INDEXES REVIEWED

edited by Norman Hillyer

This selection of extracts from reviews does not pretend to represent a complete survey of all reviews in all journals and newspapers. We offer only those quotations which members have sent in.

Our reproduction of comments is not a stamp of approval from The Society of Indexers upon either the reviewer's assessment of an index, or his competence to give an opinion.

Extracts are arranged alphabetically under the names of publishers, within the sections —

INDEXES PRAISED: INDEXES CENSURED: INDEXES OMITTED: INDEXES ENHANCED.

INDEXES PRAISED


'In 32 chapters 41 contributors have produced a valuable compendium which is simply illustrated, well-indexed and well-referenced.'


'There are a great number of references and a good index.'


'A valuable reference book with a good index.'


'The index is excellent.'


'... it is worth mentioning that the functions of bibliography and name-index are combined nicely by listing, after each bibliography entry, the pages (if any) of the text where the item is referred to. Mentions of an individual are listed directly after the person's name.'


'The comprehensive bibliography and good index make this book an indispensable sourcebook for the research worker in the field.'


'There is a list of suggested further reading for the subject matter of each chapter, and a good index.'


'The work concludes with an index of topics, which unlike so many such productions, is intelligently organized and constitutes a serviceable guide to the wealth of material contained in this indispensable book.'


'It is right to mention also, since these are rare virtues nowadays, that both the proofreading and the index are beyond reproach.'


'... and an index which usefully refers to sections of chapters rather than to pages.'

'All said, it is a directory, but a very useful one because of its indexes.'


'It is possible to refer quickly to any part of the book because of the very full index at the beginning.'


'Although there is occasionally a certain lack of clarity in the author's presentation, the book is on the whole quite readable, and its comprehensive index makes it useful as a reference text.'


'There is an excellent index.'


'... an unusually full index.'


'The index with nearly 500 alphabetic entries is a boon.'


'A four-page index, seven maps ... indicate the thoroughness of the author in presenting his story.'


'The volume is well arranged, and the index is sufficiently detailed.'


'One last endearing point about this totally satisfying biography is that it is easy to find one's way about, since index and references are both—well, very nearly impeccable.'


'Some 260pp are occupied by a detailed set of indexes to the whole work; the indexes in vols 1 and 2 have been incorporated in this comprehensive set of indexes, and the use of bold type for the principal references enables the user to find the material he wants with great ease.'


'Most impressive is the thoroughness with which Dr Kirschenbaum has elaborated his 132 plates (where appropriate) by the inclusion of a catalogue index of extraordinary precision, and outstanding documentary merit.'


'Volumes 1 and 2 of this series (published in 1975) contained an alphabetical listing of the then known alkaloids.

'In Volume 3 the author has corrected the errors in the first two volumes and brought his series up to date. He has also responded to the two major criticisms directed to the first two volumes ... by including a formula index for all three volumes and by stating that his literature coverage is through October, 1976.'


'A thorough index and a comprehensive bibliography make it an admirable researcher's handbook.'


'it is carefully indexed.'

SHAC: *A woman's place, family breakup and housing rights*, by Maureen Leevers and Pat Thynne (85p). Rev. in *Guardian* 26 Feb. 79.

'... its information is sensible and clearly indexed.'


'Poetry themes closes with a lengthy and valuable author and compiler index. The work also includes a brief but helpful appendix of two sections: poetry in-
dexes and children's poetry indexes. These are beneficial features which enhance the usefulness of Marcan's index.'

Sotheby Parke Bernet: China for the west: Chinese porcelain and other decorative arts for export, 2 vols., by David S. Howard and John Ayers (£85). Rev. by Margaret Medley, TLS 15 Sept. 78.

'... and a massive index which has been very carefully thought out to suit the complex nature of the material.'


'The index is clear and helpful.'


'... a book which is beautifully produced and well indexed.'

