



Romanticism on the Net

Stone

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Abstract

This essay draws on fifteen exhibits in *RÊVE (Romantic Europe: The Virtual Exhibition)* as well as on a sample of texts and paintings in order to show the significance of stones to European Romanticism, contributing among other things to the age's sentimental and Gothic cultures, to its development of landscape aesthetics and tourism, and to its historicism and new understanding of revolution in natural history and in politics. Using John Ruskin as a narrative thread, the essay focuses on the period's quest to ascribe agency to stones and stone-related artefacts through imaginative sympathy and affect. While stone long stood for solidity and permanence in Western culture, it also came to be seen during the Romantic period as a fragile, even vital thing.

Biographical Note

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Thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field.

—Job 5.23

“La Pierre à Ruskin,” or the End(s) of Romanticism

1. Hidden in the woods above the old priory in Chamonix lies a stray boulder, or erratic block (a term coined in 1828), known as “[la Pierre à Ruskin](#).” Before it was encircled by trees,

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John Ruskin would sit there to sketch the huge granite spires and hanging glaciers of the Mont Blanc range, from which the boulder was carried down by glacial action. As Helène Lemaître and others have shown, rocks and stones were of tantamount importance to all of Ruskin's work and thought, whether left in their natural state, as in his *Deucalion: Collected Studies of the Lapse of Waves and Life of Stones* (1875–83), or shaped into cultural artefacts, as in *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53). In his late autobiography, *Praeterita* (1886–1908), Ruskin confesses that had he not discovered Tintoretto in Venice's Scuola di San Rocco one fatal day in 1845, "I should (so far as one can ever know what they should) have written, *The Stones of Chamouni*, instead of *The Stones of Venice*" (340). Notwithstanding his love of Italian civilization, the critic returned eighteen times to Chamonix throughout his life, seeking to develop "the power of examining the Mont Blanc rocks accurately" (283; see also Sdegno). In volume 4 of *Modern Painters* (1856), eleven of the thirteen chapters are dedicated to what he calls the "materials of mountains." "There are no natural objects of which more can be . . . learned than out of stones," Ruskin affirms (368). Christopher Newall comments that his diaries from this period are filled with descriptions of individual stones "for which he felt affection or association" (228).

2. While I have been unable to find any sketches of this particular erratic, Ruskin also drew rocks obsessively; these were often based on daguerreotypes taken by John Hobbs and Frederick Crawley and reproduced in his works using lithography, in which printmakers copied the design onto a flat limestone plate. The best known of these sketches is [*A Fragment of the Alps*](#) composed in Chamonix in 1854. The watercolor combines a Pre-Raphaelite love of realistic detail with what Ruskin claims to be the truth adumbrated from

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J. M. W. Turner's late, impressionistic watercolors of Swiss scenery—that all of nature contains the same visual rhythms. The undulating lines on the stone's grainy surface represent synecdochally and on a tiny scale the crystalline structure of mountains and the deep pressures of geological change, so that "a stone, when it is examined, will be found a mountain in miniature" (Ruskin, *Modern* 368). Not only did this realization help Ruskin explain the universal source of aesthetic pleasure in Hogarth's anti-classical, curved line of beauty, pointing to "the absolute harmony and unity of all natural form" (Walton 84). It also allowed him to reconcile his religious upbringing with his interests in art, architecture, and geology and to apprehend the dynamic interplay between living organisms and natural as well as cultural objects. As we shall see below, however, Ruskin's scientific interest in stones in this period was also leading him to what Paul Walton calls "a spiritual crisis" as he increasingly read in mountains the evidence of universal decay, making him lose faith in benevolent design (85). "La Pierre à Ruskin" may be thus viewed as marking the culmination of a century-long effort to harmonize natural theology, aesthetics, and science, but also the end of the line, as Romantic idealism gave way to the Victorian period's more anguished materialism.

