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"THE DUCA DI CRINOLA"—WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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By his own admission, Anthony Trollope viewed the novel as a means of entertaining and of teaching, a literary form whose popularity and capacity to educate outweigh the frivolousness traditionally regarded as inherent in fiction. Such a view falls well within the dominant lines of nineteenth-century thought and also follows from older traditions. For Trollope, the union of morality and aesthetics remains indivisible. An interest in what the twelfth-century scholar, author, and Bishop John of Salisbury called "the cultivation of virtue and the guidance of one's conduct"¹ underlies all of Trollope's novels, shapes them, controls them, and explains why the events that happen happen. Behind the histories of Augustus Melmotte, Ferdinand Lopez, Feemy and Thady Macdermot, Lily Dale and Adolphus Crosbie lies Trollope's belief in cultivating virtue and guiding conduct by providing either object lessons or exempla. Indeed, Trollope can no more envision writing novels without a moral purpose than can John of Salisbury envision any writing at all without a moral end (p. 74; bk. 2, sec. 1). Implicit in Trollope's stance is the old belief in the desirability of wisdom, which yields "the love of what is good and the practice of virtue" (p. 74; bk. 2, sec. 1). What do we gain by reading about his many characters, his heroes and heroines, both "perfect" and "imperfect," unless it be a better understanding of what wisdom consists? Trollope himself would be the first to question the value of his novels if they did not foster this wisdom, if they did not cause us to strive to love what is good and to practice what is right.

Trollope makes clear in all his theoretical comments, whether such comments occur explicitly within his novels or not, that he wishes to foster the "love of what is good and the practice of virtue." Whereas in his theoretical prose pieces he affirms his general commitment to instruction, entertainment, sympathy, and verisimilitude as the purposes of the novel, in various comments throughout his novels he asserts the particular ends to which he turns instruction and entertainment: that sympathy to be worthwhile must be challenged; that heroes to be helpful must be realistically portrayed; that the reader to be aided must be respected; that to be better we must recognize our own culpability. He believes in sympathy and charity as the means by which his novels work. Through both his digressions and the action of his novels, Trollope hopes to inculcate charity by awakening his

reader's conscience and to entertain by providing sympathetic characters who face situations both challenging and problematic; his attempt to educate is not heavy-handed, and the amusement he provides is not trivial.

Believing that we will naturally love the good, Trollope provides good characters for us to love and good behavior for us to emulate. At the same time he shows us by means of flawed protagonists and shady secondary characters that virtue consists of charity and sympathy in our daily lives. While providing vicarious adventures through the tribulations of his characters, the structure of the novels and the digressions within them cultivate the self-awareness and compassion that enable us to see ourselves more clearly and to gain the understanding that allows us to accept the inadequacies of others. When we gain understanding and acceptance, we will treat the less fortunate among us as they should be treated so that they, too, may achieve greater goodness and virtue. Only through charity and compassion will the condition of society be improved. Because men can never achieve perfection on this earth, novels like *The Bertrams* or *The Way We Live Now* depict life bleakly; however, Trollope's faith in life's purpose—men's striving towards what they believe to be right—provides the source of the joyousness in novels like *Ayala's Angel* or *Doctor Thorne*. Because the striving for virtue justifies our existence, for Trollope, only the striving matters.

Having considered Trollope's "theoretical" aims in writing novels, we may yet wonder why his theory and aims matter or how they make a difference. The answer to these questions lies behind Trollope's obvious commitment to instruction, entertainment, sympathy, and verisimilitude. It lies in an undercurrent, an interest in the nature and ambiguity of language, an interest that occasionally becomes explicit, that often remains implicit, that nonetheless permeates all aspects of his better novels and many aspects of his weaker ones. This interest redeems what might otherwise remain simply commonplace. The undercurrent distinguishes Trollope's novels from all those other Victorian novels, like Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* or Geraldine Jewsbury's *Zoe*, whose popularity died with the world that gave them life. This interest is epitomized by the history of George Roden, in *Marion Fay*, who unexpectedly inherits a title.

