

Trollope, Millais and *Orley Farm*

*Transcript of the talk given by Dr Ellen Moody for the Trollope Society Zoom meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022.*

Many Trollope readers may be familiar with the apparent truth that Trollope strongly valued John Everett Millais's pictorial art in itself, was aroused imaginatively by at least some of Millais's many many illustrations for his novels, and felt a warm regard for Millais as a man.

The best known passage by Trollope about one of Millais's pictures occurs very late in *Orley Farm* (Chapter 63, p 513).

[Screen Illustration No 1] “Sorrow in her heart and deep thought in her mind?”

While Lady Mason is imagined thinking about her coming ordeal as the accused on trial for perjury, Trollope tells us to turn back to an early depiction of her (Chapter 5, p 42), placed well before we have begun to understand that the midnight scene, which haunts the novel and is imagined numerous times by more characters than Lady Mason, happened. In the dead of night, after her husband's adamant refusal to provide a gentleman's upbringing and income for their baby son, with his corpse nearby, a household including said son asleep, Lady Mason forged three signatures to a made-up codicil for the will. Here she is presented as thinking about the accusation early in the book:

Trollope writes:

“In an early part of this story I have endeavoured to describe how this woman sat alone, with deep sorrow in her heart and deep thought on her mind, when she learned what terrible things were coming on her. The idea, however, which the reader will have conceived of her as she sat there will have come to him from the skill of the artist, and not from the words of the writer. If that drawing is now near him, let him go back to it ... the lines of her face were [now] altered, and the spirit expressed by it was [now] changed. There was less of beauty, less of charm, less of softness; but in spite of all that she has gone through there is more of strength, – more of power to resist all that this world could do to her.”

During this talk I'm going to differ with Trollope now and again. This particular picture cannot begin to give the depth of feeling his prose offers us in either chapter nor the complicated evolving verbal characterization of Lady Mason over many chapters inbetween. For example, when finally she confides her anger, tells her one woman friend, Mrs Orme, of how she has felt about her parents' marrying her off to an old man, and her Rebecca-like “enmity,” continued “deceit” and lack of active remorse: – “Even now she would not yield” (Chapter 60, pp 488-492; see also O’Gorman’s note, pp 469-70, ns 487, 492). No single woodcut by Millais comes near these passages. In this first depiction the whole effect is too consciously pretty, there is too much skirt once again, there to signal the class she now seemingly belongs to and assumption of dignity.

Closer to Trollope by this point in the novel is the more expressionistic “Lady Mason After her Confession” (Chapter 45, pp 370-71) [We are looking at]

[Screen Illustration No 2] “Lady Mason After Her Confession”

Take a moment to observe what you are seeing again. If the kinds of pictures Millais most characteristically drew and painted and was much praised for in the era, and since, tell us anything, we begin to approach one of the strengths for which Millais was rightly valued: Millais is expressionistic, through fiercely held moments of body stances or writhing he can convey upsurges of plangency that seem to derive from a soul within an agonized figure. Accurate realism is not what Millais was after: the room we see is improbably undecorated, with its bed and candle something like what we might expect to find in servants' quarters, the wide black (still graceful) dress and shawl in which we glimpse two clutching hands are there to embody the total bereftness the figure is working to contain, the emotion she is controlling.

There are numerous problems when we try to go back in time to value art objects our contemporary technologies have rendered if not obsolete, woefully inadequate or (if we can get ourselves to admit this) puzzling. None of the sets of illustrations for Trollope's novels can compete with the extant film adaptations we can stream into our computers at will.

