

Descriptions and Evaluations: The Victorian Man of Business Revisited

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How absurd to suppose business men to be prosaic and over-sober of mind! They are the greatest sentimentalists that breathe.
The Metaphysics of Business, “Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal”, 1845

Abstract

This paper addresses the twin issues of “description” and “evaluation” with reference to Victorian discussions of the business ideal. The first section offers a brief overview of novelistic portrayals of businessmen, notable for their villainy. Scholars have repeatedly commented on the marked anti-business bias, the denigration of business and trade, that is an integral part of the critique of capitalism articulated in many a canonical Victorian novel. Did the same animosity permeate discussions of business in the periodical press? How was the businessman described and evaluated in the pages of Victorian periodicals? My investigation is an experiment in distant or vertical reading: using as database the ProQuest digital archive of British periodicals, I analyze the occurrences of three text segments (“man of business”, “business habits” and “business life”) looking for repeated associations of words and recurrent phraseology. The final section discusses the tentative results of my investigation: although clusters of positive evaluations can be detected, the structural limits of this experiment call for some caution.

I

Introduction

Ebenezer Scrooge, Augustus Melmotte, Mr. Merdle, Mr. Dobbs Broughton and a host of other fictional businessmen, whose troublesome but captivating presence commands so much attention in Victorian novels, have at least one feature in common: “they stink of money”, as one character in Trollope’s *The Last Chronicle of Barset* bluntly states¹. Bearing the signs of villainy on their very skin, these dubious personages come alive through *ad hoc* descriptions of their appearances clearly intended to raise lasting suspicions. Whatever criminal offence or vice they perpetrate (miserliness, forgery, theft), their untoward demeanor declares them guilty from the start. Augustus Melmotte is introduced in the third chapter of Trollope’s prodigiously long novel, *The Way We Live Now*, as a “gigantic swindler”:

Melmotte himself was a large man, with bushy whiskers and rough thick hair, with heavy eyebrows, and a wonderful look of power about his mouth and chin. This was so strong as to redeem his face from vulgarity; but the countenance and appearance of the man were on the whole unpleasant, and, I may say, untrustworthy. He looked as though he were purse-proud and a bully².

It takes Trollope over a thousand pages to conclude the saga of the financier and to confirm the initial suspicion of felony; one hundred chapters in total, in which the narrator delves into the crooked psychology of Melmotte, piling up evidence of wrongdoing and amoral thinking, detailing his (obvious) untrustworthiness and ultimately conferring upon the stock-market villain the honour of historical particularity. The cultural work of indicting bad forms of participation in the capitalist game is carried out mainly through descriptions that certify repeatedly the symptoms of dishonesty. The relish with which Victorian novelists indulge in the depiction of these modern, urban villains, using all the ammunition of satire to instruct readers on the timeless folly of unbridled greed, suggests that mid-Victorian finance provided a most inspiring arena for the staging of anti-capitalist sentiment in fiction. Unlike twenty-first century financial thrillers that rely heavily on serpentine plot twists and fast-paced narration to explore the mystery of corporate misconduct³, Victorian novels tend to gauge the social and cultural impact of commercial modernity in the scathing accents of satire. The satirical mode provides a moral compass that steers the narrative towards the safe shore of time-honoured truths, against the indeterminacy and uncertainty perceived as endemic to the credit economy. Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* are exemplary in this respect. The vitriolic attacks both authors level at the social network that pivots on money and the adulation of wealth are well-known illustrations of a widespread attitude of disdain and hostility vis-à-vis business, trade and the «buying and bargaining universe», as Walter Bagehot defined the sphere of economic agency⁴.

