Representations of the Upper-Class Victorian Father in Ellen Pickering's *The Fright*

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Abstract

The Fright *by Ellen Pickering deals with parental roles within a wide range of foster families of early Victorian upper classes and with parent-child relationships these roles imply. A special attention is drawn to the paternal figure as it is depicted in the characters of Mr Bradley and Mr Rolleston, and to the relationships they develop with Grace, whom they foster one after another. Mr Bradley is a kind and loving foster parent to Grace, but his physical and psychological absence and lack of domestic authority allow his wife and children to mistreat her. In contrast, Mr Rolleston is described as a sovereign father who is always present, being actively and directly involved with his foster daughter, but whose parental involvement derives from self-oriented reasons, making his fatherhood swing from stern coldness to affection. The contention is that the portrayals of Mr Bradley's and Mr Rolleston's fatherhood depart from the socio-historical prototype of early Victorian wealthy fathers, who were often absent from their households, but nonetheless ruled them with undisputed power. By comparing the literary representations of the upper-class English father to the typical historical construct, this article aims at proving, through the deviation existing between these two, that the realism of the Victorian novel does not consist in rendering characters and their actions in consistency with socio-historical templates.*

Key words: *father, foster child, early Victorian upper classes, parental absence, authority*

Ellen Pickering's *The Fright* (1839) heavily focuses on upper-class fatherhood and on father-daughter relationships. The only ideal family of the novel is disintegrated because its parents are compelled to depart for India and entrust their two daughters to the care of their relatives. The girls are separated, being sent to different families. Grace, the younger child and the novel's protagonist, is fostered by four parents. First, she is brought up

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in Mr Bradley's family, where she is mistreated by his wife and children, leading a miserable life of abuse and neglect. Although Mr Bradley is kind and affectionate to Grace, he is frequently absent and lacks domestic authority, thus failing to protect her from the discrimination she suffers. But this terrible period of Grace's life ends when Mr Rolleston, her great-uncle, having a vindictive plan in mind, takes her under his care and provides her with everything she needs. Neither of these two characters that the novel depicts in their role as fathers is the embodiment of the ideal father. Similarly, neither of them is a typical upper-class father of the early Victorian period. Instead, the traits ascribed to the ideal father and the common features describing the parental behaviour of upper-class men of the first half of the nineteenth century are interestingly mixed in their paternal portrayals, making them original, but also antagonistic in many aspects. While Mr Bradley is a man without domestic authority, an absent, but kind-hearted foster father, Mr Rolleston, a cold and stern man who enjoys undoubted sovereignty, becomes a benevolent, present, and even fond father to Grace as long as she completely obeys him.

Mr Bradley's fatherhood is defined by three main characteristics: kindness, lack of authority and absenteeism. The external narrator introduces this character with the words: "Mr Bradley, a second cousin of Mr Rolleston's, a kind-hearted squire, so well pleased with country sports, and country occupations, particularly farming his own estates [...]" (*TF* 112, vol. 1). It is an opening description that clarifies what are Mr Bradley's family connections with the male protagonist of the novel, Mr Rolleston. Immediately after that, his social status is indicated through the word 'squire', which is preceded by an adjective designating a moral trait. The use of the adjective 'kind-hearted' in the narrative introduction of the character points to the fact that kindness is his predominant personal quality. This particularity is supported throughout the novel by other explicit qualifications made by the external narrator-focalizer, such as "He certainly had one of the kindest hearts that ever beat within a human bosom" (*TF* 174, vol. 1); "his heart was all kindness" (*TF* 314, vol. 1); "her kind-hearted cousin" (*TF* 163, vol. 3) and "the warm-hearted Bradley" (*TF* 110, vol. 2). Moreover, it is also stated by other characters: "your too great kindness of heart" (*TF* 148, vol. 1); "Mr Bradley is a kind man" (*TF* 222, vol. 1), and shown by Mr Bradley's speech and actions, both means of characterization proving the narrator reliable. It is because of his kind and

sympathetic nature that Mr Bradley decides to foster his little cousin until her parents return from India. And it is towards Grace that his kindness and affection are first and foremost displayed.

