

BOOK WORM

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

August 2006

From the chair

An experiment conducted by The Australian newspaper is interesting for the light it casts on the publishing industry in Australia. In short, the newspaper submitted under a pseudonym, Chapter 3 of Patrick White's *The Eye of the Storm* to 12 publishers and agents. This novel won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973, with the judges describing it as one of his most accomplished works. None of the 12 publishers or agents recognised its literary genius, and 10 wrote polite and vaguely encouraging rejection letters. The Australian said the highest praise was "clever" and a low point was a referral to a "how to" book on writing fiction. Details, explanations and defences could still be found on the web at the time of writing but one fact that emerged is that the tradition of the slush pile (unsolicited manuscripts sent directly to a publisher) as a way to discover unpublished authors is becoming less and less successful. "Employing staff to read substandard, unpublishable, badly presented and often just plain badly written manuscripts is not the best way to find new talent," said Shona Martyn, publishing director at HarperCollins. She said the preferred methods were workshops with unpublished authors, personal recommendations, festivals, literary journals and agents. Imre Salusinszky, the new chairman of the Australia Council's Literature Board, said the rejections were troubling but a work of great literature may not be immediately recognisable in one chapter.

The acquisition editors' failure to recognise White's pen was a symptom of an education that does not value Australian literature, he said. "Australian classics are largely out of print, unread by the public and absent from university curriculums." The saga of the "sting" and subsequent developments about how the business of publishing is really conducted these days, the facts and the figures, make interesting reading. I highly recommend it to anybody associated with publishing in its various forms.

Kerry Coyle

Editorial

Just because we have no meeting this month, it doesn't mean we have nothing to read!

The report on both Tom Jenkins' talk (from the June meeting) and Janet Blagg's talk (July meeting) are in this issue, along with another humorous piece—this

time about hyphens—that Janet spotted in the SA Society’s newsletter, but which was originally from *the Skeptic* magazine.

Tom Jenkins has also reviewed an interesting book from University of Queensland Press.

Happy reading...

Tanya Marwood

Forthcoming meetings

August is our mid-winter break: no meeting.

In **September**, three WA book designers, **Robyn Mundy, John Douglass and Becky Chilcott** will be our guests, showing examples of their work and focusing on their interaction with editors.

When: Tuesday 5 September 2006, 7.30–9.00 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

RSVP to Kerry Coyle, 9482 3143, kcoyle@westnet.com.au

Meetings planned for the rest of the year:

The October meeting will be a workshop on English usage facilitated by James Hansen. Last year we looked in detail at sentence structure, and at the optimum placement of verbs and adverbs. The October theme, for the moment, is open. James would appreciate suggestions on topics which he may prepare for group discussion. Examples from the work of clients (suitably disguised) would be welcome. Please email your ideas to jehansen@westnet.com.au with the word TOPIC in the subject line.

Report on June meeting: Working with self-published authors

Perth journalist Tom Jenkins has edited and designed no fewer than 27 self-published books, many family histories.

At the Society’s June meeting, he enthralled members with a case study of *A Life Well Lived*, from the collection of handwritten memoirs through construction of the book, complete with excerpts, recollections and photographs, to the launch party!

Tom explained his communications, terms and agreements with client Peggy Blain (in more than 100 e-mails), how he shaped the book, checked facts, selected

photographs and illustrations, chose an attractive cover, oversaw the printing process and met the legal requirements involved in publishing a book.

“All writing can be creative,” Tom said. “This means that a family history can have both a good plot and interesting characters. A Life Well Lived has both.”

In his capacity as editor Tom advised Peggy to limit the number of voices in her book to the two principals and also explained such practicalities as how to limit costs in the printing process.

“No two books are the same,” Tom said.

“All need a mixture of computer skills, editing, diplomacy and design skills.

“It has been a privilege to help so many nice people make their own book.”

Tom, who also provided members with a copy of a quote for printing and a contract agreement for editing and design, said a print run of 300 copies was usual for family histories.

Self-published books were highly valued by the families concerned and also saved interesting stories from being lost.

The audience particularly appreciated Tom’s willingness to share his “trade secrets” in the interests of furthering the cause of professional editing in WA.

Kerry Coyle

Report on July meeting: “What do you understand by the term 'political correctness?’”

