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Ca' Foscari  
Dorsoduro 3246  
30123 Venezia

### **"Let Them Be Educated"** **Harriet Martineau's Disseminating Information and Moral Education in *Illustrations of Political Economy* and *The Playfellow***

**Relatore**

Prof.ssa Emma Sdegno

**Correlatore**

Prof.ssa Michela Vanon Alliata

**Laureando**

Chiara Toscan  
Marticola 820698

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## **Introduction: Harriet Martineau - An Incurable Teacher**

Harriet Martineau was a controversial 19th century writer. Due to her innovative ideas as well as her rigid moral standards she was looked at equally with admiration and opposition. Even if her intellectual career is remarkable for a woman writing in the Victorian period on contentious subjects, she became "historically invisible" throughout the centuries, probably for the topicality of the themes she treated.<sup>1</sup> Being identified as an unoriginal thinker, however, did not preclude her to become an exponent and popularizer of the dominant ideas of her time and affect the public opinion thanks to her writing.

Harriet Martineau was, above all, a writer on social issues; she was against oppressions of any kind, and attacked discrimination based on religion, gender, social class and race. She wrote extensively about women's right to education and the equal treatment of men independently from their origins. Such beliefs had remarkable consequences in her life, for instance her joining the antislavery campaign caused her to be threatened while travelling through America, and she was banned from several European countries for the anti-government content of her *Illustrations of Political Economy*.<sup>2</sup> Social improvement was for Harriet Martineau a vital question; throughout her career, she provided Victorian society with suggestions and remedies concerning different issues. As George Eliot once said, she had a "cordial interest in all human beings", in particular, she was concerned with the improvement of life conditions for the

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<sup>1</sup> G. Weiner, "Biography, their Subjects and the Construction of Self: The illuminating case of Harriet Martineau", paper presented in the symposium: 'Good' Girls and Rebellious Women: Gender Construction and Educational Life-Writing, annual meeting, American Educational Research Association, New York, April 1996., p. 1. <http://www.gabyweiner.co.uk/HM%20and%20the%20construction%20of%20self.pdf> (Accessed on February 2013).

<sup>2</sup> See L. Scholl, *Translation, Authorship and the Victorian Professional Woman: Charlotte Brontë, Harriet Martineau and George Eliot*, Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011, pp. 112-113.

lower classes.<sup>3</sup>

Martineau's first biographer Florence Fenwick Miller points out that she belonged to the category of 'purpose writers', since all her literary efforts sprung from the idea that the work had to be useful to somebody.<sup>4</sup> Harriet Martineau aimed at specific targets; some works were concerned with religion, other ones with social injustices while in other occasions she engaged in popular enlightenment by means of entertaining fictional tales. Even if her ability as a novelist has generally been considered as limited, her works deserve attention for the way in which she delivered her edifying content. The writer herself acknowledged that her purpose in writing was more important than being praised for literary skillfulness:

I believe myself possessed of no uncommon talents, and of not an atom of genius; but as various circumstances have led me to think more accurately and read more extensively than some women, I believe that I may so write on subjects of universal concern as to inform some minds and stir up others. My aim is to become a forcible and elegant writer on religious and moral subjects, so as to be useful to refined as well as unenlightened minds [...] Of postumous fame I have not the slightest expectation or desire. To be useful in my day and generation is enough for me.<sup>5</sup>

The production of knowledge was for Martineau an engaging pursuit from the beginning of her career. When just 21 she wrote for the *Monthly Repository* on the subject of female education;<sup>6</sup> in her agenda, the improvement of women's condition was a priority since she perceived they were "'caged' in one small corner of the universe".<sup>7</sup> She recognized that women were "intellectually imprisoned" in the domestic sphere and that the assertion of their potential was to be achieved through an accurate education.<sup>8</sup> Martineau wanted to create schools for women that comprised practical as well as

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<sup>3</sup> George Elliot quoted in R. K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau. A radical Victorian*, London: Heinemann, 1960, p. 256.

<sup>4</sup> F. Fenwick Miller, *Harriet Martineau*, Boston: Roberts Brothers 1887, p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> M. Weston Chapman, *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography and Memorials of Harriet Martineau*, Boston: James R. Osgoods & Co., 1877, p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> See G. Weiner, "Harriet Martineau on Education", paper presented at Birmingham University on 18th October 2004, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Martineau quoted in C. Roberts, *The Woman and the Hour: Harriet Martineau and Victorian Ideologies*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Scholl, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

theoretical learning; the idea that women should not be considered intellectually inferior, thus, unsuitable for the public life, was rejected by the writer who overturned the social impositions of a male-dominated world. Female education was fundamental as it was the only means to legitimize their new role in society and "work out their redemption".<sup>9</sup>

Harriet Martineau displayed her natural inclination for teaching in different fields; in 1830 she won a competition writing three essays for the Central Unitarian Association with the purpose of introducing Unitarianism "to the notice of Catholics, Jews, and Mohammedans".<sup>10</sup> As a young writer, religion was her main concern, and her essays had an educational orientation as they exposed the foundations of her religious belief through an attentive analysis of the Bible.<sup>11</sup> Martineau's religious path made an impression among her contemporaries for she shifted from staunch Unitarianism to atheism after having considered religious practices around the world. She explained her "passage from theology to a more effectual philosophy" in her *Autobiography* not as a total rejection of faith, but rather as the result of considering the morale of the human being as independent from divine guidance. (A2: 281) However, Martineau's Unitarian upbringing continued to affect her ideas on education even when she turned to atheism, in particular, the assumption that every human being has the right to seek improvement and self-sufficiency through a comprehensive education.<sup>12</sup>

Harriet Martineau had a genuine desire to teach, which was fit for the period she was writing in, as the lower classes of society needed moral as well as practical guidance. At her time education was a luxury that peasants and factory workers could

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<sup>9</sup> Weiner, "Harriet Martineau on Education", *cit.*, p. 5; V. Sanders, *Harriet Martineau - Selected Letters*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> H. Martineau, *Autobiography: Vol. 1*, London: Virago Press 1983 p 150. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in brackets as (A1: page number).

<sup>11</sup> R. Watts, "Harriet Martineau, the Unitarians and Education", *Martineau Society's Newsletter*, No. 30, pp. 3-10 (Winter 2011), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ivi.*

not afford, for this reason she was willing to change such situation as she ascribed to ignorance the evils of society. In the 1840s she started a campaign against the state of education in England, at first criticizing a system that did not promote education among the working classes, and then pointing out the need among unprivileged children for an integrated instruction including intellectual and vocational training.<sup>13</sup> Harriet Martineau debated on the subject with several influential figures of her time and supported the programme for national education; she might have seemed impudent when, in a letter to Richard Monckton Milnes, she revealed her intentions to write to the Queen and give her advices for the revision of National Schools explaining :

[m]y object is to point out to her the impediments in the way of making these children (peasantry, as well as factory children) what human beings should be: - the obstacles, material & spiritual; & especially (having prepared the way) to indicate what she herself may do.<sup>14</sup>

However, her interest was not only towards the needy; the growing middle class was broadly perceived as the future of the nation and needed to be educated to rule conscientiously.<sup>15</sup> Harriet Martineau promoted the idea of education as subservient to the functioning of society, highlighting that, the ameliorative power of a satisfactory training, was to be seen reflected in the moral as well as in the intellectual side of the man.

The writer demonstrated her strong interest in education in several ways; her role as an educator was indeed accomplished in "less institutionalized" forms.<sup>16</sup> Among her literary activities there were her articles and reviews for several newspapers, her essays in magazines, a few travel books, and fictional works too. Harriet Martineau collaborated with *The People's Journal*, a democratic newspaper for which she wrote numerous articles on children's education that were successively collected in her well-

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<sup>13</sup> See Weiner's introduction to *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography Vol.1, cit.*, p. xiii.

<sup>14</sup> Sanders, *Harriet Martineau - Selected Letters, cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> M. Arnold and E. E. Rea, "Matthew Arnold on Education: Unpublished Letters to Harriet Martineau", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 2 pp. 181-191, (1972), p. 181.

<sup>16</sup> Scholl, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

known *Household Education* (1848). Her works *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848) and *Society in America* (1837) were sociological-travel books that her biographer R. K. Webb defines both "descriptive and didactic" since places and situations depicted served to provide readers with an idea of social advancement giving examples from communities around the world.<sup>17</sup> Even her only attempt as a novelist contained educational elements, since *Deerbrook* (1839) displayed the evils of hygienic negligence among the population, which was frequently affected by epidemics.<sup>18</sup> Her interest in progress indeed took a scientific stance; a stronger reliance on medical knowledge as a way to foster the improvement of the human condition grew in Martineau, while her precarious health led her to rely on science rather than faith to find relief.

One of the most appreciated enterprise on "informal education" was undoubtedly her lectures at Ambleside. The lessons she provided were held specifically for adults who did not have access to instruction, and her object was

to give rational amusement to men whom all circumstances seemed to drive to the public-house, and to interest them in matters which might lead them to books, or at least give them something to think about.<sup>19</sup>

Martineau wanted a better life for all human beings, achieved through all the possible means, book-knowledge as well as learning by daily experiences in practical life. In an article for the *Daily News* in 1854 she exposed her position as she saw human improvement to be attained by different means:

[w]e still cling too much to the idea of books as the only education. Education still means books in the case of our nobles and gentry and, by a natural transference, in that our young 'workies'. But we are growing wiser - learning to see that the grasp of realities, the cordial shaking of 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.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, education was conceived by Martineau as a process that was to be obtained

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<sup>17</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

<sup>18</sup> Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography: Vol. 2* London: Virago Press 1983 pp. 305-306. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in brackets as (A2: page number)

<sup>20</sup> Martineau's article for the *Daily News* (22 March 1853) quoted in Weiner, *Introduction to Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, cit.*, p. xiii.

from life experiences as well as from more conventional ways of learning, as reading and studying books. Though not considering books as the only medium of education, Martineau dedicated most of her career to the writing of educational works.

This dissertation focuses on the critical analysis of two of these works, namely *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-1834) and *The Playfellow* (1841). While differing greatly on target and style, the two books have in common the employment of fictional tales to deliver a formative message to the audience. The well-known *Illustrations of Political Economy* is Martineau's first considerable educational work, a collection of fictional tales that aimed to present the functioning of political economy to the population. The serialized tales gained an unprecedented success and fulfilled Martineau's dream of writing for a living. Even if the principles exemplified and the way in which the author handled the issues presented have been strongly criticized by her contemporaries, they served their purpose of popularizing an 'obscure science', especially among the lower classes of society, "those whom it most concerns to learn to use their eyes".<sup>21</sup> The Victorian period met with considerable changes in the structure of society and the industrialization fostered the growth of England as an economic authority; at the same time, the lower classes, which constituted the majority of the population, were not able to keep up with the changes and their ignorance in economic matters often caused revolts and oppositions. As Webb points out, the industrial revolution presented the labourer with new opportunities of economic advancement, "but he had been denied the education to teach him how to make the best use of his labour or to show him what his responsibilities were."<sup>22</sup> The tales contained in the *Illustrations* covered different subjects such as the wage fund doctrine, capitalism, strikes and foreign trade, bringing complex and unknown aspects of the market nearer

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<sup>21</sup> Martineau's letter to William Tait (1832) quoted in Sanders, *Harriet Martineau - Selected Letters, cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

to those who most needed to be informed. Martineau idealistically thought that her tales would foster a fair coexistence between individuals of different ranks promoting the idea that everyone could achieve a "fulfilling education."<sup>23</sup> The creation of fiction based on an economic plotting was Martineau's way to "educate the people in the true laws of political economy as seen through the necessitarian eyes of a Unitarian".<sup>24</sup> The writer performed a "mediatory role" in that, not only did the *Illustrations* include influential political and social ideas of her time, but it also contained her own approach to the subject.<sup>25</sup>

The first part of the dissertation deals with the analysis of the *Illustrations*, considering in Chapter 1 the historical period in which it was written, the previous works that influenced the draft, and the importance of Martineau's life experiences to explain her ideas on the subject. Chapter 2 focuses on the analysis of some of the most significant tales contained in the series; examining both their form and their content, with particular attention to the construction of the plot and the unfolding of the principles embodied. Fiction, realism and didactic purpose in the stories are central elements in Chapter 3, where a confrontation with other contemporary writers will be outlined.

Harriet Martineau's keen interest in education has been displayed in another fictional work, *The Playfellow*; the collection of tales for children was written with the purpose of providing them with edifying as well as entertaining fiction. The four tales differed from one another in setting and plot, and yet the main purpose to provide a revealing insight on children's world was evident in all of them. The strong point of the collection is indeed its power of recalling collective feelings during childhood, while

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<sup>23</sup> Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> J. Vint, "Harriet Martineau and Industrial Strife: from Theory into Fiction into Melodrama" Manchester Metropolitan University (October 2007), p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> Scholl, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

contributing to the moral edification of the youngsters. In order to contextualize the work, Part 2 opens with a general overview on Victorians' relation with childhood; given the urge to educate that was prevalent in the period, Martineau's *Household Education* stands out for its addressing directly to parents on their children's rearing. The influence of Martineau's experiences as a child is outstanding in both *Household Education* and *The Playfellow*; in addition, her witnessing different parenting is crucial to the understanding of her handbook, which challenged the Victorian ideal of family while being more conventional in its promoting moral education that was to be achieved through religious guidance. The second chapter of this section dedicated to childhood, provides an overview on Victorian juvenile literature moving then to the introduction of Martineau's children tales. A particular attention is given to the last and most significant story of the collection, "The Crofton Boys", which holds strong autobiographical elements and applies to fiction the principles that would be enlisted seven years later in *Household Education*. The tale has been universally recognized as the best outcome of the series; in the light of such statement I attempt to motivate the appreciation of "The Crofton Boys" highlighting Martineau's insightfulness in portraying children's issues and desires while leaving a clear moral and religious message.

Both *Illustrations of Political Economy* and *The Playfellow* are shaped around Martineau's ideas on society and its need for education; the purpose of this dissertation is to present the two collections considering both their potential as entertaining work of fiction and their capacity to leave the mark on Victorian mentality for the moral and practical lessons conveyed. This dissertation explores the significance of educational aspects in Harriet Martineau's work as they spurred her to deal with social aspects such as gender, class, religion, economic concerns, and literature's function in life. While the *Illustrations* has been a case study throughout the centuries, her tales for children have

been less noticed; yet, not only do they deserve attention for the lessons they conveyed, but also for the way in which children were represented. Given that Martineau's accounts of her life contained in the *Autobiography* (1877) are crucial for the understanding of both her fictional works, this dissertation provides an analysis of the collections of tales taking into account her experiences as a neglected child, a Unitarian, a resolute woman, but most of all, an 'incurable teacher'. Social amelioration was a priority for Harriet Martineau and she stands as a "purveyor of knowledge" for Victorian society.<sup>26</sup> Considering the stance the writer took, I attempt to provide an analysis of the extent to which she succeeded in conveying moral guidance as well as practical education in her tales.

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<sup>26</sup> G. Weiner and R. Watts, "Women , Wealth and Power: Women And Knowledge Production - Producers and Consumers: Women enter the Knowledge Market", paper presented at the annual conference of the Women's History Network, Hull, England, 3-5 September 2004, p. 1. <http://www.gabyweiner.co.uk/page2.html> (accessed on February 2013).

# **Part One**

## Chapter 1 - *Illustrations of Political Economy*: Classical Ideas in a

### New Form

*I was all the while becoming a political economist  
without knowing it, and, at the same time,  
a sort of walking Concordance  
of Milton and Shakespeare. (A1:69)*

Among the works for which Harriet Martineau is chiefly remembered there is *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-1834), her first monthly issued didactic tales exploring a subject increasingly popular in the Victorian Age. Her work was grounded on the ideas of influential political economists of her time, with the addition of personal observations based on every-day life experience. The new science of political economy was intended to study and illustrate the workings of trade, and the relations between production and consumption. In that period, thanks to the accelerating development of technology and the growing mercantilism, the need to codify rules and processes that governed the market was felt. The basic principles of political economy were already established at Martineau's time, what was missing was a work capable of popularising the subject.

#### 1.1 The Historical Period

In order to better understand why the *Illustrations* became so popular in England and worldwide, we should consider the historical period in which Martineau was writing it. During the first half of the 19th century, thanks to the Great Reform Bill (1832), the political rights of the middle classes were extended; in addition, Great Britain took a direction towards reforms and was becoming increasingly liberal. At that point capitalism was at its highest point, however, "[t]he growth of manufacturing and trade,

under the impetus of the Industrial Revolution, had led to an erosion of the economic controls carried forward from the medieval and mercantile systems."<sup>1</sup> Economists felt necessary to introduce a proper regulation apt to redefine the system according to the new resources of the market "reflecting the growing dominance of industry over agriculture, and the imminent rejection of a centuries-old system of outdoor poor relief in favor of a supposedly more rational workhouse system."<sup>2</sup>

The occupational structure of the population changed greatly, increasing posts in the manufacturing and mining field at the expenses of agriculture. The inner circle of society was already debating on how this would affect the population, since social problems caused by industrialization were considerable and especially the 30s and 40s featured poverty, unemployment, and uprisings.<sup>3</sup> Thus, economic and political inequities of Britain's class structure were jeopardising the peacefulness and the positivity that the event of industrialization was spreading among society; for this reason Harriet Martineau thought that changes in the regulations of trade and manufacture were needed, since she understood that "mischievous legislative acts"<sup>4</sup> were among the main causes of hardship and poverty the population was bearing.

## 1.2 Family Background

Harriet Martineau was born in 1802 into a solidly middle class family, running a textile mill in Norwich; in her *Autobiography* she tells that her father's business was "never a very enriching one, [however] had been for some time prosperous". (A1: 128) Thomas

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<sup>1</sup> M. E. Fletcher, "Harriet Martineau and Ayn Rand: Economics in the Guise of Fiction", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 367-379, (October 1974), pp. 368 -369.

<sup>2</sup> E. Courtemanche, "'Naked Truth is the Best Eloquence': Martineau, Dickens, and the Moral Science of Realism", *English Literary History*, Vol. 73, No. 2, pp. 383-407 (Summer 2006), p. 388.

<sup>3</sup> E. Griffin "Victorian Industrialization" on-line source:  
<http://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/1006128/1446434/Emma+Griffin+Victorian+Industrialisation.pdf/4c6f4e17-19f5-443d-a65d-de8e7c5447e2> (accessed on September 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

Martineau indeed, provided his family with a comfortable living thanks to his activity, until, when the Napoleonic Wars affected British economy, his business was damaged being "subject to the fluctuations to which all manufacture was liable during the war". (A1: 127-128) In 1826, after Thomas' death, family finances further diminished and Harriet was compelled to work for a living for the first time in her life. Even though the hard times were particularly painful to her family, Harriet Martineau looked at the bright side of the event as she saw it as an opportunity to follow her personal ambitions as a writer. It is quite surprising to notice the way in which she reacted to her destitute condition, describing the period as "one of the best things that ever happened", and considering family misfortunes as an opportunity to have "truly lived instead of vegetate." (A1:142)

### **1.3 First Approaches to Economic Matters**

Martineau's first notable literary work consisted of a series of tales with the purpose of teaching to the population the basic economic principles that ruled every-day life. If we look at it from the point of view of content, Martineau's project would not seem a novelty since she treated already established ideas on the subject; nevertheless, the distinctiveness of the *Illustrations* originates in its being the first attempt to teach political economy through a work of fiction, intended to reach the lower classes of society.<sup>5</sup> An enterprise not easy to accomplish for prominent rhetoricians, it strikes indeed, that Martineau succeeded without having a conventional academic preparation on economic subjects.

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<sup>5</sup> See M. G. O'Donnell "A Historical Note on the Use of Fiction to Teach Principles of Economic" *Journal of Economic Education*, Vol. 20, pp. 314-320, (June 1989), p. 314; J. K. Highfill and W. V. Weber "Harriet Martineau: an Economic View of Victorian Arts and Letters", *Journal of Cultural Economics*, Vol. 15, No.1, pp 85-92, (June 1991), p. 86; S. Dentith "Political Economy, Fiction and the Language of Practical Ideology", *Nineteenth-Century England in Social History*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 183-199, (May 1983), p. 191.

Despite financial straits, Martineau's progeny was not hindered the chance for educational preparation.<sup>6</sup> Reading the *Autobiography* we can gather that Harriet and her siblings received a 'standard' education comprising Latin, French, and music, hence not involving training in economics.<sup>7</sup> (A1: 69) Max Fletcher explains in his essay that she gradually absorbed economic notions while reading individually publications of contemporary leading economists.<sup>8</sup> Harriet Martineau started to develop an interest in economic aspects at a very early stage in her life; when her family faced the collapse of its activity, Harriet found herself forced to needlework as her only means of earnings, nevertheless, financial difficulties did not preclude her to find time for literature, even if it implied spending the night reading and writing.<sup>9</sup>

In a sense, we can state that much of her basics of economics were self-taught. In the *Autobiography* Harriet Martineau explains how she became acquainted with social and political matters; the newspaper her family used to read was *The Globe*, when, "without ever mentioning Political Economy, it taught it, and viewed public affairs in its light". (A1: 70) In her family, economics must have been a significant element as the Martineaus were involved in business, thus, the thirteen-years old Harriet had already heard about National Debt and Funds. Later in life, her memory would become useful for her endeavour, for instance she explained that it was the readings of the *Daily News* that inspired one of her stories about Machine-breaking. However, political economy was not recognized as a social science then, which becomes clear when Martineau admits she was unconscious of being writing on an effective science. (A1: 135)

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<sup>6</sup> See M. E. Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p.368. Furthermore, Martineau's education is described as "excellent...indeed for the girls an extraordinary one" in Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>7</sup> Martineau's education is defined 'classical' involving "sciences, as well as humanities and arts" in M. R. Hill and S. Hoecker-Drysdale, *Harriet Martineau: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives*, New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 179. See also *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>9</sup> See Scholl, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

## 1.4 Influences of Previous Writers

Even if Harriet Martineau wrote her stories with professed unawareness, we know she had a background of classical economic studies; Malthus, Smith, and Ricardo were among her readings and the fulfillment of her tales was inspired by their work. It could be argued that she wanted to debunk a shared belief among the population, who perceived negatively the new science of political economy and male theorists who tried to explain its functioning. This is confirmed, for instance, by a statement in her *Autobiography* about Malthus when she explained that "[h]is work was talked about then, as it has been ever since, very eloquently and forcibly" thus, she was disappointed by the fact that his doctrines were criticised even if she "could never find any body who had read his book." (A1: 71) Martineau clearly intended to advocate Malthus ideas, such inclination becomes clear in a sort of declaration of intents when in her *Autobiography* she states that she wanted to epitomise his views because

[i]t was that doctrine "pure and simple," as it came from his virtuous and benevolent mind, that I presented; and the presentment was accompanied by an earnest advocacy of the remedies which the great natural laws of Society put into our power, -- freedom for bringing food to men, and freedom for men to go where food is plentiful ; and enlightenment for all, that they may provide for themselves under the guidance of the best intelligence. (A1: 210-211)

Her views on Malthus were extremely positive and she identified a humanistic approach in his work since he thought that everyone should place 'domestic virtue' and happiness in their lives. (A1: 209)

The novelty of Martineau's project can be found in her attempt to reach all the population with her work, a goal which previous scholars failed to attain. In the Victorian period we can see a growing interest in the study of the factors which ruled production and consumption within a country, a subject that was unknown even though it was part of everyday life. Numerous academics attempted to explain the workings of

political economy before Martineau, as Caroline Roberts remarks, one of the limitations with previous writers was that "the theoretical language of male political economist seemed boring and obscure"; she continues stating that "catechism of political economy had no charm", as a consequence, the subject was not understandable nor attractive for the population.<sup>10</sup>

Another aspect worth considering, is the gap dividing the society into those who could afford to study at the university and the rest of the population, who barely reached for literacy. Scientific publications on subjects such as political economy tended to overindulge in specialized terms which concealed the notions they should explain:<sup>11</sup>

the people complain, and justly, that no assistance has been offered them which they could make use of. They complain that all they can do is to pick up bits and scraps of knowledge of Political Economy, because the works which profess to teach it have been written for the learned, and can interest only the learned. <sup>12</sup>

In this passage taken from the Preface to the *Illustrations*, Martineau points out the limits of earlier works on this 'new science'. When she mentions Adam Smith, whom she identifies as the father of political economy, she describes *Wealth of the Nations* (1776) as "very long, in some parts exceedingly difficult, and, however wonderful and beautiful as a whole, not so clear and precise in its arrangement as it might be." (PEP: X) Martineau excuses the excessive length and dullness, as she acknowledges the fact that it was the first attempt to produce literature on a new field. Among the weak points of Smith's work there is its clear addressing to a clique of readers, by a language that was not fit for the mass audience. In her work on intellectual Victorian women Deirdre David identifies Martineau as the one who undertook a new direction to tackle the subject, maintaining that "the lofty male theoretician requires the practical female populariser as translator

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<sup>10</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, p.15.

<sup>11</sup> see G. Poulett Scrope, "Malthus and Sadler: Population and Emigration", *Quarterly Review*, Vol. 45, pp. 97-145, (April 1831), p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> H. Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy Vol. 1*, London : Charles Fox 1832, p. ix. Henceforth quotations taken from the Preface will be given in the text in brackets as (PEP: page number).

of abstract thought into a vivid application."<sup>13</sup>

In wider terms, Harriet Martineau found an inadequacy in the two main objects of literature treating political economy, namely in the way it attempted to convince the mass, and in the manner it explained facts; in both cases, the result was in large part a failure due to the lack of mutual understanding between addresser and addressee. Firstly, Martineau criticised male economic writers for their penchant to take for granted basic knowledge that common people could not have where she states that "[t]he works already written on Political Economy almost all bear a reference to books which have preceded, or consist in part of discussions of disputed points." (PEP: xi) Furthermore, she complained about the lack of clearness, where implicit meanings were involved; readers were asked to search for truth while what they really needed was "the science in a familiar, practical form." (PEP: xi) Lastly, she found in ordinary usage that political economy was wrongly combined with other discourses involving religion, history or nationalism.<sup>14</sup> Martineau's statements in the Preface prove that the crucial points in the reception of political economy were the language used by scholars, obscure for the masses, and the fact that people were not given the right tools to interpret and master the new science. Political economy tended to be 'mystified', though Martineau wanted to make economic principles accessible to the common reader and allow the population to learn by themselves how to handle their own economic resources.

As far as Martineau's approach to the subject is concerned, it could be argued that the real source of inspiration must be attributed to Jane Marcet; whose *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816) was pioneering for the way in which it explored the new science. Her writing style was unquestionably experimental, based on a purely colloquial

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<sup>13</sup> D. David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: H. Martineau, E. Barrett Browning, G. Eliot* London: McMillan, 1987, p.40.

<sup>14</sup> See S. Dentith, "Political Economy, Fiction and the Language of Practical Ideology in Nineteenth-Century", *Social History*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 183-199, (May, 1983), p.186.

form which was never used before to deepen subjects like political economy. Barbara T. Gates, in her anthology on women writers, dedicates the chapter "Popularizing Science" to the category to which Marcet belonged and defined them "knowledgeable purveyors of scientific information".<sup>15</sup> According to Gates, the purposes of these popularisers were two; first of all to facilitate the access to complex scientific subjects, secondly to put them in relation to the social context.<sup>16</sup> Marcet published the *Conversations* on several subjects: Chemistry, Natural Philosophy, Political Economy; and the writing style she used to deliver information on these scientific studies is classified by Gates as "familiar formats".<sup>17</sup> This formula takes its name from the typology of discourse it implies, usually addressing directly to the fictional interlocutor through the means of dialogues or letters; thus, the *Conversations* "offered fictional representation of informal discussion on learned subjects" that seems to be the key for their success.<sup>18</sup> Jane Marcet wanted to explain in her Preface what the *Conversations* consisted of, as well as to legitimate her work since the dialogues exposed were not to be seen as mere notions conveyed through the question-answer pattern, but rather "the questions [were] generally the vehicle of some collateral remarks contributing to illustrate the subject."<sup>19</sup>

Martineau's first short tales concerning social and political matters were *The Rioters* (1827) and *The Turn-Out* (1829), and at this early stage she was not yet aware she was about to start a new genre. It was during those years that she first read Marcet's contribution to the subject and was positively affected by her expository conversations. It is evident that the two were along similar lines since Martineau admits that the reading of *Conversation* "had revealed to [her] the curious fact that, in [her] earlier tales

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<sup>15</sup> B. T. Gates, *In Nature's Name*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 435.

<sup>16</sup> Gates, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 437.

<sup>18</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>19</sup> J. Marcet, *Conversations on Political Economy, in Which the Elements of That Science Are Familiarly Explained*, London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1827, p. vi.

about Wages and Machinery, [she] had been writing Political Economy without knowing it."(A1:233) The dialogues in the *Illustration* clearly continue a writing style developed by Marcet, whose work was illuminating for her successor who was already planning to write her first extensive series on political economy. It seems that Marcet was a sort of model Harriet Martineau was missing, showing her that somebody had already experimented the technique of illustrating economic principles "not by being smothered up in a story, but by being exhibited in their natural workings in selected passages of social life." (A1:138)

### 1.5 Women and Economics

An important matter which Ronald Bodkin calls attention to is the fact that "[i]n general, most (male) Classical economists ignored women's issues", for instance how to handle cases of unmarried women like Harriet Martineau, who had no right to property.<sup>20</sup> Visibly, women's issue was taken personally by the writer, as a consequence, she complained about women's state of education which kept them away from economic and political discourse, rendering emancipation impossible.<sup>21</sup> A belief was prevailing at the beginning of the Victorian period, according to which women were not suited for rational thinking, this is pointed out by Bodkin who argues that such was Smith's implicit belief, a prejudice which Martineau was able to fully debunk through the publication of works as *Illustrations of Political Economy* and her less known *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated* (1833-1834) and *Illustrations of Taxation* (1834).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> R. G. Bodkin, "The Issue of Female Agency in Classical Economic Thought: Jane Marcet Harriet Martineau, and the Men" *Gender Issues*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 62-73, (Fall 1999), p.66.

<sup>21</sup> See Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 113. In addition, Hoecker-Drysdale explains that "women, according to Martineau, were not in the majority financially supported by men, but they were blocked from education and training and given few choices in employment." *Ivi*.

<sup>22</sup> Bodkin, *op. cit.*, p.68.

Martineau was, in a sense, forced to emancipate herself when the family manufacturing business failed; this is probably what spurred her to think intently on women's position in society, notably in business. As a matter of fact, it was the unhappy event of her father's failure that gave her the opportunity to set up her occupation on the two practices she was best at, writing and needle working. Ann Hobart interprets the situation from a feminist perspective stressing that "when bourgeois daughters like Martineau [manage] to capitalize on the business failure of their fathers", an enhancement is accomplished.<sup>23</sup> That is to say, when the reduction of family finances foster the employment of women in the public sphere, they become instrumental to their own emancipation.

Much of Martineau's life is reflected in her work in general, this is true also for her first collection of tales where we can see her position as an unmarried woman writer who gained her autonomy thanks to her job. Hobart indeed sees the production of the *Illustrations* as "the turning point in her struggle to refashion her life after the failure of her domestic expectations."<sup>24</sup> 'Improvement through education' could be the slogan expressing Martineau's position on this subject; she wanted to bring the subject of political economy to a down-to-earth level, aiming also at women, underlining their difficulties having no right to manage their own lives and economic resources.

## **1.6 Religious Influences**

Another aspect worth considering, when approaching Martineau's tales, is her religious belief. She was born in a Unitarian family and shared their faith until several experiences in her life, notably illness and recovery, changed her mind to a point that her religious

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<sup>23</sup> A. Hobart, "Harriet Martineau's Political Economy of Everyday Life", *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 223-251, (Winter 1994), p. 236.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 224.

beliefs collided with her new perspective. However, when she was writing the *Illustrations* she was still dwelling upon Unitarian principles; John Vint notices in fact that "[t]here was underneath all of her economic ideas an overriding set of convictions from her Unitarian background."<sup>25</sup> Among the principles that formed her thought and can be associated with the tales, there are those of Joseph Priestley and Jeremy Bentham; indeed the motto 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' perfectly explains the attitude she had while writing, a mingling of rationalism and utilitarianism.

Martineau also applied the radical principles of Necessarian philosophy<sup>26</sup> holding that all human actions are pre-determined, therefore leaving no space for free will. In this regard, it is interesting to notice her stance assuming that "the workings of the universe are governed by laws which cannot be broken by human will [...] no action fails to produce effects, and no efforts can be lost."(A1: 112) The application of this concept with relation to her ideas on economy and society explains her conviction that "true Necessarians must be the most diligent and confident of all workers." (A1: 112)

The Necessarian views she shared can be seen in the background of her interpretation of the functioning of the market, depicted as something her reader has just to come to terms with. Its rules, like those governing the world, are predetermined thus, man has to accept and surrender to it. Eleanor Courtemanche sees this attitude of submission to forces that go beyond human powers as a slightly negative perception of economic mechanism when she states that the tales tend to be "gloomier than would be warranted by political economy alone".<sup>27</sup> Martineau saw a perfect embodiment of the Necessarian doctrine in the clear-cut and fair working of the economic system, and its perfectness was emphasized by the fact that it was not determined by man.

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<sup>25</sup> Vint, *op. cit.*, p.3.

<sup>26</sup> I decided to keep the term 'Necessarianism' instead of 'Necessitarianism' for it is the form Harriet Martineau used in her publications.

<sup>27</sup> E. Courtemanche, "*Naked Truth is the Best Eloquence*": Martineau, Dickens, and the Moral Science of Realism", *ELH*, Vol. 73, No. 2, pp. 383-407(Summer 2006), pp. 393-394.

Looking for religious connections within the *Illustrations* Cooper and Murphy notice that "the listing of principles at the end of each volume of *Illustrations* marks the narratives as extended economic parables."<sup>28</sup> Yet, it is not only the use of listed precepts that resembles parables, but also the structure and the content of the stories are similar. In both cases we have the depiction of a setting followed by a sequence of actions and their results; furthermore, *The Illustrations* recall parables for their quite straightforward message addressing to common people.<sup>29</sup>

It is no surprise that Harriet Martineau shared Necessarian views since they united her spiritual disposition to a social perspectives. The author indeed identified as "indolent dreamers" those who "find an excuse for their idleness in the doctrine of free-will, which certainly leaves but scanty encouragement to exertion of any sort". (A1: 112) It is clear though, that Martineau relied on the enterprising spirit that distinguished the Necessarians from Christians.<sup>30</sup> What is more, the author stuck to the idea of providing instructive lessons where all the emphasis is put on the encouragement towards moral choices, for this reason, the parable's succinct didacticism was suitable for her pedagogical purpose.

