



HAL
open science

‘Modern gardeners’ with Rustic Ideals: Fruitful Congruencies between John Ruskin and William Robinson

Aurélien Wasilewski

► **To cite this version:**

Aurélien Wasilewski. ‘Modern gardeners’ with Rustic Ideals: Fruitful Congruencies between John Ruskin and William Robinson. Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens, 2020, 91 Printemps, 10.4000/cve.7346 . hal-02889949

HAL Id: hal-02889949

<https://hal.science/hal-02889949>

Submitted on 14 Jun 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens

91 Printemps | 2020

Mediating Ruskin/Colloque SFEVE, Pau, 8-9 février 2019

'Modern gardeners' with Rustic Ideals: Fruitful Congruencies between John Ruskin and William Robinson

« Jardiniers modernes » et idéaux rustiques : Croisements fertiles entre John
Ruskin et William Robinson

Aurélien Wasilewski



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/cve/7346>

DOI: 10.4000/cve.7346

ISSN: 2271-6149

Publisher

Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2020

ISSN: 0220-5610

Brought to you by Université de Lille



Electronic reference

Aurélien Wasilewski, "Modern gardeners' with Rustic Ideals: Fruitful Congruencies between John Ruskin and William Robinson", *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* [Online], 91 Printemps | 2020, Online since 01 June 2020, connection on 14 June 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/cve/7346> ;

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/cve.7346>

This text was automatically generated on 16 February 2023.



Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

‘Modern gardeners’ with Rustic Ideals: Fruitful Congruencies between John Ruskin and William Robinson

« *Jardiniers modernes* » et idéaux rustiques : Croisements fertiles entre John Ruskin et William Robinson

Aurélien Wasilewski

Introduction

- 1 John Ruskin was a keen gardener: he had two gardens throughout his life, the first at Denmark Hill, the family house where he lived from 1842 to 1871, the second in Coniston, at the heart of the Lake District, whose local name was Brantwood. He was especially fond of daffodils and lilies, wrote extensively on botany, notably in *Proserpina* (Ruskin 1875–1886), and ‘tried to be his own Linnaeus’ to quote Collingwood (32), an artist who acted as his assistant at Brantwood. As William Robinson reminded his readers in a short note in his magazine *The Garden* in 1882, ‘it is interesting to note that Mr. Ruskin’s first writings were in [John Claudius] Loudon’s magazines’ (Robinson 1882a). Ruskin’s first prose had indeed been published in Loudon’s *Magazine of Natural History* from 1834 to 1836 and in his *Architectural Magazine* from 1838 to 1839, even if it had not been on gardening or botany *per se*, but rather on geology.
- 2 William Robinson came to the forefront of the gardening scene at the same time Ruskin started experimenting in gardening with his cousin Joan Severn in Brantwood, namely at the beginning of the 1870s, when Robinson published a series of seminal books on gardening: *The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris*, in 1869, *Alpine Flowers for English Gardens* and *The Wild Garden*, both published in 1870. The following year, he launched

his own influential gardening weekly, *The Garden*, in which he could spread his views about what he called 'modern gardening' (Robinson 1882b).

- 3 It seems Ruskin was aware of the young gardener's work as he quoted Robinson as early as 1871 in *Fors Clavigera* (Ruskin 1871, 92–94). But it was not until June 1878 that Joan Severn and Frank Miles—an artist and a keen plantsman—arranged a first meeting in London at the Fine Art Society's gallery in Bond Street where Ruskin exhibited 'his pictures'¹ (Severn). Miles was employed as an illustrator and contributed articles to Robinson's weekly journal *The Garden* between 1877 and 1887, especially on lilies and water plants, subjects Ruskin was especially partial to. In a letter written from *The Garden* Office dated 1878, Miles told Robinson that he had 'had a long talk with Mr Ruskin and told him of the good work [Robinson] is doing among the people, and his delight was intense; Ruskin is keen to improve some bog land at Brantwood and [Robinson] may like to give him a copy of his *Wild Garden*; [he] may also let Ruskin have some of the best copies of *The Garden* . . .'. He concludes with the promise that he would 'get Ruskin as keen as possible for *The Garden*' (Miles 1878).
- 4 And indeed, from 1878 onward, John Ruskin and William Robinson started corresponding² and developed a lasting friendship. The Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society holds two letters from Ruskin to Robinson and four written by Joan Severn to Robinson and related to Ruskin and gardening or botany. Furthermore, a letter dated July 4th, 1885, from Robinson to Ruskin regarding plant nomenclature, appeared in *Proserpina* (Ruskin 1875–1886, 533). In this letter, Ruskin describes Robinson as 'kind Mr Robinson of *The Garden*'³ (Ruskin 1875–1886, 532). In his obituary of John Ruskin, Robinson recalls 'precious remembrance of friendly personal contact with John Ruskin [and] memories stored with an undying recollection of his charming and brilliant personality' (Robinson 1900a).
- 5 Robinson read Ruskin extensively: the catalogue of his library mentions no fewer than 28 volumes by the art critic (Hodgson 1935). Not only did Robinson read Ruskin, but the latter also became a favourite subject of correspondence among the botanist friends of Robinson's. In 1875, for instance, immediately upon publication of the first part of Ruskin's *Proserpina*, Robinson wrote to Asa Gray, an influential American botanist: 'You are probably aware that now Ruskin is trying his hand at "botany" in his new issue *Proserpina*. I see he has one of your books and used it' (Robinson 1875).
- 6 On the other hand, we know little about Ruskin reading Robinson. There are reasons to believe he had read *The Parks and Promenades of Paris* by 1871 since he published Robinson's 1871 letter to *The Times* in *Fors Clavigera*—a letter regarding the destruction of the Paris parks during the Franco-German war (Robinson 1871a). I also think he had read *Alpine Flowers for English Gardens* by 1871 for various reasons: first, the 1870 edition of the book appeared in James Dearden's *Library of John Ruskin* (Dearden, Cat. D, IV.4) even though the book went through several reprints afterwards; then Ruskin was quoted several times in this very book (Robinson 1870a, 91–93, 305) and we learn from a letter dated November 24th 1870 (Ruskin 1870) that Joan Severn, a great admirer of William Robinson, was having her mail transferred to a certain 'W. Robinson' at the time,⁴ so they might have exchanged on the content of the book and on Ruskin's trips to the Alps.
- 7 So if the two men developed such a lasting friendship precisely at the time when Robinson was becoming a prominent figure of the gardening world and as Ruskin was starting his own garden at Brantwood, to what extent were their views on 'flora and

