



The American Senator

Anthony Trollope

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Arabella Trefoil, the beautiful anti-heroine of this novel, inspired Trollope to write of her, "I wished to express the depth of my scorn for women who run down husbands." Arabella's determination to find a rich husband is at the heart of this story and her character, though often maligned, is one of Trollope's most famous and vivid creations.

The American Senator Details

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From Reader Review The American Senator for online ebook

Kate says

"Many Trollope readers are aware that Trollope's mother Frances gained fame as a writer by criticizing America (*Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 1832); few modern fans have had the opportunity to read her son's views on this country as delineated in such rare novels as *The American Senator* (1877).

"The character of an American politician lecturing the English on their faults gives Trollope his chance to compare the two cultures; still, it must have been Trollopean irony which urged the author of *The American Senator* to adopt that title 'very much in opposition to my publishers,' he says in his *Autobiography*. For in this masterly but practically unknown novel from Trollope's later period, the visiting Senator, Elias Gotobed from the state of 'Mickewa', serves as comic relief to a stunningly sharp drama of feminine cynicism and calculation on the English marriage market.

"While Senator Gotobed analyzes England in his typically blunt, naively daring manner, the true focal point of the story, heroine/villainess Arabella Trefoil, develops into one of the most complex and successfully realized of all Trollope's women. Her coldly enacted yet oddly heroic pursuit of Lord Rufford, while she is simultaneously engaged to John Morton, spurs Trollope to the extraordinary reaches of ironic perception. *The American Senator* pokes his inquisitive nose into these and other doings of Dillsborough, through whose citizens Trollope creates another English village world. Mary Masters and her two lovers of unequal birth, the local fox hunt club, and the neighboring gentry provide the frame for one of Trollope's full-length mirrors of Victorian England."

~~back cover

I enjoyed the book very much, and intend to read it again as this first time around I read for plot and not for nuances--of which there were many.

This was a fascinating glimpse into the mind and machinations of a young Victorian lady related to the peerage but without status or wealth in her own right, who needed to marry but who could not expect to marry a title with no money to bring to the marriage, and who could not marry a commoner because of being related to a Duke & Duchess. In addition, she had the handicaps of a wastrel father and a socially inept mother to overcome. Many of the characters are a bit one-dimensional but of course that's to illustrate a point or a characteristic of English village life.

All in all, I recommend this book if you enjoy reading Victorian England fiction done by a very accomplished author.

Mitchell says

This is my 26th Trollope novel. I am bereft that there are only 21 more to read. With an average of 500 pages that means only 10,500 more pages of joy.

The American Senator is a late novel. I have noticed that the satire is slightly more bitter than in the earlier novels, but fear not! There are still sweet, totally predictable love stories and great kindness toward all characters, even the ones you want to strangle.

Arabella Trefoil would stand up very well to Edith Wharton's Undine Spragg in *Custom Of The Country*. She is even more bold-faced in her mercenary pursuit of a husband. But what is so wonderful about Trollope is that even though we see how totally manipulative and amoral she is in her attempts to land a man, he gradually endows her with a pathos that makes us unable to hate her. In fact, he gives her exactly the fate she deserves and it appears to be just fine with her and us.

Great comic characters abound. The eponymous Senator is not so much a character but Trollope's mouthpiece for his running commentary on the absurdities of English life that run through the book.

A delight. Highly recommended

Jim says

In all of English literature, there are few prolific authors who do not have a certain number of stinkers among their oeuvre. Although there are some of his novels I like better than others, I cannot think of a single stinker in the lot, even **Linda Tressel**, for which I have no great love.

I have been reading **The American Senator** since march with the Yahoo! Trollope group. As with most of the man's work, it did not take more than two or three chapter to be enchanted once again by the author's genuine high moral sense and skill in weaving the difficulties of his heroes and heroines, particularly in the field of love and marriage.

Who is the hero or **The American Senator**? If one believes the author, it is Farmer Larry Twentyman, but he has a relatively minor role and is one of the few people who is disgruntled at the end of the novel. Another disgruntled party is the title character himself, Senator Elias Gotobed from the Great State of Mickewa, who persists in seeing the English as a congeries of flaws and winds up being hooted off the stage when he tries to tell them so.

No, I would opt for the disagreeable (especially at first) Arabella Trefoil. She begins the novel as the fiancée of John Morton, a British diplomat, but attempts ruthlessly to "trade up" to the wealthier and more glittery Lord Rufford. She throws herself at him, not once but many times, but he continues to resist her. When she tries to nail him on a breach of promise, she is totally defeated and drained. But there is a hopeful future, even for her, what though it be in distant Patagonia as the wife of another British diplomat.

