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**HARRIET MARTINEAU –
SOCIAL THINKER AND METHODOLOGIST:
IN DANGER OF BEING FORGOTTEN ONCE AGAIN?**

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**Harriet Martineau-social thinker and methodologist:
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Introducing Harriet Martineau

Who is Harriet Martineau? As recently as six years ago, my response to this question would have been an uninformed one, being quite unaware of this name and the identity of its owner. The name did not feature in the course of my training as a sociology undergraduate between 1982 and 1986 at the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore. Neither did my graduate studies (first at NUS and then at Johns Hopkins) afford an occasion to get acquainted with Harriet Martineau. My encounter with this figure and personality in 1997 was a fortuitous occurrence. The context for this familiarity was provided when I returned to NUS in 1996 and was assigned to co-teach a compulsory third-year undergraduate module entitled 'Social Thought and Social Theory.' It was in the course of preparing to teach this module, as I was perusing sociology textbooks, books on history of sociology and anthologies of classical sociological theory, that I first came across the name of Harriet Martineau and a curt mention of her place in the history of sociology. This opening led to a period of self-education on my part, and in 1998, my colleague and I decided to name, list and introduce, Harriet Martineau, (alongside Marx, Weber and Durkheim) as a social thinker, theorist and methodologist, to address the issue of androcentrism in the teaching of classical sociological theory. She has remained resolutely on the course syllabus since. I have quite consciously and deliberately chosen to begin this paper with what would be apparent as a 'personal' stance, since my non-exposure to Harriet Martineau is by no means unique but reflects the experiences of a majority of sociology students of my generation. This then says something about the state of knowledge production and dissemination with respect to classical theory in the discipline of sociology in those times. This recognition has an important bearing on the arguments carried in this paper.

Given the widespread anonymity of Harriet Martineau amongst sociologists, a brief introduction to her biography and intellectual standing¹ are vital at the outset. As I have argued elsewhere, 'In this case I deem a biographical sketch to be even more necessary and crucial because most students of sociology are unfamiliar with her name and identity, let alone her writings' (Sinha, 2001: 82). Harriet Martineau was an Englishwoman born in the town of Norwich in 1802. She was born into a middle class family of devout Christian Unitarians, and the sixth of eight children. According to Deegan (1991:290):

Her childhood was marred, however, by strong feelings of fearfulness and self-doubt. She was nonetheless intellectually industrious and applied herself to both secular and religious studies. She was educated largely at home, with the exception of two years in private educational classes and a year in a boarding school for girls. Through self-study she rigorously augmented her early exposure to subjects routinely taught only to males. University study was barred to women, but Martineau maintained a regimen of intense, self-directed investigation throughout her life. Troubled by increasing deafness as a child, Martineau required an ear trumpet during her adulthood.

Due to her father's early death and the family's impending economic woes, Martineau was pressed into seeking a means of making a living. She turned to some of the few routes open to women in the mid-19th century - fine needlework by day and writing at night - and excelled at both. The second path took her into the realm of journalistic writing in which she found great success, writing scores of letters to newspapers², journal articles and book reviews and essays, but also wrote under pseudonyms and anonymously in the early years (Mineka, 1944). She also tried her hand at writing fiction and produced a number of novels, poetry, novelettes and short stories, which found a wide readership and through which she secured fame and popularity (Webb, 1960) but meager financial remuneration (Mineka, 1944). During this period of intense productive output, she was based in London and was part of a vibrant and lively intellectual arena, which included such names as Charles and Erasmus Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Carlyle, Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, William Wordsworth, Charlotte Bronte,

¹ Harriet Martineau's three volume autobiography is a primary source of information about her life. It was written in 1855 but only published in 1877 after her death, by Maria Chapman. Other important details about her life can be abstracted from Webb (1960) and Wheatley (1957).

² According to Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale (2002: 8), '...Martineau wrote more than 1,500 newspaper columns, of which only a few have been reprinted.'

Thomas Malthus,³ many of whom Martineau knew and interacted closely with. Intellectually, Martineau began with deeply religious and spiritual commitments and was committed to Unitarianism, but she found herself moving increasingly towards philosophy and metaphysics, and eventually coming to rest on positivism and science, declaring herself an atheist ultimately. She was a fiercely independent woman who valued her autonomy. Although engaged briefly to a suitor (who died unexpectedly), she does not seem to have been attracted to the institution of marriage; she remained single thereafter, and happily so (Martineau, 1877). Martineau was plagued by a number of health problems in her later years and died at the age of 74 in 1876.

For obvious reasons, in a previous piece on Martineau, I had made the *argument* that she can be read as a pioneering social thinker and methodologist (Sinha, 2001). The tone of my paper paralleled that of numerous scholars working on Martineau (over the last two to three decades) who have written in the mode of having to prove that she can really be read as a sociologist. After some 30 years of such *demonstration* through systematic research and argumentation, today it should be adequate to simply state that Martineau was a pioneering social thinker and methodologist, and drop the mind-set of having to continuously verify and legitimate her inclusion. Yet, because she is so little known amongst mainstream sociologists, it is all the more crucial to list her sociological contributions. Attempting such a listing is a formidable task in itself. Not only is her textual output vast but it also remains largely unanalyzed.

