

Economics education as story telling

An evaluation of Millicent Garrett Fawcett's *Tales in political economy*¹

Willie Henderson

Introduction

In this article, Millicent Garrett Fawcett's economics stories, published as *Tales in political economy*, are examined within the context of earlier stories with substantial economics content and evaluated by asking two questions. These are: 'Do the *Tales* work as stories?' and 'Do they work as political economy?' In what follows, the significance of story telling as a vehicle for developing and presenting economic ideas will be outlined. Attention will then be paid to economic stories developed by pioneering women economics educators. In the third section, Fawcett's *Tales* will be analysed and sources identified. Links will be made with Martineau's writing and with formal economics. The final section will evaluate Fawcett's *Tales* against the two questions identified above.

A broad context

In exploring issues of the rhetoric of economics, McCloskey talks about economists and their habit of 'telling stories'. For exemplification, McCloskey calls upon set patterns in the way economists talk and write about economics. Thus, neo-classical economists talk in terms of a starting point in which events and circumstances are stable (an initial equilibrium), followed by a change event (such as a crop failure or an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease) followed by the re-establishment of market stability (a new equilibrium). The final move in McCloskey's formal process is to ask 'Do we have an equilibrium?' and intermediate moves, linked to profit, are concerned with 'entry' and 'exit' decisions.² According to McCloskey, 'the idea of profit has been a device for telling stories that otherwise would not have been told'.³ This is micro-economic analysis developed by a formal process of questioning and reasoning that becomes encapsulated in an expected and conventional sequence of moves, just as in a story or story-telling genre. The sequence that goes from initial stability through a series of changed events and closes with the establishment of a new stability is similar to that

of (say) a conventional play. If we think of Burke's notion of thought and motives in terms of act, scene, agent, agency and purpose, we can see how economics may have elements akin to a drama.⁴ In short, narrative orders experience in a sequence (e.g. stylised events in a formal analysis of a market) and provides meaning (e.g. the search for profit or satisfaction, leading to equilibrium).⁵

But there was a time, before the development of any coherent economic analysis, when economic ideas were explored as story. The biblical discovery of the fact of human labour ('by the sweat of your brow you will find your daily bread') – an essential element of the human condition – is told in the context of the story of the Fall and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Plato explores economic ideas, of a limited range, in the *Republic*, which, though it does have passages of narrative, does not have a significant story line – Plato was not over-impressed by poets and playwrights. This Utopian discourse (in fact but not in name) encouraged others to explore economic issues within the context of stories. 'Dives and pauper' is 'a prose treatise reflecting upon ethics and economic behaviour, written probably by a Franciscan in the early fifteenth century, based on an exposition of the Ten Commandments'.⁶ Parables and metaphors (in texts as diverse as the Christian bible and those written by John Ruskin) have been used as means of teaching about economic behaviour.⁷ More's *Utopia* is a significant example of a socio-economic critique based upon fiction.

Another significant example is Defoe's fictional character Robinson Crusoe, created in a text that explores *inter alia*, the nature of resources, of property and the origins of increased productive capacity, the nature of money and wealth and related issues. Indeed, the choice-making 'Robinson Crusoe', a fictional character built around the exploits of an historical figure, escaped from the pages of fiction and entered the world of the formal economics textbook as '*Homo economicus*' and of formal economic theory 'providing a narrative basis for the theoretical

1 Thanks go to John Issitt, Sebastian Mitchell, Warren Samuels and Ruth Watts for comments on an earlier draft.

2 McCloskey, D. N., 'The economics of choice: neoclassical supply and demand' in T. G. Rawski, S. B. Carter, J. S. Cohen et. al. (eds) *Economics and the historian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p.124.

3 McCloskey, 1996, op. cit., pp.124 and 127.

4 Burke, K. A., *Grammar of motives*, (New York: Prentice Hall, 1945).

5 Jasinski, J., *Source book on rhetoric: key concepts in contemporary rhetorical studies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), pp.389–390; McCloskey, 1996, op. cit., p.127.