Although Mr Bradley has his own four children, he becomes much more attached to the fostered child. What makes Mr Bradley develop a more caring relationship with Grace than with his own sons and daughters is not only his compassion for her pitiful state (which is seriously compounded by his wife's and his children's discriminatory behaviour towards her), but also his preference for warm affection over cool decorousness. He is attracted to Grace's simplicity, honesty and her overtly expressed gratitude for his generosity, things which he cannot expect from his children. The cordial relationship between Mr Bradley and his children is, to a certain degree, prevented by the fact that the free expression of his daughters' feelings is restrained by the cultural code of the upper-class decorum, in keeping with which they are insistently taught to act by their mother, and by his sons' bad manners, insolence and dishonesty.

Consequently, Mr Bradley's attitude towards Grace, whom he treats with an unconventional easy familiarity for an upper-class man, differs from that towards his own children. He is tender and loving with his cousin, displaying the characteristics of a middle-class fond father, who expresses his affection with an easiness that is free from the formality of the Victorian elite. Because emphasis is put to a greater extent on the emotional relationship between them, Mr Bradley's fatherhood towards Grace departs from the Victorian upper-class conception of paternal fondness that was mainly expressed through the multitude of various presents and entertainments fathers offered their children (Newman 1997: 118, Roberts 1978: 65-66). However, this does not mean that Mr Bradley is not a generous parent, but benevolence[1], which is considered by David Roberts one of the most common characteristics of early Victorian fathers (1978: 59), is not one of the features that are foregrounded in his paternal portrayal. Instead, emphasis is laid on his kindness of heart, which he shows to the foster daughter more than to his own children. To the latter, Mr Bradley is not so close and affectionate. While the external narrator points out his habit to kiss Grace and to call her by the endearing name "Gracey", there is no indication that he does the same with regard to his own children, whom he occasionally reprimands for the above-mentioned shortcomings and for their coldness and cruelty to Grace. Presented like this, his parental

position is antithetical to that of his wife, who dotes on her own children but mistreats the fostered one. The reason for such a contrast resides in the characters' different ideologies that guide their actions, Mr Bradley's being in consonance with the dominant ideology of the novel.

Supporting the moral principles of humanity, sympathy, justice and equality, Mr Bradley acts as the fostered child's protector, but because of his frequent absence from home, he fails to spare the girl from the abuse inflicted by the other members of his family. Mr Bradley cannot condone his wife's mistreatment of Grace, and therefore he orders the girl to be treated similarly to their own children. He shows deep interest in Grace's welfare, intervening to keep her safe from domestic tyranny, spending time with her and caring for her needs. But such instances of paternal involvement are not many and mainly occur right after he takes her into their house. Although Mr Bradley always treats Grace like his favourite daughter, he is more and more depicted as being absent, his image as a fond father being absorbed by the increasingly emphasised figure of the absent father. Mr Bradley's remoteness is explicitly indicated through narratorial statements such as "Mr Bradley [...] unluckily, happened to be absent when she suffered most!" (*TF* 195, vol. 1) and "he was frequently absent" (314), but also inferred from the passages revealing Grace's loneliness: "[e]very hour did she feel herself more lonely and desolate" (37, vol. 2) and "none cared if she improved – none lured her on to learning by the words of praise [...], none heeded if she wept or laughed" (198, vol. 1). The negative pronoun "none", insistently repeated in the last example, primarily refers to Mrs Bradley, as the one who has the duty to supervise the children's education, to the governess that instructs them and also to the children, who, living in the same house, could be Grace's best friends instead of adding to her suffering by mocking her. However, because this pronoun means "not one of a group of people" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2017), it refers to all the members of Mr Bradley's family, including Mr Bradley. Moreover, the character's remoteness is confirmed and reinforced by Grace's harsh mistreatment from Mrs Bradley, her children and Miss Heywood, because only his presence can save her from overt cruelty.