Martineau wrote much and was clearly passionate about it, deriving immense satisfaction from putting pen to paper. Overcoming various structural constraints (as a woman in 19th Century Europe) and personal adversity (she was deaf from the age of twelve and had to use an ear trumpet through most of her adult life, and battled illnesses throughout), in her writing she addressed herself largely to lay audiences and wrote in a mode and from a platform that would be accessible to them. She valued the role of education and saw herself as a public educator, writing for the average person of working class and middle class backgrounds. Between 1832 and 1834, she produced one of her best known and most popular pieces of writing, *Illustrations of Political Economy* (3,479

³ Martineau also collaborated with Florence Nightingale (McDonald, 1994) and corresponded with George Eliot and Elizabeth Barrett Browning on their writings (David, 1987). She is also known to have developed deep friendships with Erasmus Dickens and Thomas Malthus (Hoecker-Drysdale, 1992).

pages in 25 volume installments), in which 'she used fiction to explicate the new science of political economy' (Deegan, 1991:290). These stories, through which she attempted to disseminate amongst the masses an understanding of the workings of the structural processes of production, distribution, exchange and consumption, were exceedingly popular with readers of varied backgrounds and each installment was eagerly awaited. She enjoyed a vast readership and her stories were well-received,⁴ not just amongst laypersons. She also seems to have captured the imagination of politicians, policy-makers, Members of Parliament⁵ and intellectuals of the time. She was very much an activist as well, voicing her position publicly on such current issues as slavery, women's status, international affairs (such as British colonial policy in India) and various items of legislation (relating to poverty, health, etc.), just to mention a few areas where her views had a bearing on current public opinion.

Apart from her political economy tales, Martineau also wrote widely on issues close to her heart - the need for a rational, systematic and scientific approach to life in all dimensions, and for all people. An early and important document that already reveals Martineau's attraction to reason and systematic thought were her six compositions, entitled 'Essays on the art of thinking,' written as early as 1829 but published in an anthology in 1836. The latter is described by McDonald as '...effectively empiricism-for-all: how to think logically and bring appropriate evidence to bear on the problems of the day' (1994:168). Her mature methodological reflections would appear later, being grounded firmly in her experience of first-hand, primary fieldwork and participant observation in the United States of America. In an era when it was not common for women to travel, in 1834 Martineau embarked on a two-year trip to the United States of

⁴ Evidence of her popularity as a writer are reflected in the large numbers of sales and subscriptions for journals in which she wrote. According to Hoecker-Drysdale (1992: 34) 'She seems to have outsold nearly everyone.' She further provides figures for comparison, 'J.S.Mill's *Principles* sold 3000 copies in four years; Dickens's novels...had a sale of 2,000 or 3,000 copies ...' (ibid. 33-34). Martineau's first installment of the political economy tales recorded a sale of 1,500 copies and '...by 1834, an average of 10,000 copies a month' (ibid. 33).

⁵ We know that her views were solicited by politicians, for instance in the reform of the Poor Laws. According to Hoecker-Drysdale 'At this Martineau was approached by Chancellor Brougham to write some tales on the Poor Laws in anticipation of the report of the Poor Law Commission' (1992: 45).

America⁶. The result was a classic three-volume text, *Society in America*⁷ (1837), which is today well-known and favourably regarded by students of 19th-Century American society for her astute and insightful observations of American life in practice. The text carries a comprehensive, multi-dimensional account of various slices of American society and is written in an objective, non-judgmental spirit. Consequently her account of American society can be easily subsumed in what has been called the 'sociology of everyday life,' with detailed attention to the experience of day-to-day living, elicited through personal narratives from different categories of individuals in American society.

This period was also consequential for drafting and shaping Martineau's thoughts on a book that the American sociologist S. M. Lipset (1962:7) has described thus:

This volume is, perhaps the first book on the methodology of social research in the then still unborn disciplines of sociology and anthropology. Martineau realized that the study of social systems was a separate scientific discipline, and called it the "science of morals and manners."

Lipset was referring to Martineau's text on methodology, *How to Observe Morals and Manners*, published in 1838. In this text, Martineau lays forth the process entailed in systematically, carefully and methodically observing an unknown society. She also displays a concern in this document with outlining an intellectual programme she defines as the 'science of morals and manners' (Martineau, 1838), which in her formulation attends to both the manners as well as the underlying morals. By the latter she refers to embedded values, norms and principles in which the more superficial, observable practices, the 'manners', are rooted. As is well known amongst Martineau scholars, this text is grounded in the methodological principles of empiricism, naturalism and objectivity (Hill, 1989; Lipset, 1962; McDonald, 1994, Riedesel, 1981), which for Martineau are indispensable in studying society scientifically. Her agenda for the latter proposes the use of observation techniques, including participant observation to elicit knowledge about a carefully demarcated subject matter. Her text carries instructions on

⁶ In 1846, she also spent eight months in the 'Middle East' (including present day Syria, Egypt and Palestine) which is the basis of her 1848 book, *Eastern Life, Past and Present*. She also traveled to Ireland and Scotland.

⁷ Martineau had envisaged a different title for the book, *Theory and Practice of Society in America*, one she thought reflected more accurately the logic in which the book was rooted, but this was not accepted by her publishers (Hoecker-Drysdale 1992: 56). Alexis de Tocqueville's 2 volume work, *Democracy in America* was based on his nine-month stay there and was published in 1835 and 1840.

what to observe and how to observe - noting the importance of such implements as a 'daily journal' and a 'query list' in the process of inquiry. While she was clearly attracted to rationalism and objectivity, she placed a great deal of emphasis on the 'instrument' of observation, .i.e., the observer, and spent many pages highlighting the importance of proper attitudes and perspectives embodied in the latter. She cautions the observer against prejudices, quick generalizations and ethnocentrism (not her term), arguing that a sensitive and sympathetic predisposition is crucial to the task at hand. This adds a human dimension to the work of observation, something missing in the later, more formalised and scientized, positivist approaches in sociology.

