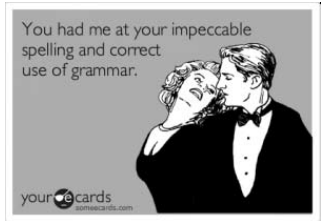


Spring 2011 vol13 no3

INSIDE: IT'S THE ISSUE OF EDITING! OR MAYBE BETTER, THE EDITING ISSUE! OR HOW ABOUT, EDIT THIS. CAN YOU MAKE THAT A LITTLE LESS STRONG BUT AT THE SAME TIME BOLDER?



MARK MY WORDS

BY SARAH LOLLEY

Behind every great writer is a great editor; one with insightful comments, meticulous reviews, and a gentle touch.



As any writer will attest, editing one's own work is no easy task. Some get sucked into the quicksand of minutia (Oscar Wilde famously said, "I spend the morning putting in a comma, and the afternoon taking it out"); some stand paralyzed before the need to delete sections that aren't working; others simply lack the objectivity to tell the wheat from the chaff. What serious writers need, sooner or later, is a **damn good editor.**

QWF PRESIDENT

Elise Moser As a short

story writer and novelist (not to mention writer of President's Messages), I have benefited from the work of many fine editorial eyes over the years. I have edited stories and novel manuscripts for other writers, for both love and money, and I have worked as a copy editor, proof reader, and editor of an anthology of short stories. Each of these forms of editing calls on a combination of technical skill, general knowledge, attention, taste and imagination. In some cases the emphasis is on the details (grammar, spelling, etc.); in others the task is more curatorial: would these two stories complement each other in an anthology?

The task of soliciting new board members for the QWF is also a kind of editing job—the curatorial kind. What skills will we need to shepherd the organization through the challenges of the coming year? Do we have enough people to work on fundraising? Do we have anyone who is connected to the spoken word community? Any kids' book writers? Do we have a range of ages represented, people at different stages of their careers? Who's bilingual? Can anyone write a grant? Is there anyone who might take on the presidency one day?

The task of finding enough people who are interested in serving on the board, who are available to come to meetings and serve on committees, and who have demonstrated a commitment to QWF, is taken on by the Nominating Committee several months ahead of the AGM. Board member Kate Orland Bere and QWF member and mentor Daniel Allen Cox joined me and Lori Schubert for a series of meetings, phone calls and emails that gradually shaped the slate presented to the Annual General Meeting on March 28. Long-serving board members Ami Sands Brodoff, our treasurer Leonard Eichel, Secretary Angela Leuck and Anne Lagacé Dowson finished their terms and stepped off the board and on to other things. We are grateful for their contributions.

Joining the board for the first time are: poet Larissa Andrusyshyn, who teaches writing and runs the High Wire reading series; devoted volunteer Mélanie Grondin, who is a writer, translator and editor who serves as Associate Editor of the Montreal Review of Books; and novelist, writer



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of short stories and screenplays, and translator Clayton Bailey. I continue as president for this year. Board member Linda Morra steps into the vice president's spot, replacing Allan Mass (who remains on the board). Mélanie has taken on the treasurer's position, and Gina Roitman takes over the secretary's spot. We now have a thirteen-member board showcasing a range of levels of experience, aspiring and emerging writers as well as the firmly established, spoken word artists, novelists, poets, non-fiction writers, and members of the community at large. It's a great group. (You can see all their names on the masthead below.)

Also in the course of the AGM, we voted to accept the budget, which will see us continuing our usual wide range of programming even as we search for new sources of funding, especially sponsorships for our prizes. We also enjoyed a brief presentation from member Carol Katz, an archivist by trade, who updated us on the progress of her many hours of volunteer work organizing QWF's documents. Thanks, Carol!

