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## Del director

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One of the pleasures of editing this journal has been the new contacts and friendships I've enjoyed through the Council of Editors of Learned Journals, an international organization of editors in the humanities (<http://www.celj.org>). My first contact with the CELJ was in 1996 when *La corónica* applied for –and won as runner-up– the Phoenix Award bestowed on

Journals that have launched an overall effort of revitalization or transformation.... This award goes to the most improved journal, regardless of its state at the time the renovations began. A weak journal that has become excellent is eligible, but so too is an admired journal that manages to become dramatically better.

In the years since, I have been privileged to serve on CELJ juries for several of its annual prizes and invited to participate on its editors' panels at the Congress of Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, the MLA, and for the Medieval Academy of America. One of the perennial topics we discuss when we face audiences who want to get published, audiences of all ages and ranks in the academy, is what moves editors to accept or reject submissions.

This is more than a practical matter for us. It is also an index of the ethics that guide us, and we ponder our responsibilities constantly in person, on our editors' listserv, and in print in our CELJ website, *Newsletter*, and the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*.

There are many reasons why academic writers are eager to please and even more eager to get a job, hang on to the job they've got, secure tenure or score a promotion. Even full professors who have nowhere to go are often anxious to prove (at least to themselves) that their prior success as published scholars was not a fluke, and that they've still got what it takes to pass the scrutiny of their peers. Everyone secretly longs for those insider tips that will smooth the way toward publication.

Some readers of this journal may be hoping for cautionary tales about how not to excite the ire of all-powerful editors, and we *do* get rightly exercised over careless or ineptly prepared manuscripts, and

over lethargic and imperious authors. We willingly tell you that our work is mostly unpaid volunteer labor, with uncertain rewards from our professional peers, chairs and deans. The truth, of course, is that editors are far from all-powerful, and in our more mundane moments we're pretty much drudges to the endless secretarial tasks that fall to us, like sorting submissions and keeping up with electronic and hardcopy correspondence.

Guidance on formal procedures for getting published and lists of common mistakes and misprisions on how the system works are available from many sources, including the CELJ website. The politics of getting published is a bit more curious, though hardly counterintuitive, and has little to do with politicking editors or anyone else serving in an editorial or publishing role in the academic world. The "politics" is mostly proscriptive and is a simple matter of quality. In the long run it would be as impolitic for us as editors to publish trivial and ill-conceived articles as it is impolitic for their authors to allow them to get into print even at the gain of another line on their CV.

It's probably more useful to offer a few ideas on the "ethics" of getting published, the moral imperatives that guide the conduct of editors and authors alike. The ethical obligations of authors, at least in their broad outlines, are not unknown to them. The practice of double submission –sending an article manuscript simultaneously to two or more journals– is an abuse of our attention and energies, and something we regard as a professional and ethical breach of trust. The same hold true for plagiarism, lack of proper documentation, failure to secure copyright when appropriate, and the usual roster of sins. It may be more helpful to disclose some of the ethical obligations editors feel so keenly but rarely get to share.

As editors we have an ethical obligation first and foremost "to the profession". That's bureaucratic shorthand for "to the truth", which I know sounds a little too noble couched like that, as if every article we rejected were to protect the sheltering fortress of *veritas* from inferior bricks that might crumble and crush the peasants (our graduate students?) who cling to its walls. The general public might think we're self-appointed guardians of the truth who have gone amusingly loony or self-important, but we're just trying to hold ourselves to strict standards of scrutiny and proof, a free market of ideas whose commerce is based on a consensus of truth value. A market, but not a bellowing fish market. Editors serve as regulators of the conversation, allowing as many voices to be heard as we can, and imposing a system of turn taking based on intelligent point and counterpoint.

All of which is a polite prelude to saying that we're not here to get you tenure. Yes, your tenure may ride on you getting into print, but the profession is best served when editors are ignorant of your job status, as well as of your age, gender, race, sexual orientation, politics, marital state, and so on. When it is time for decisions about retention, promotion and tenure, review committees and deans who may be handling cases that are sensitive for all sorts of reasons internal to the institution are counting on editors to be impartial in ways they cannot.

I even have reservations about the practice used by some journals, but not by *La corónica*, of serving up biographical notes on the contributors to each issue, revealing whether they're full professors or graduate students, or scholars outside (or currently unemployed by) the academy, as if we should read their essays with differently tinted lenses depending on that personal information. We don't inquire because even the senior editorial staff shouldn't know those sorts of things until very late in the process, and it would be a bother making sure we kept ourselves in the dark until the right moment. So the editor shouldn't ask, and if he or she finds out, shouldn't tell. Ultimately, biographical data is ephemera: when readers pick up the essay in another forty years, who will care whether the author had just gotten a Guggenheim or was still ABD? The only qualification that should matter is that the editorial board agreed that an essay deserved to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with its peers, and keeping a level playing field both before and after the moment of publication is a serious part of our ethical charge.

