

THE TEMENOS ACADEMY

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Source: Temenos Academy Review 11 (2008)

pp. 163-177

Published by The Temenos Academy

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John Ruskin as a Victorian Goethe*

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In his essay on John Ruskin, Marcel Proust wrote that in visiting the Ruskin Museum one gets the impression of a Goethean brilliance: ‘Adjoining each other are photographs of paintings by masters and collections of minerals, as in Goethe’s house. Like the Ruskin Museum, the work of Ruskin is universal. He sought the truth, and found beauty even in chronological tables and social laws. But logicians [have] defined art in a way that excludes mineralogy as well as political economy.’¹ And Ruskin is also overlooked as a surveyor of rhythmic forms and perennial archetypes in all manifestations of the world. But it is lethal to discuss Ruskin by lopping off all but one of his activities. He was one of those people, ever harder to come by, who refuse to restrict themselves to one specialty, surrendering themselves to the corporate delirium that oppresses modern people, bound to a division of intellectual work that is an aspect of the linguistic confusion of Babel. The art critic won’t dare to look at the stones that nevertheless speak like the pigments of a painting, the metaphysician doesn’t dare descend to the art gallery to enlighten the judgement of those who contemplate works of art, or to the marketplace to judge the fairness of contracts. Ruskin challenged the taboo of specialties, of exclusive skill. He understood that the universal conditions of what is conceivable, the supreme intellectual principles, permit one to contemplate, act, and judge, and that whoever knows them has the right to bring order into the chaos in individual disciplines. A troublesome man, therefore—in fact, as Proust noted, a prophet. The eradication of his irksome testimony has been attempted in two ways. First of all he is hit with an epithet that is derogatory but indefinable, vague, so that

* This is a translation of Zolla’s essay ‘John Ruskin come Goethe vittoriano’, first published in 1971 and reprinted in the collection *Conoscenza religiosa: Scritti, 1969–1983*, ed. and intro. by Grazia Marchianò (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006), pp. 27–39. The editors are grateful to Signora Marchianò, and to the publishers, for permission to print this translation. All notes are the translator’s unless otherwise stated.

1. From the preface to Proust’s translation of *The Bible of Amiens*; cited here from Marcel Proust, *On Reading Ruskin*, translated and edited by Jean Autret, William Burford, and Phillip J. Wolfe (New Haven and London, 1987), p. 29.

anyone may use it to vent personal aversion: 'aesthete'. A cheap trick, shameful enough, but certain to have an effect, because we can be sure that those who hear such a terse pronouncement won't dare to inquire further into its precise meaning. What does 'aesthete' really mean? A person who loves the beautiful, preferring to surround his or her existence with harmony rather than with a disorderly muddle? And what could be wrong with such a pleasant predisposition? Or could it mean that the aesthete is depraved in loving a false image of beauty, and is a lover therefore of bad camouflage? And if so, why not openly call him a man with warped taste? It is clear that accusations of aestheticism mask the inability to formulate precise criteria, an escape into unsubstantiated invective, and that they are no more worthy of attention than the hysterical bleat of which they are a variant.

Another, subtler way of undermining Ruskin's dignity is common nowadays: poking around in his private life, revealing things that seem reprehensible, and immediately limiting all memory of him to a description of pitiable oddities. His prophetic, majestic voice is raised; but ears corrupted by gossip will be reduced to believing they perceive a strident tone, and merciless biographers will have achieved their effect. And yet the one who is truly degraded is he who thinks that the majesty of the prophet is thus diminished. At bottom, when we get lost in dragging out demeaning or sad episodes from a life, instead of paying attention to the work that was born from it, we deserve the verdict of that Russian phrase: 'He is such a dimwit that when a finger points something out to him he only looks at the finger.'

