

Harriet Martineau's Exceptional American Narratives: Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Brown, and the "Redemption of Your National Soul"

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In the nineteenth century many Americans closely followed what the British writer and activist Harriet Martineau said about their country. An author of fiction, history, and journalism (among many other things), Martineau took an active interest in America from the time leading up to her personal tour of the United States in 1834–36 to her death in 1876. More than just travel narratives, the three books that she published about her tour, *How to Observe Morals and Manners*, *Society in America*, and *Retrospect of Western Travel*, may be counted among the founding documents of applied sociology.¹ Her ongoing connections with key figures and movements in the United States led her to be considered an "American affairs expert" by the London *Daily News*, only one of many papers in the United Kingdom and the United States to which she regularly contributed. Noted especially for her involvement in the abolitionist movement, in which she was strongly allied with figures such as Maria Weston Chapman and William Lloyd Garrison, her writing on slavery in America—especially after her tour—put her very much in the public eye. In the words of Martineau scholar Deborah Logan, "there she remained throughout the next thirty years, an expert to whom many looked for guidance during America's confrontation with its most painful social issue" (*Writings on Slavery and the American Civil War* xiii). Martineau's death notice in the *New York Independent* made the following observation:

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Miss Martineau came to our shores in 1834 . . . preceded by an honorable reputation as a writer on political economy and an earnest advocate of freedom for the slave; and, as she did not hesitate to avow her sentiments, she was . . . frequently placed in disagreeable, and even dangerous circumstances. . . . The clearness of judgment and fidelity to conviction which marked her whole career appear most strongly in her course in America, and for this Americans of to-day cannot but honour her. (quoted in Logan, *Hour* 115)

The interest in Martineau's views of America did not last. Despite continued research into nineteenth-century transatlantic relationships, in the previous century her name largely dropped out of American studies. Fortunately, recent republications of many of her works and new attention by Martineau scholars to her study of America have begun to bring her voice back in. Her potential contributions to the field are too broad to easily encompass, but using her writing about John Brown and Harriet Beecher Stowe as a catalyst, I will argue here for Martineau's importance to this period of American cultural and social history, especially in her influence on anti-slavery writing and in her efforts to define a particular kind of American exceptionalism. Though comprising only a fraction of her prose about the United States, Martineau's commentary on Stowe and Brown reveals the key elements of her methods as an abolitionist writer and serves as an example of how she encouraged her readers on both sides of the Atlantic to come to a particular understanding of America itself.

By the time Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, Martineau had played an active and highly visible role in the abolitionist movement for two decades. In the books about her American travels mentioned above, she extensively critiqued slavery through her own first-hand experience of traveling in the South. In 1839 she published *Martyr Age of the United States*, a series of profiles of American abolitionist leaders, and she contributed to major abolitionist outlets like the *Liberty Bell* (1839–58) and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (1859–62) right up to the time of the American civil war.² But her writing about slavery first came to public attention with a work of fiction. Her anti-slavery tale "Demerara," set in the British West Indies, was included in her popular series of short novels published as *Illustrations of Political Economy* between 1832 and 1834. Indeed it was the success of the *Illustrations*, especially "Demerara," that gave Martineau the kind of celebrity status in America that opened many doors for her during her tour—even her Southern hosts expressed eagerness to "change her opinions" on slavery, which one tells her he knows because "we have all read 'Demerara'" (*Retrospect* I: 226).³ It is probably impossible to determine whether or not Stowe had read "Demerara," though in her literate and socially activist family it is probable that Martineau's work would have been known. Indeed, in a 1856 letter to Stowe, Martineau recalls meeting Stowe's father, sister, and



Figure 1: Harriet Martineau, by the American sculptor Anne Whitney (1883).
Courtesy Wellesley College Archives.

possibly Stowe herself in Ohio in 1835 (C. E. Stowe 308), and Stowe recalls being compared to Martineau as a young woman (Hedrick 91 and 264). At any rate, the point here is not to try to establish the degree to which “Demerara” may have directly influenced Stowe, but to argue that it served as an influential

