



*The Morality of Irony and
Unreliable Narrative in Trollope's
The Warden and Barchester Towers**

PAUL LYONS

... not quite sticking to veracity, as indeed mercy never should. (*Barchester Towers* 378)

MUCH OF THE DELIGHT OF READING Trollope is the result of his tone: there is a relaxing quality to his pacing, a likable combination of sentiment, good sense, and sympathetic alertness to his voice, and always a sense that the narrator understands human weakness and transforms the worst to humor through tender irony. To be sure Trollope prizes this sociability with his readers: "Our doctrine," says the narrator of *Barchester Towers*, confiding his method and seeming to practice it, "is that the author and the reader should move along together in full confidence with each other" (127). In complete contrast to an author like Kafka, who maintains that literature must act as an axe to the frozen sea within his readers, Trollope claims that it is the first necessity of the writer's position "that he make himself pleasant" (*Autobiography* 195), that he "charm his readers, though his readers will probably not know they have been charmed" (212).

The undeniable pleasantness of the Trollopien narrator, however, has consistently misled (charmed in a double sense) his readers, for the teller's role in *The Warden* and *Barchester Towers* is subtle and complex: his surface jocularly and frequent light-handed digressions or intrusions underscore Trollope's serious thematic intentions and mask a pervasively manipulative, complicated, and ironic technique. At every level—syntax, tone, diction, structure, idea—Trollope's narrator disarms while he operates, creating in the reader an unwitting moral receptiveness through what Robert Heilman calls "two-tone" (301) effects, prose that speaks to the reader on several levels at once, while suspending commitment to competing sympathies and perspectives.¹

Far from writing with "absence of style," as George Meredith maintained (qtd. Bradford Booth 217), or with an undistinctive but lucid style as many contemporary critics maintain, Trollope's narrator employs a large set of rhetorical devices and structures to reinforce the novel's theme of the complexity of moral judgments.² Syntactically as well as thematically he stresses that the mixed nature of human situations necessitates a sympathetic balancing act; his normative coordinating sentence asserts fair play: "She was not . . . but she was" (*Warden* 47), "a dull house . . . though . . . everything was of the very best" (68). Simultaneous with and underscoring this equal apportioning of praise and blame are a variety of leveling devices, deflations where in a sequence of positive clauses or words a sudden negative will undercut the whole effect—"excited, happy, and merciless" (*Barchester* 356)—patterns where words infiltrate innocuous clauses with ironic touches that alter the trajectory of a sentence. When he says that Grantly's arguments are "stoutly maintained, and no doubt felt, by all the archdeacon's friends" (*Warden* 8), for instance, readers have no reason to suspect the narrator's approbation until they reach the word "friends," at which point "no doubt felt" reverses its implications, containing potential irony—why should what is stoutly maintained not be felt?—and "stoutly maintained" begins to sound ridiculous, like partisan fatheadedness. Not surprisingly, given his mock-epic tendencies, zeugma is a favorite device: "conversant with human nature and novels" (*Warden* 90), for example, converts realistic insight into fictional truth. Furthermore, that Grantly keeps "boots and sermons" (63) in his closet muddies our view of the archdeacon's piety; when Grantly "looks to heaven or to the ceiling for support" (53) the unexpected placement of "ceiling" makes it seem the likelier choice and implies upside-down morality—why should a ceiling support?³ Such effects, discussable as forms of irony, function to show disparity between viewpoints (Scholes and Kellogg 240), lead the reader to expect and mentally complete a given thought, and then undermine that thought to present an opposite perspective. The "apparent casualness" of the ironic style that works these surprise reversals and levelings, shuttling the reader between ways of seeing, is Trollope's "donnee, the ground he requires to construct his illusion, in which confessed unreality is used to enhance the reality that matters" (Fogle 347).

What matters, as Trollope claims in the *Autobiography*, are "other aims than the elucidation of plot" (194). Trollope consistently stresses character and situation over plot, in *Barchester Towers* deliberately sabotaging plot by revealing the outcome of encounters and insisting

that though the reader knows its ending his story "shall have lost none of its interest" (127). In contrast to the writer who must hold attention through mystery and suspense, he will depend on constant interaction with the reader, as Booth puts it, "recruit[ing] the reader" (206), yet he maintains that "every sentence, every word . . . should tend to the telling of the story" (198), and that the author must "weigh the rhythm of every word" (*Autobiography* 203). What such a careful but suspenseless story aims at is also made clear in the *Autobiography*, which refutes the Trollopien narrator's assertion that he is governed solely by the comic muse with an emphatic statement of the traditional moral basis of Trollope's art: "the novelist, if he have a conscience, must preach his sermons with the same purpose as the clergyman, and must have his own ethics . . . he can make virtue alluring and vice ugly" (185).

