RUSKIN AND THE ECONOMY OF LITERATURE

BY MARC SHELL

John Ruskin (1819–1900) attempted to hold in a single vision the theoretical and practical problems of aesthetics and economics. In works such as The Political Economy of Art (1857), Munera Pulveris (1862–63), and Sesame and Lilies (1865) he sought to explain the economic value of art and the relation of aesthetic taste to economic organization. For Ruskin aesthetics and politics are in the end inseparable, and the special considerations by which he binds them together are the most original aspects of his critical theory. Many students, however, have not understood the need for and significance of a political economy of art and literature. They have misunderstood Ruskin’s economic and political theory and criticism of art, and have ignored almost entirely the special “economy of literature.” Even Marcel Proust, one of the most careful and sympathetic of his readers, refused to follow Ruskin’s attempt to understand the relation between the arts and economy. Ruskin, wrote Proust, “chercha la vérité, il trouva la beauté jusque dans les tableaux chronologiques et dans les lois sociales. Mais les logiciens ayant donné des ‘Beaux Arts’ une définition qui l’exclut aussi bien la minéralogie que l’économie politique, c’est seulement de la partie de l’œuvre de Ruskin qui concerne les ‘Beaux Arts’ tels qu’on les entend généralement, de Ruskin esthéticien et critique d’art que j’aurai à parler.” 1 Ruskin did not use the term Beaux Arts “tels qu’on les entend généralement.” Unlike the logicians (to whom Proust seems to defer), Ruskin explicitly rejected that definition of Beaux Arts which excludes économie politique. Proust, in fact, does consider the economic implications of Ruskin’s aesthetics. The easy separation of art from political economy, however, has helped many other critics to avoid serious consideration of The Political Economy of Art and other political and economic works of Ruskin. Although they recognize Ruskin’s attempt to join economic and literary studies, they make no real effort to follow him closely in this exciting experiment.

Even the chronologies of Ruskin’s interest in art and political economy have been inaccurate because his biographers (like his critics) have not understood exactly what he meant by the “political economy of art.” Ruskin’s consideration of this economy predates both The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849) and the chapter, “The Nature of the Gothic,” in The Stones of Venice (1853). According to Ruskin, this most

1Proust, Contre Sainte-Beuve, précédé de Pastiche et mélanges et suivi de Essais et articles, ed. P. Clarac (Paris, 1971), 106; references to Proust are to this edition.
important interest began in 1828, when he was only nine years old. In *The Queen of the Air* he cites a curious poem of his youth.

> Those trees that stand waving upon the rock's side,
> And men, that, like spectres, among them glide.
> And waterfalls that are heard from far,
> And come in sight when very near.
> And the water-wheel that turns slowly round,
> Grinding the corn that—requires to be ground,—
> (Political Economy of the Future!) . . . 2

As Ruskin comments, this poem foretells *The Stones of Venice* and *The Queen of the Air*. The poet hears the sound of a water-wheel, built by human spectres and turned slowly by natural waterfalls, grinding the corn which men require. By the sudden interjection, “Political Economy of the Future,” Ruskin, however ironically, interprets his early poetic art as a literary attempt to *illustrate* the “political economy” of man. Such an attempt is different from, but related to, the attempt to locate *art* itself *within* the whole economy.

In his first major publication, *The Poetry of Architecture* (1837–38), Ruskin analyzes architectural decoration (which he elsewhere calls “the costliness or richness of a building”) as an example of art within the whole economy. “We can always do without decoration; but if we have it, it must be well done. It is not of the slightest use to economise; every farthing improperly saved does a shilling’s worth of damage: and that is getting a bargain the wrong way” (I, 184–85). Architectural decoration, or rather the task of justifying expenditure on grand and expensive buildings, interested Ruskin in the economy of art. In *The Poetry of Architecture* (pseudonymously signed *kata phusin* or “according to nature”), Ruskin argued that the economy of decoration in architecture should be like that in nature.

We have several times alluded to the extreme *richness* and variety of hill foreground [in nature], as an internal energy to which there must be no contrast. Rawness of colour is to be especially avoided, but so also is *poverty* of affect. It will therefore add much to the beauty of building, if in any conspicuous and harsh angle, or shadowy moulding, we introduce a wreath of carved leafwork,—in stone, of course. This sounds startlingly expensive; but we are not thinking of expense: *what ought to be*, and not *what can be afforded*, is the question (I, 182–83; italics mine).

The architect should imitate carefully nature’s economy and mode of decorating. In *The Elements of Drawing* (1857), Ruskin similarly advises the painter to imitate nature’s husbandry of colors. “Nature is just as economical of her fine colours as I have told you to be with yours” (XV, 153). The addendum to this advice, “Nature’s Economy of Colours” (XV, 217), is a foreshadowing of the “Economy of Literature”

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in which Ruskin advises the writer about the proper economy of the verbal art. Although Ruskin sometimes pretends to ignore the related economic problem of "what can be afforded," he knew that he had to justify the expense of his recommendations to artists and statesmen. In the *Poetry of Architecture* he raises the problem which will dominate his thinking until the end of his life: What is the value of art that justifies its cost and locates it in the economy of a nation? In its fullest form this problem is at the center of the practical decisions about art in a free or planned market economy.

The expense of art and the unpleasantness of discussing this matter are factors which led Ruskin to begin to study art systematically in terms of its economy. This study of the economy of art is closely related to Ruskin's great argument that the quality of work produced by manual laborers is directly related to their conditions of labor. In *The Stones of Venice* Ruskin does indeed try to show that the society in which the working man lives is the most serious factor to consider when studying the reasons why the work of one period is great and that of another mediocre. This way of relating art and economic conditions was not original with Ruskin, but he does make strange and exciting applications of the principle to both painter- and poet-laborers. In *Modern Painters*, for example, he seems to protest that poetic production differs from that of other craftsmen. "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" (VII, 215). In other works, however, he is less certain about the differences between poetic and other labor. In *The Political Economy of Art*, as we shall see, Ruskin relies heavily on the metaphor that the labor of the poet is like that of a particular craftsman: the goldsmith. Ruskin's study of the political economy of art, however wide in focus, is never so diffuse that there disappears the significant and frequently ignored concept of the poet as a laborer who is or produces some kind of economic value.

