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Restructuring with Anthony Trollope: Managing Change in Chronicle Provincial Fiction

Ruth Livesey

This article examines the series of novels by Anthony Trollope, known as the Barsetshire Chronicles, in relation to the idea of living through infrastructural transition. It contends that the novels, set in and around the fictional cathedral city of Barchester, stage a macro-level experience of living through infrastructural transition for implied readers. While the narrator's asides convey a sense of privileged early access to the informational flows of the modern state, characters are depicted as disconnected from the wide sweep of transition and, in effect, replaceable over the diachronic span of the narrative sequence. The article draws a parallel between the innovative forms of the serial provincial novel and Trollope's work for the Post Office — the foundational infrastructure of the fantasy of liberal government of a state of freedom in which individuals can encounter and gain knowledge of distant others to ensure the steady flow of capital and information. The article suggests an overlooked aspect of the Barchester novels is the backdrop of a profound transition of civic infrastructures and ethics of care from the local pastoral and temporal workings of the Established Church of England to the workings of the centralized utilitarian liberal state via the 1834 Poor Law and the work of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The Barchester novels in this sense dramatize the 'death of the parish' as a meaningful unit of local autonomy.

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It would be exaggerating to say rereading a novel by Anthony Trollope saved my professional life in summer 2021. But it certainly made it possible to laugh, and to carry on as a Head of Department. In common with many UK Higher Education institutions my own was going through a rapid period of change under new leadership. External economic pressures and political realities were the backdrop to a planned restructure of the organization. Colleagues were struggling to connect a new narrative of what the university was to be with their own very different experience of working there for decades, in some cases. It was hard — and in that year, it was conducted in the loneliness of large online meetings.

It was Archdeacon Grantly who saved me. I was walking in the rain trying to process a difficult meeting. Decisions were imminent that would affect jobs; it was clear new people were leading the institution in a new way. What on earth was going on? Luckily, I was rereading Anthony Trollope's Chronicles of Barsetshire in sequence: six novels exploring the lives and fortunes of people in and around the fictional provincial cathedral town of Barchester.[1] I had reached Chapter 5 of *Barchester Towers* (1857) that morning and in the middle of my walk I had a moment of recognition that left me crying with laughter when the two parts of academic life collided. At that moment the ambitious, worldly Archdeacon Grantly — who has always assumed the diocese would become his on the death of his father, Bishop Grantly — is confronted with the reality of the new bishop ushered in through a change of government. In the aftermath of his meeting with the new regime of the bishop, Mrs Proudie, and their power-hungry chaplain Mr Slope, Archdeacon Grantly releases his rage once safely out the gate: 'And now', Trollope's bathetic narrator leans in to observe, 'had I the pen of a mighty poet, would I sing in epic verse the noble wrath of the archdeacon.'[2] But shrinking the great human drama of thwarted ambition from an epic battlefield to the scale of a badly decorated sitting room in 'the provincial city of Barchester' allows for a very different sort of narrative affordance: an incremental transformation of character in relation to the wider network of plot and the serial novel (p. 29). From the opening of the novel, with its affecting scene between Grantly and his dying father, the archdeacon begins to shift from the hostile and implacable enforcer of *The Warden* (1855) to the flawed, pompous, but emotionally significant character of *Barchester Towers*.[3] In this scene of

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[1] Although Trollope himself did not conceive of the novels as a sequence until at least three novels had been completed, he expressed a desire for them to be republished as a series after *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867) appeared. The sequence comprises: *The Warden* (1855); *Barchester Towers* (1857); *Doctor Thorne* (1858); *Framley Parsonage* (1861); *The Small House at Allington* (1864); *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867).

[2] Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers*, ed. by John Bowen, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 34.

[3] In a prime example of Trollope's pluralism the narrator 'takes leave' of the archdeacon in *The Warden* reflecting on this potential: 'On the whole, the Archdeacon of Barchester is a man doing more good than harm, — a man to be furthered

rage that follows we are forced to recognize his reaction from the inside. And indeed, when it came to the crunch of living through structural transformation, I had to accept that, like it or not, I was playing the part of Archdeacon Grantly: a wonderful egotist fuming at the loss of entitlement to a beloved institution thanks to a shifting political climate. His might be a cathedral close in the mid-nineteenth century, mine a university one hundred and fifty years later; but the jagged energies released by self-regarding successful professionals confronted by structural change remain the same:

> ‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed the archdeacon, as he placed his foot on the gravel walk of the close, and raising his hat with one hand, passed the other somewhat violently over his now grizzled locks; smoke issued forth from the uplifted beaver as it were a cloud of wrath, and the safety valve of his anger opened, and emitted a visible steam, preventing positive explosion and probable apoplexy. ‘Good heavens!’ — and the archdeacon looked up to the gray pinnacles of the cathedral tower, making a mute appeal to that still living witness which had looked down on the doings of so many bishops of Barchester.
>
> ‘I don’t think I shall ever like that Mr. Slope,’ said Mr. Harding.
>
> ‘Like him!’ roared the archdeacon, standing still for a moment to give more force to his voice; ‘like him!’ All the ravens of the close cawed their assent. The old bells of the tower, in chiming the hour, echoed the words, and the swallows flying out from their nests mutely expressed a similar opinion. (p. 35)

Yes — Good heavens! — I *was* Archdeacon Grantly and a great deal of my struggles were because in that year of online-only meetings I could not walk away from a meeting with trusted colleagues and release the safety valve of steam in a corridor afterwards.

