Teachers & Writers

Special Issue!

Bi-Monthly • March-April 1986 Vol. 17, No. 4

EDITING in Teaching and Writing

"Writers are a dime a dozen, Thurber. What I want is an editor. I can't find editors. Nobody grows up. Do you know English?"

—Harold Ross to James Thurber

IN MANY CLASSROOMS, THE WORD *EDITING* HAS AN IMPLIED *SELF* BEFORE IT, MAKING IT SYNONYMOUS with *revision.* But for professional writers, editing usually refers to a variety of means by which colleagues help to make a piece of writing as good as it can be. That is the sense of the word as it is used in this issue of *Teachers & Writers.*

The image of writing as a lonely profession—periods of private struggle that lead to emerging with a finished product—holds true for some writers; but many others, rather than being lone wolves, travel in packs to get into print. The byline on a published piece of writing often does not tell the whole story.

The teaching of writing is largely based on how professional writers work. Since writers frequently work with editors, it seems odd that editing is not regularly taught in writing classes. Student writers are often expected to plow through, bereft of the editorial nourishment that professional writers get as a matter of course.

For several years I have taught a course in literary editing and publishing at Columbia University's General Studies Writing Program, and I have begun a pilot project in teaching editing as part of the Teachers & Writers program at P.S. 75 in Manhattan. I've found that the teaching of editing complements the teaching of writing. Student editors help their classmates, and they grow as writers from the close reading and attention to detail that editing requires.

Devoting class time to the study of the art and craft of editing might also open up a career possibility. Some students may find that their talent and disposition are more suited to editing than to writing; others may look to editing as an adjunct to their writing (most literary magazine editors are also writers). As it is, editors, unlike engineers or doctors, often enter their trade without having had a chance to study it.

The editor/writer and teacher/student relationships are in many ways analogous, and teachers of writing can benefit from familiarity with the editorial process. Editors, like teachers, help writers conceive, shape, and revise writing. They instruct, prod, stroke, and challenge, providing writers with strategies and techniques that will serve them in other situations. (The two relationships differ in that editors tend to be more concerned with the immediate product while teachers emphasize long-term growth.)

This issue explores the editorial process, links between teaching and editing, editing student work for publication, and how editing can be incorporated into the writing workshop. It is by no means a comprehensive treatment, but I hope it will encourage teachers of writing to utilize editorial skills in responding to student work, and to teach those skills to students for use with each other.

The contributors to this issue, myself included, found editing to be a slippery subject. Similarities among the contributions indicate, however, that there is some consensus on the nature of the editing process and its application in the classroom.

—Alan Ziegler, Guest Editor

ALAN ZIEGLER is the author of *The Writing Workshop* (T&W). He has won four PEN-Syndicated Fiction awards and his collection of stories, *The Green Grass of Flatbush*, will be published this year as winner of the Word Beat Fiction Book Award. His books of poetry include *So Much to Do.*

IN THIS ISSUE

Unsigned articles are by Alan Ziegler.

THE STEPS of Editing & Publishing

PICTURE THE EDITORIAL PROCESS AS AN INverted pyramid. The larger questions are dealt with first, followed by the more specific. The process can be divided into three phases—general editing, line editing, and copy editing.

General editing: There is no widely used term in publishing for a first, general edit; Kathleen Anderson refers to it in this issue as "conceptual editing." The editor deals with the work as a whole—whether it's a book-length manuscript or a poem, story, or article—and makes general suggestions, perhaps for pacing, characterization, tone of language, or parts to be written. A preliminary general edit might be done while the author still considers the text a work-in-progress. General edits often are combined with:

Line editing: The *Chicago Manual of Style* does not use the term line editing, but refers to "substantive editing" as "rewriting, reorganizing, or suggesting other ways to present material." Since "substantive" is a tough word to throw around—you wouldn't say, "I am a substantive editor"—I prefer to use *line editing.* The line editor works "line by line," perhaps following up, more specifically, on suggestions made in the general edit ("Let's have less description and more dialogue"). The editor focuses on the literary quality of the language, saving the mechanics of grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling for:

Copy editing: Now's the time for the mechanics. Many feel that the copy editor should be new to the manuscript, because by this time the line editor may, like the author, be too close to the work to edit effectively. Copy editors don't make literary suggestions unless requested to do so. A good copy editor deals with cluttered and disjointed syntax, grammatical errors, poor spelling and punctuation.

Then, if a piece is to be typeset for publication, an editor or designer will "spec" (make type specifications for) the manuscript, indicating type styles and sizes, margins, and the space between lines (leading), along with other instructions to the typesetter.

After copy has been typeset, a proofreader checks the first proofs (galleys) against the manuscript. He/she makes sure that all words and punctuation marks have been typeset exactly as they are on the manuscript, with no omissions, and that design instructions have been followed. Proofreading provides the last chance to catch any solecisms that have eluded the editors.

Sometimes each editing phase is handled by a different editor; other times, one editor does it all, perhaps in one sitting. The author should be the editor of first and last resort, looking at the manuscript before and after the others have gone through it.

—A.Z.

THE WRITER/EDITOR RELATIONSHIP

I ONCE WROTE A LONG AND DIFFICULT PIECE for the *Village Voice.* My editor, Richard Goldstein, asked me to sit with him while he edited so we could discuss any problems. His phone rang during the session and he told the caller, "I can't talk to you now, I'm in the middle of an edit." I liked the sound of that. I squirmed as he pointed out ambiguous or overly "poetic" language and clunky phrases, but I relaxed when he helped transform a tangle of words into a smooth sentence.

Writers complain about editors the way commuters complain about their cars or the subway; yet most of the time editors, cars, and subways help us get where we want to go. Being edited can be painful. But it's like the pain of hearing bad news from an accountant during tax preparation, as opposed to the worse hurt of facing the same figures from an I.R.S. auditor. Better to hear it from an editor, while there's still time to revise, than to hear it from a critic.

Maybe editors should borrow a technique from my childhood dentist. When the drilling got too painful, I'd hold up a finger and he'd ease off a little. When it got unbearable, I'd hold up two fingers and he'd pause so I could regroup.

It is only fair to note that the infliction of pain in an editor/author relationship is not one-sided. Editors often have to bear with a writer's stubbornness, ignorance, laziness, and hostility at not being understood by the world in general and the editor in particular. In the midst of the first editing session for my book *The Writing Workshop,* Cheryl Trobiani, the editor, put aside her pencil and asked me, without rancor, "Are you going to drive me crazy?" Her tone indicated that it would be part of her job if I did, but she wanted to know in advance.

Since I've compared editors to accountants and dentists, I may as well tell you about Frankie (not his real name) the Barber.

Frankie felt it was his job to cut hair extensively and consistently, regardless of your wishes and the shape of your head. You could always tell that Frankie had been there. It didn't matter to Frankie if it was your style to have hair growing over an ear; he'd delete it because it wasn't *his* style. A good editor is more like a hair stylist who consults with the client and gives advice, but ultimately follows the client's wishes.

A good editor knows language and knows people. The human dynamics of an editing session cannot be taught; but editors should be aware that a sensitively worded, well-timed comment can send a writer eagerly back to work, while an ill-placed remark can stop a writer dead in his/her tracks. A good editor can respond negatively to a piece of writing in such a way that the writer doesn't take it personally. As Anne Sexton said about Robert Lowell as a teacher, "If he was never kind to the poem, he was kind to the poet."

It's hard to have an editing session without confrontational overtones. Authors and editors often negotiate—"You give me this comma and I'll delete that adjective"—but an editor should minimize this aspect. A good editor knows when to go ahead and make a change on the manuscript, and

when to *suggest* the change with a note in the margin. Sometimes, after making a change, the editor queries if the change is acceptable: "Au: deletion O.K.?" or, "I thought this sentence was a bit wordy; did I lose anything in my suggested rewrite?"

An editor should try not to give a writer more suggestions than he/she can handle in one sitting. Editing, like teaching, is often a layered process: "Consider these changes and come back with a fresh draft so we can get deeper into it."

Finding the "Absolutely Perfect" Word

Writers spend a lot of time with pencil poised in the air, or fingers hovering over the keyboard, waiting for the right word. They may settle for a weak substitute, promising themselves to upgrade it later. Sometimes they don't realize a word is weak until an editor points it out.

Occasionally, the editor finds the optimum replacement, as *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross did for John Cheever. In Cheever's story "The Enormous Radio," a diamond is found after a party. According to Cheever, a character says, "'Sell it, we can use a few dollars.' Ross had changed 'dollars' to 'bucks,' which was absolutely perfect. Brilliant."

Lucia Nevai offers the following experience: "The best editing attention I have received as a writer of short stories has been from Eileen Schnurr at *Mademoiselle,* who had marvelous sensitivity to what changes in diction and phrasing could amplify the emotional dimension of my story, 'Grounds for Love.'