A work of literature may attempt to establish its own value to society by establishing the supposedly parallel value of a smaller literary unit within itself. Roland Barthes, for example, has suggested that Balzac's *Sarrasine* seems to establish its own value by establishing the "exchange value" of the *récit* within itself; and, as we shall see, Ruskin himself argues that Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems to establish its own special value by establishing the lack of "use value" in the tradesmen's play-within-the-play. The economic relations of the *récit* to *Sarrasine* or of the tradesmen's play to *A Midsummer Night's*

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3 In the addendum to *The Political Economy of Art* entitled "Economy of Literature," Ruskin considers very briefly the writer's management of (verbal) materials and argues (as Spencer in *Philosophy of Style*) that "it is excellent discipline for an author to feel that he must say all that he has to say in the fewest possible words . . .ICY, Appendix 6).
Dream, however, are not necessarily identical or even mimetically faithful to the economic relations of Sarrasine or A Midsummer Night’s Dream to society. It is possible, then, that literature cannot itself establish truly its own aesthetic or economic value. Therefore a friend to art and literature may wish (if only for rhetorical reasons) to write an apparently non-literary work explicitly about the economics and value of literature. In such a work, literature itself would play a role similar to that of the récit in Sarrasine or the tradesmen’s play in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. This is one of the explicit goals of Ruskin in most of his later works: to locate the work of literature within the actual world of production and exchange, and to establish the true value of literature in that world. A reviewer of The Political Economy of Art wrote properly that it was Ruskin’s “chief purpose to treat the artist’s power, and the Art work itself, as items of the world’s wealth, and to show how these may be best evolved, produced, accumulated and distributed.”

The economy of art, as understood by Ruskin, has two bases: first, that art is a value in a national economy; and second, that taste in aesthetics and morality in society are identical. Ruskin argues that the products of the Fine Arts are a valuable part of national wealth, and that those economists who do not understand the value of these products must necessarily be mistaken in their analyses of the laws of political economy. In a preface to Munera Pulveris he insists that his works were the first to present the problems of political economy from this proper perspective. An “accurate analysis of the laws of Political Economy,” he begins, cannot be made by “any person unacquainted with the value of the products of the highest industries, commonly called the ‘Fine Arts’ . . .” (XVII, 131). Ruskin believes that his main thesis is original because it centers on the importance of artistic value. In Munera Pulveris Ruskin notes five principal groups of economically valuable things: “land, with its associated air, water and organisms; houses, furniture, and instruments; stored or prepared food, medicine, and articles of bodily luxury, including clothing; books; works of Art” (XVII, 154). The correct economic organization of these five valuable items differs, but their values are qualitatively identical. From this difference and this identity arises the need for the specialized economies of art and books.

In his list of valuable items Ruskin omits gold. This is strange for two reasons. First, Ruskin does argue, in the chapter “Commerce” of Munera Pulveris, that uncoined gold is a commodity valuable like any other. Second, Ruskin frequently compares the value of art and books to that of gold. Indeed, Ruskin believes that not only art but also the artist or his talent are kinds of golden natural resources. The talents of

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5 The Athenaeum, No. 1571 (Dec. 26, 1857).
the artist, like Ruskin’s own innate “art-gift” (XIX, 396), cannot be manufactured any more than can gold. In the chapter “Discovery,” in The Political Economy of Art, he writes that “you have always to find your artist, not to make him; you can’t manufacture him any more than you can manufacture gold. You can find him, and refine him: you dig him out as he lies nugget-fashion in the mountain stream; you bring him home; and you fashion him into current coin or household plate, but not one grain of him you originally produce” (XVI, 29–30; italics mine). In “Discovery” Ruskin also argues that art or the artist is like gold because both are rare natural resources, “limited in use” (XVI, 30). Throughout “Discovery” gold is the artist or work of art on which the statesman works.

In The Political Economy of Art as a whole, however, the metaphor of gold seems to play multiple, even contradictory roles. In the chapter “Application” (about the necessity not to waste that gold which is art), gold becomes, by a significant transformation, the natural resource on which the artist works; and the artist himself is discussed as if he were a goldsmith (XVI, 45–47). Gold, the particular material on which the artisan works, is both a commodity and a medium of exchange. Ruskin argues that if gold has a higher exchange value than artistic talent itself, then art is impossible. The goldsmith will never be truly artistic until such time as he can be confident that his golden plates will not be melted down and recast to suit the fashions of some future decade. The metaphorical identity of art and gold, which Ruskin asserted in “Discovery,” is thus undermined by the argument in “Application,” namely, that art can be destroyed by melting but gold is not destroyed even when exchanging its old (possibly artistically superior) shape for a new (possibly inferior) shape.6 The implication is that gold, not art, is a heavenly treasure which neither rust nor moth can destroy materially, and on which art depends. As we shall see, this dependency of the art of the goldsmith on gold is, for Ruskin, not unlike the dependency of the art of the writer on wisdom.

The Political Economy of Art is about architecture, painting, and sculpture. The value of literature is identical to that of these other arts, but its laws of production and distribution differ. In Munera Pulveris Ruskin considers “the economical and educational value” of books, which consists “first, in their power of preserving and communicating the knowledge of facts” (to which corresponds the negative power of

6As both commodity and medium of exchange, gold tests human ability to distinguish between presumably true value (i.e., the value of the plate as a work of art) and presumably false value (i.e., its value as a medium to be melted and worked again). Gold, therefore, becomes a kind of institutional touchstone. Such an idea is clearly presented in a popular song of Chilon, which Diogenes Laertes reports (1.70-72): “By the touchstone gold is tried, giving manifest proof; and by gold is the mind of good and evil men brought to the test.” In this song, gold is both the thing testing and the thing being tested.
"disguising and effacing the memory of facts") and "second, in their power of exciting vital or noble emotions and intellectual vision" (to which corresponds the negative power of "killing the noble emotions, or exciting base ones"). Under these two headings Ruskin discusses briefly "the means of producing and educating good authors, and the means and advisability of rendering good books generally accessible, and directing the reader's choice to them" (XVII, 157). Moreover, he promises the reader an entire lecture devoted to the economy of literature. He did not keep his promise. One lecture in *Sesame and Lilies*, however, is intended to open to its audience the doors to the treasures that are books. In this lecture, "Of King's Treasure," Ruskin does not use literature to illustrate his economic ideas about society; rather he considers the special economic role of literature itself within society.

