"YOUR GOOD INFLUENCE ON ME": THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHN RUSKIN AND WILLIAM HOLMAN HUNT

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THE letters which John Ruskin and William Holman Hunt wrote to each other provide interesting glimpses of the critic's complex and often ironic relationship with the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. As Derrick Leon pointed out more than a quarter of a century ago, "Of all the Pre-Raphaelites, Hunt was the one temperamentally most akin to Ruskin, and yet, by reason of fate, he was the one whom, until many years later, Ruskin was to know least well. With the same deep passion, the same deep purism, and the same inelasticity in their natures, they both served a similar conception of art as the expression of the religious attitude toward life; but though sprung from the same class, and each inheriting, to a marked degree, the traditional attitude of that class, they were nevertheless separated by Hunt's poverty and Ruskin's wealth." 1 Of course, more separated artist and critic than the state of their finances, for, as Leon himself indicates, both were very proud men, confident in their own ideas and not very willing to take either advice or criticism. I suspect that it was this similarity of temperament, more than any other factor, which long kept

Hunt and Ruskin from becoming really intimate friends—just as it was this same temperament which eventually drew them together. The very fact that they were so alike in so many ways thus created some of the most ironic aspects of their long relationship. For example, because Holman Hunt long felt himself unable to speak openly with Ruskin, the critic did not learn about his crucial artistic and spiritual influences upon the painter until they had known each other more than three decades. At the same time, it is unlikely that Ruskin ever realized the major influence that Hunt had upon his own criticism.

The most obvious importance of Ruskin to Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti was that he defended them in the press against unfair attack, thus playing a major role in their acceptance by the picture-buying public. According to Coventry Patmore, the day The Times harshly attacked Millais’s Christ in the House of His Parents, “Millais came to me in great agitation and anger, and begged me to ask Ruskin to take the matter up. I went at once to Ruskin, and the next day after there appeared in the Times a letter of great length and amazing quality, considering how short a time Ruskin had to examine the picture and make up his mind about it”.

The John Rylands University Library has Patmore’s letter to Hunt of May 1851 in which he informed the artist, “I have been unspeakably disgusted with notices of you and Millais. I wrote to Ruskin to draw his attention to the case, thinking that if he would write to the ‘Times’ or ‘Chronicle’ it might do some good. This he has been kind enough to do, and I suppose his letter is in to-day. He says in his answer to my note, ‘I wish Hunt would let me know his price for Valentine [rescuing Sylvia from Proteus]—I may perhaps be of service to him’.”

The Library Edition of Ruskin’s Works prints precisely this letter, which the critic wrote to Patmore on 10 May 1851, announcing: “I wrote to the Times yesterday, but the letter is not in it to-day; it went late, and might have been too late; but if it is not in Monday’s,
the letter shall go to the *Chronicle*, in a somewhat less polite form. My father has written to ask if the Ark picture be unsold, and what is its price. I wish Hunt would also let me know his price for Valentine. I may perhaps be of service to him” (12. xlvi). Ruskin in fact provided very material assistance to Hunt by encouraging Francis McCracken of Belfast, an early patron of both Millais and Hunt, to purchase his picture.

The Rylands also possesses Holman Hunt’s reply to Patmore’s good news. The artist told his friend: “I am delighted to hear that Ruskin has taken the field in defense of Millais and myself, for I had almost despaired of overcoming the evident opposition to our style which the example of the ‘Times’ and other influential papers were breeding. If they had merely confined their remarks to a just spirit of criticism it would have been all fair, but, when they endeavoured to ruin our interest with the Academy and the patrons, it was necessary that some notice should be taken, and to have that by Ruskin is of all things what I could most desire” (Rylands Eng. MS. 1216/16).

Ruskin first defended the young painters from harsh attacks by the contemporary reviewers on the grounds that their daring, often awkward realism was the necessary foundation for a new English art. The Pre-Raphaelites, in other words, were following the advice Ruskin had given young artists in the closing pages of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, which had appeared in 1843. There he had urged that neophytes, who are just learning to see with and through the actions of their hands, “should go to Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remembering her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing . . . and rejoicing always in the truth” (3. 624). Despite the fact that Ruskin and his editors emphasize several times that he was here speaking to the student, the painter just beginning, readers have frequently misunderstood his point, and even today one still occasionally comes across the misguided claim that he desired a “photographic realism”.¹ In fact, immediately

after thus instructing the beginner, Ruskin adds that when the painter’s “memories are stored, and their imaginations fed, and their hands firm . . . we will follow them wherever they choose to lead . . . They are then our masters, and are fit to be so” (ibid.). Ruskin, who had begun *Modern Painters* to defend Turner’s late works, specifically those at the 1842 Royal Academy, instructs the young artist to follow Turner’s development, beginning with a topographical landscape art and progressing only later to more imaginative work. Holman Hunt was therefore making a quite Ruskinian point when he emphasized in *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* that when the friends agreed “to use the utmost elaboration in painting our first pictures, we never meant more than to insist that the practice was essential for training the eye and the hand of the young artist”.

Although many commentators then and now have criticized the apparent inconsistency of Ruskin’s praising first Turner’s late works of vapour and fire and then the precise, hard-edged realism of the Pre-Raphaelites, the critic was in fact quite true to his stated theories when he did so. Ruskin, one remembers, had turned to the painter’s early works to demonstrate that Turner, who had been attacked for being untrue to nature, had served a long and careful apprenticeship to her; and when he defended both the Pre-Raphaelites and Turner in the same lectures and books he was not being anywhere as inconsistent as careless readers of his work have assumed: he praised the young men for taking the first steps that might lead to an imaginative art analogous to that of Turner, though not necessarily resembling it.

According to Holman Hunt, the members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle were in basic agreement with the tenets of *Modern Painters*, volume I, since they too believed that imaginative art had to be founded upon a close study of nature capable of piercing conventions of perception and artistic representation. Nonetheless, it is not clear if Ruskin was the direct, major source of these ideas, or even if the young painters had read the volume which contained them before they became friendly with its author. What is clear is that Hunt believed that his own reading of the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846), which contained Ruskin’s theories of beauty and imagination, crucially affected his own artistic development and that of the Brotherhood as well. I have previously explained in this journal how the artist’s ambitious attempts to combine realism and elaborate iconography were inspired by a passage in *Modern Painters*, volume II, which explicates typological (or prefigurative) symbolism as an example of high painterly imagination. Describing the desolation in which the Virgin finds herself in Tintoretto’s *San Rocco Annunciation*, Ruskin then points out that there is more than mere picturesqueness in this picture, for if the spectator examines the composition of the picture, he will find the whole symmetry of it depending on a narrow line of light, the edge of a carpenter’s square, which connects these unused tools with an object at the top of the brickwork, a white stone, four square, the corner-stone of the old edifice, the base of its supporting column. This, I think, sufficiently explains the typical [typological] character of the whole. The ruined house is the Jewish dispensation; that obscurely arising in the dawning of the sky is the Christian; but the corner-stone of the old building remains, though the builders’ tools lie idle beside it, and the stone which the builders refused is become the Headstone of the Corner. (4. 264-5)

Citing Psalm 118, Ruskin correctly perceives that the painter has made use of a commonplace type, or prefigurative image, to combine matter and spirit, realism and symbolism. Unlike allegory, typology emphasizes the reality of both symbol and that symbolized: Moses, Samson and Melchizedek, who all prefigure some aspect of Christ, exist in their own right.

