EDITOR'S COLUMN

With this issue, my three years as editor of the *Journal of Basic Writing* end. Issues under my editorship began with Fall 1986, though I started with *JBW* in mid-1984 when reorganization plans got underway. Now that *JBW* enjoys fine health and the promise of a secure future, I need to turn once again to my own research and writing. The privilege of working with *JBW,* a journal rich with history and mission, has surely taught me more than I have given. And because this is my final "Editor's Column," I am taking more space than usual so that I report recent news and share some parting thoughts about journal editing and academic writing, before I comment on the contents of this issue.

First, I want to thank you, dear readers, for your support of *JBW,* as demonstrated by your subscriptions. Without you, no tangible, ongoing proof exists to demonstrate to legislators, administrators, and fellow faculty that many teachers and scholars in composition and rhetoric highly value the education of basic writers. To the *JBW* Editorial Board, I extend my gratitude for their steady devotion and for lending their names and expertise to our referee process. Without such distinguished, energetic participation, *JBW* could not have thrived in recent years. To colleagues who generously offered their writing to *JBW* goes my deepest appreciation. Because *JBW* has room for only about ten percent of the manuscripts received, many more people deserved a hearing than *JBW* could provide. All authors whose writings were selected by *JBW*'s rigorous review process—and often who were imposed upon to revise for the sake of limited space on our pages—have contributed importantly to an expanded vision of basic writing and basic writers.

Next, I am pleased to report that the transition at *JBW* has gone very smoothly. Two key people will continue their indispensable association with *JBW.* Ruth Davis, Associate and Managing Editor, will continue to grace *JBW* with her extraordinarily professional attention to all phases of production, advertising, subscriptions, and

daily operations. Marilyn Maiz, Associate Editor (who has been with *JBW* since it was founded in 1975 by Mina Shaughnessy), will remain as official troubleshooter and guiding spirit. The most important news is that in June, 1988, a team of two was appointed to serve as coeditors of *JBW:* Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller, both of The College of Staten Island, CUNY. The first issue under their editorship will appear Spring 1989.

Professors Bernhardt and Miller were selected by Harvey Wiener, CUNY University Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Director of the CUNY Instructional Resource Center—the institutional sponsor of *JBW.* The appointments came after a CUNY-wide search for a new editor, meetings of a search committee, and interviews with a number of finalists. *JBW* is in very fine hands indeed. Professors Bernhardt and Miller bring to *JBW* twenty years' experience teaching basic writing, freshman and advanced composition, reading, and English as a second language in two- and four-year colleges. They have been writing directors at The College of Staten Island, CUNY, conducted graduate courses in the teaching of writing, published articles in basic writing, and coauthored *Becoming a Writer* (St. Martins, 1986).

Professor Bernhardt has taught at Reed College, Fisk University, the University of Keele in England, Staten Island Community College, and Hebei Teachers University in the People's Republic of China. He is author of *Just Writing* (Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1977). Since 1985, he has been coordinator of The College of Staten Island/High Schools Collaborative Project in Language Arts. Professor Miller was a reporter for *Newsday* on New York's Long Island before beginning his teaching career. For the past five years, he has been senior college chair of the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors. He is coauthor, with Leon Chang of St. John's University in New York, of *Introduction to the History of Chinese Calligraphy* to be published by the University of Chicago Press in 1989.

Now I would like to discuss two parting observations based on having read hundreds of manuscripts and referee reviews. I want, first, to endorse heartily the idea and practice of the manuscript referee system, instituted at *JBW* starting with the 1986 issues. Without reviews, authors would not have multiple perspectives, and editors (or at least this editor) might develop tunnel vision. I surely can understand why, for example, *College Composition and Communication* (*CCC*) and *College English* (*CE*) became refereed journals in the last few years. Still, I see a potential danger. Because composition studies only now is emerging as a discipline, our profession has fewer senior scholars and recognized experts than it

will have in another ten years. Often, therefore, leading people generously agree to serve on multiple editorial boards. While the referee pool of *CCC* and *CE* is huge, a number of new journals—welcome new outlets for scholarship—start up each year and understandably often call upon the same invaluable small group of leading people for endorsement and reviews. Were I today a graduate student or new faculty member choosing composition studies as one of my specialties, I might perceive that the circle is tight and closed.

That perception would be incorrect. Having had a front row seat to the referee process at *JBW,* I can bear witness to the welcoming encouragement—indeed, the joyful response—given by senior people to new scholars and researchers. What, then, might be done about the danger of misperception? I have three suggestions: Editors of journals and leaders can acknowledge the situation openly and pledge to remain conscious of it, especially by insisting on—and publicizing the fact of—"blind" reviews; editors can strive for a mix of recognized and new people on their editorial boards, sometimes by enlarging the boards; and editors can, when feasible, assign each manuscript to at least one new and one established person.

