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Harriet Martineau
Authorship, society and empire

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Liberalism has been faulted for its pretense to universality – for Uday Singh Mehta, writing in *Liberalism and Empire* (1999), liberalism’s constitutive intolerance toward difference marks it as fundamentally exclusionary and domonatory. Yet, as Jennifer Pitts has argued in *A Turn to Empire* (2002), liberalism ‘does not lead ineluctably either to imperialism or anti-imperialism.\(^1\) Rather, whereas liberals such as James Mill and Thomas Babington Macaulay were committed to an anglocentric imperial civilizing mission, eighteenth-century precursors such as Adam Smith were relatively tolerant pluralists who saw colonialism as a retrograde mercantilist policy. What historical conditions explain the nineteenth-century turn toward an imperial civilizing mission? Although the presumption of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority is clearly part of the answer, a point richly elucidated by historical accounts such as Antoinette Burton’s *Burdens of History* (1994) and Catherine Hall’s *Civilising Subjects* (2002), the most self-consciously liberal justifications for Empire eschewed a biological category of race.\(^1\) Thus, while theories of racial essence gained ground throughout the nineteenth century, liberal imperialists such as Mill and Macaulay, by and large, opposed them. The abstract human subject they promulgated derived from the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse of political economy.\(^4\) By such lights nurture not nature was the key to civilizing subjects and *homo economicus* could, in theory, be fashioned from working-class Britons, emancipated African slaves, or the ‘Oriental’ subjects of imperial tutelage and world trade.\(^5\)

In our own day, as liberalism’s warrant for equality has been extended beyond the nineteenth century’s overt exclusions – with identifiably liberal rights granted to the descendants of slaves and many colonized peoples, as well as many women and members of the working classes – critics have begun to identify tolerance rather than intolerance as liberalism’s characteristic virtue and signal weakness. Thus, in *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (2006), the political theorist Wendy Brown argues that tolerance does not so much rein in oppression of pre-existing difference as naturalize and
even produce the very differences it protects.\(^6\) As a liberal governmentality, tolerance justifies political complacency, stigmatizing those who refuse to privatize their difference in conformity with a public sphere ruled by the homogenizing norms of tolerance. Brown’s critique of liberal tolerance thus takes us full circle. If for Mehta and Pitts, imperialism’s champions are those adamant universalists who openly ruled in the name of Westernization, for Brown, it is tolerant pluralists, in league with neoliberalism’s laissez-faire and free trade agendas, who fuel the neoimperialism of today.

To be sure, the troubling modes of liberalism I have described – Mehta’s Western universalizers, the pro-imperial racialists described by Burton and Hall, and Brown’s superficially multiculturalist enforcers of a tolerance regime – derive from a long history including a first empire predicated on New World slavery and its abolition, a second empire in which territorial conquest was often disguised as a relation of trade, and, finally, our own officially decolonized era of neoliberalism and the rise of multinational corporations, world trade agreements and global finance. Nonetheless, my point in this chapter is not only to suggest that these diverse liberal ideologies represent historically and geopolitically distinct aspects of a centuries-old and still ongoing capitalist globalization that has taken many forms, but also – and perhaps more surprisingly – that Harriet Martineau, in some fashion, exemplified every one of these positions. A renowned politico-economic popularizer, abolitionist and feminist, Martineau is not generally remembered as an ‘imperial feminist’ (to use Burton’s term) or ‘imperial woman’ (to adopt the term Hall uses to describe male globetrotters such as Anthony Trollope).\(^7\) But Martineau’s multi-faceted career, I shall argue, illuminates the geopolitical embedding specific to liberal discourses in their multiple forms.\(^8\) The following chapter visits three examples of Martineau’s oeuvre: first, the pressured universalism of *The Hour and the Man*, her 1841 romance of the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L’Ouverture; second, the tolerant pluralism she urged in *How to Observe Manners and Manners*, her ethnographic treatise of 1838; and, third, in her later career as a journalist and political pundit, the analyses of ‘Eastern barbarism’ she forwarded during the Crimean War and in the wake of the Indian rebellion.\(^9\) The end of such comparison is not merely to document the shifts from one phase of liberalism to another but also to illustrate the embedding of liberal idioms in geopolitical situations that vary across space as well as time. Historicizing Martineau’s prolific liberal discourse entails contrasting black Atlantic and South Asian locations, abolitionist and feminist rhetorics, as well as Enlightenment and Victorian-era temporalities.

One useful way of approaching these permutations is as a complicating instance of the connection Clare Midgley has identified between women’s anti-slavery writing and the pro-imperial feminism it helped to inaugurate. According to Midgley, early British feminists, from Catherine Macaulay in 1790 to John

Stuart Mill in 1869, produced a ‘triple discourse of anti-slavery’.\(^10\) Such writers, that is, repeatedly compared the subjection of British women to three variations of ‘slavery’ outside metropolitan borders: not only the chattel slavery of Africans in the Atlantic, but also the ‘slavish position of women’ in so-called savage societies, and the ‘enslavement’ of women in harems under ‘Oriental despotism’. By describing women’s inequality as a retrograde feature of British modernity, akin to outdated and non-Western forms of oppression, early feminist discourses helped consolidate the sense of Western superiority which came to underpin Victorian notions of Britain’s imperial civilizing mission.\(^11\) On this view, the nineteenth-century alliance between feminism and abolition resulted in a self-consciously liberal pro-imperialism that justified British rule on grounds of culture and, eventually, race.

