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"A Girl Such as I am": A Study of Women in Anthony Trollope's Palliser Series

Catherine Ann Renko

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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"A GIRL SUCH AS I AM"

A Study of Women in Anthony Trollope's Palliser Series

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Catherine A. Renko

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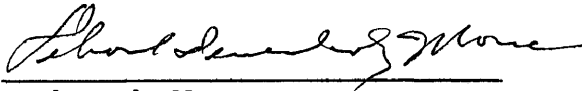
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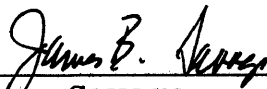
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Deborah Morse



Elsa Nettels



James Savage

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to express her appreciation to Professor Deborah Morse, under whose guidance this paper was researched and written, for her patience, assistance, and criticism. The author is indebted to Professors Elsa Nettels and James Savage for their careful reading of the manuscript, and also to Professor Terry Meyers for his advice.

ABSTRACT

This paper posits the Victorian writer Anthony Trollope as an author sympathetic to the many problems encountered by women, both single and married, wealthy and poor, in his society. I focus mainly on a character named Lady Mabel Grex, who appears in the final novel of Trollope's Palliser series, although I will compare and contrast her with several prominent women characters that appear throughout the body of work.

I have coined the phrase "inadvertent feminist" to describe Trollope's positive treatment of female characters. To further defend this position, I will cite extensively from Trollope's work, particularly from my primary focus, The Duke's Children, and from scholarly studies of Trollope's life and work.

The title of my paper is taken from The Duke's Children. Lady Mabel Grex asks a listener to "only think how a girl such as I am is placed; or indeed any girl" (81). This paper is a careful consideration of her statement.

"A GIRL SUCH AS I AM"

A Study of Women in Anthony Trollope's Palliser Series

Anthony Trollope's attitude toward women is something of a puzzle. His mother, to whom he was not particularly close but whom he respected as an intelligent, resourceful woman, was a published and popular writer who was often the sole support of her family. His wife, Rose, was in most ways the typical Victorian wife and mother, but hers was the last word in the settlement of editorial questions. When their son Harry later began to write, Trollope referred him also to Rose for help and advice on his work. He was extremely fond of women in general, liking "the rustle of petticoats" and feminine company (Glendinning:274).¹ He was good friends with George Eliot and had an enduring friendship with an American feminist, Kate Field. He was a contributor to Christmas annuals published by ardent feminist Emily Faithfull, founder of the Victoria Press, which provided employment for women. He is also infamous for writing to Kate Field that she should "go & [sic] marry a husband".²

¹ Victoria Glendinning quotes here from Trollope's North America.

² This remark is frequently quoted in Trollopiana; in Victoria Glendinning's biography it is quoted more fully. In a letter to Kate Field, Trollope recounts a conversation regarding her that he had with the Reverend William G. Eliot (grandfather of T.S. Eliot), a mutual acquaintance. Eliot said of Field "Let her marry a husband. It is the best career for a woman". Trollope then goes on in the letter to comment, "I agreed with him--and therefore bid you in his name as well as my own, to go & [sic] marry a husband". Quoted in context, the remark carries a slightly different, sarcastic spin, and no longer sounds so much the stern father figure as it does the affectionate friend.

He has his feminist figures of fun, such as the Baroness Banmann, but he generally credits his female characters with intelligence, integrity, and sophistication. Although most of them do resolve the dilemma over their futures by marriage, so long as they are undecided they are portrayed not as hysterical or deviant, but as deeply thoughtful and anxious to do the right thing by themselves and others. Trollope was a believer in romance and marriage, and a man who treated his own wife with lifelong love and respect. When he exhorts Kate Field to marry, he does so not because he wants to see her under a man's control but because he thinks that married men and women are happier people than those who remain unmarried (and therefore are presumed to have no sexual lives, at least if they are women).

Trollope was also somewhat subject to the Victorian strictures concerning the private and public spheres. The latter was a world often depicted in his work as violent and difficult, and it was a world in which he had suffered much as a boy and young man. In his Autobiography, he refers to himself at school as a "Pariah." While his parents traveled about trying to amend their fortunes, he was several times left in the lurch at school, without the requisite funds to pay for gentlemen's gear or to tip college servants. Middle-class concerns these might be, but Trollope was decidedly of the middle class, and knew firsthand what it meant to be outside the status quo. It is no great wonder that it was

easy for him to subscribe to the idea of protecting women from such perceived hardships, even when those women were beginning to find themselves suffocated by the male mantle. He was an unusual man, but not a radical one. In fact, his biographer N. John Hall notes that Trollope characterized himself as a "conservative Liberal."³ While certain statements and speeches can be construed as anti-feminist, the careful reader will focus on his art and the actions of his life, and see that there was true awareness of and sympathy for the conditions of women's lives.

Additionally, his adherence to the idea of male superiority was necessarily shaken over time by the female company he kept, and the resulting ambivalence is easy to spot in his characterizations of women. As Victoria Glendinning observes in her biography of Trollope, he was "attracted" to "outspoken, independent American and English women he met in middle life, who...frightened him and disturbed his notions of male supremacy. These women...he wrote into his novels" (Glendinning:xix).⁴

³ Hall states that "[i]n politics [Trollope's] conservatism kept clashing with his more theoretical liberalism (he later denominated himself 'an advanced but still a conservative Liberal') (Hall:112). Since the feminist movement of his day was characterized as largely political rather than ideological, his attitude toward it is encompassed in this quotation.

⁴ As for his views regarding the women other authors wrote into their novels, Hall cites critical notes Trollope made while reading classic works: "Trollope was especially annoyed at inadequate characterization of women: Jonson, for one, 'never achieves a woman's part. He hardly even tries to make a woman charming. They are all whores or fools--generally both.'" (Hall:417)

It's true that Trollope never officially supported the women's movement of his day, and also that he was prone to make humorous remarks regarding it. As Juliet McMaster puts it, "Trollope, like the Duke, sympathizes with the sentiment [of equality], even if he would not sanction the statement of it" (McMaster:177, emphasis mine). Nevertheless, because of the accuracy, insight, and love with which he renders Glencora Palliser, Alice Vavasor, Violet Effingham, Laura Standish Kennedy, and Mabel Grex (all characters woven into the six books of the Palliser series), I have chosen to regard his attitude toward women in a favorable light, and coined the term "inadvertent feminist" to describe his approach.

The six books of the Palliser series were published beginning in 1865, with The Duke's Children, my primary focus, published in 1880. The women's suffrage campaign in England, agitation to overturn the Contagious Diseases Acts,⁵ and calls to reform divorce and child custody laws were at their peak. I do not suggest that Trollope supported any of these movements; he is on record for opposing the former in any case. It does not necessarily follow, however, that he

⁵ The Contagious Diseases Acts were passed in response to epidemic levels of venereal disease, particularly in garrison towns. The laws allowed for the forced physical examination of any woman presumed to be a prostitute; it did not make any provision for the examination of men--even military men, considered the primary customers of prostitutes. Opposition to this invasive double standard treatment made activists of many middle and upper class women who were not directly affected by the laws, thus helping to galvanize the women's movement for nearly two decades. The Acts were repealed in 1886.

condoned practices that are now clearly seen to have been psychologically, physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually detrimental to women. As I have stated, he would have been a rare man to have understood and supported the true implications of the women's rights movement of the late 19th century. Even today historians tend to characterize the Victorian women's movement as a purely political endeavor, primarily concerned with enfranchisement, when in fact it was "social, moral, psychological and profoundly religious."⁶

Whether he was consciously opposed or not to a greater sphere of movement for women, he intuitively presents women as constricted by their lots in life. Several characters, such as Glencora Palliser or Laura Standish Kennedy, appear to be more politically savvy than their respective mates, and their frustration at being unable to act is documented with real understanding on the part of the author. Prostitutes, when they appear in his work (rarely), are treated as victims of rather than as seducers of men.⁷ Although it is never stated

⁶ This is a quotation of Helena Swanwick by Susan Kingsley Kent in Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914. Kent argues that "[i]n fighting for enfranchisement, suffragists sought no less than the total transformation of the lives of women" (3). It is Kent who cites a 1981 writing by Patricia Stubbs in which that author suggested the movement "was entirely civic in its aims and organization."