Mr Bradley's fatherhood is described not only in terms of physical remoteness, but also in terms of psychological remoteness demonstrated by his carelessness about family matters and relationships. While he does not

agree with his wife in many aspects regarding their children's education, he nevertheless allows her to have it her own way in everything, except for the treatment of the fostered child. However, despite his initial concerns about Grace's well-being, he is not persistent in defending her from harsh injustice and neglect:

> Mr. Bradley's conduct with regard to Grace [...] had been kind and judicious; and the continuance of such conduct wound have ensured, to a certain extent, the comfort, if not the absolute happiness, of his little *protégée*; but it was just exactly this perseverance in judicious kindness which was not to be expected from the owner of Elmwood Lodge. He was not an undecided, but, except in his favorite pursuit of agriculture, he was an indolent man; and to this indolence was his wife chiefly indebted for maintaining her rule (*TF* 181, vol. 1, original emphasis).

This excerpt calls attention to two positions held by Mr Bradley: that of Grace's protector, implied through the use of the French word "protégée", preceded by the possessive adjective "his", with regard to the fostered girl, and that of "the owner of Elmwood Lodge". It is by no means accidental that here the external narrator makes reference to the character as the master of Elmwood Lodge estate. Mr Bradley is implicitly evaluated according to his position as an upper-class ruler and the allusion is made to the fact that, notwithstanding his social status, he does not possess the typical characteristics of the early Victorian gentleman. According to the research carried out by David Roberts, the male members of the upper classes of the first half of the nineteenth century were generally confident and resolute men who freely maintained their prerogatives, governing their households with uncontested authority (1978: 71). Although Mr Bradley is a man with independent judgement and clear opinions, he lacks the strong determination of the upper-class landowners to insist on having his word obeyed and to run his house according to his principles, a detail rendered through the use of the litotes "[he] was not an undecided [...] man" instead of a direct remark that he is a determined man. For this reason, Mr Bradley is unsuccessful in performing his function as the protector of the fostered girl, in making his home a friendly environment to her. Despite his firm order that Grace should be regarded as their own child and few moments of parental caring and open affection between him and his little cousin, Mr Bradley does not persist in standing for her rights. Instead, he negligently

leaves her under his wife's supervision, never investigating whether his decisions are fully carried out and never taking serious action against the destructive influence of Mrs Bradley.

Although paternal absence, both physical and psychological, is a common characteristic of the early-Victorian upper-class father (McKee and O'Brien 1982: 18, Thaden 1997: 113, Roberts 1978: 59-62), Mr Bradley's fatherhood differs from the parenting style of most of his real counterparts, in particular on account of his deficiency of authority within the family. Despite their absence, many wealthy men were still "present" in their families through the complete control with which they ruled their homes. They were not very much concerned about bringing up their children because they were convinced that their wives and servants, to whom they delegated their parental duties, and the upper-class child-rearing system would ensure an appropriate education for them (Mitchell 2009: 150, Roberts 1978: 62-64, 78, Thompson 1988: 125-126). In contrast, Mr Bradley knows that his children are not properly instructed under his wife's supervision and that Grace is unfairly treated, but instead of interfering to counteract her negative influence, he only shows his disagreement at times. Such behaviour is determined not only by his thoughtfulness but also by his lack of domestic authority: "Mr Bradley ruled in the kennel, the stable and the farm; but, unhappily, he did not rule in his own house [...], there Mrs Bradley held the sway" (*TF* 133, vol. 1). The country occupations listed in this citation are first collectively mentioned in the character's introduction previously quoted, which indicates that Mr Bradley's involvement in them is an important aspect in the description of his personality. The same thing is emphasized, and also clarified here by means of the contrast between Mr Bradley's authority outside and that inside the home, marked by the presence of the adversative conjunction "but" and by the employment of the positive and negative forms of the verb "to rule" within the same sentence and reinforced by the enumeration of each of the outdoor activities Mr Bradley supervises. While his sovereignty in the public sphere is indisputable, his power in the private sphere is severely undermined by his determined wife's complete control over the house.