But Martineau’s works complicate this connection between liberalism, abolitionism, feminism and imperialism. As we shall see, feminism’s drift from anti-slavery to pro-imperialism was driven by the imperatives of contemporaneous geopolitics including the increasing British investment in far-flung empires of conquest. Whereas colonies in North America and Australia could gratify the English ideal of an empire of trade and settlement which was ‘Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free’, the growing geopolitical importance of South Asia, a densely populated subcontinent unsuited to British emigration, required a different vision of England’s world-historical role.\(^12\) If, in the early nineteenth century, the ideology of free trade imperialism continued to promise the rapid spread of Anglo-Saxon economic and cultural norms through settlement and commercial empire, by the 1840s (and even more after the Indian rebellion of 1857–58), the notion of the imperial civilizing mission proposed long-term British tutelage as the liberal face of territorial conquest.\(^13\)

This new temporality, I suggest, was the most palpable sign of the ongoing changes within liberalism’s geopolitical conditions of possibility. Just years after abolition, a decelerated vision of liberal progress – from the fast-acting assimilation of free trade discourse to the prolonged pupilage of imperial rule – began to influence British views of the Caribbean as well as South Asia. Whereas the optimistic abolitionist rhetoric of the 1830s had predicted smooth transition from slave emancipation ‘to the heights of Englishness’, the accounts of slow-going black assimilation which emerged in the post-abolition era foreshadowed the eventual mainstreaming of biological racism.\(^14\) This decelerated liberal temporality complicates the alliance between feminism, anti-slavery and imperialism in two ways, both of which Martineau’s writings illustrate. First, the slower pace of progress imagined in the post-abolition era meant that aspiring feminists faced a conservative political climate; second, the increasing tendency to justify long-term colonial rule saw liberals upholding a pro-imperial ideology at odds with either liberal universalism or liberal pluralism. As we shall see, Martineau’s imagination of Africans in the Atlantic world contends, by and
large, with the first dilemma while her later effort to represent the role of Asians and Asian culture in world history contends, primarily, with the second.

In Society in America (1837) Martineau embraced the slow temporality of Victorian liberalism even as she opposed biological theories of race and espoused radical political ideals. Although she pinpointed the gaps between the principles and practice of U.S. democracy, her response was to affirm a middle-class 'romance of improvement' – depicting universal progress as a long historical unfolding. As Hayden White has remarked, liberalism of this sort imagines a utopian social structure only to project such change into 'the remote future, in such a way as to discourage any effort in the present to realize it precipitately.' Nonetheless, what bears special notice is how the same decelerated temporality that prescribed patience for Britain's male workers and long-term rule for the colonized also implied a slower emancipation for British women than had been possible for Caribbean slaves. Martineau's life-long identification with Haiti's liberator must be understood through this prism. For whereas Martineau's writings on India after the 'Mutiny' indicate her susceptibility to pro-imperial forms of liberalism, earlier feminist-abolitionist works like The Hour and the Man reflect a more complicated historical matrix, suggesting Martineau's ability to discern Haiti's rebellion as a 'tropicopolitan' event. According to Srinivas Aravamudan tropicopolitans such as Toussaint L'Ouverture were simultaneously of and alternative to the European Enlightenment and, thus, able to 'interrupt' Europe's monological historical narratives. For the same reason, I suggest, Martineau's identification with Haiti's legendary black Spartacus interrupted the developing alliance between feminism and imperialism.

**Harriet Martineau and Toussaint L'Ouverture**

In an 1840 review of The Hour and the Man, an anonymous writer notes that it was the second novel in a year in which a black hero triumphs 'over the pale... children of Europe.' If such premature idealization was demonstrably 'fantastical', it was still possible to praise Martineau for her 'faithful' historification. For while the Toussaint depicted in Martineau's book cannot have been 'a born slave', he is not, the reviewer explains, a 'natural' protagonist but, rather, an 'impersonation of Duty'. Thus, having at first suggested that liberated slaves required years of reconditioning before they could play the part of heroes, the review ends by claiming Toussaint as the ideal subject of a 'universal' history.

In doing so, the Athenaeum's review unwittingly identifies aspects of Toussaint's story which entail tropicalization of the Enlightenment. According to Haitian legend, Toussaint learned of his destiny when he read a famous passage in the Abbé Raynal's 1770 encyclopedia, the Histoire des deux Indes. There Europe was warned of a so-called black Spartacus, a 'great man' who would appear among the slaves to lead them in 'raising the sacred flag of liberty.' Like Midgley's feminists, the metropolitan revolutionaries who read such catechisms invoked them for their own ends. Linking their own political disenfranchisement to slavery, they ignored the contradiction between their professed universalism and the French republic's maintenance of slave-holding colonies. Haiti's insurrectionists thus challenged the revolutionary zeitgeist in which they participated. Tropicopolitan agency is predicated precisely on such doubling – facilitating but also challenging the self-valorizing cosmopolitanism of the metropole. As a tropicopolitan, Toussaint was both the black Jacobin of C. L. R. James's account and a revisionist of Europe's Enlightenment. Tropicopolitanism thus illuminates Martineau's lifelong interest in Toussaint by helping to elucidate the politics she exemplified in the years after she rose to fame as the author of the Illustrations of Political Economy (1832–34).