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Drawing upon this central fact of typological symbolism, both Ruskin and Hunt made it an important part of their theories of art.

The typological symbolism which Ruskin explained in *Modern Painters* came as a revelation to Hunt, since it solved the artistic problems that had been troubling him. This symbolic mode, first of all, strikes the informed spectator as a natural language that inheres in the visual details themselves—and not as something laid upon the objects in some artificial manner. Indeed, as Ruskin points out, the first clue to the meaning of *The Annunciation* comes from its composition, which naturally and necessarily guides the eye to those details whose comprehension releases one into a world of religious vision. The second aspect of this kind of symbolism is that it spiritualizes the most brutal fact, allowing the painter to concentrate simultaneously upon painterly skills and his deeper message. Typology, in other words, allows Hunt to reconcile his love of detailed realism with his need to make painting depict the unseen truths of the spirit.

The crucial importance of this section of *Modern Painters* for Holman Hunt appears in the fact that he twice dwells upon it at length in his memoir, once quoting it in its entirety. First, when setting forth the events which led up to the formation of the Brotherhood, he reconstructs a conversation he had with Millais, during the course of which he related his encounter with the second volume of *Modern Painters*. According to Hunt, he told his friend that he had recently "had great delight in skimming over a certain book, *Modern Painters*, by a writer calling himself an Oxford Graduate; it was lent to me only for a few hours, but, by Jove! passages in it made my heart thrill. He feels the power and responsibility of art more than any author I have ever read" (i. 90). Ruskin's descriptions of Venetian painting, he told Millais, make you "see them with your inner sight, and you feel that the men who did them had been appointed by God, like old prophets, to bear a sacred message" (i. 90). He went on to tell his fellow student that Ruskin's readings of Tintoretto "make one see in the painter a sublime Hogarth. The Annunciation takes place in a ruined
house, with walls tumbled down; the place in that condition stands as a symbol of the Jewish Church . . . and it suggests an appropriateness in Joseph’s occupation of a carpenter, that at first one did not recognise; he is the new builder! ” (i. 90).

Hunt returns to Tintoretto’s *Annunciation*, Ruskin’s interpretation, and their effect upon his own conceptions of art when he recounts how he and the author of *Modern Painters* together visited the Scuola di San Rocco in 1869. According to Hunt, the first picture “we stood before” was *The Annunciation*, and although he found the ruin and delapidation much greater than he had expected, “the image raised in my mind by the ‘Oxford Graduate’, and retained ever since, was not so different from what I saw before me, as conjured-up scenes derived second-hand often prove to be at sight of the original ” (ii. 260). More important, now that the painter finally had a chance to view the picture which had long been such a major, if indirect influence upon his work, he was gratified to discover the validity of Ruskin’s interpretation. After examining the painting in detail, he concludes: “there could be no doubt that Tintoretto had the purpose to suggest the desolation that had come upon the existing Israelitish Church, and its replacement by a new edifice ” (ii. 260). Although Hunt does not here mention the fact, he had already made use of the typological image of the cornerstone employed by Tintoretto and explicated by Ruskin in his own *Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1860), and one may assume that he was well pleased to discover that Ruskin had been correct so many years before. Although Hunt does not point out his own use of this image, he rather characteristically uses this occasion of his first inspection of *The Annunciation* to set forth his own theories of art. In so doing he joins his own cause with that of the great Venetian:

When language was not transcendental enough to complete the meaning of a revelation, symbols were relied upon for heavenly teaching, and familiar images, chosen from the known, were made to mirror the unknown spiritual truth. The forerunners and contemporaries of Tintoretto had consecrated the custom, to which he gave a larger value and more original meaning. How far such symbolism is warranted depends upon its unobtrusiveness and its restriction within limits not destroying natural beauty. There is no more reason why the features belonging to a picture should be distorted for the purpose of such imaginative
suggestion than that the poet's metaphors should spoil his words for the ordinary uses of man. Tintoretto's meaning was expressed with no arbitrary or unnatural disturbance of the truth. (ii. 260-1)

In concluding this defence of an art which combines realism and intricate symbolism, Hunt implicitly merges himself with his great predecessor: "I thought what happiness Tintoretto must have felt when he had this illuminating thought presented to him, and of his joy in carrying it out on canvas, and was wondering how few were the men who had pondered over the picture to read it thoroughly, until in fulness of time the decipherer came and made it clear" (ii. 261). The painter here sounds much as if he were writing of himself, for both when he imagines the joy of Tintoretto's moment of "illumination" and when he laments how few have truly appreciated its embodiment, he reminds us of his many letters describing the triumphs and trials of his own career. His use of the theological language of types and prophecies to praise Ruskin as that "decipherer" who came "in fulness of time" might also suggest how much of himself he includes in Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Assuredly, Ruskin was the decipherer who came in the manner of John the Baptist to reveal the true meaning of old truths, but he also serves, again much in the manner of the Baptist, to prepare for the culmination of these old truths—in this case Hunt's own painting. It is difficult to determine to what extent he intended such a parallel to be drawn, for when completed it becomes rather outrageous. Nonetheless, since both he and Ruskin believed artists to be inspired prophets at their best, neither would have found the general implications of such a suggestion disturbing.

In his memoir the artist relates how Ruskin, who had lost the religious belief which had originally founded his interpretation, dwelt more "on the arrangement of lines in the design and the technique displayed in the handling, than on the mysteries that he had interpreted five-and-twenty years before" (ii. 261). His friend's changed attitudes led to a long discussion of the grounds for religious faith, but first Ruskin, who had not looked over his interpretation for many years, stood before The Annunciation and read it aloud. Hunt quotes the entire passage from the
second volume of *Modern Painters*, adding: "The words brought back to my mind the little bedroom, twenty-two years since, wherein I sat till the early morning reading the same passage with marvel" (ii. 261).

*Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* thus clearly testifies to the importance Ruskin's criticism had for the painter's ideas of art, but in a letter he wrote to his friend more than a decade after they met in Venice, the original of which is now in Cornell University, he explained the role it had in his life as well. According to him, before he encountered Ruskin's works he had been "a contemptuous unbeliever in any spiritual principles but the development of talent, and Shelley and Lord Byron with Keats were my best modern heroes—all read by the light of materialism—or sensualism". Then, a fellow student who was trying to convert him to Roman Catholicism lent him *Modern Painters* under the mistaken impression that its author belonged to this faith. "It was high time that I got something, and this something thus strangely gained was what first arrested me in my downward course. It was the voice of God. I read this in rapture and it sowed some seed of shame." If the painter's fervent language sounds much like that of an evangelical record of conversion, the resemblance is quite appropriate, for Hunt's words convey precisely the kind of response Ruskin had hoped to awaken in young artists. Three and a half decades after he had written the second volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin thus belatedly learned that Hunt had been a true member of that ideal audience to which he had directed his efforts. Furthermore, as Hunt told him, like any true believer he had converted others to the cause, so that "all that the Pre-raphaelite brotherhood had of Ruskinism came from this reading of mine". Hunt's outpourings in this letter of 1880 reveal the central importance to his life and art of his encounter with *Modern Painters*, for it not only gave his painting new purpose and method but also led him towards the faith which they required. Although this letter speaks only in the most general terms of the inspiration he had received from Ruskin, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* shows that one of the critic's most important influences upon
his art came in his explanation of typological symbolism which could unite realism and iconography, form and content, matter and spirit. The letter, which emphasizes how serious, how essential, was the entire Ruskinian message to Hunt at this point in his career, thus makes us realize how like a revelation such a symbolic reading must have seemed to the young artist.

One of the many ironies in the relationship between the two men is that whereas Hunt credited Ruskin with being the source of his conceptions of typology and symbolism, Ruskin, at Patmore's urging, was first moved to defend him as he had defended Turner—on realistic criteria alone. A further irony arises in the fact that Ruskin's defence of Hunt's symbolic pictures, The Awakening Conscience and The Light of the World, in 1854 played a crucial role in his own development as critic and theorist of art. Although no student of Ruskin thus far seems to have perceived the fact, the critic's explanation of Hunt's elaborate iconography stimulated him to develop those theories of symbolism which figure so importantly in the last three volumes of Modern Painters. In other words, Hunt first drew his inspiration from Ruskin's explanations of typology, attempting to create his own form of symbolic realism; Ruskin, unaware that he had thus already influenced the artist, then defended his symbolic works and in so doing became increasingly attracted to the kind of art Hunt was attempting to create. I have previously told the story of how Ruskin turned from aesthetic theorizing to iconographical analyses of art in the latter portions of Modern Painters.¹ Now I would add that Hunt seems to have provided the major impetus for this shift in emphasis.

Evidence of Ruskin's new attraction to symbolism in art appears in the third volume of Modern Painters, which appeared in 1856, two years after he had written on The Light of the World and The Awakening Conscience. There, in opposition to contemporary attitudes which held that allegory in art and literature was essentially unimaginative, he urged: "The greater and more thoughtful the artists, the more they delight in symbolism,

and the more fearlessly they employ it. Dead symbolism, second-hand symbolism, pointless symbolism, are indeed objectionable enough; but so are most other things that are dead, second-hand, and pointless” (5. 135). According to Ruskin, “the simple fact is that allegorical painting has been the delight of the greatest men and of the wisest multitudes, from the beginning of art, and will be till art expires” (5. 134). He therefore sets forth his theory of the symbolical grotesque, which is his name for such modes in visual and verbal arts, and citing Spenser, Dante, and the Bible in literature and Giotto, Dürer, Tintoretto and many others in painting, he predicts that the Pre-Raphaelites will usher in “a new era of art, in a true unison of the grotesque [that is, the symbolical] with the realistic power” (5. 137).

Earlier in this same volume he had already cited Hunt’s *The Light of the World* as an example of authentic visionary art which combined ancient faith with modern realism. At the same time he urged that “sacred art, so far from being exhausted, has yet to attain the development of its highest branches; and the task, or privilege, yet remains for mankind, to produce an art which shall be at once entirely skilful and entirely sincere. All the histories of the Bible are, in my judgment, yet waiting to be painted.... Religious art, at once complete and sincere, never yet has existed” (5. 87). Nonetheless, he asserts that such an art will come into being, “and that those bright Turnerian imageries, which the European public declared to be ‘dotage’, and those calm Pre-Raphaelite studies, which, in like manner, it pronounced ‘puerility’, form the first foundation that has ever been laid for true sacred art” (5. 87).

Another one of the ironies of the Hunt–Ruskin relationship was that by the time the painter was able to complete *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1860), which embodied Ruskin’s programme for a new sacred realism, the critic had lost his religious belief and, for many years, turned away from such issues. Hunt’s financial difficulties had forced him to defer completing the work he had begun in Jerusalem during 1854, and by the time he was able to finish it, Ruskin, the one person who should have appreciated it, was no longer interested. Nonetheless, Ruskin
did remain concerned with allegory and symbolism; one sign of this continued interest appears in his brilliant interpretations of Turner in *Modern Painters*, volume V, while another appears in his increasing fascination with mythology, which he discussed as another form of the symbolical grotesque. Equally important, in 1867 he set forth his theory of Constant Art in which allegory provided the basis for a calm, balanced, essentially static mode of painting that avoided what he took to be the characteristic flaws of Victorian art—sentimentality, excessive domesticity, shallowness, eccentricity, and a "fatal . . . desire of dramatic excitement" (19. 203).¹ In setting forth this theory of art, Ruskin formulates precisely the artistic programme which Hunt was concerned to embody in his major works—and yet there is no evidence that the critic was aware of this fact at the time he set down his thoughts, nor is there any evidence that Hunt ever came upon them. In other words, as indebted as both men were to each other, their relationship, both as friends and as theoreticians of art, was marked by a series of failed recognitions and missed opportunities to communicate with each other. Fortunately for both Hunt and Ruskin, just when each most needed the affection and admiration of the other, they were able to meet as intimate friends, and many of the extant letters they wrote to each other come from this late period of their relationship.

Hunt's 1880 letter to Ruskin, which stands as one of the most interesting portions of their correspondence, provides us with a glimpse of Ruskin's influence upon Hunt that we would never have guessed had we relied upon his published memoirs or other private correspondence. Indeed, throughout much of the time he knew Ruskin the painter expresses scepticism and outright hostility toward him. For example, in an early letter to Lear which probably dates from 1851-4, he describes him somewhat mockingly as an "Art Warwick" while in another letter to the same artist of about the same period he remarked: "Upon my word this 'puller up and setter down' takes a responsible position—I have seen him twice with the intention of bullying him but as his wife & mother were present could not get an

¹ See *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, pp. 449-57, for a fuller discussion of this essay, "Modern Art", in the context of Ruskin's career.
opportunity” (both Rylands Eng. MS. 1214/11). Part of his hostility, it seems clear, stems from his characteristic suspicion of any theorizing about art by someone not a professional artist, and sometimes this hostility prevented Hunt from recognizing how much he really agreed with Ruskin. For example, he wrote to his friend J. L. Tupper on 15 May 1877: “I agree that Ruskin has done much harm to counter balance much good in giving people the trick of talking about Art instead of really doing a little of it to enable them to understand” (Hunt. MS. Uncat. LF). Although admitting that Ruskin has done much good, Hunt failed to recognize that the critic also wanted people to learn about art by its practice, and, in fact, devoted much of his time and energies to proselytizing for art education. Nonetheless, Hunt’s primary objection to Ruskin was his intellectual arrogance—in other words, that he was too much like himself, that he was too dogmatic, too theoretical, too convinced by his own enthusiasms. As he wrote to his friend Thomas Combe from Jerusalem in May 1872, Ruskin needed a little humility: “You said in a previous letter that Mrs Combe is beginning to learn something about Art by attending the Ruskin lectures. I wish she would teach me for I find the longer I study and work the less confidence I have in my own knowledge. I think Ruskin might also be benefited by a little instruction on the subject altho’ I don’t think he has yet got to that point at which philosophers begin to feel they know nothing” (Rylands Eng. MS. 1213/29). Not until he became friendly with Ruskin after an interval of many years did he take him on his own terms, recognizing his own important debts to him.