3. Drawing on Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime" (1790), an earlier generation of critics, including Thomas Weiskel, influentially argued that in its struggle for ontological primacy, the Romantic Imagination focuses on objects in order to transcend, or "decreate" them, leading to a sort of anthropocentric solipsism (Weiskel 161). More recent critics, on the other hand, have been more interested in how Enlightenment- and Romantic-period geologists, painters, and poets were also drawn to these objects independently of

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intentionality. As Weiskel suggested almost a half-century ago, anticipating the materialist turn in the humanities and social sciences, “perhaps objects (*as* objects) only begin to be redeemed into an essential vitality when we see that they don’t need [the Imagination’s] redemption, as we do” (161). Taken up most recently in object-oriented philosophy, environmental criticism, and a number of other disciplines, the consequences of a materialist, self-generating *natura naturans* had already been explored by Leibniz and Diderot among others. In the opening pages of *Le rêve de D’Alembert (D’Alembert’s Dream; 1769)*, the latter hypothesizes that even a stone must feel, and that material objects can be sensible (345–46).

4. The long process by which scientists came to see the planet as a self-regulating organism began with the close observation of the natural world, including rocks, a phenomenon that Barbara Maria Stafford documents at length in her superbly illustrated study of Enlightenment travel, *Voyage into Substance*. According to the cultural historian,

the act of observing, recording, or charting nature’s operations . . . was predicated on the larger eighteenth-century interest in the structure of matter. To gain meaningful access to the physiognomy of the nonhuman environment—to comprehend particular formations and landmarks on their terms, not man’s—required admiration for, and penetration of, their individual corporeal composition. (59)

In *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology*, Noah Heringman describes this “hermeneutic temptation” to penetrate and read rocks as “a form of resistant materiality . . . indifferent if

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not inimical to subjectivity” (6, 11). Like the radical alterity of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” (1817) or the inhuman agency of the cliff in William Wordsworth’s boat-stealing episode in *The Prelude* (1805–50), Ruskin’s rock may thus be interpreted as a mysterious cipher suggesting what philosopher Jane Bennett calls “vibrant matter.” In the rest of this essay, I draw on a small sample of texts and on various exhibits in *RÊVE (Romantic Europe: The Virtual Exhibition)* in order to show stones’ significance to European Romanticism. Whether in their natural or in culturally mediated forms, rocks and stones contributed among other things to the age’s sentimental and Gothic cultures, to the development of landscape aesthetics and tourism, and to Romantic historicism and new understanding of revolution in natural history and politics. My main focus will be on the period’s quest, already splendidly documented by Stafford, to ascribe agency to stones and stone-related artefacts through imaginative sympathy and affect. From the Renaissance onward, stone was generally considered in Western philosophy and culture as an inert matter standing for solidity and permanence, yet it also came to be seen during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a fragile, even vital thing.

Cultured Stone

5. As the oldest, inorganic, primitive, and massive natural form, stone is the closest of the four classical elements to the *OED* definition of materiality as “[t]he quality of being composed of matter; material existence; solidity” (“Materiality,” def. 2a). According to Heringman, “rocks as the raw material of nature helped to generate the notion of materiality itself” (20–21). This chimes with French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard’s Delphic

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statement that “never can form be closer to matter than in mineral beauty.” Bachelard cites texts on stones by Dante, Goethe, Novalis, Baudelaire, and Ruskin to illustrate what he calls humans’ “desire for mineral permanence,” in other words our primordial, telluric attraction to the Earth’s deepest forces. “A dream of solidity and resistance,” he argues, “must be considered as one of the principles of a material imagination.” Stones teach us among other things to “experience the real in all its depth,” but they also “insert terror into the landscape,” threatening to crush us: rocks are “a natural tombstone” (Bachelard 133–205; my trans.).

6. Bachelard’s concept of “material imagination” reminds us that stone, although seemingly standing at the opposite extreme of culture, has always been intertwined with human activity and affect, and has a long literary history. As Heringman elegantly phrases it, “Literature is a product of the earth as well as a product of culture” (5). In *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen surveys Western culture’s “geophilia,” or romance with the lithic world. Opening his study with the story of Job, he argues, like Bachelard, that rocks in literature and culture often serve as reminders of our fragile mortality, “the inhuman against which our own humanity is measured,” creating an “ontological vertigo” as humans are faced with the dizzying perspective of death, divine power, and, much later, geological time (2–3). This feeling is frequently projected onto the stones themselves, bringing them, as it were, to life: “Full of relation, teeming with narrative, stone is seldom inert” (9).

