

The Stones of Venice: Lady Augusta Gregory and John Ruskin

Eglantina Rempert

Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, Hungary

Abstract Lady Augusta Gregory was among those Victorian Anglo-Irish genteel women who were deeply influenced by Ruskin's views on the political and artistic history of Venice. She stayed at Ca' Cappello during her visits to Venice, Sir Austen Henry Layard and Lady Enid Layard's beautiful palace on the Grand Canal. She often walked the streets of the Mediterranean city in search of architectural details that Ruskin mentioned in *The Stones of Venice*. The chapter considers the significance of these Ruskin-inspired sojourns on the formation of Lady Gregory's aesthetic sensibilities at the turn of the twentieth century and reveals the true subject matter of one of her Venetian sketches, now held at the National Library of Ireland.

Keywords Ruskin. Lady Gregory. Lady Layard. Sketching. Travel writing.

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1 Introduction

John Ruskin's three-volume *The Stones of Venice*¹ may have been only one of several travel books written about the Apennine Peninsula during the Victorian period, but it was certainly the one that exerted the most influence on the writers of the Irish Literary Revival between 1880 and 1930. My recent study, *Lady Gregory and Irish National Theatre: Art, Drama, Politics*,² explores the seminal influence of Ruskin's social thought in Ireland during the Revival period, as expressed in the volumes of *The Stones of Venice* and in later works such as *Time and Tide* and *Fors Clavigera*.³ Lady Augusta Gregory herself was a dedicated Ruskinian who disseminated Ruskin's thoughts in various ways through the work of

¹ *Works*, 9-11.

² Rempert 2018.

³ *Works*, 17; 27-29.

the Co-operative Movement, the Home Industries Movement and the Abbey Theatre, known at the time as the Irish National Theatre.⁴ Dramatist, director and designer, Lady Gregory of Roxborough in the west of Ireland county of Galway, became a powerful player in the Irish literary scene. She overcame countless struggles when managing the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and fought doggedly during and after the years of the First World War for a public space in the city to house the impressive art collection of her nephew Hugh Lane.

Lady Augusta was the wife of Sir William Gregory of Coole Park, descendant of a long-line of Gregorys in British colonial service, including the famous East-India Company. She is mostly remembered as a friend of William Butler Yeats, Noble Prize-winning poet and playwright of Dublin/Sligo and of George Bernard Shaw, Oscar and Noble Prize-winning playwright from Dublin. Lady Gregory's achievements, however, should be appreciated in their own rights, acknowledging her immense knowledge of literature and art, and her love of Ireland. It was this love of Ireland, in fact, that rocked the boat of her friendship with Lady Enid Layard, who used to welcome her to Ca' Cappello from the early 1880s until the late 1900s. Sir Henry and Lady Layard showed Lady Gregory the best of what Venetian life had to offer, including visits to the Academy, the Ducal Palace, St. Mark's Cathedral, and the Rossini Theatre. Lady Layard reveals in her diaries that when walking around Venice, she and her husband would carry around with them a Ruskin book or booklet, reading out passages from the much-valued publications (Layard, September 22, 1882). When Sir William and Lady Gregory arrived at Venice for the first time as a married couple in Octo-

ber 1881, their first excursion on Sir Henry's gondola was out to the Stabilimento, followed by visits to the Academy (to view the new exhibition), to St. Mark's (to see the Pala d'Oro), to the Seminario (to view pictures and sculptures), and to the Lido (for the Layards' customary afternoon/evening stroll). Lady Gregory had much to learn because Sir Henry and Sir William were fervent art lovers, paintings in particular, and were associated with both the National Gallery and the British Museum in London. These two men were boundless wells of information on the history of European art, including that of Italy. Sir Henry and Sir William were also involved with the Arundel Society that published John Ruskin's explanatory notes on Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua.

Lady Gregory herself had read Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* when she was still a young, single woman, living with her family in County Galway's Roxborough House. She wrote in her autobiography that when she was reading Ruskin's book - that she had found in the library of a nearby landed estate of Castle Taylor - she believed it was "without much prospect of ever seeing Venice itself".⁵ Augusta's confessions about reading the book are particularly interesting because of the context in which they are given: her comments on *The Stones of Venice* are immediately followed by the story of Sir William Gregory's marriage proposal, indicating perhaps an early instance of Sir William's marked influence on the aesthetic education of the soon-to-be Lady Gregory. All the greater was her delight when she finally saw Venice herself and met Sir Henry on his gondola.⁶ In her memoirs, Lady Gregory dedicated a whole chapter to Sir Henry, recounting the instance of Ruskin's visit to Ca' Cappello to

⁴ Rempert 2018, 85-119.

⁵ Smythe 1974, 28.

