

The Art of Deep Shepherding

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Shepherding is the process of advising and helping an author improve their manuscript before publication.¹ In short, shepherding is like being an editor—in the classic sense of the word—for a manuscript. There are a number of tasks a shepherd must undertake:

- help the author make the manuscript be the best it can given the amount of time available
- help the author organize the manuscript the best way given its nature
- help the author use the best language and writing style for the manuscript
- help the author make the manuscript as readable as possible for the expected range of readers
- when there are reviewer comments, ensure that the most important ones are addressed.

The extent to which a shepherd can help with all these depends on the knowledge and skill of the shepherd along with the knowledge, skill, and amenability of the author.

In these guidelines I will use Knuth’s “dangerous bend” symbol



in the margin by places where what’s being suggested might be at the far end of a shepherd’s abilities—that is, places where some shepherds are unable to go—or where the advice is asking a lot of the shepherd, author, or the material.

1 SHEPHERDING

Shepherding is the process of advising / helping an author complete a manuscript; this help can be limited to presentation and simple writing issues, or can extend to structure, genre, and even content. The depth and extent of the shepherd’s work are determined by agreement between shepherd and author. Shepherds assume that the manuscript is intended for an audience beyond its current author—the audience is not present during shepherding.

Shepherding can be part of a peer-review or publication process; other times it’s a more informal arrangement between a shepherd and an author—the shepherd is perhaps eager to help improve a particular manuscript or help a particular writer. When part of a review process, shepherding can take place either before or after review; when after, the shepherd might have access to reviewers’ comments and suggestions; when before the shepherd might also be part of the review process, perhaps providing recommendations to the reviewers. Sometimes, shepherds are plucked from the pool of reviewers. Regardless of these details, the process of shepherding is the same.

For some venues, the role of the shepherd is to ensure the author attends to the comments, remarks, and suggestions of the reviewers; the shepherd primarily acts as the “voice” of the reviewers. I call this type of shepherding *shallow shepherding*, even though it is important work. This document is intended for *deep shepherding* where the shepherd’s ideas, observations, and suggestions are central to the process.

In the context of shepherding, the *sheep* is the manuscript: both the author and shepherd steer the manuscript toward its best expression. Though a shepherd may act as a teacher, the author should never be thought of as the sheep—the author never “sheepishly” obeys the shepherd; they work together.

¹This paper is adapted from “HOPL Shepherding,” written by Richard P. Gabriel, Guy L. Steele Jr., and Mark Priestley for the ACM SIGPLAN Fourth History of Programming Languages Conference (HOPL IV).

1.1 Shepherding and Revision

Sometimes a shepherd helps an author *revise* a manuscript. Although this might seem to be a trivial or obvious statement, it reveals a distinction important to the way shepherding takes place.

In general, a shepherd is called upon to do their work once the author is fairly certain *what* is to be said. There could be some content-related changes to be made—particularly if the shepherd is equally (or even more) expert in the subject matter as the author—but typically the shepherd is looking at the structure of the manuscript and the words on the page to help the author get everything across well to readers—to help the author make the manuscript the best it can be. The process of revising, however, involves some degree of exploration and discovery—the author is seeking an understanding of what is to be said, and so some revisions aim at adding provisional material to see where it leads, and other revisions aim to delete or rearrange material to see what that reveals about the subject matter. Joan Didion writes:

I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.

—Joan Didion, *Why I Write*

Some say “revision” = “re-vision.” A shepherd can be called on to help with this process, as we’ll see later when we look at some of examples of shepherding. In these sorts of revisions, each revision is like an experiment testing a hypothesis about what the topic is, and so a shepherd in helping set up those experiments can be viewed as a colleague in the process of discovery that revision can be. In these cases, the shepherd and author need to have developed a deep mutual trust.

This sort of shepherding is relatively rare. A good (and short) book about revision is *The Art of Revision* by Peter Ho Davies.

