[Ghost]Writing and Retrospective Transfer: Creating Writing Research Identities Over Time

A *Grassroots* Collaborative Co-Interview

The Ghost and Joyce R. Walker

In this *Grassroots* Co-Interview, two writing researchers got together to talk about doing writing-for-hire work. As they dredge up and share their less-than-perfect writing experiences, they both begin to see this process as a kind of "retrospective knowledge transfer," where they figure out what they've learned by looking back at moments when they had no idea what they were doing.

"I Didn't Know That Was a Thing:" Writing Research in a Gig Economy

This Grassroots writing Co-Interview started out with a story the Ghost told Joyce about doing creative freelance writing as a side job. "What!" said Joyce. "There are jobs where people write fiction as part of a gig economy? I didn't know that!" From that conversation we evolved a plan to do a "literate activity co-interview" for the *Grassroots Journal*, which is when two people who are really interested in the ways writing works in the world get together to ask questions and tell stories about literate activity, like the writing geeks they truly are. The first writing research co-interview was published by the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* in Fall 2021, so the "genre" of the co-

Unstable Genres

The Writing Commons, an online encyclopedia for writers, defines genre as, "social constructs . . . [that] reflect the activities, values, and histories of communities of practitioners." Genres also "reflect shared textual expectations." But when a genre is new (like these Co-Interviews), participants have less restrictions (and less internalized guidelines) for the activity, so they tend to create texts that are not as consistent. Readers of this interview might want to compare it to the co-interview published in the *GWRJ* issue 12.1, "Everyday Writing Researchers," by Kevin Roozen and Anya Gregg (2021).

interview is still pretty unstable. What follows is our effort to capture some of the ways we talk and think about everyday literacies, professional writing, and writing research.

Writing WAAAAAAY Outside of School

During the interview, Joyce and the Ghost quickly learned they had much in common related to the different types of professional literate activities they have engaged in. One important theme of our co-interview involved a discussion of the idea of ***retrospective transfer***. That is, we realized that we use our past experiences with writing as examples that help us to understand how literate activity works. But back when we were actually engaged with this writing, we were just trying to survive, to do the writing we needed to do. We learned, but we couldn't really see all that we learned until we looked back at those experiences from the perspective of writing researchers, using the tools we've learned through being involved in the ISU Writing Program. It was only through this process of looking-backwards-with-new-information that we could see how these experiences ultimately contributed to our understanding of how writing works. We began our interview with a conversation about genres of "writing work-for-hire," and some of the difficulties that come with the job:

Retrospective Transfer

According to King Beach, the processes of making generalizations about our knowledge from one situation to another, are not "located within the developing individual, nor can they simply be reduced to changes in social activities. ***Rather . . . they are located in the changing relation between persons and activities***" (113, emphasis added). For us, the activity of this interview ended up being a moment where we both experienced ourselves "becoming someone or something new," as writing researchers, but still in direct reference to past experiences. We use the idea of **retrospective transfer** to describe what happens in these moments of coming together, sometimes days, months, or years after the original experience, when we "re-uptake" that particular knowledge back into our current understanding of what we know, acknowledging that that memory is also transformed in the process.

Joyce: I had no idea there was a **genre** of genre-fiction work-for-hire. I mean, I know people do writing-for-hire, but I understood that to be more like technical writing. I didn't know people did fiction ghost-writing for hire. The way you talked about it made me think. I'm interested in hearing about the actual writing experience, but I'm also interested in the way you found out about this job as something you could do.

Ghost: I found out about this job during undergrad I think it was about seven years ago, in 2015. I actually needed money for applying to grad school. One of my professors was a freelancer but she's a journalist, and

she told me to join freelance sites, which is when I found out about Guru and UpWork. They had creative writing calls and I figured I was a creative writer, so I started applying and got a few consistent hires. I would not submit my own creative fiction, especially because my name isn't attached to any of this. I started working consistently with one client for a very long time, but it turned out she was sort of a middleman (she was making calls for work on these sites as a client, but then presenting the work to other clients as her own and charging higher prices than she was paying me). I ended up finding out she was taking about half of my pay.

Joyce: How did you find out that was happening?

