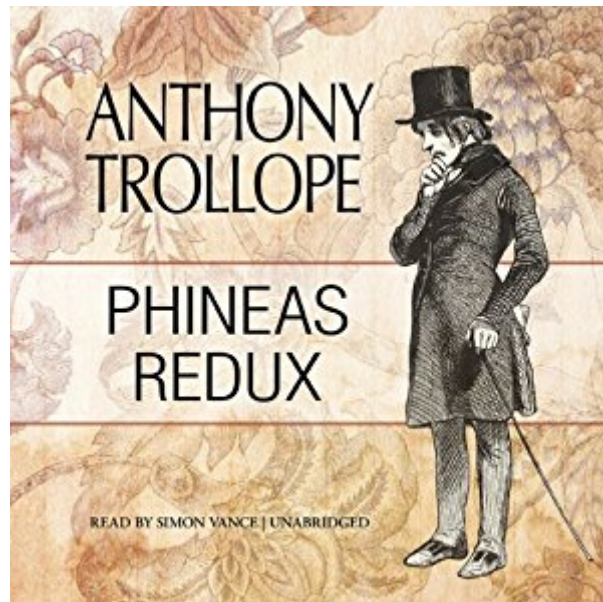


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Phineas Redux: Palliser, Book 4



Synopsis

His beloved wife having died in childbirth, Phineas Finn finds Irish society and his job as a poorhouse inspector dull and unsatisfying, particularly after the excitement of his former career as a Member of Parliament. Back in England, the Whigs are determined to overturn the Tory majority in the Parliament of the United Kingdom. Since Finn had once been considered the most promising of the younger set, he is encouraged to run for office again. Bribery, romance, and murder are peppered throughout this Trollope novel. The fourth novel in the Palliser series, *Phineas Redux* stands alone as a compelling work of political intrigue, personal crisis, and romantic jealousy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

PHINEAS FINN is a book of many virtues and one unfortunate flaw. The flaw lies in the ending, of which I can say nothing here without giving away a bit of the plot. Let me just say that the ending is a bit of a "tack on." Trollope himself confessed in his AUTOBIOGRAPHY that he botched the ending, and explains that when he decided to write a second novel starring Phineas Finn, he awkwardly had to correct the mistakes he made in the ending of the previous book. The virtues of the book lie in part in its presentation of the social complexities of the British upper class in 1860s. While a political history of the period could explain the various ins and outs of the major pieces of legislation dealt with at the time, Trollope shows us how many individuals at the time actually felt about these issues from the inside. In this way, Trollope performs a service that no historian ever could. Virtually all the major political figures of the time, from Gladstone to Disraeli appear under

thinly veiled aliases. But the true heart of the book is Trollope's great characters. I absolutely love Jane Austen. She is one of my two or three favorite writers. But sometimes I find the enormous propriety of her characters to be a tad tiring. In these way her characters, as magnificent as they otherwise might be, sometimes seem a little less than fully human. Trollope's characters, on the other hand, often fail to act with complete propriety. They do improper things, and feel improper emotions. Our hero falls in love with one woman, then another, feels attraction to another, and falls in love with yet another, and in general fails in his role as a great romantic hero. A woman marries someone she doesn't love, yet retains feelings for another, and suffers from the threat of a bad marriage.

Recently, a personal tragedy resulted in a rare hiatus in my reading. In attempting to return to normal, I found the only author that suited (and soothed) me was Anthony Trollope. As an English major at Dartmouth, I never encountered his works, and none were on the required reading list; yet now, there are few writers who can "embed" me in their world so easily as Trollope. This is the second of the Palliser series of six novels, the first of which was CAN YOU FORGIVE HER? Although it is not a prerequisite to understanding PHINEAS FINN, I recommend that readers start at the beginning, so that they have some idea of British parliamentary politics in the mid 19th century and the characters of Plantagenet Palliser, his wife Lady Glencora and their circle. To begin with, there was at that time no monetary recompense for being a member of the House of Commons. The assumption was that: (1) the member was independently wealthy or (2) the member had a day job which paid his bills. This becomes an overriding issue in the novel. Enter Phineas Finn, an engaging Irishman, who gives up the practice of law to run for an Irish seat in the House -- much to the consternation of his friends and relatives who worry how he is to make ends meet. He joins in with a group of Liberal politicians centered around Lord Beresford and his beautiful daughter, Lady Laura Standish. No sooner does Phineas get up the courage to propose to her than he finds he has been beaten to the punch by a wealthy Scottish member, who happens to be a dour and rigid Presbyterian. Next he targets Violet Effingham, who has an on-again, off-again relationship with Lord Chiltern, the brother of Lady Laura.

I purchased the Palliser Series of books by Anthony Trollope -- Can You Forgive Her; Phineas Finn; The Eustace Diamonds; Phineas Redux; The Prime Minister; The Duke's Children. I have read the first four books in the series and will comment briefly on Phineas Redux, my favorite so far. The reader who does not wish to read the books in order of composition would lose little by not having

read *Can You Forgive Her* and *The Eustace Diamonds*. However, not to have read *Phineas Finn* would create some slight problems because Finn's behavior in that first book is often mentioned in the second. Even so, it is possible to read *Phineas Redux* as a stand alone novel and derive much pleasure from the experience. If we remove the boring Parliamentary debates concerning the disestablishment of the Church of England, what remains is one of the most delightful of all English novels. Trollope is a great writer and he is at the top of his form in much of *Phineas Redux*. Particularly moving and convincing is the story of Lady Laura Kennedy, who loves Finn but is married to Robert Kennedy, a man she comes to hate and despise. She leaves Kennedy and takes up residence in Dresden to put herself out of the reach of her increasingly desperate and demented husband. Finn once loved Lady Laura enough to have proposed to her, but she chose Kennedy and ended any chance she might have had to marry Finn. Even so, her love for Finn remains strong and true. This is a sad and moving story; Trollope is at the height of his powers in the telling of it. The centerpiece of the novel is the trial of Finn for the murder of Mr. Bonteen, Finn's enemy. Trollope creates no mystery here. We know Finn is not guilty and we are given to believe that another enemy of Bonteen, the Reverend Mr.

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