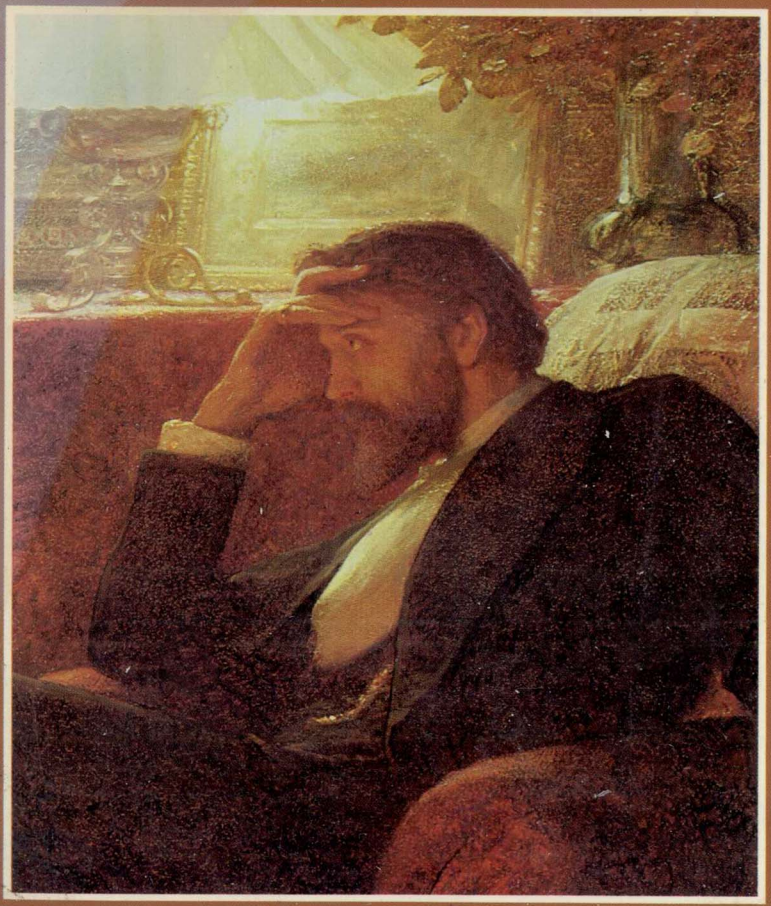
THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

OXFORD

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

PHINEAS REDUX



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ANTHONY TROLLOPE

Phineas Redux

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FOREWORD

THE CENTENARY EDITION OF ANTHONY TROLLOPE'S PALLISER NOVELS

ANTHONY TROLLOPE died in 1882, and in his centenary year Oxford University Press is launching a new edition of the six political novels commonly (if rather misleadingly) called the Palliser novels. Trollope has always been popular, but the 1970s and '80s have seen a renewed and distinctive interest in his work. Instead of seeing Trollope as a quaint Victorian second-ranker who offered the hard-pressed twentieth-century reader scenes of clerical life, a new generation has decided that Trollope is a serious moralist, a consistent political thinker, a conscious artist.

The writers who introduce and annotate this Centenary Edition reflect this revaluation, but not passively nor with one voice. The Preface to *Can You Forgive Her?* is by a distinguished senior member of the British Tory Party, and is complemented by a feminist critique of Trollope's sexual politics; *The Eustace Diamonds* is annotated by an Irish Marxist. Hermione Lee relates *The Duke's Children* to America rather than Barchester, and Jacques Berthoud compares Trollope to Flaubert and Turgenev. Such diversity is not a fashionable pluralism, but directly springs from my conviction that the literature of the past has no immutable or indestructible value. Generation after generation *we* participate in the creation of that 'past' literature in a process which crucially involves a historical perspective. The critic who refuses to concede that *The Prime Minister* is a political novel nevertheless reads the character of Lopez and the anti-semitism which gathers round him in the hideous light of twentieth-century history. It is true that the recent Trollope industry has appropriated the novelist to the conservative

cause, but the dynamics of his fiction are such that it can illustrate other ideological interpretations also.