⁷ In Can You Forgive Her?, George Vavasor's discarded mistress Jane makes an appearance. She is not in any way meant to titillate--she is demure and thoughtless of her own needs even as George rejects her--but to further stack the evidence of greed, violence, and sexual profligacy that is mounted against George (Chapter 71).

that Laura Standish Kennedy should be able to divorce her obviously mad husband, the pathetic rendering of her exile after leaving him, and her father's and brother's determination to keep Kennedy from reclaiming her, present an obvious disapproval that a woman should be so trapped by the clear error of her marriage (Phineas Redux). Trollope may not have understood why women wanted to take care of themselves, but it is apparent that he thought men should take better care of them. He does not openly question the patriarchal system, but the implication of Laura Kennedy's situation is that British law (particularly divorce and property law) hindered more than it helped women.

Throughout the Palliser series, male characters are driven to gain or maintain societal acceptance and political power. Their movements are often paralleled by the female characters' progression toward success in their own more limited sphere--to make a marriage based on love that still afforded them financial ease and allowed them some say in their men's careers. While the men jockey for parliamentary seats and invitations to the right country house, the women are concerned with the attentions of various suitors and the approach of marriage.⁸ In quite a few cases, they are pawns

⁸ Robert Polhemus maintains a similar view and states it in similar language in his essay, "Being in Love in Phineas Finn/Phineas Redux," as cited in Deborah Morse's Women in Trollope's Palliser Novels. Morse quotes him as stating that, in reference to Phineas Finn and Madame Max, "...Trollope deliberately makes their careers parallel..." (Morse:148).

employed by the men to maintain social order and to climb in the financial world.

In his Autobiography, Trollope says of Plantaganet Palliser and Lady Glencora, "how frequently I have used them for the expression of my political and social convictions" (180). I don't believe I mistake Trollope's intention when I expand this statement to include many more of his characters. He was fully aware that marriage was the most viable future for an upper-class lady of the day, and indeed for most women, and he naturally portrays their greatest concerns and dilemmas as revolving around this goal. In his letters and speeches, Trollope frequently reiterated that the best career for a woman was concern with her husband, children, and home.⁹ His primarily comic novels have a reasonable share of happy endings and wedding bells. Nevertheless, what marks many of the women in his novels is a profound ambivalence on their part to their prescribed destiny.

The most pointed exceptions to this comic rule are among Trollope's most vivid characters. From the redoubtable Glencora to the vacillating Mabel Grex, they agonize long and hard over the sole option that constitutes their futures--

⁹ Aside from the comments made to Kate Field, already cited, in the speech "Higher Education for Women" Trollope maintained that while women should be able to converse intelligently and read widely, they should also emulate their grandmothers in "the making of pudding" (Hall:339-340). Trollope was adept at the art of self contradiction, in speech and in his writings. Hall notes that "[s]ome may have missed his ironies, but it was always part of Trollope's style to allow them to do so undisturbed" (Hall:411).

marriage. As Trollope has Alice Vavasor say to herself in Can You Forgive Her?, "[w]hat should a woman do with her life?" (109-110). Several of them, Mabel herself and Laura Standish Kennedy, are unable to answer this question for themselves to any degree of satisfaction.¹⁰ Even for those who are more traditionally "romantic" and not in the least ambitious, there is no guarantee of happiness. Emily Wharton of The Prime Minister is the case in point here, with a father who actively attempts to dissuade her from choosing an inappropriate mate in Ferdinand Lopez. Having no need for financial assistance, and no real interest in politics, Emily truly refuses to behave as a commodity and marries purely for love. Unfortunately, she bestows this love unwisely and comes to repent her act.

In this paper I will trace the treatment of several women characters who appear in the Palliser series. While my primary focus will be on the marital ambitions of Lady Mabel Grex, my analysis relies on comparing and contrasting her with other women in the series who are in the similar predicament of deciding or repenting their respective fates. For instance, Glencora Palliser must strike many compromises in life, giving up the only man she ever truly loves to lock

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Mabel's surname, Grex, is the Latin word for group, or clique. In the social scheme of the Palliser series, people like the Grexes constitute the old guard, overwhelmingly concerned with social rank. Trollope's treatment of them indicates that he considers them ripe for extinction.

horns with her emotionally conservative husband and try to carve out an intellectually active existence. Lady Laura Standish marries for political influence through her husband, and the result is outright tragedy as she fails in the emotional and social spheres. Lady Mabel Grex herself, beautiful and intelligent, seems to end not only husbandless but largely friendless.

The story of Mabel's failure to find a mate goes far beyond an inability to choose from two suitors, a common literary conceit, to reveal the psychosis of a woman whose hands are tied by the society in which she lives. Although Trollope openly opposed women's suffrage and access to education and non-domestic careers, and although he does not come out directly in favor of it in his fiction, as a careful chronicler of societal mores he appears clearly to perceive the constraints placed on women. The obvious sympathy for Mabel's single, poor, and bitter state at the conclusion of The Duke's Children is the most particular example to indicate that Trollope is what I call an "inadvertent feminist."

In their book Corrupt Relations: Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Collins, and the Victorian Sexual System, Barickman, MacDonald and Stark maintain that "[w]e have...two Trollopes--the seemingly hostile critic of the Victorian women's movement and the sympathetic Victorian sociological novelist capturing in fiction the tensions being felt by upper-class men and women of his day" (196). Trollope was a fairly traditional

and down-to-earth participant in the best of what Victorian England had to offer a man--financial security, an active social and intellectual exchange, travel, and sport. Nevertheless, his fiction indicates that he had an awareness of and sympathy for the dependent status of women.

The authors quoted above maintain that much ambivalence toward traditional concepts of marriage and toward the social structures of good woman/bad woman (the Angel in the House or the prostitute, with virtually nothing in between) arose in the writing of the authors they discuss: "Women and the family were so linked in the Victorian mind that this ambivalence both complicates and intensifies the narrators' involvement with the novels' female characters" (8). They maintain that the complex portrayals of women and family life resulted from the fact that while the family (and therefore women) embodied the idealistic aspects of Victorian values, it was also clearly the "breeding ground for conflicts in sexual identity and for the forces of oppression and repression which inevitably spring from these conflicts" (8). Trollope, like many of his contemporaries, had a necessary preoccupation with these issues, and his interest and ambivalence led to many comments of interest in a feminist reading. In The Eustace Diamonds, Trollope writes that "[t]he offer of herself by a woman to a man is, to us all, a thing so distasteful that we at once declare that the woman must be abominable" (I;320), but in his Autobiography, Trollope discusses the harsh

punishments for women who sin against tradition and comments that "for our erring sons we find pardon easily enough" (334). Clearly, although he is as subject to double standards as any other Victorian, he is to a great degree aware of them as questionable standards by which to measure men and women.

According to Barickman, MacDonald, and Stark, Trollope "persistently emphasizes that a woman's condition in this patriarchal society is utterly dependent on the males she is associated with, and that in such a society, women really have very few pleasant options but marriage" (208). Mabel, Laura, et. al. are "utterly dependent," but the men on whom they depend are more concerned with their own progress. The males who are meant to be protecting them and making efforts toward securing the future welfare of each are more interested in using the women as pawns or suppliers of cash. Laura's brother, though generally a likeable character, has tremendous debts--and no qualms about using his sister's inheritance to pay them off. The result is that Laura is no longer financially able to consider a match with Phineas Finn, her true love. She marries Robert Kennedy to try to maintain some of her political interests, but once married, he expects her to give over her maneuverings and devote herself to keeping his house. Mabel's father and brother are both corrupt and have squandered the family's money, including Mabel's dowry, on their own amusements. The bottom line is that the patriarchy, by denying women the right and preparation to care

for themselves, has implicitly promised to protect them. It frequently fails to do so.

