

Character and the Career

Anthony Trollope's *Phineas Finn* and the rhetoric of the Victorian State

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In Victorian Britain, the consolidation of capitalism and the absence of bureaucracy had a huge and unsettling impact on politics and culture. This paper argues that the Victorian novelist, like the public moralist, provided a solution to this crisis by forming a construction of the individual as a rational and emotional citizen and of a state adequately representing this citizen. The study's objective is to examine the details of this construction in *Phineas Finn* (1869), a novel by Anthony Trollope (1815–1882); it identifies, analyzes and interprets the discourses of subject formation, politics, and character. The method used draws on the work of Paul de Man and is inductive, descriptive and rhetorical.

1. Inquiries

1.1 Political theory and Victorian literature

The closest Anthony Trollope got to a definition of his liberalism shows a representative tension and vagueness: he was an “advanced but still a conservative Liberal” (1999a: 291). Such nebulosity actually exemplifies the fact that the Victorian ‘age of equipoise’ was diverse and rich in its liberal thinking. After all, since England was the “first nation to develop modern capitalism” but also “the slowest of all countries to succumb to bureaucratization” (Goodlad 2003: 7), it experienced an idiosyncratic modernization. The intense changes in social structure that accompanied this modernization created an acute awareness of the present as a condition of radical crisis. This prompted the Victorians to form new representations of their society. One of these formations can be traced in Anthony Trollope's novels and his Palliser series in particular. The latter so-called parliamentary novels present us with an aesthetic imagination of politics, liberalism and the state as they were perceived by one of the period's most careful observers.

This paper proposes to investigate the ideological processes and representations that are at work in Trollope's *Phineas Finn*.¹ How do the characters in this novel imagine their own existence and how do they relate to each other? What are the rational and emotional dispositions that are part of the subjective formation of individual and community? Addressing these questions, this paper seeks to contribute to a burgeoning field of research that focuses on the relation between Victorian literature and 19th-century political theory. Criticism of Victorian culture has lost sight of the complex dialectic between political and aesthetic modernity, Amanda Anderson argues, by creating a bifurcation between early Victorianism, Enlightenment values and the bourgeoisie on the one hand and late Victorianism and protomodernism on the other. Such a direct opposition hides the fact that "there is a submerged and more complicated tradition of ethico-political modernity that is itself conceived by its Victorian practitioners and theorists as a practice of the self, or as an ethos" (Anderson 2005: 199). Examining how an ethos of self and state is created and maintained disables this opposition and yields a more productive understanding of modernity as "an ongoing achievement of consciousness" (2005: 200).²

The study of what we may broadly call 'the liberal ethos' is an underlying concern of this paper, which I wish to complement with an analysis of the formal imagery that the text uses to produce its ideologies. My main aim is to cover the text's tropological register that produces the imagination of self and state. As such, this paper seeks to pursue the tradition of rhetorical reading associated with the work of Paul de Man. A pursuit of literary concerns therefore does not require a sacrifice of political issues. On the contrary, ideology and politics are only possible because of aesthetics and language: "What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, or reference with phenomenalism" (de Man 1986: 11). My reading of *Phineas Finn* is an attempt to uncover the text's ideologies through an examination of its origins in the text's imagery. Trollope's style is generally transparent, lucid and far from mannered; as Henry James said, "[h]is natural rightness and purity are so real that the good things he projects must be real" (1883: 395). Because of Trollope's unmannered prose, however, his use of figurative language turns out to be all the more illuminative.

1.2 A man of letters

As a novelist and a Post Office official, Anthony Trollope showed a knack for the circulation of written records. His two careers have a different nature: the civil servant works for the state, the novelist engages in free enterprise. Both, however, regard the circulation of writing as a public service. I will argue that both are instantiations of the public moralist, a figure who is "marked out by [his] involve-

ment in the business of articulating reflections on human activities and exercising some kind of cultural authority acknowledged by the attentions of the wider society” (Collini 1993: 28). This figure is in need of authority, though, and therefore the public moralist must represent himself. Indeed, Trollope chooses to portray a fictional MP, Phineas Finn, as a substitute for Trollope the novelist:

[Phineas] knew that words would come readily enough to him, and that he had learned the task of turning his thoughts quickly into language while standing with a crowd of listeners around him, — as a practised writer does when seated in his chair. (1999b: II 339)

Both Trollope the novelist and Phineas the politician thus pursue careers as merchants of words, as public moralists. I believe that this rhetorical figure, ‘the career’, is Trollope’s clearest contribution to the contemporary debate on reform. It is the overarching metaphor and stepping-stone for the subsequent discussion. I am taking my cue from Nicholas Dames, who already and successfully “excavate[d] the contours of this important Trollopiian figure” (Dames 2003: 248). But I will also go further: the career generates a pool of rhetoric, from which narrator and characters use specific parts. These I will now proceed to examine. I will first explore the imagination of the individual. Next, I will shift my focus to the representation of the community, with a particular focus on politics and the state. Finally, I want to suggest that character is the Victorian notion which Trollope posits as possibility condition for the imaginative congruence between the ethos of the individual and that of the community.

