

“What is Value?”:
Victorian Economies of Feeling

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THE AMBIGUITIES OF INTERPRETATION THAT CLOUD OUR understanding of value have a long history. From an economic perspective, value is a quantifiable measure of worth or quality as determined by a standard of equivalence. From a social viewpoint, value has a powerfully ethical resonance, and is concerned with the merits of abstract principles, or codes of behaviour. These distinct levels of meaning will sometimes interact, or even merge. They might also stand in direct opposition. Ruskin was among many Victorian thinkers who followed Bentham, Carlyle, and Mill in reflecting on the overlapping or conflicting definitions of value. He did so more polemically than most. “What is value?” Ruskin asked that difficult question in *Unto this Last*, the series of combative papers contesting the foundations of modern political economy that appeared in William Makepeace Thackeray’s new journal, the *Cornhill Magazine*, in 1860 (*Works* 17: 84). *Unto this Last* marked a fundamental change of direction in Ruskin’s work, as he began to publish provocative essays and lectures on social questions rather than the substantial books on art and architecture that had established his reputation. *Modern Painters* (1843–60), *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*

(1849), and *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53) had articulated the Romantic and evangelical ideals he had inherited from his parents for a generation of readers who wanted to locate the rising commercial prosperity and industrial power of Victorian England within a framework of moral significance. Ruskin's sense of his own critical identity had shifted in the later 1850s, as the process of industrial and cultural change in Britain had accelerated, and his youthful religious certainty had begun to falter. Yet his writings on economic theory and practice in *Unto this Last*, and in the papers that followed, remain rooted in the code of aesthetic and ethical beliefs that had formed his identity as a critic. His insistently inclusive definitions of value defy the processes of professionalization that were increasingly separating the concerns of political economy from the interests of those who were most subject to its operations.

Thackeray, hoping to expand the middle-class readership of the *Cornhill*, was taken aback by the uncompromising and searching *seriousness*, in the old evangelical sense of that word, of Ruskin's analysis of the layered significance of value in *Unto this Last*. Ruskin was not interested in entertaining or amusing his readers. He wanted to unsettle, and to teach. As always, his approach is essentially that of the preacher. His title, an explicit reference to the moral authority of the Bible, gives the reader the text of this secular sermon. It points to Matthew's uncompromisingly egalitarian parable of the workers in the vineyard: "Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee" (Matt. 20.14). But Ruskin also draws on the cultural status of the classics, and specifically of the classical roots of the English language, as he proceeds to answer his own question. What is value? "*Valor*, from *valere*, to be well or strong;—strong, *in* life (if a man), or valiant; strong, *for* life (if a thing), or valuable. To be valuable, therefore, is to avail towards life. A truly valuable or availing thing is that which leads to life with its whole strength. In proportion as it does not lead to life, or as its strength is broken, it is less valuable; in proportion as it leads away from life, it is unvaluable or malignant" (*Works* 17: 84). This is the argument that culminates in the central rallying call of *Unto this Last*: "There is no wealth but life" (*Works* 17: 105).

Ruskin's argument is shaped by his extension of the category of value to incorporate connections other than

those of economic exchange. His analysis rests on wider forms of reciprocity—the multiple loyalties, responsibilities, and bonds that he includes within his definition of what he terms “social affection.” The opening sentence of his treatise makes his position clear: “Among the delusions which at different periods have possessed themselves of the minds of large masses of the human race, perhaps the most curious—certainly the least creditable—is the modern *soi-disant* science of political economy, based on the idea that an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection” (*Works* 17: 25). Ruskin’s use of the term “affection” here means more than simple fondness. It signifies a variety of associations, grounded in feeling, that lead to positive consequences, between individuals or social institutions that would otherwise exist in isolation, or perhaps antagonism. The point is an obvious one, but it is essential to the reformist thinking that Ruskin represents and influences—not only in *Unto this Last*, but throughout his critical writings. His work is a sustained affirmation of what E. M. Forster, whose fiction is deeply rooted in Ruskinian thought, was to summarize half a century later: “Only connect . . .” (*Howards End* iii).