By the time Roden learns that he is actually the Duca di Crinola and not merely an impoverished English gentleman, a host of problems has arisen, although the initial complication of the plot is fairly conventional. Having grown up in obscurity, knowing nothing about his father, and earning a living as a clerk in the Post Office, the

republican Roden has met, fallen in love with, and become engaged to Lady Frances Trafford, the sister of his republican friend, Lord Hampstead—all this in the first chapter. None of the lady's family, however—her republican brother, her Radical father, her Conservative stepmother—approves of the engagement, which cannot lead to marriage without parental consent. During the course of the novel, this conventional complication challenges the assumptions of Lady Frances's brother, distresses her father, and disgusts her stepmother. The family's reactions reveal not only the discrepancy between what Hampstead and his father profess and what they feel but also the consequences of the stepmother's narrow-minded, thoroughgoing conservatism. For most of the novel Roden and Lady Frances remain separated, and not until *after* the revelation of his parentage in the forty-third chapter do they meet again—in the fiftieth: a meeting which has become possible only after Roden learns his own history.

Asked by his mother to accompany her to Italy, Roden learns that, as a girl, she had once lost her fortune in a foolish marriage to a profligate Italian duke. In exchange for the return of her fortune by the Duke's family, she had renounced the name and titles belonging to herself and to her infant son and had returned to England. Twenty-five years after their separation, her husband has died, and Roden's uncle, the Duke's brother, withdraws the compact she had made with her father-in-law, recognizes the legitimacy of her marriage and of her son, and allows them both to claim their titles. Despite Roden's desire for secrecy, his accession cannot be kept secret, and soon "all" London knows of his title, if not of the how and why behind it. With the discovery of his past, a different set of problems arises both for him and for the reader. The impediment to his engagement has been removed, but new issues have been introduced, this time about the nature of identity and the relationship between the individual and society.

Roden's dilemma, which Trollope develops both directly through action or dialogue and indirectly through his commentary, epitomizes issues and attitudes that run throughout his fiction, issues that inform the action and the dialogue and that underlie his digressions. However, what often remains only implicit or peripheral elsewhere in his novels become explicit and central in *Marion Fay*. Here, Trollope's interest in language comes to the fore. The design of the narrative causes the reader and the characters in the novel to wonder *who* George Roden is and *whether* he has the right to reject an hereditary title. While Roden's acquaintances struggle with the question of what to call him, the reader wonders about more significant issues concerning the nature of identity and of names. The clerk's accession to a title that fortuitously resolves

his problems with the family of Lady Frances is not simply what Ruth apRoberts calls a “shameless *deus ex machina*”²: it implicitly challenges our conceptions about individual will, freedom, and responsibility.

To focus our attention on a single issue, however, Trollope emphasizes the merit and legitimacy of the title Roden rejects. The title is neither spurious nor recent but old and honorable and connected to the Bourbons. As the eldest son of an eldest son of one of the noblest, oldest, and worthiest of aristocratic Italian families, the Post Office clerk is now, even by fastidious English standards, a member of the nobility and an acceptable suitor for Lady Frances’s hand. The value of the title Roden persists in refusing emphasizes the significance of his action: the Post Office clerk rejects something inherently worthwhile, something that genuinely honors those who accept it. In refusing this honor, not only does Roden remain true to the principles of his republicanism, but he also prefers the dignity of honest labor to the idleness of impoverished nobility. Roden’s accession to the title creates a predicament: it brings him no fortune, and it displaces him in society.³ Is Roden now an Italian or an Englishman? By education and taste he is an Englishman; by birth and rank he is now recognized as an Italian. By itself, the title is enough to cause society to regard him as a foreigner, despite a lifetime spent in England.

If Roden assumes the title in Italy, he will live in the shadow of his uncle, a man already acknowledged there as the Duke and a member of the Italian ministry. He will then find himself in an alien country, claiming a title accorded (albeit improperly) a prominent citizen, lacking any respectable means of supporting himself, and cut off from any kind of worthwhile employment. If, instead, he assumes the title and returns to England, he will find himself a duke without a fortune and will still need to earn a living. Although an impoverished gentleman may work with honor in the Post Office, Roden finds an unbearable absurdity in the idea of a “Duca” sharing a desk with the foolish clerk Crocker, an absurdity recognized by his superiors, if not by his inferiors.

Just as the postal functionary Sir Boreas Bodkin and other government officials question the propriety of an Italian nobleman working as a low-grade clerk in the British civil service for less than two hundred pounds a year, Roden himself questions what will happen to him as an Englishman if he assumes a foreign title: does he or can he remain English? If he assumes it, he becomes an Italian. If an Italian title makes Roden an Italian, as the Marquis of Kingsbury, Lady Frances’s father, has been told it would, then what does it mean to

be English? Perhaps, on one level, Roden's dilemma burlesques aristocratic folderol; on another level it raises serious questions about names and titles.