At this point the Old Trollopian is feeling decidedly uneasy. He fears that the genial anachronisms he has mentally fondled for years are now about to be ridiculed in scholarly notes or—worse still—dragooned into some unseemly systematization. Certainly the Centenary Edition provides the most copious annotation of the Palliser novels ever published; certainly the editors marshal their critical arguments with precision and vigour. But the result contains a paradox which may both reassure the Old Trollopian and reveal something genuinely radical about the business of criticism. First of all, Trollope is a great deal more attentive, perceptive, and accurate than many of his admirers realize; second, the novels thus scrutinized offer a counter-narrative to that of the traditionalist plots, in the form of material traces which question and challenge the enfolding legitimation of liberal Tory values which were officially Trollope's.

The Brave New Critics cannot be opposed to the Old Trollopians in any simple-minded way. If the recent revival of interest is in part an exercise in extending that insidious form of social control represented by institutionalized literature, the other side of the coin shows Trollope as particularly popular during the Second World War. In June 1945 Elizabeth Bowen broadcast a playlet in which a serving soldier and his uncle (born 1882) debate the function of literature at a time of world crisis . . . 'there must be *something* about any writer who lives twice'. Of course it is not some mystical genius or individual trait of the biographical Trollope which sanctions this renewed interest in the Palliser novels; it is the multiple potentiality of literature as produced in the contradictory world of nineteenth-century Britain.

In 1882 the book trade was flourishing. The three-decker novel had not yet been unseated, and Mudie's circulating library simultaneously maintained the high price of the novel and distributed it to a public much larger than that which could afford to pay the retail price. It need hardly be said

that today the book trade is in quite a different state, virtually ousted from the list of significant modes of cultural entertainment. Film and television, recorded music, ritualized sport even, have supplanted the book as our primary experience of art. Television has long ago taken the Palliser novels and turned them into 'The Pallisers', thereby giving an age which is materially and spiritually unstable illusory access to past opulence. What the book uniquely retains, however, is precisely the physical presence of history. The Centenary Edition acknowledges both the Trollope of the 1880s and the market of our decade. It has not entered into the fabulously expensive business of establishing new texts which, with bombinating minutiae, often retards or replaces the reader's engagement with literary history. The texts are those of the Oxford Trollope, published between 1948 and 1954 under the general editorship of Michael Sadleir and Frederick Page. Together with fresh Introductions and extensive annotations, this represents a solution of which Trollope himself might have been proud.

W. J. MC CORMACK

INTRODUCTION

A SADDER AND A WISER MAN

TROLLOPE may have been right in supposing that few people would read his entire series of 'semi-political' (his expression) Palliser novels in the correct sequence, or indeed in any sequence. But whoever wants to get the best out of them will certainly require to read the two central stories that deal with Phineas Finn as though they were the one book which in his *Autobiography* he describes them as being. Although there was a long gap between them—*Phineas Finn* was first serialized in the *St. Paul's Magazine* in 1867 and *Phineas Redux* in the *Graphic* in 1873–4, and they were published as two-volume novels in 1869 and 1874 respectively—Trollope preserved their continuity so well that whenever he writes or speaks of 'Phineas Finn' it is generally the whole canvas he has in mind and not just this or that section of it.

He has himself explained why continuity was more important to him in this long and apparently rambling novel (though appearances can be deceptive) than in almost any other. 'In writing *Phineas Finn*', he recorded afterwards, 'I had constantly before me the necessity of progression in character—of marking the changes in men and women which would naturally be produced by the lapse of years'. And he continued: 'The happy motherly life of Violet Effingham which was due to the girl's honest but long-restrained love: the tragic misery of Lady Laura, which was equally due to the sale she made of herself in her wretched marriage; and the long suffering but final success of the hero, of which he had deserved the first by his vanity and the last by his constant honesty, had been foreshadowed to me from the first.'[1]

[1] Trollope, *An Autobiography*, The World's Classics (Oxford, 1980), pp. 318–20.

Nevertheless, while Trollope did carry out this grand design with a large measure of success, the gap which so often opens in his novels between his clear conception of character and his decidedly unclear development and resolution of plot and incident, is manifest from the outset. Part of the trouble which this caused him is his own fault, but part of it, the more interesting part, springs from the way in which his central character develops almost in spite of his creator. The difficulty that Trollope brought upon himself arose from what he himself called the 'blunder' of having as his hero a young Irish politician on the make. At the start of *Phineas Finn*, Phineas is a raw recruit indeed. Worse than that, he is already something of an oddity on the Irish scene, as he is assuredly a rarity on the English scene. He is an oddity in Ireland because he cuts across the lines of what was even then becoming a sharply demarcated society. He is the son of a religiously mixed marriage which meant, according to the Irish custom of those days, that while his sisters were brought up in their mother's Anglican creed, he followed his father's side and remained a Roman Catholic.