2. Subject formation

2.1 The career

What is the career? If the career is a master-metaphor, it is necessary to briefly examine the linguistic roots of the word. The *Oxford English Dictionary* yields five results.³ Trollope does not use the career in any of its four older meanings, but nevertheless Trollope’s strategy may be more complicated than meets the eye, as these meanings are thematically present, often with a hint of irony. The “racecourse” is one of the first characteristics that we get to know about anti-careerist Lord Chiltern (1999b: I 98). Second, the “short gallop of a horse,” is present in precisely the rupture that Phineas experiences in his amatory career when Violet decides to marry Chiltern: “[Phineas’s] back was broken, but, nevertheless, he galloped, for a yard or two” (1999b: II 130). The third meaning, “a running, course,” is again closely linked to horsemanship. “A stumbling horse regains his footing by persevering in his onward course,” Marie Goesler says, and “[a]s for moving cautiously,

that I detest,” (1999b: II 205–206) — while moving cautiously is of course exactly what her mindset is all about.

In its modern use, the career can mean either “a person’s course or progress through life” or “a course of professional life or employment”. Both uses dot the novel and are characterized by linearity. The linearity of life frequently appears in conversations between Violet and Laura. “Life will not run in harmonies” (1999b: II 114), Lady Laura complains, just as Violet’s “lines, as she once said to her friend Lady Laura, were not laid for her in pleasant places” (1999b: II 321). For employment, a recurring locution to denominate linearity is the mapping of a beginning and an end. As the Lows repeatedly tell Phineas, he “was beginning at the wrong end” (1999b: I 42). This doubt about the order in which things ought to be done will haunt Phineas throughout the novel. The distinction between the career as life and as employment becomes clear when we look at the end they presuppose. Life can only end in death: “There were a great many there; among others Sir Gregory Grogam, who apologised to me for having tried to — put an end to my career” (2000: II 343). Employment, however, has no clearly delineated destination: “Trollope’s career-narratives cannot end on any secure or lasting achievement, since the very temporal pull of ‘career’ makes achievement itself a transitional stage to the next achievement” (Dames 2003: 263).

What specifies the career as employment is therefore promotion. The metaphors in this context are the climbing of trees and the mounting of ladders. Dr. Finn knows the danger for his son’s practice as a barrister once “he has got to the top of his tree” (1999b: I 10). Whatever his father’s ideas, Phineas hopes that “promotion would come to him” as the “ladder was now open above his head, and he already had his foot upon it” (1999b: I 45). These two images are concerned with an upward movement and culminate in Chapter 60, “The Prime Minister’s House”. Like Mr. Mildmay’s house (1999b: I 151), Mr. Gresham’s house becomes an allegory for the Liberal Government. At the point of entrance, Phineas is still doubting how to resolve the predicament he got himself into because of his support for Irish tenant-right. On every new floor he meets a character who has more political influence. At the bottom, Phineas finds Lord Chiltern, the indolent aristocrat: “I’ve been trying to make my way up for the last hour, but could never get round that huge promontory there”; characteristically, “Laura was more persevering” (1999b: II 298). As Phineas “was blessed with more patience than Lord Chiltern possessed” (1999b: II 298), he next comes across Mr. Monk. Mr. Monk first joined the Government but has now given up his allegiances, and therefore occupies a middle position. Finally, Phineas meets the Prime Minister himself at the top, but he must again descend, “like the sparks [...] with the same assurance of speedy loss of my little light” (1999b: II 299). The narrator describes Phineas’s promotional trajectory, like the career, as having no clear destination or purpose:

After that he pushed his way still higher up the stairs, having no special purpose in view, not dreaming of any such success as that of reaching his host or hostess, — merely feeling that it should be a point of honour with him to make a tour through the rooms before he descended the stairs. (1999b: II 299–300)

We are dealing with a complex figure here: the Prime Minister's house is in fact the allegory of a metaphor (upward movement) of a rhetorical figure (displacement). Of course, the ascent through the house is not only an allegorical representation, but also a way of making metaphors literal. But what does the career do? The function of the career can be explained by the metaphors of subjugation and confinement, "the familiar metaphors of the career" (Dames 2003: 254). Trollope links his imagery again to horsemanship: "There are but few horses which you cannot put into harness, and those of the highest spirit will generally do your work the best" (1999b: I 129). Phineas's professional career has to "fall into the regular groove" (1999b: I 104). Similarly, Chiltern and Violet's lives cannot be bound together "[b]ecause she and I run in different grooves now" (1999b: I 104). This imagery highlights the restrictive and homogenizing impulse of the career. In this way, the career harnesses ambition.

Ambition is the driving force of the novel's plot: "There can be no juster object of ambition than a seat in the Cabinet" (1999b: I 166). We can understand ambition better if we look at it in terms of vocation. Dames remarks that vocation, in the Weberian sense of *Beruf*, or 'calling', does not apply to Trollope's plots, while Weber's *Laufbahn* does: Trollope is not interested in imaginative disappointments, Dames holds, but "in the mechanisms of how a 'career' shapes, disciplines, and makes socially workable the desires and ambitions that (supposedly) precede it" (2003: 252). However, I do think that Phineas's preceding choice to become an MP is of more moment than Dames suggests: up to the very end Phineas doubts his choice of politics as a career. For example, Mr. Low is surprised when Phineas asks him "what would be his chance of success if even now he were to give up politics and take to the Bar" (1999b: II 228). Phineas cannot shake off the feeling that he is an "imposter" (1999b: I 255). Indeed, Phineas's choice of "what kind of an MP to be" (Dames 2003: 253) is as important as whether being an MP is compatible with his own character. Vocation is therefore still markedly present in the novel.

