

BOOK WORM

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

February 2003

FROM THE CHAIR

How do they keep a straight face?

I should warn you, I feel a bit of a polemic coming on. As someone with a strong feeling for language it's a bit hard these days not to notice that appalling things are being done with it. Anybody who keeps a close watch on politicians and the media will doubtless find these observations naïve to say the least; but I've finally realised we are being saturated with propaganda (that Howard, he's a proper gander), have long been up to our necks in it. As a naïve student of history, I always thought propaganda was 'back then'. It never occurred to me that I should live through it myself.

So while we merrily advertise our ability to present people's messages with maximum clarity, in fact less and less is this a requirement. And of course, that's not where the money lies either: the money's in spin-doctoring, for which we editors, with our way with words, would be well qualified. Except we don't want to make our livings from lies, denials and evasion.

Head down, trying to work (a current job describes the atrocious behaviour of CALM, making me anything but), I feel the world — and my country — is crazier, meaner and more dangerous than I ever experienced it before. 'Welcome to reality, pal', I can hear some of you say. I read some fabulous papers (John Le Carre, Bob Ellis, Noam Chomsky, many more) that expose all the mendacity of our lickspittle government and those of the two other flag-wavers of the English language — funny, isn't it, that it is the governments of us English-speaking nations that are alone demanding to go to war — but never do I see the warmongers act as if they ever heard a word of it.

And life goes on. Our Society enters its 11th year and we live a double life of getting on with business while our hearts ache with the filthiness of it all. I will be at the Anti War Rally in the city on Saturday 15 February carrying some well-spelled sign.

Janet Blagg

PERTH INTERNATIONAL WRITERS FESTIVAL

You probably know this is on. If you don't have details, look at www.perthfestival.com.au/Festival/index.cfm/fuseaction/events.category/pkEventCategory/100165

'WRITING AND EDITING'

Look out for SOEWA members Michèle Drouart (in her capacity as prizewinning author) and Janet Blagg at the Writers Festival. They are taking part in a panel discussion, 'Writing and Editing', which will explore the process of author–editor collaboration. This event takes place on Sunday 9 February at the Art Gallery of Western Australia's Lecture Theatre at 10 am.

FEBRUARY MEETING

Many editors suffer from neck, back or shoulder complaints — a by-product of our generally sedentary occupation — and so we have much to learn from occupational therapist and director of CSC Health Ian Wee. Ian, who is an excellent (and entertaining) presenter, will talk to us about ergonomics and musculoskeletal health in the workplace.

Find out what you can do now to prevent long-term injury and avoid surgery.

When: 7.30 pm, Tuesday 4 February 2003

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)

SOEWA PROMOTIONAL LEAFLET

In a bid to promote the role and value of professional editors, SOEWA's marketing committee (with input from the SOEWA committee) has devised a leaflet aimed at prospective clients in the public and private sectors. To many people, what editors actually do and why they are crucial to the process of

preparing effective written communication remains a mystery. This leaflet is designed to explain briefly the role of an editor and to suggest the benefits of employing an editor's services. SOEWA is also profiled and the society's mail and web site details provided.

The leaflet is now in production and will be available at the end of January.

We aim to distribute the leaflet to potential clients by mail and at public events (such as the Writers Festival). Please let Anne Surma know if you would like to obtain a copy of the leaflet, or if you wish to hand out some leaflets at an appropriate forum.

CASE TELECONFERENCE

Betty Durston and Anne Surma took part in a teleconference meeting of the Council of Australian Societies of Editors towards the end of last year. A range of issues was covered, and the discussions served to crystallise how active various representatives have been in pursuing matters related to accreditation, promotion of the profession, the development of a national web site and the organisation of a national conference (in Brisbane later in 2003), to name a few.

Particularly significant information about the accreditation process emerged from the meeting. As a result of feedback from the state societies on the Accreditation Issues Paper, the national working group is now devising a number of draft models of accreditation systems. Later in 2003 two of those models (as well as the 'no accreditation' option) will be recommended for consideration by the state societies and the membership.

