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“WHO WAS THAT MASKED AUTHOR?”

The Faces of Academic Editing

LOUISE Z. SMITH

To what extent and in what ways is academic editing personal? It might look objective. Since 1980, *PMLA* has had a policy of author-anonymous and referee-anonymous (or “blind”) review of manuscripts. Submissions must exclude internal tip-offs as to their authors’ identities, so that referees can focus on what’s said rather than on who (or whose protegé) said it. Referees’ identities, too, are withheld from authors: no rewards, no reprisals. The object is fairness. Recently, though, *PMLA*’s editorial board considered doing away with anonymity. With signed submissions, so goes the argument, established authors will not have to bother with the long, drawn-out process of review and revision some see as “brutal,” but will get into print as quickly as if their articles had been commissioned (Shea). As for unknown authors, good luck. *PMLA* has maintained anonymous review. But even with it, you can’t entirely eliminate the personal in academic editing.

The four participants in *PMLA*’s “Guest Column: Four Views on the Place of the Personal in Scholarship” (1996) concurred that “the personal” inevitably shapes literary scholarship. Of course, literary editors have famously imparted their personal imprints: Gordon Lish substantively “changed some of [Raymond Carver’s] stories so much that they were more his than Carver’s” (Max 34). *The New Yorker*’s Harold Ross and William Shawn employed dramatically differing though equally influential editorial personae. Although Shawn’s persona seemed “an inspired sort of doing nothing, of just letting a piece run” (Mehta 71), his tastes governed which pieces ran. (In contrast to Shawn, unduly assertive copy editors have damaged literary manuscripts [Higgins, Becker]). Editors of life writing, too, acknowledge personal factors; if editing is hard when they have “to drag the mere truth out of some notable who is swollen with self-importance,” it is “even harder when the editor [knows] the author” (Davison 92). Over the past twenty years, even the relatively objective field of textual studies (which compares textual variants so as to arrive at a “standard edition”)—has “reapportion[ed] textual authority . . . from a monovocal . . . toward a [democratized] polyvocal” entity in which many personal agendas must be negotiated (Pettit 252; Tanselle). I know of no one so far, however, who speaks of a profoundly personal enterprise that also shapes scholarly discourse: journal editing.
Having edited *College English* between 1992 and 1999, I now have a fuller understanding of “academic discourse.” What finally gets into print by no means represents it. Only editors know the broad spectrum of submissions, and if we sent *every* submission to referees, they’d be justifiably furious with us for wasting their time. Each published article bears the personal imprints—in both substance and style—of author, referees, and editors engaged in often highly personal processes of negotiation. An article is a polyvocal text, though its author finally bears responsibility and authority. Moreover, behind each *un*published manuscript stands a person who very often, in one way or another, is isolated. That person needs an editor’s serious reading perhaps even more than a regularly published author does. Corresponding with both published and unpublished authors was a major part of my work as editor. An editor does not necessarily just sift submissions and publish some of them, thumbs up, thumbs down.

If they ever think about it, readers may find my editorship impersonal. (Quiz: Name the current editors of *PMLA*, *CE*, and one journal in your special field. Gotcha? Donald Gray’s term as *CE* editor ended in 1985, James Raymond’s in 1992, but in 1999 I still get forwarded letters addressed to each. Journal editing is a bastion of anonymity.) Until now, I have chosen to remain pretty much behind the scenes except for a few 4Cs and NCTE panels. Don’t expect a searing exposé here, either: in what follows, disguised details protect confidentiality. Behind the scenes, though, the personal inevitably enters in many ways. It shapes the development of published articles, shapes editorial policies, and—for better or worse—shapes the professional lives of both obscure and established authors, as well as of editors themselves.

**The Personal in Manuscript Development**

My editorial term fortunately coincided with the decline of theory-speak and the ascendancy of a more personal, down-to-earth voice. Richard Larson, who edited *College Composition and Communication* from 1980 until 1986,valuably advised, “Don’t try to make everybody sound alike.” To make room for individual voices meant, ironically perhaps, allowing some authors to continue using post-structuralist terminology, though I asked them to tame it by explaining a concept in fairly ordinary language and then giving the special term in parentheses. Every profession from English Studies to Dairy Science has its own lingo, after all. A letter-to-the-editor complaining about the term “phronesis” got no editorial sympathy (or space in *CE*), since the article’s explanation had been clear. How come some English professors balk at learning new words?

