Subject indexing of poetry — Could we? Should we?

Hazel K. Bell

Hazel Bell considers various approaches to the organization of poetry by theme and the indexing of poetry, and asks whether subject indexing of poetry is feasible, examining examples from the eighteenth century onwards.

In a letter to the Editor of *The Indexer* in April 1992, Anthony Ellis lamented:

> As a teacher, I often regret the lack of adequate indexing to poetry anthologies. The usual 'Author' and 'First Line' indexes are not very useful when one is teaching a theme and wishes to include appropriate poems. A s*ubject* index would be of far greater use. (Ellis 1992)

A reasonable complaint. But, at a meeting of the Society of Indexers, I challenged the feasibility of providing such indexes to poetry, quoting a sonnet by Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'The Starlight Night':

> Its meaning is conveyed or implied by deploying sound, form, rhythm, imagery, association and symbolism. ... It holds much, dense meaning; but the reader must derive his own meaning, responding personally. ... The text contains and uses much more than mere information ... Here, description itself is more important than the object described, and the form is more significant than the content. Indexers fasten on content, not form. This type of text I would consider quite unindexable. (Bell 1992)

Ellis's wish to find poems appropriate to a particular theme could in fact be met by classification of collections of poetry as well as by subject indexing. There have been some such: many hymnbooks have included indexes listing the texts prefaced to each hymn, identifying scriptural quotations in the hymn, or identifying paraphrases for the use of preachers seeking hymns to fit in with the text of their sermon or theme of their service (Beckerlegge 1992).

However, through the centuries, there have been several attempts at the subject indexing of poetry, some proving to be classsifactions in indexes' clothing — purported subject indexes.

Index as memory prompt

The eighteenth century produced several editions of narrative poems with indexes attached. Simon Stern suggests that these indexes were usually intended basically as memory prompts, 'including only enough information to point the reader to the material he seeks ... treating the reader as a re-reader'. He has described five such indexes (Stern, 2009):

[The index to] John Henley's *Esther Queen of Persia* (1714) offered the reader entries such as "the Gibbet erected" and "Room of State describ'd," but provided fuller summations of some the poem's similes, such as "*Comparison of* Mordecai *to a Rich Oar in the Mine, not useful, till produc'd.*" An edition of Young's *Night Thoughts,* published in 1777 with a twenty-five-page index prepared by W. Waring, directed the reader to "Example, the force of it pernicious," and "Grief, of greater efficacy than learning or genius," along with a similarly detailed index of similes. ... Jacob Tonson's early editions of *Paradise Lost* (1705, 1707) included a nine-page "Table of the Most Remarkable Parts . . . under the Three Heads of Descriptions, Similies, and Speeches." The entries were very brief, listing under the heading of "Descriptions" such matters as "Amaranth" and "Apples of Sodom," while "Similies" included entries such as "Clouds" and "Spears to Corn." Tonson's 1711 edition supplied a forty-page table, now labeled an index, and mixing the elliptical entries of the previous editions with more extensive entries (e.g., "Faith, unnecessary Endeavours to approve it, Suspicious"). This index was reprinted in numerous later editions, and then, from 1750 onward, was supplemented with a 180–page concordance, described as a "verbal index." Over four decades, the minimal cues in the index were replaced with a level of verbal detail that might help the reader's memory, but that might also serve the purposes of a critic, essayist, or anthologist. ... the indexes to Pope's translations of the *Iliad* (1720) and the *Odyssey* (1726) were highly intricate ... The index to the *Iliad ...* is twenty-nine pages long and consists of three parts, each ordered alphabetically: "An Index of Persons and Things"; "A Poetical Index" with numerous subsections covering the plot, similes, and descriptions of characters and places,

among other things; and "An Index of Arts and Sciences," covering topics such as architecture, music, and policy. The index to the *Odyssey* is less elaborate, serving mainly to direct the reader to plot episodes, but also includes long entries under such headings as "Description, "Morality," and "Similitudes."

