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**FAMILY AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCT  
IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL**

**Abstract**

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**Keywords:** *Victorian family, parent-child relationship, family role, fictional representation, ideal, stereotype, socio-historical template, domestic ideology, class-specific expectations, Ellen Pickering, Julia Kavanagh, Rosa Nouchette Carey*

## Introduction

A new direction in literary-critical enquiry has relatively recently emerged as a result of the growing interest in women's history. The works of an increasing number of forgotten and/or neglected Victorian female writers are now explored, being reread with modern eyes and reassessed from a more impartial standpoint obtained by the passage of about a century since they were last printed. Many of these nineteenth-century women novelists were popular during their lifetime, but their writings ceased to attract readers by the *fin de siècle*, when, due to the fundamental changes in world view and in the novel, they were judged as old-fashioned and therefore doomed to oblivion. On the other hand, although many Victorian women writers enjoyed a wide readership during their literary careers, few of them received a positive reception from contemporary mainstream critics, who generally regarded 'feminine' novels or 'domestic' fiction as "inferior and trivial" (Crisp, Ferres and Swanson 2000: 98). Moreover, minor nineteenth-century women writers have lately been frequently marginalised by the literary academic institution, because of the latter's traditional concentration on canonical literature, and because of a number of scholars who have dismissed their works too quickly on various grounds. Nonetheless, many present-day scholars engage in the process of recovering the writings of forgotten female authors by refuting the arguments which caused their neglect, by proving the inappropriateness of certain criteria according to which they were discredited and/or by demonstrating that they may be of interest to the twenty-first-century audience for the very characteristics due to which these writings lost their readership.

The present doctoral dissertation is intended to extend the literary recovery of forgotten Victorian women novelists by focusing on the works of Ellen Pickering, Julia Kavanagh and Rosa Nouchette Carey. To date, several critical studies have attempted to rediscover these writers. Only one of them, namely that carried out by Mary Poovey on the novels of Ellen Pickering, an essay entitled 'Recovering Ellen Pickering' and presented at the eighth annual British Women Writers Association conference, fails to achieve its goal, concluding that these novels do not deserve to be canonised, reissued or even taught to students. However, Poovey's negative criticism of Pickering's writings is immediately rejected, especially by Margaret Homans and Jill Campbell in the articles published in *The Yale Journal of Criticism* (Fall, 2000). These are the few critical works related to the process of recovering Ellen Pickering available so far.

The other two authors have recently received more attention. In-depth studies of Julia Kavanagh's novels have been undertaken by Michael Forsyth in *Julia Kavanagh in Her Times: Novelist and Biographer, 1824-1877* (The Open University, 1999) and by Eileen Fauset in *The Politics of Writing: Julia Kavanagh, 1824-77* (Manchester University Press, 2009). The former places special emphasis on the reflection in Kavanagh's works of various values pertaining to the mid-Victorian era, including those beyond the boundaries of the domestic ideal, and on the distinctiveness of her writing – deriving from the fact that “she approached her subjects as a multiple outsider” (Forsyth 1999: 196). The latter foregrounds Julia Kavanagh's contribution to women's history by showing that her “novels centre on women's experience as an affirmation of their subjectivity and sense of self in a society that inadvertently works against them” (Fauset 2009: 38-39).

A significant insight into the novels of the prolific Victorian writer Rosa Nouchette Carey has been provided by Jane Crisp in *Rosa Nouchette Carey (1840-1909) A Bibliography* (University of Queensland Press, 1989) and in her article ‘Problematic pleasures: The position of women as writers, readers and film viewers’ published in *Deciphering Culture: Ordinary Curiosities and Subjective Narratives* (Routledge, 2000). Jane Crisp pays particular attention to the mixed reception of Rosa Nouchette Carey's works by reviewers and tries to prove, relying on the case of this novelist, that nineteenth-century ‘feminine’ style of fiction is merely different from the masculine one and not inferior to it, being, consequently, unfairly dismissed by many mainstream critics of the time. Elaine Hartnell also makes serious efforts to reassess the novels of Rosa Nouchette Carey in more favourable terms through the investigation she conducts in *Gender, Religion and Domesticity in the Novels of Rosa Nouchette Carey* (Ashgate, 2000) by examining their most recurrent themes and by arguing that their value lies in their commitment to all matters relating to women and to female experience, based on which Carey may be regarded as a proto-feminist (2000: 21, 200).

