

Art, Ethics, and Pleasure: The influence of Ruskin on the Rev. Stewart Duckworth Headlam

Peter Yeandle

We who live in large towns know only too well that the people are perishing for the lack of beauty quite as much as for the lack of knowledge. ... Having for three centuries worshipped a God of gloom, having had Manichaeism and Puritanism established over us by the state, we have learned to think that there is some contradiction between the love of beauty and the love of God. Counteracting all this the Theatre has been at work with its heavenly mission; there the contemplation of beauty has been made possible for the people; there, in spectacular drama, pantomime, ballet, comic opera, burlesque; there, with the art of the scene painter and the musician and the dancers with their poetry of vital motion, their artistic and unconventional dress, and the harmonious blending of beautiful colours; there the people have been educated, ie, taken a little out of themselves, received hints of how beautiful this world will be when at last order has overcome chaos and when God is seen in perfect beauty. (Headlam, *The Service of Humanity and Other Sermons* 22-23).¹

So spoke the Reverend Stewart Duckworth Headlam in a sermon delivered at the slum parish church of St Michael's in Shoreditch, East London. Headlam was Warden of the Guild of St Matthew [GSM] (1877-1909), an organization widely held to be the focal point for the late Victorian Christian Socialist revival (d'A. Jones 99-163). Headlam was its heartbeat.² He was also one of the most significant and respected Ruskinians active in this period. That he remains a relatively little-known figure in the cultural politics of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century London is remiss. As John Orens prefaces his biography (one of only two written):

There are few Victorian controversies in which Stewart Headlam was not a prominent participant. He crusaded for socialism and ritualism, defended women's rights, championed the music hall and secular education, battled libertines and eugenicists, and even helped bail Oscar Wilde out of prison. A clergyman this daring and eccentric surely merits serious study, especially because it is to his efforts that the modern Christian Socialist movement in the Church of England owes its birth. Yet, apart from occasional essays and a 1926 biography by his friend F.G. Bettany, Headlam has received little attention from either historians or theologians. (xi)³

One should add to this that Headlam's crusades for church disestablishment, Irish Home Rule, and the abolition of the House of Lords increased his notoriety. His various high-profile campaigns against teetotalism and prudery meant he often made enemies of his religious superiors. If Headlam is a relative unknown nowadays,⁴ this was far from the case in his lifetime: indeed, given the controversial nature of his various moral crusades, it is little surprise that this most bohemian of priests provided such colourful copy for the London press. It would be incorrect, however, to assume Headlam was a mere attention-seeking rabble-rouser. He published widely and his theories on politics and

pleasure exercised considerable influence on debates about religion, leisure, worship, education, high politics and the politics of everyday working-class life. As Chris Waters argues, Headlam "was engaged in a broader quest to define the legitimate role of the state in the cultural arena" (152). Given Headlam's bombastic personality and willingness to fight any cause in the name of social justice, it is little wonder he was considered by his contemporaries to be one of the most colourful and morally courageous, as well as controversial characters, of his age (MacKenzie 61-66; Smith 181-99). His story allows important insights into church history and the development of British socialism. But Headlam's story should be of especial fascination to Ruskin scholars.

Headlam did more to disseminate Ruskin's views on political economy and social reform than is commonly known. Headlam's lectures, sermons, and publications championed Ruskinian ideas, simplifying them to a level intelligible to a wider working-class (and occasionally illiterate) audience. The twin pillars of Headlam's ambition were distinctively Ruskinian. Just as Ruskin was both art critic and social reformer, Headlam's brand of sacramental socialism joined together Ruskin's doctrines of meaningful labour and theories on political economy. As Gill Cockram has demonstrated in meticulous detail, both Christian and non-Christian Socialists were profoundly influenced by *Unto This Last* (162-94). Headlam was no different and was a passionate exponent of Ruskin's concepts of "Wealth" and "Illth." Headlam echoed Ruskin in his belief that the dual forces of industrialization and Puritanism had stifled creativity, joy, and Christian brotherhood. What differentiated Headlam from fellow Christian Socialists, however, was his zealous belief that it was a Christian duty to promote *pleasure*, defined along Ruskinian lines. This included the consecration of joy through encouraging an appreciation of the arts, especially the performing arts. It is no surprise that Headlam, who was refused a general license to preach on the grounds of his support for ballet dancers, should invoke Ruskinian concepts of joy, grace, and beauty to justify the Christian value of the stage.

For Headlam, Ruskin's teaching on the moral essence of sight was pivotal to his fundamental belief that performers, especially ballet dancers, could inspire noble sentiments and an instinctive admiration of divine beauty. "In showing his awareness on the general social applications and moral implications of art," notes Ian Britain, Headlam "was at one with Ruskin" (159). Indeed, Headlam was not just Ruskin's disciple; as is evident in the opening extract, he preached the Christian Socialist gospel according to Ruskin.

