

Teaching Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Martineauⁱ by Beth Torgerson (Eastern Washington University)

During Winter Quarter 2020, instead of teaching my 400-level literature seminar entitled “Major Authors” on Emily, Anne, and Charlotte Brontë as I often do, I decided to re-focus the class on Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Martineau. Thanks to the new class focus, part of our ongoing class discussion related to questions of canonicity: Why, if both of these Victorian women writers were famous in their day, is only one of them still being regularly read and taught today? Why is the second writer relatively unknown, with her works largely out-of-print? Our class texts were fairly evenly divided between the two authors. For Brontë, we read *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, and selections from Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. For Martineau, we read four tales from *The Illustrations of Political Economy*, *Deerbrook*, and selections from Martineau’s *Autobiography*. (Three of the tales were from Deborah Logan’s Broadview Edition: *Weal and Woe in Garveloch*, *A Manchester Strike*, and *Cousin Marshall*, and the fourth tale was *Demerara*.) For other short selections, we covered Martineau’s “Letter to the Deaf” and two sections from *Society in America*—“Citizenship of People of Colour” and “The Political Non-Existence of Women.” In addition to using new historicism as our primary theoretical lens, the class applied feminist, Marxist, and biographical criticisms to our selected texts during class discussions and for their various class projects. Thanks to Laine Houghton, a graduate student who interned in the class, students were given an in-depth lecture on the Gothic. As a result, we also discussed gothic elements in both writers’ work, especially in both of Brontë’s novels.

In “Teaching Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Martineau,” I share how undergraduate students responded to learning about these two Victorian women writers, their texts, and their worldviews; what similarities and differences they saw between the writers, their topics, their styles, their goals, *etc.*; and what sense the students made of how history has treated the two

writers differently in terms of their fame and canonicity. In terms of method, I use the students' work, specifically three assignments—their midterm papers, their final papers, and their learning letters at the end of the quarter where they reflect on their own individual learning in the class.

To give readers a sense of how the course was set up, below, I have included three parts of the syllabus below: 1) Course Introduction and Course Objectives, 2) Requirements, and 3) Three Extra Credit Options. I have also presented the class chronologically, with the exception of emphasizing upfront within the extra credit section that some of the student work is viewable as extra credit webtexts on the Martineau Society website. It is worthwhile to note that even though the class is listed as a 400-level English class, not all of the students were fourth-year English majors. Because of the class was cross-listed with Genders Studies, which is an interdisciplinary program, some students were from other majors. Also, because of curricular changes within our undergraduate English Studies program, which not only limits the number of literature classes offered per quarter but also makes scheduling classes in a sequential order—requiring 400-level classes to be taken only after 300-level classes are completed—difficult, the English students in the class ranged from being sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Consequently, some of the students have more experience in analyzing, discussing, and writing about literature than others. Yet, this wider range in student backgrounds also led to some lively class discussions. One final note: We ended up having a modified Victorian Tea Party on the last day of class (rather than the full 2-hour Victorian Tea Party with short individual presentations during finals week) due to the nationwide mandate to close down campuses due to the Covid-19 pandemic that hit at the end of March, 2020.

COURSE INTRODUCTION and COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This cross-listed course, English 436 and Women's and Genders Studies 498, is designed to give undergraduates the opportunity to study two major Victorian authors, Charlotte Brontë and

Harriet Martineau. Both of these women writers were famous in their lifetimes; however, now, only Charlotte Brontë's works, especially *Jane Eyre* (1847), are still regularly read. As part of an ongoing class discussion, we will consider what factors—in the shaping of the literary canon and of history itself—have contributed to one of these authors being celebrated and the other being forgotten within literary circles. Because Martineau has been reclaimed by the field of sociology and is now considered as a key pioneer in that field of studies, we will consider ways that interdisciplinary approaches in today's scholarship may contribute in making Martineau again more well-known. By the end of the quarter, you will be familiar with three historically significant novels: in addition to *Jane Eyre*, you will read *Villette* (1853), Brontë's final novel that many scholars deem her greatest masterpiece, and Martineau's novel *Deerbrook* (1839), which, well-received and beloved on its own terms, is also important in its showing the stylistic transition between Jane Austen's novels and those of Charlotte Brontë and in its making imaginable the social problem novels of the 1840s, also known as Condition-of-England novels. All three novels were best-sellers in their day. For Martineau, we will read also four of her tales of political economy, shorter didactic tales from her series *Illustration of Political Economy* (1832-1834), which first made her an overnight celebrity. Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) and Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography* (written in 1855 but published in 1877) will be included in the readings to provide biographical, historical, and cultural context.

