

## THE GENDER POLITICS OF EDUCATION AND THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT IN MICHAEL FABER'S *THE CRIMSON PETAL AND THE WHITE*

**Abstract:** The subject of this paper is the relationship between Victorian gender ideology and the education of middle-class girls. It opens with a review of the ideological context of the time, with a particular focus on the Victorian ideal of femininity - the Angel in the House. The basic premise of the paper is that the debate concerning the roles and nature of the sexes gave birth to a gender-specific system of education, which, in return, sought to promote and confirm gender ideology, instilling its premises into middle-class girls. The paper investigates the nature of nineteenth-century educational institutions and the instruction they offered, as well as the figure of the Victorian governess. Finally, it focuses on the novel identified in the title. *The Crimson Petal and the White* features Abbots Langley, a typical school for young ladies, and Sugar, an atypical governess - who, in fact, is a prostitute. The paper investigates the awareness and blindness of Faber's heroines, partly ascribed to the education they receive or fail to obtain.

**Key words:** Victorian Era, the Angel in the House, femininity, female education, ideology, ideological context.

### 1. Introduction: The Context

Christina de Bellaigue, in her research on the state of female education in nineteenth-century Britain, emphasized the rapid growth in the number of schools for girls at the beginning of the century, due to the rearrangement of social layers and the enthronement of the middle class as the financial and political leader of the country, in need of instruction in gentility (De Bellaigue 2007: 13). However, it was the overall social climate that gave birth to gender ideologies and the ideal of femininity - the Angel in the House, which conditioned the appearance of a gender-specific system of education. The flourishing of man-centered sciences, the acceptance of Evangelicalism as the official middle-class creed, and, above all, the rise of capitalism consequent to the Industrial Revolution are the key factors influencing the social dynamics and formulation of the ideological context, as well as the gender relations and hierarchy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The tendencies of the age are voiced by its prominent figures, such as John Ruskin, Sarah Stickney Ellis, Thomas Gisborne, John Parker, doctor William Acton, and Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, among others. Their attitudes are compared to the ones of modern critics - Helene Cixous, Simone de Beauvoir, Michael Foucault, Nicola Diane Thompson, Patricia Ingham, with special reference to Anna Krugovoy

Victorian ideology of femininity can be explained by Helene Cixous' theory on binary opposites – pairs of qualities which include public/private, active/passive, head/heart, nature/culture, and the like. By describing the sexes in terms of opposing, mutually exclusive and hierarchical properties, Cixous explains, they come to be represented as inherently and irreconcilably different (Sellers 2003: 38). Cixous' theory is similar to the one by Simone de Beauvoir, who speaks of the construction of the Other as the basic mechanism for the subordination of women. She argues that the category of male is described as “an absolute human type” (De Beauvoir 2010: 25), whereas that of female is defined in relationship to it and always described as a shortcoming, a defect. Furthermore, the formulation of the Other necessarily involves the assertion of a subject – the norm, the category of male, leaving women outside of it. More importantly, it denies the autonomy of women, because a man “thinks himself without a woman”, but a woman never thinks “herself without man” (De Beauvoir 2010: 25).

The division of life into public and private spheres indeed formed part of the Victorian gender ideology. Namely, whereas men came to occupy the former, the latter was assigned to women. Therefore, men engaged in business, politics, and education, while women were expected to remain in their homes. John Ruskin, a prominent public figure of the time was supportive of this ideological separation of spheres and even deemed it natural and inevitable.

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest. ... But the woman's power is not for rule, not for battle, - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision (Ruskin 2010: 44).

Moreover, Patricia Ingham notes, the Victorian middle class was ideologically represented as a perfect union of “self-interested, aggressive” masculinity (Ingham 2003: 22) and complementary, high-minded, pure femininity (Ingham 2003: 21), which introduced another aspect of Victorian femininity – disenfranchisement and economic dependence. Furthermore, this ideological context was aided by actual laws that forced women into accepting culturally prescribed roles and positions. According to Nicola Diane Thompson, women were considered *femme coverts* owing, in particular, to the Law of Coverture. Namely, so as not to disrupt the harmony of a marital union, the interests of a wife were tied to those of a husband (Thompson 1999: 34). Upon getting married, a woman's identity would be subsumed under her husband's and she would practically cease to exist in legal terms.

