



XXXXX

Overview

You a very gifted writer and that is clear from page one onward. Your writing is a delight to read. The manuscript was reminiscent of the film Wag the Dog and the book Catch-22. Bernard is an unforgettable character and reminded me of Ignatius J. Reilly in A Confederacy of Dunces. Bernard is, to put it another way, an unreliable narrator, or in literature, the “sacred fool” – someone who stumbles into trouble again and again and yet who, ultimately sees the truth of things. He is a character I will never forget. And that is a pretty great achievement, XXX!

There are, in my close read of this manuscript, an overwhelming number of positives that make this a good read, but also a couple of issues that need to be addressed to improve the read quite a lot.

The problematic issues are:

- 1) A number of overly long passages that divert us away from the main plot.
- 2) A change, in the last third of the book, during which Bernard’s character changes quite a bit, from being a Don Quixote type of character to more of a level-headed philosopher and detective. As the plot winds down in the last third of the book, the manuscript becomes very “procedural”. (That is an expression from the world of television shows that refers to the

mechanics of how a case gets solved.) The dialogue between the various characters trying to help Bernard changes dramatically from the more philosophical or humorous conversations earlier in the book into more of a laundry list of who did what and what can be done. I didn't mind this because it was of course helpful for me to understand and pull together everything that had happened leading up to that point. I will come back to this issue, but to me it is secondary to the long-winded passages mentioned first.

At over 219,000 words, the manuscript is quite a bit longer than most books in its category, but I did not see an organic way to split the book into two books. Word count averages are mostly the purview of publishing industry standards and are therefore not ironclad. Because the plan for this book is to publish it independently, we need not be slavish to the total number of words. That said, from a story point of view, I did find a number of passages in several of chapters that could be cut down quite a bit in order to keep the larger plot flowing. This will require some careful editing, because while some of these wordy passages are interesting flights in another direction, others actually do establish points that the book needs to make. So it will be with a scalpel, not a chainsaw that these edits need to be made.

These overly-long passages sometimes take the form of side-stories involving a character that don't really add up to anything in the main plot, and sometimes take the form of scenes that are just too long and could be truncated to keep everything moving. You'll notice that in the copy of the manuscript, I made every chapter heading stand out and did a word count for each chapter, so as to gain a bird's eye view of where the manuscript is weighted in terms of word count. Superfluous or wordy passages can be found pretty much throughout but there are a couple of chapters that may not need to exist at all, or can be shortened dramatically and added to the chapter before or after it.

The midpoint of the book is the chapter called "XXXX". At that point there are 109K words. The chapter has 12,265 words and can likely be shortened by at least 2,000 words. I am loathe to get stuck on *exactly* how many words should be trimmed from particular sections because it's

difficult to predict, if an editor goes in and carefully trims this sentence or that paragraph, how many less words that will result in. There are so many great passages in this book that it will be tricky to thin it out – but it must be done.

In fiction writing, each scene has a “beat” (something that is moving the plot forward). A chapter may have several scenes or only one long scene. The important part is to identify what the beat (or beats) are, in a chapter or scene.

So for example, the chapter titled **XXXXX** about Rabbi Braslaw has over 11,000 words. The chapter varies from Uri asking Simon to go to New York, to a long discussion that amounts to political backstory, to a four-page talk of Braslaw’s. So if the “beat” of the chapter is that Simon goes to New York and Braslaw is assassinated, we don’t need a 35 page chapter to tell us that. That said, **the backstory IS interesting and important for a reader to understand** – so it’s a matter of doing a lot of careful weeding out. The obvious thing to do is to slim Braslaw’s speech, way down, rather than the backstory, because we “get” that Braslaw has extreme views and the backstory helps us put it all into context. So that’s an example of a chapter that needs to be slimmed down (one of many examples) but carefully – so that information the reader needs to put the larger plot into context, vis the political aims and views of the far right – stays put, but the words of Braslaw himself can then be much more truncated.

