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Fathers of Genius: the Ambiguities of Power in Relations with their Fathers for Three Women Writers, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Virginia Woolf

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The aim of this paper is to consider the changing relations between their fathers and three major writers, Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861) and Virginia Woolf (1882–1941). These British women are still celebrated in the history of English literature for works that are original and innovative but, in addition, in their own times, each was what would now be called a 'cultural celebrity'. For the present study, what is important is that these writers had very close relations with their fathers, whose roles in shaping their literary careers have been both acknowledged and strongly criticized. It is hard to deny that, given social and legal systems that gave men so much power over their families, these fathers often acted as domestic tyrants. The bitterness this caused appears in a revealing diary entry made by Virginia Woolf on November 22, 1928, when she notes that this was her father's birthday: "Father would have been 96 today if he had lived – and why not? Others live that long. If he had not died I would never have become a writer" (W o o l f 1982, 208). Yet without the model he presented as a man of letters, she might not have seen writing as her natural career. This article tries not to take sides. I have long admired these three women writers, but it was the theme of a conference announced at Šiauliai University in 2018, the father in culture, that encouraged me to look more closely at the three fathers. I began to speculate on what it was like to be the father of a very talented daughter when one lived in a society that assigned women a very low status. Today, ironically, entering these men's names in an internet search tends to bring up first and sometimes only the word 'father', although Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744–1817), Edward Moulton Barrett (1785–1857) and Leslie Stephen (1832–1904) had talents and aspirations and were not insignificant figures in their own times.

Before considering each father-daughter relationship individually, it is interesting to report on similarities among these men that emerged during the research process: their relatively marginal status in the societies of their day, their failure to realize their own potential, and their unusually intense relations with their families. First, they all belonged to the upper middle class of the Britain of their time. Yet the social and cultural elite centred in London would not have judged any of them completely favourably. Edgeworth was a well-off landowner and highly sociable, but Anglo-Irish with manners that were considered a little vulgar. A specialist on Maria Edgeworth, Valerie Pakenham, comments that in his later life London circles saw him "as a red-faced, over-talkative and over opiniated provincial bore" (P a k e n h a m 2018, 165). Barrett was also not from the heart of the empire: coming from a Jamaican landowning family made him somewhat marginal. In addition, for many years he kept himself and his family secreted away on a large estate far from society, developing a reputation as a recluse (F o s t e r 1988, 9-11). Stephen's family was Scottish, but he really signed his own doom by writing a book about the loss of religious faith – he had lost his, and with it, his post at Cambridge University; among friends he became known as "poor Leslie Stephen" (W o o l f 1982, 61).

Furthermore, these men, despite having strong personalities and real talents, never succeeded in achieving much in their lives. Edward Barrett lost a good deal of income when the British ban on slavery made his Jamaican estates drop in value. He was forced to give up his large English country house, into which he had put so much creative energy, transforming a simple manor into an exotic Turkish structure with minarets, carved fireplaces and a circular dining room (F o s t e r 1988, 11). When he had to move to a much smaller house in London, he lost his status as a country gentleman.

Edgeworth kept his Irish estates all his life, but his attempts to make a reputation as an educationalist and industrial inventor were successful only in the earlier years of his life. In collaboration with family members, he did develop innovative programs for child education, but when his daughter Maria made her name as a novelist, he came second to her in the public eye.

Stephen did not live long enough to be eclipsed by Virginia Woolf's success, but he already felt like a failure much earlier. Although literary historians like Quentin Bell refer to him as an important man of letters (B e l l 1979, xiv), he knew that his philosophical publications and literary criticism had never made much of an impact. Suffering from depression, he told Virginia that he had only "a good second class mind" (W o o l f 1985, 110). He is often described as the editor of the massive *Dictionary of National Biography* but he held this post only for a few early volumes, as the strain of the job led to a nervous breakdown.

