Title
Affect and logistic: Trollope's postal work

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/87s7j291

Journal
Victorians

ISSN
2166-0107

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Publication Date
2015-09-01

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Peer reviewed
Interpreting such moments as affect illustrates how "a historical moment appears as a visceral moment" (Berlant 16).

Histories of the post office treat it as a unique institution, but it is also a primary, foundational example of logistics. Logistics is the management of the flow of goods, information, and other material from their points of origin to their points of consumption, aiming for optimal efficiency. In the early twenty-first century, such scholars as Ned Rossiter see logistics as the essence of globalization and the expression of its animating neoliberal ideology (55). Attention to its earlier history reveals relations between the importation and exportation of commodities, including the middle passage; the deployment of military material; and communication technologies such as telegraphy, telephony, and of course, the post. In 1839, Rowland Hill introduced the wildly successful penny post, and Britons responded by writing and reading more letters than ever before. Expanding and modernizing the post involved logistical feats and, in his postal career, Trollope proved himself a masterful logician. As R.H. Super recounts, he rooted out mail theft in Ireland; negotiated faster transportation timelines between Alexandria and Suez; suggested improvements in efficiency in Malta; recommended Jamaica over St. Thomas as a Caribbean distribution point; and—most famously—invented the red pillar box for the collection of letters (16-44). Helping to consolidate state and capital efficiency, reach, and profit, Trollope worked at the edge of British imperial modernity. His fictional scenes of letter writing, posting, and reading represent the local points or nodes at which individual people and communities interfaced with this globalizing system. In his fiction, more so than in that of such earlier epistolary novelists as Samuel Richardson and Jane Austen, the private letter archives intimacy and generates affective intensity in opposition to the impersonality of its share in a massive logistical flow through time and space. Sara Ahmed has shown that "affective economies are social and material, as well as psychic" (46). Whereas affect is open-ended, even vague in its contours, duration, and effects, logistics requires precision in measurement, counting, placing, and timing.

Toward the end of Anthony Trollope's *Doctor Thorne*, the plucky but illegitimate heroine writes her genteel beau a letter in which she heroically offers to give him up. The scene is one of intensive affect, as "Mary was forced to put her hand to her eyes, to save her paper from her falling tears" (*DT* 416-17). Crying over a letter: the apparent cliché indicates not merely emotion but the less charted realm of affect, because Trollope maps its physical aspects. Rooted in the body, affect has been defined as visceral forces beyond cognition and emotion that can propel and extend people into relation to the world and to others, or equally, to suspend those relations (Gregg and Seigworth 1).

Theorists often seek affect in the routine moments of everyday life; for middle-class Victorians, these include writing and especially mailing letters. Mary copies and recopies the letter so that she may perfect it and reread it after having posted it, her "somewhat bold handwriting" recording her affective traces. She walks forthrightly to the village post-office and with "unembarrassed" countenance affixes a penny stamp to her missive.

Then certain logistics overtake the narrative: the baker's wife, who acts as postmistress, sends the letter to Silverbridge "so that all due formalities, as ordered by the Queen's Government, might there be perfected" (*DT* 418). Since the post-boy had already picked up the mail, it does not reach Frank's house until three agonizing days later. In this playing out of affect, Trollope's heroine tests her emotional mettle against the impersonal bureaucracy of the postal system. Bernhard Siegert has argued that, with the modernization of postage, the letter-writer as private citizen registered his or her affairs with the state; this new activity produced the deep subjectivity associated with bourgeois privacy (8). Throughout his fiction, Trollope's scenes of writing, mailing, and reading contribute to this distinctively modern situation, in which affect interfaces with the postal system's massive movement of material information throughout Britain and the world.
Yet these disparate domains shape each other, producing a specific mode of modern subjectivity I seek to describe.

