



Two Victorian Women

BY CAROL CUMMINGS



Dr. Deborah Logan

DEBORAH LOGAN HAS SPENT MUCH OF HER CAREER STUDYING THE LIVES AND WORKS OF VICTORIAN WOMEN WRITERS. THE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY HAS ESTABLISHED HERSELF AS A PREEMINENT SCHOLAR ON HARRIET MARTINEAU, A CONTROVERSIAL WRITER AND SCHOLAR WHO, FROM THE 1820s

TO THE 1870s, WAS RENOWNED FOR HER WRITINGS ON SOCIAL REFORM, SOCIOLOGY, ECONOMICS, POLITICS, AND ABOLITION. LOGAN'S MARTINEAU RESEARCH ALSO LED HER TO STUDY A MORE WELL-KNOWN VICTORIAN FIGURE — FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE — THE SUBJECT OF HER LATEST BOOK.

"I was introduced to Harriet Martineau during my first year of graduate school, when I took a Victorian literature class," Dr. Logan explained. "I was impressed by what she'd accomplished. I had already chosen Victorian literature as my major and was looking for an area of concentration. I feel privileged because I discovered her when I was going through graduate school and was able to

develop original research. It is inspiring to be a part of that and to be considered an expert on her writings."

Dr. Logan received her bachelor's degree from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. She then earned a graduate certificate in Women's Studies from Duke University in 1991 and a master's degree in English Literature from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1991. In 1997, she received her Ph.D. in English Literature from the UNC Chapel Hill. She uncovered more about Martineau while writing her doctoral dissertation, later published as *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: "Marry, stitch, die, or do worse."*

When Dr. Logan first read Martineau's work, she was amazed that she had never heard of her before. The more she studied and read, the more she became convinced that this writer was truly important to literary and intellectual history. Martineau rarely used a pseudonym — even when it was fashionable to do so. She had only two years of grammar school, and the rest of her extensive and cross-disciplinary knowledge was self-taught. According to Logan, Martineau was exceptionally well-read and well-connected with Dissenting intellectual circles. She was also able to overcome a serious obstacle — being almost completely deaf — and to achieve great things in her life. She built her own home at a time when it was uncommon



Martineau



Nightingale

for women to do so. In short, she was a role model for women of her day and of ours.

When she was about twenty years old, Martineau wrote: "I have plans innumerable in my heart, and mean to go on as long as I have faculties for it." For the next half century she did exactly that. During her lifetime, Martineau was far more popular and well known than many of her contemporaries, such as Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and even Charles Dickens.

"During the Victorian period, middle-class women were expected to get married and stay married," Dr. Logan said. "Martineau had planned to do that, and she became engaged as a young woman. Then her fiancé died, her father died, and her family lost its business. Her brother, with whom she was very close, went off to the university, and Martineau was then able to follow her talent. Because she was deaf, she couldn't be a governess or a music teacher, which were typical professions for a woman of her background. So she began to write." She wrote not only because it was her passion, but because she was able to support herself through her talent.

Why, then, had Dr. Logan never heard of Martineau, even though she had spent a great deal of time learning about Victorian literature? "My theory is that she was a self-educated woman, so it was easy to write her off. It has taken a long time to bring her back into literary history, and many are assessing her contributions for the very first time. She also said what she thought, and people often didn't like that," Dr. Logan said with a smile.

Logan said Martineau's status as both a dissenter and a Unitarian shaped her thinking. "Her religion was based more on human rights than on rituals and dogma," she said. "She subsequently became an agnostic, though many commentators said she was an atheist. She was outspoken and passionate about such causes as slavery in the United States. She was also a radical."

The first time Dr. Logan wrote about Martineau was an article on her life and her fiction for the 1996 Dictionary of Literary Biography. Since that first piece, Dr. Logan has written numerous journal articles and chapters on Martineau. She has also completed three extensive series of reprints of her materials. These sixteen volumes include Martineau's writings on the British Empire, British history, and her personal letters. In support of this scholarship, Dr. Logan has received a number of WKU faculty fellowships and two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities. She is currently working on an analysis of Martineau's non-fiction writing on the British Empire, focusing on Ireland, India, the Middle East, China, and Africa. "Her work is interdisciplinary," Dr. Logan explained. "It is hard to place her, because she doesn't fit into a neat compartment."

