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JOHN RUSKIN'S CRITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE.

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JOHN RUSKIN'S CRITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

by

HELEN M. PIKE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
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Preface

The subjects of this study are John Ruskin's critical theory and practice. The attempt is not to survey Ruskin's opinions of works and writers, but to come to an understanding of his ideas about the nature of literary art and his procedures in interpreting a literary text. The method is threefold: to study how Ruskin's conception of literature derives from and complements his views on visual art; to investigate his dealings with literary theory itself; and to observe his habitual responses to the written word.

What does Ruskin consider imaginative meaning; how does the artist of words communicate it; how does the reader come close to it? Such questions cannot be answered by focusing upon only those essays devoted specifically to literature. For these concerns occupied Ruskin's mind in varying degrees over the course of fifty years of writing. Attitudes toward these issues are adumbrated in works as disparate as Deucalion and Praeterita; the issues are treated directly in studies as seemingly unrelated as Modern Painters and Munera Pulveris.

Searching through these writings one finds the theoretical and the practical criticism inextricably joined. And so they must be in any discussion. The reader cannot understand the significance of Ruskin's preference for Dante's imagery over Milton's, for example, unless he struggles with Ruskin's ideas on the nature of the artistic imagination. For many specific literary pronouncements can only be understood as they evolve from Ruskin's understanding of art in

general. To perceive how Ruskin responds to the word, one must keep in mind what he considers the word to be giving, what he considers the difference between what the word can give and what shape or color can give, what he considers the domain of art.

In fact, Ruskin's opinions about individual works frequently emerge directly from his theoretical conceptions and distinctions. And when he does devote space to extensive practical criticism, he often justifies his evaluations by demonstrating the coherence between his preferences and his principles. And, as will become apparent, Ruskin sometimes builds toward theory by elaborating his individual perceptions. But, whatever the hierarchy, his theoretical and practical criticism depend upon each other in both his contemplations and his strategy for communicating with his audience. A reader must be willing to make the same movements, back and forth.

The final goal is to understand how Ruskin responds to literature. But the path is filled with broad questions. Yet Ruskin's writings can be so illuminating, so original, though at times so problematical, the procedure is amply rewarding. Ruskin's thoughts on art and the artist, bound up as they are with his contemplations about what it is to be a human being in this world, are serious, provocative, moral. A study of the literary criticism becomes one way of entering the richness of Ruskin's mind.

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JOHN RUSKIN'S CRITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

I. Sister Arts

i. Introduction

John Ruskin is not usually considered a literary critic. His major achievement may be his elevation of the visual arts to a central position in the consciousness of Victorian thinkers and writers, or his insistence on humanistic, moral criteria in evaluating economic practices. His first commitment was to quickening an understanding of the nature and quality of life in this world and to making that life nobler, more beautiful or, at the very least, more endurable.

Compared with this end, literary criticism was often considered by Ruskin a cloistered pursuit, largely unconcerned with life's most serious matters, and ineffective in persuading an audience about value.¹ Critics have, in the main, followed Ruskin's lead. They have not concentrated upon his discussions of literature; they have not drawn out, in detail, the literary implications of his art theory. Some have maintained that he is not really a literary critic at all. René Wellek, in Volume 3 of his History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, suggests this attitude.² "Ruskin seems hardly to belong to a history of literary criticism. One can of course collect his opinions on poets and writers and come up with a body of pronouncements that, not unexpectedly, reflects the taste of the early Victorian age. . . . But all these are obiter dicta. . . . They contribute toward the total picture we may try to form for ourselves of the man, but do not immediately concern the development of literary criticism." Thus, Wellek maintains, Ruskin may have remarked occasionally on literature, but he has no real

place in a progressively developing history of literary criticism, and an examination of his discussions of literature may enhance an understanding of Ruskin, but not of the development of a discipline.

Yet, many of Ruskin's comments on literature are well-known; they have come down as standard interpretations or approaches. The subtle transmutation of vision by emotion that Ruskin calls the pathetic fallacy; the isolation of landscape description as a crucial indication of the differences between the Classic, Medieval and Modern minds; the close readings, one might say explications, of passages from Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton have been received as classics, not just because they are Ruskin's insights and approaches, but because they deal intelligently with and illuminate the material under consideration.

It is an important task, surely, to determine Ruskin's place in the history of literary criticism, to decide how central or peripheral are his approaches or techniques to a developing body of nineteenth century critical writing, to ascertain his debts and his contributions in theory and technique. But it is an equally important, and perhaps more difficult, task to find form and direction in Ruskin's pronouncements on literature, scattered as they are amid masses of other writings. Ruskin has few essays or lectures that are strictly literary in subject. Rather, statements, paragraphs, short discussions must be gleaned from such diverse writings as Modern Painters, Val D'Arno and The Queen of the Air. It is a watchword, too, in discussions of Ruskin to consider the special circumstances that prompted each essay, each lecture. Ruskin is fully capable of assuming a position in the heat of

argument, and then through pride or stubbornness, maintaining that position long after the need for it has passed. After writing two letters to The Times in 1851 defending the Pre-Raphaelites, for example, Ruskin was charged with inconsistency; had he not spent his career defending Turner, and who could be more unlike Turner than the Pre-Raphaelite painters. Ruskin's pamphlet Pre-Raphaelitism, published later that year, promptly aligns Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly in their fidelity to fact.³ And, not satisfied with this, Ruskin frequently refers to Turner as Pre-Raphaelite during the next few years.⁴ A reader must be careful to ascertain in exactly which ways Turner resembles the Pre-Raphaelites; surely he did not consider himself to be a member, and Ruskin's parallel, while just and true in certain special ways, might well be considered misleading in its overall effect.

In addition, Ruskin's writings are plagued by contradiction. He noted this about his own work and comments with good humor, "for myself, I am never satisfied that I have handled a subject properly until I have contradicted myself at least three times."⁵ Achieving a view of Ruskin's literary criticism, then, that is both comprehensive in its scope and true to the spirit of the individual essays is a difficult task.

Yet, it is one that should be attempted. The strength and originality of Ruskin's imagination, the fervor of his moral conviction are undeniable, and when such a man comments either extensively or epigrammatically on poets or novelists and their work, he deserves close attention. A number of critics have weighed Ruskin's qualifications as

a serious critic of literature. R. Warwick Bond, writing in 1905 on "Ruskin's Views of Literature," considers Ruskin's first claim to be based on the entire pattern of his personality and education. "Ruskin's proper subjects, no doubt, are art and sociology, and his utterances on literature are incidental; but his claims to be heard on the subject are indisputable, overwhelming. By his whole instinct, taste and early training he was incontestably, incurably literary." ⁶ A. H. R. Ball, who has written a rich and most sympathetic study of Ruskin's practical criticism as the introduction to his anthology, Ruskin as Literary Critic, enlarges upon Bond's remarks. Ball makes more specific claims for Ruskin's importance. "The views of such a man on literature at any time deserve attention and when sufficiently extensive, may even claim a place in the history of criticism. . . . In analysis, interpretation, and description, the power to awaken fresh and vivid currents of ideas and emotions, his genius was unequalled." ⁷ Without yet weighing Ball's contention regarding Ruskin's contribution to the history of criticism, one might still note this appraisal of Ruskin's analytic and interpretive talents. Perhaps Ruskin himself gives one of the most compelling reasons for listening to him on literature; in Praeterita he writes of "having always a way of thinking with myself what words meant." ⁸

ii. Ut Pictura Poesis

Throughout Modern Painters Ruskin is at pains to keep from making sharp distinctions between the visual and the verbal arts. He will discuss problems in painting and give examples from literature. In

Volume I he discusses the "Truth of Chiaroscuro." ⁹ "Now if there be one principle, or secret more than another, on which Turner depends for attaining brilliancy of light, it is his clear and exquisite drawing of the shadows. . . . Take the beautiful concentration of all that is most characteristic of Italy as she is, at page 168 of Rogers's Italy, where we have the long shadows of the trunks made by far the most conspicuous thing in the whole foreground, and hear how Wordsworth, the keenest-eyed of all modern poets for what is deep and essential in nature, illustrates Turner here, as we shall find him doing in all other points.

'At the root
Of that tall pine, the shadow of whose bare
And slender stem, while here I sit at eve,
Oft stretches tow'rds me, like a long straight path,
Traced faintly in the greensward.'

Excursion, Book VI"

Ruskin sees the kind of representations attempted by Turner and Wordsworth to be so alike that, in fact, the poet "illustrates" the painter.

Elsewhere, Ruskin builds up his conception of a particular artistic style by examining both the visual and the poetic. In Modern Painters III he studies the grotesque by discussing medieval painting and statuary and The Faerie Queene. The Stones of Venice deals with the social forces that make themselves felt in the arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance; Ruskin here treats Dante and Spenser as well as Giotto. Similarly, in Fiction, Fair and Foul, the critic reiterates the repugnance he feels in surveying the modern city with a discussion of its literary product, the modern novel of urban blight and decay.

Ruskin holds a unified view of art, a view that demands the same thing of painting and poetry, of all the arts. For art expresses something greater than itself, and Ruskin's first concern is for what it expresses.

Painting, or art generally, as such, with all its technicalities, difficulties, and particular ends, is nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing. He who has learned what is commonly considered the whole art of painting, that is, the art of representing any natural object faithfully, has as yet only learned the language by which his thoughts are expressed. He has done just as much towards being that which we ought to respect as a great painter, as a man who has learned to express himself grammatically and melodiously has towards being a great poet. . . . It is not by the mode of representing and saying, but by what is represented and said, that the respective greatness either of the painter or of the writer is to be finally determined.¹⁰

Ruskin does not maintain this total allegiance to the primacy of thought in art, this virtual exclusion of the influence of material and form, without exception throughout his life. As will become apparent, he became well aware that the very process of artistic creation can mold the final product, which becomes an expression of the experience of creation as well as a representation of a preconception.

Yet, in his earliest writing Ruskin gives few indications of this development. In 1856, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake wrote a review of the first three volumes of Modern Painters for the Quarterly Review.¹¹ In her article, Lady Eastlake opposes Ruskin on just this point; she argues that the good critic must distinguish between painting and poetry, and that thought is not the subject of both.

The only way to arrive at the true end for which an art is valuable at all is by determining those qualities which no other art but itself can express, and which are therefore to be considered as proper to it. Now thought, having a language proper to itself, cannot possibly be defined as the great specific excellence or purpose of the art of painting. On the

contrary the slightest reflection will show that thought when expressed by painting is, by the inherent conditions of the art of painting itself, restricted in range, depth and originality--those very qualities which are the great essentials of thought itself. No picture, whether good or bad, that does seek to embody depth and range of thought, even in the very limited degree possible, can be deciphered without borrowing another language, in addition to its own, in the shape of a glossary; while, so far from original thought being even a recommendation, the whole history of art shows that it is the familiar thought which is sure to be the most attractive.

(p. 388)

Yet the alliance between painting and poetry has a long tradition. Some justifications for the analogy have been casual and merely suggestive, others, academic and explicit. It might be helpful to survey this tradition briefly in order to place Ruskin in this line of argument, to note his orthodoxy or peculiarity.

The first major analogy between painting and poetry is in Aristotle's Poetics. Defining art as an imitation of nature, Aristotle distinguishes among the various arts with special attention to their means of imitation, color, form, rhythm, language. But the objects of imitation are the same for all the arts, "men in action,"¹² and hence the similarities between painting and poetry. One may choose to represent men as better than they are or as worse. This choice will distinguish tragedy from comedy. "It is the same in painting" (II, 1). Jean Hagstrum, in The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray, declares that Aristotle "is responsible for the unshakable association that has existed between literary idealization and ideal form in the graphic arts."¹³

Certainly Aristotle's comment seems a slim foundation for such a strong and specific contention. Aristotle's remark was indeed far from

a central point in his argument. Such too is the case with Horace, whose phrase ut pictura poesis has come down as the definitive label for this theory. In the Ars Poetica, Horace compares the two arts in a number of ways; they must both have freedom of subject; they must both maintain a propriety, a fitness regarding their characters' actions or movements. And he then draws a very specific analogy. "Poetry is like painting: one piece takes your fancy if you stand close to it, another if you keep it at some distance. One courts a dim light; another, challenging keen criticism, will fain be seen in the glare; this charms but once, that will please if ten times repeated." ¹⁴ Horace is not erecting a theory of art based on any major unities of poetry and painting; his analogy is quite clear. Hagstrum adds, "Actually the phrase means less than what it says, which is 'As a painting, so a poem.' It really implies only this 'As sometimes in painting, so occasionally in poetry.' There is no warrant whatever in Horace's text for the later interpretation: 'Let a poem be like a painting'" (p. 9).

Nevertheless, during the Renaissance, this injunction became the universal interpretation of Horace's remark. ¹⁵ Aristotle and Horace became the two Ancients most often quoted as authorities in the developing doctrine of ut pictura poesis. The doctrine took on a variety of related meanings regarding the nature of the two arts. They both represented an imitation of human nature, most often, aspects of nature selected and embellished by the artist's imagination, but derived ultimately from an observance of reality. The theme of both, following Aristotle, must be human beings in action, and eventually a

hierarchy of artists was set up; at the bottom stood the painter of still life; above him, the painter of landscape; animals; and portraits. The greatest painter, finally, was he who treated subjects and characters from history and fable. Finally, the arts were allied in their double aim, to please and to instruct.

Rensselaer W. Lee, who has developed these and many more implications of the theory in his study Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting,¹⁶ explains the special circumstances that encouraged the Renaissance devotion to the expanding doctrine. The critics of painting, like those of poetry, turned to ancient sources for inspiration and direction.

But no theoretical treatise has survived that attempted, as the Poetics did for literature, to define the nature of the art of painting, and to discuss it in terms of formal aesthetic; nor had the Renaissance inherited any seasoned advice to the practicing painter concerning good taste or effective presentation that could compare with the shrewd good sense and practical wisdom of the Ars Poetica. Now the analogies between poetry and painting that these famous treatises contained could not fail in a humanistic age to impress critics who sought to invest painting with the dignity of a liberal art, for Aristotle and Horace, not to mention fragmentary utterances of other ancient writers, had by implication already accorded her this dignity. And being in search of the doctrine that these ancient analogies seem to imply, and finding it nowhere developed in antiquity, the critics did not limit their borrowings from the Poetics and the Ars Poetica to those passages, after all, few in number, in which painting and poetry are compared.

Hagstrum indicates one implication of the Renaissance interpretation of the doctrine. It was an attempt to fight a derivative, academic classicism.

The chief, if not the sole, reason for the importance of ut pictura poesis in Renaissance criticism was that it somehow served the purposes of artistic naturalism. Filippo Villani in the early fifteenth century viewed the revival of the arts as not

so much a reversion to antiquity for its own sake as a reversion to nature. . . . If this is true in general of the revival of ancient text and ancient theory, it is more particularly true of the resurrection of ut pictura poesis. For that critical doctrine had originally risen in connection with the notion of enargeia, the vivid and lifelike reproduction in verbal art of natural detail. . . . [ut pictura poesis] was a reminder to the poet that the example of painting proved that art could achieve power only to the extent that it was in the closest possible contact with visible reality.

(p. 62).

One must keep in mind that to Aristotle and his Renaissance interpreters, nature meant human nature. The imitation that is art was based on an observation of men and life, and as Kenneth Clark has shown, in Landscape into Art, a devoted concern for a depiction of the details of landscape is not apparent in the history of art until the late eighteenth century.¹⁷

By the middle of the eighteenth century, ut pictura poesis had taken on some quite sophisticated and complex connotations. Earlier simplifications¹⁸ had been superseded by the discussions of such critics as Sir Joshua Reynolds and G. E. Lessing. Reynolds' Discourses to the Royal Academy (1769-1790) explore many of the problems raised by ut pictura poesis. Reynolds looks with the painter's eye upon the nature that art imitates and, without breaking from the tradition, questions many of its fundamental tenets. He declares that the veracity of the imitation may be a poor standard in judging the visual arts. "If deceiving the eye were the only business of the art, there is no doubt, indeed, but the minute painter would be more apt to succeed: but it is not the eye, it is the mind, which the painter of genius desires to address."¹⁹ "Painting is not only not to be considered as an imitation, operating by deception, but that it is and

ought to be, in many points of view, and strictly speaking, no imitation at all of external nature." ²⁰ And in "Discourse Thirteen," Reynolds summarizes his position. "The great end of all those arts is, to make an impression on the imagination and the feeling. The imitation of nature frequently does this. Sometimes it fails, and something else succeeds. I think therefore the true test of all the arts, is not solely whether the production is a true copy of nature, but whether it answers the end of art, which is to produce a pleasing effect upon the mind" (p. 211). Even though Reynolds here interprets nature as external nature, as landscape, the implications for art as an imitation of human nature, of Aristotle's "men in action" are quite clear. For Reynolds places the parallel between painting and poetry on a ground different from the traditional. He says in "Discourse Three," the "great design of speaking to the heart" is the "one great idea, which gives to painting its true dignity, which entitles it to the name of a Liberal Art, and ranks it as a sister of poetry" (p. 51).

The imitation that occurs in painting, then, is of a special kind. It is an imitation directed, methodized, transmuted by the imagination. The artist imitates not just observable nature, but "la belle nature." By close and repeated observations, he achieves an idea of the "central form" of a species from which each existing object is a deviation. Hagstrum warns that this must not be confused with Neoplatonism. "Reynolds does sometimes suggest, in word and phrase, the Neoplatonic ideal. But nothing is actually further from his meaning than the notion of supernal reality mediated to the artist by inner vision, by mystical contemplation. For Reynolds the ideal

does not descend to the artist or beholder from supersensory archetypes; it arises from continuously and vigorously pursued empirical observation and search" (p. 142). By abstracting that which is beautiful and permanent from the transient manifestation, the artist achieves a truer image of Nature than accidental variations can give.

In these ways does poetry resemble painting. Both address themselves to the mind and heart; both have the liberty, if not the duty, of deviating from observable reality in order to construct works of art that please the mind and affections.

Although Reynolds implies the expansion of his remarks to include poetry, he does not specify in which ways poetry imitates or deviates from nature. Such distinctions were made more clearly by a German contemporary of Sir Joshua's, G. E. Lessing. In the Laokoön, Lessing distinguishes between painting and poetry by developing their differences in subject as well as method. Painting makes use of "form and colour in space," poetry of "articulated sounds in time." Such means of representation imply distinct subjects. "Subjects whose wholes or parts exist in juxtaposition are called bodies. Consequently, bodies with their visible properties are the peculiar subjects of painting. Subjects whose wholes or parts are consecutive are called actions. Consequently, actions are the peculiar subjects of poetry."²¹ Lessing's whole effort is against the tradition that increasingly identifies painting with poetry. His attempt was to limit the arts to their proper spheres: painting, to corporeal beauty; poetry, to the expression of human action.

In effect, both Reynolds and Lessing are beginning to break away

from the ut pictura poesis tradition. Lessing attacks the analogy directly; painting is quite unlike poetry, he declares, and not to recognize this is to produce a confused and diluted art, one that does not take advantage of its natural strengths and possibilities. Sir Joshua, perhaps, was the more revolutionary, although at first glance the President of the Royal Academy would seem quite traditional. By questioning whether the triumph of art was in imitation at all, Reynolds moves toward a psychological, expressive theory of art, founded in the artist's own experience, resulting in a unique experience for the audience.

M. H. Abrams, in The Mirror and the Lamp, outlines some of the implications of the belief in art as mimesis, as mirror, as imitation of nature.

For better or for worse, the analogy [of the mirror] helped focus interest on the subject matter of a work and its models in reality, to the comparative neglect of the shaping influence of artistic conventions, the inherent requirements of the single work of art, and the individuality of the author; it encouraged the striking of a dichotomy between those elements of a work which are demonstrably representative of the real world and those further verbal and imaginative elements said to be merely "ornamental," introduced to give greater pleasure to the reader; and it fostered a pre-occupation with the "truth" of art, or its correspondence, in some fashion, to the matters it is held to reflect. ²²

Much of this was to change.

iii. Ut Musica Poesis

In the course of Romantic criticism, music replaced painting as the art most frequently compared with poetry. Perhaps the most famous statement of this analogy was made in 1877 in an essay by Walter Pater entitled "The School of Giorgione." ²³ "All art constantly aspires

towards the condition of music. For a while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it." It is toward such a statement that many earlier analogies between poetry and music are moving. The inevitability of form as it grows from content is developed too in theories of organic form.

Analogies between music and poetry were not an invention of the nineteenth century. Ancient Greek theory and practice made no distinction between the two arts. Music meant song. By the time of Plato and Aristotle, however, music could be treated as a tonal art and the philosophers considered music's relation to poetry under the general theory of mimesis.²⁴ Although Plato and Aristotle would disagree about the value to be placed on such an imitation,²⁵ both believed that the harmony and rhythm of music achieved a likeness to certain qualities of life and character. Music was another of the arts, all of which sprang from a common source.

During the Renaissance and early Neo-Classic periods in England, considerations of the similarities between music and poetry were often after the fact analyses of symmetry and proportion. They were not rich in suggestions for the poet's art, but rather discussions of the melodiousness or harmony of his work. Long and learned treatises were written comparing rhythm in music to versification in poetry: unaccented notes in a bar of music paralleled unstressed syllables in a word; rests in music resembled pauses in verse.²⁶ One development in theory, however, suggests a new direction; some critics considered

music and poetry to be related in their rhetorical powers. John Hollander, in The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry, 1500-1700,²⁷ discusses the foundation for this analogy.

"The controlling instruments of rhetoric are the persuasive, effective melody to laws' and religion's important text, necessary because that text, no matter what its truth, cannot establish its principles on the actual behavior of men without some means of affecting their feelings as well as their intellects." Music and poetry both use rhetorical devices for affective purposes.

Toward the middle of the eighteenth century, musical analogies began to develop these new implications. John W. Draper, in his essay "Poetry and Music in Eighteenth Century Aesthetics,"²⁸ indicates one practical reason for the fall in grace of the mimesis theory: the proliferation of musical forms and compositions during the Age of Reason encouraged an audience quick to appreciate and enjoy such music. At the same time, the voluminous criticism of the age was making increasingly clear the insufficiency of a mimetic theory in accounting for such great art. M. H. Abrams continues this approach. "There was wide agreement that instrumental music, dissociated from words, can reproduce only sound and motion, and is therefore imitative only in the trivial passages in which it simulates the cries of birds and the gurgle of running water or in the very limited sense that the rise and fall of a musical phrase is in accord with height or depth in the natural world. . . . Music, by its nature the weak spot in the theory of imitation as this theory was usually interpreted in the eighteenth century, was thus the first of the arts to be severed from

the mimetic principle by a critical consensus." ²⁹

Music, then, begins to be praised for its ability to raise emotions or affections in the listener. ³⁰ James Beattie, a late eighteenth-century critic, summarized this view exactly. In his Essay on Poetry and Music, Beattie writes "Music, therefore, is pleasing, not because it is imitative, but because certain melodies and harmonies have an aptitude to raise certain passions, affections, and sentiments in the soul." ³¹ As expressive theories of music developed, however, this interpretation of music's relation to the emotions was joined to a newer theory. Music expresses the passion of the composer and his effort is to communicate this passion.

During these years there were similar attempts to dissociate poetry from mimetic theories of art. In 1757, in "A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful," Edmund Burke insisted that the material of poetry is words, and words are not imitative; they are arbitrary signs with evocative power. ³²

Nothing is an imitation further than as it resembles some other thing, and words undoubtedly have no sort of resemblance to the ideas for which they stand.

(p. 351)

How then does language in poetry affect the reader?

It will be difficult to conceive how words can move the passions which belong to real objects, without representing these objects clearly. This is difficult to us because we do not sufficiently distinguish, in our observations upon language, between a clear expression and a strong expression. These are frequently confounded with each other, though they are in reality extremely different. The former regards the understanding; the latter belongs to the passions. The one describes a thing as it is; the other describes it as it is felt. Now, as there is a moving tone of voice, an impassioned countenance, an agitated gesture, which affect independently of the things about which they are exerted, so there are words, and certain dispositions of words,

which being peculiarly devoted to passionate subjects, and always used by those who are under the influence of any passion, they touch and move us more than those which far more clearly and distinctly express the subject matter. We yield to sympathy, what we refuse to description.

(pp. 353-54)

William Hazlitt approaches the same problem in his essay "On Poetry in General." He takes Burke's argument a step further. It is the configuration of words in evocative patterns that makes poetry.

Neither in the sounds themselves, which are the voluntary signs of certain ideas, nor in their grammatical arrangements in common speech, is there any principle of natural imitation, or correspondence to the original ideas, or to the tone of feeling with which they are conveyed to others. The jerks, the breaks, the inequalities, and harshnesses of prose, are fatal to the flow of the poetical imagination. . . . But poetry makes these odds all even. It is the music of language, answering to the music of the mind, untying as it were "the secret soul of harmony." . . . The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous; the musical in thought is the sustained and continuous also. There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion. Mad people sing. As often as articulation passes naturally into intonation, there poetry begins. ³³

Hazlitt and Burke place the discussion of poetry as imitation on a more philosophical, psychological plane that has been seen so far. A theory of the origin of language and its effect on the mind of the listener is implied in these discussions. Wordsworth, too, speculated on poetry as imitation. But his interests were more concrete and practical, growing as they did out of his experience as a poet. He discusses imitation as it affects the poet's subject matter. Wordsworth believed that poetry's concern was with the interaction of the mind and nature; the poet was to express this communion. "The appropriate business of poetry . . . her appropriate employment, her privilege and her duty, is to treat of things not as they are, but as they seem to exist to the senses and to the passions." ³⁴ The mind of man,

reacting to nature, the external world, creates the experience he knows. Or, as Wordsworth wrote to Francis Wrangham in 1816, referring to the "White Doe of Rylstone," "throughout, objects . . . derive their influence not from properties inherent in them, not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects. Thus, the Poetry, if there be any in the work, proceeds whence it ought to do, from the soul of Man, communicating its creative energies to the images of the external world." ³⁵ Art is no longer representing an external object or action, but recreating or expressing a sentiment, emotion or experience. Characteristically, the predominant Romantic poetic mode is not the epic or the drama, but the lyric, or at least a poetical genre that gives room for lyrical passages, Keats's Odes and The Prelude, for example. The poet's work no longer mirrors reality; now, a predominant metaphor describes the man himself. The poet becomes the Aeolian lyre, that set of strings over which the wind passes, making music.

The musical analogy, then, has two implications: poetry is like music because it does not imitate anything in the external world--it expresses the poet, his imagination, it evokes in the audience his moods, emotions; like music, too, poetry strives to break down distinctions between form and content, to justify a form anew each time it is used, to make the reading of a poem a singular and coherent experience. Poetry resembles music in origin, technique and end.

Footnotes

¹ And when a critic did have an effect, it was often perverse. See Ruskin's letter of January 18, 1875, to the editor of the "Pall Mall Gazette," later published in Arrows of the Chace. He writes, "A bad critic is probably the most mischievous person in the world. . . . and a good one, the most helpless and unhappy." The Works of John Ruskin, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903-12), XXXIV, 519. This edition is hereafter cited as Works.

² (New Haven, 1965), pp. 136-37.

³ "And thus Pre-Raphaelitism and Raphaelitism, and Turnerism, are all one and the same, so far as education can influence them. They are different in their choice, different in their faculties, but all the same in this, that Raphael himself, so far as he was great, and all who preceded or followed him who ever were great, became so by painting the truths around them as they appeared to each man's own mind, not as he had been taught to see them, except by the God who made both him and them." (Works, XII, 385.)

⁴ "Turner, the first and greatest of the Pre-Raphaelites." Works, XII, 159 ("Lectures on Architecture and Painting: Pre-Raphaelitism"). See also Works, V, 173-75 (Modern Painters, III, Pt. IV, Chap. X) for an extended defense of the comparison.

⁵ Works, XVI, 187 ("Inaugural Address at the Cambridge School of Art").

⁶ Contemporary Review, 86 (1905), 844.

⁷ (Cambridge, England, 1928), p. 6.

⁸ Works, XXXV, 14.

⁹ Works, III, 306-07 (Modern Painters, I, Pt. II, Sect. II, Chap. III).

¹⁰ Works, III, 87-88 (Modern Painters, I, Pt. I, Sect. I, Chap. II).

¹¹ XCVIII, 384-433. For a fuller discussion of Victorian attacks on Ruskin's alliance between painting and poetry, with special reference to Lady Eastlake's article, see Wendell Stacy Johnson, "'The Bride of Literature': Ruskin, the Eastlakes, and Mid-Victorian Theories of Art," The Victorian Newsletter, 26 (Fall, 1964), 23-28.

¹² Trans. S. H. Butcher (New York, 1961), II,i.

¹³ (Chicago, 1958), p. 8.

¹⁴ (New York, 1936), p. 409.

¹⁵ See, for example, Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, ed. Allan H. Gilbert (New York, 1940), where a multitude of Renaissance critics make clear references to the similarities to be desired between poetry and painting. See especially Jacobo Mazzoni, On the Defense of the Comedy of Dante, 1587; Sir Philip Sidney, The Defense of Poesy, 1583; Giambattista Guarini, The Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry, 1599. Jean Hagstrum discusses Renaissance adaptations of Aristotle and Horace in The Sister Arts, pp. 57-92. Rensselaer W. Lee, in Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting (New York, 1967), also discusses this interpretation of the ancients. J. E. Spingarn touches on it in A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance (New York, 1908), pp. 136-38.

¹⁶ Pp. 6-7.

¹⁷ (1949; rpt. Boston, 1961). See "The Natural Vision," pp. 74-96.

¹⁸ See, for example, Abbé Batteux, Les beaux arts réduits à un principe. "Ces deux arts ont entre eux une si grande conformité, qu'il ne s'agit, pour les avoir traité tous deux à la fois, que de changer les noms, & de mettre peinture, dessein, coloris à la place de poesie, de fable, de versification." Principes de la littérature (Paris, 1774), I, 330 (quoted by Hagstrum).

¹⁹ "Discourse Three," Discourses on Art, ed. Robert R. Wark (1959; rpt. London, 1966), p. 50.

²⁰ "Discourse Thirteen," Discourses on Art, p. 204.

²¹ Lessing's Laokoon, trans. E. C. Beasley, ed. Edward Bell (London, 1888), p. 91.

²² (1953; rpt. New York, 1957).

²³ Ed. Kenneth Clark (New York, 1961), p. 129. Originally published in the Fortnightly Review, 1877. Reprinted in 1888, 3rd edition of The Renaissance, and in subsequent editions.

²⁴ See Plato, Laws II, 667-70; Aristotle, Poetics I, 2-6.

²⁵ Clearly Aristotle has a less alloyed appreciation of art, but Plato does recognize the influence that rhythm and harmony can have on man's character, and accordingly includes music in education. See Werner Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture (New York, 1943), II, 211-30. See also Richard McKeon, "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern, ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago, 1952), pp. 147-75.

