

WOMEN'S POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE POPULARIZATION OF MALTHUS  
IN ENGLAND, 1815-1835

by

CHRISTOPHER ROSS SIMMERMAN

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of History  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
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Master of Arts

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Women's Political Economy and the Popularization of Malthus, 1815-1835

In England during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, women wrote popular texts of political economy. A major function of those texts was to popularize the thought of prominent political economists. This thesis compares the writings of four female popularizers—Maria Edgeworth, Jane Haldimand Marcet, Harriet Martineau, and Margracia Ryves Loudon—to those of the political economist Thomas Robert Malthus. Three subjects are considered: population, the Poor Laws, and the Corn Laws. This thesis argues that Edgeworth, Marcet, and Martineau distilled Malthus' principle of population into didactic literature; that Marcet and Martineau popularized Malthus' anti-Poor Law arguments while supplementing them with original contentions and later advocating for the reforms of the New Poor Law; and that Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon argued in favor of abolishing the Corn Laws in spite of Malthus' protectionism. Female popularizers thus had an ambivalent relationship with Malthus' political economy.

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For my family.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present thesis is three-fold: (1) to illuminate women's contributions to political economy in early 19<sup>th</sup> century England; (2) to examine the thought of the eminent political economist Thomas Robert Malthus; and (3) to assess how the two relate to each another.

The first aim is attended to because in spite of the growing body of specialized literature devoted to the study of women in classical political economy, the perception that the discipline was solely a male enterprise remains strong. By contrast, this thesis demonstrates that women were integral contributors to political economy through the production and circulation of knowledge. Invariably, this came in the form of the popular text, whether literary or nonfiction. The popular text presented its subject matter in terms simple enough to be readily deciphered by the average reader. With minimal jargon, the style of the popular text typically resembled the common conversation of the society in which it was generated. The popular text's content was intended to illustrate or append the principles contained in theoretical political-economic treatises. As a result, the most successful popular texts tended to be best-sellers, read by larger audiences than more complex literature.

An examination of Malthus' political economy is in order because it continues to be influential to modern historians. In English demographic history, a Malthusian approach currently dominates the field. The demographic historians E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield analyze England's population history through a Malthusian paradigm in their

*Population History of England 1541-1871*.<sup>1</sup> The work remains the standard account of England's historical demography despite being published nearly four decades ago. More recently, the economic historian Kenneth Pomeranz has invoked the political economy of Malthus to explain the shared economic constraints characterizing England and China's Yangzi Delta circa the year 1800.<sup>2</sup> Both Wrigley and Schofield's and Pomeranz' work make Malthus' political economy pertinent to the modern historian.

Three avenues of inquiry are selected to compare the political economy of British women to that of Malthus: population, the Poor Laws, and the Corn Laws. The three subjects were fiercely debated in England during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Overall, this thesis argues that women's political economy had an ambivalent relationship with that of Malthus. Women popularized his principle of population in didactic literature written to influence the behavior of children, adolescents, and adults. They also popularized his anti-Poor Law arguments in popular texts, but appended them with original arguments and later advocated for reform incompatible with Malthus' abolitionism. Finally, they contradicted Malthus' protectionism by arguing unequivocally for the abolition of protective tariffs on imported grain. The reasons for such a sharp break with Malthus' thought on the Corn Laws are explored in this thesis' concluding chapter.

The four women this thesis examines are: Maria Edgeworth, Jane Haldimand Marcet, Harriet Martineau, and Margracia Ryves Loudon. All studied political economy

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<sup>1</sup> E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1971: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> See Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

at a time when women were barred from receiving higher educations. Brief biographies are in order to establish this thesis' protagonists.

## **Maria Edgeworth**

Maria Edgeworth was born on January 1, 1768 at Black Bourton, Oxfordshire, in England. Her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, was of Anglo-Irish descent. He was relatively absent from her early childhood. Maria spent her first five years with her mother, Anna Maria Elers, at the family home while her father traveled elsewhere. Maria's parents had an unhappy marriage, and subsequent to her mother's passing in 1773, Richard remarried after only four months.<sup>3</sup>

Richard Edgeworth's second marriage to Honora Sneyd significantly changed Maria Edgeworth's life. Honora and Richard's attention was with one another, and as a result they paid little notice to Maria. When they took Maria to visit Edgeworthstown, the family estate in County Longford, Ireland, she became very disheartened. Death was frequently on her mind during this period and she languished in misery. Despite being versed in the latest theories of childhood development, Richard and Honora proved incompetent in handling their young daughter's needs. They sent her to a boarding school in London after two years.<sup>4</sup>

During her time in boarding school, Edgeworth markedly changed as she attempted to become closer to her parents. She regularly corresponded with both, wanting

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<sup>3</sup> Claire Denelle Cowart, "Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849)," in *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*, ed. Alexander G. Gonzalez (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 109.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

their approval and wishing to ameliorate her behavior towards them. Subsequent to Honora's death in 1780, Richard Edgeworth married his deceased wife's younger sister Elizabeth Sneyd. Elizabeth's relationship with Maria was better than that of her previous step-mother, and she became substantially happier. When she returned to Edgeworthstown in 1782, Maria became her father's bookkeeper and secretary while also educating her growing number of siblings. Richard Edgeworth married a total of four times and fathered 22 children. In 1798, Richard married Frances Beaufort, who was a year younger than Maria. The two women became close friends and confided in each other regularly.<sup>5</sup>

Maria Edgeworth drew upon her experience raising her siblings in her initial publications, which were devoted to child education. Her first work was *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), followed by *The Parent's Assistant* (1796). Next was *Practical Education* (1798), which was co-authored by her father. It combined the educational theories of John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Day, William Godwin, Joseph Priestley, and Catharine Macaulay.<sup>6</sup> Soon Maria graduated to writing fictional works such as the immensely popular and critically acclaimed *Castle Rackrent* (1800).<sup>7</sup>

Her most famous novel, *Castle Rackrent* satirized contemporary Irish landowners. In writing the work, Edgeworth drew upon the history of her own family. Chronicling the history of the Rackrent estate, the novel describes abhorrent mismanagement by absentee landlords who squander the Rackrent family fortune. The moral of the novel stressed the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 109-10.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 52.

<sup>7</sup> Cowart, "Maria Edgeworth," 110.

need for better management by Irish landlords. Maria looked to her father for the qualities of the responsible landlords for whom she calls. He had positive relationships with his tenants, and—rather than rely upon rent-seeking middlemen—directly participated in the estate’s management. Unlike Ricardo, who stressed the law of diminishing returns, Maria Edgeworth believed that effective management and agricultural science would raise crop yields and reduce food prices. In consequence conditions in rural Ireland would improve and political turmoil would be quelled. In Edgeworth’s paradigm, the interests of the landlord were in harmony with those of the rest of society.<sup>8</sup>

Despite being published anonymously, *Castle Rackrent* brought Edgeworth fame and praise from contemporaries. Her reputation put her into contact with prominent public figures of the time during her extended trips across Britain and continental Europe. These included Malthus, Ricardo, Marcet, James Mill, Francis Horner, Henry Brougham, J. C. Sismondi, Elizabeth Hamilton, Lord Byron, Etienne Dumont, and Walter Scott, among others.<sup>9</sup> Of Ricardo, Maria wrote that she

never argued or discussed a question with any person who argues more fairly or less for victory and more for truth. He gives full weight to every argument brought against him, and seems not to be on any side of the question for one instant longer than the conviction of his mind of that side. It seems quite indifferent to him whether you find or truth, or whether he finds it, provided it be found.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> William Kern, “Maria Edgeworth and Classical Political Economy,” Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession Newsletter, American Economic Association, Winter 1998, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110725212131/http://www.cswep.org/edgeworth.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.; Cowart, “Maria Edgeworth,” 110.

<sup>10</sup> Piero Sraffa, ed., *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 10:168-9.

Rather than expounding upon Ricardo's theories, Maria Edgeworth's quintessential literary exposition of political economy was an illustration of Adam Smith's division of labor. It was a short story for children entitled "The Cherry Orchard," detailing how the subdivision of tasks entails a gain in overall efficiency.<sup>11</sup> About the story, Marcet wrote that if mothers "could convey [to their children] such lessons of political economy as Miss Edgeworth gives in her story of the Cherry Orchard, no one I should think would esteem such information beyond the capacity of a child."<sup>12</sup>

After the death of her father in 1825, Maria Edgeworth wrote sparingly. By this time her fame had dwindled, and she mostly contented herself with the affairs of the family estate. During the Great Famine of the 1840s, she threw herself into the relief effort. She successfully appealed to the United States and England for aid, relieved farmers with grain, and supplied large numbers of the poor with shoes. Maria died of a heart attack in Edgeworthstown on May 22, 1849.<sup>13</sup>

### **Jane Haldimand Marcet**

Jane Haldimand Marcet was born on January 1, 1769 to the Swiss citizen Anthony Francis Haldimand and the Englishwoman Jane Pickersgill. The oldest of ten children, she was raised in London where her father had amassed a fortune from banking and real-estate development. She was educated in the household and was taught the same subjects as her brothers according to Swiss custom. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was among

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<sup>11</sup> Maria Edgeworth, "The Cherry Orchard," in *Early Lessons* (London: R. Hunter, 1815), 1:248-78.

<sup>12</sup> [Jane Haldimand Marcet,] *Conversations on Political Economy; in Which the Elements of that Science are Familiarly Explained* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Cowart, "Maria Edgeworth," 110.

the materials from which she was taught. When Jane was 15, she experienced a sudden end to her childhood as her mother died while giving birth. Her father subsequently required Jane to oversee the household and entertain guests at large parties. At these gatherings, which quickly became meetings of the London intelligentsia, Jane met her future husband Alexander Marcet, a Swiss physician residing in London.<sup>14</sup>

After ending an engagement with a cousin due to disapproval from her father, Jane found herself single at 30 years old. Yet she was attractive to suitors as she stood to inherit a large fortune from her father's banking activities. In contrast to the prevailing custom at the time, Jane's father allowed her to pick from the men according to her fancy. Alexander Marcet presented his case to Jane and she subsequently accepted his marriage proposal. After a short engagement, the two married in December of 1799.<sup>15</sup>

Jane's ties with the London financial community were strengthened when in the 1810s her younger brother William Haldimand became the youngest ever director of the Bank of England. Because of her financial ties she came into contact with Ricardo, whom she hosted regularly during discussions of contemporary monetary policy. A frequent topic of discussion at that time was the Bullion Controversy. Jane Marcet, William Haldimand, and Ricardo all maintained that the Bank of England should restore the convertibility of bank notes into gold to combat inflation. Soon after the Bullion Controversy, the subject of the Corn Laws became intensely debated by parliament and

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<sup>14</sup> Bette Polkinghorn, "Jane Haldimand Marcet (1769-1858)," in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women Economists*, eds. Robert W. Dimand, Mary Ann Dimand, and Evelyn L. Forget (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2000), 281; Bette Polkinghorn and Dorothy Lampen Thomson, *Adam Smith's Daughters: Eight Prominent Women Economists from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998), 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



was inevitably a topic of conversation at the salon in Jane's household. It is likely that Jane formed many of the opinions she expressed on the Corn Laws during this time. She came to the conclusion that more widespread knowledge of political economy would go far to improve the situation of the nation. She thus wrote and anonymously published *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816), a series of dialogues outlining the principles of political economy. Despite being expressly written for adolescents, it was read by many adults. As we will see in chapter two, it was critically acclaimed and universally praised.<sup>16</sup>

Jane's second work of political economy was published 17 years after the first appearance of the *Conversations*. After labor unrest in the English countryside in the fall of 1830, the new work was commissioned to educate workers in the fundamentals of political economy. The work was published anonymously as *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy* (1833), a collection of short stories centering upon the agricultural worker John Hopkins and his large family.<sup>17</sup> Like the *Conversations*, it was critically acclaimed. The prestigious *Edinburgh Review*, for example, praised the work: "Mrs. Marcet has resumed her valuable labours in the unpretending little volume which heads our article. It is delightfully written, and is admirably adapted, by plain and straightforward sense, for its virtuous purpose, the improvement of the laboring

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 284.

classes.”<sup>18</sup> *John Hopkins’s Notions on Political Economy* was successful enough to go through at least three editions.<sup>19</sup>

Eighteen years would pass between *Hopkins’s Notions* and Jane’s final book on political economy, *Rich and Poor* (1851).<sup>20</sup> Perhaps because it was written for children, it remains understudied to the present day. Regretfully, the present thesis does not examine the work in any depth. It is a slim work, constituting a total of only 75 pages. It is set in a rural village in which the schoolmaster Mr. B. teaches a group of boys lessons in political economy. Labor, profits, capital, machinery, price, wages, trade, money, and banks are all covered. The work’s main contention—the harmony of interests between all classes—is reiterated ad nauseum. It appears to have nothing to do with Malthus’ political economy.

Jane wrote a plethora of other introductory works on subjects ranging from Christianity to Chemistry to Botany. In the vein of Maria Edgeworth, she authored several collections of children’s stories. By the end of her life, Jane Marcet authored a total of 30 books. At the age of 89, she died on June 28, 1858 in her daughter and son-in-law’s London home.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Unsigned review of *John Hopkins’s Notions of Political Economy*, by the author of *Conversations on Political Economy*, and *Illustrations of Political Economy*, by Harriet Martineau, *Edinburgh Review* (April 1833), 2.

<sup>19</sup> [Jane Haldimand Marcet,] *John Hopkins’s Notions on Political Economy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1834).

<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Marcet, *Rich and Poor* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1851).

<sup>21</sup> Polkinghorn, “Marcet,” 285.

## Harriet Martineau

Born in Norwich on June 12, 1802, Harriet Martineau was the sixth child out of eight of Elizabeth Rankin Martineau and Thomas Martineau, a textile manufacturer. Her family was Unitarian and Harriet was initially educated in the household, where her eldest brother taught her Latin. In 1813 to 1815 she attended a school run by the Reverend Isaac Perry. After Perry departed from Norwich, Martineau's studies were confined to the household.<sup>22</sup>

Harriet was a sickly child and suffered from various ailments as a youth. Her progressive deafness began during the years she attended school in Norwich. Her other senses were impacted by her health and she claims to never have been able to taste or smell. She began to read philosophy while under the influence of the Unitarian minister Lant Carpenter, whom she met while at her maternal uncle's Bristol home in 1817. Her first literary contributions were articles submitted to Unitarian periodicals about religion.<sup>23</sup>

Her family faced serious financial difficulties during the crisis of 1825, and the death of her father one year later eventually propelled Harriet into a writing career out of necessity. She entered a literary contest held by the Central Unitarian Association in 1829 that gave prizes for worthy essays meant to convert those of other religious persuasions. The association awarded Harriet with 45 guineas, which she used in 1831 to visit her brother James Martineau in Dublin. There she formulated a plan to write a series of

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<sup>22</sup> Evelyn L. Forget, "Harriet Martineau (1802-76)," in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women Economists*, eds. Robert W. Dimand, Mary Ann Dimand, and Evelyn L. Forget (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2000), 294.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

fictional tales intended to illustrate the principle of political economy. She had learned the science principally from Marcet's *Conversations* and James Mills' *Elements of Political Economy*. She initially struggled to find a publisher, but eventually came to an arrangement with Charles Fox to publish the series. *Illustrations of Political Economy* began to be published in February of 1832 and by the tenth of February the first edition of 1500 copies sold out. Fox subsequently printed 5000 more to meet demand.<sup>24</sup>

In total the series had twenty-five installments. It became a best seller, as the installments sold 10,000 copies per month. However, critical reception was unequally divided on the *Illustrations of Political Economy*. For the most part the periodical press was favorable towards the series. John Stuart Mill gave the summary volume a positive review, writing that "as an exposition of the leading principles of what now constitutes the science, it possesses considerable merit."<sup>25</sup> *The Edinburgh Review* particularly commended "Ella of Garveloch," "Weal and Woe in Garveloch," and "A Manchester Strike:" arguing that the three "are so beautiful in their poetry and their painting, and so important in their moral, that, were we to begin to praise them, we should not know where to stop."<sup>26</sup> And yet, as noted in chapter two, Martineau's reputation was considerably damaged after the anti-Malthusian political economist George Poulett Scrope gave the series an extremely negative review in the ultra-Tory *Quarterly Review*. Nevertheless, public figures viewed the series in a better light. Princess Victoria and the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge eagerly anticipated each new installment. Richard Cobden

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 294-5.

<sup>25</sup> [John Stuart Mill,] "On Miss Martineau's Summary of Political Economy," *The Monthly Repository* 8 (1834), 321.

<sup>26</sup> Unsigned review of *John Hopkins's Notions of Political Economy*, by the author of *Conversations on Political Economy*, and *Illustrations of Political Economy*, by Harriet Martineau, *Edinburgh Review* (April 1833), 26.

gave the series public support, and Robert Peel sent a letter of congratulations to Martineau. Robert Owen unsuccessfully petitioned Martineau to illustrate his social theory in literary form.<sup>27</sup>

Martineau wrote the *Illustrations of Political Economy* while in her early thirties, and never returned to the subject of political economy afterwards. She remained a prolific writer, authoring many novels and nonfictional works throughout the rest of her days. In her private life she was devoted to philanthropy despite the limitations of her income. Like Maria Edgeworth, she never married. She died on June 27, 1876 at the age of 74.<sup>28</sup>

### **Margracia Ryves Loudon**

Unfortunately, the details of Margracia Ryves Loudon's life are very scarce. Her date of birth is estimated to be 1788 at her family's estate of Castle Ryves in County Limerick, Ireland. She was probably a Unitarian. Her own literary works were preceded by that of her mother, Frances Catherine Ryves. In 1812 the elder Ryves published *Cumbrian Legends; or, Tales of Other Times*, a poetic narrative inspired by a visit to the Lake District in 1806.<sup>29</sup> Upon the death of her father in 1817, Margracia moved with her sisters and mother to Bath in the county of Somerset, England. The family soon sold the Castle Ryves estate. Margracia married the Scottish physician Charles Loudon, he thirteen years her junior, at the age of 42.<sup>30</sup> Charles was a fervent opponent of Malthus, arguing against

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<sup>27</sup> Forget, "Martineau," 295; Polkinghorn and Thomson, *Adam Smith's Daughters*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Polkinghorn and Thomson, *Adam Smith's Daughters*, 27; Forget, "Martineau," 296.

<sup>29</sup> Mrs. Ryves, *Cumbrian Legends; or, Tales of Other Times* (Edinburgh: T. Allan, 1812).

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 5-6.

the political economist's views on population in a small pamphlet of 1836 and a large book of 1842.<sup>31</sup> In 1846, after the death of Charles and while living in Paris, Margracia wrote to the British Prime Minister Robert Peel requesting she be considered for a pension. The request was not granted, as the letter arrived shortly after Peel resigned on June 29, 1846 subsequent to repealing the Corn Laws.<sup>32</sup> Margracia appears to have converted to a communitarian form of socialism in her later years, as her novel *Maternal Love* (1849) advocated for common ownership of the means of production.<sup>33</sup> The relevant passages from the novel were excerpted in Robert Owen's *Journal* in 1851.<sup>34</sup> Margracia died in Cheltenham ten years later.<sup>35</sup>

Margracia released five novels,<sup>36</sup> three political treatises,<sup>37</sup> and a number of articles in her lifetime.<sup>38</sup> All remain understudied. The work of Margracia's which this

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Loudon, *The Equilibrium of Population and Sustenance Demonstrated* (Leamington-Spa: John Fairfax, 1836); Charles Loudon, *Solution du problem de la population etc de la subsistence; soumise à un médecin dans une série de lettres* (Paris: A. et W. Galignani, 1842). See also Patrice Bouche, "The Post-Malthusian Moment: Some Responses to Population Explosion in Britain c. 1840," in *From Malthus' Stagnation to Sustained Growth: Social, Demographic and Economic Factors*, eds. Bruno Chiarini and Paolo Malanima (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 160-77.

<sup>32</sup> On repeal, see Douglas A. Irwin, "Political Economy and Peel's Repeal of the Corn Laws," *Economics and Politics* 1, no. 1 (1985), 41-59, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0343.1989.tb00004.x>.

<sup>33</sup> Margracia [sic] Loudon, *Maternal Love: A Novel* (London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1849), 3:28: "let the inhabitants of parishes arrange themselves into mutual assurance companies, bound to let no individual sink under private misfortune: let these companies hire or purchase land to farm in common; hire or purchase machinery to manufacture in common; and train and educate their children together: let their common garden be their children's play-ground; their common farm their agricultural school; and the factories and workshops their schools of industry."

<sup>34</sup> "A Chapter from Mrs. Loudon's 'Maternal Love,'" *Robert Owen's Journal*, June 23, 1851.

<sup>35</sup> Richardson, *Political Worlds*, 73-4.

<sup>36</sup> [Margracia Ryves Loudon,] *First Love: A Novel*, 3 vols. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1830); [Margracia Ryves Loudon,] *Fortune-Hunting: A Novel*, 3 vols. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832); [Margracia Ryves Loudon,] *Dilemmas of Pride*, 3 vols. (London: Bull and Churton, 1833); Loudon, *Maternal Love*; Mrs. Margracia Loudon, *The Fortunes of Woman: A Novel* (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1849).

<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy; or, the Philosophy of Happiness, Practically Applied to the Social, Political, and Commercial Relations of Great Britain* (London: Edward Churton, 1835); Mrs. Loudon, *The Light of Mental Science; Being an Essay on Moral Training* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1845); Mrs. Loudon, *The Voice of Bulgaria. From Authentic Sources* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1846).

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Margracia Loudon, "How to Raise Capital for Co-operative Purposes," *The Leader*, January 11, 1851.

thesis investigates is her *Philanthropic Economy; or, the Philosophy of Happiness* (1835), published when she was around the age of 47. It became widely known to contemporaries for its arguments in favor of the abolition of the Corn Laws when the Anti-Corn Law League distributed a pamphlet with extracts from it to nine million electors in the early 1840s.<sup>39</sup> The Corn Law rhymist Ebenezer Elliot even wrote a poem praising Loudon.<sup>40</sup> Yet *Philanthropic Economy* also called for universal rights, universal suffrage, the abolition of the House of Lords, the abolition of primogeniture, Poor Laws for Ireland, church reform, municipal reform, a property tax to replace direct taxes, and for the poor to be allowed to cultivate allotments of wasteland. It is a work more complex than what it became known for. Nevertheless, the two scholarly works dedicated to analyzing *Philanthropic Economy* have not investigated its anti-Corn Law arguments.<sup>41</sup> An examination of its stance on the Corn Laws is long overdue.

*Philanthropic Economy* represented the first attempt by a woman to contribute to the discourse of political economy subsequent to the severe criticism Harriet Martineau received in the *Quarterly Review*. Though *Philanthropic Economy* received several negative reviews,<sup>42</sup> mostly from conservative and Tory periodicals, the liberal and radical

<sup>39</sup> See *Corn Laws. Selections from Mrs. Loudon's Philanthropic Economy* (Manchester: J. Gadsby, 1842).

<sup>40</sup> Edwin Elliott, ed., *The Poetical Works of Ebenezer Elliot* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1876), 2:106-7: "Doctor, I send you, with this scrawl, / A thing by no means common; / For, by the Power that made us all, / I send—a perfect woman! ... Oh, thanks to Loudon and to thee, Sword-breaking might of letters! Enfranchised woman shall set free / The slave who forged her fetters!"

<sup>41</sup> See Richardson, *Political Worlds*; and Patrice Bouche, "L'exemplum narrative dans la *Philanthropic Economy* de la romancière Margracia Loudon," in *L'Exemplum Narratif dans le discours argumentative*, ed. Manuel Borrego-Pérez (Besançon: Presses Univ. Franche-Comté, 2002), 67–78.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Unsigned review of *Philanthropic Economy*, by Mrs. Loudon, *The Metropolitan* 14, no. 54 (October 1835), 33-5; Unsigned review of *Philanthropic Economy*, by Mrs. Loudon, *The Monthly Repository* 9 (December 1835), 434-5; Unsigned review of *Philanthropic Economy*, by Mrs. Loudon, *The Monthly Review* 2, no. 2 (June 1835)

presses were favorable.<sup>43</sup> *The Analyst* warmly received Loudon's work, stating "we were really astonished to find a lady possessed of sufficient courage to enter the lists in so disputatious and perilous a fiend" as political economy.<sup>44</sup> The most extensive review came from *The Westminster Review*, which argued that Margracia differentiated herself from the women political economists who preceded her: "Mrs. Loudon is no lesson-player, but draws directly upon the resources of her own genius for success."<sup>45</sup> To be sure, much of *Philanthropic Economy* cannot be traced to Margracia's political economist predecessors and most likely can be credited to her own mind. But the plea to abolish the Corn Laws, as chapter four argues, is a different story. As Margracia explains in her preface, *Philanthropic Economy* condenses the wisdom of "ponderous volumes" on the prevailing misery of the working classes into a succinct tract "couch[ed] in the plain, unscientific phrases of common conversation."<sup>46</sup> It distills the fundamental principle of free trade taken from the prevailing political economists into a work intelligible to the general public. In short, Margracia does not rely solely upon her own intellect when criticizing the Corn Laws. She resembles the women political economists who predate her, as they too argued for the abolition of the laws in works intended for popular audiences.

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<sup>43</sup> See Unsigned review of *Philanthropic Economy*, by Mrs. Loudon, *The Gentleman's Magazine* 4 (August 1835), 172-4; Unsigned review of *Philanthropic Economy*, by Mrs. Loudon, *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (July 1835), 484. According to Richardson, *Philanthropic Economy* was also reviewed in the *Spectator*, the *Courier*, the *Sunday Herald*, and the *Sun*.

