

DIRTY WORK: TROLLOPE AND THE LABOUR OF THE ARTIST

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Abstract:

This article considers Anthony Trollope's emphasis on art as a form of necessarily dirty work: mental, manual, and visual labour grounded in messy, everyday real-life experience. I focus on critically neglected artist characters in several of Trollope's novels in order to connect his ideas, especially on work and social order, to those of John Ruskin. The implications of Trollope's interest in work become clear when read in the context of Ruskin's argument – most fully articulated in *The Stones of Venice* – that artistic work such as the craftsmanship of the Gothic stone-carver, is more fully human than any apparently perfect 'high' art, and therefore more real. Both Trollope and Ruskin, I argue, explore this idea of 'reality', suggesting that artists must embrace it by engaging in a particular, art-informed process of perception that reveals to them things that seem "low" (literally and figuratively), especially things that are in fact of the earth—dusty, dirty, and stony. For each author, this radical departure from the Victorian credo, 'cleanliness is next to godliness', paradoxically demonstrates what is of real value in even the humblest of humanity, and allows the seer to recognise the higher spiritual truths that inform every element of creation, down to its very particles of dirt. Such an approach to images of dirt enables Trollope to demand that his characters, and more importantly his readers, recognise social ills (visually marked by their presence in dirty places, filled with dirty people), and, finally, desire to do something about them. In *Barchester Towers*, *Ayala's Angel*, and *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, Trollope's narrators insist that the visual labour that makes this recognition possible is part of a thoughtful approach to the world, and attempt to prod his readers into thinking, and perceiving, for themselves, even if it means that they question his story.

Far too little critical attention has been paid to Anthony Trollope's focus on art and artists. One biographer of his has suggested that 'few aspects of Trollope's life have been as neglected as his interest in art',¹ but even this point was made in order to stress Trollope's significant background in art,² rather than art's

¹ Richard Mullen and James Munson, *The Penguin Companion to Trollope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 16.

² Trollope studied art as a boy. His maternal uncle Henry Milton was a professional writer on art, and his brother Thomas Anthony Trollope was a journalist, scholar, and historian who, as an expatriate in Florence, eventually became something of an expert on Italian art; the brothers apparently spent much of their time visiting museums together. One of Trollope's *Travelling Sketches*, 'The Art Tourist', is an amused account of the stereotypically obsessive English traveller who goes from museum to museum, memorising pictures and styles without necessarily loving art per se. In *The New Zealander*, Trollope praised the neglected art and architecture of England, especially its country houses and Gothic cathedrals (p. 187). He also knew and was friendly with a

presence in his novels. In this article I consider Trollope's artist characters in order to examine his idea of proper perception. I argue that Trollope uses artists to demonstrate what it means to see—to look at and perceive the things and people around one—in ways that are exemplary, and I show how good perception tends, within the novels, to raise the possibility of social progress.

Artistic perception for Trollope is above all a process that requires work, and his stress on this aligns him, to a surprising degree, with much of John Ruskin's thinking on artistic work and social order. For both Trollope and Ruskin, visual labour is the means of accessing the real, or what Ruskin calls truth, and for each, only such a commitment to finding that truth allows for real progress. Ruskin is more outspoken about the social ills that require the advent of progress, taking a longer, more historically informed view of England's need for change. Trollope, however, calls rather for a specific way of seeing that inspires small yet persistent moves toward the betterment of everyday life, suggesting that genuine progress may be accomplished within the realm of the everyday.

My interest in Trollope's idea of progress is part of a much broader recent effort to recognize the liberal, sometimes even radical, sensibility that shaped so much of his prolific output. As Carolyn Dever and Lisa Niles note in their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Anthony Trollope*, contemporary scholarship (including several of the essays that appear in that volume) has begun to undercut a widespread earlier conception of Trollope's essential conservatism – Deborah Denenholz Morse's masterly *Reforming Trollope* is a sweeping challenge to such a view. Because Trollope's uses of art still tend to be considered incidental to his work, I approach him from this angle with the aim of shedding new light the ways in which he works to change his readers' views.³

In the final pages of *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, Trollope's narrator compares himself to Rembrandt, explaining that, like that great painter, he represents 'such clergymen as I see around me,' whose 'social habits have been

number of respected English artists, including William Holman Hunt, Lord Leighton, and William Powell Frith, and worked closely with John Everett Millais, who illustrated several of his novels, including *Framley Parsonage*, *Orley Farm*, *The Small House at Allington*, *Rachel Ray*, and *Phineas Finn*. See Mullen, *Penguin Companion*, pp. 15, 165 and Pamela Neville-Sington, 'Trollope, Thomas Adolphus (1810–1892)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27755>> [accessed 3 April 2009].