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document in the literature of abolitionism. Not only does it demonstrate some of the fundamental strategies of anti-slavery fiction, but also “Demerara,” as Logan argues, “offers . . . all the elements guiding [Martineau’s] subsequent analysis and critique of American society” itself (*WSACW* xii). In this sense, “Demerara” and Martineau’s subsequent non-fiction need to be considered together for their impact on the period of anti-slavery writing in America that reached an apotheosis with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

“Demerara” opens with the main character, Alfred, returning to his father’s sugar plantation after completing his education in England. Eager to learn Demerara’s social and economic workings, Alfred finds himself amazed at the gross inefficiencies and general lassitude of the entire island, both slave and free. Though he energetically experiments in the management of the plantation and introduces several improvements, he is continually frustrated by the impossibility of any real change as long as slavery exists. As Alfred states, “the very sight of slavery is corrupting, to say nothing of the evil of holding property under the system” (119), and he notes with dismay that his father and other whites on the island behave callously, cowardly, and often irrationally under its sway.⁴ As Stowe would later do, Martineau emphasizes that slavery inevitably clashes with Christian values and makes impossible the maintenance of family bonds that—crucially—are just as important to blacks/slaves as to whites/owners. A slave named Willy, for instance, rejects his father’s encouragement to get married because while the law recognizes marriage between slaves, it does not intervene if one were sold and the new owner refused to take both. As Willy puts it, in the kind of language and sentiment that would infuse Stowe’s fiction, “Don’t ask me, father, to love anybody. Slaves cannot love” (101). After a hurricane devastates the island and leaves several plantation owners insolvent, Willy’s fears come true as his family is broken up and sold to pay off creditors. With his father and one sister left behind, “Willy and Nell [his other sister] . . . were marching, in sullen despair, with drivers at their backs, they knew not whither, to become the property of they knew not whom” (126).

Importantly, members of this slave family, depicted above in such highly sympathetic terms, are also shown to be sullen, dishonest, vain, and stand offish even to the sympathetic Alfred. In some passages “Demerara” presents uncomfortable images of the nature and behavior of its characters; as one recent scholar has put it, however progressive some elements of her vision may be Martineau can’t be expected to stand entirely outside of the “ethnocentrism that was part and parcel of everyday Anglo-Saxon life” (Ferguson 275-78).⁵ Yet in the story Martineau clearly demonstrates that the negative behavior of the slaves results from the defects of the system more than from any inherent defect of character or race, a system equally damaging to those in power. Other than Alfred, whites are hardly depicted any better—there is even a vicious, Legree-like overseer named Horner. The guiding image of the novel is what Alfred frequently calls the “topsy-turvy” nature of slavery, in which every principle of logic and mo-

rality that guides a free society has been turned on its head: "How this world is turned upside down when slaves are in it!" (86). This point is even reflected in the titles Martineau gave to her chapters, such as "Prosperity impoverishes in Demerara," "Calamity welcome in Demerara," and "Protection is oppression in Demerara." As for where the responsibility for the defects of the system lies, Martineau makes her stance clear at the end of the novel, when she summarizes (as she does after each novel in the *Illustrations*) the "Principles illustrated by this volume": "[s]ince the slave system is only supported by legislative protection, the legislature is responsible for the misery caused by direct infliction, and for the injury indirectly occasioned by the waste of labour and capital" (141). As in the concluding chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the fictional world is left behind as the author addresses specific issues of policy that clearly implicate the reader.

