



SSOL
SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF LITERATURE

Ars Poetica in a World of Change: A First Editorial Commentary on Our New Platform

EDITORIAL

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ABSTRACT

Editorial for Volume 12 Issue 1 (2023).

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KEYWORDS:

Diversity; Equity; Inclusion;
Editorial; Poetry

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Hanauer, D. I. (2024). Ars Poetica in a World of Change: A First Editorial Commentary on Our New Platform. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 12(1), 87–91. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61645/ssol.185>

For the last decade, I have been the editor of the *Scientific Study of Literature*. I inherited this role from my friend and the person responsible for getting me into the empirical study of literature, the first editor of the journal, Prof. Dr. Willie van Peer. This journal is the official journal of the IGEL organization and is designed to provide a home for the dissemination of research and knowledge relevant to and developed within our community. With my fellow editors (Arthur M. Jacobs, Gerhard Lauer, Melanie C. Green, Paul Sopčák, Federico Pianzola, and Justin Nicholes), journal reviewers, and the leadership of IGEL (Moniek Kuijpers, Federico Pianzola, Shannon Whitten, Marloes Mak, Rocío Riestra Camacho, Lynn Eekhof, and Jan Auracher), I have had the honor of reviewing and overseeing developments in the types of research conducted, the issues that have emerged, the questions that have been addressed, the methods that have been employed, and generally the way that our field has progressed. As I enter the last year of my tenure as editor of SSOL, I thought I would offer this commentary on what I consider a significant development in our organization's history and the journal's future. As you are reading this essay, I am sure you are aware that our journal has shifted from a paper-based, firewall-isolated journal publication system to an online, open-access publication type. While many practical reasons for this transition exist, I would like in this commentary to explore the underpinning, far broader processes that have led to this transition and to state my hope for the future. I consider this transition of the journal to be an opportunity to discuss developments in science and science education and how they relate to our organization and journal.

My core assumption in this commentary is that the scientific study of literature is not divorced from either changes in society or developments in the disciplines of science, literature, and languages. As someone who works in both the sciences and the humanities, I am acutely aware of transitions happening across academia and work settings. In particular, science education is undergoing a humanizing revolution designed to make science, math, engineering, and technology more accessible to and inclusive for a wide range of demographic groups (Imad, Reder, & Rose, 2023). There are several different sources and reasons for this imperative: (1) demographic analyses of the groups participating in STEM and the finding of deep imbalances between population and STEM worker ratios; (2) the need for more workers in a wide range of STEM fields; (3) economic analyses which show that graduates with STEM degrees have access to better-paying jobs; (4) cultural directives to facilitate diversity, equity, and inclusiveness across all human systems; and (5) epistemological concerns that knowledge directed and created by a demographically limited group of scientists is in itself limited in the questions it asks, the answers it suggests, and the knowledge it creates.

All these concerns have led to a series of directives intended to make science and, importantly, science education work differently across the world. Examples of this change from the US context include initiatives like the SEA-PHAGES program, an integrated Research and Education Community (iREC) which provide access to a high-level research experience in an equitable, inclusive manner across multiple institution types and student demographics (Hanauer et al., 2017, 2022); The NSF Advance program (<https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/advance-organizational-change-gender-equity-stem>) designed to provide funding for institutional change in relation to diversity and inclusion initiatives; and Presidential White Papers providing high-level directives for STEM inclusiveness such as the *Interagency Working Group on Inclusion in STEM* (2021), which delineates best practices for diversity and inclusion in STEM education and research. European examples include the European Parliament's investigation and recommendations for enhanced STEM education for diversity and inclusion (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0163_EN.html), the European University Association pan European investigation of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the higher education level (Claeys-Kulik, Jørgensen, and Stöber, 2019), and the EU Diversity Initiatives (<https://www.eudiversity2023.eu/>).

While the number of new initiatives under development is large and in relation to a wide range of levels of education and work from the team, department, institution, workplace, and across multiple countries, the overall aim is the same:

to enhance the degree of access to the practices, careers, and benefits of science for all people no matter what identities, backgrounds, and histories they may have while making everyone experience a sense of value, ownership, and belonging. (Interagency Working Group on Inclusion in STEM, 2021).

The zeitgeist of the moment is that science is not inclusive, that this creates inequities in the fields and careers of STEM and limits the types of knowledge we know and respect. This situation is to the detriment of the knowledge we have, restricts the people who produce it, and confines the potential benefits for humanity and the world. We have as a society and as academics reached a consciousness of the need for some basic changes in the way we go about our research, professions, and lives.

This position has direct and significant ramifications on the practices of a journal designed to support the dissemination of knowledge from a professional organization like the *Scientific Study of Literature*. Our aim as a scientific journal is parallel to that of any other scientific endeavor. We wish to support, develop, and disseminate innovative, warranted knowledge concerning the issues of direct interest to us as an organization while maintaining high research and ethical standards. But beyond this established role for an academic journal, at this point and in conjunction with the zeitgeist of change, we also wish to ensure the diversity, equity, and inclusiveness of our journal work. We wish our journal to be a site where people with a wide range of backgrounds and identities feel that their concerns, within the parameters of our journal's scope, have a place to be aired, that their work is valued, and that they belong to the community of empirical researchers of literature.

The concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion are widely known. But it is still worth reiterating them here. Diversity refers to the recognition of the differences between people in terms of demographics, identity, beliefs, and cultural positions. Equity relates to the idea that all people should have access to all relevant resources and opportunities without bias and discrimination. Inclusion refers to the feelings of being valued, of belonging, and of having the option to speak freely and have all voices heard and included. To use an empirical metaphor, I consider all three of these concepts to be underpinned by one latent variable which provides a vision of action. Across all our areas of activity in the journal and concerning all our outcomes, we need to facilitate an inclusive and responsive science that proves inviting and open to all.

