

Book Notice

The Penguin Classic Baby Name Book. By Grace Hamlin. Penguin Group. 375 Hudson Street, New York NY 10014. 2001. Pp. 496. Paper. \$14.

Of Grace Hamlin, the publishers will say only that this is the pseudonym of the author of several best-selling baby name books who majored in comparative literature at Princeton. No matter.

As for the title, the constituents are (Penguin Classic) and (Baby Name). Hamlin has read, with obvious great care, affection, and appreciation, the series of Penguin Classics and drawn from them the names of the major characters. These she enters and discusses, with a little bit of etymology and a great deal of literary setting, plot summary, and introspection.

Penguin promotes this book as a guide for expectant parents: where would you choose a name for your child if not from the world's great literature? However, this book will delight anyone with even a remote interest in literary onomastics. Here you can follow a name as it was used by Hardy, by Eliot, by Trollope, or by Byron. You can trace *Walter* as it is used by Chaucer, then by Sterne (Walter Shandy), by Austin (Sir Walter Elliott), by Wilkie Collins (Walter Hartright), and by Elizabeth Gaskell (Walter Farquhar). For all of these Hamlin provides context, characterization, and occasionally some historical information as well.

There is a useful index by author, subdivided by work. Dickens (who has fewer entries than one might expect given his gift for names) is represented by 16 novels, with the most names (20) listed for *Bleak House* and the fewest (2) for *Barnaby Rudge* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

Hamlin (whoever she might be) is obviously a lover of names and a lover of classic literature and she has produced in *The Penguin Classic Baby Name Book* a meld of the two consisting of some 2,000 names that will dare anyone to read only one entry.

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