

Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship Report

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THE AIM OF MY FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION

When I applied for the Beatrice Davis Fellowship I wanted to see if the editing of crime-thrillers differed materially in the US to Australia, and if there were particular skills in editing the genre I could bring back to Australia. Like many of my contemporaries here, I hadn't received much/any mentoring as an editor and had developed a method of editing crime fiction based on (my version of) common sense. The Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship seemed a terrific opportunity to look closely at a range of other approaches to the editing of crime-thrillers in the key English-language book market in the world.

As both a reader and publisher I have a particular passion for crime-thrillers. This probably stems from the necessity for successful crime-thrillers to have a strongly portrayed protagonist who proactively has to work out what's going on in a generally tricky, time-pressured situation. Editorially, I've always found it both fun and challenging working with an author to make sure the protagonist combines hard graft with ingenuity to solve a crime or avert a disaster.

My passion for crime-thrillers became even stronger after I published Peter Temple's first crime novel, *Bad Debts*, and went on to work with Peter on several more crime novels and a thriller, *In the Evil Day*. As well as being a fantastic and funny writer, Peter's writing combines all the things I enjoy in crime-thrillers – from a strong plot to a great protagonist doing hard yards and showing nouse to solve a crime. As a freelance editor I'd also edited a number of other excellent crime writers whose work I love, including Gabrielle Lord and Jane Goodall.

Besides the *how* of crime-thriller editing, an aspect of my desire to look at US crime thriller publishing was rooted in my belief that whereas US and UK crime-thriller writers dominate our bestseller charts, no Australian crime novelist has established a really strong readership in the UK or US. And yet it seemed to me that several of Australia's leading crime authors were of international quality and warranted publication in the US and other territories. Hence, I wanted to see for myself how US publishers regarded Australian crime-thriller writers, and Australian novelists in general.

MY PROGRAM

At the time I applied for the Beatrice Davis Fellowship I was completing a maternity locum position at Curtis Brown during which I'd dealt with their US sub-agent in regard to Kathryn Fox's *Malicious Intent*. On hearing I'd won the fellowship I asked this particular sub-agent to recommend a range of crime-thriller editors. To narrow down the list she gave me, I talked to various Australian colleagues and authors, ultimately deciding to approach MacAdam Cage; Little, Brown; Simon & Schuster and Grove Atlantic regarding stays of between two and three weeks.

Having heard a great deal about how proactive US literary agents had become editorially, I was also keen to spend some fellowship time with a literary agent, and chose Kim Witherspoon at Inkwell Management because she represents both Peter Temple and Shane Maloney.

WHAT I OBSERVED IN THE US PUBLISHING SCENE

MACADAM CAGE

28 February to 10 March

My first fellowship placement in the US was with MacAdam Cage, a small independent publisher with editorial and publicity offices in San Francisco, and a sales and marketing office in Denver. One of the reasons I applied to spend time at MacAdam Cage was because they publish Peter Temple. I was also interested in the challenges faced by publishers outside New York.

As I arrived, MacAdam Cage had just published Peter's thriller, *Identity Theory* (which I'd edited and published in Australia as *In the Evil Day*). They were also in the process of putting two of Peter's wonderful Jack Irish detective novels into production, so I was interested in finding out what additional editing they intended to do, particularly because there were things I'd suggested in my edit that Peter hadn't done.

My stay at MacAdam Cage preceded London Book Fair, so it was a very busy time for all members of staff, impacting on the effectiveness of my time there. Pat Walshe, Peter Temple's editor, was very time pressured and wasn't due to look at the Jack Irish novels for a few months. And the editorial report for *Identity Theory* I'd hoped to look at didn't eventuate. However, Pat and I had some good general conversations, and it appeared that the main editorial suggestions made for the US market were about changing words that might not

be recognised by a US-audience and making a few plot aspects more explicit (also suggested in the Australian edit).

Despite publishing Peter Temple, the real focus at MacAdam Cage is on literary fiction. They publish approximately thirty titles per year, primarily in hardback, and are best known for the hugely successful *The Time Traveller's Wife*.