Ideas for mounting a national promotional campaign for the editing profession were articulated in an exciting proposal prepared by Renee Otmar (Victoria) early in 2002. It was suggested at the teleconference that, with the state societies' agreement, a working group be formed to develop and implement the initiatives contained in the proposal. Please watch this space, as we'll soon be calling for expressions of interest from members keen to be part of this group.

WELL, PERHAPS THE MILK IS PURE

Have you been reading your milk cartons lately? Don't ask me how it was that the other day I discovered all this about a certain brand of milk:

- Pura is Australia's leading white milk brand and is produced right here in your State.
- Helping to keep your family healthy and active.
- Naturally high in calcium.
- Highly recommended as part of your family's balanced diet.
- Pure Fresh Pura has that creamy taste your family will love.
- For more information on Pura's great brands, visit: www.pura.com.au

See how many different mistakes you can find and document each clearly. The winner will receive a magnificent prize. (No they won't, but don't let that stop you.)

Was everyone impressed by that 'white milk' reference? I'm sure the language advances every time someone comes up with a new necessary distinction ... And in case anyone is wondering, that hyperlink does not actually appear on the milk carton (though perhaps they could look into it). No, it appears here courtesy of Microsoft — another of those features that spring into action whether or not you want them to. If anyone does use the hyperlink, please be clear you are doing it without editorial sanction.

SOEWA TENTH ANNIVERSARY DINNER

For those who weren't at SOEWA's Tenth Anniversary dinner in December, here's a taste of what you missed. Speeches are reproduced with the kind permission of Rob Finlayson, Anne Surma, Robin Appleton and Glynis Traill-Nash.

The Anniversary Address by our Special Guest, Rob Finlayson, State Literature Officer

I feel it incumbent upon me, before I go any further, to propose a toast to three absent friends. Without these friends I, for one, would not be here tonight nor, I sincerely hope, would any of you. Without these three, writers would have found their lives far too easy and not sought the expertise of us editors, who have been blessed with command of the Three Friends. Without further ado, ladies

and gentlemen, I ask you to charge your glasses and be upstanding in honour of the Three Friends of Editors: the Em Rule, the Semi-Colon and the List of References.

I was first introduced to the Em Rule — aka Em Dash — back in 1992 when I was the newly installed administrator of the Fellowship of Australian Writers WA. Robin Appleton, notorious editor-at-loose from Sydney, was in town terrorising anyone who purported to write. Ah! Robin's attacks on academic writing have become the stuff of legend, and her use of the umlaut on the second 'o' of 'cooperate' was truly the stuff of genius. But I digress. It is Robin, instigator of this worthy society, who, as I mentioned, first introduced me to the Em Rule. And not just one Em Rule. No! said Robin. The Em Rule is always in a couple! Down with the unruly and unsightly use of the single Em Rule as an excuse for a colon! And so it has been ever since. I, as I hope have you all, have waged a holy war against the perfidious usage of the single Em Rule. It's visionaries like Robin who have made editing great, and assured us all an income, at least until writers cotton on. Hail to Robin in absentia!

It was more or less Robin's bullying that made a few acolytes band together to form the Society in 1993. Please put up your hand if you're here when I read the roll of the first ever committee:

First chairperson: Edwina Davies Ward

Secretary: Glynis Traill-Nash (I know she's not here: I saw her in Sydney a couple of weeks ago and she said she had a hairdressing appointment and couldn't make it)

Treasurer *and* membership secretary: Ray Forma

Newsletter and information: Nicola Rycroft and Terry Richards

Now hands up if you were one of the first members that year: Christine Nagel, Amanda Nolan, Helen Bradbury, Greg Brotherson, Kaye Caporn, Betty Durston, Amanda Curtin, Susan Green, Irene Ham-Sauman, James Hansen, Kate Hooper, Nicholai Knuppe, Suzanna Norton, Leo van den Plas, Elizabeth Tuettemann, Allan Watson, Richard Hartzell, Rosanne Dingli, John Smith, Alex Forbes, Beth Leslie, Dennis Haskell and me.

