

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS



ANTHONY TROLLOPE THE BELTON ESTATE



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Edited with an Introduction by

JOHN HALPERIN

Oxford New York

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1986

Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

*Oxford New York Toronto
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town
Melbourne Auckland*

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*Select Bibliography and Chronology
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Introduction, Notes, and Note on the Text
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*First published by Oxford University Press 1923
First issued as a World's Classics paperback 1986*

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

*Trollope, Anthony
The Belton estate.—(The world's classics)
I. Title II. Halperin, John
823'.8[F] PR5684.B1
ISBN 0-19-281725-6*

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

*Trollope, Anthony, 1815-1882.
The Belton estate.
(The World's classics)
Bibliography: p.
I. Halperin, John, 1941- . II. Title.
[PR5684.B38 1986] 823'.8 85-8773
ISBN 0-19-281725-6 (pbk.)*

*Printed in Great Britain by
Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd.
Aylesbury, Bucks*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I SHOULD like to thank Professors Franklin Brooks, Ann J. Cook, Donald Greene, N. John Hall, Robert Tracy, and H. L. Weatherby for invaluable help during preparation of the present volume for publication.

J. H.

INTRODUCTION

There is nothing like desire for preventing
the things one says from bearing any resemblance
to what one has in one's mind.

Proust

LIKE all of Trollope's forty-seven novels, *The Belton Estate* (1865) is a love story. But it is a love story of unusual—for Trollope—proportions. The heroine is wilful, often perverse, and at times highly neurotic. Love itself is described as desire mediated, controlled, and directed by the responsiveness of its object. And along the way there is a great deal of comment—as in Jane Austen's novels, which Trollope read carefully in the early 1860s—on the plight of the impecunious, unmarried woman.

Clara Amedroz, Trollope's heroine, believes herself to be an astute judge of character. When she meets Will Belton for the first time, she thinks that she understands him perfectly; in fact she knows nothing whatever about him. Later, after she has fallen in love with Will, she tells herself that she cannot be in love with him because her heart belongs to Captain Aylmer. 'Even though she should be able to prove to herself beyond the shadow of a doubt that her cousin Will was of the two the fitter to be loved,—the one more worthy of her heart,—no such proof could alter her position . . . She, having once loved, could not change. Of that she was sure' (pp. 69–70, 76). Her fate, she believes, is 'to love the thinner and the meaner of the two' (p. 280)—that is, Aylmer. She is also certain—for a time—that Will does not love her. Of course she is wrong on all accounts. In many of Trollope's novels—*The Small*

House at Allington and *Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite* come to mind—love resists being transferred. But here eros is more mobile, subject to alterations that seem at times almost frivolous.

There is also a certain charm for Clara in the idea of being ill-used by her friends and relatives—‘a charm in the prospect of her desolation’, as Trollope puts it. ‘To be robbed of one’s grievance’, he adds, ‘is the last and foulest wrong’ (p. 95)—so Clara sticks to her grievances as long as she conveniently can, at times seeming almost to revel in them. ‘The more that she was absolutely in need of external friendship, the more disposed was she to reject it’ (p. 268). A perverse heroine indeed.

Realizing ‘that she had accepted the wrong man and rejected the wrong man’ (p. 372), she finds it almost impossible to admit this, though nothing less than her future happiness is at stake. Discovering that she can after all ‘suddenly transfer her affections from one man to another, [she] could not bring herself to say that she had done so’ (p. 402). She is proud, and finds it difficult to confess her shame. Even after she *knows* that she loves Will and should become his wife, she dispatches to him a repulsive letter renewing her demand that he remain her ‘brother’ only. Mrs. Askerton sums up the view of women in love in *The Belton Estate* when she tells Clara (p. 411):

Women are so cross-grained that it is a wonder to me that men should ever have anything to do with them. They have about them some madness of a phantasy which they dignify with the name of feminine pride, and under the cloak of this they believe themselves to be justified in tormenting their lovers’ lives out. The only consolation is that they torment themselves as much.