Welsh Arts Council and Crafts Advisory Committee: Davies Bros Gatesmiths, 18th-century wrought ironwork in Wales, by Ifor Edwards (£3). Rev. by F. I. Dunn, Post-Medieval Archaeology 12, 78.

'Suffice it to say that we are... treated to a glossary, five erudite appendices, a select bibliography, admirable footnotes chapter by chapter, and, that rarest of aids for which this reviewer is almost pathetically grateful, an index.'


'The principal virtue of this comprehensive bibliography is its topical organization. A table of contents in eight sections, a Subject Index organized under six major rubrics and an Author Index, which cites first and joint authors, provide easy access to information sought.'


'The volume contains a wealth of references, approximately 700, and is well indexed.'


'References are collected at the end of each chapter and there is a comprehensive author index and subject index to the volume as a whole.'

INDEXES CENSURED


'However, more time could have been spent on the compilation of the index, which is rather lightweight and one can only wonder why, in a book on pottery, “kiln” is not indexed whereas “Civil War” and “leather” are.'


'... and the index has been inadequately prepared—for instance, the text refers to polyarteritis, but this is indexed as periarteritis nodosa; sometimes the page numbers in the index do not correspond to any reference in the text.'


'Whilst the captions to the illustrations appear to be correct, the references to them, both in the biographies and the index, contain too many errors for a book in which the subject matter has obviously been carefully compiled.'


'One minor criticism is that he is over-fond of footnotes, relegating to them even such important matters as the terms of the Treaty of Nanking... with the result that they do not appear in the index.'

Collins: British thrushes, by Eric Simms. Rev. by Chris Perrins, Birds Spring 79.

'Some of these difficulties can be overcome by use of the index. However, this too does not always ease the reader's path. For example, there are no fewer than 57 entries under "France" with no subdivisions, Ireland scores 43, Wales 11, Scotland 29 and England nil!'

Cornell Un. Pr.: Tropical medicine and parasitology. Classic investigations, ed. by B. H. Kean and others (xvii + 677pp., $50.00). Rev. in Medical History 23(2) April 79.

'... for a book that will only be used for reference purposes, the index is pathetically inadequate.'

'Most valuably, it has sections on the circumambient literary revival and it is equipped with a variety of indexes which, however, would have been even more useful than they are if they had not so often been confined to long lists of unanalysed items.'


'...my first criticism is of the contents list. ...The index is almost as bad (only 2 pages).'


'The index is unreliable.'


'The subject index is inadequate, sometimes with subheadings ordered alphabetically and sometimes not, and sometimes no subheadings for as many as sixty references under a main heading. Many personal names are used as subjects, but it would have been helpful to provide a complete name index, which would have collated references by and about prolific writers and given access to writings of persons as coauthors. Since many readers will mine this book for references about black colleges in a given state, a complete index by state, rather than inadequate geographic subheadings under "Higher Education," would have been useful.'


'There are two indexes, an author index and a "Selective Key Word Subject Index". The latter is actually a KWIC index, with obvious limitation of its superficiality. Since each entry is cited only once and none of the words in the annotations are (sic) indexed, the user of the subject index is limited to those references that have one of the key words in the title.'


'The use of such a bibliography (it contains 1,274 references) is heavily dependent upon the arrangement, in this case the specificity or otherwise of the subject headings and the indexes. Though some of the specific topics seem to me to be too broad (e.g. "Automation—Applications"), in general the arrangement is helpful. The subject index is definitely too general. For example, "cataloging-automation" subsumes over forty citation numbers, far too many to make the index very useful.'


'...the index is inadequate.'


'...but it could do with better indexing. Cut-outs in the fore-edge of the pages to make an index with easy identification would be ideal for this book.'


'The index was helpful in locating topics, but it does have annoying cross-references (e.g. impedance: see ac impedance) that waste time and type compared with simply repeating the page numbers.'


'The use of this very long book would be easier if the index were more detailed and differentiated.'


'The index is slender and could have been more functional had personal names, places, objects and subjects been separated.'