This, however, did not prevent him from attending Trinity College, Dublin, and cutting his debating teeth in that nursery of fledgeling politicians, the College Historical Society. Phineas preceded by a few years the prohibition by the Irish Roman Catholic bishops upon their flock entering that then overwhelmingly Protestant institution, though his parents, because of their mixed marriage, would probably have ignored the ban had it existed. But his political views, as we see them slowly evolving, would certainly not have been acceptable in his Alma Mater. It was bad enough that he should turn out a liberal rather than a conservative, but that he should have taken up towards the end of the first novel the cause of tenant-right, however loosely defined, showed dangerous leanings towards nationalism. Worse still, in *Phineas Redux* he dabbles in church disestablishment. True, Trollope presents this as a British rather than an Irish issue, but since the Irish Church was disestablished in 1869—the

very year in which *Phineas Finn* was published in book form—for Phineas to be taking up such a sensitive issue would not have been regarded as respectable behaviour for a Trinity College man. More than that, his tendency to be found in the neighbourhood of such explosive questions at the wrong time was bound to raise serious doubts among his friends about his political reliability.

And this, as Trollope realized when it was too late, was precisely where his hero's Irishness made the novelist's task much harder than it need have been. At one level the two books together chronicle the rise of an obscure young man up the English political ladder. Lacking a landed background (his father is a country doctor), dependent for his livelihood either on the bounty of others or on his own uncertain earnings, he succeeds by a combination of good fortune, charm, genuine ability, and the friendship of some illustrious and influential ladies—Lady Laura Standish (Kennedy by marriage), Lady Glencora Palliser (Duchess of Omnium for most of *Phineas Redux*), and Madame Max Goesler. This could have been the life history of any political gigolo, but Trollope, by making him an Irishman, complicated the issue excruciatingly. 'There was nothing to be gained by the peculiarity', he admitted later, 'and there was an added difficulty in obtaining sympathy and affection for a politician belonging to a nationality whose politics are not respected in England.'[2]

Honest man that he was, Trollope, having saddled his hero with his Irishness, has to expose him to the full consequences of that deplorable condition. When, towards the end of *Phineas Finn*, Phineas is planning to throw up office and break with his party over tenant-right, two of the colleagues whom he most detests let him have it right in the face. 'I've always had a fear about you, Finn', says Ratler, the liberal Whip, 'that you would go over the traces some day. Of course, it's a very grand thing to be independent.' 'The fact

[2] Trollope, *An Autobiography*, The World's Classics (Oxford, 1980), p. 318.

is, Finn', says Mr. Bonteen, joining in the assault, 'you are made of clay too fine for office. I've always found it has been so with men from your country. You are the grandest horses in the world to look at on a prairie, but you don't like the slavery of harness.'[3] And when in the later book Phineas's name is scandalously linked with Lady Laura Kennedy, so that the maddened Kennedy tries to murder him, Finn apparently pays a compound price for this notoriety because of his Irishness. 'I never liked him from the first', says Mr. Bonteen, 'and always knew he would not run straight. No Irishman ever does.'[4]

Why did Trollope make his hero an Irishman, knowing that this was the sort of reaction he was likely to evoke? His own explanation—that the scheme of the book came to him on a visit to Ireland—is quite inadequate. We have to remember what a special place Ireland had in Trollope's affections and how untypical his attitude towards that country was among Englishmen of his day. It was Ireland that gave him his first breakthrough in his professional career in the postal service, Ireland that made him a hunting addict, Ireland that showed him friendship and good humour, and it was from Ireland that he chose the wife who transformed the rest of his life. Moreover, the Phineas novels are yet another version of that perennial nineteenth-century theme—the young man from the provinces breaching the ranks of the establishment and imposing himself by a combination of charm, ability, and fortune. Trollope could hardly have found a more complete outsider than an Irish politician and since Irishmen were even then deemed to be almost preternaturally lucky, there was a peculiar fitness in the fact that, as Lady Glencora says of him, 'Mr. Finn is one of those Irish gentlemen who always seem to be under some special protection'.[5]

[3] Trollope, *Phineas Finn*, The World's Classics, (Oxford, 1982), II, pp. 295–6.