Ghost: I didn't find out about that until later, when I started applying for more clients and noticing that the calls were identical to the work I was producing. Genre fiction is so specific. They'll have keywords and phrases like, I want a *Cinderella* story with your own plot, which means there has to be a certain villain, an overbearing family, money issues. The main character needs a prince figure to save her. There's also a *Red Riding Hood* version. The client who was stealing from me only found out that I had discovered her scam after I quit working with her. She went to PayPal and requested all the money back (that she had already paid me for completed projects), and I had to dispute it. It was absurd. Luckily, I had all our emails as proof that she disappeared without paying me; I ultimately won the dispute and I continued freelancing after securing more consistent, trustworthy clients.

I'm the writer, but not the Author

When taking on a ghostwriting project, most writers have to sign an **NDA** (non-disclosure agreement) detailing the project, and agreeing to the terms proposed by the client. Ghostwriters aren't allowed to disclose any ideas, examples, or quotes from the texts they write, and they don't have any ownership (or copyrights) to the work that is published. But as it turns out, Joyce also had a story of a less formal writing-for-hire situation, which didn't end particularly well for her. Right out of college, she got a job working as a telephone receptionist at a hotel. Her manager at the time found that she had studied writing in college and asked her to rewrite the employee

NDA, or, Non-Disclosure Form: From Investopedia, "A non-disclosure agreement is a legally binding contract that establishes a confidential relationship." In ghostwriting, specifically for creative writing (novellas, novels, memoir), the ghost agrees to not disclose crucial details about the project, which can also include samples of the project (unless this is disclosed to the client, since some ghostwriters will use examples of their work to secure new clients).

"front desk" manual. What followed was a similar situation involving another employee taking credit for Joyce's work, without consent.

Joyce: The texts they had (instead of a coherent manual) were kind of a mess. There were just a bunch of miscellaneous guidelines and directions and handwritten notes, but nothing coherent. They had a computer system that was really antiquated and hard to use, so they needed directions for that, and also general directions for operations at the front desk. I didn't get very good directions for the rewrite. If I took on that kind of assignment now, I'd (of course) be doing all kinds of writing research, asking questions, interviewing people, etc. But back then, I really had no experience with that kind of technical writing, and no experience with being a writing researcher (not professionally, you know, but just to know how to research new kinds of writing). I had no idea about how to do that. And the hotel's front desk manager didn't either (clearly!). What I did know was that folks at the front desk thought that all of the rules and the computer stuff was really complicated and hard. They told me that they found it intimidating. So, I basically took all of these handwritten directions, and single sheets of instructions and "wrote it up." I also attempted to make it funny, and not intimidating, adding little notes like, "don't panic" and "this isn't that hard"; basically writing it with a personal tone that I imagined might help a scared employee. The job turnover rate there was intense, and I wanted the manual to help new people feel more at home, similar to a family, because management kept saying it was a family. I gave the finished copy to my supervisor, and a couple of days later he called me into the office to yell at me (he actually yelled, and I remember that was the first time I'd ever been yelled at at a job), asking why I'd put in all of these ridiculous informal notes. And I was like, "I didn't know, you didn't give me any instructions and I thought that making it informal would be helpful to people." I mean, I had a justification for the writing style, but I couldn't just tell him that. I was so confused and felt ashamed. Now that I think back on it, this supervisor was also pretty young, and he didn't know what he was doing either, but at the time it was really scary. It turned out that he was so angry because he'd passed the manual on to his supervisors as his work (not mentioning me), and he also hadn't read it first!

Ghost: Oh my gosh.

Joyce: He was really mad because now it looked like he didn't know what he was doing. He hadn't even read the text before he sent it on. So anyway, he was really mad at me, and I remember being confused at first. I was like, "Well I can rewrite it." It took a few minutes for him to admit his lie [that he had, in fact, turned it in as his own work]. And then I was like, "Well, that's

not my fault." He couldn't tell them that I had written it because he'd already told them that he had written it. So then I got all righteous about it because that seemed really unfair to me. And so then I got fired because I was still in the three-month probationary period and they can fire you for no reason, so he just fired me basically the next day because I made him look bad. So that was my first out-of-college job experience and so it feels . . . I don't know . . . it's interesting you had a similar experience.

