Chapter Four

**Dr Thorne**

*Doctor Thorne* is the third of Trollope's Barsetshire novels, which was written only a year after *Barchester Towers* in 1858 and unlike some of the others, has little to do with the politics and personalities of the Church of England, or politics on the national level. Of all the four country Barsetshire novels, *Doctor Thorne* is the most Arcadian. We have a rich picture here of mid-nineteenth century prosperous country life with everything in traditional order – the duke in his castle, the squire in the finest specimen of Tudor architecture of which the country can boast, the farmer and cottagers respectfully in their farms and cottages, parkland studded with breeches, avenues lined with lime trees. As Trollope says in *An Autobiography*: *Doctor Thorne* has, I believe, been the most popular book that I have written, if I may take the sale as a proof of comparative popularity.  

Anthony Trollope also like many prolific novelists has his own opinion about a novel and he believes that:
A novel should give a picture of common life enlivened by humour and sweetened by pathos. To make that picture worthy of attention, the canvas should be crowded with real portraits, not of individuals known to the world or to the author, but of created personages impregnated with traits of character which are known. To my thinking, the plot is but the vehicle for all this; and when you have the vehicle without the passengers, a story of mystery in which the agents never spring to life, you have but a wooden show. There must, however, be a story.³

Trollope in his new story quits his old Cathedral town only to pass into its county, and to make acquaintance with some of county families. He invites us not to Barchester, but into Barsetshire. Perhaps the county families are hardly dealt with, but there is a good deal of shrewd and pleasant malice in the great debates on questions of blood and treasure.⁴

In *Dr Thorne* the plot revolves around the illegitimate Mary Thorne, who has been lovingly raised by her uncle, a country doctor, and who, as she comes of age, finds herself wondering whether she is a lady. Frank Gresham, son of the squire of Greshamsbury, is in love with her, but she
dismisses his affection at first as mere puppy love, thereby setting the scene for a series of entanglements, social, romantic, and of course, financial and propertied. Their resolution, indeed, makes up the centre of the novel.

In *Dr Thorne* Trollope really succeeds in how to make genuinely good people genuinely interesting, which is one of the most difficult tasks an author of fiction can face, therefore they engage not only the sympathies but also the interest of readers.

Anthony Trollope mentions about *Dr Thorne*’s plot in *An Autobiography*:

The plot of Doctor Thorne is good, and I am led therefore to suppose that a good plot, which, to my own feeling, is the most insignificant part of a tale, is that which will most raise it or most condemn it in the public judgment.

Trollope also says about the person whom the plot of *Dr Thorne* sketches:

I left England, and when in Florence was cudgelling my brain for a new plot. Being then with my brother, I asked him to sketch me a plot, and he drew out that of my next novel, called *Doctor Thorne*. I mention this particularly, because it was the only occasion in which I have had recourse to some other source than my own
brains for the thread of a story. How far I may unconsciously have adopted incidents from what I have read, either from history or from works of imagination, I do not know.

The plot is obviously as slight as anything of description which no one but Trollope could have written much better. The two young ladies Mary Thorne and Beatrice Gresham are, better drawn than any female of his former female characters. There is nothing vulgar about them instead of boxing the ears of mercenary or heartless admirers in their proper persons they leave that task to their brother and to their cook. The former flogs a sneaking fellow who wants to get off his engagement and the latter breaks the nose of a too impetuous lover with the rolling-pin in a very effective manner.

…after some nine or ten shies Frank found himself encompassed by the arms, and encumbered by the weight of a very stout gentleman, who hung affectionately about his neck and shoulders; whereas, Mr. Moffat was already sitting in a state of syncope on the good-natured knees of a fishmonger's apprentice. Frank was thoroughly out of breath: nothing came from his lips but half-muttered expletives and unintelligible denunciations of the
iniquity of his foe. But still he struggled to be at him again. We all know how dangerous the taste of blood is …

Henry James was a shrewd critic of Trollope, as he was of virtually all novelists. He understood Trollope’s power, and he acknowledged it; but he laid a heavy hand on Trollope’s weaknesses. Nothing that Trollope did seemed to James more reprehensible than his almost perverse habit of shattering the illusion of reality which must lie at the very heart of every novel’s appeal: “He took a suicidal satisfaction in reminding the reader that the story he was telling was only, after all, a make-believe.” Trollope not only goes further in showing his readers how the strings may be pulled, he asks them which string he ought to pull.

