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Start at the source.

The *Times Literary Supplement* in the Years of Anonymous Reviewing 1902-1974

Swinging Sixties, Slipping Seventies

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Various source media, *Times Literary Supplement* Historical Archive



One defence of anonymity was that it didn't seem to harm sales. The first year of Alan Pryce-Jones's editorship brought the *TLS* to its highest circulation ever: just below 50,000, double the pre-war average. This was a bumper year but Pryce-Jones kept average sales at around 42,500 copies, higher than under any of his predecessors, and a figure comfortably maintained in the first decade of his successor, Arthur Crook. By the early 1970s, the proportion of signed articles had substantially increased and it didn't go unnoticed by Crook that from now on, for whatever reason, sales declined. In the second half of 1971, they dropped back below 40,000: permanently, as it was to prove. The new downward drift, far from being halted by the abandonment of anonymity in 1974, continued steadily until 1992, by which time sales had reached 25,500, their lowest point since 1945.

Many factors were involved, of course: the state of the economy, the rise of other media, and in particular the launch of journals with overlapping readerships. The *TLS* of the 1950s and 60s held a virtual monopoly at a time when the intellectual industries, especially universities, were expanding throughout the western world. There was clear scope here for other journals. The *New York Review of Books* was launched in 1963. In 1971, Times Newspapers produced internal competition for the *TLS* in the form of the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. Most damaging of all, in 1979, a long period of industrial disputes brought the temporary but prolonged closure of all *Times* titles. The gap was filled, as far as book reviewing was concerned, by the *London Review of Books*. It doesn't seem coincidental that the present circulations of the *TLS* and *LRB* combined are the same as that, half a century earlier, of

the *TLS* alone. In 1959, however, the journal basked in the security of high sales and of the appointment as editor of a man who had been on the staff since the days of Bruce Richmond.

An editorial college

If Alan Pryce-Jones's contribution to the *TLS* partly consisted of the sheer range and number of new reviewers he brought in, Arthur Crook's skills, sharpened by his years as Deputy Editor, included the shrewdness of the appointments he made to the paper's staff. The effects were in one respect similar: Crook's assistants in turn brought in their own diverse reviewers. It was a joke in the office when a French contributor expressed the hope that his piece would satisfy the journal's "*comité de lecteurs*": no such concept had ever, or has ever, been entertained at the *TLS*. But under Crook the journal did begin to develop a more collegial character. The results were no less lively than under Pryce-Jones but achieved a level of intellectual engagement more sustained and serious, though far from solemn, than the paper had previously seen. A key figure in this was John Willett, who was Crook's right-hand man from 1960. He had written for the paper since 1948, having met Pryce-Jones in the army in northern Italy, near the end of the war. Later best known as the translator and editor of Brecht, he is a man of exceptionally wide enthusiasms which were to make their mark on the journal, not least in its design. It was Willett, for example, who commissioned cover drawings for special issues from artists including David Hockney, R. B. Kitaj, Oskar Kokoshka and Saul Steinberg. In 1967, he was reinforced by John Sturrock, a man of similar intellectual scope but with important specialisms of his own: an expert on French and Latin-

American writers and on then new developments in literary and linguistic theory. Sturrock was to follow Willett as Deputy Editor, a post he was to hold under three editors, ensuring much-needed continuity during two difficult decades at Times Newspapers. Many others spent their early careers on Arthur Crook's staff, among them political and social writers and activists (Nicholas Bethell, Alexander Cockburn, Nicolas Walter), poets (G.S. Fraser, Ian Hamilton), novelists (Piers Paul Read and, from 1973, Martin Amis), and all-round literary journalists (Richard Boston, Anthony Curtis, Derwent May, Charis Ryder).

Even more than in other periods, it's difficult to separate what was distinctive about the *TLS* in the 1960s from the intellectual and imaginative life the paper was responding to, but certain aspects stand out clearly. Special numbers were more frequent and larger, and often overlapped with long-running series on particular subjects. In both cases, the themes were more precise and more *engagé*. In 1967, for example, there were two big numbers entitled "Crosscurrents", on the relations between literature and ideas, and between literature and other specific disciplines. The first included signed articles by Jonathan Miller on psychoanalysis and literature, Alasdair MacIntyre on "Sociology and the Novel", and Anthony Jackson on "Science and Literature". This was only a start, and for the second issue, the one with a full-page cover drawing by Saul Steinberg, the editors marshalled pieces from Václav Havel on "Politics and the Theatre", Umberto Eco on "Sociology and the Novel", Italo Calvino on "Philosophy and Literature", Raymond Queneau and Roland Barthes on the relations between science and literature, Hans Magnus Enzensberger on

"The Writer and Politics", Heinrich Böll on François Mauriac and Lucien Goldmann on "Ideology and Writing". About 150 books were reviewed in this number, which also included a whole page of poems by Günther Grass.

