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## TLS Historical Archive 1902-2005

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An unexpected benefit of my retirement was to realise, at the time that a very cut-price offer came my way, that I would once again have the time to read the *Times Literary Supplement*. I had been a regular reader of the *TLS* from my student days, but pressure of work and of all the often tedious stuff we are expected to read in the course of our professional lives (or perhaps really a comment on my time management skills – or lack of) meant that the unread pile of copies eventually compelled me to cancel my standing order. Very occasionally (and with feelings of guilt at what still lay unread on my desk) I would try and read my library's copy, but now again I am able to enjoy its extraordinarily varied content. I won't quite call it unrivalled, if only because there was a short period when I tried to keep up with the *New York Times Book Reviews*, not to mention such as the *London Review of Books* and others, but the *TLS* really does seem to be pretty well unique. The balance between the academic and more general content has varied over the years, but for its interdisciplinary and international coverage for more than a hundred years it really does stand in a class of its own.

Readers of this journal will not need a reviewer to explain to them the content of the *TLS* from 1902. Thousands of book reviews, of course, as well as reviews of journals, exhibitions and performances, articles, letters, poems and short news or review notices, all build up into an unrivalled source, as the blurb puts it: "a wealth of material in 300,000 reviews, letters, poems and articles". And now it is all here online, with readily accessible images of the original pages appearing on your screen courtesy of an efficient search engine.

Searching is simple enough. A general box allows simple searches, whose results may be limited by a range of content type: book reviews, adverts, letters, articles, poem, illustration or seven other categories. The number of hits is also stated. A clear results screen shows a small image of the relevant page with the item highlighted and with a citation for the article title, the title of the book reviewed, the name of the reviewer, and the source.

Clicking on the page image leads to a larger view with search terms highlighted and allowing zooming in to read the relevant item.

The advanced search option offers three boxes with options to search for terms which may be defined by the searcher within a range of categories from full text, keywords (using "the improved online version of the published index"), authors or contributors, to book title, document type, and more. The three Boolean operators are placed in a box beside each search term row, and another box allows fuzzy search from none to high. A short note, which may be expanded at a click, indicates how to enter authors' names. Additional rows may be added if the user wishes a more complex search. Limits (article type, editorial commentary, book or journal review, etc.) may also be applied. The same type of results screen is then displayed. For regular or in-depth users there are also options to save searches and results: by search history, by "my marked list" or in "my archive".

A browse function permits a more general overview of contents, although when I clicked on Book Title I was informed that for the resulting 277,000 hits "loading may take over 30 seconds". I have no problem with the load time for that amount of material, but wonder how one might effectively browse that amount of hits. Still, the function is there and could prove valuable for more uncertain searches. The other browse functions are by issues, by authors and by contributors.

For such a major source it is natural that some introductory and explanatory material is necessary. We are offered a welcome by the editor and an overview About the *TLS* while more in-depth articles address: The *TLS* and its Contributors; *TLS* in the Years of Anonymous Reviewing 1902-1974: A Short History; *TLS* Archive at News International Record Office; and a chronology. This latter, rather reminiscent of the old *Oxford Chronology of English Literature*, lists for each year the major world events, literary events and published literature under non-fiction, fiction, poetry and juvenile. There is plenty here to help and interest both the student and the more advanced user of the resource.

Of course, it is the unique nature of the source material over more than a century that makes this such an important resource. Literature is covered not only in English but in numerous other languages too, but the breadth of coverage is astonishing. I began with a simple search on "aviation" and was amazed at the number, and especially at the range, of hits. I had never before heard of "*Forse che si, forse che no* the new novel of the conquest of the air, by Gabriele d'Annunzio" noted in the issue of 7 October 1909. For many works I do know, it is still fascinating, and valuable,

to read contemporary assessments of them in their chronological setting. Multiply that "small" example across the range of humanities, science, technology, social science, art and all the other subjects, then take a century's overview of results and consider that all the major names of their times have been contributors (and their own works under review), and you have an idea of the immense value of this resource.

Potential subscribers must contact the publishers for the rates applicable to their own institution. The public web site [www.the-tls.co.uk](http://www.the-tls.co.uk) mentions a forthcoming private subscription option; I shall be interested to see what that might cost, but have little expectation of being able to

afford it. But for academic and larger general libraries, this is obviously a resource worth investigating. I would anticipate it becoming a major academic source, for literary scholars especially (if there are to be any left in the UK – see recent correspondence in the *TLS*), but for almost any discipline (again, recent correspondence has had much to say about pre-biotic soup, for example). This is an easily searched database of a vast amount of unique material; deserves a wide access.

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