

# 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 omitted; Obiter dicta.*

## Indexes praised

**Biteback Publishing:** *Power and pragmatism*, by Malcolm Rifkind (2016, 435 pp, £25). Rev. by Harry McGrath, [www.heraldscotland.com](http://www.heraldscotland.com), 6 August 2016.

Sadly, the most interesting thing about Rifkind's memoir is the index. Bill Clinton said that a lot of presidential biographies are self-serving and dull, but even a president of modest intellect would struggle to turn all this promising raw material into such a tedious narrative.

**Cambridge University Press:** *The digital humanities: a primer for students and scholars* (2015, xiii + 273 pp, £19.99). Rev. by Sue Gwilliam, *CILIP Update*, July/August 2016.

The taxonomy of digital tools arranged by function is excellent, as is the index. The bibliography serves as a springboard for further study. All in all, this is an excellent primer.

**Glass Circle News:** index by SI member Hazel Bell, rev. by Simon Cottle and Peter Lole, letters to the Editor, *Glass Circle News*, (39)2, issue 141, July 2016.

Hazel Bell's methodical and thought-provoking approach to providing the Circle with a well-organised index for our past publications is to be admired and acknowledged. Words cannot really express the gratitude we owe to her for her Herculean task which has taken several months to achieve .... In reading Hazel's article in Issue No. 140 of *Glass Circle News*, I was amused to see the way in which she deftly handled, sifted and cut through the variety of similar terms used by contributors to produce a crystal-clear index of which the Glass Circle should rightly be proud.

Simon Cottle, Hon. President

I was delighted to find the news of your successful collaboration with Hazel Bell in producing the new updated, extended and corrected Index of our publications. Whilst I knew that some work was going on to achieve this, I had not appreciated how much and how comprehensive and accurate it has proved to be. The news contained in our current Newsletter (No: 140) overcame my dislike of web-sites, and sent me to the Glass Circle one (for the first time!) where I followed John Smith's instructions and found the Index, which most impresses me. Very well done, especially to Hazel Bell.

Whilst initially disappointed that it that it is not in printed format (although printable) the explanation that it is to be continuously updated makes the decision inevitable.

Peter Lole

**Penguin Modern Classics:** *Pale fire*, by Vladimir Nabokov (1962,

this edition 2012, 256 pp, £9.98). Rev. by Edmund White, *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 August 2016.

Even the index to *Pale Fire* is funny, and camp. We are told of a cordoned-off section of the royal picture gallery that 'contains the statues of Igor's 400 favourite catamites'. In the entry for Kinbote himself we discover inconsequential mentions of 'his boyhood in Cedarn and the little angler, a honey-skinned lad, naked except for a pair of torn dungarees, one trouser leg rolled up ... but then school started or the weather changed'. No matter that the little angler has never been mentioned until now. Kinbote also cites his loathing for a person who 'makes advances and then betrays a noble and naïve heart, telling foul stories about his victim and pursuing him with brutal practical jokes'. Marcel is dismissed as 'the fussy, unpleasant, and not altogether plausible central character, pampered by everybody in Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*'. Under 'Odon', who is identified as the actor who helps the king escape, the very last index entry is, 'ought not to marry that blubber-lipped cinemactress, with untidy hair'. Finally we are told of 'Uran the Last Emperor of Zembla, reigned 1798–1799; an incredibly brilliant, luxurious and cruel monarch whose whistling whip made Zembla spin like a rainbow top'.

## Indexes omitted

**Bloomsbury:** *Harry Mount's Odyssey*, by Harry Mount (2016, 288 pp, £18.74). Rev. by Nicholas Lezard, *The Guardian*, 2 July 2016.

The really clever thing about Mount's technique is that he passes off his learning lightly. This may not be a scholarly book on Homer and his world (there's no index, which is vexing, and I presume the transliteration of quotes from ancient Greek into the Roman alphabet is in order not to put readers off), but it is by no means an unlearned one.

**Jonathan Cape:** *A walk in the park*, by Travis Elborough (2016, 384 pp, £18.99). Rev. by Christopher Hawtree, *The Spectator*, 18 June 2016.

Startlingly, the use, and sales, of a chockful book are diminished by its lacking an index. This could include: '158, Checker, Chubby – his Twist likened to Paxton's glasswork.' [*Except that it is usual to place the locator at the end of the entry.*] Celebratory in tone, with an emphasis upon such bodies as the National Trust, their book ends on a hortatory note: we need such vigilance and wisdom as shown by *The Spectator* (a high proportion of index entries).

Rev. by William Boyd, *The Guardian*, 18 June 2016.

Parks seem an immutable, strangely paradisiacal element of our fraught and complicated urban lives, but the fact that we actually have them, as Elborough demonstrates in this wonderful book (but please could we have an index for the paperback), is something to be marvelled at.

Rev. by Peter Coates, *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 July 2016.