The drive to reflect on the profound value of such connection is by no means unique to Ruskin. His insistence on the importance of “social affection” should be seen in the broader context of a growing emphasis on feeling in the complex development of the Victorians’ understanding of national value. From a twenty-first-century perspective, critics and scholars have increasingly engaged with the functions of emotion, mood, feeling, sensation, psychological state, sentiment or sentimentality, in Victorian culture—what is now customarily known as “affect,” though our understanding of “affect” is not precisely what Ruskin meant in talking about “social affection.”¹ Among the many reasons for the rising tide of academic interest in this aspect of Victorian thought is that it facilitates our understanding of the part that gender and class played in debates on the hierarchical nature of value. Categories of emotion were

¹ Rachel Ablow notes that “the nineteenth century [was] a moment when, insofar as the novel was believed to be good for anything, it was believed to be good for making readers feel” (298). For helpful overviews, see the essays of Isobel Armstrong and Carolyn Burdett.

not ideologically neutral. In the context of nineteenth-century culture, feeling, or sentiment, might be dismissively categorized as the province of uneducated females, or the ignorant working or lower-middle classes, who were thought to lack the capacity for hard cold rational analysis. Furthermore, the expression or endorsement of feeling could be seen as a phenomenon that should properly be confined to the sphere of art, or literature, or music, where it could enhance or refine a primarily aesthetic response, or add a dimension of pleasure to a cultural experience without claiming to make a difference to serious matters of real political or intellectual moment. The power of feeling could be acknowledged as significant but always secondary, outside the remit of science, or government, or law. It might be reductively defined as the business of the home and family—the feminine domestic sphere, in short; or of certain kinds of vulgar religious practice, as seen in the shabby dissenting chapels of the new industrial cities; or perhaps particularly in the pages of the popular literature that gripped its readers through evoking spasms of terror, anger, pity, grief, or shame. The gentlemanly Anthony Trollope chose his words with care in describing Charles Dickens as “Mr Popular Sentiment.”²

In his measured analysis of “Sentimentalism,” published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1864, four years after the appearance of *Unto this Last*, the rationalist lawyer and journalist James Fitzjames Stephen (1829–94) presented a view of the acceptable role of feeling in public life that differed radically from Ruskin’s definition of “social affection” as the means to create and confirm a shared definition of value. Stephen concedes the power of feeling in human relations, respectfully citing the influential account of the philosopher Alexander Bain (1818–1903) of the “emotion of tenderness” in his 1859 *The Emotions and the Will* as “one great foundation of natural goodness, and of the social duties and virtues” (72).³ But he is suspicious of what he sees as its commercial exploitation in literature, and particularly in the sensation novel, a publishing phenomenon

² Trollope first used the epithet in satirizing Dickens’s work in *The Warden* (1855).

³ Bain’s interpretation of “the emotion of tenderness” is primarily familial in context: “Beyond all question the relation of Mother and Offspring is the most replete with tender feeling” (106).

that had reached the height of its popular success in 1864: "It is impossible to mistake what is nowadays called sensation literature when you see it. Whether it takes the shape of minute detail, or ghastly calmness, or conscious unconsciousness, the trail of the serpent is over it all" (72). Stephen insists that feeling properly belongs in the home. Public expressions of emotion are an affront to social discipline—at least, in Stephen's view, as far as the values of Englishness are concerned: "It is only on the rare occasions that they are fairly overpowered by their feelings, that people, at least in this country, display emotion publicly. In other parts of the world, where the same restraint is not practised, the satisfaction taken in the actual sensation and expression of tenderness is more prominent, and is more commonly recognized as a legitimate source of pleasure" (72). This is more than the conventionally English stiff upper lip. Stephen is clear that the men he would define as great—and and women play no part in his argument—are characterized by what he describes as the strength of coldness: "There is a sort of man who, without being in the least degree unkind, or, to outward appearance, callous, is inwardly as impenetrable and imperturbable as a nether mill-stone" (73). Such men stand staunchly opposed to what Stephen dismissed as the "luxury" of feeling, favoring instead what he defines as the "higher and more permanent satisfactions which are the proper objects of the efforts of rational human creatures—the satisfaction of investigating the truth, and applying true principles in all their force to human affairs" (75). This was, of course, exactly what Ruskin claimed to be doing in *Unto this Last*—applying true principles in all their force to human affairs. Ruskin's intervention was challenging in part because it affirmed the fundamental *value* of feeling for those other than women, children, or the working classes, and in areas other than those of literature, painting, theatre, or music.

