

A "BASTARD SCIENCE"? RUSKIN'S POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ART

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The publication of the first volume of *Modern Painters* in 1843 established John Ruskin's reputation as perhaps "the greatest art critic in the language," virtually overnight (Gilmour 199). Ruskin's sudden rise as a highly respected critic was due to the fact that in this work he irrefutably proved that the much vilified abstracted land and seascapes of J.M.W. Turner, far from being grotesque aberrations, were actually truer to the sublime power of nature than any previous art in history. Furthermore, such was the manifest authenticity of Ruskin's passionate accounts of his own intense visual and visionary experiences of landscape, art and architecture (particularly in the five volumes of *Modern Painters* [1843-60] and *The Stones of Venice* [1851-3]), that by the mid-1850s he had become the *de facto* national art critic, and the ideology and ethos of "Ruskinism" had become established as synonymous with principles and practices founded on a commitment to absolute "Truth." Later, as Ruskin diversified, beginning with his pair of lectures on "The Political Economy of Art" in 1857, he became an increasingly outspoken commentator on broader cultural-political and socio-economic concerns. Although he still retained his original reputation for truth-telling, the issues Ruskin now dealt with, such as the disturbing moral implications of Victorian industrial capitalism, labour relations and consumerism, were ones which his contemporaries found considerably less palatable than those concerning the primacy of British landscape art and artists.

Thus, when in his next and most controversial foray in political theory, *Unto This Last*, Ruskin made the typically provocative claim that political economy was a "bastard science" (209, 214), it was only to be expected that he would cast himself as the sole exponent of its true counterpart, "the real science of political economy" (209).¹ His outspoken opinions, combined with the wider critical role he had defined for himself, made this an inevitable corollary. As the leading Ruskin scholar George Landow has demonstrated, Ruskin's habit of making such outspoken pronouncements was a high-risk rhetorical strategy he evolved during the 1850s to establish his identity as the alienated Victorian "secular prophet who sets himself apart from his audience when he comes to criticise his society" (65). This particular and deliberately repeated slur against political economy probably signifies Ruskin's consciousness of the need to outdo Thomas Carlyle, the Victorian sage whom he freely acknowledged as his

¹ For the sake of accessibility I refer to the widely available Penguin edition of *Unto this Last and Other Writings* edited by Clive Wilmer, which includes "The Nature of Gothic" chapter from *The Stones of Venice* to which I also refer.

"master" (*Works* 34: 353), and who had famously dubbed political economists, "the Respectable Professors of the Dismal Science" (457).

Although Ruskin's reputation as a trouble-shooting controversialist was founded on his spectacular twin defences of Turner in 1843, and of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood eight years later in his 1851 letters to the *Times*, he only began to adopt an antagonistic approach towards the Victorian public itself in 1857 with the two lectures he gave on "The Political Economy of Art" (namely "The Discovery and Application of Art" and "The Accumulation and Distribution of Art") at the opening of Manchester's prestigious Art-Treasures Exhibition.² Cook and Wedderburn, the editors of Ruskin's collected works, contextualise these lectures from Ruskin's perspective by noting that he "was writing in a year of great commercial depression and monetary panic" and that Manchester was "the sacred city of the 'Manchester school' whose political doctrines of *laissez faire*, always hateful to Ruskin, were then much in the ascendant" (16: xxiv). As the latter comment implies, Ruskin always (mis)identified political economy as being synonymous with the *laissez faire* ideology and practices which he demonised in his first lecture on "The Discovery and Application of Art" when he said: "I wish to plead for your several and future consideration of this one truth, that the notion of Discipline and Interference lies at the very root of all human progress or power; that the 'Let-alone' principle is, in all things which man has to do with, the principle of death" (16: 26).

Later I shall examine how Ruskin's representation of authoritarian ideas of "Discipline and Interference" as a life principle antithetical to *laissez faire* appears to function privately (and possibly unconsciously) for him as a rationalisation and self-justification of his own highly problematic practices in the Victorian art world. However, because I believe that Ruskin scholarship has failed to come to terms with, or possibly even recognise, this fundamental and internally contradictory relationship between his idealising political economic theories and his material practices as critic and patron of British art, it is first necessary to consider how both his contemporaries and critical posterity responded to, and represented, Ruskinism.

