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 censured; Indexes omitted; Obiter dicta.

Indexes praised

Allyn and Bacon: The technical communicator’s handbook, by Dan Jones (2000, 432 pp, $27). Rev. by Garret H. Romaine, Technical Communication 48(4), Nov. 2001. Throughout the handbook, the author provides lists of tips to help the reader through difficult concepts. Tips are also listed separately in each chapter’s table of contents and referenced in the index, which greatly aids in usability.

American Psychological Association: Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (5th edn, 2001, 439 pp, $23.95–$34.95). Rev. by Tracy L. Christiansen, AMWA Journal 17(1), 2002. The index has been expanded and is thorough, listing page numbers, section numbers, and cross-references to related topics. [‘But there’s nothing on indexes or indexing in the manual itself!’ comments Pilar Wyman, who sent this item.]

Ashgate Arena: Good practices in palliative care: a psychosocial perspective, by David Oliveira, Rosalind Hargreaves and Barbara Monroe (2000, £27.50). Rev. by Suzanne Hammond, International Journal of Palliative Nursing, 2000, 6(1). Besides the extensive index and list of references, user-friendliness within each chapter is enhanced by the use of different typefaces and boxed information.

Aslib/IMI: Free business & industry information on the Web, by Paul Pedley (2000, 110 pp, £25). Rev. by Ann Day, Library Association Record 104(1), Jan. 2002. This book is brilliant. Every library and small business should have a copy…. The back of the book has an alphabetical listing of organisations/providers mentioned in the text. Each text reference to a website is numbered and this index provides a cross reference to this numbering system. You can therefore look up an organisation in the index and go straight to its website in the text. There is also a subject index.


Faculty of Public Health Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians of the United Kingdom: A chronology of state medicine, public health, welfare and related services in Britain, 1066–1999, by Michael D. Warren (2000, 313 pp, £18). Rev. by A. M. B. Golding, Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 94, Jan. 2001. There is an excellent general index; so, for instance, if you look up penicillin you will find 1928 and under that year that Alexander Fleming then observed the antibacterial effects of penicillin.


Fitzroy Dearborn: The information specialist’s guide to searching and researching on the Internet and World Wide Web, by Ernest Ackermann and Karen Hartman (2nd edn, 2000, 438 pp, $40). Rev. by Sally Chambers, Library Association Record 103(6), 2001. The layout is complemented by useful tools, including an expanded contents listing; comprehensive index; and user-friendly glossary.

Flammarion: Correspondance générale, vol. 7, 1864–1869, ed. by Hugh Macdonald (767 pp, 295 fr.) Rev. by John Warrack, Times Literary Supplement, 23 Nov. 2001. The editorial principles originally established in 1972 by Pierre Citron, who remains Editorial Director, have stood well the test of handling almost 3,500 letters. Texts are clearly printed and sufficiently annotated; each year is prefaced by a summary of its events; the indexes include short biographical notes identifying all Berloz’s correspondents. What we now have, achieved over some thirty years’ work, is not only an indispensable tool for scholars but a corpus of letters that belong together, and are as remarkable a testament to a great artist’s life as any in the history of Romanticism.


Indexes reviewed

adoption can however be traced through the helpful index at the end of the book.


... unusually for a book which is based on an individual's story, it is extensively indexed.


The author, title, and subject indexes are quite thorough.


The index is adequate, although the general layout is so well structured that it may not be needed.


Gould also includes a comprehensive index...


There is a nine-page bibliography and a detailed index.


An exhaustive bibliography and a particularly thorough index complete the book.


Children can look up their favourite players in the index, but plowing through all 64 pages from start to finish is tedious and unlikely.


The excellent indexes at the end of the volume are by Fiamma Bianchi Bandinelli.


The index is helpful in enabling the reader to go straight to a topic of interest or area they want help in. *That being the general idea of having an index. Index by SI member Sylvia Potter.*


The high standards of editing, indexing and physical production, which we have come to expect from the publishers, are admirably maintained.


The reference value of the book is enhanced by... the glossary, and a very complete index.


