Moral Dilemmas and Cases of Conscience: Trollope's Morality in The Warden and The Last Chronicle of Barset

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Abstract
This thesis offers an exploration of Trollope's morality in The Warden and The Last Chronicle of Barset. Existing critical work which explores Trollope's morality often argues either for or against Trollope's moral relativism. This thesis argues, instead, that Trollope's morality unifies aspects of both theoretical perspectives. It reconciles the polarisation of Trollope's moral absolutism and moral relativism, taking the middle-ground. In doing so, it makes evident the contradictions and extremes in existing Trollopian criticism.

The thesis places Trollopian morality within the historical and socio-cultural context of Victorianism. It focuses on the Victorian consciousness of change, securing a definition of Trollope's morality which brings to the fore the contradictions masked by complacent assumptions about Victorian moral conservatism. Incorporating primary and secondary literary sources, the thesis interweaves the man and his work in an original assessment of Trollope's personal and professional moral code.

Recommended Citation

Throughout his work, Trollope had a strong moral conscience and saw it as the writer's duty to convey this moral sense to the reader, in a fair and balanced way. So, although he was a moral writer, he was not dogmatic or didactic in his approach – less so than, say, Dickens, whom he lambasted as 'Mr Popular Sentiment' in his first big success, The Warden (1855). (We include The Warden in our list of 10 Classic Victorian Novels Everyone Should Read.) (The Warden would form the first of a six-part Barsetshire series, which would continue with Barchester Towers and conclude with The Last Chronicle of Barset. Trollope's other great series of novels was another six-parter, the Palliser novels, focusing on British politics.)