<sup>44</sup> Unsigned review of *Philanthropic Economy*, by Mrs. Loudon, *The Analyst* 2 (1835), 427.

<sup>45</sup> Unsigned review of *Philanthropic Economy*, by Mrs. Loudon, *The Westminster Review* 23, no. 45 (July 1835), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, v-vi.



## II. POPULATION

When women ... have turned their minds—as they have done too seldom—to the exposition or arrangement of any branch of knowledge, they have commonly exhibited, we think, a more beautiful accuracy, and a more uniform and complete justness of thinking, than their less discriminating brethren ... No *man*, we will venture to say, could have written the Letters of Madam de Sevigné, or the Novels of Miss Austin, or the Hymns and Early Lessons of Mrs Barbauld, or the Conversations of Mrs Marcet. These performances, too, are not only essentially and intensely feminine, but they are, in our judgment, decidedly more perfect than any masculine productions with which they can be brought into comparison.

Francis Jeffery<sup>47</sup>

The ladies seem determined to make the science of Political Economy peculiarly their own. Our first instructor in this difficult branch of study was Mrs. Marcet, and a clearer or more judicious teacher we have not since encountered. Miss Edgeworth too has occasional dissertations, which shew what she could have done in that department had she applied her mind to it. And now Miss Martineau comes forward to embody the most abstract, but at the same time most important principles of the science, in narratives which have all the value of truth and all the grace of fiction. After all, we believe that there is something in the female mind which peculiarly fits it for elucidating, in a familiar manner, the intricacies of political economy.

Christian Isobel Johnstone<sup>48</sup>

Women have had a vital presence in the history of economic thought since the time of classical political economy. But too frequently they have been overshadowed by their male contemporaries. For a single mention of Maria Edgeworth, Jane Haldimand Marcet, or Harriet Martineau, one finds references to Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo in abundance. The dearth of coverage on these women in the historiographical record is not commensurate with their importance, as they performed an essential function by making the ideas of political economy accessible to a larger audience than theoretically-oriented

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<sup>47</sup> Francis Jeffery, review of *Records of Woman* and *The Forest Sanctuary*, by Felicia Hemans, *The Edinburgh Review* no. 99 (October 1829), 33.

<sup>48</sup> Christian Isobel Johnstone, "Miss Martineau's Illustrations of Political Economy," *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 1, no. 5 (August 1832), 612-3.

political economists could reach. As these women intended their writings to be used as educational material, their primary task had been to distill the fundamental principles of political economy into didactic literature for mass consumption by a general audience. They sought to mold the behavior of the reading individual to fit the precepts of political economy. In this they abided by the maxim expressed by Malthus that the “science of political economy is essentially practical, and applicable to the common business of human life.”<sup>49</sup> Centering on consumption and reproduction, this chapter argues that Edgeworth, Marcet, and Martineau imbued Malthus’ principle of population into didactic literature intended for the practical application of his theory to everyday life. In stories for children, dialogs for adolescents, and novels for adults, the three warned that unrestrained reproduction would be met with catastrophic consequences. The cessation of such didactic works can be traced back to the Cambridge economist Alfred Marshall, who delegitimized them to make “economics” (his preferred term) an exclusively male discipline. This has had serious historiographical consequences, with women political economists occupying little more than passing comments and footnotes in canonical histories of economic thought like Schumpeter’s *History of Economic Analysis* and Winch’s *Riches and Poverty*.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy Considered with a View to their Practical Application* (London: John Murray, 1820), 12.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, ed. Elizabeth Boody Schumpeter (New York: Routledge, 2006), 452n12, 618, 637, 1137; Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An intellectual history of political economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 419. Of the three, Schumpeter focuses solely on Marcet, while Winch neglects Edgeworth entirely and mentions Marcet and Martineau only in passing. The exception to the rule is Mark Blaug, who examined Martineau at length in his *Ricardian Economics: A Historical Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 129-39.

## Popularizing Political Economy

The writings of Edgeworth, Marcet, and Martineau can be viewed as a part of the movement to make political economy popular amongst the public in early 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Male political economists too published their share of introductory texts during this time. The works of two Ricardians named Thomas are particularly revealing. Known more for his literary works, Thomas de Quincey released in 1824 his quasi-platonic discourse on Ricardian political economy—“The Templars’ Dialogues”—in the *London Magazine*.<sup>51</sup> Three years later, Thomas Hodgskin published a series of introductory lectures he delivered to the London Mechanics’ Institute on political economy.<sup>52</sup> These two works exemplify the literary and popular character that many introductory texts possessed.<sup>53</sup> The most striking example, however, is from an opponent of Ricardo: Jean-Baptiste Say. Say had his *Catechism of Political Economy* translated into English in 1816 and four years later appended it to his *Letters to Mr. Malthus*.<sup>54</sup> In the *Catechism*, Say presents the main topics of political economy in clear, direct, and simple language.

Utilizing a question-and-answer format, he frequently reiterates what he has previously

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas de Quincey, *De Quincey’s Writings* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1850-9), 20:255-347. For his major contribution, *The Logic of Political Economy*, see *Writings*, 22:5-220. For his opium-fueled encounter with Ricardo’s *Principles*, see *Writings*, 1:91-4. Schumpeter was characteristically dismissive of de Quincey—of *The Templars’ Dialogues* he wrote: “let us bow to the editor who published such material and to the reading public who did not thereupon discontinue subscription.” See Schumpeter, *Analysis*, 452n13.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Hodgskin, *Popular Political Economy. Four Lectures Delivered at the London Mechanics’ Institution* (London: Charles Tait, 1827).

<sup>53</sup> See also Richard Whately, *Easy Lessons on Money Matters; for the Use of Young People* (London: John W. Parker, 1833); and W. D. Sockwell, *Popularizing Classical Economics: Henry Brougham and William Ellis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994).

<sup>54</sup> Jean-Baptiste Say, *Catechism of Political Economy; or, Familiar Conversations on the Manner in Which Wealth is Produced, Distributed, and Consumed in Society*, trans. John Richter (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1816); Jean-Baptiste Say, *Letters to Mr. Malthus, on Several Subjects of Political Economy, and on the Cause of the Stagnation of Commerce. To Which is Added A Catechism of Political Economy, or Familiar Conversations on the Manner in Which Wealth is Produced, Distributed, and Consumed in Society*, trans. John Richter (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1821). See also Evelyn L. Forget, *The Social Economics of Jean-Baptiste Say: Markets and Virtue* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

written and provides concrete examples to illustrate abstract principles, making the work an effective primer for the novice. But he also presents his own idiosyncratic view that value is determined by utility as though it stood unchallenged amongst political economists.<sup>55</sup> Probably for self-serving reasons and to avoid confusion, Say neglected to mention the predominant view that *labor* was the determinant factor in value, though utility was recognized as the resolvent factor in use-value.<sup>56</sup> Utility became the dominant heuristic only with the so-called “marginal revolution,”<sup>57</sup> a process which began in the English-speaking world with the 1871 publication of William Stanley Jevons’ *Theory of Political Economy*.<sup>58</sup>

The disagreement on value reveals a weakness inherent to popular works: contestable claims may be presented as established truth. In a March 30, 1818 letter to the Genevan philosopher and brother-in-law of Marcet Pierre Prévost, Malthus thus maintained that it is more appropriate “in an Elementary work ... to dwell upon the rule [rather] than the exception and without an opportunity of entering pretty fully into the subject, it [is] more advisable to consider only the great general principle.”<sup>59</sup> Hence he found “no cause for regret” that Marcet “in her excellent conversations in Political Economy” advocated for the unrestricted free trade of cereal grains, a position at odds with Malthus’ contention that the corn trade “forms one of the very few exceptions to a

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<sup>55</sup> Say, *Catechism*, 5-7.

<sup>56</sup> As Malthus noted, use-value is “synonymous with Utility. It rarely occurs in political economy, and is never implied by the word value when used alone.” See Thomas Robert Malthus, *Definitions in Political Economy* (London: John Murray, 1827), 235.

<sup>57</sup> See Mark Blaug, “Was There a Marginal Revolution?” *History of Political Economy* 4, no. 2 (1972), 269-80, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-4-2-269>.

<sup>58</sup> William Stanley Jevons, *The Theory of Political Economy* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1871), 2: “value depends entirely upon utility.” Emphasis original.

<sup>59</sup> George William Zinke, “Six Letters from Malthus to Pierre Prévost,” *The Journal of Economic History* 2, no. 2 (November 1942), 177, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050700052566>.

general freedom of trade.”<sup>60</sup> Similarly, for Malthus the popular work should maintain that it is labor which gives commodities their exchangeable value, despite the exceptional view of Say who argued in favor of utility.<sup>61</sup> Say evidently saw the matter differently, using the elementary work as a venue to platform his own views on the subject. Putting aside the debate on the proper content of the introductory work in the writings of male and female popularizers, it is evident that the wide diffusion of political-economic knowledge throughout society commanded a major consensus at the time.

It would be a mistake, however, to wholly equate the female popularizers with their male counterparts. Though the three had also written for mass consumption, Edgeworth, Marcet, and Martineau imbued their works with an explicitly didactic character to meliorate the behavior of their readers. Much effort to this end went towards circulating knowledge of Malthus’ principle of population amongst all ages of the public. All three women knew Malthus personally, and if they did not acquire extensive knowledge of his principle through reading his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, they certainly had the opportunity to do so through personal communication.

But this feat was itself not an easy task; Malthus was born with an orofacial cleft and had difficulty being understood in speech.<sup>62</sup> The observations of Edgeworth and Martineau attest to Malthus’ birth defect of which we otherwise have so little evidence.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> In spite of this, Marcet argued that utility is the resolvent factor in exchange value: “labour ... is valuable only if it gives utility to an object.” See [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 273. Marcet’s agreement with Say likely accounts for his emphatic praise (see below).

<sup>62</sup> See Montserrat Diaz, Mar Llorente, and Victor Asensi, “Malthus Mysterious Orofacial Cleft Correction,” *The Cleft Palate-Craniofacial Journal* 55, no. 10 (2018), 1-2, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1055665618760411>.

<sup>63</sup> See also Mary Theresa Lewis, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry from the Year 1783 to 1852* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1865), 2:475: “I dined at Mrs. Apreece’s ... I sat by Malthus, and had a good deal of conversation with him—interesting, when one gets over his painful

Never shy about voicing her opinions of her contemporaries in private correspondence,<sup>64</sup> Edgeworth wrote to her mother on January 23, 1822, that she wished Malthus' "hair lip were away and that he could speak more like a human creature for if I were a child and had heard of his being an Ogre I should run away if he were to come near me and begin to speak."<sup>65</sup> Eight years later, she wrote again to her mother on November 2, noting that Malthus in "spite of all that Nature did to make his uncouth mouth and horrid voice forbid made us admire and love him ... his kindness to me is beyond belief."<sup>66</sup> More interesting is the commentary of Martineau, who out of deafness resorted to using an ear trumpet in conversation.<sup>67</sup> She noted that

Of all the people in the world, Malthus was the one whom I heard quite easily without it;—Malthus, whose speech was hopelessly imperfect, from defect in the palate. I dreaded meeting him when invited by a friend of his who made my acquaintance on purpose. He had told this lady that he should be in town on such a day, and entreated her to get an introduction, and call and invite me; his reason being that whereas his friends had done him all manner of mischief by defending him injudiciously, my tales had represented his views precisely as he could have wished. I could not decline an invitation such as this: but when I considered my own deafness, and his inability to pronounce half the consonants in the alphabet, and his hare-lip which must prevent my offering him my tube, I feared we should make a terrible business of it. I was delightfully wrong. His first sentence,—slow and gentle, with the vowels sonorous, whatever might become of the

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manner of speaking from wanting a palate to his mouth, and having had a hair-lip—not, however, at all unpleasant in appearance."

<sup>64</sup> For instance, Edgeworth wrote of Sismondi on September 26, 1820: "He is black and ugly and heavy in conversation but touch on certain historical subjects and he will talk like a book—like his own book. We all agree that *we* should be very sorry to be his wife. I know I should go to sleep some day when he was talking or waken some morning tired to death of him." See Christina Colvin, ed., *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland: Selections from the Edgeworth family letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 253.

<sup>65</sup> Maria Edgeworth, *Letters from England, 1813-1844*, ed. Christina Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 331.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 423-4.

<sup>67</sup> In a June 16, 1838 letter to Rachel Mordecai Lazarus, Edgeworth quipped that Martineau's "mind is as deaf as her ear" regarding American politics. See Edgar E. MacDonald, ed., *The Education of the Heart: The Correspondence of Rachel Mordecai Lazarus and Maria Edgeworth* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 311. Cf. Edgeworth's letter to Sophie Ruxton of July 29, 1837 on the same topic: "she has a most courageous mind and enthusiasm for good—But I cannot agree with her democratic mania and her notions of the rights of women." See Valerie Pakenham, ed., *Maria Edgeworth's Letters from Ireland* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2018), 367.

consonants,—set me at ease completely. I soon found that the vowels are in fact all that I ever hear. His worst letter was *l*: and when I had no difficulty with his question,—“Would not you like to have a look at the Lakes of Killarney?” I had nothing more to fear. It really gratified him that I heard him better than any body else; and whenever we met at dinner, I somehow found myself beside him, with my best ear next to him; and then I heard all he said to every body at table.<sup>68</sup>

Malthus overcame his disability, becoming an Anglican priest and later a professor of history and political economy at East-India College, Hertfordshire.<sup>69</sup> His *Essay on Population* propelled him to international celebrity, though it also made him the target of scorn. William Cobbett, for instance, described Malthus’ views as a “mixture of madness and of blasphemy” and the man himself as “the monster Malthus, who has furnished the unfeeling oligarchs and their toad-eaters with the pretence, that *man has a natural propensity to breed faster than food can be raised for the increase.*”<sup>70</sup> This was not an inaccurate summary of Malthus’ main contention, but it in no way covers the breadth of his arguments.

## **Malthus**

Malthus’ main argument in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* is that the natural rate of human reproduction always exceeds the growth of the means of subsistence.<sup>71</sup> He illustrates this principle using data from British North America, according to which

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<sup>68</sup> Maria Weston Chapman, ed. *Harriet Martineau’s Autobiography* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1877), 1:327-8.

<sup>69</sup> See John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Biography*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 81-124; and Patricia James, *Population Malthus: His Life and Times* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

<sup>70</sup> William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (London: William Cobbett, 1830), 356. Emphasis original.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population: The 1803 Edition*, ed. Shannon C. Stimson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 13.

population doubles every twenty-five years. From this, Malthus extrapolates that, when unconstrained by space and resources, population grows according to a geometrical (or exponential) ratio. Against this, he contrasts the arithmetical (or linear) growth of the means of subsistence. "Taking the whole earth ... the human species would increase as the numbers 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, and subsistence as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. In two centuries the population would be to the means of subsistence as 256 to 9; in three centuries as 4096 to 13, and in two thousand years the difference would be almost incalculable."<sup>72</sup>

When expressed in this way, Malthus infused his argument with the rigor of mathematical certainty. But in so specifying the rates of increase of population and labor-productivity, he opened himself up to a line of attack. Critic after critic sought to disprove Malthus' ratios, conflating their *a priori* or *a posteriori* invalidation with a refutation of his contention that the full power of human reproduction cannot be permanently realized.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps, as the economist James A. Field noted nearly a century ago, Malthus' conspicuous placement of his ratios at the beginning of his argument had made them appear essential to its claim.<sup>74</sup> But the ratios are specified only to be abandoned in the course of the *Essay*, demonstrating their superfluity to Malthus' theory. Whatever the arbitrary values one assigns to the abstract potentialities of human reproduction and

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>73</sup> E.g. William Godwin, *Of Population. An Enquiry Concerning the Powers of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind, Being an Answer to Mr. Malthus's Essay on that Subject* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820). Cf. William Godwin, *Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, Preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800: Being a Reply to the Attacks of Dr. Parr, Mr. Mackintosh, the Author of An Essay on Population, and Others* (London: Taylor and Wilks, 1801), 54ff, esp. 57-9.

<sup>74</sup> James Alfred Field, *Essays on Population and Other Papers*, ed. Helen Fisher Hohman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 7-9.



agricultural productivity, natural checks to population and the difficulty of procuring subsistence prevent their realization.

Malthus held that population is constantly subject to “preventative” and “positive” checks, both of which operate to keep the population down to the level of the means of subsistence. Preventative checks depress the birth-rate and can arise only from human action. Individuals rationally calculate the difficulties of raising a family and abstain from marriage. In the second edition of Malthus’ essay, this is referred to as “moral restraint.” Frustrated, the potential partners of these men engage in “promiscuous intercourse to such a degree as to prevent the birth of children.” This “degrade[s] the female character ... destroy[ing] all its most amiable and distinguishing characteristics,” even as it corrupts men’s morals, weakens conjugal and parental bonds, and decreases the aggregate amount of happiness in society. Promiscuity is even more widespread among the poor in the cities, where “more real distress and aggravated misery” can be found than in any other context. Speaking in euphemisms, Malthus insists sexual “intrigues” abound in urban contexts, the concealment of which leads to “many other vices.”<sup>75</sup> A significant yet frequently understated aspect of Malthus’ theory is the vice created by the practice of the preventative check.

In contrast to the preventative check, positive checks increase death-rates and have both anthropogenic and ecological causes. They include unhealthy occupations and excessive labor, exposure to the elements, extreme poverty, unhygienic living conditions, infanticide, insubstantial diet, war, disease, pestilence, famine, and plagues. In

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<sup>75</sup> Malthus, *1803 Edition*, 18-9. Compare Mandeville’s insistence that private vice leads to public virtue. See also Irwin Primer, ed., *Bernard Mandeville’s “A Modest Defense of Public Stews”: Prostitution and Its Discontents in Early Georgian England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Malthusian terminology, positive checks resolve into vice and misery, while the preventative check resolves into moral restraint and vice.<sup>76</sup>

When population inevitably outstrips the means of subsistence, food prices rise and real wages fall. Most hardship is experienced by the vast majority of the laboring-poor, who must work longer to maintain their standard of living. At this point, there are a number of escapes from the Malthusian cycle: if declining real wages cause a significant decrease in fertility-rates (that is, if enough individuals restrain from marriage); if cultivators sufficiently increase agricultural output (through increasing the number of employed laborers, expanding the total area under tillage, using higher-quality fertilizer, or by intensifying labor-processes); or if migration decreases population to a sufficient degree, then a balance between population and resources may be restored. In these cases, however, the process repeats itself until population *absolutely* outstrips the means of subsistence. This can result from a failure of the preventative check, from ecological constraints (such as soil-exhaustion) limiting agricultural production, from migration insufficient to reduce population, or any combination of these. Famine, crop failure, and widespread scarcities eventually shrink the population to a size able to be sustained by the available means of subsistence. The cycle then begins anew.<sup>77</sup>

To escape these cyclical fluctuations of population, Malthus placed his faith in the vigorous practice of the preventative check in spite of its attendant vice. The benefits of its widespread adoption would accrue to couples who delay marriage, whose passions for one another would intensify in the absence of immediate gratification. Among the

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<sup>76</sup> Malthus, *1803 Edition*, 19-20.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-3.

working poor, such behavior would have the effect of increasing wages on account of the smaller supply of labor, and for society at large, warfare for territorial acquisition would be less frequent. Malthus even speculates that wars of aggression would disappear entirely from nations whose people universally adopt the preventative check.<sup>78</sup> In light of this utopian belief it is hard not to view the inclusion of moral restraint in the second edition of Malthus' *Essay* as a concession to the perfectibilists William Godwin and Marquis de Condorcet with whom he had so fervently disagreed in the first edition.<sup>79</sup>

In their *Population History of England, 1541-1871*, the historical demographers E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield confuted and corroborated certain aspects of Malthus' theory. By reconstituting the demographic record from the 16<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the two were able to compare oscillations in mortality and fertility with series of real wages and food prices. They came to a number of salient conclusions. The first was a validation of Malthus' assertion that rising food prices are subsequent to population growth, although this relationship only applies to a pre-industrial economy. Moreover, Malthus' contention that real wages were inversely related to the rate of population growth was also confirmed, as nominal wages varied little in the long term. The second conclusion was a rejection of Malthus' claim that rising food prices engendered by demographic growth were followed by rising mortality. Though mortality responded to fluctuations in food prices before 1640, the relationship lessened in the following hundred years and there was no evidence of this positive check to population operating over the long term.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 381-96.

<sup>79</sup> Mark Blaug and George Stigler have also concluded that the inclusion of moral restraint was a concession, but for a different reason than mine. See Blaug, *Ricardian Economics*, 105; and George J. Stigler, "The Ricardian Theory of Value and Distribution," *Journal of Political Economy* 60, no. 3 (June 1952), 191, <https://doi.org/10.1086/257208>.

The third conclusion was a corroboration of Malthus' insistence that the preventive check of delayed marriage operated to some extent throughout England. Wrigley and Schofield found nuptiality to respond positively to short-term fluctuations in real wages, while in the long term nuptiality's behavior formed cycles which mimicked those of real wages, albeit with a lag of about 30 years.<sup>80</sup>

Wrigley and Schofield's reconstruction showed ample evidence of two features of Malthus' theory: a population cycle operating via the preventative check and long-term oscillations of population and living standards. In the sixteenth century, increases of population were accompanied by rising food prices. In consequence of the high price of provisions, real wages fell, which saw individuals respond by curtailing nuptiality until rates of population growth turned negative in the mid-seventeenth century. Decreasing rates of population growth corresponded with falling food prices until real wages began to rise. Then nuptiality responded positively to the change in real wages. It began to rise in the late seventeenth century after falling for a hundred years, causing population growth to resume its increase. The cycle came to an end in the late eighteenth century, which was characterized by high rates of population growth, increasing food prices, falling real wages, and declining nuptiality.<sup>81</sup>

Edgeworth, Marcet, and Martineau did not popularize Malthus' principle of population through a distillation of the concept of population cycles. Instead they emphasized the positive checks following population outstripping the means of

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<sup>80</sup> Roger S. Schofield, "Through a Glass Darkly: The Population History of England as an Experiment in History," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 15, no. 4 (Spring 1985), 587-8, <https://doi.org/10.2307/204271>; Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, 348-53, 359-84, 402-43, 466-78.

<sup>81</sup> Schofield, "Glass," 589; Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, 446-78.

subsistence. Though Wrigley and Schofield may have debunked the claim that positive checks follow rises in food prices, Edgeworth, Marcet, and Martineau cannot be faulted for adhering to an aspect of Malthus' theory not yet proven incorrect in their day. Marcet and Martineau most likely placed emphasis on positive checks to make urgent the need to adhere to the preventative check. This was not the case with Edgeworth, who illustrated Malthus' principle of population in terms of instinctually driven animals incapable of higher-order rational thought.

## Edgeworth

With the exception of Henderson's *Economics as Literature*, Edgeworth has been virtually nonexistent in histories of political economy.<sup>82</sup> This is especially puzzling because she was the aunt of the economist Francis Ysidro Edgeworth and taught him how to read by the age of four.<sup>83</sup> In his recollections, he remembered her as a "very plain old lady with a delightful face."<sup>84</sup> She was also an insightful observer of Malthus and Ricardo, whom she characterized in a posthumous memoir as a duo that "hunted together in search of Truth, and huzzaed when they first found her, without caring who found her first: indeed, I have seen them both put their able hands to the windlass to drag her up from the bottom of that well in which she so strangely delights to dwell."<sup>85</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>82</sup> See Willie Henderson, *Economics as Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 21-42.

<sup>83</sup> Lluís Barbé, *Francis Ysidro Edgeworth: A Portrait with Family and Friends*, trans. Mary C. Black (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2010), 38.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Harriet Jessie Butler and Harold Edgeworth Butler, eds., *The Black Book of Edgeworthstown and Other Edgeworth Memories 1585-1817* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927), 244.

<sup>85</sup> *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth, with a Selection from Her Letters. By the Late Mrs. Edgeworth. Edited by Her Children* (London: n.p., 1867), 2:236. In this memoir, Edgeworth reveals a distaste for David Hume, whom she had met "at Mrs. Ricardo's merely for ten minutes ... Don't like him much; attacks all things and persons, never listens, has no judgment." See *Memoir*, 2:198.

Edgeworth and Ricardo were friendly enough to refer to each other as “cousins” in written correspondence.<sup>86</sup> The cause of historiographical neglect cannot be obscurity because she was the most successful novelist in Britain from 1800 to 1814, outselling even Jane Austen.<sup>87</sup> Despite the prevalence of political-economic themes throughout the entirety of Edgeworth’s work, scholarly interest in her has been primarily limited to her contributions to British literature.

A significant portion of Edgeworth’s literary reputation rests upon her children’s stories, for which, according to Martineau, she received a great deal of respect. “It was as the friend of little children,” wrote Martineau, “that Miss Edgeworth is most beloved, and will be most gratefully remembered. Her delectable Rosamond is worth a score of famed novel-heroes, and is surely destined to everlasting youth, with an ingenuousness that can never be sullied, and a vivacity that can never be chilled.”<sup>88</sup> It is fitting that Martineau, who had been described in the press as “a *female Malthusian*,”<sup>89</sup> chose Rosamond out of all the possible works she could have named. Edgeworth’s vignette “The Rabbit,” starring Rosamond, is a fable stressing the necessity to maintain a balance between population and resources to prevent starvation.

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<sup>86</sup> Sraffa, ed., *Ricardo*, 9:240, 274, 295.

<sup>87</sup> Note J. E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 72: “I have made up my mind to like no novels really, but Miss Edgeworth’s, E.’s, and my own;” and Walter Scott, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott, 1825-32* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1891), 164: “Edgeworth, Ferrier, Austen have all had their portraits of real society, far superior to anything man, vain man, has produced of the like nature.”