⁶ Smythe 1974, 172.

examine the illustrious Layard Collection that included a Carpaccio, a Luini, and works by Giovanni Bellini. After the death of her husband in 1894, Lady Layard took to making copies of these paintings with a view to including them in a book celebrating the collection. Lady Layard was very fond of drawing and sketching – learning

some of the trade from Ruskin himself – and Lady Gregory soon followed her friend in documenting the streets of Venice. Leaving Ca' Cappello for long walks around the city, she studied Venetian architecture with a keen eye – her sketches are testimonies of her love of Venetian art and her knowledge of Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*.

2 Ruskin and *The Stones of Venice*

Ruskin wrote *The Stones of Venice* following two visits to Venice between 1849 and 1852. Observing a traveller's descent from the Alps to the Po Valley and then on to the Adriatic, Ruskin describes the arrival of river pebbles into the Veneto region as follows:

When the eye falls casually on a map of Europe, there is no feature by which it is more likely to be arrested than the strange sweeping loop formed by the junction of the Alps and Apennines, and enclosing the great basin of Lombardy. [...] The character of the Lombardic plains is most strikingly expressed by the ancient walls of its cities, composed for the most part of large rounded Alpine pebbles alternating with narrow courses of brick; [...] The finer dust among which these pebbles are dispersed is taken up by the rivers, fed into continual strength by the Alpine snow, so that, however pure their waters may be when they issue from the lakes at the foot of the great chain, they reach the Adriatic; the sediment which they bear is at once thrown down as they enter the sea, forming a vast belt of low land along the eastern coast of Italy. The powerful stream of the Po of course builds forward the fastest; on each side of it, north and south,

there is a tract of marsh, fed by more feeble streams, and less liable to rapid change than the delta of the central river. In one of these tracts is built RAVENNA, and in the other VENICE.⁷

These astute observations about the journey of the mountain pebble from the French-Italian Alps to Veneto would have described Ruskin's own descent from the east of France to Northern Italy, travelling from Chamonix through Milan to Venice, as he usually did. Whether in company or on his own, Ruskin tended to rest in Chamonix in the French Alps to take in the beauty of the mountains and the warm welcome of Chamonix's inhabitants.⁸

Ruskin's remarks about the traveller's first views of Venice are no less poetical. Writing under the spell of English romanticism that coloured Lord Byron's views of the city, Ruskin describes the arrival of the visitor into the winding lagoons as follows:

And at last, when its walls were reached, and the utmost of its untrodden streets was entered, not through towered gate or guarded rampart, but as a deep inlet between two rocks of coral in the Indian Sea; when first upon the traveller's sight opened the long rang-

⁷ Works, 10: 10-11.

⁸ Hilton 2002, 33; Sdegno 2015, 33.

es of columned palaces, – each with its black boat moored at the portal [...]; when first, at the extremity of the bright vista, the shadowy Rialto threw its colossal curve slowly forth from behind the palace of the Camerlenghi; that strange curve, so delicate, so adamantine, strong as a mountain cavern, graceful as a bow just bent; when first, before its moonlike circumference was all risen, the gondolier's cry, "Ah! Stali", struck sharp upon the ear, and the prow turned aside under the mighty cornices that half met over the narrow canal, where the plash of the water followed close and loud [...]; and when at last that boat darted forth upon the breadth of silver sea, across which the front of the Ducal Palace, flushed with its sanguine veins, looks to the snowy dome of Our Lady of Salvation, it was no marvel that the mind should be so deeply entranced by the visionary charm of a scene so beautiful and so strange, as to forget the darker truths of its history and its being.⁹

Besides illustrating Ruskin's beautiful prose style, the above passage is interesting from the point of view of Lady Gregory's own account of her arrival in Venice decades later, an arrival that was recorded in her diary and later published in her memoirs in the 1930s. She writes in her memoirs:

"Sir Henry Layard met us with his gondola and welcomed us to Ca Capello" was the first of many a like entry. And these visits stand out in my memory with their days of delight, the sight of the passing boats,

the rafts from the mountain forests, the sound of the water plashing against the wall at night, the cry of "Stali" as a gondolier turned the sharp corner from the narrow to the great canal.¹⁰

Of course, the gondolier's cries were familiar to all visitors, not just to Lady Gregory and Ruskin. Ruskin himself wrote a short piece about the gondoliers rowing along the narrow canals entitled "The Gondolier's Cry", which is attached to the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*.¹¹ There is, however, a distinct Ruskinian strain in Lady Gregory's lines as they run into an extended description of Ruskin's visit to Ca' Cappello in October 1888. Her images of "passing boats", "rafts from the mountain forests" and "sound of the water splashing against the wall at night" when hearing the gondolier's warnings,¹² resonate strongly with Ruskin's descriptions of Venice of the "colossal curve" of the Grand Canal, the "gondolier's cry" along the waterways, where "under the mighty cornices that half met over the narrow canal [...] the plash of the water followed close and loud, ringing along the marble by the boat's side".¹³ This echo of Ruskin's style in Gregory's writing carries considerable significance: in the memoirs that she wrote much later in life, she expressed her desire to be remembered not just for her Irish friends and associates but also for whom she called her "Athenaeum Friends": Sir Frederic Burton, Sir Alfred Lyall, Alexander William Kinglake, Henry James, Robert Browning, and Sir Henry Layard. Significantly, to different degrees, each of these painters and writers responded to Ruskin's narrative accounts of Venice.