The premise of Society in America, Martineau's pioneering proto-sociological study of 1837, is to 'compare the existing state' of democracy in the United States with the principles on which it is professedly founded. Although the work repeatedly draws analogies between the condition of women and slaves, it does not simply demand the status of citizens for both oppressed groups. Whereas emancipation in the Caribbean had foreshadowed the coming liberty of slaves in the United States, prompting Martineau to advise slave-owners to study the 'the state of Hayti', the equalization of women's rights was as yet futuristic and, thus, subject to the vagaries of a temporized universalism.

Hence, Martineau's feminism takes the form of an individualized romance of improvement. Women's equality will materialize 'sooner or later' when the moral power of the 'noblest' exemplars will at long last take effect. Through this elongated temporality, Martineau figures female emancipation as a distant outcome, providentially sanctioned but actuated romantically through individual self-development.

As Martineau later recalled in her Autobiography, her first inclination upon completing her study of the United States was 'to draw [the] glorious character' of Toussaint L'Ouverture. Just as Society in America proffers individual female virtue as the eventual cure for flawed democracy, so The Hour and the Man begins by narrating the romance of improvement of the enslaved Afro-Caribbean. When we first meet Toussaint he is even more patient than a middle-class feminist – a devout Catholic, practised Stoic, and devoted family man convinced that the slave's duty is 'to bear and forbear'. Destined to impose strict discipline on a revolutionary people, Toussaint begins by subjecting himself to the authority of France, Spain and the Catholic priesthood.

Martineau's contemporaries by and large approved this depiction of black restraint, even while registering a lingering scepticism. Where the Athenaeum's review affirmed the character's 'impersonation of Duty', a bemused Thomas Carlyle – soon to pen his notorious essay on the so-called Negro question –
wrote that Martineau’s Toussaint was as ‘Beautiful as a child’s heart’. In figuring Toussaint as a force for order, Martineau contested the pro-slavery tracts that argued that blacks were ‘un fit for freedom’ while countering the increasing tendency to regard abolition as a social and political failure. Nonetheless, it is worth asking what it meant to turn the leader of an Afro-Caribbean slave rebellion into a subject of universal history. Or to write a history of a rebellious slave that even a virulent racist like Carlyle could tolerate. In representing the ‘man’ as a born quietist, disciplinarian and pattern of Western virtues, did Martineau mule the ‘hour’? Did her mode of telling of Toussaint’s story defuse what Michel-Rolph Trouillot has described as Haiti’s challenge to an ontology in which the self-determined acts of slaves remained unthinkable?

From the perspective of Midgley’s analysis, the answer is clearly yes. The Hour and the Man is the product of an era when ‘black emancipation’ had become ‘the marker of Britain’s status as the most progressive Western nation’. Treating Afro-Caribbean difference as a reversible environmental effect, Martineau depicts assimilation to British middle-class norms as the apparent endpoint of human equality. ‘I... must confess’, wrote one contemporary admirer of The Hour and the Man, ‘that in all the striking scenes I entirely forgot [the] complexion’ of the protagonists ‘and drove the notion of it from me as often as it occurred’, Whiteness operates for Martineau’s reader as a transparent marker of universality against which the black skin he ‘forgets’ stands uniquely for ‘complexion’. If, in this respect, The Hour and the Man is a fertile plea for inclusiveness, it is no plea at all for tropicalization or the recognition of cultural difference.

Yet, as I have also suggested, Martineau’s embrace of Haiti’s uprising is inseparable from – and, thus, in tension with – the individual self-improvement she advocated for middle-class women like herself. As a feminist, her turn to Toussaint’s ‘glorious character’ was clearly an effort to eclipse the political quietism of Society in America. Thus, where the abolitionist Martineau sought to whiten her Haitian hero in defense of Enlightenment universalism, the feminist Martineau could perceive the doubleness of the tropicopolitan – a figure able to bridge liberalism’s alternately revolutionary and evolutionary temporalities.

The climax of Martineau’s narrative occurs when the hour confronts the man, impressing revolutionary conditions on the self-disciplinary archetype. When Toussaint learns that France, now a republic, has offered to emancipate the slaves who fight under its flag, he abandons the royalist cause and declares:

[T]here may be periods of time when changes are appointed to take place among... nations, and even among races... [A] common man may then be called to devote himself for that nation, or for that race... I feel that the hour may be come for the negro race to be redeemed; and that I, a common man, may so far devote myself as not to stand in the way of their redemption.  

Called forth by world-history, Toussaint at last becomes the black Spartacus. Although Martineau continues to admire his power to discipline the Haitian people, the Toussaint she depicts nonetheless achieves a revolutionary agency that the depoliticized middle-class feminist cannot – bringing the self-determination of black slaves into the realm of the thinkable.

