

Ca' Foscari University, Venice December 15th-16th 2025

Call for Papers

“The Beginning and the End of All Natural Scenery”: Mountain Experience Before and After Ruskin

*“My most intense happinesses have of course been among mountains”
(Praeterita 35: 157).*

In continuity with the research carried out on Ruskin and adaptation over the last two years, the second international conference organized by FoRS invites papers inspired by Ruskin and his mountain writings. Ruskin “saw and understood mountains, and taught his generation to understand them in a way no one—none even of those who had been born under their shadow—had ever understood them before”, wrote Douglas Freshfield, highlighting the comprehensive approach of Ruskin’s groundbreaking work: “He had a faculty of precise observation, the basis of all scientific research, which made him the most formidable of critics to any man of science whose eyesight might be temporarily affected by some preconceived theory. But this appreciation of detail in no way interfered with Ruskin’s romantic delight in the whole, in the sentiment and spirit of mountain landscapes” (*Alpine Journal* 1900). Considered an eclectic forerunner of mountain studies, Ruskin built on the work of significant figures who came before him (artists and writers like Gilpin, Prout, Turner, Rousseau etc.) and, in turn, inspired others whose work attempted to grasp and convey the mystery and beauty of mountains and their landscapes.

His work on mountains also fits within the scope of recent ecocritical and environmental trends, as the study of nature was to Ruskin a call to action: “All the investigations undertaken by me at this time were connected in my own mind with the practical hope of arousing the attention of the Swiss and Italian mountain peasantry to an intelligent administration of the natural treasures of their woods and streams.” (*Deucalion*, 26: 339).

We welcome original contributions exploring Ruskin’s substantial corpus of mountain writings, ranging from *Modern Painters* IV to *Deucalion* and *Praeterita*, his diaries, correspondence, early poems and fiction, including his iconographic works, i.e. drawings, watercolours, daguerreotypes, photographs. We also welcome contributions that fruitfully deal with the theme of mountains in prior and later thinkers’, writers’, and artists’ works.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Mountains in literature
- Mountain and visual culture (painting, photography, cinema)
- “Mountains of the mind”: mountains and self-writing
- Silence and solitude since Rousseau
- The colours of the mountains (Goethe, De Saussure, etc.)
- The rise of mountaineering/mountain tourism in literature
- The rise of mountain sports clubs
- The orographic, the botanical, and the literary
- Mountains in material culture and the crafts
- Mountain stones (marble, granite etc.)
- Ruskin and the Alpine Club
- Ruskin and the *Alpine Journal*

Contributions can be in English, French, or German. Please send a 300-word abstract in English and a short bio note to fors@unive.it and the conference organizers emma.sdegno@unive.it, julien.zanetta@unive.it and faberbe@unive.it, no later than 10 June 2025. Notification of acceptance will be sent by 10 July 2025.

Bibliography

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- A.C. Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime*, Ashgate, 2010.
- M. Ferrazza, *Le cattedrali della terra. John Ruskin sulle Alpi*, Vivalda, 2008.
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