Mark W. Turner has identified Trollope’s modernity in his firsthand knowledge of globalizing literary markets and communication networks (12-16); Amanda Anderson situates that modernity in the “recollectant psychology” by which his characters engage shifting moral norms (515). By repositioning Trollope’s fiction within the history of logistics and from the point of view of affect theory, I obtain a related but distinct objective. Interpreting scenes of writing, mailing, and receiving letters in Trollope’s fiction in light of logistics’ demand for maximal efficiency reveals the formation of a palpable personal atmosphere of communicative feeling in response to new possibilities and pressures of the global flow of information. Trollope continually makes his characters struggle to write difficult letters, avoid reading unwanted letters, crumple up letters and hurl them away, write letters in spite of injury, pretend to read letters, obsessively reread and recopy letters, misdirect letters, and kiss beloved letters. No other Victorian novelist imagines the letter as vividly and consistently as the occasion of emotional and bodily effort to produce and communicate the information of the heart according to postal schedules. The urgency of affects such as desire and disgust operate in relation to the timetables of state and private information and capital. At an aesthetic level, the representation of letter-writing and -reading constitutes the novels as their own logistical systems, in which characters must be moved, psychologically and physically, into new affective and social positions to complete the narrative. Indeed, Trollope’s style characteristically creates not epistemic suspense—readers’ desire to know what will happen—but rather a wish to complete the work of reading and deliver the novel’s communicative act by closing the narrative. In this sense, the reader becomes Trollope’s letter-carrier, affectively compelled to deliver the novel to its final destination. In what follows, I describe these dynamics in The Small House at Allington, Can You Forgive Her?, He Knew He Was Right, and The Way We Live Now.

In The Small House at Allington, Trollope calibrates the affective intensity of the central romance to the rhythms and procedures of the rural post office that serves the eponymous village. The plot is laden with irony, as the affections of the vacillating fiancée, Crosbie—Trollope’s characteristic hobbledehoy—have cooled, and he must compose a fake love-letter to his original beloved. “He got out his pen, ink, and paper, and then he found that his difficulties were beginning . . . He could not write an affectionate, warm-hearted letter to Lily, without bringing himself, at any rate for the time, to feel towards her in an affectionate, warm-hearted way. Therefore he now sat himself to work, while his pen yet remained dry in his hand” (SHA 194). Here, Trollope describes the distinctive affective discomfort of trying to write what one does not feel—a physical unease similar to “lifting a couple of hundredweights.” Once he achieves this feat and feels he has done his duty, he can cheerfully “deposi[t] his letter in the Courcy Castle letter-box” (197). These scenes do not merely dramatize Crosbie’s conformity to social convention and bad faith; they also depict the minor personal emergency of misaligned emotion and action. The letter-box as icon of the postal system resolves this crisis as his completed work moves into the next phase of the communicative flow. The irony develops further when the recipient repeatedly kisses the writer’s false words, which give her “bliss.” She takes even more delight in writing back: “It was an exquisite pleasure to her to seat herself at her little table, with her neat desk and small appurtenances for epistle-craft” (219). The postal system sets the key of the ironic contrast between Crosbie’s malaise and Lily’s enthusiasm for writing: “She had put down her pen that she might think . . . and then resumed it with a sudden start as though fearing that the postman might be in the village before her letter was finished” (220). The minute cognitive and emotional rhythms of writing and thinking are conducted according to the timing of a postal delivery schedule.

The postal system is large and neutral, yet Trollope opts to give it a face: that of a bitter old post-mistress who, by her own admission, possesses “the sourest temper in Allington” (SHA 221). Mrs. Crump’s relentlessly negative affect contrasts with Lily’s sunniness;
but it also registers the postal system’s pressurized condition as the focus of each villager’s desires: “A separate call was made upon her time with reference to almost every letter brought to her office, and for all this, as she often told her friends in profound disgust, she received as salary no more than ‘tuppence farden a day.’” Lily and Crosbie both make such claims on Crump as they transact their affair via the post. However, *The Small House at Allington* is not concerned with the exploitation of rural postmistresses; rather, it pits the village, with its folkways and homespun desires, against the larger, more regulated national and international systems. It may be Crump’s extraordinary exertions on behalf of the letter-writers that prompts a visit from the London inspector, retold in her country accent: “There was a man here yesterday with his imperence [sic]. I don’t know where he come from,—down from Lun’on, I b’leeve: and this was wrong, and that was wrong, and everything was wrong; and then he said he’d have me discharged the service. . . . So I told ‘un to discharge hizzelf . . . Letters indeed!” (661). Crump’s incompetence—as well as the rustic pace of “John Postman,” who haunts an ale-house instead of delivering the mail—offer a comic rebuke to the post’s modernizing logistics. Crump, who has memorized the book of Revelations and rarely stirs from her house except to attend church and hand-deliver missives, operates within pre-modern time and space. This dwindling domain features face-to-face interactions, so that she is allergic to communication at a distance: “Drat them for letters. I wish there weren’t no sich things.” Crump’s negative affect illustrates a grumpy comic friction at the human-postal interface.

