<recto><FMCT:INT>INTRODUCTION</FMCT:INT>

[*Readers who are unfamiliar with the plot may prefer to treat the Introduction as an Afterword.*]

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In 1992, while serving as Prime Minister of Great Britain, John Major chose *The Small House at Allington* (1864) as the book he would take to a desert island, and named Lily Dale as his favourite fictional heroine.[[1]](#footnote-1) The reaction was explosive. Maureen Cleave, a journalist writing for the *Evening Standard*, was particularly forthright: ‘To me that was the most shocking thing he has said so far in his premiership. I *hate* Lily Dale.’[[2]](#footnote-2) *The Small House at Allington* divides its readers, and the character of Lily Dale has always been the central point of contention. Abandoned by the treacherous Adolphus Crosbie, Lily refuses to find consolation in the devotion of Crosbie’s rival, Johnny Eames. Her obduracy, or constancy, either exasperates readers or wins their admiration. These differences suggest deeper tensions in a narrative which moves between divergent and sometimes contradictory views on contemporary social issues. The novel might be seen to endorse the rise of the middle classes, scornful of both aristocratic pretension and the vulgarities of those who were struggling for respectability on precarious incomes. Honouring the quiet rhythms of pastoral life rather than the brittle excitements of the city, it rejects the fashionable appeal of sensation fiction, which was approaching the height of its success when Lily Dale made her appearance. Yet Lily’s unhappy story does not allow for the traditional gratifications of the marriage plot. As Carolyn Dever has argued, the novel ‘empties out the very domestic ideals that its title seems to promise.’[[3]](#footnote-3) Despite its confidence and charm, *The Small House at Allington* has often been seen as relentlessly bleak, describing varieties of love and domesticity trapped in failure—‘wormish, dark, life-destroying and barren’.[[4]](#footnote-4) This is a work that persistently calls for the exercise of the reader’s judgement.

Throughout his treatment of Lily’s predicament, and his exploration of the dilemmas of characters faced with comparable difficulties, Trollope reflects on what it means for a character, or a community, to accommodate change. Some are unwilling or unable to shift their ground, while others seem only too ready to transfer allegiances. The novel’s uncertainties have their origin in a turbulent period in Trollope’s life as a writer, for he was simultaneously engaged with multiple projects as the novel’s serial publication in the *Cornhill Magazine* began in 1862, and his own ambitions were changing. The rural Barsetshire series, which had established him among the most popular writers of his generation, was moving towards completion, and before *The Small House at Allington* appeared in volume form in 1864 he had begun the serial publication of *Can You Forgive Her?*, the first of his six Palliser novels, in which he would turn his attention to the political life of the capital. Looking back over his long creative career towards the end of his life, Trollope was rueful about what he had come to see as his over-production in those crowded years—‘my name was too frequent on title-pages’.[[5]](#footnote-5) But his regret had to do with the market value of his writing rather than its quality. He looked back on *The Small House at Allington* with satisfaction: ‘I do not think that I have ever done better work.’[[6]](#footnote-6) Despite their differing responses to its characters and plot, readers have largely agreed. The novel has never lost its place among the most widely read of Trollope’s books.

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Trollope understood that the success of *The Small House at Allington* depended on the steadfastness of Lily Dale, ‘one of the characters which readers of my novels have liked the best’.[[7]](#footnote-7) In first introducing Lily, he took special care to encourage their affection: ‘Lilian Dale, dear Lily Dale—for my reader must know that she is to be very dear, and that my story will be nothing to him if he do not love Lily Dale’ (p. 000). Yet he came to share in the mixed feelings which her behaviour generates. ‘In the love with which she has been greeted I have hardly joined with much enthusiasm, feeling that she is somewhat of a female prig.’[[8]](#footnote-8) Besieged with readers’ requests to marry Lily to Johnny Eames, Trollope knew that her frustrating refusal to accept the fulfilment offered by Johnny was what endeared her to his correspondents: ‘It was because she could not get over her troubles that they loved her.’[[9]](#footnote-9) Lily’s intransigence is what makes her individual, or even eccentric, but her conduct forms part of a pattern that repeats itself throughout the novel. She is a member of an unyielding family.

Trollope is particularly interested in the work of inheritance, and a concern with legacies of property and money habitually drives his plots. Here, the inheritance of a family disposition is equally significant. Christopher Dale, the dour squire of Allington and uncle of Lily and her sister Bell, seems to represent a reassuring stability in his pastoral world. His family has been established at Allington ‘since squires, such as squires are now, were first known in England’ (p. 000). Unadventurous and tenacious, the Dales ‘had been obstinate men’ (p. 000) through the generations. The romantic history of Christopher Dale prefigures that of his niece. He had fallen in love, and found himself rebuffed; ‘and when at last he learned to know that she would not have his love, he had been unable to transfer his heart to another’ (p. 000). Trollope insists on a family context for Lily’s resolve, and in doing so he raises wider questions about the durability of the provincial gentry that she represents, a class whose survival must depend on the capacity to adapt to the transformations of the modern world. He does not, however, claim that her destiny could never be challenged, and the narrative tension of the novel turns on the tantalizing possibility that Lily might after all give up her determination to lead a single life.