At the July meeting, Janet Blagg gave an instructive and informative talk on the ramifications of ‘political correctness’. She opened with a quote from Joseph Toscano in the Anarchist Age Weekly: *Political correctness is a term that only exists in the consciousness of those who are frightened that the power they’ve been able to exercise in the past is under threat.*

Janet went on to point out that there is no ‘PC movement’, and never was. Those who genuinely care about socially aware or ethical language, or those who are actively pursuing social justice never use the expression. Yet Googling for the expression brings up thousands of references, all pejorative. Clearly, its attackers intend to demonise those who question the dominant paradigm, whatever side of the political fence they are on. What Janet hoped to accomplish in talking about it, she said, was to make us think critically whenever we hear the expression ‘political correctness’ used.

Attacks on what the assailants choose to call ‘political correctness’ tend, these days, to be concerned with what are now being called the ‘history wars’ and the ‘culture wars’. Many such attacks appear to be aimed at destroying the credibility of writers who have made it their business to speak out against revisionist history and draw attention to such issues as the genocidal policies of our past.

An amusing example of 'culture wars' is David Williamson's *Cruise Ship Australia*. Amusing because socially conservative Williamson's play *Dead White Males* (1995) reviled feminism, multiculturalism and post-structuralism for enforcing political correctness. Ten years later, following a fairly middle of the road lecture in which he spoke of the absence of values in this new 'aspirational Australia', he was himself reviled as an 'elitist leftwing intellectual' by almost every conservative commentator.

Editors, in trying to encourage the use of socially aware language, need to be aware of many issues. For instance:

- Language categories shape speakers' ideas and actions. Labels can so easily become the way people think about others. Consider the use of such loaded terms as 'illegal immigrants' or 'queue jumpers'.
- Unconscious assumptions are embedded in ordinary language. Bringing such assumptions into awareness is essential for us to be able to recognise how we think.
- Non-inclusive language is not censorship and should not be seen as such. Rather, it is an effort to ensure awareness of those unconscious assumptions and thoughtless labels mentioned above.
- Aware people do not use euphemisms. Expressions such as 'collateral damage' or 'friendly fire' would not be acceptable to aware speakers, writers, readers and listeners.
- Non-discriminatory language can be done well or badly. It does not have to be clumsy or boring; nor is it the enemy of plain speech. And if we really know what we're doing with language we do not need formulations.

Janet concluded by reminding us that democracy is not concerned only with the free election of government. The protection of the weakest members of society from exploitation by the powerful and privileged is a central tenet of democracy. This is the core work taken up by groups who have fought for non-discriminatory language and those who have pursued the history and culture wars.

Today's neo-conservatives appear to have a dedicated commitment to pushing back the social gains of the last half-century. They have realised that it is not clever politics to oppose the principles of liberal democracy directly (after all, that is what conservatives pretend to be fighting for) so they have to first misrepresent those principles as radical left, loony, out-dated and out of touch with aspirational mum and dad Australia. Janet wanted us to understand that that is exactly what has been done with PC.

'Political correctness', Janet concluded, is the thing that is defending democracy – and it needs our help.

Satima Flavell Neist

Hyphen-panic (sic): courage is the word*

An over-due fight-back from a cool-headed word-smith

(Reprinted with permission from Barry Williams, Editor, *the Skeptic*)

By Mike Robinson**

Why fast-track, scan-read, timeframe, self-promotion, process-writing, Comb-Over, chuck-writing or print-outs?

The italicised hyphenated words above (and below) are all examples of another punch in the face for punctuation at the hands of a phenomenon that could be called *hyphen-panic* (sic; sick, even). Ironically, the examples of *hyphen-panic* above were used without jest in Jef Clark's otherwise-noble piece, "English expression; is their cause for concern?" (*the Skeptic*, 25:3), lamenting the hazy use of language. I am only quibbling with Jef's own hazy overuse of hyphens because he may be one of the few people to take my point seriously – rather than as anal-retentive ramblings.

Jef could claim that he shares esteemed company in his usage of hyphens. Yes, I have noticed *ill-effects* in the usually-precise prose of *The Spectator*, and *breast-feeding* in that other stickler for style, *Time* magazine.

Hyphen-panic seems to come in occasional and irrational jolts that are gripping a raft of thoughtful and articulate modern authors of excellent books, such as Michio Kaku who hyphenates *light-years* in his *Parallel Worlds*, and Luke Slattery in *Dating Aphrodite* (hyphenating *sea-crossings*, *stomach-churners*, *no-one* and "Dionysus the god of *letting-go*"). Peter Watson's *Ideas: a history from fire to Freud* hyphenates *hand-axes*, *word-plays*, *sea-change*, *well-being*.

