Class Acts: Juvenilia, John Ruskin, and the Humanities Today

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When I taught an undergraduate course on juvenilia, a fourth-year honours seminar, I set it up as an introduction to and survey of the field, recognising that the study of child writing was not likely something the students would have encountered before. Including writers from different times and places, the course's central question I asked was whether juvenilia can be understood in the way we understand a genre or sub-genre: are there conventions or features shared between child writers despite vast differences in the time and place of their productions, or regardless of, for example, the gender or class of the author. I was asking myself a more pointed version of the question, whether the study of child writing invites methodologies and pedagogies amenable to both a *longue durée* and the interplay of active historical moments. We also looked at the study of juvenilia in relation to mature works, what Juliet McMaster calls a "vertical" treatment of juvenile material, reading Austen's *Jack and Alice* beside *Pride and Prejudice* (138). We looked at the fascinating question of genius and how one deconstructs the juvenile writer, whether it is easier to imagine the child imitating other writing, constructed by their literary and cultural environments, or whether the child can be understood as gifted because, after all, these are child writers who have had less time to be imprinted by their surroundings. We looked at differences between child writing and children's literature, the way that adults and juveniles construct childhood so differently. We also took a cue from the Juvenilia Press and worked on creating an edition of Tennyson's "The Devil and the Lady." The students began by feeling very superior to the material, enjoying misspelt words and such, but then were thoroughly humbled by the allusions in young Tennyson's work to *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Paradise Lost* and on and on, most of which initially went over their heads. We looked at the changing nature of education, the changing definition of childhood, and the changing assumptions around childhood ability, as well as all the historical and cultural themes generated by the individual texts. In the end, we agreed that juvenilia

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can be studied in the way a genre is studied, but equally that historisation is needed to understand textual differences.

It was a successful course, but for a number of reasons I have not been able to teach a full course on child writing again since that one in 2007. Many in the discipline today face programmatic obstacles stemming from the contraction of the humanities at our universities, making specialised study less and less an option. Enrollment numbers at Nipissing University where I teach in the humanities have been steadily declining for the past fifteen years, something that is generally, though unevenly, true true around the world.[1] Benjamin Schmidt states that in the US, "Almost every humanities field has seen a rapid drop in majors: History is down about 45 percent from its 2007 peak, while the number of English majors has fallen by nearly half since the late 1990s." John Guillory's popular *Professing Criticism* is only one of several recent books that read as a eulogy for literary studies. University administrators still speak of the value of liberal arts, but mostly so as to turn courses in the humanities into service courses, in service to the more lucrative professional programs. There are legitimate arguments behind this change of direction: in *The Elective Mind: Philosophy and the Undergraduate Degree*, Réal Fillion argues that what society needs most is to have professional citizens, all citizens, with some knowledge of philosophy, so in their working or "real" lives people can have some recourse to the advantages that philosophy provides for basic problem-solving. More specialised studies in philosophy, or in other disciplines now acting as electives for professional programs, would then become for the very, very few (a contraction that some might argue is already taking place in any case). For whatever reason, the need to address enrollment decline in the humanities, and specialised study in the humanities, is growing more acute. This paper is about teaching juvenilia with these obstacles in mind, addressing the need to and ways to integrate it into the study of non-juvenile, less specialised material, given that English departments in the foreseeable future will likely continue to offer fewer and fewer courses. I am not in any way arguing against teaching full courses on juvenilia. Rather, I am looking at the way that the teaching of juvenilia can be combined with other teaching goals to enhance the study of the more mainstream material while increasing the exposure of child writing and its value. There is some urgency to reinvigorate the humanities, and the study of juvenilia can have a central role in this, paradoxically by not always placing it on centre stage (as in a specific course on child writing) but by rather incorporating it into other courses.