However, both Dickens and Trollope were keen to distinguish between “good” and “bad” business, between progress and industry, on the one hand, and speculation and finance on the other. In the very name of Merdle, Dickens vividly captures the association between money and dirt or excrements, but the novel also offers a positive depiction of industry and technological innovation, conferring a quasi mythic status on the hero of invention, Daniel Doyce, with whom Arthur Clennam enters into partnership⁵. Likewise, Trollope tempers down the corrosive effects of satire in his benign appraisal of the Jewish banker, Mr. Breght, emphasizing his moral rectitude and integrity in stark contrast to the unashamed pursuit of self-interest by upper-class families, and in particular by their disgruntled

daughters. Although these novels find something to be praised in selected individuals that contribute to the making of national prosperity through honest work and straight dealings, the ideological balance is clearly tilted in the opposite direction, since the axiological fulcrum of the narrative is the denunciation of greed as a corrupting influence that may affect even those who, like Arthur Clennam, are paragons of morality.

It is difficult to generalize about Victorian novels: the «few novels we revere, read, and re-read»⁶, as John Sutherland avers, comprise only a very small percentage of the actual output of fiction published in the nineteenth century. Yet, even though the sample is restricted and arguably not representative of the whole spectrum of potential positions, several scholars have repeatedly commented on the marked anti-business bias, the explicit denigration of trade and commerce, that is part and parcel of the critique of capitalism articulated in many a canonical Victorian novel. Martin Wiener speaks of a «cultural cordone sanitaire encircling the forces of economic development» and contributing to the decline of the industrial spirit in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England⁷. Neil McKendrick invokes the category of «literary and educational Luddism» to describe the animosity with which fiction often lampoons the man of business or the entrepreneur⁸. In *The Novelists and Mammon*, Norman Russell claims that «novelists were quick to condemn the New Man of commerce as unscrupulous, coarse, bloated, probably dishonest, and given to what Bulwer called “scarlet vulgarity”»⁹. More recently, Nancy Henry has argued that the high incidence of fictional suicides in financial plots can be considered as part of «an attempt to find the right language and images with which to represent a financial sector that had long been considered unsuited and inappropriate for fiction, because of genteel and literary society’s distaste for trade, business and finance»¹⁰. Casting a wider net, Tamara Wagner reads well-known, mainstream novels alongside forgotten ones to demonstrate just how crucial “plotting money” was to the development of novelistic genres; commercial men, her argument implies, were not always seen in a detrimental light, but stock-market villainy was a powerful rhetorical device deployed to contain the sense of indeterminacy inherent to the market economy¹¹.

The cultural scenario I have briefly sketched here is by no means exhaustive. My aim, however, is not to re-open the vexed question of Victorian novels’ response to capitalism. The specific issues I would like to investigate concern not the novels themselves, but the discursive milieu in which they were immersed, the grey sphere of public opinion crystallized in the periodical press, which contributed in diverse ways to enriching the cultural life of the nation. To what extent were discussions of business in the periodical press permeated by the same animosity vis-à-vis trade, commerce and finance that scholars have documented as a recurrent feature

of much canonical fiction? How was the man of business described and evaluated in the pages of Victorian periodicals? How can we begin to reassess cultural attitudes and prevailing opinions in a more systematic way? Given the sheer abundance of periodical publications in the nineteenth century, the answer to these questions would involve a lifetime of reading – at the very least. The population of statements that constitute the discourse object “business” is immense and it cannot be studied unless it is broken down into smaller, more manageable chunks. One way of doing this would be to analyse a representative sample of articles, across a specified time period (two or three decades), looking for regularities and patterns of discourse that might reveal shared cultural attitudes or prevailing orientations. Digital technology, however, has opened up the possibility of experimenting with different, more systematic ways of reading. The Victorian periodicals I consider in this paper exist in the re-mediated form of fully searchable electronic collections. Their digital manifestation has prompted the type of questions I pose and determined my methodology.

