

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 readers have sent in. Our reproduction of comments is not a stamp of approval from The Indexer upon the reviewer's assessment of an index. Extracts are arranged alphabetically under the names of publishers, within the sections: Indexes praised; Indexes censured; Indexes omitted; Obiter dicta.

Indexes praised

Blackwell: *NVQs in nursing and residential care homes*, by Linda Nazarko (2007, 332 pp, £16.99). Rev. by Christopher Barber and Sandra Lovell, *British Journal of Healthcare Assistants*, 2(01).

. . . concludes with a helpful glossary and index.

National Archives: *Cromwell's head*, by Jonathan Fitzgibbons (2008, 238 pp, £12.99). Rev. in *The Economist*, 3 January 2009.

This work is part of a venture into the book trade by Britain's National Archives. Unlike stingy private-sector publishers these days, they have indulged in such rarities as a proper index, footnotes, bibliography and colour plates. It is a pity that they seem to have skipped the copy-editing . . .

Oak Knoll Press/HKB Press: *From flock beds to professionalism: a history of index-makers*, by Hazel K. Bell (2008, 340 pp, £49). Rev. by Nancy Mulvany, *LOGOS*, 19(4), 2008.

The book also includes a minihistory of *The Indexer* (1958–1995), a chronology of print-only indexing, extensive references, and detailed index written by the author.

Yale University Press: *Moving rooms: the trade in architectural salvages*, by John Harris (2007, 240 pp, £30). Rev. by Frank Kelsall, *Antiquaries Journal*, 88(2008).

The density of the text and the amount of information sometimes makes it a confusing read, but the book is an outstanding quarry for esoteric information, fortunately well footnoted and indexed . . .

Indexes censured

Boydell Press: *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Nick Higham (2007, 253 pp, £50). Rev. by Carole Hough, *Antiquaries Journal*, 88(2008).

. . . there is little to fault in the volume except its index, which is flawed by inaccuracies, inconsistencies and omissions.

Oxford University Press: *The collected letters of Katherine Mansfield*, vol 5, 1922–1923, ed. by Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott (2008, 376 pp, £60). Rev. by Stephen Barkway, *Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain Bulletin*, no. 30, January 2009.

I have a few minor gripes with this volume: niggles, such as the misspelling of *The Waste Lane* [sic] (vii), and an important book

like Chekhov's *The Schoolmaster* (53) or Joyce's *Ulysses* (225) not being indexed, could be overlooked. Worse, though is the lack of explanatory footnote 3 (14) and the fact that the letter to Eric Pinker of 3 May 1922 is mistakenly cut off in mid-sentence losing who-knows-what and at least one footnote (165)! (It would have been helpful too if Anne Drey had been indexed under her more well-known maiden name Anne Rice, as she was the artist of one of the best portraits of Mansfield [260].)

Society for Medieval Archaeology: *The Shapwick project, Somerset: a rural landscape explored*, ed. by C. Gerrard with M. Aston (2007, 1076 pp, £45). Rev. by Della Hooke, *British Archaeology*, March/April 2009.

This is a liberally illustrated volume (over 800 figures and plates), every bit worth a detailed read. This reader's only outstanding wish is for more cross-referencing or, at least, a fuller index.

Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies: *Life and labour in late Roman Silchester: excavations in Insula IX since 1997*, by Michael Holford et al (2006, xxvii + 404 pp, £68). Rev. by Hilary Cool, *Antiquaries Journal*, 88(2008).

This volume is not perfect. There are occasional muddles in the data. An opportunity has been missed in the accompanying web publication to make the data easily accessible for further analysis, and the index does not do the volume justice. These, though, are minor quibbles against the background of what we have been presented with. It is a joy to read. It will be a major resource for years to come. [*All the more reason for it to have a good index.*]

Indexes omitted

Atlantic: *Rimbaud: the double life of a rebel*, by Edmund White (2009, 192 pp, £16.99). Rev. by Charles Nicholl, *Guardian*, 17 January 2009.

This is a short book, less than 200 pages of fairly large print, and the absence of any notes or index makes it more an essay than a biography.

Counterpoint Press: *The devil gets his due: the uncollected essays of Leslie Fiedler*, ed. by Samuele F. S. Pardini (2008, 336 pp, £15.99). Rev. by Jordan Davis, *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 January 2009.

Several pieces are short book reviews in which Fiedler goes half, two-thirds, or even the whole way without naming either the title of the book or its author, which in the absence of an index or even citations in the acknowledgements, let alone simple identifying headers, creates unnecessary difficulty.

English Place-Name Society: *Language contact in the place-names of Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Paul Cavill and George Broderick (2007, ix + 183 pp, £25). Rev. by Carole Hough, *Antiquaries Journal*, 88(2008).

