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1 May 2022

Editing in Creative Writing

What do experts talk about when they talk about editing in the field of creative writing?

Creative writing is used as a source of entertainment for the general populous and as an escape from the real world. It is also a freeing space to write in because the rules for creative writing change and differ from author to author and story to story. Editors must be careful which rules they follow for any given piece. I was drawn to this writing field for its openness to the rules of editing, the differences between editing, beta-ing, and proofreading, and why they are essential aspects of creative writing.

The simple definition of editing is "looking at each sentence carefully, and making sure that it's well designed and serves its purpose," as the University of Toronto defines it. This first section will show the importance of editing in creative writing, and the many roles editors must play when editing. Katya Johanson states that there are two aspects to editing; the first being "it involves understanding the stages of production that a book must go through, knowing what parts it must include and the format that they are to be presented in, and the rules underpinning writing, such as argument structure, grammar, spelling, sentence structure and punctuation" (Johanson 47). The second which she says is "less tangible" is "learning when to enforce these rules, how to enforce them and when to ignore them. It is this aspect that makes editing an art rather than a science" (Johanson 47).

Editing takes on dual roles; the first role is a surrogate for the reader. Editors go through the manuscript playing the part of the reader, so they are experiencing it, and as the editor,

making corrections as needed so that, as the reader, what you are reading and experiencing makes sense and is coherent. You are following through and coming back with the messages that the author intended. Editors make sure that the flow makes sense, that things are not out of order, and that if they are, it is the editor's job to set things right and draw the author's attention to inconsistencies. Ultimately, editors ensure that once they hit the last page, they completely understand what they just experienced, that it made sense and had a logical flow. Returning to the concept of the dual role, editors stand in for the author because they have to understand the author's intent. Editors need to make sure that whatever meanings or messages the author wants to convey come across in the manner they intended. Sometimes, the best edits are the ones that are not made. Upon first glance, editors may find that does not make sense to the reader-editor, but it does make sense to the author-editor. Editing is the most common occurrence in writing, and this section portrays what is done in the role of editing.

Beta-ing—or beta readers—is defined by NY Book Editors as "a person who reads and provides feedback on your manuscript before publishing." This section will demonstrate beta-ing or beta readers' role when it comes to works of creative fiction and why they are just as important as editors. Beta-ing is similar to the software world, where beta testers run software through its paces. They test it and flag any errors, such as instances where performing a function leads to a crash. So, like the editor, beta readers are in the role of the editor or the reader. They are using the software with its intended purpose and making notes of inconsistencies and crashes. Beta readers are more focused than editors in the role of the readers because they are like the test audience for TV shows or movies. Beta readers give the authors feedback on what works and what does not. They report back on again any inconsistencies, loose threads, or things that might

have been introduced at a certain point and then dropped. However, they are not editors; they usually are not paid for their work; most of the time, they are friends of the author or adjacent who is doing them a favor. The editor has a different mindset going into a manuscript. Editors focus on technicalities, whereas beta readers focus on whether the story makes sense and whether they would buy the book if they saw it in the bookstore. Beta readers are the closest analog to the end user: the reader. This section shows what beta-ing is, what capacity it is used for, and how it differs from both editing and proofreading.

Proofreading is the last stage in the editing process, where you check for "grammatical and punctuation errors, spelling mistakes, etc." (University of Toronto). Proofreading is also an essential aspect of creative writing, so this section will explain the purpose of the proofreading process in creative writing. Proofreading is the most fundamental basic technical form of editing. Back to computer software, a proofreader is like a computer coder, checking line-by-line to ensure the codes are written in the proper syntax, and everything is correctly placed and phrased so it runs without any hiccups when the software runs. A proofreader goes through a manuscript line by line for the most minute errors. It looks at the text under a microscope, whereas the beta reader is the bird's-eye view of things. The proofreader is down in the weeds, ensuring everything is proper and as it should be. The editor can sometimes be seen as an artist because they can take artistic license and suggest fundamental changes. The proofreader is mainly concerned with everything being spelled right, punctuated right, and sentences being formed right. The proofreader is not so much concerned with what the author is trying to convey the message, their feeling towards the story. Their purpose in reading is to check for proper grammar and sentence structure. They look at it from a more engineering perspective, while the editor also

has an eye towards that; they also have that left brain, right brain approach, while proofreaders deal with the more technical left brain stuff. This section showed that proofreading is essential in creating creative writing, just like editors and beta readers.

Creative writing is a tricky field to edit. That is why it is important to understand each step of the process, from the technical editing to the enjoyment readers will get from reading the book.

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