Mixing the study of juvenilia with the study of non-juvenile works or supplementing the study of more established texts with juvenile ones impresses among students the advantages of adopting historical and self-consciously interdisciplinary approaches to their studies, promoting an inclusive view of culture. With juvenilia, students almost instinctively tend towards historicising the texts, if only in the most biographical, psychologising, or micro-historical way possible – how wealthy were the parents?; was the child home-schooled?; what was the young author reading? Students are much quicker to identify the need to know the child's situation

in relation to their compositions than when studying adult writers, likely because of common postulates fixing children as "dependants," less autonomous and more impressionable than adults. They resist reading juvenilia as a social register, however, for the same reasons, but when teaching both juvenile and non-juvenile works together, this paradox is put into relief and a full historicisation can follow. Introducing students to juvenilia when studying other non-juvenile texts can also lead to naturalising interdisciplinary approaches to literary analysis. I teach a course on the Victorians where Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a centrepiece. For a research paper I ask the students to look into nineteenth-century practices of child-rearing and education, what they say about the Victorians, using *Tenant* but also the Brontë juvenilia as research materials. Students develop an interest in juvenilia to bring to their other studies, or to develop as a scholarly field, or they simply have alternative ways into the study of more mainstream or standard literatures. I do the same thing with working-class writing, and while there are problems with grouping working-class and child writers together, they are both marginalised groups in literary studies and they both can be nudged to the centre by teaching them besides the more anthologised material.

What follows are more details and specific examples of how I bring in juvenile works not only in service to teaching other texts by the same author but also when studying material on or about other authors, literary genres, or movements. Teaching a seminar on "Victorian Masculinities," I introduce John Ruskin's (1819–1900) *The King of the Golden River, or The Black Brothers; a Legend of Styria* (1841, first published in 1851 by Smith, Elders, and Company of London) beside his properly juvenile works; and while teaching a course on Romanticism, I bring in Ruskin's juvenilia in relation to the idea of the "Romantic child." Ruskin's early poetry has attracted a lot of attention for a variety of reasons, though most commentators at some point discuss the young boy's self-conscious reflections on his own verse, on the writing process, and on childhood itself. Sheila Emerson notes that "His father's delight in his precocity spurred Ruskin to impersonate not only his elders but also boyhood itself – trumping it up and then peering at it sagely, as if from afar" (11). David Hanson notes Ruskin's defensiveness in his fragmentary verse, arguing that a "fragmentation of self was manifested in incomplete and heavily revised verse" ("Self" 255). He also notes that many of the poems are "unresolved and unresolvable, owing to their internal tensions" ("Psychology" 252). Though dismissive of the early poetry, Wendall Stacey Johnson notes that Ruskin's self-reflexiveness may be a "nervous tendency," a "reaction to anxieties about what is remembered, what is feared" (23). I have argued elsewhere that the coy posturing of the boy-poet and the abrupt closure of the poems indicate a careful managing of emotion; in a number of the poems, self-reflection and good-humoured poetics pre-emptively cut off any deeper feeling or self-analysis that the act of composition might generate. This aspect of Ruskin's early work primarily generates interest in Ruskin's biography, and though there are dangers in using biography to teach at the undergraduate level, when the overall goal is to go

beyond understanding the individual author as the final unit of analysis, Ruskin's early work, with its complex relationship to Victorian masculinities and Romanticism, can be paradigmatic.