[4] Trollope, *Phineas Redux*, The World's Classics (Oxford, 1983), I, p. 280.

[5] Ibid., I, p. 266.

But Phineas created problems for Trollope over and above his Irishness. Trollope's old schoolfellow and lifelong friend, Sir William Gregory, complained bitterly that Phineas Finn was a libel on the Irish gentleman, of which, incidentally, Sir William himself was the *beau idéal*.[6] A modern critic has said much the same, though even more harshly, when he describes Phineas as 'a case of a character outstripping the author's intention, since he emerges as a nasty, philandering young man whose true nature seems to have baffled people in the story as well as generations of readers'.[7]

This is not entirely fair. Or rather, it is fair about the earlier stages of Phineas's career, while leaving no scope for that progression of character by which Trollope set so much store. In *Phineas Finn*, it has to be admitted, Phineas passes with great rapidity from the love of Lady Laura, to that of Violet Effingham, and thence to that of Madame Max Goesler. Lady Laura does not marry him because she cannot afford to do so. Violet Effingham does not marry him because her heart is set on marrying Lord Chiltern. And while Madame Max in a very powerful scene offers her own hand and her large fortune to Phineas, he resists what, at that stage of his development, he would have regarded as a marriage of convenience without, on his part, a basis of true love. In the event, having already decided to resign office and his seat in parliament, he returns to Ireland and marries his childhood sweetheart, Mary Flood Jones, whom he has discarded and picked up again as the exigencies of the story have demanded. Phineas's amatory progress—less linear, perhaps, than circular in the manner of *La Ronde*—is not very edifying. Indeed, one has at times the disagreeable feeling that Trollope himself did not realize how un-edifying it really was, since his chief regret was that in his usual hit and miss fashion he had not worked out a more satisfactory ending for

[6] T. H. S. Escott, *Anthony Trollope: his work, associates and literary originals* (London, 1913), p. 266.

[7] R. C. Terry, *Anthony Trollope: the artist in hiding* (London, 1977), pp. 106–7.

the first novel. 'As I fully intended to bring my hero again into the world, I was wrong to marry him to a simple pretty Irish girl, who could only be felt as an encumbrance on such return. When he did return I had no alternative but to kill the pretty simple Irish girl,—which was an unpleasant and awkward necessity.'[8]

One has to say that in the sequel this hard necessity doesn't seem to have bothered either Phineas or any of his friends. One of his more objectionable traits in the earlier book had been to keep the existence of Mary Flood Jones hidden from the great ladies whom he was pursuing or who were pursuing him. With her conveniently out of the way, Phineas is welcomed back into his old circle as if he had never left it. So at least it seems at first, but we do not get very far into *Phineas Redux* before we realize that the process of resurrection has changed our hero in several profound ways. First and most obviously, his connection with Ireland, which had been crucial in the earlier novel, has virtually ceased. In *Phineas Finn*, Phineas had sat for part of the time for an Irish constituency, some of the novel's tension had sprung from the alternations between England and Ireland, and it was, after all, an Irish issue which had brought his career to a not dishonourable crisis. Now, however, there is an almost palpable irony. While his enemies, Bonteen and the ineffable newspaper editor, Quintus Slide, still refer to him in pointedly anti-Irish terms, these rebound from the armour of his indifference. His whole development throughout the book is within an English context and when the issues are finally resolved they are this time resolved with absolutely no reference to Ireland.

But there is a second and more important sense in which Phineas is transformed by his resurrection. He is quite simply both a sadder and a wiser man. Although drawn back to politics apparently irresistibly, he never approaches them with the zest of earlier days. He finds himself obliged to fight the difficult seat of Tankerville and he encounters all the

[8] Trollope, *An Autobiography*, The World's Classics (Oxford, 1980), p. 318.

bribery and skulduggery which Trollope himself had encountered at the Beverley election of 1868 between the writing of the two Phineas books. Phineas, like Trollope, loses the election, but unlike Trollope he wins the seat on petition. Yet, although getting in for Tankerville seems a flash of Phineas's old good fortune, the election leaves a bad taste and from this early incident we learn that for Phineas things are not what they were. Once again, as in the first book, he makes difficulties for himself. At the hustings he had come out strongly for church disestablishment and at once finds himself at odds with what Parnell would later call 'the liberal wire-pullers'. While disestablishment was of course a liberal cause (or at any rate a cause beloved by the nonconformist wing of the liberal party), much depended upon right timing and in this matter, as earlier with the tenant question, Phineas is hopelessly ahead of his party. And when for tactical reasons it becomes necessary to vote against a conservative proposal to tackle the problem, there is a critical moment when it seems as if Phineas will yet again give his conscience full rein on a matter of principle.