Throughout *Sesame and Lilies* Ruskin compares and contrasts the treasures of books and those of wisdom. In "Of King's Treasures" it is not clear whether Ruskin intends books or wisdom to be the real treasure of kings, "gold to be mined in the sun's red heart" (VIII, 75). Sometimes Ruskin implies fearfully that art, artist, book, and writer are not valuable in themselves. Only wisdom (which "positive" literature may or may not contain, and which "negative" literature does not contain) is truly valuable. The implication is that books are merely storehouses of easily accessible capital, containers of wisdom which can be extracted only by terrific effort on the part of the reader who—like the critic seeking Ruskin’s own economy of literature—must dig for it as for an especially valuable vein of gold. The distinction between books and wisdom is not clear in "Of King's Treasures" because Ruskin tries to dissolve the very distinction between container and contained (or imitator and imitated) which he himself established. This conflation of books (as golden capital) and wisdom (as the gold which books merely contain and which the reader must mine) is like the conflation in *The Political Economy of Art* of art or artist (as the golden material upon which the statesman works) and the material upon which the artist works (such as gold or wisdom itself). Both conflations derive from an almost purposeful confusion of the differences between the value of gold as a commodity and its value as a medium of exchange. Ruskin *seems* to distinguish clearly between these two values, but actually obscures their differences. He fears that art is not really like wisdom or gold insofar as art is not a real commodity. He fears that art—literature in particular—is like gold only insofar as it is a medium of exchange which preserves and communicates the knowledge of facts. This power of exchange is identical to that of money, a medium of exchange which

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7 Ruskin would open the bibliothecal gates to wisdom with "Open Sesame!"

8 Compare, however, the warning of Heraclitus (Frag. 22): "Seekers after gold dig up much earth." Ruskin's advice to the reader turns out to be the incorporation of capitalist ideas about gold in his own ideas about wisdom.
Ruskin defines as "documentary expression of legal claim" (XVII, 157). But gold, as both medium of exchange and commodity, deceives many into believing that medium of exchange and commodity are identical; it is a documentary expression of legal claim which lays claim to itself as commodity. Similarly, literature is a medium of exchange insofar as it may hide or contain wisdom. But when it pretends to be wisdom, it too conflates medium and commodity.

Sometimes Ruskin seems to believe that not only literature but all written language is a monetary representation or documentary expression of a legal claim to wisdom. Throughout his later works he suggests that literature, like money, is only "the written or coined sign of relative wealth" (XIX, 402). Money, however, is "the transferable acknowledgment of debt" of which there are two kinds: "the acknowledgment of debts which will be paid and of debts which will not" (XVII, 217–30). If literature is valuable, then it must have good credit. The reader expects wisdom from a book as the owner of a bank-note expects that it is transferable for gold. Ultimately Ruskin fears that all literature is necessarily misleading, false, or counterfeit; that it is only foolishness in artful disguise, pretending to a wisdom which only the best literature admits it does not contain; that the lie of literature is ignoble. If this fear were justified, as Ruskin knew, it would destroy entirely his theory of the value of literature, which depends largely on the "economic and educational value" of books to make men good. It is, then, "in defense of art" as he sees it that Ruskin confuses commodity-value and exchange-value.

Perhaps, as Proust suggested in his brilliant introduction to his translation of Sesame and Lilies, Ruskin does not pay enough attention to the act of reading. Although frequently Ruskin does stress the importance of educated readers, he does not analyze closely enough

9In the economic world, a materialized form of Grace might transcend the necessity for debts and credits. Even if a Portia were able to accomplish such transcendence in Victorian England (as Ruskin believed she accomplished in Shakespeare's Venice), it is difficult for Ruskin to conceive of a similar overlapping of the debtor-creditor problems implicit in the writer-reader and art-truth relations of literature itself, in which alone Portia exists. On Portia and The Merchant of Venice see "Commerce" (XVIII), in which Ruskin etymologizes on the words Portia (as economic portion), merchant (as divine mercy), and grace (as that which is gratis).

10Ruskin is uncertain whether books can truly educate men to be wise and act nobly. Sometimes he ignores this uncertainty by arguing simply that education is an end in itself. In "Of King's Treasures," for example, Ruskin intends to show "the use and preciousness of books" (XVIII, viii). He insists that bibliothecal education is not a means to an end, and speaks disparagingly of those persons who think only of "the education befitting such and such a station in life" (XVIII, 6). "It never seems to occur to the parents [of students] that there may be an education which, in itself, IS advance in life; that any other than that may be advancement in death." Ruskin rejects, for example, "the mere making of money" as the end of education. Although he claims that education is an end in itself, it is clear that Ruskin considered wisdom to be the end of
lecture or mining wisdom from books. Nevertheless, he is able to question both the possibility of lecture within the confines of his own understanding of reading, and the very concepts of literary value which inform that understanding. This questioning is most apparent within the context of Ruskin's more conventional literary criticism, such as the famous passage about avarice and prodigality in *Munera Pulveris*.

In a remarkable note to the second edition of *Munera Pulveris* Ruskin explains that paragraphs eighty-seven to ninety-four are "of more value than any other part of this book" (XVII, 208 ftn.). He integrates these paragraphs into the second edition of *Munera Pulveris* as the second part of the chapter "Coin-Keeping," to which they were a mere addendum in the first edition. Usually this section of Ruskin's treatise on economics is read out of context, without considering the whole of *Munera Pulveris* to which it has a relation which justifies Ruskin's high regard for it. It should be read in the light of the whole book in which literature, supposed to be one of the five values in political economy, itself illustrates principles of political economy. In "Coin-Keeping" literature illustrates its own value.

Ruskin begins "Coin-Keeping" by considering various problems of monetary currency. Currency is used to exchange equivalents in wealth: in any place, in any time, of any kind (XVII, 196-97). It is the great metaphor. The special power of gold in Victorian society (in which it is the medium of exchange) is even greater than this exchange value because gold is also a valuable commodity. According to Ruskin (himself a coin-collector), this double existence of golden currency tends to make many citizens imagine that its value is even greater than it actually is. Such citizens hoard avariciously their idol of gold. Temptations to hoard golden money include its important power of quantitative comparison, which appeals to those whose minds cannot conceive of other media of comparison, such as the linguistic or moral. Ruskin argues that both hoarding and prodigality have the bad effect on the economy of stopping the free or natural current stream of wealth. In paragraph eighty-six (the last in "Coin-Keeping" as it was first published) Ruskin tries to bolster this argument against hoarding and prodigality by illustration education, just as he considered wisdom to be the thing hidden in books. His arguments about education are strangely like those of the parents whom he disparages, except that he transforms the goal of money making in their thinking to the goal of wisdom-getting in his own thinking. Such a transformation, like that of *philokerdos* (love of profit) to *philosophia* (love of wisdom) in the Platonic dialogue *Hipparchus*, is one of the keys to understanding the confused meaning of "value" in Ruskin's writings.