There is also the usual prejudice inherent in historical framing: some sets of illustrations by relatively unknown artists for Trollope's novels are as frequently good as Millais's – not just the half set by Hablot Browne (Phiz), whose mode for *Can You Forgive Her?* Trollope rejected as he seems to have rejected central elements of Dickens's art:

[Screen Illustration No 3] “Burgo Fitzgerald”

This from *Can You Forgive Her?* is the frontispiece for my book, *Trollope on the Net*, because I thought it so perfectly captured – expressionistically, symbolically unspoken aspects of Trollope's text: through animated and un sentimental lines, and alert caricature which prompts both pity for the beggar girl turning away intensely to concentrate on that food and drink, and an awareness in the reader of how comfortable and leisured and unselfconscious is insouciant elegantly dressed gentleman (see *Can You Forgive Her?* Chapter 29, p 263). The art work of Mary Ellen Edwards (*The Claverings*), Francis Fraser (*The Golden Lion of Granpere*), Marcus Stone (*He Knew He Was Right*), George Housman Thomas (*Last Chronicle*), and even Lionel G. Fawkes (*The Way We Live Now*) is often as good as Millais and wrongly simply dismissed or simply not reprinted. They also may seem to us to be as often inadequate.

A third obstacle is the need for some knowledge of the aesthetics of the era. We need to know that there are two distinctively different modes of illustration found in middle class Victorian novels. Quite different from Millais and most of the other illustrators Trollope agreed to is the caricature, emblematic, and frequently fantastical style found in many of the era's novels. Dickens and Thackeray's novels are the most familiar places we probably have seen them. And they are far from inferior to the naturalistic “golden age” idyllic figures preferred by Trollope, can be more effective, and what's more influenced the naturalistic idyllic style (1).

One uncompromising example of this caricature style will have to stand in for hundreds:

[Screen Illustration No 4] Barnaby and Grip His Raven

This by Phiz again of the mentally disabled Barnaby Rudge and his faithful friend, the raven, to me captures more pity, respect and understanding for the comradeship of this outcast pair than any of Dickens's words in the novel.

Among Marcus Stone's generally strong lined idyllic style illustrations for Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right*, "Trevelyan at Casalunga" approaches the nightmare quality of the fantastic style, but does not quite hit it, as he is constrained by notions of portraying the human body naturalistically (*He Knew He Was Right*, Ch 84, facing p 700). [Let's look at]

[Screen Illustration No 5] "Trevelyan at Casalunga"

A solitary man in a landscape won't do; Trevelyan's mostly unhinged projections of his sexual anxiety, perverse self-destructive wish-fulfillment, his melancholy temperament are called for. The picture can serve to remind us that Trollope rarely, if ever, depicts his characters' dreams. One needs to go outside Trollope's texts to capture by visual means their inner life.

As I said, the second basic mode of the era, often called the idyllic picturesque style (the word "monumental is sometimes snuck in) is nonetheless Trollope's strong preference. I'd call it naturalistic, a term you can come across describing TV genres: Andrew Davies, the central creator for TV serials for *He Knew He Was Right* and *The Way We Live Now* (3) uses the term. It can do transcendent work. Here is Francis Arthur Fraser, not for the first edition, but a later reprint of *The Last Chronicle of Barset*. [No 6]

[Screen Illustration No. 6] "Dogged as Does It."

An interesting aspect of this one is the face of Crawley that we see is the same we see in what to me is a rather dull depiction of the Crawley family by Millais in *Framley Parsonage*, but now grown so ravaged and rigid (2). The man's eyes stare out at nowhere. I put it to everyone this is another image of two people who have learnt how to hold out, how to resist all that the world has done to them, and the punishment has been considerable. Notice how the working man holds the hand of the impoverished gentleman.

As time went on this style became darker, accommodated pictures of dire poverty and despair, and used very dark smudgy shades, such as we find in Francis Montague Hull's series for *Phineas Redux* [No 7]

[Screen Illustration 7] Lady Laura at the Glass

Lady Laura Kennedy's body and face show how the world's effects on her have ravaged her. It's not as dark as the more typical illustrations of this later manifestation of the idyllic style (say Lucas Fildes' series for Dickens for *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*), nor such as we find in Trollope in Fawkes's illustrations for *The Way We Live Now*, two of which were copied in the 2004 film adaptation, and are especially good for prison and street scenes of destitution (4). "Lady Laura at her Glass" combines the nightmare fantasies of the emblematic with the monumental feel of the idyllic types.