Arguments were pursued not only in individual issues but for week after week in articles, reviews and letters: on the Vietnam war; on the rise of sociology; on pop culture, pornography, censorship; on the current state of literary criticism (starting with a 1963 special number on "The Critical Moment": signed pieces by Richard Hoggart, F.R. Leavis, George Steiner, René Wellek); on the humanities in universities. In time, the paper's interest in ideas themselves, in addition to the books which embodied them, took the form of new regular features: "Commentary" and "Viewpoint".

Meanwhile, coverage of professional aspects of literary work was extended in numbers on libraries and on book production. The world of libraries had itself expanded since the war, and almost every week the *TLS* carried a page or two of classified advertisements for librarians' jobs. This particular source of advertising (most of it lost during the closure of 1979) was crucial in helping to pay for a journal which was at its peak in sheer size and, therefore, in the number of books it was able to attend to.

The *TLS* was also alert to new developments in the form and transmission of the book itself, though in terms of its own working methods the paper, like the rest of Fleet Street, was very slow to respond to the new technology. "We are just entering a fascinating and exciting period in book publishing," a *TLS* editorial

presciently observed in April 1963. "A wide range of technical developments is waiting to be exploited." The journal had evidently learned something from its own review of Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, the previous month, in which George Steiner (writing anonymously), while clear about the book's pretentious and erratic aspects, was equally alert to its brilliance and originality: "*The Gutenberg Galaxy* is an anti-book. It seeks to enforce, physically, the core of its own meaning..[McLuhan] is saying to us, in a verbal mime which often descends to jugglery but also exhibits an intellectual leap of great power and wit, that books are no longer to be trusted western civilization has entered, or us about to enter, an era of electro-magnetic technology". McLuhan himself was soon asked to contribute, and wrote three signed pieces in the following years.

Openness to new thinking, new interests, and to change in general, is evident from any run of issues in this period. In the second half of 1967, for example, long pieces engaged with the world food crisis, Liverpool painting, Gramsci, Canada's two language cultures, prose fiction in the ancient world, the Dutch Romantic poet Willem Kloos, poverty in South and North America, climatology, Theodor Adorno (himself a *TLS* contributor), modern Spanish poetry, the French police, Structuralism, jazz, General Franco, L.B. Johnson, 1930s Russia, modern linguistics, Robert Frost, DNA, and the Kennedy assassination; this last, the subject of a six-page piece by John Sparrow on the findings of the Warren Commission and related publications. Dull it wasn't, indeed, there was a new lightness of touch, immediately evident in the headlines: "Almanach de Goethe", "Who's Ho", "Cook's

Last Tour", "High Campus", "Art of Darkness", "The Phoneme War", "From Han to Mao". In November 1963, under the heading "UGH.", the *TLS* greeted William Burroughs's *The Naked Lunch* and *Dead Fingers Talk*. The review below this one was of a translation of *The Perfumed Gardens of the Shaykh Nefwazi*, and the heading was ".PHEW!".

In the case of *The Naked Lunch*, the joke did a disservice to the review, which - largely, it seems, on the evidence of the headline - became a byword for Establishment stuffiness in the face of Beat originality. In fact, throughout the 1960s the *TLS* reviewed the Beats and other cultural dissidents with considerable sympathy. It gave an enthusiastic editorial, for example, to the International Festival of Poetry organized by the Poets' Cooperative at the Albert Hall in June 1965, at which poets like Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso read to an audience of 6,000. It also published articles by some of them, Burroughs and Ginsberg included. And it fought long campaigns on behalf of causes with which they were identified: for example, against the obscenity laws. In 1960 the *TLS* had published some of the best arguments in favour of Penguin's publication of the unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and in 1967 it lent support to the small publisher Calder and Boyars against the prosecution of *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. Certainly, John Willett's review of *The Naked Lunch* was unfavourable. It gives an amusingly repelled account of the narrative: "On and on it flows, lapping slowly round what soon becomes a stereotyped debris: ectoplasm, jelly, errand boys, ferris wheels, used contraceptives, centipedes, old photographs, jockstraps, turnstiles, newts and pubic hairs. Such is the texture of the grey

porridge in which Mr Burroughs specializes". But the piece also acknowledges the book's farcical qualities and its vividness about the effects of drugs on the imagination. Its main quarrel with Burroughs is that he might actually harm the campaign against censorship: "If the publishers had deliberately set out to discredit the cause of literary freedom and innovation they could scarcely have done it more effectively".