Like some of the critical writings mentioned above, the present dissertation is based on the **assumption** that it is highly possible that the works of forgotten Victorian women writers address the contemporary reader through the generally valid issues they bring forth and the light they shed on the Victorian frame of mind. Nevertheless, this undertaking attempts to complement the few existing studies on the novels of Ellen Pickering, Julia Kavanagh and Rosa Nouchette Carey by putting forward an additional agenda, grounded in the **premise** that within the canon of literary realism, these novels only partly abide by the already established norms of literary representation. The research is also built on the premise that the original

contribution of the works written by the aforesaid novelists resides mainly in the fact that, by placing domesticity under the lens, they advance memorable statements about the invisible, silenced facet of Victorian life – which has remained largely unexplored, deemed irrelevant in the portrayal of an era – as may be observed in the otherwise external, metonymical and objective approach to setting and character / to character as part of the setting in the male produced literature of the time (Praisler 2005: 15-16). Along these lines, the **main element of originality** in the dissertation is that the analysis of the literary texts selected for the corpus is carried out in view of foregrounding the complex relationship between the fictional representations of Victorian family roles and parent-child relationships, and the corresponding non-fictional accounts of the time, tackling one of the less investigated aspects of the family – a central theme of the domestic novel which gives the dissertation its title. Thus, **the aim of the study** is to determine the extent to which ideological, stereotypical and socio-historical perspectives are adopted by Ellen Pickering, Julia Kavanagh and Rosa Nouchette Carey in the construction of the Victorian family in their novels, in an attempt to reappraise their writings in a more positive light. To achieve this aim, the following **objectives** are pursued:

1. to present the ideal models ascribed to the parents and children of all social classes and periods of the Victorian age and the requirements they were expected to meet in the relationships between them;
2. to discuss popular stereotypes associated with Victorian family roles, both traditional and non-traditional, stating the reasons behind their emergence and describing their content and pervasiveness;
3. to identify the most common types of working-, middle- and upper-class parents and children belonging to the traditional nuclear family, and of parents and children who found themselves in certain non-traditional family roles, by examining the great variety of actual parental and filial experiences of early, mid- and late Victorians;
4. to explore the depictions of family roles and parent-child relationships in the novels of Ellen Pickering by comparing them with the socio-historical templates of the early Victorian upper-class parents and children and their relationships, as well as with the ideal and stereotypical images when appropriate;
5. to analyse the literary representations of mid-Victorian working- and middle-class parents and children in Julia Kavanagh's works in terms of their similarities and differences with their corresponding real, anthropological prototypes and, in

appropriate cases, with the ideals and stereotypes attached to them;

6. to evaluate the degree to which the ideological, stereotypical and socio-historical factors are employed in the portrayal of Rosa Nouchette Carey's fictional characters as mothers, fathers and daughters of the late nineteenth-century upper middle class.

As apparent from this list of objectives, the critical study of the novels in focus is founded on a theoretical framework consisting of three perspectives on the Victorian family. The research particularly emphasises those social classes and family roles that are represented in the literary texts under scrutiny and is based on a comprehensive qualitative analysis of a wide range of socio-historical sources. The most important of them are: *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* by John Tosh, *Family Ties in Victorian England* and *Invisible Men* by Claudia Nelson, *Daily Life in Victorian England* by Sally Mitchell, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* by Deborah Gorham, *Victorian Childhoods* by Ginger Frost, *Destiny Obscure. Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* by John Burnett, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture, and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain* by Susie Steinbach, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* by Robert Shoemaker, and *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830 – 1900* by Francis M. L. Thompson.

The literary works to be evaluated against the theoretical framework introduced above and which make up the **corpus of the dissertation** are:

- *The Fright* (1839), Ellen Pickering;
- *The Grumbler* (1844), Ellen Pickering;
- *Rachel Gray* (1856), Julia Kavanagh;
- *Queen Mab* (1863), Julia Kanavagh;
- *For Lilies* (1885), Rosa Nouchette Carey;
- *Rue with a Difference* (1900), Rosa Nouchette Carey.

