

The Edited Voice: The Challenge of Maintaining a Writer's Distinct Voice

Description:

Panelists who work as both editors and writers will consider the balance between voice and conventions from both sides of the process. How do editors encourage the unique voices of writers when they may not comply with standard diction or syntax or may be experimental or stylistically different from a publication's norm? How can writers best work with editors to strengthen their writing while maintaining their distinct voices?

Organizer and moderator:

Nancy Lord is the author of environmentally-related books including the nonfiction *Early Warming* and *Beluga Days* and, most recently, *pH: A Novel*. She edited the anthology *Made of Salmon*. She teaches nature and science writing for Johns Hopkins University and is a former Alaska Writer Laureate.

Participants:

Elizabeth Dodd teaches creative writing & environmental literature, as well as interdisciplinary science and humanities courses at Kansas State University. She's authored six books, most recently *Horizon's Lens*. She is nonfiction editor of *Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built + Natural Environments*.

Holly J. Hughes is author of three collections of poetry, most recently *Hold Fast*; editor of *Keep a Green Bough: Voices from the Heart of Cascadia* and *Beyond Forgetting: Poetry and Prose about Alzheimer's Disease*; and co-author of *The Pen and the Bell: Mindful Writing in a Busy World*. Her chapbook *Passings* received an American Book Award.

Jill McCabe Johnson's poetry collections include *Revolutions We'd Hoped We'd Outgrown*, *Pendulum*, and *Diary of the One Swelling Sea*, winner of a Nautilus Award. She teaches Creative Writing at Skagit Valley College and is editor-in-chief for Wandering Aengus Press and its imprint Trail to Table.

Juan J. Morales is the author of three poetry collections including *The Handyman's Guide to End Times*. He is a CantoMundo Fellow, the Editor of *Pilgrimage Magazine*, an Associate Dean in the College of Humanities Arts & Social Sciences, and a Professor of English at Colorado State University Pueblo.

Moderator's welcome and introductions

Participant order and initial remarks:

Jill McCabe Johnson:

As both writer and editor, I work primarily with the first-person point-of-view in poetry, memoir, and personal narrative. I will talk about the challenges for writers to create a character on the page out of their own lives as well as challenges for editors to protect the author's vision and voice. I'll share techniques for looking more objectively at one's work, including how to recognize and shape emerging themes, narrative arc, and structure. The objective is to guide writers toward a deeper understanding of what they're writing toward and how to revise with that in mind. I'll also talk about ways to keep myself in check as an editor when suggesting revision, such as asking the author's vision for the work, questioning whether suggestions honor that vision or reflect my own aesthetic, giving authors permission to reject suggestions, and ensuring they are always the final arbiter for their work. Finally, I'll discuss how easy it is for authors to have uncertainty about the impulses and risks that give their work spark, and the responsibility of editors to encourage and cultivate those impulses and risk-taking, especially if they are still in a fledgling, not fully realized yet, form.

Juan J. Morales:

At Colorado State University Pueblo, an HSI in southern Colorado, in a city that has a population that is 51% Chicana/Chicanx/Hispanic, my editorial experience is with *Pilgrimage*, a small independent literary magazine, and *Tempered Steel*, our university's student literary magazine. My work as a professor, writer, and editor continues to affirm the work still needing to be done to avoid the editor's role as gatekeeper. Books, such as Matthew Salesses' *Craft in the Real World* and Felicia Rose Chavez's *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop*, establish methods of unsilencing writing workshops and decolonizing the student experience. The editorial process needs a similar approach. In our panel, I hope to contribute pragmatic methods and resources from various backgrounds that help decenter the editorial experience, reemphasize the collaborative relationship between editor and author, and continue championing emerging writers and editors from a wide array of backgrounds and cultures. These approaches allow editors to face preconceived notions and writers to uncover how their distinct voices can challenge literary standards.

Elizabeth Dodd:

I'll be talking about the art of *listening* as part of the editorial process. Not necessarily listening literally to a digital recording or speaking directly with the author, although online publishing makes it possible to include such recordings in the final publication, enriching the presentation of the author's work. Rather, this listening entails dialogue—written or spoken—with authors to explore both of our assumptions about audience and language. I'll be drawing on experiences I've had working with authors working outside the US—translating a poet from Haiti and editing an essayist from Brazil. In both cases, the authors and I benefitted from hearing one another's expectations and intentions throughout the editorial process.

Holly Hughes:

I'll focus primarily on a collection I edited recently that included work from both seasoned and emerging writers, and how I balanced the publisher's literary aesthetic with my own commitment

to supporting new writers' voices. I'll also give an example of an experience I had as a writer early on where the editor changed my words to advance his own agenda and how this affected my approach to editing. And I'll speak briefly to what both writers and editors can do to promote a productive writer/editor relationship.

Nancy Lord:

I'll talk about my experiences as a writer who once had a very bad book editing experience and as an editor with a book project that I think went particularly well, and what I learned from both. I'll share a few short examples of editing from the book project and end with a few favorite remarks from or about famous editors.

Potential moderator questions (as time allows):

1. The art of editing, like everything else, has evolved over time. Editors used to play major roles and assert major influence on the writing of others, sometimes in very heavy-handed ways. Think of Gordon Lish editing Raymond Carver. In particular, think of the stories "A Small, Good Thing" and "The Bath," The first is the one Carver wrote, the second the one, half as long and with a very different meaning, that Lish turned it into. The debate about whether Lish made the young Carver a better writer or not will likely go on forever, but we can probably agree that the heavily edited stories did not represent Carver's own voice, temperament, and will. What forces are behind the evolution of editing, and how can editors and writers make the most of the current situation?
2. If a writer believes his or her voice is being lost in the editing process, what are some options for responding to an editor?
3. How can an editor judge whether unorthodox use of language, syntax, etc, is intentional—as a part of a writer's approach and voice—or unintended?
4. How can we as editors and educators help grow the editing field into a more diverse one?
5. What are our favorite resources (books or articles) related to editing and self-editing?

Questions and enlarged discussion:

The final 15 minutes will be reserved for Q&A and further discussion with audience members.