

Catherine W. Morley. *John Ruskin: Late Works 1870–1890*. New York and London. Garland Publishing Inc. 1984. Main text 395 pp. Appendix 245 pp. \$80.00

Mrs. Morley's book*—a revised version of her doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of London in 1972—is the first attempt, and an admirably thorough one, to come to grips with Ruskin's educational efforts during the final phase of his career. Those efforts have of course been familiar to scholars for a long time, yet they have never received the benefit of full documentation. Their intellectual and physical center was the Guild of St. George. Ruskin labored unceasingly, in the teeth of uncertain health and extended periods of mental imbalance, both to develop a revolutionary syllabus for his institution and to turn it into an enterprise that would be viable, i.e. self-sustaining and to some degree competitive with existing academic organs. In both respects the *Guild* must be accounted a failure, though the challenge it represented to traditional teaching has left its indelible mark on the manner in which today's universities and art academies are run.

Ruskin's curricular concepts command especial attention: frankly Utopian, they sought to synthesize paths of knowledge normally pursued on separate tracks. Not content with mere interdisciplinary experiments, Ruskin attempted to evolve a set of "grammars" each of which would take a traditional discipline—whether scientific such as botany, crystallography, meteorology, etc. or humanistic such as musicology, art history, prosody, etc.—as a starting point and then drastically re-order the material under consideration so as to make it correspond to certain fundamental and, Ruskin thought, immutable laws. Being at once perceptual and conceptual, these laws had to be underpinned by sensory and epistemological postulates which at first glance seemed disturbingly novel. Yet to Ruskin their very radicalism (*radix*: root) signaled a return to

basic human dispositions. His grammars were intended to reconstitute primary modes of sentience and intellection wholly lost sight of in the brutally mechanistic carving-up process practised by discipline specialists and not seriously addressed, let alone vindicated, by their *soi-disant* opponents, the well-meaning but essentially belletristic generalists.

Mrs. Morley labels Ruskin's approach to learning "materialist"; the term, though appropriate in a sense, may lend itself to misinterpretation. What she has in mind is a conceptual framework closer to Smuts's "Holism" or Dewey's variety of Pragmatism than it is to Marx—notwithstanding the important role Ruskin assigns to both political economy and economics in the matter of *episteme*. What fuels learning for Ruskin is an optimal congruence of form and function, structure and texture; a passionate concern for the "given" as our sharpened senses apprehend it; an impatience with received opinion coupled with utter disdain for any a priori reasoning or logic-chopping. Education should start with *embodiment*; for even as spirit resides in body (and will flow from it once we address it properly) so does *nous* reside in things (and will manifest itself in due course whenever we patiently attend to the "thisness" of each particular and, later, to the organic nexus particulars are bound to form). Universalized, all education becomes creation—and self-creation—: not *ex nihilo* or *ex abstracto* but thanks to our expanding understanding of the "nature of things."

Ruskin's educational definitions and proposals are set forth in a series of much lauded but little read works: *Fors Clavigera* (1871–87), *Munera Pulveris* (1872), *Aratra Pentelici* (1872), *Love's Meinie* (1873), *Prosperina* (1875–86), *Deucalion* (1875–83) and *The Laws of Fésòle* (1877, 1878). Given the unsystematic nature of Ruskin's propaedeutic injunctions, Catherine Morley deserves the highest credit for assembling