It is interesting that in Martineau's study of American society and her methodological treatise, her name has not always been invoked in an independent capacity but comparatively with reference to Alexis de Tocqueville (Hill, 2002; Kandal, 1988; Nisbet, 1988) and Emile Durkheim (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley 2002; Reinharz, 1989) respectively. Students of 19th Century America have reflected that compared to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835-1840), Martineau's work 'is a better study of American life' (Nisbet, 1988: 173-4; See also Kandal, 1988: 73-74). It has also been noted, somewhat late, that Martineau's *How to Observe Morals and Manners* was written some sixty years *before* Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), and that the two are 'nearly analogous' (Reinharz, 1989: 92). In view of this observation, sociologists need to rethink the labeling of Durkheim's text as their 'first' methodological text.

While such comparisons are illuminating and reveal parallels between Martineau's theorising and that of other (later) sociologists, I appreciate James Terry's (1983) stand that women like Martineau should be approached independently. It might be more valuable to not see Martineau through the lens of Durkheim or Marx, but rather approach her ideas within the context of her own time and space, without moving her 60 years forward and risk being read as saying something as banal as 'she was the same as Durkheim.'

Martineau was clearly attracted to the liberating potential of science in understanding and remaking society and was keen to explore the philosophy of positivism, but she remained on the fringes of the emerging domain of institutionalized

sociology. Her closest interaction with the realm of formal, academic attempts to theorise society lie in her two-volume English translation of Auguste Comte's six-volume French original, *The Positive Philosophy* in 1853. As I have noted elsewhere:

It is not without significance that if sociologists know anything at all about Martineau it is through her association with the name of Auguste Comte. The story of how Martineau 'freely' translated, condensed and interpreted Comte's *The Positive Philosophy* from French to English is recorded, as is Comte's positive assessment and appraisal of her work (Sinha, 2001: 83)

The task of translating and making Comte's ideas accessible to English-reading audiences is by no measure a small contribution in the history of the discipline, yet Martineau has received little attention from sociologists even in this connection, something that would have surprised Comte himself given his own highly favourable account of Martineau's translation:

And looking at it from the point of view of future generations, I feel sure that your name will be linked with mine, for you have executed the only one of those works that will survive amongst all those which my fundamental treatise has called forth. (Auguste Comte, quoted in Harrisson 1895: xvii-xviii)

As is well known, Comte has been accorded an undisputed place in the history of sociology, largely on the basis of his *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, in naming the discipline and in being the first to outline the scope of the field so defined (Hoecker-Drysdale, 1992:124). But it seems pointless to state that Martineau is either absent in a vast majority of tributes paid to Comte as the founder of sociology or simply listed as a translator of his original text.

For obvious reasons, while in 1997, Harriet Martineau was news to me, she was by no means an unknown entity to a small but committed and active group of social scientists. In fact in the present, there is a substantial and critical body of secondary writings about the life and works of Harriet Martineau. This collection⁸ has been growing steadily since at least the 1960s (Wheatley, 1957; Webb, 1960; Lipset, 1962) and with

⁸ My listing of works here is by no means a complete one, but selectively highlights the range of disciplinary and substantive interests that an engagement with Martineau's writings and ideas have inspired over the last 45 years or so.

greater intensity through the 1970s and 1980s.⁹ The last fifteen years have seen a geometric increase and phenomenal interest in research initiatives and publications relating to Martineau, as a feminist thinker, activist, social thinker, theorist and methodologist,¹⁰ but this is still confined to a small, close-knit community of scholars. A close reading of the material I have listed reveals that Martineau's published work has stimulated a great deal of interest amongst students of American history, Victorian life in 19th-Century Britain, journalism, women's studies, religious studies, feminism and English literature. It would not be inaccurate to state that relatively less curiosity about her has been forthcoming from the general body of sociologists. Through the 1980s and 1990s, this has formed one important basis for reviewing and rethinking the mode in which the history of sociology has been written and reproduced, embedded in the broader critique of androcentric and patriarchal biases within the discipline.

The first moment of forgetfulness

A. Rossi¹¹ in 1973 and then S. Hoecker-Drysdale in 1992, referred to Martineau as 'the first woman sociologist.' In the years since this description was formulated, it has not found its way into the mainstream historiography of sociology. As has been pointed out by numerous scholars working in this field, the recorded history of the discipline is steeped in androcentrism (Deegan 1991, Hoecker-Drysdale 1992, Hill 1989, March 1982, McDonald 1993) such that it exclusively remembers, lists, records and reproduces contributions by male scholars. Martineau is but one name absent from a list of pioneering women social thinkers, who were present before the birth of sociology and

⁹ Prominent examples of works from this period include Rossi (1973), Deegan (1978, 1988), Hill (1987, 1989), Pichanick (1980), Reinhartz (1989), Riedesel (1980, 1981), Sanders (1986), Spender (1982), Terry (1983), Weiner (1983) and Yates (1985).

¹⁰ Some crucial path-breaking works are: McDonald (1993, 1994, 1998), Hoecker-Drysdale (1992, 1996, 1998, 2000), Deegan (1991), Hasset (1996), Hill (1998), Hunter (1995), Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1996, 1998, 2002), Hill & Hoecker-Drysdale (2002), Orazem (1999), Reinhartz (1992, 1993), Sanders (1990), Weiner (1991, 1996).