⁹ *Works*, 10: 6.

¹⁰ Smythe 1974, 171.

¹¹ *Works*, 10: 441-3.

¹² Smythe 1974, 171.

¹³ *Works*, 10: 6.

Lady Gregory describes Sir Henry as effectively the British ambassador to Venice “so great was his position” due to his highly esteemed work in the fields of art and archaeology.¹⁴ He was, as Gregory writes, “free to exercise in his spacious palace the wide and liberal hospitality” that he had learned during his sojourns in the Middle East.¹⁵ Ca’ Cappello on the Grand Canal may have been a spacious building and may have been welcoming to visitors but was not one of the palaces that Ruskin studied in detail in *The Stones of Venice*. British hospitality was, of course, on a shoe-string during Ruskin’s visits to Venice in 1849-1850 and 1851-1852. Tim Hilton remarks that when the Ruskins arrived in Venice, Rawdon Brown was “practically the only English person there: the others, like most of the Venetian aristocracy, had left the city before the [Austrian] siege began” in 1849.¹⁶ During that siege, many palaces received considerable damage both in their structure and in their ornamentation and after the siege many of the façades were vanishing under the brisk reconstruction effort of the Austrian authorities.¹⁷ Robert Hewison notes that through sketches, watercolours and daguerreotypes, Ruskin tried to record whatever he could of the famous buildings.¹⁸ Ruskin’s motivations in making the journey to Venice, recording the buildings and writing *The Stones of Venice* were, of course, manifold but some of them are worth reiterating here. He intended to record and canonise the city’s architecture from the Byzantine through the Gothic to the Renaissance; he made the case that Byzantine and Goth-

ic architecture were superior to that of the Renaissance; and, further to this, he wanted to demonstrate “how the rise and fall of the Venetian builder’s art depended on the moral or immoral temper of the State”.¹⁹

When it comes to the discussion of Byzantine architecture, Ruskin studies a number of palaces, including the Fondaco dei Turchi, the Rio-Foscari House, the Madonetta House, Ca’ Farsetti, and Ca’ Loredan. The Fondaco dei Turchi was in a dire condition when Ruskin saw it. Only the middle section of the building survived the ravages of historical battles (both Napoleonic and Hapsburg). Nonetheless, Ruskin saw in it a real beauty, observing in detail the system of its arches, the ornamentation of its capitals, and the colouring of its waterfront façade. The Rio-Foscari House, the Terraced House (Palazzo Mengaldo), Ca’ Farsetti and Ca’ Loredan receive similar sympathetic treatment, Ruskin seeing them as “indicative of Byzantine workmanship”.²⁰ This is high praise from the art critic who considers Byzantine architecture, steeped in medieval Christian religiosity, more valuable than Greek architecture, known for its use of human proportions and exhibiting an ancient pagan spirit. Ruskin compares Byzantine embellishment to Greek ornamentation, and draws the conclusion that the former is superior in style because of its closer affinity to the natural world. Ruskin writes that Byzantine shafts in Venice show a “greater love of nature” than the most ornamented of Corinthian columns because no two sides of a Byzantine capital are alike. He argues that this il-

¹⁴ Smythe 1974, 171.

¹⁵ Smythe 1974, 172.

¹⁶ Hilton 2002, 141.

¹⁷ Hewison 1978, 12.

¹⁸ Hewison 1978, 12.

¹⁹ *Works*, 9: 14.

²⁰ *Works*, 10: 152.

illustrates how the motifs of these capitals take their inspiration directly from nature, filled with a wide variety of leaves and flowers.²¹ Ruskin continues these observations with a reflection on Byzantine colouring, drawing connections between the colouring of Venetian shafts and façades and the “bright and pure colour which, in a modified form, was afterwards the root of all the triumph of the Venetian schools of painting”.²² Similar to the case of sculptural details on Venetian buildings, Ruskin finds divine ordinance in Byzantine colouring. When compared to the darker hues of a Renaissance oil painting, the natural Venetian Byzantine palette is once again found more desirable: Ruskin perceives in it a strong association with the sphere of the Divine. He remarks that “the more faithful and earnest the religion of the painter, the more pure and prevalent is the system of his colour”.²³

