

Editorial: The Birth of *Readings*

[Alexandra Berlina](#), *Editor*

Most of my friends, luckily, aren't literary scholars. Nevertheless, they read books. Most of them also take an occasional look at literary criticism. Some have even been observed to peek into essays on literature. What they never read are articles from academic journals in literary studies.

Since I first began studying literature, I couldn't shake off the feeling that they might actually get into the habit, and that this could make their reading lives more rewarding and more fun – but where should they start? When I started teaching, the same question arose in regard to my students. It seemed to me that they needed a journal aimed at both scholars and the general public, a journal free both of charge and of complicated lingo. Every now and then, I looked for one. I stumbled upon many great journals, but none was quite what I wanted to share with students and friends. In November 2014, I realized: if I can't find one, I must found one.

A discussion of literary scholarship for non-academic pleasure at [MLA commons](#) showed that I was not alone I had a name: *Readings*, I had helpful online tools, what more could I want? Encouraged by MLA's [endorsement of online journals](#), I went ahead, and soon [www.readingsjournal.net](#) was online. I emailed a dozen scholars whose work I considered not only brilliant but also enjoyable for non-scholars. Soon, amazingly, *Readings* had an illustrious and diverse editorial board. [Robert Alter](#), [Angelika Bammer](#), [Hans Bertens](#), [Brian Boyd](#), [Svetlana Boym](#), [Theo Hermans](#), [Andrew Kahn](#), [Susan S. Lanser](#), [Ansgar Nünning](#) and [Josef Raab](#) live in Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and the US; they teach American, Dutch, English, Hebrew and Slavic literature. What they have in common, apart from their knack for readable scholarship, is that they are comparatists (be it part of their official job description or not). Hans Bertens, in fact, is the current president of the International Comparative Literature Association. This mattered to me: *Readings* is meant to be open to all literatures. (As it turned out, most of this first issue focuses on Anglophone fiction – but we will come to that.)

Next, we published a Call for Papers and Reviewers, using all academic networks we could get our hands on. The CFP said this: "*Readings* is an open-access, double-blind peer-reviewed journal in literary studies. Like other journals, we look for academic quality and originality. Unlike most, we also care for high readability and the potential interest of literature-loving non-scholars. We welcome submissions on all aspects of world literature. [...] Imagine a friend who loves literature but is no scholar as your ideal reader. To put it more grandly: our idea of a Perfect Paper hovers between *PMLA* and *The New Yorker*." This audacity was rewarded: submissions and review offers began coming in. In just over four months, *Readings* peer-reviewed sixteen articles and accepted seven.

Three of these were reviewed in under two weeks. All reviews gave helpful advice; some raised points that inspired authors to develop their articles into new directions. I cannot thank the reviewers enough for their work.

In future, we will try not to let authors wait more than a month from submission to publication. A couple of years may be the standard of many a respectable journal, but *Readings* wants its articles fresh and its authors happy. In future, accepted articles will be published immediately upon the submission of the revised version. For the first issue, however, I decided to wait for the magic number of seven – and ended up with a marvelous haul:

- Carlos Abreu Mendoza's "Borges, Tlön and the Third Tiger: Towards a Poetics of Experience" doubly defies what turned out the journal's mainstream: alas, it is the only article dealing with non-Anglophone literature – and with poetry. Drawing attention to *The Maker*, it shows that Borges' work is far from being merely a dusty metaliterary labyrinth.
- Steve Criniti's "Chick Lit on Yellow Paper: Stevie Smith as Precursor", a joy to read, discusses Smith's unjustly forgotten *Novel on Yellow Paper* as a forerunner of Chick Lit.
- Melissa Knox's "'I'm Done': Philip Roth, *Serio Ludere*, Narcissism, and Nemesis" playfully connects the Renaissance concept of *serio ludere* with what Philip Roth does to the identities of his literary alter egos.
- Rebecca Long's "Children in War: The Pursuit of Happiness in Three Children's Books" looks for traces of happiness in three novels – British, Danish and Irish – dealing with topics that might seem too harsh for children's literature.
- Laura Lonsdale's "The Perils and Possibilities of Mistranslation: Equivocation and Barbarism in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*" convincingly argues for ethical value in Hemingway's much-maligned use of Spanish.
- James McAdams' "'Now is the Time for Me to Win': Social Dysfunction and 'The New Sincerity' in the Works of George Saunders" is a delightful close reading of Saunders' "Winky" in its Dostoyevskian appeal to sincerity and compassion.
- Finally, Kari Sawden's "No Magic Mirror Required: Folklore and Patriarchy in Angela Carter's 'The Snow Child'" discusses how Angela Carter turns a fairy tale inside out in order to talk about violence and gender.

The CFP has been sent far and wide, but all the articles come either from Anglophone countries or from where I happen to be living: Canada, Germany, Ireland, the UK and the US. Most of them also have another, less easily explained thing in common: they deal with ethics. If the journal reflected my own current interests, all articles would be discussing Nabokov's puns or Shklovsky's imagery, or vice versa. I'm happy that this isn't so. I've greatly enjoyed reading articles lying outside of my immediate academic interests, and I hope you will. I'm looking forward to a lively discussion: you'll find a comments section under every article.

On a personal note

This journal is a birthday present I'm making to myself. On April 9th, I'm turning 31; I've born two children, I've published a book – having no talent for tree planting and housebuilding, all I could add to my earthly accomplishments was to start a journal. Doing so on my own was slightly mad: at the moment, I'm an independent scholar, which is a fancy way of saying that I swing from grant to grant, Tarzan-like, hoping to find a stable tree for teaching and research. Today, the journal still has no funding (please [email me](#) if you know of an organization that might offer support), but I have received so much encouragement and help from the reviewers, the authors and the editorial board that I don't feel like a lonely madwoman with an *idée fixe* anymore. Now, all is ready for the most important people in the life of a journal: the readers.

Thank you!

Alexandra Berlina