Headlam's Ruskinism

Ruskin's moral critique of mid-century *laissez-faire* capitalism, and its reinforcement by evangelicalism, met with a hostile response in the 1860s. The 1880s and 1890s witnessed the emergence of a cultural vacuum in which Ruskin's ideas on the economy become popular. Churchmen found it increasingly difficult to stand back from the obvious social perils brought about by the free market (Inglis 250-71).⁵ Victorian society had moved from what Boyd Hilton labelled an "Age of Atonement," in which the path to Godliness was through individual salvation, to an age of Incarnation in which emphasis was less on damnation in the next life and more on brotherhood in the here and now (Walsh 351-74). Indeed, Headlam defined "Socialism" as "Practical Christianity" (a phrase also used by William Morris) and sought to lead by example. Ruskin had shared with F.D. Maurice, founder of the mid-century Christian Socialist movement, a humanitarian sense of Christianity in action. Ruskin specifically saluted Maurice's rejection of *laissez-faire* and advocacy of communal responsibility. Unlike Maurice, Ruskin was unprepared to sign allegiance to an institutionalized Church: for Ruskin, institutionalized religion was riddled by "pollutions and hypocrisies beyond all words" (*The Lord's Prayer* 34.207); the corruption of organized religion meant that "Christian Justice has been strangely mute and seemingly blind" (*Crown of Wild Olive* 18.421). Ruskin considered Maurice's Christian Socialism mere "amiable sentimentalism" and therefore ultimately ineffective in re-

addressing the evils posed by the mutual reinforcement of capitalist ideology and church hypocrisy (for further discussion, see Norman 131-32). Within such a context Headlam's voice became too loud for religious authorities to choke off. Headlam, who had been a student of F.D. Maurice's at Cambridge, acknowledged his social conscience had developed from Maurice's teachings that Christians should feel obliged to intervene in social affairs. From Ruskin, however, Headlam learnt that Christians should conduct themselves according to faith rather than institutionalized dogma. He led the charge to promote a specifically Christian Socialist gospel along Ruskinian lines.

Headlam was but one of many who undertook missions to the East End. He did not just stand up for the poor, but those he saw had fallen victim to Christian injustices as defined by Ruskin. He stood as a character witness for George Foote and William Ramsey (of the National Secular Society) during their infamous blasphemy trials of 1883:⁶ "As Mr Ruskin has pointed out, the worst blasphemers are those – they may be pious millionaires or rich ecclesiastics – who say: "Our Father" day-by-day, and yet practically day-by-day deny the Brotherhood."⁷ When chastised for fraternizing with Secularists, Headlam responded that Charles Bradlaugh – the first atheist admitted to Parliament and himself subject to a significant trial – was doing Christian work: "Mr Bradlaugh, as a social reformer, wants fair wages, which he defines in a thoroughly Ruskinian fashion, for all workers and says there should be no idle rich where the mass of the people can't get these" (*CR* Vol. 3, No. 4 [1884], 102).⁸ For Headlam, Secularists had gained support amongst the urban poor because the church had unforgivably abdicated its moral responsibilities: "the Secularists have ... absorbed some of the best Christian truths," which ecclesiastical authorities had forgotten or ignored, and "now give them out as something new and unchristian" (*The Sure Foundation* 10).

Headlam's commitment to socialism was defined in conjunction with his Maurician belief in the notion of a Kingdom of Heaven upon Earth: hence his desire to address the physical as well as the spiritual needs of the people. When lecturing, Headlam would ensure the audi-

ence knew he was one of the people by quoting Ruskin: "Ruskin wrote that the world 'could be divided into beggars, robbers and workers.'" The answer, says Headlam, is not for the Church to continue to encourage poor people "to put up with their poverty because they'd be rewarded hereafter." Rather, people should be "encouraged in every way to unite and educate themselves and to discipline themselves in order that they might be able to get rid of poverty here and make this world worth living in" (*CR* Vol. 3, No. 2 [1884], 39). Melding Maurice's doctrine of humanitarianism to Ruskin's call for dynamism, Headlam consistently preached of a Christ of direct action. Jesus was the "the social and political Emancipator, the greatest of all secular workers, the founder of the great socialistic society for the promotion of righteousness, the preacher of a Revolution" (*Sure Foundation* 3). It was a Christian duty to reinstate the "Christian Communism of the Church of the Carpenter" (*Service of Humanity* 3). Baptism was the great "Sacrament of equality" (*Christian Socialism* 9). Communicants became "Holy Communists" (*Laws of Eternal Life* 50) because in the Mass the Priest brings forward "such a radical reformer, so divine a democrat as Jesus Christ" which laid responsibility on the church to "support every kind of reform and progress" (*Priestcraft and Progress* 7). The *Book of Common Prayer* was a socialist textbook. Modern political watchwords, "solidarity, brotherhood, co-operation and socialism ... were vividly present in Christ's teaching" ("The Ethical Value of the Parables of Jesus" 73).

Headlam's audience was not only the workers in his beloved Bethnal Green, which he claimed as his spiritual home (Norman 103-4; Orens 19-20, 27-29); nor did he conceptualize his congregation to be merely those who attended his services and lectures. Rather, when he spoke, it was in full knowledge his audience comprised labourers, unemployed, laypeople, clergy, Bishops, journalists, politicians and policy makers. His mission, emblazoned in the three-point statement of the GSM's ambitions, was to "justify God to the people" (a neat recycling of Charles Kingsley's much-used phrase) (Bettany 87-90). Headlam had near limitless opportunities to have his opinions heard. He was an executive mem-

ber of the Fabian Committee on three occasions (1890-91, 1901-2 and 1910-11), and one of the 15 co-authors of the "Basis" of the Fabian constitution. Out of 192 Fabian tracts that were published, Headlam's *Christian Socialism* (1892) was one of the five best- and steadiest sellers (McBriar 154, 172, 350-55). His social network included key luminaries such as Annie Besant, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, G.K. Chesterton, William Morris, Arthur Symons, and other radicals, socialists, conservatives, and aesthetes.⁹ He counted respected Ruskinians such as Selwyn Image (who became Ruskin's successor as Slade Professor in 1907) and the famous architect Arthur Mackmurdo amongst his closest friends (d'A. Jones 145; Orens 71).¹⁰ He was an active and, although divisive at times, much respected member of the London School Board and the Education Committee of the London County Council (McBriar 198-202). Headlam had the ear (if not always the approval) of the most influential policy makers in London.¹¹

