



Faults, Rights, and History: Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right* and Frances Trollope's *One Fault*

By Elsie Michie

Presented at The Trollope Society Winter Lecture, January 30th, 2014

Though Anthony Trollope insisted that he read none of his mother's works except her early satiric poem "Illustrations of Matrimonial Economy," he nods to his knowledge of her fiction throughout his novels, particularly through the use of proper names. When, for example, he entitles a novel *The Eustace Diamonds* (1871), he echoes the title of his mother's anti-Catholic novel, *Father Eustace* (1847), which opens with the theft of diamonds. When in *The American Senator* he has the novel's characters congregate at "the Bush" and names one of his calculating fortune hunters Lady Augustus, he echoes his mother's satiric novel of manners *The Lottery of Marriage* (1849), where one of the main characters, Augustus, pretends he possesses a family estate called "the Bush." These echoes are particular strong in *He Knew He Was Right*, where, in giving the father of the unhappily married Emily Trevelyan the name of Marmeduke, Anthony echoes the name of the abusive husband, Sir Marmaduke Wentworth in *One Fault* (1840), Frances's novel about the decay of a marriage. The similarities between these two novels may reflect family history, if, as Pamela Neville-Sington and other Frances Trollope biographers have suggested, the controlling husband in *One Fault* is a fictional portrait of Frances's own husband and Anthony's father, whose unhappy relation to his family Anthony points to in his autobiography. But to read the relation between Frances and Anthony solely in terms of biography is to overlook what that connection can tell us about the conceptual changes that took place over the fifty year interval between 1832, when Frances Trollope published her first book *Domestic Manners of the Americans* to 1882, when Anthony Trollope died. The talk that follows traces some of these changes by looking at the similarities and differences in two tales of matrimonial cruelty, one written in 1840, the other in 1869.

The titles of the two novels *One Fault* and *He Knew He Was Right* provide key terms for understanding these changes. Indeed when we read the novels together, it becomes clear that each is also interested in the term foregrounded in the other. Frances's focus on faults makes us aware of how frequently Anthony uses that term. (The concept is discussed at least twenty-nine times in *He Knew He Was Right*. Key references occur on pp. 46, 72, 104, 156, 217, 239, 255, 362, 567, 581, 591, 634, 706, 841, 891, and 894.) But Anthony's focus on rights also makes readers see that Frances's novel is also concerned with both rights and being right. Shifts in the use of both terms that take place between Frances's and Anthony's novels

reflect changes that took place between the First Reform Act (1832), which is referenced in *One Fault*, and the Second (1867), which is referenced in *He Knew He Was Right*. But the differences between attitudes towards both faults and rights in the late 1830s and 40s, when Frances rose to fame as a novelist, and the 1860s and 70s, when Anthony wrote his most complex novels, are traced in these novels not through explicit references to politics but through depictions of unhappy marriages in which the husband seeks to dominate the wife. Kathy Psomiades's argument that *He Knew He Was Right* "uses the problematics of power and rule in relations of marriage and kinship to address larger questions of what it means to govern and be governed" [32] applies equally to *One Fault*. These concerns about governance are worked out in the two novels through key shifts in legal as well political thinking, including the founding of a secular Divorce Court and the development of the insanity defense, both of which have been read as underlying *He Knew He Was Right*. Reading that novel in relation to its 1840s precursor Frances Trollope's *One Fault* will allow us to locate these changes in a historical frame in which the law can be read in concert with widespread political reform and transformations in the shape of the nineteenth-century novel.