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7. In addition to serving as our earliest tools and shelter, stones have been used as semiotic objects carrying a variety of sometimes contradictory meanings, whether in the form of jewels, tombs, churches, or castles, all of which were very present in Romantic-period culture. Similar to Dante's *Rime Petrose*, which play on images of stone to describe Petra's beauty but also her heart of marble, [John Keats's engagement ring to Fanny Brawne](#), an almandine set in gold, was meant to immortalize their love but could not stop him from dying of consumption. As Anna Mercer comments, "The engagement ring . . . effectively became a mourning ring." Other *RÊVE* exhibits remind us that stones were closely linked, from the graveyard poets onward, with the age's culture of mourning. Catriona Seth's contribution on [the tomb of Narcissa](#), for instance, discusses the influence of Edward Young's *The Complaint: or Night-Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* (ca. 1742–45) on the development of sensibility in Germany, France, and elsewhere. As Seth informs us, the French translation by Le Tourneur suggested that Young's daughter, Narcissa, was buried in Montpellier: a stone memorial was built there in 1819 to honor the literary anecdote, which itself became a Romantic pilgrimage site.

8. Closely associated with the culture of mourning was the cultivation of genius, often monumentalized in stone. Napoleon's levelling Edict of Saint-Cloud in 1804 dictated how and where people could be buried, making the celebration of dead geniuses a political act during the Romantic period. Influenced by Young and Thomas Gray, Ugo Foscolo's poem "Dei Sepolcri" ("On Sepulchres"; 1807) responds to the edict, asking in the opening stanza, "What solace for days lost would be a stone?" (49). Even though the speaker does not believe in the soul's immortality, he recognizes, as does Wordsworth in *Essays upon*

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Epitaphs (1810), the patriotic importance of honoring the nation's geniuses, including Machiavelli, Galileo, and Dante. The first two (but not Dante, controversially) were buried in Florence's gothic-styled [Basilica of Santa Croce](#), alluded to in Foscolo's poem and where he would himself be buried. The Florentine church in turn became a Romantic tourist attraction: Lord Byron and Germaine de Staël among others visited Santa Croce and wrote about it, helping transform the monument, according to Francesca Benatti, into a "metaphor of the state of Italy and for the nature of artistic fame."

9. Byron, in turn, was monumentalized in various places, including the *souterrain* or dungeon of [Chillon Castle](#) (Vincent, "Lord"), in western Switzerland, where his name was cut into the third of the seven stone pillars. Much like Porto's [Mausoleum for the Heart of King Peter IV](#) (Silva), Chillon carried a liberal political significance for many Romantic-period visitors, including Dumas Père, Hugo, Gogol, and Beecher Stowe. Even the young Ruskin, a budding Tory, had his valet carve his name across from Byron's on his first visit in 1833. "May he be the opposite of his lordship in everything but his genius and generosity," Ruskin's father wrote in his diary (Hilton 26). In his 1816 letter-journal, on the other hand, Shelley calls Chillon a "monument . . . of that cold [and] inhuman tyranny, which it has been the delight of man to exercise over man" (*History* 130). If stone's solidity could immortalize humans, in other words, it could also imprison them, contributing to the age's Gothic imagination. Perched on a pedestal of granite, the castle is used to represent the "[e]ternal spirit of the chainless mind" in Byron's 1816 sonnet "To Chillon," but also the physical and mental aftermath of a "living grave" in his "Prisoner of Chillon" (line 1; stanza 6, line 8). After losing his two brothers, Byron's captive narrator-hero wishes to be

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crushed by the surrounding stones, then falls into a state of suspended ontology: “I had no thought, no feeling—none— / Among the stones I stood a stone” (stanza 9, lines 5–6).

Reading Rocks

10. Contrary to the above example, stones frequently talk in the Romantic period, notably as a way to gage the historicity of a given monument. Goethe, for example, opens his *Römische Elegien* (*Roman Elegies*; 1786) by invoking the city’s stones, asking them to speak. In the Simplon Pass section of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, the rocks “mutter” and the crags “spake by the wayside / As if a voice were in them” (1805; book 6, lines 562–63) And in Shelley’s “Ozymandias” (1818), the half-sunk statue in the desert expresses himself through the medium of an inscription, but also through his facial expressions, which “tell” of the tyrant’s cruelty and the sculptor’s mocking imitation. Even more common is the Christian metaphor of nature as an open book that might be read, or what Wordsworth in the same passage calls the mountain’s “Characters . . . / . . . types and symbols” (lines 570–71). Stones, in particular, were seen as texts that could lay bare the history of the Earth and of humanity if studied closely enough. At the same time, the sheer magnitude of that history, and of the material objects that revealed its depth, produced a powerful effect on the observer that was formalized as the sublime. Artists, scientists, antiquarians, and tourists were increasingly drawn to the sort of “rude” or “savage” topography that lent itself to this new aesthetic discourse, whether in the wastes of Scandinavia, Scotland, and the Alps, or on the “classic ground” of Italy and Greece.