Headlam did not enjoy much correspondence with Ruskin, though three letters are worthy of note. First, Headlam invited Ruskin to join his Church and Stage Guild [CSG], an organization established not in order to make proselytes of performers (as many first thought) but to convert the Christian Church, *en masse*, to the holy function of the drama and the sacred calling of the dance. The sheer existence of such a paradox was met with opprobrium by the religious press and bewilderment in the dailies (Christiansen 197-208; Foulkes 170-78). Ruskin's response to his invitation was one of bemusement, but also encouragement:

Dear Mr Headlam,

I don't know when I have been more pleased, amused, or amazed, than by your letter, and the papers of the Guild. Pleased – both by again hearing from you, and by the fact of this unity between clergymen and actors; amused – by thinking about what some people would have said! and some will say on hearing of such a thing; and amazed – in a good many ways.... (37.292-93)

Ruskin concluded by writing “quite seriously, you have my entire sympathy and good wishes” (37.292-93).¹² Headlam was delighted. Ruskin was also an enthusiastic supporter of Headlam’s newspaper, the *Church Reformer* [CR], which Ruskin applauded: “I am very greatly obliged by your sending me the first number of your this year’s issue. I never yet looked through a paper I thought so right, or likely to be useful” (34.357). This is not surprising given that the editorial included an encomium by Headlam for Ruskin’s view that the rich not only impoverished the poor in a material sense, but spiritually too by depriving them of opportunities for achieving “wisdom,” “virtue” and “salvation” (“The Outlook”, CR Vol. 3, No. 1 [1884], 1). That Headlam used the lines “We shall not cease from mental flight” from the poem included in Blake’s Preface to *Milton* as header for the CR would further have pleased Ruskin.¹³ Nonetheless, Headlam was so pleased that he paid for Ruskin’s letter to be reprinted in the next issue of the *Pall Mall Gazette* as a means of self-advertisement (15 February 1884).¹⁴

Headlam lost his license to preach as a result of his defense of the music hall and was not to regain it until 1898 – although the final straw for his Bishop was Headlam sharing a platform with the Fenian Michael Davitt (Orens 49). In a context in which the majority of clergy perceived the stage to be immoral, and ballet as synonymous with prostitution,¹⁵ Headlam provoked sharp debate by arguing that performers – including ballet dancers – enjoyed a sacred calling. At a time in which Headlam was derided from all quarters, he was cheered by Ruskin’s continued support and advice. In a lecture entitled *The Function of the Stage* (1889), he quoted a letter Ruskin had sent him:

Make your seats comfortable, your hours not late, your plays lively and full of story, but not depending on spectacle or catastrophe, only on pleasantness and rightness of human character: and be sure whatever music is given is executed with precision and deliberation, not scamped or scrambled through: and the effect of all such theatrical teaching will silence all opponents, theological and lay (17-18).

What Headlam knew, and subsequent historians have until recently tended not to notice, was that Ruskin was a prolific theatregoer, and furthermore was of the view that the theatre could raise collective moral consciousness and inspire noble sentiments.¹⁶ Kate Newey's and Jeffrey Richards' recent research reveals that Ruskin exercised significant influence on a number of actor-managers, playwrights, scene painters, and dramatic critics. Sharon Aronofsky Weltman has demonstrated the various ways in which Ruskin was both influenced by the theatre and mobilized theatrical metaphor to frame his social critique. In 1888 Ruskin declared: "I have always held the stage quite amongst the best and most necessary means of education – moral and intellectual" (qtd. in Richards 198-99). Ruskin was especially concerned that dance should be appreciated as a fine art. In *Love's Meinie* he reminded his reader "you know how much importance I have always given, among the fine arts, to good dancing" (25.33), and in the *Eagle's Nest*, he associated fine dancing with the graceful performance of wisdom and beauty: "national ignorance of decent art is always criminal" (22.134). Like Ruskin, Headlam believed that art served the dual function of pleasing and teaching. Before analyzing in further depth Headlam's unique blending of Ruskin's views on dance and pleasure with his own religious beliefs, it is first necessary to examine Headlam's more orthodox Ruskinism regarding the moral economy.

