Loving John Ruskin
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in Quaint, Exquisite: Victorian Aesthetics and the Idea of Japan

This chapter visits the United Kingdom with a Japanese literary tourist in the 1920s, Mikimoto Ryuzo. It searches alongside him for vestiges of Victorian art critic and social theorist John Ruskin's utopian sentiment in an interwar period from which such ideas have been wholly absented—Ruskin's complex ideas, spoken out of context and somewhat garbled, amounting to little more than passionately articulated commonplaces. In the spirit of Mikimoto's radical quaintness, the chapter next explores the convergence of Marx and Ruskin in Japan, contemporary writers on related themes whose historical coincidence in the London of the 1860s neatly frames the problem of historical major/minorness. Marx is generally considered a major writer to the extent to which he is excised from the context of Victorian Britain; Ruskin is a major writer only within that context, but rarely treated as major in the intellectual histories of Europe. Throughout Mikimoto's intellectual formation, and through his own engagements with style, this chapter attempts to catch a glimpse of a minor Marx and a minor Ruskin.