



# Bookworm

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

November 2008

## From the Chair

Hello members,

Well, for better or worse the exam is now in the past tense for us. All there is left to do is wait for the results. I must say that deprives me of a large chunk of my presidential message material (or at least relevant material), but I'll do my best with what I have left.

Hmmm...

Judging from the feedback, I think it's relatively safe to say that the website and register are now officially up and running. Most of you who wanted to register for the ... er, register seem to have now done so, and if anyone still isn't sure what to do, please let me know. The most common issue people seem to have had is forgetting to check the 'null' box isn't ticked before attempting to edit their entry – if that was you take comfort in the fact that a lot of people made the same mistake.

From a public perspective, there have been a few jobs coming through it, and I will be promoting our swanky new site to potential client pools in the new year. This will coincide with some of us being able to choose 'Y' for the accredited box, which I think is ~~excuse~~ reason enough to tell people about Editors WA.

Speaking of telling people about us, just as we've been running a 'meet the editor' section in *Bookworm*, there is an opportunity for someone out there who would like to be the face of editing to be famous, at least here in WA. The *Saturday West Australian* is running an industry profile feature and we'd love to have editing profiled and explained to the great unwashed. Please contact me if you would be happy to be profiled in this way (as opposed to being profiled in a CSI way, which I doubt we could help you with).

I've just noticed that I've now written two requests to get in contact with me, which may lend a hint of loneliness to this month's intro to *Bookworm* (did I mention I'm a Gemini and like walks on the beach?) but I assure you it is presidential in intent. I am always happy to help any members however I can, and appreciate any feedback or input you may have on EditorsWA or editing in

general. I'm only an email/phonecall/meeting away (just like the Ghostbusters but with a less catchy theme song).

*Emma Pearmain*

President

Forthcoming meeting (Note: meetings are now at Bagot Rd)

*November: Blog Nation*

**Date:** Tuesday 4 November 2008

**Time:** 7.30 pm

**Venue:** **Subiaco Community Centre (Activity Room)**  
203 Bagot Road, Subiaco

Entrance: Glass double doors opposite courtyard; turn left to find the Activity Room

Parking: Street parking in Bagot Road; Crossways Shopping Centre car park opposite

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

**RSVP:** to <[emma007@amnet.net.au](mailto:emma007@amnet.net.au)>

Have you ever wondered what blogs, vlogs, or RSS feeds are? Are you baffled by websites asking you to Digg them or follow them on Twitter? Come along to this month's meeting to learn more about virtual communication and what it means for editing; just because anyone can publish their thoughts doesn't always mean they should.

As it's Melbourne Cup Day, this will be an informal talk, and we'd love your input on blogging – so if you're part of a blogging network or have some favourites you follow religiously and think other members might enjoy, bring them along to the meeting and tell us just why we should be reading (or writing) them.

*Report on October 2008 meeting*

*Report (Part 1): Editors are bookworms*

Our instructions for the October meeting were to bring along our favourite book to try to learn what makes a good book. The first thing we figured out was that to have a single favourite book was like having a favourite family member. There are times when you like some better, but mostly you love them all. Needless to say, books far outnumbered authors at the October meeting.

My 'take home' lesson from the meeting was, what makes a book work for one reader may be exactly why the next reader hates it. Aside from the obvious ingredients – interesting writing, some sort of storyline, etc – we could not figure out a formula. The meeting was great for all us voracious readers as it was an opportunity to gloat about our favoured books. It is always good to have a social meeting and I found it interesting to see who reads what, and who shares what

tastes. I never pass up a chance to plug authors like Haruki Murakami (there, that's the spelling!) and add to my list of books to read.

*Claire Gaunt*

### *Report (Part 2): The list!*

When you get editors talking about books, the challenge will always be to get them to stop! One of the best anecdotes of the evening was from Mabel Kaplan, who remembered the first story she was ever told as a child. Heard on the radio as part of her long-distance education, *The Story of Little Black Sambo* is one that she remembers fondly. To many it seems politically incorrect and racist, but it reflects the times (late nineteenth century) in which it was written. The author wrote it on a train in India and a friend sent it to the UK to be published. It was later republished in the USA, and the illustrations were changed so that the characters were further stereotyped. Try to shed your modern sensibilities and read it to find the life-guiding story at its heart.

Then there is the joy of a good comfort read – those books that you read (and reread) when you are sick or tired or just want something light and entertaining. Polly Delany compared reading such books to 'getting into a warm bath': they just make you feel good. My personal favourite warm-bath reads are the humorous Georgette Heyer Regency romance novels.

Some of us do not seek comfort in our reading and read harrowing tales of Afghanistan and Rwanda; however, the stories of lives far worse than our own can make us feel better about our own lot.