Part I: Faults

To connect *One Fault* and *He Knew He Was Right* is to realize how fruitful an arena fiction is for exploring the mixed and intangible motives that troubled nineteenth-century lawyers as they thought through the implications of divorce cases. To read those paired fictions in relation to legal debates is also to understand the institutionalization of divorce not as a watershed event that took place with the passage of the Divorce Act in 1857, the establishment of the divorce court, and the landmark case of *Kelly v. Kelly*. Instead it involved a gradual rethinking of human character in relation to motivation and intention. That rethinking explored a mental territory that was, in Frances Trollope's words, "shapeless and undefined, ever . . . fraught with mystery and mischief" (OF II. 188). The legal historian John Biggs has argued that "looking back . . . over the period from 1850 to 1865, we can see that it was an era of doubt" (35). Frances Trollope's *One Fault* gives us a prehistory of those changes by showing how the idea of fault, which would become key to thinking about divorce from the nineteenth into the twentieth centuries, was conceived in the late 1830s and early 1840s. *He Knew He Was Right* shows how it was reconceived in the era in which divorce was becoming a broader social reality than ever before. Over the middle decades of the nineteenth century, lawyers discovered that, "no other branch of the law deals in such a way with the interweaving of characters, the conflicts of wills and the general wear and tear of daily life" (Biggs 3). This statement could describe the nineteenth-century British novel as accurately as it describes the problems faced by British matrimonial law.

In the period between the 1840s and 1860s, human motivation was reconceptualized, as both fiction and the law rethought the nature of marital relations in light of divorce. Key to both novelistic and legal discussions at mid-century was the question of what constituted matrimonial cruelty. That concept was systematically redefined in the Victorian period, as the assumption that cruelty or violence must take a physical form fell away and lawyers and novelists attempted to define the less tangible forces that triggered the collapse of a mar-

riage. As the courts began this process of redefinition, there was “a wary approach lest inadvertently the bounds should be extended to allow the full flood tide of all degrees of marital unhappiness to sweep in” (Biggs 43). When a husband engages in “nothing beyond an occasional blighting, though silent look of estrangement” (OF I.189), is he being cruel? This phrase comes, however, not from legal discussions of the period but from Frances Trollope’s *One Fault*, a novel that, like its successor *He Knew He Was Right*, explores the unspoken motivations that lead spouses, will he nill he, to injure one another to the point where the marriage is no longer viable.

The fictional portraits in the two Trollope novels raise the key issue addressed by legal scholars, the question of whether cruelty in marriage is, in fact, intentional. The difficulty of being able to identify intention in an arena where so many contradictory feelings are at play led to a paradigm shift in the way the law dealt with marriage. Divorce Law moved away from the idea that divorce should be based on the faults in one person or another and toward the idea it was instead based on the fault lines that developed within the relationship, fractures whose origins it was almost impossible to trace. As Biggs explains, there was “a change of emphasis from conduct to consequence, a change which culminated in *Kelly v. Kelly*” (Biggs 13), a divorce granted in 1869, the same year *He Knew He Was Right* appeared. Reading Frances and Anthony Trollope’s novels as a sequence allows us to see how sensitively the novel registers these gradual shifts in meaning and how much those shifts determine the form of the story about marriage that each is able to tell.

Published in 1840 in the wake of the public dissolution of two famous marriages, those of Rosina and Edward Bulwer Lytton and George and Caroline Norton, *One Fault* shows how a series of actions, which look inoffensive, can be cruel if they constitute a campaign that undermines the spouse’s physical and psychological health. As the judge commented in *Kelly v. Kelly*, “cruelty . . . lies in the cumulative ill-conduct which the history of marital life discloses” (quoted in Biggs 36, n. 3). Frances Trollope’s novel traces the escalation of Sir Marmaduke Wentworth’s attempts to control his young wife Isabella Worthington. First he tells her that she should not be too vocal; “it is not seeming that a lady’s voice should be heard in such a manner as to render that of her husband inaudible beside her” (I.204). Then he begins to send letters that detail his criticisms and explain how she should correct her behavior, a process the narrator describes as like “the ceaseless grinding of a careful gardener’s roller upon his gravel walks” (OF II.263). The wife endures “a sort of eternal schooling upon everything she said and did” (II.27), as her husband allows “no look, word, or action to pass without some annoying comment” (II.263). In legal cases, actions like these were defined as cruel if “the consequences are . . . mental suffering and bodily ill-health” (quoted in Biggs). In *One Fault* the husband’s criticisms lead to such a degree of mental and physical debility that Isabella gives birth to a premature baby, which dies as a result of the stress the husband’s behavior places on the marriage. The only time the wife feels the return of mental and physical health is when he is away from home; “The certainty of not being scolded, the assurance that she might enter her dressing-room without finding ‘a paper’ on the table, and the power of picking up a book without the expectation of being told in five minutes that it would be better for her health to lay it down again, all operated favorably upon her” (III.70).

