

Harriet Martineau on Education ¹

Gaby Weiner, Umeå University, Sweden

Abstract

Certain issues occurred continuously in the work of nineteenth century political economist and social reformer, Harriet Martineau: doubts about Christianity, interest in science and alternative sciences (mesmerism, phrenology), optimism regarding necessary social change, and importance of popular education for social development. It is the latter area of Martineau's work that is the focus of this paper. It first offers a brief biographical sketch of Martineau and then provides a general overview of the various positions that Martineau took up on education, pointing to the challenge of her writing for interpretation and its subversive and critical character. The third section of the paper provides a close reading of Household Education, one of her most influential and 'embedded' texts. The paper concludes that a general overview of Martineau's range of positions on education is insufficient for our understanding of her relevance today. Rather, closer reading of texts like Household Education reveals a subtext which shows Martineau as a feminiser of language through which she rendered accessible the ideas of her time to different audiences, in new and often subversive ways.

Biographical sketch

Harriet Martineau enjoyed a long and fruitful career as a feminist writer, journalist and political campaigner. The first and final public actions of her life illustrate the breadth and length of her career in public life. In 1832, at the age of thirty, she published a hugely popular introduction to the new nineteenth-century science of political economy (what we now know as classic economics). It made her a national celebrity overnight, provided her with financial security, and earned her the reputation of 'popular educator'. Thirty years later, in 1863 at the age of 61, she came out of retirement to publish four letters in the *Daily News* alerting the public to the dangers of the Contagious Diseases Acts. These letters were to constitute the first shots in one of the most important British feminist campaigns of the nineteenth century. In the years between she exerted a degree of influence that is difficult for us to understand today, with our present perceptions of the patriarchal nature of nineteenth-century England. She was much aware of her good fortune as a woman in having such a popular success with her political economy series and consciously sought to build on it in order to exert political influence more widely. She wrote to a friend, 'I wish I was in London. I want to be doing something with the pen, since no other means of action in politics are in a woman's power' (Martineau, 1832). She speedily moved to London from her home town of Norwich, to take up residence close to Westminster and Downing Street, suitably accessible to politicians, civil servants and society personages who sought her advice on a whole range of parliamentary and cultural matters for a decade or more. In her late 30s, exhausted, and with her health collapsing, she removed herself to the seaside town of Tynemouth and then, five or so years later, to the Lake District. She made a famed recovery with the help of mesmerism (hypnosis), and both during and after her illness, continued to produce an

¹ Paper presented at seminar at Birmingham University, 18 October 2004

impressive volume of books, articles, letters and other forms of writing, becoming a pioneer in a number of emerging nineteenth-century disciplines and fields including economics, politics, journalism, sociology, women's rights, travel writing and autobiography.

Harriet Martineau was an extraordinary figure in London society of the 1830s and 1840s, around the time that the young Victoria came to the throne. She was a woman from the provinces who became a recognised expert on determinedly male public-sphere issues such as the economy and the law; she was also a social celebrity; who managed to overcome a hearing impairment with the aid of an ear-trumpet. She contrived rather successfully to balance sociability and curiosity with authoritative comment (often dismissed by detractors as didacticism). For example, when she travelled to America in the mid 1830s, shortly after completing her political economy series which, though highly popular, was criticised for focusing on 'unwomanly' topics, the men she met were surprised by her evident sociability. As Webb (1960: 3), put it:

...the Americans were agreed. She was very pleasant, not at all so formidable as they had expected. She dressed well and quietly, and spoke in a low voice, rather rapidly. She was, to borrow their adjectives, womanly, vivacious, pleasant, unaffected, affable, courteous, communicative (Webb, 1960).²

Women also seemed to enjoy her company. Elizabeth Sedgewick wrote to her New York lawyer husband Robert.

My first impressions of Miss M. are very agreeable. She has a vivacity and love of fun about her that was wholly unexpected. I thought to see her gravely wise and solemnly sensible...- but lo – in the place she sends forth – like any woman – delicate titbits – pleasant gossipings – and those little nothings – which gracefully uttered are the charms of conversations (Sedgewick, 1835).

