

Atale told by an index: collating the writings of Angela Thirkell

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I have compiled a cumulative index to all 33 of Angela Thirkell's novels (including the 29 set in Bassetshire, *Coronation summer* and *Trooper to the Southern Cross*), two collections of her short stories, *The Fortunes of Harriette*, her autobiographical *Three Houses*, all her letters to Margaret Bird, and the letters published in *Baby, Mother and Grandmother*. The index makes 34 x A4 pages in 4 columns, with a wordcount of over 35,000. You may well wonder, why?

In the first place, I maintain that fiction to which one frequently returns needs indexing as much as any form of non-fiction, to enable one to find passages one may recall and want to trace—among 37 volumes, that is no light task. Could any one tell me, without benefit of my index, where Thirkell writes about: Brahms, bridesmaids' dresses, the *British Medical Journal*, a Christening cake, couvade, Noël Coward, perpetual curates, the *Daily Express*, Sir Isaac Newton's dog, Easter Island, a footmuff, the Frog prince, a gargoyle, grape scissors, a hat for a horse, jazz, the film *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, Pepsop bread, or the book a mother proposes to write, 'Why I hate my children'? I could look in my index and say just where they all are. I even indexed some lines that I thought too good to lose in the mass, such as the descriptions of Christmas as an 'odious and disrupting season'; London as 'land of lost delights' and 'transpontine Squattlesea'; Geraldine Birkett as 'entirely uneducated - never any good at anything but mathematics'; the exact sciences as 'a subject that even Cambridge must be slightly ashamed of encouraging'; and Eric Swan's compliment kindly paid to Grace Grantly, 'It is a certain air of arrested education about you that delights me'. (Grace marries someone else—why should that be?)

But an index does much more than locate specific items in the text. Another effect is to bring together all references to the same topic. One byproduct of this is to show, from the length of the collated entries, which themes and topics the author has the most to say about. The largest topic entries in my Thirkell index are those for: babies, baths, Bible, books, church, clothes, dogs, Latin, names, railways, schools, servants, weddings and women. I don't think that will come as any surprise. Lists are built up of subjects classified together, such as the titles of films starring Glamora Tudor, listed under her name as a subhead under 'films'; or as cross-references: for instance, my entry 'shops' has 'see also butchers; chain stores; fish shops; Post offices', and 'chain stores' has 'see also Bostock & Plummer; Empire & Fireside Stores; Gaiters; Luke & Huxley's; Sheepshanks; Woolworths'. English shoppers will gleefully recognize the transmutation of names of genuine chains: Empire & Fireside must be our British Home Stores; Gaiters is surely Boots; Luke and Huxley's is Marks and Spencers (delightful—another gospel writer and 19th-century philosopher!); Sheepshanks is Woolworths. The US Puddingdales in New York, where Edith Graham went shopping, must be Bloomingdales.

Because the Characters in the books are already listed in *A Guide to Bassetshire People*,¹ I have not generally included characters in my index, giving only particularly significant references, such as the eventual first appearance of Sir Robert Graham, or, for Leslie, Lady Emily:

bedroom
70th birthday

death
church memorial
memorial service

I have instead assembled lists of types as cross-references to that guide, such as:

butlers SEE Gudgeon; Horton; Peters; Simnett;
Sparrow
clergy SEE – a very long list!

Literary quotations

Then there is the sheer mass of references to writers and artists, quotations from works of literature. Thirkell's prose is dense with quotation; I know of no author who quotes more. These all show what were Thirkell's favourite authors or lines. Edith Jeude has told us in her pamphlet, *Angela Thirkell and Charles Dickens*, that Thirkell uses 253 or more quotations from Dickens in her Bassetshire novels and makes 73 or more references to him.² She breaks down the statistics: the greatest number of Dickens quotes are from *David Copperfield* (43); Mrs Gamp from *Martin Chuzzlewit* is referred to 24 times. Certainly Dickens is the champion in the Thirkell references lists: but I can name the runners-up.

Shakespeare is the first of them, with at least 88 references—some 30 general, and another 58 or so dispersed among 19 of the plays. Chiefly featured are *As you like it*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*; references to *Hamlet* are subsubheaded, general / film / in Mixo-Lydia / Ophelia.

