
**A “WOMAN’S BEST RIGHT”—TO A HUSBAND OR THE
BALLOT?: POLITICAL AND HOUSEHOLD GOVERNANCE
IN ANTHONY TROLLOPE’S PALLISER NOVELS**

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ABSTRACT

The year 2020 marks the one hundredth anniversary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In 2018, the United Kingdom marked the one hundredth anniversary of some women securing the right to vote in parliamentary elections and the ninetieth anniversary of women securing the right to vote on the same terms as men. People observing the Nineteenth Amendment’s centenary may have difficulty understanding why it required a lengthy campaign of nearly a century to secure the right of women to vote. One influential rationale in both the United Kingdom and the United States was domestic gender ideology about men’s and women’s separate spheres and destinies. This ideology included the societal premise where the husband was the legal and political representative of the household and extending women’s rights—whether in the realm of marriage or of political life—would disrupt domestic and political order. This Article argues that an illuminating window on how such gender ideology bore on the struggle for women’s political rights is the mid-Victorian British author Anthony Trollope’s famous political novels, the Palliser series. These novels overlap with the pioneering phase of the women’s rights campaign in Britain and a key period of legislative debates over

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reforming marriage law. This Article looks at how the Woman Question (as mid-Victorians called it), including the question of women's political rights, featured in these novels. In his fiction and nonfiction, Trollope expressed decided views about the Woman Question, insisting that a woman's "best right" was the right to a husband, rather than to the ballot or greater employment. However, the evident tension between such views and the rich portraiture of Trollope's female characters—including in the Palliser series—suggests an intriguing dialectic between espousing and subverting Victorian ideals about womanhood. Examining the first three novels in the series, *Can You Forgive Her?*, *Phineas Finn*, and *Phineas Redux*, this Article shows how they link matters of public power and political rule to private power and household rule. The novels gesture toward parliamentary debates over the Woman Question, but, by comparison with Trollope's detailed creation of parliamentary debates with real-world parallels, do not include debates over woman suffrage or the various marriage law-reform bills that failed or succeeded. Even so, this Article shows that the characters in the Palliser novels are mindful of, and constrained by, the marriage law of the time, including husbandly prerogatives of household rule, wifely duties of obedience, and women's limited options for exiting a troubled marriage. Through analyzing the various marital relationships formed in these novels, as well as other familial relationships and friendships, this Article identifies how legal and social rules about gender roles shape the characters' connections to political and household power. Trollope's female characters act in a social context in which marriage is the expected "career" for women, even as some of them experience ambition for a political career or occupation other than—or in addition to—marriage. The novels also explore women's limited ability to exit disastrous marriages, even as they include examples of relatively egalitarian marriages that seem to transcend models of husbandly rule and wifely submission. This Article's close reading of the novels is augmented by literary criticism on Trollope and some contemporaneous writings by nineteenth-century feminists, which provide a counter to Trollope's portrayal of the feminist positions in the Palliser novels. Because Trollope believed that his novels taught important moral lessons about love, marriage, and the legal and political issues of his day, this Article also considers how Trollope's complicated stance toward the Woman Question shaped the lessons taught in the Palliser novels.

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That women should have their rights no man will deny. To my thinking neither increase of work nor increase of political influence are among them. The best right a woman has is the right to a husband, and that is the right to which I would recommend every young woman here [in Britain] and in the States to turn her best attention.

—Anthony Trollope, *North America* (1862), p. 266

I envy you men your clubs more than I do the House;—though I feel that a woman’s life is only half a life, as she cannot have a seat in Parliament.

—Lady Laura Standish to Phineas Finn, *Phineas Finn* (1869), p. 51

INTRODUCTION:

LEARNING FROM BRITISH NOVELS ON THE CENTENARY OF WOMAN SUFFRAGE

The year 2020 marks the one hundredth anniversary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which provides that “[t]he right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”¹ The 2020 presidential campaign began with a record number of women campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination;² sadly, all of the women dropped out. Even so, Democratic nominee Joe Biden’s promise to select a woman as his running mate for Vice President led to the historic pick of one of those women—Senator Kamala Harris, the first Black woman and first South Asian American woman to be nominated by either major party.³ These significant milestones highlight two forms of political representation and participation: voting and holding public office. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign linked those two forms when, at the Democratic National Convention, Clinton wore white to reference the woman suffrage movement. A video of all the prior (male) presidents featured her breaking the glass ceiling by becoming the first female president.⁴ The 2018 midterm elections saw a record number of

¹ U.S. CONST. amend. XIX.

² Amanda Becker, *Record Number of Women Candidates Is Changing Dynamics of 2020 U.S. Presidential Race*, REUTERS (June 26, 2019, 1:06 PM), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-women/record-number-of-women-candidates-is-changing-dynamics-of-2020-u-s-presidential-race-idUSKCN1TR2OF> [<https://perma.cc/5XSG-657B>].

³ See Scott Detrow & Barbara Sprunt, *In Historic Pick, Joe Biden Taps Kamala Harris To Be His Running Mate*, NPR (Aug. 11, 2020, 4:17 PM), <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/11/897427306/in-historic-pick-joe-biden-taps-kamala-harris-to-be-his-running-mate> [<https://perma.cc/GZ57-58YY>].

⁴ Vanessa Friedman, *Why Hillary Wore White*, N.Y. TIMES (July 29, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/30/fashion/hillary-clinton-democratic-national-convention.html>; *Hillary Clinton ‘Breaks the Glass Ceiling’ in Her Introduction Video to the*

women elected to Congress.⁵ This highly diverse group of new legislators, along with Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other senior female colleagues in Congress, wore white to the 2019 State of the Union address by President Donald Trump, again nodding to the struggle for woman suffrage.⁶

A series of events across the United States is marking the Nineteenth Amendment at one hundred. The National Archives announced a national initiative to explore the “generations-long fight for universal woman suffrage,” including a special exhibition in Washington, D.C., as well as a travelling exhibition, classroom displays, educational offerings, and digitizing women’s records.⁷

In 2018, the National Archives in the United Kingdom similarly announced a “[s]eason of [e]vents and [e]xhibitions” to commemorate “[t]he fight for the female vote” in Britain; 2018 marked the one hundredth anniversary of some women securing the right to vote in parliamentary elections and the ninetieth anniversary of women securing the right to vote on the same terms as men.⁸ By the late-nineteenth century, women ratepayers could vote for school boards and stand for election to such boards and for city councils, but it was not until 1918, with the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act, that women could stand for election to Parliament.⁹

Young people today learning about the centenary of the Nineteenth Amendment may have difficulty understanding why it required a constitutional amendment for women to secure the right to vote and why such an amendment came only after a protracted effort described as a “century of struggle.”¹⁰ What rationales, they may wonder, justified excluding women from the vote? What legal and customary barriers kept women from running for and holding political office? They may find astonishing that among those rationales was gender ideology about men’s and women’s separate spheres and destinies, including the

DNC, ABC NEWS (July 27, 2016), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/video/hillary-clinton-breaks-glass-ceiling-introduction-video-dnc-40912726>.

⁵ Drew DeSilver, *A Record Number of Women Will Be Serving in the New Congress*, PEW RES. CTR.: FACTTANK (Dec. 18, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/18/record-number-women-in-congress/> [https://perma.cc/2UL5-Z266].

⁶ Vanessa Friedman, *A Sea of White, Lit by History*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 7, 2019, at D5.

⁷ *Rightfully Hers: American Women and the Vote*, NAT’L ARCHIVES FOUND., <https://www.archivesfoundation.org/exhibit/rightfully-hers/> [https://perma.cc/XR63-TECV] (last visited Sept. 17, 2020).

⁸ See *Suffrage 100*, NAT’L ARCHIVES, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/suffrage-100/> [https://perma.cc/K7XC-3SNH] (last visited Sept. 17, 2020).

⁹ Krista Cowman, *Women’s Movement’s and Ideologies in the Long 19th Century*, ROUTLEDGE: HIST. FEMINISM, (Aug. 3, 2016), <https://www.routledgehistoricalresources.com/feminism/essays/womens-movements-and-ideologies-in-the-long-19th-century> [https://perma.cc/MNE3-Y2TL].

¹⁰ See generally ELEANOR FLEXNER, *CENTURY OF STRUGGLE: THE WOMAN’S RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES* (Atheneum 1974) (1959).

premise that the husband was the legal and political representative of the household and that extending the franchise would disrupt that household's harmony. In Britain, members of Parliament drew on Victorian domestic ideology to insist that "giving married women any kind of legal rights," whether in the realm of marriage or of political life, "would cause discord in the home."¹¹ A related fear was that suffrage would open the door to women standing for Parliament and that women's presence there would threaten "codes of deportment, dress, posture and manners."¹²

Given present-day marriage law, equally puzzling may be how the law of marriage supported these ideas of male headship and spousal unity. For much of U.S. history, marriage law reflected the British common-law model of marriage (coverture)—wives were under the cover (or wing) of their husbands and subject to an elaborate set of civil and legal disabilities. Even so, this theory of a wife's virtual representation by a husband hardly justified excluding unmarried women and widows from the vote, a point pressed by woman suffrage advocates on both sides of the Atlantic.¹³ Further, such advocates insisted that "taxation without representation is wrong," drawing on the political ideals of the American revolution as well as the writing of British political philosophers John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor.¹⁴

This Article argues that one illuminating window into the relationship between political and household governance and the ways in which gender ideology about these two realms bore on the struggle for women's political rights is nineteenth-century fiction. In particular, this Article examines mid-Victorian British author Anthony Trollope's famous so-called political novels, the Palliser series. This Article looks at how the Woman Question (as mid-Victorians called it), including the question of women's political rights, is featured in these novels. The series (as Trollope originally envisioned it) includes five novels. This Article analyzes the first three: *Can You Forgive Her?* (1865), *Phineas Finn* (1869), and *Phineas Redux* (1873). A subsequent work will analyze *The Prime Minister* (1876) and *The Duke's Children* (1880), focusing both on political and household governance and on how the characters and the narrator depict the gender of political leadership.¹⁵ Apart from a few brief references, this Article's

¹¹ BEN GRIFFIN, *THE POLITICS OF GENDER IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN* 37 (2012).

¹² *Id.* at 196.

¹³ See LINDA K. KERBER, *NO CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO BE LADIES: WOMEN AND THE OBLIGATIONS OF CITIZENSHIP* 108 (1998).

¹⁴ See *id.* at 81-123 (quoting JULIA E. SMITH, *ABBY SMITH AND HER COWS, WITH A REPORT OF THE LAW CASE DECIDED CONTRARY TO LAW* 9 (Arno Press 1972) (1877)).

¹⁵ This Article uses the Oxford World's Classics editions of each book: ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?* (Dinah Birch ed., Oxford World's Classics 2012) (1865) [hereinafter TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*]; ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS FINN* (Simon Dentith ed., Oxford World's Classics 2011) (1869) [hereinafter TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS FINN*]; and ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS REDUX* (John Bowen ed., Oxford World's Classics

discussion omits *The Eustace Diamonds* (1872), which Trollope did not originally envision as part of the Palliser sequence, even though the novel included cross-references to events in the other novels and an “overlap in personnel.”¹⁶

As evidenced through both his fiction and nonfiction writing, Trollope had decided views about the emerging campaign for women’s rights and the Woman Question.¹⁷ The evident tension between those views and the rich portrayal of his female characters has long engaged the attention of gender scholars, for they suggest a “fictional dialectic between belief in and subversion of Victorian ideals for womanhood.”¹⁸ On the one hand, Trollope’s fiction and nonfiction expressed an official embrace of separate-spheres ideology and the view that a woman’s best occupation or career was that of wife and mother. Indeed, his nonfiction book *North America* included a chapter, “The Rights of Women,” in which Trollope criticized arguments for expanding women’s right to work and political rights (such as to the franchise) and instead insisted that a woman’s “best right” was “the right to a husband.”¹⁹ The prose in this chapter, and in some of Trollope’s other writing, brings to mind Justice Bradley’s (in)famous concurring opinion in *Bradwell v. Illinois*,²⁰ which claimed that nature and the Creator have evidently rendered women unfit for most occupations of civil life (such as being an attorney) and instead determined that their proper destiny was as wife and mother.²¹ Trollope prefaces his argument about a woman’s “best right” being to a husband by asserting,

2011) (1873) [hereinafter TROLLOPE, PHINEAS REDUX]. Each edition has “Explanatory Notes,” on which this Article draws for historical context.

¹⁶ See Helen Small, *Introduction* to ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *THE EUSTACE DIAMONDS*, at xii (Helen Small ed., Oxford World’s Classics 2011) (1872) [hereinafter TROLLOPE, *THE EUSTACE DIAMONDS*] (citing Letter from Anthony Trollope, to Henry Howard (Feb. 26, 1881)); see also DEBORAH DENENHOLZ MORSE, *WOMEN IN TROLLOPE’S PALLISER NOVELS* 2 (1987) (omitting discussion of *The Eustace Diamonds* for that reason).

¹⁷ See JANE NARDIN, *HE KNEW SHE WAS RIGHT: THE INDEPENDENT WOMAN IN THE NOVELS OF ANTHONY TROLLOPE* 1-30 (1989) (providing historical context about Woman Question in Trollope’s time, life, and writing).

¹⁸ MORSE, *supra* note 16, at 3.

¹⁹ 1 ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA* 266 (St. Martin’s Press, 1986) (1862) [hereinafter TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*]. Trollope wrote *North America* during the Civil War and later described it as expressing an unwavering and “assured confidence . . . that the North would win,” based on “the merits of the Northern cause” and “a conviction that England would never recognise the South.” ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND OTHER WRITINGS* 104 (Nicholas Shrimpton ed., Oxford World’s Classics 2016) (1883) [hereinafter TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*].

²⁰ 83 U.S. (16 Wall.) 130 (1873).

²¹ *Id.* at 141 (Bradley, J., concurring) (“The paramount destiny and mission of woman are to fulfil the noble and benign offices of wife and mother.”).

Let women say what they will of their rights, or men who think themselves generous say what they will for them, the question has all been settled both for them and for us men by a higher power. They are the nursing mothers of mankind, and in that law their fate is written with all its joys and all its privileges. It is for men to make those joys as lasting and those privileges as perfect as may be.²²

In *Can You Forgive Her?*, Trollope offers a similar prescription for the heroine, Alice Vavasor, as she ponders what to do with her life and longs for a cause. Other Trollope novels include analogous commentary, as well as satiric and caricatured pictures of feminists who resisted the prescription of marriage and motherhood.²³ On the other hand, Trollope had friendships and acquaintances with prominent women active in campaigning for women's rights (nicknamed the "ladies of Langham Place").²⁴ One such friendship was with Emily Faithfull, director of the *Victoria Press*, to which Trollope contributed two stories.²⁵ As he reports in *North America*, when an American woman "complained that the English were not doing enough for women's rights," he told her about the *Victoria Press* and gave her one of Faithfull's business cards.²⁶ Trollope was even on friendly terms with a number of women's rights activists (including Frances Power Cobbe, Rhoda Broughton, and Faithfull) who were in "female marriages"—i.e., same-sex relationships with features of marriage.²⁷ He reportedly based his characterization of Kate Vavasor, one of the strong female characters in *Can You Forgive Her?*, on both Faithfull and the American author, actress, lecturer, and feminist Kate Field.²⁸ He described Field as a "ray of light" and "one of the chief pleasures which has graced my later years."²⁹ While, in

²² TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*, *supra* note 19, at 266.

²³ For example, see *infra* Section IV.L, discussing Wallachia Petrie in *He Knew He Was Right*.

²⁴ See Margaret F. King, "Certain Learned Ladies": Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* and the Langham Place Circle, 21 *VICTORIAN LITERATURE & CULTURE* 307, 307 (1993).

²⁵ *Id.* at 311.

²⁶ *Id.*; see also TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*, *supra* note 19, at 258.

²⁷ Sharon Marcus, *Contracting Female Marriage in Anthony Trollope's Can You Forgive Her?*, 60 *NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE* 291, 291-93 (2005) (observing that "[n]etworks of acquaintances, friends, relatives, and colleagues [of such women] conferred marital status on couples who could not marry under the law but whose relationships exhibited marital features such as cohabitation, financial interdependence, physical intimacy, and agreements about fidelity").

²⁸ *Id.* at 300.

²⁹ TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, *supra* note 19, at 195-96. *An Autobiography* refers simply to "an American woman," but the editor's notes indicate that the reference is to Kate Field, who Trollope met first in Florence in 1860 and then in America in 1861-1862 while he worked on *North America*. *Id.* at 317-18. They exchanged a number of letters.

correspondence, he admonished her to “go & marry a husband,”³⁰ he also encouraged her to pursue a career as a writer—a profession, he observed, “in which women can work at par along side of men.”³¹

The characters in Trollope’s novels, particularly in the Palliser series, also suggest a far more complex response by Trollope to the Woman Question than his avowals of women’s proper destiny would suggest.³² For example, the novels link matters of public power and political rule to private power and household rule. As John Halperin writes, “in the Palliser novels there is emphasis on the social backgrounds of Parliament – and especially on the great influence of women over political ambition and success, their large share of the political game.”³³ This role of women in Victorian England shows the extension of politics and political culture into aristocratic drawing rooms, challenging separate-spheres ideology even as it confirms women’s exclusion from direct political power.³⁴

The Palliser novels, for these reasons, are rich texts for examining the relationship between political and household governance. They weave together the great political issues of the time and themes about the challenges of “the difficult marriage and its negotiations.”³⁵ The narrative voice in these novels observes that the consequences of a bad choice in marriage are more severe for women than for men. Some women in the novels express awareness of the risks of putting themselves under the power of their husbands’ governance.

This Article examines the various marital relationships formed in the Palliser novels, as well as other familial relationships and friendships. By examining particular pairings and triads of men and women, this Article identifies how legal and social rules about gender roles—including marriage law and customs—shape the characters’ connection to political and household power. For example, some relationships center around the task of bringing about a marriage that will

³⁰ Marcus, *supra* note 27, at 294 (quoting Letter from Anthony Trollope, to Kate Field (Sept. 26, 1868), in 1 THE LETTERS OF ANTHONY TROLLOPE 174, 175 (N. John Hall ed., 1983)). The year of his death, Field met the person with whom she would settle down and live, Lilian Whiting. *Id.* at 298-99.

³¹ Letter from Anthony Trollope, to Kate Field (May 24, 1868), in 1 THE LETTERS OF ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *supra* note 30, at 429, 430.

³² Ramona L. Denton, “*That Cage*” of Femininity: Trollope’s *Lady Laura*, SOUTH ATLANTIC BULL., Jan. 1980, at 1, 2.

³³ JOHN HALPERIN, TROLLOPE AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF THE PALLISERS AND OTHERS 104 (1977).

³⁴ See generally JENNIFER DAVEY, MARY, COUNTESS OF DERBY, AND THE POLITICS OF VICTORIAN BRITAIN (2019) (using story of Lady Mary Derby to claim that historians have long overlooked women’s great informal political influence and their status as informal politicians in Victorian era); K.D. REYNOLDS, ARISTOCRATIC WOMEN AND POLITICAL SOCIETY IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN (1998).

³⁵ Katherine Mullin & Francis O’Gorman, *Biographical Preface* to TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at vii, ix.

aid a male relative's entrance into Parliament or of furthering a man's parliamentary career in some way. The women in the novels display a range of attitudes about their marital and other familial connections to political power and their own aspirations for a life in politics. Some express envy of men for being able to run for Parliament, even as they enjoy their roles as political hostesses and mentors. Trollope's female characters act in a social context in which marriage is the expected "career" for women, even as some of them experience ambition for a political career or occupation other than—or in addition to—marriage.³⁶ The novels include stories of women who narrowly avoid a disastrous marriage to unscrupulous—and sometimes violent—men, as well as women who marry for strategic reasons but then chafe under a husband's governance until the wifely duty of obedience becomes intolerable. They explore women's limited ability to exit those marriages given the legal and social conventions of mid-Victorian England. Against these marital disasters, the series also includes some examples of relatively egalitarian marriages that seem to transcend models of husbandly rule and wifely submission.

One instructive way to consider the primary and secondary characters in the first three Palliser novels is as providing a range of different answers to the question of the proper relationship between political and household governance, including the Woman Question. As Trollope launches his characters along different paths, readers have a chance to examine and assess such different answers. In addition, as the narrator, Trollope does not simply describe these paths but often interjects a view about them. The narrator's prescription for what Alice Vavasor should do with her life is but one example.

Part I discusses the relevance of Trollope's Palliser novels to the politics of gender and the Woman Question in particular. Section I.A situates the Palliser novels in the context of significant political and legal developments. Section I.B examines why Trollope's novels remain a subject of keen interest by gender scholars and why the Palliser novels are a particularly fruitful resource for appreciating mid-Victorian debates over the Woman Question. Part II offers a brief biographical sketch of Trollope and then explains how the Palliser novels served as his way to comment on contemporary politics and express his political philosophy. It also describes his philosophy of novel writing and the gendered lessons that novels teach. The rest of the Article examines the first three Palliser novels, beginning in Part III with *Can You Forgive Her?* and continuing in Part IV with *Phineas Finn* and *Phineas Redux*. Part IV also analyzes the extent to which the Woman Question appears in Trollope's representation of parliamentary proceedings and in discussions among the various characters. These Parts also briefly consider how the Woman Question and women's

³⁶ See Nicholas Dames, *Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the Management of Ambition*, 45 VICTORIAN STUD. 247, 247-49, 264 (2003) (arguing that, in Trollope's writing about men's careers, there is a shift from vocational to a sequence of professional activity, but that the only "safe career" for Trollope's women is the shift from young girl to wife).

political rights feature in *He Knew He Was Right*, a novel Trollope wrote during the same period as the *Phineas* novels. This Article concludes with some observations about the present relevance of Trollope's fictional and nonfictional depictions of how best to answer the Woman Question.

This analysis is based upon close readings of the novels, augmented by insights from the extensive critical literature on Trollope and his Palliser novels in particular.³⁷ It draws on works analyzing women, the politics of gender, and masculinity in Trollope's novels.³⁸ It also considers some contemporaneous writings by nineteenth-century feminists to provide a counter to Trollope's portrayal of the feminist positions in the Palliser novels. Trollope's own reflections on the Palliser series and, more generally, on the responsibilities of an English novelist in his posthumously published *An Autobiography* also inform the analysis.

This Article does not undertake the task of persuading readers about the general value of a law and literature approach, since decades of legal scholarship have made that case. Instead, it argues for the particular value of analyzing the political novels of an enormously popular mid-Victorian writer for the purpose of gaining a more complex understanding of the Woman Question in mid-Victorian England and discerning how it related to the intertwined issues of agitation for women's political rights and for other feminist legal reform. As it happens, Trollope has been a "perennial favorite in law-and-literature scholarship from the days of his contemporary reviewers . . . to the present."³⁹ This is because his novels are "populated with legal actors" and legal plot lines but also "engage in Victorian legal culture" more broadly.⁴⁰ The novels, Professor Ayelet Ben-Yishai contends, "show that the jurisprudential upheavals and the legal reforms that characterized the British nineteenth century were in fact part of the ongoing cultural and social crisis facing Englishness itself," so that reading Trollope helps readers "understand the law as part of a larger turmoil in English culture."⁴¹ Further, Trollope believed that his novels taught important moral lessons about love and marriage, along with lessons about the

³⁷ See generally, e.g., JULIET McMASTER, *TROLLOPE'S PALLISER NOVELS: THEME AND PATTERN* (1978) (elucidating common thematic elements of Trollope's works by focusing on subplots in his novels).

³⁸ See generally, e.g., MARGARET MARKWICK, *TROLLOPE AND WOMEN* (1997) (claiming that Trollope's novels reflect complex and progressive understanding of women); MORSE, *supra* note 16; *THE POLITICS OF GENDER IN ANTHONY TROLLOPE'S NOVELS* (Margaret Markwick, Deborah Denenholz Morse & Regenia Gagnier eds., 2009).

³⁹ Ayelet Ben-Yishai, *Trollope and the Law*, in *THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO ANTHONY TROLLOPE* 155, 155 (Carolyn Dever & Lisa Niles eds., 2011). For example, four out of fourteen chapters in a recent law and literature collection about the British novel concern novels by Trollope. See generally *SUBVERSION AND SYMPATHY: GENDER, LAW, AND THE BRITISH NOVEL* (Martha C. Nussbaum & Alison L. LaCroix eds., 2013).

⁴⁰ Ben-Yishai, *supra* note 39, at 155-56.

⁴¹ *Id.*

legal and political issues of his day. How Trollope's complicated stance toward the Woman Question shaped the lessons taught in the Palliser novels is a particular focus. To my knowledge, no U.S. legal scholar has undertaken such an analysis.

I. WHY GENDER SCHOLARS (SHOULD) READ TROLLOPE

A. *The Palliser Novels in Historical Context*

The Palliser novels were written between 1863-1880 and set roughly between the mid-1850s and the late 1870s.⁴² This period was one of considerable political and legal ferment in Britain around the rights of women and the status of married women, and the novels reflect some of that ferment. In 1857, Parliament passed the Matrimonial Causes Act, which gave the Court of Divorce and Matrimonial Causes jurisdiction to grant absolute divorces and order related relief.⁴³ Because prior to the Act divorce was only available by Parliamentary petition, creating a civil divorce made divorce more readily available. The rate of divorce increased, as did the percentage of women initiating and obtaining divorces.⁴⁴ Even so, the new law included a double standard: husbands could sue on the ground of adultery, but wives needed to assert adultery and another ground. The Act "had created intense debate about the position of women—their chances of employment, their social relations with men, and their legal and cultural status."⁴⁵

During the 1860s-1880s, Victorian feminists and allied law reform organizations agitated for many reforms of marriage law, including custody law, the Married Women's Property Act, and a married woman's right to control her body. They also campaigned to end the sexual double standard, to improve the working conditions of women, and to expand women's right to work.⁴⁶ Concern over women's employment stemmed in part from an 1850 census revealing that

⁴² The precise years in which Trollope set the novels is a matter of some debate, but estimates range from a start date of 1855 to a start date of 1861. See Nicholas Shrimpton, *Appendix: The Chronology and Political Contexts of the Palliser Novels* to TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 676, 676-86 (explaining that, because Trollope's novels were neither written nor published consecutively, "the time scheme of the sequence as a whole is a muddle").

⁴³ Matrimonial Causes Act 1857, 20 & 21 Vict. c. 85 (Eng.).

⁴⁴ See Gail L. Savage, *The Operation of the 1857 Divorce Act, 1860-1910: A Research Note*, J. SOC. HIST., Summer 1983, at 103, 105-06 ("The court remained remarkably uniform in its treatment of petitions filed by men as opposed to women.").

⁴⁵ Dinah Birch, *Introduction* to TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at xi, xii.

⁴⁶ See generally MARY LYNDON SHANLEY, *FEMINISM, MARRIAGE, AND THE LAW IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND, 1850-1895* (1989).

there were over half a million more women than men.⁴⁷ Feminist discourse, as well as other discourse, debated solutions to the problem of “‘surplus’ women,” meaning those for whom marriage was unlikely.⁴⁸

As Parliament debated the Reform Act of 1867, which would expand the franchise to more of the working classes, John Stuart Mill, newly elected to Parliament, introduced an unsuccessful amendment—accompanied by a petition signed by 1499 women—to replace “man” with “person” in the statute’s language. This effort was a key event during the “pioneering phase, from 1866 to 1870,” of the woman suffrage campaign in Britain.⁴⁹ The Palliser novels gesture toward debates over the Woman Question, including passing references to “Mr Mill,” “going in” for women’s rights, and “surplus” women and female emigration as one solution to that problem.⁵⁰ By contrast to Trollope’s detailed presentation of certain parliamentary debates with real-world parallels—such as the disestablishment of the Church of England, Irish tenant reform, and the Reform Act itself—those fictional parliamentary proceedings do not chronicle Mill’s real-world unsuccessful amendment to the Reform Act.

As commentators explain, Trollope, in the Palliser novels, “is not reproducing the political life of his time” but is instead “creating his credible alternative to the real political world, not for its own sake, but as an environment in which human relationships can be dramatized and discussed.”⁵¹ With respect to the portrayal of those human relationships, this Article shows that the characters in the Palliser novels are mindful of, and constrained by, the marriage law of the time, including husbandly prerogatives of household rule, wifely duties of obedience, and a woman’s limited options for exiting a troubled marriage. As with woman suffrage, however, Trollope’s detailed representations of parliamentary politics do not mention the various marriage law–reform bills that failed or succeeded during the time period in which he set his novels.

B. *Trollope and the Politics of Gender*

In her pioneering work *Women in Trollope’s Palliser Novels*, Deborah Denenholz Morse observed that critics commenting on Trollope’s depiction of

⁴⁷ See Edward Cheshire, *The Results of the Census of Great Britain in 1851, with a Description of the Machinery and Processes Employed to Obtain the Returns; Also an Appendix of Tables of References*, 17 J. STAT. SOC’Y LONDON 45, 46 (1854); King, *supra* note 24, at 310.

⁴⁸ King, *supra* note 24, at 310. King’s works cited at the end of her article helpfully includes citations to a number of essays from the *English Woman’s Journal*. See, e.g., *The Disputed Question*, 1 ENG. WOMAN’S J. 361 (1858).