The historical fact of women's redundancy seems to have no acknowledged place in his work. Trollope presents almost every heroine with a choice of at least two suitors--a plethora of eligible men that did not exist in reality. In fact, when Frank Greystock is presented in The Eustace Diamonds with the idea that not all women who are alone are necessarily that way by choice, he indicates to his friend that "'[t]hat idea as to the greater number of women is all nonsense'" (I:223). Frank indicates that the statistics showing greater numbers of women born are patently false, that bachelors should kick in and do their duty by women, and that economic concerns over being able to support a family are rooted in mere selfishness. At the time of this conversation, however, Frank himself is playing the mating game with two women, Lucy Morris and the redoubtable Lizzie Eustace. Trollope has given us an unreliable source for information on the redundancy issue, and such a tactic leads me to presume that he is not comfortable with Frank's theories. Artistic license and adherence to the literary convention of two suitors aside, one wonders why he chose to endow female characters with a greater choice in mates than was provided in reality. Perhaps, lacking a more practical answer, this technique is merely his way of avoiding the necessity of calling for other employment than marriage for women, even

wealthy ones. Note, however, that in keeping with the convention of two suitors, in most cases one is eminently a wrong choice. Christopher Herbert discusses the plethora of unsuitable mates in Trollope's work, and concludes that it "strongly suggests a violent psychic response to the Victorian idealization of the moral sensibility of women" (T&CP:98).

Deborah Morse also comments on the way "...Trollope comically dramatizes the inadequacies of...unwanted suitors" for Mabel, Mary, and Isabel (127). On the one hand, these women should be high-minded enough to choose correctly, and on the other, they have little to choose from. It's no wonder Trollope was so ambivalent, and that, as Morse goes on to point out, he has all three girls equate marriage to the wrong man with death.¹¹

Alice Vavasor sets the stage for Laura and for the disenfranchised Mabel when she is described as follows: "her mind had become filled with some undefined idea of the importance to her of her own life. What should a woman do with her life?" (CYFH:109-110). She has "an undefined ambition that made her restless without giving her any real food for her mind" (CYFH:110). Alice ends happily in finally choosing the more worthy of her two suitors, and it is

¹¹ Trollope moves from the comic to the tragic upon investigation of these girls' reactions to unsuitable mates. Morse goes on to state that "Mabel equates marriage with most young men in her society with suicide; Mary with death; Isabel with murder, suicide, or adultery. The violence of the declarations Trollope chooses for each young women, the uncharacteristic vehemence of feeling expressed, is intentional and significant" (Morse:127).

generally clear that Trollope agreed marriage was the best career for a woman. Nevertheless, in every one of the six novels of the Palliser series one or more female characters is troubled, or at least cynical, about the commencement of this career.¹² Why is Mabel, the last of them, ultimately left out of the comic resolution of The Duke's Children?

Lady Mabel Grex is perhaps the most problematic and complex of these troubled characters. It is difficult at many points in the narrative of The Duke's Children to sympathize with her. Mabel is often unreliable--we see that her actions toward Silverbridge often contradict him: when he jests, she comes down hard on him; when he is serious, she mocks him. In his essay on the "Dark Lady" in Trollope, Charles Blinderman identifies Mabel as belonging to this type: "her dark hair and mysterious eyes in particular revelatory of the darkness within...her height, the chiselled features of her face, her lofty poise--these identify her as emotionally as well as physically unembraceable" (57). What he seems to have forgotten in his zest for typecasting is that Mabel has loved and has been loved--by Tregear. It is, after all, the realities of the marriage market, not her own nature, that

¹² In Can You Forgive Her?: Alice Vavasor, Glencora Palliser, Arabella Greenow, and Kate Vavasor; in Phineas Finn: Lady Laura Standish; in The Eustace Diamonds: Lucinda Roanoke, Lucy Morris, and Lizzie Eustace; in Phineas Redux: Adelaide Palliser, Laura Standish Kennedy, and Marie Max Goesler; in The Prime Minister: Emily Wharton Lopez; and in The Duke's Children: Mabel Grex and (to a lesser degree) Isabel Boncassen.

cause her to feel she has to give him up. The authors of Corrupt Relations assert that "Trollope's husband-hunting woman is a victim before she is a victimizer" (210), and one has only to look beneath Mabel's bravado, or to read the harrowing passages of Lucinda Roanoke's physical encounters with Sir Griffin Tewett to see that Trollope is not describing maneaters.

Nevertheless, Mabel is clearly a manipulator, and this makes her seem years older than she is, especially when she is contrasted with her foils within the story--Lady Mary Palliser and Isabel Boncassen. Mary is steady and determined while Isabel is long on self esteem and very clear as to the conditions she sets for giving herself in marriage. Both young women get their hearts' desires. Poor Mabel seems always to be playing the wrong game at the wrong time--and for an unprotected, impoverished young noblewoman, to win the game is terribly important. Indeed, in Phineas Finn, Trollope has Laura refer to the process as a game in no uncertain terms when she says to Phineas that "'[a] woman has a fine game to play; but then she is so easily bowled out, and the term allowed to her is so short'" (II:348).

In He Knew She Was Right, Jane Nardin postulates that "Trollope sometimes undercuts his romantic comedies by juxtaposing them against plots that suggest less orthodox views of women" (178). It is certainly true that Mabel's plight may cause the reader to make a less sentimental

examination of Mary's and Isabel's happy endings. Both women have been steadily depicted throughout the novel as unusually determined young ladies--as has Mabel. Mary and Isabel, however, do appear to succeed where Mabel has failed, without sentimentality and without Mabel's mercenary attitude--and without "playing the game." Quite simply, both girls have a strong sense of their own intrinsic value. As Isabel exclaims to pompous Dolly Longstaffe after his proposal of marriage, "[i]f my husband were an English Duke I should think myself nothing, unless I was something as Isabel Boncassen" (TDC:255).

A girl who appears to know what she wants does not always get it, as Trollope warns in The Prime Minister. Emily Wharton, precious jewel of her family, bestows her innocent love upon an outsider--a dark foreigner named Ferdinand Lopez. Against the wishes of her father and of the fair cousin whose bride she is meant to be, she marries him. Lopez quickly confirms the fears of those who suspect he is not a gentleman. He contracts bad business deals and generally mistreats Emily, even using her to extort money from his father-in-law. After making everybody miserable, he throws himself under a train. Emily, who had been blinded by too romantic a nature, is consumed with guilt and convinced that she has tainted herself and her family beyond repair.

Deborah Morse remarks of Mary, Isabel, and Mabel that "the women of the novel are on the whole so infinitely

superior to the men, and yet the men as a matter of course possess the power in this society" (128). Jane Nardin suggests that Mary's very modern determination to be married to the man she chooses bodes ill for the marriage in that Tregear himself is so "strong-willed...[and] neither sweet nor tender (183). In other words, a self-aware young woman would not be happy within the potentially oppressive structure of Victorian marriage. Even bearing a possible Ferdinand Lopez in mind, what I think Nardin overlooks is that the young men are of the new generation that has created these young women also, and that their attitudes toward and treatment of women is not likely to be exactly the same as their fathers', although it may not be radically different (Lopez was a young man, but as I've stated above, "foreign"). Mabel's unhappy end is not just that she cannot fit into the construct of marriage, but that, seeing herself only as a commodity and not as a lovely young woman, she attempts to measure her potential mates by purely financial standards. That she holds this view is not surprising when one examines her treatment at the hands of her family. When she dines out one night with her father, Trollope notes that "no one looking at them could have imagined that such a father could have told such a daughter that she must marry herself out of the way because as an unmarried girl she was a burden" (TDC:155). Her resulting desperation is in direct conflict with her nature as it is gradually revealed to the reader.