Ah! How the years and poorly paying clients have taken their toll.

While I'm on the honour roll, I must mention the entire list of those poor fools who have been cajoled into the top job of the Society: president, chair, cat-herder, whatever you want to call it. Please give the poor wretches a round of applause: Edwina (again), Alex George, Betty Durston, Amanda Curtin and

Anne Surma.

Well done for still being able to get out of bed after your ordeals and turn up for a feed. Especially Betty, who was appointed the Society's first Honorary Life Member in March this year.

Ah! Editing! What a life. I blame my mother for making me do it. She was the one into crosswords, she was the one playing spelling games and issuing appalling puns. What could a small boy do but become bitter and twisted and eventually discover a penchant for the red pen? It took me some time, though. For a long while — and, I confess, to this day — I was writing.

I have written plays — with, I might add, the talented Ms Traill-Nash, inaugural secretary of this august society — prose, poetry, short stories, reports, multimedia scripts, advertising copy and science for lay audiences. But it was always a bloody editor who hacked and cut at my precious art and reduced me to a grovelling wreck with their snide comments about clarity, metaphors, tone and, of course, the Em Rule.

Being a slow learner, like most writers, it only took me about ten years to realise that I could do to others what they were doing unto me if only I swapped sides. And what fun I've had ever since, allowing people to assume I know something authoritative about the dear old semi-colon, for example. May they never know that all I know about the semi-colon is what they could get for themselves out of the *Style manual* which, as we all know, is but a concoction created by argumentative crackpots like ourselves.

And to return to our good selves, I want to draw your attention to some of the other firsts of our Society.

We were the first Society of Editors in Australia to have a web site, way back in dim distant 1997, developed by Bryce Moore, who incidentally had, the year before, set up our group email service.

In 1998 Alex George was instrumental in arranging a meeting in Melbourne to form the Council of Australian Societies of Editors which, as you all know, resulted in the landmark, splendid, authoritative, groundbreaking, bloody helpful publication that we all wave at our clients whenever we're too weak to lift up the *Style manual: Australian Standards for Editing Practice*.

And what of our clients? All those people who want their modest 150,000-word manuscript turned into something approaching readable prose, preferably by

yesterday? And those taciturn or incomprehensibly garrulous businesspeople who shove a scrawled note at us and ask us to turn it into clean copy that will be sure to make them millions? Those PhD students who hope we'll wave our magic word processor and make their addled thoughts into scientifically plausible prose? Those bureaucrats who sit across the desk from us and tell us that this is the first draft and probably won't ever get to the Minister but just in case could we make adjustments here, here, here, here, here, here, here and, oh, here, when Barry from the Department gets back from holidays the day before the thing is due in the Minister's office. Oh. And can it be a printout in triplicate? Bound.

What can we do but thank the education system for never teaching them the rules of grammar, punctuation and clear thinking. A curse on all who urge a return to the basics! And while I'm cursing, I must include a curse on Bill Gates and Microsoft Word, especially its propensity to splash footnotes all over the place in completely different formats and its bewilderingly clever ability to become entirely unstable and dissolve the document one hour before deadline. I can only conclude that China's official taking up of the infernal device was some kind of US plot to destabilise the Chinese economy in the face of its disgusting rate of growth compared with the West.

But once again, I digress. I need an editor to keep me on track.

At least I can keep to deadline. And I note with some pleasure that my allotted time is almost at end. Before I go, though, I want to say that I had intended to provide you all with a list of references for this speech, but I'm still working on it and should have it to you in time for dessert, or maybe on the way to your cars.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, let me, as my final official act tonight, propose another toast. This time to the Society. May we wield our red pens forever, whether they be digital, virtual or even inkfilled! To the Society!

