NOTES

1. Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 23 (emphasis mine).
2. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, in *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon*, ed. James Kinsley and John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7.
3. Geoffrey Nunberg, "Farewell to the Information Age," in *The Future of the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 103–38.
4. James Anthony Froude, "On Progress," in *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, 2nd ser. (New York: Scribner, 1872), 262–63.
5. George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. John Goode (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 459–60.

Institutions

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> "To you the British House of Commons is everything."
> "Yes;—everything,' said Mr. Palliser, with unwonted enthusiasm;—
> everything, everything. That and the Constitution are everything."
> — Anthony Trollope, *Can You Forgive Her?*[1]

I spent the early months of the Donald Trump administration rereading Anthony Trollope's Barsetshire and Palliser novels, a self-protective act that at first I understood as a retreat. It was only after former FBI Director James Comey testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee on June 8, 2017 that I realized why Trollope's signature form—the series of linked novels—felt newly vital: Trollope's novel sequences tell the story of institutional durability amid cultural upheaval.

During the 2016 election, James Comey was responsible both for an investigation into Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server and for a subsequent investigation into the Trump campaign's connection to election-meddling by the Russians. After President Trump abruptly removed Comey from his post at the FBI, Comey was received as a hero on the left, even by those who blamed him for Hillary Clinton's

loss. In his much-anticipated testimony before Congress, Comey presented himself as a defender of the FBI as an institution, one that Trump had described as being in "disarray." Comey also went further, defending *institutionality* itself: "I worked every day at the FBI to help make that great organization better. And I say 'help' because I did nothing alone at the FBI. There are no indispensable people at the FBI. The organization's great strength is that its values and abilities run deep and wide. The FBI will be fine without me. . . . This organization and its mission will go on long beyond me and long beyond any particular administration."[2] Institutional values are fundamentally anti-individualist. According to Comey's account, successful group functioning must limit the significance of any particular individual: there can be "no indispensable people" in an institution committed to its mission, or, more cynically, committed to its own survival. An institutional timeframe strives to extend past "any particular administration," and any particular career. From a narrative perspective, the subordination of an individual's actions to an institution's continuity requires an unfamiliar temporality and character-system. Our heroes, and indeed the Victorians' heroes, more often rage alone against the red tape of Circumlocution Offices and Courts of Chancery.

A stalwart institutionalist like Comey, speaking on behalf of a smoothly functioning system is improbably cast as a hero. Such is also the case (and now we come to Trollope), with Plantagenet Palliser, for whom the House of Commons and the constitution are "everything, everything." Trollope uses his novel sequences to work through the opposing claims of individuals and institutions. While any one Trollope novel explicitly nominates both a hero and a heroine and attentively tracks their progress, Trollope's novel *sequences* enact Comey's prescription that in a well-functioning organization there can be "no indispensable people." Trollope's series "elongat[e] time," as Carolyn Dever puts it, drawing the perspective beyond any single character's focus.[3] Taken together—for the two sequences share several characters and overlapping place names—Trollope's Barsetshire and Palliser novels encompass a "fictional chronology [that] spans forty-three years," as Frank Robbins calculates.[4] By their very design, these sequences explore the possibility of placing an institution—rather than a protagonist—at the heart of a narrative. Their time scale is expansive enough to chronicle how the institutions of the Anglican Church, in the Barsetshire Chronicles, and of the British government, in the Palliser novels, adapt their traditions to a changing world.

Through the narrative form of the series, the Barsetshire and Palliser novels celebrate what Trollope identifies as the central virtues of institutionality, *replaceability* and *adaptability*. Replaceability is a function of time: as years pass, characters age and institutional roles are filled and refilled. As clergymen and politicians are promoted up the ladders of the church and government, others emerge to take their places. *Barchester Towers* (1857) opens with two vacancies—that occasioned by the death of the Bishop of Barchester (and filled promptly by Bishop Proudie) and that occasioned by the death of Eleanor Bold's husband (filled, by the novel's end, by Mr. Arabin). Having played a marriageable maiden in *The Warden* and a pretty widow in *Barchester Towers*, Eleanor Arabin reappears as a wealthy matron in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, with Grace Crawley (a toddler when Eleanor married Arabin) now cast as the marriageable girl. The structure might seem tinged with the melancholy of the passage of time were it not for its reassuring, and even procreative, stability. Replaceability favors the fate of the group over the fate of the individual.

The novel sequence allows Trollope to attend to institutional change so incremental as to be unnarratable within a single novel, change that is in fact in the service of continuity. Trollope identifies adaptability (rather than steadfastness, as we might expect) as essential to continuity: within institutions, individuals must be adaptable precisely in order to carry on. In Trollope's world, unchanging stubbornness is the keynote of villains. Intractable characters, like the jealous politician Robert Kennedy in *Phineas Finn* (1869), are punished with increasing isolation. Trollope's heroes, by contrast, bend and adjust to the developments they encounter as part of a group. Plantagenet Palliser changes so slowly that to those closest to him he seems to be standing still. His wife flippantly declares, "it seems to me he's always wrong. . . . He never perceives that everything gets changed every five years."[5] But Palliser's devotion to institutions ensures that he does in fact remain relevant; by the end of *The Duke's Children*, he has embraced an American daughter-in-law in accordance with his son's belief that "Some years ago it might have been improper that an American girl should be elevated to the rank of an English Duchess; but now all that was altered."[6]

Trollope uses the form of the novel sequence to enclose the changes of modernity within the protective care of institutional stability. The novel sequence provides a secure framework for change to occur while underscoring the forward-moving—and in that sense progressive—anti-individualism that is at the heart of institutionality. Rather than depict this state of affairs as crushing individuals down, the novel sequence

allows for individual narrative arcs and even heroism at the level of the novel, while attesting to the power of something grander than the individual at the level of the series. As we're faced anew with the question of how to balance a single individual's disruptive claims against long-standing institutional norms, and whether or not to fear a bureaucratic "deep state" operating independently of executive power, Trollope's formal negotiations take on fresh power.

Notes

1. Anthony Trollope, *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864; London: Everyman, 1994), 714.
2. "Full Transcript and Video: James Comey's Testimony on Capitol Hill," *New York Times*, June 8, 2017.
3. Carolyn Dever, "Trollope, Seriality, and the 'Dullness' of Form," *Literature Compass* 7, no. 9 (2010): 861–66, 862.
4. Frank E. Robbins, "Chronology and History in Trollope's Barset and Parliamentary Novels," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 5, no. 4 (1951): 303–16, 308.
5. Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Redux*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 278.
6. Anthony Trollope, *The Duke's Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 488–89.

Literature

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TO begin, if we merely say that literature, in the sense of "written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit,"[1] has been a major disciplinary shibboleth of the last thirty years and leave the reader to imagine an entry on literature as it might have appeared in 1987, or 1993, or 2005,[2] "literature" could then work as a placeholder for debates about canonicity and prestige that have since become part of a wider disciplinary self-conception. Here, I suggest that the relevance of the term now lies both in its apparent contrast with other forms of writing and