²⁶ For a survey of these treatises, see John W. Draper, "Poetry and Music in Eighteenth Century Aesthetics," Englishe Studien, 67 (1932-33), 70-85; Herbert M. Schueller, "Literature and Music as

Sister Arts: An Aspect of Aesthetic Theory in Eighteenth-Century Britain," PQ, 26 (1947), 193-205. See also Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, pp. 88-97.

²⁷ (Princeton, 1961), p. 195.

²⁸ Pp. 73-74.

²⁹ The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 92.

³⁰ Of course, Plato had recognized this ability of music to raise emotions, but the later critics no longer accepted the mimetic foundation of his theory, nor were they concerned with educative values.

³¹ 3rd ed. (London, 1779), p. 136. Beattie raises the major questions in his chapter "Is Music an Imitative Art?". Although he takes for granted that poetry and painting are imitative, he declares "When I am asked, What part of nature is imitated in any good picture or poem, I find I can give a definite answer: whereas, when I am asked, What part of nature is imitated in Handel's Water-music, for instance, or in Corelli's eighth concerto, or in any particular English song or Scotch tune, I find I can give no definite answer:--though no doubt I might say some plausible things; or perhaps after much refinement, be able to show that Music may, by one shift or another be made an imitative art, provided you allow me to give any meaning I please to the word imitative" (p. 120).

³² Literary Criticism in England: 1600-1800, ed. Gerald Webster Chapman (New York, 1966).

³³ Lectures on the English Poets and The Spirit of the Age (New York, 1910), p. 12. Earlier in this essay, Hazlitt discusses the province of poetry in familiar terms: "We may assume without much temerity,

that poetry is more poetical than painting. . . . Painting gives the object itself; poetry what it implies. Painting embodies what a thing contains in itself: poetry suggests what exists out of it, in any manner connected with it" (p. 10).

³⁴ Essay Supplementary to the Preface of the 1815 edition of the Poems. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1952), II, 410.

³⁵ The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford, 1937), II, 705.

II. Ruskin and Tradition

Henry A. Ladd begins his study The Victorian Morality of Art: An Analysis of Ruskin's Esthetic with the declaration "Ruskin's theory of art is at best a monster--no expiation upon its virtues, manifold as they are, can make it matter of fact or common sense. . . . the whole is a grotesque, a curiosity, a fantasy of a rather magnificent, but undeniably tortured intellect."¹ The fact of Ladd's own systematic and lucid exposition must modify this statement; surely, he demonstrates some basic consistencies, some coherent developments in Ruskin's work on art. Nevertheless, the critic's point does emphasize that Ruskin's theory of aesthetics is hybrid and unique.

Ruskin's writings on art are always conditioned by the fact that they began in an examination of landscape painting.² The questions Ruskin poses about art, the answers he can accept, must always take account of this genre. Here is an indication of how far we are moving from neo-classic aesthetics: one of the lowest forms in the hierarchy of painting has now become the norm.³ Ruskin's admiration for landscape painting is one of his most clearly Romantic traits. As has long been recognized by literary historians, a devoted attention to nature and natural description is a hallmark of the Romantic consciousness. And, like Wordsworth's, Ruskin's aesthetic experience derives from a private communion with the natural world.

In Praeterita, Ruskin describes the isolated child whose only diversions were his absorption with the accoutrements of his parents'

household and annual family journeys to the Continent. The splendor Switzerland and Italy had for the sensitive and precocious boy is recorded in the autobiography, and Ruskin's sketches from those visits attest to his excitement and the love and care with which he tried to capture what he saw.

For many nineteenth century men of religious bent, nature, with its order and beauty, its immutable spirit and evanescent but glorious creations, provided a substitute for the personal God Who seemed to be steadily retreating under the scrutinizing eye of science. Francis G. Townsend, in Ruskin and the Landscape Feeling, declares that "in his youth [Ruskin] kept his Evangelical religion and his love of nature separate. He believed in the God of the Bible and felt a spirit in nature simultaneously yet separately. . . . The story of Modern Painters I is the story of the amalgamation of Ruskin's Evangelical religion with the landscape feeling." ⁴ Certainly, by the time Ruskin began to write Modern Painters, his love of natural beauty had become permeated with the belief in an informing spirit of nature; nature was not just created by God eons ago, and left as a testimony to His goodness, but even now partook of divinity. John Rosenberg, in The Darkening Glass: A Portrait of Ruskin's Genius, declares "through a kind of supernatural naturalism both Wordsworth and Ruskin ignored the Christian dichotomy separating the perfection of the Creator from the sin-blighted creation and brought a pagan adoration of nature to their worship of God." ⁵ Rosenberg continues, "The understanding of Modern Painters begins with the recognition that Ruskin looked at the material universe with preternatural vivacity and

clarity and believed that what he saw was divine" (pp. 4-5).

Ruskin's love of landscape painting, then, reveals much more than his aesthetic sensibility. But a pattern of aesthetic questions was raised once Ruskin began writing as if landscape were the quintessential modern art form and Turner the great modern artist. The old problem that had lost its interest for Romantic critics comes back with force in Modern Painters, that of art as imitation. Because landscape painting has a clear subject which must somehow be indicated, imitation becomes an important matter to Ruskin. Is it the duty of art to represent a subject or an action? What is the relation of landscape art to visible reality; to the artist, his perspective and his response?

It is tempting to assume that Ruskin argues for an imitative art. From his earliest writings he insists on seeing the objects of life clearly and truly. In one of the most well-known chapters in Modern Painters I, "That the Truth of Nature is not to be Discerned by the Uneducated Senses," Ruskin writes "The first great mistake that people make . . . is the supposition that they must see a thing if it be before their eyes." ⁶ On the contrary, he continues, much of life goes by our eyes without making any impression on our brains. It is man's duty to train his eye and mind to see, ponder and remember what passes before him, to rouse himself from a visual and intellectual lethargy. And Ruskin proceeds to outline the varieties of truth in nature, available to him who will see. One of his aims in writing Modern Painters is to defend Turner against the charge of being unfaithful to nature.

In Modern Painters I, Ruskin writes that the first aim of the landscape painter is "to induce in the spectator's mind the faithful conception of any natural object whatsoever."⁷ Totally unrelativistic, Ruskin assumes here that there is a real truth that one can intellectually arrive at, a visible universe, common to all men. The artist's first duty is to see that universe clearly. And he must see it whole. The common sense of Ruskin's aesthetic rejects a feeble idealization. "The corruption of the schools of high art . . . consists in the sacrifice of truth to beauty. . . . Great art accepts Nature as she is, but directs the eyes and thoughts to what is most perfect in her; false art saves itself the trouble of direction by removing or altering whatever it thinks objectionable."⁸ "It is only by the habit of representing faithfully all things, that we can truly learn what is beautiful, and what is not. The ugliest objects contain some element of beauty; and in all it is an element peculiar to themselves, which cannot be separated from the ugliness, but must either be enjoyed together with it or not at all."⁹ As will become apparent, Ruskin's fight for a broad and honest vision has a dominant effect on much of his purely literary criticism and a strong influence on the moral conclusions he draws from certain aesthetic situations.

The second aim of the landscape painter is dependent on this first. It is "to guide the spectator's mind to those objects most worthy of its contemplation, and to inform him of the thoughts and feelings with which these were regarded by the artist himself."¹⁰ And Ruskin declares that this is the "real and only important end of

all art." ¹¹ But, he adds, "though we want the thoughts and feelings of the artist as well as the truth, yet they must be thoughts arising out of the contemplation of truth. . . . Nothing can atone for the want of truth, not the most brilliant imagination, the most playful fancy, the most pure feeling . . . ; not the most exalted conception, nor the most comprehensive grasp of intellect." ¹² How then does the artist achieve at once a faithful treatment of nature and a truthful expression of his thoughts and feelings? Ruskin begins to explore the problem by defining and indicating the limits of the concept of imitation.

"Whenever the work is seen to resemble something which we know it is not, we receive what I call an idea of imitation. . . . Now two things are requisite to our complete and most pleasurable perception of this: first, that the resemblance be so perfect as to amount to a deception; secondly, that there be some means of proving at the same time that it is a deception." ¹³ Implicit in this passage is a rejection of the notion that all art is imitative; Ruskin declares that whenever certain conditions exist, imitation exists. But not only is imitation occasional, when it occurs, the ideas and pleasures received from this mode "are the most contemptible which can be received from art." ¹⁴ The viewer spends his time calculating the resemblance or lack of it which the work bears to the subject. We minimize, says Ruskin, the appreciation of the special beauty in that work of art: the painting becomes merely a good or bad reflection of the subject, and the artist becomes like the watchmaker, intent on his craft, ignorant of his creativity.

Ruskin is clearly interpreting the criterion of imitation very narrowly. And one might argue that few earlier critics meant anything as limited as the almost photographic reproduction that Ruskin implies by the term. Yet, one can allow Ruskin his constricted reading, for his objections to the concept of imitation are more searching and profound than these first comments would suggest.

The relation between great art and nature, finally, is not that of imitation, but of truth. "The word Truth, as applied to art, signifies the faithful statement, either to the mind or senses, of any fact of nature." ¹⁵ The criterion of truth applies to all art and is vastly different from that of imitation. A work of art must be true not only to the physical qualities of the subject, but to the experience of the artist. There is "a truth of impression as well as of form,--of thought as well as of matter." ¹⁶ And truth may be expressed without seeking a reproductive likeness of the subject: truth allows for symbols.

The artist's obligation to study nature carefully and respect those observations in his work becomes a much stricter duty when one conceives of the relationship to nature under the injunction to truth than when one thinks of fidelity as merely an aesthetic correspondence, as imitation. Because visible nature partakes of Divinity, the artist seeking to represent nature in art must be sensitive to this holiness. John Rosenberg, in The Darkening Glass, comments on Ruskin's painstakingly accurate descriptions, in words and sketches, of nature. "Modern Painters, in its passionate study of trees and skies, mountains, seas, and living things is a reconstruction of Genesis itself. The

stamp of the Maker is still seen fresh on His works; Ruskin still hears the pronouncement, 'And it was good.'" ¹⁷ Ruskin declares "high art, therefore, consists neither in altering, nor in improving nature; but in seeking throughout nature for 'whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are pure.'" ¹⁸

The implication that this view has for Ruskin's scheme of aesthetic values is clear; the subject matter of all works of art is of great importance. In Aratra Pentelici, a series of lectures delivered in 1870, Ruskin went so far as to say that "this is the true sign of the greatest art--to part voluntarily with its greatness;--to make itself poor and unnoticed; but so to exalt and set forth its theme, that you may be fain to see the theme instead of it. So that you have never enough admired a great workman's doing, till you have begun to despise it. The best homage that could be paid to the Athena of Phidias would be to desire rather to see the living goddess; and the loveliest Madonnas of Christian art fall short of their due power, if they do not make their beholders sick at heart to see the living Virgin." ¹⁹ This is an extreme statement and, at other times, Ruskin denies that the greatness of art consists in its obliteration. Yet, the importance he attributes to the artist's subject does not diminish.

If the artist's first duties are to revere nature and make himself familiar with it, he has obligations regarding his own special gifts. In some ways the artist is like all other men; the elements that make up his technique are not peculiarly his. Keen sensitivity to natural forms, powers of association and memory are possible to us all, if we will develop them. ²⁰ Given talent or technique, what distinguishes the

artist from other men and one artist from another are special modes of thought--intuition and ideas, and deep feeling.²¹ The singular vision which is a product of character or personality, experience and intelligence, must be accompanied by sympathy, the capacity and the exercise of profound emotion. "FINE ART," Ruskin writes in The Two Paths, "is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together."²² "The Fine Arts cannot go evenly; they always must have emotion ruling their mechanism, and until the pupil begins to feel, and until all he does associates itself with the current of his feeling, he is not an artist."²³

The artist, then, in confronting nature becomes aware of thoughts and impressions rising within him. If he wishes to achieve in his art a synthesis of fact and impression, matter and thought, outer and inner reality, he must first try to bring about a consonance between visible nature and his impressions; he must make certain that his feelings, responses, arise validly. The artist must not be the aberrant man, but the greater man. He must be capable of deeper and wider vision; he must see more truly than others. Ruskin writes of the artist, "we do not want his mind to be like a badly blown glass, that distorts what we see through it, but like a glass of sweet and strange colour, that gives new tones to what we see through it; and a glass of rare strength and clearness too, to let us see more than we could ourselves, and bring nature up to us and near to us."²⁴ The artist's duty is to test the reality of his impressions by never turning from their source in nature, by keeping fidelity a paramount virtue.

One of Ruskin's best known injunctions against the artist's losing

sight of nature and becoming emotionally overwhelmed takes form in his concept of the Pathetic Fallacy. The fallacy is literary, but its implications are for all the arts. Ruskin begins his chapter in Modern Painters III with a disparaging of that product of "German dulness and English affectation," the distinction between Subjective and Objective.²⁵ Ruskin prefers to dwell on the reality and potential unity, in the act of knowing, of subject and object. Objects in the outer world have the power of producing certain sensations in a conscious subject. The subject, of course, must be prepared to receive these sensations. "A gentian does not produce the sensation of blueness, if you don't look at it. But it has always the power of doing so; its particles being everlastingly so arranged by its Maker."²⁶ The mind prepared to confront the real world can comprehend the nature of that world. Distinctions between Subjective and Objective can, for practical purposes, be done away with.

Hence I would say to these philosophers: If, instead of using the sonorous phrase, "It is objectively so," you will use the plain old phrase, "It is so," and if instead of the sonorous phrase, "It is subjectively so," you will say, in plain old English, "It does so," or "It seems so to me," you will, on the whole, be more intelligible to your fellow-creatures; and besides, if you find that a thing which generally "does so" to other people (as a gentian looks blue to most men), does not so to you, on any particular occasion, you will not fall into the impertinence of saying, that the thing is not so, or did not so, but you will say simply (what you will be all the better for speedily finding out), that something is the matter with you. If you find that you cannot explode the gunpowder, you will not declare that all gunpowder is subjective, and all explosion imaginary, but you will simply suspect and declare yourself to be an illmade match. Which, on the whole, though there may be a distant chance of a mistake about it, is, nevertheless, the wisest conclusion you can come to until further experiment.²⁷

This somewhat tongue-in-cheek analysis is important to Ruskin's theory

of the pathetic fallacy. Consonance between external reality and one's perception of it is possible and important in life and art. The "point in question" in an examination of the pathetic fallacy, Ruskin says, is to make clear "the difference between the ordinary, proper, and true appearances of things to us; and the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy." ²⁸ Ruskin distinguishes between two causes of false appearances: voluntary, when the poet chooses to describe an action or object as something it is not; and involuntary, when the poet, overwhelmed by strong emotion actually perceives nature wrongly. The discussion devolves into an analysis of two orders of poets, each representing one manner of perceiving reality. The Creative poet (Shakespeare, Homer, Dante) feels deeply but is master of his feeling. The Reflective poet (Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson, the moderns in general) feels deeply, but is "borne away, or over-clouded, or over-dazzled by emotion;" ²⁹ his emotion infects his perception and causes him to misread nature. He can see the ocean as "the cruel, crawling foam." Ruskin catalogues a variety of degrees within each class of poets: one may perceive rightly or wrongly for many reasons. But it is the first sign of a true poet that he feel deeply; it is no credit to a man that he can control his emotions when they are feeble. Ruskin considers the Creative to be the greater poet. The poets he labels Reflective may be excellent in what they do, but their range is narrower, their potential more limited.

Critics have disagreed about Ruskin's attitude toward the pathetic fallacy. Does he always disapprove of its appearance in literature?

Bertram Morris, in his essay "Ruskin on the Pathetic Fallacy, or on How a Moral Theory of Art May Fail," ³⁰ declares that Ruskin's "intent is far removed from anything like a psychological explanation of art and beauty, and . . . any similarity to theories of empathy or psychological distance is no part of the import of his theory. His aesthetic is moral, not psychological." Ruskin declared at the beginning of his chapter, however, that in encountering the fallacy in poetry, we are often pleased by it. "And what is more, if we think over our favourite poetry, we shall find it full of this kind of fallacy, and that we like it all the more for being so." ³¹ He who has championed truth in art now finds he enjoys this type of falsehood. And Ruskin attempts to find a place in literature for the fallacy. He declares that when it arises from the emotion of the poet who, looking on nature, sees there the reflection of his mastering emotion, it may be beautiful, it may be the sign of a sensitive nature, but it is always the sign of weakness. It is the sign of weakness, too, when it occurs in the speech of a character in a poem. But here the weakness may be the impression the poet is trying to achieve. The pathetic fallacy is here dramatically appropriate. ³²

Ruskin summarizes his belief: "the greatness of a poet depends upon the two faculties, acuteness of feeling, and command of it. A poet is great, first in proportion to the strength of his passion, and then, that strength being granted, in proportion to his government of it." ³³ The more powerful the emotion, the greater the victory in controlling it. There comes a point, however, Ruskin declares, when it would be "inhuman and monstrous" to vanquish emotion. And he quotes

the Scriptures. "The thought of the presence of Deity cannot be borne without this great astonishment. 'The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.'" ³⁴ This, Ruskin declares, is the condition of "men who, strong as human creatures can be, are yet submitted to influences stronger than they, and see in a sort untruly, because what they see is inconceivably above them." But, he adds "this last is the usual condition of prophetic inspiration;" ³⁵ it does not often apply to poetry.

One might argue that metaphor is integral to the poetic technique and that Ruskin is arguing an issue that will never change. To perceive the universe as possessing life may be, not a weakness, but most natural to the poetic vision; it is certainly natural to the religious. Thomas McFarland, in Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition, ³⁶ discusses the structural and historical similarities between poetry and pantheism.

The analogies of structure are of three kinds. First of all, both poetry and pantheism tend to make particular awarenesses involve, or symbolically imply, more extended awarenesses, the extensions being none the less validated by some kind of relationship that they hold in common. As the pantheistic Hermetic tracts say, "God is in all things, as their root and the source of their being." . . .

A second similarity . . . is that both tend to allow a scrambling, as it were, of ordinary reference. If, for pantheism, all things are conceived as really one, there is no reason to prefer one to the other, or for aligning or arranging them in any special way, or for regarding any existing alignment as more than temporary and adventitious.

And thirdly, both poetry and pantheism tend to obliterate the boundaries between the realm of thing and the realm of mind: for poetry, objects are invested with meaning, spiritual states are correlated with states of nature, emotions evoke things or the memory of things, while for pantheism either matter is conceived as an appearance of spirit, or spirit as an extension of

matter, or both are conceived as variations of a third reality. With this foundation, McFarland approaches the pathetic fallacy and concludes that Ruskin overlooks some fundamental principles of poetry. "To accept [Ruskin's] literal-minded contentions about proper poetic reference, we must reject Wordsworth in his deepest moments. The 'cruel, crawling foam' can hardly be held up as exciting metaphor, but its predication of emotions for things constitutes no violation in principle--no 'pathetic fallacy'. We have here not an instance of a fallacy, but of a weak observance of a norm." ³⁷

Nevertheless, one can discern aesthetic purpose and strength in the formulation of the pathetic fallacy. Despite Bertram Morris's contention, Ruskin does use his concept to clarify character psychology in a poem. Ultimately, he does take a moral view of the fallacy; it is a weakness because it indicates the speaker's failure to perceive the world aright. But it is an aesthetic flaw too because it marks the artist's inability to master his deep feelings, to control and direct the multitude of his responses. The pathetic fallacy is a major attempt of Ruskin's to define the artist's responsibility.

The landscape artist must give a true vision of nature through his own perspective. In The Two Paths, Ruskin attempts to show how these seemingly contradictory aims can be united through the concept of "interpretation," a term Ruskin substitutes for the despised "imitation." "Good art rarely imitates; it usually only describes or explains. . . . Good art always consists of two things: first, the observation of fact; secondly, the manifesting of human design and

authority in the way that fact is told." ³⁸ This second is "the visible operation of human intellect in the presentation of truth, the evidence of what is properly called design or plan in the work. . . . A looking-glass does not design--it receives and communicates indiscriminately all that passes before it; a painter designs when he chooses some things, refuses others, and arranges all. . . . And thus you see design, properly so called is human invention, ³⁹ consulting human capacity. Out of the infinite heap of things around us in the world, it chooses a certain number which it can thoroughly grasp, and presents this group to the spectator in the form best calculated to enable him to grasp it also, and to grasp it with delight." ⁴⁰ The Two Paths was written in 1858, fifteen years after Ruskin described the artist's mind in Modern Painters I as a glass, clear and strong, but sweet and strange in color. The artist's sense of values and proportion affects how he interprets and represents what he sees. The intermingling of forces, intuition, intellectual appreciation, association, comparison, design, that go into the artist's grasp and communication of his subject can best be studied in detail under a treatment of Imagination. But if we postpone an analysis of how the artist works, it is necessary to reiterate the elements that make up the pattern of artistic procedure. Conscious design is certainly one of them.

Yet Ruskin takes pains to clarify the quality of self-expression he finds desirable in art. If the artist's personality is present in the work of art, it is because it is he, with his unique character, who is directing himself to the subject. But his eye must

be on that subject. Ruskin is not of the school of Romantic theorists which believes it is the artist's duty to sing himself. George P. Landow, in "Ruskin and Baudelaire on Art and Artist" declares that both critics are firmly in the Romantic tradition. They both see similarities between painting and poetry, but both "base their conception on the belief that the two arts share a common nature and function--to express the thoughts and feelings of the artist-poet." ⁴¹

Landow builds up a portrait of the artist-poet and defines him at last as "the man of feeling who creates his art by expressing his sentiments and imaginings" (p. 301). But Ruskin is careful to distinguish his view of the artist's role from simple self-expression. In the 1844 Preface to the second edition of Modern Painters I, Ruskin writes "the power of the masters is shown by their self-annihilation. It is commensurate with the degree in which they themselves appear not in their work. The harp of the minstrel is untruly touched, if his own glory is all that it records." ⁴² Such a statement clearly implies Ruskin's preference for narrative or dramatic to lyric poetry. And in his discussion of the pathetic fallacy he elaborated that preference by declaring Homer, Shakespeare and Dante the Creative poets and placing them above the Reflective-Romantic. Throughout his discussion of the Naturalist Ideal, Ruskin reiterates his conviction that a great artist's self-expression is inevitable, but unconscious. And in The Two Paths, he summarizes this belief. "Wherever art is practised for its own sake, and the delight of the workman is in what he does and produces, instead of in what he interprets and exhibits,--there art has an influence of the

most fatal kind on brain and heart, and it issues, if so long pursued, in the destruction both of intellectual power and moral principle; whereas art, devoted humbly and self-forgetfully to the clear statement and record of the facts of the universe, is always helpful and beneficent to mankind, full of comfort, strength, and salvation." ⁴³

One is reminded of Ruskin's great teacher in the virtue of Unconsciousness, Carlyle. "The good man is he who works continually, in welldoing; to whom welldoing is as his natural existence, awakening no astonishment, requiring no commentary; but there, like a thing of course, and as if it could not but be so. Self-contemplation, on the other hand, is infallibly the symptom of disease, be it or be it not the sign of cure." ⁴⁴ In her study of "Ruskin's Relation to Aristotle," Katherine Gilbert declares unequivocally, Ruskin "did not believe in art as the expression of the emotions of the artist. It was for him not a self-regarding function at all, but an outwardly directed transaction with the world. 'Pathetic' art he placed low." ⁴⁵

The artist's emotions are of fundamental importance to Ruskin's theory of artistic creation. The artist is different from others, to a great extent, in quickness and depth of his emotions as well as his command of them. But there is a difference between saying that which makes the artist is deep feeling and saying that which the artist expresses is deep feeling. The very fact that Ruskin declares he wants Truth in art and prefers Homer to Tennyson intimates his distrust of art as mere self-revelation, a record of impressions and emotions. Ruskin is very much afraid of solipsism, and his belief in external reality allows him the prospect of testing ideas against a standard, allows him the

position that art must express outer as well as inner life. In short, Ruskin's belief in the importance of the artist's emotions is not a culte de moi.

The artist's unconscious self-expression is a major element in the moral foundation of Ruskin's aesthetic. The whole of The Stones of Venice rests on this assumption. There Ruskin demonstrates the effect the moral temper of a nation has on the character of its artists and the expression that character finds in the works the artists produce. As Ruskin later wrote in The Queen of the Air, "A foolish person builds foolishly, and a wise one, sensibly; a virtuous one, beautifully; and a vicious one, basely. . . . So that when once you have learned how to spell these most precious of all legends,--pictures and buildings,--you may read the characters of men, and of nations, in their art, as in a mirror;--nay, as in a microscope. . . . Nay, not only as in a microscope, but as under a scalpel, and in dissection; for a man may hide himself from you, or misrepresent himself to you, every other way; but he cannot in his work: there, be sure, you have him to the inmost." ⁴⁶ A man's values, those aspects of life he most cherishes, fidelity and simplicity, or perhaps ingenuity and display, will all appear in the conception and construction of his work. Clearness of mind, honesty and self-trust are reflected in one's work as well as in one's behavior.

Perhaps Ruskin's most comprehensive treatment of the way moral faculties affect works of art can be seen in The Seven Lamps of Architecture. There he describes those qualities he finds expressed in the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages, qualities as expressive of the

artisan's character and attitude toward his materials as of the buildings themselves. In "The Lamp of Truth," for example, Ruskin discusses the effect the materials of art have on what is created. Wood cannot be painted in the same way as glass, cannot be molded like clay. But, Ruskin suggests, the artist's fidelity to his materials is indicative of more than just superior craftsmanship. Late Gothic architects lost interest in the natural beauty and potential of their material; they attempted to construct a delicate and penetrable stone tracery, to achieve effects that are unnatural to stone.

"This form of falsity was that which crushed the art. The flexible traceries were often beautiful, though they were ignoble; but the penetrated traceries, rendered, as they finally were, merely the means of exhibiting the dexterity of the stone-cutter, annihilated both the beauty and dignity of the Gothic types."⁴⁷ "So fell the great dynasty of mediaeval architecture. It was because it had lost its own strength, and disobeyed its own laws--because its order, and consistency, and organisation, had been broken through--that it could oppose no resistance to the rush of overwhelming innovation." And Ruskin concludes with an application clearly as moral and humanistic as aesthetic and formal. Gothic architecture could have survived the Middle Ages; the ideas that inspired it had not totally died. "It would have stood forth in stern comparison with the enervated sensuality of the Renaissance. . . . It was not the robber, not the fanatic, not the blasphemer, who sealed the destruction that they had wrought; the war, the wrath, the terror, might have worked their worst, and the strong walls would have risen, and the slight pillars would

have started again, from under the hand of the destroyer. But they could not rise out of the ruins of their own violated truth." ⁴⁸

The Architects' misuse of their materials becomes a flaw of character, and in the intensely moral fabric of The Stones of Venice, this kind of infidelity causes "The Fall."

Yet one must be careful to distinguish Ruskin's belief in the moral implications of all art from a concern with art as a didactic effort. On occasion, Ruskin will admire or despise a work for its overtly ethical statements. But, at his most thoughtful--when he is in the midst of a serious and well developed examination of literature or architecture--Ruskin is aware of the strength a work can receive when evil or ugliness is recognized, introduced, confronted and not necessarily vanquished. His various treatments of the grotesque in art demonstrate Ruskin's attitude. The recognition of baseness, ludicrousness and terror in life, that which finds expression in architectural and literary grotesquerie, is necessary to the balanced mind. Ruskin writes in The Stones of Venice,

the more noble the man is, the more impossible it will be for him to confine his thoughts to mere loveliness, and that of a low order. . . . whatever there is of deep and eternal consciousness within him, thrilling his mind with the sense of the presence of sin and death around him, must be expressed in that slight work, come of it what will. He cannot forget it, among all that he sees of beautiful in nature. . . . misery and wrath, and discordance and danger, and all the work of the dragon and his angels; this he sees with too deep feeling ever to forget. . . . He has seen these things; he wars with them daily; he cannot but give them their part in his work, though in a state of comparative apathy to them at the time. He is but carving and gilding, and must not turn aside to weep; but he knows that hell is burning on, for all that, and the smoke of it withers his oak-leaves. ⁴⁹

Later in the same chapter Ruskin writes "wherever the human mind is

healthy and vigorous in all its proportions, great in imagination and emotion no less than in intellect, and not overborne by an undue or hardened pre-eminence of the mere reasoning faculties, there the grotesque will exist in full energy." ⁵⁰ The breadth and depth of a man's perception of evil and brutality in life, his instinctive and conscious responses to his vision, will appear in his work; he need not make a special effort to instruct his audience. His hard-won perspective, revealed unconsciously in his work, will supersede any didacticism. ⁵¹

Ruskin's writings on art, then, rest on the criterion of Truth. The artist has a threefold obligation: his impressions must rise from a close observation of nature; his expression must evolve from a clear understanding of his mind and emotions; and the final product, the work of art, must be a closely felt interpretation of nature, keeping sight of inner and outer reality. Truth governs each step.

One can easily see the influence here of Ruskin's work with landscape art. And one might contrast Ruskin's principles with those of that school of modern theorists which rejects the belief in a recognizable, shared reality as the subject of art, and substitutes a belief that what exists, exists for art only as an impetus to emotional experience. That emotional experience, finally, translated into formal terms, is communicated as art. ⁵² Ruskin, however, believed that both the reality we see and the emotion we experience, the conclusions we draw, must be communicated in art.

It is because Ruskin is so schooled in the claim of sensuous reality to be indicated in art that he cannot accept theories of art as

self-expression. His construction of the pathetic fallacy bears witness to this. Although in treating the fallacy, Ruskin does not maintain that nature must be represented, he does stress that the artist who aspires to be great must keep sight of recognized reality, must not let his emotions overwhelm his intellect. Ruskin is careful not to impose a homogeneous vision on all artists: it is not that all men must see and respond to nature alike. But the artist must make sure of his vision, must believe in his response. The criterion of sincerity is not far from Ruskin's writings. Those who see more deeply or whose responses arise from a broader perspective must be true to this experience. Derrick Leon, in Ruskin: The Great Victorian, confronts this issue. He describes Ruskin's attitude; "the function of the painter is not to draw what he thinks he sees, in an approved manner sanctioned by current taste, but to express the beauty of the visible world in the idiosyncratic manner in which it strikes his experienced and attentive eyes" (p. 80). Stressing the experience and attention of the artist, one may agree that what distinguishes him, to Ruskin, may well be his idiosyncratic, or unique, vision of the world.

The artist's private comprehension of the world, then, is an important element in Ruskin's aesthetic. The artist's impressions and their revelation are essential to the work of art. But the artist's self-expression is important, too, to Ruskin's belief that art possesses a moral foundation. A man's work reveals himself. As Ruskin suggested in a diary entry for September 8, 1849, "What the man is, such is his picture."⁵³ And art reflects not only the individual

who creates it, but the society which fosters it, the milieu which affects, encourages, restricts the artist, the culture which helps to form his values. Perhaps Ruskin's belief in the moral fabric of all artistic creation derives from his training in landscape art and his early beliefs in the sanctity of nature. If nature is divine and is the source of all art, then art must reflect that divinity. As late as 1858, Ruskin writes "I have had but one steady aim in all that I have ever tried to teach, namely--to declare that whatever was great in human art was the expression of man's delight in God's work."⁵⁴ Ruskin's belief in an almost unmediated divinity in nature lessens over the years, and, as John Rosenberg has shown, results in the increased vision of man isolated from spiritual nourishment, making his own way in the world.⁵⁵

And as Modern Painters draws to a close, Ruskin, seventeen years older than when he began the series, surveys his work from a farther perspective. His writings on social matters were just beginning, but he sees a clear link between his aesthetic and social concerns.