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11. As Barbara Stafford (105) notes, many of these sites blurred the distinction between nature and culture: [Fingal's cave](#) (Leask) was made to resemble an artificial grotto, for example, whereas Italy's much visited volcanoes, [Mount Etna](#) and [Vesuvius](#) (Duffy) were viewed as natural monuments. Like Fingal's cave, [Ossian Hall](#) (Falla) was the product of the mid-eighteenth-century vogue for James Macpherson, whose Ossian legends are filled with stones. At the same time, works such as Hölderlin's *Hyperion* (1799) and Karoline von Günderode's "Ariadne auf Naxos" (1804), indicate a similar desire to discover the scenes of classical mythology among the sun-bleached rocks and ruins of the Mediterranean. The most distinctive of these "natural" artefacts was Stonehenge, the two megalithic stone circles on Salisbury Plain that were long associated with human sacrifice, and that inspired Blake, Turner, Constable, and Wordsworth among others. Stafford comments that Stonehenge "occupied a special place, straddling the line between the artificial and the natural" (59). In her contribution on [Stonehenge](#), Jorunn Joiner cites Edmund Burke, who mentions the monument as an example of the sublime: "Those huge rude masses of stone, set on end, and piled each on other, turn the mind on the immense force necessary for such a work."
12. Mountains, as ciphers of Earth's deep history and sources of delightful horror, also began to interest natural historians, writers, and tourists from the late seventeenth century onward (Nicolson). Europe's highest chain and the divide between north and south, the Alps contributed significantly to orology and orogeny as well as becoming the quintessential Romantic topos. One of the most important scientists to write on the Alps was the Genevan patrician Horace Bénédict de Saussure, for whom mountains "always remained an elusive

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key to the origins of the Earth” (xiii). Saussure led the third successful ascent to the summit of [Mont Blanc](#) in 1787, helping transform Chamonix into a tourist destination. Travel writing on the Alps, as Simon Bainbridge reminds us, was influenced by natural historians such as Saussure and Ramond de Carbonnières, as well as by Rousseau’s best-selling novel, *Julie, or The New Heloise* (1761), demonstrating the symbiosis between scientific and belletristic discourses in the late Enlightenment. Many of the period’s most significant poets, dramatists, and novelists wrote about the Alps, including Wordsworth in book 6 of *The Prelude* and Goethe, who toured Switzerland three times in 1775, 1779, and 1797 (*Goethe*). Both writers were traumatized by their first encounter with high mountains. In his *Conversations with Eckermann*, the latter recalls that “Switzerland, at first, made so great an impression on me, that it disturbed and confused me; only after repeated visits...when I visited those mountains merely as a mineralogist, could I feel at ease among them” (1: 127; see also Powers). Even Kant, who never set eyes on a mountain, relies on Saussure’s descriptions of the Alps to argue his case in “Analytic of the Sublime” (1790), notably when explaining the dynamically sublime as “Bold, overhanging, as it were, threatening cliffs’ viewed from a position of safety” (sec. 28, 261).

13. In a December 1818 letter cited in Cian Duffy’s entry on Mount [Vesuvius](#), Shelley describes the volcano as being, “after the glaciers [of the Alps] the most impressive expression of the energies of nature I ever saw.” The poet harnessed this natural “expression” of the Earth’s revolutions in the cause of political change in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) as well as in his earlier “Mont Blanc, Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni” (1816). The poem’s images of hideously shaped glaciers wreaking havoc on