If, as a white abolitionist, Martineau’s aim was to Westernize the Afro-Caribbean Spartacus, as a feminist woman, subject to patriarchy, her most ardent wish was to tropicalize herself. In the years after 1841, Martineau increasingly focused on non-fictional genres, articulating a pioneering set of social-scientific practices. In her Autobiography, she portrayed this calling in language that echoes Toussaint’s world-historical role: ‘Things were pressing to be said; and there was more or less evidence that I was the person to say them.’ Caught in the conflict between her radical ideals and her middle-class allegiance to the romance of improvement, Martineau perhaps imagined herself as the hero of an alternative narrative – call it ‘The Hour and the Woman’ – in which female tropicopolitanism takes the form of a social-scientific savoir called forth by modern exigencies.

To be sure, Martineau’s use of Toussaint to constitute her own feminist agency might anticipate the relation, as interpreted in Gayatri Spivak’s well-known essay, between Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason in Charlotte Bronte’s 1846 novel. Yet Martineau’s Toussaint is not, like Bertha, an Africanized Creole, but, rather, a male Jane Eyre – a great domesticator and civilizing agency like Bronte’s governess. When the self-determining acts of Afro-Caribbeans enter European consciousness – as when G. W. F. Hegel’s reading about the Haitian revolution prompted him, according to Susan Buck-Morss, to elaborate a dialectic of lordship and bondage – tropicopolitan agency is manifestly potent. I suggest that in comparable fashion, Martineau’s identification with tropicopolitan doubleness interrupted her middle-class romance of improvement.

Evoking a Toussaint who both is, and is more than, a Europeanized subject, Martineau’s narrative of Haitian rebellion engages the conundrums of a temporalized post-Enlightenment liberalism. As the black Spartacus, Toussaint figures self-discipline as the successor to liberatory insurrection, creating an imaginative space for the white middle-class feminist to negotiate her desire for the collective politics she has renounced. Moreover, as tropicopolitan, Toussaint is the persistent placeholder in Martineau’s thought for a cultural otherness she struggled to recognize through the competing liberal terms of abolitionist universalism and cultural pluralism – a subject to which I now turn. In both ways, The Hour and the Man provides a glimpse outside the trajectory that saw British feminism serving imperialism’s increasingly racialized geopolitical ends.
'The greatest conflict that the human race has yet witnessed'

Of course, as an ethnographic pioneer, Martineau has been singled out for her remarkable reflexivity and anti-ethnocentrism. In How to Observe Morals and Manners, her most ambitious methodological work, Martineau noted the 'infinite ... diversities in man' and articulated ethnographic principles aimed toward 'escape[ing] the affliction of seeing sin wherever [one] sees difference.' In doing so, she tasked the ethical observer not simply to tolerate or ignore difference, but respectfully to attend it.

Did Martineau practise what she preached? According to Michael R. Hill, Society in America is 'a remarkably sophisticated, reflexive sociological study' that eschews ethnocentric comparisons between Britain and the United States, while expanding its scope beyond the privileged terrain of 'elite, white, male informants'. Likewise, John Barrell writes that Martineau's account of Ancient Egyptian religion in Eastern Life Present and Past (1848) is 'a model for the mid-nineteenth century of how to conduct the discussion of cultural difference'. Yet, as Barrell further argues, Eastern Life goes on to reproduce conventional Victorian fears of the 'Oriental' other. His remarks point to the split in Martineau's writing between the author whose commitment to African universality remained steadfast in the post-emancipation era, and the far less equilibrarian figure who emerged, almost contemporaneously, around imperialism and the Eastern Question. It is not primarily a biological conception of race which explains this contradiction but, rather, the decelerated liberal temporality that coincided with growing British investment in an expanding territorial empire in South Asia. The structuring fissure in Martineau's global imaginary is not, therefore, a racial difference between black and white — and, thus, not Afrophobic — but, rather, a geopolitically organized spatio-temporal difference between East and West (which could entail racial features). This explains why though Martineau admired Toussaint throughout her life, and could depict him as a world-historical figure without reservation, in later years when the 'political question[s] of the hour' were the Crimean War and the Indian rebellion, she depicted Russians and South Asians in non-self-determinative terms — as the victims of 'Asiatic' despotism.

In the Hour and the Man, Martineau's ethnographic pluralism occasionally asserts itself against the Eurocentric logic of abolitionist universalism. The novel glimpses at a nascent Haitian hybridity even while its ultimate vision is the Enlightened tropics. Nonetheless, such inability to translate pluralist ethics into a more fully 'postcolonial' fiction does little to explain Martineau's strident writings on the Eastern Question. Indeed, from the perspective of either How to Observe Morals and Manners or The Hour and the Man, Martineau's diagnosis of a world-historical clash between 'Asia and Europe', with the former embodied in an 'Asiatic' Russia, seems like a bolt from the blue: a Manichean worldview unrelieved by the moderating ethics of pluralism or universalism. Paradoxically, the same assimilationist assumptions that enabled Martineau to regard former slaves as co-participants in the diffusion of Western principles, could also underwrite her belief in the entrenched stationariness of contemporary Asia. Thus, where The Hour and the Man projected Afro-Caribbean progress through the heroic agency of an Enlightened Toussaint, in 1855, in the midst of the Crimean War, Martineau closed her autobiography with an 1849 letter forecasting 'the greatest conflict that the human race has yet witnessed', a war between East and West that 'no man now living will see the end of.'