Yet Ruskin, like Stephen, felt that feeling was to be disciplined. He did not favor outpourings of public emotion of the kind that affronted Stephen, nor did he sanction an individual surrender to the force of feeling. In his 1856 analysis of "The Pathetic Fallacy," published in the third volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin considers the part of intense feeling in the make-up of a powerful character, and comes to conclusions

very different from those of Stephen's praise for the impenetrable and imperturbable "nether mill-stone" nature of the strong man. Ruskin speaks of the "condition when the intellect also rises, till it is strong enough to assert its rule against, or together with, the utmost efforts of the passions; and the whole man stands in an iron glow, white hot, perhaps, but still strong, and in no wise evaporating; even if he melts, losing none of his weight" (*Works* 5: 208). Ruskin's point is that the energies of intellect and emotion are at their strongest when they work together. The legitimate role of feeling is accordingly extended beyond the sphere of the domestic, or of the creative arts, into the world of politics and economics. The capacity to connect what he valued in "social affection" would bring together levels of discourse that the prevailing orthodoxy was inclined to keep separate.

It is no surprise that neither James Fitzjames Stephen nor his brother Leslie admired Ruskin, who repeatedly encountered resistance, or even derision, from those who saw his work as trivial, or peripheral, because it appealed to the primacy of connected feeling. The *Saturday Review*, a pugnacious weekly to which James Fitzjames Stephen contributed regularly, had no hesitation in dismissing Ruskin's views as the feminized outpourings of self-indulgent feeling. Its review of *Unto this Last* was contemptuous:

If a man of any sort of mark will condescend to go about weeping and howling, quoting texts with a voice choked with tears, reproaching his country and insulting his neighbours with querulous female virulence, he may obtain a certain sort of worship. There will be people who admire his insolence, the little airs of coquetry that he constantly gives himself, like a flirt who has ceased to be pretty, and above all the slightly refined Spurgeonism of his religion. So long as Mr Ruskin confined himself to art, he had a subject on which a high degree of sensibility and descriptive power would atone for the want of more vigorous qualities. But it is intolerable that a man . . . should be able to avail himself of the pages of one of our most popular periodicals for the purpose of pouring out feminine nonsense . . . upon so grave a subject as political economy. (582)

The *Saturday Review's* attack was exceptionally vituperative, even by the robust standards of the time: "[T]he world . . . is

not going to be preached to death by a mad governess" (582). But it reveals conflicts that were deeply embedded within the economic debates of the 1860s and 1870s. Those who advocated the potential value of sentiment or feeling in a social, public, or political context could readily be seen as unmanly, or ungentlemanly, or simply irrelevant—the proponents of a self-indulgent denial of the hard laws of economic or social necessity. The advocacy of feeling as an arbiter of value was always a politically loaded act. It represented, at least in potential, a threat to established ranks of authority.

Yet the cultural critics who, like Ruskin, nevertheless chose to advocate feeling as essential to an index of political and economic value could point to long-established authorities in support of their position, for the identification of emotion as a central feature of human experience was not invented by the Victorians. Discourses of sentiment in eighteenth-century moral philosophy—not least those emanating from Scotland—have an important part to play here. So, too, do the voices of religion, as the *Saturday Review* had not failed to note. For many groups within the established hierarchies of the Anglican church, where the evangelical movement was dominant, and also in the communities of the nonconformist chapels burgeoning among the new industrial cities of the Midlands and the North, the moral and spiritual authority of feeling was paramount. Evangelicalism was “the religion of the heart,” grounded in an essentially emotional and intensely personal relationship with God that would find its proper reflection in a rigorous exercise of integrity in worldly dealings, including and perhaps especially in all financial and commercial matters, as well as in the exercise of charity in social relations.⁴ Even those who were not evangelical Christians could scarcely escape the ubiquitous influence of the rise of evangelical values on the cultural life of early Victorian England, with its emphasis on a disciplined inwardness reflected in strict standards of social responsibility. The prominent Anglican missionary Henry Venn (1796–1873), steeped in the ideas of the Clapham sect, put the

⁴ For cogent accounts of the social and theological foundations of British evangelicalism, see the respective studies of Elisabeth Jay and David Bebbington.

matter succinctly in 1834, suggesting that Evangelical believers were defined “not so much in their systematic statement of doctrines, as in the relative importance which they assign to the particular parts of the Christian System, and in the vital operation of Christian Doctrines upon the heart and conduct” (vii–viii).