RUSKIN AS PURITAN

Ruskin was born in London in 1819. He was a student at Oxford. He studied painting and was devoted above all to Turner. After the volumes on modern painters, he revealed the systematic force of his thought in 1849 with *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

It was Puritan thought brought back to life, with a capacity for exultation, rigour, and fury like that of the English religious masters of the seventeenth century. But, at a remove of two centuries, the Puritan had learned a lesson denied to his forebears: that from genuine faith must arise a stately art.

He starts with a premise: 'The sensibility and conscience of a man

are enough, provided they are assisted by Revelation, to lead him to the discovery of what is right.² In particular, architecture should have immutable, universal principles that cannot be negated without destroying the art itself. Every action, even the slightest, can be elevated to the utmost dignity if it is carried out with the intention of pleasing God. Ruskin quotes the verses of one of his favorite poets, the mystic George Herbert, who lived in the seventeenth century (one keeps coming back to that century):

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgerie divine:
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and th' action fine.
(‘The Elixir’)³

Everything must be referred to God: ‘We treat God with irreverence by banishing Him from our thoughts, not by referring to His will on slight occasions.’⁴

Architecture therefore will be defined as ‘the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man, for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure’.⁵

To illuminate architecture, seven lamps must shine: the lamps of sacrifice, of truth, of power, of beauty, of life, of memory, of obedience. And Ruskin proceeds in the course of the work to light these seven illuminating fires, delivering a sermon in the manner of the great preachers of the seventeenth century.

THE SEVEN LAMPS

The first lamp is perhaps the most important: the light of the spirit of sacrifice must illuminate all architecture. It makes us offer precious things so that we may immolate them, not because they are useful or necessary: ‘It is a spirit, for instance, which of two marbles, equally

2. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 2nd edn (London, 1855), pp. 1–2.

3. From *The Temple* (1633). Zolla quotes his Italian translation of these verses.

4. *Seven Lamps*, p. 5.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

beautiful, applicable and durable, would choose the more costly, because it was so.⁶

But is it possible to honour God through such sacrifices? Ruskin's answer refers to Revelation: the immaculate, precious offerings in Leviticus. Further:

If in the manner of performing any rite at any time, circumstances can be traced which we are either told or may legitimately conclude, *pleased* God at that time, those same circumstances will please Him at all times, in the performance of all rites or offices to which they may be attached in like manner; unless it has been afterwards revealed that, for some special purpose, it is now His will that such circumstances should be withdrawn. And this argument will have all the more force if it can be shown that such conditions were not essential to the completeness of the rite in its human uses and bearings, and only were added to it as being in *themselves* pleasing to God.⁷

If therefore the Tabernacle in the desert had to be made of special materials, in order to offer a gratuitous sacrifice to God, the buildings of all times must be abundantly adorned. It is not possible to overdo beautification, since it is a sacrifice to which one cannot impose limits.

The second lamp is truth, that is, the opposite of fraud, the deception whereby the façade hides the structure or the materials, or where much of the decoration is not crafted by hand.

For, as I advocated the expression of the Spirit of Sacrifice in the acts and pleasures of men, not as if thereby those acts could further the cause of religion, but because most assuredly they might therein be

6. The quotation in its original context reads as follows: 'Now, first, to define this Lamp, or Spirit, of Sacrifice, clearly. I have said that it prompts us to the offering of precious things, merely because they are precious, not because they are useful or necessary. It is a spirit, for instance, which of two marbles, equally beautiful, applicable and durable, would choose the more costly, because it was so, and of two kinds of decoration, equally effective, would choose the more elaborate because it was so, in order that it might in the same compass present more cost and more thought. It is therefore most unreasoning and enthusiastic, and perhaps less negatively defined, as the opposite of the prevalent feeling of modern times, which desires to produce the largest results at the least cost' (p. 9).

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

infinitely ennobled themselves, so I would have the Spirit or Lamp of Truth clear in the hearts of our artists and handicraftsmen, not as if the truthful practice of handicrafts could far advance the cause of truth, but because I would fain see the handicrafts themselves urged by the spurs of chivalry: and it is, indeed, marvellous to see what power and universality there are in this single principle, and how in the consulting or forgetting of it lies half the dignity or decline of every art and act of man.⁸

From this principle of truth derives the prohibition on using iron.

