

**Developing ourselves, developing our authors:
developmental and structural editing of fiction in the US**

Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship 2015–2016 Report

Annabel Blay



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Introduction and my approach

Beatrice Davis is probably best known for being Australia's first full-time book editor, but most importantly – and inspiringly – to me and to so many editors and others involved in our industry, she was passionate about Australian writing, Australian writers, Australian publishing, about working with her authors to bring out their absolute best, and about having true and unfiltered Australian voices in our literature. (It's hard to believe we're still having to argue about the value of this for us as a nation.) It's quite a name to live up to!

The Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship has been awarded biennially since 1992, and I'm honoured to have been invited to follow in the impressive footsteps of the thirteen previous fellows. The fellowship allows one extremely lucky and, in this case, truly humbled editor to travel to and live in New York for ten weeks to complete a research project by interviewing and working with editors, publishers, literary agents and others.

For a project about structuring and developing texts, finding a structure for this report was one of the most tricky parts – my experiences and conversations were wide-ranging, and covered many aspects of publishing and editing fiction in particular. Ultimately, I decided to divide it into three main parts: **developing texts**, **developing our editors**, and **developing readers**.

Methodology

For my research I blended different methodologies used by recent Beatrice fellows: I spent almost half of my ten weeks in New York 'in-house' in placements with agents and editors; and the rest of my time meeting and interviewing editors, publishers, agents and other publishing types.

There were pros and cons to working this way. As other fellows have noted, it is tricky to form a strong bond with someone you can only spend a limited amount of time with, in my case interviewing participants over a couple of hours or visiting their offices. To optimise my time and – hopefully – make the research as relevant to Australian editors as possible, many of the editors and agents I approached had existing connections to Australia, including former Visiting International Publishers (VIPs) and those who publish or work with Australian authors. In some cases I revisited editors who spent time with previous fellows, with the idea of assessing what's changed in their industry since they were interviewed previously. I also tried to meet with editors and agents who work on the types of books that seem to work well in Australia, or who seem to face similar challenges, for example smaller publishers with a level of resourcing more on a par with ours.

Placements

Another challenge in organising placements was my awareness of how difficult it is for those working in-house to expand their already massive workloads to include an observer such as myself. There are also issues around confidentiality, given that although I wasn't there as a representative of my employer, I can't pretend I don't work for a multinational publisher who may be their direct competition. And editing is, in and of itself, a difficult thing to collaborate on, particularly with an editor you, realistically, don't know from the proverbial bar of soap. I admit I went in with reasonably low expectations of how included I *could* be in discussions, and was surprised and delighted by how much editors and other team members were able to share. But in order to retain their confidentiality, I have had to be more general in some of the reporting that follows – I'm sure you understand why. It's also for reasons of confidentiality and trust that I found it much easier to find placements within my own corporate group – spending six days over two weeks with Harlequin US and a week with HarperCollins imprint William Morrow. This obviously slants my observations somewhat, but I do also appreciate why other publishers were not able to host me for a longer time and, for example, were not willing to have me attend meetings. I also spent two weeks working with the team at Atria, an imprint of Simon and Schuster (S&S) headed by Australian Judith Curr; and a day a week for a month working from the offices of Writers House, one of the largest literary agencies in the world. Both have hosted previous fellows.

For various reasons, including the requirements of reporting as well as my own circumstances, I spent the ten weeks in New York from very late August to mid-November – in other words, beginning at the end of the quietest time and into the busy season for US editors. I arrived at the end of a very long, hot August, kicking off my research at the Editorial Freelancers Association (EFA) conference, given the Australian publishing industry's heavy reliance on freelancers for editing, proofreading and other editorial and design functions. Much of New York's publishing staff take the final few weeks of the northern summer off, returning when school goes back after the Labor Day long weekend at the start of September – there are few submissions coming in and in general offices are quiet with many people away, summer internship programs just wrapped up and few meetings.

This of course also means that the first few weeks of September are frantic as everyone gears back up, clears their inbox and gets back to business. With Frankfurt Book Fair looming in mid-October, agents start submitting their big books in the hope of making a newsworthy deal that can be announced at Frankfurt and create buzz for international sales. And even when editors don't attend Frankfurt themselves, there is definitely an increase in submissions as well as the work of pulling together reports and feedback for the person who is attending, preparing material for the rights

team, and a general level of frenetic activity. Frankfurt itself can be busy for all – with urgent submissions landing overnight and costings being done to try to pre-empt that hot book. And then, of course, after all the Frankfurt meetings themselves, in flood the submissions from other territories such as the UK and Australia. As a former rights manager, it was fascinating to see this from the other side.

The APA was generous enough to host my sporadic blogging attempts, and you can find them on their website, or here:

[Hello, an introduction to Beatrice Davis and thank you](#)

[An editor conference, my fangirl moment, and pencils and things...](#)

[A week of contrasts](#)

[No sleep till Brooklyn](#)

[Breaking out?](#)

[The big questions?](#)

[#70NewYorkDays](#)

The big questions: my aims

It's an exciting time to be an editor – the publication of *Go Set a Watchman* by Harper Lee in 2015 initiated many discussions about the role of the editor. *Go Set a Watchman* is now widely accepted as a first or very early draft of the acclaimed classic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. We now know that Lee's editor, Tay Hohoff of J.B. Lippincott & Co, worked with her over several years and many drafts to develop the final book – one that has affected so many of us. Readers acknowledge that the original work pales into comparison with the final version. *Genius*, a mainstream feature film starring Colin Firth, Jude Law and Nicole Kidman and based on the biography of book editor Maxwell Perkins was released in 2016. Colin Firth! At the same time publishing seems to be undergoing yet another watershed moment as we see the rise and rise – and fall? – of the 'indie publishers' (also known as self publishers), the era of the blockbuster, even more mergers and buy-outs, and digital finally seeming to settle down as a format. And so it's an ideal time to relook at the role of the traditional editor in all this, with a focus on developmental and structural editing.

My conversations focused on three areas:

Developing manuscripts – and by extension, author careers: how do editors work in the US and how does this differ from how we work? Are there strategies we can adapt? Do we see the role of editor as different, and how? What can the editor contribute to the author's work? How valued is that role both within and outside the industry?

Developing editors: how and where do editors learn to edit? What about the various publishing courses on offer? Are internships useful? What can we learn from the 'apprenticeship model' so prevalent in US publishing?

Developing readers: what are the big challenges facing US publishers in terms of reaching their market, and actually getting books into readers' hands? How important are 'blurbs' (i.e. early review quotes, usually printed on the cover and used in marketing/selling in the book)? Has the role of the bookseller changed in this? Is 'discoverability' even a real word? What strategies do editors need to adapt to ensure our books actually SELL?

Developing manuscripts and authors: similarities and differences

The editor's role

Broadly speaking, in the US the 'editor' receives submissions from agents, negotiates the deal, acquires the book, works closely with the author on the development and structural edits of a manuscript, and, in most cases, does the 'line edit' as well – often blurring the lines between these types of edit. They brief the cover and internal design and work closely with the in-house design team to create a look for the book. They also work closely with publicity, marketing and sales to position and sell the book. They'll brief the copyeditor and work with the author to approve this edit. In short, they are the main champion of the book in-house, from inception through acquisition and development to handing it over to production and on to publication and beyond. They also tend to be the author's main contact at the publishing house throughout their career with the house (and sometimes afterwards too).

In the larger publishing houses in the US, it's unusual for freelancers to work on developmental, structural or even line edits, for fiction anyway – in fact, it's unusual for anyone but the acquiring editor and perhaps their assistant/associate editor to work on the bigger picture edit. In my experience, although obviously each publishing house works differently and has different levels of resourcing, in Australia these processes are split between the publisher or acquiring/commissioning editor and the in-house project editor. Very often, at least some of these processes are completed by freelancers. Of course, not every publishing house or editor in Australia works the same way – some editors commission and so do see the book through from initial submission to final text, and some publishers work closely on all levels of edit. And in the US not all people with the job title 'editor' edit either.

Most larger US publishing houses also have a distinct split between the editorial and production departments, but for them the production side includes the functions of copyedit, proofreading and typesetting. I was a little astonished at how dismissive some team members were about 'production editing', and how separately the two parts of the process were treated, compared to the way we tend to work in Australian publishing houses. 'Editorial' is definitely seen as king in US publishing! But then, their copyeditors don't work in quite the same way we typically do. For trade publishers (although again speaking generally) copyeditors correct spelling and grammar and ensure the text is adjusted to the house style. They also closely manage schedules and ensure deadlines are met. What we usually refer to as a copyedit – which might look at style, vocabulary, inconsistencies in plot or character and continuity as well as grammar and spelling, plus in some cases picking up any lingering

structural issues – would be closer to a US editor’s line edit. This is not to dismiss the vital role of the US copyeditor in any way! I met with Isolde Sauer, associate director of copyediting for the Atria imprint of Simon & Schuster. S&S has approximately seventy people working in the production/copyedit department – which lies on a completely different floor to the editors – and as one of several ‘imprint experts’, as well as actually copyediting many of Atria’s key titles, her role includes managing Atria’s production schedules, including chasing late-running final manuscripts from the editors; liaising with in-house lawyers to ensure legal changes are taken in; managing the full and ongoing training of new copyeditors; a lot of administration including managing a team of five in-house copyeditors, as well as managing freelance copyeditors, who are sometimes used for copyedits or proofreading. She mentions too the workload created by adapting constantly evolving technology into their processes and workflows.

So the US editor really needs to have the personality and skills to fill two key roles: the outward-facing networker who’s on top of the trends and has a strong sense of their own ‘brand’ (what we’d call a book’s ‘publisher’) as well as the perhaps more inward-looking soul we traditionally associate with being an editor. Interestingly, some US editors I spoke to felt like they’d be happy to just do the editing and let someone else be the ‘publisher’ (that is, a role more similar to the Australian in-house editor) – while others seemed to feel burned out after working so closely with their authors on texts for a long time and thought not having to line edit as well as acquire would be the ultimate freedom. That said, most editors were simply surprised to hear that Australian editors don’t, generally, commission.