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<sup>28</sup> B. P. Cooper and M. S. Murphy, "The Death of the Author at the Birth of Social Science: The Cases of Harriet Martineau and Adolphe Quetelet", *Studies in History Philosophy and Science*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 1–36, (2000) p.5. In addition, the term 'parable' is used to describe the tales contained in the *Illustrations* in Freedgood, "Banishing Panic: Harriet Martineau and the Popularization of Political Economy" *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 39 No.1, pp. 33-53, (Autumn 1995), p.39.

<sup>29</sup> For a full exploration of the issue see the chapter "The Nature and Structure of Parables" in G. Safran Naveh, *Biblical Parables and Their Modern Re-creations From "Apples of Gold in Silver Settings" to "Imperial Messages"* Albany: State University of New York Press 2000.

<sup>30</sup> A lengthy discussion on the superiority of Necessarianism is provided in the *Autobiography*, where Christianity is discredited to the extent that Martineau considers its future "[decline] to the rank of a mere fact in the history of mankind." (A1: 106-116)

## 1.7 Struggling for Publication

*Illustrations of Political Economy* consisted of twenty-five tales monthly issued over the course of two years from 1832 to 1834, divided into nine volumes. Despite the potential usefulness of the work Harriet Martineau had to struggle to have her tales published; the Cholera and the Reform Bill were among the main causes of refusal as she accounts:

I wrote to two or three publishers from Dublin, opening my scheme; but one after another declined having any thing to do with it, on the ground of the disturbed state of the public mind, which afforded no encouragement to put out new books. (A1: 162)

The first publishers who contacted her for the publication were Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock. Martineau was disappointed by their suggestion to change the title of the series with 'Live and Let Live' and was finally happy with their withdrawal. The author kept asking to be published and even Mr. Whittaker who seemed interested at the end offered her the mere chance of a publication on commission. (A1: 162-163) Mr. W. J. Fox, in turn, was reluctant for the same reasons as the other publishers; this explains why the frustration was still vivid in the writer's mind when, in her *Autobiography* she admits she "was growing as sick of the Reform Bill as poor King William himself". (A1: 165) After several refusals Martineau obtained a deal with Mr. Fox's brother Charles, as he agreed in publishing the first tale on condition that she would manage to procure substantial subscriptions. The first tale "Life in the Wilds" was released the 1st of February 1832 and went sold out in only ten days. The immediate success was a great relief to the author, to the extent that she declared: "I think I may date my release from pecuniary care from that tenth of February, 1832." (A1: 178)

## 1.8 Subject-matter of The *Illustrations*

The structure of the collection followed a regular pattern, every tale was divided into chapters whose titles served to underline the economic concepts exposed. Every story had a "Summary of Principles" at its end in order to clarify any doubt the reader could have and it included a synthetic list of economic concepts that built the tale's framework. As it will be outlined in the following paragraphs, what lies behind Martineau's project is a very meticulous design since she "had a master plan for her entire body of work".<sup>31</sup>

The tales consisted of fictional stories usually connected with contemporary social and political events; Martineau took specific topics one at a time and was intended to explain elementary notions. Volume 1 ("Life in the Wilds", "The Hill and the Valley", "Brooke and Brooke Farm") focused on basic concepts such as wealth, labour, and machinery. The second one, including "Demerara" and the two Garveloch tales, explored the theme of capital's increase, and how it could be easily achieved by restraining the population growth through the preventive check. Volume three contained "A Manchester Strike", "Cousin Marshall", and "Ireland" and examined the factory controversy; furthermore, it continued the concept of capital increase associated with the promotion of improvements in agricultural and domestic economy. The fourth volume ("Homes Abroad", "For Each and For All", "French Wines and Politics") talked about colonization, liberal commerce and profits. The following volume instead introduced the reader to the application of a medium of exchange in commerce, in "The Charmed Sea", while its use in the banking system was covered by one of the most famous tales "Berkeley the Banker". "Messrs. Vanderput and Snoek", (Volume 6) accounts "the Adventures of a Bill of Exchange"<sup>32</sup> while "The Loom and the Lugger"

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<sup>31</sup> O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p.315.

<sup>32</sup> H. Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy Vol. 6*, London: Charles Fox, 1834, p. vi.

treated the issue of smuggling goods. Volume seven opened with "Sowers not Reapers" and preached universal and free exchanges, like in "Cinnamon and Pearls" which represented a campaign for worldwide free trade. "A Tale of the Tyne" indeed advocated free circulation of labour and unrestricted commercial competition. The last but one publication talks about productive/unproductive consumption of capital in "Briery Creek", while the proportion of wealth in communities is explored in "The Three Ages". "The Farrers of Budge-Row" tackles taxation concerns in the concluding volume, while the "The Moral of Many Fables" provides a summary of the main principles illustrated throughout the series.

Martineau's awareness of not being writing for the intellectually elite explains why she decided to start from basic theories to further develop in her tales. The development of the plot was intertwined with lengthy conversations between characters whose focus was on concerns about political economy. However, she did not want to bewilder her readers instilling an excessive quantity of notions, for this reason she scrupulously dispensed her suggestions in each tale, offering a gradual familiarization with the subject.<sup>33</sup>

### **1.9 Preaching Economic Liberalism**

Being Martineau a firm believer in the *laissez faire* economy, she did not renounce to sprinkle liberalism over the tales. Her representation of an ideal economic environment has been laid out in several occasions, for instance in her sociological treatise *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838) in which she explained that "the spirit of fraternity is to be attained, if at all, by men discerning their mutual relation, as 'parts and

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<sup>33</sup> Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 368-369.

proportions of one wondrous whole."<sup>34</sup> Jannett Highfill and William Weber, commenting on this passage, note that Martineau found a connection between progress and political economy, since the advancement of the individual corresponds to the advancement of society in general, and vice versa. Martineau's assumption seems to provide the necessary premise to see *laissez faire* as the best means for progress thus, "society should allow the laissez faire doctrine of the political economists full reign."<sup>35</sup>

Martineau's ideas on the subject were sometimes criticized for her involving them in decontextualised arguments; for instance, John Stuart Mill accused her of "[reducing] the laissez faire system to an absurdity as far as the principle goes, by merely carrying it out to all its consequences".<sup>36</sup> It is true indeed that Martineau associated the backwardness with societies where the principle was not applied; it is the case of America which she considers 'socially immature', stressing that :

[i]f she had left labour and commerce, and capital free; disdaining interference at home and retaliation abroad; showing her faith in the natural laws of social economy by calmly committing to them the external interests of her people, she would by this time have been the pattern and instructress of the civilised world, in the philosophy of production and commerce.<sup>37</sup>

Her sensing laissez faire as the embodiment of "pure economical freedom" reveals a slightly idealistic view on economic subjects.<sup>38</sup> The benevolent spirit of the economic system Martineau campaigned tended, according to David, to translate "complex problems into happy fables"; while writings as the *Illustrations* were supposed to offer practical solutions, the ideas they were based upon tended to "expose some of the naiveté' of that philosophy."<sup>39</sup> Undoubtedly, tales like "Cinnamon and Pearls" and

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<sup>34</sup> H. Martineau, *How to Observe Morals and Manners*, New York: Harper & Brothers 1838, p. 176.

<sup>35</sup> J. K. Highfill and W. V. Weber, "Harriet Martineau: an Economic View of Victorian Arts and Letters", *Journal of Cultural Economics*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 85-92 (1991), p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> J. S. Mill's letter to Thomas Carlyle quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> H. Martineau quoted in *Ivi.*

<sup>38</sup> H. Martineau, *Society in America Vol. 2*, London: Saunders and Otley, 1837, p. 241. Freedgood, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36, maintains that the inconsistency detected in the *Illustration* lies in their realistic aspiration while attempting to "[offer] utopian resolutions to real problems"; she added that the result of such combination merged in an "impossible and inefficacious generic hybrid: realist myth."

<sup>39</sup> David, *op. cit.*, p. 43; Highfill and Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

"The Loom and the Lugger" reveal the promulgation of economic liberalism, for this reason, the corpus has been identified as "collection of stories which reveal the happy endings that await those who place their faith in a market left to its own 'natural' workings."<sup>40</sup>

### **1.10 Teaching Through the Series**

As Maria Weston Chapman stated in her *Memorials*, the economic tales "did not pretend to offer discoveries, or new applications or elucidations of prior discoveries" but rather "popularized, in a fresh form, some doctrines and many truths long before made public by others"; Cooper and Murphy conform to such statement stressing that the main aim of Harriet Martineau was to "depict, rather than discover".<sup>41</sup> We know that fiction was, throughout her career as a writer, the form Harriet Martineau preferred to adopt for educational purposes. Her simple fictional tales would make it easier to understand which were the practical solutions and "it was left to the reader to change her or his individual behavior".<sup>42</sup> Thus, she did not intend to claim any kind of discovery; the purpose of her writing was to illustrate first of all which were the functions of political economy, then how they were applied to everyday life, and finally which were the results of their application. Martineau's intents when writing *Illustrations of Political Economy* are expressed also in her epistolary production, where she stated that "the grand object of making known the moral character of the poor . . . [is] almost the primary object of my series", this statement proves that she was more concerned with the audience to which the work was dedicated rather than producing an aesthetically

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<sup>40</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> Weston Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 564; Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, p.7.

<sup>42</sup> *Ivi.*

good work depicting the experimental science for its own sake.<sup>43</sup>

Even if the educational vocation is strongly associated with the *Illustrations*, the stance Harriet Martineau took was aloof from the doctrinal and moralistic literary production that was widespread in the Victorian period. The writer was fairly against books of the “trap” kind, and in the preface she set forth her position as she did not want to allure “idle readers” with fancy storytelling ending up to make them “learn something they are afraid of.” (PEP: xiii)

When Martineau had to come to terms with literary business she was disturbed by the way her publisher, Mr. Fox, tried to interfere in her work. Not only did he want to leave the term political economy out of the title but also to make her change the style of the *Illustrations*, shifting to a more didactic form; in consequence, she fought to keep the original version since she “knew that science could not be smuggled in anonymously.” (A1:162) Harriet Martineau advocated the use of fiction in her work since she believed in its power to capture the reader's imagination; her choice indeed can be useful to discredit contemporary theories holding that imagination interfered with the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

Starting from the assumption that “Example is better than precept”, (PEP: xiii) Martineau ventured in an experimental field to create a work which was, according to the writer, strongly wanted and “even craved by the popular mind.” (A1:160-161) The writer supported free education for all classes of society; even though she declared her good intentions in instructing the masses on the functioning of the market we can see

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<sup>43</sup> Martineau quoted in Sanders, *Harriet Martineau - Selected Letters, cit.*, p. 38. On the other hand, her actual view on the lower classes is controversial and constitutes a crucial point in the criticism on Martineau. Observations on her representation of the working class will be provided in the following part dedicated to the tales' examination, notably in the analyses of “The Hill and the Valley” and “A Manchester Strike”.

<sup>44</sup> O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-315. See Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 13: “Edgeworth, writing on education and the individual's acquisition of ‘economy’, issued a warning that fictions, popular novels and travel adventures, in particular, often inflamed the imagination and interfered with the formation of proper Smithian economic subjectivity, the ‘calculation of the rational probability of success.”

her personal beliefs standing on the back of her discourses. Max Fletcher indeed identifies Martineau as a "purpose writer" since she had a specific task in her writing, in particular he associates the ideas she conveyed as a means to persuade her readers to embrace the coming of capitalism.<sup>45</sup>

In general we can state that the success of the *Illustrations* was due to its innovative style combining narrative and instruction. The tales' style and topics were sometimes demanding for many of her readers, nevertheless, every monthly publication was enthusiastically awaited and, in a short time, *Illustrations of Political Economy* became popular all over Europe and led its author to a sudden but durable fame.

### **1.11 Method of Composition**

Harriet Martineau believed that *Illustrations of Political Economy* would render economic principles understandable to the lower classes, given that such target group composed a considerable part of society, she was rather confident her massive work would become widespread. The writer had clear in her mind the purpose and the manner in which she wanted to build her series; the planning of each story was extremely methodical, she drafted a precise scheme in order to simplify the understanding for her readers, and being economic doctrines a priority in the work, the narrative structure was built around the principles it was to support. The systematic organization of her works, in particular the *Illustrations*, has been discussed by several critics;<sup>46</sup> as far as her abilities in planning is concerned, Linda Peterson in her essay "Harriet Martineau: Masculine Discourse, Female Sage" suggests that they could have

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<sup>45</sup> Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p.367.

<sup>46</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 370; David, *op. cit.*, p. 41; Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

derived from her schooling.<sup>47</sup> Eleven-year-old Harriet was sent to a boy's grammar school where she had lessons on composition:

We were taught the parts of a theme, [...] and the nature and connexion of these parts were so clearly pointed out, that on the instant it appeared to me that a sudden light was cast at once on the processes of thought and of composition [...]. I saw how the Proposition, the Reason, the Example, the Confirmation, and the Conclusion led out the subject into order and clearness. (HE: 238)

Hence, Martineau was trained and developed early her writing skills; therefore we can gather that the precocious enjoyment of writing is to be associated with her future choice of a profession.

After several years, when Harriet pondered over the construction of *Illustrations of Political Economy*, she availed herself of a small blue notebook to chalk out her ideas; the creation of the work was openly explained in her *Autobiography*, where—she described her writing process step by step. (A1: 160) First of all she read the 'standard works' on political economy; then she created the framework of the series, diving into four main points: Production, Distribution, Exchange and Consumption. (A1: 193) The preliminary reading then continued, for she reviewed each text to select information on specific subjects. Only when she finished to take notes on all the subjects, did she consider the scenes that were eventually "suggested by [her] collective didactic materials." (A1: 194) The third step was the hardest one for Martineau, since the listing of the 'Summary of Principles' was a crucial point, in which she started to elaborate the story's scene.<sup>48</sup> Since every principle was to be associated with a character in the tale, "the mutual operation of these embodied principles supplied the action of the story". (A1: 194) Character's interaction, then, was the vehicle for the exploration of principles and plot's development. The division into chapters together with the creation of a Table of Contents was the last demanding task; the table was helpful for the listing

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<sup>47</sup> See L. Peterson, "Harriet Martineau: Masculine Discourse, Female Sage" pp. 171-185 in T. Morgan, *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1990, p. 171.

<sup>48</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 16 -17.

of actions and scenes' features, but especially for the association of every character with "all the political economy which it was their business to convey". (A1: 195) The rest of the procedure was easier and, thanks to her methodology, Martineau managed to respect the monthly deadlines for the issuing of each number.

The choice of the setting for her tales was usually driven by an interest in depicting a social reality that featured connections with varied issues. For instance, "The Loom and the Lugger" was set in the Sussex Coast where smuggling traffics were an everyday event; Ceylon instead was chosen for "Cinnamon and Pearls" as she wanted to expose the functioning of colonial trade. When Harriet Martineau chose foreign backgrounds, she was extremely careful in depicting them; whenever she had the chance, she personally visited the places, while in other cases, she gathered information from travel books, topography and acquaintances' reports.

The method of composition accounted by Martineau could sound mechanical and far from the idea of writing as an artistic engagement; however, we should consider that the topics she treated were of a scientific nature, not easily fitting imaginative contexts, and needed to be exposed with rigour. The association of political economy and fictional texts has been raising debates since the time the *Illustrations* appeared. This important issue will be discussed at some length in chapter 3 devoted to "Narrative Fiction in *Illustrations of Political Economy*".

## 1.12 The Preface

When Martineau started to write the series, she had clear in her mind the way she wanted to display her argument. In the Preface she maintained that her aim was not only to prepare her readers to the acquisition of notions, but also to legitimate the study of political economy. The hope she placed in her work and in the experimental science in general, is apparent from the very beginning when, introducing her tales, she defined political economy a subject connected with "whatever material objects contribute to the support and enjoyment of life." (PEP: v)

While listing the positive effects the application of political economy entails, she criticised the way in which it was represented until then. With the sentence "yet Political Economy has been less studied than perhaps any other science whatever, and not at all by those whom it most concerns, — the mass of the people" she argued that the fulfillment of its principles could not be achieved unless the majority of the population would understand its functioning. (PEP: iv) In her Preface she continued maintaining that the majority of the books that were published at her time wrongly bore reference to previous publications; such method, according to Martineau, was not appropriate for those who needed an introduction to a subject that was new. (PEP: xi)

Harriet Martineau saw the application of political economy as a remedy for the evils of society; she underlined the universal need for a change and for greater awareness, since she believed that "[t]here are methods of governing a family which will secure the good of all." (PEP: vii) Further on she explained that the series were not dedicated to a specific class of society because she was "sure that all classes bear an equal relation to the science" thus, her object was to teach unconditionally to the population. (PEP: xiv)

To further support her writing style, Harriet Martineau claimed it was not only entertaining, but also "the most faithful and the most complete".(PEP: xiii) She went on providing examples such as how a topic like 'Freedom of Trade' could be explained dryly or rendered interesting by setting a back-story with charming characters and exotic locations:

[t]he story of a merchant in Turkey, in contrast with one of a merchant in England, will convey as much truth as any set of propositions on the subject, and will impress the memory and engage the interest in a much greater degree. This method of teaching Political Economy has never yet been tried, except in the instance of a short story or separate passage here and there. (PEP: xii)

This quotation shows to what extent Harriet Martineau relied on specific techniques closely related to the learning process.

Thus, *Illustrations of Political Economy* was supposed to satisfy the requirements needed for a turn in the representation (and consequently the reception) of the subject, while the sketches of society portrayed wanted to be as realistic as possible in order to affect the reader's mind.

## Chapter 2 - Analysis of the Tales

### 2.1 Life in The Wilds: Political Economy For Beginners

*An orange is of no use to any man living  
unless he puts out his hand to pluck it.*<sup>1</sup>

When Harriet Martineau started to write the first tales her work was still unknown, therefore, the inspiration for plot and location of her stories was coming from her personal experience and the books she read. As far as the setting is concerned, we know that many of her sceneries were influenced by the travel books she borrowed from the Public Library, for instance Lichtenstein's *South Africa* was used for the first tale "Life in the Wilds". (A1:197)

The tale begins depicting South Africa's delightful climate and richness of the soil, but a sudden shift is presented. The group of English settlers in fact, has to deal with the results of the last Bushmen's raid, which left them without any sustenance. As Martineau explains in the tale, the native's attacks is a reaction against foreign intrusions, hence, their need for revenge is understandable, and bring as a consequence the colonizers' regression to a primitive state.<sup>2</sup> This state of things prompts the community to a different approach with the territory; the vegetation becomes their only nourishment, branches and stones their tools, for this reason critics points out that the opening of 'Life in the Wilds' resembles Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.<sup>3</sup> As soon as the problem of being ransacked is presented, the pragmatism of the captain emerges as he promptly reacts, leading the operations necessary to procure relief goods. (LW: 8) Through the figure of the captain, the writer seems to provide an example of the behavior a good leader

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<sup>1</sup> H. Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, Charles Fox 1832, pp. 24 -25. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in brackets as (LW: page number).

<sup>2</sup> See Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> See O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 317; Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 371. Dentith, *op. cit.*, p. 191, instead argues that Martineau's locating the story in the wilderness is convincing "without even resorting to the 'Robinsonades' of Adam Smith's historical assumptions".

should have and how a community should determine its priorities; the opening of the story shows how the settlers find themselves forced to recreate their society and its economy, in order to endure in the wilderness. 'Life in the Wilds' constituted the beginning of the *Illustrations*, hence, Martineau had to start from basic concepts of political economy; as it will be outlined in the following paragraphs, the focus of this tale is put on manufacturing, the division of labor, and the consequences the introduction of machinery entails.

One of the first situations depicted in the tale highlights how the depredation of material assets that were taken for granted creates frustration among the community. The characters here are portrayed in the act of discussing and looking for concrete solutions to concrete problems, for instance, the lack of place settings becomes the chance to develop a resourceful attitude and, when a child complains about the lack of plates for the dinner, Mrs. Stone replies suggesting him to "try to find or make one, instead of standing with your hands behind you." (LW: 14) The new condition puts the whole community to the test, notably, the death of indispensable figures for the community forces them to rethink the priorities for the reconstruction of the village. We see in particular how the division of labour is handled, since all characters are involved in disparate tasks with the common purpose of survival. After the first measures taken for the reconstruction of the settlement, Mr. Stone reflects upon the way things changed in such a short lapse of time:

[w]hen I look round this place and think of all that I have seen and done since morning, I can scarcely believe that we are the same people, living in the same age of the world as yesterday. We seem to have gone back in the course of a night from a state of advanced civilization to a primitive condition of society. (LW: 22)

The captain confutes his observation as he believes that, even though they seem to have regressed to a primordial state "the intelligence belonging to a state of advancement remains." (LW: 22) As Elaine Feedgood cleverly notices, the concept Martineau expresses

here is that the community could never experience a proper primitive state, for the advantage of having a "civilised" background is remarkable.<sup>4</sup> Their conversation is followed by a series of observations on what constitutes the actual wealth in a context deficient in sophisticated resources like theirs, and how they could increase it by means of "unassisted labour". (LW:22) The shift to a different condition naturally spurs them to consider from a new perspective the requirements developed when living in their home country; in this regard it is evident that Martineau "uses her de-civilized settlers to show that what the English regard as necessities are in fact luxuries."<sup>5</sup> In a country where 'money is not wealth', the whole functioning of society is overturned.

The captain and Mr. Stone seem to have taken the new condition as a chance for conducting an anthropological study; when discouragement and nostalgia flood among the population they push for persistency because they both aim at people's advancement from a primitive to a civilised state. The community thus, is supposed to progress easily since "they know how to apply their labour" for they had experienced civilization and "[t]hey know what improvements they would aim at, instead of having to try experiments." (LW: 28) While the two leading figures of the group make several efforts to keep up the spirits, at the same time they observe how labour operates in this new environment; the results of pure labour are to be seen conceivable here rather than in England, precisely because in this context there is no social division and they are all put under the same condition.

As far as the nature of labour is concerned a distinction between practical and mental employment is outlined in Chapter IV "Hand-Work and Head-Work". Starting from the assumption that "[a]ny man who does anything is a labourer" (LW: 47) it is pointed out that both kinds of work are needed, especially in their state since their first

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<sup>4</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

concern is to develop a creative attitude, and then to be able to put their ideas into practice. In order to explain the application of both typologies of tasks in business activities, a detailed analysis of the process that leads from raw material to final product is illustrated and exemplified here, in the productive process of bread:

[t]he thresher, and the miller, and the baker, do not help to produce food like the ploughman; but they are quite as useful as he, because we could not have bread without their help. They are manufacturers, and the retail baker is engaged in commerce; but it would be absurd to say that they are on that account to be thought less valuable than the sower. (LW: 48)

The description clearly illustrates the distinction between productive and non-productive labour taking an example from daily goods. Though O'Donnell in this regard claims that the difference between "industry" and "idleness" is made clear by the author, her observation could be refuted since the point here is not to judge the moral aspect the definition entails, but rather to recognize a difference between equally respectable employments.<sup>6</sup> A debate is opened on whether unproductive labourers should reside inside the village and to what extent this could damage society; we are led to follow the reasoning of the characters involved in the conversation, resolving that the word *unproductive* is not meant to stand for what results from laziness, but rather a labour which does not add wealth and yet contributes to the workings of society.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the colonizers realise that the balanced proportion between the two classes of labourers determines the prosperity of the community and, broadly speaking, of nations. The acquisition of economic awareness is finally accomplished when they agree in saying that "the words [productive-unproductive] relate to wealth and not to usefulness." (LW: 54)

Chapters as "Hand-Work and Head-Work" demonstrate Martineau's ability as a populariser, where her taking a simplified concept and develop it by degrees is accomplished. It is interesting to notice, for instance, the shift she drives from simple

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<sup>6</sup> O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

<sup>7</sup> For a full exploration of the issue see A. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776, notably Chapter III "Of the Accumulation of Capital, or of Productive and Unproductive Labour".

vocabulary (hand/head work) at the beginning of the chapter, ending it with a specialized language (productive/unproductive labour). As mentioned in the section "Influences of Previous Writers", misinterpretation of political economy was chronic, thus Harriet Martineau's work was helpful for its teaching the implied meanings of words, while putting them into context. Because of the attention the author gives to the use of specific terms we are more inclined to regard her as an "incurable teacher".<sup>8</sup>

Another aspect worth considering is the cost of time in the story. Through a series of examples taken from everyday life in the community, the writer shows the way a proper economy of labour works. At the end of the chapter "Hand-Work and Head-Work" her reader would be able to grasp two main concepts, namely, that one task at a time must be accomplished and that people must follow their own disposition. The concepts exposed by the author are not to be considered as mere suggestions to spur workers to ponder over their attitudes rather, they must be thought of as the attempt at a channeling of resources towards a cost-effective type of labour. These observations lead us to another element epitomised in the following chapter "Getting Up in the World", that is to say, how to optimize time through a shrewd division of labour. When the captain resolves they "will try to-morrow what a division of labour will do towards rearing a house over our heads" he is encouraging this endeavour, as he stresses they have the means to improve their condition and "well-directed labour" is supposed to increase the results. (LW: 83)

Martineau's psychological subtlety is displayed when a conversation between the captain and Mrs. Stone explores the extent to which the pursuit of comforts spurs the community to self-improvement because

[t]hey know that they are doing their duty — that they are employed to the best possible purpose at present, in providing for the support and comfort of themselves and their families ; and the pursuit itself keeps their minds active, and therefore makes them happy. (LW: 88)

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<sup>8</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

The suggestion here is that, starting their society and economy anew, should be seen as a chance rather than an obstacle. Mankind's seeking for progress is portrayed not only as a necessity but also a breeding ground for inventions and discoveries since "[t]here are no bounds to what labour can do when directed by knowledge." (LW: 89) In the period in which Martineau was writing the *Illustrations* several controversies related to labour, the development of markets, and machinery were going on due to the Industrial Revolution:

the introduction of machinery raised profound questions for politicians and political economists, and provoked strong reactions by workers from as early as the 1790s and this was particularly prevalent in the 1820s and 1830s as the use of machinery spread.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that the introduction of machinery led to unemployment of skilled workmen adds weight to the critical argument; for this reason Harriet Martineau felt the need to include explanations for an inevitable consequence since "the division of labour has led to the invention of machinery".(LW: 77) The chapter "Signs of the Times" focuses on this subject, though machinery was previously mentioned in Chapter VI when the captain subtly refers to machinery stating that labour should be spared until they will have "a stock of labourers who do not require to be fed and taken care of." (LW: 80) Mrs. Stone acknowledges that the introduction of machinery in their settlement would be very useful, however she has some doubts on its usefulness in countries like England "at the present day, where the great object is to find employment for labour"(LW: 116) The answer of Mr. Stone resembles Martineau's own position seeing just the bright side of its purpose because he believes that "the distress is temporary and partial, while the advantage is lasting and universal." (LW: 117) Thus the end justifies the means and the invention and application of machinery becomes a process "as 'natural' and spontaneous

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<sup>9</sup> Vint, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

as child's play".<sup>10</sup>

As in many other occasions in the *Illustrations*, in this tale Harriet Martineau does not renounce to drag in her *laissez-faire* beliefs; starting from the assumption that a worldwide adoption of machinery would just do good to humanity, the characters are led to believe that "the only thing to be done is to open as many channels to industry as possible, and to remove all obstructions to its free course."(LW: 118) As a result, the freedom from government restriction together with the protection of property rights would work in what Mr. Stone calls a "letting-alone" course of policy. (LW: 119)

In "Life in the Wilds" we observe the emigrants' life with a special attention to all the issues concerning refoundation; adversities, deaths and lack of equipments do not discourage the community, since they know their efforts will be rewarded. The tale indeed, concludes with the happy event of a marriage that becomes for the umpteenth time the chance to create a collaboration among the villagers. Admitting Martineau's good intents in creating a tale that was supposed to interest and instruct its readers we should consider the ideas embodied in the construction of the plot. It is true that the purpose of the story is to teach some economic principles, however, the imperialistic propaganda involved could be disturbing for 21st century readers, while the issues concerning the appropriation of a territory on the part of the settlers was positively received by Victorian criticism, which was mostly favourable to colonialism. Even though the story opens with the savages' incursions as a result of the violation by part of the Europeans, we know that Martineau was a steadfast supporter of the Civilizing Mission. The ideology intertwined in the story indeed does not fall through the net for critics such as Elaine Freedgood and Simon Dentith who analyse the tale's colonialist perspective; admitting Martineau's position as both an advocate and a critic of British

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<sup>10</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

imperialism Freedgood maintains that "[t]he ideology that justifies imperialism and colonialism is left intact by this tale."<sup>11</sup> In addition, the anthropological explanation of the division of labour prevailing in the tale has, according to Dentith, as a secondary result of "cancellation of history".<sup>12</sup>

## 2.2 "The Hill and the Valley": the New Industrial Aesthetic

"The Hill and the Valley", is the second tale of the series. Here the author returns to England setting the story in a South Wales valley; the rural area is not chosen randomly since in the 1830s there were several riots going on in response to the introduction of machinery in factories. Measures were taken to restrain the population, and the first attempts were by means of inexpensive texts on the subject.<sup>13</sup> The urgency to convince workers on the positive outcomes resulting from the mechanization of productive processes prompted Harriet Martineau to deal with this matter, the tale indeed, depicts a society in the crucial moment of transition from agricultural to industrial based labour.

The focus of the story on machinery and wages justifies the concerns related to the establishment of an iron work in the valley, run by Mr. Wallace and his partners. The tension between the introduction of technology and the primordial relationship with nature is embodied in the character of John Armstrong, who lives a rustic life in a hillside cottage. The old man deeply believes in the dignity and self-sufficiency of his lifestyle as he states "I pride myself on having few wants which my own hands cannot satisfy"; it is quite clear thence, that the man cannot embrace the coming of the iron

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<sup>11</sup> Freedgood., *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> Dentith, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>13</sup> As Vint, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6 reports in his essay: "Useful Knowledge published An Address to the Labourers, on the Subject of Destroying Machinery (1830) which sold in large numbers. This was followed by Results of Machinery (1831) written for the S.D.U.K. by Charles Knight".

work inasmuch factory work clashes with the pastoral environment.<sup>14</sup> His negative reaction indeed emerges in a passage describing the first time he realises what is going to happen for "it was very evident, from the way that the labourers set to business, that an iron-work was about to be established where the wild heath and the green woods had flourished till now." (HV: 13) The man's gaze functions as the representative of the 'tenants of the wilderness', those who cherish nature and despise progress; Armstrong's principles are naturally in opposition to the coming of machinery since his priority is health rather than wealth.<sup>15</sup> Albeit his reasons are quite predictable, they are in conflict with the newcomers' project, with those who 'wish to rise in the world', namely, capitalists.

Through the contrasts between Armstrong and the owners of the ironwork Martineau subtly disseminates the propaganda in favour of capitalism and industrial development. It is particularly interesting to notice the way in which the author, appealing to the moral involvement of the reader, conditions his perspective towards the perception of Armstrong as he embodies the opposition to economic progress. In the first place, the fact that the peasant lets the surplus of his production rot in his garden, instead of selling it, is interpreted as a selfish act; (HV: 17) the significance of such characterization becomes all the more clear when food and farming are substituted by money in the criticism advanced by Mr. Hollins:

I wish we could persuade our old friend on the hill to invest his two hundred guineas in your concern. His daughter would be very glad of the proceeds; you would be glad of the increase of capital; more iron would be prepared for the use of society, and more labourers provided for here. (HV: 22)

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<sup>14</sup> H. Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy Vol.1*, London: Charles Fox 1832, pp. 14-15. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in brackets as (HV: page number).

<sup>15</sup> See the passage where Armstrong tells: "this plot of ground has produced to me something more valuable than ever grew out of a garden soil. It has gives me health, sir. My own hands have dug and planted and gathered, and see the fruits of my bout! Here I am, at seventy-nine, as strong as at forty." (HV: 14)

It could be argued that the religious influence on the series is embodied in this tale, since a connection between the "Parable of the Talents" and the reluctance of Armstrong to invest his capital is made.<sup>16</sup> Martineau, appealing to the reader's conscience, wants to direct him towards moral choices since the unemployment of economic resources is negatively judged and virtually condemned as a sin. (HV: 85-86) The message the author tries to convey becomes more straightforward in the chapter "How to Use Prosperity" in which Armstrong is rebuked for his passive attitude; his behaviour is criticized because, even if he takes advantages of "the fruits of the labour and capital of others", he does nothing in return. (HV: 77) The one-wayness of his relationship with the outside world is recognized as unacceptable since "[e]very man in society ought to belong to one class of producers or the other, or to stimulate production by useful though unproductive labour." (HV: 77)

Even though Armstrong is apparently immune to the brainwashing on the part of Paul and Mr. Wallace we come to know that doubts are subtly cast on the farmer's mind to the extent that all his certainties start to crumble as

while he repeated to himself how much pleasanter it was to observe and love nature than to gather wealth he could not drive from his mind the question which had been often asked him, of what use his gold was to him: and when he thanked God for having given him enough for his simple wants, it occurred to him whether he ought not to dispose of the wealth he did not use for the benefit of others [...]. (HV: 44-45)

Here Martineau sharply bestows to the investment of capital an altruistic quality. As a result, the idea that it would have been better to allow his gold to circulate ends up haunting Armstrong, while the perseverance of the businessman is ultimately supported by Martineau who denies any fallacy in the attempts to 'corrupt' the old man.<sup>17</sup>

It has been noticed that "The Hill and the Valley" represents the sequel for the first tale of the series; the society here has reached a new level of development, thus,

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<sup>16</sup> The connection is already reported in the tale itself when Armstrong asks: "You would preach to me from the parable of the talents, I suppose?" (HV:78).