The question for legal theorists was how to assign blame for this detrimental result. In pursuing the course of action that leads to his wife's ill health and the eventual death of a son, Wentworth does not intend physical harm; he simply reacts to behavior he feels must be corrected in order for him to retain his authority. Intention was key to shifts in legal thinking about behavior that justified divorce. As Biggs notes,

Study of the volition with which a cruel act was committed raises the far wider issue of the underlying philosophy of divorce. If divorce is based on marital fault, it seems essential that the conduct to which the fault attaches should be voluntary. No one should be blamed for an involuntary act. On the other hand, if we adopt the view that divorce should be granted whenever the marriage has irretrievably broken down, we must recognize that volition is *not* necessary; involuntary conduct is as capable of disrupting a marriage as voluntary conduct. (69-70)

The question of volition is, as Frances Trollope's novel demonstrates, complexly tied to fault.

In *One Fault* the husband's abusive actions result from the fact that he is a man whose otherwise good nature is vitiated by one fault, the fault of temper. In contrast his wife has no faults. But ironically even this perfection exacerbates the tensions in the marriage. As Trollope's narrator explains, "the absence of any perceptible fault in Isabella proved strangely adverse to her interest. Because he could accuse her of nothing that he had seen, he began to suspect that there must be something he had not; and all that thus gleams upon us, shapeless and undefined, ever seems fraught with mystery and mischief" (II. 188). With such descriptions, *One Fault* points toward the intangible feelings that fracture marital relations as powerfully as overt acts of physical violence, feelings matrimonial law found it increasingly necessary to address.

While *One Fault* seems almost prophetic in its ability to link divorce to fault and intention, anticipating the twentieth-century conception of no-fault divorce, it also looks backward to pre-nineteenth-century thinking. In representing Isabella as entirely blameless and locating all the blame in her husband, *One Fault* follows the logic of the ecclesiastical courts that preceded the nineteenth-century divorce court, where "the basic justification . . . for granting relief was the necessity of protecting the innocent spouse" (Biggs 61). As the century progressed, it became clear that a view in which one spouse is innocent the other a villain was too simplistic a formulation for the case of divorce, where "the dramatic history of years is poured forth by husband and wife in alternate streams of opposite colors; the memory of each is ransacked for the most trivial details; the posture of each mind is antagonistic in the extreme, drawing memory and sometimes imagination after it in the attack or defense" (Biggs 3). The changes that take place between *One Fault* and *He Knew He Was Right* reflect this shifting perception as well as the changes that took place as the form of the novel kept pace with legal drift.

In Frances Trollope's novel, the heroine's absolute and long suffering goodness highlights the cruelty of her husband but also makes for a plot that, to the modern reader, feels curiously old-fashioned and unrealistic, as we have come, like marital law, to see motivations as more mixed than this. *He Knew He Was Right* reflects this change by telling the story of a

doubly dysfunctional family in which both husband and wife display faults of temper. This shift in perception is reflected in the changing form of the novel. One has only to think about Dickens's early novels, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, novels that were written in the era when Frances Trollope was at the height of her popularity. Those early instantiations of the Victorian novel insist on telling a story that includes a character that is faultless. Indeed for many modern readers this strategy is what makes a novel like *Oliver Twist* so problematic. A serial reading of the two Trollopes allows us to locate this strategy in a particular moment in time in which the law, and as I shall argue later, politics itself, was conceived primarily as a protection of the rights of those who needed to be represented as innocent in order to justify such strategies. But, as the century moves on the form of the novel will change, shifting away from its focus on story that revolves around a single faultless figure, and turning instead to what Peter Garrett has called the multi-plot novel where both innocence and blame are almost impossible to assign absolutely. We enter an arena in which the novel insists on "Nobody's Fault, as the title of one of the two halves of Dickens's great multiplot novel *Little Dorrit* (1857) indicates.