Vocation thus causes the ambition that the career must channel. Ambition presupposes a purpose, an end which is unattainable and therefore unsatisfactory. Hence Trollope focuses on the obstacles that Phineas has to overcome: if Phineas initially wants to send letters signed 'MP', the career supplants this pre-existing ambition by a "desire engendered by the track" (Dames 2003: 255). The career becomes an end in itself. The result of this process, however, is a loss of agency. Because the career curbs independence and freedom, Phineas eventually resigns.

If Phineas does not believe in the path created by the career, he will not be able to follow that which he originally did not plan on following. The metaphors of subjugation become literal when Phineas is imprisoned in *Phineas Redux* (1873).

When the career is applied to women's lives, it is transformed into love. The regulating force of love is not ambition, but devotion, as the contrast between Lady Laura and Marie Goesler makes clear. By marrying Robert Kennedy, Lady Laura hopes to continue to exert political influence through the social sphere. However, Kennedy turns out to be a domestic, puritanical tyrant. In order to make sense of her fate, Lady Laura eventually switches her allegiances to the extremeness of the religion of love: her devotion to Phineas becomes even masochistic. Because of her guilt, she imagines an unreachable desire so as to punish herself for her own mistake. What, then, should a woman do with her life, if she can make only one promotion? Marie Goesler gives us an alternative: she is "ashamed to tell herself that it was love" she wants, but she also knows "that it was necessary for her happiness that she should devote herself to someone" (2000: I 266). As a result, in choosing devotion and sympathy as an end, Marie Goesler sets herself an unending but therefore satisfactory end. As Robert Polhemus remarks, "[d]esire causes one to fall in love, and being in love focuses and defines desire" (1982: 387). Love channels devotion in a purposeful narrative that keeps delaying the attainment of its purpose.

2.2 Sequence and the examination

Both the career and love are marked by a peculiar form of linearity: they both encompass movements that supplant their original purpose. This phenomenon correlates with the novel's formal constitution: sequence becomes a formal and literary procedure, as *Phineas Finn* is a *roman fleuve*, being the second part of the six so-called Palliser or parliamentary novels. The sequence novel has a peculiar narrative tension: every novel aspires to be a unity, while the genre encourages a free-flowing drive. This ties in with Trollope's aesthetic priority of character instead of plot: "In writing *Phineas Finn* I had constantly before me the necessity of progression in character" (1999a: 318). The narrative tension this results in is based on the postponement of the end it presupposes. The closure that we expect a plot to result in is constantly displaced, just as the career is a desire that keeps on growing. Indeed, though the novel's ending is conventional from an ethical point of view, it is unsatisfactory from a rhetorical perspective: the return to Ireland is a move away from linearity to cyclicity. Trollope is aware of the problem:

It is all fairly good, except the ending, — as to which till I got to it I made no provision. 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. (1999a: 318)

This statement has puzzled many critics. By seeing it in the context of sequence and the career, however, I believe that the matter is cleared up: Trollope did not imagine an ending, because the career has no end other than itself.

Importantly, sequence has a pedagogical nature. In the world of politics, Phineas receives assistance from three guides. First, Lady Laura and Barrington Erle look after Phineas's initiation: "the earlier a man goes into the House the better. There is much to learn" (1999b: I 35). Lady Laura harks back to classical antiquity: "if I thought so, my Telemachus, you may be sure that I should resign my position as Mentor" (1999b: I 125). Remarkably, Lady Laura frames what are in her eyes bad teachers in the language of Christianity. Ratler, for example, is a "little Gamaliel" (1999b: I 12). This likely ties in with the mythological atmosphere that pervades Parliament, an element I will return to below. Lady Laura's reign, in any case, ends. After the "semi-social and semi-political" (1999b: I 355) meetings at Loughlinter, Phineas shifts his allegiances to Mr. Monk. Mr. Monk, second, provides a theoretical, disinterested outlook on politics and explicitly recommends specialization: "There is nothing so important to a public man as that he should have his own subject; — the thing which he understands, and in respect of which he can make himself really useful" (1999b: II 182). Phineas eagerly learns Mr. Monk's ideas and copies them into his first successful speech, the next stage of his ordination (1999b: I 347). Eventually, Phineas resolves to cling to this teacher's tenets; Marie Goesler's lesson, third, comes too late. Phineas should have known that "[t]here is such a difference between life and theory" (1999b: II 27). For Madame Max, the real and the illusory should be blended. Her drawing-room unites money and beauty, her bower nature and culture: "Outside and inside the window, flowers and green things were so arranged that the room itself almost looked as though it were a bower in a garden" (1999b: II 314). Indeed, she is the closest the novel comes to an ideal of aesthetics and beauty. But even though the real and the seeming must be joined, the distinction should not disappear. Hence, only Marie Goesler can really understand Phineas when he chooses to oppose the Government; likewise, she is the only character to realize that Phineas cannot be guilty of the murder of Mr. Bonteen. All in all, she is even more honest than Mr. Monk because she is also critical.

There is one more important teacher, and that is experience in Parliament itself. It is illuminating to see this issue in the light of the mid-century civil service reform, which started a decade before *Phineas Finn* and which was epitomised by Sir Stafford Northcote and Charles Trevelyan in their 1855 report *On the Organisation*

of the *Permanent Civil Service*, better known as the Northcote-Trevelyan *Report*. The *Report* was the outcome of a “short-lived crisis over administrative reform,” which was nevertheless “part of a longer historical narrative that began in 1832 with the enfranchisement of middle-class men” (Goodlad 2003: 119) and which ended, if it ever did, in the reform measures that inform *Phineas Finn*. The *Report’s* intent was a “reform of the patronage system of government appointments” (Shuman 2000: 77) under middle class financial pressure, heightened because of aristocratic misgovernment, especially in the Crimea. From now on, civil servants needed to have had a fitting education and to be able to show proof of this in a system of competitive examinations. As Lauren Goodlad and Cathy Shuman have argued in their reading of *The Three Clerks* (1857), Trollope had two reservations.