Here the author looks at Arabella through the eyes of her equally troublesome mother, from whom she has been estranged for most of the story:

Though she had quarrelled daily with her daughter for the last twelve years,—to such an extent lately that no decently civil word ever passed between them,—still there had been something to interest her. There had been something to fear and something to hope. The girl had always had some prospect before her, more or less brilliant. Her life had had its occupation, and future triumph was possible. Now it was all over. The link by which she had been bound to the world was broken. The Connop Greens and the Smijths would no longer have her,—unless it might be on short and special occasions, as a great favour. She knew that she was an old woman, without money, without blood, and without attraction, whom nobody would ever again desire to see. She had her things packed up, and herself taken off to London, almost without a word of farewell to the Duchess, telling herself as she went that the world had produced no other people

so heartless as the family of the Trefoils.

In a word, Arabella is a very modern heroine, something of a bad girl but with redeeming qualities. She grew on me with each succeeding chapter, until at the end, I felt, as I am sure Trollope did, that he could not punish this child of Eve for her all-too-human transgressions.

This is probably not near the best of Trollope's novels; but, long as it is, it is certainly worth reading, if for no other reason than how he gave Arabella another chance.

Mary Ronan Drew says

Once again I have been unable to contain myself and have rushed ahead to the end of *The American Senator* ahead of the schedule of my online Trollope group. And it's not like I just HAD to know how it ended. I've read it at least twice before.

This is not Trollope at his best. Or rather, it's at his best and at his weakest. The character of Arabella Trefoil is one of his most complex and sensitive. Arabella is penniless but a great beauty with hopes of a brilliant marriage. However, she has waited too long, refused too many men who weren't quite rich enough, or didn't have quite as high a position in society as she wanted. She is now 30 years old, which is very old indeed in late 19th century terms, and she is still struggling to catch the perfect man. This despite the fact that she is engaged to be married to a diplomat, John Morton. He has a country house, quite a bit of money, and a respected position, and he is a good man and loves her. But Arabella is looking beyond him to Lord Rufford who has a larger house, more money, and a title.

Like so many women of her day, Arabella must find a husband. She is fit for no employment and has no other choice than to sell herself to the highest bidder. Will Lord Rufford bid? Will she be able to keep Mr Morton on a string until she has played out her game with Lord Rufford?

Arabella's story is a sub-plot. The heroine of the novel is Mary Masters, one of Trollope's sweet and lovely girls, who has been raised by Lady Ushant, whose nephew, Reginald Morton (cousin to John) she has fallen in love with. She is being courted by one of my favorite Trollope characters, yeoman Larry Twentyman. Her step-mother makes her life miserable when Mary refuses Larry. The parallels between these two women and their difficulties deciding which man to marry are explained unusually well in the Wikipedia entry for *The American Senator*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Amer...

The senator? The role of the title character is muddled, with some episodes almost laugh-out-loud funny as he gets himself into difficulties criticizing English practices such as rotten boroughs, purchased church livings, and undue deference to nobility. Trollope takes the opportunity to poke fun at Americans, though the narrator's unspoken criticisms are no more unreasonable than the senator's.

Near the end of the book the story bogs down in unnecessary repetition and when one arrives at the two chapters devoted to the senator's speech delivering his opinions to the English public the reader's eyes glass over.

Nonetheless, this is a fine novel, as almost all of Trollope's are, and in Arabella we have one of his most interesting and ultimately sympathetic characters.

Lisa says

THAT was a good story. Don't read this if you don't want spoilers; I want to express myself without fear because I DID like it so much!

I always get a kick out of Trollope's treatment of Americans in his books, but this one was a bit heavy-handed, I thought! What a jerk that Senator was! His observations on English life were interesting, but maybe I would have liked them given to me in a different form. I skimmed the whole proceeding of the Goarly crime. Even now ... confession: I haven't truly finished. I've put the book down at Chapter XXIII The Senator's Lecture No. 1 -- ugh! I can't do it!

