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JOHN RUSKIN'S *FORS CLAVIGERA*: THE HERO AS EDUCATOR

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHERLOR OF ARTS

BY

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## Library Prize Reflective Essay

I have always been passionate about Victorian literature, especially after taking Professor Joseph Bristow's English 164B class: "Beauty, Justice, and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century" in my second year at UCLA. Since then I knew I wanted to delve even deeper into the social problems and consequent reforms of the British nineteenth century that still inform and influence social change on both sides of the Atlantic today. I thus embarked on my Departmental Senior Honors Thesis in the Spring Quarter of my Junior year (2013), with Professor Joseph Bristow as my advisor. That spring I took the Honors course, English 191H, to begin the first stages of research. Though my research question and investigation has since changed quite dramatically, this course and the proposal that resulted from it were an important beginning to my research. Though I had previously checked out books from the library before this project, I had never known the extent of the resources the UCLA Library has to offer.

When I first began my research, I mentioned to Professor Bristow how I enjoyed reading John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and *The Nature of Gothic* in his class. He then told me about the infamous letters that Ruskin wrote in his later years entitled *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*; letters that many scholars wrote off as the last cries of a mad, fading genius. Professor Bristow and I set out to prove that these letters were more than that, and were actually quite important in Ruskin's large body of work in particular and to the history of British social reform in general. The proposal I wrote in Spring 2013 had to do with my interests in Ruskin's use of art criticism in his social reform and subsequently how his intellectual protégés took up and continued his work. Professor Bristow taught me how to input the names of various protégés or keywords that had to do with Ruskin, art criticism, and *Fors Clavigera*. I learned how to request books from SRLF (University of California Southern

Regional Library Facility) and even began visiting the location itself for a quick pick-up since I am a Resident Assistant in the dorms and it is closer to me than YRL.

After the first foray into my research and learning what I am interested in investigating with my thesis in Spring Quarter, I began researching in Fall 2013 and writing in Winter 2014 in earnest. Professor Bristow showed me how to use the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography online, which UCLA Library so helpfully allows us access to. I had been reading up on the form and publication methods of *Fors* when Professor Bristow and I made an interesting discovery. *Fors* was a first for Ruskin in many ways: it was the first major project he undertook directly for the sake of the working classes and it was the first work in which he took over all the publication methods himself. In 1871, at the start of his *Fors* writing, in a dramatic move, Ruskin broke with his publishing company Smith, Elder & Co (the premiere company which published the likes of Charlotte Brontë and Anthony Trollope) and gave over the means of publication to his former assistant and protégé George Allen. Since there were not many books on this long-time assistant, the DNB online was very helpful in giving me a portrait of the life of Allen. Professor Bristow also taught me how to access HathiTrust and Project Muse; I had already used Jstor in previous classes so I knew how to navigate it confidently. With the help of these online databases and not to mention the countless books I have checked out regarding various writers and topics ranging from Thomas Carlyle and Hero-Worship to the Epistolary Tradition from 1700-1900, as well as having access to the expensive and highly sought after thirty-nine volume E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn addition of Ruskin's collected works, I was able to investigate all aspects of these, Ruskin's extremely enigmatic and critically controversial, letters.

Due to the extensive research I have undertaken with the help of the many resources the UCLA library has to offer, my dissertation has slightly changed, but for the better. I am now

focusing on how these infamous letters were important in creating new reading practices by which to educate the working classes. *Fors Claveriga* comprises the most significant outcome of Ruskin's decision to turn his attention to what he perceived were the needs of a working-class audience whom he believes can benefit greatly from his unique insights into political economy, social justice, and a more democratic life that should resist—or at least not be crushed by—the onslaught of capitalist modernity. Throughout these letters, which Ruskin issued as public documents at regular intervals from 1871 to 1884, he addresses these matters in ways that seek to stimulate his laboring class readers into an active awareness of the shortcomings of the exploitative world they inhabit. And he pursues this task by demonstrating why his target audience should undertake critically motivated styles of reading, especially where complexities of language are concerned. Francis O'Gorman has mentioned that “[r]eaders of Victorian non-fictional prose were once encouraged to believe that John Ruskin died in 1860. Not literally, certainly, but intellectually and imaginatively” (1). My present project is invested in debunking this myth in order to remind readers how the “late Ruskin” works (1870-1900) have continuously influenced not only art criticism but also publishing methods, reading practices, and socialist thought.

## ABSTRACT

JOHN RUSKIN'S *FORS CLAVIGERA*: THE HERO AS EDUCATOR

1871 marked a turning point in John Ruskin's career. At that point in his career, he had become an established intellectual authority with his appointment at Oxford, Ruskin Sr. had passed away and left him both a fortune and free reign over his intellectual pursuits, and he had taken over his own publishing methods. These momentous changes helped Ruskin turn to more closely examine questions of readership and what he saw as those readers' needs: educational reading practices in particular and better education in general. My honors thesis seeks to examine the major project John Ruskin embarked on to ameliorate the needs of his readers: *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (1871-84). This project examines how Ruskin came to write *Fors*: the material and biographical circumstances surrounding its production, Ruskin's authority at the time, and the implied audience he was writing for. Here I explore the letters and investigate their form, the assumptions they make regarding reading, and the confusion respecting whether their implied audience matched up with the actual one Ruskin had. The works of what scholars call the "late Ruskin" (1870-1900) are daunting because of the phenomenal quantity and the experimental nature of much of that work. But this period, I argue, is also one of Ruskin's most important because it is the time when he finally gains intellectual independence, and uses his status as an intellectual authority to bring about social change. Francis O'Gorman writes that "[r]eaders of Victorian non-fictional prose were once encouraged to believe that John Ruskin died in 1860. Not literally, certainly, but intellectually and imaginatively (1). The present project is invested in debunking this myth in order to remind readers that the "late Ruskin" has continuously influenced not only art criticism but also publishing methods, reading practices, and socialist thought.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Professor Joseph Bristow, and my dear friends Ee Von, Linda, Michel, and Rob.

Without the continual support and encouragement I received from home, I would not have had the courage or strength to complete such a project. I appreciate your interest in every step of the research process. Tack för allt Mama, especially for always making sure I am actually writing and not cleaning my room. Thank you Dad, for printing out forty pages of Ruskin's biography so you could better understand what I was working on. Without you two reading with me at such a young age and encouraging me to pursue my passion for literature in my studies, this thesis would not be possible. Thank you for raising me in a bi-cultural household, and cultivating in me a love of both British and Scandinavian texts. Thank you for putting so much of your time and energy into helping me grow as a person and scholar. Without you, I would not be where I am today. Thank you!

Thank you to Professor Bristow! I am so fortunate to have been able to work with such a knowledgeable scholar and kind mentor. Thank you so much again for all you have taught me and for your endless patience, constantly editing my work and honing my writing skills. At the beginning of this endeavor, you told me to be prepared for a steep learning curve and you were right, I have learned much in a short amount of time. But you were also there to support me every step of the way, and without you this project would not be what it is. I am so grateful to have worked with you, and to have gained a greater understanding of the Victorian period, especially the works of Ruskin, Carlyle, and Oliphant. You will always be a role model for me, as I have never met a professor who was both a groundbreaking researcher and engaging lecturer. I am forever in your debt.

I also want to thank my dear friends, Ee Von, Linda, Michel, and Rob. Thank you for patiently listening to me as I described my thesis and for being so uplifting and encouraging. It is always so nice to know I had you to talk to and I thank you for at least feigning interest in a topic so vastly different from your own areas of study. I will always be grateful for your friendship!

## John Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera*: The Hero as Educator

The children of rich people often get the worst education that is to be had for money; the children of the poor often get the best for nothing. And you have really these two things now to decide for yourselves in England before you can take one quite safe practical step in the matter, namely, first, what a good education is; and, secondly, who is likely to give it you.

John Ruskin, "Letter 4: Switches of Broom," in

*Fors Clavigera* (1871-84)

### Introduction

Right at the start of John Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera*—the long series of letters addressed to English working men and laborers that amount to a colossal 650,000 words—he emphasizes the need for everyone in society to reap the benefits of the best education. Yet as he makes clear in "Letter 4," such learning is not necessarily acquired through material means. As he points out, the supposedly best education is not always the one that money can buy. Instead, he has in mind a very different type of education, one that he seeks to put into practice in this tremendously ambitious work that absorbed his attention for some fourteen years. In this dissertation, I explore not only the educational models that Ruskin puts in place at the start of *Fors Clavigera*; I also explain the remarkable circumstances that gave rise to what became his longest and most socially engaged publication. My discussion begins with an account of the often highly politicized topics

that Ruskin covers in the first twenty of his ninety-six letters. I then examine the circumstances that encouraged him to write in a form and a style that made a decisive break with the large quantity of art historical writing he had produced up to and including the final volume of *Modern Painters* (1860). *Fors Claveriga* comprises the most significant outcome of Ruskin's decision to turn his attention to what he perceived were the needs of a working-class audience whom he believes can benefit greatly from his unique insights into political economy, social justice, and a more democratic life that should resist—or at least not be crushed by—the onslaught of capitalist modernity. Throughout these letters, which Ruskin issued as public documents at regular intervals from 1871 to 1884, he addresses these matters in ways that seek to stimulate his laboring class readers into an active awareness of the shortcomings of the exploitative world they inhabit. And he pursues this task by demonstrating why his target audience should undertake critically motivated styles of reading, especially where complexities of language are concerned.

Brian Maidment captures perfectly this remarkable turn in Ruskin's sixty-year career: “[*Fors Clavigera*] marks a definite, and culminating, stage in the development of Ruskin's polemical style. This development may be crudely summarized as a movement away from regarding a writer's works as a series of objects towards a sense of books as possible *discourses* or centres of activity” (Maidment 196). For Ruskin, the movement toward producing living discourses instead of inert textual objects points exactly to the major break in his professional life, as he shifts his focus from *what* he is writing on to *whom* he is writing for. Among other reasons, *Fors Clavigera* is of great literary importance because of the way it attempts to reach a specific readership, one that was largely different in class and culture from the educated audience that consumed his earlier writings such as *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *Stones of Venice* (1851-53). Scholars of his work concur that *Fors Clavigera* belongs decisively to the

“late Ruskin,” the years 1870-1900 (Maidment 197). In many ways, this extraordinary undertaking marks a new beginning in his life, when he also embarked on founding his utopian society, the Guild of St. George, which aimed to promote health, happiness, and a fresh connection with beauty and nature for the working people of Sheffield, Yorkshire: one of the most heavily industrialized cities in Britain. *Fors*, too, paved the way for one of Ruskin’s most admired attacks on the destruction of the environment, *The Storm-Cloud the Nineteenth-Century* (1884). My dissertation traces the emergence of the “late Ruskin” by looking at the legacy that several of his works from the 1860s and early 1870s had on *Fors*. Such works include the essays in *Unto This Last* (1860-62), the lectures that became *Sesame and Lilies* (1864-65), and *Time and Tide by Weare and Tyne: Twenty-Five Letters to a Working Man of Sunderland on the Laws of Work* (1867).

Central to understanding the ways in which Ruskin reevaluates his critical authority in these works is his desire to remold himself as a hero in the Carlylean sense. In “Letter 10: The Baron’s Gate,” Ruskin makes his admiration for Carlyle clear, and his comment shows that Carlyle provided Ruskin with a model on which it was possible for him to develop the educational aims of *Fors Clavigera*: “Carlyle is the only living writer who has spoken the absolute and perpetual truth about yourselves and your businesses; and exactly in proportion to the inherent weakness of brain in your lying guides, will be their animosity to Carlyle” (*Works* 27:179). In this manner, Ruskin sets himself up as an exemplary hero, in the manner of Carlyle: the kind of man who leads his followers forth into a better, more enlightened world. In his famous tract, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and The Heroic in History* (184), Carlyle defines heroes as follows:

The leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world. (*On Heroes* 21)

Carlyle goes on to designate six classes of heroes, which include the hero as Divinity, Prophet, Poet, Priest, Man of Letters, and King. But where Carlyle identifies heroes as men who fill these six categories like Dante, Muhammad and Shakespeare, in *Fors* Ruskin defines what we might call another category for himself: the hero as educator. This educational role becomes evident once we start reviewing the contents of the first twenty letters in *Fors*.