Though written before Ruskin's rise to fame with *Modern Painters* (1843), *The King of the Golden River* is a mature work, even if it almost reads as if it could be or ought to be a juvenile one. My interests in teaching it were in furthering a discussion of Victorian masculinities, asking what the story says about ideal masculinity, and how its youthfulness can be read to bring out what the story says and refuses to say about the masculine. As U. C. Knoepflmacher explains, Ruskin wrote *King* when he was 22 for the 12-year-old Euphemia Gray—he referred to it as "Phemy's fairy tale"—whom Ruskin was to marry seven years later (4). W. G. Collingwood, Ruskin's first biographer, says she "challenged the melancholy John, engrossed in his drawing and geology, to write a fairy tale, as the least likely task for him to fulfill. Upon which he produced, at a couple of sittings, *The King of the Golden River*, a pretty medley of Grimm's grotesque and Dickens's kindliness and the true Ruskinian ecstacy of the Alps" (41). Gray had recently lost three younger sisters to scarlet fever. Ruskin himself was recuperating from a sickness his parents feared might have turned into tuberculosis. A light-hearted fairy tale generically bound to have a happy ending might have been what the proverbial doctor would order. Another biographical reading of the motivation behind the story, however, suggests it was primarily intended for Ruskin's parents, essentially a way to convey to them that he was not growing up too fast. Knoepflmacher notes that the elder Ruskins "made sure to retain a manuscript copy for themselves before forwarding Phemy her own," seeing it as proof that their only child was still a child with his "uncorrupted and incorruptible innocence" intact (5). The pressures to write something uplifting and light seem overdetermined, and to fully divorce the young adult from the juvenile child at this moment in Ruskin's life history would only reduce potential readings.

But as a story of three brothers, two of whom are "toxic" or at least hyper-masculine and brutal, and the youngest who is hyperbolically gentle, *The King of the Golden River* ostensibly seems unrelated to anything in Ruskin's biography. A fairy visits Gluck, the gentle boy, and he proves himself worthy of the fairy's magic, though mostly by remaining inactive; by simply obeying the King/fairy and being unconsciously generous, Gluck ensures that the valley will turn Edenic, its having become barren because of his brothers' selfishness. The story draws upon German fairy tales and reproduces from them traditional lessons in Christian charity and discipline; it remakes the Christian pilgrim in Gluck, promising his maturation, or at least a degree of growth and development to match his carefully laid-out journey. The story is fascinating, however, for the way Gluck does not mature; its representations of men and manliness are the primary reason I teach it in a course on Victorian masculinities, but Gluck does not grow into manhood. Gluck begins as the boy-Cinderella. He has to "clean shoes, floors, and sometimes the plates, occasionally getting what was left on them, by way of encouragement, and a wholesome quantity

of dry blows, by way of education" (241). Instead of growing into a mature man ready to take on the public world with his brothers finally vanquished, or ready to meet his princess, the story simply ends without the character's conversion into a more manly and independent position. Gluck's near girlishness is amplified by comparison to his hyper-masculinised bad brothers, Schwartz and Hans. The gendering of the characters is then exaggerated in publication by Dick Doyle's illustrations where, as Knoepflmacher has observed, nearly every drawing of the two men has them holding onto phallic items, flagons and sticks for example (10). Doyle's Gluck, on the other hand, is drawn as girlish, with long hair and a small build. Schwartz and Hans are powerful, suspicions, malicious, violent adult males. Their masculinity is shown to be as repulsive as their capitalist cheapness. As a "fair, blue-eyed" childlike Ruskin, Gluck is their opposite, "kind in temper to every living thing" (241). He bests his brothers and their competitive values by staying young, "unmanly," and cut off from the adult world.

When writing about familial matters or personal feelings, the cover of boyishness is exactly what the young poet adopts as well. What interests the class most with *King* is the way a story modelled on a fairy tale and ostensibly written for a young girl or anxious parents has no girl or parents in it, no romance and no lesson on how to grow and develop. It is modelled on the Grimms' tale "Water of Life," but as Jane Merrill Filstrup says, Ruskin "sidesteps" the original theme of "love" and "affection" (with a princess), and unlike "the prince in the folktale, the boy of *The King of the Golden River* engages in no heroic competition" (73–74). Gluck is said to be "not above twelve years old," like Phemy at the time, so she might have seen herself in the character (241). She also might reasonably have seen Ruskin in the character of Gluck to some extent, when he was her age, but in either case, the story precludes amorous development or just interpersonal content. And it is this reading of the story—what it omits, skips over or elides—that Ruskin's early poetry highlights. The juvenilia of his that we read also enabled the class to explore the story in relation to one of the major strands of the course, the masculine management of emotion that in theories of toxic masculinity both emerge out of and cause further trauma. The early poems, as said, often deny introspection or even describe denying or defeating it, outlining the recklessness of giving in to any emotion but the simplest forms of happiness. "On the Appearance of a Sudden Cloud of Yellow Fog Covering Everything in Darkness" (1829) introduces a personified darkness but only to have it vanquished by "light." The poem concludes abruptly, without any reflection on the effects of the "darkness": "All now became as 'twas before / And now I am not able to say more" (25).

