Indexes reviewed

Edited by Christine Shuttleworth

These extracts from reviews do not pretend to represent a complete survey of all reviews in journals and newspapers. We offer only a selection from quotations that members have sent in. Our reproduction of comments is not a stamp of approval from the Society of Indexers upon the reviewer’s assessment of an index.

Extracts are arranged alphabetically under the names of publishers, within the sections: Indexes praised; Two cheers; Indexes omitted; Obiter dicta.

Indexes praised


If it happened and it mattered even a tiny bit you will find it, decently listed, indexed and annotated (there are 322 pages of appendices and notes, all useful) . . . [Index by SI member John Noble.]


There is an extremely useful index, which is necessary for this apparently random collection of stuff.


Punctiliously indexed, ranging from Abortion to Youth . . .


. . . this admirably annotated and indexed book. . . .


. . . the book is well produced, well indexed, and a bargain besides.


The book has a good bibliography, a glossary of acronyms and a decent index.


The second welcome addition is an index. I realise that the book is alphabetically arranged but cross referencing via ‘See Also’ is, to me at least, less effective than a decent index for one-stop access to a book’s contents on a particular topic.


The Glossary and Index are excellent. It was effortful for me to find content relevant to my own work.


The sizeable index of 40 pages makes it easy to locate descriptions of the geology of specific areas, sedimentary basins, fossil localities, geological structures, mineral deposits etc.


Scholars will especially appreciate the excellent index, which makes it easy to locate the book’s many factual gems.


More than 1000 terms are arranged alphabetically, supported by an index which picks out key references and alternative ways of referring to the same or similar concepts.


Even the index is worth a visit, with entries like ‘Encyclopaedia Britannica . . . admirable anality of, 301–5’ or ‘nose, ignorance of what is right under, 216’.


There are editorial problems; the tables are not uniquely numbered, and the lack of enumeration of the figures or plates is a serious weakness, making cross-reference difficult, especially as passing reference is made to particular buildings in numerous sections of the book; some of these difficulties are ameliorated by a reasonable index.

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The only problem with this book is that the small size and many illustrations mean that the print is frequently interrupted, making it rather difficult to read. Fortunately, if at first view it is not always easy to find something, the index is very thorough.


The extensive index allows the reader to search easily from a variety of starting points.


It is a career-defining work; as he is a professor of linguistics with a variety of starting points.


The book has a glossary of terms, over 400 references and three index entries. I particularly liked the index of geographical names that is arranged by region.


A full index includes proper names, but extends to a wider range of headings: ‘wine’, ‘women’ (subdivided as ‘brawling’, ‘cleaning’, ‘disreputable’, ‘midwives’, ‘muties’, ‘noble’), and ‘songs’ are to be expected, and there is ‘ale’ (but no ‘cakes’). It also enables other- wise potentially unwieldy volumes of material to be quickly searched for ‘wigs’, ‘walls’, ‘may games’, ‘legal records’, ‘homosexuality’, ‘crimes’, ‘boy bishops’, ‘animals’ and ‘books’, and to trace any number of narratives through these rich, fragmentary annals. Each entry gains from the accumulation of small detail.


The manual is rounded off by an excellent index, which makes it very easy to find the details on any of the procedures, reagents, equipment or other information provided.


Schulz would have loved the way these books take his lifelong singular passion seriously as art. But little things would have bothered him, as they did me: a glaring typo in the great introduction to Volume 1 by Garrison Keillor; an impressive index that bothered him, as they did me: a glaring typo in the great introduction to Volume 1 by Garrison Keillor; an impressive index that

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References lead to other see terms, rather than page notations.
The index is very thorough despite a rather haphazard use of italics.


A short selective index, featured in the last edition, rounding up items on Age, Fashion, Sex and so on, has been dropped. . . . As always, the keyword index is a miracle of efficiency, now running to 279 pages. Where else could a perplexed enquirer with ‘brekekekoks koak koax’ on the tip of his tongue turn to discover that this is the cry of the frogs in Aristophanes?


The whole is rounded off by two glossaries and four indexes – though not, unfortunately, a subject index – and altogether it is a pleasure to use and consult.


The subject index, although comprehensive and substantial, does require some navigating and inventive thinking if one is to find the desired subject matter.


I read somewhere that ‘you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover, but’ (you guessed) ‘See also LHC’.