"The supreme example came in working on the ending together. She thought it needed greater intensity. The scene concerns a newly divorced man, an excavator, who has let his business slide, out of grief and rage, and has devoted himself to digging a lake on a farm, against the advice of everyone in town and everyone who has tested the soil for water-holding clay.

"In the last scene he's been up all night, trying to put the make on his best friend's wife without success, and he comes home in despair, only to find out by the dawn's early light that he has, in fact, the night before, struck clay. '"Clay," he announces.' That's how the line was in the original story. Eileen suggested 'pronounces' instead and just that word, with its innuendo of marriage, was a poetic improvement for which I was very grateful. She directed the other improvements of the final scene like a great director working with an actress."

Ron Padgett provided a similar service to me while editing my essay for *The Point,* a Teachers & Writers publication. Struggling to express the idea that I didn't feel a conflict between teaching and writing, I wrote, "But the public act of teaching and the private act of writing rarely clash with each other, and mesh often enough to make the slash between writer/teacher a point of coming together rather than a foreboding border."

Revisions can consist of adding words, deleting words, or changing words, and Ron did all three in the second half of that sentence: ". . .and mesh often enough to make the slash between writer/teacher a meeting point rather than a barrier." *Barrier* was the absolutely perfect word that had eluded me.

This gets us into the question of credit. I once saw a cartoon of an Elizabethan audience yelling, "Author, author!" while out of one wing came William Shakespeare and out of the other came Francis Bacon. If these pieces by John Cheever, Lucia Nevai, and myself were performed and greeted with the shout "Author, author!" shouldn't Harold Ross, Eileen Schnurr, and Ron Padgett share the applause? How much adulation has Pascal Covici received for his contributions to literature?

If you responded "Who?" you've made my point. John Steinbeck said about Covici: "For 30 years Pat was my collaborator and my conscience. He demanded more of me than I had and thereby caused me to be more than I should have been without him."

A graduate student in literature told me that he couldn't imagine ever being edited, because an editor can either make the writing better or worse. If worse, who needs it; and if better, how could he take credit for another's work? Perhaps this could be reconciled by including the editor's name on a book, just as it's now standard to credit a translator.

—*A.Z.*

Writers & Editors: A Symposium

Dale Worsley: Good editors are like sparring partners, adversaries who keep you in good form, who are in your corner. While some editors, often commercial ones, will give you respect, seemingly, and promote your work without analyzing it, they are not fulfilling their roles.

No one benefits from glossing the truth. Editors and teachers have to "cast a cold eye" on form, on content.

Arthur Dorros: "I'm sorry I can't use this" and "I'm sorry this doesn't work for me" are two of the oft used editorial comments put forth in the commercial writing world. More specific editorial comments are much more helpful for the writer.

Meredith Sue Willis: I've learned from editors the extreme delicacy of my *own* feelings as a writer—and, at the same time, how much I love the feeling of having every word I wrote taken seriously.

Barbara Danish: From Laura—who has been the main editor of my work—I have learned how to read my writing better (as well as others' writing). I never knew how to change anything—why would I change something? What was supposed to guide me? From her asking me questions, I learned to ask my own. From her telling me what was happening to her as she read my work, I learned to watch what was happening to me.

I've learned that in general it's important to go for the *big picture* first—not the little line by line stuff. I've watched students' eyes glaze over when I talk too much, and realized (over & over) that a crucial part of editing is letting the *writer* talk. My job is helping them think by asking questions, nodding, saying back what I hear.

Michael Schwartz: I have never found pleasure or fascination in rewriting, but I did when working on a piece for *Quarto* magazine. I might not have changed my piece much

at all had the editor, Mindy Appel, not so unstintingly offered her insight, time, and appreciation of what I was trying to say (even when it wasn't there on the page).

She noticed trouble spots—inconsistent use of commas, repetition of words within sentences—and merely said, "I noticed you do X, do you want it this way?" Sometimes I did want to keep X in, and her asking made me realize why.

When I was fed up with rewriting and it was time to go home, she suggested that we go to a copy shop and make pages for me to take with me should I think of additional changes to call in to her. I didn't think I would, but I started rewriting on the subway, and continued for three more days. I started this work out of a sense of obligation (she seemed more dedicated to the perfection of my piece than I did, and that motivated me), but once I started, I found my own reasons, rewards, and obsessions for doing it.

What struck me most was that the editing session was the Real Act of Writing, only out loud with another person present.

Harry Greenberg: Often the writer stands too close to his work, helpless. He knows that if he could move back a bit he'd see it from a new perspective, but something has anchored his feet to the ground. He tugs and he twists and he cannot move. Whatever it is—pride, ego, or tunnel vision—has him tightly tethered to a single spot, when what he really needs is the freedom to circle his piece, examining it inside and out, front and back.

An editor has this freedom. He zooms above the piece and he trots to the left; he dives hard to inspect its soft underbelly and he quietly walks to the center, testing its heart.

Amy Rosenthal: The editor has to have an affinity for what the writer is imagining. The editor has to be willing to grasp what the writer's vision is. This involves asking questions, probing, and challenging the writer.

The writer and editor must be in the same vein; a lot of times the two of them are working with what isn't there—absences—and building together. If a teacher/editor picks up a metaphor I have used and extends it, he/she is "speaking in my language," and this allows me to invest a lot of confidence in this person as a reader because I feel he/she has been affected by what I've written. ●

On Being Edited

by Phyllis Raphael

ALTHOUGH I'VE WORKED WITH DOZENS OF editors, I'm still not sure what they do. The only thing I know is they all do it differently. At *Cosmopolitan,* editing began with chats in the office. Roberta Ashley generated story ideas by probing your personal life and the lives of your friends. If your love life and career proved infertile, you could select a subject from the big black book of article ideas gleaned from the personal traumas of the *Cosmo* staff. Rewrites were done according to Helen Gurley Brown's rules for good writing: "Never start a sentence with 'there is' or 'there are' and don't use cliches." These regulations sounded simplistic, but were a valuable technical exercise. The search for fresh openings and personal images brought copy to life and gave it the *Cosmo* style.

At *Cosmo* I learned professionalism, to write a story to specifications. At W. W. Norton, Carol Smith was the editor you pray for. She handled the manuscript of my novel as if it were a newborn child. Being edited by Carol was like having Noxzema applied to a sunburn. It felt good. Carol made you feel as if she were the protector, defender, and best friend of your manuscript. Since the novel was highly autobiographical there was a problem with libel. Carol knew when to make fat people into lean ones, and bearded characters clean shaven. I'd named one character "Weatherby" (real name: Weatherall), a poor piece of fictionalizing which she corrected by suggesting gently that we rename him "Armstrong." The name communicated exactly what I'd intended.

Carol Smith established an atmosphere of trust that made cuts and changes less ego-shattering. Conversely, one of the moments of which I am least proud occurred when one editor bought a previously published short story of mine for an anthology. When I received the galleys I noticed she'd cut several paragraphs without consulting me. Furious, I held up publication and demanded that she pull the story (which she did), even though she offered to negotiate. If this happened today, I'd put my pride aside and talk to her.

Village Voice editor Ross Wetzsteon was open to new ideas and offbeat writing styles. As with Carol Smith, the collaborative effort nurtured trust, and I found it easy to succumb to Ross's gift for shutting me up. Novelist Frank Yerby once commented that "a really great novel is made with a knife, not a pen." While I was writing for the *Voice,* I was constantly betraying natural endings by setting my characters off on walks, with illuminating messages nobody asked for. Ross saved me from myself by lopping off extra endings and excess "poetry" and "meaning."

The novelist Peter Rand once said about teaching writing, "Writing is such a non-subject, I'm always astonished when I get into a classroom to discover how much I know about it." Although I thought I knew very little about being edited when I started this piece, I see that I know more than I thought. The most important ingredient in good editing is faith in the editor.

Teaching and editing are allied arts. Both the teacher and the editor create assignments, impart tricks of technique, cut, revise, and inspire. As a teacher I find it useful to remember what I've learned from being edited. The best editors communicate a sense of respect for the writer and the work and give me the feeling they are on my side. I am able to accept more from them and they get better results from me. The parallel between editing and teaching is obvious. ●

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Interview with an Editor

RON PADGETT HAS WORKED WITH TEACHERS & Writers since 1969, first as writer-in-the-schools and then as editor of *Teachers & Writers* magazine and as publications director. He is the author and translator of many books.

Interviewer: How has your attitude toward editing student writing evolved?

Ron Padgett: The first school I taught in was P.S. 61 in New York City. I started with fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-graders. My purpose was not to teach the kids to spell, punctuate, or use the right grammar—that wasn't my interest at all.