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the living, drawn in part from Volney's politically radical *Les ruines* (*Ruins*; 1791), combines the uniformitarian theory of a self-regulating earth, with the more catastrophist Biblical theories popular during the Restoration (Rudwick 94), suggesting that the earth will necessarily be revolutionized and cleansed of its "[l]arge codes of fraud and woe" without the aid of humans (stanza 3, line 33). In addition to Volney, the poet drew his radical materialism from Erasmus Darwin's final poem on the origins of life, [The Temple of Nature](#) (1803; Dauphin), splendidly illustrated by the Swiss artist Henry Fuseli. But it was another [Temple of Nature](#) (Vincent), this one not a poem but a stone pavilion overlooking Chamonix's Mer de glace, that is most directly linked with the poem and its merging of natural and political discourses (see also Vincent, "Lord Byron's Autograph"). Erected in 1795 and dedicated at the same time to the Divine Creator and to Nature "by a friend of liberty," the temple served, like Shelley's poem, to honor the mountain's revolutionary power.

14. Many of the entries left in the temple's visitors' book, as well as on the table, benches, and stone walls, were effusions in praise of God, suggesting that for the average tourist, mountains remained signs of a fallen world and of divine omnipotence. Although Shelley rejected such a reactionary reading of rocks, scandalously entering his name in the book as "a most philanthropic democrat and atheist" (De Beer 177), he too was drawn to sublime figures of fragmentation and decay, as we already saw in "Ozymandias." Much like the poem's statue of Ramses II, [the alabaster sarcophagus of Pharaoh Seti I](#) (Thomas), taken out of its Egyptian context and placed at the center of John Soane's collection in London, dramatizes the age's fascination with antiquities, curiosities, and fragments. Inspired in

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part by antiquarianism and philhellenism, but also by natural history and by the many illustrations of rocks and glaciers that artists brought back from the Alps, the Romantic fragment created a temporal and spatial *mise en abîme* that intensified the sublime effect of the passage of time and of human insignificance. In their ongoing state of dissolution, mountains in particular became iconic of deep history and of the destructive effects of time. In “Die Adler” (“The Eagle”) and “Ihr sichergebaueten Alpen. . .” (“You Firmly Built Alps”; ca. 1800–05), for instance, Hölderlin depicts mountains as solidly built, yet the interrupted second line of the latter speaks otherwise, its fragmented form suggesting that even the Alps can break down (295–99).

Like a Rolling Stone

15. One of the best-known representations of rocks in British Romantic poetry is the boat-stealing episode in book 1 of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, when the young speaker, after purloining a shepherd’s boat at night on Ullswater, invests the surrounding landscape with imaginative agency:

When from behind that rocky steep, till then
The bound of the horizon, a huge cliff,
As if voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck, and struck again,
And, growing still in stature, the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,

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With measured motion, like a living thing

Strode after me. (1799; lines 107–14)

While idealist critics in the visionary tradition of Coleridge and A. C. Bradley have usually focused on the sublime effect of the speaker's transgression on the growth of his mind, downplaying the cliff's movement as figural, more recent scholarship, sharing as it were the poet's youthful pantheism, has sought to access the objects themselves through a method of oblique allusion (Harman 187). Paul Fry, for example, interprets Wordsworth's figuration of stones as the ontological revelation of the "the nonhumanity that we share with the non-human universe" (x). We see this in "Nutting," in which the boy's "heart luxuriates with indifferent things / Wasting its kindliness on stocks and stones / And on the vacant air" (lines 40–43). For Fry, Wordsworth's poetry reveals the "minerality of being" that humans have in common with the world: he calls it "a levelling ontology" revealing the "ontic unity" of all things (6, 10).

16. Fry's argument is grounded in philosophy, but the same claim could be made based on natural history. As we saw in the previous section, geologists in Chamonix and elsewhere were trying to explain how mountains moved, and Romantic-period readers were particularly intrigued by the natural agency of rocks. On September 2, 1806, for example, the Swiss village of Goldau was destroyed by a massive landslide and tsunami that killed 457 people. Newspapers covered what became known as the Rossberg catastrophe at length, whereas a number of scientists set out to explain its causes (Bressan). The ruins of Goldau in turn became both a poetic topos (in Lord Byron's *Manfred*) and a "dark" tourist

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attraction. Travelogues and guidebooks often cite Dr. Carl Zay's *Goldau und seine Gegend* (*Goldau and its Region*; 1807) as the authoritative account:

