

# A Decade of Flight: *The Albatross* at Ten

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Sonja Pinto & Robert Steele

**Instead of the cross, the Albatross  
About my neck was hung.**

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge,  
“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

In our editors’ introduction to volume 9, we wished future editors luck with the journal, jokingly hoping that they would “find editing the journal to be a joy (as we did) and not an albatross around their necks” (Pinto and Steele, “Editor’s Note” 9). Little did we know that we would again be managing editors of the journal for its tenth issue. To commemorate the journal’s tenth anniversary, we’re looking back on the last decade of *The Albatross* in a special retrospective issue. For this article, we have interviewed past managing editors of *The Albatross* to track the journal’s development, its accomplishments, and its challenges.

*The Albatross*’s founders named the journal in metaphorical reference to journal’s literary critical mandate. Managing editor of volume 1, David Latter, writes “we derived our inspiration from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’ where the albatross, regardless of its efforts, is struck out of the sky before its flight is complete” (Latter, “Letter from the Editor” 2). Latter compares the lost potential of the albatross to that of unpublished undergraduate criticism and established the journal to provide a platform for that criticism to fulfill its potential. However, subsequent editors have grappled with the foreboding image of Coleridge’s albatross as the journal’s namesake. As Megan Welsh (co-managing editor 2012–13) writes, “because we had inherited the name *The Albatross*,

we ... spent a lot of time thinking about what that meant and how it might reflect what we wanted to offer other students, settling on the notion of ‘helping ideas take flight.’ (of course, that was in addition to the obligatory Coleridge and *Serenity* references)” (Welsh, Interview). However, other editors, such as volume 6 managing editor, Joey Takeda, are more blunt: “The albatross has a lousy reputation in the English language” (Takeda, “Editor’s Introduction” 4). Despite albatrosses’ unfortunate cultural significance, popularized by Coleridge, each managing editor drew new meanings from the bird’s intertextual legacies: in their introductions to their respective issues, Stephen E. Leckie quoted from Charles Baudelaire’s “The Albatross” (Leckie, “Wings Off the Ground” 5); Joey Takeda referenced Don McKay’s “How to Imagine an Albatross” (Takeda, “Editor’s Introduction” 4); and B.R. Reid alluded to Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (Reid, “Editor’s Introduction” 8). Just as the albatross’s replete cultural representations allow for different interpretations of the bird’s significance, so too do the different volumes’ editorial teams influence *The Albatross*’s significance to undergraduate students.

Founded in the 2010/2011 academic year and published by the English Students’ Association, *The Albatross* began as part of a movement in the UVic undergraduate community to establish student-run publications. As Megan Welsh notes, “At the time, it felt like student journals were popping up all over the place (*The Warren Undergraduate Review* had just launched)” (Welsh, Interview). However, founding an undergraduate journal came with its challenges. “Because it was the first issue,” writes Welsh, “we started from scratch: [we organized] layout, publishing options, online access, assessment rubrics, fundraising, copy editing—everything” (Welsh, Interview). This organizational labour, the building blocks for any academic journal, paved the way for future issues. We are grateful to Welsh and the other editors in the journal’s early years for establishing a venue for English students to publish literary criticism, which had been absent from UVic for over a decade, when other literary critical journals, such as the delightfully named *Tremor* and *Chaos*, ceased publication.

With the exception of one poetry piece in the journal's inaugural issue, *The Albatross* exclusively published works of literary criticism in its first few years of publication. The journal's sole focus on literary criticism persisted until volume 5, when Stephen E. Leckie reintroduced poetry to the journal. Leckie and his team, however, had to grapple with the new formatting problems that poetry presented: "We took a chance with the submissions and format, publishing poetry for the first time.... In fact, the biggest challenge was choosing what we published" (Leckie, Interview). Volume 5's addition to the journal's structure coincided with a greater emphasis on poetry in the English Department in 2015, as the English Students' Association established an annual poetry prize in that year (the contest still runs annually!). In volumes 5 to 7, *The Albatross* published an array of outstanding poetry with a diversity of genres; volume 5, however, had a distinctly modernist flair: "Most submissions of poetry came from a class assignment, where students could follow a modernist poet's style" (Leckie, Interview). In later years, with the growth of other creative writing and interdisciplinary arts journals on campus, such as *This Side of West* and *The Warren*, *The Albatross's* editorial team felt that it could better support the undergraduate community by refocusing on literary criticism. Therefore, in the 2018 issue, managing editor of volume 8, Michael Carelse, decided to reorient the journal to its literary critical foundations:

My overall goal was to raise the journal's profile as one of UVic's leading undergraduate academic journals. To that end, we got rid of the poetry section that had been a feature of volumes 5 through 7 and instead focused on publishing only undergraduate research papers. (Carelse, Interview)

Volume 8's emphasis on literary criticism created new publication opportunities for undergraduate scholars and sparked a resurgence of undergraduate interest in submitting literary criticism. Indeed, in volume 5 of the journal, "nearly all the critical papers submitted were published" (Leckie, Interview); however, as undergraduate interest in publishing literary criticism steadily grew, so too did our

submission pool. Despite our attempts to publish as many essays as possible each year—publishing a full ten in this issue—publication in the journal has become more competitive, and we are now only able to publish fewer than a quarter of the articles that we receive.