Martineau's West is the fount of an ongoing project of freedom, from the Magna Carta, the Mayflower, and the French Revolution, to contemporary libertarianist movements in Italy and anti-slavery in the United States. By contrast, Russia is the site of a nefarious 'Eastern barbarism': an empire determined to 'extend despotism' and reduce its own people 'to a brute machine'. Predicting world-scale challenge, Martineau expects retrograde powers such as Rome and Austria to ally with Russia in the coming contest 'between despotism and self-government'. Under such conditions, even 'the most peace-loving liberals must be pitched for battle since they can hardly be sorry that the time has come for deciding ... whether the Asiatic principle and method of social life are to dominate or succumb'.

In the years leading up to the Crimea, Martineau remained true to this vision of an ongoing war on despotism. Her hawkish calls for battle with Russia were notable in their emphatic break with the pacifism of the free trade position. At a time when John Bright and Richard Cobden remained firm in opposing war, Martineau used her leaders in The Daily News to lambaste the Aberdeen administration for its reluctance to uphold the 'cause of Liberty'. Unlike less bellicose liberals, she did not appear to recognize that Britain entered the Crimean conflict not to defend freedom against the Tsarist East, but to safeguard its geopolitically crucial routes to India. A consistent believer in progress, Martineau predicted that abolishing slavery would anticipate collective ownership of land: 'The old practice of Man holding Man as property is nearly exploded among civilized nations; and the analogous barbarism of Man holding the surface of the globe as property cannot long survive.' Ironically, she did not perceive how such ideals were compromised by endorsement of a foreign policy promoting territorial empire in the name of advancing freedom.

In fact, like many mid-Victorian liberals, Martineau hardly acknowledged the existence of a territorial empire. Only with the outbreak of rebellion in 1857 did she begin to account for an imperial presence that she, like much of the Victorian public, had tended to disavow. Britain's 'feetling in India', she wrote in 1858, was unlike colonial settlement in North America, since it 'began and extended without the national cognizance'. Hence, 'India is no colony of ours',
she declared, and the question of whether India ‘shall be ruled by the British Government’ was a ‘tremendous problem’ that had yet to be addressed. As Deborah Logan notes, Martineau’s ‘post-Mutiny’ writings were implicated in the awkward endeavour of discussing an imperial ‘relationship while denying that one existed’.53

Like her Russophobicallydiscourse on the Crimean War, Martineau’s post-1857 writings on India were neither universalistic nor pluralist. Her initialresponse torebellion was to fire off an ‘incendiary’ series of leaders in the Daily News.54 In British Rule in India (1857), a supposedly reflective study of the broad facts of Anglo-Indianhistory, Martineau claimed that British efforts to introduce anti-racist policies in India had been thwarted by ‘the bottomless chasm which yawns between the interior nature of the Asiatic and the European races’.55

For the most part, however, Martineau affirms the anglicization agenda of the East India Company, insisting that the apparent barbarity of South Asians is a mutable condition that will improve under continued British influence. Contesting the assertion of a racially incorrigible Indian proclivity to falsehood, she insists that ‘Slaves are liars all the world over’.56 Yet, while Martineau, by and large, reproduces the environmentalism of her writings on Africans, there are important differences. In Suggestions towards the Future Government of India (1858), she not only elongates the timeframe for South Asian improvement—adopting the decelerated temporality she had refused in narrating Toussaint’s story—she also, at various points, waffles between environmentalism and racial essence.57 Moreover, the ‘slavery’ she describes as underlying the Indian condition is not a dialectical struggle like that between Africans and Europeans in Haiti, but, rather, the effect of an Asian despotism from which British rule is cast as liberating. Martineau is more deceptive here than was Macaulay when, in 1833 — evoking the quicker temporality of the early-Victorian period — he described the imperial relation as a short-term British despotism through which empires’ ‘slaves’ would soon be transformed into capitalism’s ‘customers’.58

As apologies for imperialism, Martineau’s post-1857 writings on India are anxious and contradictory. If, at times, she harks back to ethnography, demanding sympathetic understanding of the colonized, at other points, her reluctance to mingle East with West, recalls the apocalyptic tenor of her Crimean rhetoric: ‘Never was there a more difficult case — never a more portentous conjunction in human history, than this arbitrary coexistence of the European and Asiatic genius on the same soil.’61 Clearly, what began as amercantile adventure has morphed into a long-term civilizing mission that Martineau can neither deny nor wholeheartedly embrace. British rule is thus cast as viable and necessary but also precarious. Indians are improved and improvable but also ‘incomprehensible’ on cultural, if not necessarily racial, grounds.62 Martineau, on the one hand, touts the mutual benefits of what she continues to present as a relation of trade, and on the other, identifies the British as an occupying power ready to hunker down for ‘a guerilla war of many years’.63 Though she is, as ever, a woman ready for the hour, the so-called mutiny of rebellious sepoys has exposed the limits of her pluralism.