### ***Fors Clavigera*, “Letter I” to “Letter XX”: Topics, Motivation, Form**

The first twenty letters, as with the rest of *Fors*, cover many areas, from debates about nationalist struggles in Europe to his abhorrence of competitive examinations in Britain. The subject matter moves from Ruskin’s attacks on England’s idle aristocracy and complacent middle classes to the violence of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71). He also emphasizes the riots specific to English politics (the disturbances at Hyde Park during campaigns for electoral reforms) and to French political conflict (the Commune and *La Semaine sanglante* of 1871). Ruskin frequently declares that England is killing itself from within because its industrialized cities pollute the landscape; and he claims that the nation is also killing its citizens figuratively by making them lifeless cogs in the wheels of capitalism. Yet by far the most important preoccupation in *Fors* is Ruskin’s introduction of the Guild of St. George. In many ways, *Fors*

can be seen as part of the initiation rights he believes that his working-class male readers must undergo in order to become a member of the Guild. Although Ruskin does not explain the fact, he had good reasons for naming the Guild after St. George, the patron saint of England. This figure was of course made famous from Eastern legends brought over from the Crusades that celebrated this saint's hand in slaying a dragon. The Guild was originally called "St. George's Company" when Ruskin first created it in 1871, and Ruskin used *Fors* as a way to advertise and recruit members or "Companions" with himself as the "Master of the Guild." Though he goes into minute detail in later letters regarding the workings of the Guild, as early as "Letter 7: Charitas" he reveals the main reason for the venture: this organization is a model of an ideal agrarian society within the heart of a highly industrialized, socially oppressive nation. In its beginnings, the Guild comprised a farm at Topley, a village on the outskirts of Sheffield, where he hoped to advance the cause of cooperative farming. In "Letter 9: Honour to Whom Honour," he officially announces that he is supporting the Guild through a £7,000 tithe. (This sum came from his sale of real estate after his wealthy businessman father died.) Ruskin explains that he has modeled the Guild after the ideal society that Sir Thomas More outlines in *Utopia* (1516). Thus in *Fors* the Guild emerges as Ruskin's way of offering an alternative, peaceful community with a better future than the violent, massively mechanized world of the alienating present.

Not surprisingly, scholars have traced the ways in which Ruskin's utopianism, environmentalism, and commitment to social justice in *Fors* had direct influence on William Morris, the Socialist League, and the more radical elements of the Independent Labour Party. One of the goals of the Guild was to create schools that would disseminate his teaching. But, in the 1880s, when Ruskin's health disintegrated, so did many of his ideas for the Guild's future. Moreover, the Guild's commitment to cooperative farming also failed, since there were severe

disagreements among the workers. Today the Guild is mainly an Educational Trust, which maintains a museum at Sheffield, thus holding true to one of the most important aspects of Ruskin's social reform in his life generally and *Fors Clavigera* specifically. Importantly, although both *Fors* and the Guild of St. George were initially directed at workingmen, in the end middle-class individuals became the mediators between Ruskin and the laboring classes, since the latter group had the time and money to read and put his words into action.

This point about the class profile of the people who had time to promote Ruskin's ideas draws attention to one of the deeper problems that we soon realize when analyzing the first twenty letters in *Fors*. Even though he addressed these documents to laboring men, such individuals were not always his primary readership. Moreover, he at times expressed frustration that the laboring men he targeted were not responding directly to him. In "Letter 19: Rain on the Rock," he writes: "St. George's war! Here, since last May, when I engraved Giotto's *Hope* for you, have I been asking whether any one would volunteer for such battle? Not one human creature, except a personal friend or two, for mere love of me, has answered" (*Works* 27: 293). This lack of interaction was certainly not the result of Ruskin's ignorance of workingmen's educational needs and experiences. Ruskin had long been involved in working-class education. He had already engaged in extensive work with the laboring classes as he taught art at the Working Men's College with the young Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti, beginning in the mid 1850s. He thus saw workingmen's need for education first hand and their lack of opportunities to pursue true knowledge and useful work. Yet *Fors* was his first sustained venture into explicitly writing for (rather than teaching) this constituency. Maidment states that "Ruskin's early books were written entirely without any conception of readership, nor indeed thanks to [his father] John James Ruskin's wealth, did they need readers" (198). It was not until



Ruskin wrote his first essays on political economy in 1860 for *Cornhill Magazine*, which he later collected in *Unto This Last*, that Ruskin focused his mind on the readers he thought would most benefit from his wisdom. By this time, Ruskin began to think ever more carefully about his audience members, their skills in reading, and their educational requirements. As Maidment observes, “*Unto This Last* represents Ruskin’s first attempt at a kind of writing in which the nature of the readership and the terms of the discussion were decided by the author rather than by the author’s patrons, family, or publisher” (Maidment 198). Thus with *Unto This Last* and his lectures from the 1860s, especially “Of Kings’ Treasuries” and “Of Queens’ Gardens” that he combined in *Sesame and Lilies*, Ruskin was taking the intellectual reins and deciding who his readership should be and how he should demarcate his position as a writer in relation to that audience.

Ruskin thus chose the form of the periodical letter (first with *Time and Tide* and then with *Fors*): a mode that bridges the public and private spheres in order to create the illusion of a more intimate relationship with his readers. His choice of genre is interesting at the time of the late nineteenth century since historically this type of letter had not always been successful as a means of transforming the lives of its readers. By 1871, it was no longer as favored as it had been in previous decades. The eighteenth century saw the rise of the epistolary tradition in different types of print media, including of course the novel. In France, there was an upsurge in letter-writing manuals, and, as Thomas O. Beebee observes, “in England a similar discursive power accrued to the letter through its use in news reporting and in periodicals” (Beebee 7). Such diverse writers as William Cobbett, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Carlyle had all engaged in producing types of public letters: each a part of a highly political tradition that, as Judith Stoddart claims, Ruskin perpetuated (23). Cobbett wrote the *Political Register* (1802-35), Coleridge *The*

*Friend* (1809-10), and Carlyle *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850). Each of these writers were turning a previously private writing style into a public one; as Beebee remarks, “Elizabeth H. Cook has found that the letter was an ideal form for ‘publicizing the private’ by mediating private body and public discourse” (Beebee 7). Yet why did Ruskin choose the letter rather than the lecture or the prose essay as the mode in which to publish his most well thought out project in social reform, especially at a time when the form was in decline? Beebee finds that the letter’s importance as a genre was based on the close relationship that the writer believed he or she could firmly establish with the audience, a relationship Ruskin had become more aware of in recent years: “As a literary genre the letter . . . aims to create a community of author and addressee in pursuit of a specific goal . . . Such communicative goals are specific to the correspondents; the letters may be intelligible to other readers, but each text is addressed to a particular individual at a particular time. This exclusive unity of person and time makes the letter a localized event and distinguishes it from other genres” (Beebee 14). Thus the epistolary tradition, specifically as it developed in England as a way to spread news privately between friends and publicly through newspapers, proposed itself as the perfect form for a project that relied heavily on a particular kind of writer-reader relationship. In his letters, Ruskin was in many ways trying to simulate the public voice he adopted in various lectures, but *Fors* aimed at a broader public and thus a wider audience. By writing *Fors* in the form of the letter, Ruskin took it upon himself to educate—as intimately as he could—the workingman.

Yet, for reasons that need explanation, the “late Ruskin” that includes *Fors* remains daunting to most scholars because of both the quantity of these documents and the experimental nature that they take. Francis O’Gorman mentions that “[r]eaders of Victorian non-fictional prose were once encouraged to believe that John Ruskin died in 1860. Not literally, certainly, but

intellectually and imaginatively” (1). This present project is invested in debunking this myth in order to remind readers that the “late Ruskin” has continuously influenced not only art criticism but also publishing methods, reading practices, and socialist thought.

### **Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, and *Fors*: A Transformation in His Career**

In 1870, Ruskin turned fifty and began a new chapter in his life. E. T. Cook, one of editors of the definitive edition of Ruskin’s *Works* (1903-12) describes this as Ruskin’s “Oxford decade” (*Works* 27:xviii). As I mention above, three of Ruskin’s major works had been published: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, *The Stones of Venice*, and the five volumes of *Modern Painters*. In 1869, Ruskin also was appointed as the inaugural Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of Oxford. Thus Ruskin found himself firmly established as one of the premier art critics of his age. But he had long been dissatisfied with his role as merely an art critic. The reason was that Ruskin believed that the modern critic should be like the artists he admired, who in his view maintained an immediate relationship with the world around them. He also contended that no good art could ever derive from what he deemed as a morally inadequate life. He thus wanted his criticism to engage with the world just as directly as the artist did through his art. As a consequence, Ruskin appointed himself to the role of social reformer. And his desire for reform set him apart from his onetime mentor Carlyle: Where Carlyle was satisfied with inspiring his own “divine rage” in his followers and nothing more, Ruskin wanted to take action and transform his reader’s lives (*Works* 27:xviii).

Ruskin’s first foray into changing the lives of workingmen began slowly with several essays on political economy that featured in *Cornhill Magazine*. Founded in 1860, *Cornhill* was edited initially by William Makepeace Thackeray and issued by Ruskin’s publisher George

Smith of Smith, Elder & Co. To the third issue of *Cornhill*, Ruskin contributed “Sir Joshua and Holbein,” an essay that his contemporaries deemed acceptable because it stood in the center of his main area of art history (Glynn 102). But after publishing this essay, Ruskin made contributions that addressed a different area of inquiry: these were his discussions of political economy—the discipline that Carlyle called the “dismal science.” These pieces were eventually collected in Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* (1862), which was his first volume dedicated to debates about social and political economy. Although contemporaries had no objections to his essay on Reynolds and Holbein, they disliked his remarks in the other four essays: “The Roots of Honour,” “The Veins of Wealth,” “Qui Judicatis Terram,” and “Ad Valorem.” As Jennifer Glynn observes, the reaction to Ruskin’s social reform articles in *Cornhill* was immediate and volatile: “Trouble was expected then and it came, from all quarters – the *Saturday Review*, the *Scotsman*, the *Manchester Examiner*, *The Times*. After three essays, Thackeray and Smith yielded to the criticism and decided to publish only one more, though they allowed it to be twice as long as the others, to conclude the arguments” (Glynn103).

The refusal of *Cornhill* to publish any more of Ruskin’s essays on political economy marked a turning point. Though Ruskin and Smith’s working and personal relationships lasted beyond this affair (and Smith even published these essays in *Unto This Last*), it was clear that Ruskin’s career was moving in a fresh direction that did not satisfy the editors who had supported him. By terminating Ruskin’s contributions to *Cornhill*, Smith, a leading publisher, had positioned himself against one of his own writers. In turn, Ruskin began to respond unfavorably to Smith’s publishing methods. There was a significant reason for this change. With the death of John Ruskin Sr. in 1864 and the son’s subsequent inheritance of his father’s self-made fortune, as well as Ruskin’s affirmed status as a Victorian intellectual authority through his

appointment at Oxford, Ruskin experienced a newfound freedom that he had never had before (especially under his father's ever-controlling and watchful eye). Thus, at this stage of his life, Ruskin was essentially a man at liberty to write what he liked. He was poised to develop a project that was under his complete control. *Fors* recalls this moment of transition very clearly. In "Letter 61: The Cave of Machpelah," he looks back at the beginnings of this project and observes: "I began the writing of *Fors* as a byework to quiet my conscience, that I might be happy in what I supposed to be my own proper life of art teaching" (*Works* 27: 485). In other words, *Fors*—even if an adjacent "byework" that stood alongside other projects—proved rewarding in educational ways that satisfied his political conscience.

Once Ruskin decided to take responsibility for publishing his own work, he also decided to control the material means of its production. This was another decisive break. Prior to this time, when it came to the business side of Ruskin's intellectual pursuits, his father had imposed authority. John Ruskin Sr. and publisher Smith understood each other, one businessman to another, and helped curb what they saw as Ruskin's intellectual idealism. As a result, Ruskin Sr. even wrote Smith regarding the *Cornhill* fiasco and supported Smith instead of his own son because, as Glyn says, "[t]his [social reforming] side of Ruskin's life was an embarrassment to his father" (103). Once his father died, Ruskin immediately remarked on his dissatisfaction with the publishing trade. As Glyn also observes: "In his monthly letter, *Fors* . . . Ruskin attacked current business methods, including the commissions, advertising and discounts which were standard practice in the book trade at the time" (104). He wanted fixed prices for the booksellers and fixed profits for the retailers. Ruskin promoted publishing practices that were most beneficial and honest for his readers. Smith, Elder & Co was left in a tight position because they could not upend all the business practices that kept the company afloat. At the same time, they did not

want to lose the author whose work they issued more than any other, despite their long list of renowned writers that included the likes of Charlotte Brontë and Anthony Trollope (Mumby and Stallybrass 52).

Ruskin therefore broke with George Smith. As compensation for thirty years of business and friendship, Ruskin offered George Smith the full copyrights for his works prior to 1870, since he believed these publications had been polluted already by the publishing methods he abhorred. In 1873, Ruskin asked Smith to name a price, with one stipulation. He begged Smith: “Leave to me the power of republishing as I am able, any of them I choose in my own series” (Glynn 104). Smith offered Ruskin the substantial sum of £2,500 for what he valued as the price of one to four years’ worth of profit of Ruskin’s published works. Ruskin, to his dismay, found this price much below his expectations, and thus accordingly looked elsewhere to sell his copyright. Smith suffered both a personal and commercial blow, and within six weeks his relationship with Ruskin came to an end. In such circumstances, Ruskin even tried to auction his copyright, but as Smith wrote him on 11 February 1873, Ruskin’s stipulation that he should be able to reprint his own works essentially made the sold copyright worth nothing (Glynn 109).