<sup>88</sup> Harriet Martineau, *The History of England during the Thirty Years’ Peace: 1816-1846* (London: Charles Knight, 1849-50), 2:704. Cf. Harriet Martineau, *Biographical Sketches* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), 389: “The grandmamas of our time, however, declare with warmth, as do many mothers and governesses, that Mrs. Marcet’s very best books are her ‘Stories for Very Little Children;’ and certainly, judging by observations of many little children, those small volumes do appear to be unique in their suitability to the minds they were addressed to. *Mrs. Barbauld’s ‘Early Lessons’ were good; Miss Edgeworth’s were better; but Mrs. Marcet’s are transcendent, as far as they go.*” Emphasis mine.

<sup>89</sup> George Poulett Scrope, review of *Illustrations of Political Economy*, nos. 1-12, by Harriet Martineau, *The Quarterly Review* 49, no. 97 (1833), 151. Emphasis original.

While in her garden, Rosamond discovers that a rabbit has eaten all but one of her laburnums. With the help of two other children, Orlando and Godfrey, Rosamond manages to trap the rabbit inside of a box. When the three debate what should be done with the rabbit, a conversation breaks out regarding the ethics of meat consumption. Rosamond decides she wishes to keep the rabbit as a pet and swears off eating meat to prevent the needless slaughter of animals. Orlando replies by posing a question: “How should we manage, if all sorts of animals become so numerous that there would not be food for them as us?”<sup>90</sup> Orlando insists that animals would reproduce beyond the capacity of the garden to provide adequate subsistence. This alone convinces Rosamond to continue eating meat, but Edgeworth was not content to confine the moral there. She assumes a more authoritative voice by adopting the persona of Rosamond’s father. “Sheep and oxen do not eat men,” he insists, “but if they increased so much as to eat all the vegetables, they would in the end destroy men as effectually by starving them as if they eat them.”<sup>91</sup>

Edgeworth asserts that the unchecked reproduction of animals poses an existential threat to humans, but the narrative is contradictory, and the children express reservations. Godfrey is intrigued enough to “think more of it, and write an essay on cruelty to animals”—no small feat for a child.<sup>92</sup> Peering into the box, Rosamond is stricken with sympathy for the rabbit. “Poor fellow! ... you think we are talking about you.” She asks for her father’s permission to release the rabbit “a great distance from our gardens, where he might live happily, and eat what he liked, without doing us any mischief.” He

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<sup>90</sup> Maria Edgeworth, “Rosamond,” in *Early Lessons* (London: R. Hunter, 1815), 2:143.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:144.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

responds in the affirmative, pointing her to a heavily-populated rabbit-warren six miles away. He provides positive reinforcement through praise: “I am glad to see that you are so humane to this animal who has done you mischief.”<sup>93</sup> They give the box to the farmer Early, who passes the rabbit-warren in the morning when traveling to market, in order to prevent the rabbit from eating any more laburnums.<sup>94</sup>

In “The Rabbit,” Edgeworth tempers Malthus’ principle of population with a concern for animal wellbeing reminiscent of another British popularizer of economic ideas, Sarah Kirby Trimmer.<sup>95</sup> (In itself a neglected topic amongst historians of economic thought, the cause of animal rights would later be championed by Jevons, who argued in *The Fortnightly Review* against recreational rabbit hunting on utilitarian grounds.<sup>96</sup>) But there are differences in the morals espoused by Trimmer and Edgeworth. In her *Fabulous Histories*, Trimmer argued that the “extraordinary increase” of certain species of animals “destined, by the *Supreme Governor*, as food for mankind ... would be very injurious to us if” left unchecked. Humanity therefore has an “undoubted right to kill” these species, though “we should make their short lives as comfortable as possible.”<sup>97</sup> Orlando’s argument against vegetarianism convinces Rosamond that humanity must continue to consume meat, but the act of releasing the rabbit into a population-dense habitat benign to the garden suggests human-beings can coexist peacefully with populous animals in

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 2:145-6.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 2:152.

<sup>95</sup> See Mrs. Trimmer, *Instructive Tales* (London: J. Hatchard, 1810).

<sup>96</sup> William Stanley Jevons, “Cruelty to Animals—a Study in Sociology,” *The Fortnightly Review* 19 (1876), 675.

<sup>97</sup> Mrs. Trimmer, *Fabulous Histories* (London: J. Johnson, 1786), 217-8.



such a way as to maximize agricultural production. At one and the same time, it is an act exemplifying kindness towards animals and concern for resources.

Edgeworth's decision to illustrate Malthus' principle in terms of animality and horticulture deserves further consideration. Her choice of wildlife in a garden—rather than human-beings and agricultural production—is most likely indicative of the age of her audience.<sup>98</sup> Expressed in this way, the story becomes palatable for young readers by eliminating all but the most essential of variables and expunging the darker aspects of Malthus' theory. Yet the simplicity with which Edgeworth tells the tale also necessitates its contradictory narrative. Malthus argued that animals are instinctually impelled to reproduce and lack a preventative check akin to moral restraint.<sup>99</sup> Without the twin virtues of prudence and foresight, Edgeworth can present no solution to the population problem and admits through Orlando and Godfrey the incompleteness of her illustration of Malthus' theory. In the debate on reproduction, Orlando insists they have not “gone to the bottom of the business yet,” a sentiment with which Godfrey agrees.<sup>100</sup>

Thanks in part to the influence of many women writers, among whom Edgeworth was one, the public study of political economy became fashionable in England during the early nineteenth century. This popular interest in the subject lasted well after the end of the Napoleonic wars, as evidenced by Edgeworth's March 9, 1822 letter from London to her paternal Aunt Margaret Ruxton.

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<sup>98</sup> I cannot discount the fact that Edgeworth herself was a gardener. See Christina Colvin and Charles Nelson, “‘Building Castles of Flowers:’ Maria Edgeworth as Gardener,” *Garden History* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1988), 58-70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1586905>.

<sup>99</sup> Malthus, *1803 Edition*, 12.

<sup>100</sup> Edgeworth, “Rosamond,” 2:144.

It has now become high fashion with blue ladies [educated women] to talk political economy. There is a certain Lady Mary Shepherd<sup>101</sup> who makes a great jabbering on this subject while others who have more sense like Mrs. Marcet hold their tongues and listen. ... Mean time fine ladies now require that their daughters [*sic*] governesses [tutors] should teach political economy. “Pray Ma’am” said a fine Mamma to one who came to offer herself as a governess “Do you teach political economy?” The governess who thought she had provided herself well with French Italian Music drawing dancing &c was quite astounded by this unexpected requisition[;] she hesitatingly answered “No, Ma’am, I cannot say I teach political economy, but I would if you think proper try to learn it.” “Oh dear no Ma’am. if you don’t teach it you wont [*sic*] do for me.”<sup>102</sup>

An education in political economy at this time was thus considered the necessary complement to an education in domestic (or household) economy.<sup>103</sup> In the words of James Mill, who noted the importance of the distinction on the first page of his elementary exposition of Ricardian theory, “Political economy is to the State, what domestic economy is to the family.”<sup>104</sup> That women were unlikely to become legislators did not deter writers of Mill’s caliber from arming political economy’s importance for women. In middle- and upper-class families affluent enough to afford a governess, the

<sup>101</sup> Edgeworth’s children excised the identity of Mary Shepherd (1777-1847) from the version of the letter they included in *Memoir*, 2:180. Augustus J. C. Hare, ed., followed suit in *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth* (London: Edward Arnold, 1894), 2:65. Shepherd was a respected metaphysician whose talents apparently did not extend into the realm of political economy. See Deborah Boyle, “Expanding the Canon of Scottish Philosophy: The Case for Adding Lady Mary Shepherd,” *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 15, no. 3 (2017), 275-93, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jsp.2017.0173>.

<sup>102</sup> Edgeworth, *Letters from England*, 364.

<sup>103</sup> On domestic economy, see for example J. A. Stewart, *The Young Woman’s Companion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Bartlett and Newman, 1815); Anne Cobbett, *The English Housekeeper* (London: Anne Cobbett, 1835); Esther Copley, *Cottage Comforts*, 17<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1841); Margaret Maria Brewster, *Household Economy* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1858); and Harriet Martineau, *Health, Husbandry, and Handicraft* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1861). Note the 1849 observations of Henry Crabb Robinson: “Miss Martineau makes herself an object of envy by the success of her domestic arrangements. She has built a cottage near her house, placed in it a Norfolk dairymaid, and has her poultry-yard, and her piggery, and her cowshed; and Mrs. Wordsworth declares she is a model in her household economy, making her servants happy, and setting an example of activity to her neighbors.” See Thomas Sadler, ed., *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1872), 304.

<sup>104</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1821), 1.

subject became part of the education curriculum for young women as well as for men.<sup>105</sup>

The material utilized most frequently by governesses to teach the subject was authored by another woman writer on political economy, to whom the author Lucy Aikin owed her learning on the subject, as expressed in a June 1817 letter from London.

I have been reading a book on—what do you think? I would give you twenty guesses—a book by a lady, of which I said at first, with all the superciliousness of profound ignorance, ‘I shall not read it, I am sure.’ But, happening to peep between two of its unopened leaves, I cast my eyes on so wise and well-written an exposé of the inconveniences of this same ignorance in which I gloried, that I have found myself shamed into opening the leaves, studying it from end to end with great attention, and confessing that I found it well worth the pains—in short, I have been perusing Mrs. Marcet’s ‘Conversations on Political Economy.’<sup>106</sup>

## Marcet

Jane Haldimand Marcet’s *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816) is a fictitious dialog between the governess Mrs. Bryant (Mrs. B.) and her pupil Caroline, the same two protagonists of her 1805 *Conversations on Chemistry*.<sup>107</sup> In addition to population,

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<sup>105</sup> Virginia Woolf wrote an insightful biographical essay on the daughter of Sarah Kirby Trimmer, Selina, who was a governess to Lady Harriet Leveson-Gower. See Virginia Woolf, “Hary-o: The Letters of Lady Harriet Cavendish,” in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Stuart N. Clarke (London: The Hogarth Press, 2011), 6:229-35. Woolf cites *Instructive Tales* when pressed to name a work of the elder Trimmer familiar to the reader. Given that her most well-known work was actually *Fabulous Histories*, this suggests that Alfred Marshall’s decision to place Trimmer alongside Marcet and Martineau (see below) was not misplaced. For more on governesses, see Martineau, *Health*, 188-201.

<sup>106</sup> Philip Hemery Le Breton, ed., *Memoirs, Miscellanies and Letters of the Late Lucy Aikin* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1864), 107-8. Aikin found Marcet’s brother impressive when the two dined together two years later: “I had on my other side at dinner a much more prepossessing person, Mr. Haldimand, Mrs. Marcet’s brother, who is not a little proud apparently of such a sister. I suppose he is one of the ablest and most enlightened mercantile men in London, and learnedly talked he of usury laws and so forth; *observing that ladies now studied political economy*, on the whole I found him polished, clever, and entertaining.” See Le Breton, ed., *Lucy Aikin*, 118. Emphasis mine.

<sup>107</sup> Of note is Mary Somerville’s comments, which relate the fact that Marcet’s *Conversations on Chemistry* convinced Michael Faraday to become a scientist: “So many books have now been published for young people, that no one at this time can duly estimate the importance of Mrs. Marcet’s scientific works. To them is partly owing the higher intellectual education now beginning to prevail among the better classes in Britain. They produced a great sensation, and went through many editions. Her ‘Conversations on Chemistry,’ first opened out to Faraday’s mind that field of science in which he became so illustrious, and at the height of his fame he always mentioned Mrs. Marcet with deep reverence.” See Martha Somerville, ed., *Personal Recollections from Early Life to Old Age of Mary Somerville* (London: John Murray, 1874),

Marcet's *Conversations on Political Economy* covers property, the division of labor, capital, wages, poverty, revenue, value and price, currency, commerce, foreign trade, and state expenditure. It was an immediate success upon its publication, which led to remarks like those of Anne Garbett Romilly to Maria Edgeworth of December 17, 1816.

Have you not been delighted with Mrs. Marcet? What an extraordinary work for a woman! Everybody who understands the subject is in a state of astonishment, and those, who like me know very little or nothing about it, are delighted with the knowledge they have acquired. One of our çï-devant Judges, Sir James Mansfield, who is in his 83rd year devours all that is new in Literature, is charmed and laments extremely that he did not know as much as that Book has taught him when he was at the Bar. What a blessing for the country is our twelve Judges, to say nothing of Ministers, did but know one half which is contained in it. A tolerably bold opinion you may think I have hazarded here but in your ear I may whisper it is not my own.<sup>108</sup>

Romilly's comments are confirmed by the reception of *Conversations on Political Economy* in the press. It was released to universal acclaim.<sup>109</sup> Before Romilly's comments, lavish praise flowed from the pen of Leonard Horner, a merchant and younger brother of the politician Francis Horner, who shared his thoughts with Jane's husband Alexander in a letter of October 1, 1816.

I have read the "Conversations on Political Economy" with very great satisfaction. Mrs. Marcet has executed a difficult task with great skill, and has made the subject not only very accessible to ordinary readers, but at the same time very interesting. She has discovered a royal road to political economy, and I am sure it is a book which will do an infinite deal of good, by removing many

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114. Note also Maria Edgeworth's letter to Fanny Edgeworth of May 18, 1813: "Mrs. Marcet said that she was quite surprised by my father's having ventured to give 'Conversations on Chemistry' to a girl of 9 years old. My mother told how it had been read and explained bit by bit. 'Ah' said Mrs. Marcet 'Who but Mr. E would or could do that!'" See Edgeworth, *Letters from England*, 64.

<sup>108</sup> Samuel Henry Romilly, ed., *Romilly-Edgeworth Letters: 1813-1818* (London: John Murray, 1936), 160.

<sup>109</sup> See Unsigned review of *Conversations on Political Economy*, by Jane Haldimand Marcet, *The Eclectic Review* 6 (September 1816), 288-90; Unsigned review of *Conversations on Political Economy*, by Jane Haldimand Marcet, *The London Review* 70 (September 1816), 250-2; Unsigned review of *Conversations on Political Economy*, by Jane Haldimand Marcet, *The Gentleman's Magazine* (November 1816), 441; and Unsigned review of *Conversations on Political Economy*, by Jane Haldimand Marcet, *The Monthly Review* 83 (May 1817), 106-7.

popular prejudices, which are very deep rooted. Mr. W. Haldimand cannot do a greater service to his country than by getting each of his brother directors to study this treatise; and if Prévost can effect the same purpose at Lloyd's, it will change the whole character of the merchants of London, which I suppose never stood more in need of improvement.

Mrs. Horner desires me to say, that with very few exceptions, it is quite level to the capacities of the ladies, and that even these passages only require a little borrowed light, to appear quite distinct. She unites with me in kindest regards to Mrs. Marcet, to yourself, and all your family circle.<sup>110</sup>

The work impressed Horner enough to make it a point of discussion with the Ricardian political economist John Ramsay McCulloch, whose comments add weight to the acclaimed reception of others. To Marcet's husband, Horner wrote on May 22, 1819,

I have been speaking to McCulloch about the "Conversations on Political Economy," and telling him how much good he would do, by making this excellent work more extensively known. When I asked him if he knew it, he said "Know it? Why there it is on my table before me—I have read it three times regularly through, and am constantly referring to it. It contains all the soundest and most enlightened views, most clearly laid down." He said he should certainly consider whether he could make a review of it to satisfy himself.<sup>111</sup>

Unfortunately, McCulloch never wrote the review, a fact to which Horner's April 10, 1821 comments attest.<sup>112</sup> McCulloch did, however, paint the book in an immensely positive light when it was brought up in conversation at a dinner party. According to Horner, he "at last fairly acknowledged that he had begun a review, and found he could not do the book justice. He added, however, before a pretty numerous party, that 'it is the best book on the subject without any exception,' these were his words."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Katharine M. Lyell, ed., *Memoir of Leonard Horner* (London: Women's Printing Society, 1890), 1:98-9.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:158-9.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:192.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* McCulloch eventually gave the work public attention twenty-four years later, writing: "This is on the whole, perhaps, the best introduction to the science that has yet appeared." See J. R. McCulloch, *The Literature of Political Economy* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845), 18

McCulloch's comments were not anomalous amongst political economists. Say was moved enough by Marcet's *Conversations* to write her on September 4, 1816 with his thoughts even before he had finished the book.

You have given me the greatest pleasure, and this pleasure is by no means at an end; I have begun to read your work and still haven't finished it. You have worked much more efficiently than I to popularize and spread extremely useful ideas; and you will succeed, Madam, since you have built on the strength of science, those graces which could even cause errors to be overlooked ... It is not possible to stay closer to the truth with more charm; to clothe such indisputable principles with a more elegant style. I am an old soldier who asks only to die in your light.<sup>114</sup>

Marcet's book was successful enough for the English translator of Say's *Treatise on Political Economy* to observe in 1821—the same year of the *Conversations'* fourth edition (out of seven)<sup>115</sup> and of the appearance of a knock-off by the protectionist Joseph Pinsent<sup>116</sup>—that it had “become an inmate of most establishments for the better classes of instruction.”<sup>117</sup> This meant that an entire generation was exposed to a graphic exposition of Malthus' principle stressing that uncontrolled population growth results in abject misery.

Marcet's fictitious pupil Caroline often expresses views which the reader discovers to be erroneous, and this is how the treatment of population begins. Caroline expresses a conception of population not dissimilar to the traditional Cameralist

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<sup>114</sup> Bette Polkinghorn, “A Communication: An Unpublished Letter of J.B. Say,” *Eastern Economic Journal* 11, no. 2 (April-June 1985), 170, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40324974>.

<sup>115</sup> [Jane Haldimand Marcet,] *Conversations on Political Economy; In Which the Elements of that Science are Familiarly Explained*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821); Mrs. Marcet, *Conversations on Political Economy; In Which the Elements of that Science are Familiarly Explained*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1839).

<sup>116</sup> See Joseph Pinsent, *Conversations on Political Economy* (London: J. M. Richardson, 1821).

<sup>117</sup> Jean Baptiste-Say, *A Treatise on Political Economy; or the Production, Distribution, and Consumption of Wealth*, trans. C. R. Prinsep (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821), 1:v.

understanding of demographic growth as an intrinsically healthy phenomenon representative of national prosperity.<sup>118</sup> She declares that she “always thought that it was very desirable to have a great population. All rich thriving countries are populous: great cities are populous; wealth ... encourages population; and population in turn promotes wealth, for labourers produce more than they consume.”<sup>119</sup> Mrs. B.’s method is to gently guide Caroline to the truth, so she grants that this is the case in young nations like the United States where the availability of “capital”—a term she uses as shorthand for the “means of subsistence”— encourages early marriages.<sup>120</sup> In such places the increase of capital easily keeps pace with population growth, and so children are “well fed, thriving, and healthy.”<sup>121</sup> Tacitly relying upon Malthus’ calculation, Mrs. B. asserts that the American population doubles itself in only 23 years.<sup>122</sup> But the situation is far different in older nations like England, where the rate of population growth has exceeded the increase of capital. There the wages of labor have fallen and the poor have become miserable.<sup>123</sup> To prevent population from outstripping capital, Marcet prescribes behavior on the individual level: one ought not to marry unless one’s income will support offspring.<sup>124</sup>

Marcet betrays her instructive intent by phrasing Malthus’ principle in a normative declaration. Yet she is not content to stop there. She cements the lesson in the reader’s mind by illustrating the consequences of unchecked demographic growth. If a nation’s capital is insufficient to provide for its population, scarcity causes a rise in the

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<sup>118</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 2.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

price of provisions simultaneous as a rise in the number of laborers causes real wages to fall.<sup>125</sup> Families must subsist on less and less. Want of proper nourishment leaves individuals susceptible to diseases like smallpox and measles.<sup>126</sup> Infants are the first to perish. They “are born merely to languish a few years in poverty, and to fall early victims to disease brought on by want and wretchedness.” They “weaken, impoverish, and render” the nation ever the more miserable. They “consume without reproducing, they suffer without enjoying, and they give pain and sorrow to their parents without ever reaching that age when they might reward their paternal cares.” Such “is the fate of thousands of children wherever population exceeds the means of subsistence.”<sup>127</sup>

For Caroline, this is a distressing revelation. But it makes the distress of the poor comprehensible. They are the agents of their own destruction through lack of “prudence and foresight.”<sup>128</sup> No amelioration of their condition can be permanent unless they curtail their fertility according to their ability to provide for their offspring. Hence Mrs. B. insists to Caroline that

Were all men as considerate as your gardener, Thomas, and did they not marry till they had secured a provision for a family, or could earn a sufficiency to maintain it; in short, were children not brought into the world until there was bread to feed them, the distress which you have just been describing would be unknown, excepting in cases of unforeseen misfortunes, or unless produced by idleness or vice.<sup>129</sup>

The reality of unchecked population growth may be dismal, the solution to the problem, writes Marcet, is Malthus’ preventative check of moral restraint. She did the same in

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 129-30, 140.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 147-8.



*John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy* (1833), a collection of short stories targeted at the working classes which Malthus thought was "better suited" for that purpose "than Miss Martineau's Tales which are justly so much admired."<sup>130</sup> Laborers unable to provide for their excessively large families cannot retroactively postpone marriage and childbirth, but they can teach their children Malthus' lessons to prevent them from experiencing the same fate.<sup>131</sup>

Marcet exerted considerable influence over Harriet Martineau, who read her *Conversations on Political Economy* in 1827 at the age of 25. In her autobiography, Martineau explained that she read the book "chiefly to see what Political Economy precisely was."<sup>132</sup> By reading Marcet's dialog, it immediately struck her that "the principles of the whole science might be advantageously conveyed in the same way ... by being exhibited in their natural workings in selected passages of social life."<sup>133</sup> After she achieved a modicum of success, Martineau wrote Marcet from Norwich on October 11, 1832 to thank her.

Your *Conversations on Political Economy* first gave solidity and form to the floating ideas on the subject which I had gathered from newspapers, and to you therefore I feel much of the success of my present exertions is owing. I read your work again and again with delight during the first year after it was put into my hands; and it confirmed a purpose which I had before conceived of acquainting the common people with certain facts of the social system which they do themselves great mischief by misunderstanding ... I thought of nothing beyond

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<sup>130</sup> Bette A. Polkinghorn, "An Unpublished Letter from Malthus to Jane Marcet, January 22, 1833," *The American Economic Review* 76, no. 4 (September 1986), 845, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1806082>.

<sup>131</sup> [Jane Haldimand Marcet,] *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1833), 75, 78.

<sup>132</sup> Chapman, ed., *Martineau's Autobiography*, 1:138.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

Machinery and Wages, on which I had written two little tales<sup>134</sup> actually before I knew that their doctrine appertained to the Science of Political Economy.<sup>135</sup>

It is thus to Jane Haldimand Marcet, a woman so frequently absent or marginalized in canonical histories of economic thought, that the inception of Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* can be traced.

## **Martineau**

Martineau described her mission “in illustrating Political Economy, to exemplify Malthus’s doctrine [foremost] among the rest.”<sup>136</sup> She therefore touches upon Malthusian themes in many of her *Illustrations* such as “A Manchester Strike,” wherein Martineau has young laborers marry when their incomes are in a precarious state during the strike and suggests that to do so is thoughtless and imprudent.<sup>137</sup> The most Malthusian of all her *Illustrations*, however, is “Weal and Woe in Garveloch”—a blaring warning of the dangers of human reproduction when unchecked by moral restraint.

Public memory on the island of Garveloch holds nothing but economic prosperity, and the population has multiplied fruitfully over generations. The assumption reigns strong among many that prosperity has no end. It does not occur to anyone to accumulate a stock of capital in case of economic distress.<sup>138</sup> Martineau gives voice to reason through

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<sup>134</sup> See Harriet Martineau, *The Rioters* (Wellington, Salop: Houlston and Son, 1827); and Harriet Martineau, *The Turn Out* (Wellington, Salop: Houlston & Son, 1829).

<sup>135</sup> Deborah Anna Logan, ed., *The Collected Letters of Harriet Martineau* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), 1:154.

<sup>136</sup> Chapman, ed., *Martineau's Autobiography*, 1:210.

<sup>137</sup> Harriet Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy: Selected Tales*, ed. Deborah Anna Logan (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), 180. See also Harriet Martineau, *The Tendency of Strikes and Sticks to Produce Low Wages, and of Union Between Masters and Men to Ensure Good Wages* (Durham: J. H. Veitch, 1834).

<sup>138</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 80.

her characters Angus and Ella. Ella expresses anxiety over the carrying capacity of Garveloch's soil, a fear which Angus validates by citing Malthus' geometric ratio. As "the number of people doubles itself [exponentially] for ever, while the produce of the land does not, the people must increase faster than produce."<sup>139</sup> With Marcet, Martineau takes "capital" to be shorthand for "the means of subsistence" and argues that it cannot match population's rate of increase. Population proceeds according to the progression "one to two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four," and therefore increases exponentially over time.<sup>140</sup> Yet for all her adherence to Malthus' geometric ratio, Martineau discards his arithmetical ratio by adopting the law of diminishing returns.<sup>141</sup> She asserts that "produce will fall behind more and more, as every improvement, every outlay of capital yields a less return."<sup>142</sup> What Martineau is really contrasting here is the *a priori* proposition that population growth follows an exponential curve with the empirical observation that returns on capital diminish with successive inputs. It is a comparison of apples and oranges. In contrast, when Malthus set the geometric increase of population against the arithmetic growth of agricultural produce—agriculture following a linear curve with static returns—he had been comparing like with like in the sense of two *abstract* rates of increase without reference to experience.