In another chapter, titled **“XXXX”** (which has 7,227 words) there is some good stuff there but the date that Bernard goes on with Sally, and how she brushes him off later take up a lot of pages and yet Sally is not a character that returns in the story. She doesn’t play a significant role, in other words. The chapter succeeds in showing us Bernard’s state of mind and temperament; he is desperate to be in a relationship and neurotic about being ignored, to the point of making a fool of himself. This is well written stuff; it’s painful and cringe-worthy and it makes Bernard vulnerable, funny and relatable. But it doesn’t serve the larger plot at all because there really isn’t a beat in this chapter.

The **Kidney Stones** chapter is a tough one because it's SO entertaining and so well written, and yet it is more than 17,000 words long and the upshot of the chapter is that Bernard thinks he is ill but he doesn't and he winds up in the psych ward – which will come back to haunt him later. Bernard's doings in the hospital are entertaining but many of the scenes within that portion of the book could be much, much shorter in favor of moving the plot forward. The important upshot of this chapter is that Bernard gets sent to the psych ward, which will haunt him later. As an example, the scene in which Bernard is trapped in the bathroom is 1,646 words long (that's about six pages of a book) and during this time, there are some half-scene musings on Bernard's part, as he thinks about lots of other things but primarily Louise and their strange, failed relationship. That can be trimmed down quite a bit; Bernard says a lot about Louise in many parts of the book.

The chapter titled "**The Interrogation**" goes way off into a long side story about philosophy and it's super interesting! – but again, we need to keep that larger plot moving along. We have to ask ourselves what the "beat" is in that scene – and in this case the beat is about three-fold: Bernard is arrested, the value of the videotape is made plain, and during his interrogation with Shimon, Bernard is made aware that some serious subterfuge is afoot. After a long discourse about Abraham and Isaac, Bernard realizes that he must make a difficult choice. 17,000 words is the very long way around getting that across. The discussion about Abraham does not to be excluded – nor should it be, it's fascinating – but it can be fast-forwarded in a couple of places. The same is true of other long, discursive portions of the book. The fast-forward button will be well in this manuscript. This is the practice, as we say in screenwriting, of "jumping in late and getting out early." Another way of looking at this is to give the reader some credit; we are able to come to our own realizations here and there.

Chapters with J. Farmer conversations (in particular) are not formatted correctly; this may be a copy-editing issue. There are long monologues the end of which lack end quotation marks, then new paragraphs with the same person talking that do have the quotation marks, nor dialogue tags. A dialogue tag, in its most obvious form is "he said," but here I specifically mean dialogue

being attributed to characters in such long passages. Mark knows how to do this exceedingly well and most of the time did so – but in some of the longer passages these dialogue tags are missing and thusly the quotation marks are off. This is mostly a mechanical issue that will be addressed both in another content edit and in a copy edit if there are any stragglers.

In the chapter titled **Louise**, in this new part of Miller's life, Bernard is suddenly in Israel and a seven page scene commences between he and Mitzrahi about women and dating. The beat of that scene is that Bernard should be dating. That's not enough to warrant seven pages of book. After that, in the same chapter, we move to the scene in which Miller meets Louise. I think that we need, somewhere in those first seven pages of this part of this chapter, a bit of a reset from Miller. He'd been in Israel X long, he hadn't heard from Marsha, the status of the divorce was X, etc. On page 134, as Miller walks with Louise, we begin to hear some of the backstory, but I believe also putting some of that much earlier in this chapter is a good idea. Otherwise it's difficult to pick up the previous thread with Miller, especially since the Simon chapter preceding this chapter is a long one. The beat of the Louise chapter is that Bernard is now in Israel, he has a new buddy (Mitzrahi) and a new love interest – Louise. The chapter has over 5,000 words, which isn't bad, comparatively speaking – in this case, I think that the information in this chapter mostly needs to be rearranged, with the new setting and new situation for Bernard being made clearer right away.

In **XXXXX** – the lecture that Miller gives about assassins reads like an essay; as in the other example I noted (Braslaw's speech in September 1992) this needs to be truncated, and leavened with some of the reactions of the students or even Miller as he gives this lecture. Importantly, one of the students listening in is Yitzhak Nagaar – the eventual assassin, so seeing how he is responding to this lecture would be interesting.