Ruskin continues in much the same vein when he studies Gothic architecture later on in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*: he notices once again the arrangement of stories, the relation of the central to the lateral arches on waterfront façades, and the embellishment of structural elements such as doors, windows, columns and balconies. He claims that one can notice a “loss of unity of conception which regulated Byzantine composition”.²⁴ Byzantine architecture, claims Ruskin, is “centralised in its ornamentation as much as in its proportions”.²⁵ He further examines the use of twisted shafts, decorative chamfers, intricate traceries, intrigu-

ing spires, and the recurrent use of fleur-de-lis motif in Gothic architecture.²⁶ He notes that balconies are often used in order to enhance the architectural splendour of a building, writing that “the Gothic palaces owe half of their picturesque effect” to the decorative design of their balconies.²⁷ By way of illustrating the point, he selects a number of Venetian palazzos for examination, including the Ca’ Falier, Marco Querini’s Palace and the Ca’ Sagredo.

Since the balconies of these palaces are decorated both with eye-catching balustrades and stunning windows, this examination offers the art critic a further chance to elucidate his categorisation of Venetian windows, comparing them to those of the late Gothic style found in Verona.²⁸ Lady Gregory later takes a note of these balconies with their laced windows and decorative balustrades, recording some of them in her sketchbooks during the 1890s. She follows Ruskin in noting the Gothic archways and windows of the Ducal Palace, the building that is one of the main focuses of Ruskin’s attention in his appraisal of Venetian architecture both in the first and the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*, alongside St. Mark’s Cathedral. As for the Doge’s Palace, Ruskin examines its structural elements and its long history dating back to the early medieval times. Additionally, he suggests a new way of understanding its historical significance, one that has at its heart a spiritual/theological interpretation of beauty. As he often did before and

²¹ *Works*, 10: 160.

²² *Works*, 10: 172.

²³ *Works*, 10: 173.

²⁴ *Works*, 10: 277.

²⁵ *Works*, 10: 277.

²⁶ *Works*, 10: 278-81.

²⁷ *Works*, 10: 285.

²⁸ *Works*, 10: 290-312.

would do repeatedly after the publication of the work, he connects natural light with the realm of the Divine, claiming that the way in which natural light falls on the Palazzo Ducale through the holes of its traceries and other sculpted elements resembles the way in which God's light shines down on humankind and the world. Ruskin is persistent in saying that Medieval Gothic was first and foremost an ecclesiastical style and, as such, should be appreciated for its devotional aspects above all else. At the end of the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*, after an extended analysis of the Ducal Palace, he returns to where he started the volume, only this time adding

a new, devotional layer to his description of Venice and the Alps. About his walk around the Ducal Palace looking over to the white-capped mountains of the Alps, Ruskin writes that

God had done a greater work in breathing into the narrowness of dust the mighty spirits by whom its haughty walls had been raised, and its burning legends written, than in lifting the rocks of granite higher than the clouds of heaven, and veiling them with their various mantle of purple flower and shadowy pine.²⁹

3 Lady Gregory and the Stones of Venice

Sir William Gregory and his wife took a different route to that of Ruskin, arriving at Venice via the Brenner Pass from Munich through Austria (Gregory, October 26, 1881). On their way to Venice, the Gregorys stopped to wonder at the Gothic architecture in Verona, visiting the town's medieval cathedral, Sant'Anastasia, and its Dominican church, San Zeno (Gregory, October 27, 1881). Soon after the Gregory's arrival in Venice, Sir Henry Layard invited them to a gondola ride in the direction of St. Mark's Cathedral, despite the gondoliers' ongoing strike against large steamboats threatening to take their livelihood (Layard, October 31, 1881). A few days later, Sir William and Lady Gregory returned to the cathedral to view the Pala d'Oro, the golden and enamelled altar screen inside the old Byzantine church (Layard, November 1, 1881). Lady Gregory marvelled at the ornamentation of the cathedral and enjoyed the evening Vespers during which the golden Byzantine altar piece was uncovered for the worshippers (Layard, November 1, 1881). Lady Augusta saw for herself the shafts, the capitals, the

structure wonderfully described by Ruskin. On their way back home, the Layards and Lady Gregory went to the Lido, to land at Santa Maria Elisabetta and walk around until darkness fell on land and sea. Enid Layard records the evening and its colours in a truly Ruskinian manner: "We could not take a long walk as it got late & we came home the distant mountains tipped with snow stood out clear on one side the Dolomites & the Alps were towards Trieste & on the other the hills above Bologna. The sun set was lovely & the water shot with all colours, blue, pink & green & gold" (Layard, November 1, 1881).