¹¹ It is interesting that apart from a handful of feminists in the 1970s and 1980s (Poovey, 1988; Rossi, 1973; Spender, 1982), Martineau has not been welcomed by too many contemporary feminists scholars. Part of the reason for this as argued by McDonald (1994) is due to the intense critique of empiricist methodology in feminist scholarship today. Empiricist, positivist approaches are today defined as being antithetical to feminist methodology and research and are thus rejected. Martineau, given her methodological principles and her self-definition as a woman of science, is caught in the web of such a rebuff. It is interesting to speculate on the fate of Martineau as a feminist thinker if empiricism were once again to become acceptable and legitimate either in broader sociological research or in feminist research specifically.

instrumental in contributing to the emergence of a new science of society. We know by now that this list is actually a long one, having been provided firm evidence of numerous other women thinkers, theorists and activists¹² who have been routinely left out and remain unmentioned in standard narrations¹³ of sociology's history, in particular its origins and foundations. This non-presence and non-recognition of women in the discipline's archives has been received with vivid, memorable and blunt imagery from critics. A. March (1982) speaks of this as 'female invisibility,' D. E. Smith (1987) evokes the notion of 'eclipsing' to signal the marginalization of women and female perspectives, while L. McDonald (1994) sees these female social thinkers and methodologists as 'missing persons' in the historiography of the social sciences.

Collectively this scholarship has highlighted what I label in this paper the 'first wave of forgetting,' i.e., the systematic omission of women social thinkers, theorists and methodologists from characteristic accounts of sociology and its origins, particularly as reflected in surveys of the discipline's founders and pioneers, carried in introductory and advanced sociology textbooks, encyclopedias, manuals and anthologies. This roughly takes us through the 1970s and into the early 1980s, evident in the standard commentaries in sociology textbooks and in course curricula pertaining to the beginnings of sociology, in introductory courses as well as the more advanced courses on social thought and social theory. Both the reasons for such neglect as well as its attendant consequences are numerous, and well-documented by now. The founders and pioneers of sociology are presented to students as 'great men of ideas,' 'founding fathers' and 'the great masters,' which are clearly gendered and masculinized accounts of sociology's history and its establishment. As has been pointed out by numerous others working in this field, the singular notice paid to male contributions conveys a limited, selective and distorted picture, and does not acknowledge the variety of actors (who also interacted with each other) and the roles they played in the formulation and founding of sociology. Ritzer and Goodman acknowledge and list a number of women who had an 'impact on the

¹² Some prominent examples include Harriet Taylor Mill, Jane Addams, Florence Nightingale, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jessie Bernard, Alexandra Kollontai, Pandita Ramabai Sarvasvati etc. See Deegan (1991) and McDonald (1993, 1994) for a comprehensive listing of such women thinkers and methodologists.

¹³ A survey of classical theory texts through to the late 1970s provides strong support for this observation. None of the following cite women thinkers or problematize the problem of androcentrism in recounting the story of sociology: Barnes (1948), Bottomore and Nisbet (1978), Coser (1977), Coser and Lewis (1982), Denisoff et. al (1974), Martindale (1960), Szacki (1979), Timasheff (1967) and Truzzi (1971).

development of sociology' (2003:9) and admit further the hand of gender discrimination, gender politics and patriarchal forms of domination in the subsequent marginalization of women's contributions to the field of sociological studies:

...their creations were, over time, pushed to the periphery of the profession, annexed or discounted or written out of sociology's public record by the men who were organizing sociology as a professional power base (ibid. 9)

Relating this generic observation specifically to Harriet Martineau, the silent treatment doled out to her in the chronicling of the discipline's history is indeed startling. More so because in the last two decades or so, a group of scholars have performed the painstaking and tedious work of 'recovery,' (McDonald 1994) to unearth, document and disseminate information about Harriet Martineau in an effort to get her 'off' the list of missing persons. From the 1980s to date, we have seen a steady and sustained interest in research projects and published material about Martineau's identity as a thinker, theorist and methodologist. Today a student potentially has access to details of Martineau's life, her ideas, her body of thought, her primary writings as well as a fuller explication of the context in which she was writing. There is slowly emerging a critical mass of writings about Martineau such that she can no longer be considered an unknown entity, and is far from invisible (Hill & Hoecker-Drysdale 2002, 3). On the basis of sophisticated analysis of a diverse body of evidence, the existing scholarship has demonstrated convincingly that it is indeed justifiable to regard Martineau as a social thinker and an important pioneering sociologist. This conclusion was anticipated decades ago by her biographer R. K. Webb who declared that for years Martineau was 'preaching sociology without the name' (1960:308), and A. Rossi in *The Feminist Papers* reaches a similar finale, 'Crusty, garrulous, a prodigious writer, forerunner of the discipline of sociology, not yet born, Harriet Martineau stands as an early ardent defender of women's rights, the first woman sociologist...' (1973:124).

While the neglect of pioneering women thinkers in the story of sociology's founding has been an important issue to highlight and critique, it is also timely to shift the contours of the discourse beyond this notice. Scholarship on Martineau needs to move beyond the realization and the assertion that she has been a marginalised thinker. I suggest three ways in which this move could begin to occur. First would be through a serious critical, substantive and theoretical engagement with Harriet Martineau's works

and ideas in an effort to generate a critical mass of secondary writings about her.¹⁴ For instance, in reflecting on Martineau's views on class, work, capitalism, democracy, freedom, colonialism and modernity, is it possible to abstract a coherent theory of society from her writings? As Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale note, 'In sum, Martineau's written corpus is a massive reservoir of astute sociological insight awaiting modern sociological critique and extension' (2002: 8).