Furthermore, Mr Bradley's powerlessness is clearly demonstrated through the way in which his orders with regard to Grace's treatment are executed. As Mrs Bradley artfully runs the house according to her personal

preference, which differs from that of her husband, she does not obey or only partly obeys his commands. Because she wants to be considered a dutiful wife not only by the people from outside but also by those living in their house, including her husband, she is constrained to submit to her spouse's will in his presence, in order to give at least the impression of submissiveness. Taking this into consideration, Mr Bradley can make his orders be obeyed by firmly and repeatedly insisting on them being carried out and by constantly verifying their execution. However, he does not do that, on the one hand, due to his great kindness, and on the other, on account of the aforementioned carelessness, which, along with his physical absence and lack of authority, contributes to the construction of a paternal figure that reinforces the stereotype of the Victorian absent father.

Being thus portrayed, Mr Bradley is a perfect foil to *The Fright*'s male protagonist, Mr Rolleston. These two characters are primarily depicted as antithetical personalities. If kindness is Mr Bradley's predominant personal quality, then sternness is the trait that best describes Mr Rolleston. This can be deduced from the external narrator's repeated use throughout the novel of the term "sternness" and of other words from the same word family: "stern demeanour" (TF 34, vol.1); "the stern formality" (83); "stern gaze" (87); "questioned Mr Rolleston sternly" (99); "that stern, proud man" (124, vol. 2); "he replied with greater sternness" (209, vol. 3) etc. Moreover, this characteristic is reinforced by the employment of a variety of synonyms for the word "sternness" and its derivatives: "his stern and generally immoveable features" (20, vol. 1); "cold, commanding tone" (24); "stern unpitying gaze" (95); "unsoftened look" (104); "inexorable host" (105); "harsh and inflexible uncle" (216), "the cold, keen, gaze of Mr Rolleston" (220); "his cold, unsympathising look and tone" (108, vol. 2); "grim master" (119); "habitual coldness of demeanour" (135); "unrelenting hatred" (166, vol. 3); and "his cold and stern eye without one touch of feeling or emotion" (199), to cite but a few examples. Many of these noun phrases contain two adjectives, making the character's description more vivid, while conveying and emphasising the same idea that Mr Rolleston is the embodiment of sternness.

Although sternness is Mr Rolleston's prevailing trait, it is just one of the many other characteristics that, complementing each other, form his image of a diabolic despot. As the above-mentioned examples demonstrate, Mr Rolleston's personality is rendered through both his verbal and,

especially, his non-verbal behaviour. His tone is not only stern but also sarcastic, as revealed by clauses framing the character's direct speech, such as: "exclaimed Mr. Rolleston in a sarcastic tone" (118, vol. 3); "asked Mr. Rolleston sarcastically" (92, vol. 1); and "observed her uncle ironically" (207, vol. 3); "demanded Mr Rolleston with bitter irony" (101, vol. 1). Sarcasm is also conveyed by his smile, depicted in such phrases as: "satirical curling of the lip" (10, vol. 3); "cold, sardonic smile" (12, vol. 1); hateful, cynical smile" (24, vol. 3); sneering smile (241, vol. 2); "mocking smile" (276, vol. 2); and "Mephistopheles smile" (120, vol. 1). Striking is the multitude of synonymous adjectives modifying the noun "smile" and employed throughout the novel to highlight Mr Rolleston's ironic manner. Nonetheless, more striking and powerful is the use of the proper noun "Mephistopheles" to modify the word "smile", since it points out the novel's intertextual reference to German folklore, namely to the Faust legend. Via this phrase, Mr Rolleston is explicitly compared with Mephistopheles, a devil from the German legend, by one of the minor characters, Captain Rawdon, whose thoughts about Mr Rolleston are directly reported by the external narrator. The external narrator also shows the protagonist's similarity to a diabolic figure through descriptions of his look: "looking into her face with an almost fiendish glare that made her shudder" (95, vol. 1) and "replied Mr Rolleston with the triumphant look of a demon, contemplating the misery wrought by his power" (166, vol. 3), disclosing his cruel superiority over his relatives and other people, and his malicious joy at their misfortunes.