‘Was she not a Dale? And when did a Dale change his mind?’ (p. 000) This is said of Lily’s sister Bell, whose experiences of courtship both counter and confirm Lily’s sad history. The squire has decided that Bell should marry his nephew, providing for the line of succession in a way that satisfies the conventionally minded Bernard Dale, who ‘was quite of opinion that eight hundred a year and the good-will of a rich uncle were strong grounds for matrimony,—were grounds even for love; and he did not doubt but his cousin would see the matter in the same light’ (p. 000). Bell exhibits all the stubbornness of the Dale family in rejecting this worldly bargain. Her resistance to persuasion is quite as solid as that of her sister, and she has no difficulty in holding out against the combined displeasure of the squire and his persistent nephew, who confirms his family identity in his insistence that he ‘cannot change at all’ (p. 000). Yet Bell, unlike Lily, seems to show herself capable of a retreat. She had been reluctant to marry Bernard’s rival, the trustworthy but poor Dr Crofts: ‘If there was anything in the world as to which Isabella Dale was quite certain, it was this—that she was not in love with Dr Crofts’ (p. 000). In the only instance of a successful courtship in the novel, she overcomes her initial doubts and accepts his proposal of marriage. Yet this is not a genuine exception to the novel’s dominant pattern of behaviour, for Trollope has given the reader to understand that Bell has committed herself to Dr Crofts from the very first, without fully understanding her own feelings. Bell shares Lily’s view that a willing capacity for sacrifice is essential to feminine virtue—a notion whose hazards were to become central to Trollope’s next novel, *Can You Forgive Her?* She is vexed that Crofts should consider poverty a bar to their union: ‘As if a woman cannot bear more than a man!’ (p. 000). Her tentative movement towards becoming Crofts’s wife reflects the growing self-knowledge that vindicates her earliest impulse, rather than a change of heart. In marrying Dr Crofts, Bell demonstrates that she is a true Dale.

This persistence is not, however, simply a matter of inherited obstinacy, for characters who are not members of the Dale family behave in similar ways. Johnny Eames has loved Lily since boyhood, and he turns out to be just as incapable of turning away from his first passion. In *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, Lily recognizes their kinship: ‘I think, Johnny, you and I are alike in this, that when we have loved we cannot bring ourselves to change’ (p. 000). Trollope follows the uncertain progress of this awkward ‘hobbledehoy’ (p. 000), no longer a child but lacking the self-assurance of a man, with affectionate tact. He had himself once been ‘that most hopeless of human beings, a hobbledehoy of nineteen’[[10]](#footnote-10), and his treatment of Johnny’s uncomfortable experiences in his London office and his embarrassing relations with the inhabitants of his lodging-house at Burton Crescent is grounded in his recollections of his own troubled beginnings as a clerk in the Secretary’s Office of the General Post Office. But Johnny’s scrapes are not simply a consequence of his naïvety. He suffers from deeper and more harmful confusions. In one of the novel’s many instances of self-divided behaviour, Johnny finds himself declaring eternal affection for Amelia Roper, the calculating daughter of his landlady, without wavering in his real devotion to Lily for a moment. As Juliet McMaster has pointed out, *The Small House at Allington* is persistently concerned with the impulse to self-destruction. Many of its characters ‘in one way or another consciously devote themselves to ruin and unhappiness, they are all excited by what they know will damage them, all perversely enamoured of pain’.[[11]](#footnote-11) Eames’s hapless friend Cradell exhibits a still more harmful version of this perversity in his foolish infatuation with Mrs Lupex, a liaison which he knows will lead to misery and dishonour. Trollope steps out of his story to underscore his point:

<EXT>When the unfortunate moth in his semi-blindness whisks himself and his wings within the flame of the candle, and finds himself mutilated and tortured, he even then will not take the lesson, but returns again and again till he is destroyed. Such a moth was poor Cradell . . . Oh! my friends, if you will but think of it, how many of you have been moths, and are now going about ungracefully with wings more or less burnt off, and with bodies sadly scorched! (p. 000)</EXT>

For men and women alike, this helplessness is inseparable from the consequences of social class. In Trollope’s eyes, Lily’s loyalty to Crosbie is bound up with her identity as a lady, and he is careful to ensure that lifelong spinsterhood will not, in her case, involve the crushing poverty or humiliating dependence that would often have followed a failure to marry for girls of her social position. Her dry but gentlemanly uncle provides for her future. Johnny, whose gaucheness does not diminish his own claims to gentility, is justified in his unshakable love for Lily because she is of his own class, and shares his values. Amelia is certainly not a lady, a fact which is amply confirmed by her having worked ‘at a millinery establishment in Manchester’ (p. 000). In her campaigning novel *Ruth* (1853), Elizabeth Gaskell makes an exemplary heroine of a provincial dressmaker’s apprentice. Although such a move would have been alien to Trollope, he does recognize Amelia’s pressing difficulties, and acknowledges her courage. She has passed her thirtieth birthday, has no convenient uncle to underwrite her prospects, and cannot afford the luxury of romantic ideals. As always, Trollope is repelled by the schemes of a woman who seeks marriage in order to secure material advantage. But he understands the hypocrisies and contradictions of the social codes that shape his characters’ behaviour, and Amelia finally emerges as a figure deserving respect and compassion. She has tried to take advantage of Johnny’s inexperience, but her feelings for him are not wholly feigned, and Johnny is a little too ready to encourage her unrealistic aspirations. When she flings herself into his arms, his resistance can hardly be said to be vigorous:

<EXT>‘You’ll be true to me?’ said Amelia, during the moment of that embrace—‘true to me for ever?’