6 Wood, D., *Medieval economic thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.9.

7 Henderson, W., *Economics as literature* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.123–126.

formulations of Ricardo, Edgeworth, Koopmans, Barro and others ...'.⁸ Such moves between fact and fiction challenge a simplistic notion, 'the real world', still referred to by economists. Browne and Quinn point out that 'Robinson Crusoe', in feminist theory, is not 'a universal subject' but a 'masculine subject' but McCloskey accepts that the novel illustrates the fundamental problems of scarcity and choice, though those engaged in literary criticism would emphasise the religious and prudential aspects – 'Crusoe' lands in trouble because of his 'lack of piety' and 'his want of prudence'.⁹ Leadership roles in both Martineau's *Life in the wilds* and Fawcett's *Tales in political economy* are given to males.¹⁰ The isolation and stocktaking, to establish the resource base, are elements in the tales that are derived from *Robinson Crusoe*.

Poetry too was a medium for the discussion of economic criticism and economic motivation. Examples include Dyer's 'georgic poem in four books, *The fleece*, in 1757', a work that praises the 'providential ordering of the global economy',¹¹ Thompson's 'Castle of indolence', a text that treats of labour and luxury, and Goldsmith's 'Deserted village', a work that holds that a commercially-driven society cannot be a happy one. Jane Marcet exploited both travel journals and poetry in writing her *Conversations on political economy* (1816), an educational format that drew upon her earlier work on chemistry.¹² Mandeville's poem, *The fable of the bees*, argued that 'private vices' (corruption, love of luxury) led to 'public benefits'.¹³ His arguments reverberated throughout the eighteenth century. Critical and narrative passages in the opening chapters of Smith's *Wealth of nations* (such as the discussion of the origins of the division of labour) indirectly draw upon Mandeville's *Fable*.

There is an understanding, developed by those interested in what has come to be known as 'the new economic criticism' of the 'way in which economic systems are structured, by means of the imagination, upon what are essentially fictive concepts'.¹⁴

An examination of storytelling in economics has a potential to challenge the economists' concept of 'the real world', at a point where analytical fictions are written into fictional analysis. For economics, at least according to McCloskey, there can be no hard and fast line between science and narrative.¹⁵

A narrower context

The deliberate construction and use of story to teach economic lessons derived from formal economics writing, in Great Britain, is a product of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a time when economics emerged as a formal discipline. The genre owes its development to a number of significant women educators, often marginalized in the canon of writers on Political Economy: Maria Edgeworth; Jane Marcet and Harriet Martineau.¹⁶ Such marginalisation has been challenged by subsequent research that has led, for example, to the publication of *A biographical dictionary of women economists*.¹⁷

Edgeworth wrote children's stories some of which develop economic ideas. *The cherry orchard* deals with the social and productive gains achieved by the division of labour (a story that parallels with straw plaiting, Smith's famous example of pin making). She also published, for an adult readership, a comic novel of regional customs and manners (themes touched upon by Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment), *Castle Rackrent*, that explores motivation and behaviour amongst an expiring landlord class in Ireland and which incorporates ideas drawn from her reading of Smith concerning social and economic change.¹⁸ The lessons in both, for Edgeworth's novels were also 'improving tales' were not primarily economic, though linked directly to economic themes, but moral and social.

Jane Marcet wrote extensively on educational themes, her first work of any significance being *Conversations on chemistry* that inspired Faraday. Her educational dialogues are an adaptation of an

- 8 Browne, M. N. and Quinn, J. K., 'Dominant economic metaphors and the postmodern subversion of the subject' in Woodmansee, M. and Osteen, M. (eds) *The new economic criticism: studies in the intersection of literature and economics* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.134.
- 9 Browne and Quinne, 1999, op. cit. 135; McCloskey, 1996, op. cit. 123; Speck, W. A., 'Eighteenth-century attitudes towards business' in Pollard, A. (ed.), *The representation of business in English literature* (London: IEA Readings no. 52, 2000), p.22.
- 10 Martineau, H., *Illustrations of political economy* (London: Charles Fox, 1834); Fawcett, M., *Tales in political economy* (London: Macmillan, 1874).
- 11 Speck, W. A., 2000, op. cit. p.17.
- 12 Marcet, J., *Conversations on political economy* (London, 1806) and Marcet, J., *Conversations on chemistry* (London, 1816).
- 13 Mandeville, B., *The fable of the bees* (2 vols.) F. B. Kaye (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [6th edition, London, 1732], 1924).
- 14 Heinzelman, K., *The economics of the imagination* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980) pp.11–12; Osteen and