It is strong on notes, references and indexes (no more than six unqualified page numbers in a row, and very little *passim*); it is itself well indexed.


The best bit by far, however, has to be the index. As well as having almost an entire page devoted to the instances of ‘Flaubert’ in the text, it also includes the following entries: ‘pedicurist’s: overcrowding at the, 187; ‘cutlets, lamb see Lucan, Lord’ and ‘Lucan, Lord: eats over a thousand sheep, 101; or perhaps half that number, 108’.


A list of contacts for more information and a comprehensive index appear at the end.


While children will enjoy browsing through these titles, the extensive indexes also make them useful for reports.

**Two cheers!**


The index is not perfect. It works well if one can identify the main subject heading under which something is listed and there are some helpful see also cross-references. I was mildly irritated with one see reference, however. I looked up Anton Piller Orders to find see Search and Seizure Orders; accurate as far as it goes, but it would have been easier on the reader to give the precise page reference.


Hundreds of English language anthologies published in North America and the United Kingdom have been indexed, and often reviewed, making this a useful selection tool.... Simple searches of Author, Author Category (a useful grouping of poets under headings such as Black-American), Subject and Title/First line/Last line can also be combined in the more complex Boolean Search.... However users looking for only sonnets for instance will be out of luck as no searches can be made using this term.... When searching, one can either enter exactly what is being sought or look through the alphabetic listing in that category.


The index is sufficient but, like the text, failed to produce an explanation for reducing and non-reducing sugars. *[But why should the index be expected to remedy the deficiencies of the text?]*


From a researcher's point of view I regret that the book does not have a subject index as this makes it difficult to access the multitude of topics contained in the text. I think this is a great shame, and whilst family and friends will much appreciate the index of people, the lack of a guide to subjects is a lost opportunity in a book of this importance. Whilst the process of indexing can be time-consuming *[what about the time consumed by the reader searching for something without the help of an index?]*, a fuller contents page giving key subheadings to the various chapters would have made the book more user-friendly.
There are excellent author and place indexes but, alas, no subject index. The clear content layout does go some way towards answering the need but some topics, well represented in the book, are not listed. Material on social inclusion, popular history and collecting the history of minority groups is there in plenty but, being scattered through the sections, cannot readily be found.


The first 41 figures are published by site and phase, which is good for showing associated groups, but the rest do not follow the, anyway rather complex, alphabetical and numerical sequence of wares and types. We are told that ‘the final order could not be established during the preliminary subdivision’. Appendix E does give an alphabetical and numerical index but the figures are still very hard to follow in detail and to link with the text.


The important feature of these volumes is a comprehensive index of persons and places, though it is slightly ridiculous to have entries as general as ‘parish’ which yields over 100 undifferentiated references. [Only ‘slightly’ ridiculous?]


I had only read the beautifully categorized contents, the surprisingly familiar bibliography, and the staggering index, and I was hooked…. In the index the word for itching is misspelled as ‘pruritus’, but in the text it is spelled correctly, *pruritis*…. The index is 39 pages, so you anticipate right away that this will be a worthwhile book. As I’ve said many times, a book is only as good as its index. That’s especially true of a book containing thousands of terms and as detailed as this one.

Indexes censured


The abbreviation for ‘Saint’ in the index of objects, however, is seriously misplaced, as if the word begins ‘St’ (p. 212); the same index would be much more useful with page references to the text. [So what does it have instead?]


It is disappointing that (despite the acknowledged help of a research assistant and proof reader) a book of such potential should be spoiled by numerous mistakes…. It is not clear from the main text that Audoonus and Ouen are one and the same saint in Latin and French guise; the two are separately listed in the index.…. The index contains spellings such as ‘Litchfield’ and ‘jewellery’ among other errors.


The two indices [sic] ‘General’ and ‘Title’, making a great effort at completeness, sometimes fall back defeated. The whole of an alliterative fragment on W. P. Ker, ‘Ker to the college came, wending his wild way’ (which has ‘accompanying sketches’) is included among the titles; but Ker is not mentioned in the General Index…. But here is, if not God’s, at any rate Chesterton’s plenty, celebrating God’s; and it is only to encourage explorers that I cite small defects in this magnificent guide to it.


