



Harriet Martineau and the Birth of Disciplines: Nineteenth-Century Intellectual Powerhouse

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self-assertion and more like a self-limiting concession to the idea that women are motivated (and can be satisfied in life) *solely* by romantic feeling. Not only did familiar marriage allow women to be something more than desiring subjects, but since familiar marriage ‘need say nothing about participants’ desires ... [it] could cover (and permit) a range of feeling among its participants beyond a conventional heteronormative orientation’ (p. 15). The latitude offered by Victorian incarnations of this older form of marriage come to seem profoundly attractive in Schaffer’s account, and twentieth-century critics’ relentless focus on repressed sexual desire both misplaced and – perhaps ironically – constricting.

It seems clear that if critics in the mid-twentieth century needed to believe in repressed Victorians, and to recover sex as the unspoken motivation in every plot, we are now in a critical moment when the ‘Other Victorians’ we are looking for are not the pornographers and sexual pioneers of Stephen Marcus’s 1966 study,¹ but those who can displace both sex and heterosexism from the centre of the critical conversation. These Victorians are an altogether kindlier and yet stranger breed, less rigidly heteronormative than their twentieth-century descendants, pre-Freudians whose attitudes hark back to their eighteenth-century past as much as they anticipate a *fin-de-siècle* future. Crucially, they are able to offer us older – but curiously more hopeful – ways of understanding sexuality, disability, marriage and family. Doubtless this view of the Victorians will give way to another, as present needs evolve, but Schaffer’s take on the marriage plot seems likely to stand the test of time, offering as it does compelling readings of an impressively broad range of texts, and holding out intriguing possibilities for many more to come.

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Harriet Martineau, Polymath

Harriet Martineau and the Birth of Disciplines: Nineteenth-Century Intellectual Powerhouse, edited by Valerie Sanders and Gaby Weiner, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2017, xii + 256 pp., illustrated, £95 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-4724-4693-0

Harriet Martineau has been being revived for a long time. It is a slow task, perhaps because she is not easily championed as the property of any one discipline. Her fiction is unlikely to make it onto undergraduate Victorian literature modules; her position as

1. Stephen Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966)

a woman outside institutional structures makes her unlikely to show up in Victorian political history, and since she never sat within the prophetic tradition of the sage, she has little presence in surveys of intellectual history. While an important developer of several disciplines, her approaches are easily consigned to the history of science/sociology/psychology. However, Valerie Sanders and Gaby Weiner, among others, have been doing their best to change that. Their long commitments to Martineau studies have here enabled them to map out and commission a near-comprehensive spread of essays. The resulting volume includes delightful moments of cross-referencing and mutual acknowledgement across chapters. It also benefits from being bookended by editorial chapters, with an Afterword that synthesizes the contributors' findings. The volume's three sections focus respectively on Martineau's 'Foundational Characteristics', the various disciplines to which she contributed, and the cross-disciplinary 'fields of knowledge' with which she engaged.

The Introduction negotiates the questions of whether Martineau was 'interdisciplinary' or a founder of disciplines – which side of modern debates about the benefits of interdisciplinarity does she lean towards? – and whether she was primarily an originator or a popularizer. The range of Martineau's work, as well as her positioning both outside and inside the establishment, undermines any singular modern categories. Part One's most thought-provoking chapter is Ruth Watts's, premised on the attractive idea that Martineau was both 'a lifelong educator' and constantly 'educat[ing] herself' (p. 30). Watts showcases Martineau's insistence that female education would help – not hinder – women's housekeeping abilities (p. 40). She concludes that Martineau has been little recognized because she educated through (ephemeral) periodicals rather than through founding an institution, passing laws or writing tomes on the subject. The very form of her work has contributed to her eclipse. Similarly, within Part Two, Michael Hill highlights the problem that, while Martineau is now cited as a foundational figure in Sociology, her ideas are not taken seriously: she is seen as a past manifestation of the discipline, but not relevant to today. Hill argues, by contrast, that Martineau's *Society in America* (1837) ought to be given as much credence as Tocqueville's arguably less inclusive *Democracy in America* (1835–40).

Alexis Easley's chapter in Part Two is of particular interest to me as someone who has also worked on Martineau as a 'contemporary historian' (p. 101). Easley rightly emphasizes Martineau's historiographical focus on 'seemingly "unhistorical" individuals' and their contribution to 'peaceful social change' (p. 102). She provides a particularly illuminating analysis of Martineau's 'Account of Toussaint L'Ouverture' (1838), including a usefully illustrated discussion of how the *Penny Magazine* images 'highlight L'Ouverture's European clothing and elegant handwriting ... while still emphasizing his dark skin color' (pp. 104–106), juxtaposing an acknowledgement of his race with proof of his nobility.

Some of the chapters in this volume act as surveys rather than providing further analysis. In their chapter on political economy, John Vint and Keiko Funaki note how the summaries at the end of the *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832–34) 'sometimes ... closely reflect the points made in the story – at other times they do not' (p. 50), but unfortunately do not return to this interesting point, instead structuring the chapter on Martineau's responses to Smith, Ricardo and Malthus. Lesa Scholl's chapter on Martineau's *Autobiography* draws heavily on previous work, giving valuable recognition

to other Martineau scholars, but leaving less space for new analysis. Similarly, Susan Hoecker-Drysdale focuses on outlining Martineau's sociological ideas. In this way they perhaps encounter the same problem as Martineau herself: devoting time to popularizing a previous scholar's ideas reduces a writer's opportunity to voice their own contribution. They nonetheless act as useful surveys from which to explore these scholars' own in-depth work on Martineau.