- Woodmansee, 'Taking account of the new economic criticism' in Woodmansee and Osteen (eds) 1999, op. cit. 4–6.
- 15 Narrative and its role in social science has become more transparent in recent years particularly with respect to qualitative approaches to research and writing that arises out of such research. See Czarniawska, B., *Narratives in social science research* (London: Sage, 2004)
- 16 Henderson, 1995, *passim*, Shackleton, J. R., 'Why don't women feature in the history of economics' *Economics*, Autumn, 1990, pp.123–125; Shackleton, J. R., 'Jane Marcet and Harriet Martineau: pioneers of economics education' *History of Education*, vol. 19, (1988) pp.238–97.
- 17 Dimand, R. W., Dimand, M. A. and Forget, E. L., *A biographical dictionary of women economists* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2000).
- 18 Edgeworth, M., *Castle Rackrent*, London [1800]; Edgeworth, M. *The little dog rusty: The Orange Man; and The Cherry Orchard, being the tenth part of Early Lessons* (ed.) M. Myers, (University of California, 1990).

ancient form to a contemporary educational problem: that of introducing subjects new to the curriculum to young people. *Conversations on political economy* (1816), following the work on chemistry, was published the year before the publication of Ricardo's *Principles*.¹⁹ She also, later, published, *John Hopkins's notions on political economy*, a work that explores economic notions in story format. Marcet was influenced by Ricardo, and Adam Smith, but also drew for her developing understanding of political economy on the writing of J.-B. Say.²⁰

Edgeworth and Marcet aimed their works at children and 'young persons of either sex', respectively. Martineau wrote economic stories for an audience of adult readers, as a series of monthly *Illustrations of political economy*. Her tales predate those of Jane Marcet, though not Marcet's work on *Conversations on political economy*. Evaluations of the educational and economic significance of her writing are mixed. To Freedgood it is clear that an aspect of Martineau's success is her ability to retail classical political economy's belief in a structured and predictable economic world and so help to reduce readers' uncertainty in a time of change.²¹ It is possible, however, to read the stories simply as entertainment, without paying too much attention to the economic content, though it is difficult in some of Martineau's plots to see how the economic content could be overlooked. Fawcett, whose tales date from much later in the century, in contrast, is not primarily creating literature but, rather, support material for her introductory textbook. At the end of each story Martineau added some of the key economic ideas developed and later, gathered these together into a small textbook. Fawcett started with the textbook and worked towards the stories. In making evaluations of such hybrid texts, the following questions seem relevant: 'Do they work as stories? and, 'Do they work as economics lessons'? and 'Where is the balance to be found?'

Further developments

Whilst there were others exploring economic ideas through story-telling episodes (such as Thomas De

Quincey – whose storytelling on value theory was extensively used by Mill – Bastiat, and, though not admitted to the canon of economics writing, John Ruskin),²² the development of economics education, rather than of the formal systematic treatise known as the 'Principles' text, was largely secured by women writers. In the 1870s, a significance time gap after the productive years of the women pioneers, Millicent Garrett Fawcett (hereafter Fawcett) wrote *Political economy for beginners* (first published in 1870). This was published by Macmillan and marketed to elementary schools and to individual readers. This is a genuine textbook in the sense that it is adapted in content, expression and by exemplification to the target readers and, in addition, is a work of synthesis. It is neither a commentary on, nor a summarisation of a given text but, rather, a synthesis of ideas from a range of recognised economists: Smith, Ricardo, Mill, Bastiat, Henry Fawcett and others. The work fills a gap in the market, a gap that no professional economist was prepared to fill, in much the same way that Marcet and Martineau filled educational gaps earlier in the century. We can readily classify the work as an elementary textbook.²³

Supporting the sale of the work was a marketing strategy that defended that secured the book's market by alliance with the names of established economists Henry Fawcett and J. E. Cairnes, as well as the educator, E. E. Bowen. This was required because Millicent Garrett Fawcett lacked institutional support (available to male writers through posts in colleges and public schools) to back her status as an economics writer. As part of the strategy, two things emerged: the addition of a series of 'puzzles' that became incorporated into the evolving textbook as a result of new editions and the development of a set of tales (linked in by preface and publicity by being mentioned, as supplementary material to the 'puzzles', in the Preface to the Fourth Edition of *Political economy for beginners*), showing how economic concepts work themselves out in an island economy.²⁴ The order of development reverses that of Martineau and approximates to the development pattern of textbook plus supporting textual material that is part of textbook development in

19 Ricardo, D., [1817] *Principles of political economy* (London: Dent, 1973).

20 Marcet, J., *John Hopkins's notions on political economy* (London: Longman, 1833).

21 Freedgood, E., (1999), 'Banishing panic: Harriet Martineau and the popularisation of political economy' in Woodmansee and Osteen (eds) op. cit., p.210.