³ See Carolyn Dever and Lisa Niles, *The Cambridge Companion to Anthony Trollope* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1ff., and Deborah Denenholz Morse, *Reforming Trollope: Race, Gender, and Englishness in the Novels of Anthony Trollope* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013).

worth the *labour* necessary for painting them.’⁴ This is as opposed, says the narrator, to Raphael, who tends to paint unnatural images of Madonnas who clearly never existed. Trollope’s point here echoes almost exactly Ruskin’s own critique of Raphael in ‘The Nature of the Gothic’, a portion of *The Stones of Venice* written thirteen years before *The Last Chronicle*. Raphael, Ruskin says, paints ‘only the good’ and none of the ills of the world, and therefore is not in ‘The greatest class [of painters, who] render all that they see in nature unhesitatingly [...] sympathising with all the good, and yet confessing, permitting, and bringing good out of the evil also.’⁵ Trollope’s insistence on the labour necessary to render his vision, and both writers’ stress on the importance of painting what is real whether or not it is beautiful, are key ideas in each author’s definition of artistic perception. For each, it is only by seeing ‘reality’ (a word Trollope uses repeatedly) in the right way that one can reach a higher truth—as Ruskin phrases it here, ‘bring good out of the evil also.’ Both Trollope and Ruskin connect reality particularly with things that are of the earth—stone and dirt.

To recognise this, we must first come to an understanding of what both art and labour meant in the larger context of Victorian culture. Connecting art to work is not, of course, unique to Ruskin and Trollope. *Barchester Towers* and ‘The Nature of the Gothic’ were both written within roughly a decade of the hugely influential opening of the Crystal Palace in 1851. Partly the pet project of Prince Albert, an aspiring art connoisseur, the Palace was dedicated to “The Workers of the World” and exhibited industrial creations, as well as those of the fine-arts. Still, definitions of both art and work were as vexed as they are now. Much has been made of the Victorian tendency to distinguish between intellectual labour and manual labour,⁶ but this distinction was problematic even for Victorians themselves. Ruskin, for one, struggled to reconcile the class separation that such a division of labour implied, offering differing pronouncements on it at different times. On one hand, he acknowledged that it was impractical and unfair to pretend that there was no difference in the two kinds of labour, pointing out how much physical labour could ‘tak[e] the life out of us’ and concluding, ‘The man who has been heaving clay out of a ditch all day [...] is not the same man at the end of his day [...] as one who has been sitting in

⁴ Anthony Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 860, emphases mine. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁵ John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (New York: Merrill and Baker, 1851), p. 187.

⁶ See, for example, Gerard Curtis, ‘Ford Madox Brown’s “Work”: An Iconographic Analysis’, *The Art Bulletin*, 74 (1992), pp. 623–636 (623).

a quiet room, reading books, or classing butterflies, or painting pictures.’⁷ On the other hand, Ruskin idealised the merging of physical and intellectual labour in ‘The Nature of the Gothic’, arguing that ‘we want one man to be always thinking, and another to be always working, and we call one a gentleman, and the other an operative; whereas the workman ought often to be thinking, and the thinker often to be working, and both should be gentlemen, in the best sense.’⁸ Thus for Ruskin the best artist is more than a privileged “gentleman,” painting in a quiet room: he is a labourer like the Gothic stone-carver whose physical and mental exertion make him a great artist and a great man.⁹

For Trollope, too, true artistic vision arises from both intellectual and physical labour. Indeed, Trollope’s ideal of good artistic work arguably builds on and develops Ruskin’s. As T.J. Barringer has argued, Ruskin (along with Thomas Carlyle and certain Christian Socialist writers) articulated one of the two main Victorian theories of work, which Barringer calls ‘expressive’ work: for these writers, labour was seen as a redemptive act through which humanity could become better. Trollope, as we will see, depicts labour this way, but he also takes pains to show that it is often difficult. In this he aligns himself more with J.S. Mill and Adam Smith, who saw work as a negative necessity (for Barringer, ‘instrumental’ work).¹⁰

Though none of the characters who experience artistic vision in Trollope’s novels actually engage in hard physical labour, Trollope repeatedly invokes hard labour as the standard by which to judge any work. In Trollope, as in Ruskin, stone-workers demonstrate the model relationship between craftsmen and their work. Weak, pitiful Bishop Proudie, for example, thinks of such a worker when he imagines escaping from his wife to work in peace. ‘What a blessed thing it would be’, he thinks, ‘if a bishop could go away from his home to his work every day like a clerk in a public office – as a stone-mason does!’ (pp. 151-52).

The value and use of stone-working appear surprisingly frequently in Trollope. Stone, and materials associated with it, especially dust, become symbols of a good, earthly, human existence that needs to be looked at and

⁷ Quoted in T.J. Barringer, *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 70.

⁸ Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, p. 169.

⁹ Certainly, one thing that the Pre-Raphaelites prided themselves on, and that Ruskin particularly commended them for, was their willingness and ability to endure physical hardship in order to create truthful, natural images; they were known for, say, staying up all night outdoors to catch a desired light effect at the right moment at dawn, or enduring miserable weather to achieve a sense of seasonality. See Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 152.

¹⁰ See Barringer pp. 27–28.

valued. Finally, however, stone, dust, and dirt become more than mere symbols: they are depicted as valuable in their literal essences, as matter that is of the earth. A brief look at three Trollopian artists will demonstrate how this works.