As Mary pits her will against her father's in the matter of Tregear, she still receives a certain degree of sympathy and care from Lady Cantrip and from Mrs. Finn--and before her mother, Glencora, died, she approved of the engagement to Tregear. Isabel is an open and popular young lady with two loving parents (a rare creature). Mabel's mother is so long dead she is not even described, and Mabel has relationships with both father and brother in which she must protect herself against their machinations and their anger--often by signing away money. Also, unlike Mary and Isabel, who become friends, Mabel does not ally herself with other women, and it may be in part her isolation that keeps her from realizing that the criteria for personal happiness are changing. She has her paid companion and chaperone Miss Cassewary, but this is more the relationship of friends than of mentor to young woman. Mabel is far too strong to be effectively managed by Miss Cassewary, and it is clear the younger woman frequently does as she pleases despite the protests of the elder. She appears to have no friends among the women of her own age. As Mabel says to Frank, "'I almost trust dear old Cass, but not quite. She is old-fashioned and I shock her. As for other women, there isn't one anywhere to whom I would say a word'" (TDC:81).

In contrast to Mabel's isolation, Mary not only has the interest of other women in her plight, but her father still takes great pains to try to make her happy and to take care of

her needs. Although she clearly resents his interference in her love affair with Frank, Mary knows that her father loves her deeply, and she is very affectionate to him. Isabel has her mother, whom she respects, and a very nurturing and protective father who perceives his daughter to be deserving of great happiness and respect. These two girls also form a close friendship when Isabel confides in Mary (Silverbridge's sister) that she believes Silverbridge loves her and will wish to marry her. Although Mary has concerns about the Duke's reaction to Isabel as a suitable wife for his heir (as does the savvy Isabel), she says to Isabel that "I at any rate will love you" (TDC:383).

Another headstrong young woman who appears in Phineas Finn, Violet Effingham, is regarded as unmanageable by her guardians. Though in spirit Violet, Mabel, Mary, and Isabel are similar, in behavior Violet and Mabel are more closely linked. Violet ridicules her aunt, and pooh poohs Laura when Laura repeatedly asks her to "save" Chiltern (Violet's suitor and Laura's brother). While Violet is also motherless, like Mabel, she is financially independent--and she succeeds in marrying, on her terms, her perfect mate. It is not just money that makes Violet strong, however. She does not have to endure the constant attacks of predatory male relatives, and her self-esteem remains intact. She is as attractive as Mabel, with the same sarcastic wit. She seems to be more generally popular, however, and has real friends--both male

and female--in Laura, Chiltern, and Phineas. Morse has a theory regarding Mabel, Laura and Alice Vavasor that "Trollope seems to link [a] lack of maternal nurturing with the inability of each heroine fully to appreciate the power of love--until it is too late" (48). Violet is not included in this group of motherless girls, and she stands as a clear exception to it--a remarkable woman who understands the game of walking a fine line and who succeeds in her efforts wholly without the protection and/or interference of a father, and the nurturing of a mother.

To complicate matters further, there is always the unprotected Lucy Morris of The Eustace Diamonds, who must work as the governess to support herself. She is described as "[a] most unselfish little creature...but one who had a well-formed idea of her own identity...to herself, nobody was her superior" (TED:I:25). Lucy also manages, not without difficulty but never losing sight of herself and her own needs and wishes, to secure her man. Violet and Lucy seem to me to upset to some degree Jean Kennard's theory in Victims of Convention, in which she posits the "bad suitor" as a metaphor for the woman's negative qualities, while the worthy suitor is regarded as an actual person, a character in his own right. Instead, perhaps the choice of the worthy suitor represents the woman's acknowledgement of her own worthiness and the embrace of self esteem rather than the self abnegation involved in choosing the wild lover. I would exclude Alice

Vavasor from this theory. She seems to submit to John Grey rather than truly embracing him.

Mabel is just not well equipped to deal with the pitfalls of feminine existence. It is interesting that she first appears in a chapter where the narrator chooses to make his presence known in a rather glib passage on the practice of putting the cart before the horse. In this self-conscious commentary on narrative, Trollope also uses an image of a woman surviving intended murder to illustrate his point. "'Certainly, when I threw her from the garret window to the stony pavement below, I did not anticipate that she would fall so far without injury to life or limb'" (TDC:69). The precursor to Mabel's introduction, then, is a woman who suffers violence at a man's hands. In retrospect, the juxtaposition of the melodramatic anecdote and Mabel's oddly sketched entrance bodes ill for her eventual fate. Juliet McMaster, in her analysis of The Duke's Children, also comments on this passage. "In all this horsing around, so to speak, it is easy to miss what Trollope is conveying obliquely: that Lady Mabel Grex is a girl with a past, and that we have not yet been told about it" (142). Trollope maintains this reversed method of describing Mabel's actions throughout the book. The most obvious example is when we find out, in her last encounter with Tregear before his marriage to Mary, that when he and Mabel were in love he had offered to go to the bar in order to support them in at least some small

way. To glean this information late in the story (Chapter 77) casts a different light on the earlier behavior of both characters. Imagine how we might perceive Emily differently if we only saw her allowing herself to be victimized by Lopez without first seeing how she was wooed and, subsequently, how disappointed she is in herself. In truth, Mabel has loved Tregear very deeply, but because of the patriarchal values inculcated in her, she feels they must both be more practical and she forces herself to sever the relationship. It causes her tremendous pain to do so, and as we later see from her confused behavior as to whether she wants to "net" Silverbridge, she never quite recovers from it. She is not presented with this sympathetic ordering of events and explanation for unwise behavior, and so we never know whether to like her or not. Trollope's technique of staggered chronology continually forces the reader to re-evaluate her as the story draws to its conclusion.

In this same introductory chapter (IX), Mabel and Silverbridge engage in a witty exchange concerning the plight of Lady Mary and Tregear. Indeed, the fact of a past relationship between Tregear and Mabel is passed lightly over, "There had been at one time a fear in Miss Cassewary's bosom lest her charge should fall too deeply in love with Frank Tregear;--but Miss Cassewary knew that whatever danger there might have been in that respect had passed away" (76-77). The

truth of the matter is only barely disclosed in the subsequent chapter.

The banter in this chapter, though banter it largely is, does not start Mabel off making a particularly good impression. She seems superficial, and early in the book exhibits a habit of editing her speeches for particular listeners, as when she tells Silverbridge that she thinks it silly for a man necessarily to follow in his father's footsteps. Only a very few days later, she tells Sir Timothy Beeswax that she was born and therefore remains a Conservative, and even goes so far as to express sympathy for the Duke: "...I think it a pity that he should be made unhappy by his son" (156).

Mabel has rejected Frank Tregear, despite their strong attraction to one another, because she is afraid they will have no money. She denies to Miss Cassewary and then to Frank that she loves him, "'I say that there has never really been one [lover] with me at all. No one knows that better than yourself. I cannot afford to be in love till I am quite sure that the man is fit to be, and will be, my husband'" (79). The irony, of course, is that Mabel is indeed in love with Frank, but because the reader does not know this for a fact until some pages later in the narrative, the implication of her speech is that she is rather cold. She says, "'...I am at any rate capable of not being in love till I wish it'" (79). After Mabel and Frank discuss the possibility of Mabel

marrying Silverbridge--without love--Mabel imputes Frank's misunderstanding of her motives to his sex, "'It is as I said before, because you are not a woman, and do not understand how women are trammelled'" (81). Mabel's remark is barely sufficient to excuse her behavior nonetheless, especially in comparison to her foils within the text, who seem to deserve and achieve so much. Mabel, whose upbringing was evidently less than nurturing and whose life continues to be one of emotional hardship, is missing the simple lovingkindness that might aid her in crossing the difficult ground of growing up and finding a mate: "She could not clearly see her way to be pure and good and feminine, and at the same time wise" (84). She seems to believe that the world will be better favored with her "goodness" after she gets what she wants. It may be her fatal flaw that she believes she can control the timing of her emotions--and that she believes her love for Frank is a thing of the past.