My second parting observation has to do with writing for academic journals. Given the statistics of acceptance at *JBW,* I have read many more manuscripts that were not accepted than were. Many almost made it. What seems to make the difference to reviewers and to an editor? Because so many colleagues have generously sent *JBW* their work, I want to offer in return my observations—limited severely by my personal biases, of course—gleaned from my work with *JBW.* To start with, *audience matters:* authors unfamiliar with the journal to which they are sending material usually miss the mark in assumptions about reader expertise as well as features of the "genres" a journal prefers. *JBW* receives quite a few manuscripts with little or no relation to basic writing—even in light of the expanded definition implied by the range of topics in recent issues. *Purpose matters:* when a line of reasoning calls for citations of prior work, manuscripts need to stand in the traditions of scholarly writing by acknowledging foundations in the literature. Equally important, references must be current. For *JBW,* surprisingly few manuscripts include references other than to several standard citations—excellent though they may be—five or more years old. At the least, work sent to *JBW* should reflect an awareness of recent *JBW* issues and of the 1987 *Sourcebook for Basic Writing Teachers* edited by Theresa Enos, published by Random House. Another aspect of purpose involves intention. Effective material has an embedded sense of what the

writer hopes the reader will take from the material, such as a fresh perspective, a refined attitude, or a new teaching strategy.

Ideas matter: a large number of manuscripts synthesize well but do not add significantly to ideas that have long been around, such as conferencing with students, the process approach to writing, etc. Here again, lack of familiarity with the literature can hurt a manuscript. *Topic matters: JBW* has received more essays on spelling than on any other topic (a comment in itself, but that's another matter), so I had to set a limit. The chances of topic saturation diminish with the significance or freshness of a topic, especially in a journal with limited space. *Sensitivity to readers and the reading process matters* (here my personal bias is particularly evident): essays need a clearly stated or implied thesis, preferably early enough in the essay so that the reader does not have to cast about for a point. And the reader wants the promise of a thesis fulfilled, not merely repeated. Among the most frequent comments from reviewers was "this seems to be two essays; the second half is unrelated to the first."

My list reads, I realize, as a rehearsal of a typical rhetoric. My list evolved inductively, however, not from gospel. Therefore because most authors already know the principles, I have two concrete suggestions. Ask colleagues for readings before you submit manuscripts. I cannot endorse too strongly the value of collaboration. Few writers can "see" all that they need for clear communication; the fresh, dispassionate eyes and inquiring minds of helping readers are invaluable. The review process at a journal comes after such collaboration, rather than in place of it. Also, don't given up. What one journal cannot use, another might embrace. The May 1988 issue of *CCC* includes our profession's equivalent of *The Writer's Market:* "Journals in Composition: An Update," a superb resource compiled by Chris Anson and Hildy Miller (pp. 198–216).

I turn now to a preview of this issue. We start with five accounts of research, rich in topic and in variety of method and sample size. JoAnne Liebman draws on theories of contrastive rhetoric to invite students to become her coresearchers and thereby to suggest an innovative strategy for teaching. Gail Stygall traces history and descriptive data concerning a programmatic switch in basic writing at a large university from a traditional to a process-centered curriculum. Janice Hays discusses developmental research by reporting data on the analysis of student writing from the perspective of the Perry Scheme of socio-cognitive development. *JBW* readers might recall Professor Hays' debate with others in recent *JBW* issues; because her present essay adds data to that debate, we have allotted more pages than usual to appendices so

that our readers can sample primary source material. Cherryl Armstrong examines student texts to question assumptions about basic writing by comparing Harvard University's basic writers with others she has taught. Gesa Kirsch presents a case study of how one student became more successful at interpreting writing assignments.

The next two essays relate directly to classroom practice. Irvin Hashimoto takes on the demonic, crooked little mark we know and love as the *apostrophe* (don't miss *The New Yorker* cartoon, a *JBW* first). James Deem and Sandra Engel establish a basis both theoretical and practical for using a variety of methods of transcription with basic writers.

This issue concludes with an index to the last three years of *JBW,* including this issue (1986–88). This new index is a companion to the ten-year index (1975–85) in our Spring 1986 issue, the first under my editorship. The index suggests the diversity that points today to a larger definition of "basic writing." No index, however, can summarize my feelings of affection for *JBW* or can hint at the slight tug of regret I feel as I walk through the open door symbolized by my final *JBW* Editor's Column.

Lynn Quitman Troyka