

Editor–author relationship is one of give and take

At our August meeting, trade publisher Sophie Cunningham and author Luke Davies talked about their experiences of working on Lukes novel, Candy, due for release in September.

Sophie

I always feel a bit self-conscious about giving these talks because it's been a long time since I last edited a book from its first draft to the very end of the process. In recent years I've been doing a lot of structural editing, but other people have been doing other parts of the process. So while I'll talk about them, Luke probably has more insights into how they work at the moment than I do.

I will read an early draft of a manuscript and make very detailed but very general comments. I won't mark the manuscript necessarily. I might mark a chapter if there's a particular problem with language or a stylistic problem, but I don't do that through the whole manuscript.

When I was doing a lot of copyediting I would pick up things like a character walking into the room in a red dress and leaving in a green dress. That kind of mistake can happen a lot if someone has done several drafts. Especially with word processors, people tend to rearrange material rather than rewriting the whole thing, so those kinds of inconsistencies are more likely to happen.

With Luke's book, I worked on an earlier draft with him and the copyediting was done by Sandy Webster. A lot of the final changes were done with the help of Annette Barlow, who works

in-house as a production editor. Those are very different processes and as an editor you might find yourself being part of any one of them.

One of the big differences between fiction and nonfiction editing, and I work with both, is that fiction is often more
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Next meeting:

Tuesday 2 September 1997

The state of the language —it's beaut

Frank Devine, columnist for the *Australian*

Frank Devine believes English is bursting with life and vitality. He sees signs of this health in such phenomena as the return of the descriptive dictionary and the growing power of databases to reflect language as it is actually used. He is overjoyed to see Fowler's *Modern English Usage* reinvented by R. W. Burchfield ('I'm sure to stick the boot into Fowler', says Frank. 'Just a bit.')

A distinguished journalist, Frank has been editor of the *Chicago Sun Times*, the *New York Post* and the *Australian*. He writes on language every Saturday for the *Weekend Australian*. This is a meeting not to be missed.

Non-members welcome. 6.30 pm for 7 pm in the Rooftop Function Centre, 4th floor, Australian Museum (enter from William Street). Drinks and light refreshments provided. **Please RSVP by Friday 29 August** to (02) 9552 0039 (voicemail). Members \$10; non-members and those who don't RSVP, \$12.

Coming meetings:

2 October: Lindsay Mackerras (rescheduled from July) on the role and meaning of style.

4 November: John Gibbons, from the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney.

Give and take

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private and personal. I'm not saying that a nonfiction writer doesn't care passionately, but novels are a bit like a first child. The writing process is often quite obsessive for the writer and as a publisher you constantly have to be aware that, while you might be working on 20 books at once, they've been working at home eight hours a day on this thing which is really precious to them.

You're also often working with material that's intensely private. That can be difficult because it can become very hard to be critical in an objective sense, which is often what the author needs. They don't necessarily continually need support; they also want somebody who can be hard and say, 'This isn't working'. You have to balance empathy with the author with a more objective view and not let your affection for the author interfere with how you read the manuscript.

One of the advantages of working with a lot of books is that you don't have the same amount of emotional energy, and in some ways I think my editorial comments are better because they're not as swayed by my friendships or otherwise with the author. I find it easier to be direct and less concerned about hurting their feelings.

I think it is very important that one always couch criticism in a constructive way. Instead of saying, 'The way it ends is really hopeless', you say, 'I really understood exactly what was going on un-

til the end and then I felt that you lost me.' That kind of constant positive wording is really important (and I hate saying this in front of authors because it probably makes them feel like they're being patronised).

Authors have control

Another important thing, especially with fiction, is making it clear to authors that they're in control of the editorial process and that they're responsible for the final result. I think a lot of authors think that editing is a power trip, that you like to impose your view on the text. You have to make it clear that the decisions are theirs and that you're making comments because you genuinely believe the book will be improved by them.

It might be different with mass market fiction that has to attend to certain formulas, but certainly with literary fiction you're very unlikely to take it on unless you have real faith that you want to do it even if they don't accept any of your changes. If you're only prepared to publish something if certain changes are made you sort that out early, because the bottom line is they don't have to change anything other than real mistakes.

I've known writers whose novels haven't been edited much and, while at the time they thought that was a relief, a year down the track they've been fairly antagonistic towards their publishers because they thought they weren't told the hard stuff early on. And they're the ones who ended up feeling like fools because they're the ones who got the reviews saying, 'If only the middle hadn't gone on for 150 pages, or included that'.