But she could not marry [Frank]. And it was expected, nay, almost necessary that she should marry someone. To that someone, how good she would be! How she would strive by duty and attention, and if possible by affection, to make up for that misfortune of her early love! (85)

Mabel's attitude would be well described by a comment Deborah Morse makes of Laura Standish in her discussion of Phineas Finn. Morse states that "Laura's decision to forego love in favor of money stems at least in part from the masculine cultural lessons she has learned from her father, the Earl.... [T]hey also lead her to adopt a value system

that encourages a disastrous marriage. In his portrait of the Earl and his examination of the Earl's influence on Laura, Trollope exposes the dehumanizing psychological ravages of patriarchy" (48). This portrait of Laura's father also describes Lord Grex, Mabel's father, who further lacks the basic social skills and political successes of Lord Brentford. Lord Brentford, Lord Grex, and Mr. Kennedy (Laura's husband) are examples of what Morse terms "patriarchal authority unrestrained by compassion" (Morse:52). To a lesser degree John Vavasor of Can You Forgive Her? is included in this group. He is content to be supported by his daughter Alice although "he knew himself to be unable to give to his child all that attention which a widowed father under such circumstances should pay to an only daughter" (CYFH:7), but he at least does not interfere with his daughter's happiness beyond one discussion with her. Only Abel Wharton in The Prime Minister appears to be a reasonably attentive and unselfish father. Unfortunately, he is no match for the outsider and prime manipulator Ferdinand Lopez when Lopez sets his sight on Wharton's daughter Emily.

Trollope states in his Autobiography that he had "long been aware of a certain weakness in my own character, which I may call a craving for love. I have ever had a wish to be liked by those around me,--a wish that during the first half of my life was never gratified" (159). He acknowledges the role that nurture plays in human development, then--but his

use of the word "weakness" indicates that the route to recovery lies through an ethic of stoicism. This toughness is something that Mabel, Alice, and Laura, despite their bravado, lack. Alice must surrender to her persistent suitor, Laura is ruined, and Mabel's future is tenuous at best. Even poor Emily Wharton Lopez, though she knew herself valued and loved by her family and others, and who marries with pure love in her heart, cannot be guaranteed felicity and happiness. Indeed, she endures something of a melodramatic circus before she is reconciled at last to her true mate (and cousin), the significantly named Arthur Fletcher.

So when Mabel appears to be a rather mercenary creature, there is some justification for her behavior. Mabel's father, a "worn-out old man" (73), and her brother are gambling, sensual creatures--the latter is more than once likened to a beast.¹³ Between them they are spending the last remnants of the family fortune, borrowing against (or simply taking) Mabel's small inheritance, and fighting between themselves. They clearly undervalue their own possessions,

¹³ Gerald Palliser loses a large sum of money (£3,400) to Mabel's brother Percival in a card game. When Percival presses Gerald for the cash (very ungentlemanly behavior), Gerald writes in a panic to Silverbridge. Silverbridge sends an IOU to Percival, and in a letter to Gerald warns that if Percival is difficult about the IOU, "I wouldn't kick him if I were you,--unless he says anything very bad. You would be sure to come to grief somehow. He is a beast" (TDC:481). This exchange takes place shortly after Mabel "plays her scene" and makes her penultimate pitch for Silverbridge. One wonders how much this unpleasant behavior of Mabel's brother to Gerald confirms Silverbridge's decision to marry Isabel instead of Mabel.

including Mabel. That the family is in a state of decay is underscored by the condition of the ancestral seat at Grex--the thing that Mabel loves best, and the possession of which will likely prove as elusive as that of a husband. Mabel obviously despises her guardians in life, though she says so only indirectly: "'...I despise a man who makes a business of his pleasures. ...I always know that they can do nothing else, and then I despise them'" (78).

While Mabel appears to have sized up father and brother accurately, she is not quite so clear thinking as Violet. Violet sees the charming Phineas's subtle faults, and makes short work of other suitors who are drawn to her apparent fragility. Laura, who has so many set ideas about suitable feminine behavior, in turn cannot perceive the danger inherent in Kennedy's unyielding nature until it is far too late. Mabel is a little more sophisticated, and acknowledges Silverbridge's immaturity and Mary's bravery--in fact, she perceives complexity in almost everyone but herself, and it is this lack of self knowledge that causes her downfall.

Certainly she has undervalued the importance of Frank in her life. It has been suggested that Frank may not be much of a prize after all--Jane Nardin indicates that in the original drafts of the story, he was more clearly a fortune hunter, an "unscrupulous adventurer" (182). I do not gather that impression from the text as it stands; clearly, Trollope changed his conception of the character. Nardin still doesn't

like him, however, and refers to him as "conservative," "conceited," and "callous" (182). I wished, in the first half of the story, that Frank would exert more effort in the direction of training himself for some profession so that he could support any woman--even Mabel. He has chosen to be a politician, and he does exert himself in that direction with gravity and conscience; he acquitted himself far better at Oxford than did Silverbridge. Frank generally appears to be an upright young man, and, as I have stated, he did offer to follow a profession in order that he and Mabel might marry. Unfortunately for character studies of Frank Tregear, the reader learns this fact very late in the text, when Mabel is mulling over their past relationship:

He offered to go to the bar; but she asked him whether he thought it well that such a one as she should wait say a dozen years for such a process.... She released him,--declared her own purpose of marrying well; and then...she went so far as to tell him that she was heart-whole (606-607).

It doesn't seem quite fair that Mabel rejects him and then expects him to remain smitten indefinitely--or at least to let her get married first. The end result is that Mabel's motivations often look like no more than injured pride.

Mabel therefore may be more cautious in her relations with Silverbridge because of her feeling of having been betrayed by Tregear. Silverbridge is not quite forthcoming enough actually to propose, and, while Trollope implies that Mabel is waiting for a clear-cut, manly declaration, she holds

her suitor off until he honestly thinks she does not care for him. She may be concerned that he prove his feelings for her because she feels abandoned by Tregear. She certainly does not treat Silverbridge well once she realizes that he is interested in her. Her ambivalence is clear in the passage where she is first thoughtful, regarding him as the sensitive man he promises to become and, waxing more practical as to her own needs, she sees him as some sort of fish.

But how would it be with him? It might be well for her to become his wife, but could it be well for him that he should become her husband? Did she not feel that it would be better for him that he should become a man before he married at all? Perhaps so;--but then if she desisted would others desist? If she did not put out her bait would there not be other hooks,--others and worse? Would not such a one, so soft, so easy, so prone to be caught and so desirable for the catching, be sure to be made prey of by some snare? (129)

Victoria Glendinning comments on the "many Trollopian equations between hunting...and a man's heated pursuit of a woman, or vice versa. The object of desire as 'prey'--whether the lure was money or sexual passion--is one of his recurring images" (172). Silverbridge is leery of being regarded as a prize rather than for his own value as a man, and in fact of being hunted rather than hunting himself. He is increasingly aware of Mabel's ambivalence toward him, and perceives that her "love would be bestowed upon him as on an inferior creature" (148). He is concerned "for his own manhood, and his own gifts and his own character" (148). Still, he continues his rather guarded pursuit, and Mabel continues to

muster her defenses. A major contribution to Silverbridge's subsequent retreat is Mabel's indication that her relationship with Tregear had extended beyond simple friendship. "'...Though I don't want to cut your sister out, as you so prettily say, I love him well enough to understand that any girl whom he loves ought to be true to him.' So far what she said was very well, but she afterwards added a word which might have been wisely omitted. 'Frank and I are almost beggars'" (150). Silverbridge is angry, for Mary's sake and for his own: "'You tell me to my face that you and Tregear would have been lovers only that you are both poor. ...And that he is to be passed on to my sister because it is supposed that she will have some money'" (151). Silverbridge begins to feel that "it would not do"; despite his tremendous attraction to Mabel's beauty he is slowly coming to realize that she does not love him--long before she admits this fact to herself (153). Mabel had said once of Silverbridge, speaking of his possible proposals of love and marriage, that "[i]f he had once said the word to me, he should not change" (83). Unsure whether she can truly commit herself to him, she does little if anything to reassure him that his suit is safe with her.