⁴⁹ See SUSAN KINGSLEY KENT, *SEX AND SUFFRAGE IN BRITAIN, 1860-1914*, at 184-88 (1987) (explaining that Mill served as the parliamentary liaison and provided the theoretical underpinning for woman suffrage movement during its pioneering phase).

⁵⁰ For example, see Section IV.E, discussing Violet Effingham in *Phineas Finn*.

⁵¹ Shrimpton, *supra* note 42, at 686.

women in his novels are divided between two camps: "Trollope as male chauvinist and Trollope as feminist."⁵² While the first camp argued that Trollope left unquestioned Victorian gender conventions, such as "wifely submission," the latter argued that some of Trollope's depictions of women "seem discordant with conventional images of Victorian femininity."⁵³ Some in the second camp found a sympathy for Trollope's female characters and a depth in portraying their inner lives, desires, and decision-making processes in his novels that is unusual among his male Victorian contemporaries. Even as the narrative voice in the Palliser novels appears to espouse conventional gender ideology and norms (as do some of the male and female characters), a number of Trollope's female characters challenge and subvert those gender norms. Indeed, the Palliser novels seem to introduce a "brand of 'new woman'" into Trollope's fiction: not an outright feminist—feminist characters were usually satirized by Trollope—but "a human being in search of a vocation."⁵⁴ Such a woman, for example, often takes a keen interest in and plays a powerful (though indirect) role in "the political life of her day" but finds it hard to "reconcile her energy and ambition with the 'feminine' behavior her society requires of her."⁵⁵

More recent Trollope scholarship finds a similar dynamic with respect to ideals of the gentleman and of masculinity, arguing that Trollope's later novels—including some in the Palliser series—gesture toward new forms of masculinity.⁵⁶

Decades after Morse observed the split verdict on Trollope and feminism, literary critics continue to explore the complexity of "the politics of gender"⁵⁷ in Trollope's novels, including not only feminist studies but also gender studies, masculinity studies, and "queer Trollope" (i.e., his sympathetic attention to "those whose lifestyles do not exemplify heterosexual courtship, romance, and marriage").⁵⁸ In a recent volume on such politics, Morse and her co-editor Professor Margaret Markwick (author of the earlier classic work, *Trollope and Women*) reflect that one reason for Trollope's continuing appeal to critics and his popularity with readers is what his contemporaries described—and

⁵² MORSE, *supra* note 16, at 1.

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ Denton, *supra* note 32, at 1.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 2.

⁵⁶ See generally, e.g., MARGARET MARKWICK, *NEW MEN IN TROLLOPE'S NOVELS* (2007) (examining Trollope's evolving views of masculinity in his novels and challenging popular constructions of Victorian masculinity).

⁵⁷ See generally *THE POLITICS OF GENDER IN ANTHONY TROLLOPE'S NOVELS*, *supra* note 38.

⁵⁸ Kate Flint, *Queer Trollope*, in *THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO ANTHONY TROLLOPE*, *supra* note 39, at 99, 110-11 [hereinafter Flint, *Queer Trollope*].

sometimes decried—as his realism.⁵⁹ Virginia Woolf famously described Trollope as a “truth-teller,” whose novels provide “the same sort of refreshment and delight that we get from seeing something actually happen in the street below.”⁶⁰ While such commentators stressed Trollope’s fidelity to the world, others argued that he created “a general and peaceful world, oblivious to the intellectual, political and social revolution that was in the air.”⁶¹

Morse and Markwick conclude that critics today read and interrogate Trollope from multiple perspectives, including “for insights into how they lived then”:

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 time and a dissident voice subverting convention and inviting change.⁶²

Apropos of this Article’s focus, they conclude that this Janus-like aspect of Trollope’s work is “never more evident than in the gender analysis of Trollope.”⁶³

II. THE PALLISER SERIES—ANTHONY TROLLOPE’S “POLITICAL NOVELS”

Part I attempted to answer two questions: Why read Trollope? And why read the Palliser series? This Part offers a brief biographical sketch of Trollope, stressing details pertinent to understanding the Palliser series. Drawing on Trollope’s posthumously published *An Autobiography* and some of his other nonfiction writing, it also highlights Trollope’s political philosophy, his views about the role of novels in teaching gendered moral lessons, and the place of the Palliser series in teaching those lessons.

A. *A Biographical Sketch: Tragic Father, Literary Mother*

Anthony Trollope was the son of Frances Trollope, a mother who supported her family as a successful novelist and travel writer, and Thomas Anthony

⁵⁹ One obituary predicted that Trollope’s 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.” Margaret Markwick & Deborah Denenholz Morse, *Introduction* to THE POLITICS OF GENDER IN ANTHONY TROLLOPE’S NOVELS, *supra* note 38, at 1 (alteration in original) (quoting R.H. Hutton, SPECTATOR, Dec. 9, 1882).

⁶⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Phases of Fiction: In Three Parts: Part One*, BOOKMAN, Apr. 1929, at 123, *reprinted in* 2 VIRGINIA WOOLF, COLLECTED ESSAYS 56, 62 (1967).

⁶¹ Markwick & Morse, *supra* note 59, at 1 (quoting Leslie Stephen, NATIONAL REVIEW, 1901, at 38).

⁶² *Id.* at 2.

⁶³ *Id.*

Trollope, a "failing barrister and gentleman farmer."⁶⁴ This role reversal in supporting the family provided Trollope with an early example of how gender conventions did not always hold true. Moreover, in his mother's steady work habits, one sees a foreshadowing of his own productivity of which he wrote so candidly in *An Autobiography*.

Of his father, Trollope wrote that "everything went wrong with him," as he "embarked in one hopeless enterprise after another . . . His life as I knew it was one long tragedy."⁶⁵ By contrast, Trollope chronicled his mother's steady industry in writing, producing books at steady intervals, even as she held her household together performing "all the work of day-nurse and night-nurse to a sick household."⁶⁶ Over the course of her writing career—which she began at age fifty with *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*—she wrote 114 books and stopped writing only when she was seventy-six years old.⁶⁷

As a young man, Trollope began working in 1841 as a deputy postal surveyor's clerk for the postal service. He spent many years working in Ireland, the setting for his first few novels. While in Ireland, he met and married Rose Heseltine and dates "that happy day as the commencement of [his] better life."⁶⁸ Trollope credited this marriage and the birth of two sons as giving him "[t]he vigour necessary to prosecute two professions at the same time"—his postal duties and his writing.⁶⁹ Yet of his marriage he says little: "My marriage was like the marriage of other people, and of no special interest to any one except my wife and me."⁷⁰

B. *Parliament as "the Highest Object of Ambition for Every Educated Englishman"*

Between 1864-1865, Trollope published *Can You Forgive Her?*—the first of his Palliser novels—which focused on political life, rather than clerical life, which was the subject of his popular Barchester Towers series. By 1867, Trollope had resigned from the postal service; he earned far more from his writing than his postal surveyor position. Trollope was approached about standing for election to Parliament in 1867, and he agreed to do so.⁷¹ However that opportunity did not materialize. He was defeated in 1868 when he stood as the Liberal candidate for Beverly.⁷² In *An Autobiography*, Trollope explains: "I

⁶⁴ Mullin & O'Gorman, *supra* note 35, at vii.

⁶⁵ TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 27.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 23-26.

⁶⁷ *Id.* at 27.

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 48.

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 50.

⁷¹ Mullin & O'Gorman, *supra* note 35, at ix.

⁷² R.H. SUPER, THE CHRONICLER OF BARSETSHIRE: A LIFE OF ANTHONY TROLLOPE 253 (1988).

have always thought that to sit in the British Parliament should be the highest object of ambition to every educated Englishman.”⁷³ He also recounts that when his uncle asked him “what destination [he] should like best for [his] future life” soon after Trollope became a postal clerk, Trollope answered that he would like to be a member of Parliament.⁷⁴ Trollope recalls that his uncle jeered that “few clerks in the Post Office” became members of Parliament.⁷⁵ Trollope recounts, “[T]his jeer . . . stirred me to look for a seat as soon as I had made myself capable of holding one by leaving the public service.”⁷⁶

Commentators suggest that this failure to be elected “haunted his fiction as it must have haunted his private life.”⁷⁷ In *An Autobiography*, Trollope writes that since he was “debarred from expressing [his] opinions in the House of Commons,” he “commenced a series of semi-political tales” as the “method of declaring [himself].”⁷⁸ The series allowed him “from time to time to have . . . that fling at the political doings of the day which every man likes to take, if not in one fashion then in another.”⁷⁹ It bears considering why Trollope offered his take on certain “political doings” of his day and not others. For example, he recreated parliamentary debate over religious disestablishment in considerable detail, even describing long speeches for and against various measures and reactions to them by the various members of Parliament peopling the Palliser novels. However, he did not similarly describe any of the many parliamentary activities concerning the status of women.

By comparison to this silence, a satirical journal, the *Tomahawk*, imagined candidate Trollope during his 1868 campaign delivering a speech to young ladies and being asked the “undecided” question: “Had ladies a vote?”⁸⁰ Trollope’s imagined answer shows an awareness of the prominence of women as readers of his novels: “He need scarcely say that he was strongly in favour of their having votes; for, without their influence, direct or indirect, he quite despaired of ever getting into Parliament.”⁸¹ If elected, he would “devote himself exclusively to their interests,” expanding the “ladies’ gallery” in the House.⁸² The story reports that Trollope, to “[e]nthusiastic screams,” told the ladies that “[h]e wanted to go in the House in order to obtain fresh materials with which to amuse them,” and once there, he would manufacture an “unfailing supply of novels for their delectation” and press the government to found free libraries

⁷³ TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 181.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ Mullin & O’Gorman, *supra* note 35, at ix-x.

⁷⁸ TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 196.

⁷⁹ *Id.* at 117.

⁸⁰ *Our Election Intelligence*, TOMAHAWK, Sept. 5, 1868, at 99.

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *Id.*

filled with novels—"especially his own."⁸³ The real Trollope was acutely aware that he depended upon female readers "in a great measure" for his "daily bread;" but he lectured young women who might be among his readers that "it is a woman's right to be a woman," not to seek to assimilate to men in "political privileges" and otherwise.⁸⁴

C. Trollope's Political Philosophy

Trollope's novels were a vehicle for expressing his political opinions. Trollope described his political theory as that of "an advanced Conservative-Liberal" and attributed this same political philosophy to a central character in the Palliser series, Plantagenet Palliser.⁸⁵ Trollope's understanding of the differences between the Liberals and Conservatives of his time is valuable for appreciating the place of natural inequality in both philosophies. Though Trollope does not explicitly apply this political theory to the status of women in *An Autobiography*—instead referring to men—it is still useful to consider his theory.

In *An Autobiography*, Trollope comments upon the phenomenon of feelings of inferiority and superiority among men and attendant pain because "[w]e do not understand the operations of Almighty wisdom, and are . . . unable to tell the causes of the terrible inequalities that we see."⁸⁶ People "born to the superior condition," to whom "plenty and education and liberty have been given"—a category in which Trollope includes himself—"cannot . . . look upon the inane, unintellectual, and toil-bound life of those who cannot even feed themselves sufficiently by their sweat, without some feeling of injustice, some feeling of pain."⁸⁷ But Trollope criticizes the quest by "many enthusiastic but unbalanced minds . . . to set all things right by a proclaimed equality" because such efforts

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *On the Higher Education of Women* (1868), in ANTHONY TROLLOPE: FOUR LECTURES 67, 69, 75-76 (Morris L. Parrish ed., 1938). See generally Kate Flint, *The Victorian Novel and Its Readers*, in THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE VICTORIAN NOVEL 13, 17 (Deirdre David ed., 2012) (describing concerns about Victorian women as consumers of novels) [hereinafter Flint, *The Victorian Novel*].

⁸⁵ TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 182-83. Plantagenet espouses this political philosophy in Trollope's *The Prime Minister*. ANTHONY TROLLOPE, THE PRIME MINISTER 510-19 (Nicholas Shrimpton ed., Oxford World's Classics 2011) (1876) [hereinafter TROLLOPE, THE PRIME MINISTER]; see also William A. Cohen, *The Palliser Novels* (observing that "Chapter 68 of *The Prime Minister* (1876), entitled 'The Prime Minister's Political Creed,' recapitulates the 'political theory' enunciated in the *Autobiography*"), in THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *supra* note 39, at 44, 44-46.

⁸⁶ TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 182-83.

⁸⁷ *Id.* at 182 (endnote omitted).

run up against “the ordinances of the Creator.”⁸⁸ By comparison, “the mind of the thinker and the student is driven to admit, though it be awestruck by apparent injustice, that this inequality is the work of God.”⁸⁹ As a consequence, “[m]ake all men equal today, and God has so created them that they shall be all unequal tomorrow.”⁹⁰

What divides “equally conscientious” conservatives and liberals is what they think follows from recognizing that inequality is of “divine origin”: “The so-called Conservative . . . thinks that the preservation of the welfare of the world depends on the maintenance of those distances between the prince and the peasant by which he finds himself to be surrounded”⁹¹ The Conservative errs, however, because he sees “[t]he divine inequality . . . but not the equally divine diminution of that inequality.”⁹² Instead, he views diminution of inequality taking place in society as “an evil, the consummation of which it is his duty to retard.”⁹³ If necessary, to slow the movement down, he may conscientiously assist it by adding “drags and holdfasts.”⁹⁴

The Liberal shares the Conservative’s recognition that “distances are of divine origin” and is “equally averse to any sudden disruption of society in quest of some Utopian blessedness.”⁹⁵ But he believes that he should help further a tendency toward equality because

he is alive to the fact that these distances are day by day becoming less, and he regards this continual diminution as a series of steps towards that human millennium of which he dreams. He is even willing to help the many to ascend the ladder a little, though he knows, as they come up towards him, he must go down to meet them. What is really in his mind is,—I will not say equality . . . but a tendency towards equality.⁹⁶

The Liberal needs the Conservative, therefore, because “he knows that he must be hemmed in by safeguards . . . and therefore he is glad to be accompanied on his way by the repressive action of a Conservative opponent.”⁹⁷

⁸⁸ *Id.* In *North America*, Trollope expressed a belief in a natural racial hierarchy, which led him to doubt that Black people “can be made equal to the white man” because of an inferiority rooted in “the laws of nature.” HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 21 (quoting 2 TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*, *supra* note 19, at 87).

⁸⁹ TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, *supra* note 19, at 182.

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ *Id.*

⁹² *Id.* at 182-83.

⁹³ *Id.* at 183.

⁹⁴ *Id.*

⁹⁵ *Id.*

⁹⁶ *Id.*

⁹⁷ *Id.*

Having provided this schematic, Trollope asserts that he is "guilty of no absurdity in calling [himself] an advanced Conservative-Liberal."⁹⁸ Trollope further asserts that the proper motive for political doctrine should be "improving the condition of [one's] fellows."⁹⁹ Plantagenet Palliser, an aristocrat and a Liberal, was his model politician because he disinterestedly sought to be of use for others, even though his scrupulousness made him unable to play the games necessary for political success.¹⁰⁰

Trollope's "advanced Conservative-Liberal" political theory—one accepting of inequality as of divine origin and leery of both equality as a value and too-rapid movements toward it—may explain why his political novels do not embrace the reform agenda of women's rights advocates because that agenda posed fundamental challenges to the patriarchal structure of Victorian society.¹⁰¹ While his primary female characters in the Palliser series may refer now and then to "going in" for women's rights, in the end, a mutual and egalitarian marriage (by the standards of Trollope's time)—"a kind of give-and-take in which there is no mastering"—seems to be the most Trollope can imagine for most of those characters.¹⁰² Further, explicit feminist activity remains at the margins of the books, although the desire for meaningful action motivates some female characters initially to question marriage as a career. However, it is largely the secondary female characters who busy themselves with causes such as female emigration and employment and who declare an intention not to marry.

Trollope took special pride in his development of the characters of Plantagenet Palliser and his wife, Lady Glencora Palliser.¹⁰³ Trollope began with Plantagenet and Lady Glencora's troubled marriage in *Can You Forgive Her?* and charted their marriage, Plantagenet's parliamentary career, and Lady Glencora's rise as a social and political hostess through several more novels.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ *Id.*

⁹⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰⁰ HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 222-45 (explaining that "Palliser's political failure represents to Trollope a moral success of significant proportions" and that Trollope favorably compares him to the "many political opportunists who surround him").

¹⁰¹ See Cohen, *supra* note 85, at 44-46 (arguing that "[w]hile the distinction between Conservative and Liberal positions in the professional political sphere is, in Trollope's description, rather insubstantial" with respect to class, it is "more consequential" when the Palliser novels extend the definition of "politics" to the domestic sphere of relations within families and social worlds).

¹⁰² MORSE, *supra* note 16, at 100; see NARDIN, *supra* note 17, at 193 (noting Trollope's use of "marriages of comradeship and equality").

¹⁰³ TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 117 ("I think that Plantagenet Palliser stands more firmly on the ground than any other personage I have created."); *id.* at 223 (predicting that if he enjoys "permanence of success" as a fiction writer, it will "probably rest on the character[s] of Plantagenet Palliser, Lady Glencora, and the Rev. Mr Crawley").

¹⁰⁴ Halperin argues that, while it is likely that Lady Glencora is an "essentially original creation[,]," one can recognize in her—particularly once Plantagenet becomes Prime Minister

Trollope described Plantagenet as “a perfect gentleman,” sparking extensive analysis by literary scholars of the idea of the gentleman in Trollope’s novels.¹⁰⁵ Notably, in *Can You Forgive Her?*, Trollope opined that Lady Glencora might not have been “at all points a lady, but had Fate so willed it she would have been a thorough gentleman.”¹⁰⁶

D. *Trollope’s Philosophy of Novel Writing and the Gendered Lessons Novels Teach*

In *An Autobiography*, Trollope comments that in the Palliser novels, he had to combine politics with “love and intrigue . . . for the benefit of [his] readers.”¹⁰⁷ While that comment might suggest the love and marriage plots were thrown in with the political plots to appease readers, the novels draw striking parallels between the dilemmas Trollope’s heroines face in navigating a marital career or occupation and those his heroes confront in navigating a parliamentary career or occupation.¹⁰⁸ Further, the novels also address the politics of marriage and of resolving marital conflict; given the hierarchical relationship of husband and wife—supported by law, custom, economics, and education—marital disputes serve as a “microcosm of all the disputes . . . arising in a patriarchal system where some people automatically count more than others.”¹⁰⁹

Trollope analogizes novels to sermons as sources of moral lessons.¹¹⁰ In the face of prejudice against novels, he insisted that novels could teach important moral lessons about virtue and vice, particularly to young women and men. From novels, “girls learn what is expected from them, and what they are to expect when lovers come; and also from them that young men unconsciously learn what are, or should be, or may be, the charms of love.”¹¹¹ In another nonfiction work,

in *The Prime Minister*—several prominent Liberal aristocratic political hostesses: “Lady Palmerstone, the second Lady Russell, and . . . Lady Stanley of Alderley.” HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 214. For more on these aristocratic hostesses, see REYNOLDS, *supra* note 34, at 152-87.

¹⁰⁵ TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, *supra* note 19, at 223. For commentary, see generally, for example, ROBIN GILMOUR, *THE IDEA OF THE GENTLEMAN IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL* 149-82 (1981); SHIRLEY ROBIN LETWIN, *THE GENTLEMAN IN TROLLOPE* (1982).

¹⁰⁶ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 415.

¹⁰⁷ TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, *supra* note 19, at 196.

¹⁰⁸ See MCMASTER, *supra* note 37, at 38-59 (analyzing parallels between Phineas Finn navigating “curtailment of personal liberty in accepting office under a party” and female characters’ “deliberations about the curtailment of freedom in entering marriage”).

¹⁰⁹ RICHARD BARICKMAN, SUSAN MACDONALD & MYRA STARK, *CORRUPT RELATIONS: DICKENS, THACKERAY, TROLLOPE, COLLINS, AND THE VICTORIAN SEXUAL SYSTEM* 207 (1982).

¹¹⁰ TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, *supra* note 19, at 139.

¹¹¹ *Id.* at 138. *Cornhill* magazine, in which Trollope published some of his novels serially, embraced the didactic purpose of “realistic fiction” (like Trollope’s) in “teach[ing] readers about the proper behavior and decision-making processes to employ in real life.” Jennifer Phegley, *Clearing Away “The Briars and Brambles”: The Education and Professionalization*

On English Prose Fiction, Trollope insists that guidance about love was of vital importance: "No social question has been so important to us as that of the great bond of matrimony" because "every most wholesome joy and most precious duty of our existence depends upon our inner family relations."¹¹²

These lessons and virtues that novels taught—or should teach—were notably gendered: one cardinal virtue novels taught men was honesty, but for women, it was modesty.¹¹³ In *An Autobiography*, Trollope defends some of the prominent British novelists of his generation (George Eliot, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Charles Dickens) and past generations (Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott), asking, "Can any one by search through the works of the six great English novelists I have named, find a scene, a passage, or a word that would teach a girl to be immodest, or a man to be dishonest?"¹¹⁴ Similarly, Trollope asks readers whether a novel taught a "man-pupil" that "it is well to be false to the woman, to triumph over her, and then to be indifferent; to lie to her, and then to despise her"; or whether he is "taught to be true and honest, and to be desirous of that which he seeks to win for noble and manly purposes?"¹¹⁵ Turning to the female pupil: "[I]s she taught to be bold-faced, mean in spirit, fond of pleasure, and exacting; or to be modest, devoted, and unselfish?"¹¹⁶ Trollope reiterates the virtue of feminine modesty and restraint as he paints the "happy ending" of being married and having children that follows such virtues. He asks, "That happy ending with the normal marriage and the two children,—is it the lot of the good girl, who has restrained all her longings by the operations of her conscience, or of the bold, bad, scheming woman who has been unwomanly and rapacious?"¹¹⁷

In the Palliser novels, Trollope vividly paints pictures of vice initially rewarded but ultimately punished, particularly in his characterizations of some of the unworthy male suitors. At the same time, there are tensions between this "good girl" who triumphs through modesty and eschews boldness or desire and some of the most vivid female characters in the Palliser series who subvert gender norms.¹¹⁸ Here, too, there are intriguing tensions between the complex

of the *Cornhill Magazine's Women Readers, 1860–65*, 33 *VICTORIAN PERIODICALS REV.* 22, 25 (2000).

¹¹² ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement* [hereinafter TROLLOPE, *On English Prose Fiction*], in TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, *supra* note 19, at 233, 245.

¹¹³ TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, *supra* note 19, at 139–40.

¹¹⁴ *Id.* at 140.

¹¹⁵ TROLLOPE, *On English Prose Fiction*, *supra* note 112, at 245.

¹¹⁶ *Id.*

¹¹⁷ *Id.* at 246. In assuming, as the passage continues, that Thackeray's Amelia would attract readers more than his Becky Sharp, Trollope may have underestimated Becky Sharp's appeal despite (or because of) her scheming. *See id.* at 246.

¹¹⁸ For example, see *infra* Section IV.G.2, discussing Madame Max Goesler's boldness and confident self-assertion or Lady Glencora's political scheming.

words and doings and inner life of Trollope's characters and the narrator's official embrace of gender conventions.

III. CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?

A. Introduction

A number of characters in *Can You Forgive Her?* and the two Phineas novels—*Phineas Finn* and *Phineas Redux*—share Trollope's view that a position in Parliament is the best possible aim for the Englishman. Some female characters consider being a member of Parliament as the best possible life and might well have run for office themselves if gender had not barred them. Instead, they pour energy into mentoring and furthering their male relatives and friends' careers or into plotting to help such relatives advance through marriage. On the other hand, some men staunchly prefer private to public life (at least initially), and some female characters seek other channels of political influence, eschewing politics as a man's game. Thus, one important theme in the novels is whether the male and female characters who are engaged or married to one another agree about the value of political life and the place of political ambition. Trollope sometimes opines to the reader about such characters' views.

B. Forgive Whom? For What?

Can You Forgive Her? begins and ends with the question of whether “you”—the reader—are able to forgive Alice Vavasor, a young woman engaged when the story begins to a seemingly “worthy” suitor, John Grey.¹¹⁹ But, along the way, Trollope details the marital careers of two other female characters, Lady Glencora and (for comic relief) the widow Mrs Greenow. The “her” in the title could refer to each of those women, whom Trollope links through three plots involving an unmarried young woman, a wife, and a widow “each hesitating between two suitors”—the “worthy man” versus the “wild” or unworthy man—and each “concerned not only with her own emotional preferences in the matter, but with the just and equitable disposal of herself and her fortune.”¹²⁰ While Alice's story is the opening plot, Trollope also seeks to engage the reader's sympathy and forgiveness for Lady Glencora and her marital dilemmas. Other female characters expressly seek out forgiveness, such as Alice's cousin Kate, who schemes to wed Alice to Kate's brother George (the wild or unworthy suitor). By contrast, Mrs Greenow's marital tale is more of a low comedic subplot; she seems to require no forgiveness and instead bestows it upon the wild suitor she favors.

¹¹⁹ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 7, 22, 675.

¹²⁰ MCMASTER, *supra* note 37, at 23. Trollope introduces John Grey in chapter 3 as “John Grey, the Worthy Man” and Alice's cousin George Vavasor, in the next chapter, as “George Vavasor, the Wild Man.” TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 22, 32.

For what does Alice Vavasor require the reader's forgiveness? It appears to be for her rebellious independence, both in contemplating a course for her life apart from marriage and in rejecting a "worthy" suitor out of concern for losing her independence and self-determination in a marriage to him.¹²¹ In the nonfiction work *North America*, Trollope addressed the question of "the rights of women" by offering the prescription that "[t]he best right a woman has is the right to a husband."¹²² In the fiction work *Can You Forgive Her?*, published just a few years later, Trollope offered a similar prescription as the "proper answer" to the question Alice pondered: "What should a woman do with her life?"¹²³ Thus, a persuasive reading of Alice's story is that it is Trollope's fictional, "narrative response" to a specific group of mid-century British feminists who "led the assault in mid-century Britain on the patriarchally defined 'proper answer' to what Victorians termed the Woman Question."¹²⁴

Through Alice's transgression and eventual repentance of her quest for autonomy, Trollope both surfaces and contains a threat to the "proper answer" to the Woman Question.¹²⁵ The initial "female quest plot"—"[w]hat will Alice do with her life?"—shifts to a "traditional love plot"—"[w]hom will Alice marry?"¹²⁶ But along the way, Trollope also shows sympathy for women who are denied autonomy in their marital choice—such as Lady Glencora—and even admiration for Mrs Greenow, who retains autonomy when she decides to marry a "wild" suitor.

Even Alice's repentance allows for more than one reading. On one reading, Alice's quest for independence and for a cause other than marriage—such as connection to public or political life—ends by her renouncing her own will and submitting to the wise mastery of Mr Grey as her husband, resigned to the domestic life that she initially feared.¹²⁷ On another reading, even as she renounces her "vain" ambition, Alice ends up in a marriage with terms that will allow her to realize her political ambition: the resolutely retiring and private Mr Grey is now willing to become a public man, and so she will become the wife of a member of Parliament.¹²⁸

¹²¹ See King, *supra* note 24, at 308, 314-15, 318.

¹²² TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*, *supra* note 19, at 266.

¹²³ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 92. For discussion, see *infra* text accompanying note 155-162.

¹²⁴ See King, *supra* note 24, at 308.

¹²⁵ *Id.* at 316.

¹²⁶ *Id.* at 315.

¹²⁷ See *id.* at 316 (arguing that "as Alice accepts Grey's forgiveness and his offer of marriage, the punishment and extinction of her desire for autonomy are completed").

¹²⁸ See TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 670-75.

C. *Alice Vavasor's Dilemma: Marry Mr Grey or Cousin George, or Do Not Marry at All?*

As *Can You Forgive Her?* begins, Alice is engaged to marry Mr Grey, but over the course of the next several hundred pages, she (1) has doubts about and then breaks off her engagement; (2) promises to marry her cousin, George Vavasor, to whom she had previously been engaged; (3) regrets her decision to marry George and laments what she has foolishly given up in Mr Grey; (4) breaks with George; and (5) after much self-torment, once again agrees to marry Mr Grey. Alice's various relatives' views add to the plot. Her more aristocratic relatives and her father immensely approve of Mr Grey, who is a "man of high character," if a bit staid, living the life of a well-educated gentleman in Cambridgeshire.¹²⁹ They are less fond of George, with the exception of his sister (and Alice's cousin) Kate. Fiercely loyal to her brother and fond of Alice, Kate plots to separate Alice from Mr Grey and return George to Alice's good graces; she even woos Alice on George's behalf. Cousin George is amoral, manipulative, and controlling. Eventually, both Kate and Alice are violently disabused—in Kate's case, through literal violence—of any faith in George, who, by novel's end, "vanishe[s]" from London and from the book's pages.¹³⁰

Alice's doubts about Mr Grey stem not only from concern over what kind of marriage she would have with him but also whether she should follow a path for her life in addition to or other than marriage—one that involves politics. She loves Mr Grey and admires him "even more than she loved him," but he is too perfect.¹³¹ Further, he has no interest in political life and "had declared to Alice that he would not accept a seat in the British House of Commons if it were offered to him free of expense."¹³² By contrast, she (like Trollope) believes that "no persons can be happier than . . . our public men"—members of Parliament.¹³³ Mr Grey looks forward to installing Alice, his most precious possession, in his home down in an unlovely part of the country. Alice, however, finds that she is not looking forward to that quiet life in his country home away from London: "[S]he feared to be taken into the desolate calmness of Cambridgeshire."¹³⁴

¹²⁹ *Id.* at 16-17.