Dr. Logan's work has made reprints of Martineau's work easily accessible for future researchers and scholars. As she worked on each of her sixteen volumes of reprints, she scanned old text, corrected it, and put it into word processing documents. She then annotated the writings and developed bibliographies. In addition, she included histories of Martineau's reception and criticism received from her contemporaries. "Doing reprints is thankless labor, but it serves an important purpose for scholars and researchers," she said. Complementing these editions is *The Hour and the Woman*, Logan's literary biography of Martineau's life and work.

Logan said her most rewarding work stemmed from her collection of Martineau's letters. "There were more than 2,000 of her letters all over the world," she said. "I did a great deal of traveling. The collected letters project was labor-intensive but an intellectually rewarding project. To Martineau's knowledge, all of her letters had been destroyed during her lifetime. She did not believe in saving and publishing personal letters. The letters are illuminating. She was very outspoken." Of Martineau's autobiography, Logan observes, "It is interesting to compare her public version of her life with her private letters."

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Dr. Logan's latest book, set to be published in 2008, is titled *Lives of Victorian Political Figures: Florence Nightingale*, which is a collection of articles written about Nightingale by her contemporaries. "Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) is without doubt the most recognized name in the fields of nursing, health and sanitation reform, and more recently, women's studies," Dr. Logan wrote. Nightingale's greatest strengths and accomplishments were less about practical nursing than about hospital administration and nurses' training. She helped reshape the official policies of social and political, civil, and military institutions that collectively kept public health at a "dangerously primitive standard."

Martineau and Nightingale were contemporaries who were years ahead of their time. Although they never met face-to-face, they corresponded regularly and collaborated on several social reform projects. "Both had remarkable and unusual early lives, for women, especially," explained Logan. "Martineau became an overnight international sensation as an author, after which she was remarkably well-traveled. This early success made her highly influential among public policy makers and social reformists."

According to Dr. Logan, the young Nightingale read Martineau's early works and was particularly impressed with her sensitive treatment of female alcoholism in *Sowers not Reapers*. "Nightingale made a pen case for Martineau, sent as a sort of fan letter, as the two had not met," she continued. Martineau, in turn, sent Nightingale a pillow she had needleworked "on which to rest your honoured head."

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There are striking similarities in the lives of the two women. Like Martineau, Nightingale was also well-traveled, Dr. Logan explained, but was prevented from following her desire to study nursing until she was thirty years old, when her family finally gave in to her desires. "Like Martineau, Nightingale, too, became an overnight sensation through her work in the Crimean War. By the age of thirty, both women had found their profession, and both quickly earned fame and respect."

Following a number of high-profile years, both women became house-bound invalids and remained so for the rest of their lives. "Martineau wrote glowingly of Nightingale's Crimean War exploits in the *Daily News*, and the two women began to collaborate on sanitary reforms in the military, with Nightingale providing the statistics she collected at Crimea and Martineau providing the narrative," Logan said. "Nightingale conducted her business from 'The Little War Office' — her London sickroom — while Martineau conducted hers from her sickroom in Ambleside, far from London. Nightingale, like Martineau, wielded considerable influence among policy makers. That these two chronically ill, single women successfully took on the War Office is astounding."

Martineau actually wrote Nightingale's obituary around the year 1860, but it was the elder Martineau who died first, in 1876, while Nightingale lived another fifty years.

The women had great respect for one another. In the Nightingale obituary, Martineau wrote, "It is no small distinction to our time that it produced a woman who effected two great things: a mighty reform in the care of the sick and an opening for her sex into the region of serious business, in proportion to their ability to maintain a place in it."

Of Martineau, Nightingale wrote: "She was born to be a destroyer of slavery, in whatever form, in whatever place, all over the world, wherever she was or thought she saw it . . . no matter what, she rose to the occasion."

Having spent the past fifteen years immersed in Martineau's work, Logan is considered one of the most prolific Martineau scholars at this time and has published more about her than any other scholar. In support of WKU's vision to be a leading American university with international reach, she has given papers all across the United States and in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Italy.

"It is easy to say this is a minor research niche, but I feel it is important work that has generated other important work throughout the world," Logan said. "Martineau had an amazing mind and intellect, and her writing was so polished. She has a lot to teach us about how Victorian women lived their lives. My work with Martineau led naturally to the two Nightingale projects: one volume on the literary-social reform collaboration between the two, and the most recent volume. I hope this work will enable other scholars to continue the process of making the accomplishments of pre-first-wave feminists available to students of literary and social history." ■