<sup>17</sup> See Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

Martineau extends her thoughts and promote capitalism.<sup>18</sup> When Armstrong accuses Mr. Wallace of being a slave driver, the man replies stating that the capitalist -free labourer relationship is based on "mutual service" and each pays respect to the other since they have common interests. (HV: 38-39) Through the character of Mr. Wallace, the writer seems to suggest that the capitalists' aim is to share wealth with the whole community of workers; as a result, the industrialist is depicted as a "benevolent *paterfamilias* who provides for his 'children', who include both labourers and consumers."<sup>19</sup>

In "The Hill and the Valley" capitalism is fostered as a matter involving the whole society; the increase of personal wealth becomes within everyone's reach since "laborers who think like capitalists can save enough money to become capitalists."<sup>20</sup> The shrewd choice of chapters' titles is apparent if we look at the fourth, entitled "Prosperity", where the "well-paid labourers" manage to build their own cottages and this, according to Martineau, proves that "prosperity seemed, at last, to have visited the working classes in an equal proportion with their masters." (HV: 50) Thus no fault can be found in a system where every action is taken for the benefit of the whole structure of society, from the workmen to the master.<sup>21</sup>

To further prove the beneficial nature of the change, the industrial landscape is even portrayed as aesthetically pleasant for the progress it embodies.<sup>22</sup> When Armstrong insinuates the industrial scene created is unpleasant and 'melancholy', Mrs. Wallace takes a completely different stance explaining that "there was beauty of a different kind which belonged to such establishments, and to which she was sure Mr. Armstrong would not be blind if he would only come down and survey the works." (HV:

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<sup>18</sup> See O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

<sup>19</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p.43.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42; Vint, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> See the Chapter 3 "The Harm of a Whim" where Mrs. Wallace maintains: "I know nothing more beautiful than to see a number of people fully employed, and earning comforts for themselves and each other" and Mr. Wallace adds "there appears to me not less beauty in the mechanism of society than in the inventions of art." (HV: 38)

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Even though the machinery topic was already introduced in "Life in the Wilds" it is closely explored in this story; in the metallurgic field the employment of technology seems to be inevitable as "[l]abour is saved by machinery, when a machine either does what man cannot do so well, or when it does in a shorter time, or at a less expense, the work which man can do equally well in other respects." (HV: 130) Machinery becomes the labourer's best friend and when a speaker is worried about the probable overproduction of machinery he is reassured "[t]hat is only a temporary evil: for when the market is overstocked prices fall; and when the price has fallen, more people can afford to buy than bought before, and so a new demand grows up."(HV: 42). In this way Harriet Martineau pictures machinery as the means of 'perpetual progress' and those who do not embrace its coming do not perceive "its true nature and office."(HV: 41)<sup>23</sup> At the beginning of the story, the introduction of machinery seems to be convenient, but when the demand declines and prices fall, the wages are inevitably lowered. Vint comments on the reaction of the laborers to the trend of trade noticing that "[t]he first wage reduction was accepted quietly, the second with murmurings, but the third was met with threats of rebellion."<sup>24</sup> To worsen the situation, new machinery is introduced leading to the dismissal of some men and boys; such measure is craftily justified since the fired workmen were "chosen from among the least industrious and able"; (HV: 91) however, factory workers become upset as they do not understand how difficult the circumstance is for their employers, who have to deal with a competitive market.

It has been noticed that "[p]art of the persuasive force of Martineau's tales derives from her apparent willingness to give anti-industrial and anti-capitalist views a

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<sup>23</sup> See Vint, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

full hearing."<sup>25</sup> It is true, in fact, that the tale reports several workers' complaints, especially when contrasts between man and machinery are made; the workers recognize that machinery is replacing them, for "wood and iron slaves" who have no need to complain or ask for wages. The last straw that rises the outcry is the death of a boy, caused by the machine he was in charge of; here again the author insists on defending the machine and blames the boy for his carelessness.<sup>26</sup> According to the narrator's impersonal voice, the general discontent is caused by the wrong ascription to the iron work of all unfavourable events happened in a short time. A crowd stirred up by resentment finally attacks the factory, destroying what they can and setting fire to the rest; as a result, the capitalists are forced to leave the place and look for new opportunities somewhere else.

Critics have argued that the industrial settlement in the tale corresponds to the ostentation of capitalist (thus middle-class) power over nature.<sup>27</sup> Such idea can be confuted if we consider that the story ends with the destruction of the factory, and the owners admitting defeat and then leaving. It is true that, mostly, the ideas expounded here belong to economists that were part of the ruling class, however, Harriet Martineau managed to create, even though tendentiously, a dialogue between a wide range of characters that represented the different ways in which political economy affected the individuals according to their role in society. What is more, the author succeeded in her attempt to attach some moral qualities to the economic development, referring back to the prototype of the virtuous disciple. Even though the dark side of industrialization, including unemployment and deaths, is not hidden, the negative events are mostly

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<sup>25</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Martineau provided a lengthy discussion on the subject of working conditions and workplace safety in *The Factory Controversy: A Warning Against Meddling Legislation* (1855). The publication dealt with the issue trying to minimize the effects of unregulated use of machinery and attacking those who promoted laws and inspections to protect workers.

<sup>27</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

reported as the workers' fault.<sup>28</sup>

As far as the theoretical economic content is concerned, it is clear that less space is given to economic notions, while the delineation of characters is deepened.<sup>29</sup> If we consider closely the character of Paul, for instance, we can state that there is a proper evolution in his depiction; the indigent man is portrayed as willing to redeem from his sins of idleness and become Wallace's jack-of-all-the-trades. Initially the man takes the position of the model to be followed, but Martineau subverts the situation since the industriousness of the man increases along with greed. At the end he does not win the respect of his employer and eventually spends the rest of his life accumulating wealth instead of enjoying and sharing it. "The Hill and the Valley" tackles issues of industrial conflict, presenting the relationship between employers and employees as depending on market trends. Martineau wanted to underline that capitalism, along with those who promote it are not evil, whereas wealth is engaged morally.

### **2.3 "A Manchester Strike": Class Conflict, and Social Justice**

*Have not masters oppressed their men  
from the beginning of the world?<sup>30</sup>*

We have seen that the results of labourers' dissatisfaction is hinted at in "The Hill and the Valley", nevertheless, the deep exploration of causes and consequences of factory controversies is shown in the third volume of the series containing "A Manchester Strike". Martineau's concern for strikes was already displayed in earlier works such as "The Rioters" (1827) and "The Turn-out" (1829), when she was not acquainted with the science of political economy yet.<sup>31</sup> When she decided to include the topic again in the

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<sup>28</sup> See Vint, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup>H. Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy Vol. 3*, London: Charles Fox 1832, p.32. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in brackets as (MS: page number).

<sup>31</sup> See Vint, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

*Illustrations*, she exploited the existing Manchester issue, where the textile industry was flourishing. As she explained in her *Autobiography*, she was in direct contact with Manchester workers who even provided her with documents and information associated with their "controversies about Machinery and Wages". (A1: 215)<sup>32</sup> Even though Martineau was supposed to deal with working classes' troubles, the tale "The Hill and the Valley" clearly takes the factory owners' defense, stressing the pointlessness of strikes and revolts.

The turmoil spreading among the factory workers of Medlock is due to the reduction of wages. The event is perceived by them as an abuse of authority and mistreatment by part of their masters; the attack towards the employers is based on the assumption that their wealth grows at the expenses of the employees, since they enjoy the luxuries of life "paid for with the poor man's crust." (MS: 33) The heart of the matter seems to be that workers do not understand variations in their wages depend on population growth rather than on business administration; in the chapter "A Public Meeting" Mr. Wentworth speaks on behalf of his firm explaining patiently that wages vary according to the proportion of labour and labourers:

[w]here there are permanently fewer work-men than are wanted the men hold the power. Where there is the exact number that is wanted, the power is equal, and the contest fair. Where there are more than are wanted, even to the extent of three unemployed to a hundred, the power is in the masters' hands, and strikes must fail. (MS: 57-58)

Here Martineau wants to convey notions on wage-fund theory according to which wages depend not only on capital but also on labour force available.<sup>33</sup> More than actual economists, the author employs the classical wage doctrine to persuade her readers that variations in their wages are to be attributed to the population itself, and that the actions taken by their masters are the consequence of a just application of the 'laws' of

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<sup>32</sup> However, in "Miss Martineau's Manchester Strike", *Spectator*, (4 August 1832), pp. 17-19, it is claimed: "[t]he authoress thinks it necessary to announce, that she has no acquaintance with any one firm, master or workman in Manchester", p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> See *Encyclopedia Britannica* <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/633878/wage-theory> (accessed on October 2013).

political economy.<sup>34</sup>

The possibility to have a dialogue between employers and employees is represented through the character of Allen, a sensible labourer who is involuntarily elected the workers' spokesperson. The man claims for inalienable rights since every worker should have a "comfortable subsistence in return for his full and efficient labour" and reminds that wages should be a right and not a 'gift' to be asked. (MS: 51; 34) Yet, Mr. Wentworth finds fault with Allen's statement as he adds that the request is a legitimate one, provided that it does not go "beyond his reach"; the point here is that Martineau wants the labourers to feel responsible for their retribution, because if it is true that masters administrate the capital, it is on the labourers themselves that the income depends. (MS: 52)

Harriet Martineau clearly champions manufactures underlining the inevitability of wages' reduction. If we look at *The Factory Controversies* (1855) we can notice Martineau's criticism towards the actions taken by factory inspectors, stressing that the new laws regulating the factories were demanding and unjust towards manufacturers. The author seemed to be blind in front of all the injustices and hard conditions under which factory workers performed their duty every day; in the chapter "Misstatements of Household Words" she attacked Dickens's urging for workers uprising, as she stressed employers' benevolence and their acting in good faith. The author remarked that, in several occasions, employers educated and fed their labourers, when it was not required by the Factory Law yet.<sup>35</sup>

Considering the sympathy Martineau feels for manufacturers it is no surprise that "A Manchester Strike" slightly victimizes them, where they are portrayed as handling a lot of pressure:

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<sup>34</sup> See Vint, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 12.

<sup>35</sup> H. Martineau, *The Factory Controversy: A Warning Against Meddling Legislation*, Manchester: A. Ireland and Co., 1855, p. 45.

[i]n addition to all the sad stories of distress which they must hear, and the discontent which they must witness, there was a perpetual dread of the fund appearing to decline, and of the confidence of the people being therefore shaken. (MS: 85)

In any piece of writing concerning factory work, before and after the publication of *Illustrations of Political Economy*, Harriet Martineau portrayed manufacturers as caring for their employees. Fielding and Smith remind us that the author wrote several articles for *Household Words* on the subject, for instance "The Miller and His Men"<sup>36</sup> and "The Wonders of Nails and Screws";<sup>37</sup> the journalistic approach to the subject brought her to visit various manufactures, and despite the chance to witness frequently the noxiousness of working places, she preferred to bypass or embellish the facts she reported in her articles. In this manner, manufacturers' negligence was erased and the state of factories was excused because, however that might have been, it was still a step forward.<sup>38</sup> The observations recorded in *The Factory Controversy* debouch Martineau's mindset, since she underlines that workers should look after themselves since "if the charge is thrown upon the employers of industry, they will retire from occupations so intolerably burdensome."<sup>39</sup> The point here is the defense of the masters, urging the labourers to work properly and not to make unnecessary complaints; it is very clear from the message she conveys, that the author takes an anti-unionist stance; Fielding and Smith infer in this regard that, being Martineau the daughter of a failed manufacturer, she was inclined to see the matter from the 'master' perspective, thus explaining her representation of workers as "difficult children".<sup>40</sup>

The employees of Medlock's mill-trade are depicted with different dispositions,

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<sup>36</sup> H. Martineau, "The Miller and His Men", *Household Words*, Vol. 4, No. 96, (January 24, 1852), pp. 415-420.

<sup>37</sup> H. Martineau "The Wonders of Nails and Screws", *Household Words*, Vol. 4, No. 84 (November 1, 1851) pp. 138-142.

<sup>38</sup> K. J. Fielding and A. Smith, "Hard Times and the Factory Controversy: Dickens vs. Harriet Martineau" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 404-427, (Mar. 1970), pp. 402; 422. See also Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>39</sup> Martineau, *The Factory Controversy, cit.*, p.46.

<sup>40</sup> Fielding and Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

while some of them think that a strike would be dangerous, others think it necessary. Notwithstanding the discordance, they all agree on the fact that the situation must be changed; the workman community is worried about their economic future and the beginning of a strike seems to be inevitable since "[c]ombinations are necessary...when one set of men is opposed to another, as we are to our masters." (MS: 46) Allen's views are fairly moderate and his character mild, despite his efforts to restrain the strike, he involuntarily becomes its leading figure; even though he thinks "there could be few worse evils than a strike" he feels, like his companions, the need to support their rights. (MS: 11)<sup>41</sup> The structure of the tale is based on a series of debates between men and masters, whereas the former threat to go on strike the latter employ misleading speeches maintaining that if the population decreases offspring the problem will be contained. (MS: 58) According to Martineau, the crucial point of the dispute is the fact that a strike could be worse than useless, since the breaking of the production cycle would lower the capital, damaging both employers and employees.<sup>42</sup>

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Harriet Martineau contributed to *Household Word* with several articles on factory and machinery. It was Dickens himself who asked her to collaborate with the magazine, nevertheless, their disagreement on several aspects, led them to take divergent paths.<sup>43</sup> Among the reasons Martineau claims to have affected her opinion there were "Mr. Dickens's treatment in his Magazine of the Preston Strike, then existing, and of the Factory and Wages controversy, in his tale of *Hard Times*." (A2: 419) It is understandable that Dickens, having experienced factory life, could not share Martineau's beliefs; indeed he criticized Martineau for her being a "wrong-headed woman" since she was convinced it was factory owners who should

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<sup>41</sup> See Vint, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> For a full exploration of the issue see Fielding and Smith, *op. cit.*, (notably p. 415).

oppose to interfering laws, and strikes should be avoided in any circumstance.<sup>44</sup> The belief that "feeling and sentiment" should lead human relations, including in factories, further prove the sympathetic attitude Dickens had towards laborers, an opinion that in the course of time, precluded the possibility of a fair intellectual relationship between the two writers.<sup>45</sup> However, something Martineau and Dickens share is still present in "A Manchester Strike" whereas a particular attention is put in the description of poorness. A scene from the opening chapter, where Allen and his daughter are coming home from the factory, reveals the humbleness of the slums in the industrialized town:

[b]arefooted children were scampering up and down these stairs at play; girls nursing babies sat at various elevations, and seemed in danger of being kicked down as often as a drunken man or an angry woman should want to pass; a thing which frequently happened. (MS: 3-4)

The significance of this characterization becomes all the more clear if we consider that Harriet Martineau puts all her efforts in the positive representation of industrialization; however, she does not hide the misery it invariably entailed. Similar realistic images in other tales were appreciated by her readers, to the extent that a reviewer for the *Spectator* defined her "the real painter of the poor."<sup>46</sup>

When the revolts are put to an end, fewer posts are left for workers and Allen has no chances having been involved at the forefronts in the riots. The poverty that runs throughout the tale is emphasized in its sad conclusion as we see Allen forced to sweep the streets for a living, humiliated by being "pointed out to strangers as the leader of an unsuccessful strike." (MS: 133) Critics have noticed an ambivalence in the representation of class conflict, which seems impending and unnecessary at the same time.<sup>47</sup> Martineau concludes the tale with a series of rhetorical questions and the reader

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 413; Martineau, *The Factory Controversy*, *cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> See Dickens quoted in Fielding and Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 416, "into the relations between employers and employed, as into all the relations of this life, there must enter something of feeling and sentiment; something of mutual explanation, forbearance and consideration; [...] otherwise those relations are wrong and rotten at the core and will never bear sound fruit."

<sup>46</sup> Article quoted in Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p. 393.

is left to reflect; if we compare this tale with "Life in the Wilds" and "The Hill and the Valley" we can notice that less space is given to scenery and the description of characters. This could be ascribed to the author's need to amplify conversations that were supposed to explore and explain an issue she held dear and wanted to depict meticulously.

As far as the reception of the tale is concerned it could be inferred that it was fairly positive if we consider some journal reviews as well as what the author herself reports in her *Autobiography*.<sup>48</sup> Martineau indeed was surprised to hear that Manchester labourers recognized their hero in the character of Allen, and she was further pleased "to find that [her] doctrine was well received, and [...] cordially agreed in...by the leaders of the genuine Manchester operatives." (A1: 216)

After the collaboration with *Household Words* Martineau decided to continue to treat the topics of labour and manufactures but her stated purpose was to give a more realistic and clear description of factories. (A2: 385-386) However, despite her good intents, what seems to be missing in her articles is a truthful description; as Fielding and Smith report, factories are not vividly sketched in her latter writings, where her tendency to picture progress and not the "unpleasantness" of the environment is still dominating.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See *Spectator*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>49</sup> Fielding and Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 418

## 2.4 Berkeley The Banker: The Ethics of The Gold Standard

"[M]y object is less to offer my opinion on the temporary questions in political economy which are now occupying the public mind, than, [...] to furnish others with the requisites to an opinion".<sup>50</sup>

Martineau introduced in this way the tale that would become a representative work of one of the most challenging periods for British economy. Here, more than in other tales, the author wanted to portray a reality rather than teaching specific principles. Martineau herself, noticing the attention her tale attracted, assumed that the success of "Berkeley the Banker" (1833) was due to its combining fiction with the Financial Crisis of 1825-1826. The story was introduced as a faithful account of what appended to the English Banking System, mingled with other personal events; (A1: 142) the tale indeed openly tackles issues that are dear to Miss Martineau, as she reports, the account was her "own family history of four years before", when her family business failed. (A1: 239)

The tale analysed here explores the effects the Bank Restriction period has on the economy of a small town named Haleham, where the settlement of the Cavendish family implies the opening of a competition for Mr. Berkely, the former banker of the city. The newcomers arouse the curiosity of the community since the new bank is supposed to be "supported by some very rich people at a distance, who were glad to be sleeping partners in so fine a concern as this must be". (BB1: 8) The establishment of the bank elicits positive reactions in Haleham, since the new activity is recognized as a way to increase the town's wealth at a time when banking was supposed to be "the best business of any". (BB1: 8) The plot's historical connotation has to do with the period in which the Bank of England suspended cash payments (1797-1815) because of the reduction of gold reserves. At that time, small country banks made their fortune

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<sup>50</sup> H. Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy Vol. 5*, London: Charles Fox, 1833, Preface i. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in brackets as (BB1: page number) for "Berkeley the Banker Part 1" and (BB2: page number) for "Berkeley the Banker Part 2".

providing the population with their low value notes; the reintroduction of paper currency at the beginning of the 19th century, spurred the population to invest on several businesses, while the need to create stability in the financial system helped the banks to regain their autonomy.<sup>51</sup> Alexander J. Dick in his "On the Financial Crisis, 1825-26" investigates causes and effects of the bank run that followed the period of apparent wealth; he argues that the crisis was nourished by a "frenzy of speculative investment" together with the unregulated issuing of paper notes.<sup>52</sup> The government tried to prevent the increase of national debt and the spread of forgery, limiting the issuing of paper currency and withdrawing part of the banknotes; however, the huge disposition of circulating money gradually led commodities to become expensive, as it is explained in the tale:<sup>53</sup>

money was of course very cheap; that is, commodities were very dear. As gold money was prevented by law from becoming cheap, like paper money, people very naturally hoarded it, or changed it away foreign countries, where commodities were not dear, as in England. (BB1: 38)

As a consequence, the sudden stop of issuing and the withdrawal of banknotes lead to the collapse of the market causing huge losses for investors.<sup>54</sup>

The results of bank restriction can be interpreted considering not only the tale, but also Martineau's personal account of the failure of family business. In her *Autobiography* she explains the causes of her father's ruin, notably the quick depreciation of his manufactures due to the "heavy inventory which dropped to about half its value."<sup>55</sup> Martineau reports that the financial crisis further injured the family business and "when the banks were crashing down all over England, we began to

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<sup>51</sup> A. Van, "Realism, Speculation, and the Gold Standard in Harriet Martineau's 'Illustrations of Political Economy'", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 115-129, (2006), p. 121. A. J. Dick, "On the Financial Crisis, 1825-26.", *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. Ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net. p. 2. [http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps\\_articles=alexander-j-dick-on-the-financial-crisis-1825-26](http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=alexander-j-dick-on-the-financial-crisis-1825-26) (accessed on October 2013).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>55</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

contemplate absolute ruin”, Thomas fell into debt and never restored his activity and health, as he died in 1826 leaving a precarious activity in will. (A1: 129) Despite the burden her father disposed, Martineau considers it right to defend him who has "never speculated"; thus, she sees the hard condition her family had to endure not as the consequence of bad administration but rather the result of a national plague. (A1: 129)<sup>56</sup>

Manufactures' perspective is carefully exposed in the tale as the results of the financial crisis are shown, underlining how they "had bought their raw material dear, and now had to sell it, in its manufactured state, cheap."(BB2: 26) The explanation of what happened to the Martineaus' business is already indirectly accounted in the fourth chapter "Wine and Wisdom", which considers commodities' worth; as Mr. Berkeley explains, the "lessening of the value of money" is inevitable when its amount is superior to the actual quantity of gold it is supposed to represent. (BB1: 76) The principle expounded is interpreted by the banker's daughter who interprets the effects of overproduction in a way that very much resembles Martineau's case. The girl wonders whether the event could have been avoided, even suggesting the elimination of superabundance to reestablish an equilibrium. As a matter of fact, she asks if there existed "a law to prevent an article which is particularly plentiful being cheap" and continues arguing that "the shortest and surest way for the lawmakers is to destroy the superabundance, and thus put cheapness out of the question." (BB1: 76-77)

The naivety with which the young girl talks about sensitive matters is counterbalanced by insightful observations on the proportion between gold, money, and commodities in chapter eight, "Market Day". Here Melea accuses the government of underrating the essential nature of such proportion; on the other hand, her father explains her that similar mistakes already threatened economic stability in other

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<sup>56</sup> A detailed description of Norwich's economy and the course of Martineau's family activity is provided in Webb, *op. cit.*, chapter II "Nowrich: A Manufacturer Daughter" pp. 43-64 (notably pp. 58-62).

countries, notably France. (BB1: 162) Martineau's disgrace and Haleham's are intertwined in the story, since the measures taken by the government in order to avoid the crash is ruinous for the majority of the population; indeed, after the retreat of a huge quantity of paper currency, the price rise leads to the growth of incomes and debts at the same time. As a result, the depreciation in the value of money creates frustrations for both government and population, where one complains for reduction, the other for the increase of prices; therefore, the result is worse than expected as "the injury outweighed the advantage". (BB2: 40; 26)

The ambivalent figure of the banker is introduced in the tale as his different functions and attitudes are portrayed through the characters of Berkeley and Cavendish. The duty of the "dealer in capital" as mediating between creditor and debtor is made clear from the beginning of the story; being useful to reconcile supply and demand bankers are represented positively by Martineau for their putting "dead capital in motion" and helping economy in general. (BB: 13; 24)<sup>57</sup> However, the figure of Cavendish functions in the novel as the emblem of wrongness and wile; the man circulates a huge amount of his notes regardless of being able "to answer the demands they might bring upon him", that is to say, he does not have "capital of his own" to back them with. (BB1: 65) As Dick stresses in his essay, it was small bank owners like Cavendish who were pointed at by the Bank of England as "the real culprits" for the bank run; even though the question was grounded on general structural banking problems, local banks were blamed for their uncontrolled issuing that was rarely backed by concrete capital.<sup>58</sup> At that time England was supposed to be regulated by a gold standard, however, the gap existing between the value of money issued by the official Bank of England and that supplied by all the other banks, deeply disturbed the monetary

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<sup>57</sup> See O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

<sup>58</sup> Dick, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

system.<sup>59</sup> Uncontrolled issuing was detrimental to British economy, as paper currency "could circulate and multiply in a way gold cannot - without being bound by a referent."<sup>60</sup>

What Martineau brings to light in this tale is that, carelessness can affect the economy of a whole community;<sup>61</sup> as the tale itself reveals, "Cavendish had acted knavishly, and thus injured commercial credit." (BB: 24) When Cavendish's paper currency spreads in Haleham, money becomes an unreliable means of payment; this, in turn, leads to a backward economic state:

a limited traffic went on in the way of barter, which relieved a few of the most pressing wants of those who had entered the market as purchasers[...]. Seldom has traffic been conducted so languidly or so pettishly; and seldom have trifling bargains been concluded amidst so many tears. (BB: 157)

The temporary solution of barter is rendered negatively as it entails the absence of common measures of value with the result of debates and arguments.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the absence of a proper gold standard is portrayed in the tale as a breeding ground for forgery. This being the case, Hester Pardron considers her husband's criminal activity virtually justifiable since "[w]hat can look easier than to imitate such a note as this? The very sight of it is enough to tempt people to forge". (BB2: 53) Martineau's concern for the lack of a fixed economic unit of account is clearly epitomized in Van's article as she explains that "paper currency can never be as desirable as gold because it is merely a substitute and is easily substituted for."<sup>63</sup>

The story told here is a proof for what happens when the economy of a country operates without the necessary restrictions. Whoever might be ascribed the responsibility for the events that perturbed both fictional Haleham and actual England,

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<sup>59</sup> See Van, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>61</sup> See O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

<sup>62</sup> For an introduction to the functioning of barter exchanges see R. M. Starr "The Structure of Exchange in Barter and Monetary Economies", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (May, 1972), pp. 290-302.

<sup>63</sup> Van, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

it is clear for Martineau that the absence of control in issuing, together with the lack of collaboration between the banks, that kept "issuing paper to drive out gold", and the government, that supplied more money with the result of depreciating "the value of that which the banks put out", are crucial for the monetary crash. (BB1: 76) Even recognizing the advantages that the diffusion of paper money entails, Harriet Martineau displays the dangers of its unregulated usage when the paper currency-gold relation is not fixed; as mentioned in the introduction to the analysis of "Berkeley the Banker", the aim of the tale is to explain a fact that could have been avoided. The population of Haleham is injured by Cavendish's bad notes and the unstable value of circulating money; the "precariousness of paper currency unbacked by the gold standard"<sup>64</sup> is a chief concern for Martineau, for this reason she explains through the character of Horace that the problem can be solved, provided that the Bank of England is replaced to its "state of responsibility". (BB2: 109)

By means of representing two banking outlooks (Cavendish's and Berkeley's) Martineau makes her reader ponder over the wrong and the right attitudes toward the market system. Despite the indicated dichotomy, Van notices that Cavendish's evil administration has a better result if compared with Berkeley's, since the former has the "greater ability to land on his feet".<sup>65</sup> The man indeed loses his face, not his wealth for he cunningly exploits all the opportunities to invest his finances; in addition, his versatile disposition permits him to move around the country looking for further dubious profits. The lack of integrity permits Cavendish to succeed since all his actions are not guided by a sense of morality but by eagerness for speculative investments; the results of his attitudes are described extensively in the tale, warning the population against thoughtlessness in economic actions. The concept expressed throughout "Berkeley the

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<sup>64</sup> Van, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Banker" is that even though financial power is in the hands of the upper classes, every citizen should take his decision morally.<sup>66</sup> According to Van, "[d]iscourses of ethical financial behaviors"<sup>67</sup> are the crucial point of the tale, as the defeated Berkeley, resembling Mr. Martineau, faces the failure preserving his dignity after years of "honorable toil". (BB2: 136)

Financial difficulties were for Harriet the "scope for action" she needed in order to start her career as a writer. (A1: 141) Thus, calamities like those who damaged Berkeley and Martineau do not preclude a happy ending as long as morality and initiative are involved. To put it in Lana Dalley's terms, "'Berkeley the Banker' implicitly challenges the dominant economic narratives that equate fiscal success with happiness, and bankruptcy with misery."<sup>68</sup>

## **2.5 "The Loom and The Lugger" and "Cinnamon and Pearls":**

### **A Campaign for Free Trade**

*Illustrations of Political Economy* could not come without exposing the advantages of free trade. Martineau treats the subject extensively in three different tales: "Sowers Not Reapers", "The Loom and the Lugger", and "Cinnamon and Pearls". The first two deal respectively with corn and silk trade while the latter explores the effects of a 'colony trade' not involving commerce with other nations except for the mother-country. Focusing on "The Loom and the Lugger" and "Cinnamon and Pearls" it is interesting to notice the turn taken by Harriet Martineau in creating compelling sceneries; the stories

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<sup>66</sup> See Van, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p.122.

<sup>68</sup> L. L. Dalley, "On Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy*, 1832-34", *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. Ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net. [http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps\\_articles=lana-l-dalley-on-martineaus-illustrations-of-political-economy-1832-34](http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=lana-l-dalley-on-martineaus-illustrations-of-political-economy-1832-34) (accessed on October 2013).

told are surprisingly adventurous especially if we consider the unadorned subject of political economy they contains. The narrative presents picturesque backdrops, involving murders, stealing, and curses; as the titles of the stories anticipate, Martineau treats free trade in two completely different contexts; however, in both cases the tales openly declare to be battles against the way in which the British government handled international trade.

### The Loom And The Lugger

*"You shall go in, and fortify  
yourself with some duty-paid  
brandy and untaxed water"<sup>69</sup>*

Harriet Martineau claimed to be an "illustrator of truth" in her Preface to the story. (LL1: vii) She felt that her duty was to present things as they really were, especially by exploring contexts that usually people could not get close to. This is the case with "The Loom and the Lugger", as the author accounted: "[w]hen I had to treat of Free Trade, I took advantage, of course, of the picturesque scenery and incidents connected with smuggling." (A1: 241) Martineau is particularly pleased to refer that she had the opportunity to witness smuggling traffic thanks to her connections at Beachy Head in Southern England; moreover, her visit to the Sussex Coast, explains why she managed to provide a vivid narrative on contraband even being a reality distant from her.<sup>70</sup> The conceivable story told in "The Loom and the Lugger" is a coloured portrayal of events resulting from the administration of an "unpatriotic government", since it is the main obstacle to the full functioning of silk manufacturing and foreign trade. (LL2: 14) The

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<sup>69</sup> H. Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy* Vol. 6, London: Charles Fox, 1833. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in brackets as (LL1: page number) for "The Loom and the Lugger Part 1" and (LL2: page number) for "The Loom and the Lugger Part 2".

<sup>70</sup> "A cousin told me that she was acquainted with a farmer's family living close by Beachy Head, and in the very midst of the haunts of the smugglers. [...] I went down, with a letter of introduction in my hand, to see and learn all I could in the course of a couple of days. [...] I then and there learned all that appears in "The Loom and the Lugger" about localities and the doings of smugglers." (A1: 241-243)

events in the story take place in two main locations: London and the Sussex coast; in the former place we see silk manufacturers striving for incomes due to the competitive prices of smuggled goods, while in the latter the dangerous lives of Coast Guards are portrayed. Here, more than in other stories, the author points the finger at the British Government, criticizing trade restrictions; the main point seems to be that England should favour its economic growth by opening the international silk trade, while its jurisdiction prevents it in order to protect local manufactures. Through the imposition of a high duty, the government attempted to inhibit the commerce with France, which was renowned for its high-quality silk; as a result, the activity was not prevented, but rather took the form of illegal trade.

One of the main interests of Martineau here, is the reflection upon "rational consumer[s] behaviour", since their reactions to restrictions are but a plausible consequence.<sup>71</sup> The controversies entailed in the long awaited liberalization of commerce are treated in the tale, displaying conflicting perspectives by means of different characters. The first scene of the tale presents us Mr. Culver, a London manufacturer who has always refused to get involved in smuggling. The gentleman is a committed supporter of local production and wishes for the consumers' preference of fair purchase:

[y]ear after year, since he had entered business, had he been flattered with hopes that permanent prosperity would come; that the ladies of England would continue to prize silk fabrics as the most beautiful material for dress; and would grow conscientious enough to refuse smuggled goods, when every conceivable variety could be had from the looms of their own country. (LL1: 1)

The same view is shared by Matilda, the young wife of the Lieutenant in charge of the Sussex area. When her sister-in-law Elizabeth is accused of possessing smuggled goods, she is extremely surprised to see her husband's bias in protecting his sister; the girl argues that people should benefit enough from local goods, for she declares: "I have had

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<sup>71</sup> O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

many a lecture against buying luxuries anywhere but at home; and really it seems a very small sacrifice to be content with home-made luxuries instead of foreign." (LL1: 59) On the other hand, the closure of the English market is described in the tale as giving rise to a "state of apathy" as the confrontation with French silk could lead to advancement in production or at least to give way to better foreign products. (LL1: 57) Moreover, it is apparent that "the prohibiting a commodity does not take away the taste for it" and high duties spurs people to buy from contraband. (LL1: 116)

The tale suggests two obvious remedies for the practice of contraband: the lowering of duties and the interdiction of smuggling. The crucial point seems to be that the reduction of taxes could favour the demand of the item smuggled until then, and make it available to the majority of people. (LL1: 110) This last remark is extremely important if we consider it in the light of Martineau's addressee; it is clear that consumers of luxuries like silk cannot be found among the lower classes, however, Martineau cares about their introduction to the smuggling subject and winks at their desires for gratification. In chapter three "Chance Costumers", the conversation between Mr. Culver and his nurse reveals that the whole society would benefit from the opening of the market, since commodities' cheapness would render them accessible even to servants. Mr. Culver is favourable to the diffusion of luxuries as he maintains:

I should like to see [...] the poorest of the poor, in possession of every thing that is useful and that gives pleasure. If there was enough for every body of all that is useful and beautiful, why should not every body have it? All would be the happier, would not they?. (LL2: 51)

The management of foreign trade and silk manufacturing control has been a subject matter for discussion since the second half of the 18th century; the occurrences in "The Loom and the Lugger" indeed spotlight the Spitalfields Acts, which were supposed to protect local production and help scooping foreign competition.<sup>72</sup> Mark W.

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<sup>72</sup> In M. W. Steinberg, "The Dialogue of Struggle: The Contest over Ideological Boundaries in the Case of London Silk Weavers in the Early Nineteenth Century", *Social Science History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 pp. 505-541

Steinberg provides an exhaustive description of the matter in his article on the case of London silk weavers as he explains that the focus of the acts were two: "the prohibition on foreign-wrought silks and the regulation of wages within the district."<sup>73</sup> The government was supposed to take a neutral position, working as an 'arbiter' in the protection of the common wealth; however, it failed to moderate the conflict.<sup>74</sup> As it is expressed in the tale by the French manufacturer M. Gaubion, the Government proves to be ineffective and he even considers it the instigator of the discord:

[t]he interference of government is either hurtful or useless. Foreign goods either are or are not cheaper than home-made goods. If they are cheaper, it is an injury to the buyer to oblige him to purchase at home. If they are not, there is no occasion to oblige him to purchase at home. He will do so by choice. (LL2: 90-91)

The general dissatisfaction is due to the government's implication, since the taxation on foreign goods corresponds to the filling of state coffers.<sup>75</sup> As reported in an article on the Spitafield case, the revocation of the Act is deeply wished by manufactures who have to keep up with fashion trends and need overseas supplies.<sup>76</sup> Mr. Culver is obviously speaking on behalf of manufacturers when he states that they do not want government's intromission in their business as he thinks it "has been so long killing us with kindness that I doubt whether we shall ever get over it." (LL1: 14)

On the other hand, weavers cling on their rights, and fear the competition once the market is opened again.<sup>77</sup> They are worried about possible wage's reduction due to

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(Winter, 1994), p. 517, it is reported that "[t]he Acts were passed to appease the weavers, who periodically engaged in a series of violent protests between 1765 and 1773 in response to trade depressions and competition from overseas goods."

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 517.

<sup>74</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 521.

<sup>75</sup> See (LL: 521-522): "Each new protection raises clamour for more; and some are left dissatisfied after all is done that can be done. It becomes a scramble which class can cost the country the most; how each article can be made dearest, and therefore how the people may be soonest impoverished [...] The business of government is to guard the freedom of commerce, and not to interfere with it. If they choose to show partiality and to meddle with affairs which they cannot properly control, they become answerable for the sum of disobedience which is sure to arise, and for all the mischiefs that follow in its train".