What kinds of personal criticism to publish in *CE* was, for me, an intriguing question. Personal criticism is usually all about the pronoun “I”—how I read
this, how I came to understand that, how I changed my mind about the other. Personal criticism has been identified as “the witnessing ‘I’ of subjective experience,” and it has often been associated with feminist writing produced for particular occasions (Miller 14). A good example is Adrienne Rich’s famous speech, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” which she gave at the MLA conference in 1971. Rich saw herself as “asking women’s questions, bringing literary history and criticism back to life in both senses” (33). And she saw herself as searching for “ways . . . in which the energy of creation and the energy of relation can be united” (43). Personal criticism took courage. In *The Last Gift of Time* (1997), Carolyn Heilbrun looks back twenty years to when she wrote *Reinventing Womanhood* (1979). The book

represented, in its introduction, what was for me a remarkable act of bravery; it still seems brave to me upon reflection. In this current age of memoirs, detailed recollections, and the publication of one’s most personal ordeals and imaginings, my need of the courage required to speak personally and of my family in the late 1970s must seem quixotic, if not deluded. (193, my italics)

In the tabloid-besotted 1990s, it was easy to forget what courage personal criticism demanded of Rich and Heilbrun, and their historical moment in early feminism is in any case long gone. Now we can readily acknowledge that Rich’s questions are not exclusively “women’s questions,” and that the challenge of uniting the energies of creation and relation is not only women’s work. In 1942, Alfred Kazin praised Edmund Wilson because

At a time when . . . the very exercise of criticism seemed peculiarly futile and isolated, Wilson continued to write . . . [as, in Saint-Beauve’s words] a “naturalist of souls,” a critic in whom judiciousness and sympathy became illumination. . . . In [the 1930s,] an age of [Marxist] fanaticisms and [New Critical] special skills, he stood out as the quiet arbiter, the private reader of patience and wisdom whose very skill gave him a public importance. (447-448, my italics)

Perhaps it is no accident that Wilson’s dedication of *Axel’s Castle* takes the form of a personal letter addressed to Christian Gauss, a letter that says “I have wanted to dedicate [this book] to you in acknowledgment of the kindness and instruction which, beginning at college, have continued ever since. . . .” What kind of “you” might Wilson and Kazin, Rich and Heilbrun have in mind in envisioning their readers? In working with manuscripts, it seemed to me that the implied listener in personal criticism is a “you” rather than a “they” and that we need to distinguish the “you” of strong personal criticism from the “you” of merely cathartic personal criticism.
The implied listener in personal criticism definitely is a “you” rather than a “they,” because personal criticism firmly embraces the essay form, as distinct from the article form. In an article, a relatively disembodied writer addresses a remote audience—“they” who must be convinced. *New Literary History* editor Ralph Cohen illustrates the point by quoting Paul de Man’s account of fruitlessly seeking unity among a collection of his own articles (which he calls “essays”):

The fragmentary aspect of the whole is made more obvious still by the hypotactic manner that prevails in each of the essays taken in isolation, by the continued attempt, however ironized, to present a closed and linear argument. The apparent coherence within each essay is not matched by a corresponding coherence between them. Laid out diachronically in a roughly chronological sequence, they do not evolve in a manner that easily allows for dialectical progression or, ultimately, for historical totalization. Rather, it seems that they always start again from scratch and that their conclusions fail to add up to anything. (qtd. in Cohen 1)

Such a disjunction is the antithesis of personal criticism—and of the essay. The article writer presents an airtight case: the facts and the very best way to interpret them, a way that overcomes all potential counter-arguments and emerges as unanswerable: “So there!” In each new article, de Man seems to me to be saying, the disembodied argument begins “from scratch” because it must stifle the embodied person—that potentially trouble-making person who knows firsthand where the flaws and counter-evidence are buried so as to make the argument “closed and linear.” If the real embodied person were allowed to speak his mind more fully, there would be some continuity from one argument to the next. On the other hand, in an essay—as in a personal letter that makes its recipient “feel addressed” (Koppelman 76) and invited to answer—a speaker more candidly acknowledges troublesome factors, addresses a nearby “you” listener, explores some of the facts and offers an interesting—though not airtight—interpretation of them to which “you” responds with gestures of intimacy—a nod, a glare, a raised eyebrow, and so on. Ironically, even while the participants in *PMLA*’s Guest Column affirmed “the personal” in scholarship, none addressed the others as a listening “you”; each was writing an article, not an essay.

