



JM Agency  
Publishing Consultancy

Editor's Report

Sample

## Introduction

I very much enjoyed reading this memoir. Readers are provided with an insight into both the narrator's business and personal life; often, memoirs provide either one or the other. I also enjoyed the prose style. While there are issues with the text, which I detail below and in the annotations on the manuscript, your prose style demonstrates flair, and is often evocative of place and setting, particularly when you are describing your experience of travel and living in other countries, whether that be Argentina or London. I also enjoyed the narrator's descriptions of intimacy. I found them very candid, but also gentle.

I found your thoughts and observations on religion, Catholic social teaching, America and the Northern Irish Troubles interesting, but I felt they needed to be elaborated on and teased out that little bit more. You will find extensive feedback, observations and suggestions under the various headings below. You will also find additional editorial feedback in the notes in the margins on the manuscript. Some of these notes elaborate on the points raised, while others identify one-off issues in the text, such as ambiguities or mistakes that need to be addressed before publication.



## Good Writing & Humour

The narrator's description of how he first met Renee, his future wife ('Chapter 19'), and how their courtships developed and evolved, is very skilfully done. You build suspense for readers expertly, and you don't reveal the outcome of the courtship prematurely. When the narrator first spots the 'vision of loveliness' out the guesthouse window, there is no indication that she will become his wife, which is positive. As the relationship develops, readers are always wondering how it will conclude, will they part ways, or end up marrying. This is often done badly in memoirs.

In 'Chapter Twenty Two', when the narrator decides to immigrate to London in order to pursue his ambitions in accountancy, and part from Renee, the reader is unsure whether this is their final or a temporary parting. Ditto for 'Chapter Twenty Three', when Renee leaves London for Ireland, to attend her father's funeral. Readers are still wondering whether this signals the permanent end of their courtship, or whether there is another twist. When the narrator remarks sombrely, in the wake of Renee's departure, 'Life goes on of course, and I remained in London working in my office each day and studying each evening and living alone again. I was deeply saddened at the sudden ending of my companionship and camaraderie with Renee (page 96)'. It feels like this could just as easily be the end of the relationship, as another bump in the road. This was impressively done.

Memoirists often have a tendency, when introducing how they met their beloved, to begin with something to the effect of 'how I met my future



wife/husband' which removes all the guesses and suspense for readers, and makes the writing less engaging as a result.

I also enjoyed the narrator's descriptions of intimacy with his wife. I found them candid and honest, but also gentle:

*My abiding first memory of sleeping with Renee was the rounded softness of her body. Having slept with my brothers and cousins during my boyhood years, I recalled a memory of their bony and angular bodies. But now with my new wife, wherever I moved in our bed and held her in my arms, I could savour the inviting ecstasy of her soft body forever. When I complimented her on her voluptuous figure she just giggled and said 'don't be silly'.*

I wondered if women can appreciate how much the roundness their bodies reflect the bountiful generosity of mother nature. (Page 106, 'Chapter Twenty Seven'.)

I thought the prose style was particularly effective when it came to describing experiences of being away from home, in strange lands, and the kind of bonds forged in often exotic environments:

*The propinquity of spending weeks together with other crew members creates a bond, and each is saddened at the end of a voyage shaking hands to say goodbye. Each knows that they will likely never meet again. These memories struck me forcibly as I began my round of farewells to friends I made over the eleven years I lived in London. (Page 172, 'Chapter Forty-One'.)*



Your choice of word was also good on occasion. The verb ‘hurtled’ for example, is very well chosen in ‘Trafalgar Square and using the underground that hurtled you anywhere you wanted’ (page 94, ‘Chapter Twenty-Three’). I also enjoyed the manuscript’s humorous innuendoes and dry witticisms. I felt they were very natural, and, like a lot of good humour, they often made a serious point in a subtle way.