"Demerara" deploys many conventions associated with didactic fiction, including an intrusive narrator and characters that serve as types to illustrate specific arguments. And for Martineau, this was exactly the point—to illustrate didactically the principles at hand, using fiction as one strategy in her larger didactic project to enact genuine reform. Nearly all the events of the novel are filtered through Alfred, who in his many long conversations with the inhabitants of the island—both slave and free—and in his actions serves as a surrogate figure for Martineau herself, anticipating Martineau's approach to her own first-hand study of America. Note how the narrator of "Demerara" describes Alfred's approach to studying his father's estate:

He did not, of course, make up his mind respecting the details of the management of a plantation before he had the opportunity of observing how that actual system worked; but certain broad principles were fixed in his mind—principles which may be attested in any part of the world. . . . With these principles full in his mind, he began, from the moment he set foot on shore, to observe all that surrounded him wherever he went, and to obtain information from every class of persons to whom he could gain access. (78-79)

In this brief passage, Martineau articulates the sociological methodology that served both her fiction and her non-fiction. At the heart of this methodology was an objective observation of facts, an effort to meet and talk with as many people from as wide a range of life as possible, and most importantly an application of fundamental principles to the information she gathers. In this sense, her didacticism ought to be read not for the way it limits her fiction but for the way it opens up an understanding of the function of her novel and its relationship to other rhetorical strategies within the abolitionist movement, including her non-fiction.

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In a scene in “Demerara,” for instance, Alfred confronts a slave named Cassius who proves a highly intelligent and diligent worker on his own time (as he tries to earn his ransom), but who displays blatant dishonesty and dereliction of duty when working on his master’s plantation. As Cassius explains his quite reasonable motives, Alfred finds himself speechless:

his principles of morality had all a reference to a state of freedom, and he had not yet learned to apply them in circumstances where they did not suit. He would have said, beforehand, that there could be no lack of arguments and sanctions for truth and fidelity . . . but, at the moment, it appeared to him that not one would apply. (89)

One might say that Martineau spent her entire career as a writer trying, like Alfred, to match principles to the circumstances that she encountered; when those principles do not or cannot apply to the circumstances, her writing (whether fiction or not) then becomes a determined advocacy for Martineau’s political and social ends. Thus Alfred’s fictional experiences in “Demerara” transform into to Martineau’s own first-hand experiences in the United States. In *Society in America* (1837), which Maria Frawley describes as “like investigative reporting” (14), she begins her chapter titled “Morals of Slavery” by protesting that

[t]his title is not written down in a spirit of mockery; though there appears to be mockery somewhere, when we contrast slavery with the principles and the rule which are the test of all American institutions:—the principles that all men are born free and equal; that rulers derive their just power from the consent of the governed; and the rule of reciprocal justice. (219)

What follows is her attempt to examine such “morals” as she finds: “the institution of slavery exists; and what we have to see is what the morals are of the society which is subject to it” (219-20). Not surprisingly, just like Alfred she finds the “morals” completely wanting. In just one small example of many, she complains of a system in which the children of privileged white families are taught to look down on any kind of labor (in several scenes in “Demerara” she pointedly has Alfred doing physical labor alongside slaves). She states, “A more hopeless state of degradation can hardly be conceived of, however they may ride, and play the harp, and sing Italian, and teach their slaves what they call religion” (*Society* 217-18). As for slave children, when she meets an accomplished young female slave, who was a “bright-eyed, merry-hearted child” Martineau can only think with horror of “the cruel abuse of power involved in . . . dooming to blight a being so helpless, so confiding, and so full of promise.” Despite what her Southern hosts may think, she dryly states: “to see slaves is not to be reconciled to slavery” (*Retrospect* I: 142).

With Martineau's practice of testing principles through both fiction and non-fiction, it is hardly surprising that she embraced *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and pointedly defended it on the basis of its "truth." When Stowe visited England in 1853, "Tom Mania" was at its height, with over 1.5 million copies sold in the United Kingdom and numerous product spin-offs circulating (Fisch 99-101), but she was also under criticism on at least two fronts—from those who suggested Stowe was touring to exploit her fame to further her career as a best-selling author and from those who questioned the validity of the novel's portrayal of slavery in America. Martineau defended Stowe on both counts in an impassioned piece for the London *Daily News*. "Mrs. Stowe is no fine lady," she writes, "come to play off fine sentiments amidst the flutter of fans and the homage of adoring listeners." Instead, Martineau argues that Stowe is an "involuntary preacher" whose "fame is a protest on the part of the world against slavery in a democratic republic" (*WSACW* 92-93). As for the veracity of the book, Martineau insists that Stowe did not "put forth her own opinions, or in any way make known her own presence in the scene" but instead "told in the most straightforward way what happens every day in the slave states of America" (92).