The problem of Roden's identity echoes that of Lord Hampstead:

Lord Hampstead's name was John. He was the Honourable John Trafford, called by courtesy Earl of Hampstead. To the world at large he was Lord Hampstead; to his friends in general he was Hampstead; to his stepmother he was especially Hampstead....To his father he had become Hampstead lately, with a hesitating twang in the tongue. In the early days there had been some secret family agreement that in spite of conventionalities he would be John among them. The Marquis had latterly suggested that increasing years made this foolish....But he was still John to his sister, and to some half-dozen sympathizing friends....⁴

On one level this passage remains pure farce; on another it asks us to consider what *is* in a name, and it suggests both the fluidity of identity and the disjunction between the man known as John and the words by which he is designated: we all recognize the difference between calling a man "John," "Hampstead," or "Lord Hampstead." Although the man so designated remains the same, the name by which he is called affects our perception of him and indicates as well the nature of our relationship with him.

Unlike the republican Hampstead, however, who has grown up with his title and has argued unsuccessfully and inconsistently against it for most of his adult life, George Roden has thought of himself only as Roden and only as an English gentleman. Now, he not only unexpectedly and suddenly acquires a new name, but he also unexpectedly and suddenly faces the consequences of that new name. Post Office clerks are not dukes, and "George Roden" evokes a response that differs in kind from that evoked by "the Duca di Crinola." Even those who continue to address their envelopes to "George Roden, Esq." write letters infused with their awareness of his title. From the infatuated Crocker's ejaculations of "Duke, Duke!" to the heightened respect of the servants, all around Roden pay homage to the title. In so doing, however, they disregard the man himself and reveal the superficiality of social relations. Ultimately, rank or title, external "goods" that the world has to offer, and not individual merit, may make or mar our futures.⁵

Irony compounds the matter of Roden's accession because as a republican he has long opposed hereditary titles and has always viewed

them as absurd. Whereas many of Trollope's contemporary readers might have been delighted should similar good luck befall them, Roden himself is dismayed because the accession makes a mockery of the political convictions he has held. As Trollope makes clear, moreover, Roden's convictions are genuine (unlike those of his protégé Hampstead), for Roden has recognized some inequities of hereditary titles, the very inequities that his own accession demonstrates. It is this awareness that motivates him when, in writing to Lady Frances, he hopes "she will think neither worse of [him] on that account,—nor better" and fears the latter more than the former (312). As a republican, Roden chooses to be loved for himself alone and not for his hereditary title. Because his republican tendencies led to his friendship with Hampstead and Lady Frances, the title should not disqualify him as a suitor.

The epitome of the predicament created by Roden's accession occurs when Lord Hampstead tells Marion Fay, the woman he loves, about Roden's title by saying, "George Roden is not George Roden" (332). This logical impossibility reflects the sum of the clerk's experience. Just as all who know him have wondered what to call him, Hampstead's statement reminds us of what the title has done—it has unnamed the clerk, dispossessed him, turned his identity upside down. Of course, if Roden would accept the title, the problems of who he is and how he is to be addressed would be solved. He, however, has recognized what his society remains indifferent to, the man himself, and prefers to remain true to his principles and, hence, to himself.

Society's view appears clearly when Lord Persiflage offers Roden the position of Registrar of State Records to the Foreign Office and says:

"There is no reason on earth why [the position] should not be held by an Italian. ...[A]s an Italian you would of course be entitled to call yourself by your hereditary title....I can only tell you what would be the case. The title would no doubt give a prestige to the new office. It is exactly the kind of work which would fall readily into the hands of a foreigner of high rank. One cannot explain these things, but it is so. The £1500 a year would more probably become £2000 if you submitted to be called by *your own proper name.*" (449 emphasis mine)

A number of assumptions—including who and what George Roden is, an Italian of high rank whose "proper name" is the Duca di Crinola—underlie this statement by a man who understands "the Civil Service of his country perfectly" (449). Once the legitimacy of the title

is established, Persiflage never doubts Roden's right to it, notices no discrepancy between his assumptions about the man and the man whom he actually addresses—that the "foreigner" is a foreigner in name only, an Italian of high rank only because his father, whom he never knew, was an Italian of high rank. The life that Roden has led in England counts for nothing. Because of an accident of birth and of death, his "proper name" is undeniably the Duca di Crinola.