To better understand both the writers' works and their lives, we will use modern literary criticism, most notably new historicism and feminist criticism in addition to biographical criticism, to deepen our understanding of their texts and of the continuing contribution that their works and lives make to our literary and cultural heritage. Through learning how to apply literary criticism to these major Victorian women writers' works, you will be able to extend this application to other Victorian texts—and, by extension, to texts from other eras.

As students of literature, you will not only hone your critical reading and interpretative skills, but you will also gain a greater awareness of the complexity of Victorian literature and culture, even within the microcosm provided by a focus on only two writers from the era. Similarly, you will develop an appreciation of literature's interconnectedness with the literature that precedes it and that follows it.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

40% **2 formal papers** in MLA format (20 % each; preferably one on Brontë and one on Martineau)

- may cover more than one primary text
- 5-pages *minimum* double-spaced typed for each paper
- with works cited page on page six (or beyond)
 - *minimum* of five scholarly sources
 - four or more secondary sources to of modern scholarship, such as articles or book chapters from databases and/or scholarly books
 - additional primary source to be Brontë's biography or Martineau's autobiography (or both)

20% **4 reading journals** (5% each; each 1-page minimum single-spaced typed)
(#1 *Jane Eyre*; #2 *Illustrations of Political Economy*; #3 *Deerbrook*; #4 *Villette*)
--to be posted on Canvas as well as hard copy turned in to me

30 %	Active Class Participation , including the following items:	
	Group presentation	10%
	-- 20-30 minutes (10 minutes per person)	
	-- <i>minimum</i> of one scholarly source per group member	
	--Groups 1 & 9 as exceptions since working with Broadview Editions' new historical texts included in appendices!	
	-- required Powerpoint or Prezi	
	-- required handout for classmates with key points, important quotations, and sources (including works cited page)	
	Individual presentations	10%
	--7-8-minute presentations on selected paper (either midterm or final paper)	
	PLUS three-minute summary at our VICTORIAN TEA PARTY final exam	
	100% Class attendance and Respectful Behavior	10%
	Other class activities including writing assignments, reading quizzes, in-class and Canvas discussions, and preparation for and participation in our Victorian Tea Party (final exam)	
	Final Learning Letter (2-pages single-space typed min.)	10%

Three Extra Credit Options:

1-5 pts, depending on complexity of project. You can do multiple options, up to 10 points total.

- A) Technology--Digital Web option for any and all papers
- B) Literary-- Read another text written by Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Gaskell, or one of the Brontë sisters. Either write a reading journal about the selected text, give a short presentation on it, or do both.
- C) Creative-- "Rewriting the Victorians" Project
Your choice: Either write a journal on one (or more) of the many books in existence that already rewrites a Charlotte Brontë novel or that rewrites Charlotte or Harriet's lives, or write your own story (5-15 pages) towards this end! (No zombies or monsters, please!)
Optional to present on your selected book(s) or to read from your own story.

Seven students took these extra credit options. Because six students took Option A and created a

digital webtext, their papers are available online at the Martineau Society Website at

[https://martineausociety.co.uk/eastern-washington-students-share-their-work-on-harriet-](https://martineausociety.co.uk/eastern-washington-students-share-their-work-on-harriet-martineau/)

[martineau/](https://martineausociety.co.uk/eastern-washington-students-share-their-work-on-harriet-martineau/). While some of these six students only created one digital webtext, some made

multiple webtexts, ranging from journal assignments to formal papers. If any students needed

guidance for creating webtexts, these students worked with the class intern, thanks to Laine's

expertise in Digital Humanities. Only one student took Extra Credit Option B, reading an extra text by Martineau, which he worked with in his final paper.