There are therefore not surprisingly key shifts in the use of the word fault as one moves from *One Fault* to *He Knew He Was Right*. In the earlier novel, the word is used almost exclusively to reference problems of personality: the hero has a fault, the heroine is faultless. It is not until the later novel that fault describes not something individuals possess but a relation between people that is inculcated in the phrases "to be at" or "in fault," which appear throughout Anthony's novel. The use of fault in *He Knew He Was Right* allows us to look back at *One Fault* and see that in having a fault the husband is implicitly put in the position of being at fault. That position is explicitly referenced in *He Knew He Was Right* when one of the characters, explains of the novel's central unhappy marriage between Louis and Emily Trevelyan that, "The best will be to make him, and everyone, understand that the fault is altogether his and not Emily's" (239). But by situating fault between rather than within characters, Anthony's novel opens up the possibility of alternate interpretations of the relation between husband and wife. As another character asserts that, "The best will be to make each think there has been no real fault," and a third that, "There should be no talking of faults," (239). This conversation moves from the position endorsed in *One Fault*, that the husband is entirely at fault, to the idea that it is impossible to determine who is at fault, to the conclusion that fault is useless in determining marital rights. These changes reflect an increasing sense that marriage is a contract, and, as modern legal historian Richard Epstein has argued, "the term 'fault' in contract law offers a broad signal that one of a range of standards of blameworthiness applies, depending on the context The list of synonyms for fault includes 'error,' 'weakness,' 'responsibility,' 'liability,' and 'burden.' Add 'blameworthy' into the mix, as well as the terms 'guilty,' 'culpable,' and 'at fault'" (1462).

Even the conclusion assumed in mid-century divorce law and supported by *One Fault*, that blame can be determined by the consequences of a series of actions on the mental and physical health of the spouse, fails to hold in Anthony Trollope's novel. Though the husband's mental and physical health break down as a consequence of interactions with his wife, it is impossible to say that Emily Trevelyan is at fault for this collapse. Does Louis fall ill because

of what she does or because his own processes of thinking lead to a form of psychic derangement? *He Knew He Was Right* explicitly associates these shifts in thinking with the law when it addresses the question of child custody, which was key to one of the divorce cases that may have inspired *One Fault*, the Norton separation, which led to the passage of the Custody of Infants Act in 1839. Though Louis Trevelyan has said he will allow his wife to raise their young son, her continued opposition to his wishes leads him to kidnap the boy. When Emily Trevelyan's family consults a magistrate about what recourse the wife has, the law can make no clear decision; "the magistrate could not undertake to say whether sufficient cause had here been given—or whether the husband was in fault or the wife" (581). The locution "in fault" rather than "at fault," which is here identified with the legal language, recurs in the final chapters of *He Knew He Was Right* when Emily, after regaining possession of her son, voluntarily returns to take care of her disabled husband. There she acknowledges that, "she had seen early in the day that he was the one most in fault" (891), but also admits to him that "it was all my doing,—that I have been in fault all through" (894). These are the moments that frustrate readers of *He Knew He Was Right*. If Emily believes her husband to be at fault, why then does she tell him that it was her fault?