Anthology indexing

The thousand best poems

Edward William Cole (1832-1918) was, amongst other things, a bookseller and proprietor of Cole's Book Arcade in Melbourne, Australia complete with its 'Smiling Gallery' of funny mirrors; a 'Wonderland' of multiple-reflection optical illusions; a 'Black Man Who Turned White; a penny-in-the-slot 'Hen that Laid the Golden Eggs'; and a cage full of live monkeys and cane chairs where you could sit and read your books before deciding whether to buy. Cole also wrote and published many works of his own, including *Discourse in Defence of Mental Freedom* (1868), *The Real Place in History of Jesus and Paul*, *Cole's Funny Picture Book* (1879), *Cole's Fun Doctor* (1886), *Cole's Intellect Sharpener* (1900), and – the one of most interest in this context:

THE THOUSAND BEST POEMS IN THE WORLD
       FIRST SERIES — CONTAINING FIVE
         HUNDRED POEMS
SELECTED AND ARRANGED BY E. W. COLE

The date of publication is uncertain. The Australian National Library suggest 1892 as a possibility, BibliOZ mention having had a first edition dated 1899 but they may be referring to the second edition, edited by Ernest Hope – see below - a copy of which has the inscription of 1899). This is a most entertaining volume, its various components – dedication, preface, a note to the 'Friendly Reader' explaining that **'**the Library of the Future [was] to be composed entirely of the Cream of Human Knowledge' , and an 'Appeal to the Intelligent Reader for Advice and Assistance', all eminently quotable; and, gloriously, it includes a — so-called — Index to Subjects.

Cole declares, 'This little book of poetry contains fully half of the favourite poetic gems of the world collected together for the first time.' He acknowledges his selection to be subjective: 'The pieces in this collection may not all be what a severe critic would call good poetry. I have selected them for their soul-stirring ideas rather than for their mere poetic embellishment'; and he admits that 'there are many good ones with which I am unacquainted'. But he boldly adds, 'Perhaps there are a million printed poems in the world, and to pick out the thousand best is no small difficulty, but mankind is equal to it, and it will be done'.

Cole's 'Index to subjects' is rather what we would call a table of contents. (By contrast his 'Contents', discussed below, is in fact an index of titles). He allocates his chosen 500 poems to the subjects indexed, or listed — thus in fact classifying rather than indexing the poems. The subjects are listed not alphabetically but in the order in which they appear in the book. The 'Index' begins with groupings of the human family components, then emotions, religion, virtues, abstract qualities, the elements, weather, animals, plants. Within these rough groupings the order of specific items is quite remarkable. Consider this sequence (with the number of pages for each subject added): Love (6); Devoted love (13); Proposing (1); Marriage (1); Unfortunates (13); Tears (2). Does some sad autobiographical experience determine this ordering of topics? Sixty-three 'subjects' are listed, ending with 'Miscellaneous', 'A Gem of Gems' and 'Additional poems (unclassified)'. Finally come eight blank pages 'to write or paste any Gems of Poetry in that you may come across'.

The largest category is Children (28 pages); next comes Nobleness (15 pages); then Mother, Husband and Wife, and Unfortunates (13 pages each). Sister, Woman's rights, Proposing, Marriage, Equality, Praise and fame, Freedom, various aspects of weather, Dogs and Animals get one page each. 'Books' has three pages, containing 17 extracts from poems about books (one page is entirely occupied by a 26-stanza poem by Cole himself, 'The Blessedness of Books').

There is a strange discrimination in such categorization as Wives (5 pages), Husband and wife (14), Mother (14), Parents (8) and Sister (1), with no section for Father or Brother: Of course, this shows the subjects that poets most chose to celebrate rather than the indexer's values. Man (singular) has six pages, Women (plural) three, and Woman's (singular again) rights, one. A fine line is drawn between Nobleness (15) and Nobility (5), Charity (3) and Kindness (9). 'Animals' has only one page, 'Horses'

has two and 'Dogs' one. 'Plants', surprisingly, has only one page – with no separate entries for flowers or trees.

