THE PORTRAYAL OF THE LATE VICTORIAN UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS DAUGHTER IN R. N. CAREY'S *FOR LILIAS*

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Abstract
Rosa Nouchette Carey is one of the forgotten Victorian female writers who have received some attention lately, as certain modern scholars have attempted to revive her works. Since the latter were chiefly discredited by many late-nineteenth-century critics on account of their genre and commitment to the domestic ideology, these scholars concentrated on proving that domestic fiction was unfairly dismissed and that, despite Carey's adherence to domesticity, her novels are characterised by an ambivalent attitude towards the traditional domestic ideal and may be regarded as proto-feminist writings. Aiming at reappraising Rosa Nouchette Carey's works in a more favourable light, the present article also intends to demonstrate that the traditional ideal of domesticity is both supported and challenged within the same novel by comparing the daughter figure represented by the heroine of For Lilias with the idealised expectations the domestic ideology ascribed to girls and by identifying the similarities between the filial image of the novel and the late Victorian model of femininity. Moreover, this paper sets side by side the fictional and socio-historical constructs of the late Victorian upper-middle-class daughter, indicating that the characters in For Lilias and their relationships are not created to mimetically reproduce the social, outside the text, reality, but apparently to reveal some preoccupations of the late nineteenth-century English middle classes, whose ideological context the novel reflects to a large extent.

Keywords: *late Victorian upper-middle-class daughter, parent-child relationships, socio-historical paradigm, idealised expectations, models of femininity*

For Lilias is a triple-decker novel, originally published in 1885, that focuses on mother-daughter relationships of the late Victorian society. The main character, Marjory, is

caught in a web of parent-child connections with three women, who are different from one another, especially in terms of their social status, character and parental influence. The intimate relationship between Marjory and her biological mother, Mrs. Carr, is briefly, even elliptically, presented in the novel's denouement, when Mrs. Carr discovers that Marjory is her daughter. The development of traditional parent-child bonds is prevented earlier in the novel by the fact that Marjory has no contact with her family. The story of her childhood is analeptically narrated, revealing that when she was only a baby, her parents entrusted her for three years to the care of a good servant of theirs, Mrs. Chard, and departed for Peru. Just before the widowed Mrs. Carr came to fetch her daughter, Marjory had been stolen and Mrs. Chard gave Mrs. Carr her own daughter, Lilias, instead of the stolen child. While Mrs. Carr raised Mrs. Chard's child as her own, Marjory was brought up by an upper-middle-class spinster, Anne Frere, who found and adopted her. Anne acts as a real mother for Marjory, establishing a parental friendship with her. Besides these two close relationships, Marjory is also involved in a less positive sort of mother-daughter connection with Mrs. Chard, who, upon finding Marjory four years after she was stolen, passes herself off as her mother. However, since Marjory and Mrs. Chard have nothing in common to share, except for the presumed biological ties, their relationship ends when these ties turn out to be fake.

The novel revolves around the good non-traditional bond between Marjory and her adoptive mother, which is the only mother-daughter relationship that lasts from Marjory's childhood and continues even after she is reunited with her biological mother. Through this relationship, the Victorian ideal of motherhood is exalted in the character of Anne, who brings up Marjory, having a significant role in her education as a proper lady. Moreover, it is that relationship through which Marjory's role as an unconventional daughter is fully revealed. Marjory's filial role is also depicted in her close parent-child relationship with Anne's brother, Mr. Frere, who greatly influences her personal development, being a present and excessively fond father to the girl.

The warm and loving relationships Anne and Mr. Frere develop with Marjory are mainly the result of their parental involvement with her. Being the unconditional object of their affection, that is, being the person to whom Anne's and Mr. Frere's affectionate actions and feelings are directed whatever the response may be, Marjory plays a less significant part in the maintenance of these relationships. Although she in a way returns their feelings, she does not encourage Anne's and Mr. Frere's fondness for her by being a submissive and obedient daughter to them. She is a naughty child and a wilful, unconventional teenager, who is not content with her life and yearns for freedom. Described in these terms, Marjory's portrayal as a Victorian girl and daughter contrasts with the socio-historical template of late Victorian middle-class daughters, who, in spite of failing in various respects to meet the standards ascribed to them by the declining domestic ideology, dutifully fulfilled their family roles and were obedient to their parents. Furthermore, reproducing certain characteristics of the New Woman, the novel's representation of the late Victorian girl disrupts the traditional, idealised

expectations of Victorian society for girls.

