Daily Mail—which, as I understand from some kind spies, sent out copies of our two main pamphlets after a lapse of some weeks. The enquiries generated a handful of new, mostly highly-qualified members, and of these they and we are glad. But all the others have had their hopes first raised by the article—many of them were unemployed—and then dashed by our (necessarily) disillusioning response. The article was, no doubt, published in good faith, but was surely irresponsible if not downright cruel, and I wonder on how much larger a scale this sort of thing is being perpetrated daily in the British press.

One lady who joined the Society wrote to me a few weeks later resigning, saying 'you did tell me . . .' but that she had never before taken something on only to find that she could not tackle it.

Since this is the first time I have written for the journal, I should add that I like my job—in very much the same way that I liked bringing up six children (i.e. through night starvation, teething, measles, broken limbs and adolescent love).

INDEXERS IN FICTION

Barbara Pym's gentle, romantic tale of an indexer, No fond return of love, was the sixth in our series of indexers portrayed in fiction (The Indexer 13 (1) April 1982). But all Miss Pym's novels should appeal to readers of this journal; for not only do several indexers appear among her many anthropologists, archaeologists, clergy, proof-readers and gentlewomen, but characters from each story make fleeting appearances in subsequent novels, forming a network of allusions, addenda and cross-references to entrance the indexing heart. She herself was for 16 years editorial secretary at the International African Institute, and assistant editor of the anthropological journal Africa. As the eighth in our series we look at Barbara Pym's oeuvre apart from No fond return of love.

Indexers first appear in her second novel, Excellent women (Cape 1952; Penguin 1980). Foremost among them is Esther Clovis, secretary of a Learned (anthropological) Society; a formidable and recurring figure, seen by the narrator, Mildred Lathbury, as having 'hair like a dog, but a very capable person, respected and esteemed by Everard Bone, and, moreover, one who could make an index and correct proofs'.

Less impressively, the wife of the President of the Learned Society always attends its meetings, knits, and drops off to sleep. Mildred asks Everard:

'Did she work with him in the field?'
'Good Heavens, no! She knows nothing at all about anthropology.'

'Didn't she even do the index or proofreading for one of his books? You know what it often says in a preface or dedication—'To my wife, who undertook the arduous duty of proof-reading' or making the index.'

'She may have done that. After all, it's what wives are for.'

After that, we should not be surprised (or affronted) by the following dialogue, when Mildred is invited to dinner by Everard, an anthropologist. She asks how his book is progressing.

'I have just had some of the proofs and then of course the index will have to be done. I don’t know how I’m going to find time to do it,' said Everard.

'But aren’t there people who do things like that?' I asked.

'You mean excellent women whom one respects and esteems? . . . I was wondering . . . but no—I couldn’t ask you. You’re much too busy, I’m sure.'

'But I don’t know how to do these things,' I protested.

'Oh, but I could show you,' he said eagerly; 'you’d soon learn.' He got up and fetched a bundle of proof sheets and typescript from the desk. 'It’s quite simple, really. All you have to do is see that the proof agrees with the typescript.'

'Well, I dare say I could do that,' I said, taking a sheet of proof and looking at it doubtfully.

'Oh, splendid. How very good of you!' I had never seen Everard so enthusiastic before.

'And perhaps you could help me with the index too? Reading proofs for a long stretch gets a little boring. The index would make a nice change for you.'

'Yes, it would make a nice change,' I agreed. And before long I should be certain to find myself at his sink peeling potatoes and washing up; that would be a nice change when both proof-reading and indexing began to pall. Was any man worth this burden? Probably not, but one shouldered it bravely and cheerfully . . .

'It should be interesting work,' I said rather formally and began to read from the proof sheet I was holding. But as I read a feeling of despair came over me, for it was totally incomprehensible. 'But I don’t understand it!' I cried out. 'How can I ever know what it really means?'

'Oh, never mind about that,' said Everard, smiling. 'I dare say you will eventually.'