What we don't want to do is judge such picture by literal accuracy. Why not? Because you get involved with the kinds of arguments still written about Millais's illustrations to Trollope's novels: an admittedly excellent essay by Michael Mason, overwhelms you with proof that beyond a doubt Millais either got many details in Trollope wrong or didn't bother to look carefully at what Trollope described; there are half-refutations by (among others) Hilary Gesty and Ileana Marin, both of whom assert it doesn't matter while trying to show where Millais did pay close attention. David Skilton argues these kinds of arguments misunderstand how to read Victorian book illustrations. You must look at the interactions between the whole series of illustrations for a book and the whole text.

There is today a prejudice against book illustrations in books for adult readers. Henry James was among the first novelists to inveigh vehemently against someone else's pictures getting between him and his text. It is true, especially in the area of film adaptation, the difference between the way any individual reader has imagined the characters in a book and the way a film-maker team realized them offers many irritated fans (see Byatt and Sodre) an easy and understandable form of literal attack. And dismaying book illustrations may be disruptive: since they are rarely considered necessary or quite the adult thing to do, not much money is usually spent on this. But that a thing is badly done is no argument against it. In Trollope's time publishers hired the best artists to draw for them, and demanded engravers who were skilled craftsmen, because this increased the sales of their books (Moody, *Trollope on the Net*, 129-30).

Readers in Trollope's era are thought to have understood the art of stopping reading to dwell on a juxtaposed picture to see how the picture also tells the story, how it may emphasize a different aspect of the story, or transcend the text altogether. Personal taste comes into what we like or dwell on, as well as our own interpretation of the text but some objectivity is possible.

For my chapter in my book on Trollope called "The Original Illustrations to Trollope's Novels," I viewed over 400 of the original illustrations (that includes vignettes and large letters at chapter openings). This can be done if you live in the US, as I do, near the Library of Congress, which is a deposit library and throughout Trollope's era acquired copies of British periodicals where most of the illustrations for Trollope's novels may be found. A telling count: I found only 4 (four) depictions of hunting in the original illustrations to Trollope's novels: the one of Monkton Grange in *Orley Farm* is one of these. The reason readers today think these predominate is these four are frequently reprinted, the publishers thinking this is what readers of Trollope expect and so they reinforce a mistaken impression. People politicking and engaging in economic activity are found in *Ralph the Heir* and *The Way We Live Now*, but otherwise such scenes are uncommon. I estimated less than 1/3 of the pictures (including vignettes, which are often mood pieces) are comic.

What Trollope seems to have wanted – for he did get to suggest which scenes to portray – are depictions of deep feeling absorbed moments of emotional intensity figured forth within a social scene or when alone, often right after the crisis is over. The private self is suddenly seen. There are a number of these in *Orley Farm* (5, "Van Bauhr's Dream"), but nowhere enough and not all equally successful. Critics often say that Millais's illustrations for other books than Trollope's show us him at his best. Here is another single one in place of many, from Millais's illustrations of an 1864 book called *The Parables of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*

Screen Illustration 8: "The Good Samaritan.

It's just stunning. Notice the donkey. It's one Trollopian touch among many Trollopian touches found in Millais's work outside Trollope. Many of these have the most minimal of texts and details.

So, out of 40 full-page illustrations for *Orley Farm*, 17 are of events and/or characters directly involved in just *the Orley Farm* case. That's 42.5% says google. They capture crucial and nuanced moments across Lady Mason's story. Two are frontispieces, the first Millais's depiction of *Orley Farm*, the deep heart's core of the book as Prof O'Gorman has told us (6), which N. John Hall in his *Trollope and His Illustrators*, demonstrates is a close replication of a photo taken for the occasion (Plate 29).