As I have recently suggested, an essay makes “you” feel addressed by employing the deictic relationship between “I” and “you” that Montaigne coined in discovering that he is neither the source nor the location of deixis. He cannot construct stable distinctions between object and subject. . . . He can produce only a record of . . . shifts, uncertainties, and displacement. (Kittay and Godzich 206-07)
The “you” he addresses in ordinary language (not Latin) is thus not a stable and remote entity (like the King or the Cardinal), but a nearby listener whose moment-to-moment reactions affect how “I” speaks and what “I” speaks about—the “shifts, uncertainties, and displacements” that a real person experiences but that a de Manian arguer suppresses in the interests of airtightness. Three centuries after Montaigne, Bakhtin elaborated this deictic when he spoke of the “surplus,” meaning the shared but differing perspectives that result when “you and I” are together, each looking over the other’s shoulder and seeing something the other cannot (Morson 53). At such proximity, each of us is “answerable” to the other, not because of systems (such as “class”) but because of our concrete acts with other real individuals in ordinary life (Morson 114-15). The “surplus” embodies the ethical relationships that Kittay and Godzich explain linguistically as “spatiotemporal coordinates of the act of utterance” (19). One could say that Bakhtin’s notions of “answerability” and the “surplus” are ways of naming this intellectual intimacy (Smith “Prosaic”).

Today’s “personal criticism” produces mixed results, some strong, others merely cathartic. Essays of strong personal criticism vigorously address a friendly and respectful reader (Germans would say, a Sie), whereas cathartic essays address an intimate (a Du) (Smith “Make”). Cathartic criticism addressed to a Du can be illustrated by a 1993 essay called “Breaking Silence: The Woman Warrior,” in which the critic confesses,

[A]fter I was divorced, sometime before the saving decision of Roe vs. Wade, I measured my security by my ability to afford an abortion. Even as a graduate teaching assistant, I kept enough money in my savings account to allow me to travel outside the United States should I need one.” (Garner 122)

Sentences like those do nothing to illuminate The Woman Warrior. Instead, they distract us by testifying to the author’s personal association with No-Name Woman, an association about which nobody cares except the author’s intimates—the relatives and friends who share a personal relationship with her. Diane Freedman, editor of the volume that included Garner’s essay, told me that when her students read it, they remarked that Garner had not written personally enough. Enough for what? To me, their reaction illustrates how easily the line between personal criticism and personal exposé—what Heilbrun above calls “the publication of one’s most personal ordeals and imaginings”—may be blurred. In another example—from a critical essay on narratives of Western families by Tillie Olsen, Meridel LeSeur, and others—the author muses, “I can remember the pain I felt when I first wrote that final sentence two years ago” (Graulich 186). Again, the spotlight is redirected from criticism of the works themselves to an exposé of the author’s experience of writing
about them, implying that her pain of authorship is somehow comparable to the suffering portrayed in the narratives: a mawkish analogy.

CE submissions that aimed at catharsis were not published. One such submission claimed that its author “felt violated” when her dissertation director stole her citation. The rape metaphor neglected how people who had experienced literal rape might feel in reading it. Another submission recounted how a writing group helped its members to recover from a natural disaster. When it was rejected, the author retorted that only an insensitive editor could fail to sympathize with their pain—as if sympathy were the main criterion for publication. These examples illustrate a self-indulgent personal criticism that seeks authorial catharsis more assiduously than it does illumination of texts and issues. In short, the deixis involved in such cathartic criticism places “you”—Du—too close to the author, so close that the listener is caught up in the speaker’s Montaignean “shifts, uncertainties, and displacement.” At such close range, there’s no room for the listener to look over the speaker’s shoulder and see the Bakhtinian surplus. Instead of Bakhtinian “answerability,” the self-indulgent speaker elicits Rogerian echoing: “You felt violated?” This foreshortening results in the listening Du seeing almost the same things the speaker sees, risking a kind of rhetorical solipsism. Self-indulgent personal criticism addresses readers as if they were the author’s intimates and thus falsifies intimacy. The “you” it addresses is a phoney: am I supposed to say, “I’m sorry”? How sorry am I, really, or is that just a sweet nothing, after which I go about my business? Susanne Langer’s description of some expressivism as “a frozen tantrum” (26) comes to mind.

In editing CE, I avoided the cathartic Du and turned to the strong “you”—Sie—of the best personal criticism: about but also authentically, “answerably” to a person, one who owes the speaker nothing morally or emotionally—only friendly intellectual attention. Mina Shaughnessy provided a model for Sie when she recalled sitting at her desk at CUNY in 1977, “reading and re-reading the alien papers, wondering what had gone wrong and trying to understand” (Errors vii). Without claiming to feel my eyestrain or asking me to feel hers, she made me feel addressed and able to look over her shoulder so as to develop and challenge her work (cf. Lu, Hunter). Ten years later in 1987 Jane Tompkins’s manifesto of personal literary criticism, “Me and My Shadow,” appeared in New Literary History (how jealously I wish CE had had the opportunity to publish it!). Some paragraphs portray the scene of writing (Jane sits stocking-footed at her desk) and address her colleague as “you” or “Ellen”; others portray Tompkins’s work impersonally and speak of the same colleague as “she” or “Messer-Davidow.” To undermine “the public-private hierarchy” in academic discourse, Tompkins quotes Hawthorne’s advice: authors should
imagine that “a friend, a kind and apprehensive, though not the closest friend, is listening to our talk” (170), and that is the kind of reader she addresses: Sie, not Du. Feeling addressed, I thought, “Maybe after—if?—I get tenure I’ll dare to write like that.” Shaughnessy’s preface and Tompkins’s essay are models of strong personal criticism.

