

Indexer Overwhelmed by Books - Happily So

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Early Sources

My personal collection of books shows a certain tendency to geological strata. The only one I retain from childhood, is a treasured, curious volume, bound in black and pink, lacking its first 14 pages, alas: Royal Rhymes by John Milne and D. A. Boden, published by Collins. My earliest conception of the succession of the British monarchy came from these delightful illustrated rhymes, potted history. An example:

William Rufus, 1087-1100

Red-headed, hot-headed William the Second
Was shot in the forest, and every one reckoned
It jolly good riddance, and thought it quite clear
That a King should not always be hunting the deer.
So, without even stopping to take off his pants,
They buried him cheaply, at Winchester, Hants.

Several sound elements of historical instruction there.

The next layer of my books is more conventionally educational: those garnered on an English Language and Literature university course in the '50s: Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader; a dark-blue row of Oxford editions of the English poets; small Thomas Nelson sets of Jane Austen and George Eliot (now having such a curious smell!); dull-red-covered Everyman's Library, uniform works of Castiglione, Swift, Dryden, Johnson; a nicely-bound set of the works of Walter Pater (Macmillan, 1920s). Not overly much referred to now, perhaps, but a comfort to have them all there in case of need-one never knows.

As I brought up three children, a tide of marvellous children's books swept through the house (Russell Hoban! Shirley Hughes! Ludwig Bemelmans! Babar and Miffy! The Wild Things!)-but like their young audience, they no longer remain here (Not even a special collection I then had. Finding both as mother and teacher how helpful it was to young children faced with an unfamiliar situation, such as a hospital visit or the arrival of a new baby, to show them attractive picture books about children or animals encountering the same situation-an original idea then-I compiled an annotated list of high-standard appropriate books, published in 1970 as *Situation Books for Under-sixes* [Kenneth Mason]. So many books amassed ... all gone now.)

With the passing on of parents and aunts on both sides of the family, their books all came to me. Thus I acquired a splendidly bound copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress and Holy War*, published by William Nimmo, inscribed by my great-great-(great?) grandmother to her daughter in 1867; a beautifully illustrated *Decameron* from Chatto and Windus, 1879; Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring* from "The Larger Dumpy Books for Children" series, 1902, much childishly coloured-in and mended; a copy of *East Lynne* with publication date given as MCMVII; a crimson, calf-bound edition of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *English Traits*, 1910; Ella Wheeler Wilcox's *Poems of Pleasure and Passion*, 1912; a single-volume Shakespeare including an essay by Sir Henry Irving, sixty-one "photo-engravings of eminent Shakespearian artists", and an index to the characters and glossary, inscribed by my grandmother to her daughter, 1914; a 1917 Everyman edition of Balzac's *The Country Doctor*, in English; a 1917 *Concise Oxford Dictionary* and a 1903 French and English one; *The Koran* in English in the Chandos

Classics (with SALE printed in thick black capitals on the spine, and 2/- [two shillings] pencilled in the fly leaf); many small anthologies of poetry; rhyming and crossword dictionaries; a set of "Miss Read's"; and a 24-volume set of NELSON'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA, 4" by 6" each, undated, but prefaced with:

This Encyclopaedia has been prepared with the view of meeting the requirements of the ordinary intelligent man and woman who, in the course of their reading or writing, frequently feel the want of a reliable book of reference which can be easily handled and quickly consulted.

-- which perhaps gives some clue to the date.

Also, a delightful 20-volume Windsor Shakespeare, copiously annotated, "Illustrated from the Paintings of Great Artists", these offering wonderful portraits of actors and actresses in the Shakespearian roles. These inherited books caused much duplication, but I have always been loth to discard any books, so the duplicates retain a home.

Bread thrown on the waters in the form of birthday and Christmas presents to grandmother and aunt came back to me by inheritance, good deeds rewarded-French Legends, Tales and Fairy Stories and Welsh Legends and Folk-tales from O. U. P.; Hulton Press's anthologies of words and pictures, A Book of Beauty, A Book of Delights and A Book of Britain; and the novels of Barbara Pym.

Fascinated by these early publications, I added to them with a three-volume Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle, Longmans, Green, and Co. 1883 (bought at Hay-on-Wye); bound volumes IX and X of The Strand Magazine, 1895 (from the shelves of a local pub), and Rose Macaulay's *Orphan Island* (1924) and *Going Abroad* (1934)-both from London bookshops.

Upon becoming a professional indexer, I had to acquire yet another stratum, this a collection of appropriate reference books. Very space-consuming these, for no reference book is ever uselessly out-of-date and thus discardable for an indexer in the humanities, while updated editions and new textbooks must constantly be added. The work itself provides more incoming volumes. When I started in the '60s, the proofs I worked on were colourfully paperbound, with full details printed on both cover and spine and including all illustrations-perfectly fit to adorn one's shelves. I still have many from that period, such as Wilfrid Blunt's *John Christie of Glyndebourne*, Robert Lacey's *Robert, Earl of Essex*, Joanna Richardson's *Verlaine* and Montgomery Hyde's *Henry James at Home*.