Ruskin does make the distinction between those books which are useful to read, and those which are not (XVIII, 18–22). This is not, however, analysis of what Proust calls *lecture*. In a brilliant counterpart to Ruskin's consideration of reading, Proust suggests that although Ruskin was essentially correct in insisting on the difference between speaking and writing, he was mistaken in insisting implicitly on the identity of conversation and the act of reading (lecture). "De la lecture," Proust, 160ff.
from the *Inferno* and its interpretation of the Homeric Charybdis: "the *mal tener* and *mal dare* are as correlative as complementary colours; and the circulation of wealth, which ought to be soft, steady, far-sweeping, and full of warmth, like the Gulf stream, being narrowed into an eddy, and concentrated on a point, changes into the alternate suction and surrender [associated with hoarding and prodigality] of Charybdis" (XVII, 207). The metaphors throughout "Coin-Keeping" center about such words as *currents, streams, flows, fluctuations* and so on. Ruskin takes these metaphors seriously, so that he (without, however, accepting the protection of poetic license) makes an easy transition from *currency* as the topic of a supposedly systematic economic investigation to *currency* with all its aquatic and literary associations.\(^{12}\)

In the second part of "Coin-Keeping" Ruskin illustrates his conclusions about monetary currency with passage from great works of literature. Moreover, he considers the *currency of literature* itself in terms of a substantial golden truth on which he implies it is based (XVII, 208).

It is a strange habit of wise humanity to speak in enigmas only, so that the highest truths and usefiest laws must be hunted for through whole picture galleries of dreams, which to the vulgar seem dreams only. (XVII, 208)

The enigmatic habit of speaking enigmatically is useless to the multitude and therefore its products can have no true currency for them.\(^{13}\) To those who know how to seek out esoteric truths, literature *may* be useful. Plato, however, argued that all works of literature, and the Homeric epics in particular, do *not* hide truths useful to anyone. Plato's argument is devastating to Ruskin's position that literature is valuable. Ruskin defends his position by attacking Plato's imaginative capability.

Plato's logical power quenched his imagination and he became incapable of understanding the purely imaginative element either in poetry or painting: he therefore somewhat overrates the pure discipline of passionate art in song and music, and misses that of meditative art.

In this explanation of Plato's reason for distrusting Homer and art in general, Ruskin seems to be siding with Homer against Plato. He

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\(^{12}\)Ruskin's accurate and inaccurate etymologies are among the means he employs to establish connections between the supposed meanings of words. In "Coin-Keeping" he establishes such a connection between the *currency* of money and that of water. He pretends to defend that etymological connection by arguing that "the derivation of words is like that of rivers" (XVIII, 292). Ruskin uses the concept of currency not only to join etymologically the social movement of *money* and the physical movement of *water*, but also to explain the movement of *words* or etymology itself. Although elsewhere he writes that a man thinks "economically" when he is aware of all of the etymological nuances of the words he uses, Ruskin often employs etymologies to avoid more complete linguistic or economic considerations.

\(^{13}\)According to Ruskin, currency "consists of every document acknowledging debt, which is transferable in the country. This transferableness depends upon its intelligibility. . ."(XVII, 194).
admits, however, that there is a deeper reason for Plato's distrust, which is not so easily dismissed, namely, "his love of justice, and reverently religious nature [which] made him fear, as death, every form of fallacy." Finally, Ruskin only seems to agree with Plato that literature is merely the coining of idle imaginations. He admits that

Homer and Dante (and in an inferior sphere, Milton), 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....

In this sentence, significantly, Ruskin is trying to soften the austere and utterly devastating argument of Plato against art and artists. Plato was not convinced that the poets were "full of all nobleness and wisdom," or that truth lies behind the "fallacies" of art. Ruskin, however, insists that "the indisputable truths of human life and duty, respecting which [all works of art] have but one voice, lie hidden behind these veils of phantasy [i.e., "idle imaginations"], unsought, and often unsuspected." These truths Ruskin would hunt in "picture-galleries of dreams." "I will gather carefully, out of Dante and Homer," he promises us, "what in this kind [i.e., "the indisputable truths"] bears on our subject [i.e., currency], in its due place." The goal of interpretation, as thus understood by Ruskin, is to find the truth hidden in the fallacies of art. If Ruskin can do this, he will have shown either that Plato was mistaken in his harsh judgment of art, or that the Platonic judgment was itself an esoteric enigma needing Ruskin's interpretation. He would take gifts of dust, show that they are potentially valuable, and transform them into the truth that is wealth.

The section of "Coin-Keeping" which follows this brief but significant "theory of interpretation" examines the possibility of the worthy uses of material riches and illustrates its examination with passages from many writers. At the same time, however, this section purports to be itself an example of the worthy uses of bibliothecal riches. Ruskin digs in the "gold mines" of many writers (Plato, Dante, Homer, Spenser, Goethe, Herbert, Macé, and the authors of the Bible) in order to seek out the indisputable truths which he, an educated bibliolater, believes are hidden in books. Because Ruskin himself is not fully certain of the justice of his "idolatry of books," however, he integrates with his interpretation of these books an enigmatic critique of bibliothecal riches which questions their value and ability to illustrate accurately the problems of avarice and prodigality in the currency of material riches. The

14In Ruskin's work, there are other ways in which economics and art mutually illustrate each other. In Elements of English Prosody, for example, Ruskin refers the reader to economic theories of possession, discussed in Munera Pulveris, to illustrate and explain a line of Pope's poetry ("The Rape of the Lock," IV, line 123). And as Proust (citing Milsand) suggests, Ruskin uses not only literature but also painting (for example, a "Holy Family" of Tintoretto) to illustrate his economic ideas (Proust, 107).
Divine Comedy is one of the books which Ruskin uses to illustrate his ideas about currency. In the Inferno, a place of bad economy, the mal tener and mal dare “meet in contrary . . . currents as the waves of Charybdis.” In Paradiso, the opposite place of perfect economy, there is a correspondingly perfect currency. In Purgatorio, however, there occurs the wonderful transformation of those who have been prodigal and avaricious, but (unlike the sinners in hell) for love of earth. Purgatorio, then, is a kind of translation from false to true economy. It is a place where the apparently total falseness of sinners is purged until they can participate in the truth of heaven. As we have seen, Ruskin considers interpretation itself to be such a purgation of the apparent falseness of literature. Apparent falseness can become truth only if truth and that falseness have something in common (e.g., love in Purgatorio) through which the metaphor from one to the other can happen.

