

## INTRODUCTION

[*Readers who are unfamiliar with the plot may prefer to treat the Introduction as an Afterword.*]

### I

*Phineas Redux* has a good claim to be Anthony Trollope's best title and the oddest in nineteenth-century fiction, although George Meredith's 1855 *The Shaving of Shagpat* cuts it fine. His publisher thought it was a mistake, but it has a good deal more energy than most of Trollope's titles, which usually stick to persons and places, such as *The Warden* and *Doctor Thorne*, *Barchester Towers* and *Orley Farm*. *Phineas Finn*, the name of this novel's precursor in Trollope's 'Parliamentary' or 'Palliser' series, is almost as odd. Phineas is an Irish name but also a Greek one.<sup>1</sup> The Greek Phineas, a king of Thrace and son of Poseidon, was butchered by harpies. That doesn't happen to our Phineas, who is continually assisted by distinctly unharpic-like women, including the devoted Laura Kennedy, the irrepressible Lady Glencora Palliser (who here becomes the Duchess of Omnium), and the mysterious Madame Max Goesler. Phineas also shares his name with several ancient Irish kings, above all Fionn mac Cumhaill or, as the nineteenth century knew him, Finn McCool, in a novel that asks a good number of questions about Irishness and heroism in the modern world. Finn McCool mattered a good deal in the 1860s because of the leading role that the Fenian Brotherhood, which was named after him, was playing in the armed struggle for Irish independence. The Fenians led raids on Canada, attempted a rising in Ireland in 1867, and bombed Clerkenwell Prison in London, with a dozen fatalities and many more injured. 'Phineas' is about as near to 'Fenian' as a Christian or unchristian name can get and Trollope wants us to draw the contrast between these very different Irish political descendants of Finn in the 1870s, a contrast that may also suggest an underlying resemblance.<sup>2</sup> 'Redux' is equally odd, a word that barely

<sup>1</sup> Appropriately enough for a novel so interested in and constituted by repetition and secondariness, it is not the first but the second eponymous Phineas, preceded by John Poole's *Phineas Quiddy; or Sheer Industry* (London: Colbourn, 1843).

<sup>2</sup> There is now a substantial literature on Trollope and Ireland, following Owen Dudley Edwards's pioneering 'Anthony Trollope, the Irish Writer', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 38/1 (June 1983), 1-42. See esp. R. F. Foster, "'Fatal Drollery': Parliamentary

exists outside titles.<sup>3</sup> Rabbit Angstrom, the title character of John Updike's Rabbit trilogy, hated it because, like 'arbitrageur' and 'perestroika', he didn't know how to pronounce it, just as the editor of *The Graphic* (where *Phineas Redux* was first published in 1873) wanted to change Trollope's title because 'the public would take Redux for the gentleman's surname'.<sup>4</sup> It comes from the Latin *reducere* which means to bring back, and so to be reduced is to be led or brought back, as a captive or in triumph, both of which things happen to Phineas Finn. It is also a word in English (or out of English) in which it is hard not to hear 'reduced' and the book could almost have been called *Phineas Reduced*, for its hero believes that he will never recover from the terrible things that happen to him within its pages.

*Phineas Redux*, then, from its title down is concerned with the power of names, and Trollope is on good form. We might struggle to keep track of the more than a hundred characters, if some of the lesser ones were not called such things as Mr Bouncer ('a literary gentleman'), Thomas Platter Spooner of Spoon Hall, Sir Omicron Pie, Samuel Bobwig, Messrs Chaffanbrass and Golightly, to say nothing of the Marquis of Malтанops and the 'Duke of Discount, who married old Ballance's daughter, and is brother-in-law to young George Advance' (p. 173). But names aren't all simple fun in Trollope, or signs of the brewing or moneylending on which their characters' wealth and power rest. Something significant happens to Plantagenet Palliser, the central character of the 'Palliser' series of novels (from *Can You Forgive Her?* (1865) to *The Duke's Children* (1880)), when he becomes the Duke of Omnium. He feels diminished by his elevation because, as a member of the House of Lords, he can no longer carry through the great reform