The kids wrote poems in nearly every session. I'd collect the poems, read them aloud, and take them home. Then I'd mail them to T&W, where an office slave would type them up verbatim, mimeograph them, and send them back a few days later so that when I went to school the following week I could give the kids back, in manuscript and printed form, what they had written.

At that time my theory was that these poems were somehow "documents" and that I shouldn't touch the spelling or grammar at all. I had a romantic illusion about preserving the "real thing." As a writer I was very sensitive to editors' changing my work. Later I came to feel that there should be some correction of spelling and minor cleaning up of kids' work, but not so much as to alter the feeling or wording.

I: What made you change your mind?

RP: The kids mostly. They could understand the misspelled words in their own handwriting, but not in the typed-up versions. They would say, "I can't read this." Also, some of the teachers complained that I was reinforcing the mistakes in the mechanics they were trying so hard to teach. Finally, my own ideas on editing gradually changed—I realized that I wasn't in the classroom to preserve specimens.

I: Did you do any pre-emptive editing of subject matter when presenting writing ideas? For example, urging kids to refrain from discussing certain television shows, etc.

RP: I urged students to be original and extraordinary, and by doing so I proscribed their possibilities. In a sense my whole manner was a form of editing; one chooses to say or do something in a certain way and not in another. Whether or not that is properly called "editing" I don't know. Anyway, in that sense I did edit, but in as positive a manner as I could: I didn't say, "Don't do that," I said, "Look how much better it is to do it this *other* way."

I: This year at P.S. 75 we've been attempting to train talented students to become editors of other students' work. What do you think about that?

RP: I think it's a great idea. I've never done it myself, but I did try a similar experiment in which I selected some experienced sixth-graders to help teach a writing workshop for kindergarteners. It had been difficult for me to work alone with the kindergarteners because they were like ants, running around all excited. They'd want to crawl up my leg and pull on my beard and feel my sweater and ask me if I had a dog. It was hard to get all 16 of them in one place for more than a few minutes. My idea was to take about five sixth-graders down to the kindergarteners. They would each go off with three or four kids and take dictation. It worked out very well.

I've never tried any kind of concerted editing project. I did oversee a student magazine at P.S. 19. I worked with a small group of four sixth-grade girls who did all the work—they edited, typed, mimeographed, collated, stapled, and sold the magazine. We really learned by doing; it didn't involve my lecturing on editing techniques or anything like that. The girls were all smart and they already knew a magazine had to have variety, be interesting, get the readers involved, etc.

I: Do you think students are capable of editing other students' work? Could it be a bad experience?

RP: They are capable, yes. Peer editing is becoming more common now; it involves having a student read his or her work aloud to at least one other student and then simply have repeated back what had been heard. By doing this the author can see to some degree how much of what he or she has written was clearly communicated. Another technique involves having the listener(s) ask the author questions about the piece heard.

The only problem I have with the peer editing method is that it can be only as good as the kids are, and kids can know only so much. Obviously the teacher can bring a lot more to the editorial process.

I: How did you learn to edit?

RP: I'm not sure exactly. I didn't take a course, I didn't have a job as a junior editor or editorial assistant, or work anywhere you would pick up such skills—except of course those you learn in school. I think I learned them by myself.

The other night I was looking at a magazine I published when I was 16 and wondering how I learned the production side of it—proofreading, paste-ups, etc.—I don't remember learning much of that. I think the printer showed me how to do paste-ups. Later, another printer taught me more about typesetting and mechanicals. And for the past few years I've gotten plenty of advice from T&W's printer.

Simply accepting some works and rejecting others from that magazine—being forced to make a final choice—made me read more critically. I made some egregious mistakes in being heavy-handed about rejections. I had a number of writers write back to me and ask, "Who do you think you are?" It made me aware for the first time that it might be possible for an editor to show courtesy and even humility.

I've been involved with several other magazines, such as *C* magazine in the sixties. I helped a friend of mine who was the main editor. *C* was a mimeographed, legal-size magazine that we typed and ran off by hand and distributed. It was wonderful. For a while I was also an editor of *The Columbia Review,* the poetry editor of *University Review,* and then the poetry manuscript reader for *Paris Review.*

I co-edited *An Anthology of New York Poets,* brought out by Random House. Working with the South Carolina State Arts Commission, I produced an arts-in-education magazine and taught local writers how to produce their own magazines.

I: These were mainly literary productions. For you, what is the difference between working on literary and nonliterary productions?

RP: For me, editing poetry or fiction generally involves deciding if I like a particular piece as it is. Except for minor details, I don't feel comfortable tinkering with someone else's poem or story, because it's so much a matter of taste.

But for me it's different with nonfiction, which I'm mostly involved with at T&W. Very rarely do I get articles that are flawless and perfect for the magazine. I have to read each article and decide if it is even worth working on. For example, is it suited to the magazine? Is it new? Useful? Do I like the tone and feel of the piece? If the answer to all these is yes, I decide how much work will be involved. I decide if it should go in a different direction. So I edit for content first, then for "shape," and then get down to copy editing. I become very involved in nonfiction editing, more than I do in fiction and poetry editing.

I: Is there a particular style you use at T&W?

RP: *The Chicago Manual of Style* was here when I took over this job. I like it and use it. I'm still not a tremendous copy editor. It's an acquired skill, ideal for fault-finding perfectionists.

I: You've done many translations from French to English. Have your experiences with translating affected your editing techniques?

RP: I haven't thought about it, but one obvious way in which translating and editing seem similar is in their search for the old *mot juste.* There are also similar questions of tone, fidelity to the original and to the new version. So I'd assume that translating has affected my editing, but only unconsciously.

One editing skill that comes in handy with translations and my own poems is the ability to step back and look at the work as if it were by someone else. I learned *that* through editing, not writing. The only way for me to do that as a poet was to put the poem in a drawer for a year, enough time to allow me to be more objective about it. Editing has accelerated that process. Now I can put a poem away for six weeks and have that same year's emotional distance.

I: What was it like being edited for publication in the *New Yorker?* Did they press you to conform to their style?

RP: My dealings with them have been wonderful. My editor there was Veronica Geng, the writer. I sent some short pieces to the *New Yorker* and Veronica wrote back a week later and said they wanted to publish them, and sent along some suggested revisions. The *New Yorker* editorial hand was evident in them. Not a heavy hand, but a bright, astute, and very pulse-reading hand, if you will. The editors paid close attention to every word.

I took some of the suggestions because they improved the pieces, but I rejected others because I felt they falsified the tone. The editors made the work a little more urbane than I wanted it to be. They do want things to be polished and intelligent, alert and good-natured. I found that not only had they paid attention to the text, they paid attention to my objections to some of the revisions. If I gave a cogent reason for leaving something the way I had originally wanted it, Veronica gave way.

All this caused me to reexamine my phrasing and syntax—I really had to think about it. It was refreshing to have that kind of attention: the explain-why-you're-using-two-exclamation-points-instead-of-one kind of thing. It's very flattering but useful to have that kind of close examination, and so I've tried to be that kind of editor here at T&W. And other writers appreciate it, too.

I: How do you deal with obstinate writers who refuse to take any of your editorial suggestions?

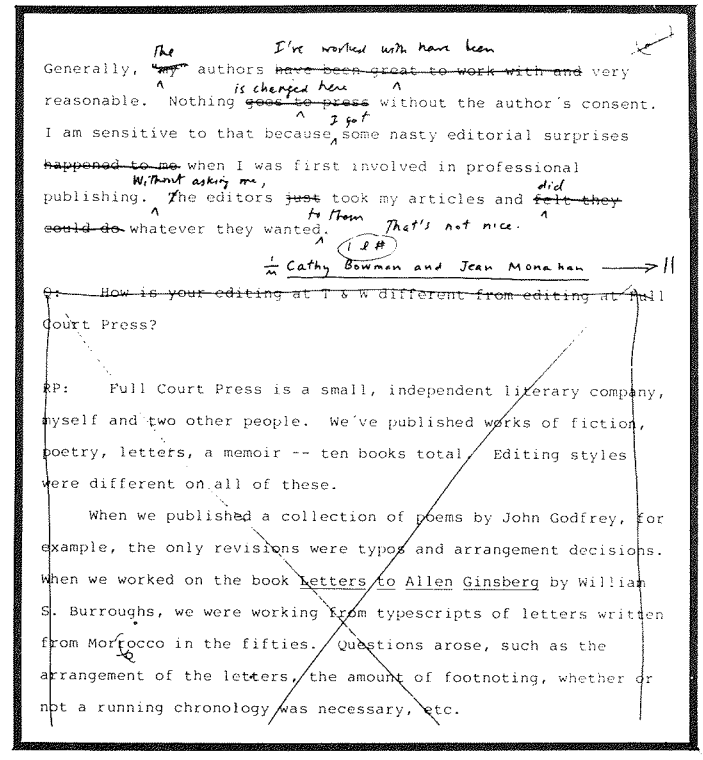
RP: That's never happened. Some writers accept every suggestion without question! More often there's a give and take. Here's an example. Recently we published *Moving Windows* by Jack Collom, the poet. I really admired his ideas on how to read and evaluate children's poetry. In the first draft, he wrote like a poet, using a gestural, non-expository style, a shorthand other poets might understand but not the general audience.