I encourage a reading of *King* as an imitation of the juvenilia or a return to it. Denied participation in the adult world, child writers will mimic adults; the course offers an opportunity here to see that the inverse of this can also be true. Subscribing to the Romantic notion of the truthfulness of the child's insights, Ruskin might have adopted his earlier voice to suggest authenticity, but it might also be the case that he turned to that voice for its very evasiveness, its refusal to engage with material that

he—both the boy and the young man—wanted to keep buried or that he considered forbidden. Though there are a number of important exceptions, the early verse is notable for its emotional distance and detachment, most likely a skirting of the emotionally troubling conditions of his upbringing as he himself later described them. By approaching the refusal of *King* to address "growing up," and the way this might correspond to the cagy child refusing to say what the adult would later say—for example, that Herne Hill, where he was raised, was an Eden where "*all* the fruit was forbidden" (35. 36)—the class can extend the idea of Victorian man's emotional control or clampdown to the child's world, with the child apparently feeling some need to mask feelings that would leave him exposed.

That young writers develop their own voices by experiments in the imitation of adult voices is well known. This can and does lead child writers to adult subject matters, including expectations surrounding gender and gender roles. But Ruskin arguably mimics different genres and discourses – the fairy tale in *King* and mechanics, history, or geology in the juvenilia – to avoid a coming-of-age narrative, which generally includes a coming to terms with gender. On the one hand, *King* and its heavily gendered three brothers is a study in masculine roles and possibilities. But like the early poems, potential maturation narratives are shut down before they lead into the emergence of anything "too adult." Ruskin can be understood as performing childhood in his early verse, and that habit of retreating into childhood continues in *King*. The poems that describe overcoming emotion, as if he were telling himself to get over personal and familial struggles or to avoid self-exploration, are especially evasive when his parents are introduced, ending hurriedly or interrupting the contemplative with textual or youthful superficiality. It is as if young Ruskin knew how to withdraw his meditative voice to call a halt to emotions that might have arisen as a result of writing poetry, which often invites introspection. Like "On the Appearance of a Sudden Cloud," "The Storm" (1827) introduces the imagery of violent threats and psychological disturbance—predators, storms, and dark clouds—only to end abruptly and cutely: "And so in beginning another line I end" (8). Read with an understanding that the boy knew his parents would be reading his poetry, discussing the appropriateness of their son's poetic habits, the forced closure can be understood as a refusal to investigate troubling emotions. "My Dog Dash" (1830) and "Dash" (1831) stand out in Ruskin's juvenilia because they are personal in a way that demonstrates emotional attachment and vulnerability. They show young Ruskin's devotion to his aunt's dog: arguably, the most emotional moment in *The King of the Golden River* is when Gluck gives his last drops of water to the suffering dog, who then turns into the King.