These ‘uncensored’ memoirs seem in places to be unedited too (as can happen when an author is his own publisher. Some passages should have been pruned. The indexing has its inaccuracies. And plenty of names are misspelt….


Parts of the book lack rigour and consistency; especially needed are a more comprehensive and better-organized index and a glossary of tsunami jargon from the many fields involved.


Where Germano does mention print-on-demand – which is not featured in the (rather sparse) index – he does so in such a way that potential authors could well confl ate print-on-demand books with e-books….
finds room for Kingsley Amis, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Terence Rafferty (a film critic) and The Who. There are many references to adaptations, with entries for ‘Films’, ‘Omissions of characters in films’ (under ‘O’), ‘British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)’, ‘Miramax’, ‘Hugh Grant’ and ‘Emma Thompson’; we can look up ‘World wide web’, ‘E-text’ or ‘The Republic of Pemberley’ (c.1813), and we may be surprised to find such disconcerting phenomena as ‘Geocities’, ‘Property relations’, ‘Use rights’, ‘Value systems’ and ‘Foot binding’. We have to look only as far as page 2 to find that ‘Jan West’ is in fact ‘Jane’; Thomas Gainsborough ‘gaines’ an ‘e’; and ‘Sir James [Martin]’ (a character in ‘Lady Susan’) is listed under ‘S’.

If it seems unfair to dwell on the Bibliography and Index, it is worth remembering that this is a ‘Companion’, a book of reference....


It’s seriously flawed, however, in the paucity of its index, and the patchiness of its bibliographical references. This will profoundly limit its usefulness; and it is certainly, therefore, overpriced.


Finally, a practical moan. Why does each citation in the text lead one first to a footnote, which then simply refers one to the reference list? Bizarrely, both are then indexed. Thus, I am quoted once, yet the index affords me three page references (to the text, the footnote and the reference).


Louis Armstrong, though present on page 118 of Thomson’s book, is missing from its index. So are Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. They are in the text, but they don’t make it to the status of a fact that a scholar might want to look up later.


A number of infelicities, and just plain errors, might have been avoided by using a Medline database. More seriously, in a publication devoted to this topic, one might have expected more synonyms and a better index.


Sadly, its lasting appeal as a reference book is let down by a seriously inadequate index.


New Grove on Line, www.grovemusic.com, edited by Laura Macy, is convenient to use and in some ways more readily informative than NG2. It ‘searches’ swiftly.... Volume Twenty-nine of the printed edition is an index, but one too summary to be helpful. Use NGoL to discover all mentions of a subject, a person, or an instrument, all entries by an admired author.


A generally excellent glossary helps the reader understand numerous technical terms and acronyms, although some acronyms are left undecoded and entered into neither index nor glossary.... The index itself is seriously deficient, lacking entries for obvious topics such as the CLIR (or its predecessor, the CLR). Library of Congress, NISO, RLG, RLIN, and UNIX, and excluding a host of contemporary personal names important to the development of digital libraries (e.g. Henriette D. Avram). In fact the entire index contains only two personal names: Vannevar Bush and J. C. R. Licklider. Quite a number of index entries even lack their full complement of locators.


The enclosure of a CD-rom, with Medline links to all references as well as the whole text of the book, makes it astonishingly good value. The index might be improved in the next edition, but terms not listed (e.g. acne and psoriasis) can easily be found by searching the disc.


Nor do the editing and proof-reading win high marks: ‘corporate punishment’ suggests Enron rather than canonising, it’s hard to believe that ‘the fifteen-year-old Prince of Wales’ was serving with the Guards, and an index reference to page ‘388’ is of limited use in a book 366 pages long.


