repose occurred between critic and artist well before 1867, in fact as early as 1863, when Ruskin asked Burne-Jones to produce drawings of various mythological characters for an illustrated version of *Munera Pulveris* (1862-63). The book project did not come to fruition, and Burne-Jones used several of the characters Ruskin required as subjects for later pictures. Of these figures, Persephone is recalled in Burne-Jones's work-record of 1875, and together with Pluto, was discussed again with Ruskin in 1883 and 1884. The character on which Burne-Jones set to work immediately was Circe; he produced a large oil, *The Wine of Circe*, which shows the sorceress transforming Ulysses' men into beasts.

Ruskin had described Circe in *Munera Pulveris* as the beautiful sorceress, daughter of the Sun and Sea, who meant for him all that is robust and vigorously alive with healthy animal passion.⁵ Ruskin glorifies Circe for being beautiful, passionate, and alive in the physical sense, a manifestation of the vital beauty conferred by “the appearance of felicitous fulfilment of function in living things.”⁶ It is interesting that the example with which Ruskin illustrates vital beauty in *Modern Painters II* (1846) is tinged with death, as beauty, alive and moral, is defined against the metaphorical grave of hibernating plants:

... if, passing to the edge of a sheet of [snow], upon the Lower Alps, early in May, we find, as we are nearly sure to find, two or three little round openings pierced in it, and through these emergent, a slender, pensive, fragile flower, whose small, dark purple, fringed bell hangs down and shudders over the icy cleft that it has cloven, as if partly wondering at its own recent grave, and partly dying of very fatigue after its hard-won victory; we shall be, or we ought to be, moved by a totally different impression of loveliness from that which we receive among the dead ice and the idle clouds. There is now uttered to us a call for sympathy, now offered to us an image of moral purpose and achievement, which, however unconscious or senseless the creature may indeed be that so seems to call, cannot be heard without affection, nor contemplated without worship, by any of us whose heart is rightly tuned, or whose mind is clearly and surely sighted.⁷

There is in this passage, as in Ruskin’s description of Circe, a chilling underlying statement that beauty is never uncomplicated; that it is always shadowed by a dark latent threat, that at its peak it is always looking towards its annihilation; that in nascent state it is fragile and tentative, not because it is unsure of itself and lacks determination to shine, but because it is exhausted by the “hard-won victory” over death. Although Circe is described at the zenith of her beauty, Ruskin locates transition in the effects of her beauty on men. The enchantress degrades Ulysses’ men but does not “slay” them in an irreversible development; instead, she leaves them “power of revival.” In the context of “Constant art,” with which Ruskin expected to capture beauty “for [...] its own worthiness,” his description of Circe introduces the fear, which was to inform much of his subsequent work, that beauty is always in transition, never permanent, never to be finally captured and possessed.

Apart from reflecting Ruskin’s uneasy speculations on the nature of beauty, fuelled – beginning with the 1860s – by his unfulfilled love for Rose, the figure of Circe is also an expression of Burne-Jones’s emotional turmoil, the result of his painful separation from Maria Zambaco. Burne-Jones was introduced to Maria Zambaco, a talented artist in her own right, in the early 1860s. Maria posed for him and became his lover. Burne-Jones painted *Circe* after her, and most likely saw himself in the position of Ulysses’ companions, bewitched by beauty and temporarily degraded for straying into forbidden territory. The affair put Burne-Jones’s marriage in danger, upset many of his friends and threatened his health and sanity. Ruskin, who had commissioned *Circe*, did not finally acquire the picture when it was finished. Speculation has it that Ruskin refused *Circe* because he could not have been seen to condone Burne-Jones’s unfortunate affair. But a discussion of his reasons for not buying the picture must also include his own emotional distress over Rose. Pained by Rose’s unavailability, Ruskin would certainly not have chosen to rest his gaze upon a reminder of his friend’s distress, which could only compound his own.

Burne-Jones’s affair ended very publicly and embarrassingly in January 1869, in Holland Park, with him trying to stop Maria from killing herself because he refused to leave his wife for her. The gruesome news spread quickly among Burne-Jones’s circle. William Morris, his

closest friend, accompanied him on a failed attempt to weather the scandal abroad, but did not do so approvingly. Ruskin, on the other hand, did something unexpected. The man who in 1857 had criticised the Oxford Union artists for depicting the sexual conquests rather than the brave deeds of the knights of the Round Table, in 1868 showed concern for Burne-Jones and offered him tacit support, visiting him daily in his studio.

It is surprising that Ruskin, the principled arbiter of moral behaviour, in full knowledge of Burne-Jones's affair, should now turn a blind eye. However, if we are to consider what he himself was going through at the time, his quiet support for Burne-Jones makes sense. In 1868 Ruskin was tormented by his own unfulfilled love. Rose had given him hope in spring, only to dash it completely in the summer. In May 1868, worn down by Rose's indecision, Ruskin planned to bring his writing career to a close. He delivered what he then thought to be the valedictory lecture, "The Mystery of Life and Its Arts," in Ireland, in the vain hope that Rose would attend. He returned to London in June "to face the most acute crisis of his courtship"⁸ – the result of Effie Millais's correspondence with the La Touches about her marriage to Ruskin.⁹

Ruskin's own emotional pain is reason enough to believe that, despite his principles, he would feel sympathy for Burne-Jones, also suffering for love. But there is another possible explanation for Ruskin's blind eye on Burne-Jones's affair – a good turn Burne-Jones had done before for the lovesick Ruskin. The year 1863, which found Burne-Jones at work on *Circe* and thinking seriously, under Ruskin's guidance, of the morality of beauty and of repose in the figures he painted, also brought the chance for Burne-Jones to fulfil the promise he had made to Ruskin on his return from Italy: a promise of "pretty drawings" – that is, work which engaged with all things Ruskin valued. These drawings materialized as imagined portraits of good and beautiful heroines of mythology, made in the hope that they would save Ruskin from the grip of his despair over Rose. The drawings illustrate Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*¹⁰ and are connected with beauty, death and revival in a manner similar to that in which Ruskin associated these matters with Circe. Compounding his perceived moral duty to "show beauty"¹¹ with his belief that doing so actually makes a positive impact upon the world, and convinced of art's restorative powers, Burne-Jones hoped to help Ruskin recover from his first serious depression over Rose.