¹³⁰ *Id.* at 609.

¹³¹ *Id.* at 24.

¹³² *Id.* at 93.

¹³³ *Id.* at 528.

¹³⁴ *Id.* at 93.

1. The Quest Plot and the "Flock of Learned Ladies" Surrounding Alice

Alice ruminates about the question "[w]hat should a woman do with her life?"¹³⁵ The narrator explains that "[t]here had arisen round [Alice] a flock of learned ladies asking that question."¹³⁶ Here, Trollope likely alludes to the mid-century Victorian feminists nicknamed the "ladies of Langham Place."¹³⁷ By locating Alice's home on Queen Anne Street, Trollope placed her several blocks away from Blandford Square where, in 1855, Barbara Leigh Smith (who became Barbara Bodichon) formed what became the Marriage Women's Property Committee.¹³⁸ Moreover, Alice is just a few blocks away from Langham Place, the location of the the *English Woman's Journal* and of a large circle of feminists, including some with whom Trollope was well acquainted, such as Emily Faithfull.¹³⁹ By 1863, the year before Trollope published the first installment of *Can You Forgive Her?*, Langham Place feminists "had attracted notice through a variety of initiatives to improve the lives of British women," such as

a Society to Promote the Employment of Women . . . ; a Female Middle-Class Emigration Society; training and employment sites for women that included a law stationer's office, a business school, and the Victoria Press; a Ladies' Institute to house women in these training programs; and at the Langham Place headquarters a women's employment registry, library, and dining room.¹⁴⁰

The focus on employment and emigration in these activities stemmed in part from the 1850 census revealing that there were over half a million more women than men.¹⁴¹

As Professor Margaret King elaborates, the *English Woman's Journal*, financed and published by the women of Langham Place, was "the discursive and organizational matrix for the first major wave of nineteenth-century British feminism" between 1858-1864; it circulated feminist work, provided women "a public voice," and offered readers ways to interact with the *Journal*.¹⁴² The periodical format also allowed feminists to "engage in an ongoing dialogue with anti-feminist discourse."¹⁴³ Individual women associated with Langham Place wrote monographs and gave speeches—often before the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science ("NAPSS")—urging reform of law and

¹³⁵ *Id.* at 92.

¹³⁶ *Id.* (endnote omitted).

¹³⁷ King, *supra* note 24, at 307-08.

¹³⁸ *See id.* at 308.

¹³⁹ *See id.* at 308-09.

¹⁴⁰ *Id.*

¹⁴¹ *See id.* at 310; *see also supra* notes 47-48 and accompanying text.

¹⁴² King, *supra* note 24, at 309.

¹⁴³ *Id.* at 309-10.

customs “controlling women’s property and voting rights, employment, and education.”¹⁴⁴ As Professor Mary Lyndon Shanley observes, mid-Victorian feminists “found many of their staunchest allies among members of the [NAPSS], whose practice of promoting social reform through parliamentary action made them receptive to the feminists’ legal strategy.”¹⁴⁵

What might Alice have absorbed from the circle of learned ladies that had grown up around her? The *English Woman’s Journal*, for example, criticized Trollope’s *North America* for ignoring the wishes of girls in his assumption that men wish their sons “to go forth to earn their bread” and wish their daughters to remain at home with them “till they are married.”¹⁴⁶ The reviewer countered that “[a] true woman is full of energies and activities, and longs to use them.”¹⁴⁷ While “Providence” may intend both men and women “to reach their highest development” in marriage, the review maintained that women should not simply wait for marriage but should pass their youth in “steady, energetic, hopeful work.”¹⁴⁸ Other essays published in the *English Woman’s Journal* in the late 1850s and early 1860s stress women’s highest aim as “the full development of our being in accordance with the design of our Creator.”¹⁴⁹ One essay challenged, “We ask but to throw down the barriers, so that women may be free to choose their own way of life—to earn their living independently, and to marry or not to marry, as they may deem it well or prudent.”¹⁵⁰

In *North America*, Trollope warns that expanding women’s opportunities to work would undo “what chivalry has done” to raise women “from the hard and hardening tasks of the world” so that “they have become soft, tender, and virtuous.”¹⁵¹ Chivalry is the beginning of “the rights of women,” he contends; it has instilled in men the duty to work and provide for women.¹⁵² Women’s rights advocates would shift the burden from men’s backs onto women’s backs. While sympathetic to efforts to relieve the distress of women compelled to work, such

¹⁴⁴ *Id.* at 309.

¹⁴⁵ SHANLEY, *supra* note 46, at 16 (explaining that this alliance “helped convince Parliament to pass many of the measures sought by feminists”).

¹⁴⁶ *Notices of Books*, 10 ENG. WOMAN’S J. 61, 63-64 (1862) (reviewing 1-2 TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*, *supra* note 19) (quoting TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*, *supra* note 19, at 261); see also King, *supra* note 24, at 309-10 (calling the review a comparatively “charitable critique”).

¹⁴⁷ *Notices of Books*, *supra* note 146, at 64.

¹⁴⁸ *Id.*

¹⁴⁹ *The Disputed Question*, *supra* note 48, at 361-63.

¹⁵⁰ *The ‘Saturday Review’ and the ‘English Woman’s Journal,’* 1 ENG. WOMAN’S J. 201, 204 (1858).

¹⁵¹ TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*, *supra* note 19, at 261.

¹⁵² *Id.* at 257, 261-62.

as seamstresses, he opposes those who seek to "spread work more widely among women."¹⁵³

Where the *English Woman's Journal* viewed the ability to earn as enabling freedom to marry or not, Trollope's chapter on the rights of women views increased employment for women as antagonistic to marriage, to women's nature, and even to divine design. He concedes the "respectability, usefulness, and happiness" of unmarried women but counters that they would be happier and more useful if married.¹⁵⁴ Further, and critically, "[i]f women can do without marriage, can men do so? And if not, how are the men to get wives if the women elect to remain single?"¹⁵⁵

Women's position in the world, Trollope contends, must be considered not from the perspective of any individual case but from the perspective of their general position, as well as from the perspective of "the general happiness and welfare of the aggregate male world."¹⁵⁶ Here, nature intends that men and women marry and that men work to provide for women. Trollope attributes young women's desire to marry rather than pursue apprenticeship to "nature's teaching," indeed, to God, who has expressly "forbidden . . . that there should be any lack of such a desire on the part of women."¹⁵⁷ Akin to Justice Bradley in *Bradwell*, Trollope upholds a gender order even if some women "do not fall into the comfortable beaten paths of the world."¹⁵⁸ In his lecture *On the Higher Education of Women*, Trollope argues that rules must fit the general case: "[I]f we admit that the laws of life among us, such as they are, are good for the many, we should hardly be warranted, either by wisdom or justice, in altering them for the proposed advantage of a few."¹⁵⁹

This contrast between Trollope's *North America* and the views presented in the *English Woman's Journal* sets the stage for considering what the narrative voice in *Can You Forgive Her?* has to say about those "learned ladies asking the question" of what a woman should do with her life. The narrator maintains that "it seems that the proper answer has never yet occurred" to such ladies:

Fall in love, marry the man, have two children, and live happy ever afterwards. I maintain that answer has as much wisdom in it as any other that can be given;—or perhaps more. The advice contained in it cannot, perhaps, always be followed to the letter; but neither can the advice of the

¹⁵³ *Id.* at 260.

¹⁵⁴ *Id.* at 259.

¹⁵⁵ *Id.*

¹⁵⁶ *Id.* at 260.

¹⁵⁷ *Id.* at 259, 263.

¹⁵⁸ TROLLOPE, *Higher Education*, *supra* note 84, at 76; see also *Bradwell v. Illinois*, 83 U.S. (16 Wall.) 130, 141 (1873).

¹⁵⁹ TROLLOPE, *Higher Education*, *supra* note 84, at 76.

other kind, which is given by the flock of learned ladies who ask the question.¹⁶⁰

Immediately after that assertion, however, the narrator concedes that, just as for a man, “[a] woman’s life is important to her”; for both, it matters not so much what shall be done but “the manner in which that something shall be done,” meaning that it is done well and with “truth and honesty.”¹⁶¹ As discussed below, this exhortation to “truth and honesty” has implications for the narrator’s later criticism of Alice for “sinning” in various ways by ignoring and acting against certain truths, such as her sincere love for Mr Grey and her lack of romantic love for her cousin George.

2. Alice’s “Hankering” for Political Life, But Not for the Franchise

In “ever asking herself” the question of what do with her life, Alice seems to be resisting the narrator’s prescription: she has “filled herself with a vague idea that there was a something to be done; a something over and beyond, or perhaps altogether beside that marrying and having two children;—if she only knew what it was.”¹⁶² In *North America*, Trollope uses similar language to acknowledge that, in the United States, women have “a sort of hankering after increased influence . . . a desire in the female heart to be up and doing something, if the female heart only knew what.”¹⁶³

By contrast to the strong sense of purpose sounded in the pages of the *English Woman’s Journal* and admonitions to energetic action, Alice is filled with “undefined ambition” and is “restless.”¹⁶⁴ She senses “that she would have no scope for action in that life in Cambridgeshire which Mr Grey was preparing for her” but does not really “know what she meant by action.”¹⁶⁵

Even though her ambition is “undefined,” when Alice “contrive[d] to find any answer to [the] question as to what she should do with her life,—or rather what she would wish to do with it if she were a free agent,” the answer was “generally of a political nature.”¹⁶⁶ Here, Trollope relates Alice’s views to various possible perspectives of his day on the role of women: “She was not so far advanced as to think that women should be lawyers and doctors, or to wish that she might

¹⁶⁰ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 92.

¹⁶¹ *Id.*

¹⁶² *Id.*

¹⁶³ TROLLOPE, NORTH AMERICA, *supra* note 19, at 262-63. However, he claims that “even in the States [the desire] has hardly advanced beyond a few feminine lectures.” *Id.* at 263. Trollope also contends that American women desire “higher classes of work” but are unwilling to put in the effort necessary to achieve those positions. *Id.* at 262-63.

¹⁶⁴ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 92.

¹⁶⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶⁶ *Id.* at 93.

have the privilege of the franchise for herself; but she had undoubtedly a hankering after some second-hand political manœuvring."¹⁶⁷

The above passage makes clear that Alice does not share "the most radical feminist aspirations of the day," including suffrage and other political rights.¹⁶⁸ Instead, Alice's vision of politics is in her own terms secondhand and romantic: she envisions life as "the wife of the leader of a Radical opposition, in the time when such men were put into prison."¹⁶⁹ She would have kept up her spouse's "seditious correspondence while he lay in the Tower" and "carried the answers to him inside her stays."¹⁷⁰ This picture both "humourously erotici[z]es"¹⁷¹ Alice's political ambitions and suggests that they are "the mere stuff of romance and idle daydream."¹⁷²

Alice also associates political action with passion for a political cause: "She would have liked to have around her ardent spirits, male or female, who would have talked of 'the cause,' and have kept alive in her some flame of political fire. As it was, she had no cause."¹⁷³ Alice's family members are politically either "very mild" or "deadly Conservative."¹⁷⁴ And Mr Grey has no politics or any interest in holding political office, even though he had opinions about the ancient Roman Senate or the French Revolution. Thus, "[w]hat political enthusiasm could she indulge with such a companion down in Cambridgeshire?"¹⁷⁵

3. Breaking Up with Mr Grey and Getting into the "Boat" with Cousin George

Even though Alice wishes to tell Mr Grey that she believes that their very different "views of life" will preclude them from finding happiness, she finds that she cannot utter those things in his presence.¹⁷⁶ Her ruminations as to why suggest how Mr Grey's manner with her is shaped by a model of male authority and hierarchical marriage; although "no man [could be] more chivalrous in his carriage towards a woman," he "always spoke and acted as though there could be no question that his manner of life was to be adopted, without a word or thought of doubting, by his wife."¹⁷⁷ Alice means to counter with a model of

¹⁶⁷ *Id.*

¹⁶⁸ King, *supra* note 24, at 314.

¹⁶⁹ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 93.

¹⁷⁰ *Id.*

¹⁷¹ King, *supra* note 24, at 314 (arguing that Trollope trivializes and eroticizes Alice's political desire in order to "nullify the threat it poses").

¹⁷² MCMASTER, *supra* note 37, at 28.

¹⁷³ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 93.

¹⁷⁴ *Id.*

¹⁷⁵ *Id.*

¹⁷⁶ *Id.* at 32.

¹⁷⁷ *Id.*

mutuality, which she cannot, however, express to him: "When two came together, why should not each yield something, and each claim something?"¹⁷⁸

As Alice later reflects on why she left Mr Grey, she reasons that, in their quarrel over the respective merits of private versus public life, he had never attempted to argue with her about the merits of life in Cambridgeshire nor "condescended" to persuade her:

Had he done so, she thought that she would have brought herself to think as he thought . . . But she could not become unambitious, tranquil, fond of retirement, and philosophic, without an argument on the matter,—without being allowed even the poor grace of owning herself to be convinced. If a man takes a dog with him from the country up to town, the dog must live a town life without knowing the reason why;—must live a town life or die a town death. But a woman should not be treated like a dog. 'Had he deigned to discuss it with me!' Alice had so often said. 'But, no; he will read his books, and I am to go there to fetch him his slippers, and make his tea for him.'¹⁷⁹

Victorian domestic ideology of marital unity and harmony stressed that husband and wife must be united in their interests as they were one legally; wives should be "devoted to the pursuit of their husbands' happiness."¹⁸⁰ While Alice does not share Mr Grey's vision, she attributes his refusal to try to persuade her of it to his sense of "scornful superiority."¹⁸¹ She later credits Mr Grey's scornful superiority and failure to discuss matters with her as the cause of her misery that drove her to enter the "terrible engagement" with her cousin George.¹⁸²

By contrast to Mr Grey, Alice's former fiancé and cousin George has political ambitions, which lead her to a disastrous second engagement to him. When the reader first meets George, he recently (and unsuccessfully) ran for Parliament and has plans to run again if he can find the money to do so. As her fiancé, George "had been as Conservative as you please" but had, after quarreling with his grandfather, become a Radical, and now possessed "very advanced views . . . with which Alice felt that she could sympathize"—but not from Cambridgeshire.¹⁸³

In Alice's internal monologue about what to do with her life, Alice does not contemplate marriage to George as a way to support his career. Indeed, she believes that she could not marry him because, when they were engaged, he had been unfaithful, and though she had forgiven him, she avows that she could

¹⁷⁸ *Id.*

¹⁷⁹ *Id.* at 527.

¹⁸⁰ GRIFFIN, *supra* note 11, at 47 (explaining that Victorian moralists viewed "[t]he pursuit of one's desires" as "unwomanly and selfish, especially in married women").

¹⁸¹ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 528.

¹⁸² *Id.*

¹⁸³ *Id.* at 93.

never again love him in a passionate way. Instead, Alice envies Kate, an "aspiring Radical" who can, "as [George's] sister, attach herself on to George's political career, and obtain from it all that excitement of life which Alice desired for herself."¹⁸⁴ Alice yearns for a similar form of attachment to George that would allow her, too, to experience the vicarious excitement of his political ambitions and to aid him financially:

Alice could not love her cousin and marry him; but she felt that if she could do so without impropriety she would like to stick close to him like another sister, to spend her money in aiding his career in Parliament as Kate would do, and trust herself and her career into the boat which he was to command.¹⁸⁵

Alice contemplates a potential career supporting a male relative's political career—a career distinct from marriage. She is even willing to put her financial resources at George's command.

Alice's envy of Kate comes after she has accompanied Kate and George on a sightseeing trip to Switzerland. Even though Kate believes that George treated Alice very badly during their first engagement, Kate has made it her mission to help George win Alice again. Kate views the trip as a chance to separate Alice from Mr Grey and reunite her with George, and she urges George to make every effort to pursue Alice. In fact, Kate's entire life is one of devotion to George. When Alice asks Kate about her own preferences in a husband, Kate answers, "I've had very few thoughts about a husband for myself. The truth is, I'm married to George."¹⁸⁶ Even as Kate schemes, her primary purpose is not to get Alice's money to support George's efforts to run for Parliament; in fact, when Alice and George are engaged, Kate recoils at George's blunt demands that Kate approach Alice on his behalf for financial support before they are married.

Even though Alice's love for George was not rekindled during the trip, "nevertheless, there had been a something of romance during those days in Switzerland which she feared she would regret when she found herself settled at Nethercoats."¹⁸⁷ Also, George cleverly plays on Alice's own doubts about her engagement, insisting that someone of her passion and fire could never be satisfied with Mr Grey. In a striking phrase, he asserts,

¹⁸⁴ *Id.* at 93-94.

¹⁸⁵ *Id.* at 94. Throughout the Palliser novels, the imagery of getting into a boat recurs both when describing the necessity for submission to political authority—for example, a member of Parliament or cabinet member getting into the boat with his party on a particularly controversial issue—and when describing a woman's decision to marry a particular man and the care that she must take before getting into the proverbial boat he is to command. Here, Alice does not plan to get into a marital boat with George but desires a political alliance. See *id.*

¹⁸⁶ *Id.* at 54.

¹⁸⁷ *Id.* at 94.

[K]nowing you as I thought I did, I could not understand your loving such a man as him. It was as though one who had lived on brandy should take himself suddenly to a milk diet,—and enjoy the change! A milk diet is no doubt the best. But men who have lived on brandy can't make those changes very suddenly.¹⁸⁸

George further states that were she the woman fit to be Mr Grey's wife, he would not be in any danger from her, but he now finds she is "not the angel [he] had supposed" but instead "the same woman [he] had once loved."¹⁸⁹

Back in London, Alice initially writes to Mr Grey to postpone naming a date for their wedding, explaining that she needs time to prepare for the change that marriage will bring to her life. She shows some candor, expressing concern that if he hurries her to marry, she may find after six months that the quiet of his home in Cambridgeshire was "making [her] mad."¹⁹⁰ But she does not write of the role that her quest for a more public life (even a vicarious one) plays in her doubts. Despite her lack of clarity about what to do with her life and her envy of Kate's attachment to George's political ambitions, when Mr Grey comes to see her, she is completely silent about those political aspirations and about her concern that she can share no political enthusiasm with Mr Grey down in Cambridgeshire.¹⁹¹ Indeed, once he determines that she still loves him, he will not even allow her to speak about her reasons for the delay, declaring, "If you love me, those words should not be spoken. . . . I think I can read your mind."¹⁹²

In this scene, Alice is struck by Mr Grey's handsomeness and by the fact that he has a "mouth like a god."¹⁹³ As King observes, it is speech from that same godlike mouth that renders Alice increasingly mute as she tries to voice her "desire[] for a cause and for autonomy."¹⁹⁴ Alice is awed by Mr Grey's resolution. When she sinks to her knees before him to tell him that she had found herself unfit to be his wife and to ask his pardon, he instead "would not allow a word coming from her in such a way to disturb arrangements made for the happiness of their joint lives."¹⁹⁵ Rather than let Alice explain, Mr Grey attributes her hesitation to melancholy brought on during her journey with her cousins. He insists that she is his wife; like a loving husband whose wife suffers an illness, he offers to be her nurse and seek to cure her melancholy.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁸ *Id.* at 47.

¹⁸⁹ *Id.* at 48.

¹⁹⁰ *Id.* at 89.

¹⁹¹ *See id.* at 93.

¹⁹² *Id.* at 96.

¹⁹³ *Id.* at 95.

¹⁹⁴ King, *supra* note 24, at 314-15 (observing that Mr Grey's "phallogocentrism," manifest in his godlike mouth, either "obliges [Alice] to speak when she would rather not or silences her altogether").

¹⁹⁵ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 97.

¹⁹⁶ *Id.* at 97-98.

While Alice is silenced during this scene, she is also “almost” angered by the “imperturbed security of his manner” and the way he treated any resolve of hers “as the petulance of a child.”¹⁹⁷ When Alice writes to Kate about this meeting, she reiterates how Mr Grey rendered her silent: “I found that I had no words at command, but that he was able to talk to me as though I were a child.”¹⁹⁸ Kate betrays Alice’s confidence by sharing this letter with George, urging him to propose to Alice. But Alice believes she is resolute that, even if she breaks up with Mr Grey, she cannot ever marry George.

Nearly from the moment that she breaks off her engagement with Mr Grey, however, Alice regrets it. When George expresses his gladness that she is released from her engagement as if from a “great misfortune,” she thinks to herself that it is instead her “fall from heaven” and from a man of great excellence.¹⁹⁹ Images of governance abound as “[h]er thoughts travelled off to the sweetness of [Mr Grey’s] home at Nethercoats, to the excellence of that master who might have been hers”; she calls herself “an idiot and a fool, as well as a traitor.”²⁰⁰

In this state of self-doubt and regret, she accepts George’s renewed proposal of marriage. George proposes by way of a letter in which he simultaneously claims that he does not propose simply to gain access to her money but also makes bluntly clear that he intends to use it: “If you were my wife to-morrow I should expect to use your money, if it were needed, in struggling to obtain a seat in Parliament and a hearing there.”²⁰¹ He suggests that they are matched in ambition and that his aspirations are similar to her own. In contrast to this businesslike wooing by letter, Kate passionately pleads George’s cause in person, falling on her knees and using the “words and gestures of a Victorian suitor demanding the hand of the woman he loves: ““Oh, Alice, may I hope? Alice, my own Alice, my darling, my friend! Say that it shall be so.””²⁰² Marcus describes how this “passionate encounter” in which Kate “incarnates courtship” as a “powerful surrogate suitor” takes place in a landscape “dominated by trinities,” symbolizing the trinity that will be formed by George, Kate, and Alice.²⁰³

When Alice accepts George’s proposal, also by letter, she makes clear that, even though “Kate, who is here, talks to [her] of passionate love,” passionate love does not motivate her acceptance; she writes, “There is no such passion left

¹⁹⁷ *Id.* at 99.

¹⁹⁸ *Id.* at 103.

¹⁹⁹ *Id.* at 123.

²⁰⁰ *Id.*

²⁰¹ *Id.* at 254.

²⁰² Marcus, *supra* note 27, at 306 (quoting TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 265).

²⁰³ *Id.* at 305-06.

to me;—nor, as I think, to you either.”²⁰⁴ To have a happy marriage, they must understand that they will not have passionate love. Instead, she has a “warm affection” for him, enabling her to “take a livelier interest in [his] career than in any other of the matters which are around [her].”²⁰⁵ The value that Alice assigns to a life of politics comes through when, having pledged her money, she writes, “Dear George, let me have the honour and glory of marrying a man who has gained a seat in the Parliament of Great Britain! Of all positions which a man may attain that, to me, is the grandest.”²⁰⁶

By accepting George, Alice believes that she can realize her own political ambitions. Even so, Alice insists that she cannot marry him for a year because she has “suffered much from the past conflicts” of her life and must endure her self-accusation of having behaved badly.²⁰⁷ In the meantime, she avows to make her money available to him.

4. Second Thoughts About Being a Political Spouse

Almost as soon as Alice accepts George’s proposal, she regrets it. George’s recklessness and pennilessness of which she was already aware loom large, and she also learns from her father that “all men spoke badly of him.”²⁰⁸ Images of husbandly household governance recur as Alice now thinks longingly of “Nethercoats, with its quiet life, its gardens, its books, and the peaceful affectionate ascendancy of him who would have been her lord and master.”²⁰⁹ Now, “her feelings were very different from those which had induced her to resolve that she would not stoop to put her neck beneath that yoke.”²¹⁰ She considers, “Would it not have been well for her to have a master who by his wisdom and strength could save her from such wretched doubtings as these?”²¹¹ But then she would consider why she should not marry George if she could “do him good” by making her money of “some service” to someone dear to her.²¹²

The gallant Mr Grey, conspiring with Alice’s father, Mr Vavasor, arranges that the funds that George demands for his parliamentary campaign will actually come from Mr Grey’s accounts, not Alice’s. Mr Grey and Mr Vavasor hope that giving George the money will be enough and that Alice might avoid the actual marriage. Alice also comes to hope that George will be content with her money so that she may avoid marrying him.

²⁰⁴ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 273.

²⁰⁵ *Id.* at 274.

²⁰⁶ *Id.*

²⁰⁷ *Id.* at 274-75.

²⁰⁸ *Id.* at 289.

²⁰⁹ *Id.* at 289-90.

²¹⁰ *Id.* at 290.

²¹¹ *Id.*

²¹² *Id.*

Part of Alice's sin that requires the reader's forgiveness is agreeing to marry a man she does not love while rejecting a man she does. Indeed, she dreads any intimate contact with George; while "[t]he memory of John Grey's last kiss still lingered on her lips," her cousin's kiss could "pollute her."²¹³ In George's physical presence, she recoils. When he clenches her hand in his, she feels that she is his prisoner and trembles with fear "lest worse might betide her even than this."²¹⁴ George proposed marriage as a matter of prudence—money—but still desired the "triumph of being preferred to John Grey."²¹⁵ Despite his anger at not receiving even "one word of love" or Alice's embrace, he still takes her money.²¹⁶

One might have imagined from George's speech about milk and brandy that George was a more charismatic and sexually alluring figure while Mr Grey was dull. However, Trollope enumerates Mr Grey's attributes: he is uncommonly handsome and has a sweet smile, the face of an angel, and the mouth of a god. By comparison, George's allure has more to do with his willingness to take risks—specifically to risk her money—for political ambition. George is less handsome than Mr Grey and has a dreadful, ugly scar on his face from defending Kate against a burglar.²¹⁷ While Alice takes pride in the scar because of its origins, it becomes more prominent and frightening when he is angry or disappointed; at various points, both Alice and Kate confront that alarming "cicatrice."²¹⁸ Alice is tormented by the idea of giving herself, "body and soul," to a man she does not love.²¹⁹ She contrasts her shudder when George asked her for a kiss with how, when Mr Grey merely touched her hand, "the fibres of her body had seemed to melt within her at the touch, so that she could have fallen at his feet."²²⁰

As Alice reevaluates the life she gave up in breaking with Mr Grey, Trollope employs imagery both of husbandly mastery and of boats and shipwrecks. When Mr Grey visits Alice after she writes of her engagement to George, he tells her that he is unwavering in considering himself still bound to her.²²¹ Alice finds his reassurance "dangerously sweet": "She knew that she had lost her Eden, but it was something to her that the master of the garden had not himself driven her forth."²²² In describing her fate, Trollope uses the imagery of shipwreck, one that recurs as his heroines describe their regretted marital choices: "Herself she

²¹³ *Id.*

²¹⁴ *Id.* at 291.

²¹⁵ *Id.* at 293.

²¹⁶ *Id.* at 293-94.

²¹⁷ *Id.* at 37-38.

²¹⁸ *Id.* at 37, 47.

²¹⁹ *Id.* at 309.

²²⁰ *Id.* at 310.

²²¹ *Id.* at 307.

²²² *Id.* at 308.

had shipwrecked altogether; but though she might sink, she had not been thrust from the ship by hands which she loved.”²²³

Alice now appreciates that she was wrong to trust Kate and George, who had been “intent on wrenching her happiness from out of her grasp” and “blighting all the hopes of her life.”²²⁴ But she also blames herself for her weakness. She blames glorying in her independence; lacking a mother, she scorned the prudence of her older female relatives.²²⁵

Trollope also suggests that Alice’s body itself reveals a truth to her: she has “done very wrong” by agreeing to “become the wife of a man to whom she could not cleave with a wife’s love,” while, “mad with a vile ambition, she had given up the man for whose modest love her heart was longing.”²²⁶ Trollope frames this as “sinning against her sex”—disregarding her body’s truth and disgracing her womanhood.²²⁷ In this context, he again asks if his delicate reader can forgive her. He explains that he has done so, having learned to think that “even this offence against womanhood may, with deep repentance, be forgiven.”²²⁸

5. Alice’s Inability to Enjoy George’s Political Success and Her Break with George

Alice accepted George’s proposal because she was seeking the honor and glory of being married to a member of Parliament. As she explained to her baffled father, by marrying George, she expected to get “[a] husband whose mode of thinking is congenial to my own” and who “proposes to himself a career in life with which [she] can sympathize” and “perhaps help,” including “with [her] money.”²²⁹ Yet when George, with the assistance of her money (in reality,

²²³ *Id.* In the novel *The Belton Estate*, Trollope as narrator uses shipwreck imagery to warn that while the “theory of man and wife,” in “accordance with which the wife is to bend herself in loving submission before her husband, is very beautiful,” it “sometimes fails of confirmation” when (as was the case of the novel’s heroine, Clara Amedroz, and her first fiancé, Captain Aylmer) “the stronger [is] submitting itself to the weaker, the greater to the less.” 1 ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *THE BELTON ESTATE* 266-67 (2d ed. 1866). In such cases, “there comes a terrible shipwreck, when the woman before marriage has filled herself full with ideas of submission, and then finds that her golden-headed god has got an iron body and feet of clay.” *Id.* at 267. The narrator seemingly approves the gap between theory of wifely submission and practice when he favorably compares “ordinary marriages,” in which “the vessel rights itself, and the stronger and the greater takes the lead, *whether clothed in petticoats, or in coat, waistcoat, and trousers.*” *Id.* (emphasis added); see also NARDIN, *supra* note 17, at 162-69 (discussing this passage to show that *The Belton Estate* employs a feminist narrator).

