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The Way We Live Now

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

THE WAY WE LIVE NOW

Anthony Trollope

Introduction and Notes by
PETER MERCHANT

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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First published in 2001 by Wordsworth Editions Limited
8B East Street, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9HJ

ISBN 978 1 85326 255 5

Typeset in Great Britain by Antony Gray
Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

Long novels are not necessarily short on thrills. Spectacularly, and on two separate levels, *The Way We Live Now* offers us the excitement of large undertakings. We feel this both inside the novel – most memorably, perhaps, in the chapters that tell of the dinner for the Emperor of China – and as attaching to it, through the author's efforts to create an action equal to the bold sweep of his title. The invaluable *Autobiography* in which Anthony Trollope (born April 1815) covers the first sixty years of his life describes *The Way We Live Now* as a powerful satire prompted by his awareness of the growing social evil of dishonesty, 'dishonesty magnificent in its proportions, and climbing into high places'.[1] Stretching to a hundred chapters

1 Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (ed. Michael Sadleir and Frederick Page, introduced by P. D. Edwards), Oxford University Press, Oxford 1980, p. 354. Subsequent references to this edition, when appropriate, use the abbreviation *Auto.*

Trollope had evidently been stirred to strenuous action by his now declining popularity, and had not resigned himself to a graceful resting on whatever laurels might still be left. Even when he could see his 'leisure evening' closing inexorably around him he was very emphatically not yet ready to go gentle into that good night. Still less had he felt such a readiness three years earlier, while he was engaged in writing *The Way We Live Now*.

Trollope fortunately found that he had one other option, a fine flare of energetic rage against the dying of the light; and moreover, to school him in this, he had one great example from the satirical literature of the past. The *Dunciad* of Alexander Pope (1688–1744), in which according to Thackeray 'the shafts of his satire rise sublimely', [3] has the poet watch the light of civilisation itself gradually darken, a black comic catastrophe in the face of which he ends unreconciled and unforgiving. London and its institutions are imagined by Pope as caught up in a perverse cultural project which is calculated to 'blot out Order, and extinguish Light' (*Dunciad*, 4. 14). Trollope in *The Way We Live Now* is similarly suspicious of what comes from the heart of the city, and similarly apprehensive about the new dispensation, not of 'Universal Darkness' (*Dunciad*, 4. 656) but of 'universal credit' (p. 643), for which everything now appears prepared. In all this, he places Disraeli – a 'vulgar man' (p. 413) but 'a political master' (p. 520) and, at the time of writing, the once and future Prime Minister – where Pope had placed Walpole. Like Pope, too, he creates a work which is thick with topical references, and visibly rooted in the London that its readers know, but which reaches out beyond its time and place to give the sense of a far wider crisis. Now and again, the novel's realistic detail takes on a grotesque dimension quite unusual in Trollope's writing; and, as it does so, the purely local is wrought up into the comprehensive.

The affinity with *The Dunciad* is perhaps surprising since initially there was little to set Trollope following in Pope's footsteps. Only the coincidence of his having – like Pope – a strong classicising bent could lead him, as it were, to the same well-heads. But in a later age, and selling to a market geared more and more to popular prints and newspapers, verse satires very different in format from *The Dunciad* began to appear – published serially, incorporating illustrations – and it is considerably easier to trace the lineaments of nineteenth-

3 *Alexander Pope: A Critical Anthology* (ed. F. W. Bateson and N. A. Joukovsky), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1971, p. 233

and serialised in twenty monthly parts of five chapters each between February 1874 and September 1875 (both before and somewhat after the publication in July 1875 of the two-volume book edition), Trollope's novel is itself magnificent in its proportions; and it not only takes its rise from some towering masterpieces of the satiric tradition but aspires unapologetically to the heights more recently hit by those proud pinnacles of Victorian serial fiction, W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847–8) and Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–3), which had likewise appeared in monthly numbers.