It has been suggested that the modern English writers of fiction should among them keep a barrister, in order that they may be set right on such legal points as will arise in their little narratives, and thus avoid that exposure of their own ignorance of the laws, which now, alas! they too often make. The idea is worthy of consideration, and I can only say, that if such an arrangement can be made, and if a counsellor adequately skilful can be found to accept the office, I shall be happy to subscribe my
quota; it would be but a modest tribute towards the cost. But as the suggestion has not yet been carried out, and as there is at present no learned gentleman whose duty would induce him to set me right, I can only plead for mercy if I be wrong in allotting all Sir Roger’s vast possessions in perpetuity to Miss Thorne, alleging also, in excuse, that the course of my narrative absolutely demands that she shall be ultimately as Sir Roger’s undoubted heiress.\textsuperscript{11}

In this way Trollope tries to tell us that he lives with his characters by day and by night, and we can simply say that the writer takes the readers behind the scenes and explains the mechanics of the pulleys and levers.

Trollope's narratives, when they are interspersed with dialogue, are normally even more casual in structure and phrasing than they are when the author's is the only voice we hear, for then he tends to reproduce the very rhythms of his characters' thoughts in his writing, and frequently to use the words they themselves would have chosen\textsuperscript{12}:

The doctor knew, or thought he knew-nay, he did know-that Mary was wholly blameless in the matter: that she had at least given no encouragement to any love on the part of the young heir; but nevertheless, he had expected that she would avouch her own innocence. This, however, she by no means did.\textsuperscript{13}
*Dr Thorne* features a strong narrative arc, employing many of the techniques of the sensation novel. The story begins with the dissolute Henry Thorne drugging and raping young Mary Scatcherd and her brother Roger, the local stonemason, murders her seducer and is sent to prison. Meanwhile, Mary gives birth to an illegitimate child, also called Mary. Illegitimacy and problems caused by that is one of the significant themes in *Dr Thorne*.

Henry Thorne had already heard of, and already seen, Mary Scatcherd; but hitherto she had not fallen in the way of his wickedness. Now, however, when he heard that she was to be decently married, the devil tempted him to tempt her... he made her most distinct promises of marriage; he even gave her such in writing; and having in this way obtained from her company during some of her little holidays--her Sundays or summer evenings--he seduced her. Scatcherd accused him openly of having intoxicated her with drugs; and Thomas Thorne, who took up the case, ultimately believed the charge. It became known in Barchester that she was with child, and that the seducer was Henry Thorne. 

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As we mentioned above here we can say that major themes of *Dr Thorne* are the social pain and disorder caused by illegitimacy and also the wicked effects of the demon drink.

Roger Scatcherd, when the news first reached him, filled himself with drink, and then swore that he would kill them both…. He took nothing with him but his fists and a big stick as he went in search of Henry Thorne…To this farm-house came Roger Scatcherd one sultry summer evening, his anger gleaming from his bloodshot eyes, and his rage heightened to madness by the rapid pace at which he had run from the city, and by the ardent spirits which were fermenting within him. At the very gate of the farm-yard, standing placidly with his cigar in his mouth, he encountered Henry Thorne…’Well, Roger, what's in the wind?’ said Henry Thorne. They were the last words he ever spoke. He was answered by a blow from the blackthorn.15

The novel also shows the difficulties of romantic attachments outside one's social class. As we see in the story illegitimate Mary grows to be an attractive and intelligent woman, and attracts the attentions of the squire’s son, Frank Gresham who belongs to upper class. Frank’s love for Mary is intense and strong, but his father’s financial incompetence means that
Frank is obliged to marry for money. When Frank’s family becomes aware of his decision to make the penniless and illegitimate Mary his wife, they commence upon concerted efforts to blame her origins, and try to force him into courting the wealthy heiress Martha Dunstable who belongs to rich and high class family.