But despite considering himself "a preacher of sermons" (145), Trollope, like the narrator of *Barchester Towers*, feels that "there is perhaps no greater hardship at the present than the necessity of listening to sermons" (6). In *Ralph the Heir* Trollope says the reader of the novel would lay the book down "did he suspect that instruction, like a snake-in-the-grass, like physic beneath sugar, was to be imposed upon him" (338 qtd. Hauerwas). Trollope, in other words, must preach an antisermonistic sermon, a tale amusing on the surface but morally instructive. He must teach covertly through his manner or way of seeing rather than through the plotted events that hold the reader. In this his deftly ironic method will encourage the reader to follow his example and "see . . . sympathetically" (Hauerwas 45) and morally, whether or not the mechanics of the example are detected.⁴ The subtlety with which Trollope accomplishes such humanistic ends is evident when as brilliant a critic as Henry James, while consistently underestimating the control and relationship to theme of Trollope's style, expresses the purpose and effectiveness of his work precisely: "Trollope will remain one of the most trustworthy though not one of the most eloquent of the writers who have helped the heart of man to know itself. The heart of man does not always desire this knowledge; it prefers sometimes to look at history another way" (*Partial Portraits* 133).

Clearly, forcing profound introspection does not easily accord with the agreed upon geniality of Trollope's narrator. But in *The Warden* and *Barchester Towers* it is precisely the handling of the narrator, the choice and modulation of his voice, that enables Trollope, under cover of straight entertainment, to inveigle the reader into adopting the contrary stances that will prove on the pulse the complexity of

human emotions. The narrator is not, as James and others assume, Trollope himself. As Louis Rubin (following Wayne Booth) has demonstrated, "a novel is told by an implied author, who is created by the biographical author and is part of the formal experience of the novel" (viii). With Trollope the distinction between implied and biographical authors ought to be doubly clear because the "author" is a character in the story, a shifty persona through whom Trollope tells a story dramatizing the necessity of full-hearted sympathy and forgiveness in a world where everyone's behavior merits laughter, and who demonstrates the near impossibility of securing definitive meanings or passing judgment accurately on another's heart. For as much as we like the narrator, embrace his humanity, and learn sympathy from him, there is little of what he says that can finally be trusted.⁵ Like the world in which he lives, where there is "no good unalloyed, and little evil that has not some seed of what is goodly" (*Warden* 127), the narrator is often curiously trustworthy and questionable within the same speech act, and this mixture of motives itself throws into question the reliability of his trustworthy passages.⁶

To begin with, the teller himself maintains contradictory attitudes towards his own story, undermining the reliability of his stance. He constantly reminds the reader that his narrative is fiction while insisting that it is true, told with "tedious accuracy" (*Barchester* 460) and "no less the fact" (497); and this double stance is reinforced by ambiguously proleptic phrases like "which is about to" (*Warden* 28) that simultaneously suggest authorial foreknowledge (fiction) and the participant's sense of impending doom (psychological realism).⁷ The opening lines of *The Warden* suggest that the events narrated began "a few years since" but that since he does not want to offend characters similar to those described in the novel the reader should "presume" that the cathedral city, "let us call it Barchester . . . is a quiet town" (1). By the end of the novel, an ending given for "the custom of the thing" (181), the narrator is writing in the present tense, as though the action continues even as he rounds out the fiction. In *Barchester Towers* he stops the action out of fear that "every well-bred reader of these pages will lay down the book with disgust" (384), equating the reader's time with time in the novel, and imagining his readers' reactions much as if they were characters (well-bred or not), a status he explicitly confers in *Barchester Towers* by including them among Eleanor's friends: "You, O Reader, and I and Eleanor's other friends" (241). For James, such intrusions were Trollope's "suicidal" way of "reminding the reader that the story he was telling was only, after all, make-believe" ("Trollope" 390) and Trollope's books being filled with

overly appropriate names like Dr Fillgrave and Mrs Lookaloft were "slaps at credulity" (*Partial Portraits* 116). Yet Trollope's narrator often regrets that things are as they are, implying that he has no control over events—"she may get kissed" (*Warden* 91)—that events are sliding into historical facts that he can only record and that as a human recorder he may not overhear "all that is said" by his heroes (54). "It was a pity," he observes of the drunken Slope, "that in such a state he could not have encountered Mrs Proudie" (*Barchester* 381). "It were to be wished devoutly that she had not done so" (385), he writes, after Eleanor has boxed Slope's ears.