‘Oh, yes; that’s a matter of course,’ said Johnny Eames. (p. 000)</EXT>

Such a promise is not seen to be serious, yet Johnny’s casual perfidy here counts against him in the novel’s recurrent questioning of masculine worth. Although he clearly possesses what Lauren Goodlad describes as ‘the unique attributes of the born-and-bred gentleman’,[[12]](#footnote-12) they do not prevent him from hurting a vulnerable woman. He can be excused far more readily than Crosbie, yet the fleeting suggestion of likeness is troubling. For Amelia, the failure of her plan is not a trivial matter. Johnny’s final dismissal of her claims to a marriage that would have transformed her life is brusque:

<EXT>‘I couldn’t do it. I should ruin myself and you too, and we should never be happy.’

‘I should be happy,—very happy indeed.’ At this moment the poor girl’s tears were unaffected, and her words were not artful. For a minute or two her heart,—her actual heart,—was allowed to prevail.

‘It cannot be, Amelia.’ (p. 000)</EXT>

Johnny’s words here echo the terms of Bell’s earlier rejection of Bernard, suggesting further levels of unexpected connection between the refined conversations of Allington and down-at-heel negotiations in Burton Crescent: ‘it cannot be; and as it cannot be, you, as my brother, would bid me say so clearly. It cannot be’ (p. 000). Amelia has to fall back on marriage with the dim-witted Cradell, evidently an inferior substitute for Johnny as a husband. She has no illusions about what her life has taught her. ‘Indeed I don’t know what’s the good of feelings. They never did me any good’ (p. 000). Her departing words carry real force, reminding the reader that Trollope is aware of a world where economic necessity makes romantic scruples an unaffordable indulgence:

<EXT>‘John Eames, I wish I’d never seen you. I wish we might have both fallen dead when we first met. I didn’t think ever to have cared for a man as I have cared for you. It’s all trash and nonsense and foolery; I know that. It’s all very well for young ladies as can sit in drawing-rooms all their lives, but when a woman has her way to make in the world it’s all foolery. And such a hard way too to make as mine is! . . . Not that I’m going to complain. I never minded work, and as for company, I can put up with anybody. The world’s not to be all dancing and fiddling for the likes of me. I know that well enough.’ (p. 000)</EXT>

Amelia lacks Lily’s playful intelligence, but the stoical honesty with which she takes her leave of Johnny makes her a character to be reckoned with.

Like Lily, Amelia and her seedy lodging-house companions divided the novel’s first readers. In general, their inclusion was felt to have sullied the ‘kindly’[[13]](#footnote-13) gentility of Trollope’s fiction. The reviewer who advised Trollope ‘to refrain from drawing odious and uncomely pictures of the little people of the Cockney world’[[14]](#footnote-14) spoke for most. Others felt that Johnny Eames’s associations with Burton Crescent diminished his standing as a suitor worthy of Lily’s hand: ‘His entanglement with Amelia Roper is fatal to all his pretensions as a hero, and he behaves as ill to her as he knows how.’[[15]](#footnote-15) Yet the dingy community of Burton Crescent is essential to Trollope’s purposes in *The Small House at Allington*, extending the patterns of thematic resonance beyond the lives of the respectable middle classes.

Lily Dale, like Amelia Roper, endures the pain of rejection; Adolphus Crosbie, like Johnny Eames, bestows his allegiance elsewhere. Although the aristocratic woman that Crosbie chooses to marry, Lady Alexandrina de Courcy, might seem to represent a world of privilege that neither Lily nor Amelia can share, Lady Alexandrina is also included within the novel’s interwoven patterns. Like Amelia, she is past 30, and the market value of her characterless beauty, as she hunts for a husband who will rescue her from a comfortless home, is diminishing. Amelia Roper knows how to display her wares to their best advantage. ‘By George! how well she looked with her hair all loose’ (p. 000), Johnny muses, after a tipsily indiscreet encounter in the lodging-house. Lady Alexandrina is not above employing similar tactics: ‘Her hair, which she usually carried in long rolls, now hung loose over her shoulders, and certainly added something to her stock of female charms’ (p. 000). For Crosbie, Alexandrina’s exalted connections seem to offer a means of entry to a world of status, power, and wealth. Trollope is at pains to demonstrate how completely he is deceived in his hopes for social and professional advantage, for the de Courcy family, as unprepossessing a collection of wastrels, bullies, parasites, and hypocrites as Trollope could conceive, regard the aspiring Crosbie as their legitimate prey. Trollope shares in a widely felt resentment among the commercial and professional classes about what John Kucich identifies as ‘the degree to which, after mid-century, aristocratic life had been emptied of its more traditional values’.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Crosbie is undoubtedly a villain, but the wretched marriage with the cold-blooded Alexandrina which is his punishment also makes him something of a victim. His encounter with the innocence and simplicity of Mr Harding, as he makes his way to the ruin of his own happiness in Courcy Castle, has no narrative function other than to reveal a capacity for a different order of judgement. Harding, the hero of *The Warden* (1855), the novel that initiated Trollope’s popular success as a writer, persistently figures as the ‘moral centre of the Barsetshire novels’,[[17]](#footnote-17) and Crosbie’s sensitivity to the values that Harding represents is an indication of his potential for something better than his approaching disgrace: ‘Crosbie felt that he had never seen a face on which traits of human kindness were more plainly written’ (p. 000). But Crosbie is among the characters that are inexorably drawn into a conscious act of self-destruction, for throwing over the intelligence, beauty, and devotion of Lily in favour of Alexandrina’s meretricious appeal as the daughter of an earl was evidently an act of folly, in both emotional and worldly terms, even in his own eyes. ‘It was in this that Crosbie’s failure had been so grievous,—that he had seen and approved the better course, but had chosen for himself to walk in that which was worse . . . he had deliberately made up his mind that he was more fit for the bad course than for the good one’ (p. 000).