Anyone can readily compile a list of important parks Elborough leaves out – though the lack of an index makes it harder to check whether a particular park merits a mention.

**Council for British Archaeology:** *Stonehenge: making sense of a prehistoric mystery*, by M. Parker Pearson et al (2015, 184 pp, £14). Rev. by Alistair Barclay, *British Archaeology*, July/August 2016.

Overall the book is a refreshing read (though some may find the lack of an index frustrating) ...

**Custom House:** *Powerhouse: The untold story of Hollywood's Creative Artists Agency*, by James Andrew Miller (2016, 752 pp, £13.60). Rev. by Jonathan A. Knee, *New York Times*, 8 August 2016.

With the fall of the studio system, when actors labored under long-term employment contracts, came the rise of the talent agents, those mysterious professionals whose job is to procure employment for artists. ... The good news is almost everyone who survived has talked to Mr Miller. Given the compelling characters involved, notably C.A.A.'s founding partners, Michael Ovitz and Ron Meyer, and their successors, Bryan Lourd and Richard Lovett, after more than 500 interviews, there was more than enough material for a truly compelling narrative. The bad news is that instead of producing such a book, Mr Miller has simply organized more than 700 pages of raw interviews in more or less chronological order – interspersed with occasional brief asides, written in the overheated prose of a showbiz trade rag. Worse, although the front of the book has 11 pages of names listed as the relevant 'dramatis personae,' no index or detailed biographies help readers keep track.

**Oxford University Press:** *The death of the Mehdi army: the rise, fall, and revival of Iraq's most powerful militia*, by Nicholas Krohley (2015, 305 pp, \$40). Rev. by Michael Rubin, *The Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2016.

The author's inner anthropologist shines through as he examines the heavily Shiite administrative district known as 'New Baghdad' on a sub-district by sub-district level. Indeed, leafing through the nearly 100 pages of notes, scholars may sense the spirit of the late historian Hanna Batatu's classic studies of Iraqi society, albeit with a narrower focus (and without an index – the book's only flaw).

**Yale University Press:** *In praise of forgetting: historical memory and its ironies*, by David Rieff (2016, 145 pp, £14.99). Rev. by Hew Strachan, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 July 2016.

When citations are direct, [the author] provides no references and little context. There is no compensatory bibliography and no index.

## Obiter dicta

### All that jazz

The Index concentrates on names, bands, venues and publications. General references are in plain type; main references are in **block**; photos are indexed in *italics* and *ep* indicates a photo in the endpapers. All venues are in Brighton or Hove unless otherwise stated. The Discography is not indexed, nor are one-off gigs (unless of particular significance) but residences are included. Non-jazz related references have mostly been ignored, nor have I indexed the many references to people having been influenced by Armstrong, Bechet, Lewis, etc. However, specific examples, like Bechet shouting at DSB to stop playing the washboard, I have deemed worth including! My grateful thanks to Parsons, Bill, for his help in checking the Index.

John Muxlow, introductory note to his index to *The Brighton jazz line*, ed. by Keith Samuel and Peter Simkins (Evergreen Graphics, 2002).

*Warm thanks to the contributors to this section:*

Hazel Bell, Hatfield  
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Christopher Pipe, Cromer

*Contributions of review extracts welcomed by the editor of this section, Christine Shuttleworth (please see inside front cover for further details).*

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# Book reviews

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**The language of technical communication**, by Ray Gallon. Laguna Hills, Calif., The Content Wrangler/XML Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1-937434-48-9 (pbk), 978-1-937434-49-6 (ebook). 133 pp.

This slim publication came to the *The Indexer's* attention because it contains contributions by two senior and respected American indexers, Jan Wright and Cheryl Landes. Essentially it's no more than an expanded glossary. The bulk of the text comprises 52 double-page articles, each by a different author but each with the same four sections headed 'What is it?', 'Why is it important?' and a brief author biography on the verso, then 'Why does a technical communicator need to know this?' on the facing recto: so rigid a format leaves little room for any wide-ranging explorations. There is also a four-page term list (Content strategy terms for technical communicators), a two-page Contributor index and a four-page Subject index.

My own limited experience of technical communications suggests

that the technicality usually tends to displace the communication; an obsession with consistency can drive out any appreciation that not all users think alike or that the irreducible unit of human comprehension is the sentence, not the keyword.

Cheryl Landes' article on Findability and Jan Wright's on Indexing both start from essentially the same proposition: that inaccessible information might as well not exist. Cheryl goes on to distinguish two approaches to findability. Navigation groups deliberately contrived access facilities (like buttons, tabs, menus and links online and, in print, contents tables and indexes); the alternative is Search, where the entire content is available to match with user-selected keywords. Jan conveys an important message, that an index 'crosses author-created boundaries and democratizes all concepts for easy retrieval'; explains that the indexer's job extends to predicting most-likely searches and disambiguating terminology; and mentions the linkability of indexes with other access methods. She certainly makes full and