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Invisible Men: Fatherhood in Victorian Periodicals, 1850-1910

Claudia Nelson

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Invisible Men focuses on the tremendous growth of periodical literature from 1850 to 1910 to illustrate how Victorian and Edwardian thought and culture problematized fatherhood within the family. Drawing on political, scientific, domestic, and religious periodicals, Claudia Nelson shows how positive portrayals of fatherhood virtually disappeared as motherhood claimed an exalted position with imagined ties to patriotism, social reform, and religious influence.

The study begins with the pre-Victorian role of the father in the middle-class home—as one who led the family in prayer, administered discipline, and determined the children's education, marriage, and career. In subsequent decades, fatherhood was increasingly scrutinized while a new definition of motherhood and femininity emerged. The solution to the newly perceived dilemma of fatherhood appeared rooted in traditional feminine values—nurturance, selflessness, and sensitivity.

The critique presented in *Invisible Men* extends our contemporary debate over men's proper role within the family, providing a historical context for the various images of fatherhood as we practice and dispute them today.

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