1.2 A Shepherd is an Editor

A shepherd brings fresh eyes to a manuscript, objective eyes. At one end of the spectrum, a shepherd helps with this:

... pruning, shaping, clarifying, tidying inconsistencies of tense and pronouns and location and tone, noticing all the sentences that could be read in two different ways, dividing awkward long sentences into short ones, putting the writer back on the main road if he has strayed down a side path, building bridges where the writer has lost the reader by not paying attention to his transitions, questioning matters of judgment and taste. A [shepherd's] hand must also be invisible. Whatever he adds in his own words shouldn't sound like his own words; they should sound like the writer's words.

—William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*

The other end is exemplified by Tay Hohoff, an editor at J. P. Lippincott. In the 1950s the writer Harper Lee was writing about her father, whom she loved and admired but who was a “gentleman bigot” in the South. Her first attempt at fictionalizing him was called “Go Set a Watchman” (which was eventually published in 2015). It has been described as “full of stilted exchanges between a benighted father and his more enlightened daughter. It wasn’t only bad storytelling; it was the sort of story that editors didn’t want to tell about the South.” The manuscript was rejected everywhere except at J. P. Lippincott where Tay Hohoff

... decided to take a chance on Lee, but encouraged her to abandon the didactic, abrasive scenes between adults and focus on the manuscript's endearing childhood scenes. For two years, Hohoff helped Lee create “To Kill a Mockingbird”: a coming-of-age story

in which the protagonist and narrator, Scout—along with Jem and their summer sidekick, Dill—learns that she has misjudged the local outcast, Boo Radley, even as others in the town misjudge Tom Robinson.

—Casey Cep, *The Contested Legacy of Atticus Finch*

(If you don't know the importance of "To Kill a Mockingbird," you should look into it. That "Watchman" was written before "Mockingbird" was a bit of shock to the literary world.)

Not all shepherds work this hard on a manuscript, but sometimes shepherding can be extensive and intense.

1.3 When to Shepherd

In general, a manuscript is a candidate for shepherding if one of the following is the case:

- after a round of peer review when the number and extent of reviewers' must-do comments are large or broad; a shepherd then can help the author manage time and can direct the author's effort to the most important parts of the manuscript (shallow shepherding)
- the manuscript is viewed as being publishable but needs revision to make it more understandable or effective, but reviewers' comments—if there be any—do not provide enough information to guide the author
- a volunteer shepherd steps forward to push the manuscript forward; for some conferences, such as Pattern Languages of Programs (PLOP), papers are shepherded before the program committee reviews them
- an author aiming to produce a better manuscript approaches a shepherd for help.

1.4 A Shepherd is a Passionate Advocate

In the best situations a shepherd will **eagerly** volunteer—because the shepherd believes in the manuscript and very much wants to see it develop to be wonderful. If no one volunteers to shepherd a manuscript, that can be a sign to a program committee or editorial board that the manuscript should not be accepted / published. When there is no such eager volunteer, the program chair or editor must become convinced that a reluctant shepherd can act assiduously for the manuscript.

1.5 The Author is the Author

The first rule of shepherding is that the manuscript belongs to the author. In peer-review contexts, papers not rejected might need to be revised—in some cases significantly, and in other cases the paper needs to be completed—and the final outcome depends on how well the author addresses the reviewers' and shepherd's concerns. But the manuscript turned in for final review is the one the author wants to turn in, not the one the shepherd wants.

1.6 Shepherding is Personal

The identities of the author and the shepherd will be known to both of them. This is because one role of the shepherd is as a guide to the author, and thus is like the relationship between a sensei and a novice. The word "sensei" means "one born before" or "one who comes before," and generally these terms refer to the relative maturity of the two in a particular area. In this case, the shepherd is using all their skill and knowledge to help the author move the manuscript along. (In other circumstances, the people who are shepherd and author could easily be reversed.)