Wealth, Illth, and Socialist ethics

... it is especially worth noting that the teaching which has revolutionised political economy in England was founded on Christ's saying, "I will give unto this last even unto thee". It is to be hoped that, now that Mr Ruskin's epoch-making little book can be obtained for a few pence, it will be read far and wide as a text-book of Political Economy which is essentially Christian. (Headlam, *The Socialist's Church* 41)

Headlam did not just “talk” Ruskin. He disseminated the central tenets of *Unto This Last* at every occasion. Three examples will suffice. The *Church Reformer* carried a front-page advertisement in November 1888 for a book by Thomas Barclay entitled *The Rights of Labour according to John Ruskin*. This book, a simplified version of *Unto This Last*, carried a personal commendation from Ruskin and was for sale via the CR office (Cockram 191-92). Headlam even went so far as to distribute key excerpts in church newsletters posted through East-End doors. In his time on the London School Board, Headlam argued that Barclay’s book would better serve the nation’s moral wellbeing if it were compulsory reading for children (CR Vol.7, No. 11 [1888], 24). Headlam had earlier quarrelled in January 1884 with one of his best friends, the Revd. John Elliotson Symes, on questions of political economy. Symes and Headlam became acquainted at the Junior Clergy Society in 1873, both becoming firm supporters of Henry George and the Single Tax (d’A. Jones 105-6). Symes was a founder member of the GSM and Headlam presided at Symes’s wedding. However, agreed as Headlam and Symes were on the need for a radical overhaul of taxation, they came to clash over the question of private property.¹⁷ Symes’s *Newcastle Sermons* (1883) proposed to attack monopoly in land only, not property – thus deviating from Headlam and the GSM’s stance on landlordism. This incensed Headlam, who in a later review felt obliged to “censure his former ally for publishing an “obsolete” economics textbook on the old pre-Ruskinian lines ... which ignores the existence of “illth” side by side with wealth” (CR, Vol. 7, No. 6 [1888], 131-32).

Headlam was delighted when the playwright Henry Arthur Jones, a fellow devout Ruskinian, produced two plays in 1889 that sought to dramatize Ruskin’s political economy (Yeandle forthcoming). Measured by audience numbers, Jones was “the most popular dramatist of the 1890s” (Davis and Emeljanow 120). To Jones, Ruskin was “the greatest art critic the world has ever seen” (H.A. Jones 263). Jones’ Ruskinism was more than evident in his collection of essays, *The Re-*

nascence of the Drama, in which he outlined Ruskin's influence: he saw it as his responsibility to revive the theatre as a force for education, thought-provoking entertainment and to raise the social consciousness of the audience (Newey and Richards 22-27; Yeandle forthcoming). In April 1889, Jones produced *Wealth* at the Haymarket. In August of the same year, *The Middleman* was first performed at the Shaftesbury. *Wealth* sought to chart the debilitating effect of "wealth," that is, "illth," on its lead character, the ironmonger millionaire Matthew Rud-dock. *The Middleman*, the more successful of the two plays, was a melodramatic "exposition on the theme of Capital and Labour" in which the Ruskinian doctrines of craftsmanship and meaningful labor were contrasted against caprice and greed (Northend 454). In his end-of-year summary of West-End productions, the *Times* critic commented on the importance of these two plays. Although there is no direct attribution to Ruskin, Ruskinian themes are obvious:

Mr Henry Arthur Jones has stepped to the forefront with *The Middleman* and *Wealth*, the latter a play of high moral purpose, which, if hardly sympathetic enough for the public of the Haymarket, fixed attention upon its author as a writer of much originality and boldness, and paved the way for his subsequent triumph. *The Middleman* ... has proved the most remarkable success, native or foreign, of the year – a fact which cannot but react advantageously upon the prospects of English drama generally. *Wealth* was a study of the evils of sordid money-making, and of that indiscriminate worship of riches which is regarded as a source of danger to the welfare of the community. These two plays mark the author's determination to apply dramatic methods to the investigation of social questions ... [which] gives promise of an important accession of vitality to the stage. (2 January 1890)

Headlam was euphoric: he was in raptures precisely because of the play's Ruskinian lessons. "We do not know whether Mr Jones intended it to be so or not, but the moral mandate of the play is Christian Socialist – it says emphatically to every tender-hearted person in the audience, 'Choose you this day whom you will serve, Mammon or Love.'" His review continued: "The alternative, between Mammon as God and Love as God, is ... clearly put before the audience, and when the old man dies strewing the wild flowers he has just but learnt to rejoice in, on his daughter's head, murmuring 'Love, Love, Love', surely the hardest heart must be touched, and the most seared conscience caught; for, as was the case with the rich man in the parable, so here the man is purified by his torments..." Indeed, in his summary of the plot, and in his description of the Ruddock who had loved money more than his daughter, Headlam drew out the play's moral message in explicitly Ruskinian terms: "Wealth to him is not the 'possession of the valuable by the valiant,' on the contrary, his wealth is veritable "illth," mere riches, which give power over others but no power over the possessor himself to make him available for any useful purpose whatsoever" (*CR* Vol. 8, No. 6 [1889], 123-24). "Puritans who denounce the stage," Headlam wrote, should go to see Jones for a lesson in how properly to tend their flock (*Function of the Stage* 18).

These are but three examples of Headlam promoting Ruskinian political economy. There were many more. Headlam's commitment to the dissemination of the key tenets of *Unto This Last* was in keeping with a large number of other Christian and non-Christian Socialists. What differentiated Headlam was his controversial belief that the performing arts should be understood as serving a hallowed purpose. Moreover, he was convinced that Ruskin's teachings provided the moral mandate for such an opinion.

Sacramental socialism and the performance of divine grace

For Headlam, the theatre was primarily a source of pleasure – an essential antidote to the horrors many workers faced in their daily lives.