The political point that Trollope is making about the degradation of the aristocracy is allied to his representation of the dangerous recklessness of men such as Crosbie, whose arrogance makes him impervious to the social controls conventionally exercised by family and community. Lauren Goodlad reflects on Trollope’s sustained interest in the ‘destructive powers of energy and ambition in a modern bourgeois society’,[[18]](#footnote-18) and in this sense Crosbie may be compared with numerous ruthless and disruptive men on the make in Trollope’s fiction. His cynical manoeuvrings finally prove self-defeating. Crosbie has no hesitation in rejecting any advantage that might have been offered by an alliance with the provincial gentry as it is represented by the Dale family, but his consciously unprincipled ambition meets its match in the aristocratic de Courcys, who make him look like an amateur in their pursuit of material advantage. The unremitting hostility of Trollope’s depiction of the ghastly de Courcy family is a product of his determination to undermine their pretensions to grandeur. Yet even Lady Alexandrina, who is granted no redeeming features as a woman or a wife, earns a small share of that sympathy which Trollope can rarely withhold from his characters, no matter how repugnant they may be. Her unenviable situation leaves her with few options. Amelia Roper declares herself to be unafraid of work, but no serious occupation is available to Lady Alexandrina. She is expected to marry, but has been unable to secure a suitor who could invest her pointless social obligations with meaning. Her dismal experiences of family life have not inclined her to create a family of her own: ‘I don’t want a baby, and don’t suppose I shall have one’ (p. 000). Her real enemy is boredom, and to her dismay she finds that life as Crosbie’s wife is no less tedious than her previous life as the unmarried daughter of an earl. Like Lily, Alexandrina finally withdraws into a sterile ménage with her mother, who has also separated herself from an unsatisfactory husband. Crosbie is hardly more content than Lady Alexandrina in his loveless marriage, but he can at least distract himself with his career in the General Committee Office. Trollope is careful to note the difference: ‘In this respect he was better off than his wife, for she had no office to which she could betake herself’ (p. 000). The issue of the lack of serious purpose in the lives of middle-class women without maternal responsibilities becomes urgent in Trollope’s later work, and it is a dominant theme in *Can You Forgive Her?* It is already beginning to hover among the disquieting and unanswered questions within *The Small House at Allington*.

What also remains unsolved is the novel’s central mystery, which is not entirely accounted for by Lily Dale’s inherited disposition to be stubborn, Adolphus Crosbie’s drive for worldly success, or humanity’s taste for self-immolation. Why does Crosbie discard a formal engagement to marry with such shameful speed, despite the predictably damaging consequences for his reputation, and why is Lily incapable of recovering from her wound? Alongside his consideration of the wider cultural and political contexts for the failed engagement, Trollope offers his readers a subtle account of the psychological processes that lead to Crosbie’s broken promise. Despite Lily’s characteristically bantering manner, it is clear from the first that she finds Crosbie compellingly attractive: ‘Mr. Crosbie is an Apollo; and I always look upon Apollo as the greatest—you know what—that ever lived. I mustn’t say the word, because Apollo was a gentleman’ (p. 000). But the Greek god Apollo was not in the least gentlemanly, at least in his dealings with nymphs. For all his golden beauty (he was the god of the sun), Apollo was a heartless seducer, and Trollope would have expected his classically informed readers to recall his serial philandering.

Lily’s rapid capitulation to Crosbie’s courtship, which Trollope does not describe, is evidently incautious. Margaret Markwick suggests ‘the possibility that Lily and he had consummated their passion’.[[19]](#footnote-19) It is unlikely that Trollope would have wished his readers to entertain this idea, given his insistence on Lily’s ‘maidenly modesty’ and ‘purity’ (p. 000), but it is clear that her passionate response to his ‘accepted caresses’, and ‘her uncontrolled and acknowledged joy in his affection’ (p. 000) is strongly sexual. Lily can know little of Crosbie’s professional and social life in London, having seen him only in holiday humour as he takes his annual leave from his office, and she has never met his family. In fact, in a novel which broods on the shared identity of families, Crosbie is exceptional in revealing no family connections. He is dangerously free, making his own way in the world. Lily holds nothing back in entrusting herself to her Apollo. Yet she concedes the possibility that she is exposing herself to suffering, with a readiness that, from the earliest days of her betrothal, almost suggests that she knows what is to happen, and welcomes its inevitability:

<EXT>she knew that there was a risk. He who was now everything to her might die; nay, it was possible that he might be other than she thought him to be; that he might neglect her, desert her, or misuse her. But she had resolved to trust in everything, and, having so trusted, she would not provide for herself any possibility of retreat. Her ship should go out into the middle ocean, beyond all ken of the securer port from which it had sailed; her army should fight its battle with no hope of other safety than that which victory gives. (p. 000)</EXT>

This is scarcely the tone of a woman who has complete confidence in her lover.

