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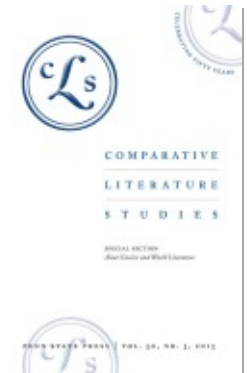
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THE VICTORIAN COUNTERARCHIVE: MIKIMOTO RYUZO,  
JOHN RUSKIN, AND AFFIRMATIVE READING

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*Joseph Lavery*

The son of well-to-do parents who, whether from talent or weakness, engages in a so-called intellectual profession, as an artist or a scholar, will have a particularly difficult time with those bearing the distasteful title of colleagues. It is not merely that his independence is envied, the seriousness of his intentions mistrusted, and that he is suspected of being a secret envoy of the established powers. Such suspicions, though betraying a deep-seated resentment, would usually prove well-founded. But the real resistances lie elsewhere. The occupation with things of the mind has by now itself become “practical,” a business with strict division of labour, departments and restricted entry. The man of independent means who chooses it out of repugnance for the ignominy of earning money will not be disposed to acknowledge the fact. For this he is punished.

—Theodor Adorno, “For Marcel Proust”

*Personality, Paraphrase, Orthodoxy*

The perverse ambition of Mikimoto Ryuzo was to transform Japanese modernity through the dissemination of the writing of the Victorian art critic and socialist John Ruskin, whose work he assiduously collected, translated,

and glossed. Mikimoto—the son of Mikimoto Kokichi, a successful Meiji businessman who developed a technique for artificially culturing pearls—founded both a library and a society in Tokyo to assist in the circulation of Ruskin's work, and in 1930 he launched a monthly journal, in which he published his own translations of critical essays about Ruskin by major British scholars, including the socialist anticolonial writer J. A. Hobson and the philosopher R. G. Collingwood, as well as many essays and memoirs and sketches of his own composition, in both English and Japanese. Yet while Mikimoto's careful work in establishing a Japanese readership for Ruskin flourished in Taisho Japan, a place characterized by broad cultural obsessions with labor, aesthetics, and crafts, what remains of that effort is confined to a rarely visited collection in a small Tokyo office, a fragile testimony to the intensity of feelings of an unusually enthusiastic reader of Victorian literature. Mikimoto was a *bricoleur*, experimenting with and recontextualizing Ruskin in the service of new personal and political demands, his library evidence of the capacity of literary writing to shape, and be shaped by, distant acts of reception. His always insightful and often outrageous writing on Ruskin records the triumphs of a scholarly son of wealth and narrates a relationship with a father whose successful business was a source of a shame freighted with gendered meanings. Yet his work always braids his own familial dissent with broad political reflections, reflections on the violence of Japanese modernization, on the history of racism, and on the crimes of empires, producing an immanent critique of capitalism, the theoretical coordinates of which are to be found not only in Ruskinian socialism but also in Marxist commodity theory and in the syncretic anticapitalist writings of his mentor, Kawakami Hajime. What Mikimoto learned from Ruskin above all were the radical possibilities for a life in which emotional and political commitments could be considered part of a single, breathtakingly complex whole, which was reflected in what Caroline Levine calls “the close intertwining of Ruskin's iconoclastic aesthetics with his radical political principles.”<sup>1</sup>

Recent scholarship on Ruskin has striven to find a singular theme underlying his work, a unifying notion that might yoke together texts as diverse as *Modern Painters* and the *Fors Clavigera* letters. Questioning a long-held dissatisfaction with what early reviewers called his “crotchety contradictions and peevish paradoxes” and “if not insanity, sheer extravagance,” the aim has been to recover Ruskin as a systematic thinker after all. While scholars such as Levine and Jonah Siegel, among others, have done much to reveal Ruskin's philosophical sophistication, they have inevitably underplayed the almost manic energy that characterized Ruskin's literary style from his earliest texts through until his last, almost incoherent, letters.<sup>2</sup> Consider the

following passage from “The Nature of Gothic,” the excerpt of *The Stones of Venice* that was printed as a pamphlet in 1854 and that circulated among working men’s clubs:

And, on the other hand, go forth again to gaze upon the old cathedral front, where you have smiled so often at the fantastic ignorance of the old sculptors: examine once more those ugly goblins, and formless monsters, and stern statues, anatomiless and rigid; but do not mock at them, for they are signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought, and rank in scale of being, such as no laws, no charters, no charities can secure; but which it must be the first aim of all Europe at this day to regain for her children.<sup>3</sup>

Ranging freely between gothic fiction, instructional literature, and art criticism, Ruskin’s prose models the very liberty that he attributes to the free laborer and picks up most of the qualities he attributes to Gothic architecture: savageness, changefulness, naturalism, grotesqueness, rigidity, and redundancy. Even nineteenth-century critics of Ruskin were quick to note that much of his reputation derived from the intensity of his style rather than from his claims or readings, with one commentator comparing him to Thomas de Quincey, who, he euphemistically notes, “sought to obtain by prose effects commonly associated with poetry.”<sup>4</sup> As the comparison implicitly suggests, the disruptive, aggressive force of Ruskin’s prose was not merely purple but pushed against boundaries of acceptable discourse. Such a force is legible without relying on what Raymond Williams called the “almost wholly irresponsible biographical attention” that Ruskin has received, but the affective incoherence of Ruskin’s prose is only amplified by his biography, beset as it was by sexual scandals and madness.<sup>5</sup> The work of freedom as Ruskin records it is autopoietic and hysterical, a stylistic practice whose effects are felt as emotions rather than internalized as doctrine.

To treat Ruskin as a dilettante is not necessarily to blunt the force of his social criticism but to relocate it. Ruskin himself understood that the value of a work of criticism did not depend on its engagement with existing sources or its conceptual completeness—indeed, in *The Political Economy of Art*, he explores ways in which such a dependence might itself befuddle a critical insight: “The statements of economical principle given in [this] text, though I know that most, if not all, of them are accepted by existing authorities on the science, are not supported by references, because I have never read any author on political economy, except Adam Smith, twenty years ago. Whenever I have taken up any modern book upon the subject, I have usually

found it encumbered with inquiries into accidental or minor commercial results, . . . by the complication of which, it seemed to me, the authors themselves had been not unfrequently prevented from seeing to the root of the business.”<sup>6</sup> To engage with the habitual vocabulary of a discipline, even with the intention of displacing that vocabulary or radically undoing the structures of its claims to legitimacy, is inevitably to reinforce many of the structuring assumptions of that discipline. This inconvenient truth of humanistic study—flashes of which were already visible in the central texts of Victorian radicalism—was, for the better part of the twentieth century, treated as one among many unpleasant but inevitable symptoms of the saturation of language by sovereign power. Deconstruction has proven an especially helpful theory for critics grappling with this problem. Derrida’s description of paleonymy as “the ‘strategic’ necessity that requires the occasional maintenance of an *old name* in order to launch a new concept” effectively defined the scope and ambitions of the deconstructive political project: to wrest control of semiotics from dominant regimes of power—and, in opening up new possibilities in language, to begin to produce new acts of resistance.<sup>7</sup>

I propose that affirmative readings (such as that on which paleonymic politics is built) depend on a *nonconceptual* cognitive practice—a “yes” whose meaning is ultimately affective. Though such a separation of conceptual from affective forms would no doubt seem naïve to Derrida, the recent turn to affect has opened up new possibilities for evaluating naive criticisms and faddish enthusiasms.<sup>8</sup> How are we to approach the uncritical Ruskinism of Mikimoto Ryuzo, which makes itself known in spasmodic bursts of genre-subverting adoration? The middle section of his essay “*Ruskin’s Views of Economic Art*” turns on just such a moment, in which Mikimoto recognizes the illegitimacy and excessive emotion of his interest in Ruskin:

I do not like exaggeration and overestimation. I am criticising Ruskin. I think Masashige Kusunoko was a great man. And I think Napoleon was a great man, too. I think Carlyle was a great man, and that Mr. Kosen Sakai is praise-worthy. I have once wept over Mr. Natsume’s *Sore-Kara*, and [have been] deeply moved by Dr. Kawakami’s *Story of Poverty*. Though criticising Ruskin, I feel tears stand in my eyes when I think of his love affairs.