<sup>76</sup> J. H. Clapham, "The Spitalfields Acts, 1773-1824", *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 104, pp. 459-471, (December 1916), p. 463.

<sup>77</sup> See Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 515.

the higher quality of French manufactures; by contrast, such concern is condemned by Mr. Culver, as he thinks they should be happy to put themselves to test since "[t]here is no stimulus to improvement like fair competition." (LL1: 12) In the second part of the tale even the old weaver Mr. Short stops grumbling when he understands that his ominous predictions on the future of his employment are unfounded; (LL2: 2) manufacturers are prepared for the opening of the market and the government should do so too. A magistrate guesses that "the government sees now that the only way is to lower the duties down to the point which makes contraband trading a speculation not worth attempting." (LL1: 117)

The intriguing scenery of smuggling traffics is introduced in "The Loom and the Lugger" as nurse Nicholas's son is sent to work for the Preventive Service in the Sussex area. The boy proves to take his job seriously and it is precisely the "unflinching discharge of his duty" that leads him to death, for he is killed by a group of smugglers while guarding the coast. (LL1: 101) The narrator comments on the sad event pointing out that it results from the fact that "[m]en of the same country [...] had been made enemies by arbitrary laws". (LL1: 108) Moreover, the consequences of the government's restrictions are finally criticized by Matilda who supported them at the beginning of the story; she is deeply disturbed by the death of the young boy and blames the law for inducing honest men to sin as they are "corrupted by our restrictive laws" (LL1: 89). The young woman has completely changed her mind in the second part of the story for she sees the ambiguity of the law as "[the government] make a crimp, tempt a man into it, and punish him for it." (LL1: 112) The malfunctioning of the system is pointed out by both Mr. Culver and Matilda; the former thinks that the law on trade is bad for its being continually broken, the latter, instead, stresses that its ineffectiveness is proved by the

fact that the majority of people are damaged by it. (LL1: 13) Such legislation of partiality needs to be changed and people should ask for "freedom in the disposal of the fruits of their toil". (LL1: 110)

The chapter "Prospective Brotherhood" concludes the story with the outcomes of the struggle; the trade is opened again and, even though some weavers are unemployed because of the flooding of French products, the advantages seems to outweigh the damages. However,

[i]t could not be otherwise, an officer of the Customs declared, as the imports of raw and thrown silk were already nearly double what they had been in the busiest year under the old system, and as our exports of manufactured silks had increased 300 per cent, since the trade had been thrown open. (LL2: 135)

The historical event is confirmed by Steinberg's essay reporting that in May 1824 the law was withdrawn and the trade with overseas countries was opened again; however, it can be noticed a discrepancy if we read the essay carefully.<sup>78</sup> Martineau's ending is predictably positive stressing the increase of British exports, while the facts reported by Steinberg reveal a collapse of the manufacturing trade.<sup>79</sup>

Martineau's confidence in her theories occasionally could have prevented her from seeing objectively the lie of the land. Even if her intention was to show the benefit of free trade as maximizing "social welfare" the actual result is a campaign for the interests of the upper classes, as the liberalization of luxuries' trade cannot be considered otherwise.<sup>80</sup> The "struggle of hegemony on an ideological field" is thus between the government and those who have enough means to fight for their unnecessary purchases.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 526.

<sup>79</sup> See *Ivi.*: "Repeal precipitously realized the nightmare that the weavers had feared. The trade experienced both severe depression and the loss of most of the fancy goods trade. Piece rates dropped between 30% and 50% in many branches over the succeeding five years, and unemployment soared".

<sup>80</sup> O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

<sup>81</sup> Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 515.

## Cinnamon And Pearls

*When we find starving men in a paradise,  
our next business is to find out  
whose fault it is that they are starving.<sup>82</sup>*

The narrative of "Cinnamon and Pearls" serves to expound an anti-monopoly doctrine against the supremacy of the East India Company; once again Harriet Martineau wanted to criticize British economy as she saw the management of the relation with the colonies as unprofitable not only for the overexploited colonized subjects, but also for her country. The exotic setting was not chosen randomly; after having been informed of the great monopoly of the east India Company, Martineau opted for Ceylon as "[c]innamon was fragrant, and pearls pretty and cool". (A1: 245) As usual the writer wanted to build up the story on reliable advices, for this reason she availed herself of contacts with Sir Alexander Johnstone who had just terminated his office as Ceylon's governor, where "he had abolished Slavery, established Trial by Jury, and become more thoroughly acquainted with the Cingalese than perhaps any other man then in England." (A1: 245-246) This time, the depiction of colonies' struggle does not underline the teaching side of Harriet Martineau, rather her aversion to specific colonial attitudes. As Roberts reports, the tale has more to do with criticism rather than didacticism; no instructions nor rebukes are provided to the readers who are engaged by the misfortunes of poor Rayo, who suffers the abuses of the monopoly and eventually reacts taking a drastic solution to the problem.<sup>83</sup>

The Cingalese protagonist works for the English East-India Company as a pearl diver, an unprofitable job since locals have to "sell their wares at low fixed prices to

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<sup>82</sup> H. Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy* Vol. 7, London: Charles Fox, 1833. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in brackets as (CP: page number).

<sup>83</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

government agents."<sup>84</sup> The modest incomes, together with the contact with "tempting objects" often prompted natives to steal, as it happens to Rayo; the young man is induced to take a beautiful pearl, as he sees in it the opportunity to have a bright future with his fiancé Marana. (CP: 1) The easy way out seduces him and, after having pondered over his choice, he is further resolute to reappropriate of what the colonizers have taken away from him. The reliance on the righteousness of his deed is skillfully commented by the narrator who tells "a pearl as this was no more than Rayo believed the proper payment of his labour, considering that strangers carried away all the profit from the country people." (CP: 32) When Rayo is caught in the act by Father Anthony, a missionary in charge of the natives' spiritual guidance, he is threatened by the man to return the loot in order to avoid the curse which falls " upon those who steal [...] unless they restore"; (CP: 9) however, Rayo prefers to run away with his wife, an act which will bring about a series of unfortunate events. The couple moves to another area where cinnamon cultivation is supposed to be profitable; conversely, they find themselves into an even worse life condition. Rayo's great expectations prove to be misleading since cinnamon trade is under the strict control of the Company; the cultivation has been spread by the Company in such a way that locals do not have any prospect to live on other activities, nor are they allowed to handle the cinnamon grown in their private gardens. The greed of the Company is developed to the extent that they burn their products to keep the prices high. Reading an interesting article of the period on cinnamon trade, we discover that the attitude of the English company, however, is a mere continuation of preceding settlements since:

[The Dutch East-India Company] had passed the most severe enactments against any who rooted up a bush of cinnamon, even from his own ground, for all alike were decreed to be the property of the Government [...]. These enactments remained unrepealed when Ceylon became a British possession, and it was not until 1833 that any but Government were

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<sup>84</sup> O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

allowed to cut a single stick of cinnamon on their own property.<sup>85</sup>

Even though the Cingalese are supposed to be "the natural owners of the native wealth of their region" they are subjugated by restrictions of the British Empire which claims the control on the commerce of the two main resources of the Ceylon domain: pearls and cinnamon plantations. (CP: 21) The oppressed colonized endure unemployment and poverty as they are "too many for their food - too many for the labour". (CP: 80) The poor condition of the Cingalese is emphasized throughout the story, thus, at a first glance, Martineau is inspired by the sympathy towards them. Yet, the author reveals an underlying aim because freedom of commerce for the natives, and their consequent enrichment, corresponds to the increase of their purchasing power. Therefore, the emancipation of the colony becomes advantageous for England which gains a new customer and "instead of complaints on the one hand of expensive dependence, and murmurs about oppression on the other, there would be mutual congratulation for mutual aid." (CP: 22)<sup>86</sup> Martineau depicts the colonized as "poor customer[s] and an expensive dependency" (CP: 124), in addition she considers the disadvantages of the British Company's restricted market.<sup>87</sup> England in fact, aimed for elite customers in order to keep the prices high while the extension of supplies would be convenient for both colonizer and colonized as "their money would come round to

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<sup>85</sup> J. Capper, "The Cinnamon Trade of Ceylon, Its Progress and Present State", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 8, pp.368-380, (1846), p. 371.

<sup>86</sup> The advantages of freeing the colony is repeatedly emphasized throughout the story: "they would have a great deal of money wherewith to buy things which the government could sell much more profitable than pepper. "; (CP: 47) "If government would let the people freely sell cardamoms, government would have a people rich enough to pay more in taxes than government will ever make by selling cardamoms." (CP: 48) "If the control be continued too long, if the colony be not admitted to understand, and allowed to pursue its own interests, its interests must languish, and it will become a proportionate burden to the mother country. It will have only the wages of ill-paid labour, or the scanty profits of feeble speculation to exchange for the productions of the mother country, instead of a store of wealth gathered by commerce with the whole world." (CP: 90)

<sup>87</sup> The nature of the deal between the East-India Company and the English Government is explained as follows: "The English government lets the East India Company have all the cinnamon you see, on condition of the Company paying so much a-year. So the spice is carried away to be sold, instead of foreign nations being allowed to come here to buy; and none is left but that which the Company does not think it worth while to carry away". (CP: 48)

England at last". (CP: 51)

Martineau's inclination for national self-interest is partly counterbalanced by the character of Mr. Carr, an agent of the East India Company. The kindhearted man does not share the opportunism of the Honourable Company as he really cares for the Cingalese and thinks "the misery of the people may be the more quickly remedied." (CP: 85) The agent openly attacks the very system he belongs to, as he recognizes that "our colonies are too often used as a special instrument [...]to serve the selfish purposes of classes, or companies, or individuals." (CP: 92) To the suggestion that, when let free, the Cingalese would withdraw from the trade with England, he answers that it was a just right and, however, if it was in their interest they would continue it. (CP: 92) Thus, Mr. Carr looks favourably at the autonomy of the dominion, not precluding its opening of commerce.

Being deprived of their 'natural wealth', the population has to live in the squalid conditions of poverty caused by the intrusion of the Europeans in their territory. Predicaments challenge Rayo and Marana, who have to suffer from malnutrition and diseases; Rayo's loss of strength due to starvation precludes his ability to work and he ends up presenting the first symptoms of elephantiasis; Marana becomes ill too and, in a moment of despair and hunger, she sells her treasure, the pearl Rayo had stolen for her. The selling proves soon to be useless for "what was gold in a country where it could not be made to reproduce itself, or answer any purpose beyond delaying want for a time? ". (CP: 105) Rayo ascribes the responsibility for their miserable life to the Company and ruminates on colonial effects; the unsatisfied revenge which he nurses finally explodes as he sets fire to a cinnamon plantation in order to ruin the colonizers' business and chase them away. Rayo's action is quite risky, however Marana supports his choice as it seems to be the only solution to their problems and

[s]he would have rejoiced to see every twig in this vast garden consumed, if such destruction could avail to drive away the Honourable Company who, by right of purchase, interfered to limit the production, restrict the commerce, and therefore impoverish the condition of those

from whom they derived their wealth. If this Company could but be driven from its monopoly, so that every man might plant cinnamon in his garden, and sit under its shadow with none to make him afraid. (CP: 70)

The destruction of a large amount of the cultivation provokes the desired result of letting the English company to gradually withdraw. The Company's jurisdiction is then confined to its properties while the Ceylon government is finally let free to sell its cinnamon or to invest the soil in other ways.<sup>88</sup> The reconquest of the natives' ownership and autonomy follows then its natural course; Father Anthony even speculates on the bright future of their economy: since Ceylon is now open to the world trade, the demand will grow and permit them to live happily on their own resources. The Cingalese can now dispose of their land and, by implementing their rights, they will engage to generate a profit since "the rewards of industry are within reach." (CP: 115)

"Cinnamon and Pearls" presents some controversial issues that need to be discussed. Martineau is undoubtedly against the intrusive method the English Company adopted to settle in Ceylon and she criticizes its penalizing the Cingalese.<sup>89</sup> However, as we have seen in the analysis of "Life in the Wilds", she was in favour of colonization; and David confirms she felt it "essential for the expansion of British markets".<sup>90</sup> If we compare the first and the last tales that have been analyzed in this chapter, the difference in the perspective adopted becomes clearer. While the opening story, "Life in the Wilds" displayed the colonizers' perspective, in the eighteenth tale of the series, the author's concern is to explain the damages an exclusive relation with the mother country entails for a colony. Thus, the point of view is apparently different, nonetheless,

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<sup>88</sup> J. Capper, *op. cit.*, pp. 376-377, accounts: "in 1833 the monopoly received the first blow; the Ceylon Government received instructions to dispose of their gardens and of their stock of spice on hand in such a way as should appear most advantageous; the sale of the latter to take place in the island, so that the merchants at last derived some benefit from it. [...] A further concession was made at this time to persons having not more than fifty bushes or trees in their grounds, who were allowed to remove them and cultivate the land; of this permission great numbers availed themselves. [...] After 1833 Government, of course, ceased to cut from jungles or other than their own gardens."

<sup>89</sup> See O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 316, who states: "In this narrative, Martineau demonstrates the futility of colonial economic subjugation by a mother country."

<sup>90</sup> David, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

the author's frame of mind is still the same. Martineau's social position prevents her from taking a truly objective stance, as a result, the arrogant assumptions of those who embraced the civilizing mission is condensed in "Cinnamon and Pearls". Even though she sympathizes with the Cingalese, she preserves the gaze of a civilized person looking at a non-civilized (inferior) community; according to Harriet Martineau the natives would not only gather wealth if let free to commerce, but also reach a higher state of civilization. The contact with advanced European cultures is supposed to be enriching for the Ceylonese as "colonies are good things both for the natives and the settlers, while the one class *wants* to be civilized and the other to find a home of promise." (CP: 90, emphasis mine) The colonizers claim the right to decide their life style is the most appropriate and should be adopted by the ignorant natives who live in a primitive state. The education of the Ceylonese is supposed to prepare them for the imminent contact with the world; being instructed about the comforts and luxuries that can be obtained in life through hard work, they would develop the "perceptions of duty,—the new sense of obligation which it is the object of all plans of civilization to introduce." (CP: 22) Thus, the natives have to naturalize with European customs and traditions; for instance, they will need to trade with France since they "would carry away pearls, and leave silk dresses behind". (CP: 61) Furthermore, Martineau's putting middle-class ladies' needs for "more pearls" and the "poor people, who want employment, and food, and clothing" on the same level could sound decidedly insensitive towards the latter. (CP: 60)

However contradictory the work may sound, Martineau's good intentions cannot be denied. It is true that she writes with a slight sense of superiority, nonetheless, the author manages to insert subtle ironies addressed to her social rank in the tale. Mrs. Carr, the spoiled wife of the agent for the Company, is portrayed in her unconcealed idleness as she spends her days being fanned and served. (CP: 84) A striking evidence of

the inconsistencies of bourgeois preconceptions are displayed in the chapter "Maternal Economy"; when discussing with her husband and some friends, Mrs. Carr condemns the natives' life-style, even if she does not have any contact with them because of her 'indoor life'. The meaningful sentence "[t]he laziness of the people is really such as to make me wonder" followed by the lady's bidding " Alice, love, come and tie my sandal" epitomizes Martineau's criticism, as by means of this exceptionable character she seems to provide a parody of the stereotyped middle-class woman. (CP: 85-86) Another aspect worth considering for the defense of her work, is the opposition "Cinnamon and Pearls" met; indeed we should bear in mind that her fostering free trade in the colonies was the object of a controversy in England, and she had to treat the subject as carefully as possible. Harriet was confident in the reliability of the facts she reported in the story, for this reason she was particularly vexed by the publication of a book claiming its untruthfulness. Of course, the man who wrote against her story on colony trade was involved in the matter, as he turned out to be "an Englishman, interested in the monopoly". (A1: 247)

As in "The Loom and the Lugger" the account serves to explain the advantages of freedom of commerce. It could be argued that the tale on the Ceylon domain presents several incongruities, for all that, the work cannot be considered less worth or useful for the purpose Harriet Martineau had written it. Lesa Scholl provides an interpretation of Martineau's purpose of attempting at protecting vulnerable lands from the abuses of dominating countries; once again her nationalism comes out as "English imperialism has the potential to be moral, where the imperialism of others does not".<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Scholl, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

## Chapter 3 - Criticism and Reception of the Tales

### 3.1 Narrative Fiction in *Illustrations of Political Economy*

When *Illustrations of Political Economy* was published, fiction and political economy were considered incompatible for their being "distinct forms of knowledge".<sup>1</sup> Despite the shared assumption that science was not to be conveyed in a narrative form, Harriet Martineau was convinced that her stories would succeed for their capacity to involve the reader's imagination.<sup>2</sup> The portrayal of picturesque atmospheres and exotic settings were usually included with the purpose of contributing to the creation of a breeding ground for imaginative frames; however, it has been noticed that the fanciful side of the *Illustrations* tended to move to the background being overwhelmed as it was by the primary means of Martineau, to instruct and popularize on political economy. The contentiousness of such relation has been the cause of several debates; even if the use of fiction was generally accepted to popularize scientific theories, as the audience of science fiction had increased notably in the Victorian period, the attempt of a woman writer at promoting a not recognized science in a lengthy narrative work took the risk of becoming unpopular.

For Harriet Martineau, economic principles came in first place, as she declared, it was their disposition within the text that "supplied the action of the story". (A1: 194) In the Preface to the *Illustrations*, she claimed she did not intend to hide instruction behind a narrative tart up; rather, she wanted to exemplify economic principles and render their learning pleasant. Martineau regarded fiction as an "accessory" to the story that

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<sup>1</sup> Dalley, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Such preconception has been challenged in the 19th century, as the narrative form became generally accepted if functional to the effectiveness of the story in conveying scientific notions.

remained "subordinate" to the plot; even if she wanted to confine narrative to the margins of her work, the role it assumed in its being successful is undeniable. (A1: 194) Roberts and Courtemanche indeed claim that the intelligibility and enjoyableness of the *Illustrations* are due to the implication of fictional elements, since the engagement of the readers was clearly influenced by the presence of captivating stories which framed the lessons imparted.<sup>3</sup> According to Maria Weston Chapman, the *Illustrations* were primarily appreciated for their fictional character in America, as economic lessons were not needed in that country.<sup>4</sup>

Harriet Martineau admitted the importance of adapting economic truths to invented stories, therefore, her work was attempting to provide something more than sheer descriptions and notions. In order to convey moral guidance in social life, the characters involved symbolized different features of human nature; as a result, the tales provided a representation of recognizable models (either negative or positive) with which the readers could have had a confrontation.<sup>5</sup> Through the exhibition of the characters' behavior and their contribution to the turn taken by the story, the author planned to highlight the way in which plausible situations could be dealt with, applying lessons on political economy. The Victorian feminist Florence Fenwick Miller defined their delineation as one of the best parts of the *Illustrations* as she thought that their being "[c]learly individualized, consistently carried out, thinking, speaking, and acting in accordance with their nature" would ensure them a long-term presence in readers' mind.<sup>6</sup> Virtues and vices of the characters were represented with a specific purpose, to show the happy ending that awaited those who lived morally or, otherwise, to individuate "causes for the errors and evils of the minds" of characters making arguable

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<sup>3</sup> See Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 25; Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

<sup>4</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>6</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

choices.<sup>7</sup>

Science and fiction were not so commonly combined at Martineau's time and there must have been a reason for it. The writer maintained that the writing process of the *Illustrations* was like writing letters for her; however the work was not always so easy to write.<sup>8</sup> Subjects like banking challenged her capacity to combine political economy with fiction, as she reported in her *Autobiography*:

[i]n planning my next story, 'Berkeley the Banker,' I submitted myself to my reviewer's warning, and spared no pains in thoroughly incorporating the doctrine and the tale. [...] At the end of my plotting, I found that, after all, I had contrived little but relationships, and that I must trust to the uprising of new involutions in the course of my narrative. (A1: 237-238)

Simon Dentith indeed confirms that classical political economy was usually ill-suited for "practical ideological purposes"; economic theories were then supposedly incompatible with fiction, yet, Martineau's expression of the science in a tangible manner permitted her to glean an "immediate narrative source" from it.<sup>9</sup>

When Harriet Martineau undertook the project of *Illustrations of Political Economy* she engaged in a lengthy fictional experiment for the first time. Thanks to the monthly issuing of her work she had a feedback on her stories as soon as they appeared, so that she had the opportunity to see how her work was interpreted, and received valuable suggestions for topics and settings to use in the following numbers. As a matter of fact, we can see an advancement from the first to the last tales, since the depiction of characters and environments became more accurate. Even if Martineau believed that "creating a plot is a task above human faculties" she managed to create valid structures for her tales availing herself of external inputs together with all the imaginative faculties she disposed. (A1: 238)

In the introduction to this chapter I have already mentioned that W. J. Fox, Martineau's editor, initially opposed himself to the use of the narrative form for the

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<sup>7</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> See Dentith, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

*Illustrations*. In this regard, Fox was influenced by James Mill who claimed that political economy should not be conveyed in fiction and therefore thought her work "could not possibly succeed". (A1: 169) Even if the economist later retracted his position, the significance of his opinion still remains, and might have influenced Martineau's keeping the narration subdued to the principles she conveyed. The co-existence of economy and engaging narrative indeed was difficult for Harriet Martineau to obtain; as several critics have suggested, when she focused more on the principles she wanted to expose, her narrative tended to mislay their effectiveness. Even Mrs. Fenwick Miller, who truly appreciated Martineau's work, admitted that the extensive use of economic conversations made the tales lose their fictional appeal. The journalist added that such a mechanism was inevitable as Martineau "was compelled to select scenes from common life, and to eschew the striking and the unusual."<sup>10</sup> Thus, a compromise was essential for the full functioning of the stories and whether Martineau managed to balance fiction and political economy was frequently a matter of debate for critics.

A crucial element in the criticism of the stories' colorlessness has been ascribed to the depiction of the characters, notably their conversations. Martineau's biographer R. K. Webb, even if praising the didacticism in her tales, defines her characters "wooden" and their emotions "synthetic".<sup>11</sup> The stories opened with well-turned descriptions of environment and characters that provided the reader with vivid images; nevertheless, the progression of the plot usually coincided with the thickening of the economic plotting. The concluding chapters resulted inevitably tedious for the intrusion of economic-driven dialogues. Courtemanche notices that the dialogues' irregular style together with a "clipped and closed narrative shape" made them lose persuasiveness;<sup>12</sup> as for Dentith, he argues that the abuse of economic dialogues rendered the tales'

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<sup>10</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>11</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>12</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, pp. 387; 392.

principles "undigested".<sup>13</sup> The sharpest criticism directed to Martineau's ability as a storyteller comes from Deirdre David who defines the stories generally "heavy going":

[c]haracters speak like the embodiment of stiff Principles that they are, the creation of settings is toilsomely mechanical, and even without an awareness of Martineau's method of composition, the reader cannot miss the fitting of doctrinal pieces into a prearranged ideological outline, and must sense that disruptive spontaneity is being banished from the narrative.<sup>14</sup>

Apparently the fictional force of the tales gets lost in the principles they exemplify; as a result, the tales become "plain and unadorned" and are reduced to an informative piece of work.<sup>15</sup> With reference to the character's discourses it could be added that they are frequently farfetched. It is indeed highly unlikely that farmers and factory workers have a dialectic on complex subjects such as wage fund or the gold standard, and it surprises that Martineau employs relatively the same lexical level when narrator, upper and lower classes' characters speak. As a result, humble characters' speeches might sound eccentric and unnatural since they are not supposed to bear conversations with a specialized language.

It has been noticed that the rejection of the combination of political economy and fiction was primarily caused by the subordination of the latter to a "predetermined set of morals".<sup>16</sup> The outstanding contribution to such criticism might have derived from the presence of the 'Summary of Principles', which corresponded to the basic passage for the draft of the *Illustrations*.<sup>17</sup> The component that was important to Martineau in her creation of the plot is, at much the same time, the factor that prejudiced the success of the fictional work for the critics.<sup>18</sup>

Even if the results of the experiment are questionable, the writer managed to

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<sup>13</sup> Dentith, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>14</sup> David, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>17</sup> See above the section "1.11 Method of Composition".

<sup>18</sup> See Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 16. The critic comments on Linda Peterson's view on the 'Summary of Principles' as follows: "For Peterson, these summaries mean that theoretical texts 'control and master Martineau's imaginative work'."

prove that scientific subjects can be popularized by fiction. It is true that her characters tended to speak unnaturally, however, Roberts reminds us that it was the expression of how the subject was treated at her time by economists.<sup>19</sup> Simplification and dramatization were crucial concerns for Harriet Martineau, who wanted to expose the doctrines of political economy to her readers.<sup>20</sup> Fiction was considered as inappropriate for certain kinds of discourses, despite the doubts of her contemporaries on its combination with economy, she gained respect as a popularizer and as a writer in general, for she managed to provide the population with an opinion thanks to her narratives. While turning "narrative pleasure to the service of economic ideology" Martineau managed to include it in an accessible literary style, creating a work of fiction which exhaustively treated the 'moral science'.<sup>21</sup>

### 3.2 Political Economy and Realism

While writing fiction, Martineau never wanted to indulge in reveries as she firmly believed that realistic representation was not only the best literary genre, but also particularly suitable for political economy.<sup>22</sup> Such reliance on authenticity explains her interest in collecting documents and commentaries for her tales; together with personal researches and family experiences, they constituted the starting point for the draft of each tale.<sup>23</sup> As Martineau plainly explained in her *Autobiography*, the functioning of a story derived from its relation with reality rather than from the plot's charm in itself:

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<sup>19</sup> See *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>20</sup> See *Ivi.*

<sup>21</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p.403.

<sup>22</sup> Such rejection of fiction as mere diversion was confirmed by an interesting statement in Martineau's *Autobiography* where she declared: "I have a profound contempt of myself as a writer of fiction, and the strongest disinclination to attempt that order of writing." (A2: 419)

<sup>23</sup> See Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 8. In addition, Martineau explained in her *Autobiography* that she could not rely exclusively on her mediocre capacity to create fiction and admitted: "my only resource therefore was taking suggestion from facts, witnessed by myself or in any way I could." (A1: 239)

[t]he only thing to be done, therefore, is to derive the plot from actual life, where the work is achieved for us: and, accordingly, it seems that every perfect plot in fiction is taken bodily from real life." (A1: 238)

In the Preface to the *Illustrations* the writer defended her realistic fiction for it was the "most faithful and the most complete" means of delivering economic notions. (PEP: xiii) She believed that the educational purpose campaigned was in harmony with realism; for this reason Cooper and Murphy endorse the work as they recognized that Martineau's realism was not to be seen as a sheer explanatory genre but conducive to the setting of moral standards, especially for the lower classes.<sup>24</sup> This idea is definitely consistent with Courtemanche's observation that Martineau's teachings shared an "intellectual project" with realism; the critic maintains that the actual ordinary experiences presented in the tales puts the readers into contact with the world of political economy in the same way as realism presents everyday plain activities and experiences to express wider social contexts.<sup>25</sup> To put it in other terms, political economy is equated with realism for their depiction of a specific situation to represent a general reality.<sup>26</sup> Another aspect worth considering in the analysis of the relation between realism and *Illustrations of Political Economy* is the educational purpose they share; in this regard, Annette Van observes that realistic texts are concerned with the exemplification of theoretical principles rather than providing an absolutely mimetic representation. Similarly, the tales present themselves as an *interpretation* of truth, rather than as mere factual reports.<sup>27</sup> It is clear thus that Martineau's work shared the "textual transparency" of realistic literature; allowing the reader to identify with the story told, the learning process was rendered effective.<sup>28</sup>

Martineau's realistic references in the work must be related to the role the

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<sup>24</sup> Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

<sup>26</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>27</sup> Van, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>28</sup> See Van, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

literary movement assumed in the second half of the 19th century as opposed to earlier romantic idealism. Martineau's use of the realist set of values can be seen as a defense of the blossoming genre as she was a firm believer in an unconcealed type of teaching through the direct exposure of the principles. However, she did not want the *Illustrations* to be received as pure didacticism, rather she aimed at keeping entertainment and education at balance, thanks to a realistic representation. Far from sentimentalism and adornments, realism rendered the work "organic and whole"; a reliable means to foster an exchange between the reader/learner and the text thanks to the reciprocal nature of "the representation and the real".<sup>29</sup>

In a letter to William Tait Harriet Martineau declared that the depiction of the "moral character of poor" was one of the main ambitions of her series.<sup>30</sup> Critics recognized that, despite the results, her original intent was to provide an objective picture of the lower classes from a bourgeois perspective, while answering to educational demands.<sup>31</sup> As far as humbleness' depiction is concerned it must be mentioned that Martineau shared Dickens's interest in prosaic life conditions that were to be dignified by literature.<sup>32</sup> In this regard, Courtemanche points out that such exhibition provided a breaking point with previous works on political economy, as the attention was shifted to the episodes depicted rather than on the notions explained.<sup>33</sup> Though offering an original variant of literature on political economy, Dickens and Martineau's realistic rendering has been questioned. In the preceding section "3.1 Narrative Fiction in *Illustrations of Political Economy*" I have reported the criticism on

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 119.

<sup>30</sup> Sanders, *Harriet Martineau - Selected Letters, cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> See Cooper and Murphy, *op.cit.*, p. 3; and Roberts, *op. cit.*, p.18.

<sup>32</sup> Martineau justly grasped that contemporary readers used to prefer highly fictional works, however, she might have been wrong in including Dickens's novels among them when she stated: "[p]eople liked high life in novels, and low life, and ancient life ; and life of any rank presented by Dickens, in his peculiar artistic light, which is very unlike the broad daylight of actual existence, English or other: but it was not supposed that they would bear a presentment of the familiar life of every day." (A2: 115)

<sup>33</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

the characters' conversations in the tales, which were regarded as lacking credibility.<sup>34</sup> Even if Dickens is considered one of the greatest novelist of the Victorian period, it can be argued that, at times, his joining the noble cause of social improvement hindered a realistic representation in the conversations between lower classes' characters. Monroe Engle in his essay "Dickens and Art" accounts that the writer complained with his collaborators in *Household Words*, when their uneducated characters spoke incorrectly since he thought writers should elevate the language, thus leaving realistic representation aside.<sup>35</sup> The two writers, in a sense, tried to seek a compromise between a faithful depiction of reality and their inclination to encourage education in the form of linguistic acquisition. Both had to defend their objective fiction: in her Preface Martineau explained that realistic narrative was the most suitable for economic subjects, while Dickens believed that the representation of poorness and degradation were to be intended as a means to prevent them.<sup>36</sup> Even though Martineau and Dickens's ideas on several subjects differed greatly, they both cherished the representation of people with their problems, and their challenges; the idea that literature should have always a purpose further unites them and also explains their collaboration in *Household Words*.<sup>37</sup> Courtemanche, analyzing the affinities of Martineau and Dickens's purposes, claims that they never wanted to label their works as 'didactic fiction', even if their stories were undoubtedly intended to teach something.<sup>38</sup> Such tendency was frequent in Victorian publications, however, substantial difference can be noticed in the result of Dickens's

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<sup>34</sup> Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, p.13, report that *The New Monthly Magazine* and *Literary Journal* accused Martineau of contravening "the cardinal rule of fiction" with her conversations. See also Van, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>35</sup> M. Engel, "Dickens on Art", *Modern Philology*, Vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 25-38, (August, 1955), p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p. 385. In addition, *Ibid.*, p. 387 discredits Dickens's and Martineau's realism since their educational purpose was too strong; thus their representation was adapted to their lessons: "[n]either Martineau's nor Dickens's work can easily be described as realist—their characters and situations are too obviously didactically overdetermined—but they both insist that their novels depict the reality of social relations."

and Martineau's combination of political economy and fiction; while Martineau's work is admittedly subjugated to the schooling on political economy, Dickens's realism puts fiction into the foreground while the reader is left to draw its conclusion without any help by summaries of principles or rebukes offered by unconvincing characters.<sup>39</sup>

Cooper and Murphy notice that the problems of coexistence were common when literary experiments as the *Illustrations* were attempted.<sup>40</sup> The risk of merging fiction and science to create a realist work was already considered by Martineau's precursor Jane Marcet who stated in the Preface to her *Conversations on Political Economy* that she knew her dialogues could sound irregular however they "gave her an opportunity of introducing objections, and placing in various points of view questions and answers as they had actually occurred to her own mind".<sup>41</sup> Thus, Marcet, like Martineau, had to manipulate the truthfulness in her stories in favour of education.

A critical point in the analysis of the relation between realism and the *Illustrations* is the spirit with which social issues were treated. It is true that Martineau wanted to offer her readers a view of the lower classes and help them in shaping their lives according to moral choices. Despite the philanthropic side of her work, it is evident that the reality she exposes is put at the service of the abstract laws that motivates her work.<sup>42</sup> In order to fully understand the contrariety of realist tales on scientific subjects with an educational purpose it is crucial to consider Courtemanche rhetorical question: "how are we to read a novel that has a law, and not a human being, as its hero?".<sup>43</sup> The answer could be left open to interpretation as the tales presents multilayered meanings; indeed, the reading audience of the *Illustrations* was heterogeneous and the reception of

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385. For an further analysis of the relationship between Harriet Martineau and Charles Dickens see K. Fielding, "'Likeness in Unlikeness': Dickens and Harriet Martineau", *Martineau Society Newsletter*, No. 12 (December 1999), pp. 4-10.

<sup>40</sup> Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Marcet, *op. cit.*, p. vi.

<sup>42</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

<sup>43</sup> *Ivi.*

the principles exposed varied according to the readers' position in society.

Martineau believed that realistic fiction was suitable for the popularization of political economy as she dealt with scientifically established principles. The reliance on the truthfulness of her theories applied to the realist outlook of her tales enabled her to proclaim herself an "illustrator of truth". (LL: vii)<sup>44</sup> Martineau's wish for self-improvement leads Webb to include her in the rank of Victorian novelists anticipating socialist realism.<sup>45</sup> However, availing herself of realism, Harriet Martineau wanted to go further and depict not only how things are but also how they *should* or *could* be.

### 3.3 Art and Instruction: a Problematic Coexistence

Harriet Martineau primarily considered the *Illustrations* as a means of education, convinced as she was that the science of political economy must be popularized in order that its principles be efficient. The need for education triggered the conception of the tales and formed its content, while the adopted form was that of a literary piece of work. The stories were intended to be beneficial especially for the lower classes who needed to be educated on the subject; according to Mrs. Fenwick Miller, this is the reason why the public welcomed her work and accepted her lessons.<sup>46</sup> For Margaret O'Donnell, the soundness of her instructions were further proved by the fact that she succeeded in spreading complicate economic knowledge among a population with a very low literacy rate.<sup>47</sup>

Sharp criticism on the *Illustrations* was essentially caused by the combination of elements such as science and fiction or art and instruction. Such union was a bold

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<sup>44</sup> Fielding and Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 414; and Van, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>45</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 40. Webb's interpretation, however, could be considered far-fetched, as only in some parts of Martineau's tales we can glimpse a socialist perspective.