Despite this point of contention, Malthus and Martineau's conclusions are the same: "since capital increases in a slower ratio than population, there will be sooner or

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. George Poulett Scrope, who wrote that Martineau "has been puzzling over Mr. Malthus's arithmetical and geometrical ratios, for knowledge which she should have obtained by a simple question or two of her mamma." See Scrope, Review of *Illustrations*, 141.

<sup>142</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 85.

later a deficiency of food.”<sup>143</sup> She illustrates this over the course of the narrative, where unchecked population growth in Garveloch nearly dissolves the community. Real wages fall as the price of provisions rises in proportion to scarcity.<sup>144</sup> Economic distress causes an increase in crime, violence, and infant mortality.<sup>145</sup> The fault lies squarely with Garveloch’s inhabitants, who, like children that feed fish to dogs during a period of famine, “did not perceive that ... it was their fault that the number of eaters was needlessly increased.”<sup>146</sup> Martineau makes her instructive intent explicit by stressing that the “half-starved multitudes of an over-populated kingdom might take a lesson from their folly.”<sup>147</sup>

The solution to the population problem is similar to that of Malthus. Martineau argues that “prudence and foresight” resulting in the delay of marriage or restraint from further reproductive activity is the only solution to curb population growth.<sup>148</sup> Individuals must rationally forecast their economic futures and modify their behavior accordingly. Martineau insists that individuals who do not adhere to the preventative check of moral restraint should not “repine if harsher checks follow. If the passionate man ... imprudently indulges in his love, he must not complain when poverty, disease, and death lay waste his family.”<sup>149</sup>

Here Martineau relies upon the individual male as her actor, as did Marcet and Malthus, but in her view women are just as able as their male counterparts to rationally

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 115-6.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 103, 106, 117.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 111-2.

calculate their circumstances and curtail their fertility. Martineau argues that a woman's concern for her male partner and her children makes her "peculiarly qualified for seeing the truth when fairly placed before" her. She is just as able to conclude, "after calculating numbers and resources, that there must be some check to the increase of the people, and that the prudential check [of abstinence] is infinitely preferable to those of vice and misery."<sup>150</sup>

Like Marcet, Martineau expects individuals with excessively large families to inculcate their children with the virtues of prudence and foresight to prevent the perpetuation of poverty. This is the moral of her novel "A Manchester Strike," wherein impoverished laborers are told they must discourage their children from having imprudent and early marriages to alleviate economic distress.<sup>151</sup> Small steps may be taken in the present by saving stocks of capital or establishing mutual savings banks for relief, but in the final analysis the amelioration of poverty is a future occurrence dependent upon adherence to the preventative check.

Critical reviewers of Martineau's *Illustrations* were revolted by her discouragement of marriage. They saw it as an affront to the social order. The political

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 116. Cf. William Ellery Channing: "What a noble creature Ella is? To give us in a fishing-woman an example of magnanimity and the most touching affection, *and still keep her in her sphere* – to make all the manifestations of this glorious virtue appropriate to her condition and consistent with our nature – this seems to me to indicate a very high order of mind. And to place Miss M among the first moral teachers as well as first authors of our time. Perhaps I may be partial. I feel so grateful to her for doing such justice to the poor and to human nature, that I am strongly tempted to raise her to the highest rank." See William Ellery Channing, "Letter from William Ellery Channing (New York) to Lucy Aikin Concerning Channing's Health, United State Relations with England, English Policy in Ireland, the Chance of Civil War in the United States, Slavery, and the Writings of Harriet Martineau, with Typed Copy, 30 May 1833," in *MS William Ellery Channing Papers: II. Dated Correspondence, 1794-1862 Reel 2. Massachusetts Historical Society*, 494. Gale Nineteenth Century Collections Online. (GALE|CDEEHW117285874). Emphasis mine.

<sup>151</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 197.

economist and opponent of Malthus George Poulett Scrope<sup>152</sup> could hardly believe the existence of “a *female Malthusian*. A woman who thinks child-bearing is a *crime against society!* An *unmarried woman* who declaims against *marriage!!* A *young woman* who deprecates charity and a provision for the *poor!!!*”<sup>153</sup> It was the same with the journalist William Maginn: “a book written by a *woman* against the *poor*—a book written by a *young woman* against *marriage!*”<sup>154</sup> These reviewers let their tempers cloud their judgment, forgetting that Martineau discouraged marriage only when the resultant offspring could not be adequately provided for. Martineau’s discouragement of marriage was conditional, not absolute.

Martineau recognized while writing “Weal and Woe” that its message could be misconstrued and therefore ruinous to her reputation. In her autobiography, she admits that she “risked much in writing and publishing on a subject which was not universally treated in the pure, benevolent, and scientific spirit of Malthus himself ... While writing ‘Weal and Woe in Garveloch,’ the perspiration many a time streamed down my face.” But she truly believed in its message, arguing that “there was not a line in it which might not be read aloud in any family.” When she finished the work, she looked to the women in her life for guidance. She

read it aloud to my mother and my aunt. If there had been any opening whatever for doubt or dread, I was sure that these two ladies would have given me abundant warning and exhortation,—both from their very keen sense of propriety and their

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<sup>152</sup> See George Poulett Scrope, *Principles of Political Economy* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1833), xvi-ii, 257-92.

<sup>153</sup> Scrope, review of *Illustrations*, 151. Emphasis original. For Martineau’s thoughts on Scrope’s review, see Chapman, ed., *Martineau’s Autobiography*, 1:204-7. For Martineau’s views on charity, see Martineau, *Illustrations*, 239-45.

<sup>154</sup> William Maginn, “On National Economy. No. III. Miss Martineau’s ‘Cousin Marshall’—‘The Preventative Check,’” *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* 6, no. 34 (November 1832), 403. Emphasis original.

anxious affection for me. But they were as complacent and easy as they had been interested and attentive. I saw that all ought to be safe.<sup>155</sup>

But all was not safe. According to Martineau, Scrope's review did serious damage to her reputation. For a decade after its publication she was the frequent target of insult and mockery.<sup>156</sup> Potential readers became wary of Martineau solely on reputation. She shared this fate with Malthus, whom she described as

the 'best-abused man' of the age. I was aware of this; and I saw in him, when I afterwards knew him, one of the serenest and most cheerful men that society can produce ... I asked Mr. Malthus one day whether he had suffered in spirits from the abuse lavished on him. 'Only just at first,' he answered.—'I wonder whether it ever kept you awake a minute.'—'Never after the first fortnite,' was his reply. The spectacle of the good man in his daily life, in contrast with the representations of him in the periodical literature of the time, impressed upon me, more forcibly than any thing in my own experience, the everlasting fact that the reformers of morality, person and social, are always subject at the outset to the imputation of immorality from those interested in the continuance of corruption.—I need only add that all suspicious speculation, in regard to my social doctrines, seems to have died out long ago.<sup>157</sup>

Actual readers found nothing immoral in Martineau's novels. Martineau provides the example of one woman who expressed reservations at seeing her books sitting on a table within the reach of children, as they had been deemed improper books by Scrope in the *Quarterly Review*. After reading "Weal and Woe" at the behest of a friend, this woman could not imagine that it could be the same book described by Scrope. She found it so benign that she allowed her husband to read it aloud to adolescents. In fact, they read all of the installments of Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* and never found

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<sup>155</sup> Chapman, ed., *Martineau's Autobiography*, 1:200.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:208.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:211.

the novellas improper.<sup>158</sup> Martineau achieved international celebrity in spite of the attacks by Scrope and his ilk. Actually reading “Weal and Woe” put to rest fears of immorality.

Martineau’s didactic exposition of Malthus principle of population was circulated widely throughout Britain, the United States, and continental Europe. It was even used as educational material by national governments. She reveals this in her autobiography in an 1833 encounter with Jane Haldimand Marcet.

Among the very first of my visitors at my lodgings was Mrs. Marcet ... Her great pleasure in regard to me was to climb the two flights of stairs at my lodging (asthma notwithstanding) to tell me ... that the then new and popular sovereign, Louis Philippe, had ordered a copy of my Series for each member of his family, and had desired M. Guizot to introduce a translation of it into the national schools ... About the same time, I heard ... that the Emperor of Russia had ordered a copy of my Series for every member of *his* family; and ... that a great number of copies had been bought, by the Czar’s order, for his schools in Russia.<sup>159</sup>

That Martineau is not taken seriously by many historians of political economy is especially confounding considering the international popularity of her works and the sheer numbers of school children who must have been exposed to her writings. The cause of this neglect can be traced back to Alfred Marshall, who frequently singled out Martineau throughout his career and tarnished her reputation amongst economists.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 1:209.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 1:233-4.

<sup>160</sup> For example, he publicly berated Beatrice Potter Webb for citing Martineau as an authority on the factory acts. See Peter Groenewegen, ed., *Official Papers of Alfred Marshall: A Supplement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 177-8. On the factory acts, see Mark Blaug, “The Classical Economists and the Factory Acts—A Re-Examination,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 72, no. 2 (May 1958), 211-26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1880596>.



## Marshall

For Marshall, Martineau embodied everything wrong with political economy: her didacticism, her use of fiction, and her insistence upon the agency of women.<sup>161</sup> That she became an international celebrity through popularizing economic ideas made her unacceptable to Marshall. In his *Principles of Economics*, he cited her as the premier example of the “hangers on and parasites” who, while “professing to simplify economic doctrines, really enunciated them without the conditions required to make them true.”<sup>162</sup> Marshall does not say what these “conditions” are and leaves the reader to turn his assertion into an argument. This appears to be a post hoc rational, because Marshall’s other writings suggest his hatred of Martineau stems from a different source.

That Martineau was a woman was likely the cause of Marshall’s scorn. For Marshall, economics “is like a fine chest of tools, which will not turn out anything of value except in skilled hands. This indicates that economics is a subject generally unsuited for advance by women.”<sup>163</sup> Rather, women’s talents are suited to “minor inquiries” such as: “(a) abundance of leisure; (b) interest in the concrete; (c) interest in personal matters; (d) sympathies; (e) access to the Unimportant individually, but numerous and therefore important collectively; (f) power of pursuing certain delicate

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<sup>161</sup> Though most male political economists showed little confidence in women’s ability for rational action in the economic realm, there existed a number of political economists beginning with Priscilla Bell Wakefield who emphasized women’s agency. On agency, see Ronald G. Bodkin, “The Issue of Female Agency in Classical Economic Thought: Jane Marcet, Harriet Martineau, and the Men,” *Gender Issues* 17, no. 4 (Fall 1999), 62-73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-998-0004-2>; and Ronald G. Bodkin, “Women’s Agency in Classical Economic Thought: Adam Smith, Harriet Taylor Mill, and J. S. Mill,” *Feminist Economics* 5, no. 1 (1999), 45-60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/135457099338148>. The marginalists reverted to treating women as irrational economic actors. See Michèle Pujol, “Into the Margin!” in *Out of the Margin: Feminist Perspectives on Economics*, eds. Edith Kuiper et al. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 12-24.

<sup>162</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1890), 63.

<sup>163</sup> Cited in Rita McWilliams Tullberg, “Alfred Marshall and the Male Priesthood of Economics,” *Quaderni di Storia dell’Economia Politica* 9, nos. 2-3 (1991), 235, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43317515>.

inquiries related to women and children in which a man would be out of his element.”<sup>164</sup> Nowhere in his list does Marshall provide a role for women in intellectual life. In contrast to his earlier advocacy of women’s education at Cambridge while under the influence of Henry Sedgwick,<sup>165</sup> Marshall, as the economist John Maynard Keynes noted, “came increasingly to the conclusion that there was nothing useful to be made of women’s intellects.”<sup>166</sup> As Marshall wrote to the Cambridge University Senate on February 3, 1896, a woman who pursues academics rather than “household management either as a wife or sister” might “get her honours; but her true life is impoverished and not enriched by them.”<sup>167</sup>

Having been produced by a woman in contradiction to all six of his proposed “minor inquiries,” Martineau’s *Illustrations* were in Marshall’s mind nothing more than an exercise in folly. He saved his harshest criticism of her for his final 1908 lecture at Cambridge: “Miss Martineau who only said one good thing in her life and that was just before she died ‘that probably everything she had said about Economics was wrong.’”<sup>168</sup> At the time of this lecture three quarters of a century had passed since the publication of Martineau’s *Illustrations*. Marshall’s statement attests to the work’s enduring relevance and to the extent of his rage. Yet I cannot but conclude that Marshall’s quotation is most

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid. For more on Marshall’s views on women, see Peter Groenewegen, *A Soaring Eagle: Alfred Marshall, 1842-1924* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1995), 493-530; and Michèle Pujol, “Gender and class in Marshall’s *Principles of Economics*,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 8, no. 3 (September 1984), 217-34, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.cje.a035547>.

<sup>165</sup> See Tiziano Raffaelli, Eugenio Biagini, and Rita McWilliams Tullberg, eds., *Alfred Marshall’s Lectures to Women: Some economic questions directly connected to the welfare of the laborer* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1995); Rita McWilliams Tullberg, “Alfred Marshall and the ‘Woman Question’ at Cambridge,” *Economie Appliquée* 43, no. 1 (1990), 209-30; and Tullberg, “Male Priesthood,” 243-54.

<sup>166</sup> Keynes, *Biography*, 335.

<sup>167</sup> John K. Whitaker, ed., *The Correspondence of Alfred Marshall, Economist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2:151.

<sup>168</sup> Rita McWilliams Tullberg, “Marshall’s Final Lecture, 21 May 1908,” *History of Political Economy* 25, no. 4 (1993), 613, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-25-4-605>.

likely fabricated. It is nowhere to be found in Martineau's autobiography, in her other published works, or in any of her letters,<sup>169</sup> and Marshall himself provides no reference. I am only able to trace it back to the first edition of Marshall's *Principles*, where he asserted without citation that before her death Martineau confessed a "suspicion that economic doctrines might be all wrong."<sup>170</sup> Possibly due to criticism, Marshall expunged the footnote attacking Martineau in the second edition.<sup>171</sup> But he restored it—albeit it without Martineau's identity and with somewhat tempered language—in the third and fourth.<sup>172</sup> He then reinserted her into the footnote in the fifth edition.<sup>173</sup> From the fifth through the final eighth edition, Marshall's claim that Martineau retracted her views on political economy remained, though he now provided no direct quotation: "before her death she expressed a just doubt whether the principles of economics (as understood by her) had any validity."<sup>174</sup> This assertion has been reprinted as recently as 2013 without clarification explaining its dubious origin.<sup>175</sup> It is likely that Marshall's readers believe it to be true. Martineau rolls in her grave.

The most significant of Marshall's attacks relied on no invented evidence. Instead it was a repudiation of classical political economy for giving women a role in disseminating knowledge to popular audiences. He delivered this attack in an address to

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<sup>169</sup> See Logan, ed., *Collected Letters*, 5 vols.; and Harriet Martineau, *Further Letters*, ed. Deborah A. Logan (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2012).

<sup>170</sup> Marshall, *Principles*, 63.

<sup>171</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 61n1.

<sup>172</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), 63-4n; Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1898), 63-4n.

<sup>173</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1907), 763n1.

<sup>174</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1910), 763n1; Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1916), 763n1; Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), 763n1.

<sup>175</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 630n1.

the Cambridge Economic Club on October 29, 1896, and subsequently published it in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* where it was circulated widely.

Never again will a Mrs. Trimmer, a Mrs. Marcet, or a Miss Martineau earn a goodly reputation by throwing [general economic principles] into the form of a catechism or of simple tales, by aid of which any intelligent governess might make clear to the children nestling around her where lies economic truth, and might send them forth ready to instruct statesmen and merchants how to choose the right path in economic policy, and to avoid the wrong.<sup>176</sup>

This was as much an affirmation of fact as a plea for the future, because Marshallian orthodoxy had by this time permeated the academy and professionalized the discipline. The economist in the Marshallian paradigm was a man trained a specialized body of knowledge inaccessible to the laity.<sup>177</sup> Concern for practical problems such as keeping the increase of population from outpacing the growth of the means of subsistence was considered of lesser import than the acquisition of “knowledge for its own sake.”<sup>178</sup>

Marshall’s address was reprinted in Pigou’s widely read *Memorials of Alfred Marshall* (1925),<sup>179</sup> whose contributors included Keynes and Francis Ysidro Edgeworth among other influential voices. Keynes himself cited the passage attacking Trimmer, Marcet, and Martineau approvingly—an act in which no small part cemented its enduring impact.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Alfred Marshall, “The Old Generation of Economists and the New,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 11, no. 2 (January 1897), 117, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882124>.

<sup>177</sup> See John Maloney, *Marshall, Orthodoxy, and the Professionalization of Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>178</sup> Marshall, *Principles*, 94.

<sup>179</sup> A. C. Pigou, ed., *Memorials of Alfred Marshall* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1925), 295-311.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

These actions combined with Marshall's influence proved powerful enough to sully Martineau's reputation amongst the economists of the day to enable such a consensus to persist into the present. The politician and economist Luigi Einaudi noted in 1934 that Martineau was not a celebrated economic thinker as she was in her own time;<sup>181</sup> and in 2001 the economist David M. Levy was "at a loss to explain why modern economists do not take Martineau seriously."<sup>182</sup> The fault lies with Alfred Marshall, and the consequences have been so far reaching as to mostly erase women like Martineau, Marcet, and Edgeworth from our canonical histories. It is high past time for historians of economic thought to discard the Marshallian framework that marginalizes women in their works.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued women distilled Malthus' principle of population into didactic literature intended to ameliorate the behavior of their audience. Edgeworth illustrated Malthus' principle of population in a children's story warning that the unchecked reproduction of animals would cause humanity to experience a mortality crisis. Her moral was somewhat contradictory but suggested that humans must take care to shield their produce from fast-reproducing animals. Marcet utilized the medium of the dialog and the short story, instructing her adolescent and adult readers to delay marriage until they had secured resources enough to support a family. Otherwise, harsh checks to population such

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<sup>181</sup> Riccardo Faucci and Roberto Marchionatti, eds., *Luigi Einaudi: Selected Economic Essays* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2:227.

<sup>182</sup> David M. Levy, *How the Dismal Science Got Its Name: Classical Economics and the Ur-Text of Racial Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 55.

as infant mortality would follow imprudent reproduction. Martineau's exposition of Malthus' principle in a novel for adults was the most complex of the three, but it held the same conclusions as Marcet: the discouragement of reproduction until one has obtained adequate resources to support their offspring. If the preventative check is not adhered to, more severe checks like disease and starvation will follow. In spite of the success of women popularizers, Marshall took pains to delegitimize their work to remove the presence of women from economics. Regretfully, his endeavors were successful, as the production of political economy in the form of didactic literature ceased with the establishment of Marshallian orthodoxy.

### III. POOR LAWS

The English Poor Laws were the foremost policies Malthus critiqued according to his principle of population. Inaugurated by the Poor Relief Act of 1601, the Poor Laws relieved, according to the economic historian George Boyer, “the elderly, widows, children, the sick, the disabled, and the unemployed and underemployed.”<sup>183</sup> Combining elements of family allowances, public works, unemployment compensation, and wage-escalation, they have been described by the economist Mark Blaug as “a welfare state in miniature.”<sup>184</sup> Malthus was one of the Poor Laws sternest critics and in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* advocated for their complete abolition. This chapter assesses to what degree women political economists—namely, Marcet and Martineau—circulated Malthusian ideas regarding the Poor Laws amongst the reading public. Following the pair’s close adherence to Malthus’ principle of population and the popular perception of Malthus as being a steadfast abolitionist regarding the Poor Laws, it might be expected for this chapter to argue that Marcet and Martineau circulated Malthusian views on the Poor Laws to mobilize support for their abolition. To a certain extent this hypothesis holds weight; Marcet and Martineau indeed did call for the abolition of the Poor Laws on what can be construed as Malthusian grounds in certain places.

Rather than strictly following Malthus, however, Marcet and Martineau utilized original arguments to critique the Poor Laws. Furthermore, the two dissented from the abolitionist stance by advocating for measures called for by the 1832 Royal Commission

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<sup>183</sup> George Boyer, “English Poor Laws,” EH.Net Encyclopedia, edited by Robert Whaples, published May 7, 2002, <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/english-poor-laws/>.

<sup>184</sup> Mark Blaug, “The Poor Law Report Reexamined,” *The Journal of Economic History* 24, no. 2 (June 1964), 229, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050700060502>.

into the Operation of the Poor Laws and enacted through the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act (also known as the New Poor Law). Though their original arguments do not find corollaries in Malthus' thought, Marcet and Martineau's support of reform is in concert with the (little-known) stance taken by Malthus in 1824 and 1830 according to which he held that reformed Poor Laws would be a net benefit to English society. It is, however, very doubtful that Marcet and Martineau were inspired by Malthus to champion the cause of reform. Marcet's support of reform came in response to the New Poor Law, on which Malthus remained silent. Martineau generated her opinion on reform independent of Malthus, though she was probably influenced by the political economist and Poor Law Commissioner Nassau William Senior. The situation was evidently more complicated than the simple popularization of Malthus' ideas, even if the two women had been influenced by the elder political economist in their considerations of his theory of population.

Marcet and Martineau's writings on the Poor Laws demonstrate that women political economists were more than popularizers in regard to this economic policy. While relying upon Malthus's arguments to establish their criticisms of the Poor Laws, they also critiqued the laws on other grounds and supported reforms discordant with Malthus' most well-known position. These substantial differences with Malthus lead one to the conclusion that, on the subject of the Poor Laws, women political economists were producers of political-economic knowledge in addition to circulators of knowledge attributable to their predecessors.



## Malthus

According to his earlier stance, Malthus saw no redeeming factors in the Poor Laws and advocated for their total abolition. In his words, it “will scarcely admit of a doubt, that if the poor laws had never existed in this country ... the aggregate mass of happiness among the common people would have been much greater than it is at present.”<sup>185</sup> And: “It may be asserted, without danger of exaggeration, that the poor laws have destroyed many more lives than they have preserved.”<sup>186</sup>

Malthus argued that the Poor Laws worsened the condition of the poor in two ways. First, the Poor Laws stimulated population growth without increasing the means of subsistence. Second, the Poor Laws impoverished individuals not receiving poor relief, and thereby create more dependent poor.<sup>187</sup> Regarding the first argument, Malthus contended that poor bachelors were able to marry without the prospect of maintaining a family because of the promise of poor relief. Due to the increased population resultant from improvident marriages, the provisions of the nation must be distributed in smaller shares. Consequently, more members of society are driven to the parish for relief, as they find themselves unable to suffice on the decreasing amount of food their labor commands.<sup>188</sup>

This argument is not without its complications; it becomes incoherent when one considers arguments made by Malthus in other places. He tempered his view that the Poor Laws encouraged improvident marriages in his public letter to Samuel Whitbread

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<sup>185</sup> Malthus, *1803 Edition*, 325-6.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 323, 326.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

(1807). There he maintained that “the poor laws do not encourage early marriages *so much* as might be expected” when one considers that the proportion of births and marriages to the whole English population is less than in most other European countries.<sup>189</sup> He finally nullified the argument in the sixth edition of his *Essay* (1826), stating in an appendix that the Poor Relief Act of 1662 (the Settlement Act), which restricted the residence of the poor to their home parish, “operates too strongly in preventing marriages.”<sup>190</sup> This was because it incentivized landlords to demolish rather than construct cottages on their estates to lessen the tax of the poor rate, which in turn caused individuals to remain single in the absence of available housing. Malthus concluded the discussion by stating he “will not presume to say positively that [the Poor Laws] greatly encourage population.”<sup>191</sup>

Malthus’ second argument is less convoluted. He asserts that the quantity of provisions consumed in workhouses by the poor of society diminishes the shares that would otherwise be consumed by “more industrious and more worthy members,” thus forcing individuals not receiving aid to become dependent upon poor relief.<sup>192</sup> Malthus views poor relief as a zero-sum game, in which no aid can be given without a corresponding loss somewhere else in society. If the cost is great enough, it forces the loser to become dependent on parish aid for subsistence. Thus, Malthus denied the right of the poor to social subsistence on the grounds that the food given to them must be

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<sup>189</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *A Letter to Samuel Whitbread, Esq. M. P. on His Proposed Bill for the Amendment of the Poor Laws* (London: J. Johnson, 1807), 16.

<sup>190</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: John Murray, 1826), 2:467.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:468.

<sup>192</sup> Malthus, *1803 Edition*, 323.

extracted from the mouths of those who deserve it more. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the following passage appearing only in the 1803 edition of the *Essay*.

A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he had a just demand, and if the society do not want his labor, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and she will quickly execute her own orders, if he does not work upon the compassion of some of her guests. If these guests get up and make room for him, other intruders immediately appear demanding the same favour. The report of a provision for all that come, fills the hall with numerous claimants. The order and harmony of the feast is disturbed, the plenty that before reigned is changed into scarcity; and the happiness of the guests is destroyed by the spectacle of misery and dependence in every part of the hall, and by the clamorous importunity of those, who are justly enraged at not finding the provision which they had been taught to expect. The guests learn too late their error, in counteracting those strict orders to all intruders, issued by the great mistress of the feast, who, wishing that all her guests should have plenty, and knowing that she could not provide for unlimited numbers, humanely refused to admit fresh comers when her table was already full.<sup>193</sup>

Through the metaphor of a feast, Malthus emphasizes the finitude of the aggregate food of society. Food on society's table must be distributed in smaller quantities to its guests for every newcomer admitted to the feast. There is no way to increase what has been prepared. There is only the means to alter the distribution of what already exists. Those individuals who have been chosen by nature have a just claim to the food on the table, while those who are not chosen have no inkling of a right to even the smallest scrap of food. By describing the distribution of the food as being ordained by nature, Malthus delegitimizes claims of the poor to a right to subsistence. By altering the distribution of food, the Poor Laws go against nature, and by extension the will of God, as God

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 417-8.

expresses himself through the laws of nature.<sup>194</sup> Though Malthus struck out this passage in subsequent editions of his work, the sentiment it expressed remained.<sup>195</sup>

Because of the harm attendant on the Poor Laws enumerated above, Malthus advocated for their total abolition. But he also wished to give society a period to adjust to their abolition rather than immediately get rid of all forms of poor relief. For this reason, his proposed solution is the passing of a regulation stipulating that no child born from any marriage is to be entitled to poor relief a year from the regulation's enactment, and the same for a child born illegitimately from two years after the same date. The passage of time would ensure the elimination of all those who receive poor relief, which would de facto eliminate the Poor Laws. To circulate knowledge of the regulation he proposes that clergymen should reiterate to couples before marriage the obligation that parents must provide for their children without parish assistance. If couples marry and are unable to provide subsistence to their children and themselves, nature should be allowed to exert its will and the family must be left to suffer. Private charity would still exist, but Malthus argued it "should be administered very sparingly."<sup>196</sup>

While in the printed editions of the *Essay* Malthus maintained the call for abolition, he revealed in his private correspondence that his views were shifting towards reform. In a letter to the minister and political economist Thomas Chalmers of July 21, 1822, Malthus confided that he saw public support of the Poor Laws a strong enough

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 425.