First, Trollope believed that not the values of the education system but the task itself must set the standard; indeed, Phineas must learn his trade while practicing it. The examination is only a promise, and a promise can only be recognized when it is broken; the ability to be a careerist is not a competitive, but a general quality. This is why Trollope also disliked the *Report’s* distinction between intellectual and mechanical labour (Shuman 2000: 111). One could argue that Phineas’s trial in *Phineas Redux* is an allegory of the reformers’ examination.

Second, Trollope also criticized the *Report’s* underlying assumption that the examination would erase class differences: “The gates of the one class should be open to the other; — but neither to one class nor to the other can good be done by declaring that there are no gates, no barrier, no difference” (1999a: 40). But Trollope may have been wrong. As Lauren Goodlad observes, “[c]ontemporaries and modern scholars alike,” Trollope included, “have often mistakenly regarded the *Report* as a solidly middle-class development” (2003: 120). The real goal, however, was “to diminish Bentham’s legacy, and to do so in the interests of an elite class of public school and Oxbridge-educated ‘gentlemen’” (2003: 121). The *Report’s* competitive examinations seemed to endow the middle class with power, but would in fact favour the aristocracy. While *The Three Clerks* may seem to suggest that examinations would let ambition go unchecked, I would suggest that a decade later Trollope had drawn the right conclusions, as his plea for the instalment of the career in Parliament is a nuanced alternative: the sequence of the career restricts ambition and maintains differences but makes passages and progress possible. Thus it could have secured the mid-Victorian consensus between the Philistines and the Barbarians. But it might well be argued that this was also the lesson of the Barseshire novels, which, as Goodlad reminds us, sustained “a balance or synthesis between two mid-Victorian popular ideals: the upper-class myth of the born-and-bred gentleman, and the entrepreneurial myth of the self-made man” (2003: 137). This allows us to move on to the discourse of the state.

3. The community and politics

3.1 Fluidity

The career is not only an individual but also a collective enterprise; for the ideology of the career to work, the individual and the community must be yoked together under the rule of analogy. This issue takes us back to the semantics of the career, since the career in its older sense as ‘progress through life’ can be used “with reference to a nation, a political party”.⁴ Mr. Monk is the only character to use this meaning of the career in a suitable phrase, “a study of the career of India” (1999b: II 182), which links the career of the nation explicitly to the colonies. Mr. Monk is right to do so: the East is often regarded as the place where civil service reform led to professionalization, bureaucratization and hence the modern idea of the career (Shuman 2000: 77). The changes in colonial administration, which resulted in the 1858 Government of India Act (Dames 2003: 249), had a huge impact on Gladstone’s (and Trevelyan’s) ‘bureaucratic’ reform of the civil service at home. Hence it is telling that Phineas’s career takes him to the Colonial Office in particular. Trollope makes us aware that the career in politics, also for an Irishman, is ambiguously colonial.

The career of the nation is most prominently represented in the world of politics. This representation is marked by a rhetoric of fluidity, similar to that of linearity. Whenever a great measure is at hand, London is often said to be in “ferment” (1999b: I 83, I 227, I 233). Mr. Low will use the figure in a discrediting way: “During all this drifting [men] are wretched, and when they have thoroughly drifted, they are still wretched” (1999b: I 45). This is, of course, part of Mr. Low’s disapproval of seeing politics as a trade: there can be no success for barristers who pass “a year amidst the miasma of the House of Commons” (1999b: I 47). But fluidity is also used in a neutral fashion. When Phineas tries to make his first speech, “[t]he chamber seemed to swim round before our hero’s eyes” and there arises “as it were a sound of waters in his ears, and a feeling as of a great hell around him” (1999b: I 184). Even in its ordinary dealings, the House is filled by “the full tide of speech” (1999b: II 258), an image that Phineas will ultimately overcome with a speech “like a vessel, watertight in its various compartments, that would float by the buoyancy of its stern and bow, even though the hold should be waterlogged” (1999b: I 180).

Fluidity sustains the metaphor of the career as a ship. Elections always involve the possibility of shipwreck: “[Fitzgibbon] was wrecked upon that rock forever. He spent every shilling he had in contesting Romford three times running, — and three times running he got in” (1999b: I 27). During the debates in Parliament, too, “there might [...] be shipwreck” (1999b: II 75). The conventional image of shipwreck becomes more distinct when the Government is linked to a ship, by Mr.

Low, for instance: “You have put yourself into a boat with these men, and you must remain in the boat” (1999b: II 229). The figure becomes most explicit when Mr. Monk takes the floor and urges Phineas to stick to the “special Government ship”: “My last word of advice to you is to stick by the ship. I am quite sure it is a career which will suit you” (1999b: II 264). When we look at “the career of India” in more detail, it is striking how Monk juxtaposes and links the career to learning, building a ship, the army and opposition:

Yes; — and the man who has half learned how to have a ship built without waste is sent into opposition, and is then brought back to look after regiments, or perhaps has to take up that beautiful subject, a study of the career of India. (1999b: II 182)

In a subtle way, the novel thematizes the metaphors of fluidity and the ship by letting Phineas commute five times from Kingston (now Dún Laoghaire), from the lakes of Loughlinter to those of Loughshane, and granting him a short trip to Flanders.