These novels have been randomly chosen not to influence the research results, the only criterion used for selecting them being the time when they were written and published. Since the analysis is expected to be representative and relatively reliable, the option has been for two novels by each writer produced at different points of their author's literary career. The selection of the three forgotten Victorian women novelists under the lens has also been made according to the chronological criterion. A writer has been chosen for each of the three phases

of the Victorian age: Early Victorian (1837-1848), Mid-Victorian (1848-1870) and Late Victorian (1870-1901). Thus, this dissertation covers the most part of the Victorian era, focus being laid on the domestic novel and on the non-fictional accounts of the family. By placing the fictional works in a non-fictional socio-historical context, the study takes an interdisciplinary path, with frequent glimpses into historical reports, without ignoring, all the while, the patterns of fictionality at play.

Consequently, the **main approach** adopted for the present investigation is New Historicism. Working on the assumption that literary production is dependent on its historical context, the dissertation concentrates on the examination of the way in which and the extent to which the novels constituting the corpus reflect the times of their authors. The preliminary step for this undertaking is an extensive review of non-fictional sources on the Victorian family and the selection of the information they provide with regard to family roles and parent-child relationships, and its systematisation into three distinct categories: ideology, stereotypes and actual experiences. Although the literary analysis is based on a socio-historical framework, against which fictional representations are invariably assessed, narrative discourse theory has also been extensively employed in view of showing how the characters are constructed and how ideological, stereotypical and socio-historical factors are embedded in the text. For this purpose, by resorting to theoretical aspects outlined by Mieke Bal (2009), Gérard Genette (1980), Michael Toolan (2001) and Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short (2007), the analysis points out narratological features and patterns of character building, while occasionally paying attention to stylistic, intertextual, lexical and grammatical peculiarities.

From the methodological and structural point of view, this dissertation is divided into a theoretical chapter and three applied chapters. The theoretical part is entitled **Ideologies, Stereotypes and Actual Experiences of the Victorian Family** and deals with non-fictional accounts of the Victorian family that are recorded in the available socio-historical sources in the field. It consists of two subchapters, **The traditional nuclear family** and **Non-traditional family roles**.

The former tackles fatherhood, motherhood and childhood in a context in which the normative structure of the family is preserved. Special emphasis is placed on parental roles, which are explored from the three aforementioned perspectives: ideological, stereotypical and socio-historical. The first section of this subchapter introduces the paternal ideal promoted by Victorian domesticity, highlighting its defining qualities and the responsibilities the ideal father was expected to fulfil. It also traces the double metamorphosis of domestic fatherhood,

accounting for the shift in attitudes towards English paternity and the replacement of the patriarchal ideal of fatherhood with a child-centred, egalitarian one. Moreover, the section in focus is concerned with the most pervasive stereotypes of the Victorian father and with the factors that contributed to their appearance. Finally, it provides an insight into the actual fathering behaviour of the men of all social classes and periods of the Victorian era, aiming at outlining the most frequent types of fatherhood and at proving that parental experience of nineteenth-century men was widely varied. The second section is devoted to motherhood, setting out with an overview of the three models of femininity circulating during various phases of the Victorian era. The major priority is given to the deeply-ingrained ideal of the Angel of the House, the attributes and the requirements ascribed to it, being thoroughly described along with the limits of its acceptance among different classes of the early, mid- and late Victorian society. This section also discusses the content of the failed mother stereotype and presents the multiple ways in which nineteenth-century women did not match the standards of the ideal mother, while concomitantly foregrounding the common characteristics of the actual mothering behaviours of working-, middle- and upper-class women. The last part of the subchapter under consideration is related to the expectations of the domestic ideology and class-specific expectations for Victorian children, daughters and sons alike, and indicates the extent to which children of various social classes met them, giving details about their relationships with their parents, as far as available evidence allows.

The latter is much shorter in length than the first one, as it focuses only on the non-traditional family role of stepmother and on the orphan, delineating their difficult condition, the prejudices against them and the idealised expectations for stepmothers, as well as how Victorian stepmothers and orphans came through their complicated situations, with particular reference to their common actual experiences.

The following three chapters are dedicated to the critical study of the works written by Ellen Pickering, Julia Kavanagh and Rosa Nouchette Carey, each consisting of two subchapters focusing on two novels by one of these writers.

The first applied chapter or the second chapter of the dissertation, **The Victorian Family Constructed in Ellen Pickering's Novels**, starts out by introducing Ellen Pickering, her literary output, and the recent critical writings on her novels, special attention being directed to the reasons why she has been marginalised. Attempting to recover this forgotten nineteenth-century woman writer, the chapter analyses two of her novels, comparing their representations of early Victorian upper-class family roles and parent-child relationships with

the corresponding socio-historical paradigms, with the stereotypes associated with them, when appropriate, and with the class-specific and/or idealised models of parents and children.

