

# Inamethischild...

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Angela Thirkell frequently observes in her novels, 'Christian names are extremely limited compared with surnames' (for example, in *A Double Affair*, page 103), so that indeed 'our Barssetshire friends [consider it difficult] to find enough Christian names of a normal kind which do not already belong to someone else'. Miss Phelps claims, indeed, 'there are quite a lot of masters at Southbridge who have the same Christian name' (*Jutland Cottage* 59).

This dearth of choice is hardly surprising. Traditional names, though few, are properly to be preferred. Mrs Merivale, hearing that her American friend Evie has married one Constant, tartly observes, 'such original names Americans have' (*Miss Bunting* 251). Lord Mellings produces a disdainful American parody of hereditary family names: Hovis Kornog Breadbaker the Third (*Love At All Ages* 308).

Children in Barssetshire are always to be named after others, usually their ancestors. Once established in a family, it seems that names must be repeated down the generations. Dr Crawley, Josiah – not 'the name he would have chosen for himself' – explains 'if one had a name handed down in the family it was a link with one's forebears' (*Close Quarters* 147). 'The three sons of John and Mary Leslie ... are Henry [after his paternal grandfather], John [after his father] and Clive [after a maternal uncle who was killed in the 1914 war]' (CQ 6). Lady Agnes Graham explains how her children were named: 'James was called after my father-in-law and John after darling John [her brother] and Robert of course after Robert [her husband]' (*Love Among the Ruins* 286). Annc Dale christens her twin daughters Dora Maud and Roberta Fielding, after her parents, Sir Robert and Dora Fielding, and her former governess, Maud Bunting (*County Chronicle*). The Deans's eldest grandchild is called Rachel after Mrs Dean (*Private Enterprise* 91). The Grantly family even take their names from Grantlies in the precedent novels of Anthony Trollope (*The Old Bank House* 95-6). Mavis Parkinson tells Peggy Brandon that she and Teddy have 'named Harold after father and Connie after Teddy's mother', and in the difficult exigency of choosing a name for her third child, says 'I did want to call him after father too, but we've already used Harold' (MB 257).

The disadvantage of using the same name for family members is recognized by Frederick and Susan Belton, whose baby boy 'had been christened Frederick but was usually called Baby (to prevent confusion with his father and grandfather)' (*The Duke's Daughter* 56). (But then, Elsa *née* Belton, Susan's sister-in-law, also calls her son, a cousin of 'Baby', Frederick (LAR 42)!) Likewise, when Emmy Leslie asks her cousin Martin's wife, Sylvia, about their new baby's name: 'I think Eleanor's a bit grown-up for her. Could I call her Ellie?' Sylvia 'said it did seem rather a large name for a baby, but as she was called after her grandmother, Sylvia's mother, and Mrs Halliday was called Ellie by her friends, it might be a bit mixing' (LAR 259).

The necessity to call the child after appropriate people, particularly sponsors, seems to override all other considerations that might occur to a parent. Edith Graham, married to Lord William Harcourt, plans to call their daughter 'Mary Agnes after her two grandmothers', and add Laura 'because I did have such a lovely time when I stayed with you' [Laura Morland] (*LAA* 57-8). However, they then select the baby's godmothers – 'Gwendolen for your family and Sally Pomfret for mine' (*LAA* 113), so the baby becomes Miss Gwendolen Sally Harcourt. This causes problems that occur

only to her uncle/godfather Robert Graham, who asks those concerned, 'What would be a good name to call her? ... She couldn't be Gwendolen because it's much too long for her yet. And if she is called Sally it might be confused with Lady Pomfret ... and I don't think Gwen is very good' (*LAA* 122-3). Maria Lufton tells Oliver Marling that her name is really Lucy Maria Lufton - 'Lucy after a great-grandmother ... but mother didn't like Lucy ... So when I was about three or four I turned into Maria. I think she was a great-grandmother' (DD 321-2).

