

BOOK WORM

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

July 2002

FROM THE CHAIR

I like language, discovering new (well, invariably old) things about it, talking about it, bitching about it. Same for editing.

My favourite quote about editing comes from Nicholas Hudson, former managing editor of the now extinct Melbourne branch of Pitmans. In 'Pedants' Corner' of the April 1995 edition of *Ozwords* he wrote:

There are three levels of editorial crime:

Level 1: to use the odd wrong word from time to time.

Level 2: to fail to correct a wrong word used by someone else.

Level 3: to change somebody else's right word into a wrong word.

The only way to deal with those who commit a Level 3 offence is to execute them. This may seem extreme, but it is really a kindness.

I don't know if I've committed a Level 3 offence, but last year a Level 2 boo-boo in the biography of Eileen Joyce I edited was reproduced in a review with '[sic]' following a quote about someone coming from 'Whoop-Whoop'. Ouch. It doesn't get much worse than that. Of course, it made me more vigilant (for a while), but the trouble with that sort of error is that it simply didn't register at all in the first place. Homophones are tricky for me. In another book I nearly got egg on my face when I missed yolk for yoke; luckily for me — and the author — the proofreader was awake . . .

My dictionaries are pretty dog-eared with checking words, unusual tenses, compounds, things I'm *almost* absolutely certainly sure of, often enough to find they are, in fact, incorrect. Who's a hundred per cent sure of the past tense of weave? Weaved is very commonly used, but wove is correct. It can be easy to overlook.

Our 'beloved' (spit) Macquarie (which is the house dictionary of both the places I work) doesn't help either. In its last edition it allows *momento* as a *variant* of *memento*. Similarly, *miniscule* is given as a variant of *minuscule*. These aren't variants. They are common misspellings, which Macquarie is giving currency to.

And the new AGPS tells us to use 'Aboriginal' as the noun, citing it as preferred by ATSIC. In the last decade or so, 'Aboriginal' has been the preferred usage for the adjective. In that same period, while many of us were getting used to 'Aborigine' as the noun, and diligently using it thus, racists generally continued to use 'Aboriginals', so that these days, until the new ruling that has just emerged, 'a group of Aboriginals' was likely to carry pejorative undertones. (This is *not* to say that only racists used 'Aboriginal' as a noun.) To round off this starting-point to discussion, I've discussed this with a number of people in the industry lately, and find quite a few feel happy that it is now all right to use 'Aboriginal' as a noun, preferring the 'sound' of it to 'Aborigine'. I'm still thinking. In the course of editing a playscript for CUP dealing with an Aboriginal massacre (*Massacre at Myall Creek*), the 'preferred usage' changed three times. The managing editor was diligent about accommodating Aboriginal preference, but preferences were being expressed in different quarters by different groups. Anyway I have long wanted to state out loud my opinion that the AGPS is no bible — it certainly does not always prescribe best practice in publishing — and I'm taking this opportunity.

Enough foaming at the mouth. (I should say that a lot of the above is the product of conversations with my pal Mar Bucknell, who I'm currently trying to talk into writing a 'Pedants' Corner' for Book Worm). Next issue perhaps.

Janet Blagg

'Pedants' Corner' sounds like a great idea. And I'm pleased to hear I'm not the only one who has reservations about the Macquarie. Heartily agree about misspellings being legitimated by appearing in print a certain number of times. That's

only one of several important issues Janet has raised. Let's have your thoughts. — Ed.

JULY MEETING: EDUCATION NIGHT

A presentation on structural editing by Bryce Moore.

When: 7.30 p.m., Tuesday 2 July 2002

Where: Tresillian Community Centre, 21 Tyrell Street, Nedlands (street parking)

Cover charge: \$2

Bookings: RSVP to Amanda Curtin (curtin@highway1.com.au or phone/fax 9377 2091)

ADVANCE NOTICE OF AUGUST MEETING: DISCUSSION ON CASE ACCREDITATION ISSUES PAPER

The Accreditation Issues Paper that accompanies this issue of *Book Worm* has been distributed in order to get feedback from members, and this meeting has been set up as the main vehicle for receiving that feedback and debating the issues raised. It scarcely needs to be said that this is an important concern for the future of the editing profession, so please come along and add your voice.