The run of *The Way We Live Now* of course took Trollope past his sixtieth birthday, and this was a milestone as momentous for him as for most men. As he approached it, he knew that it would soon become practically impossible for him to pursue 'one of the great joys of [his] life' (*Auto*, p. 64), hunting with hounds. In other respects, however, reports of Trollope's retirement were greatly exaggerated. Even while he nerved himself for the ordeal of disposing – after one last season – of his 'old horses, and . . . saddles and horse-furniture' (p. 351), he was showing himself still to be a crack hand with 'the whip of the satirist . . . the lash of objurgation' (p. 355), which he wielded in his newly published novel with a vigour that might have done credit to a writer half his age. The mellowed mildness of the 'sixty-year-old smiling public man' was as foreign to Trollope's nature as to W. B. Yeats's. And Trollope at sixty was therefore not at all like Mr Jarndyce in *Bleak House*: serene, benign, avuncular. Rather, he had discovered a new resolution in himself, and a new passion. By his own account of matters in 1876 (when he had six years left to live), he was determined to enter a furiously productive and provocative final phase of work:

> As to that leisure evening of life, I must say that I do not want it. I can conceive of no contentment of which toil is not to be the immediate parent . . . . I observe when people of my age are spoken of, they are described as effete and moribund, just burning down the last half inch of the candle in the socket. I feel as though I should still like to make a 'flare up' with my half inch.[2]

2 *The Letters of Anthony Trollope* (ed. N. John Hall, with the assistance of Nina Burgis), 2 vols, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1983, pp. 691, 702. The first two sentences quoted were written on 8 June 1876 to G. W. Rusden; the final two, on a date unknown, to Cecilia Meetkerke. Subsequent references to this edition use the abbreviation *Letters*.

The London chapters of *The Way We Live Now* reinforce Combe's lines of division. Trollope ascribes both to the City and to the West End a distinct identity and shows the novel's characters, 'City people' or 'West End people' (p. 455), being drawn into the ambit either of Gain or of Pleasure. The defining events are, in the first case, the Friday meetings – 'in its own room behind the Exchange' (p. 276) – of the Board of the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway and, in the second, the long nights of wine and cards at the Beargarden. The Beargarden stands 'in the close vicinity of other clubs, in a small street turning out of St James's Street' (p. 22). Here, where the eighteenth century had had its taverns and its chocolate-houses, are the 'hells' of Combe's London – 'The Gaming Houses of an inferior kind, in the neighbourhood of St James's, are denominated "HELLS" ' (*Dance*, i, p. 262) – and the Beargarden is thus the most appropriate possible place for 'the devil of gambling' (p. 37) to seize hold of Sir Felix Carbury. 'Perhaps no young man about town enjoyed the Beargarden more thoroughly than did Sir Felix Carbury' (p. 21). He indeed exemplifies 'the fashion considered to be appropriate to young men about town' (p. 506), living a life so recklessly devoted to 'amusement' and 'excitement' that otherwise 'the world had nothing for him' (pp. 507–8). Sir Felix is the book's principal pleasure-seeker, while Augustus Melmotte – 'established privately in Grosvenor Square', when we first meet him (p. 27), but located 'officially' in Abchurch Lane, between Lombard Street and Cannon Street – is its main money-grubber. As the man who, 'of course, entertains all the City people' (p. 454), Mr Melmotte becomes the presiding genius of the commercial world. His bursting up 'would be the bursting up of half London' (p. 339).

On the face of it, therefore, Melmotte in the City and Sir Felix in the West End – spreading himself over the other half of London – are poles apart. But Trollope has some subtle variations to explore. The character can be taken out of the habitat; and maybe, as when Dickens moved Wemmick between Walworth and Little Britain,[5] the habitat can be taken out of the character. Equally, activities supposed antithetical can reveal themselves as actually interchangeable. One measure of this is the Railway Board becoming 'a sort of Beargarden affair' (p. 343), both because there are members of the Beargarden, tempted across to the City, who also belong to the Board and because the chairman's 'gambling . . . in the City' (p. 92) is

5 See Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, Wordsworth Classics edition, p. 172.

century fiction in these. One such work, the Combe/Rowlandson *English Dance of Death* (with William Combe's couplets and Thomas Rowlandson's aquatint illustrations), was being serialised at the time of Trollope's birth. And the two volumes into which the twenty-four parts of this were collected[4] very conveniently prefigure some of the principles that organise, sixty years on, Trollope's own satirical exposition of the state of the nation. In particular, the assumptions and conventions which govern Combe's approach to human psychology and Combe's moral mapping of London are handed down to *The Way We Live Now* as well.