In 1871, Ruskin therefore handed control not only of his current publications but also all of his previous publications to George Allen, who had for years belonged to Ruskin’s inner circle. In so doing, Ruskin was the first to prove that there was a cure to the corruption he saw caused by the laissez-faire bookselling market (Mumby and Stallybrass 51). The relationship between Ruskin and Allen throws considerable light not only on the publication but also the content of *Fors*. Ruskin and Allen first met in 1854 at the Working Men’s College in Red Lion Square where Allen took drawing classes under the instruction of both Ruskin and his protégé, Rossetti. Allen proved to have what Ruskin viewed as an “innate disposition to art,” and in 1857

became an assistant drawing master under Ruskin at the college (DNB; Allen, George, 1).

Ruskin also encouraged Allen in engraving. Moreover, Allen studied engraving under John Henry Le Kneux (one of the engravers of *Modern Painters*) and mezzotint under Thomas Goff Lupton (an engraver for J. M. W. Turner's *Liber Studiorum*) (DNB; Allen, George, 1). These beginnings cemented a long-lasting friendship, and Allen was forever a loyal Ruskinian: he even turned down two lucrative and prestigious job opportunities (the one as manager of furnishing the royal palaces, and the other as a partner in Morris & Co) and relocated his family for a time to Savoy, Switzerland, to assist Ruskin when he resided there.

Thus to this trusted disciple did Ruskin turn for his publishing needs. During this period, Allen's many talents extended to typography and illustrations. In 1871, with only a week's notice, Allen began publishing *Fors* in his home at Heathfield Cottage, Keston, Kent. Though neither Ruskin nor Allen were experts in the publishing business, both were eager to try to sell *Fors* at fixed prices to readers without the added-on margin that booksellers required. In *Fors*, Ruskin describes this specific publishing venture in a way that proves that no matter how much he resisted Ruskin Sr.'s interventions, his father's business sense had indeed rubbed off on him:

It costs me ten pounds to print a thousand copies, and five more to give you a picture, and a penny off my sevenpence to send you the book;— a thousand sixpences are twenty-five pounds; when you have bought a thousand *Fors* of me I shall therefore have five pounds for my trouble, and my single shopman, Mr. Allen, five pounds for his; we won't work for less, either of us. And I mean to sell all my large books, henceforward, in the same way; well printed, well bound, and at a fixed price; and the trade may charge a proper and acknowledged profit for their trouble in retailing the book. Then the public will know what they are about, and so will tradesmen. I, the first producer, answer, to the

best of my power, for the quality of the book— paper, binding, eloquence and all; the retail dealer charges what he ought to charge, openly; and if the public do not choose to give it, they can't get the book. That is what I call legitimate business. (*Works* 27:100)

Smith had long predicted this venture would be a disaster. At first, Smith appeared to be correct: the first two years incurred financial losses. The reasons were twofold. First of all, booksellers understandably boycotted *Fors* because there was no profit to be had. Moreover, Ruskin refused to advertise except by word of mouth: “You will hear of *Fors* in time – if it be worth hearing” (*Works* 27:354). Secondly, the price was quite expensive: seven pence per month, which was beyond the reach of most workingmen's pockets. Initially, sales were modest at about 600 copies per month, and eventually Ruskin's publishing methods benefited both himself and the public: “By the second year [of *Fors*' publication] monthly sales were approaching one thousand copies” and “the [eventual] reprinting of [Ruskin's] three major titles [*Modern Painters*, *The Stones of Venice* and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*] in 1888 alone brought more profit than the 25 years spent with Smith, Elder and Company” (Sunnyside online). F. A. Murphy and Frances H. S. Stallybrass also find Ruskin's publishing venture as having a direct correlation to better business practices in the bookselling trade with “the Magna Carta of the Trade, the Bookseller's and the Publishers Associations combining force to bring the old ruinous practice [of underselling their competitors] to an end” (Mumby and Stallybrass 52).

### ***Sesame and Lilies: Authority, Audience, and Reading Practices***

Yet, at this point in his career, a further reason that informs Ruskin's motivation to undertake *Fors* is related in part to the success he enjoyed when he published his two lectures,



“Of Kings’ Treasuries” and “Of Queens’ Gardens,” which were combined as *Sesame and Lilies* in 1865. These lectures, which he presented at Manchester in 1864, were, like *Fors*, both aiming at a specific audience and casting Ruskin as a certain kind of educational authority. Many modern readers of *Sesame and Lilies* believe these lectures present a deeply conservative cultural figure. Yet, as we can see in these works, he was actually quite progressive when designating both men’s and women’s roles in the respective public and private spheres:

Now the man’s work for his own home is, as has been said, to secure its maintenance, progress, and defence; the woman’s to secure its order, comfort, and loveliness. Expand both these functions. The man’s duty as a member of a commonwealth, is to assist in the maintenance, in the advance, in the defence of the state. The woman’s duty, as a member of the commonwealth, is to assist in the ordering, in the comforting, and in the beautiful adornment of the state. (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 87-8)

Though Ruskin’s views on men’s roles is quite similar to those of other Victorians, his support for an expansion of women’s roles beyond the hearth is quite radical, especially when seen against the well-known peon of praise to female domesticity, Coventry Patmore’s *The Angel in the House* (final version 1862). Yet, in *Sesame and Lilies*, what is of greatest interest to our understanding of *Fors* is his adoption of a public voice that seeks to engage socially and politically, especially with regard to literacy. To see how Ruskin is reconstructing his own authority as an educator teaching his audience a new way to read, it is important to look at “Of Queens’ Gardens” specifically. In this lecture, Elizabeth K. Helsinger finds that Ruskin produces three requisites for the best method of reading. First, she identifies Ruskin’s advice for a kind of “mining for meaning”: essentially word-hunting and myth-hunting. Secondly, Helsinger stresses his attention on the “serious play of the associative mind.” Thirdly, she calls attention to what

she characterizes as “sympathy awakened by desire” (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 121). These three requisites will also help us read *Fors* and see how Ruskin is teaching his audience how to read there.

Not only do these requisites assist us in reading *Fors*, they also show that Ruskin sought to teach his audience new kinds of reading practices. A good example of “mining for meaning” in this work exists in the multiple connotations that can be culled from the overarching title, *Sesame and Lilies*. Lecture I is called “Sesame of Kings’ Treasuries” and is paired with the epigraph from Lucian’s *The Fisherman*, which states: “You shall each have a cake of sesame,—and ten pound” (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 27). “Sesame” can be a literary allusion to the magic word employed in *A Thousand and One Nights* to open up the thieves’ cave and discover the literal treasure hidden within. A second meaning is the opening up of a figurative treasure of the mind through reading. Such opening-up emerges from the literal grain of sesame out of which rich oil can be gleaned (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 120). Marcel Proust was particularly responsive to Ruskin’s meaning-laden prose:

Ruskin amused himself by taking up again the word *Sesame* in itself . . . insisting on its original meaning (the grain of sesame) and embellishing it with a quotation from Lucian which in a way makes of it a play on words by bringing out sharply, under the conventional meaning of the word in the oriental storyteller and in Ruskin, its primordial meaning. (Macksey 143-44)

Ruskin’s random pairing of titles, images, and epigraphs makes sense after his readers have performed intellectual labor as they read. The title “Lilies of Queens’ Gardens” is another example of a multi-layered phrase. Ruskin pairs it with a quotation from the Old Testament: “Be thou glad, oh thirsting Desert; let the desert be made cheerful, and bloom as the lily; and the

barren places of Jordan shall run wild with wood” (Isaiah 35:1). Helsinger’s interesting reading of this verse explores Ruskin’s support for women’s expanding role from the domestic sphere of the home outwards to the morally-“thirsting Desert” and “barren places” of the world. Helsinger observes:

The lilies of Ruskin’s title refer here, we discover with no little surprise, not simply to the virginal white lily, a figure for the ‘incorruptible’ moral authority of the pure woman. The Lily is also Jenny [Rossetti’s prostitute in the poem of the same name], or indeed any of the young women at risk through Manchester negligence and greed, their wild beauty soon to reveal the signs of harsh usage while their capacities to feel are sadly distorted.

(Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 133)

Helsinger’s interpretation of Ruskin’s “Lilies” points the complex dichotomy in his approach: Ruskin’s ideal woman of the title is both fragile virgin and sensuous prostitute. This doubleness makes sense when we take into account Ruskin’s support for women’s engagement in the public world as well as in their private one which he voices in this lecture (after all, Ruskin was the mentor of such female social reformers as Octavia Hill). Thus he hopes that readers will make sense of this seemingly ambiguous pairing once they engage in active interpretation, and do not trust that Ruskin will merely give them one connotation of a word to work with.

This observation leads us to the second requisite of reading in *Fors*. This is “the serious play of the associative mind”: a concept that he had developed much earlier in his writing. In volume II of *Modern Painters* (1846), Ruskin develops two terms to describe imagination and uses them in relation to Turner’s landscape paintings. Ruskin sees Turner’s genius stemming from the painter’s use of the “imagination penetrative” and the “imagination associative” (*Works* 4: 228-88). Ruskin describes “the imagination penetrative” as grasping at the underlying

structure of a scene, while the “imagination associative” brings images from one’s memory to bear on the original perception in a kind of free association. It is the latter term that Ruskin uses to teach his audience to employ while reading and what he himself so frequently deploys in his own writing. For example, in “Letter 5: The White-Thorn Blossom,” Ruskin contrasts what he sees as the useless, mechanical labor currently in use in British cloth manufacturing through power-looms, with the simple dress of “a Bavarian peasant-woman at church in Munich, looking a much grander creature, and more beautifully dressed, than any of the crossed and embroidered angels in Hess’s high-art frescoes” (*Works* 27: 89). Not many writers would ever think to compare a simple peasant woman’s dress to Heinrich Maria von Hess’s intricate artworks. Such a comparison forces unacquainted readers to educate themselves by researching examples of Bavarian dress and artwork of the Düsseldorf School. Only then can they fully appreciate such an unlikely comparison and realize the powerful imagery of both creative simplicity and excellence compared with mechanical manufacturing.

Ruskin’s third and last requisite for reading in *Sesame and Lilies* is specifically gendered; he believes that men and women should read differently. In “Of Queens’ Gardens,” Ruskin suggests that women serve as the figure of sympathy that arouses men to physical activity generally and intellectual labor specifically. Ruskin first wants to structure a woman’s reading around works that cultivate her innate sympathy: “But, chiefly of all, she is to be taught to extend the limits of her sympathy with respect to that history which is being for ever determined as the moments pass in which she draws her peaceful breath; and to the contemporary calamity, which, were it but rightly mourned by her, would recur no more hereafter” (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 81). Here Ruskin lays a heavy task to his ideal woman: she is accountable for the way history has turned out and how men have acted because she has not used her powers of sympathy to oversee

men's actions. Ruskin creates an ideal sympathetic woman whose purpose is to inspire men to act. Thus women's education should be structured around a breadth of reading rather than an in-depth study of a few texts in order to develop their sympathy through practice. Ruskin writes in this lecture:

I do not even wonder at the myriad-handed murder of multitudes, done boastfully in the daylight, by the frenzy of nations [men's wars], and the immeasurable, unimaginable guilt heaped up from hell to heaven, of their priests, and kings. But this is wonderful to me—oh, how wonderful!—to see the tender and delicate woman among you, with her child at her breast, and a power, if she would wield it, over it, and over its father, purer than the air of heaven, and stronger than the seas of earth.

(Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 90-1)

Such general reading should also be practical to women's status as the intellectual overseers (though he never says equals) of men: it must give women the necessary knowledge to inspire men to read themselves. Ruskin sets up a contrasting yet informing relationship between male and female education in *Sesame and Lilies*. In "Of Kings' Gardens," male education is disciplined and in-depth, while in "Of Queens' Gardens" female education is broad and inspires sympathy. Thus Ruskin creates strict spheres for gender roles and gendered education but, importantly, those strict spheres rely upon and inform one another.