<sup>46</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>47</sup> O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

enterprise for skilful writers, therefore we can imagine how hard a task it must have been for Harriet Martineau, who admitted she had "small imaginative and suggestive powers".<sup>48</sup> As far as the presence of art and instruction is concerned, we can see that, among the first reviews to the work, there was an immediate recognition of the difficulty of the task to combine a work of art and its purpose. The article "Miss Martineau's Monthly Novels" praised the "benevolent spirit" with which the tales were written, while harshly criticizing "the unfeminine and mischievous doctrines on the principles of social welfare, of which these tales are made the vehicle".<sup>49</sup> The reviewer finally suggested that Martineau should "burn all the little books" and learn how to write from Miss Edgeworth who conveyed her moral lessons naturally, and not through contrived conversations.<sup>50</sup>

While fictional works from other writers were primarily to be appreciated aesthetically, in the case of the *Illustration*, the artistic component cannot be judged if not as a less relevant component. Fletcher indeed defined the tales' fictional elements as "sugar coatings for tracts" while Van emphasized that the "overt didacticism" is the element that hinders the potential artistic value of the series.<sup>51</sup> The observations of Mrs. Fenwick Miller's biography recorded that their being "written to convey definite lessons" irreparably injured the fiction.<sup>52</sup> Miller however defends the tales since, it was of little interest for her if the stories were not so engaging, their aim was of a superior kind since they exemplified the "springs of the social machinery".<sup>53</sup> Lana Dally sees that the popularity of Martineau's work was destined to fade as she treated a theme whose interest was limited to the Victorian period; according to the critic, the short-term

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<sup>48</sup> Martineau's "Obituary" quoted in Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>49</sup> [Anon.] "Miss Martineau's Monthly Novels", *Quarterly Review*, Vol. 49, pp. 136- 152, (April 1833), p. 136.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

<sup>51</sup> Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 367-368; Van, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>52</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>53</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

success of *Illustrations of Political Economy* was due to its didacticism associated to topics that reflected concerns of a specific historical period.<sup>54</sup> Being scientific matters like political economy susceptible to trends, the didacticism in the *Illustrations* impeded them to endure in the literary world.

Given that most of the criticism on the *Illustration* is due to its doctrinal layout at the expenses of creativity, William Empson's article on the *Illustrations* for the *Edinburgh Review* stands out for its considering the "poetical nature of her fictions".<sup>55</sup> Even if such words could be interpreted as a praise of the work, what the critic wants to underline is, above all, the inefficacy of Martineau's fictional form to convey meaning. Empson indeed explains that the morale seems to be "stitched on" the tales and, as a result, principles and fable are seen as "independent", thus loosing the tales' original function.<sup>56</sup> However, Empson's article can be considered as an exception; even though he found inadequacies in the tales, he was among the few who recognized an artistic potential in *Illustrations of Political Economy*, for he thought that the narrative power in the tales would mislead her readers and "the usefulness of the several stories might be injured by their beauty".<sup>57</sup> Empson's concerns, however proved to be quite unique as what he regarded as an excess was a deficiency for most of Martineau's critics.

The formal introduction of *Illustrations of Political Economy* as an educational text might have debased its artistic worth; the author herself stated in the preface that the tales' object was to teach political economy, and not to provide mere entertaining stories. (PEP: xiii) The work has been usually identified as belonging to "didactic moral literature" that was widespread in the Victorian period;<sup>58</sup> however, Martineau saw the educational attitude as its strongest point and, looking at her essay "On the Duty of

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<sup>54</sup> Dalley, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Empson quoted in Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>56</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>58</sup> Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

Studying Political Economy", we come to know that she saw a connection between her purpose and the beauty of the "fair functioning" of the principles she expounded.<sup>59</sup> As Annette Van reports, Harriet Martineau carried on the defense of her tales as she associated their lecturing on political economy with an underlying moral beauty; its usefulness was enough to legitimate her work whose function was "intrinsically aesthetic as well as educational."<sup>60</sup> Even if on different levels and by different means, Martineau's tales were to be seen as the embodiment of her campaign for "universal education", as the economic principles enlisted constituted both a moral and practical guidance in the pursuit of happiness.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.4 19th Century Reception

The innovative work that Martineau offered to her contemporary readers was not overlooked but rather debated; her views on society were contended and caused uproars, especially among the upper-classes audience. Topical economic matters, an unusual literary form, radical personal beliefs - all concurred to the popularity of *Illustrations of Political Economy* for the peculiar book "naturally aroused opposition".<sup>62</sup>

Several newspapers treated the reviews of Martineau's tales, one of the most frequently mentioned by critics is the Tory *Fraser's Magazine*. The literary journal provided an example of the conservatives' reaction to the content of the *Illustrations* in the article "On National Economy: 'Miss Martineau's Cousin Marshall'- 'The Preventive Check'", labeling it "a book written by a woman against the poor - a book written by a

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<sup>59</sup> Martineau's article quoted in Van, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>60</sup> Van, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>61</sup> See Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

<sup>62</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

young woman against marriage!".<sup>63</sup> It is true that in tales such as "Cousin Marshall" Martineau suggested that the poorest should ponder over the choice of marrying and having children they could not afford, however, the reviewer jumped to hasty conclusions identifying her political economy as "selfish" and "against charity".<sup>64</sup> According to Hobart, the treatment of family values and generosity with a rational approach led her contemporaries to regard her as a "moral monster".<sup>65</sup> In the Victorian period, women were caged in a frivolous and sentimentalized stereotype; thus, Martineau's utilitarian evaluations on pros and cons of creating a family led her contemporaries to regard her as 'unfeminine', since her ideas on family and, broadly, society left no space to romantic assumptions. Despite being conscious her theories were discredited by a remarkable part of the population, which was influenced by harsh journal reviews, she carried on her campaign for people's economic awareness. Harriet Martineau seemed to be suspired rather than annoyed, when she was informed that a lady paying a visit to one of her friends, was worried that her "improper books" would be dangerous "within the children's reach" as she read about them in the *Quarterly Review*. (A1: 209) In her *Autobiography* Martineau bitterly recollected the injuries she suffered as resulting from the journal's negative publicity; at the same time she positively reminds flattering articles such as those in the *Edinburgh Review* and rejoiced when she knew that people had changed opinion after reading her tales. (A1: 208-209)

Even if she declared to be above any political alignment in the preface to the *Illustrations*, political concerns inevitably came through her tales. When writing of certain 'dangerous' matters, Martineau never appeared intimidated by the reactions her books could provoke, not even when in America she was dissuaded

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<sup>63</sup> W. Maggin [?], "On National Economy No. 3: 'Miss Martineau's Cousin Marshall'- 'The Preventive Check'", *Fraser's Magazine*, Vol. 6, pp. 403-413, (November 1832), p.403.

<sup>64</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>65</sup> Hobart, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

to travel to the south, where she was threatened because of her highly unpopular anti-slavery campaign.<sup>66</sup> Another example is the fact that Harriet Martineau gave a nonchalant reply to her friend Jane Marcet who showed her concerns for the publication of the twelfth number of the series that could have offended the French Crown treating of "Egalité". (A1: 236) Her taking a position on governmental issues led her series to be banned in several European countries; her support to the Polish cause was apparent in "The Charmed Sea" and motivated the prohibition of the book in Austria and Russia as she accounted:

[a] month after, I was subjected to similar reproaches about the Emperor of Russia. He was, in truth, highly offended. He ordered every copy of my Series to be delivered up, and then burnt or deported; and I was immediately forbidden the empire. His example was followed in Austria, and thus, I was personally excluded, before my Series was half done, from two or three greatest countries in Europe (A1: 236-237)

The readership of Martineau was inclined to her work in different manners, some of them found her optimistic views reassuring, other disturbing, but there was also a part of them who saw in her tales an opportunity to convey political messages. The *Illustrations* gained attention for their controversial nature as they carried on new ideologies on social and economic matters; even if generally disregarded they served to bring the important subject of political economy to light. The countless amount of letters Harriet Martineau received containing suggestions for the next tales of the series proves that the work was perceived as a potential vehicle to influence 19th century society. David reminds us that not only common readers, but also political figures wrote to Harriet Martineau, as they attempted to drive her works for the benefit of certain political matters.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> The "Fourth Period Section III" of Martineau's *Autobiography* dealt with her experience in America. There, she accounted, her support of abolitionism was criticized and she was labeled 'amalgamationist'. Her acceptance of marriages between black and white people even led somebody to warn her that "[her] proceeding to the southern states would bring upon [her] certain insult and danger." (A2: 16)

<sup>67</sup> David, *op. cit.*, p.36.

### 3.5 Lower Classes vs Middle Classes

In several occasions Harriet Martineau stated that her series were to be considered as a universal aid for society; her tales were written in order to familiarise the population with the science of political economy, regardless of their social position:

[w]e do not dedicate our series to any particular class of society, because we are sure that all classes bear an equal relation to the science, and we much fear that it is as little familiar to the bulk of one as of another. (PEP: xiv)

Therefore, the work was appropriate for readers having different levels of instruction and financial means; several critics argued that even though the messages conveyed were supposed to reach everyone, the actual addressee of her stories varied according to the manner in which the subjects were treated.

Harriet Martineau recognized the fact that the ruling class had more possibilities in affecting the creation of a welfare state; being the subject of political economy more relevant in the customary lives of bankers, manufacturers and merchants, they were supposed to grasp the truth of political economy easily, therefore they must have "act[ed] on knowledge of the real."<sup>68</sup> Capitalism was for Martineau the solution for socio-economic improvements and such opinion underscored her support for the middle classes. Freedgood indeed maintains that the writer succeeded in providing a comforting view for wealthy readers, as she gathered that showing the malfunctioning of governmental administration, she deprived them from responsibility as they owed "obedience to the laws of the market".<sup>69</sup> As far as the reception of the middle-classes is concerned, Fletcher argues that the immediate success of the tales resulted partly from her vindication of the pivotal role of the aspiring class.<sup>70</sup>

The nature of Martineau's relation with the lower classes has always been

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<sup>68</sup> Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

considered to be highly contradictory. It is true that she felt sympathies towards the poor and thought her tales would provide them with inspiration to change their conditions; however, her representation of the working class in tales such as "The Hill and the Valley" and "A Manchester Strike" makes critics doubt about her real siding with them. She claimed to be with the "working men against their masters", but the results of class conflict in her tales inevitably showed the defeat of factory workers.<sup>71</sup> The instructive qualities of *Illustrations of Political Economy* were particularly associated with Martineau's restraining the overexploited workers not to complain with their masters;<sup>72</sup> while she claimed that once the market was free from worthless restrictions, the lower classes would be allowed to "make their subsistence in any way that they may think best".<sup>73</sup> Another aspect worth to be noticed while considering Martineau's relation with workers, is the insensitiveness she occasionally displayed towards this part of society. As David points out, in her stories she seemed to neglect their real suffering in order to highlight the positive outcomes derived from the application of utilitarian theories, while hiding the unpleasant aspects of the industrialised environment.<sup>74</sup> Freedgood added that such an appearance can be seen as an underestimation of the real complexities of the matter and, at the same time, motivates the fact that her ideas on political economy were "systematically rejected".<sup>75</sup>

It is clear that Martineau wrote the *Illustrations* being aware of the fact that all classes would read it; she seemed to be particularly naive in her interpretations of class conflict as she thought that the technological advancement displayed by the coming of the railway would enable the meeting of all classes as: "peers, manufacturers, and

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<sup>71</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>72</sup> See the section "2.3 A Manchester Strike: Class Conflict, Winners and Defeated".

<sup>73</sup> Martineau quoted in David, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>75</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

farmers will meet face to face in railway carriages and dissolve class animosity".<sup>76</sup> According to Webb, Harriet Martineau thought her work would teach the whole population to collaborate: the subordinate lower classes were to "co-operate, if not badly to obey", while the upper classes had to deserve their services.<sup>77</sup> The ambiguousness of the work is bestowed by the apparent focus on the working class while recognizing that the active part in the change of society can be played only by those who have the means, such as bourgeois and aristocratic readers.<sup>78</sup>

### 3.6 Political Economy and Other Writers

Even if other contemporary writers ventured in the world of political economy, Harriet Martineau was probably the only one (except for Jane Marcet), who promoted science as prevailing over narrative pleasure. Margaret O'Donnell associates Martineau's *Illustrations* with "Victorian Fiction", belonging thus to the same literary world of Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and Charles Dickens. The common ground of these authors was, according to O'Donnell, the implication in their texts of "misery and woe", elements that contributed to their success in the literary field.<sup>79</sup>

Deirdre David, instead, compares Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* with Jane Austen's narratives; while Martineau's *Deerbrook* has been considered a 'bad copy' of Austen's novels, her depicting characters in the *Illustrations* who have to face "economic hardship" is seen as an added value of Martineau.<sup>80</sup> For David, the distinctive trait of the work lays in her providing an ostensible picture of a reality that is aloof from

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<sup>76</sup> David, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>77</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 117

<sup>78</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p.397.

<sup>79</sup> O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p.315.

<sup>80</sup> David, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

the writer's experience, something that many of her contemporaries missed.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, her "technical proficiency to interweave romantic narrative with political analysis" was clearly inferior to that of novelists such as Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë; compared to their work, Martineau's narrative power did not succeed in creating a relation between characters' misery and the actual situation of the country.<sup>82</sup>

Simon Dentith considers the extent to which political economy affected the narratives of Elisabeth Gaskell and Harriet Martineau; knowing that economic discourses were not usually associated with fiction, he claims that unlike Martineau, Gaskell managed to incorporate political economy in her novels in a way in which the science was recognized and accepted.<sup>83</sup> In works such as *North and South* and *Mary Burton*, Gaskell seemed to be more successful than Martineau in drawing together two apparently incompatible elements and create relevant works of fiction.

In conclusion we can say that Martineau failed to create proper powerful narratives due to the subjugation of fiction to political economy, but perhaps more than this, for the predetermined set of values she displayed in her tales, which left no space for discussion. Taking cues from Freedgood's observations we can see that writers such as Dickens or Gaskell created works that left their mark in British culture because their novels were open to "complication and conflict".<sup>84</sup> Even if these writers criticized both the Victorian society, and its economy, they managed to produce well rounded stories, while Martineau's radicalism might have prevented her heterogeneous audience to benefit from her tales.

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<sup>81</sup> *Ivi.* continues: "Austen's characters experience economic setbacks by virtue of entailed wills or diminished private incomes: Martineau delivers didactic straight-talk about a nationwide inflation that almost destroys the career of a country doctor." It must be remembered however, that financial difficulties, even if not damaging her social position, deeply affected Martineau's life.

<sup>82</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>83</sup> Dentith, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>84</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

## Conclusion

Throughout her career Harriet Martineau was driven to writing by the noble cause of teaching; she considered her profession seriously and, in the case of the *Illustrations*, took advantage of all the means she had in order to popularize the truths of political economy. The bold enterprise she embarked on was highly criticised and less appreciated, however, the influence she had on Victorian society is undeniable, as John Stuart Mill wrote, she and her tales were unquestionably "a sign of this country and time".<sup>1</sup>

Among the reasons which led both her contemporary readers and later criticism to judge *Illustrations of Political Economy* as less valuable than other coeval works of fiction on political economy, there is the unconcealed optimism she displayed in her tales. The "mythical free market" she portrayed in her stories was, according to David, just partially justifiable by the fact that the tales had to be simplified for their readers; moreover, the promulgation of utilitarian principles interpreted as the assertion of common wealth, further confirms the naiveté of her ideals.<sup>2</sup> The bold optimism that characterized the tales can be seen on the one hand as the key of their success, for the stories' positive speculations on the economic future of the country operated as a tranquilliser, especially among middle class readers. On the other hand, "[o]verly optimistic interpretations" of delicate matters weakened the power of fiction to affect real people's judgment.<sup>3</sup>

It remains unresolved as to whether Harriet Martineau succeeded in her mingling

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<sup>1</sup> John Stuart Mill in a letter to Thomas Carlyle quoted in O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p.315.

<sup>2</sup> David, *op. cit.*, p. 42; 63.

<sup>3</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 49. The critic indeed interprets Martineau's exploiting the accelerated narrative as a means to 'banish panic' while it had the opposite effect of highlighting a critical situation: "[t]he rapid-fire plots of Martineau's fiction, which dispatch problems with an initially reassuring alacrity, begin to suggest, because of this need to move with such speed and thoroughness, the severity of the problems at hand." *Ibid.*, p. 50.

the artistic literary world and science. While contemporary reviewers recognizes an harmonious coexistence on a superficial level, Victorian critics such as Leslie Stephen defined her tales as an "unreadable mixture of fiction, founded on rapid cramming, with raw masses of the dismal science".<sup>4</sup> 21st century criticism tended to weigh Martineau's credibility as a political economist as well as writer of fiction; for instance, John Vint explains that the former profession demanded competence in persuading on "the rigour and validity of one's theoretical ideas without regard to sentiments", while the latter was rather concerned with the emphatic involvement of the audience.<sup>5</sup> For Cooper and Murphy the dualism of the role she played as the writer of the *Illustrations* resulted in the impairment of both her functions, for their objectives are usually regarded as mutually exclusive.<sup>6</sup> Vint sees such conflicting perspectives as Martineau's 'dilemma', however, critics generally agrees in noticing her inclination towards a scientific application in literature; it can be even deduced that her choice was required by her reliance on the potential of scientific truth, rather than fiction, to affect people.<sup>7</sup> Highfill and Weber in turn, analyse the relation between art and political economy for Martineau; not only did the exclusive relation she had with them influenced her *Illustrations* series, but also her succeeding works. The critics, while recognizing the complexities of such relation, comment that her views on art and literature were quite a novelty as they implicated "economic aspects not found in other popular Victorian

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<sup>4</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p. 389; L. Stephen, *Dictionary of National Biography* (1855-1891), quoted in David, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Vint, *op. cit.*, p. 3. The critic explains later that "she was constrained between the competing demands of the two genres" *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 32, explains that "she undermines her own authority as a political economist by using fiction to illustrate economic truths, and simultaneously undermines her authority as an author of fiction by neglecting the ruse of random and arbitrary detail so fundamental to the realist mode."

<sup>7</sup> See Vint, *op. cit.*, p. 22. The critic argues that Martineau might have opted for science rather than fiction as it was more suitable for her purpose on the grounds that "her ambition was not to reinforce existing sentiments but to change them." In addition, he points out that such idea was confirmed by Caroline Franklin's statement that " these stories should not be judged as fiction at all but as worked examples of the way economic laws affect people".

commentaries".<sup>8</sup>

In her essay Annette Van correctly says that 20th century criticism was skeptical in regarding Harriet Martineau as a convincing novelist.<sup>9</sup> Instead, if we consider Courtemanche's study on the *Illustrations* we can see how she credits Martineau the influence on Victorian novelists in treating industrial subjects.<sup>10</sup> In Van's view, she managed to ennoble the industrial novel, although the themes explored staged "impersonal economic laws" as a substitute for "suffering individuals".<sup>11</sup> The involvement of individual behavior, however, helped in creating a connection between the reader and the economic principles exposed, thanks to the use of narrative fiction.<sup>12</sup> Martineau seems to Courtemanche, to have outdone her own expectations creating an original work that was not a vehicle of mere mechanical explanations, but rather the combination of narrative prose and economic principles.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout her career as a writer Martineau was considered a controversial author for the ideas she put forward and the way in which she delivered them. Even if she was accused of indoctrination in the case of the *Illustrations*, we should bear in mind that Martineau exposed already established "economic truths of the day";<sup>14</sup> that is to say, while her method of popularization was quite a novelty, the economic principles she expounded adhered to "the English Classical School".<sup>15</sup> The doctrines she set forth were long established, thus it was her putting them into a new context that created an innovative effect. Thanks to the theoretical framework she applied in her tales, Harriet Martineau succeeded in creating something that went beyond mere propaganda; as

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<sup>8</sup> Highfill and Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> See Van, *op. cit.*, p.116; Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 120; Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 367-368.

<sup>10</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, pp. 403-404, maintained that "Martineau's awkward but uniquely powerful disciplinary synthesis ultimately contributed to the widespread perception, especially among those Victorians for whom art became a kind of secular religion, that fiction was a field worth fighting over."

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 383

<sup>12</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 390.

<sup>14</sup> Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

<sup>15</sup> Bodkin, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

David cleverly says, *Illustrations of Political Economy* managed to promulgate a thoroughgoing "social theory".<sup>16</sup> Her interest in anthropological studies, and particularly the observation of societies she met while travelling around the world, could be linked with her initial interest in political economy. Travelling to the East, as well as crossing America, led her to consider and compare, among other things, the functioning of the market; it is interesting to notice, for instance, the way in which she reflected upon the relation between society and political economy:

I saw social modifications taking place which have already altered the tone of leading Economists, and opened a prospect of further changes which will probably work out in time a totally new social state. (A1: 232)

Harriet Martineau envisaged a positive advancement of humankind and partly related it to the right functioning of political and economic administration. Thus her serialized tales can be considered her first step in social studies, a field in which she was to become an influential figure.<sup>17</sup>

The aspect that more than others permitted Harriet Martineau to make an impression among her contemporaries is her writing as a single woman.<sup>18</sup> Her lifestyle choices disregarded Victorian domestic ideology which contemplated a low profile for women; as a matter of fact, she faced society with a bold spirit and never yielded to the predetermined standards expected for her gender and social class. Some critics, however, bestowed her authority as a writer of political economy to the 'masculine' way in which she treated the subject.<sup>19</sup> Martineau herself recognized more serious matters to be associated with male writing, and novelistic narrative with female;<sup>20</sup> notwithstanding

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<sup>16</sup> David, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>18</sup> Cooper and Murphy, *op. cit.*, p.3.

<sup>19</sup> See Peterson, "...Masculine Discourse, Female Sage", *cit.*, pp. 172-173; Hobart, *op. cit.* p. 228. Peterson in *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self-Interpretation*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 136 already argued that "[t]hroughout her career, she had consistently adopted male forms". However, in "...Masculine Discourse, Female Sage", *cit.*, pp. 174-175, she maintains that Martineau relied on a masculine form of writing ("orderly thought, logic, reason, nonfiction") in order to gain attention even if "[her] commitment to a genderless ideal for writing is evident in virtually all her books".

<sup>20</sup> See Peterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-174.

the identification of male and female writing, Martineau attempted to transform her works in "genderless rhetorical material" ignoring, in the case of the *Illustrations*, the assumption that political economy was a male dominated field.<sup>21</sup>

The extent to which *Illustrations of Political Economy* managed to have an effect on Victorian readers is another matter of debate for recent criticism, as the potential influence the work had on the thought of her contemporaries has been examined beyond its capacity to teach properly. Ronald Bodkin points out that the limited impact the tales had, was probably caused by the fact that Harriet Martineau was an avocational writer of political economy; as a result, she could just have made "a small impression on this aspect of Main Stream thinking."<sup>22</sup> The prevailing opinion that Harriet Martineau had a "little if any lasting effect on economics" is shared by Highfill and Weber; however, Vint reminds us that the *Illustrations*, and her works in general, were "remarkably successful in the short run".<sup>23</sup> Considering the educational aim of the series together with her philanthropic attitude in helping people to improve their condition at a specific time in history, it becomes clear the reason why her tales were so successful in the 19th century and barely known afterwards. The hindrance of the literary longevity of the tales can be ascribed to the topical nature of the work since the resolutions to problems that no longer existed, supported by a heavy structure of economic principles, undoubtedly prevented posterity from deepening the subject further. As far as the emotional impact of the tales is concerned, the effect they had on the readers was to be attained by an equilibrium between serviceableness and entertainment; according to Courtemanche the effect must have been "both comforting and persuasive", as the right compromise for the work was to soothe the middle classes and lecture the lower

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 178.

<sup>22</sup> Bodkin, *op. cit.*, p.69.

<sup>23</sup> Highfill and Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 85; Vint, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

classes.<sup>24</sup> Concentrating on the response of the readers to the tales, Freedgood provides a remarkable examination for she noticed that the stories worked as "short-acting drugs": they were quickly absorbed while their effect diminished with the same rapidity, therefore depending upon "additional doses of short-term relief".<sup>25</sup> The fact that the tales were published monthly adds weight to this argument; however, Freedgood supposes the explanations provided were momentarily helpful while concrete solution should have been provided by "more long-acting resolutions to the problem at hand".<sup>26</sup> The psychological acuity Harriet Martineau demonstrated through the way in which she related to her readers is noteworthy; several critics indeed notices her tendency to hide unpleasant truths and emphasize negligible advantages, especially in the case of the factory dispute.<sup>27</sup> Minimization and euphemisms were frequently employed in her stories, as her tendency to advocacy journalism that characterized her later works already influenced the tales. In addition, her mastery of marketing devices has been considered as one of the aspects that contributed to regard *Illustrations of Political Economy* a pioneer work.<sup>28</sup>

In this first part of the dissertation have attempted to demonstrate the importance of *Illustrations of Political Economy* as an experimental instructive work; while Harriet Martineau's achievements as an unwed woman, a traveler and anthropologist were not disputed, her role in British culture has been repeatedly underestimated. The tales, for all their improbabilities, left a mark in the short-term Victorian mentality and, despite the contradictions in economic theories, they served to support Martineau's ideologies and provided the society with a peculiar educational work.

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<sup>24</sup> Courtemanche, *op. cit.*, p.389.

<sup>25</sup> Freedgood, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>27</sup> Fielding and Smith, *op. cit.*, 418.

<sup>28</sup> *Ivi.*

# Part Two

## Chapter 1: Voicing the Child

### 1.1 Victorian Childhood

It is well known that children's role in society has been one of the most debated aspects in the Victorian period; adults' perception of childhood changed greatly between the 16th and the 19th century, and, with it, the way in which they should be educated. As Brian P. Cooper points out, a growing concern on education was spreading among middle class parents in the Victorian period: "numerous letters and diaries detailing their concerns about their own education and future prospects, as well as the upbringing and education of their boys and girls" were left to testify that a new era was approaching.<sup>1</sup> In the first part of the 19th century there was still a tendency to see children as 'small adults'; as a result, their education was pivotal to the construction of the adult self. Indeed, it is only in the second half of the century that we start seeing a new teaching approach, considering children's needs more carefully and recognizing them as individuals. The difficulty in finding a balanced education lies in the search for a compromise between already established beliefs; religious implications were hardly ever separated from moral concerns, and the divergence between propagating philosophical streams such as rationalism and romanticism made the setting of a standard in education even more problematic. If the romantics idealized childhood and wanted to give the child freedom of expression, emphasizing the importance of imagination in their rearing; the influence of rationalism, instead, relied on the efficient education of children based on the assumption that the teaching of the youngsters

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<sup>1</sup> B. P. Cooper, *Family Fictions and Family Facts: Harriet Martineau, Adolphe Quetelet and the Population Question in England 1798-1859*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 21.

would serve to form sensible adults.<sup>2</sup>

The Victorians felt the need to educate and train the moral faculties of their children thanks to "experience rather than the indiscriminate cramming of facts".<sup>3</sup> Marjory Lang defines the Victorian period as the "age of children" and attributes much of their importance to the massive production of books dedicated to them; it is, in fact, in this period that children were recognized as a separate reading audience.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the century indeed, children were used to 'adult literature' and when the Victorians finally recognized the potential of books in conveying instruction, as well as affecting the impressionable young minds, they started to be more careful with the content of books.<sup>5</sup> The new attention to children's readership made works written by utilitarians as well as evangelicals emerge for their "earnest didacticism".<sup>6</sup> At much the same time, while committed writers conceived education as an opportunity to advance their social criticism and react "against the cast-iron materialism of an industrial age", the romantics preferred to leave their young readers their innocence and provide an escape from reality.<sup>7</sup> The ideal text was supposed to be something in the middle, providing the right amount of moral education without involving overtly religious notions and, even if not indulging in fanciful dreams, to preserve the unspoiled naiveté of children; to put it in Marjory Lang's terms, literature was not supposed to "ignobly interest nor frivolously amuse, but convey the wisest instruction in the pleasantest

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<sup>2</sup> P. Brown, *The Captured World: The Child and Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in England*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> M. Lang, "Childhood's Champions: Mid-Victorian Children's Periodicals and the Critics", *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1/2 pp. 17-31(Spring - Summer, 1980), p. 17. Lang continues stating that the recognition of children's reading audience and the increase of literacy brought about the problem of creating texts for them: "[m]ore and more children could, read. Yet the question of what children should read, became a pressing problem for parents only in the Victorian period. "

<sup>5</sup> *Ivi.* "For the Victorians, literature represented a potent force capable of immense good or harm."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

manner".<sup>8</sup>

In the light of the Victorian dispute on children's education, Harriet Martineau's works provided a crucial testimony of the way in which she perceived the significance of a balanced upbringing to shape the character of the child. *Household Education* indeed was a well received manual that instructed parents on the formal education of their children, and also considered the distinctiveness of their personality since "parents are apt to know far too little of what is passing in their children's imaginations". (A1: 45) Martineau's ideas on education were inevitably tied with her experiences during infancy; for this reason her *Autobiography* constituted a central reference for the understanding of her ideas exploring, not only her breeding, but also her perception of and relation with children. When she learned to read, a passion for literature was awakened in Martineau as it provided her with an escape from her anguished life; autobiographical elements are useful to understand the reasons that lie under her commitment to the cause of education of feelings as well as fostering the valorization of children's perception.<sup>9</sup> In 1841, foreseeing the role that literature was gaining in children's lives, she wrote *The Playfellow*, a collection of four tales for grown up children that provided a remarkably truthful reproduction of children's inner feelings. Martineau imbibed the work with her ideas on self-development as a process that starts from the earlier years of life and that goes on through negative as well as positive events. Exploiting the educational power of the tales, the writer provided her young readers with captivating narratives that instructed them on moral, historical and social topics, while exorcizing her unsatisfactory childhood.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> See Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

## 1.2 Handle with Care: *Household Education's* Instructions for Parents

*'What you wish a child to be,  
be that to the child.'*<sup>10</sup>

Harriet Martineau had strong opinions on how to raise children, even if she never experienced maternity; her tough childhood and her witnessing of several children's rearing led the author to write *Household Education*. The book collected a series of articles she wrote on education for *The People's Journal* published in 1846, a sort of advice manual "for the secularist order of parents". (A2: 293) The work was written with the purpose of giving suggestions and providing parents with the perspective of children; a special attention was directed to critical situations such as the raising of disabled children and how to deal with events that generally inflicted suffering in young people. One of the main points that deserves attention in her work is the fact that it considers household education as an everlasting process that included all the individuals belonging to the house, from servants to grandparents. Throughout her life Harriet Martineau observed families of various kind closely, from her own, to her neighbours' and those she met abroad in America and in the Near East.<sup>11</sup> She witnessed extremely different methods of education and this gave her the opportunity of figuring out which one was the best.

Harriet Martineau's ideas on education were associated with her religious beliefs, notably her sticking to Necessarianism. She considered the eminent Unitarian figure, Joseph Priestly, the leading light in the development of her ideas on education;<sup>12</sup> his belief in events and environment as shaping children's "intellectual, physical and moral

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<sup>10</sup> H. Martineau, *Household Education*, London: Edward Moxon, 1848, p. 269. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in rackets as (HE: page number)

<sup>11</sup> V. Sanders, "Harriet Martineau and Fatherhood", *Martineau Society's Newsletter*, No. 30, pp. 18-23, (Winter 2011), p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Martineau's esteem for Priestly is displayed throughout her *Autobiography* and even provided her the inspiration for a character in one of her tales: "In 'Briery Creek' I indulged my life-long sentiment of admiration and love of Dr. Priestley, by making him, under a thin disguise, the hero of my tale." (A1: 254)

education from birth", rather than the reliance in the divine power to determine the future life, clearly affected and motivated her choice of writing *Household Education*.<sup>13</sup> In her analysis of religious influences on Martineau's ideas, Ruth Watts defines Priestley's a "modern education", as he promoted empirical experiences and the valorization of individual thought.<sup>14</sup> Harriet Martineau was also influenced by Anna Barbauld and her brother Dr. John Aikin's books for children, which displayed a new perspective on the relationship between children and parent, while teaching them on several social, artistic and scientific aspects. Works that Martineau read when she was a child, such as *Evenings at Home, or The Juvenile Budget Opened* (1792-1796), fostered her vision of the family as a community that learns every day.<sup>15</sup> Even if Martineau was a firm believer in homely education as superior to that of schools, she had a brief exposure to formal training since when she was thirteen, she attended Lant Carpenter's school in Bristol. Such experience affected her "identity and intellect" and deeply influenced her beliefs on the ideal education, since the Unitarian pastor promoted an integration between science, arts and socio-political subjects.<sup>16</sup>

Harriet Martineau had clear in her mind that the audience of her book should be made of English parents, as she recognized that educational values and ideas on education differed greatly depending upon the culture of each society.<sup>17</sup> Thanks to her several travels, Martineau had the chance to study the rearing of children in varied contexts and proved to be an objective observer, for she managed to single out the weak as well as the strong points in each community. In the United States, for instance, she

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<sup>13</sup> See R. Watts, "Harriet Martineau, the Unitarians and Education", *Martineau Society's Newsletter*, No. 30, pp. 3-10, (Winter 2011), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Scholl, *op. cit.*, p. 14; Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Weiner and Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

encountered "the best specimens of human development",<sup>18</sup> while she appreciated the freedom and grace of Near East children, especially if compared with the "ungainly and unnatural inexpressiveness of childish manners in England".<sup>19</sup> In *Household Education* Martineau displayed a certain respect for the different choices in breeding as associated with the necessities of the community in which the children lived; she thought that American parents raised their children to become politicians, while American Indians wanted their progeny to become "perfect warriors"; (HE: 15) from such diversity, however, the author brought to the fore the high aspiration of "grow[ing] wiser and better every day" of British culture, since the model chosen was that of Christ. (HE: 18) Martineau believed that there was a shared ideal outcome of popular education and hypothesized that an English parent

would wish that the child should be docile and obedient, clever enough to make teaching him an easy matter, and to afford promise of his being a distinguished man; truthful, affectionate, and spirited; that as a man he should be upright and amiable, sufficiently religious to preserve his tranquility of mind and integrity of conduct: steady in his business and prudent in his marriage, so far as to be prosperous in his affairs. (HE: 33)

The model described here is for Martineau the result of the "law of Opinion" that influences the English society; even if she considered it helpful in determining the educational goals, it was not sufficient to guide parents in their mission, for it would not be satisfactory for a "thoughtful mind". (HE: 33) The author explained that, whatever might be the objective of education, parents should have clear in their mind how they want their children to develop and make sure that "all the powers of [their] child" are trained properly. (HE: 39)

At Harriet Martineau's time, few were the parents who could afford to send their children to boarding-schools, thus, the majority of the population opted for household education. Martineau thought that school was a place in which the best "book-knowledge" was achieved, however, collective education could not serve an individual's

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<sup>18</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p.270.

