

Editorial Note

Tense, Tension and Time: Musings From a Copy Editor (English) in the Long Now

Kip Jones

"'Now' is never just a moment. The Long Now is the recognition that the precise moment you're in grows out of the past and is a seed for the future. The longer your sense of Now, the more past and future it includes."

Brian ENO, "The Big Here and the Long Now,"
Long Now Foundation 2001

In the Wizard of Oz, the dog, Toto, lifts the curtain and reveals the small, frightened man behind all of the Wizardry. It's a bit like that with your editors, silent to the general public at most times and, at other times, "speaking" privately in the codes of highlighted words, brief suggestions and word substitutions to *FQS* contributors. Once in a while, an actual paragraph appears from us in these communications, usually prodding, suggesting. [1]

Editing *FQS* book reviews in English for almost a year now, I approach this work both eagerly and with trepidation. The interesting and frustrating aspect of writing and editing book reviews is the tension of tense. A writer writes a book and so has written. A reviewer reads that book and has read. Having read, the reviewer then writes a review for an audience of readers; s/he now has written about someone else having written. Through all of these slices of time, the necessity to remain present (both in tense and in level of interest) abounds. So we try to force our language into the long now, both for the benefit of readers and, I think, to make it real; we write, when at all possible, in present tense. This is the most common slippage that occurs: reviewers find themselves stuck in cul-de-sacs of past and past perfect tenses, valiantly trying to wiggle out. With an eye to these roadblocks, as editor, I try to turn the reviewers around and get them going again in the right/write direction; at least, I hope I help with this. [2]

Editing reviews in English from many countries is also appealing to me too. An American working for some time now in the UK, I am familiar with both American English and British English. Presently, my own work is in British English, for convenience of place. *FQS* edits in the version-of-choice of its English-writing contributors. Once in a while, a review comes through in Australian English or New Zealand English (I can tell because MS Word in all its glory lets me know this!). Although I have never personally experienced Australian English for any length of time, I do faithfully watch "Neighbors". I wonder if that qualifies me? "Spunky!" When a review comes through in what I believe is second language (for instance, someone from a Spanish-speaking country writing in English), I generally have more success in editing those of Latin-based first language

writers. Having spent some time in France, I guess I can sense what it is that they are saying in English, knowing some of the Latin root words of their first language. [3]

I say a lot about the technicalities of editing book reviews, but do not mention how interesting it is to learn about all of the reviewed books too. The job not only makes me aware of many more books than I otherwise would, but also makes me think about what the reviewer is saying about what the book's author is saying. I also like the fact that *FQS* includes short biographic information about its writers at the end of the reviews. This helps me "see" the person who is "talking" to me through their writing and adds greatly to the enjoyment and understanding of the reviews. [4]

I have not mentioned the use of commas before "and" or people who begin sentences with "however" (two of my pet peeves) and I won't go on about them here now. Instead, let me slip back behind the curtain into the invisible world of "editorland". "There's no place like home." [5]

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