The Manchester Art-Treasures Exhibition, at which Ruskin gave his lectures on the political economy of art, was the most important exhibition of Italian Renaissance art in Britain to that date, centring on some 1079 "paintings by Ancient Masters and also featuring over 700 works by the modern British school" (Fraser 67-69). It has been estimated that over one and a quarter million people attended the exhibition, and for this reason alone Fraser is surely correct when she sees it as marking the high point of what the Victorians regarded as the "renaissance" of British visual culture.

Furthermore, the exhibition was of considerable cultural-political significance for the industrial middle class of Manchester, since it "was conceived and brought to fruition by a committee of merchants, industrialists and professional men," such as James Watts the cotton magnate, "whose country house contained paintings by Rubens, Holbein and Gainsborough [where] he entertained Prince Albert when the Consort came north to open the exhibition" (Gilmour 198). The exhibition was widely seen as having dispelled the pernicious myth of the philistine materialism of industrialists and

² These lectures were subsequently retitled to become even more pointed as "A Joy for Ever and its Price in the Market" (1880).

entrepreneurs by successfully demonstrating, according to local journalist Tom Taylor, that "Manchester manufacturers are the best patrons of living artists" (qtd Seed).

This comment encapsulates the great sense of civic pride felt by the people of Manchester in their Art-Treasures Exhibition. In this context it is not surprising that the comments made regarding the "Let-alone" principle by Ruskin—the man who, even though Prince Albert was the royal patron of the exhibition, had been chosen as its guiding spirit—could have been taken as deeply insulting to the city. Nor is it surprising that Ruskin's subsequent ridiculing of the "foolish people [who] even declare it is a principle of political economy, that whoever invented a new want conferred a good on the community" (*Works* 16: 48) would appear to be an attack on the ethos of the northern middle-class entrepreneur. Janet Wolff and John Seed point out that "the innovatory mentality" of the entrepreneur was a primary cause of the Industrial Revolution. However, they also note that, although seen as "a dynamic force for economic and social change," entrepreneurialism was also identified with a "profound philistinism" (4-5). This is the very negative stereotype which the Art-Treasures Exhibition appears to have been designed to dispel. Ruskin, again, seems to have been intent on touching some very raw local nerves.

Accordingly, the unsigned editorial response to Ruskin's lectures published in the *Manchester Examiner and Times* (14 July 1857) seems remarkably restrained:

Mr. Ruskin has earned the reputation of an innovator in matters of art. With the controversies which his writings have excited it would be presumptuous for us to intermeddle When he talks to us of the Stones of Venice, of the Seven Lamps of Architecture, or of the scenic beauty of mountains or clouds, we listen with the reverence which is due to a man so deeply initiated in the speculative and practical mysteries of his special craft. . . . Mr Ruskin has the adventurousness, as well as the originality and the fire, of genius. Clad in his prophet's mantle, he roams over heaven and earth, peering into all corners, or knocking down with the fist of inspired dogmatism, anything that stands in his way. In the exercise of these prerogatives, he said a good deal at the Athenaeum on Friday night, which we humbly beg permission to designate as arrant nonsense. (Qtd Bradley 202-3)³

If Ruskin's outspoken comments about the political economy of art seem to have been particularly calculated to cause maximum offence to his Manchester hosts, when he came to revise his lectures for publication, he also seems to have taken the trouble to ensure that his views would be generally provocative, for he prefaced the published lectures with the dismissive revelation that "I have never read any author on political economy, except Adam Smith, twenty years ago" (*Works* 16:10).

³ The *Manchester Examiner and Times* was "then a leading organ of liberalism" (Ruskin *Works* 16: xxv); J.L. Bradley suggests that the author of this editorial was most probably the paper's editor Henry Dunckley, a "sometime Baptist pastor in Salford" and "an outstanding journalist . . . known for a polished, vigorous style" (202).

Given Ruskin's evidently deliberate policy of adopting an antagonistic stance towards his loyal audience, it is hardly surprising to find that once he had moved away from being predominantly an art critic there was often "a significant delay between the publication of Ruskin's works and their assimilation into public consciousness" (Maidment 209). Indeed, it was only at the end of his life—in the period between his first mental breakdown in 1878 and his death in 1900, during which he lived as a recluse in his Lake District retreat—that Ruskin's social ideas began "to take shape in the public consciousness" (195), at which time he became a late Victorian institution: the venerated sage of Brantwood. Hence, by the last decades of Ruskin's life, the very "inspired dogmatism" which the *Manchester Examiner and Times* found so disturbing in his lectures on "The Political Economy of Art" was taken as virtually guaranteeing the authenticity and integrity of his prophesies.