Do editors still edit?

As I prepare this report I have read over reports from some previous fellows and find the tenth fellow, Collette Vella, asking almost ten years ago ‘do editors still edit’. Apparently some questions are perennial.

Editors edit; agents also edit. But first, **a quick note on US agents:** it’s extremely rare for larger publishing houses to pick up unagented authors, especially fiction authors. Some of the smaller imprints and independent houses will look at unsolicited manuscripts or have a slush pile (including, for example, some Harlequin romance imprints), and unagented authors are sometimes picked up at writers’ conferences, via writing courses or at other events. Nonfiction is often developed in-house from scratch, but in many cases the author is still represented by an agent for contract negotiations, etc., even if the agent didn’t actually sell the book. Even when a book concept is developed from

scratch by an IP company or packager, such as Alloy Entertainment or Paper Lantern Lit, there is often an agent involved.

While on one level agents have a similar role as they do here in Australia – managing their clients’ business relationships with publishers and managing their client’s careers – in the US they also tend to be much more hands-on in terms of development of individual submissions, particularly for debut authors.

Partly this has to do with **economies of scale**, of course. In the US, Bookscan reports total print book sales of 653 million units for 2015, vs 56.4 million units in Australia. In terms of potential audience the numbers also tell a story: the US has a population of over 324 million while Australia has just under 25 million people. There are fourteen agent members of the Australian Association of Literary Agents, and over 400 individual members of the US’s Association of Authors’ Representatives (in both cases of course there are agents who are ineligible or choose not to be members for various reasons, including working as paid editors as well as acting as an agent). It’s trickier to get a grip on publisher numbers to compare – the Association of American Publishers (AAP) represents around 400 professional members, and in addition there are over 3000 members of the Independent Book Publishers Association – but worth noting this includes independent publishers and self-published authors as well as small presses and mid-sized publishers – while the Australian Publishers Association represents around 200 members.

But obviously these numbers can’t tell the full story – clearly these 322 million people are not all book buyers, for one – but with a bigger potential audience, typically advances are bigger. This quite literally buys time for US agents to do more work on individual manuscripts before submission, work that seems to have become standard in the US – in some cases quite significant editorial work, including structural and line edits. All the agents I spoke to usually did at least two to three rounds of edit – although some did admit that as they’d got more experienced, and taken on more clients and therefore a bigger workload, they were less inclined to line edit or even take on submissions that needed too much work in the first place. It’s competitive for agents to place books – as competitive as it is for publishers to get books into the market – and so the manuscript really needs to be as strong as possible before submission. This has an impact on how agents select their clients too. Brianne Johnson, an agent at Writers House, says a manuscript really ‘has to be no more than three edits away from submittable’ and ideally only two – although sometimes she does less work, sometimes more than that.

Many editors and agents I spoke to felt there was definitely a trend towards agents doing a significant amount of the ‘heavy lifting’ involved in development of a manuscript, before even submission. Partly, this is because the market for blockbuster books has become such a key one for the larger trade publishers. Adult fiction such as *Gone Girl*, *The Girl on the Train*, anything by John Green, blockbuster series such as the Divergent books by Veronica Roth, and, in nonfiction, colouring books and certain celebrity memoirs dominate bestseller lists for such long periods of time that they are seen to suck the air out of the market. Everyone’s looking for those very big books, that new, high-concept, category-killing buzz book, and are willing to pay big for it.

This is not a new trend, nor is bemoaning the loss of the mid-list, but many editors and agents felt the situation has become even more exaggerated over the past 12 to 18 months, that the battle to claim those acquisitions has become even more acute and that advances for those authors are approaching the ridiculous. Editors have begun to feel that buying books without those newsworthy high advances and pre-acquisition buzz can even damage the book’s potential – that one way to attract attention in-house, not to mention build an individual editor’s reputation, is to acquire at these dizzying levels. But in order to obtain those levels of advance, submissions have to go to market far more polished than they would have in the past.

Of course, there are always differences, both in individual agents and in the cultures of agencies: some agents come from an editorial background and so find this a natural extension of the agent role. Others find they have been forced into becoming the book’s first editor by the state of the market. Agents at Writers House tend to do significant editorial work – but they’ve always had a culture of intervening editorially before submission, as was Al Zuckerman’s vision when he started the company, says Amy Berkower, currently Writers House chairman and agent for numerous high-profile and successful authors, including Nora Roberts.

Heather Schroder, formerly an agent at ICM Partners and now running her own boutique literary agency Compass Talent, says this is definitely a newer trend. When she started as an agent, there was more of an expectation that the editor would be the person with the vision – and time – to craft the book. Ginger Clark of Curtis Brown agrees, saying that not only has the role of the agent changed significantly in terms of editing submissions, but there’s now much more for the agent to do in terms of managing the author’s ‘brand’ over the life of the book as well. Authors need to have much more of an outward presence (separate to that of their publisher) than ever before – and not just while on submission. Because publishers are laying off staff and because of the general ‘shrinkage’ of resources there are just fewer people in-house to work with an author and on their books, and many

of the things editors 'could be relied on' to do in terms of author management they just can't do any more, because they simply don't have time – 'they're always in meetings!'

In fact Dawn Davis, VP and publisher at 37 Ink, an imprint of Atria, says she feels frustrated when an agent or author does not give that submission a final revision in order to deliver it in best possible shape. 'Having to do that extra pass [of edit] can begin to taint the way you feel about the book', she says, that is, the editor might stop seeing it in its best possible light, one implication being the book might not end up as polished as it might have otherwise.

Even for titles that won't be blockbusters, the reality for US editors now is that a book has to be in extremely good shape before they can acquire it. I spoke to several editors who acknowledged they had let go of books that they loved simply because they needed too much work, and that the pressure of their individual imprint made it just too difficult. Liz Stein, editor for the newly announced Park Row imprint at Harlequin, is helping build a brand-new list with a focus on more literary fiction, and finds that she has had to decline books that she loved because she realistically could not do the work on them that they needed and still publish in time to suit the time pressures of building a new list.

Jenna Johnson of Farrar, Straus and Giroux (FSG, an imprint of Macmillan) is another who bemoans having to pass on submissions that just need too much work, that haven't arrived pretty close to ready – but the reality is that she just can't take on as many books that require the 'heavy lifting' in terms of editorial as in the past. That said, if she feels she and the author share a vision and they agree with what she thinks needs doing before she buys it, she will work with them for as long as necessary – and was working on her eighth pass of a manuscript when we met!

But not all publishers and editors are in the running for those very big, already very polished books. Bob Miller, Flatiron Books president, describes his colleague Amy Einhorn in particular as having a knack for finding 'diamonds in the rough', that she then goes on to 'polish polish polish then publish the hell out of'. Other editors told me how they try to reserve a couple of slots on their lists each year for those rough diamonds that they just love or can't get out of their heads.

Smaller publishers also have different priorities. Juliet Grames, associate publisher at Soho Press and editor of the Soho Crime imprint, says that as a mid-size indie publisher they don't have some of the advantages or demands of the bigger publishers in terms of submissions – meaning they very often receive acquisitions (whether through agents or other means) that are 'not picture perfect', 'unpolished gems' that are not quite ready and so require a little more work from the editors. Soho's

crime list features several long-running series, and so she estimates that up to 70% of her work is on 'returning' authors – so she has the chance to build a 'long-term creative relationship' with them.

Agents will say editors don't edit any more, says Sally Kim, now editorial director for Putnam (PRH), and so they feel they're being forced to do all the work before even submitting, perhaps even feeling resentful that there's an expectation they will do that work first – but for editors the reality is that you can't chase those 'labours of love the way you could eight years ago...you can't edit for three years any more'. This also means that both sides, agents and editors, take on different books than they might have in the past, because the agent themselves can't spend a year editing any more, and it's competitive for them too – time is very directly money to an agent, when income comes from advances.

So editors still edit, absolutely. They edit at home, on weekends and at night, they edit on the train, they edit in their offices (if they're lucky enough to have one in this open-plan world) between meetings and phone calls and emails. I even heard of editors who have hired babysitters at their own expense so they could spend their own time working on an edit in peace. We are an industry of passionate, committed workers, that's for sure.

The 'level of edit'

The level of edit and number of rounds of edit varies hugely – for many reasons. In fact, talking to editors about '**a typical edit**' was probably one of the biggest challenges of this project. Long story short, there is no such thing. Each and every book has its own challenges and requirements. (On this subject I wrote an entire blog about some of the questions an editor asks themselves as they go into an edit, which you can find here www.publishers.asn.au/blog/the-big-questions .)

I was impressed, delighted, insanely jealous – and US editors in turn intrigued by my reaction – to hear **how many rounds of editing** an editor usually does, that is, before handing over to the copyeditor to manage it through the final stages. Three was the minimum, while some books require many more – and editors will push the boat out to do them. Most editors had examples of a book that went back to an author with major revisions up to seven or eight times, but all agree it's important to know just how far you can push an individual author, especially bearing in mind that if it's a debut author the agent may also have done more than one round of edit.

One of the reasons US editors seem to have the luxury of time to do near endless rounds of editing is the differences in the way they **schedule**. Some imprints will not even schedule a book until the final manuscript is ready for galleys and to go to copyediting. Susanna Porter, executive editor at Ballantine (PRH), says it would be 'crazy' to schedule before a book's been edited through to final

manuscript – but acknowledges it's a different situation in the US and for PRH and a 'result of us having more books in the pipeline' at any time. Edits that are rushed can be 'seen in the final result', she feels, that is, in a book that is not as satisfactory for the reader.