Thirkell certainly knows her Bible, and quotes it freely and deftly. I found some fifty references—with five to *The Book of Proverbs*—but there may well be more; some are esoteric and take research to recognize! In *Happy Returns*, at a committee meeting, Mrs Miller defiantly 'said, Ha-ha! inside herself'. This comes from the *Book of Job*, where a horse 'saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off'. Perhaps not many people know that. Dominance is often described like Mrs Gould's, 'to whom the buying and checking of goods to be sold from the hospital trolleys were her washpot and over the pricing and selling of them did she cast out her shoe': the surely obscure reference is to Psalm number 60. Rose Fairweather even makes the biblical joke about the wicked flea—'when no man pursueth' (Proverbs 28 verse 1).

Anthony Trollope, the Bassetshire novels' *fons et origo*, gets at least 30 references—they are difficult to differentiate, with place and personal names duplicated! Frances Trollope, too, has references in *Coronation Summer*.

Lord Byron's death is noted in *Coronation Summer*; his relationship with Harriette Wilson much traced in *The Fortunes of Harriette*; his poems are mentioned seven times in the Bassetshire novels. Tennyson (Anne Fielding's favourite poet) comes in 45 or so times: twelve of the references are to his long poem, 'Maud'. the match-making lines from 'Maud':

Well, if it prove a girl, the boy
Will have plenty: so let it be'

are spoken once of Lucy Marling and Captain Belton; twice of Edith Graham and Lord Mellings; and twice of Lord Mellings and Lavinia Merton.

Robert Browning's works — beloved of Lydia Keith — make 38 appearances (that I have noticed—maybe more). Of these, 'Soliloquy in a Spanish cloister' accounts for five; 'The lost mistress' for nine. 'Friends the merest / keep much that I resign' is said pathetically by Tom Grantly to Lady Cora, by George Knox to Laura Morland, and by Mr Oriel to Lady Gwendolen. 'The silence grows to that degree... its bosom does so heave' is quoted by Jane Crawley to George Halliday, narrated of Grace Grantly and Lord Lufton, and comes into the minds of Lydia Merton in conversation with Lord Pomfret, and of Mr Downing with Mrs Turner.

The mother in George Meredith's *Love in the Valley*, who 'often thinks, were this wild thing wedded, more love should I have and much less care', is invoked four times (in regard to poor Lady Agnes Graham, beset with daughters Clarissa and Edith).

Uncle Rudyard Kipling's works have 23 references in the Thirkell novels, as well as those to him personally in *Three Houses*. Macaulay's 'Horatius at the bridge' comes in eleven times. Sir Walter Scott and his works have 21 or more references; Jane Austen 15. Edward Gibbon (of *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*) is mentioned nine times; Stella Gibbon (*Cold Comfort Farm*) five. W. S. Gilbert's *Bab Ballads* receive four mentions; the Gilbert & Sullivan operas, twenty or more.

Wordsworth Mrs Thirkell does not care for. He gets six references, most of them disparaging. Even the fervent poetry-lover, Anne Fielding, declares, 'I honestly think he is dreadfully dull', and George Knox, in a moment of rare self-deprecation: 'Even Wordsworth was more interesting than I am at this moment'. Margot Phelps tells Swan that she had to learn a poem by Wordsworth as a child, and 'I hated it'.

But all these quotations had to be identified before they could be collated. I had decided to list all titles of works and quotations under their authors' names. This was making a rod for my own back!

Who said that?

Thirkell assumes her readers' knowledge of all her favourite works; does not condescend to explain or expatiate. The poems, novels and pictures are not attributed to authors/artists—if her readers fail to realize of whom she writes, Thirkell merely despises them. Typical is:

"When James was quite little," said Lady Graham, "mamma found a dead thrush on the window-sill and James was eating some chocolate pudding and mamma let him bury it in a boot-box."

Such educated members of the party as heard this remark felt that there were still milestones on the Dover Road and rejoiced accordingly, though to an ignorant generation this will mean nothing.'

'Educated' here implies, 'familiar with the works of Dickens'. Often references are merely hinted at, as, 'When we lived at Hendon Barnes's gander was stolen by tinkers' (Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*). 'If there were a garden path I would sit down on it' (like Betsy Trotwood in *David Copperfield*, as we are not told). In *Never Too Late* Laura Morland experiences 'the *Schadenfreude* of the Dickens addict when other and less favoured human beings do not recognize his immortal work'.