Considering that their fatherhood is the theme of this study, the most significant similarity among these three men is that, to an unusual degree, their roles in their families were the psychological centres of their lives. Stereotypes about 19th

century fathers as domestic tyrants have fostered the incorrect notion that most men were always present in their homes. However, with the Industrial Revolution, many middle-class fathers had little time for their wives and children. As Jan Marsh indicates, the daily management of a middle-class home was in the hands of mothers, not fathers; women were expected not only to increase the family by giving birth to healthy children, but also to train and supervise domestics, check the material inventory of the house, teach younger children, nurse elderly parents and invalids, and use their cultural talents to make the home a pleasant place. As a natural extension of this domestic sphere, women also acted as the unpaid social workers of the day, helping the poor around them (M a r s h 2009).

Although a father had the power to make decisions for all those in his family, his most fundamental role was to provide financially for these complex households. It would not have been considered odd for Edgeworth, Barrett or Stephen to neglect their families in a personal sense, to pay little attention to the way their children were being brought up or simply to be somewhere else – a workplace, a club, another part of Britain or abroad. What was not so common was their absorption in the family world. They did not take over women's domestic functions, but they evidently found personal satisfaction in spending many hours each day with their wives and children. As was common in the late 18th and 19th centuries, these were large families: there were eight children in the Stephen household, twelve in the Barrett family and twenty-two in the Edgeworth family.

The behavior of Edgeworth, Barrett and Stephen had a good deal to do with particularly close relationships with their wives. The word 'uxorious', Latin in origin, and meaning, as the *Collins English Dictionary* (7th ed., 2005, Glasgow: HarperCollin, p. 1769) states, "excessively attached to or dependent on one's wife" (*Collins English Dictionary* 2005, 1769), could have been coined for this trio of men. Edgeworth, who married four times, could not endure more than a few months of solitude when one died before marrying another, a haste that was considered scandalous in his time (M a n l y 2014). Except for the error of his first marriage, he made all his wives assistants in his work. Stephen's position as a college fellow at Cambridge University did not allow him to marry until he lost this post when he openly declared himself to be an atheist at the age of 35. When his first wife died he fell into a state of deep depression, relieved only by his second marriage. This wife, Virginia Woolf's mother, was a constant support in his fits of anxiety; when she suddenly died, he immersed himself in self-pity, a nightmare for his children, as Woolf recalled: "we were all sitting in the drawing room round father's chair sobbing […] We were his only hope, his only comfort, he would say" (W o o l f 1985, 92, 94).

Even more dramatically, when he lost his wife, Barrett declared that he would never marry again and, in a very unusual step, forbade his children to get married either. When two daughters and one son did marry, he cut off financial support, took them out of his will and refused to read their letters or meet with them again (F o s t e r 1988, 49, 190).

Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth

Edgeworth said about his daughter Maria that she had "an inordinate desire to be loved" (P a k e n h a m 2018, 422). This probably developed from his neglect in her early years, when he was absorbed bringing up his son according to the radical theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This experiment ended disastrously, but Edgeworth continued to study how small children learn with his second wife, Honora. Maria was seen as a rebellious child; she recalled how, at age six, ignored by her father and stepmother, she relieved her unhappiness by "trampling on the garden frames in the walled garden [which they had constructed] and the delightful sound of breaking glass" (Ibid., 23). At the same time Maria tried desperately to please her stepmother, writing from her boarding school: "I know it will give you great satisfaction to know I am a good girl" (Ibid., 24). Honora responded criticizing her posture, while Maria's father sent a chilling letter outlining how important it was that she adopt the behavior appropriate to a woman of her class: "With a benevolent heart, complying temper and obliging manners, I should make no doubt that by your mother's assistance you might become a very excellent and highly improved woman"; he rather cruelly assessed her appearance as "exactly in the middle ground between beauty and plainness" (Ibid., 24–25). Yet Edgeworth came to value Maria's real intelligence and literary talents. In 1782, when she was fourteen, he took her out of school in England to return with him, his third wife and their seven children to Ireland. Now he became convinced that Maria was the intellectual partner (the affectionate term he used for the rest of his life) he needed in research on education. In addition, with no son of a suitable age, he trained her to act as his secretary and accountant on his estate, a position of power she retained in the years to come.