Sir William and Lady Gregory were to enjoy the beauty of the Italian countryside later; first there was much religious art to discover in the local churches. Gentile and Giovanni Bellini were among Sir Henry Layard's favourite artists, whose *tableaux* formed an important part of the Layard Collection that decorated the walls of Ca' Cappello. The Bellini brothers were Renaissance artists. Ruskin admired their paintings because of their devotional quality. Ruskin asserted that while the work

²⁹ *Works*, 10: 439.

of other Italian artists could be studied easily in a museum or a gallery, "Tintoret and Bellini can be judged of *only* in Venice"³⁰ Agreeing with Ruskin on this matter, Sir Henry and Sir William lead numerous art tours around Venice in order to locate a beautiful Bellini *tableau* or altarpiece. By the side of both men, Lady Gregory visited the most famous historical locations of the city. She visited the Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo, site of the funeral service and burial of a long list of Venetian doges, where she learned about Venetian history and studied Giovanni Bellini's polyptych of San Vincent Ferrer (1464-1468) (Gregory, November 4, 1881). There she learned that Santi Giovanni e Paolo was the church where Gentile and Giovanni Bellini had been buried in the early sixteenth century. Lady Gregory went to see Bellini's triptych at the Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari near Ca' Cappello, and she saw a Bellini altarpiece (*Madonna and the Child*, 1505) in San Zaccaria, alongside further paintings at the Galleria dell'Accademia on the Grand Canal (Gregory, November 1-2, 1881). Bellini's several *Sacre Conversazioni* along with his and Andrea Previtalis's *Allegories* were exhibited at the Accademia alongside Paris Bordon's *The Fisherman Presenting the Ring to Doge Gradenigo* (1534) and Vittore Carpaccio's St. Ursula Cycle (1490s) (Gregory, October 30, 1881). Lady Gregory tentatively attributes one other painting to Bellini, one that she entitles *The Last Supper*, located in the church of San Salvatore. She raises questions regarding this attribution and today the biblical *tableau* is, in fact, attributed to Bellini's assistant, Vittore Carpaccio. She takes a further note of the Bellini at the Ducal Palace, as well Carpaccio's *St. George and*

the Dragon in the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, of which Ruskin wrote several times during his long career as art critic, from *St. Mark's Rest* to *Fors Clavigera*³¹ (Gregory, November 4, 1881). A year later, in preparation for the Gregorys' next visit to Venice, the Layards returned to the Scuola to admire the St. George series that had been carefully studied by Ruskin in *St. Mark's Rest*: "We took with us Ruskin's little book on them & amused ourselves vastly reading it on the spot" (Layard, September 22, 1882).

Ruskin's good friend, Rawdon Brown, assisted Sir Henry in assembling the Venetian collection of paintings at Ca' Cappello. Sir Henry's collection was renowned among both local and international *cognoscenti*; so much so, argues art historian Cecilia Riva, that "[t]he collection was considered one of the most beautiful in the whole Veneto".³² Riva adds that following the death of Lady Enid Layard in the early 1910s, Gino Fogolari, who was the Director of the The Royal Galleries of the Academy of Venice, "made a plea for transforming Ca' Cappello Layard into a branch of the National Gallery and keeping the paintings within Italy".³³ The Layard collection had great art historical value and abounded in North Italian religious artworks, including Gaudenzio Ferrari, Bartolomeo Montagna, Francesco Bonsignori, Andrea Previtali, and Bernardino Luini. Sir Henry owned Carpaccio's *The Departure of Ceyx*, a painting linked to the St. Ursula Cycle at the Accademia, and Paris Bordon's *Christ Baptizing St. John Martyr*, also linked to the Accademia, in addition to Gentile Bellini's *The Sultan Mehmet II* (1480) and Giovanni Bellini's *Virgin and the Child* (1490s), as well as a *tableau* from Giovanni Bellini's work-

³⁰ *Works*, 11: 359.

³¹ *Works*, 24: 27-29.

³² Riva 2018, 21.

³³ Riva 2018, 21.

shop, *Adoration of the Kings* (1475-1480).³⁴ Sir Henry and Lady Layard were immensely proud of their collection, one that also contained artefacts from the Middle East and artworks from Spain, two locations where Sir Henry had spent a considerable amount of time as archaeologist and as a British ambassador. Lady Layard records in her diary that during Lady Gregory latest visit to Ca' Cappello in May 1896, she decided to make copies of the paintings in the Layard Collection with a view to publishing these in an illustrated catalogue for the wider public to read (Layard, May 4, 1896). Lady Layard sat down daily to this task, giving Lady Gregory time to discover the lagoons of Venice for herself. There is a significant change here from previous visits, in that in the 1880s Lady Gregory used to walk about Venice accompanying her husband and Sir Henry to a place of great art historical significance. A decade later, she walks about the streets of Venice as a *cognoscente* of the local art world who had taken many lessons at the history of the Veneto region and of Northern Italy. On her return home to Ca' Cappello, Lady Gregory recognizes her friend's dedication to her new art project, encouraging Lady Gregory herself to make sketches of Venice. So she decides to walk about, making visual records of some of the buildings and monuments in the district in which Ca' Cappello is located, San Polo, as well as further afield towards St. Mark's Cathedral in the Sestiere di San Marco.