In short, the handle to his name provides Roden with the means to better himself in society, a means beyond the reach of ordinary mortals, a means without regard to his individual worth. While Roden remains a postal clerk, his menial position overshadows his grace, dignity, and merits as a man, all of which count for nothing in the well-born world. When the clerk becomes a duke, however, his poverty becomes irrelevant, and his grace, dignity, and merit affirm the rightness of his title and of Lady Frances's choice. By chance, Roden affirms society's judgment of itself, that the aristocracy are different from the rest of us. As Vivian, Lord Persiflage's private secretary, says,

"[Roden] always seemed to be—to be,—just one of ourselves....A fellow doesn't come out like that unless he's somebody....[S]ilk purses don't get made out of sow's ears....[Blood] always shows itself." (317)

Society believes that Roden's personal advantages, advantages wasted on a postal clerk, rightfully belong to it.

Although Roden adamantly asserts his right to reject a title he cannot support monetarily, the course of the narrative demonstrates that the decision is not his alone to make—those around him will have a say in the matter. For instance, although his mother has no interest in her own title, she cannot understand why her son should reject his, and she urges him to adopt it; his hostess Lady Persiflage argues, "A man cannot be this or that just as he pleases....A man has to take the name he inherits" (366); Crocker exclaims, "A man has to be called by what he is, not by what he chooses" (346). Indeed, society views names and titles as conferring certain privileges and responsibilities that a young man cannot reject lightly or ignore easily; society, moreover, has just as much right to recognize a genuine duke as it has to spurn a fraudulent one. To these arguments, Roden remains largely unsympathetic, but when told by Lady Persiflage that he has no right to deprive Lady Frances of her due rank in society, he pauses momentarily in his repudiation of a penniless, hereditary title. Although unsympathetic to the constraints imposed upon him by society, he

recognizes certain obligations to Fanny; his love for her and hers for him limit his independence. He hesitates in his repudiation of the title until she assures him that she would be happy as the Duchess of Crinola *only* if he would be happy as the Duke.

Yet society still conspires against him: Roden may withdraw his nomination to the Foreigners Club, a nomination made without his consent, but society will not let him shake the title:

The women when they were alone with him would call him Duca, joking with him; and it was out of the question that he should be angry with them for their jokes. He became aware that behind his back he was always spoken of as The Duke, and that this was not done with any idea of laughing at him. The people around him believed that he was a Duke and ought to be called a Duke. Of course it was in joke that Lady Llwddythlw always called Lady Frances Duchessina when they were together, because Lady Frances had certainly not as yet acquired her right to the name; but it all tended to the same point. He became aware that the very servants around him understood it. They did not call him “your grace” or “my lord,” or make spoken allusion to his rank; but they looked it. All that obsequiousness due to an hereditary nobleman, which is dear to the domestic heart, was paid to him. (450)

In the long run, the customs of society will prevail. What cannot be resented as a joke will, through usage, become familiar and will be accepted. The mere existence of the title gives it an influence on Roden’s life that cannot be shaken. When Roden visits Hautboy Castle, for instance, Lord Persiflage mentions Roden’s uncle after dinner. In so doing, he strengthens the title’s hold over the nephew: Roden cannot deny his uncle and is “driven to acknowledge the family, and almost to acknowledge the country” (368). If uncle, family, and country exist, the title cannot be far behind in reality. If these are admitted as real, Roden must eventually admit that the title is also real. Acknowledging his uncle admits implicitly Roden’s right to the title. If he cannot deny his kinship, he cannot deny his birth.

Yet the predicament of the Duca di Crinola remains more of an extended rhetorical question than a finished problem in logic. Trollope’s belief that the “aristocratic element will prevail” (451), that is, that the individual will yield to social pressure, resolves the plot but does not answer the question, what exactly *is* in a name. In general, the comments of Crocker, the Persiflages, and the Kingsburys raise the

issue of names and titles, and the weight of "custom" settles it. No actual answer is given, however, perhaps because early in the novel Trollope himself undercuts the seriousness of the issues he will ultimately raise:

A lord is like a new hat. The one on the arm the other on the head are no evidences of mental superiority. But yet they are taken, and not incorrectly taken, as signs of merit. (49)

On the one hand, Trollope here has reduced lords to the importance of hats; on the other, he approves of the esteem the world gives both to lords and to those who know them. Balancing the weight of social custom against a man's will, Trollope knows that after all George Roden is, has been, and must be George Roden—to himself and to his wife, if to no one else.