What contributes to my lack of interest in the Senator is the closing of the saga of Arabella Trefoil in the previous chapter. Just my kind of story. I had no idea Arabella would come round in such a believable way. How did Trollope do it? She seemed beyond hope, but all the circumstances of her journey--three lovers in a few weeks!--contrived to soften her and make her fit for Mounser Green and life in Patagonia. This had been a gargantuan, last-ditch effort at getting a husband, and it took its toll on her. The John Morton interlude had such a weird effect, softening her in that one person had remained faithful, and that faithfulness showed her atrocious behavior in stark contrast. He remembers her in his will, which was so touching since he didn't really forgive her. I like how she had taken her leave of him. That was so complex! It was the beginning of the turning, perhaps. She told him all the truth.

Love this bit of Mounser Green giving his vision of her future:

"Then he preached her a sermon, expressing a hope as he went on, that as she was leaving the pleasures of life behind her, she would learn to like the work of life. 'I have found the pleasures very hard,' she said. He spoke to her of the companion he hoped to find, of the possible children who might be dependent on their mother, of the position which she would hold, and of the manner in which she should fill it. She, as she listened to him, was almost stunned by the change in the world around her. She need never again seem to be gay in order than men might be attracted. She made her promises and made them with an intention of keeping them; but it may, we fear, be doubted whether he was justified in expecting that he could get a wife fit for his purpose out of the school in which Arabella Trefoil had been educated. The two, however, will pass out of our sight, and we can only hope that he may not be disappointed."

END OF STORY as far as I'm concerned. Don't care about the Senator, but I'll probably skim. Maybe he'll have a softening as well!

The Mary and Reginald story was satisfying as well. I thought, how can Trollope bring these two together? but he did. I found their relationship surprisingly fun, as they walked through the fields after he proposed; it was a bit quirky! His proposal was beautiful. I had been perturbed by Mary's philosophy:

"I would sooner marry a man I loved, though I knew he would ill-use me..."

rather than marry a man she didn't love who would treat her wonderfully. This rankles. Surely you'd learn to love a man who treated you wonderfully? Who knows...

It was great that Reginald wanted to learn to ride and hunt as a proper Squire should. See, he was a geek. He had a bit to say about animal activists, which I thought funny: "The fact is I hate with my whole heart the trash of the philanimalist ... a small knot of self-anxious people who think that they possess among them all

the bowels of the world."

Editorial:

"... Barring a little difference of complexion and feature, the Englishman would make a good Japanese, or the Japanese a first-class Englishman. But when an American comes to us or a Briton goes to the States, each speaking the same language, using the same cookery, governed by the same laws, and wearing the same costume, the differences which present themselves are so striking that neither can live six months in the country of the other without a holding up of the hands and a torrent of exclamations. ... The intelligence of the American, displayed through the nose, worries the Englishman... " Ha!

Nice bit of writing:

"Here she was, being made much of as a new-comer, and here if possible she must remain. Everything smiled on her with gilded dimples, and these were the smiles she valued. As the softness of the cushions sank into her heart, and mellow nothingnesses from well-trained voices greeted her ears, and the air of wealth and idleness floated about her cheeks, her imagination rose within her and assured her that she could secure something better than Bragton."

Mrs B says

Highly engaging and memorable tale of love and politics in the countryside, by one of the language's masters. The characters are chewily, juicily real and distinctive -- even the least interesting character of Mary, who is described in a number of ways as being merely 'brown', and virtuous to go with it. The higher-flying, naughtier Arabella is the real delight of the book, and the scene in which Lord Rufford must preserve the decencies with regard to her is possibly my favourite one in the whole story (not a spoiler, as you can't possibly know what that means unless you've already read it). Watch out for word play: the names, invented or otherwise, aren't accidental.

Katrina says

A good read.

<https://piningforthewest.co.uk/2018/0...>

Audrey McLachlan says

I would never dream of reading Anthony Trollop but heard some of his book The American Senator serialised on Radio 4 if you enjoyed Pride and Prejudice and other of Jane Austin's books you will love this it has the will they ever get together aspect but also the history of the period seen through the eyes of the visiting American Senator thanks to my daughter in law Ruth for reintroducing me to Anthony Trollop (Barchester Towers next)

Griselda says

Almost a first for me: I gave up halfway through. Very, very slow to move forward. The opening chapters leave the reader knee-deep in redundant genealogical detail, only to be followed by a minute-by-minute account of a day's hunting. Life's too short.

Nora says

This is a true Trollope novel. Love Arabella Trefoil. She is a bit like Thackeray's Becky Sharp. This is a great read if you love classics and Trollope.

Margaret says

For me, this is not one of Trollope's more memorable novels, I'm afraid. I was far more interested in the plotline involving Arabella Trefoil, the scheming beauty who is the anti-heroine of the novel, than I was in the American senator himself or in the more run-of-the-mill love affair between Mary Masters and Reginald Morton.