With such a sentiment I keep studying Ruskin. I sometimes wish I would rather be influenced by his personality than by his reasonings. A merchant’s son should be a merchant. If I am gently engaged in accounting, I can do without Ruskin, and can go to the Kabukiza Theatre or a London comedy month.<sup>9</sup>

This jarring confessional moment intrudes into a text that has hitherto restricted itself to a descriptive précis of Ruskin's essay "On the Political Economy of Art" (1857) and returns both Mikimoto and his readers to a set of painful feelings. The poignancy of Ruskin's ill-fated love affairs urgently demands that the author veer off course, necessitating the still-greater confession that even Mikimoto's veneration of Ruskin is the result of a substantial failure to conform to the plot attached to his name. This moment of reflection might serve as an emblem for the entire project of transnational aestheticism, formalizing as it does a broad array of aestheticist themes: an intense homosocial affection distributed among a pantheon of great men of letters, a dissent from the scripts of gender patrolled by capitalism, and a desire for greater intimacy with a thinker than the mere act of reading can provide. Casting himself as Dorian Gray and Ruskin as Lord Henry, Mikimoto theorizes the scope and limits of his own experience of textual influence and treats the transcultural counterarchive as simultaneously momentous and incomplete.

What does the reading practice exhibited in "Ruskin's Views of Economic Art" have to say about the way we read Victorian literature now? Like the surface readers described by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, Mikimoto responds to the affective life of his subject and is unwilling to engage in symptomatic reading.<sup>10</sup> Like those surface readers, moreover, Mikimoto embraces sympathetic reading as an ethics, even at the expense of his social legibility: as he puts it in another essay entitled "What Is Ruskin in Japan?" "though some may censure me for believing Ruskin too much and for not noticing his errors, yet my belief in him will never decrease" (19). Mikimoto's sense of the racial and transnational differences that separate him from Ruskin results in an discipleship that also foreshadows Anne Cheng's call for a "hermeneutics of susceptibility" that would follow the contradictions of racial, gendered embodiment under the conditions of modernity rather than preempt such contradictions with a critical intervention or conceptualization.<sup>11</sup> Cheng's approach to primitivism turns on the aesthetic pleasure that modernism derived from racial structures of knowledge and from the dramatic staging of racial performance on which such pleasure depended. The history of the Ruskin Library of Tokyo attests to the racial limits placed on Mikimoto's capacity to pass as a legitimate Ruskinian—limits placed both by the British contemporaries who received him on his many trips to Brantwood and by the posthumous scholarly reviewers who take great pleasure in the spectacle of a Japanese Ruskin enthusiast without in the least engaging him as a reader of Ruskin.

Nonetheless Mikimoto's reading habits fail to conform to the ethics of reception espoused by Best, Marcus, and others in one very important sense. Over the past decade or so, Victorianists have preferred to affirm the critical perceptiveness of Victorian writers wherever possible, a sign of this turn being that the rhetorical structure "x was a theorist rather than a symptom of y" has become ubiquitous. Amanda Anderson's defense of the position is trenchant and precise: she notes that the "polemical thrust" of her book *The Powers of Distance* is "to take seriously the specific ways in which individual Victorians constructed their ideals, to consider not only the limits but also the distinctive virtues of their conceptions of enabling detachment."<sup>12</sup> Eve Sedgwick, making a similar point to a different end, cannily notes that "paranoia has by now candidly become less a diagnosis than a prescription" and that a "reparative" reading can work toward remedying problems at which more aggressive critical practices can only harrumph.<sup>13</sup> Anderson and Sedgwick both oppose the heroic critical intervention with a gentler rehabilitation and calmly situate the Victorian writer by insisting on the explanatory power of her conceptual creations. Yet reading practices sometimes attributed to the affective turn in Victorian studies have generally restricted themselves to a single affect—that of emollient, complicit appreciation. As Elaine Freedgood and Emily Apter put it, "The recalcitrant, mystified, out-of-control, and conflicted texts of Marxist-psychoanalytic reading have been replaced by texts that are friendly, frank, generous, self-conscious, autocritiquing, and unguarded."<sup>14</sup> At the core of such an opposition is an Arnoldian faith in the soothing, and possibly improving, power of literature, a faith Mikimoto could certainly be said to have shared. His encounters with Ruskin, however, confront him with a text that is neither friendly nor frank but as monstrous as the fantasies of Sedgwick's paranoid reader. His response is to amplify, rather than resolve, Ruskin's incoherence—he performs, in other words, an affirmative reading practice predicated on feelings far uglier, and far more risky, than those of subdued respect or generous deference. It would be tempting to invoke Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry in order to explain a hyperbolic anglicization of Japanese culture, to argue that Mikimoto rehabilitates colonial discourse on the unstable discursive terrain of the excluded other with the effect of deconstructing such discourse's underlying assumptions.<sup>15</sup> Yet rather than treat Mikimoto as a deconstructive function of discourse, here I treat his engagement with Ruskin as a self-conscious experiment with the poetics and politics of readerly fidelity. The Tokyo library offers contemporary readers of Ruskin particular insights into the affective labor that sustains literary reception and that ensures that literature can continue to generate new meanings in contexts remote from the scene of their composition.

Yet the key questions raised by Mikimoto's work concern the collector's painful consciousness of his distance from Ruskin—a distance with implications for both his body and his soul. At the heart of "Ruskin's Views of Economic Art" is a desire for intimacy with Ruskin's "personality" rather than his "reasonings." What are the politics of a sympathetic reading that fails to achieve sympathy? Further, how are the sympathetic readings of professional critics interrupted or complicated by the hysterically affirmative readings of the dilettante, the dogmatist, the uncritical acolyte? These questions have begun to surface in our own moment, particularly in Carolyn Dinshaw's moving image of queer reception, the "touch across time," the desire for "partial, affective connection" in the distant past that might ground alternative communities in the present.<sup>16</sup> But when Mikimoto remarks that he wishes to be influenced by Ruskin's personality, he also points to the necessary failure that structures all such attempts to find community. The two are separated by something other than the passage of time: a *history* that disqualified Mikimoto's love for Ruskin. (Such a disqualification, incidentally, also characterizes the few notices that the Ruskin Library of Tokyo's publications have received among Western scholars since its reopening in 1984.) In the end, the Jamesonian ontology of the history that hurts is not incompatible with the Marcusian ethics of unsuspecting reading—such readings and reconstitutions can be and have been a strategy for processing trauma and loss and for building a politics of radical affirmation in the present.

Let me constellate the terrain of what I am calling "affirmative reading" with two other examples of twentieth-century radicals whose fidelity to Victorian literature derived more from the affect and style of that literature than from any of its propositional content. In the introduction to *Sarvodaya* (1908), his adaptive translation of Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, M. K. Gandhi refers to his work as a "paraphrase": "What follows is not a translation of *Unto This Last* but a paraphrase, as a translation would not be particularly useful to the readers of *Indian Opinion*. Even the title has not been translated but paraphrased as *Sarvodaya* [the welfare of all], as that was what Ruskin aimed at in writing this book."<sup>17</sup> Gandhi's paraphrase invents a syncretic Ruskin who might serve the dual functions of exploiting the veneration of British sage writers in the colonial education system in order to disseminate dissent and of visibly reproofing the hypocrisy of such a system that would insist on the applicability of liberal culturalism to the colonial situation while escalating violence at home and abroad and eliminating even the fragile provisions that midcentury liberalism had afforded the British state. But, no less importantly, the "paraphrase" indicates Gandhi's awareness that fidelity to Ruskin required creative reinterpretation. In his



autobiography—whose title, “My Experiments with Truth,” indicates its author’s capacity for imaginative, nondogmatic criticism—Gandhi records reading *Unto This Last* as a moment of conversion rather than one of persuasion: “I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book.”<sup>18</sup>

Gandhi’s concept of the paraphrase can be usefully contrasted with the theory of “orthodoxy” with which Georg Lukács characterizes his relationship to Marx. Seeking to maintain a viable relationship to Marxism after the successful establishment of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Lukács emphasizes that the indispensable part of Marx’s writing is his “method” and that the notion of orthodoxy “does not imply the uncritical acceptances of the results of Marx’s investigations.”<sup>19</sup> So, like Gandhi, Lukács seeks a methodology for reading Marx that is not dependent on any particular Marxist concept. His argument is formulated in fractious, combative prose, and his conclusions are complex and dialectical:

Great disunity has prevailed even in the “socialist” camp as to what constitutes the essence of Marxism, and which theses it is “permissible” to criticize and even reject without forfeiting the right to the title of “Marxist.” In consequence it came to be thought increasingly “unscientific” to make scholastic exegeses of old texts with a quasi-Biblical status, instead of fostering an “impartial” study of the “facts.” These texts, it was argued, had long been “superseded” by modern criticism and they should no longer be regarded as the sole fount of truth.