It may be by no means apparent that a quotation is lurking in Thirkell's prose; borrowed passages are woven gracefully

into her narrative. 'It was the azalea's breath and she was dead,' murmurs the widowed Lord Crosse, 'looking out of the window onto the garden that he and his wife had planned and made and loved', as did the unnamed Coventry Patmore in his uncited poem, 'The Azalea'. 'Never had Miss Bunting in her long career had a pupil who had tasted honeydew with such vehemence, or drunk the milk of Paradise with such deep breaths and loud gulps' (Kubla Khan, basically). Lady Emily's mother 'had not feared the furious winter's rages for nearly fifty years' (the phrase comes from a song in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*). David Leslie 'had an impression that she (Anne Fielding) had lived beside the springs of Dove' (like Wordsworth's Lucy Gray). 'To Susan at the moment there was nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon' (*Antony and Cleopatra*). "'Feeder has the rows, not me," said Mr Traill, as heedless of grammar as the Monks and Friars of Rheims'—of whom the uncredited poet Richard Barham tells us that, on seeing the wasted form of the Jackdaw of Rheims, 'Heedless of grammar, they all cried, "THAT'S HIM!"'

Clarissa speaks of her ageing, confused grandmother as 'too too Mary Rose' (from Thirkell's godfather, J. M. Barrie, of course). Mr Halliday and George 'can speak like Prince Giglio for three days and nights without stopping', as George Knox also claims for the young Tony Morland (a feat achieved in Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring*). Eric Swan tells Justinia and Lady Lufton that 'Like Hervé Riel, he had a good whole holiday with leave to go ashore—a reference which was entirely lost on both ladies'—as probably also on the majority of Thirkell's readers! (M. Riel is the eponymous hero of a poem by the much-cited-in-these-works Browning.) Philip Winter observes of delayed war shock that science 'cannot raze out the written troubles of the brain with any sweet oblivious antidote'—as Macbeth requested before him. Small boys in Barseshire are often described as 'pleasing anxious beings': that phrase comes (unattributed) from Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*:

For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing ling'ring look behind?

Angela Thirkell's quotations may be not only unattributed but also deftly adapted for her purposes: 'Dawdle, the very word was like a knell,' to Heather Adams, rather than 'Forlorn!', a very word said to be like a bell in Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'. 'The gods are just and of our pleasant vices do occasionally make something quite amusing' (from *Miss Bunting*; in *King Lear* those gods instead 'make instruments to plague us'). Swan tells Charles Belton, 'Your brother was full of ancestral voices prophesying woe' rather than war, like those in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'.

Quotations may even be mixed: 'The long winter of everyone's discontent like a very unpleasant snake dragged its slow length along' (Richard III meets Alexander Pope). When Charles becomes engaged to Lady Graham's daughter, we find one short paragraph:

'Tell me', said Charles, who was in a mood to drink up Eisel and eat a crocodile [as Hamlet challenged Laertes to do]. 'Sixpence will not part us,' which allusion was, we fear, lost upon her ladyship, never much of a reader. [This refers to *Nicholas Nickleby*, when Mr Curdle shortchanges Miss Snevellicci.]

Many authors are denied their due recognition. George Eliot is referred to only as Miss Mary Anne Evans in an eight-line passage, and her novel *Amos Barton* is invoked three times, but not as such. There are several references to works by Charlotte Yonge and Richard Barham; but these are unattributed, may well not be realised. AT writes only of (Yonge's) *The Heir of Redclyffe* (five times); then we have,

'makes them feel heroic and Daisy-Chain-ish' (another novel by Yonge). The *Ingoldsbys Legends* are referred to five times in the Barchester novels, but their author, Richard Barham, never named. John Buchan's hero, Richard Hannay has many refs, but no details of titles or author.

Quotations from the literature of other languages are thrown in with equal negligence. Walking in the 'white unfamiliar' winter landscape with Noel, Lydia murmurs, 'It is all very solitaire et glacé'. Noel responds, 'If we are spectres évoquer-ing le passé, it is a very nice past'. They are quoting Paul Verlaine's poem, 'Colloque sentimental'—but not giving him the credit. For Latin: when Canon Fewling hears Rose Fairweather prattle and laugh, 'an old tag from his schooldays came back to his mind', and he says, 'Lalage'—no more. The line invoked comes from Horace: 'Dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo, dulce loquentem'. To translate (taken from the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*): 'Still shall I love Lalage and her sweet laughter, Lalage and her sweet prattle'.

There are also references drawn from opera and mythology: a huge cultural range.

For example, Ianthe Pemberton is frequently designated Edgar Downing's 'Egeria'. In classical mythology, Egeria was a nymph supposed to have been the lover of Numa Pompilius, legendary second king of Rome, and to have instructed him in those forms of worship which he afterwards gave to the Roman people. (On Numa's death she retired weeping to Aricia, where the goddess Diana changed her into a stream. Egeria was worshipped by pregnant women, and as a prophetic deity. AT was highly selective in the aspects of Egeria that she attributes to Miss Pemberton!)