Unlike all the other publishers I was to spend time with, MacAdam Cage doesn't rely heavily on literary agents as a source of manuscripts. Instead, they acquire books primarily through word of mouth of authors, and the hard work and contacts of publishing director, David Poindexter, and their two senior editors, Pat Walshe and Anika Streitfeld. All are passionate readers and talented arbiters of fiction with different – but complementary – literary sensibilities.

Anika Streitfeld – the editor who picked up *The Time Traveller's Wife* for MacAdam Cage – was heading off to the UK for LBF within days of my arrival. She very rarely works in the crime-thriller genre, though she did give me *Sleep Towards Heaven* by Amanda Eyre Ward, an incredibly powerful study of three women whose lives come together through the murder of a man and the subsequent death sentence one of the women receives.

Anika and I bonded in the small time we had together and spent whatever time could be grabbed chatting about: what it was like to work in a small independent press in such a competitive marketplace (pros and cons), publishing on the West Coast of the US in an east-coast dominated publishing scene (pros and cons), and the challenges of living up to *The Time Travellers' Wife* with further books.

I've remained in email contact with Anika since I returned to Australia and she has sent me the reports and progressive drafts of Amanda Eyre Ward's wonderful literary mystery novel, *How to Be Lost*. Anika's work on this novel reveal an extremely astute and exacting editorial eye and her input improved the novel profoundly.

I have long had a very keen interest in the marketing and publicity of books, and have often thought about moving into this side of the publishing business myself. Before leaving Australia I had been very impressed with what I'd read about MacAdam Cage's commitment to savvy publicity and marketing of its titles. Hence, I was interested to see if their marketing and publicity approach differed greatly from what I'd witnessed in Australia.

What I found was that because of their limited budgets MacAdam Cage is very careful about targeting exactly the publications and particular reviewers they think will be interested in a given title. Similarly, in their dealings with both chain booksellers and independents, they are astute about who will be the primary market for a book and then very intensively focus their efforts accordingly. They have a highly experienced and committed marketing/publicity team who put a huge amount of time and effort into making sure each book gets the coverage it deserves.

One thing that greatly surprised me in my discussion with MacAdam Cage's head of marketing and subsequently with David Poindexter were their views regarding specialist websites as a useful place to advertise books. I had thought that specialist websites devoted to crime novels and thrillers – of which there are a great number of high-quality sites – would be the perfect place to advertise or publicise Peter Temple's work, for example. However, the feeling at MacAdam Cage is that advertising books on websites hasn't proved particularly effective and isn't something they'd prioritise over more traditional routes.

LITTLE, BROWN

4 April to 21 April, Monday to Thursday

My first placement after arriving back in New York from London Book Fair was with Little, Brown, a terrific imprint within the Time Warner Book Group. The key focus at Little, Brown is on literary and intelligent commercial fiction and non-fiction and they have an extraordinary crime-thriller list. Publishing approximately 60 titles per year in hardback and paperback, Little, Brown claim the highest ratio of *New York Times* bestsellers per title.

Three senior editors, an editor and the publisher at Little, Brown are all accomplished crime-thriller editors and I was able to learn a lot from all of them.

Michael Pietsch is the publisher and guiding spirit at Little, Brown. A highly intelligent and experienced editor and immensely savvy publisher, Michael has been at Little, Brown for nearly fourteen years, during which he's acquired and worked with some of America's leading authors, from Rick Moody to Alice Sebold, Michael Connelly, Walter Mosley and many others. Michael has also assembled an impressive array of editorial talent at Little, Brown, from Pat Strachan (Michelle de Kretser, Marilynne Robinson) to Tracy Behar (HH The Dalai Lama, Tracy Hogg), Terry Adams (Julian Barnes, Harold Brodkey), Judy

Clain (Sarah Dunn, Elisabeth Robinson, Julie Powell), Geoff Shandler (John Le Carre, James Bradley), Asya Muchnick (Alice Sebold, Asne Seierstad) and Reagan Arthur (Elizabeth Kostova, George Pelacanos, Denise Mina, Kate Atkinson).