If the question were really to be formulated in terms of such a crude antithesis it would deserve at best a pitying smile. But in fact it is not (and never has been) quite so straightforward. Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx’s individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious “orthodox” Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation and dismiss all of Marx’s theses in toto—without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment.<sup>20</sup>

The desire to strip Marxist orthodoxy of any indicative statement and replace it with a “dialectical method” whose most vital element is “the dialectical relation between subject and object in the historical process” cannot be taken at face value: of course Lukács, who has read Hegel, cannot imagine that this description alone will suffice for describing Marx’s unique contribution.<sup>21</sup>

The indisputably Marxist character of the passage, rather, is located in its electric, nervy style, swerving between scare-quote ventriloquism and withering bathos, in a rhetorical escalation no doubt designed to recall Marx's own prose style, which Benedetto Croce called "that note of violent indignation and bitter satire which is felt in every page of *Das Kapital (Capital)*."<sup>22</sup> Yet in a text whose ostensible purpose is to recover Marxism from literalism, the imitation of Marx's style comports a special meaning, suggesting, if not declaring, that true fidelity to the Marxist tradition is to be sought in the intensification of certain affects. Lukács's enthusiastic embrace of a simulated speech—a kind of stylistic masochism—is useful to our present critical situation in pointing to a new direction for sympathetic reading, and indeed sympathetic rewriting, a "method" compelled by the exigencies of the present.

In the most obvious sense, affirmation is neither inherently radical nor conservative—anybody can do it. Yet the examples of Mikimoto, Gandhi, and Lukács reflect more than a recumbent idiocy or fandom—they share a desire to theorize without theory, to create new meanings from old literary texts by maintaining contact with a writing subject rather than a text. Mikimoto identifies this proximity as "personality," but Gandhi's "paraphrase" and Lukács's "orthodoxy" speaks to it as well, just with a different inflection—each represents a truer bearer of a text's potential than the text itself. A deconstructive reading would no doubt ascribe such a move to the workings of stupidity—a cognitive function that, as Avital Ronell writes, "makes stronger claims to knowledge than rigorous intelligence would ever permit itself to make."<sup>23</sup> Yet these three contexts reveal, too, the ways in which affirmation is a particularly vital strategy for historical subjects excluded from the Enlightenment project of rationalism—non-Western intellectuals, the colonized, and workers, to name the categories these each of these three authors examines. In such a mode, affirmative reading turns Lacanian disavowal—"je sais bien, mais quand même"—into a strategic response to the political dominance of reasoning. Such a response is explicitly authorized by Mikimoto, for whom fidelity to Ruskin entailed both risk and glee: "I do not care even if the socialists laugh me to scorn. And if there is any one who laughs at me, I think I will advise him to read G. F. G. Masterman" (2). But such a reading is also part of a broader set of concerns that have existed since the beginnings of empire: how to begin dismantling the structures of power that support the dominant colonial order of things without discarding the possibilities afforded by such structures? Mikimoto's response is not to provincialize Europe but to expropriate and hystericize its cultural treasures, to return Victorian Britain's aestheticizing gaze in a gesture of ambivalent celebration and rebuke. In order to explore

the ramifications of such a gaze, I turn first to Mikimoto's understanding of the differences between Marx and Ruskin and then to the transnational network of friends and associates he built around his collection.

*Ruskin and Marx: Victorians in Japan*

Mikimoto's own descriptions of his citations from Ruskin were usually counterposed to those of the joyless, mechanistic readers of Marx. He had read at least *Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto* and disparaged Marx himself as a weak counterpart to Ruskin, a vulgar materialist who didn't deserve his newfound popularity among Japanese anti-imperialists—the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) was formed in 1922, and remained a focus of public dissent, especially among intellectuals and academics, until many of its members were imprisoned on 15 March 1928. But the insistence that Marx and Ruskin were comparable figures was hardly outside the mainstream of Japanese left thought in the period. Both were read widely and in tandem at Kyoto Imperial University under Kawakami Hajime, who was fast becoming the most prominent advocate for Marxist critique in Japan.<sup>24</sup> Kawakami's early socialist manifesto *Bimbo monogatori* (*The Tale of Poverty*), published in 1916, drew heavily on both Marxist and non-Marxist socialisms, citing both Ruskin and William Morris, but in 1919, he began publishing the Marxist journal *Shakai mondai kenkyu* (*Studies on Social Questions*), as well as writing articles on Marx in a wider array of radical magazines. Under Kawakami's influence at Kyoto, a left student organization called the Labor-Student Society formed, whose members included Nosaka Sanzo, a founder of the JCP, and Sano Manabu, a leading Communist who in 1933 broke off from the Communist International in favor of the ideology of "Tenko"—a nationalist, proimperialist revolutionary theory. The radical context of Kyoto Imperial University is vital to understanding how revolutionary Ruskin seemed to Mikimoto, who frequently aligned him with other, more celebrated, revolutionaries: "Some socialists say that Ruskin is not sufficient. In some respects he may seem illogical. But there is an ideal course or order in things. The society which is idealized by humanitarian economy is a form of society which may bring happiness on mankind. Lenin is great. And Ruskin is great as well" (16).

The implicit comparison to Lenin, unexpected as it may seem, draws on an essay called "Ruskin the Prophet" by a senior Liberal member of the British Parliament, the aforementioned Charles Masterman, which

was published in a collection of essays published by Ruskin's own press, George Allen and Unwin, to commemorate Ruskin's centenary. Prefiguring the old cliché (sometimes attributed to the Labour prime minister Harold Wilson) that the Labour Party owed "more to Methodism than to Marx," Masterman writes enthusiastically of the Russian Revolution as an extension of Ruskinian humanism: "I think when the story is told, and if this great experiment emerges from its present difficulties and succeeds, you will find that Lenin and his ideal community owe less to Karl Marx than to John Ruskin."<sup>25</sup> Wishful thinking, no doubt, but striking in demonstrating the surprising competition between Marx and Ruskin as originary moments for Communist radicalism. Nor was Masterman alone: the American Christian socialist W. D. P. Bliss had already published an anthology of Ruskin's work designed to claim him as the fount of global socialism, under the title *The Communism of John Ruskin* (1891), drawing on volume 7 of *Fors Clavigera*, in which Ruskin declares himself "a Communist of the old school—reddest also of the red."<sup>26</sup> The passage has remained less widely known than the similar formation in volume 10 of *Fors Clavigera*: "I am, and my father was before me, a violent Tory of the old school": whichever political position Ruskin preferred at a given moment, he certainly preferred it to be "of the old school."<sup>27</sup>