In fact, he does not do this, and for once opts for expediency, but the incident contributes to his disenchantment. In *Phineas Redux* Trollope was anxious to subordinate the political to the human interest more completely than in *Phineas Finn,* but the division was never absolute and it is Phineas's human predicament which does more than anything else to finish him with politics. When he returns to London society he finds that Lady Laura is still living apart from her husband, the fanatical Presbyterian, Robert Kennedy. Partly at Kennedy's request, Phineas visits Lady Laura in her exile at Dresden. But so far from urging her to return to Kennedy, as the latter has desired him to do, Phineas has to listen to her declaration of love for *him*, a declaration as hopeless as it is passionate. Back in London, the half-crazed Kennedy gives way to his jealousy of Phineas and narrowly fails to shoot him. Phineas does not call the police, but his attempts to hush things up are inevitably foiled by Quintus Slide and he

finds himself in the deeply compromising position of having his name coupled with that of a married woman whom he no longer loves and who herself is a target for gossip through having left her husband.

Phineas's involvement in this ugly scandal is the hinge on which the book turns. He had taken it for granted that on his return to politics he would pick up where he had left off and would again hold office as he had so successfully done in *Phineas Finn*. But he finds avenue after avenue closed to him and unworthy persons being appointed over his head. All this happens without a word being said directly to him, and in a masterly chapter, 'The World Becomes Cold', Phineas experiences what it is to fall foul of the establishment. The worst cut of all comes when he learns that his particular enemy, Mr. Bonteen, is to be promoted to the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, while there is still nothing for Phineas—'and there was a general feeling, not expressed, but understood, that his affair with Mr. Kennedy stood in his way'.[9] In his disappointment, Phineas goes as formerly to his women friends. 'He had always gone to some woman', says Trollope in a revealing passage, 'in old days to Lady Laura, or to Violet Effingham, or to Madame Goesler. By them he could endure to be petted, praised, or upon occasion even pitied. But pity or praise from any man had been distasteful to him.'[10]

Once again, in short, he becomes 'the ladies' pet'. Lady Glencora, now Duchess of Omnium, takes up his case, but while she is able to block Bonteen's rise to the Chancellorship she cannot conjure an appointment for Phineas. The scene is thus set for the violent quarrel between Phineas and Bonteen which is followed immediately by Bonteen's murder. The circumstantial evidence against Phineas is so strong that he is arrested and brought to trial, a great set piece which occupies much of the second volume of the novel. Nothing is more characteristic of Trollope than the way in which, hav-

[9] Trollope, *Phineas Redux*, The World's Classics (Oxford, 1983), I, p. 285
[10] Ibid., I, p. 287.

ing led up to the murder, he then loses interest in the crime and reserves all his best effects for the trial. Where Wilkie Collins would have made a mystery and built his whole novel round it, Trollope has no compunction in revealing at the outset that the murderer is the Reverend Mr. Emilius, who is being pursued by Mr. Bonteen on suspicion of bigamy. The interest of the succeeding events centres upon how the case against Phineas is demolished by his lawyer, the marvellous Chaffanbrass, and upon the way in which Trollope prepares for the ultimate union of those two outsiders, Phineas and Marie Goesler, after the latter has intrepidly travelled to central Europe to find the evidence which shall be enough to save Phineas, even if not to hang the real culprit.