Nonconformist religious practice was widely diverse, but for the most part equally insistent on the primacy of inward faith and feeling as the guarantors of responsible social conduct. Emphasizing the personal relations between the minister and the congregation, mediated through sermons that were often fervently emotional, rather than through the calm and settled rhythms of the liturgy, the dynamics of nonconformism were formed by the sanctity of feeling. Nonconformism was more distant from established centers of social status than evangelical Anglicanism, but its strong association with the growing industrial and commercial prosperity of Victorian Britain gave it increasing prominence. Its vitality was often represented by the celebrity of charismatic preachers such as Charles Spurgeon (1834–92), in ways that could be interpreted as a threat to the imperturbable masculine coldness that James Stephen describes. It is not an accident that the *Saturday Review*'s aggressive dismissal of Ruskin's social thought combined gender with religion in condemning his faith as “slightly refined Spurgeonism” before remarking that the world would not be “preached to death by a mad governess” (582).

That the vindication of the pre-eminence of feeling within religion was inseparable from the persistent legacies of eighteenth-century traditions of sentiment is clear enough. It is also central to the legacies of Romanticism. “For the Reader cannot be too often reminded that Poetry is passion: it is the history or science of feelings,” as Wordsworth, the most pedagogic of Romantic poets, instructed his audience in his 1800 “Note to ‘The Thorn’” (351). For many Victorians whose sensibilities were formed in the 1820s and 1830s, Ruskin among them, the distinct inheritances of evangelicalism, varieties of nonconformism, and Romanticism were inextricably bound together. This aggregation was particularly though not exclusively true for women writers—including Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Elizabeth Gaskell, the Brontë sisters, and George Eliot. The

vindication of the personal and the emotional gave women writers the cultural authority to challenge the dominance of the values of masculine centres of power.

George Eliot, born like Ruskin in 1819, represents the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which these reference points might be used. Long after she had ceased to be a Christian, she continues to affirm the moral precepts of her ardent evangelical commitment as a young woman. *Scenes of Clerical Life*, the series of stories with which she began her career as a writer of fiction in 1857, turn on the value of what Ruskin was to define as “social affection” rather than theology. However, she still defines this value for her readers within an explicitly ecclesiastical framework, signalling the affective and often Wordsworthian values that the stories explore. “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton,” first of the clerical “scenes” that make up the collection, establishes Eliot’s terms of reference. She portrays the hapless Amos as an amiable but foolish man, whose weakness contributes to the death of his long-suffering and over-worked wife. In describing his departure from the parish of Shepperton, Eliot insists that despite his intellectual deficiencies Amos represents an enduring moral value to his flock in acting as a catalyst for the connecting power of feeling: “There was general regret among the parishioners at his departure: not that any one of them thought his spiritual gifts pre-eminent, or was conscious of great edification from his ministry. But his recent troubles had called out their better sympathies, and that is always a source of love. Amos failed to touch the spring of goodness by his sermons, but he touched it effectually by his sorrows; and there was now a real bond between him and his flock” (58). This is one among many examples of the healing power of associative feeling that might be cited from *Scenes of Clerical Life*. For George Eliot, this first published fiction marked a shift from her identification with the predominantly masculine world of progressive London journalism, where she had been working as the *de facto* editor of the liberal *Westminster Review*, to the communication of her ideas and values through the publication of fiction produced primarily within the parameters of domestic realism, at first anonymously and then under a male pseudonym.