<sup>19</sup> H. Martineau, *Eastern Life, Present and Past*, Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1848, p. 508.

inclinations, learning abilities, and interests. (HE: 188) The concept expressed in the book is that, while at home the child is surrounded by the love of his family, which knows him well and is attentive towards his needs and propensities, the school's climate is rather cool as "everything is done by rule". (HE: 189-190) Thus, education is supposed to be better applied if the environment is suited for the individual; even when the child is educated at school, the family background is paramount for Martineau, as it constitutes the starting point of the training; for this reason she considered worthwhile to remind her readers that "school is no place of education for any children whatever till their minds are well put in action." (HE: 215) The capacity to increase knowledge, curiosity and receptiveness, are characteristics that should be raised in children from the earlier stages of their life, as not even the best books or teacher can have an effect in pupils whose minds are not open to knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

The intellectual education of children starts after physical and sensory capabilities are well acquired; at this stage, their mind has to be stirred in order to help the "acquisition of materials for future thought." (HE: 228) For Martineau it is important to give freedom in this period, the child should be left to follow her own dispositions as the independent discovery of the world would grow in him an "intense relish for reasoning, while the mind remains unwearied." (HE: 235) Her belief in the autonomy of acquisition seems to be inspired by John Locke's idea on the spontaneity with which the child should learn, as the duty of the parents is just to provide him/her the stimulus to increase his/her knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Locke thought that learning should be pleasurable for children and the method to achieve it was to have a careful attention to the peculiarity of

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<sup>20</sup> "The best tutors, the best books, the quietest school-room, will not avail, if the child's mind be not stirred and interested by something more congenial than the grammar and sums and maps he has to study." (HE: 43)

<sup>21</sup> J. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, London Printed for A. and J. Churchill, at the Black Swan in Paternoster-row, 1693, p. 78 explained: "a child may be brought to desire to be taught any thing you have a mind he should learn. [...] The fittest time for children to learn any thing is, when their minds are in tune and well disposed to it".

the child and never force him, rather let him want to learn by himself.<sup>22</sup> Martineau agreed with Locke's idea of children's innate wish to be taught, however, her ideas on the reward system differed from that of Locke for he was in favour of material gratification while she declared:

I have said nothing of a hope of reward as among the objects of childhood. This is because I think rewards and punishments seldom or never necessary in household education, while they certainly bring great mischief after them. (HE: 84)

One of the aspects of *Household Education* that is particularly in line with Martineau's general pragmatic views is her approving "vocational as well as intellectual training."<sup>23</sup> She believed that the most diligent student would not become a well-formed person if he was not trained also in more practical activities; she seems to feel pity for those who devote all their time to books instead of enjoying life and engaging in practical activities: "[l]ook at the pale student, who lives shut up in his study, never having been trained to use his arms and hands but for dressing and feeding himself, turning over books, and guiding the pen." (HE: 21) It is quite possible that Martineau took this idea from Rousseau; the philosopher believed in active learning, as direct experience was for him more effective in making an impression on children.<sup>24</sup> Practical purposes were for Martineau the most appropriate concerns for learning children, as she saw their performances best acted when they knew their efforts were directed to useful activities:

[t]he little girl who tends the baby, or helps granny, or makes father's shirt, or learns to cook the dinner, is likely to put more mind into her work than if she were set to mark a sampler or make a doll's frock for the sake of learning to sew. (HE: 48)

Harriet Martineau saw a special bound between imagination, intellect, and moral. She believed that intellect operates better when the moral sphere is involved; at the same time, moral qualities such as "Benevolence, Hope, Conscientiousness and

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<sup>22</sup> See Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 4

<sup>23</sup> Weiner and Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Firmness" cannot develop if " Reasoning and Imaginative powers" are not entailed. (HE: 259) As in many other aspects of education, parents have a crucial role in fostering the familiarisation of their progeny with these aspects, thus, Martineau campaigned for imagination but concerned with a "high and noble order of ideas"; (HE: 255) if imaginative faculties are cultivated and directed with conscience, the results are to merge into a fruitful employment since "it is the imaginative order of mankind that creates". (HE: 252) A support for directing children's imagination is provided by the reading of good fiction, as Martineau claimed that some books managed to satisfy readers' need for fancy by teaching them something at the same time; she mentioned Scott's novels and Shakespeare's plays as a bountiful supply of information on historical events:

[m]y own opinion is that no harm is done, but much good, by an early reading of fiction of a high order: and no one can question its being better than leaving the craving mind to feed upon itself,—its own dreams of vanity or other selfishness,—or to seek an insufficient nourishment from books of a lower order. The imagination, once awakened, must and will work, and ought to work. Let its working be ennobled, and not debased, by the material afforded to it. (HE: 211 )

In addition to novels, the author considered poetry another means to convey education, especially that of a moral kind.<sup>25</sup> After having acknowledged the powers of engaging literary works, Martineau explained that the "appetite for fiction" is typical of children; for this reason it is fundamental to direct their interests in quality books suitable for them as "what is read with enjoyment has intense effect upon the intellect." (HE: 219; 222)

An interesting aspect of *Household Education* that has often been looked into by critics, is her ideas on female education. In the book, Harriet Martineau took the opportunity of explaining the nonsense of preventing girls from studying subjects such

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<sup>25</sup> "In all true poetry, there is a tacit appeal to the sanction of Conscience, and Veneration and Benevolence are the heavenly lights which rise upon the scene: while, on the other hand, no Reverence is so deep, Benevolence so pure, as those which are enriched by the profoundest Thought, and refined and exalted by the noblest Idealism" (HE: 259)

as dead languages or mathematics because they were useless for their future employment, while boys needed them "to improve the quality of their minds". (HE: 240)

In addition, she perceived the shared belief that women's nature hindered abstract studies as quite offensive; she exploited this concept of female superficiality and light-mindedness to advocate that if it was true, "their minds should be the more carefully sobered by grave studies, and the acquisition of exact knowledge." (HE: 210)<sup>26</sup> As Weiner and Watts point out, the defense of women education she puts up is particularly fierce; it may be argued that her eagerness had something to do with her personal experience when the family business failure led her to a condition of self-maintenance.<sup>27</sup>

Such idea seems to be supported by her closing statement in chapter twenty-one on female education:

[w]hile so many women are no longer sheltered, and protected, and supported, in safety from the world (as people used to say) every woman ought to be fitted to take care of herself. Every woman ought to have that justice done to her faculties that she may possess herself in all the strength and clearness of an exercised and enlightened mind, and may have at command, for her subsistence, as much intellectual power and as many resources as education can furnish her with. (HE: 214)

As far as a girl's rearing is concerned, part of the criticism on Martineau's ideas is due to the inconsistency emerging from her defense of women's education and their right to public employment while declaring their innate inclination to household jobs. Indeed, in several occasions she stated proudly her passion for domestic activities; needlework for instance, was a pleasure for her. Martineau thought that the majority of "girls have a keener relish of Household drudgery than of almost any pleasure that could be offered them"(HE: 306-307) and such idea tended to be misinterpreted as conflicting with the call for the equal education of the sexes.<sup>28</sup> What we should bear in mind, however, is that

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<sup>26</sup> It might sound quite anti-feminist the statement of Florence Fenwick Miller, commenting on Martineau's article "Female Education", published in the *Monthly Repository* of February 1823, since she explained that " [Martineau] disclaimed any intention of proving that the mind of women were equal to those of men, but only desired to show that what little powers the female intellect might possess should be fully cultivated." Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>27</sup> Weiner and Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> See David, *op. cit.*, p. 89; and D. Postlethwaite, "Mothering and Mesmerism in the Life of Harriet

Martineau saw a direct connection between the practical and theoretical learning; thus, we can understand why she wanted girls to improve their domestic skills, as it was an enforcement of their future possibility for intellectual employment, and believing them biologically disposed to it, it was not supposed to result as a confinement to a subjugated position.<sup>29</sup> Harriet Martineau nurtured an ideal of (almost) equal, genderless education; indeed, it is thanks to her rearing that she managed to write for a living, while her training in domestic chores permitted her to gain autonomy, especially when she could not afford to hire somebody to do them. As mentioned in the first part of my dissertation, economic misfortunes fostered her abilities both as a writer and as a 'homemaker' as the hard conditions "saved [her] from being a literary lady who could not sew." (A1: 27)

Even if *Household Education* might be considered more in line with 19th century ideas than other Martineau's works, Weiner and Watts recognize some aspects that actually challenged contemporary opinion. According to the critics, the book provided quite a new perspective on homely education; first of all it dealt with and was directed to families belonging to different social classes, in addition, she made all individuals equally responsible for the good functioning of the household.<sup>30</sup> Her assumption that "there is room for improvement [...] as long as we live" (HE: 5) is regarded by the critics as one of the strongest points of the book which "contains a notion of life-long learning".<sup>31</sup> Many of her social ideas are contained in *Household Education* as we can see in her defense of women's emancipation, the despise for corporal punishment, and the

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Martineau", *Signs*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 583-609, (Spring, 1989), p. 607.

<sup>29</sup> David, *op. cit.*, p. 89, presents the problematic nature of Martineau's ideas on women asking rhetorically: "Was she a courageous feminist? Do her calls for women to become skilled in the domestic arts compromise a call for them to enter the public sphere?"

<sup>30</sup> Weiner and Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 11, point out the "social inclusivity of the text." However, it is quite clear that the author writes from a middle-class position as much of the attention is explicitly put on the prototype of a wealthy family who have servants and nurses and, above all, children are not forced to work to help their family's economy.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

promotion of a 'progressive' type of schooling that did not entail canonical rote learning and the reward-penalty method.<sup>32</sup> The reason for which *Household Education* appeared harmless is because it dealt with a topic which was agreeable to women writing; however, its appearing "uncontroversial" is invalidated by the fact that even if exposing Victorian concerns, "it was also challenging and subversive regarding nineteenth-century bourgeois ideals".<sup>33</sup> Formally, the book was seen as a continuation of women's writing but the content was rather challenging, especially for its overthrowing pre-determined rules. Her firm belief that parents should not impose their ideas and that children's inclinations should be followed, the attention to children's sensibility and the idea that parents cannot satisfy all their progenies' questions, puts parenting under another light, since adults are not perceived as omniscient and can 'grow' together with their children. This concept of unhinging patriarchal values is discussed also by Valerie Sanders in her article "Harriet Martineau and Fatherhood"; the critic maintains that, on the one hand, Martineau condemned excessively authoritarian fathers, on the other hand, she relied on a "hierarchical model" of the family, where the father was the figure which set the moral line of conduct for the whole family.<sup>34</sup> However, the general uncontroversial vein of *Household Education* is proved by the "cordial reception of the book by Christian parents" and by "the majority of sensible and thoughtful persons". (A2: 293-294) Harriet Martineau was pleased to know that her book was appreciated, such treatment of her work is understandable as we know that the attitudes towards children's rearing was changing during the Victorian period and adults started to perceive the importance of the first years of life in determining the future psychological and practical attitudes of their children.

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<sup>32</sup> Weiner and Watts, *op. cit.*, p.8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> V. Sanders, "Harriet Martineau and Fatherhood", *Martineau Society's Newsletter*, No. 30, pp. 18-23, (Winter 2011), p. 22. The author adds that "Martineau shows how society is made up of families, and families take their tone and direction from the leadership of the father." *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Given that the predominant part of society was brought up at home, Harriet Martineau wanted to explain the important function of the environment in helping their children's "moral and intellectual" growth.<sup>35</sup> The author promoted "godlike inspiration" for children's rearing; while setting a moral standard, she remembered that every child has his own interests, feelings and attitudes, thus justified the need for "individual fulfillment".<sup>36</sup> Even promoting a softer kind of discipline, the author taught parents how to "inculcate" their ideas;<sup>37</sup> Cooper indeed confirms the strong influence parents have as not to be strictly associated with religion or high moralism, but rather resulting in the transmission of simple good habits that are likely to affect the child if an emotional connection is involved.<sup>38</sup> The perception of the book as a work similar to other contemporary guidebooks is confirmed by Webb as the biographer reminds us that the book had strong bearings on Hartley's psychology and on the recent study of phrenology; Martineau indeed availed herself of scientific knowledge to explain parents how to have an influence on their children's mind.<sup>39</sup> Given that much of the ideas expounded in the text are clearly inspired by Martineau's childhood, Sanders rightly defines *Household Education* "a mixture of autobiography and advice manual"; the reliance on actual experiences is outstanding for several accounts present also in her *Autobiography* can be recognized.<sup>40</sup> Martineau's views in *Household Education* have been regarded as progressive as well as extremist; its basis on rational teaching involving practical and literary education, the political ideas subtly inserted, and the presence of religious references all concur to its being labeled a radical book.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 79; see also Sanders, "Harriet Martineau and Fatherhood", *cit.* p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-270.

<sup>40</sup> Sanders, "Harriet Martineau and Fatherhood", *cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> See Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-271; and Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

### 1.3 Harriet Martineau: The Ugly Duckling Child

*I was a persevering child;  
and I know I tried hard:  
but I failed. (A1: 33)*

Education in Harriet Martineau's family was an important matter; even if Thomas and Elizabeth had not received a formal preparation, their interests and their acquaintances helped them to shape an ideal education for their children. Ellen, the youngest daughter illustrated in a letter her parents' educational course:

It is certain that my father and mother knew no language but their own, at least within our memory; yet I cannot remember a time when there was not much reading going on in the family circle, and not only duty reading, but discussion and literary talk [...]. [My father] had passed some portion of his childhood under the roof of the Barbaulds, and if he did not bring away much learning from them, I like to indulge the belief that from Mrs. Barbauld he acquired the strong political leanings [...]. I believe that to my mother we must trace the beginnings of literary culture in our household [...]; [the] measure of self education enabled her to give life to the early lessons of her children, to direct the choice of teachers for them, to collect intelligent people about them, and to give a warm and appreciative sympathy to them in their subsequent literary efforts.<sup>42</sup>

Such description explains why they were so concerned with their children's rearing; they wanted them to have the academic formation they missed. Mrs. Martineau wished her progeny to get a high education, she opted for "classical education" and "vocational training" without any gender distinction.<sup>43</sup> It is true that this last aspect of the Martineaus' education is outstanding; as Mrs. Fenwick Miller points out, in the first years of the nineteenth century there was a considerable difference in male and female education; the critic defines Harriet's education "desultory", however, its being almost equal to that of her brothers proves that the family was, in a sense, quite progressive.<sup>44</sup>

For Harriet who felt unloved by her family, the school environment had been an occasion to be appreciated for the first time in her life;<sup>45</sup> interestingly her first

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<sup>42</sup> Ellen Martineau Higginson quoted in Webb, *op. cit.*, p.57.

<sup>43</sup> Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 590.

<sup>44</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 20; and Sanders, *Harriet Martineau - Selected Letters, cit.*, p. xiv, confirms this idea as she recognizes the "unusually good education she received for a woman born in 1802". Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28 and Fawcett, *op. cit.*, p. 58 explain that the innovative ideas the Martineau's had on education were strictly associated with the Unitarian movement.

<sup>45</sup> In Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 41, M. J. Degan explains that "Martineau's deafness occurred at

biographer notices that what Martineau received at school was not merely a combination of scholastic notions but the general extension of her mind.<sup>46</sup> The type of learning she acquired at school had a positive effect on her, and this might be the reason why she was so committed to the popularization of comprehensive training in *Household Education*. It is true that Mrs. Martineau spurred her daughters to achieve schooling as well as practical skills, however, Harriet seemed to regret her having spent many hours of her childhood needle working instead of devoting herself to the "cultivation of her mental powers".<sup>47</sup>

Harriet Martineau accounted in her *Autobiography* that her life started with winter, the reason which led the writer to regard her earlier years as the worst period of her life are probably her poor health and the relation with her mother. (A1: 180) Little Harriet proved to be a child with anguished feelings, generally gloomy and with a tendency to feel unappreciated. Martineau admitted her weaknesses when she stated "I have no doubt I was an insufferable child for gloom, obstinacy and crossness" (A1: 33), however, she blamed the lack of affection and sympathy for the state of her fragile mind, haunted by ill feelings, nightmares, and suicidal dreams.<sup>48</sup> (A1: 14) Penny Brown confirms that the Martineaus regarded her as a "dull, unobservant, slow, awkward child" (A1: 23) and ascribes the cause of such a negative perception to her illness; according to the critic, her growing deaf might have accentuated her sense of exclusion and, in a

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an age when she had conquered communication skills" thus, the good education she managed to obtain before losing her hearing, saved her from being regarded as inattentive and lazy, for it usually happened to deaf children at school.

<sup>46</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 22, accounts that "[t]he school-life was delectable to Harriet. Mr. Perry, the master, was gentle in his manner, and methodical in his style of teaching; and under his tuition the shy, nervous child felt for the first time encouraged to do her best, and aided not merely to learn her lessons, but also to expand her mental faculties."

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> Harriet Martineau confessed that her suicidal instincts were a reaction towards her feeling neglected and thought that suicide (or at least an attempt to it) would attract the attentions she needed: "I gloated over the thought that I would make somebody care about me in some sort of way at last : and, as to my reception in the other world, I felt sure that God could not be very angry with me for making haste to him when nobody else cared for me, and so many people plagued me."(A1: 18-19)

sense, isolation resulted from her deafness being not detected by her family.<sup>49</sup> It is true that the innate cheerless character of little Harriet could have been one of the reasons which led her to feel unloved. The duality in her bad temper conflicting with her strong need to be loved, seems to have not found a balance during her earlier years, creating an internal struggle that seems to have been partly reconciled only in her later years.<sup>50</sup> The biographer Florence Fenwick Miller regards her as the "ugly duckling" of the family,<sup>51</sup> a position that Martineau herself took as her tendency to victimization is strong throughout all her *Autobiography* as in the passage where she stated: "I really think, if I had once conceived that anybody cared for me, nearly all the sins and sorrows of my anxious childhood would have been spared me". (A1: 29) Not only did Martineau blame her parents but also her elder siblings were at gunpoint because of their "rough and contemptuous treatment", she was the sixth child thus, she was susceptible to the mischievousness of her elders who probably "meant no harm, but injured [her] irreparably." (A1: 19)

Harriet Martineau recognized that throughout her childhood she sought for "approbation and affection"; and a deepened reading of the *Autobiography* lets us gather that much of the approval she sought for was that of her mother. (A1: 19) Elizabeth Rankin had a strong personality and precise ideas on children's rearing; even if providing her progeny with the best education she could afford, her rigidity and her coldness seemed to have injured them, Harriet in particular.<sup>52</sup> The influence Mrs. Martineau had on her daughter can be seen from the very first years of her life, as the writer accounted that when she was between two and three years old she used to adopt

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<sup>49</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>50</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>51</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2, perfectly describes the figure of Elizabeth Rankin: "[a] true Northumbrian woman was Mrs. Martineau; with a strong sense of duty, but little warmth of temperament; with the faults of an imperious disposition, and its correlative virtues of self-reliance and strength of will. "

mottos such as "Never cry for trifles" (never cry for trifles) and "Duty first, and pleasure afterwards". (A1: 12) Such words are astonishing coming from an infant's mouth, but not from Harriet's, as we know that her moral rigour was prompted very soon under the supervision of her authoritarian mother. Harriet Martineau herself indirectly recognized her conformity to the rules when in *Household Education* (in the guise of a child she had the opportunity of observing) she accounted that "[s]he had a great reverence for rules; and she seemed never to dream of any rule being set aside for her sake, however hardly it might bear upon her." (HE: 286) While the author attempted at giving the image of herself as a submissive daughter, her natural instinct of self-assertion arises in some parts of her *Autobiography*. The injustices she suffered nurtured in her soul "bitter resentments" and, in some occasions, she exploded into "brief outbreaks of the rebellion against the oppressor".<sup>53</sup> Harriet Martineau's confidence has been injured mostly by her mother's "stern discipline", however, Fenwick Miller acknowledges that the harm she did to her daughter was not driven by a deliberate choice rather by her "arbitrary manner" and "quickness of temper".<sup>54</sup> Even if not intentional, the negligence of Mrs. Martineau led her daughter to withdraw herself while hoping for a sign of affection from her mother; in this regard Diana Postlethwaite concludes that Harriet's fondness of domestic duties, especially needlework, became her "substitute for maternal love".<sup>55</sup>

It does not surprise that Harriet Martineau emphasized children's need for affection in *Household Education*; as Ainslie Robinson reminds us, this kind of affection

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<sup>53</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 131. However, Martineau's rebellious self seems to have weakened in time as when she had the chance to start her career as a writer in London, her mother ordered her to go back home: "I rather wonder that, being seven and twenty years old, I did not assert my independence, and refuse to return, -- so clear as was, in my eyes, the injustice of remanding me to a position of helplessness and dependence, when a career of action and independence was opening before me. [...] the instinct and habit of old obedience prevailed, and I went home, with some resentment, but far more grief and desolation in my heart." (A1: 149) Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 70, in this regard explains why Martineau executed the order as "[t]he old habit of obedience to her mother, and the early implanted ideas of filial duty, were too strong for Harriet at once to break through them".

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14; 39.

<sup>55</sup> Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 592.

was a rare event in her life; while the ideal parent described in the book is attentive, caring, and sensitive, the one described in her *Autobiography* is the opposite.<sup>56</sup> Despite her mother might have injured her psychologically, increasing her sense of inadequacy, Mrs. Martineau disposed in the best way she thought of her means; she managed to grow eight children and educate them according to her ideas, giving priorities to objective rather than affective education. Mrs. Martineau made sacrifices for her children, provided them all the comforts and a moral guidance; the authoritarian mother did not want her children to be spoiled and with such fear in her mind she ended up on the other extreme.<sup>57</sup> However, the mother-daughter relationship changed greatly when Martineau reached adulthood, and, even with a bit of latent resentment, she gradually opened herself to her mother; despite much of Mrs. Martineau's education was self-taught and had not the chance to study as Harriet did, she managed to be a resourceful "literary confidant" for her writer daughter when they reconciled.<sup>58</sup>

Martineau defined the relation with her mother ruled by "a doctrine of passive obedience"; the emotional bond she established with her father instead was completely different. (A1: 22) Less present for working reasons, he was seen with great admiration by his daughter; the most consistent part of the *Autobiography* in which Harriet Martineau talked about her father was devoted to the description of the failure of the family business, however, the idea she had of him was extremely positive since he is described: "[h]umble, simple, upright, self-denying, affectionate to as many people as possible, and kindly to all, he gave no pain, and did all the good he could." (A1: 127) As it commonly happens in families where the father is a minor presence, Thomas Martineau

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<sup>56</sup> A. Robinson, "Playfellows and propaganda: Harriet Martineau's children's writing", *Women's Writing* Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 395-412, (2002), p. 407; Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 607, points out that "Martineau's own mother was the inverse of *Household Education's* ideal parent. Virtually everything Martineau says about motherhood in this book resonates with a bitter autobiographical subtext".

<sup>57</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 45, defends Mrs. Martineau as "[s]he was, notwithstanding, a woman of considerable talent who had profited enough from a limited education and subsequent self-education, that she was able to serve her daughter as a literary confidante, once Harriet had become reconciled to her in her twenties."

had the best of the time with his children, therefore he was associated with pleasurable moments rather than, in the mother's case, with duty and boring activities. Later in her life, Harriet Martineau still seemed to share the child's perspective towards the father, as she explained in *Household Education* "[i]t is a common saying that every child thinks his father the wisest man in the world. This is very natural; as parents are their children's fountains of knowledge." (HE: 3) Thomas's premature death might have had something to do with her tendency to idealize the male parent, and such attitude is further encouraged by the negative relation with the mother. A dichotomy can be seen in the relation between Harriet and her two distinct parents, while to Mrs. Martineau all the evils of her damaged brain are ascribed, her father seems to "soothe her anxieties"; even if not portrayed as an ideal father, Valerie Sanders considers that "there is something reassuring about his quiet presence", this idea is quite surprising if we consider that his business's failure had a notable impact on the lives of his family members.<sup>59</sup>

Harriet Martineau experienced traumas during her childhood; her sense of inadequacy caused by the relationship with her family might have injured her social emotional learning, while her formal education was definitely an encouragement to the development of her abilities as a writer. It is undeniable that Harriet Martineau's childhood has been comfortable from a material point of view while lacking the emotional ties that were so often missing in middle class families of her time. Her sufferings however helped her to extend her ability to sympathize with underprivileged and sometimes neglected categories of the Victorian society, such as women, sick people and children. To this last category Martineau has given a particular care that can be seen in her works of fiction and essays.

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<sup>59</sup> Sanders, "Harriet Martineau and Fatherhood", *cit.*, p. 19.

## 1.4 Relationship with children

Harriet Martineau's experience as a neglected child might have influenced her observations recorded in *Household Education*; her "very strong sympathy with the feelings and sufferings of children" is notable in the book as she considered several different conditions children had to endure.<sup>60</sup> Among the situations described there is that of the child facing the coming of a sibling. According to the author, the event could provoke two reactions in the elder child: he can become either jealous, fearing to lose the attentions and the affection of his parents,<sup>61</sup> or he can see the arrival of a new fellow to observe and take care of positively, as it happened to Martineau herself who accounted:

I well remember that the strongest feelings I ever entertained towards any human being were towards a sister born when I was nine years old. I doubt whether any event in my life ever exerted so strong an educational influence over me as her birth. The emotions excited in me were overwhelming for above two years; and I recall them as vividly as ever now when I see her with a child of her own in her arms. I threw myself on my knees many times in a day, to thank God that he permitted me to see the growth of a human being from the beginning. (HE: 56-57)

The passage is taken from her recollections when she was nine, however, Martineau's maternal instinct grew even earlier in her when she was just two; immediately after her mother gave birth to her brother James she entered the room and saw him for the first time, in that occasion she accounted "a passionate feeling of wonder, and a sort of tender delight" possessed her. (HE: 203) Harriet Martineau perceived the enlargement of the family positively as she sensed an opportunity to observe the growth of a child and, being involved in his rearing, helped her to understand the process of education. Furthermore, the event was for her an occasion to build new relationships from which she might finally have received some affection and exert her strong maternal instinct.

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<sup>60</sup> H. Fawcett, *Some Eminent Women of Our Times: Short Biographical Sketches*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1889, p. 57.

<sup>61</sup> "Angry and jealous feelings may grow into dreadful passions in that little breast, if great care be not taken to smooth over the rough passage from babyhood to childhood." (HE: 54)

(HE: 58)

As Mrs. Fenwick Miller points out "[b]abies were an unfailing delight to her", even during her worst periods of illness she never refused visits from children; throughout her life she managed to establish connections with them for they felt her sympathy, a feeling that grew strong in her as a reaction to her suffered infancy.<sup>62</sup> Martineau never married and such condition precluded her the chance to become a mother, however, despite her being a single woman, once in her life she was close to adopt a baby. When she travelled to America she was touched by a mulatto slave girl, Ailsie, which was left uncared when her mistress died. Martineau wanted to bring the child to England with her, and possibly train her as her own servant; she was excited at the idea of rearing a creature for the first time in her life, however, the project failed for the girl was demanded in another house. When Martineau was informed the girl was destined to another home her heart almost broke for she felt a connection with her, and she kept remembering her all her life, Martineau felt she did not deserve such a present as she thought that "[i]n her ripening beauty she was too valuable to be given to me."(A2: 145-146) Another occasion in which Martineau displayed a certain sensitivity towards children was when she stayed for a period at Tynemouth to try a mesmeric cure. There was a niece of her hostess who was badly treated by her aunt, Martineau was disturbed by the injustices committed to the orphan girl as she was constantly accused of being a deceiver and unjustly scolded:

[h]er quiet and cheerful submission impressed me at once ; and I heard such a report of her from the lady who had preceded me in the lodgings, and who had known the child from early infancy, that I took an interest in her, and studied her character from the outset. Her character was easily known; for a more simple, upright, truthful, ingenuous child could not be. She was, in fact, as intellectually incapable as morally indisposed to deception of any kind. (A2: 154-155)

Harriet Martineau gained understanding of children; even if she was well informed on their needs, and we can imagine her total commitment to them, she was

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<sup>62</sup> Fenwick Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

conscious her love might have overwhelmed them as she acknowledges: "[w]hen I am among little children, it frightens me to think what my idolatry of my own children would have been." (A1: 133) Martineau indeed criticized rough treatment of children, at the same time she recognized that an excess of love and care might have equally injured them; the idea is being implicitly employed by the writer to argue that an "excessive outbreak of feminine instinct" like hers was likely to suffocate the child.<sup>63</sup> Thus, her love for children was better employed at a distance, so that she could exert her potential as an educator without being overpowered by her maternal love.

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<sup>63</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-144.

## Chapter 2 - Harriet Martineau's *Playfellow*

### 2.1 Children's Representation

*What do we know of that which  
lies in the minds of children?  
We know only what we put there.<sup>1</sup>*

Children's representation has undergone a process of evolution throughout the 19th century; in the wake of evangelicalism several works produced for children displayed a prevailing didactic purpose, while the new perception of childhood characterizing the Victorian era favored a different approach to juvenile literature.

Looking at children's literature from the period, the differences between moralist tales and successive works of fiction that legitimised children's needs is paramount. Penny Brown singles out Anna Barbauld and Sarah Trimmer as the main exponents of late eighteenth century moralist writing with their works for children; even if differing in religious orientation the two shared the idea of moral conveyance through religious references. Moralist works tended to have the lessons conveyed as their focus, thus neglecting plausible and captivating representation; plots tended to result meagre and unattractive and characters were sketched as "mere cardboard figures".<sup>2</sup> According to Brown, one of the main weaknesses of such works was their 'adult outlook', for there was not any significant effort to "enter the child's mind"; as a result, the story's power of identification with young readers was weakened, and with it, the chance to affect their minds.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Jameson quoted in Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 13. Later on, the critic adds that children represented in moralistic tales were "sensible, serious, obedient, thoughtful, eager to learn, with a highly developed sense of filial piety and unselfish duty to others." *Ibid.* p. 38. It can be argued that the stereotyped flat characters of such tales might have created a sense of estrangement in Victorian young readers who probably indulged in such tedious books only because they were the only source of written entertainment they had access to.

<sup>3</sup> *Ivi.*

If in the first part of the century the emergence of children's individuality was limited, for seldom were they voiced in the texts, a progressive improvement followed this period as young protagonists became "more plausibly realistic, more recognisably childlike, indulging in childish thoughts" while they offered "a morally and socially desirable model" for the audience.<sup>4</sup> The conveyance of educational support was not precluded by the valorization of children's thinking; indeed, realistic representation was put at the service of more concrete and believable stories, where the child could identify and learn something.<sup>5</sup> The study of children's personality became a crucial element for writers, as the deepening of their characterization revealed their understanding of the potential of tales to affect impressionable young minds. In a sense, the need to convey moral, social, and religious lessons hindered much of the fanciful elements that were so attractive for the juvenile market; however, realistic representation gained success and put children's features to the foreground.<sup>6</sup>

The Late Georgian and Early Victorian eras were transitional periods for children's literature; the coming of romanticism and the understanding of childhood as a separate sphere of life concurred to a nearly morbid attention to children. Penny Brown spots a duality in middle-class adults' attitude towards the youngsters: on the one hand parental authority resulted in severe discipline and rebukes, on the other hand, the influence of romanticism led them to idealize their progeny which were spoiled, idolised and sometimes overprotected.<sup>7</sup>

The interpretation of childhood was the focus of many nineteenth century tales; the experience of the author as a child played a leading role in the success of such tales to have an effect on the audience and was further emphasised by the contrast with

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<sup>4</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 39. The idea that a limitation of fantastic elements strengthens the educational effect is confirmed by Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

impersonal moralistic productions. The idealization of children was influenced by the new approach to feelings, a reaction towards the industrial revolution that seemed to have destabilized 19th century society as it damaged both the environment and the individual. The reaction of Victorian writers towards a general emotional sterility tended to self-introspection, and the nostalgic feelings for their "lost childhood" concurred to the diffusion of a new attitude about the portrayal of a mythological infancy.<sup>8</sup>

Making the most of personal experiences of parenting and teaching was frequent among writers, however, the most vivid and moving stories were usually concerned with writers' recollections of their own childhood. The 'modern' approach was based on rejecting the perception of the child as a "passive recipient of instruction" and put on the spotlight childish dreams and fears. It does not surprise that Penny Brown's analysis on Victorian representation of children focuses on women's writing, since juvenile literature was largely accepted as their field for two reasons. First of all, the strong bond that forms between the mother and child undoubtedly fostered their deeper understanding of children; secondly women writers suffered restrictions and submission during childhood more than their male fellows, thus, they felt the need to tell their painful stories as a means to convey their experiences and possibly prevent other children from receiving the same treatments.<sup>9</sup>

Brown remarks that Maria Edgeworth and Harriet Martineau were precursors to the innovative portrayal of childhood, displaying a remarkable ability to psychological insight.<sup>10</sup> As we have seen in the section "1.3 Harriet Martineau: The Ugly Duckling Child", Martineau had quite a traumatic childhood from an emotional point of view; she explained in her *Autobiography* that the wrong approach to kids that undervalued their

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<sup>8</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 114.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 186.

sensitivity was injurious, and the idea that "children do not feel things as grown up people do" was for her a big mistake which caused most of her suffering when she was young. (A1: 25)<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is her vivid narration of her earlier years that provided a testimony of how such assumption was wrong; her retentive memory even permitted her to account her story since pre-verbal experiences.<sup>12</sup> It became popular at Martineau's time, to discuss among women about early impressions, this custom among literary women is confirmed by Martineau's correspondence with Anna Jameson and other women writers with which she confronted confidentially.<sup>13</sup> Ainslie Robinson, explores the Jameson-Martineau-Lady Byron epistolary relation and highlights that childish memoirs constituted the focus of their writing. Anna Jameson affected the creation of the *Autobiography's* section dedicated to childhood; in a letter to Lady Byron Jameson wrote:

HM...read to me some notes of her remembrances of her childhood, all she could recollect up to 5 years old, put together in a lesson in education & to exhibit the effect of certain early impressions on particular temperaments.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, self-analysis became for Martineau the means to create an accurate portrayal of the way in which education affects children's future self.

Sometimes happy, most often painful, Victorian writers' childish experiences provided their audience with biographical elements that presented "growing up as a means of interpreting themselves".<sup>15</sup> A significant enhancement in quality was embraced as child's individuality became the main concern of writers, especially when writing for their young readers. Helping children to understand themselves and the others, they managed to "connect with and reach out to children's emotional dilemmas";

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128, defines Martineau's *Autobiography* "one of the most open and sensitive accounts of the more painful and disturbing aspects of real-life nineteenth-century childhood".

<sup>12</sup> Martineau explained that she had "a strong consciousness and a clear memory in regard to [her] early feelings". (A1:1)

<sup>13</sup> See Sanders, *Harriet Martineau - Selected Letters*, *cit.*, p. 59, in which Martineau writes to Jameson in response to her request of Miss. Fox's commentaries on her childhood readings.