In this section of Munera Pulveris the connection between the falsehood of literature and the truth of philosophy is a series of verbal juxtapositions by which Ruskin hopes to prove that Dante (the exemplar of literature) and Plato (the exemplar of philosophy) both agree with George Herbert about the nature of truth and economic value. He begins, however, with a purposefully mistaken translation of a line from the Purgatorio:

Dante’s precept for the deliverance of the souls in purgatory is: “Turn thine eyes to the lure (lure) which the Eternal King rolls with mighty wheels.” (XVII, 211)

The Italian logore, however, is properly translated only by the English lure, which Ruskin places between parentheses! Ruskin pretends that the English lure has an etymological connection with either the English lure or the Italian logore. On the basis of a supposedly common etymon, then, he uses lucre (meaning money) as the principle English word to translate logore in Dante’s precept for purgatorial deliverance. After having so interpreted Dante, Ruskin then cites George Herbert as one who agrees with Dante about the relation of money (lucre) to stars (true wealth).

Lift up thy head;
Take stars for money; stars, not to be told
By any art, yet to be purchased.

Herbert opposes money to stars. Similarly, Dante (according to Ruskin) opposes lucre to the lure of the mighty wheels of the “Greater Fortune,” of which the constellation (of stars) is ascending in Purgatorio. Herbert makes the further point, however, that stars cannot be told (meaning related or counted out) by any art. Ruskin seems to take no note of Herbert’s artful attack on the possibility of art’s “purchasing” stars. He simply uses the passage of Herbert to make a slippery connection from Dante (to whom he compares Herbert by “false”
translation and etymology) to Plato, from whose *Republic* (416e) he cites:

Tell them they have divine gold and silver in their souls for ever; that they need no money stamped of men—neither may they otherwise than impiously mingle the gathering of the divine with the mortal treasure, for through that which the laws of the multitude have coined, endless crimes have been done and suffered; but in theirs is neither pollution nor sorrow.

The implication in paragraph eighty-nine (in which this series of passages from Dante, Herbert, and Plato occurs) is that Dante (a producer of "veils of phantasy") and Plato (a sharp critic of all art) are somehow in agreement about the nature of real or "stellar" value. In fact, however, Plato includes art as a species of "money stamped of men."15 Art is not to be trusted, as Ruskin trusts the art of Dante and Herbert and his own artful conflation of "lucre" and "lure." For Plato there is only the noble philosophical lie, and not the potentially truthful artistic lie. All art is guileful and counterfeit.

Ruskin distrusts his own artful pose or noble lie not in defense of philosophy but in defense of and for the sake of art. In considering the economy of literature he wonders whether literary currency is necessarily misleading, false, or counterfeit. By the time Ruskin ends the chapter "Coin-Keeping" the reader's credulity about the value of art has been stretched—purposefully and frequently—almost to the breaking point.16 Ruskin is in the painful position of defending literature while knowing that philosophy (e.g., Plato's *Republic*) and literature itself (e.g., Herbert's poem) suggest that it is useless. Ruskin did not balk at the task before him. At once and the same time he tried to defend literature from the point of view of *political economy*, and to attack it vehemently from the point of view of *literature* itself.

Ruskin's elegant attack is also strange praise of literature. In one of the lectures in *Sesame and Lilies*, "Mystery of Life and its Arts," Ruskin argues that the most significant characteristic of great art is its distrust of itself. Great writers differ from lesser ones in that they know that they write nothing truthful. Whatever claim is made to truth by Plato (or Ruskin) is a rhetorical pose. Beauty, therefore, has to do with the knowledge of wrongness. The first principle of aesthetics is "that the more beautiful the art, the more it is essentially the work of people who felt themselves to be wrong... The very sense of inevitable error from

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15 On the counterfeitliness of poetry in Plato: *Republic*, 580d, 583d, etc.
16 Another crafty but exasperating attempt by Ruskin (in "Coin-Keeping," XVII, 211ff.) to conjoin art and truth is his interpretation of Circe and the Sirens in Dante. The Siren, according to Ruskin, "is lovely to look upon, but her womb is loathsome." She is the goddess of the "deceitfulness of riches." Ruskin draws upon Apollonius to argue that the Siren is also the daughter of the muses. Ruskin seems to argue, then, for the deceitfulness (of the daughter) of the artful muses. He approves, however, another artful figure from the *Odyssey* (Circe), and implies that there is a good kind of art (Circean) and a bad kind of art (Sirenic).
their purpose marks the perfectness of that purpose, and the continued sense of failure arises from the continued opening of the eyes more clearly to all the sacredest truths” (XVIII, 174). Seeing more clearly is not seeing perfectly clearly. And the possibility that some works of literature may be “more beautiful” than others, does not mean that any work of literature can be valuable to society by exciting noble actions and teaching wisdom. Ruskin does find it useful, however, to compare the relative clarity or closeness to value of three groups of thinkers: the Christian writers, the naive writers, and the capitalists. He finds that the Christian writers are unclear and wrong. Milton’s account (even of his special subject, the fall of the angels) is supposed by Ruskin to be unbelievable even to Milton himself; and Dante’s Divine Comedy, to which he seems to refer seriously in “Coin-Keeping,” is judged “a vision, but a vision only.” According to Ruskin, the great writers of the Christians “do but play sweetly upon modulated pipes; with pompous nomenclature adorn the councils of hell.” In “Coin-Keeping” he expressed his wonder at the arrogance with which writers such as Dante and Milton “coin[ed] idle imaginations.” In “Mystery of Life and its Arts” he pretends to amazement that the Christian writers have “filled the openings of eternity, before which the prophets have veiled their faces, and which the angels desire to look into, with idle puppets of their scholastic imagination.”

