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Mary Howitt and *Howitt's Journal* (1847–48)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines a rare phenomenon in nineteenth-century British print culture, a periodical jointly edited by a husband and wife team. *Howitt's Journal*, a weekly miscellany with a progressive political agenda, ran for only eighteen months from January 1847 to June 1848, edited by William and Mary Howitt. The history of *Howitt's Journal* is particularly relevant to the question of women's agency in the world of periodicals, the ways in which women editors could have a public voice and engage in debate on political and social issues. One methodological issue the article raises is how we assess an editor's contribution to any publication, the nature of their input, and the extent to which they drive the agenda. In the case of a joint editorship, how do we identify the contributions and responsibilities of each editor? The paper is based on an examination of Mary Howitt's unpublished letters in the Houghton Library, Harvard, which provide new evidence of the extent of her involvement in the *Journal*. It tests the Howitts' editorial style, and Mary's in particular, against theories of editorship put forward by Patten and Finkelstein (2006) and Matthew Philpotts (2012) and suggests that these models of editorship are essentially masculine.

KEYWORDS

Women editors, editorship, Mary Howitt, *Howitt's Journal*, Britain

In this paper, I propose to examine a rare phenomenon in nineteenth-century British print culture, that of a periodical edited by a husband and wife team. The best-known example is probably the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (1852–79), edited by Isabella and Samuel Beeton, in which Mrs Beeton, famous for her *Book of Household Management* (1861), was designated 'the editress', and her enterprising and energetic husband looked after the business arrangements. Samuel Beeton founded the monthly, a pioneer in the field of middle-class women's magazines, in 1852. Isabella began to write for it shortly after their marriage in 1856. Theirs was a partnership in which, as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* notes, the personal and the professional were so 'intertwined', it was difficult to distinguish the roles each played in their various publishing enterprises.[1]

William (1792–1879) and Mary (1799–1888) Howitt were similarly regarded by their contemporaries as an indivisible partnership, a mid-Victorian 'William and Mary', echoing the late seventeenth-century monarchs.[2] Linda H. Peterson has written of the collaborative style of authorship developed by the Howitts, a collaboration that later included their artist daughter Anna Mary.[3] The American writer Margaret Fuller cited the Howitts as an example of 'intellectual companionship' in her 1845 book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.[4] In what follows I examine what is known of the editorship of their eponymous weekly magazine *Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress* in order to determine the role played by Mary Howitt in the joint enterprise.

Howitt's Journal ran for only eighteen months, from January 1847 to June 1848 inclusive. (Fig. 1) It sold for 1 ½ pence unstamped, with densely printed double-columned pages, illustrated with wood engravings. It was one of several periodicals that Brian Maidment has labelled 'magazines of popular progress', directed at newly literate readers mainly but not exclusively in towns and cities.[5] *Howitt's Journal*, like most of the magazines in this category, was progressive in its politics, although not party political. It advocated the extension of education for working people and for women. It supported the Co-operative League and the economic principles underpinning that movement. It pressed for sanitary reforms — one of its supporters and contributors was Thomas Southwood Smith, a leading sanitary reformer —, the abolition of capital punishment, the reduction of working hours, the reform of the Poor Laws, the extension of the suffrage, and women's rights. Its contents were a mixture of hard-hitting political articles, fiction by, among others, Elizabeth Gaskell, who published under the pseudonym 'Cotton Mather Mills', and a significant amount of poetry. Linda K. Hughes has highlighted poetry by more than seventy poets in the weekly, the best known of whom were Thomas Cooper and Ernest Jones, both Chartist poets, Ebenezer Elliott, Eliza Lynn (later Linton), Julia Pardoe, William Allingham, R. H. Horne, and on one occasion, Longfellow.[6] As Alexis Easley has emphasized, *Howitt's Journal*

1 'Beeton [née Mayson], Isabella Mary (1836–65)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (1 September 2017) [accessed 5 November 2019].

2 See Brian E. Maidment, '"Works in Unbroken Succession": The Literary Career of Mary Howitt', in *Popular Victorian Women Writers*, ed. by Kay Boardman and Shirley Jones (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 22–45 for a discussion of the Howitts' partnership.

3 See chapter 3 in Linda H. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters. Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

4 C. R. Woodring, *Victorian Samplers: William and Mary Howitt* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1952), p. 102.