In the first case is *Barchester Towers*'s Bertie Stanhope, who loves art but is too lazy to practise it, always 'at a loss how to kill his time without much labour.'¹¹ Instead, Bertie creates caricatures—poor in mimetic quality (and thus not “real”-looking) but still able to successfully conjure up their targets. Though Trollope presents him somewhat affectionately, Bertie is doubly condemned as an artist because he will not work and he is not interested in ‘reality’. His condescending remark that ‘no real artist could descend to the ornamentation of a cathedral’ (p. 165) directly opposes Ruskin’s Gothic stone-carvers and reveals his ignorance. For Trollope, the cathedral is Barchester’s centre of life and human activity and is an example of real art and the reality *in* art.

Frank Houston, the charming but feckless young painter in *Ayala's Angel*, at first mirrors Bertie’s failures, but in the end brings his artistic vision to life by choosing to work. Frank adds to the idea of stone-work as a moral touchstone in Trollope by twice invoking stone-breaking as just as likely a profession for him as painting.¹² However, Frank revises his cavalier tone toward labour when, seeking a way to marry his penniless love, he decides at last to earn a living painting portraits. In the passages that follow, Trollope suggests that this choice is at least more akin to stone-breaking than it is to collecting butterflies in that it will take trouble—time, thought, and energy—to pursue, and will depend on participation in the everyday world. As one character remarks to Frank, what she refers to as ‘That head of yours of old Mrs Jones’ is in her estimation ‘a great deal better than dozens of things one sees every year in the Academy’ (p. 497). Trollope deliberately refers to the portrait by its subject’s utterly commonplace, everyday name, demonstrating that Frank’s decision to be a portrait painter represents both physical and intellectual labour; is, in Barringer’s terms, both instrumental and expressive.

Perhaps Trollope’s most important good artist is Isadore Hamel (also from *Ayala's Angel*), who, in order to make feasible a marriage to Ayala’s sister Lucy, sets aside his monumental allegorical carvings for life-sized portrait busts.

¹¹ Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 138. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹² Anthony Trollope, *Ayala's Angel* (London: Trollope Society, 1989), p. 493. Further references are given after quotations in the text. The somewhat callous joke is that they are equally unlikely. Stone-breaking, the task of breaking up large rocks into smaller ones with a hammer for the purpose of paving roads, was a notoriously difficult and painful Victorian occupation, usually given to paupers from the workhouse or to convicts. See Philip Priestly, *Victorian Prison Lives: English Prison Biography, 1830–1914* (New York: Routledge, 1985), pp. 133–34.

Trollope suggests here not that these literal and metaphorical “high-art” carvings are bad, but that the sculptor’s work has more worth when he carves things that relate to the real world. A ‘likeness of Mr Jones’ that will fit on top of the bookshelves brings the artist into the human realm, the second use of the commonplace ‘Jones’ serving as a sign of approval of portraiture of everyday life (p. 525). Twice, Isadore tells his friends that since his old sculptures no longer serve their purpose, he will ‘break them up and have them carted away in the dust cart’ (p. 525), suggesting they will be more valuable as earthy matter, even as waste, than as overly exalted images. Here, ‘earth’ becomes not merely a symbol of everyday life but a tangible substance, the stony material that both comes from the ground and returns to it, through the work of those who uncover and shape it, and those who transform stone into dust or dirt. In other words, reality is not only ‘earthy’, it is actually dirty, and recognisable as reality by virtue of its dirtiness.

Ruskin also admits that reality is dirty. In *The Elements of Drawing*, published in 1857, Ruskin recommends painters grind their own paint pigments. This is a jab at his contemporaries’ reliance on the easy availability of pre-ground paint pigment from professional “colourmen”, who had been grinding, mixing, putting in tubes, and selling coloured pigments for years before this point.¹³ Ruskin preferred grinding pigments himself, because he saw just-ground colours as more ‘good and pure’.¹⁴ The grinding process generally required the painter to hold a chunk of pigment over a piece of porphyry (extremely hard, non-porous crystal) and use a stone tool called a muller to reduce the pigment to dust.¹⁵ Given that there is a whole category of colours called “earth pigments”—mixtures of clay, silica, and colouring matter, such as various forms of iron dioxide and manganese dioxide¹⁶—this practice meant in some cases that the painter would literally be grinding up earthy matter, getting his or her hands dirty, as it were, to put that “dirt” into the painting.

Even more significant, however, is Ruskin’s entirely unorthodox suggestion that painters forgo the common practice of removing a naturally occurring chalky residue from paint pigments—or, if it had already been

¹³ See Joyce H. Townsend, Jacqueline Ridge, and Stephen Hackney, *Pre-Raphaelite Painting Techniques, 1848–56* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p. 39.

¹⁴ John Ruskin, *Elements of Drawing* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1857), p. 86. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁵ Anthea Callen, *The Art of Impressionism: Painting Technique and the Making Of Modernity* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 98.