Ruskin prefers the naive poets such as Homer and Shakespeare, who show greater truthfulness than the Christian writers in their relative silence about the greatest mysteries. In Eagle’s Nest, a later work, Ruskin praises the “faultless and complete epitome of the laws of mimetic art” which is “Shakespeare’s judgment of his own art” in A Midsummer Night’s Dream: “The best in this kind are but shadows: and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.” Ruskin interprets this sentence of Theseus, “spoken of the poor tradesmen’s kindly offered art,” to be a warning about the deceitfulness or counterfeitness of mimêsis. Ruskin chooses to describe the dangers of preferring art and shadows to the simplicity of truth by using not a truthful argument, but merely a skillful, pleasant illustration from Prodicus (XXII, 152). Writers who question or mock their own mimêsis are more to be trusted than those who claim direct access to and reproduction of the truth.

Ruskin’s distrust of literature sometimes takes the extreme form of questioning language itself. Proust, a most sophisticated critic, cites Ruskin’s sentence on the necessary fallibility of human language: “Il n’y a pas de forme de langage humain où l’erreur n’ait pu se glisser.” As Proust suggests, Ruskin’s argument invites us to question the works of Ruskin himself. “Ruskin aurait d’ailleurs été le premier à nous approuver de ne pas accorder à ses écrits une autorité infaisible, puisqu’il la refusait même aux Ecritures Saintes.”17 All written works are

17Both the translation of Ruskin’s sentence (from Bible d’Amiens, III, 49), and the ascription to Ruskin of necessary and conscious fallibility, are from Proust, 135.
mensonges slipping forth from the intellectual sincerity of the writer "sous ... formes touchantes et tentatrices." It is impossible that a writer be truthful or clarify completely any mystery. As Proust suggests, however, Ruskin was pleased to affect in his writings "'une attitude de la révérence' qui croit 'insolent d'éclaircir un mystère.'" Ruskin adopts the mensonge that he can clarify a mystery, in order to defend the concept of the value of literature. That defense, however, lacks the obvious humility of the writers whom Ruskin affects to admire, and resembles that of the capitalist class which Ruskin affects to dislike.

The capitalists are the third group of thinkers whose access to truth Ruskin considers in the "Mystery of Life and its Arts." They are the avowed enemies of art and the economy of Life, and to them Ruskin sarcastically gives the power to know all things. "These kings—these councillors—these statemen and builders of kingdoms—these capitalists and men of business who weigh the earth, and the dust in it, in a balance. They know the world surely" (XVIII, 116). Ruskin is ironic in suggesting that the self-assured capitalists know the world more surely than the Christian and naive writers. But Ruskin has been able to assign to such writers no sure knowledge. His own uncertainty about the value of beautiful art and his dislike of capitalist aesthetics and morality combine to form a powerful invective against the capitalist economy of art. What is most strange in such invective is that it is a defense of art not merely on the basis of the value of art (which we have already seen is a kind of noble lie), but also on the basis of a supposed identity between aesthetic taste and economic morality.

The ambiguities of the value of literature constitute one large problem in Ruskin's economy of literature. A second and corresponding problem is that of the relationship of taste in aesthetics to morality in society. Ruskin pretends that this relationship is one of identity, and that aesthetics is ultimately an economic matter. Ruskin's sociology of art assumes not only the Marxist formula that social conditions give rise to certain forms of art, but also the non-Marxist formula that a morally good society gives rise and corresponds to aesthetically good art. Ruskin sometimes even judges or pre-judges the morality of an age by the good or bad taste manifested in its art. On the basis of his high regard for ancient Greek and Christian Gothic art, for example, Ruskin concludes that the societies which gave rise to such art must have operated according to the laws of his "Economy of Life." Other writers, such as Marx, argue that Greek art was good, but that Greek society (which gave rise to it) was slave-based and, from the perspective of history, "immature." Some writers, such as Plato, suggest that in the best society there would not be produced the best, but rather no art. The positions of these other thinkers, whereby a bad society (such as Royalist France) can produce a good art (such as Balzac's novels), is not without difficulties. But Ruskin's position, whereby only a good society
can produce great art, is politically dubious, and finally self-contradictory.

Proust argues that Ruskin's *mensonge* about the identity of aesthetic taste and economic morality (like his *mensonge* about the value of literature) was motivated by the desire to defend art. "Les doctrines qu'il [Ruskin] professait étaient des doctrines morales et non des doctrines esthétiques, et pourtant il les choisissait pour leur beauté. Et comme il ne voulait pas les présenter comme belles, mais comme vraies, il était obligé de se mentir à lui-même sur la nature des raisons qui les lui faisaient adopter."18 Ruskin renders politics aesthetic, but he pretends that he is politicizing art. As Proust knew, the greatest problem in interpreting Ruskin is that he exhibits "sans cesse [cette] attitude mensongère." One of the clearest indications that Ruskin "insincerely" confused the relationship between art and politics is the famous treatment of architecture and society in *The Stones of Venice*. "Or, si Ruskin avait été entièrement sincère avec lui-même, il n'aurait pas pensé que les crimes Vénitiens avait été plus inexcusables et plus sévèrement punis que ceux des autres hommes parce qu'ils possédaient une église en marbre de toutes couleurs au lieu d'une cathédrale en calcaire..."19 Proust concludes properly that Ruskin virtually idolized art, to the point of blinding himself to historical politics and its real relation to aesthetics.

Both the theory of the economic value of art and the theory of the identity of morality and aesthetics, however, fortified Ruskin in his battle for reforms in the arts and finally in society.20 Ruskin stresses the importance of reforming the arts by arguing (like Wagner on opera, and Morris on architecture) that art can transform society. When Wagner lost faith in the social power of art, he turned ever more strongly to reactionary opera and simple idolization of medieval Christianity.21 Ruskin too has his idols, but he looks to social reforms to make a good society which could give rise to good art. He questions the possibility of reforming the political economy of art without *first* forming a planned,

18Proust, 80.