The books discussed ranged from fantasy to popular fiction and, refreshingly, many Australian books made it onto our lists of favourites, including *The Alphabet of Light and Dark*, *Rhubarb* and *Shantaram*.

*Shantaram* was mentioned by several in the group. It was applauded for its great descriptions that take you right there. It is a long book and at least one in our group, Liz Albert, found it took a few goes to get started, but it is well worth the effort. Although promoted as a true story, it is still marketed as fiction as so many of the events have been condensed and reconstructed (perhaps to conceal those involved in the author's shady heroin-addicted past!).

Also frequently mentioned was *The Book Thief*. The idea of having Death as the narrator seems far-fetched, but everyone agreed that the author managed to pull it off convincingly. *The Book Thief* was mentioned by so many of our members that I will be hunting it down in bookstores soon.

In fact, the only book NOT recommended was a biography about Jack Nicholson, which spent too much time looking at who he met and revealed very little about the man.

We also discussed whether it was acceptable to read the ending before the rest of the book. Emma Pearmain never does for fear of the 'book police' but a few of us admitted sneaking a peek now and then. After all, knowing how it ends it is no

different to when you reread a well-thumbed favourite. Perhaps the rules of the 'book police' can be a topic for another day!

I compiled a list of the recommended books and people's comments. (I apologise if I missed anything as people do talk so quickly!)

Anderson, Jessica	<i>Tirra Lirra by the River</i>	This book is a gorgeous tale of women's imprisonment. Look for links to Alfred Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shallot'.
Asimov, Isaac	The 'Foundation' novels	These are favourite science-fiction classics.
Atwood, Margaret	Anything	Polly Delany confessed a love of anything by Atwood and frequently rereads <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> . <i>The Blind Assassin</i> was also mentioned as a favourite.
Bannerman, Helen	<i>The Story of Little Black Sambo</i>	The classic story book has been dubbed politically incorrect and misinterpreted, but it still conveys valuable lessons for life.
Brown, Dan	<i>Angels and Demons</i>	Light, shallow and hugely popular, this is an entertaining page-turner. The ambigrams make this one more interesting than <i>The da Vinci Code</i>
Byatt, A.S.	<i>Possession: A Romance</i>	Winning the Booker Prize in 1990, this incredibly literary novel tells the story of two contemporary scholars studying two nineteenth-century writers. Full of beautiful writing.
Cleave, Chris	<i>Incendiary</i>	Written as an emotionally raw first-person letter to Osama bin Laden, this novel was due to be launched the day before the London train bombings. It tends to polarise readers into those who love it and those who hate it.
Curtin, Amanda	<i>The Sinkings</i>	OK, so one of our members wrote this, but it made it to this list as all of us who have read it have genuinely enjoyed it.

Dahl, Roald	Children's stories	Dahl understands children and their desire for justice: the good are rewarded and the bad punished. Some admitted that they found Dahl's stories showed the seedy side of life, which upset them as children, but everyone loves Quentin Blake's illustrations.
Eliot, George	<i>Middlemarch</i> and <i>The Mill on the Floss</i>	If you are going to read nineteenth-century literature, you cannot go wrong with these.
Garner, Helen	<i>Joe Cinque's Consolation</i>	This compelling non-fiction book provoked the biggest discussion at one book club. It is the true story about a mentally disturbed woman who tries to murder her boyfriend.
Garner, Helen	<i>The First Stone: Some Questions about Sex and Power</i>	The writer has written her opinions and her self into this non-fiction book that makes you think about law, gender issues and sexual harassment. Garner does not shirk from telling it as it is.
Gourevitch, Philip	<i>We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda</i>	This harrowing story of Rwanda is very well written.
Hospital, Janette Turner	<i>Orpheus Lost: A Novel</i>	This is a surprisingly musical and lyrical work. (However, at least one member confessed that it was difficult to follow).
Hosseini, Khaled	<i>The Kite Runner</i>	This brilliant first novel about a boy growing up in Afghanistan earned much well-deserved praise.
Hulme, Keri	<i>The Bone People</i>	Here is another book that you want to read over and over again. That some parts remain mysterious and unclear is part of its magic.
Jacob, Trevor	<i>Southland, the Maritime Exploration of Australia</i>	This fascinating textbook about Australia's maritime history was produced for the bicentennial. For James Hansen it was a labour of love. No longer in print, you will find copies in the library (just don't look too closely at the maps).