Similarly, Patricia J. Williams in 1991 wrote an account of how she transformed an experience recorded in her personal journal—her rage at a white clerk’s prolonged refusal to unlock a door and admit her into a women’s clothing shop—into a law review article. Near her essay’s conclusion, Williams achieves the union Rich imagined between creation and relation, the private and the public. She moves from a private reflection—on the power she felt as the sole audience for her father’s poems—to a public reflection on race and gender:

My power was in living the lie that I was all audiences [of my father’s poems]. My power was in the temptation to dissemble, either out of love or disaffection. This is blacks’ and women’s power, I used to think, this power to lie while existing in the realm of someone else’s fantasy. (707)

Williams’s intimate family members are by no means the only “you” to whom her personal reflections are addressed. Both Tompkins’s and Williams’s stories of writing achieve intellectual intimacy between the storytelling speaker and Sie. This is what cathartic criticism, limited by Du, merely claims. Yet, there is an element of celebrity journalism in these pieces of personal criticism: if Tompkins were not well-known as editor of Reader Response Theory (and as Mrs. Stanley Fish), or if Williams could not subtitle her book The Diary of a Law Professor, could they risk self-revelation with quite the same confidence that readers would find their private lives interesting?

Self-revelation without self-indulgence characterizes CE essays I published by Carol Deletiner, Richard Miller, Paul Kameen, Kurt Spellmeyer, Ruth Spack, and Nancy Welch to name just a few. Here are some examples. Dan Morgan’s student confesses to murder, and from grappling with how he should respond personally and professionally, Morgan concludes that students’ “extreme” situations “reflect what has been occurring in our society at large” (324). Dana Elder transforms a “prose poem addressed to my parents” into a public meditation on social class in the academy (Elder 570). Pauline Uchmanowicz calculates her double-time career as a part-time instructor in terms of “dog years” and finds pedagogical riches in correspondence between students in private and public colleges (Uchmanowicz). Jerry Herron recalls writing of Walter Pater’s “arrival at Oxford [as] typical of a more general arrival, which the university made possible . . . ,” and then remarks, “This passage has a lot more to do with
the wishful transformation of somebody like me . . . than it does with Walter Pater. . . .” Herron’s experience of “turning against where [he] had already been” is not only personal, but also a “turning against history” that may characterize “ambitious Americans” as a class, people with “an urge to belong and not to belong” (930-934). Just as he says after reading a poem, “it was so good to be written to” (937), CE’s readers might feel he was writing to us as his Sie. Linda Brodkey wishes “everyone were taught to write on the bias” because language without a bias “is only words as cloth is only threads,” and because writers cannot avoid bias simply “by recast[ing] their first person claims into the third person” (546): the personal is inescapable. Revision entails many personal elements, and not one single CE submission was published without revision—almost always substantive. To define the border between editing and co-authorship is a special challenge, learned mostly by trial and error. It often began with my trying to understand why two referees had rendered conflicting advice, to help an author decide which of their suggestions to heed or ignore, and to consider what suggestions I could usefully offer. How could I help an author to address both specialists and generalists, to acknowledge opposition without sacrificing her own stance, to integrate further research without losing focus on his original question? How could I help an author to organize more clearly and less repetitiously, to introduce and conclude more engagingly, to boil down stylistically—without ending up sounding like me? Would an author receiving my five-page single-spaced revision letter full of questions and suggestions—along with half the manuscript’s sentences restructured and condensed—just pack up and take the work elsewhere? That happened once. Authors did not accept every suggestion, nor did I expect they would. For me, the great pleasure of editing was to talk over what an author’s idea was and how best to get it across. To see me through occasional bad days—hazy, hot, and humid days when editing felt like doing somebody else’s laundry while my own piled up—I kept a “kudos” file full of letters saying “Thanks for helping me figure out what I had to say.” In 1997 I wrote such a letter to Mosaic editor Evelyn Hinz in gratitude for her extensive work on a manuscript I had submitted—the best support my writing has ever had. Every published CE article entailed many personally negotiated questions, but you might find examples of them tedious. Besides, they are confidential.

THE PERSONAL IN EDITORIAL POLICY

An editor’s personal preferences can shape a journal in matters ranging from insignificant to crucial. An editor can design a journal’s look and feel, can revamp its features, and can control the much more serious matter of anonymous or signed review. I changed the first two as little as possible. I maintained
anonymous review—fiercely! Even so, no matter how carefully guarded the identities of authors and reviewers are, eventually an editor cannot help but find out. Fierceness notwithstanding, the personal then enters into manuscript selection.