Screen Illustration 9. "Orley Farm" frontispiece

Why is that dairy maid milking a cow in the meadow? People have found other oddities

It's not true Pre-Raphaelite art is even mostly paintings of strongly melodramatic medieval or early Renaissance looking pictures of large figures. At least half their paintings are of landscapes and figures, animals and plants, houses, sky, birds and weather usually caught only by camera. The use of the camera was Ruskin's idea and influential on Millais and the Pre-Raphaelites

This is kind of detail in Millais hard to show in the *Orley Farm* set because it lacks vignettes and letters – which are however found in Millais's illustrations to *The Small House at Allington*. So here are two of these to show you that Millais vignettes not infrequently defy taboos, show things not permitted in words in Victorian novels. From *The Small House at Allington*:

[Screen Illustration 10] The initial facing Chapter 19.

Anyone who has read *The Small House* will instantly connect this bull with his penis or balls in about the middle of the picture with Johny Eames and the Squire. We don't need any more words. Don't miss the leg turned upwards. The letter is T.

Others are hard to connect clearly with something specific like this of traveling boxes. [No 11]

[Screen Illustration 11] The initial facing Chapter 28.

It is also from *The Small House*, a vignette which occurs just after Adolphus Crosbie in a deeply embittered mood writes letter of rejection to Lily Dale: Somber in mood, no? We see some books, a tall wooden box, a lined aged trunk.

Perhaps my fellow readers are beginning to realize I do not consider *Orley Farm* to contain Trollope's best series by Millais. I offer the idea instead that it contains a few that are transcendent. The intensely active "Christmas at Noningsby" where we see a very chubby man playing Blindman's Bluff with a group of children. [No 12]

[Screen illustration 12] Christmas at Noningsby, Evening.

Note how the diagonal lines criss-crossing the figures make for a sense of crowded action (7).

In this last part of my talk I'm calling attention to pictures in the *Orley Farm* series that are not among those admired but have been (curiously, revealingly) often reprinted with puzzled remarks. In a number of Trollope's novels what happens is the illustrations emphasize a sub-story of a tertiary character. One example is Edith Brownlow in *The Vicar of Bullhampton*; the illustrator is Henry Woods whom Hall dismisses as just beneath contempt (140-43). So I want to look at one such case in *Orley Farm* which has puzzled readers [No 13]

[Screen Illustration 13] "Mr Chaffanbrass and Mr Aram"

First who is who? Critics staring at this have suggested the figure we see best does not square with Trollope's several descriptions of Chaffanbrass. Neither fit the bill for "dirty little man, without his gown and wig ... insignificant" (O'Gorman, Chapter 34, p 277). What some might call a Jewish nose is seen prominently on the man nearly facing us. There is a picture on the wall with a woman with a kind of veil one might associate with crossing the desert – a place associated with Jewish people. The image

dropped into the book faces a dialogue between Chaffanbrass and Aram where they are discussing who should cross-examine whom. Mr Aram is objecting to having “egoism” (that’s the word used) in any of the staff direct any choices. In “such a case” as we have here, says Mr Aram, “I detest all etiquette and precedence.” And: “I’m not going to have my client overthrown” (Chapter 62, p 507).

I call attention also to the non-depiction of Bridget Bolster herself, but rather the phalanx of high ranking males she has to face during her testimony [No 14]

[Screen illustration 1] Bridget Bolster facing the court

Stop and imagine the courage of this woman with all these male eyes upon her. In the event Furnival browbeats and confuses the nervous Kenneby; and then Chaffanbrass, realizing the method by which Bridget Bolster has decided she cannot be confused (simply repeating over and over “I did one, and I didn’t do no more”), resorts to insulting insinuating remarks about her personal life, motives for turning up once again, and implies this sentence is memorized, practiced, a paid feint (Chapter 71, pp 584-86).

Can we return to or let’s remember [Illustraton 13] Mr Chaffanbrass and Mr Aram?