<sup>14</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

in this way, adult preconceptions were demolished and children's voices were finally recorded and heard.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2 Introducing *The Playfellow Series*

Harriet Martineau engaged in a new literary enterprise while experiencing one of the most difficult periods of her life as, during the forties, she was seriously ill.<sup>17</sup> The idea of creating a "light and easy work" formed in her mind and brought forth in 1841 her first collection of tales for children, *The Playfellow*; the series consisted of four tales published in February, May, August and November and were broadly appreciated by both British parents and children. (A2: 159) Florence Fenwick Miller defined *The Playfellow* "the best-known and most popular of her writings" for their unvarnished narratives, eloquent descriptions, and deepening of childish perceptions.<sup>18</sup> The positive reception of the book is confirmed by a letter written by the author to Elisabeth Barrett four years after the publication of series; here indeed Martineau seems to complain about the fact that "[t]he chief demand seems to be for more 'Playfellows' " rather than for other of her usual literary productions.<sup>19</sup>

Harriet Martineau based all her literary efforts on usefulness, and it was the case of this collection too; the work was demanded by her publisher Charles Knight who was involved in the distribution of works for the SDUK (Society for the diffusion of Useful Knowledge); for Ainslie Robinson, the association of the publisher with the organization

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<sup>16</sup> A. Treacher, "Children's Imaginings and Narratives: Inhabiting Complexity", *Feminist Review*, No. 82, pp. 96-113, (2006), p. 99

<sup>17</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 161, remarks "it would have been quite impossible for any reader to imagine that [*The Playfellow* tales] were written by an invalid, in constant suffering."

<sup>18</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>19</sup> Sanders, *Harriet Martineau - Selected Letters, cit.*, p. 110. Martineau felt the need to explain in her *Autobiography* that *The Playfellow* was going to be her last effort in writing fiction for children: "If the age of fiction-writing had not been over with me, so that I felt that I *could not* write good stories, I should have responded to the appeal by writing more children's tales." (A2: 293)

can explain the engagement of Harriett Martineau to write the tales, the writer being known for the highly educational nature of her works.<sup>20</sup> Martineau indeed explained that she was eager to accept the task as "there was a great want of juvenile literature for the Secularists, who could obtain few story-books for their children which were not stuffed with what was in their eyes pernicious superstition." (A2: 293) As mentioned in the introduction to this section, Martineau was deeply affected by her childhood and kept talking and writing about it all her life. As far as childish reminiscences are concerned, a strong influence on *The Playfellow* series was exerted by the correspondence with Anna Jameson; the two writers indeed, based most of their letters on their memories, as a result, Martineau conveyed her personal experiences as well as those of her literary friends in her work.<sup>21</sup>

Even if the tales displayed a noteworthy insight on children's feelings and their perception of things, at the same time, the underlying ideas reflected the obsolete custom in moralist writing of imbuing the stories told with lessons.<sup>22</sup> The explicit moral didacticism, however, did not hinder realistic representation; differently from the *Illustrations*, hard conditions were not hidden, instead emphasized in order to foster the perception of the protagonists as heroes.<sup>23</sup> Young characters in the tales, directly or indirectly exposed their perception of the world; for this reason, Webb explains that the stories "suit the minds for which they were intended" and, even if unpleasant experiences such as mistreatments or illnesses, could have upset the audience, such readings were supposed to toughen their spirit.<sup>24</sup> Roberts agrees with Webb for she states that "[c]onsidered biographically, these tales featuring children's heroism and

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<sup>20</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

<sup>21</sup> See *Ibid.* p. 403.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396. However, the critic exclude the last tale "The Crofton Boys" from the work's explicit didacticism.

<sup>23</sup> See Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

self-reliance in adversity bear meaningful insights about perseverance and endurance."<sup>25</sup> In general, the attractiveness of the tales rested on their exploring life experiences from another slant, the point of view of the little child guided the reader in the exploration of the world, possibly leaving adults' preconceptions outside.

The first published *Playfellow* is "Settlers at Home", the tale was written by Harriet Martineau during her first year of confinement at Tynemouth; inspired by one of De Quincy's tales, the story set in the Dutch Isle of Axholme narrates the vicissitudes of a community dealing with a natural disaster. (A2: 159-160) The narrative revolves around the adventures of a group of children in handling the separation from their parents and loss commodities after the flood; as the three Linacres children, Oliver, Mildred and George together with the young maid Ailwin are seen dealing effectively with the aftermaths of the calamity. The children are left with no food, water nor any safe place to stay and, to worsen the situation, Roger Redfern, the son of a rival family, raids the little they have. As the day passes the group starts to handle the situation and eventually assimilates the outsider, Roger, in their little community while the extraordinary event overturns all their habits and certainties. The element that stands out in the story is the ability of the protagonist children to recover from traumatic experiences such as the deprivation of house and commodities as well as the supposed loss of parents. The real challenge for the children, however, comes at the end of the story as the youngest child dies; the event is handled in an astonishingly mature way as they accept the departure of George as God's will.<sup>26</sup> The maturity with which the children deal with deprivations and hardship during an extraordinary but likely event, explains why the tale has been

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<sup>25</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 397, interestingly notices that "the moral of the story makes clear that the sacrifice of an innocent is for the greater good of the harmony of the two warring families."

noticed for being highly moral and realistic.<sup>27</sup>

"The Peasant and the Prince" features two different stories, beginning in a fairy tale style, it shifts to a highly dramatized version of the history of the French Revolution. While the second part lets the reader see by himself the evils caused by the wrong management of political affairs, the opening focuses on the importance of the aristocracy helping the needy, in a more straightforward way. In the first section, the young dauphiness encounter a village of poor people along her path to France, and helps them economically; the story has a very quick progression which ends with a happy peasant marriage.<sup>28</sup> The second section, instead, develops quite dramatically as we see the decline of the French monarchy; the inability of the king to administrate his country leads to several revolts and popular insurrections which culminate with the execution of the king and the queen. Even if the whole plot is focused on the narration of the events from the period, the objective representation is occasionally suspended and replaced by the perceptions of the real protagonist of the story, Louis XVII. The child is involved in a stressful situation he cannot understand, and since nobody really explains him what is happening, his sense of frustration and fear is heightened. When the king dies, the traumatic consequences of hiding, being hated by the population and being separated by the rest of his family, lead the child to a sort of mental breakdown. Fright and general distrust towards any human being grow in Louis to the extent that he ends up shutting himself in a room where nobody is allowed to enter, without eating or washing himself. His deteriorated health seems to have a sudden improvement when Laurent, one of his former servants, reappears and take care of him; however, all the years passed alone, without any distraction or intellectual stimulation, avoiding human relations take him to

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<sup>27</sup> See E. Sanders Arbuckle "Harriet Martineau Applies Sociology in the North", *Martineau Society's Newsletter*, No. 30, pp. 11-18 (Winter 2011), p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 397, points out that the apparent happy ending does not preclude the presence of Martineau's usual social criticism since her "appended moral to this section of the text to herald the impending doom."

death when he is just nine years old. The fact that Harriet Martineau was severely ill when writing *The Playfellow* explains the focus of this and another tale of the series on physically as well as psychologically agonizing characters. The touchy account of child Louis's suffering indeed "must have wrung many childish heart", as its sad ending was undoubtedly explicit for young readers who were exposed to the reality that affliction and death affects even the wealthy.<sup>29</sup> The underlying message of the tale explains the choice of tackling the sad story of the royal child, Robinson indeed explains that the morale of the tale was supposed to address the "privileged classes in England" who should be more attentive towards the hungry poor of their country.<sup>30</sup> However, the Victorian audience did not respond to the tale as its author wished, for she explained, it was "by far the least successful of the set"; (A2: 161) Martineau was disappointed by the reception of the tale which was nearly ignored except among the poor who were fascinated by the descriptions of dresses, jewelries, and court life.<sup>31</sup> It is true that the tale tends to indulge in the historical narrative, and its lack of success might be ascribed not only to the negativity of the whole event accounted, but also to the extensive expository passages that constitutes the bulk of the story. Even if the accounts are spaced out by the exposure of young Philip's thoughts and fears, the focus of the story - the objective representation of an historical event - prevails on the moving representation of an unjustly suffering child.

The third tale "Feats on the Fiord" provides an apt example of Martineau's competence in depicting exotic and unexplored settings; the events take place in Norway where the protagonists' marriage is obstructed by the arrival of the pirates in the land. The girlish "fairy tale love story" narrated is adorned with several details of folk customs concerning food and festivities' traditions, while the accurate description of

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<sup>29</sup> Vera Weathley quoted in Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 402

<sup>30</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

<sup>31</sup> Sanders Arbuckle, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Norwegian topography strengthens the charming adventurous account of the pirate hunt.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the tale the narrator emphasizes the highly superstitious attitude of Erica, the wife-to-be, who lives in constant fear of unreal curses and her irrationality almost ruins her future with Rolf; at the same time, it is Norwegian mythology that helps to capture the pirates, who think Rolf a spirit hunting them. The tale is centered on the alternation of everyday life in the rural community with outdoor expeditions, in this way, the reader's mind is kept awakened. Despite the intriguing development, the ending of the story is pretty conventional with the wedding of the couple. In addition, Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle detects a religious message in the conclusion of the tale, for the bishop who celebrates the marriage preaches against superstitions, thus preventing young readers from irrational fears as God protects those who 'live in his house'.<sup>33</sup> Even if the story is built to please both girls and boys with its dual-purpose plot, it does not provide with any strong message nor involve them emotionally; we may say that the engagement of the reader tends to be limited to the reading moment and does not offer any particular lesson for the future.<sup>34</sup>

### **2.3 Analysis of "The Crofton Boys"**

The most appreciated tale of the series is undoubtedly "The Crofton Boys"; the story, unlike the previous ones, does not hold any strong historical or geographical connotation, and revolves around the experiences of its eight-year-old protagonist, Hugh, who longs to enter in his brothers' school where he confronts with a new world made of injustices, intimate friendships, significant discoveries and, most of all, a life-

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<sup>32</sup> See Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

<sup>33</sup> As reported in her *Autobiography*, Martineau suffered considerably from irrational fears manifested in hallucinations, nightmares and anxiety during her childhood. (A1: 10-11)

<sup>34</sup> See Sanders Arbuckle, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

changing accident. The structure of the tale is quite conventional, following the pattern of contemporary "boy's public stories" and the themes explored are prosaic, however, the psychological insight with which Hugh's formation is dealt with, let the tale stand out from canonical Victorian tales' scenario.<sup>35</sup>

The opening of the story provides an overlook on the house of the Proctors of London, an average middle-class family whose business is a shop in the city centre; the eldest son Phil, attends the Crofton school and Hugh deeply wishes to follow him; even if not old enough, he succeeds in convincing his parents and is finally sent there. Shortly after his arrival at the school, Hugh loses part of his initial enthusiasm when he confronts with rules and customs of the place; his disappointment is further increased by Phil's behavior as he tends to take some distances from him and does not protect him as he had expected. With the passing time, Hugh starts to adapt to the unfamiliar environment, makes friendship and applies himself to learning; moments of discouragement affects his mood as he plunges into a state of deep homesickness; however, friendships, brotherly affection and most of all, God's trust cheer him. When Hugh is beginning to fit with the new social context a bad event happens: while having a snow fight with his fellows, a boy (the director's son) causes him to slip from a wall; as a result, a stone falls after him landing on his foot, which has to be amputated.<sup>36</sup> The sufferings and frustrations of being disabled seem not to tear down the young hero who even refuses to reveal the culprit of his disablement; thanks to the loving cures of his mother and the assistance of his sister, Hugh manages to overcome the tough moment proving to be a brave and mature boy. Following his mother's teaching, the young boy accepts his condition as respecting God's will, and is finally rewarded when the opportunity to go to India as a civil servant with his school fellow is offered to him.

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<sup>35</sup> See Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

<sup>36</sup> H. Martineau, *The Playfellow*, New York: D . Appleton & Co. 1841. p. 96. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in brackets as (CB: page number).

Critics agree in saying that the plot of "The Crofton Boys" is straightforward, to the extent that it seems not written by the same writer who was accused of writing, in *Illustrations of Political Economy*, farfetched tales that were smothered by a doctrinal second end.<sup>37</sup> Uniquely in the series, the emotional experiences of the child are given the priority above the narrative construction and the lessons conveyed; the episodes accounted reveal Martineau's interest in displaying children's perceptions, however, since the unfolding of the story corresponds to Hugh's achievements in moral, social and academic training, it may be argued that the educational power of the story is still present. The plausibility of the events accounted and the life-like dialogues between children concur to the general positive reception of the tale, and leads critics to regard "The Crofton Boys" as the best outcome of Martineau's fictional works for children.

#### Crofton School: Entering a New World

*To prosper at Crofton,  
you must put off home, and make  
yourself a Crofton boy. (CB: 89)*

Hugh Proctor fervently wishes to go to Crofton's boarding school and his insistence finally persuades his parents to send him there. The Proctors, even trying hard, have not managed till then to motivate the child who is a dull student and advances in his lessons very slowly. Mrs. Proctor thinks Crofton an occasion for her son to mature and open his mind to learning; the fact that he will be the youngest boy at school does not scare her for she knows he is a brave boy. Her concerns are rather on the misdirected employment of his energies which, hopefully, will be rectified by a sterner discipline as she rebukes him:

[y]ou have faults,—faults which give your father and me great pain; and though you are not cowardly about being hurt in your body, you sadly want courage of a better kind,—courage

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<sup>37</sup> See Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120; Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

to mend the weakness of your mind. You are so young that we are sorry for you, and mean to send you where the example of other boys may give you the resolution you want so much. (CB: 30)

Mrs. Proctor, who is a caring mother, is worried about the future of her boy in the new place, the inconsiderate child might have some troubles and she hopes he will keep relying on his heavenly parent when needing moral comfort; such awareness soothes her anxieties as she admits: "[i]f I were not sure that you would continually open your heart to Him, I could not let you go from me." (CB: 32)

Young Hugh have fantasies on how wonderful his life would be at Crofton, he hopes he will have more time to spend with his brother, and establish friendships with the other boys; but most of all, he thinks his problems with school will be overcome as "[h]e supposed the Crofton boys all got their lessons done somehow, as a matter of course; and then they could go to sleep without any uncomfortable feelings or any tears." (CB: 30) For Hugh, his mothers' speculations on how he will miss home and his teacher, are unfounded as he thinks that learning at Crofton is much easier than at home. His expectations are quite high, it seems as if he thinks that the burden of lessons and homework may vanish "by magic" there; the gap existing between Hugh's prospects and the ordinary reality gives us a hint of the inevitable disappointment the boy will sense later on, when the unpleasant aspects of school life are presented to him.

The events in the tale, even if accounted by an external narrator, share the perspective of the eight-year-old protagonist; the rendering of childish thoughts and expectations are elements which lend a lively atmosphere to the tale; in addition, the representation of "common and universal dilemmas of school life" fosters a truthful effect.<sup>38</sup> Homely routine is the first hurdle for Hugh in his familiarization with the new place; he was used to be kissed and cuddled, hygienic practices were expected every morning at the Proctors, and Hugh was particularly inclined to take care of his

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<sup>38</sup> *Ivi.*

appearance. At Crofton, all these habits are roughly interrupted and he reluctantly follows the new rules, however, there is one aspect of home life that he cannot neglect: honoring God before bed time

[h]e saw that the others had not kneeled down to say their prayers,—a practice which he had never omitted since he could say a prayer, except when he had the measles. He knew the boys were watching him; but he thought of his mother, and how she had taught him to pray at her knee. He hid himself as well as he could with the scanty bed-curtains, and kneeled. (CB: 48)

The arrival at Crofton is traumatic for Hugh who has never imagined how different his life there would have been; signs of affection, compassion and protection he was used to are not envisaged at the boarding school and the recognition that his life will not be the same puts him in a desperate mood to the extent that he "almost choke[s] with his grief". (CB: 48) Even if changing habits is destabilizing for Hugh, it is something he vaguely expected, his relationship with Phil, instead, was a certainty to him that seems to crumble when he arrives at Crofton. From an outward look the elder brother has an exemplar behaviour with him; enough considerate to explain him the formal rules of the school, while leaving him the freedom to establish new relationships and learn to relate autonomously. On the other hand, the inexperienced Hugh, perceives Phil's distance as uncaring of his feelings and his frustration bursts after the snow accident; in a moment when his brother shows some vulnerability and compassion for him, he confesses his disappointment during his first days at Crofton:

I was so uncomfortable,—I did not know anybody, or what to do; and I expected you would show me, and help me. I always thought I could not have felt lonely with you here; and then when I came, you got out of my way, as if you were ashamed of me, and you did not help me at all; and you laughed at me. (CB: 113)

The eldest brother proves to be unaware of Hugh's suffering and explains that his conduct was the most natural way an elder brother could have behaved; not suffocating nor uncaring, Phil thinks he has performed his brotherly duty mediating between the newcomer and school's environment. Children's world seems to be innocent and uncomplicated, however, situations like those presented in the tale make us understand

that the complexities of "the social and cultural spheres constitute children and childhood".<sup>39</sup> The community of Crofton is made of boys whose behaviour is ruled by codes, as a result, every boy respects them in order to be accepted by the group; entering a new social context is hard for children, because they have to understand the mechanisms first. For this reason, Phil wisely chooses to let Hugh learn by himself the rules, as explaining them would not be productive; the boy answers to his younger brother who accuses him of negligence explaining that "[t]hat is the way all boys have to get on. They must make their own way." (CB: 114) Hugh's rearing at home had a strong feminine mark, for this reason his arrival at Crofton is embarrassing for Phil as his brother looks quite like a 'Betty', as they use to call effeminate new entries; Phil has to follow the implicit rules, and even if he loves his brother he cannot be associated with him as he tells him that the other boys mocked him for having a brother that was "scarcely any better than a girl". (CB: 113-114) A revelation is given to Hugh by his friend Firth who tells him "[l]ittle boys are looked upon as girls in a school till they show that they are little men"; (CB: 57) the shift to manhood is thus fostered by a clean break with past habits and the decisive shift in Hugh is marked by Firth's statement: "you have boasted of being a Londoner up to this time; and from this time you will hold your head high as a Crofton boy." (CB: 59)

Hugh's babyish attitudes gradually change as he comes to understand the mechanisms of Crofton's microcosm; his initial discomfort is understandable, as the narrator explains: "what [he] now found was only what every boy and girl finds, on beginning school, or entering upon any new way of life." (CB: 53) The protection felt in his native haven is replaced by the uncertainties of living in a community bonded by the common means of instruction rather than that of affection; as Amal Treacher points out,

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<sup>39</sup> Treacher, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

the process of evolution in children's perception of the world lies in their understanding that "life is complex and more uncomfortable than had previously been thought."<sup>40</sup> In the same manner, Hugh adapts implicit norms to Crofton and, putting all his efforts in peer relationship, he conquers the sense of belonging he longs for.

### The Sense of Justice

Oppression, injustices and unfairness have been crucial matters in Harriet Martineau's writings; several of her publications dealt with abuses, among which there were American slavery, women's subordination, and children mistreatment. In her *Autobiography* it is accounted that she had a "devouring passion for justice" not only to her but also to the oppressed of any kind; (A1: 18) her defense of children and servants was particularly fierce during her youth, however, for the hard she tried, her reasons were hardly ever heard since she was perceived as just an impudent bad-tempered child. When Harriet Martineau was five, she was already upset by sermons which tended to side with the rulers, while "not a word was ever preached about the justice due from the stronger to the weaker." (A1: 21) The author discussed about the importance of justice also in *Household Education*; explaining the point of view of the child, she demonstrated that even the youngest creatures develop a "moral judgment" which, even if not impartial, is grounded on the perception of their own rights. (HE: 161)

Children's sense of justice is paramount in "The Crofton Boys", clearly, the main viewpoint is that of Hugh who victimizes himself every time things do not turn out as he wishes. In chapter six "First Ramble", the boy is punished with his mates for longing around outside the boundaries of the school; in that occasion Hugh just followed the

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97; 101.

group without knowing where he was going, thus, he thinks it is unjust to be punished. However, Mr. Carnaby, the usher, wants to cane all of them, “[t]o make them remember”; (CB: 80) Phil tries to comfort his brother telling him the strokes are not hard to bear, but the point is that, what hurts Hugh is not physical pain, rather "the being punished in open school, and when he did not feel that he deserved it." (CB: 80) After having pondered on the shame he will feel for the treatment, he concludes that, even if it was not right to be punished for a crime he felt he did not commit, "it was better than having done anything very wrong—anything that he really could not have told his mother." (CB: 80) Luckily, Hugh is relieved from the punishment for Mr. Tooke rebukes the usher who sadistically makes the boys wait too long for the strokes to come; the just director is against Mr. Carnaby's measures and even fires him as school policy is to educate and provide lessons, "not mental torture". (CB: 82)<sup>41</sup> Admitting that Martineau openly declared to be against corporal punishment in *Household Education*, the episode illustrated serves to teach Hugh to be more responsible for his actions, and accept the consequences of his choices. As Firth explains him, even if he was not aware of doing something wrong, he did it anyway and "what you suffered will prevent your letting yourself be led into such a scrape again." (CB: 90)<sup>42</sup>

Hugh's intolerance towards underserved punishments resembles Martineau's, for he cannot bear even when it concerns other children. An example is provided in chapter four "Michaelmas-day Over"; after a couple of days at Crofton, Hugh is in class with his fellows when a chatter is caused by Phil who is immediately punished by the

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<sup>41</sup> The episode depicted here and the character of Mr. Carnaby are likely to be taken from Martineau's experience as she accounted: "I have known a tutor avow his practice of beating a bold boy till he broke two canes over him, because the boy ought to learn that he is under a power (a power of arm) greater than his own, and must, through fear of it, apply himself to his appointed business. Such inflictions make a boy reckless, or obstinate, or deceitful." (HE: 93)

<sup>42</sup> Martineau clarified in *Household Education* that "it may be useful to connect some expectation of pain or pleasure with particular seasons or acts, so as to make the infant remember the occasion for self-government, and rouse its will to do right; but this should be only where the association of selfish pleasure or pain is likely to die out with the bad habit, and never where such selfish pleasure or pain can be associated with great permanent ideas and moral feelings." (HE: 84-85)

usher. When Hugh sees Phil beaten, he perceives it as an abuse of power and tries to defend his brother. (CB: 47) In another occasion the youngest Crofton stands out as the defender of the oppressors when he sees a group of boys burying poor Lamb on the ground; Hugh interferes with their bullying and the victim is finally saved. When Lamb thanks his defender, he asks him why he had been so kind to offer his help and Hugh answers to the boy that it was because "he never could bear to see anybody made worse." (CB: 62)

The sense of justice that grows even stronger in Hugh at his staying at Crofton is counterbalanced by the injustices he unwillingly causes to his neighbour, notably his sister Agnes. The girl nurses his brother after the incident, leaving her life and friends in London; at Crofton, she helps her brother who is in difficulty in his new condition of lameness, even if her presence is precious to Hugh, he never seems to notice it and she spends her days with "nothing to do but to wait on him, and play with him." (CB: 123) When Agnes is with her brother and other Crofton boys she always feels "in the way" and her being a marginal figure in the tale, is finely used by Martineau to illustrate once again the minor role women had in society. Agnes is so kindhearted that she seems to "cherish her role" as a guardian even if having nothing in return; once her brother even asks her to leave the room, causing her to spend a winter afternoon in her cold room walking up and down trying not to freeze.<sup>43</sup> The narrator comments on Hugh's carelessness as he should have felt that "he had used her with a roughness which is more painful to a loving heart than cold and darkness are to the body." (CB: 136)<sup>44</sup>

Harriet Martineau exposes children's issues with justice, as their naiveté and innocence lead them to make several mistakes that cause suffering and frustration. The

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<sup>43</sup> Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 596.

<sup>44</sup> An interesting example of injustice towards sisters is provided also in "The Settlers at Home" where Mildred bears the cost of all the troubles in coping with the flood's aftermath while "[n]obody seemed to care: nobody seemed to think of her". H. Martineau, "The Settlers at Home" New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1841, p. 121. Henceforth quotations will be given in the text in brackets as (SH: page number)

injustices committed at Crofton that seems so grave for the sufferers, are an occasion for them to grow up as the emotional struggle they join "consolidat[es] a stronger awareness of the outside world with its inequalities and differences".<sup>45</sup>

### Invalidism - The Child Bearing His Pain

It is well known that Harriet Martineau suffered from several diseases and spent many of her days bedridden; the fact that the author of *The Playfellow* experienced considerable physical suffering explains her depiction of pained and invalid children such as Louis XVII in "The Peasant and the Prince", little George in "Settlers at Home" and lame Hugh in "The Crofton Boys". Her attention to invalidism was furthered in *Household Education* which contained an eloquent description of what passes in an infirm child's mind:

the lame child among the leapers has to contend alone with most of these mortifications, and with his stimulating animal spirits besides. Nothing can be further from passiveness than his state in his hour of trial, though he may sit without moving a muscle. He is putting down the swellings of his little heart, and taming his instincts, and rousing his will, and searching out noble supports among his highest ideas and best feelings—putting on his invisible armour as eagerly as any hero whom the trumpet calls from his rest. (HE: 104)

While recognizing the troubles of this typology of children, she recommended parents not to yield to pity, as it might happen that the invalid kid take advantage of its condition. The possibility of being pampered indeed, is offered to Hugh who is consoled by his mother, nursed by Agnes and supported by his schoolfellows too as "[t]here was not a boy now at Crofton who would not do anything in the world to help him." (CB: 114) Martineau explained that parents and friends' overprotection in cases of suffering children is quite usual, as they try to compensate with their beloved's loss; however, she reminds that such behaviour does not comfort the child who is even more frustrated by

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<sup>45</sup> Treacher, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

the highlighting of his condition. (HE: 115)

Ainslie Robinson points out that Martineau's childhood interest in stories of martyrs could have inspired her rendering of Hugh bearing of the incident's aftermath; when the boy is informed that his foot has to be cut, he seems to react quite rationally and when asked if he thinks he can endure it, his answer is astonishingly clam and considered:<sup>46</sup>

"Your foot is too much hurt ever to be cured. Do you think you can bear it, Hugh?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. So many people have. It is less than some of the savages bear. What horrid things they do to their captives,—and even to some of their own boys! And they bear it."

"Yes; but you are not a savage."

"But one may be as brave, without being a savage. Think of the martyrs that were burnt, and some that were worse than burnt! And they bore it." (CB: 100-101)

During the surgery, Hugh is attended by his uncle who, even trying to be strong for his nephew, manifests suffering in seeing what he is going through; Hugh, sensing his distress, manages to look at him in the middle of the intervention, to tell him "[n]ever mind, uncle! I can bear it." (CB: 102)

The real strength that Hugh demonstrates, however, is in the course of recovery, facing the new condition of lameness; when he heals from the physical pain, the boy has to undergo a change in habits, for several usual activities are now impossible for him. In this phase, poor Hugh goes through considerable upheavals and is sustained by his mother who pours into his son all the moral strength she has.<sup>47</sup> Much of the fortitude Hugh gathers is fostered by Mrs. Proctor who convinces him he is strong enough to bear physical as well as psychological pain; in order to help him coping with his loss, the woman recurs to God as he is the one who would be more pleased about children's endurance and reveals him:

[t]here is a great pleasure in the exercise of the body,—in making the heart beat, and the limbs glow, in a run by the sea-side, or a game in the playground; but this is nothing to the pleasure there is in exercising one's soul in bearing pain,—in finding one's heart glow with

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<sup>46</sup> See Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 404.

<sup>47</sup> A reference to such cases is present in *Household Education* as Martineau states: "how powerful is the example of the parents and the habit of the household in training little children to self-control." (HE: 108)

the hope that one is pleasing God. (CB: 106)<sup>48</sup>

The conscientious child wants to meet his mother's expectations, thus rest in God to "bear cheerfully whatever troubles his misfortune brought upon him". (CB: 138) For the hard he tires, discomfort prevails in certain moments, especially when he ruminates on his unattainable desire to travel; in this case, the motherly presence helps him as she sensibly responds to his complains presenting him the example of Beethoven, who kept nurturing his passion for music while becoming deaf. (CB: 105) The message Martineau wants to carry is to cheer up the injured child with positive messages, letting him know that whatever his troubles are, he can count on a flesh and bold as well as a spiritual guide; at the same time, the author wanted parents to be as realistic as possible, for there is nothing worse than to deceive children with overtly optimistic expectations.<sup>49</sup> Mrs. Proctor manages to instill serenity in her son, she explains him that his disability would permit him to develop other abilities at school and to increase his cultivation; even if her telling him he "will be more beloved" for his condition might sound as an unfair enticement, the underlying positive message the author wants to convey is that everyone should make the most of a difficult situation, (CB: 128) for she thought that the aim with infirm children is "to make them hardy in mind,—saving them from being hardened."(HE: 133)

The portrayal of Hugh is also related to a vicarious experience Harriet Martineau

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<sup>48</sup> Martineau's reliance on the capacity of children for restraint can be considered excessively demanding if we consider the cases contained in *Household Education*: "[h]ow much safer, and how infinitely more beautiful is the self-control of the little creature who stifles his sobs of pain because his mother's pitying eye is upon him in tender sorrow! or that of the babe who abstains from play, and sits quietly on the floor because somebody is ill; or that of a little hero who will ask for physic if he feels himself ill, or for punishment if he knows himself wrong, out of confidence in the tender justice of the rule under which he lives!"( HE: 77)

<sup>49</sup> See Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 36. Martineau paid particular attention to the avoidance of parents to mislead their disabled children as in *Household Education* she warned : "[n]ever let her tell him that this is of no great consequence—never let her utter the cant that is talked to young ladies at schools, that the charms of the mind are everything, and those of the form and face nothing. This is not true; and she ought to know that it is not: and nothing but truth will be strong enough to support him in what he must undergo." (HE: 132)

had during her childhood; her crippled friend Emily Cooper was clearly an inspiration as she saw her in "daily pain of heart from the keen sense of her peculiarity". (HE: 128) In her *Autobiography* she accounted that she abstained from playing with the other children during her recreational hours just to avoid her friend to feel different. (A1: 46-47) A clear reference to the episode can be seen in chapter thirteen "Tripping", where Hugh is left alone by his friend Dale who joins the group of fellows to play. Such circumstance brings Hugh to the grim reality of his infirmity as

[h]e was in an extreme perturbation. At the first moment, he was behind measure hurt with Dale. He did not think his best friend would have so reminded him of his infirmity, and of his being a restraint on his companions. He did not think any friend could have left him at such a moment. (CB: 158)

Hugh's endurance is portrayed in the tale as an example of a child exercising his "natural powers": bravery, God-fearing and parents' pleasing are associated with the success of the protagonist in conquering his place in the world. Hugh's positive attitude indeed helps him to fulfill his dream as he is sent to India to perform his "honourable duty" as a civil servant. (CB: 174) Adversities do not preclude happiness in Hugh's life who even considers the accident as a blessing for he tells Tooke: "I never should have gone to India if I had not lost my foot; and I think it is well worth while losing my foot to go to India." (CB: 173 ) Critics appreciate Martineau's handling the problem of children impairment, as the matter is supervised "frankly yet sensitively" without indulging in sentimentalization. Thanks to the support of family and friends Hugh grows morally as well as intellectually; the injurious event is thus helpful for the child who is prepared to deal with the hardship of life such as loss and frustrations thanks to adults and peers' loving attentions.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 36; Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120. Another interesting example of the child gaining moral strength thanks to traumatic experiences is provided in "The Settler At home" when the narrator comments on the changes Oliver undergoes as he tells: "Oliver seemed to have grown many years older since the flood came. He was no taller, and no stronger;—indeed he seemed to-day to be growing weaker with fatigue; but he was not the timid boy he had always appeared before. He spoke like a man; and there was the spirit of a man in his eyes." (SH: 158)

## The Education of Feelings - Coping with Fear

*A child who has never known a sensation of fear [...] can never be a man of a high order. (HE: 29)*

While growing up, Harriet Martineau managed to preserve part of the innocence and naivety from her childhood; she was genuinely fond of children and displayed an amazing capacity to sympathize with youngsters. Martineau's plead for the sensitization of parents towards their children started with subtle references to children in her tales and essays, and was fully discussed later in *Household Education*; however, the roots of such interest can be found in her *Autobiography*, where the misery disclosed is helpful to reveal mothers that "their children sometimes suffer".<sup>51</sup> To demonstrate the validity of her ideas, Martineau sprinkled with childish experiences her works; notably the account on *Household Education* of her nightmares and unfounded terrors, concurred to explain how fear should be handled by parents. (HE: 98)

Thus, fear was a consistent feeling throughout her childhood, and contributed to increase her sense of isolation; even if the sentiment is generally considered as a negative one, Martineau thought that it was not harmful if directed in the right way.<sup>52</sup> Signs of affection and sympathy can be helpful for the child to overcome his fears; such idea is conveyed in "The Crofton Boys" as when Mr. Took visits the Proctors to discuss about Hugh's admission at Crofton School, the boy is worried about what his mother might tell him:

"Mother has been telling Mr. Tooke that I cannot say my multiplication-table! Now, that is too bad!" exclaimed Hugh. "And they will make me say it after dinner! What a shame!"  
"Why Hugh! You know mamma does not like—you know mamma would not—you know mamma never does anything unkind. You should not say such things, Hugh." (CB: 18)

The answer of his sister does not soothe completely his anxieties, however, it is interesting to notice how unmotivated fears are handled by the family. When Hugh's

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<sup>51</sup> Fawcett, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>52</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

anxiety is found out, he is helped and not "unkindly ridiculed or forced to endure", but rather guided to reflect.<sup>53</sup> The lack of empathy or "slightest indulgence" that Martineau felt, especially from her mother, explains her attention to Hugh in the tale, as she knows the extent to which a trivial worry "can become an obsession in a child's mind."<sup>54</sup> Fear is faced in the story, not ignored nor alimented; such feeling universally felt unpleasant, is considered an integral part of the education of feelings for Martineau. According to the author, "[a] child who has never known any kind of fear can have no power of Imagination;—can feel no wonder, no impulse of life, no awe or veneration"; (HE: 89) thus, parents have the crucial function of canalizing the feeling in the right direction "both by reason and by bringing such courage as he has to bear on the weak point." (HE: 94) Fear becomes a means of moral growth too, as with it the capacity for empathy is developed; Hugh's worries, especially those connected with the injury, are exploited in the tale to demonstrate how even a distressing event as the loss of a limb provides a lesson on moral commitment as "[w]ithout fear of pain, we could not enter into the pain of others." (HE: 30)

The sensitivity and understanding that the Proctor family displays in the tale is precisely that which Martineau missed in her childhood; nobody helped her to overcome her fears and frequently worsened them. Feeling unloved by her family and their general misunderstanding of children's behaviour undoubtedly influenced Martineau's depiction of the Proctors; as Brown indicates, the strongest point of the tale is that the events are accounted in a "straightforward, believably childlike terms" which help the reader to sympathize with Hugh.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the emphasis on children's suffering leads Postlethwaite to detect a morbid sentimentalization of the story.<sup>56</sup> In a

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<sup>53</sup> Fawcett, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>54</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>55</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>56</sup> Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 602.

sense, the Proctor 'rosy' family with his attention to children's needs and feeling provides a contrast with the "miseries and resentments" that characterized Martineau's early years.<sup>57</sup>

### Projecting the Ideal Mother

Much of Hugh's education is provided by his mother, who, even not directly teaching him, supervises his progresses and failures. The idea that the opening of the child's mind and heart is much influenced by parents - mothers in particular - is paramount in the tale and, in the case of an injured child like Hugh, this connection is further emphasized for he "can open its swelling heart to no one else". (HE: 127) In *Household Education* Harriet Martineau stressed the importance of the mother-child relationship, especially when involving disability or illness;<sup>58</sup> the author invested the mother with a great responsibility, as Postlethwaite states, she is put at "the center of the child's psychic cosmos".<sup>59</sup> The presence or absence of the mother affects strongly all the four tales contained in *The Playfellow*, however, Mrs. Proctor is definitely "the most significant" of the series.<sup>60</sup>

The representation of the mother in "The Crofton Boys" is critical for her being equally "stern and protective".<sup>61</sup> Mrs. Proctor proves to be attentive and reasonable, for instance when she and her husband decide to send Hugh at the boarding school she openly discusses with her son "whether he would have a month's holiday or a month's work, before leaving home"; while watchful and disciplined she gives space to her child

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<sup>57</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>58</sup> "From the moment that a child becomes subject to any infirmity, a special relation between him and his mother begins to exist: and their confidence must become special."(HE: 130)

<sup>59</sup> Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 607.