The laws of architectural proportion are founded in fact on traditional materials, and on using metals only within age-old limits. The freedom to infringe the static norms that ought to have been observed when making use of traditional materials is a trap, because it leads to the absence of every norm and to the disappearance of architecture as such. Ruskin resolutely affirms and defends this ‘prejudice’. Does that word sound like a condemnation? He uses it in its seventeenth-century sense, when *prejudice* in English meant prudence. And he adds:

I would remind the architect who thinks that I am unnecessarily and narrowly limiting his resources or his art, that the highest greatness and the highest wisdom are shown, the first by a noble submission to, the second by a thoughtful providence for, certain voluntarily admitted restraints.⁹

There is a moment in the history of European art when limits are renounced, when, in the sacrilegious act par excellence, the boundary markers sacred to the god Terminus are toppled. This has the same effect as any abuse of power. At first the one who violates the proscription on drinking wine is euphoric, seemingly stronger, but he ends up paying interest on that credit. Thus does art which denies its limits start down the slippery slope that can lead only to its extinction. Thus the last high point of European art, the Gothic, had to succumb as a result of having violated its own truth and limits.

It was not because its time was come; it was not because it was scorned by the classical Romanist, or dreaded by the faithful

8. Ibid., pp. 29–30. 9. Ibid., pp. 39–40.

Protestant. That scorn and that fear it might have survived, and lived; it would have stood forth in stern comparison with the enervated sensuality of the Renaissance; it would have risen in renewed and purified honour, and with a new soul, from the ashes into which it sank, giving up its glory, as it had received it, for the honour of God—but its own truth was gone, and it sank for ever. There was no wisdom nor strength left in it, to raise it from the dust; and the error of zeal, and the softness of luxury, smote it down and dissolved it away. It is good for us to remember this, as we tread upon the bare ground of its foundations, and stumble over its scattered stones. Those rent skeletons of pierced wall, through which our sea-winds moan and murmur, strewing them joint by joint, and bone by bone, along the bleak promontories on which the Pharos lights came once from houses of prayer—those grey arches and quiet aisles under which the sheep of our valleys feed and rest on the turf that has buried their altars—those shapeless heaps, that are not of the Earth, which lift our fields into strange and sudden banks of flowers, and stay our mountain streams with stones that are not their own, have other thoughts to ask from us than those of mourning for the rage that despoiled, or the fear that forsook them. 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.¹⁰

Ruskin therefore associated the *flamboyant* Gothic with the beginning of the decline of Christian art. Thereafter, an art came into being that could only decline, little by little, lacking the revealed principles.

The third lamp is power, or the sense of authority derived from clearly defined mass and volume and crisp chiaroscuro. The fourth is beauty, or ornament, which must ‘consist of such studious arrangements of form as are imitative or suggestive of those which are commonest among natural existences, that being of course the noblest ornament which represents the highest orders of existence.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 61–2.

Imitated flowers are nobler than imitated stones; imitated animals, than flowers; imitated human form, of all animal forms the noblest.¹¹ Fifth is the lamp of life, by means of which the imprint of living rhythm must impress itself on every object. This means that reproductions should be renounced: stamped metals, artificial stones, the imitations in bronze or wood that 'will not make one of us happier or wiser . . . They will only make us shallower in our understandings, colder in our hearts, and feebler in our wits. And most justly. For we are not sent into this world to do any thing into which we cannot put our hearts.'¹² Sixth is the lamp of memory. Ruskin explains what this spirit of memory might be, remembering one of the occasions when he had contemplated the mountains in Switzerland:¹³ nothing of what attracted him would have remained intact if that scene had been set in a continent that had no history. Architecture ought to congeal this aura of places, this halo of reminiscence, this exquisitely delicate patina of time.