Trollope, however, offers a reason why some women are ‘cross-grained’. Clara informs Aylmer (p. 85) that, were he a woman, he would understand what the word ‘dependence’ means; indeed, it seems to her throughout much of the book that it is ‘her destiny to be dependent’ (p. 366). She links together ‘poverty and dependence, and

endless trouble given to others, and all the miseries of female dependence' (p. 392). 'I think it would be well if all single women were strangled by the time they are thirty,' she tells her aunt (p. 95). The problem, of course, is money. At a time when they could not go to university or enter the professions, unmarried, intelligent women without money found themselves in an anomalous position; Trollope's theme is as timely as it was in Jane Austen's day—and, later, in Gissing's. Such women could become governesses (enter the 'governess-trade', as Jane Austen puts it in *Emma*), or teachers, or prostitutes—or simply remain at home, living on crumbs. When Clara asks (p. 96), 'How can I help it that I am not a man and able to work for my bread?', we may be reminded of Jane Fairfax and Jane Eyre, Gwendolen Harleth and Lily Bart, such 'odd women' as Gissing's Rhoda Nunn and Monica Madden—and any number of other unfortunate women in fiction who are faced with a choice between an unpromising marriage and social obliteration. Unlike Becky Sharp, Clara Amedroz finds it impossible to live on 'nothing a year' (p. 110). Sounding like George Eliot (whom he knew and admired), Trollope writes in this novel of another unfortunate woman, Mary Belton: 'She was one of those whose lot in life drives us to marvel at the inequalities of human destiny, and to inquire curiously within ourselves whether future compensation is to be given' (p. 156). And sounding too like Gissing, whose novels demonstrate the degrading effects of poverty upon sensitive natures, Trollope reminds us in *The Belton Estate* (p. 274):

There are calamities which, by their natural tendencies, elevate the character of women and add strength to the growth of feminine virtues;—but then, again, there are other calamities which few women can bear without some degradation, without some injury to that delicacy and tenderness which is essentially necessary to make a woman charming,—as a woman. In this, I think, the world is harder to women than to men; that a woman often loses much by the chance of adverse circumstances which a man loses by his own misconduct.

Trollope speaks here not only of the degrading effects of poverty and dependence, but of the old double standard: a Victorian woman could not, of course, have her reputation blemished and expect to be received in polite society or make a respectable marriage; a man was expected to know a thing or two on his wedding night.

What gives additional piquancy to this love story is Trollope's focus on what we might call mediated desire: the idea that what others want, or what may seem hard to get, is most attractive to us, while what others do not want, or what may seem easy to get, is correspondingly less attractive. It is a familiar theme among the nineteenth-century novelists—employed most consistently, perhaps, by Hardy—but, for Trollope at least, a relatively unusual one. Often in his novels people fall in love, and that is that; romantic allegiances are rarely redefined or redirected, despite many provocations to waver. *The Belton Estate*, however, is the most dramatic and exhaustive treatment among Trollope's many books of another kind of love: love that depends on the perceived desirability and availability of its object.

And so when Aylmer, after much hesitation, proposes to Clara and is instantly accepted, he begins to doubt almost immediately 'whether it was wise on his part to devote the innermost bin of his cellar to wine that was so cheap . . . What is there that any man desires . . . that does not lose half its value when it is found to be easy of access and easy of possession? . . . The fruit that falls easily from the tree, though it is ever the best, is never valued by the gardener' (pp. 126, 134). Clara sees Aylmer recoil from her, and regrets that she has not been more coy—that she has not made him wait for his prize, and want it more. When she discovers that her aunt had made him promise to propose marriage to her, she breaks off the engagement—and his feelings do a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turnaround: 'Now that she was no longer his own, he again felt a desire to have her . . . the fact of her having . . . taken herself away from him, made him again wish to

possess her' (pp. 146, 175). This is very Proustian: desire (apparently) satisfied leaves one indifferent, whereas a love that is threatened is all-powerful.

Will Belton's pursuit of Clara predictably grows more aggressive and tenacious when he learns he has a rival in the field. That rival, Aylmer, vacillates wildly between indifference to her—'he remembered how very easily Clara had been won' (p. 225)—and desire to recapture her: 'As she had shown herself inclined to withdraw herself from him, he had become more resolute in his desire to follow her up' (p. 377). Aylmer keeps giving not Clara but himself another chance—until his irresolute behaviour finally destroys her affection for him. Trollope comments (pp. 379–80):

she had been won easily, and, therefore, lightly prized. I fear that it is so with everything that we value,—with our horses, our houses, our wines, and, above all, with our women. Where is the man who has heart and soul big enough to love a woman with increased force of passion because she has at once recognized in him all that she has herself desired? Captain Aylmer having won his spurs easily, had taken no care in buckling them, and now found, to his surprise, that he was like to lose them. He had told himself that he would only be too glad to shuffle his feet free of their bondage; but now that they were going from him, he began to find that they were very necessary for the road that he was to travel.

What Aylmer wants, ultimately, is victory—'triumph' (p. 381)—rather than Clara herself. She sees this, and so he fails; Trollope is mining a rich vein of psychology here.