Presentation by Anne Surma, President of the Society

I'll base my few words (which attempt a glimpse at the future of editing) on a quasi-acrostic: I'll use each of the letters of the word **editor** as the initial letter for a key term relating to SOEWA, editors and the editing profession.

E: energy. We'll need to look to members past and present first here — to their energy and commitment in focusing on and representing the interests of editors and the editing profession through SOEWA. Past members provided the

impetus for the strong and active membership we can boast today. To John Smith and Steve Warren, both former members and committee members who are here tonight, welcome. To members present, thank you all so much for your energy and generosity. Particular thanks to the committee: Janet, Amanda, Betty, Ffion, James, Wendy, Linda and Susan; to our CASE representative and education coordinator: Betty; to the *Book Worm* team: Allan, James, Lorna and Michèle; to our web site administrator: Colin; and to the marketing committee: Rhonda, Christine, Dee and Frank.

D: detail. Some call it pedantry. Editors call it passion for detail, for exploiting the richness, the flexibility, the nuances of our language. It's that that keeps us attentive to detail. Here's a joke that sends up nicely this trait of ours:

Q: How many copy editors does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: I can't tell whether you mean 'change a light bulb' or 'have sex in a light bulb'. Can we reword it to remove the ambiguity?

Attention to detail: it's our key characteristic; let's not lose it.

I: issues. One of the biggest issues for us as we face the future is that of accreditation: working through ways in which we might try to establish standards for assessing and acknowledging publicly the competence, the professionalism of editors. Going through the process of establishing and then implementing a system of accreditation is going to be long and perhaps painful, but I think it's going to be crucial to our development, growth and status as a profession.

T: technology. This has had a huge impact on how we edit and what we edit (just think of the proliferation of text genres the electronic medium has generated). And perhaps most interesting or fraught (depending on how you look at it) are the changes to language brought about by the use of various technologies: email and text messaging, for example. The linguist David Crystal believes that what he calls Netspeak creates opportunities for the expansion and enrichment of language. According to a review in *The Australian Book Review* of his text *Language and the Internet*, Crystal argues that Netspeak is non-standard, playful, irreverent of language rules, tolerant of typographic and spelling errors and full of neologisms. He is fascinated by Netspeak's diversity and innovativeness, and argues that the Internet is enabling a dramatic expansion of the range and variety of language and that it is providing opportunities for personal creativity. So what kinds of challenges does that pose for editors, when firm guidelines and principles for language usage can thus seem more provisional than ever? (I won't even attempt to answer that question here!)

O: opportunity. Editors have traditionally kept well out of the limelight, remained

anonymous, invisible. The author David Leavitt's comment about one copy editor paints an image familiar to us all: 'She was a copy editor, possessed of the rare capacity to sit all day in a small cubicle, like a monk in a cell, and read with an almost penitential rigor'. Things have changed, however, and in the future we need to seek out opportunities to promote the work we do: to educate others — prospective clients — about the benefits of using an editing service; and to educate would-be or aspiring editors about the social and professional, as well as aesthetic, value of editing practice.

R: responsiveness + responsibility. Being responsive to changes in language use in particular modes of communication and in the broader culture keeps us and our specialist skills alive and evolving, keeps us on our toes, aware and alert. But as editors we're not simply to be responsive. We're responsible too for leading the way in advising on language usage, convention and style. This task, whatever else it involves, will surely always require our insistence on the *absolute primacy* of the interaction between writers and readers.

Message from Robin Appleton, read at the dinner by Janet Blagg

I hope that the Society of Editors (WA) annual dinner is a great success and that the society can go forward, growing and keeping apace with the challenges of the ever-refined technology that editors use in the 21st century. I am told to beware of XP and 2002 versions of Microsoft; we less-updated people will find that these differ considerably from the comfort zone in which we now work. I am sorry that it was not possible for me to attend your celebratory tenth anniversary dinner, but thank you for remembering me.