A shepherd can help because typically the shepherd has a less personal stake in the manuscript than the author, who might have favorite ways of saying things, specific hobby horses, specific axes to grind, etc. Thus the shepherd can bring a more objective—or at least less invested—view on the manuscript. Moreover, the shepherd is first and foremost a reader of the manuscript, and

can be taken as a stand-in for a typical reader. For example, if a shepherd tells an author that some passage is not understandable, that should be accepted by the author as a fact (“no, you actually *do* understand it”—?!).

2 HOW IT'S DONE

Here is the process.

2.1 Introduce Yourself

Shepherding requires a personal relationship. Contact the author introducing yourself, telling what you believe is worth knowing about you, and outlining the process. This is best done in a casual style to encourage trust. In particular, the shepherd should make it clear that the shepherd understands that the author is the author, and that the shepherd's role is to make constructive suggestions and to serve as a sounding board.

2.2 Ask, Don't Tell

A good general technique to use is to ask the author questions about the material instead of making pronouncements about it. For example, instead of saying that a particular section is confusing, ask whether it means this or it means that. The author then can see concretely where readers might find issues and how they might get off track. If an author tries to explain a section by referring to a “fact” that is not apparent to you, ask where that fact is explained in the text or what bibliographic reference to look at. Try to keep the focus of the discussion on the text and not on the author.

The essential idea is this: be (and appear) to the author less like a critic of the manuscript and more like a helper. This makes accepting advice easier for the author. Moreover, when you shift your stance away from a critic's, the exchanges will be less defensive, and more ways to improve the manuscript are likely to be uncovered.

2.3 At Least Three Exchanges

In general, successful shepherding encounters take three exchanges, where a single exchange consists of the shepherd sending revision comments to the author and the author responding with a revised manuscript:

- introduction and first set of comments
- author responds with a new draft
- shepherd reviews the changes and provides a second set of comments
- author responds with a new draft
- shepherd reviews changes and provides final comments; if relevant, the shepherd prepares a final report for the reviewers
- author sends the final draft to the shepherd (and PC, if relevant; PC makes the final decision)

The primary advantage a shepherd has over the author is distance: the shepherd sees the manuscript with fresher eyes and can therefore—theoretically—see problems more clearly and quickly. Sometimes after three exchanges, the shepherd can grow too close to the manuscript to have that advantage—as well as too exhausted.

In some cases there will be many more exchanges than three. One example is described in the section “Wave of Revision” further along in this document. Another is when the manuscript is not complete, needs extensive revision, or requires substantial reorganization.


2.4 What to Exchange

There are a variety of exchange techniques in shepherding:

- a text document with a list of page/line numbers with remarks
- a physically mailed, marked-up manuscript
- a scanned-in, marked-up manuscript sent, for example, as a PDF
- a marked-up PDF using Acrobat Pro or some other mark-up application
- a shared document directly marked up (à la Google Docs or Overleaf)
- a “source” document exchanged through email, Dropbox, WeTransfer, GitHub, etc.
(this method and the shared-document method facilitate direct shepherd edits)

When a manuscript is lengthy and the depth of shepherding help is profound, page/line lists can be awkward. However, the method of exchange is, obviously, up to the shepherd and author.

But note that some of these methods of exchange hint at the nature of the shepherd / author relationship. While the list of page/line numbers with remarks speaks of a distant reviewer / candidate relationship—a relationship based on criticism—the source document exchange with shepherd-edits speaks of something more like a co-author or teacher / student relationship. The best shepherds aim toward the more up-close end of the spectrum. And in fact, I occasionally have seen authors invite their shepherds to be real co-authors.

 If the shepherd does any direct work on the document, it is very important that a technology be used that makes it easy for the author to identify—and revert if necessary—changes made by the shepherd. The author must decide or agree on the appropriate method and technology when interacting in this manner.