All of these senior editors are given a lot of freedom to pursue titles they're passionate about, though they *must* enlist Michael Pietsch's support and financial approval in the acquisition of every book they take on. As it turns out, a lot of positive in-house energy goes into the senior editors not only enlisting Michael's support for a new title, but building each other's enthusiasm about an author or idea.

My stay at Little, Brown felt perfectly timed. Geoff Shandler, the editor-in-chief, was made responsible for me and was amazingly generous with his time and energy. At the first publishing meeting I attended I outlined what I hoped to achieve and how, and within the next 24 hours was presented with the manuscript, editorial reports, interim drafts and galleys of Michael Connelly's latest book, *The Lincoln Lawyer*, a departure from his popular Harry Bosch crime novels into legal thriller territory.

Both Michael Pietsch and Asya Muchnick worked with Michael Connelly on *The Lincoln Lawyer* and it was fascinating to read the very insightful overview/reader's report Michael Pietsch had done on the first manuscript combined with Asya Muchnick's structural edit. Clearly Michael Connelly had taken their feedback on board because the draft I saw blew my socks off it was so good! I've always been a big fan of Michael Connelly but this manuscript felt like a quantum leap over his previous novels.

Even more exciting for me, in the three weeks I was at Little, Brown I really got to see close up the further editing and rewrites of several key areas of Michael Connelly's already revised manuscript, and the transformation of what was already a dazzling story into an even better, more satisfying read. During this time I got to see some of the most inspired, tactful, astute editing I've had the pleasure to observe.

While *The Lincoln Lawyer* refinements were still bouncing backwards and forwards I had the thrill of going to Little, Brown's half-yearly sales conference to see all their forthcoming books presented to the Time Warner sales team. I would have happily forked out for just about every title at that sales conference and to cap it all off Michael Connelly was our lunch speaker and signed my advanced reader's copy of *The Lincoln Lawyer*.

The remainder of my time at Little, Brown was spent reading books by Denise Mina and George Pelacanos and talking to the various editors whenever I had the chance about all things editing.

As well as a superb editorial team, Michael Pietsch has had the insight and skills to gather an extremely impressive publicity and marketing team. Sophie Cottrell, the head of marketing at Little, Brown, is one of the most innovative, energetic marketing people I have ever come in contact with. For one of Michael Connelly's previous books, Sophie had come up with the idea of producing limited edition mock police 'murder books' (the sort of journal a detective keeps when working a case) containing marketing blurb instead of case notes. Such was the trade response to these mock murder books, that Sophie had produced a more general commercial version for wider consumption.

The publicity team at Little, Brown was equally impressive, so it didn't surprise me to learn that Little, Brown has one of the best track records of any US publisher with regard to gaining reviews for their books.

All in all Little, Brown was a very inspiring place to be. A key ingredient in making them such a unique and fantastic publisher is the camaraderie between all members of staff and their willingness to support each other throughout all elements of the publishing process, from acquisition on.

ATRIA, SIMON & SCHUSTER

25 April – 5 May

Each time I finished a placement at one publisher, I couldn't believe the next could possibly be as good. Every time it was, though each were quite different.

I arrived at Atria to a lovely reception from Emily Bestler, the senior editor I would be working with there. We chatted a while, with Emily giving me a feel for Simon & Schuster, Atria and then her particular list of authors. She then gave me several recent books she'd worked on to look at and we discussed doing a combined edit of a new crime manuscript that had just been delivered.

Emily was always incredibly busy, so I spent the next few days reading some of the author's previous work and examining a couple of Emily's previous editorial reports to get a feel for her way of working. I was also able to quiz Emily, her assistant, Jodi, and another editor, Sarah, over the subsequent two weeks I was there.

