

From the Editor

In the world of academic publishing there has been much discussion of late about the virtues and shortcomings of peer review. This is especially true of what, for lack of more graceful phrasing, I am calling the double-anonymous system, sometimes called “double-blind,” in which neither the readers nor the authors know each others’ identities. The benefits of such a system, which generally has been acknowledged as a gold standard for journals’ editorial procedures, are fairly clear: readers can assess work frankly, without worries about recrimination from authors, and authors can submit their work knowing that it will receive a fair hearing regardless of their rank or reputation in the field.

Of course, any literary scholar worth her salt can meet this idealist vision—of work judged entirely on its own terms, in a sort of detachment from authorial context—with a skepticism supported by the rich array of literary theories and hermeneutic approaches in which we are trained. Claims of objectivity, of work judged in a vacuum of context, are at some level necessary fictions; no realm of purely neutral assessment exists. There also are worries that the veil of anonymity can be taken by some readers as license for irresponsible or abusive commentary or that a small pool of “expert” readers can acquire too much power within a scholarly community as gatekeepers to publication. Additional complications, too numerous to mention here, can arise, such as the question of whether to disclose an author’s identity if a reader makes an accusation of plagiarism. Nevertheless, the double-anonymous process has stood for quite a while as the best option for a journal committed to undertaking a fair and rigorous evaluation of the scholarship submitted for publication.

Recently, however, the status of this system has slipped, not least because of the opportunities and hazards presented in an online world of ever vaster, more dynamic, and more intimate connectedness. Some journals have begun experimenting with open forms of review with exciting results. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, for example, has undertaken a hybrid form of evaluation, inviting the public as well as a panel of experts to comment on four essays not yet accepted for publication. Readers must log onto the scholarly network MediaCommons, and they are required to disclose their identities just as the authors have disclosed theirs.¹ Such a process makes clear the virtues of a more open system. Authors can receive a multiplicity of feedback from knowledgeable sources who might otherwise not occur to journal editors as potential reviewers. The feedback itself, especially when filtered through a process of logging on, may be more likely, by

virtue of its place in the spotlight, to be presented in civil terms. Readers and authors alike can learn a great deal from the exchange, and thus some of the primary purposes of scholarship—advancing knowledge, provoking thought—are achieved more readily. Open sourcing also can expedite the review process, bypassing the many months most authors must wait to hear a verdict on their work. Clearly this development, which has been used for a longer time in the sciences, has much to offer for intellectual exchange and rigorous review in the humanities. It suggests, in a sense, how the more positive side of open review arenas like Wikipedia can be extended to more specialized scholarly venues.

The web also introduces separate complications to the arena of traditional, double-anonymous peer review. Most conference programs are by default published online these days; even lectures and talks with small, local audiences tend to be announced through the web to a potentially global one. Drafts of scholarly articles are widely available, either through their voluntary placement on personal or social networking websites or through databases such as Proquest Dissertations and Theses. (The increased frequency of de facto and voluntary publication of drafts online is an issue that poses complications for copyright, which I may address in a future preface.) The many upsides of these practices are obvious, but they also threaten to render the process of double-anonymous review (at least, a system in which readers are unaware of an author's identity) obsolete. Just as university presses typically disclose authors' identities to readers, on the grounds that readers are likely to be aware of a book manuscript's authorship by having read or heard sections of the project at conferences, in journals, or through other venues, the withholding of an author's identity by a journal may seem increasingly an empty gesture. Should editors maintain the practice of double-anonymous review when a Google search of an article's keywords can reveal the author's identity? Does this practice now exist only as a fig leaf of scholarly propriety?

Like many journal editors I have been pondering these issues recently, wondering if it would benefit the readers of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* to initiate any alterations to our current review process. I have been following conversations on the listserv of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals on these topics and have been watching with interest as some journals in the humanities and social sciences have ventured into arenas such as crowd-sourcing reviews. My thoughts on these issues are still developing as I learn more. My decision at this time is to stay with our current system, but I would like to share my thoughts on these matters with our readers and express my openness to hearing your opinions.

For now, I think that open forms of online review can work very well for a small collection of articles, but I doubt their usefulness for the vast

majority of our submissions. In some ways crowd or open forms of review strike me as online equivalents to a seminar with a pre-circulated paper, in that a group of people are providing highly concentrated and (presumably) frank but “signed” feedback on a single text they all have read. This system can work beautifully for a few high-profile papers at a time. I wonder, though, how much attention a large collection of articles, submitted to a journal at roughly the same time—for example, the quantity and variety of submissions more typical of what *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* deals with on a regular basis—would and could receive from a significant number of well informed and energetic readers. This second situation seems to provide a parallel to a typical conference with several concurrent sessions. As we all know, sometimes papers in such sessions are well attended, but at other times they are not. Sometimes presenters receive excellent feedback on their work, but often they do not. Some listeners provide their honest opinions along with cogent suggestions for improving the work, but many withhold their opinions out of politeness, cowardice, or fatigue.

