Introduction

Margaret Markwick and Deborah Denenholz Morse

Trollope has always been one of his generation's most popular writers, with many of his novels continuously in print for 150 years, but his canonical position has not been as secure. Seasoned commentators have long quibbled about whether Trollope was worthy of serious study. Frederic Harrison found it necessary to apologize for including him in his 1895 survey of early Victorian novelists,[1] while Stephen Spender declared in 1974 that he had never read any of the Palliser novels, and, further, doubted whether any of his colleagues in the Department of English at University College London had either.[2] In 1976 Terry Eagleton wrote that Trollope's work "bathes in a self-consistent blandly undifferentiated ideological space," whose aesthetic is "an anaemic, naively representational 'realism', which is merely a reflex of commonplace bourgeois empiricism."[3] It is as though Trollope's very popularity has been his downfall, and even those who appear to be his staunchest supporters can hold diametrically opposing views. R. H. Hutton, the earliest commentator to offer a penetrating critique of Trollope's craft,[4] said in his obituary of Trollope that "His name will live in our literature … it will picture the society of our day with a fidelity with which society has never been pictured before in the history of the world,"[5] whereas Leslie Stephen, in 1901, wrote that he created "a general and peaceful world, oblivious to the intellectual, political and social revolution that was in the air."[6] By the 1920s Hutton's view was in the ascendancy. George Saintsbury praised Trollope for creating "real people"[7], and

---

1 Frederic Harrison, *Studies in Early Victorian Literature* 1895 (London: Edward Arnold, 1910), p. 183.

2 Quoted by James R. Kincaid, *The Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 175, taken from a column in *The Radio Times* 24–30 (May 1974).

3 Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1976), p. 181, quoted in Bill Overton, *The Unofficial Trollope* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 1.

4 David Skilton's 1972 study *Anthony Trollope and his Contemporaries* (London: Longman, 1972), ch. 5, explores Hutton's critical analyses in detail.

5 R. H. Hutton, *Spectator*, 9 December 1882, lv. 1574, quoted in Donald Smalley (ed.), *Anthony Trollope: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) p. 508.

6 *National Review*, 38 (1901), quoted by Donald D. Stone in R. C. Terry (ed.) *Oxford Reader's Companion to Trollope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 129.

7 George Saintsbury, *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, pp. 41–66; quoted by Stone p. 130.

Virginia Woolf believed in Trollope "as we believe in our weekly bills".[8] But by the end of the Second World War, V. S. Pritchett was posting him back to Leslie Stephen's Arcadian dream; he declared that Trollope had become "one of the Great Air-Raid Shelters. [Trollope] presides over the eternal Munich of the heart, and Barchester has become one of the great never-never lands of our time."[9] Little wonder that, in 1971, Ruth apRoberts opened her magisterial study of Trollope with "There is something of a mystery in Anthony Trollope."[10]

Today, while Trollope still has a popular following, evidenced by the success of his dramatizations on television, and the regular appearance of adaptations on the radio, he is equally read for insights into how they lived then. We look to Trollope both to refute and to confirm—Janus-like—or otherwise complicate our view of the Victorian in his or her milieu. In the academy, the argument about Trollope today is about reading and interpretation as we interrogate the text from multiple perspectives. The concept "Trollope" now contains a range of different possibilities, possibilities that have been blown open over recent years. Today, Trollope is simultaneously the sociologist providing the raw material for every researcher's project, and the originator of a highly individualistic, esoteric, visionary take on issues such as colonialism, imperial power, the ethics of capitalism, liberalism, and gender. Thus he has become both the reflector of his times and a dissident voice subverting convention and inviting change.

This is never more evident than in the gender analysis of Trollope, for when we come to examine how the treatment of Trollope and gender has developed, we should start by recognizing that Trollope's treatment of gender issues has been seen as interesting for longer than gender studies have been seen as interesting. Kate Millett wrote *Sexual Politics* in 1970 and arguably changed forever the way that all disciplines across the humanities frame their critiques. In 1968, two years earlier than Millett, Robert Polhemus, in his originative work *The Changing World of Anthony Trollope*, used gender theory—before such theory was commonly articulated—to examine Trollope's conflicted feminism. In his chapter "Love and the Victorians: Thorns among the Roses," Polhemus explores a Trollope who exposes the "schizoid nature of love among the Victorians … He managed to get down the confusion and conflict about love which worried Victorian souls."[11] His extended examination of Glencora's impulsiveness, passion, and rebellion, and the way Trollope perceives these qualities as problematic within her stifling Victorian milieu, prepares the way for a generation of feminist analysis. As Polhemus says, "[Trollope] understood the feminine need for action, emotional outlet, and an

---

[8] Virginia Woolf, "Phases of Fiction," *Collected Essays*, vol. 2. (London: Hogarth Press, 1966–77), p. 57.