²²⁴ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 309.

²²⁵ *Id.*

²²⁶ *Id.* at 310.

²²⁷ *Id.*

²²⁸ *Id.*

²²⁹ *Id.* at 287.

Mr Grey's money), wins a seat in Parliament for the Chelsea Districts, Alice finds that, unlike the jubilant Kate, she cannot rejoice even though she tries to do so:

She had sacrificed nearly everything to her desire for his success in public life, and now that he had achieved the first great step towards that success, it would have been madness on her part to decline her share in the ovation. If she could not rejoice in that, what source of joy would then be left for her? She had promised to be his wife . . . because she had desired to identify her interests with his,—because she wished to share his risks, to assist his struggles, and to aid him in his public career. She had done all this, and he had been successful. She strove, therefore, to be triumphant on his behalf, but she knew that she was striving ineffectually.²³⁰

By this time, indeed, Alice has nearly "made up her mind that she would never become her cousin's wife," although she would continue to give him money.²³¹ When George visits her, though, she attempts to convey her joy. Because he won the seat only for a few months, he will soon need to run again and will require even more money, and she assures him of her continuing support. Beyond her money, however, George seeks more—"some spark of affection, true or pretended."²³² Overlooking the very contractual and businesslike nature of his proposal and of her acceptance, he now complains of her coldness and her denying him "all customary signs of [her] affection."²³³ She says nothing when he demands "to learn that the woman who is to be [his] wife, in truth, loves [him]" and, in anger, flings a ring he bought her as a "love gift" to the ground.²³⁴ The narrator interjects his opinion that "in the energy of his speaking, a touch of true passion had come upon [George]," leading him to forget "his rascaldom, and his need of her money."²³⁵ Although Alice stamps her feet with anger at points, she is silent as to her actual thoughts about the mistake she has made in accepting his proposal. As with Mr Grey, Alice cannot tell George what she thinks.

Even though George longs to "throw [Alice's] promise in her teeth" because of how she treated him, he is guileful enough to know that he needs her money.²³⁶ From this point on, George becomes increasingly wild and violent—a "[f]ury-possessed melodramatic villain," exposing himself even more clearly

²³⁰ *Id.* at 384.

²³¹ *Id.* at 386.

²³² *Id.* at 388.

²³³ *Id.* at 391-92.

²³⁴ *Id.* at 392.

²³⁵ *Id.* at 391.

²³⁶ *Id.* at 429.

as the unworthy suitor.²³⁷ When he inadvertently learns that it is Mr Grey's money and not Alice's that has been financing his parliamentary efforts, he physically assaults Mr Grey, who manages to throw George down the stairs. Believing that Alice involved in the scheme, George confronts her aggressively. As Alice describes the scene in a letter to Kate, George asserted that he had a right to look on Alice as his wife and demanded that she return to Mr Grey any gifts he gave her. When he said she had no right to ruin him by keeping back money that she had promised, she assured him that he "might take what he wanted" of her money.²³⁸ Even so, she found herself incapable of writing to her lawyer as George demanded and asking him for an additional £5000 to give to George and pay back Mr Grey. George grabbed her arms, put his mouth close to her ear, and said terrible words to her. Alice declares to Kate that "everything must be over" with George, who has "cruelly ill-used [her] and insulted [her]" and that Kate must make sure that George understands that it is over; Alice will, however, still give him money.²³⁹

As George begins to curse everyone and contemplates murdering them, he is thwarted in his hope that, although long estranged from his grandfather for his disobedience, he will inherit property when his grandfather dies. Instead, George learns at the reading of his grandfather's will that his grandfather decided to pass over George and leave his property in trust in the safer hands of Alice's father, John Vavasor. Should George marry and have a son, the son would have the property at age twenty-five; should he not, the property would go to Kate's eldest son. Kate herself is given five hundred pounds annually, sufficient to make her comfortable and free to "marry almost whom she pleases"—or *not* to marry.²⁴⁰

6. Kate's Violent Disillusionment with George

Things rapidly go from bad to worse with George. With "the ghastly rage of his scarred face," he promises to challenge the will.²⁴¹ He unsuccessfully attempts to enlist Kate, who nursed their grandfather in his final illness, to say that he was not in his right mind when he made the will. George is also enraged to learn that Kate honestly answered her grandfather that if he left his property to her, she would give it to George. George accuses her of ruining him, even as she pledges to give him all her money.

On a long walk, as Kate resists George's efforts to make her say that their grandfather lacked proper judgment when he made the will, she feels growing

²³⁷ King, *supra* note 24, at 315; *see also* Marcus, *supra* note 27, at 314-15 (emphasizing Trollope's characterization of George as a "wild beast" and increasingly "savage and primitive" in using physical force against Kate and Alice).

²³⁸ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 454.

²³⁹ *Id.* at 453-55.

²⁴⁰ *Id.* at 465-68; *see also infra* Section III.C.9 (discussing how this financial independence frees Kate from having to marry).

²⁴¹ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 466.

repugnance and resistance against him. She does not yield, despite his menacing words ("You had better take care, Kate"; "if I cannot have justice among you, I will have revenge") and conduct ("he put his hand upon her breast up near to her throat").²⁴² Despite his threats, her courage is as high as his. He shakes her, but she stands firm, even as his threats increase—"Say that you will do as I desire you, or I will be the death of you."²⁴³ George asks why he should not murder her and Alice because they have both betrayed him, and Kate exclaims, "Poor Alice!"²⁴⁴ He responds by calling them both "cursed, whining, false, intriguing hypocrites."²⁴⁵ He pushes her away "with great violence, so that she fell heavily upon the stony ground."²⁴⁶ He leaves without a backward glance, and she painfully makes her way home with what turns out to be a broken arm.

Kate now realizes that George is "utterly and irretrievably ruined . . . beyond the pale of men."²⁴⁷ She reflects: "And this was the brother in whom she had believed; for whom she had not only been willing to sacrifice herself, but for whose purposes she had striven to sacrifice her cousin!"²⁴⁸ As Kate makes her way home, she worries that he might "come out upon her from the trees and really kill her."²⁴⁹ Once home, Kate reflects that "everything in life was over for her" because she had taught herself to "consider it to be her duty to sacrifice everything to his welfare."²⁵⁰ While "[s]he had long feared her brother's nature," she also had some hope that success would "soften him"; now, she sees a meanness that leads her to wish never to see him again.²⁵¹ Even so, she wishes that she could give her interest in the Vavasor estate to him.²⁵²

Later, when Alice visits Kate, Kate reflects that they have both "suffered" for George, adding,

'I have been his creature, to do his bidding, just as he might tell me. He made me do things that I knew to be wrong,—things that were foreign to my own nature; and yet I almost worshipped him. Even now, if he were to come back, I believe that I should forgive him everything.'²⁵³

²⁴² *Id.* at 472-73.

²⁴³ *Id.* at 474.

²⁴⁴ *Id.*

²⁴⁵ *Id.*

²⁴⁶ *Id.*

²⁴⁷ *Id.* at 474-75.

²⁴⁸ *Id.* at 475.

²⁴⁹ *Id.*

²⁵⁰ *Id.* at 480.

²⁵¹ *Id.*

²⁵² *Id.* at 481.

²⁵³ *Id.* at 536.

7. Exit George, After a Surprise Visitor

When the reader hears the encounter from the perspective of George (or “the wild beast,” as John Vavasor describes him), they learn that he did consider murdering Kate and Alice but concluded that it would get him nothing but a hanging.²⁵⁴ Instead, he resolves to go back to London and “grasp at whatever money he could get from Alice.”²⁵⁵ George’s agent manages to get Alice’s signature on several notes, but even so, George ends up losing the election and does not return to Parliament.

As he debates taking his life or leaving England, George is visited by Jane, a woman who, as Trollope explains more than seventy chapters into the novel, “for more than three years of [George’s] life . . . had been his closest companion, his nearest friend, the being with whom he was most familiar”; he had “loved her according to his fashion of loving, and certainly she had loved him.”²⁵⁶ Impoverished and penniless, she asks where she should go for money; when they broke up, George had helped to set her up in a shop that proved financially unsuccessful. Even though there was “no one for whom he cared more,” he resists her pleas to let her go with him and let her “work for [him] like a slave.”²⁵⁷ When Jane asks if he doesn’t fear God, since they have both been “very wicked,” George answers with a startling literary allusion to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: he has been wicked and is “a kind of second Topsey.”²⁵⁸ Perhaps Trollope introduces Jane to persuade readers further of George’s wickedness or perhaps to add to the novel’s array of female characters a discarded mistress/fallen woman “outside the pale of Victorian society.”²⁵⁹ George disappears from London, taking false papers and money and leaving no trace. His parting act, as Alice’s “affianced husband,” is to visit Mr Grey with a pistol and demand that Mr Grey fight him

²⁵⁴ *Id.* at 482.

²⁵⁵ *Id.*

²⁵⁶ *Id.* at 599-600.

²⁵⁷ *Id.* at 600-01.

²⁵⁸ *Id.* at 601; see also *id.* at 694 n.193 (explaining that Topsy is “the little slave girl in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* . . . who cheerfully confessed to being wicked”). On *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s enormous, transatlantic popularity, see Flint, *The Victorian Novel*, *supra* note 84, at 28 (“[I]ncluding colonial sales, about 1,500,000 copies were sold to the British market.”).

²⁵⁹ MORSE, *supra* note 16, at 36-38 (“George exploits [Jane] as he has all the women in his life, and the ideal of feminine self-sacrifice that has served as a tool of oppression in all his relationships with women operates even now . . .”). Morse observes: “As [Jane] creeps away to further degradation, the narrator’s complacent advice to ‘fall in love, marry the man, have two children, and live happily ever after’ resounds in the reader’s memory.” *Id.* at 38 (quoting TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 92).

or give him a written promise never to go near Alice again.²⁶⁰ When Mr Grey refuses, George insults him and shoots at him, narrowly missing.²⁶¹

8. Alice Returns to Eden and Achieves (After All) Her Political Ambitions

Alice eventually returns to Eden and to Mr Grey, and a surprising plot twist occurs that gives her a second chance at realizing her secondhand political ambitions. Alice takes another European journey, this time with the Pallisers, who embark on the trip to address their marital woes. On the eve of departure, Mr Grey comes to dinner at her father's invitation. His skeptical remarks about serving in Parliament remind her of how their fundamental disagreement over the good of political life had separated them before: "There must be men for public life, of course; but, upon my word, I think we ought to be very much obliged to them."²⁶² Hand still on his arm as he takes her into dinner, she quietly observes that his pity is "hardly needed. I should think that no persons can be happier than those whom you call our public men."²⁶³ Alice still values the world of politics despite her trouble with George. She is also astonished that Mr Grey can lightly refer to "our old quarrel" when she views the quarrel as what had "separat[ed] for life two persons who had loved each other dearly."²⁶⁴

The plot twist is Mr Grey's conversion to a more positive view about the value of public life. The catalyst is conversations with Plantagenet Palliser after Mr Grey joins the Pallisers and Alice for part of their journey. Plantagenet, a politician who lives to work for others in public life, urges Mr Grey to run for Parliament. Mr Grey initially resists, using the example of the "miserable wretch" George as a cautionary tale that only wealthy men like Plantagenet should hold public office.²⁶⁵ But Plantagenet persists in pressing Mr Grey to "make an attempt at Parliament," even insisting that he could help Mr Grey find a seat.²⁶⁶ Mr Grey reflects that "Alice had also wanted him to go into public life, but he had put aside her request as though the thing were quite out of the question."²⁶⁷ He realized that this "immobility on his part" was part of what had "driven her away from him."²⁶⁸ While Mr Grey insists that "if a man can so train himself that he may live honestly and die fearlessly, he has done about as much as is necessary," Plantagenet counters, "I don't see why a man should not live

²⁶⁰ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 605.

²⁶¹ *Id.* at 606-07.

²⁶² *Id.* at 527.

²⁶³ *Id.* at 528.

²⁶⁴ *Id.*

²⁶⁵ *Id.* at 610.

²⁶⁶ *Id.* at 618.

²⁶⁷ *Id.*

²⁶⁸ *Id.*

honestly and be a Member of Parliament as well.”²⁶⁹ Trollope’s narrative interjection at this point sides with Plantagenet: “The recluse of Nethercoats had thought much more about all this than the rising star of the House of Commons; but the philosophy of the rising star was the better philosophy of the two, though he was by far the less brilliant man.”²⁷⁰ The narrator twice describes Mr Grey as “shaken” by these conversations with Plantagenet.²⁷¹ He begins to wonder whether he should accept Plantagenet’s offer of aid.²⁷²

Mr Grey’s immediate objective, however, is renewing his engagement to Alice,²⁷³ and in this he succeeds. The scene is disturbing for its language of acquiescence, penitence, and possession. In Lucerne, Mr Grey contrasts the beauty around them with the “ugly country” where he lives and asks Alice, “Will you come and be my one beautiful thing, my treasure, my joy, my comfort, my counsellor?”²⁷⁴ When she insists that she cannot forgive herself and that he ought not to forgive her either, he counters that he does. He uses language of revolt to describe her prior actions and echoes her own self-criticism for her “vile ambition,” stating, “I think you have been foolish, misguided,—led away by a vain ambition. . . . You had driven yourself to revolt against me, and upon that your heart misgave you”²⁷⁵ Mr Grey observes that her “self-forgiveness will be slow” but that he has forgiven her everything.²⁷⁶ When she calls herself “a jilt,” he counters that she has been “[t]he noblest jilt that ever yet halted between two minds,”²⁷⁷ with “no touch of selfishness in [her] fickleness.”²⁷⁸ He insists that, if she loves him, then he has “a right to demand [her] hand”; not only does his happiness require it, but if she refuses him despite loving him, she will “fail hereafter to reconcile it to [her] conscience before God.”²⁷⁹

Trollope takes the reader into Alice’s mental state, observing that she was like a prisoner resisting a pardon or perhaps that “there was still left within her bosom some remnant of that feeling of rebellion which his masterful spirit had ever produced in her.”²⁸⁰ But at last her rebellion ceases and Trollope continues the prisoner imagery, eroticizing her subservience: “She knew now that she must

²⁶⁹ *Id.* at 618-19.

²⁷⁰ *Id.* at 619.

²⁷¹ *Id.*

²⁷² *Id.*

²⁷³ *Id.*

²⁷⁴ *Id.* at 622.

²⁷⁵ *Id.* at 623.

²⁷⁶ *Id.*

²⁷⁷ *Can You Forgive Her?* borrowed elements from Trollope’s earlier play, *The Noble Jilt*. See TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 114 (stating that the story “was formed chiefly” on *The Noble Jilt*); Birch, *supra* note 45, at xiii-xiv (same).

²⁷⁸ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 624.

²⁷⁹ *Id.*

²⁸⁰ *Id.* at 625.

yield to him,—that his power over her was omnipotent. She was pressed by him as in some countries the prisoner is pressed by the judge,—so pressed that she acknowledged to herself silently that any further antagonism to him was impossible.”²⁸¹ Mr Grey tells Alice, “[T]he battle is over now, and I have won it,” and she whispers back, “You win everything,—always,” while she “still shr[inks] from his embrace.”²⁸²

If the novel ended there, the reader might fear that Alice recoils from Mr Grey out of physical repulsion as she did with George. In the next chapter, however, the narrator describes Alice as “very happy,” even though she was still disposed to regard “her happiness as an enforced necessity.”²⁸³ Further, Alice reaches for Mr Grey’s hand and “press[es] it closely,” saying that it was on this spot (in Basle while with Kate and George) that she “first rebelled” against him: “[N]ow you have brought me here that I should confess and submit on the same spot. I do confess. How am I to thank you for forgiving me?”²⁸⁴

Alice ends up with even more: Mr Grey’s conversion to public life. As they journey back to England, Plantagenet continues to urge Mr Grey to take up public life and shakes him from his “quiescent philosophy.”²⁸⁵ Mr Grey startles Alice with a word or two about contemporary (rather than ancient) politics. When he tells her, “Mr Palliser wants me to go into Parliament” and asks her opinion about it, she reasons internally that “it would not become her to show much outward joy” about this; she answers, “Oh John, what right can I have to say anything?”²⁸⁶ But he insists that no one else, apart from himself, “can have so much right.”²⁸⁷ When he expresses concern about the “mode of life” of being in Parliament, this loosens Alice’s tongue and she speaks “out her thoughts with more vehemence than discretion.”²⁸⁸ He is less imperious than in their prior discussions, and, the narrator adds, “he was not so perverse as to be driven from his new views by the fact that Alice approved them.”²⁸⁹

Mr Grey runs for Parliament in Silverbridge, a district under the influence of the Pallisers, and wins. When he receives Alice’s congratulations, she exclaims, “I am so happy. There’s no position in the world so glorious.” He responds, “It’s a pity you are not Mr Palliser’s wife. That’s just what he has been saying.”²⁹⁰ If the reader recalls that Alice once urged her cousin George to “let [her] have the

²⁸¹ *Id.*; see also MARKWICK, *supra* note 38, at 132 (arguing that, in this scene, Alice and Mr Grey “play out the fantasy of slave and master”).

²⁸² TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 625.

²⁸³ *Id.* at 629.

²⁸⁴ *Id.*

²⁸⁵ *Id.* at 644.

²⁸⁶ *Id.*

²⁸⁷ *Id.* at 645.

²⁸⁸ *Id.*

²⁸⁹ *Id.*

²⁹⁰ *Id.* at 674.

honour and glory of marrying a man who has gained a seat in the Parliament of Great Britain!," they can infer that she also regards her own position as glorious.²⁹¹ Further, instead of being in Mr Grey's quiet home in Cambridgeshire year round, they will be living in London several months a year.²⁹²

Happily for Alice by the novel's end, Mr Grey, having made up his mind to take up "his parliamentary ambition," resolved to "do it thoroughly" and "was becoming almost as full of politics . . . as Mr Palliser himself."²⁹³ He finds in Alice a "very ready listener" and "at any rate could not complain that his wife would not interest herself in his pursuits."²⁹⁴ When Alice tells Mr Grey of her happiness at his election, stating that it is "much more than [she has] deserved" and that she hopes that nothing she said may have driven him to run for Parliament, he responds, "I'd do more than that, dear, to make you happy."²⁹⁵ He puts his arm around her and kisses her; since she does not shrink, the reader may infer that she is indeed happy. Trollope ends the novel by observing that his readers "may agree with Alice" and that she "received more than she had deserved," as "[a]ll her friends, except her husband, thought so"; he adds that "they have all forgiven her," and he hopes that his readers will as well.²⁹⁶

For what did Alice need forgiveness? And what did she get? She quested for a cause other than marriage to a retiring but condescending master who eschewed politics; then, she agreed to marry a man she did not love to satisfy her political ambitions. After the false start of getting into George's boat in an effort to align herself with a political cause and the subsequent shipwreck of her broken engagement and renewed engagement to George, Alice finds a mode of life that provides a satisfactory answer to her question of what to do with her life. Equally importantly, though, the initially immobile Mr Grey has changed and become a spouse more compatible with her ambitions. Although the narrator early on described Mr Grey as loving Alice "with the perfect love of equality,"²⁹⁷ Alice instead experienced his love as coming with an air of superiority and inflexibility about his life in Cambridgeshire. She wished for, but could not voice, more mutuality and give-and-take. It is only upon their renewed engagement and after Mr Grey shakes his earlier immobility and quiescent philosophy about politics that they can have some semblance of equality in their marriage as Alice can readily and happily "interest herself in his [political] pursuits."²⁹⁸

²⁹¹ *Id.* at 274.

²⁹² *Id.* at 645.

²⁹³ *Id.* at 671.

²⁹⁴ *Id.*

²⁹⁵ *Id.* at 674-75.

²⁹⁶ *Id.* at 675.

²⁹⁷ *Id.* at 87.

²⁹⁸ *Id.* at 671.

9. Glimpses of Female Ardent Spirits and Activity in *Can You Forgive Her?*

Alice Vavasor could have readily found many female "ardent spirits" who were passionate about many causes had she ventured over to that "flock of learned ladies" that had grown up around her.²⁹⁹ To allow Alice to resolve her quest for meaningful action in that way, however, would have disrupted Trollope's fusion of the quest and marriage plots. Even so, Trollope includes two unmarried women, both cousins of Plantagenet Palliser, who seem animated by causes and express a strong intention *not* to marry. The reader learns about these cousins, Iphigenia (Iphy) and Euphemia (Phemy) mostly through their cousin Jeffrey Palliser's descriptions of them. When Jeffrey tells Alice over dinner that he despises politics because he has not the chance of a seat in Parliament, she observes, "Women are not allowed to be politicians in this country."³⁰⁰ He responds, "Thank God, they can't do much in that way;—not directly, I mean. Only think where we should be if we had a feminine House of Commons, with feminine debates, carried on, of course, with feminine courtesy. My cousins Iphy and Phemy there would of course be members."³⁰¹ Jeffrey's retort may seem comical, but his concerns about a distinctly "feminine House" reflects concerns that if women could become members of Parliament, it would disrupt masculine "codes of deportment, dress, posture and manners."³⁰² Indeed, "the idea that giving women the vote would necessarily entail allowing women to become [members of Parliament] was one of the recurring themes of anti-suffragist rhetoric," so much so that even some male supporters of woman suffrage feared that this was a logical conclusion.³⁰³

When Alice asks if the cousins are politicians, Jeffrey answers, "Not especially," adding that "they are too clever to give themselves up to anything in which they can do nothing."³⁰⁴ Instead, he provides a somewhat mocking account of their activities: "Being women they live a depressed life, devoting themselves to literature, fine arts, social economy, and the abstract sciences. They write wonderful letters; but I believe their correspondence lists are quite full, so that you have no chance at present of getting on either of them."³⁰⁵ "Social economy" may bring to mind the close alliance between mid-Victorian feminists and the NAPSS. The cousins might have read, say, the *English*

²⁹⁹ See *id.* at 92, 93.

³⁰⁰ *Id.* at 192.

³⁰¹ *Id.*

³⁰² GRIFFIN, *supra* note 11, at 196.

³⁰³ *Id.* at 197.

³⁰⁴ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 192.

³⁰⁵ *Id.*

Woman's Journal, which published articles in 1860 explaining John Stuart Mill's principles of political and social economy.³⁰⁶

Their many letters, Jeffrey explains, are not about topics like family affairs but are instead about such matters as "whether women ought to be clerks in public offices,"³⁰⁷ Trollope's nod to the keen debate at the time over increasing women's employment opportunities to address the problem of so-called surplus women. Jeffrey also mentions that "Iphy has certain American correspondents that take up much of her time";³⁰⁸ those correspondents might have included some American women championing women's rights. Professor Juliet McMaster argues that Trollope draws these cousins "unsympathetically" as "stuffy and ineffectual spinsters."³⁰⁹ Even so, these cousins explicitly reject Trollope's prescription of a husband and two children as the "correct" answer to the question of what a woman should do with her life. Instead, they expressly decline to be bridesmaids for Alice's wedding. While they plead their age as a reason, they also cite to their intention not to marry: "'No woman should stand up as a bridesmaid,' said the strong-minded Iphy, 'who doesn't mean to get married if she can.'"³¹⁰

Alice's cousin Kate does serve as a bridesmaid even though she feels awkward after her role in separating Alice and Mr Grey. There is no evidence that she intends to marry after her disastrous "marriage" to her brother George. Indeed, as Professor Sharon Marcus observes, the novel's conclusion "grants Kate the ultimate reward of Victorian fiction, a small independent fortune that enables her to avoid marriage permanently and in comfort."³¹¹ At one point in *Can You Forgive Her?*, after Alice has broken up with George for the second time, she comments to Lady Glencora: "I am inclined to think that I can live alone, or perhaps with my cousin Kate, more happily than I could with any husband."³¹² But if Alice did so, it would subvert Trollope's resolution of the marriage plot and even hint at a form of "female marriage" with which Trollope was familiar. Nonetheless, the fact that Alice and Kate retain their intimate bond, reformed without the distorting influence and destructive force of George, shows

³⁰⁶ See generally, e.g., *The Opinions of John Stuart Mill*, 6 ENG. WOMAN'S J. 1 (1860); *The Opinions of John Stuart Mill: Part II.—Co-Operation*, 6 ENG. WOMAN'S J. 193 (1860).

³⁰⁷ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 193.

³⁰⁸ *Id.*

³⁰⁹ MCMMASTER, *supra* note 37, at 27-28 (suggesting that Iphy and Phemy "are of the stuff that suffragettes are made of").

³¹⁰ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 662.

³¹¹ Marcus, *supra* note 27, at 311 (arguing that because Kate receives this reward, it would be "reductive" to read Kate "suffering for her misdeeds" when George breaks her arm as punishment for being "a gender outlaw").

³¹² TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 578.

a bond between women that is “impervious to the vagaries that destabilize relationships between men and women.”³¹³

D. *Lady Glencora’s Coerced Marital Choice: Plantagenet Palliser Versus Burgo Fitzgerald*

Critics in Trollope’s time were harsh on Alice Vavasor as a character, calling her “uninteresting and unintelligible” and even one of the “most stupid” of Trollope’s heroines.³¹⁴ Subsequent readers and critics have found her irritating, unattractive, and even “morbidly gloomy.”³¹⁵ Trollope praised himself for the strength of his characterization of Alice but also recognized that her character was “not attractive.”³¹⁶ “Alice fades more or less away with the last pages of *Can You Forgive Her?*”³¹⁷ and appears infrequently in the other Palliser novels. By comparison, critics and readers found Lady Glencora, a cousin of Alice’s, intriguing and engaging. In *Can You Forgive Her?* and the rest of the series, Trollope “portrays the character and career of Lady Glencora Palliser (née Lady Glencora McCluskie, and later Duchess of Omnium) more fully than those of any other woman in all of his novels.”³¹⁸ Trollope doubted that he could succeed in making readers understand “how frequently” he had used both Lady Glencora and her husband Plantagenet to express his own “political or social convictions”; moreover, he predicted that any lingering fame he might enjoy would be due to those two characters (as well as Reverend Crawley).³¹⁹ While later volumes chart Lady Glencora’s growing interest in politics and her rise as a prominent social arbiter and aristocratic political hostess, she is markedly disinterested in politics in *Can You Forgive Her?*. Instead, her central dilemma concerns how to address her marital unhappiness and whether to yield to the temptation to leave her husband, Plantagenet, for the man she loves, Burgo Fitzgerald, or to find a way to make her marriage work.

1. Saving the Great Heiress and Her Property from a Beautiful “Scamp”

Can You Forgive Her? describes Lady Glencora as “a great heiress in the land, on whom the properties of half-a-dozen ancient families had

³¹³ Marcus, *supra* note 27, at 309.

³¹⁴ MCMMASTER, *supra* note 37, at 20 (first quoting HUGH WALPOLE, ANTHONY TROLLOPE 100 (1929); and then quoting *Unsigned Notice*, SPECTATOR, Sept. 2, 1865, at xxxviii).

³¹⁵ *Id.* at 20-21.

³¹⁶ TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 114.

³¹⁷ HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 32.

³¹⁸ MORSE, *supra* note 16, at 7.

³¹⁹ TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 114, 223. Trollope most fully develops the character of Reverend Josiah Crawley in the final Barchester Tower novel, *The Last Chronicle of Barset*. See generally ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *THE LAST CHRONICLE OF BARSET* (Helen Small ed., Oxford World’s Classics 2015) (1867).

concentrated.”³²⁰ Burgo Fitzgerald, “born in the purple of the English aristocracy” but now thirty and having long spent his fortune, almost succeeded in obtaining her hand and her wealth until her family intervened.³²¹ By contrast to Alice’s independence and disregard for relatives’ warnings about turning aside Mr Grey for George, Lady Glencora acquiesced at the effort to part her from Burgo:

[S]undry mighty magnates . . . had sagaciously put their heads together, and the result had been that the Lady Glencora had heard reason. She had listened,—with many haughty tossings indeed of her proud little head, with many throbings of her passionate young heart; but in the end she . . . heard reason. She saw Burgo, for the last time, and told him that she was the promised bride of Plantagenet Palliser, nephew and heir of the Duke of Omnium.³²²

Thus, Lady Glencora “became Lady Glencora Palliser with all the propriety in the world, instead of becoming wife to poor Burgo, with all imaginable impropriety.”³²³ When Glencora was still resisting the “sagacious heads,” she sought Alice’s help in arranging a meeting with Burgo so they could elope, but Alice refused, based on “her woman’s feeling of what was right and wrong in such a matter.”³²⁴

Plantagenet Palliser and Lady Glencora’s marriage was an arranged marriage, not a love match. In a novel in the earlier *Barchester Towers* series, Trollope introduced Plantagenet, heir to his uncle, the Duke of Omnium, as having become enamored of a great, but married, beauty. Steered by the Duke’s agent away from the pursuit and discouraged by the lady herself, Plantagenet agrees to wed Lady Glencora. Although he has some wealth and the Duke has more, she brings even greater wealth to the marriage.