Now that we have seen what Ruskin was unveiling in *Sesame and Lilies*—namely, new reading practices—we must turn to the readers for whom Ruskin wrote and the ways in which they responded to these lectures. Unlike *Fors*, Ruskin's implied and actual audience for *Sesame and Lilies* was the same, though audience response was varied and his greatest supporters came from a readership on the fringes of Victorian society (unmarried women and sexually heterodox

men). The “kings” and “queens” who Ruskin wrote for were the ascendant middle classes: the rising capitalist aristocracy of Manchester and other industrialized English cities. Thus, though “Of Kings’ Treasuries” and “Of Queens’ Gardens” would seem to be speaking to an old aristocracy who would understand his royal analogies, Ruskin is actually writing for a class-conscious bourgeoisie on the verge of replacing the entrenched nobility by becoming the metaphorical kings and queens of the modern age. But, as Seth Koven points out, Ruskin’s relationship with his audience is more nuanced than what first appears: these Manchester middle classes may be soon to make their way into the upper echelons but they were doing so through the laissez-faire economics Ruskin was presently writing against. Therefore, although Ruskin’s topic was pertinent to his audience (educational reform and gender roles), the terms in which he couched them (of rank and political economy) would not do for adherents to liberal political economy. The same was true of spinsters and sexually ambiguous men. The former group used “Of Queens’ Gardens” as support for their work in the public sphere to spread their sympathy and inspire men to act, though it must be noted that Ruskin never wanted the abandonment or substitution of the private sphere for the public (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 181). Moreover, men who did not want to participate in bourgeois marriage found support not only in the sexually ambiguous figure Ruskin cut but also in what many called the effeminate prose of these lectures (or what one critic termed the work of a “shrieking revivalist”) (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 192). Ruskin was always vocal regarding his disdain for the sentimental prose of newspapers and the overly emotional verbiage of religious extremists, so the worst the critics could throw at him was that he was exactly who he was writing against.

### *Fors Clavigera*, Reading, and Education

*Fors*, however, differs from *Sesame and Lilies* in that he addresses his letters to an audience that departs from the modern “kings “ and “queens” whose main need, as he sees it, is to read and interpret the world through finer interpretive practices. From the beginning, Ruskin dedicates *Fors* to the workers and laborers of Great Britain. Yet it is noticeable that it takes until “Letter 89: Whose Fault Is It: To the Trade Unions of England” (1878) before his writing adopts a form that the laboring classes might be able to digest. Linda M. Austin observes that this letter “[i]s the first one for workers, free to members of guilds and trade committees. Everything hitherto in *Fors* has addressed ‘your existing Masters, Pastors, and Princes’” (*Works* 29:400). Austin thus views “Letters 1-88” as written to the employers and rulers of the workmen, not to the workmen themselves. I, in contrast, find that Austin is taking that phrase out of context, since E. T. Cook writes in his introduction that Ruskin is trying to reach a wide readership, not only the workmen, but also their “existing Masters, Pastors, and Princes.”

Like *Sesame and Lilies*, *Fors* presents itself to a particular kind of audience. But in *Fors* he did not have an audience present before him in a lecture hall. Ruskin’s ability to reach his implied audience had become increasingly hard for him to understand in the 1870s. As he began writing *Fors*, he was arguably less successful in meeting his main aim: encouraging active reading in working men. It is perhaps no surprise that it was during the 1870s that Ruskin thought more carefully than ever before about literacy. This was the period when Forster’s Act (1870) established the basis of what later became compulsory elementary education in England and Wales. One of the main objectives in state education was to increase the nation’s rates of literacy. At the same time, he had, though in a different context, become an official educator,

since he had also begun his first tenure as Slade Professor of Art at Oxford. In both capacities, he had to fit himself to the changing audiences that growing rates of literacy and cheaper publishing had created. In a study of his inaugural address at Oxford, Austin discovers a gap between Ruskin's implied audience and the actual student body he is addressing. She finds that the class structure had slowly been changing both quantitatively and qualitatively. "Oxford's matriculation," she observes, "had increased by 50 percent from 1862-1872" (Austin 21). Austin also finds that a "typical entering class of the 1870s comprised a high proportion of public-school [i. e., state-educated] men and a large number of Scots, as well as many privately educated students who depended on scholarships and would have to find jobs— in private schools or the civil service, perhaps— immediately after graduation" (20). Thus an elite university, such as Oxford, began to resemble what it is supposed to be today: a center of intellectual thought for the brightest not the wealthiest. Therefore Ruskin's audience was made up of a mixture of the sons of middle-class industrialists and entrepreneurs as well as members of the traditional elite. From the sounds of his inaugural speech, though, it appears as if Ruskin only addressed the latter group: Ruskin finds that education is "not the equalizer but the discerner of men," thereby implying that through education the middle classes can become like the upper classes: thinkers not doers (*Works* 20:20). There is also a gap between implied and actual audience in *Fors*, but it is not so easily recognizable as Ruskin's audience in his Oxford lectures. Austin concludes that

[t]he workers of Great Britain to whom Ruskin speaks in *Fors* are not the masses he evokes in his dedication, but a narrower and exclusive group, ranging from the upper-middle classes living in the country to skilled artisans. Indeed, much of what Ruskin said in his letters and lectures outside of Oxford appealed to the *rentiers*, or those aspiring to



that class. These people did not work at all, but lived on the profits and savings of their ancestors. Almost all of them were women. (3)

Thus, on this view, it is interesting to see the assertion that the people supposedly reading *Fors* were comfortable middle-class women instead of working-class men. I plan to show that I find Austin's view mistaken, since a close analysis of the first twenty letters reveals that Ruskin was trying to work out—very methodically—how he might write specifically for an audience of working-class men. It just took him some time to figure out how to do so.

### ***Fors*, Reading, and Interpretation**

Ruskin thought very carefully about the letters comprising *Fors*, as we can see the intellectual labor that went into them. Unlike the lecture form, which intends to communicate everything clearly to an audience, the letter demands very close attention from readers. This issue becomes ever more demanding when we encounter the extremely enigmatic titles Ruskin gives to each one. One of the most fascinating and convoluted aspects of *Fors* is the overarching title. Ruskin actually does not explain his title until Letter 2, dated 1 February 1871, where he writes:

“Fors” is the best part of three good English words, Force, Fortitude, and Fortune. I wish you to know the meaning of those three words accurately. “Force,” (in *humanity*), means power of doing good work . . . “Fortitude” means the power of bearing necessary pain, or trial of patience, whether by time, or temptation. “Fortune” means the necessary fate of a man: the ordinance of his life which cannot be changed . . . Fors is a feminine word; and Clavigera is, therefore, the feminine of “Claviger.” Clava means a club. Clavis, a key. Clavus, a nail, or a rudder. Gero means “I carry.” It is the root of our word “gesture”

(the way you carry yourself); and in a curious byeway, of “jest.” Clavigera may mean, therefore, either Club-bearer, Key-bearer, or Nail-bearer. Each of these three possible meanings of Clavigera corresponds to one of the three meanings of Fors. Fors, the Club-bearer, means the strength of Hercules or of Deed. Fors, the Key-bearer, means the strength of Ulysses, or of Patience. Fors, the Nail-Bearer, means the strength of Lycurgus, or of Law.” (*Works* 27:16-17)

Though it is a typical paradoxical move on Ruskin’s part to make the title of his letters to uneducated workmen and laborers of Great Britain in Latin, he does translate its meanings into English. To the classically trained Ruskin, Latin is a language that can hold multiple meanings while in his view English merely has more words or synonyms that can stand for different shades of meaning. What is so interesting here is that Ruskin chooses the feminine form of both words for his title, though they contain extremely masculine meanings of violence. In the title therefore we can detect a type of femininity pervading the kind of masculine force that scholars have detected in the works of Carlyle and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB). In *Victorian Masculinities*, Herbert Sussman defines this style of manhood as “a new industrial manliness for writer and worker, the transgressive potential seemingly invisible to early Victorian male readers” (17). It is important to note, then, that Ruskin inserts a feminine grammatical form into the bond that Ruskin wishes to consolidate with his working-class male readers. Through this carefully crafted title Ruskin intimates that a feminine element is appropriate for his male readers to negotiate the intense violence associated with clubs, nails, keys, and rudders. Thus, if we look more closely at the ways in which Ruskin opens up his title, we see that the first word connotes the three forces he sees ruling people’s lives and the second as the tools that men can use to harness those forces. The first “fors” is the power within ourselves toward action, the power to

bear the club and wield it; without wielding it, that club becomes a mere stick. The second “fors” is also a force within ourselves, but this time it is a restraining force: a force to inaction instead of action. To bear a key one must be patient and find the correct lock before wielding it. The third “fors” is the one force outside ourselves: the larger Fate or Destiny that man cannot control. The law that this “fors” represents is the God-given natural one that men must follow and obey, and its symbol, the nail, represents the figure who is the ultimate representation of Fate’s obedient servant: the crown of nails or thorns worn by Jesus on the cross. Thus, as he reminds us of the feminine component in these masculine implements, Ruskin introduces an ever-present Christian element into his work: this Fate or Destiny could be God, though Ruskin, given his shifts between faith and doubt, is always struggling between Christianity and agnosticism.

Ruskin’s chosen title is so richly associative of meaning that there is even more to be said about it. This third “fors” is reminiscent of the orthodox political economy begun by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *Wealth of Nations* (1776), in which he discusses how everyone is at the mercy of the abstract and impersonal system directed by “The Invisible Hand.” This is very similar to the Fate or Destiny of Ruskin’s third “fors” but with a distinct difference: he has two other “fors” to balance out the third. In “Letter 13: Every Man His Due,” he writes that this uncontrollable Destiny can be balanced by a controllable systemic destiny: the former is God-given, the latter man-directed (*Works* 27:231). Thus Ruskin creates a model that gives back humanity a sense of control over their lives. Paul L. Sawyer in his article, “Ruskin and St. George: The Dragon-Killing Myth in *Fors Clavigera*,” finds that this letter series is Ruskin’s own way of regaining such control: “The labor of Ruskin’s hands becomes the pages we read, he creates an alternative fate or destiny for himself” (26). Ruskin balances Fate’s ruling of his life with his own dictation of it through the labor of his hands. Thus, by writing

*Fors* Ruskin is working out this balance between fate and labor for himself as well as for his readers: his art therefore transforms both artist and audience.

The titles he gives each individual letter are also important to note. He explains the titles only in the middle of a letter, and each title usually carries more than one meaning, as we have already seen with his lectures “Of Kings’ Treasuries” and “Of Queens’ Gardens.” “Letter 2,” for instance, is titled “The Great Picnic.” It takes eleven pages before we see that this title has a triple meaning. As he demonstrates in his explanation of the overarching title *Fors Claveriga*, Ruskin loves meaning to come in threes, which is interesting since the number three is a divine number in numerology, perhaps foreshadowing his view of himself as a divinely inspired prophet for his age. The first meaning relates to a personal trip Ruskin made to Ireland, where he heard an account of a picnic where the upper classes ate, and when they were bored, paid the young serving boys to fight for their entertainment. Ruskin first sees this episode as one in which the upper classes again waste their money by forcing workingmen to produce useless labor, while encouraging the bad habit of engaging in violent actions for money (*Works* 27: 38). The second connotation is historical: Ruskin views the state of Europe for the last 800 years as one in which the aristocracy continually pays the working classes wages for useless labor. They give small amounts of money and charity to the working classes here and there, but what Ruskin sees as a primary need of the working classes is their education. The final third meaning is merely a brief allusion made in a footnote. The meaning, as with so much of Ruskin’s work, is a Biblical one: it refers to the “Great Picnic” or the feeding of the 5,000 in Mark 6. Mark 6:39 reads: “And he [Jesus] commanded them [his disciples] to make *all* sit down by companies on the grass.” This verse indicates that the picnic was not exclusive to the upper classes as both the personal episode and real world allegory iterate. Instead, it included everyone but the privileged classes. The

people who came to hear Jesus preach were perhaps too poor to provide themselves with their own meal. This is a very complicated title, and by looking at the context of Mark 6 it is not hard to sense an alignment with Jesus as prophet. The title thus suggests that through its links with Christ's divine prophetic gifts Ruskin is also establishing himself as, if not a Christ-like, then a Carlylean heroic prophet.