One of the buildings that she records is Ca' Cappello itself, the house in which she is staying, and one of the people she sketches is her host, Lady Enid Layard. Lady Gregory's sketch of her friend, now held at the National Library of Ireland, is of enormous significance for a

number of reasons: first, in the perfection of the lines and the exactness of proportions, it is testament to Augusta Gregory's skill as an artist; second, it documents Enid Layard as an artist in her own right, exhibiting not just her ability to draw but also her knowledge of Renaissance art; and third, it showcases Augusta Gregory's knowledge of the oft-used pictorial compositional techniques of 'painting-within-the-painting'. Lady Gregory's sketch depicts a female figure seated comfortably on a mount on the left, a figure who faces a painted *tableau* that is hanging on the wall, and which takes up much of the middle section of the sketch.³⁵ Lady Gregory's drawing has not yet been identified: Melita Cataldi has suggested that the female figure on the left of the scene was Lady Gregory herself and thus the drawing was a form of self-portrait,³⁶ the National Library of Ireland catalogue makes no identification as to the subject matter of Lady Gregory's sketch.³⁷ Cataldi's claim of the sketch being a self-portrait can be refuted by both Lady Gregory's sketch itself and by Lady Layard's diary entry from 13 May 1896. Lady Gregory herself wrote on the sketch next to the drawing figure of the woman: "the green drawing room - May 13 - " and Lady Layard's diary entry for 13 May 1896 reads: "copying the Holy Family by Bissolo". Since Lady Layard destroyed her own drawing later that day, Lady Gregory's sketch is the only existing evidence of her friend working on the Bissolo on 13 May 1896. Beside this, the sketch is significant for another reason in relation to Gregory criticism: as mentioned earlier, it is an early piece of evidence of Lady Gregory's use of a well-known compositional device, the 'painting-within-the painting', that was used by artists from

³⁴ Riva 2014; Layard Art Collection, National Gallery London.

³⁵ PD 3032 TX 37.

³⁶ Cataldi 2003, 304.

³⁷ PD 3032 TX 37.

the Renaissance onwards. Lady Gregory had knowledge of this devise from Spanish sources: the paintings of Diego Velázquez which were exhibited at the Prado in Madrid. Sir William and Lady Gregory visited the Layards in Madrid during Sir Henry's term as British ambassador there and visited the museum to view the famous Spanish masters, including Diego Velázquez (Gregory, April 16, 1887). Sir William and Lady Gregory also owned a Velázquez, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (1618), which Sir William bequeathed to the National Gallery in London in 1892.³⁸ Later as dramatist of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Lady Gregory would make use of this pictorial devise of the 'painting-within-the-painting' that she had seen employed in many European paintings, connecting her Irish plays to a wider European artistic tradition, part of which she had sampled during her art tours of the Apennine and the Hibernian Peninsulas. Lady Gregory's short rural Irish plays – the likes of *The Image* (1909) and *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906) – will pay homage to this European pictorial tradition that she had studied for long hours in the galleries and museums of Rome, Venice, Bologna, Florence, Verona and Venice, making her plays unique in the context of the Irish Literary Revival from the 1890s to the 1920s.³⁹

Ca' Cappello was decorated by the paintings of the Italian masters, carving out a special place for the Layard Collection in Venice. As good friend of Enid Layard, Augusta Gregory continues to return to Venice after the death of Sir William in 1892 and the death of Sir Henry in 1894. Many of her earlier forms of entertain-

ment continue, with visits to the Picture Gallery of the Academy, St. Mark's Cathedral and the Ducal Palace, but she begins to discover new ways of amusing herself. She takes long rides on Enid's gondola, going to the Giudecca, the Lido and the island of Murano. She also takes long walks around the seemingly floating streets, sketching the old, medieval architectural features around her. By this time, she had acquired the 1887 edition of Ruskin's *Examples of the Architecture of Venice from Venice*, which reiterated once again the exquisiteness of Venetian architecture.⁴⁰ While strolling on the streets of Venice, she completes a number of sketches, all of which illustrate Ruskin's artistic influence on her now well-developed aesthetic sensibility. One of the locations she draws is the Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, where she had seen the Pesaro Triptych by Giovanni Bellini, alongside works by Titian, Veneziano, and Vivarini.⁴¹ Lady Gregory chooses to make a drawing of a side entrance to the Franciscan church, an entrance ornamented with Bartolomeo Bon's relief of Virgin and St. Francis. Bon's rather impressive Gothic traceries embellished also the Ducal Palace and the Ca' d'Oro on the Grand Canal. On the other side of town, she sketches the Calle del Paradiso near the Ponte del Paradiso.⁴² Stephen Kite draws attention to Ruskin's continuous interest in tabernacles, gables, and traceries, and in what he calls "Venetian affection for triangular motifs at different scales".⁴³ Kite sees this demonstrated in Ruskin's description of the buildings of Murano in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* and in "the gables of certain

³⁸ Rempert 2011, 50-1.