Christian principles also were applied in the formulation of the Victorian ideological context. Thomas Gisborne, an Anglican priest, argued that women were

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Silver's thoughts on the properties of Victorian angelic femininity. The critic speaks of the construction of an ideal female modality through an elaboration on the practical ways in which actual women were forced to adjust to it. Her insights are particularly relevant for this paper, since it represents an attempt to link the education of middle-class girls with the said indoctrination, focusing on the actual effects it had on girls and women.

by nature tender, benevolent, sympathetic, modest and delicate, hence more prone to religion and suitable to be the moral regenerators and guides of men (Gisborne 1819: 137). Moreover, he claimed that the leveling of the sexes was a matter of divine will, and, as such, indisputable, representing a godly “corresponding plan between the mental powers and dispositions of the two sexes” (Gisborne 1819: 11).

Not only was the subordination of women considered a matter of divine will, but it also remained alive for centuries. With the commencement of the nineteenth century and the establishment of Evangelicalism as the bourgeoisie’s creed, the inferiority of women – as well as their roles as redeemers and sufferers – was confirmed.

Sarah Stickney Ellis participated in the formulation of Victorian gender ideology, elaborating on the division of reason and heart. The author described masculinity in terms of the former, and femininity in terms of the latter, additionally reducing it to feelings only, but insisting on the necessity for women to learn how to feel – to regulate their instincts and impulses, lest they should endanger their celestial eternity (Ellis 1843: 18). What is more, Victorian gender ideology was also shaped by the split of the body and the soul – a paramount part of Christian dogma reinforcing the denial of the corrupt body for the benefit of the immortal soul. According to Ellis, a proper daughter of England would be selfless, high-minded, benevolent; a meek angel in the house ready to disregard all the carnal aspects of her being. Moreover, Anne Krugovoy Silver confirms that being a true Victorian angel involved the control of all bodily appetites – including food and sexual gratification (Krugovoy Silver 2004: 6).

Not only did religion dictate female behavior – via explicit religious instruction, prayers, church-going, as well as by means of enforcing certain Biblical virtues such as benevolence, self-sacrifice, temperance, meekness, and bodily restraint, but it was also imposed on women through education, which was, according to Patricia Ingham, the combination of “a strict formation on Christian principles with a rigorous training in domestic skills” (Ingham 2003: 22). Her argument is confirmed by Debra Teachman and her claim that most schools for girls sought to “teach religious principles and a life of self-sacrifice” (Teachman 2001: 38).

A typical curriculum considered proper for middle-class girls would incorporate lessons in religious principles, reading, writing, arithmetic, French, and Italian, as proposed John Parker. Moreover, he explained that the purpose of female education was “to produce the health of body and health of mind” (Parker 1839: 27) – not to actually infuse it with knowledge, hence introducing the notions of gendered education and learning. More importantly, he emphasized the relevance of a “well-trained mind” for the performance of expected female duties – that of a daughter, a wife and a mother (Parker 1839: 20), thus relating his claims to the broader issue of the division of spheres and its link to female education. Ultimately, Ruskin explained, the purpose of female education was to confirm what he called “kingly power” (Ruskin 2010: 47) – male superiority, which was, by means of ideology, validated and represented as a natural fact, rather than a social construct.

With respect to science, Ellis recommended superficial and slight knowledge of botany, geology, natural history, and chemistry, which would serve the means of dispelling possible fears, comprehending certain natural phenomena, enabling one to admire the sublime divine creation (Ellis 1843: 42). Apart from these, such knowledge ought to add to the amiability of women by means of making them attentive listeners, for it is a listener that a woman ought to be, instead of a conversationalist (Ellis 1843: 42). The author explicitly confirmed the prevailing idea that science was a male-dominated field and dispensed all possibility of female participation, being an agent of the ideology that linked science with masculinity.

Happily for us, there are ably written books on these subjects, from which we can learn more than from our own observation; ... and far more congenial it surely must be to the heart and mind of women to read all which able and enlightened men have told us of this world of wonder (Ellis 1843: 44).