No writer captured the emergence of the modern state and its necessary switchpoints between macroscale infrastructures and local personal rivalries quite so completely as Trollope.[4] Whether the low-level subversion of junior office workers, covering for indolent bosses, the petty parochialism of those in high political office, or the all-too-human motivations under the surplice of deans and archdeacons in cathedral closes,

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and supported, though perhaps also to be controlled; and it is matter of regret to us that the course of our narrative has required that we should see more of his weakness than his strength.’ *The Warden* and *The Two Heroines of Plumplington*, ed. by Nicholas Shrimpton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 160.

[4] For more on the idea of ‘switchpoints’ in Trollope’s novels’ infrastructures, see Nicola Kirkby, ‘British Railway Infrastructures and the Novel 1850–1910’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, King’s College London, 2017), pp. 159–63. Kirkby focuses on plotting in the Palliser novels and suggests the reappearance of character later in the novel sequence indicates ‘something ever-shifting and not really resolved’ about different narrative strands running through the series.

the interface of the vividly individualized human and the abstracting systems of liberal governance is the unifying element across his works. Trollope's modernity — or, as Amanda Anderson and Elaine Hadley conceive it, his liberalism — is to a great extent grounded in this duality. Trollope's sequences of novels chart the seeming inevitability of structural change and infrastructural development as 'progress', while regretting the loss of traditional lifeways and social relationships that result.[5]

In this article I want to refocus this persistent thread of argument about Trollope's so-called liberalism. The formal innovation of Trollope's works, namely the self-conscious development from *Barchester Towers* onwards of a series of novels set in the same provincial cathedral town of Barchester and its surroundings, is essential to this analysis. My contention is that seriality and sequence enable the genre of provincial fiction to bring a vital aspect of living with infrastructural change to the fore. The chronicle novel gives a diachronic reading of loving and letting go of the individual. The individual matters only in as far as they play a part in the corporate forms of social life. Maia McAleavey argues Trollope's series of 'Barsetshire [...] novels celebrate what Trollope identifies as the central virtues of institutionality, *replaceability* and *adaptability*'.[6] But here I want to take McAleavey's argument a little further, beyond institutions — the diocese of Barchester or politics of Westminster — to the dynamic systems underlying those nineteenth-century institutions that are themselves in flux. These corporate forms in Trollope's Barchester novels, I will suggest, are those of an emergent civic infrastructure. In recent considerations of localism and citizenship, the term 'civic infrastructure' has come to denote a range of local networks and community groups and the collection of physical spaces that house them. The capacity of communities to benefit from a more participatory approach to decentralized government and local activism is to a great extent determined by a locality's existing 'civic infrastructure' of residents' associations, voluntary organizations, and religious associations.[7] It is perhaps only now that the provisions of local government and the welfare state have been so thoroughly hollowed out that we start to see exposed once more the underlying forms of civic infrastructures that predated them. In always unevenly distributed ways, the lingering material presence of old church halls, chapels,

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[5] Amanda Anderson, 'Trollope's Modernity', *ELH*, 74 (2007), 509–34; Elaine Hadley, 'On a Darkling Plain: Victorian Liberalism and the Fantasy of Agency', *Victorian Studies*, 48 (2005), 92–102. For a useful rethinking of individual and collective in Trollope's Palliser sequence that has informed my analysis, see also, Lynette Felber, 'The Advanced Conservative Liberal: Victorian Liberalism and the Aesthetics of Anthony Trollope's Palliser Novels', *Modern Philology*, 107 (2010), 421–46.

[6] Maia McAleavey, 'Institutions', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46 (2018), 742–45 (p. 744, emphasis in original). See also, Maia McAleavey, 'Anti-individualism in the Victorian Family Chronicle', *Novel*, 53 (2020), 213–34.

[7] Harold A. McDougall, 'Social Change Requires Civic Infrastructure', *Howard Law Journal*, 56 (2013), 801–47 <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2562562> [accessed 18 July 2023]; Jane Wills, 'Emerging Geographies of English Localism: The Case of Neighbourhood Planning', *Political Geography*, 53 (2016), 43–53.

friendly society meeting houses, or Carnegie libraries, Jane Wills suggests, have a determining interest on the possibility of the formation of a local, self-generating civic infrastructure, ready to move and benefit from larger scale government initiatives (p. 49). As the state recedes, the looser civic and religious infrastructure that preceded it and paved the way for a notion of collective commitment to human flourishing becomes more visible.

As James Vernon points out, 'the liberal subject was not always an individual, for liberalism was never able to entirely extricate its subjects from the social; these subjects thus remained imbricated with corporate forms that appeared embedded in society.'[8] An overly presentist reading of nineteenth-century liberalism through a neoliberal lens risks neglecting the very real extent to which thinkers such as John Stuart Mill were as nearly concerned with the social forms and abstract mutual obligations that were to replace Tory paternalism in making for a governable collective as with individual freedoms. Trollope's sequence of provincial fiction — a sequencing rapidly embraced by Margaret Oliphant for her much underrated Chronicles of Carlingford (1861–76) to similar ends — charts the transformation of civic infrastructures in modernity at a distance. Drawing on what were, by the 1850s and 1860s, familiar affordances of the forms of English provincial fiction, Trollope's Barchester novels chart the impact of the breaking and remaking of social corporations as if looking through a reversed telescope, down to the literally parochial scale: the parishes that fall under the pastorship of the Bishop of Barchester.