22 De Quincey tells a story to illustrate his concept of value and this story is incorporated into Mill's *Principles*. See Henderson, 1995, op. cit., pp.106–107. F. Y. Edgeworth was concerned sometimes that in reading De Quincey's economics writing 'the doubt occurs whether the writer was as competent to point a moral as to adorn a tale'. See Edgeworth, F. Y. 'De Quincey, Thomas' in Eatwell, J., Milgate, M., and Newman, P. (eds), *The new*

Palgrave: a dictionary of economics (London: Macmillan, 1987), p.812. Ruskin tells many stories incorporated as episodes into works such as *Unto this last*. See Cook, E. T. and Wedderburn, A. (eds). *The collected works of John Ruskin the library edition* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

23 Henderson, W., 'Millicent Garrett Fawcett's *Political economy for beginners*: an evaluation,' *Paedagogica Historica* XL, No. IV 2004, pp.435–453.

24 Fawcett conceptually divides the student questions into 'questions' and 'puzzles' but does not use these as headings in the relevant sections after each chapter of *Political economy for beginners*. Questions are routine and can be answered by exploring the text. 'Puzzles' are more difficult and tend to ask students to go beyond the text in some way. However the actual division between 'ques-

economics in the twentieth century. Elsewhere I have evaluated *Political economy for beginners*.²⁵ In what follows, the *Tales in political economy* will be described and analysed.

Fawcett knew of the contributions made by the earlier women writers and of the work of Harriet Martineau in particular. Fawcett talks of her 'plagiarism of the idea' of presenting hard economic stories in the softer context of dramatic tales as something that she borrowed from Martineau. Martineau's texts were long lived. Although Fawcett admitted to borrowing the idea of using story to develop economics understanding, she borrowed slightly more than she may have been prepared to admit.

Fawcett deals with the intrusion of foreign trade into a hitherto closed and distorted protectionist economy. The economic analysis that she is using as the basis for her storytelling is derived from trade theory. The source of her theory is likely to have been the works on trade by Henry Fawcett, published by Macmillan around the time that Fawcett was developing her stories as supplementary material to her 'little book' (Millicent and Henry Fawcett habitually talked in these terms concerning Fawcett's work). Martineau had written *Life in the wilds* (the first of her illustrations of economic forces and processes at work in communities), but the isolation of a group of settlers in southern Africa is used to develop ideas concerning the nature of resources and of money and the concept of the division of labour. It is not concerned with trade and its implications. The inspiration of *Life in the wilds* is Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and an episode of story telling in book one chapter two of Smith's *Wealth of nations* in which Smith sets out a fictional development path leading to specialisation and the division of labour.²⁶

The concept of looking at the origins of economic life and ideas used to describe and analyse that life through isolation is one that is of general literary significance. John Ruskin, for example, in developing his understanding and critique of money, makes use of a simple economy of two castaway sailors.²⁷ Fawcett, in turn, makes use of an isolated community but the purpose of the isolation is to trace out the developing impact of trade on a closed economy. However, Fawcett's approach also starts with the development of the isolated community operating under its own

resource constraints. There are parallels to be observed with Martineau's writing with respect to the common literary origins in *Robinson Crusoe* and other aspects of the texts. As we shall see, isolation is also a conceptual device readily used by economists in the development of economic analysis.