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On the first day of the class, we read aloud Stuart Hobday's "Charlotte Bronte" in *Encounters with Harriet Martineau*. My goal was to get students thinking about the fact that these two Victorian women writers knew each other and were even friends for a period of their lives. I felt this information would not only serve as basic background information but would allow us to start to see in what ways the two were similar and in what ways they differed. On the second day of class, we read and discussed Martineau's short essay "Letters to the Deaf" before starting our discussions of *Jane Eyre*. Of the main texts, we read *Jane Eyre* first because the selected edition includes introductions to specific literary theories and then includes essays with those critical lenses applied to *Jane Eyre*. It is a great way to introduce the students to literary criticism and to scholarly essays, providing students with models for their own scholarly work. After this mini-unit on *Jane Eyre* and criticism, we read the rest of the readings chronologically, so by midterm, we had read *Jane Eyre*, the four *Illustrated Tales*, the two short excerpts from *Society in America*, and *Deerbrook*. Because *Jane Eyre* is the most famous of these texts, I was correct in assuming that more students would write on *Jane Eyre* than any other topic. Plus, with *Jane Eyre* being the focus for the critical edition, students would have already read four scholarly articles on the novel, so they would have these essays to use towards the required scholarly sources for their midterm paper.

For the midterm, twelve students wrote papers on Charlotte Brontë and twelve wrote papers on Harriet Martineau. Only two of these papers utilized a combined approach, focusing on texts from both writers. Here is the breakdown of the 24 midterm papersⁱⁱ:

For Brontë:

10 on *Jane Eyre* solely

2 on *Jane Eyre* in conjunction with Martineau texts: 1) *Demerara* and 2) *Deerbrook*

The Topics/Titles for *Jane Eyre* papers included the following:

“Jane’s Defiance against and Compliance with Victorian Norms”

“Inequality within *Jane Eyre*”

“Feminism in *Jane Eyre*”

“*Jane Eyre* and Victorian Women’s Lives”

“*Jane Eyre*: Jane’s Feminism is a Result of Rochester’s Masculinity”

“The ‘Red-Room’ and the Birth of *Jane Eyre*” (an archetypal reading of the novel)

“*Jane Eyre* and the Search of Self”

“*Jane Eyre* and Colonialism”

“Helen Burns as *Jane Eyre*’s Guardian Angel”

“*Jane Eyre* as a Clay Mold” (characters who “shape” Jane’s character)

The Topics/Titles for the combination papers:

“Victorian Inequality in *Jane Eyre* and *Demerara*”

“Social Limitations for Women in *Jane Eyre* and *Deerbrook*”

For Martineau:

3 on *Deerbrook* solely

2 on *Deerbrook* in conjunction with 1) *Jane Eyre* (above) and 2) *A Manchester Strike*

8 on specific *Illustrations of Political Economy* tales:

4 on *A Manchester Strike*, including the one in conjunction with *Deerbrook*

2 on *Cousin Marshall*

1 on *Weal and Woe in Garveloch*

1 on *Demerara* (in conjunction with *Jane Eyre* [above])

1 on other Martineau class readings:

0 on “Letter to the Deaf”

1 on *Society in America* (gender inequality)

The Topics/Titles for Martineau’s *Deerbrook*:

“Gossip In Harriet Martineau’s *Deerbrook*”

“Female Friendship in *Deerbrook*”

“Concepts of Transparency versus Privacy in *Deerbrook*” (Societal vs. Individual needs)

The Topics/Titles for Specific Tales from Martineau’s *Illustrations of Political Economy*:

“Characters in Opposition as Teaching Tools in Martineau’s *A Manchester Strike*”

“How Martineau Displays her Opinions in *A Manchester Strike*”

“Invention and Discovery: Labor and Poverty in Martineau’s *A Manchester Strike*”

“Martineau’s *Cousin Marshall* and the Poor Laws”

“Martineau and Imperial Dissonance” (representation of Irish characters in *Weal and Woe in Garveloch*)

“Martineau’s *Cousin Marshall* and the Catch-22 of the Working-Class Women of the Victorian Era”

The Topics/Titles for Combinations of Martineau texts:

“Martineau’s Agenda in *Deerbrook* and *A Manchester Strike*” (Writing Style and Character Development)

“Who was Harriet Martineau? The Woman Behind the Writer” (Biographical references as well as references to *Deerbrook*, *Illustrations*, *Life in Sick-Room*, and *Letters on Mesmerism*)

“Martineau and Her Effect on Society” (references *Illustrations*, *Autobiography*, *Society in America*, *Daily News* articles, focused primarily on gender issues, but some class issues, too)

After midterm, we read *Villette*, selected parts of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and selected parts of Martineau’s *Autobiography*. These selected portions largely dealt with the authors’ childhoods and their respective paths to become published writers. Student groups also presented on various other sections of the biography and autobiography, so the writers’ full lives would be shared in class, but with the in-depth all-class focus on the context of their earlier lives and how they became writers.