Broadly defined the object of my investigation is the cultural life of business, or some aspects thereof. More specifically, I am interested in descriptions, patterns of evaluation, and the connotative and affective meanings that such expressions as “man of business”, “business habits”, and “business life” acquire in the pages of Victorian periodicals. I have used as database the ProQuest archive of British periodicals (collection II), investigating the occurrences of these 2- and 3grams in a period that spans thirty years, from 1850 to 1880. The ProQuest archive is not structured as a corpus and cannot be searched using available software packages, such as WordSmith. Nevertheless, the methodologies of corpus linguistics have provided useful hints on how to search the collection and process the data, especially as regards the analysis of recurrent phraseology and collocative meanings¹². The results I present in this paper are tentative and partial. This is an experiment in distant or “vertical” reading that attempts to capture the effects of repetitions and the aura of meaning conveyed through recurrent associations of words that describe and evaluate a very general referent – business – broken down into three text segments¹³. To render the analysis more stringent, a broader selection of key expressions or nodes should have been added to the list. But to kick-start the investigation some boundaries had to be drawn.

2

Describing the man of business

Heeding Patrick Leary’s suggestion that search strategies should be «sensitive to the nuances of Victorian language»¹⁴, I have opted for the analysis of

three expressions that refer to 1. an *individual type*, broadly associated with business: “man of business”, which occurs more frequently than “business man” in the archive; 2. *customs* or *skills* that pertain to the sphere of praxis: the phrase “business habits” was an obvious candidate given its centrality in Victorian business manuals; 3. the *vocational trajectory* captured in the compound “business life”. In other words, I have selected expressions that make it possible to bring into sharper focus at least one dimension of “business”: its incarnation as a mark of identity, as an attribute of individuals rather than as an objective field of variously defined commercial, financial or political activities. I would also contend that these text segments are fairly specific to the historical period I wish to consider. In the ProQuest archive, the highest occurrences of “man of business” and “business habits” fall between 1840-1899, “business life” has its peak in the 1890s whereas “business man” is more frequent only from the 1880s onwards. There is an intensified use of these expressions between 1850 and 1880, which can arguably be considered an indication not of absolute relevance but of historical specificity.

Within this limited time frame, the expression “man of business” occurs 1,580 times. I investigated a random selection of roughly 800 citations, isolating only those that include an adjective immediately to the left of the node (445 in total)¹⁵. Since my critical aim is to highlight patterns of evaluation, the next logical step was to ascertain whether the adjectives preceding the unit “man of business” have a prevalently positive or negative orientation. In only 28 texts out of 445 is “man of business” preceded by an overtly negative descriptor (*hard, unscrupulous, negligent, dull, terrible, pushing, dry, odious, cold, calculating, sordid, stern, coarse, bad, dishonest*). In most cases – an overwhelming majority of over 90 per cent, in fact – the adjectives qualifying “man of business” express a positive polarity (*good, capable, respectable, practical, shrewd, eminent, thorough, successful, keen, sober, excellent, perfect, active, great, energetic, practiced, honest, acute, capital, trusted, intelligent, industrious*).

Does this finding carry any special meaning for the purposes of my investigation? Yes and no. The statistical tendency of the item “man of business” to occur in conjunction with positive descriptors conveys information about the most ordinary associations or habitual connotations that Victorian readers were primed to expect. However, whether this pattern can be taken to signal the existence of a widespread cultural attitude of respect and admiration for men of business is a moot point. The phrase “a good man of business”, for instance, could have ironic overtones, along the lines of sequences such as “you’re a fine friend” or “this is a fine state of affairs”, which are often ironic. Therefore, further analyses are needed that take into account larger “units of meaning” or longer sequences¹⁶.

Shattock and Wolff describe the Victorian press as the «inescapable ideological and subliminal environment of the modern world», representing and articulating «as nothing else does, what was ordinary about Victorian Britain»¹⁷. In the study of the “ordinary” a quantitative approach, aiming at inclusiveness, may reveal «repeated patterns of meaning that are not merely personal and idiosyncratic, but widely shared in a discourse community»¹⁸. For these patterns to emerge, the kind of very distant reading that frequency lists allow has to be complemented with close readings of larger sections of texts. As Gibs and Cohen have recently argued: «Any robust digital methodology must allow the scholar to move easily between distant and close reading, between the bird’s eye view and the ground level of the text themselves. Text mining and reading are not mutually exclusive activities»¹⁹.

