

Richard M. Mikulski

“The success of the journal”

Personal networks in early 19th-century publishing

In its ideal form, academic publishing is frequently presented as an objective, meritocratic, and thoroughly systematic process through which scholarly works are objectively evaluated by unbiased editors, impartially assessed by anonymous peer reviewers, and dispassionately copyedited so the tone matches a house style. Central to this ideal is the expectation that all works undergo the same review, regardless of the personalities involved. While this unbiased and egalitarian conceptualization of the review process is laudable, it is complicated by the reality that all academic interactions are shaped by the individuals involved. This article briefly argues that personal relationships have been central to shaping the scholarly process throughout the history of academic publishing, and it further suggests this legacy continues to inform modern editorial practices. As an illustrative example, this article highlights the activities of George Long (1800-1879) during his editorship of the *Quarterly Journal of Education* (1831-1835).

As Emily Ford has recently shown, the peer review process is a deeply personal experience,¹ and relationships between editors and authors significantly shape the contemporary publishing process. Others have similarly noted the importance of relationships in publishing, with Meris Mandernach Longmeier and Jody Condit Fagan writing, “authors and editors have highly convergent interests in finding a good fit between an author’s work and the journal’s mission,”² while Silvio Waisbord remarks “no intellectual work is purely individual, and editing a journal is not any different.”³ Sarah Kagan, in her capacity as an editor, observes “academic publishing entails an odd, unacknowledged marriage brokered by people like me. As an editor, I spend hours bringing together authors with peer reviewers... The aim, of course, that this short-term arranged marriage produce progeny.”⁴ This personal aspect of editing, while important, also introduces biases and potentially contradicts the impartiality of the process. Stephen Donovan notes an occasionally adversarial relationship between editors and authors that should not exist in an unbiased and impersonal system,⁵ and Shakiba Seifi, Amir Human Hoveidaei, and Amin Nakhostin-Ansari, provide a clear, if anecdotal, example of an editor’s interactions with authors becoming too personal and unprofessional.⁶

The experiences of George Long, a London University professor who served as editor of the London-based *Quarterly Journal of Education*, will seem familiar to those engaged in 21-century publishing.⁷ Like many modern editors, for example, Long worked without monetary compensation, depending solely upon his professorship for a livelihood. In an 1832

Richard M. Mikulski is instruction and research librarian at the College of William & Mary, email: rmmikulski@wm.edu

letter to a university administrator, Long explained he worked without wages to ensure the “success of the journal.”⁸ Long also faced the daunting challenge of recruiting suitable (and unpaid) authors, contributors, and reviewers for the publication. The difficulty of this task was compounded by the scarcity of professional scholars in the first half of the 19th century, when England had only four universities, each of which held few nonclerical professorships. Long’s solution, like some modern editors, was to call upon his personal networks to recruit contributors with whom he had existing relationships. In doing so, Long succeeded in growing the journal until its circulation extended even beyond Britain to the United States. His interpersonal approach is an early example of the modern relationship-based and personal model of editorship, and a brief discussion of Long’s editorship provides historical context for some modern practices.⁹

George Long and personal networks

Long depended upon his professional status and interpersonal relationships while serving as editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Education*, a publication established by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) in 1831 to circulate education-related articles for both an academic and public middle-class readership. Unlike the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* (est. 1665), which was solely intended for a highly educated and specialized readership, the *Quarterly Journal of Education* sought to also gain readers among the literate and recently enfranchised “middling” professional classes (e.g., clerks, physicians, teachers, surveyors). Long, a notable English classicist of the 19th century, was an excellent choice as editor because his academic status lent additional prestige to the journal, and because he had large circles of scholarly acquaintances and contacts. Long graduated from Cambridge University as a prestigious Craven scholar and was a fellow of Trinity College.¹⁰ In 1824, when Long was 23, he was offered a professorship at the University of Virginia, where Thomas Jefferson warmly called him “the boy professor.” Long then joined the faculty at the new London University at age 27.¹¹ Long was well-published, he knew leading American and British classicists personally and was a founding member of SDUK and the Royal Geographical Society of London. Later in life he was awarded a royal pension by Queen Victoria in honor of his service to education.¹² Long drew upon his status and personal connections to recruit authors and promote the journal, and as a result many contributors were either affiliated with the SDUK or were faculty at London University.¹³