Not only was science characterized as male, but it was also one of the factors that determined Victorian gender ideology. By reason of significance that was attributed to it in nineteenth-century Britain (which was a consequence of the connection that existed between it and the technological progress), alleged scientific truths came to be accepted as natural, instead of as social constructs that they were. Anthropology, evolutionary biology, physiology, and anatomy offered theories on women, which all agreed that they were physically and intellectually inferior to men (Petković 2012: 78). Moreover, the era was marked by Darwin's theory of evolution, which accounted for the differences of sexes, perceiving them as the inevitable outcome of evolution (Petković 2012: 78). In addition to its service to the ideology of femininity, science aided in the formulation of female education. King claims that the difference in the weight of male and female brains was used as a basis for building arguments in favour of the exclusion of women from sciences, philosophy, and art. Furthermore, she explains that due to their bodily fragility, women were considered unable to bear the exhaustive engagements of their intellects, and thus would experience more deterioration in their health (King 2005: 13).

Accomplishments, on the other hand, were a mandatory part of female education, explains De Bellaigue. These would include the teaching of music, dancing, and drawing, and would consume a significant portion of the lesson hours (De Bellaigue 2007: 173). The necessity to include these in girls' curriculums was emphasized by a number of public figures, including Gisborne. He explained that the purpose of these "ornamental acquisitions" was to "render home attractive" – make it a haven and a heaven, as well as to "preserve the mind in that place of placid cheerfulness", all the while affording pleasure to one's kindred (Gisborne 1819: 44).

In addition to the schools for girls, there appeared another source of female education – the Victorian governess. According to Lady Elizabeth Rigby, governesses were women of noble "birth, manners, and education", who are, due to financial failures of their fathers, left destitute and poor, thus forced to resort to teaching as a means of survival (Rigby 1849: 507). Therefore, the prerequisites for becoming a governess would be financial deprivation and genteel birth, indicating the alleged fact

reinforced by Rigby that the professional class consisted solely of impoverished girls belonging to middle and upper social strata. Finally, she explained that a governess ought to teach, as well as to act as a substitute maternal figure for her students.

Nevertheless, Rigby also expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the growing number of lower middle-class, “underbred” girls were entering the governess profession, implying that her conception of the Victorian governess was far from accurate, but rather a prominent stereotype. Moreover, continues De Bellaigue, it aimed at providing support to the conception of femininity “centering on marriage and motherhood, and to bolster a notion of masculinity predicated on men’s ability to provide for their families” (De Bellaigue 2007: 50).

## 2. The White Petal

Michael Faber demonstrates the workings of the Victorian educational system on the example of Agnes Rackham, a middle-class girl enrolled in Abbots Langley, a fashionable school of the time. Moreover, Faber makes it clear that the educational system in question seeks to perpetuate and support Victorian gender ideology and the predominant conceptions of the roles of the sexes and the relationship between them. Abbots Langley offers education in becoming a Victorian lady. It targets the minds and the bodies of the girls enrolled by reinforcing the need to adjust to society’s ideal of angelic femininity, which is, in fact, synonymous with the concept of the Victorian lady.

The curriculum of Abbots Langley can be explained by Harriet Martineau’s insights on Victorian genteel schools, who claimed that there was:

no tradition, no common ground, no established method, no imperative custom..., nothing beyond a supposition that girls must somehow learn to read and write, and to practice whatever accomplishment may be the fashion at the time (Martineau 1985: 108).

We learn from Agnes’ diaries that her lessons include English, Arithmetic, Geography, and the modern languages – French and German, as well as the mandatory accomplishments – music, dancing, and needlework (Faber 2008: 502). However, the gaining of knowledge is disregarded.

On such subjects as Geography or English Agnes has nothing to say, but she records her elation at receiving praise for her needlepoint, or the misery of going for walks in the school grounds accompanied by a teacher of German or French and having to do conjugations on demand. As the years pass, Agnes never achieves more than mediocrity in any academic pursuit, earning many a ‘P’ (for ‘Pretty well’) in her copybook, but Music and Dancing are an almost effortless joy to her... Her poor spelling never attracts anything harsher than a tut-tut of reproof, while in Arithmetic, she’s often spared penalty for mistakes, as long as the calligraphy of the sums is perfectly formed (Faber 2008: 502).