Novels, Outsiders and Victorian Political History', in *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1993), 139–70, and 'Stopping the Hunt: Trollope and the Memory of Ireland', in *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 127–47; Jane Elizabeth Dougherty, 'An Angel in the House: The Act of Union and Anthony Trollope's Irish Hero', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32/1 (2004), 133–45; Patrick Lonergan, 'The Representation of Phineas Finn: Anthony Trollope's Palliser Series and Victorian Ireland', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32/1 (2004), 147–58, and 'Anthony Trollope's Palliser Novels and Anti-Irish Prejudice', *New Hibernia Review*, 11/2 (Summer 2007), 116–29.

<sup>3</sup> As in John Dryden's 1660 panegyric to Charles II, *Astraea Redux*.

<sup>4</sup> John Updike, *Rabbit is Rich* (New York: Random House, 1996), 44. Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography*, ed. P. D. Edwards (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1980), 345. In each transmission of the 'Redux', there is a reduction, from Astraea, the daughter of Zeus, to the handsome, talented but bourgeois Phineas, to Updike's dead-end Rabbit Angstrom.

of the currency that he has dreamed of for so long. Name-changing is even more important to his wife, Lady Glencora, who lost her name of M'Cluskie when she married Palliser, whom she did not really love. Place names matter too: the little club, only open a few evenings a week, where the most decisive confrontation of the novel takes place, is called 'The Universe'.

Trollope saw *Phineas Redux* and the 1869 *Phineas Finn* as 'but one novel though they were brought out at a considerable interval of time and in different forms'.<sup>5</sup> The different but the same: his remark points to one of the book's abiding concerns. A great admirer of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama, Trollope built up a substantial library of early plays, which he annotated copiously. Like those works, his novel creates analogous actions in interlocking plot-streams, relishing the subtle symmetries or contrasts that can be drawn between them. This method of comparison and juxtaposition can be seen even in such small but crucial things as the syllables of Phineas's name, two of which, as different-looking as 'Phin' and 'Finn', sound exactly the same. Such a little difference immediately puts the question of linguistic and cultural repetition in the reader's mind, which must be alert to the many parallels and echoes both within and between the two books. *Phineas Redux* is fascinated by kinds of difference that are also forms of repetition, as it returns to or repeats many of the relationships, characters, and dilemmas of *Phineas Finn*, most notably Phineas's private relationships with Laura Kennedy and Marie Goesler, and his public one with the Liberal party to which he belongs. In both books, Phineas fights two by-elections, seeks political office, tangles with the press in the shape of Mr Quintus Slide of the *People's Banner*, and, after various romantic entanglements, happily marries at the end. When he is at particularly low ebb after his trial, Trollope quotes—misquotes in fact—a passage from 'A Musical Instrument' by Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan  
To laugh, as he sits by the river,  
Making a poet out of a man.  
The true gods sigh for the cost and pain,—  
For the reed that grows nevermore again  
As a reed with the reeds in the river. (p. 479)

In the poem, the god Pan cuts a reed in the river to make himself a pipe on which to play. Trollope was troubled by the implication that he read in the poem, that the poet is somehow marred for the ordinary

<sup>5</sup> Trollope, *Autobiography*, 320.

purposes of everyday life.<sup>6</sup> Some of the power of the verse and its sticking power for Trollope and for us, stems from its repetitions—reed, reed, reeds—and the small but all-important difference between being a reed and being a reed with reeds.