Others were less complimentary about her, but this was frequently because they did not like what she was saying, or that it was a woman who was saying it, or that it was a woman who was saying it too passionately. For example, in a review of the autobiography when it was published after Harriet Martineau's death, Margaret Oliphant, the Scottish novelist, was deftly crushing.

The verdict of the world upon her will not, we think, be so high...She was a very sensible woman; yet not very much a woman at all, notwithstanding her innocent and honest love of Berlin Wool. She was a very clever writer, with a most useful, serviceable working faculty, and as little nonsense in her as could be desired. (Oliphant, 1877, p. 490)³

² Webb, R. K. (1960) *Harriet Martineau: a Radical Victorian*. London: Heinemann.

³ Oliphant, M. (1877), Harriet Martineau. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. 121. April. pp. 472-496.

As an authoritative commentator, who was also a woman, dissenter, and campaigner for advanced causes, Harriet Martineau was without doubt a highly contentious figure - attracting admiration from some (notably fellow Unitarians, political progressives, abolitionists and feminists), and much hostility from others. Thus while her achievements as nineteenth-century woman pioneer and writer were admitted by most people, there was considerable diversity in the evaluation of her historical and cultural importance, both among her contemporaries and over time. For example, on its publication her political economy series was mocked by the conservative periodical, *The Quarterly Review*, not only for poor quality of writing and misplaced reforming zeal but also on grounds of 'unfemininity'.

But it is equally possible not to laugh at the absurd trash which is seriously propounded by some of her characters, in dull didactic dialogues; introduced here and there in the most clumsy manner; and worst of all, it is quite impossible not to be shocked, nay disgusted, with many of the unfeminine and mischievous doctrines on the principles of social welfare; of which these tales are made the vehicle (Croker, 1833, p. 136).⁴

She was acclaimed by feminists writing at the end of the nineteenth-century (Miller, 1884); and viewed as an interesting, if narrow-minded and sometimes unwise, nineteenth-century eccentric, in the first decades of the twentieth century (Bosanquet, 1927). At the end of the 1950s, she was perceived by her main (male) biographer of the period, as representative of her times, even if she was also 'second-rate' and mediocre (Webb, 1960). More recently, from the 1970s onwards, she has been reclaimed once more by feminists as an important 'foremother' of modern feminism (Pichanick, 1981; Sanders, 1986, David, 1987; Weiner, 1991).⁵

Harriet Martineau and Education

General overview

Harriet Martineau displayed a keen interest in education from a relatively early age, writing her first article on the subject in 1823, at the age of 21⁶. She maintained throughout her life that education for children and adults was vital if the natural laws of society were to be learnt and understood, and preparation made for a better society. Both physical and intellectual training, she argued, was necessary for higher moral development - in order to make men better employees, factory owners better employers,

⁴ Croker, J. W. (1833) Miss Martineau's Monthly Novels. *Quarterly Review*. 1107, April.

⁵ Miller, F. Fenwick (1884) *Harriet Martineau*. London: W. H. Allen; Bosanquet, T. (1927) *Harriet Martineau: an Essay in Comprehension*. London: Etchells and Macdonald; Webb, R. K. (1960) *Harriet Martineau: a Radical Victorian*. London: Heinemann; Pichanick, V. K. (1981) *Harriet Martineau: the Woman and Her Work*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Sanders, V. (1986) *Reason Over Passion: Harriet Martineau and the Victorian Novel*. Brighton: Harvester Press; David, D. (1987) *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press; Weiner, G. (1991) Controversies and Contradictions: approaches to the study of Harriet Martineau (1802-76). Doctoral thesis, Open University

⁶ Martineau, H. (1823). On Female Education. *Monthly Repository*. February, pp. 77-81. This article was signed 'Discipulus' as were many of Harriet Martineau's early articles for the *MR*.

and women, better wives and mothers⁷. Thus, like Robert Owen, she urged factory owners both to make education a prerequisite for employment and to release child-workers for periods of schooling.