Trollope nonetheless revels in the dilemma created by the problem of Roden's identity and knows that he need not resolve the issue, for, as he himself acknowledges, the issue will resolve itself:

"[T]hings" very often do arrange themselves better than men or women can arrange them. Objections which were at first very strong gradually fade away. Ideas which were out of the question become possible. Time quickly renders words and names and even days habitual to us. (36)

Although society will "prevail," its prevailing does not appear as an eventual defeat of Roden but as one of the compromises inherent in life, in part because tradition and custom are often wiser than individual men and women can hope to be. In fifteen or twenty years, Roden may feel (if he thinks of the matter at all) that his principles have been compromised, but he will also have gained the good things that this world has to offer. Moreover, he deserves them. His grace, dignity, and merit justify the title he has received; because he will never end up as a fainéant duke, his integrity deserves the rewards this world can offer. In the end, Roden merits what the title can yield and has already yielded. In the end, the answer to Roden's predicament lies in what Trollope regards as the ultimate ordering of the universe.

The case here is perhaps more acute than in other of Trollope's novels, but Roden's dilemma shares with the dilemmas found elsewhere that interest in philosophical abstractions that underlies the seriousness of Trollope's didactic purpose and his commitment to entertainment. Roden's accession and the consequent elaboration on what to call the

man merely epitomize Trollope's interest in those abstractions that govern our behavior. The predicament of the postal clerk leads us to consider the influence and the effect names have on people. A full appreciation of those names, made possible by Trollope's acute sensitivity to the meanings of words and the implications of those meanings, causes us to step back for a moment to reflect.

Although names as such do not much occupy Trollope elsewhere, the nuances of language shape the action in many of his novels. While Trollope's protagonists often ponder the meaning of the words that govern their behavior, and sometimes even agonize over them, the train of events leads the reader to reflect on the implications of those words: in *The Warden* Septimus Harding's pain when he realizes he may have no moral right to the sinecure at Hiram's Hospital revolves around the difference between "moral" and "legal" rights; in *Lady Anna* Lady Anna Lovel's hesitation between the tailor Daniel Thwaite and the Earl of Lovel as she learns to recognize the difference between the "romantic" truth of a "coarse" tailor and the tarnished truth of a beautiful peer turns on the distinction between romantic faith and "prosaic" reality; in *Ralph the Heir* Sir Gregory Newton's thwarted desire to leave his estate to his natural son Ralph when the father dies before he can "rectify" the error of his youth by subverting the proper descent of Newton Priory centers on the meaning of "kinship" and "custom"; in *Miss Mackenzie* Margaret Mackenzie's choice of a husband, as she learns to discriminate between the hypocrisy of Mr. Maguire, the vulgarity of Mr. Rubb, and the worn but genuine breeding of John Ball, defines "true gentility." In almost all of Trollope's novels, characters struggle with the meanings and implications of those words that affect their moral and ethical lives.

Behind nearly every decision made by nearly every character lies an elaboration on the proper meaning of the words that govern behavior. Either characters themselves talk about what words mean or Trollope shows what happens to those who have misconstrued the words that govern their behavior. Working contrapuntally and by amplification,⁶ Trollope contrasts those who understand with those who are misled. Through his own comments and by means of the action of his novels, he allows a sense of what good behavior entails to emerge from the contrasts presented by his characters as they struggle with the decisions that affect their lives. What *is* in a name or what meaning belongs to a word remains a question Trollope often ponders but rarely answers definitively. The open-endedness of his consideration transforms the otherwise conventional world of his novels.

NOTES

¹*The Metalogicon*, trans. Daniel McGarry, (Berkeley, 1962), p. 6.

²*The Moral Trollope*, (Athens, Oh., 1971), p. 154.

³Despite the legitimacy of the title Roden inherits, he is, in English, according to R. H. Super, the "Duke of Horsehair," Preface to *Marion Fay*, (Ann Arbor, 1982), p. ix.

⁴Anthony Trollope, *Marion Fay*, ed. R. H. Super, (Ann Arbor, 1982), p. 8.

⁵Of course, as Trollope makes clear from the start, Roden is a sterling individual whose accession to a title corroborates his worth. Although he may well have succeeded on his own eventually, the title brings him immediate success. The accession of a fool like Crocker, however, would have created a different set of problems and perhaps more seriously attacked the idea of aristocracy than does Roden's accession.

⁶Guinevere L. Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel*, (Bloomington, 1970), p. 114; Gordon N. Ray. "Trollope at Full Length," *HLQ*, 31, (1968), 313-337; rpt. *The Trollope Critics*, ed. N. John Hall (Totowa, N.J., 1981), pp. 110-27, esp. p.114.