

[英語論文]

Reconsidering John Ruskin's 'Imagination Contemplative'

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Introduction

This study has focused on 'Imagination Contemplative', a notion put forth by Victorian art critic John Ruskin (1819–1900) in his works prior to 1860 and has aimed to clarify the role of such a concept within his overall philosophy.

Previous studies have already indicated that the concept of 'imagination' constituted an important part of Ruskin's theory of art, particularly in his earlier period. Some researchers would argue that his discussion on imagination in *Modern Painters II* (1846) somehow lacked in originality. For instance, Masao Okamoto believes that, while Ruskin did attempt to perform his own individual dissection of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's thoughts, he was, in the end, similar to his contemporary Walter Pater¹, a mere imitator of Coleridge².

In fact, Ruskin himself, as will be examined below in Section 1, was also reluctant to refer to the names he had assigned to each classification of imagination in *Modern Painters II* in any of his later works. However, as shown by detailed footnotes in the library edition of Ruskin's complete works, his thoughts were not limited to his earlier publications but were constantly revised. Hence, when reconsidering Ruskin's theory on imagination, it is important to distinguish whether he was referring to one of the classifications provided in *Modern Painters II* or something else in relation to the concept whenever he spoke of the word 'imagination'. Keeping this in mind, this study shall begin by discussing the three categories of imagination found in Ruskin's earlier theory of art.

References to Ruskin's published works are taken from *The Works of John Ruskin*, Library Edition (1903–1912), ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols, London: George Allen; New York: Longmans, unless otherwise stated. They are indicated by volume and page number in the text, thus: (4:228).

¹ See below for a comparative study on the attitudes of Pater and Ruskin towards British Romantics such as Coleridge and Renaissance artists. Kenneth Daley, *The Rescue of Romanticism, Walter Pater and John Ruskin*, Ohio University Press, 2001.

² Masao Okamoto, *A Study of the Theory of Imagination in English Literary Criticism*, Nan'un-do, 1967, pp. 152–159.

1. The Three Categories of Imagination in *Modern Painters* II

In *Modern Painters* II, Ruskin provided an evident distinction between ‘fancy’ and ‘imagination’, with the latter further divided into three different categories. In the order of their influence on a particular subject, the three categories are ‘Imagination Penetrative’, ‘Imagination Associative’ and ‘Imagination Contemplative’. Each of these imaginations is believed to serve its own unique function in a process through which visual information is first analysed or selected and organised and then combined with emotion as a form of individual experience to create a generalized memory. Judging from this definition offered by Ruskin, along with his remark that ‘Imagination Penetrative’ and ‘Imagination Contemplative’ ‘are so closely connected’ (4:228), it seems that the three categories of imagination are, in fact, parallel to each other, rendering it impossible for Ruskin to shed the criticism of ‘an imitator of Coleridge’.

As a matter of fact, it is quite possible that Ruskin’s explanation on the effects of ‘penetration’ and ‘association’ of imagination was based on Coleridge’s own discussion in the beginning of the 19th century. According to Ruskin, ‘Imagination Penetrative’, is the first to influence its subject; ‘it never stops at crusts or ashes, or outward images of any kind; it ploughs them all aside, and plunges into the very central fiery heart’ (4:250). He believed that the celebrated ideas of artists, such as Aeschylus, Homer, Dante and Shakespeare, were all founded in this imagination as ‘its function and gift are the getting at the root’ (4:251–252). In other words, ‘Imagination Penetrative’ does not pursue the nature of any image detached from the subject itself and should be clearly distinguished from ‘the fancy staying at the outside of things, which cannot see them all at once; but runs hither and thither’ as ‘one of the most purely and simply intellectual faculties’ (4:257–258).

Next, ‘Imagination Associative’ takes these disjointed and incomplete elements captured by ‘Imagination Penetrative’ and arranges them into a complete whole. This type of imagination—which Ruskin described as ‘the grandest mechanical power that the human intelligence possesses’ that not only sensed the origin of beauty but captured ‘the very imperfections’ as opposed to ‘Theoretic faculty’³ which simply sought beautiful things among many—is a form of ‘amalgamation’ through which different elements are integrated into an organised and united whole so that they are now mutually dependent on each other, creating beauty of a higher order (4:234–241).

