

THE RED PENCIL

CINDY VALLAR analyzes the work behind finished manuscripts. In this issue, she profiles **JEAN HARRINGTON'S *In the Lion's Mouth*.**

When I select a story to spotlight, I don't know which aspect of editing will become the focus of the story; that comes after I read the early draft selections the author sends. I study the differences between these and the published version before formulating questions that highlight one facet of editing. In earlier columns, I've looked at how the author creates time and place, finds the right voice for telling the story, or crafts a believable heroine or villain. What I haven't covered is editing itself, or in the definition of this column's title: to mark in red as erroneous or unacceptable; correct or delete (a piece of written work).¹

Every author knows the first draft isn't what the final product will look like, and long before a publisher's editor sees this manuscript, the author writes and rewrites many times until it's polished. Does this mean she never again revises the story? Once she signs a publisher's contract, an editor "red-pencils" more changes to be made. As the award-winning editor Michael Seidman writes, "There are as many reasons not to edit and revise as there are rea-

sons not to write. But one of the things that separates the professional writer from the amateur and hopeful is the pro's willingness to take the time to read, revise and edit her manuscript before sending it off to an agent or publisher."² Or as Persia Woolley succinctly puts it, "No matter how much you love your little darlings [words], you have to be willing to kill 'em off when necessary."³



Jean Harrington agrees with those words: "Conflict/controversy/tension are the life blood of fiction giving the writer carte blanche to slash away when necessary. This is true for all fiction, not only historical novels." Her early draft of chapter one is fourteen double-spaced pages long. In the final version she retains some paragraphs, inserting them into three different sections of *In the Lion's Mouth*, which opens in Ireland in 1667. This snippet is from that early draft.

"Tell me, love, what have you always longed for?" Owen asked.

"You."

He laughed, sending the birds scattering from the tree tops. "Besides me, what else is your heart's desire?"

"Shoes."

"Am I hearing you aright?"

Grace nodded. "With buckles, and stockings to go with them." She looked down at her long, slim legs dangling at the horse's sides, to her bare ankles and the worn moleskin brogues covering her feet. "To my knowledge, no woman in Ballyban-ree has ever had shoes, not even Kath Mann for all Connor Mann's wealth. But I saw shoes once. On Lady Anne Rushmount's feet. What a glorious sight!" Her eyes sparked green fire at the memory. "They had silver buckles over the arch and heels that lifted the foot clear off the ground." She sighed, remembering. "But shoes like that are for a lady only."

"Are you not a lady?" Owen asked.

She turned in the saddle to smile over her shoulder at him. "Indeed, I am. In moleskin brogues," she added ruefully.

"As soon as we sell the horse, shoes are the first thing we'll buy."

She leaned back against him letting the chestnut's easy canter lull her into a happy reverie. Shoes. Love. Freedom. A whole New World. Surely this day had been made possible by God alone.

By God and by stealing the horse!

She spoke over her shoulder once

more, letting the air carry her words back to Owen. "Do you think Lord Rushmount will come after us?"

What followed this opening was the journey to Galway, their arrival in that city, and the dickering over the sale of the horse. Jean's editor, however, felt the opening needed a drastic revision. She "believed the original opening . . . worked best for those who had read the first book in the series, *The Barefoot Queen*.⁴ But for those who had not, the story really begins when Lord Rushmount attempts to murder Owen."

Whenever an author edits her writing, she asks herself a series of questions.

*What were you trying to accomplish? What is the purpose of every scene and every bit of a scene (description, dialogue, action)? How does the material on the page serve not only the story, but the reader? Are things moving too slowly...? Is the tension weakened because the action has nothing to do with what's going on for the characters? Does the dialogue lack tension because you've used too many explanations, used the dialogue to offer the reader background or other information that detracts from the problem at hand?*⁵

Jean rewrote the opening. Rather than "completely eliminate the bridge between the two books," the fourteen pages became a one-page prologue to express "the joy and recklessness of young love. And since it ends on a humorous note, it serves as a dramatic foil to the shooting scene in chapter one." She deleted the reference to Kath Mann because that belongs to the first book. Nor did she mention the theft of the horse and the events that took place in Galway, including selling their ride. Why? "Ah, the dickering over the horse! What a shame to lose a passage that showed an Irish lass's quick-witted skill at bargaining. But if the story was to begin with the shooting scene, the barter-

ing became backstory and had to go.” Jean also made the drastic cuts so “[e]very scene . . . further[ed] the plot, pull[ed] its own weight, as it were, and [drew] the reader, irrevocably, toward the climax.” Here’s the published prologue:

“Tell me, love, what have you always longed for?” Owen asked.

“You.”