Although Mikimoto was aware of the tactical benefits of comparing Ruskin to the more celebrated Lenin and Marx, it is clear that the stronger benefit he derived from Ruskinian thought was its capacity to work on the individual soul: "Now that Marxian political economy is enlightening the populace with an extraordinary power, I have chosen Ruskin as a guide who enables me to settle down" (16). Yet Mikimoto's attempt to separate such a personal, reflective politics from a wider, rabble-rousing one was tested dramatically and repeatedly in his searchingly self-critical texts. The first of such challenges presented itself in the figure of Kawakami Hajime himself, whose reputation as a Marxist firebrand threatened to obscure his debt to Ruskin—which was, naturally enough, far greater than his debt to Lenin. To Mikimoto, Kawakami was emphatically a Ruskinian first and a Marxist second. Before the 1920s, Ruskin had been the subject of articles and monographs by a large number of literary critics and art historians in Japan, including the poet Shimazaki Toson, who translated parts of *Modern Painters*, and the modernist novelist Natsume Soseki, who included a section on Ruskinian aesthetics in his book *Theory of Literature*.<sup>28</sup> But Kawakami was the first professional economist in Japan to write extensively on Ruskin, and he had also written the preface to Kenji Ishida's translation of *Unto This Last* (1918). Mikimoto discussed his teacher at length in a

lecture delivered in front of the International Women's Institute at Girton College, Cambridge, in 1929 called "Ruskin's Influence in Japan," calling his preface "the shortest . . . and most noteworthy" introduction to Ruskinian economics. In it, Kawakami also counterposes Ruskin and Marx, though he does so more systematically than Mikimoto. For Kawakami, according to Mikimoto, the critique of political economy had generated two compatible, but discrete, forms of discourse, which he called "socialistic economy," represented by Marx, and "humanistic economy," represented by Ruskin (42). Unacceptable though such a view would appear from the familiar perspectives of Western Marxism, Mikimoto held not only that a unification of romanticism and Marxism was possible but also that Kawakami had ensured that such a unification was uniquely possible in Japan: "In Japan Ruskin has been raised, though temporarily, by Dr. Kawakami to the same level as Marx's throne" (43). Even during his many travels abroad, Mikimoto was keen to emphasize the particular contribution of a Japanese critic to the ongoing project of reading Ruskin. In the same lecture he joked that "it may be an unexpected fact that the greatest Marxian teacher in Japan has once been so Ruskinian that he was called the Japanese Ruskin by his colleagues" (40).

The phrase "Japanese Ruskin" aptly communicates Mikimoto's feeling that being inspired by Ruskin was not just a matter of reasonings but also of personality. Indeed, in neither "Ruskin's Views of Economic Art" nor "The Influence of Ruskin in Japan" are the theoretical differences between Ruskin and Marx explored: the contest is simply one of reputation, and it resolves itself by the power of insistence.

Was Ruskin an economist? He did not write any consistent book on political economy. So some insist that he ought to have been called a kind of economic reformer more justly than an economist. But I prefer to treat him as an economist. Some of the subjects which he has treated of in his *Unto This Last* (1862) and *Munera Pulveris* (1872) are quite different from those which were hitherto discussed by other economists, but in substance they teem with such pure theories as meet with the approval of modern economists. Though a student of little learning, I am so bold as to believe that Ruskin's worth lies not as an art critic, but as a social reformer—nay, as a Political economist. ("Ruskin's Views," 18)

In calibrating the proper designation for Ruskinian criticism, Mikimoto deploys the word "economist" as an instrument by which to detect

intellectual legitimacy. He begins by dispatching consistency as a grounds for establishing the credentials of an economist, treating it as the hobgoblin of the “some” who see Ruskin as a reformer rather than a theorist. Then he goes further, claiming that neither *Unto This Last* nor *Munera Pulveris* would warrant attributing the title “economist” to their author—who, incidentally, begins the latter by declaring it to be “the first accurate analysis of the laws of Political Economy which has been published in England.”<sup>29</sup> So if economics is neither a consistent theme throughout Ruskin’s work nor a substantially elaborated field of his two most celebrated works of social criticism, what forms the basis of the designation “political economist”? Two factors: an appeal to the essential *modernity* of Ruskin’s thought—of which more shortly—and a simple assertion of boldness on the part of a “student of little learning.” This latter strategy, which finds Mikimoto adopting a passive-aggressive tone of deference before asserting his expertise, recurs throughout his writing and is just as frequently addressed to (implicitly Marxist) socialists as to the political economists he reproves in “Ruskin’s Views.” These moments are painful to read, as the author comes to understand that he is traumatically remote from the groups to whom he most wants to speak—but, in isolation, doomed by a commitment over which he has lost control. Like Adorno’s dilettante, Mikimoto feels himself caught between a utopian faith in the life of the mind and a failure to share a vocabulary with potential allies from whom he receives nothing but scorn. Even if the Mikimoto is, like Adorno’s dilettante, “a secret envoy of the established powers,” nevertheless it is Mikimoto who exposes the reality that, insofar as it is institutionalized, even radical thought depends on a narrative of professionalization.

From the earliest moments in the reception of *Modern Painters*, moreover, critics of Ruskin recognized that the quickest way to discredit him was to accuse him of dabbling. James Whistler, in his attacks on art criticism, for example, in which Ruskin joins Sidney Colvin and Harry Quilter among the his *bêtes noires*, repeatedly insists that only artists were qualified to discuss the meaning or value of art. With his characteristic taste for hyperbole and wittily apocalyptic tone, Whistler, in the guise of “the Preacher,” declares: “And now from their midst, the Dilettante stalks abroad. The amateur is loosed. The voice of the aesthete is heard in the land, and catastrophe is upon us.”<sup>30</sup> Whistler’s case is scientific: beauty is apparent in a painting or it is not, just as “two and two the mathematician would continue to make four, in spite of the whine of the amateur for three, or the cry of the critic for five.”<sup>31</sup> Yet the hostility toward art criticism found in Whistler’s attacks was substantially less widespread than

the sense that Ruskin's turn from the art criticism of the 1850s to the social criticism he wrote from 1860 onward, when the first installation of *Unto This Last* was published, was a deep blunder, with the *Cornhill* magazine famously abandoning publication of *Unto This Last* after four weeks. In the fifty-third *Fors Clavigera* letter, Ruskin furiously and poignantly connects the power of his prose to the skepticism the readers of *Sesame and Lilies* expressed: "In the one volume of *Sesame and Lilies*—nay, in the last forty pages of its central address to Englishwomen—everything is told that I know of vital truth, everything urged that I see to be needful of vital act;—but no creature answers me with any faith or deed. They read the words, and say they are pretty, and go on in their own ways."<sup>32</sup> Notice here the gendered polarization of style and substance, the former "pretty," the latter embodying "vital truth." The stylistic reading of Ruskin is here figured as a failure to perform, to make oneself heard.

In spite of Mikimoto's claims that "modern economists" had ratified Ruskin's theories, at other times he pitted Ruskin against modernity and implicitly against Marx. There was no doubt that to do so was unfashionable, although it was an unfashionableness capable of being enjoyed: "Now that Marx is so prevalent, it may seem behind the times to discuss and admire Ruskin" ("Ruskin's Views," 19). Here again, the insistence on Ruskin's supreme virtue is undergirded by neither critical exegesis nor interpretation but by an act of insistence whose tone is elegiac and sentimental.

Before discussing Marx, we shall find it to be of some service to hold the thought of Ruskin, and that it provides a foundation most necessary to criticise Marx. As a Japanese, and as an inhabitant of that island of Japan which has been left behind in this material civilization, I wish that there may appear in present Japan only one great Ruskin rather than many small Marxes. There are many millionaires in Japan who contribute a million *yen* towards establishing a public cemetery in Tokyo. But, in present Japan, a Ruskin would be able to solve the problem. ("Ruskin's Views," 19)

The architectural metaphor arranges Marx and Ruskin vertically, with the latter not only providing the interpretative solution to problems posed by the former but also offering a deeper critique of social inequity. In a sense, however, the critical distinction here resembles Michael Löwy's influential argument concerning the difference between a romantic

anticapitalism focused on reinstating premodern forms of belonging and a Marxist critique of modern civilization motivated by the enthusiastic pursuit of new and more modern social organizations. Ruskin is positioned as the solution to the problems of a Japan that Mikimoto holds to be “left behind in this material civilization,” and Marx the modernizer whose materialism has become indistinguishable from capitalism’s own incursions into Japanese culture. Following his instinct to defend rather than analyze Ruskin’s contribution to the critique of political economy, Mikimoto began to understand capitalism as a metaphysical force, a power whose effects were not limited to poverty and inequality but could also be said to include the problem of death itself—or, at least, the problem of processing mass death in a modern city. To such a problem, orthodox Marxism could only respond like a millionaire writing a check, by addressing material problems in the hope that spiritual solutions would follow. The passage’s startling comparison—“one great Ruskin rather than many small Marxes”—indicates that its author is indicting not Marx the theorist but the collectivity that spoke for him. Mikimoto’s politics reappears as a radical individualism, encompassing theological and even messianic language. Yet the necessity of reading both Ruskin and Marx was a strikingly personal matter for Mikimoto, embodied above all in Kawakami, to whom he dedicated his published works after the latter’s arrest and imprisonment. In Mikimoto’s private study, moreover, on the wall adjoining the dresser constructed especially to house his first *Complete Works*, hung a portrait of his mentor; Kawakami was the other constant presence in Mikimoto’s private study.

