



The Society of Editors WA

BOOK WORM

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

October 2006

From the chair

Hello on this lovely spring day. Fine weather brings out the "what should's?" in me. Should I do this or should I do that? There never seems to be enough time, which says something about my own clarity of vision, or not. We come to editing from all perspectives and with our own hopes and dreams. Some never waver and others (like me) wobble all over the place.

Two readings brought this home to me recently. One was a comment in last year's third national survey of editors: "Editors are too passive. We need to be entrepreneurs—in-house or independent. Editors must be able to describe what they do, how they will work with the client and demonstrate value (not just pedantic correction)..." And the other was an email article, "Six Ways to Slow Down Smart!": "Recognise that slowing down is an opportunity, not a punishment—a chance to recharge your batteries, learn new skills, tend to long-overlooked problems and mend strained relationships....Now is the time to renegotiate agreements with yourself and other people."

So, for those of you who want to speed things up may I suggest you consider the classes (prose, poetry, picture books), workshops (freefall writing, critiquing, creative blocks) and discussions (publishing industry) that are being held around Perth in October (not to mention our own James Hansen's expert discussion on grammar at our next meeting). And for those who want to slow down smart, may I suggest you consider the classes (prose, poetry, picture books), workshops (freefall writing, critiquing, creative blocks) and discussions (publishing industry) that are being held around Perth in October (not to mention our own James Hansen's expert discussion on grammar at our next meeting)! It's all in the mind, I guess. Contact the umbrella organisation writingWA (email: info@writingWA.org or www.writingWA.org) for the "write around the west" calendar so you can kick-start your career development—or sink deep into your first love—at the same events. Perhaps I should...

Kerry Coyle

Editorial

Hello folks! Here's a slightly new 'look' for this month's newsletter, incorporating the logo we have been using on the website for some time now – and which we intend to use on all stationery for the Society.

Though you will have already received notice of a book launch by one of our June visitors, I have included details here again. Sounds like an interesting, rather different sort of book!

Apologies for misrepresenting the deadline for this edition (I said it was a week later than it actually was – wishful thinking!) The deadline for November's newsletter is correct (see below).

Finally, thanks to everyone who contributed material for this month's *Book Worm*.

Tanya Marwood

Forthcoming meetings

October: English Usage Workshop with James Hansen

The topics to be covered in the workshop have been submitted by our members and have been grouped into broad categories by James, who will distribute a set of notes to everyone attending. It should thus be possible to cover a substantial amount of material without extensive note-taking. (Topics may also be introduced at the session.) There will be a whiteboard available and, as is traditional with this sort of night, informality will reign – the object being to pool our knowledge and experience to sort out some typical and not-so-typical problems of usage. James will supply a number of reference books which can be consulted, should the need arise, and members are welcome to bring copies of their own preferred "authorities".

When: Tuesday 3 October 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

Report on September meeting: Book design

Three WA book designers – Robyn Mundy, John Douglass and Becky Chilcott – talked about their work at our September meeting. On a cold night, they had a good audience of about 40 members.

Amanda Curtin had made the arrangements and introduced the speakers.

Robyn Mundy drew an immediate parallel with editing: “Book design is an art which is apparent only when it’s missing,” she said, “when you can’t read the text on the inside of pages because it’s too near the binding, or the keys we rely on to show us through a book are not there.”

Comprehensively covering many aspects of a publication—size, headings, margins, fonts, balance, styles, paper and inks and binding—she said: “We always have to think about who will be using the book. “

It could be helpful for a designer to chat with the editor; it helps to know the word count, to understand the hierarchy of the text, to have an indication of where photos go, perhaps with a thumbnail. Sometimes clients had other priorities; they might want text squeezed to save printing costs, or expanded to “look as if will sell for \$29.95.”

She showed two striking covers she has created for UWA Press, one with a nude, the other with a piano.