Retrospective Transfer and Realizing the Importance of Writing Research

Writing is not static. For those of us who like to write, who have some sort of affinity for it, we end up taking on jobs where writing is involved. But neither of us really knew (during the time we had these experiences) how to do any kind of practical writing research to figure out how to do the writing or to understand the activity system (and it's dangers, as it turned out for both of us). We were just kind of winging it, based on "Hey, I like to write . . ." If we had known enough to investigate these genres and activity systems more fully, we might have had different types of conversations or made different choices in how we approached these writing opportunities. But we suspect that these kinds of "hard knocks" learning experiences are not actually all that uncommon for people moving into different writing-for-hire experiences for the first time.

Joyce: If I had known then what I know now, I would have asked, what do you want me to look at in this manual? Who's going to read it, who's going to receive it, what tone and style do you want? I might also have asked questions about the kind of credit I was going to get for the work. In your case, Ghost, you were trying to get your writing out there, to make some money, and then you're being taken advantage of. And then when you realize it's happening, someone tries to blame you instead of accepting responsibility, even though they're doing something they're not supposed to.

Ghost: Well, and even when you are the one making the full amount, you only make a penny per word, which is the lowest that I, or at least I assume that's the lowest that you can make so it's a lot less than other freelancers.

Everybody's a Creative Writer

A term the ISU Writing Program uses in relation to writing is trajectory—which involves thinking specifically where a text will "go" in the world. What a text's history is and who will use it or re-purpose it or transform it. In the

Trajectory: In the Writing Program, trajectory is used to understand what texts do and how they move around the world. This means both how a text might move through a process of production, but even more importantly how texts move through institutions and spaces and in relationships among different people.

case of the examples we both offered above, texts can have trajectories that don't make us very happy (or even get us fired). But as we looked back at these writing experiences, we both also realized that we now see the practice of doing the research for a piece of writing as part of the creative process of representing and producing texts that will go places and do things in the world. It can also be the scary part—the part where we have to admit that we don't know what we're doing (which can be especially challenging when it's in a workplace situation where we're being paid). But in some ways, that process of "finding out about" can also feel really creative: a way of sliding into a particular author-role and trying to envision a text that will do the work we want it to do. It's definitely a kind of making—even when it's just figuring out how to write a hotel front office manual, or doing the research on how to apply for and manage "writing-for-hire" work so that you don't get ripped off.

Ghost: I think that your example of the manual is a good chance to bring up something I wanted to ask you. As a rhetorician and scholar working in your field, I always see rhetoric and composition as very creative. This comes back to your discussion of intuition. I don't quite know what to call it, and it's not always going to be framed as "rhetoric" or "creative writing" because these aren't static instances of writing. It's that feeling of inquisitiveness, curiosity, and humor.

Joyce: So, for me, there is a kind of creativity in trying to produce something that matches up with the genre, the goals, the people who are going to get it. For example, for the manual (if I were writing something like that now), I'd try to argue that, as a writing researcher, I can see that the lexical level of a text like that should be, well . . . simple, and yes, friendly and not intimidating. That the desire to make it ***professional***-sounding shouldn't outweigh the need to make it useful to the people who are going to use it. But I'm also interested in how you would compare this kind of writing-for-hire work that you do to what you would call your more [literary] creative writing. I feel like, in the case of your writing-for-hire, we're talking about something that a lot of people would call creative writing or fiction writing, but instead of it being some kind of really original creative process, you're using very specific scripts and client-based instructions. What does that feel like, and could you talk about the first experiences, or any of them, and how creative do you feel these texts are? How would you compare them to other writing you do?

Ghost: I would say that ghostwriting can be really dangerous because it makes me so creative. I have to write really fast, which can lead to burnout across all projects, both personal and professional. In this case, I only earn a penny per word . . . and I remember when I first told other freelancers, they either laughed at me or told me this was wrong, and I was like, well I don't have enough experience to get properly paid, so unfortunately this is what we've got.

Joyce: As things add up in terms of word count, you're getting paid a penny per word—what is the length of these projects?