### *Bibliophilia and Kinship*

Throughout his texts, Mikimoto contrasts the overcrowded cemeteries and joyless economism of modern Tokyo with both the gentle melancholia of London—his “lonely second native place” (“Ruskin’s Views,” 1)—and the gothic landscapes of Ruskin’s Lake District. The first issue of Mikimoto’s *Journal of the Tokyo Ruskin Society* was published in January 1931, a year after the Tokyo Ruskin Society had been formed, and contained a narrative of Mikimoto’s tours of England, written in English and directed not at the journal’s Japanese readership but at the British figures credited with helping Mikimoto build his collection.



## MY OWN PRIVATE EXPOSITION OF JOHN RUSKIN

I met with Mr. Arthur Severn, R.A. in London and Brantwood, Coniston in 1920, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1929.

I had the "Ruskin tea" with Miss F. Banks of High St., Kensington, visited, sought Maggs Bros., Henry Southeran, and other noted places for Ruskin Relics.

I haunted Ruskin Relics in Coniston and the Lake-district with Mr. J. H. Stephenson, the painter of S. R. A. who is the intimate pupil or the friend of Ruskin.

I am very grateful and thankful to these 3 of them for my own collections of Ruskin.

R. Mikimoto  
Jan. 20th, 1931

The document is signed "R. Mikimoto" and introduces the journal, although the curator's description of his note as a "private exposition" is slightly oxymoronic, the conflicting energies of which reflect its author's ambivalence about the privacy and publicity of his collection. "Haunted" should probably read "hunted," but in its present form, it neatly fleshes out the gothic trope, reversing the visitor's interest in the "relics" of Coniston, the sacral objects that nourish the ghostly persistence of the great man, so that it is Mikimoto himself that is haunting England. The reference to J. H. Stephenson as an "intimate pupil or the friend" of Ruskin likewise plays with the reader's expectation, here aligning intimacy with pedagogy rather than friendship. Under this chronology, which also functions as a dedication of the collection to Severn, Banks, and Stephenson, Mikimoto lists the items in his collection. The list contains two manuscripts of Ruskin's—*Munera Pulveris*, which is still in the library's collection, and "On Usury," which is now at the University of Lancaster—but the rest of the "relics" are related to Ruskin only at a remove.

Much of the desire for proximity to "relics"—his personal effects, manuscripts, and other items imprinted with Ruskin's personality—was deflected by Mikimoto onto the childless Ruskin's nearest surviving relative, his distant cousin Arthur Severn, who had been living at Brantwood since before Ruskin's death in 1900 and had maintained it as a heritage site in the intervening years.<sup>33</sup> The Severn family had come to live at Brantwood, Ruskin's Coniston home, in the late 1870s and were already involved in mythologizing Ruskin nationally in Britain. Arthur,

an academician, prepared lithographs and sketches of Ruskin's home for R. G. Collingwood's important double-decker biography of Ruskin, the first volume of which was published in 1893, whose dedicatee was Joan Agnew, Ruskin's niece and Severn's wife. Among the three items in the list headed "[Ruskin's] birth and his childhood" is "collection of sea plants and cuttings and Etc. by Arthur Severn," with Severn's childhood serving as a stand-in for his uncle's. A couple of items listed are described only vaguely: "Other important things of Ruskin at his age of 9 presented to R. Mikimoto by Prof. Faunthorpe the president of [the] London Ruskin Society, and by Arthur Severn Esq." and "the important writings of his love episodes and his married life" ("My Private Exposition," 65). Love and childhood, themes to which Mikimoto returns in his writing, are the notable grey areas in the archive. Mikimoto's trips to Britain were all coordinated with Severn, who formed a relatively unbroken link between the dead and the living. Among the front matter of the *Catalogue of the Tokyo Ruskin Library* is a photograph of a young Mikimoto and an elderly Severn, taken in the last of Ruskin's three bedrooms at Brantwood—today it is grimly called "the death room" because Ruskin died on the bed on which Mikimoto is sitting.<sup>34</sup>

The five trips Mikimoto made in the 1920s yielded the large majority of his collection; some texts were procured by mail order, but since the original library was destroyed, and the records with it, the provenance of many of the texts is unclear. One at least (a New York printing of *The Crown of Wild Olives*) was bought at Maruzen, the largest bookstore in Tokyo. Many of the texts are inscribed to this Faunthorpe, a classics teacher from London who had been charged by Ruskin with the mammoth task of providing a workable index to all of the *Fors Clavigera* letters. Faunthorpe had produced a five-hundred-page list of entries published in running editions by Ruskin's own publisher, George Allen, up until 1887, with topics related to England alone running for over fifty pages, including the following entry: "what Americans have and have not learned from, *ib*; flesh-eating, 42, 130, unsentimental, 42, 131, notion of civilizing China, 42, 135." It also lists: "JAPANESE, we are afraid of, January 1st, 1871, 1, 4; screens, 26, 18; 48, 267; inlaid work, gift by Mr. Willett to S. George's Museum, 64, 125; horticulture 66, 183."<sup>35</sup> The index reproduces the haptic structure of *Fors Clavigera* in an abbreviated form, stripped of all syntagm—only the main topics are in alphabetical order; the subjects themselves are neither alphabetically nor chronologically arranged. Mikimoto's mania for Ruskin thus found a kin in another eccentric practice of collation.

By the end of the 1920s, the collection was complete and Mikimoto set about writing the commentaries, initially as occasional essays for a lecture at Girton College, Cambridge, and eventually in the *Journal of the Tokyo Ruskin Society*. In the late 1920s, a teashop modeled on Ruskin's Drury Lane café was opened in Ginza, and a few blocks away, in 1934, the Ruskin Library of Tokyo opened at last. It is in the context of the library's initial success that Mikimoto began to reflect on his own complicity, and that of his family, in the social structures he had sought out Ruskin to ameliorate. A particular source of concern—and malice—is his father's pearl farm, the very model of a Meiji-era business:

Moralists and educationalists may negatively advise us not to be extravagant. But so long as there exists the merit of my father who has been invested with a decoration for producing pearls with the help of five hundred employees, we cannot extirpate the bacteria of poverty, which are the social disease. ("Ruskin's Views," 14–15)

Almost as startling as his appeals to the reader's sympathy or his intense sentimentalism, Mikimoto's aggressive, sullen attack on his father again disrupts the fragile tonal equanimity of the essay. The text wears its symptoms on its surface, interweaving political and personal feelings. Accordingly, Mikimoto Kokichi is figured as both a barrier to progress and a partisan of a corrupt system, one that is to be eradicated in the struggle to overcome the "social disease" of poverty. This is a struggle inflected by the language of eugenics—the passage is motivated by a desire to "extirpate." Mikimoto goes on to cite *Time and Tide*, in which Ruskin had differentiated between good and bad forms of luxury by stipulating that while "you may have Paul Veronese to paint your ceiling, if you like, . . . you must not employ a hundred divers to find beads to stitch over your sleeve."<sup>36</sup> In Mikimoto's paraphrase, though, the attack on his father's trade is spelled out more clearly, as he changes "a hundred divers to find beads to stitch over your sleeve" to "a hundred divers to seek for pearls" ("Ruskin's Views," 15).