Marjory is presented as a complex character on account of her complicated personality, that undergoes major changes from childhood to early young adulthood. This is the period of Marjory's life the novel follows and, even though some parts of it are fragmentarily, analeptically or elliptically narrated, one can clearly distinguish its four stages: childhood, early young adulthood until Marjory finds out the truth about her parentage, the terrible months when Marjory is compelled to keep her secret unrevealed and the time when she finally reunites with her mother and gets married. Because these stages differ significantly from one another in terms of Marjory's behaviour, attitudes and her relationships with Anne and Mr. Frere during each of them, they will be analysed separately.

While she is a child, Marjory is difficult, but despite her wilfulness and disobedience, she manages to become the favourite of the entire household due to her lovable nature. The novel abounds in various textual indications that support Marjory's duality in being both headstrong and adorable. The external narrator's descriptions are quite explicit in this regard:

> She was certainly a most engaging little creature, with a tongue that ran on like a purling brook; and though by no means faultless – for even at that early age she developed a fair amount of self-will and temper – she had a way of kissing and making up for her naughtiness that was extremely winning (*FL*: 30); She loved Anne – indeed, she was an affectionate child, and loved everyone that showed her any kindness – but she was high-spirited and rather combative by nature (*FL*: 35).

It is clearly noticeable that the words used in the excerpts provided to depict Marjory belong to two opposing categories. One of them includes the terms that refer to Marjory's bad behaviour (*self-will*, *temper*, *naughtiness*, and *combative*), while the other represent her endearing behaviour (*engaging*, *kissing*, *winning*, *loved*, and *affectionate*). These contrasting words are connected by the employment of such conjunctions as *though* and *but*, which, being designed to link conflicting elements (Cambridge Dictionary 2018), emphasise Marjory's ambivalence, obvious in her conduct. Besides the external narrator's explicit statements, there are other ways of characterising Marjory as at once naughty and lovable, as, for instance, the direct qualification communicated through Anne's words: "her will is so strong even now; but how is one to help loving her" (*FL*: 31) and the manner in which Marjory is presented through her actions. She cries and stamps when her adoptive mother asks her to do her baby lessons and is pettish and contrary when she meets Mrs. Chard, to give just a few examples, yet she often shows her affection to Anne and Mr. Frere through hugs and kisses.

Based on these direct and indirect qualifications, Marjory's image as a daughter is not consistent with the ideal image of the Victorian daughter, nor is it the replication of the prototypical image of the late Victorian upper-middle-class girl. The ideology of domesticity required children, daughters in particular, as they were granted less independence than their brothers, to be submissive and dutiful to their parents (Frost 2009: 11, 23, 29; Shoemaker 2013: 131-134). Undeniably, by describing Marjory as being a wilful and naughty daughter, instead of a humble and obedient one, the novel departs in its representation of the late nineteenth-century upper-middle-class girl from Victorian idealised expectations and from the socio-historical paradigm of the Victorian daughter, who was generally submissive to her parents (Frost 2009: 32). Nonetheless, there are other points at which the fictional, ideal and typical daughters diverge. The ideal girl, in spite of staying home, did not spend her time in idleness, but developed various accomplishments, like embroidery, drawing and playing the piano (Nelson 2007: 82-85). In contrast, Marjory's sole meaningful occupation is embroidery, which she learns with difficulty, because she hates any kind of work. If Anne allowed her to have her own way, she would play all day long and lead "as free a life as the butterflies that skim so aimlessly through the summer air, being a most idle and merry little soul" (*FL*: 35). Using a simile that compares one's life with that of a butterfly, the external narrator renders Marjory's strong desire for freedom, for which she fights even from her early childhood. Owing to her powerful self-will, Marjory succeeds in obtaining a measure of freedom for, as she grows up, Anne is less strict with her and although she continues to strive in giving Marjory an excellent education, teaching her to be ladylike, she does not employ a governess that could instruct Marjory at least in drawing, music or languages. This particularity of Marjory's education signals not only the deviation from the ideal, but also from the upper-middle-class custom according to which girls were taught by governesses, being subjected to a rigid regime of daily activities, which limited their liberty of action (Mitchell 2011: 337, Thompson 1988: 125-126).

