A SHAVIAN INDEX

George Bernard Shaw’s prefaces to his own plays, ‘forming a series of pamphlets and essays on current political and social problems, are quite journalistic in character, and cover a period of nearly thirty years’, as he describes them in the Introduction to Prefaces, the collection published by Constable and Company in 1934, when GBS was, as he tells us, ‘a sage of seventy-eight’. The text makes 777 pages; the index 24, double-column. The indexer is not credited, but the hand of the author himself seems evident throughout, in the deliberately provocative style and assertions, and reinforcement at some length in the index of the lessons of the text.

The choice as to expatiation is considered; there are several undifferentiated strings of page references—17 for flogging, 19 for liberty, 15 for Nietzsche, 31 for Ibsen before his subheads start, but a single reference may be expanded where the author wishes to repeat his point:

History is always out of date, 606
Morals, are like teeth: the more decayed they are the more it hurts to touch them, 434

and there is certainly no attempt to keep subheadings concise:

Bible . . . as we cannot get rid of the Bible, it will get rid of us unless we learn to read it ‘in the proper spirit,’ 616; . . . why not bring it down to the ground, and take it for what it really is? 615; . . .
Censorship of plays . . . the serious problem play is suppressed, while plays dealing with coarse humors and physical fascination of sex are allowed . . .
Democracy . . . ended in an official government which could do nothing but talk and an actual government of landlords, employers, and financiers, 347;
Literature . . . the main thing in determining the artistic quality of a book is the fact that the writer has opinions, 165; . . .

GBS has joyously seized the opportunity to restate his views—to such effect that the entries for children and doctors each take one column of the index, that for marriage takes one and a half, and his own entry—such a full and detailed biographical summary that one can hardly feel the need to consult the text cited—over two columns. The index is most entertaining to read, and thoroughly Shavian. We print below a selection of entries from it, by courtesy of Constable Publishers.

Doctors, a surgeon has a pecuniary interest in operations—the more he mutilates, the higher his fee, 237, 238; agree to agree on the point that the doctor is always right, 241; . . . bring comfort and reassurance to the relatives, and sometimes death to the patient, 239; . . . operations are recorded as successful if the patient leaves alive, 242; . . . statistics should be kept of all illnesses of doctors and their families, 280; . . . they themselves die of the very diseases they profess to cure, 241; . . .

Englishman, always leans to virtue’s side as long as it costs him nothing, 184; as a citizen is a wretched creature, and will shut his eyes to abuses rather than add another penny to rates and taxes, 694; bullied and ordered about, he obeys like a sheep, 82; . . . hates liberty and equality, but loves a pedigree, 187; . . . is quarrelsome, selfish, and without moral courage, 73, 74; . . .

Family . . . modern clever Englishwoman’s loathing of the very word Home, 690; . . .

Jesus Christ, a highly-civilized, cultivated person, 535; adapted himself to the fashionable life of his time, 631; . . . was a communist . . .

Love . . . an appetite which is destroyed for the moment by its gratification, 22; . . . cases of chronic lifelong love ought to be sent to the doctor, 37; entire preoccupation with, is a nuisance, 9; . . . is a tyranny requiring special safeguards, 37; . . . proposals made under its influence should not be binding, 22

Shakespeare . . . Antony and Othello betray their proprietary instincts in Cleopatra and Desdemona, 39; . . . his nice old women drawn from his mother, 726; . . . his women always take the initiative in sex business, 155; . . .

Shaw, George Bernard . . . boyhood and education— . . .