The first subchapter is dedicated to *The Fright* and explores the portrait of the stereotypical substitute mother, the kaleidoscopic depictions of the early Victorian upper-class father and the embodiment of the idealised girlhood, and orphanhood in the image of the daughter. It shows how closely the fictional maternal figure matches the stereotype of the wicked substitute mother or stepmother, significantly deviating from the real, anthropological prototype of the early Victorian upper-class mother, and being in contradiction with the standards of the domestic ideology – the dominating norm of the novel against which the characters are constantly judged. Furthermore, the two almost opposing paternal images in *The Fright* are investigated, the emphasis being placed on the fact that they combine the attributes ascribed to the ideal father, with those characterising the socio-historical template of the early Victorian upper-class father in varying degrees. Hence, these representations diverge from both the ideal and prototypical patterns of fatherhood, as well as from the stereotype of the absent father, which is subverted by one paternal image, while reinforced, without being replicated, by another one. The present subchapter also describes the daughter figure of the novel's heroine, who, being the epitome of the angelic ideal, does not share the actual filial experiences of the girls belonging to the upper classes of the early Victorian age, and whose condition is comparable with the condition of the poor orphan, which was uncommon among respectable orphans – the category of Victorian orphaned children which the character falls into.

The second subchapter covers the main parental and filial figures in *The Grumbler* by examining its illustration of the warm and close father-daughter relationship and the hybrid image of the son in the early Victorian upper classes. This section of the dissertation concentrates on the depiction of a present and fond father whose parenting conflicts in many respects with that of most upper-class men of the first half of the nineteenth century, and which departs from ideal fatherhood mainly because it is influenced by his contradictory states of mind. The character under consideration develops a strong and affectionate father-daughter bond with one of his female wards, through which Victorian conventions regarding parent-child relationships are challenged. The novel's representation of the daughter is also carefully scrutinised in the mirror of the ideal and socio-historical constructs. As the analysis reveals, the daughter image in *The Grumbler* is particularly complex due to its duality of social classes, being represented by an upper-class girl with middle-class values. Endowed

with the moral qualities the domestic ideology expected girls to display, this character embodies the traditional feminine model, her portrayal as a daughter thus deviating from the socio-historical template of early Victorian upper-class daughters. The depiction of the son in the novel relates to the ideal and prototypical images in the same way, as the role of son is performed by a young man who, like the previously-mentioned character, is a member of the early Victorian upper classes whose behaviour is governed by the principles of Victorian domesticity, supported only by the middle classes at that time.

The third chapter, **Family Roles and Parent-Child Relationships in Julia Kavanagh's Novels**, intends to reappraise Julia Kavanagh's work by invalidating or proving inappropriate some of the arguments due to which it was discredited and forgotten, and which are presented at the beginning of this part of the dissertation through the investigation of how the Victorian family is constructed in two of her novels.

The first subchapter takes a close look at the degree to which the representations of parents and children in *Rachel Gray* replicate the actual family experiences of most working-class Victorians of the mid-nineteenth century and the stereotypes revolving around Victorian parental roles. It deals with the depiction of a working-class stepmother whose parenting reproduces the parental behaviour of the stereotypical wicked stepmother. Consequently, the maternal figure of this character is not representative of mid-Victorian working-class (step)mothers, although the former shares features with the latter, thus reflecting particular concepts and principles, as well as certain realities and anxieties surrounding family life of the respectable sections of the mid-nineteenth-century working classes.

Moreover, the present subchapter pays great attention to two antithetical and unconventional father-daughter relationships. It highlights that the family roles incorporated in the main parent-child relationship in the novel diverge greatly from the socio-historical paradigms of mid-Victorian working-class parents and children. The departure of the filial image constructed in *Rachel Gray* from its corresponding prototypical portrait stems mainly from the intense longing for paternal affection and religious piety of the main character, who amply fulfils the class-specific expectations for girls and displays many of the traits Victorian domesticity attributed to daughters. The incompatibility between the fictional and socio-historical paternal figures derives from the complete parental indifference of the heroine's father and from his absenteeism, through which the stereotype of the absent working-class father is sustained, though not accurately replicated. The same stereotype is debunked through the description of an overly-involved and loving father, whose parental experience contrasts

in many ways with the most common types of fatherhood adopted by mid-Victorian working-class men. Nevertheless, this character has particular features identifying him with the men belonging to the respectable working classes of the mid-nineteenth century through which both the ideological preferences of these classes and the grim realities in their lives are revealed. Besides the aforesaid paternal image, the second father-daughter relationship in *Rachel Gray* includes a filial figure, which, being represented by a spoiled and wayward girl, differs markedly from the typical historical construct of the mid-Victorian working-class daughter.