The scholars who, since the mid-1970s have been responsible for the corresponding rehabilitation of Ruskin's reputation for this century, have been especially concerned to demonstrate the existence of a fundamental intellectual and, perhaps especially, an ethical continuity not only between his early writings on art and architecture and his subsequent socio-political and cultural-economic criticism and theory, but also between both of these and his practical involvement in numerous important and apparently enlightened and philanthropic projects. These include his lectures on art at the Working Men's College, his involvement in the building of the Ruskinian Gothic Oxford Museum of Science in the mid-1850s (the period in which he was most intensively involved with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood), as well as the founding in the 1870s of St George's Museum in Sheffield and the Guild of St George (of which he was the "Master").

In the current intellectual climate in which multi and interdisciplinary studies are in the ascendant, the phenomenon of Ruskinism seems to appear less threatening and more assimilable than at any time since his death. Thus Landow is able to assert that an irrepressible "drive to interpret" is the "constant in Ruskin's career" (17), while the Director of the Ruskin Programme at Lancaster University, Michael Wheeler, can with equal confidence describe him as "Victorian Britain's most influential polymath" (113). Wheeler goes on to state that "the demands of the eye and those of the moral sense [were] for Ruskin—always the author of *Modern Painters*— . . . inextricably linked" (2). Therefore it would appear that, as at the end of the nineteenth century, the broad consensus in the final decade of the twentieth century is that a commitment to an ideology of "Truth" is the constant factor in Ruskinism. This is especially so since hindsight now appears to show us that Ruskin evolved from an art critic whose ethos as a secular prophet derived its greatest authority from its basis in his own exemplary visual practices, to a polymath and philanthropist who put into practice the ideals he preached about the true political economy of art.

Consequently, as my preliminary discussion of Ruskin's Manchester lectures indicated, the objective of this article is to confront what I perceive to be some of the most inescapable and insoluble contradictions implicit in the satisfyingly neat and benign model of Ruskinism that I have been describing. In order to do this, I propose to examine the extensive Ruskinian art economy which invisibly underpinned his assiduously cultivated high-profile image as the impassioned yet disinterested champion of Turner and the P.R.B.; for Ruskin's public role as benefactor of Britain's modern

painters can only be understood when it is recognised that whilst he was promoting their work in this way (and thereby his own status as Victorian art sage) he was at the same time acting privately as their patron. Indeed, not only did he collect the pictures of Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites, but in the latter case he closely supervised and directed what they painted and how they painted it, as well as involving them in important architectural design projects such as the Oxford Museum. Because it is plainly beyond the scope of a single article to encompass the full extent of Ruskin's transactions with Britain's modern painters, I shall be focusing on his dealings with the Pre-Raphaelites. Nonetheless, I hope to demonstrate that his activities as their critic-patron were monopolistic, hegemonic and even entrepreneurial, and as such have far-reaching implications for the dominant view of him as philanthropic moral prophet.

For his entire adult life, Ruskin engaged in various forms of critical patronage. His father, the self-made and upwardly mobile sherry merchant, John James Ruskin, started to collect Turners for himself and his son from 1839, and John James's astute entrepreneurial practices in both the wine and the art worlds appear not only to have financed but also to have been an unacknowledged prototype for his son's even more astute dealings.⁴ Following his father's example and using the Ruskin patrimony very wisely, the younger Ruskin invested a large amount of money in collecting works by Turner. On his father's death in 1864 he had "inherited £120000, various leases and freehold properties and pictures valued at £10000" (Lutyens 135).

In addition, between 1851 and the 1880s, Ruskin subsidised, supervised and influentially publicised the work of a long succession of Pre-Raphaelite artists. These were predominantly a group of four: John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddall together, followed by Edward Burne-Jones, to whom Ruskin was able to give financial assistance after "having inherited a sizeable fortune on his father's death" (Christian 203). To finance his earlier purchases in the mid-1850s, Ruskin had paid Rossetti and Siddall by means of annuities.⁵ He was also involved, although more briefly, with three artists associated with the Pre-Raphaelite circle: J.W. Inchbold, John Brett, and W.J. Stillman. Moreover, when it is remembered that in his 1853 lecture "Pre-Raphaelitism," Ruskin described Turner as (improbably) "the first and greatest Pre-Raphaelite" (*Works* 12: 159), it can be seen that a clear pattern of Ruskinian appropriation of Britain's modern painters emerges.