When: 7.30 p.m., Tuesday 6 August 2002

Where: Tresillian Community Centre, 21 Tyrell Street, Nedlands (street parking)

Cover charge: \$2

Bookings: RSVP to Amanda Curtin (curtin@highway1.com.au or phone/fax 9377 2091)

USEFUL LINKS

The following article was originally published in the word, the newsletter of the Society of Editors (SA) and is reproduced here with kind permission.

The fabulous Project Gutenberg website — if you've never downloaded an ebook, start here, and don't look back:

promo.net/pg/index.html

The Internet Public Library, a complete catalogue of the 20,000 electronic books available on the internet:

www.ipl.org/reading/books

(Arguably) the company that bought out the company that bought out the first company to manufacture and sell a hand-held reading device, the wonderful Rocket ebook:

www.gemstar-ebook.com

All manner of articles, software and information related to all kinds of paper and multimedia publishing. Gina Inverarity, the President of the SA Society of Editors, found a plug-in for MS Word that supposedly helps to make typesetting easier in Word:

www.planetebook.com

The Scholarly Electronic Publishing Bibliography: articles, books and other printed and electronic sources concerning scholarly electronic publishing:

HTML: <http://info.lib.uh.edu/sepb/sepb.html>

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Need a quick calculation? This page gives a simple word count, percentage and temperature calculators, and a constantly updating earth population counter. But how do they know?

www.copydesk.org/words/calculators.htm

The following is from the Editorial section of the same newsletter.

Project Gutenberg (promo.net/pg/index.html) is about to publish its 5000th electronic book. The book will be an English language version of *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*.

Project Gutenberg was begun in 1971 by an American named Michael Hart, with the operating philosophy that all books in the public domain should be available free on the Internet. So, while you won't find contemporary literature, the classics are well represented. According to American copyright laws this means books published prior to 1923. The complete works of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and Edgar Allen Poe and the amazing Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes mysteries can be downloaded with Project Gutenberg and, if you possess a hand-held ebook, you can have a number of books with you at any time and, as Gina says, you can read it in the dark from its little back-lit screen.

ADVANCE NOTICE OF SEPTEMBER MEETING: GUEST SPEAKER SUSIE HAZLEHURST, MAGABALA BOOKS

When: 7.30 p.m., Tuesday 3 September 2002

Where: Tresillian Community Centre, 21 Tyrell Street, Nedlands (street parking)

Cover charge: \$2

Bookings: RSVP to Amanda Curtin (curtin@highway1.com.au or phone/fax 9377 2091)

JUNE EDUCATION NIGHT: FICTION EDITING

Aspiring fiction editors take heart: Janet Blagg's first commission was editing *Police rescue* for Heinemann, a book hurriedly transformed into print from the then popular television series. From these relatively humble beginnings, Janet, who describes herself as 'a high-intervention editor', has worked on a number of prestigious texts, among them Julia Lawrinson's novel *Obsession*, which won the 2002 Premier's Prize for young adult fiction.

Janet gave a detailed account of the processes involved in editing both fiction and non-fiction, and, over the course of the evening, evoked a strong sense of the complex, multifaceted nature of this work: from the labour-intensive, text-focused aspects, to the imaginative energies required of a committed editor, to the importance of developing a productive working relationship with authors.

Focusing much of her discussion on fiction editing, Janet explained how most often it is plot and character issues that require her attention. Whether it is 'infelicities' of plot (Janet's diplomatic yet apposite choice of term) or characters that don't ring psychologically true, she gently points these difficulties out to her authors and very often will suggest solutions too. Use of language and style are other areas that absorb her attention. She is particularly keen that her authors achieve a strong, clear narrative, and so she's sensitive to the rhythms of dialogue, the timbre of narrative voice and the disruptions caused by verbosity and repetition.

