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VICTORIAN LITERARY CRITICISM.

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JOHN RUSKIN AND THE NOVEL: A STUDY IN VICTORIAN
LITERARY CRITICISM

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JOHN RUSKIN AND THE NOVEL: A STUDY IN VICTORIAN
LITERARY CRITICISM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	111
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. RUSKIN'S AESTHETICS	16
III. RUSKIN AND FICTION	61
IV. RUSKIN'S LITERARY CRITICISM	76
THE MORAL FUNCTION OF THE NOVEL . . .	78
THE HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL	
CONTEXT OF THE NOVEL	89
THE VICTORIAN NOVEL	99
V. CONCLUSION	118
BIBLIOGRAPHY	141

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Few generalizations can be made without elaborate qualification about the Victorian world, its writers, and their productions. Victoria's was a long reign (1837-1901) marked by many events and words. England became in the second half of the century the greatest industrial power in the world. The flag of the commonwealth circled the earth. To the external observer at least, England seemed immune to the revolutions which swept the Continent from 1789 until the mid-nineteenth century. After 1870 London became the economic center of Europe, replacing Paris in international banking.¹ At home there was unparalleled economic prosperity, and for the first time in the nation's history there were signs that England's prosperity could be the people's prosperity. Democracy was the word, and, however limited its practice may have been, the economic and social principles of modern democracy were established in Victoria's reign. Popular education was increased vastly in the nineteenth century, and, although it was 1918 before school fees were abolished in all elementary schools,² the expanded reading public had a clear effect on the publishing industry in general and on journalism in particular. Penny dailies--the Daily

Telegraph, the Standard, the Daily News, and the Daily Chronicle--were by the 1870's relatively large publication newspapers directed, as was the Times, toward middle and upper classes. But in the eighties and nineties with Tit-Bits, the Evening News, and the Daily Mail the half-penny press emerged, directed specifically toward the newly educated masses, providing a sensationalism previously unknown in journalism.³

The international power, domestic prosperity, increasing franchise, and new literacy were not, however, lauded by all members of the society. For a few the utilitarian spirit which made possible England's international role as well as her domestic economy thrived at the expense of traditional moral and cultural values. The new democratic spirit with its implicit end, elevation of the masses to self-determination and ultimately to determination of the directions of society itself, was frightening. It was frightening because there was no recent historical precedent which could illustrate possible virtues of such change; on the contrary, the idea of popular rule was shadowed by the anarchy and tyranny which followed the French Revolution of the previous century. At home the many attempts throughout England to organize trade unions, frequently resulting in violent confrontation between owner and worker, worker and law, seemed a microcosm of that anarchy and tyranny. The new literacy, too, as it

began to influence advertising and through advertising publishing appeared to some to be leveling the entire society to the lowest common point rather than raising the masses to higher intellectual, moral, and cultural levels. The newspaper by the end of the century became for many, as for Arthur Symons, "the plague, the black death, of the modern world."⁴ The writings of the greatest intellectuals of the age reveal a fear that the old and new worlds cannot coexist, and that without the values of the old the new will have no human reason to exist.

The major prose writers of the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century reflect an anxiety which developed out of their inability to accept utilitarianism as the central motive and method of all individual and collective activity. These individuals respond in widely differing ways, but they do agree that steam power and the newspaper do not constitute the millennium. Newman's acceptance of traditional dogma in his spiritual life and plea for a return to education of the whole man; Carlyle's call for a hero, a Victorian David to slay the Goliath popular democracy; Matthew Arnold's assertion that survival of culture itself depended upon the individual's ability to dissociate himself from the enthusiasms of the age; Pater's central message that "Everything that has occupied man, for any length of time, is worthy of our study"⁵--each response is to a world incomplete and un-

acceptable to the analytical mind. Ruskin, too, responds and it is upon his writing that this study centers.

Few would question that John Ruskin was a significant, if not a central, figure in the Victorian world. Born in the same year as Victoria,⁶ survived by his queen by just one year, Ruskin's life spans the long reign. For almost half of the century, from 1844 until about 1890,⁷ he produced the volumes which reflect the sensitivity and rage of a mind too intensely aware of the objects and lives surrounding it to remain silent. The sheer mass of Ruskin's prose is overwhelming. The text of the Library Edition of his works includes thirty-seven volumes, totaling over sixteen thousand pages, exclusive of appendices.⁸ This in itself is not extremely unusual for Victorian writers; Newman, Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and Pater all produced considerable bodies of prose. The variety of subject material with which Ruskin dealt, however, is unusual. Painting, architecture, literature, biology, geology, economics, and a host of other topics are approached with an air of authority in his writings. To many specialists in the fields in which Ruskin assumed authority, he was an unlearned, frustratingly dogmatic man too wealthy to be defeated by his own ignorance, but for thousands of others in the last third of the nineteenth century he was a modern-day prophet, a voice from the storm cloud itself. Like his most remembered contemporaries, he

had a double vision, looking directly on the world around him, yet never losing sight of worlds that had been and could be. The diversity of his prose is testimony to this. Perhaps it is by this Janus-face that Ruskin is most distinctly recognizable as a Victorian.⁹

Whatever similarities Ruskin may have had with other major Victorian writers, it is a curious fact that he stood essentially alone both in his personal life and in his professional associations. The physical isolation of his childhood has been told too often by biographers and too well by Ruskin himself to deserve treatment here,¹⁰ but of his adult relations some comment is necessary. With the exception of Carlyle Ruskin had close contact with none of the great Victorians, and with Carlyle a master-disciple relationship is implicit. When Ruskin did attempt to assume himself Carlyle's peer, a breach in their friendship occurred which was only tentatively reconciled in the elder's lifetime.¹¹ Ruskin had a multitude of acquaintances in England, on the Continent, and in America; the body of his correspondence is large, numbering in the thousands of letters, but there is no Tennyson-Hallam, no Arnold-Clough relationship in his life. His friends, if such a term may be used, can be classified in two groups: those who intensely admired Ruskin and those whom Ruskin intensely admired. His university experience serves as one example of his isolation from the true

intellectual peers of his generation. During his period at Oxford, enrolled in Christ Church college, Ruskin seems to have been unaware of the intellectual frenzy of Balliol in those same years.. As Derrick Leon has noted, "Between 1831 and 1841, indeed, Balliol produced all the most brilliant men, which included, in the single decade, two archbishops of Canterbury, two Lords Chief Justice, two cabinet ministers, two poets (Clough and Arnold) and many famous scholars. But with such men as Clough, Matthew Arnold, Stanley and Jowett, all his contemporaries, Ruskin made no acquaintance."¹²

It is not difficult to understand why, in the absence of intimate intellectual relationships, Ruskin's writings take the highly individual directions that they do.¹³ There can be little question that he writes of painting, architecture, clouds, and butterflies out of personal and private interest rather than because these topics were of particular concern to the society in which he lived. As might be expected, the prose style and method of argument which Ruskin developed are highly individual, reflective of an unsystematic mind, a mind not structured by the patterns of formal education. Ruskin read widely in the poetry and prose fiction of the nineteenth century and his writings illustrate a familiarity as well with earlier English literature. There are many comments about and allusions to literature in

Ruskin's works, but they are seldom organized in a manner which suggests a conscious critical intent. Most frequently, his statements about literature and his quotations from poetry and prose are used to illustrate non-literary topics such as painting, architecture, and economics. While there are isolated passages in his writings which are clearly literary and suggest critical intent, the student who seriously wishes to study Ruskin's response to literature must read a great many of his works clearly of a non-literary nature.¹⁴

The purpose of this study is to consider Ruskin's response to prose fiction, to the novel, particularly in relation to the general aesthetic principles he developed at some length during the first twenty years of his writing career. He had a continuous contact with the novel from very early childhood until late in his life. He writes in the opening passages of his incomplete autobiography Praeterita of his early reading: "I had Walter Scott's novels and the Iliad for constant reading when I was a child, on week-days: on Sunday, their effect was tempered by Robinson Crusoe and the Pilgrim's Progress. . . ."¹⁵ Late in 1887, less than three years before mental depression ended all activity, he listed a number of novels he had read recently in letters to a friend and to a novelist he wished to praise for the moral qualities of her work.¹⁶ There are many comments on and allusions to novels--they number in the hundreds--in

Ruskin's works, but only a few are clearly organized literary criticism. On the whole the many references to prose fiction are reflective of the unsystematic structure of the majority of his works. To come to a full understanding of Ruskin's response to prose fiction, however, it is necessary to consider both passages of organized literary criticism and the many isolated allusions. Anything less would be to enforce an arbitrary formalism upon his works.

Literary scholarship and criticism have almost totally ignored this aspect of Ruskin's work. Of the several hundred Ruskin studies, books and articles, now in print, only two distinctly relate to the topic. Of these two, one, "Ruskin and George Eliot's Realism,"¹⁷ does not center on Ruskin at all but discusses the influence of Ruskin's theories on Eliot's fiction. The second, "Ruskin and the Waverley Novels,"¹⁸ is more to the point. It is a fairly complete survey of Ruskin's attitudes toward Walter Scott and toward the Waverley novels. The author is concerned primarily with collecting data from the vast body of Ruskin's work, and very little space is given to analytical discussion of that material. With the exception of isolated mention in other studies of Ruskin's attitude toward one or another of the many novelists he read, these two articles constitute the total scholarship related to the topic. There are numerous studies of Ruskin's relationships with

Tolstoy and Proust, but to consider these would be to shift attention from Ruskin's response to fiction to the response of Proust and Tolstoy to Ruskin and his ideas. The need for a thorough study of this aspect of Ruskin's literary criticism is clear. By the mid-nineteenth century the novel was a major literary form. David Masson in his study British Novelists and Their Styles finds that between 1820 and 1856 some three thousand novels in about seven thousand volumes were added to the British Museum Library.¹⁹ By 1856 Ruskin was the most productive of Victorian writers on art and aesthetics. To understand his response to the novel brings the student of Victorian literature a step closer to understanding the age itself.

It is curious that so little attention has been given to this particular material when, in fact, rather thorough treatment has been accorded to other aspects of Ruskin's work. Generally Ruskin studies may be grouped in three somewhat overlapping areas: biographical, aesthetic, and social. Of biographical work little can be said of relevance to the topic of this study. The primary biography of Ruskin is by E. T. Cook, published in 1911.²⁰ This two-volume work is still basic to Ruskin studies, although numerous others have appeared since its publication. Recent biographies have differed in two basic ways from the Cook work: through careful study of letters aspects of Ruskin's personal

experience have been discovered which were unknown in the early twentieth century, and with the rise of popular interest in psychology, the events of his life have been reinterpreted.²¹ One study deserves special note. Ruskin's Scottish Heritage: A Prelude by Helen Gill Viljoen is a first volume of a projected definitive biography of Ruskin.²² The thorough nature of this volume certainly suggests that if Professor Viljoen is consistent her work will be far superior to those which have preceeded it.

Less attention has been given to study of Ruskin's aesthetics than to biographical issues, but there are several excellent studies which deserve note. Henry Ladd's The Victorian Morality of Art traces the sources of Ruskin's aesthetic principles, considers how he used those sources, and reviews the contradictions as well as the unanswered questions implicit in his writings.²³ There have been a number of more specialized shorter studies, but Ladd's 1932 work is still the most valuable single study of the general topic.²⁴ Also there are numerous studies concerned with the specific application of aesthetic theory in the fields of painting, architecture, and, to a lesser degree, poetry. The primary contribution of such studies is clarification of the body of Ruskin's applied aesthetics, much of which seems contradictory and inconsistent. Among the most informative of such studies related generally to literary matters

are Charles T. Dougherty's "Ruskin's Moral Argument," J. D. Thomas's "Poetic Truth and Pathetic Fallacy," and especially Bertram Morris's "Ruskin on the Pathetic Fallacy, or on How a Moral Theory of Art May Fail."²⁵ In addition there are several unpublished doctoral dissertations which consider specific topics of literary relevance; none, however, are related to Ruskin's criticism of prose fiction.²⁶

The great body of writing about Ruskin concerns his work after 1860, his social and economic involvement. Ruskin's image as a prophet for the age developed not from his first volumes, but from the lectures and essays on social questions which dominate his later publications. His popularity with and influence upon the Victorian world emerged primarily from the four essays of Unto This Last and the volumes that followed rather than from Modern Painters and The Stones of Venice.²⁷ The large circulation of the early volumes, frequently in the form of selections, came after 1870, when the author's primary attention had ceased to be on man's relationship with nature and art. The great mass of Victorian society was clearly more concerned with changes in social and economic structure than with questions of art and aesthetics, and it is understandable that the reputation of Ruskin should emerge from his later work. It is equally understandable that the twentieth century, with its interest in those same issues, should also give primary

consideration to the later work, and it would appear that despite new approaches to Ruskin's aesthetic writings,²⁸ his statements on society will continue to claim the central attention of the contemporary reader.

The attention of the present study, as has been noted, is directed toward prose fiction and Ruskin's response to it. In order to consider his various statements as more than individually isolated comments, it is helpful to review the aesthetic principles he developed in his first nine volumes.²⁹ It is in these volumes that he concentrated most clearly on questions of nature, the creative imagination, the artistic product itself and how man relates himself to each. Without becoming involved in the questionable assumption that all of Ruskin's comments are consciously derived from the early principles, it can be noted that the central aspects of his aesthetic are implicit in much of his literary comment and allusion. A survey of the aesthetic principles with their apparent inconsistencies can clarify the foundation upon which the structure of his literary comment stands. That structure has its inconsistencies also, but despite the somewhat disorganized appearance of much of his later writing, Ruskin's judgments are firmly established within the central aesthetic which dominates all of his work.

FOOTNOTES

¹David Thomson, England in the Nineteenth Century (Baltimore, 1950), pp. 140-141.

²Ibid., p. 135.

³Ibid., pp. 175-176.

⁴Arthur Symons, Studies in Prose and Verse, "Fact in Literature" (London, 1904), p. 4.

⁵William Butler Yeats, The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats (New York, 1938), p. 258.

⁶As a matter of curiosity Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Charles Kingsley, and James Russell Lowell were also born in 1819.

⁷Modern Painters I appeared in May, 1843. The final published material of Praeterita appeared in July, 1889; soon after, aging and mentally depressed, he ceased to write.

⁸The Complete Works of John Ruskin, Library Edition, 39 vols., eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903-1910). It should be noted that this edition, however impressive, is not complete; several additional volumes of letters have been published, and there is an undefined body of letters that has not been and perhaps cannot be collected. All references to Works are to the Cook and Wedderburn edition unless otherwise noted.

⁹It has long been noted that unified vision is not a Victorian quality. Walter E. Houghton's The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven, 1957) provides the most complete documented study of the subject.

¹⁰Works, XXXV, pp. 20-21; 26; 130-131. Ruskin's comments here have been taken by all of his biographers as a true record of the isolation enforced by his mother on her young son.

¹¹Works, XVII, pp. 480-482. Derrick Leon, Ruskin the Great Victorian (London, 1949), pp. 379-385.

¹²Leon, p. 42.

¹³The point of this generalization is not to imply that

Ruskin wrote in a vacuum, but to suggest that those friends and acquaintances who had greatest influence on his ideas, primarily his parents, were not his intellectual peers.

¹⁴There have been two attempts to collect Ruskin's literary criticism--Ruskin as Literary Critic: Selections, ed. A. H. R. Ball (Cambridge, England, 1928), and The Literary Criticism of John Ruskin, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, 1965). In both cases the editors have found it necessary to include materials not distinctly of a literary nature.

¹⁵Works, XXXV, p. 13.

¹⁶Works, XXXVII, pp. 592-593.

¹⁷Darrel Mansell, Jr., "Ruskin and George Eliot's Realism," Criticism, VII (Summer 1965), 203-216.

¹⁸Henry Holland Carter, "Ruskin and the Waverley Novels," The Sewanee Review, XXX (April 1922), 130-153.

¹⁹David Masson, British Novelists and Their Styles (London, 1859), pp. 212-213.

²⁰E. T. Cook, The Life of John Ruskin, 2 vols. (London, 1911).

²¹The primary works related to these topics are: R. H. Wilenski, John Ruskin: An Introduction to Further Study of His Life and Work (London, 1933); Peter Quennell, John Ruskin: The Portrait of a Prophet (New York, 1949); Sir William James, The Order of Release: The Story of John Ruskin, Effie Gray and John Everett Millais Told for the First Time in Their Unpublished Letters (London, 1947); Joan Evans, John Ruskin (London, 1954). Emphasis in these studies, in terms of new materials and psychological interpretation, is generally on Ruskin's relationship with his parents and on matters surrounding his unsuccessful marriage. Since the present study is not concerned with psychological motivation in its consideration of Ruskin's response to the novel, these works need only be noted.

²²Helen Gill Viljoen, Ruskin's Scottish Heritage: A Prelude (Urbana, 1956).

²³Henry Ladd, The Victorian Morality of Art An Analysis Of Ruskin's Aesthetic (New York, 1932).

²⁴There are many specialized studies of Ruskin's aesthetics ("Plato and Ruskin," "Ruskin's Relation to Aristotle," etc.), too numerous for listing in a study not primarily of a bibliographic nature. A thorough bibliography of Ruskin studies before 1911 is found in the Library Edition, volume XXXVIII. Material since 1911 must be collected from CBEL (vols. III and V), PMLA, Modern Philology (1932-1956), and Victorian Studies (after 1956).

²⁵Charles T. Dougherty, "Ruskin's Moral Argument," Victorian Newsletter, No. 9 (Spring 1956), 4-7; J. D. Thomas, "Poetic Truth and Pathetic Fallacy," Texas Studies In Literature and Language, III, (1950), 342-347; Bertram Morris, "Ruskin on the Pathetic Fallacy, or on How a Moral Theory of Art May Fail," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XIV (December 1955), 248-266.

²⁶Morton Berman, Studies in John Ruskin's Literary Criticism (Harvard, 1957); George F. Landow, The Aesthetic Theories in John Ruskin's Modern Painters (Princeton, 1966); Sister Mary Eileen Neville, The Function of the Concept of Organic Unity in the Writings of John Ruskin between 1857 And 1870 (St. Louis University, 1958).

²⁷That Ruskin had little influence on art criticism in general either through his major volumes or through his brief tracts on individual paintings, Academy Notes (1855-1859), is established by R. H. Wilenski's John Ruskin An Introduction to Further Study of His Life and Work, pp. 369-383.

²⁸Harold Bloom in the introduction to his anthology of Ruskin's literary criticism argues for consideration of Ruskin as "the linking and transitional figure between allegorical critics of the elder, Renaissance kind, and those of the newer variety, like Northrop Frye, or like W. B. Yeats in his criticism," perhaps as the first "archetypal" critic (p. xvi).

²⁹The nine volumes and their publication dates are as follows: Modern Painters, I (1843); II (1846); III, IV (1856); V (1860; The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849); The Stones of Venice, I (1851); II, III (1853).

CHAPTER II

RUSKIN'S AESTHETICS

Rene Welleck in his A History of Modern Criticism asserts that "Ruskin's aesthetics apply to literature, for he always refused to draw a line between painter and poet."¹ Rather obviously this statement is fundamental to any study of the theoretical basis of Ruskin's literary criticism. When he praises Walter Scott's excellence in describing external nature, it is only reasonable to look to the lengthy discussions of the principles underlying J. M. W. Turner's excellence as a landscape painter. From these discussions the reader may discover what importance Ruskin placed on landscape, how it relates to man, and how man is to represent it in art. The volumes concerning architecture similarly state an aesthetic which is relevant to understanding the bases of judgments of literature. Statements such as Welleck's must, of course, be qualified by simple reasonableness, since much of Ruskin's application of theory to specific aspects of painting and architecture has no relationship, and consequently no relevance, to literature. The central justification for such an approach to Ruskin's aesthetic principles and their application is realized by recognizing the thesis that ultimately unifies all of his writing. Throughout his works--whether centered on painting,

architecture, literature, or social problems---man, his spiritual integrity and harmony, is of central concern. He asks why man responds as he does to nature and to representations of nature, what determines the patterns of his physical constructions, and why he must recognize the power of social and economic structures around him; each of these questions centers upon the life and well-being of man. Thus, for Ruskin the aesthetics of painting, architecture, and literature may have their particularities, but they radiate from and relate back to one consistent center.

