

SPECIAL ISSUE

Scholarly Editing: History, Performance Future

From the Editor

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I've recently dug myself out of a rather deep editorial hole. I spent most of January and a fair chunk of February really, really sick. I will spare you the gory details, and I'm pretty much fine now—thanks for asking. My first sign that health was indeed returning was a panicked sense that utter chaos must be awaiting me in the *College English* editorial queue and email inbox. Apologizing sincerely to the authors who had been waiting several weeks for even initial responses to their essays, I copyedited everything in the accepted pile, and started the journal chugging along again: like its editor, *College English* shows every sign of having made a complete recovery.

It is not a confessional impulse that leads me to open with this anecdote. Rather, I do so to offer a glimpse into one of the many unseen relationships in editing: that between the body of the editor and the body of a journal. That is, editors are often invisible figures in the scholarship of our field, rarely discernible in our scholarly conversation. When they do appear, it's often as a disembodied spirit, either in the figure of the Gnarly Gatekeeper scything ideas at random or the Gracious Senior Handmaiden (Handman?) tenderly ministering to the field's growth. Alas, it seems the prior image is the most pervasive, at least in the perceptions among editors themselves. Indeed, since Robert Connor's invocation in the pages of this journal of the editors as "gates" (352), our self-perception seems to have spiraled down. In a 2009 symposium in *Profession* for example, editors describe their in-field representation as those individuals who "defend against publication" (Brown 119), "the evil troll lurking under the bridge" (Luey 112) and, perhaps most allusively, a gothic "murder of crows . . . a dark fellowship threatening to drain the soul out of an essay" (Argersinger and Cornett 105). However, I would argue that even the far more comforting notion of the beneficent sage effaces the realities of living as an editor, leading to misapprehensions of how this work can be and is conducted. That is, whenever editors are canonized or abominated, replaced with commonplaces of praise

or vituperation, or otherwise transposed from the quotidian editor into some mythic counterpart, as a field we collectively lose an understanding of what the real work of editing involves and means.

The results of replacing scholarly knowledge with these abstract angels and devils will be familiar to those of us in writing studies, who have long contended with academe's cultural commonplaces of such figures as the writing teacher-hero and the conniving "boss compositionist" (Sledd 275). Moreover, and echoing early writing studies scholarship, much of our extant editorial knowledge takes the form of Stephen-Northeastern lore via first person accounts (see, for example, Bryant, Brown) or deliberative arguments for future action based in the writer's personal experience (see, for example, Luey, Ianetta). And, as with writing studies' anxieties about its intellectual prestige and WPAs' concern with communicating the intellectual nature of their labor (see, for example, Council of Writing Program Administrators) so depictions of editorial work exhibit an anxiety about its status as intellectual activity (see, for example, Brown). Similar questions abound in both areas: Is editing professional? Is teaching? Is writing teachable? Is editing? What preparation do you need for either activity?

These parallel anxieties are not surprising, for if editing involves hearing carefully what a writer is saying, responding to it in a manner that seems to best suit the writer's goals in this exigency and helping the writer with development, to edit is, quite often, to teach writing. Certainly, the analogy fits easily over the image of the sage editor-elder guiding the new scholar through the complexities of multiple rounds of peer review, editing, and publication. Moreover, readers in writing studies, who will be familiar with the shared notion that all writers need readers to provide feedback and thus improve their texts, will naturally liken editing to teaching at all levels of expertise and authority. Given the prominence of such beliefs as well as the fact that our area of scholarly enterprise includes writing in all its forms, it is surprising that writing studies has such a small presence indeed in the extant conversations concerning editing. The recent volumes of the *Journal for Scholarly Publishing*, for example, are characterized by a dearth of voices from writing studies; indeed, even when a book from the discipline is reviewed—such as Christine Tulley's *How Faculty Write: Strategies for Process, Product, and Productivity*—the reviewer is from outside the field (Gump). And while as an editor, I certainly support the decision to have a reviewer who aligns with the journal's broader readership rather than any specific discipline, it nonetheless underscores for me the lack of voices from writing studies in these scholarly conversations. Admittedly there have been exceptions to this rule. Fredrick G. Gale published a useful essay on the topic in *JAC* back in 1998, for example, and more recently, former *College English* editor Kelly Ritter published an essay on the editor's report as microhistory. Such work, I think, underscores

what filling this gap in our knowledge might offer to the field as well as drawing our attention to the losses our lack of attention has created. It is this loss that both this introduction and this issue attempts to address.

Before I turn to the embarrassment of riches that comprise the contents of this issue, however, I'd like to share a few effects of editorial invisibility that I have noted over my twelve or so years of editing: coediting *Writing Center Journal* (2008–13), cocurating the essay reprints in *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research* (2016) and *Landmark Essays in Writing Program Administration* (2019), and, currently, editing *College English*. In brief, I am fascinated by, and think the field should attend more closely to, the various economies of editing. I use this term with some trepidation, mindful of its rich history. And yet, my experience in editing resonates with many notions of economy—and their related discontents. Certainly, at its basest and most banal foundation, much of editing is implicated in economic concerns. When serving as both coeditor and institutional host for *Writing Center Journal*, for example, I estimated the costs to publish a single essay in the journal, adding together the literal costs (editing time + cite checking + typesetting + printing + mailing costs) to help explain to the authors why I was unable to send their 98-page essay out for review, for example; put simply, in order to publish this quasi-monograph, I'd be unable to publish several other essays. Admittedly, such fiscal arguments were quite often met with suspicion, for the monetary realities of journal publication are, apparently, as unseemly as they are unseen. That is, anxiety about any unknown contours of the intellectual marketplace couples with the unspeakable/unknowable financial exigencies of journal production, causing all of us—writers, editors, publishers, mentors—to draw a decorous yet anxious veil across relevant monetary realities. As a result, there is, I think, a shared sense that, as we value our collective intellectual work so highly someone *somewhere* must be making “real” money on the scholarship over which we all labor so intensively. Editors, perhaps? Or professional organizations? But if there are individual apex publication-predators at the top of my particular food chain, I have yet to meet them. Admittedly, perhaps I too stand in front of the veil.