Amy Einhorn, now SVP and publisher at Flatiron Books (Macmillan) is another editor who does not typically schedule a book until editing is finished. Amy thinks of it as similar to having a baby: she needs at least nine months, but twelve is ideal (that is, just for the edit). Typically, among the editors I spoke to, final text, usually in the form of galleys or Advance Reader Copies (ARCs), needs to be ready nine to twelve months before publication, and edits are planned to take account of that. It was interesting that at the developmental stage these edits do not seem as tightly scheduled as the way we might work here in Australia.

My experience is that scheduling this way is rare in Australian publishing, and that we're more schedule-driven on the whole. Of course, being able to wait to schedule a book is not true of all the editors I spoke to, especially in the case of books where there is a huge advance outstanding, and even where the book is not officially scheduled it is usually at least earmarked for a specific season. Repeat authors, series authors and very big bestselling authors are more likely to be scheduled far in advance – not the least so that vital resources such as publicity and marketing can be properly allocated, slots at events such as BEA can be reserved and author tours planned, explains Amy Einhorn. The luxury of waiting to schedule a book's publication date is also less likely to be the case for smaller and independent publishers. Likewise, very commercial and genre publishers, such as Kensington and the category romance imprints of Harlequin, are far more likely to work to strict schedules, even acquiring for specific time slots in the case of genre fiction. But, for the editors I interviewed, it seems there is typically (that word again!) a reasonable amount of time reserved for development between acquisition and publication, more so than I (typically) see Australian publishers able to allow.

A key difference is, of course, that the US editor is managing their own editorial time and workload of books they acquired, and usually only around twelve books a year, although some editors work on as few as eight or as many as twenty – and bear in mind they do many of the other tasks related to positioning and pitching too, as well as managing staff, developing strategy, and so on. And in the US as here, editors 'inherit' books from colleagues who have left or for other reasons, so won't always have acquired it in the first place. Meanwhile, the typical Australian editor is managing more books all the way through the editorial process, including copyediting and proofreading, managing freelance schedules as well as the requirements of sales, marketing, publicity and the acquiring publisher.

For US publishing houses, if a final manuscript isn't ready for 'launch' you lose vital in-house buzz and traction. Launch is often when a book introduced is first to the sales team, who more often than not have had no input into acquisitions at an earlier stage, unlike their counterparts in Australia. I was also surprised to learn that most editors have no direct liaison or contact with their sales teams (let alone booksellers) – in most large houses, marketing team members act as the go-between. This means, for example, that representatives from marketing will attend and have input into cover meetings, and if sales input is required, the marketing director will co-ordinate that.

Although not prepared to put **a number on the rounds of edits** that they were willing to do, all editors agreed there is a limit. Sometimes you just have to admit the author is not capable of realising a book's full potential, or that you perhaps just did not have the same vision for the book. Liz Stein of Park Row says that sometimes after that third round 'you start to question your own decision' to acquire the book in the first place! Most editors insist on meeting or at least speaking to the author before acquiring the book, to ensure their 'vision' for the book is compatible. Although as Susanna Porter jokes, 'they always say "I'll do anything, yes, I totally agree with your vision"' but so often edits are not as straightforward as that in reality.

Second or subsequent books

For both editors and agents, editing is different when working on a **second or subsequent book** by an author you've worked with before. Sally Kim points out that in the case of a first book you're often working with material that's a long way along the path to publication – that's been refined perhaps by an Master of Fine Arts (MFA) writing program, and may have been thoroughly workshopped multiple times, could have been developed further with a freelance editor, likely edited again by the agent, and possibly received other rejections with feedback. 'You publish a first book because you love what's already there', she says. The really 'nerve-racking and stressful' part is that second book – when both editor and author have an awareness that the critics, booksellers and sales reps are waiting, you're both 'under pressure and scrutiny' and the odds are that that second book 'won't come out of the oven as well-cooked' as the first book. There's always a 'moment of panic' when you start to read it – particularly following a great success, but even if the previous book was one of the 85% of books that everyone in-house 'loved and didn't do as well as you liked'. If the book is contracted, it might already be scheduled for a specific release so there may also be time pressures. So the 'really deep development work' often comes with book two and on – 'these are the books that are the great unknown and the problems may be deep and long-ranging'.

On the other hand, you know the author's quirks – and they know yours. You have formed a bond with them. Sally mentions an author she's worked with for ten years over several books and at two

different imprints – the author always needs the same advice on her manuscript, and so Sally writes the same key points in each edit report, to the point where the author now delivers her manuscript with a note, ‘I know what you’re going to say’. But Sally knows just how much support she’ll need, and has a sense for how much time the edit will take, and can start work confident that they’ll end up with a great book in the end.

Erica Imranyi, editorial director at new Harlequin imprint Park Row, also makes the distinction between that first book and ‘repeat’ authors – you don’t really know what you’re getting from a second book until it lands, and at Harlequin (as with other publishers) they more often schedule an author’s next book/s earlier on in the process, likely at acquisition. This can mean books in a multi-book contract are scheduled a long way ahead of the receipt of the manuscript. Her colleague Margo Lipshultz, senior editor for another new Harlequin imprint Graydon House, comments ‘your head is in a different place’ when you work on an edit from a new author as opposed to a repeat author. Last year, she had five repeat authors on her list but as they work frantically build a new list for the new imprint, she is working with all new authors and is finding she is less able to predict how to manage her editing time.

Most agents do far less and often no work on contracted second or subsequent manuscripts. Ginger Clark agrees that her editorial ‘focus is entirely on the first book’ and if a second book is contracted, she will often have the author deliver it straight to their editor, sometimes not even reading it until it’s ready for copyedit – unless of course her author specifically asks for feedback or there are, for example, changes at the publisher such as the original acquiring editor moving on. The editorial on second books is now the editor’s vision and for the ‘editor to edit’; and Ginger’s role as agent is now to manage and develop the author’s career.

Bob Miller of Flatiron reminds me of the **other advantages of building ‘repeat’ authors** – that the investment in development and platform is more long-term. This is one way he sees fiction as having an advantage over nonfiction, as he oversees the building of a list at new Macmillan imprint Flatiron Books. His speciality is nonfiction, which comes with the challenge of coming up with a brand-new list every year – ‘it’s tough’ developing authors as well as subjects that are going to be timely. Much of it is reinventing the wheel every time, creating a market for the new subject, even if the author already has a strong platform (please also see p.26 for more on platform). Nonfiction often requires far more development work – especially given publishers frequently acquire nonfiction on a proposal only, or even generate an idea from scratch and then find a writer to suit the project, and thus have to wait for a manuscript to be delivered. Bob says ‘ninety-nine out of 100 come in’ years after the proposal was bought and ‘you’ll go “oh!”’: perhaps you find you and the author had a different

vision for the book, or the author themselves may have changed during the writing of the book, or their focus, or world or local events may have changed the focus. Similarly John Oakes of OR books describes the feeling of buying a nonfiction book at proposal stage and 'hoping to god the author sticks to it'.

The role of the freelancer

As mentioned above, US trade publishing houses don't tend to use freelance editors for the same kinds of work Australian fiction publishers do, that is, everything from developmental work to the nitty-gritty of copyediting and proofreading. The opportunities for US freelancers are much greater in nonfiction where editors are buying from a proposal and therefore the readiness of delivered manuscripts can 'vary wildly', as Leslie Meredith of Atria (S&S) puts it. Freelancers are used as nonfiction 'book doctors', developmental and structural editors, ghostwriters and co-writers – since, as Leslie says, you simply can't be an expert in every field. Agents also work with freelance developmental editors on nonfiction – at the author's expense – 'when you don't have the experience or skills in that particular subject or genre', says Ginger Clark. These are usually experienced freelancers who have spent significant time in-house, and often already have a relationship with the author, subject or genre.

Getting started as a freelancer seems to be much more competitive in the US too, particularly in fiction – as above, freelancers rarely do development/structural work for fiction publishers and even experienced former editors find they are competing on price with much less experienced editors. (Balancing this out, of course, is that there are many more staff positions for editors than in Australia.) I did hear a rumour that Amazon Publishing, as distinct from their self-publishing arm, freelance out *all* editorial, and pay better than trade publishers do – but at the same time some editors questioned whether Amazon Publishing does any editing at all, apart from basic copyediting.

The rise of **independent publishing** has created a huge new area of work for US and local freelancers – with all the pros and cons that can involve, including 'scope creep' (where the author expects more or far different work from the editor than was briefed or indeed was paid for); difficulty in extracting payment when you're working with an individual rather than a company; and working on less 'curated' texts that may require a huge amount of work and be expected to be brought to 'print ready' stage. (It's worth acknowledging here that I suspect most freelancers have probably had similar experiences with big publishers too.)

But again, freelancers in the US seem to enjoy a level of **resources** Australian freelance editors can only dream of. There are several big freelance organisations – including the EFA, the Editorial Freelancers Association (www.the-efa.org), and ACES, the American Copy Editors Society (www.copydesk.org/) – offering professional development, companionship (albeit online only for much of the working year), forums, local branches in population centres around the US, well-organised conferences, and resources in the form of books, style guides, job boards, newsletters and more. Some of this is relevant to Australian editors, but sadly much of it is not.

One of my observations after attending the EFA conference was that there was much less of a focus on the ‘author’ than I’d expected for a bunch of editors getting together. It wasn’t until I saw how publishing houses keep their copyeditors away from authors that I realised that this was because most of the freelancers there were copyeditors and proofreaders. It is also compounded by the fact that they were often working in technical, scientific and medical editing, where there is a much heavier emphasis on enforcing style. It may also have been due to so many attendees being at the start of their freelance careers and often had previously worked in less author-oriented roles, such as sub-editors for newspapers.

I was also interested to hear the breadth of freelance work in the US. For example, some imprints of Harlequin use freelancers to write their cover copy!