The trick involves Combe taking a commonplace of social commentary and expanding it into the semblance of an anthropological hypothesis. As the West End and the City are the opposing poles of London life, so, in *The English Dance of Death*, those who are pleasure-seekers line up on one side of the floor and those who are money-grubbers on the other. Humanity is broadly divisible into these two groups, each with its own allotted habitat. If they were to saunter 'down Bond-street, tow'rds the Park', the poem's readers are told, they would find that among 'the young Loungers' idly stalking there the 'Love of Pleasure' held sway; but from Charing Cross to the Exchange the 'Love of Gain' would invariably be found to override all else (*Dance*, ii, pp. 116–17). In Bond Street, what Lady Gew-gaw loves is the *éclat* that goes with being the most fashionable female in town (*Dance*, ii, p. 160). Her City counterparts – representing the other main strain in humankind – have the same itch in a different spot:

> if the Muse should turn her Car
> And eastward drive of Temple Bar,
> Then onward, in due order range
> Or to the Bank or the Exchange,
> Ambition will be found possesst
> Of various forms as in the *West*.
> But MONEY there gives all the fire:–
> 'Tis Wealth to which they all aspire.
>
> [*Dance*, ii, p. 162]

4 *The English Dance of Death*, from the Designs of Thomas Rowlandson, with metrical illustrations by the author of 'Doctor Syntax', 2 vols, R. Ackermann's Repository of Arts, London 1815–16. Subsequent references use the abbreviation *Dance*.

time took Roger as central and normative. Commentators have largely abandoned the character who dilates, in a spirit of either disapproval or incomprehension, upon 'the way of the world' (p. 151) and the way in which 'people live now' (p. 353); the preference today is for readings hinged by way of contrast on the character who actually embodies these supposedly incomprehensible and indefensible things. Such analysis of Melmotte as the pivotal figure in *The Way We Live Now* has meant not only that the novel can contrive to justify its grand-sounding title better than commentary would once permit it to do – and certainly far better than Lady Carbury's novel, *The Wheel of Fortune* (pp. 673–82), has any chance of doing – but that possibly the most complex and challenging piece of character-creation in the whole of Trollope is now receiving the critical attention it deserves.

In recent years, much of that attention has been devoted to deciding how far Melmotte is a prejudiced and anti-Semitic invention on Trollope's part. It is a partly conscientious difficulty which admits of a simple logical solution: not denying the prejudice but denying the antecedent, the dubious assumption – as Trollope presents it (pp. 425) – of Melmotte's having 'been born a Jew' in the first place. The more Melmotte is investigated, in fact, the more resistant he seems to racial and religious classification, the less credible as a distillation of Jewishness, and the more imprinted with indeterminacy. 'Nobody knows what Mr Melmotte is' (p. 495), and he has 'risen no one knew whence' (p. 634). His origins are argued over by his obituarists and biographers (p. 743); and his movements from country to country, before his arrival in London, cannot be definitely established. Melmotte's restless travelling might be seen as a fitting recapitulation of the history of a people 'scattered about all over the world' (p. 593); but 'this surfeited sponge of speculation' – as Sir Felix considers him to be (p. 181) – has also, in the course of his travels, soaked up many non-Jewish influences. John Sutherland describes him as 'a national-racial compendium' (Sutherland, *Literary Detective*, p. 161). Melmotte the universal speculator resembles the universal soldier in the song by Buffy Sainte-Marie: conceived as a complete cultural crossover – 'a Catholic, a Hindu, an atheist and a Jain,/A Buddhist and a Baptist and a Jew' – in order to make him the aggregate of all our follies, and to leave the disquieting suggestion that such men act for and like each and every one of us.