One of the great pleasures of volunteering with QWF is working with Lori and Julia Kater; another is the opportunity to meet and work with the members of our board and committees. Doing meaningful work together is one of the best ways to get to know people and build a community. Here's to another year of the same! ¶

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La Quebec Writers' Federation remercie le Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, et le Conseil des arts de Montréal, de leur appui financier. The QWF also thanks the Canada Council for the Arts and Canadian Heritage for their financial support, as well as QWF members for their generosity.

Conseil des arts
et des lettres
Québec

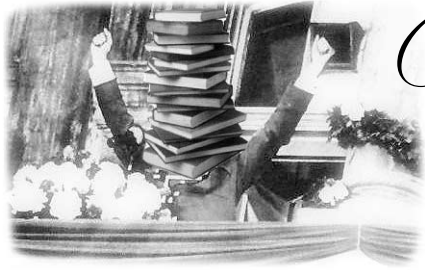


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Vive le Québec Livre!

A QUEBEC BOOK WORTH A SECOND LOOK

The role of a literary editor is cloaked

in mystery and paradoxical by nature. Writers consistently credit their editors with having unique and invaluable abilities and insights necessary to transform a sometimes largely unformed manuscripts into literature. Indeed, the iconic status of literary editors regularly inspires writers to wax metaphoric, with comparisons running the gamut from midwife to magician, and from carny to car mechanic.

But if the editor's role is so integral to literary excellence why do we hear so little about them? Why aren't editors feted at book festivals and followed on Facebook? Where are the \$50,000 prizes and the glitzy galas?

The fact that most of us can't name a literary editor is actually a good thing. When the narrative flows smoothly and the characters blossom and engage, when the dialogue is convincing and the plot is free of inconsistencies, the reader forgets that what they are reading has been painstakingly shaped and revised. This is what the literary editor wants, an illusion that the book is not a product of months and often years of nitpicking and negotiation, but rather a perfect object of literary inspiration that sprang fully formed from the author's brilliant brain. A good example of this is Lynn Henry's seamless editorial work on Kathleen Winter's *Annabel*. Henry took a manuscript with obvious potential and encouraged the writer to find where the power in each section lay and to create a coherent narrative structure. Henry also asked Winter to rewrite the last third of the novel over and over again, until she got it right.

Some people may argue that readers would rather remain in the dark about how a manuscript becomes literature; that revealing the inner workings of the process of publishing fiction destroys the magic of the reader's experience with the book at hand. But as someone who spends a lot of her time reading, reviewing, writing and talking about books with anyone who will listen, I would say that the role of the editor is of great interest to anyone intrigued by the literary process.

So how does a raw manuscript become a respected, appreciated, and much-lauded piece of literature? A good editor perceives the potential in a writer's work and knows what needs to be done to make the book the best that it can be. Often the editor is able to see connections and themes that the writer herself isn't aware of. Gina Roitman's editor Carolyn Jackson at Second Story Press transformed *Tell Me A Story, Tell Me The Truth* from a collection of unrelated stories into a chronologically organized story of one woman's life. Perhaps even more importantly, she gave the writer the confidence to make the connections between the stories and offered the awareness that the stories themselves have universal themes. Armed with a compassionate nature and a ruthless red pen, the editor asks the hard questions while reassuring the writer that her hard work is appreciated.

The adjectives *kind*, *empathic* and *trustworthy* come up often when

THIS ISSUE:

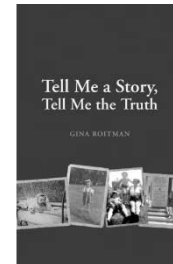
B. A. MARKUS LOOKS AT TWO BOOKS THAT GIVE GOOD EDIT

ANNABEL

BY KATHLEEN WINTER

TELL ME A STORY, TELL ME THE TRUTH

BY GINA ROITMAN



writers talk about their editors. While a soft touch is required when handling a writer's ego, editors are also expected to be merciless in their quest to eliminate inconsistencies, to root out weaknesses, and to articulate to the writer when things just aren't working.