3

Words in context: evaluations and arguments

To this purpose, I have considered the most frequent collocates of “man of business”, namely “good” (72), “shrewd” (42) and “thorough” (34), studying in some detail their context of occurrence (the sentence or sentences) and its evaluative orientation. The results are shown in the charts below (see FIGURE 1).

I have grouped the occurrences according to the type of evaluation that is prevalent in each text segment. Even at the level of the sentence, there is a marked tendency to express unambiguously favourable value judgments when referring to the “man of business”, as in the following examples.

1. He was of a commanding and organizing nature – a **good man of business** – frank, clear decisive, imperative – a man to confide in and to look up to, as a leader, in the midst of any great peril²⁰.
2. Caxton’s character, so far as the scanty details of his life enable one to judge him, was that of a **shrewd man of business**, blessed with a genuine love of literature and a patriotic desire for its diffusion amongst his own countrymen²¹.
3. He describes himself as a Birmingham manufacturer; and, though he does not deal with the subjects in which he may be assumed to have a special knowledge, he always writes, and it is a high merit, like a **thorough man of business**. He goes straight to the point, and is uniformly clear-headed and sensible²².

In these and many other similar cases, the goodness of the “man of business” is reinforced through the cumulative effect of the positive attributes that surround the node: the individual identified as a man of business tends to possess various qualities or virtues, not necessarily related to business, that confirm his high standing. In other cases, being a “good”

FIGURE 1
Evaluations



or “thorough” man of business is invoked as a standard, an ideal towards which men in different professions have to strive («an architect must not only be an artist, but a good man of business, unless he is such he cannot be an architect»)²³.

As for the citations in which “good” or “shrewd” convey a pejorative assessment, it is noteworthy that they tend to occur in one specific genre of

writing: fiction or narrative. In the ProQuest archive all texts are classified according to their genre, it is therefore quite easy to verify the architext of each occurrence. Two of the examples below are extracts from serialized novels, the third one occurs in a short story.

1. A **good man of business**, sir, robbed me nearly of all I had; that **good man of business**, sir, is now living on the spoil; and my opinion is, sir, that a **good man of business** is thrust into so many dirty actions, that he is only one remove from a common thief²⁴.
2. In fact, it was clear that George Moreton, **shrewd man of business** as he was, and expert, no doubt, in duping others, had himself been duped²⁵.
3. [...] he was of a clever, covetous, gripping nature, and as he grew older, his hoarding propensities had become more apparent. His bargains were proverbially hard ones. He had the reputation of a clever, **shrewd man of business**, whom it would be extremely difficult “to get the blind side of”²⁶.

Predictably, when a negative affect prevails, the “man of business” is depicted as greedy and involved in underhanded dealings (duping others, stealing from them), while the speaker’s attitude is one of disdain. In the first example, “good man of business” is used ironically, but the “affective meaning”²⁷ conveyed by the speaker is one of indignation for the robbery he has been a victim of. Hence, the prevalent evaluation is negative. Of course, there is a partial overlap between ironic and unfavourable statements, but irony can be used in more or less benevolent ways to communicate different shades of meaning, not necessarily hostile.

1. «There is only one kind of reference I care about,» interrupted Hyams, imitating at the same time the counting out of imaginary sovereigns into his palm. «So much the better – there will be trouble saved,» said I. «I perceive, Mr. Hyam, you are a **thorough man of business**. In a word, then, my pupil has been going it [sic] too fast»²⁸.
2. If he writes a book with a little popular philology or natural history, properly tintured with religion, he will gain a sound literary reputation; and at the price of very little abstinence from irregularity he may obtain the still more useful glory of being a **good man of business**. The man who is best fitted for high success in the clerical profession is not a man of superabundant vigour²⁹.