These comments demonstrate Martineau's efforts to integrate Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into the heart of the abolitionist cause. The sensationalism of the novel (in both its content and its tremendous popularity) potentially worked against it (as it still does today) as a document to be taken seriously in the effort to undo slavery. To counter this, Martineau constructs a particular profile of Stowe as an author and argues that the novel should be treated on the same representational plane as any non-fictional account of the abuses of slavery. Indeed, these two points—that Stowe's prominent position as an author was "involuntary" and that her novel tells the truth—are closely intertwined. In the previous decades the abolitionist movement had been split over (among other things) the public involvement of women in the cause. For Martineau, Stowe's activism (much like her own) came not out of a desire for any personal gain or to intentionally upset traditional gender roles, but because she had no choice:

Two years ago, she was in her home in Ohio . . . busy in her nursery and carrying about an anxious heart, always and increasingly burdened by a growing knowledge of the sins and sufferings attendant upon the institution of slavery. When she could bear it no longer she spoke; and the manner in which she spoke indicates the quality of the woman, and explains the power of her speech. (*WSACW* 92)

Here Martineau portrays Stowe's act of writing in terms very similar to the way she describes her own. In her *Autobiography* she explains, "Authorship has never been with me a matter of choice. I have not done it for amusement, or for money, or for fame, or for any reason but because I could not help it. Things were pressing to be said; and there was more or less evidence that I was the person

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to say them” (143). For Martineau, it is crucial that the author be subordinated to the morals and principles advocated by the writing she produces, because the point of the writing is to effect change. The tremendous success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* thrust Stowe into the spotlight, but only as a humble advocate for a larger crusade: “She has been made, unintentionally and even unconsciously, the apostle of the greatest cause now existing in the world” (*WSACW* 92).

The strongest defense of Stowe and the novel comes, for Martineau, in its truth. Though she mentions in passing its “grave aesthetic faults,” Martineau argues that “the power of the book was its truth, set forth in its full strength by the objective character of the work” (*WSACW* 92-93). Obviously this kind of characterization runs counter to the highly emotional scenes that the novel is most noted for, but to both Stowe and Martineau the argument against slavery and even the mere presentation of facts cannot be accomplished without this emotional framework. In the preface to “Demerara,” Martineau asserts, “If I had believed, as many do, that strong feeling impairs the soundness of reasoning, I should assuredly have avoided the subject of the following tale, since Slavery is a topic which cannot be approached without emotion” (70). Yet she also expresses her determination to bring “calculations and reasoning” to this volatile topic, insisting that her “object” was nothing less than to “appropriate everything, properly authenticated, which could illustrate my subject” (69). To Martineau, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* achieves the same thing.

To say this is not, of course, to make an argument that these novels *are* factual, but to emphasize that Stowe and Martineau intended the details of their fiction to be received by readers as *both* highly emotional and empirically grounded. When pro-slavery forces attempted to refute the authenticity of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by providing “evidence” that Stowe’s portrayal of brutality and injustice was inaccurate or highly exaggerated, Stowe responded by publishing *The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which meticulously went through the novel chapter by chapter citing evidence from sources such as newspapers, trial transcripts, congressional records, personal testimony, and travel narratives as support for her “fictional” account of slavery (and this at the same time that anti-abolitionist forces were publishing novels that attempted to portray slavery in a highly positive light).⁶ Like Martineau’s sociological methodology as enacted by Alfred in “Demerara,” Stowe constructs a way to organize and present information that, even if in the form of fiction, gains its persuasive power from concrete evidence. And Martineau expresses confidence that this novel, penned by a woman, can lead to change as effectively as any other action or event: “her welcome here [in England] is a broad hint, if her countrymen would but take it, that the institution [of slavery] is doomed. . . . Whether it is a book, or a woman, or a Great Exhibition, or a Hungarian revolt, or anything else that elicits the truth and conveys the warning matters little; it becomes a solemnity through its use” (*WSACW* 93).