John Douglass confessed he had “made all the errors” during his designing career, but later showed books which had won prizes, one a children’s picture book with large chicken feet on the cover.

He spent some time on a fervent plea for texts to work with that have not been “formatted to death.” Formatting and styles often had to be painstakingly stripped out, wasting time and effort. He might combine a number of text files into one to make this operation easier.

The resolution of graphics was badly understood by many, he said. Files at screen resolution of 72dpi would print very badly. Photographs should be no less than 300dpi and, importantly, scanned at the size they would be printed, or slightly larger. If an illustration had to be stretched, resolution was lost. Line art should be 600dpi. Tables and graphs should be compatible with the layout software.

Some modern methods were impressive: he had sent a client’s book, a 500Mb file, over the Internet to be printed in Singapore, using File Transfer Protocol and the proofs that came back were “spot on.”

Becky Chilcott concentrated on typography. The ideal text type had small ascenders and descenders, but whether it was serif or sans serif depended on the book. Type could look dark and dense, or it could look washed out, grey.

She showed a book with wide outside margins on the pages “so that when you’re reading, your thumbs don’t cover the words.”

After the formal session, there were hot drinks and nibbles and a great deal of worthwhile conversation. It was a good meeting.

Tom Jenkins

Book Launch

In June this year Perth writer Jonathan Griffiths was a guest at our meeting on 'Editing and Designing books for self-published authors', and was consequently inspired to organise a launch for his own self-published book. The committee is pleased to have had such a positive outcome from one of the society's endeavours, and wishes Jonathan well. Details of his book launch are as follows:

Place: Planet Books, 646 Beaufort Street (near junction with Walcott Street)

Time: Thursday 28th September 2006 from 5:30

The book: '*Sex Tips for Sad Bastards*' by 'pertinax@thesadbastard.com', being (among other things) an exercise in applied metaphysics and a romance in the form of a software specification.

Related material can be found at www.thesadbastard.com

Wine and finger food will be served.

Howler of the Month

Did anyone else spot this little gem in *The West Australian* on Wednesday 20th September?

'Like a swan leading a procession of signets ...'

Luke Morfesse, Inside Cover, p. 2.

I can't wait for *The West's* next editorial on declining literary standards.

Mar Bucknell

IPEd notes

News from the Institute of Professional Editors September 2006

IPEd has some major advances to report, including a new working group, a timeline and an indicative budget. The meeting of the Interim Council in Canberra in the first week of August confirmed that face-to-face discussions are far more productive than email or even teleconferences. We thank Virginia Wilton for arranging accommodation and food and providing a very comfortable venue at her company's premises.

iped-editors.org

The new working group is convened by Mike Purdy of the Canberra society, who has already volunteered considerable time to set up the IPed website. The group, which is made up of the web managers of the societies, aims to inform members about the site and encourage them to use its interactive features. If you want to

have a go, join the forum on the draft document 'Ideas for Strengthening a Society'. We look forward to your contribution.

Timeline

The timeline is a dynamic document and the version on the website will be updated from time to time, so only a summary is given here.

DATE		EVENT	RESPONSIBLE BODY
2006	Oct.	Complete the draft documentation for the accreditation scheme: guidelines for applicants and assessors, information kit for applicants, etc.	Accreditation Board
	Nov.	Hold workshops to discuss revised Standards, accreditation documentation and any other IPEd developments	Societies Accreditation Board IPEd working groups
	2-3 Dec.	Meeting of representatives of first pool of assessors (distinguished editors)	Accreditation Board
2007	end Jan.	Meeting of Interim Council	Interim Council
	Feb.	Complete the proposal on the structure of the national organisation, including constitution and three-year indicative budget	National Organisation Working Group
	Feb.- Mar.	Present the proposal to the societies	IPEd delegates
	Feb.- May	Vote to approve the national organisation (to be completed by 1 May)	Societies
	9-12 May	Hobart IPEd conference Meeting of Interim Council	Tasmanian SocEds Interim Council
	May- June	Societies amend their constitutions to enable them to join the national organisation Finalise the arrangements for becoming a legal entity (by 30 June)	Societies Interim Council