[9] V. S. Pritchett, *New Statesman*, (8 June 1946) p. 415; quoted by Stone, p. 130.

[10] Ruth apRoberts, *Trollope, Artist and Moralist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), p. 11.

[11] Robert Polhemus, *The Changing World of Anthony Trollope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 89 and p. 90.

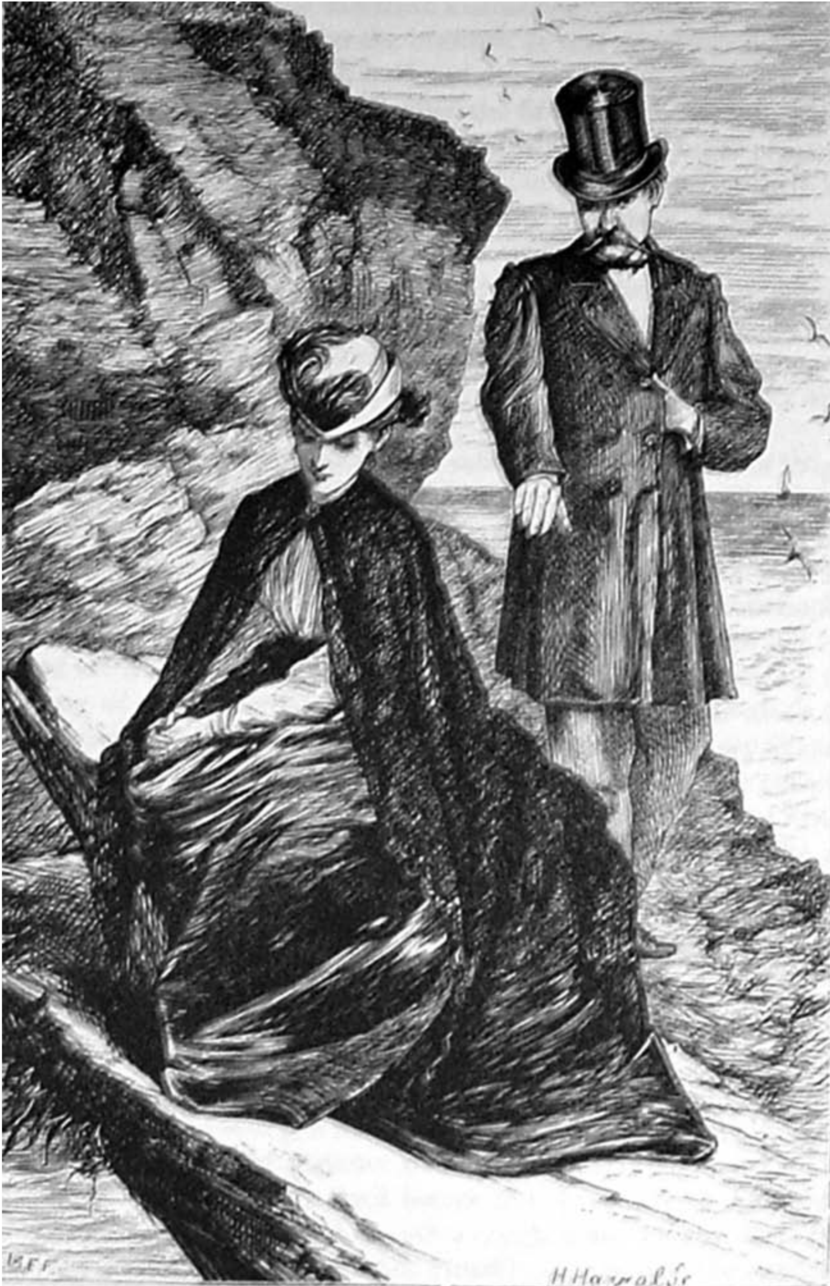

Fig. 1.1 "Lady Ongar, are you not rather near the edge?" M. E. Edward's illustration for *The Claverings*, Chapter 27