'A Gem of Gems' has the subheading, 'The Best Verses of the Best Poets' (ten pages) with snippets arranged under such headings as 'Unappreciated Genius', 'Universal Gravitation', 'Intellectual Expansion', 'Harmony of Nature', 'Words', 'The Golden Stair' (ascended by a child to join the angels), concluding with 'Good Advice to All'.

The 'Additional Poems' section (42 pages) has the subtitle, 'To be classified in a later edition'. Some of its poems obviously belong in sections already existing in the main part of the book, such as 'The children', 'The tired wife', 'Woman's rights'. Perhaps Cole was constantly discovering more great poems to include, while the printer explained that further repagination would be expensive; that might account for the varying type faces and sizes in which the poems appear, some in very small print, as though crammed in.

Cole's 'Contents' lists the titles of poems in alphabetical order, the page on which each poem appears indicating the sections to which they have been allotted. Some seem reasonable classifications; others intriguing. Among those in the opening section of the Contents are:

Abou Ben Adhem and the Angel [in Human brotherhood]

Address to the   Mummy in Belzoni's exhibition [Unclassified]

African chief [Slavery]

After death [A future state – a section that follows GOD; Religion]

Alexander Selkirk [Miscellaneous]

All men equal [Equality]

Always a future [Unclassified – could it not have been included in A future state?]

Animal existence [Duty – not Animals]

Annie Gray [Unfortunates]

Arab's farewell to his steed [Horses]

Are the children at home [Husband and wife]

Are the heroes dead [Nobility]

Are we not brothers [Human brotherhood – an unarguable classification]

Arsenal at Springfield [Unclassified]

Asleep at the switch [Steam]

Art [Knowledge]

Auld Robin Gray [Husband and Wife]

Baby [Unclassified. *Hmm.*]

Beautiful child [Children]

Beautiful hands [Man. *Well ...!]*

Beautiful Snow [Unfortunates]

Beautiful war [War]

Better than gold   [Unclassified]

Bet Graham [Nobleness]

Beth Gelert [Dogs]

Betsey and I are out [Husband and wife]

This volume was followed, probably in about 1899, by a second, containing another 500 poems, edited by Ernest Hope, who wrote in the preface, 'This volume forms the concluding portion of The THOUSAND BEST POEMS IN THE WORLD ... In the main, the plan and classification adopted for the first volume have been adhered to' — thus recognizing that Cole's poems were indeed classified, not

indexed. The largest section in the second collection is for War, with 15 pages (it had five in the first volume).

The pageant of English poetry

The pageant of English poetry which was compiled by R. M. Leonard and first published by Oxford University Press in 1909, puports to have a proper Subject Index. The volume has 606 pages, 'being', the title page proclaims, '1150 poems and extracts by 300 authors'. The prefatory note adds that these 'cover a period of upwards of 600 years ... The work of living poets has been excluded': the earliest poet quoted is Geoffrey Chaucer (six extracts); the latest is W. E. Henley who died in 1903 and has two poems included ('Out of the Night' and 'England, My England'). The note also states

> The poets appear in alphabetical order, and their poems are also printed in the alphabetical order of first lines … At the beginning of the book there is a list of authors, giving their full names and the dates of birth and death where known … at the end are two indexes, one of first lines of the poems ... and the other a subject index, in which an attempt has been made at classification.

– A fascinating attempt, indeed. The subject index runs from page 601 to 606, with a headnote including:

> In this index, which does not pretend to be exhaustive, the poems have been classified under main headings.

So Leonard recognizes, as Hope did, that the designated subject index is really a gallant attempt at classification.

The punctuation of the index is elaborate: a capital initial letter for each main entry; a space and a colon following each entry term; a full stop following each list of numbers and each cross-reference. These last are curiously distinguished: *See* is used, as today, to indicate listing under an alternative term; while indication of additional terms to be consulted, for which today we would instruct *see also*, again have *See*, but these supplementary references are enclosed in brackets.