Conclusion

Underlying the difference between Martineau’s Afro-Atlantic and Asian imaginaries is the geopolitical split between two variations on the liberal narrative. On the one hand, Martineau continued throughout her life to hallow the free-trade universalism that had flourished in the 1830s — a vision in which emancipated Africans joined Britons in globalizing Western commerce and culture. The high point of such universalism occurred at the close of ‘Demerara’ (1832) an early political economy tale, in which Martineau depicted Liberia as a land in which freed slaves will ‘make their own laws, guard their own rights’, and be ‘citizens’.64 As Thomas C. Holt explains, the path from such supposedly abstract universalism to racialization could be all too direct: since abolitionist discourse was premised on the rapid assimilation of Africans, it could be highly intolerant of the differences that arose.65 Yet, Martineau, by and large, remained loyal to her universalistic conception of Africans, heroizing Toussaint in The Hour and The Man and, twenty years later, writing passionate pleas for abolition in the National Anti-Slavery Standard. If her work fell short of anticipating the tropical countermodernity today’s scholars find in the black Atlantic, she, nonetheless, demonstrated what universalism could contribute to anti-racial politics.

How telling, then, that the same woman who fought for African citizenship, insisted that Indians were not yet fit for self-government.66 Writing for a US audience in 1861, Martineau likened Northern tariffs to Southern slavery and upheld free trade as a ‘science’ that should not be ‘bound by time or place’; only England, she declared, had actuated this creed by ‘free[ing] both person and industry’.67 Clearly, Martineau saw no contradiction between England’s supposed universalism and the barbarous particularity she herself alleged to justify domination in Asia. Liberalism’s geopolitical divisions had seemed to render blacks, for Martineau, as the essence of human malleability while conjuring Asians to the ‘waiting-room of history’.68 Where Africans could testify to emancipation and, thus, the perfectibility and universalizability of Western civilization, Asians stood for the incorrigible aspects of human culture which must be eradicated by exceptional means.

From the vantage of hindsight (at a time when scholars across the disciplines still work to reconcile pluralist and universalist ethics), it is easy to see that Martineau’s pioneering efforts toward a respectful ethnography conflicted with her investment in a Eurocentric project of global modernity. Yet, both pluralism and universalism contradicted the geopolitical imperatives of a capitalist-driven
imperial expansion. Persuading themselves that colonialism could be ethical and progressive if its ultimate purpose were to turn 'slaves' into 'customers', mid-Victorian liberals such as Martineau increasingly embraced a profoundly illiberal imperial civilizing mission, even as they sought to war against enemies within Europe. As the exponent of this imperial romance of improvement, Martineau ceases in any fashion either to heed her own ethnographic principles, or admire the self-determination of tropical subjects. If she steers clearly mainly free of the racialism that pervaded later feminisms, there is no more hint of a South Asian Spartacus to inspire her than of respect for cultural difference in her anti-Russian diatribes. Her prescient clash with the 'Clash of Civilizations' is an object lesson for today.

Notes

1 Uday Singh Mehta, Liberalism and Empire: A Study in British Thought (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
5 Here I am making a key distinction between racism (a belief in hierarchies of biological "races") and racism (discrimination toward non-whites whether resting on such belief or, alternatively, on belief in mutable hierarchies of culture).
7 Burton, Hall, Civilising.
8 Historians such as Andrew Sartori and Manu Goswami have emphasised the need to describe the socio-historical – and, I would add, geopolitical – conditions of possibility which account for transformations across and within multi-faceted discursive configurations such as liberalism. See Andrew Sartori, 'The British Empire and its Liberal Mission', Journal of Modern History, 78 (2006), 623–42 and Manu Goswami, "Rethinking the Modular Nation Form: Toward a Sociohistorical Conception of Nationalism", Comparative Studies in Society and History, 44 (2002), 770–99.
10 Clare Midgley, 'Anti Slavery and the Roots of Imperial Feminism', in Gender and Imperialism, ed. by Clare Midgley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 161–79 (p. 166).
11 Ibid., pp. 166, 176.