Many of you do not or did not know me or why I was in Western Australia from April to late September 1992. The inaugural editor-in-residence to a university, a six-month fellowship funded by the Australia Council, I was hosted in the school of humanities at Murdoch University. The purpose of the fellowship was to work with academics to encourage them to reduce obfuscation in their writing. That aim was high and more than a challenge for one person to attempt to meet. Some academic writers understood that they needed to use non-discriminatory, plain English, while others held to their specific styles and exclusive terminology. I met with academics, students, thesis writers and journals editors on Murdoch campus, discussing aspects of their drafts. Some theses were being reworked for publication as books. One supervisor wanted me to have more involvement than that with theses.

In the first week of my time in Western Australia I visited Western Australia

University Press and spoke with the manager, Meredith Chesterton, and met Edwina Davies Ward who became a good friend to me, later helping me organise the publishing day and coordinating other events. Thank you, Edwina.

Also early in the residency, having the names of academics at other campuses, I made a point of meeting with academics from the three other state universities and there was support for an editor-in-residence to a university and support for me and for what I was attempting to do. After seeing some of the events that resulted from the residency several academics said that they would like to have seen an editor in residence appointed for twelve weeks rotation at the four state universities.

I spoke with Julie Lewis, the-then Western Australian representative for the Literary Unit of the Australia Council and it was agreed that I could extend my role beyond academe so I presented a seminar on editing at the Katharine Susannah Prichard Writers Centre, and courses in editing at Fremantle Arts Centre, Fellowship of Australian Writers at Tom Collins House in Swanbourne and was guest speaker at the fellowship's annual dinner. Thank you, Rob Finlayson for organising that and for being my chauffeur to and from those winter evening meetings. I presented a day-long seminar about editing and legal matters in publishing to the Oral History Association of Western Australia in Perth. I also organised a lunchtime seminar for academics at Murdoch campus on the legal responsibilities of academic writers re copyright and plagiarism, and so on. The-then dean of the law school at Murdoch, a specialist in copyright, was the speaker. That was held on 3 August and academics from other campuses attended

Over time I met with editors of journals, heads of departments, university council members, established writers, would-be writers, writers with promise, and academics, some of whom are noted for their contributions to their disciplines and their innovative ideas.

3 August 1992 was a busy day. I called a meeting of editors and people in print media to talk about founding a society of editors in Western Australia at Murdoch University. We met in a room that proved to be a little too small for the 24 people who attended. I had held a publishing day at Murdoch on 10 June that year at which about 90 people attended to hear eight speakers: writers, a publisher, a designer, a bookseller, and editors, so there was already an awareness in the academic and publishing world in Perth of the presence of easterner 'mouthing' ideas.

Perhaps more difficult was arranging and presenting a course across the four university campuses in July 1992 on the publishing process and the principles of editing that was to be five days, but became six days. One whole day unintentionally being taken up with discussions about punctuation, a dangerous and very personal area in editing it would seem. This paper I called ‘. . .but Sister Mary said’. The travelling participants got to know each other, other campuses, and some are probably still discussing the finer points of punctuation and plain English today with each other. Some people who attended the 3 August meeting and/or those courses have been or are on the society’s committee: Bryce, Christine, Rob, Allan, to name a few.

As well I presented lunchtime courses at Murdoch on the same matters in publishing in an abbreviated form and these were attended by students and academics from many disciplines. Thesis-to-book [or letting go of nanny’s hand] was a popular paper I presented at several campuses and I hope that academe has come to some conclusion about where editors sit on the vexed question of whether editors should/could/ be involved in any part of the process of thesis preparation. The matter was dealt with differently from one academic to another I found. I presented other papers to postgraduate and research students.

I doubt that many of you have known of the extent to which I attempted to alert people to the role of the editor in the printed word and how important I thought it to be that in each state and territory editors need a voice, a society in which they can relate to like people, and I hope one day that editors will be seen for what they are: vanguards for readers, and not people who are seen to take over others’ writings as their own. In the Northern Territory (1998) and in the ACT (1990) I also promoted the idea of setting up societies of editors and these have happened.