The editorial process with Jack involved convincing him to write expository prose. It turned out that he knew how to write that way, but needed goading. I won a lot of arguments, but he won some as well. I think the meeting point we reached was wonderful because I got him to make sense and he kept me from standardizing him.

I: Have you ever made major revisions on an article?

RP: I have in some instances copy edited so much it looked like a red fungus was growing on the pages. Being an editor is difficult in that you have to be tactful as well as tough. Generally, the authors I've worked with have been very reasonable. Nothing is changed here without the author's consent. I'm sensitive to that because I got some nasty editorial surprises when I was first involved in professional publishing. Without asking me, the editors took my articles and did whatever they wanted to them. That's not nice.

—Cathy Bowman and Jean Monahan



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i & # — Cathy Bowman and Jean Monahan →11

~~Q: How is your editing at T & W different from editing at~~ Full Court Press?

RP: Full Court Press is a small, independent literary company, myself and two other people. We've published works of fiction, poetry, letters, a memoir -- ten books total. Editing styles were different on all of these.

When we published a collection of poems by John Godfrey, for example, the only revisions were typos and arrangement decisions. When we worked on the book Letters to Allen Ginsberg by William S. Burroughs, we were working from typescripts of letters written from Morocco in the fifties. Questions arose, such as the arrangement of the letters, the amount of footnoting, whether or not a running chronology was necessary, etc.

EDITING: The Teaching of Craft

by Kathleen M. Anderson

EDITORS HAVE BEEN LIKENED TO EVERYTHING from corporate devils to guardian angels. It is a profession that has many jobs and definitions, but most editors have no formal training in the art of editing. They develop their craft through instinct, intuition, and experience.

In the world of commercial book publishing, editing begins with the discovery and acquisition of an author and carries through to the creation of a finished book. The editor works closely with the author on every aspect of the writing and revision of a manuscript. The editor-author relationship does not always go smoothly, due to conflicting desires and temperaments; but when it does, most authors would agree that it plays a vital role in their professional development.

Editing is, in effect, an advanced form of teaching that takes into account the content and direction of a writer's work, how it can be deepened and made more meaningful, how it can be expanded and developed more fully. In editing a story, this could mean working on new scenes, characters, or plot; in nonfiction, the honing of concepts; in poetry, the unveiling or layering of metaphor.

Although editors follow some general principles, editing is extremely subjective. No one edits the same work in the same way. Editors bring to every piece of writing their own perceptions of what should be done and come up with their own ideas for the development of new material. Yet editing is a selfless act, and suggestions must remain compatible with the style and scope of the writer; all changes are made at the author's discretion. An editor can argue vehemently in favor of making certain adjustments in the manuscript, but ultimately a writer must remain true to his/her inner voice.

Editing requires an artistic sensibility and a sculptor's eye. It is like taking raw clay that has approximated the image agreed upon and making the final cuts, giving character, strength, and dimension to the piece by shaping and smoothing out the finer points. It means examining not only what is present but what is absent from the work. It means providing inspiration and encouragement.

Working with an author is like becoming intimate with an acquaintance you must also remain detached from in order to preserve a dispassionate point of view. It can be exhausting because it demands highly creative, original thinking. It is a cooperative relationship where the success of one is inextricably bound up in the success of the other, with the book's final achievement hanging in the balance. At its best, it is a candid, symbiotic relationship, an emotional and intellectual lock with a writer's vision that can have a catalytic effect on how it is expressed.

One cannot help but wonder why the editorial relationship has been left out of most creative writing classes or reserved for graduate-level seminars. One reason may be a matter of time. Editing is almost always performed on an individual basis, which can often become a consuming and lengthy exchange. For many teachers this may not be possible, given their time constraints. But the method of editing can be taught to a whole class, so that students can then pair off to edit each other's work. Ideally, this approach should be initiated by the teacher's having an editorial consultation with each student, because the best way to become familiar with the process is to go through it yourself.

When I begin work on a fiction manuscript, the first thing I do is to read it through before going back a second time to search for the major loopholes, in either the plot or presentation of an argument. Basically I am looking for what is *not* there, what needs to be "fleshed out." Are the motivations of the characters clear? Are we left dangling when we need an explanation? Do we need to know what a character is thinking or feeling? Has the writer skated over the surface so that another layer of activity or insight needs to be revealed? Does a summary description of an event need to be brought to life in a scene where the action is revealed through the creation of characters and dialogue? This conceptual editing must be done first, before an editor can work with more specific elements of the text.

My second but often simultaneous task is to see how the manuscript is organized. Occasionally, gaps in construction can be remedied by shifting things around: sentences, paragraphs, chapters. In a short story, for instance, the chronology of the piece can make all the difference. Recently I had an experience with an episodic novel where one chapter just didn't seem to fit in anywhere. It was written in a different style than the rest and almost felt as if it should be in a different book, yet it shed light on an aspect of the main character that the author and I wanted to preserve. I read through the manuscript several times, placing the chapter in new locations, and finally came upon the only spot where it could work. Rereading it each time was necessary in order to get the full impact of the transition from one chapter to the next.

Once the author has come to terms with the major problems of form and content, I turn back to the manuscript, editing with a fine-tooth comb to bring the work into focus, cutting digressions, repetitions, weak lines, and inconsequential utterances. This word for word, line by line editing is a marathon job and the most intimate an editor will become with a manuscript, since the author does not usually re-enter the relationship until this task has been completed.

What follows is the "talking-through" stage of the process, where the meaning and intention of statements and actions are examined with the author in an effort to clarify ambiguities that the editor came upon while line editing the work. By this time, I have been "broken in" to the book and have transported myself within it. One could almost say that editors experience a kind of transference with the elements. I anticipate the characters' every move and reaction, what they will say or do next, so when they act in a way that doesn't make sense, there is a clash of vision and I can "see" where minor revision or "alignment" is needed. In this way editors also act as prototype general readers, asking the author questions that would come up in the reader's mind. An enormous

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amount of dialogue goes on during this period as the editor and author hammer out the final imperfections.

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The dynamic of editor and author differs somewhat from that of teacher and student. A teacher sees writing as an extension of the student, the result of a teaching process that emphasizes learning and development rather than the creation of publishable products. For the editor, the *work* becomes paramount, taking on a life and importance of its own. The author is the conduit to its creation. If an author chooses not to make the revisions that I view as essential, I have the option of turning down the book. Thus, an editor's primary concern is the quality of the text while the teacher's concern is the quality of a student's understanding.

Unless teachers are required to give grades, they do not have to deliver ultimate judgments. (In many creative writing classes I've encountered, grading is optional, particularly in elementary and secondary schools.) Their careers do not depend on their students' work being well reviewed or commercially successful, and the students are not trying to support themselves by their writing. On the contrary, the classroom is a forum for discussion, where experiments are allowed to fail as well as succeed. Students learn from the process of writing no matter what level of achievement they are able to reach. Being taught how to edit can be an addendum to that process, a chance for improvement.

Editing is negotiation—hard-hitting yet compassionate. Some things must be given up, on both sides. Editors and authors must respect each other's convictions about the work and the need for revision. To be rewarding, their relationship must be grounded in faith and belief: faith in the editor's skill, belief in the author's talent.

An editor acts as an arbitrator who must weigh the concerns of the publishing house and the wishes of the author, switching advocate roles from one to another depending on the issue at hand, while trying to remain true to his/her own opinion, which may differ from both. An editor's corporate responsibility can also have an effect on how a manuscript is edited. I once had to cut a manuscript three times before it was down to a length that was financially feasible.

Editing in the classroom is not as businesslike. A teacher does not have to be as selective about the material a student writes nor does the work have to be letter perfect. It is more important for teachers to guide and incite their students' imaginations, exciting them about imaginative uses of language. The classroom should be seen as a birthing room where new life is formed in an atmosphere of mutual support.

The most emotionally difficult aspect of editorial work is having to point out weaknesses in an author's writing. Writers unaware of the editorial relationship can sometimes feel as if they're being attacked instead of being given constructive criticism. It should be explained to students that editing should not be taken *personally.* Editors criticize the writing, not the writer. Editing is meant to push, not shove, writers to the extent of their abilities.

Although an editor has to be sensitive to an author's ego, he/she must also give a truthful appraisal, to help a writer learn how readers see the work, and understand how to make it better. If this hurdle can be surmounted in a supportive classroom where other students are going through the same thing, the experience turns from threatening to instructive, and eventually will be appreciated. Since the editorial process almost always produces happy results, it will give students more confidence when approaching revision in the future. Improvement of the work instills a sense of pride deeper than the one the writer had originally for a flawed first draft.