And in these books of mine, their distinctive character, as essays on art, is their bringing everything to a root in human passion or human hope. Arising first not in any desire to explain the principles of art, but in the endeavour to defend an individual painter from injustice, they have been coloured throughout,--nay, continually altered in shape, and even warped and broken, by digressions respecting social questions, which had for me an interest tenfold greater than the work I had been forced into undertaking. Every principle of painting which I have stated is traced to some vital or spiritual fact; and in my works on architecture the preference accorded finally to one school over another, is founded on a comparison of their influences on the life of the workman.⁵⁶

One must keep in mind, of course, that this declaration was made long after the work in question was written; this evaluation is seen through

a filter of intervening work on social matters. Anyone who studies Ruskin's long chapters on the Imagination, color theory, rock stratification and other quite esoteric subjects will find it hard to accept the contention that these were forced upon Ruskin, even by the nature of his predecessors' arguments. His eccentricity in taking these private paths is too striking, his enthusiasm too great. Yet the declaration that his studies possessed a spiritual core can be appreciated. Ruskin does continually try to bring his work into a human perspective, to see the relations between man, his moral life and his art work.

In these middle writings Ruskin replaces the earlier standard, God as the measure of all things, with a newer, man as the measure. Whereas landscape was once seen to be holy because it partook of divinity, now landscape is barren if man is not there. "Desert--whether of leaf or sand--true desertness is not in the want of leaves, but of life. Where humanity is not, and was not, the best natural beauty is more than vain. It is even terrible; not as the dress cast aside from the body; but as an embroidered shroud hiding a skeleton." ⁵⁷ "The degree of power which any man may ultimately possess in landscape-painting will depend finally upon his perception of this influence. If he has to paint the desert, its awfulness--if the garden, its gladness--will arise simply and only from his sensibility to the story of life. Without this he is nothing but a scientific mechanist." ⁵⁸

This attitude is not of a piece with Ruskin's earliest writings. His religious perceptions have been almost entirely replaced by a moral

but non-doctrinal belief. Nevertheless, these later writings possess an understandable relation to the earlier Ruskin's theoretical writings on art: they are both almost consistently non-formal; technical problems are kept in what he believes their proper place, secondary. Although Ruskin can analyze technique in painting or poetry as well as any contemporary essayist, he believes that the real importance of art lies in its thought, its ideas, the nobility of the emotions represented and elicited. Whether those thoughts are of man's joy in God's work or of man's central position in a bald universe, it is the artist's vision that validates his work.

Ruskin's moral aesthetic grows from his belief in a continuity of God and nature, of nature and man. Great art indicates this continuity. As his work develops, however, Ruskin becomes less concerned with nature as the manifestation of God's goodness and more concerned with man as the "crowning and ruling work of God."⁵⁹ Finally, nature is seen as incomplete unless man's presence is made known.

Ruskin writes, in Modern Painters V, a paean to man that is the culmination of all his earlier work and the starting point of his later. Unrepresentative as it is of some of the earliest writings, it does not contradict them, and it does indicate the direction his work finally took. "Therefore it is that all the power of nature depends on subjection to the human soul. Man is the sun of the world; more than the real sun. The fire of his wonderful heart is the only light or heat worth gauge or measure. Where he is, are the tropics; where he is not, the ice-world."⁶⁰

One may glance back at the earlier analogies of painting, poetry

and music and see how Ruskin's views differ from the traditions. On the surface, Ruskin is more firmly allied to the Classic mimetic view. He frequently discusses painting and poetry as one; he lays great stress on the representative aspect of art; he emphasizes subject matter. The "truth" of art is central and Ruskin ponders frequently the kind of truth that can be thus obtained. Art is not seen as a mere vehicle for the revelation of private emotion; the artist expresses something greater than himself. And art possesses a moral character, in a generous sense, a moral function, and, at times Ruskin would imply, a didactic function.

And yet, these congruities between Ruskin's and earlier thought are jarred by certain underlying discrepancies. If both painting and poetry must deal with something external, not mere impression, they deal, in earliest theories, with nature, specifically, human nature. By the time of Sir Joshua Reynolds' Discourses, they deal with "central form," an abstraction from perceivable reality, but still an objective outer reality. Ruskin can agree with neither view. Painting and poetry are alike to him because both represent thought. Here one can perceive the influence of Romantic theory. Ruskin is keenly aware of the intervening effect of the mind of the artist; that effect is both inevitable and desirable. The artist's perspective and values give color and humanity to both the visual and the verbal arts.

And like Reynolds, Ruskin could believe in the possibility of a theory of central form; man can indeed intuit that which is essential to elements in a species. But this abstraction cannot be the subject

of great art. The transient manifestation, the fleeting apparition was too dear to Ruskin for him to make little of it. His sensuous response to the visual and palpable cannot be underestimated.⁶¹

Finally, Ruskin is profoundly aware of the impact of the artist's emotions. They influence his choice of subject, his perception and evocation of that subject in art. George P. Landow writes that Ruskin's aesthetic theories are an attempt to provide earlier mimetic theories with an emotional center, to replace the imitative function of the artist with an expressive. And yet, one clearly cannot characterize Ruskin's view of the artist's duty as either imitation or self-expression, as a record of mere outer or inner reality. Ruskin writes in Modern Painters III that poetry is "the suggestion, by the imagination, of noble grounds for the noble emotions."⁶² The artist's experience of emotion may initiate his desire to create a work of art, but that emotion must be noble if the product is to be true art, and the imagination must suggest, within the poem, the grounds for that emotion. Not just the artist's experience but a cause, somewhat akin to what T. S. Eliot called the "objective correlative" must be present. Neither Ruskin's aesthetic nor his moral training could allow for an art of mere self-expression. The artist must attempt a synthesis of nature and self, a proper perspective of the world and the self, in order to achieve fully the potential of art.

Footnotes

¹ (New York, 1932), pp. 2-3.

² Ladd stresses the influence that landscape training had on Ruskin's view of art's representative function. "The early theories tend over and over again to throw Ruskin's emphasis on the side of objective truth instead of subjective inspiration in art, though it is obvious that there were forces pulling him in an opposite direction. . . . Seeing true is for him the sine qua non of fine art" (pp. 58-59).

³ See Rensselaer W. Lee, Ut Pictura Poesis: the Humanistic Theory of Painting, pp. 18-19. French aestheticians in the seventeenth century established a hierarchy of artists according to their subjects. The lowest was the painter of still life, then the painter of landscape, of animals, of portraits; finally, the great painter was one of subjects from history and fable. Lee bases his discussion on André Félibien's preface to his Conférence de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture (Paris, 1669). Félibien was a member of the Academy.

Il est constant qu'a mesure qu'ils [painters] s'occupent aux choses les plus difficile et les plus nobles, ils sortent de ce qu'il y a de plus bas et de plus commun, et s'anoblissent par un travail plus illustre. Ainsi celui qui fait parfaitement des paysages et audessus d'un autre qui ne fait des fruits, des fleurs, or des coquilles. Celui qui peint des animaux vivans est plus estimable que ceux qui ne représentent que des choses mortes et sans mouvement; et comme la figure de l'homme est le plus parfait ouvrage de Dieu sur la terre, il est certain aussi que celui qui se rend l'imitateur de Dieu en peignant des figures humaines, est beaucoup plus excellent que tous les autres . . . un Peintre qui ne fait que des portraits, n'a pas encore atteint cette haute perfection de l'Art, et ne peut prétendre à l'honneur que reçoivent les plus sçabans. Il faut pour cela passer d'une seule figure à la représentation de

plusieurs ensemble; il faut traiter l'histoire et la fable.

⁴ (Urbana, 1951), p. 9. See Townsend, too, for an extended comparison of Ruskin and Wordsworth.

⁵ (New York, 1961), p. 5.

⁶ Works, III, 141 (Pt. II, Sect. I, Chap. II).

⁷ Works, III, 133 (Pt. II, Sect. I, Chap. I). "The great point in painting a lake" Ruskin declared in 1870 "is --to get it to look like water." (Works, XX, 283; "Likeness," Aratra Pentelici.)

⁸ Works, V, 56-57 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. III).

⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰ Works, III, 133 (Modern Painters I, Pt. II, Sect. I, Chap. I).

¹¹ Ibid., 136.

¹² Ibid., 137.

¹³ Works, III, 100 (Modern Painters I, Pt. I, Sect. I, Chap. 4).

¹⁴ Ibid., 101.

¹⁵ Works, III, 104 (Modern Painters I, Pt. I, Sect. I, Chap. 5).

¹⁶ Ibid., 104.

¹⁷ P. 7. Rosenberg comments extensively on Ruskin's reverence toward nature. See Chap. I, "Nature, Truth, and Turner."

¹⁸ Works, V, 58 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. III).

¹⁹ Works, XX, 285-86 (Lecture IV, "Likeness"). In 1875, during his lectures on the Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Ruskin declared "the object of all great artists is to make you forget their art and themselves, and believe in and love their subject" (Works, XXII, 506).

²⁰ See Works III, 614 (Modern Painters I, Pt. II, Sect. VI, Chap. III).

²¹ In Ruskin's theoretical discussions of art, he barely recognizes the importance of technique to the artist's vision. At first, this may seem naive. One begins a discussion of Ruskin's idea of the artist with the statement: given his technique, the artist is different from other men because . . . And the question is raised, is it not only the existence of technical proficiency, but the special nature of that proficiency that in part distinguishes one artist from another? Does not the quality of one's technique affect what one does; does not technique affect ideas? Is not technique at some point transformed into style, and is not one's style a great distinguishing aspect of one's creativity?

And yet, when one considers contemporary American art, technique becomes again subservient. It is technique put in use to these particular subjects that reveals the wit of Oldenburg's billiard table or Warhol's Brillo box, that permits recognition of these works. In some contemporary aesthetic theories, too, the intuition in art is all; technique is of no importance. In The Principles of Art (1938; rpt. New York, 1958), R. G. Collingwood declares of expression in art "the means-and-end, or technique, terminology too is inapplicable. Until a man has expressed his emotion, he does not yet know what emotion it is. The act of expressing it is therefore an exploration of his own emotions. He is trying to find out what these emotions are. There is certainly here a directed process: an effort, that is, directed upon a certain end; but the end is not something foreseen and preconceived, to which appropriate means can be thought out in the light of our knowledge of its special character. Expression is an

activity of which there can be no technique" (p. 111). Ruskin himself possessed great technical ability; his sketches are remarkably fine. Yet he believed that he would never be a great artist. Undoubtedly, his experience as a draughtsman affected his understanding of the importance of technique. For although he makes little of it in his theory, Ruskin often deals with technique quite carefully and completely in his writings on specific works of art.

²² Works, XVI, 294 (Lecture II, "The Unity of Art").

²³ Ibid., 295.

²⁴ Works, III, 137 (Modern Painters I, Pt. II, Sect. I, Chap. I).

²⁵ Works, V, 201 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. XII).

²⁶ Ibid., 202.

²⁷ Ibid., 203.

²⁸ Ibid., 204. Most critics regard the pathetic fallacy as merely the attribution of animation to nature. Ruskin's definition is broader and this latitude is essential to his use of the fallacy as an interpretive tool in his reading of poetry. J. D. Thomas discusses this matter more fully in "Poetic Truth and the Pathetic Fallacy," TSL, 3 (1961), 342-47.

²⁹ Works, V, 208 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. XII).

³⁰ JAAC, 14 (1955), 248.

³¹ Works, V, 204-05 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. XII).

³² Ruskin ends his chapter on the pathetic fallacy by contrasting the laments of two deserted heroines, Shenstone's *Jessy* and Wordsworth's *Ellen*. *Jessy* complains

If through the garden's flowery tribes I stray,

Where bloom the jasmines that could once allure,
 'Hope not to find delight in us,' they say,
 'For we are spotless, Jessy; we are pure.'

Ellen appeals to her absent lover to mark

that poor bird--
 O, come and hear him! Thou who hast to me
 Been faithless, hear him;--though a lowly creature,
 One of God's simple children that yet know not
 The Universal Parent, how he sings!
 As if he wished the firmament of heaven
 Should listen, and give back to him the voice
 Of his triumphant constancy and love;
 The proclamation that he makes, how far
 His darkness doth transcend our fickle light.

Ruskin concludes that "Jessy is weaker than Ellen, exactly in so far as something appeals to her to be in nature which is not. . . . Ellen, on the other hand, is quite above the slightest erring emotion. . . . The reader will find by examining the rest of the poem, that Ellen's character is throughout consistent in this clear though passionate strength" (Works, V, 218-19; Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. XII).

³³ Ibid., 215.

³⁴ Ibid., 215-16.

³⁵ Ibid., 209.

³⁶ (London, 1969), pp. 274-75.

³⁷ McFarland, p. 277. It is important to note that Ruskin, who begins Modern Painters with a clearly pantheistic appreciation of nature, does not abandon there his intellectual adherence to a personal God. He possesses sufficient distance from a pantheistic philosophy to reject, in his discussion of the pathetic fallacy, the fundamental mystic and pantheistic intuition: the ultimate oneness of all. To trace the fluctuations of Ruskin's religious life would require, of

course, a study to itself, but one sees from time to time the impingement on the aesthetic criticism of religious, not just moral, beliefs.

³⁸ Works, XVI, 269-70 (Lecture I, "The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art over Nations").

³⁹ Cook and Wedderburn believe that this line should read "And thus you see design, properly so called is human intention, consulting human capacity." This reading appears in the MS of the lecture, but in no edition of it. It seems clear that this passage, dealing as it is with the formative power of the artist's intellect, does indeed refer to his "intention" not his "invention."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁴¹ UTQ, 37 (1968), 295.

⁴² Works, III, 23. Ruskin's harp is the instrument of the minstrel who sings a story, not the Romantic Aeolian harp, the poet himself.

⁴³ Works, XVI, 268 (Lecture I).

⁴⁴ Thomas Carlyle, "Characteristics," The Works of Thomas Carlyle, ed. H. D. Traill (London, 1896-99), XXVIII, 7.

⁴⁵ Philosophical Review, 49 (1940), 58.

⁴⁶ Works, XIX, 389-90 (Lecture III, "Athena Ergane").

⁴⁷ Works, VIII, 93 ("The Lamp of Truth").

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 98-99. Ruskin later modified this interpretation. In 1880, he appended a note; "the closing paragraph is very pretty--but, unfortunately--nonsense. The want of truth was only a part, and by no means an influential one, of general disease. All possible shades of human folly and licentiousness meet in late Gothic and Renaissance

architecture, and corrupt, in all directions at once, the arts which are their exponents." Although Ruskin admits that the decay of Gothic architecture was due to much more complex forces than just the relation between the artist and his materials, he does not deny his major thesis: the artist's character does have a deep influence on the quality of the work created, is reflected in that work.

⁴⁹ Works, XI, 167-68 (Volume III, Chap. III).

⁵⁰ Ibid., 187.

⁵¹ In 1870, delivering his Lectures on Art, Ruskin declared, "although good never springs out of evil, it is developed to its highest by contention with evil. There are some groups of peasantry, in far-away nooks of Christian countries, who are nearly as innocent as lambs; but the morality which gives power to art is the morality of men, not of cattle" (Works, XX, 83; "The Relation of Art to Morals"). In his writings on morality, Ruskin lays great emphasis on the will, the desire for goodness. Action is not the ultimate test; one can be forced into good. But the heart which yearns for good is the truly noble. He touches on this in The Crown of Wild Olive when he answers those critics who complain that he reduces morality to taste. "Taste is not only a part and an index of morality--it is the ONLY morality. The first, and last, and closest trial question to any living creature is, 'What do you like?' Tell me what you like, and I'll tell you what you are. Go out into the street, and ask the first man or woman you meet, what their 'taste' is, and if they answer candidly, you know them, body and soul. 'You, my friend in the rags, with the unsteady gait, what do you like?' 'A

pipe and a quatern of gin.' I know you. . . . 'Nay,' perhaps you answer: 'we need rather to ask what these people and children do, than what they like. If they do right, it is no matter that what they like is wrong . . .'. Indeed, for a short time, and in a provisional sense, this is true. For if, resolutely, people do what is right, in time they come to like doing it. But they only are in a right moral state when they have come to like doing it; and as long as they don't like it, they are still in a vicious state." ("Traffic," Works, XVIII, 434-35.) John Henry Newman approaches the same problem in The Tamworth Reading Room, where he declares that the transition from knowing what is right to doing it may well need the intervention of supernatural grace (Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects [London, 1924]).

⁵² See, for example, R. G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art and Susanne K. Langer, Problems of Art (New York, 1957).

⁵³ The Diaries of John Ruskin, ed. Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse (London, 1956), II, 437.

⁵⁴ Works, XVI, 290 (The Two Paths, Lecture I).

⁵⁵ See The Darkening Glass, pp. 20-45.

⁵⁶ Works, VII, 257 (Modern Painters V, Pt. IX, Chap. I).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 258. The belief remained constant in Ruskin's late writings. In 1871, delivering his Lectures on Landscape, he declared "landscape painting is the thoughtful and passionate representation of the physical conditions appointed for human existence" (Works, XXII, 12).

⁵⁸ Works, VII, 258-59 (Modern Painters V, Pt. IX, Chap. I).

⁵⁹ Works, VII, 264 (Modern Painters V, Pt. IX, Chap. II).

⁶⁰ Works, VII, 262 (Modern Painters V, Pt. IX, Chap. I).

⁶¹ In Modern Painters III, Ruskin confronts Reynolds' position directly. Reynolds had argued that the poetic treatment of a situation or event avoided minute examination and detail and attempted instead to search out the unchanging in our experience. Reynolds characterizes this as the Imaginative as opposed to the Historical treatment. Ruskin, analyzing a stanza in Byron's "Prisoner of Chillon," demonstrates that neither the addition nor removal of details is a mark of poetic quality. What makes a poem lies outside this kind of discussion. Poetry depends upon the nature of the details--that is, there is such a thing as a poetic subject, and on the treatment. A discussion of poetic treatment may well be postponed until an examination of Ruskin's remarks on the Imagination.

⁶² Works, V, 28 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. I).

III. The Imagination

i. Introduction

It is in studying painting, perhaps, that one becomes most aware of the transforming power of the Imagination; one sees bald the force that can turn the raw material of perception into art, that can convert the scene that strikes every tourist's eye into a Turner study of Venice. And it is Ruskin's work on landscape art that suggests those aspects of the nature of the Imagination which are most important to him.

Ruskin's basic stimulus in investigating a problem was never academic or literary. The most fertile sources of speculation in his life were his love of nature, his love of art and finally his view of what industrialization was doing to the places he loved and the people he saw; he derived his nourishment and his battles from his experience, not from his books. Ruskin was not a scholar; although educated at Oxford, he freely admits, in Praeterita, that his studies were not his primary concern.¹ Nor was he a Coleridge, a voracious, eclectically self-educating, reader. The Victorian would not have said, as Coleridge did in 1796, [I] "have read almost every thing."²

Ruskin felt no obligation to survey and account for the major previous speculations on the Imagination. He abhorred German metaphysics, although clearly he was aware of some of these studies.³ Yet he was well read in areas that interested him: he was versed in many eighteenth-century English theorizings on the Imagination.⁴

Ruskin does not treat the Imagination in an orthodox manner; he discusses what is important to him. He omits, for example, any mention of that epistemological necessity, the mind's regulative function in all knowledge, that function described in Coleridge's theory of the Primary Imagination. Ruskin concerns himself only with that special, artistic, willed creativity that is Imagination. In 1883, he prepared a new edition of Modern Painters II; he appended to the original text an Introduction and a series of notes giving his reservations about and final estimate of his youthful study. Cook and Wedderburn conclude that "Ruskin had come to feel . . . in the end that he had builded better than he knew. . . . 'Looking back,' he said at Oxford of Modern Painters, 'I find that though all its Turner work was right and good, the essential business of the book was quite beyond that, and one I had never thought of. I had been as a faithful scribe, writing words I knew not the force of or final intent. I find now the main value of the book to be exactly in that systematic scheme of it which I had despised, and in the very adoption and insistence upon the Greek term *Theoria*, instead of sight or perception, in which I had thought myself perhaps uselessly or affectedly refined.'" ⁵

Henry A. Ladd agrees. He believes that although Ruskin came to reject much of his early theorizing, the first aesthetic speculations were necessary for all later work. Ruskin "did not realize that the outlines of his theoretical concepts had become definite only through the discipline of these earlier arguments. He could not be expected to perceive how much of his [later] assurance rested upon this impetuous

though pedantic casuistry." ⁶

The limitations of Ruskin's theory--its now outmoded faculty psychology, its wilful distinctions and muddying of old distinctions, its touch of "pedantic casuistry," its religious foundation, its impulsive blend of doctrine, psychology and aesthetics in one grand Ruskinian vision--may all incur the disapproval of the modern reader. Certainly Volume II of Modern Painters is not one of Ruskin's most admired works, and it is not likely ever to have the appeal of Sesame and Lilies or Unto This Last. And if the intrinsic value of Ruskin's study seems slender except for the historian of theories of the Imagination, the first question to be asked is whether Ruskin's theory is necessary to an understanding of his aesthetics? And, whatever the answer to this first, are there any sources of a fuller understanding of the critic's artistic and literary sensibility hidden in this work? That is, is Ruskin's ostensible subject fundamental to his aesthetics; are his examples and digressions illuminating in less apparent ways? One must direct most attention to the first question, but the second cannot be ignored.

ii. Theory of Beauty

One might begin a study of Ruskin's theory of the Imagination by noting his organization. He had structured Modern Painters I according to "the ideas conveyable by art," power, imitation, truth, beauty and relation. He had spent most of this first volume on the first major idea, that of truth, advising the reader of the importance of truth in art, of the necessity of educating one's senses until one can recognize

truth, whether in nature or art. Volume II continues this discussion, and then addresses the second major idea, beauty. The idea of beauty encompasses Ruskin's discussions of the Theoretic Faculty and Imagination, two faculties of the mind concerned with the perception and creation of beauty.

Ruskin had defined beauty in Modern Painters I; "any material object which can give us pleasure in the simple contemplation of its outward qualities without any direct and definite exertion of the intellect, I call in some way, or in some degree, beautiful." ⁷ Ruskin insists that the perception of beauty must be immediate, instinctive, without overt dependence on the intellect. "Why we receive pleasure from some forms and colors, and not from others, is no more to be asked or answered than why we like sugar and dislike wormwood. The utmost subtilty of investigation will only lead us to ultimate instincts and principles of human nature, for which no farther reason can be given than the simple will of the Deity that we should be so created." ⁸

Ruskin had discussed just this issue in a letter to a college friend, two years earlier. "It seems to be sometimes permitted us to trace the purposes of God in giving us these instincts-- as painful sensations are generally destructive, and pleasures the contrary; and in our sensations of beauty it would seem that a healthy mind has a natural attraction toward, and admiration for, attributes of material things, which are illustrative of the attributes of the Deity." ⁹ It is not, Ruskin maintains in 1843, that intellect has no place in the perception of beauty, Certainly a critic is aware of the importance of

intellect in a thorough understanding of one's enjoyment. But the experience of beauty is not dependent on our understanding why we appreciate an object. We like it, or love it, and may be incapable of telling why, or may be able, after long consideration, to explain the varied and subtle reasons, but the liking is immediate, striking, instinctive, healthy--and moral.

Because the instinct for the beautiful has been implanted in man, it is his duty to prefer certain sensations, impressions to others. In a passage which captures the special tone of this discussion, the union of aesthetics, psychology, morality and doctrine that almost always characterizes his writings on the relation of sense impression, and finally art, to the moral life, Ruskin crystallizes his argument.

Over immediate impressions and immediate preferences we have no power, but over ultimate impressions, and especially ultimate preferences we have; and . . . 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 pleasures in them in different measure; and because, wherever power of any kind is given, there is a responsibility attached, it is the duty of man to prefer certain impressions of sense to others, because they have the power of doing so, this being precisely analogous to the law of the moral world, whereby men are supposed not only capable of governing their likes and dislikes, but the whole culpability or propriety of actions is dependent upon this capability, so that men are guilty or otherwise, not for what they do, but for what they desire, the command being not, thou shalt obey, but thou shalt love, the Lord thy God. ¹⁰

In an 1883 note to this passage Ruskin writes "it is, in fact, the radical theorem, not only of this book, but of all my writings on art." ¹¹ It is, of course, the foundation for Ruskin's insistence on the morality of taste. In Modern Painters I, he had defined taste as "the faculty of receiving the greatest possible pleasure from those

material sources which are attractive to our moral nature in its purity and perfection." ¹² The belief that man's instincts are implanted by a good God, as a way of leading His creatures to Himself; that these instincts can be led astray, can be warped, can betray us, but in their purity and especially in their regulated and cultivated perfection can only do us good; this is the presupposition behind the statement "Taste . . . is the ONLY morality." ¹³

Before developing his own theory of beauty, Ruskin devotes a chapter to refuting a series of contemporary approaches. He dismisses three quite easily, but spends pages on the last, strongest opponent, the theory that beauty is based on association. First, however, Ruskin denies that beauty is truth. This, he writes simply, is confounding matter and propositions. Second, the beautiful is not the useful. This is "the most degrading and dangerous supposition"; it is base; it asserts "that the human creature has no ideas and no feelings, except those ultimately referable to its brutal appetites." Beauty exists beyond utility. And third, Ruskin denies that beauty is the result of custom. Custom can deaden us to ugliness, anaesthetize us, but it cannot create beauty. ¹⁴

Finally Ruskin confronts beauty as association. He attacks Archibald Alison's Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste in which the eighteenth century critic developed his version of the theory. Alison believed that the mind, not the external world, was the locus of beauty. An object produces in the mind an image or conception, accompanied by emotion. This causes a train of similar images called up by association, and similar emotions. The pleasure resulting

from the contemplation of this image and its train is the experience of beauty.

Alison elaborates. "An old tower in the middle of a deep wood, a bridge flung across a chasm between rocks, a cottage on a precipice, are common examples. If I am not mistaken, the effect which such objects have on everyone's mind is to suggest an additional train of conceptions, beside what the scene or description itself would have suggested." He continues. "The illustrations in the preceding chapter seem to show that whenever the emotions of sublimity or beauty are felt, that exercise of the imagination is produced which consists in the indulgence of a train of thought; that when this exercise is prevented, these emotions are unfelt or unperceived." ¹⁵

At the end of the second essay in the volume, Alison summarizes his argument.

- I. That each of these qualities [beauty and sublimity] is, either from nature, from experience, or from accident, the sign of some quality capable of producing emotion or the exercise of some moral affection. And
- II. That when these associations are dissolved, or in other words, when the material qualities cease to be significant of the associated qualities, they cease also to produce the emotions either of sublimity or beauty. ¹⁶

Some consequences of Alison's theory are immediately apparent. To Alison, beauty is an emotion felt as the result of an association of pleasing images and their resulting positive emotions.¹⁷ But the images called up by the view of an "old tower in the middle of a deep wood" will vary from perceiver to perceiver. You may think of long gone children who played about the tower; I may think of it as a fortress in old wars. You may esteem it for the comfort and joy it has brought; I

may pity it as the ruin of a great glory; still another may despise it as the sanctuary of brutal armies. Calling up associations can help one to lose sight quickly of the particular tower, the object that stands before us.

Ruskin's objections to this theory are clear. As an artist, as a critic of art, he could never accept a theory of the beautiful that dismissed, or devalued, the object before his eyes. Then, too, to ground beauty in the mind rather than in nature and in God is impious and reprehensible. It was also becoming increasingly popular. Ruskin, in devoting his energies to refuting this particular argument, demonstrates his knowledge, instinctive, perhaps, rather than conscious, of the line that theories of the beautiful would henceforth take. George P. Landow declares, in "Ruskin's Refutations of 'False Opinions Held, Concerning Beauty,'" ¹⁸ that many eighteenth-century aestheticians were concerned with changing this site of beauty from the external world to the mind. "The result was that whereas writers still discussed the qualities of beauty, they were primarily concerned to investigate why these qualities were received as pleasing by the mind" (p. 62).

Ruskin was here concerned with no such thing. He acknowledges the existence of association as a regulating principle of the mind. We indeed associate, he says, and according to two methods: rational and accidental. Rational association will explain our being attracted to an object which has historical connotations; this explains Alison's devotion to Runnymede. Accidental association, however, is private. We love objects of our childhood and, perhaps without understanding why, objects that remind us of those first pleasures. This form of

association clearly affects us all. And, for many of us, this is the level of preference at which we form judgments on the value of all objects that aspire to be called beautiful. But, Ruskin continues, the preference of accidental association cannot be an authoritative standard. The idiosyncratic visions or emotions suggested by familiar scenes cannot act as a guide whereby we judge our tastes as deep and true and dismiss others as shallow and capricious.

Ruskin cannot argue that the mind, or even the Imagination is the source of beauty in the external world. He is searching for some qualities in that world which are permanent and recognized by all men. The only foundation for such qualities must be divine. This brings him to the full consideration of his theory of beauty.¹⁹

A review of that theory need not detain us long. "By the term beauty, then properly are signified two things. First, that external quality of bodies already so spoken of, and which, whether it occur in a stone, flower, beast, or in man, is absolutely identical, which, as I have already asserted, may be shown to be in some sort typical of the Divine attributes, and which, therefore, I shall, for distinction's sake, call typical beauty; and, secondarily, the appearance of felicitous fulfilment of function in living things, more especially of the joyful and right exertion of perfect life in man. And this kind of beauty I shall call vital beauty."²⁰ The first is material beauty, qualities perceivable in objects themselves, that kind of beauty to which the artistic temperament instinctively responds. And because the instinct is implanted in us by God, He uses it as a guide to our understanding of His attributes.²¹ "Whatever good there may be,

desirable by man, more especially good belonging to his moral nature, there will be a corresponding agreeableness in whatever external object reminds him of such good." ²²

Ruskin outlines some examples of typical beauty. He begins by recollecting his own powerful experience in childhood, running down behind the bank of a beach to get the view of the black land against a darkening, but yet bright sky. He has found this contrast of a dark foreground and a light distance to be especially pleasing wherever he has since encountered it. What is the instinct which makes this contrast immediately effective, he asks, and after much speculation, concludes that the scene suggests infinity. "It is of all visible things the least material, the least finite, the farthest withdrawn from the earth prison-house, the most typical of the nature of God, the most suggestive of the glory of His dwelling-place. . . . the bright distance has no limit, we feel its infinity, as we rejoice in its purity of light." ²³

Ruskin then proceeds to art and declares that any work in which such a scene is possible is supremely elevated by its presence. He supports his argument by reference to a variety of artists, Giotto, Angelico and Raphael, Carpaccio, Titian and Veronese.