<sup>195</sup> See, for example, Ibid.: "He should be taught to know that the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, had doomed him and his family to starve for disobeying their repeated admonitions; that he had no claim of right on society for the smallest portion of food, beyond that which his labour would fairly purchase; and that, if he and his family were saved from suffering the utmost extremities of hunger, he would owe it to the pity of some kind benefactor to whom, therefore, he ought to be bound by the strongest ties of gratitude."

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 423, 425.

barrier to prevent the general adoption of the abolitionist cause. He believed that “the first improvement” was “likely to come from an improved administration of our actual laws, together with a more general system of education and moral superintendence.”<sup>197</sup> Again writing to Chalmers on November 9, 1822, he stated that “from the present temper of the House of Commons, I own that I have latterly felt myself compelled to restrain my hopes of any thing like the complete abolition of the Poor Laws, and to satisfy myself with the prospect of amelioration of the present system.”<sup>198</sup>

Though the *Essay* was later to go through its sixth edition with the call for abolition unmolested, Malthus’ attitude in his final public address on the Poor Laws was one of supporting conditional reform. In *A Summary View of the Principle of Population* (1830), based on his anonymously published article on population for the 1824 supplement to the fourth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Malthus argued that the benefits of relief given to the poor by law

depends mainly upon the feelings and habits of the labouring classes of society, and can only be determined by experience. If it be generally considered as so discreditable to receive parochial relief, that great exertions are made to avoid it, and few or none marry with a certain prospect of being obliged to have recourse to it, there is no doubt that those who were really in distress might be adequately assisted, with little danger of a constantly increasing proportion of paupers; and, in that case, a great good would be attained, without any proportionate evil to counterbalance it.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Cited in James, *Population Malthus*, 450. Chalmer’s political economy was derivative of Malthus’. For his main work, see Thomas Chalmers, *On Political Economy, in Connexion with the Moral State and Moral Prospects of Society* (London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1832).

<sup>198</sup> Cited in John Pullen, “The Other Correspondence of T. R. Malthus: A Preliminary List and Selected Commentary,” *History of Political Economy* 48, no. 1 (2016), 78, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-3452303>.

<sup>199</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *A Summary View of the Principle of Population* (London: John Murray, 1830), 73.

He therefore conceded that the Poor Laws, under the right circumstances, could be beneficial to English society. This appears to be a reversal of his earlier argument that relieving the poor necessarily turns rate-payers into rate-receivers. According to the new line of thought, the advantages of poor relief are not counteracted by any attendant harms. Moreover, such a contention is an admission that reform along the lines of the workhouse test established by the New Poor Law would be welcome. The workhouse test, in short, entailed the elimination of relief given outside the workhouse and a reduction in the quality of life inside the workhouse to a level below the minimum held by the independent worker.<sup>200</sup> In theory, this would ensure that only those truly in distress would submit themselves to the workhouse to receive poor relief. In practice, the policy was implemented irregularly and outdoor relief continued to be administered following the New Poor Law's passage.

Notwithstanding the congruence between the workhouse test and Malthus' vision of reformed Poor Laws, the political economist remained silent on the New Poor Law despite living to see it become a legal reality. When considered in isolation, his silence cannot be taken for support or repudiation of the act. Yet, when viewed in conjunction with his implicit support of Marcet's call for the Poor Laws' abolition as expressed in her *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy*, which will be made clear, it seems Malthus' final position on the Poor Laws was a reversion back to his earlier abolitionist stance.

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<sup>200</sup> On the workhouse test, see Timothy Besley, Stephen Coate, and Timothy W. Guinnane, "Incentives, Information, and Welfare: England's New Poor Law and the Workhouse Test," in *History Matters: Essays on Economic Growth, Technology, and Demographic Change*, eds. William A. Sundstrom, Timothy W. Guinnane, and Warren C. Whatley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 245-70.

In contrast to their close adherence to Malthus' principle of population in their literary works, Marcet and Martineau were more selective in following Malthus in his views on the Poor Laws. While the two used Malthusian arguments to critique the Poor Laws, they also utilized their own original arguments to persuade readers that the laws were detrimental to society. Their remedies were at first in agreement with Malthus' well-known call for abolition. Later, however, their views morphed into proposals consonant with the effort to reform the Poor Laws undertaken by 1832 royal commission and realized by the 1834 amendment act.

### **Marcet**

Marcet adopted from Malthus the cornerstone of her criticism of the Poor Law. Following Malthus, she argues that the Poor Laws stimulate population growth and engender downward mobility in *Conversations on Political Economy* and *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy*. Targeted towards adolescents and workers respectively, the two works present Malthus' arguments in simple language meant to persuade the uninitiated in political economy. They were evidently successful, receiving critical acclaim and going through multiple editions.

Regarding Malthus' contention that the Poor Laws stimulate population growth, Marcet argues that the Poor Laws incentivize imprudent marriages of individuals who have neither secured an income large enough to support a family, nor accumulated a stock of capital sufficient to alleviate distress caused by unforeseen circumstances. By offering sums of money to individuals so long as they have a family, the laws create the

conditions which they are supposed to alleviate. Through the operation of the Poor Laws, the number of individuals dependent upon parish relief increases.<sup>201</sup>

Marcet illustrates Malthus' argument on downward mobility in *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy*. Here, the worker John Hopkins relates an anecdote of encountering an impoverished widow named Dixon at the vestry to collect poor relief. John asks her how she arrived at such a position, because he thought that her husband had left her a sizable income when he passed away. Dixon responds: "No, Master Hopkins; he did all he could not to bring me down to a lower station while he lived; but his means were but small, and the profits of our little shop did but just serve to maintain us."<sup>202</sup> She would have remained in her former station if not for the poor rate, which ate up all her savings. Now she is reduced to collecting poor relief for herself and her children, which she does only with "shame and sorrow."<sup>203</sup> John reassures her that she has a definite right to aid now that she is in need because she paid the poor rate for so long. This provides her little solace. The last image of the widow Dixon Marcet impresses upon the reader's mind is one of downcast resignation. "God's will be done!" she cries to Hopkins, tears streaming down her face.<sup>204</sup>

The above two arguments may have been borrowed from Malthus, but Marcet also has an original argument against the old poor laws: they reduce the wages of labor. The poor rate which taxes the capitalist reduces his capital and his demand for labor, and so the remuneration he provides his laborers must necessarily be less than if he went

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<sup>201</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 163; [Marcet,] *Hopkins's Notions*, 106, 112, 114.

<sup>202</sup> [Marcet,] *Hopkins's Notions*, 108.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*



untaxed.<sup>205</sup> Thus Farmer Stubbs tells John Hopkins that he “would willingly pay higher wages, and employ more hands, too, could I once be rid of this poor’s rate.”<sup>206</sup> According to Marcet, the laws’ “greatest evil” is that they suck capital from its natural channels in order to relieve the poor.<sup>207</sup> If the funds allotted for the poor laws were left in the circulating capital of England, workers would secure larger incomes for their families and be able to save for times of distress.<sup>208</sup>

Marcet dramatizes the catastrophic effect of the Poor Laws by imagining a time when the increase of population they engender outweighs the ability of the parish to collect the assessed rates.<sup>209</sup> She argues children reared by imprudent marriages will grow up to find no work for their numbers, so they themselves marry to secure income from the parish. With population far outweighing the demand for labor in the country, workers resort to crime, “for when a man cannot get a livelihood honestly by his labour, he is little like to resist a temptation that falls his way to get it otherwise, especially when he has been bred up to indolence.”<sup>210</sup> Then workers are faced with imprisonment, but they will not stand for such a fate. So they riot, threaten, set fires, and cause mayhem.<sup>211</sup> For Marcet, the Poor Laws have the potential to devolve society into a state of chaos.

In place of the Poor Laws, Marcet advocates for the vigorous education of working-class children in addition to their participation in institutions aimed at the cultivation of prudent habits. Adults are not the targets of education because “it is

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<sup>205</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 164.

<sup>206</sup> [Marcet,] *Hopkins’s Notions*, 105.

<sup>207</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 164.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> [Marcet,] *Hopkins’s Notions*, 110.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-4.

difficult, if not impossible, to change the habits of men whose characters and formed, and settled ... whilst youth and innocence may be moulded into any form you chuse to give them.”<sup>212</sup> Education should render children “not only moral and religious, but industrious, frugal, and provident.”<sup>213</sup> To this end, institutions aside from schools should be relied upon: those being friendly societies and savings banks.<sup>214</sup>

The friendly society, or benefits club, provides its members with a fund for relief in times of economic distress, sickness, or old age. It does so by collecting a small amount of monthly dues from each member. For Marcet, workers in friendly societies are among the deserving poor, who, in contrast to their undeserving counterparts, are “comparatively cleanly, industrious, sober, frugal, respecting themselves, and respected by others ... they maintain an honourable pride and independence of character.”<sup>215</sup> In the *Conversations on Political Economy*, Mrs. B. remarks to Caroline that her “prudent gardener Thomas is a member of one” such society.<sup>216</sup> Caroline replies with the observation that the membership of individuals like Thomas to friendly societies incentivizes the poor to join, because the membership of economically secure individuals increases funds allotted to the relief of distressed members.<sup>217</sup> In *John Hopkins’s Notions on Political Economy*, Farmer Stubbs tells John’s wife that “if your husband had been a prudent man, and had belonged to the benefit club, he might have got relief when his

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<sup>212</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 159.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-60, 162.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-1.

children were sick, without going to the parish.”<sup>218</sup> Participating in friendly societies teaches the poor the benefits of pooling resources for times of hardship.

Yet friendly societies were not without their flaws. They apparently failed regularly to meet the needs of their sick members, as many of their members had no recourse when ill but reliance on the poor rates. This fact is affirmed by even as ardent a supporter of friendly society as Samuel Roberts, who wanted to legislatively mandate that every individual in England join a society. He wrote: “Hundreds, perhaps I may safely say, thousands of old men, in the parish where I reside, have been thrown, in sickness, upon the Poor Rates for relief, after having paid for thirty or forty years, their contribution regularly to the club; in many instances without having ever received any thing out of it.”<sup>219</sup> The pauper John Hall attests to this reality in a September 16, 1819 letter to his parish, wherein he admits his application for relief comes after being denied sick pay from his friendly society.

I Beg Lieve [*sic*] to Iform [*sic*] you that I Stand in further Assistance for I Am Lame in my Leg through A Strain & am unable To Work so Sir I hope you Will Not think it Ill of my going to this Parrish for Relief for my Club Box is Shut Up & have No feind [*sic*] to go for any thing But you I have two Children that is Not able to do any thing So Sir I hope you Will Send An Order to the Oversears [*sic*] of Chelmsford for they dont Like to Any thing Without your Order I Am your Humble Petitioner *John Hall*.<sup>220</sup>

Failure to provide for sick individuals was not the only shortcoming of friendly societies. In some instances, when funds were allotted to sick members they were

<sup>218</sup> [Marcet,] *Hopkins's Notions*, 101.

<sup>219</sup> Samuel Roberts, *A Defence of the Poor Laws* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1819), 43.

<sup>220</sup> Thomas Sokoll, ed., *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 316.

insufficient to provide for the sustenance of themselves and their families. Such was the case for Samuel White, who admitted so in a May 21, 1828 letter to a vestry clerk.

Haveing [*sic*] been favoured with Pretty good health in my own Person and Family I have not made any application to my Parish for about sixteen Months and if Providence had Continued the Blessing I would still have kept from so doing – but I am sorry to inform you that I am ill and unable to work I have been Poorly for several weeks but Continued to work till the Doctor informed me I should not get better till I left off – I am in a Clubb and receive 10/6 per week but that is not near enough for the support of eight of us – especialy [*sic*] as I am recommended by the Docter [*sic*] to take nourishing things which it will be the interest of the Parish to enable me to get that I may be the sooner restored to health and strength any sum the select vestry may be Pleased to allow me till that Period will be thankfully received.<sup>221</sup>

As noted in the previous chapter, Marcet argues that the poor are impoverished because of their tendency to produce excessively large families. She advocates for friendly societies to alleviate these families in times of sickness. But the funds of these societies, as evidenced by White's letter, are not always sufficient to provide for large numbers. Thomas the gardener may be prudent to join a friendly society, but he is a bachelor and so his needs when ill can be met with the funds provided by his society. The same cannot be said for workers with excessively large families, which Marcet argues are manifold. The utility of the friendly society appears especially suspect when considered in this light.

In addition to friendly societies, another institution Marcet argues the working classes should utilize is the savings bank. In these the poor should place a portion of their incomes and accrue monthly interest on their deposits, in this way acquiring the habit of

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 263.

frugality.<sup>222</sup> In the fifth edition of his *Essay* (1817), Malthus sang the praises of savings banks, asserting that they appear “much the best, and most likely, if they become general, to effect a permanent improvement in the condition of the lower classes of society.”<sup>223</sup>

Little known is that the Quaker political economist Priscilla Bell Wakefield was the first to establish such an institution.<sup>224</sup> She did so in Tottenham on October 22, 1798.<sup>225</sup>

Initially Wakefield’s bank was solely for the use of children, but its success quickly spawned a similar institution for adults. With the backing of six philanthropically-minded trustees, Wakefield’s bank conducted business on the first Monday of each month. At this time workers, servants, and other members of the poor could deposit sums above one shilling or withdraw their savings as needed. Every twenty shillings a person deposited would accrue interest at an annual rate of 5%. The funds collected by the bank were divided into £100 sums to be distributed evenly among the trustees. For every £100 collected in excess of the original £600, a new trustee would be chosen in order to preserve the equitable distribution of risk. In an ideal situation, the poor would utilize these banks to save sums of money for the time when they became elderly or infirm, so as to not pass their later years in a parish workhouse.<sup>226</sup>

Wakefield, Malthus, and Marcet were not the only political economists concerned with savings banks. Ricardo spent some of his fortune gained from the stock market in

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<sup>222</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 162.

<sup>223</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: John Murray, 1817), 3:275.

<sup>224</sup> For her major work of political economy, see Priscilla Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex; with Suggestions for its Improvement* (London: J. Johnson, 1798).

<sup>225</sup> Priscilla Wakefield, “Extract from an account of a female benefit club,” in *The Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor* (London: J. Hatchard, 1802), 3:186.

<sup>226</sup> Priscilla Wakefield, “Extract from an account of a charitable bank at Tottenham for the savings of the poor,” in *The Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor* (London: J. Hatchard, 1805), 4:206-9.

founding a savings bank in Gloucestershire. He reveals this in a December 10, 1817 letter to Hutches Trower.

We have established a Savings Bank in this neighbourhood in the formation of which I have been very active. I was the only one practically acquainted with such Institutions and therefore my services have been much more highly appreciated than they deserved. We give a half penny per month for every 13/-. In six weeks we have received about £1100 which may be said to be tolerably successful, but we understand that a strong prejudice exists among the manufacturing classes against us. They think we have some sinister object—that we wish to keep wages down. Time and good temper will overcome this feeling and convince the prejudiced how that the rich have no other personal object in view excepting the interest which every man must feel in good government,—and in the general prosperity. The success of these Banks would be great if the enormous abuses of the Poor Laws were corrected.<sup>227</sup>

As evidenced by Ricardo's letter, the ideology behind the savings bank presumed a harmony of interests between its well-endowed founders and their poor counterparts. But the rich took pains to distinguish between members of the poorer classes who *deserved* participation in such institutions and those who did not and were likely to abuse their inclusion. This is the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, or in Marcet's language, "the industrious poor" and "the indolent and profligate."<sup>228</sup> For Marcet, those who relieve the poor ought to "consider it as a duty to ascertain whether the object whom we relieve is in real want, and we should proportion our charity not only to his distress, but also to his merits."<sup>229</sup> This not only excludes the undeserving poor from relief, but ensures that members of the poor who have come to ruin through irresponsible behavior are less attended to than their industrious brethren. Discriminate relief would

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<sup>227</sup> Sraffa, ed., *Ricardo*, 8:220.

<sup>228</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 167.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

disincentivize imprudence, as meritorious workers would no longer be able to look to their idle counterparts and find them as well provided for as their own.<sup>230</sup>

With universal education, friendly societies, and savings banks in mind, Marcet argues for the abolition of the Poor Laws in *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy*. Reminiscent of Malthus, she suggests that a law be passed that stipulates no child born after three or four years is to be entitled to parish relief. This would provide a buffer period where society adjusts to the absence of the Poor Laws. Workers would be discouraged from having more children while those that receive relief pass away in the course of time. Eventually those on whom the rate is assessed would retain the income which previously was subject to taxation, and the demand for labor, and consequently wages, would rise.<sup>231</sup> Notable is that Malthus wrote Marcet after reading *Hopkins's Notions* and complained only of her treatment of the Corn Laws, the abolition of which, we will see in the next chapter, she thought of as being unequivocally advantageous. Malthus promised to purchase a dozen copies of the work to distribute to the cottagers in his neighborhood, so convinced was he of the soundness of Marcet's doctrines.<sup>232</sup> Evidently Malthus was satisfied with her call for the abolition of the Poor Laws despite his admonition three years earlier that reformed Poor Laws would be beneficial to society. Malthus' silence on the Poor Laws in the letter to Marcet lends credence to the view that he remained in favor of abolition to the end of his life in spite of his shifting opinion on reform.

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>231</sup> [Marcet,] *Hopkins's Notions*, 118-9.

<sup>232</sup> Polkinghorn, "Unpublished Letter," 845.

While Marcet advocates for abolition in *Hopkins's Notions*, the seventh edition of her *Conversations on Political Economy* (1839) instead supports the reforms of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. There Marcet approves of the act's implementation of the workhouse test. This, she asserts, has stimulated the initiative of many families who previously would have contented themselves with receiving parochial aid. Wishing to avoid the workhouse, they now endeavor to maintain themselves and remain independent.<sup>233</sup> The confinement of relief to the workhouse, she argues, has also made numbers of the formerly undeserving poor labor for themselves in rejection of the alternative to work for the parish. Marcet holds that poor relief under the New Poor Law caters to the deserving poor above all. The workhouse provides food, shelter, and medical care, while every able-bodied workhouse inhabitant labors for the necessities of life. Marcet credits these measures with reducing the expenditure of the poor rates from eight million pounds to four million, the savings of which now circulate the country as capital in maintenance of the independent worker. As a result of this increase of circulating capital, the demand for labor increases, and in consequence so do the real wages of the working class. Marcet is sure that it "is the idle and vicious who are alone losers by these new regulations."<sup>234</sup>

One is struck by how well Marcet popularizes Malthus' thought on the Poor Laws as she simultaneously goes beyond him by promoting institutions and legal reforms independent of his proposals. Malthus had little to say about friendly societies and

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<sup>233</sup> Marcet, *Conversations*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., 152.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-4. Clark and Page have disputed the claim that the New Poor Law increased wages. See Gregory Clark and Marianne E. Page, "Welfare reform, 1834: Did the New Poor Law in England produce significant economic gains?" *Cliometrica* 13 (2019), 238-9, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11698-018-0174-4>.



savings bank prior to the appearance of the *Conversations on Political Economy*.<sup>235</sup>

Though he admitted reform could be beneficial, he remained silent on the passing of the New Poor Law and supported Marcet's call for abolition. While popularizing Malthus was without a doubt part of the function of her writings on the Poor Laws, she diverges from the elder political economist by articulating original arguments on wages, friendly societies, and savings banks, while also supporting the reforms of an act on which Malthus abstained from commenting. It must be concluded that Marcet was more than a popularizer of Malthus' ideas regarding the Poor Laws.

## **Martineau**

Martineau's critique of the Poor Laws comes in "Cousin Marshall," the eighth number in her series *Illustrations of Political Economy*. In "Cousin Marshall," Martineau critiques the poor laws on seven fronts: (1) their stimulation of population growth; (2) their tendency to turn rate-payers into rate-receivers; (3) their exorbitant expenditure; (4) their equivocation with regard to different types of poverty; (5) their corruptive influence on the morals of their administrators and of the poor; (6) their prevention of rural economic development; and (7) their restriction of settlement. Only (1) and (2) are Malthusian arguments. At the core of Martineau's critique is the concept of the wage fund, which stipulates that the average rate of wages is ascertained through dividing capital (i.e. the

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<sup>235</sup> He did, however, advocate for universal education of the lower classes. See Mark Blaug, "The Economics of Education in English Classical Political Economy: A Re-Examination," in *Essays on Adam Smith*, eds. Andrew S. Skinner and Thomas Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 574-7.

“wage fund”) by the number of laborers it maintains, or  $Wage = \frac{Capital}{Population}$ .<sup>236</sup> For

Martineau, the Poor Laws appropriate capital from its natural place in the wage fund, and thereby reduce the capital available for the subsistence of honest laborers in favor of providing for the poor. This disincentivizes industrious behavior while at the same time incentivizing idleness.

Regarding the first critique—that the Poor Laws stimulate population growth—Martineau places blame squarely upon the Speenhamland system of allowances implemented in 1795. This measure guaranteed increasing amounts of relief based upon the number of children possessed by the poor. Such relief provided a stimulus to population growth because it incentivized marriage by providing increasing amounts of aid to families.<sup>237</sup> Recent historical scholarship has not been kind to this argument. In their cliometric study of the Poor Laws, the economists Gregory Clark and Marianne Page (2019) conclude that the laws did not induce significantly higher fertility rates.<sup>238</sup> The historical demographers E. A. Wrigley and Richard M. Smith (2020) analyze the results of the 1851 census and find that the counties which adopted the Speenhamland system had marriage patterns comparable to the counties that did not adopt the system. The marital proportions of women aged 45-69 in 1851, whose marriages were primarily contracted under the Speenhamland system, were within 1% of the marital proportions of

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<sup>236</sup> On the wage fund doctrine, see Blaug, *Ricardian Economics*, 120-7. Jevons heavily criticized the doctrine, writing, “This theory pretends to give a solution of the main problem of the science—to determine the wages of labor; yet on close examination, its conclusion is found to be a mere truism, namely, that the average rate of wages is found by dividing the whole amount appropriated to the payment of wages by the number of those between whom it is divided.” See Jevons, *Theory*, vii.

<sup>237</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 249. Cf. Mark Blaug, “The Myth of the Old Poor Law and the Making of the New,” *The Journal of Economic History* 23, no. 2 (June 1963), 151-84, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050700103808>.

<sup>238</sup> Clark and Page, “Welfare,” 236-8.

similarly aged women in non-Speenhamland counties when accounting for the effects of the higher sex ratio of Speenhamland counties.<sup>239</sup>

Martineau's second argument concerning downward mobility relates firstly to the clause in the Poor Laws guaranteeing employment to those who cannot procure it for themselves. She argues that employment is strictly limited by the wage fund; it is impossible to extend employment to numbers in excess of what the circulating capital of England can support. Therefore efforts towards providing employment to the unemployed remove independent workers from their rightful occupations, and in turn make them dependent upon the poor rates for sustenance. The state thus maintains the condition of pauperism it attempts to alleviate.<sup>240</sup> Secondly, Martineau argues that the growing numbers of the poor increase the poor-rates levied on rates-payers, sinking their condition down into rate-receivers. Members of all classes who pay the poor rate find themselves turned into paupers.<sup>241</sup> She illustrates this in the case of the small farmer. The amount he pays for the poor rate increases as the numbers of poor increase. He pays more and more until his profits are extinguished; then he must give up his landholdings one after another until nothing remains but his fixed capital, which is promptly seized. Then he is forced to turn to the parish for relief. For Martineau, to speak of "security of property" under the poor laws is laughable. There is no more security of property "than there is security of life to a poor wretch in quicksand, who feels himself swallowed up inch by inch."<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> E. A. Wrigley and Richard Smith, "Malthus and the Poor Law," *The Historical Journal* 63, no. 1 (February 2020), 48, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X19000177>.

<sup>240</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 247.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 282-3.

The creation of paupers is especially true in the case of parishes adopting the Speenhamland system, which proportioned poor relief to the price of wheaten bread. For Martineau, this has the effect of taking bread out of the mouths of those who earned it, because the amount of bread available for maintenance is a function of the wage fund. As such, a given quantity of aid to the poor necessarily means a subtraction from the wage fund, which lowers wages and sends workers to the parish for aid.<sup>243</sup>

As it pertains to her third argument, the Poor Laws' expenditure appears especially suspect to Martineau given that the wage fund has not increased at a rate comparable to the poor rates. She takes the period of the previous 100 years, noting that while capital has increased rapidly, it is nowhere near the rate of the Poor Laws' expenditure, which has risen from five or six hundred thousand pounds per annum to upwards of eight million.<sup>244</sup> Hence Martineau complains of excessive taxation weighing heavily upon the middle and upper classes. This critique lends credence to her criticism that the Poor Laws engender downward mobility.