The change might seem to mark a retreat into a broadly feminine field of activity—novels centered on feeling, with a domestic market in mind. In fact Eliot uses the vehicle of fiction to affirm her own version of the connectedness that drives Ruskin's social thought, in which the domestic, the public, the political, and the scientific are brought together. What Ruskin calls "social affection," George Eliot calls "sympathy." These are not precisely synonymous terms, but they do share some telling points of reference. Both Eliot and Ruskin, influenced by their early evangelical convictions, develop their codes of conduct on the basis of a convergence of feeling and thought, and they both emphasize the public and political implications of their work. For George Eliot as for Ruskin, authors working within widely different literary forms, writing could both generate feeling and prompt a deeper awareness of its positive and sometimes political force within social relations, opening as it did the possibility of creating the bonds of sympathy and consequent responsibility between divided social classes. Rachel Ablow underlines the point in her introduction to a recent collection of critical essays on processes of feeling and reading: "[I]n the mid- to late nineteenth century, reading was commonly regarded as at least as valuable as an affective experience as it was as a way to convey information or increase understanding" (2). The domestic novel was increasingly valued for the way in which it could effectively combine these functions, conveying information and increasing understanding through its capacity to generate affective feeling.

For George Eliot, this emotive capacity mattered more than the rigour of the scientific and philosophical systems that influenced the intellectual framework of her novels. The theoretical doctrines of Comte's positivism, which provided Eliot with the formal means to reconcile the claims of the intellect and the emotions, could not finally allow for the kind of imaginative experimentation that she wanted to pursue. Her attempts to arrive at truths that could be established by observation and analysis were empirical by definition, but the experiments of fiction were not quite those of the laboratory. She wrote to the positivist Frederic Harrison in 1876: "[M]y writing is simply a series of experiments in life—an endeavour to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of—what stores of

motive, actual or hinted as possible, give promise of a better after which we may strive—what gains from past revelations and discipline we must strive to keep hold of as something more than shifting theory” (*Letters* 6: 216–17). The connected economies of domesticity and of domestic feeling were not, in the models that Eliot and Ruskin advocate, simply derived from the study of contemporary life, or from the growing scientific scrutiny that was shedding new light on physiological processes underlying the emotions. They drew on what Eliot describes as “gains from past revelations and discipline.” In looking for the origins of his interpretation of a disciplined economy, Ruskin claims classical precedent.

In his 1857 Manchester lecture on the “The Discovery and Application of Art,” Ruskin reminds his readers, as indeed he was to do again in *Unto this Last*, that the word “economy” means, in its Greek root, “the laws of the household”—“house-law.” The domestic and the broadly political were not distinct, and Ruskin’s image of an ideal economist—an intransigently and provocatively old-fashioned one—is that of a virtuous woman managing a household. In this way Ruskin introduces, as Dickens repeatedly does, a dimension of nurturing emotion into the economic model: “Economy no more means saving money than spending money. It means the administration of a house; its stewardship, spending or saving, whether money or time, or anything else, to the best possible advantage” (*Works* 16: 19). Ruskin’s is a definition that George Eliot would have recognized. Her domestic fiction is “economic” in Ruskin’s sense, thinking about the responsible stewardship of resources, including financial resources. The sorrows that Eliot’s Amos Barton and his patient wife Milly have to endure arise primarily from their poverty, and from Amos’s short-sighted and self-indulgent mistakes in allocating what few resources they have. Eliot remains keenly conscious of the power of money to influence the broad patterns of judgment and feeling that she traces in her fiction. Her plots, like the plots of most Victorian novels of domestic realism, often turn on money, seen in terms of its just inheritance and proper use in relation to the moral development of her characters. Within the economies of feeling, money is both necessary and valuable. But it is not simply to be possessed, saved, or spent. For George Eliot as for

Ruskin, money must be translated into life before it can be invested with its full range of potential meaning.

Instances of this preoccupation in Eliot's fiction are numerous, but perhaps the most explicit are to be seen in her 1861 novel *Silas Marner*. The cold and alienated heart of Silas, the miserly weaver, can only be re-animated when his heap of useless gold is stolen. It is replaced by the living gold represented by the shining hair of the orphaned Eppie, the child whose human needs will reintegrate him into the small community of Raveloe. The short-sighted Silas at first mistakes Eppie's blonde curls for the gold coins that he had lost: "Gold!—his own gold—brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away! He felt his heart begin to beat violently, and for a few moments he was unable to stretch out his hand and grasp the restored treasure. The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger beneath his agitated gaze. He leaned forward at last, and stretched forth his hand; but instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls. In utter amazement, Silas fell on his knees and bent his head low to examine the marvel: it was a sleeping child—a round, fair thing, with soft yellow rings all over its head" (*Silas Marner* 108–09). Eliot's sleight of hand here is simple and almost allegorical in its effect. Silas's moment of transformation is described as though it were a religious conversion—he "fell on his knees and bent his head low."⁵ The rigid value of money as hard metal passes into the softer values of the heart and body—transient, vulnerable and creative. The violent beating of Marner's heart is an indication of an awakening, as he begins to progress from cold sterility into emotional and social maturity.

