

# The Claverings, Chap. 13-24

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# The plot so far:

- ▶ The beautiful Julia Barbazon makes a mercenary marriage with Lord Ongar; first love, Harry Clavering, with whom she had a romance, calls her a “jilt;” she can’t afford to marry for love.
- ▶ A little more than a year later, Harry (despite a conviction of being in “perpetual misery from blighted affection”) is engaged to Flo Burton, a “dear, modest, affectionate girl;” he follows in the tradition of engineers-in-training becoming engaged to the boss’s daughter.
- ▶ Lady Ongar (Julia) becomes a widow; there are rumors about her conduct and Hugh Clavering will not allow her to return to Clavering Park.
- ▶ Harry reconnects with Julia as a friend and helper; tells himself she “could have made no man happy, but Florence Burton would be the sweetest, dearest, truest little wife that ever man took to his home.”
- ▶ And yet . . . can’t bring himself to tell Julia about Flo or tell Flo he is seeing Julia.

## *The Claverings* as teaching moral lessons?

Trollope defended novels as, like sermons or lectures, teaching “moral lessons”\* about vice and virtue, and courtship and marriage. He defended prominent British novelists of his generation (George Eliot, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Charles Dickens) and past generations (Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott), as teaching that:

- Men should be **honest and true**: do such novels teach a “man-pupil” that “it is well to be false to the woman, to triumph over her, and then to be indifferent; to lie to her, and then to despise her”; or is he “taught to be true and honest, and to be desirous of that which he seeks to win for noble and manly purposes?”
- Women should be **modest**: “[l]s she [the “girl-pupil”] taught to be bold-faced, mean in spirit, fond of pleasure, and exacting; or to be modest, devoted, and unselfish?”
- \*Anthony Trollope, *On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement*, in TROLLOPE, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, at 233, 245.

# The modest girl gets the happy ending.

- “In treating of vice does the British novelist . . . make vice alluring, or does he make it hideous? Which course does he recommend to you, —honour or dishnour? That happy ending with the normal marriage and the two children,—is it the lot of the good girl, who has restrained all her longings by the operations of her conscience, or of the bold, bad, scheming woman who has been unwomanly and rapacious? Which attracts you, Amelia—Thackeray’s Amelia, who is not clever but good; or Becky Sharp, who is all intellect and all vileness?” (Actually, Becky is a lot more interesting; and even Dobbin grew tired of Amelia’s devotion to her feckless, deceased husband George!)
- On this value scheme, Flo is the “good girl” who deserves a happy ending with a “normal marriage;” Julia has “married [a man who is “old, disreputable, and a worn-out debauchee”] manifestly for money and rank, -- so manifestly that she does not herself pretend, even while making the marriage, that she has any other reason.” (Trollope, Autobiography). She has already had an unhappy marriage, and her vice-filled husband has met an early death. And yet . . . is she entirely “bad”?

# What Trollope critics thought about Julia:

“The heroine, one of the most charming women that even Mr. Trollope has ever drawn, in a very wicked manner marries a debauched peer for the sake of his money and his title, although she is in love all the time with a more interesting commoner, who, like the majority of interesting commoners, has only a very inadequate income . . . [and she] never disguises her motives. . . This is an example of Mr. Trollope’s close reproduction of the actual way of the world.” (Saturday Review, 18 May 1867, xxiii. 638-39)

“There is only one character in the whole book in whom we are really able to feel an interest. Lady Ongar is a very charming woman in spite of the mistake she makes in the early part of the history. . . She finds herself a rich widow, still young, and more beautiful than ever. At length the time has come, she fancies, when a little sunshine will be allowed to fall upon her path [by enriching Harry Clavering]. Noble aspirations, generous sentiments, stir once more within the heart. . . ” (London Review, 11 May 1867, xiv. 547) (reviews found in Anthony Trollope: The Critical Heritage, D. Smalley, ed.)

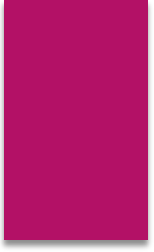
# The dilemmas faced by Julia and Harry

## Julia:

- ▶ Can ashes turn to apples again by bestowing Ongar Park and all her wealth from the “price” of her marriage on Harry? (Ch. 13)
- ▶ “had that fatal episode in her life been so fatal that she must now regard herself as tainted and unfit for him?” (Ch. 16)
- ▶ Nearly proposes marriage by letter, but decides that he must come to her to “take” her, as other men would.