Everyone agrees that good literary editors have the necessary tools to help writers write better books. But editors also have to walk a fine line between offering suggestions and guidance, and ultimately must allow writers to make the changes themselves. The challenge is to allow the writer to do the writing, so her voice, and not the editor's, is the one the reader hears. Both *Annabel* and *Tell Me A Story, Tell Me The Truth* are excellent examples of an editor's light touch when it comes to respecting and preserving the author's voice.

Like any relationship, the author/editor dynamic requires give and take. In exchange for the editor's insights, empathy and merciless honesty, the author is expected to bring to the table an openness to constructive criticism, a willingness to make changes, and an extended commitment to the process. While Roitman and Winter would both likely admit that the editorial process was sometimes stressful and often challenging, they obviously embraced the process, trusting that their editors would help them create a better book in the end. The journey from manuscript to published book is a long and winding road. That should come as no surprise. Every writer knows it takes a lot of work to create the illusion of perfection. ¶

B.A. Markus is certain that her latest manuscript is one good literary editor away from being a real book. You can read her book reviews at www.roverarts.com, listen to her song lyrics at www.myspace.com/michaeljeromebrown/music, and check out the podcast of the first chapter of her novel at www.bamarkus.com.

HE WROTE / SHE WROTE

TWO VIEWS ON THE PAINFUL AND PRODUCTIVE EDITING PROCESS

BY ROB SHERREN

There is a species

of pedantic editor that strikes terror into the heart of anyone who loves words, and the thoughts they describe. In my corporate world we call them Comma F#\$%kers.

A thoughtful editor takes the time to understand and care about the ideas, tones and rhythms of a piece. It's a gift to collaborate with a technician who helps manipulate the levers of language and takes the whole work to its fullest potential.

The C F on the other hand cares little for your words or ideas. These are folks who, often through the engagement of invisible bureaucratic gears, are placed in a position to review what you have written; and you can't finish your task until they have had their way with it. I've had the pleasure of watching C Fs work firsthand. It's awe-inspiring to see how they can pick up something for the first time, and proceed to gut it, comma by comma, with such focus—often without even understanding the issue or content. They work with what seems like a sadist's sense of entitlement, rewriting erratically in their own voices, before flinging it back for some final word smithing. The wrecks of tone, tense, and structure they leave in their wakes are impenetrable, virtually unrecognizable, and yet will eventually have your name attached to them.

There are tough professional editors out there, but I'd sooner take on ten of them in a dark alley, with my spell checker tied behind my back, than cross paths with another Comma F#\$%ker.

Rob Sherren participated in the 2010 QWF Fiction mentorship - see and hear his work at YouTube.com/robsherren



BY BEVERLY AKERMAN

An emerging writer

lives on a high wire, where self-confidence—the bulwark against frequent rejection—counterbalances humility, because who doesn't have a lot to be humble about? The struggle to maintain equanimity was never more obvious than the first time my work was edited seriously.

I'd had over 20 stories published, most without even a comma displaced, so I was shocked when a publisher returned my

fiction collection covered in chicken scratchings. The putative editor, a prizewinning author in her own right, was much younger than I, and had a Google-invisible editing history.

After a week or so, I finally forced myself to flip through the thing. And it was worse than I'd feared! For instance, "Montreal" and "Quebec" had morphed to "Montréal" and "Québec." My first story, a prizewinner itself, took place in the late '60s in Anglo Jewish Montreal, where Jeanne Mance's given name was pronounced like a synonym for dungarees... and this Torontonian had shtupped in all those aigus? Were all her other corrections equally ill-informed?

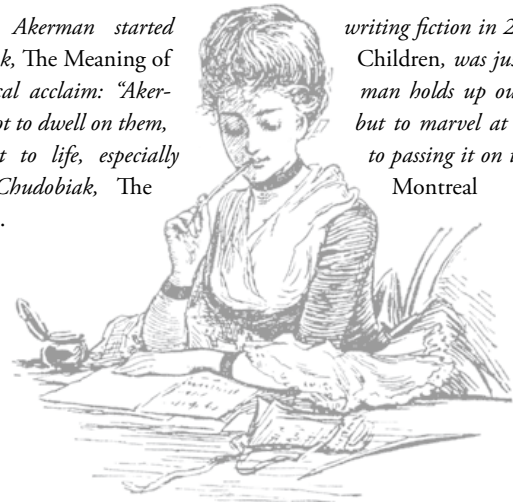
When in doubt, do nothing, I decided. Besides, the publisher had offered me bupkis, contract wise.