Over a period of more than thirty years this pattern reveals Ruskin to have been engaged in a unique form of cultural-capitalism based on what is now called "insider

⁴ John Dixon Hunt explains that as a way of acknowledging "his son's taste and insights" into the artist, John James bought him "*Richmond Bridge, Surrey* and *Gosport* during 1839, *Winchelsea* as a twenty-first birthday present the next year, quickly followed by *Harlech Castle* and *Nottingham* in that April and an Oxford drawing in August" (136).

⁵ In October 1854 Ruskin suggested the following arrangement to Rossetti:

It seems to me that, amongst all the painters I know, you on the whole have the greatest genius. . . . What I meant was to ask if an agreement to paint for me regularly up to a certain value, would put you more at your ease. . . . I forgot to say also that I really do *covet* your drawings as much as I covet Turner's; only it is a useless self-indulgence to buy Turner's, and a useful self-indulgence to buy yours. Only I won't have them after they have been more than nine times rubbed entirely out—remember that. (*Works* 5: xlii)

The following April he also decided to pay Elizabeth Siddal £150 per annum for all of her work.

dealing." As we shall see later, this involved what amounted to a process of attempted cloning—the process having to be frequently repeated because Ruskin regularly failed "to create the perfect Pre-Raphaelite" (Christian 193)—and a corresponding critical monopolisation of these Ruskinian artists as a means of invisibly underwriting his infallibility as national art sage. The existence of such a Ruskinian art empire is, I would suggest, clearly implicit in the notorious Whistler v Ruskin libel case of 1878 in which Burne-Jones was the star witness for Ruskin's defence. In *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin had accused Whistler of asking "two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face," yet it could be argued, as Whistler's defence indeed tried to do, that his work probably resembled Turner's abstractions more than any other Victorian painter's. But then Whistler was a modern painter who operated outside—if not directly in opposition to—Ruskin's considerable sphere of influence.⁶

Therefore, as the hidden common denominator behind Ruskinism for more than three decades, the existence of this nexus of critical-patronage would appear to call into serious question the credibility of the Ruskinian ethos of integrity and high principle implicit in *Unto This Last*, where he invoked the spirit of his "real science of political economy" in his crusade against the evils of the "bastard science." I shall return to examine Ruskin's dealings with the Pre-Raphaelites after establishing what the broad principles of his "real science" were, and what they are taken to be now.

The current, dominant idealistic view of Ruskin's political economy of art with which I am taking issue is most clearly represented by Willie Henderson's recent book, *Economics as Literature*. Henderson believes that Ruskin "can be seen, without too much forcing, as the first environmental economist, the first human resource manager, the first ethical consumer" (114). This belief explains why Henderson calls his chapter on Ruskin, "John Ruskin or the Political Economy of Soul." He defines what Ruskin means by "soul" by explaining that Ruskin's idea of justice in *Unto this Last*

is intended to include possibilities of social sympathy, reciprocity and self-realisation. The motivating power of the economic agent is neither "steam, magnetism nor any agent of calculable force" but "Soul." "Soul" is to be taken to mean individual personality and capacity for "moral energy" and to stand in contradiction to depersonalised "labour." (119)

In emphasising Ruskin's commitment to liberating the worker's "Soul" by empowering the individual personality in this way, Henderson overlooks the fundamental contradiction and source for potential conflict implicit in the actual means by which Ruskin proposed to achieve this "liberation." We have already seen how Ruskin told his Manchester audience that "the notion of Discipline and Interference lies at the very root of all human progress or power," and he also wrote to the Social Democrat Sidney Cockerell in 1886 that "of course I am a Socialist—of the most stern sort" adding, significantly, "but I am also a Tory of the sternest sort" (qtd Lee 76). It is this Toryism

⁶ Ruskin's libel appeared in *Fors Clavigera* (*Works* 29: 146-69) and referred specifically to Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, one of several Whistlers exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877. For a full account and assessment of this case see Merrill.

that is the underlying ideology of works such as *Unto This Last*, "The Political Economy of Art," and even "The Nature of Gothic" section of *The Stones of Venice*, a chapter recognised as the precursor of Ruskin's writings on political economy, and the text widely regarded as the "locus classicus of his 'socialism'" (Lee 77).