In the absence of an index, it is not always easy to find references

to related topics, and there is less cross-fertilization of ideas than might have been expected in the proceedings of a conference devoted to a single theme.

Hamish Hamilton: *Hackney, that rose-red empire*, by Iain Sinclair (2009, 581 pp, £20). Rev. by Andy Beckett, *Guardian*, 21 February 2009.

Part of the point of the book is that Hackney, like London, like any city, will never be completely knowable. There is not even an index here for readers who want to take a short cut to their favourite Hackney topic. Instead they must be patient and open to surprises, like drivers inching their way through the road works and reckless pedestrians of Dalston Junction. It may take a while, but along the way almost anything can happen.

Oxbow: *Landscape of the megaliths*, by Mark Gillings, Joshua Pollard, David Wheatley and Rick Peterson (2008, 416 pp, £40). Rev. by Mike Pitts, *British Archaeology*, November/December 2008.

Only quibbles are the small size of many of the photos, and the lack of an index to a book that will be intensively used.

Oxford University Press: *The sinister side: how left-right symbolism shaped Western art*, by James Hall (2008, 304 pp, £16.99). Rev. by John McEwen, *The Tablet*, 22 November 2008.

His book lacks an index and suffers, like so many, from a paucity of illustration due to punitive reproduction costs.

Pantheon: *Reading dance*, by Robert Gottlieb (2008, 1360 pp, \$45). Rev. by Adam Kirsch, *New Yorker*, 12 January 2009.

This sweeping anthology of dance writing weighs in at more than thirteen hundred pages. In his introduction, Gottlieb, the editor of myriad books on dance and the former editor of this magazine, acknowledges that no anthology is ideal. This one has a strong tilt toward ballet (and further toward Balanchine), an emphasis on the canonical past over the present, and no index. Within those limits, however, lies a marvellous compendium. Authors and essays both famous and forgotten, memoirs and interviews, panegyrics, eviscerations, the topical and the retrospective all speak to one another in ways that illuminate the essential personalities and debates that shaped the art, as well as the possibilities for tracking such an ephemeral subject in prose. [*Possibilities that seem somewhat limited by the absence of an index.*]

Penguin: *Pure, white and deadly: the new facts about the sugar you eat as a cause of heart disease, diabetes and other killers*, by John S. Yudkin (1972, 164 pp, pbk £40.43). Rev. by Sheila Dillon, *Food Magazine*, 83, October/December 2008.

It is still a fascinating read, even without footnotes and an index (though I wonder if the hardback copy – £59 on Amazon – has them?).

Scoval Publishing: *The Fleet Air Arm: an illustrated history*, by Alan Key (2008, 235 pp, £30). Rev. by John Shears, *Fleet Air Arm Officers' Association News Sheet*, 36(1), January 2009.

Without an index it is hard to look up a specific item. For instance I wanted to check something about the Torrey Canyon, although I knew the year I was unable to find anything. Whether it was there or not I have no idea.

Timber Press, *Moth orchids: the complete guide to Phalaenopsis*, by Steven A. Frowine (2008, 204 pp). Rev. by Harold Koopowitz, *Orchid Digest*, vol. 72–4, Oct/Nov/Dec 2008.

A third criticism has to do with the index. There is only a plant names index and this is incomplete. For example, two important plants in the history of yellow breeding are Phal. Deventeriana and Phal. Golden Sands, but they are not listed. There is no subject index at all. This severely handicaps the utility of the book and makes it difficult to use as a reference source. One cannot research a topic without spending inordinate amounts of time scanning chapters if there is no index; one cannot overstate the importance of a decent general index in a book of this type.

Hans Zell Publishing: *Publishing, books and reading in sub-Saharan Africa: a critical bibliography* (2008, 762 pp, £132). Rev. by Kelvin Smith, *LOGOS*, 19(4), 2008.

. . . while there are direct links to country sections from the contents page, the lack of an alphabetic index in the browsing function means, for example, that the user must either scroll through pages 1–24 (out of fortythree) to reach Senegal, or bracket down to page 24 to get the same result. But these are small niggles, and are not germane to the importance of this publication.

Obiter dicta

Fourth Estate: *Me Cheeta: the autobiography*, by Cheeta (2008, 320 pp, £16.99). Rev. by Michael Newton, *London Review of Books*, 29 January 2009.