What is Mr Aram’s role in the proceedings besides insisting on status must not be considered in choosing who examines whom. We are told that he visits Orley Farm more than once, and the night before the trial begins it is he who “settles it” that the way to and from the court will be by hired closed carriage, Mrs Orme and Lady Mason inside, and himself seated on the box on top (Chapter 64, pp 522-23). Each day Mr Aram turns up to Lady Mason and Mrs Orme and the two sons with “sundry little instructions in a low voice as to the manner in which they should go home and return the next morning” and how he will be there to meet them at the door of the court (Chapter 70, p 568). He is once suddenly there reminding Felix Graham what he has been hired to do (Chapter 65, p 533). It is he who has gained knowledge of who lived in Hampton when the jury is chosen, so he is central in which people are “passed over” (Chapter 68, p 552). Mr Aram turns up after Furnival’s concluding peroration to suggest to Mrs Orme not to tell Lady Mason to be sure of acquittal; and when he lifts his hat to leave Mrs Orme insinuates it’s important Lucius Mason not be there when the verdict is delivered. Thus is Mrs Orme driven to make Lucius understand his mother forged the signatures (Chapter 73, p 595). And that last morning, Mr Aram, as ever so self-effacingly, says to Mrs Orme, he is relieved because by coming up to this day Lucius “has done all the good he could do” (Chapter 75, pp 613-14). No wonder Trollope wanted him included in the pictures.

The scene where Lady Mason is driven to tell Sir Peregrine she is “guilty of all this with which they charge me” has been much admired and Trollope himself says of the scene it is as good and “sensational” as several highly memorable scenes in two by Walter Scott, *Jane Eyre*, and Henry Esmond (*Autobiography*, p 142). [No 15]

[Screen illustration 15] “Guilty.”

It’s painful to me to look at the picture of Lady Mason cringing at the feet of Sir Peregrine Orme; it makes me cringe. Who is he that she should cringe to him? But look carefully and you also see that in “winding her arms” around his knees and lower legs, she is seeking to shield her body by his as if he were a bulwark. His hand is up in a perhaps feeble gesture to push away reality; is he absolving her? His fist is against his chest. We may feel for him as an old man, but far from protecting her, he comes close to giving her away in his visit to the other side’s lawyer, Mr Round, an important scene to which is devoted a very poor illustration. You can see it online (9).

I suggested in my talk on *Dr Thorne* that Trollope's seventh novel is radical because it makes an apparently penniless bastard the heroine of the book whose unexpected huge inheritance shows up the untrustworthy hypocrisy of the established order, and because it substitutes another criteria for rank and money as a basis for life: affectionate human bonds made legitimate by time and effort. I see this story of Lady Mason as taking this radical stance from a vulnerable no-status woman's point of view much further.

I realize the way people talk about this central story is to emphasize the exposure Trollope makes of legal procedures; courts are not places where a key aim is to ferret out truth. In this novel like Trollope's others with trial scenes, we see adversarial fights where lawyers use unfair exploitative means, where subjective impressions and feelings about the people involved on the parts of judge, jury, lawyers play a strong role – all to produce a verdict the community is expected to respect and everyone in the novels minimally accept. Not everyone does. I'm taking a very different angle on what these lawyers end up with, one which I suggest the novel & Millais' pictures also sustain. I say that Trollope's team achieved the morally right verdict. Her son has failed her, but they did not. Lady Mason does not go to jail, as she should not (10).

What the pictures do is reinforce what the dramatized events of the book show: to keep herself safe for all these years and to continue to live in some kind of peace, she performs obeying other people's wills, and lives apart. Only this way can she remain strong. She has been careful to consult others at each step: like what school to send Lucius to. Trollope suggests that in the event, that advice was bad, Lucius needed to go to one of the usual well-known upper class young gentleman's schools where he could have been knocked about. She will continue to remain for the rest of her life alone. It's been a life of masking, of semi-cringing, as in this early semi-fearful self-presentation [No 16]

[Screen illustration 16] “Your son Lucius, did say – shopping?”

How tentatively Lady Mason stands there as if reluctant to take up any space. There is a look of hesitancy on her face. This one has on the floor a stack of papers with a ribbon round them: they might symbolize or remind us of the documents Lady Mason forged which she has not been allowed or not been able to forget.

