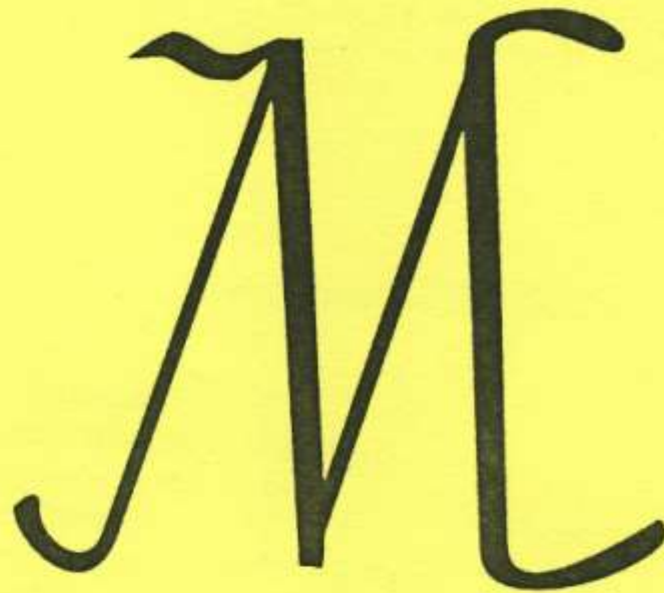
The Martineau Society



Eighteenth Newsletter
August 2003

THE MARTINEAU SOCIETY

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EDITORIAL

The Editorial this time sounds a valedictory note, as Barbara Todd and I are swapping jobs after the AGM: she will take over as Newsletter Editor, while I become the new Chairperson. Before I do anything else, therefore, I'd like to thank all those members who have kept the Newsletter going over the last nine years (is it really that long?), by sending in contributions of articles, summaries of papers and short news items. A Newsletter like this depends on the active interest of its readers, and the fact that it's survived this long is very much thanks to you.

Circulation of the Newsletter has now expanded to the extent that whereas a few years ago, we would always have about thirty surplus copies out of an order of a hundred, we now use up most of the original order. Not only has the membership expanded: we also send copies to enquirers, who themselves seem to be on the increase - evidence that interest in the Martineaus is flourishing.

We would now very much like to expand the Newsletter into something bigger and fuller, with plenty of space for reviews, letters and other items sent in by members. We also need more of you to become active members of the Society, so that you can influence what we do, and become involved in running the Committee. The original founding members have done most of the planning and organizing since the Society was established, and are looking for successors! Please give it some thought, and come to our next AGM and Trail in Birmingham in July 2004! A report on this year's AGM in Oxford will follow in the next Newsletter.

NOTICEBOARD

- Congratulations to Barbara Todd, whose edition of *A Year at Ambleside* was awarded the Lake District Book of the Year Award for 2003.
- Valerie Sanders has written a new online entry on Harriet Martineau for the Literary Encyclopaedia, which can be accessed on http://www.litencyc.com.

Valerie Sanders: Harriet Martineau in Italy

Post the big bicentenary year, the question was always going to be whether 2003 would fall flat, but people are still busy talking and writing about the Martineaus. Deborah Logan and I were invited to speak at a Harriet Martineau symposium (subtitled 'A Reassessment') at the University of Macerata, Italy, on 3 and 4 July by Silvana Colella, a lecturer there. We were very generously entertained and had the opportunity to meet some international Martineau scholars as we listened to two half days of papers and talked afterwards over meals. The focus was very much on the *Illustrations*, which seem to be experiencing a revival of critical interest - especially, on this occasion, in relation to economics and empire. Brian Cooper, from Oswego in the USA, discussed currency issues in *Berkeley the Banker*, Claudia Klaver (Syracuse) Martineau's way of narrating empire in the *Illustrations*, especially *Life in the Wilds*; and Enrico Reggiani (Milan) the 'economics of narrative,' in relation to *A Manchester Strike* and others. Silvana herself convincingly demonstrated how several of the *Illustrations*, such as *Ella of Garveloch*, are self-contradictory. I had often wondered why Ella, a prolific mother of children, is chosen as the

