

PREFACE

The preface harbors a lie.

GAYATRI SPIVAK, Preface to *Of Grammatology*

A preface precedes a book that likely has been written prior to it, thus making it a discursive move doomed to fail from the start. That is in part the lie it harbors. But as Spivak reminds us, this lie a preface harbors is more than an accepted, amusing fiction readers live with; the presence of a preface also upsets a book's desire to stand alone, self-made, an object that is its own explanation. It fractures that desired autonomy by reminding us that a writer and text are never alone; they are deferred, always preceded and surrounded by and always building on and adding to other writers and texts. In her own translator's preface to Derrida's preface to *Of Grammatology*, Spivak writes that "the text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end. Each act of reading the 'text' is a preface to the next" (1976, x). A preface is thus an act of repetition that unhinges and defers the thing it repeats at the same time as it inaugurates and promotes it.

I read this relationship between a book and its preface as somewhat analogous to the project this book attempts to undertake. In examining the dynamic relationship between writers and the texts they produce, I am interested in how writers both preface a text and are prefaced by other texts, namely genres, in relation to which they write. As such, the act of writing becomes a complex site for the enactment of prefaces, in which writers and texts preface each other, constantly inaugurating and deferring their own beginnings. In this book, I identify genres as such sites of interaction in which, to paraphrase Louis Althusser (1984), writers act as they are acted upon. In its examination of this process of articulation, I hope the book can contribute something of importance and of use to the study and teaching of invention and writing in composition studies.

Situated at the intersection between acting and being acted upon, I would like here to take the opportunity the preface allows to identify and thank those who, through their support, expertise, direction, and generosity, have acted upon me to make this book possible.

It was my teacher and mentor and more recently my coauthor and friend at the University of Kansas, Amy J. Devitt, who first introduced me to genre eight years ago and who helped me formulate the questions I continue to ask to this day. This book is the gift of expert knowledge, wise direction, and unwavering support and patience she has given me over the years, and in whatever are its strengths, this book is the gift I give back to her. At the University of Kansas, I also benefited in countless and lasting ways from the wisdom and knowledge of my teachers: Peter Casagrande, who shared and guided my curiosity into why and how texts are produced; James Hartman, through whose careful and thoughtful questions I learned to think more carefully and thoughtfully; and Sidney I. Dobrin, whose expertise, vision, and energy inform my work to this day. For his early mentorship while I was an undergraduate, I thank Gale K. Larson.

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