

The writing of Fanny Trollope

Following is an abridged version of Teresa Ransom's address at our AGM on 6 February.

The writing of this book came about almost by chance. I was looking for some information for a family tree in an old box of Trollope family letters I discovered in my attic in McMahons Point. They had been brought from England after the death of my Trollope cousins, and stored and forgotten for about 25 years. Among the clutter was a very small book printed in 1909 advertising an English guest-house in Florence called the Villa Trollope. The first sentence said, "The world famous Villa Trollope was for many years the home of Mrs Trollope the well known authoress. Sunday evenings at home here were attended by the most notorious and celebrated in literature, music and art."

I'd never heard of a famous authoress called Mrs Trollope, so I decided to find out who she was. I contacted the Trollope family in Sydney, the only direct descendants of Fanny Trollope, and they very generously lent me some battered copies of her books. I found them witty and very clever and it seemed very strange that such an entertaining author appeared to be almost totally unknown so, when the opportunity came to go to England, I decided to find out a bit more.

Fanny Trollope, the mother of the much more famous Anthony, was a remarkable woman who began to write at the late age of 53 from economic necessity. She became an instant best seller and in the space of 25 years produced 41 books in 115 volumes. She wrote of her own time, the regency world of Jane Austen, but in such a way that opens our eyes to the intrigues, gossip, matchmaking, and social lionising of the fashionable 19th century resorts.

Fanny was born Frances Milton in Stapleton, a village just north of Bristol, where her father, the Reverend William Milton, was a clergyman. She was the third of six children, only three of whom survived. Her mother died after the birth of the youngest child, Henry, and the children seem to have been brought up by the father, who was more inclined towards mathematics and mechanical inventions than religion, and from whom they received a somewhat unorthodox education.

In 1801, after the Rev Milton remarried, he returned to his duties as a parish priest at Heckfield, a village just south of Reading. Fanny was 22. Life in the country vicarage

must have seemed very slow to her and her elder sister Mary after the bustle of Bristol. When their brother, Henry, took up his new appointment with the War Office in London, Fanny and Mary were happy to go with him and keep house.

It was then that Fanny met a friend of Henry's, a barrister, Thomas Anthony Trollope, who lent her some books of verse. That act marked the beginning of a courtship and a year later, in 1809, 35-year-old Mr Trollope married 30-year-old Miss Milton in Heckfield parish church. Their early married life in Keppel Street was very happy; they produced seven children in the next eight years. Tom was born in 1810; Henry in 1811; Arthur in 1812; Emily the first (born and died on the same day) in 1813; Anthony 1815; Cecilia

Next meeting: Tuesday 2 April, 1996

Terry Chesher on Pre-translation editing — insights for writers

Terry Chesher is a translation adviser and freelance translator. She was a member of the Plain English panel at last year's Style Council, and won a Reader Friendly Award in 1993 for a health pamphlet which was translated into nine languages.

This promises to be a fascinating evening, with lessons for everyone who cares about effective communication. Explore the importance of unambiguous English, how to be 'plain' but not dull, issues of culture and language, and much more. Working with translators may even be an area you'd like to explore professionally. Come along and find out.

6.30 for 7 pm in the Rooftop Function Centre, 4th floor, Australian Museum (enter from William Street). Drinks and light refreshments provided. **RSVP by Friday 29th March** to (02) 552 0039 (voicemail). Members, \$10; non-members and those who don't RSVP, \$12.

1816 and Emily the second in 1818.

After a few years life became less tranquil for the family, when Mr Trollope began to show signs of fierce rages and disabling, sick headaches which were to plague him for the rest of his life. To alleviate the symptoms he took, in ever-increasing quantities, a mercury-based drug called calomel. After the birth of their fifth child, Anthony, in 1815, the family leased a house in Harrow and made it their main home. They called it Julian Hill.

The boys were destined to be educated first at Harrow, where they could get free education as town boys, then later at Winchester and New College, Oxford, as their father and grandfather had been before them. After several years all went well with the family. Fanny had many friends and they enjoyed the social life in both Harrow and London, but by 1824 the Trollopes were beginning to experience money problems. Henry, the second son, was achieving little at Winchester so in 1826 it was decided to find employment for him in a counting house in Paris.

