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How to Be in Charge (*and Make Authors Do What You Tell Them*): An Examination of Editorial Authority in Letters Written by Trade Fiction and Nonfiction Editors

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How to Be in Charge ~~and Make Authors Do What You Tell Them~~:
An Examination of Editorial Authority in Letters Written by Trade Fiction and Nonfiction Editors

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Research Question:
What are the different ways in which editors of trade fiction and nonfiction establish their professional authority when writing editorial letters to authors?

Introduction

"A developmental editor performs two tasks," according to Per Henningsgaard, Director of the graduate program in Book Publishing at Portland State University. "Number one is to identify the sorts of changes that need to be made to the manuscript. Number two is to communicate those changes to the author."[1]

The primary means by which a developmental editor (henceforth to be referred to as "editor") fulfills their job is through an editorial letter, a comprehensive document written to the author addressing existing errors and weaknesses in the author's manuscript with the aim of having the author correct these errors to improve the overall work. Editorial letters can be as short as three pages or as long as twenty (or even longer). Letters can cover any number of writing aspects, such as language, structure, plot, pacing, characterization, consistency, dialogue, setting, genre conventions, and audience. This list is by no means exhaustive.

Editorial letters hold special significance to both editors and authors. Adam O'Connor Rodriguez, senior editor at Hawthorne Books believes that "[an] editor is a hybrid of a writer and an editor…[and that] editor's job is teach professional writers how to write."[2] Editors know that authors will be using their letters as guides to refer back to again and again when revising. Authors will pour over letters

[1] Per Henningsgaard, "First Lecture on Developmental Editing" (lecture, Portland State University, Portland, OR, February 2015).
[2] Adam O'Connor Rodriguez, "1. The Role of a DE and How We Can Improve That" (lecture, Portland State University, Portland, OR, January 7, 2016).

in order to make sure they understand the problems their editor has identified in their manuscript and what they need to do to fix them.

As such, it's necessary that editorial letters effectively convey to the author what kinds of edits a manuscript requires in order to be a successful piece of writing. Equally importantly, editorial letters must be written such that a positive relationship develops between the editor and author: The editor recognizes the author as the original creator who has the final say over their work. The author recognizes the editor's skill at their job and their insight into the author's manuscript.

The aim of all editorial letters is for authors to edit and improve the quality of their writing *by using* the editor's notes, edits, suggestions, and directions found in each respective letter. Even if an author disagrees with an editor, decides not to perform a particular edit, or figures out a way on their own to revise a problem in the manuscript, an editor nevertheless desires the author to recognize and respect the editor's authority as someone with experience and insight into the English literature, language, and the writing thereof.

This paper will introduce and discuss the ways in which six different editors of trade fiction establish their own authority as editors in their developmental letters to their authors. These particular editors edit a wide range of genres, such as literary fiction, adult fantasy and science fiction, middle grade fiction, short story collections, memoirs, and nonfiction. Some are (or have been) editors for big New York publishing houses, and others are part of small, independent presses. One editor is currently a literary agent, and another does freelance editing in addition to

working at a publishing house. All six of them write letters in different styles and employ similar tactics in a variety of ways in order to identify errors with the aim of having the author address them.

Over the course of this paper, I will discuss ten different overall means by which an editor may write an editorial letter in order to embody and convey authority to the author. I will begin by introducing each contributor and their letters:

- **Steve Silverman** is an editor of literary fiction at an independent publishing house in Portland, Oregon that publishes four to five titles a year and a freelance editor. His Letter #1 is written to a more experienced writer regarding a memoir/investigative account of a criminal trial and his Letter #2 is to a newbie writer hard at work on her memoir of her childhood and teenage years.
- **Arielle Rabinowitz** is an editor of literary fiction at a slightly larger independent publishing house in Portland, Oregon that publishes nine to ten titles a year. For this paper she has submitted two letters for two different novel manuscripts (Letters #1 and #2).
- **Joseph Goldstein** is a literary agent for commercial fiction and a former editor of a large New York publishing house of fantasy, science fiction, and horror. He has submitted a letter for a YA-leaning science fiction manuscript (Letter #1).
- **Rachel Kravinsky** is an editor of literary fiction at a small, newly established literary press in Portland, Oregon publishing anywhere from one to four

titles a year. Letters #1 and #2 are two different letters for the same literary novel and Letter #3 is for a second literary novel.