Accordingly, the concluding paragraphs of "The Roots of Honour," the opening "Essay" of *Unto This Last*, explain how "in his office as governor of the men employed by him, the merchant or manufacturer is invested with a distinctly paternal authority and responsibility" (*Unto* 178).⁷ Elaborating on this paternalistic principle at the end of his third Essay, "Qui Judicatis Terram," Ruskin states categorically:

If there be any one point insisted on throughout my works more frequently than another, that one point is the impossibility of Equality. My continual aim has been to show the eternal superiority of some men to others, sometimes even of one man to all others, and to show also the advisability of appointing such persons or person to guide, to lead, or on occasion even to compel and subdue, their inferiors according to their own better knowledge and wiser will. (202)

Seven years earlier in "The Nature of Gothic," Ruskin had wondered "if a day is ever to come when the right nature of freedom will be understood, and men will see that to obey another man, to labour for him, yield reverence to him or to his place, is not slavery. It is often the best kind of liberty,—liberty from care" (86). It is this kind of "liberty," therefore, which Ruskin prescribes as the antidote to "the great civilised invention of the division of labour," a division which he regarded as responsible for the present phenomenon of the fragmenting of the "human soul" (87).

Barely concealed in these passages is Ruskin's assumption that he, himself, is the eternally superior individual for whom other—inferior—men must work if they are to attain their creative freedom. Thus, even the celebrated passages in "The Nature of Gothic" which identify the grotesque gargoyles carved on Gothic cathedrals as "the signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone" (85), and argue that "one man's thoughts can [never] be, or ought to be executed by another's hands" (90), are carefully qualified by the recognition that this principle applies only to work done on a "smaller scale." But "on a large scale . . . it is indeed both possible and necessary that the thoughts of one man should be carried out by the labour of others; in this case I have already defined the best architecture to be the expression of the mind of manhood by the hands of childhood" (90). Consequently, it appears reasonable to assume that in 1884, when F.J. Furnivall, having already "distributed a pamphlet which reprinted the 'Nature of Gothic' chapter . . . at a meeting to discuss its foundation" (Hilton 203), invited Ruskin to teach at the newly founded Working Men's College, the institution's founding educational principles for its adult students were consciously Ruskinian, apparently employing the "mind of manhood" to instruct "the hands of childhood."

⁷ *Unto this Last* was originally serialised in 1860 in the recently established *Cornhill Magazine*. After the fourth instalment the editor, Thackeray, curtailed publication due to (un)popular demand. Each instalment was classified by Ruskin as one of "Four essays on the first principles of Political Economy."

The year 1854 became something of an *annus mirabilis* for Ruskin. Not only was this the year in which he was given the opportunity to instruct working men in his "Gothic" political economic theories of art and to strategically deploy his second Pre-Raphaelite protégé, Rossetti, as one of their teachers; he was also, at the end of the year, to receive news that his theories of architecture and labour relations could be put into practice in the building of the Oxford Museum. For in December the Gothic plan of Thomas Deane and Benjamin Woodward won the competition for the Museum's design. This project had been campaigned for tirelessly by Dr Henry Acland, the astute "university politician" (Hewison *Ruskin and Oxford* 52) who had been Ruskin's close friend since their days together as undergraduates at Christ Church. Ruskin wrote ecstatically to his patron Lady Trevelyan:

I have a great deal to tell you about my workmen—but I really can't today. The main thing is—Acland has got his museum—Gothic—the architect is a friend of mine—I can do whatever I like with it—and if we don't have capitals and archivolt!—& expect the architect here today—I shall get all the pre-Raphaelites to design me—each an archivolt and some capitals—& we will have all the plants in England and the monsters in the museum—. (Surtees 94-95)

What the wildly telegraphic punctuation and megalomaniac content of this letter reveal is that behind the scenes Ruskin was working to a grand, cultural imperialist design which "all the pre-Raphaelites" and "the architect," Woodward, would unwittingly be serving. For the spectacular project of the Oxford Museum was evidently intended both to complete the appropriation of the Victorian Gothic Revival for Ruskinism, and to demonstrate, in the manner of the proverbial self-fulfilling prophecy, the validity of Ruskin's assertion that "on a large scale . . . it is indeed both possible and necessary that the thoughts of one man should be carried out by the labour of others" ("Nature of Gothic" 90).