The above definitions for ‘Imagination Penetrative’ and ‘Imagination Associative’ do in fact resemble Coleridge’s theory, which had grown in its strictness considering the distinction between ‘fancy’ and ‘imagination’. Even though Ruskin made limited reference to Coleridge in

³ With regard to the Theoretic faculty, which ‘is concerned with the moral perception and appreciation of ideas of beauty’ (4:35), please refer to the following study of mine: Hajime Ogino, ‘Ruskin and the Aesthetic Movement’, *Proceedings of Comparative Literature & Culture (Hikaku Bungaku Bunka Ronshu)* No. 20 (2003), University of Tokyo, Society of Comparative Literature and Culture, pp. 41–52.

his works, it is uncertain how many publications such as *Biographia Literaria* (1817) he had read⁴ when he first penned *Modern Painters* II. However, Coleridge did mention a quality similar to that of 'Imagination Penetrative' when he described Shakespeare as having an ability to thrust into the root and grasp the essence of things in *Biographia Literaria* by saying 'the former [Shakespeare] darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion'⁵. Furthermore, Coleridge had also referred to imagination as 'that synthetic and magical power'⁶ that harmonizes 'discordant qualities', which is almost identical to the definition of 'Imagination Associative'. Finally, Ruskin's view that these two types of imagination are somewhat like 'sisters' and that most artists are in possession of both (4:242) could have been a contributing factor to the opinion that his ideas did not differ from the theory of imagination on which the Romantics had based their creative principles.

However, while reading Ruskin's explanation for 'Imagination Contemplative', one cannot help but wonder if such a criticism was indeed valid. Especially in the case of Ruskin, it is pivotal that one must always remember the significance of *Modern Painters*, the work through which his theory on imagination was first formed. The book was a pioneer of its time in that it viewed landscape painters who were beginning to gain popularity from the latter half of the 18th century⁷ despite being largely ignored by the Royal Academy—the representative figure of which was certainly the 'modern painter' Turner—by inventing the new motto of 'faithful to nature'⁸. One shall yet refrain from reaching any conclusion too soon from such a perspective alone as doing so may risk overlooking the true meaning of 'Imagination Contemplative'. The most suitable approach, therefore, is to first understand the differences between 'Imagination Contemplative', which is said to be 'a certain habit or mode of operation' (4:289), and the other

⁴ Henry Ladd, *The Victorian Morality of Art, An Analysis of Ruskin's Esthetic*, New York: Ray Long & Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1932, pp. 206, 381.

⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria", *The Complete Works of S. T. Coleridge*, edited by W. G. T. Shedd, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864 (Reproduced by Rinsen Book Co., 1989), Vol. 3, p. 381.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

⁷ Rather than pure artistic appreciation, the popularity of landscape paintings at the time was supported by a now wealthier middle class who yearned for the imageries of 'The Grand Tour' represented in these works that were actually travel sketches made by many painters as a way to generate extra income. Ladd, *op. cit.*, pp. 50–55.

⁸ Although, as shown here, Ruskin's evaluation of landscape paintings (or painters) based on this new standard of 'nature' is quite similar to the view of William Hazlitt, who tried to incite a reform by going against the theories of the Academy, some critics saw Ruskin as the more advanced thinker in art criticism for inventing new vocabularies such as 'Imagination Penetrative' while Hazlitt depended much more on conventional discourses. William C. Wright, "Hazlitt, Ruskin, and Nineteenth-Century Art Criticism", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1974), p. 518. The need to examine this motto more carefully shall be discussed further in Section 2.

two types of imagination.