A year later, 12-year-old Anthony was awarded a place at Winchester and his father, who was determined to send all his sons to a private school, decided that the only way in which he could afford the fees was to lease Julian Hill and move the family to a small, dilapidated farmhouse three miles north of Harrow at Harrow Weald where the rent would be less. Fanny was appalled at the prospect. On a visit to Paris that summer she met a charismatic young reformer called Frances Wright, the founder of a utopian settlement at Nashoba in Tennessee, America, where slaves could work to earn their freedom. Frances, who was recovering from malaria, was in Paris to look for new settlers for her community, so when she suggested to Fanny that she and Henry become part of the Nashoba experiment, Fanny saw it as a way of removing her children from the rages of her husband. Mr Trollope gave his permission on the condition that Tom, who was now 17, and Anthony, 12, would remain as boarders at Winchester.

Fanny took with her Henry, 16; Cecilia, 11; Emily, 9; two servants, and M. Hervieu, the drawing master who expected to find employment in the school at Nashoba. They arrived in America at the mouth of the Mississippi in December and reached Nashoba in January 1828.

Fanny was horrified at her first sight of Nashoba. It was just a collection of miserable wooden huts built on partly cleared land in a fever-ridden swamp. What was she going to do now? She was without funds and was marooned with her party in a strange land in the company of a woman she was beginning to think was mad. With all possible speed she took the children, servants, and luggage to Cincinnati where, supported by Auguste Hervieu the artist, she planned to wait for the arrival of her husband to transport them home.

When they got to Cincinnati they repaired to the Washington Hotel and, having had dinner, went forward to seek a house for more permanent accommodation. Before long they found a dwelling and returned to the hotel. Not wishing to take their evening meal with the three score and ten gentlemen of the dining room, nor with the half-dozen ladies of the bar room, Fanny ordered tea in her own chamber. The landlord was outraged. "We have no family tea-drinkings here. You must either live with me and my wife or not at all in my house." Fanny apologised, explaining that they were

strangers. "Our manners are very good manners and we don't wish any changes from England", was the curt reply.

The next day they moved into the new dwelling which looked neat and comfortable enough, but which lacked most of the basic essentials that Europeans conceived necessary to decency and comfort. There was no cistern, pump or drain of any kind, no dustman's cart or any other visible means of getting rid of their rubbish. They were expected to throw it all into the middle of the street for the pigs to carry it off.

It was nearly a year before Mr Trollope, bedevilled by his own financial worries, could join them. By then Fanny had hatched a new scheme. She would build a bazaar in Cincinnati for Henry to manage, a grandiose centre incorporating a saloon, coffee house, ballroom, and art gallery. The locals were affronted and gave her no support. Who did this middle-aged English woman think she was? Contractors walked off with all her money. Mr Trollope, who was in England, instead of sending out money sent out useless, trumpery store goods and the bazaar, which was later nicknamed Trollope's Folly, was seized by creditors along with all the Trollopes' possessions. They were left with only the clothes they were wearing. It was to be another two years of hardship before Fanny and Hervieu between them could save and borrow enough to get them all back to England.

Fanny had been writing a book of her adventures in the hope that it would bring her some much-needed money. They returned to England in 1831 to the run-down farmhouse at Harrow Weald and Fanny's book was in the hands of publishers by the autumn of that year. *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*, the caustic, witty and truthful tale of Fanny's experiences of the equality of American life, was published in March 1832 just after Fanny's 53rd birthday. It became an instant best-seller and in the first year went into four editions in England and a further four editions in America. The English Tories hailed it as a dire warning of the pitfalls of freedom and the Whigs denounced it as a pack of lies. The Americans howled with rage, bought her book and lampooned her on the stage.

Overnight, Fanny became a celebrity. She also became the sole income earner supporting her husband, who was too sick to work, and their surviving five children: Tom, 24, whose Oxford bills had to be paid before he could take his degree; Henry, 23, who was now dying from consumption; Anthony, 19, unemployed; Cecilia, 18; and 16-year-old Emily who was also showing signs of consumption. The rest of the family appeared to accept without question that Fanny would work to support them and made little attempt to help her. Anthony acknowledged this later in his autobiography when he said, "Now and again there would arise a feeling that it was hard upon my mother that she should have to do so much for us, that we should be idle while she was forced to work so constantly, but we should probably have thought more of that had she not taken to work as though it was the recognised condition of life for an old lady of 55."