An editor might use a journal’s design as a way to express her personality, kind of like wallpaper. Oh boy, I fantasized, now *College English* can have cat cartoons and a centerfold “Theorist of the Month.” But I never thought the journal belonged to me personally. Asked in 1991 to redesign the cover, I replied “What’s wrong with the blue stripes?” NCTE answered, “We always redesign for new editors.” After my “But why spend the money?” repeatedly failed to persuade, I finally suggested, “OK, how about the letter E in various fonts flying through a window, suggesting the varieties of English Studies to which the journal is open?” Still blue and white.

Nor did I feel it was up to me to change the features (which earlier editors had kept consistent). Yes, *CE* would continue to include lyric poetry, which enabled the journal to be literary in brief, offered pleasure to readers and, frankly, provided flexibility in spacing copy. No, I would not add an editor’s column, since I wished neither to opine eight times a year nor to explain how each issue cohered; *CE* would speak for itself. Yes, *CE* would continue to ban footnotes, even though I personally prefer them (Thompson). *That* decision, though, was a mistake: footnotes can provide readers with access to the origins and trajectories of a discussion, a valuable function for a journal whose over 15,000 member subscribers span a great many specialities. I compounded the mistake by believing that fairness demanded consistency throughout my editorial term. In not changing the journal’s design and the features, I did not of course avoid “the personal.” Some of my characteristics—thrift, respect for precedent, preference for staying in the background (oh well, and fondness for blue and white)—invisibly shaped these early decisions and the discourse resulting from them.

The most important editorial policy was to maintain anonymous review. This policy hadn’t been broken exactly, but it had been a little bit bent by guest-edited issues. Even if a “call for papers” precedes these, guest editors may end up quietly commissioning contributions. Then fairness diminishes. Avoiding guest-edited issues, I nevertheless retained the clearly labeled “Editor’s Choice” and introduced the occasional “symposium” among experts whom I obviously had invited. By and large, however, I resisted Stanley Fish’s view that author-anonymity is neither feasible nor desirable. For Fish all editing is personal: famous authors’ manuscripts are *ipso facto* significant, as are their protegés’ to a lesser extent, whereas unknowns’ manuscripts require the advice and consent of the most famous referees willing to evaluate them (1985,
However, I believed that Fish’s view confused ideological with personal identity, over-valued the latter as constitutive of scholarship, assumed that reputation is self-maintaining, and—all or nothing—found anonymity undesirable unless it could assure a perfectly objective process (Smith “Anonymous”).

In order to maximize impersonality, our practice at CE resembled the PMLA practice to which Fish objected. I commissioned book review essays by experts whose own scholarship had earned them the right to evaluate that of others. Otherwise, our staff logged in each manuscript anonymously, making sure to conceal any internal reference to the author’s identity (including institutional affiliation). Anonymous log-in applied even to manuscripts whose authors I had invited to submit revised and expanded talks given at MLA, CCC, and other conferences; issuing about 75 invitations annually, I had no trouble forgetting who had given which talk. I read every manuscript and conferred with the associate editor(s) on whether to seek referees’ advice. We then made up a list of possible referees. Only after that did we learn its author’s identity, a necessary step in order to avoid selecting the author or the author’s colleague as a referee. To the staff’s amazement, my list of potential referees for a manuscript as-yet-anonymous to me often included its author’s name. In fact, that is how I learned that a scholar’s reputation is not self-maintaining. We readers were sometimes taken aback to discover that a piece we thought unworthy of even of being refereed, much less accepted—or that seemed likely to need very extensive revision—was in fact the work of a well-known scholar. One of my least favorite tasks was to write rejection letters to these scholars, especially when they were also my friends. On the other hand, we sometimes found that a manuscript publishable with little revision was the work of an as-yet-unknown graduate student.

Impersonality with regard to manuscript selection was the goal—but not the means—of author-anonymous and referee-anonymous review. The personal enters the review process because potential conflicts of interest among an author and referees must be minimized. This is harder than it looks. In the small world of scholarship, it is possible to know who teaches in an author’s department and appears regularly with the author on conference programs. But it is impossible to know who may have read a manuscript already for another journal, who may have heard the piece at a conference, what other social relationships may link author and referee, and who may accurately guess the author’s identity. Of course an editor seeks unbiased referees—what would be the point of sending a manuscript to a referee whose approval or disapproval one could anticipate? But an editor remains at the mercy of individuals’ professional integrity, which I assure you is unevenly distributed. At the high end is Heather Dubrow, whom I invited to referee a manuscript because she had
established her expertise in its subject by guest editing a special issue of *PMLA*. When she received this manuscript, however, she recognized it as a submission for that special issue, one which she had admired but finally could not include. I said that that didn’t matter. She wrote a detailed, positive report with valuable advice, and the piece appeared in *CE*. At the low end is a referee whose name I will not mention. An author asked her friend at another university to read a manuscript in draft; by coincidence, *CE* later asked the same friend to referee the piece, and without disqualifying herself, she trashed the manuscript (bringing up issues she had never mentioned to the author). No one would ever have discovered the conflict of interest except for a terrible clerical accident (the only such we know of) in which the referee’s name was left unconcealed when *CE* transmitted the referee’s report to the author. That was the end of their friendship, and of my respect for the referee. It took two acts of fate to make the personal visible—glaringly—in this ostensibly impersonal process.