the vegetable kingdom' (Robinson 1882a) 'congruent' (Châtel 2010)? What stylistic and formal developments did such elective affinities entail in the garden? What ethical considerations underlie such gardens?

'Modern gardeners', 'truth to nature' and Garden Beauty

- 8 In a short article published in *The Garden* in 1882 and entitled 'Is Beauty a Fashion?', William Robinson ponders over the principles that govern garden beauty and comes to the conclusion that the conceptual framework John Ruskin used for fine art can be applied to gardening. Namely 'that "beauty" is synonymous with "good", and the moral sense', and that

[b]eauty and utility, too, go hand in hand, and in some senses mean the same thing, and the one need not necessarily be sacrificed for the other. . . . No, if we are to excel, or even advance, in gardening, we must start with a higher conception of the beautiful than mere fashion, and inculcate principles, which I take it is what modern gardeners worthy of the name are trying to do. (Robinson 1882b)

- 9 According to John Ruskin, whose *Modern Painters* was quoted by Robinson under the title 'Natural Beauty' (Ruskin 1875), those principles, or 'ideas of beauty' derive from Nature and its careful observation:

Ideas of beauty are among the noblest which can be presented to the mind And it would appear that we are intended . . . to be constantly under their influence, because there is not one single object in Nature which is not capable of conveying them, and which, to the right-perceiving mind, does not present an incalculably greater number of beautiful than deformed parts. (Ruskin 1843, 110)

- 10 This led William Robinson to reject botanic gardens, on the one hand, where, much too often, beauty was sacrificed to utility and classification. On the other hand, Ruskin's concept of 'truth to nature' (Ruskin 1843, 689) also enabled William Robinson to condemn the bedding-out system 'that was a fashion and nothing more, and was as severe and restrictive in its features as the shapes and patterns of the *beau monde*, which tolerates nothing that does not conform to its rules' (Robinson 1882b). He saw himself as part of a gardening avant-garde of 'modern gardeners', 'a modern teacher of beautiful gardening' (Robinson 1882b). Of course, those were veiled references to Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and to his teaching career and theories.
- 11 Both men adamantly rejected the bedding-out⁵ system which required glass-houses and mass production of identical exotic specimens of showy flowers. In *The Poetry of Architecture*⁶, Ruskin declared⁷:

A flower-garden is an ugly thing, even when best managed: it is an assembly of unfortunate beings, pampered and bloated above their natural size, stewed and heated into diseased growth. . . . The florist⁸ may delight in this: the true lover of flowers never will. He who has taken lessons from nature, who has observed the real purpose and operation of flowers . . . will never take away the beauty of their being to mix into meretricious⁹ glare or to feed into an existence of disease . . . the flower-garden is as ugly in effect as it is unnatural in feeling. . . . (Ruskin 1893, 156)

- 12 But William Robinson went further and developed his abhorrence into a landscape theory. To him, formality was to be found within nature in its natural forms and shapes, not superimposed on it through topiary and carpet-bedding. As early as 1871,

he published *The Subtropical Garden*, whose subtitle tellingly read: *Beauty of Form in the Flower Garden*. Robinson explained that

... the use in gardens of plants having large and handsome leaves, noble habit, or graceful port, ... has reminded us how far we have diverged from Nature's ways of displaying the beauty of vegetation, our love for rude colour having led us to ignore the exquisite and inexhaustible way in which plants are naturally arranged'. (Robinson 1871b, 3-4)

- 13 From 1870 to 1878, he developed this idea, shared by John Ruskin, that nature is the perfect model to imitate and that the true gardener, or 'artist planter' (Robinson 1916) is 'an interpreter of nature':

The true gardener conceals his art, and, privileged as he is above all men in being the interpreter of nature herself, to modestly conceal his art must ever be his pride. The feeble and foolish gardener glories in geometrical figures, of which nature, it need not be said, knows nothing. The truth is fully expressed by Shakespeare in his beautiful words on grafting in the *Winter's Tale* ... 'This is an art / Which does mend nature: change it rather: but / The Art itself is Nature'.¹⁰ (Robinson 1872b)

- 14 This was summed up in Robinson's best-known concept of 'wild garden', where plants were chosen and grouped according to their natural habitat and their natural habit.¹¹ To illustrate his point, Robinson quoted an excerpt from *Modern Painters* in his nascent newspaper *The Garden* in 1872, in which John Ruskin addressed the idea of 'natural formality'—as opposed to 'artificial formality'. In this passage, entitled 'The Pine' in William Robinson's periodical (Ruskin 1871b, 220), John Ruskin studies and celebrates the formal beauty of fir trees, 'the most formal of trees', as opposed to the loose wildness of the vine:

The vine, which is to be the companion of man, is waywardly docile in its growth, falling into festoons beside his cornfields, or roofing his garden walks ... The pine, placed nearly always among scenes disordered and desolate, brings into them all possible elements of order and precision. ... It stands compact, like one of its own cones, slightly curved on its sides, finished and quaint as a carved tree in some Elizabethan garden ... Summit after summit rise its pyramidal ranges, or down to the very grass sweep the circlets of its boughs; so that there is nothing but green cone and green carpet. (Ruskin 1843, 103-07)

- 15 So much for artificial topiary and beds of exotic flowers: they were to be replaced by architectural trees and natural self-sown meadows. Artists and gardeners had to 'take lessons from nature' (Ruskin 1893, 156), which is best exemplified by Ruskin's Educational Series of drawings,¹² meant to instruct young artists to be truthful to nature's forms, as truth to nature's appearance would lead to higher truths. Robinson concurred with this idea and, in his magazine *Flora and Sylva*, quoted a passage from *The Queen of the Air* (Ruskin 1904) where Ruskin explained how lilies and water lilies had been at 'the origin of the loveliest forms of ornamental design, and the most powerful floral myths yet recognized among human spirits' (Ruskin 1860-1870, 372-73).