The amount of freedom Anne and Mr. Frere offer Marjory during her childhood determines Marjory's relationships with them, which subvert the Victorian ideological preferences and conventions with regard to parent-child relationships. Being especially concerned with the education of her naughty adopted daughter, Anne chooses to take on a strict but loving parenting style, which bothers Marjory who wants complete freedom without restraint and rebels against Anne's firm control by misbehaving. While Marjory is disobedient to her adoptive mother, she rarely shows her tantrums and stubbornness to Mr. Frere, because he is kind to her and usually does not scold her for her temper, allowing her to have her own way. Giving Marjory the possibility to act freely, Mr. Frere draws her to him, quickly becoming her favourite. Consequently, the relationship between Marjory and Mr. Frere is warmer and more intense than her relationship with Anne. Such a depiction of parent-child connections deviates from the way in which Victorian domesticity viewed a daughter's relationships with her parents, as, ideologically, the development of an intimate mother-daughter bond was more important than that of a father-daughter relationship, the former being especially

encouraged by certain particularities of the idealised roles assigned to each family member and, consequently, more frequently encountered among all Victorian social classes (Shoemaker 2013: 133).

Despite her close relationship with Mr. Frere, Marjory does not fulfil her filial role towards him as a father, the role through which the ideal Victorian girlhood was amply demonstrated (Gorham 2013: 38). Nineteenth-century domestic ideology expected daughters to act as wives to their fathers, which meant to create a pleasant home atmosphere alongside their mothers, to entertain both their parents and to be their gentle and submissive companions (Nelson 2007: 84, 87). Marjory fails to meet these expectations not only because she is not submissive, but also because she does not devote herself to pleasing Mr. Frere and Anne, and to making them happy. Instead, she is the one whose own wishes are the priority and to whom alone all Anne's and Mr. Frere's selfless attention is directed during her childhood and when she is grown up as well. Notwithstanding that the young Marjory is not a naughty and demanding child anymore, she is characterised by perverse moods and by a high state of discontent, which prevent her from concentrating on others rather than on herself, and thus from performing the major duties towards parents that Victorian domestic ideology ascribed to daughters and that nineteenth-century middle-class girls performed as properly as the circumstances allowed (Frost 2009: 32; Gorham 2013: 11).

The period when Marjory is overwhelmed by dissatisfaction is the second stage of her life – a part of her early young adulthood, with which the novel opens and which ends when Marjory discovers that Mrs. Carr is her biological mother, and a time span in which her image as a middle-class Victorian daughter diverges even more markedly from the ideal model. Although Anne succeeds to bring Marjory up as a refined and cultivated lady, she does not persist in subduing Marjory's self-will, which grows into a general state of discontent, being encouraged by Mr. Frere's excessive indulgence. The nature of Marjory's discontent is best described through the comparison she makes between her and a squirrel:

> Because they are satisfied with their life, they think it must content me; but you might as well ask the squirrel to be content with his revolving cage. I think if he were asked to choose he would prefer the woods and liberty, and the nuts he found for himself before he cracked them. All my nuts are ready cracked for me, and somehow they lose their flavor in that way (*FL*: 60).

Analysing the character from within, the external narrator presents in these few lines Marjory's thoughts – that disclose the reason for her unhappiness and her unsatisfied state, which lies in her attitude towards her life. Marjory does not suffer from bad living conditions, domestic mistreatment or the lack of a physical, educational or emotional need, as Anne and Mr. Frere provide her with everything necessary for a comfortable life and for her harmonious personal development. Additionally, she can have even more if she wants it (for example, Anne and Mr. Frere would not begrudge spending

money on hiring tutors to teach Marjory music, drawing or some other activity). Nevertheless, as the last sentence of the quotation metaphorically suggests, it is the fact that she has everything she needs without any effort on her part that makes her unhappy and restless. The only thing Marjory lacks is freedom. She yearns for the independence that Victorian domesticity did not grant the ideal girl, who was ideologically viewed as the epitome of feminine dependence (Gorham 2013: 7), that the typical middle-class Victorian girl did not enjoy and that the late Victorian feminist movement advocated for (Vicinus 2013: ix-x; Black et al. 2010: 103-104).