Examples of ambivalence include citations in which the “man of business” is declared “good” or “shrewd”, but also unlikable («He was a good man of business, she believed, but she did not like him and she wished he had never come to Tubber»)³⁰; those in which the writer expresses uncertainty about the alleged qualities being described («He seems, however, to have been a good man of business, faithful to his friendships and of an affectionate disposition»)³¹; and statements that cast doubts on the relative merits or

importance of the subject under consideration («[...] though he may be a shrewd man of business – the difficulty in the manufacture of which is very much overrated – he will find himself an unimportant item in the machinery of State»)³². Ambivalence, like negativity, is most frequently found in texts that are classed as fiction or narrative, suggesting that different genres of writing codify different cultural attitudes and systems of values. In other words, if the “man of business” appears as a character in a fictional narrative, his qualities are more likely to be questioned, whether openly through criticism of his dealings or less obtrusively through an ambivalent assessment of his merits.

On the whole, however, of the citations I have scrutinized a good two thirds convey a positive evaluation, thus confirming the pattern already identified in the longer list of adjectives with which the item “man of business” co-occurs. «The world could be represented in all kinds of way» writes Michael Stubbs, «but certain ways of talking about events and people become frequent. Ideas circulate, not by some mystical process, but by a material one. Some ideas are formulated over and over again, such as, although they are conventional, they come to seem natural»³³. By looking at the propagation of the phrase “man of business”, one can gain a better understanding of its cultural and affective meanings, which become more visible, or more observable, through the cumulative effect of discourse, by being repeated time and again in various permutations. These meanings are interesting in so far as they reveal shared attitudes, common values and perceptions that characterize, to use Foucault’s words, «the spontaneous philosophy of those who did not philosophize»³⁴. That the expression “man of business” very frequently occurs in a positively connoted semantic environment might suggest that the periodical press codified a complex of values, a set of tacit understandings that were not as hostile to business as those encountered in the pages of much Victorian fiction.

Further evidence of this is provided by the unequivocally positive discourse prosody³⁵ of the phrase “business habits” (266 occurrences), often embedded in a sequence of appreciative words that reinforce the overall impression of desirability.

1. Both are men of *great ability, vast application, extensive experience, tried business habits*, great oratorical and debating power³⁶.
2. Mr Roby belonged to the small class of English gentlemen who have connected the *exact business habits* of a banker with the *agreeable pursuits* of art, science, and literature³⁷.
3. Equally *proud* are we of the vast development of our commerce and of the *business habits* which characterize us as people³⁸.

4. She considers that when false ideas of gentility shall have been buried and put out of sight, women *will gain much* by the **business habits** they must necessarily learn if they wish to make a position for themselves which shall have no flavor of charity about it³⁹.
5. Mr. Galton sums up the elements of the scientific character as follows – *energy, health, steady pursuit of purpose, business habits, independence of character,* and a strong innate taste for science⁴⁰.

Excluding grammatical words, the most frequent collocates that appear immediately to the left of the node, in the longer list of occurrences, are *good* (8), *thorough* (6), *active* (5), *practical* (4), *careful* (3), *admirable* (3), *steady* (3), *excellent* (3), *energetic* (2), *shrewd* (2), accompanied by other equally favourable but less frequent qualifications such as *assiduous, acute, exact, tried, industrious*. The only adjective with a distinctively negative ring is *ferocious*, which occurs only once. At a distance of two words from the node, positive attributes – *courtesy* (3), *intelligence* (2), *judgment* (2), *ability* (2), *genius* (2), *sense* (2), *experience* (2) – still outnumber unfavourable ones (*mania, derangement, anxieties, ineptitude*), confirming the idea that the approval of “business habits” is common currency in the texts analysed. Remarkable is the extent to which “business habits” are elevated to the status of a cultural benchmark, a national standard of value that connotes excellence in all walks of life, from the ruling elites to the working classes, from politicians to artisans and working women, as can be evinced from the longer list of concordances examined. There is widespread consensus about the importance of possessing “business habits” and the scanty examples of pejorative evaluation convey only mild criticism («The general business habits prevent boys from being taught music, their parents or friends considering it as not belonging of necessity to education»)⁴¹.

