Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing: Editors in Writing Studies ed. by Greg Giberson, Megan Schoen, and Christian Weisser, and: *The Inner World of Gatekeeping in Scholarly Publication* ed. by Pejman Habibie and Anna Kristina Hultgren (review)

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Book Review

Greg Giberson, Megan Schoen, and Christian Weisser, eds.
Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing: Editors in Writing Studies.
Logan: Utah State University Press, 2022. Pp. xv, 241.
Paper: ISBN-13 978-1-64642-216-6, US$33.95;
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Pejman Habibie and Anna Kristina Hultgren, eds.
The Inner World of Gatekeeping in Scholarly Publication.
Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. Pp. xvii, 267.
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Reviewed by STEVEN E. GUMP

Look around, and you will find metaphors aplenty for editors: *brokers*, *custodians*, *mentors*, *midwives*, *mothers*, *shepherds*, *sponsors*, *standard-bearers*.[1] One of the most common and potentially pernicious metaphors is that of *gatekeeper*. Its use often implies that editors have unrealistic expectations, that they wield their power indiscriminately, and that they relish the humiliation of rejection. Other connotations imply insecure Wizard of Oz–like individuals engaged in collusive, conspiratorial, behind-the-scenes machinations. True, unless you self-publish, you do have to 'satisfy' editors, so they do hold power: the power to accept or reject your work. As Naomi Pascal reminds us, however, 'the editor's chair is not a throne.'[2] And although the two parties have differing interests and priorities, scholarly authors and editors share a common need: each other.

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Distrust generally stems from a lack of understanding. Rebecca Colesworthy offers apt advice for dispelling some of the mythical power of these metaphors: scholars and publishers—that is, authors and editors – should strive to 'communicate openly and candidly.'[3] And communicating openly and candidly about editorial purposes and practices is precisely the goal of the two edited volumes reviewed here. By presenting the voices of experienced scholarly reviewers and editors of scholarly books, series, and journals, both works shed to illuminate 'the inner world' that exists 'behind the curtain,' offer context and transparency, and elucidate the complex roles and trajectories of scholarly editors and editorial responsibilities. Authors seeking to understand better how and why scholarly editors make the decisions they do could have much to learn from the chapters collected in these two volumes. Editors seeking ideas or best practices, as well, could be inspired by what they find in either work.

In *The Inner World of Gatekeeping in Scholarly Publication*, Pejman Habibie (Western University, Canada) and Anna Kristina Hultgren (The Open University, United Kingdom) offer their own chapters and bring together the work of twelve additional contributors, primarily in the field of applied linguistics, affiliated with institutions in Canada, Hungary, Iran, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Although the contributors' disciplinary perspectives align, the cultural diversity across the fourteen chapters adds remarkable depth to the work. Several chapters in fact address tacit cultural hegemonies that underscore scholarly publication. Márton Demeter (University of Public Service, Hungary) explains how international publication is grounded 'on the basis of Western academic norms (language, research methodologies, academic writing, etc.)' (124). The impact, also addressed by Maria Kuteeva (Stockholm University) and by Hultgren (in her own chapter), introduces questions of ethics and agency in the construction, certification, and distribution of knowledge.

Yet 'Western academic norms,' we soon learn, are far from universal. Demeter's chapter offers fascinating insights into the world of scholarly publishing in Hungary; he does not shy away from the word *nepotism*. In Hungary, 'local academic norms expressly contradict with the international norm of impartiality that the double-blind peer review aims to support' (133). Academic nepotism is apparently 'common practice' in Iran, as well, as described in the chapter by Karim Sadeghi and Farah Ghaderi

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(both of Urmina University) (259). Disentangling culture from ethics—or ethics from culture—is not a goal of this volume, yet scholars in Hungary and Iran are far from the only ones whose lives, both professionally and personally, are affected by challenging tensions of these sorts.

In their respective chapters, Kuteeva, Ling Shi (University of British Columbia), and Guillaume Gentil (Carleton University, Canada) examine their practices as reviewers. Gentil's chapter is especially reflective, optimistic, and helpful, arguing for more 'explicit instruction and mentoring' to assist novice reviewers (64). And effective, authoritative reviews are vital to the enterprise of scholarly publishing. Carmen Sancho Guinda (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid) notes how gatekeeping authority often rests in the hands of the peer reviewers, not the editors. How, then, does one become a reviewer? Habibie, in his chapter, explains how he 'start[ed] with low-stakes genres such as book reviews' to raise his 'self-confidence as a junior scholar' (33). In his chapter, Peter De Costa (Michigan State University) suggests the same approach for emerging applied linguists: 'start writing book reviews in order to get onto the radar of colleagues' (96). Given the volume of submissions—and the need for peer reviewers—review invitations will inevitably materialize. But every task has its price. Hultgren takes a critical stance toward peer review in her chapter, where she asks: Is it 'reasonable for profit-making companies to expect academics, many of whom are paid by publicly funded institutions, to undertake peer reviews for free and with little or no acknowledgement' (165)?