Second, in historicizing her contributions to the discipline of sociology, it is further important to recognise that while she remained on the margins of the intellectual circle of would-be academics, she publicly and boldly articulated her views on the possibility of 'sociology,' 'moral sciences' and the 'social sciences'¹⁵ taking root as a disciplined mode of inquiry, alongside the natural sciences. In 1858, in letters to *The Spectator* and *Daily News*, in an era before the social sciences were codified and formalized, Martineau was already asking the question 'What is social science?' and more importantly, providing her own answers. Her criticism of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences (NAPSS) was that it did not operate with a rigorous definition and understanding of 'science' and was grounded in her belief that the 'moral sciences' and 'social sciences' must be based on the model offered by the natural sciences. She also envisioned it as having a practical agenda for reform, progress and improvement of society, not merely being concerned with abstract, philosophical speculation - something that Durkheim and other positivists would certainly have agreed with.

The third possibility lies in asking how our familiarity with and knowledge of Martineau makes a difference (if at all) to our reading of Marx, Weber and Durkheim (or other founders of sociology)? Our responses to this question must be based on further detailed study and would carry implications for the discipline as a whole beyond a specific concern with Martineau. But a tentative response is possible at this preliminary stage. Had I first encountered Martineau's political economy tales, like *The Rioters* and

¹⁴ This has already started to happen, an outstanding example being the 2002 collection of essays on Martineau edited by Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale.

¹⁵ It is not without significance that while not a member herself, Martineau followed closely the affairs and activities of the National Society for the Promotion of Social Sciences (NAPSS), established in 1857 'by members of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, who wished to study political economy, education, and social issues' (Hoecker-Drysdale, 1992: 135).

The Turn Out, I would have learnt that it is possible to learn the principles of political economy through fictitious tales, in addition to reading abstract, philosophical and theoretical tracts on the subject. The value of fiction and literature for conveying sociological ideas, and thus as a pedagogical tool, has not been pursued seriously amongst sociologists, but it was a tool Martineau used quite effectively and successfully, if also rather unintentionally.

The possibility of a second memory lapse

In 1994, Lynn McDonald notes with appreciation the rediscovery and restoration of women's contributions in the social sciences but poses this disturbing question, 'Welcome as the recovery of this lost or ignored material is, the question naturally arises as to whether or not it will all again disappear' (1994:239).

Inspired by this line of thinking, I have been prompted to assess what has happened to Harriet Martineau in the last three decades. What visibility and presence does she have in sociology? To address this question, I make one observation and pose one related query and introduce what I call the possibility of the second memory lapse with respect to Martineau. It is ironic that after some 20 years of sustained sociological and historical research on Martineau, in 2004, she still remains on the margins of the discipline, and her ideas are not viewed as constitutive elements of what is recognised as the sociological canon. It is intriguing to ask why this should be the case. The evidence for this neglect is abundant, and I suggest that this is not for want of accessible resources and information on Harriet Martineau.

In the midst of ongoing and intensive work to uncover and reveal the multifaceted sociological insights offered through an engagement with Martineau's writings and practice, I propose that for a variety of reasons, her name and contributions may at the same time be in danger of being forgotten once again. In the remainder of this paper, I outline the basis for making such an argument, by pointing to a set of contributing factors.

First, it is true that today Martineau does find mention in a number of sociology textbooks, some mere passing references and others more substantial. The fact that Martineau is now at least mentioned and present in some introductory sociology texts,

sociology theory texts and encyclopedias¹⁶ shows that some pressure has been brought to bear upon authoritative voices in the discipline, shifting the balance somewhat, but with much work still to be done. Here are some moves in the right direction. In Ritzer and Goodman's *Sociological Theory* (2003, 6th ed, International edition), an authoritative and popular book amongst students of sociology, Harriet Martineau is mentioned three times in the entire book, twice in relation to the 'work of a number of women in or associated with the field' (2003:9) and once in relation to Comte's work, 'part of which had been translated into English in the 1850s by Harriet Martineau' (ibid. 33). The fourth edition of Ritzer and Goodman's *Classical Sociological Theory* (2004) fares better, in including an entire chapter on 'Early women sociologists and classical theory: 1830-1930,' contributed by P.M. Lengermann and J.Niebrugge-Brantley. Hill (1998) notes that 'Martineau is now mentioned in more than a dozen introductory sociology textbooks' (in Hill & Hoecker-Drysdale, 2002: 18). The issue that needs attention here is more than whether these books merely mention and register her presence, but rather the mode and tone in which she is included. I share Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale's (2002:4) position on this:

Taking Martineau seriously demands more than honorific mention in introductory textbooks-no matter how salutary it is to add such a remarkable 'heroine' to the discipline's traditionally male-dominated founding pantheon. Martineau's work demands more than a genteel tip of the hat.