story's Malthusian, while her friends Katie and Ronald, who have every good reason to marry (being past their first youth and financially secure) nobly decide to sacrifice their feelings for each other in the interests of reducing the population. I talked about Martineau's portrayal of men in *Deerbrook*, while Deborah surveyed her writings on the British Empire. We also met an Italian Martineau scholar, Ginevra Conti Odorisio, who compared Martineau's American writings with De Tocqueville's. She presented us with copies of her book on Martineau, which should be an inducement to me to learn Italian. Even despite a few days' holiday afterwards in Ravenna and Venice (where Deborah and I socialized further with two of the conference delegates, Brian Cooper and his wife Margueritte Murphy), I mastered only enough Italian to ask for a cappuccino. We at least fared better in Venice than Martineau herself, who in 1839 discovered how ill she was, and had to be brought home to Tynemouth.

Obituary

[Cyril] HUGH KINDER 1922-2002

Hugh arrived at the Society's first Norwich 'Trail' on a bleak January day in 1995, introduced by a colleague, Dr Anthony Batty Shaw, to whom we had applied for permission to visit the (now "Old") Norfolk & Norwich Hospital. Anthony showed us the portrait by Beechey of Philip Meadows Martineau, whose brother John's grand-daughter was Hugh's grandmother Emma. To see Hugh pose against that portrait was a moving experience: the likeness between the two heads was striking, but one felt it was more than superficial and that the wisdom and benevolence of generations of medical Martineaus had persisted from those first Huguenot emigrés, Philip's ancestors,

right down to the present. We have Alan Middleton's excellent photograph of the occasion, and it is good to know that one of Hugh's sons not only maintains the medical tradition but continues to specialise in urology as Philip and Hugh did. It is interesting to note that through Emma (whose mother was a Taylor, grand-daughter of Dr John Taylor), Hugh inherited another strand of Norwich nonconformity which he was proud to show us in the Octagon Chapel, which Taylor had built and where the Martineaus worshipped, at a later 'trail'.

Through the kindness of his widow, Audrey (whom we were glad to get to know when she accompanied Hugh on subsequent occasions), the following outline of his career is taken from the obituary by A R Mundy:

The son of a civil engineer, Hugh was born in Alexandria but returned to England at the age of one. At Sherborne School he developed three of his many interests: sport, painting and falconry. He enjoyed Cambridge enormously, not least because that is where he met Audrey (her father being the first Professor of Geography and also the youngest member of Scott's fated polar expedition).

In 1942, Hugh went for his clinical training to Guy's, where he developed an interest in surgery, and after two years in the RAF returned to Guy's intent on a surgical career. In 1958 he became Consultant Urologist, helping to build up one of the best departments of urology in London. He retired in 1986 after becoming President of the Urological Section of the Royal Society of Medicine, secretary of the British Association of Urological Surgeons, and holding office in many kindred societies. His genius was in encouraging and persuading colleagues to work, learn,

develop and especially to work together in multi-disciplinary teams. He was universally admired and respected at Guy's and left a huge hole behind him.

Yet the focus of his life was his family and home. He and Audrey celebrated their Golden Wedding in 1998, surrounded by their five children and grandchildren (now fifteen in number). On retirement to South Walsham, Hugh pursued his interests in sailing (he raced sailing dinghies for 64 years), gardening with Audrey, painting and exchanging visits with his family.

We remember him with affection: his pride in the treasured relics and mementos of the Kinder side of the Martineau family he showed us, his articles in the Newsletter - but above all the enthusiasm and geniality he brought to meetings of the Society.

NEW BOOK

Amazing Grace: An Anthologyof Poems about Slavery, 1660-1810, edited by James G Basker.