Some contributors to *The Inner World of Gatekeeping in Scholarly Publication* lean too heavily on jargon and theory, using too light a hand to emphasize the implications, thus potentially alienating readers who are not also applied linguists. For example, several chapters distractingly layer autoethnography onto their presentations, as if to give the ideas and experiences a more academic, analytical, or trustworthy veneer. Likewise, more assertive editing could have improved the clarity and presentation of some chapters. The chapter by John Edwards (St. Francis Xavier University and Dalhousie University, Canada) refreshingly eschews theory, but its conclusion strays too far afield. And in a move that has become commonplace in similar edited volumes, stylistic conformity was not applied to the chapters presented here. Given that this volume is the third that has been co-edited by Habibie since 2019 (with two additional

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co-edited volumes published in 2023 and at least one more slated for publication in 2024), I would expect to see continued improvement and refinement in the editorial role.[4] Hultgren in fact notes that one of the 'risks' of the 'neoliberalist underpinning of contemporary evaluation regimes' is that they 'inevitably end up prioritizing the quick and dirty over quality and substance' (172). This analogous comment by Joan Turner, about writing, applies equally to editing: 'Good writing is time-consuming, and in the contemporary neo-liberal climate, speed is more highly rated than grace, or elegance.'[5] At this price point, especially, such shortcuts disappoint.

Not as disappointing is the editing of *Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing: Editors in Writing Studies*. (After all, Utah State University Press is well regarded for its lists in rhetoric, composition, and writing studies.) Co-editors Greg Giberson and Megan Schoen (both of Oakland University, Michigan), with Christian Weisser (of Penn State Berks), offer a clearly organized collection of sixteen chapters authored by many of the most recognizable scholars in writing studies in the United States, including David Bartholomae, Charles Bazerman, Muriel Harris, Paul Kei Matsuda, Michael Pemberton, Victor Villanueva, and Kathleen Blake Yancey.[6] The narratives in this model collection of 'personal histories, philosophies, experiences, and advice' (3) engage and reveal, with no furbelowing of autoethnography. Contributors write about how they came into editing, how they learned and refined their practice, and what aspirations they envisioned for the journals or monograph series under their care. Some chapters offer retrospectives of an almost valedictory sort.

Several themes organically emerge from the contributors' presentations, aided by some of the most generous and supportive cross-referencing within an edited volume that I have seen in years. The editorial gatekeeping function is examined—and questioned—by a number of contributors. Byron Hawk (University of South Carolina), for example, sees editors 'not simply' as gatekeepers but, more importantly, as teachers (183). Villanueva (Washington State University), in a striking chapter that invokes the style of Amitava Kumar's *Every Day I Write the Book*, concurs.[7] And Douglas Eyman (George Mason University) and Cheryl Ball (Wayne State University) flip the gatekeeping metaphor on its head: 'Many authors think editors are gatekeepers meant to prevent their work from reaching its audience, but it's actually the opposite, in our experience: editors serve

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authors and are at their best when they are shepherding an author's work to its appropriate audience' (175).

In terms of the 'appropriate audience,' Yancey (Florida State University) presents a delightful analogy for journal editors who thoughtfully recommend 'other venues that might offer appropriate publication hosts' for manuscripts they must reject (99). Yancey likens such editors to the Macy's department store clerks in *Miracle on 34th Street* who send customers to other stores when Macy's lacks specific desiderata. Gatekeepers, therefore, can be helpful. Such behaviour indicates not self-centredness but rather an awareness of what Ken Hyland (University of East Anglia) notes in the opening chapter of *The Inner World of Gatekeeping in Scholarly Publication*: that 'most papers eventually find a home in a journal somewhere' (5). Let us add *matchmaker* to our list of editorial metaphors, then.

Another theme in *Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing* is the extent to which editors 'control' or 'influence' their fields. Some contributors afford editors more power than others. One who describes editors as less influential is Kelly Ritter (now of the Georgia Institute of Technology), who writes that a scholarly journal 'is a mirror that can only reflect what the field is producing; it cannot make trends where there are none, and it cannot control the past or, really, the future' of a field (20). Weisser, in contrast, refers to 'the gradual and fragmentary shaping of the scholarly conversations' in a field as 'the essence of scholarly editing' (78). To reconcile these views, I posit that Weisser is describing the collective effect of editorial practice over time. Yancey, in fact, describes journal editing as 'an act of supporting community' (101). And scholarly communities vivify scholarly fields. Weisser, although clearly valuing the individual editorial role at the outset of his chapter, ultimately concludes that 'innovation and the progression of scholarship are not driven by editorial choices but by the scholars who create content and meaning' through their submissions (90).[8] Again, editors need authors just as much as authors need editors.