Lily’s unguarded intensity impresses and dismays Crosbie in equal measure. His second thoughts take root almost as soon as the engagement becomes public, and become more marked once it is clear that Christopher Dale will not provide Lily with a dowry. ‘He must give up his clubs, and his fashion, and all that he had hitherto gained, and be content to live a plain, humdrum, domestic life, with eight hundred a year, and a small house, full of babies’ (p. 000). The ‘Small House’ of the novel’s title is presented as a place of established pastoral beauty, but Crosbie’s view of a ‘small house’ identifies only its constraints. Lily claims, rather too emphatically, that she will make no demands, and will separate from him—or ‘be divorced’, as she tellingly puts it (p. 000)—rather than damage his worldly interests. But her unnervingly possessive displays of affection, in both private and public, amount to something close to emotional blackmail. Crosbie shrinks from the sense that he has no way out:

<EXT>It was the calf-like feeling that was disagreeable to him. He did not like to be presented, even to the world of Allington, as a victim caught for the sacrifice, and bound with ribbon for the altar. And then there lurked behind it all a feeling that it might be safer that the thing should not be so openly manifested before all the world. Of course, everybody knew that he was engaged to Lily Dale; nor had he, as he said to himself, perhaps too frequently, the slightest idea of breaking from that engagement. But then the marriage might possibly be delayed. (p. 000)</EXT>

Crosbie is among the characters in the novel that prove themselves incapable of change. He simply reverts to his first commitment, which in his case is a single-minded dedication to his own social and financial advancement. Lily seems oblivious of his increasingly wary response to her ardour, as he frets about the financial and social consequences of his hasty engagement. In a moonlit walk with Crosbie, Lily opens her heart to her lover, while he seems more interested in the erotic opportunities provided by seclusion and darkness:

<EXT>‘. . . To be loved by you is sweeter even than any of my dreams,—is better than all the poetry I have read.’

‘Dearest Lily,’ and his unchecked arm stole round her waist.

‘It is the meaning of the moonlight, and the essence of the poetry,’ continued the impassioned girl. ‘I did not know then why I liked such things, but now I know. It was because I longed to be loved.’ (p. 000)</EXT>

Here Trollope suggests the nature of the problem that will wreck Lily’s happiness. She is in love with being in love, wanting, as Stephen Wall observes in his masterly analysis of this key scene, ‘her identity and her love for Crosbie to merge’.[[20]](#footnote-20) But she has failed to take Crosbie’s real character and ambitions into account. Understandably, Crosbie feels trapped. The scene concludes with unreserved passion from Lily, and Crosbie’s ominously self-regarding attempt to live up to the role she has created for him:

<EXT>he stooped over her and pressed her closely, while she put up her lips to his, standing on tip-toe that she might reach to his face.

‘Oh, my love!’ she said. ‘My love! my love!’

As Crosbie walked back to the Great House that night, he made a firm resolution that no consideration of worldly welfare should ever induce him to break his engagement with Lily Dale. He went somewhat further also, and determined that he would not put off the marriage for more than six or eight months, or, at the most, ten, if he could possibly get his affairs arranged in that time. To be sure, he must give up everything,—all the aspirations and ambition of his life; but then, as he declared to himself somewhat mournfully, he was prepared to do that. Such were his resolutions, and, as he thought of them in bed, he came to the conclusion that few men were less selfish than he was. (p. 000)</EXT>

Trollope’s sardonic tone makes it clear that Crosbie’s commitment is superficial, and will fade once he is no longer in Lily’s presence. He traces, with the level of detail that duplicity and self-deception often elicits from him, Crosbie’s prevarications as he is absorbed into the toxic atmosphere of Courcy Castle, where a cool disdain for country life soon diminishes the memory of Lily’s warm attractions. His second engagement to Lady Alexandrina is presented as a matter of grim inevitability rather than positive choice. Trollope underlines the difference between Lily and her apathetic successor in the absence of any active expression of affection from Alexandrina as Crosbie proposes: ‘it was understood by both of them that that affair was settled’ (p. 000). This is a courtship that can be concluded only in the passive voice.

Lily is not to blame for Crosbie’s betrayal, but Trollope repeatedly implies that her subsequent behaviour verges on the pathological, exhibiting the characteristics of the ‘erotomania’ often thought to be characteristic of women’s psychological vulnerabilities in mid-century Victorian England.[[21]](#footnote-21) Lily’s devotion to her false lover conforms closely with what the influential French doctor Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol defines as a disease rooted in the imagination, where infatuated women

<EXT>forget themselves; vow a pure, and often secret devotion to the object of their love; make themselves slaves to it; execute its orders with a fidelity often puerile; and obey also the caprices that are connected with it . . . Like all monomaniacs, those suffering from erotomania, are pursued both night and day, by the same thoughts and affections, which are the more disordered as they are concentrated or exasperated by opposition.[[22]](#footnote-22)</EXT>