Krugovoy Silver explains that the offering of comprehensive education to girls was represented as dangerous and likely to have a detrimental effect on their psyche – or even cause hysteria (Krugovoy Silver 2004: 29). Henry Maudsley went as far as to suggest that the energy and physical efforts spent on learning may damage girls' reproductive organs and health in general, hence endangering their future as wives and mothers (Maudsley 1884: 7).

Four years pass and Agnes' curriculum becomes even more limited – for the increase of knowledge and the exercise of mental endowments is perceived as normal and necessary in relation to masculinity, whereas to combine it with femininity seems subversive. Martineau explains that:

...the boy goes on increasing his stock of information, it being its only employment to store and exercise his mind for future years; while the girl is probably confined to low pursuits, her aspirings after knowledge are subdued, she is taught to believe that solid information is unbecoming her sex, almost her whole time is expended on light accomplishments, and thus before she is sensible of her powers, they are checked in their growth; chained down to mean objects, to rise no more; and when the natural consequences of this mode of treatment arise, all mankind agree that the abilities of women are far inferior to those of men (Martineau 1985: 89).

Agnes eventually becomes a fashionable, “untraveled,” “uninteresting,” and “shallow” Victorian lady who has “nothing but small talk to offer,” (Faber 2008: 525) and marries Cambridge-educated William Rackham, a future capitalist and a master, “fresh from continental travels, flamboyant and full of mystery,” “vigorous” and “fearless” (Faber 2008: 523).

Furthermore, the education Agnes receives promotes an ideology of femininity that emphasized the preoccupation of women with physical appearance. The prerequisites of being considered pretty in Victorian terms are all found in Faber's depiction of Agnes - “...a paragon of porcelain femininity, five foot two with eyes of blue, her blonde hair smooth and fine, her mouth like a tiny pink vulva, pristine” (Faber 2008:124).

Krugovoy Silver explains that the ideal female modality - the feminine body, had a prescribed size, shape, and colour, and was even assigned a specific manner of walking, moving, and dressing. In order to fit this standard involving the thinness of waist concurrent with the voluptuousness of extremities, bosom, and face, paleness and delicacy in general, women resorted to tight lacing corsets and crinolines, which, according to Faber himself, choked their breaths and deformed their ribcages (Faber 2008:66) – also true of Agnes.

Moreover, it can be argued that Agnes's body is an example of what Michael Foucault termed a docile body “that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault 1995: 136). Her body indeed is subjected – trapped within her clothes, continually examined and invaded by the doctor, possessed and invaded by her husband – but also productive, since it performs her sole function, giving birth to a child. It is by means of medical science that she is made docile even more - doctor Curlew, an expert in “feminine illness” (Faber 2010: 79), does that by means

of aiding the ideology of femininity, arguing that the source of her madness is in her reproductive organs exclusively. The doctor is in favour of the theory that women are synonymous with their wombs, that they are controlled by them – hence, he never checks Agnes' head where a tumor is nestling (Faber 2008: 210), for the source of her madness cannot be in the part of the body considered only in relation to men.

Practices of gendered eating were another way of regulating female bodies. The Victorians represented the body as a source of contamination, infection, corruption, and folly consistent with the split of the body and the soul adopted by Christianity (Krugovoy Silver 2008: 6). Agnes is, indeed, starving, while, at the same time performing “secret rituals for maintaining a spotless Catholic soul” (Faber 2008:520), unlike her stepfather whose “former vulpine expression has disappeared under jowls swollen by Continental pastries and cheeks reddened by liquor and sunshine” (Faber 2008: 560).

There was also an additional significance attached to the dimension of female waists, diets, and fasting. An angelic Victorian lady ought to be the moral center of the family and the nation, and her body, corrupt and misleading as it is, would stand in the way of her spirituality and high-mindedness (Krugovoy Silver 2004: 10). Therefore, all of the desires, cravings, instincts, and needs of the flesh, including food and sexual indulgence, must be put in check (Krugovoy Silver 2004: 9).

Although it prepares its pupils for marriage, Abbots Langley, on the other hand, fails to ensure their mental maturation. In this sense, the school can be said to support the predominant conception of femininity that wished to equate women with children in terms of mental incapacity, promoted, among others, by Ellis. Being a lady implies remaining a child – financially dependent and intellectually immature, as confirmed by Faber and his depiction of Agnes.

