

16. Letting go!

Just as editing can be a painful process, so too, is the following step. If you thought all the other steps that go into the creation of a novel were difficult, then don't underestimate the emotional strain involved in letting go of the novel once it has been written.

It's funny, you know, but true in almost all cases, that when you undertake the writing of a work of fiction, you go through various levels of confidence and self-belief, counterbalanced by deep periods of lack of confidence and a conviction that you're useless. None the less, if you have reached this stage, you have obviously plodded along, using the memory of the high points to carry you over the times when the novel in progress has threatened to overwhelm you and drive you to give up.

You didn't give up. You reached The End, and now you've edited, keeping any particularly wonderful passages that didn't fit the story, but were too beautiful to toss onto a garbage heap. So what now? Straight into an envelop with a letter to a publisher waxing lyrical on your talents? I don't think so!

I haven't talked about writing groups here as I was more concerned with you, the writer, building healthy writing habits. The process as I developed it is relevant regardless of whether you write the novel without ever sharing your work in progress with others or alternatively, while participating in a group where your work is read, or at least discussed with other like minded people. The merits or otherwise of such groups will be discussed in another article.

Right now, you're sitting with a manuscript that you have edited to the best of your ability, using your skills as both reader and writer. But never underestimate the power of your emotional attachment to this work; never underestimate the subconscious powers within your own spirit that might prevent you from honing in on the best and worst aspects of this work of fiction. Don't imagine that one more read, one more skim over the text will bring to light the weaknesses in the text, or plot or character development. You do not have the detachment necessary to assess this work impartially and that is no slur on your abilities. It is a simple fact. You have put heart and soul and a lot of hours into this work. Following the process as described within this topic, you have come jumped psychological and emotional hurdles to achieve this end, so don't expect to sanguinely trim it down and perfect it all on your own.

Sit back, relax, and let yourself take one or two mental steps back from your work. Allow yourself to let go. Experience the insecurity, own it, and integrate it, so that you clear the way for 'going public' with your work. Just

as the voices in your head whispered in your ear that you were not capable of even getting this far, so they will scream at you now to hide this novel in a drawer somewhere, because it's all rubbish. Use the same techniques now as you employed then to overcome this tidal wave of nerves and prepare to hand this manuscript over. Imagine it being read by someone else and then visualise who that someone else is. Preferably two or three someone elses. Then ask these other people, readers you know have the courage to criticise as well as praise, to read your work, and give you the necessary feedback. Be emphatic about needing 'negative' as well as 'positive' feedback. Insist that you want to hear it all, because you know this is the only way to trim this story into shape and make it the best it can be.

When I was writing *The Cloths of Heaven* I was, uncharacteristically, involved in a writing group, and had presented the chapters on a regular basis to my group (a small one consisting of three members, including myself), so grammatically I had done the necessary editing en route. When the first draft was completed, I did my own fine tuning as described in article 15, and then asked my group to read the entire manuscript again. But, in order to get an overall view, I asked others to read it too, not writers, just readers, and readers who were prepared to criticise. That way I would receive a well-rounded idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the novel.

Then I busied myself with all those tasks that had piled up, waiting to be done, while my novel was being written. Do anything that takes your mind off the novel for a while, and be patient while your trusted readers do their job.