Part II: Rights

But Trollope's use of the locution "in fault" tells us that what is at stake here is the tension between moral and legal readings of fault. Readers who are used to the moral discourse of the novel expect a clear assessment of blame at its end, but nineteenth-century divorce law found it impossible to assign blame in such an absolute way. The tension between moral and legal issues is inherent not just in the term fault, key to the title of his mother's novel, but also in the terms right and wrong, key to the title of his novel. Those terms may also be borrowed from Frances Trollope's novel, in which the marriage collapses because the husband "neither did, nor by the nature of things *could* believe himself to have been wrong" (I.182). When Trollope's narrator describes Wentworth as possessing "the paltrophy which made him shrink from the avowal of equal rights and equal dignities" (II.51), this phrase stresses the tension between being right and admitting the rights of others, as the term fault stresses the tension between having faults and being at fault. Both *One Fault* and *He Knew He Was Right* show that these issues were complicated by an increasing awareness of the psychological complexity of the motives that drive individuals' actions. As Frances Trollope's narrator explains,

On no occasion did Mr. Wentworth ever acknowledge to himself that HE WAS WRONG. Nevertheless, truth would have her right, and if she could not wring *this* from his stubborn self-approval, she contrived, in spite of him, to produce a sort of gnawing unrest, of which, if called upon to explain it, he would have said (and with great sincerity), that he thought he had been unkindly and unworthily treated, and that the remembrance of it made him sad. (I 299-300)

Rewording the phrase that is in small capitals in his mother's novel to create the title of his work, Anthony Trollope heightens the mental split implicit in his mother's description of gnawing unrest. In his title the apparent act of will or intention on the husband's part—he

knew what he was doing—leads to a division within the self, which is marked grammatically by the two he's of the title, *he knew he* was right.

Picking up on issues suggested by his mother's language, Anthony Trollope brings the question of right and wrong into the arena of psychology as well as morality. Between the appearance of *One Fault* and of *He Knew He Was Right* the law had also addressed conceptions of right and wrong in its thinking about what would constitute an insanity defense. Passed in 1843, the M'Naughten rule argued that "it must be clearly proved that, at the time of committing the act, the party accused was labouring under a such a defect of reason, from disease of mind, as to not know the nature and quality of the act he was doing, or, if he did know it, that he did not know what he was doing was wrong" (quoted in Biggs 105, n.2). Here, as in divorce law, nineteenth-century courts moved away from legal decisions based in material actions toward taking into consideration less tangible motives. As David Oberhelman argues, "the M'Naughten replaced the more empirical standard of delusion with an ethical standard, a knowledge of right and wrong" (793). In *He Knew He Was Right* Anthony Trollope points to the overlap of the M'Naughten rule and the evolving definition of marital cruelty by raising the question of whether Sir Louis Trevelyan is insane or not. But, like the question of who is at fault in the collapse of the Trevelyans' marriage, this is a question the novel refuses to answer. It suggests at some points that he is insane but at others that he knows exactly what he is doing. This ambiguity reflects the difficulty of making clear assessments of blame as one moves to address psychological intangibles rather than external evidence.

As the title of *He Knew He Was Right* suggests, Anthony Trollope's novel foregrounds the question of right and wrong as it rethinks the nature of an unhappy marriage. But again, the drift between his novel and Frances's makes us aware of shifts in the use of the term. Like the shift from possessing faults to being in or at fault, the shift from having rights to being right maintains some of the feeling of Frances's initial use of the terms but also transfers the novel's focus from the individual, who possesses certain qualities, to the relations between individuals whose actions may wrong each other. That change occurred also as the legal understanding of marriage shifted, with the founding of the Divorce Court in the wake of the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act. Anthony Trollope's novel has typically been taken to reflect these changes in the marriage law, as well as meditating on debates about the Married Woman's Property Act, which, as Wendy Jones has argued, was being fiercely debated in parliament in 1867 and 1868, the years in which Anthony Trollope was working on the novel and also ran unsuccessfully for a seat in parliament. (The first Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1870.) But the difference between the two novels might also be explained through the movement from status and contract that Henry Maine explicated in *Ancient Law*, which was published in the period between *One Fault* and *He Knew He Was Right*. The shift that Maine traces might, though he locates it in the deep past, actually be read as reflecting the legal and political changes that unsettled familiar conceptions of personal relations in the middle decades of the nineteenth-century that elapsed between Frances's and Anthony's novels about divorce.