Because the only content requirement was that one paper would be written on Brontë and one on Martineau, there was no requirement for students to write only on later texts covered in the second half of the quarter for the final paper. Again, I anticipated that many student might revert to writing only on *Jane Eyre* for the reasons already stated. However, I was pleased to see what texts and topics appeared within the students’ final papers. For the 20 final papers, thirteen were written on Charlotte Brontë, with ten of these focused on her novels, two on *Jane Eyre* and eight on *Villette*, and with three of these focused on her life. Six were written on Harriet Martineau, three on her texts and three on her life. At midterm, no papers were focused on the authors’ lives; now, at the end of the quarter, six papers addressed the authors’ lives. Only one paper worked with both Brontë and Martineau. Here is the breakdown of the 20 final papers:

For Brontë:

2 on *Jane Eyre* solely

8 on *Villette* solely
3 on Charlotte Brontë

The Topics/Titles for Brontë's *Jane Eyre*:

- "The Decline of Jane Eyre" (How trauma causes her to become weak feminine figure)
- "Rochester and the Dynamics of his Relationship with Jane"

The Topics/Titles for Brontë's *Villette*:

- "An Interrogation of Female Friendship in the Victorian Era through Brontë's *Villette*"
- "Mental Illness and Obsession in *Villette*"
- "*Villette*'s Lucy Snowe: Triumph over Tragedy"
- "Ambiguity as Closure in *Villette*"
- "Lucy Snowe: Strength over Depression"
- "Psychological Love and the Gothic" (Use of the Gothic in queer readings of texts, using Lucy's gender fluidity in *Villette* as primary example)
- Lucy Snowe: A Direct Assault on the Victorian Oppression of Women"
- "'The Disasters behind My Eyes': An Examination of Trauma and Narrative in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*"

The Topics/Titles on Charlotte Brontë:

- Charlotte Brontë and the Construction of Female Literature (focuses on Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*)
- "'I Feel the Reverberation to This Day': How Setting and Environment Influenced Charlotte Brontë's Long-Term Well-Being" (applies modern psychological understanding of depression to author as represented in Gaskell's *Life* and to the character Jane Eyre)
- "The Reason for Charlotte Brontë's Depression" (focuses on her relationship with her father, first his emotional absence, then his emotional reliance on Charlotte)

For Martineau:

1 on *Deerbrook*
1 on *A Manchester Strike*
1 on *Demerara* and *The Hour and the Man*
3 on Harriet Martineau

The Topics/Titles for Martineau's Texts or for a combination of Martineau Texts:

- "Martineau's Flipping of Gender Roles in *Deerbrook*: Mrs. Rowland's Masculine Characteristics"
- "Risks and Opportunities in Writing *A Manchester Strike*" (Risks of informative writing, Opportunities of social improvement)
- "Harriet Martineau, Social Reform, and her Anti-Slavery Writings *Demerara* and *The Hour and the Man*"

The Topics/Titles for Martineau:

- "Martineau as Versatile Author" (references her topics as Slavery, Disabilities, and Political Economy)

“Harriet Martineau and Political Economy: How One Author Affected Progressive Movements of the Early 19th Century” (primary focus on population issues found in *Weal and Woe in Garveloch*; also reference to population related to strikes in *A Manchester Strike*)

“Harriet Martineau: On Individuality through Education” (Female Education)

For Brontë and Martineau:

1 paper on Brontë and Martineau:

The Topic/Tile for this combination paper:

“What Makes Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Martineau So Cool” (Victorian feminists, on how they were heroines of own lives and writers of powerful stories)

Student Insights from the twenty Final Learning Letters:

These Learning Letters provide students with the opportunity to self-reflect on their individual learning in our class, so they provide me with useful information about where each student started and ended their educational journey within our 10-week class.