This summarizes Lily’s situation precisely, as she spends her hours alone brooding over her loss, ‘thinking over it—thinking, thinking, thinking’ (p. 000). Trollope is deeply interested in disturbed conditions of mind in which an obsession threatens to tip into mental illness. He explores this concern in *Framley Parsonage* (1861), and more deeply in his treatment of Josiah Crawley’s irrational behaviour in *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867). He does not intend his readers to see Lily as a woman slipping into insanity, for she remains self-aware, and her wry sense of absurdity never quite leaves her. Yet her reaction to Crosbie’s wedding on Valentine’s Day, obsessively imagining the event as it takes place in London, and casting herself in an exaggeratedly dramatic role of self-martyrdom, reveals a disturbing lack of balance. Her uncompromising identification with her love for Crosbie has not been touched by his faithlessness. Lily becomes a figure of pathos, but her suffering enables her to maintain control over her life. After her dangerous bout of scarlatina, Lily’s will becomes ‘paramount’ at the Small House: ‘Ill-usage and illness together falling into her hands had given her such power, that none of the other women were able to withstand it’ (p. 000). It is a power that becomes inseparable from the fanatical fidelity to Crosbie that has become the bedrock of her identity, and it makes it impossible for her to marry Johnny Eames.

Given Lily’s ‘kitten-like’ (p. 000) ways before she met Crosbie, as an inexperienced teenage girl entirely dependent on her family for support, the unwavering force of will generated by the misfortune of her engagement is remarkable. Trollope assembles every possible incentive for her to change her mind. Her family wishes her to accept Johnny’s suit, and her uncle is prepared to make the marriage financially practicable. Johnny, growing up at last, has begun to demonstrate his effectiveness in the office. His uncertain social standing has been enhanced by his alliance with Lord de Guest, whose patronage he has won in characteristically boyish fashion by rescuing him from an angry bull, the comically misnamed Lambkin—who turns out be no more ‘innocent’ (p. 000) than Crosbie as a calf garlanded for the sacrifice. De Guest’s absurd confidence in Lambkin’s good nature is a droll echo of the self-destructive inclinations that characterize the novel. Yet the earl remains a substantial figure, standing alongside Christopher Dale as the dependable representative of a long-established rural gentry. He is a powerful supporter of Eames’s desire to marry Lily, though he and his stalwart sister Julia are among those who have not achieved a happy marriage, or indeed any other kind of marriage. Julia is irrationally proud of her single life, and the earl, like Christopher Dale, having failed to recover from an unsuccessful courtship in his youth, is also resolutely unwed. Trollope repeatedly emphasizes this connection between the squire and Lord de Guest: ‘The story of their lives had been so far the same; each had loved, and each had been disappointed, and then each had remained single through life’ (p. 000). The earl is as stubborn as any other character in a novel which prickles with obstinacy, sharing the dangerous tendency to take pride in intransigence which recurs throughout the narrative: ‘when I say a thing I mean it. I think I may boast that I never yet went back from my word’ (p. 000). A generation who has not been able to find happiness in marriage makes it their business to give the stories of Lily and Johnny a different ending. Their determination is generous, but finally futile. Trollope continues to resist the conventions of his own courtship narrative, refusing to reward his readers with the happy pastoral wedding that the novel’s domestic genre leads them to expect.

Nevertheless, *The Small House at Allington* does not aspire to the grandeur of tragedy. Its characters are firmly located in a social reality that undermines any claims to other-worldly transcendence. Lily will not marry Johnny Eames, but she has no intention of becoming a lifelong invalid, still less of dying of her broken heart. Nor will she live with her mother in perpetual servitude: ‘I mean to have a will of my own, too, mamma; and a way also, if it be possible. When Bell is married I shall consider it a partnership, and I shan’t do what I’m told any longer’ (p. 000). Eames is determined to prove his worth as her suitor, but Trollope does not transform him into a romantic hero. His claim to be an appropriate replacement for Crosbie is greatly strengthened by the pleasingly vigorous punch he lands on his rival, as he avenges Lily in a brief fracas at Paddington station. Yet the incident is tellingly located among the ‘yellow shilling-novel depot’ at the railway bookstall of W. H. Smith, for this undignified scuffle would be out of place in the pages of chivalry:

<EXT>The bystanders, taken by surprise, had allowed the combatants to fall back upon Mr. Smith’s book-stall, and there Eames laid his foe prostrate among the newspapers, falling himself into the yellow shilling-novel depôt by the over fury of his own energy; but as he fell, he contrived to lodge one blow with his fist in Crosbie’s right eye,—one telling blow; and Crosbie had, to all intents and purposes, been thrashed. (p. 000)</EXT>

Trollope’s masculine ideal is primarily a matter of gentlemanly principles, but it includes an element of what de Guest calls ‘a young man’s proper courage’ (p. 000) when it comes to a fight. The conspicuous black eye that Crosbie develops as a result of this encounter damages his reputation among his London acquaintance far more decisively than his callous treatment of Lily. Nevertheless, Eames’s air of immaturity is not dispelled by his victory, for Trollope once more fuses comedy and gallantry in his account of Eames’s exploits, as he does in the encounter with Lambkin. Eames wins universal approval for humbling Crosbie, but his feat does nothing to improve his chances as Lily’s suitor.