The number of references for each entry gives an indication of the major topics of poetry at the beginning of the 20th century. The full entry for 'Love', for example, with 19 subheadings, takes one and a half of the index's 11 columns (no surprise really that that topic comes out top). The longest single entry, with 13 lines of references, is for the subheading 'tributes of' under Love; next is 'Elegies and Dirges' (9 lines); then 'Poets and poetry' (7); 'Love ___ unrequited', 6; 'Historical' (6); and 'Birds', 'Children and childhood', 'Flowers', 'Life ___ the true living of', 'Love ___ desires of' and 'Spring' (5 lines). There is no subject with only one poem referring to it but many with just two.

The selection of terms and of cross-references gives an interesting indication of the values of the period. For example: 'Historical. (*See* Patriotism)', 'Patriotism. (*See* Heroism)' [and seeing it, we find 'Heroism and courage']; 'Loyalty. *See* Kings and Queens.', 'Kings and Queens. (*See* Jacobitism.)', 'Queens. *See* Kings.' ; 'Suicide. *See* Murder'.

Below is a selection of entries from this most curious 'index', the figure in brackets indicating the number of lines devoted to each entry, each line having about 7 references so three lines means about 21 references. The original punctuation is reproduced exactly.

> Animals : (3 lines)
>
> Art. *See* Drama, Painting.
>
> Battles: (2). (*See* Sea-Fights.)
>
> Beauty, Ideal : (1)
>
> Birds : (5). (*See* Cuckoo, Nightingale, Owl, Raven, Robin, Thrush, Skylark.)
>
> Boys and boyhood : (3).
>
> Children and childhood : (5). (*See* Death of Children.)
>
> Content and calm : (3).
>
> Courage. *See* Heroism.
>
> Creation and the Creator : (3).

Death (Miscellaneous) : (3).

___ death-bed and burial : (3)

___ desire of : (1).

___ fear or fearlessness of : (2).

___ for country's sake : (1). (*See* Patriotism.)

___ inevitableness of : (2).

___ mystery of the hereafter : (1). (*See* Heaven.)

___ of children : (1).

___ orations : (1).

___ prospect of : (2).

___ victory over : 1. (*See* Elegies and Dirges; Epitaphs, &c.; Love; Murder and Suicide.)

Disillusionment : [this leads to 4 poems, by Byron, Shakespeare ("O! that this too too solid ..."); Thackeray; Wordsworth]

Doctors. *See* Medicine.

Dogs : [poems by Blake, E. B. Browning, Spenser]

Elegies and Dirges : (9). (*See* Death.) [= 63 references – no subheadings]

Fairy stories, fables, legends, &c. : (2). (*See* Classical mythology.)

Fish, fishing, and fishermen : [poems by Joanna Baillie, Crabbe, Donne, Gray, Carolina, Lady Nairne, Smollett, Wolcot]

Flowers : (5). (*See* Daffodils, Primroses, Roses, Violets.)

Forgetfulness : [only Marston and Macbeth are cited here]

Goethe [as subject, treated of by Arnold and Thackeray ("Werther had a love for Charlotte ...")]

Heaven : (2). (*See* Death, mystery of the hereafter.)

Heroism and courage : (2).

Historical : (6). (*See* Patriotism.)

Independence and Liberty : (2).

Jacobitism : (1).

Jesus Christ. *See* Religion.

Kings and Queens : (3). (*See* Jacobitism.)

Kisses : (1).

Life, definition or description of : (3).

___ mystery and complexity of : (2).

___ philosophy of : (4).

___ the true living of : (5).

Love, coldness in : (2).

___ constancy in : (4).

___ courtship : (4).

___ death of : (1).

___ definition and description of : (2).

___ desires of : (5).

___ falsehood in : (3).

___ farewells and partings : (3).

___ fickleness and coquetry in : (2).

___ ideal : (1).

___ philosophy of : (4).

___ power of : (3).

___ tragedies of : (4).

___ tributes of : (13). (*See* Marriage.)

___ unrequited : (6).

___ and war : (1).

___ as a plague : (1).

___ for the absent : (2).

___ for the dead : (3).

Loyalty. *See* Kings and Queens.