At the end, of course, Clara accepts Will—but not before some similar fluctuations of her own. When, in the penultimate chapter, she thinks he is not coming to propose to her, she weeps; and then, when he turns up at the first possible moment to accomplish that very purpose, she 'almost' (p. 416) wishes him away again. It is appropriate that the final chapter—indeed, the very last page—of this tale of mercurial passions illuminates Clara's hatred of Lady Emily Tagmaggert, Captain Aylmer's new

bride. *The Belton Estate* is about the pathology of desire and indifference.

It has never been a favourite among Trollope's books. 'In the tale before us', wrote Henry James in his 1866 review in the *Nation*, 'we slumber on gently to the end.' The *Spectator* was disappointed; the *Athenaeum* found that 'the story drags'. The *Saturday Review* called the novel 'commonplace', and added: 'This is what a crude half-considered notion of realism comes to.' The *London Review* declared that 'Mr. Trollope should forbear from leading us through the same familiar scenes.' Since Trollope enjoyed an unusually good press throughout most of his long career as a novelist, these were for him startling notices. He seems to have succumbed to the general feeling about the book, writing in his *Autobiography* (1883) that it was 'readable' and realistic, but agreeing with those of his contemporaries who found that it had 'no peculiar merits, and will add nothing to my reputation as a novelist. I have not looked at it since it was published,' he says here (the passage was written in 1876), 'and now turning back to it in my memory, I seem to remember almost less of it than of any book that I have written.'

Trollope was uncharacteristically modest as authors go, but he was perhaps unduly modest about *The Belton Estate*. It has always been one of his most undervalued novels. Following as it did on the heels of several of his greatest popular successes—*Framley Parsonage* (1861), *Orley Farm* (1862), *The Small House at Allington* (1864), *Can You Forgive Her?* (1865)—it got, almost literally, lost. In a sense it has yet to be properly and sufficiently reviewed.

JOHN HALPERIN

NOTE ON THE TEXT

TROLLOPE wrote *The Belton Estate* between January and September 1865. By an agreement dated 5 April 1865 he was to receive £800 for its serialization in the *Fortnightly*. The novel began in the first number of the new periodical, published on 15 May 1865, and ran through 1 January 1866. For the book issue Chapman and Hall paid £700 for all rights to the first 2,000 copies, with half copyright reverting to Trollope thereafter. It was published in December 1865, with 1866 on the title page. Original publication was in three volumes. This angered Trollope, who had intended *The Belton Estate* as a two-volume novel; he endorsed his schedule of returns, 'Surreptitiously printed in three volumes'. See *The Letters of Anthony Trollope*, 2 vols, ed. N. John Hall (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA., 1983), I:304 n., I:320 n., and *passim*.

That it took the normally speedy Trollope nine months to compose this relatively (for him) short novel—one of his most interrupted books—is a result largely of the fact that he devoted much of the year 1865 to writing for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Fortnightly*.

In his *Autobiography* (I, 167–8), Trollope says that the editors of the new *Fortnightly*, against his own advice, decided that their review 'should always contain a novel. It was of course natural that I should write the first novel, and I wrote *The Belton Estate*.'

The present edition is a reproduction of the second impression of the Oxford World's Classics text originally printed in 1923 (reprinted 1930, 1943, 1951, 1958, 1964, 1969, and 1974). The manuscript of *The Belton Estate* is in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

THERE is no collected edition of the works. A facsimile edition of thirty-six titles (62 vols.), *Selected Works of Anthony Trollope*, has been published by the Arno Press (1981; General Editor, N. John Hall). Works by Trollope are also available in the Oxford World's Classics series; in the Harting Grange Library series (mostly the shorter works), published by the Caledonia Press; and in *Anthony Trollope: The Complete Short Stories* (forty-two stories in 5 vols.), ed. Betty Jane Slemph Breyer (1979–83). Some of Trollope's essays have been collected in *The New Zealander*, ed. N. John Hall (1972). The standard bibliography of the works is Michael Sadleir, *Trollope: A Bibliography* (1928; reprinted 1977). *The Letters of Anthony Trollope*, 2 vols., ed. N. John Hall (1983), is now the standard edition.