Other personal factors can color an anonymous review process. Referees are selected because they have published scholarship in the field to which an author seeks to contribute—and because they can be counted on to deliver a detailed, constructive review on time, a personal quality that an editor discovers only through experience. Some very famous and busy referees took time to compose detailed and constructive reports for which the authors and I are deeply grateful; whether these referees ever contacted the authors once their manuscripts were published I have no idea. If not, the connection remains invisible.

Another personal element is that a referee may sabotage or promote an author’s challenging or applauding the arguments that that referee has established. However, an editor can usually avoid that referee only if he or she appears in the author’s works cited list. Unlisted but similarly situated referees cannot be avoided because no *CE* editor can possibly know all the networks of alliance and enmity in every scholarly speciality. The editor of a specialized journal or a newsletter might have a somewhat better chance at guessing who might recognize an author’s identity or have an ax to grind, and so on. Also, referees may use a manuscript as a springboard for their own ideas, ignoring what it does say and competing rather than collaborating with the author.

Still another factor that compromises even anonymous review is that today’s reviewer may be tomorrow’s reviewee (Patten 100), a consideration that may have prompted a doctoral student to volunteer to review his dissertation director’s latest book for *CE*. (Or was he just green?) Moreover, I believe one earns the right to review others’ work by making one’s own scholarly mark first. The butter-up factor is one reason why referee-anonymity is just as important as author-anonymity. In the interests of consistency and fairness, I even declined...
referees’ requests to be identified to authors so as to collaborate, reasoning that their collaboration could grow after a manuscript was published.

Personal circumstances—especially impending tenure decisions—also can affect objectivity. An assistant professor’s request for speedy review can be ethically accommodated. But what about the author, invited to revise a refereed manuscript, who told her tenure committee that it had been accepted—and then later, when the revision turned out to be weaker than the original and was rejected, enlisted an advocate to twist my arm? An amusing instance of attempted interference came from an irate participant in the University of Texas’s culture wars during Linda Brodkey’s days as writing program director. Having heard of her CE article “Writing on the Bias,” he threatened me with a lawsuit if I published anything more about the UT situation. How easily he might have discovered that “bias” referred to cutting cloth, a metaphor in Brodkey’s literacy biography.

A final personal element was my reliance on readers to realize that the views expressed in any given article were not necessarily those of “the management.” I never felt that CE belonged me; rather, it ought to represent the interests and demographics of a very large and diversified professional organization. I tried to make sure that CE included authors representing various kinds of academic institutions and ranks, as well as races, ethnicities, and religious and sexual orientations. Only once in seven years did an author claim ethnic discrimination as the cause for rejection of a manuscript. I told the author that the manuscript simply wasn’t done well enough for CE. (When my stuff gets rejected, is it because an editor has found it too smithily bland, too Z-fully mysterious, too tall?) Thus, while CE included my interests (such as reception studies, forms of poetry, non- and echt-canonical authors in balance, applied linguistics, and deafness), it also included articles that were not of particular interest to me and, frankly, some that I heartily disagreed with (for instance, Alan France’s critique of David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky’s Ways of Reading, which I consider The Great American Textbook for composition). Politically, I hoped that some readers would find me too conservative, others too liberal. They did. The late Thelma Atkins, a part-timer at UMass/Boston who had been a USO tap-dancer, often reassured her students, “If I insulted you today, don’t feel bad. Soon I will have insulted everyone.” A good motto for me, I thought.

All in all, the personal element of manuscript selection involves how such matters as the clarity and consistency of editorial correspondence, as well as the timeliness of decisions and of publication, affect authors’ and referees’ careers and reputations. The impersonal, it turns out, cannot entirely avoid depending upon the personal.
Does an editor read all the submissions, or just the better ones chosen by staff readers? Who writes the rejection letters? To what extent are they boilerplate? The answers to these questions have a lot to do with an editor’s personal characteristics. If you decide to read all the submissions and write the letters, you’re going to have less time for professional reading or playing the piano or . . .