Discussion of Ruskin's aesthetics demands, perhaps to a greater degree than with any other major writer,² summary of even the central volumes. While much of his work has rather general application, in the mid-twentieth century it is read only by specialists. The advanced student of Victorian literature expects to read Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua and The Scope and Nature of University Education, Arnold's Culture and Anarchy, and Carlyle's Sartor Resartus and Of Heroes and Hero Worship, but of Ruskin's works, only selections. Modern Painters and The Stones of Venice are among the best known titles in Victorian literature, but few have read the eight volumes which comprise the two works. Therefore, in order to discuss with any clarity the relationship between Ruskin's criticism of the novel and his aesthetics, it is essential that the major ideas of

those early volumes be surveyed. Only those passages which are central to his aesthetics or relate in a specific way to prose fiction need be summarized; other more specialized material relating particularly to painting or architecture need not be considered.

The first volume of Modern Painters, published in 1843 when Ruskin was twenty-four years old, began seven years earlier as a brief defense of J. M. W. Turner. Turner's painting "Juliet and Her Nurse" had been attacked by Blackwood's Magazine for historical inaccuracies and false representation of nature.³ The brief essay, which was sent only to the owner of the painting, is barely recognizable as the germ of the eventual five-volume work, the large majority of which seems to be only vaguely related to Turner. The first volume opens with the assertion that art which has been long admired must be good because erroneous opinion, however widely held, is inconsistent and will eventually fade in the light of just opinion. Great amounts of time may be necessary before the superior prevails over the inferior, but Ruskin argues that gradual victory of "all that is highest in art and literature" is certain.⁴ This process, however, does not relate to judgment of modern art, the work of Turner and his contemporaries, Ruskin's declared subject. Turning to the viewer, he introduces a topic to be dealt with many times throughout his writings, the condition of

mind which permits valid judgment of contemporary art. Viewers, Ruskin argues, misjudge because they assess the new against the old rather than the new and old against their actual subjects. Re-education must take place; men must be taught to see clearly and accurately the world around them so that they can rise above custom and tradition in their judgments.⁵

Ruskin's task, then, is to provide that re-education. Regarding painting as the "language" of art, he develops a direct parallel between painter and poet; paint and method are to the painter what words and language are to the poet. Painting, like literature, conveys ideas, and Ruskin asserts in his earliest definition of greatness in art "that the art is greatest which conveys to the mind of the spectator, by any means whatsoever, the greatest number of the greatest ideas. . . ."⁶ It follows directly that the greatest artist is one who "has embodied, in the sum of his works, the greatest number of the greatest ideas."⁷ Ruskin argues that there are five kinds of ideas that can be received from works of art--ideas of power, imitation, truth, beauty, and relation. Ideas of power are those which arise in the viewer from "simple perception of the mental or bodily powers exerted in the production of any work of art";⁸ they are divorced altogether from the actual nobility or worthiness of the art object. Only a trained eye through knowledge of

both the subject and the artist's response can properly judge power, since appearance of difficulty may be deceiving. "It is far more difficult to be simple than to be complicated," Ruskin notes.⁹ Ideas of imitation concern the pleasure received from the perception that something produced by art is not what it seems to be. For Ruskin they are the most contemptible that can be received from art; they relate only to low or mean subjects, since great or noble subjects cannot be imitated. Also, ideas of imitation center on deceit in impressing the viewer by catering to his expectations rather than to truths of which he may be unaware.

It is upon truth that Ruskin centers this and much of his later aesthetic comment. Ideas of truth differ from those of imitation in their involvement with emotions, impressions, and thoughts as well as with material representation. Truth may be presented through signs or symbols which do not image a likeness to a particular fact, and, unlike ideas of imitation, they appeal both to the conceptive and to the perceptive faculties. Ultimately, truth and imitation are inconsistent. Truth, "the faithful statement, either to the mind or senses, of any fact of nature,"¹⁰ cannot be compatible with that which derives its pleasure from deception, from falsehood. The greatest artist will recognize that "the truths of nature are one eternal change--one infinite variety,"¹¹ and will choose and present the

essential characteristics of his subjects, the highest truths. For Ruskin, "All really great pictures [i.e., truthful], therefore, exhibit the general habits of nature, manifested in some peculiar, rare, and beautiful way."¹²

The moral ethic of art which dominates Ruskin's statements on painting, architecture, and literature has its genesis in this concept of truth as the central "idea" which can be received from art.

Turning then to ideas of beauty and relation, Ruskin argues that those of beauty give pleasure through simple contemplation of "outward qualities without any direct and definite exertion of the intellect."¹³ Taste for Ruskin concerns the faculty of receiving pleasure from material sources which are attractive to the moral sense. One who does not receive pleasure from these sources has no taste, and one who receives pleasure from other sources has false taste. The observer's response to beauty is instantaneous and non-intellectual. Because the viewer's moral feelings and intellectual powers are inseparable, he will respond to "intellectual beauty," but he will not be able to explain that response. When he can say how and why he has responded, he has proceeded to ideas of relation, all of those ideas "conveyable by art, which are the subjects of distinct intellectual perception. . . ."¹⁴ Ideas of beauty are the subjects of moral, non-intellectual perception; investiga-

tion of intellectual perception leads to ideas of relation.

The remainder of the volume is given to discussion of the "truths" of nature which both artist and viewer must understand before the highest art can be created or be understood. With particular concern for painting he discusses color and chiaroscuro, then centers his discussion upon specifics of external nature--space, sky, clouds, mountains, water, and vegetation. From this lengthy comment, with many examples and comparisons, mainly from modern painting, Ruskin concludes that "Turner is the greatest landscape painter who has ever lived."¹⁵ The young author reaffirms the necessity of an aware, experienced observer, but Modern Painters cannot give the requisite knowledge; it can only lead the reader to observe nature carefully, apart from the conventions of tradition.

There are problems in this first major volume. Ruskin's ideas are not systematically developed in terms of his sources. As his editors have noted, "Ruskin's education was broken and discursive."¹⁶ Henry Ladd names Plato, Aristotle, the Bible, Locke, Hogarth, Burke, and Reynolds as sources to some degree for the ideas of Modern Painters I, but he finds Ruskin unread in the works of Hume, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and other major eighteenth-century thinkers.¹⁷ For Ladd it is a "confounding background" that leads to "confusing but earnest paragraphs."¹⁸ Also, in

this volume Ruskin does not clearly distinguish between artist and observer, a problem considerably more serious in his attempts to structure a theory of the imagination in the second volume. Rene Welleck argues that the central weakness of that work is that it "suffers from a lack of clarity in distinguishing between viewer and artist, between man in general and the artist, and between the artist's mind and the finished work."¹⁹ But despite problems, Ruskin established in Modern Painters I an important base for his later aesthetic writings. However influenced he may have been by eighteenth-century theories of art, Ruskin's advocacy of diversitarianism identifies him as heir to the "Romanticisms" of Wordsworth and Coleridge, a position particularly evident in his discussion of the imagination in Modern Painters II. Also, the attention given to the viewer, stressing the false conditioning which keeps him from seeing clearly the world in which he lives and thus from judging accurately the works of those who do see clearly, suggests the emphasis on the harmony and unity of the total man central to much of his later writing, both in artistic and social areas. This emphasis establishes the humanist principle, essentially Christian, dominant in his thought.²⁰

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Modern Painters I in terms of literary criticism is the multitude of references throughout to writers and their works, particularly

to poets and poetry.²¹ George Herbert, Milton, Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats are all quoted in the volume, primarily for the purpose of illustrating the aesthetic ideas discussed. In his attempt, for example, to clarify the directions English landscape painting should take, Ruskin turns to lines from Wordsworth:

So fair, so sweet, withal so sensitive;--
Would that the little flowers were born to live
Conscious of half the pleasure which they give.
That to this mountain daisy's self were known
The beauty of its star-shaped shadow, thrown
On the smooth surface of this naked stone,

and asserts that "Our painters must come to this before they have done their duty."²² The five ideas which can be received from art are stated always in terms applicable to any object of art as are other of the aesthetic principles of the volume. It is in no way surprising that Wordsworth, Tennyson, Mrs. Gaskell, Charlotte Bronte, the Brownings, and George Eliot were attracted to Modern Painters before any had a personal acquaintance with Ruskin.²³

The second volume appeared three years later and, like its predecessor, is concerned with definition and clarification of aesthetic principles. Ruskin makes clear in the opening pages that art is a serious matter which makes great demands on both artist and viewer:

Art, properly so called, is no recreation; it cannot be learned at spare moments, nor pursued when we have nothing better to do. It is no handiwork for drawing-room tables, no relief of the ennui of boudoirs; it

must be understood and taken seriously, or not at all. To advance it men's lives must be given, and to receive it, their hearts.²⁴

He also clarifies his own role, extending his task beyond the original defense of Turner and revealing an intensity of purpose more akin to his later social writings than to his first volume:

. . . the object I propose to myself is of no partial nor accidental importance. It is not now to distinguish between disputed degrees of ability in individuals, or agreeableness in canvases; it is not now to expose the ignorance or defend the principles of party or person; it is to summon the moral energies of the nation to a forgotten duty, to display the use, force, and function of a great body of neglected sympathies and desires, and to elevate to its healthy and beneficial operation that art which, being altogether addressed to them, rises or falls with their variableness of vigor. . . .²⁵

This concern for the "neglected" conditions of mind which determine how man sees and what he sees, stated in a moral context, defines the tendency which becomes increasingly dominant in later volumes. As Morton Berman has noted, in Modern Painters II "Ruskin had already begun to move from esthetic to social matters."²⁶

Primarily the volume is a discussion of the two faculties of mind which make possible the viewer's response to ideas of beauty and relation, two of the five ideas which, according to the first volume, can be received from art. The first of these faculties is the Theoretic, the operation of which Ruskin terms Theoria.²⁷ The Theoretic faculty is that which defines all right response to beauty as

moral, reflective of the nobility of both object and viewer. The "exulting, reverent, and grateful perception of it beauty I call Theoria,"²⁸ Ruskin asserts in an attempt to distinguish between moral impressions of beauty and "Aesthetic" or sensual impressions. Aesthesis, as opposed to Theoria, relates only to the "mere animal consciousness" of pleasantness, inferior in that it is divorced from the "sense of contemplation" essential to complete response to the sublime in art.²⁹ Ruskin argues that, although a viewer may respond to the sensual, he can reorient himself to the moral perception, Theoria, by recognizing that:

. . . over immediate impressions and immediate preferences we have no power, but over ultimate impressions, and especially ultimate preferences, we have; and that, though we can neither at once choose whether we shall see an object red, green, or blue, nor determine to like the red better than the blue, or the blue better than the red, yet we can, if we choose, make ourselves ultimately susceptible of such impressions in other degrees, and capable of pleasure in them in different measure. And seeing that wherever power of any kind is given there is responsibility attached, it is the duty of men to prefer certain impressions of sense to others, because they have the power of doing so.³⁰

Ultimately, then, Theoria is a morally imperative condition in which the spiritual harmony and unity of man is reflected.

Continuing his discussion of the Theoretic faculty as it enables man to respond to ideas of beauty, Ruskin distinguishes between "Typical" beauty and "Vital" beauty. He defines Typical beauty as the external quality of objects which, "whether it occur in a stone, flower, beast, or in

man . . . may be shown to be in some sort typical of the Divine attributes. . . ."31 The "Divine attributes" he notes, with illustration from painting and poetry as well as from nature, are infinity, unity, repose, symmetry, purity, and moderation. There are grades of Typical beauty; all objects are not equally beautiful, and it is in the highest or most noble degree of the manifestation of Typical beauty that man's energies are called to the pursuit of it and he attempts to recreate it for himself.³² At their highest the external qualities of Typical beauty approach the internal sense of Vital beauty. Ruskin defines Vital beauty as "the appearance of felicitous fulfillment of function in living things, more especially of the joyful and right exertion of perfect life in man,"³³ a definition clearly reflective of a moral orientation. Later in the volume he elaborates on the "vital" aspects of beauty:

Throughout the whole of the organic creation every being in a perfect state exhibits certain appearances or evidences of happiness; and is in its nature, its desires, its modes of nourishment, habitation, and death, illustrative of certain moral dispositions or principles. Now, first, in the keenness of the sympathy which we feel in the happiness, real or apparent, of all organic beings, and which . . . invariably prompts us, from the joy we have in it, to look upon those as most lovely which are most happy; and, secondly, in the justness of the moral sense which rightly reads the lesson they are all intended to teach, and classes them in orders of worthiness and beauty according to the rank and nature of that lesson; . . . in our right accepting and reading of all this, consists, I say, the ultimately perfect condition of that noble Theoretic faculty, whose place in the system of our nature I have already partly vindicated with respect to typical, but which can only

fully be established with respect to vital beauty.³⁴ In this statement is the justification of a moral view of all experience, including art, which at once carries Ruskin into the ambiguous and finally mystic aress of "happiness" and divorces his morality from the strict Christian fundamentalism so often implied by his vocabulary. If his view here involves contradictory ideas as one scholar argues,³⁵ it is also an impressionistic structure which permits Ruskin to approach literature, architecture, and society in a moral context related to the central terms happiness and fulfillment.

The second of the faculties of mind discussed in Modern Painters II is the Imaginative, which makes possible man's response to ideas of relation to the same degree that the theoretic faculty makes possible response to ideas of beauty. Ruskin distinguishes the imaginative faculty as that which "the mind exercises in a certain mode of regarding or combining the ideas it has received from external nature, and the operations of which become in their turn objects of the theoretic faculty to other minds."³⁶ In a rather sweeping rejection of all attempts to define the imagination in philosophic terms, Ruskin asserts that the imaginative faculty is "utterly mysterious and inexplicable, and to be recognized in its results only, or in the negative results of its absence."³⁷ His discussion of that faculty is descriptive, centered, like much of his previous theory,

in comment on specific paintings and poetry. Three functions of the imagination are noted, termed by Ruskin as associative, penetrative, and contemplative. In its associative function the imagination takes imperfect individual entities which, when joined with others, produce perfect total form. The process is not a conscious, controlled event, but is essentially intuitive and thus, for Ruskin, inexplicable. The work of art produced by the associative function of the imagination is not, however, Coleridge's "diverse-coloured fruit";³⁸ Ruskin insists on organic unity as the ideal of this function and argues that if one object is removed from such a work the vitality of the entire unit is lost. Mere composition can be taken apart without undue harm; the creation of the imagination must be accepted as an organic, harmonious unit.³⁹

The penetrative function of the imagination ignores external appearances and moves directly to essential qualities or truths. It is the "highest intellectual power of man," but Ruskin insists that, like the associative function, it exists without reason, without conscious intellectual control.⁴⁰ He finds an absence of the penetrative imagination in Milton, arguing that in Paradise Lost the poet depends upon descriptions of external violence rather than moving to the essence of the vision he wishes to express. Of the description of Satan's fiery world in Book I, Ruskin

comments, ". . . we feel rather the form of the fire-waves than their fury."⁴¹ In Aeschylus, Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare Ruskin finds this highest faculty to the degree that "every circumstance or sentence of their being, speaking, or seeming, is seized by process from within."⁴² As with the associative the penetrative aspect of the imagination assumes that the highest expressions of the mind in art will be organic.

The contemplative aspect of imagination Ruskin distinguishes from the previous two as a "certain habit or mode of operation" rather than as a distinct faculty of the imagination.⁴³ This "habit" abstracts from the total impressions on the mind as perceived by the associative and penetrative faculties and "treats, or regards, both the simple images and its own combinations in peculiar ways."⁴⁴ Ruskin recognizes that memory of past experience and anticipation of beauty unseen are a part of all minds and will exert a great influence on the mind of the artist. While the expression is not used by Ruskin, the contemplative is rather clearly the idealizing function of the imagination.⁴⁵ By means of the contemplative mode the imagination may reach truths unseen in the material structures of things, truths intuitively grasped. That power which does concern itself with material or external appearances Ruskin terms the fancy, and he consistently relegates it to a place inferior to the

functions of imagination proper. He argues that the fancy has three functions complementary to the associative, penetrative and contemplative, but it never moves beyond appearances to moral truth.⁴⁶ Within the frame of the imaginative contemplative Ruskin recognizes that art is not a direct transcript of nature but that sources of beauty "invariably receive the reflection of the mind under whose influence they have passed, and are modified or coloured by its image."⁴⁷

It is clear that by the conclusion of the second volume of Modern Painters Ruskin is concerned with the conditions of mind which produce great art as well as those which enable the viewer to receive and assess impressions from art. He can argue from the principles established in these volumes that even "a few shapeless scratches" can move the imagination of the beholder, and that a work of a truly imaginative mind can sweep away the mind of the viewer.⁴⁸ It is evident that environment can influence the responses of either artist or viewer by distorting the way in which man sees, and, while Ruskin gives little space to the topic in these volumes, the foundation for later concentration on the influence of environment on architecture and on man himself is found here. It is, in fact, to architecture and the conditions under which great architecture may come into being that Ruskin directs his next four volumes. Only after

an elaborate study of the environment and condition of mind which produce man's most noble constructs does he return a decade later, in 1856, to Modern Painters.

The Seven Lamps of Architecture and the three-volume study The Stones of Venice extend the range of Ruskin's aesthetics by shifting emphasis from study of the nature of imagination to consideration of the social and moral milieu which permit the imagination to function. The shift is gradual, beginning in Modern Painters II and not totally complete until publication in 1860 in Cornhill Magazine of the essays later collected as Unto This Last. The Seven Lamps of Architecture reflects Ruskin's awareness that the great constructs of Europe, primarily those of France and Italy, are in the process of decay and his urge to capture their passing magnificence in drawing and description; the volume centers, however, on an attempt to describe the aesthetic principles essential to great architecture and to illustrate those principles in existing structures. Ruskin makes clear, as in the earlier volumes, the moral context within which his studies are founded, regardless of their particular application:

It has been just said, that there is no branch of human work whose constant laws have not close analogy with those which govern every other mode of man's exertion. But, more than this, exactly as we reduce to greater simplicity and surety any one group of these practical laws, we shall find them passing the mere condition of connection or analogy, and becoming the actual expression of some ultimate nerve or fibre of the mighty laws which govern the moral world. . . . the truth, decision,

and temperance, which we reverently regard as honourable conditions of the spiritual being, have a representative or derivative influence over the works of the hand, the movements of the frame, and the action of the intellect.⁴⁹

The study of great architecture, then, can be one means of considering the moral conditions essential to greatness.

Seven principles or "lamps" are chosen to represent the sources of greatness in architecture--sacrifice, truth, power, beauty, life, memory, and obedience. Ruskin warns his reader, however, that "Both arrangement and nomenclature are those of convenience rather than of system; the one is arbitrary, and the other illogical; nor is it pretended that all, or even the greater number of, the principles necessary to the well-being of the art, are included in the inquiry."⁵⁰ Looking back on the volume in 1880 while in the process of re-editing it, he also recognizes an unnecessary adherence to specifically religious connotations of morality and omits "some pieces of rabid and utterly false Protestantism."⁵¹ As with Ruskin's earlier writings, the fundamentalist vocabulary which was his childhood legacy should not mislead the reader into association of his "morality" with the narrow dogmatism of his mother's evangelicalism. It would also be to misread the volume to see it as the exploitation of architecture for the purpose of discussing morality. It is, like the earlier works, a descriptive study centered upon more than two years of concen-

trated study and recording, both by sketch and photograph, of specific facts of existing structures.

Three of the lamps of architecture--truth, power, and beauty--show a rather obvious similarity to truth, power, and beauty as "ideas" which can be received from art in the first volume of Modern Painters. The primary difference in Ruskin's usage is in orientation; the seven lamps are those abstract moral qualities which relate builder or artist to the finished work, whereas the ideas of Modern Painters I center upon the object-viewer relationship. The difference, however, is more semantic than aesthetic, reflected by the fact, previously noted, that Ruskin often fails to distinguish between artist and viewer in his early volumes. Truth is the dominant principle in all human activity, and Ruskin asserts that the spirit of truth, if strong "in the hearts of our artists and handicraftsmen," determines the dignity "of every art and act of man."⁵² Imaginative or fanciful vision is accepted in this volume as one aspect of truth "so long as it confesses its ideality." There must, Ruskin insists, be no deception; "It is necessary to our rank as spiritual creatures, that we should be able to invent and behold what is not; and to our rank as moral creatures, that we should know and confess at the same time that it is not."⁵³ He argues that nature provides the architect with his only truly beautiful model, and it is this argument

which justifies his assertion that all beauty must be derived from natural forms. That which is powerful, however, depends upon the ability of the mind to arrange and govern its concepts and materials. He concludes that "All building, therefore, shows man either as gathering beauty or governing power"; and the secrets of his success are his knowing what to gather, and how to rule."⁵⁴ It is clear that Ruskin places importance upon the architect's ability to control form in his structures as well as to reproduce beauty in the decorative aspects of his works.