- **Sarah Meyer** is a children's author and a former editor of children's fiction at a large New York publishing house. Sarah submitted two editorial letters she herself received for her two most recent titles, one of which is an award-winning historical fiction novel and the second is a newly released lighthearted fantasy novel. Both books are middle grade fiction and are published two different New York publishers. The historical fiction editor will be referred to as **Helen Feldman**, and the fantasy editor will be referred to as **Linda Freedman**.

Structure

A letter's structure is one of the fundamental aspects determining how an author reads a letter and receives the edits on their manuscript. Good letters are typically expected be clean, orderly, and easy to follow from point to point. Henningsgaard advises feedback to be separated into concrete categories, citing from experience that an author is going to use the letter "like a to-do list" when revising.[3] Regarding appearance, O'Connor Rodriguez has stated he favors a "beautiful-looking" letter for being easier to read, whether that means an easy-to-read font, a hierarchy of section breaks, an organized list of bullet-points, etc.[4] Of course, every editor has their own particular style for writing editorial letters (as

[3] Per Henningsgaard, "Third Lecture on Developmental Editing" (lecture, Portland State University, Portland, OR, February 2015).
[4] Adam O'Connor Rodriguez, "Week 8 Lecture" (lecture, Portland State University, Portland, OR, February 23, 2016).

will be demonstrated through the seven editorial letters referenced in this paper), and they all reflect the way each editor conceptualizes and priorities which edits they give. Some letters are more highly structured than others and make use of explicit categories; some read as more stream-of-conscious, flowing from one topic to the next; and other letters go through their edits chapter by chapter.

Steve Silverman writes the most involved letters of those surveyed, favoring lengthy, highly-personalized letters that are tailored to fit the exact dimensions of the project, the kinds of edits the manuscript needs the most, and the author's own experience as a writer. Each letter opens with a section titled "Note on this Note," an overview Silverman tailors to each author about how to read the rest of the letter and how to approach revision at this particular stage of the editing process. He then follows up with the official Intro detailing his overall thoughts on the manuscript before moving on to big-picture categories that are heavily personalized for the author and their manuscript on what needed the most attention. Both letters end with a section titled "Road Map to Revision" in which Silverman gives each author guidelines for how to begin revising the manuscript based on each issue raised in the letter.

The manuscript for Letter #1 is an atypical example of an editor being thoroughly involved in the creative process, rearranging sections, writing or rewriting certain other ones, and offering these edits to the author for approval. Since the manuscript was at this point much further along in the writing process, includes brief sections on the book's title, the author's name that will appear on the

cover, chapter titles, lengths and numbering, and a longer section on the manuscript's structure that includes approximately two pages of line-level edits.

Letter #2, having been written for a rougher manuscript by a newer writer, includes several categories walking the author through the process of editing, starting with Overall Impressions and moving on to Formatting, Language (which includes a lengthy section on Dialogue), Structure, and line level edits. These sections both point out errors and serve as "how-to" guides for the author regarding how to best include physical details, write dialogue, and avoid clichés and shabby craftsmanship. Letter #2 even includes a brief overview on how best to format a manuscript in Microsoft Word to fit with industry best practices. This letter overall serves as both an editorial letter and a teaching instrument introducing the author to the professional world of writing and publishing and what the expectations are for a publishable manuscript.

Silverman's letters are demonstrative of the extent to which he himself is involved and a partner in the writing and editing process alongside the author. This line between editor and writer becomes blurred in both letters, particularly in Letter #1, for whose manuscript a manuscript for which Silverman took a more involved role than is typical of an editor. (It can be assumed the author and editor agreed to this arrangement, as an entire section is dedicated to a description of the restructures and prose-level changes Silverman made to the manuscript.) In showing the author how thoroughly he has delved into the manuscript by writing equally thorough letters, Silverman seeks to connect with his authors through an attention to detail that demonstrates the energy he is ready and willing to invest in

order to make their manuscripts publishable. "I can't make any promises about the book's publication, success, or impact on the world, our careers, or on [the subject's] case," Silverman writes in the "Introduction and Overview" section of Letter #1. "But I can promise that I'll be invested in this matter what the outcome, and to the end."[5]

Some editors strike a balance between highly structured and unstructured letters. Editors Joseph Goldstein, Linda Freedman, and Helen Feldman use a mix of discrete sections on specific writing components (Goldstein and Freedman) and chapter-by-chapter sections addressing edits either through paragraphs or bullet-points (Goldstein and Feldman). None of the other editors' letters surveyed here go to the lengths Silverman does, both in getting their hands dirty with the manuscript itself or acting as a writing teacher in the editorial letter (nor are they as effusive with regards to the author-editor relationship or contract), making him an outlier regarding the penning of highly structured editorial letters.