This progression is characteristic of Ruskin's treatment of typical beauty, the experience in nature, the pondering of its moral significance, the examples from art. So he proceeds through types of unity in nature, those that suggest Divine comprehensiveness; for variety is ultimately desirable only as it leads to a final unity. Repose in material things, an appearance of permanence and quiet,

suggests the Divine permanence. And in this section Ruskin repeatedly cites Wordsworth's poetry as examples of the feeling of repose in verse. "I cautiously said respecting infinity, I say fearlessly respecting repose, that no work of art can be great without it, and that all art is great in proportion to the appearance of it. It is the most unfailing test of beauty, whether of matter or of motion, nothing can be ignoble that possesses it, nothing right that has it not, and in strict proportion to its appearance in the work is the majesty of mind to be inferred in the artificer." ²⁴

Ruskin continues to outline his examples of typical beauty, but his list is not exhaustive. Other examples can be found, new lists made. The important thing to note in his description is that typical beauty first appears in its sensuous form and is a figure of a Divine attribute. This attribute is not superimposed on the object, nor is it an intellectualized structuring of experience; Ruskin makes clear that the presence of the religious dimension is implicit in the original experience. It is this, in part, which gives the experience its power. We may abstract it in order to understand it, but we cannot remove it and still have the experience. To perceive typical beauty one must intuit at once the nature of the specific object and a larger significance.

Ruskin distinguishes another form of beauty; not static, it can be perceived only in its active fulfillment; Ruskin terms it Vital Beauty. He had earlier defined it unforgettably as the "felicitous fulfilment of function." He here conceives four types of vital beauty. The first two he calls relative. We perceive relative vital beauty

when we experience happiness in the happiness of other life, in larks and doves, in growing flowers.²⁵ The second form of relative vital beauty is experienced when we value the virtue of other life, the industry of the bees. In 1883 Ruskin redefines these two categories succinctly; "the first state of vital beauty is defined to be Happiness, perceived with sympathy; the second, Moral intention, perceived with praise."²⁶ One must note that although Ruskin here admits the presence of the perceiving mind in his definition of this form of beauty, there is no indication that the source of beauty is mental.

The third type of vital beauty is generic. The perceiver honors the perfection of form in a species, its ideal state. "The form is understood to be of that period when the generic attributes are perfectly developed, and previous to the commencement of their decline."²⁷ And lastly, there is vital beauty in man, the perfection of physical strength and grace enhanced by intellectual and emotional power and control.

The presence of emotional fulfillment in the object of vital beauty at first may seem to be an indication that Ruskin is moving away from the material beauty he categorizes as Typical. Vital beauty is indeed more flexible, its discernment depends on greater sympathy in the viewer; its presence depends on a fuller use of the object's powers. But Ruskin is not indicating a theory of beauty in the perceiver's mind. Beauty exists in the object here as surely as it did in the earlier theory.

And, here too, beauty is the reflection of Divinity. Ruskin aligns the sources of beauty in the world with their ultimate source. Beauty

is either (typical beauty): "a symbolizing of Divine attributes in matter," "the glorious symbol of him," or (vital beauty): "the record of conscience, printed in things external," which is "the approving voice of God;" "the felicity of living things," which is "the evidence of his kind presence," or "the perfect fulfillment of . . . duties and functions," which is "the obedience to his will by him induced and supported." Ruskin's theory of beauty in Modern Painters II is conservative, objective and religious. ²⁸

iii. Theoretic Faculty

Ruskin's purpose in explaining the grounds of beauty is to clarify the Theoretic Faculty. He declares, in his treatment of beauty, that the beautiful is not the useful, and, here, he begins to define the Theoretic Faculty by developing that declaration. He distinguishes between that which is immediately useful to man, the practical, and that which is useful in the highest sense, that which enhances man's development of himself in this world. 'Man's use and function (and let him who will not grant me this follow no farther, for this I propose always to assume) is to be the witness of the glory of God, and to advance that glory by his reasonable obedience and resultant happiness. Whatever enables us to fulfill this function is in the pure and first sense of the word useful to us.' ²⁹ Now man's pursuits may be divided into those which are in the quotidian sense useful or useless. Theoretic pursuits are commonly held to be useless; they deal with phenomena, not applicability. But they bring man's mind closer to the primary concerns of life. Ruskin uses the analogy of knowledge as its

own reward, and concludes "that those pursuits which are altogether theoretic, are those whose results are desirable or admirable in themselves and for their own sake, and in which no farther end to which their productions or discoveries are referred, can interrupt the contemplation of things as they are." ³⁰

Now the perception of beauty is not subservient to life. We can see and hear all we need without experiencing the joys of a landscape or a symphony. Each of these last is not necessary to the conduct of life; it is an "object of life," "infinitely and for itself desired;" and "we may be sure there is something of divine; for God will not make anything an object of life to His creatures which does not point to, or partake of, Himself." ³¹ And when we perceive beauty in nature, its unity, each part completing and enhancing the whole; its variety; color and warmth, we experience "not only a feeling of strong affection toward the object in which they exist, but a perception of purpose and adaptation of it to our desires; a perception, therefore, of the immediate operation of the Intelligence which so formed us, and so feeds us." ³² This is theoretic perception, the appreciation of the physical fact accompanied by the "joy, admiration, and gratitude" due the Intelligence which proffers this gift; it is a union of the object and the proper emotional response. Theoretic perception is neither sensuous nor intellectual; it is moral.

Theoretic perception is not analytic. Ruskin writes, "it is necessary to the existence of an idea of beauty, that the sensual pleasure which may be its basis, should be accompanied first with joy, then with the love of the object, then with the perception of kindness

in a superior Intelligence, finally with thankfulness and veneration towards that Intelligence itself . . . these emotions are in no way resultant from, nor obtainable by, any operation of the intellect." ³³

In her Study of Ruskin's Concept of the Imagination ³⁴ Sister Mary Dorothea Goetz elaborates two levels of the theoretic faculty. The lower level is contemplative and receptive; the higher is active. "On this level of reflection an image resulting from the first theoretic function is considered against its mental background. All the relevant ideas stored in the memory are made to bear upon the single item of contemplation. By continuously grouping and comparing, weighing and preferring, the mind gradually moves toward a synthesis of images" (p. 12). But this view of the faculty is not in accord with the bulk of Ruskin's writing on the subject. He insists that theoretic perception is receptive, attentive, loving, not analytic or abstracting. He contrasts it to the active, imaginative faculty. ³⁵ Sister Mary Dorothea is here making the mistake of taking a single function of the mind for its action as a whole in confronting beauty. She declares "the higher theoretic function is an action of the mind as a whole" (p. 13). But Ruskin never avers this. Nor does he declare that the theoretic and imaginative faculties encompass all the actions of the mind regarding its perception and creation of beauty. But rather, "these are the two faculties to which I shall have occasion constantly to refer during that examination of the Ideas of Beauty and Relation on which we are now entering, because it is only as received and treated by these, that those ideas become exalted and profitable." ³⁶ That is, in order to explain fully his definition of

beauty, these are the two faculties most important, most essential to develop, but not the only two faculties which act.

Sister Mary Dorothea is however touching on an aspect of the theoretic mode that distinguishes its activity in contemplating nature from its contemplation of art. In his discussion of typical beauty, Ruskin writes simply and clearly of the theoretic faculty as loving attention, as contemplation and emotion. We perceive beauty in nature and comprehend it as both sensuous beauty and a sign of God's love. Such a response may be immediate and instinctive. In his earlier writings on art, however, Ruskin is always anxious to warn his readers that proper appreciation, taste, takes time and training. We must educate our senses, our responses. It may be necessary to learn to love what is beautiful. And in his analysis of vital beauty, Ruskin again suggests that a proper attitude may have to be learned, may well be the result of knowledge and effort.

We are to come down again from the judgment seat, and, taking it for granted that every creature of God is in some way good, and has a duty and specific operation providentially accessory to the wellbeing of all, we are to look, in this faith, to that employment and nature of each, and to derive pleasure from their entire perfection and fitness for the duty they have to do, and in their entire fulfilment of it; and so we are to take pleasure and find beauty in the magnificent binding together of the jaws of the ichthyosaurus for catching and holding, and in the adaptation of the lion for springing, and of the locust for destroying, and of the lark for singing, and in every creature for the doing of that which God has made it to do. Which faithful pleasure in the perception of the perfect operation of lower creatures . . . implies a knowledge of the habits and structure of every creature. 37

A full appreciation of beauty, whether in art or in conscious life in nature, may require a sophisticated knowledge in the perceiver. But the acquisition of such knowledge is not the experience of beauty; it

is a preliminary. Theoretic perception is the full and final moral perception of beauty, perhaps dependent on other actions, but unique in its own function, a joyous reception.³⁸

Ruskin occasionally refers to the faculty as contemplative.³⁹ In an 1883 note to the opening of the discussion, he declares that the reader "must please remember that Theory, from the beginning to the end of this part of Modern Painters, is used in the sense of contemplation, whenever it is used carefully" (Works, IV, 33). Joseph Pieper, in Leisure the Basis of Culture,⁴⁰ discusses the nature of contemplation in terms that may shed light on Ruskin's meaning.

What happens when we look at a rose? What do we do as we become aware of its colour and form? Our soul is passive and receptive. We are, to be sure, awake and active, but our attention is not strained; we simply "look"--in so far, that is, as we "contemplate" it and we are not already "observing" it (for "observing" implies that we are beginning to count, to measure and to weigh up). Observation is a tense activity. . . . To contemplate, on the other hand, to "look" in this sense, means to open one's eyes receptively to whatever offers itself to one's vision.

(p. 31)

Pieper contrasts the kind of knowledge attainable through contemplation with that achieved by consecutive reasoning.

The Middle Ages drew a distinction between the understanding as ratio and the understanding intellectus. Ratio is the power of discursive, logical thought, of searching and examination, of abstraction, of definition and drawing conclusions. Intellectus, on the other hand, is the name for the understanding in so far as it is the capacity of simplex intuitus, of that simple vision to which truth offers itself like a landscape to the eye. The faculty of mind, man's knowledge, is both these things in one.

(p. 34)

Medieval theologians considered ratio the purely human faculty, intellectus the superhuman; intellectus touches on the order of pure spirit. Quoting Aquinas in the Quaestiones disputate de veritate

(15, 1), Pieper concludes that man can achieve "a sort of participation in the simple knowledge which is proper to higher beings, of whom it is therefore said that they possess the faculty of spiritual vision" (p. 34). This participation is "the fulfilment of the highest promise in man" (p. 35). One is reminded of Ruskin's definition of theoretic as that which enables man to fulfill his use and function.

And Ruskin draws out the spiritual implications of his theory. As typical beauty is beauty of form which reveals the presence of God in nature, so the faculty which perceives such beauty must be capable of spiritual as well as physical vision.

The fact of our deriving constant pleasure from whatever is a type or semblance of Divine attributes, and from nothing but that which is so, is the most glorious of all that can be demonstrated of human nature; it not only sets a great gulf of specific separation between us and the lower animals, but it seems a promise of a communion ultimately deep, close, and conscious, with the Being whose darkened manifestations we here feebly and unthinkingly delight in. ⁴¹

He later refers to such perceptions of beauty as "these visionary pleasures," ⁴² undoubtedly encompassing the phrase's two possible meanings, pleasures of sight and spiritual pleasures. ⁴³

As is often the case with his abstract discussions, Ruskin's terminology here creates some problems. He often refers to the perception of ideas of beauty, rather than the perception of beauty. Now to perceive something implies the existence of an object outside the perceiver. But an idea is a mental construct within the perceiver; it is not in nature. What, then, is the perception of an idea of beauty? Theoretic perception, as Ruskin develops it, is a recognition of the physical beauty of an object, a realization of the goodness of God and

joy, admiration and gratitude to the giver. It is perception informed by emotion.

With this theory, Ruskin, understandably, would not call the process the conceiving of an idea of beauty. This phrase makes the act purely intellectual; it loses sight of the physical object. Nor would he want to term the process the perceiving of beauty, although he occasionally refers to it in this way. Perceiving beauty connotes the purely aesthetic, sensuous apprehension from which Ruskin wishes to distinguish theoretic perception. To perceive an idea of beauty, then, may not be a completely satisfactory phrase, but it does capture the blend of physical object and perceiver's mind and emotions essential to theoretic activity.

Beauty exists in the physical object, but beauty is more than the physical. It is the revelation of a higher intelligence, organization, goodness. The theoretic faculty is capable of recognizing this; it apprehends sensuously and includes the appropriate emotional response. Such a theory of the perception of beauty must exist for a theory of art that is grounded in reality but depends on the emotions and perspective of the artist.

iv. The Imagination

A. Introduction

If the theoretic faculty contemplates beauty, what in man is capable of producing the beauty offered for contemplation? What faculty in man transforms the raw material of perception into art?

We have hitherto been exclusively occupied with those sources of pleasure which exist in the external creation, and which in any faithful copy of it must to a certain extent exist also.

These sources of beauty, however, are not presented by any

very great work of art in a form of pure transcript. They invariably receive the reflection of the mind under whose influence they have passed, and are modified or coloured by its image.

This modification is the Work of Imagination. ⁴⁴

To Ruskin, pure copy of nature is possible; the copier can bend his mind to the object and keep it steadily before him. But no great artist works this way of imitation.

Ruskin claims that his method in examining the Imagination is to determine its presence or absence in works of art; its essence, he says, is "mysterious and inexplicable;" ⁴⁵ it cannot be isolated. We can perceive the presence of a mysterious force; we see its effects; but we cannot understand that force. And yet he does distinguish three forms or functions of the Imagination and does attempt to explain the mechanics of each. Ruskin does not however treat the Imagination as a purely mechanical force. His most mechanical treatment is that of the Associative Imagination and he later admits the inadequacies of this discussion. ⁴⁶

He declares that he will use the visual arts as his primary material for analysis; they lend themselves most easily to a demonstration of the Imagination's presence. And yet, in the earliest parts of each discussion, when the reader needs the most concrete examples to clarify points, Ruskin chooses the literary. This may be, in part, because a reader can follow an argument more easily and surely when he has the work under examination before his eyes. The critic can quote a poem but cannot as easily produce a plate or drawing. But one suspects, too, that the history of theories of the Imagination, growing as it does through literary rather than visual discussion, suggests the

art that is most apt for such analysis. And Ruskin's immediate predecessors in England, those most concerned with the problem, Hunt, Wordsworth and Coleridge, were poet-critics.

Ruskin begins with Dugald Stewart's definition of Imagination; this

includes conception or simple apprehension, which enables us to form a notion of those former objects of perception or of knowledge, out of which we are to make a selection; abstraction, which separates the selected materials from the qualities and circumstances which are connected with them in nature; and judgment or taste, which selects the materials and directs their combination. To those powers we may add that particular habit of association to which I formerly gave the name of Fancy; as it is this which presents to our choice all the different materials which are subservient to the efforts of imagination, and which may therefore be considered as forming the ground-work of poetical genius.⁴⁷

Walter J. Hipple, Jr., in his essay "The Aesthetics of Dugald Stewart: Culmination of a Tradition,"⁴⁸ summarizes this theory. "Stewart's imagination is a poetical faculty creating a new world from the materials of the world of perception."

Ruskin objects to Stewart's theory on two grounds. The first is classic and has been the implicit objection that later theories of the Imagination make. If fancy is merely a habit of association, conception a species of memory and abstraction a working on whatever has previously been offered to the mind, what controls the entire working of the Imagination, what foresees the end of the artistic process before the work is begun so that the artist may submit each stage to his plan for the whole, what makes the final product a unity? Ruskin writes, "in order that anything may be directed, an end must be previously determined; what is the faculty that determines this end? and of what frame and make, how boned and fleshed, how conceived or

seen, is the end itself?"⁴⁹

Now this search for the faculty or concept that rules the mental processes in creation is an old one. Most associationist theories came up against the same problem that mechanical theories of the universe had faced. M. H. Abrams, in The Mirror and the Lamp, surveys nineteenth-century attempts to solve the dilemma. He explains "if the process of imagination is conceived as images moved by purely mechanical, or efficient causes of attraction--each present image pulling in the next automatically, according to the accident of its inherent similarity or its contiguity in past experience--how are we to explain that the result is a cosmos instead of a chaos?" (p. 164) Abrams finds that one solution was inadmissible, the analogy of an intelligent artisan, a kind of master image in the mind; this challenged the primary empirical assumption that there is no mental content which has not entered through the senses. The designer could not be an innate idea.

Coleridge's organic metaphor was an attempt to solve this problem; he substitutes the principle of growth for that of mechanical linkage. To Coleridge, an organism is inherently teleological; its form is endogenous and automotive. The oak is inherent in the acorn; its final form may be modified, come to fruition or be stunted, by the action of sun and rain, the condition of soil; but the acorn will never produce a rose. The seed holds the secret of the fully grown tree; growth is merely the development of potential. But, Abrams objects, if one suggests nature as an analogy for artistic creativity, what happens to consciousness and free will? Is the artist merely effusing his

products; is his art determined beyond his control? Coleridge declares that we must make ourselves to be what comes naturally to the plant. But Abrams finds Coleridge's solution unconvincing. And Abrams is not alone. Many critics after Coleridge attacked again the problem and proposed new alternatives. ⁵⁰

Ruskin's theory of the Imagination confronts this issue in a variety of ways. But first one might glance back at his second objection to Stewart's theory. The philosopher at his best only describes one mode of the Imagination's workings. What of those examples from poetry where a combination of images is not the moving force? Ruskin cites Il Penseroso:

Missing thee, I walk unseen
On the dry smooth-shaven green,
To behold the wandering moon
Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray,
Through the heaven's wide pathless way;
And oft, as if her head she bowed,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.

"It is evident that Stewart's explanation utterly fails in all these instances; for there is in them no 'combination' whatsoever, but a particular mode of regarding the qualities or appearances of a single thing, illustrated and conveyed to us by the image of another; and the act of imagination, observe, is not the selection of this image, but the mode of regarding the object." ⁵¹

My gracious silence, hail!
Wouldst thou have laugh'd, had I come coffin'd home,
That weep'st to see me triumph? Ah, my dear,
Such eyes the widows in Corioli wear,
And mothers that lack sons.

"How did Shakespeare know that Virgilia could not speak? This

knowledge, this intuitive and penetrative perception, is still one of the forms, the highest, of imagination, but there is no combination of images here." ⁵²

Ruskin's artistic conscience makes him aware that the Imaginative process is much more complex than Stewart would have it. A theory of the Imagination must provide for artistic control, foresight, design; it must allow a multitude of responses and acts. And Ruskin develops his theory of the Imagination's threefold modality, attempting, by facing the second of Stewart's flaws, to mend the first.

B. The Associative Imagination

Ruskin's theory of the Associative Imagination is his first attempt to deal with the problem of control in creativity. He recalls Stewart's definition of Imagination and designates it composition. The mind, desiring to compose, calls up a number of ideas and chooses the most fit. The mind summons these ideas, Ruskin concludes, according to two laws: beauty and likeness or dissimilarity. And, in fact, though Stewart does not specify these two principles, he does indicate that the mind in creation arranges its ideas according to inherent qualities in the ideas or stable relations between them. He defines fancy, for example, as "a power of summoning up, at pleasure, a particular class of ideas,--and of ideas related to each other in a particular manner." ⁵³ Stewart's fancy is intimately related to the work of the Imagination; fancy "presents to our choice all the different materials which are subservient to the efforts of imagination." ⁵⁴

Ruskin agrees that fancy works by the laws of the association of ideas. Since Hume and Hartley, upholders of this theory had held that ideas are associated when they intrinsically resemble one another, when they have occurred simultaneously or closely together in time, or when they are bound together as cause or effect. In each case, it is the relationship between the two ideas that causes their association in the mind.⁵⁵ Ruskin can accept such association as a function of fancy, but he denies that it operates in imaginative creativity. Just as in his treatment of "False Opinions Held Concerning Beauty" he could accept the consequences of the association of ideas without declaring that such association is all that operates, so here Ruskin reaps the rewards of the theory but reveals its inadequacies and attempts to supersede them.

The Associative Imagination does not function according to the principles of the association of ideas.⁵⁶ Ruskin outlines the workings of this mode of Imagination.

By its operation, two ideas are chosen out of an infinite mass (for it evidently matters not whether the imperfections be conceived out of a number conceivable, or selected out of a number recollected), two ideas which are separately wrong, which together shall be right, and of whose unity, therefore, the idea must be formed at the instant they are seized, as it is only in that unity that either is good, and therefore only the conception of that unity can prompt the preference.⁵⁷

Ruskin, implementing his critical insights with his experience as an artist, recognizes that the inherent value of the separate ideas is of limited importance, their previous relations inessential. What makes them important to the artist is their place in his vision.⁵⁸ Unlike Stewart's, Ruskin's theory implies the voluntary and conscious

selection of details; creation, the importance of the artist's will in bringing about his end. And Ruskin approaches the central question. "What is that prophetic action of mind, which out of an infinite mass of things that cannot be tried together, seizes, at the same instant, two that are fit for each other; together right, yet each disagreeable alone? This operation of mind, so far as I can see, is absolutely inexplicable." ⁵⁹

C. The Penetrative Imagination

It would seem that Ruskin, while recognizing the need for a controlling force in the artist's mind, abandons the search for such a force. He has twice used the adjective "inexplicable," first, indicating the essence of Imagination; second, the controlling mental principle in creativity. But Ruskin's forte has never been his consistency. And while accepting the honest avowal of his defeat at this stage of investigation, it would be well to keep the problem in mind as we progress in a study of the Imagination. This hole in his theory haunts Ruskin and he does not dismiss it as quickly as he would suggest.

The critic next develops his theory of the Imagination Penetrative. In investigating this mode of Imagination, Ruskin declares, we will "endeavour to understand, not only its principles of selection [already attempted under the Imagination Associative], but its modes of apprehension with respect to what it selects." ⁶⁰ The Penetrative Imagination is a singular force which pierces the shard of experience until it comes to the core, the internal spiritual fact. "It never

stops at crusts or ashes, or outward images of any kind; it ploughs them all aside, and plunges into the very central fiery heart; nothing else will content its spirituality." ⁶¹ The Penetrative Imagination is "the highest intellectual power of man," and although "there is no reasoning in it; it works not by algebra, nor by integral calculus," ⁶² because it is intellectual and bound, perhaps mysteriously, to the intellectual faculties, this mode of imagination is not a free-flowing emotional attraction; Ruskin will argue for its ability to intuit truth.

The Penetrative Imagination can be clarified by contrasting it with its subordinate form of Fancy. "The fancy sees the outside, and is able to give a portrait of the outside, clear, brilliant, and full of detail. The imagination sees the heart and inner nature, and makes them felt, but is often obscure, mysterious, and interrupted, in its giving of outer detail." ⁶³ Both the Imagination and Fancy are here involved with the original experience, character, emotion that is to become part of the work of art. Unlike the Imagination and Fancy Associative, they are not faculties of craft.

The first distinction between the Imagination and Fancy Penetrative points up two underlying suppositions of Ruskin's theory of art. When he writes that the Imagination here "sees the heart and inner nature, and makes them felt," Ruskin implies that the purpose of art is to communicate the experience of the artist. If he has not truly experienced a situation, if "he collects expressions of it from other writers, . . . searches for similes, . . . composes, exaggerates, heaps term on term, figure on figure, . . . it is all faggot and no

fire; the life breath is not in it." ⁶⁴ Ruskin is here defining art as a revelation, a communication of personal experience and an attempt to reproduce that experience in others. The criterion here is sincerity, the genuineness of the artist's life. It is a Romantic standard, and one that Ruskin always warms to, if he is not always consistent in applying it.

A second implication is that experience and the intuition of meaning exist prior to language. Unlike many twentieth century critics, some of whom are held to be Ruskin's disciples, ⁶⁵ the Victorian believes that insight is independent of its expression, that language is not only not the fundamental shaper of experience, but it may be inadequate to the expressing of that experience. An artist's idea may remain greater than the language which attempts to reveal it. "There is in every word set down by the imaginative mind an awful under-current of meaning, and evidence and shadow upon it of the deep places out of which it has come. It is often obscure, often half-told; for he who wrote it, in his clear seeing of the things beneath, may have been impatient of detailed interpretation: but, if we choose to dwell upon it and trace it, it will lead us always securely back to that metropolis of the soul's dominion from which we may follow out all the ways and tracks to its farthest coasts." ⁶⁶

One of Ruskin's weaknesses as a critic is his tendency to draw out the implications of a theory and stick to them, good sense and previous intellectual commitments notwithstanding. An example of this can be found in his contrasting Fancy and Imagination as here explained by specific literary examples of each. He quotes and labels

lines from "Lycidas." 67

Bring the rathe primrose, that forsaken dies,	Imagination.
The tufted crow-toe and pale jessamine,	Nugatory.
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,	Fancy.
The glowing violet,	Imagination.
The musk rose, and the well-attired woodbine,	Fancy, vulgar.
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,	Imagination.
And every flower that sad embroidery wears.	Mixed.

Now Coleridge attempts something of the sort when he quotes Shakespeare against Otway in the Biographia. But the Romantic critic is quick to give the reasons for his conclusions and most readers have been persuaded. Ruskin does not elaborate. And the appalling sight of consecutive lines in a poem labeled imaginative and unimaginative is in no way mitigated. The reader, left to worry over why line 2 is nugatory and line 4 imaginative can come to but one surprising conclusion. The imaginative lines in this piece all bear the marks of a suppressed pathetic fallacy. The forsaking of the primrose, with its hint of callousness on the part of the forsaker, sadness on the part of the flower; the glowing violet, with its slight suggestion of animation; the wan cowslips that hang their heads in thought--all bear the signs of conscious life. Contrast the other flowers described merely in their outer details, "pale jessamine," "pansy freaked with jet," "well-attired woodbine." Ruskin's criticism here is overprecise and bordering on the foolish. His categorical distinctions are consistent with his contrasts between Fancy and Imagination, and the difference between the two faculties can have a practical use when applied to characters in a play or long passages of a text. But such differences lose all value as critical tools when made to work inflexibly on such slight material.

The "one essential difference between imagination and fancy,"⁶⁸ then, is not the focus of their vision, but their relation to emotion. "Fancy . . . can never feel. She is one of the hardest-hearted of the intellectual faculties."⁶⁹ But "there is reciprocal action between the intensity of moral feeling and the power of imagination; for, on the one hand, those who have keenest sympathy are those who look closest and pierce deepest, and hold securest; and on the other, those who have so pierced and seen the melancholy deeps of things are filled with the most intense passion and gentleness of sympathy."⁷⁰ The Penetrative Imagination works in conjunction with emotion. Although it is an intellectual faculty, it is spurred on and guided by emotion, and it secures the sanction of emotion.

Later in this chapter, Ruskin returns to the relation of Imagination to emotion from another point of view. "All true and deep emotion is imaginative," he writes. And "all moral truth can only thus be apprehended," through the Imagination.⁷¹ The play of the Imagination is dependent on our ability to forget ourselves and enter into the spirit of others. Such is the Penetrative Imagination in art. And such is the beginning of morality. When we can imaginatively identify with another, suffer and rejoice when he does, be tempted and fall or withstand when he is, we can begin to approximate moral judgments. In his Defence of Poetry, Shelley makes the point even more clearly. "The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put

himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination." ⁷² Love is the beginning of all morality as it is the beginning of all art.

Ruskin's vision of the Penetrative Imagination was not entirely new to nineteenth-century thought. Theories of the sympathetic imagination had existed a century earlier and their roots before that. Walter Jackson Bate, in From Classic to Romantic, ⁷³ discusses the sources of an increased emphasis on feeling in art, a "general reliance on feeling as a valid means of insight and communication" (p. 129). One group of predecessors was the Scottish "common sense" school. "Stemming from Shaftesbury, a modified confidence in an 'inner sense' passed almost imperceptibly, especially through the Scottish school of moralists and critics, into much of later eighteenth-century British thought" (p. 130). Another source is more surprising. "Associationism, in particular, tended to give . . . support by breaking down the barrier between 'thought' and 'feeling'; by considering thought and conviction as an integrally interrelated series of feelings and responses on the part of the human mechanism to an external stimulus" (p. 130).

In an earlier article, "The Sympathetic Imagination in Eighteenth Century English Criticism," ⁷⁴ Bate outlined some of the characteristics of this view of the imagination's power. "The imagination, by an effort of sympathetic intuition, is able to penetrate the barrier which space puts between it and its object, and, by actually entering into the object, so to speak, secure a momentary but complete

identification with it" (p. 144). "The truth of imaginative insight is, of course, a frequent corollary of this doctrine; for by its sympathetic identification the imagination perceives, as the reason cannot, the fundamental reality and inner working, the peculiar 'truth' and nature of its object" (p. 145).

Bate continues his description. The poet must possess an extensive knowledge of human nature, instinctive sensibility and imaginative fervor. There is needed a "yoking of empiricism and intuitionism" (p. 151). "Just as empirical data are a meaningless chaos without the shaping and coordination, the unifying direction of intuition, so instinctive insight, though immediate in its action, works through the particular, the empirically known, and is progressively broadened, refined, and molded by knowledge and experience" (p. 152). The sympathetic imagination, then, can intuit meaning and that intuition can provide a shaping, unifying force in molding the details of a work. We might recall for a moment the problem that arose in the discussion of the Associative Imagination: what idea or force provides the principle about which details in a work of art can cluster and take shape? A cursory survey of the work of Ruskin's predecessors in intuitionist theory indicates the direction in which the Victorian's answer will lie.

In England, the clearest uses of the theory of the sympathetic imagination can be found in Romantic criticisms of Shakespeare. Hazlitt writes of the dramatist in his essay "On Shakespeare and Milton." ⁷⁵

The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds--so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within

itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications.

(p. 47)

He had only to think of any thing in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects.

(p. 48)

And Coleridge writes in Chapter 15 of the Biographia, Shakespeare "darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion, the one Proteus of the fire and the flood. . . . Shakespeare becomes all things, yet forever remaining himself." ⁷⁶

The ultimate extension of this theory of poetic creativity is suggested by Hazlitt [Shakespeare "was nothing in himself"] and made a poetic doctrine by Keats. In a letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, he writes, "As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian, or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone), it is not itself--it has no self--it is every thing and nothing--It has no character--it enjoys light and shade. . . . It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosop[h]er, delights the camelion Poet. . . . A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence because he has no Identity." ⁷⁷

Ruskin does not take his theory of the Penetrative Imagination to

this extreme. The Victorian is using his concept of the force and power of intuition in artistic creativity as a means, a piece in a larger network, which is the entire theory of the Imagination. The Penetrative Imagination is, to Ruskin, the central act that initiates and controls creativity. But it must be followed by other acts in order that the artist may produce; the Penetrative Imagination provides the idea; the Associative Imagination searches for material to help embody that idea. Beginning his discussion of the Imagination, Ruskin declares he will arrange an arbitrary order for critical purposes. The natural order, "the most logical mode of treatment would be to follow the order in which commonly the mind works; that is, penetrating first, combining next, and treating or regarding, finally." ⁷⁸ Ruskin implicitly, perhaps unconsciously, finds the solution to Dugald Stewart's problem, and the problem of all associationist theories of the Imagination, in his theory of penetration.