The irony of the postmistress who hates letters coalesces in a comment about the supply chain that is simultaneously clear-sighted and obtuse. When Lily pesters Mrs. Crump for Crosbie’s as-yet undelivered letter, Crump informs her, “I can’t make letters for people if folks don’t write them” (*SITA* 217). The imagined fallacy that the post office might manufacture letters as fetishized commodities to be consumed frames the letter as a young woman’s greatest desire. The quip registers the affective intensity focused on the timely delivery of the mail, while also rebuffing it. Crump’s stubborn negativity thus also expresses the post-office’s impassivity as the site of logistics, which can endlessly defer desire through its delays, all the while offering the alibi that its function is that of the messenger and not the producer.

Yet each stage of the mail’s modernization increased the volume and accelerated the flow of letters in order to stimulate and feed such imagined desires. In the second half of the century, delivery in such urban areas as Birmingham jumped from three to six times daily; in some parts of London, the mail was delivered hourly (Daunton 46-47). Such high performance required logistical marvels. To transition from single horse-drawn mail carts to the Royal Mail coaches in the 1790s, teams of horses had to be watered and harnessed, ready around the clock to take mail trunks at the moment they arrived at the relay point; schedules had to be coordinated with innkeepers so that passengers on the mail coaches could take meals speedily (Campbell-Smith 94-95). When Hill proposed a plan for prepaid letters in 1837, he suggested storing stamped paper at post offices so that letters could be quickly postmarked and sent; this too was a logistical concern, requiring the sheets to be constantly available for consumers to purchase (127). In the 1860s, workers began sorting letters on trains in what were known as “traveling post offices” or TPOs (165). Stationed in Ireland as a postal surveyor, Trollope enthusiastically systematized mail delivery there, removing it from the influence of elites and making the system accessible to all: “it was the ambition of my life to cover the country with rural Letter Carriers” (*Autobiography* 61). Trollope’s passion was logistical: it extended the reach, speed, and regularity of delivery and culminated with the pillar box. Following the introduction of the standardized penny post, rural inhabitants who lacked nearby post offices could readily buy stamps but only inefficiently get their letters into the flow of communication. Observing such boxes in France, Trollope recommended the system in 1851, and iron boxes were erected in the Channel Islands in 1852; they enjoyed tremendous success and were soon widespread throughout England (Super 26-28). Although the post office did not manufacture letters, by making their delivery as cheap, expeditious, and convenient as possible it elicited a
groundswell in their production. Millions of people, especially of the working class, obtained greater communication with far-flung loved ones (Trevelyan 533). Cheap postage “tapped into and fueled the spirit of Victorian liberalism” by giving the powerless voices, promoting hopes for social ascendancy, and creating a marvel of technological progress (Rotunno 6). People of all classes—whether literate or not—reoriented their relationship to sending and receiving letters. Trollope’s letter box intervened precisely at the human threshold, when the hand released the letter into a contained void. As postal logistician and novelist, Trollope could observe affective adjustments to this new communication technology.