Over its ten-year run, *The Albatross* has flourished as the leading venue for undergraduate literary critical publications at UVic. During our management of the journal, we increased the number of student volunteers to a staff of twenty-seven editors, the largest number of editors the journal has seen. With this larger team and publication in volumes 9 and 10, we noticed the greater demand for editorial training and publication opportunities among undergraduate students, and we responded to that demand by emphasizing the journal's role as a training ground for editors. We continued the practice of offering substantive editing workshops with Drs. Lisa Surridge and Mary Elizabeth Leighton, who shared their substantive editing process developed during their careers as editors of academic journals. We also introduced a separate copy-editing workshop, run this year by past *Albatross* managing editor, current UVic English MA student, and professional copy editor, Michael Carelse. Also in collaboration with Michael Carelse, we introduced a publication workshop during the fall term, which was open to all undergraduate students and gave tips and tricks on how to get published.

Along with the journal's successes over its decade-long run, each issue's editorial team encountered various problems. While volumes 7 to 10 benefited from the design expertise of Emma Fanning, earlier editorial teams had to contend with the daunting task of laying out the journal, as Amy Côté describes: "I remember Alex Coates [co-managing editor for volume 3] and I cursing InDesign as we tried—largely unsuccessfully—to format seemingly endless footnotes. Since then, I viscerally understood why academic journals tend to prefer endnotes, even though they're demonstrably worse to read" (Côté, Interview). Beyond the challenge of designing the journal, editors have contended continually with the mistakes that slip through the cracks. "I remember

late nights spent copy editing in the Student Union Building (and the typo that still found its way to the back cover),” writes Megan Welsh, describing every editor’s everlasting fear of the inevitable typo, a feeling shared by Michael Carelse:

Unfortunately, I am now aware of three errors that made their way into the journal: one misspelled name, one spacing inconsistency, and one minor factual error. If you ask me, I will point them out to you. However, if, dear reader, you find any other errors in my journal, please do not tell me. I don’t want to know. For that reason, I have not read my journal since we sent it to the printer, and I perhaps never will. (Carelse, Interview)

Despite the problems the journal faces, each year’s editorial team is proud of the journal, both as a venue for academic publication and as a pillar of the English community at UVic and in Greater Victoria. Every year, upon the journal’s publication in the spring, *The Albatross* launches at the annual English Students’ Association Spring Gala and *Albatross* launch. Many managing editors’ best memories of *The Albatross* come from the launch, as Amy Coté reminisces:

My fondest memory from my years editing *The Albatross* was our launch party for the second issue of the journal, at the (pre-renovation) Solstice Cafe. The whole evening was such a joyful celebration of a year’s hard work by the whole editorial team and the issue’s authors. In particular, I remember a rousing game of ‘Pin the Apostrophe on the It’s.’ I believe copy-editor extraordinaire Cam Butt beat us all handily. (Coté, Interview)

Karyn Wisselink, managing editor for volume 4, called that year’s combined launch with *The Corvette* (UVic’s History undergraduate journal) at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria “the event of the season” and emphasized the journal’s important connections across departments: “we were so pleased to be able to celebrate our authors with such ceremony and to create interdepartmental friendships within the Faculty of Humanities” (Wisselink, Interview). The jour-

nal's community-oriented focus developed in part because of its close faculty mentorship. Many of the English department faculty have contributed to the journal's success. Notably, past issues have thanked the following English faculty members for their contributions to the success of the journal: Luke Carson, Susan Doyle, Gordon Fulton, Iain Higgins, Erin Kelly, Mary Elizabeth Leighton, Robert Miles, Allan Mitchell, Michael Nowlin, Richard Pickard, Stephen Ross, and Lisa Surridge. Moreover, the journal has participated in many faculty endeavours, such as the following event described by Amy Coté:

I remember *The Albatross* editorial team joining the English Department's "100 Special Books" series organized by Dr. Surridge. She specifically requested that we wear our new editorial team T-shirts ... and that they be ironed. An iron was a surprisingly difficult thing to find among our members and, long story short, two of us ended up with a stack of wrinkled shirts and a fold-out ironing board in what was then the honours lounge an hour before the event. We cleaned up well enough, though!  
(Coté, Interview)

Speaking of "cleaning up well enough," the journal's design is greatly indebted to its community connections: Robert and Karver Everson, a father-son graphic design team from the K'ómoks First Nation, designed the journal's logo for volumes 2 to 5, and Emma Fanning, a local graphic designer and UVic English alumna, has designed the journal's logo and layout since its seventh issue. Moreover, *The Albatross* has also been an integral part of the Victoria community even beyond campus: B.R. Reid often spots "worn cop[ies] of *The Albatross's* seventh volume at Habit Coffee in Victoria's Chinatown," and feels "great pride whenever [he sees] its face on the magazine rack" (Reid, Interview).

Over its ten-year history, *The Albatross* has been an invaluable resource to its undergraduate students: As Karyn Wisselink explains, "The essays that are published are the result of careful research and thoughtful editing. The Albatross editorial team elevates the students and the English

department, offers a look into the publishing process that governs much of Western scholarship, and creates a space for new ideas” (Wisselink, Interview). The journal’s pedagogical approach, its commitment to open-access publishing, and its community engagement will continue to benefit UVic’s English community, and we are excited to see how the journal develops over its next ten years.

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