An advantage of Emily being so busy was that I was given the opportunity to edit a crime manuscript. Having freelance edited solidly for the previous five years, I'd been itching to have a go at an edit while I was in the States, so I threw myself into the task and that kept me busy over the ensuing two weeks I was at Atria.

Judith Curr, the (Australian) Vice President and Publisher of Atria, was away at a sales conference for most of my first week at Atria. However, once she returned she made sure that I was happily settled, and despite her incredibly packed schedule she made a point of taking time out to talk to me about everything from editing in the States and how she thinks it differs from elsewhere, online sales of books via publishing websites, corporate American publishing and whatever other questions I came up with.

As with MacAdam Cage and Little, Brown, I was delighted by the absolute kindness and generosity of my colleagues at Atria. From the top down, everyone at Atria made an effort to make my time enjoyable there. And Emily was very appreciative of my editorial report.

GROVE ATLANTIC

9 May – 19 May

As with each previous publisher, I arrived at Grove Atlantic with great excitement – and all the normal trepidation you feel going into a new workplace where you know no-one. Again, I was delighted by people's warmth and enthusiasm.

Michael Heyward had recommended Grove Atlantic as a place to spend part of my fellowship, and had put me in contact with the delightful Elisabeth Schmitz, best known internationally for picking up Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*. I expected Elisabeth to be impressive, but she was even more so – and warm and lovely to boot. And, like Geoff Shandler at Little, Brown, Elisabeth cut time out from her very busy schedule (which includes rights as well as editorial!) to take me under her wing and show me the Grove Atlantic ropes.

A medium-sized independent run by the well-known Morgan Entrekin, Grove Atlantic punches well outside its weight with some great bestselling books. As well as publishing *Cold Mountain*, they have some truly fantastic crime writers, including (to my great excitement) Donna Leon. I would have

loved to observe an edit of any of Donna Leon's wonderful Commissario Brunetti novels, but unfortunately they're all edited in the UK.

Elisabeth stepped into the breach with a literary suspense novel called *A Carnivore's Inquiry* that she'd worked on the year before. I spent a solid chunk of my time at Grove Atlantic reading *A Carnivore's Inquiry* and then reading Elisabeth's highly astute editorial report on it.

When not reading the rather startling *A Carnivore's Inquiry* I attended some fantastic editorial meetings at Grove Atlantic and was taken out to lunch by several key editors there, which was fascinating. Grove is a great publishing company. Morgan and Elisabeth both use their contacts, chutzpah and excellent reputations to get some great books that might be considered the preserve of wealthy multinationals, as well as doing some astute buying of overseas titles. There's a great buzz about the place and a real excitement about the books they're publishing.

INKWELL MANAGEMENT

23 May – 3 June

Formed as a result of the merger of three leading New York literary agents, Inkwell Management is a powerhouse of a literary agency, with a great list of authors, lovely staff, and some interesting innovations.

During my time at Inkwell, I was able to talk to all of the three senior agents – Kim Witherspoon, Richard Pine and Michael Carlisle – as well as the up-and-coming agents and assistant agents George Lucas, Matthew Guma and David Forrer. I was impressed by the highly proactive approach taken by the agents at Inkwell, and their commitment to making sure each stage of the production and publishing process – from editing to cover consultation to publicity – went as smoothly and successfully as possible for their clients. Inkwell also has a very successful foreign rights department, with some very experienced players. There is good mentoring of junior staff and a sense of excitement and camaraderie about their agency. I learnt a lot about agenting from everyone there.

One of the most exciting aspects of Inkwell for me, as an editor with a keen focus on publicity and marketing, was their decision to include a publicity strategist as a key member of staff from their very inception as an agency. A former head of publicity at Little, Brown, Beth Davey's role as publicity strategist

at Inkwell is to follow up the relevant publicity people at the publishing companies which buy Inkwell titles, to learn about what publicity ideas they have for a given title, contribute to them where she can and help facilitate them (wherever possible) using her own extensive experience as a publicist and the huge range of contacts she's developed. Given the sometimes high turnover of publicists in some companies, a person like Beth to provide assistance or advice regarding publicity is fantastic.