As regards critique four, Martineau criticizes the workhouse for equating all the different strata of poor which enter its walls. She represents the deserving poor in the character of Susan, an unemployed domestic servant who has fallen on hard times through no fault of her own. Susan arrives at the workhouse and is placed on equal footing with individuals whose impoverishment is due to their own malfeasance. In this manner the deserving and undeserving poor are equated, "poverty and indigence confounded, and blameless and culpable indigence, temporary distress, and permanent

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 248-9. See also Ibid., 287: "individual distress cannot be so relieved without inflicting the same portion of distress everywhere."

<sup>244</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 245.

destitution, all mixed up together, and placed under the same treatment.”<sup>245</sup> Martineau argues that there should be a clear distinction between temporary and lasting indigence, as well as innocent and culpable indigence, inside of the workhouse, as between poverty and indigence outside of it.<sup>246</sup> Efforts ought to be made to sharply distinguish not only the deserving and undeserving poor, but also between the graduations of poor within such classifications. For Martineau, the deserving poor include certain individuals who are permanently indigent, such as the disabled. It does them a disservice to classify them alongside not only the poor whose impoverishment is the consequence of vice, but also the honest worker whose hardship is the result of transient causes such as a fluctuation in the trade cycle.

Critique five—that the Poor Laws corrupt the morals of the poor—can be seen in the characters of Mrs. Bell and Childe. Mrs. Bell is a mother who gains aid from the parish for one of her children who has died; while Childe is a beggar who feigns sickness in order to collect more relief from his parish. For Martineau, fault for these fraudulent attempts at collecting poor relief lies at the feet of the Poor Laws. Actions such as these “would never have been dreamed of unless suggested and encouraged by a system which destroys the natural connexion between labour and its rewards.”<sup>247</sup> The same may be said of the corrupt morals of the Poor Law administrators, many of whom “pocket[] every penny that can be saved out of [the poor’s] accommodation,” and perform other nefarious deeds.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 235.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

The character Farmer Dale provides the rationale behind the Poor Laws impeding rural economic development, Martineau's sixth critique. Dale complains that taxation prevents him from cultivating a promising piece of land because "the tithe and the poor-rate together would just swallow up the whole profit."<sup>249</sup> This is especially onerous given that England's bountiful population is in need of increased subsistence. In addition to preventing the cultivation of farmland, the poor rates impede economic development by preventing the construction of homes for England's increasing rural population. Proprietors are taxed so heavily by the poor rates that no more houses than those absolutely necessary are built. The poor in rural areas thus find themselves in need of housing and migrate to urban areas in hopes of fulfilling the need. This overcrowds urban areas, so that the poor are forced to migrate back to their villages in search of work to feed their families. "If it were not for the poor-rate," Martineau insists, "we should see in every parish many a rood tilled that now lies waste, and many a row of cottages tenanted by those who now help to breed corruption in towns."<sup>250</sup>

Martineau's seventh critique of the Poor Laws, relating to the Settlement Act, is reminiscent of Adam Smith. Smith criticized the Settlement Act because it impeded the ability of parishes to realize their maximum economic growth. This was because it reduced the profits of capital by restricting the free movement of labor. By tying a worker to the parish through the Settlement Act, the Poor Laws prevent movement to the most dynamic sectors of the economy with most favorable remunerations of labor.<sup>251</sup> When the

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 269. For Martineau's critique of the tithe tax, see Harriet Martineau, *The Tenth Haycock* (London: Charles Fox, 1834). See also Claudia Oražem, *Political Economy and Fiction in the Early Works of Harriet Martineau* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 165-96.

<sup>250</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 270.

<sup>251</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 1:151-2.

profits of capital are stunted, so too is the capacity of parishes to grow economically, as capitalists cannot reinvest their capital to grow their businesses to the extent that they could without the limitations of their labor supply imposed by the Poor Laws. In this vein, Martineau complains that the Settlement Act prevents workers from migrating to parishes with high demand for labor, as signaled by high wages.<sup>252</sup> Just as critiques (1) and (2) can be considered popularizations of Malthus' arguments, critique (7) can be seen as a popularization of Smith's.

Most of Martineau's criticisms of the Poor Laws cannot be traced to Malthus and seem to have been generated independently of any direct influence. Aside from critiques (1), (2), and (7), Martineau's arguments do not resemble those made by her political economist predecessors.<sup>253</sup> She was certainly a fervent believer in the wage fund doctrine and in that regard had probably been most influenced by Marcet, McCulloch, and Mill, but they did not take the doctrine to the conclusions she reached. It appears, then, that Martineau was not just a popularizer of other political economist's ideas. She articulated original arguments while intervening in a pressing and contemporary policy debate.<sup>254</sup> Scholars should have taken notice of this, yet the monographs on the Poor Law debate are silent on Martineau's contributions.<sup>255</sup>

In proposing an alternative to the Poor Laws, Martineau takes pains to discredit the idea that charity is a viable mechanism for the alleviation of poverty. She argues that

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<sup>252</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 277-8.

<sup>253</sup> For the arguments of her predecessors, see Rajani Kannepalli Kanth, *Political Economy and Laissez-Faire: Economics and Ideology in the Ricardian Era* (Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 1986), 42-80.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. Forget, "Martineau," 296: "Her efforts in political economy were not original."

<sup>255</sup> See, for example, J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1775-1834* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969); and Raymond G. Cowherd, *Political Economists and the English Poor Laws: A Historical Study of the Influence of Classical Economics on the Formation of Social Welfare Policy* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977).

charitable institutions such as hospitals, dispensaries, and alms houses perpetuate poverty rather than alleviate it. Such charitable institutions stimulate population growth beyond what the country's means of subsistence can provide, so that the growing population finds itself acutely impoverished and consequently suffers from diseases.<sup>256</sup> The only charitable institutions that should remain are schools—which should offer free education to all—asylums for the impotent, and casualty hospitals for emergency medical aid.<sup>257</sup> These institutions offer no bounty to population, and in the case of schools, actually counteract the tendency of the lower classes to reproduce without regard to their economic futures.<sup>258</sup>

Martineau's proposals to reduce the numbers of dependent poor are derived from the concept of the wage fund. She argues that to reduce the numbers of the indigent, only two measures can be taken: (1) the wage fund ought to be increased; and (2) the numbers of laborers ought to be proportioned to the capital delineated to their subsistence.<sup>259</sup> For both ends she proposes to gradually repurpose funds for poor relief to the purposes of production. This, Martineau asserts, would not only increase the amount of capital in the fund, but also proportion the population of workers to the wage fund (presumably through eliminating the Poor Laws' incentivization of marriage).<sup>260</sup> It was this logic which led Martineau to argue for the abolition of the Poor Laws.

In "Cousin Marshall," Martineau argues that the repurposing of capital and proportioning of population can only be done through the abolition of the Poor Laws. She

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<sup>256</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 241.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-3.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 284

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.



mentions friendly societies and savings banks as useful tools for laborers in the case of hardship,<sup>261</sup> but her final recommendation is the same as that of Malthus: the enactment of a law stipulating that no child born within a year of its passing and no illegitimate child born within two years of its passing is to be entitled to parish assistance.<sup>262</sup> With the passing of generations comes the abolition of the Poor Laws, a process she argues will be gradual enough to ensure society can adapt to the change with as few problems as possible.

In her later series *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated* (1833-4), however, Martineau advocates reforms identical to those proposed by the Poor Laws Commissioner's Report of 1834 and enacted by the New Poor Law. This series was commissioned by Henry Brougham and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, who supplied Martineau with evidence collected by the 1832 Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws.<sup>263</sup> The amount of evidence was overwhelming. As she told the publisher William Tait in a December 28, 1832 letter, "[h]ow long I shall go on, I do not know, but I might go on for 50 years to come. I have materials for a thousand & one tales before me."<sup>264</sup> The conclusions she deduced from the evidence were probably influenced by Nassau William Senior, who visited Martineau during 1832-4 to discuss the Poor Laws.<sup>265</sup> Nevertheless these conclusions reflected her own ideological commitments as a political economist and utilitarian.<sup>266</sup> Composed of members with the same ideological

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 261, 280, 284.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>263</sup> For insightful criticism into the methodology of the commissioners, see Blaug, "Poor Law Report," 229-45.

<sup>264</sup> Logan, ed., *Collected Letters*, 1:178.

<sup>265</sup> Chapman, ed., *Martineau's Autobiography*, 1:415.

<sup>266</sup> As evidence of her utilitarianism see the final insistence in "Weal and Woe" that "The positive checks, having performed their office in stimulating the human faculties and originating social institutions, must be

makeup—the most important whom were the Benthamite Edwin Chadwick and the political economist Senior—the Poor Law Commissioners were bound to derive the same conclusions as Martineau given the same data set.<sup>267</sup> The New Poor Law derived its provisions directly from the suggestions from the commissioner’s report and naturally was based upon these same conclusions. In her autobiography, Martineau recalled the experience of discovering the similarity of her proposals and those enacted by New Poor Law when musing upon the evidence provided to her by Brougham.

There can be no stronger proof of the strength of this evidence than the uniformity of the suggestions to which it gave rise in all the minds which were then intent on finding the remedy. I was requested to furnish my share of conclusions and suggestions. I did so, in the form of a programme of doctrine for my illustrations, some of which expose the evils of the old system, while others pourtray the features of its proposed successor. My document actually crossed in the street one sent me by a Member of the government detailing the heads of the new Bill. I sat down to read it with no little emotion, and some apprehension; and the moment when, arriving at the end, I found that the government scheme and my own were identical, point by point, was not one to be easily forgotten. I never wrote any thing with more glee than “The Hamlets,”—the number in which the proposed reform is exemplified; and the spirit of that work carried me through the great effort of writing that number and “Cinnamon and Peals” in one month,—during a country visit in the glorious summer weather.<sup>268</sup>

“The Hamlets” tells the story of a rural parish saved from imminent economic collapse by several reforms to its system of poor relief. Economic collapse is impending because poor relief is being administered indiscriminately in the parish so that the number of recipients has risen until every poor person in the region continually applies for aid under a plethora of pretexts, many illegitimate. Martineau likens pauperism to a

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wholly superseded by the preventative check before society can attain its ultimate aim—the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” See Martineau, *Illustrations*, 136.

<sup>267</sup> Oražem, *Harriet Martineau*, 150.

<sup>268</sup> Chapman, ed., *Martineau’s Autobiography*, 1:221-2.

“curse” and compares its spread to “one of the Egyptian abominations, penetrat[ing] into the recesses of every house.”<sup>269</sup> Parish officials banish the curse through abolishing all forms of relief distributed outside the workhouse and running the local workhouse according to what Martineau considers to be the original legal principles established by the Poor Relief Act of 1601. All inmates now must work for lodging and food, adults are split from the elderly and children—who are housed and schooled separately—and life in the workhouse is made markedly less desirable than that of the independent worker outside. By making the workhouse a test of true destitution, the parish is ridden of fraudulent claims to relief. As the English literature scholar Claudia Oražem notes, the symbol of the changes undergone by the parish is an elderly woman named Goody Gidney, whom Martineau portrays as a blight upon society for living in a workhouse for more than 70 years while living entirely off the labor of others. Gidney dies despised by the community as a disgrace to society. The transformation undergone by the parish affects positive change: those in the workhouse leave to seek independent employment, the poor rates decrease, wages rise, and the tale ends with the closure of the local workhouse.<sup>270</sup>

By concluding that the Poor Laws should be reformed rather than abolished, Martineau moves beyond the popularization of Malthus into the role of a social reformer. While Malthus was favorable towards reform in his *Summary View*, his final stance shifted back to the abolitionism he maintained in all editions of the *Essay on the Principle of Population*. Moreover, his vacillating opinion on reform cannot be said to

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<sup>269</sup> Harriet Martineau, *The Hamlets* (London: Charles Fox, 1833), 15.

<sup>270</sup> Oražem, *Harriet Martineau*, 154-5.

have influenced the reformist views Martineau developed independent of any published treatise. Like her novel arguments against the Poor Laws, Martineau's proposed reforms are evidence of her originality as a thinker—an originality overlooked in most scholarly accounts of her popularization of political economy.<sup>271</sup>

## Conclusion

There is a mixture of consonance and difference between the treatment of the Poor Laws of Malthus, Marcet, and Martineau. Marcet and Martineau popularized Malthus' arguments that the laws stimulate population growth and engender downward mobility, but they supplemented those contentions with original arguments. Marcet criticized the Poor Laws for lowering wages, while she supported savings banks and friendly societies for their tendency to impart prudential habits to the poor. Martineau criticized the Poor Laws for their excessive expenditure, their conflation of different types of impoverishment, their tendency to corrupt the morals of the Poor Law overseers and their constituents, and their prevention of rural economic development. Marcet and Martineau first called for the abolition of the Poor Laws according to the proposal laid out by Malthus, but the two later advocated for the reforms of the New Poor Law. Their advocacy of reform was congruent with but not influenced by the opinion Malthus

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<sup>271</sup> See Margaret G. O'Donnell, "Harriet Martineau: A Popular Early Economics Educator," *The Journal of Economic Education* 14, no. 4 (Autumn 1983), 59-64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220485.1983.10845037>; J. R. Shackleton, "Jane Marcet and Harriet Martineau: pioneers of economics education," *History of Education* 19, no. 4 (1990), 283-97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760900190402>; Bette A. Polkinghorn, "Jane Marcet and Harriet Martineau: motive, market experience, and reception of their works popularizing classical political economy," in *Women of Value: Feminist Essays on the History of Women in Economics*, eds. Mary Ann Dimand, Robert W. Dimand, and Evelyn L. Forget (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1995), 71-81; Elaine Freedgood, "Banishing Panic: Harriet Martineau and the Popularization of Political Economy," *Victorian Studies* 39, no. 1 (Autumn 1995), 33-53, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3829415>.

espoused in his *Summary View*. The difference between Malthus's proposals and those of Marcet and Martineau can be attributed to ingenuity and a genuine desire to improve the lot of the poor.

#### IV. CORN LAWS

On April 4, 1845, 2,000 women-activists gathered at the Hanover Square Rooms at the behest of the Anti-Corn Law League in preparation for their grand bazaar about to be held in the Covent Garden Theater.<sup>272</sup> The League relied upon women to distribute tracts, collect signatures for petitions, fundraise, prepare items for sale, host tea parties—and now it called upon them to hear an address from the orator William Johnson Fox. Taking the stage, Fox posed a thought experiment to the women. If the river which flowed to the sea through London were to alter its course and encircle the county of Middlesex, isolating its inhabitants from the farmers of the rest of the country as the Corn Laws sought to do to England in regard to the produce of the world, what would result? The recreational plots of Hampstead Heath would be put under plow, rents would increase, and the price of grain would rise. Unable to find remuneration for their labor, many would emigrate with heavy hearts to foreign lands where food could be had for cheap. But why need he tell them this, Fox maintained, when it was a story they already knew—he told them only that which had been “beautifully described in such bold and strong language by Mrs. Loudon, in her philanthropic economy, by Mrs. Marcett [*sic*] with such elegance in her almost fairy works, and with such varied and beautiful illustrations by the unfailing resources, the elegant and powerful language of Harriet Martineau.”<sup>273</sup> In response, the crowd of women erupted in cheer.

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<sup>272</sup> On the Anti-Corn Law League bazaar, see Peter J. Gurney, “‘The Sublime of the Bazaar’: A Moment in the Making of a Consumer Culture in Mid-Nineteenth Century England,” *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 2 (Winter 2006), 385-405, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2007.0016>; and Leslee Thorne-Murphy, “Women, Free Trade, and Harriet Martineau’s *Dawn Island* at the 1845 Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar,” in *Economic Women: Essays on Desire and Dispossession in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*, eds. Lana L. Dalley and Jill Rappoport (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), 41-59.

<sup>273</sup> “National Anti-Corn-Law League. Grand Free-Trade Bazaar,” *Evening Sun*, April 5, 1845; “The League Bazaar,” *The Morning Chronicle*, April 7, 1845.

As evidenced by the response to Fox’s evocation of Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon, a major component of the audience for women’s political economy was politically engaged women. The three women had endeavored to politicize women by teaching them the fundamentals of political economy in familiar language and by relating the science to their domestic lives. They were successful, as their names were sufficient to rile up scores of women at a meeting of a leading political organization of the 1840s. This chapter proports to reconstruct the arguments of Jane Haldimand Marcet, Harriet Martineau, and Margracia Ryves Loudon against the English Corn Laws—a series of restrictions on the importation of foreign cereal grains into England enforced between 1815 and 1846—while contextualizing the arguments within their author’s greater mission of teaching women political economy. Their arguments are contrasted with those of Malthus, who was infamous for defending restrictions on the importation of grain. The Corn Laws were thus an issue on which women political economists deviated significantly from Malthus.

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first section provides arguments as to how the three women attempted to persuade their women readers that political economy could be synchronous with their traditional responsibilities. Section two examines the views of Malthus, centering on his two pamphlets released during the Corn Law debates of 1814-5. The third section examines the arguments put forth by the women against the Corn Laws. All were agreed upon the fact that the Corn Laws raised the price of grain through cultivating inferior land. Section four reconstructs the shared vision of free trade the three advocated, showing that they envisaged a scenario in which England traded manufactured goods to agricultural countries in exchange for cheap grain.

Section five interrogates how all three tried to persuade landowners to join the side of free trade, as it was landowners who held the power to abolish the Laws. The concluding section offers a brief summary of the entire chapter.

### **Women, Political Economy, and the Corn Laws**

It was through teaching the science of political economy that Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon sought to mobilize female action against the Corn Laws. Aside from Malthus, political economists were united in their opposition to the Corn Laws and economic protectionism more generally.<sup>274</sup> The three women took the fundamental principle of free trade espoused by most political economists—most notably by Ricardo—and distilled it into texts intended to be easily digestible for women and others uninitiated in political economy. Whether through the form of literature or the slim nonfictional tract, the women expressed their arguments in plain language and substantiated them with lengthy explanatory passages or illustrations. Intervening in a pressing policy issue of the Corn Laws, a central goal of the enterprise was to mobilize readers to action. The action the three writers envisaged varied, ranging from somewhat benign conversation to politically charged petitioning, but in all cases they had to contend with the dominant gender ideology of the time, the separate spheres doctrine. This ideology served as the rationale to bar women from meddling in the politics of the male-centric public sphere. Dealing with this ideology often meant relating political action in the public sphere to feminine action in the domestic sphere. Marcet did this by making the polite conversation of ladies

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<sup>274</sup> See Kanth, *Laissez-Faire*, 81-116.



a tool of political discourse; Martineau by connecting domestic economy to political economy; Loudon by subsuming “political” economy under “philanthropic” economy. With the connection between the political and the domestic established, the door was opened for women to take action to abolish the Corn Laws.

Marcet’s goal in writing the *Conversations on Political Economy* was to arm women with knowledge of the science so that they may promulgate truths in daily conversation. This contention naturally lends itself to knowledge of the drawbacks of the Corn Laws and the benefits of free trade. Early in the book, the two protagonists Mrs. B. and her pupil Caroline engage in a dialog on the utility of ladies being competent in political economy. Caroline describes it as the most uninteresting of all subjects and asserts there is no purpose for ladies to study it. Mrs. B. counters by calling attention to the fact that political economy is intimately connected with the content of the conversation ladies partake in. Caroline herself has been caught musing on the current scarcity of grain, blaming farmers for holding back their supply to raise its price.<sup>275</sup> By asserting such she propagates errors in political economy, ignorant as she is that, as Marcet argues, scarcity is attendant to the agricultural cycle under the Corn Laws. Mrs. B. scolds Caroline for resigning herself to ignorance, for, in contrast to chemistry or astronomy, the science of political economy is “intimately connected with the daily occurrences of life.” While propagating errors in chemistry or astronomy matter little as relating to the daily occurrences of life, doing so in the realm of political economy can lead to “serious practical errors.”<sup>276</sup> If women were to have the ear of a member of

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<sup>275</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 7.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

parliament and convinced him that pursuing a policy of agricultural protectionism would be best to stimulate demand for manufactured goods, he might enact legislation which would stunt manufacturing capital's accumulation by confining worker's transactions to life's first necessities. Women, therefore, ought to arm themselves with knowledge of the benefits of free trade and be ready to disseminate truths through conversation to combat falsities.

Marcet's insistence that women study political economy to propagate correct arguments in conversation has an ambivalent relationship to the dominant ideology of separate spheres which relegates women's responsibilities to the household. She does not advocate for women to take an active role in the public sphere through political activity, yet she politicizes the discourse espoused by women in the domestic sphere by convincing them to take argumentative stances on policy issues like the Corn Laws. To a certain degree, Marcet's politicization of discourse expands the domestic sphere's realm of influence to include elements of the public, while her limiting of women's political activity to discourse reifies masculine domination of the public sphere. Despite this ambivalence towards the separate spheres doctrine, Marcet's writings were great influences upon women who transgressed the doctrine by participating in the movement to abolish the Corn Laws. Marcet even implicitly endorsed their activities by donating 500 copies of *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy* to the Anti-Corn Law League in May of 1845 in preparation for their grand bazaar held in the Covent Garden Theatre.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> *The League*, May 3, 1845.

More forthcoming towards the separate spheres doctrine are Martineau's writings, which at the time of her *Illustrations of Political Economy* were conflicted on issues of gender. In 1823, she had pseudonymously published an article in the Unitarian periodical *The Monthly Repository* which made the case for vigorous female education simultaneously as it maintained that the proper sphere for women is the household.<sup>278</sup> Nine years later she published "Ella of Garveloch," an installment of her *Illustrations of Political Economy* series featuring a female protagonist who is the lease-holder of a small farm, giving her a prominent role in the public sphere at a time when property rights for women were scarce.<sup>279</sup> Evidently Martineau's perspective had shifted, a change which would reach its apogee in the writings immediately following her *Illustrations*. In *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838), she lamented that one finds married women everywhere "treated as the inferior party in a compact in which both parties have an equal interest," from indigenous Americans to Englishwomen, the latter of which are

less than half-educated, precluded from earning a subsistence, except in a very few ill-paid employments, and prohibited from giving or withholding their assent to laws which they are yet bound by penalties to obey ... The degree of the degradation of woman is as good a test as the moralist can adopt for ascertaining the state of domestic morals in any country.<sup>280</sup>

One way which Martineau fought the degradation of women was to educate them. Through her didactic novellas, she promulgated the ideas of political economy to women. To make the science relatable to her audience, she likened it to the domestic economy of the household. In the household, the family adhering to the principles of domestic

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<sup>278</sup> See Discipulus, "On Female Education," *The Monthly Repository* 18, no. 206 (February 1823), 77-81.

<sup>279</sup> See Harriet Martineau, "Ella of Garveloch," in *Illustrations of Political Economy*, vol. 2 (London: Charles Fox, 1834), 1-144.

<sup>280</sup> Harriet Martineau, *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1838), 174-5.

economy has all its members temperately fed, wholesomely clothed, and with money in pocket. It falls upon the people of England, its women included, to adhere to the principles of political economy to ensure the nation experiences the same fate.<sup>281</sup>

Martineau's educational endeavor was successful, evoking comments such as those of the 9<sup>th</sup> Lord Kinnaird, George William Fox Kinnaird, at a meeting of the Anti-Corn Law League in May of 1845. There he ranked Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* among the "masterly productions" of Smith, Ricardo, and Marcet, and recommended them to "the ladies more especially" because of their literary qualities.<sup>282</sup>

Martineau provides a role for women in the public sphere through the use of the petition. In one of the final scenes of her anti-Corn Law novella, "Sowers not Reapers," citizens agree to draft a petition during a general assembly to influence parliament against restrictions on the grain trade.<sup>283</sup> Women are naturally included among the petition's signees. Martineau's advocacy of the petition is consonant with her status as a member of the Anti-Corn Law League,<sup>284</sup> which ran a campaign to collect signatures to petition Queen Victoria. The Anti-Corn Law League Circular emphasized the need to get women involved in the campaign relatively early on, noting on December 20, 1839,

We do think that petitions to the queen from the wives and mothers of ... Great Britain ... ought to be immediately compared and signed. It is not the husband and the father who have to still the heart-rending cry of starving childhood for food. ... This is emphatically a mother's question. It is a mother's duty to take it up. ... British matrons! Be up then and doing. Help us with the eloquence of your

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<sup>281</sup> Harriet Martineau, "Preface," in *Illustrations of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (London: Charles Fox, 1834), v-vi.

<sup>282</sup> "Great Meeting at Covent-Garden Theatre," *The League*, May 4, 1844.

<sup>283</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 373.

<sup>284</sup> Chapman, ed., *Martineau's Autobiography*, 2:260.

sweet plaintive voices, and of your infants' cries. Hunger breaks stone walls; but you may yet perform a greater wonder; turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.<sup>285</sup>

Women heeded the call and petitioned the queen. Of the 729 petitions, memorials and addresses sent to the queen from January 1841 to April 1842, 306 came from women, including one giant petition from the “women of England” with a total of 255,271 signatures.<sup>286</sup> Describing herself in a letter to Richard Cobden of December 27, 1845 as a Peelite and a Cobdenite, but “more than either, a Leaguer,” Martineau endorsed the League’s efforts to collect signatures from women.<sup>287</sup> Campaigns along these lines were perhaps what Martineau had in mind when she stressed in her summary of political economy, “The Moral of Many Fables,” that England’s people should constantly petition parliament for free trade; “[d]ay and night, from week to week, from month to month, the nation should petition for a free trade in corn.”<sup>288</sup>

Loudon connected feminine action in the domestic realm to political action in the public realm by subsuming “political” economy under the more compassionate “philanthropic” economy, defined as “a disposition of things based on the principle of good-will to all, thus necessarily including equal justice, and active benevolence.”<sup>289</sup> While women will likely confound “political” economy with political intrigue, and therefore associate it with corruption, contention, and party politics, they will understand “philanthropic” economy to alleviate want, enlighten ignorance, cease injustice, and cultivate sympathies. In Loudon’s view, the Corn Laws have the greatest impact on the

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<sup>285</sup> Cited in Henry Miller, “Popular Petitioning and the Corn Laws, 1833-46,” *The English Historical Review* 127, no. 527 (August 2012), 916, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ces073>.