13 Although territorial empire in India had been gaining in perceived geopolitical importance since the loss of American colonies, the subsequent expansion of empire in South Asia created ongoing problems for liberal ethics, producing disavowal and the cliché of (so-called) absent-minded imperialism. See H. V. Bowen, 'British Conceptions of Global Empire, 1756–83', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 26 (1998), 1–27 and Lauren M. E. Goodlad, 'The East India Diamonds and "The Great Parliamentary Bore"', in The Politics of Gender in Anthony Trollope's Novels, ed. by Margaret Markwick, Deborah Deenerholz Morse, and Regina Gagnier (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 95–112. Before the rebellion, it was common for Victorians like Martineau to regard India not as a colony (a term primarily used to describe white settlement in temperate zones such as Australia), nor even as part of an empire so-called, but as a 'dependency', Suggestions Towards the Future Government of India, in Harriet Martineau's Writings on the British Empire, ed. by Deborah Logan, 5 vols (Brookfield: Pickering & Chatto, 2004), V, p. 178.
15 The phrase 'romance of improvement' originates in the work of Patrick Joyce where it describes middle-class political conservatism after the 1832 Reform Bill, Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Extending Joyce's ambition to incline the transnational contexts of abolition and imperialism, I use 'romance of improvement' to express how the enfranchised middle classes tended to temporalize – and, thus, attenuate – the Enlightenment ideal of universal progress. See also Patrick Brantlinger, The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1812–1867 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977). Of course, as a middle-class woman, Martineau was not herself enfranchised, a point of some importance.
18 'Review of The Hour and the Man', Athenaeum, 5 December 1840, p. 958.
19 Ibid., pp. 958–9.
20 Ibid., p. 959.
21 Quoted in Aravamudan, p. 301.
24 Martineau finds American slave-owners to discern their own prospects in recent Caribbean history, inquiring with precision what is the state of Hayti; ... what the emancipation really was there; what its effects actually are', ibid., I, p. 357.
25 Ibid., II, p. 259.
26 Autobiography, ed. by Weiner, II, 212. Martineau’s diary passage for Jan. 15, 1838 describes the sudden inspiration to write on Toussaint as ‘Probably... the greatest day of my year’, excerpted in Maria Weston Chapman, Memorials of Harriet Martineau, in Appendix to Autobiography, ed. by Weiner, II, p. 334. As Laura Callanan notes, the Haitian revolution was a double-edged sword for abolitionism since it confirmed white fears of black insurgency as well as abolitionist claims for universal freedom. Deciphering Race: White Anxiety, Racial Conflict and the Turn to Fiction in Mid-Victorian English Prose (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p. 23. See also Robin Blackburn, ‘The Black Jacobins and New World Slavery’, in C. L. R. James: His Intellectual Legacies, ed. by Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), pp. 81–97. Haiti’s proclamation of independence in 1804 was, as David Geggus remarks, ‘extraordinary’: ‘The wealthiest planter class in the Americas had been destroyed by its own, predominantly African slaves, who in twelve years of desolating warfare had defeated every European army that had been sent against them’, Haiti and the Abolitionists: Opinion, Propaganda and International Politics In Britain and France, 1804–1838, in Abolition and Its Aftermath: The Historical Context, 1790–1916, ed. by David Richardson (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 113–40 (p. 113). Yet, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot shows, the West’s response to this world-historical event was silence, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997). For all of these reasons, Martineau’s decision to tell Toussaint’s story rather than write on post-abolition British locales such as Jamaica was remarkable.


29 The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1834–1872, ed. by Charles Eliot Norton, 2 vols (Boston, 1883), I, p. 318. Carlyle was not, of course, persuaded by Martineau’s universalistic depiction: she had, he complained, made a ‘beautiful “black Washington”... of a rough-handed, hard-headed, semi-articulate gabbling Negro’. Ibid. Yet one imagines that Carlyle would not have been amused by a less Europeanized depiction of Toussaint. On Carlyle and Toussaint see also Cora Kaplan, ‘Black Heroes/White Writers: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the Literary Imagination’, History Workshop Journal, 46 (1998), 33–62. Carlyle’s infamous essay, a harbinger of the turn toward racism, was first published as ‘Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question’, Fraser’s Magazine, 40 (1849), 670–9.


31 Midgley, p. 166.


33 Likewise, the 1819 Quarterly Review article that inspired Martineau to write on Toussaint argued that racial ‘colouring’ is ‘but skin-deep’; yet it goes on to say that a century’s exposure to new climates and habits will ‘untwist the negro’s hair’, ‘lengthen his nose’, ‘pare down his lips, and blanch his skin’. Past and Present State of Haiti, Quarterly Review, 21 (1819), 430–60 (pp. 432–3). Racial traits may be skin-deep, but the upshot of such superficiality, is the presumptive ontological priority of the European phenotype.

34 Hour and the Man, I, pp. 145–6.

35 Autobiography, ed. by Weiner, I, p. 188.

36 Fittingly, Caroline Roberts and Deborah Logan have adopted variations on the Toussaint-inspired phrase to entitle their recent studies of Martineau. Logan’s book is The Hour and the Woman: Harriet Martineau’s ‘Somewhat Remarkable’ Life (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002).


39 Martineau’s self-heroization, as when she predicts that ‘The Hour and the Man will do a world of good to the slave question’, is inseparable from her firm belief that Toussaint’s story is uniquely heroic in its character. Chapman, p. 334. This emphasis on Toussaint’s heroism marks the difference between Martineau’s intense identification with Haiti’s liberator and the kind of abolitionist text which trumpets white succour at the expense of black agency. Thus, Callanan rightly notes how Martineau’s writing diverges from female abolitionist classics such as Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852) in allowing its black hero ‘to retain revolutionary agency’, p. 28.


42 Michael R. Hill, ‘A Methodological Comparison of Harriet Martineau’s Society in America (1837) and Alexis de Tocqueville’s Democracy in America (1835–40)’, in Harriet Martineau: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives, ed. by Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale, pp. 59–74 (p. 73).


44 Harriet Martineau, Suggestions, p. 175; Autobiography, ed. by Weiner, II, p. 431. Space does not permit a sustained dialogue with Barrell’s essay which explores the disturbing moments in Eastern Life in which Martineau, disgusted by aspects of modern Egyptian culture, likens Egyptians to animals. Barrell uses psychanalytic theory to describe this tendency to bestialize Egyptians as an ‘unofficial’ complement to the official rhetoric of the civilizing mission, ‘Death on the Nile’, p. 203. Although the idea of racial fantasy does indeed illuminate such passages, it does not explain the marked political differences between Martineau and more consistently racist thinkers, nor the equally marked difference between Martineau’s African and Asian imaginaries. In the terms of my argument, racial fantasy may either complement or extend beyond geopolitical inputs, but geopolitical inputs are never wholly reducible to racial fantasy.
Toussaint's milieu is described as 'a curious medley of European and African civilization, brought together amidst the ruins of a West Indian revolution', a passage Callanan reads as representing 'the new hybrid Haitian culture that is Toussaint's goal', Hour and the Man, I, p. 277; Callanan, p. 37.