The novel's claims for itself as lashing satire are made good with a vengeance here. Jonathan Swift, in his Preface to *The Battle of the Books* (published 1704), famously defined satire as 'a sort of glass,

only an extension of trying (less by fair means than by foul, in some cases) to win money at cards. 'Commerce on an extended scale' proves as good a source of excitement and amusement as 'whist or unlimited loo' (p. 562). Sir Felix's 'habit of play' (p. 92) is an exportable commodity, travelling with him from West End card-room into City boardroom. That habit is simply writ larger and bolder in Melmotte than it ever could be in Sir Felix, as are all of the 'Frailties' which – according to *The English Dance of Death* (i, p. 258) – an 'excessive love of play' is bound 'to impart . . . to the heart'. Sir Felix does nothing, it seems, that Melmotte is not doing at least as flagrantly. If Sir Felix cruelly mistreats Marie, so too does Melmotte himself. Marie's disillusioning discovery about Sir Felix, 'that her golden idol was made of the basest clay' (p. 631), echoes earlier warnings about Melmotte: 'I fear you will find that your idol has feet of clay' (p. 200). And the shame of Sir Felix being 'found . . . out' by Marie as 'a poor creature' (p. 559) is nothing to the humiliation heaped upon her father when, as the language of the headline-writers and the scandal-mongers has it, 'Melmotte's been found out' (p. 462). So increasingly, as the former's devotion to pleasure and the latter's dedication to gain converge under one umbrella, Sir Felix dwindles from a potential contrast to Melmotte into a pale copy of him, signifying nothing beyond what is already comprised in the great speculator himself. When Trollope's novel echoes Combe's complaint about 'these degenerate days' (*Dance*, i, p. 117), it is in Melmotte that the decay is most sharply seen: 'his position is a sign of the degeneracy of the age' (p. 419).

Melmotte thus enjoys a double rise to prominence: as 'the very navel of the commercial enterprise of the world' (p. 269) and, simultaneously, as the very navel of the artistic conception of Anthony Trollope. Melmotte's elevation involves the dislodgement of another Carbury, Roger, who is Sir Felix's second cousin. For in the process of composition, as John Sutherland has shown (Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction*, p. 118),[6] Roger was relegated while Melmotte came to dominate. Curiously, there is a corresponding shift in the critical history of *The Way We Live Now*, a shift which now appears nearly complete. Little is left of that 'moralizing criticism', as Christopher Herbert terms it (Herbert, pp. 176ff), which for a long

6 Full details of Sutherland's study, and of all other critical works cited here in similarly abbreviated form, can be found in the Bibliography which immediately follows this Introduction.

Clearly, just as Melmotte himself comes to London by a mysterious and circuitous route (via Hamburg and Paris and other places perhaps too numerous to mention), so the idea of creating him comes to Trollope in such a roundabout fashion, mediated through various novels and plays, that it is again impossible to compile a full and reliable family tree. Melmotte has kinsfolk and forebears scattered about all over the world – or all over the nineteenth century, anyway, and all over the corpus of classic English fiction and drama. With Trollope using both historical reference and literary allusion to annex Melmotte's existence to theirs, the wholly appropriate result is a peculiar diffusion of the character's substance. He has, or seems to have, a multitude of lives outside the limits of the text.

This remarkable and barely containable diaspora creates, in the latter stages of the story, a very suggestive complication in Trollope's thinking about Melmotte. Our best clue to it comes, perhaps, when he fastens upon Melmotte the Horatian tag 'Non omnis moriar' (p. 473). Horace in his *Odes* (3.30.6) meant by this that he would not wholly die because posterity would preserve his works and secure his literary reputation. As applied to Melmotte, however, it takes on a more sinister resonance: he will not wholly die because he is like the fabled hydra, which could always dodge destruction by growing new heads. The 'recuperative powers of modern commerce' (p. 566) are not to be underestimated. Melmotte certainly senses something superhuman in himself; the flattering designation of 'commercial giant' has brought the belief that such a power in the land as he has now become 'would not all die' (p. 621). And Trollope feels the force of that belief, as much as he feels the pressures of his own plot. In so far as his approach to Melmotte is – like that of the first people to rush into print about him (p. 743) – biographical and realistic, Trollope's novel has to be pitched towards the deadliest and most emphatic kind of closure. But in so far as he presents Melmotte as a type, as the very navel of the commercial enterprise of the world, he is committed to telling a tale of adaptation and survival.

