

**Notes on *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* for Richardson's Readathon in Trentham,
August 2018**

Bio

HHR was born in Melbourne in 1870 and spent most of her childhood in Victoria. Her father worked as a doctor during her early years, but died in 1879 after a long and painful mental and physical deterioration. Her mother trained as a postmistress to support the family and HHR attended Presbyterian Ladies College as a boarder from the age of 12. In 1889 she was admitted to Leipzig Conservatorium in Germany to study piano and composition. She met and married Scottish academic, John George Robertson in Germany and they lived for some time in Munich and Strassburg before settling in England in 1904. She died there in 1946.

Published works

Between 1908 and 1939 HHR published six novels - *Maurice Guest*, *The Getting of Wisdom*, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony (a trilogy)*, *The Young Cosima*, and a volume of short stories, *The End of a Childhood*. A volume of autobiography, *Myself When Young* appeared in 1948, and two volumes of her music in 1999. She also translated two Scandinavian novels, *The Fisher Lass* and *Niels Lyhne*.

The writing of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*

In 1887 HHR, near the end of her schooling in Melbourne, read the letters written by her mother and father to each other, what she called 'a love story of 30 years ago', and years later she used them for her work on Richard Mahony. As she reflects in her memoir, *Myself When Young*, as a child of nine she had felt mostly relief at the death of her father, but that changed:

Not till many years later when, with the help of old letters and diaries, I began to trace the shifting course of his life and the character behind it, for my work on Richard Mahony, did I grasp at least something of what he must have suffered, both for himself and for those dependent on him.

Although she completed her music studies with a creditable result, by 1893 she had turned to writing. She wrote stories, articles, did translations, wrote her first two novels and then on October 11, 1910, she records in her diary that she has written the first paragraph of what will become *Australia Felix*, the first volume of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. In 1912 she made her only return trip to Australia to do research for the Richard Mahony story, making notes and taking photographs as she visited the towns where her parents lived before she was born and the towns she lived in herself as a child.

The first volume of *The Fortunes* was finished in 1917, the second in 1925 and the third in 1929.

Useful Reading

You can read the letters of HHR's parents that inspired the trilogy in *Marriage Lines* by Meg Probyn, a detailed and highly informative edition.

HHR's own letters are available in the 3 volume edition by Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele, completed as part of the extensive Monash Richardson Project.

Notable biographies are those by Dorothy Green, Axel Clark and Michael Ackland. Bruce Steele has written a biography of Walter Richardson.

A range of articles, orations and other talks are available on the Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia website – www.henryhandelrichardsonsofaustralia.org.au