Described by Henry Louis Gates Jr as 'the most definitive collection of anti-slavery sentiment in verse yet compiled, essential reading for historians and literary critics alike,' *Amazing Grace* is published by Yale University Press. Their flier says: 'This landmark volume is the first anthology of poetic writings on slavery from America, Britain, and around the Atlantic during the Enlightenment - the crucial period that saw the height of the slave trade but also the origins of the anti-slavery movement. Bringing together more than four hundred poems and excerpts from longer works that were written by more than 250 poets, both famous and unknown, the book charts the emergence of slavery as part of the collective consciousness of the English-speaking world.' The book includes poems by 40 women and works by both canonical writers (Defoe,

Johnson, Blake) and newly-recovered black poets. James G Basker is Ann Whitney Olin Professor of English, Barnard College, Columbia University, and President, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. The book will be published in November for $45.00.

The Truth and Harriet Martineau: Interpreting a Life:

Gaby Weiner, Umeå University, Sweden

Harriet Martineau and the truth [continued from previous Newsletter]

In the remainder of this paper, I take this line of enquiry further to argue that Harriet Martineau was an early, conscious, producer of truths. Predating the ideas of the French philosopher Michel Foucault by a century or more, she recognised an essential element of truth production - what Foucault calls 'the twilight zone of knowledge'. According to Simola, Heikkinen & Silvonen (1998, p. 65)

> From the point of view of truth-production ... the central question is not whether the truth is true or false, scientific or ideological, but how it is produced, circulated, transformed or used. Foucault's...analysis of discourses attempts to illuminate that twilight zone of knowledge.

Thus Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography* cannot be understood as a straightforward, descriptive record of her life – but as a form of truth-production. It is a conscious and judicious production of a linear narrative that is meant to look truthful. The image conveyed is of a truthful, fearless, progressive, hard-working woman, who, by dint of self-education, effort and good luck, gained autonomy, economic independence, fame and a long and enjoyable career as a political commentator and writer - even if, at times, she faltered

due to ill-health or ignorance on the part of others. It also enabled her to revisit and re-emphasise the important intellectual themes of her life - political economy, education, the 'Woman Question', politics, parliamentary reform and so on.

Yet, as Sanders (1989) has pointed out, questions need to be raised about construction, selection and incompleteness of autobiographical accounts. What may be left out is also important, as is what to take at face value or how to read between the lines.

Moreover in a recent book *A Social History of the Truth* (1994), Shapin argues that judgements about what is true are framed by the promotion of certain 'realities' and not others. He identifies a 'materialist' concept of truth grants which gives more weight to the beliefs we attach to the world and less to the beliefs of others (Shapin, 1994, p. 4). Such a materialist sense of truth suggests that individuals consciously ascribe truth in such a way as to promote their own convictions (of what happens etc.) and minimise or exclude the truths of others. In the next sections, I suggest that Harriet Martineau is an example *par excellence*, of how truth-regimes are created. She knew how to portray herself and to do so, she needed five key elements: (i) a strong sense of market; (ii) networking skills; (iii) a truth worth telling; (iv) the ability to tell it well; and (v) control over information channels

i. Having a strong sense of the market

Harriet Martineau was an incisive social observer and commentator. She had a researcher's eye and an understanding of social and cultural relations. For example, in *How to Observe* (1838), she produced a framework for identifying which social and political institutions were most indicative of a country's

advancement. She argued that observers needed to be objective, impartial, and aware of their own prejudices. This clear perception of how society worked had earlier been evident in her preparation for the *Illustrations*. In the early 1830s, she surveyed the political and intellectual scene, detected a gap in the market and did her homework: 'I could never even have started my project but for my thorough, well-considered, steady conviction that the work was wanted' she wrote (*Autobiography*, 1, p. 160). Political economy was an influential discourse in the 1820s, as an intellectual response to the rapid shifts in class relations following the Napoleonic Wars. She was convinced that there was a need for a popular introduction to political economy, and that the people had to begin by informing themselves if they wanted reform. She used the medium of illustrative fiction, first pioneered by Jane Marcet in her two-people *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816). Harriet Martineau was more ambitious. She produced eye-catching titles and storylines (viz. *French Wines and Politics, Cinnamon and Pearls, The Loom and the Lugger*) and fleshed out characters so successfully, that contemporaries frequently read the stories for their fictional qualities alone. She was tenacious in her attempts to persuade publishers to take up the series, and even though James Mill advised the publisher that Harriet's plan 'could not possibly succeed', it was an instantaneous, popular success, perhaps because it was both 'educational' and entertaining. In the end, ten thousand copies were sold in Great Britain and America and the series was a best seller, vastly outselling John Stuart Mill's more authoritative work.