*And I did. On the first week in November, we flew to the resort town of Magaluf in Majorca and booked into our hotel. Upon finding two separate single beds in our room, we placed them close together. We discovered that they moved apart on the marble floors when conjugal relations were attempted. I fell out on to the marble floor and bruised my elbows. (Page 205, ‘Chapter Forty Five’.)*

This dry observation from ‘Chapter Forty Four’ was also very funny:

*He told me he had to quit school at sixteen to work in a bottle factory owned by his family. In our conversation together he showed a great familiarity with a person he called ‘Jaysus’. (Page 195.)*

I also enjoyed your wry observations on the ‘cross fertilisation of human resources’ (‘Chapter Fifty’) your remark that the relationship between an underwriter and a reinsurer is akin to a marriage (‘Chapter Sixty Three’), and particularly your innuendo aimed at the business executives at Munich Re:

*Afterwards, I was thinking capriciously how these ‘world’ executives managed to sublimate their personal lives to the demands of business. A mischievous thought entered my head, as I remembered Alec Guinness in*



*the comedy film 'The Captains Paradise' as he tried coping with a wife in each port. (Page 307, 'Chapter Sixty-Three'.)*

## **Weaker Writing**

While I enjoyed your humorous innuendoes, I felt, on occasion, you are guilty of being a little too subtle. I felt on occasion you could be a little kinder to the reader, be more explicit with what you meant. I worried some readers would miss your point. In 'Chapter Seven' for example, the narrator describes feeling a little resentful that he, as the older brother, didn't receive more pocket money than his brothers for helping with the hay. He then informs readers that he remembered the parable of the workers in the vineyards. I feel you should elaborate a little here, explain to readers unfamiliar with it what the parable is and why it was relevant. Today, you have the prospect of engaging a large readership, many of which will come from different educational backgrounds, and some may not be familiar with the parables from the gospels.

Similarly, when arriving on Puerto Ordaz on the Orinoco, ('Chapter Thirteen') the narrator remarks 'I was not surprised to find that there was minimal entertainment or shopping available at Puerto Ordaz' (page 57). It wasn't entirely clear from my reading why he wasn't surprised. I would elaborate a little here, explain why the narrator wasn't surprised; assuming knowledge on the part of readers can be risky.

Similarly, are you being too subtle in 'Chapter Fifty-Seven', when the narrator, on the subject of contemporary business theory, remarks 'The question was posed about how and why the shares in railroads in America rose so highly in the nineteenth century and dropped so steeply in the



twentieth. The answer lies in one's ability or otherwise to ask the key question "what business are we in?" (page 271)'. I feel that while some readers will understand what you mean, those familiar with business and business theory for example, others will miss the point, and may feel a little frustrated. Being a little more generous with readers here, explaining your meaning a little more, should be considered. I have marked another one or two occasions of this in the manuscript, occasions where I felt you could have been more generous to readers, or you assumed knowledge of texts and references that a modern, more diverse readership may not recognise.

I also felt the language could have been clearer at times. While your descriptions of your work in the insurance industry, first with CU, and later your various positions in Hibernian in Ireland, were predominantly clear, there were one or two occasions where I felt you could have been a little clearer, you could have unpacked complicated terminology more, for example. Consider the following passage from 'Chapter Forty-Three':

*In accordance with normal practice in large claims, Hibernian retained part of this risk and shared the balance with a panel of co-insurers and reinsurers. Every company on the risk arranged its own reinsurance protection also. Eventually, all those involved agreed on the amount to be paid. The insured accepted the amount offered in compensation including estimated reinstatement. (Page 190.)*

I would clarify some of the terms in this passage? Terms like 'risk' and 'reinsurment' in the context of the insurance industry were clear to me, but I think there is a danger that some readers will be lost. You could insert a clarifying line, something to the effect of 'by reinsurance I meant that



Hibernian ourselves took out policies with reinsurers, in order to share the financial burden in the event of a large claim, such as a fire'. The phrasing here may not work for you, but I feel it or something similar would help clarify the terminology here, for readers less learned in business speak.