In the ensuing furore on the letters pages, ample space was given to Burroughs's supporters, among them E.N.W. Mottram. It was an earlier letter from Mottram in March 1963 which had first alerted readers of the *TLS* to the overzealousness of the British police in relation to a copy of *The Naked Lunch* sent in the mail from the USA. In May, the question was pursued in an editorial, "Freedom to Read", asking whether there was an official list of banned books and, if so, who drew it up, what its legal status was, and whether it was available for public scrutiny. Given the reaction to "UGH.", there is some piquancy in the fact that the author of this trenchant article was the person who later reviewed *The Naked Lunch*, John Willett.

The *TLS*'s battle against censorship continued, not least in relation to the activities of the Lord Chamberlain's Office. In 1967, for example, there were strong editorials against stage censorship, one of them ('Deprive and Corrupt II', written by Samuel Hynes) mocking the censor's clumsy interference with Charles Wood's play *Meals on Wheels*, and setting it in the context of earlier battles over Edward Bond's *Saved* and John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me*; another ('Foul Play', by Ian Hamilton), attacking the National Theatre's decision

not to stage Rolf Hochhuth's *The Soldiers* because it presented Churchill unfavourably. The importance of pieces like these lay not only in the intrinsic quality of their arguments but in the very fact that they were read by the kind of people who read the *TLS*. For this audience, including some in positions of cultural influence in the USA and continental Europe, as well as Britain, the arguments had the added weight of being presented in a forum which, as in the case of *The Naked Lunch*, was not easily swayed by fashion.

Contributors, 1959-1974

Kingsley Amis was to say that the trouble with giving names was that it would lead to a preference for Names. In fact, this objection might have been made much earlier. Looking back, there is an increasing sense that from the 1960s on, you could get your piece signed in the *TLS* so long as you were famous enough. Apart from those already mentioned, writers who contributed signed articles during Crook's editorship include Chinua Achebe, Margaret Atwood, Saul Bellow, Heinrich Böll, Bertolt Brecht, William S. Burroughs, Noam Chomsky, Janet Frame, Allen Ginsberg, Nadine Gordimer, Julia Kristeva, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Georg Lukács, Raymond Queneau, Nathalie Sarraute, Tom Stoppard, Lionel Trilling, John Updike, Gore Vidal and Alice Walker.

Still, the overwhelming majority of reviews were anonymous, and the *TLS Historical Archive* enables one to track the contributions of yet new influxes of writers. In *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960-75* (1986), the cultural historian Robert Hewison wrote, "The reviewing Establishment changed very little during the

1960s. Cyril Connolly and Raymond Mortimer were the chief reviewers on the *Sunday Times*, Philip Toynbee was on the *Observer*; V.S. Pritchett continued for the *New Statesman*. Other periodicals tended to use the same small number of writers over and over again". This would have been news to John Willett and his colleagues, whose new reviewers in the 1960s included Brian W. Aldiss, Kingsley Amis, John Berger, Malcolm Bradbury, Anthony Burgess, Raymond Carr, Norman Del Mar, Douglas Dunn, William Empson, Ernest Gellner, Zulfikar Ghose, Simon Gray, Jane Grigson, Seamus Heaney, Cardinal Heenan, Patricia Highsmith, Tim Hilton, Michael Holroyd, Barry Humphries, Clive James, John Lahr, Mario Vargas Llosa, Derek Mahon, Ved Mehta, Karl Miller, Desmond Morris, Paul Scott, Janet Adam Smith, George Steiner, John Sutherland, E.P. Thompson, Ann Thwaite, Claire Tomalin, Hugo Williams and Theodore Zeldin. John Gross made his *TLS* debut in 1960 with a review of a book on Ezra Pound. And by the end of the decade, the generation born since the Second World War was beginning to make its anonymous impact. Peter Ackroyd, Julian Barnes, James Fenton, Christopher Hitchens, Timothy Mo, Shiva Naipaul, Craig Raine, Lorna Sage and Marina Warner all first wrote for the *TLS* in Arthur Crook's final years as editor.