There is no index, so the chances of finding that elusive synonym of gamahuching a second time are slim.


(Gordin seems equally devoted to extensive annotations, which spread over sixty infuriatingly unindexed pages of tiny type and contain much of the body of his argument.)


Unfortunately, the index seems to consist of only section subheadings so a great deal of the wealth of information in this book cannot be found through the index.


The CHT-CEL has great virtues, some minor shortcomings, and, for a work of reference, one major blemish. The index is a disaster, so much so as to be horribly hilarious. Who, for example, would not want to read Morrison Blake’s And When Did You Last See Your Father?, D. H. Lawrence’s The Planned Serpent, Richard Hoggart’s The Abuses of Literacy, or Thomas Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot? Denys Thompson (Leavis’s erstwhile collaborator) is, one discovers, the author of The Making of the English Working Class. There is some impostor called ‘E. P. Thomson’ [sic] lurking a few entries down. Maxim Gorky wrote The Early Years of Thomas Hardy and The Later Years of Thomas Hardy. Oscar Lewenstein wrote The Caucasian Chalk Circle, Giles Cooper wrote The [sic] Lord of the Flies, ‘O. C. Dublin’ wrote Juno and the Paycock and ‘the Rosenbergs’ wrote Ragsie. There is much more, but not all of it funny. By my estimate, over half the references in the volume escaped the witless indexer’s eye. Just as well. What is appended to this volume is an outrage on the editors’ industry, the contributors’ scholarship and the imprint’s reputation. The publisher should immediately re-index and post the corrected, downloadable, apparatus on the CUP website.


What of the indexes? It is seldom one encounters a book that is well indexed. To find an entry only to be told to ‘see under’ something else is a bitter experience, exceeded in bitterness only if one cannot find at all what one is looking for. Editors of textbooks ought to attend to this matter, for bad indexing can compromise useability. The medical volume is the better indexed [by SI member Jill Halliday]. In the surgical book one finds the usual fare awaiting magahuching, and ‘the Rosenbergs’ wrote Leishmania donovani one finds ‘granuloma inguinale’, which has nothing to do with Leishmania. Further under Leishmania donovani the index lists ‘granuloma venerum’, an entity that has nothing to do with either Leishman or Donovan.

Carolrhoda: A monkey baby grows up, by Joan Hewett (2004, 31 pp,
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There is no need for the seven-entry index that appears on the copyright page. [One wonders what the entries were.]


The 'author' index lists those persons who are mentioned by Jourdain, but does not cite mere citations of works, and, corollarily, does not list those persons who are mentioned merely by citing their works. I found this restriction to be an inconvenience. For example, Christine Ladd-Franklin is cited once in the index, but I know that her work appears elsewhere as well, and I would like to know where without having to skim through the whole book.

I found the subject index woefully inadequate. Every time – and I mean that literally – I wanted to look a subject up, it wasn’t there. A skimpy index is not unusual, but this one is, in fact, not even three full pages long, and considering the wealth of material contained in Jourdain’s papers, it’s not surprising that it fails to be very satisfying. Moreover, neither index covers the introduction. Because Grattan-Guinness’s introduction is valuable in its own right, I find this to be a nontrivial inconvenience. . . . I would have preferred an unrestricted index, combining both authors and subjects . . .


A different weakness, from my point of view, is the lack of a clear index. It would have been helpful for it to be divided into subject areas.


The index is less than comprehensive and somewhat sloppy; absent are titles of plays and the names of playwrights mentioned in the text of broader entries. Finally, the text and the index have a confusing alphabetical scheme.


The index has occasional lapses. [Such as?]


The set index, also in every volume, is adequate, but coverage is not always complete for topics mentioned within the body of entries. [Adequate?]


Prominent see-also references and a set index at the back of each book seem helpful at first glance, but may bewilder and frustrate inexperienced encyclopedia users. Youngsters interested in monkeys will have to use the index, which refers them to three different volumes. If they persevere, they will be rewarded with a few pages under ‘Primates’. Under lightning, the index leads students to nothing more than a captioned etching of Ben Franklin and his famous kite under the subject heading ‘Science’.


The book is not totally free of blemishes. Proofreading seems to have been hurried and patchy and there is more than a suspicion that one or two photographs have been printed back to front. For a book of 600 pages of information, description and opinion, the index could also be improved. When the reader has read this book from cover to cover it will still be on the shelf as a work of references for years to come. But for works of reference, a well-compiled index is no luxury – it is an essential.