Sacrifice and obedience, two of the remaining four lamps, are discussed almost solely in the language of Protestant fundamentalism, and, as a result, may appear somewhat limited as abstract aesthetic principles. Assuming the position that man's work is not needed by God, Ruskin calls for sacrifice motivated by adoration alone, totally unconcerned with any utilitarian end. Ruskin's plea to his own society is for orientation to attitudes rather than to objects: "It is not the church we want, but the sacrifice; not the emotion of admiration, but the act of adoration; not the gift, but the giving."⁵⁵ In abstract terms of orientation to values rather than to materialistic usefulness, Ruskin's call for sacrifice is closely related to his earlier comments on the involvement of artist and viewer necessary to all great art. But this volume places art itself within

a strictly religious context: "though it may not be necessarily the interest of religion to admit the service of the arts, the arts will never flourish until they have been primarily devoted to that service. . . ."56 His discussion of obedience has, likewise, religious connotations, although it is less difficult to see the basic principles which are expressed in religious terminology. Asserting that all right effort recognizes that law and obedience, not freedom or license, determine man's proper attitude toward all of his activity, Ruskin moves beyond the basic concept that the service of God is perfect freedom. He has only disdain for critics who call for stylistic freedom or originality in English architecture and the other arts. "A man who has the gift," he asserts, "will take up any style that is going, the style of his day, and will work in that, and be great in that. . . ."57 In its broadest context obedience is adherence to established principles, whether recognition of gravity as natural law, structural patterns in architecture, or metrics in poetry. Law, not liberty, is central to Ruskin's concept of life as well as art in this volume.

Of the remaining two lamps of architecture memory is treated rather briefly while life is developed as one of the major terms of the entire study. Ruskin asserts that architecture communicates the history of a nation to later generations more completely than other arts or the writings

of the historian, an assertion which becomes a basic premise of his more elaborate study, The Stones of Venice. Memory has two duties with respect to architecture. It must preserve those objects which are man's inheritance from past ages, and it must create an historical architecture in the present which will communicate the spirit of the nation to future generations. But it is in his discussion of the lamp of life that Ruskin reveals the fundamental directions of his subsequent thought. He argues that the work of art, however noble or ignoble, reflects the energy of the mind that created it. Noble art will not be produced by minds lacking in vitality or hands reduced to mechanical reproduction; by the same reasoning the careful observer or the art object can recognize the condition of the mind of the artist himself. Such observation is particularly relevant in architecture because inert stone does not distract the viewer from essential vitality in the same manner as color or phrase may in painting or literature. Turning, then, to the producing hand, Ruskin shifts emphasis from the work itself:

. . . so long as men work as men, putting their heart into what they do, and doing their best, it matters not how bad workmen they may be, there will be that in the handling which is above all price: it will be plainly seen that some places have been delighted in more than others . . . and the effect of the whole, as compared with the same design cut by a machine or a lifeless hand,

will be like that of poetry well read and deeply felt to that of the same verses jangled by rote.⁵⁸

It is the concept stated here that makes possible the central assertion of this section of the volume, one of the most frequently quoted of Ruskin's statements:

I believe the right question to ask, respecting all ornament, is simply this: Was it done with enjoyment-- was the carver happy while he was about it? It may be the hardest work possible, and the harder because so much pleasure was taken in it; but it must have been happy too, or it will not be living.⁵⁹

This principle that upon the happiness of the worker depends fulfillment in the work is not, in its full sense, a call to hedonism. Ruskin goes on to qualify his position within a religious context, arguing that man is "sent into this world" with specific tasks. When he is carrying out those tasks his work will be happy; when he is not, his efforts can only be mechanical and lifeless. It is a transition principle, oriented more to the workman than the discussion of the "vital" qualities of beauty in Modern Painters II but not yet centered directly upon the social circumstances which make noble creation possible, one topic of The Stones of Venice.

The first volume of The Stones of Venice appeared in 1851, followed in 1853 by the second and third. Outlining the purposes of the volumes in the 1874 edition, Ruskin notes the first as an analysis of the best principles of structure in stone and brick, but he asserts, "The second and

third volumes show how the rise and fall of the Venetian builder's art depended on the moral and immoral temper of the state."⁶⁰ The author centers his study on "The relation of the art of Venice to her moral temper," and "that of the life of the workman to his work," two issues he finds totally ignored in nineteenth-century studies of architecture.⁶¹ As with Ruskin's earlier volumes, The Stones of Venice is founded upon careful observation. The volumes are intensely descriptive; abstract principles are consistently supported by reference to and, in many cases, plates illustrating specific examples of Venetian architecture. The entire first volume is a discussion of those structural laws which determine the physical limits of design. Upon this elaborate foundation the later volumes trace the major periods or evolving patterns of Venetian architecture to and from its Gothic pinnacle.

Ruskin's role as critic of architecture is the same as that which he assumed earlier in relation to painting. His function is to re-educate architect, workman, and observer: "it is necessary first to teach men to speak out, and say what they like, truly; and, in the second place, to teach them which of their likings are ill-set, and which justly."⁶² Recognizing that faults in an observer may cause a building to be discounted or the viewer's enthusiasm cause

faulty construction to be praised, Ruskin's urge is to give proper understanding as well as sympathetic temper. If he is successful in stating the vital principles that relate man to his creative effort, the "Stones of Venice" will be "touch-stones" to all understanding of such effort. As in his earlier thought all faulty judgment and excessive enthusiasm are signs of deviation from man's natural responses. Ruskin argues that "Half the evil in this world comes from people not knowing what they do like; not deliberately setting themselves to find out what they really enjoy."⁶³ The entire discussion of natural response, however, rests on the concept of divine order and intent central to the "Lamp of Truth" in the previous volume. He calls upon his readers to accept "natural choice and liking" as "true humility, a trust that you have been so created as to enjoy what is fitting for you, and a willingness to be pleased, as it was intended you should be."⁶⁴ His function in The Stones of Venice is nothing less than to guide man to a proper sense of himself and his efforts by the explicit premise that if man is in his place, all will be right with the world. The remainder of Ruskin's career was spent reminding man that he was not in his place.⁶⁵

In this first volume of The Stones of Venice the author insists that to associate pleasure in art with reasonableness and usefulness is to misunderstand the nature

of man. Such association is futile and can only destroy man's response to beauty. Ruskin attempts to outline a proper "aesthetic" role:

You were made for enjoyment, and the world was filled with things which you will enjoy, unless you are too proud to be pleased by them, or too grasping to care for what you cannot turn to other account than mere delight. Remember that the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless; peacocks and lilies for instance. . . .⁶⁶

His attempt, however, was easily misread by later generations, in the same manner that Walter Pater's "Conclusion" was to be misread two decades later, as a call for art for its own sake, art justified by no system of values outside itself. Such a reading of this and other passages clearly deviates from the text of Ruskin's statement, since it ignores the intent or motive which he finds in every existing object and activity. The central issue is that Ruskin establishes a foundation for discussion of all art within the premise that noble art fulfills its natural or divine function and reflects an artist and society capable of joy through acceptance of a universal chain of being. Ignoble or distorted art is a clear warning that man has refused to make that acceptance, primarily in the nineteenth century because of false association of the terms use and joy.

As is to be expected, Ruskin finds all of external nature adequate as subject material for art, although in varying degrees.⁶⁷ His hierarchy of nobility of artistic subjects includes twelve levels, the highest being abstract

lines from nature, crystal forms, and wave forms. The lowest or last of the order is man. For man to center his architectural ornament upon himself is a sign of "miserable self-complacency, a contentment in our own wretched doings."⁶⁸ Such art is limited, Ruskin argues, in that man does not derive greatest joy from contemplation of his own image but from his sense of the divine in the world around him. Ruskin anticipates the possibility that his discussion of the subject material proper to noble art may be read as a call for photographic representation of nature itself. He meets this reading by asserting that the artist makes comprehensible a universe "unfathomable, inconceivable, in its whole" by long contemplation, then by careful presentation of "what he has learned of it" for his audience. He gathers that which he has learned from the infinity of nature and, in presenting that, at once reveals his own deepest thoughts and displays the object "in a thousand ways before unknown."⁶⁹

From these principles Ruskin turns to the architecture of Venice in its three major phases, Byzantine, Gothic, and Renaissance.⁷⁰ In the characteristics of Gothic architecture he finds reflected the proper relationship of man to nature and to his own creations. Observation tells Ruskin that those who designed, constructed, and decorated buildings during the Gothic period of Venice had clear sight and accepted with humility man's proper responsibilities in the

universal order. His discussion of "The Nature of Gothic" is one of the most frequently published selections from his works and need not be extensively discussed here.⁷¹ Ruskin finds six characteristic moral elements or conditions of mind reflected in the gothic structures of Venice: savageness, changefulness, naturalism, grotesqueness, rigidity, and redundance. With more insistence than in his previous writings he argues that the end of art is not perfection and that the goal of life is not freedom. To demand perfection in a work of art is to demand that man become a machine, that he abandon his natural place in the creation. Thus Ruskin can attack all production which involves no act of individual creativity by the workman, whether it be imitation, mass production, or exact finish for its own sake. Regarding the universe itself as in the process of decay, he concludes that imperfection must be a part of all art as it is "essential to all that we know of life."⁷² He briefly repeats the principle of The Seven Lamps of Architecture that it is no slavery to obey, labor for, and revere another man, provided that that man accepts the responsibilities of leadership and has himself the humility to serve. It is emphasis upon man's condition and that art which reflects the proper integration of man and society that dominates this and later aesthetic principles. By the 1850's art gains Ruskin's attention as an artifact which records man's

condition for those who can see clearly. Art was never an end in itself for Ruskin, but by the mid-nineteenth century its aesthetic values are seldom mentioned; it is the life art reflects that dominates his thought.

In his discussion of naturalism or love of nature Ruskin's aesthetics clearly center upon man. He argues that there are three classes of artists--purists, naturalists, and sensualists. By analogy to reapers he defines the three types: "The Purists take the fine flour, and the Sensualists the chaff and straw, but the Naturalists take all home, and make their cake of the one, and their couch of the other." He continues and his point clearly is that only the Naturalist can produce great art:

That man [the Naturalist] is greater . . . who contemplates with an equal mind the alternations of terror and of beauty; who, not rejoicing less beneath the sunny sky, can bear also to watch the bars of twilight narrowing on the horizon; and, not less sensible to the blessing of the peace of nature, can rejoice in the magnificence of the ordinances by which that peace is protected and secured.⁷³

At their height of power those of Venice who created Gothic architecture were naturalists. In the third volume of Modern Painters Ruskin enlarges upon this basic classification, extending it to specific discussion of music, painting, and literature. The greatest of poets, Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare are used to illustrate the "naturalist ideal."⁷⁴ The naturalist's creations reflect the quality of mind termed the "imagination associative" in Modern

Painters II, that imaginative power which creates from imperfect individual entities the unified and noble work of art. The central point of the discussion of naturalism, however, is to outline man's proper relationship to external creation, a relationship in which the artist "with all that lives, triumphing, falling, or suffering, . . . claims kindred. . . ."75

Since Ruskin's confessed function in these volumes is educative, it is not surprising that he considers at some length the types of knowledge and education necessary to the artist. Early in the third volume of The Stones of Venice the general topic is introduced through a specific attempt to distinguish between art and science. Ruskin finds art centering upon appearances and impressions, science on facts and demonstrations. Both, he asserts, are concerned with truth, science with truth of aspect and art with truth of essence. He finds the realm of art much larger than that of science. Science studies the relations of things to each other, while art studies the relations of things to man and asks "what that thing is to the human eyes and human heart, what it has to say to men, and what it can become to them."76 Ruskin credits the decline of Venetian Gothic architecture into Renaissance forms to excessive concern with fact, essentially a shift to scientific orientation. The artist must not value phenomena only insofar

as they lead to facts.

The discussion moves directly to consideration of that education and knowledge proper to the artist. Denying any significant value to vicarious experience, Ruskin asserts that "The whole function of the artist in the world is to be a seeing and feeling creature. . . . His place is neither in the closet, nor on the bench, nor at the bar, nor in the library."⁷⁷ Intensive concern with fact will only keep the artist from seeing and feeling. Knowledge does not in itself open the artist's eyes; it may close them in reflection. Knowledge can have significant value only when the individual is capable of keeping it subordinate to his own work. For Ruskin, an educated man is "one who has understanding of his own uses and duties in the world";⁷⁸ his mind is always greater than the knowledge it contains and always is in total control of that knowledge. The mind of the uneducated but learned man is overwhelmed by facts, wholly trapped in a labyrinth of data. It is proper perspective that Ruskin calls for, rejection neither of science nor of learning in general.⁷⁹ Scientific fact itself, such as that related to the chemistry of the painter's colors, can be of service to the artist, but it must not be confused with that unknowable genius of the finished work of art.

The three-volume study concludes with a lengthy assertion of the central premise of all his art criticism:

Here, therefore, let me finally and firmly enunciate the great principle to which all that has hitherto been stated is subservient: --that art is valuable or otherwise, only as it expresses the personality, activity, and living perception of a good and great human soul; that it may express and contain this with little help from execution, and less from science; and that if it have not this, if it shows not the vigor, perception, and invention of a mighty human spirit, it is worthless. Worthless, I mean, as art; it may be precious in some other way, but, as art, it is nugatory.⁸⁰

From this principle Ruskin reaffirms the idea that photographic representation, whether through photography itself or through drawing, does not constitute the vital element of artistic creation; rather, he insists that man's spiritual condition is primary. He argues that "social science" must become understood so that doctrines of liberty and equality can be more than words to be preached. By the conclusion of this work Ruskin is clearly concerned about the relationship of environment to that integration of sensibility essential to noble art. In a later writing the specific point of this principle is clear when he argues that "the most noble and living literary faculties, like those of Scott and Dickens, are perverted by the will of the multitude. . . ."⁸¹ Social conditions which create the "multitude" can and do distort man's right function. Art reflects that distortion.

The last three volumes of Modern Painters add little to the rather discursive aesthetic established in Ruskin's preceding six volumes. Modern Painters III (1856) is less organized in terms of a central topic than any of the

previous writings. This decentralized structure, dominant in his later essays and lectures, is suggested by the subtitle to the volume, "Of Many Things."⁸² The sweeping issues of Modern Painters I and II, discussion of the "Ideas" which can be received from art and of the functions of the imagination, are replaced by consideration of particular problems. Among the more significant of those problems is the universal-particular debate over the subject material proper to art, the nature of truth and beauty in the context of art, and the ideal relationship of the artist to feeling, defined by the expression pathetic fallacy. There are fewer extended descriptive passages of external nature, and Ruskin's style is, on the whole, less eloquent than it had been a decade earlier. Much more space is given to consideration of specific aspects of existing works of art, now those of Titian and Veronese as well as those of Turner; the free-flowing passages centered in nature itself are no longer dominant.⁸³

Ruskin's investigation of the "Grand Style" as discussed by Sir Joshua Reynolds in two Idler essays (seventy-nine and eighty-two) leads him into the question of whether the artist should center his attentions on the universal and general or on the particular. In Modern Painters I he had praised Turner's truth to nature while at the same time attacked direct imitation of external form. But in

1851 his defense of the Pre-Raphaelite painters suggested a praise of minute detail and material accuracy; Holman Hunt, for example, in order to produce "The Scapegoat," a painting Ruskin publicly praised, traveled to Crimea to create "as nearly as possible a representation of what an ancient Israelite might have seen had he been standing on the shores of the Dead Sea a few days after the Day of Atonement."⁸⁴ The discussion of Reynolds and the Grand Style can easily and properly be read as an attempt by Ruskin to resolve an apparent conflict in his own aesthetic. A careful analysis of Reynolds' argument is developed in which Ruskin in a relatively methodical manner illustrates fallacies in the Idler essays. His central point, however, is independently derived and has no logical relationship with the discussion of Reynolds. Essentially Ruskin argues that Reynolds' concern was misdirected, that an "instinctive consciousness" guides the artist in choices which he cannot rationally explain:

It is not true that Poetry does not concern herself with minute details. It is not true that high art seeks only the Invariable. It is not true that imitative art is an easy thing. It is not true that the faithful rendering of nature is an employment in which "the slowest intellect is likely to succeed best." All these successive assertions are utterly false and untenable, while the plain truth . . . is that the difference between great and mean art lies, not in definable methods of handling, or styles of representation, or choices of subjects, but wholly in the nobleness of the end to which the effort of the painter is addressed.⁸⁵

He goes on to clarify his position in specific terms of the aesthetic of moral beauty dominant in his early writings:

"It does not matter whether he seek for his subjects among peasants or nobles, among the heroic or the simple, in courts or in fields, so only that he behold all things with a thirst for beauty, and a hatred of meanness and vice."⁸⁶

This response to the topic is consistent with the central ideas of the previous volumes. By the conclusion of The Stones of Venice Ruskin is clearly convinced that upon hatred for meanness and vice love of beauty depends. The principle of beauty as having a moral context is never absent in his thought, but it is central by the mid-1850's and the publication of Modern Painters III. Ruskin distinguishes between truth and beauty in systematic terms: truth is a property of statements, beauty a property of objects. They can thus be seen as independent of one another.⁸⁷ In art, however, the painter does express statements in presenting that which claims to resemble objects in the surrounding world. Lines in a painting may be beautiful, yet totally false in their representation; the most ugly work may express truthfully an aspect of external reality, particularly for Ruskin a reality of modern life. He argues, then, that while the artist can separate beauty and truth, he is wrong to do so. The greatest man seeks them "together in the order of their worthiness; that is to say, truth first, and beauty afterwards. High art dif-

fers from low art in possessing an excess of beauty in addition to its truth, not in possessing excess of beauty inconsistent with truth."⁸⁸

It is this emphasis on truth which gives meaning to his discussion of the pathetic fallacy. Ruskin distinguishes two classes of poets. Those of the first order (Homer, Dante, Shakespeare) feel and think strongly. The second order of poets (Keats, Tennyson) feel strongly but think weakly. Because they think less strongly than they feel, their vision is distorted by emotion and they see "untruly." Both orders exhibit essential feeling or pathos, but the greater poet subordinates it to truthful vision. A man who does not feel, who sees the world around him truthfully but without emotion, specifically love, is not a poet. The danger in the presence of feeling in art occurs only when that feeling is represented as truth, when it is deceptively fallacious. Ruskin's summation of his general discussion, "the pathetic fallacy is powerful only so far as it is pathetic, feeble so far as it is fallacious, and . . . the domination of Truth is entire, over this, as over every other natural and just state of the human mind,"⁸⁹ is clearly related to earlier statements of aesthetic principle. Without truth there is no valid statement, and without feeling there can be no art.⁹⁰

Ruskin continues to clarify his aesthetics and gradually

to shift them to more overt social orientation in the concluding volumes of Modern Painters. The emphasis placed on the naturalist ideal in The Stones of Venice, the idea that the greatest artist is capable of accepting all of creation as worthy of his attention, is apparent to an even greater degree in Modern Painters IV and V. In 1858 Ruskin's gradual unwillingness to remain committed to evangelical "purism" climaxed when he left a chapel in Turin and before the works of Titian and Veronese asserted that "A good, stout, self-commanding, magnificent Animality is the make for poets and artists, it seems to me."⁹² This moment of praise for the naturalist ideal marks no great change in Ruskin's aesthetics, but it records a conscious urge to divorce himself from the limitations of the vision prescribed by pietism. By the conclusion of Modern Painters his attention is clearly on social and moral problems of England and the destructive effect of those problems on art. "All great Art is Praise,"⁹² but the temper of his thought removes the aphorism from the chapel to the street. In the closing chapter of Modern Painters V Ruskin's depression is obvious: "So far as in it lay, this century has caused every one of its great men, whose hearts were kindest, and whose spirits most perceptive of the work of God, to die without hope;--Scott, Keats, Byron, Shelley, Turner, Great England of the Iron-heart now, not of the Lion-heart. . . ."⁹³ It is absolutely consistent

that the essays of Unto This Last, traditionally accepted as Ruskin's public announcement of his shift from aesthetic to social concerns, contain only one explicit reference to art. Charles Dickens is briefly mentioned, not for aesthetic reasons, but because Ruskin wishes him "studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions."⁹⁴ If art reflects the condition of the artist and his world as Ruskin argues in both Modern Painters and The Stones of Venice, then objects of art become artifacts which can assist in the study of society.

The preceding summary is selective and by no means complete. Its purpose is solely to outline those aesthetic principles which have relevance to Ruskin's literary criticism and particularly to the directions that criticism takes in the last three decades of his writing career. He was not openly concerned with inconsistency of ideas and, in fact, in the preface to Modern Painters V argues that "All true opinions are living, and show their life by being capable of nourishment; therefore of change."⁹⁵ It is evident, however, from consideration of his response to the novel that his literary opinions are generally founded within the aesthetic pale of Modern Painters, The Seven Lamps of Architecture, and The Stones of Venice. In turning to Ruskin's criticism of the novel, it is necessary to pause only to review Ruskin's understanding of the term fiction.