The motif of the heart, in both emblematic and physical contexts, is ubiquitous in Victorian culture, as the recent thoughtful work of Kirstie Blair and Fay Bound Alberti has shown, and it is especially persistent in the nineteenth-century literature of both religion and post-Romanticism. It could represent the

⁵ Bebbington notes the central importance of such transformative moments in the evangelical charismatic movement: "Charismatics . . . looked for a sudden sense of release rather than for any moral transformation. That was symptomatic of an ethos that stressed immediacy, the human capacity for instant heightened awareness" (230).

intensity of the hidden, inward response—what Tennyson called the “secret heart” of the mystic (230). But it could also be an emblem of shared values, in the sense that Wordsworth intended when he claimed, in “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” “That we have all of us one human heart” (233)—a line quoted by Elizabeth Gaskell in *North and South*, her novel of industrial, regional and romantic conciliation (419). But it could also simply be a heart, an organ of flesh and blood, signaling both the strength and the vulnerability of the body in its connections with feeling. Many readers have noticed how often George Eliot’s more emotionally damaged characters die of heart failure—Casaubon in *Middlemarch*, Captain Wybrow in *Mr Gilfil’s Love Story*, Latimer in *The Lifted Veil*. The power of feeling may have moral and spiritual implications, but it is also rooted in the sensations and processes of the body, as a new generation of Victorian scientists, Darwin among them, were to demonstrate, in their pioneering analyses of the physiological bases of emotion. Feelings run in the blood.

It is in both definitions—moral and physical—that Ruskin uses the image of the heart in the solemn and intensely preacherly peroration of his lecture *Traffic*, delivered in 1864, in which he warns the Yorkshire merchants of Bradford that they cannot separate their choice of an architectural style for a new Wool Exchange from the moral principles that guide their own practices of exchange:

But if you can fix some conception of a true human state of life to be striven for—life, good for all men, as for yourselves; if you can determine some honest and simple order of existence; following those trodden ways of wisdom, which are pleasantness, and seeking her quiet and withdrawn paths, which are peace;—then, and so sanctifying wealth into “common wealth,” all your art, your literature, your daily labours, your domestic affection, and citizen’s duty, will join and increase into one magnificent harmony. You will know then how to build, well enough; you will build with stone well, but with flesh better; temples not made with hands, but riveted of hearts; and that kind of marble, crimson-veined, is indeed eternal” (*Works* 18: 458)

Ruskin argues for an economy that will connect diverse definitions of human value—artistic, cultural, and religious. The concerns of domestic affection would be aligned with those of

public duty, so that private riches might be transformed into common wealth. The lecture employs the rhetorical forms and cultural authority of a sermon to celebrate the “social affection” that has the capacity to join people together and to condemn the economic forces that, as Ruskin understood them, drive them apart.

Did the Yorkshire merchants respond to Ruskin’s apocalyptic admonitions? Hardly. It may be that the choice of thirteenth-century Gothic, broadly Venetian in style, as the architectural idiom for the magnificent Wool Exchange that they eventually built was influenced by Ruskin’s architectural writings, though the building also shows strong elements of Flemish Gothic. Whether or not they selected the style of their Wool Exchange on Ruskinian principles, the prosperous Bradford traders clearly did not choose to reform the way they pursued their business along the radical lines urged by Ruskin.⁶ Measuring influence, however, is a troublesome matter, as Francis O’Gorman has shown elsewhere in this journal. What I want, finally, to propose is that the connected values proposed by Ruskin, Eliot, and others who thought as they did might be of something more than historical interest in our own time, as we ask our own questions about the capacities and the limits of modern capitalism. In making that suggestion, it is not my intention to imply that we should attempt to revive the religious, moral, or aesthetic values of Victorian thinkers and writers. Their understanding of politics, race, class, and gender is not ours. But the contention that economic theory and practice, or even the concept of wealth itself, may finally be a question of a dynamic web of feeling alongside thinking remains important to our identity as scholars and as citizens. We are not after all separate and distinct economic units, as the competitive drives of economic affluence might imply. Nor are the communities that form and support our work likely to function at their best if they are primarily or exclusively driven by the fragmenting forces of competition. Schools, towns, cities, hospitals—or even universities, or departments within universities—will work best when they communicate and co-operate with each other. These