Jones, Gail	<i>Sixty Lights</i>	Another beautifully written book with rich descriptions and lyrical prose.
le Guin, Ursula	<i>Lavinia</i>	Best known for science fiction, le Guin here writes historical popular fiction in brilliant prose.
Llewellyn, Kate	<i>The Waterlily: A Blue Mountains Journal and Dear You</i>	Llewellyn writes incredibly beautiful and imaginative prose. She is also a poet, so every description is a mini poem.
London, Joan	<i>The Good Parents: A Novel</i>	This local author writes a fascinating story of parenting and how parents and children move apart at various stages of life.
McKinley, Robin	<i>The Hero and the Crown</i>	The story of a misunderstood, suffering heroine.
Murakami, Haruki	Anything, especially <i>Kafka on the Shore</i>	This Japanese author writes stories that start out normally but develop bizarre twists, like a David Lynch movie. They show a little bit of fantasy and magic in everyday life.
Niffenegger, Audrey	<i>The Time Traveler's Wife</i>	This book provoked lively discussion about the 'rules' of time travel, especially in the one disturbing scene when the protagonist goes back in time and meets his younger self. Polly Delany ended up sobbing at 3 am and waking her husband to keep her company.
Peters, Ellis	<i>The Sanctuary Sparrow</i>	Like all of the titles in this series of monkish mysteries about Brother Cadfael, it is a good fun and entertaining read. Under the name Edith Pargeter, the author also writes some well-researched Welsh histories. She also writes as Elizabeth Peters.
Pratchett, Terry	The 'Discworld' series	People are either die-hard fans of Pratchett's absurd fantasy humour or they are not. Everyone must read at least one to find out.

Roberts, Gregory David	<i>Shantaram</i>	A mostly true story that tells of how an escaped prisoner ends up in India and is mistaken for a doctor because of a first-aid kit. It has a few weak spots but the great story carries you through.
Sebold, Alice	<i>The Almost Moon: A Novel</i>	On page 1 the daughter murders her mother, who has dementia. The rest of the book goes back to explain how they got to that point. It is a little tacky in spots but is worth reading for the portrayal of parent-child relationships. Some readers found they had little empathy for the characters.
Sereny, Gitta	<i>Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth</i>	Hitler's architect, who designed the gas chambers, is interviewed by a Jewish woman, and the conversation between them makes suspenseful reading. The biography, despite the subject, is not maudlin and focuses on the author-interviewer relationship.
Shriver, Lionel	<i>We Need to Talk about Kevin</i>	This incredibly thought-provoking book will keep you thinking about parenthood, nature vs. nurture, guilt and relationships long after you have put the book down. The only glitch was the narrator's occasional use of an unnaturally pretentious word. It might be frightening for those planning children in the near future, so pregnant women might want to avoid it.
Silvey, Craig	<i>Rhubarb</i>	Set in Fremantle the story tells of a blind girl and an agoraphobic cellist. It has moments that make you laugh and cry and was strongly recommended, during the Perth International Arts Festival, as the one book you must read.
Suskind, Patrick	<i>Perfume: The Story of a Murderer</i>	<i>Perfume</i> has an astonishing opening. The richly layered descriptions set the scene and break every rule about adjectives.

Watson, Don	<i>The Death Sentence and Weasel Words</i>	These tirades on the ever-present and irritating bureaucratise and gobbledegook will make you feel less alone next time you have to edit corporate or government documents.
Winton, Tim	<i>Cloudstreet</i>	A local classic, it was very helpful for a newly arrived immigrant trying to get a grip on Western Australian culture.
Wood, Danielle	<i>The Alphabet of Light and Dark</i>	Set in Bruny Island, off Tasmania, this book won the Australian Vogel Literary Award in 2002.
Zusak, Markus	<i>The Book Thief</i>	You never would think that having Death as the narrator would work, but it does. This emotionally touching novel will sweep you away and show you another side of death.

As a last note, when Kate Kenny sent in her apologies she said that she would have brought Ken Follet's *Pillars of the Earth*—a monumentally entertaining and engrossing experience that details medieval life and how those astonishing cathedrals were built. It's a book she looks forward to rereading every few years.

**Carla Morris**

Editors WA Christmas dinner

The Editors WA Christmas dinner this year will be in early December. Keep an eye on the mailing list emails for updates. More news soon!

Spotlight on the editor: *Janet Blagg*

*Longtime member of Editors WA*

I began to edit in 1984 as the result of a near nervous breakdown. I had just embarked on a teaching career, and couldn't cope at all. When a friend of mine moved into a shared house with the Senior Designer at Pitman I begged him to ask me to dinner so I could meet this person. I'd had plenty of experience in paste-up, had operated an offset printer, and had worked on a cooperatively run newspaper. Louise Lavarack was the designer, and she gave me some in-house freelance paste-up work. I soon showed an eye for spotting typos, and talked Pitman into giving me my first book to edit, under the wing of Senior Editor Angela Gundert. I was very lucky, as Angela was passionate about the job, and liked the fact that I was too.