The afternoon of the catastrophe, the Rossberg gave ominous signs of some approaching convulsion. Rocks started spontaneously from its bosom, and thundered down its sides; birds flew screaming through the air; the pine trees of the forest rocked and swayed without any blast, and the whole surface of the mountain seemed gradually sliding towards the plain. . . . The Rossberg was on the march for Goldau with the strength and terror of an earthquake. (Zay qtd. in Headley 76–77)

Even though Zay provides a naturalistic rather than supernatural interpretation of the event, his description ascribes to the rocks the same “measured motion” as in the above boat-stealing passage, anthropomorphizing the mountain and investing the scene with a similar pantheistic sense of nonhuman powers at work in nature. Rocks and trees here are not just figures of speech, but also have their own energy and material agency, in short, their own reality.

17. Zay's description may be compared with Turner's much commented [*The Fall of an Avalanche in the Grisons*](#), first exhibited in 1810 and based on another rockslide in the Grisons in 1808. Turner's painting helps us better understand how stones, and especially stones in motion, titillated the Romantic imagination, and how they continue to intrigue us today. The artist invests a rock with autonomous force, not only representing it as a threat, as we saw earlier, but also as an object with its own vital agency, serving as a salutary

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reminder of the interrelation between beings and things. Bennett defines vitality as “the capacity of things . . . not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents of forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (viii). The Romantic emphasis on imaginative sympathy, in particular, enabled what Bennett calls an “aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality” that takes us beyond anthropocentrism toward an apprehension of material objects as vibrant matter (x).

18. Ruskin came to a similar realization after having studied two late watercolors belonging to the Turner bequest, *The Pass of St Gothard, near Faido and Goldau, with the Lake of Zug in the Distance* (ca. 1842–43), treated at length as companion pieces in volume 4 of *Modern Painters*. Turner’s Faido sketch represents the rocky fragments carried down by erosion from the distant pass: “Turner,” Ruskin writes, “found more material for his power, and more excitement to his invention, among the fallen stones than in the highest summits of mountains” (374). It taught Ruskin, among other things, that the sympathetic imagination was essential to capturing a deeper, dynamic form of truth, one that considers the “natural relations” of objects and links aesthetics to affect. This is what Ruskin calls the “spirit of place” (35–36). The Faido sketch also made him realize how this affective relation to scenery allowed Turner to see even inanimate objects as alive, including the “undulating grain” of rocks’ “crystalline structure” (369). Ruskin, moreover, perceived the same curvilinear visual rhythms in the stony surfaces of the [Goldau rockslide](#) as in his later “Fragment of the Alps,” signs of a vibrant materiality he had first discovered in the granite peaks surrounding Mont Blanc.

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19. Informed by Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1833), on the other hand, Ruskin also drew from Turner's representation of the rockslide at Goldau the more tragic realization that mountains, like all sentient beings, are subject to powerful natural forces and are in a constant state of decay (176–77). Comparing the scene to Dante's Malebolge, Ruskin describes its "sepulchral stones" and "*crimsoned* sunset skies" (381) as symbols of death. Indeed, by the mid-nineteenth century, as we also see in poems such as Tennyson's *In Memoriam A. H. H.* (1850), stones no longer were able to provide the comforting reassurance that some things at least could remain eternal, a realization that we might say is also inscribed in "la Pierre à Ruskin." As Paul Walton comments, the "boulder that Ruskin drew at Chamouni may be understood to include this new awareness as one of the dimensions of its meaning, and as such it illustrates the way his mountain studies began to undermine the religious faith and optimism of his youth" (85). Concluding his chapter on stones, Ruskin tries to extract a positive moral lesson from his new, proto-Darwinian vision of nature, citing a quote from the Book of Job that rings truer than ever in our own age of climate apocalypse: "For thou shalt be in league with the Stones of the Field; And the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee" (5.23). Expressing his hope in humanity despite the surrounding signs of decay and destruction, Ruskin argues that nature will always recover, and that by relying on God's mercy, humans will grow humbler and feel closer to the stones and the beasts of this world (382–84). Privileging the dissolution of the subject-object divide through immanence rather than transcendence, this is a very different message from the grandiloquent ending of *The Prelude* or other critical set pieces that helped define Romanticism as the mind's overcoming of the earth, one that opens humans up to the

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earth's radical otherness while at the same time reminding us of our shared destiny with stones.

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