For Maria, this elevation of status and her father's real affection bonded her to him permanently. She was not naïve about his feelings for her, understanding that she could hold his love only by concrete achievements; she wrote that "admiration and affection are more nearly connected in my father's mind than in most people" (Ibid., 81). Edgeworth's vision of what Maria should write about were limited to his own interests, education, science and technology. The notion that a woman could take part in scientific research was very liberal on his part, but it did ignore her own inclinations. With his encouragement she read widely in subjects that were considered beyond most women's capacity, but she was also eager to read novels, which he discouraged at first (Ibid., 11). In 1783, when she was 15, she confided to a school friend that she was trying to create a novel, but that her father had asked her to write "simple moral tales" which could be used in his educational project (Ibid., 31–33). As it turned out, her realistic stories about mischievous children, published as *The Parent's Assistant* in 1797, were her first literary success. Almost immediately her publisher republished them in a more expensive, illustrated format, seeing that this young author was worth investment (Ibid., 50). With the publication a year later of the scholarly work *Practical Education*, signed by both

Edgeworths, it must have seemed to her father that Maria was firmly launched in their scholarly partnership.

However, encouraged by women relatives, in secret she wrote a very different kind of book, the satirical novel *Castle Rackrent*, published in 1800; this novel on Irish country life is considered the model of a new genre, the regional novel. Unlike her other writings, which her father edited, it was entirely her own work and though published anonymously, was soon reprinted with her name on the cover. It was an immediate and enormous success. Richard Edgeworth linked himself to her novel by providing a preface to the second edition (Ibid., 67), but it was Maria who became a literary star at the age of 32. She followed this novel with others that sold very well. In 1814, her publisher paid her the very large sum of 2000 guineas for one of her novels (the equivalent of about 200, 000 pounds in 2018 currency); indeed, after the best-selling Sir Walter Scott, she was the "highest paid novelist of her generation" (Ibid., 421).

Her success as a novelist might have upset the father-daughter relationship, as it made her financially independent, but Maria was very careful not to let this happen. She continued to write novels, telling one correspondent how much pleasure the process of working out the structure of her story gave her (Ibid., 195-196). Nevertheless, she allowed her father to interfere in organizing the time she planned for writing. In 1805, he told her that she should write "a useful essay upon professional education", by which he meant a full-scale monograph and applied considerable emotional pressure: "He has pointed out to me that to be a mere writer of a number of pretty stories and novelettes would be unworthy of his partner, pupil and daughter" (Ibid., 90). Was Edgeworth jealous of her literary success? Probably, but her continuing to work on educational publications seems to have satisfied his need to feel he still had power over her. When she completed *Professional Education* in 1808 she admitted to a friend: "I cannot help however looking forward to its departure" but also stated with some irony: "I am still well repaid for all the labor it has cost me by seeing my father is pleased with it and thinks it a *proof of affection*" (Ibid., 114; emphasis by Maria Edgeworth). Only very occasionally did she stand up to him on a question of her literary work as, for example, in opposing his desire to re-publish *Castle Rackrent* heavily annotated by his explanations of Irish society (Ibid., 133). Still, in a letter to a friend she acknowledges her inferior status in the relationship: "in the last event of things you know that I must do what my acting and most kind literary partner decided" (Ibid., 133). Her own use of her father's phrase "literary partner" is clearly ironic here.

The truth was that her happiness depended on maintaining good relations with her father; he gave her not only his love, but also with a superior position in among her family, the members of whom she cared for deeply. After his death she took over many of his roles with her younger siblings, travelling much more in Ireland, England and France. Her family home became a place of literary pilgrimage for aristocrats and writers and it was also where she was happiest: "I want the interest,

the necessity of occupation which I can find nowhere else but at home" (Ibid., 216). When she was asked to write an autobiographical preface for her works, she declared: "As a woman, my life, totally domestic, can offer nothing of interest to the public" (H a r e 1895). It was not that she accepted the ideal of feminine submission but that she was satisfied with much of what she had and had learned to release her rebellious feelings through ironic letters to friends. In one she defended apparently wasting time on embroidery by explaining that she did this work while her father read aloud after breakfast, a habit he had taken up after his fourth marriage: "it is much more agreeable to move one's fingers than to have to sit with hands crossed or clasped immovably" (P a k e n h a m 2018, 91). Though some contemporary admirers and later critics have held that her talents were distorted by her father, Maria Edgeworth probably considered herself lucky as a woman in her social period in winning her father's attention and support.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Edward Moulton Barrett

Elizabeth Barrett Browning is often seen in connection to two men, her father and her husband. She chose to place both their names on her published works once she married, but this gives a false impression of a unified life. In 1846, when she ran away with Robert Browning, she turned her private relationship with her father into a public drama of rebellion against the power of the father. Maria Edgeworth found ways to accommodate her father's demands, while ultimately Elizabeth Barrett could not.