And then, of course, there are copies of the many indexed books in published form-but more on that below.

The glories of fiction

Beyond these early sources, my library largely reflects my adult reading interests, my own free choice of acquisitions. For leisure reading, for sheer pleasure, I resort to literature - to works of the imagination, so much more richly rewarding than the mere reportage of facts. Released from the necessity of conforming to the truth of events and to mere chronology, fiction writers are free to use language in which meaning is not merely stated but may also be conveyed or implied by deploying sound, form, rhythm, imagery, association and symbolism; while the form of the novel may make an aesthetic gestalt, a significant artistic whole that is far more than the sum

of its parts: what E. M. Forster called the pattern or the rhythm of a novel.

I have acquired full, or nearly so, sets of the novels by my most of my favourite writers. The earliest of these are Wilkie Collins, Henry James, Arnold Bennett, E. M. Forster, Hardy and E. H. Young. Among more modern authors what I most love are novels full of complexity, richness, subtly woven with buried echoes and connections, in which more is to be discovered, understood and appreciated on each rereading. Supreme in this genre I find A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, Nabokov's *Lolita*, Rosamond Lehmann's *The Echoing Grove*, Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* and *Alias Grace*, Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* and the bewildering novels of Elizabeth Jolley. The extraordinary complexity of those of Peter Ackroyd -- *Hawksmoor*, *First Light et al* - still baffles me; I look forward to understanding them on some future rereading. There are the novels where the first-person narrator so terribly and unwittingly betrays himself, as in Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*.

Then there is the sensitive insight to be found in novels by Rosamond Lehmann and Elizabeth Taylor; compelling, at times chilling, Marghanita Laski (*Little Boy Lost* and *The Victorian Chaise-longue*); the gentle conviction of Penelope Lively's writing, the more powerful of Julian Barnes's. I own, have read and admire novels by Ian McEwan and William Trevor, but find them too harsh, bleak, disturbing to read again. Yet distressing literature may be pleasurable reading: Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, L. P. Hartley's *Eustace and Hilda* and Elizabeth Taylor's *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* are all sadly painful, but are wonderful stories to live through. Then there are the marvellously witty writers: Rose Macaulay, Nancy Mitford, Alice Thomas Ellis; acerbic Ivy Compton-Burnett and Molly Keane; sardonic Evelyn Waugh; satirical Barbara Pym and Angela Thirkell. J. S. Brahm and Caryl Simon cause laughing-out-loud with their *Bullet in the Ballet*, *Don't Mr Disraeli* and others.

An added bonus, gilt on the gingerbread, I find in sequels and sequences that extend an engrossing story, its characters and themes, through further years and volumes, showing their later development. I am devoted to Anthony Powell's marvellous sequence of twelve novels, *A Dance to the Music of Time*, with style and events of each attuned to the period he writes of, from the early 20th century to the 1960s; Byatt's tetralogy running from *A Virgin in the Garden* to *A Whistling Woman*, and Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest* sequence, *Children of Violence*, mingling politics with personal passions and social comment (how I identified with the adolescent Martha!); Canadian Robertson Davies's glorious, vibrant trilogies, David Lodge's witty academic one, Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger*, L. P. Hartley's *Eustace and Hilda*, with such insight into his characters; and Rebecca West's *The Fountain Overflows* and its successors, sweeping the reader along in entire sympathy with her characters.

The solitary enjoyment of reading and rereading these books extended outward, as from my familiarity with them I devised and led courses for the Workers' Educational Association on "Past and Present" (studying Marghanita Laski, Rosamond Lehmann and Elizabeth Bowen); "Biographers in Fiction" (Lively's *According to Mark*, Davies's *What's Bred in the Bone*, Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, Alison Lurie's *The Truth about Lorin Jones* and Byatt's *Possession*); "Woman's-eye View" (a novel each by Austen, Thirkell, Pym, Lessing, Alice Thomas Ellis, Keane and Catherine Heath); as well as "London in Literature", "A Dance to the Music of Time" and "Thomas Hardy, poet and novelist".

There are inner collections in my personal library, dispersed, but sharing a theme. I prepared an anthology of extracts from quaint, dated, biased, humorous or appalling indexes (*Indexers and Indexes in Fact and Fiction*), and managed to acquire copies of nearly all the books there quoted. In preparing my W. E. A. on biographers in fiction, I

discovered twenty-six novels which featured biographers (the outstanding example being William Golding's *The Paper Men*), and succeeded in procuring copies of them all-from Kingsley Amis's *The Biographer's Moustache* to A. N. Wilson's sequence of five, *The Lampitt Papers*. And I claim to possess all novels with indexes -- at least, all that I know of.