19Proust, 82

20Ruskin’s suggested reforms in the arts are so well documented that they do not need listing but rather interpretation. In the particular case of the economy of literature, Ruskin considered carefully educational institutions as touchstones discovering young talent; and the publisher’s dilemma that there is a modern plague of cheap, profitable literature, but that the best literature does not pay. In some ways, the famous *Fors Clavigera* experiment (in which Ruskin actually instituted somewhat original means of publication, pricing, and distribution) followed logically from *The Political Economy of Art*. Ruskin argued, however, that the price (or exchange value) of books ought not to be so low as to diminish their (use) value in the eyes of the public. Such an argument, defending implicitly the high selling price of his own *Fors Clavigera*, is a strange and important admission that the exchange-value of a book may well affect its use-value (see esp. *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 38, Feb. 1874, Paragraph 13; and Letter 6, June 1871, Paragraphs 1ff.).

nonsocialist economy. Although his understanding of society and economics was (as Proust argues) distinctively aesthetic, Ruskin finally argues that great art is impossible without economic reforms. Ruskin’s famous desire for reforms, then, does not arise only from moral indignation at the horrid conditions of the working class, but also from the fear that a society producing such conditions could never produce great art. In *Sesame and Lilies* Ruskin fears that in Victorian England even “reading well” is impossible. For Ruskin the desperate conclusion from this state of affairs is that literature cannot have an educative value in Victorian England, in which good, self-evaluating literature cannot be produced and the works of past masters cannot be read properly. Such a conclusion may have pleased Ruskin, who was notoriously dissatisfied with his own literary production. But the supposed impossibility of good and therefore valuable art in Victorian England drove him to ever more bitter invective against his society and its false self-assuredness.

The most famous example of Ruskin’s invective is his lecture “Traffic,” delivered in Bradford and directed to leaders of England’s capitalist class, who had invited him to advise them on how to build a beautiful building to house their Exchange. They wanted architectural, not moral advice. Ruskin, however, argues from the principle that good taste in architecture is (like all aesthetic taste) “not only a part and an index of morality; it is the only morality” (XVIII, 134). Beauty, therefore, must be moral truth. And good buildings cannot be had simply by asking the advice of an expert in architecture, but only by following the advice of an expert in morality and truth. Ruskin, pretending for rhetorical reasons to be an expert in both architecture and economic morality, claims no interest in the construction of the Bradford Exchange, which must be as ugly as capitalism is immoral. He does “not care about this Exchange of [theirs]” (XVIII, 433). He focuses his attention instead on the conceivable Exchanges of more moral societies.

One such society, argues Ruskin, was that of the Gothic Christians, in which there could have existed an aesthetic theory for the construction of beautiful Exchanges (XVIII, 448). Ruskin suggests that the decorations for his proposed medieval Exchange would represent the morally admirable economic exchanges which took place in the medieval era: “On his houses and temples alike, the Christian put carvings of angels conquering devils; or of hero-martyrs exchanging this world for another” (XVIII, 449). Only by its admirable moral *heroism* does Ruskin judge the worthiness of an action—such as exchanging—to give rise to imitation in the form of architectural decoration.22 The practice of supplying poor people with food (e.g., Jesus’ miracle of loaves and fishes) is such an exchange. Because the audience is not interested in this “good” kind of exchange, however, Ruskin concludes

22In “Traffic,” the focus on decoration is a particularly effective (if somewhat dangerous) rhetorical device with which to satirize capitalism because it translates so easily into the medium of literature. Unlike some twentieth-century theorists of architecture (e.g., Le Corbusier), Ruskin considered decoration to be an important part of a building.
that he is unable to "carve [as decoration for the Bradford Exchange] something worth looking at" (XVIII, 450-51). Ruskin argues that Christian or beautiful subjects are "inappropriate to the manner of exchange" to be represented by the decorations for the un-Christian Bradford Exchange, the actions of which are more insidious and "cunning than any of Tetzel's trading." He deduces the worthless decorations most appropriate to the Bradford Exchange, and makes an ironic suggestion that "in the innermost chambers of [the Exchange] there might be a statue of Britannia of the Market," his detailed and bitter description of which is an indictment of modern economic exchange itself (XVIII, 450).

The lecture "Traffic" is rhetorically powerful because Ruskin argues for the identity of architectural Exchange and monetary exchange, and insists that the first cannot be good unless the second is also good. He conflates Exchange (as work of art) and exchange (as economic organization) and opposes one good to two bad societies. To the morality and art of Bradford capitalism Ruskin opposes first those of the Gothic Christians and then those of the ancient Greeks. He opposes to the thought of Victorian capitalism the _Republic_ and _Laws_ of Plato, who was one of the greatest enemies of "this idol of yours," and who taught men "to bear lightly the burden of gold." Ruskin is deceived (or wishes to deceive others) in judging the whole of Greek society by the art and philosophical writings which it produced. The philosopher-king, so necessary to the Platonic "economy," exists only at the extreme margins of possibility in Greek society. Plato himself was able to produce great writing _within_, and even define his philosophy _against_, the conventions of classical Athens, just as Ruskin (a disciple of Plato and the prophets) lectures to an assembly with which he believes he is in some disagreement. The writing of "Traffic," and even the possible construction of the temple to "Britannia of the Market," are proof that "good" critical art _is_ possible in "bad" society. Not all thinkers in Victorian England came to Ruskin's conclusion about the ineffectiveness or impossibility of great art in the society in which they lived.

In his lecture "Ruskin's Politics," George Bernard Shaw compares the extraordinary power of the invective of Ruskin with that of Marx. Shaw argues perversely that Ruskin's power of invective is the greater because unlike Marx, he was a "Tory-Socialist" in his attitude to society:

In "The Relation of Art to Use," for example, he argues that "the entire vitality of art depends upon its being either full of truth, or full of use" and consequently, that good art must have "one of these main objects—either to state a true thing, or to adorn a serviceable one" (XX, 95-96). If, as Ruskin feared, art cannot itself be true and there is nothing serviceable to decorate or adorn, then there can be no good art. It has been argued by some modern thinkers that Ruskin's concentration on architectural decoration (to the exclusion of consideration of structure, which may also be truthful or useful) is symptomatic of his theory of the relation between worker and product, and consequently of a whole political outlook.
When you read [the] invectives of Marx and Cobbett, and read Ruskin's invectives afterwards, somehow or other you feel that Ruskin beats them hollow. Perhaps the reason was that they hated their enemy so thoroughly. Ruskin does it without hatred, and therefore he does it with a magnificent thoroughness. You may say that his strength in invective is as the strength of ten thousand because his heart is pure. And the only consequence of his denunciation of society was that people said, "Well, he can't possibly be talking about us, the respectable people"; and so they did not take any notice.23

We have already seen, however, that Ruskin's heart was anything but "pure." His falsification of the economic value of art and the identity of taste and morality are, as Proust knew, signs of a certain intellectual evasiveness which he employs in that "noble" lie which is his defense of art. The power of Ruskin's invective derives from these falsifications. A biographer might even argue that Ruskin was so bitter because he believed that his own "art-talent" had been wasted in a bad society in which it could not flourish.

