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Ella Dzelzainis and Cora Kaplan, Eds. *Harriet Martineau: Authorship, Society, and Empire*.

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Over the past three decades, Harriet Martineau scholarship has grown at a steady pace. Beginning in conventional form with biographical and recuperative work on Martineau's massive body of writing, studies over the past 10 to 15 years have moved towards more theoretical and complex engagements with specific texts. It is tempting to say that with Ella Dzelzainis and Cora Kaplan's substantive and sophisticated collection of essays on the author's work, life, and legacy, the study of Harriet Martineau has come of age. Arising out of a one-day conference on Martineau in the spring of 2007 at the Institute for English Studies at the University of London, this collection is divided into three sections as indicated in the subtitle; each segment looks at Martineau's work through a cultural studies lens, blending consideration of her work, her personal and professional identity, and her impact on Victorian society and beyond in compelling ways.

The list of contributors to this volume presents an array of the most significant voices to date in Martineau studies. Few have done more than Deborah A. Logan to bring Martineau's

work into view, with her extensive collection of edited volumes, and most recently her study of Harriet Martineau's writings on the Irish Question. In this collection her essay in the first section, "Authorship," addresses Martineau's correspondence and, more specifically, Martineau's attempt to control both the reading and the proliferation of her texts. Scholars, Logan notes, have been challenged by the lack of primary texts to work with, while at the same time aware of Martineau's vast network of correspondents. Martineau's deep desire to control who read and kept her correspondence is interesting in light of her professional identity and obviously strong ambition. This conflict seems, to me, to go to the heart of Martineau as an historical figure.

The "Authorship" section begins with an essay by Linda H. Peterson on Martineau's contribution to the establishment of the professional woman writer. With this essay several themes emerge that are addressed in a variety of ways throughout the collection: Martineau's underappreciated contribution to letters, the author's incredible work ethic and productivity, and her conflicted relationship to questions of genius. A. Lara Stef-Prawn's essay presents a discussion of Martineau's construction of genius relative to her deafness. Working to change the vision of genius represented in such, in her eyes, morally questionable figures such as Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, Martineau "constructs a triad between genius, infirmity and morals" (45). Part I finishes up with essays on Martineau's relationship to Unitarianism and her translation of the work of Auguste Comte.

The second section presents four essays on political economy, technology and society, two on Martineau's landmark *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-34) and two on Martineau's relationship to trade labor and workplace accidents. Mark Curthoys' and Tamara Ketabgian's respective essays create a fascinating discussion of Martineau's views on labor and trade unions. Martineau's emphasis on the education and improvement of the working classes,

evident in the project of *Illustrations*, led her to take the wrong side on the debate on trade unions and collective action. Arguing that trade unions inhibited individuals from freely pursuing work—a perspective echoed by politicians in the United States currently pushing right to work laws—Martineau found her “displacement as an authority on the labour question was rapid and comprehensive” (147). However, Curthoys and Ketabgian help us understand Martineau’s logic and, while perhaps not agree, at least sympathize with her perspective on the questions, showing how her point of view arises from her genuine concern for the well-being of the laboring classes.

The third section, on empire, race, and nation, is the strongest of the book. Eitan Bar-Yosef’s essay on Martineau’s construction of herself as a deaf objective interpreter on her travels is fascinating. Bar-Yosef unpacks the ways Martineau constructed her deafness as an aid to her objective reasoning capacities. Utilizing her ear trumpet as a kind of textual prop in her own self-fashioning as exceptional observer, Martineau struggled, in Bar Yosef’s argument, “to produce travel accounts that would acknowledge her impairment *and* ignore it at the very same time” (176). Throughout this collection, Martineau’s growing reputation as one of the founders of modern Sociology is of great concern. Cora Kaplan, in a reading of “Life in the Wilds” (1832) and “Demerara” (1834) discusses the ways in which sympathy and stadial theory are crucial to understanding Martineau’s conflicted ability to present the humanity of slaves. Lauren M. E. Goodlad’s discussion of *The Hour and the Man* (1840) puts that text into dialogue with Martineau’s presentation of Asian cultures and peoples, arguing that “[w]here Africans could testify to emancipation and, thus, the perfectibility and universalizability of Western civilization, Asians stood for the incorrigible aspects of human cultures which must be eradicated by exceptional means” (207). The final two essays by Isobel Armstrong and Catherine Hall address in different ways Martineau’s historical work and her relationship to the gendering of that field.

Even an exceptional collection such as this one will leave many questions unaddressed. The primarily cultural studies perspective employed throughout the essays leaves some avenues open for further consideration. For instance, there are only a few cursory mentions of *Deerbrook* (1839), Martineau's novel and, I would argue, an under-examined work. However, this speaks to a larger absence of aesthetic engagements with her work in general, which goes to the tension in her work between Martineau as public intellectual and as artist/writer. And although there are certainly discussions of Martineau's self-fashioning of herself into a public figure, there is little in the way of performance or celebrity theories brought to bear on the question, theories evident in some of the most recent work on Martineau. More prevalent is consideration of disability studies, particularly as they help understand Martineau's deafness in relationship to her ability to understand and interpret objectively. However, these questions only remind us of the myriad of questions raised by this fascinating woman and her expansive and varied work, many of which find compelling and original answers in these fine essays.

Biographical Notice:

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