For a Victorian wife, Lady Laura Kennedy, nee Standish, speaks with surprising forthrightness to her husband Robert Kennedy in Anthony Trollope's second and fourth Palliser novels, Phineas Finn: The Irish Member (1869) and Phineas Redux (1873). The couple's dialogue indicates Kennedy's disapproval of Lady Laura's frankness about gender equality in marriage:

"There are moments, Robert, when even a married woman must be herself rather than her husband's wife. It is so, though you cannot understand it." "I certainly do not understand it." "You cannot make a woman subject to you as a dog is so." (PF 300)

Yet, while Lady Laura's essentially irrevocable wedding-day consent anticipates a lifetime of marriage with Kennedy, she attempts to retract that promise through desertion, provoking Kennedy to contemplate filing for restitution of conjugal rights. A successful restitution suit did not compel sexual relations per se but more broadly forced a deserting spouse to return to the home, regardless of extenuating circumstances. Only a handful of historians--Olive Anderson, John M. Biggs, Maeve E. Doggett, and Mary Lyndon Shanley (2)–have studied restitution, but with little attention to the Phineas novels. Trollope regrets that Lady Laura must "re-consent" to her unhappy marriage; in Phineas Redux, she grieves: "it can't be right that a woman should pretend to love a man whom she loathes. I couldn't live with him" (PR 139). Through Lady Laura, Trollope shows that rights--specifically conjugal rights--are a primary problem vexing miserable yet "consenting" wives in nineteenth-century England.

"Restitution of Conjugal Rights

Eighteenth-century precedent enabled nineteenth-century restitution suits. In A New Abridgment of the Law (1736), lawyer Matthew Bacon reports: "The Husband hath by Law Power and Dominion over his Wife, and may keep her by Force within the Bounds of Duty ... he has by Law a Right to the Custody of her, and may, if he think fit, confine her" (285). Professor, lawyer, and judge William Blackstone addresses this power in Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765): "the courts of law will still permit a husband to restrain a wife of her liberty, in case of any gross misbehaviour" (433). In practice, husbands did not necessarily need to wait for or prove wives' misbehavior before filing for restitution, masculine prerogatives (honor, obedience, ownership) clearly outweighing concerns about female morality.

Scores of British spouses filed for restitution throughout the nineteenth century. Wives filed the most restitution suits for financial support, usually after the husband had deserted the home, leaving the family without a viable breadwinner. (3) Yet, in the smaller number of cases when husbands filed for restitution, the situation could be tragic in a different way. If a husband abused his wife physically, emotionally, and / or sexually, prompting her to escape the situation, he could turn to the courts to sue for restitution. Although restitution of conjugal rights did not signify sexual services, it did require a spouse's permanent presence in the home; and, since an abusive husband owned his wife's body via coverture, such suits would almost certainly indicate...
4. And she saw that Gopher Prairie was merely an enlargement of all the hamlets which they had been passing only to the eyes of a Kennicott was it exceptional. (S.L.) 5. Calm and quiet below me in the sun and shadow lay the old house.(D.) 6. How have I implored and begged that man to inquire into captain's family connections; how have I urged and entreated him to take some decisive step. (D.) 7. Gay and merry was the time; and right gay and merry were at least four of the numerous hearts that were gladdened by its coming. (D.) EX. The tingling stopped. She plunged into guilt, feeling as cold and hard as the glass vase. She was a wife and mother; what right did she have to freedom? Responsibilities pulled at her, and attachments. What had happened to them? Why wasn't she lonely, worried, anxious to get back where she belonged? (J.M.) Graphical expressive means. Emphatic use of punctuation. M a r g a r e t: Father! (She runs to him…and flings herself upon him.) Father! I was reincarnated as a villain in a novel. Jealous of the female lead, I committed all kinds of evil deeds only to be executed in the end. In order to escape from my fate, I decided to stay away from the male lead. However 'I think you're pregnant...' No way. What the hell is going on! What do you mean pregnant, that isn't even in the original story? To protect my child and my life, I ran away from the male lead, the father of my child. Then seven years later, 'Who told you to run away as you please?' I didn't expect the male lead to follow me to the end ... I read the reviews before reading so I didn't have much expectation of this novel. But, its better than what I thought. Huge kudos to the translator!