The second subchapter targets at evaluating the family roles outlined in *Queen Mab* according to the ideals attached to them and the socio-historical templates of mid-Victorian middle-class parents and children. It analyses the complex image of a mid-Victorian middle-class father who is an absent and harsh parent to his biological children, yet an affectionate and permissive parent to the adopted daughter. This paternal figure combines various characteristics defining three types of mid-Victorian middle-class fathers, departing from all patterns of mid-nineteenth-century middle-class fatherhood in varying degrees. However, it is closer to absent parenting – the prevailing pattern in its construction –, thus reinforcing the stereotype of the absent father and disrupting the idealised expectations. The latter are largely met by the character depicted as a son, but who performs the role of father to his younger siblings. Although his paternal portraiture approximates the traditional ideal of fatherhood, his filial image falls short of many requirements the domestic ideology ascribed to boys and significantly deviates from the socio-historical prototype of the mid-Victorian middle-class son.

Furthermore, the present section compares the daughter figure of the novel with angelic girlhood, highlighting that there is no one-to-one correspondence between them and that, despite the similarities, certain qualities of the former challenge several precepts of the latter, reflecting the ideological context of the middle classes during the mid-Victorian era. The filial experience of the female protagonist is not rendered in consistency with the most common family experiences of mid-nineteenth-century middle-class girls either. Through the same character, the novel represents an orphan image, which, being created based on a mixture of features describing the two major types of Victorian orphaned children, diverges from the socio-historical accounts of both poor and respectable nineteenth-century orphans.

The fourth chapter, **Parents and Children in the Novels of Rosa Nouchette Carey**, opens with a brief introduction reviewing the reception of Rosa Nouchette Carey's literary

production during her time and the critical assessment of the present-day scholars who have attempted to rediscover this prolific but otherwise forgotten woman writer of the late Victorian age. The chapter is divided into two large sections that aim at determining which of the ideological, stereotypical and socio-historical dimensions of the Victorian family is predominantly used in the portrayal of characters as family members in two novels written by Rosa Nouchette Carey.

The first subchapter concentrates on the analysis of the parental and filial images of the late Victorian upper middle class in *For Lilies*. It explores the fictional embodiment of the Angel in the House – the traditional Victorian ideal of femininity and the most pervasive stereotype attached to nineteenth-century women – in the character of a late Victorian upper-middle-class adoptive mother. The present section also sets side by side the novel's representation of the father and the paternal ideal increasingly accepted during the second half of the nineteenth century, indicating that the two have many characteristics in common, without being, however, in total agreement with one another. Being present and excessively loving, the fictional father subverts the stereotype of the absent father, as well as the worldly model of masculinity, and contrasts with the prototypical parental figure of late Victorian upper-middle-class men. The daughter image depicted in *For Lilies* is also in opposition to its corresponding socio-historical template. In addition, through the portrayal of this family role, which reproduces specific attributes associated with the New Woman, the traditional idealised expectations for girls are violated, and the ideological preoccupations of the late nineteenth-century middle classes regarding Victorian femininity are best displayed in the novel.

Carrying out the same type of study, the second subchapter focuses on the representations of various family roles of the late nineteenth-century upper middle class in *Rue with a Difference*. It examines the tyrannical maternal figure illustrated in the novel, which conflicts with Victorian idealisation of motherhood and greatly deviates from the real, anthropological prototype of the late nineteenth-century upper-middle-class mother. In antithesis to the above-mentioned image stands the depiction of an ideal (step)mother which subverts the stereotype of the wicked stepmother and diverges from the socio-historical construct of late Victorian upper-middle-class (step)mothers. Embodying sympathetic, egalitarian parenting and being endowed with certain unconventional features, the maternal portrait under consideration is not a replication of the ideal promoted by the domestic ideology, which the novel challenges without undermining it in its entirety. The ambivalent attitude towards traditional domesticity is also revealed through the complex image of the late

Victorian upper-middle-class daughter based on its combination of conventional and unconventional elements. Moreover, the representation of the daughter is built out of peculiarities that are typical and atypical of the filial experiences shared by late nineteenth-century upper-middle-class girls, with the latter predominant.