If the Government is like a ship, what deeper connotations might this bear? One is unavoidably directed to Plato’s famous metaphor of the ‘Ship of State’ in book VI of the *πολιτεία* or *Republic*. Phineas clearly resembles Plato’s philosopher. He is a man of ambition and has pleasure in learning; he is a lover of truth with a vocation. However, in *Phineas Finn* the idea is crucial that a good working member must follow his captain, the Prime Minister. This is irreconcilable with Phineas’s ‘platonic’ ideal of honesty. Phineas resembles the captain or Prime Minister, but also wants to be independent; he will therefore mutiny. This brings us to the important difference between Plato’s and Trollope’s ship: the members or sailors of the English Government must work together to counter the other ship that is floating in the ocean of the House: the opposition. The Government is in fact a pilot which not only represents, but also drags the bigger ship of the nation into a groove.

3.2 Parliamentary antagonism

The idea of the Government as an antagonist is founded upon a metonymical relation of causality and contiguity to the people. An image that Trollope uses relentlessly is that of the Office as a coach which has to live against an “uphill strain” (1999b: I 25) and reform as a “coach” which “must be allowed to run down the hill,” otherwise “no journey will be made” (1999b: I 333). This downward movement takes on more significance if we see it in the context of the power struggle between Conservatives and Liberals. The Conservative resists reform, but will knowingly succumb to its force “feeling that under the gentle pressure supplied by him and with the drags and holdfasts which he may add, the movement would be

slower" (1999a: 293). The Liberal, on the other hand, seeks to lessen differences. As Mr. Monk holds, "the wish of every honest man should be to assist in lifting those below him, till they be something nearer his own level than he finds them" (1999b: I 128). But even for the most radical Liberal of the book, Lady Glencore, difference is not eradicable: "I am not saying that people are equal; but that the tendency of all law-making and of all governing should be to reduce the inequalities" (1999b: I 127). Reducing inequality may be the goal of reform, but it remains a tendency, an end best left displaced and unachieved.

Difference in politics is essential for Trollope, Courtney Berger maintains, because a rigid division "embodies the principles of disagreement and difference that impel action and commitment" (2003: 320). As Barrington Erle puts it, "the House of Commons should be divided by a marked line, and every member should be required to stand on one side of it or on the other" (1999b: I 15). In order to emphasize this, Trollope indulges in a rhetoric of collision and contest. To give just one example, Mr. Daubeny shows himself to be "a gladiator thoroughly well trained for the arena in which he had descended to the combat" (1999b: I 60). Likewise, Phineas sees his university debating club as an "arena" that "was only a trial-ground for some possible greater amphitheatre" (1999b: I 7). This aura of respectful violence can also enter social life: Marie Goesler knows that it might "be necessary that there should be a little duel," should Lady Glencora "throw her aegis before the Duke" (1999b: II 202, II 203).

Difference thus lends conflict and creativity to Parliament, and Trollope will play around with the idea. While in *The Prime Minister* (1876) the instalment of a coalition government hinders the work of difference, in *Phineas Redux* we see the dangerous consequences that this mechanism might lead to: by taking up the cause of disestablishment of the Church of England, the Conservatives take the bread out of the Liberals' mouths. *Phineas Finn* focuses on yet another consequence of the system: the working member has to opt for principle instead of feeling if he wants to advance his own cause. In an act of free will, Phineas paradoxically has to set it aside. This is unavoidable and necessary, for only then can difference generate progress. Yet another paradox follows: in suppressing his own feelings, Phineas gets to serve his own interest, as he is rewarded with promotion. Altruism and egoism should go hand in hand. In this respect Trollope's public moralist differs from Stefan Collini's, for whom the two were polar opposites (Collini 1993: 65).

As a result, difference has a paradoxical function: it creates agency, but it also puts agency in a harness. In an act of free will, you decide to restrain it. And indeed, Trollope mixes his figures of collision with a rhetoric of assent, the primary images of which are marriage and the family; on the collective level, the career and love unite. First, we can read that England has been married to Ireland by the 1800 Act of Union:

But if it was incumbent on England to force upon Ireland the maintenance of the Union for her own sake, and for England's sake, because England could not afford independence established so close against her own ribs, — it was at any rate necessary to England's character that the bride thus bound in a compulsory wedlock should be endowed with all the best privileges that a wife can enjoy. (1999b: II 180)

The marriage between England and Ireland must curb the independence of the Emerald Isle, thus reinforcing its supposed status as a colony, but it must also be a contract founded on equality. Second, the state is the father of its citizens. Parliament is in charge of what Phineas calls “household in boroughs” (1999b: II 97). Like Plato's philosopher, Mr. Monk goes on, the ruler ought not to beg his subjects to be ruled by him:

It was [Mr. Monk's] great political idea that political advantages should be extended to the people, whether the people clamoured for them or did not clamour for them, — even whether they desired them or did not desire them. ‘You do not ask a child whether he would like to learn his lesson,’ he would say. ‘At any rate, you do not wait till he cries for his book.’ (1999b: I 334)

The images of the ship and marriage can even take on a charged philosophical significance when we consider the incorporation of the Ship of State into the English (Romantic) imagination by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. To a limited extent, one could attribute to Phineas's divorce from his party the same attitude of scepticism that characterizes the Ancient Mariner. The cause of this problem is flagged most clearly in the novel's preoccupation with representation. Therefore we now travel from what the Ship of State does to what it is.

