

BOOK WORM

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

April 2006

From the chair

It's an honour and a pleasure to be the new President of the society following the tenure of our distinguished life member and immediate past President Betty Durston. She represents the very best in leadership and I can't hope to live up to her accomplishments and dedication. I'll have to make up for them in enthusiasm.

Welcome to the other committee members: Janet Blagg, Linda Browning (Treasurer), Amanda Curtin, James Hansen (Vice-President), Tom Jenkins, Tanya Marwood, Emma Pearmain and Anne Surma. Please give the committee as a whole your confidence and active support. We will be doing our best to advance the objects of the society, which are to:

- develop, maintain and promote high standards of editing skills;
- promote the exchange and dissemination of information and ideas among editors and people involved in the publishing industry;
- promote, produce and hold or join in promoting, producing and holding meetings, lectures, conferences, symposia, excursions and exhibitions to further the objects of the society.

These objects are spelt out in the constitution of our society posted on our website, which I encourage you to explore (www.editorswa.com).

You will have noticed that the name of a committee secretary is missing. This is a role of considerable importance in a thriving organisation of more than 100 members (thanks, Linda). So if you can volunteer in a spirit of teamwork, service (and urgency), please contact me or one of the fine committee members mentioned above. Your generosity can and will make a difference.

For those who don't know me, let me introduce myself. I'm a 52-year-old newspaper journalist and sub-editor, born in Perth, have lived throughout the State and travelled to foreign parts. I'm a wife and mother of two sons, aged 19 and 17, and have a BA from the University of WA and a Master's in Journalism from Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. I am also a member of the service group, Zonta, which I enjoy greatly for its friendship and service.

A society such as ours has a diverse membership from novices to experts in a range of fields, perhaps all feeling slightly marginalised – an occupational hazard for editors. *Book Worm*, ably edited by Tanya Marwood, and the members' on-line message system exist for a professional, robust and important exchange of views and as a resource for and by all members, from beginner to expert. Please use

both means of developing fellowship and expertise in a generous spirit to build confidence and competence. In other words, I don't mind what individual members have to say but I do mind how you say it. Please be kind to each other despite possible imperfect sympathies.

One of the most important tasks ahead for the committee and the membership is coming to grips with the proposed national accreditation scheme for members. At our next monthly meeting, Amanda Curtin, WA's distinguished delegate to the Accreditation Board of the national body, the Institute of Professional Editors, will begin the workshop process to help us develop portfolios to qualify for accreditation (see meeting notice below).

The workshop will be held NOT at our usual venue of Tresillian BUT at CWA House. I look forward to seeing as many members attending as possible—surround yourself with really smart people! All the very best...

Kerry Coyle

Editorial

'Oh woe, woe and thrice woe!' as the seer on Frankie Howerd's 'Up Pompeii' was wont to cry. I know I'm showing my age and am probably ripe for a spot on 'Grumpy Old Women', but is anyone else experiencing the same anguish at the recent news of the new-look WA Year 12 English exam? You know, the one where students can sketch their answers and need not be able to spell or use correct grammar? I believe it heralds an inevitable further decline in literacy, especially amongst young adults—a real 'dumbing-down' of our society. Is it any wonder that articles are appearing in newspapers (*The Australian*, March 18-19, 2006, Review, p. 4) speculating that the end of the Australian literary novel is nigh? For who will buy and read such a novel, if there are no up-and-coming 'educated' readers? We can't just assume that if a novel is well written and relevant, people will read it without the need to be 'educated' in literary readership. How many of us would have known the joy of Shakespeare's plays without the dedication of our English teachers, who helped us see through the archaic language to the timeless themes of humanity that the playwright examined? But apparently this is all a thing of the past and kids now don't even have to be able to construct a sentence. We might assume it will mean much more work for us all in SOEWA—but will it? In my gloomier moments I think perhaps none of the young adults graduating from this new system will recognise badly written prose and therefore will not bother to have anything edited. We can only hope that it is not so...

Tanya Marwood

Forthcoming meetings

April Meeting: Accreditation Workshop

When: Tuesday 4 April 2006, 7.30-9.30 pm

Where: CWA House, 1174 Hay Street, West Perth, third-floor Boardroom (enter via back door and take the elevator. Free parking is available at the rear of the building.)

Cost: \$2 members, \$5 non-members

Do you want to know more about the IPed accreditation process? Are you planning to apply for accreditation but unsure about what kind of evidence you need to provide or whether your evidence would be acceptable? Do you have questions about accreditation?