Besides having a publicity strategist, Inkwell takes a fresh approach to things when it seems appropriate. An example of this was their weekly lunch, to which they invite a key senior editor, publisher, scout or industry figure, so they can keep up with what people are looking for, what's happening out there. This provides a great opportunity for more junior members of staff to both meet people and learn about the industry.

WHAT I OBSERVED ABOUT US PUBLISHING

Before heading to the US I'd read the previous Beatrice Davis fellows' reports, so I had some sense of how things worked in US publishing. I'd also long been a fan of numerous American crime-thriller writers, including Sara Paretsky, Donna Leon, James Lee Burke, George Pelacanos, Michael Connelly and James Ellroy. I didn't have a particular expectation of whether the editing of crime-thrillers would be materially different in the US, but then I had only ever read one or two Australian edits of a crime novel or thriller when sending manuscripts out to freelancers.

Having completed the fellowship I suspect that the best editing in the US is comparable to, though not necessarily better than, the best editing in other English-language countries, including Australia. I wouldn't say that there was anything radically different about the approach to the edit of Michael Connelly than an equally experienced editor in Australia would have taken. Still, it was both impressive and reassuring to see that great editors are of the same high quality everywhere.

I suspect it's always going to be hard for Australian crime and thriller writers to break through in the US market. However, there's no reason why the best of our crime writers shouldn't succeed there given the right sales and marketing support.

THE ROLE OF EDITORS IN US PUBLISHING

At the publishing companies I went to, senior editors (roughly equivalent to commissioning editors and publishers in Australia) were highly valued and regarded as critical to the success of a publishing house. Unlike some Australian commissioning editors and publishers, they were very involved in the initial structural edit of manuscripts they had taken on. There was a strong emphasis on editorial excellence.

The relationship between editors and their sales and marketing colleagues seemed, in general, to be stronger than in Australia and I wondered if this is because without good *American* books, a US publishing company would founder in what is a very parochial market. With overseas books being such a strong part of an Australian company's sales, this dependence on the local editor and publishers isn't quite as strong.

HOW THE EXPERIENCE HAS, AND WILL INFLUENCE MY EDITING PRACTICE

The best examples of editing I saw in the US confirmed that when all is going well the substantive editing of a manuscript can be a highly collaborative, creative, positive process. To see as famous an author as Michael Connelly be so appreciative of and responsive to the creative, tactful, insightful editing he received with *The Lincoln Lawyer* was an experience that I will never forget. All the editorial reports I read at different companies were equally impressive in different ways and I learnt a lot from each of them.

My time in the US reassured me that the approach I take to editing a crime-thriller, though different in some ways to what I saw overseas, is fine. I suspect differences in editing styles are more individually than nationally based, though there seems to be more opportunities for mentoring of younger editors in the States than in Australia.

BEATRICE DAVIS FINANCIAL INFORMATION: LOUISE THURTELL

FLIGHTS
\$4,475.31

PASSPORT, VISA ETC
\$174.45

ACCOMMODATION
\$7,836.45

SUBWAY, TAXIS
\$1,143.55

CAFES & RESTAURANTS
\$2,058.00

GROCERIES
\$1,230.58

TOILETRIES
\$191.45

BOOKS
\$666.56

STATIONERY & GIFTS
\$680.93

FILM, VIDEOS AND OTHER ENTERTAINMENT
\$556.99

PHONE CALLS (including mobile phone cost)
\$616.71

WIRELESS ACCESS FOR LAPTOP
\$195.00

LAUNDROMAT AND DRYCLEANING
\$270.40

POSTAL (MAINLY POSTING STUFF BACK TO AUSTRALIA)
\$425.30

MISCELLANEOUS
(including BEA attendance, adaptors, moneybelt, suitcase, bank fees for conversions and transactions)
\$1,411.81

AMOUNT DESIGNATED TO PAY MORTGAGE AND OTHER UTILITIES IN AUSTRALIA
\$8400

GRAND TOTAL
\$30,333.47