Apart from female family roles, this subchapter deals with the parental role of a man whose masculinity is chiefly described in traditional terms, but who has egalitarian views on marriage and parenting. He is a companionate and affectionate father; however, his parental behaviour does not reproduce the ideal fatherhood of the second half of the nineteenth century, since the former's main characteristic is absenteeism. Hence, the paternal figure in *Rue with a Difference* supports the stereotype of the absent father without being an exact copy of it, and bears similarities to the socio-historical paradigm of upper-middle-class fathers living during the last decades of the Victorian age, although the fictional and socio-historical images do not match in many respects.

Each applied chapter has a concluding section which shows how the works of the Victorian woman writer under the lens may be reassessed in more positive ways through the findings of the research undertaken.

### **General conclusions**

The purpose of the current study has been to examine how the Victorian family is constructed in the novels of three neglected Victorian female writers, by comparing the fictional representations of various family roles and parent-child relationships with their corresponding socio-historical templates and with the ideals and stereotypes ascribed to them, attempting, based on the findings of the analysis carried out, to retrieve these writers from obscurity.

The achievement of the established goal would have been impossible without a theoretical framework consisting of three dimensions of the Victorian family: ideological, stereotypical and socio-historical. Therefore, the first chapter of the dissertation has offered a detailed non-fictional account of the working-, middle- and upper-class Victorian family, presenting: a) the idealised expectations for every family role set up during different periods of the Victorian era, through which a deep insight into the ideological backgrounds of the three major social classes of nineteenth-century England has been provided; b) the stereotypes revolving around various traditional and non-traditional family members (particularly parents), which have revealed the concerns and fears of Victorian society surrounding family

life and parent-child relationships; and c) the actual family experiences, including the most common types of traditional and non-traditional parents and children, which have confirmed that the idealised expectations were often unfulfilled and that the stereotypes were seldom completely justified in reality.

Aiming at determining the extent to which the three perspectives mentioned above are processed in the creation of fictional characters as family members and their parent-child relationships in the novels making up the corpus of the present doctoral dissertation, in order to refute specific arguments which caused the marginalisation of their authors, the research conducted in the applied chapters led to separate, similar conclusions.

The analysis of the chapter dedicated to Ellen Pickering's writing has shown that the perspective predominantly adopted in the depiction of the family roles of the early Victorian upper classes in the novels *The Fright* and *The Grumbler* is the ideological one. Without implying that the majority of the characters are portrayed as living according to the idealised expectations, the ideal models of family roles are more often replicated in their construction than the prototypical or stereotypical images. It is not the upper-class requirements that the idealised filial figures meet, but the moral requirements set by Victorian domesticity. The characters performing the role of son or daughter in both novels are epitomes of virtue and morality, although the family circumstances in which they live deviate from those promoted by this ideology, as they are temporary or permanent members of early Victorian upper-class families, which did not measure themselves against the domestic ideal. Representing children who are guided by middle-class religious and moral values, in close connection with worldly, upper-class parents, *The Fright* and *The Grumbler* juxtapose the beliefs and tastes of the two classes, displaying the ideological context of the early Victorian society, at a time when traditional domesticity was endorsed only by the middle classes. Accordingly, the idea that Ellen Pickering's writing is of no interest because it does not add to the modern reader's understanding of ideology is rejected.

Another finding to emerge from the study undertaken in the first applied chapter is that all parental and filial images in *The Fright* and *The Grumbler* diverge, in varying degrees, from the socio-historical paradigms of early Victorian upper-class parents and children. The representations of parents, fathers in particular, as those of mothers receive less attention, are atypical of the early Victorian upper classes, as they do not display the features most common to the wealthy parents of the first half of the nineteenth century. The paternal images are kaleidoscopic, being described by absence, lack of domestic authority and affection or by