I was perversely pleased to find *free-will* used throughout John Carroll's book, *The Wreck of Western Culture: Humanism revisited*, only because it tied in with that book's woolly line of argument. A.C. Grayling, in his great new biography on Descartes, briefly restored my faith. Here was "free will" without a hyphen. But, alas, also here was *stillbirths*, *counter-attack*, *pen-portrait* and *no-one*.

Iain McCalman does not hyphenate "no one" in *The Last Alchemist: Count Cagliostro: Master of Magic in the Age of Reason*, but lapsed with *good-bye*, *wonder-worker*, *show-off*, *wife-beater* and *next-door*. In another great book, *The Tyrannicide Brief*, Geoffrey Robertson was also blighted by *hyphen-panic* with *court-martial*, *king-killing*, *cross-examine*, *letter-bomb* – but "no one" was used without a hyphen. (*Time* magazine, thankfully, is holding the no-hyphen line on "no one". Why should it be hyphenated? No one knows.)

So what is *hyphen-panic* and its symptoms? It occurs when we are faced with using two associated words such as "free will" or "baby boomers". There seems to be haziness as to how to treat them. Are they:

- two separate words,
- two hyphenated words, or

- one joined complex word?

Take, “bully boy”, for instance. It could easily be joined as “bullyboy” without causing mayhem. So why hyphenate *bully-boy*? (*The Weekend Australian Magazine*, Nov 19-20, 2005, p31). No reason, except that even the best reporters and sub editors are getting caught in the panic and confusion.

Just two other instances of the confusion. A headline says, “Resources groups rock solid” – but in the body of the story we are told, “big resources players are now about as *rock-solid* as any investment”. (*The Weekend Australian*, Nov 19-20, 2005, p41). Also, Kerry Packer faced death *head-on*, according to an Adelaide *Advertiser* headline (Dec. 29, 2005), but the report tells us that his “wish was to face death” – without a hyphen – “head on”.

This is hyphen haziness that can lead to laziness, if not craziness. I have always found *The Macquarie Dictionary* to be a source of this haziness. My pickpocket (as distinct from *pick-pocket*) edition of the *Macquarie* has, for instance, *water-column* and *water-bottle* hyphenated but not “water cycle” and “water dragon”. Then the *Mac* has *sea-urchin* but “sea wasp” sans hyphen, along with a host of other bewildering hyphenations such as *fence-sitter*, *pen-name* and *lime-juicer*. This extends into the latest *Macquarie Australian Slang Dictionary*. Why are *dung-puncher* and *leg-opener* hyphenated but not “Toorak truck”?

So what is wrong or right in how we use hyphens? Somewhere there are arcane rules, such as the one about not hyphenating an adverb, which are receding beyond the memory of the best writers. That’s why even they get *hyphen-panic*.

Life would return to an uncluttered elegance – the haze would clear – if we had just one primary use for the hyphens: as the means to link words that are adjectival descriptors of another key word. This is where the hyphen shines.

The hyphen’s importance in making sense of what we write can be seen in the example of a “man eating tiger” as against the intended “man-eating tiger”. Or, more delicately, “a man-eating woman” as against a “man eating woman”.

A “once in a lifetime opportunity” should have the words “once-in-a-lifetime” hyphenated to qualify “opportunity”.

Hyphens, as these examples show, not only improve the sense of our writing. They are crucial in punctuation’s other role: to orchestrate the rhythm of language as we read it. Punctuation is the literary equivalent of musical notations. That is why the hyphens in “once-in-a-lifetime” are a signal to mentally absorb it at a faster pace (the pace at which we would speak it) than “once in a lifetime” without hyphens.

To hyphenate *free-will* demeans the full weight that should be given intellectually and rhythmically to two special words: free will.

Not using hyphens demands courage (derring do, not *derring-do* – bravely defying the *Oxford Dictionary*’s insistence on a hyphen).

This need for courage relates to the vexed question of when and whether two associated words, such as “high” and “way” suddenly become one word: “highway” – without going through that wimpy halfway period of being *high-way*.

That moment when two words suddenly become joined as one compound noun is cloaked in mystery. Maybe it happens on winter solstice nights when all those buried cow horns filled with dung start weaving their magic. The Germans have many compound words in their *Worterverzeichnis* or vocabulary. Rudolf Steiner spoke German. Join the dots.

But there are many English words that could be compounded if we had the courage to give them a go. Associated words could be made into compound nouns, such as “takeoff”, “leadup”, “washout”, “breakin”, instead of copping out with the hyphenated *take-off*, *lead-up*, *wash-out* and *break-in*.