There are other more abstract, and perhaps more troubling, economies of journal editing. Take, for example, the selection of a journal editor: on both the occasions that I have applied for such a leadership role, I needed to include the sorts of sponsorship my institution was willing to provide. I am grateful that my school has been generous each time, providing the release time, physical space, and financial and graduate student support that I have requested. Such backing assists the editor individually and the development of the field more generally; however, it also contributes to the restriction of editorial economies by encouraging applications from one sector of the academy and at the expense

of would-be editors working in different circumstances. For a field that finds a significant proportion of its mission and members outside the research institution, it is surprising (or not) that our model rests upon the patronage of institutions that prioritize research production and professional visibility and thus inclines editorships toward individuals in those institutions.

Compounding the effect of clustering opportunity among a subset of field members is the cultural capital that can accrue to journal editors. At first glance, such capital may seem negligible or even in deficit: in both my current and former positions as journal editor, for example, the amount of time officially assigned to my editing massively underestimates the actual requirements of the work. In that way, journal editing may seem like an act of love or charity or simply part of one's professional calling. And yet, despite this veneer of noble self-sacrifice, there have been honors and opportunities that have been bestowed on me that I strongly suspect can be attributed in part, if not absolutely tied, to my editorial work: book contracts signed, invitations to write and speak, and the like. Over the long term, such opportunities have led to promotions and awards; thus, this cultural capital transforms into financial capital. I cannot, of course, speak for other editors, past and present, for part of the occlusion of editorial work is that its impact on the editor herself remains unknown.

The material realities of both journal editors and the journals they create, however, are just a small slice of the gaps in our knowledge of this work. In the essays that follow, we see additional gaps revealed and addressed. In "Editing as Inclusion Activism," for example, *Composition Studies* editorial team members Kelly Blewett, Christina M. LaVecchia, Laura R. Micciche, and Janine Morris argue for a model of journal leadership that encompasses "inclusion activism," which they define as "an intentional effort to ensure participation and access as well as leadership opportunities to people of all backgrounds, at all career stages" (275), thus intervening in the editorial economies of citation and prestige. Lori Ostergaard and Jim Nugent employ another tactic working to make an explicit historical record. Their "'Other Stories to Tell': Scholarly Journal Editors as Archivists," draws upon their experiences editing *WPA: Writing Program Administrator* and their expertise as archivists to propose strategies that would make journal practices more visible even while protecting the anonymity of authors and reviewers.

Turning from these interventions in our editorial systems to the role of editor itself, in "Editorial Perspectives on *Teaching English in the Two-Year College: The Shaping of a Profession*," authors Holly Hassel, Mark Reynolds, Jeff Sommers, and Howard Tinberg, give us an insight into the symbiotic relationships among the journal, the editor, and the field. In their case, as Hassel, Reynolds, Sommers, and Tinberg note, the notion of field has a specific inflection, for

Teaching English in the Two-Year College (TETYC) “has defined itself by an institutional space rather than a disciplinary affiliation” (315), rendering it distinct from journals such as *College English* whose nomenclature clearly announces its disciplinary focus. By contrast, *TETYC* has worked to serve the needs of the two-year college faculty, a group that cuts across disciplinary specialties. Working with this lens, the coauthors—all past or present *TETYC* editors—describe the ways in which the journal evolved to meet the readership’s needs during their respective tenures. Michele Eble, Tracy Ann Morse, Wendy Sharer, and William P. Banks also focus on the editor’s role, but they move the inquiry to the edited collection, where they use promotion and tenure guidelines to examine the value of collaborative editorial work in promotion and tenure decisions. While the news they share may be bracing for those of us involved with such work, the authors offer means by which we, as a field, might work to help our colleagues better understand the intellectual contribution such collections achieve.

Rounding off the issue is Doug Hesse’s “Journals in Composition Studies, Thirty-Five Years After.” Here, he revisits the topic and purpose of Robert Connors’s “Journals in Composition Studies,” taking stock of the field and looking to its future by considering current publication venues. Such a move seems both timely and traditional, for among the scant handful of texts in this area, Connors’s 1984 essay stands alongside the work of Maureen Goggin as the most cited and circulated on the topic of journal publications. Connors’s essay had the added effect, I think, of introducing a generation of graduate students to the wider publication scene these individual journals comprise. So too, Hesse’s always-delightful and sometimes-provocative essay will introduce newer scholars to possible means of connecting with readers with intellectual concerns similar to their own. Even as thus welcoming newer voices, Hesse’s “Journals” will give senior members of the field the opportunity to compare their own understanding of the publication scene to that of one of the field’s leaders.

Taken together, then, these essays invite us to consider the ways in which editors and their journals now function in the field and to consider what kind of future we wish to chart. Here “we” includes not just editors but all of us who identify as members of a field. For while editors may seem like autonomous agents, when progressing to publication in any journal, writers quickly become apprised of the reviewers, copyeditors, assistant and associate editors, and the like, all of whom make the existence of each journal possible. Certainly, *College English* would be a far lesser publication without the community of people who support this work. It seems fitting, then, that I close with a heartfelt thank you to those board members listed in the masthead who served as reviewers for this issue. I find the contents here compelling and timely, and your work made that possible. Thank you.

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