With this analogy in mind, I doubt that all of our submissions to *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* would receive substantive, helpful responses after the novelty of open review faded. As at many conferences, submissions would be likely to receive more attention in direct proportion to the status of their authors or the fashionableness of the topics discussed. This bias would be a significant problem for any reputable journal, but I think doubly so for a feminist one, as it would perpetuate entrenched hierarchies of status and rank rather than providing spaces in which our most junior or most marginal scholars could receive a fair hearing for their ideas. This could be particularly damaging to graduate students. Online reviewing also would value the voices of those more technologically inclined and equipped, disregarding those who do not have the knowledge, the information technology support, or the general wherewithal to participate. In some of the most crucial ways—in ways that affect whose work receives detailed commentary and whose work is published—traditional forms of review still seem more open to me than what we are now calling “open” review.

In addition to the questions of openness and fairness are uncertainties about the quality of assessment in an open, online system. Countless potential problems could arise, depending on who participated, why, and how. Whereas in a traditional system an editor can deliberately seek out a wide group of experts, in the online system a few readers could exert disproportional sway over the process simply because they had greater time and willingness to participate. Work of high quality also could fall through the cracks because the topic did not attract the interest of the readers who happened to be engaged with the online review process. There is, finally, the question of frankness. The virtues of open feedback are great, but having

viewed well over a thousand readers' reports in my tenure as editor, I am convinced that most readers provide a more forthcoming assessment of our submissions when their identities are not disclosed to the authors. Such feedback of course can be difficult to read—we all have our stories to tell of stinging reports on our own work—but on the other hand we cannot dismiss the positive comments of anonymous readers as flattery, and that must always be a worry when the authors and readers are aware of each others' identities. In sum, I feel that more would be lost than gained if *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* abandoned anonymous review in favor of open approaches. I may contemplate setting up an open, online review for a single article or small collection of submissions in the future, as a way of fostering this relatively new mode of scholarly interaction. For now, though, this journal is sticking with the traditional, confidential mode of peer review.

The question of whether to disclose the identities of our authors is a more difficult question to answer because here one faces what seems a wave of inevitable change. At what point will it become entirely impossible to withhold from our readers the authorship of work under review? Are we at that point already? With some hesitation, I say that the answer still is no. First, my sense is that journals with a narrower focus—and thus typically a more tightly knit community of readers—are likely to be compelled to confront this issue before *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* does. A journal with the international scope and topical variety of this one is simply less likely to be drawing from the same pool of readers with the same frequency. Certainly a relatively small group of expert readers will be available to read submissions focused on less well-known authors or more specialized topics, but still, the ever increasing geographical space from which our authors and readers hail decreases the likelihood that our readers will have happened previously to have encountered the work under review. We do occasionally have readers disclose, after receiving the article they have agreed to review, that they are acquainted with the author. This slows down the review process, as we have to find new readers, but it does not threaten the process's integrity.

In answering the question of whether to disclose authors' names to readers, however, I need to distinguish between situations in which readers simply happen to know the identity of a submission's author—thereby compelling us to find a new reader—and possible situations in which readers would deliberately investigate authorship through keyword searches on the web. Here I face a choice: do I keep faith that our readers will not research authors' identities, thereby maintaining the double-anonymous system, or do I disclose all authors' identities because I assume that some readers will seek out this information anyway? For now, I am taking the

more optimistic—some might say idealistic—path. I retain my good faith in the vast majority of our readers. I believe that they would not search for the identity of a submission's author because they prefer not to have their judgment of a submission clouded by knowledge of the author's name, because they simply do not wish to take the time to seek out this knowledge, and because their integrity prevents such behavior. I will be revising our guidelines for readers, exhorting them not to seek out authors' identities, and I will move forward with the expectation that they will adhere to these ethical standards. I do this partly because I know that when I read for other journals I prefer to do so without knowledge of an author's identity, and I wish to continue extending this opportunity to our readers. I do so with caution, however, and with the awareness that this policy may need to be revised in the future.

Our long-standing system of double-anonymous or double-blind review certainly is not without flaws, as I am all too well aware. It still seems to be to be the best system, however, given my commitment to rigorous and fair review and to a process that provides opportunities for scholars to receive solid feedback on their work without regard to their reputation or rank. For now, at least, I remain committed to this system, but I would welcome responses from the journal's readers on this topic. If you have thoughts you would like to share with me on this issue, please email them to tswl@utulsa.edu.

Three years ago I began a process of altering the constitution of our advisory and editorial boards. I invited the members of the editorial board, most of whom had served the journal generously for at least twenty years, to join our advisory board. Making three appointments every six months, I then started filling a newly constituted editorial board with a total of eighteen members serving terms of three years each. Over these transitional years I have been deeply gratified by the support that both the advisory board and the new editorial board have shown the journal. Few editors, I have to assume, have the good fortune I do in undertaking my work with the support of such a generous, knowledgeable, and insightful group of scholars. Their loyalty and sound advice have sustained me, and it is no exaggeration for me to say that my job would be impossible without their input.

