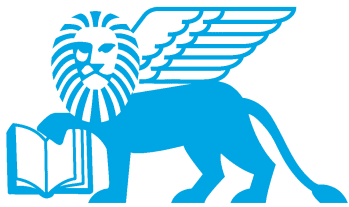


# Exploring 'new territories' of scholarly enquiry with



## Literature Online

Since 1996, *Literature Online* has been one of the most substantial resources available for scholars and students of English and American literature. In addition to over a third of a million full-text works of poetry, prose and drama in English, *Literature Online* also contains resources for over 17,500 authors, more than 4000 biographies, and the full text of well over 200 specialist literature journals. The vast depth and range of content in *Literature Online* enables academics to both review and revisit traditional areas of scholarly study, as well as exploring completely new themes, ideas and subjects.

*Literature Online* contains not only canonical texts in their original format (all *Literature Online's* texts are accurate reproductions of authoritative printed texts; full publication and pagination details of the print original are given for accurate academic citation) but also more than 100,000 contemporary works of literature, from an extensive range of authors and publishers.

In such a huge database – described by the poet Edwin Morgan as a 'Shelleyan universal anthology' – how can a researcher be sure they are finding all the

relevant information they need? Professor Steven Connor compares searching *Literature Online* to dropping a fishing line in a wildly-populated literary ocean: 'almost every search throws up a writer or text with some kind of local excellence or originality that you have never encountered before'. Navigating this plethora of resources is made easy by *Literature Online's* sophisticated search functionality, which 'allows you to spot connections, contingencies and adjacencies' avoiding the dangers of 'keyhole surgery [...] where results are stripped from their context'.

Over the course of his career 'fishing' through *Literature Online*, Professor Connor has used the database to identify many new objects and themes to study, including greasiness, spots, flies, corridors, bags, 'the vapours', and, more recently, 'sobbing'. As he says, '*Literature Online* helps you break free from the ways in which the landscape of cultural history has been mapped – allowing you to go far off-piste and to generate alternate topographies for that landscape, even whole new territories.'

*Fly*, London: Reaktion, 2006  
'This is a compact work of scholarship,



'Literature Online is preeminent among a number of database resources that are transforming the nature of literary study and the ways in which it relates to other disciplines'  
Professor Steven Connor





*well researched and well referenced both from entomological and literary standpoints. I commend it to any reader whose view is broader than a microscope tube.* British Journal of Entomology and Natural History

*Fly* traces the history of the fly in poetry, painting, religion and science. Connor found that the perception of the fly went through a radical shift in the late nineteenth century, a period in which the fly was viewed as a source of infection. However, earlier texts in *Literature Online* point to a very different perspective, where the fly might be seen as the 'figure of fleeting and ephemeral joy' or even more surprisingly as 'sexy'. Connor cites a speech in *Romeo and Juliet* where Romeo imagines the fly can access the 'white wonder of dear Juliet's hand/ And steal immortal blessing from her lips' where he cannot. This reassessment of the much maligned fly has been very pleasing for entomologists.

In plotting the course of the fly through English poetry, Connor was able to develop a taxonomy of fly poems – including, for instance, 'fly-idyll, which celebrates the careless life of the fly; the fly-fable, in which the fly is used to point up moral lessons about the transitoriness of life and the vanity of corporal

pleasures, the fly love-poem' and so on. He says that 'the literary texts that *Literature Online* made it possible for me to convene helped immeasurably to sieve the subtle feeling-tone attached to the fly – the ironic mixture of triviality and weightiness involved in thinking and writing about such an insignificant thing'.

Tracing thematic subjects across time in this manner requires an in-depth analysis of literature across a wide range of texts, from the traditional to the marginal, in order to gain an understanding of 'the transmissions and subtle transformations of poetic and metaphorical formulae'. Before the development of electronic resources such as *Literature Online*, a study such as Connor's *Fly* would have been a laborious, painstaking process of ploughing through archives and footnotes, 'an affair largely of hunch and hazard'. What's more, this painstaking process could also be without satisfaction: 'I would never actually have known how much of the available material I had actually located – whether I was aware of most of the relevant texts, half of them, or hardly any'. With *Literature Online*, however, the scholar can quickly and easily 'get through a lifetime of reading' and 'make your own scholarly luck'.

Since 2001, ProQuest has sponsored the annual Filming Literature competition, run by the Learning Technologies Group at the University of Oxford. Every year, students at the University are invited to submit short films on digital video inspired by literary texts that are included in *Literature Online*.

<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/marketing/academics/filmlit.jsp>

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Steven Connor is Professor of Modern Literature and Theory at Birkbeck College London, where he has taught since 1979. He is also the College Orator. He is Academic Director of the London Consortium Graduate Programme in Humanities and Cultural Studies. His most recent books are *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004) and *Fly*, on the history of the fly in poetry, painting, religion and science (London: Reaktion 2006). He is currently completing an historical poetics of the air.