5 Brian E. Maidment, 'Magazines of Popular Progress and the Artisans', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 17.3 (1984), 83–94.

6 Linda K. Hughes, 'Mary Howitt and the Business of Poetry', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 50.2 (2017), 273–85.

HOWITT'S JOURNAL.

of literature and popular progress, edited by William and Mary Howitt.

3

1848

NEW YEAR'S EVE IN DIFFERENT NATIONS.

In most countries New Year's Eve is a festival. In our country the great custom seems to have been drinking from the Wassail Bowl, which was handed down from our Saxon ancestors. This bowl filled with spiced ale, adorned with ribbons and a golden apple at the top, was carried from house to house by young maidens, who sang a wassail song, which may be found in "Brand's Antiquities," or "Hone's Every Day Book." Sir Henry Ellis says in his notes to Brand that this cup in the great monasteries was placed on

No. 53.—Vol. III. January 1, 1848.

Fig 1 Cover of *Howitt's Journal* for 1 January 1848. Archive.org

encouraged contributions from women writers, and from working-class poets.[7] Mary Howitt contributed a substantial number of poems herself.

The first number of the *Journal* on 2 January 1847 began with 'William and Mary Howitt's address to their Friends and Readers' in which the joint editors set out their agenda. The paper would give support to:

> all the onward and sound movements of the time […] to the cause of Peace, of Temperance, of Sanatory reform, of School for every class — to all the efforts of Free Trade, free opinion; to abolition of obstructive Monopolies, and the recognition of those great rights which belong to every individual of the great British people.[8]

7 Alexis Easley, 'Making a Debut', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. by Linda H. Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 15–28 (p. 19).

8 [William Howitt], 'William and Mary Howitt's Address to their Friends and Readers', *Howitt's Journal* (2 January 1847), 1–2.

'The Editors' Address to their Friends and Readers' became a regular feature of the journal, along with the 'Weekly Record of Facts and Opinions connected with General Interests and Popular Progress'. The latter, indicative of some news content, led to the weekly being stamped at an additional cost of a penny. As an example of its contents, the 'Weekly Record' for 1 January 1848 contained a short piece advising against immigration to Texas in the summer months — the journal ran a campaign against all immigration to slave states; a notice of the Annual General Meeting of the Co-operative League; a note on the Swedish singer Jenny Lind's current tour during which she donated the proceeds of one concert to a charity for the education of the poor; an account of recent public lectures delivered in Canterbury, made possible, it was emphasized, by the extension of the railway to the city; a brief article by Elihu Burritt, an American diplomat and philanthropist and a friend of the Howitts, on the 'Ocean Penny Post and will it Pay'; and a notice of a recent dinner given by the Manchester Corporation for its employees, an example, it was pointed out, of good employer-employee relations.

Each issue of the *Journal* contained an extensive section of 'Literary Notices' in which current fiction and poetry were given priority. The number for l January 1848 included an unsigned review of Tennyson's *The Princess* which stated among other things that 'Men must be taught that women are their equals and not their slaves', that there must be no attempt to make woman what she never was, a 'she-man', and the assertion that 'the true equality which she claims and to which she has a right is found in nature'.[9] Sir Charles Tennyson, in his biography of his grandfather, suggested that Tennyson's ideas about women's education and their social position in *The Princess* were influenced by conversations at the Howitts' home in 1846, the year before he wrote the poem.[10]

As well as these regular features in the issue for l January 1848 there were articles such as 'The Poet's Mission' by Henry Sutton, a middle-class poet and disciple of R. W. Emerson, warning of the dangers of putting the pursuit of fame over devotion to one's art; a two-part article 'A Day and Night at the General Post Office', by George Reynolds, which came under the category of general knowledge; 'The Royal Clock of Court Worshipton', a fable on the misuse of power, 'translated from the German for *Howitt's Journal*'. It is possible that the articles marked 'translated for *Howitt's Journal*' were by Mary Howitt, who was proficient in German after spending three years in Heidelberg from 1840 to 1843. In its focus on general knowledge and information that would be of use to its artisan readers *Howitt's Journal* resembled *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* (1832–1956) and the *Penny Magazine* (1832–45). Where it differed from its predecessors was in its overt reformist political agenda and in the amount of poetry and fiction it contained.