Long also called upon his personal connections to improve the journal’s circulation. When the journal launched, Long asked the publisher to send “one or two hundred copies of the prospectus” to “two eminent gentlemen” in the United States who would circulate the journal in America. One of these individuals was University of Virginia professor George Tucker (1775-1861), with whom Long had taught in the 1820s, and who would later co-author works with Long in the 1830s and 1840s.¹⁴ Tucker would later contribute articles to the SDUK’s *Penny Cyclopaedia*, for which Long also served as editor.¹⁵ The other “eminent gentleman” was John Delafield, a Columbia graduate involved in the founding of New York University.¹⁶ Delafield received packages of SDUK materials for American circulation during the 1830s, which he spread through his own personal networks.¹⁷ Long would also ask former students, such as University of Alabama professor Henry Tutwiler (1807-1884), to circulate and promote publications throughout his career.¹⁸

It is important to assume that Long was not driven by nepotism, but rather by an earnest desire to find suitable contributors for the journal. In an 1831 letter to the journal's Board, for example, Long stressed the importance of only publishing materials that reflect the "opinion of some scholar" on topics being addressed.¹⁹ Long also argued that book reviewers for the journal must be experts on the subject matter, as well as "authorities . . . able to judge of the [sic] accuracy of [the author's] work."²⁰ By calling upon colleagues with whom he had worked, Long could be assured that contributors were experts in their fields, and could be depended upon to provide the promised material—two considerations that are still important to modern editors.

The growth of the journal under Long's editorship demonstrates the success of his interpersonal approach, at least to a point. One obvious weakness was that contributors were almost entirely limited to scholars who knew Long. This lack of diversity within the contributor pool is at odds with the journal's stated values of "enabling them [readers] to form their own conclusions, as well from the difference as from the agreement of the writers."²¹ This insular characteristic of the journal was amplified by its publisher, the SDUK. Many SDUK Board members, such as Henry Lord Brougham (1778-1868), were Whig education-reformers affiliated with the *Edinburgh Review* and London University, both of which were viewed as bastions of radical education reform. It is also notable that key members of the SDUK Board, as well as some contributors to the journal, held noble titles, making the journal's editorial process a case of academic and literal "peer" review. By effectively restricting the pool of contributors to Long's acquaintances, SDUK members, and London faculty, the scope of materials and opinions submitted to the journal were limited.

Certainly, a great deal has changed in the last two centuries, and it is inappropriate to examine Long's 1830s activities and pull too many direct parallels and lessons for today. The most general, and perhaps most useful, point to consider is the fact that academic publishing has, since its earliest foundations, been an interpersonal affair. Then, as now, an editor's personal interactions with colleagues, and their standing within the academic community, shape the content of the journal by potentially excluding contributors who are not already known in the editor's circles. As journals continue to further embrace values of inclusivity, plurality of opinion, and openness, it is useful to be mindful that this difficult work requires editors and Boards to reverse centuries of practice.

Notes

1. Emily Ford, *Stories of Open: Opening Peer Review through Narrative Inquiry*, ACRL Publications in Librarianship no. 76 (Chicago: ACRL 2021), <https://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/36043>; Emily Ford, "Stories of Open," <https://storiesofopen.org>.

2. Meris Mandernach Longmeir and Jody Condit Fagan, "Library and Information Science Journal Editors' Views on Query Letters," *College & Research Libraries* 86, no.6 (Sept. 2021): 899.

3. Silvio Waisbord, "Editorial: Adiós, Farewell, Goodbye," *Journal of Communication* 69 no. 2, (April 2019): 121.

4. Sarah Kagan, "Brokering the Blinded, Unacknowledged Marriage of Publishing," *International Journal of Older People Nursing* 14, no.2 (June 2019): 1.