There is no definitive life. Among the more useful biographical volumes are Bradford A. Booth, *Anthony Trollope: Aspects of His Life and Work* (1958); James Pope Hennessy, *Anthony Trollope* (1971); Michael Sadleir, *Trollope: A Commentary* (1927); C. P. Snow, *Trollope* (1975); and L. P. and R. P. Stebbins, *The Trollopes: The Chronicle of A Writing Family* (1945). The best sources of information about Trollope's life remain T. H. S. Escott's memoir, *Anthony Trollope: His Public Services, Private Friends and Literary Originals* (1913; reprinted 1967), and the novelist's *Autobiography* (1883). Other useful tools are W. and J. Gerould, *A Guide to Trollope* (1948), and N. John Hall, *Trollope and His Illustrators* (1980).

The best bibliographies of criticism are Rafael Holling, *A Century of Trollope Criticism* (1956), and *The Reputation of Trollope: An Annotated Bibliography 1925–1975*, ed. John Charles Olmsted and Jeffrey Welch (1978). A selection of contemporary criticism may be found in *Trollope: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Donald Smalley (1969). David Skilton, *Anthony Trollope and His Contemporaries* (1972), also discusses early critical responses. Three useful collections of essays: *The*

Trollope Critics, ed. N. John Hall (1980); *Anthony Trollope*, ed. T. E. Barcham (1980); and *Trollope Centenary Essays*, ed. John Halperin (1982).

On Trollope's politics and political novels, see John Halperin, *Trollope and Politics* (1977), and Juliet McMaster, *Trollope's Palliser Novels: Theme and Pattern* (1979). Recommended critical studies: Ruth apRoberts, *Trollope: Artist and Moralist (The Moral Trollope in US)* (1971); A. O. J. Cockshut, *Anthony Trollope: A Critical Study* (1955); James R. Kincaid, *The Novels of Anthony Trollope* (1977); Shirley R. Letwin, *The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct* (1982); Robert M. Polhemus, *The Changing World of Anthony Trollope* (1968); Arthur Pollard, *Anthony Trollope* (1978); Robert Tracy, *Trollope's Later Novels* (1978); and Andrew Wright, *Anthony Trollope: Dream and Art* (1983).

More general studies with helpful sections on Trollope: Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (1981); J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction* (1968); Robert M. Polhemus, *Comic Faith: The Great Tradition from Austen to Joyce* (1980); and J. A. Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (1976).

A CHRONOLOGY OF ANTHONY TROLLOPE

- 1815 Born at 6 Keppel Street, Bloomsbury, 24 April.
- 1822 Sent to Harrow as a day-boy.
- 1825 Attends private school at Sunbury.
- 1827 Sent to Winchester College.
- 1830 Removed from Winchester and sent again to Harrow.
- 1834 Leaves Harrow, serves six weeks as classics teacher in a Brussels school.
Accepts junior clerkship in General Post Office; settles in London.
- 1841 Becomes Deputy Postal Surveyor at Banagher, in Ireland.
- 1844 Marries Rose Heseltine, in June. Transferred to Clonmel, in Ireland.
- 1845 Promoted to Surveyor in the Post Office and moves to Mallow, in Ireland.
- 1847 *The Macdermots of Ballycloran*, his first novel, is published (3 vols., T. C. Newby).
- 1848 *The Kellys and the O'Kellys; or Landlords and Tenants* (3 vols., Henry Colburn).
Rebellion in Ireland.
- 1850 *La Vendée: An Historical Romance* (3 vols., Henry Colburn).
Writes *The Noble Jilt* (play; published 1923).
- 1851 Postal duties in western England.
- 1853 Returns to Ireland, settles in Belfast.
- 1854 Leaves Belfast and settles at Donnybrook, near Dublin.
- 1855 *The Warden* (1 vol., Longman).

- 1857 *Barchester Towers* (3 vols., Longman).
The Three Clerks (3 vols., Richard Bentley).
- 1858 Postal mission to Egypt; visits Palestine; postal mission to the West Indies; visits Malta, Gibraltar, and Spain.
Doctor Thorne (3 vols., Chapman & Hall).
- 1859 Returns to Ireland; moves to England, and settles at Waltham Cross, in Hertfordshire.
The Bertrams (3 vols., Chapman & Hall).
The West Indies and the Spanish Main (travel; 1 vol., Chapman & Hall).
- 1860 Visits Florence.
Tales of All Countries serialized in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* and *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper*, May–October.
Castle Richmond (3 vols., Chapman & Hall).
- 1860–1 *Framley Parsonage* serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*, January 1860–April 1861; its huge success establishes his reputation as a novelist.
- 1861 *Framley Parsonage* (3 vols., Smith, Elder).
Tales of All Countries (1 vol., Chapman & Hall).
Election to the Garrick Club.
Tales of All Countries: Second Series, serialized in *Public Opinion*, the *London Review*, and *The Illustrated London News*, January–December.
- 1861–2 *Orley Farm* published in twenty monthly parts, March 1861–October 1862, by Chapman & Hall.
Visits the United States (August 1861–May 1862).
The Struggles of Brown, Jones and Robinson: by One of the Firm, serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*, August 1861–March 1862.
- 1862 *Orley Farm* (2 vols., Chapman & Hall).
North America (travel; 2 vols., Chapman & Hall).
The Struggles of Brown, Jones and Robinson (1 vol., New York: Harper; first English edition published 1870).
Rachel Ray (2 vols., Chapman & Hall).
- 1862–4 *The Small House at Allington*, serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*, September 1862–April 1864.