Rustic Developments: Of Heather, Bog and Rock Gardens

- 16 Now if for both men nature was the model to emulate and an inexhaustible source of inspiration, how did this translate in the space of the garden? What stylistic consequences and formal development did this new outlook entail?

- 17 First, it meant that beauty could be found in wild and native flowers, even the most humble ones, rather than gaudy horticultural hybrid florists' creations, deemed too artificial in outlook as much as in essence. One must not forget the historical context of rural depopulation and industrialization of cities, which can explain the popularity of 'cottage gardening' and a return to a rural ideal in gardens. This materialized in a rustic aesthetics common to both men, in which the essential link to an organic nature was underlined rather than obliterated by too sleek a design or too exotic a choice of specimens. In other words, the modern garden was meant to showcase the natural beauty of the place. Thatched garden structures, garden furniture made of timber logs¹³ or especially Ruskin's iconic stone chair in Brantwood are as many instances of his taste for a bygone rurality and tangible attempts at being true to the spirit/nature of the place.¹⁴ But the best example of this rustic ideal might well be the 'heather garden'. Both Robinson, in Gravetye Manor, and Ruskin, in Brantwood, experimented with this new form, to the dismay of Ruskin's farmer neighbours whose 'idea of improvement [was] to burn the heather . . .' and turn Brantwood into 'Brantashes' (Ruskin 1871, 707). Indeed, heather was perceived merely as a wild coarse invasive plant that grew on moorland and could in no way be considered ornamental. However, William Robinson and John Ruskin saw in the genus a potential for new forms and winter flowering¹⁵ of breath-taking beauty (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. 'The heath garden at Gravetye in April, and its protecting pines. Sheltered by native and ornamental evergreens, masses of white *Erica arborea* and rose colored *Erica mediterranea* occupy the background, with pale violet *Erica gracilis* in the centre and the pink *Calluna vulgaris* close up'.



Illustration to 'William Robinson, the man and his work', WILKINSON ELLIOTT, James and HERRINGTON, Arthur, *The Garden Magazine*, 31 (June 1920): 255.

- 18 In 1878, Frank Miles informed William Robinson in a letter that 'Ruskin [was] keen to improve some bog land at Brantwood and Robinson may like to give him a copy of his

“Wild Garden”; [and that he] may also let Ruskin have some of the best copies of *The Garden* (Miles). So John Ruskin may have also received advice on ‘marsh’ or ‘bog gardening’—which was another new concept developed by Robinson (Robinson 1871c). In Brantwood, this materialized into the ‘Moorland Garden’, which Ruskin started conceiving and designing in 1881, on a piece of steep land that he preserved instead of simply draining (Fig. 2). Collingwood recalls that ‘just as a portrait-painter studies to pose his sitter in such a light and in such an attitude as to bring out the most individual points and get the revelation of a personality, so Ruskin studied his moor, to develop its resources’ (Collingwood 40). In other words, the work of a gardener was to observe and understand the essence of a set place and reveal and unveil its beauty rather than to stick a preset design on a piece of land, and the role of the gardener was to showcase and slightly rearrange the natural environment to reveal its hidden wealth and potential beauty.

Figure 2. ‘Ruskin’s moorland garden’.



Illustration by COLLINGWOOD, William Gershom, from his *Ruskin Relics*, 1903, 41.

- 19 Robinson shared one particular passion with Ruskin: that of alpine plants. He is credited for inventing the ‘Alpine garden’, or rock garden, whose detailed lay out concepts he developed in *Alpine Flowers*, first published in 1870. With this book, he meant to explain how alpine plants might be grown in English gardens. To describe the natural habitat of such ‘tiny mountain gems’ (Robinson 1870a, 78), he narrated his own trips to the Alps, in the footsteps of John Ruskin, whose diaries he quoted extensively (Robinson 1870a, 91–93, 305). It seems the Alps afforded Ruskin and Robinson a new source of forms, patterns and colours, in which they could tap for inspiration. The visual similarities between John Ruskin’s watercolours and sketches and Robinson’s book illustrations are quite telling in that respect¹⁶ (Fig. 3). In both, the quintessential

garden perspective is forgotten, and the human scale is blurred into a macro/microscopic levelling that prevents the viewer from discerning the infinitely large from the infinitesimal.

Figure 3. 'Alpine Flowers at Home'.

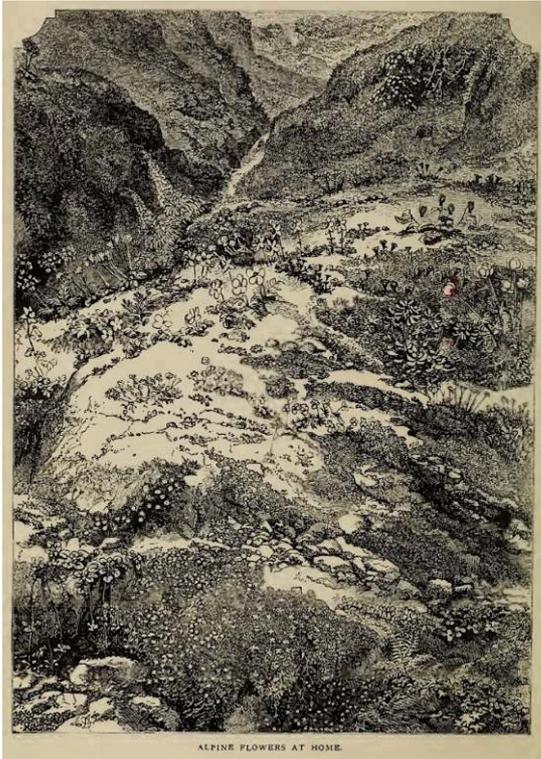


Illustration to ROBINSON, William, *Alpine Flowers for English Gardens*. London: Murray, 1870: facing title page, engraved from a drawing by DAWSON, Alfred.