Trollope's diachronic forms, I shall argue, necessitate an investment in infra-structural thinking: understanding the subordinate part of the individual character or a local cultural lifeway in a broad and necessarily changing network. That distinctive element of his Barchester fictions — in common with Oliphant's Carlingford — in which Eleanor Bold may be a beloved central protagonist in the first two novels, only to fade into a supporting role in later ones, requires an investment in the corporate structures of social life as opposed to individuation. Reading Trollope requires us to love and realize the individual; but also to accept their obsolescence in the flows of civic infrastructures. These are narratives of plenitude in which an idea of common good — of collective thriving, or as Lauren Goodlad has termed it 'Bigger Love' — is the constant that works against the primacy of individual wish fulfilment.[9] It is an abstracting sort of affect in which a re-encounter with Johnny Eames — the endearing hobbledehoy hopelessly in love with Lily Dale in *The Small House at Allington* (1864)

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[8] James Vernon, 'What Was Liberalism, and Who Was its Subject?; Or, Will the Real Liberal Subject Please Stand Up?', *Victorian Studies*, 53 (2011), 303–10 (p. 306).

[9] Lauren M. E. Goodlad, 'Bigger Love', *New Literary History*, 48 (2017), 701–27.

— after some distance once more in *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867) can seem like meeting a rather tiresome and a merely dull grown-up 'somebody' up in London.[10] The systems function of a character in a particular social structure and an individual novel seems the animating force that makes them matter — that makes them material characters. As civic infrastructure changes and the regional authority of the established church gives way to a newly centralized modern state, Archdeacon Grantly matters in a different way: his function changes from a character who needs to be 'controlled' in narrative requirements of *The Warden* to one whom, the narrator notes, in the new civic infrastructures of a London-centred state, needs to be 'furthered and supported' in the novels that followed (*The Warden*, p. 160).

Trollope and postal infrastructure

Before Barchester, before Trollope's unexpected and relatively late innovations in the forms of realist fiction, came years of work and reams of his writing for the primal infrastructure of governance and the modernizing imperial state: the British Post Office. The modern state required a mode of rule over a distance and a means to create subjects who could interact and interrelate in economic and social terms with strangers. James Vernon suggests that in the interplay of the individual and the collective in the liberal state, 'techniques of liberal individuation became a new invisible hand, a way of dispersing mentalities of self-government to distant and anonymous strangers for whom the old forms of power and authority lodged in place and person were losing purchase' (p. 305). First and foremost in the infrastructures that conveyed the dispersion of these mentalities was a national postal service. For Patrick Joyce, the Post Office and postal networks were the most sensitive and strategically important technologies in the emergence of the modern state and its technologies for the 'rule of freedom'.[11] As a senior civil servant in the Post Office and Surveyor of Post in Ireland (1841–54), Trollope was at the heart of developing a British state infrastructure for dispersing such mentalities of self-governance to strangers subjected to British rule.[12] Whereas in the past state proclamations might have circulated from the monarch out through the pulpits of the Church in a symbolic union of state power and spiritual subjection, the dissemination of rule in liberal governance relied on the seemingly invisible hand

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[10] Anthony Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, ed. by Helen Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 121.

[11] Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 20.

[12] For a detailed study of Trollope's work in this context, see R. H. Super, *Trollope in the Post Office* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981). For a more recent consideration of the intersection of Trollope's fiction with postal infrastructures, I am indebted to Susan Zieger, 'Affect and Logistics: Trollope's Postal Work', *Victorians*, 128 (2015), 226–44.

of a well-functioning postal network: the liberal state, Joyce argues, 'necessitated the cultivation of subjects able to work by the rules of the postal game' (p. 102).

If the early career of Trollope tells us anything it is that he knew all about gaming the rules of the Post Office — even if his professional blossoming as an analyst of its networks came rather late. In the era before competitive examination for these relatively well-paid civil service roles, the seemingly hopeless, feckless 19-year-old Trollope started as a clerk in London thanks to his mother's contacts and went nowhere, doing as little as possible at work, apparently, for seven years before taking a new role in Ireland as surveyor's clerk in 1841. Here, according to his biographers, he began to thrive and embrace the work of the infrastructural state during a decade in which a substantial portion of the Irish railway system opened, displacing some older modes of road communication for the postal service. Trollope was promoted to assistant surveyor in 1844 and by that time had written most of his first novel *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (1847), swiftly followed by *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* (1848). Throughout the 1840s Trollope travelled across Ireland, identifying and investigating snags in the network of postal delivery, exploring collaborations with existing mail and stagecoach infrastructures and seeing the impact of new railway lines. It was a role that required him to reconcile the interplay of microscale human complexities — one unreliable postmaster in one village office disrupting the flow of mail — with the macroscale transformations of the emerging modern imperial infrastructural state. For Claire Connolly, Trollope's earliest novels set in Ireland embody this apprehension of the bumps in the road towards modernity and a centralized infrastructural state. The 'narratives [...] pause to notice the relationship between temporal progress and ruination and attribute agency to residual aspects of the network such as lanes and boreens'. The plot diversions and sticky ground encountered in Trollope's Irish novels, Connolly suggests, 'inscribe the "bumpy territory" of Irish modernity in compelling ways'.[13]