- 1863 *Tales of All Countries: Second Series* (1 vol., Chapman & Hall).
Death of his mother, Frances Trollope.
- 1864 Election to the Athenaeum.
The Small House at Allington (2 vols., Smith, Elder).
Can You Forgive Her? (2 vols., Chapman & Hall).
- 1864-5 *Can You Forgive Her?* published in twenty monthly parts, January 1864-August 1865, by Chapman & Hall.
- 1865 *Miss Mackenzie* (2 vols., Chapman & Hall).
Hunting Sketches (1 vol., Chapman & Hall); also serialized in *Pall Mall Gazette*, February-March.
Travelling Sketches, serialized in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, August-September.
- 1865-6 *The Belton Estate*, serialized in the *Fortnightly Review*, May 1865-January 1866.
Clergymen of the Church of England, serialized in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 1865-January 1866.
- 1866 *The Belton Estate* (3 vols., Chapman & Hall).
Travelling Sketches (1 vol., Chapman & Hall).
Clergymen of the Church of England (1 vol., Chapman & Hall).
- 1866-7 *The Claverings*, serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*, February 1866-May 1867.
Nina Balatka, serialized in *Blackwood's Magazine*, July 1866-January 1867.
The Last Chronicle of Barset, published in thirty-two weekly parts, December 1866-July 1867, by Smith, Elder.
- 1867 *Nina Balatka* (2 vols., William Blackwood).
The Last Chronicle of Barset (2 vols., Smith, Elder).
The Claverings (2 vols., Smith, Elder).
Lotta Schmidt: and Other Stories (contents published between 1861 and 1867; 1 vol., Alexander Strahan).
Resigns from the Post Office and leaves the Civil Service.
- 1867-8 *Linda Tressel*, serialized in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October 1867-May 1868.

- 1867-9 *Phineas Finn: The Irish Member*, serialized in *St. Paul's Magazine*, October 1867-May 1869.
- 1867-70 Serves as Editor of *St. Paul's Magazine* (founded 1 October 1867).
- 1868 *Linda Tressel* (2 vols., William Blackwood). Visits United States to negotiate postal treaty. Stands as Liberal candidate for Beverley, in Yorkshire, in General Election; finishes at bottom of poll.
- 1868-9 *He Knew He Was Right*, published in thirty weekly parts, from October 1868-May 1869, by Virtue.
- 1869 *Phineas Finn* (2 vols., Virtue).
He Knew He Was Right (2 vols., Alexander Strahan).
Did He Steal It? A Comedy in Three Acts (privately printed and never performed; a dramatization of *The Last Chronicle of Barset*).
- 1869-70 *The Vicar of Bullhampton*, serialized in eleven monthly parts, July 1869-May 1870, by Bradbury & Evans.
An Editor's Tales, serialized in *St. Paul's Magazine*, October 1869-May 1870.
- 1870 *The Vicar of Bullhampton* (1 vol., Bradbury & Evans).
An Editor's Tales (1 vol., Alexander Strahan).
The Commentaries of Caesar (1 vol., William Blackwood).
Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite (1 vol., Hurst & Blackett); also serialized in *Macmillan's Magazine*, May-December.
- 1870-1 *Ralph the Heir*, serialized in *St. Paul's Magazine*, January 1870-July 1871.
- 1871 *Ralph the Heir* (3 vols., Hurst & Blackett). Gives up house at Waltham Cross; visits Australia.
- 1871-2 Travelling in Australia and New Zealand.
- 1871-3 *The Eustace Diamonds*, serialized in the *Fortnightly Review*, July 1871-February 1873.
- 1872 *The Golden Lion of Granpère* (1 vol., Tinsley); also serialized in *Good Words*, January-August. Returns to England and settles at 39 Montagu Square, London.