The Index, also Tolzmann’s responsibility, is altogether inadequate; it was evidently compiled by computer, with no sign of human intervention. It consists almost entirely of personal names, but even within those limits it is very poor; ‘Lorenzo’ turns out to be Lorenzo de’ Medici (also indexed under ‘de Medici’ but not under ‘Medici’); three cardinals are indexed under ‘Cardinal’; ‘Whittall’ is the Whittall Foundation, ‘Tilly’ refers to a mention of the capture of Heidelberg by Tilly’s troops, and so on.


Pearson’s retouching of his own portrait of the Kray twins adds authority to a landmark text on their lives and influence, despite indifferent editing and a woefully slapdash index.


If one may end with suggestions for the future, it would be good if catalogues of manuscripts could say more about the prosopography of their owners and donors, and provide more thorough indexes. This would help their works to make the historical (as well as the bibliographical) impact that they deserve.


More puzzling is the virtual absence of homosexuality. Lesbianism fails to make the full index at all, and homosexuality appears there once only, referring the reader to the entry on sexuality. There is actually better coverage a few pages later, under Sexual Orientation, but the topic deserves fuller treatment in such a volume.


The index of subjects is not much better, either. Presumably to disguise what an imbalance there is between the political names and those following other vocations, all the MPs and Ministers (even the names of Prime Ministers) are listed not by date or even in alphabetical order, but rather, alphabetically and not by period (even the names of Prime Ministers) are listed not by date or even in alphabetical order, but rather, alphabetically and not by period of office, under the parties to which they belonged.


The names of some of those who have had a profound effect on the study of these years are mentioned: François Furet, Alfred Cobban
and Eugen Weber, for instance. But their names are banned from the index, a sign that this book is not about their writings. [Or a sign of a not very comprehensive index?]


Incidentally, the Pan Macmillan General Books Design Department has fashioned, in the typographical design, a rather lovely homage to late 18th- and early 19th-century printing; it is only a shame that the undersized and overloaded text of the index seems to belong to another book entirely.


With the mistaken assurance of long association, Milford mistitles a major poem (even in the index).

**Excessive page number references.**

... the index does not refer to the relevant map or maps (confusingly the maps are provided with an apparatus for locating place names by having letters and figures provided in the margins; these are without explanation and one must assume they belong to some abandoned stage in developing this Atlas).


Overall the book is a fine collection of scholarly work that is supported with copious notes and an index, although the latter is not terribly detailed, and it suffers from occasional entries with excessive page number references.


... it suffers, as usual, from bad Verso indexing.

### Indexes omitted


Eskin’s story is well told, marred only by an irritating paucity of dates which makes it difficult for the reader to work out what year is being referred to (a typo on page 229 gives 1990 when it should be 1999). An index would have helped. These quibbles aside, I followed the author with growing fascination...


... the lack of an index is regrettable.


Finally, for me, and I suspect for a number of other readers, a book this size really needs an index.


The book is quite fat and deals with a lot of poets, Irish and British, so massively populated with relatives, friends and literary personalites, with references to public places, works of art and a variety of cities and towns in America and Europe. There are also some helpful notes, but not nearly enough of them. In this most recent printing of A Small Boy there are no notes of any kind, no index and a cursory two-page foreword.

I mention page numbers because, crassly, there is no index. What if I can’t remember when it was that the future US President Herbert Hoover and his wife translated into English *De Re Metallica,* the standard European text on salt-making published by Georgius Agricola in 1556? Or if I want to remind myself who suggested that women would live longer, healthier lives if they washed their genitals in the urine of a cabbage eater? (It was Cato.)


One criticism of the first edition [of 1991], that it had no bibliography, has been corrected. However, in an era when historians are being criticized for lack of attribution, this book includes no source notes. ... and there is still no subject index to allow readers to track a chemical product through its development and use. [It’s a long, hard struggle.]


In a work without index or references, you have to trust the facts or the whole ediifice lurches drunkenly into the maze like the masked guests at Mitchell's own wedding party.

**Editora Sextante:** *De esperança à Utopia: testemunho de uma vida,* by Paulo Evaristo Arns (512 pp, £35). Rev. by Margaret Helselwaite, Times Literary Supplement, 10 May 2002.