Edwina was a reluctant co-speaker with me at the Karrakatta Club in Perth, my chauffeur occasionally, and the reluctant inaugural president of the infant Society of Editors Western Australia in August 1992. I would like to acknowledge Edwina’s help and her contribution to the publishing day, to networks she helped me with, and for being there when she had her own professional and academic matters to attend to.

Editors are privileged to be invited to be the first readers of strangers’ thoughts and feelings and it is our role to respond to those writings, rather than to judge them. Read on and enjoy.

Message from Glynis Traill-Nash, first SOEWA Secretary,

read at the dinner by Janet Blagg

Well, hard to believe it's been ten years since a small group of like-minded people (some may say pedants) first got together on the suggestion of Robin Appleton to create a Society of Editors. I remember many an evening trekking out to Osborne Park offices or the back rooms of cafes to hold our regular meetings. As secretary, I suppose my least favourite part was writing up the minutes, which I'm sure must still be kicking around somewhere. But we felt we were forging new territory, which made it all worthwhile.

In the years since I left Perth in 1995, I spent five in London, first working my way up from editorial assistant to editor for a small business publisher. The money was terrible but the people were nice. Eventually the pound won out, though, and freelance subbing became my staple. All this while I was still pursuing the music and theatre dreams I had when I left Perth. To that end, I got to sing at Ronnie Scott's, work with Caryl Churchill on a jazz opera and perform at the Edinburgh Festival with my one-woman show. You can ask Rob Finlayson about our high jinks at that one. Certainly a lot of whisky was consumed ...

And here I sit with my back to one of the most spectacular views of Sydney Harbour in my highbrow role as deputy chief sub-editor of *Who Weekly*, although it's now just *Who*, don't you know. In spite of its subject matter, I have to say that there are more brilliant minds in this office than I have ever encountered anywhere I have worked. Surprising, but true. And since I've been in Sydney I've also done a short film and recorded my debut album, *After Blue*. You'll be hearing all about that in the new year ...

Anyway, best wishes on this night of nights. See if you can't get a paparazzo to take some shots of you all on the red carpet that we can publish in *Who* next week. I'll be on deadline as you dine, but I'll sneak a glass of champagne to your continued success. Congratulations!

Editor's note: Having criticised Pam Peters for (among other things) not exercising an editorial function in respect to contributions to Australian Style, I have felt obliged to do something of the sort with Book Worm. If I have messed about with your punctuation or words (dear contributor), please don't hesitate to argue with me. I might learn something. BUT I have made an exception in regard to the Tenth Anniversary contribution by Robin Appleton. In view of this lady's seniority and eminence, not to mention her parental standing as far as SOEWA is concerned, no such interference would be appropriate.

FROM OUR ROVING REPORTER

Alex George reports from the UK:

Members of SOEWA may be glad to know that all is not lost in the commercial world. In Marks and Spencers' supermarket here the fast checkout actually has '10 items or fewer'.

APOSTROPHISING

The following article was originally published in the newsletter of the Canberra Society of Editors for November 2002 and is reproduced here with the kind permission of the publisher and the author, Elizabeth Murphy.

Driving around eastern Australia, I've been keeping my eyes open for signs — street signs, signs pointing to places I wanted to visit, signs telling me where to buy this or that. One day recently, I came across several signs that decided me on my topic for this issue: the use of the apostrophe. In this one day I spotted the following:

- a placard announcing NEW POTATOE'S for sale
- a sign over a shop that sells and rents videos — VALLEY VIDEO'S
- a poster advertising a local entertainment — ITS MAGIC!
- and on a television program, a transcript of a spoken comment that included the words 'on Alan Jones' program'. The broadcaster referred to is Alan Jones and not Alan Jone.