The other sources for Fawcett's *Tales* are of two kinds. The first to be considered is similar formats from other literary texts. Bastiat's 'Candlemakers' Petition' is the original of the first *Tale* and *Robinson Crusoe* is used, for example, as way of setting up the initial story of the peopling of the 'Isle Pleasant' and of introducing the *Tale* as an economics one.²⁸ There is also a link with Martineau's *Tales from the wilds*, the first story in the series that became *Illustrations of political economy*. Fawcett, in the Preface to the first edition, describes her aims and inspiration:

It is hoped that these little tales may be of some use to those who are trying to teach Political Economy. I cannot let them go to press without a word of apology to Miss Martineau for my plagiarism of the idea, which she made so popular thirty years ago, of hiding the powder, Political Economy, in the raspberry jam of a story.²⁹

In the Preface to the fourth edition of *Political economy for beginners* (1876), Fawcett specifies the subject matter of the *Tales*:

In order to help beginners through some of the difficulties connected with the subjects of currency and foreign trade, I have published a little book called *Tales in Political Economy*, which I hope may be useful to those young students who find that some of the puzzles carry them out of their depth.³⁰

Fawcett's *Tales*, however do not remain as close to the inspiring source as the Preface may suggest, as readers are directed textually to consider the economic meaning of events. There is as much powder as jam. Opening and closing moves in the first *Tale* signals its economic significance. The following quotes illustrate how the economics message is spelled out in opening and closing sections:

The first story that he told me I shall call a free-trade story, because I think it gives a very good example of what people gain by free trade, and shows how it is

tions' and 'puzzles' is not strictly maintained. The *Tales in political economy* do not have any direct relationship with the puzzles as set out in the relevant chapters of *Political economy for beginners*, as such, rather they have an orientation towards the learning as a whole irrespective of the division.

25 Henderson, 2004, op. cit.

26 Henderson, 1995, op. cit.; Smith, [1776], *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, R. H. Campbell and

A. S. Skinner (general editors), W. B. Todd (textual editor) (Oxford University Press, 1976), p.27.

27 Henderson, 2000, op. cit., p.137.

28 Bastiat, F. (1845) 'The candlemakers' petition' trans. From *Oeuvres complètes de Frédéric Bastiat*, (Paris: Guillaumin et cie, 1862–1864).

29 Fawcett, M., *Tales in political economy*, preface, (1874)

30 Fawcett, M., [1870], *Political economy for beginners*, preface, 4th edition (London: Macmillan, 1876).

that some people are injured through the introduction of free trade.³¹

This story is an illustration of the fact that when you have once got protection it is impossible to get rid of it without injuring the people who have invested their capital and labour in the protected industry.³²

This story and lesson are integrated in a much closer way than they are in Martineau's work. Examples from other contexts are woven into the closing section of 'The Srimats' and the exemplification of the protection for French 'beet-root sugar' against West Indian sugar is also found in *Political economy for beginners*.

The 'he' in the first quote (above) is 'Captain Adam', the fictional source of the stories. Captain Adam is a ship's captain and explorer and originator of many new economic ideas and opportunities in the *Tales*. He is, to some extent, the counterpart of Martineau's 'Captain Adams', community leader rather than a captain, just as 'Mr. Davies', a man better suited to consumption rather than production, is the counterpart of 'Mr. Arnall' in *Life in the wilds*. Some elements are bound to exist in parallel as elementary economic concepts are drawn upon for elements in the plot, though here the parallels may be considered close as Fawcett nods firmly in the direction of Martineau.

In the further three stories, the elements of the economic lesson are signalled in advance by a summarisation, in note form, of the economic content (in Martineau the economic elements tend to be set out in a codicil after each story). The economics lessons are reinforced in the text by authorial comment. This comment is suggested by the story but not directly part of it. The following is an example that reflects upon the classical notion, supported by Say's Law and the notion of the wages fund and an economy rooted in production (much criticised by John Ruskin who saw, from outside the realm of 'professional' discussion of economics, and unlike most of his contemporaries, the significant role demand plays in the generation of economic well-being), that the demand for commodities is not a demand for labour:

It accordingly happens that general prosperity and an increased demand for commodities nearly always go together; but the increased demand is not the cause of the increased prosperity. On the contrary, the increase of production gives those who benefit it greater power to purchase the products of other kinds of labour; in other words, increased prosperity makes a greater demand for commodities possible.³³

The first lesson is one in what would now be called 'the political economy of protectionism' as it links policy discussion to the economic structure and its associated political superstructure. The rest of the lessons examine the process of growth in a community that comes to accept the benefits of trade.