Developing editors

Our profile and attitudes to our work

One of the keynote speakers at the EFA conference, Jane Friedman (janefriedman.com) discussed the 'myths' surrounding art and creative work, and touched upon some issues that are relevant to editors, whether in-house or freelance, as well as writers. She spoke about the importance of seeing our 'art' as having a value, and the slightly scary notion of 'untangling net worth and self-worth' as well as finding ways to *talk* about money: earning it, selling your work and being paid without feeling you're 'selling out'. A book she found inspiring when she was trying to decide what her future as a freelancer looked like was *Make Art, Make Money: lessons from Jim Henson on fueling your creative career* by Elizabeth Hyde Stevens (which seems to have recently been reissued by Lake Union Publishing, an imprint of Amazon).

US editors seem to have more ownership of their work (although I don't mean to imply above and beyond the author's ownership) and a much higher profile – to some extent, they create their **own brand**, distinct from that of their publishing house, which they take with them to a new house (along with many if not all of their authors) if they leave. Do Australian editors, with their more behind-the-scenes roles and our reliance on freelance editors, and arguably a more self-effacing culture, need to change the way we look at ourselves as well?

Jane describes three main hurdles to success for creatives, including freelance editors:

- **Baggage** – a need to 'cast off the layers of gunk' that prevent creatives pursuing financial as well as creative goals
- **Toxic advice** – can include those kinds of articles '5 Ways to be Successful...' but also advice that is simply 'not right for you now'
- **Status anxiety**: e.g. needing a certain job title to feel 'important'.

Freelancing is often considered 'giving up the illusion of security for the illusion of freedom', but Jane says she actually feels more secure as a freelancer.

Question the myths, she says: 'Art and business can dance together'.

Training

There are very clear paths to becoming an editor and beyond in the US, and most of the people I spoke to had followed fairly a similar path, with slight generational shifts.

Most senior editors had landed an **editorial assistant** role early in their working lives, sometimes straight out of college – this makes it sound easy but then, as now, getting into publishing was intensely competitive. Some editors talked of pounding the pavements for weeks or months, and of brilliant strokes of luck with someone resigning just as they turned up; or of landing that life-changing initial interview through a family friend or a friend of a friend.

Younger staff tend to have come through one of the many **publishing masters qualifications** or certificates – which include the prestigious The Columbia Publishing Course, the CUNY Publishing Institute, NYU's Summer Publishing Institute and Pace University's MS in Publishing, to name just a few of the New York-based ones.

They also tend to have completed one or more **internships** of three months and sometimes more. As in Australia, these internships often lead directly to jobs – the contacts and experience are invaluable, and highly regarded on your CV. But the internships seem much more formalised than those at many Australian publishers – there is a set workload and the interns are given distinct responsibilities, which might range from changing the toilet roll in smaller organisations (no, I'm not joking: interns literally work from the bottom up) to assisting associate editors with their reading load, as well as data entry, filing, writing form rejection letters and many of the less glamorous but essential tasks of publishing. This is not the place to comment on the ethics of an industry that relies on an unpaid workforce, although some publishers, especially smaller ones such as OR Books, do pay their interns a nominal wage. In the case of OR this is around \$50 per day – not enough to actually live on in New York but still something.

Getting into the right internship/s is in itself incredibly competitive – Writers House, for example, runs such a comprehensive internship program that junior agent Victoria Doherty-Munro joked 'it's harder to get into an internship here than it is to get into Harvard'.

Others who have completed the WH program call it 'a publishing boot camp'. Run by the dapper and incredibly welcoming director of interns – who remembers his interns from years ago and greets them with a hug – the program weaves an intensive publishing course into the internship, with guest speakers, a regular rotation of tasks including time in contracts, subrights and accounts departments, as well as 'practice projects' including writing an edit letter and a pitch letter for a real

manuscript. Graduates of the program describe the network it creates as ‘invaluable’. In their latest [call](#) for interns, WH say that since 2000 ‘the program has trained and placed 248 of its graduates into entry-level publishing jobs at all the major publishers...and agencies...’. One huge appeal for attendees is that most of WH’s assistants and, given their policy of promoting from within, ultimately their agents, come from this internship (as chairman Amy Berkower puts it, they ‘get to grow within the company’). And it’s valued in the industry too, since graduates have a good understanding of some of the less glamorous aspects of publishing, such as being able to read a royalty statement.

But does any of this help potential editors learn to edit?

US editors and agents have traditionally followed an informal ‘**apprenticeship model**’ to train up staff – which still exists, although seems to have become just that much more competitive and challenging.

Once an **assistant role** is secured – and assuming the person has the stamina to stick it out, since these jobs are overwhelmingly busy, poorly paid, and any editorial work or networking is done on your own time – there is a clear career path towards editing, and it’s often similar for agents. As assistant to one or, more usually these days, two or more editors, and after building a level of trust with them, the assistant will usually start reading and reporting on submissions, acting as a filter for the editor. For this reason, Emily Bestler, who has her own eponymous imprint at S&S, would ‘only hire someone who wants to be me some day’ – that is, they really want to be an editor, can’t wait to start editing, and are prepared to do all the work required. Most importantly, they have a similar taste to her. In some cases, and especially when the editor still edits on paper – as a surprising number still prefer to – the assistant might have the opportunity to get very close to an edit as take in those edits to the digital file using track changes (in some cases interns are asked to this too).

Eventually, the editor will have the assistant work more closely with them on a specific edit – in some cases doing a ‘shadow edit’ where they both do an edit and compare notes, or even doing the second pass edit or final line edit. A trusted assistant can act as a valuable fresh eye at that second or third round of edit when fatigue sets in, or as Susanna Porter called it ‘the challenges of seeing the forest for the trees’, picking up continuity errors or just giving a new perspective.

It used to be that at this stage assistants were often given the chance to acquire a book or take on a client for themselves, to champion it through the entire publishing process – for example, agent Dan Lazar of Writers House describes how he found something he loved in the slush pile, and ‘left it on [his boss, Simon Lipskar’s] couch where it was ignored until Simon said “do it yourself, if you like it”.’

That author is still his client today. Esi Sogah, senior editor at Kensington, had an unusual first day as an assistant at Avon Books, when someone resigned suddenly and she was given her first three authors to manage – at that stage she hadn't even written a readers' report! She says she did 'a ton of reading' those first few months and acquired her own first book nine months later – after she had written a very positive readers' report on it, her boss suggested she just, well, buy it.

But in many houses and agencies, the path has been formalised and 'assistants don't acquire', I was told. One young editor told me there were certain advantages to this – they weren't directly competing with other assistants to be the first to acquire or to acquire a big book, so they had a greater camaraderie, and had built a stronger support network, and so to this day feels like they're 'growing up in publishing together'.

A lot of this, of course, depends on the editor you work with – another young editor described working as assistant to an intensely competitive group of young editors who were extremely busy and focused on building their own lists, and not interested in encouraging others to develop their editing or acquisitions skills.

And even for an editor who is committed to mentoring, as staff numbers diminish and yet budget expectations still grow, the editor needs to find space in their workload to share their edits and give the assistant those opportunities. Harlequin editor Allison Carroll commented that she knows she was 'incredibly fortunate to have had bosses who championed' her. Several more senior editors and agents commented that they learned much more by osmosis, when as assistants in the days before email they had to type up letters for their bosses, including correspondence to authors, contract negotiations and edit letters. They recalled having to photocopy paper edits, laboriously removing the post-it notes and replacing them in the same spots, and to filing paperwork (while surreptitiously reading through the correspondence file). Now, editors work on email and with track changes – and take responsibility for their own email archiving. Offices are open plan so many negotiations take place via email or in small 'phone rooms' off the main floor of the office, or at agent's offices instead of the editors'. Editors spoke of now having to consciously copy in their assistants on emails, and invite them to listen in on phone calls and meetings, in order to give their mentees the same opportunity to learn that they felt they had.

More than one editor commented that a key part of their training came as an offshoot of writing rejection letters. Sarah Cantin, senior editor at Atria, spent much of her time as an assistant crafting rejection letters that also gave really good, constructive reasons why the book wasn't for her. She feels this taught her to really think about what was working in a book and what wasn't, whether it

was right for the market, what would need doing to bring it up to potential, whether it was one for her, and importantly *why*, and gaining the tools to ‘articulate’ that. Lauren Smulski, associate editor for Harlequin’s Teen and Mira imprints, adds that there is a value to ‘rejecting well and responding early’ because that agent will ‘look closely at your next offer’.

The next step in the career ladder is **associate editor**. This role usually combines the assistant role with an acquisitions load and can be hugely challenging – basically two jobs in one. As Judy Clain, VP and editor-in-chief at Little, Brown, says ‘it’s not the business for you if you expect weekends off’. That said, in many houses the role does not come with a specific budget or acquisitions target – so there’s no pressure financially. It’s more a personal challenge, to develop one’s own tastes, to grow a list, start to form relationships with agents and get some runs on the board. Of course you need to be able to do this while still working closely with the editors you report to, with a significant editorial load from them as well as administrative responsibilities.

From associate the next step is usually **editor** – but several interviewees commented on the obstacles in the way of making that step from the assistant role to a purely acquisitions one in the same house. This is often the point at which up-and-coming editors change houses in order to take that step up.

The **limitation**, of course, to the apprenticeship model is that you learn only how *your* boss edits – and, as Tara Singh, senior editor at Putman commented, ‘to a degree you already have to get it’. She sees another issue (for all of us) is that ‘you won’t know [if you’re any good at it] until you’ve been doing it for five years’ – that is, you’ve edited and seen several books published, and you know if they’ve worked. It also seems that you need to work your way up to a point where sales and marketing take you seriously and you start to get sufficient resources put behind the book to make it work.

So, in this model, **how useful are tertiary courses?**

Some editors thought the US courses on offer, which are primarily targeted at graduates, were most valuable for the networking and the job-seeking support they offer. They also give students a good overall view of how publishing works, with, for example, the Columbia course assessing teams of students as they create their own mini publishing houses and collaborate to create a book – including a jacket, cover copy and marketing strategy. This is all included in a catalogue that is sent out to key publishing folk, who select what they see as the most viable concept and meet with the group that pitched it to follow up with feedback and one-on-one time. At NYU, students create covers, write jacket copy and learn to pitch books, with feedback from key industry people. There

are often guest lecturers, giving an overview of their different roles in the industry, and a lot of networking, as well as job fairs.