This fundamental instability of the text's foundation, its simultaneous claims for fictionality and truth, is not conventional unreliability, in which, as Wayne Booth defines it, the speaker's norms differ discernibly from those assumed to be held by the implied author (159).⁸ In fact, considering the biographical evidence of letters, interviews, and autobiography we may assume that Trollope's narrator generally reflects his sentiments, the workings of his mind, and his political and moral convictions, however often his specific claims may be laid open to question. When, for instance, the narrator of *Barchester Towers* speaks of Harding having been "ruthlessly driven" (9) from the hospital there is no reason to doubt his distaste for what has happened, but the phrase does not accurately describe the warden's triumphant resignation, and it cannot even be taken as one of the narrator's quick shifts into the idiom of the character whose thoughts he reveals. Through such strokes Trollope, having endowed his narrator with a voice sympathetic with his own, projects the unreliability of his narrator and suggests that the complexity of human nature makes omniscience impossible in life or on paper. Trollope allows his narrator the traditional stance of omniscience, but at every point denies the reliability of that omniscience. The unreliably omniscient narrator destabilizes any notion of reliability, restating in the conflict between fiction and reality the classical problem of words not being things but arbitrary symbols for things to which the reader must bring meaning. "An over-attention to words instead of things" (*Warden* 65) is a fault, and not only because "words . . . forsake, elude, disappoint, and play the deuce" (*Barchester* 167). Even if one could say what one felt, Trollope suggests, the complexity of human motivations and the way temperament, mood, and opinion inscribe and entangle themselves in the plainest statements always make for what Wallace Stevens calls "erratic" readings. Trollope's consistent description of people in terms of what they are not ("Grantly is by no means a bad man" [*Warden* 13]) rather than what they are suggests that

"veracity" demands distance from the sayable and recommends tender, humane irony. The striking feature of Trollope's realism is thus precisely his denial of the possibility of realism and his equation of that impossibility with the unreliability of all acts of perception. But at the same time his pronouncement that fiction cannot be true asserts itself as a truth without disqualifying itself by suggesting that fiction leads to kinds of truth and by arguing that the acknowledgement of unreliability and fissures in communication jolt the reader into active moral speculation.

The dualistic nature of the narrator calls further attention to the issue of the text's reliability. With few exceptions, Trollope's narrator has complete omniscience. He may record the "many shades between love and indifference" (*Barchester* 211), note the exact moment "the first shade of doubt" (*Warden* 2) falls across Harding's mind, reproduce with intricate detail the unconscious psychological debates within his characters, flash backwards or forwards, and shift scenes with cinematic rapidity. But despite this ability to peer into the minds and hearts of his characters, the narrator is also a character whose personality is revealed progressively and whose acquaintance is part of the pleasure of the novel. He constantly refers to personal encounters with characters in the novel, and his sliding present tenses and declarative "is's" suggest the writer who slips out of the tavern to sketch his associates while their dialogue is still fresh in his mind—the writer whose "gossip" tends to help "shift and show different points of view and a many-faced morality" (Hardy 120). When he asserts that no one knows the cost of Harding's music books except "the author, the publisher, and Reverend Theophilus Grantly" (*Warden* 6) he puts writers (Harding, the narrator himself) on the same level of physical reality as characters. Since authors are a fact, characters are real; since characters are characters, the author is a fiction. As a fictive personality the narrator casts himself as the down-to-earth teller who cuts through "conventional absurdity" (*Barchester* 499), dislikes the artificiality of tinting the "final pages with couleur de rose" (481), but is drawn into robust sentiment by his attachment to both his reader and his characters. We must imagine from his repeated digressions on what a man can know only after forty that he is a jovial, elderly country gentleman (not Trollope commuting to London or complaining about his wretched childhood in the *Autobiography*) who is almost overfond of chatting. He has a violent distaste for "the bore of the age"—the preaching clergyman, who, as is clear when he describes bumping into "a young [preacher] friend . . . the other day" (*Barchester* 47) and sympathizing with the man's poor listeners, is an ongoing

concern. Still, he is careful not "to be thought to scoff at the pulpit" (44). He is conscious too of foibles of his own that link him to his characters: when he says that to withstand Madeline's smile "a man should be cased in triple steel" (252), it is clear he includes himself. Thus, though the other characters in the novel do not seem aware of him, he is not a disembodied voice. The reader, to believe anything he says, must accept his assertions that he knows Harding, has sat in the pew, and has trouble enduring the "cold, clammy perspiration" of Slope's handshake (25).