The circulation of *Howitt's Journal* fluctuated between 25,000 and 30,000, according to the information that exists.[11] Many of the contributions were signed; some with a full name, others with a pseudonym, and still others by initials. William Howitt signed most of his contributions with his initials. In her memoir, *Landmarks of a Literary Life 1820–1892*, the novelist Camilla Toulmin (1812–95), who was not an admirer of the Howitts, alleged that William had 'flooded it with his own and his wife's contributions'.[12] This was not strictly true. The Howitts assembled a large group

9 'Literary Notices', *Howitt's Journal* (3 January 1848): 28–29 (p. 29).

10 See Charles Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 202, 219.

11 'Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress 1847–1849', in *Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals. 1800–1900*, ed. by John D. North [accessed 11 November 2019].

12 Mrs Newton Crosland (née Camilla Toulmin), *Landmarks of a Literary Life 1820-1892* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1893), p. 198.

of contributors by drawing on their extensive networks.[13] These included the Radical Unitarians who originally congregated at South Place Chapel, Finsbury, and who had been involved in the influential *Monthly Repository* (1806–37). Others were drawn from metropolitan radical and reformist circles generally. Toulmin's statement – which was by no means impartial – also implied that William Howitt ran the journal and took the decisions as to what was and was not published in it. This highlights the methodological issue at the heart of this paper: how do we determine an editor's contribution to any publication, what is the nature of their input, to what extent do they drive the agenda? In the case of a joint editorship how do we identify the contributions and responsibilities of each editor? The case of *Howitt's Journal* is particularly relevant to the question of women's agency in the world of periodicals, the ways in which women editors had a public voice and entered into debate on political and social issues. Can Mary Howitt, in her role as co-editor of *Howitt's Journal,* be said to have directed the journal or set its agenda?

Theories of Editing

Critical commentary on nineteenth-century editing, both contemporary and modern, is surprisingly sparse. A search on databases published by Cengage and ProQuest produces numerous articles from the mid-1880s onward, as a mass market in newspapers emerged and with it subdivisions in the editor function (sub-editors, assistant editors, later news editors, literary editors, and so on). Some of these articles, many of them autobiographical, reflect on long hours, poor working conditions, on the gruelling pace, particularly of newspaper editing, and on editorial judgment or the lack of it. Scholars writing on the editing of literary periodicals in the middle decades of the century often quote Walter Bagehot's observation in 1855 that Francis Jeffrey of the *Edinburgh Review* 'invented the trade of editorship'. 'Before him', Bagehot wrote, 'an editor was a bookseller's drudge; he is now a distinguished functionary.'[14] That is relevant in assessing the editors of quarterly and monthly reviews, and some of the prestigious publishers' house magazines like *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the *Cornhill* but is by no means applicable to all nineteenth-century editors.

Two recent articles are helpful in analysing nineteenth-century editorial practice. Robert L. Patten and David Finkelstein's 'Editing Blackwood's; or What do Editors Do?' in Finkelstein's collection *Print Culture and the Blackwood Tradition, 1805–1930* (2006) distinguish three editorial strategies.[15] The first is what they term 'big-name editors', examples of which include Thackeray at the *Cornhill Magazine* (1860–62), under the proprietorship of George Smith of publishers Smith Elder and Trollope at *Saint Pauls Magazine* (1867–70), published by James Virtue and later Alexander Strahan and Henry S. King. Both were high-profile authors for whom a lucrative editorship was a mark of esteem as well as a welcome addition to their finances. A second category was what Patten and Finkelstein term 'hands-on' editors. Dickens, ably assisted by W. H. Wills at *Household Words*, is the most obvious example, and a compelling model which as Beth Palmer argues in her book *Women's Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture:*

13 See Joanne Shattock, 'Researching Periodical Networks: William and Mary Howitt', in *Researching the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press. Case Studies*, ed. by Alexis Easley, Andrew King, and John Morton (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 60–73 for an exploration of the Howitts' interlocking networks.

14 Walter Bagehot, 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers', in *Literary Studies*, ed. by R. H. Hutton, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1884), I, pp. 1–40 (p. 30).

15 Robert L. Patten and David Finkelstein, 'Editing *Blackwood's*; or, What Do Editors Do?' in *Print Culture and the Blackwood Tradition, 1805–1930*, ed. by David Finkelstein (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 146–83.