As Headlam argued in his lectures, and wrote in the *Function of the Stage* (1889), "In Ruskin's words, just as life without industry is guilt, so industry without art is brutality" (21-22). The theatre could also serve a secondary didactic purpose in educating the audience and, in true Ruskinian fashion, inspire noble sentiments: hence Headlam's especial joy that Jones had used the stage to teach Ruskin's lessons on moral economy. Most controversially, Headlam argued that the ballet could reveal divine grace: the body of a ballet dancer was emblematic of Christian sacrament. In making these arguments, Headlam invoked Ruskin's doctrines of joy and teachings on beauty.

In Headlam's view, Ruskin had sanctioned dancing, when properly undertaken, as divine. In the letters of *Time and Tide* (1867), Ruskin speculated upon faith, religious practice, and forms of worship. He also reflected on pantomime and modern French dancing. He found much to do with the stage grotesque: smoking children, cross-dressing, and Parisian can-can dancing (Aronofsky Weltman 29-36). Yet this led Ruskin to consider the religious dimensions of Old Testament stories on worship, especially dance rituals, which were in contrast to French indulgences. Ruskin affirmed his love for the dance: "you have in these passages a positively Divine authority for the use of Song and Dance, as a means of religious service and national thanksgiving" (*Time and Tide* 17.355). Headlam, unsurprisingly, found this to be astute wisdom and followed Ruskin's lead by appealing to biblical history to defend the religious value of performance and performers. In "Some Darkened Christian Truths" (1883), Headlam used the story of how Bezaleel and Aholiab, "in early Hebrew times," were "inspired by God to be artists" and to express their God-given artistry in building the tabernacle; he quotes Hebrew singers – "let them Praise His name in the Dance" and retold the story of Jeremiah, who looked forward to dancers, – for they "will turn mourning into joy, it will comfort them, and make them rejoice" (1-2). In particular, dancing was godly since it inspired creativity, joy, and pleasure.

In Headlam's view, pleasure was as essential to human wellbeing as meaningful labor, and it was a Christian duty to encourage people to enjoy themselves. In an open letter to entertainers of 1883, Headlam celebrated the "sacred" vocation of performers: "To artists we say: 'your calling is a sacred one ... your art tends to give cheer and pleasure to vexed and worried lives.'" To those who fret because they may be derided by churchmen, you should know that your work is 'not in vain in the Lord'" ("Some Darkened Christian Truths" 2).¹⁸ Such positioning of the performer as "sacred" was highly controversial given that it railed against received clerical wisdom that the stage and those in its employ, especially in East-End entertainments, were through their moral ambiguities essentially sinful. However, for Headlam, the consecration of performers was a fundamental feature of his doctrine of Christian pleasure.

Headlam questioned the morals of those who condemned dancing: "Your Manichean Protestant, and your Superfine Rationalist, reject the Dance as worldly, frivolous, sensual and so forth; and your dull stupid sensualist sees legs, and grunts with some satisfaction" (*Laws* 51). Consider that this was addressed to the Bishop of London and one begins to understand further why Headlam was labelled an heresiarch by the evangelical press.¹⁹ In contrast, the sacramentalist knows that "we live now by faith and not by sight, and that the poetry of vital motion is the expression of unseen spiritual grace" (*Laws* 51). Headlam consecrated theatrical space: "He is with us now in the Theatre as well as in the Church ... those who minister to the lighter needs of life are God's servants equally with others" (*Service* 27). "We worship not to bribe an angry God ... but to give thanks to a loving one; not to wring something out of Him, but to give something to Him. Our worship, our adoration must be Eucharistic: all joy, mirth, beauty are sanctified by it" (*Laws* 24). That behoved Christians to encourage pleasure for the people, and the theatre was excellently placed to provide such joy in life and bring divine beauty into dull lives. In *The Function of the Stage*, Headlam not only argued that pleasure should be the primary yardstick by which to

measure the success of popular amusements, but that pleasure itself was godly:

instruction, education and edification may all accrue from plays, but pleasure *must*: a work of art has failed its object if it does not give pleasure.... The moral ministry of the stage depends upon the fact, that we can be made better people by being made brighter and happier people.... Overworked and worried, living too often in gloomy streets, surrounded with mud, dirt, grime, meagreness, can you overestimate the ennobling, healing, exhilarating influence of merely a bright, spectacular ballet, quite apart from any plot or story ... Suppose, if you like, that the story goes for nothing, there is still the poetry of vital motion, there is still the beauty of form, music, and colour. And this is why the ballet becomes such a useful touchstone for the clergy, to see whether they are Mahommedans or Christians, Manichaeans or orthodox Churchmen. They have to face the fact, whether they think the human body an evil thing or the temple of the Holy Ghost. Tragedies and comedies may be supposed to appeal mainly to the Intellect – the ballet does not do so any more than a sunset does. (9-11, 21-22)

Headlam was not arguing for "Art for Art's Sake." Rather, his doctrine of pleasure was closely allied to his understanding of the spiritual rewards of bringing beauty – Ruskinian notions of beauty – to people's lives.