According to Ruskin, ‘Imagination Penetrative’ and ‘Imagination Associative’, as demonstrated by paintings of Tintoretto and Turner, are essentially related to artistic expressions whereas ‘Imagination Contemplative’ is more similar to the recollection of something, a quality that is not exclusive to artists but may also be seen in ordinary people. Furthermore, the function of ‘Imagination Contemplative’ is often abstracted and symbolized so that ‘[it] is not to be by lines or colours represented’ (4:299) to allow people to decipher signs and meanings embedded within paintings. We consider Ruskin’s claim from another angle. As shown by the passage ‘like the theoretic faculty, the imagination must be fed constantly by external nature’ (4:288), Ruskin believed that imagination is built on a foundation of information about things in the physical world. This ‘information about things’ can be divided into two types: ‘idea’ that appears ‘in a verbal form’ and ‘conception’ that appears ‘in a visible form’. For instance, linguistic knowledge such as the name of a flower and the number of petals belong to the former, while the colour of a flower and the shape of its bud in recollection would belong to the latter (4:229–230). Even though the connection between imagination and ‘concept’ is quite obvious, as both ‘Imagination Penetrative’ and ‘Imagination Associative’ deal with elements of thoughts, ‘Imagination Contemplative’ not only functions to trigger the recollection of these thoughts but also works to make sense of the new impressions produced by the other two imaginations.

Indeed, as described previously, if the creative activity of an artist begins with gaining insight into something (‘penetrative’), then follows by putting these thoughts together (‘associative’) and assigning meanings to these new impressions (‘contemplative’), it is only natural that ‘Imagination Contemplative’ would come last in the process. However, another similar mechanism, which works in a slightly different manner, is involved when one attempts to retrieve one’s own experience. When that happens, ‘Imagination Contemplative’ brings nothing but an accumulation of thoughts drenched in biased obscurity and a pleasant feeling created by fleeing impressions. We consider Ruskin’s description where he likened such a condition to a linkage of momentous events provided below.

The peculiar charm we feel in conception results from its grasp and blending of ideas, rather than from their obscurity; for we do not usually recall, as we have seen, one part at a time only of a pleasant scene, one moment only of a happy day; but together with each single object we summon up a kind of crowded and involved shadowing forth of all the other glories with which it was associated, and into every moment we concentrate an epitome of the day; and it will happen frequently that even when the visible objects or actual circumstances are not in detail remembered, the feeling and joy of them are obtained we know not how or whence: and so, with a kind of conceptive burning-glass, we bend the sunshine of all the day, and the fulness of all the scene upon every point that we successively seize. (4:290)

According to this passage, Ruskin saw human experience not as fragmented instances but

a harmonious sum of a variety of images. Unlike perception on the general level, this process seeks to preserve only the experience of a moment even when the actual details are already lost so that as one remembers someone or something in the past, that memory is filled with all kinds of attached emotions. As such, the pleasant feeling of impressions that one obtains from such experiences 'is not by art attainable' for 'it must differ from the mere *conception* of obscurity and indefiniteness' and 'can only lay hold of things which have shape, and destroys by its touch the fearfulness or pleasurable-ness of those which "shape have none"' (4:291). In any case, it is fair to say that 'Imagination Contemplative' does not recreate new things out of a certain scenario but merely plays back that group of images that is a result of one's conscious experiences. Ruskin's argument further states the following aspects.

Depriving the subject of material and bodily shape, and regarding such of its qualities only as it chooses for particular purpose, it forges these qualities together in such groups and forms as it desires, and gives to their abstract being consistency and reality, by striking them as it were with the die of an image belonging to other matter, which stroke having once received, they pass current at once in the peculiar conjunction and for the peculiar value desired. (4:291)

To illustrate that notion of 'striking' and 'current' with examples from literary works, Ruskin referred to 'like a Comet burn'd'⁹; these are the words used by John Milton to describe Satan in the second book of *Paradise Lost*. For Ruskin, Milton had succeeded in capturing the essence of Satan by solely focusing on the image of Satan's 'spiritual power' burning up (4:292). Here, even 'fancy', which has been distinctly separated from the notion of 'Imagination Penetrative' earlier, becomes more than something that 'merely caught the vivid actuality, or the curious resemblance of the real object'. When 'fancy' reaches the contemplative state, 'she verily believes in the truth of the vision she has summoned, loses sight of actuality, and beholds the new and spiritual image faithfully and even seriously'. In other words, 'the Fancy passes gradually from mere vivid sight of reality, and witty suggestion of likeness, to a ghostly sight of what is unreal; and through this, in proportion as she begins to feel, she rises towards and partakes of Imagination itself' (4:293)¹⁰. In a revised edition of *Modern Painters II* (1883)

⁹ John Milton, "Paradise Lost", *The Works of J. Milton*, edited by Frank Allen Patterson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1931, p. 63.