### **The Letters in *Fors*:**

#### **The Main Text, the Paratext, and the Quotations from Newspapers**

Many of the early letters of *Fors* demand exactly this kind of reading to glean the kinds of connotations Ruskin wants readers to discover. Such demands on readers relate not just to the titles but also to the main text. His letters cannot be read as straightforward textbook prose on the definitions and pros and cons of political economy. Instead, Ruskin provides definitions along with illustrations and examples of various kinds to educate the reader in his point of view. Such illustrations and examples range from Ruskin's own experiences or stories he has overheard, to present cultural and political events in England and abroad, as well as lessons on England's and the Continent's historical past (mostly regarding England's interactions with the Continent and its role as an imperialist power). Ruskin quotes from works including David Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), as well as Millicent Garrett Fawcett's *Political Economy for Beginners* (1870), which Ruskin terms the "Cambridge Catechism" (the author of the latter work is the wife of the Cambridge Professor of Political Economy at the time) (*Works* 27: 31). Added to these excerpts, Ruskin introduces passages from well-known writers, William Shakespeare and Walter Scott. In addition, Ruskin interlards for critical inspection quotations from the newspapers he so abhors, including the 1855 Tory *Daily Telegraph* and the 1896 sensational *Pall Mall Gazette*. Begun in 1855, the *Daily Telegraph* was run on the slogan "the

largest, best, and cheapest newspaper in the world”; thus content was based on how well it would sell not how educative or true the material was (BBC News online 1). The *Pall Mall Gazette* (*PMG*) was a politically influential gentlemen’s paper that came out at lunchtime, which meant that its readers could review it at their clubs during the afternoon and evening. In the 1870s and 1880s, the *PMG* gained a reputation for journalistic exposes, such as the trafficking of young English girls to foreign brothels. Ruskin sees the type of journalism in these newspapers, which catered to educated readers, as detrimental, since they set precedents that affected reading matter sold to the working classes. Such journalism, he believed, enfeebled the mind. He describes newspapers as “damp,” their ink “coming off on [reader’s] fingers, and beyond all washing, into their brains” (*Work 27*: 100). Yet one has to ask why Ruskin included them in his letters. The answer relates to several reasons: Ruskin definitely wanted to contrast the overly sentimental, uninformative, and unthinking prose of popular journalism with his own highly educative writing. Ruskin included excerpts on the state of the working classes as sentimentalized by the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* in “Letter 2” on the same day: 17 January 1871. The *Daily Telegraph* describes the violence occurring in Paris in 1871 as primarily affecting the laboring classes: “Each demolished house has its own legend of sorrow, of pain, and horror; each vacant doorway speaks to the eye, and almost to the ear, of hasty flight, as armies or fire came—of weeping women and trembling children running away in awful fear, abandoning the home that saw their birth” (*Works 27*:41). A sample from the *Pall Mall Gazette* on the state of the working classes in England on the same day in January is as follows: “A father in the last stage of consumption—two daughters nearly marriageable with hardly sufficient rotting clothing to ‘cover their shame.’ The rags that hang around their attenuated frames flutter in strips against their naked legs. They have no stool or chair upon which they can sit” (*Works 27*:42). Both

newspapers display the highly sentimental prose of a novel rather than the fact-based style of a periodical. In a deliberate move against such writing, Ruskin wrote his letters in the style he felt they should follow: highly discursive and allusive but very much unsentimental.

Therefore, in contrast to the emotional drivel he sees the newspapers printing, Ruskin wants to create reading material that educates his working-class readers. Ruskin even makes the material means of producing *Fors* an educational experience, as we can see through the employment of Allen and also through the engraving labor of his present assistant Arthur Burgess (whose engravings grace the pages of *Fors*). Many saw the success of Ruskin's former assistant Allen and wanted the opportunity to follow in his footsteps. Burgess was a talented engraver who started working for Ruskin part-time after an introduction by Octavia Hill. He was soon promoted to be Ruskin's full-time assistant with a paid salary. Ruskin once commented that Burgess' work had "a splendid cadence of line" and some of his engravings remain in the Ruskin School of Drawing at Oxford to this day (*Works* 14: 349-56). Thus *Fors* was enacting within its pages the kind of education it was promoting: turning an average working-class man like Arthur Burgess into "a representative of the highest type of working man" (*Works* 17: lxxviii). With these letters, Ruskin is creating a kind of textbook for workers. One that does not give readers their opinions regurgitated or sentimentalized back to them, like the newspapers, or scholarly prose deemed unreadable to the uninitiated. Ruskin is "leveling down," as Austin discerns, in that these letters are not as scholarly as his Oxford lectures but are certainly more demanding than the daily newspapers. He writes: "That other men should know their measure, is, desirable; but that they should know it themselves, is wholly necessary" (*Works* 27: 149). Ruskin sees *Fors*' primary educative goal as teaching working men to think *for* and know *about* themselves. Each letter contains practical advice regarding Ruskin's view on money, political economy,

labor, governance, and the nation alongside quotes from textbooks, newspapers, and literary sources. All of this information about complex titles, current cultural and political events, and attacks on newspapers shows that, for Ruskin, each letter of *Fors* is a carefully crafted work that aims to cultivate his reader's intellectual skills. In many ways, providing his laboring audience with thoughts of familiar events and ideas, he is giving them a kind of university education in a monthly letter that they would otherwise never have access to.

One interesting way that Ruskin educates his readers and organizes his text is through his use of the paratext, which generally includes appendices, items of correspondence, postscripts, and footnotes. The paratextual aspects of *Fors* take on quite a life of their own separate from the main text. Ruskin's use of large amounts of paratext to accompany his main text began in the 1860s. During that decade, his works became recognized for their extensive footnotes, which range from mere clarification of his definitions to newspaper articles reprinted in full. Though he included long explanations and analysis of his phrases as well as quotations from secondary sources within the main body of his works, Ruskin still felt the need to append additional supplementary material. Often it is the paratext that not only supports but also makes sense of the main text, which can at times seem quite discursive and unorganized. Cook observes that “[t]he book [*Fors*] needs a good many notes for two reasons. One is the large number of topical and transient allusions that it contains. The other is the nature of the style in which it is written” (*Works* 27: xxxi). (It should be noted, though, that many of these notes were added by Ruskin in the Cook and Wedderburn *Works* and were not appended to the letters during the earliest publication of *Fors*.) Even Ruskin himself later writes in his memoir, *Praeterita* (1885-89): “I tried always in *Fors* to say things, if I could a little piquantly. Whether I succeeded in writing piquantly, or not, I certainly often wrote obscurely” (*Works* 35: 46). Thus obscurity sometimes



occurred through the linguistic demands he made on readers, but more often than not so did intellectual engagement, which we begin to detect when we see the incredible clarificatory labor that Ruskin puts into the paratextual elements of *Fors*.

It is now crucial to focus in on the significance of Ruskin's footnotes in these letters. The footnotes are often *Fors*' clearest text and provide a sense of organization and clarification to the opaque, discursive nature of the main text. The footnotes in these letters often maintain their normal usage, as citations from other texts, but more often than not they contain hidden meanings or allusions that explain the main text. For example, Ruskin cites the historical background of Sir John Hawkwood and "The White Company" from his "friend Mr. Rawdon Brown, of Venice, [taken] from his yet unpublished work, *The English in Italy in the Fourteenth Century*" (*Works* 27:17). This early footnote is crucial because Ruskin uses the model of Hawkwood and "The White Company" as a model for the Guild of St. George, an allusion readers will only glean much later in the text. Thus footnotes contain allusions meant to educate readers as important as—if not more so than—the main text because one has to search even harder for their meaning. Ruskin also uses footnotes to elaborate on his main text: to clarify and define terms. For example, in "Letter 2" Ruskin explains the various usages of the word "royalty": "Observe generally, 'Royalty,' means rule of any kind; 'Monarchy' rule by a single person; 'Kingship' rule by an able and wise person" (*Works* 27:29). Such footnotes makes sense in light of Helsinger's first requisite for reading Ruskin: "mining for meaning" or word hunting (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 121). Sometimes Ruskin even puts whole newspaper articles reprinted as footnotes, as in "Letter 5: The White-Thorn Blossom." The piece, entitled "To the Editor of the *Times*" (5 April 1871), itself is a letter from one W. Robinson discussing the terrible state of the gardens of Paris after the recent violence during *La Semaine sanglante*. One

question that arises here is why Ruskin did not include this in the body of his main text. Why make an entire letter in a newspaper a mere footnote? I find the answer to be inherently nationalistic. In the main text, he is discussing the three “Material” things that humans need to be useful: “Pure Air, Water, and Earth.” Ruskin describes humanity’s need to care for the earth, and in the footnote the newspaper letter serves as an example of how he sees the state of that care in France. Though Ruskin tends to discuss British history and events in the main body of *Fors* (with the exception of *La Semaine sanglante*, the “Bloody Week” of the Commune that lasted from 21 May to 28 May 1871), information regarding the state of affairs in France is footnoted. It is important to note that the letter that Ruskin footnotes is an Englishman’s, not a Frenchman’s, account of the present conditions of the French gardens after the recent upheaval. Thus, I agree with Stoddart that there is a strong sense of British nationalism pervading *Fors* (66). I, however, find this nationalistic fervor most represented between which country is allowed mention in the main text and which in the paratext. Though the paratext provides meaningful allusions that both explain and organize the main text, the former is still supplemental to the latter. England is given precedence in the main text while France is footnoted.

Footnotes also give detailed accounts of the time, whereabouts, and state of the author during the writing of *Fors*, as is the case in the opening of “Letter 6: Elysian Fields.” These instances when Ruskin the writer is making us aware of his writing ensures that this public letter is even more transparently private as well; other examples include *Works* 27: 98; 102; 106; 132. In “Letter 7,” for example, Ruskin makes an apology to the botany lecturer who he had previously belittled in “Letter 3: Richard of England,” whom he now realizes knew more about botany than he himself did (*Works* 27:55). Thus the footnotes remind readers that the form in

which Ruskin writes is both a private as well as public one. Ruskin's footnotes reveal his mistakes in judgment, his illnesses, his means of writing, and the newspaper articles he reads to gain inspiration for composing *Fors*. Thus *Fors* is a series of letters that straddles both the public and private spheres through the dialogue between the main text and the paratext: the public world is represented through the dense, discursive prose of Ruskin as Oxford lecturer and heroic educator. Meanwhile, the footnotes reveal the thoughts of Ruskin, the private man. In other words, the relations between main text and paratext enable us to see that *Fors* is a document that assumes public authority and private intimacy with its readership.

### **Ruskin's Authority in *Fors*: Hero as Educator and Prophet**

Through the features I have been tracing, we can observe how Ruskin wishes to establish his public authority in a personal way: he is a figure related to prophecy, and the ways in which he negotiates that position with his implied audience are important to note. The kind of authority he has is not condescending, from on high, but rather, as the footnotes show, fully immersed in the world of everyday cultural events. As mentioned above, Ruskin always calls attention to the circumstances around his writing these letters: he wants to share with readers both the immediacy and the surroundings in which he writes. At the end of "Letter 2," he observes: "As I was revising [again a hint that these letters are well-edited] this sheet,— on the evening of the 20<sup>th</sup> of last month,— two slips of paper were brought to me" [one containing the speech made by his friend the Right Hon. William Francis Cowper, M. P. for South Hampshire, and the other to the "Liberal Association" at Portsmouth and a prospective made by the Boardmen's and General Advertising Co-operative Society] (*Works* 27: 42). As Francis O'Gorman comments: "Ruskin, in *Fors Clavigera* aspired to insert himself, and the valuable messages he wanted to transmit, into

nothing less than the daily life and the weave of his readers' experience and perception of the world, and he endeavored to do this through a practice of writing explicitly, continually, and insistently in contact with the stuff of that life" (83). Ruskin is also revealing his writing processes by letting readers know that one of his last revisions occurs on 20 January, giving Allen enough time to publish *Fors* for the 1 February. In "Letter 27: Christ's Lodgings," for example, Ruskin writes: "When I consider the quantity of wise talking which has passed in at one long ear of the world, and out at the other, without making the smallest impression upon its mind, I am sometimes tempted for the rest of my life to try and do what seems to me rational, silently; and to speak no more" (*Works* 27: 353). But Ruskin is not silent; he continues to speak, and *Fors* is his testament. One disadvantage to the fact that Ruskin's prophecy is not Biblical one (and is thus an imperfect human testament rather than a divine one) is that many of the promises he makes in the early letters are not fulfilled in the later ones. For example, when Ruskin refers to the three figures that he pairs with his three "*fors*" or forces—Hercules, Ulysses, and Lycurgus—he only returns to Lycurgus in "Letter 27" and "Letter 68: Bags That Wax Old," while the first two are only briefly mentioned in "Letter 79: Life Guards of New Life" and "Letter 82: Heavenly Choirs." This information shows that if Ruskin is a prophet, he is clearly a heroic not a divine one. His teaching thus involves what he readily acknowledges as distinctly human practices that relate to revision, correction, and responsiveness to the changing currents of the everyday world.

We can investigate Ruskin's humanized type of heroic and prophetic authority further by observing how he sets himself up in relation to his implied audience. He opens his letters with the salutation "My Friends" and ends them with "I remain, your faithful friend, John Ruskin." He immediately creates a sense of equalization between writer and reader. But like everything else

with Ruskin, nothing is so simple; his relationship with his audience is highly nuanced. Like the government he proposes for nations (a kind of equalizing hierarchy, not quite socialism but not quite autocracy either), his letters are set up similarly. Everyone is equal as human laborers: for both writer and reader, to live is to labor, and to labor is to live. However, with the Guild of St. George, Ruskin creates a hierarchy with himself at the top as the “Master” and below him are his readers as his “Companions” or pupils. Consequently, he sometimes slips into speech that would seem more appropriate to his Oxford lectures than in public letters. He often begins his letters by reviewing previous lessons taught and previewing the next lesson to come, in which “we may continue our studies in [the next] month” (*Works* 27: 44). Moreover, these pupils that he teaches are distinctly of one class. He addresses readers as “you” and aligns that second person pronoun with the working classes. He writes that he wants to teach them Latin (one reason being to explain the title) and he assumes his reader’s response: “Do not smile at my saying so. Of Arithmetic, Geometry, and Chemistry, you can know but little, at the utmost; but that little, well learnt, serves you well. And a little Latin, well learnt, will serve you also, and in a higher way than any of these” (*Works* 27: 27). Thus he sets up his implied readers as the barely literate working class who need him as their Master to show them that such archaic and privileged knowledge as the classical languages has a higher purpose, which they would not immediately see as they are a part of the masses: namely, concerned only with the body.