Martyrs : [only Milton on Piedmont and Wade on "The True Martyr"]

Medicine and doctors : [Chaucer, Johnson and Shakespeare – Macbeth again]

men and manhood : (3).

Milton [as subject] : (1).

Morality. *See* Virtue.

Murder and suicide : (2).

Orations. *See* Death.

Patriotism : (4). (*See* Heroism)

Poets and poetry : (7). (*See* Addison, Browning, Chapman, &c.)

Loyalty. *See* Kings and Queens.

Religion : (2).

___ comfort of : (1).

___ faith and criticism : (2).

___ Jesus Christ : (3).

___ observances : (1).

___ teaching and doctrines of : (2).

___ (*See* Hymns, Nuns, Prayer, Preaching.)

Repentance : [only Drummond and Fletcher]

Reptiles : [Cowper and Shakespeare – the Dream]

Robin : (2).

Self-control : [only Clough and Newman]

Sexes, The relations of the : (1). [No cross-reference to Love here!]

Shakespeare : (2).

Spring : (5).

Suicide. *See* Murder.

War : (4). (*See* Battles, Sea-fights, Soldiers.)

Women and womankind : (3).

Humorous indexes

I have written previously in *The Indexer* about two deliberately humorous indexes in twentieth-century anthologies. (Bell 1974; 1986)

The Stuffed Owl tongue-in-cheek *Anthology of Bad Verse* boasts a SUBJECT INDEX, so headed, which does indeed rcfer to the contents of the separate poems in the book. It features such lèse-majestic entries as these (I have added the names of the authors of the poems cited. Lewis and Lee 1930):

Bird. *See* Maiden, feathered [Hervey]

False Gallia's sons. See Frenchmen [Grainger]

Fish, Tennyson contrives to avoid mentioning

George II, his fortunate philoprogenitiveness [Cibber]

German place-names, the poet does his best with [Cibber]

Gill, Harry, his extensive but inadequate wardrobe [Wordsworth]

Heaven, unexpected grandeur of its architecture [Watts]

Immortality, hope of, distinguishes man from silk-worm [Wordsworth]

Maiden, Swiss, coming-on disposition of [Longfellow]

Muse, reformed by a pension [Young]

Pond, 3ft. x 2ft. [Wordsworth]

Surprise, unqualified, Jonah's [Young]

Tadpole, poetically celebrated [Darwin]

Tapeworm, lonely but prolific [Darwin]

Wet-nurses, male parents useless as [Wordsworth]

York, Duke of, a cargo in himself [Dryden]

This is an index which clearly aims to mock rather than to aid location of items, but at least it is indeed what it says on the tin, a true Subject Index, and it gives page references. Equally mocking, but less conventional in form, is the index to *The complete clerihews* of E. Clerihew Bentley (Bentley 1983), which is as original as the book itself.

The clerihews were published in a succession of volumes, each with its own index (the work of Bentley himself), starting with *Biography for Beginners* (1905).
The first composite index was to *Clerihews Complete* (1951), but was selective only. *The Complete Clerihews* (OUP, 1981), was the first complete collection of clerihews published, and was succeeded in 1983 by a revised, paperback edition, including for the first time all entries from all the original indexes. The latest edition dates from 2008, available in paper and hardback and also as a Kindle ebook (complete with the index).

A 'clerihew' is described in the introduction as 'a humorous pseudo-biographical quatrain, rhymed as two couplets, with lines of uneven length'; such as:

> The sermons of John Knox
>
> Teemed with disapproval of frocks.
>
> There was no acquiescence by him in
>
> The Monstrous Regiment of Women.

There are 139 such verses in the 1983 volume, provided with an index of ten pages, double-column, headed, 'Index of Psychology, Mentality and Other Things frequently noted in connection with genius'. The introductory note runs:

> In all work of a biographic character it is important to make copious reference to as many as possible of the generally-recognized virtues, vices, good points, foibles, peculiarities, tricks, characteristics, little weaknesses, traits, imperfections, fads, idiosyncrasies, singularities, morbid symptoms, oddities, faults, and regrettable propensities set forth in the following table. The form of an alphabetic index, with references to the examples given in the preceding pages, has been chosen, so that the beginner who may be desirous, when trying his hand at work of this sort, of seeing how any given one of these subjects may best be treated, is enabled at once to turn to one or more model passages.