At the end of *Phineas Finn*, Phineas returned to Ireland to marry his childhood sweetheart, Mary Flood Jones, having successively but unsuccessfully fallen in love with Lady Laura Standish ('the best character in the two books', according to Trollope) who marries Robert Kennedy, Violet Effingham (who marries Lord Chiltern), and the rich and beautiful widow Marie Goesler.<sup>7</sup> His political career seems to have come to an end with his refusal to support his party over the question of Irish tenant land reform and he has accepted a post as the Inspector of Poorhouses in Cork on the substantial salary of £1,000 a year, worth perhaps a hundred times that today. All seems set for a prosperous if rather dull provincial career. But Mary dies and Phineas is lured back to the parliamentary life that he had abandoned two years before. Trollope later said that he had been 'wrong to marry him to a simple pretty Irish girl, who could only be felt as an encumbrance on such return. When he did return I had no alternative but to kill the simple pretty Irish girl,—which was an unpleasant and awkward necessity.'<sup>8</sup> It is strikingly and strangely phrased. Trollope doesn't name Mary but simply repeats the triply adjectived epithet of 'simple pretty Irish girl', as if she had no more individuality than that. Trollope's politely bureaucratic phrasing of the 'unpleasant and awkward necessity' of killing her simultaneously emphasizes his own responsibility for the death and half puts the blame on Phineas. This is misleading for she in fact dies before, not after, Phineas returns to England. The point, though, is clear: freed of their simple, pretty encumbrance, Trollope and his hero are ready to begin a parliamentary career once more in almost exactly the same place that they were at the beginning of *Phineas Finn*—with a single, talented, ambitious but poor young man, on the lookout for a seat in Parliament.

Why does he come back? Trollope's description of his thoughts as he tries to decide whether to return to England and a parliamentary career explains everything and nothing:

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'A Musical Instrument', in *Last Poems* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1862). The poem was first published in the *Cornhill*, 2 (July 1860), 84–5, in an issue that also included chapters 19 to 21 of Trollope's *Framley Parsonage*. See also Elizabeth R. Epperley, *Patterns of Repetition in Trollope* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press 1989), 126–8.

<sup>7</sup> Trollope, *Autobiography*, 320.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 318.

We all know those arguments and quotations, antagonistic to prudence, with which a man fortifies himself in rashness. 'None but the brave deserve the fair.' 'Where there's a will there's a way.' 'Nothing venture nothing have.' 'The sword is to him who can use it.' 'Fortune favours the bold.' But on the other side there is just as much to be said. 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' 'Look before you leap.' 'Thrust not out your hand further than you can draw it back again.' All which maxims of life Phineas Finn revolved within his own heart, if not carefully, at least frequently, as he walked up and down the long pier of Kingston Harbour. (pp. 13-14)

It is a remarkably impersonal discussion, consisting in great part of a war of clichés in Phineas's head, a war which Trollope tells us is not worth detailing because 'we all know' about it. The narrator deliberately, flagrantly, eschews the opportunity to individualize Phineas's thoughts at this key moment in his life and with it the chance to make his decision-making anything but commonplace. It is a disenchanted view of how the human mind works and one that is followed immediately by the even more disillusioned question and remark: 'But what matter such revolvings? A man placed as was our Phineas always does that which most pleases him at the moment, being but poor at argument if he cannot carry the weight to that side which best satisfies his own feelings' (p. 14). This might appear at first to be laziness on Trollope's part, an unwillingness properly to imagine and make individual his characters' emotional lives but it is of a piece with his deep sense of the unknowability of the self to itself, and of the ignorance, chance, and cliché that often accompany human decision-making.

Such questions also appear in the marriage plots of the book, particularly the rivalry (although it is scarcely that) for the hand of Adelaide Palliser between the idle Gerard Maule and the dull and pompous Mr Spooner of Spoon Hall. Maule's lethargic courtship is contrasted with his father's mercenary pursuit of Marie Goesler, who is also courted, and proposed to, by the old Duke of Omnium. Although the book is about those who live at the very apex of political and social power, Gerard Maule and his father are typical of the often purposeless or broken men who fill its pages. Men who do find a direction to their lives are often drawn to essentially futile hobby horses, such as Lord Chiltern's pursuit of foxes or, in Palliser's case, decimal currency. Trollope's work has a strong sense of the weakness and vulnerability of the male mind, its tendency to become obsessed with a single idea or go off the rails entirely. His father, Thomas Anthony Trollope (1774-1835), was an impossibly difficult man, who destroyed his own prospects through futile and unsuitable projects, such as farming (for