Only one who has dishonoured the hearth will dare to violate its aura, only one who has betrayed the ancestors will dare to expunge their traces. To destroy monuments of the past is a crime because they are not ours to destroy. The seventh lamp of architecture is obedience, thanks to which political life has stability, life has joy, faith is accepted, and creation is continued—obedience, and not liberty, despite the various odes to liberty of the century of Shelley and Byron. Despite the poem of Coleridge that exalts the clouds wandering free in the free heavens,¹⁴ Ruskin remembers the chaste words of Herbert that advocate obedience. Here is the memorable passage:

If by liberty you mean chastisement of the passions, discipline of the intellect, subjection of the will; if you mean the fear of inflicting, the shame of committing a wrong; if you mean respect for all who are in authority, and consideration for all who are in dependence . . . watchfulness over all thoughts, temperance in all pleasures . . . why do you name this by the same word by which the luxurious mean

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 106–7. 12. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

13. This is a slight slip on Zolla's part: Ruskin was in fact describing an experience in the Jura in France.

14. Ruskin here refers to Coleridge's 'Ode to France': 'Ye Clouds! that far above me float and pause,/Whose pathless march no mortal may control' (*quoted ibid.*, p. 204).

license, and the reckless mean change; by which the rogue means rapine, and the fool, equality; by which the proud mean anarchy, and the malignant mean violence?¹⁵

Heaven help him who searches for a new style: it takes one style, whatever it may be, as it takes one legal code, because only he who knows how to obey has the right to change—but he will be the very one who will not change intentionally. A resolute style will free the artist from the burden of choice, source of much of the evil that besets our existence.

THE IMITATION OF THE IMPONDERABLE

Ruskin provided the antidotes to all the sophisms that have guaranteed the destruction of Western art. He had to come up with others in his next great work, *The Stones of Venice*. The slightly pagan Christian faith of the Venetians is what nourishes the art of that city; the beauty of stone will decline, in the centuries of decadence, when the Venetian eye becomes incapable of discerning the aura of objects, the transparency of supernatural grace.

Ruskin insists on the supremacy of medieval art, precisely because it was a perfect imitation of nature. His readers must have been stunned, since it seemed that a faithful imitation of reality became prevalent only with the Renaissance. ‘No,’ says Ruskin,

not one whit; for the most part [the Renaissance imitated nature] less faithfully. Indeed, the outside of nature is more truly drawn; the material commonplace, which can be systematized, catalogued, and taught to all pains-taking mankind,—forms of ribs and scapulae, of eyebrows and lips, and curls of hair. Whatever can be measured and handled, dissected and demonstrated,—in a word, whatever is of the body only,—that the schools of knowledge do resolutely and courageously possess themselves of, and portray. But whatever is immeasurable, intangible, indivisible, and of the spirit, that the schools of knowledge do as certainly lose, and blot out of their sight, that is to say, all that is worth art’s possessing or recording at all; for whatever can be arrested, measured, and systematized, we can con-

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 184.

template as much as we will in nature herself. But what we want art to do for us is to stay what is fleeting, and to enlighten what is incomprehensible, to incorporate the things that have no measure, and immortalize the things that have no duration . . . [that which has] in it that spirit and power which man may witness, but not weigh; conceive, but not comprehend; love, but not limit; and imagine, but not define.¹⁶

These imponderables are present in the ancients, up to Orcagna and Pisano, but disappear when the meticulous replicators of the real intervene.

Thus Ruskin taught us to scorn all slavish imitation of matter as much as the abstraction from reality that would become so pervasive in the century after his.

FORMS AND EVOLUTION

But Ruskin had the merit of destroying the myth upon which the vast construction of the modern world was based: the theory of evolution. It is the keystone of Alcina's castle, where everyone appears hopelessly enclosed, even today, just as the contemporaries of Ruskin were imprisoned there.¹⁷

The source of art is the same as that of religion: wonder, by which finite man feels himself before an infinity, and rejoices as much in his own ignorance as in knowledge, as in new ignorance. This sense of wonder is exactly what is undermined by evolutionism.