The passage places the affective life of family at the heart of the struggle for social justice, which is in turn reconfigured as a generational clash over the life of the nation. The complex of associations—justice, nation, family—resonates within the broader literary climate of Japanese modernity. The generational character of revolutionary struggle, which turns on the figure of the young scholarly man, is one of the most frequently recurring thematic structures within the novels of Natsume Soseki, the greatest of the late-Meiji generation of Japanese novelists. In "Ruskin's

Views of Economic Art,” Mikimoto acknowledges his appreciation of Soseki, especially his 1909 novel *Sore-Kara (And Then)*.<sup>37</sup> In that novel, as throughout his comparatively brief but extraordinarily productive career—he published twenty novels over a career that spanned only eleven years, 1905–1916—Soseki investigates both the opportunities afforded to and limitations imposed on the scholarly scion of wealth. In *Sore-Kara*, an aesthetically sensitized and cosmopolitan young man named Daisuke struggles with his lack of productivity in the capitalist empire and rues, over two hundred pages, his reliance on his wealthy but barbaric father and the feelings of shame and deracination such a reliance generates. His imaginings of the future, as the novel’s title suggests, are always stuttering and incomplete but, for all that, utopian and optimistic. Like Daisuke, Mikimoto treats his displacement by the enthusiastic libertarianism of the Taisho era not as itself evidence of greater investment in the nationalist project of Japanese modernization: “My father was born and brought up in the ago of individualistic economy. The rising generation should make it their mission to fix their eyes upon the world of socialistic economy. . . . To be faithful to one’s country is not merely to fight bravely in battle and defeat one’s enemy” (“Ruskin’s Views,” 16).

This important assertion—that Ruskinian moralism itself might be co-opted to serve the Japanese imperial mission—is posed as a formal problem in Soseki’s second novel, *Kofu (The Miner)*, published in 1908. *The Miner* has often been dismissed as a great novelist’s juvenile experiment in metafiction—it ends by declaring of its narrative that “every bit of it is true, which you can tell from the fact that this book never did turn into a novel.”<sup>38</sup> But its failure to resolve a *Bildung* plot might also be taken to designate a wider failure for which Soseki could hardly be held responsible: the difficulty of imagining futures for individual subjects outside the structure of the modern nation. In the story, a lonely, unnamed intellectual young man, who has violated some unknown taboo involving a fiancée, leaves Tokyo by foot and finds himself outside the city. Oscillating between indolent passivity and a desire to escape the strenuous expectations imposed on him by his family, he is recruited by an unscrupulous wandering gang master as manual labor in a local mine. He wanders around the mine as various laborers try to prove to him that the work is too menial for somebody of his particular skill—an idea he repeatedly repudiates, so full is he of self-disgust at his never-revealed transgression. He accepts every instruction and follows every rule until, deep in the mine, he encounters one of very few named characters—an older miner named Yasu. Yasu reveals that he too was once a student in circumstances very like the narrator’s and that he stayed in the

mine for similar reasons, with the result that he has become the degenerate that others had always thought him to be:

It's a terrible thing to cause the degeneracy of an individual human being. Just killing him would be less of a crime. The degenerate goes on to cause harm, to hurt others. I know what I'm talking about because that's just what I have done. It's the only thing I *can* do—now. And all the screaming and crying in the world isn't going to change that. Which is why you have to get out of here fast. For the others. It's not just you who'll suffer if you become degenerate . . . Tell me, are your parents living?<sup>39</sup>

The consequence of this degeneration—of failing to live up the intellectual capacity that the young man has within him—is the impoverishment of the empire. Yasu's next question—“And you're a Japanese, aren't you?”—leads to the following disquisition: “If you're a Japanese, you should take a profession that will benefit Japan. For a man of learning to become a miner is a great loss to the nation. That's why you should get out now. If you're from Tokyo, go back to Tokyo. And do something decent—something that's right for you and good for the country.”<sup>40</sup> Even in the place where the narrator had most hoped to avoid pegging his own fortunes to the national will, such a moral imperative is inescapable. Most post-1945 readings of *The Miner* have agreed that this late advice is not meant to be taken literally, that Soseki's tone is satirical—and indeed the narrator himself is suspicious of the staginess of Yasu's appearance: “For me to meet Yasu at a time like this was something right out of a novel.”<sup>41</sup> But Soseki's *Theory of Literature* reveals that satirizing the claims of the nation is easier than doing without them and that despite a desire to retain a writerly conscience independent of the state, “I must face without shrinking whatever measure of unhappiness may prove necessary when it comes to upholding the honors and privileges due a sovereign subject of Japan.”<sup>42</sup>

It remains unknown whether after the collection was stowed in 1937, Mikimoto had given up on the idea of having a Ruskin library altogether or whether other circumstances prohibited him from reopening the library or teashop in a different location after the war. The precise date of the removal is not established either, but it certainly occurred later than May 1937, because in that year the library printed a *History of the Ruskin Library*, which makes no mention of its closing. This book was written by Uemura Ryuzo, a contributor to the *Journal of the Tokyo Ruskin Society*, and in the midst of a scrapbook of various photographs and images from the collection's history it outlines in Japanese, as Mikimoto had already done in English, the history of Ruskin's reception in Japan and situates the library's own history within

wider narratives of Japanese anticapitalism and Victoriana. A commentary on Mikimoto's counterarchival practice, the *History of the Ruskin Library* adopts many of Mikimoto's habits in its assembly of material and bears textual traces of Mikimoto's work: a menu from the teashop, photographs of the staff of both the teashop and the library, and a group photograph of the Ruskin Tennis Club in Tokyo, taken in April 1937. It reprints a facsimile of R. G. Collingwood's family tree, which shows the relation of Ruskin to Arthur Severn and Joan Ruskin Agnew, and photographs of the various items Mikimoto had had made to adorn the library: his *meeshi*, which bore the slogan "A JOY FOR EVER" underneath a Beardsley-style image of roses (for Rose La Touche, perhaps), for instance, and the welsh dresser he had had specially constructed in order to perfectly suit the dimensions of the *Complete Works*. One encounters on each page both the fragility of transhistorical intimacy and the possibility of its archival persistence in the recurrence of the slogan, attributed to Ruskin, "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

Ruskin adapted the line from Keats's *Endymion* as a name for the 1868 edition of *The Political Economy of Art*—adding the cruel rejoinder "and its place in the market." Siegel effectively shows that the view of art outlined in the two *Political Economy* lectures emphasizes the transtemporal, transcultural power of art. Yet Ruskin is hardly a naive optimist. In fact, his critique of the 1857 Great Britain Exhibition in Manchester—the largest collection of art ever amassed anywhere in the world—stresses the problems of accessing art just as much as the benefits of doing so.

[The] fury of the sight of new things, with which we are now infected and afflicted, though partly the result of everything made a matter of trade, is yet more the consequence of our thirst for dramatic instead of classic work. For when we are interested in the beauty of a thing, the oftener we can see it the better; but when we are interested only by the story of a thing, we get tired of hearing the same tale told over and over again, and stopping always at the same point—we want a new story presently, a new and better one—and the picture of the day, and novel of the day, become as ephemeral as the coiffure or the bonnet of the day. Now this spirit is wholly adverse to the existence of any lovely art. If you mean to throw it aside to-morrow, you can never have it today. If any one had really understood the motto from Keats, which was blazoned at the extremity of the first Manchester exhibition building, they would have known that it was the bitterest satire they could have written there, against that building itself and all its meanings—"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." It is not a joy for three days, limited by date of return ticket.<sup>43</sup>

The local reference is to the special edition train tickets that train companies offered to bring people from across Britain to Manchester. But what is more striking is Ruskin's treatment of the Keats line, which stems from his division of objects of aesthetic appreciation into "the thing" and "the story of the thing"—a division that perhaps owes some genealogical debt to the Kantian aesthetics in which apprehension of beauty depends on the free play of cognitive forms, from which it follows that a particular experience of beauty cannot be strictly described, except by reference to the general form. But, unlike Kant's, Ruskin's concerns are deeply bound up with questions of public policy: how can access to beautiful things be as wide as possible, given the necessary commercialization of art which accompanies increased access? Ruskin's view is not, strictly, antiegalitarian—he would prefer beauty to be available to all. But it is structured according to a familiar double bind: to encounter art is to achieve a lifelong pleasure, but the mediating structures that allow for such encounters to occur—the train, the story, the exhibition—nullify such pleasure before it is achieved. Only a set of serial encounters with the thing itself is any guarantee that beauty will evade mere narration and endure in a new future.