Eames’s failed courtship of Lily, Lady Alexandrina’s coolness, the resistance of the two unnamed objects of the devotion of the squire and the earl, Amelia Roper’s thwarted schemes: these suggest a world in which the fulfilment of love is hard to achieve. Although Lily’s sister Bell breaks the pattern in her undoubted loyalty to Dr Crofts, her response to her successful suitor seems oddly tepid. She accepts his proposal in terms that echo, unnervingly, Trollope’s account of Lady Alexandrina’s capitulation to Crosbie: ‘I do not think it would have made her unhappy if some sudden need had required that Crofts should go to India and back before they were married. The thing was settled, and that was enough for her’ (p. 000). These varieties of emotional distance have the effect of throwing Lily’s unconditional love for Crosbie into relief, but they also suggest Trollope’s interest in exploring forms of disjuncture between men and women, their proper relations chilled by dishonesty and distrust.

Dissonant coldness recurs throughout *The Small House at Allington*. Plantaganet Palliser, who becomes the gentlemanly hero of the Palliser novels, is here given an unimpressive introduction as a ‘thin-minded, plodding, respectable man’ (p. 000). Untouched by anything that might be described as love, Palliser nevertheless attempts a liaison with the fashionable beauty Lady Dumbello (once Griselda Grantly, familiar to readers of Trollope’s earlier Barsetshire novels). She is a woman whose glacial selfishness makes Lady Alexandrina look positively convivial. Palliser is entirely dependent on his uncle, the Duke of Omnium, who makes it known that misbehaviour on his nephew’s part would result in disinheritance—a serious risk, as the Duke is identified among the novel’s many intransigent characters: ‘If he says a word, he never goes back from it’ (p. 000). This only makes the Palliser more determined to court Lady Dumbello. His ineffectual efforts as a moth-like lover share in the quasi-comedy that marks a novel where dignity is hard to come by. But they also underline Trollope’s ambivalent response to such wilful perversity. Palliser’s approach to Lady Dumbello is dangerous and absurd, and yet Trollope finds his obduracy admirable. Like Lily, Palliser will destroy his own prospects rather than give in to the wishes of an older generation: ‘he had that pluck which would have made himself disgraceful in his own eyes if he omitted to do that as to the doing of which he had made a solemn resolution’ (p. 000). Lady Dumbello’s icy indifference rescues him. Her smile is as ‘cold as death, flattering no one, saying nothing, hideous in its unmeaning, unreal grace. Ah! how I hate the smile of a woman who smiles by rote!’ (p. 000). Her behaviour is prudent, but her motives chill the blood.

Wintry relations between characters are often expressed in their frigid residences, for in this novel Trollope’s views of the domestic ideal are as much a matter of houses as of homes, or the people who live in them. When Mrs Dale reflects on the ‘deathlike coldness’ (p. 000) of Christopher Dale’s Great House, she is not thinking of its heating arrangements. Nevertheless, it is not an accident that one of the points of difference between Mrs Dale and the squire is her insistence on keeping good fires: ‘I like a fire when I’m cold,’ she says (p. 000). The London mansion owned by the de Courcy family is a ‘cold, comfortless’ place (p. 000), and Crosbie’s impressions of the villa where Alexandrina’s sister lives in St John’s Wood are still frostier: ‘No spot in London was, as he thought, so cold as the bit of pavement immediately in front of that door’ (p. 000). Lily’s response to the wedding of Crosbie and Alexandrina emphasizes the fact that it takes place in icy weather: ‘“Mamma,” she said, “how cold they’ll be!” Her mother had announced to her the fact of the black frost, and these were the first words she spoke’ (p. 000). The newly-weds’ marital home in the fashionable location of Princess Royal Crescent is no improvement: ‘The very atmosphere was cold;—so cold that no fire could remove the chill’ (p. 000). A warm atmosphere is, for Trollope, a reliable indication of human kindness. When Mrs Dale and her daughters decide to escape the squire’s domineering ways by leaving the Small House for a dismal retreat in Guestwick, he gives a vindictive order that the gardener should neglect the fire which would ripen their hothouse grapes. But the squire’s essential generosity reasserts itself, and he immediately withdraws his instruction: ‘Have the place put in perfect order’ (p. 000).

A deeper order is soon restored within the Dale family, as the proposed move to Guestwick is abandoned in what seems to be one of the novel’s few significant changes of mind. In fact this is another return to an earlier position rather than a genuine conversion, yet the novel’s stubborn conservatism is here mitigated by Trollope’s insistence on the potential for new kinds of understanding, as the long-standing quarrel between the squire and Mrs Dale is finally healed. The good-humoured conclusion of *The Small House at Allington* comes close to reaffirming the values of the traditional marriage plot. Bell is cheerfully wedded to Dr Croft, and Trollope assures his readers that no-one, after all, has come to complete ruin. The tenacity that has intensified Lily’s difficulties also contributes to her salvation, as she rejects the role of a tragic heroine: ‘she resolved that she would be happy, and I here declare that she not only seemed to carry out her resolution, but that she did carry it out in very truth’ (p. 000). Crosbie is rehabilitated professionally, if not socially, and Alexandrina’s withdrawal to Baden-Baden allows her to escape the tedium of Princess Royal Crescent. This is not quite a celebration of universal harmony, but it is not the grim finale that the darkening tone of the narrative seemed to suggest in the immediate aftermath of Crosbie’s betrayal. Instead, Trollope provides his readers with a pragmatic but broadly hopeful account of the human resilience that make the best of disappointment and loss.