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Timeline *continued:*

July	Launch IPEd PR campaign Publish revised <i>Australian Standards for Editing Practice</i>	Communications Working Group Standards Revision Working Group
October	Call for applications for accreditation	Accreditation Board

IPEd indicative budget 2006-07

INCOME (\$)		EXPENDITURE (\$)	
Detail	Amount	Detail	Amount
Seed funding (levy of \$20 per member)	28,000	Meeting of Interim Council (Nov. 2006)	5,000
		Meeting of Interim Council (May 2007)*	2,000
		Accreditation Board (AB) meetings (2)	7,000
		Accreditation assessors meeting	5,000
		Teleconferences: Interim Council (3)	1,500
		Working groups and AB (12)	5,000
		Legal fees for incorporation	1,000
TOTAL	28,000	TOTAL	26,500

*In Hobart, in conjunction with the national conference.

The working groups have also been busy at their various tasks; their news will be reported next month.

Janet Mackenzie
Liaison Officer

Words That Should Be Kept in Captivity

It certainly won't be news to anyone reading this that words change their meanings over time. Some words became harsher, some softer in their tone, though it's mostly softer. Naughty used to mean evil (from naught meaning nothing). It now means disobedient, mischievous or salacious.

But some words have such precise and specific meanings—impossible, in some cases, to signify by any other single word—that I believe it is worth ‘keeping them in captivity’, that is, resisting any sloppy extension of their usage.

This may seem like a lost or hopeless cause, worthy of the intercession of Saint Jude, but one of these words was actually, temporarily, rescued from misuse.

The words I want to keep in captivity are alibi, unique, only, refute, dilemma, fulsome and enormity.

Alibi is the very specific defence, legally and otherwise, that I can prove I was somewhere else:

The judge said, ‘Son, what is your alibi?
If you were somewhere else,
then you don’t have to die.’

(‘Long Black Veil’, traditional, recorded by Joan Baez and Nick Cave amongst others.)

To use it to mean any sort of defence, plea or excuse, robs us of a very useful word with a very specific meaning. If alibi means any old sort of excuse, we now don’t have a single word that says ‘I can prove I was somewhere else.’ We now have to use seven words to say it. Alibi is Latin in origin, and literally means ‘elsewhere’.

In *The Complete Plain Words* (1954), Ernest Gowers makes this same point, and it was largely heeded for a long time. Oddly, the most conspicuous abuser of it in Australian letters for many years has been Frank Devine, who used to write an excellent column on language in *The Australian* in the 1990s (though I have to say I hate his politics).

I fear, though, that alibi is creeping back into misuse. I, for one, will resist.

Imagine the loss to the language if ‘screw’ came to mean ‘a small piece of metal’. A screw *is* a small piece of metal, but so are a nut, a bolt, a washer, a paper clip, a safety pin and a nib.

Unique is such a misused word these days that I think it is almost beyond redemption, and I doubt whether more than one in ten people know what it means. Unique is almost unique as an adjective in that it should never be qualified. It means ‘one of a kind’. So many people have been using it to mean ‘special’ that even that abuse has spread and now it is often used when ‘interesting’ would have done the job. If something is one of a kind, it can’t be very unique or somewhat unique, and it definitely can’t be the most unique. If there are two of a kind, they can be ‘almost unique’, but then why would you bother saying that it’s not one of a kind? Unique is the adjective of the Latin for ‘one’.

The other word that was almost unique, but has now lost most of its precision, is actually a synonym of unique: **only**. I don’t think it started with the ads that invited you to come to McDonald’s ‘only’ for the burgers and ‘only’ for the fries and ‘only’ for the drinks. If I come in ‘only’ for a burger, and I want a drink, do I

have to take the burger home and come back on a separate trip for the drink? (Only joking: I have more self-respect than to eat their products.) Only means 'one-like'; it's the adjective from the word 'one'. Unique is the same word in Latin instead of Anglo-Saxon. The entry for only in Skeat's *Dictionary of English Etymology* is under the headword 'one'.