On the first of those levels, requiring some savage nemesis for Melmotte, Trollope's planning is as good as done for him. The novel could very justifiably paint itself in the colours of Lady Carbury's, as it bids fair to relate 'the great traditional story of fortune's wheel, the rise, the grandeur, and the fall of a great man' (Cockshut, p. 205). Melmotte is the *illustris vir*, 'the boy out of the gutter' (p. 473) made too great for his own good; and the narrative of his life must therefore mark out – as realistically as is consistent with that structure – an ascent (Melmotte *aspirans*), an apex (Melmotte

wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own'. Melmotte is installed in *The Way We Live Now*, accordingly, as the mirror in which we are expected at first to fail to recognise our own reflections. The further the novel's readers were to stray from any sense of Melmotte as the enemy deep within, and the more they insisted upon stigmatising him as some alien Other quite unconnected with themselves, the more successful – and Swiftian – Trollope's satire would be. Trollope is like Swift in that he knows the difference between crudely pandering to his readers' prejudices and carefully, subversively, teasing them out. Arguably, therefore, although negative stereotypes are indeed brought into play in Trollope's representations of Jewishness, across a wide range of major and minor characters both here and elsewhere, the trap is also subtly sprung upon those stereotypes where it matters most. Jonathan Freedman's view, in his cogent and thoughtful discussion of *The Way We Live Now* as a 'seemingly anti-Semitic' text, is that such stereotyping is both 'brilliantly deployed' and 'thoroughly critiqued' (Freedman, p. 88).

One other common and constructive line of critical inquiry likewise hooking on to Melmotte's tangled origins is that which seeks to identify possible models for the character. Readers now have a wide choice of real-life figures upon whom Trollope might have drawn. Melmotte is George Hudson the railway king 'reincarnated', for example (Martin, p. 234), or is 'inspired . . . at least partly' by the disgraced financier John Sadleir, who had killed himself in 1856 (Sutherland, *Literary Detective*, p. 674). Equally, the evidence could point in the direction of Albert Gottheimer (Russell, pp. 159–61) or Lord Rothschild (Sutherland, *Literary Detective*, pp. 159–60), who were both alive at the time of writing. Trollope's own account of himself as an author who does not 'indulge in personalities' but rather puts together 'created personages' (*Auto*, pp. 99, 126) might encourage us to widen the search still further; Melmotte is not the fictional translation of any single individual but a composite of many. To that lengthening list of candidates we must then add quite an extensive range of literary sources of which Trollope is presumed to have been mindful. For Bryan Cheyette, Melmotte is 'an intertextual figure, deriving from both Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* . . . and Charles Dickens's Mr Merdle in *Little Dorrit*' (Cheyette, p. 38); other scholars describe an even more boldly transmigratory Melmotte, seeing him as 'Trollope's Shylock' (Rosenberg, p. 149) or as a lineal descendant of Sir Giles Overreach from Massinger's *New Way to Pay Old Debts* (Herbert, p. 181).

commercial wealth' (p. 698). Apart from Roger, for whom credit has always been anathema, all have caught the infection from Melmotte and 'all play his game, which is to believe and induce belief, in the absence of genuine values' (Fleishman, p. 79). Whereas Dickens's *Bleak House* described a contagion bred in the slums and then borne 'through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud and to the highest of the high',[7] in *The Way We Live Now* the original source of corruption is not at the unregarded base of the Victorian social pyramid but up aloft: the 'topping Croesus of the day' (p. 18), the colossus of commerce who 'carried the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway in his pocket' (p. 268). And from here pernicious practices cascade downward through society so pervasively that Trollope sees no shortage of characters equipped and inclined to pursue what Melmotte has begun. Their wheeling and dealing, also, is a telling index of the way we live now.