3.3 Representation and pastorship

Trollope's narrator regularly draws our attention to the fact that what we are reading is fiction, that is, representation. Significantly, the offices of writer and public servant, literature and government are linked precisely through the image of navigating a ship: “How again is [the poor fictionist] to steer his little bark clear of so many rocks, — when the rocks and the shoals have been purposely arranged to make the taking of a pilot on board a necessity?” (1999b: I 267–268). Like the novel as a whole, its depiction of parliamentary government is a complicated matter of representation.

Trollope's cunning move is to attribute to Parliament the characteristics of a trope itself. Mr. Monk is the character most occupied with this issue. An illuminating passage is his letter to Phineas, situated at the centre of the book: “Another great authority has told us that our House of Commons should be the mirror of

the people. I say, not its mirror, but its miniature. And let the artist be careful to put in every line of the expression of that ever-moving face” (1999b: I 336). Parliament is a miniature or a metonymy, and the portrait of a face, which is precisely the definition of *prosopopeia*, “the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter’s reply and confers upon it the power of speech” (de Man 1984: 76). Mr. Monk gives us, as it were, a glimpse behind the scene, *scaena*, because the novel — like political language in general — frequently falls back upon metonymy and personification to describe the actions of the House. Both are united, for example, when “the whole House was sick, having been whipped into various lobbies, night after night” (1999b: II 75). This instance hints at the trope of the body politic, which Trollope uses in an indirect way: “Viscount Thrift and Mr. Monk occupied chairs on the further side of the table, near to Mr. Mildmay’s end, and Mr. Legge Wilson placed himself at the head of the table, thus joining them as it were into a body” (1999b: I 272). Not surprisingly, the House is also compared to a theatre, a performance. This happens only marginally in *Phineas Finn*, as when Daubeny calls Phineas “a god out a machine” (1999b: I 287). In *Phineas Redux*, however, the metaphor becomes full-blown when Daubeny acts his part as “Cagliostro” (2000: I 347) and “the great pyrotechnist who did it all” (2000: I 308). The world of politics, indeed, is a performance. But why must the intellectual labourer, “for Trollope, as for Arnold [...] be a subject who is also the object of a spectacle” (Shuman 2000: 119)?

The fictionalization of reality, I think, entails the necessity of ‘ironic credulity’. According to Catherine Gallagher, this psychological-historical attitude was the foundation of modern fiction. During the 18th century, the reader stopped ‘believing’ in stories, but would see them as hypothetical propositions: thus disbelief became “the condition of fictionality, prompting judgments, not about the story’s reality, but about its *believability*, its plausibility” (Gallagher 2006: 346). The purpose of this hypothesis was to create pleasure: the reader was given the power of judgment, and could control his disbelief. This cancelled out the ontological confusion between fiction and reality: the reader “had the enjoyment of deep immersion in illusion *because* she was protected from delusion by the voluntary framework of disbelief” (Gallagher 2006: 349). As in fiction, so in Parliament and in the career: you have to believe in it in order to make it work, even though your detachment from the figure makes you aware that it is merely a figure. Seeing the system is what makes you a part of it; knowing that the system is irrational is an act of rationality.

How, then, can the career of the nation be controlled? In order to ensure the likeness of the representation, the community installs two forms of control. The first form is negative and restrictive, and earns Trollope’s disapproval. It is exemplified by Mr. Turnbull, the “leviathan of the people” (1999b: I 186), and Mr. Slide,

the scheming editor who tries to manipulate the career of the nation as an organ “ensconced in a little glass cupboard” (1999b: I 317). Lady Glencora, perhaps, also unlawfully watches the watchmen. She can even be seen as a member of the secret police: “It might be necessary that [the Duke] should know that he was watched, but things had not come to that as yet” (1999b: II 201). The second form of control is linked to the positive concept of pastorship. Pastorship, in Goodlad’s reading of Foucault’s later work, encompasses societal processes of “indirect influence” that “promote wellbeing” and “entangle the individual in a normativizing web” (2003: 18). It entailed a development from the model of the family to an “idea of abstract population” (19), but would also persist in “conceptualizing” it in a “moral, religious, and familial way” (20). I would suggest that Mr. Monk is Trollope’s symbol for this figure. This man, a wealthy, intelligent and independent MP, can make public opinion by creating belief in progressive measures. He is a “parliamentary hermit” (1999b: I 75), different from the crowd of party-conscious MP’s, the “purlblind sheep” (1999b: II 334).

4. Character

4.1 Honesty

So far, I have discussed three major images (the career, sequence, and the state) and I have tried to show that they are all created by constitutive contradictions. I believe that their paradoxes are held together by the rhetorical model of character. Character is a concept that grasps the moral qualities which are part of an individual’s personality — or, taking character closer to its original meaning as *χαρακτήρ*, the moral traces that inscribe and mark an individual’s face or mask: like the career, character deals with engraving. Character, however, offers a fixed and individual identity to counter the dynamic and homogenizing ‘plot’ of the career. As a consequence, Trollope seeks refuge in ‘traditional’ resources such as animals — “[Chiltern] is not a griffin” (1999b: I 96) — mythology — “Lady Laura had been the Mercury” (1999b: I 293) — and colours: “You will find that poor Lord Chiltern is not so black as he is painted” (1999b: II 151). Character is also the reason why Trollope’s plots are often built on the conflict between the unmeltable core of an identity and the conditions set by modern life. Cathy Shuman convincingly argues that “identity and value are metonymically rather than metaphorically related” (2000: 97): character is something the individual owns and produces, but which he ought not to exchange or represent — unlike the career. When a gentleman represents his identity, as when Phineas signs a bill for Fitzgibbon, this can have highly undesirable consequences.