…Of course you know that your father owes a great deal of money.'…'And then, he has sold Boxall Hill. It cannot be expected that Boxall Hill shall be purchased, as some horrid man, a railway-maker, I believe--'

'Yes; that's Scatcherd.'

'Well, he has built a house there, I'm told; so I presume that it cannot be bought back: but it will be your duty, Frank, to pay all the debts that there are on the property, and to purchase what, at any rate, will be equal to Boxall Hill…

'You have but one line of conduct left you, Frank: your position, as heir to Greshamsbury, is a good one; but your father has unfortunately so hampered you with regard to money, that unless you set the matter right yourself, you can never enjoy that position. Of course you must marry money.16
Importance of good birth and blood is another important theme of Dr Thorne. In chapter XLIV we have the conversation between Frank and his mother regarding his love towards Mary. She tries to keep her son away from Mary by blaming Mary’s birth.

... I have no feelings against her--none, indeed; none but this: That she is not fit to be your wife.'
'I think her fit.'

'Ah, yes; but how fit? Think of your position, Frank, and what means you have of keeping her. Think of what you are.

Your father's only son; the heir to Greshambury... Of all men living you are the least able to marry a girl like Mary Thorne.'

'Mother, I will not sell myself for what you call my position.'

'Who asks you? I do not ask you; nobody asks you. I do not want you to marry any one... If you marry now, that is, marry such a girl as Mary Thorne--“such a girl! Where shall I find another?

"I mean as regards money, Frank; you know I mean that; how are you to live? Where are you to go? And then her birth Oh, Frank, Frank! 17
Trollope believes that a novel should give the picture of real and common life enlivened by humour, therefore, comedy and humour would never be away from Trollope’s novels. *Dr Thorne* includes the happy comedy of the doctor preparing his home for the gleeful introduction of his young niece:

The doctor made a thorough revolution in his household, and furnished his house from the ground to the roof completely. He painted for the first time since the commencement of his tenancy, he papered, he carpeted, as though a Mrs. Thorne with a good fortune were coming home tomorrow; and all for a girl of twelve years old. 'And now,' said Mrs. Umbleby, to her friend Miss Gushing, 'how did he find out what to buy?' as though the doctor had been brought up like a wild beast, ignorant of the nature of tables and chairs, and with no more developed ideas of drawing-room drapery than an hippopotamus.

In *Dr Thorne* humorous and comic tone is simply clear, which attracts the reader’s interest. This attention and interest would be impressive with mocking a known character of the novel.
The significant point would be that, through the history of Mary Thorne’s life and her uncles Dr Thorne and Roger Scatchered is rather dramatically and emotionally narrated still the reader can find the comic tone and sense of humour in the novel.

In *Dr Thorne*, Mary Thorne is Trollope’s virtuous chaste young heroine and Trollope describes her personal appearance through the long and right pictorial details:

> She is my heroine, and, as such, must necessarily be very beautiful; but, in truth, her mind and inner qualities are more clearly distinct to my brain than her outward form and features. I know that she was far from being tall, and far from being showy; that her feet and hands were small and delicate; that her eyes were bright when looked at, but not brilliant so as to make their brilliancy palpably visible to all around her; her… her lips were thin, and her mouth, perhaps, in general inexpressive, but when she was eager in conversation it would show itself to be animated with curves of wondrous energy; and, quiet as she was in manner, sober and demure as was her usual settled appearance, she could talk, when the fit came on her,
with an energy which in truth surprised those who did not know her; aye, and sometimes those who did.

Energy! 19

In *Dr Thorne* Trollope simply shows that though Mary is an illegitimate girl who is left by her mother, she is still the chaste, energetic, polite, educated and faithful girl. She has a great energy to talk that surprised those around her. Due to her birth she suffers a lot in her life from Frank’s family and she stands it all for her love’s sake and in chapter XLII we see how confidently and politely she talks to Lady Arabella regarding her true and mutual love towards Frank.