³⁹ Rempert 2018, 121-56.

⁴⁰ Sotheby and Co. 1972, 54.

⁴¹ PD 3032 TX 49.

⁴² PD 3032 TX 49.

⁴³ Kite 2012, 154.

streets, such as the famous Calle del Paradiso".⁴⁴ Situated en route to St. Mark's Cathedral, the Calle and Arco del Paradiso are remnants of the glorious days of Venice, with the crests of the Foscari and Mocenigo families exhibited under the protective arms of the 'Madonna of Mercy'. Lady Gregory's attention to Gothic detail in these sketches is stunning, exposing her careful attention to architectural detail influenced by John Ruskin's work as travel guide and art historian.

Two further sketches reveal her interest in Venetian Gothic architecture. Near the Ponte del Paradiso, there are a number of houses that exhibit exquisite Medieval features, two of which she drew on one of her excursions around the city.⁴⁵ Lady Gregory's sketch of the Gothic window with the pointed arch, and with the curtain casually falling on the window-sill, dated 19 June 1896, is reminiscent of Ruskin's drawing of the windows of Ca' Falier, one of the more prominent sketches of Ruskin's in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*.⁴⁶ Lady Gregory makes a little drawing next to this Gothic window: that of a domestic balcony with a traced balustrade, straight clean side shafts and a round arch to complete the architectural composition. This drawing brings to

mind Ruskin's argument about the coexistence and correlation between ecclesiastic and domestic architecture during the period of Venetian Gothic.⁴⁷ Ruskin persistently and fervently argues in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* that, in part, the beauty of Venetian architecture lies in the fact that the same Gothic features that ornament religious buildings decorate non-ecclesiastical constructions, such as noblemen's palaces or common houses. Discussing St. Mark's Cathedral, the art critic elucidates the nature of domestic architecture in Northern Italy:

at the time when the best of them were built, every man's house was a kind of temple; a figure of the Madonna, or of Christ, almost always occupied a niche over the principal door, and the Old Testament histories were curiously interpolated amidst the grotesques of the brackets and the gables.⁴⁸

Once again, Ruskin's religious attitude saturates his art historical writings, drawing attention to what he perceived as the close connection between the builders, the building and the sphere of the Divine.

⁴⁴ Kite 2012, 154; *Works*, 10: 51, 53.

⁴⁵ PD 3033 TX 1.

⁴⁶ *Works*, 10: 304-5.

⁴⁷ *Works*, 10: 122.

⁴⁸ *Works*, 10: 122.