end of intense repression."[12] He was followed in the 1970s by Ruth apRoberts, in her important article on *He Knew He Was Right* in the collection *The Victorian Experience: The Novelists*,[13] and by Juliet McMaster in *Trollope's Palliser Novels: Theme and Pattern*. While she posits no clear feminist agenda, McMaster's retelling of the plots and sub-plots foregrounds the action of his women.[14] Her new, insightful interpretation of this group of novels opened the way for more rigorous and specifically feminist critiques, and Deborah Denenholz Morse's was the first of these. In her exploration of Trollope's conflicted feminism, Morse shows that while Trollope sees the truth about women's lot, he also shrinks from endorsing the direct action of the activists of his time. She shows him, in spite of his insight, both as a man of his time in seeing marriage and children as a woman's best career, and as a man ahead of his time in admiring egalitarian marriage and portraying the disastrous effect on real men and women of conventional Victorian gender roles.[15] Morse was followed two years later by Jane Nardin's *He Knew She Was Right: The Independent Woman in the Novels of Anthony Trollope*. Mark Turner's recent review of Trollope criticism from 1987–2004 for the *Dickens Studies Annual* says of these two studies: "Taken together, Morse's and Nardin's books represent a particularly important moment for feminist readings of Trollope, which make his fiction complex and nuanced texts in which the role of women can never be taken for granted."[16] In 1990, Polhemus's illuminating chapter on Phineas in love in *Erotic Faith* complicated sexual politics with aesthetic and philosophical issues,[17] while Morse and Nardin's themes were reiterated by Margaret Markwick's 1997 study, *Trollope and Women*, which argued for a subversive Trollope, whose women are accorded space to achieve sexual expression and fulfillment. For increasingly, old truths about the Victorian woman have been examined and found wanting. Earlier feminist readings have now been superseded by works like Elizabeth Langland's *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*, which re-evaluate and reconstruct the Victorian woman, whose greatest duty is no longer to suffer and be still.

By the mid-1990s, the field of feminist studies had broadened to the wider forum of gender studies encompassing the growing interest in forms of masculinity

---

[12] Polhemus p. 106.

[13] Ruth apRoberts, "Emily and Nora and Dorothy and Priscilla and Jemima and Carry," in Richard A. Levine (ed.), *The Victorian Experience: The Novelists* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976).

[14] Juliet McMaster *Trollope's Palliser Novels: Theme and Pattern* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

[15] Deborah Denenholz Morse *Women in Trollope's Palliser Novels* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987).

[16] Mark W. Turner "Trollope Studies: 1987–2004" *Dickens Studies Annual*, 37 (2006), p. 226.

[17] Robert Polhemus *Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D. H. Lawrence* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990).

and in gay and lesbian critiques. This is reflected in Turner's *Trollope and the Magazines: Gendered Issues in Mid-Victorian Britain* (2000). The previous decade had witnessed an explosion of examinations of masculinity (400 in ten years, according to Lynn Segal[18]), and Turner's study, which analyzes the masculinization of Trollope's prose when writing for periodicals targeting a male audience, has paved the way for further studies of Trollope's men, of which Markwick's 2007 study, *New Men in Trollope's Novels: Rewriting the Victorian Male*, is the latest.

The nature of our reading has also changed. Single-issue interpretation has less validity and is being displaced by multifaceted readings. We can see a clear illustration of this in Morse's work, where her original strong feminist voice is now tempered and coupled with the subtleties of new historicism and liberalism. This is evident in Morse's chapter in this volume, where she traces the influence of the Governor Eyre affair, following the 1865 Morant Bay rebellion, from the embedded themes of race and racism in *He Knew He Was Right*, and makes the firm connection between Trollope's construction of gender and his liberalism. Today's commentators look at the fine detail of the inlaid references to the political background, for no other writer of his age writes so compellingly in the present. Since the turn of the century, other critiques in Victorian studies—informed by discourses as various as race and queer theory and the history of liberalism—have merged with gender critiques to examine imperialism and its postcolonial legacy, the distortions wrought by capitalism and discriminatory legislation, liberal ideologies, racial codings and injustices, and marginalization. Commentators have increasingly turned to Trollope for their material in these fields, and again have discovered a conflicted Trollope, a Trollope who does not so much mirror the times he wrote in, as undermine the given view. Mary Jean Corbett is a cogent example of this, as she pins down the implicit references to Robert Peel's Encumbered Estates Acts to adduce Trollope's stance on Irish reform in the Trollope chapter of *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing 1790–1870*. Indeed, this study, published in 2000, is the exemplar for so much of the work being undertaken on Trollope in the twenty-first century, where the keynote Trollope studies are to be found in very focused short essays in books with broader concerns in these fields. Thus Lauren Goodlad devotes one chapter of *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State* (2003), her book-length study of liberalism, legislation, and political reform, to Trollope's representations of the Civil Service. Corbett's influential study is the direct inspiration for *Victorian Literature and Culture*'s issue dedicated to Victorian Ireland (March 2004). It is significant that of the 13 Irish essays published, 4 are on Trollope's use of Irish tropes. Additionally, Corbett's identification of Trollope with post-colonial theorizing signalled his potential for broader studies in this field.[19] Lisa Surridge's argument in *Bleak Houses* on the legal underpinnings of

---

[18] Lynn Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, 1990 (London: Virago Press, 1997), p. xii.