In the later juvenilia of 1836, however, having fallen for Adèle Domecq, Ruskin writes directly about love, so he was quite capable of doing so at a young age (seventeen). His parents' attitude towards the relationship was very similar to their attitudes toward their son writing verse: his mother, née Margaret Cock, was largely against it, snubbing Adèle in part because the girl was a Roman Catholic but also

because she considered passion and romantic rapture dangerous. John James Ruskin, on the other hand, encouraged the union, discussing marriage possibilities with Adèle's father, who was also his business partner. A great deal has been written on Ruskin's parents and the way that they can be understood to represent conflicting social forces, Margaret promoting an evangelical Protestantism that manifested in overprotectiveness and a rejection of the poetic and John James representing something like Romantic daring, encouraging young Ruskin to write by giving him a farthing for every line of verse he came up with. Still, this is not simply or simple biography. Margaret was following a role more socially prescribed to mothers at the time and John James was performing a role more open to fathers. John James, that is, could be expected to promote the Romantic image of audacious masculinity even if he were attuned to the transition from Romantic emotion to Victorian stoicism affecting ideas of masculinity at the time. Much of young Ruskin's poetry can be read in the context of a boy negotiating his parents' opposing views, leading to the evasion of conflict by a refocusing of the poems away from the personal. In "On Adèle" (1836) or "A Moment's Falter" (1836), poems about him falling in love, Ruskin tends to avoid deep feeling by borrowing liberally from conventionally poetic forms. Emerson characterises these poems as using "determinedly poetic language" (14). The second stanza in "Evening in Company – May 18" (1836), for example, runs as follows:

> Chance sounds the changing breeze can fling
> Across the harp with fitful finger
> Or sweep the chords with wayward wing,
> And on the quick-responsive string
> Long and low vibrations linger.
> They strike the chord, but I alone
> Can hear the sounds in answer start—
> With sweet delay that echoing tone
> Rolls round the caverns of my heart. (65)

Students see that this is an affected and controlled performance of the paramour, that the complications of a half-forbidden, half-expected love affair are concealed or abolished in the artificiality and conventionality of the verse, a way to avoid difficulty by sentimentally playing the role of the lover and using genre to control the representation of feeling. Since evasiveness also marks the later *King*, students reading the juvenilia see a pattern of elusiveness that would not be available to them without the juvenilia.

So much of the early poetry includes consciously poetic performances that deny or excise introspection that the students were able to understand *King* as a performance of genre, and we went beyond the more obvious representations of masculinity in the story to its refusal to examine masculinity. Stoniness, stoicism, and the stiff upper lip were Victorian virtues for men; moreover, children might not to

commit personal feelings to paper if they know that their parents will be reading their work. Yet the way the restriction of the personal in the juvenilia corresponds with the avoidance of the intimate, the sexual, and the adult in *The King of the Golden River*—its impersonation of childhood—allowed the class to explore the reserve and control central to Victorian expectations of middle-class manliness as a social equivalent to Ruskin's childhood evasiveness and all the possible reasons for it. The violence of the Black Brothers as a form of vile masculinity becomes a cover for a different habit of masculinity, emotional closure. The parental complications involving Ruskin's upbringing and especially Margaret's and John's varying attitude towards his creativeness may have led to the evasiveness of the early verse, but they also might remind us that this kind of tension is not all that remarkable for the middle-class Victorian child and has broader social implications, which the class should be mostly interested in. Reading *King* as a withdrawal into the juvenile allowed us to see further into its representation of masculinity as more broadly representative of the time.

In a different class on Romanticism, I bring in many of the same early poems but in this case do so to explore the relationship between the "Romantic child" and child writers, looking at Ruskin's poetry to consider the way that a young poet from the Romantic period might have imitated the image or felt pressure to replicate the image of the Romantic child, even feeling pressure to be that figure. The ideal of the "Romantic child" could not be easily replicated. The attempt to model oneself on it may have produced difficulty for young poets at the time, and I use Ruskin's early work in this course in that context. Ruskin's verse, that is, can be brought into a discussion of Romanticism in order to get the students thinking about Romantic poetry and the reception of it as something that would be deeply affective, a lived experience. The course begins with the figure of the child, starting with Blake's *Songs* and moving to Joanne Baillie's "A Mother to Her Waking Infant" and Wordsworth's "We are Seven," "There was a Boy," and "Intimations of Immortality" or "Tintern Abbey." The image that emerges is of the child with special knowledge, wisdom that is lost as we are socialised, as we encounter institutions or the pressures of adulthood. It is an image of the child with unmediated connections to nature, to truth, and to the divine. Barbara Garlitz writes that the assumption "that the child is fresh from God and still remembers its heavenly home, that the aura which surrounds childhood fades into the common light of adulthood, that the child has a wisdom which the man loses . . . became the most important and the most common ideas about childhood in the nineteenth century" (647). Seeing the Romantic construction of childhood allows students to debate their own ideas about childhood, constructivism more generally, and the psychological difficulties that even children might face if feeling pressure to meet an image of childhood.

