

Ruskin letters sold for double estimated price



Yesterday Bonhams in London sold letters sent by John Ruskin to his wife Effie Gray, who provided the inspiration for Emma Thompson's new [film](#), for £88,900 which was more than twice the estimated price. The seventy-five signed letters were sold to an anonymous telephone bidder.

Interest in the love-triangle of John Ruskin, Effie Gray and John Everett Millais is particularly high due to the recent release of the hit film, [Effie Gray](#). The doomed marriage of Ruskin and Gray, his coldness towards her and her affair with the artist John Everett Millais, undeniably provide a compelling story, and this Victorian scandal has long captured the public's imagination. It was the subject of the 1912 silent film *The Love of John Ruskin*, the 1975 BBC series *The Love School* starring Peter Egan, and numerous stage plays.

The fascinating series of letters which were auctioned at Bonhams provides an uncensored and previously inaccessible insight into the dark heart of Ruskin's blackest years, revealing the complexity of his character. Pertaining to such a distinguished writer, art critic and social theorist, the letters constitute an invaluable literary resource.

Although written to a priest, many of Ruskin's letters digressed from the subjects of the Church and the Lord's Prayer, instead imparting the anguished confessions of a man lamenting the folly of his engagement: 'I married like a fool, because a girl's face pleased me. She married me for my money, breaking her faith to a poor lover.'

Effie Gray's broken-hearted lover was just one whose life was ruined by contact with the cursed marriage. In another letter from the collection, Ruskin referred obliquely to Rose La Touche, the cherished student and pre-Raphaelite ideal with whom he subsequently fell in love, and related how his

separation from Effie corrupted that relationship: 'in the last ten years, and especially in the last year, my *life* has been set on a cast – and that of a righteous girl with it. – And both are destroyed.'

But the profound misery evident in these letters is matched by a hard vindictiveness. One letter betrayed the ruthlessness, even cruelty, of its writer as he informed Malleon: 'The first condition of my keeping friends with anybody is that when I ask them to do a thing, they should do it. If – without showing just reason – they twice give me trouble to ask twice, I have done with them.'

Matthew Haley, Head of the Bonhams Book Department, said: 'The letters are a vivid reminder that there was passion and tumult underneath the outward formality of the Victorians. Here we see the bitterness and regret that haunted Ruskin throughout his life.'