According to Orens, Headlam believed that "Catholic Christianity ... lifted the veil from the eyes of the faithful, allowing them to perceive God's sacramental presence in society, in nature, and in their own bodies. The ballet, Headlam believed, was the paradigm of this worldly holiness" (63). As an Anglo-Catholic, Headlam subscribed to Catholic sacramental liturgy, and claimed a sacramental function for the ballet as the outward visible sign of an inward spiritual grace.²⁰ "We have constantly affirmed

that stage dancing should be treated as a genuine art; from a theological standpoint we have declared that the Corps de Ballet is part of the Body of Christ" (CR Vol. 5, No. 6 [1886], 133-34). Ruskin, in *The Poetry of Architecture*, urged the use of the word "poetry" to denote the intellectual and emotional essences of art (Bright 259-77). It is no surprise, therefore, that Headlam invoked the ballet as sacramental by labelling it "the poetry of motion." Headlam's notion that the dancer could reveal divine grace drew from Ruskinian teaching on beauty. Tom Gibbons illustrates how Headlam was influenced by Ruskin's "Of Leaf Beauty" (*Modern Painters* V), in which Ruskin wrote of the ballerina's vital motion:

And all these proportionate strengths and measured efforts of the bough produce its loveliness, and ought to be felt, in looking at it, not by any mathematical evidence, but by the same fine instinct which enables us to perceive, when a girl dances rightly, that she moves easily, and with delight to herself, that her limbs are strong enough, and her body tender enough, to move precisely as she wills them to move. You cannot say of any bend of the arm or foot what precise relations of their curves to the whole figure manifest, in their changeful melodies, that ease of motion; yet, you feel that they do so, and you feel it by a true instinct. (7.86; qtd. in Gibbons 332-33).

For Ruskin, the dancer, like a tree, can be instinctively felt to be perfect. For Headlam, the dancer performed grace and inspired spiritual emotions. As Sara Atwood argues, Ruskin's dissatisfaction with Darwinian science was that it rendered vision technical rather than moral (Atwood 127-46). Hence, Headlam not only identified with Ruskin's argument in *Modern Painters* III that "to see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion – all in one" (5.333), but with Ruskin's insistence in *The Queen of the Air* (1869) that "the body is only the soul made visible ... [and] ... the presence of life is asserted by characters in which the human sight takes pleasure" (19.358).

Gill Cockram notes that "although Ruskin was neither an Orthodox Christian nor a Socialist, his teaching made possible an ethical synthesis between the two" (184). Indeed, Ruskin was not dissimilar to a number of "other lapsed Evangelicals in Victorian England" in that "the moral fervour underlying the faith in which they grew up still remained with them after they had discarded its theological trappings" (Britain 75). Ruskin's use of religious language and symbolism certainly made his moral critiques of capitalists attractive to Christian Socialists generally. Headlam may have been a radical amongst Christian Socialists, but he shared with them their devotion to Ruskin's economic creed. Through his commendation of popular entertainments, however, Headlam invoked Ruskinian ways of seeing and connected Ruskin's views on the morality of art to his own brand of sacramental socialism. Headlam held up theatres as "palaces of art for the people" ("Some Darkened Christian Truths" 1): in his worldview, all the world was indeed a stage – and the world was the product of God's love and creativity. In essence, Headlam conducted his life in dramatic terms. His Christianity and his Socialism meant he was concerned to address social problems in the here and now. Crucial to that was his gospel of pleasure. By bringing joy into people's lives, Headlam perceived himself as undertaking a Christian duty in a Ruskinian fashion.

Headlam died in 1924. One month before his death, he received a letter from the Archbishop that thanked him for his Christian hard work. The funeral was attended by leading lights of the stage, and the members of all denominations of the church. It would have pleased Headlam that children from Bethnal Green schools were present, and that *Jerusalem* was sung. In death, the Church, the Stage, and the working-class had come together to celebrate the extraordinary life of this extraordinary man. And what might have pleased him even more was that in a series of short biographical sketches of key contributors to the Christian Socialist movement by Edward Norman, Headlam was placed alongside John Ruskin.

Ulverston, Cumbria

Notes

¹ I wish to thank Alan Davis, Kate Newey, Jeffrey Richards, and Clive Wilmer for discussing with me ideas raised in this essay.

² It should be noted from the outset that the British Christian Socialist movement was neither a uniform movement nor consistent in its various campaigns. It was constituted by a broad spectrum of High Church Anglicans and Nonconformists (Inglis 32; Jones 5; Parsons 39-62). Some believe Headlam to be the central character in the movement (see especially Binyon 119; Leech 61-88; Liberty 271-72; Norman 98-120). Peter d'A. Jones is less convinced of Headlam's centrality to British Christian Socialism. However, he does not doubt the importance of Headlam's influence on later – and more well-known – Christian Socialists such as Percy Dearmer, Henry Scott Holland, Conrad Noel, and Percy Widdrington (164-65).

³ The first biography was published soon after Headlam's death, by his close friend, F.G. Bettany, in 1926. Headlam left no papers – most were burnt by his housekeeper when he died. However, the content of Bettany's biography includes those papers that Headlam had given him before his death.

⁴ Not once is Headlam mentioned, for instance, in the most recent academic study of the origins of the Labour party (Worley 2009). However, he does merit brief mention in texts that greeted the arrival of new Labour on the British political scene in the 1990s, presumably because of Tony Blair's emphasis on Labour's Christian Socialist heritage (Bevir 287-89; Bryant 93).

⁵ This is evident in sales of *Unto This Last*, which had increased exponentially to 2,000 per year by the 1880s (Cockram 65-66; Hewison 111).

⁶ For more on these trials (though Headlam is not mentioned), see Joss Marsh's excellent *Word Crimes*.