Nor is there any need for a hyphen after “self”, as in “self defence, self determination and self control”, when “self” is being used as just an adjective. And let’s rise up and reject style books or dictionaries that say references to a commander in chief or a bride to be or an attorney general or lieutenant colonel need to be hyphenated.

We could even learn to live with the dreaded joining of vowels in “coordinate” and “cooperate” if we gave them a go. OK, maybe “reenter” and “reelected” should not be attempted in front of children, but it is better to avoid them rather than resorting to *re-elected* and *re-enter*.

The choice is clear: either associated words, such as “breast feeding” (when they do not adjectivally qualify another word) are two separate words or they should be joined in holy matrimony as one compound word, “breastfeeding”. But they should never be split asunder by a rogue hyphen.

Conversely, as a side symptom of *hyphen-panic*, compound words such as “anymore” and “everyday” are starting to crop up in a context where they should remain two words. We are losing the distinction between everyday happenings every day.

The prime example of this side symptom is the case of “underway” – as in: “The project is about to get underway”. Surely, in this case, it should be, and always be, “under way” as two words – while an “underway” describes the opposite of an overpass. But, no, this profligate misuse of “underway” is out there breeding like rabbits. It even bobbed up in Slattery’s erudite *Dating Aphrodite*. How did all these underways get under way? What set them off? This remains one helluva (not *hell-uv-a*) mystery.

Perhaps a few cow horns with bung dung were buried that winter – by someone. Ah! “Someone” – the wedding of “some” and “one” with a sharing of vowels and a happy loss of hyphen.

*without a hyphen

***Mike Robinson* is a semi-retired journalist working on his fourth novel. The first three never got past Chapter One.

Book Review

Paper Empires. A History of the Book in Australia, Vol 3: 1946-2005, edited by Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright, University of Queensland Press, \$45 paperback.

This substantial and ambitious book (381 pages before you reach the extensive index) is the third in a series. Previous volumes covered the periods to 1890 and from 1891 to 1945. In the period dealt with here we have all seen massive distortions arise in the publishing trade, with phenomena such as *Harry Potter* and the *da Vinci Code* occupying the high ground and much else down in the swamp.

Early chapter headings indicate the sweep of it: After the War (highlights such as Angus & Robertson and *They're a Weird Mob*), Sixties Larrikins (the sad story of how Rigby was taken over by, of all people, James Hardie), New Wave Seventies (including a story about Fremantle Arts Centre Press) and Into the Global Era (including diverse bedfellows Lonely Planet and Magabala).

There are eight more chapters and it is probably inevitable that such a sweep seems at times to achieve less than satisfying depth. But there is good reading, for editors and many others interested in books, particularly in case histories.

For example, the story behind Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*, in which most readers would agree the distinctive "voice" of Ned Kelly is the greatest success. Yet in 1999, when Carey undertook a horseback research trip in Victoria, the text was "a mixture of more sophisticated writing of Carey's normal kind, coupled with Bacchus Marsh State School vernacular" and Laurie Muller of UQP, who was on the trip, told Carey the narrative was not working. Playwright David Williamson and legendary editor Gary Fisketjon from Carey's US publisher Knopf brought influence to bear. About 100,000 words were rewritten and we know the result.

The case study says of Fisketjon's role: "There is an irony in this ventriloquial novel to find the editor so cleverly ventriloquising the author." Doubts about that last verb aside, this is a fascinating insight. In the Kelly book, Carey pays generous tribute to Fisketjon's editing.

Another case study is by publisher Hilary McPhee about her time at McPhee Gribble. She says this of their approach to editing: "We learnt to ask questions, make suggestions and to do the first edit in pencil. This was a useful reminder to ourselves that the editorial process was secondary to the act of writing, and, for authors, that the text remained in their charge and that they must in the end seek

solutions for themselves. Suggestions could be ignored and often they were, but by our indicating the places in the work *where the writing seemed uneven, the voice wavered or the reader's attention wandered* – often a sign of something going wrong – the author would find a way to solve the problem.” My italics highlight an excellent description of the essence of editing.

A case study of Drusilla Modjeska's book *The Orchard* recalls that this unconventional book sold 30,000 copies in its first year and makes the point that it was a pioneering book for women, who are both the major readers and buyers of books in Australia.

One quibble: a section of illustrations on glossy paper is quite badly presented, photos clumsily cropped, many illustrations too small. But the words in the book are fine!

Tom Jenkins

CredAbility 2: Confidentiality

CredAbility is the Accreditation Board's forum for discussing its current thinking on concerns that you as members have raised, and seeking your input as we work through the issues that arise on the road to accreditation. From the accreditation workshops already held (in the ACT, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, Western Australia and New South Wales), it has become obvious that many editors see confidentiality as a problem.