Figure 1. John Ruskin, *Rose La Touche* (1862), Ruskin Library, Lancaster University.

In 1863, Ruskin was forty-four and desperately in love with Rose (Figure 1), twenty-nine years his junior. "I had to perjure myself if I wanted a kiss," he writes to an old family friend, and vow that "I had headache or toothache or something that wouldn't go away on any other terms – And now she's got to be fifteen there's no making a pet of her any longer - and I don't know what to do."¹² When Rose fell ill later that year, Ruskin believed she was dying and made plans to retire from the world to a chalet in the Alps. Family and friends tried to

dissuade him, but to no avail. He answered Burne-Jones's and (his wife) Georgiana's pleas with suicidal abandon:

I am deeply moved [...] by all your letters. [...] You would make me entirely happy with your loves if I felt strong and as if I should have life and time to stay with you – but I have a great feeling of its being too late. [...] And I've another notion of a thing the great cliff above may be useful for, some day – or night.¹³

Burne-Jones responded to Ruskin's despair with encouragement, asserting "Dearest Papa, oh, don't despair about health, or ever think it is too late, you must and shall grow strong, and do lots of work, and when you are very old you shall sleep somewhere where we can kiss every stone and blade of grass that covers you."¹⁴ Significantly, Burne-Jones did not send wishes for Rose's recovery or better luck in courtship. He mentioned only Ruskin's work and renewed the vows of friendship, sensing that Ruskin's labour of love – interpreting pictures – and a sympathetic audience to disseminate the fruits of his labour were his sustenance, while his earthly love was simply a pretext for his creativity. Burne-Jones picked up on Ruskin's hint at death, both literal and as a silencing of his voice through withdrawal from the world. He represented it artistically as sleep and transformed it into fertile, regenerative rest, by sketching Chaucer asleep in the garden. Burne-Jones offered to design for Ruskin tapestries, illustrating Chaucer's dream of "Amor" and the good women martyred for love. "On one side of your fireplace will be Chaucer beginning the subject," suggests Burne-Jones.

Shall you like it, dear, and will it ever make a little amends for sorrow? I know it won't, only you will pretend it will. I suppose nothing can make amends for your troubles – I think and think about it – it is so detestable for me to be happy and you not – I can't bear that sometimes.¹⁵

The designs were to be embroidered under Georgiana's supervision by girls at Winnington Hall. The Burne-Joneses had visited Winnington with Ruskin the previous year and sensed the school was special to him, and that he had found at Winnington a family-like community which "treated him like an adult, a master, rather than a gifted child."¹⁶ Burne-Jones, too, had enjoyed his time among the girls. "I can look six in the face at one time, I can play at cricket, and read aloud, and even paint with three or four looking on, and I am deeply in love with several at a time," he recalled.¹⁷ Winnington had proved a congenial retreat for both friends; Ruskin and Burne-Jones always derived pleasure from the company of young, pretty and articulate female company. The girls would have reminded Ruskin of Rose's similar state of innocent maidenhood and by association with her, they embodied what he later referred to as Cora, or young Proserpine before knowing Hades. To have the girls sitting for the heroines of Chaucer's tale, and themselves embroider Burne-Jones's cartoons, could only meet with Ruskin's approval. "I should like that better than any – any – thing," he wrote back.¹⁸

Burne-Jones hoped Ruskin would take heart, at this most difficult time, from images of beautiful young women, symbolically brought back from the dead through Chaucer's poetry. The series of tapestry figures would have been headed by that of the dreaming Chaucer, asleep in a fertile garden, engendering the visions – doing, in fact, his writer's work.¹⁹ Burne-Jones imagined Chaucer would give Ruskin an abstract vision of cyclical renewal, as the physical and emotional death of the women, proven, after all, to have been "good," is placed in the context of revival and creativity. He also sent Ruskin a more concrete vision, with a double revitalizing seed: the good women journey from death to life, and from the dull

earth of the garden – where Chaucer is sleeping – into the full colour range of vegetation in bloom:²⁰

the ground thereof will be of green cloth or serge, and a fence of roses will run along behind the figures – these roses to be [...] red and white [...]. Chaucer in black, Love in red and white, and Alcestis in green. [...] The ladies will be in uniforms of blue and white, and red and white.²¹

The legendary figures of Burne-Jones's creation may well symbolize physical and moral beauty, but they identify best as patterns of colour, the test of real beauty for Burne-Jones. He hoped the rhythm and brilliance of colour and the references to inspired sleep in the walled garden, masculine creativity and feminine beauty, would all appeal to Ruskin and rouse him from his despair over Rose. In his version of *The Legend of Good Women*, Burne-Jones draws a parallel between the grave and the walled garden, and explores the reconciliation of life and death in visionary dreams. He redefines, purposely for Ruskin, the myth of frozen time, rebirth, creativity and afterlife, and conceives images with which Ruskin could identify. Read and interpreted, these images were meant to show Ruskin the way forward, allowing him to enact the myth of cyclical renewal as envisaged by Burne-Jones. It so happened that, after a sterile spell in the Alps and then losing his father in the spring of 1864 – a symbolic autumn and winter of the head and heart – Ruskin returned to work with new energy and freedom, producing the bulk of his most visionary work.