By 1855 Trollope was happy to commend himself to a select committee of mostly Irish MPs as an expert witness on the basis of the interlocking scales of his work. He had, he told the Select Committee to Inquire into Postal Arrangements in Waterford, Tipperary, Cork, and Limerick, 'local knowledge over the whole of Ireland'.[14] Trollope's professional role as a servant of the infrastructural state was not so much that of the government mandarin at a distance but rather as a connecting node between local

[13] Claire Connolly, 'Lane-ism: Anthony Trollope's Irish Roads in Time and Space', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Anthony Trollope*, ed. by Frederik Van Dam, David Skilton, and Ortwin de Graef (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 272–87 (p. 286).

[14] HC Select Committee to Inquire into Postal Arrangements in Waterford, Tipperary, Cork, and Limerick (HC Paper (1854–55) no. 445), p. 128, para. 1990. Available via Proquest.

intimacy and individuation and imperial networks and structures led from London. In that respect Trollope's extensive evidence to the select committee of 1854–55 is a documentary narrative of the interlocking of individuality and civic infrastructures which are then reimagined in the structures of the chronicle novel. The smooth civil servant baited his interlocuters, turning questions from Sir Edward Grogan and, in particular, the MP for Tipperary, Francis Scully with subtle suggestions of their lack of impartiality when it came to their personal priorities versus the requirements of a wider national and imperial network.

In a bravura performance over four days in July 1855 — just as Trollope's first Barchester novel, *The Warden* was published — Trollope rebutted a proposal from the manager of the nascent Waterford and Kilkenny Railway, Henry Alcock Fletcher, to reroute post travelling by existing rail lines in Ireland from interconnecting horse-drawn transport onto portions of the new line.[15] In an overwhelming volume of tabulated evidence Trollope demonstrated how the rerouting of the post might provide some small marginal gains in speed of delivery for some towns, but little elsewhere, and at great cost to the state with profit going to an investment-hungry new corporation and its shareholders. The question at hand is one familiar to transport historians: Trollope was facilitating the emergence of a mixed mode of circulation in which the need for horse transportation actually increased in the first decade of the railways.[16] By 1855 railway lines in Ireland could speed transport between major cities and towns with some stops on the way, but servicing towns off the straight lines ruled between significant conurbations still required a capillary flow of horse-drawn transport.

Trollope's deflection of local-interest lobbying against the need for a functioning network is most evident in his testy exchanges with MP Francis Scully. Scully shared the seat with his cousin James Sadlier, brother of John Sadlier who had recently resigned his own parliamentary seat after a corruption scandal involving the Tipperary Joint Stock Bank established by the Sadliers and Scullys.[17] A few incidents with a mail cart picking up mail from a railway halt — Goold's Cross — to serve the nearby town of Clonmel in

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[15] Henry Alcock Fletcher (1820–1861) was a transport manager with Pickford and Co., the Midland Railway, and London and South-Western Railway Company until moving to Ireland. His obituary records that 'in consequence of the reputation he there succeeded in earning, he was in 1855 selected […] to fill the important post of traffic-manager, in India, for the Madras Railway Company', later becoming its general manager. There is a clear pattern here of infrastructural networks replicating imperial governmental structures at a distance. See obituary republished in 'Henry Alcock Fletcher', *Grace's Guide to British Industrial History* <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Henry_Alcock_Fletcher> [accessed 18 July 2023].

[16] Philip S. Bagwell, *The Transport Revolution 1770–1985* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 126–28.

[17] John Sadlier was already reviled as a political turncoat in Irish circles by 1854 after promising never to join a Westminster government as a member of the Independent Irish Party. In that year the scandal that forced his resignation was the exposure that he had threatened to have a bank customer imprisoned for not voting for him. His subsequent suicide after the collapse of the Tipperary Bank in 1856 is widely recognized as the inspiration for Dickens's Mr Merdle in *Little Dorrit* (1855–57) and a model for Melmotte in Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1875).

Scully's constituency sparked sixty questions from the MP. Trollope sailed close to the wind of civil service neutrality in his response to the demand that he provide evidence on the daily record of punctuality of mail deliveries to Clonmel in the past winter to contradict the assertion of Scully's good friend Mr Kennedy that it was always delayed:

> 2382. [Trollope]: [...] I can give no statement of the absolute arrivals during the last winter of the day and night mails at Clonmel; it will be easily seen, that if I am expected to do it of Clonmel, I must be expected to do it of hundreds of towns situated in the different counties to which this inquiry goes; the amount of evidence I should be expected to give would be very voluminous, and more than can be reasonably looked for.
>
> 2383. [Scully] — Are there a hundred such towns in the district, or 50 towns in Ireland, the size of Clonmel? — No. Not of the size of Clonmel.
>
> 2384. Is not Clonmel one of the first inland towns in Ireland? — Certainly it is one of the first inland towns in Ireland; but if I am expected to give these details as regards Clonmel, I should be, I presume, expected to give them as to other towns so circumstanced. Another Honourable Member for some other county than Tipperary might think that the towns of his county were equally deserving of importance with Clonmel.
>
> 2385. Are you aware of the extent of trade and business done in Clonmel, or are you aware of any other inland town in Ireland which does the same amount of business? — I should be sorry to say that it was not so; although Clonmel is a good town, I think Kilkenny is as good. (HC Select Committee, p. 151)