2.5 Before the First Exchange

When shepherding is done before or outside peer review, the shepherd should read the manuscript with an eye toward structure, clarity, coverage, and genre; what the intended reader knows; how the material unfolds; matters of style, punctuation, and typesetting; and anything else that affects the quality of the manuscript. The shepherd’s suggestions should be in the first email to the author. The shepherd’s introduction can be part of this as well.

When shepherding is done in the context of peer review, the first two things a shepherd should do before the first exchange with the author are as follows.

2.5.1 *Prioritize Reviewer Comments.* When review precedes shepherding, an important source of suggestions for the author comes from the reviewers. Before shepherding begins, the reviewers will have made comments, and some of them might be labeled as required revisions or corrections. For less critical comments, the shepherd should judge how important each is and send the entire prioritized list to the author. If the shepherd has suggestions for the author about how to address the reviewers’ comments, these should be included in the first exchange.


Sometimes a shepherd simply helps an author address reviewer comments—by prioritizing, by suggesting approaches, by reviewing revisions aimed at addressing them, etc. If the reviewers and program chair need only this, then that’s all the shepherd must do. This is typically the case for papers that are “almost there.”

2.5.2 *Re-review the Submission and Make Suggestions.* The shepherd should re-read the entire manuscript—even if already a reviewer²—with the same eye that’s described above. The shepherd’s suggestions, along with a prioritized list of the reviewers’ comments, should be in the first email to the author. The shepherd’s introduction can be part of this as well.

The shepherd and author should establish a schedule for getting the three exchanges done before the final submission date.


²In some contexts, a shepherd might also be a reviewer.

2.6 Structure and Genre

The structure of a paper is the order of, nature of, and relationships among its sections; the genre of a paper is, for example, whether it is a technical or scientific paper, a scholarly history, an essay, a historical narrative, a pattern language, a practitioner's report, or any other characteristic that describes how the material is presented. 

Suggestions regarding structure and genre are within bounds for most deep shepherding situations. However, the larger and more comprehensive the suggested revisions, the more sure the shepherd should be of their potential effectiveness, and the earlier in the shepherding process they should be made. An important consideration is that a shepherd is striving to help an author make the author's manuscript better, not to make the manuscript into the shepherd's.

Because many manuscripts are still works in progress, their shepherds should be looking carefully at the structure and genre as well as the coverage, context, and content of the manuscript to help the author complete then revise and polish that manuscript.

For one paper submitted to Onward! 2015, RPG was the shepherd and he recommended changing the genre of the paper from polemic to fictional interview. Although the paper was on its way to being rejected, the revised and reenvisioned paper was accepted and published. It is by David West, and its title is "The Cuban Software Revolution: 2016–2025." The paper is an essay, and it describes a different way of doing software development. The first draft was a sort-of personal history of how Dave West matured into a software development "guru" and the many mistakes he observed other people making and the nature of the forces behind the proper way to develop software. It had some facts wrong and otherwise presented itself as one man's whine. RPG liked the ideas, but the program committee was skeptical. RPG wanted to keep the personal story part, but didn't see how to make it less whiny. One of the suggestions was a genre change—to make the essay into a fictional interview. Dave West picked up on the idea and suggested making it a story about how he moved to Cuba and started the great Cuban Software Revolution,³ which was possible only because Cuba had been so thoroughly isolated technologically from the rest of the world that it developed a strong "tinkerer" mentality. The setup is that a magazine writer is sent to Cuba to interview Dave West about all this—the essay is a fictional interview conducted in the future. This had nice advantages: it defamiliarizd⁴ the context so that readers were not tempted as much to think of why the ideas would not work in the US; in this form the personal history aspects became natural; the interviewer could also provide signposts about what the meat of the essay was about; it put in play several characters who could amplify the material, including Cuba itself as a character. 

Dave West and RPG did three-plus exchanges over the course of two full months, and the essay was accepted and then performed at Onward! as a play.

