



John Ruskin (Critical Lives)

Andrew Ballantyne

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John Ruskin (1819–1900) was the most prominent art and architecture critic of his day. His books, pamphlets and letters to the press had an influence on all classes of society, from road-menders to royalty, and he still maintains a popular reputation today, though he is remembered less for his views than for his failed marriage to Fanny Gray, who left him for the Pre-Raphaelite artist John Everett Millais. Frequently imagined as a Victorian prude, there was far more to Ruskin than this derisory description suggests. John Ruskin shows us how Ruskin's ideas gave a moral character to art, architecture and the Picturesque and reveals how and why his reputation endures. Ruskin's devoted parents were convinced that their son was a genius and encouraged him to write about the moral and spiritual value of art rather than his other major passion, geology. While his parents lived Ruskin wrote his best works: *Modern Painters*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, *The Stones of Venice* and *Unto This Last*. After they died Ruskin seemed lost until he put himself in the hands of a younger cousin, Joan Severn, who guarded his reputation while his mental capacities declined, beyond the public gaze, in the Lake District.

This book weaves Ruskin's life and work into a fascinating narrative about Victorian society: Ruskin understood art, its beauty and wonder, as a solution to the miseries of the urban poor and the key to living a worthwhile life. Offering fresh readings of Ruskin's major texts, this is an engaging biography of the artist's life and times.



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