Sensational Strategies (2011), women editors like Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Ellen Wood, and Florence Marryat among others sought to emulate.[16] A third model was that of the 'publisher-proprietor', exemplified by William Blackwood I and his successors John Blackwood and William Blackwood III at *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817–1912) and Robert and William Chambers in their management of *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*.

Patten and Finkelstein list seven key editorial functions:

1. finance and administration
2. promoting an ideology
3. commissioning contributors
4. arranging and perfecting copy
5. buying and selling advertising
6. supervising quality
7. giving the periodical its distinctive character.

They note that the biggest division of labour was between what they term the 'business side' of the enterprise and the 'copy text' side and they also note that one prevalent arrangement throughout the nineteenth century was for the publisher to finance the journal and to turn the editorial function over to a 'hireling', or an editor to whom a stipend was paid. They also note that family firms like the Chambers brothers and William Blackwood and Sons blurred the division between the publishing and editorial functions. I will return to this implied tension between the 'business side' and the 'copy text side' of nineteenth-century editing later in this article.

Matthew Phillpotts's 'The Role of the Periodical Editor: Literary Journals and Editorial Habitus' (*Modern Language Review*, January 2012), as the title indicates, uses Bourdieu's notion of habitus in which to situate the editorial function. The editor, he argues, is an agent negotiating 'what Brooker rightly identifies as the complex nexus of social, economic, and artistic relations which [find] material form in a journal or magazine'.[17] According to Bourdieu, editors, like gallery directors and publishers, are a category of cultural agents who are ascribed a distinctive type of habitus; they are 'double personages' who 'mediate between the aesthetic and commercial fields'. Philpotts, quoting Bourdieu, writes:

> Caught between the conflicting logic of two opposing fields, these double personages 'combine completely contradictory dispositions: economic dispositions, which, in certain sectors of the field, are totally foreign to producers, and intellectual dispositions near to those of the producers whose work they can exploit only in so far as they know how to appreciate it and give it value'. That is to say, periodical editorship depends on a dual and contradictory habitus.[18]

Philpotts, like Patten and Finkelstein, identifies three categories of editorship. The first is what he terms 'charismatic editorship'. His examples are Ford Madox Ford's editorship of the *English Review* and John Middleton Murry's editing in turn of *Rhythm*, the *Athenaeum*, and the *Adelphi*. Both men had considerable social capital, they were extremely well networked, and, in Ford's case, had been born into the cultural aristocracy. They also exercised astute judgment in drawing into their respective journals the literary

16 Beth Palmer, *Women's Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture: Sensational Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

17 Matthew Philpotts, 'The Role of the Periodical Editor: Literary Journals and Editorial Habitus', *Modern Language Review*, 107.1 (2012), 39–64 (p. 42).

18 Ibid.

stars of the day as well as encouraging new writers. They drew on their considerable experience as critics in the editing of the contributions they received. Both Ford and Middleton Murry, according to Philpotts, were driven by a sense of mission; they had clear agendas for their periodicals. Such was the intensity of their editorship, as with all charismatic editors, he argues, they burned out quickly. Their terms of office were little more than two years. Another feature of the charismatic editor which he singles out was financial incompetence. Both Ford and Murry were hopeless when it came to the 'business' side of editing. Murry and his partner Katherine Mansfield at one point were bankrupt.

Philpotts's other categories are firstly 'bureaucratic editorship', in which the editing of a periodical is shared among several individuals, a structure in which the editor is not pre-eminent, and a well-oiled machine ensures the transition from one editor to the next. His example is André Gide and the editing of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. Secondly, he identifies 'mediating editorship', which combines the qualities of charismatic and bureaucratic editorship. An example of this is T. S. Eliot's editorship of the *Criterion*.

Although Philpotts draws his examples from modernist editors and periodicals, there is much in his article that is helpful in analyzing the editorship of nineteenth-century literary periodicals. One limitation in both Patten and Finkelstein's and Philpotts's otherwise illuminating discussions of editorial practice is that all their examples are of male editors. There is an unacknowledged assumption, I suggest, that female editorial roles were confined to women's and children's periodicals.