All this, of course, drove me to much searching in dictionaries of quotations - an activity itself much practised in the novels, and I duly have entries in the index: quotations / books of / seeking / using.

Recall how many Thirkell characters keenly do crosswords!

Works of art

Thirkell also makes knowledgeable references to pictures and the world of art. John Leslie's home, the Old Rectory, is described as 'not unlike "Bolton Abbey in the Olden Time"'. And if there are readers who do not know this picture ... we can, like Miss Fanny Squeers of *Nicholas Nickleby*, only pity their ignorance and despise them.' Nannie with the Pomfret children appears as 'a kind of Laocoon group'. The narrator of *Trooper to the Southern Cross*³ describes the picture 'with the medieval name of "Melencolia" by some Boche artist' that his wife brings with her to Australia: 'a sketch of a woman in an old-time kind of gown ... sitting all hunched up with a lot of things strewn about her and a kind of little flying fox up in the air holding a label to tell you the name of the picture.' (Sydney Customs officers query the importing of this picture, but she tells them, 'It's a family portrait, and that's my auntie and her flying fox that she makes a pet of', and is allowed through.) The name Albrecht Dürer is not to be found in the book.

'Horrible modern English usage'

Thirkell's intense concern with language is less reflected in the index. I can think of no justification to indicate her wonderful way of conveying people's thoughts in the idiom of their speech, and of sliding from idiom to idiom in conversation or reportage, particularly with servants, nor her mastery of prose rhythm, matching it to mood. I can, though, convey her insistence on grammatical correctness and loathing of horrible 'Modern English usage'. The entry for **language** has the subheadings:

agricultural; archaic; bad (*see also* swearing); Biblical; church; common idiom; mispronunciation; numbers, expressing; rhyme (Cockney / usage); *see also* English; French; German; grammar; Greek; Latin; pronunciation

The entry for **latin** covers grammar, jokes, parody, learning/teaching, pronunciation, reading, reciting, rhymes, and women (with cross-refs to Greats, Horace and Virgil).

Some particular bogies of vocabulary are included in my index, because I feel that Thirkell's comment on looking up those references are well worth the finding: 'actually', of course; fiancée, 'the dreadful word fiancée (and what we can do about it we really do not know)'; fridge ('that horrible word'), Furniture, names 'Mrs Belton wished that she could stop Mr Adams calling a sofa a couch ... wondering why such very small things as the name of a piece of furniture should matter. For the fact remains that they do matter.'; genteelisms; lounge (in direct narrative she writes, 'still we *cannot* say lounge'); marge ('an underbred word, but it has come to stay'); 'sort of' ('Young people appear incapable of speech without that meaningless qualifying phrase'); 'Hullo', which Nurse reproves Jessica for saying, Colin Keith 'always feels ashamed after using'; and Betty embarrasses Miss Pemberton with—for whatever is one to say in reply?

The entry for pronunciation has many caustic entries under the subheadings BBC and cONtroversy (I am very careful not to say contrOversy, and risk invoking Dean Crawley's imprecation, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth!'), with a cross-reference to latin.

Subheadings and what they show

For long entries in an index that cover copiously treated topics, subheadings have to be devised to differentiate references. These can prove most illuminating to read through, clearly showing the author's attitudes and interests. Here are two examples from the Thirkell index.

servants: address by; club for; confronting; AT's daily help; dismissing; introducing; loyalty; managing; marrying/leaving; nostalgia for; obtaining; quarrelling; retired; rivalry; territorial disputes; training; transgressions; unmarried mothers; in wartime.

see also bells; butlers; chauffeurs; cooks; footmen; gardeners; maids; Nannies

women: adoring clergy; Australian view of; beauty; church-going; clever / knowledgeable; doctors; dons; dress; educated; efficiency;

firm handling of. This one has several subsubheadings, precise quotes from the text:

beating, desirability of; 'I needed beating'; 'at once licking the hand that beat her'; 'a true woman who adored the hand that held her in check'; 'like a true woman licking the hand that chastised her'; licking the hand that held the whip, like a true woman; masochists; 'need beating'; 'if necessary beat her'; 'need riding to subdue'; self-abasement, 'peculiar passion for'; subjection; after thrashing, 'rather admired her father for this display of brutality';

in forces; friendship; in government; idealised by younger men; and Latin; middle-aged heroines (*see also* Rivers, Hermione, books of); non-technical; organisers / village leaders; readers; rich; rivals; sharing home; students; unescorted; at university; after war; working / careers, ubiquitous

see also housewives; mothers; witches; wives

Autobiography in Barsetshire

I find my composite index particularly interesting as showing where topics that have been treated in Thirkell's writing about her real life—*Three Houses*,⁴ her account of her childhood; *Baby, Mother and Grandmother*,⁵ her letters to her mother detailing her third son's infant years; and her letters to her friend and typist written during the last ten years of her life, in her sixties—appear again in fiction. There is much autobiography, and nostalgia, to be found in Barsetshire.