- 20 In those new gardens, Robinson meant to encapsulate the beauty of the various landscapes he remembered from his trips in the mountains of Europe. Through his publishing activities, he invited and helped readers to recreate miniature ecosystems reminiscent of the natural scenes he had glimpsed in the wild, just as Ruskin managed to condense the scenic alpine landscape in his drawings.¹⁷ As Robinson aptly put it:

... as the artist's work is to see and keep for us some of the beauty of landscape, tree, or flower, so the gardener's should be to keep for us as far as may be, in the fullness of their natural beauty, the living things themselves. The artist gives us the fair image; the gardener is the trustee of a world of fair living things, to be kept with care and knowledge. . . . (Robinson 1900b, 7)

The Ethics of Gardening: 'The lesson of the leaf'

- 21 However, the relation of both men to gardening reached beyond formal similarities and also included a set of practices related to deeper values. Gardening, conceived as a conscious intervention on and within nature, embodied the quintessential activity in which humans could adopt an ethical and aesthetic approach to nature. Gardening was perceived by Ruskin and Robinson as a practical way to learn from nature and foster an ethical relation to the world in general.

22 As previously mentioned, Ruskin's *Educational Series* of sketches and drawings were intended to develop aesthetic sensitivity among his students. To him, the observation of nature was a prerequisite to art practice. In a passage from *The Stones of Venice on The Savageness of Gothic*, quoted by Robinson in the first volume of *The Garden* and entitled *North and South* (Ruskin 1872, 245), Ruskin sustains the idea that a civilization's formal manifestations and peculiarities are deeply rooted in the land and climate it stems from, just as a plant would grow from a specific soil and develop its specific features from a typical environment:

... acknowledging the great laws by which the earth and all that it bears are ruled throughout their being, let us not condemn, but rejoice in the expression by man of his own rest in the statutes of the lands that gave him birth. ... let us stand by him, when, with rough strength and hurried stroke, he smites an uncouth animation out of the rocks which he has torn from among the moss of the moorland, and heaves into the darkened air the pile of iron buttress and rugged wall, instinct with work of an imagination as wild and wayward as the northern sea; creatures of ungainly shape and rigid limb, but full of wolfish life; fierce as the winds that beat, and changeful as the clouds that shade them. (Ruskin 1853, 187-88)

23 Thus, a people cut off from the natural environment that surrounds them could not but wither away into oblivion.

24 Hence the absolute necessity, for Ruskin or Robinson, to make the lessons of nature available to all. For instance, the two men exchanged extensively on plant nomenclature and botany. Robinson contributed an article entitled 'English Plant Names, On Botany as Now Taught' to *The Garden* in 1881, in which he quoted Ruskin scoffing at the botanic jargon, a mix of Latin and English which the latter equated to 'a doggish mixture of the refuse of both' and that would constitute 'a bar to the fairest gate to knowledge' (Ruskin 1875-1886, 200). And 'to put, if it might be, some elements of the science of botany into a form more tenable by ordinary human ... faculties' Ruskin and Robinson defended the idea of resorting to English names. Ruskin would name a few plants himself, for example the orange lily on which they exchanged with Robinson: 'in English, Flame-Lily, will be the most easily accurate expression for the noble flower; and in French *Lys Ardent*'¹⁸ (Ruskin 1875-1886, 534). However, Ruskin defended the use of Latin as 'an international language for scientific communication' (Ingram 2014a), saying that

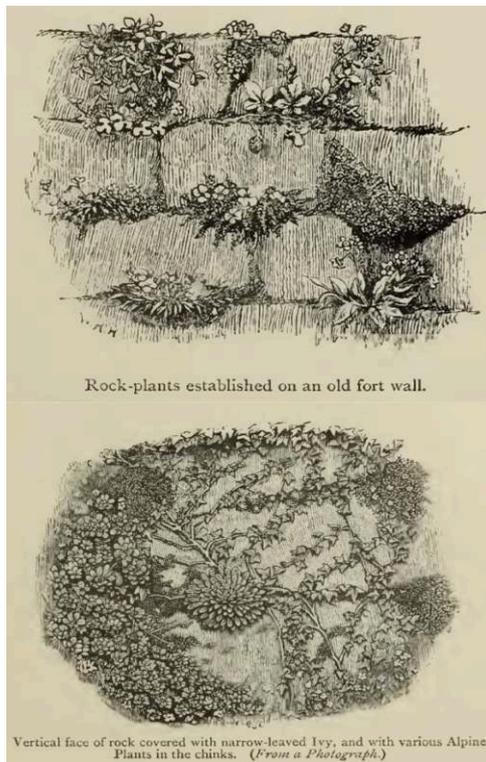
I am most grateful to Mr. Robinson for his admission of the need of simple nomenclature, and most earnestly I will try to recover, or invent, English names for England, and French for France. But the Latin name is always necessary for scientific European service. (Ruskin 1875-86, 534)

25 The necessity to make nature's teachings available to all was also attempted by Robinson when, in 1903, he launched *Flora and Sylva*, a magazine he published for three years 'at less than its actual cost, with a view to putting little pecuniary bar to its circulation' (Robinson 1905, 321). The professed democratization of garden knowledge and accessibility to natural beauty were entailed in the symbolic movement from wood to paper, from the wild places of the world to the most humble household in England. Hence, the insistence of Robinson to publish his journal 'with flower drawings [from] the best colour-printer in Europe; [from] the paper mills that still make real paper, and [from] a surviving wood-engraver who understood my good artist's drawings' (Robinson 1903). Here again, the choice materials perceived as 'authentic' ones, and the return to traditional craftsmanship, was part of a rustic aesthetics that did not

obliterate the natural origins of wood pulp, colour pigments and wood engraving blocks, in an attempt to remain true to nature.

