



Fatherhood, Authority, and British Reading Culture, 1831-1907

Melissa Shields Jenkins

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During a period when the idea of fatherhood was in flux and individual fathers sought to regain a cohesive collective identity, debates related to a father's authority were negotiated and resolved through competing documents. Melissa Shields Jenkins analyzes the evolution of patriarchal authority in nineteenth-century culture, drawing from extra-literary and non-narrative source material as well as from novels. Arguing that Victorian novelists reinvent patriarchy by recourse to conduct books, biography, religious manuals, political speeches, and professional writing in the fields of history and science, Jenkins offers interdisciplinary case studies of Elizabeth Gaskell, George Meredith, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Eliot, Samuel Butler, and Thomas Hardy. Jenkins's book contributes to our understanding of the part played by fathers in the Victorian cultural imagination, and sheds new light on the structures underlying the Victorian novel.

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