⁷ Headlam edited his own newspaper, the *Church Reformer*, hereafter referred to in texts and notes as *CR*. This quotation is from Vol. 2, No. 2 (1883), 6-7.

⁸ For further discussion of Headlam's relationship with Bradlaugh, see Orens (36-49); for further information on Bradlaugh, see Arnstein.

⁹ On sociability in late nineteenth-century London more generally, and such networks of association, see van den Beukel (135-53).

¹⁰ It is known that the decor for Headlam's Bedford Square house was by Mackmurdo, furnished with upholstery by Morris, and decorated with pre-Raphaelite paintings (some of which are on display at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow, North London). Stuart Evans speculates that Headlam, Mackmurdo, and Morris saw this as a project to design Ruskinian home furnishings. Image was a frequent contributor to the *Church Reformer* and companion for Headlam at his many theatre trips and Church and Stage Guild [hereafter CSG] dances. Image delivered papers to the CSG, including "Of Art, and the Aims and Responsibilities of an Artist," in which he defined art as "the serious adornment of life through beauty," and repeated his belief in the Ruskinian "gospel of beauty" (*CR* Vol. 6, No. 3 [1887], 65). Image's reverence for Ruskin is evident in his preface to the *Seven Lamps* (Everyman edition, 1907). Image had shared a studio with Arthur Burgess and corresponded with Ruskin at the time of Burgess' early death, receiving Ruskin's thanks. This was originally published in the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, Vol. 2 (1887), but reprinted in the Cook and Wedderburn *Library Edition* (*CW*, 14.xxxii-xxxiii, 349-56). Headlam would frequently discuss Ruskin with Image, and other members of the Rhymer's club – which included such notables as Arthur Symons, Oscar Wilde, Lionel Johnson, Victor Plarr, Ernest Dowson, John Todhunter, and Arthur Mackmurdo. Headlam would also discuss Ruskin with his fellow Fabians, most notably the Webbs, Annie Besant, George Bernard Shaw, and Graham Wallas. (Britain 72-75, 158-59).

¹¹ His involvement with campaign and protest organizations were numerous and included the Land Law Reform League, League for the Defence of Constitutional Rights, National Association for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, and the London Shakespeare League, amongst many others (Orens 151; Smith 181-200).

¹² Ruskin and Headlam had only once previously corresponded (so far as I can tell from extant records), and that was in May 1875 when Headlam's letter to Ruskin, asking him to rethink his attack on preachers, met with a sour reply in *Fors* – the young Headlam, thought Ruskin, was of “perilously loose Divinity” (28.359). Headlam's admiration for Ruskin is made clear, however: “It is only because I have already received so much from you that I write this letter.”

¹³ On Ruskin's admiration for Blake, see Davis (24-55).

¹⁴ Headlam's early biographer Bettany claims Ruskin and Headlam shared more cordial correspondence than this in the 1880s, yet these are not in the *Library Edition* (Bettany 102).

¹⁵ See Carter (24-28, 38-39, 111-12; Donohue 137-38; Foulkes 166-80).

¹⁶ Headlam, like Ruskin, was a frequent first-nighter at the theatre. They both attended and commended Wilson Barrett's *Claudian* and the *Silver King*, as well as many pantomimes and adaptations of Shakespeare. There is no documentary evidence to suggest they met, though it is clear that Headlam would have tried to arrange a meeting.

¹⁷ There is not space in this essay to explore the third significant intellectual influence on Headlam. If Maurice taught Headlam Christian compassion and humanitarianism, and Ruskin inspired Headlam into the practical application of his theology, then Henry George – the American Single Tax land reformer – provided Headlam with a template for the redistribution of wealth.

¹⁸ This line was taken up by the Reverend E. Husband, a close ally of Headlam's in both the GSM and CSG, who said in a paper to the Guild in 1885 that “true art is a heavenly thing. It is the gift of God ... for the instruction and amusement of mankind, not to be placed under a Calvinistic bushel or to be buried in a puritanical napkin. I have heard many sermons in my life, but some of the noblest lessons I have ever been taught have been from the stage” (Rev. E. Husband, “A Sermon,” reprinted in *CR* Vol.5, No. 6 [1885], 137-38).

Peter Yeandle, "Art, Ethics, and Pleasure: Ruskin and Rev. Headlam"

¹⁹ See, for instance, "The Temptations of Ballet Dancing." *The Rock* (July 1886), 3.

²⁰ This defence of the ballet recurs frequently and is given its most systematic theological treatment by Headlam in *Laws* (51). See Walsh (369-73).

Works cited

- Arnstein, Walter. *The Bradlaugh Case: Atheism, Sex and Politics among the late Victorians*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- Aronofsky Weltman, Sharon. *Performing the Victorian: John Ruskin and Identity in Theatre, Science and Education*. Ohio State UP, 2007.
- Atwood, Sara. "The Soul of the Eye: Ruskin, Darwin, and the Nature of Vision." *Nineteenth-Century Prose* Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring 2011), 127-146.
- Bettany, F.G. *Stewart Headlam: A Biography*. London: John Murray, 1926.
- Bevir, Mark. "New Labour: A Study in Ideology." *The British Journal of Political and International Relations*. Vol. 2, No. 3 (2000), 277-301.
- Binyon, G.C. *The Christian Socialist Movement in England*. London: SPCK, 1931.
- Bright, Michael. "The Poetry of Art." *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 46, No. 2 (1985), 259- 77.
- Britain, Ian. *Fabianism and Culture: Socialism and the Arts, 1884-1918*. Cambridge UP, 1982.
- Bryant, Chris. *Possible Dreams: A Personal History of British Christian Socialists*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996.
- Carter, Alexandra. *Dance and Dancers in the Victorian and Edwardian Music Hall Ballet*. London: Ashgate, 2005.
- Christiansen, Rupert. *The Victorian Visitors: Culture Shock in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000.
- Cockram, Gill G. *Ruskin and Social Reform: Ethics and Economics in*

the Victorian Age. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007.