The apostrophe is used to show possession or omission. It is only rarely used to indicate plural, in expressions that would otherwise be unclear — for instance, in *mind your p's and q's*. So the first two examples are simple plurals and should be written without apostrophes: NEW POTATOES and VALLEY VIDEOS. The first example offends doubly because the plural marker is actually -es and not just -s.

The third example shows the confusion that can occur between *its* meaning *belonging to it*, and *it's* meaning *it is* (apostrophe used to indicate omission). The correct spelling here would be IT'S MAGIC!

In the fourth example, the correct spelling is ALAN JONES'S PROGRAM,¹ and the pronunciation should reflect this, with JONES'S being pronounced *djownzez*. To say *Alan djownz program* is to have listeners believe that his surname is *Jone*. To write it as *Jones'* is to show confusion about where to put the apostrophe.

My rule for using the apostrophe to indicate possession in nouns² is very simple. If we want to write *the book belonging to John* using the apostrophe,

1. Write down the possessing noun — John
2. Add an apostrophe — John'
3. Add an s if the whole expression sounds better with it — John's book

In the case of the program of Alan Jones, use the same formula:

1. Write down the possessing noun — Alan Jones
2. Add an apostrophe — Alan Jones'
3. Add an s if the whole expression sounds better with it — Alan Jones's program

What about the plural of Jones? Suppose a whole Jones family, collectively known as the Joneses, own a swimming pool. Here's how to write it using the apostrophe:

1. Write down the possessing noun — the Joneses
2. Add an apostrophe — the Joneses'
3. Add an s if the whole expression sounds better with it.

Does *the Joneses's swimming pool* sound better? No. It sounds like *djownzezez!* So don't add the s. It is the Joneses' swimming pool.

There is a school in Sydney that used to be known as Fort Street Boys' High School. Now it would be known as Fort Street Boys High School — no apostrophe. The word *Boys* has taken on the sense of an adjective rather than a possessing noun, so the apostrophe has been dropped. However, we can't drop the apostrophe in *He went to the men's locker room* because the plural word *men* doesn't end in an s. We can probably get away with *The ladies room is on the first floor*.

There is a school of thought that believes the apostrophe will eventually disappear from English. Perhaps not just yet. I think it has its uses.

¹ *Style manual for authors, editors and printers*, 6th edn, John Wiley & Sons Australia, 2002, pp. 85–6.

² Elizabeth M Murphy, *Effective writing: plain English at work*, Pitman, Melbourne,

1989, pp. 15–17, 56–7.

AUSTRALIANSTYLEWATCH: THE FINAL CHAPTER

The retiring editor of *Book Worm* herewith relinquishes responsibility for keeping the editorial standards of *Australian Style* under review. It may be noted that, whether because of his slackening grip on the portfolio or because there was less to criticise, he found less to criticise on this final occasion. Enough but.

First, the perennials:

- The issue number is given as ‘Volume 10 No 2’. Not ‘Volume 10 No. 2’ -- and how about ‘Vol. 10 No. 2’ or ‘Volume 10 Number 2’?
- The bang-it-in-your-face Australia Post abbreviations for the names of Australian States (e.g. QLD) are used in preference to the usual (and *Style Manual*–recommended) c&l versions. Refer page 6.
- There is the same bizarre inconsistency over breaking or not breaking words at the end of lines. On page 1, compare lines 9 and 14 of para 1 and lines 1 and 4 of para 2.

(Did you notice the use of the en rule in the second item? Do you think one in a thousand non-editors would?)

Now for some particular lapses of editorial grasp:

- In the introductory para on page 1 the name of Oxford University Press is given as ‘Oxford’; on page 8 it is rendered in full.
- The second last sentence in column 2 of page 3 is missing an interrogation mark.
- The comma in the second line of column 3 on the same page does not have its pair after ‘paragraph?’ in line 4.
- Also on page 3, the second line of the italic sidebar is short.
- On page 6, column 1, para 2, the second sentence is at the very least clumsy and arguably syntactically deficient.