Janet's presentation offered us an informed and entertaining insight into the highly concentrated and often taxing, but always absorbing and varied work of the fiction/non-fiction editor. Thank you, Janet.

Anne Surma

ENGLISH GRAMMAR AS SHE REALLY AM

Those of us editors who feel our grasp of English grammar might not be all it could be can take comfort from the fact that the authors of a new book claim nobody has ever really understood the subject — until now. It is 'alarmingly complex' and its explication 'largely botched' in published textbooks. They emphasise their point by taking 1842 pages to give their account of it.

Many of you will have read the piece by Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey Pullum in the *Weekend Australian* for 25–26 May in which they plug their book, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. (Huddleston is a research consultant at the University of Queensland and Pullum a professor of linguistics at the University of California, Santa Cruz.) One thing they emphasise in the article is that many commonly touted prescriptive rules are 'unsupported myths'.

You should be able to pick up the book at your local newsagent. The RRP is \$299.

ARCHIVES

There will be an informal meeting at 3 p.m. on Sunday 14 July 2002 at 44A Nicholas Crescent, Hilton, for anyone who has amassed material on SOEWA (Book Worm, minutes etc.) that they would like to unload. A small Archives Committee (Janet Blagg and James Hansen so far) will amalgamate, sort and hold the said archives. If anyone has material, but can't attend the meeting, they could bring it to the next SOEWA meeting at Tresillian (Tuesday 2 July) or phone Janet (9337 4352) or James (9293 1972) before 14 July to arrange a pick-up or drop-off.

When I went to editors' school (so to speak) I was taught that one of my fundamental duties was to ensure consistency. So I changed '3 pm' above to make it consistent with Amanda Curtin's usage in the announcements of forthcoming meetings. I could have gone the other way (and claimed, perhaps, that I was at the cutting edge of editorial practice). Of course the issue here is a style choice that has been highlighted by the Style manual's changed recommendation in the sixth edition. Let's be democratic about this: Which of these two styles would members like to see used in our august journal? — Ed.

TAUTOLOGISATIONS

No bêtes noires (you lucky people to be so untroubled by what you read), but another little clutch of tautologies for your delectation:

A silent hush has fallen over the stadium — *Christine Nagel*

There was heavy selling of industrial stocks on a large scale — *ABC Radio news via Allan Watson*

Microsoft Word problem — *Rhonda Bracey*

Oh Rhonda, naughty naughty.

EDITING SPECULATIVE FICTION FOR KIDS

The following article was originally published in the newsletter of the Victorian Society of Editors for May 2002 and is reproduced here with the kind permission of its author, Kath Harper, and publisher.

Two very entertaining speakers discussed the joys and hazards of producing children's genre fiction for the US and Australian markets at the April meeting of the Victorian Society of Editors and dispelled any uncertainty about what 'speculative fiction' meant. Had you been there, you would have learned very quickly: it encompasses horror, fantasy, science fiction and anything else that has an element of the unreal.

Paul Collins and Meredith Costain gave many examples of the constraints imposed on educational publishing in this area — from authors who refuse to allow their work to be 'censored', to strangulation of language to fit American expectations. There are obvious guidelines to be observed — a good ethnic mix, a balance of male and female, no violence involving guns or knives (not even pointy sticks or fire hoses!) — and some that are much less obvious. There is a blanket ban, for example, on anything to do with witches, wizards, and spells — no wonder, then, that the Harry Potter books are among the most frequently banned in the US. Some Australian publishers, in fact, are becoming more and more disenchanted (!) with the restrictions forced on them by their US counterparts. Others accept that the enormous buying power of the US market is worth making a few sacrifices for.

And the restrictions don't stop at the text. Meredith and Paul gave several instances of illustrations that had had to be re-drawn to allow for American sensitivities: a child deemed to be too close to a campfire (potential opportunity to sue); a cow whose udder had to be removed; and concerns about babies' bare bottoms and breastfeeding. No wonder some authors opt for the greater freedom of writing for the trade

market, or refuse to allow their work to be amended for sale overseas.