In Figure 1 is a piece of writing that needs work. It was written by one of my students in a creative writing class, a middle-aged woman whom I'll call "Myra." There isn't much here to work with, but I line edited it so that she could see how her writing could be more cohesive.

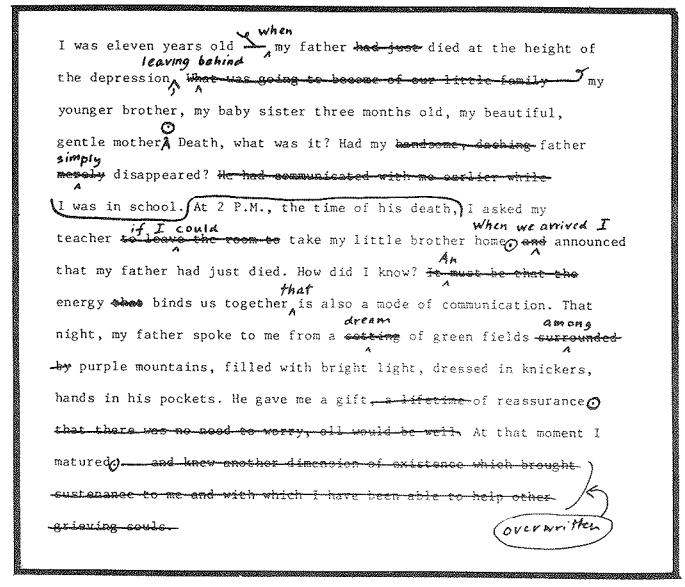
I was eleven years old when my father ~~had just~~ died at the height of the depression leaving behind ~~What was going to become of our little family~~ my younger brother, my baby sister three months old, my beautiful, gentle mother. Death, what was it? Had my ~~handsome, dashing~~ father simply ~~merely~~ disappeared? ~~He had communicated with me earlier while~~ I was in school. At 2 P.M., the time of his death, I asked my teacher ~~to leave the room to~~ if I could take my little brother home and announced that my father had just died. How did I know? ~~It must be that the~~ An energy ~~that~~ that binds us together is also a mode of communication. That night, my father spoke to me from a ~~cotting~~ dream of green fields ~~surrounded by~~ among purple mountains, filled with bright light, dressed in knickers, hands in his pockets. He gave me a gift, ~~a lifetime~~ of reassurance ~~that there was no need to worry, all would be well.~~ When we arrived I At that moment I matured. ~~and knew another dimension of existence which brought sustenance to me and with which I have been able to help other grieving souls.~~ overwritten

Fig. 1

I encouraged Myra to develop this fragment into a short story, using these suggestions:

1. Describe the depression from a child's point of view.
2. Describe what death seemed like, in terms of something else. For example, it could be described as the soul rising like the moon after daylight has left us; the body diminishing to bone; a silver heart streaking across the sky until the last ray has beamed out.
3. Create an actual gift that your father gave to you in the dream—a tangible symbol of reassurance.
4. Describe the moment of maturity—that in-between moment when change occurs. Hold the moment in your mind's eye like a still life with a dreamlike quality, evoking the details of your surroundings, the heightening of the senses, and how it felt to seem different than you were before.
5. Develop the piece overall into a more complete story. How did your father die? How did the rest of your family react? Rework your arrival at home and your premonition about your father's death into an actual scene with setting, dialogue, and characters.

These are general suggestions that an editor hopes will trigger more comprehensive and imaginative ideas from the author. If a student is stuck, some progress might be made by letting him/her talk it out. This can often lead to a realization of what the writer would like to express and the underlying motivations. In this sample, Myra should work on small parts of it at a time since it will require a great amount of new writing and a number of rewrites before it can begin to shape up as a story.

Once the students have some direction from the editing, they can go off by themselves to revise. When they come back with a revised version, it is an editor's job to respond to it again, and to keep doing so until both editor and author are satisfied. I should point out that if Myra's piece were submitted to me as a sample of an author's work in a book proposal, I would have to reject it. It would necessitate too much editorial work to make her writing acceptable for publication.

It is the role of a writing teacher to provide impetus for the act of writing, and to encourage students to progress from the passive to active phase of the process so that they will initiate their own ideas. Having one's writing edited can facilitate that transition. Once students have made that breakthrough, they will take themselves more seriously as writers. In turn, learning how to be a good editor can help students focus on their own work so they can, to some extent, edit themselves.

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Editing has been an expansive experience for me. It has put me in touch with people I would not have known and subjects I would not have read about. It has sharpened my perceptions and my ability to articulate them, and it has taught me the diplomacy of maneuvering within a close working relationship. It has improved my instincts as a critic, which has informed my involvement with other art forms: painting, movies, plays, music, even cooking. I read voraciously and feel a closer kinship to what I'm reading because I understand more about the source.

I am able now to experience a book on several levels: as reader, editor, critic. How it has affected my own writing remains to be seen, though I now see more quickly what's missing in it than I used to. It is often said that editors cannot be writers and vice versa. I can understand why. There is a real problem shifting gears from one mind-set to the other, that doesn't exist in quite the same way if you are trying to write while working in a completely different profession. An editor once told me that she became an editor so she wouldn't *have* to write.

For most, however, writing is a matter of talent, and it's been my impression that if you have a writer's gift, then you have no choice but to pursue it. For myself, I have known since I was 19 that I wanted to be an editor and it's been my belief that it, like teaching, holds a gift as well. ●

THE TEACHER AS EDITOR

by Nick Bozanic

I CANNOT DISTINGUISH ENTIRELY BETWEEN THE process of teaching writing and the process of editing. Like any good editor, the writing teacher works with an author through various stages of revision towards the completion of a publishable—i.e., readable—manuscript. Like any good editor, the writing teacher must bring to each author and each manuscript an open and attentive mind. The editor/teacher must approach the manuscript at hand prepared to recognize the peculiar, perhaps even eccentric, value of that singular linguistic event.

At the outset of the writing process, the teacher's primary task is to encourage the student to create a workable text—i.e. a text susceptible to constructive editing. In this role the teacher, more often than not, must actively discourage the student from giving any thought to editorial refinements.

Strange to say, students—especially adolescents—tend to be rather conservative. By the time they reach high school, students have become calcified with fear of failure, fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of rejection, fear of fear. Consequently, students often have trouble overcoming their inclination to pre-edit—to play it safe by omitting any material that might invite criticism. They avoid or discard anything tentative, exploratory, aberrant—anything, that is, that makes a piece of writing worth the effort of editing.

Therefore, the teacher's first job is to incite the student to generate a substantive, authentic text, by word-play, free association, free writing, free anything. Like psychoanalysts, we should insist on the sanctity of the writing workshop—the no-fault environment. Only when the student has used this freedom to produce a genuine (uninhibited) rough draft should we begin the editorial/instructional process.

We must become the ideal reader. That doesn't mean that we gladly swallow everything the student dishes up. It means we look at the text as critically as a diamond cutter looks at the rough stone. What must be done to realize the specific brilliance of this text? What needs to be cut away? What stays? Why? And then we start asking, not telling, the student.

A writing teacher is an interrogator. Give the text (not the student) the third degree. The trick is to bring the student into complicity, to induce the student to question the text, with intensity and desire. Without the student's complicity, the teacher becomes a ghostwriter, not an editor, and the procedure lacks instructional validity.

What I'm suggesting is simply the Socratic method. The teacher/editor's role is that of Hermes, the guide, the god of transactions and translations, the mediator between potential and realization. These negotiations make great demands on both the teacher and the student. They must be frank, but cordial; forthright, yet discreet; cautious, yet energetic.

There's another trick to it: respecting the integrity of the text. A writing teacher once asked me, "Do I have to read the works of writers I don't particularly like?" As a civilian, no. As a writing teacher, yes. Editor Maxwell Perkins didn't especially like everything Thomas Wolfe wrote, but it was his job to help Wolfe mature as a novelist.

Only after the text has obtained a recognizable fullness of expression does the teacher become a niggling and needling proofreader. But it needn't get nasty. The text belongs to

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the student, to the author. However, once the text appears in print, it is a gift freely given. And who wants to give a shabby gift?

Punctuation, spelling, spacing, shaping—all have to do with clarity and definition. A finished piece of carpentry doesn't have nails sticking out, doesn't wobble on its legs, doesn't have misfitted joints. A finished piece of writing doesn't have misspellings, erratic punctuation, haphazard diction. The student must decide about these things. And largely through interrogation, more rarely through suggestion, the teacher must help the student to reach these reasoned decisions.

Interrogation not only elicits response, it *obliges* authorial engagement with the text. It emphasizes this vital point: it is the work above all that counts. Not the personality of the student. Not the teacher. Not this rule or that rule. No authority but the text itself.