¹⁰ In that sense, to borrow the words of John Grote, a contemporary of Ruskin at Cambridge, the meaning of 'Imagination Contemplative' (and to some extent the 'fancy' that is divided in nature), is 'a vast imagination which we take care to make self-consistent: and fresh imagination which possesses this consistency we call experience'. John Grote, *Exploratio Philosophica*, Part 2, Cambridge, 1865, p. 169. Refer below for the study on Ruskin's understanding of imagination based on Grote's theory. W. David Shaw, "The Very Central Fiery Heart: Ruskin's Theories of the Imagination", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (1981), pp. 199-225.

published in his later years, Ruskin further questioned the need to distinguish between ‘fancy’ and ‘imagination’, which he saw as having similar psychological functions in man¹¹, in a footnote prior to the introduction of the three categories of imagination (4:219–222). However, even without such a fact, it remains quite clear how different his argument is from that of Coleridge, which asserted that the two must be strictly separated.

2. The Conceptual Development of ‘Imagination Contemplative’ in *Pre-Raphaelitism*

Nonetheless, the explanation for the functions of ‘Imagination Contemplative’ or ‘fancy’, offered by *Modern Painters* II was not always so straightforward. Up until 1846, ‘Imagination Contemplative’ was defined as an important function that crystallizes the obscure flow of perception-based recollections into experiences with special value or form. Then, in *Pre-Raphaelitism* (1851), which was written five years after *Modern Painters* II, Ruskin no longer saw this type of cognitive process as the sum of separate events, that is, the workings of thoughts or recollections and the consolidation of personal impressions through imagination, but as an experience with greater uniformity. First, let us consider a passage wherein Ruskin attempted to explain the methods of Turner whose perception ran alongside the imagination process to the point that the two were almost without distinction.

But there is not one change in the casting of the jagged shadows along the hollows of the hills, but it is fixed on his mind for ever; not a flake of spray has broken from the sea of cloud about their bases, but he has watched it as it melts away, and could recall it to its lost place in heaven by the slightest effort of his thoughts. Not only so, but thousands and thousands of such images, of older scenes, remain congregated in his mind, each mingling in new associations with those now visibly passing before him, and these again confused with other images of his own ceaseless, sleepless imagination, flashing by in sudden troops. (12:360)

According to Ruskin, Turner was able to not only consciously register those images ‘now visibly passing before him’ in reality but also mentally capture the entire flow of time, for instance, from the moment a cloud is formed to the moment it evaporates. Further, as Turner could personalize such images, it becomes easier for him to recall something no longer in existence. These images are deemed just as valuable as the products of Turner’s lively imagination and the two often intertwined to create many more new images. As a result, Turner sees everything in nature as ever-changing dynamics, so much so that his paintings ‘will be covered with stray symbols and blots, and undecipherable shorthand’ (12:360).

¹¹ The change in views regarding the distinctions between the two can also be in the footnote of the revised edition of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1880), which interpreted ‘fancy’ as a larger, more encompassing term.

Five years after *Pre-Raphaelitism*, Ruskin drew further comparison between Turner's imaginative approach to the truth ('poetical') and the Pre-Raphaelites' more simplistic approach ('historical') (6:27) in *Modern Painters* IV. To understand the true intention of such a comparison better, let us consider some descriptions in his writing. In *Pre-Raphaelitism*, Ruskin also applauded a school of artists who advocated the return to a more refreshing style before Raphael. Ruskin named John Everett Millais as a representative of that school; further, he asserted that even though Millais' approach had differed from Turner's approach, the fact that both artists sought truth through direct confrontation with the nature made them comrades 'whose inner principles and final aims are exactly the same'. However, Ruskin went on to comment that while 'the other [Turner] is impatient in temperament, has a memory which nothing escapes, an invention which never rests, and is comparatively near-sighted', 'one of them [Millais] is quiet in temperament, has a feeble memory, no invention, and excessively keen sight' so that while the former's imagination was able to capture the overall impression of a scene in shorthand, the latter was limited to 'abandoning at once all thoughts of seizing transient effects, or giving general impressions of that which his eyes present to him in microscopical dissection, he chooses some small portion out of the infinite scene' (12:359).