Nor are book titles immune. Paul's *The Wizard of Castle Rock* became simply *Castle Rock*. *The Vampire Kids* metamorphosed into *Tricking*, but this too was unacceptable: apart from the ban on mention of all things to do with Halloween, there was the unfortunate association of this term with the age-old profession of prostitution — hence, *Tricksters*. Another, originally *Dead Fish and Dog Poo*, was sanitised to *Creatures on the Loose*. In extreme cases, said Meredith, text has been changed without consulting the author, and (her personal favourite, because it was her own work) the author's name was left off the front covers of a 48-book set, on the grounds that it made the cover 'too busy' and 'You don't want to see your name 48 times'. Says who?

(As an aside, while discussing the compilation of *Book People*, a series of profiles of people in the Australian children's book industry, Paul expressed surprise at how many of his subjects didn't know the details of which awards they had won during their careers as authors, illustrators, etc. A modest, unassuming lot, Australian writers.)

In explaining the origins of their very successful *Spinouts* series, Meredith said she and Paul saw themselves as writers who had stumbled into editing in a string of happy accidents. Paul's previous work for MUP on the *Australian Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy* had left him with a bulging file of unused material, biographical information and photographs. He approached other publishers with a proposal for five books, and was delighted when Longman (aka Pearson) said they wanted fifteen! Fortunately, since the publisher also demanded the obligatory teacher's resource book with blackline masters, Meredith's contribution to the project was a depth of experience both in teaching and in all aspects of production of educational magazines.

They produced the entire package: commissioning writers, editing their work and organising book design and cover art (here they acknowledged the contribution of Mark McBride in creating an integrated look for all the books in the series) — the lot. They encouraged illustrators to read the books they were working on. Not the usual practice, apparently, but very effective in promoting a sense of involvement in the project. The challenge for both authors (most of whom were more used to writing for the adult market) and editors was to make the stories accessible for a younger audience — shorter sentences, more dialogue and definitely more humour. A short digression led us to consider whether Australian humour would translate effectively to the US market, given their penchant for removing any unfamiliar words from the text ('corroboree', for example, was replaced by 'pow-wow').

Invited to question the speakers, the audience wanted to follow up on a diverse range of issues, from the advantages of working freelance ('Who will we target today?') to the inspectorial powers of US school boards, who apparently can, and do, tear out pages and even burn books that offend their sensibilities. We explored possible reasons for the American love of Australian writers, and mourned the tendency to extinguish any local colour (or color) that might challenge the monolithic American culture portrayed in most children's literature there.

And what of the future? Australian publishers, said Paul and Meredith, are becoming more courageous about publishing children's literature that challenges accepted norms. Although still dominated by the US market, they are prepared to take a chance, so it's a matter of finding a gap in the market and presenting them with a viable proposal. Yes, educational books will date, eventually, but they don't seem to go out of print nearly as quickly as trade ones. You may have to work 2000 hours a week when all your projects come in at once, and lose track of all horizontal space in your house, but when it all gets too much you go out and play with the dog!

AN ELITE OF EDITORS?

Perhaps that's pushing things a bit far, but someone offered it. An appropriate collective noun for subeditors was recently raised as a matter for speculation and creativity by Murray Waldren in his 'That's language' column in the *Weekend Australian*. No doubt many of you read it, and it is at the risk of boring many that I repeat some of the offerings:

a superiority of subeditors
an erudition . . .
a rejection . . .

My own opinion is that this column is much more interesting now that Waldren has taken it over from Frank Devine. Recently, too, he issued the challenge for readers to come up with yet more words created by adding, subtracting or changing one letter of an existing word and supplying a definition. I liked these:

abdocate — to give up hope of ever having a flat stomach
contriversy — a rumpus designed to distract the public
campanion — a gay partner
macademic — an instructor for a fast-food chain

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE: Tuesday 23 July 2002

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