Trollope's barbed replies rebuff local interests with a macroscale view of Irish communication infrastructure. One inland town in Ireland can be substituted for another, a Clonmel for a Kilkenny, when read in terms of mail in and out, investment, and volume of economic activity. The rules of the postal game necessary for the liberal state enforced such abstraction to prioritize economic flows over individual or local needs. But to play the game on the ground, and to win — Trollope's performance to the select committee suggests — it was always helpful to have a little local, and personal knowledge up your sleeve. You could make the individual characters involved material to achieving the desired outcome.

Provincial and parochial: scale and replaceability

Trollope's argument that Clonmel and Kilkenny were, in some sense, substitutes for each other and just like any moderate-sized town in inland Ireland is a prescient account of provincial towns as they have featured in more recent critical discourse. For

Ian Duncan the very difference between the idea of the regional and the provincial lies in this potential for substitution. Duncan's argument relates to subgenres of nineteenth-century fiction in which, he suggests, regional fiction embraces a radical otherness and singularity embodied through landscape, dialect, and alternative cultural forms; whereas the provincial novel might be set anywhere but which stands in for the nation as a whole. Walter Scott's Scotland, for example, or Emily Brontë's Yorkshire represent a region, 'a place in itself, the source of its own terms of meaning and identity'.[18] Trollope's Barchester or Eliot's Middlemarch, on the other hand, are provinces: 'a typical setting defined by its difference from London'. Nevertheless, Duncan suggests, the province is not subordinate in that hierarchy:

> From *Cranford* to *Middlemarch* [...] 'provincial life' assumes the burden of national representation. In the great novels of Gaskell, Trollope, and Eliot the provincial county town or parish becomes the generic and typical setting of a traditional England, responsive to the pressures of modernity (politics, debt, fashion, crime) that have overwhelmed metropolitan life, but resisting or absorbing them — if only ambiguously, if only for a time.[19]

Although Trollope's evidence to the select committee might seem rather distant from Duncan's recent argument about literary forms, the parallel identifies crucial common ground between Trollope's work for the infrastructural state in the Post Office and his crafting of the fiction of the provincial country town in the Barchester novels. In provincial fiction, as in the infrastructural state, the identity of the town derives from its limited exposure to the flows of capital, information, and legislation flowing from a distant centre — in this case London. The idea that the provincial town derives its identity from its subordinate place in a London-centred network is crucial, also, to the dispersion of mentalities that naturalize empire and the modern systems of governance emerging from the metropole. As recent research by Helen O'Neill demonstrates, in the broader corpus of nineteenth-century fiction the term *provincial* most often occurs in contexts that frame Irish, Scottish, and Welsh characters and cultures as awkward, unfashionable, or uneducated.[20] Provincialism in that context works as a means to

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[18] Ian Duncan, 'The Provincial or Regional Novel', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 318–35 (p. 323).

[19] Duncan, p. 323. See also the challenge to Duncan, in Josephine McDonagh, 'Rethinking Provincialism in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Fiction: *Our Village* to *Villette*', *Victorian Studies*, 55 (2013), 399–424.

[20] Helen O'Neill, '"I didn't know there were so many kinds of people and so many sorts of provincialism in the world": Tracking Provincialism Through the Nineteenth Century Corpus', *Journal of Victorian Culture* (forthcoming, 2023).

contain potential sources of nationalist resistance against imperial governance as merely the effect of delays in the flow of modernity from the metropole outwards.

Trollope's Barchester novels are, of course, not set in the Ireland that launched Trollope's Post Office career, but in an indeterminate region in the south-west of England (Super, pp. 20–29). But the unfolding of diachronic change through the sequence does trace the displacement of localized infrastructures of governance and identity by a network centred on London.[21] The Barchester novels chart the inevitable decline of the temporal powers and wealth of the Church of England as Canterbury, York, dioceses, deaneries, and parishes are reformed by the efforts of government, the new scrutiny of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners appointed in 1836, and the reformist press in London. The very first sentences of *The Warden* establish the town's indefinite geographical identity as 'the cathedral town of —; let us call it Barchester'. It could be named 'Wells or Salisbury, Exeter, Hereford, or Gloucester', or any 'quiet town in the West of England, more remarkable for the beauty of its cathedral and the antiquity of its monuments, than for any commercial prosperity' (p. 5). The crucial aspect of its identity here at the outset — before the sequence and scale of the fictional topos of Barset was imagined — is that the provincial town owes its identity to an infrastructure that is on the wane: it is not the flows of commercial capital and information that animate Barchester, but rather historical endowments and governance structures that predate the Reformation and have not moved much since.