The index gives as locators merely the subjects of the verses, which are printed in alphabetical order of subjects' names— one to a page, illustrated. More than one entry, many indeed, may be accorded to the mere four lines of text, with further sly humour injected. The quatrain quoted above yields these eight references, some shared with other subjects:

case, borderline (FIFE, KNOX, YOUNG)

fads (BURNE-JONES, KNOX, LISZT, MARX)

glamour, negative reaction to (KNOX)

imbecility (KNOX)

Juan, Don, imperfect sympathy with (KNOX)

love, withering exposure of (KNOX)

obsession (GOERING, KNIGHT, KNOX)

sex-appeal, allergy to (KNOX)

The well known quatrain on Sir Christopher Wren, attended by an entry in the index under each letter of the alphabet, can be read in my earlier article on this index (Bell 1986).

Stand-alone indexes

The Indexer has reviewed two indexes to poetry collections published as stand-alones.

Index to Canadian poetry in English (published 1985)

consists of three indexes: titles and first lines with some extra bibliographical detail; authors; subjects. ... I started with a random choice of poem from my anthology—'The prize cat' by E.J. Pratt—and traced its title, first line and author easily through the Index. It was present in the subject index under 'Cats', and the 'Animals' entry had a cross-reference to 'Cats'. So far, fine. My second exploration was more troublesome. I chose the first entry in the Index with a location in my anthology: '... Person, or a Hymn on and to the Holy Ghost. Margaret Avison.o lwl, pbcv'. (lwl is the code for Lords of winter and of love, pbcv denotes the Penguin anthology referred to above.) Avison duly appears in the author index, and '... Person, etc.' takes its due place (first) among the fifty-four titles attributed to her. (No entry in either list under 'P' for 'Person'; who except a librarian would dream of looking before 'A' for such a title?) I found the poem in my anthology, but never found an entry in the subject index. I wish that the editors had provided a more user-friendly index ... it seems hard that the key to seven thousand poems, excerpts and translations should be so reluctant to court easy consultation. (Batchelor 1987):

This, too, is surely a (unsatisfactory) classification rather than a subject index.

The Indexer reviewer also had reservations about the 1994 *Scottish poetry index* (SPI) (produced by the Scottish Poetry Library), writing 'The Subject Index is a list of headwords and phrases of bewildering and entertaining variousness' (Robb 1996).

Julie Johnstone (SPL Librarian) has explained the SPL's rationale for poetry subject indexing and its difficulties:

> Subject access can bring poems out of the collection into public or private arenas ... People need a way into poetry, and subject access can provide that'. …

> Individual poems are analysed by subject, theme, language and literary form ... Possibly the most difficult aspect is to index by subject ... It could be argued that poetry is a form of writing that defies subject analysis ... It may suggest rather than say.

Indeed, she asks, drawing on an SPL research study carried out in 2005, do the difficulties inherent in the subject indexing of poetry not make it counterproductive even to try.

> The interpretation of a poem is a subjective act, dependent on personal response and a necessary exercise of the imagination. The suggestibility of a poem, due in particular to the use of metaphor, leaves it open to a multiplicity of meanings; subject matter and theme may be ambiguous. Translation of the aesthetic whole into a set of useful index terms is problematic. Are our best attempts better than not trying at all? Or is accurate indexing merely misleading and detrimental to facilitating access to the resources we value? (Johnstone 2010)

This last was, at least, an honest attempt at true subject indexing of poetry, not mere large-scale classification.