A second source is formal economics. As she worked closely with her husband in the preparation of his manuscripts, and given the date of publication, it is to be expected that Fawcett used, for her developing understanding of Trade Theory, the work on that subject by Henry Fawcett. Henry Fawcett had been blinded in a shooting accident some years prior to the marriage to Millicent. Millicent was his helpmeet and therefore closely involved, as such, in the production of his written texts. For her general economic knowledge, Fawcett could call upon the studies that she undertook in preparation for writing *Political economy for beginners*, including her search for reader-adapted exemplifications. Formally, the island economy (here as in other writers) sets up a simplification (still a legitimate method in the development of economic argument) based on, in Fawcett's first example, a two-sector economy, a concept that is itself an analytical fiction. Isolation simplifies, as it does in texts such as Moore's *Utopia*, in much the same way that the formal assumptions on which deductive economic reasoning is founded work to stop, as Joan Robinson once said, everything in an economics model happening at once.

Fawcett's *Tales* deal with sectoral transformation through the productive power of specialisation and exchange. The economy starts simple and new, complicating aspects are introduced one at a time (in turn: barter; commodity money and the division of labour; new domestic products; metallic currency and a foreign trade sector) and their social and economic impact traced out and discussed. The economic aspects of the stories and the structural and attitudinal transformations involved are in line with classical economics, as its subject matter was understood by, for example, Henry Fawcett. What is interesting is the ease with which the analysis can be cast in story format and still retain a measure of credibility as political economy. This finding is at least consistent with the insights of Heinzelman and the 'new economic criticism', that formal economics has an imaginative and essentially fictive base.

The first economy in question (that of 'The Srimats') is inspired by Bastiat's highly satirical 'Candlemakers' petition'. In literary terms it is an example of 'continuation'. Bastiat was an econom-

31 Fawcett, 1874, op. cit., p.2.

32 Ibid., 1874, p.11.

33 Ibid., 1874, p.27.

ics writer who believed in the significance of market freedom as a means for the achievement of a productive social harmony. It would be natural for Fawcett to start with Bastiat. His 'Candlemakers' petition' was already used, in summary form, in *Political economy for beginners* and this constitutes one of the textual links between the two books.³⁴ At the very start of his writing career, Bastiat criticised tariffs and protectionist thinking.

Fawcett is likely to have come across Bastiat's writing as a result of the work of her husband Henry Fawcett. Fawcett simply transposes Bastiat's ideas from that of a satirical proposition into a textually realised, isolated island economy and community ('The Srimats'). The plot is reworked in terms of the power structure and cultural practices of a community that devotes most of its resources to the production of palm oil. The palm oil is used as a source of domestic lighting even in the day. Custom and law requires that houses exclude sunlight and that palm oil, considered sacred, be burned as a source of light even in the day. 'Captain Adam', the source of the stories, attempts to open this isolated economy to international trade and reports on the structure of production using the alleged words of one 'of the old chiefs':

Two-thirds of our people ... are occupied in our most important industry, the making of palm oil; the other third work hard to provide enough food and raiment for us all. We can only just produce enough to maintain the tribe in decency and comfort; we have no surplus that we could exchange for the products of other lands.³⁵

This is a fully employed economy (always a potential advantage of isolationism) and those living in it share a mind-set that makes it difficult for them to understand the transformation through trade and comparative advantage that the 'Captain' proposes. To make the changes, the sunlight needs to be let into every house and the palm oil monopoly smashed. This is not acceptable to the vested interests that run the economy. Faced with this, Adam proposes a gradual transformation of the economy under a planning regime based upon what would now be called 'balanced growth'. The main aspect of Adam's plan 'was not to abandon the plantations suddenly, but gradually to transfer the labour they now absorbed to more profitable occupations'.³⁶ This plan is rejected by the Council, which was composed of, in effect, the owners of the plantations, and the principal beneficiaries of, the palm oil

economy. Fawcett reflects, 'Captain Adam blamed himself very much for not having found out that the palm plantations were the private property of the council, for he knew men too well to think they would ever pass laws involving loss to themselves'.³⁷ These reflections are curiously significant for today's world: both the IMF and the World Bank initially underestimated the political consequences of moves towards reform under the 'Structural adjustment' programmes associated with policy developed to adjust economies in the developing world in the light of the second debt crises. Although Adam starts out as the narrator, there are two narrators, Adam, textually identified as such, and the author directly, though sometimes the 'voices' get muddled.