'Lady Arabella,' she said, 'I think that you do not understand me, and that it is not likely that you should. If so, our further talking will be worse than useless. I have taken no account of what will be given between your son and me in your sense of the word giving. But he has professed to--to love me'--as she spoke, she still looked on the lady's face, but her eyelashes screened her eyes, and her colour was a little heightened--'and I have acknowledged that I also love him, and so we are engaged. To me my promise is sacred. I will not be
threatened into breaking it. If, however, he shall wish
to change his mind, he can do so. I will not upbraid him;
will not, if I can help it, think harshly of him.\textsuperscript{20}

Trollope likes his heroine “Mary Thorne” and he shows that Mary’s birth would not make her an unacceptable wife for a gentleman; therefore no one has a right to disregard her on the grounds of her birth. Trollope intends to tell us that perhaps many persons in Mary’s situation live around us in our real life and he wants us not to judge them harshly.

Dr Thorne is introduced to us as the hero of the story who adopts his brother Henry’s illegitimate child Mary and brings her up as his own. In \textit{Dr Thorne} Trollope describes him:

No man plumed himself on good blood more than Dr. Thorne.... He had within him an inner, stubborn, self admiring pride, which made him believe himself to be better and higher than those around him.... He was brusque, authoritative, given to contradiction ... and inclined to indulge in a sort of quiet raillery.... People did not always know whether he was laughing at, or with them.\textsuperscript{21}
Trollope intends to picture his novel’s characters and their behaviours as real as possible so that his readers can feel and imagine them in their own real world and also they think about them. Picturing the social life and its difficulties and joys are what Trollope wants to show to his readers delicately.

Lady Arabella is another woman character in *Dr Thorne* who is a selfish, scheming woman. She insists on arranging successful marriages for her son Frank and her dowerless daughters. In XXVII Lady Arabella talks to her husband Mr Gresham to convince him to cut his friendship with his old family friend:

…”Well, then, Mr Gresham, if you ask me, I must say, that I think you should abstain from any intercourse with Dr Thorne whatever.’

'Break off all intercourse with him?'

'Yes.'…”I certainly think that you ought to discontinue your visits to Dr Thorne altogether.’

'Nonsense, my dear; absolute nonsense’…

'Nonsense! Mr Gresham… I must let you know plainly what I feel. I am endeavouring to do my duty by my son. As you justly observe, such a marriage as this would be utter ruin to him.\(^{22}\)
In fact here Trollope means to show us a woman who tries her best to prevent her family members from sustaining contact with someone who gives them one of the pleasures of their existence. And it is a deprivation for Beatrice to give up Mary; it is a real grief to the squire to give up his one male friend.

This type of tension derives from the reality that such things are not petty matters and anyone would see the same motives of jealousy and spite and a desire to dominate everything and everyone in exactly the same way not only in our own families but in families of others and this is a very significant point in today’s life that Trollope insists on mentioning that to the readers through his novel’s story.

The narrative tone of Trollope almost always reminds readers of Dickens. *Dr Thorne* also is no exception. But here Trollope goes beyond Dickens and seems to drive his inspiration from Jane Austen. There is one incident and a plot device in *Dr Thorne* intimately connected with Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.

The incident is the meeting between Lady Arabella and the Squire. They discuss the suitability of Mary Thorne with their son Frank. The Squire like Mr Bennet does not want to have any discussion on the topic
because he is not as unfavorable to the match as his wife is. Naturally when Lady Arabella opens the topic, he wants to have his room to himself but he does not have the strong personality of Mr Bennet. He does not order his wife to leave his room. Here the roles are reversed. In *Pride and prejudice* it is the wife who wants the marriage between Elizabeth and Mr Collins at any cost. Mr Bennet on the other hand is not in the favour of the match. When Mrs Bennet orders her husband to speak out his mind to the daughter and threatens that she would not see her daughter’s face if she does not accept the proposal of Mr Collins, Mr Bennet ironically points out to Elizabeth the dilemma that she faces. Whatever decision she takes, he says, she has to lose one of her parents. If she does not marry Mr Collins her mother would not see her face and if she marries him her father would not see her face. In *Dr Thorne* the squire does not have such ironical humour in fact it is Lady Arabella who is the stronger of the two. In fact she taunts that it was his haunting that ruined the family and Frank therefore has to marry a girl who can bring money which Mary Thorne cannot. The plot device which