Even though she never again achieved the publication levels of the *Illustrations*, her other books and articles were popular because they were well-prepared and researched, well-targeted, accessibly written, sometimes deliberately controversial yet always modestly framed. As now, her sense of the market told her that the more 'popular' a book, the more likely it would be to secure high sales.

ii. Networking

Harriet Martineau was a highly competent communicator, making good use of a wide variety of networks. As Richardson points out, 'her political contacts were constructed, sustained and extended by her comprehensive use of correspondence networks, from her childhood to her death' (Richardson, 2000, p. 58). Letter writing was one of the few socially acceptable, intellectual activities available to women and thus was used as a means of gaining access to 'male bastions of power' (p.58). Even when confined to the sickbed, her writing flow continued unabated. For example, in a letter to Fanny Wedgewood, Harriet claimed that she had dictated 23 letters within a week and had personally written several more (Arbuckle, 1983).

Harriet Martineau also drew strongly on her family, religious, political and friendship networks to help her get published, disseminate her views, support her in times of trouble (economic or physical) and take care of domestic arrangements. In the run up to the *Illustrations*, for example, she first consulted her brother James about whether to go ahead, accepted 'small loans from two opulent friends', used a 'lawyer-cousin' as a witness in discussions with publishers, consulted mother, aunt and brother Henry about whether to travel to London to secure the deal, and used another

cousin's 'great Brewery house' as a base in London, drawing on the same cousin and his family's support at a time when the prospect of publication seemed dire. Moreover, when she needed subscribers for the series, she approached her 'monied relations' first, many of who were both encouraging and generous (*Autobiography*, 1, 161-178).

iii. Having a truth worth telling

One condition of the establishment of a particular truth is that it has to be seen to be of significance. From her earliest days, Harriet Martineau wrote because she felt she had something important to say – as she herself put it, she had 'the need of utterance' (*Obituary*, 1876). Her earliest writings sought to interpret theological doctrine and her first two articles for the influential Unitarian periodical the *Monthly Repository* were on women entitled respectively 'Female Writers of Divinity' (1822) and 'Female Education' (1823). These themes and others are much in evidence throughout her writing career.

An autobiography is clearly one means of promoting a truth. She had thought of writing an autobiography several times in her life: first at the rather early age of 29, predating her success with the *Illustrations* and 10 years later during her period of ill-health at Tynemouth. Both attempts came to nothing, perhaps because her main aim then was to recollect her childhood experiences before she forgot them. The *Autobiography* was finally written in 1855 when she thought she had not long to live. She wrote it out of duty 'when my life became evidently a somewhat remarkable one'. The aim, she wrote in her introduction, was to offer a whole 'from one

point of view, and in a consistent spirit' (pp. 1-2). So one reason for the *Autobiography* was clearly that it was to be her version and hers alone. At the same time she moved to interdict the publication of her private letters, which might provide alternative viewpoints on her life.

One gains an insight into her stance on writing in her more journalistic pieces. For example, in a collection of letters sent to the *Daily News* on a visit to Ireland in 1851, she presents her work as impressionistic, honest, unaltered and concerned with common things.