Maine's discussion of the early forms of status or Patriarchal Theory captures what Frances Trollope conveys through her description of Wentworth's actions in *One Fault*: his

desire to have “a dominion [that] extends to life and death, and is unqualified over his children and their houses as over his slaves” (119), a stance carried over into marriage. As Maine explains, “I do not know how the operation and power of the ancient *Patria Potestas* can be brought so vividly before the mind as by reflecting on the prerogatives attached to the husband by the pure English Common Law, and by recalling the rigorous consistency with which the view of complete legal subjection on the part of the wife is carried by it” (154). Associating the husband’s insistence on being right with “the paltry vanity which made him shrink from the avowal of equal rights and equal dignities” (II.51), Frances Trollope describes Wentworth’s assertion of social hierarchy within his marriage in terms that echo debates about the Reform Acts. They were designed, as John Stuart Mill argued, to give those who had not traditionally held property “an equal right to be heard. . . to be consulted, to be spoken to.” This is the freedom Wentworth denies his wife when he tells her that, “I have a right to expect that no vivacity of animal spirits shall ever carry you beyond the precise place which I wish you to hold in society. It is not seemly that a lady’s voice should be heard in such a manner as to render that of her husband inaudible beside her” (I. 204). Insisting that she has no say in the relations between them, he teaches her over the course of the novel that “not only that it was his wife’s duty to obey, but that she would do nothing else, and think of nothing else from morning to night” (II. 52). Having married her in part because she possessed no wealth, he tells her that, “by your docility and constant endeavours to please me, let me perceive that you are anxious to atone, as far as lies in your power, for the great inequality in our past positions” (I.225).

Though Wentworth early on tells Isabella, “I have no wish to be a tyrant” (I.175), the novel consistently represents his dominance in political terms. His wish to engage in “the process of governing every member of one’s family by the simple machinery of his single will” (II.238) drives his wife to the point where she “no longer recognized any superiority in her husband, but that of power” (I. 298). Feeling “the growing tyranny close round her” (II.234), she becomes “like a state prisoner, immured within a splendid fortress, where she was treated with feigned respect, but debarred from the indulgence of every feeling, and of every faculty that made life desirable” (III. 48). Wentworth’s actions destroy the love Isabella bears him and threaten her mental and even physical health. It is only after his untimely death that she “feel[s] for the first time the full value of her liberty” (III. 214). Frances Trollope explicitly associates these references to tyranny, power, civil rights, and liberty with the Reform Act of 1832 when Isabella’s spinster aunt, Christina Clark, a radical feminist who reads Thomas Robert Malthus and Harriet Martineau, insists that women’s suffrage is “the next step, by far the most important left for England to take in her great onward course of reform” (I.108). On first meeting Wentworth Clark tells him that, “whatever class can contrive to get possession of freehold property must, so long as they are permitted to hold it, have a real and positive influence in the country” (I.106). While property might enable the man to have a real and positive social influence, it is also a position of authority that could lead to the exercise of a form of power that becomes tyrannous.

Marriage is a particularly easy place to depict such tyrannies. As Christina Clark explains when Mr. Wentworth’s mother appears at Oak Park on the occasion of her son’s death, assuming erroneously that she is about to regain possession of the family estate,

"It is really vexatious . . . to see how women will persist in making their excessive ignorance an excuse for the tyranny of man . . . you ought to be ashamed of yourself, for not knowing, at your age, something more of the law of property than to fancy that you have any right to stand there, bullying me, merely because you were mother to the late owner of the plantation" (III. 132-33).