Character is the counterpart of the career's fluidity, but it is also its possibility condition. The connection between the two is made by honesty. Honesty, Amanda Anderson argues, has two functions. On the one hand, it is a "socialized virtue" (2007: 513) that ties the individual to self-discipline and the conformity of embedded ethos. This shows in Trollope's investment in the 'morality' of his tales. Thus honesty is linked to the career. On the other hand, honesty is a critical function, which is a consequence of Trollope's narratological use of "recalcitrant psychology" (2007: 515). Even more, Anderson asserts, honesty can be critical of honesty as a socialized virtue. As a result, similar to Arnoldian 'disinterestedness', critique becomes "an ethos that can be cultivated, rather than simply an estranging practice that threatens traditional ethos" (2007: 516). Thus honesty is linked to character. Perhaps more than any other Trollope novel, *Phineas Finn* articulates the tension between these two forms of honesty by virtue of its two outsiders at the centre of the book. Marie Goesler, probably a Jewess, clearly challenges the English narrow-mindedness concerning matters of money and love. In *Phineas Redux*, moreover, she is the only character to effectively question Phineas's supposed guilt by setting up an expedition to Prague. Phineas, an Irishman, cannot reconcile his own beliefs with his party's. Like Daniel Deronda, he resists a surrender of his identity to a larger ideological platform.

4.2 Liberalism

There is a second bifurcation: as honesty shows Trollope's skepticism about the problems inherent in a system based on experience, it also challenges the dominant Victorian liberalist belief that private and public beliefs are inseparable. At the heart of Victorian liberalism, Lauren Goodlad finds a tension between two dueling worldviews: idealism and materialism. Far from being mutually exclusive, they were indeed a source of "syncretic liberal thinking" (2003: 23), but they both produced a different concept of character. Character came into being as a Romantic resistance to the materialist underpinnings and "bureaucratic rationality" (2003: 23) that accompanied the rise of pastorship. Therefore, character foremost took a morally prescriptive form, which "implied the limitless improvability of all human beings" (2003: 24–25). Materialism, however, had its vengeance and gradually established a competing notion, "a descriptive language of character" which "implied a comparatively limited view of individual improvement and, thus, a naturalization of relatively fixed sociopolitical hierarchies" (2003: 25). The career and love — in both personal and supra-individual senses — can be seen as descriptive character formations meant to inhibit prescriptive character formations such as ambition and desire they are simultaneously connected to. However, it is unclear whether the career emerged at the origin of the materialism and bureaucratization

which prompted character in the first place, or at a later moment when materialism could influence the already established prescriptive character. This uncertainty may be the reason why honesty also needs to ensure the connection between descriptive and prescriptive formations (through conformity) and the connection between descriptive and prescriptive character (through critique).

Honesty thus lies outside character and its formations, yet it makes the likeness between the two possible: in “the true theory of representation [...] one only excellence may be acknowledged, and that is the excellence of likeness” (1999b: I 335). Pastors, like Mr. Monk, are needed to protect this likeness. If honesty fails to unite descriptive and prescriptive character formation, progress can get dangerously out of hand, and posterity has shown that it did. Or as Marie Goesler points out to Phineas: “you as the express train [...] will probably do your sixty miles an hour in safety, but may possibly go down a bank with a crash” (1999b: II 240). If honesty does not keep ambition on track, material progress will deteriorate character, as John Stuart Mill claimed, making representation dominate reality (Goodlad 2003: 29–30).

Honesty’s unifying power, however, is not ideologically innocent: it typifies Trollope’s propaganda of the Victorian gentleman. The gentleman took part in the “trade-off in which Britain’s dynamic middle classes ceded the nation’s leadership to an upper-class elite in exchange for free rein over business and local affairs” (Goodlad 2003: 119): while the prescriptive rhetoric of the self-made man was a staunchly middle-class development, the descriptive rhetoric of the gentleman was the aristocracy’s countermeasure, which served to “sublimate the nation’s bold entrepreneurial spirit by integrating it within the crucial imagining of a ‘classless class of well-bred men’” (Goodlad 2003: 120). Again, this system was actually meant to enhance the aristocracy’s credentials. By 1866, Trollope had found his own answer. Phineas is different from the Barchester deacons: he is, in an oxymoron, a self-made gentleman. Trollope portrays a humble protagonist working up his way in politics; but character, as a construction built on career and honesty, will continually displace the purpose that his development aims at. Channel your ambition into a career, Trollope says, but be aware that the career is only an image of likeness, of purposiveness — an image that can always be shattered.

5. Conclusion

If Trollope’s imagination of politics can be regarded as being too fictional, it is precisely meant to be so in a qualified sense: his rhetoric shows a clear investment in alternative ways of constructing subjectivity and imagining the evolving society he had to live in. I would like to conclude by emphasizing the way in which *Phineas Finn* is an intricate material manifestation of aesthetic ideology and *Bildung*.