Michael Brooks, when writing about the brothers John and James O'Shea (Ruskinian workers on the Museum's carvings), suggests that "no one who has ever read the anecdotes about dignitaries of the university finding themselves carved as parrots and owls is likely to think of the Oxford Museum without visualising a rollicking band of lighthearted Irishmen setting about their work with untutored skill" (128). Passing over the issue of the obvious racial stereotyping of the "Irish worker," Brooks's subsequent citing of James O'Shea's letter to the effect that he "would not desire better Sport than putting monkeys cats dogs rabbits hares, and so on, in different attitudes on those jambs" does reveal the potential dangers inherent in the putting of Ruskin's ideologies of naturalism—which he defined as "the love of natural objects for their own sake, and the effort to represent them frankly, unconstrained by artistical laws" (*Unto* 99)—and freedom of expression too literally into practice, even on the small scale specified in "The Nature of Gothic."

But even if we accept that Ruskin's professedly feudal concept of labour relations succeeded in liberating the souls of the O'Shea brothers on the grounds that they do appear to conform to his Gothic ideal of "the old sculptors" of "ugly goblins and formless monsters" ("Nature of Gothic" 85), the fatal flaw in Ruskinian labour theory

was the question of its applicability to his dealings with the museum's middle-class architects and artists, the relationship with members of Ruskin's own social class for which feudalism had never legislated.⁸ As the project got underway, Ruskin observed to Acland that:

The great good of this matter is that Mr Woodward is evidently a person who will allow of suggestion and is glad of help—though better able to do without either than most. But there is something quite providential . . . in the way my work is being laid out for me at present . . . here is this college with you and Woodward both ready to do anything possible with money. (Qtd Blau 66)⁹

If Ruskin's concept of providence here seems little more than a convenient, valorising euphemism for what we now know as networking, then the contradictions in his account of the nature of his relationship with Woodward—in which the architect is characterised as being easily suggestible yet perfectly capable of working without advice—betray the existence of a clear conflict of wills between both parties. Thus Ruskin's boast in 1877 that "Woodward was my pupil" (qtd Brooks 127) appears to be a highly questionable one to say the least, particularly in view of William Tuckwell's recollection of how "Ruskin himself hovered about to bless the Museum work and suggest improvements, which silent Woodward sometimes smilingly put by" (qtd Blau 66).

However, the most intractable problems for the Ruskinian art economy—particularly for those who subscribe to the view that it was a liberating, empowering and enabling one—are those generated by Ruskin's repeated attempts to appropriate Pre-Raphaelitism for Ruskinism. In 1854 Ruskin wrote to Acland: "I hope to get Millais and Rossetti to design flower and beast borders—crocodiles and various vermin . . . I will pay for a good deal myself, and I doubt not to have funds. *Such* capitals as we will have!" (*Works*: 16 xlv). But Millais wanted nothing to do with Ruskin's plans, which is hardly surprising in view of the scandal surrounding the recent annulment of the unconsummated Ruskin marriage, and Millais's compromised position as Ruskin's former Pre-Raphaelite protégé and intended second husband of the former Mrs Ruskin. However, like Ruskin's wildly misplaced optimism in hoping for Millais's support, the failure of either Rossetti or Siddal to produce satisfactory designs for the Museum cannot be so easily explained away.

It will be recalled that in the mid-1850s Ruskin was paying both Rossetti and Siddal annuities for their work. Added to this, in the summer of 1855, he arranged for the couple to stay with Acland in Oxford so that they could discuss plans for the Museum, and so that Siddal could consult Acland in his medical capacity about her

⁸ In "The Nature of Gothic" Ruskin suggests that "there might be more freedom in England, though her feudal lords lightest words were worth men's lives, and though the blood of the vexed husbandmen dropped in the furrows of her fields, than there is while the animation of her multitudes is sent like fuel to feed the factory smoke, and the strength of them is given daily to be wasted in the fineness of a web, or racked into the exactness of a line" (*Unto* 85).