Childhood

First, her childhood memories, recounted directly in her first book, *Three Houses*. I have put references to this in bold type in the index, so they can be easily detected and compared with fictional entries. In it Thirkell writes of 'the silver eggspoon which my brother put down the hole of the rocking-horse's pommel, and nothing would get it out'. This is recalled in her early novel, *Wild Strawberries*,⁶ in the Graham children's nursery: 'A large dappled rocking-horse with fiery nostrils stood in one corner. The pommel had long since been lost, and down its socket a good deal of property had been lost ... Part of a doll's tea-set and two nursery teaspoons were known to be in Dobbin's stomach, and no power on earth had been able to get them out'.

Of her nursery wall-paper at 27 Young Street Thirkell writes in *Three Houses*, 'One occupation I can thoroughly recommend if your heartless parents send you to bed while it is still light. You lick your finger and rub it up and down on the Morris wallpaper. Presently the paper begins to come off in rolls and you can do this till you have removed so much of the pattern that your mother notices it.' In *Three Score and Ten*,⁷ Lord Stoke reminisces, 'I can remember the pattern of my nursery wallpaper as if it was yesterday. If Nurse put me in the corner I used to lick my finger and rub it up and down the wallpaper. I got quite a lot off that way till Nurse told my mother.'

In Thirkell's childhood nursery 'was a small recess into which I was put when I had offended ... fenced in with a chair and left to repentance.' Grandfather Burne-Jones, filled with pity, 'took his paint box into my corner and painted a cat, a kitten playing with its mother's tail, and a flight of birds, so that I might never be unhappy in my corner again'. In *The Old Bank House* Agnes Graham reminds the housekeeper how 'when darling Clarissa was a baby, Mama (Lady Emily) painted pictures in all the corners of the nursery so that if she was put in a corner for being naughty she would not feel dull'.

In *Three Houses*, Thirkell tells us that as a child, 'I took a couple of ginger-nuts to bed to make them soft and malleable. In the morning it was my pleasure to roll them into sausages, or mould them into balls, or into the likeness of the human face'. In *What Did It Mean?* Lydia remembers doing the same: 'In the morning one could squish them up and make animals and faces with them, only nurse said not to'.

In *Three Houses*: 'Nursery bath-time was delicious. The big tin bath was brought in from the brown staircase-landing and Nanny hung towels on the fender to warm while she went downstairs to fetch a huge can of hot water from the pantry boiler. It was so comfortable to sit in the high-backed bath with the hot water surging up round one, and then to get out in front of the blazing fire and be wrapped in a delightfully scorching towel', followed by Marie or Petit Beurre biscuits.

In *Three Score and Ten*, Laura Morland tells Sylvia Gould: 'how nice it was to sit in a large hip-bath with hot water up to your waist in front of a blazing fire and Nanny waiting with a

big bath towel that had been warming on the fender' - again with those biscuits to follow.⁷

After all these traces of *Three Houses* - which ends when Thirkell was 8 years old—we can see the development of Thirkell's life reflected - and idealized - in her books. Her own schooldays are surely portrayed in the dashing Isabelle Ferdinand at Hosiers Girls School in *The Headmistress*, as well as recalled by Laura Morland in *Three Score and Ten*.⁷ Thirkell's adolescent problems seem to be shared by Margaret Tebben in *August Folly*, who was likewise 'sent to Germany and then to France when she left school', and returns to wonder 'if having to pinch really need make people so trying as her own dear father and mother, by whom any kind of relaxation appeared to be regarded as a crime'.

Both AT's marriages are most painfully depicted in the two early novels, *Ankle Deep* and *O, These Men, These Men*. Particularly, the heroine of the latter novel, Caroline Danvers, says on her second marriage, to Frances Lester, 'I'm terribly glad you married me because now I shan't have any more trouble with those horrid apostrophes ... I mean all that trouble about esses. You see with Danvers one never knew what to do. If I wanted to say Mrs Danvers's car ... it was such a hissing noise. And when it came to writing it, I never knew whether I ought to put in an apostrophe or lots of esses. ... But now it will all be so easy. It is so easy to say Lester's'. Angela herself, of course, at her second marriage changed her name to Thirkell from McInnes.