The Domestic Manners was followed by an unending stream of books. Driven by the need to earn money for the support of the family, Fanny sometimes wrote as many as three, three-volume novels in one year. Her own difficulties never intruded into her books. She wrote of her own regency and early Victorian world with a sharp sense of the ridiculous in the society of that time. Her quizzical sense of

Society of Editors (NSW)

Membership application and renewal 1996

Name

Business name (if applicable)

Home address

..... Postcode

Telephone Fax E-mail

Have your contact details changed since last renewal? Yes No

Are you working as an editor? Yes No

If yes, are you working Freelance Full-time

Part-time

Employed Full-time

Part-time

If employed, name of employer

Address

..... Postcode

Telephone Fax

If the society publishes a list of members and their addresses, do you wish your name, work address and telephone to be included? Yes No

This is a Renewal \$40

New membership application 1 Jan - 31 Dec \$45

New membership application 1 July-31 Dec \$25

Please make cheques payable to the Society of Editors (NSW)

Signed Date

Optional: Please give us an idea of how the society can help you (suggestions for training workshops, meeting topics, services you'd like the society to provide, etc). Thanks.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Send to: The Treasurer, Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007

humour was deplored by the critics but much enjoyed by her readers. One reviewer said of her, "Certainly no other author of the present day has been so much read, so much admired, and so much abused."

When the family fled to Belgium to escape creditors, Fanny continued to write by rising at four in the morning so that she could nurse her dying husband and children during the day. Henry died in 1834, Mr Trollope in 1835, Emily in 1836 and Cecilia in 1849. As well as travel books, Fanny wrote murder mysteries, romances, gothic novels, and satires. Some of her more powerful books were written to expose social injustice, the evils of slavery in America, the harshness of the Poor Laws, the dangers of excessive evangelism, and in *Michael Armstrong: The Adventures of a Factory Boy*, a book commissioned by Lord Shaftesbury, the exploitation of children in the cotton mills of northern England. She also cleverly infiltrated into her novels a case for women's emancipation arguing, in a society where women had no rights at all, that they should have the vote and the right to stand for the Church, parliament, and the legal profession. She wrote wicked satires of English travellers abroad and of contemporary county society. She wrote also of the London literary circle and the power of reviewers with whose condemnation she was all too familiar. In *Charles Chesterfield or The Adventures of a Youth of Genius*, she warned of the pitfalls for a young writer in London. The book was a cautionary tale for young Anthony, who at the age of 26 felt miserably trapped by his humdrum job as a post office clerk, and who longed to become a writer.

Fanny spent the last years of her life living with her son Tom and his wife in the Villa Trollope in Florence among the distinguished expatriate literary community. At the age of 77 she wrote her last book, *Fashionable Life, or Paris & London*. She died in Florence in 1863 aged 84 and is buried there in the English cemetery. She is now mainly remembered for her satirical *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, the only one of her books that is consistently in print. After her death her books fell from favour as Victorian morality tightened its grip and her candid writing was labelled coarse and vulgar. However, when read today, the Fanny Trollope of 150 years ago is clever, witty and surprisingly modern.

When I decided to write this book it was because, having just discovered her, I was appalled that such a courageous and dynamic writer was sentenced to oblivion in the rare books departments of a few select libraries. It seemed that her work was not merely forgotten but now almost totally unknown and so I set out to rediscover her. First I went to England to read all her books, because they weren't available here, and to make initial contact with a few publishers to see if they were interested. Then I came back to Australia to begin to put a story down on paper. As my knowledge of all things to do with publishing was absolutely nil, I went to a series of seminars with Robin Appleton which gave me the necessary insight into the problems of publishers and the basics of proofreading and indexing. I found this knowledge absolutely invaluable when I returned to England the next year with my first draft. I was much more realistic in my approach to publishers and much more understanding of their requirements. I needed an agent at this stage, but coming from Australia with no history of authorship, quite understandably, nobody would take me on. Alan Sutton were the

most positive of the publishers I approached and after much deliberation they gave me some much-needed and most welcome advice on the editing from which I learnt a great deal. I then came back to Australia to complete the final draft and once that was dispatched, did a one-day proofreading course — again with Robin — and returned to England in March. Three days after I got back to England the first batch of galley proofs arrived. I don't know how I would have managed without the information I got here. It gave me the confidence not only to insist on discussing proposed changes, but also to be much more constructive in suggestions for picture layout and necessary cuts for reasons of length. Because I knew what they were talking about I could understand why the changes had to be made.