Mary Howitt's role in co-editing *Howitt's Journal* is without precedent. *Howitt's Journal* was a weekly miscellany with a political and social agenda, not the accustomed environment for a woman editor. Linda K. Hughes is surely right when she argues that the best source for assessing her editorial practice, decision making, and relations with contributors is through her editorial correspondence. It must, as she suggests, have been extensive, given the number of poets alone who contributed in the *Journal's* eighteen-month run. She examined Mary Howitt's correspondence held by the Nottinghamshire libraries and discovered it to be surprisingly thin as regards her editorial work, apart from her letters to one poet, William Cox Bennett, who contributed nine poems to *Howitt's Journal*. In these letters, Mary shows herself to be a sensitive, tactful, and insightful editor, suggesting changes to words and phrases that would improve Bennett's poems, in other words doing what a good editor should do, especially one who was herself an experienced and widely published poet. In encouraging contributions from major Chartist figures and from working class poets she signalled the weekly's openness to radical ideas and its political sympathies. Ironically, Hughes notes, the more politically radical and working-class poets often wrote apolitical poems, whereas the edgier lyrics were often written by less well known middle-class poets. From her examination of the Howitt archive in Nottingham Hughes concludes that Mary was the de facto poetry editor of *Howitt's Journal*, a title which certainly did not exist in the minds of the proprietors, let alone on any contents page or masthead of this domestically produced weekly but which, Hughes argues, sums up Mary's role.[19]

The collection of Mary Howitt's letters in the Houghton Library at Harvard is another source of information on her editorial practice and reveals a wider range of responsibilities in the *Journal*. It comprises upwards of five hundred letters, many of them written to her friend the journalist and novelist Eliza Meteyard. Others were written to a variety of correspondents, many of them American, who were involved in the short lived weekly as contributors or sympathizers, and to several of whom she unburdened

19 See Hughes, pp. 273–85 for a discussion of Howitt's correspondence in the Nottingham archives.

herself with remarkable candour. Some letters were written in haste, in periods of crisis or immediately afterwards, when emotions were raw and unfiltered. Others are more formal, announcing the establishment of *Howitt's Journal* and requesting a contribution. Most of the letters are undated, but those written during the period of the journal are identifiable by the address, The Elms, Clapton, to which the family moved in 1846 and which they were forced to leave when the journal came to an abrupt and unexpected end in 1848.[20] Most of the business of the journal was conducted from home, although Mary occasionally writes of going to 'the office', presumably that of the printer, William Lovett, just off the Strand. The Harvard letters add considerably to the composite picture of the conduct of *Howitt's Journal* and provide a sense of the quotidian in a way that business records and ledgers cannot convey. The personal anguish and stress that the running of the journal produced in both Howitts spilled over into their correspondence, making it a unique record of this short-lived but intense period in their lives.

One of Mary's projects was a series of biographical memoirs of eminent Americans, which were accompanied by a full-page wood-engraved portrait. These became a feature of *Howitt's Journal*, as they had been of its predecessor the *People's Journal*. She published one on William Lloyd Garrison, the American abolitionist, and another on Charlotte Cushman, the flamboyant American actress and close companion of Eliza Cook, who later became one of Mary's protégés. Other subjects included Elihu Burritt and the abolitionist Henry Clarke Wright.[21] She wrote to R. W. Emerson on the eve of his lecture tour of Britain in September 1847, in the hope of soliciting material for a memoir. He declined gracefully, but he did facilitate the publication of an article on the discovery of etherization, a controversy in which he had an interest, in the *Journal*.[22]

> 'You have heard perhaps that my husband has commenced a weekly Journal which I have the honour of editing with him & which is called Howitt's Journal', another letter in the Harvard collection begins. This one, dated 2 April [1848], invites her unnamed American correspondent to contribute to the journal on subjects of interest to both their countries, a policy as she explains, of both *Howitt's Journal* and the *People's Journal*. The letter candidly outlines the Howitts' unhappy relationship with the proprietor of the *People's Journal,* and their reasons for breaking with him to establish their own weekly. The proprietor, who is not identified by name, has used 'every measure to prejudice the Americans against us', she goes on, hence her desire to recruit American contributors sympathetic to their own project.[23] The frankness with which she expressed her distress at the attempt to damage their characters, 'after the 25 years we have been before the public', and the fact that they are not yet free of 'dreadful liabilities' from their previous association are indicative of Mary's whole-hearted involvement in the affairs of the *Journal*, and her palpable sense of an impending crisis in the spring of 1848.[24]