These letters have important value for anyone interested in understanding the complex relationship of these men and their ideas, but the evidence that they provide must be used warily. At several points in the correspondence, one encounters letters, such as that written in 1880, which radically change usual views of their importance to each other, but since these fifty letters are but a small portion of those they wrote, one must assume that contradictory information may surface when new portions of the correspondence appear—as they well may. Part of our difficulty here arises in Hunt’s apparently all-embracing sincerity.
The artist wrote an unusually large number of long letters to various correspondents in which he bared his soul, setting forth his religious and artistic beliefs. Although Holman Hunt is not a particularly skilful writer, he does manage to achieve the impression that he is necessarily revealing all of himself, and one is often surprised to discover from other letters that he has in fact told but a portion of his views. It is not that he is ever dishonest or disingenuous but that he always seems to be telling everything about a particular subject of interest to him. In other words, his very ability to convince his reader that he is stating the entire truth often convinces us that we know more about him than we actually do.

Another problem one faces when attempting to piece together the story of their friendship from the evidence of letters is that it is sometimes difficult to be certain to which Hunt Ruskin was writing; for he knew—and mentions in letters and diaries—not only William Holman Hunt but also William Henry Hunt and Alfred William Hunt. Furthermore, as Lady Mander has pointed out to me in conversation, the matter is complicated even more by the fact that both Holman Hunt and A. W. Hunt, the landscape painter, lived at the same address (Tor Villa) at one time or another. Since Ruskin frequently simply begins his letters with “Dear Hunt” or “My dear Hunt” and does not include an address, the result is that one frequently encounters libraries, collectors, and (I assume) auction catalogues making false attributions—a fact easily ascertained in the longer letters which mention dates, family, and other precise topics but which is often unclear in the shorter notes. Unfortunately, in attempting to piece together this friendship, one finds that it is just these notes, which are often difficult to date or determine the addressee, which are of significant biographical value. It is important, for example, to have Letters 12, 14, 15 and 16, which demonstrate that Hunt and Ruskin were still seeing each other and on friendly terms after Millais, Hunt’s close friend, had married Euphemia Chalmers Gray after the annulment of her marriage to Ruskin.

Fortunately, there is no difficulty either about the eight letters I have located from Hunt to Ruskin or the five the critic wrote to Edith Hunt, the painter’s wife. The provenance, content, or
adequate addresses of the thirty-six from Ruskin to the artist convince me that they are indeed correctly understood to have been intended for William Holman Hunt. Of the fifty letters assembled, seven of those from Ruskin to Hunt have appeared partially or completely in print before—Letters 7, 29, 31, 33, 44, 48 and 49—and I have included them for the sake of completeness. In editing these letters below I have foregone the use of footnotes, assuming that the evidence for dating and other matters demanding annotation are best provided in narrative form.

Following the editorial approach of John L. Bradley and Van Akin Burd, I have tried to print the letters in such a way as to remind the reader that they were intended as private communications and not for publication. I have therefore emended the punctuation of both men's letters as little as possible; in general I only add terminal punctuation that is obviously required, and I have only changed capitalization when Hunt begins a sentence in the lower case. Hunt frequently uses American, rather than British, orthography, writing "color", for example, rather than "colour"; and I have changed this spelling to match that in his published works. All other changes, such as obviously omitted words, have been supplied in brackets, while crossings-out appear restored within oblique brackets.

I would like to thank the Ruskin Trustees and Miss Diana Holman-Hunt and Mrs. Elizabeth Burt Tompkin, holders of copyright on the artist's unpublished manuscripts, for kindly permitting me to print these letters. I am of course deeply indebted to the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, Olin Library of Cornell University, the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Ruskin Galleries at Bembridge School, Isle of Wight, and the John Rylands University Library of Manchester for permitting me to inspect and publish manuscript materials in their possession. I am also grateful to Mrs. Mary Warner Marien for pointing out to me the letters at Cornell University.

II

At Ruskin's urging, Francis McCracken of Belfast had purchased Hunt's *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* in
November 1851. Although the following letter makes it appear that Ruskin had not seen Hunt's picture before recommending its purchase, other evidence suggests that he had examined it under Patmore’s direction at the Royal Academy and now merely wanted to inspect it more closely. Shortly after his return to London in July 1852 after a ten-month stay in Venice he wrote to Hunt arranging a visit to his studio.


My dear Sir

I found so much to do at first on my return to London that I was obliged to delay the pleasure of a visit to you at Chelsea—and of seeing the picture which I have to thank both you and Mr McCracken with all my heart for leaving in London so long.

I will make my way to Chelsea—if convenient to you—on Monday morning—the 2nd—sometime near 12 o’clock.

Ever most truly yours

J Ruskin

In this next letter, which can be dated 9 January 1853, Ruskin asks Hunt to act as his assistant in charity. I have been unable to identify the particular Thomas Langdon whose condition Hunt was sent to investigate, since he does not appear in Graves or other standard biographical works of reference. Ruskin, who at this time had not seen very much of Rossetti’s work, mentions this artist’s Ecce Ancilla Domini! (The Annunciation), which McCracken had purchased apparently at Hunt’s suggestion. He had not yet seen the painting when he wrote to Hunt, but he had liked Rossetti’s watercolour Beatrice Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast, Denies Him Her Salutation, which he had examined at the 1852 Winter Exhibition of the Old Water-colour Society. Although he refers to it as a sketch, it is in fact a finished watercolour; but Ruskin may simply have meant that he understood it to be the first version of a subject later to be painted in oils.

[Huntington MS. Uncat. LF] Sunday evening

9th January

Dear Mr Hunt,

Some time ago—I am ashamed to say—I received a letter informing me of a very pitiable case of a poor artist said to be lying in sickness—poverty—and age at Chelsea—No 1. Park Place, Park Lane.—his name Thomas Langdon. Could
you favour me so far as to enquire into his state? I am much grieved at having mislaid the letter for some weeks. I hope I may yet be in time to be of some service to him if you find him in distress.

I have heard much from Mr McCracken of a Madonna of Rossetti’s which I was to see some day. Have you nothing to show me? I am very much delighted with a sketch of Rossetti’s in the Winter Exhibition—Beatrice and Dante—a most glorious piece of colour—Is he painting it?—The breadth of blue—green—and fragmentary gold of the smaller figure is a perfect feast.

