

Performing the Victorian: John Ruskin and Identity in Theater, Science, and Education by Sharon Aronofsky Weltman. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2007. xviii, 177 pp. + 9 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-8142-1055-0. \$36.95.

If Ruskin lingered in the popular memory of twentieth-century Americans, it was for the eponymous brand of John Ruskin cigars, cheaply produced and boxed with his portrait printed on inferior paper, manufactured from the 1890s through the 1950s. He loathed all tobacco products, and would have been incensed, or mortified, or both. The Ohio State University Press reproduces the cigar box on the cover of Sharon Aronofsky Weltman's new book, which ensures that the irony is not lost. To the extent that Ruskin has been accorded attention by scholars in the later twentieth century, it has typically been to recall Kate Millett's dismissal in *Sexual Politics* (1970) of his essay "Of Queen's Gardens," a sentimentalization of bourgeois women and "one of the most complete insights obtainable into that compulsive masculine fantasy one might call the official Victorian attitude" which morphed, in reputation, into the "senile eroticism" he later directed at Rose La Touche, originally when she was nine and consistently until she rejected his proposal of marriage when she reached twenty-one. Weltman set out to rehabilitate Ruskin's gender politics in her earlier book, *Ruskin's Mythic Queen: Gender Subversion in Victorian Culture* (1998), and in *Performing the Victorian: John Ruskin and Identity in Theater, Science, and Education* she seeks to reconstitute his sexual identity.

It is a tall enough order to unify Ruskin's views of theatre, science, and education. The latter categories are relatively compatible, but the former is an unruly and paradoxical mate. Ironically, cigars prove to be instrumental in identifying the pattern of Ruskin's thought. In one of the theatre anecdotes that Weltman finds hidden in plain sight (this time in *Time and Tide*, 1867), Ruskin describes his visit to a Covent Garden pantomime, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*:

The forty thieves were girls. The forty thieves had forty companions, who were girls. The forty thieves and their forty companions were in some way mixed up with about four hundred and forty fairies, who were girls. There was an Oxford and Cambridge boat-race, in which the Oxford and Cambridge men were girls. There was a transformation scene, with a forest, in which the flowers were girls, and a chandelier, in which the lamps were girls, and a great rainbow which was all of girls.

This is all pleasant to Ruskin. He admired the beauty and grace of the so-called "girls" – shapely young women, costumed to show their contours – and enjoyed pantomime's marvels as an alternative to society's grimy reality. The bravado of the pantomime boys (Ali Baba and his cohort of forty) was standard