

Bigger Than Botox

Practical instructions for when your book needs more than a face-lift

Combined, Emily McKay and Robyn DeHart have spoken on several occasions to a total of fifteen RWA chapters. They presented their workshop, Character Plotting, at the 2004 RWA national conference to rave reviews. Not only was this workshop the number 1 selling tape that year, they also receive comments weekly from writers regarding this ground-breaking approach to writing.

Award-winning author, Emily McKay has been a Golden Heart finalist and a double RITA finalist. She is Walden's Series Romance bestselling author. She has written several articles about the craft of writing. She's presented workshops on-line, at numerous local RWA chapters, as well as for the Central Texas Library System and the Burnet Cultural Arts Festival. Her most recent release, *The Baby on the Billionaire's Doorstep*, was a Silhouette Desire release in April 2008. Her next book, *Baby Benefits*, will be out in October.

Robyn DeHart spent seven years writing before breaking into the seemingly impenetrable historical market. So far her historicals have earned such accolades as an RT Reviewer's Choice Award Nomination and a double final in the Desert Rose Golden Quill Award. Her books have received rave reviews garnering a 4 ½ star Top Pick from *RT. Publishers' Weekly* touts, "The battle of the sexes tests more than just wills in this charming...whodunit romance...a pleasure for fans." While the *Chicago Tribune* says, "two superbly matched protagonists match wits and wiles with wonderfully entertaining results." A self-proclaimed craft junkie, Robyn is a popular writing instructor, having presented numerous workshops on-line, at several RWA chapters and three times at RWA's National Conference.

Revisions...

Sure, everyone knows how to edit a manuscript. But how do you revise one? We're not talking masy-pansy punching-up-your-verbs revisions. We're talking my-book-is-flatlining-and-needs-a-heart-transplant revisions.

Maybe your critique group is harping on your convoluted plot and you're getting rejections that say they just don't feel connected to your characters. These are problems your spell checker and thesaurus can't fix. It could be time for major surgery.

This workshop will unveil three levels of revisions that will take your book from an unhealthy, flabby mess, to a thing of beauty your editor will want to clutch to her chest while singing Etta James's At Last.

Revisions AREN'T:

- Proofreading
- Line editing
- Verb strengthening, adverb and adjective trimming

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RWA National Conference, San Francisco, CA
July 2008

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- Spell-checking

in defense of revisions...

Jack Bickham says, "Good novels aren't written. They're rewritten and revised."

Jean Jacques Rousseau says, "However great a man's natural talent may be, the art of writing cannot be learned all at once."

In his book, Techniques of the Selling Writer, Dwight Swain quotes mystery author, Margery Allingham as saying this, "I write everything four times: once to get my meaning down, once to put in everything I left out, once to take out everything that seems unnecessary, and once to make the whole thing sound as if I had only just thought of it."

Layering – the art of revisions

HEART TRANSPLANTS – look at each subtopic and the questions they pose

Characters, GMC and character growth/arcs

1. Are the goals and motivations of the characters clear? Is their behavior consistent with their character traits? Do the main characters grow and change?
2. Can the reader feel the emotions of the characters? Are the emotions believable? Will the reader empathize with the protagonist?
3. Are the characters consistent in their behavior and actions?
4. How do the hero and heroine interact? What's the dynamic of their relationship?
5. Are the characters true to their archetypes?

Plot

1. Does the plot move forward in every scene?
2. Do you have any plot holes that need filled or repaired?

Theme

1. Does the book feel "tight" or "cohesive"? Do all the elements (conflict, characters, subplot, symbolism, etc) rotate around a central theme?
2. If you can't find your theme, try this exercise. Make a chart of every theme (emotional element such as justice, forgiveness, trust, etc.) you deal with in the book. Then list all the elements (and/or scenes) in your book that deal with each theme. Is there one clearly dominate theme? There should be.

Scene & pacing

1. Does each scene advance the plot or reveal new facets of the characters?
2. Does the pacing of action and reaction smoothly propel the reader through the story?
3. Did I open with a hook? Does each scene end on a hook?
4. Did I switch viewpoints only when necessary? If I did switch, is the shift clear?
5. Does the dialogue move the story ahead? Does it reflect the character's unique personality?
6. What's the scene about on a subtextual level ?

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7. What's the tone of the scene? Does it match the tone of the rest of the book?

TUMMY TUCKS – look at each subtopic and the questions they pose

Setting

1. Is my description fresh and original? Have I used significant details?
2. Does my use of the five senses draw the reader into the story?
3. Am I fully utilizing my setting to maximize emotion?

Subplot and secondary characters

1. Do the subplots mimic the main plotline or add contrast and conflict?
2. Does each of the secondary characters serve a unique purpose?
3. Do the secondary characters have goals, motivations and conflicts of their own?

Continuity

1. Is there a timeline to the story and if so, are there any holes or missteps in the course of the book?
2. Have you checked minor details like character names, places, eye/hair color and other things that might accidentally change?

BOTOX – look at each subtopic and the questions they pose

Character Voice

1. Does each of the characters have a unique voice for their dialogue and narrative?
2. Do the men sound differently than the women?

Word choice & more pacing

1. Have I created a flowing rhythm by varying the length and structure of my sentences?
2. Have I used strong action verbs? Have I deleted all unnecessary adjectives and adverbs? Cut repeated information?

Proofreading/Spell check

1. Are my sentences grammatically correct?
2. Is the manuscript prepared in proper format? Have I checked for spelling, punctuation, and typographical errors?

Steps to tackling your revisions

1. take a break
2. know yourself and your strengths & weaknesses
3. read the book all the way through
4. set a deadline
5. write your own revision letter
6. have realistic expectations

Bigger than Botox: When Your Book Needs More than a Face-lift (DeHart & McKay)

Emily & Robyn's suggested reading list...

GMC: Goal, Motivation and Conflict by Debra Dixon

The Complete Writer's Guide to Heroes and Heroines by Tami Cowden, et. al

38 Most Common Mistakes of Fiction Writers by Jack Bickham

Scene and Structure by Jack Bickham

Self-Editing for Fiction Writers by Renni Browne and Dave King

The First Five Pages by Noah Lukeman

Techniques of the Selling Writer by Dwight V. Swain

What Type Am I?: Discover Who You Really Are by Renee Baron

Books by Emily McKay

Baby Benefits (coming from Silhouette Desire
in October 2008)

Baby on the Billionaire's Doorstep
(Silhouette Desire)

Surrogate and Wife
(Silhouette Desire)

Her Wildest Dreams
(Harlequin Mills & Boon)

Perfectly Saucy
(Harlequin Temptation)

Perfectly Sexy
(Harlequin Temptation)

Baby Be Mine
(Harlequin Temptation)

Books by Robyn DeHart

Tempted At Every Turn

Deliciously Wicked

A Study in Scandal

Courting Claudia

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