Ibid., II, p. 451. Martineau's anticipation of 'long and bloody warfare' is all the more remarkable for being written in 1849, more than a year before the friction between France's Napoleon III and Russia's Nicholas set in motion the events that led to the outbreak of war in 1854. Ibid., II, p. 454.

Ibid., II, pp. 451–2.


Writing in 1853, Martineau contrasted John Milton's heroic 'summons' to the battle with despotism, to a contemporary milieu in which 'securely old gentlemen write' wordy . . . cabinet notes, while there is not a day to lose', ibid., p. 151. In her expanded 1865 edition of the History of the Thirty Year's Peace she continued to defend a war that many contemporaries remembered in light of British military incompetence, describing the 'so-called Peace party' as medlinsome Quakers who had inadvertently encouraged Russia; History of the Peace Being a History of England from 1816 to 1854, 4 vols (Boston: Walker, Wise, 1865), IV, p. 590. By contrast, Cobden held to the position that free trade was antithetical to a foreign policy dictated by upper-class investments in war, empire, and the balance of power; see Richard Cobden, Speeches on Questions of Public Policy, ed. by John Bright and James E. Thorold Rogers (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 187 as well as Peter Cam, 'Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden', British Journal of International Studies, 5 (1979), 229-47, and Anthony Howe, 'Richard Cobden and the Crimean War', History Today, 54 (2004), pp. 46-51.


Suggestions, p. 178.

Harriet Martineau, 'Introduction to Suggestions', Harriet Martineau's Writing on the British Empire, V, p. 170.

Logan, 'Introduction' in Harriet Martineau's Writing on the British Empire, p. xin.

Harriet Martineau, British Rule in India: A Historic Sketch, in Harriet Martineau's Writings on the British Empire, V, pp. 8, 142.

Harriet Martineau, 'Understanding India', in Harriet Martineau's Writings on the British Empire, V, 260. The same 'devilish cruelty' displayed during the rebellion, she insists, has been manifested by 'every outbreak of a half savage conquered people' – including 'white men and Christians'. Notably, while Martineau counts Haiti (St Domingo) among her examples, she is careful to explain that mulattoes, not negroes, were responsible for most of the cruelty there. Suggestions, p. 221.

Discussing the supposedly 'constitutional vices' of Indians, she concludes that 'lust . . . may probably be implicated with a basis of race, though mainly due to training', while insisting that 'falsehood' and 'treachery' are universal attributes of the 'oppressed' and the 'weak'. A few sentences later, she strikes a decidedly more provisional note: 'If we are ever to learn whether there is, between us and races of,

Hindostan, any of the family relation of humanity, we must give them scope to show what they are and can do. It is for them to prove their capacity, intellectual and moral; but it is for us to afford them the opportunity', Suggestions, p. 221.


Suggestions, p. 192.

Ibid., p. 182.

Suggestions, p. 262.


Thus, writes Holt, the 'large scale economic failures following emancipation – failures attributed to the blacks' refusal to work – fueled racist thinking and imperialist ambitions. When ex-slaves chose to define the content of their freedom in apparent opposition to market forces, they became themselves vulnerable to redefinition as a different kind of human being'. The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 309. When Martineau succumbs to such racialization of Africans it is generally, as Cora Kaplan shows in Chapter 12 in this volume, in direct contact with the abjection of slaves, especially female slaves. Martineau's inability to tolerate proximity to actual slaves without lapse into racist representation is yet another index of the fissure within the abolitionist's assimilative universalist imaginary – the flipside of her need to imagine Toussaint as a European

For advice on earlier versions of this manuscript I am indebted to Nninnivas Aravamudan, Cora Kaplan, Ellis Durrenian, David Wayne Thomas, and to the members of an Illinois program for Research in the Humanities seminar on 'The South'.


59 Suggestions, p. 192.

60 Ibid., p. 182.

61 'Understanding', p. 262.


63 Thus, writes Holt, the 'large scale economic failures following emancipation – failures attributed to the blacks' refusal to work – fueled racist thinking and imperialist ambitions. When ex-slaves chose to define the content of their freedom in apparent opposition to market forces, they became themselves vulnerable to redefinition as a different kind of human being'. The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 309. When Martineau succumbs to such racialization of Africans it is generally, as Cora Kaplan shows in Chapter 12 in this volume, in direct contact with the abjection of slaves, especially female slaves. Martineau's inability to tolerate proximity to actual slaves without lapse into racist representation is yet another index of the fissure within the abolitionist's assimilative universalist imaginary – the flipside of her need to imagine Toussaint as a European

64 See, for example, Suggestions, p. 179.


66 Harriet Martineau, quoted in 'Fighting', p. 53.