The story, as story, lacks both the energy and conviction of some of Martineau's *Tales illustrating political economy*. Martineau can set a scene economically and with conviction. Martineau's stories could be read and enjoyed simply as stories and the reader can catch glimpses of a 'character's mind and heart', essential aspects of storytelling according to Booth, even if constrained by the needs of contextualised economic agency.³⁸ Fawcett, once described by Mill as having a 'literal way of looking at things' is not able to produce characters that are anything other than economic ciphers. The text freely admits that the island is 'an extreme' example of a community turning its back on 'free trade'.³⁹ It does not, however, shirk either the theoretical or practical issues involved in structural transformation through trade, even if the context is an extreme oversimplification. Its structural transformation lessons are economically sound and clear and explicitly recognise that trade can be socially disruptive in the short run.

The second economy, created by 'the shipwrecked sailors' of 'Isle Pleasant', is founded upon a continuation of the 'Robinson Crusoe' story, a story assumed to be familiar to target readers:

Once Captain Adam and some twenty of the passengers and crew of a sailing vessel were shipwrecked on a small uninhabited island in the Pacific. They were like Robinson Crusoe in one respect, which was, that they were fortunate enough to be able to save a number of things off the wreck, which they find to be of immense value and comfort. They were not able, like Robinson Crusoe, to go to their vessel before it broke up, and ransack it for the most useful things they could find;

34 Fawcett, M., [1870] (1876) op. cit., p.166–170.

35 Fawcett, M., 'The Srimats', *Tales in political economy* (London: Macmillan, 1874), p.5.

36 Fawcett, op. cit., p.8.

37 Fawcett, op. cit., p.10.

38 Booth, W. C. *The rhetoric of fiction* (London: Penguin Group, 1983), 2nd edition, p.3.

39 Fawcett, op. cit., p.11.

they got nothing that was not washed ashore, so they obtained altogether a very motley collection.⁴⁰

The first story, 'The shipwrecked sailors', with elements drawn from *Robinson Crusoe*, *Life in the wilds* and Smith's idealisation (based upon a passage in Mandeville) of how economic differentiation takes place in a 'tribe', looks at the adaptations required in economic expectations and concepts in the framework of new resource constraints. Captain Adam continues his role as reporter and source of rational economic ideas and practical suggestions for coping with disruptive events such as the impact of a new crop, 'plantain' on the market for 'corn'. The corn versus plantain episode gives rise to a reference to the 'English corn laws' and a sustained discussion for and against protection for the corn interest in the island economy. The Captain's way out is to suggest an alternative use for corn in the brewing of beer. The idea that resources are flexible but that there are short-term social costs to change is finely handled.

The second story, 'Isle Pleasant' is concerned with the inconveniences of barter and the origins and growth of money in the economy. The developments take place when Captain Adam is absent from the island. A number of semi-technical and technical issues about money are introduced, including the instability of 'cocoa-nuts' commodity money – the cocoa-nut has an intrinsic value as a consumption item and hence may be 'eaten up' and the circulation of currency reduced as a result – and the problems of weight, size and indivisibility.

The transition to metallic money is based upon the discovery of a chest 'long underwater and fixed between two rocks'.⁴¹ The initial distribution of the money in favour of those who found it creates the opportunity for looking at the short-term and long-term impact of money on prices, on the development of credit and on productive capacity. Although the story element is sustained, the 'lesson' element is more significant than in the two earlier *Tales* and much closer to the surface. Adam's role is simply that of reporter though the fact that he returns with new resources means that he faces the community with the need for a new series of adaptations, set out in the final tale, 'The islanders' foreign trade'.

The final story is economically interesting in that it links in social expectations and initial misconceptions. In other words, although the story telling is in many ways of secondary importance it allows for the development of ideas, including misconceptions, from the point of view of economic actors and novices. The participants in the story are themselves learning the economic lessons. It is the possibility of such a

perspective that makes the story-telling educationally useful. The first steps in foreign trade cause an inflow of metallic currency. This leads to increased domestic prices and much frustration. Islanders do not know how to behave in the new context (at first sight a fanciful notion but consider the reaction of many people recently as the old centrally-planned Soviet Union started to break-up, those without experience of the market did not at first know how to act). It is only the intervention of another Captain, that of the 'Carrier Pigeon', the means of trading with San Francisco, that the chain of misunderstanding is broken as he returns from San Francisco with new commodities, unthought of by the islanders, that trade starts to bring significant benefits. Natural advantage and comparative advantage are introduced, though, again, the narrative element is somewhat displaced by the conceptual development, and the islanders experience the economic lesson that 'foreign trade, to be permanent and beneficial, must be in the nature of an exchange of commodities for commodities'.⁴²