He laughed, sending the birds scattering from the tree tops. “Besides me, what else is your heart’s desire?”

“Shoes.”

“Am I hearing you aright?”

Grace nodded. “With buckles, and stockings to go with them.” She looked down at her long, slim legs dangling at the horse’s sides, to her bare ankles and the worn moleskin brogues covering her feet. “To my knowledge, no woman in Ballybanree has ever had shoes. But I saw shoes once. On Lady Anne Rushmount’s feet. What a glorious sight! They had silver buckles over the arch, and heels that lifted the foot clear off the ground.” She sighed, remembering. “But shoes like that are for a lady only.”

“Are you not a lady?” Owen asked.

She turned in the saddle to smile over her shoulder at him. “In-

deed, I am. In moleskin brogues,” she added ruefully.

“As soon as we reach Galway and sell the horse, shoes are the first thing we’ll buy. Then we’ll seek out a trading vessel bound for Cork City. The farther away we get the better.”

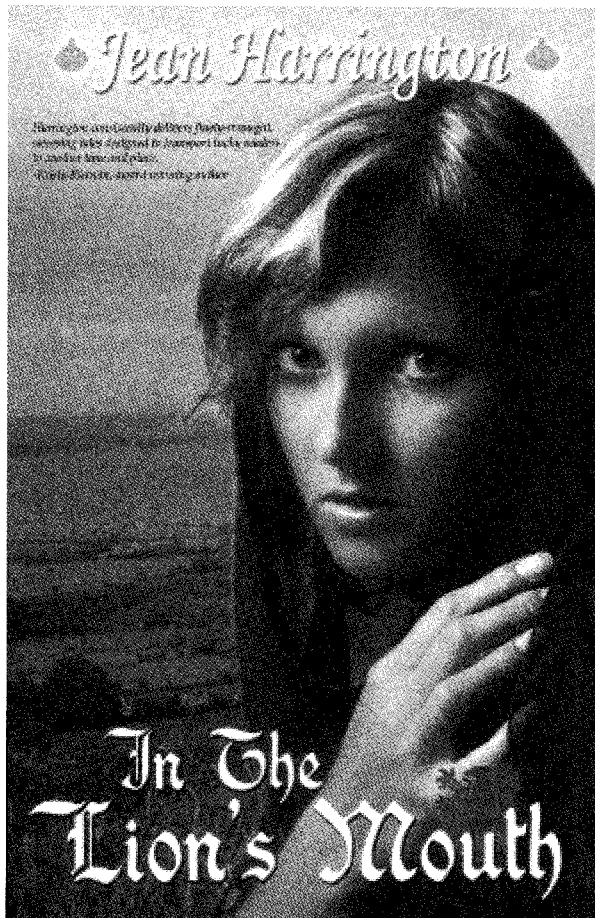
She leaned back against him letting the chestnut’s easy canter lull her into a happy reverie. Shoes. Love. Freedom. A whole new world awaiting them. Surely this day had been made possible by God alone.

By God and by stealing the horse.

While chapter two begins much the same in both versions, it, too, required some major revisions. For example, the first draft reads:

Ross Rushmount cursed the mare’s slow gait, but flogging her yet again would do no good. He’d bought her for Anne because of her gentle nature, and that wouldn’t change no matter how wild he might be to overtake O’Malley and the girl. And overtake them he would, with enough patience and time.

How he missed the chestnut’s fire, his front hooves pawing the ground eager for a run. Once given free rein, how he fairly flew, leaping over low walls and hedges, every ride the ride of a lifetime. His like might never be seen again. At the thought of his loss, rage pounded through him flooding up like gall into



his throat.

These paragraphs don't snare the reader's attention or raise the suspense. They define the action, but don't ". . . continue the evolution of character and add ambience and tone (important aspects of involving the reader, placing her there, in the story)." Nor do they ". . . create tension, worry on the part of the reader a need to turn the page."⁶ Editing corrected this problem.

"Faster! Faster! Move along, you drab!"

Ross Rushmount cursed and flipped the reins over the mare's back, but flogging her yet again would do no good. He'd bought her for Anne because of her gentle nature, and that wouldn't change no matter how wild he might be to overtake O'Donnell and the girl.

And overtake them he would. But he missed the chestnut's fire, his front hooves pawing the ground eager for a run. Given free rein, he'd fairly fly, leaping over low walls and hedges, every ride the ride of a lifetime. Chances were strong his like might never be seen again. Rage pounded through Rushmount's gut, flooding up like gall into his throat. Yet he didn't dare waste time searching for the steed. O'Donnell was his prey. Once he had him in his grasp, he'd find the chestnut as well.