parental involvement, sovereignty and benevolence or by another combination of these attributes. Moreover, parents in both novels are intricately rendered due to their changing attitudes towards their children resulting from the fact that parenting is not their first priority, being subordinated to their self-serving interests. The filial figures are also complex and atypical of early Victorian upper-class children mainly due to their combination of middle- and upper-class characteristics, their close relationships with parents of opposite genders being yet another unconventional element. All these particularities indicate that Ellen Pickering did not intend to faithfully reproduce the real prototypes of early Victorian upper-class parents and children and the relationships between them in the construction of fictional family roles and parent-child relationships. Thus, the recent invalidation of the assumption that nineteenth-century realist writers sought to mimetically reflect reality in their works is confirmed and the negative reception of Ellen Pickering's novels based on this assumption is proved unfounded. Furthermore, the unconventionality and uniqueness of the images of parents and children and their relationships as depicted in *The Fright* and *The Grumbler*, conferred by the departure of literary representations from the most common actual family experiences among the early Victorian upper classes, as well as from the stereotypical images associated with them in most cases (but not all, as the maternal figure in *The Fright* fits the stereotype of the wicked stepmother), can be viewed as elements of originality in these novels, which were discredited, along with other Ellen Pickering's writings, as being conventional and uninteresting.

The comparative analysis of the representations of mid-Victorian working- and middle-class family roles and relationships in two novels by Julia Kavanagh with their corresponding ideal, stereotypical and socio-historical images, which constitutes the core of the second applied chapter, attempts to reappraise Kavanagh's works in more favourable terms using the same arguments that were deployed for reviving Ellen Pickering's writings. The former, like the latter, were dismissed for their lack of originality and failure to accurately and irrefutably portray their characters as representatives of the classes to which they belong. The conclusions drawn from the examination of the way in which the Victorian family is constructed in Julia Kavanagh's *Rachel Gray* and *Queen Mab* reject the assertion that these novels are devoid of individuality. The research has shown that some of the distinctive elements of the texts under the lens are found in the uncommonness of the main father-daughter relationships they outline. Besides being unconventional because they connect parents and children of opposite genders, father-daughter relationships are unique on account

of the daughter's unusual, selfless devotion to her indifferent and absent father, in the case of *Rachel Gray*, and of the father's active involvement with his adopted daughter rather than with own sons, in the case of *Queen Mab*. Additionally, most characters are created in an original manner. They are characterised by complex dualities or inflexible attitudes towards other family members, making their parental and filial figures diverge from the socio-historical templates of mid-Victorian working- and middle-class parents and children. This latter aspect demonstrates that Julia Kavanagh did not fail to render her fictional characters in consistency with real prototypes, because, like other Victorian realist writers, she did not even pursue such a goal. Nonetheless, the characters are true to life, sharing features with the working- and middle-class Victorians of the mid-nineteenth century and, through their depiction, certain realities of the family roles and social classes they represent are revealed. The individuality of parental images is also proved by the fact that, even in those instances when they sustain particular stereotypes, they rarely completely embody them (which is, however, the case of the only mother figure in the novels under focus that closely conforms to the stereotype of the wicked stepmother). Notwithstanding that the stereotype of the absent father is not exactly replicated, its reinforcement, as well as subversion, through the portrayal of paternal images in both *Rachel Gray* and *Queen Mab*, seem to display the concerns of Victorian society surrounding the father's absence from the home.

Besides the analysis of the extent to which the stereotypical and socio-historical factors were used in the creation of Victorian family roles and parent-child relationships in two of Julia Kavanagh's novels, the chapter under consideration also dealt with the ideological dimension. It has indicated that although this dimension is only sometimes adopted, the ideological backgrounds of the mid-Victorian working and middle classes are nevertheless reflected.

The concepts and principles prevalent among the middle classes of the mid-Victorian era are brought forth in *Queen Mab* mainly through filial images, despite the lack of total compatibility between them and the ideals ascribed to children. Actually, it is the deviation of the daughter figure from the idealised expectations on account of its attributes which question the traditional ideal of femininity that seems to best reveal the ideological framework of the mid-Victorian middle classes, among which the domestic ideology gradually lost its popularity due to the growing consciousness of its flawed nature and limitations imposed on women.

In *Rachel Gray*, the beliefs and preferences of mid-nineteenth-century working classes

are mainly conveyed through the worldliness and moral weakness of most of the characters it depicts, which are placed in stark contrast with the piety and virtuousness of the idealised heroine, through whom the moral values of the domestic ideology are supported. Even though the novels discussed in the second applied chapter endorse the traditional moral principles – one of the reasons for which Julia Kavanagh's writing was neglected –, they are sufficiently reflective of mid-Victorian society to facilitate the contemporary audience's understanding of the ideas and concepts characteristic of that time. They also offer glimpses of mid-nineteenth-century domestic fiction – one of the means through which the deeply ingrained ideal of domesticity was deprived of its power and influence.