It is to be hoped that when this important work finds an English translator and publisher, it will also find an indexer. There are many good stories, but with not even an alphabetical list of names it is hard to find your way around, especially since Arns has devised a curiously confusing way of ordering his subject matter.


What a pity there is no index.


There is much of academic interest (though the absence of an index is a minor quibble)... [Oh!] comments the sender of this item. Rev. by Robert Nye, The Times, 17 April 2002.

The book is quite fat and deals with a lot of poets, Irish and British, American and East European, ‘predecessors and contemporaries’ (as the blurb says), yet it has no index and that is fitting. By the end, there is this sense that everyone and everything has turned into Seamus Heaney. [Well, if you say so.]


For the moment, this rich and informative study will provide an indispensable tool, despite a good deal of repetitiveness and the regrettable absence of an index.


The only single-volume edition of the three books [of James’s memoirs], edited by Frederick Dupee, was published in 1956 and is long out of print. Dupee provides an index, much needed for books so massively populated with relatives, friends and literary personalities, with references to public places, works of art and a variety of cities and towns in America and Europe. There are also some helpful notes, but not nearly enough of them. In this most recent printing of A Small Boy there are no notes of any kind, no index and a cursory two-page foreword.

Having brought so much together and begun to disentangle it all, it seems odd that the book shouldn’t be provided with an index.


There are some misspellings and the book deserves an index…


Apart from the lack of index, this book provides an excellent study of the subject.


Look at Chris Woodhead’s much-discussed Class War; its claim to seriousness and amending the record is warped by the absence of an index and the editor’s failure to curb infuriating repetition even of flippant expressions like ‘a tad’.


Holroyd, who is a fine stylist, is perhaps too reliant on the colon: this is contagious. And, irritatingly, there is no index.


Bookshop browsers will not be alone in regretting the lack of an index.


…it is a travesty for publishers to produce a book of this kind without an index.


The bibliography and list of works are a bonus which make the lack of an index puzzling.


…there is no index to track the dense and intricate information.


The ‘fast track guide’ which the authors suggest the reader can use to find suitable recipes is really a list of sources, not very functional, and there is no index.


If Beecham Stories unavoidably falls short as a character-sketch, it should not fail as a work of reference. But it has no index, and the anecdotes are grouped rather loosely by content. But these quibbles will matter little to Beecham fans…[I would like to prohibit the use of the word ‘quibble’ in connection with the absence of an index.]


As we have remarked before, this remarkably wide-ranging account of pure and applied science would be more than doubly valuable if an index allowed you to find what is going on in broad or narrow fields and disciplines. Have said which we suddenly see an enclosed note that says you can search by subject or word by consorting with www.irishscientist. OK, OK: technology wins.


A list of illustrations and an index of personal names complete the book. Here I should have liked to find a subject index, for how often does one not need to trace a book only vaguely remembered or wonder whether a bibliography of a certain subject exists.


I have cavils: no index, an over-sweet choice of cover…


Its creation is a mammoth achievement, one that, is one is not surprised to see sadly acknowledged in the introduction, was far too much for one person to carry alone. In such circumstances, to suggest that an index would have been useful seems simply churlish. [The logic of this remark escapes me.]


Editorially there is only one blemish: no index.


Up the Down Escalator is a book without an index. It is hard to work through its windy generalities without wondering if that omission results from the difficulty of making something tangible out of an idea that has no substance. But at least Leadbeater powerfully illustrates the general theory which he seeks to promote. Future books on changes in society are certain to be an improvement on this one.


One quibble: De Teran’s division of entries according to the four ancient elements is no substitute for the lack of contents page or index.


Shamefully, these memoirs have no index.

Obiter dicta


The Child That Books Built [sic] is a gem, unshowily erudite, beautifully written and heartfelt without being sentimental. Even better, it is the kind of book that makes you want to read other books and to revisit your own childhood reading. This makes the absence of a bibliography and, worse, an index all more deplorable. It is like neglecting to plumb and wire a house.