Besides Mr Rolleston's sternness and sarcasm, other features contribute to his depiction as a despotic tyrant. Among them is his deep insight into human motives, a characteristic foregrounded even from the opening pages of the novel. *The Fright* starts with two gentlemen sitting at the table in a country mansion: Thomas Rolleston and his nephew, Henry Trevyllian. But the introduction of their names is purposely delayed until a detailed portrayal of Mr Rolleston's personality is provided, emphasising that it is his personal qualities what determine his behaviour and his relationships with all the other characters, and not his social status, family connections, or something else. This portrayal is presented by the external narrator who renders Captain Rawdon's opinion about Mr Rolleston, whom Rawdon again compares with one of the characters of the Faustian legend. However, this time he is not analogized with Mephistopheles, but

with the legend's hero. Similarly to Faust, who sold his soul to gain unlimited knowledge, Mr Rolleston has intellectual discovery at the expense of his happiness. The protagonist's keenness of insight into the minds of people, as described by Captain Rawdon, is "universal" (3, vol. 1); he reads the reasons behind their actions with complete easiness. The external narrator-focalizer mentions that such a description is exaggerated and demonstrates this through instances when Mr Rolleston's insight is not absolute. Examples are found in phrases like: "even his penetration could not determine which" (252, vol. 2); "some parts of his niece's conduct [...] puzzled his penetration" (70, vol. 3) and "so that even his almost superhuman penetration had been baffled" (219-220, vol. 3). So, although the novel abounds in explicit references to the character's keenness, confirming that it is indeed one of his most distinctive qualities, the narratorial qualifications of it seem to be more objective. A relative objectiveness is provided in the last cited example by the employment of the adverb "almost", which diminishes the power of the surrounding statement, deeming it more neutral. In fact, the external narrator tends to maintain neutrality with regard to Mr Rolleston, generally not criticising him, nor sympathising with him, but rather pointing out the way other characters consider him to be.

Furthermore, the tyrannical figure of the novel's male protagonist is reinforced by the dreadful wrath he expresses against those who act in opposition to his will. This feature is clearly illustrated by his comparison with a lion: "The lion is not as fierce as he is painted; but he has nothing sentimental about him, and is awful when crossed" (124, vol. 2). These are Mr Rolleston's words about himself and they fully reveal his character, which is likewise displayed by the way he refuses to consider his nephew and his great-niece Grace as his relatives and refuses to leave his fortune to them when they decide to disregard his choices for their marriage partners. In fact, anger is, as disclosed by a "subjective anachrony" (Bal 2009: 85-86) and an external analepsis, the main reason Mr Rolleston behaves like a tyrant. The "undying anger" (*TF* 227, vol. 3) produced by the fact that Grace's grandmother rejected his marriage proposal when he was young kills every trace of humanity in him and makes him thirsty for revenge. The revelation of this fact is purposely delayed and the suspense it generates is heightened by the use of anticipatory hints, such as "one dark and gloomy passion ruled his soul, rolling its noisome flood over all things fair and

lovely, whelming beneath its turbid waves, love, gentleness and pity" (86, vol. 1), and "his niece [was] convinced that there was much in his character which she did not understand; whilst the fancy crossed her mind, that he had not been in his youth as he was in his age" (137, vol. 2). Although the first example strongly indicates that the motive behind Mr Rolleston's antisocial and unsympathetic behaviour is a horrible grudge he harbours, it is only when light is shed on his past that the suspense is broken. The second example, however, more subtly suggests that Mr Rolleston is not stern and cruel by nature and that there is something that makes him so, something concealed from all the other characters and from the reader as well.