In “Letter 2,” he also explains to them the meaning of their “Squires” and “Capitalist Employers,” in which the former represents what Arnold terms the “Barbarians” (upper classes) and the latter “the Philistines” (middle class). This distinction suggests that Ruskin’s implied audience comprises the working classes. But though these are indeed his implied readers, the confusion that arises over readership stems from *Fors*’ goal itself. Ruskin is calling his working

male readers to be even better laborers than they already are. Ruskin writes in “Letter 27” that his intended audience is “the providers of houses and dinners,” which he later expands to those “who must use their heads as well as their hands for what they do” (*Works* 27: 187). By this, Ruskin means he is writing to “a representative of the highest type of working man” (*Works* 17: lxxviii).<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt, then, that Ruskin’s readers belong to the working classes but at the same time he hopes that *Fors* will raise them in order for them to become highly skilled members of that class: the upper echelons of the laboring classes or what Carlyle terms the “aristocracy of talent” (see *Past and Present* 32-37). In *Fors*, Ruskin also refers to the lowest or illiterate unskilled workers as “the poor”; he discounts this group from the “you” in his letters. Both Austin and Stoddart mention that in 1880 Ruskin reveals that up until then his audience had been those who were similar to his Oxford students (i.e. the upper and middle classes), and they claim that that only in “Letter 89” do we see the proper beginning of letters for workmen. However, I find that this revelation comes later in the writing of *Fors*, after 1878, the year of his first mental breakdown, which Ruskin admitted stemmed not only from overwork but also depression regarding what he felt to be *Fors*’s lack of engagement with his implied audience. In the late 1870s, Ruskin thought no one read or understood his work: he believed that no “Companions” were actually listening and learning from the “Master.” But as the success of the

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<sup>1</sup> His short letter series *Time and Tide* is often termed “a dress rehearsal” for *Fors* (Stoddart 28). These letters, published in 1867, held the full title of *Time and Tide by Weare and Tyne: Twenty-Five Letters to a Working Man of Sunderland on the Laws of Work* and were letters of correspondence between Ruskin and Thomas Dixon, of Sunderland (1831-80), a real individual, who he took to be “a representative of the highest type of working man” (*Works* 17: lxxviii). Ruskin drew much of *Fors*’ material from these previous letters as *Fors* “was originally intended to be a second series of *Time and Tide*” (*Works* 17: lxxxix).

Guild of St. George demonstrates, *Fors* did reach readers and those readers were skilled, literate workmen.

### **Reaching the Literate Workman through *Fors***

As we have seen, one of the ways in which Ruskin used *Fors* to educate the working classes was through teaching active reading to his readers. One of the techniques that Ruskin employs is what Austin terms “leveling down” or what she defines as “aural and precritical reading.” To explain this type of reading, Austin makes the following observation: “In verbal readings, then, meaning inheres in conventional signs and their syntactical arrangements.

Precritical interpretation involves visual and aural elements rather than conceptual or abstract levels of language” (107-08). Ruskin had learned such reading practices from his mother when studying the Bible with her as a child, and through such literal reading practices he felt *Fors* would reach a wider audience. In Austin’s view, when Ruskin read a painting, he created a narrative, and when he wrote a narrative, he created a painting of words (Austin 109). This structure marks the movement from verbal to precritical reading. We can see this movement at work throughout *Fors*, where the letters tend to resist abstract conceptualizations and philosophical propositions. Instead, each letters tends toward aural and visual effects, often through highly imaginative allusions. As his explanation of its title reveals, *Fors* is heavily allusive and, like the titles for each letter, the content is heavily layered with meaning.

In “Letter 3” alone, Ruskin first discusses the sentimentality of present-day newspapers, creates a metaphor for the relations of king to country as one between a husband and wife, brings to light notions of new and old slavery (then too much work, now too much idleness), and finally quotes an excerpt from Edward Augustus Freeman’s *History of the Norman Conquest* (1867), which relates King Henry II’s relations with his sons, especially the important figure of his

second son: Richard the Lionheart. The organization of all these seemingly unconnected allusions holds together through Ruskin's use of the "imagination associative": this is the imaginative process by which he uses his memories and readings of the past and present to come into play and association with the concepts he is presently discussing. Thus, unlike other intellectuals of his age, who formulate their work with strict organization, abstract topics, and easily seen allusions, Ruskin's organization and allusions have to be searched out, though his topics remain fairly commonplace and important to readers' lives.

A further example of Ruskin's practice occurs where he abstracts from a well-known present-day conflict, such as the current Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), and reveals the ridiculousness of military violence by "leveling it down" to another historical, and much more local, conflict: one between two royal houses and areas of England. In "Letter 1," he discusses the war between France and Prussia over the Rhine River as if it were a squabble between Lancashire and Yorkshire for the River Ribble. (He is of course alluding here to the Wars of the Roses that took place between the Houses of York and Lancaster from 1455 to 1487.) Benedict Anderson's sense of nations and nationalism as imaginary communities comes into play here when Ruskin reveals the absurdity of strong national feelings even as he continuously plays on his reader's sense of Englishness as superior to Frenchness.

The "leveling down" of meaning occurs in his account of not only of political history but also modern philology. Ruskin writes on the importance of words themselves and their etymology, and in so doing teaches his readers not to read quickly like the newspapers encourage them to do, but rather to take their reading word by word. In "Letter 4: Switches of Broom," Ruskin takes apart John Stuart Mill's definition of productive labor word for word. He performs a demanding reading on one of Mill's clauses: "That which produces utilities fixed and



embodied in material objects” (Mill 48). Here he subjects Mill’s rhetoric to philological and grammatical analysis:

“Object,” you must always remember, is fine English for “Thing.” It is a semi-Latin word, and properly means a thing “thrown in your way;” so that if you put “ion” to the end of it, it becomes Objection. We will rather say “Thing,” if you have no objection—you and I. A “Material” thing, then, of course, signifies something solid and tangible. It is very necessary for Political Economists always to insert this word “material,” lest people should suppose that there was any use or value in Thought or Knowledge, and other such immaterial objects. (*Works* 27: 65)

He continues by finding the words “embodying” and “fixed” as superfluous and thus he finally cannot define Mill’s concept of utility at all. Ruskin’s simplifies Mill’s definition to “[t]he Productive labour is labour that produces a Useful Thing” (*Work* 27: 64-5). Ruskin therefore not only sets himself up as an exemplary reader: a “Master” who is obviously better to follow than Mill ever would be. Moreover, he exemplifies for his readership the kind of work that he believes that intellectuals should do before publication: define their terms properly and synthesize their abstract ideas.

In *Fors*, Ruskin constantly emphasizes the accurate use of language. He reiterates that his readers do not take words and definitions at their face value, but instead delve deeper and look at a word’s etymology and use within a sentence. In “Letter 12: The Prince’s Lesson,” for instance, Ruskin shows what he means by conducting a reading of the Nativity scene as written in Luke 2 for his Christmas 1871 letter. Before beginning, Ruskin asks: “What is, or may be, this Nativity, to you, then, I repeat? Shall we consider, a little, what, at all events, it was to the people of its time; and so make ourselves more clear as to what it might be to us?” (*Works* 27:201).

Even in his questions, Ruskin employs commas and other punctuation to break up and halt each phrase in order to force readers to mull over what he is saying. Ruskin is here asking a question that not many people put to themselves during this holiday season. Ruskin assumes that his readers are used to being told that Christmas is meaningful because of Christ's birth. They accept this phenomenon without any explanation. But in this letter Ruskin urges them to realize that they should discover meaning for themselves and not just be told what to think. If they want political reform for the working classes, they need to learn to deserve it. Ruskin continues: "We will read slowly. 'And there were, in that country, shepherds, staying out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks at night'" (*Works* 27:201-2). Thus the scene is set up: the first people to hear of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, are lowly shepherds: people whose work makes them night workers, nomads with no stable place to set down their roots (like many of the readers Ruskin is addressing). Ruskin then continues to the next verse (Luke 2:9): "'And behold, the Messenger of the Lord stood above them, and the glory of the Lord lightened round them, and they feared a great fear!' 'Messenger.' You must remember that, when this was written, the word 'angel' had only the effect of our word—'messenger'—on men's minds. Our translators say 'angel' when they like, and 'messenger' when they like; but the Bible, messenger only, or angel only, as you please" (*Works* 27:202). Ruskin is here revealing the power translators have over readers: they interchangeably use "angel" and "messenger" depending on which one they see best suiting a particular scene. Since Ruskin knows that the word "angel" derives from the Greek verb to announce or relay a message, translators' lax linguistic attention to the original meaning amounts to blasphemy, since they override the original Greek of the Bible. What Ruskin sees as the license of translators is hidden from readers because of how similar the terms "angel" and "messenger" are, but with his help they will discover an important

difference. “Angel” is defined as “a ministering spirit or divine messenger; one of an order of spiritual beings superior to man in power and intelligence, who, according to the Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and other theologies, are the attendants and messengers of the Deity” (OED entry). Similarly, “messenger” means “A person who carries a message or goes on an errand for another; a courier. Formerly also: an envoy or ambassador; a person who brings news or other intelligence; a spy, a scout” (OED entry). Even though, both terms are fairly synonymous, the term “angel” has more precedence because, in his view, it possesses divine qualities. “Angels” are more “superior to man in intelligence and power,” which also puts them ahead of the normally human-embodied “messenger.” As we can see, Ruskin is here emphasizing the importance of accurate language and context. The shepherds were scared, but at the combined effect of “the Messenger of the Lord” and “the glory of Lord” that was around them. As Ruskin points out, interchanging the name “messenger” with “angel” makes this figure of the Lord’s servant as powerful as “the glory of God” that succeeds it. Like Zeus, showing his glory to Semele, leading to her death because she would never be ready for that glory, God sent his messenger (probably in this instance a spiritual being but less powerful than if the term “angel” was used) to prepare the way and remediate the effects of the glory of God not outshine it.

Besides breaking down the syntax and diction of the Nativity scene, Ruskin also reads it through an eco-critical lens: “You would have liked to seen it, you think! Brighter than the sun; perhaps twenty-one coloured, instead of seven-coloured, and as bright as the lime-light: doubtless you would have liked to see it, at midnight, in Judea . . . I am actually writing this sentence on the second December, at ten in the morning, with the feeblest possible gleam of sun on my paper; and for the last three weeks the days have been one long drift of ragged gloom, with only sometimes five minutes’ gleam of the glory of God, between the gusts, which no one

regarded” (*Works* 27:203-04). Ruskin thus is using tales of the past to draw his readers’ attention to the present. It must have been beautiful to see the glory of God at midnight in Judea, but they cannot even see his glory, the sun, on a regular day in England.

A further striking aspect of Ruskin’s reading is his astute contrast between the responses of the shepherds and the Magi to Jesus’ birth: “The uneducated people [the shepherds] came only to see, but these highly trained ones to worship; and they have allowed themselves to be led, and governed, and directed into the way which they should go (and that a long one), by the mere authority and prestige of a superior person, whom they clearly recognize as a born king, though not of their people” (*Works* 27:211-212). Ruskin is here suggesting that at this moment his working-class readers are at the stage of the shepherds, willing to see but not quite willing to be led. Through *Fors*, Ruskin hopes that his literate working-class readers will become like the Magi, and humbly submit not only to see, but also be ruled by another. As he sees it, such readers can begin this journey by submitting to him as “Master.”

### ***Fors* and the “Real War”: Literacy, Reading, and Class**

Ruskin’s interest in discussing the shepherds and the Magi points to his consistent concern with class differences, which in many ways he strives to resolve through strengthening the literate working classes’ abilities in reading. Like Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Ruskin uses *Fors* as a platform to critique all of the major classes of modern Europe: he sees the violence erupting in England and in France directly stemming from debates about class conflict. What marks Ruskin from Arnold in this instance is that he remains on the side of the masses or working classes against the useless labor of the aristocracy and capitalists. At the same time, he believes that the traditional ruling class enshrines certain values that should be preserved for the culture as a whole. Though Ruskin heavily critiques the aristocracy, his admitted hero-worship

of kings in “Letter 10: The Baron’s Gate” stops him short from calling for their abolishment, which he does not hesitate to do with regard to middle-class capitalists. Ruskin uses the excessive luxurious habits of the French Catholic church as an allegory for the state of the European *ancien régime*. In a French village, Ruskin witnesses a “pyramid of candles” barely used during mass every day, while the villagers themselves have barely enough light by which they can do their work by at night. He sees that the candles are beautiful to look at but give no real light to anyone, and are therefore useless (the worst accusation Ruskin can level at anyone). He sees the female aristocracy in the same light as these candles: “[W]hat I should have tried to convince the young ladies themselves of, at the evening service, would probably not have been admitted so readily;—that they themselves were nothing more than an extremely graceful kind of wax-tapers which had got into their heads that they were only to be looked at, for the honour of God, and to light anybody” (*Works* 27:110). Thus Ruskin sees the female aristocracy as useless models to be observed, ones who do not use their light in any form of productive labor. He sees their male counterparts the same way: “[T]he English squire, after his fashion, sends himself to the highly decorated gaol [i.e. Houses of Parliament] all spring-time; and cannot be content with his hands in his own pockets, nor even in yours and mine; but clasp and laughs, semi-idiot that he is, at dog-fights on the floor of the House” (*Works* 27:110). Thus the women of the Old Guard are just there to be looked at while their menfolk idly play what might as well be children’s games. In the face of such meaningless living, Ruskin calls for the aristocracy to be the true squires and ladies that they were meant to be and return to live in their country estates where they can enact useful labor. He also advocates for the education of the ruling class to be a combination of physical as well as mental labor, as his Ferry Hinksey road-building project for his Oxford students attests (1874-75). (Oscar Wilde is perhaps the best known of the students

who participated in this exercise.) Ruskin thus takes an unusual stance alongside the working classes instead of against them when he asks: “Alas! Of these divided races, of whom one was appointed to teach and guide the other, which has indeed sinned deepest—the unteaching, or the untaught?—which now are guiltiest—these, who perish, or those—who forget?” (*Works* 27:138). For Ruskin, it is the former group who is the most culpable.