<sup>286</sup> Miller, “Petitioning,” 916.

<sup>287</sup> Logan, ed., *Collected Letters*, 3:34.

<sup>288</sup> Martineau, “Moral,” 118.

<sup>289</sup> Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, iii.

poor—a condition which was then understood as having to labor continually to secure subsistence—so it is their cause which philanthropic economy champions. Philanthropic economy’s end can only be attained through establishing a proportion between the wages of labor and the price of grain as will secure to the poor (or, in other words, workers) the comforts of a decent life in exchange for a sensible amount of their time and effort embodied in labor.<sup>290</sup> In this aim Loudon was influenced most by Torrens, whom she cites, as it was Torrens who insisted real wages must at minimum be sufficient to afford working families the amenities of a respectable existence.<sup>291</sup> By locating philanthropic economy’s aim in helping the poor, she makes the historically feminine virtue of charity the end of her science. Loudon notes that the title of “Lady” meant, in Old Saxon, “bread giver,” and was acquired through handing out bread to the poor at the city gates daily.<sup>292</sup> Philanthropic economy understood in this light makes the political the responsibility of women whose public duties were confined to charitable action. Women contribute to the abolition of the Corn Laws and the improvement of the lives of the poor by circulating the ideas of philanthropic economy throughout the ranks of society.

When Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon wrote on political economy, they wrote in part to mobilize women to action against the restrictive tariffs which heightened the price of their food. It is clear that women listened; as one *Morning Chronicle* writer noted in April of 1845, “[w]hat Mrs. Loudon, Mrs. Marcet, and Miss Martineau have written, it is creditable to their countrywomen to have read, understood, and felt.”<sup>293</sup> Readers armed

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., vi-vii, 67-8.

<sup>291</sup> Robert Torrens, *An Essay on the External Corn Trade*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1829), 84ff. For more on Torrens, see Lionel Robbins, *Robert Torrens and the Evolution of Classical Economics* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1958).

<sup>292</sup> Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, vii.

<sup>293</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, April 8, 1845.

themselves with the knowledge of classical political economy conveyed to them by their fellow women and threw themselves into the movement to abolish the Corn Laws.<sup>294</sup> The political-economic theory underpinning their actions was made palatable to them by Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon likening it to familiar responsibilities, whether that be conversation, domestic economy, or philanthropic activity.

By orienting their writings towards women, Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon deviate significantly from Malthus. Malthus wrote on the Corn Laws solely to influence MPs (members of parliament) and neglected entirely that a popular audience could be engaged in political economic matters. The content of his pamphlets was laden with technical terminology off-putting to the novice—but persuasive to the legislator—while the three women wrote with a minimum of jargon to facilitate an easy introduction to the uninitiated. If Malthus had written for a popular audience, however, his writings would still markedly deviate from those of Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon. Malthus championed the cause of agricultural protectionism, placing him irreconcilably at odds with the free-trade-inclined arguments of the women.

## **Malthus**

Malthus' first contribution to the Corn Law debates came in his 1814 pamphlet *Observations on the Effects of the Corn Laws*. At the time of that pamphlet's publication,

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<sup>294</sup> On women and the Anti-Corn Law League, see Simon Morgan, "Domestic Economy and Political Agitation: Women and the Anti-Corn Law League, 1839-46," in *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat*, eds. Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 115-133; and Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, *The People's Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 116-138.

parliament was debating whether to revise the 1804 Corn Laws which imposed duties on imported grain.<sup>295</sup> In the pamphlet Malthus proports to assess the pros and cons of free trade and self-sufficiency “with the strictest impartiality,” in order to assist the legislature in making a “just and enlightened decision ... whatever that decision may be.”<sup>296</sup> He declines to explicitly take a side by critically evaluating both policies, and prides himself for his impartiality.

In the *Observations*, Malthus held that a nation with a large manufacturing population and all its fertile land occupied, such as England, would not grow an independent supply of grain if it freely traded with a nation where the opposite conditions prevailed. England would rather trade for cheap grain than spend capital cultivating inferior soils to meet domestic demand.<sup>297</sup> Free trade would benefit English manufacturing for two reasons: (1) it increases foreign demand for English manufactures;<sup>298</sup> (2) it would lower the price of labor, as Malthus thought that nominal wages followed the price of grain, though not instantaneously.<sup>299</sup> Free trade would also secure a supply of grain uncharacterized by the price fluctuations attendant to a home-grown supply.<sup>300</sup> It is only through prohibiting the unrestricted importation of foreign grain that England can be made to forgo these benefits and cultivate poor soils, as such

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<sup>295</sup> Specifically, 24 shillings and three pence when the price of wheat was less than 63 shillings per quarter, two shillings and six pence when between 63 and 66 shillings per quarter, and six shillings when above 66 shillings and six pence per quarter. North American wheat was subject to the same duties, but the prices were ten shillings lower at all three levels. Greater protection was given to barley, beans, beer, oats, peas, and rye. See Donald Grove Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1961), 89.

<sup>296</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *Observations on the Effects of the Corn Laws, and of a Rise or Fall in the Price of Corn on the Agriculture and General Wealth of the Country* (London: J. Johnson, 1814), 2-4.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-8.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-3.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.



cultivation raises the price of grain above the internationally competitive level.<sup>301</sup>

Malthus contends that “few things seem less probable, than that England should naturally grow an independent supply of corn ... it would incontestably answer to us to support a part of our present population on foreign corn.”<sup>302</sup>

Malthus argued that duties upon the importation of foreign grain negatively impact the economy in six ways. First, they waste national resources by allocating more capital to agriculture than necessary to produce the required quantity of grain. Second, they reduce the competitiveness of exported commodities, as the high price of grain and labor they engender increase costs of production. Third, they check population growth by reducing the supply of grain and demand for manufactured commodities from their what levels would be if free trade prevailed. Fourth, they must be revised regularly to reflect the changing international grain market. Fifth, they would negatively impact agriculture by diminishing England’s foreign commerce. Sixth, when high enough, duties engender fluctuating domestic grain prices. When the nation has an independent supply of grain, excess grain from bountiful harvests cannot be sold in foreign markets because of its high price. Consequently, grain gluts the market, causing its price to fall. A glutted grain market discourages cultivation, and as a result supply become insufficient to meet English demand. This requires grain to be imported to meet domestic demand, the price of which increases due to sudden English demand. Furthermore, importing is done at a premium because of restrictive duties. Another bountiful harvest would send the price of grain spiraling downwards, and the process would repeat itself again. In a protected

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 40-1.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 21.

agricultural market, therefore, the price of grain fluctuates between the low price of a glutted market and the high price of grain subject to import duties.<sup>303</sup>

Just as tariffs on foreign grain are attended by detrimental consequences, so too does free trade have drawbacks. With England producing manufactures to trade for grain, the nation becomes susceptible to the fluctuations of the domestic and international business cycles.<sup>304</sup> In consequence, workers in manufacturing become disgruntled on account of their oscillating wages.<sup>305</sup> Potentially worse than this, however, is the precarious state of England's national security under free trade. A nation dependent upon foreign grain runs the risk of having its food supply cut off during wartime. And yet, the risk is not very significant. Even when dealing with enemies, grain-producing nations have a vested interest in uninterrupted profits. If need be, England could purchase grain from elsewhere on the world market.<sup>306</sup> The number of sellers on the market would have increased, as English demand incentivizes the United States and a plurality of nations in the Baltic to regularly grow grain for exportation.<sup>307</sup>

Malthus ends the *Observations* by suggesting parliament postpone deciding on the Corn Laws on account of “the deliberation which the subject naturally requires, but more particularly on account of the present uncertain state of the currency.” If this advice is not heeded, parliament should replace the 1804 Corn Laws with a fixed duty on imported grain, “not to act as a prohibition, but as a protecting, and at the same time, profitable

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 34-5, 37, 42-3.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 18.

tax.”<sup>308</sup> Though Malthus refused to endorse either free trade or self-sufficiency in 1814, the next year would see him take a decisive stand in favor of an independent supply of grain.

In *The Grounds of an Opinion on the Policy of Restricting the Importation of Foreign Corn* (1815), Malthus argued that the imposition of tariffs calculated to secure England an independent supply of grain is preferable to removing trade restrictions and opening English ports. His new opinion came in response to the enactment of restrictions on French grain which prohibited exportation when the price rose above 49 shillings per quarter. Malthus thought France would be England’s main source of foreign grain because of its close vicinity and cheap produce. Due to the new regulation, England’s supply would be cut off during French seasons of scarcity. It would be impossible, Malthus now held, to regain that supply suddenly through other channels. Relaxing English import restrictions would compromise national security.<sup>309</sup>

The question was no longer free trade or protection, as other nations restricted or taxed their exports. Aside from France, Malthus now recognized that the Baltic nations heavily taxed their exported grain in proportion to the demand for it.<sup>310</sup> Abolishing England’s grain restrictions would not obtain free trade, as the concurrent cooperation of other trading partners would not be secured. It was “entirely out of our power ... to obtain a free trade in corn ... whatever may be our wishes on the subject.”<sup>311</sup> While the

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>309</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *The Grounds of an Opinion on the Policy of Restricting the Importation of Foreign Corn; Intended as an Appendix to “Observations on the Corn Laws.”* (London: John Murray, 1815), 12, 15.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 11.

principles of political economy advise nations to devote production to the sectors and industries to which their circumstances are most suited, and to freely trade commodities with one another, reality demands that an alternative course must be taken.<sup>312</sup>

In the absence of free trade, the best alternative is to rely upon Great Britain's own capacity to produce grain and thereby secure self-sufficiency. The high price of English grain during the Napoleonic Wars induced a large amount of capital to be allocated to agriculture. The amount of marginal land under cultivation had been expanded, and technological innovation had been stimulated.<sup>313</sup> By keeping the price of grain high, import restrictions would perpetuate these processes and further increase agricultural production. The resulting "quantity of additional produce would be immense, and would afford the means of subsistence to a very great increase of population."<sup>314</sup> In contrast, unrestricted foreign imports would drastically lower the price of grain, put marginal land out of cultivation, check technological innovation in agriculture, and destroy large amounts of agricultural capital across the country.<sup>315</sup> England would become dependent upon foreign grain, as production from the remaining land under cultivation would be insufficient to meet domestic demand in average seasons. Large numbers of agricultural workers would become unemployed, and many farmers would be ruined.

In *Grounds*, Malthus continued to maintain that nations with import restrictions are subject to fluctuations in the price of grain, but he now held that England would

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 15-6.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 22

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 5.

experience more drastic fluctuations by abolishing its restrictions.<sup>316</sup> Initially, the price of grain would be low as cheap French imports dominate the market. But when France prohibits exports during scarcities, the price of English grain would spike in response to unfilled demand. Marginal English lands that had been abandoned would take too much time to re-cultivate. England would be forced to obtain grain from nations like in the Baltic, which sell their produce at enormous prices in times of dire need.<sup>317</sup> The price would continue to be high until France returned to exporting grain. English marginal land would likely not be taken under cultivation in anticipation French exportation resuming. If marginal land was cultivated in response to the high price of grain, it would be abandoned when England imports French grain, as marginal land has a higher cost of production. To this peace-time fluctuation Malthus adds the wartime fluctuation resultant from more conflict with France.<sup>318</sup> Adhering to a system of import restrictions would secure steadier grain prices.<sup>319</sup>

In short, *Grounds* saw Malthus argue that “a system of restrictions so calculated as to keep us, in average years, nearly independent of foreign supplies of corn, will more effectually conduce to the wealth and prosperity of the country, and of by far the greatest mass of the inhabitants, than the opening of our ports for the free admission of foreign corn, in the actual state of Europe.”<sup>320</sup> This contention was a radical dissent from the other political economists, who then argued invariably for the abolition of the Corn Laws. The consensus in favor of abolishing the Corn Laws was so widespread that Ricardo

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 20.

referred to Malthus' views as "dangerous heresy" in a December 18, 1819 letter to McCulloch.<sup>321</sup> Hence Malthus sustained serious damage to his reputation because of his defense of protective tariffs on grain. As his biographer Patricia James wrote, after his support of the Corn Laws it was "even easier than it had been before to make Mr. Malthus seem like an ogre who wanted large families of little children to be starved into extinction."<sup>322</sup>

The economist Samuel Hollander has argued that Malthus recanted his protectionist views later in life.<sup>323</sup> For support of this argument he raises several pieces of evidence. First, Hollander notes that Malthus deleted several passages reiterating his protectionist stance in the second edition of the *Principles of Political Economy* (1836), and suggests he had not gotten around to revising the remaining protectionist passages near the end of the book before his death.<sup>324</sup> Second, Hollander points to Malthus' 1824 article in the *Quarterly Review* which argued that in spite of the "superior importance of food and raw materials ... [i]t does not follow ... that any forced encouragement should be given to agriculture," because it "would probably defeat the very end in view."<sup>325</sup> Third, Hollander raises the footnote in the sixth edition of the *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1826) stating:

at a period when our ministers are most laudably setting an example of a more liberal system of commercial policy, it would be greatly desirable that foreign nations should not have so marked an exception as our present corn-laws to cast

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<sup>321</sup> Sraffa, ed., *Ricardo*, 142.

<sup>322</sup> James, *Population Malthus*, 269.

<sup>323</sup> Samuel Hollander, "Malthus's Abandonment of Agricultural Protectionism: A Discovery in the History of Economic Thought," *The American Economic Review* 82, no. 3 (June 1992), 650-59, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2117328>; Samuel Hollander, *The economics of Thomas Robert Malthus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

<sup>324</sup> Hollander, *Malthus*, 846-9.

<sup>325</sup> Unsigned review of *Essay on Political Economy. Supplement to the Encyclopedia Britannica, The Quarterly Review* (January 1824), 306-7.

in our teeth. A duty on importation not too high, and a bounty nearly such as was recommended by Mr. Ricardo, would probably be best suited to our present situation, and best secure steady prices. A duty on foreign corn would resemble the duties laid by other countries on our manufactures as objects of taxation, and would not in the same manner impeach the principles of free trade.<sup>326</sup>

Hollander maintains that Malthus here referred to implementing Ricardo's policy package involving a non-protecting tariff and drawback hinging on the differential taxation of corn, and not simply the lowering of an existing protective tariff.<sup>327</sup> Finally, Hollander considers Malthus' correspondence. In a letter to Senior dated March 31, 1829, Malthus argued that an increase of real wages due to free trade would be desirable provided the working-class exercise moral restraint to prevent falling wages. Such a period "during which the pressure of population is lightened, though it may not be of long duration, is a period of comparative ease, and ought by no means to be thrown out of our consideration."<sup>328</sup> Next, a letter to Thomas Chalmers of March 6, 1832 simply stated "I quite agree with you in regard to the moral advantage of repealing the corn laws."<sup>329</sup> Last, Malthus states in the January 22, 1833 letter to Marcet that he was "*for the removal of the restrictions* [on imported grain], though not without fear of the consequences."<sup>330</sup> The consequences Malthus feared were that nominal wages would decrease with the price of grain, leaving workers disappointed, while in the short-term many will be thrown out of work as the nation adjusts to free trade.

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<sup>326</sup> Malthus, *Essay*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 2:209.

<sup>327</sup> Hollander, *Malthus*, 853-4.

<sup>328</sup> Nassau William Senior, *Two Lectures on Population, Delivered Before the University of Oxford in Easter Term, 1828. To Which is Added, a Correspondence Between the Author and the Rev. T. R. Malthus* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1829), 85.

<sup>329</sup> Cited in Hollander, *Malthus*, 854-5; Cited in James, *Population Malthus*, 433.

<sup>330</sup> Polkinghorn, "Letter," 845. Emphasis original.

Taking his evidence collectively, Hollander presents a persuasive case that Malthus repudiated his protectionism.<sup>331</sup> Yet the view that Malthus remained a protectionist vis-à-vis the Corn Laws to the end of his life reigned strong to his contemporaries. Much of the blame can be placed upon Malthus' failure to complete the second edition of his *Principles of Political Economy*, if, as Hollander suggests, he would have removed the remaining protectionist passages. In such a case, had Malthus explicitly pointed out the revisions, his new view could not have remained a secret. Yet there is another reason to consider: Malthus had been blacklisted by the *Edinburgh Review* because of his protectionism and subsequently turned to the Tory *Quarterly Review*. Had Malthus been more public about his new position, he would have opened himself up to charges of treachery. Hollander suggests his reluctance to do more to publicize his change of heart is best understood in these terms.<sup>332</sup>

Malthus' protectionist views stand in stark contrast to the views expressed by Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon in favor of free trade. The three women maintained that national security was not put at risk by removing restrictions on imported grain. They held that grain supplies suddenly cut off during wartime could be readily acquired elsewhere on the world market. They did not consider France to be a potential trading partner for England, and so said nothing about its policy of prohibiting exports during scarcities. They considered the world market to be a place of free and open exchange

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<sup>331</sup> The economist John Pullen took exception to Hollander's argument in J. M. Pullen, "Malthus on Agricultural Protection: An Alternative View," *History of Political Economy* 27, no. 2 (1995), 517-29, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-27-3-517>. Hollander responded to Pullen's criticisms in Samuel Hollander, "More on Malthus and Agricultural Protection," *History of Political Economy* 27, no. 3 (1995), 531-7, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-27-3-531>.

<sup>332</sup> Hollander, "Malthus's Abandonment," 658.



aside from England's import restrictions. To acquire a steady source of cheap grain free from price fluctuations, they advocated for the abolition of the Corn Laws.

### **The Case Against the Corn Laws**

While all three women maintained that the Corn Laws raised the price of grain in England above the level set by international competition, as did Malthus, the precise mechanism through which the price of grain rises is elaborated upon best by Marcet. For Marcet, the Corn Laws raise the price of grain by making cultivators resort to marginal lands. Land can be divided into different degrees of fertility, from the most productive plots to stony soils to certain marshlands whose productivity can be said to be zero.<sup>333</sup> By placing restrictions on the importation of foreign grain, the Corn Laws force more of England's land to be put under cultivation to meet the population's demand for grain. When all of a country's most fertile soils are occupied, land of an inferior quality will be cultivated to meet the demand of that part of England's large population whose needs had not been met by cultivating soils of the most fertile type. Inferior, or marginal, land requires more labor to raise grain on it; more manure, for example, is required.<sup>334</sup> Because grain raised on land of inferior quality requires more labor than grain raised on more fertile land, its cost of production is higher. In Marcet's words, the "expense that has been bestowed on a commodity in order to bring it to a saleable state" is greater.<sup>335</sup> The price of grain—which is uniform for all produce—must be sufficient to repay grain's

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<sup>333</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826), 29.

<sup>334</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 195-6.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

cost of production on the least fertile soils, or else it would not be cultivated. It is therefore the cost of production of grain grown on the least fertile land which regulates the price of all grain.<sup>336</sup> By consequence, every new degree of marginal soil brought under cultivation, by increasing the cost of production of grain, increases the price of grain.<sup>337</sup> The Corn Laws, then, may be said to increase the price of grain by forcing marginal land into cultivation to meet England's demand for grain.

Loudon also made the connection between cultivating marginal soils and the rising price of grain. She too argues that it is the cost of production on marginal soils which has this effect. As she notes, England spends 80 million pounds on domestic grain when grain could be purchased in foreign markets at a much cheaper price. On average, England pays 30 million more pounds for grain than if the same quantity had been obtained from other countries. Of this sum, 27 million is sunk in forcing marginal soils to produce grain. Consumers are therefore compelled to repay the farmers the 27 million through the artificially high price of grain.<sup>338</sup> Therefore it is the extra cost of cultivating marginal land which occasions the high price of grain.<sup>339</sup>

Martineau agreed with Marcet and Loudon that the Corn Laws raise the price of grain, and similarly for her it is the cost of production which regulates this high price. Estimating a much lower sum than Loudon, she bemoans the fact that the people of England pay a total of 12.5 million pounds more for grain than if England adhered to a policy of free trade. Compounding the tragedy, she estimated that all but 625,000 pounds

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 200-1.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 386.

<sup>338</sup> Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, 98-9.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 162.

of that sum is sunk in forcing marginal land to produce grain. As that 625,000 goes into the pockets of the landlords, farmers must sink their profits into forcing a scanty crop to rise from poor soil.<sup>340</sup> This is the case with her character Farmer Anderson, whose profits are buried in “useless drains and fences, and in stony soils,” indicating that he is cultivating marginal lands.<sup>341</sup> As marginal lands are not cultivated unless their produce will repay the cost of production, it is the cost of production on the furthest degree of inferior soil which regulates the price of grain.<sup>342</sup>

The three women do not have a consensus on the effect of the high price of grain on worker’s wages. Marcet asserts that by raising the price of grain, the Corn Laws in turn cause worker’s wages to rise. For Marcet, wages must rise as the price of grain rises to ensure that workers can live. But the rising wages of labor do not better the working classes’ conditions of life, for these wages only enables workers to subsist at the higher price of the necessities of life.<sup>343</sup>

In contrast, Loudon argues instead that worker’s wages were unable to keep pace with the rising price of grain. For Loudon, the wages of labor set by market competition are insufficient to reproduce worker’s conditions of life because of the high price of provisions artificially created by the Corn Laws. In response, workers extend their workday, laboring for 16 out of the 24 hours in a day. Yet they remain poor despite

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<sup>340</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 347.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>342</sup> Harriet Martineau, “The Moral of Many Fables,” in *Illustrations of Political Economy*, vol. 9 (London: Charles Fox, 1834), 43, 119.

<sup>343</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 386; Marcet, *Conversations*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., 355. In the first edition, Marcet also asserts that capitalists raise the price of manufactured goods in response to grain’s rising price. But she removed this clause in the second edition of the *Conversations*, which was written after receiving advice from Ricardo. See *Conversations on Political Economy; in Which the Elements of that Science are Familiarly Explained*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1817), 408.

continuously creating wealth on account of their low wages.<sup>344</sup> Here Loudon distances herself from Malthus, as Malthus argued nominal wages follow the price of grain.

Martineau would seem to fall somewhere between Marcet and Loudon on this issue. In her novella “Sowers not Reapers,” the manufacturing capitalist Oliver complains that his capital is spent ensuring his worker’s wages are sufficient to purchase grain at its unnaturally high price conditioned by the Corn Laws. Since all the worker’s wages are spent procuring grain for subsistence, there remains nothing to spend on manufactured goods; Oliver thus warns that capitalists might emigrate to where grain is cheap in order to have regular demand for their commodities and to secure profits on their capital.<sup>345</sup> Yet Martineau also argued that forcing England’s population to subsist on grain cultivated from marginal soils guarantees that either a number of citizens will die outright of hunger or that a much larger number will be made to subsist upon grain insufficient for their numbers. She thus argues paradoxically that wages rise to keep pace with the price of grain at the same time that the price of grain ensures starvation or inadequate nourishment.<sup>346</sup> Martineau cannot pinpoint a social class which would physiologically suffer because of the high price of grain. It is not workers, who have wages adequate enough to subsist as they did prior to the rise. If not workers, who fronts the burden of the high price of grain? It is certainly not landlords or capitalists, who have accumulated fortunes shielding them from the brunt of grain’s high price as an umbrella shields one from a rainstorm. Nowhere in her writings is there an answer to this conundrum.

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<sup>344</sup> Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, 69-70.

<sup>345</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 370-1.

<sup>346</sup> Martineau, “Moral,” 116-7.

With Martineau, Loudon held that the Corn Laws stunt the accumulation of capital. The laws contract the home market by restricting transactions to life's first necessities. Consumers confine their activities to purchasing grain at its artificially high price, as it is all they can afford. Capital, in Loudon's words, is "like so much seed, without a field in which it may be sown, with a fair hope of increase."<sup>347</sup> For this reason manufacturing capital's demand for labor decreases, causing individuals to underbid each other for employment in a labor market overstocked with workers.<sup>348</sup> Capital's inability to accumulate under the Corn Laws, in other words, causes low wages for the working class.

One effect of grain's high price is to render it unsalable in foreign markets during seasons of superabundance. For Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon, in foreign markets where the price of grain is low, England's produce cannot sell unless at a loss to farmers.<sup>349</sup> Only Marcet elaborated upon the consequences of this fact. She argues that the only alternative is to restrict the sale of produce to the national realm, glutting the market and sending the price of grain spiraling downwards. In such cases, farmers who cultivate marginal soils will let their lands lie fallow to avoid ruin. In consequence, less grain will be cultivated in succeeding seasons than demand calls for, resulting in dearth or famine injurious to the population. Farmers will eventually respond by recultivating their marginal lands. When another bountiful season occurs, the cycle will be set in motion again. In a protected agricultural market, then, the price of grain will be continually fluctuating between the low price of a glutted market and the high price of

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<sup>347</sup> Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, 85.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 386-7; Martineau, *Illustrations*, 357-8; Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, 70, 87.

scarcity.<sup>350</sup> In average seasons, the cost of grain will be higher than the internationally competitive price according to its high cost of production on the most inferior soils. Marcet advocated for the unrestricted importation of grain to lower its price in English markets and avoid the volatility characteristic of a protected agricultural market.