In *One Fault* Frances Trollope illustrates the bullying made possible by the possession of property by describing a marriage where the wife, "schooled herself to bear this well, and did it perhaps almost too successfully; for there was in the spirit of her husband a principle of resistance which made a little opposition now and then as agreeable as the pungencies of Cayenne pepper and mustard to the palates that require them" (I.233).

This model, which is enacted, though unhappily in *One Fault*, continues to haunt *He Knew He Was Right* as something outmoded that the hero longs for but can no longer achieve.

The stance incarnated in Frances' Sir Marmaduke Wentworth plagues Louis Trevelyan as a memory of something that can no longer be enacted. As he thinks of his relation to his wife, "he was her master, and she must know that he was her master. But how was he to proceed when she refused to obey the plainest and most necessary command which he laid upon her? Let a man be ever so much his wife's master, he cannot maintain his mastery by any power which the law places in his hands" (43). In Frances's novel, the wife knows that "she had vowed submission and obedience, and that these vows must serve her as a rule of conduct after affection had failed" (228). But in Anthony's submission poses so great a conceptual problem that characters find it almost impossible to utter the word. When Louis Trevelyan's conservative friend Lady Milborough intervenes in the Trevelyan marriage, attempting to heal the breach between husband and wife, she tells Emily "a husband has a right to expect some—some—some—a sort of—submission from his wife" (99).

The novel deals with this problem by developing multiple plots which depict a series of marriages which provide differing models of power relations, from the one between the Trevelyans in which Louis attempts a control which Emily resists to the one between Emily's sister Nora Rowley and the radical journalist Hugh Stanbury, in which, as Nora tells Lady Millborough at the end of the novel, "I don't mean to submit to him at all . . . of course not. I am going to marry for liberty" (897); "I don't think the young men think much about obedience . . . Some marry for money, and some for love, but I don't think they marry to get a slave" (898). But in *He Knew He Was Right*, the story that most clearly addresses the problem of submission in terms that echo but also modify Frances's novel is a story not of marriage but of adoption, a topic also of interest to Maine, the story of the spinster Miss Stanbury's decision to take her niece Dorothy into her home. In his autobiography, Anthony Trollope contrasted that story to the one about the Trevelyans, explaining that he looked on the latter "as being nearly altogether bad," but "in part redeemed by certain scenes in the house and vicinity of the old maid in Exeter." The story of the failed marriage, the "bad" plot, charts a relation in which authority, in being challenged, becomes defensive and is no longer able to assert itself. This failure leads to the collapse of the social ties that should bind individuals together, the link of the marriage vow. In contrast, the plot about Miss Stanbury and her

niece, the “good” narrative, tells the story of an apparent tyrant who softens her stance and an apparently submissive subordinate who finds a way to resist tyranny.

It is in the story of Miss Stanbury that Anthony Trollope’s novel explicitly mentions the Second Reform Act, as the narrator explains that she “hated the name of Reform so much that she could not bring herself to believe in Mr. Disraeli and his bill” (63). (Though there is also a lovely counterpoint scene in which Louis Trevelyan is complaining about his inability to control his wife, while Dorothy’s brother Hugh Stanbury is writing an article about reform for the radical journal the Daily Review). The story of Miss Stanbury’s dealings with Dorothy involves an ongoing series of negotiations in which the spinster acts the part associated with the status order that she endorses. In particular, like both Frances and Anthony’s controlling husbands, she has “no fault but this, that she likes to have her own way” (72), repeatedly insisting that she is right. Aiming to retain absolute control of her household, as the abusive husbands in both Frances’s and Anthony’s novels also wish to do, she tells herself that, “If I’m not mistress here, I’m nobody” (68). In adopting her niece Dorothy into that household, she takes on someone who appears to exhibit the submissiveness that Emily Trevelyan lacks. As Dorothy’s brother explains to the man who wishes to marry her, “I believe her to be as sweet a woman as God ever made. She hardly knows that she has a self belonging to herself” (464). But the process of dealing with Dorothy and her family forces Miss Stanbury to become aware of other perspectives, such that her idea of rightness is endlessly modified and Dorothy’s submissive stance is also transformed.