Because of Trollope's decision to foreground his own guise as a public moralist, the discourse of subject formation is from the beginning characterized by performance. Indeed, *Bildung* encloses "a fusion of process, telos, and self-representation" (Redfield 1996: 48). The central metaphor of this performance is the career. The career encompasses a linear movement of promotion that constantly defers and thus restricts its original purpose, the ambition caused by vocation. Likewise, love conducts emotional forces in a purposive narrative that is sustained by either an unreachable desire or an unending devotion. More specifically, the novel's investment in this displaced narrative is a formal and aesthetic procedure: as a *roman fleuve*, the novel postpones the end it presupposes. *Bildung*, too, always "remains in a constant state of further continued *Bildung*" (Redfield 1996: 48). This rationale is reinforced by the presence of allegorical passages, which highlight the fact that the novel's narrative reflects its content: in the *Bildungsroman*, content "instantly becomes a question of form, precisely because the content is the forming-of-content" (Redfield 1996: 42). As such, the *Bildungsroman* is derived from the paradoxes of aesthetic ideology. Indeed, Phineas meshes particularity and generality in order to integrate his "particular 'I' into the general subjectivity of a community, and thus, finally, into the universal subjectivity of humanity" (Redfield 1996: 38). This aesthetic integration dovetails with *Phineas Finn's* investment in education. Education begins with pragmatism, is countered by theory and finally unites these in the blending of reality and illusion. At the same time, this pedagogy is based on difference, which explains Trollope's resistance to the Northcote-Trevelyan *Report* and competitive examinations. The career, as an alternative, both promotes and restrains middle class ambition: upward progress is possible only through the creation of class differences which provide illusory purposes.

The discourse of the community is marked by a similar linear pattern, imagined as it is in the rhetoric of fluidity. The ships of the government and the opposition must antagonistically pull reform towards equality, an end that may never be reached, since the difference this struggle generates is the basis for material progress. Difference separates the subject from its ideal and gives this displaced narrative its political force; ideology not only produces but also consumes agency. *Bildung* is therefore only possible when the ideal is sustained by assent to its nature. As a consequence, Trollope's imagery of the state must also work metaphorically. Parliament itself is constructed as a metaphor, and thus the distinction between politics and fiction becomes blurred: in the words of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "the political (the City) belongs to a form of *plastic art*, formation and information, *fiction* in the strict sense" (quoted in Redfield 1996: 49). In order to experience this representation, the Trollopien subject must cultivate the paradox of ironic credulity.

However, ironic credulity must also be complemented by honesty if the likeness between individual and community is to be made possible. Honesty entails conformation to embedded ethos, but also criticizes this ethos. It joins character with its social formations, and within these formations it links descriptive figures with prescriptive ones. Thus honesty contains a constitutive instability between character and the career: together with pastorship it ensures a successful materialist fiction of likeness between ideal and reality. Nonetheless, *Phineas Finn* disrupts the fiction's narrative movement to purposiveness without purpose by undoing the progress of the hero. Now we can understand that this is again in keeping with the logic of *Bildung*. Since the task of effacing difference between the individual and the community in the figure of the protagonist is an infinite task, it "becomes understandable as an ironic predicament and easily acquires the tonality of melancholy" (Redfield 1996: 53). *Phineas Finn* has a downbeat ending, and things do not change for the better in *Phineas Redux*. The novel performs the work of what it tries to represent; therefore it can only fail. As a *Bildungsroman*, *Phineas Finn* shows an understanding of its own impossibility, situated as it is in the paradoxes of aesthetic ideology.

Notes

1. *Phineas Finn* can be located at the summit of Trollope's 'period of success', a period which began when he settled at Waltham Cross and Waltham House in 1859, and which ended in 1872 with his decision to visit his son in Australia. This decade witnessed a shift in Trollope's professional interests from his Post Office obligations to his writing, journalism and editing. He also helped to found three new journals: in 1865 the daily *Pall Mall Gazette* and the radical-liberal *Fortnightly Review*, and in 1867 his own Gladstonian-liberal *Saint Pauls Magazine*. Trollope wrote *Phineas Finn* near the end of this period, from 17 November 1866 to 15 May 1867. The novel appeared in twenty issues from October 1867 to May 1869; it was illustrated by Sir John Everett Millais and published as a book by Virtue & Co. in 1869. Like *Orley Farm*, *Can You Forgive Her* and *The Claverings*, the book was not vastly popular, but it had a certain audience. The reviews, however, were rather sceptical. More detailed information on the genesis and reception of the novel can be found in Glendinning (1994: 383–386), Hall (1991: 188–397), Skilton (1996: 24–30), Sutherland (1972: 10, 35–37), Terry (1999: 416, 419), and Trollope's own account (1999a: 317–321).

2. This field of research is, of course, marked by internal debate. Elaine Hadley, for example, has distanced herself from what she finds to be Anderson's concept of political liberalism, which Anderson "too easily fold[s] [...] into a broader Enlightenment legacy" (Hadley 2005: 98). Hadley's point is that we should not forget that there is a constitutive contradiction between liberalism's "cognitive values" and "liberalism's aversive response to social alterity" (2005: 98). The Hyde park riots had as much influence on disinterestedness as Kantian epistemology, so to say. Still, it does not seem to me that Hadley's emphasis the historicity of politicization is irreconcilable with Anderson's suggestions.

3. Career. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2008. Oxford University Press. 24 November 2008, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.
4. Career (5.a). *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2008.

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