The April workshop is your opportunity to find out more. Amanda Curtin, SOEWA's representative on the Accreditation Board, will discuss the board's progress, review how applications will be structured, and use examples to get you thinking about the kind of evidence assessors will be looking for.

Bring along your questions to this introductory session, and start preparing for accreditation now.

RSVP to Amanda Curtin, phone/fax 9377 2091, e-mail acurtin@highway1.com.au

Report on AGM Panel

More than 30 members who attended the Annual General Meeting were treated, after the business of electing new office-bearers, to wine and finger food – and then to an entertaining panel discussion on “The State of Writing in WA”.

The panel consisted of publisher Ray Coffey from Fremantle Arts Centre Press (FACP), author Josephine Wilson (her novel “Cusp” was recently published by UWA Press), and Janet Blagg, one of our best editors. Anne Surma was in the chair.

Ray Coffey opened with a good insight into his work. About 15 manuscripts are received a week, of which, he said a little reluctantly, one might be good. The press published 35 to 38 books a year. But the feeling was that WA produced a surprising amount of good writing, considering the size of the population and our isolation. “Sometimes,” he said to laughter, “I feel there may be more people out there writing than reading.”

He had some forthright views on the publishing market. Trade liberalisation has brought severe competition for local publishers, particularly in academic publishing, and there was a tendency for “middle-brow” publishing to dominate sales. “The perception is that that is where the market and the money is,” he said. There had been growth in publishing for adolescent readers.

Ray Coffey had two pieces of advice for writers. First, “read—read a lot.” And secondly, get an editor. “All writers need an editor. An editor engages with the author about what they are trying to achieve and how readers are going to respond to it. A lot of writers lack strong, clear advice on their text.”

Josephine Wilson began by reading an amusing and evocative section from her book, set mostly in Perth about 30 years ago, “when Wattsie and Yorkie were on the radio.” The book had been in progress, somewhat intermittently, for eight years. In it, her character Lena Hawkins flies in from New York to spend time with her mother in Perth, and then begins to ask herself: What am I doing here? Why have I come home? And she also begins to think it is all her mother's fault. The publisher calls this a “poignant, dark, humane and funny novel.”

Josephine paid tribute to her editor, Amanda Curtin, who, she said, had shown her “the power of a limited point of view” and the value of realism. “It is,” she said, “a gift to have someone engage with your words in that way.” The edited book “had a sense of the world outside while its characters concentrated on their own lives. It had a fidelity to time and place.”

Janet Blagg was, as always, entertaining. She told of an author whose work needed cutting, who went away to cut and brought it back longer than before! Authors varied; she gave us an intimate insight into working with one author who self-published his first humorous science-fiction book, had his second published by FACP, and was now working on a third. He was, said Janet, amazingly and endlessly receptive to advice from his editor.

“Editing,” Janet said, “is being a critical reader.” She might spend six to ten hours reading a manuscript and writing a report on it, even though it was not immediately publishable, but showed promise. She quoted T.S. Eliot, at one time an editor for Faber and Faber. Someone said to him, “Aren’t editors just failed writers?” “Yes,” said “Eliot, “but so are most writers.”

By general consensus, this was one of the best evenings SOEWA has had and all involved should be congratulated.

Tom Jenkins

IPEd notes

News from the Institute of Professional Editors

March 2006

IPEd’s teleconference in mid-February was a welcome chance to review progress made during the summer. The Interim Council is improving both its communication and its administration. Plans are well advanced for a new website which will not only offer a national forum for members but will also ease IPEd’s internal communications and improve our record-keeping and archiving. The Canberra society has offered to hold a sub-account for IPEd funds as an interim

measure until IPed becomes a formal body. Most societies have formally agreed to the proposed levy of \$20 per member to help with the initial costs of setting up the national organisation and have decided how best to raise the money.

Accreditation

Workshops are being held in each state and territory to explain the assessment process and hear members' concerns. The Accreditation Board, chaired by Robin Bennett (Qld), will collate and analyse the information gained from this discussion in order to plan the information kit that will be sent to applicants and guidelines for the assessors. The board's timeline extends to May 2007, when it expects to make a detailed presentation to the national conference in Hobart. Most societies have nominated distinguished editors to assess the first round of applications; a list of their names and brief biographical details will be published shortly, and a very impressive list it is.

Working Groups

We welcome the new convenor of the Promotions Working Group, Kathie Stove (SA). Kathie has form as the leader of the team that created *Australian Standards for Editing Practice*, so we look forward to her contribution.