In his late work *The Eagle's Nest* (1872), Ruskin attacks Darwin in the name of the Goethean concept of nature as an unfolding of forms that shape matter but do not depend on it, originating from non-material archetypes.

Some animals have to dig with their noses, some to build with their tails, some to spin with their stomachs: their dexterities are usually few—their awkwardnesses numberless;—a lion is continually puzzled

16. Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. 3 (New York, 1889), pp. 50–52.

17. Zolla here alludes to Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, canto 6. The beautiful Alcina enslaves knights in her castle, as Circe and Calypso had both sought to seduce Odysseus.

how to hold a bone; and an eagle can scarcely pull the meat off one, without upsetting himself.

Respecting the origin of these variously awkward, imperfectly, or grotesquely developed phases of form and power, you need not at present inquire: in all probability the race of man is appointed to live in wonder, and in acknowledgment of ignorance; but if ever he is to know any of the secrets of his own or of brutal existence, it will assuredly be through discipline of virtue, not through inquisitiveness of science . . . [I have never] heard yet one logical argument in [Darwinism's] favour, and I have heard, and read many, that were beneath contempt. For instance, by the time you have copie[d] one or two of your exercises on the feather of the halcyon, you will be more interested in the construction and disposition of plume-filaments than heretofore; and you may, perhaps, refer, in the hope of help, to Mr. Darwin's account of the peacock's feather. I went to it myself hoping to learn some of the existing laws of life which regulate the local disposition of the colour. But none of these appear to be known; and I am informed only that peacocks have grown to be peacocks out of brown pheasants, because the young feminine brown pheasants like fine feathers. Whereupon I say to myself, 'Then either there was a distinct species of brown pheasants originally born with a taste for fine feathers; and therefore with remarkable eyes in their heads,—which would be a much more wonderful distinction of species than being born with remarkable eyes in their tails,—or else all pheasants would have been peacocks by this time!' And I trouble myself no more about the Darwinian theory.¹⁸

CLARITY AND ANXIETY

The certainties and firm canons that Ruskin offers were mastered and maintained by him at the price of his own health. Towards the end of his life he fell into frequent states of confusion, as if he could not bear the weight of a hostile world that was spreading about him—even within him, as doubt and hesitation. Above all he was disturbed by religious doubt. The daring Puritan certainty of *Seven Lamps* had cracked

18. Ruskin, *The Eagle's Nest: Ten Lectures on the Relation of Natural Science to Art, Given Before the University of Oxford in Lent Term, 1872* (Sunnyside, Orpington, Kent, 1880), pp. 177–9.

with contemplation of the sensual art of a Titian or a Veronese. So also with other reflections, on the insufficiency of faith for salvation. The confidant of these worries was an American friend, who preserved the memorable letters addressed to him: Charles Eliot Norton.

Here is a passage from August 1861:

but it is to me so fearful a discovery to find how God has allowed all who have variously sought him in the most earnest way, to be blinded—how Puritan—monk—Brahmin—churchman—Turk—are all merely names for different madnesses and ignorances; how nothing prevails finally but a steady, worldly-wise labour—comfortable—resolute—fearless—full of animal life—affectionate—compassionate.¹⁹

The first shock had been in 1858 in Turin. He had written to him with a slightly demonic enthusiasm, in an already Nietzschean tone:

[I went] to *Turin*, where I studied Paul Veronese in the morning and went to the opera at night for six weeks! And I've found out a good deal—more than I can put in a letter—in that six weeks, the main thing in the way of discovery being that, positively, to be a first-rate painter—you *mustn't* be pious; but rather a little wicked, and entirely a man of the world.²⁰

He had turned up at a sermon in a Waldensian temple, where the preacher inveighed against the wickedness of Turin; from there he had gone to the Sabauda Gallery, where he saw Veronese's Solomon and the Queen of Sheba shining in the soft afternoon light. His Puritan integrity had a revelation of gentle, energetic, inspiring wickedness. He had to atone for these prospects, however, with a series of physical ailments. Only toward the end of his life did he go about regaining his lost faith, by means of very odd experiences—encounters with those marked by the stigmata, visions of a dead friend.