Burgo has unearthly beauty: “No more handsome man . . . lived in his days.”³²⁵ But he also lives “without conscience, without purpose” beyond eating, drinking, and riding to hounds.³²⁶ In *An Autobiography*, Trollope opines that Burgo was “beautiful, well-born, and utterly worthless” and “[t]o save a girl from wasting herself, and an heiress from wasting her property on such a scamp, was certainly the duty of the girl’s friends.”³²⁷ But he also says that Lady

³²⁰ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 154.

³²¹ *Id.* at 153.

³²² *Id.* at 154.

³²³ *Id.* at 156.

³²⁴ *Id.* at 155. As commentators observe, this seems hypocritical on Alice’s part, given her own “sins” with respect to giving and breaking her word. *See, e.g.,* MCMASTER, *supra* note 37, at 31 (“The disjunction between her advice and her conduct is a cause for some irony at her expense.”).

³²⁵ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 154.

³²⁶ *Id.*

³²⁷ TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 115.

Glencora "had received a great wrong": "[I]t must ever be wrong to force a girl into a marriage with a man she does not love,—and certainly the more so when there is another whom she does love."³²⁸ After all, if a woman's "best right" is to a husband—as Trollope elsewhere argued—that right must include choosing for herself. Trollope states that he attempted to "teach this lesson" about the wrong done to Lady Glencora by subjecting "the young wife to the terrible danger of overtures from the man to whom her heart had been given" and having her overcome that trouble.³²⁹ How does she do so?

2. Reflections on Husbandly "Cruelty"

Lady Glencora is deeply unhappy in her marriage, and she and Plantagenet Palliser seem ill matched. He believes that the House of Commons and the Constitution are everything and devotes himself to designing a decimal system of coinage. She has no interest in such matters and is astonished that, late at night, he seeks to tutor her in the British Constitution, thinking of what her life might have been like instead with Burgo.

In a startling passage, Lady Glencora reflects on her marriage and on "the cruelty of husbands."³³⁰ She considers whether being beaten by Burgo would not be preferable to the "deadness" of her current life:

She had been told over and over again . . . that Burgo would ill-use her if he became her husband. The Marquis of Auld Reekie had gone so far as to suggest that Burgo might probably beat her. But what hard treatment, even what beating, could be so unendurable as this total want of sympathy, as this deadness in life, which her present lot entailed upon her?"³³¹

Even as Lady Glencora ridicules in her "very soul" the idea that Burgo would beat her, she again compares forms of cruelty: "Would it not even be better to be beaten by him than to have politics explained to her at one o'clock at night by such a husband as Plantagenet Palliser? The British Constitution, indeed!"³³² If Burgo were her husband, she imagines, he would *not* be explaining the British Constitution "as they sat together under the pale moonlight" in Italy.³³³

Trollope inserts his authorial voice here to comment on Lady Glencora's imaginings as "infantine" and to call her a "[p]oor, wretched, overburthened child, to whom the commonest lessons of life had not yet been taught."³³⁴ Akin

³²⁸ *Id.*

³²⁹ *Id.*

³³⁰ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 358.

³³¹ *Id.*

³³² *Id.*

³³³ *Id.* at 358-59.

³³⁴ *Id.* at 359.

to asking if the reader can forgive Alice, Trollope asks, "Who would not pity her? Who could say that the fault was hers?"³³⁵

3. Resenting Coerced Choice but Resisting Temptation

Even though Lady Glencora acquiesced in her marriage, she resents that marital choice was taken from her. The "images of her role in the marriage contract stress her impotence and her victimization," and she "realizes that she has been used by her family and society as a chattel."³³⁶ For example, she tells Alice,

'We talk with such horror of the French people giving their daughters in marriage, just as they might sell a house or a field, but we do exactly the same thing ourselves. When they all come upon you in earnest how are you to stand against them? How can any girl do it?'³³⁷

She also loathes herself for considering the possibility of running off with Burgo, even as she continues to voice her love for him in internal monologues and to Alice. Urged on by a doting aunt, Lady Monk, Burgo makes a few bumbling attempts to "rescue" Lady Glencora from her unhappy marriage.³³⁸ Although not motivated solely by her fortune, he cannot forget that he nearly succeeded in accessing it. Lady Glencora, however tempted, does not go with Burgo. One reason is a sense of duty; another is realism about what her life would be like as a married woman who left her husband to live with her lover.

For much of the book, Plantagenet seems oblivious to Glencora's internal struggles and to her continued longing for Burgo. Plantagenet views her as young, immature, childlike, and in need of guidance. She bristles at his efforts to provide her with duennas—old women as companions and officious political aides who she believes are monitoring her behavior. Plantagenet assumes that she has put the past behind her as he insisted she must.

The crisis that spurs Plantagenet's awakening occurs when he insists that Lady Glencora attend a party hosted by Lady Monk, who Halperin describes as a "resourceful social politician" and "the political hostess incarnate."³³⁹ Here Trollope provides a glimpse of the close connection between political and social life, devoting an entire chapter to explaining that "[t]his giving of parties was her business, and she had learned it thoroughly."³⁴⁰ Trollope describes the great crowds and how Lady Monk "ensconsed herself" in a room at the head of the stairs; "a mighty Cabinet Minister, or a duchess in great repute . . . could not fail

³³⁵ *Id.*

³³⁶ MORSE, *supra* note 16, at 13.

³³⁷ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 187.

³³⁸ *See id.* at 242-51, 410-28.

³³⁹ HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 60.

³⁴⁰ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 404.

of entering her precincts and being seen there for a few moments."³⁴¹ Lady Glencora attempts to beg off, fearing that she will meet Burgo, but Plantagenet insists that she go, only to leave the party soon after depositing her.

As Burgo and Lady Glencora meet, Trollope stresses Burgo's beauty and that he managed to look "as though it were possible that he might die of love."³⁴² Lady Glencora is shaken. Even though Burgo hesitates when he considers what her life would be like if she went with him, he makes one last effort. They dance energetically as Lady Glencora gives herself up to her passionate fondness for dancing as in the old days. But while Burgo tries to evoke the old days, that reference rouses Lady Glencora from her dream and she tells him, "You must not talk of that," explaining that it is impossible.³⁴³ Meanwhile, their dancing leads one of Plantagenet's political colleagues to summon him to the party. When Plantagenet comes and leaves her alone with Burgo to retrieve her scarf from Lady Monk's receiving room, she is touched by his chivalry in leaving them alone together.³⁴⁴

4. Plantagenet's Sacrifice and Reward

At breakfast the next morning, Lady Glencora reveals the full extent of her misery to Plantagenet. Unable (yet) to conceive a child and convinced that he does not love her, she wishes that she would die and that he could take another wife. Shocked, he insists that he does love her and concludes that he must take her away from England on a long trip.³⁴⁵

The timing of this decision comes just moments before he is finally offered the very thing for which he has worked so long: a position in the Cabinet as the Chancellor of the Exchequer.³⁴⁶ When Plantagenet repeats that it is imperative that he take his wife abroad, his mentor, the Duke of St Bungay, is incredulous. When the Duke answers that he would understand if she were dying, Plantagenet answers, without elaborating, "There are things worse than death."³⁴⁷ Plantagenet insists, in effect, that household matters—namely, saving his marriage—must come first, even at the cost of sacrificing the political goal that had been his only end. The trip is a turning point for Lady Glencora, who is moved by his nobility in making such a sacrifice.

On the trip, Plantagenet often thinks of that sacrifice, trying to throw all his usual energy into the daily logistics of their travel. He "received political letters from England, which made his mouth water sadly, and was often very

³⁴¹ *Id.* at 411.

³⁴² *Id.* at 417.

³⁴³ *Id.* at 423-24.

³⁴⁴ *Id.* at 427-28.

³⁴⁵ *Id.* at 491-93.

³⁴⁶ *Id.* at 495-97.

³⁴⁷ *Id.* at 499.

fidgety.”³⁴⁸ And Lady Glencora tries his patience with her more adventurous approach, such as visiting a gaming room. Mr Grey (pursuing Alice, Glencora’s travelling companion) provides Plantagenet welcome companionship.

The Pallisers’ marriage receives a big boost—and their trip is cut short—when Lady Glencora announces that she is pregnant; this is momentous news after all of her self-reproach for not being able to produce an heir. Notably, this happy event occurs after Plantagenet stops reading bluebooks until all hours of the night. Such news not only “drove Burgo Fitzgerald out of Mr Palliser’s head” but also “so confused him that he could no longer calculate the blunders of the present Chancellor of the Exchequer.”³⁴⁹ In a rare physical display, Lady Glencora whispered the news in his ear and “burst out into tears on his bosom as he sat by her on her bedside.”³⁵⁰ As Plantagenet walks by the lake, he realizes how much he had wished for a child—and not simply any child, but a male heir: “The one thing in the world which he had lacked; the one joy which he had wanted so much, and which is so common among men, was coming to him also.”³⁵¹ Without knowing the sex of his future child, he already envisions his child’s political future and future as a duke.³⁵²

Suddenly, he values something—the “good things” coming to him—even more highly than political life: “It would be better to him, this, than being Chancellor of the Exchequer. He would rather have it in store for him to be father of the next Duke of Omnium, than make half a dozen consecutive annual speeches in Parliament . . . !”³⁵³ In his reverie, he is even grateful for Lady Monk’s ball, since the exuberant and conspicuous dancing between Lady Glencora and Burgo there caused the marital crisis that spurred their foreign tour.

5. Lady Glencora’s New Purpose and Power

Lady Glencora’s own outlook improves. She tells Alice, “I am so happy . . . It seemed as though I were destined to bring nothing but misery to everybody, and I used to wish myself dead so often. I shan’t wish myself dead now.”³⁵⁴

For Lady Glencora, the baby displaces Burgo. She next encounters him, by chance, after she asks Plantagenet for a favor—that he take her up to the gambling rooms. She sees Burgo looking worn and listless, though still handsome; he is gambling and, with an enormous pile in front of him and with a companion dissuading him from continuing to play, plays once more and loses

³⁴⁸ *Id.* at 611.

³⁴⁹ *Id.* at 612.

³⁵⁰ *Id.*

³⁵¹ *Id.*

³⁵² *Id.* at 613.

³⁵³ *Id.*

³⁵⁴ *Id.* at 614.

it all.³⁵⁵ At Lady Glencora's urging that Plantagenet help him, Plantagenet agrees, leading her to caress her husband's hand and tell him, "You are so good."³⁵⁶ Lady Glencora seems to have broken decisively with the past as she tells her husband, "God bless you, dearest! I shall never see him again; but if you could save him!"³⁵⁷ Plantagenet pays the landlord's bill, but Burgo will not accept financial help, noting the oddity of such an offer when "[he] would have taken it all if [he] could have got it,—and [he] tried hard."³⁵⁸ Plantagenet later arranges (with Burgo's family) a small weekly sum to be paid to Burgo so long as he "remain at a certain small German town . . . in which there was no public gaming-table."³⁵⁹ And with that, the novel bids farewell to "poor Burgo."³⁶⁰ Lady Glencora, who before her pregnancy once thought of drowning herself, now tells Alice that "[she] shan't think any more of that poor fellow now."³⁶¹

Lady Glencora has a son—"Thank God!" Plantagenet writes to Mr Grey. Trollope waxes lyrical on the "[w]ondrous little baby" born in the purple, foreshadowing the exalted rank in the aristocracy that awaits him.³⁶² We hear Lady Glencora's perspective on this fortunate birth when she says to Alice that "[i]t is such a comfort that it is over."³⁶³ When Alice calls her "the most ungrateful of women," she explains the pressure from her husband and his uncle to have a boy, using imagery of male household governance,

'Your baby may come just as it pleases. You won't lie awake trembling how on earth you will bear your disgrace if one of the vile weaker sex should come to disturb the hopes of your lords and masters;—for I had two, which made it so much more terrible.'³⁶⁴

Though Plantagenet would have been "gentle as a dove" in his disappointment and the Duke would go away until "the next chance comes," she would have known their thoughts and feelings.³⁶⁵ The male child has "made it all right" for her.³⁶⁶ If Burgo was a sort of idol, now the baby is the new idol, receiving from his mother and Alice "various mysterious ceremonies of feminine idolatry."³⁶⁷ Having now shed her disgrace at taking so long "before that gentleman was

³⁵⁵ *Id.* at 633.

³⁵⁶ *Id.* at 634.

³⁵⁷ *Id.*

³⁵⁸ *Id.* at 638.

³⁵⁹ *Id.* at 642.

³⁶⁰ *Id.*

³⁶¹ *Id.* at 670.

³⁶² *Id.* at 672.

³⁶³ *Id.*

³⁶⁴ *Id.*

³⁶⁵ *Id.*

³⁶⁶ *Id.* at 673.

³⁶⁷ *Id.*

born,” Lady Glencora asserts that she “shall dare to assert [herself], now.”³⁶⁸ Plantagenet, meanwhile, is back in Parliament, “thoroughly contented with his fate” as the Chancellor of the Exchequer and about to propose “his scheme of finance” for his country’s use.³⁶⁹ Household and political governance are both back in order—for the moment. Later volumes, however, show Lady Glencora’s growing self-assertion. Beginning with the *Phineas* novels, they provide new chances to explore her energetic efforts to influence politics and to be a political hostess. While Plantagenet is an indulgent husband, he is not beyond insisting on spousal unity, husbandly authority, and wifely obedience when he thinks those efforts should be curbed.³⁷⁰

E. *Mrs Greenow’s Marital Choice: Mr Cheesacre or Captain Bellfield*

A third, comedic plot of marital choice involves Mrs Greenow, sister of John Vavasor and aunt of Kate, George, and Alice. While she was a young woman, Mrs Greenow married an older man for financial reasons, had a brief and happy marriage, and became a wealthy widow after his death. Despite comical professions of her great grief and how she could never possibly wed again out of devotion to her beloved, saintly, deceased husband, she is pursued by two men: Mr Cheesacre, a successful landowner who boasts to her of the bounty of his estate, Oilymead; and his friend/rival Captain Bellfield, a more handsome and charming but rascally and impecunious fellow with a questionable past.

Mrs Greenow finally decides on Bellfield (the wild suitor), which Trollope describes as a “rash act” given her usual prudence.³⁷¹ But Mrs Greenow values some dash of romance, what she calls “rocks and valleys,” along with “bread-and-cheese,” having enough of her own resources to provide the latter.³⁷² Further, Trollope makes clear that Mrs Greenow “did take so much care in securing the payment of her own income into her own hands” and, in the months prior to the marriage, “made him live discreetly”—that is, less extravagantly.³⁷³ Thus, she pays off his debts only after he penitently makes a full confession of

³⁶⁸ *Id.*

³⁶⁹ *Id.* at 674.

³⁷⁰ As I will discuss in a related work, the clash is most acute in *The Prime Minister* in which Lady Glencora’s attempt to influence the Silverbridge election (over Plantagenet’s instruction that she not do so) leads to a sequence of events that threatens the Coalition government. When Lady Glencora insists that he let her take the blame, he will not because of his belief that a husband and wife are one, and he is responsible. TROLLOPE, *THE PRIME MINISTER*, *supra* note 85, at 388-89 (describing Plantagenet’s refusal to allow his wife to “be talked about by [any]one” or to escape any political punishment by “fixing the stain” on his wife).

³⁷¹ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 650.

³⁷² *Id.* at 534.

³⁷³ *Id.*

them.³⁷⁴ While Bellfield has visions of access to her wealth through marriage, it is clear that she will maintain control of her "great resources."³⁷⁵ Here, the household "governance" will be hers.

Even in this comedic plot, Trollope emphasizes the intertwining of the social and the political. Mrs Greenow, Halperin points out, is a "brilliant social politician," "[a]n accomplished tactician," and a skilled diplomat.³⁷⁶ Even as she rejects Mr Cheesacre, she manages to reconcile him with Bellfield, retain his admiration, and maneuver him into proposing to another woman.

IV. THE PHINEAS NOVELS: *PHINEAS FINN* AND *PHINEAS REDUX*

Phineas Finn, the second novel in the Palliser series, offers an instructive contrast from *Can You Forgive Her?*. Not only is its "hero" a man rather than a woman requiring the reader's forgiveness, but the novel also intertwines the twists and turns of Phineas's early parliamentary career with the twists and turns of his marital pursuits of three women—Lady Laura Standish, Violet Effingham, and Mary Flood Jones—and his rejection of a marriage proposal by a fourth—Madame Max Goesler—to whom he later proposes. In *Lady Laura Standish*, the novel also introduces a character who, even more than Alice Vavasor, values public life and resents the constraints of being a woman. She becomes a political mentor of Phineas's but also a tragic figure after she makes a marital choice that leads to a disastrous (and, for her, an intolerable) form of husbandly governance. In *An Autobiography*, Trollope described Lady Laura Standish as "the best character in *Phineas Finn* and its sequel *Phineas Redux*."³⁷⁷ She is also, by his description, a tragic figure. Among the central female characters in the two novels, she is the most opposed to women's rights (although she says she envies men, their clubs, and the House), even though her own disastrous marital choice shows the stark consequences of women's lack of rights within marriage—including a right of exit.

A. *The Phineas Novels in Context*

In *An Autobiography*, Trollope described *Phineas Finn* and its "sequel," *Phineas Redux*, as "in fact, but one novel," although written six years apart.³⁷⁸ With respect to the fictional political events that the books describe, critics locate *Phineas Finn* as set between 1863-1867 and its sequel between 1868-1871 or

³⁷⁴ King, *supra* note 24, at 322 (demonstrating how Arabella Greenow's marital relationship with Bellfield reverses gender roles because his "desire . . . is contained and domesticated in marriage").

³⁷⁵ TROLLOPE, *CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?*, *supra* note 15, at 650.

³⁷⁶ HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 60.

³⁷⁷ TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, *supra* note 19, at 198.

³⁷⁸ *Id.*

1872.³⁷⁹ Reflecting *Phineas Finn*'s "extraordinary immersion in its contemporary political moment," its "principal parliamentary business is the passage of a Reform Bill" credited to a "Liberal ministry"; in reality, in July 1867, two months after Trollope completed the novel, "the momentous Second Reform Act was . . . passed," although under a Conservative administration.³⁸⁰ On May 20, 1867, John Stuart Mill introduced the petition mentioned above and proposed to amend the Reform Bill to extend suffrage to women by replacing "man" with "person."³⁸¹ The Woman Question was very much in the air as Trollope wrote, but the issue of woman suffrage nowhere features in Trollope's fictional presentations of parliamentary debate about the Reform Bill.

In *Trollope and Politics*, Halperin argues that *Phineas Finn* "may well be the best political novel in English"; it is "more single-mindedly focused on politicians and political processes" than the later Palliser novel, *The Prime Minister*.³⁸² To prepare to write the book, Trollope recounts in *An Autobiography* that he received permission to sit for a few months in the gallery of the House of Commons to "become conversant with the ways and doings of the House" in which he would place some of his scenes.³⁸³ Halperin suggests his "cautious studiousness paid off," earning later praise by "some of the shrewdest parliamentarians" (including Harold Macmillan).³⁸⁴ It is all the more noteworthy, then, that those scenes do not include any mention of extending the franchise to women. Off the floor of Parliament, however, Trollope brings up Mr Mill and the question of women's rights. The following analysis highlights those references in the novels and the different stances his characters take toward such rights.

As a preface, let us return to *North America* and Trollope's nonfictional consideration of "the political rights of women"—a question he regards as "worthy of no consideration, to be capable of no action, to admit of no grave discussion."³⁸⁵ Observing that many men and women "of mark" in the United States argue that women should be able to vote in public elections, he mentions Wendell Phillips, a Boston lecturer and advocate both of abolition and women's rights whom Trollope heard during his travels.³⁸⁶ In an 1851 speech at a convention on women's rights, Phillips offered the resolution that the right of suffrage was "the corner-stone" of women's rights "since we do not seek to

³⁷⁹ Nicholas Shrimpton, *Appendix 2*, in TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 574-75 (giving timeline for all Trollope novels and their relation to the true timeline of political events).

³⁸⁰ Simon Dentith, *Introduction* to TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at xi, xiii.

³⁸¹ 187 Parl Deb HC (3d ser.) (1867) col. 817-29 (UK).

³⁸² HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 69.

³⁸³ TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *supra* note 19, at 196.

³⁸⁴ HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 71.

³⁸⁵ TROLLOPE, NORTH AMERICA, *supra* note 19, at 258.

³⁸⁶ *Id.* at 265.

protect woman, but rather to place her in a position to protect herself.”³⁸⁷ Similar to writings in the *English Woman’s Journal*, Phillips argued against any proper sphere for women or their subjection to men: “Leave it to woman to choose for herself her profession, her education, and her sphere” and “let facts—not theories” settle the question of women’s capacity.³⁸⁸

In *North America*, Trollope contends that “the argument in favour” of women’s political rights amounts to this: “A woman is subject to the law; why then should she not help to make the law? A child is subject to the law, and does not help to make it; but the child lacks that discretion which the woman enjoys equally with the man.”³⁸⁹ Trollope calls the “logic” of this argument “conclusive” and admitting of “no answer.”³⁹⁰ He then offers a response that insists on retaining separate spheres even in voting and governing:

I will only say that the mutual good relations between men and women, which are so indispensable to our happiness, require that men and women should not take to voting at the same time and on the same result. If it be decided that women shall have political power, let them have it all to themselves for a season. If that be so resolved, I think we may safely leave it to them to name the time at which they will begin.³⁹¹

This solution is likely intended as fanciful or tongue in cheek. Indeed, Trollope concludes *North America*’s chapter on “The Rights of Women” by predicting that his own doctrine about women’s “best right” being the right to a husband—which “every young woman [in Britain] and in the States” should turn her attention to—would “be more acceptable than that of Mrs. Dall or Mr. Wendell Phillips.”³⁹²

B. *Phineas’s Early Career and Trollope’s Wish Fulfillment*

Like Trollope, Phineas Finn believes a life in Parliament would be the highest good. Halperin suggests that “Phineas’s political career is in part sheer

³⁸⁷ WENDELL PHILLIPS, SPEECHES, LECTURES, AND LETTERS 11 (Lee and Shepard 1884).

³⁸⁸ *Id.* at 17. By the mid-1860s, however, as Congress debated the post-Civil War Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, Phillips “wanted nothing to deflect from pursuit of the franchise for Black men” and did not support pushing for woman suffrage as a goal, even though he “hope[d] in time to be as bold as Stuart Mill.” Virginia Sapiro, *The Power and Fragility of Social Movement Coalitions: The Woman Suffrage Movement to 1870*, 100 B.U. L. REV. 101, 134-36 (2020) (quoting Wendell Phillips, Address Before American Anti-Slavery Society (May 9, 1865), in NAT’L ANTI-SLAVERY STANDARD, Dec. 1, 1866, at 3).

³⁸⁹ TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*, *supra* note 19, at 265.

³⁹⁰ *Id.*

³⁹¹ *Id.* This notion that sex-segregated voting would be necessary to maintain “mutual good relations” might reflect another argument against woman suffrage: not exposing women to the rough and tumble and “violence and disorder at elections,” especially at contested elections. GRIFFIN, *supra* note 11, at 235.

³⁹² TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*, *supra* note 19, at 266.

Trollopian wish-fulfillment.”³⁹³ Further, some of Phineas’s experiences mirror ones from Trollope’s life, not only in small details like attending parties by prominent political hostesses of the day but also a larger parallel: “Finn, like Trollope himself, comes over from Ireland to find success in England, moves into the fashionable world, becomes disillusioned, yet keeps some of the passive detachment of an outsider.”³⁹⁴

Another notable detail about Phineas’s life is that “his political success is largely due to his popularity with women.”³⁹⁵ As with *Can You Forgive Her?*, Trollope shows the close connections “between political activity and one’s social and/or financial status” and that “there seems to be no real separation between political and social life. . . . Political success anywhere depends in part on charming the social elite of the Establishment”—that is, on both social and political approval.³⁹⁶ Trollope, as well as male and female characters in the novel, describe Phineas as comely and handsome. Trollope repeatedly describes how Phineas particularly charms women and how they exert themselves to further his career; in *Phineas Redux*, for example, he describes their efforts to save his life when Phineas is prosecuted for a murder he did not commit. Phineas also turns to women, rather than men, for comfort and consolation as well as for praise:

Nor had it been his wont in any of the troubles of his life to ask for sympathy from a man. He had always gone to some woman By them he could endure to be petted, praised, or upon occasion even pitied. But pity or praise from any man had been distasteful to him.³⁹⁷

Yet, in both novels, his very ability to charm women also creates social and political peril for him.

Finally, there are important parallels between Phineas’s own challenge to pursue a parliamentary career without the necessary money to achieve “independence” (in Trollope’s time, Members received no pay unless they held a government position) and the challenges some of the female characters face when a lack of necessary funds compromises their “independence” in choosing a marital partner. Further, Trollope employs the language of getting into a boat with someone both to connote a woman’s choice of a marriage partner and Phineas’s commitment to his political party and the need for party loyalty. The possibility of shipwreck features in both contexts. Phineas himself views his marital and political careers as intertwined as he falls in love with and seeks to marry various women whose connections and/or money could further his political career and afford him independence. He even turns down a marriage

³⁹³ HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 83.

³⁹⁴ *Id.*

³⁹⁵ *Id.* at 104.

³⁹⁶ *Id.* at 103-04.

³⁹⁷ TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS REDUX*, *supra* note 15, at 229.

proposal from a woman he does not yet love but who could amply provide such independence.

C. *Phineas's Career Begins*

In the opening chapter of *Phineas Finn*, Phineas, age twenty-four, the only son of a doctor and his wife in County Clare, Ireland, has studied in London for three years and is about to be called to the Bar. Through his membership in an "excellent" political club, the Reform Club, he suddenly has a chance to pursue a political ambition of which he had not dared to speak: to stand for the British Parliament (with his father's financial support). He stands in a district near his home in Ireland and is elected. Throughout the book, characters comment on his remarkable good fortune, even as some view his decision to go directly into political office without first starting in a paying profession such as law as ill advised. A recurring concern in the novel is how Phineas will support himself. His goal, which he eventually achieves, is to have a Cabinet position, which entails an income. His mother and five sisters view him as a black swan—a rare and wondrous bird—and enthusiastically support his political career, while his father is more skeptical, though still supportive. Sharing these women's high esteem of Phineas is "little Mary Flood Jones," a local Irish girl who is in love with him and with whom he may also be in love.³⁹⁸

1. Phineas Finn and His Mentor, Lady Laura Standish

As he contemplates running for Parliament, Phineas receives encouragement from Lady Laura Standish, a distant cousin of Barrington Erle, the politician who urged Phineas to stand for Parliament. In the chapter "Lady Laura Standish," Trollope introduces her as someone who Phineas admired very much and who was worthy of his admiration. Trollope observes, "It was probably the greatest pride of our hero's life that Lady Laura Standish was his friend, and that she had instigated him to undertake the risk of parliamentary life."³⁹⁹ Lady Laura strongly embraces the value of political life; she tells Phineas, "I think it is a man's duty to make his way into the House;—that is, if he ever means to be anybody."⁴⁰⁰

Throughout much of the book, Lady Laura is Phineas's most trusted friend and political advisor. Lady Laura comes across as an unusual woman, more like a man in her physical posture, gestures, and speech. This unfeminine aspect extends to her passion for politics and public matters. Trollope's description stresses both her beauty and her departure from conventional femininity. She was relatively tall (5 feet 7 inches), "carried her height well," and had a certain

³⁹⁸ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 30.

³⁹⁹ *Id.* at 29.

⁴⁰⁰ *Id.* at 33.

“nobility in her gait.”⁴⁰¹ She had large hands and feet and a large frame.⁴⁰² Trollope observes that “[h]er face was very fair, though it lacked that softness which we all love in women.”⁴⁰³ He stresses the power of her gaze as a reflection of her overall power: “Her eyes, which were large and bright, and very clear, never seemed to quail, never rose and sunk or showed themselves to be afraid of their own power. Indeed, Lady Laura Standish had nothing of fear about her.”⁴⁰⁴

In vividly describing Laura’s masculine manner of sitting and speaking, Trollope suggests her distaste for norms of feminine “charm”: “[S]he would lean forward when sitting, as a man does, and would use her arms in talking . . . after the fashion of men rather than of women;—and she seemed to despise that soft quiescence of her sex in which are generally found so many charms.”⁴⁰⁵ Trollope also comments on how her complexion reflects her steady and controlled personality, observing that “she never blushed.”⁴⁰⁶

In this initial introduction of Lady Laura, Trollope also explains the power of self-governance and household governance that she enjoys as the unmarried daughter of the widowed Earl of Brentford. Finn observes that the Earl seemed to place “unlimited confidence” in Lady Laura, who “seemed to have perfect power of doing what she pleased. She was much more mistress of herself than if she had been the wife instead of the daughter of the Earl of Brentford,—and she seemed to be quite as much mistress of the house.”⁴⁰⁷

Even with such household power, Lady Laura is aware that, because of her sex, she cannot have the political power and public life she considers ideal. When, at a later dinner at her father’s home, the men leave for their political club, she states, “I envy you men your clubs more than I do the House;—though I feel that a woman’s life is only half a life, as she cannot have a seat in Parliament.”⁴⁰⁸

From the beginning, Phineas especially values Lady Laura’s “sympathy” and counsel: “She understood him and his aspirations if no one else did so on the face of the earth.”⁴⁰⁹ Although he has often told himself that he is not in love with her, he begins to wonder, “[W]hy should he not now tell himself that he was in love with her?”⁴¹⁰ He soon resolves to ask her to be his wife; but, for funds, he has only the allowance sent by his father, so he must make his proposal

⁴⁰¹ *Id.* at 31.

