

Dear Reader,

When I last wrote to you, I described students ‘lolling about’ on the green lawns of the University of Nottingham’s handsome campus. I can assure you that no such lolling is taking place today. The high beeches and oaks around the lake have shaken their leaves to their ankles and the sky has turned a narrow-eyed grey and it is *cold*. It will get colder before the winter is through, no doubt, but after the blue fresh days of autumn this feels cold enough for now.

So I hope you are reading this in a warm place; if not beside a blazing log fire then at least in a room with a source of heat and a comfortable chair. We have ten letters gathered in this issue, and although the given theme was penpals most of our correspondents have taken that idea and run on ahead to consider the ways in which a letter – any piece of writing – speaks from one person to another, often in ways the original writer could never have foreseen. We’ve enjoyed reading them, along with the many other letters that came flooding through the brass letterbox which the School of English have newly installed in our office door.

But the last couple of months haven’t just been about reading letters. We’ve been talking about them as well. When we launched our first issue, back in early October, we were hoping for a handful of social media mentions and maybe an interview with a literary blog or two. But, thanks mainly to the power of the press release (remember those?), we found ourselves blinking in the headlights of publicity for a brief moment. There were articles in *the Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Financial Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, and interviews on BBC television and radio. (Shortly after an interview on BBC World, a young production assistant mentioned that their typical viewing figure was around 200 million. We are slightly disappointed that some of those viewers have not yet subscribed to our mailing list.)

We mention this not by way of bragging, but as an observation that there is an obvious level of interest in the idea of letters and letter-writing. Intriguingly, just about every one of the dozen local radio stations this editor was interviewed by asked whether ‘people are really still interested in letter writing.’ The affirmative answer seemed to be implicit in the question being so repeatedly asked, and we’ve been wondering why.

Clearly, *we* think letters and letter-writing are good starting points for a literary journal. But we were surprised to find how many other people feel the same way. Partly this is down to nostalgia, of course, and a realisation that handwritten letters are going the way of all superseded technologies. But it seems that in the letter people see a form of writing which is still both accessible and meaningful. The point was often made, in interviews, that those who rely entirely on email will still use the letter for moments of significance; a letter of condolence, of complaint, of thanks. And we persist in thinking, against accusations of nostalgia or worse, that there can be something uniquely considered about the letter form; that the slow pace of delivery creates a tone of thought and response which is different from the immediacy of digital correspondence.

So the letter isn't dead yet, and people still feel a need for it as a form. Which is good news for us, and for our marketing department. But let's be clear: this journal isn't attempting to revive a dwindling medium or campaign on its behalf. Rather, we're here to enjoy letters and letter-writing, to celebrate what letters can do, and to explore what the passing of the medium might mean.

Our next issue, due out in April, is on the theme of travelling light. More details in the footnotes below. We'd love to hear from you. Meanwhile, enjoy this issue, pass it on to a friend, and tell everyone you know that it's free to subscribe to *The Letters Page*. We have metrics to hit, apparently. We're not sure what a metric is, but we're going to try and hit one before writing to you again.

Yours Sincerely,
The Editor

We feel that some of the following should take responsibility for the contents of these pages:

Editor: Jon McGregor
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Online Editor: Hannah Jackson
Publicity Manager: Elexa Rose
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Additional Notes: *The Letters Page* is a project run within the Creative Writing section of the School of English at the University of Nottingham, and is entirely funded by the University of Nottingham. We are grateful for the opportunity, and for their support, and excited about the enthusiasm and insight which our student assistants have brought to the project. We don't feel it would be inappropriate at this point to mention that, should you or any of your close friends and relations be considering studying for an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in English or especially in Creative Writing, it would be well worth your/their while looking at the courses available here. We're not saying that our editorial office is *the* smartest place to spend time honing your/their love of reading and sense of writing craft, but it's pretty close. Also, there are sometimes doughnuts. Details of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses can be found at www.nottingham.ac.uk/ugstudy/courses/english/english.aspx, or by writing to:

Admissions,
School of English,
University of Nottingham,
Nottingham NG7 2RD,
UK.

One Last Thing: Submissions are now open for our third issue, loosely based around the notion of 'travelling light'. We're thinking about travel, and travelling, and being away from home. We're thinking about the song, *Travelling Light*, from the second Tindersticks album, but that's probably just us. We're thinking about being away from home, and writing home, and writing away. We're thinking about how distant you can really ever be in the digital age. We're hoping that our correspondents will interpret this thematic starting point in as loose or associative or casual a way as they see fit. Letters should be handwritten and posted to us at the address below. Closing date is January 15th 2014; for more details, or to sign up to our regular email memoranda, see www.theletterspage.ac.uk. You can also follow us on Twitter @TheLettersPage. And of course, if you'd like to just write to us about nothing much at all, we would welcome that as well. Our address is:

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