Baby care

There is much in the novels about courtship, marriage and the care of babies (or delegation of such care to nannies) in Barsetshire. As for Thirkell's own care of her baby, in *Baby, Mother and Grandmother* we have the letters she wrote as a young mother from Australia, to her mother, Margaret Mackail, in London, during the years of Lance Thirkell's infancy—1921-5.⁵ The letters are charming, and foreshadow the many delightful, tender descriptions of babies in Thirkell's novels.

She writes in 1921 of Lance sleeping 'with both arms out, flung about anywhere with starfish hands', and 'flung up above his head or starfish on the eiderdown'. 'I see two feet waving over the edge of the cot, and then two hands waving about till they catch the feet', and, 'He has just found his feet and when sat up among cushions he bends cautiously over till he can see a woolly boot and then moves it very slowly and gingerly backwards and forwards with a stupefied expression.' All these descriptions seem to foretell the various starfish-handed babies of Barsetshire, particularly small Harry Merton, who in *Private Enterprise*, published in 1947, was 'lying on his back on a rug, waving his hands about with a general air of wondering where these starfish creatures had come from. ... he managed to catch one of his fat feet in his fat hands and was a good deal surprised by what he had done'; and little Philip Carter in *Growing Up*, 'lying on his back holding his own toes and quite unable to account for their presence in his cot'.

Thirkell tells her mother that her baby son 'talks most exquisitely in the loveliest voice I have ever heard. Fluting is a coarse expression for its sweetness.' Later, in *County Chronicle*, she tells her readers how the Dale twin babies, after their christening, 'began the one to talk melodiously rubbish, the other to emit fluting squeaks of happiness'.

The concern with Lance's vaccinations, and whether they will 'take', is reflected in anxieties about the vaccinating of Sybil Coates's baby in *Demon in the House*.

For the next stage of life, following infant care, there are copious accounts in the novels of small boys and their ways, and mothers' attempts to deal with them. Laura, like Thirkell, is a mother bringing up a small boy alone - in *Demon in the*

House she expresses Laura's 'vague feeling that Tony ought to be allowed to do everything that frightened her, in case he became a milksop'.

Adultrelationships

Thirkell started writing novels at the age of 43. Laura Morland, and the general viewpoint, match Thirkell's own age as the sequence proceeds. The next stages of life show a community of married couples in the upper-middle-classes, and perhaps a degree of wish-fulfillment. There are several romantic, unconsummated love affairs: the half-glances and restraint of Catherine Middleton and Denis Stonor in *Before Lunch*, where 'Denis wondered to what point self-control could be born'. Older women, langorous like Mrs Dean, are adored by younger men. Mrs Brandon is skilled in flirtation; Mrs Villars basks in the devotion of Holden and his like; Mrs Belton thinks that 'though her daughter Elsa was in love with Captain Hornby and she wasn't, she would often catch his meaning before Elsa did'. Yet Thirkell appears to despise books depicting passionate middle-aged love affairs: constant scorn is poured on those of the genre by Hermione Rivers. Some wives look back, with a degree of regret permitted, to their earlier lives - Mrs Tebben, formerly the brilliant Winifred Ross in her blue dress; Mrs Turner recalls her dead, drunken husband. Dr Joram 'feels compassion for' Peggy Brandon, 'this pretty affectionate woman who seemed almost damned in attractive husbands'—lines surely written by one who regarded herself as another such. Most of the widows of Bartseshire welcome their restored single state, remembering their departed husbands as boring nonentities 'removed by death with kindly care' (a black-comedy phrase used of the late husbands of both Poppy Turner and Lavinia Brandon). This is the attitude of Aurea, in Thirkell's obviously autobiographical early novel, *Ankle Deep*, who tells a friend, 'If Ned were just comfortably dead it would not be very regrettable' - a sentiment twice repeated. The divorced husband in *O, These Men, These Men* meets death in an accident (his own fault, of course). His wife comments, 'I wouldn't have lifted a finger to hurt him, but I am extremely glad he is dead'.

When Laura Morland rejects a proposal from Lord Crosse (in *Never Too Late* - 1956), she muses, 'I shall write a beautiful scene where Madame Koska refuses to marry ... because she feels she is too old to be bothered with a man about the house - you see she had been married before, years ago, and her -usband was really nothing but an expense', at which words Lord Crosse had an uneasy feeling that this was partly autobiographical. As indeed it was, but all so long ago, and now like a dream'.