This is an extreme example. Onward! is an ACM SIGPLAN Symposium, and even its essays are typically tame in style and genre. Dave West's essay is dramatically different—so different that the first section is reproduced in Appendix A. It demonstrates that boundaries are not always as impermeable as one might believe.

Changes of genre this large are not recommended. I describe it only because I believe it is an example of an extreme point within the boundary of what can be done with shepherding. A more common genre-bending suggestion would be, for example, in a programming-language history conference to change from a scholarly recitation of a committee-centric march to standardization

³Also fictional.

⁴*Defamiliarization* is the artistic technique of presenting to audiences common things in an unfamiliar or strange way so they can gain new perspectives and see the world differently.

to a narrative about how technical influences brought to light by committee members shifted the direction of that march.

2.7 Presentation and Style

The shepherd represents the reader. The shepherd should always question what the target reader knows at every point in the manuscript, what should be explained next, and how much the author should assume the reader knows in general. This does not mean that the shepherd should always aim to expand the pool of qualified readers by requiring changes to accommodate them (perhaps with tutorial material), but the shepherd should develop a good understanding of the sweet spot of readership and aim to make the manuscript work well for them. This can result in taking out tutorial material when the manuscript is centered on the hard frontier of a discipline.

A paper submitted to *The Art, Science, and Engineering of Programming* comes to mind. It was a fairly technical paper talking about the various ways a difficult concept in programming languages (monads) is taught. The paper was not about that concept but about how it is explained and taught—that is, the paper did not have a tutorial aspect. The program committee debated whether to include tutorial material to expand its readership, but finally decided to let the paper remain aimed toward readers who already understood the concept of monads but who would benefit from learning the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to teaching it; the program committee asked the author to produce, at a later date, a companion tutorial paper explaining the concept.

In this case, the reviewers’ debate on the idea of adding tutorial material, which was made visible to the author, was enough to provide shepherd-like advice to that author, who revised the paper beautifully to slightly expand the comfortable readership.

This takes us to the matter of good writing. I happen to believe in good writing. However, being a good writer and being able to teach it are not required to be a good shepherd. It is typically enough to be able to say when something was not understood or where the manuscript led the shepherd astray.

Advice to shepherds: if you are a good writer, then you can suggest style or good writing approaches to the author. And if there is sufficient rapport between you and the author, you can even suggest some rephrasings. However, this can be dangerous and the author can easily think of you as presumptuous. Tread lightly here.

A difficult case is when the manuscript is, essentially, incomprehensible to the shepherd. One way to approach this is to—with the author’s permission—provide a rewrite of a short, critical section. This might suggest to the author the level of knowledge a prospective reader might have, as well as point out where the author’s natural writing is not working. This, however, can be unpleasant territory, and if attempted, should be after the first exchange of comments.

In a related arena, it is appropriate to point out typos, ungrammatical sentences, spelling mistakes, punctuation issues, typesetting problems, etc. For example, I (and Guy Steele Jr.) always point out that the Oxford (or serial) comma leads to less confusion in readers—because it is the conservative choice—but I leave it up to the author whether to use it. Most authors like to see such problems noted, but not all revise them.

I suggest pointing out only recurring errors in the first round, and saving detailed comments on typos, etc., until the third or final round.

2.8 Strive to Retain the Author’s Voice

In many cases a manuscript is aimed at “reporting results” or is assumed to require a neutral authorial voice. Legal, bureaucratic, technical, and scientific papers typically fall into this category. Here the shepherd should strive to strip away the author’s voice. A good guide to such writing is “Clear and Simple as the Truth: Writing Classic Prose” by Francis-Noël Thomas and Mark Turner.

However, in other situations the author’s voice is an important part of the text. Some computer-science conferences and journals accept essays; essays rely on voice; seeing—or better, hearing—how an author explains things is central to the text.

The voice of the author reveals itself in word choice, manner of speaking, punctuation, diction level, sentence complexity, musicality, and other aspects of the writing. I recommend shepherds try to retain these qualities if the manuscript is understandable and not riddled with grammatical, punctuation, and other egregious errors. If we made every author sound the same, we would be losing information.