⁹ In 1855 Ruskin told Furnivall: "I see Woodward, and tell him what I want. . . . If I want Gothic, I must for the present go to Mr. Woodward or Mr. Scott" (*Works* 16: xlvi).

continued ill health. In view of the extent of Ruskin's patronage of the couple, the returns he received for his considerable investment can only be described as paltry: both turned down Woodward's request to "undertake some designs for the decoration in July . . . Siddal made some drawings which Ruskin found exquisite, but thought too delicate to be carved by Woodward's carvers" and "Rossetti was commissioned to paint *Newton Gathering Pebbles on the Shores of the Ocean of Truth*" (Blau 74-75), but he never completed the work. Thus Rossetti's triumphant return to Oxford in the summer of 1857 to paint Arthurian murals at the University Union with a team of eight artists including Burne-Jones and Morris, can surely only be regarded as a most spectacular defection from Ruskin and his Gothic Museum, and a drawing up of battle lines between their two competing versions of medievalism. Certainly, it is difficult to see how Brooks can represent the Oxford Union project as "the merger Ruskin dreamed of" (125).

A conspicuously recurrent theme in Ruskin's correspondence about the Oxford Museum is his assumption that money—his own and the University's funding—would guarantee the success of the project on his terms. This was the basis on which he had enthused to Acland about "you and Woodward both [being] ready to do anything possible with money" and had similarly gloated about Millais and Rossetti being certain to produce exquisite capitals because "I will pay for a good deal myself, and I doubt not to have funds." Ruskin's absolute confidence in the power of money takes on added significance when evaluated in terms of the theory of "wealth" versus "illth" (*Unto* 211), which he subsequently developed in *Unto this Last*.

In the "Preface" Ruskin wrote for the 1862 edition of *Unto this Last*, he proudly boasts that "the real gist of these papers, their central meaning and aim is to give, as I believe for the first time in plain English . . . a logical definition of WEALTH: such definition being absolutely needed for a basis of economical science" (162). Ruskin begins the process of definition in the second essay of *Unto This Last*, "The Veins of Wealth," with a redefinition, by explaining that what is popularly thought of as "political economy" is in fact a misnomer for "mercantile economy." He defines this mercantile economy as "simply the science of getting rich . . . the economy of 'merces' or 'pay,' [which] signifies the accumulation, in the hands of individuals, of legal or moral claim upon, or power over, the labour of others, every such claim implying precisely as much poverty or debt on one side, as it implies riches or right on the other" (180, 181). In contrast therefore, Ruskin's true "political economy" is "the economy of a State or citizens" which, he says, "consists simply in the production, preservation and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful and pleasurable things" (181).

Ruskin was in no doubt that "all political economists in the true and final sense" invariably add "to the riches and the well-being of the nation to which they belong." However, his Toryism and personal wealth appear to have compelled him to argue that although the mercantile "art of becoming rich" must be defined as "the art of establishing the maximum inequality in our own favour," these inevitable "inequalities of wealth" might be "unjustly established . . . unjustly directed" and thus injurious to the nation. Equally, they could be "justly established, [and] benefit the nation in the course of their establishment" (182-83). Thus it transpires that Ruskin's differentiation between "mercantile" and "political" economies is by no means as clear cut and stable

as his later, apparently corresponding, essentialist dichotomy between the "bastard" and "true" sciences implies it should be.

Given the central importance of monetary transactions to Ruskin's Oxford Museum project and his dealings as critic-patron with Rossetti, Siddal and later Burne-Jones, it is difficult not to avoid the conclusion that, in his own terms, Ruskin was, like his father, a "mercantile" rather than a truly "political" economist. However, it remains to be determined to what extent Ruskin's inequality of wealth was "justly" directed to the benefit of the artist's soul, and thereby the true "wealth" of the nation, or whether, on the contrary, it was more productive of what he called "'illth,' causing various devastation and trouble" (211). The failure of either Siddal or Rossetti to produce anything for the Oxford Museum, coupled with the latter's defection to the Oxford Union project and development of a more decadent, medievalist manner, appear to suggest that Ruskin's critical patronage was not only unproductive but ultimately counterproductive for him. Hence the taking up of a fourth Pre-Raphaelite protégé, Burne-Jones, in 1856-57 can primarily be seen as an expedient and an admission of defeat regarding Rossetti.