Duffy Pratt says

I bumped this to four stars from three. I've read all of Trollope. It took many years. When I ranked his books when I first signed up for Goodreads, I had only vague recollections about some of them. I started reading him when I was in my twenties because I was looking for an author who wrote lots of fat books where pretty much nothing happened. He quickly became one of my very favorite writers, especially in the big books told by his charming narrator.

To be fair, this book is mediocre Trollope. But mediocre Trollope is still very, very good. It interweaves three plots that center around a rural area named Diillsborough. It should probably have been named Dullsborough. First, there is a love triangle among the moderately well off class - a working farmer, a younger son who just barely has enough to maintain a life of leisure, and the daughter of a struggling attorney. This story is quite thin, and it involves a plot that Trollope retread many times. A good girl is admired by a man quite suitable for her, but she doesn't love him. Everyone tries to push her into the marriage, but she refuses to yield. Secretly, her heart belongs to another.

Second, and quite more biting, are the efforts of Arabella Trefoil, a beautiful and heartless social climber. She starts the book engaged to one fairly wealthy, but dull man (who is the elder son of the gentleman involved in plot number one). But she soon sets her sights higher, and tries to catch a Lord while keeping open her options on the first engagement. Bella is a great character. The Lord she tries to catch is weak willed, a bit slimy in his dealings with women, and a liar. It's pretty clear from the start that he will escape from Bella. It's less clear whether this was the best thing, either for him or her.

The remaining plot is probably the weakest part of the book. It involves the American Senator and his observations about English country life. Trollope has the Senator introduced to this by trying to get him to

understand the values of fox hunting. This plot involves some people who laid poison in a wood to kill either some foxes or hounds. One suspect has shown resentment over the hunters trampling his crops, and foxes eating his livestock. The Senator comes to his defense. This plot is by far the thinnest of the three, and the Senator is pretty much a one-dimensional boor, who happens to also be fairly intelligent. On the plus side, the fox hunting gives a great parallel to Arabella's hunt for the Lord, and Trollope handles the comparison very nicely, without being too blunt.

Laura says

Anthony Trollope's tale of Arabella Trefoil, a clever, conniving and ruthless woman.

Lindsey Strachan says

This is the 9th Trollope I have read this year, having fallen in love initially with the Barset novels. Whilst this is by no means his best work, Trollope's very best is such a high standard that even his "second-rate" novels are really fine examples of his craft and well worth reading.

The American Senator of the title is actually not the main focus of the story, but more a vehicle through whose eyes Trollope exposes the highs and lows of British life of the period and indeed some of the flaws which exist in our society even now. The Senator, the wonderfully named Elias Gotobed, is paying a visit to Britain to study British society, and whilst here ruffles the feathers of the great and good of British society. There are certain parts of the novel where the Senator's expostulations are clearly a diatribe of Trollope's own grievances with British society, and indeed these areas are some of the weakest in the novel, but they are small and interspersed with some very funny instances of the Senator committing numerous faux pas.

However, the main thrust of the novel actually comes with a number of the characters who the Senator encounters on his visit. The "heroine" of the novel is Mary Masters, one of the sweet young things who Trollope creates, though thankfully not as annoying as his most famous example of this type of character, the Pollyanna-ish Lily Dale. Mary has become like a surrogate daughter to Lady Ushant and falls in love with her nephew Reginald Morton. Meanwhile, she is being courted by Larry Twentyman, a local farmer and fine young man who, despite his desperate and repeated attempts which are encouraged in particular by Mary's stepmother, fails to capture Mary's heart.

This main plot is pleasant enough to read and the main protagonists are all likeable characters. However, the real treat of the novel actually comes with its sub-plot, the story of the machinations of anti-heroine Arabella Trefoil. The novel has a slow start, but please do persist through that because you will then get to the point of meeting the delightfully naughty Arabella and be introduced to one of the most complex, intriguing and ultimately endearing female characters in literature.

Arabella is a beauty but without any fortune of her own, and clocking on a bit by the standards of the time (she is only 30). However, she carries hopes of making a brilliant marriage and is encouraged to this end by

her heartless mother. However she has refused too many men who couldn't give her just the fortune she desired, or didn't have as high rank society as she desired and so is now in the later, desperate stages of trying to secure a husband. She carries on these machinations throughout the novel, despite being engaged to a well respected diplomat and local squire John Morton. John has a country estate, a decent fortune and is very well respected both as a man and diplomat. But Arabella is all the time trying to trap Lord Rufford into marriage, as he can provide her with a larger house, more money, and a title.