From introducing the Romantic child, an image students are at first very attracted to and very quick to corroborate or accept, at least the idea that the child has insights that adults lose, it is not difficult to transition the class to many of Romanticism's related tenets: "the spontaneous overflow of emotion," energy and enthusiasm,

uncensored states of being, and authenticity. The Romantic era, of course, also offers us child poets who were represented as prodigies, as evidence, in a way, of this unspoilt child, such as Thomas Chatterton or Thomas Dermody, though their biographies, especially Dermody's, more than distract from the image of the innocence of youth. The class, however, interrogates the idea of the Romantic child not solely through an image constructed by adults or by young writers thrust into position by the media of the day, but by child writers whose verse suggests an imitation of the Romantic child, as if constructing themselves through their work to reproduce the model offered by Romanticism.

Young Ruskin in many ways fits the bill. Growing up in Romanticism's heyday or its immediate aftermath, the young poet, as with many from his generation, looked at Romantic poetry as poetry, and the influence of Wordsworth, for example, can be directly seen in a great deal of his verse, especially where he recounts his "tours" of the Lake District. Poems such as "On Skiddaw and Derwent Waters" (1830) demonstrate not just imitation, but a degree of posturing as the boy takes up the mantle of the Romantic and his quest for isolation, contemplation, and deep meaning, showing an affinity to nature in contradistinction to any meaning that might emerge out of the study of society. One passage from the poem reads,

> Now Derwent Water come. A looking glass
> Wherein reflected are the mountain's height
> As in a mirror framed in rocks and woods.
> So upon thee is a seeming mount,
> A seeming tree, a seeming rivulet.
> All upon thee are painted by a hand
> Which not a critic can well criticize. (17)

As if to replicate Wordsworth reflecting on youth's special relationship with nature, he adds,

> Thy polished surface is a boy at play
> Who labours at the snow to make a man
> And when he's made it knocks it down again
> So when thou'st made a picture thou does play
> At tearing it down again. (17)

The snowman's primary value is in being impermanently adult, reinforcing the unique relationship between child and nature.

That Ruskin studied and emulated Wordsworth, Byron, and Scott is in itself not remarkable for a young poet in the 1830s, but Ruskin spends so much of his time meditating on his own verse, contemplating the act of composing as he writes, that it may not have been possible for him to avoid a self-conscious comparison between

himself as a young poet and the idea of the Romantic child, and he may not have wanted to avoid doing so. He repeatedly underlines his ability to describe things as they are, following Wordsworth's insistence that the best poetic language does not need to embellish, and frequently explicates his facility by saying things like, "And now a little description of the sun" ("The Sun" [1828]) (12). Sharing the somewhat false modesty of "cease this vain rhyme / Which not at all needed wastes paper and time / Too lengthened and tiresome" ("Iteriad" [1830–32]) (35) underscores that he had been swept away in the previous moment. In this way he reproduces the Romantic doctrines of spontaneity, powerful feeling, special insight or uncensored truth; of Coleridgean writing "without any sensation or consciousness of effort" ("Kubla Khan") and of what Jerome McGann has described as an ideology of "sincerity" (63).