One of the most common conversations I have with writers of either autobiography or fiction is about their voice. The central character, who's usually the one based on fact if there is an autobiographical element, is often the most shadowy and obscure character in the whole book—a bit like someone holding a camera and filming everyone but themselves.

I looked at the letter that I sent Luke when we first began working together. In it I talked about the first person narrator having no physical [presence]; there was no idea of what the narrator looked like. I think that was partly a deliberate decision on Luke's part, but it is quite common for authors to not describe the person that might resemble themselves in any way. But you can't always make assumptions about the central character having some reflection on the author.

Editing is arrogance

Editing always involves a bit of arrogance. You say, 'I didn't get this bit' or 'I slipped or stumbled over this sentence and therefore it's not working.' But I think it is the only way someone can be an editor. A piece of advice Hilary McPhee gave me is that if you feel something is wrong, assume there is a problem. Without that confidence you don't have any tools; your tool of the trade is your ability to have a finely tuned sense of judgement and then to trust it.

If you're getting it wrong and consistently suggesting things that aren't appropriate, you'll find out pretty quickly. But I think you have to go in with a certain amount of confidence; otherwise you aren't doing the job or being particularly useful.

Luke's novel was sold at auction, so I read it as a second or third draft, probably. There's always a fine line between wanting to get it and also saying what you think needs to be done. One of my main concerns was the representation of the character Candy. It's a novel about a relationship and Candy is the woman in that relationship. When it became clear that I was going to be the publisher and the editor on the book, I faxed Luke, who was living overseas at the time, and gave him my general responses to the book.

Obviously I felt extremely positive about the book, which is why I wanted to be its publisher, but after you've done this really positive thing, as in signed the

Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

Membership

Membership of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. is open to anyone working as an editor in the print media, and anyone who supports the society's aims.

Membership runs for a calendar year. 1997 fees are \$45 for new members (\$25 if joining after 30 June) and \$40 for renewals.

For a membership application form, phone (02) 9552 0039, or write to PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007.

Blue Pencil

The society's newsletter, *Blue Pencil*, is mailed to members monthly, except for January. We welcome your comments and contributions. Please mail them to Merry Pearson at 55 Collins St., North Narrabeen, NSW 2101, or fax or e-mail them to her as per the committee list on the back page.

Deadline for the October issue is Monday 15 September.

cheque, you go into a critical mode. While the author appreciates the cheque, all they've actually heard from you is what needs to be fixed.

I sent Luke a two-page fax while he was away so he could think about his response to the general issues I was raising. When he came back, we had a much more detailed talk, then he did another draft and made an enormous leap.

The other issue was the dream-like sequences, and getting the timing right between the dreams and the main narrative. That made a huge difference and really pulled the novel together.

Candy is a love story, and it's also a novel about heroin addiction, so we were really keen that people didn't obsess about whether it was autobiographical or not. That's going to be a real problem in promoting this book. People just love to say, 'Is it true, isn't it true?' and that's not the point. It has to work as a novel.

A novel on this subject is very likely to get pigeonholed as 'grunge'—I'm sure you've read the articles. It was a very complex book, but a thoroughly enjoyable book to work on. But Luke might have a very different version of events.

Luke

I experienced the editing process in three very distinct parts, although each part sort of blended into the other. [These incorporated] the large-scale structural editing, beginning with Sophie's sweeping suggestions and Sandy Webster's initial responses that actually carried on from what Sophie was saying. Then we moved into the more specific things, and then finally the production editing phase. That was the shortest but was made problematic by the fact that I was overseas again, so a lot of it happened by fax.

Despite the fact that the hardest work for me was in the four-month period of writing the major changes, the last few weeks of the production editing were the most neurotic. That was when I became aware that it was now or never; I had 24 more hours to make a decision on this word or that word. And I think in the last couple of weeks Annette Barlow was incredibly patient with my continuing faxes saying, 'Just six more things...'

I was fortunate to have attracted an auction, and there were many factors that went into selecting which publisher to go with. One publisher said, 'We like this a lot; we'll publish in early 1997', while

Sophie said, 'We like this a lot; we think it needs some work; we'll publish late in 1997.' And because I had a little instinct that the first draft had lots of problems, it was one of the factors that helped me decide to go with Sophie. The end result of that is I think the book is better than it might have been. What Sophie said really clicked with what I was thinking.

Open to change

It was important for me to push myself into an attitude of being open-minded about changes. I actually liked the process of editorial involvement. I think that, left to my devices, I don't necessarily see what's best about my book. One of Sophie's main editing points was that the narrator's voice is a very deadpan, monotonal, slightly ironic voice. For many reasons this deadpan voice was a deliberate device; however, it was in danger of alienating the reader.