Peer Editing

GRADUATE SCHOOL WRITING WORKSHOPS EMphasize group discussions of individual work. Eleven out of twelve may dislike a poem, but the author can choose to read prescience and wisdom only in the comments of the dissenting member. A workshop provides a buffet of feedback—you take as much as you want.

Likewise, writing teachers in primary and secondary schools can have a student read a piece out loud, followed by responses from the others. This is a good approach but is time-consuming and can leave a writer overwhelmed by too many suggestions, some of which may be contradictory. (In sound systems, the screeching we call feedback occurs when the sound comes out of the speaker and back into the microphone, then out of the speaker again, etc. The unpleasant sound is actually caused by *excessive* feedback.)

As an alternative to group "feedback," students can pair off for individual peer criticism, or as Dale Worsley dubs it, "the buddy system." Some teachers provide students with suggested questions to ask each other.

At the Interlochen Arts Academy, writer-in-residence Harry Greenberg asked students to exchange poems with a partner: "They made comments on the work, edited it, and recopied the new version. They paired off with their fellow editor and talked about the poem and why they made the changes they made. Many in the class found it extremely insightful, a few did not." One student, Dan Bond, reported that his partner "found the excess words that I had failed to see. He also switched two lines to help them move more smoothly. They were changes that I would not have made on my own."

At P.S. 75 in Manhattan, the Teachers & Writers team (which includes Cathy Bowman, Steve Mason, Jean Monahan, Mark Shifflett, and me) has started a pilot project in peer editing. As Ron Padgett mentions in his interview in this issue, the quality of peer editing can be only as good as the student involved. We have chosen student editors for their ability to articulate their thoughts and for their sensitivity to their classmates' feelings.

We maintain a folder of manuscripts to be edited; contributions are made either by the T&W teaching team (we select stories that lend themselves to editing—worthwhile but not fully realized) or by the authors. The editors work on photocopies so that they can edit freely without fear of blemishing the original.

We discuss editing strategies and critique the editors' approaches to specific pieces. For example, in a story a robber yells at a policeman, "Freeze, police, drop your gun. You're under arrest." The editor wrote in the margin, "Don't say 'arrest,' here because the robber can't arrest policemen." It was pointed out that the author may have intended this to be a humorous ploy by the robber. The editor added, "If you want you can have the policeman complain about being arrested."

Being anointed as *editors* seems to affect the care and depth of the students' responses; no longer are they just well-meaning "peers." Lisa Ventry, a fifth-grader, says, "When I read as an editor, I pay more attention to what the writer is trying to say. When I know that someone wants this to be edited, I just feel that I'd like to help." ("I need a little honest help," Thomas Wolfe wrote to Maxwell Perkins in a note accompanying the manuscript that was to become *Look Homeward, Angel*.) Nicole Santomasso, a fifth-grader, states the difference between editing and peer criticism as "kind of bossing the author around a little bit more."

The student editors employ three approaches:

1) **Role-playing:** Two editors select a piece of writing from the editing folder. One plays author, and the other plays editor, and they challenge each other to explore the complexities and nuances of the editing process. For example, the "author" may play at being obstinate ("I *like* it this way, not knowing what the main character feels; don't you see the *beauty* in that?"), dense ("Can you be clearer about what you mean by 'vague'?"), or uncritically cooperative ("I'll do anything you say"). By working with an actor rather than the actual author, the editor can concentrate on the process and experiment with approaches. This technique enables the student playing the author to examine the editing process from the other side.

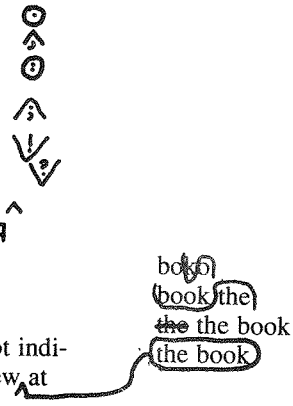
2) **On the page:** The editor makes comments, suggestions, and queries in the margins or on self-stick "Post-it" fliers (or "tags") applied to the page. Providing editors with these yellow fliers has been a breakthrough—the students feel "official" and perhaps safer about writing comments because they can easily replace any of the fliers with a revised comment, or remove a flier entirely.

The editors also make markings between the margins. They can make deletions, transpositions, and rewordings, or can correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Any of these markings can be augmented by a note in the margin or on a flier. Nicole Santomasso said, "Sometimes writers don't want the grammar to be correct; they want it to sound like a kid speaking. You ask them whether they really want it to be like that." To facilitate this process the editors and the authors should know a few basic copy editing symbols (see Figure 2).

The edited piece of writing is then shown to the author, after which the two meet to discuss the edit and evaluate what was and wasn't helpful.

A couple of years ago, Cory Tax-Schwartz, a third-grader, showed her classmate Alicia Herman an edit she had just done of Alicia's story. Alicia examined the comments and markings Cory had put on the manuscript and scrunched her face with the controlled rage of a writer who feels violated and said, "What did you *do* to this?" Cory patiently but firmly replied, "I made it make sense." Spoken by a true editor. Eventually Alicia incorporated most of Cory's suggested revisions.

Some Simplified Copy Editors' Marks



Note: Lists of complete marks can be found in many dictionaries and style manuals. They vary. For revising one's own writing, it is perfectly O.K. to invent one's own marks.

Fig. 2

3) **Face-to-face:** After studying the manuscript, the editor meets with the actual author. Nicole Santomasso might open a session by saying, "Maybe we can do this together so if you don't like something you can tell me right away. And I'll explain to you everything I'm going to do, why I'm doing it." She describes the interaction: "You have to ask them what they think they could do to make the story better. And if they can't come up with anything, you tell them what you think they can do. And sometimes they might say, 'No, that'll ruin it.' You take another copy and see how it would sound with the extra things in it, and if he doesn't like it, you say, 'I think you were right. This is good the way it is.'"

It is crucial that all editors and authors understand the fundamental law of literary property: authorship equals ownership. The editor offers suggestions; the writer decides which ones to accept.

•

Here are some comments made by student editors at P.S. 75—Kate Epstein, Elizabeth Kozodoy, Nicole Santomasso, and Lisa Ventry. In some cases, the editor's comment is preceded in italics by a line from the text being edited or a note describing the context of the comment.

"You should describe more what the jungle and the animals look like, the sounds that they make."

"Maybe you could talk more about the man's feelings when he was climbing mountains—what made him like it."

"Why do these nasty animals have to bother you when you are in the middle of the most interesting sentence in your book?" "You could tell the reader what the most interesting sentence in the book was."

"I think you should do a continuation to this story—maybe another adventure."

"I think you should be a tiny bit more descriptive."

"I think you should continue this story. Did your mother believe you when you told her what you saw?"

"It had a design on it." "What kind of design?"

The ending of "The Little Girl Who Never Went to School" was, "Finally she became a woman. She took welfare and she got a job and got married. Her husband supported her good and she had a family and lived happily ever after." "Did she ever learn anything? How did she get the job? Why don't you tell us some more about her new family!"

"There was a once boy named D.I. He thought that he was really cool but everybody else thought he was stupid including me." "What did he do that made people think he was stupid? Maybe you should have part of it take place at school."

In a story taking place in a school, there's "Then the doorbell rang." "Where were you? In a classroom there is no doorbell."

"She scared the fifth-graders away." "It would be interesting if you told us how the fifth-graders looked."

"Nicolas said, 'Wait up David! Why must you run!'" "Most people don't talk like this."

For a story with many antecedent problems: "Which one are you talking about?" "What is 'it'?"

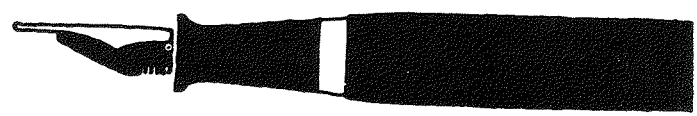
"This would be more interesting if you explained more often how you felt and with more details."

"The bellboy seemed to like me" "How did you know?"

Lots of vagueness in a story: "What family is this?" "I thought the father beaver was alive." "I thought he had a heart attack but I'm not sure if he died or not."

"So the next day she found one of her old grandfather's guns and shot herself in the head." "A little drastic, wouldn't you say?"

—A.Z.



REJECTION

IN PUBLISHING, BEFORE THE EDIT COMES THE acceptance. Editors reject far more than they accept, so no matter how rough an edit gets, the writer should remember that the editor liked the piece enough to want to publish it. In the classroom, therefore, perhaps we should confine the formal editing process to pieces with merit or potential (relative to the skills of each author). Being edited should be considered an honor.

All pieces that are edited might automatically be considered for publication in the school literary magazine. If student editors are involved in the selection process, they will have to deal with one of an editor's most difficult and delicate tasks: rejecting.

