

*John Ruskin and the Fabric of Architecture* by Anuradha Chatterjee. London: Routledge, 2018. 144 pp. +10 colour plates. ISBN 978-1-315-61136-5. \$140.

Anuradha Chatterjee's *Ruskin and the Fabric of Architecture* provides an innovative look at an under-explored theme within Ruskin's thought and work: the connection of clothing to architecture and, more specifically, how fabric and the veil function in his architectural discourse. Chatterjee uses dress, gender, visual studies, and science to explore the concept of the "wall veil" in Ruskin as it relates to the aesthetics of his architectural thought. Chatterjee notes that, for Ruskin, this wall veil was a correspondence "between cladding and textile, wall and dress, building and body," repositioning how adornment is theorized on buildings. She presents an astute study of Ruskin's focus on surface through an exploration of ornamentation and polychromy. Though there are many complex angles to Ruskin's apparent fascination with surface, this text presents engaging arguments which leave the reader pondering the connections of surface aesthetics and theoretical depth. It also raises provocative connections to the Pre-Raphaelites, especially in the first and third chapters where Chatterjee presents Ruskin's theory of dress in relation to bodily movement and artistic representations of gender.

Ruskin's preference for decorative elements that seem to have no apparent architectural purpose has often been a source of significant discussion among art theorists, Ruskin scholars, and students of architecture, for ornamental elements are crucial to understanding Ruskin's architectural aesthetics while they often are at odds with certain architectural styles. Often, Ruskin is critiqued on the grounds that he did not have any formal architectural training, nor did he ever design a building; thus, he would have no educational or practical foundation to discuss architecture. However, as Chatterjee emphasizes, his focus on surface and the larger implications of surface and ornament to an analysis of skin and the gendered discourse of buildings is incisive and significant. By understanding surface we can explore the larger consequences of Ruskin's architectural thought. One of the strengths of Chatterjee's work is the way she incorporates gender and literary theory, such as Sharon Marcus's concept of "surface reading" with architectural theory to support her argument in a very accessible manner for those whose background may not be in architecture.

Chatterjee connects fragments in Ruskin's work to form a cohesive whole of building, fabric, and dress. Each of the five chapters emphasizes a specific argument about fabric, dress, and architecture, from ornament to the influence of Carlyle, to Ruskin's social theory of dress, to the language of draping and structure, to the aesthetics of architecture advocated by Ruskin. The first chapter sets the foundation of Ruskin's surface studies and the way in which

his background in geological studies becomes influential to his study of architecture and art. Early on, Chatterjee introduces the concept of Ruskin's wall veil, which then becomes an important thread (both figuratively and literally). Ruskin's focus on walls is noteworthy, and Chatterjee does well to highlight how a study of Ruskinian interiority is often lacking and should be a notion requiring further exploration, since his understanding of interiors is a natural progression from an analysis of walls and surfaces as focal points. Often, the wall becomes figured as a divider or separator of space and the marker of the beginning of a building or built environment – a very timely socio-political concern. Thus, there is also an opening here in the text for a greater exploration of the intersection of the social and architectural, which would be a noble focus for subsequent work on Ruskin's architectural values. Chatterjee also includes the fascinating concept of the architectonic, which reappears throughout the text, but specifically in chapter four, as a way to tie adornment concepts together. The architectonic is the character or the characteristic of structure, and for Ruskin there are certain characteristics that he prefers in structures time and again, such as walls and ornamentation.

Sensory scholars will be interested in Chatterjee's discussion of the intersection of vision and touch in Ruskin's architectural thought as "optical tactility," as well as her examination of the textuality seen in his own art. For Ruskin, buildings are conceptualized and adorned like people, and his art and architectural thought reflect this position. Chatterjee also relates this focus on dress and adornment to the theory of dress promoted by the Pre-Raphaelites – specifically, the concept of loose dress. Ruskin worried about the ethical repercussions of dresses sweeping the street and the reflection that such attire would have on national temper, Chatterjee reminds us. This juncture would have benefited from more discussion of *The Ethics of the Dust* and the depiction of dress and built environment seen in this Socratic dialogue. However, Chatterjee's argument that "Ruskin's new language of architecture transformed the constructive into the sartorial, and tectonic into textile" is convincing and well supported through references to specific pieces of art and buildings that became great inspirations to his work.