Marx had a different understanding of the roles of art and intellectual discourse in society, and of the solution to the ills of society itself. Marx, like Ruskin, attacked capitalism on the level of abstract political economy, but his principal goal was to understand not artistic reproduction in particular, but economic production in general. In "Traffic," as we have seen, Ruskin is strangely satisfied with his too-much protesting opposition of the Victorian "Goddess of Getting-On" to the Greek "Goddess of Wisdom," comparing the mythology of the heroic Greeks with that of his own age. In an essay (written in London in 1857 when Ruskin was delivering his lectures on The Political Economy of Art in Manchester) Marx made a similar comparison. For him the Crédit mobilier is the symbol of modern economic exchange as Printing House Square is the symbol of modern linguistic exchange:

We know that Greek mythology is not only the arsenal of Greek art, but also its basis. Is the conception of nature and of social relations which underlies Greek imagination and therefore Greek [art] possible when there are self-acting mules, railways, locomotives and electric telegraphs? What is . . . Hermes compared with the Crédit mobilier? All mythology subdues, controls and fashions the forces of nature in the imagination and through imagination; it disappears therefore when real control over these forces is established. What becomes of Fama side by side with Printing House Square?24

This passage is both elegy for the mythology of Greece and eulogy of the capitalist technology of France and England. Hermes—whether thief or messenger of the gods—is impossible in the Prometheus age of the

23Bernard Shaw’s Nondramatic Criticism, ed. S. Weintraub (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1972), 193; Shaw discusses “Tory-Socialism” (201–02).
Crédit mobilier. Ancient art (the technological and material basis of which we have transcended) can still give us "aesthetic pleasure" and in certain respects can be regarded as "a standard and unattainable ideal." Marx explains this power of Greek art not by arguing (as does the menteur Ruskin) that it contains some sort of golden eternal truths, but rather by arguing that "the charm [which Greek] art has for us . . . is a consequence of [the immature stage of society in which it originated], and is inseparably linked with the fact that the immature social conditions which gave rise, and which alone could give rise, to this art cannot recur." Artistic production, perhaps, is the superstructure which rises from the substructure (that is material production) to which, however, artistic production does not correspond mimetically or "equally," but rather dialectically. Marx does not need to argue that Hermes was somehow better than the Crédit mobilier, or that the Greek "God of Wisdom" was somehow better than the Victorian "Goddess of Getting-on." Indeed, Marx sometimes admits to a grudging admiration of the heroic accomplishments of Promethean capitalism. The "Tory-Socialist" Ruskin, on the other hand, feared that if capitalist exchange were heroic, then good decoration would be conceivable for the Bradford Exchange. "There might indeed, on some theories, be a conceivably good architecture for Exchanges—that is to say if there were any heroism in the fact or deed of exchange, which might be typically carved on the outside of your building" (XVIII, 448; italics mine). But Ruskin pretends that there is nothing serviceable or heroic about capitalism, just as he pretends that Greek society was somehow "good." Such pretence, of course, differs from the curious recognition of capitalist serviceability and heroism in the writings of Shaw, and also from the Marxist recognition of the heroism of the working-class and of capitalist technology.

This respect for capitalism enabled Marx to offer his scathing critique of it. And his theory of a dialectical relationship between aesthetic taste and economic morality enabled him to understand how a work of art could be truly of a period and also in opposition to that period. It was unnecessary for Marx, as it was necessary for Ruskin, to aestheticize politics by arguing that the societies which give rise to great artists must be good societies. Because of this understanding, perhaps, Marx did not feel the debilitating desperation which haunted Ruskin.

The great danger to literature is not the argument that literature subverts citizens by teaching them falsehoods. The great danger is the argument, implicit or explicit, that literature has no real value or potential to effect either good or evil, that it has no real role in human affairs and ought not to be taken seriously. Although the student and

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27Ibid.
lover of literature may find his most theoretically exciting enemy in the arguments of those attackers of literature who (like Plato) take it seriously, he finds his most threatening and politically insidious enemy in the ignorance of those who do not bother to consider at all the economic and political significance of literature. They sift the relics of their favorite literary saints to a god whom they abstract from the political and economic world. Assuming the social value of literature, they are unable or unwilling to define precisely the exact nature of that value, and trust hopefully that such matters do not matter. Such enemies to the serious consideration of literature would shield it from that significant and interesting analysis to which John Ruskin attempted to subject it in his theoretical and practical writings.

Ruskin's attempt to write an "economy of literature" (corresponding to his economies of the other arts) was not totally successful. His theoretical writings are mirror reflections, albeit unwilling, of capitalist ideology transferred from the realm of economics to the realm of art; they do not transcend completely the capitalist ideology from which they clearly arise and against which they constantly inveigh with rhetorical ammunition. Ruskin protests against the abstract theories of classical political economy and only pretends to substitute for its concept of economic value a new understanding of Life. Ruskin himself knew the errors and dangerous implications of some of his theories proposed in the economic defense of literature. We have seen some of his consciously unsuccessful attempts to treat literature and wisdom as exchange- and commodity-value, and to identify aesthetic taste and economic morality. Ruskin felt the wrongness of these theories. Most interesting, he felt a certain necessity to continue in that wrongness in order to defend what he believed to be the proper place of art in national economy. His pose of certainty (what Proust calls an "attitude mensongère") was like the very capitalist self-assuredness which he mocked sarcastically throughout his lectures. Both capitalist and his own ideological defenses are too-much-protesting assertions without rigorous argument. Fortified with such assertions, however, Ruskin suggested and supervised many excellent reforms in the arts, some of which actually surpass in vision many of his theoretical writings.

Ruskin's economy of literature is much more than a self-contradicting attempt to apply a special variation of classical political economy to the economy of art. To the extent that Ruskin did analyze his own thinking, he found it insufficient. He recognized the hidden capitalist ideology of his theory of literary value, and the politically dangerous implications of his theory of the identity of taste and morality. That he recognized and criticized implicitly his own theoretical mensonges is a great example and contribution to the sociology of literature. That he persevered in these mensonges is the sign not of his intellectual dishonesty, but of his tremendous desire to understand and interpret the relation between art and economics in his own time.

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