¹⁶ Frederic Taubes, *The Painter’s Question and Answer Book, with Contributions by Thomas Hart Benton, Jacob Getlar Smith, Aaron Bohrod, and Henry Varnum Poor* (New York: Watson-Guptyl Publication, Inc., 1948), p. 79.

removed by a colourman, that the painter mix some chalky white paint back into whatever colour was to be used.¹⁷ Having the chalky substance in the pigment would, Ruskin argued, give the painting ‘dead’ colour that would look ‘infinitely liker Nature’ than would purified, un-chalky pigment, which was too shiny and translucent to seem natural. ‘[W]hich of us would wish to polish a rose?’ Ruskin asks his readers. Ruskin considered his advice on chalkiness especially appropriate for painting ‘ground, rocks, and buildings’, because ‘the earthy and solid surface is, of course, always truer than the most finished and carefully wrought work in transparent tints can ever be’ (pp. 196-202). It is difficult to imagine anyone describing a more literal way to value dirt as a substance in and of itself.¹⁸

Trollope’s interest in dirt is important not only for its relationship to studio practices (real and theoretical), but also because, historically speaking, Victorian literature continually covered up dust, dirt, and anyone associated with them. The work of critics as diverse as Christopher Herbert, Anne McClintock, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, and Natalka Freeland highlights a chain of Victorian associations connecting poverty, dirt, and moral impurity as social problems that could be identified visually. As Herbert argues convincingly in his discussion of an inextricable relationship between idols (such as money) and taboos (such as excrement), a general Victorian sense of reverence for the painful state of poverty meant that ‘the holiness and purity of the poor would render them frightening and untouchable, and could only be felt [...] as a repugnant and dangerous form of dirt’. Thus the middle class could claim to honour the poor’s sufferings, and wish to ameliorate them, while also keeping them out of sight. Herbert quotes Engels’s horror over city areas ‘so dirty that the inhabitants of the court can only leave [...] if they are prepared to wade through puddles of stale urine’ to show how ‘the strict isolation of slum neighbourhoods [...] shielded [them] very effectively from middle-class viewing’.¹⁹

The desire to shut this dirtiness out of sight was also motivated Victorian

¹⁷ *Methods and Materials of Painting of the Great Schools and Masters*, pp. 422–23.

¹⁸ Ironically, Ruskin’s advice on this point was almost certainly not taken, at least not by any painter whose paintings have survived into the present (except, we must suppose, himself). Even the Pre-Raphaelites could only bear so much ‘nature’ in this sense, and were in fact famous for, among other things, their fanatical attention to purified, saturated colour painted on top of a dry white ground, which meant that the surface would remain glossy (the very ‘polishing’ Ruskin deplors) rather than becoming ‘dead’. Thus Ruskin’s plea for the practical logistics of achieving visual ‘truth’ remained firmly theoretical.

¹⁹ Christopher Herbert, ‘Filthy Lucre: Victorian Ideas of Money’, *Victorian Studies*, Winter 2002, pp. 195-96.

interest in the idea that ‘cleanliness is next to godliness.’²⁰ Writing about Elizabeth Gaskell’s rejection of this equation between dirt and immorality, Natalka Freeland excellently summarizes its many manifestation. She cites medical opinions, police reports, and Victorian reformers such as Edwin Chadwick and George Sims to show its widespread influence, typified by Chadwick’s claim that ‘the fever nests and seats of physical depravity are also the seats of moral depravity, disorder and crime.’²¹

The need to shield the middle-class from dirt and its assumed attendant ills was paralleled by a similar attitude toward the visibility of work: as Davidoff and Hall have shown, the same middle class that required the world to look clean required that physical work, and poor physical workers, be kept out of sight. Because of this, middle-class households maintained their status as such partly through the ‘appearance of a non-working lifestyle’. For example, families who could not afford servants often attempted to conceal housework from the sight of outsiders performed an elaborate ‘character role’, hiding whatever elements of their lives that might detract from a sense of leisure and repose.²²

These important studies identify a pattern whereby various social problems were made more manageable by being hidden: hide the dirt of lower-class poverty, hide the dirt that attends immorality, hide the poor work of cleaning up middle- and upper-class dirt. What is missing here, however, is a direct connection between work and dirt: it is not simply that work needed to be hidden like dirt, but more specifically that *dirty work*, and the immorality it gave rise to or revealed needed to be hidden. I would argue that Victorian images of instrumental work is often depicted as dirty, while expressive, redemptive work is shown to be clean. One useful example is the painter Ford Madox Brown’s celebrated painting, ‘Work’.

²⁰ The association between cleanliness and godliness dates as far back as a rabbinical statement from the second century A.D. One example of its widespread Victorian use was a successful series of soap advertisements that appeared in the 1880s. See Nigel Rees, *Brewer’s Famous Quotations* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006)

<http://books.google.com/books?id=uIRi0BOvTi4C&pg=PA489&lpg=PA489&dq=John+Wesley+sermons+cleanliness+godliness&source=web&ots=WwGVgG7zkX&sig=sn9x6d7cpHpDxYtg0IB1Z6Iv-N0&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=3&ct=result#PPA489,M1> [accessed 3 November 2008].

²¹ Natalka Freeland, ‘The Politics of Dirt in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, v. 42, no. 4, *The Nineteenth Century*, Autumn, 2002, pp. 799-818.

<<http://www.jstor.org/monstera.cc.columbia.edu:2048/stable/1556297>> [accessed 8 October 2008].

²² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 161. On the magnitude of the task of Victorian housekeeping, see the Reverend G.R. Gleig, *Domestic Economy* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1856), p. 39.