Now because Ruskin needs intuition as a first step to be followed by a craftsmanship, he cannot accept the annihilation of the poet's personality. The weaknesses in Keats' concept are apparent. If the poet is merely a vehicle, an instrument, what is the source of perspective, value, order in the poem? Ruskin's poet must retain the complex controls indicated by the theory of the Associative Imagination in order to remain master of his work.

Of course one may produce passages from Ruskin's writings that indicate a lesser assurance about the place of the mind's control in art. In The Queen of the Air Ruskin discusses myth. "All the greatest

myths have been seen, by the men who tell them, involuntarily and passively--seen by them with as great distinctness (and in some respects, though not in all, under conditions as far beyond the control of their will) as a dream sent to any of us by night." ⁷⁹ And in Praeterita, he records an incident that occurred in the summer of 1842. Traveling through Switzerland, he encountered a small aspen tree and proceeded to sketch it. "Languidly, but not idly, I began to draw it; and as I drew, the languor passed away: the beautiful lines insisted on being traced,--without weariness. More and more beautiful they became, as each rose out of the rest, and took its place in the air. With wonder increasing every instant, I saw that they 'composed' themselves, by finer laws than any known of men. At last, the tree was there, and everything that I had thought before about trees, nowhere." ⁸⁰

But the reception of myth is not the creation of art and the sketching of the aspen cannot be compared to a Turner vision of a sea storm. Ruskin is aware of the mind's passivity in the presence of an overwhelming event--either a direct, active experience or the presence of great beauty. But the creation of great works of art demands the artist's control. Submitting oneself totally is the first step, not the final. He writes in 1870, "that not only the highest, but the most consistent results have been attained in art by men in whom the faculty of vision, however strong, was subordinate to that of deliberate design, and tranquillised by a measure, continual, not feverish, but affectionate, observance of the quite unvisionary facts of the surrounding world." ⁸¹ As we have seen in Ruskin's discussion

of emotion in art, he cannot admit an art that demands that the artist relinquish the final authority of consciousness. "Good art always consists of two things: First, the observation of fact; secondly, the manifesting of human design and authority in the way that fact is told." ⁸²

Ruskin's debt, as a theorist of the Imagination, to his Romantic predecessors in England has been a matter of some dispute. A. H. R. Ball declares that Ruskin's theory "differs little from that of Coleridge" (p. 17). Van Akin Burd concludes that Ruskin's theory was "in part an extension of Coleridge's ideas through Hunt." ⁸³ Alba H. Warren, Jr. finds the two major influences Wordsworth and Hunt; Warren declares that there is no evidence that Ruskin had even read Coleridge at this time.

Now the major piece of evidence about Ruskin's knowledge of Wordsworth and Coleridge's prose (his knowledge of their poetry is apparent throughout Modern Painters) appears in a letter to the Reverend W. L. Brown, 20 December 1843. "I never heard of the Coleridge and Wordsworth dispute (where can I find an account of it?)" ⁸⁴ One can only assume that Ruskin was directed to Wordsworth's Prefaces and the Biographia Literaria. Wordsworth's influence on Ruskin was subtle and complex. And a number of studies have been devoted to just this matter. ⁸⁵ The similarities between the two men, in their quick and profound response to nature, in their mature sense of a world that was poorer than the one they had known as children, in their search for the philosophic mind that would provide recompense, such similarities may be the reason for the frequent echoes

of imagery and phrasing, for Ruskin's lifelong quoting of Wordsworth. Modern Painters abounds in such references, some chosen because they were Wordsworth's lines and he puts the thought best, some because Ruskin is looking for any example of a technique or image and Wordsworth is always close to the surface of his mind.

And one can see similarities to Wordsworth in Ruskin's view of Imagination's function in life. Ball declares that "like Wordsworth, Ruskin saw the imagination as the link between man and God; it is only by the imagination that he can recognize the divine qualities in nature, and see what is before him as the symbol of something greater than itself" (p. 18). To both writers, Imagination is much more than just an artistic faculty, although in Modern Painters II Ruskin dwells on its function in art. In his 1815 Preface to the Poems, Wordsworth concentrates too on the artist's Imagination. The clearest similarities to Ruskin may be found in Wordsworth's distinctions between Imagination and Fancy. "To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy; but either the materials evoked and combined are different; or they are brought together under a different law, and for a different purpose."⁸⁶ One immediately sees the relation of this statement to Ruskin's Imagination and Fancy Associative; both Imagination and Fancy associate, but according to different laws, under different controls. Wordsworth continues. "Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch; and where they admit of modification, it is enough for her purpose if it be slight,

limited and evanescent. Directly the reverse of these, are the desires and demands of the Imagination." ⁸⁷ The resemblances that the Imagination seeks out depend "less upon casual and outstanding, than upon inherent and internal, properties." ⁸⁸ Again, one is reminded of Ruskin's insistence, in his discussion of the Penetrative Imagination that Fancy "has to do with the outsides of things," Imagination with "the very central fiery heart."

There can be little doubt that Ruskin's formulation of the imaginative power was influenced by his reading of Wordsworth. Still, there are significant differences between the two. Wordsworth, for example, makes no attempt to define an intuitive, penetrative power that provides both an impetus and central focus for artistic creation. Wordsworth was not a theoretician. Commentators have long remarked on the disparity between his pronouncements in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads and his own practice. Wordsworth was largely content to write his poetry, secure in his own genius. And his significant writings on the Imagination did not occur until 1815, long after his great burst of creativity. Ruskin, on the contrary, here considers his theorizing to be his contribution; he is a critic, not a poet. And he is committed to integrating his insights into a theory.

For this reason alone it might be more rewarding to compare Ruskin with the greatest English Romantic critic, the one frequently considered a major influence on Ruskin's theory, Coleridge. Now it is sometimes assumed that Ruskin had not read Coleridge by the time he came to write Modern Painters II. There is no conclusive evidence on either side. He may have read the Biographia, just as the Reverend

Brown may have recommended it. He certainly knew Coleridge's poetry; the assumption that he knew the prose may not be irresponsible. Still, the only way of conclusively determining influence is by comparison, and the frequent allusions by critics to Coleridge's influence demand some investigation.

At the end of the thirteenth chapter of the Biographia, Coleridge gives his famous definition of the Imagination. He does so by distinguishing three faculties, Fancy, the Primary Imagination and the Secondary Imagination. Fancy is "no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space" (I, 202); images and ideas are stored in the memory and called up voluntarily by Fancy. "But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association." This is identical to Ruskin's theory of the Associative Fancy.

Now Coleridge defines the Primary Imagination as "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception." This is the mental faculty that supports a coherent vision of life. If what we really experience is the bombardment of energy, the activation of our senses, the Primary Imagination interprets this experience, makes a world from random sensations. Ruskin does not discuss this aspect of the Imagination, common to us all, necessary for life. Unlike Coleridge, Ruskin was uninterested in matters deeply psychological or metaphysical. His speculations were important because they helped him to make sense of art; he had no abiding interest in or commitment to philosophy for itself. Ruskin, there can be no doubt, would have agreed with Coleridge's theory of the Primary Imagination. His

discussions of the influence of sense experience on our vision of the world attests to his recognition of a mediating faculty. But an examination of this faculty does not seriously occupy him.

The Secondary Imagination is the artistic organ. "Co-existing with the conscious will . . . it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify" (I, 202). One sees immediate parallels to Ruskin's Associative Imagination; it too, in conscious artistic fashion, chooses ideas, separately wrong, unrelated, and melts them together. It too dissolves in order to recreate. Coleridge insists on the "esemplastic" action of the imagination; through its action all things become one. "£ 1 3 £ 2" $\pi \beta \alpha \iota \epsilon \lambda \nu$ he glosses his constructed word, "to shape into one" (I, 107). But Robert D. Hume, in an analysis of "Kant and Coleridge on Imagination," ⁸⁹ points out the danger in Coleridge's "melting pot." "Given his apparent schematization, Coleridge had no choice but to say that secondary Imagination destroys before it creates. . . . But this grants Imagination absolute power over the rational world without explaining the source of its truth or defining the relation of its constructs to the material from which they are constituted. Blake might defend the proposition that imaginative reality can supplant the world of rational experience, but Coleridge would not do so, and, therefore, his suggestion is misleading." ⁹⁰

It is this problem that Ruskin avoids by his theory of the Penetrative Imagination. The insight, central image, emotion, idea achieved by this faculty informs the artistic product, guarantees its

truth, provides its relation to external reality. Thus does Ruskin solve Dugald Stewart's problem and avoid Coleridge's.⁹¹ Ruskin's theory too, however, is vulnerable. For although he succeeds in dealing with the issues raised by a theory of art that keeps the external world always in view, that is constructed according to the demands of a faculty psychology, Ruskin makes no provision for the view that art springs from the artist's mind, or that art is a purely formal endeavor. Ruskin's greatest treatment of the ideal in art, for example, develops into his theory of the Naturalist ideal. Ruskin's bent as critic is toward naturalism.

It would seem then that Ruskin was not substantially influenced by Coleridge's theory of the Imagination. Van Akin Burd, in his study "Ruskin's Quest for a Theory of Imagination,"⁹² would argue otherwise. Burd believes that Ruskin's theory is "admittedly Coleridgean;" but Ruskin, certainly, admitted no such thing. Burd continues.

Ruskin conceives the imagination as that force by which the mind seeks to unify and penetrate experience. What Ruskin calls the associative imagination, Coleridge had termed the esemplastic imagination, referring to the power of the mind to shape form from matter. What Ruskin called the penetrative imagination, Coleridge had described as that action of the mind which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate." Again like Coleridge he distinguishes between imagination and fancy to contrast creative thought with the routine patterns of association. The fancy, according to both writers can work by pattern, but can never create an original whole.

But the parallels that Burd draws do not really bear investigation. Coleridge does not use esemplastic to refer to a specific mode of imaginative activity, as Ruskin uses associative. Esemplastic describes the action of imaginative activity in general. And Ruskin's Penetrative Imagination has no direct corrolary in Coleridge's theory. The

Secondary Imagination dissolves, diffuses, dissipates; it breaks up or scatters. Coleridge implies a body of materials reworked and redistributed to form a new whole. Ruskin indicates a passing by of these materials to get to the spiritual fact behind them. Now one might argue that Coleridge suggests penetrating these materials in order to find the principle according to which they are to be rearranged. Nevertheless he does not, in his treatment of the Imagination in the Biographia, indicate such a step. Ruskin confronts the matter directly. And, finally, the very distinction between Fancy and Imagination is not sacred to Ruskin, as it is to Coleridge. When the Victorian outlines the Contemplative Imagination, he indicates that the complementary Fancy can rise and partake of the Imagination's activity. Fancy, under particular circumstances, can become Imagination.

Indeed, in 1883, in an Introductory Note to the section of Modern Painters II that treats the Imagination, Ruskin renounces all distinctions between the two.

The reader must be warned not to trouble himself with the distinctions attempted or alluded to, between Fancy and Imagination. The subject is jaded, the matter of it insignificant, and the settlement of it practically impossible, not merely because everyone has his own theory, but also because nobody ever states his own in terms upon which other people are agreed. I am myself now entirely indifferent which word I use; and should say of a work of art that it was well "fancied," or well "invented," or well "imagined," with only some shades of different meaning in the application of the terms, rather dependent on the matter treated than the power of mind involved in the treatment. 93

This is, of course, 1883 and Ruskin is more cavalier toward theory than he was in 1846. Still, in Modern Painters II the reader does not

feel an urgency in the distinction between Fancy and Imagination.

Not only did Coleridge and Ruskin disagree on the importance of some concerns, they were often of two minds in approaching those matters they recognized as central. Ruskin treats consciously and directly some problems only implied by Coleridge's theory. And the Victorian omits any treatment of that universal faculty that structures every man's vision of the world. Ruskin does not share Coleridge's zeal for discovering the springs of all mental activity; Ruskin's aims were more limited; and, at least during his writing of Modern Painters II he found his success surer.

D. The Contemplative Imagination

In treating the Penetrative and Associative Imagination, Ruskin believes he has considered the essential imaginative activity. The Contemplative Imagination, he declares, is not integral to the whole. Yet, contemplation or regarding, in the special way Ruskin uses those terms, is a "habit" in which the imagination "frequently delights, and by which it addresses itself to our perceptions more forcibly, and asserts its presence more distinctly than in those mighty but more secret workings wherein its life consists." ⁹⁴

The Penetrative Imagination pierces the surface of an object, emotion, character until it reaches the central spirituality. It brings back its insight and the Associative Imagination searches for an idea to correspond to that insight. The Contemplative Imagination works directly with those insights achieved by penetration. Contemplation chooses certain elements, truths, reorganizes them for

artistic purposes and gives them new form. "Depriving the subject of material and bodily shape, and regarding such of its qualities only as it chooses for particular purpose, it forges these qualities together in such groups and forms as it desires, and gives to their abstract being consistency and reality, by striking them as it were with the die of an image belonging to other matter." ⁹⁵ The Contemplative Imagination works under the direction of a point of view, intuition, provided by the Penetrative. Ruskin makes this clear by his example from Paradise Lost. "Thus, in the description of Satan . . . 'And like a comet burned,' the bodily shape of the angel is destroyed, the inflaming of the formless spirit is alone regarded; and this, and his power of evil, associated in one fearful and abstract conception, are stamped to give them distinctness and permanence." ⁹⁶ But this particular image of Satan depends upon Milton's primary conception of his character.

Ruskin's description of the process and his example suggest that the ultimate product of Contemplation is metaphor. To speak of forging qualities and striking them with an image indicates a metaphoric vision and procedure. One looks with new perspective on newly organized materials and searches for a physical image to embody them. In his History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, René Wellek touches very briefly on Contemplation. "It includes what we would call the whole process of symbolization and externalization--that is, the work of art itself" (III, 142). Ruskin does indeed suggest externalization in Contemplation, but it is of a special type. As is his habit in discussing modes of the Imagination, after he has treated the verbal,

Ruskin turns to the visual arts. But he here declares with respect to Contemplative activity, "it is evident that the bold action of either the fancy or the imagination, dependent on a bodiless and spiritual image of the object, is not to be by lines or colours represented. We cannot, in the painting of Satan fallen, suggest any image of pines or crags; neither can we assimilate the briar and the banner, nor give human sympathy to the motion of the film, nor voice to the swinging of the pines." ⁹⁷ The visual arts are inherently externalizing, but they cannot capture the technique of representing one set of emotions or ideas by an image ostensibly unrelated to that idea. Satan cannot be represented as a comet. The externalization effected by the Contemplative Imagination is of a special kind and not inherent in all art.

The new organization and its image find their place and justification in the work for which they were designed. If the image is striking, illuminating, appropriate, the relationship is valid, the product valuable. And its only value arises from its place in the work of art.

In her treatment of Contemplation, Sister Mary Dorothea Goetz concludes that it is merely "a variation or a combination of penetration and association or the imaginative activity as a whole" (p. 89). Ruskin "refers here to an abstraction of accidental and purely sensuous aspects of things and to a laying bare of essential qualities. This process he earlier attributed to the penetrative function. In this passage there is also reference to a selection of qualities having a certain definite affinity, to a welding of incompatible ideas in the

light of a dominant idea, or rather the representing of an abstract idea in terms of a concrete image. This combining and fusing of ideas coincides with the associative function. The only reference pertinent to contemplation is in the word regarding" (pp. 90-91). But Contemplation is not a mirror of the entire imaginative process; it is a unique process that may or may not occur. It is not a duplication of penetration; it depends upon penetration. Although its operation may superficially resemble association, it works on different materials. The Associative Imagination works on ideas chosen out of an infinite mass to help develop intuitions. It is these ideas which may be separately wrong, but become right, become one, when forged to correspond to the intuition. The reorganization, fusing, that the Contemplative Imagination effects is upon the intuited elements themselves, on the selection one chooses to use in a line of poetry from the variety of Satan's characteristics one has seen.

And not only do the materials on which they work differ, the very processes of Association and Contemplation show distinct variations. When Ruskin speaks of Association, he mentions "ideas," when discussing Contemplation he notes "images." Association searches the infinite world of ideas for those which will cohere to the central idea, fact. Disparate ideas, a Mercutio and a Romeo, find their relation when viewed in the whole of Shakespeare's play. But Contemplation forges a selection of intuitions and then searches for an image, a physical fact, to embody them.

The only literary example of Contemplation that Ruskin works out

in detail is the Satan image from Paradise Lost. The critic does give some further instances of this mode of Imagination, but without extensive comment. One might glance at a few of these passages in an attempt to elaborate the implications of Ruskin's theory. From Wordsworth's address to the daisy:

Sweet flower--for by that name at last,
When all my reveries are past,
I call thee, and to that cleave fast,
Sweet silent creature,
That breath'st with me, in sun and air,
Do thou, as thou art wont, repair
My heart with gladness, and a share
Of thy meek nature.

And from Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight":

The thin blue flame
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
Only that film which fluttered on the grate
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing!
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of thought.

These passages are representative of the few that Ruskin quotes here. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge describe the "dim sympathies" that exist between man and nature. The speaker in Wordsworth's poem, noting that both he and the flower breathe the same air, live the same natural life, turns to the flower for the strength it habitually gives him. All individual life depends upon the principle of life; its sustaining power can be our consolation. Coleridge is more tentative. "Methinks," he begins, but goes on to suggest the companionship between the two solitary mobile things in this still scene. The mind

searches out a mirror for itself in nature. Both passages seek to express a state of mind by finding a correlation in the natural world, a sympathetic object. They then achieve expression by describing the particular union of mind and object.

This is undoubtedly the ground for metaphoric vision, although the final stage, a specific metaphor, is not reached. There is no new image struck here; the images are natural and derived from the specific scene. But the process undergone is basically Contemplative; the intuition of oneness with nature is expressed through particular selected elements.⁹⁸

Despite the fact that, in retrospect, Ruskin will minimize the importance of distinguishing Fancy from Imagination, he here takes great pains to discriminate between these modes of Contemplation. Like the Imagination, the Fancy Contemplative "beholds in the things submitted to her treatment things different from the actual; but the suggestions she follows are not in their nature essential in the object contemplated; and the images resulting, instead of illustrating, may lead the mind away from it, and change the current of contemplative feeling."⁹⁹ The Fancy, like the Imagination, beholds the elements for artistic expression, but is limited to an attraction toward the inessential; the Fancy searches for an image, metaphor to embody the evanescent. The result is that Fanciful imagery, while beautiful, has no integral relation to the work; it is ornamental. Fancy Contemplative dwells merely on external features. It is playful and easily misled. It lacks the guidance and sanction of intense emotion, the sureness of moral sympathy that would keep it

close to the centrality of the intuition. And Ruskin contrasts the Contemplative and Penetrative. "The regardant or contemplative action of Fancy is in this different from, and in this nobler than, that mere seizing and likeness-catching operation we saw in her before; that, when contemplative, she verily believes in the truth of the vision she has summoned, loses sight of actuality, and beholds the new and spiritual image faithfully and even seriously; whereas, before, she summoned no spiritual image, but merely caught the vivid actuality, or the curious resemblance of the real object." ¹⁰⁰

But the Fancy Contemplative differs from other modes of Fancy in one most dramatic way. It can join with the Imagination, become one with it. The Fancy works with intuitions, and while not emotional, it can assimilate emotion as it moves out of its proper range. "In proportion as she begins to feel, she rises towards and partakes of Imagination itself; for Imagination and Fancy are continually united, and it is necessary, when they are so, carefully to distinguish the feelingless part which is Fancy's from the sentient part, which is Imagination's." ¹⁰¹

In his chapter on the pathetic fallacy, Ruskin mentions two causes of the fallacy, one of which might be of some concern here. The critic declares that he will examine "the difference between the ordinary, proper, and true appearances of things to us; and the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy." ¹⁰² Ruskin does not treat this latter cause in this chapter, nor does he indicate this problem in

his treatment of the Contemplative Fancy, itself. In his recent study, The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin, George P. Landow takes up the problem.¹⁰³ Landow concludes that, despite Ruskin's statement, the Pathetic Fallacy has no relation to Contemplative Fancy.

Since [Ruskin] mentions the fancy when introducing the problem of false appearances, and since, moreover, he always emphasizes that imagination perceives truthfully, one might be tempted to attribute poetry which employs the pathetic fallacy to the action of the fancy. According to this view, the greatest poems, the Iliad, the Divine Comedy, and King Lear, which do not use the pathetic fallacy, arise in the imagination, while the fancy produces the Immortality Ode and Maud. Ruskin's other comments in this chapter, however, make it clear that he does not align the pathetic fallacy with fancy. In the first place, he obviously considers the fine poets of the second rank--those such as Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson--men of high imagination; and, secondly, fancy cannot play any important role in the pathetic fallacy, which is a matter of emotional distortion and projection, since this lower faculty, as he explained in his previous volume, concerns itself chiefly not with feeling--the province of imagination--but with "mere vivid sight of reality" and "witty suggestion of likeness."

(pp. 381-82)

It is especially difficult to determine the relation between Contemplative Fancy and the Pathetic Fallacy, but Landow's explanation is not entirely sufficient. For Ruskin to align the two would not be to suggest that an entire poem, the Immortality Ode or Maud, takes its origin in Fancy, even if certain images do. The Penetrative and Associative Imagination are responsible for all art, even if parts of a work may illustrate the presence of Contemplative Fancy. The role of emotion is a more complex question, however. The central question becomes, is all Pathetic Fallacy the result of distorted perception due to an uncontrolled emotion? If this is the case, the Contemplative Fancy can have no part. Ruskin makes it clear that no mode of Fancy

is affected by emotion.

The problem becomes more complicated. In his chapter on pathetic fallacy, Ruskin writes, "It will appear also, on consideration of the matter, that this fallacy is of two principal kinds. Either as in this case of the crocus ['the spendthrift crocus, bursting through the mould / Naked and shivering, with his cup of gold'], it is the fallacy of wilful fancy, which involves no real expectation that it will be believed; or else it is a fallacy caused by an excited state of the feelings, making us, for the time, more or less irrational." ¹⁰⁴ Now the fancy mentioned here "which involves no real expectation that it will be believed" cannot be the Fancy Contemplative which "verily believes in the truth of the vision she has summoned." Despite Ruskin's claim, we have as yet no evidence that the Fancy Contemplative may be responsible for pathetic fallacy.

Speculating, one can understand why, of all the Imaginative-Fanciful faculties, the Contemplative Fancy is the most likely to produce the pathetic fallacy. This operation creates images in which one believes, but images based on elements that are not spiritually essential to the object pondered. These images are true in a limited sense, in that they embody the insights achieved by the Penetrative Imagination. But these images may be misleading, for Ruskin declares of the Contemplative Fancy "the suggestions she follows are not in their nature essential in the object contemplated; and the images resulting, instead of illustrating, may lead the mind away from it." If one gives unlimited credence to misleading

images, the result could be pathetic fallacy. But, as has already been suggested, though Ruskin mentions the Contemplative Fancy as one cause of the pathetic fallacy, he does not elaborate upon it and does not develop the fallacy in any way that can support this first contention. As he comes to explore his theory of perception distorted by emotion, Contemplative Fancy plays no role.

v. Conclusion

Ruskin's concept of the Imagination is the end to which much of his theorizing has moved. The Imagination, as the critic defines it, is capable of creating beauty, of providing an experience for man as intense as his experience in the presence of natural beauty.

Great art derives from nature; it is a revelation of nature through the artist's perspective, a communication of the pulse and meaning of the world as the artist perceives them. This union of matter and spirit is built up, in Ruskin's work, through a series of similar unions. Natural beauty, whether typical or vital, is a reflection of God in the physical world. To perceive this beauty is to react to sensuous form with joy and gratitude to the Giver, the Maker of this universe. The Theoretic Faculty allows this spontaneous but complex reaction to take place.

The Imagination creates a beauty that is both material, in that it is embodied, and spiritual, in that it conveys the artist's thought. The Penetrative Imagination, guided by the artist's special perspective, intuitively grasps the meaning of facts. And in their varying ways, the Associative and Contemplative Imaginations search for ideas and

images to give expansion, movement and voice to those intuitions in their varied conjunctions. Abstracting from the physical, the artist returns those essentials, newly fired by his imagination, to the physical once more, but, this time, a heightened, reflected, transfigured physical.

Ruskin's concern in Modern Painters II is with the artist, not the audience. He speaks of the painter and poet's response to nature, their transmuting of nature. He does not treat of those faculties that perceive or experience beauty in art. The Theoretic Faculty, for example, contemplates, rejoices in the beauty of the natural world. We are never told if works of art can be the object of such contemplation. It is not difficult, however, to see the movement Ruskin's thought is taking, even if he does not explicitly direct us. The experience of art is an expanding of the viewer's mind, not just a focusing of his eyes. As we react to natural beauty by moving from the scene to dwell in thanksgiving for God's goodness, so in contemplating art we attempt to come closer to the world which makes such art possible, to the mind which provides such insight and perspective. We come to love not only the arrangements of color upon the canvas, but the mind of a Turner and the grandeur, the sublimity of a sunset or a storm at sea.

Ruskin's concept of the Imagination derives much of its substance from Romantic studies of the effect of emotion in creativity, particularly from concerns with the role of sympathy in knowledge. And the Victorian has been classified Romantic in spirit because of these leanings. In his study of the Pathetic Fallacy, Bertram Morris

summarizes this view. 105

Since imaginative art is not something to be learned, even though the native capacity it presupposes can be developed, and since its creation is the work of an intuitive faculty, not attainable through reason, dissection, or analysis, Ruskin makes clear that art is engendered by emotion, and by emotion that is moral. He has continually been telling the reader that the creation of art presupposes love, a love of reality, wide sympathies with that which the artist would paint. Emotion is responsible then not merely for the production of art but also for its appreciation. The central position that is given to emotion thus provides the basis for calling Ruskin a romanticist.

Yet one must keep in mind that Ruskin subordinates the role of emotion, in fact the role of the artist himself, to a higher end, the exploration, the celebration of the Creation. Emotion is necessary to art, but it is only one of many elements in the understanding of the universe. And to show us the wonder and glory of God is the artist's highest calling. Ruskin withdraws from the extremes of Romanticism, and moves back, in Modern Painters II to an Imagination tied to palpable reality.

Footnotes

¹ Ruskin closes his discussion of Oxford, in Praeterita, after a cursory treatment. He replies to a friend who objected to this briskness. "I have no space in this story to describe the advantages I never used; nor does my own failure give me right to blame, even were there any use in blaming, a system now passed away. Oxford taught me as much Greek and Latin as she could. . . . For the rest, the whole time I was there, my mind was simply in the state of a squash before 'tis a peascod" (Works, XXV, 261). See also pp. 610-13 for Ruskin's further account of his "Oxford Studies."

² Letter to John Thelwall, 19 Nov. 1796, The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford, 1956), I, 156.

³ Ruskin appends a note to Modern Painters II in which he castigates German philosophy as over-developed, over-precise and generally useless. One may recall his dismissal of subject-object distinctions in his chapter on the pathetic fallacy. Ruskin's knowledge of specific German studies is hard to trace. He mentions Kant on occasion (Works, V, 425; XXIX, 383; XXV, 232), but these references are slight and unimpressive. He read Schiller's Philosophic and Aesthetic Letters (see Works, IV, 215), an important, Kantian, document, but Wellek maintains (p. 139) that Ruskin distorted Schiller. He mentions, in works written after Modern Painters II, a number of German philosophers who wrote on the Imagination. His references, however, are usually to other works by these men--A. W. Schlegel on Shakespeare,

for example, and Schelling on architecture.

⁴ Ruskin's knowledge of Coleridge and Wordsworth will be discussed later. He quotes from Leigh Hunt's Imagination and Fancy (Works, IV, 254, 256). He cites Hazlitt's Criticism on Art, (Works, III, 350). He builds his theory of Imagination by refuting Archibald Alison and Dugald Stewart. He mentions Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments (Works, I, 370), refers repeatedly to Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (see, for example, Works, XVIII, 270; III, 91-92; XVII, 512). And he considers Burke's writings on the sublime in great detail (Works, IV, 109n; III, 99, 128; IV, 105, 108-10).

⁵ Works, IV, xlviii-xlix.

⁶ The Victorian Morality of Art, p. 203.

⁷ Works, III, 109 (Pt. I, Sect. I, Chap. VI).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Works, I, 451.

¹⁰ Works, IV, 53-54 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. III).

¹¹ Ibid., 53.

¹² Works, III, 110 (Pt. I, Sect. I, Chap. VI).

¹³ Works, XVIII, 434 ("Traffic," The Crown of Wild Olive).

¹⁴ The selections from Ruskin quoted in the preceding paragraph are from "Of False Opinions Held Concerning Beauty," Works, IV, 66-75 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. IV). Ruskin was still arguing against custom as the cause of beauty in 1853. See Lecture I, Lectures on Architecture and Painting (Works, XII, 13-52).

- ¹⁵ Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays, ed. Scott Elledge
(Ithaca, 1961), II, 1030.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 1043.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 1044.
- ¹⁸ British Journal of Aesthetics, 8 (1968), 60-72.
- ¹⁹ Before leaving Alison, however, one might glance at a passage that begins by sounding very like Ruskin and ends with a suggestion that only measures the difference between the two. In the first essay of the volume, Alison writes,

Whatever is great or beautiful in the scenery of external nature is almost constantly before us, and not a day passes without presenting us with appearances fitted both to charm and to elevate our minds; yet it is in general with a heedless eye that we regard them, and only in particular moments that we are sensible of their power. . . . the difference arises from the state of our imaginations, from our disposition to follow out the train of thought which some objects naturally produce, or our incapacity to do it, from some other idea which has at that time taken possession of our minds and renders us unable to attend to anything else.

(Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays, II, 1020)

Ruskin's discussion, in Modern Painters I, of the same fact of our daily life insists on the beauty we miss, our own diminution of our lives. We have a duty, he says, to recover the innocent eye. Ruskin would never say with such casualness, however, that obliviousness is the result only of our minds being elsewhere occupied. Rather, to be inured to beauty is a moral failing.

- ²⁰ Works, IV, 64 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. III).
- ²¹ Ruskin writes in 1883, "the word 'typical' might also have been better chosen. . . . It means here any character in material things by which they convey an idea of immaterial ones" (Works, IV, 76n).