Non-fiction

In non-fiction, my favourite reading seems to be all memoirs: M. V. Hughes's *A London Child of the 1870s*, *A London Girl of the 1880s*, *A London Home in the 1890s* and *A London Family Between the Wars*; Gwen Raverat's *Period Piece*; Thirkell's *Three Houses*; Mary Stott's *Forgetting's No Excuse*; and all of Edward Blishen's and Diana Athill's. I also acquired and much enjoy a full set of John Sutherland's intriguing *Puzzles in Classic Fiction*.

I would choose, other things being equal (specifically, the height of the books), to categorize my non-fiction into: biography, English language, essays and journalism, history, humour, lit crit, philosophy (Aristotle, Kant and J. S. Mill retained from university days, others acquired since), plays, poetry, psychology (some purchased while training to be a teacher, more in the quest for self-knowledge, several volumes since then indexed and kept), publishing (including editing and indexing, tools of the trade, and augmented by a signed copy of Ian Norrie's splendid *Mentors and Friends*), reference; and my husband's patch-maths, music, science and technology. And a small, proud group of books by or referring to members of my family and myself, including my mother's plays, my godmother's memoirs, and my books on children's books, on indexing, and on my mother's stage career and my own experience of being a stage mother.

Indexing – A Career and Its Influence

For some years, publishers automatically sent indexers copies of the books they had worked on. Some would be donated to the local library or to friends having the appropriate interest or enthusiasm. I have passed on many biographies of footballers to eager male neighbours. I retained a splendid row of hard-back biographies from such sources: lives of Gerald Brenan, Richard Burton, Ivy Compton-Burnett, God (yes, as portrayed by Alexander Waugh), Alec Guinness, Keats, T. E. Lawrence, Sean O'Casey, Shakespeare and Bertrand Russell, among others. Later, economics biting more stringently, publishers notified indexers that such copies would be sent only on request. Thus I missed some goodies: at the end of indexing a complex biography one knows it so excessively well, so intimately, that one cannot imagine ever wanting to read it again. Thus I forbore to request copies of David Cesarani's *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, Nick Clarke's *Alistair Cooke* or Ian McIntyre's *Joshua Reynolds*, but now regret not having them.

An indexer never knows what may turn up. I would not have acquired the *Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters* and *The Disney Studio Story*, huge and weighty volumes, 12.5" x 9", had I not indexed them. And by binding proof copies and adding home-printed jackets, I now have "self-published" editions of *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, *A Dictionary of Battles* and Paul Johnson's *The Renaissance*.

Through the world of indexing I was privileged to enjoy the friendship of the eminent art historian, William S. Heckscher, and so am fortunate to have many inscribed copies of his articles, as well as three of his books: *Emblematic Variants*; *The Princeton Alciati Companion*; and *Art and Literature: Studies in Relationship*. He also gave me a fascinating little book by an author who claims to have compiled the earliest dictionary of quotations: *Reference Handbook of Quotations: English, Latin, French*, published by Whittaker & Co. in 1877. It measures 5" x 3", and consists of three previously published small books bound together, one for each language: the side opposite the spine, the right-side

page edges when closed, has printed across it in capitals the three lines:

FAMILIAR ENGLISH QUOTATIONS

FAMILIAR LATIN QUOTATIONS

FAMILIAR FRENCH QUOTATIONS

the third section, French, having red edges. The title page reads: "A Book of Quotations for men of letters and the conversationalist is a necessity; it is a hand-book for the general reader; it revives the recollection of the scholar, and affords entertainment to all who consult its pages." The first section, the English, is even blessed with a 4-page index!

Other books by friends that I indexed are on local history, paper mills, the criminal justice system, and memoirs. Books presented to me by their indexers are Philip Bradley's *Index to the Waverley Novels* (Scarecrow Press, Inc. - 681 pages) and the Pavilion Books edition of *Three Men in a Boat*, annotated and introduced by Christopher Matthew and Benny Green and indexed by Anthony Raven. Even more personally, I am the proud owner of one of only three bound sets of the first seventeen volumes of *The Indexer*, 1958-91, seven of these volumes edited by me and containing many of my own articles.

Books continue to flood in. Writing reviews for various publications brings in many volumes. Libraries offer trolleys of withdrawn books for sale, absurdly cheaply -- out of print desiderata such as vanished early works by my favourite authors often to be found there, and books that one cannot bear to be pulped, the fate, I understand, of unsold books from such trolleys. I am happy to possess ten of the eleven-volume Latham and Matthews edition of *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (including the Companion and Index volumes)-purchased in good condition at our County Library for the ridiculous price of 50p each. (I already had the single-volume 1925 Macmillan edition of my late aunt, and volume III of the Everyman 1963 edition, purchased chiefly in order to examine its index.)