> My readers will take them for what they are – a rapid account of impressions received and thoughts excited from day to day, in the course of a journey of above 1200 miles. I have thought it best not to alter them, either in form or matter. There would be no use in attempting to give anything of the character of a closet-book to letters written sometimes in a coffee-room, sometimes in the crowded single parlour of a country inn, - now to the sound of the harp, and now to the clatter of knives and forks, and scarcely ever within reach of books; therefore have I left untouched what I wrote, even to the notices of passing incidents as if they were still present, and references to a future already fulfilled' (Martineau, 1852, p. iii)

Much of her other writing was characterised similarly. In the case of the *Illustrations* she promoted her ability to detect the truth. For example she said that the stories were written rapidly, like letters, and that she never altered 'the expression as it comes fresh from my brain' (quoted in Fenwick Miller, p. 79).

iv. Sounding truthful

Harriet Martineau was extraordinarily good at persuading others that she was telling the truth. She convinced the poet Elizabeth Barrett who asserted 'her (Harriet's) love of the truth is proverbial among her friends', as we saw from a quote at the beginning of this

As we can see from New Labour, if certain truths are to be accepted as true (and others not) then it is important to control information channels. Harriet Martineau took a number of steps in this direction. First, as we have already seen, she urged friends and correspondents to destroy all surviving letters (a dictate which many ignored). The reason she gave was that correspondence was 'written speech' which should be protected and bound by the same codes of honour as private conversation (Martineau, 1877, 1, p.3). To her, publication of letters amounted to nothing more than gossip and tittle-tattle. Second, she pre-wrote her own obituary for *Daily News*, which was published on her death and was widely quoted in other obituaries. Third, the publication of her two-volume *Autobiography* followed speedily upon her death, such that occasionally her obituary and the review of the *Autobiography* were written simultaneously.

Evidently, as recent publication of her letters testifies (e.g. Arbuckle, 1983; Burchell, 1995) Harriet Martineau was not able totally to eliminate alternative perspectives on her life and times. Yet the fact that so many of her biographers drew principally on the *Autobiography* and *Obituary* as key sources of information, suggests that to some extent, she was successful in retaining control over her image, way beyond her death.

Conclusions

To summarise, I have argued in this paper that Harriet Martineau was an outstanding self-publicist and market-strategist. This factor goes some way to answer the question many have put: how did she, a provincial, plain, deaf, dissident young woman, get to 'make it' in mid-Victorian society. As Webb says, for decades her name

was on everybody's lips as she tried this fad and that - in modern parlance, she was a celebrity. My argument is that she had to work hard to become one of society's elite, which involved, among other things, being known for her candour and honesty. In so doing, she used a number of what we would recognise as modern methods of information gathering, dissemination and control. She was thus largely successful in ensuring that her own version of the truth remained predominant, and her carefully produced image stayed intact. In giving Harriet Martineau the last word, we can see that her own evaluation of her life's work offered in the obituary remains today a prevailing truth about her achievements and place in history.

> Her stimulus in all she wrote, from the first to last, was simply the need of utterance. This need she had gratified early; and those who know her best were always aware that she was not ambitious, though she enjoyed success, and had pride enough to have suffered keenly under failure....her original power was nothing more than was due to earnestness and intellectual clearness within a certain range. With small imaginative and suggestive powers, and therefore nothing approaching genius, she could see clearly what she did see, and give a clear expression to what she had to say (*Obituary*, 1876)

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Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle: Harriet Martineau and the Wedgwood Circle [extracts continued from previous Newsletter]

As a consequence of the testimonial fund, Martineau conceived the idea of a book about her illness aimed at helping other invalids. *Life in the Sick-Room* appeared late in 1843, Martineau insisting that it was not meant for personal gain. 'My dear Fanny,' she writes emotionally, 'your sympathy about that book was almost the earliest I had; O how hearty! I liked your pointing to those 3 pages wh were, perhaps, the most deeply felt by me, of any.' If Fanny had reservations about Martineau's rather morbid account of physical and mental suffering, she apparently did not disapprove of the self-congratulatory tone of the work - another good omen for her future loyalty to Martineau.