The above descriptions from *Pre-Raphaelitism* have provided us a better understanding of the explanation offered at the beginning of *Modern Painters* III (1856), which rendered Turner's 'poetical' approach not as a common expression of the truth but a practice that needs to be elaborated with concrete yet unique experiences when compared with the 'historical' approach (5:27-28). What must not be misunderstood here is that Ruskin's continued support for Turner was most probably related to the artist's pursuit of 'material truth' with a scientific eye, as well as his contribution towards the development of natural sciences and modern landscape paintings as seen in *Modern Painters* I (1843). For Ruskin, who had dedicated his adolescent years to sciences such as geology¹², Turner was indeed a painter more faithful to nature than the likes of Claude Lorraine or Gaspard Poussin. However, as the faithfulness of an expression or the likeness of an imitation is only relative so one must not overlook Ruskin's other claim that 'the painter who really loves nature [...] will make you understand and feel that art *cannot* imitate nature; that where it appears to do so, it must malign her and mock her' (3:289). In that sense, one can see that as early as *Modern Painters* I, Ruskin was already awakening to the notion that an artist must not rely on simple imitation of the nature but must also actively exercise his unique 'imagination'. It was not until *Modern Painters* III that Ruskin finally declared that 'Pre-Raphaelitism, as long as it confined itself to the simple copying of nature, could not take the character of the highest class of art' (5:188).

¹² Quentin Bell, *Ruskin*, London: Hogarth Press, 1978, p. 21.

3. 'Imagination' as a Form of Childishness

Initially, as previously discussed in Section 1, Ruskin had believed that 'Imagination Contemplative', a process through which the type of concrete/unique experience mentioned above is created, cannot be represented easily by art forms as described in *Modern Painters* II. However, Ruskin then claimed in *Pre-Raphaelitism* and *Modern Painters* IV, that Turner's limitless 'invention' was able to translate his conscious imagination and the entirety of his experience onto his 'poetical' paintings such that people looking at them may also receive 'impressions on the mind'. In Ruskin's own words, 'this impression on the mind never results from the mere piece of scenery which can be included within the limits of the picture. It depends on the temper into which the mind has been brought, both by all the landscape round, and by what has been seen previously in the course of the day' (6:33), meaning that 'Imagination Contemplative' based on the workings of thoughts and recollections must be constituted by various objects in the physical world. While writing *Modern Painters* IV, Ruskin also referred to a kind of 'childishness' as an important factor for the arousal of such 'impressions on the mind'. In *Modern Painters* II, drawing an example from that purest emotion one experiences when gazing at the horizon during childhood which Ruskin described as 'the most intense, superstitious, insatiable, and beatific perception of her splendours' (4:77), he continued to stress such primitive or instinctive sensations as an integral part of personal perception, demonstrated below in a passage from *Modern Painters* IV.

But, the longer I live, the more ground I see to hold in high honour a certain sort of childishness or innocent susceptibility. Generally speaking, I find that when we first look at a subject, we get a glimpse of some of the greatest truths about it: as we look longer, our vanity, and false reasoning, and half-knowledge, lead us into various wrong opinions; but as we look longer still, we gradually return to our first impressions, only with a full understanding of their mystical and innermost reasons; and of much beyond and beside them, not then known to us, now added (partly as a foundation, partly as a corollary) to what at first we felt or saw. (6:66)

Ruskin's assertion, which stated that when one returns to initial childishness without the vanity of knowledge one may begin to feel various added sensations, does in fact resonate with the theory that claims when one beholds something or someone from the past, one may also feel emotions associated to that particular object or person brought back by 'Imagination Contemplative'. However, to reach a better understanding of his words above, one must turn to the distinction between 'chiaroscurist' and 'colourist', both of which have been referred to throughout this book. The technique of the former, which reproduces everything only in terms of shadow and light, or black or white, regardless of the subject's actual colours, was widely practised by many artists including Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt and Raphael but according to Ruskin, 'because it was an unnatural way, [it was] thought to be a philosophical one' (6:63-65).