Thus it is that Trollope co-ordinates the various elements of his satire, and ensures that what might seem the loss of the linch-pin, with seventeen chapters left still to fill, does not actually cause the writing to lose touch with its main organising idea. One key principle for novelists which Trollope lays down in his *Autobiography* is that the story 'should be all one, yet . . . may have many parts', provided that those parts are smoothly and satisfyingly integrated (*Auto*, p. 238). *The Way We Live Now* makes strenuous efforts in this direction, although its author modestly declined to pronounce it a complete success. The reader's interest could have been more evenly distributed across the novel's various constituent parts if two love-triangles – between which explicit parallels are drawn (pp. 354–5, 546) – had not both fallen a little flat for Trollope. One sees Ruby Ruggles scrapped over by two men: John Crumb with his 'dusty . . . nobility' (p. 332) and, in the drab and diminished form of 'the bad baronet Felix Carbury', a seducer who – no less than the dusty suitor himself – 'belong[s] entirely to stereotype' (Gilmour, 'A Lesser Thackeray?', p. 201). As for the other such triangle, which in fact appears first (in Chapter VI), Trollope himself admitted in his *Autobiography* that 'the young lady with her two lovers is weak and vapid . . . Roger Carbury, Paul Montague, and Henrietta Carbury are uninteresting' (*Auto*, p. 356). Of all the movements that the book's many characters make in its concluding chapters (movements into new alliances, or to new lands), theirs are the least likely to

7 See Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, Wordsworth Classics edition, p. 507.

triumphans) and a descent (Melmotte *moriens*). From gutter to glory to grave, this modern Swindler's Progress measures itself against the time-honoured tragic pattern, stated for example at the end of Marlowe's play *Edward II*:

> Base Fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel
> There is a point to which when men aspire
> They tumble headlong down . . .

Melmotte's very public prostration in the House of Commons (p. 637), quickly followed by his suicide, proves to us that he has passed that point.

But death is not (by some seventeen chapters) the end in this novel. Melmotte posthumously emerges as the conquering Galilean of the commercial world, since much of which he had been the incarnation still remains; swindling is almost a modern article of faith, and 'the Americanisation of business has been deferred rather than defeated' (Easson, p. 88). William Cobbett's watchword in his *Political Register* pieces of 1807–8 had been 'Perish Commerce.' Trollope is unable to write that script, despite sympathising with Cobbett's conviction that commerce on an extended scale is merely a device for diverting yet more wealth to those who least deserve to have it. Rather, in *The Way We Live Now*, one 'cormorant' (p. 181) among many perishes while commerce generally continues to prosper. However transmuted after the fall of Melmotte, it will still in Trollope's view survive, inwoven as it is with absolutely every aspect of the way we live now. In the world Melmotte leaves behind him, commerce has both latched on to love and attached itself to art, so that nakedly commercial considerations drive the courtships of Georgiana and her generation – 'Who thinks about love nowadays?' (p. 723) – and also shape the publishing policy of Messrs Leadham and Loiter (pp. 673–4). Melmotte's habits of glorified money-grubbing, and of 'cheating and forging and stealing' (p. 490), are now, the book suggests, imperishably a part of English life. For Melmotte is far from being the only character on show who, in the words of Jonathan Freedman, 'generates false value by means of fraudulent writing' (Freedman, p. 83). There are also those who scribble IOUs – dealing, therefore, in 'unsecured paper' (p. 75) as worthless as Melmotte's Mexican Railway scrip. And there is Lady Carbury, for whom puff – defined as a mere loading of the air (p. 676) – is so much more than performance that she makes herself a perfect mistress of those same 'magnificently false representations' which must be instrumental in any business tycoon's rise to 'the splendour of

world.'[8]