Part Three, on Martineau's interventions in fields that cross disciplinary borders, opens with Weiner on feminism. She suggests that Martineau's generational moment (born 1802) made her a somewhat lone voice in her career's early decades, and later distanced her from the younger Langham Place group. She traces Martineau's belief that the primary goal was to secure 'domestic and economic self-reliance' for women, from which political rights would inevitably emanate (p. 158). Weiner suggests another reason for Martineau's relative eclipse in the history of women's rights: her very popularizing skill, which made her ideas 'mainstream and normalised' and then even 'almost unfashionably consensual' (p. 168).

Sanders's chapter on Martineau's journalism builds on this with a key problematic: sages speak from the margins, while the 'wisdom writer' speaks from within society.¹ As Sanders shows, Martineau is both inside and outside, voicing 'common sense' but often 'vilified as an 'unfeminine' eccentric' (p. 187). Ascertaining Martineau's impact on journalism is made harder by her own conflicting self-assessments. In letters and the *Autobiography* she gives multiple examples of editors soliciting her work – and her often turning them down – whereas her self-authored obituary uses an 'exaggerated modesty' (p. 190). Iain Crawford's discussion of Martineau's travel-writing (on the USA, the Middle East and Ireland) reminds us of her ability not only to speak her mind with forthright determination, but also to adapt her message and style to different audiences. He makes a particularly instructive comparison between her two sets of articles written from Ireland: one for *Household Words*, the other for *The Daily News*. The former 'domesticates the scene' and 'collaps[es] the differences' between Irish and English homes; the latter emphasizes 'savage Otherness' (p. 182).

The final chapter concerns Martineau's complex approach to correspondence. Deborah Logan characterizes it as imbued with two contradictory Wordsworthian values: 'spontaneity' and 'revision' (p. 217). Martineau's insistence that her letters are mere 'utterances' and must never be published is counterbalanced not only by her own prevalent concern with posterity, but also by using letters to draft ideas for articles, visible in 'near-exact phrasing in material both intended and not intended for publication' (p. 216). It would have been interesting to see some examples of this, particularly which kinds of phrases stayed the same (key declarations or points of analysis?) and which were rewritten (becoming more or less radical?). This is nonetheless a fascinating exploration of a paradox: as students of Martineau, we find ourselves in the unnerving position of reading letters in which she exhorts the addressee never to let anyone else read it.

1. Linda H. Peterson, 'Harriet Martineau: Masculine Discourse, Female Sage', in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, ed. by Thais Morgan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 171–86; George Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

The concise Afterword highlights some of the challenges of recovering Martineau. As Sanders and Weiner put it, ‘her achievements as a woman who stood up for the rights of slaves, women, children, the blind and deaf sometimes seem easier to applaud than the torrents of dedicated prose that fuelled those campaigns’ (p. 235). Their synthesis evokes for me Tuchman and Fortin’s theory of *Edging Women Out* (1989), where Martineau might represent the earlier generation that succeeded in the nascent fields of sociology, history, realist fiction and psychology.² As Sanders and Weiner outline, contemporary assessments of Martineau’s work do not always align with ours: the very topical engagement of her works can make them now feel irrelevant. The adulation that met her tales of political economy is hard to fathom, whereas the *History of England* that had a mixed Victorian reception proves a valuable source for Catherine Hall, Alexis Easley, me and hopefully others to come.³

Part of this volume’s limitation is epitomized in the conclusion to an earlier chapter: ‘Martineau was indeed an innovative ... [and] noteworthy founder’ (p. 97). The volume argues very convincingly for her importance, but is constrained at times by its aim of advocacy. Its focus on proving Martineau’s worth sometimes prevents other lines of debate (questions of why and how) from coming to prominence. At a lower level, typographical errors at times mar the reader’s confidence in the text, especially as some unfortunately change the sense of the passage – these include ‘one many’ for ‘one man’ (p. 104) and ‘immoral’ for ‘immortal’ (p. 110), and a familiar draft shorthand, ‘HM’ (p. 216).

However, this book decisively shows how wide-ranging, how well-integrated, and how influential Martineau’s work was. As long as other scholars listen to its convincing arguments, we can hopefully move in future beyond justifications of this remarkable writer’s value into integrating her into analyses of other kinds. This book also contributes to debates beyond Martineau studies about the place of disciplinary and interdisciplinary working practices in Victorian Studies. It reminds us how fallaciously we look back for a singular disciplinary heritage: maybe Martineau is less celebrated by any one discipline because of her interest in so many others. This distorted modern expectation should not blind us to her real achievements in whatever she thought was an idea, and a problem, worth pursuing.

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2. Gaye Tuchman and Nina E. Fortin, *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 1989).
 3. Catherine Hall, ‘Writing History, Writing a Nation: Harriet Martineau’s History of the Peace’, in *Harriet Martineau: Authorship, Society and Empire*, ed. by Ella Dzelzainis and Cora Kaplan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 231–53; Alexis Easley, ‘Harriet Martineau: Gender, National Identity, and the Contemporary Historian’, *Women’s History Review*, 20 (2011), 765–84; Helen Kingstone, *Victorian Narratives of the Recent Past: Memory, History, Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).