Strange as it may seem, Mr Rolleston's vindictive anger, which determines his despotic behaviour, is the dominant element that makes him engage in a parent-child relationship with Grace and become like a father to her. Although Grace's graciousness and her affectionate nature play a significant part in the changes that take place in their initially cold relationship, it is Mr Rolleston's desire to make her totally dependent on him that is the decisive factor. The reason Mr Rolleston fosters Grace is a selfish one. He plans revenge against her parents and grandmother, who dared to refuse him, by manipulating his niece into complete submission to his will. To accomplish his plan, he tries to establish a strong relationship with Grace by spending time with her, by taking care of her every need and by lavishing her in luxury, so that she could not imagine her life without the things he provides her with and would obey him unquestioningly from fear of losing them. The novel, however, is silent about Mr Rolleston's scheme, which only becomes clear the moment Grace refuses to marry whom her great-uncle asks her to. Because she makes this choice, Mr Rolleston no longer considers Grace his relative or foster child. Up to that critical point of their parent-child relationship, the novel details only the positive way Mr Rolleston and his niece become close to each other, how her fear gives way to love and how his sternness is softened by the girl's tenderness and gratitude, transforming him into a caring and fond father, while his intentions and motives concerning Grace remain unrevealed. This concealment creates a sense of suspense, which is increased by the following anticipatory clue:

> There were times too when she [Grace] fancied that Mr. Rolleston surrounded her with luxury either as a mere matter of psychological

> curiosity, [...]; or else, by accustoming her to this splendour, make it absolutely needful to her happiness, and thus bend her to his will, from the fear of losing it (159, vol. 2).

Despite the apparent clarity and straightforwardness of this anticipation, it is still a hint, because its "germinating force" (Bal 2009: 95) is seen only when Mr Rolleston divulges the secret of his sternness and inhumanity and the reason behind Grace's fostering and his caring attitude towards her. Before that disclosure, the information this hint provides cannot be relied upon, since it is, in this context, just a hypothetical thought that comes to Grace's mind, unsupported by any explicit and precise statements about Mr Rolleston's plan. But the delayed clarification explored here is not employed only as a means of producing suspense; it also helps to separate Mr Rolleston's image as a foster father from his egotism and desire for revenge, as otherwise his paternal figure would be significantly spoiled by the knowledge of his hidden motives.

Being thus presented, Mr Rolleston's fatherhood is characterised by three main features: sovereignty, benevolence and presence, departing to a certain degree from the socio-historical paradigm of early Victorian upper-class fathers on the basis of its characteristic. According to David Roberts's research, sovereignty is one the three most common characteristics describing upper-class men of the first half of the nineteenth century (1978: 59, 78). Mr Rolleston's undoubted authority derives from his distinctive personality traits and that together form his portrait as a despot in whose presence almost everyone feels uneasy. Although in his relationship with Grace he is not as cruel as others deem him to be, he requires and expects her to acknowledge his absolute sovereignty over her and to act according to his rules. Despite her uncomplaining submissiveness, Grace chooses not to obey her great-uncle when he asks her to marry someone she does not love. Opposing him, she causes the force of his tyranny to unleash on her, as it unleashed on her parents, and she finally witnesses the manifestation of all his despotic characteristics. Through her non-compliance, she diminishes his authority and makes his secret scheme fail, which leads their parent-child relationship to its end. Hence, it becomes evident that Mr Rolleston's sovereignty is essential for his fatherhood of Grace.