A few more rejections passed. I finally calmed down, read the edited manuscript and contacted the publisher: they were only suggestions, he said. Use those that seem useful and forget about the rest. Ultimately, I realized most of her changes were printer's instructions, and several of her propositions were sound. So, I followed them and found the result an improvement. Perhaps I'd been skimping on the humility side of my balancing equation.

Editors can't turn a sow's ear into a silk purse; but hand them raw silk and you may get a better story altogether.

Beverly Akerman started first book, The Meaning of to critical acclaim: "Akerfears, not to dwell on them, mitment to life, especially Anne Chudobiak, The Gazette.

writing fiction in 2005. Her Children, was just released man holds up our greatest but to marvel at our com-to passing it on to others." Montreal



<hed>MARK MY WORDS</hed>

“Not that the story need be long, but it will take a long while to make it short.”

These few words by Henry David Thoreau sum up why we need editors... they help us do that job.

<JUMP>CONTINUED FROM COVER PAGE<JUMP>

Who are these people and how did they earn their chops?

Sarah Harvey, who edits Young Reader, Juvenile Fiction and Teen Fiction books at Orca Publishing in Victoria, came to editing after years as a buyer for the University of Victoria bookstore and book critic for the *Globe & Mail* and *Quill & Quire*. As the acquisitions editor, she sifts through submissions and determines which ones could make great books, then shapes them into compelling reads. Harvey believes that she already had the skills that make her good at her job. “I’m pretty analytic, pretty critical, and I’m intuitive about writing,” she says. When considering a manuscript, she asks herself if she could still enjoy the book after ten reads through—a typical number of reviews.

If the manuscript makes the cut, she then works with the writer. “The editing job is 75% relationship and 25% mechanics,” she explains. “There is give and take on both sides. We can speak freely, openly and with a certain amount of humour about what the process involves. It’s sometimes difficult, but it’s not painful.”

Carolyn Souaid, Poetry Editor with Winnipeg-based Signature Editions, agrees that spotting a good manuscript requires a certain intuition. Where poetry is concerned, she says, editing is about selecting poems that “work”; if a poem isn’t working, there’s nothing an editor can do other than point that out to the author. Souaid had been reading, writing and publishing poetry for years before she began editing, so she can spot a good verse. “There’s a perfect marriage of content and form,” Souaid explains. “By the end of a reading of [the poem], it feels like it was effortless on the part of the writer.”

The skill set required is slightly different when it comes to copy editing - working with manuscripts that have already been accepted for publication to ensure they are grammatically and factually correct, proof-read, and have proper citations. Bruce Henry, Copy Editor with Vehicule Press, believes that a good copy editor has many of the same skills as a good writer: a strong and sustained attention span, an ability to work in isolation, a profound understanding of what he calls “the bones of language,” and faith that readers will value the work. Copy editing also requires the unique ability “to hold in your mind the macro and the micro; to keep the flow of the work in your mind at the same time as you’re looking at each detail,” Henry says.

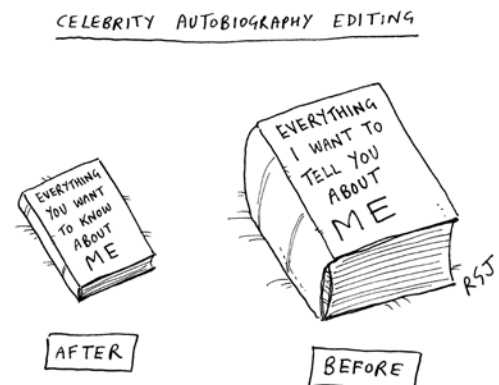
Unlike Harvey, though, in order to maintain objectivity he prefers not to have a personal relationship with the authors. “You know how much work they’ve put into it, it’s like their baby, and there you are correcting it.” That’s not to say that he does not become personally invested in the process. “You put a bit of your soul into this,” he says. “An editor has to be able to be critical and to love at the same time, because if you don’t respect the work, it becomes mechanical.”