[19] Though in this field, as in so many others, it is important to notice that Polhemus was there first, in 1968. His chapter on *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* examines at length

domestic violence in *He Knew He Was Right*, Elsie Michie's work on the gender of capitalism, Kathy Psomiades's work on aesthetics, and Jenny Bourne Taylor's analysis on nineteenth-century psychology equally inform the construction of so much of the recent work on Trollope. This is all cogently demonstrated by William A. Cohen's chapter, "Trollope's Trollop," in *Sex Scandals: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (1996), in which Cohen looks at the "economy of gender relations" in *The Eustace Diamonds*, and more recently, in Mark Forrester's essay on gender anxiety in Trollope in *Imperial Desire: Dissonant Sexualities and Colonial Literature* (2003).

Amanda Anderson's recent essay, "Trollope's Modernity," perhaps epitomizes these shifts in reading and interpretation. In this essay, she uses Lionel Trilling's aesthetic explorations in *Sincerity and Authenticity* to understand Trollope's codes of honor. By examining Trollope's concepts of honesty in *Barchester Towers* and *The Way We Live Now*, she uncovers the limitations of Trilling's thesis—that it reduces, rather than enlarges the Victorian moral ethos. She detects in Trilling a sense that "the Victorians lack the spirit of freedom to relinquish sincerity and the idea of being true to oneself in the society that underwrites it." In demonstrating that Trollope fails to fit into the generalizations of Victorian literature that Trilling identifies in Matthew Arnold, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot, Anderson subtly manages simultaneously to use Trollope to critique Trilling's application of liberal humanism, and Trilling to critique Trollope, again uncovering a conflicted Trollope. As she concludes: "There is a genuine tension between his liberalism and his persistent valuing of traditional forms of life in the face of what for him are the negative dimensions of modernity," a twenty-first century articulation of the contradictions in Trollope identified earlier in feminist studies, and now drawn out as a major theme in decoding Victorian liberal humanism and its relevance to political processes today.[20]

The Politics of Gender, based on ideas emerging from the Exeter Trollope conference in July of 2006, recognizes Trollope's importance as source material for scholars working in diverse fields of cultural study. Trollope, more than any of his fellow novelists—such as the Bröntes, Dickens, Collins, Hardy, even Gaskell and Eliot—is being studied as source material by commentators from such wide and dissimilar disciplines, as well as by literary critics. This book draws together the threads of this very diversity, and finds unity in the themes. Thus, imperial and postcolonial studies are examined from economic, cultural, aesthetic, and demographic angles; gender-sensitive analysis exposes Trollope's own critique of the influence of capitalism; Queer Studies, the Law, new constructions of archetypes, and re-critiquing of classical feminism address Trollope and sexuality; and Victorian understandings of psychology bring new approaches to narrative theory.

---

the interaction between the English colonial rulers and a demoralised peasantry. "The Macdermots," he says "is one of the most powerful indictments of colonialism written in the nineteenth century" (Polhemus, p. 16–17).

[20] Amanda Anderson, "Trollope's Modernity," *ELH*, 74.3 (Autumn 2007), pp. 509–34.

Alongside contributions by established Trollopians, such as Markwick, Morse, Polhemus, and Skilton, and by leading cultural historians, such as Bourne Taylor, Corbett, Gagnier, Goodlad, Michie, Psomiades, and Vlasopolos, are essays by young emerging scholars—Amarnick, Blythe, Hensley, and Noble—the next generation of Trollopians. It is also significant to notice how often these commentators turn to lesser-known texts to locate their theses. Thus while in this volume you will find analyses of the cornerstone works, such as the Palliser novels, the Barchester chronicles, *He Knew He Was Right*, and *The Way We Live Now*, there are interesting explorations of *Lady Anna*, *Ralph the Heir*, *Castle Richmond*, and *Is He Popenjoy?*. Our contributors also make wide use of Trollope's travel writings and his short stories, both very under-explored territory. And Helen Lucy Blythe locates her examination of colonial aspiration in that unclassifiable tract, *The New-Zealander*.