Most of the learning letters reinforced the fact that no one had ever heard of Harriet Martineau, let alone read any of her work. Many students had heard of Charlotte Brontë, but only three students, Amanda, Rachel, and Leo, had read *Jane Eyre* before, with Amanda only having read an abridged edition at the age of 10. Rachel had enough knowledge of the Brontë sisters that she noted that she had been hoping the class would cover works by either Emily or Anne since she was only familiar with Charlotte. Only one student, Amanda, acknowledged that they had read *Villette* before—in an earlier class. Consequently, many of the learning letters started by addressing the fact that this was their first reading of these writers, or any Victorian writers, for that matter. As a result of this, quite a few students mentioned that their initial shock that these Victorian novels included such dense prose, when they had been expecting more dialogue and more plot-based action. Many of the letters also addressed that it was their first exposure to the Victorian era, with only two students making references to our department’s British Literature

Survey class that includes the Victorian period. In fact, one of these learning letters surprised me since a student noted it was the first time that she had ever had tea and that she appreciated how our class's Victorian Tea Party tied in with the many written descriptions in our novels about the partaking of tea.

Several students commented about how they appreciated our incorporating information from the writers' lives and Victorian historical information along with the literature. Students noted how knowing biographical information allowed them insight into the personalities of these two women. Elizabeth appreciated how "seeing the difference between both women's upbringing also shines a light on how that may have influenced their writing." Breanna wrote, "Before this class I didn't have a lot of exposure to the lives of the authors during the Victorian times, but this was by far my favorite part of this class." Lillian wrote, "I learned there were some really cool and badass female authors back then." Garner developed how having multiple biographers for Charlotte Brontë added to his understanding but caused him to "wonder who [Elizabeth Gaskell or Juliet Barker] was actually closest to displaying her life like it actually was." Garner commented that he appreciated that the class was also a "history class" as well as a "literature class." Rich commented that "to really study some authors in the Victorian era, it might be a good idea to learn French and French history," pointing out how much his understanding of *Villette* depended upon knowledge of the French language and how his realization that there were *two* Napoleons made a difference to his understanding of history. Edgar explained that he had been so surprised by the "prominence of disease" as the theme in the novels, with its affecting the students at Lowood and the people of Deerbrook, he ended up doing his own outside research and learned more about cholera, typhoid, and scarlet fever in the Victorian era. Ethan, too, discussed the prevalence of consumption in the Victorian era, especially how it

affected Charlotte and her family. Ethan also wrote how the novels with their focus on daily life (*i.e.*, “details of how plates looks, the material of bonnets, and the like”) were “very helpful in bring this period to life” since they brought details of Victorian cultural life into focus for him.

Many students discussed the writers’ lives. Three students wrote about our selected readings from Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Brooke wrote, “It also surprised me how much of Bronte’s own life bleeds into her writing,” specifically noting “it was interesting that *Villette* mirrors so much of Bronte’s life.” Alex also connected the life with the writing, writing that he felt that “there is a lot of [psychological] authenticity to her writing because she drew so heavily from her life experiences.” Kimmy wrote, “My presentation on Brontë was very informative because I not only learned more about her but about Elizabeth Gaskell as well.” A fourth student, as one of the students who went beyond the class readings for his group presentation on the differing, or, as he phrased it, “clashing,” Brontë biographies, Quinn noted the following: “Regardless of how convoluted or clouded Charlotte’s personality got, her writing cannot be altered in any way; her writing is phenomenal.”

After reading our selections from her *Autobiography*, multiple students felt that Martineau’s life was more impressive than her literary works. Lillian was the first to state this openly in a class discussion. In Alex’s learning letter, he agrees, writing, “I agree with Lillie’s statement in class that Martineau was more impressive than her writing.” He noted that he “appreciated her tenacity and her resourcefulness in accomplishing her goals,” giving Martineau’s decision to write to members of Parliament to promote *Illustrations* and her traveling to America as examples. Quinn similarly captured this sentiment of Martineau’s life being more impressive than her fictional skills, writing, “I was fascinated to learn about Harriet Martineau as a person, regardless of how one feels about her actual writing.” Quinn also noted,

“For Martineau specifically, her writing about atheism and her stout commitment to being a secular person is not something many people would do, regardless of their gender. As someone who sees secularism as a progressive idea even in 2020, Martineau’s refusal [in the *Autobiography*] to acquiesce to any theme of religion in her writing and life is commendable. She was an impressive person, but a less impressive writer.”

Describing Martineau’s life, several students used the words such as “inspiring” and “inspirational.” Kimmy commented, “The fact that Martineau was mostly deaf and still went on to be a well-loved author of the time was very inspirational.” Sam wrote, “I found her life story and her accomplishments to be inspiring and admirable.” He declared, “The biggest thing I learned from the Martineau scholarship/work was how easily someone so significant can get ignored in the overall English canon.”