We do not see why they [the employers] should not establish a public opinion among their workmen, forbidding the employment of children under a certain age, or for so many hours in the day as to interfere with school instruction.⁸

‘Industrial training’, in particular, she viewed as important for children of all classes even if it was especially relevant for the poor and ‘loose-living’; as,

necessary for the strengthening of the body, the cultivation of the senses, and the enlivening of the mind... all important to moral discipline. A really good industrial training, various enough to suit the varieties of pupils...would mitigate the evil from which a great deal of poverty and loose-living now arises.⁹

As noted elsewhere¹⁰, Martineau took up different positions on education at different periods of her life. In the 1830s and 1840s she largely focused on structures. For example, she criticized the existing system of parliamentary grants for not extending provision to working-class children, and instead, advocated a national system of education based on trust and cooperation

a provision for their education being once established, the people, whose interests are now so difficult to manage, would be converted into co-operators with the government, as long as the government is worthy of that co-operation.¹¹

Later in 1861, she was to welcome the Revised Code of Robert Lowe which tied grants to examination results: ‘henceforward the State Payments must be earned by the fulfillment of the aims of the State’.¹² She claimed that parents were far more likely to keep their children at school if they saw positive outcomes. Moreover, teachers would be able to offer a more thorough and practical form of schooling without necessarily narrowing the curriculum available. This could only enhance their professional status: ‘they [teachers] will find themselves occupying a higher place than at present’.¹³

In the 1850s and 1860s, she looked more closely at the practice of education. For example, she argued for vocational as well as intellectual training:

⁷ Watts, R. E. (1980). The Unitarian contribution to the development of female education. *History of Education*. 9, 4, pp. 273-286.

⁸ Martineau, H. (1857). *Daily News*. 5 June.

⁹ Martineau, H. (1857). *Daily News*. 26 May, p. 4

¹⁰ Weiner, G. (1991). Controversies and Contradictions: approaches to the study of Harriet Martineau (1802-76). Unpublished doctoral thesis. Open University

¹¹ Martineau, H. (1823). On Female Education. *Monthly Repository*. February, pp. 77-81

¹² Martineau, H. (1861). *Daily News*. 24 September.

¹³ Ibid.

the cordial shaking hands with nature, in industrial training, is as good for the intellect as books are for the expansion of the moral as well as the intellectual part of man.¹⁴

She was an advocate of 'progressive' schooling, wholly opposed, for example, to rote learning and reward systems.

There will be no reward and punishment at all; ... human beings will be so trained as to find their pleasure and pain in the gratification or the abuse of their own highest faculties.¹⁵

Martineau was highly critical of corporal punishment, describing, in 1854, the public schools' use of 'flogging and fagging' as a 'system based on brute force and despotism'. As a tyranny similar to slavery, she predicted its downfall.

All such tyrannies are doomed; and none more surely than that which is built upon unregenerate passions, secured by aristocratic usage and convenience, and disguised by a haze of pseudo-religious sentiment.¹⁶

Girls' and Women's Education

Martineau displayed a consistent and long-standing commitment to girls and women's education. Her stance, as in her other works, was firmly grounded in, yet challenging to, prevailing ideas. On the one hand, she located the place of women ideally in the home and frequently described their 'natural' occupations as being wives and mothers. Accordingly, she argued for a form of female education that would both extend their thought processes and advance their domestic skills. On the other hand, for example in an article entitled *Female Industry* in 1859 where she drew on the 1851 census figures to show that there were more women than men of marriageable age, she argued that women ought to be educated in preparation for work¹⁷. She described specific types of training as appropriate for different types of female employment, all the while emphasising the importance of intellectual attainment.¹⁸

While acknowledging that marriage and motherhood was likely to be the destination of most girls, regardless of class, Martineau was persistent about the necessity for access to continuing and higher education for those women who either wanted or needed training or qualifications for career advancement. She held that no profession or career avenue should be closed to women, supporting a number of campaigns aimed at removing barriers preventing women from entering the careers of their choice. For example, she argued for women's right to enter the field of medicine in 1854,¹⁹ and in a *Daily News* leader in 1859, proposed the establishment of a female medical school.