- 26 The beauties of nature were for everyone to behold, even if through the reductive prism of newspaper pages and coloured plates.¹⁹ Robinson had been proud to tell Ruskin in 1885: 'my *Gardening [Illustrated Magazine for Town and Country]* goes among the more simple people' (Ruskin 1875–86, 533). It was indeed 'aimed at the burgeoning middle class [and] maintained a very practical . . . attitude to gardening. At a penny per week (as against the original four pence per week, rising to six pence for the *The Garden*), . . . it was an immediate success and [soon became] hugely profitable' (Bisgrove 117). This was also what Robinson intended when he helped protect Hampstead Heath and transform it into a public park.²⁰ It was a patch of wild nature protected from urbanisation, but at the same time it lay at the heart of London, thus accessible to any Londoner. With the threatening *Storm-cloud of the Nineteenth Century* looming ahead, powered and propelled by the idea of 'progress', nature came to embody the past and needed protection, for the same reasons monuments did: both were testimonies and necessary roots to the past, meant to strengthen and keep a culture alive.

Figure 4. 'Rock-plants established on an old fort wall' and 'Vertical face of rock covered with narrow-leaved Ivy, and with various Alpine plants in the chinks'.



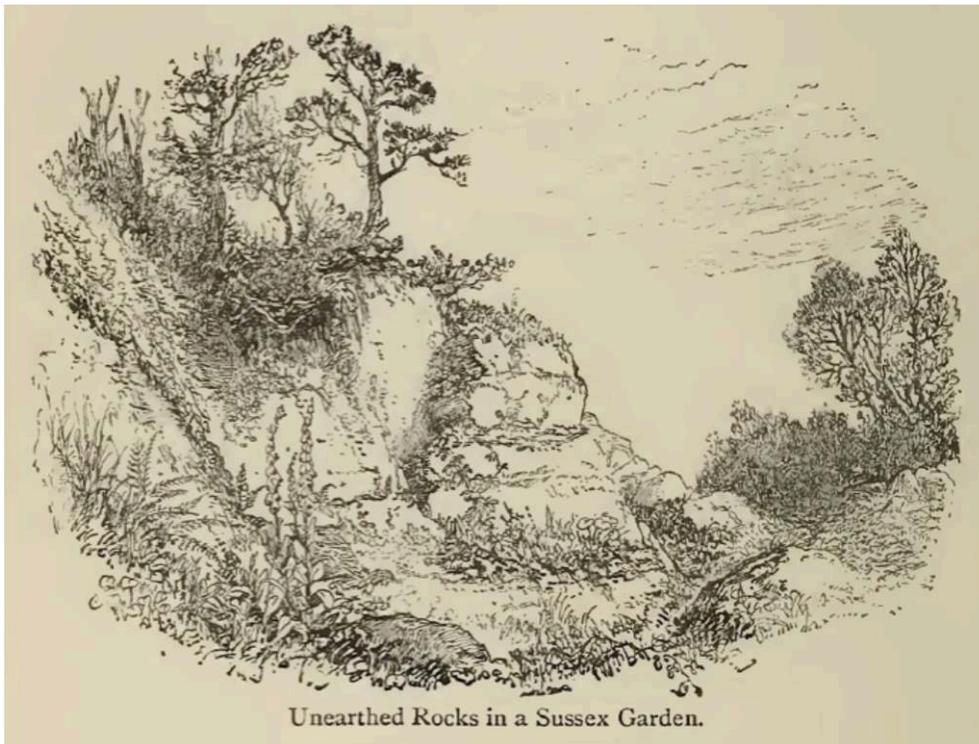
From ROBINSON, William, *Alpine Flowers for English Gardens* [1870]. London: Murray, 1875.

- 27 Again, the inspiration came from nature and stemmed from a lesson learnt from the study of the 'leaf's life' cycle. In a passage from *Modern Painters* quoted twice by Robinson in his newspapers, Ruskin compared the leaf's life to human life and extends the metaphor to trees, equated to peoples:²¹ 'the power of every great people, as of every living tree, depends on its not effacing, but confirming and concluding, the

labours of its ancestors'. This, the humble leaf does when, 'dying, it leaves its own small but well-laboured thread, adding, though imperceptibly, yet essentially, to the strength, from root to crest, of the trunk on which it had lived, and fitting that trunk for better service to succeeding races of leaves' (Ruskin 1843, 99–100). Robinson understood the significance of 'confirming and concluding, the labours of [the past]'. In *Alpine Flowers for English Gardens*, he included a whole chapter on wall and ruin gardens, in which he explained how to enhance the beauty of such traces and remnants (Fig. 4). The geological history of the earth itself was to be revealed, displayed and beautified in a form of archaeological gardening. Indeed, both Ruskin and Robinson recommended unearthing the 'hidden wealth' (Robinson 1872a) of existing rocks from the soil to create the groundwork for Alpine gardens—rather than bringing in new ones from elsewhere, which wouldn't look nor feel authentic and true to nature and the spirit of the place (Fig. 5):

While many go to great expense in allowing certain artists in plaster to embellish their grounds with huge masses of artificial rock, made of old bricks and cement, . . . very few trouble themselves about the rock treasures that often lie beneath the sod . . . by clearing away the earth from the flanks of that nose of rock that just projects above a grassy knoll, he will discover beautiful wrinkles and other charms in it. Thus by a little persevering poking and digging has been produced a scene as striking and interesting as many in an alpine country, and one which offers such a variety of aspects and positions that every kind of hardy plant may be grown on it in the best manner. (Robinson 1872a)

Figure 5. 'Unearthed Rocks in a Sussex Garden'.



