

REVIEWS

Sesame and Lilies by John Ruskin. Edited and introduced by Deborah Epstein Nord with essays by Elizabeth Helsinger, Seth Koven, and Jan Marsh. New Haven: Yale UP, 2002. 265 pp. ISBN 0-300-09259-8. \$35.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-300-09260-1. \$14.95 (paper).

For a long time I have been hoping for an edition of *Sesame and Lilies* such as this one. For decades Ruskin's tremendously influential 1865 best seller has been out of print and unavailable for courses in Victorian literature and culture, literary theory, or the Woman Question, where it is an especially vital text. *Sesame and Lilies* comprises two provocative essays, "Of Kings' Treasuries" and "Of Queens' Gardens," which first famously challenge England's middle- and upper-class men and women to social action and then outline the kind of reading and education necessary to fit them to that duty. Yale's new edition, part of its *Rethinking the Western Tradition* series, provides us with an inexpensive paperback to order for classes, complete with tools students need to approach Ruskin's text: an introduction by Deborah Epstein Nord, a chronology of Ruskin's life, substantive and bibliographic endnotes, a glossary of possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, and a meticulously researched set of suggestions for further reading. But it also provides more advanced scholars with three new articles on *Sesame and Lilies* by critics whose work any Ruskinian and many readers of this journal will recognize: Elizabeth Helsinger, Seth Koven, and Jan Marsh. Each of these essays offers a significant contribution to our understanding of *Sesame and Lilies*, including new information about the text's historical context and impact.

One of the most exciting aspects of this new volume is that it publishes both the essays that make up *Sesame and Lilies*. For many years the first essay, "Of Kings' Treasuries," has appeared alone in such collections of Ruskin's work as Penguin's *Unto this Last and Other Writings*, and excerpts of the second, "Of Queens' Gardens," in Helsinger, Robin Sheets, and William Veeder's *The Woman Question: Defining Voices*. But for many years the paired essays have not appeared together as originally published and received by their Victorian public. Reuniting the two halves of *Sesame and Lilies* inspires the critics included here to interpret for almost the first time the book's significance as a unified statement about literature, culture, and gender.

"Of Kings' Treasuries" urges the establishment and endowment of public libraries. Dubbing his upper middle-class male readership "kings," Ruskin invokes a notion of government simultaneously democratic and feudal: the middle-class "kings" should endow a system of libraries that distribute intellectual treasures to all, while at the same time the kings should read