¹⁴ Martineau, H. (1853). *Daily News*. 22 March.

¹⁵ Martineau, H., (1849). *Household Education*. London: Edward Moxon. p. 86.

¹⁶ Martineau, H., (1854). *Daily News*. 13 June.

¹⁷ Martineau, H., (1859). *Female Industry*. *Edinburgh Review*. 222, pp. 293-336

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 319

¹⁹ Martineau, H., (1854). *Daily News*. 5 July. Here, she also makes the case for the paid employment of women as nurses.

The aim is to diffuse such hygienic knowledge as will prevent a great amount of disease [particularly among children]; and to afford the benefit of hospital treatment of the best kind by placing the patients under the charge of female physicians, who will have the advantage of consultation with a Board of Physicians and Surgeons.²⁰

In 1870, she petitioned Parliament to admit women to the medical profession on equal terms to those of men,²¹ and in 1872, only four years before her death, she offered support for the *Medical Education for Women* campaign, inaugurated to combat 'the injustice of the present arbitrary exclusion of women from the medical profession'.²²

Table 1: Summary of Martineau's views on education

<p><i>Supportive of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - national system of education for the working class to be state financed and run. - industrial training and a relevant curriculum, which should include the 3Rs, industrial and manual training and oral work. Girls' education should similarly comprise the 3Rs, 'common things', and household skills. - less didacticism and increased use of oral methods in infant schools. - Revised Code - parents more likely to keep their children at school if they saw clear progress. - working women's colleges in the belief that vocationally trained women would get better paid jobs. - provision of general education classes for women who were interested in self-improvement. - reform of public school endowments and investigation of all charitable trusts. - Taunton Commission (1864-7) which set out to investigate current state of middle-class schooling. She wanted girls' schools to be included in investigation, and also that the commissioners should be familiar with the issues surrounding female education. <p><i>Critical of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monitorial system as dreary and too dependent on rote learning. - same tests for girls and boys, even though girls spent a quarter of their school time on sewing activities. - Endowments, of which there were many that had originally been intended for girls and boys but which now excluded girls e.g. Christ's Hospital. - corporal punishment for being despotic and brutal. - public schools as 'connexion' networks rather than institutions of learning.
--

²⁰ Martineau, H. (1859). *Daily News*. 25 March

²¹ MS 1378. 23 May 1872. *Harriet Martineau's Papers*. Birmingham University Library.

²² *Medical Education for Women: Lists of Executive, Edinburgh and General Committees*. 23 May 1872. Committee members included Harriet Martineau, her brother James, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Lydia Becker, Madame Bodichon, Jessie Boucherett, Mrs. Butler, Mary Carpenter, Frances Power Cobb, Charles Darwin, Emily Davies, Henry and Mrs. Fawcett, Frances Galton, the Jex-Blake family, John Stuart Mill, and Miss Shirreff among other notables.

Martineau's challenge to interpretation

Useful and interesting though this overview of Martineau's various positions on education may be, it does not provide the full flavour of how or why she came to hold these perspectives, nor indeed why we need to pay attention to them some 150 years later. Also because she wrote in so many places at different times about different aspects of education, it is impossible to integrate her range of views in a consistent seam (see table 1 above for an attempt at a general summary). Martineau's greatest challenge to modern scholarship thus is her eclecticism, which defies unification or integration.