Ditto for your discussion of the role of brokers in 'Chapter Forty-Six':

*Brokers also acted for underwriting companies in placing business on large risks in the reinsurance markets of the world. (Page 209.)*

You should clarify what precisely you mean here. You could add something to the effect of 'in order words, they purchased stakes in policies held by large international underwriters'. I may not have understood you correctly, and this sentence may not work for you, but I feel something like it is needed. Your explanation of tensions between brokers and underwriters when it came to payments of cash was also a little opaque.

*Brokers would contend the client had delayed payment, while the underwriters relied on the agency contract terms. (ibid.)*

A concrete example would help readers understand this tension more. For example, you could cite a particular client whose policy caused tension between the broker and the underwriter when it came to payment. A real-life example would help readers visualise the theory. A fictitious one would work just as well, perhaps even better.

## **Elaboration Needed**

I particularly liked the passages on topics such as the northern Troubles, religion, particularly the Church and sexual morality, and America. I felt



your varied life experiences gave you a particular insight into these subjects, and you managed to discuss significant historical issues, such as Cold War tension in America and the Troubles, in a very candid and personal way. My favourite passage of this kind is your remarks on America in the wake of the Kennedy assassination in ‘Chapter Thirty Three’. I felt you succeeded in being both insightful, but also very personal and candid:

*I thought of their welcoming of immigrants from all over the world but also their horrid and blood thirsty four year Civil War; their ‘civilising’ of the native American Indians as described in their novels and films and their ‘cops n robbers’ charades in the Prohibition years, their gangsters and their rogues in Wall Street; their peril at Pearl Harbour, their saving of Europe and Asia from the madness of Hitler and Hirohito. (page 132.)*

I also thought your descriptions of religions belief, particularly how Catholic social teaching impacted the narrator and Renee while living in the London of the ‘swinging sixties.’ I feel there is room to elaborate on your thoughts on religion more however, and tease out the role it played in your lives. Throughout, I felt readers were being teased a little, giving glimpses into the narrator’s views on religion, without these ever being fully developed.

Early in the book, in ‘Chapter Six’, the narrator mentioned how his school friend Eric would pose difficult questions about religion, but we are never told what these questions are. Too tantalising I think. More engaging if you went into a little more detail.





Consider the narrator's remarks in 'Chapter Thirty', that 'Whilst Renee and I shared concerns about the intrusion of Catholic doctrine in our personal relationship, when it came to music, our tastes were completely Catholic,' (page 118). This is an interesting observation, and while it comes as no surprise they had 'concerns', considering the milieu they were living in, in the London of the 'swinging sixties', it was a little surprising considering the narrator's earlier remarks. Up to that point, I think most readers would have the impression that the couple followed the social teaching to the letter, while acknowledging the rules were ridged. In 'Chapter Twenty-Eight' for example, the narrator admits that both he and Renee avoided contraceptives as they were viewed as a 'mortal sin'. Is there a little irony here, that some readers may miss? I also enjoyed the observation in 'Chapter Twenty Nine', where your more profane neighbours decorated their Christmas tree with packs of condoms. It was clear the narrator saw the humorous side to this, but there was no indication, until 'Chapter Thirty', that you found the social teaching oppressive. Readers get another glimpse into the narrator's struggles with Catholic doctrine in 'Chapter Thirty Five', when he remarks:

Our conscience however was troubled, how would we continue as 'good' Catholics, while containing the size of our family by artificial means. It was a real and serious dilemma and it worried us sincerely. (page 40.)