Through Arabella, Trollope provides a brilliant study and criticism of the "marriage-market" of the time. He evokes images of women "fishing" for husbands, whilst also showing a compassion for the fate of women such as Arabella in having to effectively sell themselves to the highest bidder. The novel is a great study of society at the time, but also just a darn good story.

There are one or two elements I did not like here though. As I said previously, the novel is a slow starter and it really took a good 100 pages to get going and really grip me. Also, there are some prolonged scenes of hunting, in which Trollope took a great interest, which are not really to the tastes of the modern reader (and I say that as someone who has no gripe with fox hunting). They just do not seem relevant or interesting to our less rural society now and I happily skipped over some of his. The other slightly annoying element was the Senator himself. At times he was a little "preachy" for my liking, and perhaps not as funny to the modern sense of humour as when he was first written. Trollope is certainly at his most cynical, bordering on bitter, in this novel and this does make for at times a more uncomfortable read than we are used to in his work. However, it also does give an interesting glimpse into, and indictment of, the political system of the time.

All in all, *The American Senator* was an enjoyable read. However, if you are new to Trollope I would recommend starting with the Barset or Palliser novels and come to the American Senator when you are more familiar with Trollope's work as you will then be able to appreciate this novel more.

Doreen Petersen says

I really hate to give a bad review to any book but this one deserves it. What started out as a reasonably good story was drawn out far, far too long and lost the story's focus after the first couple of chapters. Don't bother with this one.

Kim says

This little known Trollope classic is wonderful -- the beginning chapter is a little slow in large part because Trollope is introducing a morass of interconnected people who do not appear in other Trollope novels and who are critical to what becomes a rollicking, hilarious, fast-paced story about horses, hounds, gracious grand-aunts, horrid mothers-in-law, simple farmers, striving lawyers, complacent gentry, virtuous townsfolk, a saint-like Cinderella and one unimaginably desperate and venal social climber. Great stuff! If you want to dip into Trollope but don't want to embark on the intimidating Barchester Chronicles or Palliser books, this is the book for you.

Rose A says

When this novel was recommended to me I had not even heard of it among Trollope's works but gamely gave it a try. I found it the easiest to get into and raced through it on holiday. I think it's probably my favourite of his novels that I've read so far. I feel like at the beginning, Trollope was very savage and was using the character of the American Senator as a vehicle to expose inconsistencies and irrationalities in British culture - and he was savage to all his characters, the Senator included. But as the novel progressed, I felt that the characters all developed and showed that it's never so simple. It's a novel with several different, connected plotlines and I'm not sure it always hangs together coherently, but if there is any theme, it is the very wise that what may stand up in principle or seem initially straight forward is in reality much more complex, whether situations or characters. I found a lot to amuse in this novel and also a lot to provoke a great deal of thought about England, about America, about the attitudes of both countries, about the author, about love and ambition and principles... It was a real treasure trove of interest. I only wish people I knew had actually read it!

Carolyn Geason says

Not one of Trollope's best, but quite a number of memorable characters. Arabella Trefoil, Larry Twentyman, to name a few. I did not myself particularly like the senator Mr Gotobed, but his analysis of the english country and its culture is his most particular point of interest.

Bettie? says

classic serial starts wednesday

I try, I try, yet Trollope is just as he sounds!

David says

No, this novel isn't set in America. And it isn't really about the senator either. He merely serves as a sort of catalyst, giving Trollope an opportunity for republican jabs at British institutions, and counterjabs at republicanism, since the senator's ideas are often foolish.

The novel is set in the English countryside, where the senator is visiting, and its plots revolve largely around love and marriage. As is frequently the case in these 19th century settings, love is at the heart of good middle class marriages, and a threat to the making of a good marriage among the upper classes. These themes are played out here.

There's also a good deal of fox hunting. Trollope loved hunting, and it is frequently featured in his novels, although I seem not to have mentioned that in my other reviews of Trollope novels. Here the unimaginable happens -- someone poisons a fox! The hunting crowd is determined that this crime not go unavenged.

I thought about the story of this vulpecide a few years ago when England decided to ban hunting. Hunters

would be happy in a world filled with foxes, but farmers would prefer a foxless world. Will England's decision to ban hunting mean the end of the fox? I sometimes wonder.