The debates about class conflict intensify elsewhere in *Fors*. In “Letter 7,” Ruskin reveals that the main object of his letters is “the Real war” that is occurring, and extracts three promises from his readers (*Works* 27:123-31). He writes: “So that above all things, in what we value most of possessions, pleasant sights, and true knowledge, we cannot relish seeing any pretty things unless other people see them also; neither can we be content to know anything for ourselves, but must contrive, somehow, to make it known to others” (*Works* 27:123-24). Thus his reasons for writing *Fors* are explained in this section: he could not enjoy being just an art professor discussing the true beauty created by humankind when the British air was choked with manufacturing smoke and its waters heated beyond livable conditions. He could not continue to write true things about art when the daily newspapers were spewing lies about everything else. In true communist style, he also finds that the war truly raging within Europe is not between France and Prussia or within France itself: it is between the capitalist and the workingman. Ruskin writes:

And the guilty Thieves of Europe, the real sources of all deadly war in it, are the Capitalists—that is to say, people who live by percentage on the labour of others; instead of by fair wages for their own. The Real war in Europe, of which this fighting in Paris is the Inauguration, is between these and the workman, such as these have made him. They have kept him poor, ignorant, and sinful, that they might, without his knowledge, gather

for themselves the produce of his toil. At last, a dim insight into the fact of this dawns on him; and such as they have made him he meets them, and will meet. (*Works* 27:127)

Clearly, the true enemy is the Capitalist. Ruskin depicts this figure as parasitic: performing no labor of its own at all, but merely living off the labor of others. Ruskin ends “Letter 7” with three promises he wants his readers to make to him: “(I.) You are to do good work, whether you live or die . . . (II.) Seek to revenge no injury . . . (III.) Learn to obey good laws” (*Works* 27:129-31). Thus as prophet for his age, Ruskin sets out three biblical promises that he wants his readers to fulfill. First, he urges his readers to perform useful work, which he has defined as both intellectual and physical labor and whose value does not come from the product produced or the consumer who buys it but rather from the laborer himself. Secondly, Ruskin has seen the destruction of both lives and artwork that “the Bloody Week” has wreaked on Paris, and he wants peaceful means of fighting (Ruskin is a staunch anti-war adherent). Lastly, Ruskin is writing against all those who just want to change bad laws, when he finds they cannot obey the good ones. (Though he acknowledges that bad and good are relative terms, he emphasizes that people should be law-abiding citizens if they plan to give the government so much power over them.)

Though in *Fors* Ruskin discusses the many class-based and national problems presently occurring in Europe, he, unlike Carlyle, proposes a solution to them. Through the Guild of St. George, Ruskin believes he can create an equal society like that which Sir Thomas More proposed in *Utopia* (1516). More than 350 years before Ruskin, More described a society almost identical to its Victorian offspring. Like Ruskin, More believes that government should support human labor: “The chief, and almost the only business of the government, is to take care that no

man live idle” (*Works* 27:118). To keep men free from the evil of idleness, More creates an interesting regimen for his ideal society:

But, they [Utopians], dividing the day and night into twenty-four hours, appoint six of these for work, three of which are before dinner and three after; they then sup, and, at eight o’clock, counting from noon, go to bed and sleep eight hours: the rest of their time, besides that taken up in work, eating, and sleeping, is left to every man’s discretion; yet they are not to abuse that interval to luxury and idleness, but must employ it in some proper exercise, according to their various inclinations, which is, for the most part, reading. (*Works* 27:118)

For More, hours not spent laboring to create useful objects are spent cultivating human beings through painting, thinking, and reading. This model of living is what Ruskin is trying to advocate in *Fors*: he is giving readers an opportunity to be not just “beasts of burden” grinding away at the wheel of capitalism, but instead intellectual and physical laborers (*Works* 27:118). More also addresses questions as to whether a plan with so little hours of working will succeed: he finds that it will since the world already functions on so little labor.

In *Fors*, Ruskin marks an important distinction between useful and useless labor, but he also does so with education. The competitive examination that England currently had in place is what Ruskin sees as the root of its useless, mechanical education system.<sup>2</sup> In *Fors*, he uses the

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<sup>2</sup> In the late nineteenth century, the education system that had been newly made mandatory in England and Scotland only demanded that the three Rs be taught: Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic (made so by the English Education Code of 1870 and the Scottish version of 1872). Here Ruskin uses the term “competitive examination” to mean more than just the civil service examinations taken by those interested in government jobs. It also refers to the “prizes” given to the top-ranking students in a given subject. Often these prizes could be more easily won if candidates copied the styles and models of study of previous winners. Ruskin himself admittedly did this when he wrote his poem “Salsette and Elephanta” with Wordsworth as his poetic model for the Newdigate Prize for poetry at Oxford University in 1839 after two failed attempts.



Socratic model of dialogue to tease out the difference between his own instructional methods and those of the state. In “Letter 9: Honour to Whom Honour,” Ruskin asks his readers how they tell the measure of a man, and Ruskin sees his working-class “Companions” as hesitantly suggesting: “By competitive examination of course?” Ruskin answers: “Sternly, no! but under absolute prohibition of all violent and strained effort—most of all envious or anxious effort—in every exercise of body and mind; and by enforcing on every scholar’s heart, from the first to the last stage of his instruction, the irrevocable ordinance of the third *Fors Clavigera* [Fate or Destiny], that his mental rank among men is fixed from the hour he was born” (*Works* 27:149). The Socratic model of dialogue Ruskin employs here is arresting: he is questioning an educational system long held beyond question. Ruskin here points out that a man’s intellect is set the hour he is born (the third “fors” or Fate decides that), and though man chooses how he will employ that intellect, he cannot enhance it by “the temporary and violent effort” that men put themselves through in the competitive examination.

Ruskin sees such methods as one of the hypocrisies of modern liberal society. He believes that workingmen remain convinced that every man is equal but he is frustrated because he assumes that they do not grasp that they force each other to compete against one another in an education system that promotes inequality. He exclaims in a footnote to “Letter 14: On the Dordogne”: “Every man as good as his neighbor! You extremely sagacious English persons; and forthwith you establish competitive examination, which drives your boys into idiocy, before you will give them a bit of bread to make their young muscles of” (*Works* 27: 248). To give an example of this, Ruskin recalls one of his former art students a decade before who had the audacity to ask if he would ever draw like Turner. Ruskin was shocked at such a question, since to him the pupil had always been no better or worse than a copyist:

It was the first time that I had been brought into direct collision with the modern system of prize-giving and competition; and the mischief of it was, in the sequel clearly shown to me, and tragically. This youth had the finest powers of *mechanic execution* I have ever met with, but was quite *incapable of invention*, or strong intellectual effort of any kind. Had he been taught early and thoroughly to know his place, and be content with his faculty, he would have been one of the happiest and most serviceable of men.

(*Works* 27:150-51; emphasis added)

The education system has thus been capitalized in Ruskin's view: it awards those of its pupils that are best at mechanized copying rather than imaginative creation. Ruskin perceives the problems of society generally to be reflected in education specifically. He thus concludes that capitalism is hypocritical: the laissez-faire system of economics seems to offer everyone a chance to better their lives, when in actuality their "Fate" or third "fors" has been set since birth and it is up to them to do well in their prescribed role (by using the first and second "fors"). Ruskin is thus opting for an approach to politics that is honest about the hierarchy that he believes that Fate has decreed, but he also wants to allow freedom in inventive creation in for the men who occupy those predetermined roles.

In contrast to the British education of the present, Ruskin offers the education of the past as examples of how every young British man should be instructed. Ruskin takes an excerpt from Plato's *Alcibiades* that describes the education of Persian male royalty: "When the boy is seven years old he has to go and learn all about horses, and is taught by the masters of horsemanship, and begins to go against wild beasts; and when he is fourteen years old, they give him the masters whom they call the Kingly Child-Guiders: and those are four, chosen the best out of all the Persians who are in the prime of life" (*Works* 27:212). Plato continues to describe the four

“Kingly Child-Guiders” who were chosen as the wisest, the most just, the most temperate, and the bravest men in the kingdom. Thus through this type of education, the young prince would exercise both his physical and mental abilities: he would be able to ride and hunt, and he would value the Gods, kinship, the truth, patience, and courage. This kind of education, in the diction Plato employs and in Ruskin’s translation of the Greek, gives the educated Persian prince freedom and does not make him a slave to outward fears or inward desires. Just such a liberating education does Ruskin want for every class of men, especially his working-class readers. This is the education Ruskin desires to establish in England, for all classes, an education that addresses both body and mind and emancipates rather than enslaves its pupils. The only problem in this example is the education that Plato describes was only given to the *princes* of Persia: an even more select group than England’s education system catered to. Though it might appear to be idealistic, Ruskin is pointing out two important problems with bringing this example of the Persian royal education to bear on the current British system. First, education should be for everyone; this had been recently ameliorated with Foster’s Education Act. Secondly, it should not reduce pupils to the status of slaves who learn mechanized copying and memorization for a few competitive examinations. Instead, his program of learning should engender imaginative creativity to help them live useful lives.

### **Ruskin, *Fors*, and Alternative Education: Creating and Interpreting Art**

As an alternative to the competitive examination that Ruskin sees ruining British youth, he offers an artisanal curriculum. Ruskin’s plan is revealed in his private correspondence, which he includes publicly in “Letter 6.” In this letter, Ruskin mentions a correspondent from Birmingham (one of the large English cities closely associated with industrialization) who is

responding to the following statement in “Letter 5”: “In my plan for our practical work, in last number, you remember I said, we must try and make some pottery, and have some music, and that we would have *no steam engines*” (*Works* 27:103; italics added). One senses that Ruskin’s proposal to develop artisanal skills and produce music on traditional instruments in the name of destroying “*steam engines*” sounds impractical: Why would you dispense with technology in its beginnings in order to go back to an agrarian society not of the near past but the medieval age? Ruskin even admits that his Birmingham correspondent wrote that such a scheme would be impossible. But as with anything to do with Ruskin, there are many layers to what he writes. Though he rightly knows that life cannot revert back to a pre-industrial world, he finds the price that society pays for technology unsustainable. Art creation and material production for him have become mechanized, and thus they no longer possess the creative imperfections he admired. Instead, he believes that human beings are turning into efficiency-driven machines. He gives *Fors*’s readers his response to his Birmingham correspondent:

To this, as my correspondent was an educated person, and knew Latin, I ventured to answer that porcelain had been painted before the time of James Watt [the steam engineer who invented the concept of horsepower]; that even music was not entirely a recent invention; that my poor company [Guild of St. George], I feared, would deserve no better colours than Apelles and Titian made shift with, or even the Chinese; and that I could not find any notice of musical instruments in the time of David, for instance, having been made by steam. (*Works* 27:104)

The first section of Ruskin’s response reveals that his correspondent is actually an educated middle-class man. But this individual, even though he “knew Latin,” is also a prime example of the education system Ruskin is against and is writing *Fors* to remediate: an education system that

merely crams pupils with information to pass exams and win prizes and not to live life. This seemingly educated Birmingham man does not realize that artistic production has occurred for centuries without the help of machinery and that many such works are considered masterpieces, even by Victorian standards. Ruskin goes so far as to suggest that the primitivism and roughness of pre-industrial art are what makes these works examples of genius. Thus Ruskin writes about his preference for Gothic architecture rather than its Victorian counterpart in “The Nature of Gothic” in volume II of *The Stones of Venice* (1853). He glorifies the Gothic because its imperfections reproduce the human desire to represent nature in art, unlike the Victorian facades that are unnaturally perfect owing to mechanical techniques in producing masonry. To substantiate his words, Ruskin alludes to Jeremiah 18:4-6 in which God compares his powers over nations with the potter’s abilities to mold beautiful art out of mere earth: “And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?’ saith the LORD. ‘Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel’” (*Works* 27: 105). Thus if God can compare his vast power to the mere primitive artwork of the potter, Ruskin finds powerful support in the Bible for celebrating pre-industrial and thus, for him, vibrant and dynamic forms of art production.