Besides the desire for freedom, there are other features which draw Marjory's image as a girl near to the New Woman model and mark its departure from the traditional model of angelic femininity, which is included in the Victorian idealisation of girlhood based on daughters' main role – that of future wives and mothers (Gorham 2013: 7; Nelson 1995: 67-68). Among them, the most conspicuous characteristic is Marjory's unconventionality, which is revealed through various means. The external narrator explicitly states that "Marjory [is] unconventional" (*FL*: 124), yet much more light on this trait of hers is shed through implicit qualification deriving from multiple sources. Marjory's unique, picturesque way of dressing herself, which is not "quite like other people's, but [which] seem[s] to belong to herself" (*FL*: 72), is undeniably indicative of her eccentricity. That she dislikes commonplace people who have no individuality and considers them "stupid and tiresome and matter-of-fact" (*FL*: 65) implies that she is not an ordinary person herself. Having different opinions and views from others, Marjory can hardly find people "with whom [she] can exchange ideas, and be in sympathy" (*FL*: 65). Moreover, she thinks that even Anne and Mr. Frere, whose natures are not shallow or narrow, but "large [and] bountiful [enough to] [...] attract and retain [her] fastidious heart" (*FL*: 249), do not understand her, which is also suggested in the first sentence of the extract provided above.

Despite Marjory's full awareness that her uncommon way of being is odd for the majority of people surrounding her and that her real feelings and thoughts can disappoint or even offend somebody, Marjory does not try to hide what she feels and thinks, or to cease being herself. For instance, she is not ashamed to tell Anne that her mother (not the biological one, but Mrs. Chard, whom she knows at that moment as her mother) is a deceitful woman, and even to communicate this to Mrs. Chard herself. Marjory straightforwardly informs Lilias that she does not love her mother (Mrs. Chard), which shocks Lilias deeply, as it is out of the ordinary to hear that a daughter does not love her mother. Similarly, she has the courage to say that she does not think well of Mrs. Stallard, who is a general favourite, fearing not to contradict the common positive opinion about this young woman or to destroy the good impression she makes on Mrs. Carr, whose love and respect Marjory strives to gain. Above all, she refuses to wear mourning clothes for the late Mrs. Chard, who wronged her and for whom she feels no sorrow. These are just some examples showing that Marjory is unconventional and emphasising her complete honesty, which is another distinguishing feature of her

character (and the governing principle of all her thoughts, words and actions). Although honesty is a moral virtue, based on the analysis carried out so far, Marjory is not a paragon of morality, as the ideal Victorian daughter was expected to be (Nelson 2007: 85; Nelson 1995: 24; Harrison 2000: 157).

The novel's representation of the late Victorian girl through the character of Marjory further deviates from the conventional Angel in the House through Marjory's indifference to children, which is one of the characteristics describing the New Woman (Lynn Linton 1896: 43; Nelson 2007: 67). Marjory openly acknowledges to some of her family's friends that she is "not particularly fond of children" (*FL*: 74) and unabashedly explains to them what she detests about children. The negative reaction that this declaration provokes reveals that Marjory's thinking and preferences go against the ideological orientation of almost all the other characters in the novel, that is, against traditional Victorian concepts of womanhood. Marjory amply demonstrates that she does not care about children through her indifferent attitude towards the little girls of Mr. Brooks, the widower who regards her as a potential second wife candidate. On account of this unusual trait of hers, Marjory is considered unfeminine, just like the New Woman, who lacked all the features of the traditional ideal woman and mother, including devotion to children (Sage 1999: 465). At the same time, Marjory's lack of interest in children is the major factor that, along with her other faults, makes her unsuitable as a wife and mother, which is the reason Mr. Brooks does not to ask her to marry him. Failing to achieve the main goal of the ideal Victorian girl – that of becoming the perfect wife and mother –, Marjory cannot embody the angelic ideal and meet the Victorian idealised expectations surrounding girlhood.

However, there comes the third stage of Marjory's life – a critical time that transforms her from a self-willed and discontented individualistic girl into a submissive conventional woman. This period begins the moment Mrs. Chard tells Marjory the truth about her parentage on condition that Marjory promise not to disclose it to anyone before her (Mrs. Chard's) death. Promising to keep the secret, Marjory experiences some months of intense suffering, produced initially by the inner conflict between her conscience (that urges her to be honest and patient until Mrs. Chard's death, which will enable her to divulge the truth), and her impulse to enter in her biological mother's house as Lilias's friend, to gradually win her love. After she decides to go and live with her mother, her suffering is not reduced; only its source is different, seeing how the maternal love of her own mother is lavished on another girl instead of her. As a consequence of such an internal torture, Marjory's appearance dramatically changes. Her look is so unhappy and pitiful that one of the novel's minor characters compares it to the "pathetic look" of the impoverished, distressed seamstress Marian Erle in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1857: 217 cited in *FL*: 310). The external narrator also displays sympathy for Marjory's anguish by repeatedly naming her "the poor girl" (*FL*: 295, 318, 328) and by exclaiming "Poor Marjory!" (*FL*: 185, 390) or "Poor impetuous misguided girl!" (*FL*: 366).