May and Ringler's *Elizabethan poetry: A bibliography and first-line index of English verse, 1559-1603*, published in 2004, includes a 34-page 'Subjects' index with 24 subdivisions: Agriculture; Alchemy; Animals; Astrology; Astronomy; Death; Education; Fortune; Geography; Hunting; Law; Love; Marriage; Medicine; Moral; Pastoral; Philosophy; Poetry; Political; Practical; Religion; Social Class and Status; Women; Miscellaneous Subjects. A reviewer observes:

> Remarkable here is, first, the number of poems on Love: however familiar amatory lyrics from the era seem, it is surprising to encounter almost 11 full columns of EV cataloging perhaps as many as 4100 poems dealing with Love. For their part, "Moral" poems (including "subjects in a moral context") draw a full 9 columns of entries, with records for poetry both admonitory (on such topics, for instance, as "Envy" and "Gossip") and hortatory ("Charity," "Gratitude"). "Friendship" was an important topic for poets: this portion of the index records some 285 poems on the subject. As important as Love and Moral poems were to the Elizabethan poets, however, Religion was more crucial yet, with a full 21 columns in this part of the index devoted to it (and to "subjects treated in a religious context"). This includes, among other things, entries for poems on various biblical figures ("Susanna," "Job") and passages ("Revelation 19:17-18," "Proverbs 16"), metrical versions of the Psalms, Hymns, Graces to be spoken at meals, other Prayers, and various invectives and satires on religious figures and practices. (Bruster 2005)

Ho-hum. Despite its designation, `Subjects index', this is rather another classification by theme.

Students give it a try

Br Tom Murphy, an English teacher and indexer of fiction, took up the challenge of genuine poetry subject indexing in 2002, setting a class of students to compile subject indexes to the poems of Emily Dickinson. He reported the results in *The Indexer* (Murphy 2003). He realized that this would require them 'to recognize, organize and interrelate key words and essential themes from the poems', and wrote:

> What if an index were not merely a quick locator? What if it were a process, a method – a harvest of understandings ... because an indexer is really just a reader ... who is noting and listing, grouping and connecting the important things ... We are not trying to boil the poems down to one homogenous gray goo called 'the theme', 'the moral', 'the lesson' or 'the meaning'.

Murphy explains, 'They would have to read the poems closely to identify key terms and themes', and told them, 'No other students in the world are doing what we are going to do'. One student saw a particular difficulty: 'There are many different ways to interpret [Dickinson's] poems and that would make a difference to what we thought was an important object or theme.'

Murphy gives a brief sample of headings from one index:

Solitude

    of self

    of soul (*see also* Soul)

Soul

    as aware of an afterlife

    as being exclusive (*see also* Solitude, Personification)

    being perched

    being played by God (*see also* Music, God, Epiphany)

    drinking exhilaration (*see also* Joy)

    forging of

    liberty of (*see also* Liberty)

Storm imagery

    gale

lightning

thunder

Success

counted

in circuit

Summer

a blessing

as intoxicating (*see also* Intoxication)

Sun

affordability of

happenings before sunrise (*see* Dew)

in summer (*see also* Summer)

Conclusion

The examples of designated 'subject indexes.' to poetry examined in the course of this article show that many prove to be only classification of collections of poems. Certainly these can be helpful to locate poems in collections, to show the values and most popular subjects of a particular class of readers or of a period, to indicate the (at least ostensible) themes of poems, and to jog the memory as to items in familiar poems. But as to subject indexing proper — we see that it can provide entertainment, whether by inadvertent absurdity or deliberate wit; also that, seriously attempted, it presents great difficulties. It is not clear whether the caveats expressed by myself and Johnstone as to the feasibility of subject indexing of poetry have been or can be resolved: or, whether, indeed, it is desirable that they should be.

John Keats famously wrote in his long narrative poem, *Lamia*, deploring Sir Isaac Newton's scientific analysis of light (Keats 1820):

There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:

We know her woof, her texture; she is given

In the dull catalogue of common things.

Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,

Conquer all mysteries by rule and line ...

Unweave a rainbow ...

Surely Keats would have held the subject indexing of poetry to be equally a case of mystical vandalism. It would be a bold indexer indeed who attempted to index *Lamia*.

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