What Agnes also does not learn in Abbots Langley is anything related to her body (Faber 2008: 510). While undeniably living in a culture that focuses the attention of women on their bodies and, in particular, the discrepancies between them and societal beauty standards, Agnes is simultaneously oblivious to the fact that she is physically maturing. She does not even know what a period is. What is more, she is unaware of her pregnancy, believing that the gaining of weight is due to the workings of demons feeding her in her sleep (Faber 2008: 571). She also shows no knowledge of, let alone interest in, sexual desires, which is also deemed suitable, for an angel cannot be sexual (Krugovoy Silver 2004: 3). William Acton, a prominent Victorian doctor, explains that “the best mothers, wives, and managers of households, know little or nothing of sexual indulgences,” but must, nevertheless, always be ready to please their husbands (Acton 1867: 144).

Not only is Agnes untaught with regard to her flesh, but she also experiences it as a burden that needs to be transcended, cast away:

We have firstly our First Body, (which I shall call our Father Body), being the body we inhabit from day to day. We have secondly our Second Body, (which I shall call our Sun Body. This body is kept safe for us, by the Angels of Paradise, in Secret Places all over the world, waiting for the Resurrection...) (Faber 2008: 509).

Therefore, Agnes is demonstrating the anorexic logic Krugovoy Silver elaborates on: she is spiritual, self-disciplined, non-sexual, and, finally, abhors her body. (Krugovoy Silver 2004: 3). Her anorexia, quite legible in her emaciated figure and starvation, is, in the light of Susan Bordo's famous arguments, an expression of her culture and its defects (quoted in Krugovoy Silver 2004: 3) – the most accurate demonstration of the material effects Victorian gender ideology has on women.

Taking into account the parameters discussed above, Agnes Rackham is undeniably a proper Victorian angel. Nevertheless, she also demonstrates certain qualities considered monstrous in Victorian terms. She lacks an indispensable maternal instinct, fails to render her home a pleasant, cheerful haven for her husband, dares to agitate rather than please William, who is wondering “how did the sweet nature with which she once delighted him turn so bitter” (Faber 2008:549); she is seen as a crawling, crying monster that “laughs hysterically, a terrible, bestial sound” (Faber 2008:550). The monster is first pacified with laudanum, next restrained and tied to her bed, and finally meant to be removed - locked away in a mental asylum. Nevertheless, she dares rebel – running away from her husband i.e., the patriarchy he represents. Faber, however, does not provide any insight into the results of her actions.

### 3. The Crimson Petal

Faber's unconventional governess, Sugar, is by virtue of her profession and sexuality a Victorian monster. Her hair is “flame-red,” “abundant,” “disordered,” and “loose” (Faber 2008: 97); her skin “rough and freckled” instead of “smooth” (Faber 2008: 97). Finally, it is her “unnatural intellect,” her “masculine appetite for business” (Faber 2008: 754), her love of reading and unfeminine ability to actively participate in serious conversation about literature (Faber 2008: 99), as well as her creativity and her imagination (reflected in writing a book) that confirm her “monstrosity”. Nevertheless, Sugar demonstrates certain lady-like practices, such as wearing a bodice and indulging in fashionable clothes (Faber 2008: 37). Moreover, she is thin, and even “keeps her cheeks terrible pale” (Faber 2008: 36), both properties evocative of the physical appearance of proper Victorian ladies. Moreover, a prostitute's body is, just like a lady's body, docile. Although she has no legal or social identity, Sugar's body and its forces are of paramount importance for the capitalism that regulates and then exploits them. She becomes William Rackham's lover first, his daughter's governess next – demonstrating, therefore, a multifunctional, as well as an efficient body (Petković 2012: 88). Nevertheless, taking into account social hierarchy – the bottom, if not the very fringes of which Sugar occupies – it can be assumed that it is closely tied to Sugar's productivity. Namely, Foucault argues that the education within capitalism classifies school children into ranks according to their value (Foucault 1995: 146), whereas the same can be said to apply to the women in Faber's novel. Hence, Sugar is required to provide sexual and tutoring services, but under



