The hobbledehoy's choice: Anthony Trollope's awkward young men and their road to gentlemanliness

Identifier
etd-04132005-192550

Mark King, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Degree
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Department
English

Document Type
Dissertation

Abstract
This study reads the rise, reign, and fall of the English gentleman through the lens of the hobbledehoy novels of Anthony Trollope. It explores Trollope's use of the hobbledehoy (a term, now almost archaic, for an awkward young man) in eight novels appearing between 1857 and 1879: The Three Clerks (1857), The Small House at Allington (1864), The Last Chronicle of Barset (1867), Phineas Finn (1869), Phineas Redux (1874), John Caldigate (1879), The Way We Live Now (1875), and The Prime Minister (1876). Since the hobbledehoy figure serves as a cultural reference point or touchstone, then by examining the permutations and adjustments in Trollope's hobbledehoy, the study clarifies and challenges existing suppositions regarding Victorian notions of class, gender, and nationality. For example, the work argues that the "crisis of gentlemanliness," identified by Robin Gilmour in The Idea of the Victorian Gentleman as developing in the final years of the century, actually begins much earlier—as early as 1871. Not only is this argument important for Trollope scholars, but it also has ramifications for the larger world of Victorian studies and the discipline as a whole. For instance, "The Hobbledehoy's Choice" argues that Trollope's hobbledehoy tales form a distinctive sub-genre of the bildungsroman. Additionally, by examining Trollope's hobbledehoy figure within the larger framework of Victorian texts, the dissertation illustrates the shifts in connotations of gentlemanliness from mid to late century. Furthermore, the arc of Trollope's hobbledehoy narratives illustrates the author's initial unswerving belief in the unconditional benefits of hard work—ideas popularized by the essayist Thomas Carlyle. However, as the century wore on, Trollope's hobbledehoy narratives demonstrate a steadily increasing suspicion of this Carlylean "gospel of work." Finally, I argue that Trollope's hobbledehoy novels negotiate a distancing from much of mid-nineteenth-century self-help literature, especially the work of Samuel Smiles. This cultural infusion of the hobbledehoy narrative with the corpus of nineteenth-century conduct literature illuminates the manner in which Victorian conduct literature twists and distorts the traditions of its progenitor, courtesy literature.

Date
2005

Document Availability at the Time of Submission
Release the entire work immediately for access worldwide.

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/3930

Committee Chair
Sharon Aronofsky Weltman
Author Anthony Trollope always takes care of his characters - most are safely housed by the end of his books, and most have found a way to a financial security of a sort, even if life plans have gone awry and any dreams of rising up in class or a job went sideways. Trollope is an expert writer. His plot is an interesting one of young women who are hoping to find satisfying husbands, and of young men who are hoping to find satisfying wives. Some hope to climb upwards in class by marriage, while others hope to find true love. Despite their aristocratic status and assets, the De Courcy family are also short of 'ready money' - and none of the many unmarried De Courcy daughters has much to recommend her, either in face, fortune or personality.