Also while women such as Harriet Martineau do now find mention in sociology textbooks that are otherwise dominated by a listing of male contributors, even within a single book, male and female thinkers are presented as, and exist, in separate and parallel streams. For example, in texts by Zeitlin and Ritzer and Goodman, separate chapters are devoted to Martineau, Comte and Durkheim, with little attempt to demonstrate intellectual interaction, influence and contact amongst the different players. Sections that discuss Comte's *The Positive Philosophy* make little or no reference to the role played by

¹⁶ Some prominent examples include *The Women Founders; Sociology and Social Theory 1830-1930* (1998) by P. M. Lengermann and J. Niebrugge-Brantley *Classical Sociological Theory* (3rd ed., 1996), edited by G. Ritzer, the theory text by Irving Zeitlin and *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists* (2000), edited by G. Ritzer. Others important publications still have a vacuum to fill- such as Bryan Turner's *Classical Sociology* (1999) which mentions neither pioneering women thinkers nor Martineau, G. Ritzer's *Sociological Beginnings; On the Origins of Key Ideas in Sociology* (1994) which is also silent on the contributions of women social thinkers prior to the institutionalization of the discipline.

Martineau in translating, and thus introducing, Comte's ideas to English reading sociologists. Durkheim's pioneering contribution is noted with the description of his *The Rules of Sociological Method* as sociology's 'first' methodological classic, without the awareness of Martineau's text on methodology which predates Durkheim's book by some six decades. There appears to be little interest in presenting a more integrated and nuanced account of various endeavors which collectively culminated in the formalized discipline of sociology. A rare recent example is, however, found in the Reader's Guide to the Social Sciences (2001, Volume 1), edited by Jonathan Michie. Here is how he locates Comte and Martineau's intellectual encounter and its historical significance for sociologists:

Comte's writings would have reached an English-speaking audience far later if it had not been for the labours of Harriet Martineau. She was the first person to translate and condense *The Positive Philosophy* into English. Although there have been recent efforts to re-establish her role as a premier "Comtean" of the 19th century, feminists have claimed that her contribution to the development of sociology has been underestimated, especially in the English-speaking world (2001:76).

A pulsating, synergized and complex history of how sociology came into being would emerge through more such accounts and if the efforts of different individuals were seen as multiple, contributing inputs.¹⁷ In ensuing renditions then it would be difficult if not impossible to omit some voices selectively while retaining others.

Second, the failure to notice is further possible because not only is Harriet Martineau absent from the historiography of the discipline, as set out in published materials¹⁸ that survey the field, define the sociological canon and disseminate the same, she also does not feature in too many undergraduate or postgraduate sociology course

¹⁷ Just a small example of this, in the course of researching Martineau I was quite excited to learn that Harriet Martineau and Ram Mohan Roy (who is one of the other thinkers we have introduced in our module) had met each other in London in 1831, the latter also being attracted to Unitarian principles. I am keen to pursue this meeting and ask if they had read each other, or communicated in any way or what they thought of each other's ideas. We know, for example, that given Martineau's interest in India, she had reviewed works of Roy in the *Monthly Repository* (Hoecker-Drysdale, 1992: 125, n 16).

¹⁸ Zeitlin's *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory* (1997, 6th edn) carries a chapter on Martineau (in addition to Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Taylor Mill). Osborne and Van Loon's *Sociology for Beginners* (1996) mentions Martineau thus: 'Anticipating much later feminist critique of sociology's masculine bias and approach, Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) published a work that had little impact at the time but became recognised as an interesting comparative analysis of social structure' (p. 29). Referring to the book *How to Observe Morals and Manners*, he adds, 'It was an early instance of what we might now call cultural studies, an important branch of sociology' (ibid. 29).

syllabi¹⁹ and curricula.²⁰ An early instance of incorporating Martineau into a teaching curriculum is provided in James L. Terry's piece 'Bringing women...In; A modest proposal,' where he states '...in the Principles of Sociology course that I have taught I boldly place Martineau at the side of Auguste Comte. To complete the sociological conjugal unit, she is presented as the 'mother of sociology' (1983: 258). It is significant that almost twenty years later Terry's example is still widely cited (Hill & Hoecker-Drysdale, 2002:11, 13) as a valiant, innovative attempt to teach classical sociology with a difference. Since this piece, not too many similar citations about including Martineau in inventive teaching are found in the published literature. It is telling that in 2002, the editors of *Harriet Martineau: Theoretical and methodological perspectives*, are still making an impassioned plea for 'Taking Harriet Martineau seriously in the classroom and beyond' (Hill & Hoecker-Drysdale, 2002: 3).

Third, there is a crucial gap between research on Martineau and the teaching of sociology's pioneering figures in the mainstream undergraduate curriculum. We know that by now there is a wealth of published and on-going research about Martineau in the field of women's studies, American History, English literature, social science methodology and theory and history of sociology. This is evidenced in a large number of books, articles, and critical commentaries published, and in the regular holding of seminars, conferences and workshops amongst interested scholars, who further established the Harriet Martineau Society²¹ in 1996. The Martineau 'supporters' constitute a committed group of active scholars who would be considered specialists who

¹⁹ This is based on my own observations of how sociology is taught in universities in various countries, and is grounded in anecdotal evidence, gleaned from conversations with colleagues teaching in such places as India, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, rather than a systematic survey of the field.

²⁰ We know that individuals who are working on Martineau also either teach courses relating to Martineau, or incorporate her in other teaching. Other examples include Michael Hill and Susan Hoecker-Drysdale. See (Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale 2002: 13-14), for a full discussion of how Martineau's work is incorporated by them in a variety of sociology courses.

