Chapter Eight

Conclusion

The case presented in the thesis rests here. It is hoped that during the course of the argument the art of Anthony Trollope as a novelist reflected in *Barsetshire Chronicles* has been adequately brought out. Now in this final chapter by way of conclusion only a couple of small pints related tangentially to the main argument need to be made.

Coming out of the set of *Barsetshire Chronicles* is like returning to one’s world with one’s vision not ever so slightly but substantially altered. The old familiar faces and places begin to wear a different look. And that is a tribute to Trollope’s novelistic art. The *Barsetshire Chronicles* is a fine example of topographical fiction; it presents a neat, self-contained world which serves to function as a microcosm of the external universe. The moment one speaks of topographical fiction one immediately thinks of Thomas Hardy and his Wessex novels. A comparison of Trollope’s set with hardy’s undoubted masterpieces is not fortuitous; in fact in some ways it may prove to be quite illuminating.
First, it is true that Hardy and Trollope have created in their respective group of novels a world complete in itself, Dorsetshire as Wessex in the case of the former and Salisbury county as Barsetshire in that of the latter. But the way they present their worlds is different. And their difference can be summed up in a sentence: to borrow terms from linguistics, whereas Hardy presents his Wessex in a *synchronic* way, Trollope presents his Barsetshire in a *diachronic* way. That is, in Hardy the stories Michael Henchard, Tess, and Clym Yeobright are complete in themselves and exist independent of each other; the only common point among them is that they happen in the same Wessex County. The characters do not cross into each other’s stories. The stories take place in different parts of the district and at more or less the same period or at least not greatly separated in time. In Trollope, on the other hand, all the stories except *The Small House at Allington* occur in the cathedral town of Barchester. And even in *The Small House*, Barchester is not totally absent, for the protagonist makes a sojourn there. Secondly, characters appear and reappear in novel after novel. For instance, Mr Harding appears in all the stories from *The Warden* to *The Last Chronicle*; similarly Mrs Proudie who makes her first appearance in *Barchester Towers* takes her exit not only from the Barset county but from the world in *The Last Chronicle*. 
So it is with Mary Dale who appears in the last two novels of the series. This continuing presence of some characters through different novels gives *Barsetshire Chronicles* a real look of a chronicle or a historical account. This distinction is not made in judgemental but merely descriptive terms. The exercise is not an attempt to determine as to who is doing better, Hardy or Trollope. Rather it is an attempt to underscore the fact that both of them in their own different ways have succeeded in creating a parallel world a glimpse into which opens our eyes to those aspects of reality which otherwise would remain unperceived.

It is this achievement of British novelists like Trollope of creating not only life-like, living characters but living worlds that the American Henry James in his obsession with the theory of fiction seems to have failed to grasp or to have misunderstood when he castigated them for their theoretical reticence and their bantering almost cavalier disclaimers about writing ‘real’ history. As stated in the introductory chapter of the thesis, E. M. Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel* represents the apogee of the sturdy British common-sense about fiction.¹ He hits the nail on the head, as it were, when he with seeming ruefulness tells what a novel does: a novel tells you a story, dear. The ruefulness is there because Forster does realise that a novel does many other valuable things than merely telling a story which is inextricably bound up with life-in-time as opposed life-by-values.
But he also points out that for the novel to do those other valuable things it has to tell a good story first! In other words a good novelist is always a good storyteller. Granted, all good storytellers may not be good novelists; but it is also equally true that all good novelists have been good storytellers.

It is possible to raise about what constitutes a ‘good story’ The answer is not far to seek. Forster traces the origin of the novel to prehistoric times when man hunted and lived in caves. At night round the fire which roasted their food, the tribe would gather and would tell each other stories of their day’s hunt. They would be eager to know ‘and then, what?’ And one who would not satisfy that curiosity would be seen as a dull storyteller and be punished forthwith by being thrown out from the tribe. Ever since then, he says, the human heart has been beating to the rhythm of ‘and then, and then’. Similarly, he compares a novelist to Scheherzade of The Arabian Nights who has to tell an interesting tale to survive. Even Trollope describes a good story as one that makes a reader want to know what happens next. As shown in the previous chapters, all the volumes in the Barset group make the reader feel exactly that. It is a moot question as to how many times that happens in the novels of James except perhaps in Ambassadors. The usual experience of readers is that they have to wade
through a number of pages only to learn how a maiden looks at her hero across the table or how she says no an English peer’s proposal. H. G. Wells’s remark after going through Jamesian tomes quoted in the ‘Introduction’ neatly sums up readers’ exasperation.

It is a misfortune of literary history that thanks to James artistic novel has been equated with dull storytelling and Trollope in spite of demonstrably better novelistic gifts was consigned to the category of novelists of little or no art. Thanks to the spate of recent revaluations, Trollope’s art as a novelist is coming to the fore; Juliet McMaster’s “The Unfortunate Moth”: Unifying Theme in The Small House at Allington’ is a fine example of how Trollope comes out with flying colours even when James’s modernist test of imagistic orchestration is applied. This thesis, too, is an humble attempt in the same direction in bringing out Trollope’s novelistic art in his most popular group of novels Barsetshire Chronicles. In the end it would like to suggest that similar studies can be undertaken in the case of Arnold Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells—all condemned as ‘materialists’ by Virginia Woolf in ‘The Modern Fiction’—especially in the light of the wish expressed by a contemporary novelist like Muriel Spark that she would like to write novels like Wells.
Notes & References

4. As reported by David Lodge in *The Art of Fiction*, 68