Where can we see these adjustments? After all, as a communication network, the post clearly lacked the nuance of face-to-face conversation. Moreover, the materiality of letters served as information about the writer’s intent as if it were unified and purposive, the expression of reasoned sovereignty. The preponderance of letters in Trollope’s fiction could thus furnish evidence for Rachel Ablow’s judgment that “all characters retain their autonomy, self-consciousness, and powers of judgment at all times” (124). On the one hand, Ablow’s description makes sense: while Trollope’s characters express emotion, they also seem remarkably self-possessed and cognitively organized in ways that ought to foreclose the narrative space for affect. Yet their apparent psychic definition and containment co-exist with a persistent erethism surrounding letters that indicates the less organized zone of affect. For example, a second logistical plot within The Small House at Allington reveals the post’s power to instantly produce disgust and dread by delivering unwanted letters. Trollope’s second hobbledehoy, John Eames, finds himself so victimized when he receives a love-letter from a woman he despises yet cannot bring himself to reject. Wishing to throw the letter into the fire without opening it, he instead compels himself to read, and Trollope interpolates the letter’s offensive insinuations with his revulsive reactions: “as he read the words, he crumpled the paper up between his fingers. . . . Again he crunched the paper up in his hand, and, as he did so, he muttered words which I need not repeat at length. But still he went on with his letter. . . . [He] threw the letter from him, thinking whence he might get relief. . . . but presently he took it up again, and drained the bitter cup to the bottom” (SILA 106). John Eames’ self-enforced consumption of Amelia Roper’s letter reveals affective revolt in the slow, ineffectual violence of crumpling and crunching, convulsive actions similar to mastication, painful swallowing, and disturbed digestion. The letter, replete with Amelia’s unified purpose, is like a bolus: “It was written in a fair female hand, with sharp points instead of curves to the letters, but still very legible, and looking as though there were a decided purport in every word of it” (105). If Amelia embodies Ablow’s judgment of Trollope’s characters’ constant self-command, then Eames—finding himself at the endpoint of the logistical flow and forced to receive goods he did not order—registers its affective dimension. The postal system best serves calculating communicators such as Amelia; but it frustrates those like Eames, who lack the modern affective efficiency to marshal their emotions and act consistently upon them, especially in writing letters: “He knew that he could not himself form such words upon the paper; nor, as he was well aware, could he himself find the courage to tell her to her face that he had changed his mind” (109). The postal system’s logistical flow, too fast and precise to accommodate emotional ambivalence, begins to influence human relations, ruthlessly channeling them into economic, contractual forms. Eames’ and Amelia’s correspondence exemplifies the unevenness of this transformation.

One of the most modern of Trollope’s characters thus exemplifies the odd imbrication of the postal system and affective life. In The Way We Live Now, Winifred Hurtle writes three letters to Paul Montague in her struggle to reconcile her explosive fury toward him with her desire to win his love. The first generously releases him from his marriage proposal; this one she keeps in her pocket, telling herself she should send it but not making herself do it. In the second, she “gives] play to all her strongest feelings on the other side,—being in truth torn in two directions” (WWLN np). This letter, written “with rapid words, and flashing thoughts,” includes a distinctively un-feminine threat to horsewhip him for his lack of loyalty. The third
letter, responding to his offer to visit her, is powerfully minimalist, consisting only of the words, “Yes. Come. W.H.” Mrs. Hurtle’s three letters display her affective range, between violent rage, forgiveness, and wounded dignity. But as she tells Paul when he arrives, “I could not send them all by post, together.” She therefore shows him the three letters, so that he may fully understand her divided mind. When two characters sit down to review the unsent correspondence of one to the other, rather than speaking their feelings directly, the Victorian novel enters into a new kind of interpersonal bureaucracy.

Does this episode represent a failure of the postal system’s power or its triumph? Clearly it is both. The system fails insofar as it cannot convey Mrs. Hurtle’s ambivalence; she must forego sending the two more expressive letters and substitute a face-to-face meeting to effectively communicate with Paul. Yet the post wins a game of higher-stakes: its very limitations generate different possible communicative acts into which Mrs. Hurtle might channel her affect; each one represents a different model of personhood. In this way, the post’s limitations permit Trollope to develop her character, transforming her from one model—the enraged, jilted lover—to another—the independent woman who ultimately rises above Paul’s insult. At stake in Paul’s and Mrs. Hurtle’s exchange is whether or not he will honor his verbal marriage proposal, affirming it as a binding contract. One end of Mrs. Hurtle’s affective gamut—the wrathful, horsewhipping one—insists on the primacy of presence and shared experience as the grounds of the contract; this model disparages letters as mere ephemera: “Wrote to me! Could any mere letter of your writing break the bond by which we were bound together? . . . The letter must be unwritten” (WWLN np). The opposite end of Mrs. Hurtle’s affective swing acknowledges that letters cannot be unwritten: people can only write more letters. It is by this perpetuation of correspondence that the postal system ensures its powerful hold, proliferating different affects, situations, and social relations. The romance between Mrs. Hurtle and Paul eventually resolves into a new social relation of uneasy friendship for which there is no name ready at hand.