⁴⁰² *Id.* at 32.

⁴⁰³ *Id.* at 31 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁰⁵ *Id.* at 32.

⁴⁰⁶ *Id.* at 31. Consider the usual role of the blush used to signal women’s emotions and that, by comparison, Phineas Finn blushes easily.

⁴⁰⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁰⁸ *Id.* at 51.

⁴⁰⁹ *Id.* at 35.

⁴¹⁰ *Id.*

provisional on securing a paying position in the government. He recognizes the great advantage of such a match for his political career, for "Lady Laura was related to almost everybody who was anybody among the high Whigs."⁴¹¹ He rationalizes that this is not his motive or at least not his sole one:

[A]s an introduction into official life nothing could be more conducive to chances of success than a matrimonial alliance with Lady Laura. Not that he would have thought of such a thing on that account! No;—he thought of it because he loved her But . . . there could be no reason why he should not,—on her account as well as on his own,—take advantage of any circumstances that there might be in his favour.⁴¹²

Lady Laura is not simply connected by blood or marriage to everybody of importance. She also brings them together at her father's house for dinner and is in the thick of political conversation and strategy. It is the closest she can come to the political power denied to her because of her sex. When her father, the Earl of Brentford, accepts a position in the Cabinet, she feels "infinite delight"; in this passage, Trollope speaks of how "[i]t was her ambition to be brought as near to political action as was possible for a woman without surrendering any of the privileges of feminine inaction."⁴¹³

Given Laura's envy of men for being able to serve in Parliament and her view of a woman's life as "half a life" because she cannot do the same, the use of "privileges" in this sentence sounds odd. However, Trollope elaborates that Lady Laura does not seek more direct political power:

That women should even wish to have votes at parliamentary elections was to her abominable, and the cause of the Rights of Women generally was odious to her; but, nevertheless, for herself, she delighted in hoping that she too might be useful,—in thinking that she too was perhaps, in some degree, politically powerful; and she had received considerable increase to such hopes when her father accepted [his cabinet position].⁴¹⁴

These sentiments echo concerns of some aristocratic political hostesses: that suffrage would bring a loss of political influence.⁴¹⁵ Lady Laura's views may

⁴¹¹ *Id.* at 36.

⁴¹² *Id.*

⁴¹³ *Id.* at 75.

⁴¹⁴ *Id.*

⁴¹⁵ See REYNOLDS, *supra* note 34, at 1 (describing Lady Dorothy Nevill as "[u]nrelentingly hostile to the reduction of any form of exclusive aristocratic power and equivocal about publicly defined women's rights," such as the vote); *id.* at 143 (speculating that "the aristocratic woman, outside the formal constitution and without a vote or a seat in the House of Lords, had more to lose by the widening of the franchise and the weakening of the aristocratic hegemony than her male counterparts").

also reflect realism that there is no “public solution” to her envy and that her only path to political power is marriage to a “politically important man.”⁴¹⁶

In the spirit of being useful, she tries to guide Phineas. As she gently reprimands him for being aloof toward a possible political ally (the very wealthy Mr Robert Kennedy), she asks, “I wonder whether you will be angry if I take upon myself the task of mentor,” and calls Phineas her “political pupil.”⁴¹⁷ Phineas asks himself whether “[t]he female mentor might be softened” and whether it was “within his power to compel her to love him.”⁴¹⁸

2. Lady Laura’s Tragic Choice to Marry Mr Kennedy

The match is not to be, however. As Phineas is on the verge of proposing, Lady Laura tells him that she accepted an offer of marriage that Mr Robert Kennedy made the day before. When he hesitates to “wish [her] joy,” explaining his own planned proposal, she tells him not to say it.⁴¹⁹ When he asks whether he would have had a chance if he had asked earlier, she cannot answer his question; instead she reminds him of their prior conversation that they both were very poor and reliant on their fathers’ support. Phineas needs to marry a woman with money, she states, and explains her own choice: “The man whom in all the world I think the best has asked me to share everything with him;—and I have thought it wise to accept his offer.”⁴²⁰ She explains her marital choice in terms of prudence and duty: “I have accepted the owner of Loughlinter as my husband, because I verily believe that I shall thus do my duty in that sphere of life to which it has pleased God to call me. I have always liked him, and I will love him.”⁴²¹

This rather stilted statement to Phineas about Lady Laura’s duty includes nothing about the role of her ambition to maintain and even to build her social position as a political hostess. Later in the novel, when Lady Laura has physically left Mr Kennedy’s home because she cannot do her “duty,” she shows more self-awareness about her ambitions. Such reflections make clear the expectation that marriage was the only “career” for women and that remaining unmarried was not an option; “it was her fate to be either Lady Laura Kennedy or Lady Laura Finn.”⁴²² If she allowed herself to admit that she loved Finn, who was then “almost nobody,” she faced a loss of status; by contrast,

in marrying Mr Kennedy she had maintained herself in her high position . . . socially and . . . politically. But had she married Phineas . . . [s]he could not have entertained the leading men of her party.

⁴¹⁶ MORSE, *supra* note 16, at 46.

⁴¹⁷ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 63, 65.

⁴¹⁸ *Id.* at 68.

⁴¹⁹ *Id.* at 114.

⁴²⁰ *Id.*

⁴²¹ *Id.*

⁴²² *Id.* at 409.

She would not have been on a level with the wives and daughters of Cabinet Ministers.⁴²³

She tells Phineas openly that she has loved him as a friend and "could have loved [him] otherwise had not circumstances showed [her] so plainly that it would be unwise."⁴²⁴ Those circumstances include that she has used her own money to pay the debts of her beloved brother, an act which limited her freedom to choose. Phineas refers to his torment, doubting that she knows what it is "to love dearly," and asks for one kiss to treasure in memory.⁴²⁵

The colossal mistake that Lady Laura made in accepting Mr Kennedy soon becomes evident, even as Phineas heals from his torment far too soon for Lady Laura's comfort. It initially appears that perhaps she can do her wifely duty because she does esteem Mr Kennedy, and he her. Further, Mr Kennedy tells Phineas that a wife like Lady Laura was "all that was wanting to me" and "very hard to find."⁴²⁶

Perhaps the saddest part of *Phineas Finn* is Lady Laura's disturbing transformation from a lively, vigorous young woman delighting in her connection to power and political life into a prematurely aging woman full of regrets who realizes she has made a "shipwreck of [herself]."⁴²⁷ A few initial scenes after the marriage suggest that it may be mutually satisfying, but troubles surface soon. Lady Laura envisioned being of use to her husband in his political career (he is a cabinet member, although he has had an unremarkable political career), but instead she finds herself assisting with administering his huge estate and soon experiences her life as deadening and dull.

Trollope describes Lady Laura's disillusionment as she sees the sharp contrast between the small and tedious tasks that occupy Mr Kennedy and the high politics with which she hoped to help. She had at first "declared that it would be her greatest ambition to help her husband in his work, and she had read all the letters from the MacNabs and MacFies, asking to be made gaugers and landing-waiters, with an assumed interest. But the work palled upon her very quickly."⁴²⁸ Her husband worked through it all "with utmost patience" and "conscientiously," but she quickly saw that "there was nothing in it which she really did":

But Lady Laura wanted to meddle with high politics, to discuss reform bills, to assist in putting up Mr This and putting down my Lord That. Why

⁴²³ *Id.*

⁴²⁴ *Id.* at 114.

⁴²⁵ *Id.* at 116.

⁴²⁶ *Id.* at 117.

⁴²⁷ *Id.* at 480.

⁴²⁸ *Id.* at 169-70 (endnote omitted).

should she waste her time in doing that which the lad in the next room, who was called a private secretary, could do as well?⁴²⁹

Trollope later puts it:

She had married a rich man in order that she might be able to do something in the world;—and now that she was this rich man’s wife she found that she could do nothing. The rich man thought it to be quite enough for her to sit at home and look after his welfare.⁴³⁰

Her husband’s religious piety and asceticism are also confining. While she prefers to spend Sundays at her father’s house, having political discussions with guests, Mr Kennedy expects her to keep the Sabbath. Her frequent headaches are the physical sign of her misery. Mr Kennedy cannot understand why his wife will not do her “duty” and makes it clear that the life he prefers is one of quietude and retirement. It dawns on him that she is bored with such a life; he regards her headaches as caused by “the prospect of a quiet decent life, to which would be attached the performance of certain [wifely] duties.”⁴³¹

Lady Laura, having presided as mistress of her father’s home and of herself, overestimated her ability to control her husband. When her father tells Phineas that he is worried she is not happy, he refers to Mr Kennedy as “hard and dry” and “exacting.”⁴³² He adds, “Laura has never been used to that. With me she always had her own way in everything, and I always found her fit to have it. I do not understand why her husband should treat her differently.”⁴³³

Lady Laura’s brother, Lord Chiltern, observes that she is mistaken in thinking that she will be able to control Mr Kennedy. She herself comes to realize that, while she thought that she could steer Mr Kennedy by virtue of being quicker witted than him, he is like an ox—not easily moved. Phineas, in turn, is “astounded” that the Lady Laura “whom he had thought he had known,—should have become so subject to such a man as Mr Kennedy, a man whom he had despised as being weak, irresolute, and without a purpose!”⁴³⁴

Lady Laura comes to realize that she cannot love her husband and cannot even live with him. She has prided herself on her tight control of her emotions, believing that she can love Phineas as a beloved brother or friend; but she realizes that she did/does love him and that she should have married him. Mr Kennedy increasingly resents her interest in Phineas’s career, accusing her of extravagant passions and idolatry. When he advises her that all will go smoothly if she consents to “adopt [his] opinion,” she comments that he has “the law” on his side; he insists he is not speaking of the law but of how “in this country,” as

⁴²⁹ *Id.* at 170.

⁴³⁰ *Id.* at 243.

⁴³¹ *Id.* at 248.

⁴³² *Id.* at 250.

⁴³³ *Id.*

⁴³⁴ *Id.* at 246.

he understands "the position of a man and wife," matters can be "harmonious."⁴³⁵

Her marital woes remind her of the limits imposed by her sex. After Lady Laura discusses this particular exchange with her friend Violet Effingham, Violet states, "This is terrible . . . This makes me feel that I never will be married."⁴³⁶ Laura observes that the alternative is to be single and that "[t]he curse is to be woman at all."⁴³⁷ When Violet counters that she has always "felt so proud of the privileges of [her] sex," Laura answers, "I never have found them . . . I have tried to make the best of its weaknesses, and this is what I have come to!"⁴³⁸

Eventually, Lady Laura uses Mr Kennedy's accusations that she has an attachment to Phineas as a reason to leave him and to return to her father's home. Under the matrimonial law of that time, she does not seem to have sufficient grounds for legal separation, but she stresses that it will kill her to remain with him. The narrator reports divided public opinion about their separation, noting that

[a]ll the world had been talking of the separation of Mr Kennedy from his wife, one half of the world declaring that his wife, if not absolutely false to him, had neglected all her duties; and the other half asserting that Mr Kennedy's treatment of his wife had been so bad that no woman could possibly have lived with him.⁴³⁹

D. *Lady Laura's Marital and Legal Woes*

In her unhappiness, Lady Laura increasingly focuses on her "sin"—her mistake in marrying Mr Kennedy—becoming obsessed with the idea that she could have loved Phineas (who loved her) "before she had handed herself over as a bale of goods to her unloved, unloving husband."⁴⁴⁰ In *An Autobiography*, Trollope similarly assessed her error, contrasting "[t]he happy motherly life of Violet Effingham, which was due to the girl's honest but long-restrained love" for Lord Chiltern with "the tragic misery of Lady Laura, which was equally due to the sale she made of herself in her wretched marriage."⁴⁴¹

Meanwhile, Mr Kennedy insists on his legal rights of husbandly and household governance. He "went to his lawyer, and desired that steps might be taken for the restitution to him of his conjugal rights."⁴⁴² He dispatches Phineas

⁴³⁵ *Id.* at 374-75.

⁴³⁶ *Id.* at 376.

⁴³⁷ *Id.*

⁴³⁸ *Id.*

⁴³⁹ *Id.* at 505.

⁴⁴⁰ *Id.* at 409.

⁴⁴¹ TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, *supra* note 19, at 197.

⁴⁴² TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS FINN*, *supra* note 15, at 511.

to tell Lady Laura that “if there be any law in the land, she shall be made to” return to his home;⁴⁴³ Lady Laura refuses, no matter what the law:

‘Whether there be law in the land to protect me or whether there be none, I will never live with him . . . Is a woman like a head of cattle, that she can be fastened in her crib by force? I will never live with him though all the judges of the land should decide that I must do so.’⁴⁴⁴

By the end of *Phineas Finn*, Lady Laura leaves with her father for Dresden on legal advice, telling Phineas, “[T]he lawyer says that if I remain here I may be subject to very disagreeable attempts from Mr Kennedy to force me to go back again.”⁴⁴⁵

The writ of “restitution of conjugal rights” obtained by Mr Kennedy was initially part of the canon law but was “transferred from the ecclesiastical courts to the Divorce Court by the Divorce Act of 1857.”⁴⁴⁶ The Divorce Court could enforce the penalty of attachment, imprisoning the spouse who refused to return until they obeyed the court order.⁴⁴⁷ Writing of Trollope’s gripping portrayal of the “tragedy of Lady Laura Kennedy,” Shanley observes that Lady Laura leaves England with her father to avoid imprisonment, but their exile is “itself a kind of imprisonment,” cutting her off from “home, work, family and friends.”⁴⁴⁸

Victorian feminists sought to eliminate this writ and the unjust control it gave a husband over his wife’s body. Finally, in 1884, moved by the plight of a *husband* against whom a wife obtained a writ, Parliament eliminated attachment as a penalty, instead treating noncompliance as an act of desertion entitling the deserted spouse to a separation.⁴⁴⁹ In 1891, feminists declared victory for the legal rights of wives to personal freedom when, in a writ of restitution case, the Court of Appeal reversed a Queen’s Bench decision that upheld a husband’s forced detention of his wife. Lord Halsbury, the Lord Chancellor, declared that, under the law of England, “no English subject has such a right of his own motion to imprison another English subject, whether his wife or any one else.”⁴⁵⁰

By novel’s end, Mr Kennedy resigns his seat in the cabinet and is reportedly too ill to attend Parliament. In *Phineas Redux*, as discussed later, he has become mad. He is among Trollope’s “many portraits of intractable men, unyielding,

⁴⁴³ *Id.* at 525.

⁴⁴⁴ *Id.* at 526.

⁴⁴⁵ *Id.* at 560.

⁴⁴⁶ SHANLEY, *supra* note 46, at 177.

⁴⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁴⁸ *Id.* at 158.

⁴⁴⁹ *Id.* at 179 (observing that “[t]he image of Captain Weldon languishing in jail because he could not tolerate living with his wife was more than Parliament could bear, although earlier in the century a Suffolk woman had been allowed to die in prison when she refused to return to her husband”).

⁴⁵⁰ *Id.* at 180-83 (quoting *Regina v. Jackson* [1891] 1 QB 671 at 681 (Eng.)).

rigid, often crazed”; their love of “dominance over others, a stance encouraged by their patriarchal society . . . often cripples them emotionally.”⁴⁵¹

E. *Phineas and Violet Effingham*

Rebounding quickly from his “sore” heart after Lady Laura’s rejection, Phineas next falls in love with the beautiful heiress Violet Effingham, whose money would be an undeniable aid to his political career. Phineas cannot remain in his paid position in government if he defies the party line on things like Irish tenant right; but without the independence that sufficient money brings, he cannot afford simply to serve in Parliament, where he would be free to speak his mind.

This subplot does not extensively intertwine political and household governance, although Violet’s resisting marriage for much of *Phineas Finn* and her comments about Mr Mill and Parliament warrant mention. Lady Laura and her father both wish Violet to marry Lord Chiltern, who has loved her since childhood but whose proposals she has refused. Mindful of this and tone-deaf as to Lady Laura’s anguished feelings about Phineas, Phineas seeks Lady Laura’s help in winning Violet.⁴⁵² When Phineas refuses to give up his own interest, Chiltern demands that they fight a duel.

Violet makes several interesting observations about the more serious consequences for women than for men from the wrong marital choice. She resists Lady Laura’s urging that she could be Chiltern’s “saviour,” countering that “the man . . . should be the saviour to the girl” and give her protection.⁴⁵³ She has “quite enough” to do to save herself.⁴⁵⁴ She views Lord Chiltern as too great a risk, asking, “Suppose that I did not save him, but that he brought me to shipwreck instead?”⁴⁵⁵

Indeed, Violet’s problem is that she prefers the kind of man she can’t dare to marry—a *roué*, or improper man. Evocative of Plantagenet Palliser, she observes, “[A] prig who sits all night in the House, and talks about nothing but church-rates and suffrage, is to me intolerable.”⁴⁵⁶ Were she a man, “[she] should go in for everything [she] ought to leave alone,” but because she is not, she must take care of herself.⁴⁵⁷ She uses imagery of horses and jockeys: “The wrong side of a post for a woman is so very much the wrong side.”⁴⁵⁸

As with Phineas’s other potential loves, Violet also expresses a desire to be in Parliament. During a riding party, she exhorts Phineas not to allow himself to

⁴⁵¹ BARICKMAN, MACDONALD & STARK, *supra* note 109, at 231.

⁴⁵² TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 292-93.

⁴⁵³ *Id.* at 142.

⁴⁵⁴ *Id.* at 80.

⁴⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁵⁸ *Id.*

be counted like a sheep on a particular issue. When he asks, “But what am I to do?,” she answers,

‘Do something on your own hook. You men in Parliament are so much like sheep! If one jumps at a gap, all go after him,—and then you are penned into lobbies, and then you are fed, and then you are fleeced. I wish I were in Parliament. I’d get up in the middle and make such a speech. You all seem to me to be so much afraid of one another that you don’t quite dare to speak out.’⁴⁵⁹

When Lady Laura, whose marital misery under Mr Kennedy’s tyranny is already evident, urges Violet to marry Lord Chiltern and “be [her] own mistress,” Violet counters that she can do so without marrying and may “set up a little house of [her] own, and let the world say what it pleases.”⁴⁶⁰ Violet continues her resistance to marriage well into the novel, even enlisting “Mr Mill” and “women’s rights”:

‘No; I do not think I shall [accept him]. I shall knock under to Mr Mill, and go in for women’s rights, and look forward to stand for some female borough. Matrimony never seemed to me to be very charming, and upon my word it does not become more alluring by what I find at Loughlinter.’⁴⁶¹

Violet’s references here and elsewhere to Mr Mill are likely jokes intended to suggest that Mill’s “public solution” to women’s liabilities is “ludicrous,” similar to her joking reference to herself as a possible “pioneer” for her aunt’s “Female Protestant Unmarried Woman’s Emigration Society” to aid “redundant women.”⁴⁶² Nonetheless, Violet is an astute observer of the risks of a marital career, even though in the end she agrees to marry Lord Chiltern. She does so but exhorts him that she cannot respect him if he is an “idle man,” which angers him, yet sets him on the path to finding the perfect career for his talents as Master of Hounds.⁴⁶³ In *Phineas Redux*, she and Lord Chiltern seem to have attained one of the happiest marriages in the Palliser novels, with several children and with Violet as “witty and outspoken as ever.”⁴⁶⁴ Violet “eschews public affairs

⁴⁵⁹ *Id.* at 97.

⁴⁶⁰ *Id.* at 162.

⁴⁶¹ *Id.* at 377 (endnote omitted).

⁴⁶² *Id.* at 310; see also MCMASTER, *supra* note 37, at 162 (“And when Violet Effingham, tired of the idea of matrimony, threatens, ‘I shall knock under to Mr. Mill, and go in for women’s rights, and look forward to stand for some female borough,’ she is of course joking – the proposition is so grotesque it has to be a joke.” (quoting TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 377)); MORSE, *supra* note 16, at 64 (arguing that Violet regards Mill’s “advocacy of this important issue of the ‘Woman Question’ debate as ludicrous”).

⁴⁶³ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 527-28.

⁴⁶⁴ MORSE, *supra* note 16, at 68; see also MCMASTER, *supra* note 37, at 162.

and is happy"; Lady Laura, by contrast, "takes politics so seriously as to endanger her own happiness" and ends up "destroyed."⁴⁶⁵

When Violet accepts Chiltern's proposal, Phineas feels his back is proverbially broken from the blow. Phineas, although denying to himself that he sought her only for her money, cannot help but wish that she had been "kinder to him" so that he could be in the House, rather than be "cabined, cribbed, and confined by [government] office."⁴⁶⁶

F. *Phineas and "Little Mary Flood Jones"*

A contrast figure to the comparatively well-developed characters of Lady Laura and Violet is Mary Flood Jones, Phineas's local love back in Killaloe. Even as Phineas pursues Lady Laura and Violet, Mary Flood Jones waits patiently back home. As he leaves to begin his parliamentary career, he asks for a lock of her hair. Trollope describes her as "a little girl about twenty years of age, with the softest hair in the world, . . . and she was as pretty as ever she could be."⁴⁶⁷ He uses imagery of irresistible prey and of men's animal appetites: "She was one of those girls, so common in Ireland, whom men . . . feel inclined to take up and devour on the spur of the moment; and when she liked her lion, she had a look about her which seemed to ask to be devoured."⁴⁶⁸ In startling language, Trollope contrasts "cold-looking" girls with girls like Mary whom "to abstain from attacking . . . is, to a man of any warmth of temperament, quite impossible."⁴⁶⁹ She is a "temptation" that "[n]o one ever dreams of denying," just "like water when one is athirst."⁴⁷⁰ Mary, Trollope makes clear, did not allow Phineas "to thirst in vain for a drop from the cool spring."⁴⁷¹ To quell Mary's concern about Lady Laura, Phineas contrasts Mary's "perfect" figure and soft hair with Lady Laura's "straggling figure" and "lumpy hair," even though he admits Lady Laura is handsome.⁴⁷²

Mary is glad of Phineas's "high ambition" but believes that it will take him from her. By novel's end, however, after rejection by Violet and when he seems likely to lose his cabinet position by voting against his party for Irish tenant right, Phineas proposes to Mary—but only after telling the tale of his unsuccessful love for Violet.⁴⁷³ When family members and political allies urge him not to vote

⁴⁶⁵ HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 43.

⁴⁶⁶ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 493. Phineas's language of confinement echoes Lady Laura's declared resistance to being cribbed and confined in the marital home by her husband.

⁴⁶⁷ *Id.* at 20.

⁴⁶⁸ *Id.* at 20-21.

⁴⁶⁹ *Id.* at 21.

⁴⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁴⁷¹ *Id.*

⁴⁷² *Id.* at 22.

⁴⁷³ *Id.* at 495-97.

in a way that will endanger his cabinet seat, Mary praises him for “acting for the sake of principle.”⁴⁷⁴ While nothing is “so flattering as the warm expression of the confidence of a woman’s love,” Phineas also thinks that “no woman ever expressed this more completely than did his Mary.”⁴⁷⁵ Indeed, when he encounters Violet again and still feels an ache, he observes, “But, after all, Violet lacked that sweet, clinging, feminine softness which made Mary Flood Jones so pre-eminently the most charming of her sex.”⁴⁷⁶

If Phineas began by imagining himself in love with and seeking to marry Lady Laura, who defies conventions of the charms of her sex, he ends up proposing to “little” Mary Flood Jones, a preeminent exemplar of such charms. Measured against his past loves, Mary triumphs: “What girl was ever so sweet, so gracious, so angelic, as his own Mary? He swore to her that he was prouder of winning her than of anything he had ever done in all his life.”⁴⁷⁷ Reader (Trollope does not ask): can you forgive *him*?

Despite his loss of a cabinet position for taking a stand of conscience, in the final pages all is restored when he is offered a new governmental position (with a salary) as “poor-law inspector” in Ireland.⁴⁷⁸ He and Mary may now marry.

Phineas’s marital career ends abruptly and sadly, however. *Phineas Redux* introduces him as newly widowed, with Mary having died in childbirth. In *An Autobiography*, Trollope writes, “As I fully intended to bring my hero again into the world, I was wrong to marry him to a simple pretty Irish girl, who could only be felt as an encumbrance on such return.”⁴⁷⁹ It was, then, an “unpleasant and awkward necessity” “to kill the simple pretty Irish girl.”⁴⁸⁰ Even in her death, Mary Flood Jones remains nameless, reduced to her simple charms. Her death opens the door for Phineas to have a second chance at marriage, this time with a more formidable and suitable marital partner.

G. *Phineas Finn and Madame Max Goesler*

Can there be room for yet another woman in Phineas’s life? Enter Madame Max (“Marie”) Goesler, an arresting character introduced in *Phineas Finn*, who features prominently in later volumes in the series. She is reportedly the widow of a wealthy business man rumored to be Jewish, and her own origins are mysterious, with some saying that *she* is part Jewish. She owns many businesses in Vienna, and her dinner parties have achieved a certain standing in London society. An astute observer of social and political life, perhaps because of her status as an outsider, she also is vividly attractive, with particularly powerful and

⁴⁷⁴ *Id.* at 512.

⁴⁷⁵ *Id.* at 513-14.

⁴⁷⁶ *Id.* at 508.

⁴⁷⁷ *Id.* at 566.

⁴⁷⁸ *Id.* at 567.

⁴⁷⁹ TROLLOPE, *AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, *supra* note 19, at 196.

⁴⁸⁰ *Id.* at 197.

intense eyes. Her differences from English women, such as her dark ringlet curls, jewelry, and vivid clothing—black lace but with silk “traceries” producing an abundance of color and “brightness”—feature prominently in Trollope’s descriptions.⁴⁸¹ Trollope’s characterization of Madame Goesler radically subverts gender conventions by showing “masculine” qualities such as courage, foresight, and forcefulness but, in doing so, makes her “tremendously attractive.”⁴⁸² For her many qualities, some literary critics deem her, rather than Plantagenet, Trollope’s “perfect gentleman.”⁴⁸³

When Phineas meets her, he is struck by her large, dark eyes. Trollope uses masculine images to capture their power:

[S]he used them in a manner which is as yet hardly common with Englishwomen. She seemed to intend that you should know that she employed them to conquer you, looking as a knight may have looked in olden days who entered a chamber with his sword drawn from the scabbard and in his hand.⁴⁸⁴

That forthright manner extends to expressing her view about politics and women’s exclusion from direct political action.

1. Madame Max’s Similar “Strong Programme” of Equality and Resentment of Being “Shut up in a Cage”

In this first meeting with Phineas Finn, Madame Max Goesler shocks him with her “strong programme” favoring equality.⁴⁸⁵ Similar to Lady Laura and Lady Violet, Madame Goesler expresses the desire to be in Parliament. In the dinner party scene in which Trollope first introduces her, Madame Goesler leads with: “Mr Finn, . . . what would I not give to be a member of the British Parliament at such a moment at this!”⁴⁸⁶ The “moment” is a time when “[d]ay after day, and clause after clause, the [reform] bill was fought in committee.”⁴⁸⁷ She is eager to be in Parliament because it is a “moment” when “there is something to be done,” and there is “a real fight in the lists,” adding, “The one great drawback to the life of women is that they cannot act in politics.”⁴⁸⁸ While Trollope never discusses parliamentary debate over woman suffrage, it is clearly on Madame Goesler’s agenda. When Phineas asks her “which side [she] would take,” she answers,

⁴⁸¹ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 303-04.

⁴⁸² NARDIN, *supra* note 102, at 193-94 (arguing that Trollope’s “conception of womanhood has expanded” so that “a ‘masculine’ women is no longer monstrous”).

⁴⁸³ *Id.*

⁴⁸⁴ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 303-04.

⁴⁸⁵ *Id.* at 305.

⁴⁸⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁸⁷ *Id.* at 301.

⁴⁸⁸ *Id.* at 305.

'Politically I should want to out-Turnbull Mr Turnbull, to vote for everything that could be voted for,—ballot, manhood suffrage, womanhood suffrage, unlimited right of striking, tenant right, education of everybody, annual parliaments, and the abolition of at least the bench of bishops.'

'That is a strong programme,' said Phineas.