I thought the narrator's concerns with the social teaching were interesting, particularly considering the context of his life, leaving rural Ireland for Dublin, and later London, while also travelling the world as a radio operator. I did feel you could have elaborated that little bit more however, teased out the details a little more. One possibility that occurred to me while reading was perhaps you could dwell on how living in London



changed your religious beliefs and attitude to religion; perhaps the circumstances of yourself and Renee's life forced you to question some aspects of the social teaching; perhaps the immigrant experience strengthened some aspects of your faith, while undermining others.

I had a similar view when it came to your observations and thoughts on the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and British-Irish relations more generally. You had many valuable insights to share on this topic, particularly because of your varied life experiences and your candid, fluid form of expression. I felt you had a nuanced view of the conflict, exemplified by the narrator's reaction to the burning of the British Embassy, described in 'Chapter Forty-Nine'. The narrator is shocked by the Bloody Sunday atrocity, while also condemning the angry mob that stormed the Embassy in its wake. As with your writings on religion, I felt one thing that was missing was an articulation of how living in Britain shaped your view on the conflict.

You remark in 'Chapter Forty Four' (page 192) that the wider public in Britain were shocked after the revelations of gerrymandering, while admitting that the problems of Northern Ireland, like Scotland, were often forgotten by Londoners, they being so far from the 'seat of power'. I felt this was an insight you could only get from living in the country, and that perhaps you could elaborate on how immigrating there shaped your views, and perhaps made your views subtly different to that of your Irish peers who had never lived in Britain.

A possible location for this, ie an additional passage on the Troubles, and how your experiences shaped your views, would be a conclusion. As I explain below, I feel the book needs a separate conclusion, eg an 'Afterword'.



Another possibility is the end of ‘Chapter Forty Seven’ when you mention the Arms Crisis, and the cabinet resignations that resulted from it. It would be a good location to articulate your own nuanced view of the conflict, and how your experiences informed it. There were one or two other occasions in the manuscript where I felt you could have elaborated on your views a little bit more, give readers a greater insight into your thinking.

In ‘Chapter Fifty-Three’ for instance, you remark on how Fine Gale policy at the time was biased against business. This struck me as interesting, especially as Fine Gale court that constituency, ie business people, and I felt readers would like to hear why exactly you thought this.

One final point in this regard is, I think some readers will be disappointed you didn’t give, considering your background in business, your views on the financial crisis of 2009, 10 and onwards. The more recent decades were skimmed over in fact, and this tumultuous period in history, the banking crisis, was passed over without remark. To such an extent that I got the impression you wanted to concentrate on earlier decades. I do feel readers would appreciate your views on this, as it is fresher and perhaps more directly relevant to them, and especially since you provide some interesting insights into finance, business and international business during the course of the book. The conclusion is another potential location for this, but there are other possibilities in the present draft.

One potential location is ‘Chapter Thirty-Eight’, when you contrast the British laissez-faire approach to investment regulation with the more regulated French approach, remarking that while initially you favoured the British approach, later in life you grew to see the merits of the French



philosophy. If this is a hint at the later damage caused by volatile financial markets then I would be a little more explicit here. In ‘Chapter Forty-Seven’, you mention ‘development and changes in the Irish banking industry’, but you refer specifically to changes in the time period you are writing about. I would also mention here the more recent changes and developments, and evaluate them through the prism of your own experiences in insurance and business. I feel this will engage readers more.

I would do something similar for the contemporary situation in insurance, where there are controversies over the capping of personal injury rewards and so forth. In ‘Chapter Forty-Two’ (page 182 in particular) you reflect generally on the insurance industry at the time in question, but I would insert one or two comments on the contemporary, present-day situation as well, to ensure readers are engaged.

## **Suggested Cuts**

The present draft is very long at just over 150,000 words, and there are places where you could make cuts. While the draft is enjoyable and engaging on the whole, and I never felt bored while reading, there were some, occasional long- winded and tedious passages, which I would advise cutting or reducing in size. Your descriptions of various family holidays you took over the years, to Ireland, France and so forth, felt just a little mundane.