Contrasting with John Eames’s and Mrs. Hurtle’s ambivalence, Trollope also plots the mastery of affect into a mode that Anderson calls sincerity. This mastery becomes the signature of subjectivities thoroughly keyed to postal logistics in his fiction, as the central plot of Can You Forgive Her? attests. When the novel’s protagonist George Vavasor renews his passionless, mercenary, yet sincere proposal of marriage to his cousin Alice, he gambles with the already-written letter: “He took it up and held the corners between his forefinger and thumb, throwing forward his hand towards the flame, as though willing that the letter should escape from him and perish if chance should so decide” (CYFH 334). The motif repeats when he asks his servant boy to flip a coin to determine whether or not he should mail it: Jem “declared that the uppermost surface showed a tail. ‘Then take that letter and post it,’ said George Vavasor. Whereupon Jem . . . did take the letter and did post it. In due accordance with postal regulations it reached Vavasor Hall and was delivered to Alice on the Christmas morning.” One instantly notices that affect is absent from this scene. Since there is no risk of the letter going awry, George’s decision to enter it into the logistical chain by posting it becomes the site of deliberation. His calculation is that of the gambler assessing his odds—in this case, of whether or not Alice will accept him a second time. Alice’s equally passionless, stipulating acceptance of the proposal contained in the letter forms the moral error the plot must correct but also registers a modernity in which marriage partners express their ambivalence through negotiation. Trollope dramatizes this modishness through her logistical calculations vis-à-vis her reply: since “the post illuminated Vavasor but three days a week,” Alice gave “a boy sixpence to take it to Shap” (348). Alice’s and George’s improvisatory uses of postal delivery boys do not undermine but rather extend the official system into rural pockets and gaps in delivery schedules, covering even Christmas. The result strikingly resembles a twentieth-century negotiation of marriage, one that accommodates both George’s frankness about his economic motives and Alice’s bureaucratic construction of decisional safeguards. Adapting themselves to postal
logistics, George and Alice represent modern, affectively controlled individuals who, at this point in the novel, seem to be two of a kind.

In Can You Forgive Her?, Trollope offers a comic version of this calculating use of the post in the figures of Geoffrey Palliser's sisters, Iphy and Phemy, avid letter writers who do not read their own correspondence: “Free communication with all the world is their motto, and Rowland Hill is the god they worship. Only they have been forced to guard themselves against too great an accession of paper and ink. ... I shrewdly suspect they don't read half what they get. ... No; their delight is in writing. They sit each at her desk after breakfast, and go on till lunch” (CYFH 259). Iphy and Phemy are like feminine, domestic versions of Trollope's minor civil service clerks, scribbling away at meaningless paperwork rather than expressive correspondence. The difference is their seeming zest for the activity, which admits of no emotional complexity or affective difficulty. Letters slide from their pens into the post. In their caricatured devotion to Rowland Hill, they figure forth the imaginary post office dedicated to producing letters, as implied by Mrs. Crump. Their enthusiasm for writing is so impersonal and so copious that it is humorously imagined to effect the post office's global reach. As letter producers, the two sisters mirror George's and Alice's impassivity in a comic vein. Their zany postal zeal exposes the modernized system's encouragement of the flatter, more one-dimensional affects through which to conduct personal relations.