As the board was filled with the last issue, it will now be part of my task in the editorial prefaces to mark the departures of board members whose terms have expired, even as I introduce new ones. With this issue I therefore would like to express my thanks to the first three scholars who so graciously agreed to join the new editorial board: Dianne Chisholm, Maram Epstein, and Elizabeth Robertson. This is not a true farewell, for

whether they know it or not (and whether they welcome it or not!), I will be continuing to ask for their advice in the future. I am deeply grateful for the time they have given to *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* over the past three years, and I will remember the tenure of these three founding board members with great fondness.

I also am delighted to introduce our three new board members. Anna Battigelli is Professor of English at the State University of New York, Plattsburgh, where she specializes in Restoration and eighteenth-century English literature. She is the author of *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (1998) as well as articles on the religious context of Restoration print culture, early modern science, and satire. She was a Carey Senior Fellow at Notre Dame University's Erasmus Institute, and at SUNY Plattsburgh she won the State University's Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. She has served both as book review editor and as an editorial board member of *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, and she is a contributing editor to *The Scriblerian*. To my delight, she and I are co-editing an upcoming special issue of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* devoted to English Catholic Women Writers, 1660-1829. Her works in progress include a book titled "John Dryden and Catholicism: Religion and Politics in Restoration London."

Anne Fogarty is Professor of Joyce Studies, Director of the James Joyce Research Center, and Head of the University College Dublin School of English, Drama, and Film. She is a central figure in scholarship on twentieth-century Irish literature, particularly Joyce. She has been President of the International James Joyce Foundation from 2008 to 2012, the Academic Director of the Dublin James Joyce Summer School since 1997, and was Associate Director of the Yeats Summer School from 1995 to 1997. Her editorial work has been exceptionally extensive and diverse. Until 2009 she was editor of the *Irish University Review*, and she is coeditor with Luca Crispi of the *Dublin James Joyce Journal*, founded in 2008. She also is co-editor with Timothy Martin of *Joyce on the Threshold* (2005), with Morris Beja of *Bloomsday 100: Essays on "Ulysses"* (2009), and with Fran O'Rourke of *James Joyce: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (forthcoming). She has written on many aspects of gender and genre in contemporary Irish fiction and poetry, with essays on Paula Meehan, Frank McGuinness, Colum McCann, and on the theme of gender and transnationalism in contemporary Irish fiction, and published in journals including *Irish University Review*, *Colby Quarterly*, and *Graph*, as well as in many book collections. In 2008 she received the Charles Fanning Award from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, for excellence in the field of Irish Studies. She currently is preparing for publication a monograph titled "James Joyce and Cultural Memory: Reading History in *Ulysses*," and a study of the poetry of Eavan Boland is forthcoming.

Hyungji Park is Professor of English Language and Literature and Associate Dean of University College at Yonsei University, Korea. A specialist in the nineteenth-century British novel, postcolonial literature, and Asian American literature, she is the coauthor, with Heasim Sul, of *Jekukkjuüi wa Namsöngsöng: 19seki Yöngkuk üi Jendö Hyöngsöng* [Imperialism and Masculinity: Gender Formation in Nineteenth-Century Britain] (2004). She also has published many articles in venues including *Feminist Studies in English Literature*, *British and American Fiction to 1900*, *Journal of English Language and Literature*, *Studies in Modern Fiction*, *Lingua Humanitatis*, *The Journal of Teaching English Literature*, *Victorian Studies*, and *Milton Studies*. She has received fellowships from the Yale Center for British Art, the Daewoo Foundation, and the Korean Research Foundation, and in 2006-07 she was a visiting scholar at the Harvard-Yenching Institute. She is at work on a study of representations of Asia/Korea in nineteenth-century British culture and literature.

Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature is at least as fortunate in its staff as it is in its board, and so in closing I would like to reiterate my gratitude to the journal's staff for their consistent, excellent, and reliable work. As I have ventured into higher levels of multi-tasking in my department, the managing editor and graduate interns have done more than ever before to keep our operations running smoothly. It has been a joy to work with our Managing Editor Karen Dutoi, our Book Review Editor Jen Krisuk, and our interns Jacob Ball and Lexi Stuckey. In particular I would like to thank Lexi, who is just finishing her term as advertising intern. Fortunately I do not have to say goodbye to her, as she will be coming on board as our new Book Review Editor, sharing the position next semester with Jen Krisuk. I am pleased to welcome Jennifer Fuller as our new advertising intern and very much look forward to working with her this year. I also am delighted to have Melissa Antonucci on board this semester as a volunteer. Finally, I am overdue in expressing my gratitude to Bob Spoo, a past editor of our sibling publication the *James Joyce Quarterly*, a colleague of mine in the English Department, and now my colleague in the University of Tulsa's School of Law, for agreeing to serve as our Copyrights Editor. As the world of academic publishing grows ever more complicated, I find myself turning to him often for advice, and I already owe him a great deal for the generosity he has shown with his time and expertise.

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NOTES

¹ Jennifer Howard, "Leading Humanities Journal Debuts 'Open' Peer Review, and Likes It," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 26 July 2010, <http://chronicle.com/article/Leading-Humanities-Journal/123696/>. On open reviewing generally, see Steve Kolowich, "Killing Peer Review," *Inside Higher Ed*, 19 July 2011, http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/07/19/debate_over_whether_social_web_sites_can_replace_peer_review.