Ghost: The shortest piece I wrote was a 5,000-word novella, which paid fifty dollars. Right now I'm working on a 110,000-word project. I've completed 60,000 words and I send them off in increments. In order to not get paid less than minimum wage per hour, I have to be speed-writing. The most I've written in a day would be 30,000 words. I guess I call it dangerous because my own creativity gets burnt out, and it can also get stolen, essentially. I'll always ghostwrite with two documents open, one for the project and another for sentences that I think are really good that I don't want to sell for less than ten dollars to somebody—I save them for my novel. So the writing I'm doing as a ghostwriter must be creative, because it generates a lot of new creativity, even if I don't want to use it in that particular space.

Joyce: So have you ever seen your stuff in print? And it doesn't go under your name, correct, it goes under the "author's" name?

Ghost: Yeah. It's actually always cisgender heterosexual men publishing under female names and bios. They've had me write their newsletters under their pen names before selling bundles of books.

Joyce: That's wild. So this project that's 110,000 words, is this an actual novel?

Ghost: Actually it's a series, and it's a really specific genre, and romance is just the umbrella term beneath which there are subgenres.

Happily-Ever-After is a Genre?

In ghostwriting, there are hundreds of different subgenres. Currently, the Ghost writes in the genre called **insta-love**, where two characters meet and immediately fall in love (within the first two chapters).

Ghost: My clients for these kinds of romances have specific requirements, such as the books must be capped off at a certain number, they must contain

a **HEA**, or, happily-ever-after. Each novella introduction features the lead character in some sort of danger, and her love interest needs to intervene to save her. There are key points in relationship building that must be met before the first kiss, leading all the way to an engagement around chapter eight or nine. The ending of each novella always features a honeymoon, and an incentive to buy the other books in the series (which benefits the publishers). Anyone can go to these sites to work freelance, and there are other types of jobs involving editing, and other genres of writing.

Joyce: That is just amazing. I don't know, it's just . . . I can see how it's so formulaic, but obviously readers (some readers) really like that pattern being always the same. And there are specific sites you go to where people will pay you to create these texts?

Ghost: UpWork is a lot more reliable; I had trouble with Guru because of all these clients who get you to write for free. Sometimes they'll go so far as to hire you, commission an outline, then never pay you because they claim they have a boss who doesn't like the outline. Immediately after they request a refund, and you never see any of that money.

Joyce: And then it's published?

Ghost: Yeah.

Joyce: Is there a way to find these published pieces?

Ghost: I've only found a few books with titles that didn't change. I always have to use a thesaurus for synonyms because I can't repeat the same titles other ghostwriters have used (though we all draw from the same pool of terms). I did find a few of the ghostwritten books in print. Sometimes I think I'm going to buy them and put them on my shelf, even though they're published under someone else's name. But UpWork is a more reliable site—it's great for freelancing, and they have multiple types of jobs, including editorial work.

Joyce: And these editorial jobs pay a little more?

Ghost: They do, it's awesome. It's like a flat rate to edit for a small bundle of pages.

Editorial Writing as a Collaborative Literate Activity

When we began talking about editorial work, we immediately started talking about genre and trajectory. For example, in order to get the editorial jobs, the Ghost had to turn in a resume. Her other editorial jobs at literary magazines

and journals helped her get hired. The concept of trajectory—not just looking at texts as they go out in the world, but understanding that all kinds of literate activities also have trajectories—makes us realize that these aren't just texts. A resume is actually a **representation** of a person's body of work. It collects and displays all of the learning and knowledge about writing and editing that the Ghost has accumulated. And it's also the **tool/genre** being used to get future work because it goes out into the world and represents her as a candidate for new jobs.

Ghost: Yeah, I've also been hired to edit a novel. There's also two different trajectories for the editing I do when I freelance. The first involves editing for grammar, and sometimes for content. For the client who hired me to edit the novel, they're more concerned that I look at the grammar and punctuation (though I've had other clients who've given me specific writing glossaries for the time period their pieces are set in). And at other times I edit other ghostwriter's projects—which they're not aware of, at all. My job is to clean up the entire project to make it more engaging, structurally sound, while still existing in all the genre conventions we've discussed.