Other parents show surprising helplessness in the matter. Cecil Waring, according to his sister Leslie, 'was to have been a girl called Cecil, and when he turned out to be a boy my people were struck all of a heap and couldn't think of any boys' names, so they kept Cecil' (*Growing Up* 167). Lord Pomfret announces, 'I am called Giles after my uncle, which is the only name the Pomfrets ever seem to have been able to think of' (OBH 96) – and indeed he bestows the name on his second son.

Liking or not liking the proposed name has nothing to do with the choice. Lady Pomfret speaks of her firstborn as 'Poor little Ludovic – such a name too, but old Lady Lufton offered to be his godmother and ... we couldn't refuse' (OBH 67). Lord Lufton himself, speaking to Lady Cora of his sisters, Maria and Justinia, remarks, 'They are family names, I think. I know Justinia is, like my awful Ludovic. Do you know that the Pomfrets' elder boy is called Ludovic because my mother was his godmother and she wanted it. Poor little devil, what a time he'll have when he goes to school' (DD 115). Matters are even worse for Ludovic, Lord Mellings: later in life he recites the full toll - 'Ludovic Neville Eustace Guido Foster ... Ludovic after Lord Lufton because ... his mother is my godmother and Neville after some kind of an ancestor and Eustace after the one that turned Catholic ... and Guido Strelsa ... and Foster is the family name' (*Never Too Late* 24). On first meeting Mrs Marling, on the first page of *Marling Hall*, we learn that she 'disliked her name, Amabel, but had never seen her way to do anything about it'. Yet when her daughter, Lucy, is considering the name for her first child, a girl, and says that her husband's 'mother was Hilda and his [first] wife was Rose', 'if Mrs Marling felt any disappointment that her own name was not mentioned, she did not show it'. When Lucy goes on, 'so we thought Rose Amabel, or Amabel Rose', 'humility was rewarded, for Mrs Marling had hardly dared to hope that Lucy's child should bear her name' - rather than, as a kind grandmother might, begging Lucy not to inflict her own hated name on the baby (DD 35).

Inhabitants of Barssetshire frequently express dislike of their names. 'My name is so awful: Poppy', declares Mrs Turner; Mrs Bill Marling, 'my name's Deirdre but it's so ghastly nobody says it' (CC 37). The Honourable C. W. Bond is always so known, his initials covering 'the shame of being called Cedric Weyland' (LAR 37). Cecil Waring avows, 'It's a ghastly name but my own' (DD 72). Mr Oriel, proposing marriage to Lady Gwendolen Harcourt, tells her 'There is only one possible drawback - my dreadful name - Caleb. It is a family name ... a good Bible name, but no beauty' (*LAA* 135). Gwendolen's mother finds it difficult to reconcile herself to 'her future son-in-law's Christian name' (*LAA* 231), but tells him of her own name, Dorothea, 'I don't fancy the name and never did' (*LAA* 143). Peggy Arbutnot says of her sister-in-law, 'Florence is an awful name, so Fred [Florence's brother] always called her F. E.' (PE 166).

With the passage of time, usually people become reconciled to the cross that denominates them. 'I know Verena sounds a very affected name, but I am used to it', sighs Mrs Villars (*Northbridge Rectory* 36). 'I never much cared for my name, but one has to be called something', says Lady Gwendolen (LAA 123-4). Septimus Grantly observes that 'if he had been in a state to give an opinion when he was christened he would certainly have made a protest. "But it is extraordinary," he added, "how used one gets to one's own name over a period of sixty years or so"' (OBH 11).

