

Feeling like a New Man: Trollope's Multi-Dimensional Masculinities

New Men in Trollope's Novels: Rewriting the Victorian Male. Margaret Markwick. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. 216 pp.

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<1> The voice of Trollope's narrator frequently sounds stern and judgmental when directed at his male characters. This voice creates an apparently simplistic dichotomy between being manly or unmanly; between acting like a gentleman, or failing fatally to do so. While we know that Trollope's women are strong and complex, it is no wonder that, until recently, we had not thought of his men as similarly multi-dimensional, or even as going against the grain of the public Victorian discourse on middle- and upper-class masculinity. In Trollope's novels, fathers and sons are attached to one another and vocal about their mutual affection, and the husbands are happy to push perambulators. Trollope's fictional men do not fit neatly into the bifurcated "natural" female and male characteristics and social functions, seemingly so dear to the Victorians; and neither did real-life Victorian men. In the last decade or so, fascinating literary and historical research has unsettled the myth of the stern, distant, abstemious Victorian male. Margaret Markwick's compelling, enthusiastic, and well-researched account is a fine contribution to this growing body of work.

<2> The introductory section, "Trollope Past and Present," has a double purpose: a reconsideration of Victorian masculinities and the reinstatement of Trollope as both a writer eminently worthy of critical acclaim and a gender iconoclast. Indeed, while there is "a veneer of masculinist behavior in [Trollope's] novels," "...[b]eneath the veneer, Trollope's masculinity is explicitly grounded in a man being in touch with his nurturing side" (13). Markwick argues persuasively that Trollope's views on gender roles are surprisingly forward-looking, thereby making his often-underrated work relevant again. His men were "new," before the concept of the "New Man" was invented.

<3> While the introduction demonstrates Markwick's prodigious reading in feminist and men's studies scholarship, chapter 1, "The Making of Victorian Masculinities," and chapter 2, "Men in Fiction," evince her equally impressive competence in Victorian political, religious, and literary primary sources. Chapter 1 combines effectively an account of main sociopolitical influences on Victorian manhood, from Malthus to Thomas Arnold, with examples from Trollope's novels. Chapter 2 analyzes in detail literary instantiations of Victorian manhood, focusing both on the

staples of Victorian masculine identity, such as Charles Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* (1857) and Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), and on the lesser-known *Eric, or Little by Little* (1858) by Frederic W. Farrar and *Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles* (1862) by Mrs. Henry Wood, and eventually also getting to examples from Trollope's novels.

<4> "Telling Masculinities," the third chapter, contains perhaps the most theoretically compelling argument of the study. It connects gender and narrative theory with skill and originality. Markwick recounts numerous critical attacks on Trollope's perceived superficiality and lack of novelistic sophistication. The young Henry James was particularly acrimonious; he did not mince words, calling Trollope's writing "stupid" (62). Yet Markwick demonstrates convincingly that while it is James who is traditionally credited with the invention of a narrative voice that presaged stream of consciousness, Trollope, years before, was experimenting with a self-conscious narrative voice that, in her estimation, is similar to Joyce's and Calvino's. Before Trollope and James, there was, of course, Laurence Sterne, but the chapter goes beyond establishing connections between Trollope and modernism. Using primarily the example of Luke Rowan, a character in *Rachel Ray* (1863), Markwick shows how the novel's complex narrative technique, whereby the narrator identifies, by turns, with readers and various characters, reflects the multi-faceted nature of masculinity in general and Luke's masculinity in particular.

<5> For Trollope, the words "manly" and "unmanly" are always loaded and difficult to define; the word "gentleman" is similarly multivalent. In the fourth chapter, entitled "The Preux Chevalier: 'Sans Peur and Sans Reproche,'" Markwick addresses the influence of the chivalric ideal on Trollope's definition of manliness. Trollope is a chronicler of (mainly) heterosexual relationships, and certainly many of his ruminations about manliness center on men's behavior towards women, whether noble, loyal, and restrained, or treacherous and profligate. In her discussion of chivalry and/as heroism and restraint, Markwick focuses primarily on sexuality. She illustrates Trollope's sensitive treatment of the diversity of male sexual expression by walking the reader through a veritable gallery of Trollope's men, from normative heterosexuals (Arthur Fletcher and Phineas Finn) to homoerotic/homosocial men (Herbert Desmond and Owen Fitzgerald in *Castle Richmond* [1860]). Though, until recently, Trollope's novels have been unlikely candidates for queer readings, Markwick opens up intriguing possibilities by suggesting that "[i]n Trollope, we find men in close caring bonds with other men; we find men that we might label effeminate expressing sexual attraction to young men and young women, and men who enjoy close physical relationships with other men, while consumed with passion for a woman" (100).

<6> "Dissident sexuality" (100) is not the book's main focus, and chapter 6, "Sex and the Single Man," and chapter 8, "Smoking Rooms: Bawdy Jokes," consider, respectively, Trollope's representation of male behavior in heterosexual relationships and marriages, and his relative freedom in using sexually suggestive language. Both chapters serve to dispel the well-worn stereotypes of Victorian repression and prudery, as well as of the Victorian male's self-imposed abstinence. As always, with the help of a detailed close reading, the author shows that while Trollope's novels generally frown on pre-marital sex, romance and desire are essential components in the development of their young male (and female) characters. The eighth and final chapter offers a glimpse into the pleasures of Trollope's "boys-will-be-boys" bawdy humor that

rivals the humor of his eighteenth-century role model, Henry Fielding. The rather explicit description of the young Plantagenet Palliser's erection appears in both chapters, illustrating their points and making an appropriately humorous link between them.

<7> Chapter 5, "From Birth to Man's Estate," and chapter 7, "Husbands, Fathers, Sons," treat the ostensibly more serious issues of the education of men and the position of men in their families. Chapter 5 surveys eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of education and claims that Trollope's more successful characters do not go through the rigors of the public school system designed to make men out of boys. Contrary to the pedagogical doxa of the time, a nurturing environment in Trollope's novels is conducive to the formation of viable manhood. Similarly, the analysis of men's domestic duties in chapter 7 emphasizes nurturing as a fundamental characteristic of Trollope's gentleman. Trollope's portrayal of men is unique because it "advance[s] a model of behavior that transcends the convention to embrace a wider range of behaviors which address the nurturing side of a man's nature, taking him out of the market place, off the field of battle, away from his field sports and into domestic and feminised spaces" (194). Marwick deftly dissects such unique aspects of manhood in Trollope's novels as affectionate relationships between fathers and children and the predicament of single fathers, who, overall, have a harder time with childrearing than do single mothers, but relish close relationships with their offspring. Not only is Trollope's attention to such matters singular, but it is also singularly resonant today, when families and gender roles are undergoing sweeping changes.

<8> To illustrate her analysis, Marwick uses detailed tables. All in all, there are four: "Manliness in *The Duke's Children*"; "Men's Appearance"; "Education"; and "Family Structure." The use of tables in humanities monographs is not exactly routine, but Marwick makes it work. Not only are the tables effective in summarizing textual evidence garnered from an enormous body of work, but they are also helpful in marshalling the study's most salient arguments, such as, for example, the intimate link between sensitivity and manliness (table 4.1), or between a nurturing educational environment and success (5.1). The tables work well as a "Trollope-for-beginners" tool. At the end of the book, Marwick offers new directions for the study of Victorian masculinities; her own work sets a worthy example for future monographs.