The sketches, Burne-Jones made for *The Good Women*, were not finally used for tapestries. “The joint embroidery scheme [at Winnington] proved impracticable,” recalled Lady Burne-Jones, “and the drawings [...] remained as a symbol of loving intentions.”²² Ruskin owned at least three of these drawings and, in 1867, praised them in the lecture he delivered at the British Institution, “On the Present State of Modern Art.” *Amor and Alcestis*,²³ for example, appealed to him because he believed Burne-Jones did not only show, like Chaucer, the “perfect human passion,” but “the Spirit of the Love that lives beyond the grave” – that also being the only thing Ruskin could bring himself to hope for in his relationship with Rose. Burne-Jones's picture, Ruskin infers, is valuable because in it we can truly see how, after “she gives up her life for her husband's, [Alcestis] is [...] restored to him from the grave.”²⁴ The story of Alcestis resonated deeply in Ruskin's imagination; in time, he came to believe that, by refusing to marry him on the grounds of his religious views, which included Christianity but were not limited to it, Rose herself was sacrificing her life for him, and would, somehow eventually, be restored to him after death.²⁵

On another of the three *Good Women* drawings in his possession, that of “The Two Wives of Jason” - *Hypsipyle and Medea*,²⁶ Ruskin commented as follows:

I want you to note in it again the special gift of the painter in seizing the good, and disdaining evil. For in the legend of Medea – as we usually read it and think of it – a common painter would have discerned only a cruel and enraged sorceress. But Medea is more than a Sorceress. Her name means Counsellor, Designer – as the name of Jason means the healer; she is, in fact, the Pallas or Minerva of the lower phases of human art, and her terror is that of Wisdom forsaken or despised, corresponding to the snake-fringed ægis of Pallas herself. [...] Hypsipyle is the type of the patience and protective gentleness of the affections [...] and the painter has therefore endeavoured to express together these two ideals of gentleness and wisdom, but the last, in the power of it and the authority, dark and inexorable.²⁷

Love and a dual nature comprising death and revival, light and darkness, even wisdom and terror, and gentleness and inexorability are recurring motifs in the symbolism Ruskin attaches to the mythological figures he interprets. These terms equally apply to his vision of Proserpine, Athena, Circe and Medea, as they do to his own relationship with Rose. Burne-Jones may not have necessarily thought of Jason's wives as a reconciled contradiction – gentleness and dark authority – but as Ruskin put these words into his mouth, he let them pull at the strings of his imagination and keep him exploring the tensions of two-sided truths.

Ruskin also owned a revised, more elaborate version of Chaucer asleep, *Chaucer Asleep in His Study* (Figure 2). Here Chaucer is no longer in the garden, but in his study which has been taken over by poppies, the flower of intoxication and also of death. The image of sleep as the source of creativity is even clearer compared with an earlier version with Chaucer outside in the walled garden. Whereas the garden can only boast of vegetation growth, the study-cum-garden draws a parallel between vegetation and creativity, the latter a more complex degree of growth. Most importantly, by representing Chaucer at a low energy point, in numb, poppy-drugged sleep, but open to the visions of love, Burne-Jones suggests cyclic progression. When the power of the poppies wanes, the writer must awake and put pen to paper to record his vision.

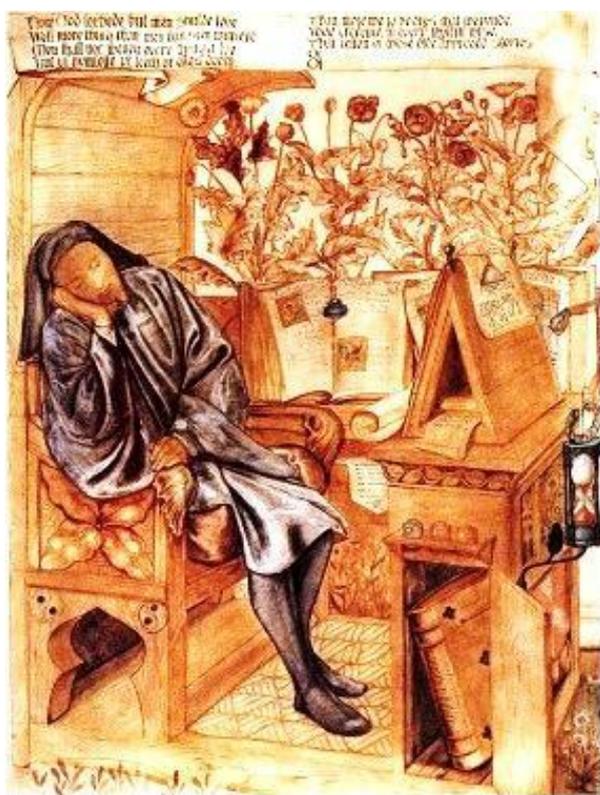


Figure 2. Edward Burne-Jones, *Chaucer Asleep in His Study* (1864), Ruskin Library, Lancaster University.

Having created an intriguing set of symbolic images in the mid-1860s, Burne-Jones continued to explore the sleep metaphor beyond *The Legend of Good Women*, yielding an increasingly charged idiom, rich in universal symbolism as well as personal relevance. The motifs of vegetation, sleep and awakening link *The Legend of Good Women* to *The Briar Rose* both directly and through the myth of Persephone. Burne-Jones knew first-hand as early as 1866 that Ruskin associated Rose La Touche with the goddess. Much encouraged in his feelings for Rose by her visit to Denmark Hill²⁸ in the spring, Ruskin wished to share his illusory happiness with his friend. He sent Burne-Jones a brief note under the pretext of clearing times to sit for a portrait, and acknowledged with the same breath the enormously weighty and far-reaching decision to make his love for Rose the ruler of his life. “I’ll come on Monday and then be steady, I hope, to every other day – Proserpine permitting,” writes Ruskin; then the light-heartedness which crossed “God

willing” with “weather permitting” to produce “Proserpine permitting” gives way to possessive seriousness: “Did you see the gleam of sunshine yesterday afternoon? If you had only seen her in it, bareheaded, between *my* laurels and *my* primrose bank!”²⁹

The description of Rose looking pretty among flowers in Ruskin's garden – a Proserpine well above the ground and delighting in the spring flowers - is a rare glimpse of joy among Ruskin's gloomy visions of the goddess, considering that only a few months earlier Ruskin complained to another friend, Charles Eliot Norton³⁰ about the “horror of the myth.”³¹ Earth always figures as level zero of reference in Ruskin's interpretation of Proserpine, but as a

signifier of ambivalence rather than a separation line; his interest lies in those manifestations of the goddess which emphasize duality and cyclical renewal rather than seasonal symbolism of summer and winter, or life and death. Even the fairly optimistic description of Rose in the sunshine, with all its implications of light, life and fulfilment, could not have failed to signal to Burne-Jones the allusion to Proserpine's imminent rape and the growth of her dominion to include the dead. In his lover's *élan*, Ruskin was already assuming Hades' attributes, metaphorically trapping Rose 'between' the laurels and primroses in *his* garden. The symbolism of Rose's uncovered hair pairs perfectly the allusion to passion by association with the flower beds, earthy and down-sloping, in preparation for Proserpine's double fall, into the Underworld and Hades' passionate embrace, and her subsequent sleep.