The effect of this co-presence and convergence of omniscient and first-person "eyewitness" voices is simultaneously to confirm and call into question the veracity of any passage in the narrative. Because of the narrator's first hand contact with the characters he may be thought in a better position to "know" than the traditional historian (author-historian), who is separated from the events he narrates by time and must sift through accumulated materials to find what is significant. Traditionally, if the story teller is in the story, his "assertions gain in weight" (Lubbock 263). But the fact that the teller is also a character in his own fictional world forces investigation of his reliability. Though he sees into characters, to be credible as a character himself he must have likes, dislikes, idiosyncrasies, inconsistencies—he must see through the lens of his own conditioned biases. Human perception, the narrator himself would argue, is limited—no man can infallibly know the workings of another's heart—much is a matter of feeling, disposition, and motives, and we must imagine that the narrator's motives, like Slope's and most men's, are mixed. In a world where it "takes an age to ascertain the truth of any question!" (*Warden* 134), and where it is "hard . . . to judge the feelings of others" (*Barchester* 265), the narrator's fear that he has been too hasty in "representing" Grantly's faults implicitly suggests that all of the book's portraits are partial. The portrait-softening he performs while weighing the archdeacon's faults against his merits suggests that if he has emphasized the bad side of one character all along it has been to exaggerate the goodness of another, and in the imagery with which he surrounds his principal players he clearly stacks the deck by making "our good, kind, loving warden" (*Warden* 23) whose every "moods are kind and sweet" (55) a Christ figure beset by satanic opponents. Like Milton's Satan in the council in hell, "the archdeacon cease[s], and [stands] self-satisfied, watching the effect of his spoken wisdom" (80). Driven by such "merciless tyrant[s]" (81) Harding must leave his garden, "make his last adieux to every tree, and shrub" (116). Even when the narrator admits that "opinion was much

divided" (175) over Harding's conduct he undercuts the validity of both sides by demonstrating how perception of Harding is governed by the affiliations of his perceivers—those motivated by a desire to preserve the status quo condemn him, those less politically motivated praise him. And at the end of *Barchester Towers* when the narrator might seem confused as he leaves Harding as "not a man to be admired and talked of . . . but . . . a good man" (499), his phrasing is tricking us into asking why we do not generally admire men like Harding who are simply good.

Once detected, the manipulative partiality of the narrator's portraiture seems almost excessive, and when he admits that he "does not like Mr Slope" (*Barchester* 55) or refers to the "heartless cruelty of a Slope" (103), he makes the reader question whether anything he could say about the man would be unprejudiced. Even when he later claims, for instance, that Slope has "an uneasy conscience" (*Barchester* 253) we must question the impulse, wondering whether, since there is nothing in Slope's manner to corroborate the narrator's choice of words, the remark is either overtly ironic or part of the narrator's characteristic conciliatory tendency—whether his philosophy of mixed human motivations leads him into false and convenient rounding out of characters. Certainly, we must take as ironic his reluctance at "own[ing]" his belief that Slope "lied" (*Barchester* 306). In short, once the narrator has convinced the reader of his place in *Barchester*, his words on perception must be applied to him: "It is astonishing how much difference the point of view makes in the aspect of all we look at!" (*Barchester* 217).

Because of this interestedness and confidentiality, without which we could not believe the narrator, his words must be constantly examined against the actions he describes (which are also his words), and measured against what the reader in retrospect or re-reading perceives as his agenda. We must expect that when the narrator treats characters he will be influenced by events we cannot see, and expect that Trollope has an overall strategy for making the narrator guide the reader into perceiving events in particular ways. Since Trollope, as he says, is preaching a sermon and enforcing an ethical code and yet remains pleasant, he must induce the reader to view situations from reversible sympathetic viewpoints. This "maddening tendency," as Ross Murfin calls it, to endorse an institution or point of view and then engage in a satire of it (17), involves a trapping of the reader in hasty, incomplete judgments, a manipulation of the reader toward moments of self-examination that the surface sociability of the elderly *Barchester* narrator subtly conceals.⁹ "When the

narrator judges," as Booth points out, "how is the reader to avoid judging?" (382). (Not judging, or holding against each other conflicting alternatives, is also a kind of judging.) And if the reader is truly made sociable with the characters through the narrator and sees characters holding competing and potentially unsavory sentiments—for example Harding "hardly wishe[s] his daughter to hate" Slope "but . . . prefer[s] that to her loving him" (*Barchester* 107)—how can he or she avoid sympathetic involvement?