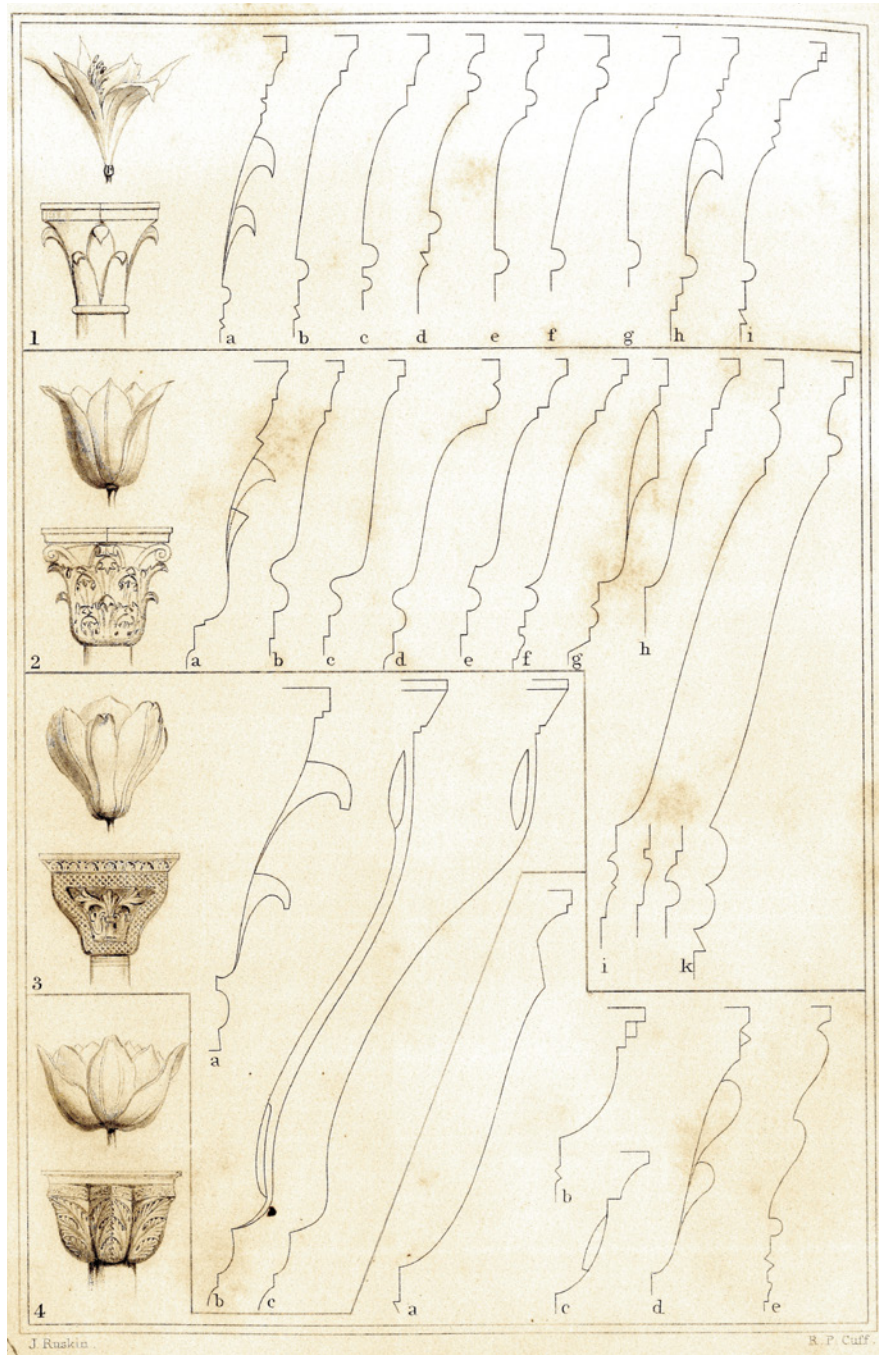


Figure 1 John Ruskin, *The Four Venetian Flower Orders*,
 from *The Stones of Venice*, vol. III, tav. X.
 London: Smith, Elder and Co., 65, Cornhill, 1853.
 Courtesy of the Marciana Library, Venice

4 Conclusion

Lady Gregory's Ruskin-inspired art tours need to be understood in the context of the whole of her cultural experience in Venice during the 1880s and 1890s. While her early diaries from the period are clear indications of her education in Venetian art and architecture, her later diaries are true revelations of her mounting interest in the multifaceted cultural and political discussions carried out at Ca' Cappello during those two decades. While at Venice, she attends several cultural programmes such as the performance of *Lord Byron in Venezia* at the Marionette Theatre (Layard, October 24, 1885), Verdi's famous and scandalous *Rigoletto* at the Teatro Rossini (Gregory, November 5, 1881; Layard, November 5, 1881), and *I due Foscari*, also at the Teatro Rossini (Layard, November 1, 1887). She visits the Palazzo Contarini del Bovolo to see its beautiful spiral staircase (October 28, 1881); the Palazzo Correr that housed Teodoro Correr's fabulous Venetian collection (Layard, September 27, 1882); the Palazzo Barbaro that was renovated by Daniel and Ariana Sargent Curtis to showcase its Baroque splendour (Layard, May 14, 1896); and the Palazzo Labia to view Venetian artist Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's famous frescoes from the late

1740s (Layard, June 9, 1896). Because Lady Gregory's diaries of the period either consist of extensive descriptions of paintings (especially those from the 1880s) or wide-ranging accounts of local Venetian gossip (especially those from the 1890s), Irish literary critics and Gregory biographers have been led to believe that her diaries from the period are of little importance, insignificant to her later work for the Irish Literary Revival that would bloom from the 1900s to the 1920s. The exact opposite is the case: Lady Gregory's visits to Venice are of immense significance for her later work as founder, dramatist and designer of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and for her involvement in the artistic and cultural circles of early-twentieth-century Ireland. Her visits to Venice and her many Ruskin-inspired tours of the beautiful city shaped her artistic and aesthetic sensibilities, as evidenced in her sketchbooks from the period. More important still, her experience of fin-de-siècle Venice would leave a deep imprint on her life and work in Ireland, providing a further instance of Ruskin's wide-ranging influence on the period of the Irish Literary Revival beyond that of the more obvious cases: William Butler Yeats, Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw.

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