Other letters are more positive and give further evidence of her immersion in the day-to-day running of the weekly. On one occasion she commissioned an entire issue. 'I have managed I think gloriously', she wrote to Eliza Meteyard, 'The 3rd no is all my

20 Some of the envelopes, which provide the date of postage, have been retained.
21 Mary Howitt to R. W. Emerson, 2 September [1847], fMS English 883.1, in Mary Botham Howitt, *Letters to Eliza Meteyard 1846–76*, Houghton Library, Harvard, Film 03-0819, Houghton Master Film Number H1579.1. Subsequent references are to this collection.
22 See Todd H. Richardson, 'An Evaluation of the Howitt/Emerson Relationship through "Etherization"', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 33.4 (2000), 397–401.
23 Mary Howitt to an unidentified correspondent, April 2 [1848], Houghton Library, Harvard.
24 Ibid.

own doing & I take pride in having got Mr Fox to write the lst article — such a good one! On the Museum being closed at Xmas.'[25] She had first met W. J. Fox, the editor and later proprietor of the Unitarian *Monthly Repository* when he was in charge of South Place Chapel in Finsbury.[26] Her close relationship with Meteyard, for whom she became a mentor and protector, had an indirect bearing on *Howitt's Journal* in that the tales Meteyard wrote for the weekly with Mary's encouragement, under the pseudonym 'Silverpen', were central to its causes and underlying principles.[27] One of her characteristic Utopian tales, 'The Co-operative Band' (13, 20 March 1847) outlined the economic reforms that were possible with co-operation. 'Earth's Worst Tragedy' (8 May 1847) emphasized the latent artistic talents and aesthetic sensibilities inherent in all classes and pressed for more education for the working class. 'The New Lord Burleigh' (17, 25 June 1848), the story of a cross-class marriage, highlighted the sexual double standard and the evils of prostitution. 'Fruit from Plates and Dishes' (8, 15, 22, 29 January 1848) expounded her belief in the aesthetic and moral value of good design, even in the humblest home.

It can be argued that Mary exerted considerable soft power in the *Journal* through her encouragement and support for women writers, not only Eliza Meteyard, but Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Gillies, Julia Pardoe, and others. Kathryn Gleadle notes that many of the Langham Place feminists were influenced by an earlier generation of female role models, of whom Mary Howitt was one. Gleadle points out that both Barbara Leigh Smith and Bessie Rayner Parkes subscribed to *Howitt's Journal* and quotes Parkes who once commented, 'There is a healthy, hopeful vigorous tone in all Mary Howitt writes.'[28]

The Demise of *Howitt's Journal*

The seeds of the sudden, and to the Howitts catastrophic, end to their joint venture were sown at the outset. As Mary had indicated to her American correspondent, she and William had contributed to its predecessor, the *People's Journal* (1846–48), under the proprietorship of John Saunders, and William had taken a financial share in the weekly, making him in effect a partner in the enterprise. The finances of the *People's Journal* were precarious and Saunders's domineering behaviour had led the Howitts to break with him and to establish their own journal in January 1847. Financial innocents, William and Mary found themselves liable for the original debts which had continued to mount after the dissolution of the partnership. 'The Editors' Address to their Friends and Readers' in the issue of l January 1848 declared, 'as all the world knows we have fallen into the hands of an unprincipled and designing adventurer'.[29] It soon became a very public

25 Mary Howitt to Eliza Meteyard. Clapton, n.d., Houghton Library, Harvard.

26 On Mary Howitt's association with Fox and the *Monthly Repository* see Joanne Shattock, 'Women Journalists and Periodical Spaces', in *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s–1900s*, ed. by Alexis Easley, Clare Gill, and Beth Rodgers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 306–18 (pp. 307–10) and 'The Feminisation of Literary Culture' in *The History of British Women's Writing*, ed. by Lucy Hartley, 6 vols (London: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, 2018), vi, pp. 23–38 (pp. 27–30).

27 On Meteyard as a journalist see Joanne Shattock, 'Becoming a Professional Writer' in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. by Linda H. Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 29–42 (pp. 32–34) and Shattock, 'Women Journalists', pp. 310–13. See also Kay Boardman, 'Struggling for Fame: Eliza Meteyard's Principled Career' in *Popular Victorian Women Writers*, ed. by Kay Boardman and Shirley Jones (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 46–65 and Tomoko Kanda, 'The Early Journalism of Eliza Meteyard' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2018).