Fanny Trollope: A Remarkable Life was released in England in August last year, in America in October, and in Australia in November. What gives me the greatest pleasure from this whole venture is that her works are now being republished after 150 years of oblivion. Last year they republished *Domestic Manners of the Americans* and *The Widow Barnaby*. Of *The Widow Barnaby* one reviewer in England said, 'This is Jane Austen with the gloves off'. This year Alan Sutton are republishing *Hargrave*, the only detective story Fanny wrote, and, I think the first detective story ever written. It was written 25 years before Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*, which is always thought to be the first detective story. They are also republishing *The Vicar of Wrexhill* which is about this dreadful, seductive, evangelical vicar who goes around pawing all his female parishioners.

I hope and believe that now Fanny will be remembered as Mrs Trollope, the well-known authoress, and not just as Anthony's mother.

Still more about the Style Council

The suggestion of the name Style Council was one of those half-in-jest remarks that are taken seriously. Richard Tardif — now Publisher at *Macquarie Dictionary* — was very keen on Style Council in 1984, so when I put up the idea for the conferences he supplied the name. It fitted the conferences beautifully, so we decided to borrow it without apology from the band.

Josephine's account of the first Style Council lays rather too much stress, I think, on the link with AGPS. While it is true that I saw AGPS as a leading member of the Council, the conference was designed more to meet the needs of the next edition of *Macquarie Dictionary*. I saw that we had a real problem if we produced a second edition without making the public aware that various changes were taking place in style and usage in Australian English and that there was at that time a great deal more variation in the community than most people realised.

I hope this sheds more light.

Susan Butler, Executive Editor, *Macquarie Dictionary*

NOTICEBOARD

If you have not yet paid your membership fees, then do it now!!

All memberships expire at the end of January, so please use the enclosed form and send it back directly. This will be the last *Blue Pencil* you will receive if you don't renew.

A conference on ethics in editing?

The Society of Editors (NSW) is canvassing the possibility of holding a national (and international) "Ethics in Editing" conference, in Sydney, some time in 1998. The secretary has written to each of the interstate societies asking for the consideration of their membership as to the nature and scope of such a conference.

At this early stage, we would like the New South Wales membership to give us their ideas on such a conference, what it ought to offer, and how it might best be conducted. Also, in a few weeks or months a conference planning committee will need to be formed, and volunteers will be needed on that committee.

As valued members of the Society in New South Wales, we would like to hear what you think of this very important and exciting proposal.

Please write to the secretary at the Broadway post box, or fax him on (02) 331 4653.

Thank you.



Juliet Richters, contact details

Juliet was in the process of moving both home and job at the time the *Freelance Register* was published. Correct contact details are as follows:

Juliet Richters, 536 Darling Street, Rozelle, NSW 2039

Home tel: (02) 810 9590 Work tel: (02) 850 8606

Fax: (02) 850 8112 E-mail: richters@bunyip.bhs.mq.edu.au



A national magazine for editors?

The Society of Editors (Vic) has approached us for support for the idea of a national magazine for editors. At this stage we would like feedback from all of our members on what you would look for in such a magazine — whether, for example, you would prefer a news-based publication, or something with more of a focus on training, including quizzes and tests to help hone your skills. The proposal is for a 16-page quarterly. Would you be prepared to pay for a subscription? How much?

Please direct your thoughts on this idea by post to PO Box 254, Broadway, or talk to one of the committee members.



SOCIETY OF EDITORS (NSW) 1996 COMMITTEE

President and Treasurer

Catherine Gray

Phone/fax: (02) 358 1294 (w & h)

Secretary

Michael Giffin

Fax (02) 331 4653

Membership

Rhana Pike

Phone: (02) 569 7831 (h)

Fax: (02) 351 5687 (w)

Catering

Josephine Bastian

Phone: (02) 660 7107 (h)

Newsletter

Karen Young

Phone: (02) 438 1264 (h)

(02) 9901 4088 (w)

Fax: (02) 9906 2218 (w)

Jean Cooney

Phone/fax: (02) 357 1025 (w & h)

Publicity

Terry Johnston

Phone: (02) 337 4126 (h)

Members

Robin Appleton (Immediate Past President)

Phone/fax: (02) 560 1017 (w & h)

John Fleming

Phone: (02) 529 8638 (h)

Fax: (02) 529 9764 (h)

Isabel Partridge

Phone: (02) 523 7295