

## Red Pencil Revelations

*Editors Talk about Editing: Insights for Readers, Writers and Publishers*

by Susan L. Greenberg. New York: Peter Lang, 2015. Paperback, 217 pp., \$39.95

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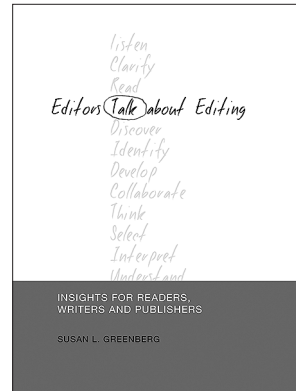
What does an editor do, exactly? In contrast to the writer, whose front-of-house glamour attracts the attention of readers, lay and scholarly alike, the editor has traditionally remained hidden. This invisibility is the marker of a trade well practiced. But in an age of expansive digital and self-publishing, the need for textual mediation outside the classical confines of the editorial office continues to grow, making an up-close look at the art and craft of editing long overdue.

If anyone is equipped to illuminate this elusive, behind-the-scenes business, it is Susan Greenberg. Currently a senior lecturer in the department of English and creative writing at University of Roehampton, London (and a founding member of IALJS), Greenberg has had long career as a writer, editor, teacher, and scholar that has put her on all sides of the red pen.

*Editors Talk about Editing* is a collection of thirteen interviews Greenberg conducted with people from a wide range of publications. These include staff members at large magazines (*Economist*, *New York*), from literary and academic publishing (*Nature*, *PeerJ*), from daily newspapers (*Baltimore Sun*), and at of online sources such as the Wikimedia Foundation and the *Atavist Magazine*. Greenberg also includes conversations with editorial practitioners who fall outside the traditional job description: an author, a literary agent, and a freelance book editor.

The book's success in presenting readers with a rich picture of this neglected field owes much to its interesting participant selection. The rest is due to Greenberg's strengths as an interviewer. Guided by a master list of questions—provided in the appendix—she remains conversational and responsive to each interviewee. The result is a detailed professional portrait of the individual editors, from their origins, through the nuts and bolts of their everyday practice, to deeper descriptions of their particular processes. Taken together, readers see a group of veteran practitioners, largely self-taught, whose creativity and enthusiasm for text disrupt the usual metaphors of editors as “gatekeepers,” “butchers,” or, following journalist Gene Fowler, “traffic cops of the arts.”

Greenberg's questions are designed to encourage self-analysis, and as such she is able to identify a handful of significant comparisons and themes. From her conver-



sations she outlines, for instance, a set of core editorial principles, and determines a shared desire to give more value to the practice. The book's structure also provides some helpful thematic herding. These thirteen interviews are organized into five parts. The first, "Identity," focuses on the editor's role in establishing a collective publication identity. The second part, "Attention," explores the way in which skilled editing contributes to a text. The third, "Legacy," considers the meaning of standards and judgments in an ever-evolving media landscape.

The last two, "Devolution" and "Digital," handle more urgent questions about the place of editing in the rapidly changing and increasingly digital publishing world. These latter interviews are particularly engrossing, as they tackle head-on the problem of developing viable future business models for publishing. It is encouraging to hear from Peter Binfield of *PeerJ* and Evan Ratliff of *Atavist*, cofounders and publishers of online publications who actively experiment with options beyond advertising and institutional support, such as tiered subscription or membership models. Still, one takeaway from Greenberg's conversations with Binfield, novelist Louise Doughty, and literary agent Carole Blake is that writers should brace themselves to absorb many of the financial and editorial responsibilities traditionally covered by publishers.

The subtitle lets us know that this book casts its net for a wide audience. Readers with a scholarly interest in editing will find *Editors Talk about Editing* a welcome reference for its original source material. Greenberg's working definition of the practice, and the thirteen responses to it, are also bound to be valuable. For teachers of journalism and writing, the bootstrapping methods by which these interviewees have learned their trade should provide useful material. How can college courses more effectively teach these editing skills, which, after all, are so vital to the art and craft of writing?

Finally, *Editors Talk about Editing* does what all good behind-the-scenes books do—it gives insight into best practices through entertaining examples and anecdotes. Any readers unfamiliar with the inner workings of publishing will thoroughly enjoy this opportunity to look behind the curtain.

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