- In the second column of the same page, at para 2 line 4, we read a reference to 'school teachers', whereas the Macquarie (and the Oxford) list only 'schoolteacher'. Not a capital crime perhaps, but doesn't the editor have respect for that other Macquarie product?
- In column 3 of page 6 is a run-on list of questionnaire respondents. It features at least two inconsistencies: the word 'at' is used in some instances where a comma appears in others; and States are indicated only in some cases.
- The sidebars attached to book reviews on pages 8 and 9 give the book titles according to the initial-cap style, whereas the new edition of the *Style manual* recommends the lower-case style. (Reminder: the editor of *AS* was a member of the editorial team that compiled the *SM* — or should that be *Sm*?)
- In those same sidebars there is a single period after 'RRP', which defies even an ingenious explanation.

One can only hope that there is, among those teaching Macquarie's postgraduate editing course, someone capable of testing students' grasp of and skill in basic copy editing. If not, what is the use of the course? (Another reminder: the editor of *AS* and the Head of the Graduate Program of Editing and Publishing at Macquarie are the same person.)

A REVIEWER'S COMMENT ON EDITING

Bryce Courtenay's *Matthew Flinders' cat* was reviewed by Kathy Hunt in the 'Books Extra' section of the *Weekend Australian* for 30 November – 1 December (page 7). Here's a titbit:

The book is interminable and should come with a cut lunch.

Worse, it is a cynical attempt to cash in on the bicentenary of Flinders' circumnavigation of Australia... Running about as smoothly as a Darlinghurst drain, the narrative could have been cleared of these obstructions by removing the dead cat, flushing 300 pages and letting Ryan speak more for himself. But that would mean firm and fearless editing, and that's another story.

Any volunteers to fearlessly edit Bryce Courtenay?

1999'S BEST ACTUAL NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

This stunning collection was originally published in the newsletter of the Canberra Society of Editors for November 2002 and is reproduced here with kind permission. (Don't ask us why it took them so long to publish it ...)

- 1 Include Your Children when Baking Cookies
- 2 Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says
- 3 Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers
- 4 Safety Experts Say School Bus Passengers Should Be Belted
- 5 Drunk Gets Nine Months in Violin Case
- 6 Survivor of Siamese Twins Joins Parents
- 7 Iraqi Head Seeks Arms
- 8 Prostitutes Appeal to Pope
- 9 Panda Mating Fails; Veterinarian Takes Over
- 10 British Left Waffles on Falkland Islands
- 11 Lung Cancer in Women Mushrooms
- 12 Eye Drops Off Shelf
- 13 Teachers Strike Idle Kids
- 14 Clinton Wins on Budget, But More Lies Ahead
- 15 Enraged Cow Injures Farmer With Axe
- 16 Plane Too Close to Ground, Crash Probe Told
- 17 Miners Refuse to Work after Death
- 18 Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant
- 19 Stolen Painting Found by Tree
- 20 Two Sisters Reunited After 18 Years in Checkout Counter
- 21 Killer Sentenced to Die for Second Time in 10 Years
- 22 Never Withhold Herpes Infection from Loved One
- 23 War Dims Hope for Peace
- 24 If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last a While
- 25 Cold Wave Linked to Temperatures
- 26 Deer Kill 17,000
- 27 Enfields Couple Slain; Police Suspect Homicide
- 28 Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges
- 29 Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead
- 30 Man Struck By Lightning Faces Battery Charge
- 31 New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group
- 32 Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft

- 33 Kids Make Nutritious Snacks
- 34 Chef Throws His Heart in to Helping Feed Needy
- 35 Arson Suspect Held in Massachusetts Fire
- 36 Ban On Soliciting Dead in Trotwood
- 37 Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half
- 38 New Vaccine May Contain Rabies
- 39 Hospitals are Sued by 7 Foot Doctors

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE:

Tuesday 18 February 2003

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