Elizabeth was passionate by nature, something that she recognized but which, according to her biographer Margaret Foster, in part frightened her (F o s t e r 1988, 28). Still, she refused to follow the family-centred model which she witnessed in her mother's life, telling her mother at the age of 16 that she agreed with the radical ideas expressed by Mary Wollstonecraft; she wrote in a notebook: "My mind is naturally independent and spurns that subserviency of opinion which is generally considered necessary to feminine softness" (Ibid., 29). From an early age she wrote poetry; by the age of 21 this had become a fixed ambition, to be recognized as a significant English poet (Ibid., 35– 36).

Her father recognized very soon that his oldest daughter was very talented and took steps to nurture her intellectually, buying many books and having her study Latin and Greek like a boy. When she turned fourteen he had 50 copies of her poem on a Greek theme, "The Battle of Marathon", printed. But this act marked a limit for her as well: the 50 copies were only for relatives and family friends, not for public consumption. Later he was supportive of her sending poems to magazines, but they had to be published anonymously (Ibid.). His vision of her was coloured by his religious faith: she was to be "religious, responsible, humble" and praised her in this respect: "so happy a specimen of Christian submission and devotional feeling never was surpassed" (O s b o r n 1989). For a time he would come to her room regularly so that they could pray together; she wrote: "He prays with

me every night with one of my hands held in his and nobody besides him and me in the room" (Ibid.). Her father's strong preference for her, like Edgeworth's for Maria, was undoubtedly a mark of success for a girl, since in this large family she was the favourite of the person with the greatest power. But his close attention also restricted her.

Like a number of Victorian women frustrated by limits to their freedom, Elizabeth seems to have developed the strategy of using periods of real ill health to create a persona as a serious invalid. One of her biographers believes that, by the time she was an adult, apparent illness was a way for Elizabeth to manipulate her family (F o s t e r 1988, 39). She never wanted to go on the formal visits that were part of the socialization of young ladies, writing "what is called GOING OUT is the greatest bore in the world" (Ibid., 33; emphasis in original). As an invalid she made her bedroom a refuge to which she could always withdraw, even from her siblings and father.

Then, in her mid-thirties, a series of events made her take more active control of her life. From 1837, when a grandmother left her money, she became at least theoretically independent. Now she pushed her father hard and won the right to publish under her own name (Ibid., 87). In 1838, when her father moved the family to London for financial reasons, so that her brothers could hold jobs; now she entered the literary world with the publication of her first collection of poems (Ibid., 88). A poet suggested they write a play together; an American publisher wanted to produce her poems (Ibid., 112). As her father grew more controlling over his children, she started acting according to her own convictions. In 1844, she wrote poems on social issues and experimented with her style; she told a friend: "it seems to me that I have more *reach*, whether in thought or language […] all the life and strength which are in me seem to have passed into my poetry" (Ibid., 131; emphasis in original). Through approved female visitors she became acquainted with the newest poetry, including that of Robert Browning; she mentioned him with approval in one of her own poems – and opening the way to one of the most volcanic romances in English literature.

Even a less strict Victorian father would have considered Browning an unsuitable friend or husband for Elizabeth: He was six years younger than her, had no job or money, was lower in social class than the Barretts, and very different from them in manners, extremely out-going, talking a great deal in a loud voice (Ibid., 151). But he took her by storm, insisting on a meeting, then immediately announcing he had fallen in love with her and wanted to marry her. Browning was ready to confront Elizabeth's father; she forbade this but began to prepare for escape. She walked much more, drank milk to make herself stronger and sat in the sun to make herself stronger, all without hinting to her father or brothers that she was in love (Ibid., 155–156). She wrote to a friend that she was "growing and growing just like the trees – it is miraculous, the feeling of sprouting life in me and out of me – and now I begin to sleep and look altogether like another person" (Ibid.).