Trollope seems to have borrowed from James Austen is that of a letter in *Pride and Prejudice*. It is a letter of Mr Darcy to Elizabeth Bennet which not only exposes the villainy of Wickham but also make a second
Proposal of marriage to her. And it is this letter that is the turning point in the novel. In the same way in *Dr Thorne* the letter of Mary to Frank plays a similar role in the plot design of the novel.

"DEAREST FRANK,

'Your mother has been here talking to me about our engagement. I do not generally agree with her about such matters... She says that our marriage would be distressing to your father, injurious to all your family, and ruinous to yourself. If this be so, how can I, who love you, wish for such a marriage? I remember my promise, and have kept it. I would not yield to your mother when she desired me to disclaim our engagement. But I do think it will be more prudent if you will consent to forget all that has passed between us... If so, if you think so, dear Frank, do not have any scruples on my account. ..'Let me have but one word to say that I am released from my promise, and I will tell my uncle that the matter between us is over."

The note of same sacrifice on the part Mary changes the circumstances and her marriage with Frank does take place finally in the same way that Darcy is accepted by Elizabeth. Thus both the novels turn
upon the importance of letters exchanged between characters. But Trollope does not let go this device without his usual authorial commands on the earlier fashion of epistolary novels.

In chapter XXXVIII he talks about this outmoded fashion:

There is a mode of novel-writing which used to be much in vogue, but which has now gone out of fashion. It is, nevertheless, one which is very expressive when in good hands, and which enables the author to tell his story, or some portion of his story, with more natural trust than any other, I mean that of familiar letters.24

When the letters effect a reversal in both Jane Austen and Trollope there is once again interesting contrast. Mrs Bennet has all through the novel carried resentment against Mr Darcy but in the end she realizes her mistake and accepts Mr Darcy open heartedly. Lady Arabella also shows a similar act of reconciliation.

'Oh, Mary, dear Mary; what can I say to you?' and then, with a handkerchief to her eyes, she ran forward and hid her face in Miss Thorne's shoulders. 'What can I say--can you forgive my anxiety for my son?'

“How do you do, Lady Arabella?” said Mary.
'My daughter! My child! My Frank's own bride! Oh, Mary! Oh, my child! If I have seemed unkind to you, it has been through love to him.25

From the way Trollope describes the whole scene of reconciliation, it is clear that Lady Arabella unlike Mrs Bennet does not ring true in spite of all her protestations. And that is the difference between two characters. Mrs Bennet is foolish, a woman of mean understanding as Jane Austen describes her in the opening chapter but certainly she is not vicious.

Lady Arabella on the other hand is a domineering person and to that extent vicious because she leaves no space for others. Thus Trollope in borrowing the incident and the device from Jane Austen alters them to suit his aesthetic purpose.

At the end of the novel he gives us a fully romantic conclusion. Frank is not only married to Mary but ironically enough she brings him a lot of money as if to spite Lady Arabella. But the ending is not without the characteristic authorial comment of Trollope which reminds readers the fictionality of all fiction much in the manner of post modern novelist.

And thus Frank married money, and became a great man. Let us hope that he will be a happy man. As the
time of the story has been brought down so near to the present era, it is not practicable for the novelist to tell much of his future career.
Notes & References

3. Ibid. 84-85
5. *An Autobiography*.84
6. Ibid. 77
8. *Dr Thorne*.229
11. *Dr Thorne*. 467-8
13. *Dr Thorne.* 239

14. Ibid. 18

15. Ibid. 19

16. Ibid. 95-6

17. Ibid. 456

18. Ibid. 31

19. Ibid. 36

20. Ibid. 439

21. Ibid. 22

22. Ibid. 287

23. Ibid. 440

24. Ibid. 393

25. Ibid. 488

26. Ibid. 495