The case of John Brown presented a very different problem than that of Stowe, quite literally the sword against the pen. On October 16, 1859, Brown

and his “provisional Army of the United States” stormed the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He intended to seize weapons stored there and distribute them to slaves throughout the south to encourage a massive insurrection that would force an end to slavery. Instead he was captured after a bloody battle and standoff, tried for treason, and hung just six weeks after the raid.⁷ Martineau did not initially know what to make of this event, especially given its violent nature and its rather implausible goals. When she first writes about it for the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, admitting that she still does not have all of the facts about the case, she expresses fear that the raid will cause “a great deal of trouble” for the abolitionist movement by besmirching all abolitionists, and praises “patient pertinacity in civil action in pursuit of reform” as against those who (presumably like Brown) would “break through the law and the peace that it guards” (*WSACW* 144-45). However, always the astute observer of momentous events, Martineau quickly realized that Brown’s raid was now the central drama of the American abolitionist movement, and that shaping the way in which his story was told was critical to its success. Just one week after the cautious, slightly disapproving comments above, she began her next piece for the *Standard* by stating “The only clear thing to us about the Harper’s [sic] Ferry business is the moral greatness of John Brown” (145).

Not surprisingly, Martineau seized on the didactic possibilities of Brown’s action. “There can scarcely be a mistake,” she writes, “in regard to the lesson which this rising will teach” (146)—namely that the practice of slavery is doomed: “Can the slaveholding communities ever get over the exposure . . . of the hollowness of the social state in which slavery is an element? Can slavery ever again be what it has been—in Virginia at least—while the spectre of Old Brown walks in the midst of it, as it always will from this time forward?” (147). She also vigorously defends Brown against the charges (still under debate today) of insanity, insisting that the actions he took were perfectly reasonable within the circumstances of an irrational system like slavery. As for his character, “I doubt whether there is in history anything nobler than the calm devotedness of his temper, and the heroic moderation of his demeanor” (145). In passages like this Martineau participates in the mythologizing of the figure of Brown, giving him a power and stature designed to allow him to succeed in death where he failed in life.⁸ Much like characters deployed in fictional anti-slavery writing, Brown comes to serve as a type—hero, prophet, martyr—that embodies the qualities that most effectively make an argument for abolition. Though Martineau certainly turns Brown into a hero, consistent with her advocacy of broad principles and the social or political changes that they must drive, she portrays him as one who (like Stowe) served to bring attention not to himself but to the greater cause. In a profoundly moving description of his funeral procession and burial written for a British audience in the *Daily News*, she says “I consider it of great importance that the effects of his action in Virginia on the whole of the United States should not be mixed up with the emotions aroused by the character and bearing of the man” (*WSACW* 108). She strove to describe him in the same kind of terms that

she used to defend Stowe against claims of self-aggrandizement, praising the “self-sacrifice” of his actions and stating that “[t]he brave and tender old confessor and martyr, with plainness of manner and paucity of speech, with honest self-assertion and no egotism, with everything about him the reverse of fantastical and sentimental, is precisely the most soul-saving saint your community could be blessed with” (148).

These elegiac accounts of Brown demonstrate that even in non-fictional forms like journalism, emotion and fact are just as inescapably intertwined as in abolitionist fiction. If didactic fiction benefited from the impression of objective fact, as in “Demerara” and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, so these accounts of real people and real events benefited from an emotional and even spiritual intensity that reminded readers of just how high the stakes were. The language that Martineau uses in these passages would resonate strongly to readers familiar with sentimental, evangelical strains of abolitionism, even if it seems rather far removed from the more matter of fact tone she uses in much of her other writing, including the sociological studies based on her travels to America. When she writes in the *Daily News* of Brown’s execution, she even goes so far as to state, “[t]here is nothing profane in repeating what has been said from hundreds of pulpits within the last month—that it is the case of the death of the Cross over again” (108).