*CE* publishes roughly 10% of submissions. I decided—in retrospect, perhaps with excessive idealism—that the best I could do was to read the other 90% just as seriously and to write some individual comments to the authors. (Except for a one-semester sabbatical, when Associate Editor Gillian Gane was in charge, I did this.) In time I learned to adjust my comments to the seriousness of the submissions. The few frivolous submissions received short notes: a high school student’s “A” paper, an unsolicited review sent in 1991 of a single book published 1986, a software ad thinly disguised as an article, a short story, an after-dinner speech to a town reading group—all manuscripts whose authors had obviously never looked inside the journal. In June, 1992, two poems arrived with a cover letter written on three-hole lined paper, which I'll lightly paraphrase (so as to avoid tracking the poet down for permission):

I am a young man who has moved out of his parents’ house and has written many great poems, of which one has been published in *Dude* magazine. . . . It would be very much appreciated if you published one of the following poems in your mag. Like any other professional writer, I expect to be paid if published. The first poem was written in ’91, and the second was written last week.

Authors like this one received letters suggesting as gently as I could that they try another publisher.

Most rejected submissions were serious but inadequately researched. Since lazy people do not write manuscripts, I reasoned that the authors were isolated in one way or another. Some taught in colleges geographically remote from good libraries and inadequately supplied with electronic resources. Some lacked colleagues working in the same field, who could give their manuscripts preliminary readings. Some faced overwhelming workloads. Some authors confined their research to outdated sources or read too superficially, thus remaining unaware that their points had already been made. In contrast, other authors summarized research so thoroughly that they never got around to saying what made their own work newsworthy. Or they acknowledged having nothing to add to a professional discussion but, nevertheless, hoping that readers would like to know how they saw it. They were addressing *Du*, not *Sic*. Some authors represented others’ work inaccurately, as saying what it would be convenient for their own arguments if it had said. And some manuscripts suffered the same ills
that English 101 papers are heir to: vagueness, windiness, repetition, and convolution affecting everything from sentences to paragraphs to overall structure—none of it beyond my willing editorial help if the idea itself warranted refereeing. These authors were all writing uphill and deserved encouragement. To read their work attentively and offer some detailed comments or suggest some further reading—and sometimes to remark on interests and experiences we shared—were ways in which my rejection letters could modestly counter their isolation and foster their professional growth, and—a little at a time, I hoped—the growth of the profession. One thing no editor ought to do, however, is to name another journal that would be just right for the rejected piece; although I gladly published a few castoffs from PMLA, Profession, and other journals (and noticed some of CE’s rejections in print elsewhere), I never welcomed the task of disappointing the false expectations other editors raised, however well-intentioned. Instead, authors’ own research ought to show them which journals publish in the fields to which they seek to contribute.

Some well-established authors of rejected manuscripts really ought to have known better. The prize for sentimentality went to a famous author who described taking students to spend a day in jail so that they would know what it’s like to be incarcerated: the absurdity lay, of course, in the fact that the incarcerated do not go home at the end of a day. The prize for boneheadedness went to the faculty member who had her entire seminar submit papers; reading through these anonymously logged-in submissions, I increasingly wondered why so many in a single batch dealt with such similar questions—only to retrieve their cover letters and discover that the students had been sent to CE in search of a second set of paper comments! (“Editor goes on six-state murder spree!”) Then there were the two senior authors who persuaded their graduate student to withdraw an accepted manuscript from a book-in-progress and send it along with their two manuscripts to CE as a three-part package. Since that would have amounted to their guest-editing a special issue, I let the three know that their manuscripts would be refereed individually. Referees recommended rejection of the graduate student’s work, which I agreed was weak. I accepted the other two manuscripts, but rather than leave their protégé in the lurch (“All for one! One for all!”), the two senior authors withdrew their work. Months later they relented, CE published their articles, and eventually CE also published an entirely different manuscript by the graduate student. Another well-known author’s manuscript required extensive revision, on which associate editor Pat Wright and I labored for days; on the morning when Pat was finally about to mail copy to the printer, he was eating breakfast and browsing through another publication when his eye fell upon an article by the same author, including—oh, no!—a very long passage corresponding word-for-word to part of CE’s copy. Of
course, we had to pull the whole article and substitute another, wasting all our
work and scrambling to meet the printer’s deadline. Confronted with the double
submission and narrowly missed copyright infringement, the author answered
unapologetically, “But I want to publish it in CE. The circulation is so much
larger.” Each of these vignettes shows personal motives that remain invisible in
published academic discourse. Thank goodness such situations are unusual.