Several definitions were offered during the course of his long career, and they can be seen as a bridge between aesthetic theory and applied criticism.

FOOTNOTES

¹Rene Welleck, A History of Modern Criticism, III (New Haven, 1965), p. 138.

²The expression "major writer" is admittedly ambiguous. The fallacies inherent in definitions of the phrase (is Ruskin major because of the many volumes he wrote, because of the scope and relevance of his subject material, because of his influence on his age, because he is or is not currently read?) negate the value of attempts at clarification.

³Ruskin's editors, Cook and Wedderburn, discuss the genesis of Modern Painters and are the source for biographers' comments on this important point in the young writer's career (Works, I, p. xxxiii; III, pp. xviii-xix).

⁴Works, III, p. 79.

⁵Works, III, p. 81.

⁶Works, III, p. 92.

⁷Works, III, p. 92.

⁸Works, III, p. 95.

⁹Works, III, p. 97.

¹⁰Works, III, p. 104.

¹¹Works, III, p. 145.

¹²Works, III, p. 157.

¹³Works, III, p. 109.

¹⁴Works, III, p. 112.

¹⁵Works, III, p. 617.

¹⁶Works, III, p. xix.

¹⁷Ladd, pp. 26-38.

¹⁸Ladd, p. 38.

¹⁹Welleck, p. 141.

²⁰Alba Warren (English Poetic Theory 1825-1865)

(Princeton, 1950⁷) argues that "Perhaps the best word for Ruskin's criticism is humanistic" in that all man's works, artistic or other, derive their values "from the world of moral choice and action in which they have their being" (p. 206).

²¹There are some twenty quotations from Wordsworth's poetry alone in Modern Painters I.

²²Works, III, pp. 177-178. Italics are Ruskin's.

²³Works, III, pp. xxxvii-xxxix.

²⁴Works, IV, p. 26.

²⁵Works, IV, pp. 27-28.

²⁶Berman, p. 196.

²⁷Henry Ladd provides a detailed discussion of Ruskin's concept of Theoria and the complex of ideas related to it (pp. 118-125).

²⁸Works, IV, p. 47.

²⁹Works, IV, p. 33. The term "aesthetic" as used in this study clearly differs from Ruskin's use of the term. Here it is used to refer to artistic theory in general, whether related to painting, architecture, or literature. For Ruskin the expression is used quite literally to mean sensual response to beauty.

³⁰Works, IV, p. 53. In the 1883 edition of Modern Painters Ruskin reflects upon this passage as "the radical theorem, not only of this book, but of all my writings on art."

³¹Works, IV, p. 64.

³²Works, IV, p. 144.

³³Works, IV, p. 64.

³⁴Works, IV, p. 147. Italics are Ruskin's.

³⁵Ladd, pp. 170-183.

³⁶Works, IV, p. 36.

³⁷Works, IV, p. 224.

³⁸The Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, IV, "Lecture VII: Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger" (New York, 1884), p. 256. Parallels between Ruskin's discussion to the imagination and the organic nature of art to this essay and to chapter thirteen of Biographia Literaria are clear despite Ruskin's concept of the fancy, noted below, and his insistence that all previous attempts to define the imagination have been in error. While the two theorists are frequently in agreement, Ladd suggests that Ruskin had not read Coleridge's prose at this time (pp. 205-206).

³⁹Works, IV, pp. 239-240.

⁴⁰Works, IV, p. 251.

⁴¹Works, IV, p. 250.

⁴²Works, IV, p. 252.

⁴³Works, IV, p. 289.

⁴⁴Works, IV, p. 228.

⁴⁵Ladd also notes that Ruskin seems close to commenting on the idealizing function of imagination in his discussion of the contemplative (pp. 215-216).

⁴⁶In an introductory note to the 1883 edition of the volume Ruskin rejected his distinction between fancy and imagination, arguing that "distinctions are scarcely more than varieties of courtesy or dignity in the use of words" (IV, pp. 219-220).

⁴⁷Works, IV, p. 223. Morse Feckam's suggestion that Ruskin's art theory centered on the "innocent eye" as the primary equipment of the painter in recording the world around him must be qualified in terms of Ruskin's statement here (Beyond the Tragic Vision [New York, 1962], pp. 346-347).

⁴⁸Works, IV, pp. 260-262.

⁴⁹Works, VIII, pp. 22-23.

⁵⁰Works, VIII, p. 22.

⁵¹Works, VIII, p. 15.

⁵²Works, VIII, p. 57.

⁵³Works, VIII, p. 58. Ruskin's elaborate description of the process of the imagination and his distinction between imagination and fancy in Modern Painters II have little application in this volume. Reflecting on the passage quoted above, he asserts in 1880, "A dream is as real a fact, as a vision of reality: deceptive only if we do not recognize it as a dream."

⁵⁴Works, VIII, p. 102.

⁵⁵Works, VIII, pp. 39-40. Scholarship has not yet considered the parallels between Ruskin's ideas in this volume and those of Henry Adams in Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres and The Education of Henry Adams. One point of departure might be to consider the central adoration both associate with the age of the great cathedrals as contrasted with the very different orientation of the nineteenth-century mind.

⁵⁶Works, VIII, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁷Works, VIII, p. 253.

⁵⁸Works, VIII, p. 214.

⁵⁹Works, VIII, p. 218.

⁶⁰Works, IX, p. 14.

⁶¹Works, IX, p. 14.

⁶²Works, IX, pp. 68-69.

⁶³Works, IX, p. 71.

⁶⁴Works, IX, pp. 71-72.

⁶⁵Ruskin's adherence to the concept of the Great Chain of Being, explicit here, is suggested in much of his thought. Arthur O. Lovejoy (The Great Chain of Being. A Study in the History of an Idea /Cambridge, Mass., 1936/) does not mention Ruskin, nor has this important aspect of Ruskin's world view been discussed by other scholars.

⁶⁶Works, IX, p. 72.

⁶⁷The city itself, Ruskin suggests, has potential beauty if "its art and architecture are right" (IX, p. 411). In his rejection of fiction centered on the Victorian city, it is clear that the requisite "rightness" was not found.

⁶⁸Works, IX, p. 264.

⁶⁹Works, IX, pp. 409-410.

⁷⁰The classifications of Venetian architecture are made by Ruskin.

⁷¹This and his discussion of the pathetic fallacy in Modern Painters III reveal significant aesthetic principles of common knowledge to students of Victorian literature.

⁷²Works, X, p. 203.

⁷³Works, X, p. 225.

⁷⁴Works, V, pp. 111-119.

⁷⁵Works, X, pp. 226-227.

⁷⁶Works, XI, p. 48.

⁷⁷Works, XI, p. 49.

⁷⁸Works, XI, p. 53.

⁷⁹Ruskin's lack of respect for philosophic writings has already been noted, but his full reasoning for the attitude is stated here: "Thus philology, logic, rhetoric, and the other sciences of the schools, being for the most part ridiculous and trifling, have so pestilent an effect upon those who are devoted to them, that their students cannot conceive any higher sciences than these, but fancy that all education ends in the knowledge of words: but the true and great sciences, more especially natural history, make men gentle and modest in proportion to the largeness of their apprehension" (XI, p. 68).

⁸⁰Works, XI, p. 201.

⁸¹Works, XXIX, pp. 317-318. This comment from Fors Clavigera (1878) is discussed more fully in the later discussion of Ruskin's criticism of the novel.

⁸²Ruskin's editors note that after ten years away from Modern Painters, Ruskin intended to complete it in one volume. In 1860, after three additional volumes and pressure from his father, Modern Painters was ended rather than completed (V, p. li; VII, pp. lv-lvi).

⁸³The point here is that there is a relative difference in descriptive passages, not that Ruskin turns away from nature totally. All changes in Ruskin's thinking occur gradually over an extended period of time.

⁸⁴Herbert Sussman, "Hunt, Ruskin, and 'The Scapegoat,'" Victorian Studies, XII (September 1968), 87.

⁸⁵Works, V, p. 42.

⁸⁶Works, V, pp. 42-43.

⁸⁷A mathematical process, for example, may be true but, because it is not visible, have no beauty. A flower may be beautiful, but it is not true or false since it expresses no statement (Works, V, p. 55).

⁸⁸Works, V, p. 56.

⁸⁹Works, V, p. 220.

⁹⁰Charles T. Dougherty ("Ruskin's Moral Argument") argues that the entire moral context of Ruskin's aesthetic rests on the necessity of "feeling" which Dougherty defines as the artist's "love" for his subject. This essential love, neither sensually nor intellectually comprehensible, is reflective of the "other-regarding" relationship of artist to subject, a moral relationship.

⁹¹Works, VIII, p. xl.

⁹²Works, VII, p. 463.

⁹³Works, VII, p. 455.

⁹⁴Works, XVII, p. 31.

⁹⁵Works, VII, p. 9. In his inaugural address before the Cambridge School of Art Ruskin's apparent pride in inconsistency is less intellectually justified: "I am never satisfied that I have handled a subject properly till I have contradicted myself at least three times."

CHAPTER III

RUSKIN AND FICTION

As was noted early in this essay, Ruskin had an intensive, if unsystematic, contact with literature from early childhood. He was influenced to read and to write almost from infancy by a mother who had dedicated him before birth to the service of God and a father who saw in young John's first scribblings genius comparable to that of his own favorite poet, Lord Byron. Defoe, Bunyan, Scott, Wordsworth, Byron, and the Bible were a dominant part of his youth, although his early literary contact includes major figures from Spenser and Shakespeare to contemporary Romantic poets and novelists. He was able to read and write at the age of four and was paid by his parents for literary efforts, both in prose and verse.¹ In 1830, then eleven years old, he recorded a visit to the Lake District in the "Iteriad," a rhyming poem of more than two thousand lines. When the father in a letter to James Hogg in 1834 proudly wrote that his son had produced "thousands of lines," there was no exaggeration. In prose Ruskin's beginnings were less impressive, perhaps because his father favored verse, but there were several attempts at short fiction. Two stories, "Leoni; A Legend of Italy" (1836) and "The King of the Golden River" (1841), have been published; they are imitative,

heavily moralized sketches, neither of which suggests that Ruskin's talent lay in imaginative storytelling.

While he did not fulfill the initial desires of either parent, Ruskin's early and continuous contact with literature is reflected in direct statements and allusions throughout his long career as critic of art and society. His first essay which can be considered explicit literary criticism was written for his tutor Reverend Thomas Dale in 1836.² In response to the topic, "Does the perusal of works of fiction act favorably on the moral character?" Ruskin develops a discussion of his own favorite authors, Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, and Bulwer.³ While no direct definition of the term fiction is offered, he does provide detailed comment on the proper functions of literature, particularly of the novel. Using Scott's novels as ideal examples, Ruskin asserts that fiction can have three positive effects on the mind. The reader's involvement with scene and character and the feelings of love and benevolence which emerge from that involvement have a humanizing influence. The sympathetic responses of the reader purify his sense of himself, help him to put aside self and to see with benevolence the world around him. Secondly, the reader is carried by an author's "transcendent and infinitely superior intellect" to knowledge of the world by being shown "an infinite variety of scenes and circumstances."⁴ Such knowledge cultivates,

polishes, and refines the reader in addition to broadening his intellect through the range of ideas presented. Finally, in the greatest authors the moral feelings of the reader are improved. Using Scott's fiction to illustrate, Ruskin defines this "moral tendency" as punishment of guilt, reward of virtue, and characterization of women as most exemplary when most prudent. He notes that such treatment of women may lead to less interesting and natural works but ultimately to more morally effective writing.

Ruskin suggests that objection to fiction as injurious and immoral rests primarily on the distorted premise that "whatever is amusing must be criminal; that a grave countenance and severe demeanour are the true signs of sanctity of mind and consequent morality of conduct; that austerity is the companion of innocence, and gloom, of religion."⁵ He is willing to admit the possibility that excessive contact with works of fiction may lead to an unnatural urge for excitement or a "morbid state of mind" but insists that moderate reading is beneficial to both intellectual powers and morality. The young writer's apparent "liberalism" here should not be overemphasized. The tract to which Ruskin's essay is probably a response was extremely Puritanical, too extreme even for Reverend Dale in its attempt to sweep Byron, Moore, Hume, Paine, Scott, Bulwer, and Cooper "from the libraries of all virtuous men."⁶ His enthusiasm for both

prose and poetry in his defense of fictional literature is always a defense of its moral values. That fiction which he considers trite, centered upon false sentiment, is passed over as unworthy of comment, and he makes no comment whatsoever about fiction of topical relevance, that "realistic" writing he was later to abhor. The essay does, however, provide evidence that Ruskin accepted early the premise which pervades Modern Painters and later writings, that beauty has a basis in truth and must always be understood in a moral context.

The most explicit definition of fiction proposed by Ruskin appears in the fifth of a series of essays, Fiction, Fair and Foul,⁷ written in 1881, forty-five years after the "Essay on Literature." The definition is stated in terms of a Greek vase, a "symbol of fair fiction," "the best type of it being the most fictile":

A thing which has two sides to be seen, two handles to be carried by, and a bottom to stand on, and a top to be poured out of, this, every right fiction is, whatever else it may be. Planned rigorously, rounded smoothly, balanced symmetrically, handled handily, lipped softly for pouring out oil and wine. Painted daintily at last with images of eternal things--

"For ever shalt thou love, and she be fair."⁸

He explains the definition in terms more literally related to literature in following passages, and, since the essay centers upon the novel as a dominant fictional form, Ruskin's explanation is primarily related to that type of prose fiction.⁹ The creator of "fair fiction" has total control over

form, "not a stone useless, not a word nor an incident thrown away," and the world of the story moves with "unfelt swiftness," with no sense of falsity or contrivance. Moral balance should be achieved, with proper division of good and evil, not simply the endless recording of either good or evil. The finished work is totally comprehensible by the reader in its structure and content, always illustrating the "kindness and comfort" Ruskin finds in Keats' line.

As early as the third volume of Modern Painters Ruskin insists that full life demands seriousness of pursuit. If senseless fiction, that which depends upon "the prolongation from age to age of romantic historical deceptions instead of sifted truth," is man's source of pleasure, he will lose sight of the reality of the world around him.¹⁰ A literary work, just as any other object of art, has value only so long as it does not mislead the observer concerning the nature of reality itself. Consistent with this principle Ruskin has disdain for all fiction which makes use of traditional pastoral subject material and language. In somewhat the same tone as Dr. Johnson's comments on Lycidas, Ruskin asserts that such usage "for the most part corresponds in its aim and rank, as compared with other literature, to the porcelain shepherds and shepherdesses on a chimney-piece as compared with great works of sculpture."¹¹ "True pastoral," he argues, does not depend on brooks "purling," birds

"warbling," and mountains that "lift their horrid peaks above the clouds"; his objection is against those fixed ideas about external nature which keep man from seeing what is before him. Ruskin finds only two works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which merit even qualified praise for proper treatment of subject material, The Compleat Angler and The Vicar of Wakefield. In these works there is a notable sense of sympathy or feeling, but only as related to nature as a "series of green fields"; there is no evidence of response to the uncommon and the sublime.

Ruskin's position is more than a brief affirmation of the preference for particularity frequently identified with nineteenth-century Romanticism. His essential contention from Modern Painters I throughout his works is that through imagination the artist sees, reveals, and records truth (in Modern Painters II by means of the associative, penetrative, and contemplative functions of the imagination); any art which deceives the observer concerning truth is false. A literature which presents a farmer's daughter as a "nymph" or his son as a "swain" is untrue. Ruskin's attention here is more directly on the artist's ability and willingness to see and feel than it is on the debate over particularity or universality as the proper guide in his choice of subject material. The discussion of the pathetic fallacy in Modern

Painters III suggests a dominant principle here in the central idea that the greatest poetry reflects feeling consistent with truth.

Prose fiction in its highest form, like great poetry, is produced by men of feeling or sentiment. A writer who sees clearly but without feeling may produce a truthful statement, but he will not create noble art. The work of such a writer, in Ruskin's judgment, will reflect a lack of imaginative power. Through Voltaire's prose and poetry, for example, can be seen "a man whose head was as destitute of imaginative power as it is possible for the healthy cerebral organization of a highly developed mammalian to be," but, Ruskin argues, "Voltaire's wit, and reasoning faculties, are nearly as strong as his imagination is weak."¹² Voltaire's indignation against injustice is praiseworthy, and is even based on pathetic motives, but the writer has not the imaginative faculties to understand or reveal those motives. Ruskin praises Candide for its acute reasoning while condemning its "entire vacuity of imagination." He argues that the imaginative power purifies while lack of it defiles; thus, Ruskin finds in Voltaire, and in Pope and Horace as well, a "foulness of thought" which taints their work for all its illustration of brilliant rational power. This taint can be found in all but those writers whose "colossal powers of imagination result in absolute virginal purity of

thought," Pindar, Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Scott. Others-- Aristophanes, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Fielding-- occasionally reveal the unsympathetic or unimaginative in their writings, but in their most noble work "throw off" this aspect of their nature.¹³

The imaginative power which permits expression of feeling must, of course, be truthful. As would be expected from Ruskin's comments on the falsity of "pastoral" literature, he rejects all literary usage which only affects feeling. The nature of false sentiment is vividly illustrated by a brief scene in which:

elegant lawyers' clerks, who, having obtained a fortnight's leave of absence, are brought down per steamer to Edinburgh, and then, the Lady of the Lake in their pocket and a new silk umbrella in their hand, perambulate, with open mouth and upturned eyes, the "hateful shoeblimities" of the Scotch Highlands.¹⁴

Such a scene, or one in which young men read "Romeo and Juliet," do the despairing lover, and get the colic," does not reflect true feeling in the writer. This sort of vacuity of both truth and sentiment Ruskin seldom discusses except in the most brief and passing manner. He suggests that such novels should not be the sole reading of the young lady, "heaped up in her lap as they fall out of the package of the circulating library," but he argues that "the worst romance is not so corrupting as false history, false philosophy, or false political essays."¹⁵ The primary danger Ruskin sees in any fictional work is the possibility that

it may make life seem uninteresting and increase the reader's appetite for scenes and events unrelated to his actual life.

It is clear from Ruskin's emphasis upon truth as well as sentiment that he credits the novel with a potentially serious function aside from direct entertainment. Arguing the necessity of controlling shadow in architecture in The Seven Lamps of Architecture, he illustrates by shifting to a discussion of literature. He asserts that works of art which have use and influence in man's lives express a measure of human sympathy by reflecting darkness "as great as there is in human life," and that:

the great poem and great fiction generally affect us most by the majesty of their masses of shade, and cannot take hold upon us if they affect a continuance of lyric sprightliness, but must be often serious, and sometimes melancholy, else they do not express the truth of this wild world of ours.¹⁶

In later statements Ruskin moves beyond this note that significant fiction must be serious, as life itself is serious, to a direct appeal for didactic literature. As he became disillusioned with the reportorial nature of the contemporary novel in the 1870's and 1880's, the desire for a fiction which teaches "the difference between finite and infinite knowledge, of certain laws of moral retribution," is more evident.¹⁷ The subjects of such stories, Ruskin suggests, should be from common life rather than from high station so as to provide examples within the sight and events within the experience of the reader.

Despite his rather explicit concept of fiction and opinions concerning the subject material proper to it, Ruskin gives little advice related to the educative values of the novel or even to which books should be read by the young. Advising art students on proper reading material, only magazines and review literature are explicitly forbidden.¹⁸ Richardson, Scott, and Miss Edgeworth are suggested as worthy novelists, but the weight of choice is left on the student who is told, "If you don't like the first book you try, seek for another." Ruskin does insist that time and diligence must be given to reading, and he warns his students to center their attention, not on plot, but on acquaintance with the characters, the "pleasant people," the writer creates. In another context, discussing the education of young ladies, Ruskin asserts that even the best fiction has little likelihood of greatly influencing its reader:

The utmost they [novels] usually do is to enlarge somewhat the charity of a kind reader, or the bitterness of a malicious one; for each will gather, from the novel, food for her own disposition. Those who are naturally proud and envious will learn from Thackeray to dispise humanity; those who are naturally gentle, to pity it; those who are naturally shallow, to laugh at it.¹⁹

Thus, even in his call for a didactic fiction, there is no confidence that the reader will be greatly influenced by any single novel. If entertainment is the sole motive for reading, then the moral truth of a work is not likely to move the reader, and if the individual is conditioned, for

example, by the problems of life in an industrial city, he will not be able to see or respond to a truthful representation of rural life in fiction.