But in addition to addressing a particular audience, through this language Martineau taps into ideas that resonate deeply with some of the most fundamental tenets of American civil religion and American exceptionalism. The idea of exceptionalism—the belief that America has somehow been singled out for a special destiny as a nation—is complicated and controversial (one need only think of how it is still put to use on the global stage today), and (again still to this day) much intertwined with Christian religious traditions. However, to observers like Martineau, it also contained the seeds of genuine reform, revision, and even revolution in social and political spheres. Even if she depicts Brown as a Christ figure, it is not so much an eschatological claim about religious matters but a suggestion that in Brown’s death rests the opportunity for America to redeem itself and fulfill its worldly principles. She tells her American readers of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* that “The world will be anxious now to see how you express your homage—what you will do, now that all must see that something must be done” (148).

In her books on her American voyage, for all her criticism she consistently expresses optimism about the core *secular* principles of American political life, especially as outlined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and describes figures like Jefferson and Madison as “men inspired by the true religion of statesmanship [and] faith in men” (*Retrospect* I: 198). Of course to Martineau, America’s laudatory principles have been corrupted by its inability to fully shuck off the outmoded values of the old world: “the turbulence and tyranny are the immediate offspring of the old-world, feudal, European spirit which still lives in the institution [slavery] assailed, and in the bosoms of the aristocracy of the country” (*WSACW* 79). As Martineau scholars have emphasized,

her writings on America are characterized by her ongoing analysis of the tension between America's principles, especially as stated in its founding documents, and the actual practice of its social, political, and economic life, all of which must unavoidably be viewed through the prism of slavery. In Martineau's words "slavery is as thoroughly interwoven with American institutions—ramifies as extensively through American society, as the aristocratic spirit pervades Great Britain" (*WSACW* 46), and as such no element of American life can be judged separately from its pervasive influence.

With this in mind, one can even say that much of Martineau's writing fulfils the prophecy of John Winthrop, one of the founding fathers of exceptionalism, when in 1630 he predicted that America would be seen as a "city on the hill," observed and judged by a watchful world. In another passage from the article for the *Standard* on Brown's death, she announces, "your public procedure, for the redemption of your national soul, character, and reputation, we shall follow with the deepest interest" (148). Earlier, writing on "The Slave Trade in 1858" for the *Edinburgh Review*, she produces volumes of damning evidence of the continued corrupt and illegal slavery practices worldwide, but concludes with a particular focus on America. Although the presence of slavery has "degraded" the "national character" and "may ultimately explode [the] Union," she has faith in "the free millions who regard . . . human liberties with the love which their great men of a past century bequeathed to them." With these solid principles at hand, America still has a chance to lead the way to reform:

The opportunity of regenerating the Republic, and regaining the old place of honour among nations is now present and pressing. If our American kindred accept it and use it, their best days are yet to come. If they let it pass, the world will grieve, but the work will not the less be done. It is the "manifest destiny" of justice and humanity to lead the world onward. (*WSACW* 271)

Thus Martineau's hopes for America rested not on a blind faith in some kind of special *American* principles, as suggested by this redefinition of the concept of "manifest destiny," but on the belief that in America there lies an especially favorable opportunity to enact—as called for in her methodology—*universal* social, political, and economic principles that she felt necessary for the progress of all countries and all people. That is, the principles test America, not vice-versa—and the world (for which Martineau feels quite comfortable speaking) is watching.

With regard to exceptionalism, it is worth noting that both the length of her original visit and the scope of her ongoing study of America and its institutions far exceeded that of the more famous European visitor to the United States in this period, Alexis de Tocqueville. In the words of sociologist Michael Hill, Martineau "embraced a far wider conception of democracy" and pursued "empirical strategies that allowed her to see the structural effects of white male privilege

on the disenfranchised sectors of American society” (74). Martineau herself, in a largely laudatory overview of Tocqueville’s career, complains that in his visit to America “he saw few people . . . and conversed very little; the remark was that his book might have been written in his own library, without the trouble of a voyage” (“Representative Men” 293). Hill goes on to argue that Martineau’s writing provides not only an alternative view of America to Tocqueville, but also a considerably superior one. While Tocqueville lacked any “logical plan of inquiry” and “failed to make systematic observations of concrete social patterns across the crucial divisions of race, class and gender” (73), Martineau arrived with a detailed methodology that grounded her more nuanced insights.