Perhaps the best Trollopian example of the saturation of everyday life by the post, and the consequent pressure the postal system exerts on affective states, is He Knew He Was Right. The novel's main plot—the breakdown of a marriage—and its subplots—involving the contractual negotiations of marriages—all feature the creep of postal logistics into affective states of mind. It is not merely that Louis Trevelyans splits from his wife because she has written to a disreputable family acquaintance: but that Trollope makes his declaration coincide with the disappearance of her stamped letter into the anonymous flow of the mail: “‘Then we must part;—that is all. I will take care that you shall hear from me before to-morrow morning.’ So saying, he left the room, and, passing through the hall,
saw that the letter had been taken away” (HK 92). Trollope does not narrate the affective moment but lets the letter's mailing by a faceless servant imply it. Similarly, when Trevelyans writes a harsh letter to his wife after their separation, he spends a day steeling himself to send it, “trying to prove the weight of every phrase that he had used. Once or twice his heart almost relented. Once he had the letter in his hand, that he might tear it. But he did not tear it. He put it back into his pocket, and thought again of his grievance” (260). Trollope narrates Trevelyans's vacillating cognition and emotion, and the shuttling between the two states of mind conjures the affect subtending them. This tiny zone shrinks as the letter departs his person, and he unifies and solidifies his affect: “Yes; it was his duty to be firm. So he went out and posted the letter” (261). Ablow observes that Trevelyans's letters increasingly form a closed circuit of pleasurable self-alienation (132-33). As he issues commands and directives through the post, his inter-subjective space shrinks until his sense of himself precisely matches his public position—a state of madness. This insane error gives the novel its ironic title; Trollope frames it as a cognitive condition, complementing the post as an instrument of sovereign reason. Yet the novel's title equally discloses the irony that true knowledge is partial, interactive with emotion, and contingent on an elusive affect—that which Trevelyans can't know—because he can neither feel it nor confirm it through others.

Is it possible to be jealous of the postal system? In He Knew He Was Right, the character Aunt Jemima Stanbury illustrates this attitude. She bans pens and ink from the bedrooms, drawing-room, and dining-room; she regards penny postage as evidence of “the coming ruin” and revives the new pillar boxes. Although bourgeois convenience-seekers lobbied post officials to erect them near their homes, she resents the one that “stood almost close to her own hall door” because “she had not the faintest belief that any letter put into one of them would ever reach its destination” (HK 69). Consequently, she insists on walking her letters to the post office herself. This detail is more than Trollope's self-referential joke or a cheap shot at an elderly woman's attachment to old habits. An authorial figure who attempts to manipulate her family members and acquaintances into
marriages and professions, Miss Stanbury resents the pillar boxes for their automated power: “She could not understand why people should not walk with their letters to a respectable post-office instead of chucking them into an iron stump,—as she called it,—out in the middle of the street with nobody to look after it.” Eschewing trust in a communication network, which affords the complex authorship, transmission, and reception of multiple, conflicting desires and intentions, Aunt Stanbury wishes to control the social placement of those around her. Trollope plays this out as an older woman’s inability to comprehend and credit love-matches in place of mercenary ones, a common trope in Victorian novels. Aunt Stanbury’s resentment of the postal network and attempts to control the writing of letters complements Louise Trevelyan’s efforts both to police his wife’s correspondence and his own use of the post to assert his dominance. Both register older models of social power that gradually give way as the postal network reaches deeper into the English countryside and the world. Nuncombe Putney, the parish twenty miles west of Exeter where the Stanbury plot unfolds, is served by a wooden-legged postman; when penniless forces the Stanbury women to relocate beyond his beat, they must call at the post office themselves for their letters. As in The Small House at Allington, England’s rural postal infrastructure remains rustic and slow-paced, but its connection to more modern spaces also enables new situations and social configurations to arise.

To balance the novel, Trollope writes numerous scenes of letter-writing and reception that dramatize more even relations between affect and cognition, inter-subjectivity and sovereign reason. These individual, intra-psychic relations contribute to the more modern social relations the novel articulates, as an interlocking sequence of escalating and ebbing situations. Contrasting the open-endedness of a “situation” to the discreteness of an “event,” Berlant describes it as “unforeclosed experience” and “animated suspension”: “The situation is therefore a genre of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable” (5-6). Trollope’s situations express this sense of change. Representing instances of marriage and separation more common in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, Trevelyan’s break with his wife is a situation that proliferates, creating others that are all mediated by logistical pressures—such as his kidnapping of their son and the arrangement of visitation rights. Another unstable moment of social change occurs when a young woman writes to her sister to ask advice about marrying a man she has just met, and the postal schedule demands that the writer act quickly: “The post left Nuncombe Putney at three; and therefore the letter had to be written before their early dinner. So Priscilla went into the garden and sat herself down under an old cedar that she might discuss the matter with herself in all its bearings” (HK 323). The mail pickup determines the available window in which Priscilla Stanbury can master her feelings and thoughts in the figure of “self-discussion.” Under the benignant emblem of nature and spirit, she marshals her affect before returning to the house to write her response to her sister Dorothy. In this specific situation, she must fashion intelligible advice to reject the economic security of marriage in favor of personal autonomy. The event of the postal pickup structures her affective practice. Since the social rules governing women’s advice to each other about marriage are in flux, it is the postal schedule that forces affect and intellect into a new situation.