Most of the students complained about Martineau’s more prosaic, didactic, and/or philosophical prose. Complaints were related to the density of her writing, her detailed descriptions, her large cast of characters she created in each text, her didactic use of characters to portray certain ideas or values, her writing feeling more analytical than emotionally based, and the fact that Martineau’s writing often had a specific “agenda.” In regards to the idea of her agenda, Ethan noted that once he did some research, he “began to appreciate the kind of writing and story that Martineau was trying to tell with *Illustrations* and why it was important for the time period.” Leo commented, “Harriet Martineau is so intelligent and analytical that she forgets to add emotion, I think.” One of the few students to appreciate Martineau’s philosophical asides, Rachel noted that she “enjoyed her philosophical diatribes in *Deerbrook* more than any of the content of the story itself.”

Breanna wrote, “In studying the life of Harriet Martineau, I became a huge fan before I had even been introduced to her literature. The individual that Martineau was aside from her literary work is every bit, and more, impressive than her publications. She was a female succeeding in a man’s world in more areas than one.” Edgar wrote, “Harriet Martineau is one of the most impactful women I have read about. . . Martineau made a career in writing when few woman had done so. Not only did she write but she wrote on social issues that mattered.” The specific issues named included disabilities, political economy, and slavery. He felt the latter was particularly significant since “at the time for someone to speak out against slavery was something rare and as a woman it makes it even more of a brave act.”

Haley stood up for Martineau’s writing, noting, “Like critics said of her, she is a very interesting person, even more so than her work. Her work, though, is still interesting because it contains so much of her in it, and each piece has an overt or implicit political agenda, which is just so badass for a woman of her period. I applaud Martineau and all I’ve learned about her and her eccentric personality. This is all not to say that I dismiss Charlotte Brontë, I think she is very talented, but I feel like she was probably not the most fun guest at parties. I can relate, but I tend to wish I was more of a Martineau.”

In his final learning letter, Rich starts with the rhetorical question, “So what did I learn in ENGL 436?” and answers it with this response: “First and probably the biggest thing I learned was that Harriet Martineau existed. I had never before this class heard of her, and now that I have, I find myself constantly comparing her social policies to those advocated in other authors’ works. While she might not be as fully evolved as Marx as far as philosophy is concerned, her rhetoric is easier to applying seeing she wrote it via stories modeling her ideology rather than as a doctrine or manifesto. In fact, I preferred her method so much more than Marx that I have

started to use her works, her methods as a means to apply Marxist theory even if her conclusions don't exactly match what Marx was calling for. In a way that is a good thing since not eating the rich is a better idea when it comes to intellectual growth and long-term profitability." Rich also comments on her influence in the American Anti-Slavery Movement, writing, "I wonder what would have happened had she not advocated for the cause of the North in the Civil War?"

While I did not ask students to pick their favorite author of the two, students often still gave this information. Brooke, who preferred Charlotte Brontë over Harriet Martineau, could not completely articulate why, writing "Overall, I feel like I enjoyed Brontë's work more than Martineau's just because." The sentence ends there: "just because." Grant noted Brontë "exposed inequalities of society" and "delved into the philosophical ramifications of rebellion and what it meant to bolster one's identity after it had been suppressed for so long." He gave Brontë "mad props for her relatability" and wrote of his identification with Jane's rebellion, commenting, "I looked through her eyes, and I knew her mind. I felt within both of us the rebellious spirit which drew [Milton's] Satan from the lake of fire to face the gates of heaven if only to stand for himself as himself, and not for the dictated rule of law which suppressed." Grant concluded, "I gained knowledge, but much more than that I adopted some of Brontë's wisdom for my own." In contrast, Lillian commented, "I liked Harriet Martineau a whole lot more than Charlotte Brontë. I just think that I really vibed with Martineau's writing more and that I am actually so surprised that she isn't more popular today."