Unearthed Rocks in a Sussex Garden.

Illustration to ROBINSON, William, 'Hidden Wealth'. *The Garden*, 1 (Jan. 1872): 225.

Conclusion: The Robinsonian Garden as Kaleidoscopic Translation of 'the world's vegetation' and of Ruskin's Oeuvre

- 28 Robinson compared alpine flowers to 'gems' and one can say that the Robinsonian garden was the refraction of the world's Flora and Sylva, bejewelled 'through a kaleidoscope, brightly'. He introduced in the garden condensed model spaces that would reproduce the ecosystemic conditions in which plants lived in the wild, thus creating a kaleidoscopic rendering of the 'world's vegetation' (Robinson 1886) in fractions of 'that variegated mosaic of the world's surface' (Ruskin 1853, 185–88).
- 29 Those gardens were the crystallization of recollections from trips in the mountainous regions of Europe and were thus also places of conservation—conservation of natural and rural landscapes idealized through the prism of memory and perceived as threatened by mechanization and urbanization. The modern gardener represented a paragon of virtue since he followed the lessons of nature to create the conditions for harmonious growth, vital both for the plant and the civilized world. This could only be achieved after scientific observation of nature and of the culture that stemmed from it, thus leading to the emergence of a prelapsarian rustic ideal, in which human activity would be congruent with Nature—where gardens, when created by a 'right-perceiving mind' (Ruskin 1843, 110), channelled and conveyed most directly the inherent beauty partly hidden within Nature.
- 30 Robinson also managed to develop and spread his vision through a kaleidoscopic rendering of Ruskin's work. He used and diffused fragments of Ruskin's oeuvre for almost a century in various media and under different forms (newspapers, books, illustrations and gardens); and not only excerpts on botany, but also passages on geology, climate studies, painting, travelling or teaching, to corroborate and substantiate his theories which, to a certain extent, can be read as reflections on and of Ruskin's work and life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BISGROVE, Richard. *William Robinson—The Wild Gardener*. London: Frances Lincoln, 2008.
- CHÂTEL, Laurent. 'W. B. & W. B.: "A Long Story" – Sublime Congruencies between Gray, Beckford and Blake'. *Interfaces* 30 (Spring 2010): 57–74.
- COLLINGWOOD, William Gershom. *Ruskin Relics*. London: Isbister & co, 1903.
- DEARDEN, James Shackley. *The Library of John Ruskin*. Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2012.
- HODGSON & CO. *A Catalogue of the library of the late W. Robinson, Esq., removed from Gravetye Manor, East Grinstead, Sussex*. London: Hodgson & Co, July 31, 1935.
- ILLINGWORTH, John. 'Ruskin and Gardening'. *Garden History* 22.2 (1994): 218–233.

- INGRAM, David, and Stephen WILDMAN. *Ruskin's Flora: The Botanical Drawings of John Ruskin*. Lancaster: Ruskin Library and Research Centre, 2011.
- INGRAM, David. 'Wild Gardens: The Robinson, Ruskin and Severn Correspondence'. *Ruskin Review and Bulletin* 10 (2014): 30–34.
- INGRAM, David. *The Gardens at Brantwood, Evolution of John Ruskin's Lakeland Paradise*. London: Pallas Athene & the Ruskin Foundation, 2014.
- JELlicoe, Geoffrey and Susann. *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*. 1986. Oxford: OUP, 2001.
- LOUDON, John Claudius. *Magazine of Natural History, and Journal of Zoology, Botany, Mineralogy, Geology and Meteorology* (1828–1840).
- LOUDON, John Claudius. *Architectural Magazine and Journal of Improvement in Architecture, Building, and Furnishing, and in the Various Arts and Trades Connected therewith* (1834–1939).
- MILES, Frank. 'Letter to William Robinson, 1878'. *Papers of William Robinson*. Royal Horticultural Society Lindley Library. GB 803 WRO/2/129.
- ROBINSON, William. *The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris, Described and Considered in Relation to the Wants of our own Cities, and the Public and Private Gardens*. London: Murray, 1869.
- ROBINSON, William. *Alpine Flowers for English Gardens*. London: Murray, 1870.
- ROBINSON, William. *The Wild Garden, or our Groves and Shrubberies Made Beautiful by the Naturalization of Hardy Exotic Plants*. London: Murray, 1870.
- ROBINSON, William, 'Letter to *The Times*, Apr. 5, 1871'. Quoted by John Ruskin, in *Fors Clavigera*, 1871, 92–94.
- ROBINSON, William. *The Subtropical Garden, or, Beauty of Form in the Flower Garden*. London: Murray, 1871.
- ROBINSON, William. 'The Bog-garden'. *The Garden* I (Nov. 1871): 7.
- ROBINSON, William. 'Hidden Wealth'. *The Garden* I (Jan. 1872): 225.
- ROBINSON, William. 'Bedding Out, a Defence and a reply, part III'. *The Garden* II (Oct. 1872): 333–34.
- ROBINSON, William. 'Letter to Asa Gray, June 21, 1875'. *Asa Gray correspondence file, 1820-1904*. Asa Gray Correspondence project, Harvard University Botany Library.
- ROBINSON, William. 'English Plant Names, On Botany as Now Taught'. *The Garden* XIX (Jan. 11, 1881): 599–600.
- ROBINSON, William. 'John Ruskin'. *The Garden* XXII (Sept. 2, 1882): 220.
- ROBINSON, William. 'Is beauty a fashion?'. *The Garden* XXII (Dec. 9, 1882): 516.
- ROBINSON, William. 'Ruskin's garden at Denmark Hill'. *The Garden* XXX (Dec. 11, 1886): 539.
- ROBINSON, William. 'John Ruskin, an Appreciation'. *The Garden* LVII (Feb. 1900): 73.
- ROBINSON, William. *The English Flower Garden and Home Grounds*. 1883. London: Murray, 1900.
- ROBINSON, William. Introduction to *Flora and Sylva* I (Dec. 1, 1903).
- ROBINSON, William. 'To Our Readers'. *Flora and Sylva* III.33 (Dec. 1905): 321.
- ROBINSON, William. 'The Wrong Route (Landscape Painting)'. *Gardening Illustrated* XXXVIII (Dec. 1916): 51.