Ginger Clark commented that these courses also give students ‘an early version of, a preview of’ some of the vocabulary of publishing, a sense of the structure, some have some great speakers, and students certainly get ‘bonded’ together as friends in future.

But some editors commented on the ‘self-filtering’ nature of these courses: most are post-graduate so an applicant needs to have completed a college undergraduate degree first, needs to be able to afford the cost of tuition, and the costs of living in one of the most expensive cities in the world while doing the course. The Columbia course, for example, is six weeks long and costs US\$8575 (although this includes room and board). They then need to support themselves while seeking work, often completing one or more low- or unpaid internships. This, to a huge degree, filters potential editorial staff on a socio-economic basis.

John Oakes, director of public university CUNY’s publishing program, is also critical of some of the content – unlike his program, some courses don’t acknowledge the problems he foresees with ‘traditional’ publishing, and he says many of their tutors have never ‘published a book’. He feels that our industry is ‘contracting and evolving’, and ‘although there are a million different paths’ many students won’t end up working at a ‘traditional midtown publisher’, and certainly not in a traditional role where editorial, marketing, sales etc. are separate departments. His course at CUNY, a public university with a more accessible, vocational mission, is focused on students learning to be flexible, mobile and open, looking at new ways of doing business and the realities of, for example, opening a start-up.

But the reality is that **these courses act as a filter** – they give students valuable support and a network. They indicate to future employers, among a flood of other, similarly impeccable CVs, that this candidate is serious. In addition many of the courses are also very focused on assisting their students find placements in publishing after completion of the course. Shaye Areheart, director of The Columbia Publishing Course, described how she uses her own personal contacts to ensure as many of her students as possible find placements. Even so, many of the editors I spoke to felt that, specifically for breaking into US editorial, internships were more useful – ‘spend that course fee on getting accommodation for three months and get some hands-on experience’ said one senior editor.

That said, and bearing in mind that in the US, ‘editing’ is inextricably bound up with acquiring, I had a lot of conversations about **the challenges of teaching developmental editing** where, so often, there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, especially compared to copyediting. Judy Clain feels that ‘some people just

have a gift or an eye for editing'. Lauren Smulski, a young editor acquiring for Harlequin's Teen and Mira imprints, feels that rather than being able to be 'taught', editing at this level is very 'intuitive', although she feels you can definitely hone your craft with direction and mentorship. But, she says, there's just 'a gut feeling that you have a good project', and how do you teach that without giving people that experience themselves? But given we can't give every hopeful editor the task of acquiring and developing a book in real life, how do we give students the opportunity to do this in a safe space such as an educational institution?

Amy Einhorn agrees that you 'can't teach taste' – although you can mould the way an editor works, and you can educate them in *your* taste so they work well with you and on your books. She feels that mentorship and internships are most useful to publishing hopefuls. Brianne Johnson at Writers House feels that 'editing is like writing – you do have to have a level of innate talent and then work hard to learn how to use that talent'.

John Oakes compares learning editing to learning to drive: you can go so far with theory, and that's important too – but in the end you get better at it by doing it, and learning from your mistakes (although presumably a slip in POV is slightly less fatal!).

Developing readers: platform, discoverability and breaking out

When I started working in rights it was a rule of thumb that nonfiction authors looking to be published in the US needed a **'platform'**, ideally somewhere at the Oprah end of the scale. (Jane Friedman provides a useful definition of platform here janefriedman.com/author-platform-definition/ but very simply it is 'an ability to sell books because of who you are or who you can reach'.) Somewhat naively, I now think, at the beginning of my trip I started out asking editors how necessary platform was now, whether it was still a requirement. After several incredulous looks I amended my questions to ask whether it was possible for a publisher to *create* a platform for a fiction writer; whose responsibility it was to guide an author on all things platform-related; and what kinds of platform worked better in terms of finding an audience for a book. (Nonfiction writers tend to come with an existing platform tied to the subject area of their book.)

'I hate to say it,' says one editor of literary fiction, 'but even literary authors do need a platform'. She used Garth Greenwell as an example: he's a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop, he's well connected in the literary scene, and came to his publisher with a huge platform because of his existing writer network, his prolific Twitter account, his reviewing, and being published in literary journals. '*What Belongs to You* is a great book but its success was definitely helped by his platform,' she adds.

Dan Lazar describes how the 'kinds of platform' authors might require have changed – from the heady days of Oprah's book club, now it might be a podcast or a popular Instagram account. (Although many editors acknowledge that raw numbers of followers/subscribers are never an indicator of sales.) But he sees the publishing house's role as to create a platform for them too – including via reviews and 'blurbs'. Even for fiction it's easier and more effective to say 'this is the new book from X' than 'here's a new book'.

Other **social media** that are seen as useful for creating a platform that really works for a writer are what are known as 'booktubers', i.e. creating short videos about books and reading on YouTube, where followers tend to convert most directly into sales. Next comes Instagram. It's now broadly acknowledged that Twitter followers or profile don't convert into sales but Twitter is still vital for the writer to network – with other writers as well as potential readers. The downside of course is how easy it is to find oneself the focus of some kind of scandal – 'which apart from anything can be terrible time wasters for writers and use up a lot of emotional resources too!' says Kamilla Banko, an editor at Paper Lantern Lit, as we discuss the latest fascinating incident breaking overnight, of SE Hinton getting into a brawl with readers over identifying some of her characters as gay and raising

the question of who ‘owns’ characters (more info here: www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-outsiders-gay-20161019-snap-story).

Paper Lantern Lit is a **packager/IP company** that develops YA and middle grade fiction from the ground up, matching concepts developed in-house with the right writer. They look for ‘interesting authors’, that is, ones with a platform or the potential to build one – ‘unfortunately it’s just not possible to be JD Salinger any longer,’ says Kamilla. Yes, numbers of followers on social media are one aspect, but do they also do something interesting outside their writing (or connected to their writing)? Do they have some level of ‘celebrity’ that can be exploited? YA and middle grade can be very ‘celebrity driven’ – even John Green is famous, though in his case it’s actually for his books. ‘Author personality really counts’ – whether they’re relatable, aspirational, how they communicate with readers and fans. Do they blog frequently and engagingly? Do they have other relatable interests?

Speaking of **blurbs** – as in the kind of pre-publication review quotes from other authors and sometimes literary publications like the *New York Times*, that appear on the jacket of a book but also, importantly, in marketing and sales material – sourcing these seems to have become a huge part of the editor’s job. It’s quite a process: tapping into one’s network of authors, agents and colleagues for authors who might be appropriate and willing to supply a quote, but without overusing any one reviewer, or pushing a favour too far. The book’s author can help, but as Lauren Smulski points out, it’s vital to ensure you are on the same page. Will a blurb from that person help position the book correctly, do they have a high enough profile for their words to make a difference, or are they just a supportive friend?

There was much debate over the value of blurbs for readers – given the considerable resources invested in getting them in the first place (one editor described some borderline nefarious techniques, including a deep internet search, she’d once used to get a galley into a particular author’s hands) – but on the whole editors felt they were more about internal and bookseller positioning, and the earlier you have them the better so sourcing them begins sometimes before a book is even acquired. They can then become part of the agent’s pitch. One editor had heard from a bookseller that blurbs are mostly useful in assessing whether the book is to their personal taste – but also ‘would that book do well here, did the blurbing author do well here?’ But this of course can be a negative too, if the blurbing author did not do well in that store! There are definitely ‘first-tier blurbers’ – authors who work well. One editor tells me ‘Elizabeth Gilbert and Stephen King are the only ones who matter’! Amy Einhorn also had feedback from a bookseller who reported that it’s less about the content of the quote, and more how it positions the book for them, but importantly, also

that it shows the author and publisher ‘know how to play the game’. But regardless of who benefits, these blurbs ultimately end up helping with the ‘lifting’ of the book both in-house and in the market.

Another obsession of US editors is finding **the perfect ‘comp’ or comparison title**. As here, these are used to position books for sales, marketing and booksellers. Juliet Grames of Soho Press points out that the passion for finding that ideal comp title is problematic, because the more interesting books don’t actually *have* comparisons, they’re not ‘like’ anything else – that’s the reason you acquire them, and that’s the hook for readers. Amy Einhorn agrees that comps can be useful and an important selling tool, but for ‘truly fresh and original books there are no comps, so [the obsession with comps] can limit those new voices from being published’.

I also asked publishers whether it’s possible to **make a break-out book**, or whether it’s more organic than that.

Susanna Porter felt that, ‘unfortunately it’s not the publisher’, despite much analysis of how and why books do break out, and considerable resources put towards trying. It’s definitely something to do with a spark created by word-of-mouth and readers themselves. Although, she says, that ‘flame’ does need to be ‘ignited’ somewhere and often that comes from publishing house support. Bob Miller agrees: ‘Certainly internal support helps but isn’t the whole story – somewhere along the line there needs to be some kind of pixie dust’.

But Erika Imranyi felt that that kind of buzz *does* start in-house – if you can’t break it out in-house ‘the writing’s probably already on the wall’. Dan Lazar agrees – his sense is that it comes from the top down in a publishing house, that it’s decided as a company that they’ll prioritise this book, and then the company as a whole will champion it, and importantly invest the necessary resources in it. Dan says part of the magic though is how the author speaks about their own book. Ultimately that author will have to talk about their book to editors, readers and others, so if they’ve got that one line that drags Dan in at the outset, that will form part of his pitch and ultimately part of their promotion of the book.