It [the Chapel of the Rosary in Venice] is hard to find in the index because the two books’ indexes follow different systems. Professional indexers can be quick and efficient but tend to beaver away in solitude, caring little for the publication as a whole. [An odd accusation! The first volume of Spurling’s biography of Matisse, The Unknown Matisse, was published in 1998.]


In a book of this scope and length, a few mistakes are inevitable. Here there are too many; a more attentive editor would have corrected wrong or misspelt names and excised occasional repetitions. The index is not as impressive as it looks.


It comes as no surprise to learn that Barrie never consummated his marriage. (Unintentionally, but rather appropriately, his wife has no entry at all in the index to this book.)


The book is a little hard to follow. Looking for a way to dress up potatoes? You’ll find Garlic Mash in the saucepan chapter, Roasted New Potatoes With Coarse Salt and Rosemary under roasting pan and Twice-Baked Potatoes With Crabmeat and Walnuts under baking sheet. The index doesn’t help unless you’re looking for ‘Garlic Mash’ under G.


One thing that does let the book down from the usability aspect is the index. Finding precisely what you are looking for can be frustratingly hit-and-miss. Look up ‘potatoes’, for instance, and you will be given seven page references, but no clue to what’s on them; and under ‘disease’, 19 page references, but you still won’t know where to find potato blight. ‘Blight’ itself doesn’t appear in the index.

Manson Publishing: Self-assessment colour review of hepatobiliary

There are a few minor criticisms. There are no references if the reader wants to read more, and the index could be more useful – primary sclerosing cholangitis is under ‘c’ for cholangitis.


The index is inadequate, with some omissions and some strange headings like ‘War, First World’ and ‘War, Second World’.


There is one technical flaw in this enjoyable volume. The reference notes have not been incorporated into the index. Without such a key, even an avid reader will miss a great many nuggets.


Puns are marked and pursued, although, oddly, there is no index entry for ‘pun’ or ‘wordplay’, just as in Volume One; in Volume Two there is an entry for ‘pun’, with a dozen listings.


In Kenny’s (frankly inadequate) index the only entry for ‘political philosophy’ refers, strangely, to Heraclitus.


... the omission of the author on the title page of each work, or even in the index, is baffling.


One tiny editorial quibble: it is a mistake, I think, to index ‘A Haunted House’ and similar titles under ‘A’ (‘An’ and ‘The’ are not treated likewise), but since all Woolf’s works are listed under a common heading, not a grave one.


It is also frustrating that Ryan’s index has no keyword references, such as ‘alienation’ (Brechtian). With critical writing, an index can provide alternative paths.


Scholars will be disappointed by the limitations of its index.


The comments about biblical criminals might be useful in sermons though no biblical characters are included in the inadequate index. An index of scriptural references would also be useful.


On the other hand, it’s hard to understand the poor-quality index, glossary, and table of contents that mar the book’s value. Navigational aids are just as important in books as they are on Web sites. Using Sun.com as an example, I find a clear set of links on the home page, well-organized site maps and a search function. These tools let me find what I want quickly on this content-rich site.

I can’t say the same about this book. Network designers who want to find specific answers quickly will be disappointed with the skimpy 2½ page index (followed by three pages of publisher’s ads) near the end of this 400-page tome.


T&H deserves a special award for what must surely be the most inadequate and appalling index ever to undermine a publication of this kind ... the completely random, utterly inconsistent and often just plain wrong selection of artists’ names and references to places renders the whole exercise literally useless. The captions to the copious illustrations (which are not all in focus) and the crazy credits are equally bizarre. Combined with serious sloppy editing, the most serious oversight is the lack of any linkage with the inexplicable un-numbered illustrations.


... Levy’s editing is grandly minimalist. Most names are left unannotated (and some are not even indexed)...

Rev. by Peter Parker, Times Literary Supplement, 29 April 2005.

‘Anrep’ is mentioned twice before we are told that he is the mosaicist Boris Anrep, though these earlier occurrences are not recorded in the book’s scrappy and unreliable index.


A sloppy index ascribes Linda di Chamounix to Bellini and unfor-givably conflates Rosine Stoltz, Donizetti’s first Leonore in La favorite, with Teresa Stolz, Verdi’s ideal Aida.