Evaluation

Story telling with significant economic content was one way of reflecting on the changes that were taking place in economic life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even writers of formal economics in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century used small story-telling episodes to illustrate economic concepts as well as to reflect upon the socio-economic contexts of change. The links between the novel as social criticism and economic aspects of an era are strong. The deliberate use of stories to teach formal classical political economy was the output of significant women writers and economics educators at the start of the nineteenth century. Thus such stories are not simply an historical curiosity from the nineteenth century, but represent, to some extent at least, a continuation of a story-telling tradition, adapted to suit new learning opportunities.

Though a generation and more separates the pioneering women from Millicent Garrett Fawcett's work, her *Tales in political economy* owe much, in genre terms, to the work of her predecessors, that of Harriet Martineau in particular. Her *Tales* were less successful than Martineau's which took the 1830s by storm. Martineau's socio-economic lessons about economic order and predictability working together according to known economic laws satisfied a social need for order, according to Freedgood, and supplied readers with images of themselves as they went about their daily lives. Fawcett is writing stories to educate in the sense that her work is for young people coming

40 Ibid., 1874, p.15.

41 Ibid., p.59.

42 Ibid., p.92.

new to political economy as a subject. The stories are a balance of plot and economic reflection and explication, though more a series of skilled exemplifications than elaborate plots sustained by skilfully painted episodes in the manner of Martineau. The fact that they grew out of Fawcett's successful textbook, *Political economy for beginners*, as supplementary material, gives them some historical significance despite their inadequacies as literature. The pattern of development that led from the systematic economic treatise known as the *Principles* text to the fully-adapted student-adapted 'Introductory' text plus supporting material, a pattern mainly found from the second half of the twentieth century, is evidenced in embryonic form by the production of *Political economy for beginners* (a student adapted textbook) plus the associated publication of *Tales in political economy*. The story format would be more difficult to sustain with economic ideas of a more sophisticated nature, though modern approaches to teaching by case study that can be based around narrative suggest that narratives can be adapted to treat with more complex ideas. In case studies the 'lessons' are learned directly by participants and not indirectly through character and plot.

Even if Fawcett's *Tales* have little to recommend them for their literary merit (unlike the work of Martineau where the success of the *Tales illustrating political economy* as literature and as economics can at least be debated), the economics, albeit simplified in much the same manner as in *Political economy for beginners*, is formally correct and developed in a way that makes complex concepts easily understandable. The strong visual element, a feature of the work of the pioneering women writers, is lacking in Fawcett's writing, especially when compared to Martineau who took great delight in painting word pictures.⁴³ What they all have in common is simplification by concretisation as opposed to the simplification by abstraction favoured by political economists such as James Mill.⁴⁴

The balance between story and lesson shifts in Fawcett's work, as the tales proceed. Fawcett's illustrations are primarily governed by economic and educational concerns rather than literary concerns. The exemplifications are as accessible as those in *Political economy for beginners* and some of the examples and explications are found in both texts. The main issues of structural transformations and how these could work out as an economy opens itself to trade are set out clearly along some with adequate attention given to the social and political aspects as significant new elements are added to the island economy in a process that matches economic method. The literary sources go beyond Martineau to ideas and formats developed by Bastiat on the one hand and Defoe on the other.

The economics sources are derived from Fawcett's reading for *Political economy for beginners* in the works of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, and specifically from Henry Fawcett's work on protectionism and free trade.

I have not found, as yet, any scholarly histories of economics education or of the historical development of the economics textbook, though there are significant fragments. If such histories should ever be written, Fawcett's student-adapted approach to the development of a textbook as a work of synthesis (rather than as a systematic treatise) and *Tales in political economy* as adapted supplementary material and as literary continuation, will have a place.

Willie Henderson is Professor of Continuing Education at the University of Birmingham. He works on the history of economic thought and of economics education. Publications include papers on language and economics; nineteenth-century women economists; exemplification and hedging strategy in Adam Smith's Wealth of nations and related topics.

43 Henderson, 1995, op. cit., pp.10 and 77.

44 Henderson, 1995, op. cit., p.76.