Ruskin’s alternative education includes an appreciation for not only un-mechanized, imperfect art but also the cultivation of the ability to interpret that artwork accurately. By investigating the art Ruskin chooses to include in *Fors*, we can discern the ways in which he teaches his readers how to understand artworks. Three of the figures in “Letters 1-10” are copied woodcuts of Giotto’s works from the Italian Chapel of the Arena at Padua. From 1853 to 1860,

Ruskin had published essays that would be eventually collected in *Giotto and His Works in Padua*. These essays therefore informed Ruskin's art teachings in *Fors* and allowed him to use his expertise in art criticism to explain political economy to himself and to his readers. "Letter 5" begins with an engraving of "Hope," which Giotto depicts as a female angel in profile. She is set against a darkened doorway reaching up for a crown that another miniature angel is holding down to her but just above her reach. Paired with this image, though, and set at the end of "Letter 6" is a facsimile of a woodcut created by Holbein (one of the exceptions to Ruskin's almost sole use of Giotto's artwork) that depicts a goblin-like creature using a bellows to blow air into the ears of the man it is sitting upon. This image is entitled "He that hath ears to hear let him hear" (*Works* 27:112). "The imp," as Ruskin calls the creature, is "one of the ministering angels of the goddess [Hope]; for she herself, having ears set wide to the wind, is careful to have wind-instruments provided by her servants for other people's ears" (*Works* 27:112).

This explanation provides an interesting reading for both images. I interpret the second illustration as centering on the gargoyle-like creature blowing wind into the ears of a man whose face is half in shadow, half turned away. Thus I see the man standing in for Everyman, in whose ears Hope's messengers pour nonsensical words: mere air and no substance. The first illustration therefore runs in a similar cynical vein and portrays an angel trying to reach victory but never quite capturing it. Thus Ruskin appears to be choosing quite dark images for his letters: hope is something illusive and cannot be counted on. It is also significant to note that Ruskin's pairing of works from two very different artists to illustrate the same point reveals how he wants art criticism to be creative and freely associative. With this freedom come multiple interpretations of the same painting as well.

In “Letter 7,” “Charity” opens with another figure, also drawn by Giotto, from the same chapel: it depicts a woman standing atop bags of money with her right hand holding a bowl of beautiful fruits and grains (pomegranates, for example, are visible). The left hand is lifting up a heart to a figure that looks like Jesus. She is not a young woman: she has bags under her eyes and the dress of a stout and ordinary design. Her hair is beautifully garlanded. Ruskin describes the painting thus: “[Giotto’s] Charity tramples upon bags of gold—has no use for them. She gives only corn and flowers; and God’s angel gives *her*, not even these—but a Heart” (*Works* 27:130). He then later corrects himself in the footnote by writing: “I do not doubt I read the action wrong; she is *giving* her heart to God, while she gives gifts to men” (*Works* 27:130). Thus, it makes sense that Charity gives her heart to God because when devoting works to men, his creation, one is essentially devoting oneself to God. But unlike Ruskin, it seems to me that Charity is not trampling bags of money, but is rather being propped up by them. Without the layer of money, she would not be able to give her heart to God. It is interesting to note here that both Hope and Charity are depicted as women by Giotto, a feature that gives historical precedence for the kind of sympathetic action-inspiring woman Ruskin creates in *Sesame and Lilies*. More important, however, is Ruskin’s willingness to pair works by different artists and thus permit multiple interpretations of the art. Even he himself changes his interpretation of “Charity” after studying it for some time. Thus, through his revisionary practice, we can see that in *Fors* Ruskin demonstrates that interpreting art is similar to creating art: both are creative processes that allow the pupil or artisan to employ the “Imagination Associative” flexibly in order to create new worlds and not copy already formed or predetermined ones.

Lastly, Ruskin shows readers that art criticism does not reside in a vacuum, but is an invaluable part of the alternative education he is offering them. He believes that the imaginative

ways in which one interprets an artwork can help in other areas of study. For instance, there are many moments in *Fors* when Ruskin's art expertise and understanding of political economy conflate into beautifully described images. In "Letter 7," in order to describe the different shades of communism, Ruskin aligns them with different shades of blood:

But with respect to the management of both [public and private property], we old Reds [communists] fall into two classes, differing, not indeed in colour of redness, but in depth of tint of it—one class being, as it were, only of a delicately pink, peach-blossom, or dog-rose redness; but the other, to which I myself do partly, and desire wholly, to belong, as I told you, reddest of the red—that is to say, full crimson, or even dark crimson, passing into that deep colour of the blood which made the Spaniards call it blue, instead of red, and which the Greeks call φοινίκεος, being an intense phoenix or flamingo colour: and this not merely, as in the flamingo feathers, a colour on the outside, but going through and through, ruby-wise; so that Dante, who is one of the few people who have ever beheld our queen full in the face, says of her that, if she had been in a fire, he could not have seen her at all, so fire-colour she was, all through. (*Works* 27:122-23)

Thus, though many critics find that Ruskin is not an expert in political economy, he nonetheless uses what he is expert in, art history, to put the abstractions of the former discipline into words that are understandable to him and are therefore able to be understood by his audience. Through this attention to different types of redness, he identifies two shades of communism. The two groups comprise the following: first, those communists who are content to care to protect "from injury or loss their neighbour's property, as well as their own"; and secondly, Ruskin's own "deep-red group" who are not content with just protecting property, but want to give of their own property to their neighbors (hence the title of the letter "Charity") (*Works* 27:123). What proves



so revealing here are the colors Ruskin chooses for both groups. The first group is designated by colors that are light, delicate, even feminine: “delicately pink, peach-blossom, or dog-rose redness,” while Ruskin’s own group is deep red (φοινίκεος translates as crimson), almost to the point of blue (which also denotes that this group is blue-blooded, royal, and even if one bears in mind Dante’s depiction of Lady Charity, divine): “reddest of the red,” flamingo-colored. Thus Ruskin juxtaposes the delicate blush of pink with the deep, fiery red; and he pits femininity against masculinity, with the white lily versus the black sesame seed.

As these contrasts show, Ruskin aligns himself with a deeply masculine group, though he complicates it by making it a hybrid vision. The colors he chooses are deep and warrior-like but their patron saint is the very feminine Lady Charity. Consequently, we can see that there is femininity among this hyper-masculinity, like the sexually hybrid title of *Fors Clavigera* and the androgynous image that Ruskin himself cuts. Just as the male and female spheres are inextricably linked in Ruskin’s imagination, so too can Ruskin’s use of the “Imagination Associative” in his art criticism to interpret political economy creatively. Through this ambitious type of alternative education, Ruskin shows through *Fors* how to create imaginative links between art and politics where most Victorian intellectuals would say none exist.

### **Conclusion**

In “Letter 9” and “Letter 12,” the main purpose of education is “to see the sky” (*Works* 27: 164, 219 respectively). Cook explains Ruskin’s enigmatic phrasing to mean: “To see it, he explains, not with the astronomer’s telescope, but with human eyes trained to love and reverence” (*Works* 27: lxi). For Ruskin, education is a process of understanding the world around and within oneself. Education, in his view, is not about the amount of knowledge one acquires or how one places in an exam that is an estimate of one’s worth or the world one inhabits. Ruskin

writes in *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866): “Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know. It means teaching them to behave as they do not behave” (*Works* 18: 502). In the late nineteenth century, as I mention above, the education system that had been newly made mandatory in England and Scotland only demanded that the three Rs be taught: Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic (made so by the English Education Code of 1870 and the Scottish version of 1872). In his later works, but especially in *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin lays down the fundamentals for a broader, more useful education.

First, he wants education to be moral. In “Letter 12” of *Fors*, Ruskin teaches the importance of the intrinsic value of his readers because he sees virtue and morality as lacking in his day and giving way to extrinsic value. For Ruskin, “[e]ducation must be moral first; intellectual secondarily” (*Works* 27: lxi). Secondly, education needs to teach pupils about themselves, not try to reach an ideal that was beyond the mental faculties that Fate (the third “fors”) had allotted them. Ruskin observes: “True education has respect, first, to the ends which are proposable to the man, or attainable by him; and secondly, to the material of which the man is made” (*Works* 27: lxi). Thus, Ruskin was against competitive examinations and prizes because they pitted unequal pupils against one another and taught students to use the system rather than their brains to give themselves advantages they would not otherwise deserve. Ruskin drew on his own experience to describe the debilitating effects of such a system. One of his art pupils in an episode I have discussed above had won many prizes at school for what Ruskin thought was merely good copying skills. But these accolades and awards made the student think that he was capable of the art skill of Turner when clearly he was not destined for such greatness. Thirdly, education needs to teach men to be the creative beings they were made to be, not become the machines that were supposed to be mere supplements to their labor. As one of

Ruskin's followers, the Edwardian liberal theorist J. A. Hobson remarks: "It is essential to Mr. Ruskin, as social reformer, that he should have clear ideas on education of the young. For what marks him off most distinctively from others is the repudiation of all mechanical or merely external methods of reform, and his insistence upon individual and social character as the means and the end" (233).

Socialist historian E. P. Thompson records William Morris writing in the 1892 Kelmscott Press edition of "The Nature of Gothic" that "we manufacture everything . . . except men" (35). Ruskin's job as educator was to help men become men. Finally, in *Fors* Ruskin wants education to be valued for itself, not for the status or money it can bring. Hobson finds that in such essays and lectures as those combined into *Unto This Last* and *Sesame and Lilies*, "[Ruskin] inveighs against the enslavement of education, even among the middle and upper classes to the 'gospel of getting on'" (234). In fact, it is because the upper and middle classes are so obsessed with commodifying education as with everything else, that Ruskin sees the working classes as the hope for England's future. Thus *Fors* is dedicated to the workers and laborers of Great Britain because Ruskin believes they are the most open to the kind of education he wants to teach them. This is a point he makes in appendix 7, volume III of *The Stones of Venice*: "The great leading error of modern times is the mistaking erudition for education . . . Millions of peasants are at this moment better educated than most of those who call themselves gentlemen" (*Works* 11: 261, 263).

In order for Ruskin to offer a new form of education, he had to establish a kind of relationship with his readers that encouraged them to listen in order to be taught by him. As I have explained in his study, the form he felt most suited to this is the letter, in which he addresses his readers as "My Friends" and bridges the public and private spheres. His awareness

of his audience had grown since *Unto This Last*, when he began to take the intellectual reins from all the authority figures in his life. With the writing of *Fors*, Ruskin had officially become his own authority: his father had passed away and he had broken with his former publisher. Ruskin controlled the means, mode, and content of his writing now. Thus “[Ruskin’s] conviction of the deep importance of free personal intercourse between teacher and taught, so often dwelt upon in *Fors*, was illustrated in these letters” (Hobson 264). Through *Fors*, Ruskin continued the reading practices he used in *Sesame and Lilies* and the political economic thought of *Unto This Last*, and begun new publishing methods. Through these letters, Ruskin forever influenced the education system, eco-criticism, and socialist thought. Even as early as 1893, Ruskin’s influence on education is clearly seen in Sir Arthur Dyke Acland’s introduction of the Education Budget: Acland “discarded Mr. Lowe’s views on education [the aforementioned three Rs] as ‘far too mechanical and inflexible,’ and said ‘our object is to consider not merely what the children know when they leave, but what they are, and what they are to do; bearing in mind that the great object is not merely knowledge, but character” (*Works* 27: lxii).

Moreover, Ruskin’s influence on environmental thought can first be traced to “Letter 8: Not as the World Giveth” of *Fors* where the first notes for his astounding eco-critical work *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884) can be found. Finally, his many disciples that carried on his commitment to social reform included Octavia Hill, J. A. Hobson, W. G. Collingwood, Alice Meynell, John Marshall Mather, and of course William Morris. It is significant to note that John Ruskin and Karl Marx were Morris’ two main influences in his development as a socialist, and what really influenced Morris was the way in which Ruskin venerated great art as supremely moral. Many “Victorian critics were content that art should moralize . . . But, at his best, Ruskin sought to treat the arts as the expression of the whole *moral*

*being* of the artist, and—through him—of the quality of life of the society in which the artist lived” (Thompson 34). *Fors* was Ruskin’s expression of his whole moral being, as he worked to improve the lives of the working classes. Though he felt discouraged, the longevity of the Guild of St. George to this day and the present high standard of the British education system attest to the fact that *Fors Clavigera* was indeed proof that art and labor are inextricably linked in the moral transformation of not only the laboring men the “Master” sought to teach but also the hero as educator himself.

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