## Harry:

- ▶ Will he be “true” to Flo even though Julia is free?
- ▶ Will he be “true” by telling Julia about Flo?
- ▶ “He was now the property of Florence Burton, and whatever happened, he would be true to her.” Perhaps he pitied himself, but narrator hopes Flo never learns of that pity! (Ch. 15)



Aside: Julia, like others, perceives that, “With all his early studies and his talent, Harry Clavering was not the man . . . to make his way in the world by hard work; but with such an income as she could give him, he might shine among the proud ones of his nation” (Ch. 16)

# How does Harry do in these chapters?

Not well!! By Ch. 21, Harry has all but proposed marriage to Julia!

Harry “would given all he had in the world that he had never gone to Stratton” (where he met Flo), even as he tells himself he won’t “become a villain.”

When he asks, “is there anything that will comfort her,” touching Julia's hair and taking her hand, Harry understood it all, as will the reader. “He knew how it was with her and was aware that at this instant he was false almost equally to her and to Florence.”

And yet, even as she says he must be her brother and friend, and that their old love is lost, he takes her in his arms, holds her closely to his bosom and presses his lips to hers, and says (over her “no”), “Yes, Julia, yes; it shall be so; ever so – always so.”

Now what? Compare this scene with marriage proposal scenes in Trollope. Sophia G. interrupts, but still . . . Harry concludes he is now engaged to two women!



# “Torn between two lovers, feeling like a fool . . . “

By Chapter 22, Harry faces the dilemma of being “true.”

He is not a joyous lover!

“It did not seem to him to be even possible that he should be altogether untrue to Florence. It hardly occurred to him that he could free himself from the contract by which he was bound.”

**Julia** is the one to whom he must be treacherous.

Must sacrifice her, and himself.

Has to tell Julia he “simply insulted her” given his position. He must rob her of contentment.

“The letter would not get itself written.” He can’t write to Flo or Julia!



"HARRY," SHE SAID, "THERE IS NOTHING WRONG BETWEEN YOU AND FLORENCE?"

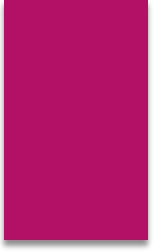
# Comic relief: Captain Booodle on wooing

Trollope wrote that “the chief merit of *The Claverings* is in the genuine fun of some of the scenes. Humour has not been my forte, but I am inclined to think that the characters of Captain Booodle, Archie Clavering, and Sophie Gordeloup are humorous.” (Autobiography, 124)

In Ch. 17, “Let Her Know You’re There,” Trollope engages in bawdy humor as Booodle advises Archie Clavering and how to break a mare (widow) rather than a young filly; “ride her with spurs,” etc.

Trollope often used bawdy jokes in his writing, with a “suggestive ambiguity;” many have “horse-riding and horse-tradition associations.” (Markwick, *New Men*, p. 180)

Trollope also compares Julia and Archie as horses, with Archie realizing he is by far the lighter of the two, ‘and know their own weight, and shove themselves aside as being too light for any real service in the world.’



Critics in Trollope's day noted this coarse humour in *The Claverings*. One suggested there was a moral point to it:

"in truth the coarse humour contains the highest moral in the story, showing, as it does, how just a retribution women who act as Julia Barbazon acted, bring on themselves, by being made the subject of such coarse speculation."

Unsigned notice, *Spectator*, May 4, 1867, xl. 489-99.

Seriously??



CAPTAIN CLATERING MAKES HIS FIRST ATTEMPT.

Archie's first attempt to make Julia know he is there is not a success.

By Chapter 24, "The Russian Spy," more comedy ensues as Boodle persuades Archie to pay Lady Gordeloup to assist him in his courtship.

In Ch. 22, Harry is stunned and sick at heart that Julia's sister is trying to enlist him to help in a plot to have Archie marry Julia; but he fails to perceive that she is only scheming for purpose of peace which might perhaps come if Hugh were satisfied.