This can sometimes require shepherds to be lenient toward informal and non-scientific writing. Here are some examples.

In some circumstances it’s okay to use the first person singular (“I”):

In 2003, I and most other members of the committee had high hopes for...

This is better and more clear than many re-wordings. (Approximately half of the papers in the first ACM SIGPLAN History of Programming Languages conference (HOPL) include substantial passages written in the first person singular.)

In some circumstances it’s okay to use the second person (“you”):

When you take the broadest notion of Lisp, programming in and with fundamental data structures, Clojure is both clearly a Lisp and seeking to extend the Lisp idea. In being built on abstractions and strongly focusing on functional programming, it is a novel Lisp.

This sounds like the author. The use of “you” is also a well-worn practice in serious writing:

The more or less money you get for any commodity, in the London market, for example, the more or less labour it will at that time and place enable you to purchase or command.

—Adam Smith

Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it.

—George Eliot

Some of you might have noticed the very first sentence in this document:

Shepherding is the process of advising and helping an author improve their manuscript before publication.

—Gabriel

This wording was deliberate. The use of the plural pronouns “they,” “their,” “them,” and “themselves” to refer to an individual is considered by many to be ungrammatical or at least to be bowing to political correctness. Some readers are repulsed by this. Its use in English dates back to the early 1400s, and has been used by Shakespeare and others:

*There’s not a man I meet but doth salute me
As if I were their well-acquainted friend,
And every one doth call me by my name.*

—William Shakespeare

A person can’t help their birth.

—William Makepeace Thackeray

To do a person in means to kill them.

—George Bernard Shaw

When you love someone you do not love them all the time.

—Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Some sentences are not improved by avoiding “improper” plural pronouns such as the one used by Anne Morrow Lindbergh above. Consider the author’s voice—including the beauty of sentences—when commenting on informal prose.

Moreover, there is more to word choice than laying out simple propositions in the most straightforward way. Sean Lennon (the singer/songwriter son of John Lennon and Yoko Ono) wrote the following in the *New York Post* in 2005 while trying to find a girlfriend:

Any girl who is interested must simply be born female and between the ages of 18 and 45. They must have an IQ above 130 and they must be honest.

If there were ever a pair of sentences where the gender of reference is clear, it’s these. So, why “they” instead of “she”? The use of “they” is a reminder that the pronoun is not referring to any one specific person. If it were “she,” that would hint that the writer intends to refer to a single, known person. “Any girl” is a quantifier that ranges over a set. The numbers don’t match, but the sentences are clear and the implication of being unknown is made. (Keep in mind that the pronoun systems of most spoken languages do not handle relationships between specific individuals and members of aggregates anywhere near as cleanly and precisely as map and reduce and lambda expressions can!)

One last one:

*Now leaden slumber with life’s strength doth fight;
And every one to rest themselves betake,
Save thieves, and cares, and troubled minds, that wake.* —William Shakespeare

It’s perilous to second-guess the bard, / but I will humbly venture this advice: / “themselves” is better matched with “all” than “one,” / or “each” or “every”—do you agree?

Even though I don’t recommend insisting on corrections to the author’s natural voice when the wording jars, I do recommend pointing out those places and explaining why some readers might have difficulty with them. (“Did you really mean ‘themselves’? Is there some clearer way to say this?”)

2.9 Wave of Revision

Sometimes a thorough revision or rewrite is needed—for example, when the manuscript is aimed at the wrong readership or level of knowledge; or when the genre is being changed. In these cases the author might need to move forward incrementally with shepherd reviews at a smaller scale. In these cases there can be shorter, more frequent interactions in which the author revises just a few pages—perhaps just one section’s worth—and sends them (as part of the whole manuscript) to the shepherd. Sometimes when operating in this mode, there can be several short exchanges per week. This can make sense when the amount of new material to review on each exchange is just some paragraphs or a few pages. This mode can be thought of as a sort of “pair writing.”

