

THE DELETE KEY STRIKES BACK

By Julia Ann Charpentier

Is it possible to polish too much? With copy-editing skills and an overpowering urge to hit "delete" I've often wondered.

Manuscripts of years past got the brunt of my newfound editorial techniques and suffered the most. They've since been trashed. Damaged beyond repair. Or deleted into oblivion. Whichever you prefer.

I guess I just didn't like what I had to say back then. Or perhaps it wasn't worth saying at all.

Today I use more prudence when I edit, and I'm more inclined to let a paragraph stand as is. No tampering, rearranging, or fussing. I correct basic errors and awkwardness, then pray...

That I haven't made a mistake.

I'm supposed to know better, so when I do come across a carelessly mangled sentence or a monotonous repetition I degrade myself with undignified mumbling such as: "Stupid idiot! Incompetent a--! Fraud!"

Especially if the material is already in an editor's hands.

My most recent blunder was a deletion of several lines of dialogue that were crucial to the total understanding of a scene. I took them out like excess baggage.

I put them back in with more undignified mumbling.

Yes, I believe it is possible to polish too much. Too much editing can be just as damaging as too little. I think a constant desire to cut as you're writing tends to smother the motivating desire that fires the romance. (I could have eliminated the double use of "desire" here, but forced my itchy delete finger to leave it alone.)

Obsessive editing is more a hindrance than an aid.