In Barbara Pym's next novel, Jane and Prudence
(Cape 1953, Granada 1981), we learn that Mildred married Everard, having 'even learned to type so that she could type his manuscripts for him'. In this novel, too, we find Miss Clothier, who works in a 'vague cultural organization' where she 'drew a small card index towards her and began moving the cards here and there with her fingers, as if she were coaxing music from some delicate instrument'. (Barbara Pym's ethereal appreciation of card indexes is shown again in An unsuitable attachment (Macmillan 1982), where this dialogue occurs:

'One feels that anything to do with card indexes is more in a woman's line.'

'You mean it's slightly degrading?'

'Oh, no. A card index may be a noble thing."

Less than angels (Cape 1955, Granada 1980) shows us the diligent Mildred Lathbury again, this time through the eyes of Esther Clovis, as 'a rather dull woman who was nevertheless a great help to [Everard] in his work'. Poor Mildred's role is not enhanced when Everard proposes a Festschrift which he will edit, Miss Clovis 'do the work', as she put it, rounding up and bullying the contributors and harrying the printers; Everard's wife Mildred would of course do the typing'.

One final quotation from Less than angels proves irresistible here:

It is often supposed that those who live and work in academic or intellectual circles are above the petty disputes that vex the rest of us, but it does sometimes seem as if the exalted nature of their work makes it necessary to descend occasionally and to refresh themselves, as it were, by squabbling about trivialities.

How this should warm the hearts of all our readers!

The extracts above are quoted by kind permission of the late author and Messrs Jonathan Cape Ltd.

H.K.B.

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In lieu of an index . . .

'A complex of further discoverabilities is inherent in eternally regenerative Universe and its omni-interaccomodative complex of unique and eternal generalized principles. It is inherently potential in the integrity of eternal regeneration and the inherent complexity of unity that god is the unknowable totality of generalized principles which are only surprisingly unveiled, thereby synergetically inaugurating entirely new, heretofore unpredicted—because unpredictable—ages.'

Would you care to index an 876 pp book prefaced by these words in the 'Moral of the Work'? Apparently no one would. Synergetics: explorations in the geometry of thinking by R. Buckminster Fuller (Collier Macmillan, 1976) has no index, but this note on its last page:

'The attention of the reader is directed to the detailed Table of Contents for each chapter, which has been supplied by the author in lieu of an index, with each paragraph numbered.'

There are twelve chapters, entitled: Synergy, Synergetics, Universe, System, Conceptuality, Structure, Tensegrity, Operational Mathematics, Medelability, Omnitopology, Triangular Geodesics Transformational Projection, Numerology. Each is divided into numbered sections; sections into numbered paragraphs. Thus, chapter 2, Synergetics, appears in the Contents List as:

200.00  Synergetics
200.001  Definition: Synergetics  22
220.00  Synergetics Principles  32
240.00  Synergetics Corollaries  63
250.00  Discoveries of Synergetics  67

and is supplemented in the Table of Contents, thus (only a part is quoted):

223.00  Principle of Prime Number Inherency and Constant Relative Abundance of the Topology of Symmetrical Structural Systems
223.01  Definition
223.02  Axis of Spin
223.03  Equation of Prime Number Inherency of All Symmetrical Structural Omnitriangulated Systems
223.04  Equation of Constant Relative Abundance of Topological Aspects of All Symmetrical Structural Systems
223.10  Constant Relative Abundance
223.20  Primary Systems
223.21  Primary Systems: Equations
223.30  Symmetrical Analysis of Topological Hierarchies
223.40  Powering
223.50  Prime Number Inherency
223.60  Analysis of Topological Hierarchies: Omnitriangulation
223.64  Table: Synergetics Hierarchy of Omnitriangulated Polyhedral Systems
223.70  Planck's Constant
223.80  Energy Has Shape

. . . and so it continues.

Could it be that no indexer could be found to take on this work? What do readers think of this substitute for an index, devoid of any alphabetical order?