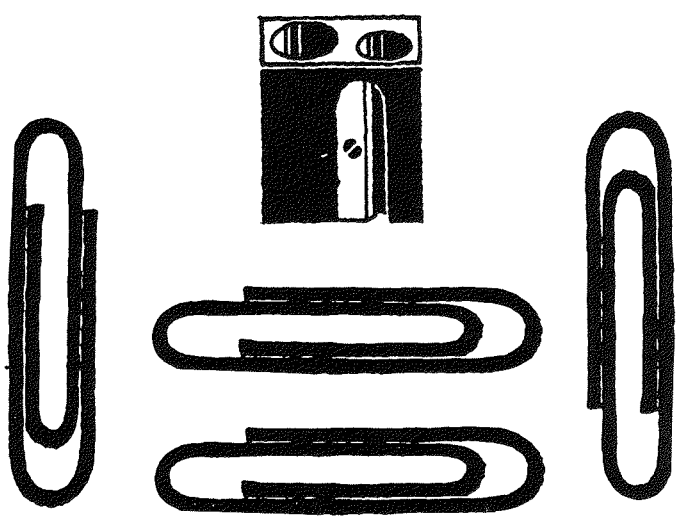
Whatever the reason for a turndown, the writer is likely to feel, well, *rejected*, and fear that he/she is just not good enough. Some professional writers stoically transfer the rejected manuscript to a fresh envelope and try another publisher. Some writers shrug at rejection and say, "What do *they* know?" (The problem with this attitude is that it may also follow an acceptance.) For writers to survive they need to be resilient.

Student writers generally don't have alternative markets for publication, which puts more of a burden on the editors. Many factors can enter into the selection process, but basically it comes down to a matter of taste. Poe said the sole arbiter of poetry is taste, but it's also been said that there's no accounting for tastes.

The following "rejection quiz" illustrates that the judgments of editors and other purveyors of taste are subject to overwhelming disagreement. (Unfortunately, the quiz will have an impact only on students who are familiar with some of the names mentioned.)

Match the judgments with the manuscript and/or author. The answers are on the back page of this issue.

[Most of these are from *The Experts Speak* by Christopher Cerf and Victor Navasky (Pantheon); other sources are *The Literary Life and Other Curiosities* by Robert Hendrickson (Penguin), and *Rejection* by John White (Addison-Wesley).]



Rejection Quiz

1. My dear fellow, I may perhaps be dead from the neck up, but rack my brains as I may I can't see why a chap should need thirty pages to describe how he turns over in bed before going to sleep.
2. There is no way to sell a book about an unknown Dutch painter.
3. The story is only mildly interesting, and it does nothing new with language or with form. Thanks for showing it to us, though. (*Paris Review*)
4. [This book] will never make it as a paperback.
5. The work of a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples.
6. The incoherence and formlessness of her—I don't know how to designate them—versicles are fatal. . . . An eccentric, dreamy, half-educated recluse in an out-of-the-way New England village (or anywhere else) cannot with impunity set at defiance the laws of gravitation and grammar. . . . Oblivion lingers in the immediate neighborhood.
7. M. [ ] n'est pas un ecrivain.
8. Mr. [ ] has a diseased mind. He is obsessed by sex. . . we have no doubt that he will be ostracized by all except the most degenerate coteries in the literary world.
9. His fame is gone out like a candle in a snuff and his memory will always stink.
10. [ ] is a failure.
11. [ ] is as unacquainted with art as a hog is with mathematics.
12. Thy honored manuscript has deigned to cast the light of its august countenance upon me. With raptures I have pursued it. By the bones of my ancestry, never have I encountered such wit, such pathos, such lofty thoughts. With fear and trembling I return the writing. Were I to publish the treasure you sent me, the Emperor would order that it should be made the standard, and that none be published except such as equaled it. Knowing literature as I do, and that it would be impossible in ten thousand years to equal what you have done, I send your writing back. Ten thousand times I crave your pardon. Behold my head is at your feet. Do what you will.

    Your servant's servant,
    The Editor

13. This will never do. . . . [His] case is manifestly hopeless; and we give him up as altogether incurable and beyond the power of criticism.
14. I am only one, only one, only. Only one being, one at the same time. Not two, not three, only one. Only one life to live, only sixty minutes in one hour. Only one pair of eyes. Only one brain. Only one being. Being only one, having only one pair of eyes, having only one time, having only one life, I cannot read your MS three or four times. Not even one time. Only one look, only one look is enough. Hardly one copy would sell here. Hardly one. Hardly one.

    Many thanks. I am returning the MS by registered post. Only one MS by one post.

15. [A publisher commenting on his editor's decision to accept a novel:] You're the only damn fool in New York who would publish it.
16. . . . smelled like rotting carrots.
17. Because you send your poem by mail.

Authors and/or Works

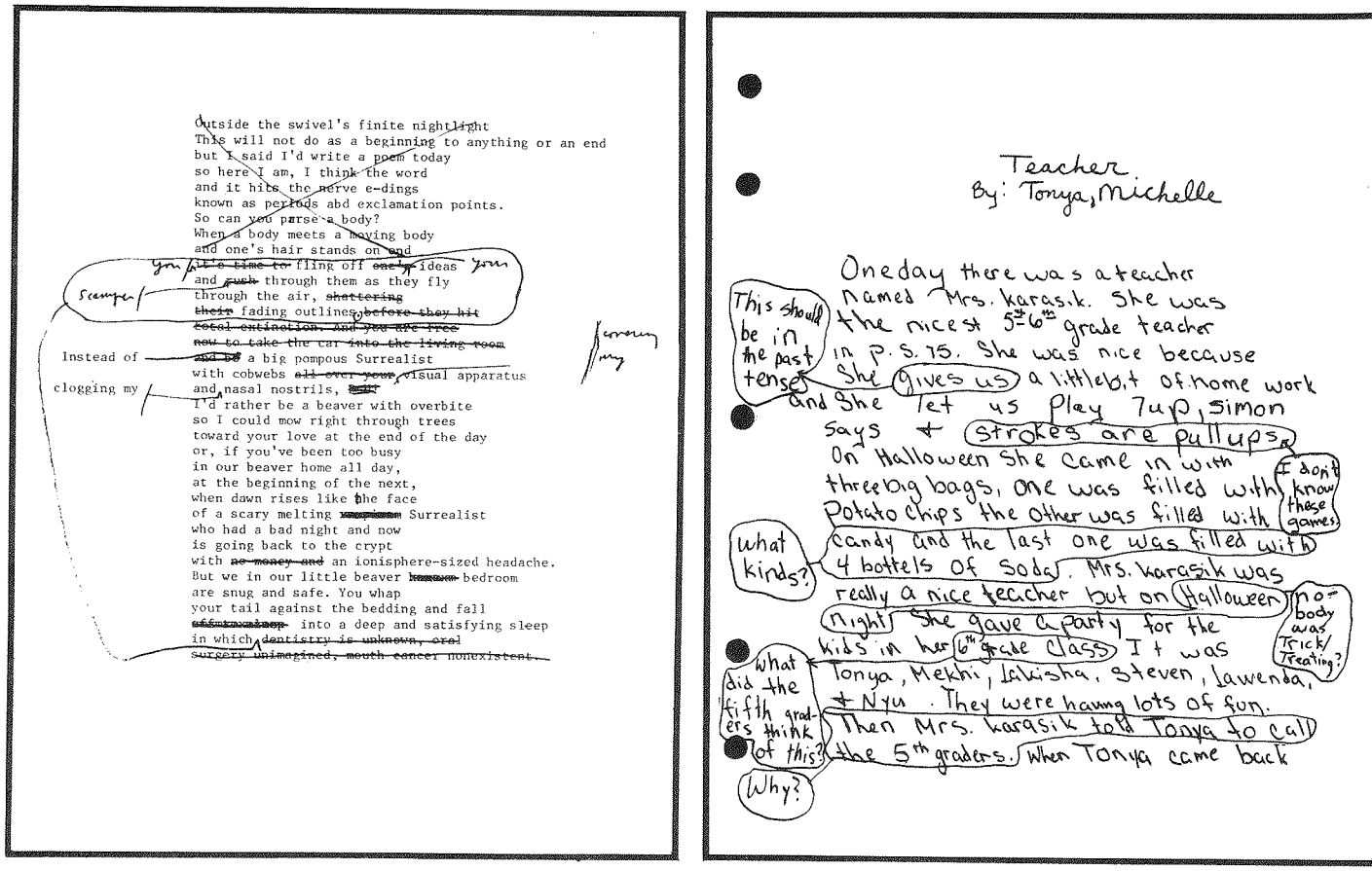
A. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*
B. Virginia Woolf on James Joyce
C. D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterly's Lover*
D. Poem titled "Why Do I Live?"
E. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*
F. Submission to a Chinese economic journal
G. Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*
H. Irving Stone, *Lust for Life*
I. Orwell, *1984*
J. Emily Dickinson
K. Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*
L. Milton
M. Wordsworth
N. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*
O. Gertrude Stein
P. *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*
Q. T. S. Garp, "The Pension Grillparzer" (from *The World According to Garp* by John Irving)

Postscript

"I think I am starving for publication: I love to get published; it maddens me not to get published. I feel at times like getting every publisher in the world by the scruff of his neck, forcing his jaws open, and cramming the Mss. down his throat—'God-damn you, here it is—I will and must be published.'"