Ruskin probably idealized Rose as Proserpine, at first due to her name and the status of the rose among flowers,³² and also because Rose often spoke to him a language of flowers, sending him flowers and leaves in her letters to symbolize her chaste love. Specific portraits – he drew of her in 1862 (Figure 1) and in 1874 (Figure 3) – show her crowned with flowers; her profile and the way the wreath sits on her head recall the heads of Demeter³³ and Persephone on ancient Greek coins, with which Ruskin was familiar³⁴ (Figures 4, 5, 6). Rose's portraits differ compositionally very little, the second reading as a comment on the passage of time over the figure in the first, a metaphorical wilting of the flower.



Figure 3. John Ruskin, *Rose La Touche* (1874), presumed destroyed. **Figure 4.** Drawing from Ruskin's "Coin Book," Ruskin Library, Lancaster University. **Figure 5.** Syracusan coin (picture reproduction from George Henry Noehden, *Selections of Ancient Coins of Magna Graecia*, a book which Ruskin had in his collection). **Figure 6.** Sicilian coin (picture reproduction from James Millingen, *Ancient coins of Greek Cities and Kings*, a book which Ruskin had in his collection).

The spectre of losing Rose following her bouts of illness and self-denial gave Ruskin an added reason to think of her as his Proserpine, not only in her guise of Queen of the Underworld, but drawing hope from the goddess' symbolism of cyclical renewal. Over a short period of time, though, Proserpine is gradually transformed in Ruskin's mind from the goddess of vegetation cycles into a darker and more complex deity. By 1869 when *The Queen of the Air*, the zenith of his work on myth, was published, Ruskin had come to regard Proserpine as the tutelary force of destiny, and called her "Queen of Fate" – a function she performed in association with her mother, Demeter:

The rule of the first spirit, Demeter, the earth mother, is over the earth, first, as the origin of all life—the dust from whence we were taken: secondly, as the receiver of all things back at last into silence—'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' And, therefore, as the most tender image of this appearing and fading life, in the birth and fall of flowers, her daughter Proserpine plays in the fields of Sicily, and thence is torn away into darkness, and becomes the Queen of Fate—not merely of death, but of the gloom which closes over and ends, not beauty only, but sin; and chiefly of sins, the sin against the life she gave: so that she is, in her highest power, Persephone, the avenger and purifier of blood,—'The voice of thy brother's blood cries to me *out of the ground*.'³⁵

This is a highly charged passage, which fuses the study of myth with Ruskin's own desires and fears. Ruskin's Proserpine can be understood as a "mythopoeic construction," Paul Sawyer argues, designed to supply a narrative accommodating both "the energies of nature and the persistence of the desired, human other." Sawyer explains further in his study that Ruskin posited Rose as the radiating centre of his newly constructed world, which demanded not only a combined scholarly and emotional point of view, but also "a language capable of interpreting all things as a continuous code of emblems."³⁶ It is entirely true that Ruskin's mythological figures are in fact constructs. Raymond Fitch proposes to qualify the process by which Ruskin projects his anxieties and needs into mythological or hagiological figures as *psychomythic*. "Only for Ruskin," Fitch argues, "these figures are now often there in person, in communication or conflict with him, or confused with the real persons of his recollection. Some might say that this tendency is evident in his myth work before any evident illness overtakes him."³⁷

What neither Sawyer nor Fitch remembers, though, is that reinventing a mythological figure after his own design, and often by his biased argument, is a corollary of Ruskin's definition of myth. In *The Ethics of the Dust* (1866), Ruskin had explained that apart from the "physical" and "ethical" character, "myth has [...] a personal character; and is realized in the minds of its worshippers as a living spirit, with whom men may speak face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."³⁸

Proserpine, Athena, and St Ursula, for example, *are* real figures for Ruskin not because of the haze in his fevered brain, but because he very lucidly decreed them to be so. Fitch and Sawyer sense correctly the contrived nature of Ruskin's mythology, fine-tuned to accommodate *his* perceptions and desires; but in their arguments they both overlook that Ruskin postulated the embodied existence of myth figures as part of the convention he established for interpreting myth. As a result, Sawyer is baffled by the richness and engendering power of Ruskin's imagination, and Fitch thinks it hallucinatory and unbridled. Burne-Jones, on the other hand, saw Ruskin's myth-making habit as an artistic and interpretive process which it is, and developed the idea in his own work.

An integral part of Ruskin's interpretation of Proserpine, therefore, is to explore the "ethical character" of the natural cycle of life and death, and to find for her a "personal"

correlative. He personifies Proserpine as Rose, who thus gains all the attributes of the goddess. There are two questions which spring to mind: what new dimensions does Proserpine acquire in *The Queen of the Air* that Ruskin hoped Rose would discover in herself, and, more importantly, why does Ruskin pin his hopes on communicating effectively with Rose through myth? Ruskin believed that “the thoughts of all the greatest and wisest men, [...] since the world was made, have been expressed through mythology.”³⁹ He needed the weight of this wisdom behind him, as well as a framework within which he could use incontestable “natural” examples, such as the cyclical renewal of life, to convince Rose of his moral argument. Ruskin was desperate to show Rose that her understanding of divinity was narrow and inflexible. The Proserpine he introduces to her in *The Queen of the Air* is of inherently dual nature and her “tender image” expresses simultaneously life and death. But she is also the Queen of Fate because, Ruskin argues, she has the power to end not only the worldly life cycle, and with it put an end to visible things, but also, with the annihilation of life, to end sin and redress it.