More heterogeneous is the semantic environment of “business life”, (96) a compound that attracts a higher level of negative evaluations (42 per cent). On the one hand, “business life” still appears in good company, being linked to *success, admirable prospects, action, knowledge and experience, attention to detail, thrift*. On the other, it is persistently related to unpleasant feelings (*anxieties, annoyances, fears*), danger (*perils, incidents, follies, villainies*) and the paradoxical temporality of fast capitalism, *furi-ously throbbing* and *stormy* yet *dull* and *monotonous*.

1. No need to render a **business life** *more* unpleasant than can be avoided. It is bad enough at the best – grinding, soul-narrowing, heart-contracting; but render it not an absolute curse⁴².
2. He was an only son – an only child, and the wealthy manufacturer had beguiled the *dull routine* of his **business life** by a splendid dream during the years of his son’s boyhood⁴³.

3. Quite satisfactory so far; and with such full, hearty service did we strike out together into the *turbid, stormy sea of City business life*, that before we retired to bed I had gleaned many a valuable hint as to the soundness and hollowness of a number of firms whose paper I might, could, would, or should discount⁴⁴.
4. He is, on the contrary, a person of very great ability and shrewdness, who has turned to the best account the short *experience* he has had of **business life**; and yet, had he lived a few generations earlier, he might have become a valuable ally and adviser of the great statesman to whom we have just referred⁴⁵.
5. They assert that, whereas in business and **business life** we are *economical and thrifty* almost to a fault, in our homes we are far more extravagant than any other people in Europe⁴⁶.
6. In fact, when this man of business was not actually occupied with accounts, or money, or the *intricacies and tricks* of a **business life**, he was simple as a child, especially in regard to Mabel⁴⁷.

“Business life” certainly carries some disagreeable connotations, as illustrated in these examples, but only rarely is it associated with immorality, crime or commercial misconduct. The unpleasant aspects of devoting one’s life to business concern the fatigue and anxieties that come with it, as the authors of Victorian business manuals never tired of reiterating. Whereas possessing business habits – a rigorous method of work, a reliable template of virtuous practice – is posited as the precondition of success in different fields of professional life, the decision to embark upon a business career, perceived as risky and tortuous in an unstable economy, is considered with suspicion. As a modern vocation open to many, business still lacked the prestige of more traditional callings and the occurrences of “business life” I have analysed confirm this cultural pattern, revealing a pervasive awareness of how demanding and uncertain such a life was thought to be.

4

Conclusion: narrating, describing, arguing

It would be tempting to conclude that the investigation carried out on the body of texts here under scrutiny has brought to the fore a consistent configuration of meanings that differs significantly from the structure of feeling codified in many a Victorian novel. Hostile connotations of the compound “man of business” are much rarer than favourable ones; “business habits” have the status of a cultural ideal, praised almost unanimously, and “business life”, albeit not an object of celebration in a good many cases, retains a fair proportion of positive meanings. However, the structural limits of my experiment call for some caution. Arguably, the choice of these particular texts segments – which was an *a priori* deci-

sion rather than the result of a computer generated search for the most frequent keywords – is debatable and might have predetermined the outcome. I would still contend, however, that the frequency with which the appellation “man of business” is accompanied by positive descriptors and framed by favourable evaluations is rather surprising and may suggest that in the anonymous zone of periodical publications a more tolerant, less contemptuous attitude vis-à-vis business prevailed. Of course, the drastic reduction of what counts as text – not the whole article but a sentence – might appear suspicious to literary scholars and even students of periodicals. How far can we generalize on the basis of data derived from the observation of a broad but still very fractional cross-section of scattered sentences? The rudimentary map of connotations I have drawn is just that, a sketchy design of a vastly uncharted verbal territory in which clusters of positive evaluations can be detected. To make the argument more rigorous, and the transition from numbers to meaning more conclusive, distant readings of digitized Victorian novels should also be included in the picture – a future development, perhaps, but one that requires collective work. Genuine cross-disciplinarity in the field of digital humanities can hardly be a solo adventure⁴⁸.