Another aspect of ethics for editors is guaranteeing shelf life. We judge submissions to a large measure on their perceived durability. That's the real reason we are rather uninterested in the demolition of Michel Foucault or Ramón Menéndez Pidal or Emilio García Gómez, or any of the big names living or dead in our field. Who will care in forty years? Admittedly, and especially when they've made it into print, puncturing windbags is important work—that's why all researchers have annual gatherings like the ones we attend at MLA, Leeds, Kalamazoo, the AHLM in Spain, etc., and periodically publish major reassessments of the current state of the question.<sup>1</sup> But as far as we can, editors should foster exchanges that transcend personalities and the critical

<sup>1</sup> See recent Forums in this journal on "Inflecting the *Converso* Voice", 25.2 (Spring 1997): 159-205; "Return to Queer Iberia", 30.1 (Fall 2001): 215-65; "The Genre of 'Sentimental Romance'", 31.1 (Fall 2002): 137-41, 31.2 (Spring 2003): 237-319, and in this issue; and "Historical Romance Linguistics: The Death of a Discipline?", in this issue.

buzzwords of the moment. I cringe to write those words: they make me sound rearguard and anti-theory. But without being patronizing, editors have an obligation to mentor younger scholars and help them achieve a voice that will allow them stand up to their peers and to the passage of time, so when they come up for that last promotion to full professor, no dean will pick up a random bit of juvenilia and think that the person's entire career has been built on quibbles with the previous generation.

At the other end of the ethical spectrum, the routine flow of manuscripts through all phases of the editorial process, editors have no right to take the research of fellow scholars and hold it prisoner indefinitely. It's a personal complaint as well: one of my own articles sat in editorial limbo for six years, two others essays for twelve. We all understand that there can be legitimate delays in publication, and sometimes the organizers of guest edited volumes have received some of the contributed articles months or even years before editors see them. But authors always have the right to inquire (politely) about the status of their submissions and how long the up-coming phases may take. I do not mind those inquiries at all, and sometimes they remind me to go ahead and nag outside evaluators who I have treated too gently because I know how deeply I am indebted to them for their free labor.

Finally, the relationship between authors and editors is a collaborative one of adding value to the original work. Apart from bestowing the veneer of authority that comes from appearing in print with the implicit approbation of one's peers, editors have an ethical duty to help refine and toughen your arguments, make at least the presentation of your data watertight, smooth out infelicities, and when possible anticipate legitimate counterarguments and require you to address their substance. When I was a graduate student, I heard a visiting editor-publisher describe his work handling book manuscripts and someone asked how he tried to make sure that they were worthy of publication. He dismissed the question with thinly disguised irritation and a vague statement that he merely published the books; other researchers would ultimately praise, condemn or ignore the work of his authors. I thought his answer was cowardly and irresponsible then, and I recognize today how uneven that editor's series has been over time and why he has published not a single landmark title. If editors butt in and try to sharpen your work, it's in part because our reputation is at stake too.

So rather than try to impress aspiring or seasoned writers with their ethical burdens, I would like to suggest that editors live with

those responsibilities before their eyes on a daily basis. We are entering a new age of self-publishing which deserves respectful consideration, but which may make the journal editor's job a lot more central to the qualitative review of emerging scholarship and maybe even bids for tenure. Admittedly, self-publishing may cut costs, speed access to new work, and preserve the distinctiveness of individual contributions. But it forsakes peer review, collaborative improvements (that take none of the credit away from the original author), and in particular a sense of embeddedness within a discursive community that vetted and nurtured an essay prior to its public appearance. This is especially true of journal articles in an age when university press monographs (the traditional "gold standard") are issued in shrinking numbers and ever smaller press runs. On the contrary, editorial judgment calls in journals will be more needed than ever before, both inside our fields of research and in advance of the judgments made by administrators, granting agencies, and the general public.

Clarifying, negotiating and sharing those ethical duties is often the most rewarding aspect of being an editor and sometimes the best of what we have to bear witness to before our younger colleagues during the editorial process. In those terms, the editor's most satisfying role is one of welcome and socialization for a new generation of scholars and successors.



As always, the Editor stands in the particular debt of certain individuals who generously contribute their time and expertise to *La corónica*. They invest great effort in bringing us timely news, evaluating and critiquing submissions, and offering sound advice on editorial policy. They include most recently

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**George D. Greenia**  
**College of William & Mary**