no circumstances is an heir to the Rackham family. Her pregnancy marks her failure to do solely what is wanted of her, entitling the master to get rid of her disobedient body by throwing her out of the house. Obtaining a governess position additionally marks the appropriation of Sugar's intellectual and creative energies, evident also in the fact that William makes use of them to improve his business. Moreover, Sugar is at William's mercy, fearing both his literal, physical strength (Faber 2008: 600), as well as the patriarchal power he represents, aware, as she obviously is, of gender relations, and that "the world is made for men" (Faber 2008: 542). Her awareness and overwhelming intellectual ability are source of rage, although she never dares to rebel openly – her tantrums are always inward and private. It is only through Sophie and the education she provides for her that Sugar shows signs of defiance, since her instruction appears to depart from the one a young lady is expected to undergo.

Sugar is a prostitute, uneducated and unaccomplished, lacking the "axioms, dictums and golden rules... wanted in a teacher" (Faber 2008: 461). She makes mistakes an official Victorian governess – or, at least, the stereotypical one described by Rigby – is not likely to make. She is reluctant to keep Sophie inside the house where "laughter is forbidden" (Faber 2008: 651), because she is worried about the child's paleness, although she knows that "a lady is never too pale" (Faber 2008: 533). Nevertheless, it is Sugar's gift to Sophie, an edition of *Alice in Wonderland*, which best undermines the Victorian lady ideal she is expected to instill in the child. According to Krygovoy Silver, "Alice is aggressive, curious, and hungry" (Krugovoy Silver 2004: 71), which immediately makes Carroll's heroine the opposite of the Victorian lady. Providing such a subversive role model for Sophie indicates that Sugar seeks to prevent the girl from eventually becoming an emaciated, sickly, fragile Victorian angel. Despite the fact that Krugovoy Silver argues that once Alice's maturation begins, so does the development of the anorexic logic in her mind (Krugovoy Silver 2004: 71); the effects the book has on Sophie are quite different and revolutionary. Sophie identifies with Alice and follows her on her quest to discover herself, her potentials, and her abilities. Hence, she engages both her reason and imagination in reading the book, explaining that "she is powerless to do otherwise; a mysterious voice, which she doubts is God's, urges her to do them" (Faber 2008: 629).

Not only is she, therefore, accepting a bold girl fond of eating as her role-model, rather than the culturally-imposed, oppressed, hungry angel, but she also dares claim her thoughts, rather than to ascribe them to God – or Saint Teresa, like her mother does. It is the instruction Sugar provides for her that makes Sophie want to be big and lively, instead of tiny and fragile.

*I am going to grow bigger than my Mama*, she thinks, not defiantly, nor competitively, but because she has fathomed that her body is different in nature from her mother's, and not destined to be petite. It's as if she was fed a morsel of Alice's Wonderland cake when she was a baby, and instead of shooting up to the ceiling in seconds, she is expanding the tiniest amount each minute of her life, an expansion that won't stop until she's very big indeed – as big as Miss Sugar, or her father (Faber 2008: 685).

What Sugar also provides for Sophie is knowledge of the body, considered utterly undesirable and unnecessary for girls and women. Doing it in a childish, innocent manner – as if she were telling a children's story, the governess explains to her pupil that babies grow in women's bellies, where their husbands plant their seed (Faber 2008: 634). The knowledge Sugar's lesson provides ought to be inaccessible to women in Victorian society – not even Curlew, a medical doctor, wishes to share it with Agnes, dooming her to remain ignorant of her body and its powers. Ironically, the source of Sugar's familiarity with the matter is her own experience, which implies the fact that both knowledge and ignorance, regardless of their sources, are used to prepare women for their future roles, making them docile in one way or another. Sugar, the prostitute, must know her body; Agnes, the lady, must be ignorant of it.

Moreover, whereas Sophie's father, the representative of Victorian masculinity, provides for his daughter a lady-like doll – a model of appropriate female beauty, fashion and passivity, Sugar encourages her to consider other possibilities – masculine, adventurous, subversive – and become an explorer.