Here, Ruskin alludes to Abel’s murder by “tiller of the earth” Cain – “the sin against the life [Demeter / Proserpine] gave” – suggesting that in her “avenger” role she equals Rose’s all-powerful God, operating both above and under the ground. In this way, Ruskin’s Proserpine becomes responsible for rendering justice not only to Christians, collectively represented by Abel, but to all those brothers, pre- and non-Christian, whose blood is “crying out of the ground.” The sin, Ruskin refers to, is the interruption of the life cycle before it has run its course. “Out of the ground” suggests dynamics and transcendence, attributes which emphasize Proserpine’s transitional nature as the deity governing both the living and the dead, the dying and coming back to life. Such a presentation of Proserpine, if understood, would have put enormous pressure on Rose, as Ruskin is metaphorically asking her to watch over both her and his lives – Christian and heathen⁴⁰ – and not curtail them before they are fulfilled, even if cutting life short at will is within her power as Queen of Fate.

Rose’s power to bring both light and gloom, transferred from Proserpine, is reinforced by comparison with Athena, the Queen of the Air in the book’s title. Ruskin interprets her, too, as a complex, two-sided – if not necessarily divided – personality. Athena as equally passionate and detached guiding principle, divine and physical life-sustaining breath, expression of courage and of wisdom, resembles Ruskin’s idealization of Rose as his inspiration for work, love and spiritual betterment. The other “Gorgon” side of Athena is as frightening as an untimely descent into the underworld, and warns Rose against her narrowly pious and hostile side, nurtured by her mother, “Lacerta.”⁴¹ The previous year Maria La Touche had caused a major rift between Rose and Ruskin and had figuratively turned him into stone, leaving him perplexed and helpless after she shared with Rose the poisonous letter from Ruskin’s first wife, Effie Millais, who accused Ruskin of being impure and unnatural.⁴² Ruskin’s interpretation of Athena and Proserpine in *The Queen of the Air* highlights the precipice between Rose’s warring sides; he does not seek to provide a solution for Rose’s inner conflicts but, instead, recognizes and accepts them as “natural.” What he appears to ask of Rose by writing this book is only that she should not let darkness win before its time, nor blight the flower of her own youth. It was a tall order for Rose, who, as Hilton argues, lacked the physical and emotional maturity to understand his request.⁴³

By the time Ruskin finished writing *The Queen of the Air*, Rose had been mulling for nearly a year over Effie’s version of the breakdown of her marriage to Ruskin. She remained out of reach in Ireland, forbidden by her parents to contact him. Ruskin hoped Rose would read *The Queen of the Air*, which could clarify his beliefs and regain him her sympathy.⁴⁴ Interpreting Proserpine as Fate, Ruskin signals to Rose his submission to her decision about their future. As soon as he finished the manuscript, though, the distress of awaiting Rose’s reaction pressed Ruskin to go abroad, leaving Norton to edit and see to the publication of *The*

Queen of the Air. Ruskin's mood in the spring of 1869 was of utter despair. He "got into such a worried and nervously overstrained condition," Norton writes, "that he broke away from home, regardless of engagements and of half-completed matters of important concern. He left me in charge of many of these matters, tossing them pall-mall into my hands, with [...] scanty specific directions."⁴⁵

Earlier in the year Ruskin had sold many of his pictures at auction. He had previously parted with a considerable number of Turner's, giving to Oxford and Cambridge in 1861, but those were gifts, made in the belief that they would be studied and appreciated. Now in 1869, Ruskin no longer cared about the breaking up of his collection; his troubled mood drove him to scatter his treasure, which had once given him joy, as if it had become a burden. "All my work now is posthumous,"⁴⁶ he writes to Norton in April 1869, allowing him a glimpse of the emotional abyss which the prospect of losing Rose had opened for him. Proserpine had symbolically sealed his fate and Ruskin now begins a descent into the underworld of his personal fears, reaching its nadir with the first bout of severe illness in 1878, three years after Rose's death.

During the summer of 1869, Ruskin writes to Norton constantly, partly to discuss the printing of *The Queen of the Air*, and partly to confide his gloomy thoughts. The letters are heavy with a bleakness which breaks to the surface in acute, disturbing lines. "Everything is a dreadful problem to me now," Ruskin writes from Italy, "of living things, from the lizards [...] – and of dead, everything that *is* dead, irrevocably, how much!"⁴⁷ Later, he noted:

I have perhaps alarmed you by the apparent wildness and weakness of the [...] letters I have sent you. But I am neither wild nor weak, in comparison with what I have been in former days: and in thinking of me, you must always remember that it is impossible for you at all to conceive the state of mind of a person who has undergone as much pain as I have.⁴⁸

And, indeed, if I were to die now, the life would have been such a wreck that you couldn't even make anything of the driftwood. It really is [...] important [...] for me to try before I die to lead two or three people to think 'whether there be any Holy Ghost.' [...] Don't send me any letters that will require any sort of putting up with or patience, because I haven't got any. Only this I'll say – I've suffered so fearfully from *reticences* all my life that I think sheer blurting out of all in one's head is better than silence...

My life is much more like a strange dream of things that I once cared for, than a reality.⁴⁹

Writing of death, the dead, the questionable value of one's life, emotional frustration and alienation from one's own self reflect Ruskin's distress, which he tried to cure with a punishing work schedule. "I am up always at ¼ before 5," he confesses, "and at work at 6, as I used to be in 1845. But my hand gets shaky by 12 o'clock."⁵⁰ Instead of working on a definite project, he tired himself out with disconnected writing, drawing, thinking of buildings and hatching fantastic projects such as dams above the Rhone. Ruskin was firmly in the grip of his private mythology and his thoughts kept returning, with bitter self-irony, to the "Queen of Fate," whose spirit pervades his correspondence of this period with Norton. "To exist, or not to exist"⁵¹ is both a constant recalling of Rose and a motif of self-dramatization in quest mode on which his imagination fed. In August 1869, Ruskin was appointed Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford. "The recognition of his exceptional fitness for the position," writes Norton, "was naturally gratifying to him, and the opportunity afforded by it of influencing the youth at the University was one he was glad to possess. But the honour came

for him at a time when he cared little for it. It could not calm his fevered spirit, nor soothe his wounded heart.”⁵²

The appointment may not have made Ruskin a happier man, but the expectation to lecture starting with January 1870 provided a much needed focus for his energies. The position of authority with which he was invested prompted Ruskin even further into lecturing, although to a different audience and by diverse means. In January 1871, he began *Fors Clavigera* (1871-1884), a series of monthly letters addressed “to the workmen and labourers of Great Britain.” On the one hand, this is a vehicle for making public some of the *reticences* of which Ruskin had written to Norton. The direct address in *Fors*, both exhortative and confessional, creates the ideal framework for the “blurting out of all in one’s head”, giving Ruskin a sense of reassurance that he is not alone in his imaginary worlds.