19. Ruskin, *Letters of John Ruskin to Charles Eliot Norton*, vol. 1 (Boston, 1904), p. 118.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

POLITICAL RUSKIN

Perhaps it was an obscuring of faith that pushed Ruskin into an excessive civic and political activity: the restoration of the medieval corporations, including the founding of the Guild of Saint George in 1874, a community where the talents that gave birth to the Romanesque and the Gothic were supposed to have blossomed once again. All of this great practical activity of poor Ruskin left a road behind, in whose construction even young Oscar Wilde had taken part.

It is not this short-lived part of his work that demands our attention so much as his critique of political economics itself. He was not the only one to do this: one thinks immediately of Marx. But the convergence of their antipathies originated at points of departure and in principles that are diametrically opposed. For Marx, the relationships of production are the basis of every phenomenon, the hidden watermark of every event; for Ruskin, matter is always imprinted by forms that are independent of it, evil is precisely always a lack of form, or is a malevolent form. Marx unhinges the theories of economists by means of an analysis of merchandise as fetish, Ruskin by means of Puritan sermons that repeat the same critical procedure with which he had attacked the idea of a purely materialist imitation of nature. The form exists for every thing; it is its essence and cannot be measured; it is not tangible, and is lost when the thing is reproduced without soul, without entelechy. The same holds true for economic science, which believes it can analyse and reproduce economic relations apart from social relations. In 1862 the great invective against political economics, *Unto This Last*, was published. What use is political economics if it cannot even offer a criterion for resolving a common conflict in a trade union? In fact:

The varieties of circumstances which influence these reciprocal interests are so endless, that all endeavour to deduce rules of action from balance of expediency is in vain . . . For no human actions ever were intended by the Maker of men to be guided by balances of expediency, but by balances of justice. He has therefore rendered all endeavours to determine expediency futile for evermore. No man ever knew, or can know, what will be the ultimate result to himself, or to others, of any given line of conduct. But every man may know, and most of us do know, what is a just and unjust act . . . I have said

balances of justice, meaning, in the term justice, to include affection,—such affection as one man *owes* to another . . . Observe, I am here considering the affections wholly as a motive power; not at all as things in themselves desirable or noble, or in any other way abstractedly good. I look at them simply as an anomalous force, rendering every one of the ordinary political economist's calculations nugatory . . . [There is a natural economy, according to which work should be paid according to an inviolable standard, leaving the bad workman unemployed.]²¹ The natural and right system respecting all labour is, that it should be paid at a fixed rate, but the good workman employed, and the bad workman unemployed. The false, unnatural, and destructive system is when the bad workman is allowed to offer his work at half-price, and either take the place of the good, or force him by his competition to work for an inadequate sum.²²

Salaries should therefore be equal and workers all employed, whatever the demands of the market. Economic wealth, since it is a relative concept, is simply the art of keeping one's neighbour poor. Life is the true wealth, such as being able to love and rejoice and admire; that country is wealthy indeed that nourishes the maximum number of noble and happy beings, and the height of enjoyment does not depend on the quantity of things savoured but on the liveliness and patience of the palate.

What effect could such statements have in their day? They must have seemed a medieval delirium, and in fact, on 2 October 1860, the *Manchester Examiner and Times* wrote of Ruskin: 'If we do not crush him his wild words will touch the springs of action in some hearts and before we are aware, a moral floodgate may fly open and drown us all.'