²¹ The Harriet Martineau Sociological Society was formed in 1996 through the joint initiative of Michael Hill and Mary Jo Deegan, to 'encourage research and scholarly exchange on the sociological work of Martineau and other early women sociologists' (Lopata in Hill & Hoecker-Drysdale 2002: xvi).

research, write, publish and teach²² Harriet Martineau. But this is also a fairly small and concentrated group, some of whom have been working in this field for at least two decades. Presumably they also have been in a position to disseminate their interest and expertise to a group of students. But what about the larger body of sociology students and the faculty who teach them? How consistently and effectively is the research output from this group ‘fed back’ into mainstream teaching of sociology to undergraduates and postgraduates? The absence of such a feedback mechanism signals a crucial gap between research and teaching. This inhibits the dissemination of novel ideas (in this case about a forgotten pioneering social thinker and theorist) and thus their reproduction within the community of sociologists as commonsense knowledge eventually.

At this stage, these are some factors which suggest that information and engagement with Martineau’s works and ideas have not entered mainstream sociological discourse and practice, hence her continued location on the periphery of the discipline, if not outside it. This is a function of marginalizing not just a thinker but also the vast scholarship *about her* that has been produced in the last 20-30 years. In my assessment then, Harriet Martineau today is not entirely unknown but yet a peripheral entity. This observation carries magnitude for the shape of the discipline today and in the future, a theme which I touch upon in the next and final section of this paper.

Where do reflections on the ‘possibility of forgetting Martineau’ come to rest?

At a substantive level, this paper is explicitly about Harriet Martineau, a woman social thinker, theorist and methodologist who has for too long been absent from mainstream accounts of sociology’s origins and development. But on another more essential plane, my discussion of the once forgotten figure of Martineau (and now maybe twice) comes to rest on a number of broader problematics in the discipline.

²² The decision to include Martineau in a teaching curriculum is fraught with other kinds of dilemmas, which I have myself experienced but which I view as ‘technical’ difficulties, which can be overcome. These include the lack of easy access to teaching materials (including primary materials) and teaching resources (secondary writings and critical commentaries) as most library collections are weak in these areas, while the prohibitive cost of relevant books (which being out of print and circulation are few in number and thus have to be secured at exorbitant prices) makes it impossible for students to easily secure them. In the course of teaching Martineau at NUS, I have tried to order the necessary books for the library and have ended up building my own private collection through self-funding.

In the course of teaching Martineau in the last few years, I have presented her as an important ground-breaking figure whose ideas and thoughts were instrumental in shaping a discourse about the potential for understanding society through science, in an era long before sociology was systematized and formalized. In the module that I co-teach at the department with a colleague, we have introduced Martineau together with Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Jose Rizal, Ibn Khaldun, Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati and Ram Mohan Roy as examples of social thinkers, located in diverse socio-cultural and political settings, who grappled with the experience and impact of modernity (Alatas & Sinha, 2001). This re-thinking has had important consequences for my own education as a sociologist, in revisiting the foundations of my discipline, in taking me back to a set of basic questions, which assume even more significance for me in the present.

As all students of sociology know, there is a body of writings recognized as the sociological canon and a 'must read' list of theorists. This is typically formed through drawing up a catalogue of individuals whose ideas and writings are deemed to be classic works for the discipline. Why is it that even today someone like Martineau (and numerous others like her) continues to hover on the margins despite ample knowledge of her various accomplishments and contributions? I am led to ask the following questions: What are the criteria by which the discipline recognizes social thinkers and theorists? This attention to selection standards assumes paramount importance when 'new' candidates are considered. How is this select list of acceptable theorists generated? We all know of 'non-sociologists' from Tocqueville, to Marx, to Freud, to Mead, to Foucault, who have been appropriated as sociologists and granted honorary entry into the discipline's canon. Many of the aforementioned figures were working in a context that pre-dates the formalization of sociology, were thus not trained as sociologists and neither did they see themselves as such. Yet on the basis of interpretation of their works, and abstraction of sociological thought from the corpus of their writings, they have been claimed as 'one of our own' by future generations of sociologists.

This experience of trying to include Martineau in the course on social thought has been invaluable in making me think explicitly about the logic, rationale and historical process by which the sociological canon is constructed and how it notes and marks some individuals as social thinkers but not others. Amongst practising sociologists, this subject

has remained part of the discipline's condensed knowledge pool for too long and consequently received scant overt attention. Some sociologists have, however, been transparent about their selection criteria for recognizing sociology's pioneering figures. George Ritzer supplies us with an example in his text, listing three criteria for including theories, which must have (a) a wide range of application, (b) deal with centrally important issues and (c) have stood up well under the test of time, that is they must continue to be read and be influential (2004:6). By this definition, would not the ideas of someone like Martineau qualify? If Martineau (or someone else) has not been read, is it a function of the substantive and intellectual demerit/limitation of her writings or could that be due to other factors? The good thing about such lucidity is that it allows a number of possibilities for further deliberations about the criteria used in practice. (1) An appraisal of these criteria is crucial - are they adequate, meaningful and comprehensive? (2) Are they uniformly, consistently and accurately applied? (with Martineau I would argue that they are not) (3) If the criteria are limited and problematic, should they be discarded and alternatives sought? Responses to these questions have implications for the very definition of sociology, about which there is no consensus amongst all practitioners anyway. D. E. Smith provides us with a rather different way of looking at the discipline: 'Sociology is systematically developed consciousness of society and of social relations' (in Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004: 272), which appeals to me, and which is used by these two authors to construct their list of early women founders of sociology. Other feminist scholars have proposed that in addition to an emphasis on written works, action/practice/activism be used as another gauge for abstracting social thought. My purpose in raising the issue of criteria is to call attention to the process by which the boundaries of the discipline are maintained, to make a case for greater self-consciousness and reflexivity on the part of practitioners. My position is that a taken-for-granted acceptance of prevailing lists and measures (when and if articulated) inadvertently serve as gate keeping mechanisms of new ideas and entrants, which at least partly accounts for Martineau's location on the fringes. Clearly I am not suggesting that there should be no criteria at all. Neither am I saying that one should settle for anything less than rigorous, critical and systematic assessment of works and ideas. Rather I have tried to make a case for the need to reflect on criteria-in-use, and to consider others that may be more relevant

and broader in scope, rather than unreflexively accept those that are steeped in specific and unique historical and cultural experiences, and which are then universally applied²³.

