

REVIEWS

John Ruskin and the Victorian Woman Writer by Anne Longmuir. Oxford: Taylor and Francis Group, 2024. ix, 190 pp. ISBN 978-1-03-211207-7. \$152.00.

It is not controversial to admit that John Ruskin had somewhat problematic views on gender. His *Sesames and Lilies* (1865) describes men as having the role of the “doer, the creator, the discoverer,” while women are engaged in “sweet ... arrangement” and “ordering,” and exemplifying much of what Seth Coven has termed Ruskin, a “patriarchal bogeyman” (2; 31). However, Anne Longmuir’s recent book, *John Ruskin and the Victorian Woman Writer*, aims to complicate these understandings of Ruskin’s attitudes towards women through a deep engagement with Ruskin’s relationships with prominent Victorian women authors of the time. Drawing from Dinah Birch’s assessment that “reading Ruskin from the perspective of gender can reaffirm his significance and value,” Longmuir’s book proposes “to make a new contribution to this decades-long debate” about Ruskin’s views of women, “uncovering the surprising and complex network of influence that existed between Ruskin and women writers in the 1850s and 1860s.” It presents a deeply nuanced portrait of Ruskin’s view of women by delving into Ruskin’s correspondence and friendship with them, alongside his reading of their writing and discussing how many Victorian women saw Ruskin as an “ally” rather than an opponent. It demonstrates that he shared significant interests with female authors of the time, especially in relationship to approaches to “female education,” tracing how the “ideas advanced in women’s fiction, poetry, and essays in the mid-nineteenth century are more central to Ruskin’s thought than had previously been acknowledged.”

Longmuir’s book offers a significant contribution not merely in proposing a revised understanding of Ruskin’s relationship with women, but also in addressing a larger concern with the idea of literary influence within the context of Victorian studies and beyond. While used primarily as a methodology, Longmuir’s book offers a compelling reading of influence in line with Michael Baxandall’s suggestion that “influence occurs not across time, but rather in the writing present of the author.” Longmuir’s discussion of “influence” rather than “intertext” arises because, while “intertext” seemingly offers a more horizontal relationship between texts, it also risks “ignoring questions of authorial agency,” a problem particularly acute in relation to “historically marginalized groups.” Longmuir insists that female