As with her nieces and nephews, the children of Martineau's friends became substitute children of her own. When Fanny has taken her children to Staffordshire, in January 1838, Martineau begs, 'Don't let them forget me.' In 1841, Martineau was to publish a group of stories for children, called collectively *Playfellow*. Today, Martineau's stories seem rather grim, but her letters to children are charming. Her first known letter to Snow begins as if to a grown-up: 'It was very kind of you to write to me'; and she appeals to what might interest a seven-year-old: 'The shore here is not all sand, nor yet shingle.' To illustrate the fun of the seashore, Martineau tells about an adventure she had when *she* was a little girl, of scrambling over rocks as the tide came in and getting her white dress all wet (no doubt a serious worry for little Harriet). Now she

hopes Snow will come to Tynemouth with her mother, where she might make a collection of seaweed and pin the different varieties on cards, as Martineau knows a poor woman has done. Planning *Playfellow*, several months later, Martineau solemnly asks Snow for a favour - will she and Macky make a list of the stories and books they like best, as her nieces and nephews have done? Martineau needed the extra income. Having earned only a moderate sum from her novel *The Hour and the Man*, she felt too ill to concentrate on any but the 'easy work' of children's stories (nevertheless, several of the tales in *Playfellow* seem based on extensive reading).

In a long letter to Snow in May 1857, Martineau reviewed her whole friendship with Charlotte Brontë as well as her current demand that Elizabeth Gaskell make corrections to the next edition of her biography. The episode is not flattering to Martineau. In 1854, she had gossiped unkindly about George Eliot to Fanny: 'Mr Lewes and his elder boys, and Miss E. are living at Weimar...My notion is that L. finds it answer well to pick her brains for his book [on Goethe] and his boys' education, and so makes profit and pleasure agree. When will she find that out?' Six years later, the identity of the athor (George Eliot) of *Scenes from Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* was taken up with gusto by correspondents of Martineau's like Elizabeth Gaskell. Writing to Erasmus, Martineau prudishly avoids mention of Eliot's irregular liaison, but begs him to 'please tell Fanny that it was not the romance of Miss Evans's pseudonym that I objected to...The point was that she had adopted a false name, - even...signing it to a legal instrument [and she] had no right to complain of a strict investigation into what *was* true in her case.'

Several of Martineau's last letters to Fanny Wedgwood are obviously missing, but we know they continued almost to her death. What then *was* the significance of Martineau's friendship with the Wedgwood circle? Martineau cherished her friends for their emotional and moral support. In 1843, Fanny must have promised to destroy Martineau's letters, as requested, but perhaps saved them for the time to show to members of her extended family. After Fanny's death, the scholarly and methodical Hensleigh - one of the Wedgwood clan who rarely threw anything away - failed to do so. As a result, we have a record of friendship showing Martineau at her personal best.

Martineau's seeming self-confidence belied her need for love and reassurance. Childhood memories of being unloved or misunderstood surely contributed to her intense adult friendships with a few men and a number of women. Though her writing usually came first, her friends served as confidants, readers, fellow 'students' or sometimes simply secretaries or nurses. Women friends like Fanny Wedgwood supplied the place of an equal 'sister' Martineau never really had. Her eldest sister, Lissey, was too close to her mother to be a true friend; Rachel, two years older than Harriet - though ultimately less of a rival - never became really close; while Ellen, the youngest sister, became the object of her *mothering*. Fanny Wedgwood was the perfect, intelligent equal. Though not always sympathetic or supportive of Martineau's notions (ie, her early statement in favour of ease of divorce, her flagrant statement of agnosticism in *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*, and of course the command to destroy all her letters), Fanny seems to have been intellectually less attracted

to Martineau and eager to hear her gossip and opinions on politics and social questions. Fanny's own full life exempted her from emotional dependence on Martineau - as happened with some of Martineau's women friends - nor was she a professional rival. She was the ideal correspondent, able to follow Martineau's political involvements, appreciative of her writing and probably entertained by her gossip. A mature and motherly person herself, Fanny could extend concern for her own family to take Martineau's welfare under her wing. And Martineau repaid her with frankness and trust and an invaluable record of almost 40 years of her life.

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