Joyce: It's not the same as editing for the *Grassroots Journal*, but these different types of editorial work can web together. For the journal, we call some of the work we do **developmental editing**, and that kind of editing is more like entering into a conversation with the author—not just making suggestions and small changes, but actually offering samples of text they might want to include to expand an idea or talk about a concept. In a way, I guess, you could call that a kind of ghostwriting, but we think of it as editing because we're just trying to help the author shape their ideas in ways that will work for the journal, yet also make the author feel like the article expresses their ideas in a way they're happy with.

Ghost: There is also a large community involved in all of these examples of editorial work. For both genres I work on, what I would call literary fiction and romance, I get hired because of both experiences on my resume. I actually got hired by a couple—two people on UpWork who are married. I worked for the husband for years, and then he told his partner I was a good writer, and he thought I would like the projects she's working with. We've been working together since 2016. So she hired me to do developmental editing, without the ghostwriter's permission, because they've already been paid a flat fee and signed the NDA relinquishing rights, among other things. You only get paid once for these projects, and you have no idea what trajectory the text enters. So, someone else wrote it, and now I'm revising it, and all of that is ghostwritten—the first ghostwriter has no idea that I'm editing their work, and neither of us will be named as authors in the final

work. And you can't trace where it goes because it has multiple stops, and only one is with you.

Joyce: That's fascinating because we have that sort of understanding of the concept of **trajectory** that involves this activity of tracing. But in this case it's like, these words are out in the world and different people are getting involved. I get a fascinating map in my head of people getting paid for their words, and their words go out to other people, who get paid on a different timeline for the same product. And it's not really a linear timeline of an author producing a specific piece of work—instead it's a timeline of a text with multiple authors. As an academic, you make your artifact [a scholarly article or something similar] and they [the editors] approve or send you some notes, and you do a revision, and then a copyeditor gets involved, but you get to approve those copyedits also. So it's really a timeline that centers on the author or authors. We tend to see that writing as "our" (the author's) work. But in fact, there is really a lot of "ghost-writing" that goes on in that trajectory also. The "life of the text" involves so many people.

Ghost: This reminds me that we can maybe draw in another ISU Writing Program P-CHAT term, **socialization**, or "the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute and use texts." For example, in creative writing, or in other majors, we often teach each other's work. Joyce, as someone who teaches in this Writing Program and creates at this school, we cite you all the time, and then we talk about your articles that help us understand P-CHAT, and other key terms. It's always helpful and generative, these discussions. You have materials that won't rest in these final forms; it's not just about head-nodding at scholars. In freelance, we don't use works cited—it's public knowledge, these genres that are rooted in fairytales.

Joyce: And there seems to be a super solid formula for the genres you are producing. Sometimes people talk about genres as never stable, and I was thinking, in these writing-for-hire scenarios, you are supposed to be creating something kind of original within a really specific format and storyline. A very stable genre base, but flexible still in its execution.

Ghost: Yeah, I think part of me also wants to disrupt that. I'm always worried I'll get in trouble because I try to put a little symbol in each project, so that readers (if they buy the box set of text) start wondering, why do these specific birds keep showing up? Sometimes it's a phrase, or a type of flower, sometimes it's a fruit. It depends on how long I've been writing for the client, but I'll try to disrupt that by connecting these universes with one image.

Joyce: One thing.

Ghost: Yeah.

Don't Go Not Changing: Building a Flexible Writing Research Identity

When we looked at this next excerpt of our original interview, which is about how we feel about writing "rules," we realized that doing writing research isn't necessarily about breaking the rules, or about learning to follow them. For us, it's more about using research to understand where we are and what we want to do next, in terms of how we use literate activities in the world.

Joyce: When it comes to re-using themes, especially in creative writing, I think we can do it without even knowing we're doing it. I think a lot of us don't know, actually, how many tropes or ideas or ways of phrasing things that we repeat over time. But in the situation you're talking about, [putting one kind of object or symbol into texts you write as a ghostwriter], you have to know you're using it, right? And that's also part of writing research. You learn to know, to see your patterns, and I think it even helps some of us to know ***why*** we're doing it. Like in your case of putting in the symbols across different texts, that's an effort to make the piece a little better because readers might catch that, and it will form a pattern. And even if readers don't notice, it gives you a way to make the text interesting to yourself.