Nine students named their favorite books, with one student, Jamie, listing her top five favorites (*Jane Eyre*, *Deerbrook*, *A Manchester Strike*, *Villette*, and *Autobiography*) and another, Haley, ranking her top three (*Villette*, *Deerbrook*, and *Jane Eyre*). Based on these twenty final learning letters, *Villette* became the clear favorite with five students declaring it as their favorite

novel of the quarter. *Jane Eyre* ranked in second place with three students naming it as their favorite. Leo's justified his ranking of *Villette* as being better than Brontë's first novel in this way: "*Jane Eyre* felt quick and bland like the main character. *Villette* has way more personality." Garner disagreed with Leo, noting, "I enjoyed *Jane Eyre* more for its relatability and display of friendships, and [Jane's] overall success of finding herself and independence was more inspiring than *Villette*'s." Edgar gave the highest praise, acclaiming, "*Jane Eyre* is among the best books I have read now." Brooke named *Villette* as her favorite, shared this reading about *Jane Eyre*: "Ultimately, I am disappointed that Jane ended up becoming a docile housewife when that complete goes against her nature. Jane was this fiery character throughout most of the novel and just gave up that part of herself to play the role of housewife and caretaker."

Deerbrook was not named as a favorite; however, it was ranked in second place by both Haley and Jamie. Haley justified her choice of *Deerbrook* rather than *Jane Eyre* in this way: "Admittedly, it was hard to choose this over *Jane Eyre* since I love Jane as a character so much. However, while *Deerbrook* is more boring on the surface than either *Villette* or *Jane Eyre*, the political and social commentary underlying the narrative is extremely interesting and made me pay attention to the novel more than the *ohh-and-ah* plotline of *Jane Eyre*. Mrs. Rowland, being the most dynamic character in the novel, held my attention whenever she was around causing trouble. Martineau's villain work is quite good, even in her political economy tales. I found that the key plot points in the story were actually pretty cool and not so far-fetched that I found them hard to believe. I think the riot outside the Hopes' home was a crazy scene, and something I definitely was not expecting to come from the novel. As I wrote about for my midterm, I also really appreciated the friendship between Margaret and Maria and found the execution of their friendship to be excellent." Haley also clarified the differences between her feelings towards

Jane Eyre the character and *Jane Eyre* the novel, writing, “*Jane Eyre*, though it has my favorite heroine, the feisty but plain Jane, was my least favorite of the novels I read. I feel like though it’s the most famous, it is kind of the most basic at the same time.” Even though only selections of it were read by the entire class, Martineau’s *Autobiography* was included as a favorite text by Rachel and Jamie, two of the students who had selected to work in-depth with it for their group presentations.

Although *A Manchester Strike* was the only tale from *Illustrations of Political Economy* to make it on anyone’s list of “Favorites,” four students wrote how they found all of the *Illustration* tales helpful. Alex, who already has a graduate degree in Economics, wrote, “Reviewing Malthus and Ricardo’s theories with Martineau’s stories was really eye-opening. In an Econ class, the theories would be discussed, but I’m not sure how much of the social upheaval of the early industrial age would be discussed in vivid detail. Martineau’s writing and her depiction of suffering added a sense of urgency to and context to understanding how economy works.” Grant wrote, “Harriet Martineau’s *Illustrations of Political Economy* was probably the most profound to me when it came to grasping an idea of the social dynamics of the time.” Grant gave a list of issues due to industrialization, which included poverty, disease, death, and despair, and noted how Martineau was often calling for reforms within the system. Jesse wrote, “Reading through Martineau, and to a lesser extent Brontë, and researching her life brought me a new and deeper understanding of the things the Victorians were concerned with. It was easy to suppose that the Victorians were struggling with the full ramifications of the Industrial Revolution. It was another to read *Illustrations of Political Economy* and see a woman of the era struggle through bleeding-edge concepts and how they were affecting British Society.” From there, Jesse included Martineau’s novel, adding, “It is one thing to discuss the nature of femininity and womanhood in

British thought. It is another to see these subjects dissected in *Deerbrook*.” He concluded, “This is why, in spite of the fact that reading through her fiction is a slog, I find the works of Harriet Martineau extremely valuable to scholars and students of the period. For this, I will prize my time in this class and the lessons it has taught me.” Leo wrote, “Martineau had so many ideas and used her fiction to communicate these ideas and agendas. I respect that. As fiction, the stories are extremely average. As a statement, these stories are amazing. I think this is Martineau in a nutshell.”