Trollope's much discussed portrayal of Grantly, which he rated among his best, exemplifies this calculated complexity of method. It is difficult at any moment to ascertain what the narrator makes of the "worldly" archdeacon. We are told at once that Grantly is "by no means a bad man" (*Warden* 13), but the phrase leaves us guessing. If he is not comparatively or actively bad are we to consider him a good man? Such passages, which seem to make light of his machinations or exculpate him from militancy, consistently draw attention to his shortcomings; laced with apparently sympathetic irony, they pose interpretational problems: Grantly is a "moral man, believing the precepts which he teaches, and believing also that he acts up to them" though the narrator "cannot say that he would give his coat to the man who took his cloak" (14). But what does "moral" mean here, if it cannot be evidenced by practice? And that the narrator "cannot say" that Grantly would give up his coat, that he stops just short of saying Grantly definitely would not do it seems less tact than tactic, a manipulative pulling short that makes the reader an accomplice in completing an incriminating thought. Saying Grantly believes "he acts" on his precepts clearly suggests that he believes intellectually what he does not put into practice, and asserting that Grantly's beliefs are more publicly maintained than lived by or deeply felt. In the end "belief" thus seems wholly inappropriate and thus ironic here, a thinly disguised assertion that Grantly is less self-deluding than hypocritical.

Describing Grantly in mock-epic terms as he gears himself for battle, the narrator claims Grantly does not "believe in the Gospel with more assurance than he [does] the sacred justice of ecclesiastical revenues" (*Warden* 36), and that Grantly is animated by the sense of holy cause that enables "a sister of mercy to give up the pleasures of the world for the wards of a hospital" (36). But if Grantly does not believe in the Gospel more than in revenues does he believe in it less than or as much as them? Should an archdeacon take so much pleasure in defending revenue as if it were gospel? And the comparison of his fight to that of the sister of mercy is so blatantly false that

the reader is forced into examining the motives behind the narrator's phrasing. As evidenced by the splendor of his study and his constant references to comfort and money, much of the archdeacon's motivation is unabashedly monetary, and if this holiness about church revenues regardless of their sources does not strain most Christian definitions of morality, the irony of his alliance with Abraham Hap-hazard (the name linking old-testament willingness to sacrifice with moral indiscriminateness) must. Still, at the end of *The Warden* the narrator fears that Grantly has been represented "as being worse than he is" (174), a marvelously mixed way of incriminating as he exculpates, hinting the badness of a man he will call the "virtue" that opposes Slope's "vice" (*Barchester* 321). And he insists that the archdeacon "is a gentleman and a man of conscience," who in "matters of religion . . . is sincere" (*Warden* 174).

That we have not seen Grantly's conscience, sincerity, or adherence to the principles of the Gospel in *The Warden* makes us question the narrator's analysis here on several grounds. Why has the narrator failed to give us better reasons to believe his assertions? A flashback of some moment when Grantly acted disinterestedly would be more convincing than this "telling." Is his telling then an oversight, the result of rapidity in composition, ambivalence about Grantly, authorial over-involvement in the events that confirms the fallibility (thus integrity—truth to life) of his perspective? If, as Wayne Booth argues, the "novelist must not, by taking sides, exhibit his preferences . . . he has to render and not to tell" (25), has the narrator's apparent reluctance to "show" Grantly's truly fine qualities revealed inadequacy in craftsmanship or been a purposeful, manipulative omission? Does his digression constitute an admission of his insecurity about his ability to show Grantly's hidden qualities accurately? If so we may suspect that each explanatory digression, besides being pleasant and conciliatory, acts as Trollope's way of reminding his reader of his narrator's potential unreliability as a teller.