Julia has described her sister as Hugh's "body slave," just as Archie is, although Hugh doesn't want her near.



"DID HE NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST HER?"

Julia perceives a plot to frighten her into marrying Count Pateroff to protect her reputation.

Harry carries out a mission from Julia, but without much success. (Are there papers? What's in them?)

Trollope writes that the character of Count Pateroff "disposes of the young hero's interference in a somewhat masterly manner." (Autobiography)

We learn about the count's appetite and his pleasure in food – the man he pities is the man who cannot digest. Good digestion as metaphor for what is well with the world beginning with Adam and Eve. Digestion is everything.

Julia similarly describes Lord Ongar, Hugh Clavering, and Count P. as all being "hard as stone," and "desirous simply of indulging their own appetites. (Ch. 19)

## Some Tragedy -- Chapter 20, Desolation



"THE LORD GIVETH, AND THE LORD TAKETH AWAY."

Lady Clavering tries to comfort Hugh Clavering on death of their son, his heir, which had "stricken" him hard. The "harsh, cruel selfish man had at last been made to suffer." But "he raised his own hand and with it moved hers from his person. He did it gently—but what was the use of such nonsense as that?"

'The Lord giveth,' said the wife, 'and the Lord taketh away. . .'

'That's all very well in its way' said he, 'but what's the special use of it now? I hate twaddle.'

'Oh, Hugh; what could we do? It was not our fault.'

'Who is talking of fault? . . . He was always poor and sickly. The Claverings, generally, have been strong.'  
[Implied: it must be her family's weakness?]



Trollope on this marriage and this scene:\*

“In the Claverings, too, there is a wife whose husband is a brute to her, who loses an only child – his heir – and who is rebuked by her lord because the boy dies. Her sorrow is, I think, pathetic.” (p. 125)

\* Trollope, *An Autobiography* 125 (1883).

# Of what did the child die? Syphilis?

- We learn this is the second child they have lost died. The first, a girl, when one year old.
- Earlier, the child is described as “a poor, **rickety**, unalluring bairn,” who gives out a “feeble squeak,” but is all the mother has. (Chap. 11)
- Compare the description of the young boy (the heir) who dies in *Is He Popenjoy*; his father, the debauched and cruel Marquis, Brotherton, calls him “a **rickety** brat who was bound to die.” The Marquis himself seems to have tertiary syphilis, based on his description of his physical condition and his death.\*
- “Rickety” is a clue since “children born to syphilitic parents had poor bone construction and failed to thrive.” (Margaret Markwick, *New Men in Trollope's Novels: Rewriting the Victorian Male* 92 (2007))
- If that's the case, then Hugh must have syphilis.

# And what about Lord Ongar's death?

Reading the clues that Trollope gives, it seems that Lord Ongar might also have had syphilis and not simply delirium tremens and advanced alcoholism; for example, his baldness and penchant for “wiggery” suggests concealment. Trollope “cannot say” what “misfortune” had made him bald. (Ch. 3). Ongar is thin, “weak,” and “physically poor” – the latter two conditions increased by “hard living;” a “worn-out debauché.” Sophie Gordeloup calls him “an old roué” (Ch. 14); Harry, a “rich, debauched, disreputable lord.”

Markwick compares Lord Ongar with the Marquis (in *Is He Popenjoy*) as well as Louis Satcherd in *Dr Thorne* where “Trollope exploits the similarity between the advanced symptoms of syphilis and those of excessive alcohol consumption.” “While the adult mind would know that the manner of death is similar and make the connection, a younger, more innocent audience would take on an early lesson in temperance and the evils of drink.” (Markwick, *New Men in Trollope*, 94).

# Questions:

(With apologies for omitting the renewed proposal by Mr Saul to Fanny (in Ch. 23) and Flo's reflections on Clavering Park!)

1. If *The Claverings* is teaching moral lessons, what should Harry do now to be "true"? Is sacrificing Julia the right path rather than breaking the engagement with Flo?
2. If *The Claverings* is teaching moral lessons, how do you think readers in 1867 assessed Julia's mercenary marriage and her proper "punishment" versus how we in 2025 assess her choices?
3. Do you think Flo is clearly the wife most "fit" for Harry? Has Trollope persuasively sketched her character?