Nevertheless, Martineau's work is important not least because it exposed existing crises of knowledge and belief that were in the process of destabilising the nineteenth-century domestic family ideal. Thus, Martineau reveals that Victorian ideology was not stable and fixed, but fractured, contradictory and constantly changing – and that she had the ability to write from within yet interrupt popular discourses and ideas. As Roberts points out:

Martineau's steady and widespread appeal to the public means that her works are an important gauge of prevailing beliefs, opinions and attitudes within her society. She was adroit at establishing herself as a prominent speaker in many of her society's most vexing debates, and the topic of her publications addressed issues of general concern... This representative quality of Martineau's works is indicated by their noisy reception: if her interests had been tangential to the concerns of her society, her works would have been marginal which was not the case... Martineau believed that the author should be of his or her age... She also recognized that individuals were overdetermined by cultural influences, so that an author was also necessarily of his or her age.²³

Martineau's writing, Roberts argues, was most subversive when it seemed most integrated into the concerns of the Victorian age. This point is taken up in the next section which is devoted to an analysis of one of Martineau's most 'embedded' works, *Household Education*, which she wrote in 1849 in mid-career²⁴.

Household Education

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, educationists stressed the role of the family and parents, especially the mother, in imprinting moral values on the child in infancy. Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More and others claimed, for example, that the main tasks of the mother were as educator and socialiser, in particular for the next generation of educators – their daughters. Thus Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies*²⁵ focused on women's education as a means of informing their judgement, cultivating their understanding and thereby, contributing to the domestic contentment of the family. Most writers on education emphasized the importance of mothers' role in the development of a Christian, moral viewpoint.

²³ Roberts. (2002) pp. 4-5

²⁴ Martineau, H. (1849). *Household Education*. London: E. Moxon.

²⁵ Edgeworth, M. (1798). *Letters for Literary Ladies*; More, H. (1799). *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*. 1802 edn. Boston: for J. Brumstead.

Thus when Harriet Martineau entered the fray with *Household Education*, she was following an earlier female writing tradition, which indeed she had also been part of - several of her earliest articles dealt with educational issues, as already noted. The topic of the book was thus uncontroversial (unlike much of Martineau's other work) in the sense that it was considered a socially appropriate topic for a known woman writer which engaged with a familiar literary form. However as with much of her other work, while the book was deeply rooted in contemporary cultural concerns, it was also challenging and subversive regarding nineteenth-century bourgeois ideals.

Household Education was a completed version of two series of articles on education published in 1846 in a short-lived magazine, *The People's Journal*. After the journal's demise, Martineau was encouraged to finish the series by John Saunders, the journal's editor. It received generally good reviews, as a useful practical guide on the topic, and as a suitable topic in itself. For example, a contemporary reviewer wrote:

She destroys nothing without supplying its place with something better; and a book on education has rarely appeared, combining more interesting illustration with real practical utility.²⁶

The same reviewer welcomed it as an important contribution from a distinctive yet 'fair', liberal and 'truthful' perspective.

If from her particular position in society she gives in many cases a one-sided view, she is on the other hand careful to present her own opinions without violently or illiberally attacking those of other people; and we are irresistibly led to follow a train of reasoning in which we perceive an earnestness of purpose that will inevitably reach at a truth in some form.²⁷

The self-proclaimed task of *Household Education* is authoritative:

I propose to say, in a series of chapters, what I have observed and thought on the subject of LIFE AT HOME, during upwards of twenty years' study of domestic life in great variety' (p1).

Household Education follows a standard format for a discussion of such a topic: introduction to the aims of education, whom it affects, what faculties and senses are involved, domestic education's features, concepts and so on. Yet, this is no platitudinous gallop through the various educational theories and ideas of the day: rather a means through which Martineau could provide insights into contemporary phenomena and simultaneously insert challenges to prevailing orthodoxies. For example, unusually for the time, it

- addresses parents of all classes;
- challenges the Victorian family patriarch as all-knowing – 'But every wise parent has occasion to say, now and then-"I do not know, my dear"' (p2);

²⁶ (1849). Miss Martineau on Education. *American Whig Review*. 9. 18, June. New York: Wiley & Putnam (604-18), p. 618

²⁷ Op cit. p. 605

- contains a notion of life-long learning viz. ‘there is room for improvement ... as long as we live’ (p3);
- asserts the equal rights and responsibilities of girls and boys, mothers and fathers - to education; and
- educational values are conceived of as arising out of the beliefs and values of particular cultures and societies.