Applicant confidentiality

Even though editors work in a broad range of areas, publishing often seems like a small world. Collegiality and broad editing networks have been and will continue to be encouraged. But to make the process of assessment as fair and objective as possible, accreditation applications will be sent interstate, to assessors experienced in the applicant's area of expertise but with no knowledge (personal or professional) of the applicant. An assessor who knows the applicant in any capacity will be expected to disqualify themselves from that particular application.

Applicants will not find out who assessed their applications; there will be no channels for contact between applicants and assessors. All applications and ongoing negotiations will be handled through the Accreditation Board.

The board is continuing to investigate other ways of ensuring the confidentiality of the process, such as the use of numbered applications and the removal of identifying markers. However, as participants at various workshops have pointed out, complete anonymity is not always possible, especially in the more specialised areas of editing.

Client confidentiality

Part B of your application for accreditation requires the submission of evidence demonstrating that you can meet the five Standards in *Australian Standards for Editing Practice*. This means that you will be submitting samples of your editing work (as well as reports, correspondence, etc.), and you will need to obtain permission from the clients, employers and authors involved.

Some editors have expressed concern that certain publishers or authors might be reluctant to allow edited drafts to be scrutinised. Many editors who work on classified or commercial-in-confidence material feel doubtful that permission to use drafts will be granted. Editors in the latter situation have the option of using a less restrictive project for evidence or even of seeking out such a job for accreditation purposes. In respect of documents that have already been published at the time an application is submitted, the Accreditation Board will be seeking clarification from the Arts Law Centre on whether the use of edited drafts constitutes a breach of agreement.

The board encourages you to discuss these matters with clients, employers and authors in the lead-up to accreditation. We suggest that you stress the following:

- The submitted material will be made available to a very small audience: the board's secretary, several assessors and, in the case of an appeal, members of the Accreditation Board and the IPEd Council. Everyone concerned will have signed a confidentiality agreement undertaking not to discuss applications or evidence with anyone other than members of assessors' panels, the Accreditation Board and the IPEd Council.
- The number of pages of any one manuscript submitted may be as low as 20.
- Identifying information can be deleted from drafts, if requested.
- Applications and evidence will be stored securely while in the hands of the Accreditation Board and assessors, and evidence will be destroyed or returned after a specified period, still to be determined by the board. We will be seeking to minimise this period.

The Accreditation Board is preparing an information sheet, to be included in the kit for applicants, that will fully explain these arrangements and will serve as a declaration of the Accreditation Board's commitment to confidentiality and the integrity of the process. The information sheet can be filled in by the applicant and distributed to clients, employers and authors.

If you have any suggestions or comments on these matters, or any others, please contact your Accreditation Board delegate, Amanda Curtin (ph./fax 9377 2091, e-mail acurtin@highway1.com.au). We welcome your input.

IPed notes

News from the Institute of Professional Editors

July 2006

IPed's Interim Council is making preparations for its first face-to-face meeting since the national conference in Melbourne in October 2005. Delegates will descend on Canberra in the first week of August, and we thank Virginia Wilton and Ed Highley for hosting the meeting and making the arrangements.

At this meeting the Interim Council will review progress so far and chart future directions for the creation of the national organisation. It will also hear reports from the various working groups, and other items on the agenda are finance, the development of the accreditation scheme, news from the societies, and preparations for the national conference to be held in Hobart in May 2007.

After one of its rare teleconferences, the Accreditation Board is completing its current round of consultation with members with the holding of a workshop in South Australia. The first-round assessors, the distinguished editors, are meeting in each state and territory to review the process of assessment and the role they will play. The board has also begun to draft documentation such as the information kit that will be sent to applicants to guide them in preparing their application.

The Standards Revision Working Group, led by Shelley Kenigsberg, has held a teleconference and is making progress with improvements to *Australian Standards for Editing Practice*. The National Organisation Working Group is recovering momentum under its new convenor, Deborah Edward, and will hold a teleconference this month.

Janet Mackenzie
Liaison Officer

New members

Welcome to:

John Comrie-Greig of 17 Uplands Gardens, Willetton, WA 6155

E-mail: john.comrie-greig@iinet.net.au

Colin Hanbury of 8 Carnarvon St, East Victoria Park WA 6101

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Deadline for September 2006 *Book Worm* issue:

Tuesday 22 August

All submissions gratefully accepted.

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