

MINUTES  
of the Meeting of  
The Novel Club of Cleveland  
Tuesday, June 7, 2011

Location: Home of James Saunders, 16210 Shaker Blvd., Shaker Heights

Hosts: James Saunders and Louise Mooney

Novel: *Barchester Towers* by Anthony Trollope

Papers: biographical, Ham Emmons; critical, Art Newman

After the pleasant opening period of refreshments and wine, President Clyde Henry called the meeting to order at 8:20. Guests were introduced, and committee reports were requested. Program committee will meet briefly at end of presentations to schedule its next get-together. Treasurer reported balance of \$1375.35 as of March 8, with all bills paid. Members should pay Mary their \$20 dues either tonight or next fall. Protocols for archiving papers (set at last meeting) were reviewed: at the end of each meeting, presenters should give hard copies of papers to Clyde and email copies as Word documents to Ham Emmons. At end of season, President will remind any non-submitters to bring their submissions up to date, so that both electronic and hard-copy archives (the latter at Western Reserve Historical Society) can be maintained. There is no set format or paper-type requirement for the paper submissions (archival paper is optional). Minutes for the last meeting were read and accepted with one correction.

**Ham Emmons presented the biographical paper:**

Anthony Trollope was the fourth son of Thomas Anthony Trollope, a barrister, who though well educated was gloomy and improvident—his law practice and his farming ventures failed, and his hopes for inheritance were dashed by the marriage of his wealthy uncle. Nevertheless, the Trollopes came from gentry, and Thomas wanted to educate his sons. Anthony went as a “day boy” to Harrow, shifted from school to school, and didn’t do well socially. He felt an outcast—had no money, no friends, and was bullied a great deal. In 1830 Anthony’s mother moved to America with the boys; she set up a bazaar in Cincinnati, Ohio for sale of English goods; but this failed and she returned to England in 1831. Soon Thomas failed entirely and fled to Belgium; following this Anthony’s mother made some money as a writer, and then the whole family moved to Belgium.

Anthony got a commission in the Austrian cavalry, so for that job he learned French and German. Later he tutored for a while, and then returned to England to a job in the Post Office. There he acquired a reputation for insubordination and lack of promptness. He went into debt and was dunned continuously—an experience he drew on later in his novels. In 1841, Anthony had a chance to become Deputy Postal Surveyor in Ireland. In debt and in

trouble at the office, he volunteered for the position and his boss, happy to get rid of him, supported his application. Although he arrived with bad record from London, he soon developed a good reputation in Ireland. He took up fox hunting and enjoyed the Irish people he got to know. At this time, he matured and acquired social graces, outgrowing his “hobbledyhoynood.” He became engaged to Rose, a banker’s daughter. He was resolved to become a novelist, but had done little writing in his first three years in Ireland. Then he began writing on the train, and set firm goals about how much he would write each day. He got some good ideas for his fiction by dipping into the Lost Letters box. He traveled a lot on business, and then after leaving the Post Office he continued writing on trains.

Trollope’s first novels were about Ireland, and were not well received in England. When he was sent to England on a work assignment he visited Salisbury Cathedral, which became the inspiration for Barchester. After returning to Ireland he wrote the first Barchester novel, *The Warden*, which was noticed and sold fairly well in England. *Barchester Towers* (second in the series) did fairly well also—it was not a great success, but helped establish him as a novelist. He offered to write short stories for *Cornhill Magazine*, published by Thackeray, who encouraged him instead to write another novel—but on a short time frame. Trollope agreed, and the third Barchester novel, published in *Cornhill*, was a hit.

When he was passed over for a promotion at the Post Office, Trollope quit and ran unsuccessfully for Parliament. But he continued to produce novels and travel. In the 1870s, he visited his son in Australia, then returned to England and continued writing. He would write from 5-11 a.m., with the goal of 40 pages per week; then he pursued recreations for the remainder of the day. Trollope was a sociable and modest person, a strong walker, a lover of wine, and an “insatiable disputant.” His literary reputation sank after his death. He said frankly that he wrote as a business—on schedule, and for money—which didn’t go down well with the literary establishment. But nowadays his reputation is higher, and numerous Trollope Societies honor his work.

**Art Newman presented the critical paper:**

This novel has a villain, and a villainess—the bishop’s wife and her chaplain. Neither Mr. Slope nor Mrs. Proudie has the power to oust the bishop, but both strive to manipulate the weak bishop. Trollope’s story includes large doses of irony, and he announces his biases by his choice of surnames for his characters, such as Slope, Proudie, Quiverful and many others. The narrative voice gives the impression that Trollope is both narrating and participating in the story, since the narrator gives his opinions of the characters’ actions as they go—as in his distasteful description of long Sunday sermons. Is there a hero? Maybe not, but a clear hero would be less interesting than the characters that we have. Mr. Arabin wins Eleanor, but the competition (Slope and Bertie Stanhope) aren’t much. The signora is fascinating. The competition

initiated by the death of the bishop shows off the high-church/low-church conflict which was important in Trollope's society. Trollope's blend of comedy, nostalgia, and worldly wisdom (as in his handling of Eleanor and Arabin's story) provides the appeal of the novel. It is a cheerful book with not a tear between its covers.

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In discussion, the first question invited a comparison/contrast between the age of Trollope and that of Jane Austen. Readers offered various comments, remarking generally on differences between Austen's relatively provincial Georgian perspective and that of Trollope's Victorian commercial/industrial age. It was noted that authors of the earlier period were more inwardly focused, where later Victorians were very aware of the outside world. On the question of how Mrs. Proudie's approach to religion would compare to that of anyone present among us, readers agreed that Mrs. Proudie was presented as concerned more with social and financial advantage than with religion.

On Mr. Slope, with the question of what advice he must have received from his father, someone suggested that he probably became a clergyman to avoid being a doctor like his *Tristram Shandy* forebear.

The question of what the novel reveals about Trollope's own religious outlook stimulated much conversation about the community influence and political operation of the Church of England at that time. Trollope could have been quite devout and still found things to criticize about Church proceedings. But readers agreed that in the novel, Trollope's interest seems less theological than sociological, as he observes and writes about the conflicts around him. He seems to be intent on deflating the pomposity of the clergy, and to be thoroughly enjoying the process.

We were invited to compare the marriage of Eleanor and Mr. Arabin to the recent marriage of Prince William and (now) Princess Kate, as to their prospects of happiness. One reader noted that six volumes later the Arabins are still happily married, so they seemed to win.

Further comments were offered on the feminist tendencies of the novel and on various features of other characters—such as for example the complex fascination of la signora and the quiet virtue of Mr. Harding, who was nominated as the real hero of the book.

**The meeting was concluded with the traditional season-ending vote for most and least favorite novels.** There was a tie for most favorite, with seven votes each to *The Magic Mountain* and *Barchester Towers*. Least favorite was a three-way tie (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, *The House of the Spirits*, and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*). Since *Barchester Towers* tied for most

favorite and got **no** “least favorite” votes (whereas *The Magic Mountain* got two), James claimed the honor of having hosted discussion of the favorite novel “every year.” On that happy note, the meeting adjourned for the season’s final round of refreshments and visiting.