'The layman will find the index maddeningly inadequate.'
INDEXES OMITTED


'There is a tendency for subject matter to be fragmented in the text; the additional lack of an index makes it doubly difficult to track down useful points. It is astonishing that neither author nor publisher should have felt this to be essential.'


'It is, however, most unfortunate that, like others in the B.A.R. [British Archaeological Reports] series, this volume has no index. In most commercial publications and in the lengthier journals, an index is today a sine qua non, and a reviewer once even suggested a boycott of publications without them. Speedy production and relatively low cost should not be an excuse for such a fundamental omission in B.A.R. volumes now reaching three or four hundred pages in length.'


'The reader would have been able to benefit from this careful study more had an index been provided.' (Our apologies to Croom Helm, publishers of Iran: the illusion of power, by Robert Graham. Alas, p.176 in our last issue applied Robert Stephens' complaint to the wrong book. Croom Helm's book is indexed; Penguin's is not.)

INDEXES ENHANCED

Allen and Unwin: The complete guide to Middle-earth, by Robert Foster (460pp., £4.95). Rev. by Tom Shippey, TLS 24 Nov. 78.

'What is the point of producing a complete index to J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-Earth cycle? ... Is it not simply a labour of love, even of devotion, but of devotion fundamentally misguided? ... If nothing came of the labour except what was already in the source-texts, the answer to that last question would have to be a courteous or regretful "Yes". The curious thing, though, is that Mr. Foster can quite easily dig out more than Tolkien ever openly expressed, and not in the way of opinion or critique, but of simple flat information. Beorn of The Hobbit, he observes, was "a berserker". Tolkien never said that, preferring the term "skinchanger". But clearly Beorn's other "skin" was a bear's, while in the Battle of the Five Armies he displays (as berserkers will) manic rage and imperviousness to iron. "Berserk" of course means, or meant, "bearcoat"; and the Oxford English Dictionary will tell you so. Mr. Foster's entry then tells you a little more about Professor Tolkien's sources—and also about his linguistic scrupulosity, for "berserker" is (as he said of other words) not really English, but a Walter Scott import partaking of a little of that "innocent sentimentalism" he so often and so fruitlessly deplored. ... And that is the way that Tolkien's cycle works. It stimulates exegesis; rewards it; provokes more. The way that so many unnoticed pieces fit together, once they are noticed, further contributes to its unmatched air of fantastic solidarity. No wonder, then, that index-makers feel they have something left to do.'


'This Bibliography represents an initial attempt to identify the central issues of bioethics, to develop an index language appropriate to the field, and to provide comprehensive, cross-disciplinary coverage of current English-language materials on bioethics topics. The index is complex, but I found that reading the directions quickly made it usable. Each volume is in six parts: introduction, list of journals cited, a bioethics thesaurus, subject entry section, title index, and author index. The thesaurus makes it possible to begin a search by checking entries in common parlance or in more technical language and to find quickly the appropriate heading in the subject entry section. The editor and his collaborators have done their work well.'

Letters to the Editor—

Under 'Indexes suggested' in the April issue of The Indexer you quote a review in which Anthony Powell deplores the absence of an index to Kilvert's Diary. Eighteen years ago I compiled a comprehensive index to the three volumes of William Plomer's edition of Kilvert. This was originally published as a pamphlet and is included in the 1961 reprint of the Diary.

Yours sincerely,

P. A. SPALDING.

Our warm thanks to members contributing to this issue: Judith Beadle, Hazel Bell, Diana Boatman, Michael Z. Brooke, Rosemary Dawe, Philip E. Found, J. Gibson, Bruce Harling, L. M. Harrod, Cherry Lavell, D. L. Mackay, S. W. Mcintosh, Hilda Pearson, David Pygott, Annette Surrey, A. S. Thorley, Elizabeth Wallis.

Contributions of review extracts are always welcome. Norman Hillyer's address is Hatherleigh Vicarage, Okehampton, Devon EX20 3JY.