In this image, Ford daringly celebrates the English navigator, or “navvy” – a person who dug trenches and built roads – as a central figure of the greatness of English industry (see Figure 1).²³ Though navvies were often morally suspect in the popular mind – generally seen as “reckless” and known for “fighting and rowdiness”²⁴ – Ford vindicates their image by representing his working navvy without a speck of dust or dirt on him, in spite of the fact that he is in a hole in the middle of a dirt road, shovelling up earth. Instead, the navvy’s spotless white shirt sparkles in the sunlight, and his ruddy skin glows as though he has just taken a bath. These details signal the goodness of the man and his labour, and allow him to be the central focal point (though not literal centre) of this enormous composition. In his diaries, Brown implicitly compared his own research, and his elaborate physical exertions in preparing for and executing the painting, to the labour of the navvies.

A similar painting is John Brett’s ‘The Stonebreaker’, from 1858-59 (two years after the publication of *Barchester Towers*), in which a young boy hammers away at the difficult occupation that Trollope’s Frank Houston so lightly invokes (see Figure 2). Here the boy is fairly well dressed, pink-cheeked, and eminently spotless, splashed by sunlight. This painting, oddly enough, was well loved by Ruskin, though its cleanliness would surely seem unnatural to anyone actually involved in this exercise. Though critics, including Barringer, have worked to show that this painting, too, constitutes a critique of the society that requires such labour from this worker,²⁵ it nevertheless speaks to the value and moral goodness of the poor labourer it depicts precisely by presenting him as clean.

The only salient English image of a genuinely dirty stone-breaker from this period is Henry Wallis’s 1857 painting, also called ‘The Stonebreaker’, in which an exhausted labourer rests at the foot of a tree (see Figure 3). The man’s face, hands, boots, and clothing are all darkened with dirt. It is difficult to determine whether Wallis’s subject is merely asleep or in fact dead. A stoat or ermine, nearly invisible in the shadows, sits unnoticed on the man’s right foot, and the bent of the man’s head and sprawled legs look so painful that it is hard to imagine that he could sit this way if alive. Wallis resisted clarification when questioned on this subject, and the ambiguity of his painting adds to its disturbing effect. The painting’s muted browns make its own surface appear somewhat dirty. English painters did not regularly begin to depict labour as

²³ Sullivan, Dick. ‘The Victorian Navvy,’ <<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/work/navvy.html>> [accessed 12 November 2008].

²⁴ Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 60.

²⁵ Barringer, *Men at Work*, p. 98.

difficult, degrading, and dirty until the very end of the nineteenth century, under the influence of the French Naturalists.²⁶ Wallis's 'Stonebreaker' painting was critically acclaimed for its mimetic skill, but apparently made the general public uncomfortable. The *Athenaeum*, for example, referred to it incorrectly as the 'Dead Stonebreaker', and dismissed it as overwrought: '[It] may be a protest against the Poor-law, but it is still somewhat repulsive and unaccounted for [...] an attempt to excite and to startle by the poetically horrible'.²⁷

That it was dirty work, rather than simply dirt or work, that needed hiding from general view is further evident in a number of extracts from nineteenth-century journals and periodicals. The housemaid Hannah Cullwick, for example, recorded in her diary in July of 1860 an exhaustive day's work in terms of where she could and couldn't go, given her dirtiness: 'Got tea at 9 for the master & Mrs Warwick in my dirt, but Ann carried it up. [...] Put the supper ready for Ann to take up, for I was too dirty & tired to go upstairs.'²⁸ Cullwick's vocabulary identifies the way dirt (created by the work of cleaning) needs to stay where it belongs, at or below ground level (where she prepares tea and supper, in the kitchen), rather than being allowed to taint the atmosphere of the master and his wife on the upper floors by appearing there on her person. There is evidently no problem with the fact that dirty hands are involved with the food—Cullwick is not too dirty to do any particular thing, she is just too dirty to be seen.

A reform-minded *Westminster Review* article, from 1843, on the working classes of Sheffield, similarly focuses on the visibility of dirt. Written by a doctor, the article aims to arouse sympathy for conditions among Sheffield's knife-grinders:

The moral condition of the people appears to be frightfully bad, and their habits and minds utterly sensual. We have seldom met with a more striking and painful picture than that presented by the grinders at Sheffield. As many of our readers are aware, the dust which necessarily attends this operation is vitally pernicious, and

²⁶ Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Beyond Impressionism: The Naturalist Impulse* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), pp. 9–23.

²⁷ *Pre-Raphaelite Critic: Periodical Criticism of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, 1846-1900* <http://www.engl.duq.edu/servus/PR_Critic/index.html> [accessed 5 April 2009].