early employments, and as a young man, 650; he took care to dodge every commercial opening, and became an incorrigible unemployed, 638, 644; at about the age of thirteen seeks employment with a firm of cloth merchants, 640; spent four and a half years as a clerk and cashier in Dublin, 639–641; employed by the Way Leave Department of the Edison Telephone Company, 638, 643, 644, 650; assists in counting the votes at Leyton election, 643; a shy youth and ignorant of social routine, although some may have found him insufferable, aggressive, and impudent, 629, 630, 638, 643, 647; contradicted everyone from whom he thought he could learn anything, 647; his diabolical opinions as a young man, 637, 638; his moustaches, eyebrows, and sarcastic nostrils, 634; says ‘I had never thought I was to be a great man simply because I had always taken it as a matter of course,’ 642; . . . emerges from obscurity and is applauded as the most humorously extravagant paradoxer in London, 685 . . .
miscellaneous—a natural-born mountebank, he first caught the ear of the British public on a cart in Hyde Park, 712; acquires a superhuman insensitiveness to praise or blame, which leads to indifference to the publication or performance of his works, 644; advertizes himself, 714; as a pianist, 653; denies that he is original, 721; difference between the spirit of Tolstoy and the spirit of Mr. Shaw, 228; found it impossible to believe anything until he could conceive it as a scientific hypothesis, 523; . . . people meeting him in private were surprised at his mildness and sociability, 638; says ‘Whether it be that I was born mad or a little too sane, my kingdom was not of this world: I was at home only in the realm of my imagination,’ 648; The Complete Outsider, 648; the least ambitious of men . . . has
risen by sheer gravitation, too industrious by acquired habit to stop working, 642; . . .
Socialism . . . the great obstacle to its realization is the repugnance of the average man to public regulation of his life, 306; the only possible socialism is the socialization of the selective breeding of man, 185; the real opposition to Socialism comes from the fear that it would cut off the possibilities of becoming rich, 340
Stage . . . why the critics do not accept great original dramatists as dramatists, 204; is it possible to treat the artistic quality of a play altogether independently of its scientific quality? 681; . . . refusing to write down to the level of that imaginary monster the British public, 681; . . . the musician, not the playwright, now presents dramatic sensuousness on the stage, 227, 228; the theatre, behind the scenes, has an emotional freemasonry of its own, 744, 745; there can be no new drama without a new philosophy, 718-721; . . .
Women . . . entirely preoccupied with affection are nuisances, 9; . . . home life makes them unfit for human society, 7, 690; . . .

INDEXERS IN FICTION

In The Indexer 14 (4), p.278, Judy Batchelor wrote of the hero of Penelope Lively's novel, According to Mark (Heinemann, 1984), 'Here surely is the indexerly mind floating free, creative, full of possibilities: the world its book, world and mind alike to be enlarged, and simultaneously diminished, by the delicate momentary attachment of a network of cognitive relationships.'

There are other characters in Mrs Lively's delightful works who practise indexing and allied research. The predicament of the hero of a short story, 'The art of biography' (in Corruption, Heinemann, 1984) gives a most salutary and absorbing warning of the dangers of too enthusiastic an immersion in one's subject. Initially, however, he is more weary of the work:

Seventeen card index boxes. Seven hundred and nineteen letters in the British Library and the University of Texas and in God knows how many box files and drawers of desks. Notes and footnotes and references and cross-references; checks and cross-checks and headings and sub-headings. Names and places and times and dates. All sewn up and stashed away, or just about. A man's life reduced to paper—or rather, card and tempo pen. The material, the valuable laboriously gathered material for the definitive biography of Edward Lamprey, poet and man of letters . . .

(That seventeen may seem a mite excessive . . . but one knows just how he feels.)

In Perfect happiness (Heinemann, 1983) there is a gratifying, Pym-like affaire that may let us smile tenderly and believe, ah, indexing can lead to romance . . .

* . . . She told him about her new house, and the job, and he told her about the progress of his book and his problems with compiling such things as bibliography and index. 'I'm a mere journalist,' he said. 'I've never had to deal with these refinements before.'

'I once did an index for Steven,' said Frances. 'It's not so difficult. The thing is to have all these little cards . . .' Morris Corfield nodded gravely as she talked, appearing to take careful note. The conversation, it occurred to Frances, was becoming somewhat banal. She said, 'All this is rather dull.' Morris nodded in acquiescence and then jumped slightly. 'Not at all. Absolutely not.'

Frances laughed. 'You were getting a glazed look.' 'I was concentrating,' he said.

. . . She had given him some guidance about indexing, of which she apparently had experience, and he had tried to give the impression of taking note while searching for some way to ensure another meeting. Consequently, he could no longer remember what she had said about indexing.

'Tell me about indexing,' said Morris.
'I told you about indexing, at Zoe's party. Didn't I?'
'Yes,' said Morris. 'I'm afraid I didn't listen properly.'

Frances laughed. 'You can't really want me to tell you the technicalities of indexing for the second time at . . . at a quarter past midnight.

'I've been putting into practice your advice about indexing. The thing begins to look more shapely.' 'Good,' said Frances. And beamed. 'It's nice to be useful.'

* . . .

We thank Penelope Lively for permission to quote the above extracts.

Unfair to women