A. H. R. Ball, in Ruskin as Literary Critic, traces Ruskin's typical beauty to Platonic origins. "Ruskin's ideas go back to Plato and Plotinus, who taught that beauty was 'an emanation from the Infinite, and a disclosure of it.' Every beautiful object, says Plato, consists of sensible phenomena or form, but it also embodies an idea, a reflection of the infinite and perfect, which underlies the form; and it is the function of the form to lead us to the idea" (pp. 15-16). One is reminded of Plotinus: "The beauty, then, of bodily forms comes about in this way--from communion with the intelligible realm" (Enneads, I, 6, 3). Plato's influence upon Ruskin has been suggested by many critics, although fully explored by none. Ball sees it as largely a shared belief in the morality of art, although it would seem that the difference between Plato's view of art as educative and Ruskin's emphasis on the effect that society has on the art it produces demonstrates the different stresses they place in their practical unravellings of their beliefs. William Smart, in A Disciple of Plato: A Critical Study of John Ruskin (Glasgow, 1883), sees Plato's influence in two spheres: the political-social, the need for a just state in which all may find their proper places and in which all private good would be subordinated to the public; and, art, a theory that holds the fine arts inseparable from a view of life. Whether these beliefs are dependent, in any deep sense, upon Ruskin's reading of Plato is debatable; the Victorian's own experiences, religious, aesthetic and social, may well be enough to account for his convictions. Certainly Ruskin knew his Plato well. Dean Inge, in an essay on "Plato and Ruskin" in Essays by Divers Hands, Transactions

of the Royal Society of Literature, Vol. 14 (London, 1935), finds Ruskin's familiarity with Plato's works a source of personal, stylistic influence as well as a philosophical. Ruskin read Plato daily for a long time, and translated a great part of the Laws. The influence was a good one. Plato was endowed with a healthy mind and body and was a man of both letters and business affairs. "The fundamental sanity which underlies Ruskin's frequent violence of language and occasional real perversity owed much to Plato."

²² Works, IV, 76 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. V).

²³ Ibid., 76. Ruskin's delight in the presence of a light background against a dark foreground may be substantiated by his well-known fear of the reverse. John Rosenberg, in The Darkening Glass, reports that Wilenski "maintains that Ruskin suffered from a morbid fear of light spots against a dark background, a fear to which he attributes Ruskin's attacks upon Rembrandt's 'alarming explosions' of light and upon Whistler's The Falling Rocket" (p. 172n).

²⁴ Works, IV, 117 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. VII).

²⁵ The opening paragraph of Ruskin's chapter on Relative Vital Beauty is especially striking when one recalls that in the next volume of Modern Painters he would attack the pathetic fallacy. He writes here,

I have already noticed the example of very pure and high typical beauty which is to be found in the lines and gradations of unsullied snow: if, passing to the edge of a sheet of it, upon the lower Alps, early in May, we find, as we are nearly sure to find, two or three little round openings pierced in it, and through these emergent, a slender, pensive, fragile flower whose small dark, purple-fringed bell hangs down and shudders

over the icy cleft that it has cloven, as if partly dying of very fatigue after its hard won victory; we shall be, or we ought to be, moved by a totally different impression of loveliness from that which we receive among the dead ice and the idle clouds. There is now uttered to us a call for sympathy, now offered to us an image of moral purpose and achievement, which, however unconscious or senseless the creature may indeed be that seems to call, cannot be heard without affection, nor contemplated without worship, by any of us whose heart is rightly tuned, or whose mind is clearly and surely sighted.
(Works, IV, 146-47)

This opening paragraph is representative of the mode of writing in the chapter, an outstanding example of Ruskin's belief in the communion between nature and man. It is not pathetic fallacy, but is clearly of the emotion and presupposition from which pathetic fallacy is made. One recalls here René Wellek's contention that it is surprising for Ruskin to complain of the pathetic fallacy; "attribution of emotion to things is of course as old as the hills; it is a prevalent device of folk poetry, a reflection of the belief in an active universe, which is, after all, Ruskin's own central creed" (A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, III, 147). Wellek dismisses the subtleties of Ruskin's distinctions between the states of mind of the speaker and such dismissal would seem peremptory, yet Wellek does note a central complexity in Ruskin's attitude toward nature and art.

²⁶ Works, IV, 152-53n (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. XII).

²⁷ Works, IV, 174-75 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. XIII). The opening of this chapter is especially striking. Ruskin distinguishes between ideal and unideal (realistic) works of art. "Any work of art which represents, not a material object, but

the mental conception of a material object, is, in the primary sense of the word, ideal. That is to say, it represents an idea and not a thing. Any work of art which represents or realizes a material object is, in the primary sense of the term, unideal" (pp. 164-65). This is unsatisfactory and very simplistic for Ruskin, who devotes so much of Modern Painters I to demonstrating that art is not copy, that the artist in attempting to capture external reality must be faithful to the demands of a cultivated and purified imagination. At his most characteristic, Ruskin does not draw such distinctions between ideal and realistic. One recalls that in Modern Painters III Ruskin defines the "central and highest branch of ideal art" as the Naturalist Ideal.

²⁸ Works, IV, 210 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. XV).

²⁹ Works, IV, 28-29 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. I). In 1883, Ruskin appended a humorous note to his injunction "let him who will not grant me this follow me no farther." "Many readers in old times, did follow me no farther; the passage being indeed offensively aggressive in its pietism, and rude in its brevity." Such criticisms of his earlier writings, as here on the self-assured and moralistic tone, abound in these notes of 1883.

³⁰ Ibid., 34-35.

³¹ Works, IV, 46 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. II). In 1883 Ruskin appended a note to this passage. "An entirely unwarranted assertion, made evidently without reflection, and on hearsay." But Ruskin is not denying the truth of the assertion,

merely his right to state it without further thought and study. And it does seem odd that Ruskin should question his right to this declaration when many comparable statements have earlier passed without comment. See, for example, his declaration that material things illustrate the attributes of God, or that man's instincts, implanted as they are by God, can only, if properly educated, do us good.

³² Ibid., 47.

³³ Ibid., 48-49.

³⁴ (Washington, 1947).

³⁵ Works, V, 17-18 (Modern Painters III). See also p. 438n; referring to a passage later deleted from Modern Painters II, Ruskin writes of the volume as a whole. "It divides the faculties of the mind concerned in the contemplation of Nature into two great branches--one passive, the other active; one receiving delight from external things, the other so modifying and regarding external things as to increase this delight. The passive power I call Theoria, and the active, Imagination."

³⁶ Works, IV, 36 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. I).

³⁷ Works, IV, 164 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. XII). Katherine Everett Gilbert and Helmet Kuhn, in A History of Esthetics (Bloomington, 1953), also interpret Ruskin's theory as that of the active mind as preliminary to the theoretic experience. "Habit and discipline, then, supervene upon affection and impulse and change sensuous concern into steady and energetic contemplation. Aesthesis--the work of the eye--is brought along until it becomes

Theoria--a spiritual beholding through the instrument of the eye" (p. 416).

³⁸ Of course, objects of beauty can be perceived sensuously, what Ruskin calls aesthetically, and intellectually. We perceive aesthetically when we appreciate pure form: symmetry, unity, those physical characteristics of typical beauty Ruskin outlines. We perceive beauty intellectually when we criticize or analyze its parts. But both these forms of appreciation are diminutions of the full. They are abstractions that may be made for a purpose, but whose results must eventually flow back and enrich the full experience. Theoretic appreciation can be increased by the abstracting process, but is itself the end of all analysis.

³⁹ Speaking of Modern Painters II, Ruskin declares "the second volume nearly opened the inquiry into the nature of ideas of Beauty and Relation, by analysing (as far as I was able to do so) the two faculties of the human mind which mainly seized such ideas; namely, the contemplative and imaginative faculties" (Works, V, 17-18; Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. I).

⁴⁰ Trans. Alexander Dru (New York, 1952).

⁴¹ Works, IV, 144-45 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. I, Chap. XI).

⁴² Ibid., 145.

⁴³ In Appendix I to their edition of Modern Painters II, Cook and Wedderburn print a passage of Ruskin's on the experience of beauty.

And then I learned-- what till then I had not known-- the real meaning of the word Beautiful [having just viewed a storm]. With all that I had ever seen before-- there had come mingled

the associations of humanity-- the exertion of human power-- the action of human mind. The image of self had not been effaced in that of God. It was then only beneath those glorious hills that I learned how thought itself may become ignoble and energy itself become base-- when compared with the absorption of soul and spirit-- the prostration of all power-- and the cessation of all will-- before, and in the Presence of, the Manifested Deity. It was then only that I understood that to become nothing might be to become more than Man;-- how without desire-- without memory-- without sense even of existence-- the very sense of its own lost perception of a mightier-- the immortal soul might be held for ever-- impotent as a leaf-- yet greater than tongue can tell-- wrapt in the contemplation of the Infinite God.

(p. 138)

This passage is found in the Allen Manuscript, a first draft for portions of Modern Painters II; it was to be included in the first chapter. But Ruskin never did include it, there or elsewhere. It is hard to understand why. The passage captures perfectly Ruskin's sense of the meaning of natural beauty, its power to seize our emotions, and make us aware of divinity; it suggests too Ruskin's contention that the experience of beauty is immediate and not analytic. One may only speculate that the critic thought he had made his argument without including this piece of experience.

⁴⁴ Works, IV, 223 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. I).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 224.

⁴⁶ In his treatment of the Penetrative Imagination, in particular, Ruskin dwells on the unmechanical, mysterious quality of its action. See also Works, IV, 234 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. II). This criticism is discussed below, note 57.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Works, IV, 224-25 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. I).

⁴⁸ JAAC, 14 (1955), 89.

⁴⁹ Works, IV, 225 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. I).

⁵⁰ For Abrams' discussion of this problem, see pp. 159-77.

⁵¹ Works, IV, 227 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. I).

⁵² Ibid., 227-28.

⁵³ Quoted by Hipple, p. 89.

⁵⁴ Quoted by Ruskin, Works, IV, 225 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. I).

⁵⁵ Many of those who subscribed, in the main, to the theory of the association of ideas had reservations. Locke had believed that although association determined our thinking and our temperament, the process was yet irrational and a danger to logical thought. It was a source of error. Hobbes attempted to postulate a faculty beyond association that structured ideas by seeking or inventing an order among the associations. Dugald Stewart, too, adumbrates the existence of an ordering power beyond association, but is at a loss to define it. For further discussion of these and other attempts to modify the theory, see Martin Kallich, "The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory: Hobbes, Locke and Addison," ELH, 12 (1945), 290-315.

⁵⁶ Alba H. Warren recognizes this. See English Poetic Theory, p. 184. The Associative Fancy, which Ruskin does not develop here, however, would seem to be simply the old theory of the mechanical association of ideas.

⁵⁷ Works, IV, 234 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap.

II). In an 1883 note to this discussion, Ruskin describes "the fallacy of this theory of imperfection. Musicians, indeed, speak of the imperfection of chords, without certain notes required for their completion or resolution; but the separate notes in either melody or harmony are not themselves faultful or painful. The theory stated in the text applies in music only to the use of discords; and in painting applies but vaguely and doubtfully to anything. Two wrongs, do, indeed, in pictures, sometimes make a right: but it is much more likely they will make a third wrong" (p. 233_n). One may question whether Ruskin has really disposed of his earlier argument. His criticism of Dugald Stewart remains correct, and although the visual nature of his explanation of imperfection, resembling, as it does, a description of pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, may disturb him, the strength of his original theory has not really been argued away. Ruskin does, indeed, seem to have touched on a characteristic of creativity in art--the artist's arranging his materials according to a principle that is not derived from the relations among those materials. In a work of art, elements do fit together in a way not previously suspected.

⁵⁸ Ruskin here lays the foundation for his attack on beautification in art, the value of the pretty. For what is ugly or immoral in life may find its place in the artist's plan.

⁵⁹ Works, IV, 234 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. II).

⁶⁰ Works, IV, 249 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. III).

⁶¹ Ibid., 250.

⁶² Ibid., 251.

⁶³ Ibid., 253.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 252-53.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Benedetto Croce, Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London, 1909). "Intuitive activity possesses intuitions to the extent that it expresses them" (p. 8).

One often hears people say that they have many great thoughts in their minds, but that they are not able to express them. But if they really had them, they would have coined them into just so many beautiful, sounding words, and thus have expressed them. If these thoughts seem to vanish or to become few and meagre in the act of expressing them, the reason is that they did not exist or really were few and meagre.

(p. 9)

See also R. G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art:

When a man is said to express emotion, what is being said about him comes to this. At first, he is conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this emotion is. All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement, which he feels going on within him, but of whose nature he is ignorant. While in this state, all he can say about his emotion is: "I feel . . . I don't know what I feel." From this helpless and oppressed condition he extricates himself by doing something which we call expressing himself. This is an activity which has something to do with the thing we call language: he expresses himself by speaking. It has also something to do with consciousness: the emotion expressed is an emotion of whose nature the person who feels is no longer unconscious.

(pp. 109-10)

⁶⁶ Works, IV, 252 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. III).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 255.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 258.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 257.

- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid., 287.
- 72 The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Roger Ingpen and W. E. Peck, VII (New York, 1965), 118.
- 73 From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England (1946; rpt. New York, 1961).
- 74 ELH, 12 (1945), 144-64.
- 75 The Collected Works of William Hazlitt, ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, V (London, 1902).
- 76 Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross (London, 1907), II, 20.
- 77 The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), I, 387.
- 78 Works, IV, 228 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. I).
- 79 Works, XIX, 309 (Lecture I: "Athena Chalinitis").
- 80 Works, XXXV, 314 (Vol. II, Chap. IV: "Fontainebleau").
- 81 Works, XX, 56 (Lectures on Art, Lecture II: "The Relation of Art to Religion").
- 82 Works, XVI, 269-70 (The Two Paths, Lecture I: "The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art Over Nations"). Ruskin's concept of the Naturalist Ideal in Modern Painters III is one of his most significant attempts at clarifying the artist's control in creativity. He frames the question in terms of the relation between that which is given in landscape art, nature, and that which the artist's mind directs. "The question is, therefore, how the art which represents things simply as they are, can be called ideal at all. How does it meet that requirement . . . imperative on all great art, that it shall

be inventive, and a product of the imagination? It meets it pre-eminently by that power of arrangement" (Works, V, 111). "It is to be kept in mind that the naturalist ideal has always in it, to the full, the power expressed by those two words. It is naturalist, because studied from nature, and ideal, because it is mentally arranged in a certain manner" (p. 113).

Within this discussion Ruskin broaches the subject of the unconscious artist. "The great men never know how or why they do things" (p. 119). "From a bee to Paul Veronese, all master-workers work with this awful, this inspired unconsciousness" (p. 122). This seems to imply a deterministic, inspirational view of art, directly contrary to what Ruskin had earlier said. But the contradiction is more apparent than real. Great artists are possessed by their vision of the world, a vision that is the result of the communion between the artist's perspective and values and nature. To communicate that vision is the artist's dream and duty. A great artist's intellectual power of arranging materials to represent his idea may lose the semblance of choice. So vivid is his concept that the representation of it may seem to be inevitably directed. He almost loses the power of choice; he seems simply "a scribe of visions" (p. 125). Yet, stepping away from such an artist, we may see how complete is his real control, how dependent upon his own complex of talents is his work of art, how real is his authority over it.

⁸³ "Ruskin's Quest for a Theory of Imagination," MLQ, 17 (1956), 61.

⁸⁴ Works, IV, 391.

⁸⁵ See especially Townsend; and Rosenberg, The Darkening Glass.

⁸⁶ The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, 2d ed., II (Oxford, 1952), 441.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ JAAC, 28 (1970), 485-96.

⁹⁰ P. 491.

⁹¹ One might note, however, that his problem is of less importance to Coleridge than to some other theorists because the mimetic theory of art had been seriously called into question by this time. Coleridge does not insist, in his theoretic writings, on the imitation of nature in art, on the relationship of the work to the world. "A poem," he reminds us "is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth" (Biographia Literaria, II, 10). Of course Coleridge would not dismiss entirely the artist's obligation to life; witness the moral at the conclusion of "The Ancient Mariner." Guaranteeing the relation of art to the outside world is more crucial to Ruskin, of course; he still prizes art for its truth.

⁹² P. 61.

⁹³ Works, IV, 219-20.

⁹⁴ Works, IV, 289 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. IV).

⁹⁵ Ibid., 291.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 299. The passages to which Ruskin refers here are from

Paradise Lost:

On the other side,
 Incensed with indignation, Satan stood
 Unterrified, and like a comet burned,
 That fires the length of Ophiunchus huge
 In the arctic sky, and from his horrid hair
 Shakes pestilence and war.

from Scott's Lady of the Lake:

The rocky summits, split and rent,
 Formed turret, dome, or battlement,
 Or seemed fantastically set
 With cupola or minaret.
 Nor were these earth-born castles bare,
 Nor lacked they many a banner fair,
 For, from their shivered brows displayed,
 Far o'er the unfathomable glade,
 All twinkling with the dew-drop sheen,
 The briar-rose fell, in streamers green
 And creeping shrubs, of thousand dyes,
 Waved in the west wind's summer sighs.

and from Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," reproduced above, p. 105.

⁹⁸ In a passage we have already noticed (see above, p. 81)

Ruskin deals with Contemplation that results in a submerged, not fully realized image. "The act of imagination, observe, is not the selection of this image, but the mode of regarding the object" (Works, IV, 227; Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. I).

⁹⁹ Works, IV, 292 (Modern Painters II, Pt. III, Sect. II, Chap. IV).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 293.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Works, V, 204 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. XII).

¹⁰³ (Princeton, 1970).

¹⁰⁴ Works, V, 205 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. XII).

¹⁰⁵ "Ruskin on the Pathetic Fallacy," p. 257.

IV. The End and the Means

i. Introduction

Ruskin's aesthetic theories make their first full appearance in Modern Painters. And although he frequently refers to literature in these studies, indeed carries on his discussion of the Imagination with citations from poetry, Ruskin is ostensibly concerned with the implications the creative process has for the visual arts.

But theories of beauty and the Imagination must include literature as well and one eventually asks how Ruskin there applies his ideas. The great painter shows us natural fact through his unique perspective. His vision is this union of nature, intelligence and emotion; he interprets the world for us. What does the literary artist, the poet, in an inclusive sense of the word, give?

In examining Ruskin's beliefs about literature and literary meaning one might begin with the literary statements surrounding his theory of the Imagination. We have already seen some of these in detail--Ruskin's elevation of narrative over lyric poetry and his formulation of the pathetic fallacy, both evidence of his retreat from making poetry the outpouring of pure, private emotion; as well as his discussion of the formation of images under a treatment of Contemplative Imagination. And one must examine too some implications of the theory of Imagination for literature. In addition, Ruskin has, scattered throughout his writings on various subjects, a multitude of statements about the kind of knowledge and pleasure one can derive from literature. Finally, however, one must turn from what Ruskin

says about poetry to examine the way he does, in fact, respond to it. When faced with a literary text, what does he search for and react to; how does he go about finding or achieving a meaning in what he confronts? In sum, how does John Ruskin read?

ii. The Visionary Artist

Ruskin's conception of the Imagination, in many ways the summation of his early aesthetic theorizing, provides a stable point to which later critical statements can be referred. It is his most systematic attempt at creating an aesthetic theory. Elsewhere Ruskin provides detailed analyses of his beliefs about the nature of art or statements of his evaluative principles, but nowhere else does he develop so fully a philosophy of the creative process.

The artist's Imagination depends upon external reality. Ruskin makes the inception of poetry, the Penetrative Imagination, the intuition of meaning in the world outside the poet. The ability to reach this meaning and the delicacy, inclusiveness and truth of the meaning caught depend, of course, on the power and nature of each artist's talent. As Ruskin reminds us frequently, the artist gives us his vision of the world. But the Imagination moves outward; it is the artist's instrument for union with the divine and the human.

The Penetrative Imagination is a vigorous, active faculty. Ruskin writes of it in muscular images. "It is a piercing pholas-like mind's tongue, that works and tastes into the very rock heart . . . all is alike divided asunder, joint and marrow." ¹ The artist, whose mind and character are prepared, strikes forth in the heat of creation.

And working with the Imaginations Associative and Contemplative, he puts together and fuses disparate ideas to develop, find a world for his intuited meaning, strikes images to embody it.

At every stage, the Imagination appears a moving, elastic force. Yet, in other volumes of Modern Painters, in later, unmethodical treatments of the artist's imagination, Ruskin writes as if some artists passively receive their art, simply copy what they see, as if they are recorders of their works, not their creators.

All the greatmen see what they paint before they paint it,--see it in a perfectly passive manner,--cannot help seeing it if they would; whether in their mind's eye, or in bodily fact, does not matter; very often the mental vision is, I believe, in men of imagination, clearer than the bodily one; but vision it is, of one kind or another,--the whole scene, character, or incident passing before them as in second sight, whether they will or no, and requiring them to paint it as they see it; they not daring, under the might of its presence, to alter one jot or tittle of it as they write it down or paint it down; it being to them in its own kind and degree always a true vision or Apocalypse, and invariably accompanied in their hearts by a feeling correspondent to the words,--"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are." 2

Ruskin is careful to include here references to the poet as well as the painter; artists are enjoined to paint what they see, but if their talent lies in that direction, to write what they see.

Sight is always for Ruskin both a bodily sense to be cultivated and a metaphor for understanding. His writings abound in injunctions to his readers to see clearly, abound in praises of the interior illumination and joy that come from clear vision. "Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion,--all in one." 3 Now Ruskin interprets the sense of sight so inclusively that

one must be careful, in reading his remarks on seers and visions, to determine his exact meaning, to distinguish any implications about a poet's literal vision from those about intuition or comprehension.

Nevertheless, shearing away statements where vision is used ambiguously, one still retains a variety indicating clearly that some great poets see what they write. In these passages Ruskin declares that not only the meaning, the intuition, is held by the poet, but the incarnation of that meaning, its embodied structure, is apparent too. And this is possible even in those instances where the physical could not have been literally present.

In discussing Homer and Dante, and sometimes Milton, Ruskin frequently writes of the visions they record. He contrasts Milton's hell with Dante's.

Milton's effort, in all that he tells us of his Inferno, is to make it indefinite; Dante's to make it definite. Both, indeed, describe it as entered through gates; but, within the gate, all is wild and fenceless with Milton. . . . But Dante's Inferno is accurately separated into circles drawn with well-pointed compasses. . . .

Now, whether this be in what we moderns call "good taste," or not, I do not mean just now to inquire--Dante having nothing to do with taste, but with the facts of what he had seen. . . . it does not follow, because Milton did not map out his Inferno as Dante did, that he could not have done so if he had chosen; only, it was the easier & less imaginative process to leave it vague than to define it. Imagination is always the seeing and asserting faculty. ⁴

And, in an earlier section of this volume, Modern Painters III:

The whole power, whether of painter or poet, to describe rightly what we call an ideal thing, depends upon its being thus, to him, not an ideal, but a real thing. No man ever did or ever will work well, but either from actual sight or sight of faith. . . .

For instance, Dante's centaur, Chiron, dividing his beard with his arrow before he can speak, is a thing that no mortal would ever have thought of, if he had not actually seen the centaur do it. They might have composed handsome bodies of men

and horses in all possible ways, through a whole life of pseudo-idealism, and yet never dreamed of any such thing. But the real living centaur actually trotted across Dante's brain, and he saw him do it. . . .

The great men have no choice in the matter; they do not know or care whether the things they describe are vulgarities or not. They saw them; they are the facts of the case. If they had merely composed what they describe, they would have had it at their will to refuse this circumstance or add that. But they did not compose it. It came to them ready fashioned. ⁵

The poet, rapt in his vision, merely observes and reports. Yet it is a vision achieved with difficulty, for Milton's poetry could have reached the definition of Dante's, but Milton remains in a less imaginative, vaguer realm. Ruskin writes as if the greatest poet must penetrate to the center of his vision, take advantage of his potential, sweep away difficulties, in order to reach that state where he can simply stare and record; the passage may be arduous, but the greatest poets must attempt it; the very greatest succeed. ⁶

But one must question further the nature of this vision, its source and matter. Ruskin writes at one point as if it were an amalgamation of memories. In a discussion of Turnerian topography, he states that this painter's composition was "universally an arrangement of remembrances, summoned just as they were wanted, and set each in its fittest place." Turner's vision was "composed primarily of the strong memory of the place itself which he had to draw; and secondarily, of memories of other places . . . associated, in a harmonious and helpful way, with the new central thought." And Ruskin extends this process of composition to include poets as well. "With all those whom I have carefully studied (Dante, Scott, Turner, and Tintoret) it seems to me to hold absolutely; their imagination consisting, not in a

voluntary production of new images, but an involuntary remembrance, exactly at the right moment, of something they had actually seen." ⁷

This passage may illuminate Ruskin's thoughts on the matter, but it is not his final, nor his fullest or most representative statement. Memory may help provide some matter for poetry, but Dante out on a walk never saw Chiron, and the visions of great poets contain more than matter; they contain meaning. Now Ruskin admits that the principle upon which such memories are associated is "utterly inexplicable," but his assertion that mysteriously fused memories become the content of poetic vision does not provide an inclusive enough definition to allow this discussion to stand as a satisfactory treatment. He elsewhere points out repeatedly that poetic visions approach a higher truth than is readily available to most men. Dante's apocalyptic visions have an authority that his mere memories of Florence, however associated, could never give. Dante's vision, like all imaginative power, depends upon his character, his intellectual and emotional insight into reality as well as his storehouse of images. A discussion of memory is only a partial entrance into the poetic vision.

One other point Ruskin makes in this passage should be noted. This imaginative activity consists, he tells us, "not in a voluntary production of new images, but an involuntary remembrance." ⁸ And passages mentioned above indicate the same involuntariness on the poet's part. Scenes pass before poets "whether they will or no;" "the great men have no choice in the matter." When he is not writing of the vision as memory, Ruskin occasionally treats it almost as

literally inspired, breathed into the poet from outside. And this religious analogy becomes even stronger when one notes how often Ruskin speaks of such qualities as the divinity of these visions. "All these dreams of Shakespeare, as those of true and strong men must be, are . . . divine phantasms, and shadows of things that are." ⁹

Yet, as is so often the case in considering Ruskin's opinions, one must search out those discussions which seem to handle the problems most fully. In the course of forty years of writing, Ruskin often touched allusively upon subjects he treated more systematically elsewhere. The reader's task is to find and concentrate on the more detailed discussions. So here, in surveying Ruskin's writing on voluntariness and consciousness in these visions that partake so fully of the unconscious, one might first recall how much Ruskin stresses the artist's control in the ordinary workings of the Imagination. His entire treatment of the three modes springs from an attempt to discover the faculty that directs the fusing of ideas in imaginative activity. The artist might not always be aware of the reasons for his strategic choices in fashioning a work, but he retains complex controls over that work. His desire to capture his intuition determines the choices he will make in his attempt to embody it. Now all art partakes of the unconscious. But ordinarily the unconscious directs the conscious in making choices while creating. In this special instance, for these greatest of artists, there seems no choice. All is present before such discrimination can operate.

The artist to whom portions of an entire work, spirit and flesh, come as if in a vision might seem at first to be a mere vehicle for a

higher voice or spirit, a vates. And, in some of Ruskin's writings on the subject, the quality of the artist's control is left somewhat ambiguous. In the passages mentioned above, for example, using such words as "involuntary," Ruskin might seem to imply an absence of artistic control or responsibility. And one is tempted to think, because of Ruskin's frequent alliance of poet with prophet, that the ambiguity is deliberate. Yet, it is hard to believe that the critic meant the poet to be literally the voice of God. Ruskin dwells too frequently, from his earliest work on, upon the ways in which the poet reveals his character in his writing, on the temperamental differences between works of art. There appears too great a realization of the artist behind the work for one to believe that Ruskin wished to dismiss that artist's responsibility, even in these special instances of vision.

And, in other writings, Ruskin comes to discuss this issue in some detail. In Modern Painters III he approached it directly. Rephrasing his audience's question, he asks, "if then your great central idealist is to show all truth . . . receiving it in this passive way, what becomes of all your principles of selection . . . ?" He answers, "why, the choice, as well as the vision, is manifested to Homer. The vision comes to him in its chosen order. Chosen for him, not by him, but yet full of visible and exquisite choice, just as a sweet and perfect dream will come to a sweet and perfect person, so that in some sense, they may be said to have chosen their dream, or composed it; and yet they could not help dreaming it so, and in no otherwise." ¹⁰ Ruskin's use of the dream analogy is fortuitous. To

the artist, the vision seems involuntary. It comes to him as an inescapable view of human life. But the vision is dependent upon the artist's peculiar configuration of talents, on his personality. It is chosen for him the way his talent is chosen for him, inexplicably. Yet the uniqueness of the vision depends on the uniqueness of the personality. Here Ruskin is dealing with as subtle a control of the vision as possible. It is controlled the way we control our characters, just as our dreams can be influenced to some degree by the way we consciously try to develop and modify our personalities. The artist does maintain a control, though he may not be aware of it, for it is not so much revealed by his choice in directing his vision as it is by his responsibility for the kind of vision he receives.

Surveying Ruskin's writings on the poet's mind leads one to several conclusions. The systematic material on his theory of the Imagination gives us his description of the universal creative process. The poet discovers, rather than creates, his meaning.¹¹ In the presence of external reality, natural, human, or divine, the poet, employing his varied gifts, penetrates to the truth of what he sees before him. In his work of art he captures what he intuitively sees, either directly, through powers of arrangement, or obliquely, inventing to embody his meaning. Ruskin writes in Modern Painters III of these two types of literature, each "which merely describes what it saw," that is, which deals with the physically present. A poet of this type "tells you whom he met, and what they said." Contrasting this kind of writing to inferior self-expression, Ruskin distinguishes

between two modes of dealing with external reality, "this plain recording of what people said and did," and "the right invention of what they are like to say and do." ¹² Such a view of Imagination adheres to Ruskin's earlier analysis in Modern Painters II and is of a piece with his later definition of the poet in Modern Painters V. "A poet, or creator, is therefore a person who puts things together, not as a watchmaker steel, or a shoemaker leather, but who puts life into them. His work is essentially this: it is the gathering and arranging of material by imagination, so as to have in it at last the harmony or helpfulness of life, and the passion or emotion of life." ¹³

But, beginning in Modern Painters III and The Stones of Venice, Ruskin makes provision for another kind of artist, the functions of whose imagination seem to work spontaneously on material not immediately proffered by the outside world. There have been few of these artists in the history of literature. They are those who most closely come to a comprehension, almost divine in its intensity and truth, of human life. This artist penetrates to the truth of situations, but carries his insights, understandings, with him, learning, growing, and nourishing these pieces of knowledge about the world until he builds, unconsciously, an immense fund of understanding. This is the poet whose accumulated insights, slowly developed, organized, modified, come back as profound visions of the world to be captured in poetry. The vision may demand effort to be recreated entirely in poetry, may indeed demand effort to be fully confronted, but once the core of the vision is seen, it overcomes the

poet; he is held by it. Unlike poets who work according to the normal processes of the Imagination, these visionary artists give us an art whose embodiment has, for them, the same reality and power as its meaning. And the embodiment may have the same dimly understood ramifications as its meaning. Because so much of this kind of art is unconsciously produced, its structure may spread out beyond the poet's knowledge; like Dante describing Chiron, this poet can only tell what he saw. ¹⁴

It must be kept in mind that these visions are not simply idiosyncratic, internally generated versions of the self. Ruskin frequently insists on their truth. They are built from, tested by, enriched and modified by years of experience and insight into the world.