The premise of *The Warden* is the collision between the remaining temporal power of the Church and a drive to modernity emanating from London. In a lightly veiled fictionalization of a campaign led by the *Morning Post* in the early 1850s, a dispute over the uses of an ancient endowment designed to support the poor in the almshouse Hiram's Hospital pushes a quiet corner of Barchester into the spotlight of public opinion. The Reverend Septimus Harding has unquestioningly received a considerable income for a decade as warden to the twelve elderly men resident at Hiram's, thanks to his appointment by his dear friend Bishop Grantly. Driven by the spirit of the age and the exposure of long-standing abuses of charity, the young reformer and town councillor John Bold takes it upon himself to launch an inquiry that will bring Hiram's Hospital and the management of the diocese to the attention of the new Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Despite his love for Harding's daughter Eleanor, John Bold insists

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[21] The Ecclesiastical Commissioners Acts (1836 and 1840) involved the restructuring of bishoprics, pay, incomes, and the infrastructures of dioceses. The drive was towards the centralization of Church assets. See G. F. A. Best, *Temporal Pillars: Queen Anne's Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Church of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 145–94; and on the historical background to *The Warden*, see G. F. A. Best, 'The Road to Hiram's Hospital: A Byway of Early Victorian History', *Victorian Studies*, 5 (1961), 135–50.

'private motives should never be allowed to interfere' with his sense of righteous public duty in rooting out outdated practices (p. 48). Insulated by his wealth inherited from trade in London, Bold's investigation breaks open the local practices of the diocese to the gaze of campaigning journalists from the national newspaper, the *Jupiter*, while the authority of the cathedral close becomes subject to 'news from London' in the shape of legal opinions from the attorney general. Once started, the flows of information up and down the railway line to London from Barchester cannot be stopped, despite John Bold's capitulation to the pleas of his lover. The new 'Vatican of England' is the office of the *Jupiter* and its 'self-appointed' pope, the journalist Tom Towers, issues 'the only known infallible bulls for the guidance of British souls and bodies' (p. 109). Broadsheets flying out from Fleet Street drive the motions of politicians in Westminster and unloose Harding from his sinecure in Barchester. Trollope traces the bewildered wandering of Harding around the capital in search of a new notion of public good and justice in the eyes of the modern state. From his natural resting places at an inn near St Paul's and in Westminster Abbey he is forced to encounter the performative cut and thrust of political speech-making in the Houses of Parliament.

The pursuit of rights, the irresolute ending of *The Warden* suggests, subordinates customary relations and pastoral care to a new functional understanding of civic relationships. Bidding farewell to the inhabitants of Hiram's Hospital — some of whom had expected new personal wealth from promised reforms — Mr Harding reflects, 'In this country all are entitled to look for their own rights, and you have done no more' (p. 163). The new model of the modern state yokes together the pursuit of rights and the public good to a systematized civic infrastructure and abstract social obligations enacted at a distance. Old infrastructures of poor relief and social care were based around the Church of England parish as an administrative entity stemming from the 1601 Poor Law and ancient endowments often still in the management of the Church. Inquiries into and redistribution of Church incomes and endowments resulting from the Ecclesiastical Commissions of 1836 and 1840 moved in tandem with the institutions of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The establishment of Poor Law Unions to support the new utilitarian control of poor relief and the workhouse system, as Beatrice and Sidney Webb put it in their monumental history of English local government, constituted 'the death of the parish'. The 1834 Act 'laid the axe to the root of the most important trunk of the Parish structure': the ability to levy local rates for poor relief.[22] By 1853, the *Morning Post*, in its long-running exposé of the 'most lucrative sinecure' of £4,000 a year income accrued by the master of St Cross Hospital in Winchester from

[22] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act: The Parish and the County* (London: Longmans, Green, 1906), p. 171.

its ancient endowments, made clear that systems for the care of the poor dating back to the Reformation needed to be swept away:

> The present age is not behind its predecessors in munificent charity, but it adopts another form. People do not fund almshouses now by deeds of gift to any great extent. Committees and guinea subscriptions are the order of the day.[23]

With its substantial new workhouse built on the commissioners' Y-shaped Benthamite design in 1836 next to the railway line, parochial schools, burial ground, and waterworks, and just across from the infantry barracks, 1850s Winchester had a new secular state infrastructure that made the remaining temporal presence of the Church and its ancient cathedral systems seem redundant and not fit for purpose.

In the Barchester novels, however, there is a delicious irony in the interplay of this truth of infrastructural change and modernity and Trollope's narrative forms. As with *The Warden*, the drive for reform around Hiram's Hospital is central to the premise of *Barchester Towers*. Mr Harding's potential return to his beloved role as warden is a pawn in the powerplay between Archdeacon Grantly, the Proudies, and Mr Slope. At first sight Harding's response to Slope's snide insinuations embed an idea of inevitable modernization led by individual men of progress:

> 'New men are carrying out new measures and are carting away the useless rubbish of past centuries!' What cruel words these had been; and how often are they now used with all the heartless cruelty of a Slope! A man is sufficiently condemned if it can only be shown that either in politics or religion he does not belong to some new school established within the last score of years. He may then regard himself as rubbish and expect to be carted away. A man is nothing now unless he has within him a full appreciation of the new era, an era in which it would seem that neither honesty nor truth is very desirable, but in which success is the only touchstone of merit [...]. 'The same thing is going on throughout the whole country! Work is now required from every man who receives wages!' And had he been living all his life receiving wages and doing no work? Had he in truth so lived as to be now in his old age justly reckoned as rubbish fit only to be hidden away in some huge dust-hole? (*Barchester Towers*, pp. 91–92)