Another scene in this chapter that underwent revisions involves Lord Rushmount's arrival in Cork City in search of Grace and Owen. At this point in Irish history, the English are well entrenched and consider themselves superior to the Irish.

For an Irish household, this one was passing fair, Rushmount noted. The thick stone walls kept out the city's noise and most of its odors, and the candles glowing against paneled walls presented him with a pleasant scene. As he entered

a small, inner room, the sight of the lord mayor and his lady seated at a laden table reminded him he hadn't eaten all day.

The mayor, a tall, vigorous man, his white hair clubbed back at the nape, English style, rose to greet him. His lady, more corpulent even than the gatekeeper, kept her seat but bowed slightly from the waist, her flesh, as she did so, oozing over the top of her gown, her expression both bored and haughty. Clearly, Galway Irish were a different breed from those in Ballybanree. He smiled. Cities, despite their obvious defects, did offer amusement.

"Lord Rushmount is it?" the mayor asked.

Ross nodded then returned the fat matron's bow, determined to have his air of hauteur exceed hers.

His host seemed not to notice. "Do sit, man, and sup with us. We're delighted to have you . . . ah . . . surprise us this way." He filled a goblet with claret and handed it to Ross. "The kitchen lass will bring you a plate of food. Simple stewed lamb. I trust that will satisfy the weary traveler."

"Very much so, indeed. I thank you."

The mayor leaned forward, elbows on the table. He lost no time getting to the heart of the matter. "Tell me, sir, what brings you to Galway?"

"A horse." Was he mistaken, or did the mayor's expression alter ever so slightly?

"Pray, explain."

"I seek your help, lord mayor, in reclaiming my property, an outstand-

ing steed, a chestnut stallion of Arabian breed. He was stolen from me a few nights ago. I suspect he's been brought to Galway for sale."

"Ah." The mayor leaned back in his padded chair and drained his goblet. Reaching for the decanter, he poured himself another before offering the decanter to his guest. "Enjoy your food, Lord Rushmount. When you're through, I'll escort you on a tour of my stables."

Since Sir Barry's wife adds nothing to the scene, she disappears. Retaining her would have slowed the pacing, making the scene less dynamic. The revised version emphasizes the condescension. Since Jean omitted Galway from the final version, that city became Cork, and she opted to reveal tidbits of Rushmount's personality, as well as the passive-aggressive manner in which the Irish sometimes battled the usurpers of their country.

For an Irish household, this one was passing fair, Rushmount noted. The thick stone walls blocked the city's noise and most of its odors, and the candles glowing against paneled walls presented him with a pleasant scene. Upon entering a small, inner room, the sight of the lord mayor seated at a laden table reminded him he hadn't eaten all day.

The mayor, a tall man well past middle age, his white hair clubbed back at the nape, English style, rose from his chair, favoring him with a curt bow and nothing more by way of greeting. Clearly, the Irish here were a different breed from those in Ballybanree. Interesting. Cities, despite their obvious defects, did offer entertaining

diversions.

Rushmount bowed correctly, deeply. "Lord Rushmount . . . ah . . . Lord Barry."

"Rushmount is it?" the mayor asked, his voice coolly polite.

Ross nodded briefly, determined to have his air of hauteur exceed Sir Barry's.

His host seemed not to notice. "Do sit, man, and sup with me. I'm delighted to have you . . . ah . . . surprise me this way." He sat, filled a goblet with claret and handed it to Ross. "My lady has retired for the night, but the kitchen lass will bring you a plate of food. Simple stewed lamb. I trust that will satisfy the weary traveler."

"Indeed. But I have no time to waste on dining."

The mayor leaned back in his chair and regarded Rushmount with somber curiosity. "Oh? What brings you to Cork in such haste?"

"A horse."

"Pray, explain." The mayor bent to his meal and, with great delicacy, pierced a morsel of lamb with the tip of his knife.

To hide his growing annoyance, Rushmount sipped his wine. An inferior vintage. "I seek your help, lord mayor, in reclaiming my property, an outstanding steed, a chestnut stallion of Arabian breed. He was stolen from me a few nights ago. And the thief . . . an Irishman . . ." — he paused to clear his throat — "and his woman are here in Cork. On a packet boat from Galway. Or so I believe.

"Or so you believe."

The man dared to mock him?

The lord mayor picked up his goblet and drained it then leaning forward, pushed his pewter plate out of the way and rested his elbows on the table. "Can you describe this . . . ah . . . Irish thief?"

"Yes! A blacksmith with a powerful body despite a damaged leg."

"You have witnesses to the theft?"

Frustrated, Rushmount spat out, "My bailiff. His wife. Another man, a visitor."

"So a man with a crippled leg stole your horse. And you did nothing to prevent him?"

