

The Editor's Fence

The place where the editor leans and talks to his neighbors.

—Hal Gerber

ROBERT LANGENFELD

Changes Coming, Compliments of the U.S. Post

Is there such a thing as a clichéd cliché—to say “academic publishing is in trouble”? I’m not referring to the prices of scholarly monographs, nor to how few are sold today in comparison to even ten years ago, nor to the fact that some presses do not want to publish manuscripts by those who don’t already have a book in print. No, I’m using the bromide as an apt introduction to dreary news courtesy of the United States Postal Service, news that affects *ELT* and other journals.

In May 2007 the post office set a rate change for first-class mail, a 5% increase. You know about that. What you probably missed, quite understandably, are the other changes. The word “incredible” seems a perfect way to describe them. Perhaps some other word or short phrase would fit better.

Mailing the usual packet of *ELT* in the states (two issues weighing just under one pound via Library Rate) is graced with a 60% increase. The same packet to Canada gets tagged with an 80% increase. Ah, but that’s small potatoes to what it now costs to mail that packet overseas. It used to be \$2.48 to send via surface Media Mail to, say, Great Britain. Now we have only what is termed First-Class International. It costs \$10.80. That’s an increase of 330%.

How can this be? Well, the Postal Board of Governors basically adopted changes submitted by Time Warner, the nation’s largest magazine publisher, *People* being one of many in its galaxy of publications. Large publishers like Time Warner will enjoy small postal increases. Now isn’t that a surprise? Efficiencies of scale is the reason, it is argued; or is that inefficiencies of congressional oversight?

A postal official, one of those protected sources, told me that in his/her view the idea is to make the prices so exorbitant that people will stop mailing such packets overseas: “They will dwindle to a relative

trickle. The aim is to get the U.S. post out of a segment of the mail business that is not as profitable as first-class mail.” That’s the spirit.

What is to be done? *ELT*’s subscription rates are low for a quarterly in the humanities. The slight increases for 2008 were planned before I learned the cold facts from Uncle Sam. Librarians drop journals if they show a dramatic increase in price. Our rates, particularly for overseas, must be revised upward in 2009. How much? I don’t know. I need to consult with colleagues at university presses. We may have to set a measurable difference between the online and the print versions for overseas, less so for the U.S.A. We will make sure that *ELT* is priced affordably for an online version if the print is too expensive, so individuals and libraries of varying sizes may continue to subscribe.

Those of you who have been readers for many years know the journal has weathered similar tempests. We will do that once again. It’s in the mission of the journal to remain largely independent and take care of its finances.

Many Thanks

I much appreciate all the e-mails and letters of congratulations on our 50th anniversary volume last year. It means a lot to read your words of support, and it reconfirms my belief that *ELT* plays an important and worthwhile role in the ongoing scholarship about British literature and culture bridging the two centuries.

In Memory, Professor Robert Schweik

News of Bob Schweik’s death came to me early in 2007. He was well known as a superb Hardy scholar, active in the Hardy Society. He was a dedicated member of our Advisory Board for some forty years and did much to help young people in our profession. I met Bob several times and have a hefty file of his correspondence compiled over the years.

We were always amused by a strange irony. He considered taking a position at Arizona State University. In the end, though, he couldn’t leave his beloved Fredonia, New York. He recommended a colleague, Hal Gerber, who took the position. I of course became one of Hal’s students. I think if “dicing Time” had brought Bob to Arizona State, I would have been his student.

He was a wonderful man, his great intelligence matched by his gentleness, integrity, and good will. We miss him.

See information about the Robert Schweik
Memorial fund in *ELT*’s Announcements