Certainly social class has much to do with the determination and use of Christian names in Barsetshire. The Beltons' nurse, S. Wheeler, refuses to divulge hers, on the grounds that 'upper servants, such as butlers and head parlourmaids, were always called by their surname' (*The Headmistress* 8-9). The working classes ape the names of the great in diminished forms. Emmy Graham explains to Anne Fielding, on a tour of the Leslie estate, that a little girl in a faded frock is Aggie, 'called Agnes after mother. Nearly all the cottages have one of our names and it gets a bit confusing. They always ask Martin [Leslie] first if they may. There's a Martina at the post-office, and a Davida and a Davidette at Hacker's Corner' (*Peace Breaks Out* 202). Ed Pollett, halfwit labourer, explains the nomenclature of his own offspring: 'There's Luce after Miss Lucy and Ol after Mr Oliver [Marling]; and then there's Will after Mr [William] Marling and Belle after Mrs Marling [Amabel] ... she was fair pleased when Millie asked her to be godmother ... Then there's Cassie, that's after Lady Bond [Lucasta]' (*LAR* 166). The Middletons' potential sixth housemaid, Lou, the 'youngest scion of the Puckens ... had been christened Lucasta after Lady Bond, who had with overpowering condescension ... stood godmother to her ex-kitchen-maid's child, but it was well understood ... that the name Lucasta was no more to be used than the best parlour' (*Before Lunch* 15).

Children lacking fathers have names contrived for their situation. Edna Thatchett's son, whose father was the vanished Percy, is named Purse (OBH). The illegitimate son of Ellen Humble's aunt Sarah, born in the last week of rationing, is called Poyntz (*LAR* 44).

There are other motives for choice of name, independent of liking of the name. Some mothers perversely call their daughters after women of whom they have suffered jealousy on account of their husbands. Elsa Belton 'called her little girl after' Catriona Ellangowan, 'who had refused Christopher Hornby some years earlier' than her own meeting with him (DD 317). Lydia and Noel Merton call their daughter Lavinia, perpetuating the memory of Noel's summer-long flirtation

with Lavinia Brandon, which caused such distress to Lydia. The theatrical couple, Aubrey Clover and Jessica Dean, determine from the first to call their baby Sarah Siddons, and indeed do so.

Just occasionally names are found attractive and appropriate. Lydia Merton is told by Lady Waring, 'Lydia is such a charming name and it suits you' (GU 146). In *High Rising* (110-11) Amy Birkett asks Laura Morland, 'have you noticed .. the higher clergy always have suitable Christian names. The guardian angel of the Church of England makes men who are going to be bishops be christened Talbot Devereux, or Cyril Cyprian ...'. Laura agrees that preachers in the Roman Catholic Church 'are all called Monsignor Cuthbert Bede Wilkinson, or Dom Boniface Chrysostom Butts'. Philip Winter remarks, in *Growing up*, 'I love all those names that haven't any gender, like Leslie and Lindsay and Cecil and Evelyn. Not Esme, though' (GU 167). Alice Barton, infatuated with Julian Rivers, thinks 'Julian was a very noble and beautiful name. It was strange how some people had the names that suited them' (PT 126).

Only one character in the entire sequence of novels actually changes his name. This is the playwright, Aubrey Clover, whose real name 'is Caleb Lover, and he used to sign his letters C. Lover, because Caleb is such a dreadful name ... so then he needed a Christian name and chose Aubrey, because his mother's name is Audrey' (CC 64). His wife further explains: 'He didn't like the name Caleb, and no wonder, poor lamb, but his parents were frightfully religious, so they called him that' (PE 153).

Only outside Barsetshire is the choice and establishment of a name for a person recognized as having more personal significance. Caroline Danvers in *O, These Men, These Men* (pages 25-6) laments, 'I can't get away from my own name ... It's a horrid thought that one's same name ... may be waiting for one after one is dead for ever and ever'. Caroline sees names as appropriate or not to their bearers: on meeting Julia Beaton she reflects, 'Julia was just what a Julia should be, with dark hair and eyes, fair skin, red lips, and pretty hands and feet' (OTM 23). But to the Leslies, the Grahams, the Fieldings, the Pomfrets, the Harcourts and Marlings, naming children is primarily—or solely—a matter of precedence, family tradition or respect.

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This paper appeared in *The Angela Thirkell Society Bulletin* No. 54, February 2003,