Mr Rolleston's parental authority is closely connected to his physical and psychological presence in Grace's life, which is an atypical feature of upper-class early Victorian fathers. As mentioned before,

wealthy men were often absent from the household, physically in particular, but also psychologically. Paternal presence was frequently felt only through observing the total control fathers had over their children – as they delegated parenting responsibilities to various other agents – or during rare moments spent together, especially at holidays, when upper-class fathers lavished their children with gifts and took them to various entertainments. In contrast to these fathers, Mr Rolleston is depicted as an "always there" parent. He is necessarily psychologically involved in Grace's life because she plays the most important role in his plan for revenge, which is facilitated by his great intuition about people that allows him to understand Grace's motives and therefore manipulate her more easily. Moreover, he is a physically present father, who spends much time with his foster daughter, discussing with her about literature, painting and history, helping her to improve her drawing and foreign languages skills, listening to music and playing chess together.

Depicting a present upper-class father, the novel subverts the Victorian upper classes' well-established convention regarding the children's home education. During the nineteenth century, it was customary for upper-class parents to entrust the rearing and education of their children to a complete staff of nannies, nursemaids, governesses and tutors, a traditional and universal practice that was most likely to prevent the establishment of intense parent-child relationships (Burnett 1994: 237, Thompson 1988: 125-126, Mitchell 2009: 150, Frost 2009: 23, 32). Mr Rolleston acts against this custom by concerning himself with the instruction of his foster daughter, regardless of the fact that she is in her late teens, the age when the education of Victorian girls was already finished. He wants her to be excellent in everything she does and to become an intelligent woman with considerable knowledge and deep insight. In order to achieve this, he does not employ any teachers, but takes the time to teach her all the necessary things. His active involvement in Grace's personal development is an important factor contributing to their close parent-child relationship, which is encouraged by his great benevolence as well.

Similarly to most early Victorian upper-class men, Mr Rolleston is a benevolent father. He lavishes his niece with expensive presents, such as beautiful dresses and valuable jewellery. He provides her with everything a true lady needs, surrounding her with luxury. Furthermore, he takes her to various balls, allowing her to enjoy one of the most popular upper-class

entertainments. Such benevolence is shown to Grace not because Mr Rolleston wants to make her happy, but because by its means he intends to accomplish his ingenious secret scheme. Nevertheless, everything Mr Rolleston does for her fails to guarantee Grace's unquestioning obedience in the end. Notwithstanding that, as a token of her gratefulness for Mr Rolleston's kindness, Grace is submissive to him, she is not corrupted by his wealth and the privileges she may have as his heiress, and she refuses them when Mr Rolleston requires her to marry against her will. However, she becomes his heiress, because Mr Rolleston finally acknowledges his selfishness and pride and is thankful for the transformation that has taken place in his character due to Grace.

The paternal image of the male protagonist of *The Fright* is intricate, combining characteristics that are common for early Victorian upper-class men, such as sovereignty and benevolence, with those, like physical and psychological presence, which mark a departure from the socio-historical paradigm. Moreover, the fact that Mr Rolleston's reason for becoming a foster father is a self-oriented one further complicates his image as a parent. Because his fatherhood is not based on genuine feelings, he displays contradictory parental behaviours, being warm and affectionate when he is obeyed and cold and stern, even despotic, when opposed. In Mr Rolleston's case, as in that of Mr Bradley, parenting is subordinated to other interests. While Mr Rolleston fosters Grace only to take revenge on her relatives who have dared to cross him, Mr Bradley is too busy with his outside occupations to be able to supervise her upbringing and education. Although the father figures of these two men are antagonistic in many respects, there are many similarities between them. Neither of them reflects the socio-historical prototype of the early Victorian upper-class father, nor the Victorian paternal ideal. Instead, both of them represent kaleidoscopic examples of foster fatherhood that seem to indicate that paternal experience, being complex and varied, cannot be contained within any prototypical image and that the nineteenth-century realism did not aim at representing characters and their relationships in one-to-one correspondence with the real templates of Victorian society.

Note

[1] When the term 'benevolence' is used here to describe one of upper-class fathers' characteristics, it refers to fathers' willingness to dispense gifts to their children and to offer them the possibility of enjoying various class-specific entertainments.

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