It does get worse than those wretched ads, though, when people say 'one of the only' when they mean 'one of a few'. I've even heard 'two of the only'.

John Howard can often be heard saying that he **refutes** the Leader of the Opposition, when all he really means is that he disagrees with what Mr Beazley has said. Refute means to prove wrong, and is not synonymous with repudiate or deny. 'The observations of Copernicus and Kepler refute the ancient idea that the sun orbits in a circle around the earth.' That is, if Copernicus and Kepler are correct in their observations, then no other theory is tenable other than that the Earth moves around the Sun in an elliptical orbit. 'I refute the suggestion that Telstra services in the bush will be adversely affected,' would require John Howard to implement the changes and then prove that the services were at least as good as they were before.

If you can be 'on the horns of a **dilemma**', then you should already be onto a clue about what it means, as pretty much all the horned creatures have two equally unpleasant horns. So there can be no 'dilemmas of contemporary feminism' as there are many different conceptions of feminism and the various problems and questions that are encountered there. Similarly, there are no 'dilemmas of health service provision in remote communities'. A dilemma is the choice between two equally unpleasant fates, and is best used where there is no single clear moral choice: the decision can be morally unpleasant whichever choice is made, such as 'Do I offend my friends by telling them they are bad parents, or do I let them continue to humiliate their children in public?' Again, etymology is helpful. 'Di' is Greek for two, and any Philosophy 101 student ought to be able to tell you that 'lemma' means premiss.

John Howard is also a high-profile abuser of the word **fulsome**, though in this he is in the company of Kim Beazley. Fulsome does not just mean very full or complete. It means full to the point of being cloying; it means disgusting. The sense is similar to the feeling of having eaten far too many sweets. Yet our distinguished leaders offer their fulsome praises to everyone from the Anzacs to the police. There are times when I agree with what they are actually saying, rather than what they think they are saying, but that's just me. In the meantime, clear English is the loser, because now I cannot remember the last time I heard or read the word used correctly. We have now almost lost a word that was so specific in its use that I couldn't hear it without picturing in my mind and imagining in my mouth a full green and gold tin of Tate and Lyle's Golden Syrup. Yet John Howard dares to preach to us about literacy.

A similar thing has happened to the word **enormity**. It does not come directly from 'enormous'. Both words came from Latin meaning outside the normal. Enormous means outside the normal range of size: very big. Enormity means outside the normal range of morality: a great crime. A huge (that is, enormous) massacre is an enormity, but so is a single rape. Again, I can find myself agreeing with the Prime Minister when he talks about the enormity of the Government's agenda, but I am not agreeing with what he thinks he is saying. It's true that most dictionaries these days have enormity as a synonym for enormousness; but now when I talk about an enormity, who will know what I am talking about?

I don't want to stop the evolution of English, and I couldn't if I tried, anyway. I will resist changes that reduce clarity and confuse people. If I may go back to Ernest Gowers, in the Prologue to *The Complete Plain Words* he writes:

Writing is an instrument for conveying ideas from one mind to another; the writer's job is to make his reader apprehend his meaning readily and precisely. Do these letters always say just what the writer means? Nay, does the writer himself always know just what he means? Even when he knows what it means, and says it in a way that is clear to him, is it always clear to the reader? If not, he has not been getting on with the job.

(Note that he was writing in 1954, so the language is a little quaint, and the beginnings of a feminist critique of sexism in language were fifteen years away.)

I think editors would do well to heed his advice (and read your dictionaries).

Mar Bucknell

Deadline for November 2006 *Book Worm* issue:

Tuesday 24 October

All submissions gratefully accepted.

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