Some of the best jokes are to be found in the words accompanying the photographs and, above all, in the index, which, for instance, suggests discreetly that both John McCain and Barack Obama indulged in adulterous liaisons with Lupe Vélez, the most fiery of Johnny Weissmuller's five wives. The conceit is that the index was compiled before the lawyers looked at the manuscript, and remains unrevised after their ravages. So although Chapter 8 has been excised on legal grounds, the curious reader may infer its contents from the index entries on Esther Williams, the 'million-dollar mermaid'. These include: 'Williams, Esther, egomania of', 'nauseatingly self-justifying autobiography of' and 'vow of revenge taken by Cheeta'.

Oxford University Press: *Stone the crows: Oxford dictionary of modern slang* (2nd edn), by John Ayto and John Simpson (2008, 408 pp, £10.99). Rev. by Henry Hitchings, *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 February 2009.

The main innovation introduced for this edition is a thematic index. This, say Ayto and Simpson, 'enables the user to track down slang expressions in a particular subject area, and also to gain an impression of those areas of human existence that are the most prolific engenderers of slang'. One scarcely needs the index to achieve this impression: no one will be surprised that there are an awful lot of pungent synonyms for the penis, having sex, dying, homosexuals, police officers, dislikeable people, insanity, money and drunkenness.

Penguin: *The life of Samuel Johnson*, by James Boswell (2008, 1408 pp, £18.99). Rev. by Nicholas Lezard, *Guardian*, 17 January 2009.

Yes, I know you've already got a copy of the *Life*; so have I, somewhere: a nice old two-volume Everyman edition, portable, with a serviceable index – and rarely consulted. So when I saw this, I

thought it might be unnecessary: expensive and unwieldy, not really Penguin's kind of thing at all. You can't read it through in one go, of course, that would drive you mad. (Its composition very nearly drove Boswell mad; and you also have to feel for his poor printer, who must have suffered as much as Proust's.) This edition is more than 1,000 pages long before you even get to the appendices, notes and indexes – four of them, along with nigh on 1,300 notes. (These, incidentally, are very useful, though you don't get the feeling that they're compulsory.) But as the book became part of the furniture, it became less and less intimidating. Once you realise that it's for dipping into, it becomes much less imposing: an 18th century treasure trove rather than a monumental classic that demands dry and serious attention.

Index provides clues

The Write Stuff, the literary panel game on BBC Radio 4, broadcast on 3 November 2008 (repeated on 9 November) had a round in which entries were read from the index of a writer's biography and the panelists had to identify the subject of the biography. On this occasion the clues were 'entranced by St Ives' (which for many of us would have been enough!), 'becomes increasingly aware that her mother has no time for her', 'studies at King's College, London', 'works for Women's Suffrage', 'honeymoon: does not respond sexually', 'furious with Cecil Beaton', 'passion for Vita heightened when she is about to be separated from her', 'travels to Yorkshire to see a total eclipse of the sun'. This was not in chronological order, as the presenter admitted, and came from James King's biography (1994). Indeed King does claim that [Virginia] Woolf 'studie[d] at King's College', although this gives a misleading impression of her formal education presumably unknown to the BBC researcher, who probably assumed she was a bluestocking. Sebastian Faulks and Andrew Motion knew the answer immediately in any case, based on the clues about St Ives, women's suffrage and lack of sexual responsiveness. The presenter went on to say that 'Vita' was Vita Sackville-West with whom Woolf had a 'famous affair' and who was 'the model for Orlando in Woolf's novel of that name'.

'Virginia Woolf Today', *Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain Bulletin*, 30, January 2009

Too complicated

It appears that Mexico is contemplating banning the sale of toy guns; it isn't, however, thinking of blocking gangster and murder films, or the portrayal of violent events on television screens. I looked up the history of Mexico in one of my reference books, but the index was so complicated that apart from mention of frequent wars with the US, I learnt nothing as to why Mexicans should suddenly start worrying about toys.

Beryl Bainbridge, 'How playing with toy guns saved my life', *Guardian*, 19 January 2009

Unhelpful indexing?

Printed books and electronic texts are good for different things. Printed books are good for reading; electronic works for searching and annotating. You never run out of room in the margins on an ebook, whereas the books that I really love look as if they have been the victim of a methedrine-crazed medieval monk.

Equally, there is no index in a printed book that will find the passage you know is in there somewhere as a parenthesis in a discussion of something entirely unconnected, which will be indexed, but not at all helpfully.

Andrew Brown, 'Amazon Upgrade: a really useful idea that nobody has heard of', *Technology Guardian*, 15 January 2009.

[If anyone understands the last sentence, will they please explain it to the *Indexes Reviewed* editor?]

Warm thanks to the contributors to this section:

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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).

It is with regret that we announce the deaths of:

Robert (Bob) Palmer, founder member of ASI, on 4 April 2009

Valerie Chandler, a longstanding SI member, on 24 April 2009

Obituaries will appear in the September issue of *The Indexer*.