Attributing the fluctuations of the agricultural market to the Corn Laws is complicated by the fact that, before 1828, these laws allowed for the free importation of grain when the price in English markets reached 80 shillings per quarter or higher.<sup>351</sup> This provision, it could be argued, alleviated the English agricultural market in times of scarcity. Marcet and Martineau both found fault on ground of political economy with the importation of grain only in times of scarcity. Marcet argued that agricultural countries will sell their produce at extremely high prices when imports are allowed only during scarcity. Without regular international demand, those countries will not cultivate grain in excess of their national demand in order to avoid glutting their markets. They will only have the capacity to sell the grain meant for home consumption, at anything resembling a market price. Beyond this, they would be willing to sell abroad at nothing less than exorbitant prices.<sup>352</sup> If they had regular demand for their produce, they would cultivate as much grain as possible to export at the price set by international competition and make a profit.

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<sup>350</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 387.

<sup>351</sup> An 1828 act introduced a sliding-scale tariff which levied a duty of 34 shillings when the price fell to 52 shillings per quarter or below, 13 shillings and 8 pence when at 69 shillings, and 1 shilling per quarter when the price rose to 73 shillings or above. Martineau critiqued the sliding-scale because it induced farmers to speculate on the price of grain, often to ruinous ends. See Martineau, *Illustrations*, 368.

<sup>352</sup> [Marcet,] *Hopkins's Notions*, 185-6.

Martineau argues that trade deals agreed upon during times of panic, such as bad harvest seasons, will be harmful to the English economy. In “Sowers not Reapers,” the starving city of Sheffield agrees to import grain during a period of acute agricultural distress. England’s trading partners levied heavy duties on the grain because (1) England was in a weak bargaining position; and (2) the grain traded was part of the stock meant for home consumption, not surplus grain grown regularly for exportation. Compounding the harmful effects of importing grain at a premium, the precise amount of grain necessary to quell the suffering of the English economy cannot be ascertained. Grain is over-imported in a panic, so that its price falls to 50 shillings per quarter and much of it lies unsold, glutting the market. Sellers are forced to obtain drawbacks on what they imported to export it at a loss rather than let it remain unsold.<sup>353</sup>

On the whole, the three women’s arguments against the Corn Laws converge except with respect to worker’s wages. With Malthus, Marcet and Martineau held that nominal wages follow the price of grain, as grain (specifically wheaten-bread) constitutes the principal wage-good on which wage-earners spend their income. Loudon dissented not only from Malthus, Marcet, and Martineau by arguing nominal wages were low when the price of grain was high, but also from all political economists; until the mid-1840s, they were united in arguing that the two act in concert.<sup>354</sup> Despite this point of contention, Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon all advocate for the same remedy for the failings of agricultural protection; namely, free trade.

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<sup>353</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 357.

<sup>354</sup> According to Mark Blaug, “[f]or the most part, the economists now [in the mid-1840s] agreed that the rate of wages did not vary with the price of food and that repeal would not necessarily produce a fall in money wages.” See Mark Blaug, “The Empirical Content of Ricardian Economics,” *Journal of Political Economy* 61, no. 1 (February 1956), 54, <https://doi.org/10.1086/257744>.

## Free Trade

In contrast to the protected agricultural market and all its attendant flaws, Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon advocate for free trade in grain between England and the world. This would guarantee England could acquire a supply of grain sufficient to meet national demand at the low price commanded by international competition. At the same time, it would shield the country from the fluctuations of the system demanding a home supply of grain. By purchasing grain imported from countries where produce has a low cost of production, England can devote the labor-time saved from not producing grain on marginal soils to the creation of some other commodity which the country demands.<sup>355</sup> At the same time, consumers can spend the money saved from not purchasing protected English grain on other commodities they require. Doing so creates demand for labor on behalf of the workers who create the purchased commodities, ensuring employment in the manufacturing sector for those who seek it.<sup>356</sup> With consumers acquiring grain from international trade, farmers can convert the marginal land previously used for grain cultivation into pastureland to increase the supply and lower the price of meat, milk, butter, and cheese.<sup>357</sup> Alternately, landlords can convert their marginal farmland into real estate for England's large population.<sup>358</sup> The benefits of a free trade for grain accrue to a number of social classes. Under free trade, manufacturers have a greater demand for labor and more capital accumulation than under a system of restriction. Workers also benefit, as they find greater employment in manufacturing. Farmers no longer struggle to cultivate grain on soils with a high cost of production and can devote their labor-time

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<sup>355</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 375.

<sup>356</sup> [Marcet,] *Hopkins's Notions*, 157-9.

<sup>357</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 389; Martineau, *Illustrations*, 371.

<sup>358</sup> Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, 168.



elsewhere. Finally, landlords may convert their marginal soils to more lucrative real estate.

Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon envisage a scenario where England produces manufactured goods to trade with agricultural nations that excel in producing grain. Their ideal trading partners are countries which have capital and population small enough relative to their size to confine their activities to agriculture. As Marcet notes, manufactures are only established in countries which have large amounts of capital and a population such as that of England, which must find employment for large numbers. Countries like the United States,<sup>359</sup> Poland,<sup>360</sup> and Russia,<sup>361</sup> being either newly established or slow in the progress of capital and population, attain full employment solely in the agricultural sector and export produce in exchange for manufactured goods. In those countries there exists a plethora of fertile land which can be employed to raise grain with only a small cost of production. England's population is too great to be maintained by the produce of its soils in average seasons, so it will find it advantageous to import some quantity of the grain it consumes in exchange for the manufactured goods its population produces.<sup>362</sup> England is a small island with a limited surface, but it excels in converting raw materials into manufactured goods. For Loudon, it ought to exchange those manufactured goods for the raw produce in stands in need of from countries with nothing else to offer.<sup>363</sup> By this manner England would attain full employment for its

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<sup>359</sup> [Marcet,] *Hopkins's Notions*, 179; Martineau, *Illustrations*, 332-3; Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, 160.

<sup>360</sup> [Marcet,] *Hopkins's Notions*, 180; [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 367; Martineau, *Illustrations*, 332; Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, 161.

<sup>361</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 367; Martineau, *Illustrations*, 333; Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, 160.

<sup>362</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 389.

<sup>363</sup> Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, 81-3, 86, 172.

working class, who no longer would have to underbid each other in an glutted labor market. They would find greater work for their numbers and wages able to secure subsistence at reasonable prices.<sup>364</sup>

### **Landlords and the Corn Laws**

The only way to repeal the Corn Laws within the existing socio-political framework of England was to get a majority of MPs to vote them out of existence. As a prerequisite for being an MP was to own land, Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon all must contend with getting landlords on their side. This was not an easy task, given that landlords stood to benefit most from the continuance of the Corn Laws. This was because the Corn Laws increased the rents on their properties. To explain why, it is useful to clarify why rent is paid in the first place.

Suppose a group of settlers encounter a vacant island while traveling by boat. Suppose further that the settlers decide to stay on the island and develop a community. Some of the settlers will devote themselves to farming and will have no trouble finding premium quality land with a low cost of production to farm. In time capital and population will increase, and new land will have to be taken under cultivation. When all the most fertile land is in use, land of inferior quality will be cultivated to secure subsistence for our island's growing population. Our first generation of farmers will be in possession of the best quality land which affords the greatest returns on capital and will accumulate their fortunes most quickly. Let us suppose that they will make 30 percent,

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 107-8, 91-2, 155, 159-60.

while our new generation of settlers makes only 20 percent. Because the first generation cultivates rent-free and has the most fertile soil, it is not improbable that they will seek to cease farming near the end of their lives while still desiring to hold onto their property. They will readily find individuals willing to pay an annual sum to cultivate their lands rather than cultivate soils of a more inferior quality. These individuals become their tenants, and pay, let us suppose, 10 percent to use the land. Therefore, the profits of our tenants are 20 percent, which is equal to the profits of our second generation of settlers who are both farmers and proprietors. As capital and population continue to progress, the island's demand for grain will increase, and land of even more inferior quality will be required to be brought under cultivation. Let us suppose this new land will not yield above 10 percent profits. Then our second generation of settlers will be able to find tenants for their land, as it will be just as advantageous for a farmer to pay 10 percent while making 20 percent as it is to pay nothing while cultivating land that yields no more than 10 percent. As soon as the leases of our previous tenants expire, their landlords will stipulate that they make no more than 10 percent to go along with the competitive rate. Our first generation of settlers will now make 20 percent in rent, while their tenants' profits are reduced by 10 percent. It can be seen that every new degree of marginal land under cultivation has the double effect of raising rents and reducing profits on capital at the same time as it raises the cost of production, and therefore the price, of grain.<sup>365</sup> By forcing the cultivation of marginal lands, the Corn Laws increase rents, decrease profits on capital, and raise the price of grain.

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<sup>365</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 196-9.

Given that, at the time of the passage of the Corn Laws, one had to be a landowner to vote in parliament, and the Corn Laws had the effect of raising rents, it seems likely that landowners voted in the Corn Laws to maintain the profits they accumulated during the Napoleonic Wars. At that time, as conflict drew to a close it was predicted that grain would enter English markets at a much lower price than it was sold for during wartime, when bad harvests all across Europe and the restrictive impacts of the continental blockade sharply raised the price of grain. Depending on the continuation of high prices, landowners had heavily invested in the improvement of marginal land and had leased farms at proportionally higher rates. The Corn Law of 1815, establishing protection on agriculture, was tuned to the abnormal scale of prices prevailing in 1815, ensured landowners could keep up their rents on marginal soils, and propped up the high price of grain.<sup>366</sup>

Loudon recognized that landlords had voted in the Corn Laws at the expense of other classes, and as a result was, of the three women writers, the most hostile towards them. She argued that landowners voted against living on the fair market price of their land and instead made up the deficiency at the expense of the rest of the nation—out of the wages of workers, the profits of farmers, the incomes of annuitants, and the ruin of 13 million people dependent upon manufactures.<sup>367</sup> As a result, wealth is transferred from workers and capitalists to landlords whose land

thus rendered not national property, but a tool of national oppression; not an addition to her national income, but an addition to her national debt ... all that [Great Britain's] landowners do receive as rent become nothing more, neither less, than an unjust transfer to the landowners, of the creations of the labour, and

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<sup>366</sup> Blaug, *Ricardian Economics*, 7, 9; Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 153.

<sup>367</sup> Loudon, *Philanthropic Economy*, 121-2.

the profits on the capital of other classes; so that, in fact, for agricultural purposes, the whole of the land of Great Britain is thus rendered, in the present state of European markets, worth, to the nation, less than nothing.<sup>368</sup>

Hyperbole aside, Loudon appealed to landlord's self-interest to get them to think of repeal as being in their best interests. With the advent of free trade, landlords, she argues, should be inclined to convert their marginal land into real estate and to erect houses to lease to England's large population. By this manner the value of the landlord's property would increase even without an increase in cottage rent, as the lowest value of real estate is much higher than the highest price of agricultural land.<sup>369</sup> Just as self-interest had been the determining factor in enacting the Corn Laws, it would prove the decisive element in repeal. In this sense Loudon is a disciple of Adam Smith, who famously argued one can only be successful in influencing others by appealing to their self-interest: "is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but in regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their own advantages."<sup>370</sup>

Martineau also appealed to landlord's sense of self-interest when attempting to persuade them to adopt the cause of repeal. She argued that their revenues fluctuate according to the fluctuations in the price of grain. In seasons of scarcity and an abnormally high price of grain, their revenues rise as their tenants make more profit, while in seasons of abundance with a low price of grain, their revenues fall as their tenants glut the market with produce and have falling profits. By establishing a free trade

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 87-8.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>370</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 1:18.

in grain, revenues become stabilized through importing and exporting grain according to the situation of the home market in all seasons. Landowners no longer suffer fluctuating revenues or tenant hardships.<sup>371</sup>

Only Marcet fails to provide an argument as to why it would be beneficial for landlords to repeal the Corn Laws. Instead she places her faith in the enlightened legislator who pursues the general interest of his country even if he stands to lose from it. The landlord in *John Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy* is emblematic of this figure, as it is he who convinces the protagonist of the benefits of unrestricted foreign trade. Even if the landlord's revenue is lessened through the repeal of the Corn Laws, he puts the needs of his society before his own and does what most benefits his nation.<sup>372</sup>

Either by appealing to their self-interest or to their enlightened sensibilities, Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon attempted to persuade landowners that the repeal of the Corn Laws would be in their best interests. By doing so they appealed directly to the group of individuals most able to effect repeal: members of parliament. Through attempting to persuade MPs, the three women's writings performed a similar function to Malthus' Corn Law tracts, as he also wrote to influence the legislature. This is one of the few similarities between the writings of the two camps, barring Malthus' later conversion to the side of free trade.

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<sup>371</sup> Martineau, *Illustrations*, 380.

<sup>372</sup> [Marcet,] *Hopkins's Notions*, 176.

## Conclusion

There are significant differences between the arguments of Malthus' Corn Law pamphlets and the arguments espoused by women political economists. Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon mobilized women to action against the Corn Laws through likening political economy to their traditional responsibilities. Malthus did not write for a popular audience. The women argued that the Corn Laws raising of the price of grain stunts capital accumulation in manufacturing, while agriculture becomes subject to violent fluctuations between the low cost of a glutted market and the high price of acute scarcity. Malthus made no such argument about capital accumulation, though he did argue the protected agriculture market is characterized by fluctuating grain prices. However, for Malthus the price fluctuates between the low price of a glutted market and the high price resultant from importing grain subject to duties, not the high price of scarcity. Moreover, he held that England would be subject to greater fluctuations if it abolished its tariffs due to France's policy of prohibiting exportation during scarcity. Marcet, Martineau, and Loudon advocated for free trade in grain between agricultural nations and England to secure a number of economic benefits, foremost of which are low and steady grain prices. Malthus advocated for England to adopt heavy import restrictions to secure an independent supply of grain, primarily for reasons of national security. The women envisaged England producing manufactured goods to trade for grain, which would create demand for labor in the manufacturing sector and ensure greater employment to the working class. For Loudon, this raises the wages of labor, but for Martineau and Marcet, free trade is likely to lower wages raised because of the high price of provisions under the Corn Laws. Malthus envisaged England cultivating significant amounts of marginal land to produce grain for its own consumption. This

would raise the wages of labor proportionally to the increase in the price of grain. For Malthus, rising wages increases production costs for capitalists, whose manufactures lose competitiveness with their foreign counterparts. Marcet and Martineau, who believed the Corn Laws raised wages, neglected this drawback of import restrictions. The women also denied that free trade could have negative effects on the English economy, whereas Malthus argued abolishing import restrictions comes with its own set of harmful consequences. In the final analysis, women political economists' arguments were incongruent with Malthus' views on the Corn Laws.



## V. DEVIATION FROM MALTHUS EXPLAINED

This thesis has found that women had an ambivalent relationship with Malthus' political economy. They distilled his principle of population into their didactic literature, urging individuals to prevent population from outstripping resources. They popularized his arguments against the Poor Laws, but supplemented them with original contentions and later advocated for reforms inconsonant with Malthus' abolitionism. Finally, they sought the eradication of the protectionist Corn Laws which Malthus maintained (until his recantation) would be beneficial to the English economy. It remains to be explained *why* women—Marcet and Martineau specifically—diverged sharply from Malthus' views on the Corn Laws when they adhered to his principle of population and anti-Poor law arguments. Marcet and Martineau deviated from Malthus on the Corn Laws because the two took their cues from other on that issue. Specifically, Marcet was influenced Smith's conception of foreign trade in the *Wealth of Nations* when insisting upon the inexpediency of protective tariffs. Martineau's stance on the issue was shaped by Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*. Marcet and Martineau's deviation from Malthus is due to the overriding influence of other political economists.

### **Marcet**

In the preface to the first edition to the *Conversations on Political Economy*, Marcet admits that “the principles and materials of the work ... have been obtained from the writings of the great masters who have treated this subject, and more particularly from

those of Dr. Adam Smith, of Mr. Malthus, M. Say, and M. Sismondi.”<sup>373</sup> An examination of the *Conversations* reveals Marcet adopted an assortment of principles from their works in a seemingly arbitrary manner. For instance, she chose to exposit Malthus’ conception of population while ignoring the significant portion of Sismondi’s 1815 entry on political economy in the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia* that had been devoted to critiquing Malthus’ principle.<sup>374</sup> She also adopted Say’s view that exchange value is determined by utility in spite of Smith’s labor theory of value. Marcet’s picking and choosing from the works of her predecessors extended into her discussion of foreign trade. She discounted Malthus’ protectionism and instead let Smith’s *laissez-faire* policy guide her views.

In the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith maintained that import restrictions are uncondusive to the welfare of society when they discourage or prohibit the purchase of foreign commodities which can be had for cheaper than it costs to produce in the home market. Such restrictions reduce the value of the nation’s annual produce by diverting capital to industries where a monopoly over the home market is assured. By this manner the price of the protected commodity rises, while the wealth of the nation is lessened. The more expedient policy is to not interfere with the market, and to purchase inexpensive foreign commodities with the produce of the nation derived from the advantageous allocation of capital.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, vii.

<sup>374</sup> See [Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi,] “Sismondi on Population,” *Population and Development Review* 16, no. 3 (September 1990), 557-70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1972836>. Sismondi expanded upon his critique of Malthus in J.-C.-L. Simonde de Sismondi, *New Principles of Political Economy: Of Wealth in Its Relation to Population*, trans. Richard Hyse (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991).

<sup>375</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 1:478-9.

It is this view of foreign trade which forms the backbone of Marcet's treatment of import restrictions. She insists that restrictions on the importation of foreign commodities are inadvisable because they raise prices to a higher level than elsewhere on the world market by guaranteeing producers a monopoly over the home market. As capital is drawn into the protected industry, it is driven away from those areas most conducive to the "wealth, prosperity, and enjoyments" of the nation.<sup>376</sup> Thus, the annual produce of the nation is diminished. It is better for nations to employ their capital where it is most advantageous and to purchase commodities where they can be had cheapest.<sup>377</sup> This end is attained by letting capital and consumption operate free of restriction. The natural working of the market should not be interfered with.

Smith thus set the tone on import restrictions which Marcet followed. Of course, not all of Marcet's arguments against tariffs are reducible to Smith's insistence upon the benefits of unrestricted foreign trade. Some of her case against the Corn Laws appears to have been generated independent of any direct influence, and therefore attests to her ingenuity. But it remains that she had been heavily influenced by Smith's *laissez-faire* approach to foreign trade. It is that influence which accounts for her deviation from Malthus.

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<sup>376</sup> [Marcet,] *Conversations*, 380.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.* 391-2.

## Martineau

In “The Moral of Many Fables,” Martineau confesses that her political economy owes much to “Smith and Malthus, and others of their high order.”<sup>378</sup> An examination of Martineau’s *Illustrations* reveals reliance upon not only Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* and Malthus’ *Essay on the Principle of Population*, but Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy*. The order in which Martineau’s tales appeared followed the order of the four main categories laid out by Mill’s *Elements*: production, distribution, interchange, and consumption. The content of Martineau’s *Illustrations* was similarly dependent upon Mills’ treatise—the wage fund doctrine so central to “Cousin Marshall” is traceable to Mill’s treatment of wages, for instance. It is Martineau’s adherence to Mills’ exposition of Ricardian political economy that accounts for her vacillating allegiance to Malthus’ views. Mill’s conception of population was an adaptation of Malthus’ principle, and Martineau mixed ideas from both. Mill declined to comment upon the effects of the Poor Laws, which set the stage for Malthus’ arguments and Martineau’s ingenuity to fill the gap. Finally, Mill criticized defenders of the Corn Laws and maintained that a free trade in grain would be most beneficial to the English economy. Mill influenced Martineau to adopt Malthus’ views on population and the Poor Laws, but also to advocate for the abolition of the Corn Laws.

With Malthus, Mill held that population has a tendency to increase faster than capital. Mill deduces population’s natural rate of increase *apriori*. Supposing that a woman’s reproductive period extends from 20 to 40 years of age, and supposing that one

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<sup>378</sup> Martineau, “Moral,” vii.

birth every two years the natural interval of accouchement, there is time for 10 births within a woman's childbearing years. Allowing for infant mortality to take one-half of these children—which Mill holds will be true for parents in comfortable circumstances—a couple will produce five children.<sup>379</sup> Supposing this to be true of all couples, it is evident that population will double in only a short period of time.<sup>380</sup>

Against this doubling of population Mill contrasts the law of diminishing returns. When, after exhausting land of superior quality, capital is applied to new marginal lands, its produce constantly diminishes proportional to its increase. The same is true when capital is applied in successive doses to the same land. Capital's rate of increase is thus continually declining, while population's stays consistently fast. "It thus sufficiently appears," Mill concludes, "that there is a tendency in population to increase faster than capital."<sup>381</sup>

The result of population outpacing capital is the impoverishment of the masses. Wages fall, and their continual decrease produces a greater and greater degree of poverty among the people. Poverty is attended by the twin Malthusian consequences of misery and vice. As poverty, misery, and vice increase, so too does mortality. Mortality is especially acute among infants, who are born into a world without the resources to sustain them. Death eventually proportions the number of people to the means of subsistence, and at that point wages become stabilized.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Mill, *Elements*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 48-9.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

The only effectual method to prevent population-driven mortality crises is the limitation of births. This is best achieved through the widespread practice of “prudence; by which either marriages are sparing contracted, or care is taken that children, beyond a certain number shall not be the fruit.”<sup>383</sup> Just as Mill’s wage-fertility dynamic is attributable to Malthus, his solution to the population problem is likewise derived from the reverend.

It is manifest that Martineau’s treatment of population is a mixture of Malthus’ and Mill’s views. She evidently found the mathematical certainty of Malthus’ geometrical ratio more convincing than Mill’s many suppositions when delineating population’s rate of increase. Yet she found the law of diminishing returns a useful heuristic to demonstrate the inferiority of the growth of capital. Martineau’s blending of Malthus and Mill on this issue was fairly seamless as there was little disagreement between the two. Yet on the Poor Laws Mill said little, allowing Martineau to adopt and append Malthusian doctrine as she saw fit.

In terms of the grain trade, Mill maintained that it is beneficial for a nation to import foreign commodities which can be purchased at a cheaper price than can be procured in the home market. This would secure the best outcome to the importing nation, as capital would naturally be allocated to the production of commodities in which the nation has an advantage.<sup>384</sup> In this way capital is allocated to its most profitable sectors. Restrictions upon the importation of grain are inexpedient because they prevent this outcome from occurring.

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 199-200.

Mill takes pains to discredit the arguments of those who advocate for England to produce an independent supply of grain. First, he considers the argument that importing nations may be deprived of their grain supplies by hostile neighbors. Mill counters this on two fronts: historically, importing nations have enjoyed the most steady and reliable grain markets; and principally, obtaining grain from a multiplicity of nations is the best defense against unfavorable seasons. By contrast, the nation that grows its own grain is subject to marked fluctuations in price resultant from seasons of dearth of famine.<sup>385</sup>

The second argument Mill discredits is that protection should be given to grain producers on account of protection afforded to manufacturers. To begin with, the logic of this argument dictates that if protection should be afforded to agriculture on account of protection given to some other industry, protection should be given to all industries. Acquiescing to this argument would reduce England's international trade to solely those commodities which it could not produce domestically. Moreover, the argument supposes that industries acquire some gain in consequence to their protection, while agriculture sustains a loss on account of being unprotected. According to Mill, protection does not come with an attendant economic benefit such as increased returns on capital. The only consequence to protection is that it induces more capitalists to enter that branch of industry with which it interferes. As industry derives no gain from protection, no loss is incurred by agriculture. The market for grain is not diminished because restrictions are imposed upon the importation of woolens, nor would that market expand if the

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 202.

restrictions were abolished. Thus, agriculture is not impacted by protection given to other industries.<sup>386</sup>

Finally, Mill contends with the argument advanced by landlords that farmers and manufacturers benefit from restrictions on the importation of grain. He holds that whether farmers and manufacturers benefit from the Corn Laws can be ascertained by examining how the laws impact their profits. The profit of farmers and manufacturers are high when wages are low, and low when wages are high. As the Corn Laws increase the price of grain—and the rate of wages depends on the price of grain—the Corn Laws increase the wages of labor. Increased wages mean decreased profits. Therefore, the Corn Laws reduce profits on capital. The true interests of farmers and manufactures lie in the abolition of the Corn Laws, as free trade would increase their profits.<sup>387</sup>

Mill's *Elements* set the pattern which Martineau's *Illustrations* followed. On population, Mill promulgated a variant of Malthus' principle. Martineau subsequently followed Mill's lead. Mill's neglect of the Poor Laws allowed Martineau to adopt the views of Malthus, whom Mill evidently saw as an authority on political economy. Mill's anti-Corn Law stance positioned Martineau against protective tariffs on grain in spite of Malthus' opinions to the contrary.

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 203-5.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 205-7.



## Conclusion

The political economy of Marcet and Martineau was influenced by more than Malthus. As popularizations of political economy, it is to be expected that their works drew inspiration from a multiplicity of sources. Marcet followed the great master of political economy, Adam Smith, in critiquing import restrictions which meddle with the natural working of the market. Martineau let James Mill be her guide to political economy, as she drew influence from his arguments against the Corn Laws to orient herself against tariffs which heighten the price of grain. It is therefore the influence of other political economists which accounts for Marcet and Martineau's deviation from Malthus' protectionism.

Malthus was one of the most eminent political economists in England during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. His *Essay on the Principle of Population* contained the definitive statements of classical political economy on population and the Poor Laws. When writing works of political economy, women endeavored to popularize those statements. Yet women remained true to the fundamental principle of free trade when Malthus advocated for restrictions on grain imports. The influence of Malthus reigns strong in British women's political economy, but it only went so far.

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