Many publishers now have their own in-house programs to start that buzz early. Sally Kim describes PRH’s Tidal Wave program where the sales team meet monthly to decide which book they want to be their ‘make book’ and throw their massive resources behind. HarperCollins has a similar program, where imprints compete to have their lead title selected for the Lead Read program.

Another way of creating **in-house buzz** and a sense of ownership are rights sales – if the publisher has the rights, that is. Rights sales by the agent don't have as much impact internally. Tara Singh thinks perhaps that's because sales to international territories gives everyone a sense of ownership.

I asked Liane Moriarty's US publisher Amy Einhorn what she thought was the secret behind Liane's apparent overnight success in the US with *The Husband's Secret* – her first *New York Times* bestseller. (Liane's most recent book *Truly Madly Deeply* was a bestseller and Liane was in the midst of an extensive author tour while I was in the US.) Amy says that because of that exposure, there are lots of people who think *The Husband's Secret* was her first book – in my experience it is the same in Australia, where a lot of readers hadn't heard of Liane before her US success. Amy reminds me that the first of Liane's books she published, *What Alice Forgot*, sold 20,000 copies in hardback – a fair but modest quantity – but around 80 000 ebooks. So part of what broke her out was actually an existing large and established market of readers and fans, built and developed over time. The success of *Husband* was partly this backstory of hard work and growing an author – plus of course an 'iconic cover' and a dash of 'right place, right time' as domestic suspense as a genre really found a big market. Liane also writes 'acute social commentary but is never mean' and that appeals to readers who then want to talk about her books – so a lot of her success is down to word-of-mouth.

But **what can the publisher do** to make a book break out? 'Well,' says Amy, 'I could describe what we did on one book that worked, and we can do exactly the same for another book and it won't – it's completely unpredictable'. But what they do have in common, she says, is that 'they are books that people want to talk about'. Brianne Johnson describes it as 'that magic X-factor', adding that 'platform helps' but the book needs to be unputdownable, and to really grab the reader, and after that, 'everything else [about creating buzz] is negotiable'. She suggests debut authors set aside five to ten per cent of their debut advance to invest in marketing and brand development for themselves – beyond what a publisher can (or will) do. She tells them 'you're always going to wish your publisher would do more for you', especially given that, in most cases, the publishing house won't have budget for trade advertising for a debut – 'especially a debut'. It also means that once the publisher sees the author committing their own resources, they may see it as worthwhile to invest more. Brianne emphasises that she suggests authors not spend money on publicity, that doesn't do much for sales vs the cost of pursuing it – but to invest in *marketing*, that is, advertising. This is how discoverability starts, she says. The other key to discoverability is 'serious, old-fashioned talent' which creates word-of-mouth. There's no way of buying word-of-mouth, that comes from 'that X-factor' which in itself 'is a product of talent plus hard work'.

Jenna Johnson at FSG drilled down even further – as she sees it there are two routes to making a book break out. For FSG, a literary imprint of Macmillan, the first is via indie bookseller buy-in – this ‘can create heft and success’, although you can’t ‘achieve the velocity’ that will make it a megaseller – unfortunately indie booksellers just don’t move that number of copies.

The other route is appealing to ‘the grass roots’ – that is, getting readers to talk about books on social media. She uses the example of the US edition of *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara (published in the US by Doubleday (PRH)), when readers photographing themselves with the book cover – which in the US has a full bleed image of a man’s face – in front of their head went viral on Instagram. Jenna’s sense is that that Doubleday did not seed the social media so much as encourage that spark internally once it hit off. The key is that publishers need to be able to ‘react nimbly to that groundswell once that spark ignites’.

Sally Kim agrees, saying that corporate publishers are finally looking beyond their sales teams and key accounts and realising they need to know how to get books directly into people’s hands too – and are investing by hiring digital marketers in an effort to catch up to readers, to speak directly to their readers in a way they didn’t before, the way successful genre and indie authors do. Publishers are also looking at how they can ‘cut through that sea of noise’ with extremely limited resources, says Kim.

Jhanteigh Kupihea, senior editor at Atria Books, agrees that ‘the majority of the time trying to make [a break-out book] doesn’t work’ but points out that ‘all our books are acquired to be break-out books’. She feels that ‘you have to believe in the product, from the top down’.

More cynically, one editor at a small independent press told me that it’s as easy as paying Barnes & Noble to make a book break out, if you have those resources.

But how do you **position ‘accessibly literary’ and ‘high-end commercial’** given that increasingly they’re effectively the same book, the book that all editors seem to be looking to acquire? ‘How do you have your cake and eat it too?’ as Sally Kim puts it – how do you get the literary reviews that are so vital to break through in the US and yet still sell in Target? There are many US imprints that are now blurring this line between literary and commercial fiction – for example Penguin imprint Riverhead, traditionally a literary imprint, bid on and won the commercial cross-over *The Girl on the Train*, to great success. Kim points out that the story in that alone creates a degree of buzz – and the trade sees it as an important or special book from the outset.

But again, Sally points out that it all begins with the quality of the book. There may be increasing pressure to acquire that ‘hot new thing with the high-end pitch’ – but the reality is that the books that continue on and build after that first flash of attention at release are the ones that are in fact really *good*. ‘The odds of success are actually really poor, so the book itself has to be excellent.’

Rachel Kahan, executive editor at William Morrow (HarperCollins) agrees that break-out books can be made, absolutely: ‘we make them all the time’. That said, you’ve ‘got to be a good picker’ and have the right book to promote in the first place. As part of this you have to know your audience. For this reason Rachel tries to avoid ‘cynical publishing’ – publishing books she’s not in love with because she sees a trend or wants to fill a slot.

Challenges

I had some extremely lively conversations about the challenges facing publishers. I wanted to know whether US publishers face different challenges to us here, and whether there was reason to be optimistic. It was also interesting to compare the bigger, established imprints and editors to the smaller and newer ones – including the challenges that come from building a new list when an editor has moved to a new house or the focus of the imprint has shifted; as well as the challenge of creating an entirely new imprint.

And of course we all face the challenges created by a **shrinking retail market** and ‘a concentration of book sales with one leading online retailer’, as Tina Jordan of the American Association of Publishers puts it. One big challenge most interviewees agreed on was that of **‘discoverability’**. How do readers find books, when there is less and less physical shelf space? Many editors referred to Barnes & Noble, who have notoriously decreased shelf space for books by half, to prioritise higher profit non-book items like stationery, mugs and, well, handbags. As here in Australia, mass market retailers are also ‘dialling back’ (as Jenna Johnson puts it) on books – both Target and Costco are radically reducing their shelf space for books and although they didn’t ever take many titles, they could really make the ones they did take on, creating ‘lightning in a bottle’ and guaranteeing huge sales. Amazon, the other key book retailer, does not actually have physical shelves, of course, and use complex and constantly changing algorithms for searches, bestsellers, reader recommendations and other means of making a particular book more visible.

So how do readers find books? As the internet and social media become the key places for publishers to market books, and for readers to discover them, we create new challenges for ourselves: once we’ve sent our potential reader to Twitter to find our book, how do we get them back to the book itself again? When there are so many distractions, from Netflix to podcasts to social media, how do we keep readers reading – and buying – books?

The lack of shelf space is even more of a challenge for nonfiction titles, Bob Miller of Flatiron points out. Although ebook sales have stabilised – and may even be in decline, depending how you interpret recent statistics – and there are now predictable and significant digital sales for fiction (varying by category, but comprising around half to two-thirds of sales for bestselling fiction), digital is not such a significant portion of nonfiction sales. Depending on category, around 85% cent of sales for nonfiction are print format – and as much as 98% in some categories, like cookbooks, other illustrated and children’s. This of course means that physical shelves are vital for readers to find nonfiction in the first place. But the failure of major bookselling chain Borders in 2010 wiped out

15% of US bookstores in one go, leaving only B&N as a significant player. Lack of shelves leads to lack of discoverability in the traditional sense – and this is ‘a big problem’, says Bob.

For fiction, having a solid digital market means that the book is constantly accessible, so even if you only have a miniscule number of physical copies out on shelves, if the book gets ‘a little bit of the right attention, it can still have a big life’, i.e. readers can lay their hands on it immediately (and in the meantime, you can buy time to respond with print copies). But for nonfiction, once hard copies of a book aren’t visible on shelves, you’ve lost a huge part of your ability to sell it at all.

Other challenges faced by publishers include the **trend towards massive advances** and everyone bidding on the same few titles. Amy Berkower points out that this means it’s harder to sell those smaller or newer writers – ones without a splashy debut, anyway. But often there’s no marketing hook beyond that big advance and that’s only on publisher’s radars, ‘there’s nothing in that for the reader’. She admits that Writers House has certainly made money out of those big advances but doesn’t see it as a sustainable trend – especially when publishers are paying seven-figure advances on two-book deals. ‘When the first book doesn’t work it’s even harder to get the second one up to any kind of level (even if the book deserves it).’

Agent Faye Bender points out that this also leaves books ‘in the middle’ out in the cold – even ones with reasonably significant advances out against them, say US\$125K. It’s ‘heartbreaking’ to see these great books not achieve the readership they deserve. Unfortunately, even with the best of intentions, these books don’t receive the attention and resources they deserve and require in-house, and so from the very outset it’s ‘difficult for them to succeed’ even on their own terms – to get them into the hands of the readers. So the real challenge becomes ‘how to circumvent the top feeding and round out everyone’s list’, and, in the longer term, how to build a real career for authors.

The literary agents I spoke to saw a related trend in their industry: **authors making agents compete against each other to represent them**. Why this trend? Ginger Clark think these ‘beauty pageants’ are happening more frequently partly because there are so many more agents setting up now, and authors are better educated and want to ‘play the game a lot more’. Frustratingly for them, agents invest a lot of their personal and professional time in preparing notes for the author and pitching to them. And of course in many cases authors will go with the agent (or editor) who *doesn’t* ask them to do any or significant work on their manuscript.