Editors Arielle Rabinowitz and Rachel Kravinsky both write freestyle letters that comprised of several paragraphs that flow or jump from topic to topic (theme, characterization, language, verisimilitude, etc.) with little to no separation between the topics. For example, in Rabinowitz's Letter #1, she writes to the author that the main obstacles in her manuscript are language and setting, and the rest of the letter addresses each writing component in turn (sometimes both simultaneously) as Rabinowitz identifies instances where changes in language will affect setting and

[5] Steve Silverman, "Editorial Letter #1" (working paper, Portland, OR, August 19, 2015).

vice versa. Some of these edits verge into addressing characterization, although they aren't identified as such.

The lack of structure causes the edits to bleed together, letting go of the idea of the author focusing on "just" language or "just" setting when revising. As any writer or editor can attest, this phenomenon is inimical to the act of engaging with a piece of writing: one cannot fully isolate individual writing components as discrete entities, and editing one component will likely necessitate the editing of one or two or more components in order to accommodate the edit. Of course, it's difficult to ascertain from structure alone how an editorial letter conveys edits to an author, or the editor's status as both a professional and personal authority figure to the person in question. This is where the subject of language and tone become especially important when analyzing editorial letters. Indeed, those are the first things an author is likely to notice upon reading their editor's letter.

Language and Tone

Per Henningsgaard's rule of thumb is that an editorial letter "should make an author feel good and appreciated, and that their work has value. "[An editor] should come across as genuine…[and] that they love what the author is doing."[6] Because one of the editor's jobs is serving as the book's cheerleader, whether to their publisher to or the author ("You can do it! You can edit this book and make it great!") the language and tone an editor uses in a letter towards an author can go a long way towards reassuring the author that the editor a) believes in the book and

[6] Per Henningsgaard, "Third Lecture on Developmental Editing".

b) knows what they're talking about. Alternately, language and tone can inadvertently discourage an author from wanting to revise at all.

Children's author Sarah Meyer expressed different reactions to the two developmental letters she received for her different middle grade manuscripts. Regarding the letter for the historical fiction manuscript from her editor Helen Feldman, she perceived Feldman to be inexperienced, "despite declarative sentences." Meyer believed the letter hadn't successfully communicated to her the editor's confidence about the revision process, and she stated that the letter did not give her the confidence to return to work on the book. "[The] letter seems to say, 'There. I've done my part. Now you do yours,' " Meyer wrote in an email.

Feldman's letter is noticeably the most sedate of the ones discussed in this paper, expressing positives and negatives in the same measured tone. The letter makes use of markedly couching phrases to deliver edits, such as "I'd like to hear," "I'd like to see," and "I wonder if you…" Regardless of whether Feldman deliberately kept the language of the letter warm and mellow in order to deliver her edits, it appears this technique may be less successful in building a positive relationship with the author as a result of the emotional distance the language puts between the editor and the author.

Meyer's second letter, written by Linda Freedman for her middle grade, lighthearted fantasy novel, contains significantly more enthusiastic language (as well as an unusual plethora of exclamation marks.) Freedman's excitement shows through especially when listing the positive elements of the manuscript with statements such as "Nicely played!" and "Very satisfying! Very impressive!" and

"[S]o evil! So ingenious! Dastardly!" In the rest of the letter, Freedman relies on short, punchy questions and interspersed personal reactions that continue to convey interest and excitement in the manuscript while discussing edits. Regarding the prologue, she writes:

> "Can you weave in more [of these two characters]? Perhaps show them going East, then South, then North, and only then West… Could add comedy. And help explain why it takes them so long to get there. Maybe they pick up [U] in the middle? So we see a bit more of her? She's such a loose cannon! Love her! Do we see [B] making trades? He makes such an odd trade of the mirror for the crutch—does he make other dubious trades that work out right in the end?"[7]