The dramatic irony in Trollope's serial novels is that the emotional energies of individuals, parties, camps, reformers, and conservatives is — over the diachronic sweep of the novels — shown to matter so very little in comparison to the endless flow

[23] *Morning Post*, 13 August 1853, p. 5.

of the breaking and remaking of civic infrastructures. Characters care so much, fight so hard, for things that, in the end roll on and change regardless of the microscale drama of individual desires. John Bold, the agent of reform in *The Warden*, after all, is summarily killed off in some retrospective lines at the opening of *Barchester Towers*. 'Poor Eleanor!', the narrator comments, 'I cannot say that with me John Bold was ever a favourite [but] [...] that arrogance of thought, unsustained by first-rate abilities, that attempt at being better than his neighbours which jarred so painfully [...] did not injure him in the estimation of his wife' (p. 15). And with Bold thus swept away the floor is open for a new and even more odious reformer and a new competition for Eleanor's hand in the next novel. The individuals who believe they are agents of the story change; the premise and requirements of the system remain the same.

In the Barchester sequence Trollope thus stages what Paul Edwards characterizes as a macroscale perspective on time and social organization. Trollope novels show infrastructures to be 'a solution to the problem of *flow* in industrial capitalism'. In the diachronic forms of the chronicle the significance of characters derives from their associations with the changing civic infrastructure of the imagined collective. 'At this [macro] scale', Edwards suggests, 'structure and form shift constantly. Particular technologies and systems are less important than the functions they fulfill.'[24] In the case of the Barchester novels, the narratives chart the increasing displacement of customary forms of wealth, welfare, and local governance in the Church of England by the emerging modern state centred on London. We see in fictional form the Webbs' vaunted 'death of the parish', as the parish as a temporal structure with any organizing power subsides into a synonym for short-sightedness — the merely parochial. Infrastructures at the macroscale, Edwards argues, are 'not a rigid background [...], but a constantly changing social response to problems of material production, communication, information, and control' (pp. 221–22). The changed structure and form of civic infrastructures that are the background to the Barchester sequence matters little at this macro-level: the important thing is that the sequence of storytelling continues to flow and, in so doing, brings fresh localities and characters into connection with its system — even to the further reaches of Allington and Hogglestock and the new infrastructural hub of Silverbridge on the direct line to London which is the starting location of *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867).

It is no less important for the formal innovations of Trollope's works that at the scale of the individual provincial novel, rather than of the sequence, characters adopt

[24] From Paul N. Edwards, 'Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organisation in the History of Socio-Technical Systems', in *Modernity and Technology*, ed. by Thomas J. Misa, Philip Brey, and Andrew Feenberg (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 185–225 (p. 221).

a rather different analysis of infrastructural change. Edwards notes how research that adapts a microscale perspective, focused on users of particular infrastructures, tends to conclude that ‘individuals and small, spontaneously organized social groups shape and alter infrastructures’ (p. 222). In scene after scene of the Barchester novels, groups of characters coalesce and conflict animated by a belief that they can change the civic infrastructures in which they are embedded and advance or hold back transitions of power. John Bold, Archdeacon Grantly, Eleanor Harding, and Mr Slope move to the front of the page as emotionally significant protagonists in their turns to claim their power as social constructivists who can change the system given enough support. Trollope’s particular genius of characterization in these moments — as Sophie Gilmartin has indicated — stems from a quasi-theatrical technique of blocking and staging the movement of bodies, touch, and physical sensations.[25] Scenes such as Eleanor’s desperate appeal to John Bold in *The Warden*, Grantly’s night-time conversations with his wife, or the cheerful chaos inflicted by the Stanhope family upon Mrs Proudie’s party in *Barchester Towers* in this sense are time-bound ensemble performances distinct from sustained interiority. These moments are fleetingly performative and often explicitly managed and distanced by the intrusive narrator who reminds us to step back and be sceptical. But they are also a means to enmesh just enough hope for the individual life in the civic infrastructure. In that moment of laughter or tears that comes from recognizing a reflex response to a modern social situation, there is just enough substance to make one believe, for a while, that individuals and small, spontaneously organized social groups — perhaps the machinations of a Mr Slope or Archdeacon Grantly or the joyful chaos of the Stanhope family in *Barchester Towers* — can shape and alter that emergent state social order.