One of the most difficult parts of the job, all three editors say, is knowing where to draw the line. “The urge is often to rewrite someone’s poem,” Souaid explains. A poem “is kind of part of the character of the person; it’s their voice. The minute you start... a major edit where you’re changing words, you’re changing the voice.” Too much editing can also affect that delicate quality every writer needs in order to persevere: confidence. “One or two times I proposed a lot of alterations and after that, I wondered if it had a negative impact on the author; if it made them lose confidence in themselves,” Henry admits.

Should a writer hire someone to edit his or her work to increase the chances of having a manuscript accepted? Harvey says that authors of prose might consider it, but only if they hire someone reputable. “I get a lot of submissions where people say they have hired an editor and I have to wonder what the hell that editor’s credentials are because the book is no better than the stuff than comes untouched by editorial hands.” To find a reliable editor, turn to the Editors’ Association of Canada, she suggests.

Ultimately, all three editors say, writers need to cultivate their own inner editor by reading voraciously (to see how other writers do it), working with critique groups, and learning to be objective about their writing. In time, they will start to see, as Mark Twain did, that “the difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”

Sarah Lolley’s feature articles and personal essays have appeared in ELLE Canada, up! magazine, the Globe & Mail and The Doctor’s Review. When she wants a damn good edit, she turns to her trusted writers’ group.



Member News

Send your news to info@qwf.org (please keep to a 60-word limit) with "Member News" in the subject line—and you'll be entered in a draw to win a beautiful book!

This issue:

The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl

by Trevor Schoonmaker

published by Duke University Press

Members of the Qwrite Editorial Board and staff are not eligible for the quarterly prizes.

This issue's winner is:

John Hart Whitt



Johanna Skibsrud's first novel, *The Sentimentalists*, made a huge splash by winning this year's Giller Prize, the richest literary purse in Canada.

Katrina Best's collection of short stories *Bird Eat Bird* won the Commonwealth First Book Prize (Canada & the Caribbean).

Kathleen Winter's novel, *Annabel*, was nominated for all three of Canada's most prestigious fiction prizes: The Governor General's Award, the Giller, and the Rogers Trust Prize for Fiction. It is also currently shortlisted for the Orange Prize and the Amazon.ca First Novel Prize.

Miguel Syjuco's novel *Ilustrado* added the Paragraphe Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction to its two international awards, and was shortlisted for the Grand Prix du Livre de Montréal—a rare accomplishment for a Quebec writer working in English. It is currently shortlisted for the Amazon.ca First Novel Prize and the Commonwealth First Book Prize (Canada & the Caribbean).

Daniel Allen Cox's second novel *Krakow Melt* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010) will be translated into Turkish and released as part of an underground literature series by Istanbul-based publisher Altikirkbes. The series will also include a book by Lydia Lunch. Altikirkbes publishes the well-known literary journal *Underground Poetix*, as well as work by Franz Kafka and Allen Ginsberg.

Cheryl Braganza performed "an intimate evening of Melody and Verse" at La Biblioteca in San Miguel, Mexico, this February. She played her favorite melodies interspersed with poems written over the past 40 years. A student of classical piano at Trinity College of Music, she is now studying jazz at McGill University. A native of Bombay, she studied in Rome and London before settling in Montreal in 1966. See cherylbraganza.com for her work as an artist for human rights.