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Indexes omitted

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Leonard Bernstein put together his first and arguably best book in 1959 and its recurring reissue is welcome. It is, however, legitimate to lament the absence of an index, let alone the DVD tie-in promised this time.


There are no surprises in Extreme Measures for anyone who knows these sources, and it is difficult to judge if Brookes has done any research beyond reading them, since he (or his publisher) has chosen not to include references, a bibliography or even an index.


It’s a shame this book contains no index . . .


An index would have been welcome.


For an article on e-book myths, I’m enduring The Gutenberg Elegies by Sven Birkerts. Meanwhile here’s a question: Why the devil doesn’t Elegies have an index? Am I reactionary in believing that every serious nonfiction book should have one? Shouldn’t Birkerts have cared enough about ‘The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age’ – his sub-title – to have had the costs of indexing subtracted from his royalties?


. . . this is one of the rudest, most unapologetic books of translation or transposition I have ever read. It is monolingual, the source poet is acknowledged curtly in a parenthesis under the title, and care is taken not to provide any kind of an index giving exact references with titles in the original language (a source of serious irritation for a reviewer).


How many, for example, could make their way to Woundale? (An index would have helped here but, to save hours of scouring maps, it’s off the Kirkstone Pass.)


Also, the lack of an index in both books makes for a confusing reading of events featuring a multitude of characters, many of whom went by several names. The relationship chart included in both books is an inadequate substitute and fails to provide for the many peripheral characters.


Sadly, the absence of both an index and any references detracts from its value for anyone who might want to follow up the story of Hammonds and its locality.


. . . irritatingly without an index . . .


And what use is his mass of information (which constitutes the raw material of the social history of an important subject) without an index?


Perhaps in a work such as this it is indeed the lack of any index – of publishers and printers principally, if not authors and titles – which detracts most from this book’s overall usefulness as a reference and locating tool. A checklist without aspirations of comprehensive coverage or the inclusion of an index could most usefully be presented in easily-searchable electronic form.


The Queen’s stamps has the full academic apparatus of endnotes (though those in chapter 2 seem to have gone haywire), appendices and a glossary (an index would have been nice, too) which chart the author’s prodigious research.


Every author he has ‘done’ gets his own chapter. But rather than studying each in a self-contained fragment illuminating a particular aspect of the translation process, he has awkwardly strung the whole together, making it necessary for readers to get through most of his book if they wish to understand his jokes and allusions towards the end. Tighter editing might have solved that problem and eliminated tiresome repetitions; an index would have made the volume easier to use.


. . . there is no index.


Everyone interested in the period will want to read it, not least for the discovery that in many respects ‘the long 18th century’ did not even come to an end in 1832. But the value of this otherwise excellent edition is needlessly diminished by the absence of an index, for
which it so obviously cries out. For want of this ha’porth of tar, it plunges to the bottom of the harbour within sight and sound of a tumultuous welcome. What a pity.


Unfortunately, in a fit of madness, the publisher has not seen fit to provide this lovely book with an index.


But one can excuse a little colourful hyperbole in the title (not to mention spelling errors and no index) when it comes to such an intelligent, spirited book.


It is also a pity that the book has no index to make navigation easier for casual readers.


There are two curiosities about this book. The chronological bibliography of McKenzie’s writings is in descending order beginning in 2000 and ending in 1958. More seriously, the omission of an index makes it difficult to trace the development of the author’s views on the various topics covered here as they evolved over three decades.


One major black mark against an otherwise moving and brilliant book however: although it has excellent maps it lacks an index. In a work so crammed with names and places, this is unforgivable.


I’d like to speak more about my favorite part of the book, a short paragraph in which Pelikan suggests that earlier and more allegorical translations of the Bible might actually have better assimilated modern scientific theories about evolution than the literal, creation over the course of six twenty-four-hour periods, interpretation, but I can’t, primarily because I can’t find it. In a completely inexplicable and inexcusable move, the Viking Press has seen fit to issue this work of timely and relevant scholarship without an index. Readers hoping to use Pelikan’s academic text in research works or conversations of their own are hereby forewarned that they should mark any passages they find interesting with bookmarks or highlighting.


The lack of an index is a drawback.


Who is this book for? Without an index or many bibliographies, it does not seem to be targeting the academic market.

Obiter dicta

Indexing !!!