'It is strong, Mr Finn, but that's what I should like. I think, however, that I should be tempted to feel a dastard security in the conviction that I might advocate my views without any danger of seeing them carried out. For, to tell you the truth, I don't at all want to put down ladies and gentlemen.'⁴⁸⁹

As Phineas questions her about whether it is "comfortable" having theories that "one is not bound to carry out," she embarrasses him with Mr Palliser by asking the latter, "[D]o you live-up to your political theories?"⁴⁹⁰ She provocatively misattributes to Phineas her own view that "it is very well to have far-advanced ideas . . . because one is never called upon to act upon them practically."⁴⁹¹ When Mr Palliser admonishes that "[t]hat is a dangerous doctrine," she retorts, "But pleasant,—so at least Mr Finn says."⁴⁹² After Palliser's implicit rebuke that he himself is "really anxious to carry into practice all those doctrines of policy which [he] advocate[s] in theory," Phineas comments to Madame Goesler that she has "taught a Cabinet Minister to believe that [he is] a most unsound politician" and that she "may have ruined [his] prospects for life."⁴⁹³ Her retort is to hope not but observe: "As far as I can understand the way of things in your Government, the aspirants to office succeed chiefly by making themselves uncommonly unpleasant to those who are in power."⁴⁹⁴ Once again, there is no serious discussion of her political "programme" of greater equality, including for women.

In *Phineas Redux*, Madame Goesler has another exchange with Phineas in which she expresses regret about women's lack of direct political power but pulls back from embracing women's rights. The "moment" this time is the proposal by the Conservative government to disestablish the Church of England. Phineas asks whether she will go and hear Mr Daubeny speak. She declines with a retort that stresses how differently they are situated with respect to direct political action: "But you have the excitement before you of making a good speech in answer. You are in the fight. A poor woman, shut up in a cage, feels

⁴⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁴⁹¹ *Id.* at 306.

⁴⁹² *Id.*

⁴⁹³ *Id.*

⁴⁹⁴ *Id.*

there more acutely than anywhere else how insignificant a position she fills in the world."⁴⁹⁵

By the "cage," Madame Goesler refers to the space where women were permitted to watch parliamentary proceedings. Phineas seems astonished: "You don't advocate the rights of women, Madame Goesler?"⁴⁹⁶ Using the language of male "mastery," she expresses frustration at being constrained from direct action and from having her interests represented by Phineas and other men:

'Oh, no. Knowing our inferiority I submit without a grumble; but I am not sure that I care to go and listen to the squabbles of my masters. You may arrange it all among you, and I will accept what you do, whether it be good or bad,—as I must; but I cannot take so much interest in the proceeding as to spend my time in listening where I cannot speak, and in looking when I cannot be seen.'⁴⁹⁷

Madame Goesler's lack of interest echoes Jeffrey Palliser's comments in *Can You Forgive Her?* about his cousins, Iphy and Phemy. They would serve in Parliament if they could but are not politicians because "they are too clever to give themselves up to anything in which they can do nothing."⁴⁹⁸

2. Madame Goesler's Attraction to Phineas and Pursuit by a Duke

Madame Goesler is attracted to Phineas but aware of his quest for Violet. Meanwhile, she catches the eye of the Duke of Omnium, who proposes to her. This subplot allows for an airing of harsh prejudices against outsiders and how those should constrain even a duke's marital choice. Lady Glencora, seeing a threat to her son's future status as duke should the Duke of Omnium marry and have an heir, attempts to stop the match. Having been coerced out of her own marriage plans in *Can You Forgive Her?*, she now sees the wisdom of such coercion: "[I]f she had been controlled when she was young, so ought the Duke to be controlled now that he was old."⁴⁹⁹ Thus, she is prepared to enlist the Duke's relatives and friends to prevail on him against the marriage. Although her self-interest—wishing to be the future Duchess of Omnium—is one clear motivator, she also casts her efforts in terms of upholding what the Duke owes to society because of his prominence.

In Lady Glencora's anger, the internal monologue Trollope reports includes highly anti-Semitic depictions of Madame Goesler and of any child of her marriage to the Duke: she cannot abide that "a black-browed baby with a yellow skin should be shown to the world as Lord Silverbridge."⁵⁰⁰ How could the Duke

⁴⁹⁵ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS REDUX, *supra* note 15, at 230.

⁴⁹⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁹⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁹⁸ TROLLOPE, CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?, *supra* note 15, at 192.

⁴⁹⁹ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 456.

⁵⁰⁰ *Id.*

be “such a fool” as to propose to “[t]he widow of a Jew banker!”⁵⁰¹ Lady Glencora vilifies Madame Goesler’s physical appearance (“devil’s eyes”) and character in reflecting that the Duke would be cutting away from himself “all honour, all peace of mind, all the grace of a noble end to a career which, if not very noble in itself, had received the praise of nobility”:

And to do this for . . . a Jewess, . . . an adventuress who had found her way into society by her art and perseverance . . . ! That such a one should have influence enough to intrude herself into the house of Omnium, and blot the scutcheon, and,—what was worst of all,—perhaps be the mother of future dukes!⁵⁰²

Trollope hastens to add that “Lady Glencora, in her anger, was very unjust to Madame Goesler, thinking all evil of her, accusing her in her mind of every crime, denying her all charm, all beauty.”⁵⁰³ Tellingly, the mixed marriage itself fuels Lady Glencora’s anger; she could more readily tolerate it if the Duke had “forgotten himself and his position” for the sake of an Englishwoman, meaning “some fair girl with a pink complexion and grey eyes, and smooth hair, and a father.”⁵⁰⁴

In a showdown with Madame Goesler before this monologue, Lady Glencora—without the anti-Semitic vitriol—tells Madame Goesler that “it is not that [she] despise[s] [her]” but that “an old man, over seventy, carrying the weight and burden of such rank as his, will degrade himself in the eyes of his fellows, if he marries a young woman without rank, let her be ever so clever, ever so beautiful.”⁵⁰⁵ Madame Goesler warns Lady Glencora that, if anything, her arguments that she “should degrade his house” have nearly driven her to accept the Duke’s proposal. In the end, though, she declines the proposal because she is “not fitted by birth and position” to be his wife and could not “carry her coronet with a proper grace.”⁵⁰⁶ She prefers to live “even among [her] superiors, at [her] ease,” as Madame Goesler.⁵⁰⁷ She writes to the Duke that “[a] woman who is alone in the world is ever regarded with suspicion,” and “[i]n this country a woman with a foreign name, with means derived from foreign sources,

⁵⁰¹ *Id.*

⁵⁰² *Id.* at 456-57.

⁵⁰³ *Id.* at 457; see also BRYAN CHEYETTE, CONSTRUCTIONS OF ‘THE JEW’ IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND SOCIETY: RACIAL REPRESENTATIONS, 1875–1945, at 32, 34-35 (1993) (arguing that through Lady Glencora’s tirade, Trollope expresses “racial chaos” that would ensue from such a marriage; however, once Madame Max declines the Duke’s proposal, she is “[t]he figure who acts as an idealized model for the ambivalent assimilation of the Jewish racial ‘other’ into Trollope’s fictional aristocracy”).

⁵⁰⁴ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 457.

⁵⁰⁵ *Id.* at 454.

⁵⁰⁶ *Id.* at 458-59.

⁵⁰⁷ *Id.* at 459.

with a foreign history, is specially suspected."⁵⁰⁸ That the Duke would consider her worthy to be his wife surpasses her wildest dreams.⁵⁰⁹

Madame Goesler also rejects the Duke's proposal because she realizes she loves another—Phineas—more, even though it seems hopeless. By the book's end, though, when his future in Parliament seems fragile without money, she offers him some. When he refuses, saying that he cannot take money *from* her hand, she then proposes marriage, reaching out her hand: "Take the hand then first. When it and all that it holds are your own, you can help yourself . . ."⁵¹⁰

By this time, though, Phineas has proposed to "little" Mary Flood Jones. He is tempted strongly, imagining the life he might have with "all that was needed to make his life rich and glorious"; as Trollope puts it, "[w]hat man so placed could do other than take a woman's hand?"⁵¹¹ But, Phineas says that it cannot be, though without revealing his engagement to Mary. She leaves the room, saying she has betrayed herself. Although he feels "pure and unmixed disappointment" at not taking the "great prize" offered him, his betrayal of Mary would be so great that he would experience misery.⁵¹² Yet, even knowing that he had done right, "comfort did not come readily within his reach."⁵¹³

Strikingly, Lady Laura urges Phineas to marry Madame Goesler to obtain the money he needs to stay in Parliament, which would give Lady Laura "the pleasure of thinking that one of [them] can remain here,—that [they] need not both fall together."⁵¹⁴ Phineas is astonished that she would advise him to offer marriage to a woman "merely because she is rich," given Lady Laura's experience of marrying without love.⁵¹⁵ Lady Laura insists both that he could love Madame Goesler and that, while marriage without love makes a woman "wretched," "it is so different with a man."⁵¹⁶ Household governance is one reason: a wife "cannot domineer over [her husband]" or "expect [her husband] to pluck [himself] out of [his] own soil, and begin a new growth altogether in accordance with the laws of her own."⁵¹⁷ Lady Laura desires that he "should not be shipwrecked," in contrast to her own fate.⁵¹⁸

⁵⁰⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁰⁹ *Id.* Showing Madame Goesler as an astute social politician, Trollope gives the title "Madame Goesler's Politics" to the chapter in which Madame Goesler carefully weighs the Duke's proposal and the gains and losses if she "blazoned forth to the world as Duchess of Omnium." *Id.* at 443-47.

⁵¹⁰ *Id.* at 538.

⁵¹¹ *Id.* at 539.

⁵¹² *Id.* at 540.

⁵¹³ *Id.*

⁵¹⁴ *Id.* at 516.

⁵¹⁵ *Id.* at 516-17.

⁵¹⁶ *Id.* at 516.

⁵¹⁷ *Id.*

⁵¹⁸ *Id.* at 518.

H. Phineas Redux: *A Second Chance at Politics and Marriage*

1. “There Must Be Some Woman’s Fingers in the Pie”: The Influence of the Duchess of Omnium

If Lady Laura is Phineas’s primary benefactor in *Phineas Finn*, that role shifts to Madame Goesler and Glencora Palliser in *Phineas Redux*. Indeed, Phineas’s relationship with Lady Laura—or, rather, rumors about their supposed love affair which drove Mr Kennedy to try to shoot Phineas—has become a political liability. Phineas comes to realize that, because of the efforts of the “slanderers” (particularly, Mr Bonteen), he will not be “invited to join the future Government” once the Liberal party returns to power.⁵¹⁹ He recognizes the costs of Lady Laura’s patronage, which he has narrowed to her fanatical love and devotion: “There was nothing he would not do for Lady Laura,—were it in his power to do anything. But no circumstance in his career had been so unfortunate for him as this affection.”⁵²⁰ He further recognizes that, when she returns to London, he must “devote himself to her service” as a friend but that this will “be used as proof of the accusation that had been made against him.”⁵²¹

When he confides his worries about being left out of the government to Madame Goesler, she assures Phineas that Lady Glencora—now Duchess of Omnium—is “determined to fight [his] battle for [him].”⁵²² Phineas insists that “[he] want[s] her to do nothing of the kind,” but Madame Goesler counters that a scheme is already in place on his behalf:

‘You will know nothing about it. We have put our heads to work, and Mr Palliser . . . is to be made to tell Mr Gresham that you are to have a place. It is no good you being angry, for the thing is done. If you have enemies behind your back, you must have friends behind your back also.’⁵²³

When he expresses alarm, she tells him that he will be “called the ladies’ pet” but that he shouldn’t mind it.⁵²⁴ Even Lady Laura, once she is back in London, will have a role—“get[ting] hold of Mr Erle,” her cousin.⁵²⁵

Madame Goesler makes clear that their scheme even extends to finding a way of “attacking” Mr Bonteen to the Duke of St. Bungay. This leads Phineas to say, “If that kind of thing is done I shall not accept place even if it is offered me.”⁵²⁶ Madame Goesler also stresses Lady Glencora’s power and determination to do

⁵¹⁹ TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS REDUX*, *supra* note 15, at 261.

⁵²⁰ *Id.*

⁵²¹ *Id.*

⁵²² *Id.* at 263.

⁵²³ *Id.*

⁵²⁴ *Id.*

⁵²⁵ *Id.*

⁵²⁶ *Id.* at 264.

"anything and everything" to thwart Mr Bonteen and aid Phineas, asking, "Did you ever know Lady Glen fail in anything that she attempted?"⁵²⁷ Madame Goesler even appeals to Phineas's solicitude for Lady Laura as a reason why he "must submit" to their scheme: "[T]he Duchess believes,—that falsehoods have been used which are as disparaging to Lady Laura Kennedy as they are injurious to you, and [Lady Glencora] is determined to put it right."⁵²⁸ Madame Goesler denies that these efforts are derogatory to him and tries to educate him that falsehoods told about him of the kind cannot be met in a "straightforward way" or by fighting "above ground" when one's "enemies won't stay above ground."⁵²⁹ Once again, she attests to the Duchess's power: "[B]elieve me, that there is not a better engineer going than Lady Glen."⁵³⁰

The narrator refers to this scheme as a "conspiracy" formed by Madame Goesler and the "young Duchess" to force "upon the future Premier the necessity of admitting Phineas Finn into his Government."⁵³¹ As the scheme is put into action, the reader follows the Duchess's repeated efforts to exert her influence on Phineas's behalf, while experiencing her frustration and skepticism as the male politicians claim they never interfere. When Lady Glencora asks the Duke of St Bungay to find a place for Phineas, he replies that he has "never in [his] life . . . asked for an appointment as a personal favour" and cannot do so now.⁵³² Lady Glencora's frustration is evident when she exclaims to Madame Goesler, "[T]o think that I should have had that stupid old woman [the Duchess of St Bungay, the Duke of St. Bungay's wife] a week in the house, and all for nothing!"⁵³³

When Lady Glencora urges Barrington Erle that he ought to try to help Phineas because Mr Bonteen has turned Mr Gresham against him, Erle too says, "I never interfere now unless I'm asked."⁵³⁴ When she threatens to "make such a row that some of [them] shall hear it" if Phineas is passed over, Erle sounds the "ladies' pet" charge: "How fond all you women are of Phineas Finn."⁵³⁵ She counters that it is wrong that a decent fellow should be thrown over for falsehoods involving Erle's own cousin, Lady Laura. The Duchess peremptorily tells Erle that she knows that he could manage it if he chose to "put [his] shoulder to the wheel" and that "[she] shall expect to have it managed."⁵³⁶

⁵²⁷ *Id.*

⁵²⁸ *Id.*

⁵²⁹ *Id.* at 265.

⁵³⁰ *Id.*

⁵³¹ *Id.*

⁵³² *Id.* at 266-67.

⁵³³ *Id.* at 267.

⁵³⁴ *Id.*

⁵³⁵ *Id.*

⁵³⁶ *Id.*

Next is the Duchess of Omnium's conversation with her husband, Plantagenet, when she asks him to do something for her—a surprisingly rare request. He joins the male chorus, asserting, "I never interfere."⁵³⁷ She insists that he must because "[o]ther men do continually" and because "[i]t's quite a common thing for a man to insist that one or two others should come in [to the government] with him."⁵³⁸ In frustration, she exclaims, "Who does interfere? Everybody says the same."⁵³⁹ She warns her husband, "If you can't manage this for me, Palliser, I shall take it very ill."⁵⁴⁰ The narrator tells us that the Duke was, "in his quiet way," an "affectionate" and "indulgent husband."⁵⁴¹ The next day, remembering his wife, he whispered into Mr Bonteen's "private ear" that if the Liberals come in, "I suppose something will be done for that Mr Finn," who "spoke well [in the House] the other night."⁵⁴² Mr Bonteen's negative reaction prods the Duke to disclose Lady Glencora's interest; Mr Bonteen repeats the falsehoods and then reveals that he *has* been asked about Phineas and said "that he would weaken any Government that would give him office."⁵⁴³ After Plantagenet shares this with the Duchess, she swears "that she wasn't going to be beaten by Mr Bonteen."⁵⁴⁴

By the time the Conservative leader goes out and Mr Gresham is forming his Cabinet, the Duchess's plan has had partial success. Mr Gresham needs the "very powerful" Duke of St Bungay for the new government as several others, including the Duke of Omnium, will not come in without him. Mr Gresham "insisted on Mr Bonteen" as well, but the Duke of St Bungay and Plantagenet indicate that they do not support giving Mr Bonteen a position.⁵⁴⁵

Trollope, as narrator, interjects that "Lady Glencora . . . was at the bottom of it all," for "[s]he had sworn an oath inimical to Mr Bonteen, and did not leave a stone unturned in her endeavors to accomplish it."⁵⁴⁶ Trollope describes her as a "second Juno," who "would allow the Romulus she hated"—Mr Bonteen—"to sit in the seats of the blessed" but only on condition that "Phineas Finn must be allowed a seat also," even if only "at the second table of the gods."⁵⁴⁷ However,

⁵³⁷ *Id.* at 268.

⁵³⁸ *Id.* Lady Laura echoes the Duchess's sense of the political world when she defends her plan to speak to Barrington Erle on Phineas's behalf, over his objection: "But, my dear Mr Finn, people do make efforts in such cases. I don't doubt but that at this moment there are a dozen men moving heaven and earth to secure something." *Id.* at 272.

⁵³⁹ *Id.* at 268.

⁵⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁵⁴¹ *Id.* at 269.

⁵⁴² *Id.*

⁵⁴³ *Id.*

⁵⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁴⁵ *Id.* at 282.

⁵⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁴⁷ *Id.* at 282-83.

her struggle for Phineas proved useless. After learning of Mr Bonteen's "insolent answer" to her husband, she "went sedulously to work" against Mr Bonteen with better results: "[B]efore a couple of days were over she did make her husband believe that Mr Bonteen was not fit to be Chancellor of the Exchequer."⁵⁴⁸ She achieved this in part through hosting a dinner party at which she "singled out" Mr Bonteen "for her special attention, and in the presence of all who were there assembled he made himself an ass" by talking boastfully at her encouragement.⁵⁴⁹ This "arrogance" is "intolerable" and offensive to older school aristocrats like the Duke of St Bungay, who values "official discretion and personal reticence."⁵⁵⁰

After this dinner party, the Duke of St Bungay tells Mr Gresham that he is "going a little too quick in regard to Mr Bonteen" and that Plantagenet shares his view. Mr Gresham wavers, and Mr Bonteen perceives that "the young duchess" had done it.⁵⁵¹ Mr Gresham comes to perceive a "woman's fingers in the pie" when Barrington Erle makes an "insidious proposition . . . that matters would go quieter if Phineas Finn were placed in his old office at the Colonies instead of Lord Fawn"⁵⁵²:

Mr Gresham, when he heard this, thought that he began to smell a rat, and was determined to be on his guard. Why should the appointment of Mr Phineas Finn make things go easier in regard to Mr Bonteen? There must be some woman's fingers in the pie. Now Mr Gresham was firmly resolved that no woman's fingers should have anything to do with his pie.⁵⁵³

Gresham's resistance to women's influence may suggest a fear of a so-called petticoat government. However, in the next Palliser novel, *The Prime Minister*, we learn that Gresham himself has been susceptible to such influence. When Plantagenet—now Prime Minister—suggests that while wives of prime ministers may do "foolish things," they do not "interfere in politics," Glencora counters, "Doesn't everybody know that . . . Mrs Gresham got her husband to make that hazy speech about women's rights, so that nobody should know which way he meant to go?"⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁸ *Id.* at 283.

⁵⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁵⁰ *Id.* at 284.

⁵⁵¹ *Id.* at 285.

⁵⁵² *Id.* at 285-86.

⁵⁵³ *Id.* at 286.

⁵⁵⁴ TROLLOPE, *THE PRIME MINISTER*, *supra* note 370, at 389. Such political influence was one argument offered in parliamentary debate against Mill's proposed amendment to extend suffrage to women. Countering the argument that "women do not need direct power, having so much indirect [power], through their influence over their male relatives and connections," Mill contended that such "great power" is "indirect, and therefore irresponsible," while the vote would make such power "responsible." 187 Parl Deb HC (3d ser.) (1867) col. 824-25 (UK).

In the end, however, despite Gresham's resistance to a "woman's fingers in the pie," the Duchess has partial success: "[a]t last Mr Bonteen was absolutely told that he could not be Chancellor of the Exchequer" and accepts, resentfully, a lesser position without a seat in the Cabinet.⁵⁵⁵ But "no office whatever was assigned to Phineas Finn," and Lady Glencora vows to Madame Goesler that "[she is not] done with Mr Bonteen yet."⁵⁵⁶ Although rumors fly, the truth contained in them was that "[t]he duchess had done it" by going "on her knees to Mr Gresham to get a place for [Phineas]," allegedly because Lady Laura Kennedy was "in love with [him]."⁵⁵⁷ The rumors are basically correct in reporting "[t]hat the degradation of the one man had been caused by the exclusion of the other."⁵⁵⁸ According to rumor, when Mr Gresham refused her, "at her bidding, half-a-dozen embryo Ministers—her husband among the number—had refused to be amenable to Mr Gresham," who then had "to sacrifice Mr Bonteen."⁵⁵⁹

Even this does not end the matter, as the Duchess's efforts on Phineas's behalf continue. Trollope reports that "very many ladies" took Phineas's part and did not "approve the stern virtue of the Prime Minister" or his wrongfully shutting Phineas "out of office because a lady had been in love with him."⁵⁶⁰ Trollope describes the Duchess's power of influencing other aristocratic women in a way that shows the blending of social and political life:

The young Duchess was a woman very strong in getting up a party; and the old Duchess[, wife of St Bungay], with many other matrons of high rank, was made to believe that it was incumbent on her to be a Phineas Finnite. One result of this was, that though Phineas was excluded from the Liberal Government, all Liberal drawing-rooms were open to him, and that he was a lion.⁵⁶¹

Mr Bonteen's "snarling" about his lesser position and his open insolence to Plantagenet Palliser add zest to the scene, and there are "Bonteenites" consisting of some former members of Parliament as well as "Phineas Finnites," a "tribe . . . for the most part feminine."⁵⁶²

Lady Glencora's ability to exert social and political influence is also evident in *The Eustace Diamonds*, which overlaps in time with the *Phineas* novels. A central plot concerns whether Lady Eustace stole her own diamonds or is an innocent victim. Lady Glencora (not yet a Duchess) undertakes a campaign to

⁵⁵⁵ TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS REDUX*, *supra* note 15, at 286-87.

⁵⁵⁶ *Id.* at 287.

⁵⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁶⁰ *Id.* at 307.

⁵⁶¹ *Id.* at 308.

⁵⁶² *Id.* at 309.

sway opinion in Lady Eustace's favor. Glencora is described as "very true as a politician" but "apt to have opinions of her own, and to take certain flights in which she chose that others of the [Liberal] party should follow her."⁵⁶³ Trollope describes Lady Glencora as having "stood too high among her set . . . for others to resist her leading."⁵⁶⁴

In *The Prime Minister*, when Plantagenet reluctantly agrees to be Prime Minister with a coalition government, the Duchess reaches the apex of her power. She creates her own shadow cabinet and engages in lavish entertaining to hold her husband's coalition government together. Her husband comes to wonder if she is actually the Prime Minister and if such entertaining is more important than his role. As I will explore in a related work, Lady Glencora muses that she should have been the Prime Minister, both because she possesses the requisite thick skin contrasted with Plantagenet's thin skin and because she understands the ways of politics better than he does.

2. Madame Goesler's Rescue of Phineas and Lady Laura's Hatred

After these political developments, the open hostility between Phineas Finn and Mr Bonteen is evident when they encounter each other in their political club. Shortly after their quarrel, Mr Bonteen is murdered, and Phineas is suspected and arrested based on circumstantial evidence. While many of his male colleagues doubt Phineas's innocence, his various female supporters never waver. The Duchess of Omnium is prepared to bribe judges and jurors to free him, but Madame Goesler undertakes the more practical steps that aid him.

Unsatisfied with Phineas's attorney,⁵⁶⁵ Madame Goesler conducts her own investigation, interviewing crucial witnesses (whose memories and willingness to recount them are aided by plenty of silver coins). She dramatically travels to Prague to find critical evidence that will implicate the real killer, Reverend Emilius, whose motive was to halt Mr Bonteen's efforts to gather evidence proving Emilius is a bigamist and voiding his marriage to Lady Eustace.

The public is fascinated with the tale of Madame Goesler's efforts and her "roving tour through all the wilder parts of unknown Europe . . . with the object of looking for evidence to save the life of Phineas Finn."⁵⁶⁶ She becomes very popular.

In a chapter entitled "I Hate Her!," Lady Laura fumes that Madame Goesler will have the "glory of [Phineas's] deliverance!"⁵⁶⁷ She sees her own fate ahead of her with even more misery than in her past, constantly recalling her "one great sin" in failing to give her hand to a "poor man" (Phineas) and instead giving it

⁵⁶³ TROLLOPE, *THE EUSTACE DIAMONDS*, *supra* note 16, at 397. Trollope also describes her as "erratic and dangerous, but . . . powerful." *Id.*

⁵⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁶⁵ TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS REDUX*, *supra* note 15, at 406.

⁵⁶⁶ *Id.* at 458.

⁵⁶⁷ *Id.* at 461.

to a “rich suitor” (Mr Kennedy) with the conviction that she could “best serve” Phineas’s interest and merely feel “simple and purest friendship” toward him.⁵⁶⁸ She reflects again upon the shipwreck that she has made of her life, but she also sees that even though she is now a widow, she cannot hope to marry Phineas. Lady Laura laments that it was not she who went to Prague.⁵⁶⁹ “Womanlike,” Lady Laura visited him in prison and “wept at his feet” while “[t]his strange female, this Moabitish woman, had gone to Prague, and had found a key.”⁵⁷⁰ Trollope recounts Lady Laura’s hatred of “the strange woman,” “this half-foreigner, this German Jewess, this intriguing unfeminine upstart” but adds (as he did earlier with Lady Glencora) that she “wronged her rival foully” in this diatribe.⁵⁷¹

Despite Lady Laura’s promise not to be jealous of Phineas’s wife when he married again, the news of his proposal to Madame Goesler brings bitterness. She offers him her money to afford him the independence he needs to be in Parliament without a government position. But he refuses and tells her of his intention to propose to Madame Goesler. She remarks on his hard heart in telling her, commenting, “Phineas, you have killed me at last.”⁵⁷² Later, as she looks up into his face, she seems to regret her fanatical devotion to what Ramona Denton calls her “love religion.”⁵⁷³ “Oh Phineas . . . Oh, my darling! My idol that I have worshipped when I should have worshipped my God!”⁵⁷⁴ Even still, she refers to her great fault for which she continues to pay “the penalty of [her] whole life”—not understanding “how strong the heart can be.”⁵⁷⁵

In contrast to Lady Laura’s marital misery, Madame Goesler and Phineas Finn have a happy marital union that transforms “the Victorian ideal . . . out of recognition.”⁵⁷⁶ Rather than the wife providing a refuge to which the husband can withdraw, Madame Goesler’s money from the businesses she manages will protect Phineas’s political independence and the spouses “share power, freedom, professional engagement, and the right to obey conscience on absolutely equal terms.”⁵⁷⁷

I. *Lady Laura and the “Cage of Femininity”*

In an insightful essay, “‘That Cage’ of Femininity: Trollope’s Lady Laura,” Denton offers Lady Laura as a prime example of the Trollopan “new woman,”

⁵⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁶⁹ *Id.* at 463.

⁵⁷⁰ *Id.* at 463-64 (endnote omitted).

⁵⁷¹ *Id.* at 464.

⁵⁷² *Id.* at 560.

⁵⁷³ Denton, *supra* note 32, at 4.

⁵⁷⁴ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS REDUX, *supra* note 15, at 561.

⁵⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁷⁶ NARDIN, *supra* note 102, at 200.

⁵⁷⁷ *Id.*

mentioned above, who searches for a vocation other than "solely" being a wife and mother and often "plays a key role in the political life of her day."⁵⁷⁸ Denton ponders whether Lady Laura's misery is seen as "punishment she deserves for her betrayal of her womanhood" by making a loveless marriage in a quest for a "vicarious political career" as Kennedy's wife.⁵⁷⁹ Lady Laura also treats it as her fate to love only once, by contrast to Phineas who she expects will love and marry again: "I tried to blaze into power by a marriage, and I failed,—because I was a woman. A woman should marry only for love."⁵⁸⁰

Denton contrasts the political ambitions with which Lady Laura begins her marriage with her "conversion" to a "fanatic adherent of a love religion"; she becomes "desperately in love with Phineas" and can explain her misery only in terms of a sin she committed by betraying her heart.⁵⁸¹ She amplifies, in her imagination, what she felt for him at the time of Mr Kennedy's proposal—telling Phineas that the world has become a "blank" for her because of her "strong, unalterable, unquenchable love."⁵⁸² Even so, she tells him her love is sisterly and that she will not be jealous if he remarries. She will attempt to live through his political successes and to support his career as she can.

Lady Laura's increasingly fanatical devotion to the "love religion" and to Phineas has parallels in the increasingly fanatical devotion by her estranged husband, Mr Kennedy, to his husbandly rights and to his insistence that Laura do her duty and return to him.⁵⁸³ Mr Kennedy's sense of divine right fuels his ongoing legal battle with Lady Laura in *Phineas Redux*. Lady Laura writes a letter to Phineas about her husband's demands: "He begins by quotations from the Scriptures, and from the Prayer-Book, to show that a wife has no right to leave her husband,—and then the goes on to the law. One knows all that of course."⁵⁸⁴ She also states that Mr Kennedy, in his letter, asks whether Lady Laura has grounds to remain away from him:

'Do I think, that were I to choose to submit the matter to the iniquitous practices of the present Divorce Court, I could prove anything against him by which even that low earthly judge would be justified in taking from him his marital authority? And if not,—have I no conscience? Can I reconcile it to myself to make his life utterly desolate and wretched simply because duties which I took upon myself at my marriage have become distasteful to me?'⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁷⁸ Denton, *supra* note 32, at 1-2.

