

Compiling an anthology of indexes

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The Indexer has appeared regularly twice each year since 1957. When I ceased to be its editor (after 18 years in the post), in 1995, at the conclusion of volume 19, 4376 pages had been published in this journal. I think I can claim greater familiarity with them all than any reader.

Thus I was aware of all the humorous, quirky items, whether full articles or minor 'fillers', tucked away in those back issues, generally forgotten. I felt they deserved resuscitation, re-exposure, fresh appreciation, and considered producing anthologies of these. Originally I intended a series of such collections: 'Rogue indexes' would have demonstrated how indexing should *not* be done; 'Parthian Arrows' would have been composed of indexes showing extraordinary bias; another would have included the remaining, generally humorous items; and finally there would have been a collection of fictional portrayals of indexers.

To my delight, the Publications Manager of the British Library was interested in the proposal. He specified:

From our point of view it would have to be a single all-embracing anthology, to appeal to a wider audience than professional indexers; we want to tempt bookish people of a variety of persuasions.

I would like there to be a succinct but informative historical introduction explaining how indexing in books started and developed, and within this introduction some general comments about the importance of a good index, and the difficulty sometimes of achieving this. Then a little bit about how this selection was made.

So then came the making of a selection to reduce the number of items to fit into a single volume. The 'how not to' items were the first out, as not being of interest to readers not in the profession. Eventually I had about a hundred chosen items, in three sections – 'Indexes in fact', 'Fiction and verse with indexes' and 'Indexers in fiction'. The title was to be, precisely, *Indexers and indexes in fact and fiction*.

This caused a problem, though. Books with the word 'indexes' in the title are usually textbooks – manuals on how to do it. It was essential to make it clear at first sight that this was no text book, but intended purely for entertainment. The publishers suggested that the answer would be to have an image on the cover of an indexer hard at work, slaving over proofs, possibly tearing his/her hair out; something 'Dickensian' in character, with a 'Grub Street' feel. We examined several such drawings – but none of them obviously cried out 'This is an indexer!'. It began to appear that no cartoons of indexers, recognizable as such without dependence on a caption, exist.

Then a wonderful stroke of luck. An email friend of mine in the USA, into whose sympathetic virtual ear I had been pouring all these editorial woes, is the wife of a graphic designer who also draws cartoons. The thrice-blessed man, Dean Munson, offered to draw a suitable cartoon specially



Cartoon by Dean Munson, graphic designer in Rockford, Illinois

for the anthology cover – and has thus provided the world with its first indexer-(picture-only)cartoon.

Preparing this anthology of index extracts for publication caused very particular problems regarding copyright, acknowledgements and indexing.

Copyright

First came the hideous task of obtaining copyright permissions for anything published within the last 70 years, unless the authors had died more than 70 years earlier. It was rather a macabre pleasure to learn that Arthur Conan Doyle died early in 1930, and his works had thus just come into the public domain. I had to determine by the pricking of my thumbs which of these protected extracts were short enough to come under the remission of 'fair use'. For the remaining items, I had to discover who currently held the rights to them, send off letters of request (from the original publisher on to another, then to an agent, and to another agent, was a frequently recurring chain of letters), keep an account of fees requested that would not overrun the budget allotted for this purpose (many permissions were given free, but some planned items were eliminated from the collection if the fee requested seemed excessive), and note the form of acknowledgements specified.

Indexers fondly suppose themselves to own the copyright of their indexes. However, in no case, when I wrote to

publishers to ask for permission to quote lines from indexes, did any of them refer to the individual indexers. It is true that most of the indexes I quote are by the authors of the books, but not all. Douglas Matthews of the Society of Indexers (SI) was entirely happy for me to quote from his index to *The Frank Muir book* (by Frank Muir). I quoted only lines from the index, none from the text of the book. Nevertheless, I still had to contact the (successors of the) first publishers of the book, who passed me on to the agency dealing with the late Frank Muir's literary estate. They gave permission free, but wanted a two-line printed acknowledgement (*not* to Douglas Matthews!), and two copies of the book on publication.

There was a second type of copyright permission and acknowledgement in my anthology to be considered. Most of its items consist of a few lines of introduction to and comment on an index, or a novel featuring indexers, followed by the extracts quoted. The majority of these critiques were originally written by me; some were by other contributors to *The Indexer*, notably Judy Batchelor, John Vickers, and the late Margaret Anderson and Norman Knight. I traced the holders of the literary estates of all the deceased SI members I was quoting, and received ready permission (and free!) from all SI contributors to the anthology, or their heirs. Reaction to my requests in the latter cases was usually delight that the work was to be revived. I received messages such as: 'If it indeed requires a word from me to approve your intentions, it is yours'; 'I have no objection to your using my article . . . In fact, I am pleased that you have found some use for it!'; and 'Permission granted with pleasure. How you stir the memory!'.

Acknowledgements

Then there was the question of how to credit these other contributors. If we gave the name or initials of each critic at the end of each item, my own would appear with unacceptable frequency. I added a note to my introduction to the book explaining that critiques and comments not by me are indicated by initials at the end of those, and full details of the sources are given in the acknowledgements at the end of the book.

These two different sorts of acknowledgements are given in two separate sections. The first lists the original *Indexer* items from which excerpts have been taken. The second lists the publishers or authors who gave permission for passages quoted – with many differences of wording and form, according to specifications with the permission forms. All

those in this second section who gave permission insisted on 'acknowledgement to the author, title, and publisher'. To save repeating details of author, title, and publisher on the acknowledgements page as well as in the text, the listings in the acknowledgements were coded by section/item numbers. Unless otherwise instructed, we gave just the name of the body that gave permission; usually the name of the author or publisher, but long and wordy forms of expression were exactly specified and demanded by some by the publishers and agents. In some cases we had to print two full versions, one each for UK and US permissions for the same item.

Index

The index of the anthology likewise brought its own peculiar problems. All written works are listed there under their authors. The names of the authors of items from *The Indexer* appear in the index. Just three articles by other hands than mine are printed in full: two by Margaret Anderson, one by Judy Batchelor. Those article titles are given in the index as subheadings under their names, although they constitute part of the text of the book itself, rather than passages quoted within it.

Another problem in the index concerned A. S. Byatt, who, to our further delight, had written a Foreword for the book. She already had her own index entry, with her novel *Possession* (one of those that features indexers) as a subheading. I felt obliged to add a second subheading, 'Foreword', for her, as she indeed was the author of two items in the anthology. Including the Foreword as an item in the index, though, seemed an odd thing to do.

Indexers and indexes in fact and fiction was finally published in December 2001 jointly by the British Library and University of Toronto Press, consisting of a Foreword by A. S. Byatt, the requested introductory history of indexing, 62 annotated examples of 'Indexes in fact', 15 of indexes to novels or verse, and examples of 21 authors' portrayals of indexers in fiction – all appearing by permission, with proper acknowledgement, and locatable, d.v., by the index.

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Editor's note: A review of *Indexers and indexes in fact and fiction* appears on p. 51 of this issue of *The Indexer*.