However, it is a growing trend among pennypinching publishers who seem to think that such shoddy workmanship is acceptable. These days it’s common for non-fiction books to appear without an index or an index that’s almost useless, with few entries and even fewer sub-headings.

As Bernard Levin once pointed out: ‘The sign of an indexer who is wholly unequal to the task is the use of strings of indifferencedated
page numbers which, as far as the reader’s need of an index is concerned, is literally useless.’

It was enough to make Levin’s blood boil. We understand how he felt.

From now on therefore we will endeavour to name and shame publishers who think they can short-change the reading public with such shoddy products. Watch this space. [We will.]

**Farrar, Straus & Giroux:** *Flaubert: a life*, by Geoffrey Wall ($27).


No abbreviation of the life may ever match the cranky wit and wry felicity of Julian Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot* (which, however, enjoys the riffing privileges of fiction). But the author of the *Dictionary of Received Ideas* — the glossary of clichés that Flaubert appended to *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, his ‘encyclopedia of human stupidity’ in novel form — would surely have bellowed with joy at the themes listed after his name in Wall’s index. With a few minor omissions, they are as follows: ‘Flaubert, Gustave: aesthetic mysticism; alleged sadism; artistic intransigence; attitude to marriage; castration complex; celebrity and influence; chevalier de la Légion d’honneur; death; debts; dogs; fatness; hallucinations; interest in history; masturbation; modernity; pleasure taken in books; pleasure taken in travelling; realism; recitations; romanticism; sexual abstinence; sexual initiation; sexual passion; syphilis use of prostitutes; views on book illustrations.’

Flaubert might also have argued against spoiling the effect of such a deliciously incriminating catalogue with the clutter of elaboration.


To enter this world of ‘bookbinding historians’, indexers, archivists and ‘collectors of drawing manuals’ is to believe, despite all abundant evidence to the contrary, that our literary culture still survives. [A cheering thought.]


Noteworthy among offenders are IBP, or Iowa Beef Packers, who supply an amazing amount of cow meat to the fast food industry. Look at their index entry: ‘Deceptive practices of, 166, 179–81, 206; emissions violations of, 164–65; lawsuits against, 182–83; and meat contamination, 203, 213–14; … and organized crime, 154–55…’ It goes on. Those are just some of the highlights.


Robertson… was in jocular form at the launch. The work is the first legal tome, he boasted, to include the F-word in its index. He apologised for the date of the occasion (Valentine’s Day — not, apparently, having realised its significance). Proof, according to Ian Hislop, the Editor of *Private Eye*, that lawyers know nothing about life.

Legal Diary, *The Times*, 19 Feb. 2002

### Something to indicate

**Hazel K. Bell**

Julian Barnes’s collection of essays on France and French writers, *Something to declare* (Barnes, 2002), has an index as delightful and intriguing as that to his *Letters from London* (Barnes, 1995), which we hailed in *The Indexer* in 2001 (Bell, 2001). The same ingenious techniques are deployed as before.

There is the careful contrivance of entries to enhance the original text. For example, Barnes taxes a biographer of Lord Lucan with an obsession with statistics, he having among other calculations stated how many sheep must have provided the number of lamb cutlets eaten by Lord Lucan. Further on, the biographer’s arithmetic is disproved. This is indexed as:

Lucan, Lord: eats over a thousand sheep; or perhaps half that number

Claude Chabrol’s film of *Madame Bovary* is criticized. Among other flaws: ‘Chabrol feels obliged to show us a tangle of Emma and Léon inside the cab, just to confirm that they aren’t playing Scrabble’. In the index:

Scrabble: not being played

Chabrol has been married three times. ‘Three wives, and always the same wedding-ring’, his third wife is quoted as commenting. So, in the index:

Chabrol, Claude: … pertinacity of wedding ring

and also, under marriage

a tenacious wedding-ring

There are other running jokes or mocking echoes traceable through the subheadings of this index:

Belgium: … Simenon escapes, 103

marriage: as an escape from Belgium, 103

newspapers: as an escape from Belgium, 103

Jean-Paul Sartre’s grandmother ‘in her seventies was still complaining about the leek salad she and her husband had shared … on their honeymoon half a century earlier’. This yields the index entries:

Food: … momentous dispute over leeks

leeks: Sartrean dispute over

In the preface to *Something to declare* Barnes tell us, “‘I wish he’d shut up about Flaubert’,” Kingsley Amis, with popped truculence, once complained to a friend of mine’. So, we find in the index not only

Amis, Sir Kingsley: limited zeal for Flaubert, xiv

but also

Flaubert, Gustave: … Kingsley Amis has heard enough of, xiv

and furthermore

Lee, Hermione, xiv

Dr Lee is not named on page xiv – but this entry must tell us who was the friend of Barnes to whom Amis vented his exasperation.

There are other examples of identification by index only:

Kavanagh, Pat, 3, 52
The index is a flick through history: ‘oatmeal Sunday pudding’, ‘saddle of mutton with mousse of turnips’, ‘sheep’s tongue’, ‘savoury black plum toast’.

Eliot is faulted on a number of counts, as suggested by a random glance at the index, where, under ‘Eliot, Thomas Stearns,’ we encounter, among many other entries, ‘antipathy to VHE,’ ‘hermaphroditism,’ ‘obsessional orderliness,’ ‘fear of women/female sexuality,’ ‘disgust for heterosexual love,’ ‘snobbishness,’ ‘misogyny,’ ‘anti-Semitism’ — you name the defect and you’ll find it listed.

In addition to their innumerable duties, almost all of them excruciating, the Royal Family has one main function: to go on being a family. In The Royals, Kitty Kelley’s louche but lively blockbuster of 1997, the most capacious subsection in the index for Prince Philip is ‘and women’ (76, 152, 154–55, 159–60, 192, 265, 422, 423–27, 510–11). Lacey’s emphasis falls the other way (‘rumors of infidelities, 166–68, 212’).

is named on neither page — nowhere in the book except in the index — but on page 3 we have ‘two of us were traversing a high upland plateau’, and on page 52: ‘My wife recalls reading an E. D. article about breadmaking ...’
The interesting entry

Hodgkin, Howard: cover, 52
is explained by ‘Cover painting by Howard Hodgkin’ in the back flap of the book cover, and ‘A painter friend, now in his sixties, recalls ...’ on page 52.
Some entries offer an intriguing narrative development or contradiction direct:

Armstrong, Lance: refuses to speak French; speaks French again
Boardman, Chris: reasons for not taking drugs; ‘retires to take drugs’
Conran, Terance: praises [Elizabeth David’s] prose; disparages her prose
Goncourt, Edmond: loathing of Courbet; admiration for Courbet
Prussia: impossibility of war with; war with

Another entry seems an exercise in prose:

Courbet, Gustave: realism; careerism; Yevtushenkoism; egotism; modernism; snobbism; anti-imperialism; alcoholism

Many subheadings sharply whet our curiosity:

Asparagus: poet’s revulsion at urinary consequences
bourgeoisie: gleefully spanked
Cany-Barville: rebarbative soup
cows: as intelligent as village girls; Flaubert wants to hug one; bad pianist makes them flee
Eiffel Towers: a small man collects them
Flaubert, Gustave: ... erotic bifurcation
Gautier, Théophile: co-poisoner of Sartre
Godard, Jean-Luc: ... preposterous telegram
Hugo, Victor: hogs the rainbow
Pont du Gard: not intelligent enough for Henry James; sublime enough for Edith Wharton

I give my assurance, consultation of the text offers justification for all these entries!

Unfulfilled promise

A most tempting destination is the Iberian peninsula, if only because of the promise in the Let’s Go Spain and Portugal 2002 guidebook. Skipping through the index of his copy, Dr Abrahams of Oxford came across an entry for nipples: ‘nipples — see orgasm’. Curiosity led him to look up ‘orgasm’ only to be directed to pages 253 and 565 — neither of which, he found after careful reading, contained any relevant material.