On the other hand, *Fors* is, by name and function, another reference to Rose, transformed by Ruskin into a larger-than-life figure. Proserpine as Queen of Fate, or “fortune,” is tempered by “force” and “fortitude” to make up Fors.⁵³ *Fors* gives Ruskin the opportunity to introduce Rose publicly as his inspiration, showing himself receiving instruction in real time, from “a living spirit, with whom men may speak face to face.” Starved of real contact, Ruskin writes that “Fors led me,” “Fors won’t let me,” “as Fors will have it,” or “by appointment of Fors,”⁵⁴ to mention just a few instances of his continuous invocation of Rose’s imaginary help. Every monthly edition of *Fors* feeds on the illusion that his relationship with Rose is alive, bridging, before 1875, over her remoteness in life, and then over her absence in death, and keeping the relationship in the public eye as a source of valuable spiritual, artistic and practical teachings.

There is little factual evidence that Burne-Jones followed closely Ruskin’s personal turmoil from 1869 until after Rose’s death. He was not, then, the main recipient of Ruskin’s brooding letters, as he had been during the 1863-64 crisis over Rose. On the other hand, Burne-Jones was constantly in touch with Norton over this period. They were good, close friends and it is highly likely that they discussed Ruskin’s affairs and state of mind, considering him a mutual friend. A little note that Burne-Jones sent Norton in 1875 supports the assumption that the artist was in fact *au courant* with Ruskin’s emotional reinterpretation of the myth of Persephone and continued to respond to Ruskin’s suffering over Rose “with an almost feminine sensibility.”⁵⁵ Drawing Norton’s attention to the new *Records of the Past*, “a series of thin, cheap books published by Samuel Bagster & Co [...], translations of cuneiform and hieroglyph,” Burne-Jones wrote that “there is a descent of Ishtar, which is Aphrodite, into Persephone country, too beautiful - made long before the Greeks knew of her. An old world, and so beautiful, isn’t it?”⁵⁶

Burne-Jones’s comment betrays not only familiarity with Ruskin’s work on myth, but also genuine interest in his thinking, which confirms that the foundation of their friendship was as strong personally as it was intellectually. Ruskin had argued in *The Ethics of the Dust* (1866) that Neith, Athena, and the Holy Spirit were personifications of the same governing principle, and that the images relating to these mythological figures bear the condensed wisdom of the Egyptian, Greek, and Christian civilisations according to their respective understanding of the life-giving spiritual principle. Three years later, in *The Queen of the Air*, he reinforced this argument and made it intensely personal. Thinking of Ruskin and his loss, Burne-Jones’s attention was attracted, in 1875, by the similarities between the Egyptian and Greek mythological figures for love and death, and a “beautiful” scenario involving the transformation and regeneration of earthly love through contact with death, the very thing Ruskin was hoping to re-enact and achieve in his difficult relationship with Rose. Burne-Jones’s work-record for the year also mentions a “design of Proserpine”. It is not possible, though, to tell whether the “design” and the “descent into Persephone country” predate or are a reaction to Rose’s death in May 1875.

After Rose's death, Ruskin continued to think of her as only temporarily and physically absent. He honoured his understanding of her as an embodiment of Persephone, not dead, but only sleeping and due to rise again in spring, in almost everything he thought and wrote. His book on botany, *Proserpina*, appeared in instalments between 1875 and 1886, and in it he lamented her passing thus, "Now I must go out and see and think [...] what becomes of all these fallen blossoms, and where my own mountain Cora hides herself in winter; and where her sweet body is laid in its death."⁵⁷

In the spring of 1883, Ruskin renewed his request⁵⁸ from Burne-Jones for a *Rape of Proserpine*. "Darling Ned," he pleaded, "if my Proserpine isn't begun, *please* begin it; and if it stopped, go on again; and if going on again, do a nice little bit as the Spring comes."⁵⁹ Ruskin was no doubt remembering Rose and alluding to the mixed feelings that spring brought to him, as he was both acutely conscious of his earthly loss and spiritually hopeful. Burne-Jones replied that "Proserpine bides, my dear, I haven't begun her yet, I am practising my art. One day I mean to paint a picture."⁶⁰ Over a year later he announced that "I have designed what should look beautiful and awful if it were well done, Pluto going down with Proserpine into the earth, and a nice garden, a real one, all broken to bits, and fire breaking out amongst the anemones; and Pluto is an awful thing, shadowy and beautiful."⁶¹

Burne-Jones never actually painted *The Rape of Proserpine*, but there are two pencil drawings of the subject, only slightly different in their degree of finish. One was in Ruskin's possession when he died, the other Burne-Jones kept for himself. The drawings show a chaotic agglomeration of figures in distress and express the anguish at Proserpine's disappearance. In the more finished drawing, faces have been developed from mere outlines into images of grief, with pleading eyes and screaming mouths. These unsettling drawings, raw images of the heart-break caused by Proserpine's descent into Hades, mark a crisis in Burne-Jones's imaginative reinvention of Rose as Proserpine. From this point on, Burne-Jones's efforts concentrate on finding, for Ruskin's sake, a way of breaking the infernal cycle of hope and despair.