Ruskin's concept of the visionary artist is not fully explained until ten years after his discussion of the Imagination in Modern Painters II. One can only speculate about the need for this later, supplementary, theory. But a few points might be made. Although he speaks often of the "inexplicable" nature of the Imagination, Ruskin's discussion of the faculty is thoroughly analytic and almost exhaustive. The artist's mysterious Imagination begins to lose much of its mystery. And Ruskin's Imagination is rooted in external reality. Poetry that treats of the fantastic or apocalyptic is hard to trace along that track unless one explains it as simply a direct manipulation of images. Finally, one can see readily in the product of the visionary artist, the fruit of a life's thought, the authority of a life's experience. Ruskin's conception of the time and energy,

intellectual and emotional, that precede the vision can guarantee the solemnity with which the audience should view it.

It is important to stress that Ruskin sees the artist's vision as inherently dependent upon his own nature. For as he grows older what is here simply an aesthetic belief becomes a cause for lamentation. We have not been deeply engaged by the relationship between Ruskin's critical principles and his religious concerns. Yet, as one cannot fully understand his ideas about the theoretic faculty without some reference to man's response to God, so one cannot appreciate Ruskin's late opinions on artistic vision, their particular colorations, without attention to his loss of faith in orthodox Christianity. And although Ruskin regained a version of that faith at the end of his life, it was a paler and thinner faith, with never the vigor or exuberance religion gave to his life as a young man.

The fact that the artist's vision derives from his character becomes a sign of the fragility, almost the insubstantiality, of that vision. In Modern Painters V, a volume that shows the slow progress of Ruskin's thought from aesthetic to social matters, from God in nature to man in the world, from the capturing of beauty to the confrontation with brutality, Ruskin writes sadly of the difficulties we, in this world, must face in trying to find God. This is no longer the voice of the rapturous young man who found beauty and truth written all around him, or even the voice of the young man who half believed that God might show His truth directly to men in vision, but the sound of him who must seek his truth in pain. This quoted passage is long, but it sums up Ruskin's thinking on revelation during

these middle years, his reasoning as well as his conclusions, and captures too the sad tone of the writings of this period when they approach such subjects.

For the directest manifestation of Deity to man is in His own image, that is, in man.

"In His own image. After His likeness." Ad imaginem et Similitudinem Suam. I do not know what people in general understand by those words. I suppose they ought to be understood. The truth they contain seems to lie at the foundation of our knowledge both of God and man. . . .

It cannot be supposed that the bodily shape of man resembles, or resembled, any bodily shape in Deity. The likeness must therefore be, or have been, in the soul. Had it wholly passed away, and the Divine soul been altered into a soul brutal or diabolic, I suppose we should have been told of the change. But we are told nothing of the kind. The verse still stands as if for our use and trust. It was only death which was to be our punishment. Not change. So far as we live, the image is still there; defiled, if you will; broken, if you will; all but effaced, if you will, by death and the shadow of it. But not changed. We are not made now in any other image than God's. . . . So that the soul of man is still a mirror, wherein may be seen, darkly, the image of the mind of God. . . .

A mirror, dark, distorted, broken, use what blameful words you please of its state; yet in the main, a true mirror, out of which alone, and by which alone, we can know anything of God at all.

"How?" the reader, perhaps, answers indignantly. "I know the nature of God by revelation, not by looking into myself."

Revelation to what? To a nature incapable of receiving truth? That cannot be; for only to a nature capable of truth, desirous of it, distinguishing it, feeding upon it, revelation is possible. . . . In so far, therefore, as you love truth, and live therein, in so far revelation can exist for you. . . .

"But this poor miserable Me! Is this, then, all the book I have got to read about God in?" Yes, truly so. No other book, nor fragment of book, than that, will you ever find; no velvet-bound missal, nor frankincensed manuscript;--nothing hieroglyphic nor cuneiform; papyrus and pyramid are alike silent on this matter; nothing in the clouds above, nor in the earth beneath. That flesh-bound volume is the only revelation that is, that was, or that can be. . . . Know thyself; for through thyself only thou canst know God.

Through the glass, darkly. But, except through the glass, in nowise. 15

Ruskin's confidence in the possibility of direct religious

revelation is broken during these years. This concentration upon finding God in man is reflected in his frequent admonitions to look not toward the sky but toward one's duty and work. And his critical theories undergo a change in tone. Any ambiguity with which Ruskin treated the source of artistic vision is dispelled. In Munera Pulveris, three years later, he declares that Homer and Dante and Milton, those writers most often mentioned as visionaries, "have permitted themselves, though full of all nobleness and wisdom, to coin idle imaginations of the mysteries of eternity."¹⁶ And he speaks throughout this volume of these and all writers as if they alone were fully and consciously responsible for their images and their meanings, as if the Iliad and the Commedia were the summation of what Homer and Dante wanted to teach us about human life.

And in a lecture delivered in 1868, "The Mystery of Life and Its Arts," Ruskin's private sadness is so touching and pervasive it has the effect, John Rosenberg says, "of implicating the cosmos itself in his grief."¹⁷ Ruskin implies unequivocally that literature depends fully upon its writer; that there is no inspiration from above; any unconscious speaking forth must come from within. But some writers will not even search within. And we cannot even be sure how much to trust the vision; perhaps it is only a plaything, and the artist is contenting himself with fictions he knows to be false.

Milton's account of the most important event in his whole system of the universe, the fall of the angels, is evidently unbelievable to himself. . . . The rest of his poem is a picturesque drama, in which every artifice of invention is visibly and consciously employed; not a single fact being, for an instant, conceived as

tenable by any living faith. Dante's conception is far more intense, and, by himself, for the time, not to be escaped from; it is indeed a vision, but a vision only . . . and the destinies of the Christian Church, under their most sacred symbols, become literally subordinate to the praise, and are only to be understood by the aid, of one dear Florentine maiden.

I tell you truly . . . it seems daily more amazing to me that men such as these should dare to play with the most precious truths . . . by which the whole human race listening to them could be informed . . . they do but play upon sweetly modulated pipes . . . and fill the openings of eternity . . . with idle puppets of their scholastic imagination. 18

Ruskin's long need for truth in art becomes almost paramount.

By the time of these writings, 1860-1868, no truth seems possible but that which man finds within himself, and the demand that writers lead him to this truth begins to usurp Ruskin's aesthetic appreciation. He despairs that writers would rather create beauty than help their audience to the eternal. Ruskin's desire for supernatural, or even natural, meaning is so strong, he cannot indulge his aesthetic sense unless he finds an authentic moral strain in the work. Toward the very end of his life, this demand for the consciously moral voice of the poet, for conscious truth, without exaggeration or invention, culminates in Ruskin's telling his readers that he had always chosen Byron above all others for his master. Byron tells the truth as he knows it, and it is a serviceable truth.

It was of no use for Homer to tell me that Pelion was put on the top of Ossa. I new perfectly well it wouldn't go on the top of Ossa. . . . Nay, the whole world, as it was described to me either by poetry or theology, was every hour becoming more and more shadowy and impossible. . . . I felt already, with fatal and increasing sadness, that there was no clear utterance about any of them--that there were for me neither Goddess guides nor prophetic teachers. . . .

But here at last I had found a man [Byron] who spoke only of what he had seen, and known; and spoke without exaggeration, without mystery, without emmity, and without mercy. "That is so; --make what you will of it!" 19

In earlier criticism, Ruskin would not have preferred Byron to Homer.

iii. The Approach through Exegesis

As one draws closer to Ruskin's treatments of specific literary texts, one looks for assumptions or statements that can make clear his opinions about poetic language. How does the diction of a poem reflect the experience the poet is trying to convey; how does the reader or the critic come close to that language and, ultimately, to that experience? Ruskin's belief about the importance of the unconscious in the poetic process is a foundation for his opinions on the origins of a poem's language.

He writes in Modern Painters II on the Penetrative Imagination.

Every great conception of poet or painter is held and treated by this faculty. Every character that is so much as touched by men like AEschylus, Homer, Dante, or Shakespeare, is by them held by the heart; and every circumstance or sentence of their being, speaking, or seeming, is seized by process from within, and is referred to that inner secret spring of which the hold is never lost for an instant; so that every sentence, as it has been thought out from the heart, opens for us a way down to the heart, leads us to the centre, and then leaves us to gather what more we may. It is the Open Sesame of a huge, obscure, endless cave, with inexhaustible treasure of pure gold scattered in it. . . .

Hence there is in every word set down by the imaginative mind an awful under-current of meaning, and evidence and shadow upon it of the deep places out of which it has come. 20

Every imaginative conception, whether gained through intuitive understanding or vision, is held secure by the poet's Imagination. Words are chosen from an infinite variety to embody that conception. The words are not created by the poet; they are given him from history and society. But he makes these borrowed objects his own by the reasons he employs in choosing them, reasons manifested in their use.

The language may be connected to the poetic experience by objectively verifiable meaning, by visual, psychological, emotional or historical association. But the links between the poetic experience and the words chosen do exist. It is for the critic to focus upon those words, discover those links and move back to the vision or experience of the poem, its heart, its meaning, what Ruskin elsewhere calls its "thought."

To each man, words bear a double history, public and private, those meanings he recognizes in common with other men and those associations developed by his individual consciousness and life. With a few exceptions, Ruskin writes under the assumption that the poet is attempting to communicate his experience to others. And, in his criticism, Ruskin focuses upon the achievable, recoverable meaning in language; his method is to trace words back through their etymology. Now Ruskin is not a systematic literary critic; he does not stake out this domain as his; he does not attempt inclusiveness. His practical criticism is of works that are his favorites. And although his views on the origins of poetic language allow for the kind of study that would treat the idiosyncratic verbal associations of writers, Ruskin, himself, does not attempt that. He approaches poetry in a way almost instinctive with him, in a way he approached language all his life, by looking for the historical meanings of words; ²¹ the way to come closest to meaning in literature is through the traceable meanings of individual words.

Ruskin habitually worked through detail. Arthur Severn, husband of Ruskin's niece, writes of excursions he and the critic would take.

In a picture gallery he [Ruskin] had many curious ways. He never seemed able, or didn't care, to look at a picture first as a whole. He got no enjoyment out of it that way. He must go near and see what it was all about. . . . In architecture, he never looked at the silhouette of a building against the sky, only at the details. Once we were talking about our Parliament Houses. I was praising the towers; he shrugged his shoulders and began abusing the ornamentation. ²²

Severn's may be an anecdotal statement of Ruskin's procedure in the presence of art, but it gives a variation of what appears a frequent response to literature, perhaps a pattern of mind--to work through details, in literature, through etymological details.

Ruskin gives advice to him who would read well.

First of all, I tell you earnestly and authoritatively (I know I am right in this), you must get into the habit of looking intensely at words, and assuring yourself of their meaning, syllable by syllable--nay, letter by letter. . . . The entire difference between education and noneducation (as regards the merely intellectual part of it), consists in this accuracy. A well-educated gentleman. . . . is learned in the peerage of words. . . . remembers all their ancestry, their inter-marriages, distant relationships. ²³

Ruskin works from the assumption that a good writer is at least dimly aware of the heritage of his words; a good poet is that much of a craftsman. In studying Milton's poetry, the reader is advised by Ruskin to "ascertain the meanings through which the English word has passed; and those which in a good writer's work it must still bear." ²⁴ And the moral significance of Shakespeare's characters' names, such as Desdemona, miserable fortune; Hamlet, homely; Ophelia, serviceableness; were chosen "not without Shakespeare's cunning purpose." ²⁵

Ruskin proceeds etymologically not merely for his enjoyment in tracing the history of words, but to find the shades of meaning available in them. Overtones, almost hidden, but present nevertheless, are

what distinguish one word from another to the cultivated speaker. And Ruskin searches for those nuances derived from each word's history. They influence a writer's choices. Locating them, the reader can determine how roots and cognates, how confluences of exact meanings can hold a text together and return to us the artist's experience. In Munera Pulveris, Ruskin discusses The Merchant of Venice. He begins by quoting Shylock.

"This is the fool that lent out money gratis; look to him, jailor," (as to lunatic no less than criminal) the emmity, observe, having its symbolism literally carried out by being aimed straight at the heart, and finally foiled by a literal appeal to the great moral law that flesh and blood cannot be weighed, enforced by "Portia" ("Portion"), the type of divine Fortune, found, not in gold, not in silver, but in lead, that is to say, in endurance and patience, not in splendour; and finally taught by her lips also, declaring, instead of the law and quality of mercy, which is not strained, but drops as the rain, blessing him that gives and him that takes. And observe that this "mercy" is not the mean "Misericordia," but the mighty "Gratia," answered by Gratitude, (Observe Shylock's leaning on the, to him detestable, word, gratis . . .) that is to say, it is the gracious or loving, instead of the strained, or competing manner, of doing things, answered, not only with "merces" or pay, but with "merci" or thanks.

Ruskin appends two notes to this section.

Shakspeare would certainly never have chosen this name [Portia] had he been forced to retain the Roman spelling. Like Perdita, "lost lady," or Cordelia, "heart-lady," Portia is "fortune" lady. The two great relative groups of words, Fortuna, fero, and fors--Portio, porto, and pars (with the lateral branch, op-portune, im-portune, opportunity, etc.), are of deep and intricate significance; their various senses of bringing, abstracting, and sustaining being all centralized by the wheel (which bears and moves at once), or still better, the ball (spera) of fortune. . . . Portus and porta, and gate in its connexion with gain, form another interesting branch group; and Mors, the concentration of delaying, is always to be remembered with Fors, the concentration of bringing and bearing, passing on into Fortis and Fortitude.

As Charis becomes Charitas, the word "Cher," or "Dear," passes from Shylock's sense of it (to buy cheap and sell dear) into

Antonio's sense of it: emphasized with the final i in tender "Cheri," and hushed to English calmness in our noble "Cherish." The reader must not think that any care can be misspent in tracing the connexion and power of the words. . . . Much education sums itself in making men economize their words and understand them. ²⁶

This astonishing discussion gives the flavor of this kind of criticism. Its technique deserves some discussion. A glance at the Oxford English Dictionary will show Ruskin's scholarship to be impeccable. Fortitude is derived from fortis, which is related to fortune, fortuna, which is, in turn, related to fero. Ultimately, chance or fortune is related to endurance and strength. Although Ruskin is defining Fortune as he sees it in Shakespeare's play, the conception is clearly akin to his own. He makes the point repeatedly in his own writings; the broad outlines of fate may seem indiscriminate, large events may appear beyond our control; but we do determine much of our lives by the characteristics we develop in response to the unavoidable. Our quotidian existence is largely our own. ²⁷ That this is the play's import is apparent in Shakespeare's making Bassanio's fortune derive from lead and not from gold, from endurance, as Ruskin tells us, and not from splendor.

And the play redefines mercy for us. Ruskin develops the conception by aligning it with grace, that is, the freely given, by showing Shylock's hatred of the word gratis. And finally, he crystallizes his interpretation of the play: it moves us from Shylock's definition of "dear" to Antonio's. It is an appropriate summation. The closest we can come to understanding the play is to find the specific meanings implied by the characters, implied by Shakespeare, and follow as these meanings cohere into a whole. The

play becomes a transfixed interweaving of colorations of meaning.

The reader must define and redefine, choosing his meanings from among those available historically by focusing upon those most appropriate to the particular text. The reader must become aware that Fortuna, in her alliance with fero, not only bears, but is to be borne.

Perhaps the passage that best reveals Ruskin's love for discovering the exact meanings of words is his explication of "blind mouths" in Milton's "Lycidas." Rather than repeat this famous section and comment upon what has been treated extensively in almost every study of Ruskin's criticism, one might go on in that chapter of Sesame and Lilies. Ruskin later pauses at another line from "Lycidas." Milton describes those who suffer under evil bishops. "But, swollen with wind, and the rank mist they draw."

This is to meet the vulgar answer that "if the poor are not looked after in their bodies, they are in their souls; they have spiritual food."

And Milton says, "They have no such thing as spiritual food; they are only swollen with wind." At first you may think that is a coarse type, and an obscure one. But again, it is a quite literally accurate one. Take up your Latin and Greek dictionaries, and find out the meaning of "Spirit." It is only a contraction of the Latin word "breath," and an indistinct translation of the Greek word for "wind." The same word is used in writing, "The wind bloweth where it listeth"; and in writing, "So is every one that is born of the Spirit"; born of the breath, that is; for it means the breath of God, in soul and body. We have the true sense of it in our words "inspiration" and "expire." Now, there are two kinds of breath with which the flock may be filled,--God's breath, and man's. The breath of God is health, and life, and peace to them, as the air of heaven is to the flocks on the hills; but man's breath--the word which he calls spiritual--is disease and contagion to them, as the fog of the fen. They rot inwardly with it; they are puffed up by it, as a dead body by the vapours of its own decomposition. 28

One need only recall some of the dominant imagery in "Lycidas,"-- storms, both of wind and rain; water, both of ocean and tear; and breath, not only of life but of song, through voice and instrument. By focusing upon one significant word, Ruskin is identifying an essential cluster of images, scattering hints for other critical explorations of the poem.

He moves outward here from a concentration upon etymologies toward a moral reading of the text. It is habitual procedure, certainly one revealed in his discussion of The Merchant of Venice. Though many of Ruskin's interpretations of literature begin with a detailed examination of words, his aim is to discover the moral meaning of the whole. Etymology is only an approach.

In reading, Ruskin refuses to rest with the vague or blurred impression. Just as he could never believe that Turner was anything but completely faithful to nature, just as he insisted on the necessity for distinctness in painting, "all great drawing is distinct drawing,"²⁹ so in his responses to literature he sought the precise meaning. Great works of art are realizations; they can bear scrutiny. And, consequently, it is the most careful writer who is in greatest danger of being misunderstood. He chooses his language with such intent that he requires an equal effort from the reader. Ruskin is willing, anxious to give that effort. He writes reading is "annihilating our own personality,"³⁰ seeking to enter the writer's. But the effort is rewarded. The child who spent hours staring at the pattern of a carpet displays, as a man, the same patience, the same ability to merge in meditation with the object before him. Reading,

too, can lead to theoretic contemplation.

Ruskin is so intent on searching for meaning in a text that one may be tempted to believe he holds in slight esteem its sensuous importance, employing the text merely as a means, for its content, moving through it, hardly stopping at the surface. The temptation to such reading may be seen in purer form among students of a text whose primary importance cannot be considered aesthetic, the Bible. In fact, the traditions of exegesis can be distinguished from each other by the kind of attention each pays to the words on the page. Addressing Ruskin's aesthetic response to language, George P. Landow focuses, in his Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin, upon the practices of Victorian Evangelical explication. Landow argues that these interpretations of Scripture were typological rather than allegorical. "In typology one real, physically existing being or event, represents another real, physically existing being or event, in allegory a thing may often represent a doctrine or abstract idea" (p. 350). The insistence of typology upon the importance of the literal and historical meaning acts as a caution against abandoning the text in search of spiritual implications. The procedure, Landow argues, influenced Ruskin's reading of secular allegorical texts. "Unlike most nineteenth-century critics, including Arnold, who believe that once the meanings of allegory make themselves clear the narrative tends to disappear like a useless husk, Ruskin places essentially equal emphasis upon both signifier and signified" (p. 351).

The line of influence Landow sees is a true one. And not only was Ruskin in attendance at Evangelical sermons throughout his youth,

he reports in his autobiography, Praeterita, that he took daily Bible lessons from his mother. In The Bible of Amiens he documents their effect. "The duty enforced upon me in early youth of reading every word of the gospels and prophecies as if written by the hand of God, gave me the habit of awed attention which afterwards made many passages of the profane writers, frivolous to an irreligious reader, deeply grave to me."³¹ The words of the Bible become sacred and filled with meaning, even if that meaning is not immediately discernible. And although Ruskin's theoretical writings indicate a belief in an almost Freudian origin of literature, his Bible studies can illuminate what he believes the reader's task to be.

The methods of seeking the difficult of opaque meaning become the recognizable characteristics of exegetical approaches. The distinction between seeing the text with its implications and seeing through the text can be traced back at least as far as early Christian exegesis. One might go back further to pre-Christian treatments of Homer, but it is Biblical study that influences Ruskin; his works and diaries as well as family letters attest to his knowledge, scattered but existing, of early Christian exegetes and some Church Fathers.³²

It is worth glancing briefly at these early schools of reading, although their specific influence on Ruskin would be difficult if not impossible to trace. Rather, they show in pure form two kinds of approaches one can make toward a text and both the assumptions of these approaches and their yield. Early Christian exegesis can be categorized as Alexandrian or Antiochene. The Alexandrian, beginning in the first century A.D. with Philo Judaeus, continuing into the third

century with Origen and influencing both Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas, was the predominant school of medieval exegesis. Its distortions were responsible for the most extreme of medieval Biblical interpretations. Alexandrian exegesis treated the text as an introduction to the speculative realm. The words may give us only a small hint of a meaning which must be sought beyond these words. Origen tells us in a Homily on Leviticus, "the letter appears as flesh; but the spiritual sense within is known as divinity. This is what we find in studying Leviticus . . . Blessed are the eyes which see divine spirit through the letter's veil."³³ The letter is not an entrance into the spirit; it is a cover, a veil. And Origen was willing, if necessary, to abandon the historical meaning to support his reading.³⁴

Writing in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, Claudius of Turin is a most representative example of Alexandrian exegesis. Beryl Smalley, in The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, writes of Claudius' assumptions. "The letter is a garment for the spirit, with a suggestion of cloak or concealment, which the commentator must penetrate. It is necessary to the spirit, as the body is necessary to the soul in this mortal life. The spiritually minded commentator will accept the letter, but treat it ascetically, as the good religious treats his flesh, in order to devote himself to the spirit" (p. 2). Smalley quotes, as analogy, from a study by Roger Hinks of medieval art. "It is as though we were invited to focus our eyes not on the literal surface of the object, but on infinity as seen through the lattice . . . the object . . . exists--as

it were--merely to define and detach a certain portion of infinite space, and make it manageable and apprehensible." ³⁵ Smalley adds, "this description of the pierced technique in early northern art is also an exact description of exegesis as understood by Claudius, if we substitute 'text' for the 'physical surface' of the artists' material, and 'truth' for 'infinite space'. We are invited to look not at the text but through it" (p. 2).

The assumptions about language that lie behind this approach may help to clarify an apprehension that occasionally appears in Ruskin's writing. Ruskin ordinarily writes as if the artist embodies his meaning as clearly as possible in order to communicate it. But there are a few places where he declares that great writers try to hide their meaning, make it inaccessible except to the initiated.

It is a strange habit of wise humanity to speak in enigmas only, so that the highest truths and usefulest laws must be hunted for through whole picture-galleries of dreams, which to the vulgar seem dreams only. Thus Homer, the Greek tragedians, Plato, Dante, Chaucer, Shakspeare, and Goethe, have hidden all that is chiefly serviceable in their work, and in all the various literature they absorbed and re-embodied, under types which have rendered it quite useless to the multitude. ³⁶

And in a letter written to his father a few years earlier, 23 October 1861,

I have been reading the Odyssey to-night with much delight, and more wonder. Everything now has become a mystery to me--the more I learn, the more the mystery deepens and gathers. This which I used to think a poet's fairy tale, I perceive to be a great enigma. . . . what it all means, or meant, heaven only knows. I see we are all astray about everything--the best wisdom of the world has been spoken in these strange enigmas--Dante's, Homer's, Hesiod's, Virgil's, Spenser's--and no one listens, and God appoints all His best creatures to speak in

this way: "that hearing they may hear, and not understand"; but why God will always have it so, and never lets any wise or great man speak plainly-- . . . there's no guessing. 37

Ruskin's mood here is similar to that at the end of Modern Painters V. But there are critical implications. One comes to feel that such a text as is here described may be beautiful but that its meaning is virtually inaccessible. Its beauty has no correspondence to its meaning. To appreciate it is not to come closer to it, as in theoretic contemplation; it is to be distracted from the enigma. The entrance to meaning, like that of a puzzle, is not by drawing nearer through love but by pure ratiocination.

This kind of reasoning about literary works, more frequent as Ruskin grows older and disillusioned about what he can learn from great writers, may help account for some of his more erratic excursions into interpretation. The fact of his growing madness has been abundantly documented elsewhere.

But a second exegetical tradition exists, the Antiochene. Not as literal as the pre-Christian Rabbinic, it attempts to maintain the historic meaning of the text, the apparent moral. It is akin to Victorian Evangelical exegesis, typology, although its specific modern descendents would be difficult to trace; most Antiochene work was lost before the Middle Ages. The Antiochenes were not crude literalists, writes Smalley. "Their aim was to define the senses of Scripture more precisely" (p. 14). They discriminated among the literal sense, the intended meaning of the writer; the theoretic, prophetic writings with emphasis upon those teachings intended by the prophet; and the spiritual sense, largely restricted to New Testament

fulfillments of a selected number of recognized Old Testament types. The Antiochenes were conservative in their interpretations; they emphasized the necessity for coming to terms with the text, holding closely to it in one's reading. This early Christian school of exegesis, whose principles were not revived until the thirteenth century, can yet serve as a model for some of Ruskin's procedures.

But there is a difference between reading Scripture and reading literature. Literature traditionally exists for itself, not as a camouflage. Its meaning is born in the human mind and it is a realization of that meaning. Part of its reason for being is its beauty. The appreciation of that beauty makes more than just intellectual demands on the reader. In investigating how much attention Ruskin pays to the surface of a work, one must do more than consider how various attitudes might influence his procedure. Ruskin does have an artistic temperament which instinctively works against dismissing the sensuous. His moral readings of art might make one forget that for a moment, but he occasionally admits it outright. Writing from Verona to his father, 2 June 1852, he declares "I should like to draw all St. Mark's and all Venice stone by stone, to eat it all up into my mind, touch by touch."³⁸ And he comments in Munera Pulveris on "the usual tendency of long repeated thought, to take the surface for the deep."³⁹

Ruskin does respond to the texture of language. Certainly this is not his major concern in his criticism. But the sensitivity appears on occasion. Writing to his father from Venice, 4 April 1852, he states that he is reading Milton. "I am struck most with his dextrous

use of language--he is the very master of Verbiage in its best sense.

. . . It is true that dress does not make a man, neither do words make a thought; but as Veronese and Tintoret bring highest dignity out of, or rather put into, furs, tissues and brocades, so Milton puts a play of colour into his wordy Tissue which is as majestic as most men's ideas."⁴⁰ It is in these letters to his father that one often finds such reports of the sensuous pleasure Ruskin takes in art; in his formal essays these experiences are subordinated. One must conclude, however, that in his reading Ruskin did not leave the surface behind. And in his criticism, perhaps because his method is so often to work through the historical meanings of words, he does not abandon those words. Ruskin does not translate his text into something else. The surface does not disappear; it lengthens into the deep.

One major development of Ruskin's exegetical reading is his treatment of allegory and myth. He reads these narratives psychologically and morally by finding the precise meanings of characters and their acts. In a discussion of Turner's Garden of the Hesperides, he interprets the function of the Goddess of Discord by focusing upon her name. "I cannot get at the root of her name, Eris. It seems to me as if it ought to have one in common with Erinnyes (Fury); but it means always contention, emulation, or competition, either in mind or in words;--the final work of Eris is essentially 'division,' and she is herself always double-minded; shouts two ways at once (in Iliad, xi, 6), and wears a mantle rent in half (Aeneid, viii, 702)." ⁴¹

In Munera Pulveris, Ruskin compares Dante's, Homer's and Goethe's discussions of the desire for riches and what it does to the human soul.

The rewards of a worthy use of riches, subordinate to other ends, are shown by Dante in the fifth and sixth orbs of Paradise; for the punishment of their unworthy use, three places are assigned; one for the avaricious and prodigal whose souls are lost (Hell, canto 7); one for the avaricious and prodigal whose souls are capable of purification (Purgatory, canto 19); and one for the usurers, of whom none can be redeemed (Hell, canto 17). The first group, the largest in all hell . . . meet in contrary currents, as the waves of Charybdis, casting weights at each other from opposite sides. This weariness of contention is the chief element of their torture. . . . For it is not avarice, but contention for riches, leading to this double misuse of them which, in Dante's sight, is the unredeemable sin. The place of its punishment is guarded by Plutus, "the great enemy," . . . a spirit quite different from the Greek Plutus, who, though old and blind, is not cruel, and is curable, so as to become far-sighted. . . . Still more does this Dantesque type differ from the resplendent Plutus of Goethe in the second part of Faust, who is the personified power of wealth for good or evil. ⁴²

A passage such as this displays, however, more than just a concern with language. Ruskin is deriving part of his reading from the iconographical tradition of morally interpreting visual details. The movement of water around Charybdis and the dress of Plutus are crucial.

iv. The Approach through Visualization

It would be the simplest of tasks to document Ruskin's familiarity with traditional iconography. A glance at The Stones of Venice or a skimming of those chapters in Modern Painters III that treat medieval art will show a detailed knowledge of what Emile Mâle calls that "sacred writing of which every artist must learn the characters." ⁴³ Erwin Panofsky defines the discipline simply. "Iconography is that

branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form." ⁴⁴

In fact, one might say that a constant complaint about Ruskin's response to visual art has been that it is iconographical rather than formal.

An iconographical approach to art historically assumes that the artist's visual details represent moral, psychological or doctrinal qualities. And the relationships between detail and meaning become quickly codified. The medieval craftsman in paint was aware that a

circular nimbus placed vertically behind the head serves to express sanctity, while the nimbus impressed with a cross is the sign of divinity which he will always use in portraying any of the three Persons of the Trinity. He will learn that the aureole (i.e. light which emanates from the whole figure and surrounds the body as a nimbus) expresses eternal bliss, and belongs to the three Persons of the Trinity, to the Virgin and the souls of the Blessed. ⁴⁵

But visual details do more than identify; they can embody states of complex emotion, ways of life and habitual actions. A most representative literary example of such allegorical imagery can be found in Prudentius' Psychomachia. Mâle paraphrases part of the battle.

Now Pride (Superbia), mounted on a spirited horse, caracols in front of the enemy's army. Her hair is piled up towerlike on her forehead, her mantle is blown by the wind. This impetuous warrior addresses the enemy, insolently accusing the impassive Virtues of cowardice. Suddenly horse and rider disappear in a trap that Dishonesty (Fraus) has dug on the battlefield, Humility (Mens humilis) then advances, takes the shield which Hope holds out to her and cuts off the head of Pride. ⁴⁶

Characters are developed by their physical qualities, hair piled high on Pride's forehead; dress; silhouette, a mantle blown by the wind; movement and function. The allegorical details become richer, more

capable of absorbing the uniqueness of the artist's imagination as the genre develops. But the details still exist to be interpreted.

By Spenser's time the opportunities for allegorical variation and embellishment have become almost endless. The demands on the critic have become severe. And Ruskin, for one, delights in explicating allegorical imagery. A small passage from his discussion of Envy in the House of Pride can attest to this. "All in a kirtle of discoloured say / He clothed was, y-paynted full of eies." Ruskin infers these characteristics of Envy, "that it looks every way, and that whatever it sees is altered and discoloured by its own nature . . . which discolouring, however, is to it a veil, or disgraceful dress, in the sight of others." ⁴⁷

And in a discussion of Dante's rocks, Ruskin's proclivity for allegorical images is put to work on a passage less precise in its intended allegory. "It is, indeed, with his usual undertone of symbolic meaning that he describes the great broken stones, and the fall of the shattered mountain, as the entrance to the circle appointed for the punishment of the violent; meaning that the violent and cruel, notwithstanding all their iron hardness of heart, have no true strength, but, either by earthquake, or want of support, fall at last into desolate ruin, naked, loose, and shaking under the tread." ⁴⁸

As has become apparent, the metaphor of vision pervades Ruskin's theoretical writing. And since his training was in the visual arts, one might expect him to react strongly to images in literature. In order to respond to images, one must visualize what one reads, not

merely search for the meanings of words. Ruskin does frequently visualize his reading.