Of new contributors in 1959-1974, the most prolific in terms of number of books reviewed was Anthea Secker, who had been on the paper's staff in the 1950s and subsequently married the son of the publisher Martin Secker. She covered more than 500 titles in this period, mainly children's books and biographies. Both David Harsent and Marghanita Laski reviewed over 400, the former poetry and new fiction, the latter principally

detective novels but also other publications ranging between social studies, literary history and lexicography (she was herself an important contributor to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, identifying many new usages on the basis of the books she reviewed). John Russell Taylor scored about 350, his topics ranging from film, which he reviewed for *The Times*, to art deco.

The anonymity debate concluded

Though Arthur Crook was intensely loyal to the tradition of anonymity and both enjoyed and was adroit at the editorial manoeuvres it made possible, the steady expansion of the use of signed articles looks in retrospect like an evolution towards the inevitable. But more than 25 years after he retired, he and some of his colleagues still maintained that the system operated well, that, as John Willett put it, "As with many English institutions, if you've got something logically impossible and quite wrong but it happens to work, you shouldn't alter it". (Willett made a comparison with the Royal Family.) Between the 1960s and early 70s criticism of the policy was mounting in various quarters, not least, now, within the office. But whatever the views of the assistant editors, one of them has recalled that they "were always expected to defend it to the last outside", and the subject was scarcely mentioned in the *TLS*'s columns. Typical was a review of F.W. Bateson's *Essays in Critical Dissent* (1972), in which his 1957 attack on the *TLS* was reprinted in a slightly updated form. The reviewer, the young Terry Eagleton (a very frequent contributor around this time), mentioned anonymous reviewing along with "pedantry in learned journals and the examination system in English studies" as being among the book's targets, rather in the spirit in which one might report the complaints of a notorious grouse

about ineluctable forces such as the weather, but he made no attempt to engage with, or even to summarise, Bateson's arguments. As for letters related to anonymous reviewing, people in the office must have enjoyed printing an attack by M.C. Bradbrook on a piece about William Blake which she claimed had slighted the scholarship of Kathleen Raine, who was in fact the anonymous reviewer. Only one letter directly about the subject was published during Crook's editorship. In the course of replying to a review, the Conservative Lord Alport had made a glancing and good-humoured criticism of the policy, only to be slapped down by another peer, Lord Elkins, in one of those interventions which for a time made the *TLS*'s letters page a byword for motiveless-seeming ferocity. Its only interest for present purposes lies in Elkins's suggestion that since the anonymity of *TLS* reviewers was "a well-known fact", anyone who complained about it should "be denied the favour of your correspondence columns". If this was a *non sequitur*, it none the less seemed to enunciate something not all that remote from editorial policy. The sense of a near-embargo on the matter prompted Bateson to return to the attack in "A *TLS* Postscript", published in *Essays in Criticism* in April 1971. (This piece, too, was reprinted in *Essays in Critical Dissent*.)

Here, Bateson concentrates on two instances of what he describes as "editorial censorship". The first arose from a misattribution. The literary historian Barbara Hardy had learned that the author of a book on 19th century fiction believed that Hardy had written what he regarded as an unfair review of it, published in the *TLS*. The story had spread among his friends. Wanting to limit the damage, Hardy wrote a letter

intended for publication in the *TLS*, making clear that she disapproved of anonymous reviewing and had never written for the journal. Neither this nor a subsequent letter, more strongly worded, was published. Bateson's second example is a letter of his own, the only one from him to have been turned down by the *TLS*. It took up a published letter by an American author, L.P. Curtis, who had alleged (18 May 1967) that a lengthy *TLS* review-essay about recent work on Donne published under the heading "Ill Donne; Well Donne: Scholarship and Para-Scholarship" (6 April 1967) exemplified, among other things, anti-Americanism in English literary culture. (The piece was by John Sparrow. It, and Curtis's reply, generated a considerable correspondence.) Bateson described Curtis's response as "wild" but professed to sympathise with him because the situation was one where "a discomfited reader is shooting an unseen enemy in the dark". Surely, he wrote, the time had come for the *TLS* "to abandon its obsolete adherence to faceless reviewers". His letter did not appear.