This suggestion that language and story will ultimately be insufficient even for someone as wise and close to events as the narrator is dramatized in the first chapter of *Barchester Towers*. With his old father dying Grantly returns "happy and elated" and sits by the bed to "calculate his chances" (2). He tries to will himself into a less mercenary attitude and in a moment of sudden remorse prays eagerly "that his sins might be forgiven him" (3). The scene is brilliantly rendered, but in the next moment his genuinely felt eagerness is undercut. The archdeacon realizes that "he had brought himself to pray for his father's life"—a phrase suggesting that the grief was not

wholly involuntary. We can believe his prayer to be an act of self-exoneration, a concerted effort to feel better about himself, a religious farewell reflex devoid of conviction, or an illustration of what Johnson refers to in *Idler* 103 as the secret horror of all conclusions (314-16). Immediately afterwards we see him falsifying his emotions to get Harding to act in his interest—then the narrator shifts again, begging to be allowed to "draw a curtain over the sorrows of the archdeacon as he sat, sombre and sad at heart" (8). Characteristically, the words at first seem plain and sentimental in a vague enough way to allow the reader to feel a measure of genuine sympathy, however, the longer one looks at word choices such as "curtain" (implying that some Thackerayan puppeteering has gone on) and "sorrows" the more ironic they become. Acknowledging that this somberness may not be convincing, and that many will feel the archdeacon "wicked to have coveted episcopal power" (8), the narrator claims that he not only empathizes with the worldliness of the archdeacon, but that if we are honest readers, we will admit that we do as well! "Our archdeacon was worldly—who among us is not so?" (8). And this is as far as the reader can be taken without having pleasant confidence violated. The narrator's question may or may not be rhetorical—his honesty, his realism here—is ultimately a confession of uncertainty. But Trollope draws the curtain and the reader must go backstage, like the narrator, to question whether the archdeacon's hopes "were . . . innocent or sinful" (9).

Trollope sought to represent "to [his] readers characters like themselves" (*Autobiography* 139), but naked truth, if renderable, hurts, and it tends to repel rather than morally engage the reader. "Satire," Swift writes in the Preface to "The Battle of the Books," can become "a sort of glass; wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's face but their own." Trollope avoids these literary difficulties by working through his pleasantness; by not insisting on "veracity" he educates the reader toward the habit of mercy. At the same time, like a Kafka mourning/rejoicing over the terrible freedom he feels at the death of his father, though in as different as possible a manner, in a scene like Grantly beside his dying father Trollope explores the monstrously mixed emotions we all may feel in traumatic moments. While the narrator may just be showing a moment in the career of one of his characters, Trollope, passing through the persona, in such scenes subtly helps the heart to know itself in its most terrifying postures.

NOTES

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¹While this paper concerns itself primarily with narrative strategies employed in two of Trollope's books, my assumption, which an eclectic reading of Trollope bears out, is that the argument would hold for Trollope's work in general. Except when he is being overtly self-ironizing, Trollope's metafictional digressions consistently accord well with his discussions of authorial method and intention in the *Autobiography*.

²Of course, as Mark Schorer argues, "one cannot properly say that a writer has no technique or that he eschews technique . . . we can speak only . . . of technique which serves the novel's purpose or disserves" (143). Perhaps Trollope's style has been glossed over so frequently because, as Ruth apRoberts says (paraphrasing the *Autobiography* 201), he "aimed at . . . style so lucid that it does not show at all" (24). Bradford Booth notes in his comments on style, "In reading Trollope one rarely thinks of style" (216-28). Certainly, Trollope's description of his writing habits discourages rigorous stylistic analysis (*Autobiography* 228). However, David Aitken and Hugh Sykes Davies have discussed marked characteristics of his style. My own sense, as this essay argues, is that Trollope was far more purposeful in his stylistic decisions and particulars than most give him credit for, that his style only creates the "illusion that there is no style" (Kincaid 49). Though he does not concentrate on style, Ross Murfin's comment that "patterns found at one level of artistic structure often correspond to patterns that characterize larger or smaller structural units" (23) seems particularly useful.