Having requested a *Rape of Proserpine* in February 1883, in March Ruskin prompted Burne-Jones to think of the more hopeful, regenerative, and redemptive side of the myth, asking him to design the Whitelands hawthorn cross.⁶² A champion of female education, Ruskin had supported the Whitelands Training College for Women, Chelsea, since 1877. In 1881, he inaugurated the May Queen festival and had gold crosses designed to give as a prize – together with copies of *Proserpina*. Unhappy with the first two crosses, he sought Burne-Jones's help, hoping the new design would suit his taste better. "The cross is always of pure gold," Ruskin wrote to Burne-Jones, declaring "it may be any shape you like, but it must be hawthorn because it is for the 1st May, when they choose a May Queen at Whitelands, the girl they love best, and I give her the hawthorn cross, annually, and the whole lot of my books to give away to the girls *she* likes best."⁶³

To this Burne-Jones replied swiftly: "I am about the jewel now, and the design will quickly follow this letter. [...] By an early post tomorrow you shall positively have it. [...] If anything strikes you as ugly in it, send it back and I will do it again."⁶⁴ May hawthorn clearly indicates that Ruskin's idea for a Whitelands May Queen is his homage to Rose. The association is further extended through the gift of books, as *Sesame and Lilies*, *Queen of the Air*, and *Proserpina* had been especially meant for Rose. Burne-Jones's enthusiasm for Ruskin's project is touching. His willingness to please his friend, the sense that he is setting everything aside to become Ruskin's jewellery designer – until the job is done to his satisfaction – the very simple "send it back and I will do it again" testify to Burne-Jones's deepest sympathy. His unconditional participation in Ruskin's cycles of grief and hope focuses his creative energies on such figures as Rose-Proserpine (at a time when he was

already exploring death), revival and suspended sleep in *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* begun in 1882, and absolute beauty in *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (which he would finish in 1884). All these explorative threads finally came together in the third *Briar Rose* series completed in 1890, which replaces the harrowing death-and-revival or loss-and-regain cycle, with a suggestion of suspended time and perpetual youth and beauty in a frozen, perpetual sleep.

Sadly, Ruskin never had the chance to see any of the *Briar Rose* series. The earlier versions had been commissions and went straight to their owners. By 1890, when Burne-Jones finished the third series, Ruskin's intellectual powers had irretrievably broken down. But these circumstances are irrelevant, for Ruskin would never have been consoled by peaceful pictures, even if painted by this extraordinary friend of his at his side in his devastation at the loss of the woman he loved, and had dreamed up – with him, for him, or because of him – symbols and visions to give absence the seed of return, and to death the hope of life. Ruskin could not be consoled in his loss; he simply did not wish it. A few years before Rose's death, as she was traversing a difficult period of illness and Ruskin was working on his Slade lectures on engraving, he thought he had finally deciphered a personal meaning in the myth of Theseus, Ariadne and the labyrinth. Associating Rose with Ariadne, he hoped for a way out from the labyrinth of his turmoil. He wrote to his secretary:

I want to tell you one or two more curious things about that Irish child [Rose]. She seems appointed to break me down by the vision of her always when I'm coming to a leap anywhere – and *yet* has been the root of all that I best know or ought to know – for my work. She sent me back last month from Cheshire so miserable that I couldn't speak to anyone – but went to Euston Hotel and worked at British Museum. *In consequence of which* – I came on Sandro's [Botticelli] engravings just when I wanted them – and found out a lot of other things in the very nick of time for my next lectures. [...] Now I got at Lucca duomo the deliciousest medieval labyrinth [...] – but Ariadne wouldn't work in, no how. Well – in thinking over her again, to-day, I came on the Odyssey bit [i.e. that Theseus does not desert her, but she him, in dying]; and there it is all at once, as right as can be. My poor little Rose is dying [...] – 'in the power of Diana', madly pure [...]. Now I knew that the Labyrinth meant the entanglement of the animal nature – and Theseus is the divine law giver conquering Minos and fate. [...] I suppose she'll die [...] at the end of the seventh year she bid me wait and I suppose I shall have to go down and try to drag up Persephone.⁶⁵

As early as 1872, Ruskin knew he would lose Rose, and chose to see his loss in terms of freedom from the “entanglement” of desire, compensated by Rose's spiritual guidance in his work. At the same time, he prepared himself for a symbolic perpetual descent into Hades, to “try to drag up Persephone.” His entire work, after *Modern Painters*, bears the mark of these excruciating descents, and is – for this matter – richer, fuller, and more poignant.

Notes

¹ Cristina Pascu-Tulbure, ‘Burne-Jones's *Briar Rose*: New Contexts’, in *English*, 61/233 (2012), 151-75.

² *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols, ed. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (London, 1903-12), XXVIII, 246; subsequently cited as W followed by volume and page number. Ruskin met Rose in 1858 and proposed to her in 1866, but never got a definite answer; there followed a period, up to her death, punctuated by separations and reconciliations; Ruskin's perceived lack of faith and the story of his disastrous first marriage to Effie