Trollope's world can consequently come to seem too prosaically familiar, and Trollope himself too guileless, for readers who would have Charles Dickens or George Eliot set the standard. Unfavourable comparisons with those novelists, and others, are temptingly easy. Trollope drew Henry James's surprised distaste, at one point, with his 'deliberately inartistic' narration.[9] However, Trollope's disarming honesty serves an especially important purpose in *The Way We Live Now*. If the novelist can be (or appear to be) completely open with his reader, he is thereby very effectively distanced from 'the great speculator who robs everybody' (*Auto*, p. 355). Trollope too has something to sell, of course, but something with substance to it, and something by which no purchaser should feel cheated. His is honest commerce and not fraud. Our trust in the vendor is what the product most proudly prizes and most wants to promote. To that end, the message sent out to the reader of *The Way We Live Now*, for whom the masculine pronoun is always used (pp. 432, 582, 734), is that Anthony Trollope will be travelling the whole way with him, taking him in hand – 'But we must go back a little' (p. 64) – and treating him as both a valued and a like-minded companion. The reader need not fear the broaching of any topic inadmissible in these sociable situations but has the author's assurance that all else will be told without quailing or veiling, however dark and unflattering a picture might emerge of the way we live now.

What we have from Trollope, then, is all the comradeship he finds is possible, and all the candour he deems to be proper. In its appeal to shared experience, with an airy 'We all' here (pp. 72, 301) or an affable 'I . . . or you, O reader' there (p. 264), *The Way We Live Now* incorporates a continuous personal address, like a letter of which each one of its readers is a favoured recipient. The letter that it most resembles is the 'plain-spoken and truth-telling letter' sent by Mr Brehgert (whom Trollope, impressively, has it in him to admire) to Georgiana: 'very long', which might tax us, but inviting at the same time, because it comes from an 'affectionate friend' and radiates a 'single-minded genuine honesty' (p. 601). So Trollope leaves it to

8 From *The Examiner*, 28 August 1875; reprinted in *Trollope: The Critical Heritage* (ed. Donald Smalley), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1969, p. 410.

9 See pp. 535–6 of the cited *Critical Heritage* volume. The passage under discussion here is from *Barchester Towers*, and in the Wordsworth Classics edition of that novel appears on pp. 112–13.

intrigue or excite. But in order to counter that perceived deficiency Trollope decided to give more of the story to Mrs Hurtle, the American 'woman or wild cat' (p. 499) whose air of 'dangerous mystery' (p. 208) and 'battery of . . . charms' (p. 356) stamped her in the estimation of the writer as one of the novel's chief successes, along with 'Melmotte . . . and the Longestaffes, and Nidderdale & all the "rowdy" lot' (*Letters*, p. 660).

Trollope's *Autobiography* admits something else about *The Way We Live Now* which has the potential to be even more damaging: 'The book has the fault which is to be attributed to almost all satires, whether in prose or verse. The accusations are exaggerated' (*Auto*, p. 355). So the novel, as it took shape, risked tumbling headlong into the very fault, 'dishonesty', which it reprehended as 'abominable'. There was indeed reason for Trollope to worry about his own closeness to the egregiously dishonest Melmotte, whose appetite for large and ambitious undertakings already appeared emulated in the novel's very conception. Melmotte now masterminds the grandest enterprise, 'when you consider the amount of territory manipulated, which has ever opened itself before the eyes of a great commercial people' (p. 263); and the wheel of literary fortune is bringing Trollope himself to a point from which he will claim a back catalogue of 'literary performances' probably 'more in amount than the works of any other living English author' (*Auto*, p. 362). An urgent need arises for Trollope to create, somehow, a perceptible gap between Melmotte's activities and his own. He does this by developing a narrative manner for himself which will make him, the teller of the tale, the representative in the text of everything that opposes Melmotte's errors and excesses. He first ensures that, although the 'Now' of the title announces a novel which (as some of my Notes will indicate) is demonstrably up to the minute in respect of its situating detail, its format and techniques have nothing capriciously innovative about them but evince a firm preference for solidly traditional methods. Trollope is a respecter of forms and not, like Melmotte, a roughshod rider over them. He then avoids, for the most part, whatever might smack in this context of 'a false spirit of speculation' (p. 338); there is little psychological probing and, except for some touches of the grotesque around Melmotte himself, no visionary enlargement in the book's descriptive language. Much is sacrificed for the sake of a restrained and faithful chronicling – so that the only ostentation which the novel evinces is in the act of sacrifice itself. As one of its earliest reviewers observed, 'Mr Trollope does not seek to throw a transforming imaginative veil over his

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