

# Foreword

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**T**he foreword is a tricky genre of writing. Positioned prominently, it demands the reader's immediate attention, and yet, at the same time, it is all too easily dismissed as an inessential distraction on the way to the actual text. The foreword for a serial publication such as *aspeers* is even more challenging—there are, after all, eleven forewords preceding this one, and the task of continuing the conversation begun in them is not an easy one. As is the case in any series, the dynamics at play here is one of repetition and variation, of doing justice to the core function of the foreword while adding something new and compelling.

But what, then, is the core function of the foreword? Examining the foreword as a genre of writing, it is possible to establish a number of constitutive characteristics: The foreword is concise, rarely spanning more than a few pages. It is usually written by someone other than the author, and quite often (although certainly not always) that someone is someone eminent or famous, whose endorsement lends credibility and authority to the actual publication. More often than not, the foreword is thus used as a marketing tool, turning the act of writing it into the act of writing copy.

In terms of content, the foreword aims to be reflective rather than substantial. It may offer, in quite general terms, commentary on the main text's topic, but it is more likely to reflect on the process of writing, or in the case of *aspeers*, of selecting and editing texts written by others. Apart from that, the foreword often discusses the relationship between its author and the author of the main text, adding a personal dimension to the work.

A prominent author who appreciated the genre and experimented wildly with its use is Vladimir Nabokov, whose “most systematic peritextual project was the composition of the forewords to the English translations of his Russian novels

between 1959 and 1971,” as Duncan White writes (149). John Updike called these forewords “landlordly,” arguing that Nabokov used them as a means of gaining control over his readers’ engagement with the texts. The foreword, it turns out, is more than just a meek introduction in miniature; it is a powerful tool to “roughly nudge” (Updike qtd. in White 149) the reader into the ‘right’ direction.

The core functions of the foreword, then, are to market the book or journal, to reflect on its genesis, and to guide the reader—roughly or gently—as she traverses its pages. Given these parameters, and taking into consideration *aspeers*’s twelve years of existence, one might wonder whether the format of the foreword is still truly necessary, whether there is such a need to market, reflect, and guide. After all, by now, the journal certainly stands on its own, and to a large degree, its content speaks for itself. And yet, perhaps because of the uniqueness of *aspeers* as a project, because of its “ability to keep evolving and experimenting” (Schmieder and Herrmann v), there are still elements to highlight every year, warranting the kind of contextualization that a foreword may provide.

The marketing part inherent in the foreword is certainly easy. As *aspeers* is on the brink of entering its teenage years, it is safe to say that the project has been, and continues to be, a resounding success for everyone involved—the authors, the student editors, and the general editors. This year’s call for papers again prompted numerous submissions from different parts of Europe, thus proving, yet again, the need for a peer-reviewed journal in American studies that showcases the excellent work done on the graduate level.

The process of editing this issue continued a practice begun last year, as the editing cycle was again accompanied by a team-teaching arrangement. This setup of dispersed editorial responsibility for the general editors also helped encourage the graduate editors to take ownership of the process, planning and scheduling the entire semester, discussing and evaluating the submissions, collaborating on feedback letters, acquiring additional artistic contributions and a professorial voice, and finally line-editing all the parts of the issue—by now, certainly, a tried and tested approach that has secured high editorial quality for over a decade. During this time, they were also generously supported by alumni and alumnae of *aspeers*, specifically the previous general editors Sebastian M. Herrmann and Florian Bast and the former student editors Elif Özdemir and Alina Theune.

The previous months also came with their typical share of ups and downs, of highly elating and slightly frustrating moments, which seem part and parcel of such complex collaborative projects. Yet at the end of it all, this year's seven student editors again managed to both create a compelling issue of *aspeers* and benefit (even if perhaps only in retrospect) from the intense experience of having done so in a time-sensitive, labor-intensive, and teamwork-oriented process.

Their efforts have resulted in an issue focusing centrally on the timely topic of American Anger, with most of the academic and the artistic contributions highlighting the different facets and possible understandings of anger and related sentiments. Together, the six academic graduate contributions in this issue remarkably demonstrate both the diversity and the interdisciplinarity of American studies as a field: While three of these contributions, broadly speaking, investigate US history, politics, and society, three more analyze American literature, media, and (popular) culture. They are rounded out by a professorial voice specifically taking on the question of American Anger in the contemporary political discourse as well as three artistic contributions adding an aesthetic, rather than strictly argumentative, engagement with this topic.

Unlike Nabokov, we do not have any 'landlordly' intentions to 'roughly nudge' our readers, but we rather hope that, by highlighting some of the unique elements of this journal and the process during which it is created, our reflections in this foreword complement and enhance the reading experience. In this spirit, we would like to much more gently invite you to explore this twelfth issue of *aspeers*.

#### WORKS CITED

Schmieder, Katja, and Sebastian M. Herrmann. Foreword. *aspeers*, vol. II, 2018, pp. v-vii. [www.aspeers.com/2018/foreword](http://www.aspeers.com/2018/foreword).

White, Duncan. *Nabokov and His Books: Between Late Modernism and the Literary Marketplace*. Oxford UP, 2017.