Ghost: I'm thinking about the concept of permission and **antecedent knowledge**. Like knowing that you can use what you know, that you have permission to use it, and you get to the Writing Program at ISU and it's like, you're in charge as a writer researcher, and I don't think I knew that. I don't think I knew that I could do that. I'm wondering if that comfort, or trusting yourself as the researcher, has always been there, but I just couldn't access it?

Joyce: Yeah, well, I think it is there, but we can't always access it. I mean for me, it's similar in a lot of ways to you. There's always that hesitancy, and I often don't feel comfortable. I can be really afraid to try to write things that are new to me, because I don't know the rules. But I'm also not a good rule follower. My problem, I think, comes in another way, which is that I get an assignment or something I'm supposed to do, I kind of automatically assume that someone "out there" is telling me what to do, and if someone's going to tell me what to do, I'm not going to like that. I have a real resistance to it. And so, a lot of times my problem is that I don't feel the freedom to experiment, so I'll just refuse to do the work because it feels constraining but I don't feel able to break that constraint. Or I'll just create a different genre entirely, like, "Screw you I'm doing this ***other*** genre." But in a way, that kind of thinking ignores the ideas of trajectory and antecedent knowledge. Like, I'm trying too hard to **not** be part of something bigger than myself. So, let me ask, do you find this kind of [creative-writing-for-hire] writing enjoyable, or do you mostly see it as work?

Beta Readers: Not all ghostwriting clients hire beta readers. A beta reader is responsible for reading the text for clarity and plot. If there are big-picture changes, or grammatical issues, these are usually delegated to an editor (so there are four or more people working on the same story).

Ghost: Well, right now, because I'm stuck in a specific story, I'm bored. I'm writing sheriff romances, and we were supposed to switch to mafia, which involves nuance, secrecy, privacy, and architecture, and then the client told me I was doing so well with these sheriff stories, so I have to keep writing them. The problem is, there's only so many sheriffs in one town. So you get bored. But you have to be careful, also, because getting flagged happens—there's **beta readers**, who are also hired by my clients, and they can be really frustrating.

Joyce: What does that mean, to **get flagged**?

Ghost: They'll flag my writing and tell me I need to rewrite whole sections because they're not believable, and I don't get paid for those edits. They also won't pay me at all for the whole story unless I make changes. I get these kind of "breakup messages" that say, "We need to talk," and all I can think is, talk about the contract? And then I get nervous and start answering these emails in the middle of class. And the message will be something like, "You know this doesn't make sense, somebody said it didn't make sense, that they [the character] had soup [first], and then they had dinner."

Joyce: In some ways it's kind of like a panic response because you're getting paid for all this hard work that is dependent on making people happy, but you don't know ahead of time that what you're doing is going to make them happy, and that's got to be really scary.

Ghost: I think it just really seeps into who I am as a person and how my mind operates. I think ghostwriting has started affecting my habits and the ways in which I write and complete assignments. And I'm trying to always do the opposite, like, these are restrictions but they're also generative. For instance, how do I tell creative writing students they can lean into their anxiety without having full-on panic in class? And I'm panicking all the time at my job, but I have to use it to pay the bills. It's all very knitted together. Going back to what we discussed before, about trajectory, even the emotional trajectory tied to the text is not always positive. It's a lot of questioning that can be very stressful, and the text is always changing, so there are always new questions.

Joyce: I like that (not that I like that you're feeling so stressed!), but because it is, in my opinion, closer to the way writing sometimes works in the world when there are really high stakes. In school, it's like, "Yes, let's talk about the stakes in writing, that writing matters," but the stakes mostly seem to be

about fitting into the teacher's ideas about what writing should look like. So you don't really get to figure out what matters to you, and I don't like that; but then, on the other hand, it's not like there aren't situations in the world where figuring out what someone wants in a text doesn't matter, a lot. Which is a lot of what we've been talking about! But it's complicated. **Writing research identity** isn't always about being in charge, but it is about learning to act [with writing] in purposeful ways.