Yours most truly

J Ruskin

The following letter, which is undated, can be assigned to January or February 1853, since it obviously follows closely upon Ruskin’s letter of 9 January. He and his wife Effie had moved to Herne Hill in late July 1852, very shortly after their return from Venice, and he may have underlined the Denmark Hill address of his parents either to emphasize that he still used their home as a business address or that the money was to be paid by his father, John James Ruskin. This Denmark Hill address is nonetheless troublesome, since it suggests that the letter was written before the move to Herne Hill, something which the content presumably makes impossible. Hunt had obviously carried out Ruskin’s instructions about Langdon, reporting that the old man did in fact require aid, and Ruskin was now sending along some small amount of money. Of course, far more interesting than Ruskin’s act of charity is the fact that we again observe him trying to come to terms with Rossetti’s art, of which he had as yet seen very little.

[ Huntington MS. Uncat. LF]

Dear Mr Hunt

I thank you exceedingly for the trouble you have kindly taken about Mr Langdon. The enclosed post order for £1 must be asked for from Mr. J. R. Denmark Hill, Camberwell. Would you kindly apply it to the purchase of anything immediately necessary for Mr L. I will send a little more from time to time. I shall be most glad to see what you say you are finishing.

One thing vexes me about Rossetti’s Dante, as I look at it further. The expression of all the heads without exception—vulgar—or lifeless—or proud—

Even in a sketch I don’t understand how a man of feeling should do this. It is for colour & grouping only that I like it.

Ever yours

J Ruskin
The following brief note, in which Ruskin again enclosed money for Langdon, is dated only “30th March”, but we can confidently place it in 1853, not only because it clearly follows the previous two letters but also because it mentions Edward Lear, the landscape painter and nonsense poet. Hunt had shared lodgings with Lear at Clive Vale Farm, Fairlight while painting Our English Coasts (Strayed Sheep) in the summer and autumn of 1852.

Dear Mr Hunt

Please apply the enclosed for me to the comforts of the poor old man whom you were so kind as to aid [or visit?]. I got such a nice modest letter from Lear yesterday—ascribing to you much help and instruction on his art.

Ever faithfully yours

J Ruskin

Occupied with seeing The Stones of Venice through the press, Ruskin explained that he would be unable to visit Hunt and he asked him for his opinion of Millais’s The Order of Release, for which Effie had posed. Ruskin, his wife, and Millais left for Scotland on 19 June and the private view at the Royal Academy took place on 29 April, so the following letter would seem to have been written on Tuesday the 3 or 10 of May 1853.

Beneath Ruskin’s signature another hand, almost certainly that of Hunt, has made what appear to be colour notes:

gray/blue

Pink/Brown

green.

My dear Hunt

I am sadly vexed at not being able to come to you—but the printers are keeping me close to my own work.—I must look to the exhibition. I have hardly seen even Millais’ head of my wife, which I am curious enough about, as you may suppose—Please write and tell me how the audience of Tuesday afternoon like the picture—and how you are satisfied with it yourself.

Ever faithfully yours

J Ruskin

The following letter, dated only “15th May”, was probably written in 1853 or in the years from 1856-60. Ruskin was sending
along Joseph Noel Paton (1821-1902), a Scottish admirer of the Pre-Raphaelites who specialized in "Faerie painting"—scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and other renditions of fantasy. Paton, who was later knighted, continued to be friendly with Ruskin, visiting him at Brantwood in 1880.

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6

[Huntington MS. Uncat. LF]  
Danish Hill  
15th May

Dear Hunt  

I never had more pleasure in writing a note than I have at this moment, hoping it will be brought to you by Mr Noel Paton who has been admiring you to a quite irrational extent: and to whom, therefore, please show some bad sketches or something to bring him to his senses again.

I hear you're going to Norway.  
Please Don't.

Always affectionately Yours,  
J Ruskin.

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About a month after writing the previous two letters, Ruskin set off for Scotland with wife, Millais, and various relations. In *Millais and the Ruskins*, Mary Lutyens has masterfully told the story how the young painter fell in love with Effie while struggling to complete his portrait of her husband. Apparently Millais became increasingly despondent, and Ruskin, who did not know the cause, became quite worried, finally writing to Hunt on 20 October 1853. Miss Lutyens prints this letter, which she has transcribed from a manuscript in her own collection, on pages 100-1 of *Millais and the Ruskins*, and for the sake of completeness I include it here.

7

20th October

My dear Hunt  

I can't help writing to you to night; for here is Everett lying crying upon his bed like a child—or rather with that bitterness which is only in a man's grief—and I don't know what will become of him when you are gone I always intended to write to you to try and dissuade you from this Syrian expedition—I suppose it is much too late now—but I think it quite wrong of you to go. I had no idea how much Everett depended on you, till lately—for your sake I wanted you not to go, but had no hope of making you abandon the thought—if I had known sooner how much Everett wanted you I should have tried. I can be of no use to him—he has no sympathy with me or my ways, his family do not suffice him—he has nobody to take your place—his health is wretched—and he is always miserable about something or other: and his mind is really of too
much value—as I think yours is also—that the health and life of both should
be endangered because you must needs go to paint the holy land—You are not
fit to do it yet—your own genius is yet quite undeveloped—I say so the more
positively because I think it is a great one—and the greater it is, the longer it
will take to mature. If you go to the Holy Land now, you will paint things
that you will be ashamed of in seven years: if you wait, to take care of Everett
till he gets somebody else to take care of him, you may go then with fully ripened
power, and save him besides. I never saw so strange a person, I could not
answer for his reason if you leave him. Instead of going to Syria, I think you
ought to come down here instantly: he is quite overworked—very ill—has yet
a quarter of his picture to do in his distress—and we must go to Edinburgh—and
leave him quite alone—next Wednesday. Think over all this.

Yours ever faithfully and in haste
J Ruskin

Don't say anything about this letter to him.

Effie told the young painter that her husband had written to
Hunt, and the next day Millais wrote to his friend, assuring him
that, though not feeling quite well, he had nothing seriously
wrong with him. On 26 October, Ruskin and his wife left
Millais at Brig o’Turk while they visited Keir, Dunblane, and
after their arrival Ruskin again wrote to Hunt.

Dear Hunt

Everett had so severe a headache yesterday that he begged me to write to
you. I was packing, &c., & could not till this morning. Everett says buy the
picture immediately and the money shall be with you in less than a week, and
that he will go to Florence with you in the spring. I was obliged to leave him
yesterday as he could not move with headache; but I have sent a carriage for
him this morning and my servant to bring him here, as there is no possibility
of his finishing his picture this season, and I mean to take care of him all the way
home.