The stage is now set for Isabel Boncassen to make an impression upon the confused Silverbridge; the question is whether Mabel has deliberately set that stage herself. When she tells Miss Cassewary that Silverbridge has virtually

proposed to her, she puts it thus: "'Though I had him in my net, I let him go'" (160). She goes on to indicate that

'I shall not spare him again. No;--not twice. I felt it to be hard to do so once, because I so nearly love him! There are so many of them who are odious to me, as to whom the idea of marrying them seems to be mixed somehow with an idea of suicide' (161).

Deborah Morse notes that this "startling statement powerfully describes Mabel's equation of a loveless marriage with the very opposite of self-realization: the absolute self-negation of death" (125). Although Mabel's behavior indicates that she is unwilling to sell herself, her words try to deny or curb her physical reactions. It is our first glimpse of the depth of her conflict--even she seems unaware of the discrepancy at this point.¹⁴

¹⁴ These negative physical reactions occur in characters other than Mabel. When Alice Vavasor has accepted her cousin George's second proposal but indicated that her former passion for him no longer exists, his efforts to appeal to her heart fall flat. In one speech he uses the word 'husband' twice, and the hearing "was painful to Alice's ear. She shrunk from it with palpable bodily suffering" (CYFH:362). She later agonizes over her fate of necessary surrender to George, but rails that "it was not in my bargain; I never meant it" (CYFH:383). It is very clearly spelled out that marriage, for women, meant the complete surrender of their bodies to their husbands. Laura Kennedy is made literally ill by the thought of continued carnal relations with her husband, and when Phineas conveys the message of Kennedy's request for her return, she shudders, saying "'[h]is presence would kill me'" (PF:II:285). When Lucinda Roanoke is forced by Griffin Tewett to a betrothal kiss, she cries bitterly afterward and believes that "[n]ever before had she been thus polluted...[i]t made her odious to herself...how was she to drink the cup to the bitter dregs" (TED:II:24). Lucinda eventually jilts her suitor, going mad in the process.

When Isabel Boncassen does arrive on the scene, Mabel's actions become even more confusing. Her behavior at the garden party, to which Silverbridge has come with every intention of furthering his suit with Mabel, literally drives him to compare her with Isabel: "And she [Isabel] was clever too;--and good-humoured;--whereas Mabel had been both ill-natured and unpleasant" (225). Mabel is obviously made angry by Isabel's presence at Killancodlem and goes so far as to indicate to Silverbridge that an alliance with the American girl would be beneath him. She goes for a walk with Silverbridge to question him about his intentions toward Isabel, and says "[i]f you are so much in love with her that you mean to face the displeasure of all your friends---" (322). Silverbridge is forced by her comment to defend both himself and Isabel. Mabel is throwing him into Isabel's arms.

I have previously stated that Mabel does not ally herself with other women, and she has shown repeatedly that she is capable of very ill humor indeed. Although I find I am reluctant to say it, because the psychological source for her unhappiness clearly lies at the door of her rapacious "protectors," the simplest reason could be that Mabel is jealous of the women with whom she must compete for her future. I venture to guess Trollope is indicating that her poor treatment at the hands of her father and brother does not excuse her from responsibility when she is unkind or rude.

His depiction of Mabel is rendered by a realistic hand. James Gindin points out that "[t]he more her emotions are paramount, the more despair she seems to exhibit, the less Trollope sympathizes" (35). But then, Mabel is not some deliciously naughty Lizzie Eustace (The Eustace Diamonds), useful for plot twists and private jokes. In his Autobiography, Trollope notes that through his work he hoped to convey that "honesty is the best policy; that truth prevails while falsehood fails; that a girl will be loved as she is pure, and sweet, and unselfish" (145; emphasis mine). But Trollope is also a realist. In the long chapter of The Eustace Diamonds in which he discusses Frank's weakness for Lizzie Eustace, he indicates that very few humans are completely irreproachable, and specifically notes that "those sweet girls whom you know, do they never doubt between the poor man they think they love, and the rich man whose riches they know they covet?" (I:319).

A very interesting scene, then, because it seems out of character for Mabel, is the one in which she bears witness for Mary after Mary has publicly embraced Frank Tregear.¹⁵ "[T]hough in all this there was much to cause her anguish," Mabel admires Mary's straightforwardness. She embraces Mary and wards off Silverbridge's remonstrations: "'She has behaved like an angel,' said Mabel, throwing her arms round

¹⁵ Similar scenes, wherein one woman "bears witness" for another, occur between Maggie Tulliver and Lucy Deane in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss and between Jemima Bradshaw and Ruth Hilton in Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth.

Mary as she spoke, 'like an angel. If there had been a girl whom you loved and who loved you, would you not have wished it? Would you not have worshipped her for showing that she was not ashamed of her love?'" (232). Mary, protected by family and money, is free to show her feelings in a manner that will never be available to Mabel, and yet Mabel is able to rise above her jealousy and recognize Mary's behavior as honest and laudable (while her own has been underhanded and based on finance rather than emotion).

But Mabel, despite her warm reaction to Mary's outburst, can't really reconcile herself to be friends with her, because Mary now has Tregear's love. Isabel is Mabel's direct competitor for the attentions of Silverbridge, although Isabel never condescends to compete herself. The one friend Mabel has, Miss Cassewary, is a woman who is incapable of aiding her because she is neither rich, nor powerful, nor a relative. Mabel is astonishingly alone--and she does not respond favorably to being left out.

She continues almost to toy with Silverbridge, responding to his efforts at courtship with what could be construed as modesty or sheer obstinacy toward helping him out. When he offers her the ring, honestly responding to her joke, she answers that "'it would be wholly useless to me,'" and shortly thereafter changes the subject to Mary and Tregear (285). She asks Silverbridge to do what he can to further Tregear's suit, yet when Tregear comes to visit her at Grex she cannot

restrain herself from speaking of her jealousy of Mary. She belittles herself: "'Have you not a strength which I cannot have? Do you not feel that you are a tree, standing firm in the ground, while I am a bit of ivy that will be trodden in the dirt unless it can be made to cling to something?'" (297).

I did not like Mabel Grex in these passages. She seemed to go to great lengths to defeat herself, rejecting most offers of support almost petulantly. Juliet McMaster believes that Mabel acts out her scenes "for the form's sake, but she can summon up the energy to try for [Silverbridge] only when he is already out of her reach" (143). It is clear that Mabel is in a state of psychological conflict. She is not the first person, in life or literature, to cling emotionally to anything that looks like it will hold her, though her deeper values tell her she is wrong in doing so. Her comparison of herself to ivy may be more than apt, however pathetic it sounds.

Similarly, Laura Standish Kennedy spins out of control when circumstances stack themselves against her in Phineas Finn. It becomes clear to her that she is a virtual prisoner in her marriage, and she does make one plea for help to Phineas--but in other passages she is as capricious as Mabel will prove to be with Silverbridge and Tregear. When she discovers that Phineas is romantically interested in Violet Effingham, she does her best to discourage the connection. Over and over again she advises Violet to "save" Chiltern, and

to Phineas she is quite deliberately unhelpful and harsh. As James Gordin describes it, she becomes "more shrill and more intense" (36), and I must confess that once I got past the "don't do it" stage while reading of her impending marriage to the dour, intractable Kennedy, I quite lost patience with her. Most critics find her story tragic, but my more puritanical streak felt she got what she deserved, as there was something so perverse in her choice of mate to begin with. More than the need for financial security or political influence, there seemed something masochistic, especially since, unlike Mabel, she was protected by both father and brother, and neither seemed particularly struck with her choice. In her defence it can be said that her protective brother had already allowed her to give him her patrimony to liquidate his debts. Chiltern ends up both as husband to Violet, probably the most interesting of all these women, and Master of Hounds--and from this happy vantage point can rail at Laura's poor choice all he wants.