There is also a scientific thread that runs through the text that is welcome when exploring art and architecture. Chatterjee's examination of Ruskin's view of nature as "dressed" draws on the anatomical figurations of nature in his artistic thought and theory. There is a definite connection between the body and the building for Ruskin, and the biological mimicry that Chatterjee highlights is a stimulating focus for readers who work at the intersection of science and art. In some ways, buildings can become objects of desire; the focus on the sensory in Ruskin's architectural discourse demonstrates that desire. Carlyle is referenced in the second chapter, where Ruskin is positioned

as the cofounder of dress studies, making this chapter of special interest to Carlyle scholars. Ruskin's focus on dressed sculptures and not nudes is connected here to Mary Lutyens's claim about Ruskin's fear of pubic hair, a story commonly circulated in popular work since the 1970s. Ruskin's position in relation to women and women's representation is still in need of revision, even though much academic work has been done, and Chatterjee's text does well to remind readers of the motivation behind Ruskin's complex feminizing of architecture.

Ruskin's acquisition and documentation of Pre-Raphaelite art and the importance of the Pre-Raphaelites to his art collection is also discussed. This connection of the Pre-Raphaelites to Ruskin's curatorial style and his archives, as seen in the Collection of the Guild of St. George in the Millennium Gallery Sheffield, becomes an insightful way to approach the reciprocal influence they had on each other. Ruskin's belief in ornamentation is tied to a need for ornament to be organic in form. This is subsequently related to the organic nature of the art produced by the hand of the craftsman, a concept which was also promoted by Morris.

Chapter three starts with an exploration of Ruskin's philosophy of clothes in relation to material and colour, which is a refreshing way to address colour in Ruskin. Ideal dress influenced Ruskin's architectural principles, and Chatterjee demonstrates how colour and form are in inverse relation. For Ruskin, the colour of natural stone is ideal, and natural marble, the surface of stone, evoked a similar feeling to skin, giving an innate force to the structure. He also preferred natural colours in dress – pale yellows, oranges, and browns. However, "if the force of sculpture is subdued," there would be a need for stronger colours for effect and to enhance beauty. Again, the emphasis of science, geology and natural hues, here in connection to the visual in 19th-century thought, becomes a way to highlight the realism of anatomy in architectural and artistic representation. This intersection of visual, anatomical, and formal leads to a discussion in chapter four about the connection of dress to Ruskin's descriptions of the architecture of such buildings as St. Mark's Basilica. There is an interplay of flora, fauna, and landscape in the way Ruskin talks about buildings, and Chatterjee traces the origin of this descriptive tendency. Polychromy is important for Ruskin, and another strength of the text lies in the examples that Chatterjee provides to support how polychromy links to a gendered understanding of buildings. (Polychromy, or the use of different colours, sometimes in brick and ornamentation, highlights a sense of movement when looking at a building. An example is how St. Mark's has pale colours under the surface of the marble that vary from section to section because of the character and structure of marble.)

The last chapter, on architecture and restoration, will be of interest to

Morris scholars as well. Here concepts of history, character, and authenticity are coupled with artistic integrity to emphasize how “buildings, like bodies, bore witness to the passage of time” for Ruskin. Chatterjee highlights how Ruskin’s thought about buildings and restoration mean “we have no right to touch them” because the buildings “are not ours.” This focus on possession and the value of the built environment works well in relief to Chatterjee’s argument of how fabric and architecture are gendered for Ruskin. It becomes clear how much textiles are a significant, almost crucial, aspect to Ruskin’s thought. Surfaces are generative spaces, and Chatterjee leaves readers with much to think about in terms of how Ruskin’s theories can still influence architecture and design in an era of glass towers and facadism. The volume includes ten colour plates featuring the architectural design that impressed Ruskin, along with his watercolours, portraits of women that were inspirational for his thought on dress in art, and superb photographs of architectural detail taken by Chatterjee herself. *Ruskin and the Fabric of Architecture* provides innovative ways to think about the many connections of architecture to textile and gender and is of interest to those studying the aesthetic influences in the nineteenth century and beyond. It is also accessible for those without extensive architectural knowledge to enjoy the Ruskinian connections of art and architecture.

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