Of the editorial letters surveyed, two other editors relied on blunt, straightforward yet informal language when making edits. Joseph Goldstein's letters are comprised of direct statements telling the author what isn't working. When giving structural edits, Goldstein follows up with similarly direct statements telling the author how to fix the problem. With regards to edits addressing characterization, pacing, and world-building, Goldstein uses brief, brusque sentences encapsulating the nature of the problem, about half of which are then followed up with a direct edit. A following example are the edits he gives in his Letter #1 regarding chapter 23:

> [The] lockdown feels artificial. They would always have had to break back out, right? [CA] wouldn't just let 2 of their weapons out with their head genehacker and the daughter of [LA]. I think they should realize they have to go now that they know that [CB] the key to unlocking the vaccine and that kicks off the escape plan … If you need a sense of urgency, maybe [LB] or [D] knows something about the plans for the bombings moving up"[8]

Goldstein acknowledges his comparatively brusque tone as the result of the closeness of the relationship he has, or is expected to develop with his clients as

[7] Linda Freedman, "Editorial Letter #1" (working paper, New York, NY, 2015).
[8] Joseph Goldstein, "Editorial Letter #1" (working paper, Portland, OR 2015).

their literary agent. In an email exchange he contrasts the letters he used to write as an editor compared to the ones he writes now:

> As an agent you have a long-term, very close relationship with your clients. As an editor, your relationship is mediated and you need to maintain more distance to be able to more effectively say no to them or engage in more challenging discussions if need be. The editor's loyalty is to the imprint, the agent's to the client.[9]

Goldstein's statement acknowledges the different types of relationships editors have with their authors, depending on the role they're playing in the manuscript, or where in the publishing process the manuscript is currently situated. Goldstein can afford to be more loose and casual in his language—alternately, it's in his advantage to do so—because as a literary agent, his own success at his job depends on the strength of an author's manuscript. Thus the relationship between an agent-acting-as-editor and an author is based on mutual desires and allows for more latitude in the actual relationship. Goldstein's praise is as casual as the rest of his letter ("This is one of the best scenes in the book. More genehacking biopunk badassery please") but still comes across as sincere.[10] Additionally in that last example, despite the brusque tone, it nevertheless conveys a sense of investment and possible excitement through his offhand reference of the finer points of the manuscript's world building and storytelling.

Steve Silverman's language similarly reflects the close, personal relationship he establishes with his authors. In the section Note on the Note in Letter #2, Silverman characterizes himself as an "irreverent, brutally honest editor and person", a description that goes on to influence his letter writing. This is especially

[9] Joseph Goldstein, email message to author of this paper, April 11, 2016.
[10] Joseph Goldstein, "Editorial Letter #1".

the case with line-level edits, many of which are only a sentence long: "This chapter needs a lot more reflection and description," and "Introduce [character] earlier; his entrance is kind of jarring here."

In contrast when discussing editorial issues on the manuscript level, Silverman makes sure to balance "negative" honesty with positive acknowledgement of what the manuscript has already achieved or the ease/likelihood that an issue can be fixed. In Letter #2 he says to the author, "You write beautiful prose generally, but there are of course ways you can improve the language further," and follows up with specific things the manuscript needs, such as further description, scene-setting, etc. Earlier in the manuscript, he remarks upon the book's length with the following statement: "The book is too short. It needs to be 1.5 to 2 times as long. The good news on that front is the book is ripe with opportunities for expansion, and I'll detail some of those for you."[11]

As a general rule across the editorial letters surveyed, line-level edits were typically written using more direct languages and simpler phrases compared to larger-level manuscript aspects such as theme, characterization, and language. Rachel Kravinsky's letters, which don't include any line-level edits, read like extended literary analyses in which she probes these topics and how what's written on the page affects either the reading experience or the overall story as a piece of literature. Her writing is friendly and measured without being coddling—her considered analyses require the authors to ask hard questions about what sort of effect or message they are trying to imbue their words with, questions that have the

[11] Steve Silverman, "Editorial Letter #2" (working paper, Portland, OR, December 22, 2015).

potential to alter the trajectory of the entire manuscript. This can be seen in the following passage from Letter #2 regarding the book's theme:

> "If you're saying something about loyalty, or faith, or familial obligation, or how the most rigid people change (or don't), then we'll feel more tension, versus just following interesting stories to see where the characters go without knowing how the story threads relate...It's also something to consider when looking at POV. We're fully invested in [character] and the ladder, so moving on to the girl POVs has to be for a reason, and that reason has to connect with what we've already seen, to some degree. Depending on what theme/premise you pick, I can help evaluate each thread in relation to it. It doesn't have to be super obvious, or even something that someone besides us would be able to articulate, but you need to know it, and make decisions accordingly."[12]

Returning to the subject of positive, encouraging language and feedback, Freedman's letter made the most liberal use of it, with other editors sprinkling it in here and there. Noticeable in editor Arielle Rabinowitz's editorial letters is the lack of almost any positive language and some sections where the language borders on being unnecessarily harsh, with little to soften the blow of some particularly negative feedback. In her Letter #1 she includes some feedback from an outside reader of the manuscript regarding setting:

> It makes me feel a little unmoored as a reader and a little at [a] loss when it comes to picturing the world [the author has] given her characters. It's as if her characters are operating in a limbo. There's also no immediate indication of where the story is headed. That combined with the disconnection to a concrete place and time makes it hard to continue reading.[13]

Rabinowitz writes herself in her Letter #2:

> The scene in the jail is confusing to me. I am not sure what the purpose of the conversation about humidity and the cops playing with the door serves. It feels cop show (not that I watch them!) to me, but I also don't see what it does to enhance or forward the narrative; in fact I worry that it drags a bit.[14]

[12] Rachel Kravinsky, Editorial Letter #2" (working paper, Portland, OR, June 30, 2014).
[13] Arielle Rabinowitz, "Editorial Letter #1" (working paper, Portland, OR, 2014).
[14] Ibid.

More so than other editors' letters, Rabinowitz's letters convey a singular focus on identifying and fixing errors. Combined with the lack of overt structure in her letters identified earlier, the letters move from error to edit from error to edit with little to break up the flow, whether through positivity towards the manuscript or direct overtures to the author. This style of letter writing potentially gives the author assurance of Rabinowitz's professionalism and dedication to the project. It could also scare an author to read a never-ending letter of things their manuscript is doing incorrectly. The main aspect modifying and arguably mellowing Rabinowitz's writing is through consistently referring back to herself as a reader and her reactions.

What About the Readers?

Referencing either the editor or another reader's personal response is a technique utilized by all the editors discussed in this paper. This technique modifies the language and tone of the letter itself and affects what kinds of edits are given to the author. The extent to which each editor uses it varies, as does the method—Joseph Goldstein for example prefaces almost all his edits with "I think," yet this phrase is used so ubiquitously that it has no overall effect on the types of edits given or how they are meant to be received by the author. Editors Rachel Kravinsky and Helen Feldman make infrequent use of this technique and reference their personal reactions only occasionally to make a point about a particular edit. For editors Rabinowitz and Linda Freedman, referencing their personal reactions, or another

reader's reactions, is integral to how they frame and justify their edits, a bedrock on which they base their editorial authority.

To be clear, referencing the editor or reader's personal response is a different technique than one I have termed "editing with the reader in mind." With this technique, the editor makes a case for an edit by appealing to the reaction or taste of a hypothetical reader and how they are likely to read the manuscript. Editing with the reader in mind draws on the argument of writing to or for an audience. Editing using one's own reactions, or those of existing readers, is an attempt to give the author a reader's perspective without overtly referencing the "audience" at large. This approach can have the effect, however, of personalizing editorial suggestions and insight to the point that they appear subjective and less about the work itself than about one or more individuals' responses to it.

In Rabinowitz's case, for all three of her letters she prefaces most of her edits with her own reaction, using phrases such as "My sense is," "I'm not sure," "I think/I don't think," "I do wonder," "It slightly bothers me," and other similar statements. In contextualizing these edits through her feelings and responses, the letter conveys to the author the necessity of the edits arise from the existing problems as Rabinowitz sees them while lending them a subjective quality.