Laura has chosen, through her love for her brother, to give him her patrimony, while Mabel has had her money virtually extorted from her by her unpleasant father and brother. Being thus victimized has served to make Mabel less than nice about getting what she, in turn, wants. She is very unpleasant in the passages that describe her meetings with Silverbridge. At Killancodlem, she reminds Silverbridge of

her connection with Tregear. In an attempt to make him jealous, she refers to Tregear's visit to Grex.

She could hardly explain to herself why she told him this at the present moment. It came partly from jealousy, as though she had said to herself, 'Though he may neglect me, he shall know that there is someone who does not; '--and partly from an eager half-angry feeling that she would have nothing concealed. There were moments with her in which she thought that she could arrange her future life in accordance with certain wise rules over which her heart should have no influence. There were others, many others, in which her feelings completely got the better of her. And now she told herself that she would be afraid of nothing. There should be no deceit, no lies! (311, emphasis mine).

Mabel and Silverbridge part in anger, and that night Silverbridge tells Isabel that he loves her: "And when he spoke he was telling her the truth. It had seemed to him that Mabel had become hard to him, and had over and over again rejected the approaches to tenderness which he had attempted to make in his intercourse with her. Even though she were to accept him, what would that be worth to him if she did not love him?" (315). The next day, on a walk with Mabel, she makes the further error of telling him that Isabel is beneath him.

Mabel's feelings will continue to compromise her. She will be afraid, and in her desperation she will stoop to deceit. As McMaster states, "she breaks her own rules and resolutions, and keeps only enough of them to destroy her happiness" (142). Her presence at Matching, keeping Christmas with both her enemies, renders her pathetic, especially when Mrs. Finn proves that Mabel has no real right to feel sorry

for herself. Of Silverbridge and Isabel, Mabel ventures to Mrs. Finn that "it all means nothing," and when Mrs. Finn disagrees Mabel says:

'Don't you think that one always has to be sorry for the young ladies? Young ladies generally have a bad time of it. Did you ever hear of a gentleman who had always to roll a stone to the top of a hill, but it would always come back upon him?' 'That gentleman I believe never succeeded,' said Mrs. Finn. 'The young ladies I suppose do sometimes' (427).¹⁶

Mabel is slightly encouraged by the Duke's behavior to her at Matching, but in her heart she knows that her cause is a lost one. "It had all been shame, and sorrow, and disappointment to her. And she could not but remember that there had been a moment when she might have secured him by a word" (431). Poor Mabel: "The grinding need for money, the absolute necessity of luxurious living, had been pressed upon her from her childhood" (431). She determines to try one more time, and only succeeds in humiliating herself.

Mabel's position is now a desperate one, and her only hope for success is in duping Silverbridge into thinking that she does care for him after all: "She must be false, but false with such perfect deceit, that he must regard her as a pearl of truth. If anything could lure him back it must be his conviction of her passionate love," of which it has been made abundantly clear that there is none (471). It is hardly

¹⁶ In Women in Trollope's Palliser Novels, Deborah Morse discusses this passage at length in terms of several different women characters. Most particularly, Mrs. Finn has her own courtship with Phineas Finn in mind (Morse:136).

surprising that Mabel's desperate last effort would prove futile, and one almost wonders whether she means it to be when she insults Silverbridge so roundly. Her initial reaction, however, is to feel that she has failed: "She had played her scene, but was well aware that she had played it altogether unsuccessfully" (476).

That Mabel still regards men as acquisitions, and emotional expression as "scenes," points again to some missing element in her character that the lack of love in her life has left empty. Deborah Morse also attributes it to "the psychological abuse" that is clearly part of Mabel's past (129). Silverbridge, in his comparison of Mabel and Isabel, hits the nail right on its head.

Lady Mabel with all her grace, with all her beauty, with all her talent, was a creature of efforts, or, as it might be called, a manufactured article. ...There had always been present to him a feeling that she was old. ...Something had gone of her native bloom, something had been scratched and chipped from the first fair surface, and this had been repaired by varnish and veneering" (543-544, emphasis mine).

Mabel realizes too late that love is important to her, and that financial considerations do not constitute a successful marriage. She summons Silverbridge and tells him off for his vacillation in a way that is not altogether fair in consideration of her own behavior. Juliet McMaster evaluates the passage similarly: "Silverbridge was not false to her as she claimed: there was never an acknowledged pledge between them, and when he tried to make one she balked him.

She is a sympathetic and mainly honest figure, but she is unreliable at certain key points..." (148). However she goes about it, the shreds of pride, or at least courage, she manages to reclaim in manipulating Silverbridge allow her finally to admit her love for Tregear.

Silverbridge can only pity her, and her subsequent half proposal to Tregear serves only to gain his pity also.¹⁷ Mabel has completely given herself up to bitterness now: "'A girl unless she marries becomes nothing, as I have become nothing now'" (614). She is reduced to a ghostlike status, and only her non-presence (at the weddings) is remarked--and her wedding gift to Frank of a ring she meant to give him at their own wedding. Once Mabel has lost the game, and finally admits to herself that she is her own worst enemy, the reader can again feel sympathy for her plight.

In her many disappointments and subsequent realistic maturity, Mabel has grown in importance to her creator. Trollope seems reluctant to punish her too soundly. He allows her to make the immoral proposition to Tregear in her final scene with him, but she is not accepted. Although Trollope

¹⁷ In his Autobiography, Trollope critiques two female contemporaries, and says of one (Rhoda Broughton) that in her "determination not to be mawkish and missish, she has made her ladies do and say things which ladies would not do and say. They throw themselves at men's heads, and when they are not accepted only think how they may throw themselves again" (258). It may be that Trollope considers that since Mabel delicately manipulates rather than "throwing herself," she cannot be described in these same terms; nevertheless, his condemnation of Broughton's characterizations is amusing.

leaves her final fate, in large part, to the reader, it's hard to be overly optimistic. As Juliet McMaster points out, "[o]nly Lady Mabel, left motionless and portionless on her sofa in the middle of the room where the very furnishings are changing and being taken away, remains as an uncomfortable vestige of a past best abandoned" (154). Referring again to his "cart before the horse" introduction of Mabel, perhaps we can conclude that she is not only a "girl with a past" (McMaster:142), but also a girl without a future. One of Mabel's possible futures may be best described in a character who precedes her chronologically in the series--Lady Rosina De Courcy: "her elder brother, the Earl, was a ruined man...her sisters had married, rather lowly in the world...and Lady Rosina lived alone in a little cottage outside the old park palings, and still held fast within her bosom all the old pride of the De Courcys" (TPM:I:182). Despite Mabel's similar attachment to Grex, and her mortification over the loss of prospects for love and marriage, I do have difficulty picturing her living in such resigned and virginal circumstances. Trollope has given Mabel beauty and a passionate nature to go with her poverty. I believe he sees her as highly sexual--and in the Trollopian scheme of things, sex is usually provided by marriage. If she has learned her lesson, perhaps she, like Emily, will find a lover when least expecting to do so.

In The Duke's Children, the final book of the Palliser series, the dilemma a woman faces in having to seek economic as well as emotional protection through marriage has been fully acknowledged, and her needs and desires have gained complexity and importance. Although Trollope has difficulty stating the fact outright, the need for a true spirit of equality for women plays a larger and larger part in his characterizations of them. He is still uncomfortable with the terminology and its fuller implications. As he has Mr. Monk say to Phineas when they discuss one of Glencora's political tirades, "'[e]quality is an ugly word and shouldn't be used. It misleads, and frightens, and is a bugbear. ...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'" (PF:I:128).