The provincial serial novel

In Trollope’s serial provincial fictions we are made to care for the beleaguered lovers, the frustrated middle-aged man, and to feel with them — if only fleetingly. This caring matters: it is necessary to the ways in which his fictions enable living with change. But read diachronically the novels insist we also accept the systemic replaceability of characters as material functions in an ever-changing network; and that we love their successors too. Trollope’s novels maintain this duality of affect and replaceability by setting up two parallel flows of information across the novels. The narrator repeatedly intrudes to convey broader macro-level insights into the structure of the narrative

[25] Sophie Gilmartin, ‘The Physiology of the Everyday: Trollope’s Deflected Intimacies of Clothing, Touch and Free Indirect Discourse’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Anthony Trollope*, ed. by Van Dam, Skilton, and de Graef, pp. 44–62.

to readers, while the characters are only privy to the partial insights of a provincial parochial world that is an off-centre England, somewhere further back down the line of circulation. In *Barchester Towers* Trollope's narrator playfully dismisses the novel 'system' that keeps readers in the dark alongside characters violating 'all proper confidence between the author and his readers':

> Our doctrine is that the author and the reader should move along together in full confidence with each other. Let the personages of the drama undergo ever so complete a comedy of errors among themselves [...]. I would not for the value of this chapter have it believed by a single reader that my Eleanor could bring herself to marry Mr. Slope, or that she should be sacrificed to a Bertie Stanhope. But among the good folk of Barchester many believed both the one and the other. (p. 112)

The liberal promise of Trollope's works is that the individual reader can flow freely through the information infrastructure of his works by learning never to be too strongly attached to a 'merely' local interest in a particular character or individual situation over and above the needs of the wider common good. At the opening of *Doctor Thorne* (1858), for example, Trollope's narrator seems to offer an alternative route through the information flows of the novel for those so minded to choose a different hero:

> [Francis Gresham] would have been the hero of our tale had not that place been pre-occupied by the village doctor. As it is, those who please may so regard him. It is he who is to be our favourite young man, to do the love scenes, to have his trials and his difficulties, and to win through them or not, as the case may be. [...] Those who don't approve of a middle-aged bachelor country doctor as a hero, may take the heir to Greshambury in his stead, and call the book, if it so pleases them, 'The Loves and Adventures of Francis Newbold Gresham the younger'.[26]

There is always a substitute available: one lover may stand in for another as hero; one provincial cathedral town could be any other; the localized temporal powers of the Church displaced by the infrastructures of the modern centralized state. The individual is materialized and given force by their place in the dynamic networks of the nineteenth century.

The dual flows of information in Trollope's novel forms schools implied readers as the ideal subjects of the modern 'state of freedom' exemplified by the Post Office. Trollope's narratorial asides create a sense of early access to crucial information. The

[26] Anthony Trollope, *Doctor Thorne*, ed. by Simon Dentith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 9–10.

reader is implicated in a fantasy of liberal governance in which they receive timely communications that enable informed, independent judgements about distant others. It is a fantasy of the rule of freedom that Patrick Joyce argues was underpinned by the Post Office in which 'the disparate aspects of a free society [...] know and evaluate one another, thus aiming to make the economy and society self-regulating' (p. 102). Trollope's interjection at the opening of *Doctor Thorne* promises just that fantasy of free knowledge and independent evaluation over a distance by reading the missives aright. But the fact that he does not make Francis Gresham the hero is its own assertion of how these novels stage a critique of an easy recourse to individualism. The forms of the Barchester novel are no less attentive to characters' own limited provincialized, parochial knowledge and insights and the sharp contrast this offers to the systematized macro view offered by the narrator. As we have seen, this sort of sticky local business was the substance of Trollope's day job in the early 1850s. His secondment to the region that became Barset was necessary to ensure rural delivery routes and provincial market towns in the south of England were not so far behind the delivery times of larger towns on fast rail routes to the capital: an intervention by the emerging modern state to avoid an endless loop of vastly uneven development diverting capital and information away from once significant local settlements. In the forms of fiction, this constant duality and co-presence of macro-level analysis and micro-level user experience undermines any vaunted liberal fantasy of free and unimpeded movement in the infrastructures of modernity. We experience as readers the smooth pleasures and privilege of unimpeded flow, but we must notice the widening gap between us and those characters who cannot access the network and who have lost their connections.

For those of us who continue to work through profound changes in the infrastructures of learning and higher education there is little room for flippancy about the impact of that widening gap. Institutions that once led the way in creating new networks and digital infrastructures for our field have been hollowed out. Sometimes the rhetoric of the highly disputable 'decline of the Humanities' and the dawn of a new era has a distinct echo of Mr Slope's rumbling rubbish cart ready to load up anyone not matching the most recent success criteria. So how can reading Trollope's chronicle fiction, of all things, help understanding and survival amid infrastructural change now? The capacity of Trollope's novels to value both the micro- and the macro-level analysis of infrastructural change and to render both scales as material and embodied give some resources for being human and for learning to thrive in this uncertainty. There is a solace in recognizing that the rivalry, the passions, the power of gossip and speculation, and the pain of severance magnified by infrastructural change is all there in Trollope's stories of the modern state writ small in Barchester. The repetition of these emotions

across characters and novels in the chronicle sequence is in itself a means to notice a communality of experience in what can seem like uniquely lonely or extreme times for many. But the form of the chronicle novel also asks us to look for and recognize the bigger pattern at the macroscale beyond the individual or the single provincial town or medium-sized place of learning. Infrastructural change is always coming and its reach goes beyond the people who, most locally, seem responsible for it in moments of crisis. Getting into the story of that macro-change early can — perhaps — change its direction: not every story needs to centre on a young wealthy white man, Trollope reminds us in *Doctor Thorne*; we need to challenge the inbuilt bias of our assumptions and our data. And so, it is worth working hard at being hopeful and continuing to tell the story of how narrative forms can shift our perceptions of the structures that shape our lives.