As a spin-off from this, several editors noted the ubiquity of the dumbed-down **celebrity book** – where a high-profile media personality, vlogger or YouTube star is attached to a cookbook or a

makeup book they did not, could not, write. As Susanna Porter puts it, the fear is that the ‘bad money pushes out the good money’ – that you create a market where books aren’t valued for their literary merits, that there won’t be room on the already squeezed and shrinking shelves for books by *writers* for readers.

One challenge that was on the forefront of everyone’s mind was the **US presidential election**, which apart from fear about what might happen in the future for artists, writers and even publishers, had the effect of taking up almost all potential publicity airtime for almost eighteen months (and, writing now after it has all been decided, possibly for a lot longer).

Internal changes at publishers have also created challenges. Tina Jordan mentions ‘**the concentration of publishing houses**’ – acquisition of another house is seen as the only way to grow in the current shrinking market. This, Tina feels, ultimately damages variety and range of product as well as the number of books that are actually able to be produced – ‘bigger publishers are looking for the even bigger blockbusters they need to keep the machine running’. As Liz Stein puts it, there’s more and more pressure to succeed and make those advances back; and less and less people to actually make the books. And these mergers create other issues – employees see potential disruption for staff after Penguin Random House’s recent announcement that Penguin will move into Random House’s premises on Broadway in 2019, a massive undertaking as two very entrenched and different cultures merge into one physical building. Other recent mergers, such as Harlequin and HarperCollins, create similar challenges and disruption for staff.

Agents, too, are concerned that their **options for places to sell will become more limited** – some foresee a future where, for example, Penguin and Random editors aren’t allowed to bid against each other. It’s only good business for the publishers to stop this, Faye Bender says. Amy Einhorn is concerned that as publishers become more ‘conglomeratised’, they tend to ‘buy by committee’, and acquisitions seem to be run now ‘by the business people’. She’s concerned that a book like *The Help* would never have been acquired if there had been too many voices at the table (not the least because they may have rightly pointed out that this was a white woman writing in black voices about a contentious part of US history...!). It’s a good thing and a bad thing, she comments, to try to make publishing more of a business – editors run P&Ls and analyse data more now, and so have a better understanding of their market and the retail scene, but is concerned all this prevents fresher voices from getting their start.

Smaller and independent publishers face other challenges, including that of **distribution**. Juliet Grames of Soho books acknowledges that their books are distributed ‘wonderfully’ by PRH, but

‘when your sales force are external it can take a lot of elbow grease to get billing’ among all the other books they’re looking after. She also finds there’s a lot of pressure to reinvent their authors, to exploit any niche or expertise, exploit any opportunity for exposure – taking energy and limited resources away from editorial and away from creating great books for readers.

Another challenge facing Soho, as well as other publishers, is **book pricing**: an average book that had a retail price of \$23.95 in 1993 is still priced about the same now, even while the cost of rent, staff, paper, printing and distribution has risen. And with digital and indie publishing and Amazon, there’s pressure to keep prices even lower and discount more. Everyone’s making less...and everything costs more. Publishers are being forced to ‘chase a business model where volume equals billing’ – the size of the print run dictates how much energy is spent building author profile and shelf space in bookstores – and makes it difficult to compete as a smaller publisher.

Are there any answers?

While the challenges US publishers face are nothing new to Australian publishers, and in fact I suspect sometimes we wish we had their problems in tandem with their potential market, their media outlets and their literary scene, on the whole publishers were upbeat and positive about the future.

Jane Friedman suggests that while the problems are different there are lessons for book publishers in the music business, where there’s been a 76% decline in the average consumer spend on music since 1999 as consumers turned to streaming and buying electronically rather than the more expensive physical product. Because the music business has been keeping much more comprehensive historical data for much longer than the book industry, they’ve been able to more effectively crunch the numbers, as detailed in [this](#) article at [redef.com](#), ‘Ride or Die’ Less money, mo’ music & lots of problems: a look at the music biz.

The nitty-gritty of editing: how other editors edit!

One of the delights of my time in the US was being able to talk about editing all day, every day. And there are definitely some universals of editing. But thought I would share some of the more sparkling gems, interesting strategies and practical tips I heard:

- Kamilla Banko aptly described the editor as ‘a guest in someone else’s world’. We also discussed editing as a heavily creative role, and how that’s often overlooked – by editors themselves as well as their employers and, to an extent, authors. It’s not that editors want credit for that creativity – it definitely remains the author’s project and we are facilitators between reader and writer – but more in terms of self-care, not beating ourselves up if it’s just not coming or takes a long time to ‘get into it’, allowing ourselves rest time to refresh those juices, and while being conscious of deadlines – as a necessity – also appreciating that sometimes it doesn’t come to order.
- Amy Schneider is a freelance fiction editor, and I had the pleasure of attending one of her sessions at the EFA conference. She discussed her (fairly typical) editing method: she does three passes, one full read on her couch, where she makes no notes; a main edit, on-screen; and final read-through and clean-up on-screen, removing tags and notes. She uses four separate style sheets, titled 01, 02 etc., so she can tab to them easily – a word list; character list; a timeline, which she uses a calendar format to track, especially when more than one story is running parallel; and a list of locations. She uses four monitors to work. Four! She also discussed ‘the art of the gentle query’, that is, avoiding addressing the author as ‘you’ even if it requires considerable ‘gymnastics’ to get there.
- Another EFA speaker Ally E Machate discussed different editing styles – do you use a ‘cheerleader’ style or an ‘educational’ style, where the developmental edit acts as a one-on-one writing course with author’s manuscripts as focus. She reminds us that it’s important to remember to tell the author what they’re doing *right*, otherwise they might ‘chop that’ too.
- Kathy Sagan, senior editor at Mira, invited me to listen in on an editorial phone call with a high-profile, high-volume repeat author for Harlequin. The author is writing a big book in a new genre, and is struggling with deadlines and being overcommitted – and possibly the different requirements of the new genre. Kathy’s strategy has been to institute weekly phone calls to keep the author – and the manuscript – on track. The author emails through the latest section,

outlining any particular issues she's encountered, they chat about it and the content of the proposed next chapters, how character arcs are working, the balance of backstory required, points of view and potential issues. Kathy also reminds the author not to go back and line edit at this stage, to keep moving forward with the big picture.

- Tara Singh, senior editor at Putnam (PRH) talks about her 'sandwich method' of editing: first, a conversation with the author (usually by phone, although in person if possible), then sending through her initial edit letter. She then checks in by phone a week or so later – since she finds that they might agree to everything in the initial chat but seeing it on paper, and having time to sleep on it, they find they have objections or questions, or simply do not know where to begin.
- A surprising number of editors confessed, like it was their darkest secret, that upon first read, they handwrite out a summary by hand – 'mapping out' the manuscript in detail. This might include a chapter breakdown, timeline, list of character development, etc. In one case the editor showed me how they must have one sheet of paper, folded precisely in half lengthways, to make these notes on.
- Mary-Theresa Hussey, who freelances under the apt business name of Good Stories, Well Told, showed me her 'office': she works with two screens, keeping her dictionary and other resources open on one screen. She uses a time management app to keep track of projects/billing. Depending on the job, she starts with a nice long editorial letter, which includes lots of general information and links to resources for the author while they rework – she sees her role partly as educating the author in the basics of 'how to write', especially when she works with authors who plan to self-publish and/or may not have a lot of writing experience. After working at Harlequin for over twenty-five years, her speciality is romance so her standard style sheet includes columns for character names, brands, locations, and a series of timeline columns to keep track chapter-by-chapter of narrative arc/s. One of these is a 'romantic arc' column – including entries like 'kissed', 'nearly had sex' etc. (She also caused an intense case of bookshelf envy when she showed me her custom built-in bookshelves, designed to hold books two deep on each shelf.)
- Like many of us, Amanda Brower, associate editor at Little, Brown, was taught that if you 'raise a problem' in an edit, you need to suggest a solution to that problem. You need to keep in mind,

she says, that the author is not trying to be mean or lazy, and it's not good enough to just say some aspect is 'not working' without trying to pin down why for them.

- Brianne Johnson, agent at Writers House, THRUST into my hands a copy of a new book by one of her clients, 'plot genius' and Scholastic editor Cheryl Klein – *The Magic Words: writing great books for children and young adults*. 'This book changed the way I edit for life', she says. In particular she uses the 'plot checklist' template in the book to work through her edits – it's also available here: cherylklein.com/book-resources/plotchecklist. She suggest all her writers use it when revising, both adult and children's authors. Brianne also suggested a useful podcast for editors, 'The Narrative Breakdown' at narrativebreakdown.com
- An impressive number of editors still prefer to edit on paper – and this does not seem to be related to age, as some of the more junior editorial staff worked this way too. Leslie Meredith of Atria feels that especially for her nonfiction books, it's so much more 'fruitful' for her to work on paper. She finds editors and writers miss a lot of repetition in particular when only working on-screen – in one case, she came across whole chunks repeated several times. Also for working with structure, she finds she can see the big picture more clearly on paper – though she does think that if she could have four huge screens she might prefer to work on-screen. (What is it with four screens?) As mentioned previously, some editors then have assistants or associate editors type up these notes onto the manuscript using track changes, while some prefer to do it themselves, adding to or refining their comments as they go.
- Of course some authors still prefer to work on paper too, and in these cases Johanna Castillo, also of Atria, occasionally uses freelancers to key author's edits into the soft copy for typesetting, saying she prefers to pay people who have the skills/expertise to transcribe quickly and accurately rather than try to do it herself. Johanna also prefers to edit fiction on paper, and likes to break the manuscript up into chapters, spreading them around her dining room table and making notes on the front page of each. She finds this lets her see timeline/pacing/character more clearly. Surprisingly though she prefers to work on nonfiction on-screen. She'll then type in her changes in track changes (if the author will be able to work that way).
- Emily Bestler always writes down her edit notes for her author to read and absorb in their own time, in contrast her husband, also an editor, who 'does his edits over the phone', going through the manuscript closely with the author verbally. Emily says she feels her method allows

her to be more firm (but 'not brutal') and honest in pointing out what needs to be worked on. She describes editing as akin to weeding a garden: 'just when you think you're done, you realise the weeds you've removed have exposed another layer of weeding that needs to be done', that is, every time she reads a new draft she sees new things that need to be addressed – a lovely way of thinking about why more than one developmental pass may be necessary. She sees her role as an editor as being able to say to the author things about a book that the reader thinks and feels but can't say: this character wouldn't behave like that, or I can't understand why we're in London all of a sudden.