(Thomas Wolfe to Sherwood Anderson)

—*A.Z.*



A self-edited poet's manuscript (left) and a peer-edited student manuscript (right). The two roles of author and editor have been combined in the poet's revision process, with the poet asking (but not necessarily writing down) questions not unlike those the student editor asks.

Editing Student Work for Publication

IN THE FILM INDUSTRY, DIRECTORS CLASH WITH studios over who determines the "final cut"—the version of a movie that's distributed. Publishing has no equivalent term, but generally the writer rules over books and literary magazines, while newspaper and magazine editors have the upper hand for news and feature articles. A literary magazine editor may make minor copy editing changes in a short story without notifying the author. Gray areas abound.

In New York State it is illegal to display a work of art publicly "in an altered, defaced, mutilated, or modified form." Many writers have railed against foul deeds done to their literary offspring. If a court were to rule that published poems and stories are publicly displayed art, then a lot of editors would be needing lawyers.

Who has "final cut" when we publish children's work? Should children's work be edited at all, and if so, what should be the author's role? Several writer/teachers comment on their approach to editing children:

Dale Worsley: Before I make recommendations I must be certain the student will have the confidence to disagree. I confess I have edited student work when there has been no time to get the students' approval. Most often, I have been right to do it because I know the students would have agreed with me.

Sometimes, however, I have regretted this. In the heat of the moment I once let a student's character live instead of die a macabre death at the end of a story, simply because I was tired of so much unhappiness and terror in the magazine as a whole. Later I saw the student's crestfallen look. Now I try to hold firm in those pressured moments before printing, and let the psychologists sort it out later.

Michael Schwartz: I have always appreciated miswritings by students because they express more about the authors and what their mental processes might have been than standardized editings do. When I am typing a student anthology I prefer to keep the most representative or suggestive deviations. My rule of thumb is that if a section is tediously repetitive or if misspellings or omitted words require the reader to work too hard to decipher the meaning of a sentence, then I often ask the authors to restate aloud the idea to me and have them word the repair themselves.

Lucia Nevai: For little ones (first-, second-, and third-graders) some spelling, punctuation, and grammar must be altered; and for poems, linebreaks must sometimes be determined.

For older ones, awkwardnesses get optional phrasings and the author has the power of veto; errors get stronger suggestions.

Kids' work is tainted by editing only when the magic of their imaginings is made logical. Good editing suggestions are just as thrilling to kids as to professional writers.

Mary Logue [the following comments are excerpted from a longer article called "Respecting Student Poetry"]: Poetry is not ordinary speech and as such does not fall under the grammatical laws of the land.

Young poets try to capture the wonderful jumpiness and whirling of their minds and put some of that energy down on paper, as do all hard-working poets.

Problems can show up in four areas when dealing with voice. The four areas are: 1) structure, 2) personal tics or idiosyncracies, 3) misspellings, and 4) punctuation.

Personal idiosyncracies come out in poems in the form of repeated phrases, incomplete sentences, and sentences that follow a pattern structure other than English. I encourage them. I feel they give the poems character and vitality and often charm. For example, in a poem written by an Indian student; is the line: "We got into Conversation." By leaving out the article "a" or "the," she has made the conversation become all conversations, and also pointed out the visual image of literally stepping into conversation, like it was a car that would take you someplace, which it is and does. Also, I love it that Conversation is capitalized. It is the big conversation, the one she's been waiting a long time to get into. Now, I'm not saying these interpretations were those of a fourth-grader in writing this poem, because few good lines of poetry are so heavily premeditated as literary criticism would make them seem.

I think students have the right to decide how they want capitalization and punctuation to be handled in their poems. I let elementary students put periods and commas in as they feel like it and am more often than not pleased with their unconscious use of them.

In years of teaching I have acquired enormous respect for the poems students have written. I think they know what they're doing and I think they should be allowed to do it.

Harry Greenberg: In the schools, I do quite a bit of editing. I usually leave each school with an anthology of the work written during my residency. I never add, only delete. Sometimes the conflict of wanting to teach poetry at its natural leisurely pace, but having to do it in a confined school period, makes for rushed, overwritten masterpieces. The masterpiece is there, but it is diluted. I edit by deleting to condense the writing and make it strong. I always correct spelling and grammar and lend a helping hand when punctuation proves to be confusing.

If my residency at a school is rather short, I find there is not time to seek out an approval from the individual author. I hope that he/she will view my personal care of the language as looking out for his/her best interest. If my residency runs through the school year, I will edit as I go along and show the student the strengths and weaknesses in the writing. By doing so on a continuous basis, I help the student in the self-editing process.

—A.Z.

BOOKS

Editors on Editing:
An Inside View of What Editors Really Do
edited by Gerald Gross
(Colophon Books/Harper & Row, 1985)
$12.95 paper, 273 pp.

IN *EDITORS ON EDITING* SOME OF THE BEST practitioners of the editing trade tell what they do, and how and why they do it. Although called a "revised edition," this is more like a sequel to the 1962 version, containing a majority of new material. Geared toward aspiring editors, it is also full of revelations for writers.

Editors on Editing is divided into editing theory, editing practice, and editor-author correspondence. Editors of all stripes contribute, and many of the pieces are rich with anecdotes. We hear from a senior acquisitions editor, an editorial assistant, and from editors specializing in fiction, nonfiction, mystery novels, and children's books. There are strong contributions on the crafts of copy editing and line editing.

Perhaps the best *reading* is contained in the section of author-editor correspondence, which includes a generous sampling of letters by Maxwell Perkins, editor of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Wolfe. Perkins' response to a draft of Marcia Davenport's novel *East Side, West Side* illustrates how an editor can get inside a work-in-progress and provide the author with a plan of attack for revision.

Editors on Editing provides an excellent foundation for classroom discussions on the nitty-gritty of publishing.

—*A.Z.*

The Chicago Manual of Style:
Thirteenth Edition, Revised and Expanded
(University of Chicago Press, 1982)
$35 cloth, 738 pp.

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A DICTIONARY, *THE Chicago Manual of Style*, also known as "Chicago" or "The Bible," is the book most often found on an editor's desk. Previously titled *A Manual of Style*, the official name has been changed to what people were actually calling it, which illustrates the book's openness to change. All aspects of editing and book production are covered in it.

One of *Chicago*'s many strengths is its comprehensive approach to the mechanics of copy editing and proofreading. Memorizing the copy editing and proofreading symbols without knowing how to use them is like learning a foreign vocabulary without knowing its grammar. *Chicago* walks you through pages of examples that prepare you for virtually any situation.

Chicago contains far more than you probably want to know about how to make books; you might flip through sections on indexes, bibliographic forms, and marking mathematical copy. But who knows what will catch your eye? Did you ever wonder how printing can create the illusion of full color reproduction by using dots of only four colors? Or how book designers imbue a text with personality?

One might expect a technical book written by committee to make for dry, stolid reading. But *Chicago* has an accessible, personable tone. You get the feeling that the University of Chicago Press is a nice place to work.

—*A.Z.*

Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing
by Claire Kehrwald Cook
(Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985)
$14.95 cloth, 240 pp.

THIS ASTUTE BOOK WOULD BE MORE APTLY subtitled *How to Copy Edit Your Own Writing*, for it deals less with general editorial decisions than with the word-by-word skills necessary for copy editing. Claire Cook gives specific, thorough, and solid advice in chapters on baggy sentences, faulty connections, ill-matched partners, mismanaged numbers and references, problems with punctuation, the parts of a sentence—followed by a glossary of questionable usage. She also provides numerous examples of poorly written sentences, followed by corrected versions. I confess to taking pleasure in the ludicrousness of the really bad sentences.

Most published writers leave copy editing to their copy editors, and would question the value of doing one's own. They might wonder: what's the next step, typesetting one's own books? But as a writer who is also a copy editor, I've found that focusing on every detail of every sentence has made me question the half-baked generalizations I often make so freely in my first drafts. Paying minute attention to the text also makes me eat, drink, and sleep with it, a close companionship that always develops new ideas.

Line by Line is not intended for students. It is for those people whose intense desire to see the world become clear and perfect gives them satisfaction in finding fault and correcting it. I count myself among these fanatics.

—*R.P.*