Several chapters end with action-oriented suggestions, aiming to get readers thinking and then following through in some intentional way. I was inspired, for example, by Malea Powell's (Michigan State University) use of a novel, optimistic disposition for manuscripts submitted to a journal she co-founded in 2018: 'accept with mentoring and revision' (209). If more journals would try such a disposition over 'revise and resubmit,' I

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trust fewer authors (especially first-time authors) would give up at that point, especially when faced with voluminous (and possibly contradictory) suggestions and criticisms.

In an afterword, Giberson reveals the origin story of the volume.[9] Giberson also brings together a number of themes raised throughout the volume, and his doing so highlights the unfortunate absence of a similar concluding chapter in the Habibie and Hultgren volume. Giberson puts his finger on the effort required in 'publishing a successful edited collection' such as *Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing*: the process 'takes focus and intellectual clarity regarding the purpose and value of the collection to the scholarly conversations it is meant to contribute to' (231).

Earlier edited volumes have trod some of the territory addressed by *The Inner World of Gatekeeping in Scholarly Publishing* and *Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing*.[10] But these two works, representing different cultural and disciplinary perspectives on the roles and rewards of editing and peer reviewing, help bring the discussion up to date. Applied linguists will naturally be most drawn to *The Inner World of Gatekeeping in Scholarly Publishing*, and scholars of rhetoric or writing studies may be most drawn to *Behind the Curtain of Scholarly Publishing*. Readers from all fields in the humanities or social sciences should see in either book new—and less fraught—ways of conceptualizing editors as gatekeepers. If, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claim, we live by metaphors, then surely we think by them, write by them, review by them, and edit by them, as well.[11]

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NOTES

1. See, for example, Donna Alvermann and David Reinking, 'On Metaphors and Editing,' *Reading Research Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2003): 8–11, https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.38.1.1; Jana L. Argersinger, ed., 'Inside the Journal Editor's Office: A 2007 CELJ Roundtable,' *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 40, no. 2 (January 2009): 144–83, https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp.40.2.144; Stephen McGinty, *Gatekeepers of Knowledge: Journal Editors in the Sciences and the Social Sciences* (Westport, CT: Bergin &

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Garvey, 1999); Naomi B. Pascal, 'The Editor: In Search of a Metaphor,' *Publishing Research Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 53–57, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02678406; Ikuya Sato, '"Gatekeeper" as a Metaphor and Concept,' *Hitotsubashi Journal of Commerce and Management* 46, no. 1 (October 2012): 41–50, https://www.jstor.org /stable/43295039; Sue Starfield and Brian Paltridge, 'Journal Editors: Gatekeepers or Custodians?,' in *Novice Writers and Scholarly Publication: Authors, Mentors, Gatekeepers*, ed. Pejman Habibie and Ken Hyland (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 253–70, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95333-5_14.

2. Pascal, 'Editor,' 57.
3. Rebecca Colesworthy, 'Why I'm Wary of Publishing Advice, but Will Offer It Anyway,' *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 20 September 2023, https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-im-wary-of-publishing-advice-but-will-offer-it-anyway.
4. Both of Habibie's earlier co-edited volumes have been reviewed in this journal. See Zhicheng Mao and Chen Li, review of *Novice Writers and Scholarly Publication: Authors, Mentors, Gatekeepers*, ed. Pejman Habibie and Ken Hyland (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 50, no. 3 (April 2019): 219–23, https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp.50.3.05; Steven E. Gump, review of *Scholarly Publication Trajectories of Early-Career Scholars: Insider Perspectives*, ed. Pejman Habibie and Sally Burgess (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 53, no. 4 (October 2022): 294–300, https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp-2022-0042.
5. Joan Turner, *On Writtenness: The Cultural Politics of Academic Writing* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 110.
6. Only one chapter feels rather out of place: Michael Pemberton's (Georgia Southern University), primarily on journal editing, is included not in the section on editing journals but in the section on editing books and book series. And the chapter by Victor Vitanza (Clemson University) is an utter insider's piece, reminding me of the difficulties faced by editors of these sorts of collections in explaining the imagined audience.
7. See Amitava Kumar, *Every Day I Write the Book: Notes on Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).
8. In his chapter, Weisser does a commendable job arguing for the value of open-access publication. Editors of any journal contemplating a shift from print (or firewalled) to online distribution would be wise to read Weisser's contribution.
9. Christine Tulley does the same in an earlier volume published by Utah State University Press, suggesting the gentle influence of a series or acquisitions editor—or simply an observant reader qua author (Giberson) paying attention to the very sorts of questions that others in writing studies would wish to see answered. See Christine Tulley, *How Writing Faculty Write: Strategies for Process, Product, and Productivity* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2018), 156–57.

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10. For example, see Yehuda Baruch, Alison M. Konrad, Herman Aguinis, and William H. Starbuck, eds., *Opening the Black Box of Editorship* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Rita J. Simon and James J. Fyffe, eds., *Editors as Gatekeepers: Getting Published in the Social Sciences* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994).
11. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

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