Oddly, Bateson's 1971 article didn't mention a legal case which would have given him extra ammunition, and which had been reported not only in *The Times* but in the *TLS* itself. In May 1967, an anonymous *TLS* 'middle' had attacked a scientific publishing house which, it alleged, was charging excessively high prices for abstracts of articles in Russian scientific journals: articles which did not fall under copyright regulations, and which could therefore be reproduced at very little cost. The publisher, Eugene Gros, sued successfully for libel. At a late stage in the legal action it emerged that the author of the piece had previously been employed by Gros for several years. He

was a scientist and Russian linguist named Serweryn Chomet, who had been introduced to Arthur Crook around the time he stopped working for Gros, and had contributed several unsigned pieces to the *TLS*. The judge in the case found that Chomet's piece defamed Gros and that Chomet had been motivated by malice. Awarding costs plus £7,000 in damages against Arthur Crook as editor and Times Newspapers Ltd, the judge observed that "a maligned person should be entitled to know the identity of one who may be a highly malicious and self-interested writer" and that the case, which had taken two years to resolve, would have been dealt with more quickly and therefore much less expensively if the authorship of the libel had been known.

He could have added that if the author had not been writing under cover of anonymity, he might have written more judiciously, or not at all. On an intellectual rather than personal level, this was the argument behind another serious attack on anonymous reviewing, published in 1973 in the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*. J.B. Kelly, an American historian of the British Empire who specialised in the Middle East, analysed *TLS* coverage of books on Britain, the Arabs and Israel during the previous five years. His article, "*TLS* in the Desert", made detailed reference to Bateson's 1957 essay and the published responses to it, while developing a new argument about the risks of anonymity in political debate. Kelly argued, first, that anonymity, far from contributing, as Alan Pryce-Jones and others had argued, to 'balance' and detachment, had given a specious authority to what Kelly presented as anti-Zionist propaganda: for example, in reviews of books by Elie Kedourie and P.J. Vatikiotis. Second, he claimed that serious scholarly work was being reviewed

by people with insufficient expertise. From the point of view of the history of the *TLS*, the article was made more piquant by its first example, which was taken from a review of a book on the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war written by David Pryce-Jones, son of Alan. Kelly also introduced an intriguing question. Another weekly journal with substantial coverage of books on international affairs also published (and still publishes) its reviews anonymously: the *Economist*. So, Kelly surmised, "there may have been occasions when the same reviewer, unknown to either the one editor or the other, has reviewed a book in both the *TLS* and the *Economist*".

The paradox was that although it would not have been difficult to mount a defence against Kelly, to have done so would have involved breaching the very policy he attacked. One man's bias is another's editorial line, and whatever the substance of Kelly's disagreement with the reviewers' opinions, the reviewers themselves were often much more authoritative than he guessed. One was Gordon Waterfield, a former Reuters correspondent with long experience in the Middle East, who had been in the Cabinet Office in 1944-1946; another, Elizabeth Monroe, a Fellow of St Anne's College Oxford who had held a Rockefeller Travelling Fellowship in the Middle East and North Africa in the 1930s, had served in the Middle East Division of the Ministry of Information in the Second World War, and had subsequently (on this point at least, Kelly's hunch was correct) joined the staff of the *Economist*.

The battle, however, was already over. *The Times* itself had already introduced by-lines. The following year, on

7 June 1974, in a signed editorial, Arthur Crook's successor John Gross, a former literary editor of the *New Statesman* who had held posts at London and Cambridge Universities, announced the abandonment of anonymous *TLS* reviewing. In the correspondence which ensued, Bateson basked in being on the winning side, this time against opponents who included Jonathan Culler and Alfred Knopf. But he was never one to leave an advantage unpressed. 'The next step, Sir,' he wrote in September 1974, 'will be for you to reveal to us. who it was actually wrote the brilliant, prejudiced, silly, perfunctory reviews in that distant past to which Mr Knopf looks back so fondly'. This new element in his campaign has taken even longer to reach fruition (though a start had in fact already been made in an occasional column called 'The Fifty-Year Rule' - later, 'Fifty Years On' - which began under Crook in October 1967). How Bateson and his allies would have enjoyed the *TLS Historical Archive*.

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