The decision to marry, and whom to marry, has become much more complicated than the wealthy patriarchs who populate Trollope's world would like to think it is. Trollope's novels illustrate changing notions of women; it is no longer acceptable for men to use women merely as a means of maintaining or increasing financial or social position. Certainly Silverbridge and Phineas Finn have come to the realization that women are infinitely more complex than the ornaments each initially perceives. Love is more than stewardship and protection of women. It is respect, for both self and beloved--respect that includes flexibility of self in

honoring the other. When John Grey is described in the opening chapters of Can You Forgive Her?, it is noted that though he is a good man overall, he has a certain rigidity. Trollope has Alice musing over whether it can be right that the man should have it all his way--"[w]hen the two came together, why should not each yield something, and each claim something?" (CYFH:34).

Violet Effingham (Phineas Finn) and Isabel Boncassen (The Duke's Children) are the rare individuals who seem to understand the real implications of involvement with another person. For the most part, however, the Palliser novels in toto express a reluctant acknowledgement that the comic "happily ever after" is a rare occurrence predicated upon correct behavior by both the man and the woman involved, and a state achieved perhaps only by Violet and Chiltern, and Isabel and Silverbridge. Mary Palliser gets her heart's desire, but only after much fear and pain have been dealt out to her, her father, and to the unfortunate loser, Mabel. The Duke, still preoccupied with "all that he had suffered", witnesses the marriage of Mary and Tregear with a sense of resignation--although that afternoon he acknowledges to Silverbridge that he finds Tregear "manly" and courageous (TDC:633).

There is something wrong with a society that holds out such poor odds for intelligent, honest, (mostly) moral women who all contain a tremendous capacity for love. By the end of

The Duke's Children, Trollope seems fully aware of how such difficulties might have a deleterious effect on a woman's behavior. Although Mabel permanently loses both Tregear and Silverbridge, she is left to punish herself. James Gindin says, "Lady Mabel does not...remain engulfed in self-pity for long. At the end of the novel, her great intelligence and direct self-appraisal reassert themselves and she realizes clearly the different reasons she could not have either of the two men. And Trollope, himself exercising restraint and pathos, restores her to full sympathy" (35).

Perhaps Gindin is too sanguine, but Trollope has already indicated that circumstances and feelings are open to alteration. Witness Alice's declaration to herself that she "can never marry, can never forgive herself" (CYFH:37). She does ultimately make a peace with herself, and she marries John Grey. We must also bear in mind Glencora's own temptation to commit adultery with Burgo Fitzgerald--the truly profligate early model of Frank Tregear. When Trollope tells the story, he asserts that though "[w]omen doubt every day," this doubt does not necessarily render them lost souls (CYFH:II:103). Even when Mabel offers herself as Frank's mistress, she claims she would not make the offer if she really thought him capable of accepting it: "'You know, do you not, that if it were possible, I should not say so. But as I know that you would not stir a step with me, I do say so'" (TDC:616).

Throughout the Palliser series, with the destruction of several women and the wounding of several more, Trollope has effectively delineated the possible fates for a confused young woman in a society that has its priorities and possibilities for women rather skewed. Mabel's untenable position is the most potent example of what can go wrong in a dependent woman's life: "her dilapidated estate and her degenerate father and brother are among her appurtenances that remind us she and her like are in a state of decay, a generation and a way of life that are outmoded and doomed" (McMaster:144). Implicit in McMaster's comment is the idea that this "degenerate" way of life is indeed changing, and I believe her opinion is borne out by the happy successes of Mary and Isabel. Mabel does not have access to the kind of familial support that Mary and Silverbridge can rely upon, even when they rebel against some of its precepts. She must look instead to the more static principles of the society in which she lives. Even though many of its ideas about the use of women as social pawns are slowly becoming obsolete, the continuing emphasis on the importance of class, blood, and rank does not accurately reflect her sensitive nature. Mabel, unsure whether to follow her heart or protect herself financially, is the girl who does not fit, and whose subsequent failure and bitterness are largely attributable to the attempt to make herself fit. Jane Nardin, in referring to the "third heroine" (Lucinda Roanoke) of Trollope's The

Eustace Diamonds, also describes Mabel: "Though she tries to convert herself into a commodity, she discovers that her real self cannot be repressed" (Nardin:208). Marriage without money may be impractical, but marriage without love is unthinkably horrifying. Juliet McMaster says of Mabel that "in practice she finds herself incapable of living up to her programme of change. She is faithful [to Tregear] in spite of herself..." (141).

Mabel, motherless, abused by both father and brother, and in financial straits that cannot be resolved by employment (because there is none), is a woman who could appear in any age and be unhappy. Her tragedy is this: because she has not been loved, she does not know how to love. Her more immediate and insurmountable problem, however, is that she is clearly a product of the mores of Victorian society. Imbued with the values of her class, she does not know how to set any other than an economic value upon herself and upon other people. She struggles hard, not merely to win herself the right man, but to survive, to continue to live the life she was born to.

Whether Mabel marries or retires to live the life of a Rosina De Courcy is one that Trollope refuses to resolve for the reader. If we can take him at his word that he uses characters "for the expression of my political and social convictions" (Autobiography:180), what is his purpose in leaving Mabel out of the final plot resolution? He doesn't make her disappear; in fact, her presence (perhaps non-

presence, as I called it earlier, is more accurate) resounds almost to the last page. On the morning of his wedding to Mary, Tregear receives by post a signet ring sent by Mabel. She has sent it from Grex. The final words of the book, spoken by the Duke in regard to Tregear, apply equally to Mabel and to all women of the Victorian era looking for greater satisfaction in their lives: "Perhaps what surprised me most was that he should have looked so high. There seemed so little to justify it. But now I will accept that as courage which I before regarded as arrogance" (633).

The Duke's Children was published in 1880, two years before Trollope died at the age of 67. The original momentum of the women's rights movement was galvanized from 1866 to 1870 by agitation against the Contagious Diseases Act and demands for divorce reform. The period from 1870 to 1905 is described by Susan Kingsley Kent as "muted and diffused," although the goals cited above were accomplished (the first Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1870) (184). Trollope was an old man during this latter period, and he was no radical. I've stated that he had no official sympathy with the women's movement. At the same time, as Susan Peck MacDonald says in her study of Trollope, "his women characters' dilemmas reveal his profound, if not entirely conscious or explicit, understanding of the problems producing the women's rights movement" (36). If we will grant Kent's characterization, the movement as a whole, at this time,

lacked direction, as the women tried to determine exactly what was needed and how those needs could be met. It's not so surprising that Trollope's female characters in the Palliser series tend to refer to the movement only in passing.

Trollope's work does not contain a suffragette that one could take seriously, but his female characters are rarely ideal--that is to say, fragile and retiring--Victorian maidens. Lowry Pei believes that Trollope "made his contemporary readers aware of things that were so close at hand they were difficult to see; and we can see in his novels the prehistory of our own beliefs" (289). At a time when women were generally objectified and considered mainly for their usefulness as sexual partners, mothers, and housekeepers, Trollope's female characters radiate intelligence and individuality. Some of them seek power in public life from behind the scenes (Laura Standish Kennedy), some seek openly to make waves (Glencora Palliser), some are merely amused at the show men put on (Madame Max Goesler), and, unfortunately, some are damaged by the abuses of which men were capable (Mabel Grex). All are a vital part of the society in which they move. Although the comment springs from his own religious fanaticism, Robert Kennedy may sum up the attitude of too many Victorian men when he remarks of his wife Laura, "'[h]appy? What right had she to expect to be happy?'" (PR:I:87). I believe Trollope, from the bottom of his heart, disagrees.

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VITA

Catherine Ann Renko

Born in Sacramento, California, February 26, 1959. Graduated from Portsmouth Senior High School in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, June 1977. B.A., University of New Hampshire, 1988. M.A. candidate, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1989-1990, with a concentration in English and American Literature.

The author is a newly licensed teacher, with plans to teach English in a New York City secondary school.