Sugar's perception of the knowledge Sophie is to acquire is a rather revolutionary one. Even though she does not cast aside the recommended *Mangnall's Questions*, she realizes the book is not fit for children, and decides to revise it and adjust it to Sophie's level (Faber 2008: 485). Moreover, instead of asking Sophie to provide answers to the given questions she is later to learn by heart, Sugar allows the girl to ask some of her own – to learn what she herself chooses to learn (Faber 2008: 492). Sophie's curiosity is hence settled, and her brain is not crammed with information she is unable to grasp. Finally, she chooses to replace the history book altogether, and fetch a new one, “with engravings on every page” (Faber 2008: 513). Sophie's learning of history thus becomes radically different from the one generally preferred at that time, which results in a whole new vision of this science:

‘These are modern books, up-to-date books,’ enthuses Sugar. ‘Because you are a modern person, living today, don't you see?’

Sophie's eyes threaten to revolve in confusion, at this amazing notion that History is on the move, like a vehicle in which a six-year-old girl may ride. She's always imagined History as a cobwebbed edifice, to whose colossal pedestal the insignificant speck of Sophie Rackham adheres like dirt (Faber 2008: 513).

Finally, the learning is made easier and more appealing by means of Sugar's history verses, in a reforming attempt to make the process more interesting for Sophie. This “novel approach to history” (Faber 2008: 653) offers a sharp contrast to the generally accepted one, consisting of a slight knowledge of the subject, as advised by Ellis, rather than the interesting ways of memorizing large amounts of data. Sugar targets and develops Sophie's intellect, making her a future active conversationalist, rather than a mere attentive listener – contradicting Ellis even further. Faber also opposes this gender-specific attitude to female knowledge through the very detailed lessons in geography Sugar provides for Sophie, who becomes proficient in this science. Next, once convinced she is unintelligent and inferior by the verses she read, Sugar now provides different ones for Sophie, verses that actually stir her imagination, evoking pictures of owls and pussycats in her mind. Finally, to her list of new books, Sugar adds the one that sparks Sophie's creativity in particular – a book featuring a list of things to be made with paper, glue, and string (Faber 2008: 513).

The subversive character of Sugar's instruction is reflected in the fact that she actually aims towards developing the girl's intellectual capacities – memory, reasoning, inquisitiveness, imagination, and creativity, even though she is aware that this is not “quite what's required of a young lady in the making” (Faber 2008: 739). The girl ultimately believes that, contrary to what Sugar has taught her, “the business of making one's way in the world is not as arduous and thankless” (Faber 2008: 555).

Sugar's ultimate rebellion is reflected in an attempt to escape from William, taking Sophie away from the reach of the patriarchy and capitalism he represents. Despite the fact that the happy ending for the two of them remains unrevealed, Sugar's promise of a better life calls for a leap of faith, at least.

#### 4. Conclusion: A way out?

Michael Faber seems to be subverting ideologically constructed female labels. Namely, although undeniably a proper Victorian angel, Agnes also shows signs of Victorian monstrosity. On the other hand, even though Sugar might be said to feature all the prerequisites for being a Victorian monster, she appears angelic, showing strong maternal instinct, not only for her own baby, but also for Sophie, whose hand she protectively grasps, whom she wishes to make happy and eventually adopts - unfortunately, in her thoughts only. Both heroines eventually rebel, escaping Rackham's house and the constraints of the patriarchy embodied in him. Unfortunately, the success of their disobedience remains uncertain, and their fate undisclosed.

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**Stefana Stojković**

## **POLITIKA RODA, OBRAZOVANJE I IDEOLOŠKI KONTEKST U ROMANU *GRIMIZNE I BELE LATICE* MIŠELA FEJBERA**

### **Резиме**

У уводном делу овог ради утврђује се јасна повезаност викторијанске идеологије рода и женског образовања. Разматра се идеолошки контекст овог доба, са освртом на теорије истакнутих јавних личности. Долази се до закључка да је из идеолошког контекста Викторијанаца изронио идеал женствености назван анђео у кући, који је наметнут женама чији су умови и тела присвајани и преобликовани, како би се прилагодили норми.

Други део рада бави се романом *Гримизне и беле латиче* Мишела Фејбера – школом за девојчице средње класе Аботс Ленгли и Шећерлемом, несвакидашњом гувернантом. Испитује се утицај идеологије која је промовисана родно-специфичним образовањем на Фејберове јунакиње, да би се на крају утврдило да ли за њих има начина да превазиђу своју културу или се бар побуне.

[stefanaa92@gmail.com](mailto:stefanaa92@gmail.com)