The floodgate did not open, and a substantial number of Ruskin's ideas have become almost common property. And that very criticism of political economics in itself—is that not echoed in our own day? If we put aside the old books of Ruskin and read certain pages of a contemporary economist such as Walter Adams, do we not come across the same scepticism that Ruskin expressed towards that science, the

21. The preceding sentence was misquoted by Zolla. It is not in Ruskin's original text, but I have translated this sentence (and only this one) from Zolla's paraphrase.

22. Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies—Unto This Last—The Queen of the Air—The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (Boston, n.d.), pp. 152, 154, 157–8.

same notoriety of its being a discipline incapable of resolving the problems that devastate society?

CRITICISM OF ECONOMICS AND OF AESTHETICS

Political economics and aesthetics are, Croce used to teach, the two modern sciences par excellence. They are the two which Ruskin intended to demolish, and he pointed out the disaster that both attempted to justify with their false, materialistic rigour: the loss of the forms that had sustained civil life and the arts. Economics can make sense only in relation to something that transcends it, and aesthetics can be viable only in relation to something that is above it. Profit in the long run shows itself inept even in doing its own business, and taste in the long run does not even know how to tell the beautiful from the ugly. Already in his early book on modern painters, Ruskin had scornfully pointed out the haughtiness of mere taste:

Taste, Goût, Gusto,—in all languages, indicates the baseness of it, for it implies that art gives only a kind of pleasure analogous to that derived from eating by the palate. Modern education, not in art only, but in all other things referable to the same standard, has invariably given taste in this bad sense; it has given fastidiousness of choice without judgment, superciliousness of manner without dignity, refinement of habit without purity, grace of expression without sincerity, and desire of loveliness without love.²³

Above and beyond art is a revelation of the divine, which is the only thing that can save art from the futility of 'good taste'. This heartening conclusion was paid for by Ruskin with mortal agony.

In 'Histrion', Pound wrote:

No man hath dared to write this thing as yet,
 And yet I know, how that the souls of all men great
 At times pass athrough us,
 And we are melted into them, and are not
 Save reflexions of their souls.

23. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3 (London, 1906), p. 63.

Among all those whom the spirit of Ruskin affected stands out that future pupil of Gurdjieff, Orage, who in *The New Age* (1911)²⁴ with Ruskinian disdain again denounces a naturalistic art deluded that it can resolve the psyche into material facts thanks to that autopsy that is psychological analysis, and decreed again that the ineffable soul is the subject, predicate, and object of art.

The dramatist Euripides managed to substitute an idea for the soul; it was all downhill from there, until art was fed on morals or politics. The aesthetic of Orage goes back to that which transcends aesthetics, to the ritual that feeds the psyche and is the archetype of every art, just as his economics goes back to that which transcends profit. Already A. J. Penty in *The Restoration of the Guild System* (1906) had reasserted praise for the guilds, guardian of the fair price. With S. G. Hobson, Orage proposed that the state should acquire the industries in order to entrust them to the guilds, composed of all those who produce certain goods in a given territory, according to an agreement that demanded quality of goods, fair prices, support of all members, election of directors. The motto of this dream was taken, Ruskin-style, from Ecclesiasticus (38:31): 'All these rely upon their hands,/ and each is skilful in his own work.'²⁵

But how could such a legal device have functioned, if technological evolution was bound to continue gathering speed, prompting ever different investments, forcing guilds into unending metamorphosis, to which their system could not respond, designed as it was for a much calmer world?

Orage finally resigned himself to the extinction of guild socialism, saying that such a seed could have grown only in a society permeated by religion, whereas 'religion for the so-called modern mind is only the last instead of the first resort against despair'. Only by discovering the Aspiration that is the Origin can one have a science of minor aspirations.

The dream of Ruskin is a ghost that will stir again who knows how many times in this aeon; and, now and then, someone will again wander its labyrinths.

Translated by Andrew Frisardi

24. [Author's note:] Cf. W. Martin, *The New Age Under Orage* (Manchester, 1967).

25. Revised Standard Version.