Editorial correspondence includes personal moments as sad, bizarre, and
funny as any other part of academic life. An established scholar urged me—
purely on his say-so, never mind the scholarship—to write on behalf of his
friend at another university who had been denied tenure and to get my friends
do the same. An unknown author accused a CE author of repeating the
unknown’s ideas expressed some years before in a graduate seminar they had
taken together. A famous author charged that in rejecting his submission I was
part of a cabal. When a submission that relied upon caricature was rejected, its
author retaliated with Xeroxed copies of several already-published articles set-
ting forth the identical caricature—but with differing examples: a kind of self-
plagiarism. An author’s name appeared on each page of a submission (against
the rules on CE’s mast page), so we cut it off before reviewing it; not having
kept a copy, the author insisted that I retype it. I rejected a humor piece, thus
convincing its author that I had no sense of humor—or had lost it since CE
published another humor piece years before. And so on.

ME AND MY SHADOW

What does it mean to me personally that I am CE’s first woman editor?
When my gender is no more noteworthy than my being the first Dutch-
American editor, or the tallest, feminism will have accomplished one of its
goals. For years women have made such significant contributions to the
English Studies profession, that my relatively small role in the 1990s seems to
me quite ordinary—and it’s very good to be able to say that. In 1998, a fre-
 lance writer’s informal survey of editorial correspondence concluded that male
editors value competence, autonomy, and achievement, whereas female editors
value nurturance, collaboration, and understanding (Thomson). He presents
his results lightly, and I do not want to make too much of them except to say
that they not only reify outdated gender stereotypes—the (male) ethic of jus-
tice and the (female) ethic of care, as if we could have one without the other—
but also contradict my experience of having my work edited by Mosaic’s Evelyn
Hinz and CE’s Donald Gray, who both value all those qualities.

Am I just a cog in the profession’s publication machinery? Faculty hired
in the 1950s and early 1960s might finish their dissertations after they
became tenured, whereas today’s young faculty complete theirs—and often
publish several articles—before getting their first jobs. At places where tenure once demanded an international reputation, it now must be intergalactic. Tabloid scholarship sells increasingly well because “as a credential for tenure or promotion at a real college or university,” such work is “transgressive”; the background of traditional scholarship gives such work its point (Dowling 121-124). As the young publish more, so must the gray—or forgo merit raises. Ernest Boyer’s 1990 report to the Carnegie Commission revealed that 47% of professors thought that publications were merely counted (not read qualitatively). And 45% felt that pressures to publish detract from teaching. Yet of twenty-five reasons to publish given by James Axtell, Kenan Professor of Humanities at William and Mary, fifteen are personal (Axtell 5, 9-15). His last, most emphatic reason is that “publication of scholarship . . . is a form of teaching in itself” (16), and I believe that CE is especially attuned to that connection. To publish in CE, with its broadly conceived orientation towards teaching, might help win tenure and promotion in some institutions—and place one below the salt in others. In my early years, CE became my favorite journal because its articles closely linked knowing, understanding, and doing—though only occasionally transgressing. Ideally, every CE article helps readers teach with greater understanding of English Studies (even if they do not teach the particular subject—or with the particular critical concepts—at hand). It will be up to others to judge the extent to which we achieved this ideal.

The most personal element in academic editing is the professional friendships built through correspondence and amongst the staff. How often have we thought, “Why even ask so-and-so if s/he is willing to referee a manuscript when s/he is in such demand as a speaker and writer?” only to receive a cheerful “Sure, send the manuscript” followed in due course by a thoughtful, detailed, and collaborative referee’s report. How often have I mailed one of my mega-revision letters and then regretted some lapse in diplomacy, only to hear from the author, “Thanks, I needed that!” Our profession is rich in generous good will, much of it given quite invisibly—all far less colorful than some of the situations described above—and almost always proffered in a friendly, respectful way to Sie.

In the transition from James Raymond’s editorial term to mine, he advised me, “Hire people who can do things that you can’t.” Office manager Anita Anger kept us organized (in seven years, we misplaced one manuscript), helped me find the right tone of voice in difficult correspondence, and particularly nurtured our interns in learning the ways of professional life. Associate editor Pat Wright fiercely perfected every detail (insisting, for instance, that the printer’s software could print a really good-looking Old English ash for John
Niles’s ‘Beowulf’ article [December 1993]), and he put together the symposium on teaching literature in the composition classroom (March 1993). Associate editor Gillian Gane fiercely got the graphics just right (for instance, in Andrea Lowenstein’s article on teaching ‘Maus’ [April 1998]), and she put together the symposium on English Studies at the millennium (July 1999). The beautiful young people who have been our interns have gone on to careers in music, social services, public relations, publishing, academic administration, and secondary and college teaching. At the end of my seven years, I felt grateful to have edited CE yet completely ready to let it be someone else’s turn, anticipating continuing associations with those colleagues I now not only write to but also talk with as Sie, and especially with the staff: all harmoniously Du.