Fundamental revisions in the canon of any discipline require what Kuhn calls paradigmatic shifts, rooted in the very rethinking of the discipline in question. My intention in highlighting the presence of a sociological canon is less about wishing it away, and more about pushing its boundaries. Having acknowledged and demonstrated Martineau's marginalization within the historiography and practice of sociology does not necessarily lead to passivity and inertia. Anticipating the likelihood of women thinkers and methodologists fading once again, McDonald asks, what can be done 'to prevent another slide into oblivion' (ibid. 242)? Part of the responsibility, she argues, rests with 'institutions to promote women's studies,' and she lists universities, university presses and funding agencies as examples of such institutions. This is where my approach differs from McDonald's (but would add to her suggestions), since I am a great believer in the role played by individual agency, initiative, choices and practices (Sinha 2003). In my assessment, the various institutions listed by McDonald are today driven more by agendas other than intellectual and do not have an interest in asking basic questions of a pedagogical or disciplinary nature. Although a canon exists, it is possible in practice, particularly in the realm of university teaching, to question it and to raise critical issues for debate. Admittedly, a range of structural constraints can derail individual agency. But speaking from personal experience of having tried something different, I have found the classroom setting within the university to be an ideal environment, where I have yet to be told what and who I can teach in the theory module. Comments and criticism from colleagues like 'Why are you teaching so and so? He/she is not a real sociologist' are a real possibility, and indeed one to be welcomed because it opens the door to engagement, discussion, critique, debate and dialogue. In this sense I do think of teaching both as a form of advocacy and of activism. Also, barring the presence of an oppressive academic

²³ A good example is the invocation of the term 'classical,' which obviously lends itself to a variety of context-dependent meanings. Speaking of a classical age in the European case would alert us to a different time frame and historical experiences than talking about it in other parts of the world.

setting and the politics of academia²⁴, one does not need to wait for a green light from the 'authorities' before acting. My own approach has been to say that if I am convinced about introducing a particular figure, on the basis of sound argumentation and evidence, I would make a case for a serious consideration. Rather than rely on institutions to take a lead, my view is that it is more instrumental for practitioners of the discipline to act, adding my voice to James Terry's in highlighting the crucial role played in this rethinking project by 'teachers, researchers and writers' (1983:259). Personally, I have found undergraduate teaching to be a particularly appropriate arena for introducing new ideas, while also familiarizing students with what is presently considered essential knowledge in the discipline. Listing Martineau alongside Marx, Weber and Durkheim, assigning her primary works to be read and criticized in tutorial discussions, setting term projects and exam questions on her ideas, are important steps in the right direction.

There is no room in my argument for the suggestion that all sociologists must now include Harriet Martineau in their teaching or must do research on her because she is the 'best' or ideal social thinker. This call would be as oppressive and dogmatic as her omission has been so far. Having made acquaintance with her, I have had my own reasons for pursuing this awareness. Namely my interest in androcentric biases within classical sociological theory, in the issue of Eurocentrism (given Martineau's views on British rule in India) and in Durkheim's methodology, are all pivotal points for my engagement with Martineau's works. Martineau is but one example of a social thinker who has been marginalized, neglected and forgotten, who has subsequently been recovered and is now being read. For different reasons, other such unknown figures may be more appealing to other sociologists. The larger argument I wish to make via my attention to Harriet Martineau is in the recognition that the tapestry of contributions to social thought and theorising is enormous and multifaceted, emanating from multiple

²⁴ In this paper, I have not dwelt upon the question of politics in the academy based on ideological difference, a factor which is certainly real and crucial in accounting for the inattention to figures such as Martineau. But it is equally important to acknowledge the role of habitual and unreflexive acceptance of received wisdom in such a neglect. Certainly with regard to including a list of women social thinkers, non-European or European contributors as part of the canon, scholars have noted apathy, indifference and resistance to even seriously considering the merits of this suggestion. What is most problematic here is not the presence of a canon in sociology but rather its habitual, automatic and unthinking perpetuation by practitioners who have routinely not raised critical questions about inherited traditions and their continued relevance in the present.

sites and via a variety of different actors. My aim is to expand the playing field rather than restrict it, and I thus stand with Hill when he says that 'Our discipline grows stronger from inclusion and dialogue, not from exclusion and silence' (2002:191). Furthermore, I do have reservations about generating yet another 'must read' list of thinkers. The concern here is more about opening the door to a serious consideration of a larger pool of potential contributors to sociological theorising *in addition* to existing names. There are no doubt numerous others like Martineau, men and women, located in different societal contexts – both European and non-European - and time-frames, whose contributions and insights for sociological theorising have for too long gone unnoticed in narrating a history of the discipline. It is time this lack of attention was problematized and *acted upon* by its practitioners.

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