Indeed it can be argued that Ruskin's regime of critical patronage was productive of more "illth" than "wealth" for the Pre-Raphaelites; an interpretation which does, of course, contradict the popular view of him being exclusively their benefactor. Moreover, as the number of Pre-Raphaelite defections from Ruskinism increased, so too did the amount of "illth" inflicted on Pre-Raphaelitism by Ruskin. Having lost control of Rossetti and starting to gain influence over Burne-Jones, Ruskin travelled to Italy in May 1858 where he met John Brett and J.W. Inchbold. On 26 August he wrote to his father:

I sent for [Brett] at Villeneuve, Val d'Aosta because I didn't like what he said in his letter about his present work, and thought he wanted some more lecturing like Inchbold He is much tougher and stronger than Inchbold, and takes more hammering; but I think he looks more miserable every day, and have good hopes of making him completely wretched in a day or two. (qtd Hilton 253)

Tim Hilton notes that Brett's sketchbook for this period contains some pages by Ruskin marked "JMWT," Turner's initials, which indicate that he was in fact trying to "force his knowledge of Turner into the practice of a younger artist"—attempting in fact to produce a Turner clone.

Commenting a year later on the painting *Val d'Aosta* (1858), which was the outcome of Brett's tutelage by Ruskin, Millais wrote bitterly: "There is a wretched work [in the Royal Academy] like a photograph of some place in Switzerland, evidently painted under his [Ruskin's] guidance, for he seems to have lauded it sky high" (qtd *Ruskin Works* 14: 22n). Millais's apparently psychic inference (the echo of Ruskin's "wretched" is uncanny) that, because his review of it was so enthusiastic, Ruskin must have supervised the painting of *Val d'Aosta*, gives a clear insight into what the nature of his relationship as critic-patron with Millais had been, and how Ruskin was trying so transparently to replicate that relationship with Brett four years later. In addition, having failed with Brett as he had already with Millais, Rossetti and Siddal, Ruskin

apparently tried the same methods again with W.J Stillman in 1860. Stillman was a member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle who experienced "an acute crisis of confidence and even temporary blindness while working with Ruskin in Switzerland" (Christian 205).¹⁰ Ultimately, therefore, this cycle of "illth" can be seen as the logical and inevitable consequence of the Ruskinian ideology and practice of "Discipline and Interference" espoused at Manchester.

In their Marxist analysis of "Literature as an Ideological Form," Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey argue that "the ideology of literature, itself a part of literature . . . work[s] ceaselessly to deny" its "objective base" in a linguistically and socially divided [French] schooling system, and

to represent literature supremely as "style," as individual genius, conscious or natural, as creativity, etc., as something outside (and above) the process of education The root of this constitutive repression is the objective status of literature as an historic ideological form, its relation to the class struggle. And the first and last commandment in its ideology is: "Thou shalt describe all forms of class struggle save that which determines thine own self." (226)

Much of what Balibar and Macherey say here seems applicable to the ideology of Ruskinism which I have been examining. At the root of Ruskinism is a ceaseless denial of its objective basis in the acquisition, ownership and attempted control of artists' work, a "constitutive repression" of the fact that the "individual genius" of Ruskinian criticism is materially underwritten, if not indeed fatally compromised by, Ruskinian patronage. Furthermore in terms of this model, Ruskin's Tory doctrine of "Discipline and Interference" as life-enhancing principles can be seen as an attempt to justify the "class struggle" which determined the existence of Ruskinism, though I have suggested that for Ruskin the greatest conflict was the internal, middle-class power struggle with the Pre-Raphaelites for the ownership of "Pre-Raphaelitism."

Ruskin's decision to wage war on the ideologies and practices of political economy can thus be seen to have functioned in three related ways. First, his attacks on the entrepreneurialism and materialism of others in his guise as the "secular prophet who sets himself apart from his audience" (Landow 65) may be identified as Ruskin's displacement of his own deep complicity in the practices of "bastard science." Second, and as a corollary of this displacement, the formulation of an allegedly alternative and "real" science of political economy functions to perpetuate the myth that Ruskinism is the repository of absolute truth. And third, because political economy was the totalising ideology which Ruskinism aspired to be, it posed the kind of threat which, like recalcitrant Pre-Raphaelites, had to be ruthlessly eliminated for the sake of the survival of the Ruskinian monopoly.

¹⁰ Having abandoned painting for a diplomatic career, Stillman later wrote: "Ruskin had dragged me from my old methods, and given me none to replace them. I lost my faith in myself, and in him as a guide to art" (qtd Christian 205).

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