As this last example implies, the narrator, though sympathetic, does not approve of Marjory's reasoning and actions. Instead, the apparently neutral narratorial position, which is maintained towards all characters throughout the novel, is abandoned in relation to the suffering Marjory in order to clearly show that her predicament is the result of three great mistakes she makes because she chooses to act according to her own judgment rather than ask for Anne's and Mr. Frere's advice. Compelled by her promise of secrecy, Marjory avoids being in the presence of Anne and Mr. Frere as much as possible. She does not want them to know what troubles her. For this reason, and on account of her inherent determination to have her own way, she dispenses with their guidance and besides the errors she makes giving her word to Mrs. Chard to keep silent about her parentage and, entering Mrs. Carr's house as a stranger, she commits her third grave mistake by refusing to reveal the truth after Mrs. Chard dies, out of fear that it will kill Lilias, whom she dearly loves. Thus, Marjory sacrifices her long yearning for a close relationship with her own mother *for Lilias*, two words that are reiterated throughout the novel and that give it its title.

The painful experience Marjory undergoes has a transforming power upon her character and prepares her for the proper fulfilment of the role of wife and mother. Trouble subdues her undisciplined temper and her discontented state of mind, making her regret the time she wasted being idle, not studying what a Victorian girl was expected to study, and not teaching herself to think of others rather than of herself. Marjory is generous, sympathetic and affectionate in her relationships with Mrs. Carr and her children, becoming so closely attached to them that she renounces her right to join her biological family for the sake of their happiness. However, advised by Mr. Frere, whom she learns to unquestioningly obey, and who explains to her that her self-sacrificing deed is a serious mistake, Marjory finally tells Mrs. Carr that she is her daughter. In the end, during the last briefly presented stage of Marjory's life and the novel's denouement, Marjory is reunited with her mother, becoming a conventional submissive wife to Mr. Frere and a good mother to their baby boy.

To sum up, the novel's daughter figure is unconventional in two ways. Firstly, it diverges from the socio-historical construct of the middle-class Victorian daughter, particularly due to Marjory's self-will and disobedience as a child. Unlike most middle-class girls of the Victorian era, Marjory fails to fulfil her responsibilities towards her parents, thus violating the idealised expectations for daughters. Secondly, Marjory's image is inconsistent with angelic girlhood on account of its common features with the late Victorian feminine ideal, which qualifies her as being unfit to become an ideal wife and mother. Nevertheless, Marjory is a dynamic character, who changes significantly and ultimately becomes an Angel in the House. The protagonist's eventual conformity to traditional standards of femininity, along with the embodiment of the angelic ideal in the character of Anne, strongly suggests that it is the domestic ideology which is the dominating norm in *For Lilias*.

Notwithstanding the general endorsement of Victorian domesticity, Marjory's endowment with features deviating from this ideal seemingly serves as an effective tool for at least two purposes. On the one hand, it allows the cautious incorporation of certain late Victorian values that clash with the principles of domestic ideology, which is thus questioned without being seriously undermined. *For Lilias*'s evident endorsement of traditional version of femininity and its disapproval of late Victorian womanhood seem to be imposed by its author's position as a woman writer. Rosa Nouchette Carey could not overtly subvert the domestic ideology, which, in spite of being very much on the decline, still remained dominant during the time when the novel was written (Hartnell 2000: 135). Therefore, she obliquely criticises it through the depiction of *For Lilias*'s protagonist as an unconventional young woman who eventually complies with the traditional female role. On the other hand, the fact that the protagonist and other characters are not depicted in exact accordance with traditional domesticity, as well as with the late Victorian ideals presented in the novel, indicates that the characters are realistically drawn, although they do not reproduce their prototypical actual images. Consequently, it appears that the late Victorian family roles and parent-child relationships represented in *For Lilias* are not created to faithfully replicate the English society of the 1880s, but to reflect the ideological preoccupations and anxieties surrounding the domestic life of that time.

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