Recent commentators such as Wheatley and Thomas have dismissed the work as pedantic or merely concerned with educational theory²⁸. Webb emphasizes Martineau’s radicalism, ‘pseudo-scientific enthusiasms’ and materialist perspective while Peterson hails its ‘*feminist* position on education’ and ‘shrewd revision of an English *feminine* tradition of didactic writing on the subject of “female education”’.²⁹ Yet, while I am largely in agreement with Peterson and have some understanding if not total sympathy with the other viewpoints, I wish to offer yet another interpretation. *Household Education* was popular with contemporary readers because it engaged with popular discourse and incorporated the observations, skills and expertise of an incisive social commentator and communicator. However what it also dares, is to insert social justice and rights into a hitherto conservative, feminised discourse, and thus offer a challenge to already threatened bourgeois ideals concerning the patriarchal family. It manages to do so because when the text threatens to become too ‘serious’, Martineau inserts an intriguing phrase or anecdote to provide a temporary diversion. For example, the following extract captures wonderfully, the reading obsessions of childhood.

Some children’s greediness for books is like a drunkard’s for wine. They can no more keep their hands off a beloved book than the tippler from the bottle before him. The great difference as to the safety of the case is that the child’s greediness is sure to subside into moderation in time...while the drunkard’s is sure to go on increasing till all is over with him. (p145).

One of my favourites is in the section on how parents needed to help develop children’s personal habits. A mother is described as using a child’s wish to have a particular book as an incentive for him to overcome his dislike of rice-pudding.

In a family, where it was the custom to have a great rice-pudding every Saturday and sometimes also on another baking day, - Wednesday, - there was a little fellow who hated rice....

His longing for this little book was of that raging sort which I suppose only children ever feel. He was to have this book if he would eat rice-pudding. He

²⁸ Wheatley, V. (1957). *The Life and Work of Harriet Martineau*. London: Secker & Warburg.; Thomas, G. (1985). *Harriet Martineau*. Boston: Twayne.

²⁹ Webb, R. K. (1960). *Harriet Martineau: a Radical Victorian*. London: Heinemann; Peterson, L. H. (1984). Harriet Martineau’s *Household Education: Revising the Feminine Tradition*. In: Scott, P. & Fletcher, P. (eds.) *Culture and Education in Victorian Society*. London & Toronto: Associated University Presses. 183-194.

eagerly promised; feeling at the moment, I dare say, when there was no rice within sight, as if he could live upon it all his days, to get what he wanted. I saw how his gorge rose at the sight of the pudding; but he fixed his eyes upon the opposite wall, gulped down large spoonfuls, wiped his mouth with disgust, and sighed when he had done, demanded his fee, ran for the book, and alas! had finished it, and got almost tired of it, before bed-time (p186).

One suspects that the ‘little fellow’ is indeed Martineau herself, who later in her Autobiography, recounts her inability to digest such foods as a child.

Many such anecdotes pepper the text. However the underlying message and themes are nonetheless clearly put. For example from the book’s earliest pages, Martineau emphasizes the social inclusivity of the text. Education, for her, is the right of all individuals, whatever their class.

The aim proposed [of education] – of doing justice to the powers of every human being under training – includes women, the poor, the infirm – all who were rejected or slighted under former systems – while it does more for the privileged than any lower principle ever proposed to do. (p.2).

She incorporates the most recent scientific understandings, for instance, about the need for cleanliness as enshrined in the Laws of Health.

I fear it is still necessary to teach and preach that nobody has the right to health who does not wash all over every day. This is done with infants; and the practice should never be discontinued. Every child of a family should look upon this daily complete washing in cold water as a thing as completely of course as getting its breakfast. There was a time, within my remembrance, when even respectable people thought it enough to wash their feet once a week; and their whole bodies when they went to the coast for sea-bathing in August. In regard to popular knowledge of the Laws of Health, our world *has* got on... (p180-1, original emphasis).