Most truly yours
J Ruskin

Although the letters by Millais and Ruskin to others
published by Miss Lutyens provide no information by which
one could identify that picture Hunt was to buy immediately,
they do reveal that Millais apparently changed his plans several
times, ultimately travelling to Edinburgh where he remained
until 10 November. Upon his return to London, the young
painter discovered he had been elected an Associate of the Royal
Academy.
There are no other securely dated letters before 1856. Hunt left for the Middle East on 16 January 1854, returning to London around February 1856, and there is no evidence that he and Ruskin corresponded during this time. Of course, since there are such gaps at certain places in their correspondence with each other, it is possible that additional letters may yet be found. The three following brief notes would seem to fall somewhere between 1853 and 1860. The first note, which tantalizingly mentions “Wednesday the 11th”, cannot be securely dated, although several likely possibilities may be suggested. Of the more than forty times that Wednesday fell on the 11th of some month during their relationship, above half occur when either Hunt or Ruskin were in Europe, the Middle East, or otherwise out of London. 11 August 1852 seems too early, since Ruskin addressed the artist more formally at this point in their acquaintance. More likely are 11 May 1853, 11 January 1854 (five days before Hunt left for Egypt, Syria and Palestine), 11 February 1857, and 11 November 1857. Assuming that these three letters form a sequence, one can conclude that all were written early in their friendship or soon after Hunt’s return to England, since it seems unlikely that in the later years of this relationship the critic would have summoned Hunt to bring along sketches, as he does in Letter 10.

[Huntington MS. Uncat. LF]
Dear Hunt
   Could you dine with us on Wednesday the 11th at ½ past six—some pleasant people are coming who would like much if you would come too.
   Yours affectionately
   J Ruskin

10

[Huntington MS. Uncat. LF]
Dear Hunt
   Wednesday is the day at six o’clock—but come an hour at least before, if you can—I am going to break my compact so far as to ask our clergyman & his wife who want much to know you to join us at dinner. You will like them.
   —Remember the little sketches.
   Truly yours
   J Ruskin
Dear Hunt

Do you drop your sketches about wherever you go—I have one which I found soon after you left—I have forgotten every day to write about it till past post time.

Always yours
J Ruskin

The reference to Louis Napoleon and the fact that Ruskin discussed Hunt's The Scapegoat in the 1856 Academy Notes makes that the most likely year for this letter. The query after the date is Ruskin's.

Dear Hunt

Can you dine with us on Tuesday next? I'm going off to the Continent—unless Louis Napoleon goes to war with us—the moment I've finished your picture at the Royal Academy, so I shall not have time for the least chat before I go, unless you'll come & see us then. The worst of it is we dine too early for you—6—but pray come if you can.

Yours affectionately
J Ruskin

I have tentatively assigned the next letter to April 1856, which would make it closely follow the last. Both men were in England and Hunt sent paintings to the Royal Academy exhibition in 1853, 1856, 1860, 1867 and 1869, but the 9th fell on a Saturday in 1853 and 1869. Although the following invitation could possibly have been written in 1856, 1860 or 1867, I have assigned it to the first year, since there is not much evidence that the two men saw much of each other between 1858 and their unexpected reunion in Venice in July 1869. The clergyman to whom Ruskin refers both here and in Letter 9 is probably the Rev. Henry Melvill, the "Evangelical Chrysostom", who was later Dean of St. Paul's and already the most famous Evangelical preacher of his day. One would like to know if this dinner ever took place, because when Ruskin defended Hunt's subject in
The Scapegoat in the 1856 Academy Notes, he cited one of Melvill’s sermons to explain the artist’s meaning (14. 64 n).

Dear Hunt

I know the pictures go in on the ninth. Could you dine with us quietly on that day at six o’clock? I promised our Clergyman & his wife, whom, both, you will like, that they should dine with you some day soon—would that day do? I know you wouldn’t come before.

Always faithfully yours
J Ruskin

The next letter, written while Ruskin was travelling in Switzerland, again reveals him requesting Hunt to assist him in an act of kindness—something which demonstrates that despite Hunt’s close friendship with Millais, who was by now married to Ruskin’s ex-wife, the relationship between Hunt and the critic had not changed very much. This fact of Hunt’s continuing relationship with Ruskin is all the more striking because both Millais and Charles Collins had written long letters to Hunt accusing the critic of madness and cruelty. Hunt managed to remain close to Millais and his new wife while not breaking with Ruskin.

Johann Ludwig Rudolf Durheim (1811-95), a minor Swiss artist and Ruskin’s old travelling companion, was the friend whom Ruskin asked Hunt to aid. The Pierpont Morgan contains eight letters written in French from Ruskin to Durheim between 1845 and 1856, the last of which includes as a postscript: “J’ecrivais à M. Hunt tout de vite il y’ a déjà une semaine. Son adresse est / W. Holman Hunt Esq. / 49 Claverton Terrace / Lupus Street, Pimlico / London.” Ruskin’s Diaries (ii. 516) reveal that he was in Thun on 7 June 1856.

I would like to thank Professor Beverly S. Ridgely of Brown University who, upon looking at the following letter, parts of which are very difficult to decipher, immediately identified the source of Ruskin’s allusion to Molière as Le Misanthrope, act V, scene 4, pointing out that Ruskin has somewhat garbled the original which reads “et depuis que je l’ai vu, trois quarts d’heure durant, Cracher dans un puits pour faire des ronds”.
Dear Hunt

Today I left at Berne, very sorrowful, an old friend of mine—M. Durheim, to whom at parting, I promised that I would write to you today, first—with affectionate salutation from myself—secondly with more than I can translate of pretty & sincere French courtesies from him: thirdly with the information that he had written you two letters lately; which I am not surprised at your having never answered, in as much as he tells me they were addressed to

Holman Hunt Esq.
Care of the Royal Academy
London.

Said letters, it appears, contained some enquiries touching the fate of a little picture of an interior which you kindly promised to take charge of, and this picture, if quit of exhibitions, Durheim wants to have sent to Berne as speedily as possible, for an exhibition there, soon to open. His address is

M. Rudolf Durheim
Rue des Gentilhommes, 147a
Berne.

I am as idle as a grasshopper—and feel this little piece of business a frightful bore. I have, really, no patience to tell you where I am—or what I am about—I mean—what variety of Nothing it is on which I employ myself. There is only one mode of passing time uselessly which I don't think the Germans will ever teach me—that which disgusts Celimene with her idle lover in the Misanthrope: "Depuis que je l'ai vu passer deux heures a cracher dans un puits pour faire des ronds." If you happen to hear in London of any new and complete ways of wasting time, please send me word of them, to Poste Restante, Interlachen. Love to all friends.

Affectionately yours
J Ruskin

Ruskin remained on the Continent from the middle of May to the end of September 1856, and after his return he wrote to Hunt, arranging a visit to the latter's studio to see The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple, which was not completed until 1860. He wished to bring along Mrs. Hugh Blackburn, a minor artist whom he and Effie had visited in Glasgow in December 1853. Since Ruskin reminds Hunt in a letter of 23 September 1857 that Mrs. Blackburn had already been to his studio, one can deduce that this note was written between October 1856 and the summer of 1857. Had the note been written before Ruskin's 1856 trip, one can assume that he would have mentioned both The Finding and The Scapegoat.
Dear Hunt

Pray be at home on Monday if you can, & send me word if you can’t. I am going to bring a clever little lady, Mrs Blackburn, to see you & the Jews.