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After the completion of *The Small House at Allington*, Trollope’s growing interest in wider political and cultural issues led to his role in establishing the *Fortnightly Review* in 1865. It was to be a platform for debate which would be free from the control of political parties or partisan editors, giving every contributor the opportunity to ‘say what he really thinks and really feels’.[[23]](#footnote-23) One of Trollope’s early pieces for the *Fortnightly* reflects on the tension between the cultural conservatism and progressive liberalism that seemed to him characteristic of British thought: ‘In almost every bosom there sits a parliament in which a conservative party is ever combating to maintain things old, while the liberal side of the house is striving to build things new. In this parliament, as in the other, the liberal side is always conquering, but its adversary is never conquered.’[[24]](#footnote-24) This unending conflict ran through Trollope’s thinking on the social questions of the day, and it creates the ambiguities inherent in what Lynette Felber has analysed as ‘the contradictions in Victorian public discourse about liberalism’,[[25]](#footnote-25) which shape *The Small House at Allington*. Trollope knew that the wish to preserve ‘things old’ could lead to paralysis, and that the force of reason lay with movements for reform in the lives of individuals, communities, and institutions. His own work as a public servant had brought about hard-won change in the Post Office, and the comic account of the cross-grained resistance of Mrs Crump, the local postmistress, to the work of the visiting inspector is based on his own painful experiences of obstruction:

‘That’s a bitter old lady," said the inspector to the man who was driving him.

‘Yes, sir; they all says the same about she. There ain’t none of ’em get much change out of Mrs. Crump’ (p. 000).[[26]](#footnote-26)

Yet Trollope approves of Mrs Crump, with her refusal to be intimidated by officials ‘down from Lun’on’, and her staunch affection for Lily. Change is necessary, but it often sweeps away what warms and sustains our lives. Trollope could never conquer his sympathy for those obstinate characters whose first loyalties stand firm. Lily is seen to be damagingly mistaken in her fidelity to the unworthy Crosbie, but ‘Love does not follow worth, and is not given to excellence;—nor is it destroyed by ill-usage, nor killed by blows and mutilation’ (p. 000). Finally, Trollope is on her side.

1. John Major, *Desert Island Discs*, BBC Radio 4, 26 January 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Maureen Cleave, *Evening Standard* (31 January 1992), 9. See John Letts, ‘Preface’, in Margaret Markwick, *Trollope and Women* (London: Hambledon Press, 1997), p. vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Carolyn Dever, ‘Gross Vulgarity and the Domestic Ideal: Anthony Trollope’s *The Small House at Allington*’, in Susan David Bernstein and Elsie B. Michie (eds.), *Victorian Vulgarity: Taste in Verbal and Visual Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 139–52, at 140. Dever discusses Trollope’s ‘dismantling of narrative conventions’ in ‘Trollope, Seriality and the “Dullness” of Form’, *Literature Compass*, 7 (2010), 861. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Robert M. Polhemus, *The Changing World of Anthony Trollope* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. Nicholas Shrimpton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Chapter 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Trollope, *An Autobiography*, Chapter 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Trollope, *An Autobiography*, Chapter 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Trollope, *An Autobiography*, Chapter 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Trollope, *An Autobiography*, Chapter 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Trollope, *An Autobiography*, Chapter 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Juliet McMaster, ‘“The Unfortunate Moth”: Unifying Themes in *The Small House at Allington*’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 26 (1971), 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 119–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Unsigned review of *The Small House at Allington*, *London Review* (7 May 1864), 495. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Unsigned review, *London Review*, 495. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Unsigned review of *The Small House at Allington*, *The Athenaeum* (26 March 1864), 437. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. John Kucich, ‘Transgression in Trollope: Dishonesty in the Antibourgeois Elite’, *English Literary History*, 56 (1989), 599. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Jane Nardin, *Trollope and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996), 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State*, 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Margaret Markwick, *New Men in Trollope’s Novels: Rewriting the Victorian Male* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 123–4. See also Markwick, *Trollope and Women*, 84–5, where she discusses this possibility at some length. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Stephen Wall, *Trollope and Character* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Helen Small explores this concern in *Love’s Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), while Sally Shuttleworth, in *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), discusses definitions of erotomania in relation to the contemporary preoccupation—often reflected in Trollope’s fiction—with varieties of monomania. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity*,trans. E. K. Hunt (1845; repr., New York: Hafner, 1965), 336; see Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Prospectus, *Fortnightly Review* (15 May 1865), inside front cover*.* See Mark W. Turner, ‘Women and the Progressive *Fortnightly*’, in Kate Campbell (ed.), *Journalism, Literature and Modernity: From Hazlitt to Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 72–91, for an account of the idealism of the *Fortnightly*’s early years. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Anthony Trollope, ‘Public Schools’, *Fortnightly Review* (1 October 1865), 476. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Lynette Felber, ‘The Advanced Conservative Liberal: Victorian Liberalism and the Aesthetics of Anthony Trollope’s Palliser Novels’, *Modern Philology*, 107 (2010), 424. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See note to p. 000. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)