John Hart Whitt, a Quebec City poet, has recently had his first book, *Visitations: Poems*, published. His poetry, mostly metrical, and ranging from sonnets to shaped poems, deals with numerous themes, each poem unveiling a new metamorphosis of the poet. Illustrations are by Jeanne d'Arc Whitt. To read a review and order the book (ISBN: 9781450266451), go to the poet's official website: johnhartwhitt.org.

Horace I. Goddard has published his collection of poetry through IUniverse. Entitled *The Journey Home*, the book is available at iuniverse.com or through the author at hgoddard@emsb.qc.ca.

Vikki Stark's *Runaway Husbands: The Abandoned Wife's Guide to Recovery and Renewal* (Green Light Press) has been named as a finalist in the category of Women's Issues at ForeWord Reviews' Book of the Year awards. See www.bookoftheyearawards.com or runawayhusbands.com. Follow her blog on the *Psychology Today* website, "Schlepping Through Heartbreak."

Merrily Weisbord's *The Love Queen of Malabar: Memoir of a Friendship with Kamala Das* was shortlisted for the Writers' Trust Non-fiction Prize and the Charles Taylor Prize.

Michael Harris' poetry book *Circus* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award.

Daniel Allen Cox's *Krakow Melt* is shortlisted for the Lambda Literary Award (Bisexual Fiction) and the Ferro-Grumley Award for LGBT

CALL FOR WORKSHOP PROPOSALS

QWF workshop leaders are established writers with professional credentials and profiles. We offer a wide range of subjects and we welcome new ideas.

Subjects have included the short story, screenwriting, memoir, poetry, travel writing, spoken word, and more; there have also been workshops on getting published, doing historical research, getting an agent, etc. Most sessions are open to all; occasionally we offer a master class, requiring potential participants to submit writing samples. Most workshops take place in the QWF office, although sessions are also occasionally given outside Montreal. To propose a workshop for the 2012 series, please send an email to julia@qwf.org and request an application form. The deadline for submissions is the end of the day on Wednesday, June 8, 2011.

WRITERS IN CEGEPS

2011-2012 CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

DEADLINE: JUNE 23, 2011

WRITERS WHO HAVE ALREADY BEEN APPROVED FOR THE WRITERS IN CEGEPS PROGRAM DO NOT NEED TO RE-APPLY

Once again this summer, a selection committee will be convened by the Quebec Writers' Federation to evaluate applications from published English-language writers to participate in the Writers-in-CEGEPs program of Quebec's Secrétariat à la politique linguistique.

To participate, writers must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- at least one book published with a recognized publisher
- at least five texts published in recognized journals (print or online)
- at least one screenplay for cinema or television produced by a producer recognized by the CALQ or SODEC
- at least one dramatic work either published by a recognized publisher or performed by a professional company during the last seven years.

Additional information about the program is on the QWF web site, at <http://www.qwf.org/programs>.

Participating writers receive an honorarium of \$500 per day for a day of readings and lectures, or a day of writing workshops, and \$400 per day for a day of meetings and discussions. To participate, you must be entered in the current repertoire. If you are not currently on the list and you wish to participate, you must submit five copies of the application form and five copies of a sample of your published work to the QWF office by June 23, 2011. This work can be in the form of books, or photocopied excerpts and articles (please submit a minimum of 25 pages.) A three-person selection committee composed of writers and teachers familiar with the CEGEP milieu will review the material. You should note that this application requires a brief outline of what activity you propose to do in the classroom.

In the fall, CEGEPs will receive information about the program.

We recommend that writers who have been approved for the project make their own efforts to get bookings.

Visits will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, and CEGEPs are eligible for only two visits a year.

For more information, contact the QWF office.

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info@qwf.org

THE Q MUNITY COLUMN

BY ALANNA MACNEVIN

“You find surprising and unique pieces while editing,” says Maria Turner, head editor for *carte blanche*,

explaining why she continues to volunteer her time as one of the tireless editors for the online magazine, “...and they are entertaining!”