The position here is close to the principle stated and restated in Modern Painters, that the effectiveness of all art depends on the observer's ability to see clearly. Viewers, Ruskin argues, misunderstand Turner's representation of landscape because they have been conditioned by seeing false art rather than by studying external nature itself and letting themselves respond to those ideas of beauty painting can express. By the 1870's and 1880's, when most of his comment on fiction is written, Ruskin is less confident that man can easily be re-educated in a society which he sees as diseased; as a result, his appeal for a fiction of moral truth is made without confidence that such literature will be understood.

If his hope for the effectiveness of fiction is weak, his faith in the great artist to produce despite all adversity is strong. Chastising the false values of contemporary society in Fors Clavigera, a long series of public letters, Ruskin asserts:

There are a few, a very few persons born in each generation, whose words are worth hearing, whose art is worth seeing. These born few will preach, or sing, or paint, in spite of you; they will starve like grasshoppers, rather than stop singing; and even if you don't choose to listen, it is charitable to throw them a few crumbs to keep them alive.²⁰

He goes on to attack all who write only for profit or to

be genteel, saying that such are "more contemptible than common beggars." Noble literature is created out of "love and truth," a condition of the artist which a perceptive viewer can see reflected in the work of art. Ultimately the writer, in his total commitment to his art, carries out a mythic function. Ruskin defines the novel as myth in the same sense that some Greek literature is myth; the common element is "moral purpose." This purpose, "partly beyond the consciousness of the storyteller himself," establishes the novel as existing within an archetypal context.²¹ The point is not developed further in specific terms of the novel, but the simple assertion suggests the importance Ruskin places on the writer's function in the full sweep of human history.

The specific responses Ruskin makes to the novel are frequently stated in subjective terms; he had a long and personal contact with the genre, but his opinions and attitudes are in the main consistent with the points outlined above. In reviewing his criticism of particular novels and novelists, it is convenient to consider three general areas of response. Much of his judgment of fiction is in biographical and historical terms, derived from the implicit assumption that fiction emerges out of the general cultural and direct physical experiences of the author. Secondly, the moral truth of individual works of fiction is an

everpresent topic for investigation by Ruskin. Finally, he attacks all literature which he considers tainted by the unhealthy social and moral conditions of the Victorian world. These areas of discussion are clearly interrelated; there are few topics in the entire body of Ruskin's work which are totally isolated. These are, however, dominant areas which can illustrate an aspect of consistency in the multitude of references to the novel throughout his writings.

FOOTNOTES

¹Works, I, p. xxvi. A reader interested in Ruskin's first efforts in verse and prose should refer to the first two volumes of the Library Edition. While they do not establish young Ruskin as a potential Lord Byron, the vocabulary and digressive tendency of the child foreshadow his later work, as does the sheer volume he produced.

²Works, I, pp. 357-375.

³Apparently the enthusiasm for Bulwer (Bulwer-Lytton after 1843) waned; aside from one passing mention of him in a letter in 1840, there are no other references in Ruskin's works.

⁴Works, I, pp. 365-366.

⁵Works, I, p. 358.

⁶Works, I, pp. 357-358. Ruskin's editors conclude that the "Essay on Literature" is a response to Reverend John Todd's The Student's Guide. Dale had issued an edition of Todd's popular tract in 1836, although his granddaughter has argued that he was not in full agreement with Todd, an American divine.

⁷Works, XXXIV, pp. 265-394.

⁸Works, XXXIV, p. 370. The highly figurative manner of this definition is typical of Ruskin's later prose. His misquotation of Keats is also typical, since he generally quoted from memory.

⁹While Ruskin occasionally refers to types of prose fiction other than the novel, to short stories for example, his references to novels are overwhelmingly dominant. The occasional implicit equating of the terms novel and prose fiction is a matter of convenience in this particular study, not a failure to distinguish between the terms when such distinction is relevant.

¹⁰Works, V, p. 100.

¹¹Works, XII, pp. 118-119.

¹²Works, XXXIV, pp. 629-630.

¹³Works, XXXIV, pp. 630-631.

¹⁴Works, I, p. 369.

¹⁵Works, XVIII, p. 129.

¹⁶Works, VIII, p. 116.

¹⁷Works, XXXII, p. 5.

¹⁸Works, XV, pp. 226-228.

¹⁹Works, XVIII, p. 130. Ruskin's position here is close to that of Milton in Areopagitica.

²⁰Works, XXVIII, p. 646.

²¹Works, XXIX, p. 588. Harold Bloom in his introduction to The Literary Criticism of John Ruskin, cited earlier, sees a dominant archetypal function in Ruskin's several essays on Greek mythology.

CHAPTER IV

RUSKIN'S LITERARY CRITICISM

The general directions of Ruskin's literary criticism can be anticipated even from the brief summaries of aesthetic principles and attitudes toward fiction that have been provided. Truth and sentiment, a measure of the quality of the creator's imagination, are the essentials of all art. For those whose sight is not distorted, the object of art is a mirror in which the physical and moral conditions of both artist and society are reflected. The greatest art emerges from an artist whose vision is clear, who intuitively achieves the proper balance of truth and feeling, whose life is aesthetically "right." Because for Ruskin environment has an overwhelming power over all but the most noble men, and a considerable influence even on them, great art will rarely emerge from a society that is not itself aesthetically "right." Thus his literary criticism is frequently allied to biographical and social comment. An art which deceives its audience as to the nature of truth is not moral, just as art produced by a man of weak imagination cannot be beautiful. The frequently quoted aphorism, "All great art is praise,"¹ is centrally an affirmation of the potential of great art to achieve moral beauty.

The majority of Ruskin's criticism of prose fiction

appears in two works, Fiction, Fair and Foul and Fors Clavigera. The former, published in the periodical Nineteenth Century, appeared between June 1880 and October 1881. The five essays of Fiction, Fair and Foul touch on many literary figures, both poets and novelists, but the majority of space is given to discussion of nineteenth-century novelists.² The latter, a series of "Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain," includes ninety-six separate essays written between January 1871 and December 1884.³ In ten of these essays Ruskin provides explicit discussion of either novelists or their works. Most of these references are to Sir Walter Scott, to his life and his work. While there are comments about literature from the first volume of Modern Painters throughout his writings, it should be noted that these two principal works appear from ten to twenty-five years after Modern Painters V, the final volume in which Ruskin is generally thought to be primarily concerned with the aesthetics of art. The dominant principle of his writings after 1860 centers upon what might be called an aesthetic of life, suggested by the aphorism, "There is no wealth but life."⁴ The later criticism of fiction, as might be expected, reflects this relative shift in orientation.

The Moral Function of the Novel

The moral beauty which Ruskin sees as the essence of all great art has been discussed previously in aesthetic terms. In specific criticism of the novel he notes the source of the creative impulse, the immediate physical qualities of moral art, its possible didactic purpose, and the potential effectiveness of that didacticism. Ruskin asserts on several occasions that great artists create intuitively, that they cannot explain the total artistic process, and that no critic can reduce the object of art to a systematic pattern of rules. Walter Scott, for Ruskin the greatest of modern novelists, produced his best works without significant conscious effort, working only a few hours each day. His novels provide proof that "if a great thing can be done at all, it can be done easily."⁵ This ideal process of creation results in an art expressive of universal or divine truth, the artist being an instrument for such expression. Ruskin writes of the Iliad, the Inferno, Pilgrim's Progress, and the Faerie Queene as "true dreams," and he defines those dreams as coming to men in the "deep, living sleep which God sends, . . . the revealer of secrets."⁶ The highest levels of moral beauty are achieved, then, by that artist whose sense of truth and whose imagination are harmonious with divine or universal truth and beauty.

The vast majority of artistic effort does not achieve such moral beauty, and Ruskin quite reasonably centers his literary criticism on those works which are less than ideal. He praises novels that provide either implicit or explicit moral principles, provided those principles are not presented in a "moralizing" or sentimental manner. In Scott's treatment of love and marriage Ruskin finds an exemplary presentation of calm, resolution, chastity, and courage. Scott's characters reveal a moral structure in which they would be "embarrassed by the consequences of their levity or imprudence." Marriage is not the sole business of existence, nor is love the only reward of virtue.⁷ The prudence Scott's characters express, Diana Vernon in Rob Roy and Jeanie Deans in Heart of Midlothian especially, Ruskin praises as illustrative of an honorable morality generally absent in lesser fiction. The centering of a story on love and marriage also leads to abandonment of the grander designs of human experience and, thus, to a loss of artistic perspective.⁸ The two great moral principles illustrated in Scott's novels are **truth and courage**, Ruskin asserts. To Scott they are inseparable qualities.⁹ Ruskin thinks it a weakness that "animal courage" is frequently the basis of all other virtue in Scott, but he praises the refusal of the novelist to show mercy for a coward. A lengthy discussion of Andrew Fairservice and Richie Moniplies,

characters in Rob Roy and The Fortunes of Nigel respectively, is developed to illustrate the truth and courage which are central to Scott's fiction. In Fairservice, "driven out at the kitchen door," and Moniplies, rising in rank and power, winning a wife in battle, Ruskin finds Scott's consistent and praiseworthy treatment of courage.¹⁰

Using the same two characters to illustrate, Ruskin discusses the basic religious code he finds in Scott's fiction. Both figures emerge from a Presbyterian environment, but Fairservice's "scornfully exclusive dogmatism, which is indeed the distinctive plague-spot of the lower evangelical sect everywhere" is absent in Richie Moniplies.¹¹ Ruskin asserts that Scott presents in Moniplies a high level of religious morality. The character is little associated with the dogma of Presbyterianism:

In Richie, it has little to do; his conscience being, in the deep of it, frank and clear. His religion commands him nothing which he is not at once ready to do, or has not habitually done; and it forbids him nothing which he is unwilling to forego. He pleads no pardon from it for known faults; he seeks no evasions in the letter of it for violations of its spirit. We are scarcely therefore aware of its vital power in him, unless at moments of very grave feeling and its necessary expression. . . .¹²

Moniplies is neither an independent nor a non-conformist; he is orthodox in the full sense of his religion, lacking any mark of hypocrisy. Using these two figures as typical, Ruskin suggests that in characters throughout his works Scott asserts a distinctly religious morality of faith,

submission, affection, and comfort without severity and resignation.

Arguing that the moral purpose of the whole of Scott's fiction is inseparably related to study of the effects of true and false religion on conduct, Ruskin arranges significant figures in five groups. The lowest rank of characters includes those who hold to the general truths of evangelicalism but transfer those truths to their own passions and by this process can justify any crime or violence. The second group consists of believers who restrain themselves from crime and violence but are not capable of overcoming self-interest and small temptations. The third order is of those naturally just and honest characters whose excessive pride often makes them censorious and tiresome. The fourth rank includes that class of figures whose enthusiasm, particularly when directed toward missionary effort, often leads to martyrdom. The fifth and highest rank of characters in Scott's fiction consists of those who are "always gentle, entirely firm, the comfort and strength of all around them; merciful to every human fault, and submissive without anger to every human oppression."¹³ From this rather elaborate classification it is clear that Ruskin values Scott primarily for the principles of conduct established through characterization. Much of Ruskin's comment on the novel is, in fact, character study; discussion of

plot and other aspects of the genre is frequently directed toward establishing a point related to character development. Scott's novels are significant because they offer patterns of conduct truthfully and with sentiment.

One weakness Ruskin finds in Maria Edgeworth's fiction is a failure to develop characters fully, to provide details which will make it possible for the reader to have a sense of familiarity with each figure in a story. He suggests that this occurs in her fiction because of her concern with morality to such an extent that she frequently loses sight of setting, plot, and character.¹⁴ In the early "Essay on Literature" the didactic aspect of her work was dismissed as "the decidedly and professedly moral fictions of the Edgeworth and Sherwood school."¹⁵ Ruskin's most pointed attack on Maria Edgeworth, however, is directed, not at excessive moralizing, but at the moral or philosophical system itself which she accepts. He argues that the stoicism expressed in Dr. Johnson's "The Vanity of Human Wishes" was acceptable to eighteenth-century figures but has no place in nineteenth-century thought. Miss Edgeworth, he asserts, is one of the many who stoically accept the "glorious discovery of the civilized age," and even go so far as to proclaim its arrival triumphantly "with bray of penny trumpets and blowing of steam-whistles."¹⁶ This implicit acceptance of utilitarianism is rejected by Ruskin as false; it weakens

the potential moral power of her fiction.

Ruskin is consistent in his refusal to accept sentimentality in fiction, of which he considers Maria Edgeworth's treatment of morality but one form. He particularly attacks excessive concern with emotion itself:

the mass of sentimental literature, concerned with the analysis and description of emotion . . . is altogether of lower rank than the literature which merely describes what it saw. . . . And, generally speaking, pathetic writing and careful explanation of passion are quite easy, compared with this plain recording of what people said and did, or with the right invention of what they are likely to say and do; for this reason, that to invent a story, or admirably and thoroughly tell any part of a story, it is necessary to grasp the entire mind of every personage concerned in it, and know precisely how they would be affected by what happens; which to do requires a colossal intellect. . . .¹⁷

The flaw in the writer who produces sentimental fiction is, then, the inability or unwillingness to see, imagine, and record truthfully. There is a distortion of truth as well as feeling in such literature which relegates it to an inferior position, just as Claude's landscapes are inferior to those of Turner, because they are untrue. Ruskin's suggestion that Charles Kingsley's novels be removed from Sir John Lubbock's "List of the Best Hundred Books" is based on this principle; Kingsley's novels are false because, "People who buy cheap clothes are not punished in real life by catching fevers; social inequalities are not to be redressed by tailors falling in love with bishops' daughters, or gamekeepers with squires'. . . ."¹⁸

Sentimentality frequently occurs when an author feels compelled to follow the tastes of his audience. Public desire leads an otherwise superior author into unmotivated and unjustified dwelling on sickness and violence. Ruskin illustrates his point by noting that little Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop "was simply killed for the market, as a butcher kills a lamb."¹⁹ He similarly finds passages in Scott inferior because they are colored to be acceptable to the audience or arbitrarily expanded to lengthen the total work. Unlike Dickens, however, Scott never dwells upon the pathos of the sickroom in order to record the last syllables of the suffering patient. The low point in literary "anatomical preparations for the general market" is Wilkie Collins' Poor Miss Finch, a novel in which "the heroine is blind, the hero epileptic, and the obnoxious brother is found dead with his hands dropped off, in the Arctic regions."²⁰ In the novels of his own day, Ruskin notes, such exploitation of emotion is common; truthful and imaginative presentation is the exception.²¹

Ruskin states with absolute certainty that all great art, "every great piece of painting or literature--without any exception, from the birth of Man to this hour--is an assertion of moral law, as strict, when we examine it, as the Eumenides or the Divina Commedia."²² The specific design of great fiction must be such as to assert visible

justice; the presentation of "good and gentle persons in unredeemed distress or destruction" may be interesting, but it will not convey moral power. Catastrophe should have a clear cause in the violation of moral law, even when it admits the ultimate mystery of human fate. Rejecting Balzac and George Sand as "good novelists" but incapable of noble moral design, Ruskin turns again to Scott, with particular reference to Heart of Midlothian. This novel is credited in two instances as the greatest of Scott's works, here for the proper expression of moral law.²³ Reward and punishment derive explicitly from the virtues and vices of the major characters. Jeanie Deans' "absolute truth and faith" make it proper that whatever suffering she must endure ultimately leads to a prosperous and peaceful life for herself. By the same reasoning the falsehood and vanity of her sister Effie and the pride of their father David Deans lead properly to familial separation and humiliation. No victory or defeat in this novel, Ruskin suggests, is unrelated to the basic design, that moral cause-effect pattern which is the essence of great fiction.

Although Ruskin occasionally praises didacticism, he is not convinced of the effectiveness of didactic literature on human conduct. He distinguishes Oliver Twist as Dickens' greatest novel primarily because it "is an earnest and uncaricatured record of states of criminal life, written

with didactic purpose, full of the gravest instruction."²⁴ Similarly he suggests in a fictitious conversation with a group of young girls in The Ethics of the Dust that they read Miss Edgeworth's novels because there is "no one who tells you more truly how to do right." As in other references to Edgeworth, however, he notes that while "her examples of conduct and motive are wholly admirable," her "representation of events is false and misleading," because the balanced patterns of great literature are absent.²⁵ The assumption of the didactic writer that "noble training and right principle can always give the power of self-command" is not fully acceptable to Ruskin.²⁶ While he can admire didacticism, he admits uncertainty that education derived from such material has great influence. Ruskin suggests that Shakespeare's emphasis on passion as the dominant principle in Miranda's character is worthy of consideration also, and that although the rule of passion is by no means noble, it should not be discounted.

Ruskin credits fiction, however, with influencing his own life. In Praeterita, an incomplete autobiography, he credits Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison with having a "greater practical effect on me for good" than any other single work.²⁷ For that effect Richardson's novel is placed above all others Ruskin has read. In a similar manner he praises the "imaginative teaching" of Defoe and Bunyan, the

earliest fictional influences on his life.²⁸ More specifically, Ruskin notes that his own literary style and even his view of external nature have been influenced by literature. He relates the shaping of the former directly to having Johnson, Goldsmith, and Richardson constantly read to him as a child.²⁹ His comments on the latter are consistent with the assertions in Modern Painters that man sees what he is conditioned to see. The reading of Maria Edgeworth's stories, with their descriptions of external nature, gave "an almost romantic and visionary charm to mineralogy" for young Ruskin traveling through Scotland and on the Continent with his parents.³⁰ He acknowledges that he was much influenced in what he saw by frequent contact with her works.

Ruskin is more convinced of the influence of fiction on himself than he is of its effectiveness in society in general. He argues that Bunyan's prose, along with Paradise Lost, "formed the English Puritan mind,"³¹ but this is the only example of influential fiction he gives. In another instance, discussing the English court system, he cites Dickens, but only on hearsay, noting that he "wrote with a definitely reforming purpose, seemingly; and, I have heard, had real effects on Chancery practice."³² Four years earlier, however, writing in 1870 soon after Dickens' death, Ruskin says that his novels had no influence, that

their finest points are undiscovered by the reading public, although Dickens' "liberalism" may have been attractive to his audience.³³ Ruskin is certain of the potential of the great writer to influence his audience, but he finds little evidence of that potential being developed in his own society. In 1873, reviewing the literary careers of Miss Edgeworth, Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, he is unable to discover "what essential good has been effected by them, though they all had the best intentions."³⁴ Scott and Edgeworth are ironically credited with influence for good, "because nobody now will read them," but in general society is changed in no positive way by their fiction.

Scott is praised at length for the "good . . . he has in him to do," even though Ruskin greatly doubts whether the novelist has had any observable influence on his audience. The potential of his fiction centers upon his sense of honor in men and women, "his conception of purity in woman" which Ruskin asserts is higher than Dante's, "his reverence for the filial relation" which may be compared to Virgil's, and his universal sympathy.³⁵ Ruskin argues that if an individual reader approaches fiction seriously, with a desire to learn, he can gain much from it. Advising a student to read Waverley rather than more complex works, Ruskin's instructions clearly define the didactic possibilities he credits to the novel:

Read your Waverley, I repeat, with extreme care: and of every important person in the story, consider first what the virtues are; then what the faults inevitable to them by nature and breeding; then what the faults they might have avoided; then what the results to them of their faults and virtues, under the appointment of fate.

Do this after reading each chapter; and write down the lessons which it seems to you that Scott intended in it; and what he means you to admire, what to despise.³⁶

The clear implication of Ruskin's comments on the effectiveness on fiction in the nineteenth century is that few will read with this essential diligence, and, as a result, the moral potential of the great writer will be unrealized. Didacticism itself is acceptable in the novel if it is not so excessive as to unbalance the relationship of truth and feeling necessary to great art. Emphasis on emotion leads to a similar loss of balance, a condition of sentimentality which weakens the total work. Recognizing the potential positive influence of literature on society, Ruskin nevertheless finds nothing in his culture comparable to the influence of literature on his own life. The implied conclusion of his comments on fiction is that art does not shape society. Unless the reader is receptive and committed to the structures presented by the writer, literature can only entertain, a function which is, in its escapism, ignoble.

The Historical and Biographical Context of the Novel

If Ruskin is convinced that society is not shaped by

art, he is also certain of the overwhelming influence of environment on the formation and development of literature. The structure, characterization, morality, and even dialect patterns of individual novels he traces to sources in cultural history and in the personal experience of the writer. much of what can generally be classified as Ruskin's literary criticism is, in fact, historical and biographical survey. He goes beyond the premise that historical and biographical knowledge creates a context which broadens one's response to fiction to the implicit position that such knowledge is essential to proper understanding of a literary work. He argues, for example, that the false pastoralism of eighteenth-century literature, noted in the previous chapter, was dictated by the mores of English society, and he credits orientation toward concern for "actual" external nature in part to the French Revolution.³⁷ The large body of comment on Sir Walter Scott and his novels centers in study of Scott's ancestry, his personal experiences, and the immediate cultural patterns, particularly religious, of Scotland. Scott, as has been noted, was Ruskin's favorite novelist, and it is not unusual that in discussing his work Ruskin gives much more attention to these issues than he does with other writers.