It is fitting, at this point, to round up my reflections by clarifying how this paper addresses the overarching theme of this collection: “narrating, describing, and arguing” as textual dimensions. On a general level, my work has been an attempt to look at textual descriptions from a distance and to ascertain whether their context of occurrence contains implicit or explicit arguments pro or against business. «Distance [...] is a condition of knowledge,» Franco Moretti claims, «it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems»⁴⁹. The focus on hundreds of small units, segments of texts and short strings of words has allowed me to concentrate on the descriptive function of words and adjectives in particular, but not to investigate how narration and description interact. On the other hand, I have been alert to the argumentative dimension implicit in the evaluative orientation of the statements analysed, which, taken together, may be said to narrate a story of appreciation for the Victorian “man of business”. Most of all, I intended this work to be a reflection on how we can approach cultural attitudes and patterns of meaning differently via the study of recurrent phrasings, which includes taking full stock of how phrases express evaluative judgments. All the texts I have considered are fragments of longer narrations, which in their turn are contained in larger structures (the single issues of periodicals in which they were originally published). Since I have not focused on these macro-structures, the dynamics of narration have not entered the picture. At the micro level of individual textual

fragments, descriptors, if not descriptions, abound and have been my main concern throughout. How these lexical items contribute to outlining arguments pro or against business, in each of the longer sequences considered, has also been an integral part of my inquiry. In this respect, the concentration on fragments, hundreds of them, has brought home the point that descriptions and arguments are often welded together. I have began this essay with a discussion of novels and I would like to conclude circularly with a quotation from Dickens's *Little Dorrit* that neatly captures the recalcitrant centrality of business in the money age. «What's a man made for?» asks Pancks, one of Dickens's most memorable men of business, «What else do you suppose I think I am made for? Nothing. Rattle me out of bed early, set me going, give me as short a time as you like to bolt my meals in, and keep me at it. Keep me always at it, I'll keep you always at it, you keep somebody else always at it. There you are, with the Whole Duty of Man in a commercial country»¹⁰.

Notes

1. A. Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867), Oxford University Press, Oxford 1987, p. 252.
2. A. Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (1875), Penguin, Harmondsworth 1993, p. 31.
3. A good case in point is the novel by Robert Harris, *The Fear Index*, Hutchinson, London 2011. See also C. Moore, *City of Thieves*, Sphere, London 2009.
4. W. Bagehot, *The First Edinburgh Reviewers*, in *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot: The Literary Essays*, vol. 1, The Economist, London 1965, p. 311.
5. See C. Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (1857), Penguin, Harmondsworth 1998, Book 1, chapter 16.
6. J. Sutherland, *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1989, p. 2.
7. M. Weiner, *British Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981, p. ix.
8. N. McKendrick, "Gentleman and Players" Revisited: *The Gentlemanly Ideal, The Business Ideal and the Professional Ideal in English Literary Culture*, in N. McKendrick, R. B. Outwhite (eds.), *Business Life and Public Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986, pp. 98-136, p. 102.
9. N. Russell, *The Novelists and Mammon: Literary Responses to the World of Commerce in the Nineteenth Century*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1986, p. 150.
10. N. Henry, "Rushing into Eternity": *Suicide and Finance in Victorian Fiction*, in N. Henry, C. Schmitt (eds.), *Victorian Investments: New Perspectives on Finance and Culture*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington-Indianapolis 2009, pp. 161-81, p. 163.
11. T. Wagner, *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction: Plotting Money and the Novel Genre, 1815-1901*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus 2010.
12. Tognini-Bonelli defines corpus linguistics as both a "theory" and a "methodology". She characterizes it as «an empirical approach to the description of language use; it operates within the framework of a contextual and functional theory of meaning; it makes use of new technologies». See E. Tognini-Bonelli, *Corpus Linguistics at Work*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam 2001, p. 2.
13. See Tognini-Bonelli's distinction between horizontal and vertical approaches to texts and corpora: «the text is to be read horizontally, from left to right,» she explains, «paying at-

tention to the boundaries between larger units such as clauses, sentences and paragraphs. A corpus, examined at first in the KWIC format with the node word aligned in the centre, is read vertically, scanning for the repeated patterns present in the co-text of the nodes». Ivi, p. 3.