On the contrary, the latter, represented by Veronese, Titian and Turner, is more like 'any child or simple person' who reproduces colours as they see them, and 'this, which seems a childish and simple way of going to work, requires verily a thousandfold more power to carry out than all the pseudo-scientific abstractions that ever were invented' (6:67) ¹³.

There are in fact two aspects to this childishness or indifference to pseudo-science that are unique to the colourists. One is the assumption that such a sensation can only be felt by someone seeing the world for the very first time, a pure vision before the world is divided. In terms of painting technique, this is the basis for perceiving colours as seen without any prejudice. Ruskin himself also admitted that this was not an easy practice. For instance, in *The Elements of Drawing* (1857), which he wrote in the year after *Modern Painters IV*, Ruskin used the expression 'innocence of the eye' to refer to the highest form of artistic skills ¹⁴. As opposed to this visual and physical way of approaching the practice of art, the second aspect is much more internal, the kind of emotional state obtainable only through encounters with new visions, which Ruskin saw as a significant characteristic of a 'genius' as shown by a passage below from *The Stones of Venice III* (1853), published four years prior to *The Elements of Drawing*.

They look back to the days of childhood as of greatest happiness, because those were the days of greatest wonder, greatest simplicity, and most vigorous imagination. And the whole difference between a man of genius and other men, it has been said a thousand times, and most truly, is that the first remains in great part a child, seeing with the large eyes of children, in perpetual wonder, not conscious of much knowledge, —conscious, rather, of infinite ignorance, and yet infinite power; a fountain of eternal admiration, delight, and creative force within him, meeting the ocean of visible and governable things around him. (11:66)

Here, the great wonder sensed in ignorance, as well as the realization of an infinite power while in the state of that ignorance, are all rooted in what Ruskin called the 'most vigorous

¹³ However, chiaroscurists and colourists were further divided according to the practice of 'Line' in *Lectures on Art* (1870), and as a result, the members were reshuffled. The earliest schools of 'Line' were separated into Greek 'Line and Light' and Gothic 'Line and Colour', whose traditions were inherited respectively by Leonardo's 'Mass and Light' and Giorgione's 'Mass and Colour'. These two schools later united to form 'Mass, Light, and Colour', to which Titian belonged (20:128). Turner's work in mezzotint has been regarded as typical chiaroscurist, alongside Leonardo (20:155-156). On the contrary, the works of the Venetian school, which primarily relied on colours, has always been referred to as the 'perfect art'.

¹⁴ 'The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the *innocence of the eye*; that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify,—as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight' (15:27).

imagination'. Even though such 'imagination' is likened to a 'fountain' in this particular occasion, Ruskin then argued that it is not only a source of admiration and joy but also a flow of consciousness, 'running waters in the sweet wilderness of things unnumbered and unknown, conscious only of the living banks, on which they partly refresh and partly reflect the flowers, and so pass on' (11:66) in another passage immediately followed. Furthermore, he believed that this 'running waters', despite being a measure of genius, is a type of 'creative force' that all shall possess whether in 'rivulets or rivers' (11:66).

Therefore, in summarizing viewpoints put forth by Ruskin's works during the 1850s, one can see that he believed 'childishness' may only be obtained on the basis of experience without any pre-existing knowledge, through either the human 'eye' that sees with visual innocence or the human 'heart' that is filled with vigorous imagination and flow of consciousness. The latter, a type of 'Imagination Contemplative', was only explored further by Ruskin in his works after 1870, the year he resumed writing on art theories as the very first Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford after finishing all five volumes of *Modern Painters*. This has been linked to the rise of aesthetic movement around that time and shall be dealt with in a future discussion.