Thus, in Trollope’s novels, postal logistics modernize affect by flattening it, but that very compression can also bring about new social formations. In He Knew He Was Right, Emily’s correspondence with Colonel Osborne, Nora Rowley’s sanguine love letters with Hugh Stanbury, and Hugh’s epistolary support for his sister Dorothy all perform new social alignments—a friendship between a married woman and an older man, a middle-class marriage without money, and brotherly support for a sister’s independence, respectively. Emily Trevelyan’s free use of the post becomes the modern rebuke to Trevelyan’s insatiable attachment to a husband’s ancient absolute rule over his wife. In The Way We Live Now, the post mediates Mrs. Hurtle’s development of true independence and dignity. Even Iphig and Phemy’s comic rival letter-factories in Can You Forgive Her? demonstrate women’s capacity for a form of
literary production. Each of these realignments have feminist potential, forcing a revision of the traditional view of Trollope’s social conservatism similar to the one proposed by Deborah Denenholz Morse (169). Trollope’s postal situations have also been heard to echo queerly, playing subversively on the sexual connotations of increased and less discriminating circulation mobilized by the mail (Thomas 98). Catherine J. Golden, noting the proliferation of unsolicited circular letters, blackmail schemes, and propaganda, emphasizes anxiety as the primary affect associated with the mass use of the mail for “impersonal, offensive, dangerous, anonymous, and promiscuous communication” (164). Yet Trollope’s consistent emphasis on the letter as the scene of multiple and conflicting affects affords numerous situations to form and reform the social body, pushing against norms and thus starting to form new ones. The “anxiety thesis” seen so often in analyses of Victorian culture can obscure some of these affective microstructures from visibility.

Henry James linked Trollope’s logistical precision to the quotidian life and flattened affect of his characters, whose actions are “registered to the letter and timed to the minute. They write a number of letters, which are duly transcribed; they make frequent journeys by the down-train from London; they have cups of tea in their bedrooms” (255). Yet Trollope’s ability to construct lengthy plots and recruit readers to follow them attests to his canny ability to show the affective dimensions of lives increasingly lived according to logistics. If one accepts the analogy of author as logician, then one can observe Trollope moving his characters into affective and cognitive positions within the various plots with enough precision and efficiency to keep readers motivated and interested. Regenia Gagnier has described Trollope’s ability to recuperate affect that his plots sometimes seem to foreclose (243). Especially over monthly and weekly serial installments, the narrative goods needed to be delivered in a ratio calculated to preserve continuity and build interest. Two brief examples of delayed letters evoke readers’ affective role in Trollope’s fiction. In The Way We Live Now, Hetta Carbury directs her letter forgiving Paul Montague for his dalliance with Mrs. Hurtle to his club, the Beargarden; but it has gone out of business, and “the letter never reached his hands. When, therefore, he returned to London he was justified in supposing that she had refused even to notice his appeal” (WWLN np). This mishap delays their reconciliation, though attentive readers know it will take place. Similarly, in Doctor Thorne, Mary Thorne’s letter to Frank Gresham, with which I began, undergoes a long delay; it falls into the hands of Frank’s mother, Lady Arabella, who resists the desire to destroy it and finally surrenders it to him. Readers suspect Mary and Frank will be married, so the delayed letter has the effect of increasing the urgency of this narrative resolution. In such moments, Trollope prompts readers’ identifications with characters suspended between postal communication—the space in which the system’s logistical aspects become most visible and bear most pressingly on their desires.