The online magazine, *carte blanche*, is a volunteer, not-for-profit project published by the Quebec Writers' Federation (QWF) and funded in part by the Canada Council for the Arts. However, the magazine—true to its name—is an independent publication and its content is completely driven by its editors. These editors operate on small stipends and, like Turner, continue to volunteer their time and editorial expertise out of a love for the published word.

According to their website (www.carte-blanche.org), the magazine is “open-ended and open-minded; it is a blank page that gets filled up, scribbled on, and passed around; it is where writers can sound off, send up, amuse, follow their muse, versify, dramatize, sketch, snap, think big, get famous, polish, perish and, above all, publish.”

Published twice a year on the web, the magazine's focus is on publishing and supporting Montreal, Quebec, and Canadian writers. The support that the publication offers to the writing public is apparent with the “3Macs *carte blanche* Prize,” the annual award it gives out in recognition of an outstanding submission by a Quebec writer.

The magazine was founded in 2004 and Turner was there from the beginning. It started out as an internal publication for QWF members, but quickly grew. Over the years it has gained some global recognition and has recently begun to accept submissions from the international community.

“We [*carte blanche*] had a flat hierarchy for the first few years. We produced bits, but it wasn't really growing; nobody was really committed to making it something that was really great,” says Turner, describing how the magazine and her position of editor began. “I became editor around issue 7. I just started doing more and at some point became editor because that was the role that I was performing.”

Turner explains that the editors approach the editorial process in as unbiased a way as possible. The editorial process includes selecting the right pieces, as well as editing these selections. “Obviously, at some point it is subjective,” she continues. “Each editor has those things that they look for and that they like. But they also look for *who* are writers; *who* is writing.” Turner draws back to the publication's goal to support writers. “We, as editors, can tell which people have put the time in. So stylistically it might not be your favorite, but you can see the effort.”

Over the years the magazine has expanded the genre and types of submissions that it accepts. “Because we are online it offers a certain amount of freedom,” explains Turner, “[we] can tell stories in different ways.” The online format of the magazine frees the publication from editorial constraints of the traditional print format. “And that is nice!” she adds.

Initially publishing only non-fiction, fiction, and poetry, the publication has recently begun publishing photographic essays and



graphic novels. The expansion of genres accepted has increased the work required in the editorial process.

Turner mainly edits non-fiction for the publication; however, she has gained experience with the full range of genres. Her experience has proven that each genre has its own unique challenges. “With non-fiction I do a lot of fact-checking. For fiction I check for coherent story, voice consistency, or if it is structurally a bit off. Poetry is a little more difficult [and I] edit on a word level. With photography it might be the order of the pictures; we might suggest a particular order or ask for additional photos.”

Turner admits that most of her own editorial woes have been technical, due to the publication's online format. She highlights that one of the draws of editing the magazine is the opportunity to read stories one would otherwise not have access to; stories that cross cultures and generations. “I publish a lot of stuff from people I've never met and never will meet,” she explains.

She gives the example of a story entitled “In Dominance,” written by Jamie Rand. “He was in the United States Marine Corps when he first submitted and he was trying different things [with his writing].”

Turner explains how the piece was initially submitted in the third person. She felt it was strong, but a change in perspective would make it more powerful. She suggested using the first person, and Rand re-submitted his piece taking the edits into consideration. Although the two have never met, the excellent results of their distant collaboration can be read in the most recent issue.

“I found it really interesting,” Turner comments about this particular editing experience, “that I find this person, and I—in my apartment in Montreal—get to read and edit his work.”

The online magazine has not finished expanding. Future plans include launching an e-book and iPad version. “I'm a bit of an all-or-nothing person in that, if you are going to do something,” Turner laughs, “...you should do it well.” ¶

Alanna MacNevin completed a BA in Political Science from St. Thomas University and an MLIS from McGill University. She is pleased to currently be spending her workdays as the Home Delivery Coordinator at the Atwater Library and Computer Centre. She volunteers with CKUT 90.3 FM, Montréal's campus and community radio station.