The second major point was that *Candy*, the main female character, lacked a voice and lacked depth. There was some deliberateness to this also: there were points being made about the world that these characters inhabit. The whole book is told through the narrator's point of view, but Sophie's point was that a few scenes could be added which could add depth to *Candy*'s character.

Also, the conclusion of the book in the early drafts always seemed very rushed and underdeveloped and, as Sophie pointed out, some of the most important scenes are obviously some of the most emotional and intense. These were the scenes I had the most trouble writing. Some of the best chapters happened when I finally saw that there was a structural gap which needed to be filled.

Another point was that some of the crimes and scams that happen in the book got repetitive. I found that really difficult because I loved all the scams that were depicted and it was really hard to listen, not just to Sophie but to Sandy also, saying, 'Sure they're good but they're boring after a while. You just have to cut them.'

There was one area that involved a mixture of structural editing and apparently also potential legal problems. There's a depiction of drug manufacturing that contained too much technical detail for some people's liking. But I was also told that it should be cut for stylis-

tic reasons, that the technical details of this recipe got too boring.

My point was that the narrator describes everything, no matter what he's seeing, in this deadpan monotonal voice with this microscopic scientific detail, and that the drug manufacture should be no different. But eventually we compromised, and I cut a six-page chemical description down to a page-and-a-half and blended it with another chapter. Now I can see that it's tighter and it works better.

When I came back to Sydney, Sophie and I discussed the letter she sent me and we started talking about changes and solutions.

This was my first experience of working with an editor. I'd had a book of poems published, but nobody really tells you what to do with that. I didn't know what to expect and I think I expected that Sophie would say, 'Here are the problems: A,B,C,D, and here are the solutions. Now do them.'

It wasn't like that at all. It was like, 'Here are the problems; you have hard work ahead of you. Good luck.' And rightly so; there's no other way for that to work. For me the pleasure of the experience was that for the next four months there was this backwards and forwards thing.

And there were a few major breakthroughs when I suddenly had a great solution and would ring Sophie and say, 'I'm going to put that chapter there and do this with this thing and divide it into parts one, two and three...' By that stage I wasn't saying, 'Do you think this is a good idea?' I was saying, 'I've got a great idea.'

Down to the wire

Then it moved into the copyediting stage, which for me was basically all sorts of minor things and occasionally some large things. I had lots of examples of the red dress/green dress thing happening because I had reworked scenes at different times. Characters would go into the bush and it would take them a certain number of hours to get to a place and about half the time to get out. Sandy worked that out.

She was also really good at pointing out many examples of overwriting. This is my first novel and I'm learning a lot. I still feel pretty insecure about what I'm doing a lot of the time. Sandy was really

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quite hard about it. She would have large slashes through certain paragraphs saying, 'This is unnecessary, I get the point, you've already said it.' She would always suggest, but in about 95 per cent of cases I would agree with the suggestion.

There were a lot of minor stylistic things, syntactical things, and in the copyedited manuscript there were about 1,500 marks. Many of those were just hyphens and semicolons and commas, but probably about a hundred or so were quite important small things, nice little turns of phrase that made a difference. Occasionally a whole paragraph would be shuffled around or something.

So I read her copyedited manuscript, which she'd done in pencil, and if I didn't agree with anything I just erased it and if I agreed I left it. Of all the changes, I rejected maybe 40 for various reasons. Usually the reason was, 'No, what I'm trying to do here is what you're trying to stop me doing, and I still think it's the right way.'

There were also some changes that I went along with and then about a month or so later when I got the advance proof pages back, looking like the book would look, I could see that I didn't like something and I wanted to change it back. Or I had rejected one of her changes, but I now saw that it didn't look so good in the final page version, and maybe her idea was better.

When I read the book in that version for the first time, I found about 60 more things I wanted to change. By this time the whole thing was funnelling down to very small changes, but they seemed

incredibly significant. I think I was driving Annette Barlow crazy with all the details.

There were a couple of chapter endings I had always thought were weak—not weak enough that they were ever picked up by anybody, but which I wanted to end in a different way. So I rewrote three or four chapter endings and a few key scenes and turns of phrase that I'd never liked. That's what I kept sending to Annette in the final couple of weeks.

That was essentially the process for me. I guess the final thing to say is that now that I've seen the book as it is, I've found five or six things which, if I'm ever fortunate enough that it reprinted, I would change. Not huge things, but little things I think would make a difference.