- Jenna Johnson of FSG describes her first round of edit as 'getting rid of any ballast'. She also says she sometimes finds herself frustrated by the process of editing, for example she might get fixated on something and revisit it in edit round after edit round, but the author, for whatever reason, ignores or refuses to change and it stays in the book. In the end she asks herself, did it really matter? Will it ultimately bother the reader? Will the change have affected the overall book?
- Bob Miller at Flatiron perceives the editor as 'a romantic': seeing a book the way you want to, as you originally envisioned it, and then working towards that vision, ensuring the 'cover and all moving parts' are true to the book. Red flags for Bob that a nonfiction book might need significant structural work are a book that is really hard to find a title for, and hard to design a cover for. 'There's probably more than one book lurking in there, and you need to get the right one out'. He suggests that you need to think about what will attract readers to a book vs what the book is about 'at its essence' – and how to bring these potentially contradictory elements together while retaining the integrity (of book and author).
- Juliet Grames of Soho Press notes 'it's really lonely to be an author' and so the editorial relationship can be a vital one. It's important too to know your own weaknesses as an editor. Juliet finds that now when she reads, even for pleasure, she's 'always looking for what can be improved' – obviously this is important when working in acquisition but 'the problem is [she] sometimes loses the joy of just reading'.
- Harlequin editor Allison Carroll describes the in-house editor's role rather neatly: the editor's role is 'to identify an author's audience and communicate with them'; but also to remember your responsibility to 'the business who pays you' so you're also 'the author's advocate in-house and the publisher's advocate to the author'.

- Shaye Areheart, who ran her own imprint at Crown for many years before moving across to training editors, sums up the editor's responsibility to the author beautifully: 'I don't want someone to say something in a review that I didn't say to you first'.
- And finally, a few words from the EFA keynote speaker, Mary Norris, also known as 'the comma queen' and a copyeditor at the *New Yorker*. She believes 'editing also involves the ear' and hearing how things sound, both in the outside world and in the writing itself – giving an example of a colleague who went deaf and the result was that the text they edited was no longer so 'light' as it had been. She also shared some of the general principles she uses when editing: always respect the voice of the author; suppress the ego 'in the service of the writing'; be alert for things that sound good but don't really mean anything, e.g. expressions like 'Anglo-British'; and finally 'cultivate self-doubt' (or, 'check check check!'). She offers advice on how not to miss something when you're editing too: 'do your best', although she acknowledges how 'deeply humiliating' an error can be. ('A night's sleep helps!'). She says that *New Yorker* readers are 'very good at writing in with errors'.

Inclusivity and diversity

Inclusivity and diversity were two words that come up in just about every conversation (as well as 'Trump' and 'Clinton' but I will not go into that here!). There are many discussions happening in the US, as there are here, about how we might better reflect our diverse societies, both in terms of what goes on the page, and in terms of who has access to working in publishing.

As referred to above, even more so than in Australia, the competitive nature of publishing means that it is far easier for young people of a certain socio-economic 'type' to find their way into publishing. It's expensive to attend a publishing course and even more expensive to live in New York while you complete an internship or for the long years as a low-paid assistant or associate. But publishers are increasingly having these conversations and looking at ways to overcome this slant towards a certain demographic.

Tied into '**who gets to publish**' is the debate about '**who gets published**'. For the reasons discussed earlier, a writer who's been able to attend a post-graduate writing program, spend time building their writing portfolio, networking and building a social media profile – not to mention simply having the luxury of time to actually write – is more likely to get the attention of an agent and a publisher.

Caroline Bleeke, associate editor at Flatiron, says they ask themselves the slightly facetious question 'will it play in Omaha', but points out how careful we must be to not let our own relative homogeneousness affect our publishing too much – we're so often city dwellers, university educated, read widely on social issues, come from a similar socio-economic and demographic background, and a similar political alignment. Younger editors are working hard to bring more diverse voices, finding stories that 'aren't about us' and yet hold a universal truth – and to create a viable market for those books.

At the same time editors and others are working to **ensure texts are as inclusive as possible**. At a fantastic and lively session on the topic at the EFA conference, award-winning freelance editor Sarah Grey suggested that no one is the true authority on inclusiveness, no one knows everything, but we have a duty to *try to* get it right. It's not 'political correctness', she says, it's about ethics, etiquette, accuracy and customer service. Language is a tool that's here to serve *all* of us, and making everyone feel welcome and bearing in mind how our language choices affect this is just plain good manners. Her basic principle: don't be a jerk! Pressing buttons is fine, she acknowledges, as long as you know the buttons you're pressing, and why you're pressing them, and are prepared to accept the aftermath of said pressing. It's part of our job as editors to keep authors up to date with changes in usage / terminology in general. Assume the best intentions, and communicate with authors tactfully:

'I'm worried that your readers – or worse, reviewers – might wrongly take your wording here to be to be sexist in nature. Let's rephrase!'

Sarah also suggested some resources including style sheets from relevant organisations; using the Conscious Style Guide (<http://consciousstyleguide.com/>); keeping up to date with relevant blogs and articles on inclusive language; and retraining your own brain to be aware of and alert to non-inclusive usage.

There was also much discussion around Lionel Shriver's controversial Brisbane Writers Festival speech on **cultural appropriation**, especially among students of writing and editing programs. While the answer to the questions raised by these conversations are far more complex than Lionel might have implied, it's great that we're having these conversations.

Many YA and children's publishers – who are on the coalface of changes in how we perceive inclusiveness and diversity in books – now commission '**sensitivity reads**' as a stage of the editorial process to check for issues of inclusivity and cultural appropriation, using specialists in various fields – there is a database of readers here writeinthemargins.org/sensitivity-readers. Kamilla Banko personally reminds herself constantly that she 'is a white girl from the Midwest' and therefore has certain privileges that might lead her to not seeing certain issues. The most important thing, she says, once you've done the best you can, is 'to be gracious when you're wrong'.

Final thoughts

Tina Jordan from the AAP points out that the publishing industry is unfairly judged for being traditional, slow to embrace change, even unwieldy and staid, but in fact it's a very vibrant industry:

- The number of translated titles is growing and moving from a more academic readership to a general readership, e.g. the success of Scandi crime
- Readership is growing: the generation of kids who rediscovered reading with Harry Potter are now grown up and passing that love down to their kids
- There are thriving awards programs that not only reward authors for their work but are hugely important in creating awareness among readers
- Publishers are using data to find their readers and offer them a richer experience, and are more data driven than ever before, including analysing market data from places like Facebook, Twitter and Goodreads
- Editors have great relationships and networks with writers, agents, and readers.

The editorial process is treated much more reverently in the US by the industry as a whole, in my experience. Obviously I come from an editorial perspective, but I can't help wondering whether we, in Australia, are – by necessity perhaps, or perhaps as a result of local publishing often growing out of distribution companies – less focused on the book itself, than selling the product? I know this is of course my own personal slant, and that those sales pay my wage and sponsor programs like the BDEF – and that this sense would be very different in the event this was a publicity fellowship or a sales fellowship. And I certainly don't dismiss the invaluable contribution sales, marketing and publicity teams make to our acquisitions – nor did any of the editors or agents I spoke to, of course.

That said, one of the delights of my conversations and interviews was the emphasis on the value of the editor, and *their* investment in the book as both a work of art and a saleable product. It might seem obvious but it was still inspiring to hear so many editors prioritising the quality of the writing and the experience for the reader, even within the hunt for that next big blockbuster – something that the editor is uniquely positioned to recognise and champion.

In the US there is an expectation that the acquiring editor will edit, and only that editor – but then this can also allow for idiosyncrasies to flourish. As editors, we have more opportunities here in Australia, both in-house and as freelancers, to work more broadly on texts and across different kinds of edits and styles of book – but less opportunity for mentorship and, especially if one pursues a freelance career, it's harder to continue your professional development and you receive little in the way of feedback on your work. Budgets and schedules limit the time an editor has working directly

with the author, so we aren't able to form the same kinds of relationships with them, and earn their trust (or otherwise!) to the same degree. On the other hand, as the in-house editor I can give both freelance editor and author somewhere safe to ask questions, to disagree with an editorial suggestion, and allow both parties to retain 'face' and not risk damaging their relationship in the heat of the moment.

One editor who has worked with both American and UK publishers put it to me that perhaps it's not just time and budgets, perhaps we do actually have a different editorial style in Australia from the US, suggesting that perhaps the culture of the UK and Australia was more about stepping back and letting the author prevail, a 'politeness' about our editing style, if you will, whereas a 'brash American' will step in and feel free suggest significant changes – *à la* Maxwell Perkins as described in *Max Perkins: Editor of Genius* by A Scott Berg. It seems like their authors are perhaps more willing to have their books reworked and reworked – although to be fair I am not privy to what goes on inside an author's head. Perhaps it's as simple as the reality that in the US market so many more writers can actually live off income from their books alone, compared to our authors – it's simply a more commercial transaction from the outset. Do we give our authors more space to be themselves, or do we not push them far enough? I also wonder about the balance of power – the author is entirely in the hands of the editor, to a degree. If they don't feel secure there, what recourse do they have? These are questions I still don't have answers to.

But to sum up, at last, at one of my very first meetings in the US a young editor said to me that 'publishing is definitely an industry of ups and downs, but it is all worth it because the highs are so high'. I can't agree more.

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