RUSKIN, John. *Modern Painters*. 1843. *The Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. COOK & WEDDERBURN. London: Allen, 1903-1912.

RUSKIN, John. *The Stones of Venice*. 1853. *The Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. COOK & WEDDERBURN. London: Allen, 1903-1912.

RUSKIN, John. *The Cestus of Aglaia and The Queen of the Air*. 1860-1870. *The Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. COOK & WEDDERBURN. London: Allen, 1903-1912.

RUSKIN, John. 'Letter to Joan Severn, Miss Agnew, Care of W. Robinson Esq., Nov. 24, 1870', Ruskin Library, Ruskin Manuscript Letters L35.

RUSKIN, John. *Fors Clavigera*. 1871. *The Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. COOK & WEDDERBURN. London: Allen, 1903-1912.

RUSKIN, John. 'The Pine' (from *Modern Painters*). *The Garden* I (Jan. 27, 1871): 220-21.

RUSKIN, John. 'North and South' (from *The Stones of Venice*). *The Garden* I (Feb. 3, 1872): 244-45.

RUSKIN, John. 'The Lesson of the Leaf' (from *Modern Painters*). *The Garden* I (Mar. 9, 1872): 351.

RUSKIN, John. 'Natural Beauty' (from *Modern Painters*). *The Garden* VII (Feb. 20, 1875): 157.

RUSKIN, John. *Proserpina, Studies of Wayside Flowers, while the Air was yet Pure, Among the Alps, and in the Scotland and England which my Father Knew*. 1875-86. *The Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. COOK & WEDDERBURN. London: Allen, 1903-1912.

RUSKIN, John. *The Poetry of Architecture, or, the Architecture of the Nations of Europe Considered in its Association with Natural Scenery and National Character*. 1893. *The Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. COOK & WEDDERBURN. London: Allen, 1903-1912.

RUSKIN, John. 'Lilyworts' (from *The Queen of the Air*). *Flora and Sylva* II (1904): 40.

SEVERN, Joan. 'Letter to William Robinson, 3 Jun. 1878'. Papers of William Robinson, Royal Horticultural Society Lindley Library. GB 803 WRO/2/180

WILKINSON, Anne. *The Victorian Gardener*. 2006. Stroud: The History Press, 2011.

NOTES

1. According to David Ingram, 'the reference to "his pictures in Bond Street" must refer to the exhibition of 1878 at the Fine Art Society's gallery, where Ruskin added examples of "his own handiwork" to Turner watercolours still in his collection. The Turners were shown from the beginning of March, with Ruskin's drawings added at the end of May or beginning of June, which fits nicely with what Joan writes (although technically, "his pictures" might also refer to the Turners)' (Ingram 2014a).
2. The complete transcripts of the Robinson/Ruskin/Severn correspondence have been published by David Ingram in 'Wild Gardens: the Robinson, Ruskin and Severn Correspondence'. *Ruskin Review and bulletin*, 10 (2014): 30-34.
3. Quoted in 'Ruskin and Gardening' (Illingworth 223).
4. The name being so common, it is difficult to positively conclude that it was our 'W. Robinson'.
5. Bedding or change-bedding denotes the practice of planting beds with different subjects at different times of the year, by removal and replanting. The bedding system 'was a term used in England in the 19th c. for the art of ornamenting flower-beds by bedding-out [*i.e.* the operation of stocking a bed during the warmer months with tender or half-hardy exotics which need

protective covering in the winter]. From 1840s to 1870s the favoured plants were pelargoniums (which have always remained prominent), petunias, salvias, lobelias, verbenas, and calceolarias; these were planted for high contrast of colour' (Jellicoe 42).

6. *The Poetry of Architecture* first appeared serially in Loudon's *The Architectural Magazine* (1837–38). The papers were first collected in book form in 1873, in an unauthorised edition, by an American publisher (John Wiley & Son, New York); the volume was entitled *The Poetry of Architecture, Cottage, Villa, etc., to which is added Suggestions on Works of Art. With numerous illustrations. By Kata Phusin* (Nom de plume of John Ruskin). The only authorised edition in England was issued in England in 1893.

7. Quoted in 'Ruskin and Gardening' (Illingworth 222).

8. 'The word florist today means someone who sells cut flowers and creates arrangements with them. In the nineteenth century such a person would be known as a market florist. The word florist on its own meant someone who grew particular, specialised, plants for competitions held by florists' societies' (Wilkinson 60).

9. 'Meretricious' means 'showy and false'.

10. This quote was to become *The Garden's* motto.

11. In botany, 'habit' is the characteristic *form* in which a given species of plant grows.

12. Held at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford. See: <http://ruskin.ashmolean.org>, (accessed 24 September 2019).

13. See scanned image and text by George P. Landow, *Ruskin's walk in the garden at Denmark Hill, Works*, facing 35.560: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/ruskin/homes/14.html>, (accessed 24 September 2019).

14. See for instance, *A Farm near Abingdon* by Albert Goodwin, a watercolour that John Ruskin held in his Cabinet Series: <http://ruskin.ashmolean.org/object/WA.RS.RUD.142>, (accessed 24 September 2019).