The lecture gives voice to some of Ruskin's many doubts concerning art's ability to morally improve those who consume it—but it was delivered in a context that may be obscured if it is simply related to the Great Britain Exhibition. In one sense, Ruskin's anxiety over art's capacity to improve people and peoples is nothing new: as De Quincey had already noted in the first English essay to make critical use of the word "aesthetic," the capacity to treat something "in relation to good taste" could theoretically absolve one of the responsibility of treating it in relation to morality. But for Ruskin, whose interest in the public appreciation of art was shaped by national and racial concerns, doubt over the ameliorative power of art was grounded in the epochal violence of the imperial enterprise. As is well known, Ruskin spent the latter half of 1866 working on behalf of the Eyre Defense Committee, established by Thomas Carlyle to provide funds for a legal defense of the governor of Jamaica who had ordered the judicial murder of hundreds of Jamaicans in the wake of the Morant Bay Rebellion. What is less known and more important for understanding Ruskin's aesthetics is that his response to the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 was even more uncompromising and troubled. In a lecture delivered at the Kensington Museum in January of 1858, Ruskin explained that the rebellion had disproved the notion that a race's capacity for artistic appreciation, such as he accorded the Indians, could be morally improving:

Since the race of man began its course on this earth, nothing has ever been done by it so significative of all bestial, and lower than bestial

degradation, as the acts [of] the Indian race in the year that has just passed by. Cruelty as fierce may indeed have been wreaked, and brutality as abominable been practiced before, but never under like circumstances; rage of prolonged war, and resentment of prolonged oppression, have made men as cruel before now; and gradual decline into barbarism, where no examples of decency or civilization existed around them, has sunk, before now, isolated populations to the lowest level of possible humanity. But cruelty stretched to its fiercest against the gentle and unoffending, and corruption festered to its loathsomest in the midst of the witnessing presence of a disciplined civilization,—these we could not have known to be within the practicable compass of human guilt, but for the acts of the Indian mutineer. And, as thus, on the one hand, you have an extreme energy of baseness displayed by these lovers of art.<sup>44</sup>

The absolute mutual indifference of art and morality that would become, from Ruskin through to Wilde, the cornerstone of aestheticism's politics is here represented as a historical rather than metaphysical truth—one resulting from the sheer incommensurability of anticolonial violence with the concept of “civilization” that hinges aesthetics and policy.

Critics as different as Paul Gilroy, Ian Baucom, and Raymond Williams have all agreed that Ruskin's aestheticism provided a cultural context for British imperial ambitions, reconfiguring the cultural heritage of the race as an implicit justification for the civilizing mission.<sup>45</sup> But while Ruskin's pieces on the Sepoy Rebellion and his personal participation in the Morant Bay scandal reveal him to be an enthusiastic imperialist, each configures the relationship between aesthetics and imperialism quite differently from that generally assumed. Both insist on the essential incompatibility of aesthetic and imperial modes of civilization. The exhibition's sheer ambition and array fades quickly into trivial vulgarity, proving nothing more than that the state is not a fit provider of art. And the escalation of imperial violence in India is defended precisely on the basis that the aesthetic nature of the Indian race had only precipitated the uprising. Treating aesthetic pleasure as both an object to be desired and an insurgent force to be resisted, Ruskin reveals the unresolved ambivalence of Victorian aesthetics. Such an ambivalence might also account for Ruskin's surprising lack of interest in Japanese art. Other than generalizations about Asian cultures and a briskly generous response to a book of woodblock prints he had been given by William Michael Rossetti—“the sea and clouds are delicious, the mountains very good”—I have not been able to find anything he wrote about specifically Japanese art



anywhere.<sup>46</sup> In a lecture delivered in 1906, the art dealer and Japan-enthusiast Marcus Huish offered an anecdotal explanation for Ruskin's lack of interest, recounting a conversation with a friend who was asked to stop sending Ruskin Japanese art books, "as they disturbed him, and it was too late for him to enter into those matters."<sup>47</sup>

Disturbance and belatedness: two aestheticized affects that connect Ruskin to Mikimoto through the mysticism of the archive. One of Mikimoto's names for such a connection was "love": "In the case of Ruskin, morality was love. Apart from love, there was neither beauty nor virtue. Beauty was virtue, and virtue was love" ("What is Ruskin in Japan?," 57). His most systematic treatment of the subject occurs in a short piece written in English but published inside the Japanese-language *History of the Tokyo Ruskin Library* titled "On Ruskin's Loves: In Loving Memory of Rosie." Unlike his other anglophone texts, "On Ruskin's Loves" seems less designed to attract an English-speaking readership than to avoid a Japanese-speaking one, so much more candid and personal it is than the rest. It largely comprises a schematic account of Ruskin's doomed love affair with Rose La Touche, the young girl with whom he was scandalously infatuated and who became the model for Nabokov's *Lolita*. But Mikimoto moves between third-person narration, first-person confession, and interior monologues in the person of Ruskin with disorienting verve, seeming cheerier than usual and returning to the theme of dancing with optimism tinged with melancholy: "Last autumn, I felt sadness in gladness, with my young tennis-mates, finding men and women dancing, lonely at the Florida dance hall, Tameike, Akasaka. A lady had a dance with me cheerfully as if she had been the camellia of early spring; and another girl seemed to be a fading cosmos. But I, as a disciple of Ruskin, happily could play [and] dance in tunes from [the] Moulin Rouge" (2). Mikimoto's dancing recalls for him the discussions he had with the gravedigger at Coniston during his seven trips to Ruskin's grave, in which the gravedigger (echoing Miss Coward of Brantwood) often referred to Ruskin's joy at the English waltz and distaste at the Scotch trot. Mikimoto recognizes that it may seem odd to imagine the old sage dancing but concludes that "by regarding any ancient sage too morally, sometimes we young generation would have bad influences from him. Therefore I am afraid of making [my account of] Ruskin [an] extraordinarily poeticalized one. But I cannot help believing him one who essentially appreciated the dance and was a solitary philosopher" (5).

Mikimoto's redemptive "poeticalization" of Ruskin through the dance works to find an afterlife to a "marriage [that] was too distressful a tragedy to be mentioned and of which we cannot find anything about his opinions in

the ‘Praeteritia’” (7). And the poeticalization of Ruskin comes at a moment in which Mikimoto himself feels complexly drawn to Ruskin’s tragic love of Rosie and also repelled enough to feel old: “Readers, I thank you for reading this poor lecture in the waste of the precious sheets of this book. It is just five in the morning. Now I am in my forties and father of my two children. And I am a dry man, unable to love another woman. [But even] to such a man as I am, the portrait of Rosie drawn by Ruskin is enough to make him tearful” (9). Even Ruskin’s celibacy, which Mikimoto knows all too well to have been enough for him to have been treated with contempt, is a sign of Ruskin’s virtue and of his lovability: “If a man . . . abstain from conjugal relations for a long time, he may be a hero who has been able to perform one of the highest deeds in humanity. I am in wonder on this subject as a disciple of Ruskin, for his does not enter into the physiological laws. But I believe in the destiny of love through Ruskin’s experiences. One sometimes may find a profound love in the conditions of one’s lasciviousness, but one must be careful lest such things shall fall into ugliness and deadness” (10). It is finally in celibacy that Mikimoto finds an apt figuration for his ideal relationship with Ruskin—a connection of intimate friendship and discipleship. The final name for a transtemporal, transcultural relationship that had hitherto lacked one, celibacy affords Mikimoto a model of aesthetic sociality capable of sustaining, however briefly, the fragments of affect that had comprised his own extraordinary act of fidelity.