David Hanson notes that as "a child" Ruskin "could compose dozens of lines in a day, and fair-copy the draft with minimal revision. In his family, this effortlessness was termed the heart's ease of composition. Years later, this quality was still employed by Ruskin as a criterion in literary criticism, a writer's ease indicating a felicitous imagination" (255). Ease of composition also confirms the tenets of Romanticism, and the ability of the Romantic child to simply be part of the world they represent. Later in life Ruskin would continue to subscribe to the Romantic notion of the truthfulness of a child's insights, saying in *Modern Painters I* that "all great painters, of whatever school, have been great only in their rendering of what they had seen and felt from early childhood" (3. 229). Poems such as "Iteriad" leave readers with an image of a child living spontaneously, untroubled and with exuberance, fostered by rural environments. If there is an issue in this group of poems, it is that his solitude might be disrupted by tourists, as he also suggests in "The Invasion of the Alps" (1835). As an adult, in *Sesames and Lilies*, Ruskin would speak of a desire to "put an end to the vulgar excitement which looked upon the granite of the Alps only as an unoccupied advertisement wall for chalking names upon" (18. 24). I quote from the later Ruskin to again stress that a life-long continuity of thought as if spontaneously arising in childhood is fundamentally Romantic and meant to demonstrate truth of purpose. Youthful wonder, the thrill of exploration and discovery, and the draw of a good climb were undoubtedly felt genuinely by young Ruskin, but his verse, or at least some of it, heightens the experience of youth with deliberate Romantic flair.

But Ruskin was not the Romantic child, and he arguably found the model of childhood offered by the Romantics deeply unsatisfactory if not oppressive. At least some of his early poems demonstrate either that he had trouble with living up to the idea of the Romantic child or that he simply did not want to be seen as that figure. Ease of composition would run against his efforts to demonstrate that writing poetry was a vehicle to rehearse scientific or historical fact as much as or more than personal feeling. Poems such as the very early "On the Steam Engine" (1826) and "The British Battles" (1828) assert that his interests are not just adult ones, but interests more considered than inspired. They do not reproduce nature's abundance or isolate the

speaker away from public matters or nagging reality, and they do not confirm the speaker as lost in the moment. Rather, they give us a self-conscious treatment of the adult in waiting, though only an adultness marked by the knowledge of external things, not adult emotions. Ease of composition would also run against his efforts to demonstrate that writing poetry was a discipline demonstrating accomplishment, a work ethic, and learning. This line of thought in Ruskin's verse may have been to appease his mother, who again tended towards restricting her child's leaps of imagination and who insisted upon educational practices that were non-Romantic, if not anti-Romantic, or at least anti-Rousseauian.

Moreover, not all of Ruskin's poetry demonstrates an ease of composition, far from it. As Hanson has documented, many of the early poems are fragmented, revealing "consistent effects of psychological disturbance on the process of Ruskin's composition" ("Self" 264). One way this manifests is in the stifling self-consciousness in his early verse discussed earlier. The exceedingly abrupt endings of "The Storm" and "Time" (1827), for example, suggest that at the very moment when the poems almost demand Romantic introspection, young Ruskin ends them. Hanson goes further to suggest that "often starkly contrasting indications of facility and difficulty of composition in the manuscripts tend to be identified with competing forms of romantic quest" ("Self" 255-56). On the one hand, we have Byronic language demonstrating difficulty with his attachment to his mother; on the other hand, we get Wordsworthian language "untroubled by revision" that signifies an effort to "recover the heart's ease" he associates with his father ("Self" 256). For my purposes of teaching the Romantic child, the Wordsworthian poems, often corresponding with family expeditions and mountain heights, are used to represent the elements of Romantic thought aligned with the image of the Romantic child. But it is intriguing to consider young Ruskin as caught between early and late Romanticism, Wordsworthian verse competing against imitations of *Manfred* and *Childe Harold*, for example. Yet even in the more Wordsworthian poems, childhood insight is often limited to confirming powers of observation, and instead of the boy uncensored, unself-conscious and in the moment, we see him struggling with where his observations of the external world lead him, and the need to shut that down, censoring himself. The more Wordsworthian poems mark a temporary retreat from "darker thoughts" but not an escape, and the boy, remarkably self-aware, is then faced with the added difficulty of failing to live up to the idea of the "Romantic child."