Students enjoyed comparing and contrasting the two writers’ approaches to writing. Justine was one of the students who noted that “Martineau used her real name in writing, while Charlotte Brontë used a pseudonym instead.” Rich wrote, “Unlike Martineau who seems to really get at the political and societal level stuff, Brontë seems better at the psychological level.” After noting his sense of Martineau’s writing being “heavy-handed,” Alex wrote, “Brontë didn’t seem to have any great social agenda. She just wanted to create great stories.” After declaring both to be “brilliant writes,” Jamie focused on their difference of their writing styles, asserting, “Being that Brontë wrote fictive yet expository novels and Martineau wrote informative fiction, this was their fork in the road beyond both being women [writers] during the era.”

Students commented on their “newfound love for Victorian literature” and the relevance of the themes and topics today (2020—time of class). Rich noted, “The biggest takeaway from these authors is really how much the same we are as the Victorians. Their ideas formed the basis from which the modern era. Their solutions to problems that we still need to deal with are the foundations of modern politics and social policy. The theories of the mind and the body paved the way for modern medicine. As they industrialized, they became increasingly modern in their approaches to things, even when, to us, their solutions seemed ridiculous. Would the same not be

said about some of our solutions to things looked at from a Victorian standpoint? Or what of 100 years from now?" Breanna wrote, "More than anything, I really love that this class felt so relevant in 2020 even though we studied Victorian literature. Ethan commented, "I think Brontë and Martineau both taught me to appreciate different aspects of Victorian period writing and how intricate the narrative can be, or how you could still be a radical at the time, despite any of your illnesses or disabilities." Lilian concluded, "Harriet Martineau shocked me the most this quarter. I could not believe that an unmarried woman in the 1800s had accomplished what she had and also that she was handicapped. I appreciated the social issues she tackled as a writer and the history that she and Charlotte Brontë made. I don't believe the women's suffrage movement, women's domestic rights, or working rights would have had the same outcome if it wasn't for these two women voicing their opinions as they did."

Overall, I was delighted with our class. For class discussions, we covered a wide range of topics, including the following: gender issues including gender roles, gender norms, and the rights of women; class issues, including money, labor and capitalism; race issues, including representation, rights, slavery, and the abolitionist movement; health of individuals, including mental, physical, and spiritual health; health of society, including isolation, gossip, education, religion, secularism, social reforms; love, love triangles, marriage, divorce, family, and children; and how individual rights impact the larger society; supernatural and gothic elements; Victorian psychological ideas such as phrenology and mesmerism. This wide range of topics resulted in the equally broad range of topics covered in the midterm and final papers and, ultimately, in the insights found in the students' final learning letters. I felt the class was largely successful in giving the students an in-depth look at these two Victorian women writer's works, their lives, and the historical and cultural context of their era.

If I were to teach the class again, while I am happy with the Charlotte Brontë material, I would want to think more about which Martineau texts to include. Because fiction is the most accessible and interesting for new readers, I might want to consider other fictional works by Martineau to replace one of the *Illustrations of Political Economy*. Or, I might replace the selected *Illustrations* with *The Hour and the Man*, which would help extend the range of Martineau's international focus and influence. Or, I might consider adding more of Martineau's nonfiction writings. I could include her *Life in the Sickroom* since it is in print and fairly accessible to read. Or, I could include a few of her more famous newspaper or journal essays, such as "Female Industry" from the *Edinburgh Review* or some of her pieces about the American Civil War. Martineau's travels in America and her political work with the abolitionist movement may be a great focus for an American audience, such as that found in this American classroom. Or, while I appreciate the complexity of Martineau's *Autobiography*, for an undergraduate class such as this one, it might be fine to switch over to Florence Fenwick Miller's 1883 biography of Martineau. Working with two biographies would offer another advantage in allowing students to consider how Miller and Gaskell, as Victorian women themselves, are both framing these two Victorian women writers within a narrative that focuses on how they fit the Victorian ideal for women of being dutiful daughters and proper women even though they, as writers, are stepping outside of traditional Victorian gender roles. Overall, if the students' enthusiasm is any indication, for a first time teaching this content focused on the works of Charlotte Brontë and Harriet Martineau, I think the course can be deemed a success. I look forward to the possibility of being able to teach this "Major Authors" literary seminar again.

i Because this pedagogical research paper required students' consent, IRB forms are on file at Eastern Washington University. To honor the undergraduate students' privacy, I have not used surnames; however, to honor these students' hard work and opinions, with their permission, I have kept their first names.

ii I have used the students' titles for their papers. In the few cases where no title was given, I used the student's thesis to create a title. When students' titles do not indicate the specific topics covered, I have included this information in parentheses.