In *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich understands queer counter-archives—by which she means, in general, repositories of ephemera connected to gay and lesbian histories of trauma in North America—to be the result of a profound need to process trauma, “the desire to collect objects not just to protect against death but in order to create practices of mourning.”<sup>48</sup> Such archives pose an implicit challenge to positivist historiography because “they are composed of material practices that challenge traditional conceptions of history and understand the quest for history as a psychic need, rather than a science.”<sup>49</sup> The needs that one finds in the Ruskin Library of Tokyo—for beauty; for Ruskin; for a life plot outside of family expectations; perhaps, casually, for some kind of revolution—are hardly submerged; they comprise his archive as such. Like the affective labor of the queer archives Cvetkovich describes, and that have more broadly become a focus of contemporary queer theory, Mikimoto’s collection paradoxically preserves not just the flotsam of an intimate relationship but the desire that necessitated searching for such materials in the first place. The queerness of the archive, if it is reasonable to refer to such a thing, derives not from any queerness on the part of its superintendent or its subject but

exists somewhere in the gap between them. The parts of the archive most central to its functioning are also those furthest from it: personality, intimacy, reciprocity. Even the small number of manuscripts of minor works that Mikimoto assiduously amassed point out all the more clearly the huge number of major manuscripts he didn't find or couldn't afford. Despite his successes, Mikimoto's affirmation remains asymptotic and repetitive: failing to convene a substantial *proportion* of Ruskin's manuscripts or rare editions under the same roof, he went for *quantity*, buying the same books over and over again. Sixteen years dedicated largely to his Ruskin collection yielded seven sets of the *Complete Works* but manuscripts of only *Munera Pulveris* and "On Usury," along with a few letters purchased from Faunthorpe. The tone of J. B. Bullen's review of the collection (the only notice the library's reopening received in the British academic press) may have been patronizing, but his claim is substantively correct: "They are all rather impersonal, public pieces, . . . not major contributions to our knowledge of Ruskin and his ideas."<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, it is the *impersonality* of the work, its unavailability to the standard institutional procedures of critical reading, that might be said to have motivated Mikimoto's collection in the first place, and that might still endure somewhere in the spectral space of affirmation.

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### Notes

This article makes extensive use of documents at the Ruskin Library of Tokyo; most of which are unavailable anywhere else. I gratefully acknowledge the help of the director of the library's board of trustees, Yasuo Akiyama, and its librarians, Yukiko Nakamura, Miyuki Yamagami, Yoko Shiba, Jun-ichi Iwasaki, and Masumi Iijim. Without their patience and care, this work would not exist in any form.

1. Caroline Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 23.

2. See Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense*, and Jonah Siegel, "Black Arts, Ruined Cathedrals, and the Grave in Engineering: Ruskin and the Fatal Excess of Art," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27.2 (1999): 395-417.

3. John Ruskin, *On the Nature of Gothic Architecture, and Herein of the True Functions of the Workman in Art* (London: Smith, Elder, 1854), 10.

4. Hugh Walker, *The Age of Tenmyson* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1904), 199.

5. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 133.

6. John Ruskin, *The Political Economy of Art*; or, "A Joy Forever" (and Its Price in the Market) (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1886), vii-viii.

7. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 71.

8. See, for example, Anne Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), Stephen Best and Sharon

Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108.1 (2009): 1–21, Heather Love, "Close but Not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," *New Literary History* 41.2 (2010): 371–91, and Rita Felski, "Context Stinks!" *New Literary History* 42.4 (2011): 573–91.

9. Mikimoto Ryuzo, "Ruskin's Views of Economic Art," in *What Is Ruskin in Japan?* (privately printed, 1930), Ruskin Library of Tokyo, L1.17a. Transcribing Mikimoto's prose presents a set of problems, since the texts of his English works have evidently been typeset by a printer with limited experience of setting English writing, and there are infelicities of expression, which perhaps betray Mikimoto's own incomplete knowledge of the language, although because there are no extant manuscripts, there is no possibility of resolving the question of who is the source of the apparently strange vocabulary choices. I have corrected obvious mistakes (such as the occasional spelling "Ruskiin") and have maintained British English spelling (such as "criticising"). Typographical idiosyncrasies have been corrected in line with the style guidelines of *Comparative Literature Studies*.

10. Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 19.

11. See Ann Anlin Cheng, "Skins, Tattoos, and Susceptibility," *Representations* 108.1 (2009): 98–119.

12. Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Culture of Detachment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5.

13. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 125.

14. Emily Apter and Elaine Freedgood, afterword, *Representations* 108.1 (2009): 139.

15. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

16. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 21.

17. M. K. Gandhi, *Unto This Last: A Paraphrase*, trans. Valji Govindji Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1956), 2.

18. M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Auckland: Floating Press, 2009), 476.

19. Georg Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?," in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 1.

20. Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?," 1.

21. Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?," 1.

22. Benedetto Croce, *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), 25.

23. Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 43.

24. For a more detailed account of Kawakami's biography, see Gail Lee Bernstein, *Japanese Marxist: Kawakami Hajime, 1879–1946* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

25. C. F. G. Masterman, "Ruskin the Prophet," in *Ruskin the Prophet, and Other Centenary Essays*, ed. J. Howard Whitehouse (London: George Allen, 1920), 52.

26. W. D. P. Bliss, ed., *The Communism of John Ruskin* (New York: Humboldt Publishing Company, 1891); John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*, 8 vols. (New York: Bryan, Taylor, 1894), 7:1

27. Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, 10:2.

28. See Soseki Natsume, *Theory of Literature*, ed. Michael Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda, and Joseph Murphy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

29. John Ruskin, *Munera Pulveris* (Orpington, UK: George Allen, 1880), v.

30. J. A. M. Whistler, "Mr. Whistler's Ten O'Clock," in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (London: Heinemann, 1890), 152.

31. J. A. M. Whistler, "Whistler v. Ruskin: Art and Art-Critics," in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, 26.

32. Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, 3:45.

33. Howard Hull to author, 29 Nov. 2011.

34. The paintings cannot be identified. Howard Hull, the director of Brantwood, tells me that until about 1920, the Death Room contained a large number of Turner paintings, a still life by

William Hunt, and a painting of Conwy Castle by John James Ruskin, the writer's father. But none of those paintings resembles anything in this photograph. Mr. Hull points out that by 1920, Arthur had made the decision to sell none of the Turners at Brantwood. Hull's immensely helpful letter (16 Nov. 2011), which I gratefully acknowledge here, offers no speculations about who might have painted the works exhibited in this photograph.

35. John Pincher Faunthorpe, *Index to Fors Clavigera* (Orpington, UK: George Allen, 1887), 142, 249.

36. John Ruskin, *Time and Tide, by Weare and Tyne: Twenty-Five Letters to a Working Man of Sunderland on the Laws of Work* (New York: John Wiley and Son, 1869), 143.

37. Soseki Natsume, *And Then*, trans. Norma Moore Field (Tokyo: Tuttle, 2011).

38. Soseki Natsume, *The Miner*, trans. Jay Rubin (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1988), 161.

39. Soseki, *The Miner*, 142.

40. Soseki, *The Miner*, 142–43.

41. Soseki, *The Miner*, 143.

42. Soseki, *Theory of Literature*, 49.

43. John Ruskin, "On the Present State of Modern Art, with Reference to the Advisable Arrangement of a National Gallery," in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1905), 209.

44. John Ruskin, *The Two Paths: Being Lectures on Art, and Its Application to Decoration and Manufacturing* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1876), 11–12.

45. See Williams, *Culture and Society*, Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), and Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

46. John Ruskin to William Michael Rossetti, 15 June 1863, qtd. in Julie L'Enfant, *William Rossetti's Art Criticism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 192.

47. Marcus Huish, "England's Appreciation of Japanese Art," in *Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society of London*, vol. 7 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1908), 138.

48. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 269.

49. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 268.

50. J. B. Bullen, review of *Ruskin's Letters in the Mikimoto Collection: A Facsimile Edition*, ed. Masoa Simura, *Review of English Studies* 47.187 (1996): 459.