His primary response to literature, however, is not visual. In ascertaining the weight to give those instinctive procedures that develop into his habitual ways of reading, one must consider the etymological first; it is more pervasive, it is more central than the visual. Looking for the history of words is more often Ruskin's mode of investigating meaning than is interpreting appearance or gesture. Yet, this latter does occur. And, what is more remarkable, the visualizing function of Ruskin's mind works in ways more complex than might be immediately suggested by a particular text. Ruskin achieves his meaning linguistically, not through images. But images do act as a shorthand for him, and noting this can help illuminate some passages of his criticism that do not reveal an etymological bias.

"I try to summon this vision of Chaucer's into definiteness, and . . . it fades before me and reappears, like the image of Piccardi in the moon."⁴⁹ Ruskin seems often caught by an image in the text; he focuses upon it, trying to recreate it as faithfully as possible. His purpose is interpretive; he will read his images as symbols even when it is not clear that they were intended to carry that kind of meaning. His treatment of classical, medieval and modern landscape provides numerous examples of this. He observes not only the growing specificity of description, not only the growing animation of the natural scene, but the developments in color, that most immediately visual aspect of landscape description. He never seems to forget which colors a poet uses and he builds interpretations and comparisons

from them until he can come to a conclusion such as "Sophocles really did not know green from yellow or brown," ⁵⁰ Ruskin's point being the serviceable use of color in Greek poetry as opposed to its ornamental or aesthetic use in medieval. Modern poetry, of course, he finds drab, brown, cloudy. He concludes that the poets' use of colors both suggest and symbolize the temperaments of their periods.

Ruskin may also characterize a writer's style by its visual qualities. His contrast between Dante's and Milton's hells, in their precision of imagery, has already been remarked. And he treats Sir Walter Scott's poetry at one point by applying the painter's distinction between color and form. Scott, as much as Dante, depends upon color for his power.

For instance, if he has a sea-storm to paint in a single line, he does not, as a feebler poet would probably have done, use any expression about the temper or form of the waves; does not call them angry or mountainous. He is content to strike them out with two dashes of Tintoret's favourite colors: "The blackening wave is edged with white, / To inch and rock the seamews fly." There is no form in this. Nay, the main virtue of it is, that it gets rid of all form. ⁵¹

Ruskin sees what he is reading; he concentrates on the visual qualities the writer employs for his effects. He responds to the visual image by both appreciating and investigating its power.

But Ruskin on occasion does more than visualize and investigate what he reads; he uses images for his own purpose. In discussing Spenser's portrait of Envy, he writes "there is the whole thing in nine lines; or, rather in one image, which will hardly occupy any room at all on the mind's shelves, but can be lifted out whole, whenever we want it." ⁵² He writes as if, in capturing fully the picture of Envy

that Spenser creates, the reader possesses an emblematic miniature of that section of the poem, to be taken out and its meaning re-examined, whenever desirable. The poet's language appears inessential, secondary. It may build the image but it is the image that remains in one's mind. Ruskin, usually so intent upon precision of expression, here circumvents diction almost entirely.

At one point in his criticism we see him creating his own image out of details that exist in his sources but do not there cohere.

He begins his chapter on "Modern Landscape" in Modern Painters III:

We turn our eyes, therefore, as boldly and as quickly as may be, from these serene fields and skies of mediaeval art, to the most characteristic examples of modern landscape. . . .

Out of perfect light and motionless air, we find ourselves on a sudden brought under sombre skies, and into drifting wind; and, with fickle sunbeams flashing in our face, or utterly drenched with sweep of rain, we are reduced to track the changes of the shadows on the grass, or watch the rents of twilight through angry cloud. ⁵³

Ruskin here crystallizes his interpretation of the medieval and modern by creating a scene with color and movement. Not detailed or stable enough to be visualized for long, or with complete seriousness, this fragmented image nevertheless captures Ruskin's distinction between the two landscapes; "whereas all the pleasure of the mediaeval was in stability, definiteness, and luminousness, we are expected to rejoice in darkness, and triumph in mutability." ⁵⁴ Ruskin condenses his thoughts, transforms them into an image and extends its visual qualities into metaphors and examples of the moral. He is working with his created image the same way he works with given images. One must note, however, that the visual remains in Ruskin's mind. Scenes remain so tied to his interpretation that he cannot

dismiss them as he explicates them. Even in summarizing, he creates a new scene to embody his point.

Ruskin's occasional use of images to accompany or realize discursive thought occurs even when the text in question does not provide the specific images. In The Cestus of Aglaia, he discusses Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls. Patience is sitting upon a hill of sand.

I should like to know what Chaucer means by his sand-hill. . . . Sometimes I would fain have it to mean the ghostly sand of the horologe of the world: and I think that the pale figure is sitting on a recording heap, which rises slowly, and ebbs in giddiness, and flows again, and rises, tottering; and still she sees, beside her, the never-ending stream of phantom sand. Sometimes I like to think that she is seated on the sand because she is herself the Spirit of Staying, and victor over all things that pass and change;--quicksand of the desert in moving pillar; quicksand of the sea in moving floor; roofless all, and unabiding, but she abiding;--to herself, her home. And sometimes I think, though I do not like to think (neither did Chaucer mean this, for he always meant the lovely thing first, not the low one), that she is seated on the sand-heap as the only treasure to be gained from human toil; and that the little ant-hill, where the best of us creep to and fro, bears to angelic eyes, in the patientest gathering of its galleries, only the aspect of a little heap of dust. 55

Finally Ruskin rejects all these readings to choose another. But he does not simply try our meanings to find one closest to Chaucer's work and personality; he adds to the poem as he thinks, setting images in motion or creating new characters, scenes. Proceeding through Ruskin's passage one finds an hour glass and moving sand; one shifts from desert to sea floor; the mound of sand becomes an ant hill, then a heap of dust. None of this is apparent in the original. Ruskin's attempts at discerning meaning are attended by appropriate images. He brings these with him to clarify the possibilities he wishes to convey, to clarify them to his reader, perhaps to himself.

The assumption that visual details bear meaning to both artist and audience lies behind much of Ruskin's literary criticism. Confronted with an image, he habitually treats it allegorically. The only major exceptions occur when he uses visual qualities simply to characterize a writer's style--an emphasis on form or color, a delight in certain kinds of color, or a preference for graduating or merging colors.

This is all to be expected from a critic with Ruskin's background. But his visual creativity is more complex. Using images to clarify a meaning that is not itself conveyed in images demands improvisation, originality, imagination on the critic's part, demands a visual sensitivity, almost a visual bias. The images Ruskin creates are to be themselves explicated. But the readiness to create them shows more than just an interpretive bent. They take on their own value within the critical work, give it a distinct texture and bring readers closer to the critical procedure of its author. Just as some minds are inherently logical and must make clear causes and relationships the foundation for subtle thought, so Ruskin on occasion reveals a need to see his meaning in characters and scenes. And he will fashion such images for his reader if they do not exist, as if he assumes the same need in his audience.

In a discussion such as that on Spenser's *Envy* Ruskin suggests that meaning can be not only conveyed through images, but best retained that way. This pronouncement is not developed and there are few other statements or procedures in Ruskin's criticism that could be thought of as supporting it. One must keep in mind, too, that this

is an allegorical image; by definition, its details are meant to concretize meaning. Still, even suggesting that Ruskin reads some poetry as picture or panorama provides a needed balance against stressing too much his etymological bent.

One might question the relationship between these two approaches. Historically, of course, Biblical exegesis is a foundation for Medieval iconography. But one asks whether these two strains are complementary or dialectical in Ruskin's mind. To some degree his procedure depends upon the text before him. Where language offers a complex texture, where words are striking, unusual, repetitious, either in root or cognate, Ruskin approaches through etymology. Where a text is carried or enriched by images, he focuses upon, recreates, interprets those images. Understanding the Chaucer passage demands a method different from that used in discussing a speech from The Merchant of Venice. And it might be noted that as he moves toward more modern literature, Ruskin's readings become looser, more general, less explicatory. Modern literature, it might appear, did not on the whole offer him the density and precision of technique coupled with the intensity of moral insight he desired in art. But it was with the very greatest literature, with Homer and Dante, Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton, and his favorite moderns, Wordsworth, Byron and Scott that Ruskin was most at home. When his powers were at their strength, when the literature offered was the best, he could use all his critical gifts in a focused and unified way. At other times, with other writers, his criticism often fragments; he works by starts. Nevertheless, even when they appear

isolated, his methods provide insights. The etymological approach, particularly, working as it does with the primary material of poetry, words, and working by accumulating directions for meaning beyond the reader's mind, leading him outside himself, offers a wealth of critical possibilities.

v. Conclusion

As Ruskin grows older it would almost seem as if the reticulative qualities of his mind become uppermost and triumph over his judgment. His literary criticism seems to become an indulgence in associations, without any focus or fact guiding them; his writing reveals only the idiosyncratic, sometimes pedantic connections he makes himself. The richness of his mind can no longer be subdued to a purpose. And he begins to recognize his own symptoms as early as 1869, "I am almost sick and giddy (though perfectly well) with the quantity of things in my head--trains of thought beginning and branching to infinity, crossing each other, and all tempting to and wanting to be worked out."⁵⁶ In 1861 he had written to his father, "Everything becomes endless when one works it out."⁵⁷ This ability to see connections, the knowledge broad enough to inform and guide that ability, these were his strengths as a critic. But the energy becomes feverish, the motions undirected, and Ruskin's criticism, in his later years, suffers.

Yet, at its best, Ruskin's is a mind that pulls in knowledge from a variety of sources in order to illuminate the passage before him, to define the vision of life which his author propounds or implies. Ruskin

relates what he reads to the nature and conduct of human life. Art brings us nearer to life, to both divine and earthly life.

Some of Ruskin's most exciting criticism directly confronts large human questions. We have been focusing upon his techniques of reading, but these techniques are put into service. And many of Ruskin's moral readings have been widely commented upon. Glancing briefly at a few, however, might give a sense of where the critic's ultimate concerns lay.

Ruskin writes frequently about the influences upon a man's work. Such an interest is transformed, in part, into the assumption behind his social criticism: the economic milieu in which a man lives affects his character and perspective. Understanding his society can help us to read a man's work. Browning, because of the period in which he lives, finds it easier than Shakespeare to enter into the spirit of the Middle Ages.⁵⁸ And Scott can be better appreciated when one realizes that he sums up almost completely the predominant traits, both good and bad, of modern times.

Sometimes Ruskin's goal to show more specifically how life, biography less, natural and social conditions more, influence, almost determine, a man's outlook, the dominant traits of his work. His contrast between Giorgione's childhood and Turner's in Modern Painters V, allying their natural surroundings to the use of light in their paintings, is justly famous.⁵⁹ But he weaves together in Modern Painters IV natural surroundings and the temperament displayed in literature. He discusses Bacon and Pascal. Beginning with the assumption that these are men "naturally very similar in their tempers and powers of mind,"

he finds the distinctive influencing factors to be geographical and social.

One, born in York House, Strand, of courtly parents, educated in court atmosphere, and replying, almost as soon as he could speak, to the queen asking how old he was--"Two years younger than Your Majesty's happy reign!" -- has the world's meanness and cunning grafted into his intellect, and remains smooth, serene, unenthusiastic, and in some degrees base, even with all his sincere devotion and universal wisdom; bearing, to the end of life, the likeness of a marble palace in the street of a great city, fairly furnished within, and bright in wall and battlement, yet noisome in places about the foundations. The other, born at Clermont, in Auvergne, under the shadow of the Puy de Dôme, though taken to Paris at eight years old, retains forever the impress of his birthplace; pursuing natural philosophy with the same zeal as Bacon, he returns to his own mountains to put himself under their tutelage, and by their help first discovers the great relations of the earth and the air: stuck at last with mortal disease; gloomy, enthusiastic, and superstitious, with a conscience burning like lava, and inflexible like iron, the clouds gather round the majesty of him, fold after fold; and . . . he stands like that mound of desolate scoria that crowns the hill ranges of his native land. 60

Ruskin is not so much analyzing these writers' styles as he is recreating in metaphor and image, the spirit of their work. The court influences Bacon, who takes on so completely its tone, its strengths and weaknesses, that he becomes himself a "marble palace" to be described in detail. Likewise, Pascal becomes a mountain like those he loved. The writer, influenced by his milieu, is transformed into an emblem of that milieu. Ruskin's visualizing tendency is apparent, but equally present is his desire to show the unity between a man and his times--and places.⁶¹ And although he would retreat from the extremes of his view, for he still believed in man's ability to control his life, Ruskin insisted that many influences affect us deeply, beyond our knowledge. Man can unconsciously grow toward the world around him.

The Victorian's final reason for writing about literature is

twofold; he wishes to describe the thoughts of his author on large questions about human life, and he wants to discover what he and others can learn from that author. Such passages as those discussing the contrasting views of Dante and Shakespeare on fate are representative. Shakespeare, Ruskin tells us

almost always implies a total difference in nature between one human being and another; one being from the birth pure and affectionate, another base and cruel. . . . And with this stern view of humanity, Shakspeare joined a sorrowful view of Fate, closely resembling that of the ancients. He is distinguished from Dante eminently by his always dwelling on last causes instead of first causes. Dante invariably points to the moment of the soul's choice which fixed its fate. . . . But Shakspeare always leans on the force of Fate, as it urges a final evil; and dwells with infinite bitterness on the power of the wicked, and the infinitude of result dependent seemingly on little things. 62

One might compare a passage from Modern Painters V on Homer. Ruskin begins by contrasting Greek with Shakespearian tragedy. He then describes the Homeric temperament and comes finally to some conclusions about Greek attitudes toward difficulty in this life. He draws here largely on the Iliad and the Odyssey.

The Greeks never shrink from horror. . . . For them there is no passing by on the other side. . . .

Meeting it boldly as they may, gazing right into the skeleton face of it, the ambiguity remains; nay, in some sort gains upon them. We trusted in the gods;--we thought that wisdom and courage would save us. Our wisdom and courage themselves deceive us to our death. . . .

And beyond that mortality, what hope have we? Nothing is clear to us on that horizon, nor comforting. Funeral honours; perhaps also rest; perhaps a shadowy life--artless, joyless, loveless. No devices in that darkness of the grave, nor daring, nor delight. . . .

Be it so. With no better reward, no brighter hope, we will be men while we may: men, just, and strong, and fearless, and up to our power, perfect. Athena herself, our wisdom and our strength, may betray us. . . . While we live, we will hold fast our integrity. . . . So may we fall to misery, but not to baseness; so may we sink to sleep, but not to shame. 63

In reading Ruskin's criticism one becomes aware of how urgently he turns to his authors for help, for advice and consolation. His books become his counselors; and he declares that he "used Wordsworth as a daily text-book from youth to age."⁶⁴ Such testimonies--to Homer and Dante, to Scott and Dr. Johnson--are frequent. Even as he comes to rely less on the authority of poets' truths, he turns to them still for their experience of human life. If art can no longer be the voice of God, it is still the voice of man.

Ruskin's literary criticism reconciles, for him, any strain between technique and goal, means and end. He approaches literature through detail, verbal and visual, but his aim is never simply to display the richness of surface in a literary work, not even to display the variety of co-existing meanings. He admires this kind of potential in a work of art. And his temperament, intensely sensuous, though he finds this almost impossible to admit publicly, revels in intricate, abundant beauty. But Ruskin remains the child of his parents. When his father died, rejecting all extravagant praise, he wrote on John James Ruskin's tombstone the simplest of testimonies, "an honest merchant." For in the end, he believed, daily, humble virtue is all that holds us in good stead. As one reads through the allusive, pedantic, erratic, brilliant literary criticism, whether seeking Ruskin's thoughts on other writers or his own ideas about human life, one is urged toward the same conclusion.

Footnotes

¹ Works, IV, 251 (Modern Painters II, Sect. II, Chap. III).

² Works, V, 114 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. VII).

³ Works, V, 333 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. XVI).

⁴ Works, V, 269-71 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. XIV).

⁵ Works, V, 114-15 (Pt. IV, Chap. VII).

⁶ One of the obvious implications of Ruskin's theory is that the most imaginative literature will contain precise images, for the greatest poet will attempt to capture fully what he saw. Continuing his contrast between Milton and Dante, Ruskin discusses their treatment of fiends.

Malice, subtlety, and pride, in their extreme, cannot be written upon noble forms; and I am aware of no effort to represent the Satanic mind in the angelic form which has succeeded in painting. Milton succeeds only because he separately describes the movements of the mind, and therefore leaves himself at liberty to make the form heroic; but that form is never distinct enough to be painted. Dante, who will not leave even external forms obscure, degrades them before he can feel them to be demoniacal; so also John Bunyan: both of them, I think, having firmer faith than Milton's in their own creations, and deeper insight into the nature of sin. (Works, XI, 174; The Stones of Venice III, Chap. III)

This distinctness that Ruskin prefers in poetry is here allied by him to distinctness in painting. Certainly one can see the influence of Ruskin's training in and predilection for the visual arts in these discussions of the poet's visions. Sight remains the primary mode of knowledge; visual detail remains a proof of that knowledge. But Ruskin is not so unthinking, or even inclined toward formalism in his response to literature, as to make precision of imagery a major criterion in evaluating poetry. His critical standards are more complex, certainly

more moral. And anyone tempted to equate the intensity of imagination with the simple precision of imagery would do well to recall a distinction Ruskin insists upon. "The fancy sees the outside, and is able to give a portrait of the outside, clear, brilliant, and full of detail. The imagination sees the heart and inner nature" (Works, IV, 253; Modern Painters II, Sect. II, Chap. III). We shall investigate later how Ruskin responds to images in a text; we are now concerned with what he, as theoretician, thinks precise images tell us about a poet's imagination.

⁷ Works, VI, 41-42 (Modern Painters IV, Pt. V, Chap. II).

⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁹ Works, XVII, 258 (Munera Pulveris, Chap. V).

¹⁰ Works, V, 118 (Pt. IV, Chap. VII).

¹¹ As always, we are dealing here with the Creative not the Reflective poet, the narrative not the lyrical poem.

¹² Works, V, 334-35 (Pt. IV, Chap. XVI).

¹³ Works, VII, 215 (Pt. VIII, Chap. I).

¹⁴ In his recent and excellent study, The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin (Princeton, 1971), George P. Landow deals extensively with Ruskin's ideas on allegory. The subject is worth mentioning here because, by virtue of the amount of space Landow devotes to it, nearly a third of his volume, and by the implications of some of his remarks on the importance of allegory for Ruskin, one is led to consider it a primary literary mode. "Ruskin believes that allegorical painting and poetry embody the highest workings of the artistic imagination" (p. 321). Landow considers allegory equivalent

to Ruskin's concept of the symbolical grotesque, itself a category that tends to expand until it begins to include almost all symbolism. The amorphousness of the term need not be of concern here, however. What is worth focusing on for a moment is Landow's treatment of the way in which knowledge is revealed to man to be later captured in symbols. Landow equates the allegorical artist with the prophetic. Drawing upon the tradition of the prophetic inspiration of holy men, he writes as if the artist's major task is to capture in symbols that which he cannot completely understand. "Although the vision of truth is sublime, men, in their present state, rarely encounter any truth not too great for their capacities, so that almost all truths of the spirit appear to man in the form of grotesques" (p. 372). One hesitates considerably before disagreeing with Professor Landow; his study of Ruskin's aesthetic is the best that has been published in forty years. Not since Henry A. Ladd's Victorian Morality of Art has there been so sympathetic, well developed and documented a study of Ruskin's often neglected critical theories. Yet, the interpretation of Ruskin's view of the grotesque demands some modification. When he is dealing (and it is rare) with a truly prophetic artist, Ruskin may write as if, in fact, the artist tries to encompass and understand his vision but cannot, and therefore writes his work elliptically, knowing he is distorting, but finding in these broken images the only means of giving the broken sensation of his vision--the vision that his mind cannot grasp whole. But this is a special category of art in Ruskin's writing and a category that evaporates as he grows older. It is so unlike what he conceives to be the way the artistic mind usually

proceeds that it is an error in tact to imply that he believes this to be a pervasive method. Ruskin's treatment of Imagination insists on the artist's penetration to the heart of his subject. If the description the poet gives is inadequate, it is so because "he who wrote it, in his clear seeing of the things beneath, may have been impatient of detailed explanation." The Penetrative Imagination is confident of its ability to grasp all; "the imagination being at the heart of things, poises herself there, and is still, quiet, and brooding, comprehending all around her with her fixed look" (Works, IV, 252, 258; Modern Painters II, Sect. II, Chap. III). The other rarer, evidence of the poet's imagination, the uncalled-for vision, does not function like the symbolical grotesque would imply. Here too the poet sees all in his vision. The ramifications of its meaning may not be clear, but the poet does comprehend the core of his vision.

¹⁵ Works, VII, 259-62 (Pt. IX, Chap. I).

¹⁶ Works, XVII, 209 (Chap. III).

¹⁷ The Darkening Glass, p. 171.

¹⁸ Works, XVIII, 157-58 (Sesame and Lilies, Lect. I). In

Munera Pulveris, Chapter III, five years earlier, Ruskin had written in almost identical terms. We have alluded to this passage above; it might be worthwhile quoting in some detail here.

We shall perhaps now every day . . . feel ourselves more and more wonderstuck that men such as Homer and Dante (and, in an inferior sphere, Milton), not to speak of the great sculptors and painters of every age, have permitted themselves, though full of all nobleness and wisdom, to coin idle imaginations of the mysteries of eternity, and guide the faiths of the families of the earth by the courses of their own vague and visionary arts: while the

indisputable truths of human life and duty, respecting which they all have but one voice, lie hidden behind these veils of phantasy, unsought, and often unsuspected.

(Works, XVII, 209)

¹⁹ Works, XXXV, 148-50 (Praeterita I, Chap. VIII).

²⁰ Works, IV, 252 (Sect. II, Chap. III). The imagery in this passage is worth focusing upon. It supports Ruskin's other implications about the unconscious source of much great art. Graham Hough, in An Essay on Criticism (New York, 1966), gives a modern, Jungian view of the role of the unconscious in art:

The fact of organizing discourse into an aesthetic form raises it to a new dimension. It is no longer bound by the intentions of its author or the circumstances of its time; its existence as an aesthetic object gives it an infinite, or at least undefined, capacity of meaning. The formal organization of literature is a partly unconscious process; and the personal unconscious--the innate predispositions and tendencies of the human race. This vast ocean of possibilities is indeed canalized by the occasion and conscious intention of the individual work, but we cannot determine with certainty what will flow through the channel. The work is a gateway to an immense flood of human tendencies, aspiration, forms and dreams. This must not be regarded as a static repository, but as a collectivity of forces which will find expression while they can. Meaning unforeseen by the author may appear because it was prévu par l'Esprit Saint--for in this secularized context it is the collective unconscious, the mind of the race, that takes the place occupied by the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of literature.

(p. 72)

Ruskin's bias is not what we would call Jungian; it is probably more Freudian. Yet, his statements exploring the role of the unconscious in artistic creation, as here with his images of unexplored, endless caves containing inexhaustible treasures, adumbrate later, more scientific examinations by others. Hough maintains that the unconscious supplants the Holy Spirit as the mysterious source of writing, supplants, in another context, the Muse. Ruskin, in his own lifetime,

moves from a belief in the literal inspiration of Scripture to a concentration on the unconscious sources of art. And, what is perhaps equally important for his readers, documents the stages of his progression.

²¹ All his life, in literary work and out of it, Ruskin enjoyed researching and spinning out the etymologies of words. A few examples from his social writings can be provided. In a passage discussing the different duties and virtues of men and women, "Lady means 'bread-giver' or 'loaf-giver,' and Lord means 'maintainer of laws'" (Works, XVIII, 138; Sesame and Lilies, Lect. II). From The Bible of Amiens, Chapter II, commenting upon Gibbon's statement that the Germans deserved

"the honourable epithet of Franks, or Freemen." He does not, however, tell us in what language of the time . . . "Frank" ever meant Free: nor can I find out myself what tongue of any time it first belongs to; but I doubt not that Miss Yonge (History of Christian Names, Articles on Frey and Frank) gives the true root, in what she calls the High German "Frang," Free Lord. Not by any means a Free Commoner, or anything of the sort! but a person whose nature and name implied the existence around him, and beneath, of a considerable number of other persons who were by no means "Frang," nor Frangs.
(Works, XXXIII, 66-67)

²² The Professor: Arthur Severn's Memoir of John Ruskin, ed. James S. Dearden (London, 1967), p. 108.

²³ Works, XVIII, 64-65 (Sesame and Lilies, Lect. I). A distinction between the intellectual and non-intellectual part of education is one Ruskin makes frequently. He applies the same distinction to reading. And the non-intellectual side is necessary in order to understand the text. One must have the right spirit, be of good heart, in order to understand wise men. Sheer ratiocinative power is not

enough. See for example Sesame and Lilies, Lecture I; Works, XVIII, 78.

²⁴ Ibid., 69. The precision of Ruskin's reading is apparent in more than just his etymological studies. One striking example of his questioning the exact meaning, though not history, of a word is his discussion in Modern Painters III of Dante's use of "green enamel" as an image for the grass trod in the Inferno by the righteous spirits of the pre-Christian ages.

I am very sure that Dante did not use this phrase as we use it [i.e. carelessly]. He knew well what enamel was; and his readers, in order to understand him thoroughly, must remember what it is,--a vitreous paste, dissolved in water, mixed with metallic oxides, to give it the opacity and the colour required, spread in a moist state on metal, and afterwards hardened by fire, so as never to change. And Dante means, in using this metaphor of the grass of the Inferno, to mark, that it is laid as a tempering and cooling substance over the dark, metallic, gloomy ground; but yet so hardened by the fire, that it is not any more fresh or living grass, but a smooth, silent, lifeless bed of eternal green.

(Pt. IV, Chap. XIV; Works, V, 285)

And Ruskin substantiates this interpretation of "enamel" by discussing another passage employing the term, a passage where the sense of hardness and lifelessness is also desired. Ruskin's literary criticism abounds in this kind of approach; he frequently calls upon his widespread knowledge of minerals, flowers, animal life, geography, his unpredictable, eclectic knowledge, to examine a literary passage. As always, however, the knowledge becomes ultimately subservient to an interpretation. Ruskin is aware, too, that our modern understanding of words and things may differ from the accepted public understanding at the time in which a work was written. He occasionally attempts to act as literary historian, to rescue or recreate an earlier meaning.

See, for example, his discussion of the forest in Homer, Dante and Shakespeare, in Modern Painters III, Part IV, Chapters XIII-XV.

²⁵ Works, XVII, 257n (Munera Pulveris, Chap. V).

²⁶ Works, XVII, 223-24; 223n; 224n (Chap. IV).

²⁷ "Fors" is a word with varied and important meanings to Ruskin. In their introduction to Fors Claveriga (Works, XXVII, xix-xxiii), Cook and Wedderburn gather some of Ruskin's many attempts to define it. Ruskin took up and abandoned some of his definitions, but the most cogent seems to be his statement that the word implies "the best part of the three good English words--Force, Fortitude, and Fortune" (xx).

²⁸ Works, XVIII, 73-74 (Lect. I).

²⁹ Works, V, 60 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. III).

³⁰ Works, XVIII, 75 (Sesame and Lilies, Lect. I).

³¹ Works, XXIII, 119 (Chap. III).

³² For Ruskin's references to Origen, the Fathers of the Church, Bede, Aquinas, see Works, XXXIII, 113, 142, 170. See also Diaries of John Ruskin, 314, 488. Landow quotes a letter in which Ruskin's wife worries that "he chuses to study Hebrew and read the Fathers instead of asking God to give him Light" (p. 397n).

³³ Quoted by Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, 2d ed. (1951; rpt. Notre Dame, 1964), p. 1.

³⁴ See Victor Harris, "Allegory to Analogy in the Interpretation of Scriptures," PQ, 45 (1966), p. 1.

³⁵ Quoted by Smalley, p. 2, from Carolingian Art (London, 1935), pp. 82-83.

³⁶ Works, XVII, 208 (Munera Pulveris, Chap. III).

³⁷ Works, XVII, lxiii-lxiv.

³⁸ Works, X, xxvi.

³⁹ Works, XVII, 225 (Chap. IV).

⁴⁰ Works, X, 86-87n.

⁴¹ Works, VII, 404 (Modern Painters V, Pt. IX, Chap. X).

⁴² Works, XVII, 209-10 (Chap. III).

⁴³ The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century, trans. from 3rd ed. by Dora Nussey (1913; rpt. New York, 1958), p. 1.

⁴⁴ Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance (1939; rpt. New York, 1967), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Mâle, p. 2.

⁴⁶ P. 100.

⁴⁷ Works, V, 132-33 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. VIII).

For a more extended example of Ruskin's reading of Spenser, see

Works, XI, 251-54 (The Stones of Venice III, Appendix II).

⁴⁸ Works, V, 307 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. XV).

⁴⁹ Works, XIX, 82 (The Cestus of Aglaia, Chap. III).

⁵⁰ Works, V, 283 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. XIV).

⁵¹ Works, V, 346 (Modern Painters III, Pt. XIV, Chap. XVI).

⁵² Works, V, 133 (Modern Painters III, Pt. IV, Chap. VIII).

⁵³ Works, V, 317 (Pt. IV, Chap. XVI).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Works, XIX, 84-85 (Chap. III).

⁵⁶ In a letter to his mother, 8 August; Works, XIX, lxiv. Ruskin's

late literary criticism scatters examples of this desultoriness. See, for example, the middle chapters of Praeterita. Sections of The Cestus of Aglaia reveal the mental imbalance. As early as 1869 one can see the beginnings. In The Queen of the Air Ruskin writes on a Homeric image by discussing the thoracic structure and respiratory capacities of the fly, as we have learned them from modern science.

⁵⁷ 1 July; Works, XVII, 225n.

⁵⁸ See Modern Painters IV, Pt. V, Chap. XX (Works, VI, 442-47).

⁵⁹ See Modern Painters III, Chap. XVI (Works, V, 330ff.).

⁶⁰ Works, VI, 439-40 (Modern Painters IV, Pt. V, Chap. XX).

⁶¹ Ruskin's movement toward meaning could be described in the same phrase once used, and there derisively, about Origen's interpretation of Scripture, "magis divinare quam explanare," more divination than explanation. (Quoted by Hough, p. 74).

⁶² Works, VI, 452-53n (Modern Painters IV, Pt. V, Chap. XX).

⁶³ Works, VII, 274-76 (Pt. IX, Chap. II).

⁶⁴ Works, XXXIV, 349 (Fiction, Fair and Foul, Chap. IV).

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