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Index: Periodical Parts and the Bookish Afterlife

James Mussell

Nineteenth-century periodicals managed abundance by imagining a future. Positioned between accumulating back issues and the promise of more to come, every issue of a periodical was oriented to a moment destined to pass. Yet with pagination running from one issue to the next and terminating only with the book-like closure of the volume, the periodical was also written through with the promise of an archival life. While the individual issue was designed for readers reading in the moment, it also addressed that unknown reader who would read the periodical when bound into a book.

The index was not only a crucial part of the paratext that constituted the periodical as book, it also set out how the book might be read. Like the covers of the volume, the index gathered together diverse content so that it might be grasped as a whole. Styles might have varied in the period, but every index, because it listed content alphabetically, flattened it out, disassociating articles from their position on the page and in the issue. The index, in other words, disassociated content from both the where and when of its periodical publication, instead presenting it in a repository without hierarchy in which every article was as recoverable as any other. In our digital present, we too use indexes to jump straight to articles, reading them out of order and out of time. It says a lot about how we continue to understand periodicals that nineteenth-centrury indexes imagined a reader who reads just like us.

This faith in an archival afterlife was an integral part of the periodical as genre. The *Philosophical Transactions* (1665-) conceived of itself as an ongoing repository of information and so provided an index by which it might be searched, one volume at a time, in future. This was rapidly lampooned, and publications such as *The Transactioneer* (1700) and *Useful Transactions in Philosophy* (1708-9) mocked both the tone of the *Philosophical Transactions* and its bibliographic apparatus (Wheatley, *How To Make an Index*, 42). The *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731-1907), too, included contents pages with every monthly issue and an index at the end of its first volume. Even early newspapers such as the *London Evening Post* issued volume title pages (Harris, 45) and some provincial weeklies had continuous pagination well into the nineteenth century. From 1811 The *Liverpool Mercury*, for instance, numbered its pages in a continuous sequence over each year; in 1845 it added a second set of page numbers for each issue, running both sequences concurrently until 1853. The *Tenby Observer*, which began in 1853, labelled each issue with an issue and volume number, something it continues to do today.

However, over the course of the nineteenth century the newspaper divested itself of this concern for futurity, leaving only the periodical to imagine a bookish afterlife. The fecundity of the periodical press in the period was both a cause for celebration, marking as it did the spread of literacy and so culture, and a cause for alarm, as readers drowned in print, reading the right things wrongly, or, worse, the wrong things rightly (see Mays; "Reading as a Means of Culture"). If it was difficult to keep up, indexes at least promised a chance to catch up and, as long as readers knew which volume to consult, an index could direct him or her to the relevant article.

Of course, that depended on the accuracy of the index. In 1893 Eliza Hetherington, W.T. Stead's long-term collaborator, detailed some of the idiosyncrasies of periodical indexes. Firstly, there were those compiled from monthly tables of contents, usually by the

periodical's printers. Most aggregated the tables into a single alphabet, listing articles under words culled from their titles (*Strand Magazine* used one; *New Review* and *Cassell's Family Magazine* two or three; it was claimed that the *Cornhill* indexed under them all). Not only did this assume that titles expressed content, but it could also result in misleading entries. Hetherington, for instance, cited the index to volume 273 of the *Gentleman's Magazine* in which Goring Cope's "The Books of Rudyard Kipling" was listed under "Books" and "Rudyard" but not "Kipling" ("Indexing of Periodicals", 94; "Contents of Vol. CCLXIII"). Secondly, there were periodicals that only indexed by the names of contributors (*Fortnightly Review*, *National Review*); while such indexes were useful for those looking for contributions by particular people, they were useless for finding articles on particular subjects. There were exceptions, and Hetherington notes those that combined these two techniques, or mitigated vague titles through synonyms and cross references. Nonetheless, when William Frederick Poole came to create his *Index to Periodical Literature* in 1876, he instructed his compilers to ignore existing indexes entirely (vii). As Henry Wheatley, in *How to Make An Index* put it, "The indexes of some periodicals are good, but those of the many are bad" (59).

Recognizing that often readers did not know which volumes to consult, many long-running titles also issued cumulative indexes, often to mark an anniversary or new series. Such indexes, which reconstituted the bookish volume as a set, took a stand against ephemerality by insisting on the continuing value of their contents. In the eighteenth century, Paul Henry Maty produced *A General Index to the Philosophical Transactions* (1777) and Samuel Ayscough an index to both the first fifty six volumes of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1786, 1789) and first seventy volumes of the *Monthly Review* (1786, 1796). In the nineteenth century, the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews* published index volumes every twenty years or so; the *Westminster Review* issued a general index to its first thirteen volumes (1832); *Blackwood's* issued a general index to its first fifty volumes (1855); *Notes and Queries* to each

of its four series (1856, 1862, 1868, 1874); *All the Year Round* its first twenty volumes (1868); and *Leisure Hour* its first twenty five (1876) (Wheatley, *What Is an Index?*, 89-96; "Indexing of Periodicals", 95-6).

The problem of abundance remained, however. A cumulative index might help a reader to find an article in a particular publication, but it was no use if a reader wanted to track a subject across the press. Poole's *An Index to Periodical Literature* (1882) was the most significant attempt to produce a subject index to the periodical archive. Earlier editions in 1848 and 1853 established both the utility and practicality of such an index, but the 1882 edition was much more ambitious. Begun under the auspices of the newly-founded American Library Association in 1876, this new edition, six times the size of its predecessor, was produced collaboratively, individual libraries indexing titles allocated to them by Poole and his assistant, William Fletcher (Williamson, 104-117). Looking back in the *Athenaeum*, which was itself involved in an attempt to continue Poole's *Index*, R.A. Preddie, in 1913, claimed it had set free "a mass of imprisoned material, which, without its aid, might as well have been at the bottom of the sea." (532).

Poole knew his *Index* would be out of date on publication and so, as part of its original scheme, planned a series of five-yearly supplements, themselves compiled from a set of annual indexes prepared by Fletcher. The form of the book might have exerted bibliographic control, but the ongoing nature of periodical publication meant that content always escaped its necessary closures. The bound volume aspired to bookish permanence, its content indexed and so readily available, but it stood in sequence as one volume of many.

Poole's *Index* mastered periodical content at the expense of the periodical's periodicity, yet in doing so it recapitulated the periodical's own provisionality. Nineteenth-century periodicals enact closure as they progressed, demarcating limits that were not limits at all. In fact, to be periodical was to recognize the insufficiency of both edges and endings:

just as the miscellaneity of the issue acknowledged that nothing exists in isolation, so the forthcoming issue heralded more to come. Periodical progress was structured by provisional moments of retrospection—articles, issues, volumes—in which readers could grasp content as a whole. The index did the same: it might assert order and, as a book, assert that order for all time, but, as cumulative indexes and projects such as Poole's made clear, what was indexed could always be indexed anew, and the ongoing nature of periodical publication meant there would always be more to include.

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