And now she must give up the one near friend worthy of her whom she has made [No 17]

[Screen illustration 17] “Farewell”

This is the novel's penultimate image. As common with Millais, it's a central square or rectangle with a triangular intersection of bodies. The expressionistic dresses outline a height of intense grief contained. I used the grey tints in reproducing the image so you can see – perhaps it's meant to be an evanescent blackness. There's a book on the table. Like Phiz's *Barnaby and Grip*, there is no specific equivalent in Trollope's text. The last we hear of Lady Mason, her son has gone far far away -- Australia. And I quote Trollope: “Mrs Orme [though] kept her promise, and wrote constantly to Lady Mason – hearing from her as constantly” (O'Gorman, Chapter 80, p 661). Lady Mason is both punished and rewarded.

Sources for images:

No 1, Moody, *Trollope on the Net*, p 128

No 2, *Orley Farm*, Dover facsimile, Vol ii, Chapter 5, facing p. 40.

No. 3, Moody, *Trollope on the Net*, frontispiece to the book.

No 4, Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, from *Complete Oxford Illustrated set*, 1966, Chapter 17, facing p 136

No. 5 Trollope, *He Knew He Was Right*, Trollope Society Edition, Chapter 84, facing p 700

No 6 , Moody, *Trollope on the Net*, p 144.

No. 7, Trollope, *Phineas Redux*, Trollope Society edition, Chapter 69, facing p 552.

No. 8, *Beyond Decoration*, p 151

No 9, *Orley Farm*, frontispiece, from Dover facsimile.

No 10, *The Cornhill Magazine*, found in Library of Congress, Chapter 19; *Beyond Decoration*, p 219

No 11, *The Cornhill Magazine*, found in Library of Congress Chapter 28; *Beyond Decoration*, p 234

No 12, *Orley Farm*, Dover facsimile, vol i, Chapter 22, facing p 174

No. 13, *Orley Farm*, Dover facsimile, Vol ii, Chapter 22, facing p 172.

No 14, *Orley Farm*, Dover facsimile, Vol ii, Chapter 31, facing p 246

No 15, *Orley Farm*, Dover facsimile, Vol ii, Chapter 4, facing p 32

No. 16, *Orley Farm*, Dover facsimile, Vol i, Chapter 13, facing p 98

No 17, *Orley Farm*, Dover facsimile, Vol 11, Chapter 38, facing p 304

Notes

- 1 From Forrest Reid's influence. See *Life*, both essays.
2. See Hall, "The Crawley Family," Plate 5, facing p. 18.
3. Moody, "Epistolarity and Masculinity in Andrew Davies's Trollope Adaptations, pp 79-94.
4. Moody, *Trollope on the Net*, pp 146-47, "The Journey to Liverpool" closely imitated in the 2004, *The Way Live Now*, Part 4, Episode 9.
5. See Dover facsimile, *Orley Farm*, Vol i, Chapter 17, facing p 137.
6. See Francis O'Gorman's brilliant essay on the indirect autobiography in *Orley Farm*
7. "Christmas at Noningsby." People also like the absurdity of "There is nothing like iron, Sir; nothing." See Hall, Plates 26 and 27, pp 48-50. Indeed there is not for furniture as Miriam Usbeck Dockwrath had to learn the hard way. Trollope makes Dockwrath an abusive husband
8. Quite a number of Millais's illustrations for Trollope's *Small House* are truly superb; *Framley Parsonage* and *Phineas Finn* less so. Details in them especially when a character is visualized for the first time are picked up by later illustrators and Millais himself, Crawley's face (Crawley's). Lady Lufton's unavoidable confrontation with the Duke of Omnium, was favorite with Trollope; see Hall Plate 6, p 22 "Lady Lufton and the Duke of Omnium."
9. See *Orley Farm*, Dover facsimile, Vol ii, Chapter 16, facing p 127, "Sir Peregrine at Mr Round's Office." The chubby over-coiffured Mr Round makes me wonder how readers at the time saw lawyers.
10. Pionke's essay shows how lawyers at the time saw it as an attack upon their profession, but the reviews meant for the general reader as reprinted by Smalley (pp 143-79) mostly praise the book strongly; at least three see the central story as tragic. Millais's illustrations are mentioned as adding to it

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Ellen Moody  
Independent Scholar