⁵⁷⁹ *Id.* at 2.

⁵⁸⁰ TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS REDUX*, *supra* note 15, at 88.

⁵⁸¹ Denton, *supra* note 32, at 4.

⁵⁸² TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS REDUX*, *supra* note 15, at 85.

⁵⁸³ Denton, *supra* note 32, at 6.

⁵⁸⁴ TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS REDUX*, *supra* note 15, at 139.

⁵⁸⁵ *Id.* (endnote omitted).

Lady Laura indicates legal advice that she received in response to Mr Kennedy's statement:

[H]e can get an order from the Court of Queen's Bench which will oblige the judges in Saxony to send me back to England in the custody of the police . . . I had the opinion of Sir Gregory Grogram before I came away, and he told me that it was not so. I do not fear his power over my person⁵⁸⁶

However, Mr Kennedy also threatens her with publicity—that “he will put into some of the papers a statement of the whole case,” and *that* she does fear.⁵⁸⁷

Mr Kennedy does turn to publicity out of frustration with what he perceives as the “gross insufficiency in the laws of extradition,” which will not allow him to “call upon the magistracy of a foreign country to restore to him his erring wife.”⁵⁸⁸ When Quentus Slide, editor of the *People's Banner* newspaper, gives Phineas a chance to respond to the allegations in the letter Mr Kennedy sent for publication, Phineas sees that Mr Kennedy “expatiated on the absolute and almost divine right which it was intended that a husband should exercise over his wife,” quoting both “Old and New Testament in proof.”⁵⁸⁹ Mr Kennedy now puts his hope in “public opinion”; Mr Slide explains to Phineas that “[they] go in for morals and purity of life” and that publishing the letter will allow the paper “to say that [they have] done [their] best to promote domestic virtue and secure forgiveness for an erring wife.”⁵⁹⁰

For his efforts to persuade Mr Kennedy not to publish the letter because of its falsehood, Phineas narrowly escapes injury when Mr Kennedy shoots at him after fulminating against Phineas as “her paramour” who is abetting her in “sin.”⁵⁹¹ Mr Kennedy continues to appeal to “the laws both of God and man,” insisting that she has broken her vows in deserting him.⁵⁹² When Phineas recounts what happened to his former legal mentor, Mr Low, Trollope shares that Lady Low apparently took Mr Kennedy's side: “[A]s to Lady Laura Kennedy, she seemed to think that the poor husband had great cause of complaint, and that Lady Laura ought to be punished. Wives, she thought, should never leave their husbands on any pretext,” and Lady Laura seemed to have “no pretext at all.”⁵⁹³ Phineas and Mr Low manage to get an injunction against publishing the letter, but this incenses the editor, who launches an unrelenting campaign against Phineas, hurling various thunderbolts against him—disclosing

⁵⁸⁶ *Id.* at 140.

⁵⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸⁸ *Id.* at 161.

⁵⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁹⁰ *Id.* at 161-63.

⁵⁹¹ *Id.* at 166-67.

⁵⁹² *Id.* at 166.

⁵⁹³ *Id.* at 170.

Mr Kennedy's attempted murder of Phineas and arguing that Phineas is unfit for a place in the government.

Mr Kennedy's evident madness strengthens Lady Laura's legal position and opens the door for her to return to England without fear of legal action. As she conveys to Phineas in a subsequent letter, her father has consulted with his lawyer and thinks that "there can be no difficulty in my obtaining a separation on terms which would oblige him or his friends to restore this horrid money."⁵⁹⁴ As Lady Laura's father's lawyer demands from Mr Kennedy restitution of the money arising from Lady Laura's fortune, Mr Kennedy flies into "bitter wrath," insisting that she return to Loughlinter, repent, "and receive it there."⁵⁹⁵ The Earl's lawyer counters that "[a]n act had been done . . . which made it quite out of the question that Lady Laura should return to her husband."⁵⁹⁶ Mr Kennedy no longer fears police coming to Loughlinter to take him away in connection with attempting to shoot Phineas, and thus "he still felt that he was sufficiently his own master to defy the Earl's attorney and to maintain his claim upon his wife's person. Let her return to him first of all!"⁵⁹⁷ By this time, Mr Kennedy is dying, and his attorneys, no longer letting him handle correspondence himself, commit to paying Lady Laura the interest on her money. Even on his death bed, he still is "wailing" his complaint about Lady Laura: "If she had the fear of God before her eyes, she would come back to me."⁵⁹⁸ But he died without changing his will, so Lady Laura not only gets all her money back and the stipulated jointure of £1200 per year but, to her surprise, also his entire estate for her life.⁵⁹⁹

With her financial future secure but with no interest in living at Loughlinter unless Phineas would join her there, Lady Laura slowly fades from the pages of *Phineas Redux*. She wishes to give her fortune to Phineas and fantasizes that she might become his wife, even if he were to be sent to the gallows for murdering Mr Bonteen.⁶⁰⁰ She is unable to play any role in aiding Phineas's legal defense.

Toward the end of *Phineas Redux*, Lady Laura has lost interest in politics—except for her personal concern that Phineas regain a seat in the House. Strikingly, in a letter to Phineas about how she has grown "weary of herself," she echoes Madame Max's imagery of the cage in which women observing Parliament sat, stating,

'I sometimes wonder whether I could go again and sit in that cage in the House of Commons to hear you and other men speak,—as I used to do. I do not believe that any eloquence in the world would make it endurable to me. I hardly care who is in or out, and do not understand the things which

⁵⁹⁴ *Id.* at 225.

⁵⁹⁵ *Id.* at 368-69.

⁵⁹⁶ *Id.* at 369.

⁵⁹⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁹⁸ *Id.* at 370.

⁵⁹⁹ *Id.* at 374-75.

⁶⁰⁰ *Id.* at 375.

my cousin Barrington tells me . . . Not but that I am intensely anxious that you should be back.’⁶⁰¹

Denton comments on the astonishing transformation of Lady Laura, initially described in *Phineas Finn* as “having an almost ‘masculine’ grasp of politics—even her body language, we remember, was ‘after the fashion of men’ when she discussed political issues.”⁶⁰² At that earlier time,

she fully accepted a behind-the-scenes political role, rejecting the women’s rights cause. Now . . . having failed to win the measure of political power her society is willing to grant a woman—the power of an influential man’s wife—she loses interest in politics altogether, and yet seems to resent for the first time woman’s circumscription.⁶⁰³

Denton observes the irony that Lady Laura makes her “bitter, almost feminist remark” about the cage only when she “has become narrowly ‘feminine’ in her obsession with love”: “She is indeed trapped, imprisoned in an ideal of womanhood that denies her individual identity, and the final irony is that she has internalized that ideal—has turned the key upon her own cage.”⁶⁰⁴ While she began as a self-appointed mentor to Phineas, using her extensive connections to open doors for him, now it is only his career that might resurrect her interest in politics: “If, looking on from a distance, I can see you succeed, I shall try once more to care for the questions of the day.”⁶⁰⁵ But even the prospect of Phineas being reelected and welcomed to the House “with open arms” is not enough to tempt her to “to be once more in the cage.”⁶⁰⁶ She tells him that she will find “some consolation,” when he does succeed, in thinking “[she] also helped a little.”⁶⁰⁷ This is a diminished echo of her earlier political ambitions to be of use.

Another irony is that the widowed Lady Laura, now freed from Mr Kennedy’s marital tyranny and legal threats and now financially independent, views her life as over with “nothing left for [her].”⁶⁰⁸ She writes Phineas that “watch[ing] [her] father to the end”—a duty that “[t]he world would say . . . is fit for a widowed childless daughter”—is a fate to which she cannot be reconciled.⁶⁰⁹ She alludes to the different “fate” for which she longs—marrying Phineas.⁶¹⁰ She resists

⁶⁰¹ *Id.* at 502.

⁶⁰² Denton, *supra* note 32, at 7 (quoting TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS FINN*, *supra* note 15, at 32) (noting ironies in Trollope’s description of Lady Laura as stereotypically feminine but with masculine tendencies, such as her interest in politics).

⁶⁰³ *Id.*

⁶⁰⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁰⁵ TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS REDUX*, *supra* note 15, at 502.

⁶⁰⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁰⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁰⁸ *Id.* at 549.

⁶⁰⁹ *Id.*

⁶¹⁰ *Id.* at 549-50.

things being over for her, since she is not yet “an old woman, going down into the grave”; however, she rejects attempting a comeback as a political hostess, even as she contemplates it:

‘I suppose I could start a house in London, and get people around me by feeding and flattering them, and by little intrigues,—like that woman of whom you are so fond. It is money that is chiefly needed for that work, and of money I have enough now. And people would know at any rate who I am. But I could not flatter them, and I should wish the food to choke them if they did not please me.’⁶¹¹

In this letter, Lady Laura implicitly contrasts herself with Madame Goesler, whom she (correctly) perceives as a rival. Her language suggests disillusionment with the indirect political influence she once craved. Her experience also seems to confirm her earlier declaration that it is a curse to be a woman. And yet, Trollope does not have Lady Laura’s bitter disillusionment lead her to revise her dislike of women’s rights or to recognize the need for women’s more secure footing in the domestic and political spheres.

J. *Lady Glencora’s Taking to Politics and Advocating for Women’s Equality*

When *Can You Forgive Her?* ended, Plantagenet Palliser enjoyed doubly good fortune: Lady Glencora gave birth to a male heir and his Liberal colleagues gave him a second chance to accept the ministry position he most desired—Chancellor of the Exchequer. In *Phineas Finn*, when Phineas first meets Lady Glencora, Trollope describes her not only as a “young” and “very pretty woman” but also as having “taken lately very strongly to politics, which she discussed among men and women of both parties with something more than ordinary audacity.”⁶¹² That audacity includes embrace of the rights of women, causing her male compatriots to recoil. In the next chapter, set at Mr Kennedy’s estate at Loughlinter, Lady Laura manages to include Phineas in a predinner drawing-room conversation taking place among Lady Glencora and Liberal party luminaries, such as the Prime Minister (Mr Gresham) and Mr Monk. Lady Glencora and Mr Monk have been in conversation and she asserts that they “are the only two in the whole party who really know what [they] would be at.”⁶¹³ He initially graciously says he would be happy to be “divided from so many of [his] friends” to “go astray” in her company, but when Mr Gresham presses to know what the two are “really at,” Lady Glencora’s bold embrace of sex equality leads Mr Monk to recoil and Mr Bonteen’s wife to be incredulous.

‘Making men and women all equal,’ said Lady Glencora. ‘That I take to be the gist of our political theory.’

⁶¹¹ *Id.* For readers who would like to envision a happy ending for Lady Laura in her later life, see JOHN F. WIRENIUS, *PHINEAS AT BAY* (2014) (picking up Lady Laura’s story two decades later).

⁶¹² TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS FINN*, *supra* note 15, at 96.

⁶¹³ *Id.* at 104.

'Lady Glencora, I must cry off,' said Mr Monk.

'Yes;—no doubt. If I were in the Cabinet myself I should not admit so much. There are reticences,—of course. And there is an official discretion.'

'But you don't mean to say, Lady Glencora, that you would really advocate equality?' said Mrs Bonteen.

'I do mean to say so, Mrs Bonteen. And I mean to go further, and to tell you that you are no Liberal at heart unless you do so likewise . . .'⁶¹⁴

Lady Glencora does not expressly mention the ballot as part of her agenda of making men and women equal but presumably intended it because Parliament would soon be debating the Reform Act. Her words to Mrs Bonteen put her finger on a seeming contradiction within Liberal political theory: accepting inequality between men and women. The "liberalism" espoused by Trollope, which he later puts in the mouth of Plantagenet Palliser, accepts inequality as natural and works to reduce it, although he nowhere mentions inequality between men and women. As Halperin explains, Trollope accepted the legitimacy of aristocratic rule and believed such rule was a critical feature of British society. In that respect, Plantagenet Palliser was his ideal gentleman and politician.⁶¹⁵

What of Lady Glencora as a liberal political philosopher? As the conversation continues with Mrs Bonteen, she tries to reason by analogy from the liberal commitment to improving the condition of the "lower orders" to improving the condition of women.

'Do you not wish to make the lower orders comfortable?'

'Certainly,' said Mrs Bonteen.

'And educated, and happy and good?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'To make them as comfortable and as good as yourself?'

'Better if possible.'

'And I'm sure you wish to make yourself as good and as comfortable as anybody else,—as those above you, if anybody is above you? You will admit that?'

'Yes;—if I understand you.'

'Then you have admitted everything, and are an advocate for general equality,—just as Mr Monk is, and I am. There is no getting out of it;—is there, Mr Kennedy?'⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁴ *Id.* at 104-05.

⁶¹⁵ HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 56. For further discussion, see text accompanying notes 84-99.

⁶¹⁶ TROLLOPE, PHINEAS FINN, *supra* note 15, at 105.

At this point, Mr Kennedy has come to lead Lady Glencora, described by Trollope as "the French Republican,"⁶¹⁷ into dinner.

As she went, she whispered in Mr Kennedy's ear, 'You will understand me. I am not saying that people are equal; but that the tendency of all law-making and of all governing should be to reduce the inequalities.' In answer to which Mr Kennedy said not a word. Lady Glencora's politics were too fast and furious for his nature.⁶¹⁸

Nor does Lady Glencora receive any reply to her political argument from any other male politician present, even though her philosophy of reducing natural inequality seems to be a tenet of the Liberalism later espoused by her husband in *The Prime Minister*. Recall Trollope's frequent use of Lady Glencora, as well as Plantagenet, to voice *his own* social and political convictions: Does her argument concede a logical basis for women's rights, after all? Or is Trollope simply floating the argument, letting readers decide what to think? Later, Mr Monk, "the most advanced Liberal" in the Cabinet, remarks to Phineas that "Lady Glencora was not so far wrong the other night," even though he eschews the "ugly word" of "[e]quality."⁶¹⁹ He continues, "But the wish of every honest man should be to assist in lifting up those below him, till they be something nearer his own level than he finds them."⁶²⁰ But even this highly advanced liberal does not spell out whether such uplift extends to women.

K. *Phineas's Disillusionment with Politics*

By the end of *Phineas Redux*, Phineas is disillusioned with politics even though he is (at last) offered a position in the new Liberal government. Somewhat like Lady Laura, he can scarcely rally any interest in it, and he even refuses Mr Gresham's offer to be made Under-Secretary of State. By contrast to Lady Laura, however, he has the prospect of a second chance in political life when he is ready for it again. And he also has a happy marriage to Madame Goesler, a woman whom he now dearly loves and whose wealth will afford him the economic independence necessary to have political independence. The Duchess holds a dinner where they can announce their engagement, and "[b]efore dinner on that day every one of the guests at Matching Priory knew that the man who had refused to be made Under-Secretary of State had been accepted by that possessor of fabulous wealth who was well known to the world as Madame Goesler of Park Lane."⁶²¹ To Phineas, Madame Goesler comments, "Now you can bide your time, and if the opportunity offers you can go to work

⁶¹⁷ *Id.*

⁶¹⁸ *Id.*

⁶¹⁹ *Id.* at 106.

⁶²⁰ *Id.*

⁶²¹ TROLLOPE, *PHINEAS REDUX*, *supra* note 15, at 567.

under better auspices.”⁶²² Trollope ends *Phineas Redux* reporting that “[t]hose who know him best say that he will of course go into office before long,”⁶²³ and, in *The Prime Minister*, Phineas does so, advancing in government while also enjoying an evidently strong, happy, and relatively egalitarian marital partnership. In *The Prime Minister*, when Plantagenet becomes Prime Minister and Glencora is determined to sustain the Coalition government through her receptions, dinners, and entertaining, she declares to Madame Goesler, now Mrs Finn, that she is forming a “small cabinet” of her own in which Mrs Finn “shall do foreign affairs.”⁶²⁴ Two outsiders have become trusted insiders.⁶²⁵

L. *Political Rights or a Right to a Husband, Redux?: He Knew He Was Right*

References to “women’s rights” feature in a number of Trollope’s novels, but Trollope refers to “Mr Mill” only in two—*Phineas Finn* (as discussed in this Article) and *He Knew He Was Right*.⁶²⁶ Begun in late 1867, after Trollope finished writing *Phineas Finn*, *He Knew He Was Right* merits discussion not only for its mentions of John Stuart Mill’s advocacy for women’s equality but also for one striking contrast with the Palliser novels: it includes a character, the “poetess” and lecturer Wallachia Petrie (the “Republican Browning”), an unapologetic, full-throated champion of women’s rights, including the ballot.⁶²⁷

First, Mill: the American minister to Florence buttonholes English aristocrat Charles Glascock, who has not read Mill; the minister contends that the “far-seeing” Mill “has understood that women must at last be put upon an equality with men.”⁶²⁸ Glascock (perhaps a stand-in for Trollope) attempts “playfulness” in replying, “Can he manage that men shall have half the babies?”⁶²⁹ The minister, undeterred, calls this a “somewhat trite objection” that “we in our country . . . have altogether got over”; unfortunately for the reader, the minister defers a full account as to *how* his country “got over” this to another occasion

⁶²² *Id.*

⁶²³ *Id.* at 569.

⁶²⁴ TROLLOPE, *THE PRIME MINISTER*, *supra* note 85, at 48.

⁶²⁵ See Elizabeth R. Epperly, *From the Borderlands of Decency: Madame Max Goesler*, 15 VICTORIANS INST. J. 25, 29 (1987) (“The politics of [Madame Goesler’s] world and Phineas’s are similar: together Phineas and Madame Max suggest how a persistent outsider may win a place in the capricious world of London high society.”).

⁶²⁶ HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 39.

⁶²⁷ ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT* 513 (John Sutherland ed., Oxford World’s Classics 1998) (1869) [hereinafter TROLLOPE, *HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT*].

⁶²⁸ *Id.* at 521.

⁶²⁹ *Id.* Glascock may have been speaking for Trollope here, considering that “Trollope’s own knowledge of Mill is doubtful, since Mill’s *Logic* is the only volume by him known to have been in Trollope’s library.” HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 39.

(which never arises).⁶³⁰ For Trollope, however, women's role as the "nursing mothers of mankind" was hardly a trite objection but rather a decisive "law" in which "[women's] fate is written with all its joys and all its privileges."⁶³¹

Second, through the character of Wallachia Petrie, Trollope frames the competing careers of marriage versus women's rights as a pitched battle. To be sure, literary critics regard Trollope's portrait of Wallachia as "an opportunity for satire,"⁶³² a mocking caricature and intentionally unflattering: Wallachia is a "comically doctrinaire feminist[]." ⁶³³ Even so, it is illuminating to consider Wallachia, her ideas, and her fate in *He Knew He Was Right* as yet another fictional answer to the Woman Question that Trollope broached in *North America*. While the ardent spirits for whom Alice Vavasor longed remained offstage in *Can You Forgive Her?*, Wallachia is both ardent and vividly present in *He Knew He Was Right*. While Lady Glencora and Madame Max espouse women's equality and yet, in actuality, are loathe to end the privileges of aristocracy, Wallachia, an American woman, detests aristocracy. Possible models for Wallachia include Trollope's "ray of light," the American Kate Field, as well as Bostonian Wendell Phillips, the abolitionist and women's right advocate whom Trollope heard lecture while writing *North America*.⁶³⁴ Wallachia's abolitionism is evident when Caroline Spaulding appropriates an abolitionist slogan to urge her to be civil to Glascock—"Though he is to be a lord, still he is a man and a brother"—and Wallachia despairs that Caroline is "already learning to laugh at principles" dear to Caroline since childhood.⁶³⁵

Trollope's "doctrine" offered in *North America* is sharply at odds with that of Wallachia's. While *North America* extols chivalry as the source of gains in women's rights over the centuries and cautions that calls for women's rights could undo all chivalry has done, Wallachia bluntly declares, "I hate chivalry;—what you call chivalry. I can carry my own chair, and I claim the right to carry it whithersoever I may please."⁶³⁶ To the English lord, Charles Glascock, she states that the "so-called chivalry of man to woman" is akin to the affection with which a man speaks of a dog but is always mixed with "contempt" and a sense

⁶³⁰ TROLLOPE, *HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT*, *supra* note 627, at 522.

⁶³¹ TROLLOPE, *NORTH AMERICA*, *supra* note 19, at 266.

⁶³² Flint, *Queer Trollope*, *supra* note 58, at 102 ("satire").

⁶³³ NARDIN, *supra* note 102, at 211; *see also* HALPERIN, *supra* note 33, at 39; MARKWICK, *TROLLOPE AND WOMEN*, *supra* note 38, at 196-97.

⁶³⁴ TROLLOPE, *HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT*, *supra* note 627, at 947 (suggesting that "Wallachia Petrie seems to have been an amalgam of Wendell Phillips" and that New England poet Lizzie Doten "may have partly inspired Wallachia"); Gary Scharnhorst, *Kate Field and Anthony Trollope: The Gaps in the Record*, 109 *VICTORIAN NEWSL.* 21 (2006) (observing that both Wallachie Petrie and Caroline Spaulding are "nominees for figures" that Trollope modeled on Kate Field).

⁶³⁵ TROLLOPE, *HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT*, *supra* note 627, at 720.

⁶³⁶ *Id.* at 721.

of woman's inferiority.⁶³⁷ Wallachia contrasts chivalry with equality: "I want no favour, but I claim to be your equal."⁶³⁸

Of Wallachia, Trollope observes that the English are "not usually favourably disposed to women who take a pride in a certain antagonism to men in general, and who are anxious to shew the world that they can get on very well without male assistance."⁶³⁹ Such women have "noble aspirations" and are worthy of admiration; those "solicitous" of such women, however, all hope "that they will be cured at last by a husband and half-a-dozen children."⁶⁴⁰ "In regard to Wallachia Petrie there was not, perhaps, much ground for such hope"; so "positively wedded" was she to "women's rights in general, and to her own rights in particular."⁶⁴¹ No man would be "brave enough to make the effort" to get her to succumb; further, Wallachia believed in the "unanswerable truth" of her arguments because the very "chivalry of men" that she detested kept her opponents from challenging her.⁶⁴²

Marriage is not for Wallachia, but she loses the battle to avoid that fate for her friend and chosen protégé, the American minister's niece, Caroline Spalding. Wallachia hoped that Caroline would be her comrade in arms in "that contest which she was determined to wage against man," particularly British men, given her hatred of rank, riches, and monarchy.⁶⁴³ Wallachia fails to persuade Caroline against marriage to Glascock, who uses marital imagery to tell Caroline, his "captive," that he "[has] won the battle, and [her] friend, Miss Petrie, has lost it."⁶⁴⁴ Wallachia's lamentation over the loss of Caroline as a comrade makes clear that marriage and women's rights are incompatible "careers" and that Caroline chose wrongly:

It was to her a thing very terrible that the chosen one of her heart should prefer the career of an English lord's wife to that of an American citizeness, with all manner of capability for female voting, female speechmaking, female poetising, and, perhaps, female political action before her. It was a thousand pities!⁶⁴⁵

According to Wallachia's "theory of life," Caroline was "wrong" and "weak": she chose to get "happiness from soft effeminate pleasures" and luxuries, instead

⁶³⁷ *Id.*

⁶³⁸ *Id.*

⁶³⁹ *Id.* at 717.

⁶⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁶⁴¹ *Id.*

⁶⁴² *Id.* at 717, 720.

⁶⁴³ *Id.* at 717.

⁶⁴⁴ *Id.* at 765-66.

⁶⁴⁵ *Id.* at 768. By using language such as "chosen one of her heart" and making references to Wallachia's possessive feelings for Caroline, Trollope may or may not be signalling Wallachia's "sexual preferences"; in any case, she espouses a "resolute[ly] separatist feminism." See Flint, *Queer Trollope*, *supra* note 58, at 102.

of "from rational work and the useful, independent exercise of her own intelligence."⁶⁴⁶ But the narrator, however, clearly favors Caroline's career choice. Further, Caroline defends Wallachia against Charles, claiming that Wallachia did her good and would do the world good, but Wallachia seems to have had no lasting influence: in the aptly-named chapter, "Mr. Glascock is Master," Caroline refers to Charles as her "master" and almost relishes that he is "so strong that he treated her almost as a child."⁶⁴⁷

CONCLUSION: PRESENT-DAY ECHOES OF THE WOMAN QUESTION

Of what present-day relevance are Trollope's fictional and nonfictional depictions of how best to answer the Woman Question? Do his mappings of the various possible forms of household power and their relationship to political power resonate at all today? Are there assumed dichotomies between the right to a husband versus to employment and the ballot? Yes and no. Marriage is not the only "career" prescribed for women and the notion that women do not need direct political representation—either through voting or holding public office—is moribund. The contradictions that Lady Glencora pointed out between Liberal theory and practice no longer exist, at least with respect to the denial of formal gender equality. Nor are women with "ambition" to be of use or active in politics confined to whatever political influence they can achieve by marriage to political men. Certainly, Lady Laura, in 2020, would not face formal barriers to standing for Parliament or onerous legal barriers to escaping from her miserable marriage. Alice could find a more direct outlet for her political "hankerings" and, given her astute political and social skills, perhaps the inimitable Madame Max could be part of a dual-career power couple with Phineas. However, as the fate of the several highly qualified women seeking the Democratic nomination suggests, women still face a number of barriers to full political participation at all levels of office, such as lingering stereotypes about their electability. Further, although Black women have played a powerful role as reliable and dedicated voters, they have not enjoyed adequate party support as candidates and leaders.⁶⁴⁸ Perhaps

⁶⁴⁶ TROLLOPE, HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT, *supra* note 627, at 768.

⁶⁴⁷ *Id.* at 765. Charles's mild and good temper, however, suggests a form of husbandly governance that is a foil for the unreasonable and tyrannical "rule" of Louis Trevelyan, who, like Mr Kennedy, finally goes mad when he cannot extract obedience from his wife, Emily, who he wrongly suspects of betraying him. *Id.* at 360-66 (describing how Louis was "in truth, mad on the subject of his wife's infidelity" and viewed her whole conduct as "one tissue of disobedience"). Markwick speculates that Trollope offered his mocking portrait of Wallachia to "appease his middle of the road readers" by not "upset[ing] the apple cart" since the theme of the "many threads" of the novel's story was "the injustice of women's powerlessness," including that of Emily. MARKWICK, TROLLOPE AND WOMEN, *supra* note 38, at 196.

⁶⁴⁸ See, e.g., Nadia E. Brown & Danielle C. Lemi, "Life for Me Ain't Been No Crystal Stair": Black Women Candidates and the Democratic Party, 100 B.U. L. REV. 1611 (2020).

Vice President Biden's selection of Senator Harris indicates a positive shift toward respecting rather than fearing ambitious women.

What of Trollope's defense of chivalry against the threat of expanding women's rights or of Wallachia's rejection of chivalry for equality? Consider the revival of interest in the Equal Rights Amendment ("ERA"). Just as 2020 saw commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment, it also featured renewed interest in ratifying the ERA, first introduced by prominent suffragists several years before ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment.⁶⁴⁹ Indeed, even though the deadline for reaching the three-fourths majority of states necessary for ratification expired decades ago, Virginia ratified the ERA in 2020.⁶⁵⁰

The legendary battles over the ERA are again in the public eye, with the recent television series *Mrs. America* focused on the successful efforts of Eagle Forum and Stop ERA founder Phyllis Schlafly.⁶⁵¹ She and other opponents of the ERA argued that it would threaten the "privileges" women enjoyed as homemakers, wives, and mothers. Schlafly argued that the ERA would remove the "special protection" that the "Christian tradition of chivalry" afforded women.⁶⁵² Opposition to the ERA today does not often use the language of chivalry, but it continues to warn that an "equality amendment" could result in a loss of women's "special protections" in the realm of marriage and family.⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁹ See Reva B. Siegel, *The Nineteenth Amendment and the Democratization of the Family*, 129 YALE L.J. F. 450, 467 (2020).

⁶⁵⁰ Gregory S. Schneider & Laura Vozzella, *Va. Finalizes ERA Votes, But State Is Set for Fight*, WASH. POST, Jan. 28, 2020, at B1.

⁶⁵¹ *Mrs. America: Phyllis* (Hulu Apr. 15, 2020).

⁶⁵² Judith Warner, *She Changed America*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 29, 2006, at 10 (book review) (quoting DONALD T. CRITCHLOW, PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY AND GRASSROOTS CONSERVATISM: A WOMAN'S CRUSADE 218, 220 (2005)).

⁶⁵³ Toni DeLancey, *Don't ERAse Women with an Equal Rights Amendment*, CONCERNED WOMEN FOR AM. (Dec. 31, 2019), <https://concernedwomen.org/the-equal-rights-amendment-is-a-war-on-women/> [<https://perma.cc/X34E-Y54N>] (listing arguments for why Equal Rights Amendment is "so wrong for women").