Toward the end of her stay with her aunt Dorothy is described as having “an infinitely greater possession in herself than had belonged to her before . . . ; but that possession was so heavily mortgaged and burthened as to make her believe that the change was to be regretted” (548). With its reference to mortgages, this passage points towards the Second Reform Act’s association of civil rights with property owning, but it also suggests, as the novel bears out, that the possession or lack of property does not so much grant or withhold freedom and power as place on in a complex contractual relation to others. Interestingly *He Knew He Was Right* makes almost no direct references to the civil rights evoked in *One Fault*, except through its mocking depiction of the American feminist Walachia Petrie, whose companion, the American heiress Caroline Spaulding will enter into the novel’s most hierarchical marriage when she accepts the hand of the English peer Lord Glascock, whom the radical Nora Rowley has rejected. Indeed Anthony rarely even uses rights as a noun, preferring instead to highlight the clashes between individuals’ differing perceptions of who is in the right and who in the wrong in their dealings with one another. This process reflects changes in the evolution of political as well as marital law as the relations between individuals are read less as a matter of status than of contract.

The representation of the domineering husband and the faultless but submissive wife in Frances Trollope’s novel suggests that as long as those who lack rights do not explicitly ask for them, readers can be sympathetic to their plight and wish it to be improved. This representation reflects the political rhetoric of the period of the First Reform Act, which we find also in Dickens’s early novels and Frances’s anti-slavery and anti-child labor novels, which pled for innocent victims, for the rights of slaves and child factory laborers to be protected from the tyrannous systems that oppressed them. By the time we get to *He Knew He*

Was Right and the Second Reform Act, those relations are depicted in much more troubled terms, as individuals, like the wives in Anthony's novel, begin to demand their rights and those in power came to understand that their relations to those they govern involve less dominance and submission than a contractual relation that could and must be endlessly renegotiated. This change is reflected also in the form of the Victorian novel as it developed in the era following the Second Reform Act. I am thinking here of the great dark novels of Anthony Trollope's later period, *The Prime Minister* and *The Way We Live Now*, but also of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* which she began in 1869, when *He Knew He Was Right* first appeared. Eliot's novel that marked a significant formal shift in her practice, as she moved from narratives primarily centered on a single character to ones that dispersed the story through a range of perspectives. Like those in Anthony's novel, the differing points of view in *Middlemarch* posit a variety of differing takes on what constitutes right and wrong. Appropriately Eliot's novel is set in the period of the First Reform Act but narrated from the perspective of the new perception of character and motivations developed in legal discussions of marital law throughout the nineteenth century and in the new contractual perception of social relations that crystallized in the era of the Divorce Court, the Married Woman's Property Act, and the Second Reform Act.

He Knew He Was Right represents the relations between those in power and those who lack it as a form of the consensual relation embodied in contract, which Maine reads as "a safeguard against almost innumerable delusions" (127). (We might think here of the various delusions that fracture the Trevelyan's marriage.) Contract is intended to manage an arena in which the innumerable distinct subjects who negotiate with one another possess innumerable individual versions of what constitutes right and wrong. Those contractual relations involve gradual shifts in the stance of the person in control of property and also in that of the person who lacks it. They represent a qualitatively different understand of power relations from that displayed in novels of the 1830s and 40s like those of Frances Trollope and Charles Dickens, which reflect the thinking in the period of the First Reform Act. The changes in the conceptions of individual personality and responsibility that took place between that period and the era of the Second Reform Act are played out with particular clarity in the arena of the law, particularly as it involved changing concepts of marital relations. Reading *One Fault* and *He Knew He Was Right* together allows us to bookend that period of change and to see how the transformation of legal and political conceptions of interpersonal relations was both reflected in and necessitated new forms for the Victorian novel.

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