She sought also to demonstrate her knowledge and authority regarding the newly developing natural and social sciences. For example, she regards science as essential for a child’s intellectual development, displaying an pre-Piagetian perspective on scientific learning. Of two children reading ‘Conversations on Chemistry’ or ‘Scientific Dialogues’, the younger child, she argues, is likely to see Chemistry more as a ‘play-thing’ and:

find some entertainment, and particularly if allowed to try chemical experiments: but these experiments will be to him a sort of cookery; - a putting things together, in order to succeed in producing some result, - amusing or pretty (p 162).

The older child, however, might approach these texts in an altogether different, more abstract way.

He does not want to try chemical experiments. He would rather think quietly of the great agents of Nature, and see them, with the eye of his mind, for-ever at their work; - Heat, spreading through all things, and even hiding in the polar ice; - Electricity, darting and streaming through all substances and being the life of all that lives; and the flowing together and mixing of three airs to make air that we can breathe, - this flowing together and mixing having gone on ever since there were breathing creatures on the globe... (p161-2)

Martineau also uses *Household Education* to reaffirm her views on the importance of education for girls and, indeed, provides her most scornful, succinct and comprehensive demolition of the arguments used to deny them this right. Thus,

I mention girls, as well as boys, confident that every person able to see the right, and courageous enough to utter it, will sanction what I say. I must declare that on no subject is more nonsense talked, (as it seems to me) than on that of female education, when restriction is advocated. In works otherwise really good, we find it taken for granted that girls are not to learn the dead languages and mathematics, because they are not to exercise professions where these attainments are wanted; and a little further on we find it said that the chief reason for boys and young men studying these things is to improve the quality of their minds... If it is said that the female brain is incapable of studies of an abstract nature,- that is not true: for there are many instances of women who have been good mathematicians, and good classical scholars. The plea is indeed nonsense on the face of it; for the brain which will learn French will learn Greek; the brain which enjoys arithmetic is capable of mathematics. If it is said that women are light-minded and superficial, the obvious answer is that their minds should be the more carefully sobered by grave studies, and the acquisition of exact knowledge. - If it is said that their vocation in life does not require these kinds of knowledge, - that is giving up the main plea for the pursuit of them by boys; - that it improves the quality of their minds. - If it is said that such studies unfit women for their proper occupations,- that again is untrue. Men do not attend the less to their professional business, their counting-house or their shop, for having their minds enlarged and enriched, and their faculties strengthened by sound and various knowledge; nor do women on that account neglect the work-basket, the market, the dairy and the kitchen. (p155-6).

However, perhaps even more unusually, she assumes a shared responsibility of the 'caring' of children, on the part of fathers as well as mothers. For example, of a 'conscientious and affectionate father', she writes:

Ernest he must be, for it appears that it was his constant habit, during the infancy of his children, to rise in the night, to see that they were well, and sleeping peacefully: and he invariably went with them to school, and met them at the school door, to bring them home again, - more than a mile, - though he was a busy man, - and obliged to work for their bread and his own (p173-4).

Perhaps the model here is her brother James, who, whatever Harriet's quarrels with him, could certainly never be faulted as a committed and caring father.

Conclusion

What has been attempted in this paper is to demonstrate that providing a general summary of Martineau's perspectives and writing on education, while useful, is insufficient for our understanding of her work today. It is important also to undertake a closer reading of Martineau's work, in this case, of *Household Education*, Martineau's most noted treatise on education. Such a reading reveals that her ambitions for the work were much wider than its title indicates. As in much of her other writing, it allowed her to revisit and reassert her ideas – on sex equality and social justice, the importance of science etc. – to yet another audience, using the popular writing form in which she excelled. In the latter sense I depart from Peterson and others who claim that Martineau's writing style is masculine. Rather, like Roberts, I suggest that she feminised and rendered accessible ideas from contemporary (male) theorists and writers, in new and often subversive ways.