⁶ See Malcolm Hardman’s account of Ruskin’s relations with the city of Bradford.

are not new observations, but in our current financial circumstances it may be useful to reflect on the extent to which they are not new.

We cannot pretend a lofty oblivion to the values of the market-place, nor should we. Money is what underpins our social activities, and Ruskin and Eliot knew that very well. They also knew that money is powerful according to the way in which it is used, and that some values are not to be measured by the market. Ideas may be among them, and shared thoughts might have reciprocal value other than those defined by the laws of intellectual property. But mutual value is not simply a matter of abstract concepts. The culture of material objects might also contribute value other than that of the sale room as they pass into collective ownership. Ruskin's work for the Guild of St. George in the 1870s and 1880s, and the collection of his gifts to the Walkley Museum, now housed in the Millennium Gallery and cared for by Museums Sheffield, is a tangible reminder of the results of that wish to establish connections of a kind that might endure. The museum can now be visited virtually, making its rich resources accessible in a way that Ruskin could never have predicted, through Marcus Waithe's expert digitization of the building and its exhibits.⁷ In the notes to the 70th letter of *Fors Clavigera*, published in October 1876, Ruskin recorded the origins of his collection:

I am sending in gifts to the men at Sheffield, wealth of various kinds, in small instalments—but in secure forms. Five bits of opal; the market value of one, just paid to Mr. Wright, of Great Russell Street, £3;1 a beryl, of unusual shape, ditto, £2; a group of emeralds, from the mine of Holy Faith of Bogota, and two pieces of moss gold,—market value £2, 10S.,—just paid to Mr. Tennant. Also, the first volume of the Sheffield Library; an English Bible of the thirteenth century,—market value £50,—just paid to Mr. Ellis. I tell these prices only

⁷ See Waithe's *Ruskin at Walkley*, a site which allows visitors to navigate the museum as it would have been experienced by its first visitors. *The Ruskin Collection* (<<http://www.museums-sheffield.org/>>), physically held at the Millennium Gallery, Sheffield, and the *Elements of Drawing* (<<http://ruskin.ashmolean.org/>>), a site created from the collections at Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, provide further online information on Ruskin's teaching collections.

to secure the men's attention, because I am not sure what acceptant capacity they have for them. When once they recognize the things themselves to be wealth,—when they can see the opals, know the wonderfulness of the beryl, enjoy the loveliness of the golden fibres, read the illuminations of the Bible page,—they will not ask what the cost, nor consider what they can get for them.
(*Works* 28: 727)

Ruskin was right, in that the people of Sheffield have not thought of selling the collection that he gave to them, choosing instead to maintain the worth of what it represents as a collective resource. The social value represented by the museum is multiple in its nature. The visual pleasure of the objects and the expansion of knowledge they represent are interwoven with the emotions they generate—wonder, admiration, curiosity. They mingle with the “social affection” that arises from a perception of the care with which the items are presented; or from the experience of looking at them with others in a social space, or by remembering the people who have seen them before, in different times and in different circumstances. It would be impossible, and finally unnecessary, to try to disentangle the distinct components of these frameworks of value. Each complements and supports the other. And this interconnection is, I would suggest, what we may want to take from an approach to concepts of Victorian value in terms of the economies of feeling. Ruskin's social affection, or Eliot's sympathy, or contemporary academic models of affective value that suggest new interpretations of their work, point to the connections that associate the communication of feeling with disciplines of thought. They remind us that all economies, however defined, are social in their origins and in their consequences, and bind us together in a reciprocal process that can still construct and confirm our shared understanding of value.

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