In the summer of 1846 she made all the practical arrangements needed for eloping with Robert Browning. He had no money but she persuaded him to accept hers. First they married secretly in London and then on September 19, 1846 she went off to Italy with him, leaving letters for her family. Though she did die in in her mid-fifties, she managed to do everything she wanted before that. Despite serious miscarriages, she had a son; she took up the cause of the liberation of Italy (Ibid., 336). In 1856, as Simon Avery explains, her novel in verse, *Aurora Leigh*, took a strong feminist line on two women's issues in Victorian society: the restrictions on middle-class women and how prostitution was often forced on working-class women (A v e r y 2014). The love sonnets she had written secretly to Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, along with her elopement, made her celebrated among people who ordinarily never read poetry. Meanwhile her father never read her letters and remained a closed, angry man, ruler of a smaller family kingdom.

Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen

Unlike the encouraging roles played by Edgeworth and Barrett in the early years of their daughters' aspirations to become writers, the young Virginia Stephen had to deal with a father who was so occupied with his own psychological difficulties that he often fell back on ways of treating daughters that were already being questioned at this time. For example, money was found only to send the sons to school. Still, he functioned as the model of a writer for her, not least because he worked at home. His friends included the major authors of the period; he earned most of his living by writing reviews of the most recent books for literary journals. It was natural for him to make his own daily problems at work into family concerns so that, through him, Virginia understood how the literary market worked, saw Stephen dealing with publishing issues, deadlines and problems in writing, not only in his own work but also because he often functioned as an editor. The career he had seemed open to a girl who spent all her free time reading voraciously through his large library. She imitated him in many ways, twisting a piece of her hair because it was a nervous habit he had, and using a writing board propped on her knees as he did (W o o l f 1985, 111, 119). When she was a small child, she told her sister she preferred her father to her mother (B r i g g s 2005, 355).) Part of what she felt was a distaste for the model of womanhood her mother presented: loving and deeply loved, yet always serving others, what A.H. Bond calls the "almost total abnegation of self" (B o n d 1986). Growing up, Virginia noticed that when her parents sat in the drawing room in the evenings, he had his own table, chair and lamp, while his wife sat "behind him at her writing table built into a very dark angle of the room", dealing with her correspondence by candlelight (W o o l f 1985, 112– 113). The malignant side of this role was confirmed when her mother, exhausted by constant involvement in the emotional crises of her husband and others, showed no resistance to an ordinary infection. Friends and relatives agreed

that she had worked herself to death (M e t z g a r 2012). This life of service was respected, but left nothing tangible behind it – while Virginia, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, wanted to make a mark in English literary history.

Virginia's mother died when she was 13, just the age at which a middle-class girl began preparing herself for entering society and finding a husband. It was also the age when Virginia needed more space to try out her creative skills. Unfortunately, it now corresponded to the time in her father's life when he was most needy and demanding of emotional attention from his daughters, surrogates for his dead wife. As has been stated, Stephen was never a major success as a published author. He himself told Virginia that he had "only a good second class mind", which was why, she later believed, he was always needing to be complimented (W o o l f 1985, 110). She recalled how he had always been given the central role in family gatherings: "What he said was thus most respectfully listened to. He had a godlike, yet childlike standing in the family […] an extraordinarily privileged position" (Ibid.,111). Although she loved her, Virginia felt that her mother had been "too much obsessed with his health, his pleasures, <…> too willing, I think now, to sacrifice us to him", with the result that the daughters inherited "the legacy of his dependence, which after her death became so harsh an imposition" (Ibid.,133).

Until the death of Julia, Stephen's recurring fits of anxiety and even despair were kept at bay by his wife; once he lost her, he became much more deeply depressed and seemed determined to reduce everyone's pleasures to the minimum. Earlier they had spent long summers at a house on the sea where the children felt very free; this was stopped since Stephen could not bear to renew such excursions without his wife. Now Virginia and her sister Vanessa were often restricted to their house in London, a space which grew more constricting as they grew up because of social norms governing the relations and movement of young ladies. Stephen applied rules to his daughters that seemed very old-fashioned to their contemporaries at the beginning of the 20th century: for example, they had to be chaperoned when visiting their brother at Cambridge University (B e l l 1972, 97).