The recent success of !!! – pronounced chickchickchick or powpowpow – has raised the bar in this category by making the band very difficult to talk about and virtually impossible to index. ‘I don’t think the name has held us back,’ says guitarist Mario Andreoni. ‘Possibly people get frustrated looking for us in record shops, but we’ve never been real promotion hounds. We assumed people would file it right before A.’


Nonagenarian indexer

The 18th-century antiquary John Loveday made more than a hundred tours around the British Isles between 1729 and 1765, keeping detailed notes of his experiences and describing buildings and their contents, particularly country houses and churches. The account of his longest tour, which included a visit to the Continent, was edited by Sarah Markham’s grandfather, and published by the Roxburgh Club in 1890, but the full value of his diaries could not be appreciated until the appearance in 1984 of her biography, John Loveday of Caversham, 1711–1789: The Life and Tours of an Eighteenth-Century Onlooker. This, her first book, was an outstanding scholarly achievement, recognised the following year, when she was 75, by her election as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. . . . After the second book [A Testimony of her Times] Markham concentrated on ordering, transcribing and indexing every one of Loveday’s tour diaries, which she did with the utmost diligence, and remarkable computer literacy for a 90-year-old. The task continued to within a short time of her death.

Obituary of Sarah Markham, The Times, 4 June 2003.

Evocative index

Even a mere index could now entice the traveller. During the 1890s, Murray’s handbook crucially altered their policy, copied from Baedeker, of folding practical information on cities and towns into the body of the text, shifting it instead to the back of the volume. Turning to the index for the 1903 Asia Minor, under ‘S’ for Smyrna, we watch that ancient port city of Homer and St Paul, metropolis of the Ionian Greeks, with its 28,000 Jews, 12,000 Armenians and an English merchant community dating from Elizabethan times, spring irresistibly to life amid Murray’s profligate scatterings of detail. A gasworks, an ice manufactory and a Greek hairdresser are listed, along with an English girls’ school, an Italian shoe shop, a sporting club, three casinos, two newspapers in Ladino and a Scotch Presbyterian mission. French boulevard dramas and Italian operas play at the Théâtre des Quais, and should we crave more exotic fare, the index notes ‘Howling Derivishes every Friday in the Armenian town’.


The hated task

In September 2004, thanks to the editorial skills of Rob Bartlett and the support of Blackwell, R. W. Southern’s four presidential lectures were published, along with a number of his other papers,
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including a review of [F. W.] Maitland’s letters. Of Maitland, Southern wrote: ‘few historians hold all the trump cards. Those who can generalise are often inaccurate in detail; those who can write well shirk the labour of transcription; almost everyone hates the task of indexing. Maitland loved it all and did everything – or almost everything – supremely well. . . . He would even make indexes for other men’s books. ’ . . . The high-points of my presidential stint? One I’ve already mentioned, the dedication of Maitland’s memorial. Another was indexing – yes, indexing – the Southern papers (a great way into a wonderfully ordered mind).’


Wiser counsel, or the power of the review

Indexes omitted (The Indexer, 24(3)) included five reviews taking Andrew Marr to task for omitting an index to his My trade: a short history of British journalism. In the preface to the new paperback edition he writes:

I have added an index. I left one out of the first edition hoping this would spur idle and time-pressed colleagues to actually read the book. But almost every reviewer protested. They cannot all be wrong and I have succumbed.

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Contributions of review extracts welcomed by the editor of this section, Christine Shuttleworth (please see inside front cover for further details). Closing dates for the next two issues: 30 November 2005 and 30 May 2006.

Indexing the medical sciences by Doreen Blake, Michèle Clarke, Anne McCarthy and June Morrison

£17.50 (£20.00 overseas); £15.00 (£17.50 overseas) for members of indexing societies

Guidance on the pitfalls and possibilities in medical indexing, including a good selection of interesting and specific examples. The text of the previous edition has been extensively rewritten, and advice is given on a wide range of topics, including:

★ medical terminology
★ choice of headings
★ journals indexing
★ indexing names
★ abbreviations and acronyms
★ final preparation of the index text.

There are also new sections on:

★ electronic indexing
★ the ethical aspects of changing language
★ gene nomenclature.

The comprehensive list of reference materials includes up-to-date website addresses.

A very practical book, with a wealth of friendly commonsense advice. . . . much encouragement to those with less experience. (The Indexer)

An excellent entrée into the art of medical indexing. (IASC Bulletin)

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