Painfully, adolescent sons are shown despising and snubbing their mothers - mirroring the hurtful rejection by Thirkell's older sons? Richard Tebben, Julian Rivers and Francis Brandon cause real pain—at least to women readers who themselves have sons. Oliver's mother, Mrs Marling, feels 'the complete disillusionment that a loving parent can feel without loving her child the less'. Mrs Brandon gets the better of the selfish, sardonic Francis: the hurt is real—the consolation imaginary. Note that only Laura Morland's youngest son, Tony—the Lance-Thirkell-simulacrum—appears in the novels: her elder three are perpetually off stage, far away, only referred to.

The period of the Barchester sequence during World War II shows village communities engaged in war work, fundraising, coping with rationing and black-out—like Chipping Campden and Beaconsfield where Thirkell spent the war years. Then come the detailed difficulties of life in the postwar period. The Women's Institute, Townswomen's Guild, comments on doctors and the Health Service, all occur in AT's letters to Margaret Bird as well as in the novels.

Professional representation

For Thirkell's writing career—after Pearl Trotter in *O, These Men*,¹⁰ a writer for magazines 'who preserved such a sphinx-like attitude towards her work that no one had ever discovered whether she was lying or not'—Laura Morland is an obvious close representation. She is first introduced, in *High Rising*,¹¹ as having 'written for magazines for some years past, in a desultory way, but now the problem of earning money was serious', as she must pay for the education of her sons. So clearly is Laura Morland Angela Thirkell that I made a long (though not full) entry for her alone of the characters of Bartseshire. her subheadings in the index are:

Morland, Laura: articles; books: with sub-headings - 'all the same'; bad; earning power; 'extra', 'Molly Bangs'; 'only pot-boilers'; own attitude to; 'rubbishy'; 2nd-rate; son's attitude to; 'under another name'

career; clothes; fan mail; hair; handbag contents; 'other or writing self'; papers, sorting; personal life; publisher, relations with; refuses marriage proposals; as single mother; typewriter, difficulties with

So close is the identification of author and creature, that in a letter of October 1958, Thirkell says she will try her current writing problem out on Laura Morland and see what happens! 'I have told Hamilton I can't get on with a book just at present ... But I may try again and put Mrs Morland in my position and see how she can get out of it.'

Later life

The problems of later life appear: deaf and dependent fathers. Dr Dale, Admiral Palliser, Admiral Phelps; the taxing care of elderly parents experienced by Ann Ford, Isabel Dale, Jane Gresham and Margot Phelps.

When we come to Thirkell's last completed novel, *Love at All Ages*,¹² written at the age of 68, we find very sad reading. It is repetitive, nostalgic, with frequent expressions of yearning for warmth (note that she developed and suffered from aplastic anaemia), and constant reiteration of the woes of age and patronage by the young. The only mention of Rottingdean by name in the novels occurs here.

The first five chapters of *Three Score and Ten* constitute Thirkell's last work — this novel was completed by C A Lejeune.¹³ (In fact miscompleted. Lejeune wrote in her autobiography, 'Mrs Thirkell had written five chapters and left no notes, no hint at all of the way she meant the story to develop'.¹² In fact she had written to Margaret Bird in March 1960 about this book: 'I had already—to my horror—realised how old everyone is now—including Sylvia Gould. But I shall try to rewrite some of it. As I intend Sylvia to marry Lord Stoke the ages will be quite reasonable. He will offer her his hand and separate bedrooms and I think they will be quite comfortable, and Rising Castle will of course go to the Bonds via his sister Lucasta and her son and there will a suitable allowance for Sylvia as Dowager. It means re-reading and re-organising most of what I have written, so I must turn up my shirt sleeves and get down to it.')

I put any references to Lejeune's chapters in brackets in the index, and will quote none here.

*Three Score and Ten*⁷ frequently moves into the first person—almost autobiography. Thirkell, in the person of Laura, remembers her childhood and schooldays; and in direct narrative recalls her baby daughter, Mary who died at one year old: 'Not having a daughter myself—for she left us at a very tender age and is but a shadowy loved remembrance ...'

I found that I made many references to the same subjects in Thirkell's chapters of this book and the letters she wrote in her

last months to Margaret Bird: there is an astonishing amount of overlap.

In a letter of January 1957, Thirkell writes: 'My Leg is playing up, just to show. But half the elderly women in Chelsea have a limp or a shuffle'. In December 1958: 'I hobble — luckily I have my grandmother's umbrella with a long handle and a crook at the top which makes a nice crutch'.