Yours affectionately

J Ruskin

Ruskin probably sent the following invitation to Hunt in 1856, for while the 1st of December fell upon a Monday in 1851, 1856, 1862, 1873 and 1879, Ruskin was out of the country on this date in 1851 and 1862 and at Oxford in 1873. The Brantwood Diary (p. 201) does in fact show that Ruskin was in London on 1 December 1879, but it seems unlikely that he would have written an invitation which does not mention Hunt’s wife.

My dear Hunt

If you are at all able to come out at present, we have some very quiet people with us on Friday next the 5th whom you would give great pleasure to, as well as to us, if you could dine with us on that day at six.

Most truly Yours,

J Ruskin

The following fragment, with its tantalizingly incomplete first sentence, was written by Ruskin as part of the arrangements to raise money for the family of Thomas Seddon, Hunt’s companion in the Middle East who had recently died on his return there. A meeting was held first at Hunt’s house to organize an exhibition of Seddon’s work, and later, on 6 May 1857, a more formal meeting was held at the Society of the Arts for the same purpose. Ruskin spoke at both gatherings, and he is here careful to assure Hunt that he will distinguish Seddon’s work from his own, for although the painter worked very hard to raise money for Seddon’s family, he did not entirely approve of either his friend’s extreme hard-edge style or his conduct in the Middle East. Hunt thus had written to Dante Gabriel Rossetti in a long journal-letter from Cairo of March 1854:

I never knew such an extraordinary combination of ability &c. and absurdity &c. as he is. His devout admiration of the Arabs is perfectly exasperating. They
are the meanest sneaks in the world and he never tires in praising them. His adoption of the costume is simply amusing in the result, for somehow the wind and other little circumstances disturb the arrangement with a familiarity never assumed towards a native. If this indeed were all, however, I should merely regard him with amiable consideration which we should always extend towards our fellow creatures who exhibit the weakness of cockney nature, but to my shame, a few weeks ago he sat down gravely before a snake charmer with the landlord of our hotel present, and went through the incantation to render him venom proof with as much solemnity and evident faith as any church ceremony should have received. I am certain he will get into some frightful danger from this stupid degrading act, for he professes a belief with more seriousness than I have ever seen in any other matter since I arrived, that he could handle serpents and scorpions with impunity, and indeed two or three days ago when he was here he assured me that he had had several of these reptiles in his hands and he attributed his escape to the virtue of the charm. I have done all I can.

(Huntington MS. Uncat. LF)

Seddon, who may well have been spoofing Hunt, died not of snake bite or scorpion venom but dysentery.

[17] [Huntington MS. Uncat. LF]

not [letter torn and an entire line is missing] poisoned him?

—You may make your mind easy about the connection of Seddon’s work with yours. I shall take care to separate them clearly—and to abuse you for having gone to the East at all.

Yours affectionately
J Ruskin

While in the Highlands during the autumn of 1857, Ruskin sent along a letter from Mrs. Blackburn, who had obviously made a tactful observation about the woman in Hunt’s Claudio and Isabella: Ruskin’s words suggest that Mrs. Blackburn, like many of the contemporary reviewers, believed Hunt’s heroine was not quite as beautiful as one might expect to encounter in an illustration of Measure for Measure.

[18] [Huntington MS. Uncat. LF] High Fall of Tees Inn 23rd September

Dear Hunt

I should be very much obliged if you would enable me to answer the queries in the uncrossed part of the enclosed—It is from a newly made convert of yours—very rightly minded now in matters of art. Only she says your Isabella has “not a face that a bad man would have fallen in love with.”

—I hope to be at home in a fortnight now.

Ever yours affectionately
J Ruskin
What a goose I am—You saw Mrs Blackburn at Lupus Street; so please just send her a line yourself in answer, to Ros [. . .] N. B.

If you have anything to say to me, write to Denmark Hill

The following letter, the first by Hunt that I have located, is obviously in reply to a missing letter from Ruskin in which he had agreed to do a favour for one of Hunt's acquaintances.

[19]

1 Tor Villa
Campden Hill. W.
Decemb[er] 28/ [18]57

My dear Ruskin

Accept my best thanks for your note appointing time and place for the possessor of the two pictures to bring them for our inspection. Immediately on its arrival I sent on to him and I doubt not that he will take advantage of your kindness to-morrow morning. I am not less obliged for your good wishes of the season to myself. You are wise in connecting my work with me in the compliment, for indeed prosperity and happiness concerns me less directly than most men. Prosperity means advancing with my picture—happiness merely my conviction of the fact—What you say about the imprudence of remaining at work very long at one picture might be met by the fact of Leonardo da Vinci's working for seven years at the Last Supper. Don’t let the apparent conceit of this provoke you to severity. To me my “Finding” is as important as Da Vinci’s Last Supper was to him. You mistake however in your conclusion that I spend so long at this picture. Do you remember the “Why don’t they eat sponge cakes then”? of the Princess who was told that the people had no bread to eat? I don’t mean that I am so badly off as the people. I have however to make coarser fare than the daintiest of my stock serve my art appetite at times to an extent not known to my luxurious critic.

Yours affectionately

W Holman Hunt

Best wishes of the season to your family and self—

As this last letter demonstrates, Hunt was always frank—even to the point of roughness—with Ruskin. Unlike painters such as J. W. Inchbold or A. W. Hunt, he was never willing to let Ruskin lecture him, even when, as here, the critic was at least partly in the right. Ruskin perhaps did not adequately appreciate that the painter was in financial straits and hence had to defer working on The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple to paint what he himself considered pot-boilers, but he did perceive that his friend was devoting so much time and energy to a single major picture that he made his chances of artistic and financial
success perilous indeed. With this work Hunt began his practice of turning each of his pictures into a bizarre combination of self-discipline, artistic experimentation, and sheer self-torture, and his friend was worried by this development.

Ruskin was equally frank with Hunt, and in the following letter, which was written about four months after Hunt's, he defended some of his harsh comments about *The Scapegoat* in the 1856 *Academy Notes*. He had begun his long discussion of that painting with the remark that "This singular picture, though in many respects faultful, and in some wholly a failure, is yet the one of all in the gallery which should furnish us with the most food for thought" (14. 61). Praising Hunt's courage and dedication in working under adverse conditions in the Middle East, Ruskin argued that the artist was correct in painting the shores of the Dead Sea: "Of all the scenes in the Holy Land, there are none whose present aspect tends so distinctly to confirm the statements of Scripture as this condemned shore. It is therefore exactly the scene of which it might seem most desirable to give a perfect idea to those who cannot see it for themselves; it is also that which fewest travellers are able to see; and which, I suppose, no one but Mr. Hunt himself would have ever dreamed of making the subject of close pictorial study" (14. 63). Ruskin also points out that many in the audience who did not understand the painting's iconography wrongly dismissed it as merely bizarre, and while he himself does not explain the picture as a commonplace type of Christ, he does cite Melvill's sermon to aid his reader. However justified he believed the artist's choices of setting and subject to be, he nonetheless criticized *The Scapegoat* with particular seventy. The author of *Modern Painters*, who wrote his famous discussion of the Pathetic Fallacy in the same year he reviewed Hunt's picture in *Academy Notes*, charged that the artist had succumbed to precisely such emotional distortions in this work:

The mind of the painter has been so excited by the circumstances of the scene, that, like a youth expressing his earnest feeling by feeble verse (which seems to him good, because he *means* so much by it), Mr. Hunt has been blinded by his intense sentiment to the real weakness of the pictorial expression; and in his earnest desire to paint the Scapegoat, has forgotten to ask himself first, whether he could
paint a goat at all... It is a great disappointment to me to observe, even in the painting of the goat itself, and of the fillet on its brow, a nearly total want of all that effective manipulation which Mr. Hunt displayed in his earlier pictures.... The difficulties, whatever they may have been, are not conquered: this may be very faithful and very wonderful painting—but it is not good painting; and much as I esteem feeling and thought in all works of art, still I repeat, again and again, a painter’s business is first to paint. (14. 64-65)

Although one might disagree strongly with Ruskin’s charge that Hunt failed in painting both the goat itself and the distant landscape, he is certainly correct about the picture’s disastrous composition—“the insertion of the animal in the exact centre of the canvas making it look as if it were painted for a sign” (14. 66). Hunt’s conception of The Scapegoat as a prefigurative symbol of the agonies of Christ required him to thrust the animal forward at the spectator, but, unfortunately, this created a very ineffective, awkward picture.

The “black mark” Ruskin kept out of the Academy is probably the oil sketch for The Scapegoat, now at Manchester, in which Hunt had depicted a black, rather than a white animal. The letter is firmly dated as having been written on 29 April 1858 by Hunt’s citation of it in his of May 4 of the same year (Letter 21).

20

[Huntington MS. Uncat. LF] 29th April

Dear Hunt

I am sorry we are not to see you, and hope you will take care not to make yourself ill by such work: I am not at all remorseful respecting the share I have had in keeping the black mark out of [the] Academy as I do not doubt it would have much injured both your reputation and the cause of good art: nor do I repent of what I said of the Scapegoat—for in my poor travels as far as Naples, I noticed that neither the laws of reflection—refraction—or gravitation—underwent any change in that latitude; so I considered myself quite justified in assuming they were constant as far as Syria—But nothing that I can say will ever depress the value of a popular picture: had the Scapegoat been a really delightsome composition, I might have invoked optics and geology till doomsday against it—in vain.

You must try to think more of what people like.—Two things are necessary in all art as in all policy: first sincerity—then recommendatory or persuasive power. You seem to me rarely to think of these last, and so your work gets harsh.

Ever affectionately yours,

J Ruskin
Holman Hunt’s response to this last letter forms one of the most interesting portions of the extant correspondence. He must have written his letter at white heat and then gone over it, deleting expressions he thought too strong; for in several places he has drawn a single line through an entire sentence. These crossings out nonetheless still permit us to read his first version, and I have included such partially deleted passages in oblique brackets. Although the artist wrote the letter on 4 May 1858, he kept it by him (as his postscript reveals) until 9 May.

[Huntington MS. Uncat. LF] 1 Tor Villa, Camden Hill W
May 4, 1858

My dear Ruskin,

After cleaning my palette this evening I find half an hour on hand, the first available since the receipt of your note of the 29th ult: part of which I must expend in answering your remarks on criticism.

I cannot do this however without feeling great regret that words are not <more> as controllable tints in my hands as in yours. If they were I should despair not of proving to you that you <are false to your principle of conciliation in Art when you utter your dictum to men who not only see the truth at a distance but pursue it to its home until it is secured as a new revelation from God, as authoritatively as to mere lookers on at the chase. I prefer this footing however not as one of separation but of as better understanding between us.> should leave room in your observations on Art for the possibility of men who pursue the truth to its home being true in this [respect?] even when this does not coincide with its aspect seen in a general survey from a distance as well also as for the possible necessity of appealing to natures different from your own. Of course, I as others, turn away from works which do not respond to my own feelings. If I were in the <more> responsible post of critic however, I should hesitate in deciding the matter so summarily.

When I spoke of a home pond I should have explained this to mean one available for your light guage. There can be no doubt that in fact the light reflected in water is more or less lower in tone than the sky above. It is brought down thus however into violent opposition with the darkest parts of the subject which, to the eye, gives it a luminosity such as no opposition of mere pigment will produce unless the <mere> literal truth of proportion is departed from. To the eye in some cases the reflection is quite as bright <or brighter than> as the sky itself—Millais who always works <by> on impression—and not <by> theory—<very properly> painted his water thus in the Dream of the Past. Your matter of fact criticism however confused him so that on its return in repainting parts in his studio he dimmed the <picture> water and I hesitate not to say spoiled the picture—Candidly I believe that your strictures on the Scapegoat have not depressed its value—it did for the <two> first month<s> of the Exhibition—
and as I wanted money and could not hold out the buyer will get the reward which I had earned with my sweat and blood. I am reconciled to this order of fate by long use. I may however trace back this cause of the necessity for labouring so closely as I do without letting it be seen too clearly that (this) harshness got into my disposition in life and Art too. If it does you ought to have both excuse and sympathy for it unless the general (opinion of the tendency) verdict on your writings is false, that you are not over meek except in manner (a general opinion which I concur in so far as to feel that your condemnation verdict on my work is not a final one valuable as it is.) in which by the bye you are more true to your principle of conciliation than this letter would make me seem were it not written with a conviction that such consideration is not needful between us.

Ever affectionately yours

W Holman Hunt

[Written up left margin of last page of letter] I kept this back to read it the next morning which brought about a further delay that now on reconsideration it does not seem (needful) at all just to your friendship to continue any longer.

May 9/58

Hunt's frank and even aggressive reply to Ruskin's criticism does not seem to have impaired their friendship, and more than a year later we find Ruskin writing to him again about the Swiss artist Durheim. The following letter presents a serious problem in dating, since although it would seem to follow closely upon Ruskin's letter of Saturday, 7 June which I have assigned to 1856, the clear allusion to The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple, which Ruskin hopes "may be ready for 1860", makes 1859 the almost certain year of its writing. It seems unlikely that Ruskin would have written, even jokingly, that the picture on which Hunt had placed all his hopes would not be ready for another four years: even if such a remark were not too cruel, Hunt still had hopes, in 1856, of finishing the work quickly. On the other hand, all the available evidence suggests that the first letter was written in 1856: not only did June 7 fall upon a Saturday in 1856, but Ruskin's Diaries show him to have been in Thun on that date, having recently come from Berne. Since there is no reason to believe that Ruskin made a mistake with day and date, I have reluctantly concluded that these two letters were in fact written several years apart; and the Diaries (ii. 548) show that Ruskin was at Berne on 8 and 26 August 1859, having spent the weeks in between at Thun and Interlaken.
Dear Hunt

I don't want to see Durheim's picture, but I do want to arrange [manage?] any little debts he may owe to you, and which I shall be happy to settle for him, poor fellow.

—I never saw such a wreck as he was, when I found him last at Berne.

—I hope the golden pillars are getting overlaid properly, and may be ready for 1860.

—Ever affectionately yours,

J Ruskin

The second part of this article will be published in the following number of the Bulletin.