Ruskin asserts that Scott's sense of honor, that quality evident in his fiction, was inbred. Study of his

ancestry can elucidate the "subtlety of design" in his poetry and prose by revealing the history which filled his mind. In order to illustrate these two points Ruskin traces Scott's lineage from Wat of Harden, a sixteenth-century figure, through six generations.³⁸ He relates a rescue by Wat of Harden's wife of an English child from her husband's men, noting a traditional belief that the child grew up to become a creator of Scottish border songs. Noting Sir Walter's yearly pilgrimage to visit the place from which the name Harden is derived, Ruskin concludes that he drew the central theme of his poem "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" from this ancestor's history. Wat of Harden was a marauder whose primary source of income was derived from theft of livestock. Ruskin argues, however, that in sixteenth-century Scotland, "open thieving had no dishonesty in it what . . . ever."³⁹ He places such a "profession" next to farming as the most honorable means of getting a living, far above law, the ministry, writing, painting, and other means of livelihood which generally owe their success to pleasing the public.

The honor, dignity, and purity of each of Scott's forebears is illustrated to suggest the source of those qualities in Sir Walter and in his works. In addition, specific events in the ancestors' lives, Ruskin asserts, are reproduced in his fiction. In Wat of Harden's son,

Sir William, Ruskin finds the strong religious faith and passion of Scotland. After relating the story of Sir William's marriage, he recounts how, when it was discovered that his son Walter and the son's wife had been converted to the Quaker faith, the father obtained an order from the Privy Council of Scotland to imprison both and take their children from them.⁴⁰ The children were, by this separation and education under their grandfather's eye, "cured of Quakerism," the youngest, Walter Scott, Tutor of Raeburn, becoming a lifelong supporter of the Stuart cause and founder of a Jacobite club in Edinburgh. Ruskin asserts that the late novel Redgauntlet is evidence of the importance Scott's mind gave to this complex history.

With Sir Walter's grandfather there is a shift from cattle thieving to cattle dealing, and in this Ruskin sees the family move into essentially modern society. He insists, however, that a stubborn honesty, "inherited from his race," dominated Robert Scott as it had every member of the family.⁴¹ In the grandfather's rash investment of his profits, Ruskin finds the germ of Sir Walter's own financial difficulties. Direct relations between Sir Walter Scott and other members of the family are discussed both to establish moral and religious principles and to suggest biographical influences on characterization in Scott's novels. It is clear, however, that Ruskin frequently becomes interested in biography and

history for its own sake and digresses into anecdotes for no other apparent reason than because they are entertaining. He notes many parallels between history and the specific novels, but it would be to enforce an arbitrary formalism on his essays concerning Scott to imply that literary criticism is their sole purpose.

Ruskin divides Scott's life into three stages, youth, labor-time, and death-time.⁴² Greatest emphasis is placed on discussion of his youth, which, Ruskin states, lasted twenty-five years. He argues that "the youth of all the greatest men" is "long, and rich in peace, and altogether accumulative and crescent."⁴³ Scott's youth is divided into seven stages from his birth and unhealthy infancy in Edinburgh to his apprenticeship to his father and earliest practice of law. Ruskin places emphasis on the early education Scott received and particularly on "the three women who, as far as education could do it, formed the mind of Scott."⁴⁴ The importance of the order, quiet, and peacefulness of the home, directly attributable to women properly carrying out their role, is central to the early awareness and literary consciousness of Scott. Ruskin compares his own childhood with that of the novelist and finds that each took place in positive circumstances. Except for the influence of one aunt, his mother, and an early romance, Ruskin asserts, Sir Walter would have "assuredly been only

hunting laird, and the best story-teller in the Lothians."⁴⁵

Ruskin's interest in Scott's ancestry and biography rests on the premise that a reader must understand the history in Scott's mind to grasp the subtlety of design in his fiction. There is, however, a second stated purpose which is not of a literary nature. He states in one essay of the Fors Clavigera series that in previous discussions of Scott he is "examining the conditions of the life of this wise man, that they [Ruskin's readers] may learn how to rule their own lives, or their children's, or their servants'."⁴⁶ Whatever his specific reasons for tracing Scott's life, there are frequent assertions of direct biographical sources in the novels. In Guy Mannering, A Legend of Montrose, and Old Mortality in particular, Ruskin finds aspects of Scott's life fictionalized.⁴⁷ He suggests that when Scott turned from poetry to prose fiction between 1810 and 1814, he ceased to be a singer and became a historian. For Ruskin the novels are history, different from traditional historical writing only in their expression of deep feeling or sentiment. In the fourth volume of Modern Painters he argues that great artists--Dante, Scott, Turner, Tintoretto--create, not through "voluntary production of new images, but an involuntary remembrance, exactly at the right moment, of something they had actually seen."⁴⁸ The minds of these men are capable of retaining even the "slightest intonations

of syllables heard in the beginning of their lives." It is, for Ruskin, the involuntary association of this complex of accumulated data and impression which produces the body of an art which can thus be called historical.

Ruskin does not, by this principle, relegate the subject matter of art to the literally verifiable. Writing of the descriptive truth of Dante, Dickens, and Scott, he illustrates the imaginative scope of "history" in its literary expression:

From Dante's Paradise to Dickens' Prison every word of noble description is written by personal vision of the facts. Dante had seen Heaven as truly as Dickens the Marshalsea. Understand at once and forever, if you can, this eternal difference between good and bad work. Dante had seen Love, and Honour, and Learning, and Patience, and Shame in living human creatures, and the glory and happiness of the creatures in them. . . . And Dickens had seen Lust, and Fraud, and Ignorance, and Covetousness, and Insolent Shame, and all the other gods whom England now serves, in their nakedness, and truly wrote of the conditions of their service.⁴⁹

Upon this concept of reality and its description in art, Ruskin concludes that Scott is the "greatest of imaginative artists in fiction, because he is the faithfulest of observers." At its highest level the novelist's imagination may move beyond association to a prophetic function. Passages in The Antiquary in which a town clerk successfully bargains to cut a water channel through Oldbuck's property in exchange for ancient stones from a chapel are compared with actual letters from Scott to the builder of his home,

Abbotsford. Ruskin finds in the fictional scenes, written in 1816, Scott's "prophetic instinct with which great men of every age mark and forecast its destinies."⁵⁰ This novelist, Ruskin argues, anticipates the directions of change toward a society of "modern cockneyism" in which the tradition of an ancient shrine is traded for the efficiency of a public road.

In addition to the historical and prophetic roles of the novelist that concern Ruskin, he also discusses Scott's creation of character and the specific biographical sources of his characters. Ruskin finds aspects of directly autobiographical characterization in at least three of Scott's novels. In The Antiquary, Rob Roy, and Redgauntlet he notes three "definite and intentional portraits of himself . . . each giving a separate part of himself."⁵¹ The three figures, Jonathan Oldbuck of Monkbarns, Frank Osbaldistone, and Alan Fairford respectively, are not discussed at length, but Ruskin establishes the point that Scott drew directly from his own experience in developing characters. Ruskin also makes unsupported allusions to characters in Scott's novels, evidently assuming that his own readers will make proper biographical identifications. In this manner he refers to Dandie Dinmont, Colonel Mannering, Counsellor Pleydell, and others as occasional guests at Abbotsford on a typical Sunday.⁵² In less specific although quite lengthy comment Ruskin argues that the characters in

Scott's fiction are developed out of extensive knowledge of the people of his native society and of their religious assumptions.⁵³ The dominant principle of Scott's characterization, as well as the reason for the success of that characterization, is, as has been previously noted, that great fiction emerges from the mind which is capable of absorbing experience and impression. Scott, Ruskin insists, had such a mind.

The closest Ruskin comes to specific textual analysis is his study of Scott's use of dialect as compared with similar usage by other novelists. He distinguishes between dialect and "mere deteriorations" of language by localizing dialect to:

any district where there are persons of intelligence enough to use the language itself in all its fineness and force, but under the particular conditions of life, climate, and temper, which introduce words peculiar to the scenery, forms of word and idioms of sentence peculiar to the race, and pronunciations indicative of their character and disposition.⁵⁴

In Humphry Clinker, Oliver Twist, and The Mill on the Floss Ruskin finds only corrupt language "gathered by ignorance, invented by vice, misused by insensibility, or minced and mouthed by affectation,"⁵⁵ but in Scott's fiction he finds true dialect. Ruskin selects a brief passage from Rob Roy to illustrate Scott's usage. He notes some twenty-five words or expressions in the selection, from the simple "weel," "gude," and "mony" to "Curlewurle," "opensteek

hems," and "crouse." He attempts to discover the source of each term and to explain why the dialect form is preferable to any other.⁵⁶ Standard English spelling is not modified for the sole purpose of indicating pronunciation; the word "James," for example, is spelled without modification because, Ruskin concludes, only a Scot could pronounce it correctly, and variant spelling would be nothing more than affectation to please the reader. Such proper use of dialect in the novel is, for Ruskin, one more evidence of Scott's awareness of himself in time and place, of his ability to draw from the culture around him the essentials of an art which reflects truth and feeling.

One of Ruskin's criticisms of the nineteenth-century novelist is that the biographical and historical functions necessary to great art have been ignored or misunderstood. He can find the ideal of Scott's relationship with past and present in no other nineteenth-century writer. Only in Turner's landscape painting does he find any modern artist comparable to Scott. Maria Edgeworth, for example, fails in her role as historian because the comfort she derives from the age blinds her to any "balanced account of the pains of the poor" as well as the pleasures of the rich.⁵⁷ When the writer looks to the modern world for subject material, he will find little which is not diseased, and an art which is solely pathologic, Ruskin asserts, loses

that balance which can be termed moral beauty. Ruskin's comment on the modern novel is primarily negative, primarily an attack on the imbalance which results from excessive emphasis upon the city and its diseases, both moral and physical. To complete a survey of his criticism of prose fiction, it is necessary to consider the specifics of Ruskin's adverse response to those novels which emerged out of the society he knew.

The Victorian Novel

The last forty years of Ruskin's life were spent in intense concern for the moral and physical condition of the Victorian world. He found in urbanization and industrialization forces destructive to every member of the society and, fearing the dehumanization of the culture, committed himself in speeches, essays, and personal letters to the task of reforming England. This is not the place to discuss his many activities from road-building to operating a tea shop to structuring a neo-feudal society.⁵⁸ The significant point is that for Ruskin environment has an overwhelming power to influence the individual. The man who daily sees nothing more than the monochrome of brick and of coal smoke will be a different person than that individual who daily studies a mutable nature, its rocks as well as its clouds. An artist who lives in an unhealthy environment will not produce healthy art, just as an audience conditioned by

such an environment will have a distorted response to noble art.⁵⁹ Ruskin's criticism of the nineteenth-century novel frequently reflects his social concern, and it provides explicit evidence to support his argument that the directions prose fiction takes in a culture are determined to a great extent by the culture itself.

By no means does Ruskin imply that the novel was "pure" before the nineteenth century, destroyed solely by the utilitarian impulse of the age. Great art at any point in history is balanced in its presentation of truth and feeling; inferior art lacks this essential balance because it is untrue or because its element of sentiment is either excessive or inadequate. Ruskin judges the novels of Fielding and Smollett, for example, to be less than noble. In somewhat the same manner as he notes Voltaire's excessive wit and want of feeling, Ruskin asserts in an early letter:

I cannot . . . understand the feelings of men of magnificent wit and intellect, like Smollett and Fielding, when I see them gloating over and licking their chops over nastiness, like hungry dogs over ordure; founding one half of the laughable matter of their volumes in innuendoes of abomination.⁶⁰

In his own judgment the "taste" of these writers is distorted, leading to an excessive concern for one aspect of human experience. Ruskin asserts that the novels of these two writers are not injurious to the mind, but he is certain that they are tainted and in no way reflective of the moral beauty of great art.

The term "fimetic" is coined by Ruskin to describe the taint of Fielding, Smollett, Voltaire, and a host of nineteenth-century figures. The word, derived from the term "fime" or dung, means, for Ruskin, literature of the dunghill.⁶¹ Such literature is at least partially truthful but in its lack of feeling reflects an unsympathetic author. One result of the fimetic taint is failure to produce fully developed characters in fiction. Ruskin argues that authors so tainted will "never invent character, properly so called; they only invent symbols of common humanity."⁶² Upon this premise he judges Fielding's characters to be limited, Allworthy a type of simple English gentleman and Squire Western a type of rude English squire. A few writers are tainted but in their noblest work are capable of rising above the limitations the condition places upon them. Ruskin finds Chaucer and Shakespeare to be among this class of writers. The fimetic taint is also reflected in the subject material a writer chooses or in his presentation of subject in an analytic manner, without authorial sympathy.

Most of Ruskin's discussion of the fimetic taint derives from his concern for the subject matter of nineteenth-century fiction. He argues that only changes in the environment of the English child can produce changes in what the adult will create and in what he will desire to see created. A child accustomed from birth to gravel, gas-lamp posts, old iron, and wood shavings as "a fixed condition of the

universe, over the face of nature" will find no activity more pleasurable than the analysis of the physical corruption of that environment.⁶³ Ruskin suggests that the literature which emerges from the analysis of physical and moral disease, frequently the literary product of contemporary society, will not be imaginative. In Fiction, Fair and Foul he groups under five general divisions the many reasons for the unhealthy and unimaginative condition of contemporary fiction. The first of these divisions concerns the several results of the massing of people into large cities. Ruskin asserts that "hot fermentation and unwholesome secrecy" develop as members of the population lose privacy and individuality through overcrowding. The frustrations of each member of the society become infectious to every other member until the entire society is a mass of decay. There are an endless number of specific directions the distress of the individual may take, and Ruskin argues that a fiction created out of study of the particularities of urban decay becomes a scientific literature, closer to botany than to art in the traditional sense of the term.

In Balzac's "Le Pere Goriot" Ruskin finds an illustration of his ideas.⁶⁹ The story concerns a grocer who makes a large fortune, with which he indulges the pleasures and pride of his two daughters. He marries them to men of title and even provides funds for his favorite to carry on

an extramarital affair. This favorite is called to his death-bed but, having to decide between her father and a ball, chooses to attend the ball. Ruskin considers this sequence of events ample evidence of the influence of the city on life as well as on the subject material of fiction. Because "a village grocer cannot make a large fortune, cannot marry his daughters to titled squires, and cannot die without having his children brought to him," Ruskin concludes that the story could only take place in a city and could only have been conceived by one conditioned to urban life.⁶⁵

He argues, secondly, that more profound than the analytical curiosity formed by the variety of diseases created in urban society is the personal disgrace and grief which the constant pressure and friction of overcrowding inevitably bring. The individual becomes overwhelmed by:

The power of all surroundings over them for evil; the incapacity of their own minds to refuse the pollution, and of their own wills to oppose the weight, of the staggering mass that chokes and crushes them into perdition, brings every law of healthy existence into question with them, and every alleged method of help and hope into doubt. Indignation, without any calming faith in justice, and self-contempt, without any curative self-reproach, dull the intelligence, and degrade the conscience. . . .⁶⁶

The philosophy and the art which emerge out of such hopeless indignation will be partially satiric but partly consolatory, Ruskin asserts, concerning itself only with "the regenerative vigor of manure" but anxious to prove that "everybody's fault is somebody else's." A literature

obsessed by this satiric-consolatory orientation will be shallow, ready to mix complacence with mild heresy but unwilling to practice self-chastisement.

Ruskin also finds the monotony of life in any great city a significant influence on the fiction which is produced in an urban society. He argues that man under proper conditions, primarily the conditions of external nature, is kept in a state of mental excitement because of constant contact with a variety of sense and physical experiences. The changing of the seasons, the care and companionship of domestic animals, the processes of planting and reaping: these provide man with mental excitement adequate to sustain his body and imagination. The city, however, offers alternations of heat and cold as the only signs of seasonal change. the routine of life divided between the office or shop and the street can only be broken by violence in the forms of death, injury, or thievery. Ruskin argues that such life will not create a desire in man for more varied experience, thus possibly causing him to turn to external nature. Instead, he will enjoy only forms of experience to which he has been conditioned and, as a result, desire no excitement which cannot be offered by the city.

Ruskin chooses Dickens' Bleak House to illustrate the effect of urban monotony on fiction. He counts ten deaths in the novel, each of which is in some way violent,

"carefully wrought out or led up to, . . . or finished in their threatenings and sufferings with as much enjoyment as can be contrived in the anticipation, and as much pathology as can be concentrated in the description."⁶⁷ Ruskin's point is not that violence and death are in themselves unnatural, but that Bleak House is a domestic story, reflective of "the statistics of civilian mortality in the centre of London," not a tragic, adventurous, or military narrative. His charge is that the violence of most of the story is directed against inoffensive, respectable persons, and that Dickens presents the sequence without suggesting that there is anything unnatural in the apparent premise that it is the destiny of a large number of the population "to die like rats in a drain, either by trap or poison."⁶⁸ In contrast, Ruskin notes an approximately equal number of deaths in at least three of Scott's novels, Old Mortality, Waverley, and Guy Mannering. In these, however, death is "either heroic, deserved, or quiet and natural."⁶⁹ Even in his weaker fiction, Ruskin asserts, Scott, because of the essential health of his mind, was incapable of appealing to the excitement afforded by sickness and death. Ruskin clearly identifies Scott's fiction with the variety of external nature, Dickens' fiction with the monotony and resultant disease of the city.

Fiction, shaped by the environment of the writer and

the demands of the public, ultimately becomes little more than a daily bulletin in "the prison calendar, the police news, and the hospital report." Men who have known only the misery of the city, who delight only in the study of its various maladies, will produce and seek a reportorial literature. Ruskin illustrates the grotesque directions of fictional "reporting" with particular emphasis on French literature; Victor Hugo's The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, for example, is classed as "the effectual head of the whole cretinous school."⁷⁰ The city- and disease-dominated imagination will frequently center on the prison, the asylum, and the morgue, "amusing itself with destruction of the body, and busying itself with aberration of the mind."⁷¹ Ruskin excepts from his attack that fiction which has definite historical and didactic purpose, that which reflects a writer concerned with warning his reader of the evil of urban civilization. To a degree the violent tales of Eugene Sue and Gaboriau are given qualified praise in these terms. That there is little opportunity for the modern writer to observe and experience under healthy circumstances Ruskin readily admits; he does not, however, find this a justification for tolerating the pathologic labors of the contemporary novelist.

His final point is that in a village environment children, through close and constant contact with their elders, learn prudence, responsibility, dignity, and honor,

values which are absent in an overcrowded society. Urban culture, Ruskin asserts, has established self-indulgence, a doctrine of unbridled pleasure, as the sole guide to individual choice, and, as a result, the events in the modern novel often turn upon the absence of traditional values of dignity and restraint. George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss is singled out for one scene in which the heroine's lack of prudence allows her to abandon sexual restraint. Ruskin views this story as typical of "the automatic amours and involuntary proposals of recent romance [which] acknowledge little further law of morality than the instinct of an insect, or the effervescence of a chemical mixture."⁷² Fiction, Ruskin argues, does not in its most noble forms center upon individual accidents or on failures of insignificant characters, but upon the larger designs of human existence. In Scott's relegation of love and marriage to a minor role in the total experience of life, cited earlier, Ruskin finds that balance which is absent in the mid-nineteenth-century novel. The problem of misplaced, distorted, or lost values illustrated in modern fiction is a result of that condition in urban culture itself, and Ruskin offers no hope that the directions of literary content can be changed until the environment of writer and audience is modified.

Sex and love in fiction are further discussed in

an essay of the Fors Clavigera series.⁷³ Ruskin notes that in the novels of Scott, Maria Edgeworth, and Richardson there is a frankness in the confession of love and a fidelity regardless of the hopelessness of circumstances. He asserts that such frankness and fidelity are viewed by contemporary readers as absurd and impossible. The only love modern youth have known, Ruskin suggests, is that which takes place "under the conditions in which it is also possible to the lower animals." As a result, these readers cannot respond to noble love. They can, however, respond to that fiction discussed above in which love and sex are enlarged to the degree of seeming to be man's sole reason for existing. They can respond to love and sex only as accidental, violent, and self-oriented.