Even as Trollope’s readers identify with characters, they also remain detached, especially when the Trollopian narrator limns the plots’ resolutions. For example, toward the end of He Knew He Was Right, the narrator claims “we will not anticipate by alluding prematurely to Hugh Stanbury’s treachery, or death”—or other unlikely narrative outcomes (HK 826); “[b]ut the instructed reader must be aware that Camilla French ought to have a husband found for her; that Colonel Osborne should be caught in some matrimonial trap . . . and that something should be at least attempted for Priscilla Stanbury.” Exposing and discussing narrative expectations, Trollope defuses any suspense about the plots’ outcomes; readers need not wait for new information, as in detective fiction; nor, as in sensation fiction, do they experience shocks and thrills. Rather, their pleasure lies in the performative aspect of their reading, the only means by which the narratives, as a series of tasks, can be completed. Completion affords a special pleasure peculiar in a logistical world: not only does it validate one’s value to the system, but it brings the system itself into comprehensible view. Thus, Trollope’s readers become his letter carriers: as their reading enables communication between characters, they become self-conscious of the novel’s world as a system.
Trollope’s narrators often encourage such self-conscious reading when the prose shifts into epistolary form—for example, when observing that Nora Rowley “would trust her letter, when written, to no hands but her own; and as she herself dropped it into the safe custody of the Postmaster-General, it also shall be revealed to the public” (HK 502). Here Trollope positions his readers as public, snooping letter-carriers or mail sorters. He implies that letters in the logistical flow achieve a kind of transparency within their very safety. So readers, as letter-carriers, also ensure the security of the mail, ironically, by opening and reading it. They form a kind of omniscient personification of the postal system. In this position, their reading paradoxically slows the delivery of the letter, expanding the time of the letter so it may establish the writer’s voice and expression and the letter reader’s reaction. As I have been arguing, this is the time of affect for the characters but for the novel’s readers as well. It is also the realm of the aesthetic, which, as Siegert notes, inhabits the delay in the communicative relay: “The impossibility of technologically processing data in real time is the possibility of art” (12). Trollope openly meditates these conditions of aesthetic communication. For example, the narrator of Doctor Thorne interrupts to justify his unfashionable quasi-epistolary format as “one which is very expressive when in good hands” because it generates “natural trust” (DT 369). “Natural trust” describes Trollope’s particular style of realism, bringing readers inside not only the psychology of communicative acts but also the network that transmits them. Within that network, readers doubtless experience a range of affects, one being the pleasure of having delivered Trollope’s letters to their final destinations.

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**Threads of Masculinity: The Nexus of Press and Manliness in Trollope’s Novels**

by Margaret Markwick

By the opening of the twenty-first century, our taste for things Victorian had progressed from a style statement to mass cultural appropriation. After learning to cherish “original features” in our Victorian terraces, and to value solid mahogany furniture, we now have a flourishing trade in their reproduction. Popular writers such as Sarah Waters, Michel Faber, Philip Pullman, and Sebastian Faulks have all reconstituted a twenty-first-century version of Victorian Britain to locate their fictions. In exploiting our appetite for period costume drama, Andrew Davies has made dramatizations of the Victorian blockbuster novel his own and immensely profitable specialty. Such artistry is essentially a reaching back to access what we think we recognize as Victorian—a society of enormous gulfs between rich and poor, with a great seething underbelly of sexual hypocrisy. We are less aware of areas where, in contrast, the Victorians reach forward into our society, where attitudes that we fail to identify as Victorian are perceived as new and innovative ways of thinking today.

From this starting point of cultural appropriation, I propose to examine Trollope’s novels to discover the ways in which his thesis of masculinity and male sexuality rebuts our popular conceptions of how these were constructed in mid-Victorian Britain. I also suggest that our own age’s theorizing of these topics, far from discarding old ways of shaping these ideas, does in fact appropriate the cultural norms of the very era they seek to repudiate.

What constitutes manliness for Trollope, and how does he share his thesis with us? This is the question addressed in my book, *New Men in Trollope’s Novels: Rewriting the Victorian Male*, a study of Trollope’s men which reveals, beneath a veneer that supports a conventional view of men finding confirmation of manly assertiveness in the pursuit of their professions and politics, a subversive voice which