<sup>60</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

<sup>61</sup> Sanders Arbuckle, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

and treats him as a mature boy. (CB: 28) Even if Brown points out that, in the tale, "parental authority is never questioned" a clear open-mindedness and leniency is displayed; as a matter of fact, Mrs. Proctor reminds us more of James Martineau's vision of his mother rather than of his sister's.<sup>62</sup>

As far as Mrs. Proctor's behavior after the incident is concerned, the woman proves to be a loving mother, the "unfailing refuge" baby Harriet would have wished for herself. For Martineau, the mother is the most important figure in a child's world and this is confirmed by the fact that Hugh's behaviour in the course of the whole story is very much influenced by the female figure who instills knowledge and dictates his choices. In order to avoid her disappointment, Hugh manages to overcome his weakness even when he thinks he cannot bear the pain, as thinking of his mother's expectations "[makes] him resolve to bear, not only his loss, but any blame which might come upon him silently, and without betraying anybody." (CB: 78)

The maternal deprivation suffered from Harriet Martineau seems to be exorcized in the tale where the protagonist child is surrounded by love and compassion; at the same time the author does not display an immoderate pouring of affection as the mother depicted seems to be balanced in her relationship with the son. Presenting figures such as Mrs. Proctor, Martineau "built a monument to the generative power of women in molding human nature and, thus, human society".<sup>63</sup> Not only does Mrs. Proctor prove to be an idealized version of the mother Harriet Martineau wished to have and likely wanted to be; the mother figure is further explicitly employed by the author to argue women's potential as moral educators.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 36. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 409, suggests that "[i]f Mrs. Proctor does at times resemble the severe authoritarian figure often associated with Victorian parenting, she also represents a number of the principles advocated by Martineau for modern mothers, in particular a listening ears and sincere regard for children's feelings."

<sup>63</sup> Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 607.

<sup>64</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

## The Heavenly Parent

*[W]hen a child makes God his friend,  
God puts into the youngest and weakest  
the spirit of a man. (CB: 33)*

The ideal Victorian middle class family was centered on the perception of the household as a "congregation of believers" whose moral and intellectual cultivation had the homely environment at its base.<sup>65</sup> The Martineaus were a Unitarian family whose religious beliefs affected their children's rearing and in particular Harriet, who sought refuge in God when she felt forsaken. The Unitarian upbringing provided Martineau with a guidance in several important aspects, notably in education, and it fostered her positivity and open-mindedness, helping her moral strength. Even if she disavowed her belief system when she moved to an atheistic perspective on life, she acknowledged that "old religious superstitions" were a nostrum for her childish fears and frustrations.<sup>66</sup> Critics agree in saying that religion was for her a source of comfort, while fearing people she had no fear for God, and her faith was "a source of great joy and little misery."<sup>67</sup> Linda Peterson recognizes that religion did her good, as Martineau herself explained that the initial religious fervour was not only acceptable in children development, but also a comfort as she told: "[w]hile I was afraid of everybody I saw, I was not in the least afraid of God." (A1: 18)<sup>68</sup>

The perception of religion as an ideal means to convey instruction explains its extensive employment to support Martineau's ideas on education; in "The Crofton Boys" religiosity provides Hugh with a great comfort, in addition, religious observance and

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<sup>65</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>66</sup> The positive influence of Unitarianism on Martineau is epitomized by Ruth Watts in the "belief in the goodness and potential possibilities of humanity, their fervent belief in the right of all individuals to free enquiry in religion, their search for moral order and perfection, their application of reason to all things and their hope of unraveling the laws of nature by reason, experience and experiment in all matters including education." Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 3; see also Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography..., cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>68</sup> Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography..., cit.*, p. 141. In addition Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 47 explains that "[u]ntil she found her consolation in religion, she followed the usual chain of childish fantasies: suicide, running away[...]."

moral behavior are strictly associated and concur to Hugh's full development. The child grows with the idea that his right behavior would appease his parents as well as God; while the formers provide an example of rectitude in everyday life, the divine presence becomes for him an abstract ideal to follow, as godlike inspiration is paramount in the proctor's family.<sup>69</sup> Their attitude towards religion is far from being dogmatic, however, there is a strong presence of God in motivating Hugh's thoughts and choices throughout the tale; the Hugh portrayed at the beginning of the story misbehaves and does not make enough efforts at school, still he is a conscientious child who recognizes his mistakes and tries to make amend "praying to God to give him strength to overcome his great fault." (CB: 24 -25) It has been already mentioned above ("Crofton School: Entering a New World") that Hugh has some difficulties to familiarize with an unwelcoming environment; as Martineau recurred to God when sorrowful, so too does Hugh in the tale as he seeks for moral strength in his heavenly parent:

O God, I am all alone here, where nobody knows me; and everything is very strange and uncomfortable. Please, make people kind to me till I am used to them; and keep up a brave heart in me, if they are not. Help me not to mind little things; but to do my lessons well, that I may get to like being a Crofton boy, as I thought I should. I love them all at home very much,—better than I ever did before. Make them love me, and think of me every day,—particularly Agnes,—that they may be as glad as I shall be when I go home at Christmas. (CB: 49)

Hugh's religious awareness seems to grow with his moving to Crofton; as feelings of despair usually lead people to appeal to God for comfort, the snow fight accident allows his confidence in the Lord to reach the climax. The divine presence seems to be a certainty that greatly assists poor Hugh in a way that much resembles Martineau's childhood, notably the perception of suffering as a gift given to 'special' children. In her *Autobiography* she accounted:

[m]y youthful vanity took the direction which might be expected in the case of a pious child. I was patient in illness and pain because I was proud of the distinction, and of being taken into such special pupilage by God"; (A2: 148-149)

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<sup>69</sup> To further Martineau's ideas on the importance of godlike inspiration for children see (HE: 260-261)

the autosuggestion of being chosen by God to bear pain is, in turn, present in the story and introduced by Mrs. Proctor who tells her son: " you yourself will love God more for having given you something to bear for his sake." (CB: 129)

At Martineau's time education and religion were strictly associated, yet, the former was seen as subservient to the latter, while the writer remained confident that the priority had to be given to education.<sup>70</sup> Whichever the first concern was, "the incorporation of a religious message in domestic fiction" was widespread in the period as a means to uphold established ideas; impressionable young minds displayed a natural capability for reception and, their propensity to identify with positive attitudes rendered it easier to convey religious constructive messages.<sup>71</sup> Children's unquestioning faith is represented in "The Crofton Boys" through the character of Hugh who wins his fears and gains understanding of the world supported by an uncritical acceptance of the divine will.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>See Brown, *op. cit.*, p, 40.

<sup>71</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 93 and Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 20-21. Such idea can be disproved by Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 15 which exposes Rousseau's theory that "children are often inclined to identify or sympathise with the wrong character, the naughty, wicked or defiant being more interesting because livelier and, perhaps, more true to life than the very good."

<sup>72</sup> The acceptance of divine will is a very strong element also in "The settlers at Home" where it corresponds to the resignation to death: "When we said our prayers that night, and whenever we have said them since, we begged that we might be able to bear dying in this flood,—to bear whatever it pleased God to do. Now, our right way is to make up our minds at once to everything, and just in the way it pleases God. Let us try to bear it cheerfully, whether we lose the cow or anything else first; or whether we all die together. That is the way, Mildred! [...] we shall be thanking God for taking our little brother to be safe and happy with him." (SH: 160 and 175)

## Hugh's Learning

*[A] school is to boys what the world is when they become men. (CB: 90)*

At the beginning of the tale, Hugh is portrayed as a dull student who prefers daydreaming instead of employing his mind in arithmetic or geography; the boy wishes to become a soldier or a sailor and his youthful passion for adventures seems to be nurtured by his readings as "he was always wishing that school-hours were over, that he might get under the great dining table to read Robinson Crusoe." (CB: 11) The schooling he receives at home can be considered fairly over-indulgent as his faulty attitude towards learning is not restrained at all; when Hugh moves to Crofton the permissiveness he was accustomed to at home deeply disadvantages him as he was used to great cheering for the slightest progress. When he is academically praised for the first time at Crofton, he boasts with his school fellows who do not seem to really care about his outcomes; such indifference hurts Hugh who even thinks "[t]hey did not care for him, [...] he longed for his mother's look or approbation when he had done well, and Agnes' pleasure, and even Susan's fondness and praise." (CB: 87) The disappointment for such indifference is shared by Hugh with his friend Firth; when Hugh asks him whether it makes any sense to succeed at school if nobody is interested in your achievements the boy replies:

[t]o do a difficult lesson well is a grand affair at home, and the whole house knows of it. But it is the commonest thing in the world here. If you learn to feel with these boys, instead of expecting them to feel with you (which they cannot possibly do), you will soon find that they care for you accordingly. (CB: 88)

Hugh is unfamiliar with such mechanism and keeps perceiving it as an injustice; his friend has to explain him that parents can rejoice for the achievements of their offspring as they know well their limits and inclinations, while at school teachers know less their pupils and have to treat them objectively as "[a] schoolmaster can judge only by what he

sees."(CB: 89)

The lessons for the newcomer are particularly tough as most of them are "above Hugh's comprehension"; thus, the boy is helped by his brother who hears his lessons daily. (CB: 84) Hugh strives to fix the notions in his mind, however, rarely does he succeed and little help is given by Phil who calls him 'stupid' worsening his already unstable learning abilities. (CB: 66) After a while, Hugh has his breakthrough of knowledge, and although the lessons were hard for him

he continually perceived new light breaking in upon his mind: his memory served him better; the little he had learned came when he wanted it, instead of just a minute too late. He rose in the morning with less anxiety about the day: and when playing, could forget school. (CB: 84)

Even if some scholastic aspects like rote learning seems to be useless and boring, Hugh starts to find pleasure in learning. Besides, homework becomes an occasion for socialization, for instance he shares with his friend Dale ideas on subject matters for themes; in this regard, it is interesting to notice that the creative process of writing becomes a stimulus for Hugh in a way that reminds of Martineau's training at the Bristol school. (CB: 84)<sup>73</sup> At this point everything seems to go for the better, now that his mind has been opened to knowledge "he felt himself really a Crofton boy, and his heart grew light within him."(CB: 85)

When Phil believes his brother can handle the lessons by himself, he decides to quit his help as he thinks that "it was not fair that he should be helped; and that it was even hurtful to him to rely on any one but himself." (CB: 154) As a result, Hugh who does not feel ready to be left alone with his learning, falls into a "state of consternation not at all favourable to learning"; (CB: 154) his issue seems to be that he has not grown enough judicious and is left "at the mercy of circumstances". (CB: 67)The boy regresses in his lessons and is put at the back of the class again, with the consequent sense of

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<sup>73</sup> See Peterson, "...Masculine Discourse, Female Sage", *cit.*, pp. 171-172.

humiliation that further weakens his learning. However, when Hug's academic life seems to be at a point of no return, the snow incident helps him regain autonomy in learning and he manages to advance in his studies. In the concluding chapter of the tale, the happiness procured by the opportunity of going to India as a civil servant fosters his commitment to learning and, at the end of the story the narrator informs us that Hugh changed his attitude and "studied well and successfully". (CB: 173)

Hugh's academic success seems projecting Martineau's redemption as she was initially little appreciated by her teachers who discouraged and accused her of being a slow and inattentive pupil. (HE: 203) Brown reports that her attitude towards school changed when she was eleven, since she directed her mind in intellectual efforts as a "refuge from moral suffering"; similarly, Hugh changes attitude as he manages to associate learning with a pleasant prospect for his future. (A1: 65)<sup>74</sup> In the tale, Crofton school can be considered a "microcosm of adult life"; maturity is reached through efforts, mistakes and reflections within a young mind's reach, as Hugh's childish experiences have an analogy in the grown-up real world.<sup>75</sup>

### Autobiographical Elements

It has already been mentioned in the section "Invalidism - The Child Bearing His Pain" that Harriet Martineau was inspired by her childhood friend Emily for the representation of Hugh's lameness; the image of the male protagonist and the setting of the tale instead, probably owes more to the memories of her brother James, when he attended the boarding school. While concrete events and school's environment were influenced by indirect experiences, the psychology of Hugh has to be associated with

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<sup>74</sup> Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* p. 37; Postlethwaite *op. cit.*, p. 598.

Martineau's personality, as many similarities can be seen between the male protagonist and the female author.

Harriet Martineau once said that "[e]very perfect plot in fiction is taken bodily from real life", (A1: 238) such idea is consistent with critics who agree in saying that the author's impairment and the strong sense of public duty are epitomized in the male protagonist of "The Crofton Boys".<sup>76</sup> In addition, biographical concerns are further confirmed by the description of episodes that are present in both Martineau's *Autobiography* and *Household Education*.<sup>77</sup> The clear-cut presence of her memoirs is confirmed by her correspondence with intimate friends; in addition, Ainslie Robinson includes among the evidence of the tale's biographical outline, a public declaration made by James Martineau who, in a letter to the *Daily News* spotted the presence of personal records in "The Crofton Boys".<sup>78</sup> It is curious to notice however, that the familiarity of the aspects that James recognized in the tale - Mrs. Proctor's resemblance of his mother - is the very element that Martineau seemed to have envisioned from her ideas on motherhood rather than from her lived experience.<sup>79</sup>

The inclination to identify Harriet Martineau with the protagonist of the tale is very strong among critics, and the fact that a substantial part of Victorian tales for children were written by women, adds weight to the argument on the tendency to feminize male characters.<sup>80</sup> In the case of "The Crofton Boys" such impulse is very strong at the beginning of the story, when Hugh is mocked for his girlish habits. The boy indeed is surrounded by a prevailing feminine presence until his arrival at school and through such feminization, Martineau seems to attribute a strong power in children's rearing to women. It could be argued that the tale should have had a female protagonist if the

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<sup>76</sup> See Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

<sup>77</sup> See Robinson *op.cit.*, p. 401; Sanders Arbuckle *op.cit.*, p. 13 ; Postlethwaite *op.cit.*, p. 598.

<sup>78</sup> See Robinson *op.cit.*, p. 408.

<sup>79</sup> Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 408.

<sup>80</sup> Brown *op.cit.*, p. 184.

author wished to assert, among other things, women's right for education; however, Postlethwaite considers Hugh's conquest of the Crofton (male) world as an enterprise the woman writer "could not attain psychologically".<sup>81</sup> In a sense, Martineau's self is divided between Hugh and his sister Agnes, the former managing to enter "the exclusive men's club of intellectual achievement" and the latter fulfilling her duty through self denial and unconditioned love for the male hero.<sup>82</sup> According to Diane Postlethwaite, the feminization of Hugh does not correspond to a hindrance, rather the vulnerability he experiences after the accident helps him raise his "intellectual powers" as well as enlarging "human sympathies".<sup>83</sup>

Harriet Martineau seems to write the story as a way to heal her childhood wounds transforming her frustrations into a "parable of suffering and redemption"; as it happened to the her, Hugh's physical disability enlarges his mental faculties, he grows strong in mind as well as in heart, while the impairment does not preclude him the chance to pursue his dream of travelling.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 597 rhetorically asks "How could this tale have been written by a woman who vocally advocated the equal education of women for much of her life? " for Hugh's growth process corresponds for the critic to the giving up of his 'girlish' behaviour and mental attitude. At the same time, she explains that such representation is a "mirrored vision of the world of male society, a world she can only see reflected, never experience directly. But it is also a vision of a male world transformed by the female sensibilities of suffering and sympathy." Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, pp. 600-601.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p. 599. In addition, the critic suggests that Hugh's condition of lameness indirectly revenges Agnes submissive position; in contrast with her brother's wish for intellectual achievement Martineau "punishes him for that aspiration with a symbolic castration." Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 120, sees a connection between the relationship Agnes- Hugh and Harriet-James as "like Agnes, Martineau was left behind when her brother James went to college."

<sup>83</sup> Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 600. The critic adds that the sentimental value achievements of Hugh through his recovery from the accident resembles Martineau's sickroom: "[j]ust as Hugh would grow through his fall into femininity, so Harriet Martineau's sickroom was transformed from a cloistered retreat into a place of visionary perspective. Her incarceration became a willful achievement of independence." *Ibid.* p. 603.

<sup>84</sup> Robinson *op. cit.*, p. 401; Postlethwaite *op. cit.*, pp. 596; 598.

## Criticism

Harriet Martineau believed that *The Playfellow* - its concluding tale in particular - would be her "last word through the press". (A2: 169) Even if severely ill, she put all her efforts in the draft of the stories; her sensing the end of her life is quite present in the tales as they amply deal with suffering and death.<sup>85</sup> While creating a work of fiction, the writer, who was a committed popular educator, managed to introduce in her work pressing issues such as religious oppression and hunger; the idea that her stories had a dual readership might have influenced such attitude of hers, as she presented engaging adventure stories for young readers, introducing elements of social criticism that made adults reflect at the same time.

There is a tendency among critics to consider the tales as instructive and moralizing; even if in varying degrees, the stories are regarded as in continuation with the conventional moralism that was so widespread at Martineau's time.<sup>86</sup> Her biographer Webb defines them "pointed and grisly little stories", while Roberts limits herself to recognize the tales as conforming to her previous writings.<sup>87</sup> Other critics based their judgments on a confrontation between her writing for adults and children; Harvey Darton for instance, prefers her former production as her *Playfellow* tales are humourless, lacking in imagination, and her characters are not dynamically depicted.<sup>88</sup> Robinson agrees in saying that both characters' representation and the plot are trivial as the construction of the story is bare, leaving excessive space to the educational

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<sup>85</sup> The idea of an impending retirement after the publication of *The Playfellow* is confirmed by the writer who, in a letter to Catherine Macready in 1841, wrote: "this week my nephews from Newcastle are with me, that I may use this first and last opportunity of trying on them the effect of one of my own stories" Sanders, *Harriet Martineau - Selected Letters*, cit., p. 64.

<sup>86</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 408; Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>87</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 205 ; Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>88</sup> Darton quoted in Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

purpose.<sup>89</sup> Maurice Baring's idea is consistent with the previous one, yet, he infers that the stories could have had a powerful effect on young readers for "children in any age will cheerfully swallow (or perhaps ignore!) a sermon, if the story is sufficiently real and entertaining". Webb, on his part, considered such not the case of *The Playfellow*, as he thought that its reading was likely to traumatize children.<sup>90</sup> An excess of seriousness is generally perceived by critics as the writer had not shifted considerably her attitude towards the changed readership she addressed to; in a sense, the "didactic voice" employed by Martineau helps her purpose to stand out, and at the same time it hinders the attractiveness that tales supposedly should have.<sup>91</sup> A continuation between *Illustrations of Political Economy* and *The Playfellow* is seen by Webb and Robinson as they see the latter work for children as an extension of "the moral and economic lessons she believed it her 'duty' to share with the adult population"; the idea that Martineau was committed to such lessons and to education in general is further emphasized by Robinson who argues that, in all her works, she adopted the tone of a public educator.<sup>92</sup>

The period in which Martineau's tales were written, inevitably delineated the work, both because it conveyed prominent political and social ideas of her time, and it reflected the inner feelings of suffering human beings. Given that the educational suggestions she provided through her stories are not hidden but rather explicit, it frequently raised controversies; at the same time, the tales displayed compelling narratives that likely amused and made its young readers reflect. In the Victorian period the tales were "universally admired", not only did they entertain young readers, adults read them gladly too; Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle in her essay "Harriet Martineau Applies Sociology in the North" records the positive review of one of Martineau's friend,

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<sup>89</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 396

<sup>90</sup> Maurice Baring quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 402 and Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>91</sup> See Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 120 and Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 396.

<sup>92</sup>See Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 156; Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

Henry Crabb Robinson, who thought "The Crofton Boys" to be extremely realistic and moral, while appreciated "Feats of the Fiord" for its picturesque scenario.<sup>93</sup> The collection of tales keeps being appreciated today for their entering children's psyche; however, its reflecting the moralist and pedagogic tendency of the period in which they were written, often caused them to be criticized or, even worse, ignored.

The contemporary critic Robinson presents a recent analysis on *The Playfellow* and enlists the "childlike frankness" among the aspects positively received nowadays; it is true indeed that the perspective used in the tale is that of the little ones, as with them the reader shares intimate secrets and feels with the characters in good and bad times.<sup>94</sup> A significant element for the success of a tale for children is, according to Lang, precisely its "abound[ing] in imagination and feeling"; in the case of *The Playfellow*, Martineau managed to use her imaginative powers for settings such as those in "Feats on the Fiord" while in "The Crofton Boys" as well as in "The Peasant and the Prince" she demonstrated her ability in rendering individuals' sensitivity.<sup>95</sup> Martineau makes use of "dramatic settings" and "active heroism" in her tales where the young protagonists are seen reacting to tough situations as they can count only on themselves. Such dignity given for the first time to young protagonists constitutes a starting point in the change that 19th century juvenile literature underwent, as the sharing of a remarkable insight on children's perspective and the introduction of adult readers to their children's world was quite unique at her time.<sup>96</sup>

The most appreciated tale in the Victorian period was "The Crofton Boys"; George Eliot defined it "an exquisite thing" as she was moved by the account of Hugh's suffering, the tale was also the most admired by Elizabeth Barrett who thought it was "written in

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<sup>93</sup> See Webb *op. cit.*, p. 205; Sanders Arbuckle, *op. cit.*, p.14.

<sup>94</sup> Robinson *op. cit.*, pp. 398; 402.

<sup>95</sup> Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>96</sup> See Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

such a fine heroic child-spirit as to be too young and too old for nobody."<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, 20th century criticism, probably harder to be pleased, is more severe with Harriet Martineau as the story is considered excessively instructive and morbid; another element that slightly disturbs contemporary critics is the fact that it does not seem to be written by a convinced feminist, as the representation of the subdued female character personified by Agnes clashes with Martineau's supposed ideals.<sup>98</sup> For Valerie Pichanick, the reasons behind such compromise with predetermined set of Victorian values could be read as a way to leave the scene "[avoiding] controversy and [giving] the public what it liked and expected."<sup>99</sup> Such idea could partially be taken into consideration, however, Postlethwaite remarks that under most of Martineau's fiction there was a deeper meaning to be found, the critic indeed believes that in "The Crofton Boys" the author managed to insert a "powerful subtext" concealed under the mask of a rather traditional story.<sup>100</sup>

As it happened with *Illustrations of Political Economy*, the didactic purpose of the tales was seen as penalizing the narrative power of the stories; yet, it can be noticed that Martineau improved the quality of her fiction since her character's depiction is more plausible and the morales of the tales is less straightforward in *The Playfellow*.<sup>101</sup> Victorian tales tended to show young readers "ways they can learn about and come to terms with the adult world and its relationships"; and, with such purpose in their mind,

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<sup>97</sup> See Webb, *op. cit.*, p 205; Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p., 596. Elisabeth Barret quoted in Postlethwaite *op. cit.*, p., 596.

<sup>98</sup> Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>99</sup> Valerie Pichanick quoted in Postlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 597. The idea that the collection's recalling the stereotyped gender roles can be interpreted as Martineau's fall into lines is confirmed by Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 120: "for Martineau's contemporary readers unacquainted with, and possibly unconcerned by, the author's personal experiences, the Playfellow stories probably functioned as conventional tales. With male heroes and marginalized female characters, the Playfellow series upholds conventional gender-role socialization. It appears to me to be an apology for her earlier challenging of social norms".

<sup>100</sup> Postlethwaite, *op.cit.*, p. 597.

<sup>101</sup> I argue that, even if it cannot be denied that Martineau made a step forward in characters' portrayal, especially if we compare them with *Illustrations of Political Economy*, the depiction of children in *The Playfellow* is too often associated with excessively mature and wise thoughts and a level of rationality that a young person is highly unlikely to have.

it was inevitable to let the teachings side prevail.<sup>102</sup> However, Martineau's prioritizing the psychological representation and her personification of feelings in young characters helped to distinguish herself from her contemporaries. Even if the inevitable tendency of adult writers is to draw the child in their rational and unidealistic world, Martineau's powerful memories helped her to recreate a plausible childish microcosm without neglecting the social and historical contexts helpful to the secondary instructive function of the tales.<sup>103</sup> To conclude, we could say that works like *The Playfellow* can be considered "transitional" for their fostering harmony between the romantic mythology of childhood, a more realistic representation, and the ubiquitous educational/moralistic purpose.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Treacher, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>103</sup> Jacqueline Rose quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 99, argues that children's representation can never be truly realistic as adults' "[draw] the child into an adult world"; as a result, "children's fiction categorizes and fixes children's identities according to adult understandings and definitions of social and emotional spheres."

<sup>104</sup> G. G. Yates, "Reason over Passion: Harriet Martineau and the Victorian Novel by Valerie Sanders", *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 266-268, (Winter, 1988), p. 267.

## Conclusion

The joined analysis of *Household Education*, *The Autobiography*, and *The Playfellow* helps to clarify Harriet Martineau's consideration of childhood; her traumatic infancy prevented her from a real parting from early feelings and allowed her to retain an unaffected mind. A continuation can be seen indeed in her passage from childhood to adulthood, as the author herself perceived her being a direct consequence of early experiences.<sup>1</sup>

The emotional impact that childhood had on writers was often exploited to interpret their writings; even if such assumptions are sometimes farfetched, in the case of Harriet Martineau they are not.<sup>2</sup> *Household Education* was published with an educational purpose, however, it can be read also as a "transformation of childhood trauma into a life giving educational theory"; her desire to demonstrate the positive outcomes of a healthy relationship between parents and their offspring is paramount in the manual and her idea that "we are all children together" re-dimensioned adults' position.<sup>3</sup>

Like many of her contemporary women writers, Martineau poured childish miseries in her texts; the cathartic experience of writing *The Playfellow* - "The Crofton Boys" in particular - helped to overcome her frustrations while providing her audience with honest and unvarnished stories. The power of identification with the characters of her tales managed to affect a dual readership, while young readers were fascinated by the adventures accounted, parents saw themselves reflected in the young protagonists. Victorian juvenile literature featured different shades of realistic representation; it is

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<sup>1</sup> See Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Postlethwaite *op. cit.*, p. 607.

true indeed that some authors opted for an objective perspective while others preferred a closer observation of children's reality. It is indeed the latter category of writers which fostered the novelty in literature, not only did their intervention provide a view of children's world but also a radical shift in scattering adults self-righteous perspective was accomplished.<sup>4</sup> Even if the child as a vulnerable human being became a common, sometimes overexploited, device to involve the reader, the way in which Harriet Martineau conveyed such representation stands out for its moderation; while many of her contemporaries indulged in stereotyped childish figures contained in predictable 'happy ending' tales, she managed to provide lessons and hopeful messages even if not sparing her young readers the grim reality of death and suffering.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Martineau debunks preconceptions that saw sick and disabled children as mentally inferior, for *The Playfellow* displays disadvantaged young heroes coping with every-day issues and fears, and growing strong as they learn "courage, patience and acceptance of the Divine will".<sup>6</sup>

Thanks to her personal accounts and the close observation of children, Harriet Martineau attempted to overturn stereotypes and preconception on infancy. Even if not renouncing to provide her social as well as political views, children representation was for her a chance to instruct both the young and the grown-ups, while giving a particular attention to the development of human moral faculties.

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<sup>4</sup> See Brown *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>5</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 183; Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

## Conclusion

Harriet Martineau has been considered a pioneer for her achievements in education; through her writing she managed to subvert Victorian assumptions on social concerns comprising education, gender, and class. While her influence on nineteenth-century society has never been questioned, her importance over time weakened as she came to be considered a "popularizer of topical issues".<sup>1</sup> Besides the inconsistency frequently noticed in Martineau's works and her inconvenient position as an unmarried invalid woman writer, the worth of her literary efforts has been disputed for their promoting unattainable social conditions; in addition, as a writer of fiction she was criticized for her flat and predictable style. Despite she displayed modest outcomes - especially if compared with masterpieces created by her contemporaries - her role can be appreciated for her skill to "mediate" and "reinterpret" Victorian ideologies.<sup>2</sup>

Moderation has never been considered a quality belonging to Harriet Martineau, however; it is thanks to her determination and commitment that the writer succeeded in her mission: "disseminating information" and become "a teacher of the people".<sup>3</sup> Her position on education changed in time though the latter kept being her priority; Martineau conceived intellectual as well as practical exercise crucial for the "higher moral development" of the individual.<sup>4</sup> To her, the idea that "every human being is to be made as perfect as possible" meant that one must seek for a thorough formation in compliance with the means s/he is provided with. (HE: 245) Thus, improvement should

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<sup>1</sup> Sanders, *Harriet Martineau - Selected Letters*, cit. p. xii. See also Arnold and Rea, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> See Scholl, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Martineau's physician quoted in Webb, *op.cit.*, p. 311 and W. J. Fox quoted in Webb, *op. cit.*, p.132.

<sup>4</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 194; Weiner, "Harriet Martineau on Education", *cit.*, pp. 3-4. Martineau explained her point of view on the interdependence between moral and intellect as follows: "It is true that there is a division between the intellectual and moral powers of man, as there is between one moral power and another. It is true that we can think of them separately, and treat them separately: but it does not follow that they will work separately." (HE: 186)

not be based on impersonal book knowledge, since

[t]here are plenty of highly-educated people who are not morally good; and there are many honest and amiable and industrious people who cannot read and write. The thing is, we misuse the word "Education." Book-learning is compatible with great poverty of intellect; and there may be a very fine understanding, great power of attention and observation, and possibly, though rarely, of reflection, in a person who has never learned to read,—if the moral goodness of that person has put his mind into a calm and teachable and happy state, and his powers of thought have been stimulated by active affections; if, as we say, his heart has quickened his head. These are truths very important to know; and they ought to be consolatory to parents who are grieved and alarmed because they cannot send their children to school,—supposing that their intellectual part must suffer and go to waste for want of school training and instruction from books. (HE: 187-188)

Harriet Martineau explained that her strong commitment to education was motivated by her interest in achieving "social happiness"; (HE: 37) fictional works such as *Illustrations of Political Economy* and *The Playfellow* can be considered her attempt at providing her readers with moral and intellectual guidance. Considering the premise that a good work of fiction should "let the story carry its own moral and leave the interpretation to work itself out", I argue that the ability of the writer in conveying edifying messages through her tales is slight in the *Illustrations*, while significant in her tales for children, notably in "The Crofton Boys".<sup>5</sup>

Harriet Martineau wrote *Illustrations of Political Economy* as she was convinced that "relations could improve with proper education on all sides";<sup>6</sup> indeed she shared political economists' thought that society could not reach a state of harmony until the uninstructed population improved their "behavioural standards".<sup>7</sup> The literary enterprise Martineau embarked on was largely welcomed by her contemporaries who appreciated her pedagogical insight; through her tales the author managed to comment on several social aspects and provided the audience with "cautionary tales" abstracted from practical contexts of everyday life.<sup>8</sup> The tales have been criticized for their being grim and giving to the impersonal laws of the market more importance than to the

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<sup>5</sup> *London Quarterly Review*, XIII (1860) quoted in Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>7</sup> Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>8</sup> See Scholl, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

delineation of human characters; however, such characteristic did not preclude the stories narrated to leave the mark in 19th century ideology. Thanks to her translation of economic subjects into practical advice, Harriet Martineau managed to mediate and expose the values of the science to the population while asserting women's educational power in a presumed male-dominated field.<sup>9</sup>

The first part of the nineteenth century featured a stereotyped view on children and childhood; several literary works tended to present children as parents wished them to be, rather than providing faithful portrayals. Thus, Martineau's *Playfellow* was a novelty in juvenile literature, as the tales revised adults preconceptions and gave space to the representation of the little ones.<sup>10</sup> The work was acclaimed since she demonstrated to be an acute observer of the dynamics in children's world and managed to transmit the essence of children's nature.<sup>11</sup> Despite the sentimental attachment Harriet Martineau had towards the youngsters, she aimed at campaigning her ideas on education through the four tales; as Robinson reminds us, the work should not be considered as a break from her more serious writing, but rather "an integral part of a career founded on her expressed desire to instruct her readers."<sup>12</sup> It is true indeed that Harriet Martineau had a sheer vocation for teaching; the diffusion of useful information and schooling was consistent in the collection of tales that, even if fictional, presented plausible situations and delivered moral precepts that might have had an influence on young readers' mind.

The commitment of Harriet Martineau to social amelioration was a permanent feature in her tales, such attitude caused her to be criticized, not only for her employment of literature to spread her ideas but also for her conveying lessons in the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>10</sup> see Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

guise of fiction. She indeed acknowledged her limits as a writer in her obituary:

[h]er original power was nothing more than was due to earnestness and intellectual clearness within a certain range. With small imaginative and suggestive powers, and therefore nothing approaching to genius, she could see clearly what she did see, and give a dear expression to what she had to say. In short, she could popularize while she could neither discover nor invent.<sup>13</sup>

Harriet Martineau was aware that her specific role in society was to spread knowledge; therefore, even if her fictional works have not been considered exceptional they served the author's purpose of supplying the population with the necessary tools to foster the "diffusion of happiness". (HE: 142)

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<sup>13</sup> Martineau quoted in Weston Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 572.

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