Ruskin asserts that scientific thinking has a dominant influence on philosophic and religious thought, reflected in the literature of even the most profound thinkers. He laments that as a result of scientific thinking and resultant loss of religious faith:

. . . nearly all our powerful men in this age of the world are unbelievers; the best of them in doubt and misery; the worst in reckless defiance; the plurality, in plodding hesitation, doing, as well as they can, what practical work lies ready to their hands.⁷⁴

He argues that Dickens and Thackeray have set themselves "against all religious form, pleading for simple truth and benevolence." Balzac limits himself to statement of facts divorced from feeling, and Beranger adopts a tone of

"careless blasphemy." Even Sir Walter Scott, whose work is usually reserved for praise, is found to rely on "surface-painting" when confronting the most profound issues of religious faith. Ruskin traces the influence of scientific thought and resultant skepticism into politics, poetry, and painting; he concludes that lack of faith has an equally destructive influence on each.⁷⁵ One example of the scientific "blasphemy" which Ruskin finds in the nineteenth-century novel is in Thackeray's Vanity Fair. He quotes the concluding sentence of chapter thirty-two: "The darkness came down over the field and city, and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart."⁷⁶ In these lines, with their "natural enthrallment by the abominable," Ruskin identifies that deliberate emphasis upon the ignoble which is attractive to even the great minds of the age.

A few of Ruskin's opinions concerning specific Victorian novels derive from situations unrelated altogether to the individual works of literature themselves. Although he admits that he has read Disraeli's novels, Ruskin passes over them with no more comment than that the author is a clever coxcomb, "the last person fit to make Chancellor of the Exchequer."⁷⁷ His apparent reason for dismissing Disraeli's fiction is that he disagrees violently with the statesman's liberal political role. His dislike of Lord

Beaconsfield's politics is so great that any possible literary contribution is overshadowed.⁷⁸ He is more willing to discuss Charles Kingsley's fiction, but conflicts in non-literary areas limit any final respect for his work.⁷⁹

Ruskin alludes both favorably and unfavorably to Alton Locke in the third volume of Modern Painters. He finds praiseworthy a passage of comment on landscape, but in his well-known discussion of the pathetic fallacy he draws his prime example of false description from the same novel.⁸⁰ Perhaps worth some consideration also is Ruskin's response to Kingsley's satirical references to him in Glaucus; or, The Wonders of the Shore and in the poem "The Invitation to Tom Hughes." The latter with its lines, "Leave to Mournful Ruskin/ Popish Appennines,/ Dirty Stones of Venice/ And his Gas-lamps Seven-/ We've the stones of Snowdon/ And the lamps on Heaven," led Ruskin to comment in a personal letter, "I have half a mind to let him see a little bit of tusk-point one of these days."⁸¹

Situations of this sort, in which personal or political conflicts make consideration of an author's work difficult if not impossible, are not frequent. Ruskin's high personal regard for Charles Dickens and George Eliot, for example, does not restrain him from attacking Barnaby Rudge and The Mill on the Floss, the former as "an entirely profitless and monstrous story," the latter as a "railway novel" in

which the characters "are simply the sweepings out of a Pentonville omnibus."⁸² The majority of Ruskin's comment on the nineteenth-century novel is oriented to the works themselves and to the cultural problems which influence the directions of prose fiction. Finally convinced that human happiness is achieved through compassion, identified as sympathy or fellow-feeling, Ruskin asserts that the condition depends upon the individual's ability to understand the nature of others, to put himself in another's place. Only a person of imagination can thus achieve compassion in its full sense. Because Ruskin finds his society unimaginative, self-oriented, and obsessed with its own diseases, he looks to fiction "to supply, as far as possible, the defect of this imagination in common minds."⁸³ The ultimate frustration of this appeal to fiction is self-evident; he readily admits that the nature of individual works depends upon the "degree of imaginative power of the writers,"⁸⁴ and healthy imaginative power does not develop in an unhealthy environment. Ruskin's judgment of the nineteenth-century novel, then, is determined by his response to the culture out of which it emerges, a response as thoroughly negative as that of any other major Victorian.

FOOTNOTES

¹Works, XV, p. 351. The aphorism is repeated several times in his lectures and essays (VII, p. 453; XXXIII, p. 305; XXXIV, p. 310).

²Works, XXXIV, pp. 265-394.

³Works, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX.

⁴Works, XVII, p. 105.

⁵Works, XXXIV, pp. 287-288. Ruskin had stated this principle in each of the first three volumes of Modern Painters. His classification of Scott's works in terms of quality is discussed in section two of this chapter.

⁶Works, XI, p. 180.

⁷Works, XXXIV, pp. 283-284.

⁸Works, XXXIV, pp. 285-286. Ruskin supports this assertion by reference to subordination of the Henry-Katherine courtship in Henry V and to the last-sentence resolution of a courtship, almost as an afterthought, in Scott's The Abbot.

⁹Ruskin's point is drawn from a statement by Scott that "without courage there is no truth, and without truth there is no virtue," quoted in Lockhart's Life of Scott Works, XXXIV, p. 226/.

¹⁰Works, XXXIV, p. 295; pp. 383-387.

¹¹Works, XXXIV, p. 389. Ruskin associates Gilfillan, a figure in Waverley, with Fairservice in these terms of evangelical narrowness.

¹²Works, XXXIV, pp. 387-388.

¹³Works, XXXIV, pp. 382-383. Ruskin illustrates the five groups with the following characters in order from lowest to highest: (1) Trumbull (Redgauntlet), Trusty Tomkyns (Woodstock), Burley (Old Mortality); (2) Fairservice (Rob Roy), Blattergowl (The Antiquary), Kettledrummle (Old Mortality), Gilfillan (Waverley); (3) Richie Moniplies (The Fortunes of Nigel), David Deans (Heart of Midlothian), Manse Headrigg (Old Mortality); (4) Warden (The Monastery), Colonel Gardiner (Waverley), Ephrian Macbriar (Old Mortality),

Joshua Geddes (Redgauntlet); (5) Rachel Geddes (Redgauntlet), Jeanie Deans (Heart of Midlothian), Bessie Maclure (Old Mortality).

¹⁴Works, XXV, p. 282.

¹⁵Works, I, p. 362.

¹⁶Works, XXXIV, p. 314.

¹⁷Works, V, pp. 334-335.

¹⁸Works, XXXIV, pp. 584-586. Lubbock's list appeared in the Contemporary Review, February 1886. Ruskin's reply was published in the Pall Mall Gazette within the same month. The references to Kingsley's novels are to Alton Locke and Yeast, although Ruskin confuses a dean's daughter as a bishop's.

¹⁹Works, XXXIV, p. 275. Ruskin cites Forster, Charles Dickens' biographer, who explained that he, not Dickens, thought of killing Nell.

²⁰Works, XXXIV, p. 277-278.

²¹Works, XXXIV, p. 274.

²²Works, XXIX, p. 266.

²³Works, XXIX, pp. 267, 456. Both references are in the essays of Fors Clavigera.

²⁴Works, XXIV, p. 277.

²⁵Works, XVIII, pp. 299-300.

²⁶Works, XXXII, p. 492. Ruskin refrains from choosing between reason and passion here; he simply argues that unquestioned faith in education is unjustified.

²⁷Works, XXXV, p. 308.

²⁸Works, XXVII, p. 167. The reference is to Robinson Crusoe and The Pilgrim's Progress.

²⁹Works, XXXVI, p. 153. The references are probably to Johnson's Idler and Rambler essays, Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield, and Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison. These are the works to which Ruskin most frequently makes

reference. He, incidentally, praises Clarissa Harlowe but never read it Works, V, p. 373⁷.

³⁰Works, XXXI, p. 94.

³¹Works, XXIII, p. 277. These works are placed above the Bible in their formative influence on the Puritan mind.

³²Works, XXVIII, p. 189.

³³Works, XXXVII, p. 10.

³⁴Works, XXVII, p. 562.

³⁵Works, XXVII, p. 563.

³⁶Works, XXVIII, p. 496.

³⁷Works, XII, p. 117.

³⁸Works, XXVII, pp. 565-583. Ruskin cites Lockhart's Life of Scott (Edinburgh, 1837) as his source for genealogical and biographical information. The ancestry Ruskin traces centrally concerns the following figures: (1) Walter Scott (Auld Wat) of Harden, (2) Sir William Scott of Harden, (3) Walter Scott of Raeburn, (4) Walter Scott, Tutor of Raeburn, (5) Robert Scott of Sandy-Knowe, (6) Walter Scott, citizen of Edinburgh.

³⁹Works, XXVII, p. 577.

⁴⁰Works, XXVII, pp. 573-574. Caught marauding on a neighbor's estate, Sir William was given the choice of marrying the least attractive of his captor's three daughters or being killed; "not it is said without hesitation," he chose to marry.

⁴¹Works, XXVII, p. 578. Italics are Ruskin's.

⁴²Ruskin also divides Scott's novels into three periods, developing in the process a theory that the quality of his fiction corresponds directly with his physical health. The theory is not discussed in this study because its application to Scott's work is too fraught with error. Ruskin places Rob Roy and Heart of Midlothian among Scott's half-dozen best novels, thus produced in his most healthy years; in fact, they were both written in periods of acute illness and pain Works, XXXIV, pp. 287-292⁷.

⁴³Works, XXVII, p. 585.

⁴⁴Works, XXVII, p. 608.

⁴⁵Works, XXVII, p. 616.

⁴⁶Works, XXVII, p. 606.

⁴⁷Works, XXVII, pp. 587-588.

⁴⁸Works, VI, pp. 41-42.

⁴⁹Works, XXIX, p. 535.

⁵⁰Works, XXXIV, pp. 304-306.

⁵¹Works, XXVII, p. 298. Ruskin enlarges somewhat upon the autobiographical aspects of Oldbuck and Fairford in volumes thirty-four (pp. 304-306) and twenty-seven (p. 585), respectively.

⁵²Works, XXXIV, pp. 345-346. These characters appear in Guy Mannering. Ruskin probably assumes his readers are familiar with the frequent source identification in Lockhart's Life of Scott.

⁵³Ruskin's outline of patterns of religious thought in characterization was noted in the previous discussion of the moral orientation of figures in Scott's novels and need not be repeated here.

⁵⁴Works, XXXIV, p. 293.

⁵⁵Works, XXXIV, p. 294.

⁵⁶Ruskin's etymologies are frequently more imaginative than historically valid. He asserts, for example, that the name Ailie, in the novel Guy Mannering, "is the last echo of 'Ave,' changed into the softest Scottish Christian name familiar to the children . . ." Works, XXXIV, p. 307.

⁵⁷Works, XXIX, p. 395.

⁵⁸There are a multitude of discussions of Ruskin's social activities. The primary source of information, aside from Ruskin's own comments in the Library Edition, is E. T. Cook's The Life of Ruskin (London, 1911).

⁵⁹The single exception to this principle is the artist of the highest nobility--Dante, Turner, Scott--whose genius

as has been previously noted, neither derives from nor is dependent upon society.

⁶⁰Works, I, p. 418.

⁶¹Works, XXVII, p. 630.

⁶²Works, XXVII, p. 631.

⁶³Works, XXXIV, pp. 267-268.

⁶⁴Works, XXXIV, pp. 268-269. The social and moral problems Ruskin finds in Victorian society are problems of nineteenth-century Europe, not solely those of England. French writers--Balzac, Sand, Hugo, and others--are frequently cited in the same context as Dickens and other English novelists.

⁶⁵Works, XXXIV, p. 269.

⁶⁶Works, XXXIV, p. 269.

⁶⁷Works, XXXIV, pp. 271-272. The persons and deaths Ruskin lists are as follows: Mr. Tulkinghorn, assassination; Joe, starvation; Richard, chagrin; Mr. Krook, spontaneous combustion; Lady Dedlock's lover, sorrow; Lady Dedlock, remorse; Miss Flite, insanity; Sir Leicester Dedlock, paralysis; a baby, fever; Mademoiselle Hortense, anticipated death by hanging.

⁶⁸Works, XXXIV, p. 272.

⁶⁹Works, XXXIV, pp. 272-275.

⁷⁰Works, XXXIV, p. 277.

⁷¹Works, XXXIV, p. 281.

⁷²Works, XXXIV, p. 282.

⁷³Works, XXIX, pp. 444-445.

⁷⁴Works, V, p. 322.

⁷⁵Works, V, p. 323.

⁷⁶Works, XXXIV, p. 72. Ruskin's misquotation from memory is here corrected by his editors.

⁷⁷Works, XII, p. lxxxiv.

⁷⁸In Arrows of the Chace Works, XXXIV, p. 549
 Ruskin's attitude toward Disraeli and Gladstone is illustrated in his comment that he cares no more for either "than for two old bag-pipes with the drones going by steam."

⁷⁹Ruskin's dislike of Kingsley derives primarily from his alleged failure to stand by Carlyle, Ruskin, and others in their defense of Governor Eyre, an Englishman charged with unnecessary violence in putting down a riot in Jamaica. Kingsley's sympathies were apparently with Eyre, but Carlyle and Ruskin felt that he was "hanging back afraid" Works, XVIII, pp. xliv-xlvi; XXXIV, p. 609.

⁸⁰Works, V, pp. 238-239, 205.

⁸¹Works, XXXVI, p. 257.

⁸²Works, XXII, p. 467; XXXIV, pp. 376-377.

⁸³Works, XXXIV, pp. 627-628.

⁸⁴Works, XXXIV, p. 628.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Ruskin's critical method in discussing prose fiction is thoroughly extrinsic.¹ His study of literature concerns itself with external causes and effects; seldom, if ever, is it concerned with explication de texte or any other of the analytical processes of an intrinsic critical method. The individual literary work exists, for Ruskin, in a historical context and can best be understood by a reader aware of that context. He finds the experiences and impressions which constitute the author's imagination to be an integral and observable part of the finished artistic work. A reader's experience with a novel is inevitably a sharing of the life of the creator. The literary critic, then, has a double function; he considers history, both personal and social, in order to elucidate a given work, and he studies the individual writing or body of writings in order to better understand the personality of the writer and the nature of his culture. Bertram Morris argues well that Ruskin's "criticism was one which grounded art in a nobility that could come only from a social matrix. He taught that a great society will have great men, and its art too will be great; for art is an exponent of the worth of society."² Ruskin insists that the object of art is always an artifact which reflects

the whole experience of man, and he rejects suggestion that the existence of an individual work is justified by any quality, structural or aesthetic, which is not related to the physical and moral context of human life. The critical practice of Ruskin does not admit the possibility that study of literature solely for its intrinsic values can be more than ignoble and irrelevant escapism.

Much of the aesthetic theory of Modern Painters, The Seven Lamps of Architecture, and The Stones of Venice anticipates the specific assumptions of his applied criticism of prose fiction. Ruskin asserts from the first volume of Modern Painters that moral unity and harmony are essential to both artist and viewer. Both must see clearly the world around them in order to create or to assess properly the creation of others. An artist who paints what he is conditioned to think he should see rather than what he actually sees will produce an inferior art; the viewer who responds to art through false conditioning will arrive at faulty judgments.³ Victorian fiction, Ruskin concludes, is the product of men whose vision has been distorted by the unhealthy environment of an urban, industrialized society. Readers who demand a reportorial, violent, diseased fiction are responding to the same conditioning. Great art expresses "the greatest number of greatest ideas," but, Ruskin suggests, the novelist of the mid-nineteenth century is no

longer capable of producing those ideas, and his audience can no longer receive them. Review of the existing literary products of the age and their popularity with the general public illustrates this condition.

The educative function Ruskin assumed in Modern Painters becomes a reforming function by the 1870's and 1880's when most of his literary criticism was produced. John D. Rosenberg argues convincingly that art and social reform are, in Ruskin's total aesthetic, inseparably related:

The artist, himself a product of society, produces an art whose style is an accurate index to the moral qualities of that society. A decadent society produces a decadent art; a joyless or smog-ridden society produces dismal art, or none at all. A thing of beauty may be a joy forever, but only for those who have the leisure to look at it with unwearied and educated eyes. The England of Manchester or Birmingham could not, Ruskin believed, produce artists or a public capable of appreciating art. His impulse to social reform thus stemmed from his belief that beauty was a sacrament in which all were entitled to partake but from which most were in fact excluded: industry without art is brutality, art without industry is guilt.⁴

An aesthetic which describes noble art must also describe the conditions of noble life. Thus, without abandoning his early art theory, Ruskin turns to criticism of the problems created by an "unaesthetic" culture, problems reflected both in the object of art and in life itself.⁵ In The Seven Lamps of Architecture and The Stones of Venice Ruskin argues that an integral relationship exists between the quality of an architectural work and the moral and physical conditions of the workman. There is no fundamental shift in thought

in his argument, long after the publication of those works, that the quality of prose fiction is dependent upon the same conditions in the author.

The emphasis Ruskin places on truth, beauty, and feeling in his aesthetics and in his applied criticism has been noted several times in this study and need not be further discussed in detail. In his criticism of the novel Ruskin does not explicitly cite his early comments on the Theoretic faculty of the imagination, that faculty which allows moral response to beauty, nor does he discuss those divine attributes--infinity, unity, repose, symmetry, purity, and moderation--which can produce Theoria. The fact that he does not return to discussion of the faculties of the imagination should not suggest that he abandoned the aesthetic principles involved; it is adequate to note that from his explicit comments on the Victorian novel he could not have returned to these principles except in the most abstract terms. In the fiction of the mid-nineteenth century the qualities which can most nobly affect the imagination of a properly conditioned reader are absent, as that reader himself is absent. The fiction of Sir Walter Scott and, it is implied, Ruskin's own response to it provide the only literary examples in the nineteenth century of the creation and response to the highest levels of truth and beauty.

In his classification of artists as purists, naturalists,

and sensualists in the second volume of The Stones of Venice, amplified in Modern Painters III, Ruskin establishes the "naturalist ideal" as that in which the artist comprehends and expresses the unity and indivisibility of man in nature, the unity and indivisibility of the universe itself.⁶ He explicitly rejects both sensualists and purists for their oversimplification of the total experience of man. There are, however, distinct problems in tracing the operation of this principle in his applied criticism. In painting Ruskin is rarely able to appreciate nudity; he never finds representation of contemporary civilization praiseworthy. His literary criticism accepts the urban settings of Dickens, but the final product is consistently judged to be flawed, never noble. Ruskin justifies his conclusions by assessing overt expression of sex and of urban life to be sensually oriented. Thus he finds most contemporary art distorted by the individual artist's inability to sense and record the full human experience, the experience which moves beyond a complex of facts. The justification has not gone unchallenged,⁷ although a reader cognizant of Ruskin's fundamentalist origins and his early contact with external nature can understand these possibly inconsistent critical judgments.

Ruskin's aesthetic theory and critical practice are seldom considered in relation to that of other major nineteenth-century figures. Perhaps because of the body

and scope of his work, the large majority of Ruskin studies make no attempt to place his writing within the intellectual context of his age. Infrequently a writer will suggest a brief comparison, such as Charles Dougherty's assertion that, in his fundamental assumption of the unity and indivisibility of man, Ruskin "is at one with Matthew Arnold and with Newman,"⁸ but these allusions are seldom developed. No discussion of the relationship of his literary criticism to that of other writers has yet appeared. A thorough investigation of the topic is, of course, beyond the scope of this study, but even a brief review of Victorian theory and opinion suggests that Ruskin's literary criticism, while it may be distinctly "Ruskinian" in tone and phrasing, is neither innovative nor iconoclastic. More than three decades before his birth the annual publication of novels took the lead over theological works and thereafter continued to increase its dominance over all other book publishing.⁹ Opposition to the literary genre was, by the 1820's and 1830's, still existent, but it had no observable influence on either the publication or sales of novels. Thus, Ruskin's early contact with the form was consistent with the patterns of English society in general, and his comments are directed to a public to whom the novel was the principal literary fare.

In his series of lectures collected in 1859 as British

Novelists and Their Styles, David Masson does not hesitate to parallel forms of the novel with poetical forms, finding the novel at its highest a "prose Epic."¹⁰ He recognizes that the "thousand and one stories of society in Mayfair" make a poor comparison with the wanderings of Ulysses, but argues that the potential of prose fiction is as great as that of narrative poetry, limited only by the convention of stating the most exalted subject material in verse. Masson's lectures trace the history of the novel from beginnings to the mid-nineteenth century and are, as a result, much more systematic than any of Ruskin's literary criticism. He is in agreement with Ruskin, however, in arguing that "the deepest literary criticism is that which connects a man's writings most profoundly and intimately with his personality, conceived comprehensively and with central accuracy. . . ."¹¹ In his discussions of various outstanding fictional works he consistently surveys aspects of the life of each author which seem to be related to the individual work. Masson places more emphasis on the artist as thinker than does Ruskin, but he admits that the act of creation may be intuitive, that the author may not be "thoroughly conscious of the meaning he was infusing into it,"¹² a premise which is central to Ruskin's assessment of the process by which the most noble art is produced.