³A case might be made that Trollope's self-consciously intrusive narrator and his sense of the world as demanding multi-perspectivity involve him in a kind of romantic irony. According to this form, discussed by Muecke (159-215) and Handwerk, "verbal incompatibilities set up and provoke a deep interrogation of self-consciousness" (2) that leads to better knowledge of others and the world. However, while Trollope insists upon the complex mixture of motivations behind acts, there is a beef-and-ale simplicity to his essential message: the need for what Hardy calls "lovingkindness." He is not, as Handwerk says of his romantic/ethical ironist, "epistemologically restless" (196) or introspectively exploratory. As a proper Victorian novelist he seems distinctly unconcerned with transcendentalism or exploration of authorial self-consciousness (however often the narrator is made a subject in the text, or the author reveals a divided mind). His *Autobiography* withholds more than it tells, at times making Trollope seem more a machine than a person. The close reader, that is, sees the contradictions in the narrator (his unreliability), while the author does not make or allow the narrator to make himself into a subject. More applicable to Trollope's irony, perhaps, would be a synthesis of Wayne Booth's concept of normative irony as set forth in *The Rhetoric of Irony*, a concept that sees irony working to "reaffirm accepted verities" (Handwerk 7) and Muecke's "heuristic irony" (see especially 232-47).

⁴The fundamental morality of irony is argued neatly by Ruth apRoberts, who shows how Trollope uses irony to destroy "simplistic illusions" and force the reader to "correlate incongruities" (191) with a moral end. In this Trollope's irony fits Burke's definition of irony as humble, not superior to its enemy, operating primarily to force civilizing dialectic (514). Though he is more interested in Trollope's general moral message than in the mechanics by which Trollope achieves his effects, Stanley Hauerwas makes an elegant case for the moral effectiveness of Trollope's

novels (43-46). Like Hauerwas, I emphasize the importance of forgiveness to Trollope's teaching or example, though, I am primarily concerned with the somewhat devious means by which Trollope cultivates pluralistic responses through his kindly, ironic, but unreliable narrator.

⁵Kincaid, the most thorough commentator on Trollope's narrative methods, is especially sensitive to the "highly unconventional" (17) but "subtle and organic use of the dramatized narrator" (32) who is often "as sly and devious as possible" (43). For a good summary of the major positions on the function of Trollope's narrator see Kincaid (32).

⁶Unreliability is, of course, a form of irony in that it maintains a discrepancy between statement and experience. (One might as easily argue that irony is simply a form of unreliability.) Discrepancy between statement and experience as a definition of irony, however, seems so broad that it renders the term virtually meaningless. From a certain point of view, the deconstructionist hypothesis, for instance, every written act can be seen as fundamentally ironic. It is thus always necessary to distinguish between kinds of irony, and I treat unreliability separately from the more superficial irony of tone in this paper because its mechanics are distinctively complex and fundamental to the larger effects at which Trollope aims. As a basic distinction it could be argued that surface irony is locally contained, contingent on immediate contexts, whereas detecting narrative unreliability involves making comparisons between parts of the text.

⁷Trollope's seamless shifting of time/tense words exemplifies his method of keeping the reader in two places at once. Frequently he alternates words that denote time within a single sentence. "The parties most interested in the movement *which is about to set* Barchester by the ears *were* not the foremost to discuss the merit of the question, as *is* often the case; but *when* the bishop, the archdeacon, the warden, the steward . . . *were* all busy . . . *it is* not to be supposed" (*Warden* 28; emphasis mine).

⁸My thinking about omniscience and unreliability has been informed by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg and by Wayne Booth. These works suggest ways in which unreliability makes "the reader participate in the act of creation" (Scholes and Kellogg 265), but neither one explores the possibility of an unreliable omniscient narrator, a combination that seems special to Trollope. When Austen's narrator, for instance, intrudes by introducing us to a heroine we will not like, or Fielding's *histor* introduces us to a heroine we will like, there is little reason to doubt them. Intrusive narrators like Swift's hack or Sterne's Shandy, on the other hand, are notable for their lack of perspective or omniscience.

⁹Murfin is particularly good in suggesting Trollope's anti-satirical satire, a means by which Trollope ridicules both a method he does not like and his own method in ridiculing it. Trollope's comic stance is rarely that of the satirist, for satire implies a fixed norm that Trollope's shifting perspectives opposes. Murfin shows how Trollope presents Carlyle's and Dickens's narrative tactics as reformatory strategies he has eschewed and shows how in the process of critiquing Carlyle and Dickens he uses their methods to make effective attacks on other positions. This pattern of playful undercutting, showing self-parody endemic to most modes, characterizes all of Trollope's rhetorical strategies: his narrator is often implicated in the laughter by his own excessive garrulity, his talkativeness is always ready to turn into sententiousness, his sentiment, to slide into bathos.

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