In *Three Score and Ten* we find:

'Elderly women are much more apt than men to "Have a leg" ... to use a very old expression for limping—dot and carry one. Going as we do up and down the main shopping street of the pleasant suburb of Riverside where we live, most of us - that is the elderly—are furnished with a stout stick, or, as in our own case, the tall parasol of one's grandmother. It is a fine upstanding creature with a strong crook handle. The ex-parasol, re-covered with black, supports our rather rickety footsteps when we aren't using it to shelter us from unexpected rain.'

There are several letters referring to the house opposite being painted in a revolting colour. For one, in October 59: The large low building opposite me has changed hands and has been repainted a most hideous kind of brown-red - what the French wd call 'caca'. She repeats the term 'caca' for this colour in three other letters. Then, in *Three Score and Ten*: 'In less time than it has taken us to write the preceding paragraph (with frequent intervals to look out of the window and watch the workmen painting the house opposite a most revolting shade of shrimp-gamboge which we could describe far more accurately in one word, borrowed from our formerly lively neighbours the Gauls, if it were not rather too French)'

In January 1960: 'they are removing our pretty gas lamps and replacing them by those awful tall electric lamp posts that shine into all the bedroom windows.'

In *Three Score and Ten*, we find: 'Our local Council has caused the charming elegant Victorian gas lamps in our street to be dismantled and has put up in their place very powerful and hideous electric standards whose light shines ferociously into our front bedroom windows'.

Both Thirkell, as recounted in her letters to M Bird, and Laura Morland in *Three Score and Ten*, do voluntary work for the cottage hospital, bagging up sweets for the trolley round.

Repetition

Duplicated references coming together in the index show the amount of repetition Thirkell fell back on, as her powers of original creation and criticism waned. Her letters to Margaret Bird pathetically show her awareness of this, and her gratitude to Mrs Bird for her help in spotting and avoiding inconsistency. *Three Score and Ten* includes a clear ref to Margaret Bird, though not by name. Laura tells Sylvia Gould:

'I used to type all my own books and then I got better off and now I send them all to a delightful and most intelligent person who sees all the stupid things I haven't noticed and saves me from worse than death'.

Multiple references also show the close relations of certain novels —*Love at All Ages* draws on, recalls Pomfret towers. *Three Score and Ten*, Thirkell's last novel, looks back to *Demon in the House*, her short stories published 24 years earlier in 1934. There are sequels within the Barsestshire sequence.

The falling back on repetition of well-told tales is matched by the increasing use of quotation in the later novels. Edith Jeude reports: 'Mrs Thirkell increased the number of Dickensisms as she continued to write. The first fifteen of her Barsestshire novels contain only 78 Dickens references: the last

fourteen bulge with 246! *Love at All Ages* (her last completed novel) has 48.'¹

Socialhistory

As well as showing so much of Thirkell's personal life, her novels are illuminating about social history from 1934 to 1960 - the period she covered in her writing. In my index you can look up: air raid precautions, dummy books on book-case doors, button boots, cami-knickers, clothing coupons, Dowagers, food rationing, ginger beer bottles, goat carts, an Ideal boiler, lorgnettes, parasol whip, smoking jackets, a speaking-trumpet, a stamp-wetter, stays, telephone party lines, a weighing-chair, and all those references to servants.

References in the index to *Coronation Summer* (set in 1838) and *The fortunes of Harriette* (who lived 1786-1855) lend a historical perspective. There are subheadings, 18th-century or 'Victorian' for: art; Cambridge; clothes; daughters; dogs, care of; dressmakers; dustmen; fathers; London; novels; police; racing; railways; rowing match, street lighting; tea-making, and further references for Byron, Canning, Dickens, Disraeli, opera, Palmerston, Scott and Thackeray. References to *Trooper to the Southern Cross*, AT's satirical account of her journey on a troopship to Australia, broadens the geographical range, gives new subheadings 'Australian' under etiquette, food, nannies, railways, swearing, stained-glass windows, wives and women; 'on shipboard' under baths, cats, children, dances, dentistry, games; lends a contrasting mood, with more sombre entries added to those for alcoholism, ambulances in wartime, Roman Catholic church; and throws new light on AT with unexpected new entries such as belts as weapons, bottles as weapons, female impersonation, street fighting.

So the compilation of this index revealed AT's enormous, highly knowledgeable use of quotations from literature, her main topics of concern as language and literature, the parallels between her autobiographical works and her fiction, and her observations regarding the social history of the times.

I begin to wonder how anyone can undertake literary criticism without indexing the work in hand. First compile your index ...

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