5. Stephen Donovan, "How to Alienate Your Editor: A Practical Guide for Established Authors," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 36 no. 4 (July 2005): 238-42; Stephen Donovan, "Putting Editors to Trouble (or People of That Sort)," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 41 no. 1 (September 2009): 103-09.

6. Shakiba Seifi, Amir Human Hoveidaei, Amin Nakhostin-Ansari, “Respecting the Authors by Journals’ Editorial Team: Doing a Favor or a Responsibility?” *Balkan Medical Journal* 39 no. 1 (January 2022): 76-77.

7. London University became University College, London, in 1836.

8. Negley Harte, John North, and Georgina Brewis, *The World of UCL* (London: University College London Press, 2018), 45; Letter, “Long to Coates,” January 9, 1832. SDUK Papers, In-Letters 1832 [George Long UCL 0010571]. Special Collections, University College London; Senate House Library (“GLSDUK” in future references).

9. For historical discussions of academic publishing, see “Untangling Academic Publishing: A History of the Relationship Between Commercial Interests, Academic Prestige and the Circulation of Research” (May 2017) by Aileen Fyfe, Kelly Coate, Stephen Curry, Stuart Lawson Noah Moxham, and Camilla Mørk Røstvik, <https://doi.org/10.17613/M66J5D>.

10. H. J. Mathews, *In Memoriam: George Long* (Brighton: Offprint from Brighton College Magazine, 1879): 4.

11. Richard Davis, *Correspondence of Thomas Jefferson and Francis Walker Gilmer, 1814-1826* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1946): 22; George Long and Thomas Fitz-Hugh (ed.) *Letters of George Long* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1917): 25.

12. N. B. Harte and John North, *The World of University College, London, 1828-1978* (London: University College, 1978): 39; W. W. Wroth, revised by Martin D. W. Jones, “Long, George (1800–1879),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*.

13. Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, *Address of Committee, June 1, 1843, List of Works, &c.* (London: Printed by W. Clowes, 1843): 3.

14. Letters, “May 1830 Letters to Coates,” GLSDUK; Letter, “Long to Coates,” n.d. May 1830, GLSDUK; Letter, “Long to Coates,” June 16, 1831, GLSDUK; “Letters to Henry Peter Brougham, Baron Brougham [manuscript] 1832–1846. From George Long, Mss 5500 -a,-b,-c,-d.,” transcribed by G.P. Burstow 21.12.70. MSS 7842-c, 7842-d Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia (“SCLUVA” in future references); Letter, “Long to Coates, October 15, 1832,”

15. Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, *Address of Committee, June 1, 1843, List of Works, &c.* (London: Printed by W. Clowes, 1843): 4; Letters, “Long to Coates,” May 5, 1835 and February 28, 1835, GLSDUK; Tucker, “Autobiography of George Tucker, 1858.” *Bermuda Historical Quarterly* vol. 18, nos. 3 & 4 (1961): 143; Library of Congress, *National Union Catalog, Pre-1956 Imprints Vol. 340* (Chicago: ALA, 1974): 72; Letters, “May 1830 Letters to Coates,” GLSDUK.

16. Theodore Jones, *New York University, 1832–1932* (New York: New York University Press, 1933): 9–11; Thomas Frusciano and Marilyn Pettit, *New York University and the City: An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997): 7.

17. Letter, “Long to Coates,” June 16, 1831, GLSDUK; “Letters to Henry Peter Brougham, Baron Brougham [manuscript] 1832–1846. From George Long, Mss 5500 -a,-b,-c,-d.,” Transcribed by G. P. Burstow 21.12.70. MSS 7842-c, 7842-d, SCLUVA.

18. Long and Fitz-Hugh, *Letters of George Long*, 60.

19. Letter, “Long to Coates, May, 31, 1831,” GLSDUK.

20. Letter, “Long to Coates,” December 28, 1830 [mislabelled as 1831], GLSDUK.

21. “Notice,” *The Quarterly Journal of Education* (London: Charles Knight, 1831), vol.1, January 1831, [1]. *z*