It is in his lengthy discussion of Scott that Masson's

critical judgments may most easily be compared with those of Ruskin.¹³ The critic sees Scott's love for the past and his intense "Scottism" as the primary qualities of his genius, but he is unwilling to credit the novelist with a historical function. Unlike Ruskin, Masson sees Scott's passion for history as poetical rather than strictly and philosophically historical. Masson places emphasis on Scott's "veneration for the past" as a sympathetic response to a few moments, primarily gothic, in history, moments often more fictional than factual. Ruskin, as was noted earlier, also judges feeling or sympathy to be a significant aspect of Scott's fiction, but he insists that truth, in this case personal experience and historical fact, controls the direction of his greatest novels. Masson and Ruskin agree that Scott's work reflects an intense familiarity with the geography of Scotland as well as an intimate knowledge of Scottish institutions and of the dialect, thought, and humors of all ranks of his countrymen."¹⁴ Masson acknowledges Ruskin as having established in Modern Painters III the relationship of Scott to external nature, the novelist's sense of landscape which the critic asserts has influenced the directions of subsequent fiction.¹⁵

The greatest differences in Ruskin's and Masson's responses to prose fiction appear in their attitudes toward fiction of the mid-nineteenth century. Masson passes no

moral judgment upon urban society other than implied acceptance of it as an integral part of the total culture. He suggests that Dickens and Thackeray can be considered the founders of a branch of the novel of manners, "the British Metropolitan Novel," and he assesses their work to be wholly positive and contributive.¹⁶ Both novelists are capable of objectively observing and commenting on society and its institutions; neither is seen as trapped by environmental conditioning, perhaps because Masson is not convinced that England is in the process of physical and moral decay. He acknowledges that the proper role of the contemporary novel may be in the realm of social reality, a term under which he lists Dickens and Thackeray, but argues that at its most noble prose fiction may, through presentation of "characters of heroic imaginary mould, . . . remove us from cities and the crowded haunts of men."¹⁷ Masson's appreciation of Scott, like Ruskin's, recognizes that there can be a felicity in fiction which emerges out of contact with external nature, a felicity not found in the novel of the city.

There are numerous theoretical discussions of the novel, its place in literary history, and its functional relation to the reader. Of these, two may be briefly considered in terms of Ruskin's comments on fiction. In 1862 Thomas Hill Green presented the essay "The Value and Influ-

ence of Works of Fiction" at Oxford.¹⁸ In the same manner as David Masson he notes the possibility of comparing the novel with narrative poetry, potentially with the epic. Green, however, argues that in reality the novel as it exists in England centers upon external qualities of characters rather than, as in great poetry, emerging out of the interior values and essential conflicts of figures. Thus, he suggests, it is unlikely that prose fiction has any deeply meaningful influence on readers. Green recognizes, as does Ruskin, that the division of labor and specialization produced by industrialization lead to a sense of incompleteness in the individual person. In the newspaper and the novel Green finds the only means by which modern man can attain, in the imagination at least, those experiences and affections which urban life denies. This is not necessarily a positive function however, for Green, like Ruskin, concludes that the novel will do little more than mirror the reader's own external environment, leaving him "poring over a detail of the causes and symptoms of the disease which he hugs. . . ." ¹⁹

The combination of Ruskin's confidence that fiction has great potential to "do good" and his awareness that the potential has been seldom realized finds a counterpart in Green's essay. He argues that despite the self-orientation and resultant sentimentality typical of an art which mirrors the diseases of the reader, the novel can reveal social

injustices and possibly have a corrective influence on the culture. The works of Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, and others reveal that the "novelist catches the cry of suffering" before it is publicly heard.²⁰ No evidence is given, however, to suggest that this potential has had a significant influence on society or on individual responses to the injustices of society. Green's central argument is that the novel may to a degree cultivate the weakest intellects, but it will also have a conforming tendency on the higher intellectual orders, thus leveling the entire society to general acceptance of uninspired reporting as the purpose of fiction. His view of Victorian culture as decayed and thoroughly ignoble, reflected clearly in the prose fiction of the age, is close to that of Ruskin. Green's style is more conservative, less vivid, than that of his elder, but his ideas suggest that Ruskin's opinions were by no means held in isolation.

A decade earlier, Arthur Hugh Clough, writing a brief review of a minor poet's work for The North American Review, attempts to explain why the modern novel is preferred by the public to poetry, particularly to poetry based on classical models.²¹ He recognizes that "people much prefer Vanity Fair and Bleak House" to poetical works that move beyond the pale of everyday activity, that "often dirty, or at least dingy, work which it is the lot of so many of us

to have to do, and which some one or other, after all, must do."²² Clough suggests that the modern reader may be of a more practical, prosaic mind than his predecessors and, as a result, find images of the factory and of "urban and suburban dustiness" most familiar and attractive. Unlike the noble poet who asks man to consider a higher unity, that "purer existence" to which man, however abased, may relate himself, the modern novelist builds his reader "a real house to be lived in; and this common builder, with no notion of the orders, is more to our purpose than the student of ancient art who proposes to lodge us under an Ionic portico."²³ Clough laments the pedestrian nature of that literature which the reading public most eagerly accepts. He finds, as does Ruskin, the source of this appeal in the shifting environment of the English reader, and his implied conclusion is that men seek representations in art of the life with which they are familiar. Thus fiction becomes a record of the urbanized, industrialized society with no ends more noble than reporting the "general wants, ordinary feelings" of the reader.

Ruskin's specific literary opinions, particularly his judgment of Scott as the greatest of English novelists, are generally close to those of other Victorians. James T. Hillhouse, in his survey of Scott's literary reputation from 1814 to 1935, suggests that the novelist became a

standard by which Victorians measured their own best authors, including Dickens, Thackeray, and Eliot.²⁴ The emphasis upon biographical and historical material related to Scott, central to Ruskin's assessment of the novelist, was typical of the Victorian reader in general. Hillhouse sees "personal affection" for Scott a relevant point in the popularity of his fiction through the nineteenth century:

It is clear enough that Scott's character and personality were of tremendous service in keeping alive the fame of his novels and poems. Through most of the Victorian period, the acclaim of Scott as a man was as great as it had been in his own lifetime. . . . The Victorians had no writer of their own . . . for whom they felt the personal affection and tenderness and reverence that they lavished on this idol of the last age.²⁵

Even Thomas Carlyle, who judges Scott's novels as having little more purpose than to amuse "indolent languid men," is swayed by the impressive facts of Scott's life to give the writer credit for his overwhelming success.²⁶ Tennyson is closer to Ruskin in acknowledging the greatness both of Scott's life and of his literary production in his comment, "Scott is the most chivalrous literary figure of this century, and the author with the widest range since Shakespeare."²⁷

The repetitious listing of literary opinions neither establishes nor challenges the validity of Ruskin's literary criticism, but it does suggest that his Victorian readers found little that was unfamiliar in the pages of Fors Clavigera and Fiction, Fair and Foul. They may, however,

have found several conspicuous omissions. Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and George Meredith were writing in approximately the same years as Scott, Dickens, and Eliot respectively; Ruskin refers to the latter figures many times yet seems never to have read the former. Likewise, William Godwin's fiction, especially Caleb Williams, was respected and in its concentration on social justice should have gained Ruskin's attention, but there is no reference to Godwin, either to his fiction or to Political Justice, in his works.²⁸ These inconsistencies in Ruskin's reading do not have their source in chronology and in the decay of sensibility as R. H. Wilenski argues (see footnote 7); rather, they relate directly to the highly individual manner in which he pursued every personal interest throughout his career. Those discoveries he did make--Turner, Veronese, Scott, the Pre-Raphaelites, the Ducal Palace--are given his full time, energy, and devotion, but he is unsystematic in his application to any single discipline.²⁹

Ruskin's penchant for using literary criticism as a vehicle for social and economic statement and his frequent assertion of authorial intention in specific works have led some readers to criticize his methods. Matthew Arnold, who charges Ruskin with sentimentality and provinciality in his comment on Homer and Shakespeare, cited his peer as evidence of the principle that

the critic must keep out of the region of immediate practice in the political, social, humanitarian sphere, if he wants to make a beginning for that more free speculative treatment of things, which may perhaps one day make its benefits felt even in this sphere, but in a natural and thence irresistable manner.³⁰

Ruskin, in Arnold's judgment, suffers from a loss of critical objectivity; he uses literary criticism to reinforce his personal affections and to propagate his public opinions rather than accepting criticism as an independent, self-justifying discipline. In a less serious tone Henry James noted in the 1870's that Ruskin is often guilty of "the attribution of various incongruous and arbitrary intentions to the artist. . . ."³¹ Comparing Ruskin with a French art critic, James comes to essentially the same conclusion as does Arnold: Ruskin's "too passionate" urge to establish "his rigid conception of the right" leads him to unjustified excesses in his criticism. In another instance Henry James argues that Ruskin's emphasis upon the duty of the viewer distorts the meaning of art. Essentially, James's charge is against excessive seriousness and false perspective:

One may read a great many pages of Mr. Ruskin without getting a hint of this delightful truth; a hint of the not unimportant fact that art, after all, is made for us, and not we for art. . . . And as for Mr. Ruskin's world of art being a place where we may take life easily, woe to the luckless mortal who enters it with any such disposition. Instead of a garden of delight, he finds a sort of assize court, in perpetual session.³²

Matthew Arnold and Henry James cannot accept Ruskin's criticism because their own assumptions concerning the function

of the critic differ from his on too fundamental a level. Both demand that the critic assess his subject in an objective manner; Ruskin insists that the role of the critic is personal, moral, and social.³³

As was noted in the first chapter of this study, Ruskin's literary criticism has been generally ignored through the first half of the twentieth century. The popularity of scientific, analytical methods in the criticism of the present age has not made attractive the voluminous work of a man who, as E. T. Cook comments, "was not so much a critic, as a crusader."³⁴ Those highly personal, seemingly arbitrary assertions to which Arnold and James objected in the nineteenth century have become no more acceptable in the twentieth. Similarly, the biographical, historical, and moral contexts by which Ruskin frequently assesses literature are likely to be questioned or discounted altogether by a critical structure centered upon the work itself. When his judgments are acceptable, the tone which Ruskin assumes in asserting himself may alienate the reader. Walter Houghton concludes that the dogmatic, assertive quality of Ruskin's work emerges not so much from personal arrogance as from an intellectual context within which he assumed his statements were, in fact, fixed laws of "truth and right," an assumption common to the greatest minds of the period.³⁵ Thus a reader who dismisses Ruskin's critical judgments

because of their tone may be misreading the context which produces that quality.

There is much of what C. S. Lewis calls the medieval "image" in Ruskin's critical method.³⁶ While Ruskin can by no means be totally identified with this aspect of medievalism, he does refuse to condense his ideas, to eliminate all but the essential framework of his thought; he consistently enlarges, digresses, and implicitly demands that his reader acknowledge that a lecture titled "Crystallography" can properly treat Cistercian architecture. "The whole of Ruskin's opus," as John Rosenberg suggests, "is an uninterrupted dedication to the Oneness of the many."³⁷ Morton Berman explains the elaboration and seeming digression of Ruskin's work as clearly as anyone who has treated the topic: "The point is . . . that Ruskin must use all of his details because he is committed to the view that nothing is irrelevant, and that the whole can only be grasped if all of the parts are given their due."³⁸ The qualities of elaboration in Ruskin's prose, then, are a functional part of his total approach to any given topic. The post-Victorian reader, "compelled to extract the greatest intellectual and spiritual nourishment . . . he" can, within the smallest compass," may find this method distracting, perhaps even unreadable.³⁹

To sympathetically consider the literary criticism

of John Ruskin is to become conscious that "No wreck is so frequent, no waste so wild, as the wreck and waste of the minds of men devoted to the arts."⁴⁰ Ruskin's concept of the "unity and indivisibility" of man, illustrated in aesthetic principle and critical practice, may appear outmoded, subjective, and capricious to the twentieth-century student. It is inconceivable that he could have achieved the contemporary vision that man makes experience meaningful by creating personal identity, personal values, out of nothingness. Perhaps only to the reader willing to sympathetically consider Ruskin's aesthetic and critical assumptions does the very real power of his mind reveal itself. Two such diverse readers as Virginia Woolf and Graham Hough have, in sympathetic reading, found that "In the passages on literature that are scattered through his writings we are constantly compelled, in spite of frequent disagreement, to acknowledge the energy and acuteness of his judgments."⁴¹ Future scholarship may reveal unrecognized approaches and insights in his work, as Harold Bloom's recent essay has,⁴² but if it does not, knowledge of Ruskin's aesthetics and literary criticism still remains essential to understanding one aspect of the Victorian age.

FOOTNOTES

¹Rene Welleck and Austin Warren in their study, Theory of Literature (New York, 1956), provide a discussion of extrinsic method in literary criticism (pp. 61-124).

²Bertram Morris, "Ruskin on the Pathetic Fallacy, or on How a Moral Theory of Art May Fail," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XIV (December 1955), 266.

³For all of his realization of the power of environment, Ruskin never moves to Wilde's "Nature imitates art." The moral context within which all experience is assessed keeps Ruskin from ultimately reaching a sense of what Morse Peckham calls "the dynamic relation between orientation and perception in both art and science" Beyond the Tragic Vision (New York, 1962), p. 247.

⁴John D. Rosenberg, The Darkening Glass A Portrait of Ruskin's Genius (New York, 1961), p. 43.

⁵In his essay "Ruskin and George Eliot's 'Realism'" Criticism, VIII (Summer 1965), 2057, Darrel Mansell argues that "For Ruskin, great art in some way reflects the mind of the artist; and inferior art impersonally reflects only the subject." Mansell sees George Eliot's assumption that "Art is always the mirror of a mind," as directly formed by Ruskin's aesthetics.

⁶Graham Hough extends the specific artistic limits of this point in his suggestion that it is Ruskin's "special distinction" to have shown how aesthetic experience "can lead directly to that unified apprehension of nature, and of ourselves as a part of nature, which can fairly constantly be recognized, under various mythological disguises, not only as that which gives value to aesthetic experience, but also as one of the major consolations of philosophy" "Ruskin and Roger Fry: Two Aesthetic Theories," Cambridge Journal, I (October 1947), 277.

⁷R. H. Wilenski in his psychology-oriented study of Ruskin's life and work argues that Ruskin's later criticism is irrelevant because "he cared so little about art": "After forty he took no interest at all in contemporary production; and even before that age there were times when he escaped from the hard task of understanding the present to the easy pastime of pretending to understand the past. After forty he became one of the thousands of people who

imagine that they can understand the original art created by dead cultures though they cannot understand the original art of the living culture around them. In his early years he knew that no one can understand any aspect of human activity unless he can understand it in men who are alive" /John Ruskin An Introduction to Further Study of His Life and Work (New York, 1933), p. 243/. Without naming Wilenski, Rosenberg challenges the conclusions of "a brilliant critic of Ruskin" by noting that any lessened passion for art after 1859 resulted from "that larger collapse of nature whose perfection he could no longer find mirrored in art." This critic directly contradicts Wilenski, asserting that Ruskin in the 1870's was still discovering art and artists never before appreciated (pp. 43-45).

⁸Charles T. Dougherty, "Ruskin's Moral Argument," Victorian Newsletter, No. 9 (Spring 1956), 5.

⁹John Tinnon Taylor, Early Opposition to the English Novel (New York, 1943), p. 6.

¹⁰David Masson, British Novelists and Their Styles (London, 1859), pp. 2-5.

¹¹Masson, p. 149.

¹²Masson, pp. 23-24.

¹³Masson gives inordinate attention to Scott, about one-fourth of his entire survey of English prose fiction. In a prefatory note he acknowledges some imbalance by asking his readers to remember that the lectures were delivered in Edinburgh.

¹⁴Masson, pp. 172-173.

¹⁵Masson, pp. 196-197.

¹⁶Masson, pp. 238-239.

¹⁷Masson, p. 308.

¹⁸Thomas Hill Green, "The Value and Influence of Works of Fiction," Works of Thomas Hill Green, Vol. III, ed. R. L. Nettleship (London, 1911), pp. 20-45.

¹⁹Green, p. 37.

²⁰Green, p. 44.

²¹Arthur Hugh Clough, "Recent English Poetry," The North American Review LXXVII (July 1853), 1-30. The specific comment on the Victorian novel appears in a brief review of Alexander Smith's volume Poems.

²²Clough, pp. 2-3.

²³Clough, pp. 3-4.

²⁴James T. Hillhouse, The Waverley Novels and Their Critics (Minneapolis, Minn., 1936), pp. 190-193, 197.

²⁵Hillhouse, pp. 174-175. This scholar does not find a body of negative criticism of Scott's work developing until the 1890's. (p. 168).

²⁶Thomas Carlyle, "Sir Walter Scott," Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, Vol. IV (London, 1899), pp. 22-87. Carlyle dismisses Scott's novels with vigor; ironically, the qualities he cannot find in the novelist are the same qualities which Ruskin argues are responsible for Scott's greatness: ". . . there is little to be sought or found in the Waverley Novels. Not profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for edification, for building up or elevating, in any shape! the sick heart will find no healing here, the darkly-struggling heart no guidance: the Heroic that is in all men no divine awakening voice. We say, therefore, that they do not found themselves on deep interests, but on comparatively trivial ones; not on the perennial, perhaps not even on the lasting" (p. 76).

²⁷Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir (London, 1897), p. 372. Hallam Tennyson is here quoting his father.

²⁸Masson, for example, cites Godwin as the only novelist writing between 1789 and 1814 who is superior to Mrs. Radcliffe, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen (p. 179).

²⁹That Ruskin continued to read new works of fiction throughout his life is clearly established by his letters. As late as 1888 in a letter to Miss Kate Greenaway, Ruskin writes that he is working his way through a circulating library and believes that he could produce "a recipe for the writing of novels without a novelty in them" (Works, XXXVII, p. 601).

³⁰Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," Lectures and Essays in Criticism, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1962), p. 275. The reference to Homer

appears in the essay "On Translating Homer" (On the Classical Tradition), pp. 102, 149; the comment on Shakespeare is from "The Literary Influence of the Academies" (Lectures and Essays in Criticism), pp. 251-252.

³¹Henry James, "Les Maitres D'Autrefois," The Painter's Eye and Essays on the Pictorial Arts, ed. John L. Sweeney (London, 1956), p. 117.

³²Henry James, "Recent Florence," Atlantic Monthly, XLI (May 1878), 591.

³³Differences between Arnold and Ruskin should not be overemphasized; as Walter Houghton notes, there are close parallels in their rejections of jest in literature on the common ground of "high seriousness" (The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven, 1957), p. 358⁷). In a lighter vein Arnold recalled his response to his sister's charge that he was becoming "as dogmatic as Ruskin": "I told her the difference was that Ruskin was 'dogmatic and wrong'" (Lectures and Essays in Criticism, p. 402).

³⁴E. T. Cook, The Life of John Ruskin, Vol. II (London, 1911), p. 289.

³⁵Houghton, pp. 143-145, 148-149. Houghton acknowledges, however, that "To turn to Ruskin's letters from his published works, with their explicit claims and implicit assumptions of infallibility, is to hear a succession of cries from a bewildered and sometimes even a humble man" (p. 156).

³⁶C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 1-21, 214-215. Lewis argues that the world view of the medieval writer led him to approach all accumulated knowledge and opinion as relevant to the total experience of man, that his works reflect a refusal, on established principle, to discriminate in the structuring of a literary work. This principle, Lewis suggests, explains the multitude of "digressions" in medieval poetry.

³⁷Rosenberg, p. 42. It is Rosenberg who relates the instance of Ruskin's discussing architecture in the lecture on crystallography (p. 41).

³⁸Morton Berman, "Studies in John Ruskin's Literary Criticism" (unpublished doctoral dissertation), Harvard (1957), 163.

³⁹Derrick Leon, Ruskin The Great Victorian (London, 1949), p. 170.

⁴⁰Peter Quennell, John Ruskin: The Portrait of a Prophet (New York, 1949), foreword. The quotation is from a letter to Mrs. Hugh Miller written in 1857.

⁴¹Graham Hough, The Last Romantics (London, 1947), p. 3. Virginia Woolf argues that despite the early twentieth century's rejection of Ruskin's aesthetics and economics, a reader has to "reckon with a force which is not to be suppressed by a whole pyramid of faults" / "Ruskin," The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays (New York, 1950), p. 51/.

⁴²Harold Bloom (see Chapter I, footnote 27) considers Ruskin the first archetypal critic.

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