28 Quoted by Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists. Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831–51* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995; repr. 1998), p. 181.

29 [William Howitt], 'The Editors' Address to their Friends and Readers', *Howitt's Journal* (3 January 1848), 1–2.

quarrel, with a number of prominent former supporters, including Harriet Martineau, Douglas Jerrold, and Charles Knight withdrawing their aid, and in Martineau's case, breaking off relations with them. Mary's poignant poem 'Eighteen-Hundred and Forty-Seven. A Lay for Old and New Year' in the same number made no attempt to disguise her feelings:

> We had friends, by scores, when he came in,
> But he has thinned their ranks amain,
> Has dimmed a deal of friendship's gold,—
> Has laid some true-hearts 'neath the mould,—
> And now we look around, and few remain.[30]

The number for 3 June 1848 contained a full-page 'Address to the Readers of *Howitt's Journal*' signed by William, declaring that he had no recourse but to seek the protection of the Court of Bankruptcy. Mary Howitt's *Autobiography*, published posthumously in 1889, is surprisingly reticent on what was a very testing eighteen months in the lives of both Howitts, a period which ended in their financial ruin. The only indication she gives of the tension created by the *Journal* was a comment on 18 December 1846, on the eve of its launch, when she noted their discovery that the manager of the *People's Journal*, who was Saunders's brother-in-law, had not kept any books and had mismanaged the business. This was followed by an account in January 1847 of a 'peculiar experience' akin to a panic attack, 'a strange, alarming sense of perplexity, of impending, all-embracing darkness and evil' which overwhelmed her. 'It preceded a time of calamity', she added, 'We had speedily severe monetary losses and mortifications, and gained new and sad revelations of human nature.'[31]

The Harvard letters, in contrast to the *Autobiography*, were written in the moment, and are at times both extremely painful and uncharacteristically blunt. In the summer of 1848 Mary wrote to the American publisher James T. Fields of her hope of visiting 'when we have a little recovered from the hurricane of ruin that has passed over us. Heaven knows only what a dreadful year this last twelvemonths [*sic*] has been to us. We are not crushed quite', she added, 'We mean to rise up & be happy & with the blessing of God, prosperous yet.'[32] Other letters were less philosophical. 'You cannot tell what a scoundrel that Saunders is — ten times worse than we thought', she wrote to Meteyard, 'The Rogue always has an advantage over the honest man.'[33] Having engaged them as authors for the *People's Journal*, according to her narrative, he entrapped them and brought about their ruin. Elizabeth and William Gaskell were enlisted in the Howitts' support, writing a letter signed with the initials C. M. M which was published in the *Journal*. Southwood Smith was another prominent supporter. According to Mary, Saunders took out a series of advertisements in newspapers to discredit them. The sectarian press came out in their support — notably the *Christian Witness* — and the Boston-based *Anti-Slavery Standard*, which published a letter by the eminent lawyer and abolitionist Wendell Phillips.

At one point an amalgamation with *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* was mooted, William Tait having sold his magazine at the end of 1846, but that appears to have come to nothing. After William Howitt was forced into bankruptcy a conjoined *People's*

30 Mary Howitt, 'Eighteen-Hundred and Forty-Seven. A Lay for Old and New Year', *Howitt's Journal* (1 January 1848), 7.
31 Mary Howitt, *Mary Howitt. An Autobiography*, ed. by Margaret Howitt, 2 vols (London: Wm Isbister Limited. 1889), II, pp. 41–42.
32 Mary Howitt to James T. Fields. August 16 [1848], Houghton Library, Harvard.
33 Mary Howitt to Eliza Meteyard. The Elms, Clapton, n.d., Houghton Library, Harvard.

and Howitt's Journal was launched by Saunders and published by Willoughby and Co., between 1849 and 1851. Mary played a full role in preparing their case against Saunders in the arbitration that followed. The financial consequences of the collapse of *Howitt's Journal* were severe. They had to sell their books, manuscripts, and copyrights at a fraction of their value, all of which they had held as a legacy for their children. They were forced to move from The Elms, a large, comfortable house which had become a meeting place for writers, anti-slavery campaigners, feminists, and radicals of varying hues, and where Mary for the first time had a room of her own in which to work, into a series of smaller, more cramped houses in North London. William and their son Charlton went to Australia to earn money, leaving Mary and Anna Mary behind. They scraped an income with a variety of projects over the years and became central figures in the literary establishment but the price they paid for founding *Howitt's Journal* was a heavy one.

