

## INDEXERS IN FICTION

This time, seventh in our series, an index in fiction rather than an indexer.

In the following extracts from *A mind to murder* by P. D. James (Faber and Faber, 1963; Penguin, 1974) we grieve to see to what evil uses our professional labours may be put. All our readers will, we trust, take to heart the final solemn warning.

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In the medical director's room . . . (Superintendent) Dalgliesh placed three black metal boxes on Dr Etherage's desk. The boxes, which had small round holes punched in each of the shorter sides, were packed with buff-coloured cards. It was the clinic diagnostic index. Dalgliesh said:

'Mrs Bostock has explained this to me. If I've understood her correctly, each of these cases represents a patient. The information on the case record is coded and the patient's code punched on the card. The cards are punched with even rows of small holes and the space between each hole is numbered. By punching any number with the hand machine I cut out the card between the two adjacent holes to form an oblong slit. If this metal rod is then inserted through say, hole number 20 on the outside of the box, and pushed right through the cards, and the box is rotated, any card which has been punched through that number will stand out. It is, in fact, one of the simplest of the many punch-card systems on the market.'

'Yes. We use it principally as a diagnostic index and for research.' . . .

Dalgliesh laid a slim manilla file on the desk.

'Mrs Bostock has lent me the coding instructions. I see that you code sex, age, marital status, address by local authority area, diagnosis, consultant who treated the patient, dates of first and subsequent attendances and a considerable amount of detail about symptoms, treatment and progress. You also code social class.' . . .

Dalgliesh ran the thin metal rod through his fingers.

'So I could select, for example, the cards of patients in class one who were treated eight to ten years ago, were married with a family, and were suffering from, say, sexual aberration, kleptomania, or any other socially unacceptable personality disorder.'

'You could,' admitted the medical director quietly. 'But I can't see why you should want to.'

'Blackmail, Doctor. It occurs to me that we have here a neatly contrived apparatus for the pre-selection of a victim. You push through the rod and out pops your card. The card bears a number on the top right-hand corner. And down in the basement record-room the medical record is filed and waiting.' . . .

The medical director . . . said quietly . . . 'What do you want me to do?'

'To help me select a victim . . .'

Dalgliesh waited patiently, metal rod in hand, while the doctor sat in silence, the code book open before him. After a minute he . . . said quietly:

'Try codes 23, 68, 69 and 71.'

There were now only eleven cards remaining . . .

. . . 'You know the rest. I'm still wondering how you managed to trace me.'

'We found you in the same way as the blackmailer picked out Colonel Fenton, from the clinic diagnostic index and the medical record. You mustn't think that they don't look after their confidential papers at the Steen. They do. Dr Etherage is very distressed indeed about the blackmail. But no system is completely proof against clever and deliberate wickedness.'

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### Narration by index

We thank Messrs William Heinemann Ltd and McGraw-Hill Book Company for permission to reprint the following narrative entry from the index to *Boswell's London Journal* (ed. F. A. Pottle, 1950):

Lewis, Mrs (Louisa), actress. JB to call Louisa in journal, 84; receives JB, 85; JB visits, 88; JB's increased feeling for, 89; JB discusses love with, 94-5; JB anticipates delight with, 96; JB lends two guineas to, 97; disregards opinion of world, 97-8; discusses religion with JB, 101; JB entreats to be kind, 101; uneasiness of discourages JB, 104; JB declares passion for, 107; promises to make JB blessed, 107; JB sees every day, 109; JB talks with freely of love connections, 112; JB promises to support child, should one be born, 113; makes assignation with JB, 116; consummation with JB interrupted, 117; promises to pass night with JB, 118; JB likes better and better, 121; JB's felicity delayed, 126; to stay with JB Wednesday night, 130; agrees to go to Hayward's with JB, 135; account of her birth, unhappy marriage, and separation, 135; spends night with JB at Hayward's, 137-40; JB has tea with, 141-2; JB afraid of a rival, 144; JB feels coolness for, 145; reads French with JB, 145; JB resolves to keep affection for alive, 149; JB incredulous at infection from, 155-6; JB enraged at perfidy of, 158; JB discusses infection with and takes leave of, 158-161; JB asks his two guineas back, 174-5; returns JB's guineas, 187; mentioned, 12, 98, 116.