15. See for instance John Ruskin's heather study: <http://ruskin.ashmolean.org/object/WA.RS.ED.015.a>, (accessed 24 September 2019).

16. See 'Study of Foreground material: Finished Sketch in Watercolour from Nature', presented by John Ruskin to the Ruskin Drawing School (University of Oxford), 1875: <http://ruskin.ashmolean.org/object/WA.RS.RUD.133>, (accessed 24 September 2019).

17. See for instance *Fragment of the Alps*, held at the Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum: <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/303730?position=0>, (accessed 24 September 2019).

18. 'Throughout *Proserpina* Ruskin rejects the Latin names applied to plants by botanists and substitutes his own anti-Linnean system of classification based on aesthetic, spiritual or human principles rather than scientific understanding' (Ingram and Wildman 37).

19. Robinson was the first to introduce coloured plates in a weekly magazine in January 1876.

20. For further information on landscape or land preservation and urban green spaces in the nineteenth century, see Charles-François Mathis, *In Nature We Trust: Les paysages anglais à l'ère industrielle*, Paris: PUPS, 2010.

21. For further analysis of the passage, see Mark Frost, 'Of Trees and Men: The Law of Help in Modern Painters V', *Nineteenth Century Prose* 38.2 (Sept. 2011): 85–108.

ABSTRACTS

William Robinson, a gardener and magazine editor, is usually celebrated as the originator of the wild garden and the English flower garden, aesthetic forms that flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century in England. He greatly admired John Ruskin and made his the latter's 'definition of the vegetable kingdom [which] is quite different from the definition of botanists generally, but perhaps not on that account less true. 'Corn for the granary, timber for the builder's yard, flowers for the bride's chamber, and moss for the grave'. In a word, food, shelter, and beauty for all of us, living or dead, are the sum total of a world's vegetation'. This short quote from 'Ruskin's garden at Denmark Hill', published in the December 11 issue of *The Garden*, 1886, sums up the extent of what William Robinson shared with John Ruskin, from his aesthetic theories to his social commitments, spiritual stance or environmental conscience. In fact, it appears that William Robinson read Ruskin extensively, but rather exclusively from the point of view of the gardener and we would argue that William Robinson considered John Ruskin's work as an inspirational matrix on which he could base his aesthetic choices, new gardening practices, and even editorial and literary enterprises. In an attempt at mapping the numerous outcrops of Ruskin's body of work in Robinson's garden publishing, this paper will endeavour to untangle the ties between the two Victorian gardeners. To what extent were the views of those 'modern gardeners' on 'flora and the vegetable kingdom' congruent? What stylistic and formal developments did such elective affinities entail in their respective gardens and theories? What ethical considerations underlie such new gardens and practices?

William Robinson, qui fut jardinier et éditeur de magazines horticoles, est souvent célébré comme le créateur du jardin sauvage et du jardin de fleurs locales, deux formes esthétiques qui s'épanouirent dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle en Angleterre. Il fut un grand admirateur de John Ruskin et fit sienne la « définition du royaume végétal » de ce dernier, « bien différente de celle des botanistes en général, mais non moins empreinte de vérité : "Du maïs au grenier, du bois aux chantiers des bâtisseurs, des fleurs dans la chambre nuptiale, et de la mousse sur le sépulcre". » En résumé, pain, abris, et beauté pour chacun, vivants ou morts, sont, d'une végétation donnée, les éléments constitutifs.' Cette courte citation de « Ruskin's Garden at Denmark Hill », publié dans le numéro du 11 décembre 1886 du *Garden*, résume ce que William Robinson partage, de ses théories esthétiques à ses engagements sociaux, de sa posture spirituelle à sa conscience environnementale, avec John Ruskin. Il semble en fait que William Robinson connaisse l'œuvre de Ruskin sur le bout des doigts, mais qu'il l'ait appréhendée exclusivement du point de vue du jardinier, et nous montrerons ainsi que William Robinson considérait l'œuvre de Ruskin comme une source d'inspiration à partir de laquelle il pouvait développer ses choix esthétiques, ses pratiques nouvelles, voire même ses entreprises éditoriales et littéraires. Nous tenterons de cartographier les nombreux affleurements ruskiniens dans l'œuvre éditoriale de William Robinson et de démêler les liens entre ces deux jardiniers victoriens. Dans quelle mesure ces « jardiniers modernes » partageaient-ils des positions congruentes sur « la flore et le royaume végétal » ? Quels furent les développements stylistiques et formels induits par ces affinités électives ? Quelles considérations éthiques sous-tendaient ces jardins et pratiques nouvelles ?

INDEX

Keywords: Robinson (William), Ruskin (John), alpine garden, bog garden, ethics, aesthetics, nature, rustic, botany, fine arts

Mots-clés: Robinson (William), Ruskin (John), jardin alpin, jardin tourbière, éthique, esthétique, nature, rustique, botanique, beaux arts

AUTHOR

AURÉLIEN WASILEWSKI

Aurélien Wasilewski is *professeur agrégé* at Paris Nanterre University. He is undergoing doctoral studies under the direction of Laurent Châtel, Professor in British Art, Culture and Visual Studies at the University of Lille. His research is conducted in the doctoral school Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société and the Centre for Research in Foreign Cultures, Languages and Literatures (CECILLE). He studies the work of William Robinson (1838–1935) and more specifically the links between gardens, the horticultural press and environmental awareness.

Aurélien Wasilewski est professeur agrégé d'anglais à l'université Paris Nanterre. Il est en doctorat à l'université de Lille au sein de l'École doctorale "Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société". Il effectue ses recherches au laboratoire CECILLE sous la direction de Laurent Châtel, Professeur en art et culture visuelle britanniques. Ses recherches portent sur le travail journalistique de William Robinson (1838–1835) et en particulier sur les liens entre jardins, presse horticole et conscience environnementale.