It is also clear that the Howitts' was not the only account of the quarrel. Saunders became a modestly successful dramatist and novelist. He had powerful supporters in Harriet Martineau, Douglas Jerrold, and Charles Knight, with whom he had worked in an earlier period, as well as Camilla Toulmin. Martineau never restored her relations with the Howitts but retained a very cordial one with Saunders. Jerrold moderated his view to the extent that he offered continued work to Eliza Meteyard when pressed by both William and Mary. In retrospect it appeared that the quarrel had a personal as well as a financial element, and one which has never been satisfactorily explained. One theory is that it began as a trivial argument about which of them, William Howitt or Saunders, first had the idea for the *People's Journal*. There is no doubt that the Howitts' letters about Saunders are obsessive, and as their detractors indicated, uncharacteristically vindictive. R. K. Webb, Martineau's biographer, describes the disagreement as one of those intellectual quarrels that can never quite be explained.[34] Kathryn Gleadle on the other hand argues that the Howitts allowed their sense of disappointment and frustration with *Howitt's Journal* to boil over into their disagreement with Saunders. She, I sense, is closer to the truth.[35]

Conclusion

What conclusions can be drawn about Mary Howitt's role in *Howitt's Journal*? Poetry editor, whether by name or de facto, does not seem an adequate job description. Nor does the familiar and patronizing category of a supportive wife who shares her husband's political and literary interests do justice to the scale of her involvement, and the obvious commitment she demonstrated in her letters and her autobiography.

Of the seven key editorial functions identified by Patten and Finkelstein, Mary Howitt can be said to have fulfilled at least four, and possibly five. Her letters show that she commissioned contributors. Linda K. Hughes's examination of her correspondence with the poets who published in the weekly demonstrates that she supervised the quality of at least some of their work. Her own contributions and those for which she was responsible, for instance the radical poetry and Meteyard's articles and stories, helped to give the *Journal* its distinctive character, and together they promoted the ideology of the weekly. Mary was familiar with the practicalities of layout and the makeup of individual numbers. She had been editor of *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrapbook*, a lavish gift book or annual, which she took over at the death of Laetitia Landon in 1838. In

34 See R. K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau. A Radical Victorian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 266–69.

35 See Gleadle, p. 186, and Woodring, p. 138 for the repercussions of the quarrel with Saunders.

Fig 2 Mary Howitt (1799–1888). Nottingham City Council, NTGM011866

her *Autobiography* she indicated that her role was mainly to write poems to accompany the engraved plates supplied by the publisher, so her practical experience may have been limited. But it is highly likely that as the *Journal* was run on a shoe-string she had a hand in layout and proof reading.

It could be said that both William and Mary embodied many of the characteristics of Philpotts's 'charismatic' editor, while decidedly lacking in personal charisma. Of the two, Mary's literary reputation was the stronger, reinforced by her transatlantic profile as a poet and children's writer. William Howitt had extensive connections with the London literary world and had achieved some celebrity as a writer but it is questionable whether he gave sufficient thought to his own profile when deciding to call his new publication *Howitt's Journal*, inviting comparisons with *Ainsworth's Magazine* (1842), *Hood's Magazine* (1844) and *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine* (1845), each of whose editor/proprietors had a stronger brand image than his own. However, with their extensive networks on which they drew for contributors, and their sense of mission in promoting the political and social agenda of *Howitt's Journal*, both Howitts conform

to Philpotts's template. Unfortunately, where they also conformed to the pattern of charismatic editors, as we have seen, was in their inexperience in financial matters.

The final issue of *Howitt's Journal* in June 1848 contained a portrait of Mary Howitt engraved from a painting by their friend the painter and portraitist Margaret Gillies. (Fig. 2) It is possible to interpret its inclusion in two ways. It could be a tribute from a devoted husband grateful for his wife's support through a tumultuous period in their writing lives. Or it could be a tangible acknowledgement of their equal collaboration on this, the latest of their joint enterprises.

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