Within the house, Virginia and her sister were expected to give up the time they wanted to devote to creative work so that they could take part in the never-ending rituals of meals. Every late afternoon they had to change their dress and hold tea for Leslie Stephen: "father could not give himself tea in the society of those days" (W o o l f 1985, 148). They had to observe official visiting hours when relatives or family friends had to be entertained with proper conversation. Then in the evenings they had to change again, "For we had to enter the drawing room with bare arms, low neck, in evening dress" and afterwards often be taken to a formal party (Ibid., 150). The hours of Virginia's days were regulated with activities of womanly service, during which she had to look attractive and speak in a pleasant way about nothing in particular. That she was generally a failure on both counts did not help matters.

Moreover, the father who had been preoccupied yet sometimes pleasant now regularly turned into a monster. His wife had been able to reduce his anxiety over

rising costs, but his daughters, who had to present the accounts to him, could only endure his aggression: "down came his fist on the account book. His veins filled; his face flushed. Then there was an inarticulate roar […] he beat his breast. Then he went through an extraordinary dramatization of self pity, horror, anger" (Ibid., 144). She called him "the tyrant father" and came up with an evocative comparison: "it was like being shut up in the same cage with a wild beast" (Ibid., 116).

Years after her father's death, Virginia Woolf found herself arguing with him in her mind, trying to resolve what she eventually realized was a psychological ambivalence: she both loved and hated her father. She understood that he was suffering: "he was a man in prison, isolated" (Ibid., 146), but this did not solve her problems. She wanted to write literature of a complex, modern kind, but could write nothing until she was physically free of him. Even then she felt his evaluation imprisoning her: she was a woman, she could never be a real writer of significance.

Conclusion

These father-daughter relationships would not have involved so many painful conflicts if they had not included mutual love and admiration. Yet as a daughter matured in her ambitions, her very success threatened her father, less talented than her, but who could fall back on the applying the social norms that regulated women to control her.

What did these talented women gain from having fathers who directly or by example encouraged their ambitions as writers? Considering the low status of women in the societies of this period, it has to be said that they gained something essential – the kind of education they needed along with the chance to read widely. In a time before the establishment of free public libraries, and when using a commercial lending library was expensive, all three women enjoyed the luxury of access to the very large and up-to-date libraries that Richard Edgeworth, Edward Barrett and Leslie Stephen put together. The three women had the fortune to grow up in families in which books, reading and discussions played a major part in daily life, as their biographers noted (P a k e n h a m 2018, 11; F o s t e r 1988, 27–29; B e l l 1972, 186). Even in the dark final years of his depression, as Virginia recalled, her father, when she developed a fascination with Elizabethan prose, "lugged home" heavy volumes from a library that she had no access to (W o o l f 1982, 271). With possibilities for education for girls restricted and the fact that many fathers did not choose to spend money on the contemporary literature that inspired women to write, only a very small percentage of British middle-class women who might have had literary ambitions succeeded in being published. Even most of these had to content themselves with working in the marginal cultural fields considered appropriate for their sex – didactic literature for children, religious and social pamphlets for the working classes, kinds of writing that were quickly forgotten (B r i g g s 1989, 222–224). Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Virginia Woolf wanted to be writers of literary texts that were treated as seriously as men's were.

Nevertheless, both they and their fathers paid a price for the development of talents beyond those that women were supposed to have at that time. At least the three women could eventually take pride in their very real literary achievements, but what about their fathers? In the Edgeworth case, Maria, who lived in the earliest period, had to deal with the strongest of social prejudices against women writers. She accepted a compromise in power with her father and probably felt rewarded when he, on his deathbed, said: "I did not know how much I loved Maria till I came to the parting with her" (P a k e n h a m 2018, 212). Barrett Browning's father had to endure much more painful final years; he lost the child he was proudest of and felt publicly humiliated by her rebellion, something that her growing celebrity as a writer would have always reminded him of. Virginia Woolf did not have the strength to escape from her father, but she never gave him what he so desperately wanted in old age, that total devotion to his emotional needs that her mother had provided. Both the fathers and their daughters broke norms that limited the possible roles of women, but the women eventually benefitted from this rupture, while the three men, ironically, were punished by losing their power as fathers.