I can appreciate that it is a very personal memoir for you, and there is therefore an imperative to keep an accurate and comprehensive record of your life. The description of the narrator’s honeymoon with Renee in



‘Chapter Twenty Seven’ for example, is obviously a very worthwhile recording.

Material of this kind is not always very engaging to the more general reader however. Your descriptions of your travels to locations such as Hong Kong and Argentina, in the earlier parts of the manuscript, will be more engaging to readers than records of family holidays, which, in however exotic a location, are more everyday in nature. Also, when it came to holidays, you often adopted a listing style, in the respect you listed the various destinations visited and activities done. Again, while this is commendable in the respect that you have compiled an impressive and detailed record of your life, it may not be that engaging to read.

Your description of your first holiday with Renee after the birth of your first-born for example (‘Chapter Twenty Eight’) would be an example of this listing style, where you list the various places visited, the Abbey Hotel etc, and the car used, the Hillman. As would the trip to Bideford in ‘Chapter Forty One’, and the trip to Normandy in ‘Chapter Fifty Two’:

*We booked a family berth on the ship for the nineteen hour voyage. We were served a Swedish style buffet dinner, called Smorgasbord, and we all tucked in heartily. It was disappointing to note some people piling their dinner plates to excess. C’est la vie.*

*We had a happy sea voyage and I was embarrassed I had lost my sea legs. Renee was a natural sailor, as were two of the children. Michelle, like me, struggled to avoid becoming seasick. (Page 242.)*

I felt you were quickly skimming through the details, and while the



holidays sounded exciting, I felt there wasn't enough to grab the reader's attention. If you decide to cut some of the material, I would do so conservatively however, as there was the occasional interesting observation too. On a holiday to Beziers in south-west France for example, you observe how the children were called 'free staters' by children from the North. I think that detail is worth including in the final draft. Similarly, your reflections on Franco and your experience with Catalan nationalists on holiday to Spain ('Chapter Fifty Five'), were more interesting and possibly worth keeping in the final draft. I have marked more of these potential cuts on the manuscript. I have highlighted the text, and inserted corresponding notes in the margins, explaining why you should consider cutting or re-wording this material.

## **Tense Issues**

Another issue that occurs frequently in the draft is tense confusion. While writing in the past tense, you occasionally lapse into the present tense. This is not surprising, writers, when writing longer pieces, often struggle to sustain the correct tense throughout. In most cases this is easily corrected by replacing present tense verbs with, for example, past-tense verbs. In 'Chapter Fifteen', when pining about the lack of female company at sea, the narrator remarks on how much 'I miss having a normal life at sea'. The verb 'miss' is present tense here, while it is clear your intention is to reflect on experiences and emotions in the past. It is small but it creates confusion and worth correcting.

In 'Chapter Forty Seven', as already mentioned, you comment 'recent history of the development and changes to the Irish banking industry' is confusing. By 'recent' you mean to refer 'recent' to the time in question,



as opposed to recent to readers reading the manuscript today. Again, confusing and I would tweak. Ditto for the line ‘we started a new life four years ago in Dublin (‘Chapter Forty’, page 229). This suggests present-tense, ie today. As I felt your meaning here was past-tense, I rephrased it as ‘we had started a new life four years previous in Dublin’.

Where I felt the tense confusion was caused by small errors in expression, I edited and changed, although all of these are tracked in the manuscript if you would like to review. On other occasions however, I felt your intention was not to write exclusively in the past-tense, but rather to blend past and present-tense perspectives. In other words, document your thoughts and views at the time in question, but also your thoughts and feelings on the subject at the time of writing. Passages of this kind can be a positive inclusion in a memoir. It is interesting to readers to get your perspective on things today, and see how your views have changed and evolved; it keeps the material fresh. I really liked, for example, the passage in ‘Chapter Thirty Seven’ where the narrator describes his partnership with his wife:

*I honestly do not and did not have time to develop fanciful ideas. I never thought much beyond today, unless it was about surviving Neither of us cares much for being in the limelight, nor ingratiate ourselves in what is termed ‘society’. We live for each other, we are blessed with a quantum of intelligence that is adequate. We share a liking for a quiet lifestyle, and happy to embrace the concept of ‘carpe diem’, live for today, and what will be, will be. We are well suited, neither of us interested in taking an advantage , neither expressing high ambition, or indeed any ambition, for our future, except being healthy and happy. (Page 150.)*

This passage is written predominantly in the present-tense. I wasn’t sure



whether this was your intention however. Considering the passage's context, I felt that perhaps you either wanted to reflect on the narrator and Renee's attitude to life at the time in question, ie London in the sixties, or perhaps a mixture of both. One option would be to covert to the past-tense, but insert something to the effect of 'and this continues to be our attitude today, this bond and outlook that has sustained us throughout our happy years together ...'

Similarly, in 'Chapter Fifty', the narrator, when contrasting himself to his colleague Cyril, remarks 'I have expertise in the financials of the business'. This use of the present-tense tense jarred a little, as I felt you wanted to remark on your contrasting abilities at the time in question. I rephrased the sentence so that you remarked on both your abilities at the time of the question and the present day:

*In comparison to him, I had, and still have, expertise in the financials of the business, but I had much to learn about the industry in its wider implications. (Page 226.)*





## Textual Issues & Conclusion

I would make changes to the final concluding paragraphs. I liked your candid reflection on the futility of 'looking back' at your business career, the fact it was like 'tracks on the sand washed away by the waves', and I found the last paragraph a fitting conclusion to the book. I would advise a separate concluding section however. At present, the concluding paragraphs of the book feel grafted onto the end of 'Chapter Sixty Seven'. A separate concluding section is advised; it is neater and more presentable. For a memoir of this kind, a good title for a conclusion would be 'Afterword'. 'Conclusion' would suit more technical literature, while 'epilogue' would suit a fictional work.

This Afterword can be short, and you can include the two paragraphs cited above. I would also conclude the book more neatly than you have done at present. You could, as I mentioned above, draw some concluding comments on the subject of religion and the Northern Irish troubles, perhaps take the opportunity to reflect on how your life experiences shaped your views on those issues. While I feel readers will respect your reluctance to dwell excessively on your business career, it is 'like tracks on the sand', you could take the opportunity to pass on advice to younger people, starting off in the careers. You wouldn't be 'looking back', as much as 'looking to the future', imparting some final words of wisdom for the close of the memoir.

The text is in good shape overall. The grammar and syntax is of an overall good standard, and it is formatted reasonably well. There are formatting anomalies, such as extra spacing etc, which could have been caused by importing from another file format. There were a few occasions of poorly



structured sentences. In most cases the sentences were too long. In some cases I have rectified this by breaking the longer sentences into shorter, more digestible ones - all work of this kind is tracked in the margins for you to review.

One repeated error was inconsistent capitalisation. The convention is to capitalise 'proper nouns', ie the official name of something, but use lower case for regular nouns, ie more general use of names. Therefore, the word 'staff' in reference to employees in organisations such as CU or Hibernian, would be in lower case, as it is a general name, as opposed to the official name. 'Street' in 'Baker Street' however, should be capitalised, as this is the official name of the location, are ditto for the various street names that appear in the manuscript.

I have made numerous corrections to capitals, but there are some remaining. I would advise a professional copy-edit before proceeding to publication. While I have tweaked and re-structured the odd, messy sentence, there are likely to be more, in addition to small, textual errors, such as incorrect capitalisations, the odd punctuation error, and those formatting anomalies discussed, extra spacing etc. These need to be addressed before publication. We provide an extensive copy-editing package, which includes the manuscript being copy-edited by two professional proofreaders, and filtered through advanced, computer-editing software, in order to ensure it is perfect in advance of publication.