I do not wish to speak in opportune platitudes without being specific about what this means in terms of the journal. On a simple, practical level, some directions need to be taken to support the inclusiveness, equity, and diversity of the journal. First, as an organization and promoter of quality empirical studies of literature, we strive as much as possible to have diversity in our editors, reviewers, readers, and submitting researchers. There are broader processes at play concerning the reality of having diversity at all these levels. Who is qualified to edit, review, and submit are areas of training beyond the journal or IGEL as an organization. But increasingly, the initiatives within IGEL aim to enhance our diversity through education, workshops, article accessibility, grants, and conferences. It is a slow process. But serious improvements have been made and like all human endeavors, one has to take the long view. With its partners in the IGEL organization, the journal aims for diversity and inclusiveness in its personnel on all levels. Second, in relation to our policies of reviewing and publishing, we aim for equitable, safe, caring, supportive, clear, and nurturing processes. This relates to the way communication is enacted between parties, the quality and clarity of the review, and the desire to be constructive and supportive in moving papers to publication. In addition, the move to the new platform allows a discussion of the community's desires in terms of the specific practices that are desirable in terms of equity, transparency, and support. The journal is designed to serve the IGEL organization and provide a publishing arm for its members. As such, conversation and change are possible. Thirdly, the content we publish needs to address the potential diversity in the languages, literatures, identities, and methodologies of our members and readers. Historically, as we all know, there has been a set of languages and literatures that have had a far higher frequency of discussion than others. In addition, certain methodologies have had more presence than others. The collective work we have published in the past is and should be a point of pride for its innovative interdisciplinarity. But it should also be the ground from which more diverse research endeavors are launched. Once again, there is a reality to what we can achieve. But the aim, through education and careful nurturing of potential papers, is for an increased diversity of content.

I could continue with the practical level of the imperative of diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices for the journal, but I think there is a far more important and deeper level of interaction that I would like to discuss. On a very basic level, it is critical to define what is it that the empirical

study of literature does. Why literature? Why science? I would argue that our collective work is deeply important for the social processes of our times. Look through the pages of our past issues, and what will you find? Studies of how literature is processed? How engagement, empathy, sympathy, understanding, and a sense of beauty emerge in the consciousness of another? How narrative makes us feel and respond? How a literary text allows us to see and make meaning? Methodology is central for us, and we explore and propose an ever-increasing and more sophisticated set of ways of getting at human interaction with literary texts. At the heart of the matter, collectively, we are concerned with how humans engage with the beauty of literature, how that happens, and, increasingly, the ramifications of this on who we are and how we respond to those around us.

Taking into perspective the world we live in, I wish to elaborate on this last point. As I write this commentary, around the world, violence rages. In Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, Afghanistan, Yemen, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and elsewhere, people kill one another over land, identity, religion, race, and a multitude of other supposedly meaningful distinctions. They do not see the other or feel the humanity of the people in the world. They fall foul of the narratives in which they believe without seeing how those same narratives trap them into ethically unsupportable actions. As Hakemulder (2000) showed us at the turn of the century, positionality interacts with narrative, and our moral positions are situated in our identities, histories, and backgrounds. Collectively, over the years, we have been looking at how the cultural products of literature work and interact with the human. Increasingly, as you will see if you review the last few years of publications in SSOL, papers have appeared dedicated to what I once termed *applied literariness* (Hanauer, 2018) – the use of our knowledge of literary processing in order to make the world a better place. Issues such as the use of literary reading and writing for well-being, eco-criticism, and a range of particular populations are becoming central to our work. We generate the knowledge of literary processing and apply it to help solve the heart of humanity's woes – the deep difficulty in knowing the other and seeing beyond ourselves. Our science can help in exactly this area.

I would like to share my vision for our collective work: I hope for a world in which our knowledge of literary reading and writing facilitates empathy and understanding among people and thus alleviates the very worst of the situations created by hate, violence, and racism that can emerge between groups. I hope that our work allows humans to connect in a safe framework of the internal workings of the mind and allows equitable, diverse, and inclusive communities to emerge and flourish. I hope that our work allows beauty to be used to counter the need for horror, and that we facilitate processes in which the meanings of all people's lives are valued and expressed. I hope our science can make a better world.

Finally, let me end in an unconventional way. I offer you my version of *Ars Poetica* as a way of expressing my belief in the role of poetry and literature in the world.

ARS POETICA (HOMAGE TO ARCHIBALD MACLEISH)

By David I. Hanauer

A poem like the transitioning

Yellow, brown and blood red leaves

Of Fall,

Should flutter

Into your consciousness

The presence of others

And your situatedness in nature.

A poem should

Distance you from yourself

Allowing the theater of ghosts

To perform the drama of our existences

In the dark, silence of your mind.

A poem like a gentle hand on the small of your back,
Or a cold blast of wind across your face
Should make you feel
The impossible sense
Of what has happened to another.

A poem should resonate like
The silent pause
Between the notes
Of a piano solo
Leaving you in suspense
For the moment to come.

A poem
Should not only mean, or feel or be,
A poem should do
Bringing you closer to yourself, the world and those around you.


FUNDING INFORMATION

The work for this editorial was not supported by any funding.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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Submitted: 11 December 2023

Accepted: 11 December 2023

Published: 12 January 2024

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