To Martineau, that America—most especially because of slavery—had not lived up to its potential becomes a matter of deep distress but also of hope because, perhaps unlike the corrupt and muddled “old” world, America has not lost its chance to fulfill it.

The actions of the likes of Stowe and Brown become potential catalysts to tip the new world ever closer to meeting its promise, and even in the shadow of the Civil War she remains optimistic: “I am anything but unhappy about America. It is the resurrection of conscience among them,—the renewal of the soul of a genuine nation” (Logan, “Fighting” 64). Thus Martineau’s efforts to shape the interpretation of the character and actions of particular individuals serves as a microcosm of her larger project to shape an interpretation of America itself. Despite the tremendous controversy and resistance that met both Stowe’s fiction and Brown’s raid, Martineau makes blanket statements that express tremendous confidence in their impact. Just as she felt that the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* would inevitably lead to the end of slavery, she argues that the raid on Harpers Ferry is “plain proof that Brown has accurately represented the spirit and the convictions of his time and country, and fairly inaugurated the political and social reform which has been so long preparing” (*WSACW* 111). These claims might be seen as mere hyperbole or even wishful thinking, but they are key to Martineau’s effort to construct a narrative about America and its potential to serve as a model for progressive reform. Her brand of exceptionalism enacts familiar devices of destiny and redemption, but her vision is grounded by her sociological methodology, by an unusually long and deep engagement with the key figures in the abolitionist movement, and by her first-hand engagement with its attendant social and political pressures. Martineau, far from just an observer, took an active role in pushing America toward renewal and reform. For American studies scholars, long fascinated with how others have treated America, her actions provide a rich resource that is only beginning to be tapped.

Notes

1. See Michael R. Hill’s introduction to Martineau’s *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838), “the first methodological treatise on sociology” (xxix). Though it was not specifically about America, it lays out her methodology for her visit, and was first composed by Martineau on her sea voyage to the United States.

2. Martineau's writings on America have been reprinted as *Writings on Slavery and the American Civil War* (abbreviated *WSACW* in in-text citations) edited by Deborah Anna Logan.

3. Martineau was initially welcomed in the South (though some expressed concern for her personal safety) because of her reputation for keeping an open mind and because she had not publicly spoken out at any abolitionist gatherings. When she toured New England in 1835 she broke her public neutrality by speaking against slavery and in favor of abolitionist activity, an action that quickly shut many of the doors that had been opened to her in the first part of the tour. Her planned return to the South was now impossible, though Martineau saw the greatest violence and feared most for her safety in New England, where anti-abolitionist sentiment, and even mob violence, was rampant. See Martineau's *Autobiography* 344-352, and Logan, *Hour* 85-88.

4. Page numbers are from the reprint of "Demerara" in volume I of *Harriet Martineau's Writing on the British Empire*, edited by Deborah Anna Logan.

5. As Stowe did in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in "Demerara" Martineau posits relocation to Liberia as a viable solution for emancipated slaves—a position she would strenuously reject just after its publication. See Logan's introduction to "Demerara" in Martineau, *Writing on the British Empire*, 65-66.

6. See the wonderful Internet archive *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, directed by Stephen Railton, at <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/>. The Anti-Tom novels are discussed under "Pro-Slavery Responses," <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/proslav/antitoms.html>.

7. An extended account of the raid can be found in Reynolds, 309-333.

8. For an excellent overview of the construction of Brown's martyrdom and its cultural context, see Nudelman. See Reynolds, 444-470, on the "avalanche" of literature and music he inspired.

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