‘Oh my God, something’s gone wrong here,’ says a spokeswoman for Pan Macmillan publishing. ‘That is very weird — but it’s not our fault. We get our information from the USA.’

Jack Malvern, Diary, The Times, 19 March 2002

The joys of ‘passim’

Then there is the scholarly apparatus. Volume III, The Return of the King, has 110 pages of appendices, and another 23 of separate indexes for songs and verses, first lines, persons, beasts and monsters, places, things. The Lord of the Rings was the first book I read which had anything like this at the back, the first book I ever read in which the scholarly rituals were observed; in which you flipped from index to text to appendix, cross-referring to maps. I remember how impressed I was with the word ‘passim’, used especially often of Frodo, the hero, in the index. I remember how

Then, as before, we have the classified entries, assembling together references to a single subject from the various essays, to produce such cumulations as:

Excretion: daunting lavatories; French brothels like English lavatories; motorists demand better plumbing; Courbet’s eighteen litres; failure to preserve the infant Flaubert’s excrement disappoints Sartre; literature as shit; Louise Colet writes ‘chamber-pot of a book’; Flaubert ‘shitting catapults’; ‘merde, merde et archeimerde’; Turgenev’s soul like cesspool; tide of shit beats against ivory tower

The subheading referring to Sartre recurs under Flaubert’s entry as ‘no excrement preserved’.

God: fails to impress Jacques Brel; paints like Courbet; ‘that old and evil plumage’; priests an obstacle to; if just, would turn [George] Sand into a man; Sand at ease with; Holy Ghost as parrot
Sex: Frenchmen’s skills exaggerated; spankers and spankees; lack of respect for condoms; Flaubert, satisfactory; Musset disappointing; French-kissing a publisher; ‘fucking your inkwell’; buggery in the Champs Élysées; pitiful chastity of the young; three saucy stories; lefoutro; how they do it in Paris; French women’s expectations; Frenchmen’s expectations; podophilia

The text itself is already supremely witty throughout. But what’s wrong with gilding lilies, anyway?

Note
We are grateful to Julian Barnes for permission to quote Something to Declare here.

References

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Indexes reviewed
impressed I was with myself as I studied the chronologies and family trees.


Summing up a life

But Ms. Phillips was far more brutal about herself than about any of the people she scorned. She detailed her descent into drugs, which almost killed her. She wrote that on Oscar night for The Sting in 1974, she took ‘a diet pill, a small amount of coke, two joints, six halves of Valium, which make three, and a glass and a half of wine.’ The index listing of her name at the end of her book (You’ll never eat lunch in this town again, 1991) seemed to sum up her personal life: ‘depressions of… drug wanderings of… pregnancies of… loneliness of… suicidal behaviour of…’


Those unworlly indexers…

Shackles. She looked it up in Witkin under S, knowing it wouldn’t be there. Those unworlly scholars who indexed legal books and computerized legal research didn’t think like she did. She was going to have to find every case Collier might come up with in support of his position, as well as offer countervailing authority. Local court rules, exceptions to… inherent powers of the judiciary… escape… prisoners, physical restraints on…

Shackles. Fetters, bonds, chains, leg cuffs, irons, manacles...

Perri O'Shaughnessy, Invasion of privacy, Island Books (Dell Publishing), 1996

Elusive listing

But trying to find a listing for ‘Goliath’ in the Bombay address book – or in any book – proved impossible. In Bombay phone books, names may be listed under their employer’s name or under the name of the person who first installed the telephone or under whoever paid the most for an entry. Categories were constantly shifting, and as mobile phones and fax machines arrived and street names were updated to reflect current political beliefs, the dialling code for a fishing community became by tomorrow a code for the inner city.

Squinting at the rows of white on black lettering on the flickering screen I reflected, not for the first time, on how in a computer era the whole book if they’re not in. Shakles. Fettles. Fetters, bonds, chains, leg cuffs, irons, manacles...

Simon Hoggart’s diary, The Guardian, 29 June 2002

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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 2002 and 30 May 2003.

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*Quair = a literary work (in Scots language)
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