Sophie

I wanted to talk about choosing Sandy Webster [in Melbourne] as the copyeditor. Obviously one can't always do this, but she and I have worked on a lot of fiction together (Sandy was an editor with me at McPhee Gribble) and so I had a sense that we could act as a continuum. With fiction in particular I try to work with copyeditors I know because it's an important way of me overseeing the process.

It's important that an author can tell us when we are wrong, also. I get nervous when an author says, 'I've done everything you asked', because the responsibility of that is overwhelming. You need an author to say, 'While I can see there was a problem, I haven't dealt with it in the way you've suggested.' As an editor, that's a real relief because then you can be sure that the author has also had some control over the process and is conscious of what they're doing.

Luke's book is also being sold to imprints of Random House in both in the UK and the USA. The UK is happy to do the book as we've done it, but the USA wants to make some other changes which, apart from the fact that I find that quite insulting, does show that America has a tradition of interventionist editing.

Question: What kind of changes did the American publishers want?

Luke: The changes are radical and I'm awaiting a fax from the New York editor to tell me her plan. I'm open to them; it's really interesting. It's not as if there's any one version of this book that is carved in

stone. I had never thought of her suggestion, which was to take the first chapter and make it the last chapter, but it's an incredibly interesting suggestion. It changes the mood of the ending, it gives a sort of ghost ending. But it comes down to that thing of instincts. I met the New York editor and I feel very comfortable with her. She's engaged with the book, and she said to me, 'If you say no, if you change nothing, we'll still publish.'

Question: So it's not really an American power trip.

Sophie: It is a bit, in the sense that the book is a finished product, and if we had the finished product of an American book we wouldn't be doing this. I can see how you could switch the chapters and it would work. It's not a ridiculous suggestion by any means, but it is also a power trip.

The other thing is that the UK publisher has been very patronising about the cover. But everybody likes to own a book in some way and be involved in the process, and that's part of what is happening with this book.

Question: Did your agent act as an editor in any sense?

Luke: Yes, they said similar things to what Sophie would later say more concretely, things about the monotony of the voice and the characters' lack of dimensionality.

Question: How long did editing *Candy take*?

Luke: I did the deal in July 1996. I was overseas until October, which is when I came back and started talking to Sophie about changes and implementing them. That went on until about February 1997, when I went back overseas and the production editing began. Up until May we were still faxing changes back and forth. But before it was a book there were short stories, and they were written about eighteen months ago. It's gone from nothing to a book in a year-and-a-half.

Candy, by Luke Davies, will be published by Allen & Unwin in September.

New members

A warm welcome to all those who joined the society from 18 July to 15 August 1997:

Sarah Shrubbs
Heather Curdie
Robyn Gold
Viki Wright
Therese Kutis

Nonsense from the Internet

Anonymously, from the Internet, we have some answers to that perennial question: Why did the chicken cross the road?

Kindergarten teacher: To get to the other side!

Plato: For the greater good.

Aristotle: It is the nature of chickens to cross roads.

Karl Marx: It was an historical inevitability.

Andersen consultant: Deregulation of the chicken's side of the road was threatening its dominant market position. The chicken was faced with significant challenges to create and develop the competencies required for the newly competitive market. Andersen Consulting, in a partnering relationship with the client, helped the chicken by rethinking its physical distribution strategy and implementation processes. Using the Poultry Integration Model (PIM), Andersen helped the chicken use its skills, methodologies, knowledge capital and experiences to align the chicken's people, processes and technology in support of its overall strategy within a Program Management framework. Andersen Consulting convened a diverse cross-spectrum of road analysts and best chickens along with Andersen consultants with deep skills in the transportation industry to engage in a two-day itinerary of meetings in order to leverage their personal knowledge capital, both tacit and explicit, and to enable them to synergise with each other in order to achieve the implicit goals of delivering and successfully architecting and implementing an enterprise-wide value framework across the continuum of poultry cross-media processes. The meeting was held in a park like setting enabling and creating an impactful environment which was strategically based, industry-focused, and built upon a consistent, clear, and unified market message and aligned with the chicken's mission, vision, and core values. This was conducive towards the creation of a total business integration solution. Andersen Consulting helped the chicken change to become more successful.

Timothy Leary: Because that's the only kind of trip the Establishment would let it take.

Nietzsche: Because if you gaze too long across the Road, the Road gazes also across you.

Albert Einstein: Whether the chicken crossed the road or the road crossed the chicken depends upon your frame of reference.

Buddha: If you ask this question, you deny your own chicken-nature.