The mayor twirled the stem of his goblet as if they were merely engaged in polite conversation.

Rushmount took a gulp of the wine and grimaced. It tasted like piss. "He had me tied up, held at knife point."

"I see." The trace of amusement playing about Sir Barry's lips infuriated Ross. "But surely you'd not risk the docks at this late hour, even for the sake of a prized steed?"

"Of course I'll risk it!"

"But I will not," Lord Barry said lounging back at his ease in the arm chair. "Nor will I rouse my sheriff and his guard to search our docks in the middle of the night for a man you believe is in Cork. On a trader you believe headed our way. No, we will wait until the morning light. Your quarrel with this blacksmith will, I daresay,

keep till then."

"He may be gone by morning!" Rushmount slammed his goblet onto the table top, the remainder of its sorry contents slopping over onto the damask cloth. He stood and stared down at the pompous man. "I am a peer of the realm. You cannot refuse me."

The lord mayor arched an eyebrow. "Though Irish I may be, I govern Cork City at the pleasure of His Majesty, King Charles II. My will, not yours, prevails here."

While the first book takes place in Ireland, Grace and Owen travel to England and Rhode Island in the second novel. When asked why, Jean replies, "My love affair with the Irish mystique and with the glamour of Granuaile first inspired the story. That it continues in Rhode Island is more pragmatic. Grace and Owen fled an oppressive native land. No future remained there for them, but where to go? In . . . *The Barefoot Queen*, the parish priest spoke of a land where men were free to worship their God as their consciences dictated – the Rhode Island colony. Ironically, this is an English colony, but Grace and Owen, hearing of the vastness of the land, believe they can live at peace there." Thus this beomes their final destination where Jean contrasts the difference between how the English secured ownership of Irish land versus their tracts in Rhode Island. "[U]nder Roger Williams' governorship, [the colonists] did not steal their land from the natives, but purchased it. This would be important to Owen and Grace, coming as they did from a country where the land had been usurped by invaders. That the Indians did not understand the irrevocable nature of such sales, which lead to the bloody King Philip's War, is another ironic issue . . . raised in the third book in the series."

Did Jean always dream of writing historical novels? Her website⁸ reveals she wanted to be a foreign correspondent, but "reality set in and instead I went to

the exotic University of Rhode Island for degrees in English literature . . .” She married, had children, and wrote advertising copy before teaching writing and literature to college students. When she finally decided to pen her own novels, she listened “to my husband’s mother, a native of County Cork, tell tales of the Old Country. It is her voice that permeates both books. In addition, rereading biographies of Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island where I was raised, sharpened my prior knowledge of one of my historical heroes. The internet, too, was an invaluable source, particularly the web site of the Narragansett Indian tribe and its various links.⁹ To familiarize myself with naval terminology, I read C. S. Forester’s Hornblower series. Though set over a century later than *In the Lion’s Mouth*, they provided a fascinating background into the hazards of ocean travel via sailing ships.”

As to her thoughts on how true to history (or the historical fact) – a frequently discussed topic on the HNS list – the writer should be, Jean writes, “Usually, the historical novelist wants to remain as true to a period as he or she can while bearing in mind that the history used as the basis for a book has already been pre-edited, abstracted if you will, from the total reality of the time. When the historical novelist fleshes out events of history, he does – in fact, must – use poetic license to make the story come alive. He strives to avoid anachronism, of course, and employs research to recreate the milieu of a period. But he is, after all, exploring a world that has been lost to time. Thus, writing historical fiction means filtering known facts and interpretations through the creative imagination.”

Notes

1. This definition comes from the sixth edition of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

2. Michael Seidman, *The Complete Guide to Editing Your Fiction* (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 2000), 1.

3. Persia Woolley, *How to Write and Sell Historical Fiction* (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 1997), 133.

4. According to Jean, “the first book . . . blends the legend of the historic female pirate, Granuaile O’Malley, with the life of her fictional great granddaughter, Grace O’Malley.” After Lord Rushmount hangs her father for poaching, Granuaile’s courageous spirit mentors Grace as she rebels “against her father’s killer and [to] seek her own fulfillment with Owen, her one true love.”

5. Seidman, 58-9.

6. *Ibid.*, 40.

7. Initially, Owen and Grace were second cousins, but Jean’s editor “believed such a relationship hovered on the incestuous and would be offensive to modern readers. While small, isolated villages undoubtedly had much inter-marriage among kin, I bowed to [her] opinion. After researching names indigenous to the west of Ireland, I reluctantly chose O’Donnell for my hero’s surname.”

8. <http://www.jeanharrington.com/>

9. <http://www.narragansett-tribe.org/>

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