

HARRIET MARTINEAU: VICTORIAN POLYMATH

BY MAGGIE HILLIARD

TEACHING STUDENTS HOW TO DO RESEARCH IS NOT JUST TAUGHT FROM THE BOOK IN DR. DEBORAH LOGAN'S CLASSROOMS. SHE TEACHES FROM HER OWN EXPERIENCES AS WELL. DR. LOGAN BELIEVES THAT "RESEARCH IS INTEGRAL TO THE LEARNING AND TEACHING PROCESS AND IS AN ESSENTIAL PRACTICE THAT SHOULD NOT BE ELIMINATED, BUT, RATHER, 'STEPPED-UP' AFTER GRADUATE SCHOOL."

Dr. Logan is on her way to becoming a preeminent scholar of Victorian literature and culture and an authority on Harriet Martineau. Dr. Logan is also an assistant English professor up for early tenure this year. She is working to disprove the idea that "teaching and research are separate, unrelated activities. Both are, in fact, integral to all academic endeavors," she said.

Dr. Logan is originally from Scranton, Penn., and earned her bachelor's degree from Hamilton College in New York and her master's degree and doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While studying 19th-century British literature, with an emphasis on Victorian studies and the novel, Dr. Logan finally found the person that she would spend many years researching: British writer Harriet Martineau.

During her undergraduate education, Dr. Logan said, she had so little exposure to women writers that she began to request independent studies so she could uncover the history that was left out of so many of her courses. She was seeking to find out "why these women had been written out of literary and social history," she said.

Logan's thesis and dissertation on the status of women in the 19th century and on women writers became her first book, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing*. While conducting this research, she discovered Martineau.



Dr. Deborah Logan looks at a display concerning Victorian women in Western Kentucky University's Kentucky Museum.



"I was intrigued with Harriet Martineau because, when I first discovered her, I wondered why I had never heard about her before," she said. "The more I studied her life and her writings, the more I was convinced that she was someone who was really important." Dr. Logan discovered that Martineau's significance is wide ranging in that her writing incorporates politics, history, biography, sociology, philosophy, political economy, journalism, religion and literature. In modern terms, Harriet Martineau's works are genuinely interdisciplinary, an increasingly viable pedagogical approach in 21st century academia.



ILLUSTRATION BY TOM MEACHAM

Martineau's impact on Victorian culture is impressive by any standards. Her *Illustrations of Political Economy* (consisting of 25 tales) sold 10,000 copies each, with an estimated readership of nearly 150,000. The series, which "popularized" classical political economy for the general reader, was translated into several European languages. Its reception history far surpasses that of the works of her more famous contemporaries, like Charles Dickens and John Stuart Mill. Martineau was subsequently "courted" by Parliamentary members to write two more series, *Illustrations of Taxation* and *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated*. For her writing on industrial British society and pre-Civil War America, Martineau has been called the "first woman sociologist." Her later career as a journalist earned her the title, "the first and greatest woman journalist."

In addition to writing analyses and critical studies of Martineau's writing, Dr. Logan is working toward bringing

Martineau's writing back into print to revive the Victorian scholar's contributions to these disciplines. She has applied for two grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities that will allow her to continue her research in manuscript collections overseas as well as throughout the U.S.

One of Logan's outstanding grants concerns her forthcoming five-volume reprint of Martineau's writings on the British Empire that will be published by Pickering & Chatto. Logan hopes to spend one month in England conducting research, primarily at the British Library's East India Company collection, Trinity College Library in Dublin and the University of Birmingham (United Kingdom) to piece together the introductions to her forthcoming series. She plans to complete the series in April 2003, with publication scheduled for fall 2003.

Her other grant application aims at a larger and more time-consuming project: the collected letters of Harriet Martineau. There are approximately 2,200 letters in the United States and Britain to be assembled for this collaborative research project. Logan's project will be co-edited by fellow Martineau scholar Dr. Valerie Sanders of the University of Hull (United Kingdom). The authors anticipate a 2005 publication date for this five or six volume collection.

Dr. Logan has been studying Martineau since 1992, conducting research for three books, all forthcoming in 2002: *Harriet Martineau and America's Martyr Age*, *The Hour and the Woman: Harriet Martineau's 'somewhat*

Martineau was a very strong and self-sufficient intellectual woman whose greatest strength was as a social problem writer. Her writing incorporates politics, history, biography, sociology, philosophy, political economy, journalism, religion and literature.

remarkable' Life, and *Selections from Harriet Martineau's 'Illustrations of Political Economy.'*" Her writings have also been published in five journal articles on Martineau and in papers presented at 13 professional conferences, with three more taking place this fall, as well as several colloquia at Western Kentucky. Most recently, she presented a paper about

Martineau's transatlantic abolitionism at Yale University's Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition.

"I see my role as a researcher as that of making women writers and their texts available to new generations of readers, to provide a more comprehensive picture of literary history than has been available thus far," Logan said.

Logan notes that publishers are sometimes reluctant to do reprints. However, she has secured publishing commitments from companies in the United States, Canada and Britain so far, which attests to Martineau's growing popularity and continued relevance. Logan's reprint volumes are critical editions that include Victorian and modern supplementary texts and are intended for use in classrooms as well as libraries.

"Martineau never hid her identity as a woman, as did other Victorian women writers," Dr. Logan said. "She was criticized because she wasn't writing romance novels, nor did she use a male pseudonym. Martineau is notable for her participation in 'serious' non-fiction writing, work traditionally considered to be the province of male writers only."

She also believes that if Martineau is more prominently featured in college textbooks and classes, it will provide female scholars with a positive example of a woman non-fiction writer. Such role models, Logan emphasizes, provide women students with the tools to overcome intellectual prejudices and confront gender-based criticisms. Martineau, for example, was often criticized for her gender as well as for her disability, deafness, rather than having her writing assessed according to literary standards. This in part explains, in Logan's opinion, Martineau's exclusion from academic study.

"According to traditional textbooks, there are few strong, women political figures throughout history, so

Martineau was often criticized for her gender as well as for her disability, deafness, rather than having her writing assessed according to literary standards.

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many students go through school thinking that the absence of female role-models proves that women are inferior to men," Dr. Logan said. "But women have been systematically eliminated from academic, no less than social, history. I participate in the ongoing academic research aimed at recovering these women and restoring them to their rightful place. Martineau was a very strong and self-sufficient intellectual woman whose greatest strength was as a social problem writer." She focused on such issues as gender, race, and class, a paradigm popular in today's university classrooms.

Logan's research has led her to find a missing piece of history, and her insightfulness has led her to encourage us all to rediscover the past. By doing this, we can face the future with a more accurate understanding of women's intellectual contributions through knowledge of our "literary grandmothers."

"Just as Martineau represented the 'spirit of the Victorian age,' so also does the work of women scholars on women writers represent the spirit of academia in the postmodern era," Logan said.

Books by Dr. Deborah Anna Logan, Ph.D.

Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing. 'Marry, stitch, die, or do worse' Columbia and London University of Missouri Press, June 1998.

Editor, Reprint and critical edition of Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy*. Forthcoming from Broadview Press, Fall 2001.

The Hour and the Woman: Harriet Martineau's "somewhat remarkable" Life. Forthcoming from Northern Illinois University Press, Spring 2002.

Editor, anthology of Harriet Martineau's writings on pre-Civil War America entitled *Harriet Martineau and America's Martyr Age*. Forthcoming from Northern Illinois University Press, Spring 2002.

Editor, *Harriet Martineau's Writing on the British Empire*, 5 volumes. Forthcoming from Pickering & Chatto, 2003.