The habit of indexing spills over even into fiction: the more I love a book, the higher the probability of there being a handwritten index in the back -- I having inserted a small signature of blank pages for the purpose, if the original binding did not leave enough blanks. Indexing a book one really enjoys prolongs the pleasure of reading it. The highest accolade for my indexless books is to find that I have bestowed one on them.

Other signs of favour are reinforcement cards cellotaped into the covers of worn old paperbacks, and of course cellophane strips reuniting separated pages. Sometimes, when nearly every double-spread would require one, I pierce a hole through the top left corner and hang the whole volume on a treasury tag. I do not relinquish my cherished books readily, however tattered. If the lettering on a hardback spine has become too faint to be read, or the volumes become spineless, I may compensate for this by printing new jackets for them -- good old dtp. But while this has made the books appear smarter, it adds to the difficulty of finding them -- my long-held mental images of their spines are no longer valid.

Sometimes my home-made indexes to novels show such a fascinating recurrence of topics and characters among the works of an author that I will cumulate them all into a single index, as I have done with the (ten) novels of Lurie and (twenty-seven) of Murdoch. There can be no excuse for the indexless publication of some biographies - how could the publishers do that to Gwen Raverat, M.V. Hughes, Mary Stott and Sybille Bedford? My provision of handwritten indexes in the back of these books is the righting of a positive wrong.

At one point, I deliberately attempted a change of career to move to indexing works of literature, submitting indexes to several of A. S. Byatt's novels to publishers as samples. This was not successful (the indexes were never published), but I

enjoyed working on them, and they brought new insights into these complex novels.

Coping With the Volumes

The storage and arrangement of the books causes great problems. As their volume threatened to match that of our furniture, my husband erected a wallful of shelving, custom-measured-that is, allowing much space for Penguins, then a standard 18 cm by 11 cm. And what did the wretched bird do? Promptly enlarged the standard format to 19.7 cm by 12.5 cm, throwing out entirely my intention of a true, thorough alphabetical sequence of all my fiction. Thus, Virago editions now march separately in a single dark-green row.

Variations in book sizes likewise prevent my properly sectionalizing the non-fiction as I would wish. M. V. (Molly) Hughes recorded a similar difficulty in her memoir, *A London Family Between the Wars*, published in 1940: "Books are very tiresome to arrange, with their different heights, and I had to be content with this rough classification: serious books in the Chesterfield [a bookcase purchased from the library of Lord Chesterfield]; frivolity in the deal [shelves erected by their builder]".

Now my books are again beginning to exceed their accommodation, and I must make continual choices for discarding.

The gem of the collection? I don't know where it came from: on the flyleaf the price 1/3 (one shilling and threepence-7 1/2p today) is crossed out, and 6d (sixpence) written in-and indeed, the reverse of the half-title has on it, in italic caps, CHEAP EDITION. It's *The Epic of Sounds. An Interpretation of Wagner's Nibelung Ring*, by Freda Winworth. (punctuation sic on front cover, spine and title page), published by Simpkin and Novello in London, Lippincott in Philadelphia. It is a 6.5" by 4.5" hardback, green-bound, 'RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO Herrn Siegfried Wagner (with the gracious consent of Frau Cosima Wagner)'. After the Preface and Analytical Introduction (which includes THE ETHICAL EXEGESIS), a Note to the Reader explains that small type in deep indentations, Old English type, and capitals, roman or italic, are used to draw attention to 'the first entrance or reappearance of persons on the scene', 'the chief scenes and incidents of the drama', important symbols and (numbered) motives [sic]. Indeed it is so, with the whole action of *The Ring* detailed in this glorious typographic potpourri, followed by musical notation for the Principal Motives, and, yes, an eight-page index. It's my Best Book, and I love it. (Oh, and there's the Little Temple Classics edition of *The Romance of the Rose* published by J. M. Dent, MDCCC, 6.3" by 3.8", illustrated and with shoulder headings, sold for 25p in a garage sale by a foolish friend who wouldn't be told. And ... and ...)

Conclusion

The series editor asks me which books have influenced me the most, and I am lost for an answer. But it must be indexing that most informs my personal library, with the array of volumes indexed by me; the books that helped me in the work (including indeed my own contributions to the body of texts on indexing, *Indexing Biographies and Other Stories of Human Lives* and *Indexers and Indexes in Fact and Fiction*); the collection of books with entertaining indexes; the set of volumes of *The Indexer*; and my personal contribution, the sign of esteem awarded to certain books published without indexes -- my own inserted as a coda in the back.

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