- Gray (1828-97), who later married the painter John Everett Millais, added further strain to his relation with Rose.
- ³ Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* (London: Macmillan & Co, Ltd, 1912, rpt. London: Lund Humphries, 1993, with an introduction by John Christian; unless specified otherwise, all references are to the 1912 edition), I, 145.
- ⁴ W 19, 203.
- ⁵ W 17, 213.
- ⁶ W 4, 146.
- ⁷ W 4, 146-47.
- ⁸ Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2002), 416.
- ⁹ The La Touches wrote to Effie for clarification on her annulled marriage to Ruskin; Effie's account branded Ruskin as "unnatural;" understandably, this strengthened the La Touches' opposition to the marriage of their daughter to Ruskin.
- ¹⁰ A dream poem in which Cupid – or Amor, as referred to by Burne-Jones – and his companion, Alcestis (famous for volunteering to die in her husband's place) reprimand Chaucer for portraying women in a poor light and give him the chance to redeem himself by telling tales of good women, who have all suffered for love.
- ¹¹ The Studio Diaries of T. M. Rooke, V&A, London, 465, quoted in Penelope Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones* (London: Michael Joseph, 1975), 32.
- ¹² Hilton, *John Ruskin*, 335.
- ¹³ Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, I, 266.
- ¹⁴ The Burne-Jones archives, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Edward Burne-Jones (subsequently cited as BJ) to John Ruskin (subsequently cited as JR), September 1863.
- ¹⁵ Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, I, 269.
- ¹⁶ Hilton, *John Ruskin*, 341.
- ¹⁷ Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, I, 269.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 266.
- ¹⁹ Edward Burne-Jones, *Chaucer Asleep* (1864) Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.
- ²⁰ Edward Burne-Jones, *The Legend of Good Women* (1863), Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.
- ²¹ The Burne-Jones archives, BJ to JR, September 1863.
- ²² Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, I, 276.
- ²³ Edward Burne-Jones, *Amor and Alcestis* (1864), *The Elements of Drawing* Collection, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
- ²⁴ W 19, 207-08.
- ²⁵ After Rose's death, Ruskin returned to a narrower Christianity by embracing "Spiritualism." While copying Carpaccio's *Dream of St Ursula* in Venice, he had an epiphany which convinced him Rose spoke to him from beyond the grave.
- ²⁶ Edward Burne-Jones, *Hypsipile and Medea* (1864), *The Elements of Drawing* Collection, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
- ²⁷ W 19, 208.
- ²⁸ Ruskin's house in London.
- ²⁹ W 36, 504. JR to BJ, April 1866.
- ³⁰ Professor of Fine Art at Harvard, and Ruskin's executor.
- ³¹ W 36, 501. JR to Charles Eliot Norton (subsequently cited as CEN), January 1866.
- ³² The portrait Ruskin drew of Rose in 1862 is inscribed as "Flos florum Rosa" (Rose, the flower of flowers), Ruskin Library, Lancaster University.
- ³³ Alan Davis, *Ruskin and the Persephone Myth* (Lancaster: The Ruskin Library, 2007). There was not much difference, visually, in ancient Greek representations of Demeter and Persephone. Persephone's fate is closely related to her mother Demeter, as she returns to Demeter for half of the year to perform her "summer" function; the absence of Persephone is Demeter's distress (see W 25, 294.) manifest as winter. Ruskin did not explicitly say Persephone and Demeter are the same deity at root, but his work on myth implies it.
- ³⁴ Alan Davis, 'Ruskin and Persephone Revisited: The Goddess, the Maiden and the Bud', in *Ruskin Review and Bulletin*, 4.2 (2008), 4-19.
- ³⁵ W 19, 304.
- ³⁶ Paul Sawyer, *Ruskin's Poetic Argument* (Ithaca and London: Cornell, 1985), 234.
- ³⁷ Raymond E. Fitch, *The Poison Sky: Myth and Apocalypse in Ruskin* (Athens and London: Ohio University Press, 1982), 580.
- ³⁸ W 18, 348.
- ³⁹ W 33, 294. Although this is dated 1883, it is a synthetic formulation of Ruskin's 1869 theories.

- ⁴⁰ Ruskin discusses Athena in both “heathen” and Christian terms. To Rose, who considered herself a Christian, Ruskin and his book would have seemed “reprehensibly pagan” (Hilton, *John Ruskin*, 438).
- ⁴¹ Fitch, *Poison Sky*, 580.
- ⁴² Hilton, *John Ruskin*, 417.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 437-41.
- ⁴⁴ Rose’s copy of the book survives. Her annotations betray “admiration, distress and a form of complicity,” as “Rose knew that the book’s author was thinking of her and that his book was also hers.” See Hilton, *John Ruskin*, 437-39.
- ⁴⁵ *Letters of John Ruskin to Charles Eliot Norton*, 2 vols, ed. C. E. Norton (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), historical reproduction by BiblioLife (subsequently cited as NL), I, 202.
- ⁴⁶ *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, ed. J. L. Bradley and I. Ousby (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 132-33, JR to CEN, 26 April 1869, quoted in Hilton, *John Ruskin*, 435.
- ⁴⁷ NL, I, 207. JR to CEN, 14 June 1869. References to Maria La Touche, whom Ruskin had nicknamed “Lacerta,” possibly to his dashed hopes of marrying Rose.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 209. JR to CEN, 16 June 1869.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 211-13. JR to CEN, 24 June 1869; 227. JR to CEN, 16 August 1869. Reference to the La Touches’ dogmatic religiousness.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 208. JR to CEN, 14 June 1869.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 213, JR to CEN, 24 June 1869.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 227.
- ⁵³ W 27, 28.
- ⁵⁴ examples include W 25, 535.; W 26, 327.; W 28, 254.
- ⁵⁵ John Christian, “‘A serious talk’: Ruskin’s place in Burne-Jones’s artistic development”, in Leslie Parris, ed., *Pre-Raphaelite Papers* (London: Tate Gallery, 1984), 184-205.
- ⁵⁶ Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, II, 53.
- ⁵⁷ W 25, 371. Cora is an alternative name for young Proserpine.
- ⁵⁸ It is not known when Ruskin first asked Burne-Jones for a *Proserpine*. The note in Burne-Jones’s work-record mentioning “a design for Proserpine” in 1875, could equally refer to the initial commission, his own emotional response to Rose’s death or to a drawing inspired by a fifteenth-century picture-chronicle, attributed to Maso Finiguerra. See Douglas Schoenherr, ‘A. Drawings’, in *The Earthly Paradise: Arts and Crafts by William Morris and His Circle from Canadian Collections*, ed. Katharine Lochnan, Douglas Schoenherr and Carole Silver (Art Gallery of Ontario: Key Porter Books Ltd., 1993), 37-98. The Italian drawings had been offered up for sale to the British Museum in 1874, but the Museum did not have the means to buy them. Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, II, 21. Burne-Jones then asked Ruskin to buy the collection, to which he agreed – despite his reservations.
- ⁵⁹ W 37, 437.
- ⁶⁰ Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, II, 129.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 129.
- ⁶² Ruskin was drawing a hawthorn branch when he received the news of Rose’s death; in his imagination, hawthorn became Rose’s flower.
- ⁶³ Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, II, 131.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.
- ⁶⁵ Jay Wood Claiborne, ‘Two Secretaries: The Letters of John Ruskin to Charles Augustus Howell and the Rev. St. John Tyrwhitt’, (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas 1969, unpublished), 311-14, (29 Sept. 1872) quoted in Dinah Birch, *Ruskin’s Myths* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 150-51.

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