



SSOL
SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF LITERATURE

An Editorial as Autumn 2024 Comes to a Close

EDITORIAL

DAVID I. HANAUER 



ABSTRACT

Last editorial by David I. Hanauer.

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As leaves turn from green to red to brown
And slowly flutter to the ground
Leaving branches bare against the iron sky
I must gently part
leaving you
with a new orchardist
to cultivate, nurture and harvest
the sweet fruit of knowledge.

An academic journal, especially one that is the official publication of a professional society, is a community affair. Our journal, the *Scientific Study of Literature*, is part of the larger public of empirical researchers of literature and is directly supported by this community. Many academics at varying levels of development in their personal careers have and continue to voluntarily contribute to the success and functioning of the journal. As someone who has been the editor of the journal for the last decade, and as someone who is announcing in this editorial the transition of this position to a new general editor, I want to thank all those who have submitted and revised papers, reviewed papers, proofread and prepared manuscripts for publication, managed the editorial process, facilitated and supported the editorial platform, read papers that have been published, participated in discussions concerning issues that arise in running a journal and finally supporting the general editor's role. As opposed to current political misthinking that situates grand personae as saviors, deciders and doers, academic journals like ours run on the power of community and one-person, general editor or otherwise, is a part but not a deciding factor of a journal's future. As such, I foresee (for the reasons I will state below) a positive future for the development for the *Scientific Study of Literature* journal and confident, innovative stewardship from the incoming editor – Dr. Moniek Kuijpers.

Over the last 10 years, the field of the scientific study of literature has changed and developed in ways that I could not have predicted when I took on the position following the editorship of Dr. Willie van Peer. At that time, the empirical study of literature had already established that it was possible and valuable to conduct empirical investigations of literature, but the training and experience for this endeavor was lacking and studies tended to be constructed with the framework of classic psychological-empirical designs. Sample sizes tended to be small, the literatures studied coming primarily from English, German and Dutch speaking countries and text numbers limited. Qualitative work was a rarity but when conducted it utilized the best practices of psychological research. These methodological frameworks allowed the establishment of empirical understandings and theories of literary reading and were reported in the journal. The initial aim of this dissemination was to establish the importance of empirical research within the field of literary studies and literary education.

Since that time, several positive developments have occurred. Central to these is the widening understanding that empirical studies of literature are important beyond literary and education departments. Interest in how literature is processed is now situated within brain studies, social and cultural contexts, advocacy for the environment, support of cancer patients, and aesthetics and has become both a pure and an applied field of scientific work. This development has led to increased funding for research and the foundation of a few high-profile research centers dedicated to the study of literary processing, something that could only have been dreamed of years before. Methodologically, in our field, we now find large scale computational linguistic studies, brain scanning techniques, measures of physiological response, sophisticated qualitative designs, and an ever-widening array of new statistical techniques. Research has widened to include creative writing and not just literary reading and recently there is an increasing presence for arts-based research methodologies.

Perhaps the most important development has been, that funding was found to support the training of cohorts of new empirical researchers of literature. Rather than literary researchers who found their own way and training into empirical research, or empirically trained researchers who found their way into literature, there are now young researchers who were trained as empirical literary researchers. This cohort and their training are a sign of the maturity of our field and a positive sign for the future. I have no doubt that ten years from now, the field will have changed once again as significantly as it has over the last decade.

I hope that my tenure as general editor has helped support and promote these developments. I have throughout my tenure tried to summarize in editorial form changes that I have observed and provide a platform for established and new researchers to push our knowledge forward. I am proud of everyone who made it into the archives of the journal for the last ten years and look forward to see what will be published in the future editions of the journal.

I would like to personally thank some close friends and colleagues who have worked directly with me in my role as general editor. Dr. Paul Sopcak has been by my side throughout my tenure. Those who know me, know I can write a good letter and make a nuanced decision. They also know that having written the letter or having made the decision, acting upon this within the relevant systems is nearly always beyond me. Paul has helped and supported me, always a friend and always forgiving for my failures. I thank him from the depth of my heart. Dr. Justin Nicholes has worked tirelessly to make sure that no paper is ever turned away just because of an English language issue. Justin, a former doctoral student of mine, has put into action a principle that I have held dear for a very long time – that English, the current language of science, should not be a gatekeeper for researchers. Justin's role has often been silent and unacknowledged and yet it is crucial for a field like ours. Dr. Federico Pianzola proposed, built and manages the new online platform for the *Scientific Study of Literature*. This development, that could not have happened without him, facilitates a much broader audience for the journal and allows us to overcome the unfair barriers of paywall journals. I thank him for making this a possibility. I thank my editorial board – Dr. Arthur Jacobs, Dr. Melanie Green, and Dr. Gerhard Lauer – for always being willing to step in and handle relevant editorial tasks and for being such good, informed and intelligent discussion partners on any issues that needed to be addressed. I thank Dr. Don Kuiken for initially suggesting to me that I apply for the position of general editor and for showing me the complexity of literary thinking. I would like to thank Dr. Frank Hakemulder for figuratively and literally saving me from drowning and for always being willing to take on a review of a paper when we might get stuck. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Willie van Peer, for being there before me and for showing me the way, when there was no one else to do it.

My final act is to introduce and wish well to our incoming general editor Dr. Moniek Kuijpers. I think everyone in our field knows Moniek as she is the outgoing IGEL chairperson, a prolific researcher, an active academic in our field and someone who has a track record of organizing funded initiatives. Moniek brings with her a wealth of experience in relation to empirical studies of literature and has a good understanding of the procedural, ethical and real-world aspects of the work we do. It is time for new initiatives, new eyes and innovative ideas. Ever since the empirical study of literature was founded, it thrived on thinking and researching literature in new ways. Under this new general editorship, I am sure that the journal will continue to thrive, grow and change.

David I. Hanauer 27th of November, 2024

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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