I don’t expect every shepherd to engage in such fine-grained shepherding, but I mention it because it can happen, and it can be a good idea.

2.10 Content

When a shepherd is expert in the subject matter of the manuscript, it’s permissible for the shepherd to remark on the content of the manuscript, but not to insist that specific changes be made. Feel free, however, to make persuasive arguments if warranted. A good approach is to ask questions about the material so the author can see where readers might be confused or where the author’s point of departure is too narrow.

2.11 Diminishing Suggestions

When things are going well, the manuscript will be converging after the second exchange is finished. This means that the final exchange is cleaning up. If at first the shepherd is like a full-blown editor, the shepherd in the third exchange will become mostly a copy editor. However, it's possible that more than three exchanges will be needed, and possibly those additional ones can be handled or assisted by a program chair, editor, or a second ("tag team") shepherd.

2.12 Final Report

When part of a peer-review, the last chore for the shepherd is a hard one: the final report. This is a summary to the program committee of how shepherding went. This report should include the following:

- how each of the reviewers' comments were handled; not all need to be addressed in the revision, but it is important that each comment be considered and, if not acted on, an explanation provided; how much to say is up to the shepherd
- what major revisions were made and why; how many exchanges were done; in what order were things addressed
- how receptive the author was to suggestions; in principle this is not important information for the program committee, but some PCs do find it useful; for conferences that use the writers' workshop format—such as PLoP—this is crucial information because it goes to how well the author will respond to the workshop; did the author care about the readers, and is the final manuscript the result of good effort or grudging compliance?
- a recommendation regarding acceptance; when shepherds take part in the ultimate decision, the opinion of the shepherd is of special, critical importance; however, the shepherd might have developed a bond with the author and the material—may in fact feel like a co-author—and it is the job of the rest of program committee to take this into account; the program committee makes the final decision, not the shepherd.

3 EPILOGUE

Writing isn't easy, and sometimes we don't take it as seriously as we could as scientists and engineers. One way to change this is to take shepherding seriously. When we help other authors we also help ourselves by being able to see what it is we notice about other writers' writing. Maybe we can help ourselves notice more about our own writing.

A “THE CUBAN SOFTWARE REVOLUTION: 2016–2025”: FIRST SECTION

This is the first few paragraphs of Dave West’s essay.

My Story

Writer: It was dark and cool inside the Bodequita.

The darkness, because not a single ray from the blinding Caribbean sun made it past the heavy curtain separating the bar from the entry vestibule and the street.

The coolness, ephemeral and mostly illusory—vestiges of early morning cold emanating from the walls and floor curled in response to the lazy twirling of the fans on the ceiling. Faint breezes, cool only in contrast to the broiling temperature outside, caressed my face and arms.

Standing behind the curtain, I let my eyes adjust to the light thrown by a few incandescent bulbs on faux candles on the table and a bit of neon behind the bar.

When I got this interview I was told the bartender would know where he could be found, so I stepped up and asked “*Professor West, por favor.*” A quick nod directed me to the wooden open riser stairs leading to a loft and eventually a second floor.

The bar was not half full.

Before the embargo was imposed, the Bodequita was a must-see tourist mecca—one of Hemingway’s two favorite bars, they say. *My mojito in the Bodeguita del Medio and my daiquiri in the Floridita*, Hemingway’s words, in his own hand, framed behind the bar.

Most post-embargo tourists have only a cursory knowledge of Hemingway, few have read any of his work, and next to none show any nostalgic interest in the master and his habits in his adopted home.

Only one of the tables on the mezzanine balcony was occupied.

An old man sporting the long flowing hair popular in the 1960s, quite grey now, framed a face—its most distinguished element were the eyes.

“*Professor West?*”

West: Just Dave will do. Sit down. Mojito?