

ANTHONY TROLLOPE'S

Travels and Travails in 1871 Australia

Nigel Starck reveals the outrage at Anthony Trollope's views of colonial Australians as 'blowers'

Anthony Trollope, the author of 47 novels and international traveller of exceptional energy, was the accused man in an early Australian trial by media. The press found him guilty of disparaging colonial character and that verdict endured unto death.

As the microfilm in the Library's Newspapers and Microforms Collection unspools, there emerges an intriguing journalistic dossier. It discloses sentiments of initial gratitude that so eminent a writer as Trollope would travel so far. However, this was followed by mild suspicion at his motives and, later, sustained outrage at one of his assessments which was just too trenchant for Australian sensitivities. The newspaper columns wallowed in collective resentment.

Melbourne Punch offered the fruitiest of welcomes when the SS *Great Britain*, designed by Brunel and advertised as possessing 'noble passenger decks', sailed into Melbourne in July 1871 after a 64-day voyage from Liverpool. Trollope, singularly industrious among her 391 passengers, used

the time to write his novel *Lady Anna* (1874).

Trumpeting its rapture that such a distinguished man of letters would favour Australia with his presence, *Punch* published a full-page cartoon, and declaimed in an accompanying 48-line poem, four lines of which are quoted here:

Welcome, my Tony—laurel-crowned
romancer—
Shake down your swag and make yourself at
home;
Or south of Capricorn, or north of Cancer,
Or 'twixt the two, midst truest friends you roam.

The 'laurel-crowned romancer' brought with him his wife, Rose, along with their cook. Through his customary commercial acumen, he had secured his publisher's commission for a book on Australia and New Zealand. From his Australasian odyssey, he produced a 1049-page memoir with an incisive view of the society he encountered. It was intended, James Pope Hennessy says in his biography of Trollope (1971), as 'an aid to young men and women wishing to emigrate to the Antipodes'.

The voyage was inspired by parental duty: Frederic Trollope, Anthony and Rose's younger son, had become a sheep farmer near Grenfell in New South Wales. They had not seen him for two years and, with his impending marriage to Susannah Farrand (the daughter of a magistrate), time appeared ripe for a reunion.

After a brief stop in Melbourne and a tour of Queensland, Trollope headed down the coast to Sydney, receiving a more circumspect welcome in *The Sydney Morning Herald* editorial column. He carried the same last name, it warned, as 'a lady who travelled



above:
Lock and Whitfield
Anthony Trollope c.1877
woodburytype photograph
11.7 x 9.4 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an24722350

below left:
George Gordon McCrae (1833–1927)
The Great Britain 1860s
pen and ink; 11.5 x 19.0 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an6326825





R. Jenny
A Welcome Guest
 reproduced from *Melbourne Punch*,
 3 August 1871
 (East Melbourne: Melbourne
 Punch, 1871)
 Newspapers and Microforms
 Collection
 NX 104

through America and who became a severe critic of the American people'.

This disquiet owed its existence to a notorious and wildly successful book written 40 years earlier by his mother, Fanny. Her *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), based on her prolonged personal anguish and commercial misfortune in the United States, had castigated New World manners.

Branding both Mrs Trollope's book and a subsequent American memoir by Charles Dickens as 'slipshod', the Sydney newspaper expressed uneasiness at the limitations that visiting writers were likely to experience in their research. They would report

only the 'more prominent manifestations' of colonial life, it said, and 'can never know the thousands of quiet families who are improving the country and their fortunes'.

This was a grossly unfair judgment on Anthony Trollope's technique. While it is true that he enjoyed vice-regal hospitality, he also (in his late fifties) spent his year and two days in Australia descending mines, mixing with shearers and rouseabouts, riding his horse into the loneliness of the bush, touring lunatic asylums, and exploring coast and plain by steamer and stagecoach.

The mining experiences began with the Gulgong gold rush in New South Wales, where Trollope was feted by the region's goldfields commissioner, T.A. Browne, who later achieved authorial distinction himself as Rolf Boldrewood, writer of the novel *Robbery Under Arms* (1890).

Local press accounts capture the mood of clubmanship. The *Gulgong Guardian* reported the post-prandial cheers as the gentlemen of the town toasted a guest whose name was 'a household word in all English-speaking countries'. For its part, the *Gulgong Mercantile Advertiser* praised the quality of the 'viands and sparkling wines' served for lunch and said the applause for Trollope's speech 'lasted some time after the guest sat down'.

In his book, appearing in 1873 as *Australia and New Zealand*, Trollope writes

of the miners' 'manly bearing', of their occasional successes and of their frequent disappointments, pondering the futility of 'trundling dirt up out of a hole eight hours a day without results'.

The text takes a more encouraging line when it addresses female immigration. Joining Frederic at the sheep station towards the end of October 1871, Anthony and Rose lost their cook. She married a farmer after 'about a month in the bush' and became 'quite the lady'. Trollope sees the episode as socially significant:

No woman of that kind ought, as regards herself, to stay in England if she can take herself or get herself taken to the colonies.