- Davis, Alan. "Journeys through the Doors of Perception: John Ruskin and William Blake." *Ruskin Review and Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2006), 24-45.
- Davis, Jim and Victor Emeljanow. *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-80*. Hertfordshire UP, 2001.
- Donohue, Joseph. *Fantasies of Empire: The Empire Theatre of Varieties and the Licensing Controversy of 1894*. U of Iowa P, 2005.
- Evans, Stuart. "The Century Guild of Artists: A Ruskinian Venture." *Persistent Ruskin: Aesthetics, Education and Social Policy Conference*, Lancaster University, June 2008.
- Foulkes, Richard. *Church and Stage in Victorian England*. Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Gibbons, Tom. "The Reverend Stewart Headlam and the Emblematic Dancer: 1877-1894." *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 5 (1965), 329-40.
- Hewison, Robert. *John Ruskin*. Oxford UP, 2007.
- Headlam, Revd Stewart Duckworth. *Priestcraft and Progress*. London: John Hodges, 1878.
- . *The Service of Humanity and Other Sermons*. London: John Hodges, 1882.
- . *The Sure Foundation: An Address Given before the Guild of St Matthew at the Annual Meeting, 1883*. London: F. Verinder, 1883.
- . "Some Darkened Christian Truths, III." *Church Reformer*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (1883).
- . "The Outlook." *Church Reformer*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1884).
- . *Laws of Eternal Life*. London: Frederick Verinder, 1888.
- . *The Function of the Stage: A Lecture*. London: Frederick Verinder, 1889.
- . *Christian Socialism*. London: Fabian Society Tract 42, 1892.
- . "The Ethical Value of the Parables of Jesus." *The Meaning of the Mass*. London: S.C. Brown, Langham and Co., 1905.
- . *The Socialist's Church*. London: George Allen, 1907.

Peter Yeandle, "Art, Ethics, and Pleasure: Ruskin and Rev. Headlam"

- Heinrich, Anselm, Kate Newey and Jeffrey Richards, eds. *Ruskin, the Theatre and Victorian Visual Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009.
- Hilton, Boyd. *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.
- Inglis, K.S., *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.
- Jones, Henry Arthur. *The Renaissance of the English Drama: essays, lectures and fragments relating to the modern English stage, written and delivered in the years 1883-94*. London: Macmillan, 1895.
- d'A. Jones, Peter. *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914: Religion, Class and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England*. Princeton UP, 1968.
- Leech, Kenneth. "Stewart Headlam." *For Christ and the People: Studies of Four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England between 1870 and 1930*. Ed. Maurice Reckitt. London: SPCK, 1968, 61-88.
- Liberty, Stephen. "Stewart Duckworth Headlam." *Christendom*, Vol. 15, No. 72 (December 1948), 271-72.
- MacKenzie, Compton. *Certain Aspects of Moral Courage*. New York: Doubleday, 1962.
- Marsh, Joss. *Word Crimes: Blasphemy, Culture and Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*. U of Chicago P, 1999.
- McBriar, A.M. *Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 1884-1918*. Cambridge UP, 1962.
- Newey, Kate and Jeffrey Richards, *John Ruskin and the Victorian Theatre*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010.
- Norman, Edward. *The Victorian Christian Socialists*. Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Northend, Marjorie. "Henry Arthur Jones and the Development of the English Drama." *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (1942), 448-63.

- Orens, John R. *Stewart Headlam's Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses and the Music Hall*. U of Illinois P, 2003.
- Parsons, Gerald. "Social Control to Social Gospel: Victorian Christian Socialist Attitudes." *Religion in Victorian Britain, II: Controversies*. Ed. G. Parsons. Manchester UP, 1988.
- Richards, Jeffrey. *Sir Henry Irving: A Victorian Actor and His World*. London: Continuum, 2005.
- Ruskin, John. *The Works of John Ruskin (Library Edition)*. 39 vols. Ed. E.T. Cook & Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1903-1912.
- van den Beukel, Karlien. "Arthur Symons's Nightlife." *Babylon, or New Jerusalem? Perceptions of the City in Literature*. Ed. Valeria Tinkler-Villani. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005. 135-53.
- Smith, Warren. *The London Heretics, 1870-1914*. London: Constable, 1967.
- Walsh, Cheryl. "The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience in the Victorian Church of England." *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (July 1995), 351-74.
- Waters, Chris. *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914*. Stanford UP, 1990.
- Worley, M., ed. *The Foundations of the Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives*. London: Ashgate, 2009.
- Yeandle, Peter. "Christian Socialism on the Stage? Henry Arthur Jones's *Wealth* (1889) and the dramatisation of Ruskinian Political Economy." Ed. Keith Hanley and Brian Maidment. *Persistent Ruskin: Aesthetics, Education and Social Theory, 1870-1914*. London: Ashgate, forthcoming 2011.