Ghost: It influences how I make texts, too, because I'm learning to work with such different genres—such as email, because right now I'm learning to write these personified emails, as a ghostwriter, which is a genre convention of almost every contract I receive. And thinking of new genres, I had to learn to write this sort of **call to action**, which tells readers that if they liked the story, they can purchase the next book and so on. That's influenced how I learn, especially in the pandemic, all these digital genres are linked, and I'm calling on engagement from readers. How can I make these texts appealing? It takes time to create and learn, and it's not always perfect, but I'm not used to failing in freelance. I've sometimes had texts sent back to me telling me to change all sorts of nuanced details that are part of the formula—but if I mess up the formula, I have to rewrite. It can be difficult to keep track of all the plot points I need to feature in each text. And a lot of that can be my OCD because I'll trick myself with fabricated memories into believing I didn't complete a specific aspect of a task. So I can get stuck here, opening documents then closing them, triple and sometimes quadruple (or more) checking emails, and finally I close my laptop after more than an hour of unpaid labor has gone by.

Joyce: It's interesting to think about how those patterns get messed up, especially because it's piecework, so you're getting paid minute by minute, word by word, and if you have to go back through things over and over again, you're literally losing money. I think this is also interesting, and related to studenting, and thinking about practical writing research vs. being a theorist. Somebody who writes about people's writing practices vs. being someone who is in a situation, making decisions about writing in the moment.

Joyce: I think I have a final kind of overall question for you, and that is, thinking about your writing experiences, would you call yourself a writing researcher now? And, do you think the writing researcher that you are as a scholar is different from the writing researcher you are as a romance writer? Are they different kinds of writing researchers, or do you see that as the same identity?

Ghost: That's so interesting. I actually think I see them as the same in a really positive, influential way, because constantly having to write in multiple

genres puts me in a creative habit. When I was younger I used to get writer's block—when I got older, I was like, I don't think that's a thing, and I don't have time for it, but also, I should find out how and why I don't think writer's block is real. Part of that could be scheduled, like when your brain is creative at the same time every day, it starts turning to that switch. And so last year, I amassed over a million written words, and that wasn't only romance, that was my own creative writing. I think that was a result of all the freelance, and it's also affected the way I write my academic papers. I've started to plan and brainstorm more (digitally) and then when I return to revise, I realize I really enjoy my writing, and I start cleaning up the work in a different kind of way.

Joyce: So all these habits of writing have sort of influenced the way you edit, as well? Not just that you are better able to do it, but that you've changed how you're looking at work as well. How would you describe that?

Ghost: I think that it somehow opens me up for the fact that writing doesn't necessarily need to be super lofty. I actually think that that's, like, a very restrictive, systematic writing practice that I had to unlearn.

Joyce: Yeah, and, for example, looking at different *Grassroots* articles, we have to think about what's valuable in flexible ways—to try to keep the author's individual focus and personality, but also tie everything together for the readers in a way that connects.

Ghost: Yes, you have to ask how you can keep the author's authentic voice, and for *Grassroots* articles, that really matters. But that kind of thinking can also influence other kinds of editorial work.

Joyce: This is a good way to talk about editing beyond word structure or correcting grammar. We think about the issue of language *quality*, and how this shows up in suggestions for revision, and we try to move away from what is considered standard language practice to prioritize the fact that there are multiple Englishes, both in this journal and in the world. Something I think the journal does really well is that when we work with authors, is realize they're sharing their experiences with the journal, and we keep an awareness of that as part of the editorial process.

Ghost: I think that's something that is so fantastic about the journal, that it publishes authors who explain terminology in their own words. That changes the text, and as the journal expands to include terms outside of the ISU Writing Program, it has to, even more carefully, consider both the author and the audience—how to keep the author's voices clear and authentic when what they write is something that is going to be used (at least by some people) as a teaching text, at different schools and in different kinds of situations.

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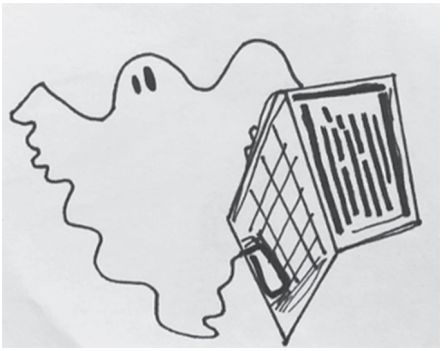

The Ghostwriter writes and edits fiction, along with lots of other literate activities she can't describe if she wants to remain anonymous.