The changed character of Phineas is emphasized by the effect upon him of having been on trial for his life. Bearing up manfully while the ordeal in court is actually in progress, he breaks down afterwards and finds it hard even to meet his friends. Worse than that, he finds his zest for politics so completely gone that when he is at last asked to join the government he staggers the Prime Minister and nearly everyone else, including Marie Goesler, by an almost contemptuous refusal. Trollope's analysis of this critical moment shows how clear-sightedly he could regard his muddle-headed hero:

> Of his own feelings in regard to the offer which was about to be made to him he had hardly succeeded in making her understand anything. That a change had come upon himself was certain, but he did not at all believe that it had sprung from any weakness caused by his sufferings in regard to the murder. He rather believed that he had become stronger than weaker from all that he had endured. He had learned when he was younger,—some years back,—to regard the political service of his country as a profession in which a man possessed of certain gifts might earn his bread with more gratification to himself than in any other. The work would be hard, and the emolument only intermittent; but the service would in itself be pleasant; and the rewards of that service,—should he be so successful as to obtain reward,—would be dearer to him than anything which could accrue to him from other labours. To sit in the Cabinet

for one Session would, he then thought, be more to him than to preside over the Court of Queen's Bench as long as did Lord Mansfield. But during the last few months a change had crept across his dream,—which he recognized but could hardly analyse. He had seen a man whom he despised promoted, and the place to which the man had been exalted had at once become contemptible in his eyes. And there had been quarrels and jangling, and the speaking of evil words between men who should have been quiet and dignified. No doubt Madame Goesler was right in attributing the revulsion in his hopes to Mr. Bonteen and Mr. Bonteen's enmity; but Phineas Finn himself did not know that it was so.[11]

She remains loyal to him, of course, and, after a bitter and intense scene with Lady Laura, he comes to rest eventually in Marie Goesler's arms. We are to suppose that the two outsiders will live happily ever after. Perhaps they do, but Phineas never again re-enters the charmed inner circle of power. Later in the series we catch a glimpse of him as a middle-aged MP in comfortable circumstances (living on his wife's money, not to put too fine a point on it), but of the old Phineas no trace is left.

As the story of Phineas himself *Phineas Redux* has something autumnal about it. Trollope has subjected his hero to such a series of ordeals that nothing of the golden boy remains and what we are given is a sad, at times almost sombre, progress towards maturity and self-wisdom. But Trollope, here as always, paints on a wide canvas and if the fates of Phineas and of Lady Laura cast a shade, the development of the other characters along their predictable lines is sheer joy. The married life of the Chilterns at Harrington Hall, though it seems a loss of direction for Violet, is in fact idyllically happy and she is shown at her best as a wife and mother who has learnt to manage her 'savage lord' so that without realizing it he is as completely broken in as one of his own hunters. The sub-plot of Adelaide Palliser's marriage, which Violet and Glencora arrange between them, is beauti-

[11] Trollope, *Phineas Redux*, The World's Classics (Oxford 1983), II, pp. 332–3.

fully done, while Glencora's incorrigible itch to interfere in what does not concern her, brings her once more into collision—but in a strange way, loving collision—with her husband, Plantagenet. He is unhappy at having to leave the House of Commons when he becomes Duke of Omnium, but we are never in any doubt that Glencora will make a formidable Duchess.

Her friendship with Marie Goesler flowers in *Phineas Redux*. At the end of *Phineas Finn* Marie had resisted the old Duke's offer to make her his mistress or even his wife and this had won Glencora's heart. The two women are present at the old Duke's death-bed, where his infatuation all too obviously still persists. But Marie behaves impeccably and her absolute refusal to accept his legacy of jewels not only makes possible Adelaide Palliser's future happiness, but cements the alliance between Glencora and herself. Both women are studies in the vivacity which Trollope could convey so well, utterly different from each other and having in common only their creator's unstinting prodigality. Alas, that prodigality seems to have faltered in the case of Lady Laura whom he himself regarded as 'the best character' in the two books. She is indeed a genuinely tragic figure and the scene at Königstein where she declares her love for Phineas, and still more the scene near the end where Phineas reveals to her that he is going to marry Marie Goesler, are among the most powerful Trollope ever wrote. Nevertheless, she is monotonous, precisely because she is exactly what the word implies, all on one tone. Her self-pity, though itself piteous, beats upon poor Phineas like a dentist's drill. True, he had ill-used her from time to time, but we come to feel, as he evidently feels himself, that he had never quite deserved this.

There is a case for arguing that *Phineas Redux*, although perhaps less well-known and popular than *Phineas Finn*, is in some ways a greater achievement. In it Trollope displays, at times almost negligently, his two greatest strengths—his power of characterization and his capacity to dramatize the ordinary. Phineas Finn began life almost too good to be true