With these letters, it's difficult to discern in Rabinowitz's letters the extent to which this practice is an unconscious aspect of her writing, or whether it's a deliberate attempt to cast herself and her responses to the text as the cornerstone of authority—a strategy to personalize the letter and establish a relationship with the author through characterizing her edits as rooted in reader-reaction. The lack of

structure in her letters discussed earlier combined with consistent reference to her own personal reactions might cause the author to question their editor's comfort or confidence in handling their manuscript. It also makes it difficult to elucidate from Rabinowitz's letters what the actual problems with their manuscript are and how to go about fixing them. Reaching the end of the letter, the author understands how Rabinowitz has read and interpreted and edited the manuscript as a reader, but not so much as an editor who is able to provide the author concrete insight or help into elevating their manuscript to be ready for publication:

Linda Freedman is another editor who liberally refers back to herself and her reactions in her editorial letter to Sarah Meyer, yet in this case it's clear that this is her particular style, and that she is deliberately using her reactions as supporting evidence for certain edits. Like Rabinowitz, she makes use of phrases such as "I feel like," "I do like," and "I'd love." In a few places she goes so far as to cast herself as the "reader" of the manuscript (albeit a reader serving in an editorial capacity). Examples include:

> "I love all the things that happen—so it's not that anything needs to change. I'd just try to find the comic slant on each scene."
>
> "The prologue feels quite long to me … It takes a while before we meet our heroine, and as a reader I'm always impatient for that moment."
>
> "I can imagine feeling like I didn't belong anywhere, that I was alone… But a soul is such an interior thing that I can't really imagine that I lacked it. … This bit of the story never quite gelled for me… "[15]

Also similar to Rabinowitz, Freedman's casting of herself as the manuscript's reader in edition to editor is likely meant to impart her investment in the manuscript as

[15] Linda Freedman, "Editorial Letter #1".

demonstrated through personal reaction. In Freedman's case, her investment is amplified by her enthusiastic language, as discussed earlier, and so her referencing of herself comes across as part and parcel of her editing style, in which she uses both her excitement, her laid-back structure, and her responses as a reader to best convey to Sarah what edits are needed and for which reason.[16]

An additional iteration of this strategy used by Rabinowitz is to specifically quote the opinions and reactions of other people who've read the manuscript, as with the quoted material on page 14 of this paper. Letter #1 makes the most use of this strategy such that the readers' reactions directly influence the shape this letter takes. Rabinowitz writes in the letter's intro, "My notes will mostly address the first 100 pages, as it seemed the biggest issue was that the readers had difficulty finding a footing in the story and for two readers, this was what caused them to lose interest and not continue reading." Approximately a third of the letter is made up of edits in the form of these readers' reactions and written quotations regarding these areas, with Rabinowitz fitting in her own reactions to the manuscript in between.

In Letter #2, Rabinowitz cites the marketing person's experience reading the manuscript in two different places regarding characterization and scene order (the marketing person had predicted the outcome of a particular plot point that Rabinowitz had not on her first reading) in order bring the author's attention to areas in the manuscript that could potentially use further revision. Similar to Rabinowitz's personalizing her edits through her own reading experience, the

[16] At the time of this letter was written, Sarah and Helen were already friend. Sarah wrote in an email exchange, "Had [we] not been, and I'd received this same letter, I believe I would have responded the same way. Would she have written the same letter, had we not been friends already? I think so!" Sarah Meyer, email exchange to author of this paper, April 22, 2016.

perspectives supplied by the interns and marketing director serve as either the reason or justification for a problem identified in the text and/or an editorial suggestion given by Rabinowitz.

On the other side of the spectrum, while Steve Silverman frequently includes "I" statements demonstrating his overall reaction to the manuscript or his editorial approach, these kinds of statements are reserved for the introduction and conclusion and issues that are more subjective in nature (such as the manuscript's title and which version of the author's name will appear on the cover). He makes greater use of the technique "editing with the reader in mind' (identified earlier on page 16 of this paper). This can be most clearly seen in his Letter #2—while not he doesn't use it liberally, Silverman occasionally employs the technique to underscore the purpose each edit serves towards crafting a more polished manuscript that will provide a better reading experience for the audience. In this way, editing with the reader in mind acts as an extension of his previously discussed strategy of providing mini-writing lessons as a means of editing large-scale issues:

> "We don't really hear a lot about the land, the weather, the people, the smells and sounds, the colors…"
>
> "Prepositions weaken prose because they confuse the reader by trying to draw the picture in their heads too clearly."
>
> "...even though you reveal quite a few personal details and traumatic events, the reader feels oddly disconnected from the narrator in the present. We imagine that you have strong views about much of what happens, particularly about the sexual and emotional abuse and later the substance addiction, but those views are largely hidden."[17]

Silverman's Letter #1 represents an unusual example of an editorial letter in which half the letter is a description of the edits Silverman himself made to the

[17] Steve Silverman, "Editorial Letter #2".

letter. In this case, Silverman uses both his structural practice of explaining the structure of the letter itself and his more irreverent writing style to both preface and contextualize why he himself made the edits:

> "A general note about the condensing and cutting I did: you're a goddamn good writer, but you're obsessed with minor details that general readers won't care about, or won't care enough about to miss what's done. I think you know this. I personally found it all interesting, but since I would read the 1,000 page version of this book, I'm probably not the best judge of that. But please know I grappled with every cut."[18]

In both of Silverman's letters, editorial authority is rooted firmly within the editor's knowledge of how good writing functions and his experience in rewriting and editing other authors' manuscripts. As such, whether he's referring to a generic reader—editing with the reader in mind—or referencing edits he himself made to a manuscript, these techniques are part of Silverman's overall editorial strategy of directly asserting his skill and his confidence thereof as a means of projecting authority to the author.

Rachel Kravinsky, as noted earlier on 13, keeps her personal reactions to an author's manuscript in her letters to a minimum. Rather than appealing to the author based on the needs or reactions of a reader, she firmly grounds her edits in the text of the manuscript itself. While she does at times reference her own beliefs as the reason for why certain edits need to be made, she then follows up with explicit concern for the literary quality of the overall story. Complemented by her unassuming yet engaged voice in her letters, Kravinsky's authority primarily rests in approaching the manuscript as a piece of art first and foremost that requires careful consideration for how best to consider larger issues like theme and language. In her

[18] Steve Silverman, "Editorial Letter #1"

very first letter to a new author, Kravinsky is forty pages into his novel, and she writes:

> I'm now wondering about you trying third person all the way through, focusing on each character in turn, so [B] will start it off, and then move to third person [G], vs. a strict omniscient. That would give you permission to follow the girls, too, but you'd also be able to zoom the camera way into their heads so we feel/see what they feel/see, which feels really important as a way of grounding such an out-there story…The big change would be changing [B] to third person—or, and this is more of a risk—you could try pulling of[f] [B] as first, the rest as third.[19]

In this passage, and in the rest of her letters, Kravinsky makes great use of a technique I have termed "cause and reaction" to explain and justify edits. Instead of solely identifying issues in need of fixing, this technique specifically provides solutions by explaining what these solutions are meant to do to the text. First she gives an edit (in this case switching the perspective of certain POVs.) Next she extrapolates from the edit by looking ahead to how the edit would be implemented and how it would achieve the desired effect. In utilizing this technique, Kravinsky conveys her comfort with handling in-progress manuscripts and demonstrates her ability break down the fundamental components of a piece of writing, as well as an ability to think ahead to what the final shape of the manuscript might look like. Because "cause and reaction" is a more writer-focused method of editing, her letters come across as having an understanding and familiarity with the writer's point of view as opposed to that of a publishing professional.

As Kravinsky is the editor a small, independent literary press, she has somewhat more leeway to decide not to address marketing and sales concerns in an editorial letter, or to give edits directly based on those concerns. Nevertheless, these

[19] Rachel Kravinsky, "Editorial Letter #1" (working paper, Portland, OR, June 16, 2014).

concerns can provide one last way for editors to lend the weight of authority to certain edits, the final category discussed in this paper.

The Professional Market

Adam O'Connor Rodriguez has stated that his primary goal as an editor is to transform the manuscript into the best possible version of itself.[20] In the case of fiction, this statement is especially meant to apply when factors such as genre, the market, popular or mass appeal, and/or publishers' agendas are relevant topics of considerations for authors revising a manuscript and for editors working in big houses that are seeking to acquire new, successful titles.