14. P. Leary, *Googling the Victorians*, in "Journal of Victorian Culture", 10, Spring 2005, p. 11.

15. I am aware that this method of selection has drawbacks since it does not capture adjectives or other relevant descriptors that do not appear to the immediate left of the phrase "man of business", but are located at some distance from it (2 or more words apart). My choice was determined by the need to reduce the great number of occurrences (over 1,500) to a smaller and more manageable group.

16. See J. Sinclair, *The Search for Units of Meaning*, in "Textus", 9, 1996, pp. 75-106.

17. J. Shattock, M. Wolff, *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, Toronto University Press, Toronto 1982, p. XIV.

18. See M. Stubbs, *Words and Phrases: Corpus Studies of Lexical Semantics*, Blackwell, Oxford 2002, p. 215.

19. F. Gibbs, D. J. Cohen, *A Conversation with Data: Prospecting Victorian Words and Ideas*, in "Victorian Studies", 54, 1, 2011, p. 76.

20. *In Memoriam*, in "Macmillan's Magazine", 22, 1870, p. 239.

21. *The Caxton Exhibition*, in "British Architect", 8, 1877, p. 27.

22. *Essays of a Birmingham Manufacturer*, in "Saturday Review", 31, 1871, p. 122.

23. *The Architectural Association of Ireland*, in "British Architect", 6, 1874, p. 149.

24. W. Beilby Bateman, *Evalla*, in "New Monthly Magazine", 115, 1859, p. 355.

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26. *The Poor Clergyman's Tale*, in "St. James's Magazine", 20 (1867 Aug.), p. 16.

27. See S. Hunston, G. Thompson (eds.), *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990, p. 2.

28. *The Congress and the Agapedome*, in "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine", 70, 1851, p. 372.

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30. *Through a Judas Window*, in "Novel Review", 15, 1877, p. 218.

31. *The Princes of Wales*, in "Leader", 11, 1860, p. 330.

32. *Political Candidates*, in "Saturday Review", 35, 1873, p. 14.

33. M. Stubbs, *Words and Phrases: Corpus Studies of Lexical Semantics*, Blackwell, Oxford 2002, p. 149.

34. M. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Routledge, London 1989, p. 153.

35. «Prosody refers to patterns in language that are revealed via corpus analysis». See P. Baker *et al.*, *A Glossary of Corpus Linguistics*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2006, p. 135. Discourse prosody is a term that describes «the way that words in a corpus can collocate with a related set of words, or phrases, often revealing (hidden) attitudes» (ivi, p. 58).

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37. *The Legendary and Poetical Remains of John Roby, Author of Traditions of Lancashire*, in "Eclectic Review", 7, 1854, p. 368.

38. *Charity Brokers*, in "Saturday Review", 8, 1859, p. 738.

39. *Work for Women*, in "Saturday Review", 46, 1875, p. 441.

40. *Natural History of Men of Science*, in "Saturday Review", 39, 1874, p. 616.

41. *Scraps from a Travelling Journal Kept by a Lover of Music*, in "The Musical World", 30, 1852, p. 114.

42. *Pleasure in Business*, in "New Monthly Magazine", 107, 1856, p. 115.

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48. See R. Heuser, L. Le-Khac, *Learning to Read Data: Bringing out the Humanistic in the Digital Humanities*, in "Victorian Studies", 54, 1, Autumn 2011, pp. 79-86.
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