Despite (or because of) having excellent mentoring, I came adrift on my first two books. The first was for the adult education market, by a painter who taught painting classes, mainly, it seemed, to middle-aged women. The problem was, he loathed his students, and when I pointed out that it wasn't politic to treat potential buyers with such scathing language (pointed out tactfully, of course), he



refused to budge. (He really was a frustrated – and misogynistic – artist!) The book had been contracted without being properly read, and the publisher supported me. In the end, the author was permitted to walk away with his bile, and interestingly, a university press ended up publishing it just as it was.

The second non-starter was a small book on menopause for the mass market, a new edition of a nice little earner for Pitman. The author was a Toorak doctor, and she almost literally threw me out of her house when I pointed out that the term ‘undercarriage’ would make no sense to any non-native-English speakers (and this was part of the projected market). Someone else finished the job, and I went on to work for several publishers, on all manner of books, by all manner of writers.

Now I do a little work for Fremantle Press, fiction and non-fiction, adult and children, and also work privately. My favourite thing these days is what I call ‘existential editing’ – by which I mean work that brings the author to the edge of their capacities, sometimes opening doors that were until then well disguised. I often find that seeking to resolve something the author is having difficulty with can, if approached in a deep and sound way (rather than the easy fudge they were hoping to get away with), lead to truly innovative writing.

These days too, lazily, I love to be given free rein (reign almost works), by authors who have no illusions about their ability and simply want their work taken to the next level. It is such bliss not having to be tactful!

*We’d like to hear from other members – simply send 350 words about yourself to <[rebecca.m.newman@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.m.newman@gmail.com)> and we’ll put you in the spotlight! (If you are a member of Editors WA but you’re not actually an editor, we’d like to hear your story too. We’ll change the section’s title for that month!)*

## IPEd Notes

### *News from the Institute of Professional Editors Limited October 2008*

**By the time readers of the society newsletters see these notes, IPEd’s first accreditation examination, held on Saturday 18 October will be almost done and dusted – an outcome of enormous significance for the future of our profession. I write ‘almost’ because the exam markers, before they finalise their task, will be participating in a moderation workshop in Sydney during the first weekend in November to ensure a consistent approach to assessment across jurisdictions. More on the exam next month.**

New on the IPEd website is a report by Pamela Hewitt<sup>1</sup> of her fourth national survey of editors, conducted in conjunction with the 2007 national conference in Hobart. There were 132 responses to the survey, just under half of the respondents describing themselves as freelance. The full report is recommended reading for all editors, but to whet your appetite I’ll list here a few of the main findings.

- The profession had not been taken over by men since the previous survey in 2005: 87% of the respondents were female.
- We're a highly educated lot: fewer than 10% of respondents did not have at least a first degree, and more than 60% had qualifications higher than an undergraduate degree.
- The proportion of editors reporting that they participated in professional development programs remained high at 97%.
- The proportion of full-time editors fell to 54%, compared with 60% in the previous survey, with 28% working part-time and 14% working at other jobs as well as editing. About half the respondents worked as employees.
- There was little change since 2005 in the rates that editors reported charging, the average hourly rate remaining at just above \$60. There were significant interstate variations in the average. As before, the standard deviation about the mean was large, with reported hourly rates ranging from \$34 to \$160.<sup>2</sup>
- Among the main challenges identified by respondents were extending skills and keeping abreast of technology.
- High priorities for respondents included that the professional associations take on a greater public promotion role, that professional development activities increase, and that more effort be put into mentoring and career advice and development.

Here's a little gem from the comments field of a survey form:

I am sick of hearing about women supplementing their income when they are stuck at home with kids by doing 'a bit of editing'. I wouldn't dream of doing 'a little doctoring' or 'a little engineering'. Editors need to be acknowledged as professionals, and important ones at that.

*Ed Highley*

IPed Secretary <[www.iped-editors.org](http://www.iped-editors.org)>

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela is a member of the Professional Editors' Association (NSW). Her previous surveys were conducted while she was a member of the Society of Editors (NSW).

<sup>2</sup> 'Rates revisited', a paper presented by Pamela Hewitt at a recent public meeting of the Professional Editors' Association is another recent addition to the website.

## New members

Welcome to:

Marisa Wikramanayake

Sue Thomson

Joanne Hum

Georgina Wilson

Julia Berney

Kate Ambrose

Sally Landman

Deadline for next *Bookworm*:  
Tuesday 18 November 2008

## Contacting Editors WA

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