The first part, on Sex, Power, and Subversion, opens with a new essay from Robert Polhemus, who applies the thesis of his great work *Lot's Daughters* to Trollope, both as a man and as a writer. To this end, Polhemus takes two of Trollope's short stories, one early, one late, and examines them in the light of Trollope's deep attachment in the last 20 years of his life to the young and beautiful American feminist journalist and lecturer, Kate Field. This is followed by Kathy Alexis Psomiades's examination of Victorian theories of anthropology set against Carole Pateman's classic feminist critique of liberalism. Her analysis of *He Knew He Was Right* opens up the subtleties of the impact of the Second Reform Act on Trollope's intuition of human society and culture. Jenny Bourne Taylor considers Trollope's relish for the ambiguities of the legal boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate birth in his late fiction, examining *Ralph the Heir*, *Lady Anna*, and *Is He Popenjoy?* in the light of contemporaneous litigation and George Eliot's *Felix Holt*. Margaret Markwick seeks to establish a liberal Trollope, open-minded and tolerant of difference, in her exploration of the indicators of homoeroticism in the novels.

Part 2, Imperial Gender, is a group of essays by Deborah Denenholz Morse, Lauren Goodlad, Mary Jean Corbett, and Helen Lucy Blythe examining Trollope's views on colonial development and the West Indies, India, Ireland, and the Antipodes, respectively. Morse, in her essay, which could well be read alongside Psomiades', posits a Trollope who expounds a strong critique of British imperialism. She identifies Trollope rethinking his ideas of Empire following Governor Eyre's massacre of Jamaican rebels, and offers a close reading of *He Knew He Was Right* to repudiate the Victorian legal framework of masculine control of the female body. Goodlad's essay is a multifaceted and virtuoso exploration of the nexus of several discourses: the histories of the annexing of Indian states after the dissolution of the East-India company in 1858; the treatment of Indian Princes such as Prince Azeem Jah at the hands of the British legislature; Trollope's own fictionalized Indian Prince, the Sawab of Mygawb; and the commodification of Lucy Morris. This is followed by Blythe's study of "Catherine Carmichael," a late and little-known short story set in New Zealand. She locates her analysis of

the gendered aesthetics of the new colony in the context of that other little-known text, Trollope's Carlyean discourse, *The New-Zealander*, written in 1857, though not published till 1972, where he postulates a Britain of the future, in ruins, visited by the young, beautiful glitterati from New Zealand, a trope he borrowed from Macaulay.

This leads to a third section, Genderized Economics, which examines the connections between money, capitalism, and class, with essays by Nathan Hensley, Elsie Michie, and Chris Noble. Hensley tracks the gendering of speculative wealth from Defoe's "Lady Credit" to current Western foreign and economic policy, and finds Trollope critiquing their value judgments in *The Way We Live Now* with great pertinence for the state of international affairs today. Michie's researches have uncovered the originals for Martha Dunstable's Oil of Lebanon fortune; she exposes the hype of Holloway's pills, and the light it throws on Miss Dunstable's locus as a touchstone of honesty. This is followed by Chris Noble's examination of financial independence and widowhood. This essay unpicks Trollope's masculinization of married women without husbands through four very different widows, Eleanor Bold in *Barchester Towers*, Mrs Greenow in *Can You Forgive Her?*, Emily Warton in *The Prime Minister*, and Madame Max in the Palliser Novels.

The final section, the Gender of Narrative Construction, has essays by Steven Amarnick, David Skilton, and Anca Vlasopolos. Amarnick compares the manuscript of *The Duke's Children* with the published version to uncover an original where the primary plot is the emerging manhood of the young Lord Silverbridge, and which is a longer, discursive novel with intriguing shifts in Trollope's conceptualization of masculinity. Skilton, reaching back to his 1973 *Trollope and his Contemporaries*, gives an historical examination of the Victorian process of reading, and uses George Lewes's and R. H. Hutton's writings on realism and the ideal to show Trollope's innovation in breaking down the separation between the characterization of men and the historical conventions of the analysis of women. Vlasopolos examines the writing of two pieces of Trollope's shorter fiction, "Mary Gresley" and *Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite*, to expose a darker Trollope critiquing the cultural Victorian "Law of the father," and the fatal results of the pursuit of this feminine ideal. Regenia Gagnier's Afterword examines the cultural differences between readings of Trollope in Britain and Europe, and in North America. She rereads *The Prime Minister* from Ferdinand Lopez's point of view, and considers his treatment at the hands of the British upper classes in the context of her work on philosophical anthropology, to produce a radical and illuminating analysis of this great novel of liberal politics.

Looking back on the history of Trollope criticism, it is probably true to say that each generation finds in Trollope the Trollope they wish to find. In the twenty-first century we recognize that he is not merely holding a mirror to his times; he is one who comments on that reflection, and advances personal, often controversial, and sometimes subversive ideas about his times that resonate with twenty-first century liberal ideologies.