The examination of the fictional images of late Victorian upper-middle-class parents and children in Rosa Nouchette Carey's *For Lilies* and *Rue with a Difference* has proved that the writer chose to embed the ideological perspective in their construction more often and to a greater extent than the stereotypical and socio-historical ones. Like the family roles in the works of Ellen Pickering and Julia Kavanagh, those in the novels of Rosa Nouchette Carey deviate from their corresponding socio-historical images, although most of them are realistically drawn and may reflect the family experiences of some parents and children of the late Victorian upper middle class. Moreover, the parental and filial figures in *For Lilies* and *Rue with a Difference* generally do not fit the stereotypes of parents and children circulating during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the only exception being the mother image in *For Lilies* that is the embodiment of the stereotypical Angel in the House. *Rue with a Difference* is also concerned with a stereotype attached to Victorian mothers – the stereotype of the wicked stepmother –, but it is debunked through the depiction of a stepmother who loves her stepdaughter like her own child. Besides these stereotypes, the two novels deal with the stereotype of the absent father, reinforcing it through the description of a loving, permissive, but mainly absent father, or denying it through the portrayal of a paternal image defined by fondness, overindulgence and parental involvement.

Although the stereotypical factor is employed in the representation of certain family members, it plays a less important role than the ideological one, which can be traced in almost all the major characters of Carey's novels analysed in the third applied chapter of the dissertation. Apart from the fact that *For Lilies* outlines a maternal figure which closely approximates the ideal of the Angel in the House, both novels mainly build the characters' images as parents and children based on traditional models of femininity and masculinity, even if they often do not meet all the idealised requirements for their family roles. However,

most filial and parental figures are characterised by particular features defining the late Victorian ideals, which is clearly illustrated through the egalitarian parenting of mothers and fathers, daughters' self-assertion and the desire for freedom and unconventional outlooks of some female characters.

By building various family roles and parent-child relationships out of traditional and non-traditional, late Victorian elements, *For Lilies* and *Rue with a Difference* do not only support the domestic ideology – as Carey's contemporaries maintained, dismissing her works on this ground –, but also subvert it. Thus, as far as their author's condition as a woman writer allowed, both novels display the ideological context of the middle classes of the late nineteenth century (which was a period of transition from traditional domesticity to late Victorian ideologies) and reveal certain concerns of the time. These are the main arguments emerging from the analysis of the Victorian family in the two literary texts under scrutiny, which suggest that Rosa Nouchette Carey's writings are valuable for present-day readers, attempting to prove that they deserve further study.

Even though the authors under the lens write during different periods of the Victorian era and concentrate on different social classes in their novels, they share many similarities in the portrayal of family roles and parent-child relationships. They always describe non-traditional and/or incomplete families, generally focus on father-daughter relationships and employ the stereotype of the absent father and that of the wicked stepmother, either by sustaining or refuting them. Moreover, these writers seem to adopt the ideological, stereotypical and socio-historical perspectives in the construction of the Victorian family with nearly the same frequency. They never render the images of parents and children and the relationships between them in accordance with socio-historical templates. Additionally, while Kavanagh does employ the stereotypical factor more frequently than the other two writers, the novelists seldom replicate the stereotypes revolving around family members in creating their characters. Finally, as particularly noticeable in Pickering's and Carey's novels, the writers under focus adopt the ideological dimension quite frequently in their depiction of family roles.

Owing to the obvious ideological perspective, the ideological background of the novelists' own time is reflected in their writings, whose value thus lies in facilitating the understanding of the opposing ideologies at work within Victorian society and of its main anxieties around family life by the twenty-first-century audience. Furthermore, the fact that Ellen Pickering, Julia Kavanagh and Rosa Nouchette Carey make use of the ideological factor

more than of the socio-historical one indicates that they did not intend to mirror societal reality, but tried to influence that reality by justifying and/or challenging the domestic ideology in their novels. And, since they were popular during their writing careers, it seems that, despite their limitations as women writers, they contributed, along with many other novelists, to the ideological changes taking place on the Victorian stage.

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