He also notes a comparative absence of class consciousness, finds Perth 'a very pretty town', Melbourne a 'magnificent' city with hospitable clubs rivalling those of London, Hobart blessed by 'perfect air' and 'delicious' summer weather, and Sydney Harbour 'inexpressibly lovely'.

Less happily, Trollope's travel book declares it impossible to find anywhere 'a river more ugly' than Adelaide's Torrens, condemns Bendigo as having been 'scratched up violently out of the earth by the rake of some great infernal deity', and laments the 'horrid dissipation' encountered in the Chinese opium dens of Ballarat.

There were some harsh words, too, for Australia's Aboriginal people. Dismissing them as 'drunkards and thieves', Trollope concludes:

Of the Australian black man we may certainly say that he has to go. That he should perish without unnecessary suffering should be the aim of all who are concerned in the matter.

The passages that outraged the colonial papers, however, were those accusing Australians of being braggarts:

You are told constantly that colonial meat and colonial wine, colonial fruit and colonial flour, colonial horses and colonial sport, are better than any meat, wine, fruit, flour, horses, or sport to be found elsewhere ... Now if I was sending a young man to the Australian colonies, the last word of advice I should give him would be against this practice. 'Don't blow,'—I should say to him.

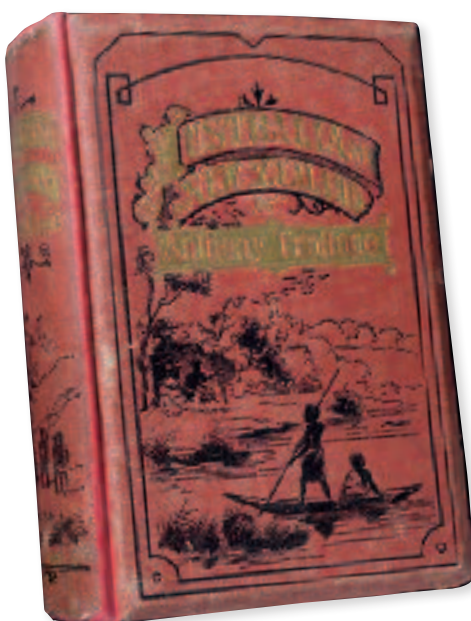
Developing this theme of displeasure at self-aggrandisement, Trollope told his readers:

You hear it and hear of it every day. They blow a good deal in Queensland; a good deal in South Australia. They blow even in poor Tasmania. They blow loudly in New South Wales ... But the blast of the trumpet as heard in Victoria is louder than all the blasts—and the Melbourne blast beats all the other blowing of that proud colony.

Although *The Sydney Morning Herald* glowed at Trollope's references to the natural beauty that graced the harbour and its environs, press reaction at large was unfriendly. This hostility was aimed as much at the author's character as at his writing. The *Gulgong Guardian* suddenly recalled that he had displayed poor table manners when entertained to lunch and had drunk so much that his memoir suffered from 'foggy remembrance'. In Melbourne, the *Argus* accused Trollope himself of being the real braggart in the affair, opining that he:

may entertain a very disparaging opinion of the things and persons he encounters in his travels, but he manifestly entertains the highest respect for Mr Anthony Trollope.

This hostility endured. When Trollope returned to Australia in 1875 to wind up Frederic's failed farming enterprise, he sensed immediately that the resentment created by his 'blowing' accusations had not been forgotten. His despatch to the *Liverpool Mercury*, the eighth of a series entitled *The Tireless Traveller*, contains the observation that:



on reaching the colony again, I found myself to be regarded as rather a bad man ... I was shown an article in a newspaper in which my mendacity, malignity, and general fiendishness were dilated on with all an editor's eloquence.

The editor of the *Gulgong Evening Argus* lambasted him for accepting the township's hospitality four years earlier, 'only to abuse the host afterwards'. Even the premier of New South Wales, John Robertson, could not resist a dig. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, reporting Trollope's presence at a shipboard ceremony on Sydney Harbour, quotes the premier as saying that the official party 'felt inclined to "blow" a little'.

At his death in 1882, the Melbourne and Sydney newspapers smouldered yet. The obituary in the *Argus* suggested that Victoria, home of the loudest 'blowers', still harboured some opprobrium. Trollope, it said, had 'reached eminence by patiently toiling up the hill of fame'; however, all his works were below those of 'the first rank of novelists'.

Towards the end of *The Sydney Morning Herald's* obituary came a more overt allusion to the cause of this abiding pique. After a few sentences conferring faint praise on *Australia and New Zealand*, the newspaper remarked that the 'now historical injunction "Don't blow" provoked some adverse criticism'. In the colonial press, Anthony Trollope's prospects for absolution appeared themselves to be forever blown.

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above:
Nigel Starck
Gulgong Pioneer Museum's Albion Press, made in 1869 and used to print the *Gulgong Mercantile Advertiser* at the time of Trollope's visit

below left:
Cover of *Australia and New Zealand* by Anthony Trollope (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1873)

below right:
American & Australasian Photographic Company
Charles Guigini's Jewellery Shop,
Gulgong Mercantile Advertiser
Office and John Congdon's Prince of Wales Theatre, Gulgong c.1872
quarter plate glass photonegative
Courtesy State Library of New South Wales, Holtermann Collection, PXA 4999