Ernest Hemmingway: To die. In the rain.

Ronald Reagan: I forget.

Mark Twain: The news of its crossing has been greatly exaggerated.

Johnny Carson: Because it heard there was a man over there laying bricks and it wanted to see for itself!

Useful(?) facts

Also from the Internet:

- The 'save' icon on Microsoft Word shows a floppy disk, with the shutter on backwards.

- The combination 'ough' can be pronounced in nine different ways. The following sentence contains them all: A rough-coated, dough-faced, thoughtful ploughman strode through the streets of Scarborough; after falling into a slough, he coughed and hiccoughed.

- The verb *cleave* is the only English word with two synonyms that are antonyms of each other: *adhere* and *separate*.

- The only 15-letter word that can be spelt without repeating a letter is *uncopyrightable*.

- *Facetious* and *abstemious* contain all the vowels in the correct order, as does *arsenious*, meaning 'containing arsenic'.

- The Main Library at Indiana Uni-

versity sinks over an inch every year because when it was built, engineers failed to take into account the weight of all the books that would occupy the building.

New AGPS bulletin

Electronic Publishing Standards is a new bulletin published by the Australian Government Publishing Service to inform readers of the progress of the editorial committee that is developing a document on standards for Commonwealth information published in electronic format. The first issue contains the current contents framework and invites reader comments.

Regular information on the progress of the document, a draft of which is expected to be available in mid-October, will be posted on the AGPS web site at www.agps.gov.au/whatsnew/epub.htm.

Write to Lesley Levy, AGPS, GPO Box 84, Canberra City ACT 2601 to be placed on the bulletin mailing list.

Workshop

The AGPS is also presenting a workshop, *Electronic publishing without the byte*, on 17 September at Rydges Canberra. Topics include: what's involved in managing an electronic publishing project; tips on preparing copy for electronic dissemination; and options for delivering electronic documents.

The cost is \$175, or \$150 if you book before 5 September. For information, fax (06) 295 4176.

Punctuating the appositive

From *Book Worm*, the Society of Editors (WA) newsletter, comes this interesting exercise in punctuation:

Dear John,
I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy—will you let me be yours?

Gloria

Dear John,
I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours,
Gloria

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NOTICEBOARD

Onscreen editing workshop

Don't miss the insert in this issue of *Blue Pencil* giving details of the society's workshop on onscreen editing to be held on Saturday 18 October.

Spring Writing Festival

The NSW Writers' Centre's Spring Writing Festival will be held this year on Saturday and Sunday, 13 and 14 September. The Society of Editors (NSW) will again have a booth at the festival, and members who are willing and able are encouraged to help staff it. Please call Isabbel Partridge at (02) 9544 4389 for details. The NSW Writers' Centre is on the Old Rozelle Hospital Grounds on Balmain Road in Rozelle.

Also at the NSW Writers' Centre

Robin Appleton is convenor of a six-day weekend course, *The Publishing Process and Principles of Editing*, which will run from 9.30 am to 5 pm on 11, 12, 19, 25 and 26 October and 1 November. Topics will include: publisher, author and copyright; principles of editing; parts of a book; lists, glossaries, photographs and captions, and so on; and indexing and proofreading.

On 2 and 8 November, Robin will present a *Practical Editing* workshop, from 9.30 am to 5 pm each day. Participants will work on group and individual exercises, compare their ways of reading copy, and hear other's views on the processes by which decisions in editing are made.

For further information, call (02) 9555 9757 or fax (02) 9818 1327.

Total print management

The Galley Club of Sydney and Intech Australia are presenting an all-day seminar titled *Total Print Management* on Friday, 19 September, at Heidelberg Australia, 50 O'Dea Avenue, Waterloo. Topics include: the communication revolution, specifying your production requirements, from concept to final product, from the desktop to the World Wide Web, using new print and digital technologies, and do's and don'ts for prepress and print management.

The cost is \$90 for members and \$120 for non-members (non-member registration fee includes membership of the Galley Club until December 1998), and includes morning and afternoon teas, lunch, and drinks afterwards. For further information, call Wendy Rapee on (02) 9499 4145.

Editor needed for national journal

Due to the heavy commitments of a new full-time job, Paul Bennett will resign as editor of the soon-to-be-published new national journal for editors after the first issue has been mailed. The journal, titled *The Australian Editor*, is now in production and will contain an ad for the editor's position. After his experience with the first issue, Paul suggests that the best type of person to run *The Australian Editor* would be an editor with newsletter experience, and who is retired, semi-retired or freelancing part time.