One of my directives, in providing this evaluation, was to see if there was an organic place to divide this into two books. After the read, I actually don't think that's a good idea. The story is too much of a fun ride to interrupt. It might make sense to divide the book into parts, so that

Part One (from chapter one to the chapter titled XXXXX) and Part Two is XXXXXX, to Gabriel etc. You might wind up with something like six or even eight parts of the book but I think this would help the reader to segue from one period of time and set of characters to the next.

It's important to note that you don't make mistakes when you write. Everything you wrote works and works well. Everything is connected. The only place where that doesn't really happen, I believe, is with the Sally character. As I said, I wouldn't particularly worry about the word count overall, since this will be published independently; rather, I would see this scaling down as an editing task that will make the story that is on these pages simply work much better for a reader. This is important, not just because we want some random reader to enjoy the read, but because a good book gets good reviews on Amazon and gets recommended to other people. A book that has problems can suffer from the reverse; poor reviews and bad word-of-mouth.

In order to come much closer to a book that people will find memorable and want to recommend, some careful editing needs to take place, with the goal of simply making the book move along with the dramatic beats that it does have, and to slim down those side stories a bit, so as to get the gist across more quickly. I think that the last third of the book being very detective/procedural in nature is okay because it's necessary and that trimming some of the first 2/3 of the chapters in the book will make that fit better as well. It is in jail that Bernard changes significantly, as he surveys his situation from a more sober point of view and takes stock of his life. I think an added sentence or two, well-placed, would help the reader shift to this new Bernard – he might marvel at his newfound clarity and insights directly vis a vis solving this case. To be sure, Bernard does remark to himself that jail is doing him good; he's proud of getting into better shape and feeling clearer and more sober. But I think one or two well-placed thoughts about how that directly applies to the procedural/evidence collection conversations would be good. Mind you, this is not a note of major importance in the manuscript, rather, a fine tuning.

Next Steps

First, get this edit/rewrite done. Everything else is secondary.

After the Edit

In previous conversations, I noted that you'll need cover art, a copy edit, a book formatter and then the ISBN/Amazon uploading (categories, keywords, etc.)

Another option is to go with a **hybrid publisher** and they provide the things in the list above and some minimal marketing. I must stress that the marketing provided is *really* minimal. It can be easier for you since all of the steps are handled for you, though you will have slightly less creative freedom when it comes to the cover art. So this might be an option to consider.

Here is a short list I put together for you of hybrid publishers vetted by the Alliance of Independent Authors:

[Axel Author Services](#) (cost, \$4,500)

<https://axelauthorservices.com/book-publishing-packages/>

[3P Publishing](#) (cost, \$5,500)

<https://www.3ppublishing.co.uk/publishing/>

[Escarpment Publishing](#) (cost, \$2,500 but this is not full service; you need to do the Amazon/uploading part yourself)

<https://escarpmentpublishing.com.au/full-self-publishing-service/>

[Author Imprints](#) (cost, \$2000 to \$3800)

<https://www.authorimprints.com/selfpublishing/>

[Book Reality](#) (cost not listed; they require a sample)

<https://bookreality.com/services/>

[Independent Ink](#) (cost not listed; they require a sample)

<https://www.independentink.com.au/services/print-and-publish/>

[Kazoo Publishing](#) (cost not listed; they require a sample)

<https://www.kazoopublishing.com/compare-packages/>

Whether you go with option number one, of publishing independently (which will require you to make a check-list and keep track of everything; not so difficult) or option number two, pursuing a hybrid-publisher, it should take you something like 6 to 10 weeks from the time you hand over the finished manuscript until it is available for people to purchase. I'm ballparking that time line but I think that's fairly accurate.

In Summary

You have written an excellent manuscript, XXXX, and one that you can be very proud of and that I think readers will enjoy very much. The story would be better still if it were shaped carefully to keep the main plot moving along a clip. Less is more very much applies here. There are, in my opinion, a lot of darlings that need to be cut back or out of the manuscript.

I really enjoyed reading the manuscript, very, very much so, and I thank you for choosing to work with me.