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Milda Danytė

Geniali rašytoja ir tėvas: Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Virginia Woolf

S a n t r a u k a

Pagrindinės sąvokos: *tėvų ir dukterų santykiai, XVIII–XIX a. britų moterys rašytojos, moterų statuso suvaržymas, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Virginia Woolf, Richard Edgeworth, Edward Barrett, Leslie Stephen.*

XVIII–XIX a. vyraujančios socialinės normos labai sunkino britų moterų patekimą į literatūrinę rinką – daugumai jų tai pasisekė padaryti tik su tėvų pagalba. Straipsnyje analizuojami trys santykių tarp tėvo ir dukters atvejai, kai moterims pavyko tapti savojo meto literatūrinėmis žvaigždėmis (Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning ir Virginia Woolf). Ieškoma atsakymo į du klausimus: 1) kodėl tėvai, nepaisydami nusistovėjusių visuomenės normų, ryžosi paremti savo dukterų ambicijas; 2) kaip pačius tėvus paveikė toks jų sprendimas.

Išryškėjo įdomūs panašumai tarp visų tėvų: nepaisant to, jog visi jie priklausė vidurinei klasei, visuomenėje buvo laikomi šiek tiek atstumtaisiais. Visi trys puoselėjo asmenines ambicijas, kurių neįstengė įgyvendinti. Svarbiausia buvo tai, jog jie visi buvo neįprastai atsidavę šeiminiam gyvenimui. Kiekvienas iš tėvų savaip skatino dukras imtis literatūrinės kūrybos, leido naudotis savo sukauptomis bibliotekomis. R. Edgeworthas ir E. Barrettas pasistengė, kad pirmieji jų dukterų kūriniai būtų išspausdinti, o L. Stephenas, pats aktyviai dalyvavęs literatūrinėje rinkoje, paskatino dukterį pasirinkti panašią karjerą. Tačiau laikui bėgant visi trys vyrai grįžo prie tradicinės sampratos apie moters antraeilį vaidmenį šeimoje ir netgi manė, kad su tokiu vaidmeniu turinčios susitaikyti ir jų dukros. M. Edgeworth turėjo tapti tėvo asistente ir atlikti jo skiriamas užduotis tam, kad galėtų rašyti romanus. E. Barrett Browning geriausius literatūrinius kūrinius parašė tik pabėgusi iš tėvų namų.

V. Woolf, žinoma literatūrinio modernizmo atstovė, atsiskleidė tik po despotiško tėvo mirties. Senatvėje šių rašytojų tėvų laukė skaudūs nusivylimai, ypač dukterų išduoti jautėsi E. Barrettas ir L. Stephenas.

Milda Danytė

Fathers of Genius: the Ambiguities of Power in Relations with their Fathers for Three Women Writers, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Virginia Woolf

S u m m a r y

Keywords: *father and daughter relationships, 18th and 19th century women writers, restrictions on women, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Virginia Woolf, Richard Edgeworth, Edward Barrett, Leslie Stephen.*

18th and 19th century British social norms made it very difficult for talented women to become published writers: many of those who were successful owed a good deal to the help of their fathers. This article considers the particular nature of such father-daughter relationships, focusing on three women who became literary celebrities of their time, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Virginia Woolf. It also poses two questions: why the fathers in these cases acted against the rules for women by encouraging their daughters, and what price the three men paid for breaking rules.

Research on the fathers, Richard Edgeworth, Edward Barrett and Leslie Stephen, reveals similarities among them. Although comfortably middle-class, they were still marginal in their societies; all had ambitions of their own which they failed to realize; and all devoted unusual amounts of time to their families. All of them encouraged their daughters' literary development, in particular by giving them access to contemporary literature collected in their private libraries. Both Edgeworth and Barrett did a great deal to promote their daughters' writings, while Stephen provided the model of a possible literary career. However, at a certain stage the fathers became less liberal, returning to the idea that women should be subordinate within their families. Maria Edgeworth had to write educational works to be allowed to write novels. Elizabeth Barrett Browning published her strongest works only after eloping with Robert Browning. Virginia Woolf was not able to write her modernist fiction until her father died. As for the fathers, Barrett and Stephen especially felt betrayed by their daughters in their later life.

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