

state of Florida now argues for prison expansion based on the contention that such programs are a solution to crime and recidivism.

In the time I've spent conducting ethnographic research and interviews at Lawtey and other prisons and teaching in several prison-college programs, I've found that incarcerated men and women have complex relations to the faith-based programs. Some view the programs as the only option among severely constrained choices, and others testify to how religion has transformed their lives. It is condescending to overlook or disparage the ways in which imprisoned people describe and experience their religious beliefs and practices. It is also important to recognize their efforts to develop self-knowledge and engage in self-making, religious and otherwise, while elucidating how those efforts relate to larger social and political concerns.

For more information, I refer Rollin to my 2007 article in *American Quarterly*, "Testimonial Politics: The Christian Right's Faith-Based Approach to Marriage and Imprisonment," in which I discuss the PFM program and court case, the politics of faith-based prison privatization, and Christian evangelization.

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### Editorial Policy and Peer Review

TO THE EDITOR:

Despite the recent calls from the MLA for our discipline to develop a more capacious understanding of what might constitute scholarship, for the time being, at my institution at least, the peer-refereed article largely remains the gold standard of scholarly accomplishment when annual raises, tenure, and promotion are at stake. Given the crisis in the academic-book-publishing industry, as a representation of scholarly excellence the article potentially carries even more weight than in the past. Yet recently, two refereed journals declined to submit my work to the normal review process. In both cases, the editors made this decision. Obviously,

this is their prerogative, but neither gave me any real feedback on the piece in question—making the whole endeavor a waste of time.

In contrast, my recent dealings with another journal have exemplified how an academic journal should function. Though my essay was rejected, the readers' reports were so helpful that when I revised the essay in the light of them, it was subsequently published elsewhere. More recently, so generous and collegial was the editorial policy of this same journal that the editor solicited readers' reports from three reviewers, just to be certain that my piece would be fairly considered. Although the reviewers concluded that the essay did not meet the journal's needs, the editor nonetheless solicited from me a briefer piece more appropriate to the journal. If the goal of the refereeing process is to allow all of us in the profession to engage in the extended conversation that is scholarship, this journal provided an excellent model of how such a goal might be achieved.

Even worse than the tendency to provide scholars with inadequate advice on their work is the policy of most literary journals, which routinely refuse to provide any feedback to the author whatsoever. In the university, creative writing increasingly demands to be recognized not only as a legitimate discipline but as a teachable skill, as the burgeoning BFA, MFA, and PhD programs in the field suggest. Yet the editorial policies of most literary journals implicitly subscribe to the idea that writing is a talent and not a skill, that revision is not something a writer can learn, that works of literature are not revisable, and so forth. The excuse that literary journals face too many submissions is just that—an excuse to keep alive an ideology in which artistic genius is at odds with the actual practice of creative writing programs. Such an ideology shores up the authority of those in power by mystifying the processes of literary production and evaluation.

My guess is that the more an essay crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries, the more likely an editor will be to refuse to send it out for review, given the labor involved in find-

ing an appropriate reviewer and the tendency of editors to be locked into narrow visions of their journal's disciplinary scope. As Michel Foucault reminds us, academic disciplines are regulatory mechanisms. They determine who can speak, what can be spoken, and under what circumstances speech can occur. Having taken on Foucault's critique, journals in language studies should be particularly open to sending out work whose disciplinary orientation may not be easy to define.

The policy of not sending work out for review, however, is especially debilitating to scholars at smaller institutions, because we generally lack colleagues in our areas of expertise and have few occasions to teach courses that deal with our research interests. These factors, combined with the fact that we often teach upwards of three courses per semester, mean that we have precious little time to spend on our research. Readers' reports thus provide one of the few opportunities for us to receive careful, considered responses from our colleagues in the field. Beyond the practical advice concerning revision, readers' reports can lead us to new sources, push us to reexamine our assumptions, and renew our sense that we belong to a larger community that values our work and wishes to see it flourish—a sense we feel despite the labor conditions that turn us into second-class citizens who, for example, are often held to the same research expectations as our colleagues who make more money and teach less than we do.

To raise a critique in a public forum like this is potentially embarrassing, because it will undoubtedly provoke a response from some quarters that, were my scholarly work "better," it would have been sent out for review. Or else I will be accused, in writing such a letter, of pursuing my own interests. Were I to feel such embarrassment, however, it would be a sign of my having been sufficiently disciplined. Again through Foucault we remember that disciplines work at the level of the subject, producing docile bodies that embrace their normalization by internalizing the disciplinary logic. I am at a point in my career, however, where I can afford embarrassment. This is not the case for younger scholars, who, if their work is not published, risk failing to secure a job or losing the job they hold. As for the question of self-interest, it is clearly in the best interests of us all to work against undemocratic editorial policies. For disciplines are not simply mechanisms for the production of groupthink but also sites of contestation, inquiry, and revision. Those of us who teach composition, in particular, encourage our students to imagine writing as a process of discovery and an occasion to confront the limitations of their thinking. How, then, can we subject each other to editorial policies that treat writing as simply an occasion for displaying knowledge, knowledge imagined as something fixed, final, and disinterested?

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