At best, Ruskin had ambivalent feelings towards the Romantic model of childhood, and that can be seen in the switchbacks between the parts of his poetry that would satisfy his father's approval of imaginative acts, rejecting a matter-of-fact view of the world, and the parts that seem to conform to his mother's contrasting propensity to insist upon a restriction of the imagination and a containment of emotion. These dual pressures also correspond to competing models of education Ruskin and other affluent children his age would encounter. Against the influence of Rousseau and the idea that children are best left free from authority to discover the

world around them through their own reason is the evangelical notion that discipline, regulation, and even chastisement are needed to direct children away from the paths created by "original sin."[2] Ruskin, in various ways, would later reflect on this division when recounting his early verse, stating that being without siblings and friends, he was drawn to either "inanimate things—the sky, the leaves, and pebbles, observable within the walls of Eden," referring to the gardens at Herne Hill where he was raised, "or caught at any opportunity of flight into regions of romance" (35. 37).[3]

The point here is that the Romantic notion of childhood may have contributed not only to Ruskin's but also to other young artists' sense of self in ways that would create expectations and pressures observable in their youthful work. Ruskin's imitation of the Romantic child—an adult treatment or idealisation of childhood—may have been yet another source for the boy's struggle with his voice, "the signs of textual difficulty" ("Self" 255) that Hanson identifies, or in the way he seems to spend more time meditating on what to write or on how to write than on any particular subject matter, often avoiding personal reflection or introspection despite Romanticism's preference for the lyric mode. The figure of the Romantic child and the powerful feeling it is said to possess presented the young poet with an unattainable ideal. In addition to the pressures Ruskin must have felt to satisfy contradicting familial expectations, that ideal also led to the remarkable layers of self-consciousness in his verse, the boy's non-Romantic failing to simply be in the moment.

As Michael Sprinker says, Ruskin is a "central figure in the history of Romanticism for having recognized himself as both heir and enemy to this tradition" (115). Perhaps this recognition of being both allied with and set against Romanticism began in his childhood years. For the adult Romantic, childhood comes with "vision," with the child somehow in touch with or still connected to "the infinite." The child is a redeeming force for the adult who has lost these things; like nature, the child can teach morality, true humanity. Students learning of the care-free Romantic child, happy in isolation, and Romanticism through it, however, would benefit from considering Romanticism as a lived experience for its audience, and that the image of exuberant happiness created by the Romantic child full of wonder was and should be understood as troubled by lived history. Laurie Langbauer argues that understanding "Romanticism as part of youth movements alters its identity and importance" (77). As with the class on Victorian masculinities and *The King of the Golden River*, Ruskin's juvenilia alerts students to historically sensitive and multi-disciplinary approaches to the material, to a criticism from the inside. If current trends continue and English departments are faced with the fact of fewer and fewer students and thus fewer and fewer courses that they can offer, introducing juvenilia into the study of non-juvenile works may be one way to rejuvenate our classrooms.

NOTES

[1] Nipissing University is a primarily undergraduate university in North Bay, Ontario, Canada, one that used to be a mostly liberal arts institution with a large Education program but is increasingly becoming something like a professional school, with very large online nursing and business programs.

[2] Hanson explores the competing models of education faced by young Ruskin in "Ruskin's *Praeterita* and Landscape in Evangelical Children's Education."

[3] The older Ruskin adds, "compatible with the objective realities of existence in the nineteenth century" (35. 37) as if to insist that he never fully sided with either things or thoughts.

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