The National Organisation Working Group led by Trischa Mann (Vic.) is developing the content of the proposal for a national organisation. They have reached some preliminary conclusions but there are still many details to be investigated, and they expect to present the proposal to members by mid to late 2006. If members accept the proposal, registration would follow soon after.

The Education Working Group under Rosemary Luke (SA) is researching the formal courses in editing offered in Australia by universities, TAFE, private providers and the editors' societies. This survey will provide a picture of what is available and where the gaps are, giving a basis for future planning to develop continuous and comprehensive education for editors. As if that wasn't enough, these energetic people are looking into mentoring as well, so the group's official name is now the Education, Training and Mentoring Working Group.

The Standards Revision Working Group, with Shelley Kenigsberg (NSW) as convener, is charged with updating *Australian Standards for Editing Practice*. The group is considering whether to embark on a more thorough revision to rewrite the document in a form that can be used for competency-based learning and training. This would enable the profession to meet demands from an industrial environment that is insisting on more formal vocational educational qualifications, but it is a large undertaking. The group is looking into methods of tackling this project, including funding, timing, and coordination with the other working groups. The group would welcome more members, especially if they have expertise in developing Training Packages.

Meanwhile, down in Hobart, the conference committee is making good progress in organising the 2007 national conference, which will have the theme 'From inspiration to publication'.

Janet Mackenzie*
Liaison Officer

*Further to the discussion on rates of pay for editors, Janet Mackenzie draws our attention to "an interesting discussion of Australian hourly rates" that can be found at www.emendediting.com/blog/

Book Review: 'Who Discovered What When'

Author: David Ellyard
2005, Reed New Holland, 439 pages
ISBN 1-877069-22-1
Hardcover

'Who Discovered What When' is the sort of book fact-checkers and quizmasters lust after.

Author David Ellyard juxtaposes major historical events and philosophical trends with notable developments in the sciences. Alongside Darwin, Newton, Einstein, Pavlov, Heisenberg and Galileo, are figures such as Beethoven, Catherine the Great, Hobbes, Marie Antoinette, Germaine Greer, Mary Shelly, Ralph Nader and Mary Queen of Scots.

But rather than being a go-to-whoa narrative, this book is a chronology of the major players in scientific progress from the year 1500 through to 2000.

This approach means some of the limitations imposed by the typical three-part story-telling process are avoided—such as being compelled to discard all but a few of the very juiciest facts and names. The result is a hefty compilation that serves as a comprehensive journey through the evolution of scientific ideas given the wider context of humanity's travails and struggles. The index alone reads like a who's who of science.

The buzzword summary for this book would be 'jam-packed'. Among the panoply of famous humdinger discoveries such as oxygen, germ theory, evolution, calculus, photosynthesis, atoms, electricity, vaccines, quantum theory, DNA and nuclear fusion are lesser-known but equally important scientists and developments. Charles Darwin's granddad Erasmus and his book 'Zoonomia' (p. 160), which laid the conceptual foundation for the theory of evolution, probably rank among these.

It's not only the scientific concepts that strike the reader and force a pause for thought. For instance, popular opinion once held that a magnet could be rendered

useless by garlic (p. 34). And the title of a poem written by a sixteenth-century doctor-poet is the origin of the disease name 'syphilis' (p. 22). The chap touted as the 'father of palaeontology' reportedly could remember almost word for word the contents of the 19,000 books he owned (p. 186).

The lack of a bibliography may prove a disappointment to some fact-checkers. It means facts presented can't readily be traced back to a particular science historian or group of historians. Realistically, though, given the volume of detail contained in this book, a bibliography probably would have left it with the mass of a neutron star (see p. 360).

If you're reading for enjoyment, this book would allow you to peruse the cavalcade of notable scientists and their significant scientific achievements before deciding on your all-time favourites. And anyone wanting a solid base from which to launch further reading should also take a look at 'Who Discovered What When'. This reviewer is now setting off to learn more about Marin Mersenne, the seventeenth-century French monk who ran a chat-room long before the invention of the Internet.

This is one book that will reveal what you didn't know you didn't know.

Sarah Belfield

New members

Welcome to:

Jane Bourke of 106 Whatley Crescent, Maylands WA 6051

E-mail: jaybeebooks@people.net.au

Irene Wringle of 74 Rennie Crescent, Hilton WA 6163

E-mail: renerod@aapt.net.au

Re-instated members:

Moria McDermont of 135 Gloster St, Subiaco, WA 6008

E-mail: moira_mcdermont@hotmail.com

Deadline for May 2006 *Book Worm* issue:

Monday 24 April 2006.

All submissions gratefully accepted.

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