Since the majority of authors' goals for their manuscripts is to have them published and to reach as wide an audience as possible, the question of a book's marketability and likelihood of achieving any sort of sales is a consideration for both authors and editors alike. Because a book must be competently and engagingly written regardless of how it ends up being marketed, an editor's first priority is to bringing the manuscript up to snuff. Still that doesn't mean an editor can't bring up the subject of market and genre as factors for an author to consider when making decisions on how to revise their manuscript.

Joseph Goldstein, as a literary agent tasked with selling his clients' manuscripts to publishers, is required to consider the professional market and genre categories each manuscript best fits. In his Letter #1 he includes a section titled "Audience," in which he identifies the manuscript as sitting "right on the cusp

[20] Adam O'Connor Rodriguez, "1. The Role of a DE and How We Can Improve That".

of YA and Adult SF." His suggestion to the author is to revise it for the YA market since he thinks it has a better shot of fitting in there, but he writes also that he's fine with going in either direction. For the manuscript to be YA, "the only tweaking it would need are around some of the flirtier-sexier bits. Make it less like teens flirting and more adult and you're there."[21]

Of the editors' letters surveyed in this paper, Kravinsky and Silverman's arguably subscribe the most to O'Connor Rodriguez's earlier statement about the editor's primary goal. Still even these two editors make one or two passing references to authors regarding the need to consider a book's potential future as commodity for sale. Silverman uses the publishing industry and market in his Letter #2 to identify the goal that both he and the author are aspiring to with the manuscript, referring to it as an already-publishable book (after his line-level editing), but otherwise the manuscript "is really a start towards a book that can be published by a good house, marketed well, and be a good and steady seller that could help to launch your career/continue your career…" The one instance in which the question of the manuscript as memoir is raised in the section "Overall Impressions," it is made in terms of "memoir" as a literary as opposed to marketing category. [22]

Kravinsky, like Goldstein, brings up in her Letter #3 the question different book markets and genre categories as a means of helping the author consider her choices, and also to help guide the author in the direction Kravinsky is aiming for, as

[21] Joseph Goldstein, "Editorial Letter #1".
[22] Steve Silverman, "Editorial Letter #2".

the editor and publisher of the manuscript. With this novel, the concern was one of language and the extent to which it is appropriate for an intended literary novel:

> "...if you were going for a super commercial market, you might want to leave some of those markers, those reminders, but with this literary/commercial mix, and being a small literary press, I think we can trust our readers will see what's already on the page." [23]

As editors of small literary presses, both Kravinsky and Silverman have the leeway to largely leave marketing and genre category concerns out of their letters, only referencing it in very specific contexts when the need seems appropriate to each editor. More importantly, both of them feel comfortable performing editing in a greater void in which marketing and audience expectations aren't a primary concern.

Conclusion

To quote O'Connor Rodriguez once last time, "There are three levels to developmental editing. The first is instinct. The second is objective criteria. The third is art and creativity, falling in love with the manuscript you're working on."[24]

Writing an editorial letter may not take six months, or a year, or longer to write like a manuscript may take, but almost every editor at some point feels confusion, uncertainty, and frustration in trying to get their thoughts across to an author, attempting to provide guidance and give them the tools they need to improve their book without flat-out telling them, "Do this and do that and you'll have a perfect manuscript." The act of writing, be it fiction or nonfiction, is

[23] Rachel Kravinsky, Editorial Letter #3" (working paper, Portland, OR, 2014).
[24] Adam O'Connor Rodriguez, "First-Day Lecture in Developmental Editing," (lecture, Portland State University, Portland, OR, January 5, 2016).

inherently creative, and the judging of a creative endeavor can never be one hundred percent objective. Yet an editor must establish their authority to an author about the job of editing the author's manuscript. For some editors, this means establishing themselves as an objective authority; for others it means embracing the subjectivity of writing as an act and reflecting this in their own letters.

Edits are not just edits—anyone can read a piece of writing and state their opinions on it. Some people may even tell the author what they should have done differently, or what they now should do afterward. An editor is an editor because their edits carry authority and the author has agreed to read and respect and consider their edits based on the recognition and acceptance of their authority. Editorial authority can be located in one or two or multiple components of an editorial letter, and the four surveyed in these letters—structure, language and tone, editor/reader reaction, and market/genre—are only a few of them. And like a book, these four components affect and interact with one another to together create a cohesive document that is both instruction and conversation from an editor to an author—backed by editorial authority.

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