²⁸ Mitchell, *Daily Life*, p. 52. Cullwick is now of course best known for her relationship with her documenter/employer/husband, Arthur Munby, which was based in part on their mutual erotic interest in the way various kinds of hard work made her appear. This extract, however, shows that in an 'everyday' situation, which, though it may have been written about for Munby, clearly does not describe work done for him.

finally coats the lungs in stone. Sir Arnold Knight, M.D., thus describes this horrid disease [...] “They stoop forward, and appear to breathe most comfortably in that posture [...]. Their complexion assumes a dirty, muddy appearance. Their countenance indicates anxiety.”²⁹

Here the writer’s anxious attention to tracing the dirt the grinders create and ingest seems to help explain their unavoidable moral descent, which, just like their dustiness, ‘appears’—is visible to the eye—in the ‘picture’ that they present. The men’s work requires that they stoop forward, getting closer and closer to the ground as their health worsens, and eventually makes their pitiable condition evident in their very faces, as years’ worth of ground stone in the lungs colours their complexions, making them ‘dirty, muddy’. Both the author, a doctor himself, and the doctor he quotes concentrate their attention on dust and dirt here in a way that makes those elements of the situation the principal horror of the grinders’ lives, and the passage works to elicit pity from readers by suggesting that a viewer of these men, forced to recognise their figurative and literal lowness, will also inevitably experience personal pain on sight of this painful picture. This work, and these workers, are bad because they are dirty.

One more useful article, also from 1843, published in the *Edinburgh Review*, is particularly interesting for its stress on the troubling aesthetic presence of dirt. The article’s author invokes a vision of a landscape as though he were describing a painting, and then laments the way recent innovations in working life have spoiled the landscape, and the people associated with it:

In the same valley the green turf may now be disfigured by banks of coal or black shale [...] The change in the appearance of the inhabitants is equally great. The begrimed and sooty collier, the artisan, the colour of whose skin can scarcely be seen through stains of ochre or indigo, seem but sorry representatives of the shepherd or the ploughman.³⁰

The particular problem, for this writer, is that the grime and soot of the collier and artisan have obscured their humanity—there is in fact an undeniable racial

²⁹ ‘Working Sheffield’, in *Working Classes in the Victorian Age: Debates on the Issue from 19th Century Critical Journals*, with an Introduction by J.M. Goldstrom, Vols. I and II (Hants, England: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1973), II, p. 464.

³⁰ ‘Distress of the Manufacturing Districts’, in *Working Classes in the Victorian Age*, p. 195.

element in the critique here, since their filthiness makes ‘colour of [their] skin’ indeterminate. This seems to mark the character of these workers as dubious. The degrading work of “disfiguring” the land by revealing the dark and dirty underside of the once bucolic green turf has thus literally and figuratively “stained” them.

In the context of these extracts’ attitudes toward dirtiness, Trollope’s insistence that dirt be noticed and valued for its relationship to reality is especially significant. A few examples of the way dirtiness, especially working dirtiness, is seen by his characters and narrator will help draw out the full extent of its meaning in the novels. Taken together, these moments suggest not only that the ability and willingness to see dirtiness is a kind of work itself, but that seeing dirt does a kind of work, in that it reveals things that would otherwise remain invisible. The process of looking at things that are dirty can have far-reaching social effects, and can paradoxically uplift both viewer and viewed. Ultimately, Trollope shows that higher things can only be attained and understood through the medium of everyday reality, and suggests that it is the work of the artist that makes this possible.

The Last Chronicle of Barset traces the trials of the Reverend Josiah Crawley, a poverty-stricken cleric who, for much of the narrative, is believed to have stolen a cheque and cashed it for himself, and who is so addled by his destitution and by accusations against him that he cannot remember what happened, and is not absolutely certain of his own innocence. Summoned to the Bishop’s Palace and unable to afford a carriage for the thirty-mile round trip, Crawley obstinately decides to walk there, partly because he genuinely believes he should obey the Bishop, and partly to demonstrate the ‘misfortunes which had been unworthily heaped upon his head’ (p. 173). Trollope gives Crawley’s march to the palace a full four pages, in which his muddy state is of central importance: ‘He took great glory from the thought that he would go before the bishop with dirty boots –with boots necessarily dirty [...] he would be hot and mud-stained from his walk’. (p. 174). On meeting a fellow-clergyman, Mr Robarts, Crawley refuses to be persuaded to abandon his walk, though Robarts, concerned with ‘what would be becoming for a clergyman’, points out that the Proudies will certainly notice ‘how dirty your shoes were when you came to the palace’. As Crawley ‘walk[s] on through the thick mud, by no means picking his way’ (p. 176), he is slightly ridiculous, yet on firm ground, morally speaking. In the course of the novel, such glorious muddiness takes on more and more weight as a state of being, calling attention to realities that need to be recognised and understood.

Crawley’s muddy march has social implications that directly contradict

the commonplace Victorian idea of hiding dirty work. In a remarkable passage, Trollope's narrator explains that the brick-makers of Hogglestock, a group Crawley has been especially attentive to within the parish, have taken on their particular line of work because 'the nature of the earth in those parts combin[ed] with the canal to make brickmaking a suitable trade' (p. 117). Like Ruskin's artist-workers, the work of these men is in the most fundamental sense natural, dependent on the nature of the very ground as a means of earning an everyday living. Unfortunately, however, the narrator points out that the workers have 'a bad name in the country', because they often get drunk and fight with their wives. That the brick-makers should be rough and degenerate, comparable to those of the widely condemned knife-grinders and navvies in reform literature, is perhaps unsurprising, but the narrator goes on to explain how their degeneracy should be viewed:

It should be remembered that among the poor, especially when they live in clusters, such misfortunes cannot be hidden as they may be amidst the decent belongings of more wealthy people. That they worked very hard was certain [...] What became of the old brickmakers no one knew. Who ever sees a worn-out aged navy? (p. 118)

Here, unlike in so much nineteenth-century literature, it becomes clear that hiding the dirtiness and attendant ill behaviour of hard work does nothing to solve or change misfortune. These lines, rather than endorsing, expose the trouble and misfortune of the middle- and higher-class counterparts of the brickmakers by insisting on an abiding similarity between the two groups. The worn-out navy – a degraded version of Ford Madox Brown's clean, youthful, virtuous labourer – is invoked to suggest that someone should know what becomes of him, that he needs to be seen. Only genuine recognition of these figures in their dirt can bring about needed change.

This point is made clear when, much later in the novel, Crawley, still suffering under accusations of theft, is seated outside in the pouring rain, lost in thought and 'quite unobservant of anything around him'. At this point he is approached by one of brickmakers, an elderly worker named Hoggett who, unsurprisingly, is 'soaked with mire, and from whom there seemed to come a steam of muddy mist'. The man points out that Crawley, too, is soaked, at which point Crawley is 'recalled suddenly back to the realities of life'. He looks at the brickmaker, sees him in his dirt, and recognises that the two of them are in the same pitiable state (p. 645).

Thus a moment of visual recognition brings muddy “reality” into focus. We must wonder, however, what kind of work it would take to respond to this reality properly. Describing the damp- and mud-related rheumatism he suffers, Hoggett’s answer is to be “dogged” in the face of adversity: ‘It’s dogged as does it. It ain’t thinking about it.’ Doggedness, Crawley realizes, is in effect a call for ‘self-abnegation’ (p. 646), and he dejectedly tries to follow suit by at last submitting to his critics’ demands and giving up his parish, stopping his own work altogether. However, Trollope makes it clear that, just as poor Hoggett should not be forced to bear his rheumatism without recourse, Crawley should not be cowed into giving up his clerical position without a fight. As one character puts it, ‘I do not suppose that any person wishes him to throw up his work’ (p. 647).

When at last Crawley’s friends, zealously working on his behalf, resolve the mystery of the cheque and prove his innocence, his good name is restored and he is offered a better-paying position as a clergyman, along with a new coat and an upper-class son-in-law. This raises an important question. In general, the choice to look at dirty reality and to work through it has, in Trollope’s fiction, a restorative domestic effect between individuals: Frank can marry Imogen, Ayala can marry Stubbs, the Crawleys can be restored to domestic harmony, their daughter can marry. These are standard novelistic resolutions, at which Trollope himself pokes fun through Signora Negroni’s comment in *Barchester Towers* that ‘There is no happiness in love, except at the end of an English novel.’³¹ What, however, happens to a Hoggett, who is not heard from again in the *Last Chronicle*, but whose rheumatism is a far more pernicious and widespread kind of phenomenon than Crawley’s individual case of poverty?

Though we get no particular answer to this, Trollope’s *Autobiography* picks up on the image of dirt so resonant in his artist novels and broadens its implications, using it to address more far-reaching social questions. In it, Trollope hints that individuals are not enough to help ameliorate troubling realities, and begins to imagine working through larger networks and groups of people. Discussing *The Vicar of Bullhampton*, Trollope writes he envisions prostitutes ‘chiefly with the object of exciting not only pity but sympathy for fallen women,’ as individuals suffering in their “gaudy dirt” and banished from “honest labour”. Here the whole social institution of prostitution is summed up as, essentially, dirty work. Trollope continues,

to me the mistake which we too often make seems to be this,—that the girl who has gone astray is put out of sight [...] as though she had

³¹ Trollope, *Barchester Towers*, p. 274.

never existed, and that this ferocity comes [...] from a dread of the taint which the sin brings with it [...] mothers and sisters [...] should remember this, and not fear contamination so strongly.³²

In the midst of urging that the gaudy dirt of these women not be ‘put out of sight’ and not be turned away from, Trollope includes himself in the ‘we’ who wrongly pretend that they ‘had never existed’. At the same time, he fashions himself as the figure who, through his writing, brings them back into view by describing them visually.

Caroline Levine has brilliantly argued that Ruskin’s own efforts toward ‘visual labour’ connect his devotion to painterly realism and his socialist tendencies. In ‘The Nature of the Gothic’ Ruskin’s thorough critique of slavery argues that good, thoughtful work ‘fosters a resistance to the repetitions of the machine’. Levine sees Ruskin’s realism and socialism both promoting labour to bring about a desired result: thoughtful appreciation of individual details and particularities, rather than a mindless acceptance of preconceived ideas that tend to reinforce stereotyped generalities. Thus, for Levine, Ruskin’s ‘radical realism’ anticipates today’s critical attempts to ‘produce a responsible picture of the Other, [making possible] ethical, dynamic, thoughtful representations.’³³ In this same vein, Amanda Claybaugh offers an account of Anglo-American realism in which realist novelists borrowed from nineteenth-century reform, conceiving of themselves as reformers who could act upon the world via readers.³⁴ I would suggest that in the end Trollope goes one step further than Ruskin. As I have tried to show here, Trollope directly and openly connects a visual recognition of ‘the real’ to those that, socially speaking, might at first seem ‘Other,’ all the while demonstrating, like Ruskin, that this kind of recognition is an ongoing process rather than a fixed end goal. That is, since Trollope shows that work continues to be needed, and needs to be continued, in order to bring about change and progress, we cannot simply say that he adds a new category—the dirty—to a list of static things-to-be-looked-at. Rather, Trollope demonstrates that dirt, dust, stone, and mud have potential as mediating elements; that they may be worth seeing *through*, as it were, for what they cover, if one is doing the right kind of looking.

³² Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography*, ed. by David Skilton (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 207.

³³ Caroline Levine, ‘Visual Labor: Ruskin’s Radical Realism’, in *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2000), pp. 80–81.

³⁴ See Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

For Trollope, the right kind of looking involves the reading of novels. Trollope's famous narrative voice repeatedly calls attention to two facts: first, that he is depicting for us a world that is like reality but is not real, and second, that the construction of that world is an artistic undertaking that requires enormous labour. In *Barchester Towers*; Trollope's narrator interrupts the story with this comment:

These leave-takings in novels are as disagreeable as they are in real life; not so sad, indeed, for they want the reality of sadness; but quite as perplexing [...] What novelist [...] can apportion out and dovetail his incidents, dialogues, characters, and descriptive morsels, so as to fit them all exactly into 439 pages, without either compressing them unnaturally, or extending them artificially at the end of his labour? (pp. 251-2)

Maintaining this distinction between reality and fiction – reminding readers of the reality outside of the confines of the novel by evoking our reality *within* the pages of the novel – is for Trollope a great artistic labour, the 'art of telling tales'. Ever mindful of the value of work, Trollope compares the labour of writing to that of a cobbler throughout his *Autobiography*.³⁵ Referring to himself as he has to his many of his artist characters, Trollope casts artistic creation as inseparable from the daily drudgery of simple, necessary work, both instrumental and expressive.

It is noteworthy that some of Trollope's most oft-quoted critics, whether praising or condemning his work, invoke earthliness or groundedness to describe it. Henry James conceded approvingly that Trollope's characters 'stand on their feet'.³⁶ (The cobbler has done his work.) Nathaniel Hawthorne, whom Trollope quoted delightedly in his *Autobiography*, referred to Trollope's novels as

³⁵ Surely shoemaking is the most appropriate of all possible occupations for the creator of the righteously muddy shoes of Josiah Crawley. According to Kate Thomas, Trollope compares writing to shoemaking at least five times in his *Autobiography*; perhaps the most famous of these comments is 'I was once told that the surest aid to the writing of a book was a piece of cobbler's wax on my chair. I certainly believe in the cobbler's wax more than the inspiration' (1:162–63); see Thomas's *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 77.

³⁶ Quoted in Henry N. Roger, 'The Fixed Period: Trollope's "Modest Proposal"', *Utopian Studies*, 10 (1999), p. 651. Significantly, one of the few Trollope characters who does not 'stand on her feet' – the mysterious lameness of Signora Negroni – is frequently described as though she were a work of art. Mrs. Proudie calls her 'an object' (1.104); she is 'perfect' (1.76), 'so beautiful and yet so motionless' (1.92), 'a vision'. She is in this sense 'high art,' which does not do any work in Trollope's world, and so is set apart from the rest of the 'reality' that the novel delineates.

being ‘just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their daily business.’³⁷ Aside from Hawthorne’s implicit connection between earthy ground and ‘daily business’ here, it is significant that he describes himself as though he were watching the characters ‘under a glass case’: this is a visual experience.

What, then, is the reader’s work? Partly, surely, it is to think. Hoggett’s ‘it ain’t thinking about it’ is untenable for Trollope, and his narrators consistently urge readers to think for themselves, as when *Barchester Tower’s* narrator imagines a reader who will ‘lay down the book with disgust, feeling that, after all, the heroine is unworthy of sympathy’ (p. 2.145). Here, Trollope imagines the novel itself “at work”, affecting its readers; permission to judge a character bespeaks a certain thought process on the part of the reader, a requirement that he or she consider engaging with the story by opposing the narrator’s thoughts.

For Trollope, the novel’s work is to take part in the everyday; in the same way that Trollope’s imagined reader can lay down her book, she is expected to use the novel, to think and realize with the book as the mediating element, and to work. ‘My only doubt as to finding a heaven for myself at last’, Trollope once wrote, ‘arises from the fear that the disembodied and beatified spirits will not want novels.’³⁸ Perhaps this is because the embodied, unbeatified bodies and going about their daily business on this great lump of earth do want them very much.

³⁷ Trollope, *Autobiography*, c. 8.

³⁸ N. John Hall, ‘Trollope and Carlyle’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 27 (1972), p. 205.



Figure 1—*Work*, Ford Madox Brown, 1852 –1865.



Figure 2—John Brett, *The Stonebreaker*, 1857–58.



Figure 3—Henry Wallis, *The Stonebreaker*, 1857–58.

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