

The SOCIETY of EDITORS (VICTORIA)

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 32 NUMBER 12

JUNE 2003

Next meeting

Annual General Meeting

The Society of Editors (Victoria) Inc

Rhumbaralla's Café (The Loft, upstairs)

342 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy (*Not* 23 Bourke Street, city)

Wednesday, 2 July 2003, 6.30 p.m. for 7 p.m.

Free for members; \$15 for non-members. Drinks at bar prices.

As is traditional, at this year's AGM, the Society will pay for members' food but not drinks. Non-members are welcome to attend, but pay for their own meal, and are ineligible to vote on any motion presented at the meeting.

This year, the format and approximate starting times will be as follows.

- **6.30:** Arriving, mixing and mingling, and purchasing drinks from the bar
- **7.00:** Enjoying the chef's special winter entrée of vegetable and red-lentil soup with bread rolls
- **7.30:** Grazing on sumptuous and plentiful food platters of steamed-shrimp *shoi mai*; ricotta-filled mushroom caps; assorted nori rolls; falafel balls; dolmades; spinach and ricotta rolls; tomato, red-onion and basil pizza slices; and chicken satay, after which the outgoing committee members will present their reports and stand down
- **8.30:** Savouring *petit fours* dessert platters of tartlets and slices, washed down with full-strength or decaf coffee or tea, during or after which Master of Ceremonies, Vane Lindesay, will read out the nominees' names and we'll elect the president and new committee members as required.

Please book with Deb Doyle by either email at <deb@hotlinks.net.au> or phone on (03) 9388 1571, **strictly before 5 p.m. on Monday, 30 June**. If you're looking for a parking spot near Rhumbaralla's, try any of the streets between Brunswick and Smith streets. Don't forget to let Deb know as soon as possible if you have to cancel your booking, so we don't waste money by over-catering. Please also let her know if you have any special dietary requirements.

Coming up: Wednesday, 6 August: *Editing corporate publications*, with editor Trischa Baker. Trischa will be presenting

In this issue

June meeting report – Sophie Cunningham	3
About us – Kirsten Slifirski	8
Membership renewal form	9
The Society's Constitution	10–11

this paper at the CASE National Conference in Brisbane in July. Venue: Rhumbaralla's (The Loft) in Fitzroy. Cost: \$25 members and \$30 non-members, for a set menu. Please read the next newsletter and our website for more details.

Aust Post = Lost Post

Australia Post has once again been entertaining us all by returning mail addressed to the Society. The problem seems to occur each time the Society renews its mail box subscription or lodges a redirection notice. The Society has played its part perfectly as a client, but nevertheless has been treated as a postal nonentity. I have carefully explained to the Carlton South PO that this is less than funny, especially when we've all seen the joke before. They have assured me that they will seek to amuse us in other ways (!) The problem was entirely within their procedures and the PO manager has told me that it will never re-appear. I am seeking ways to absolutely guarantee this.

All should be well by now, and I sincerely apologise for any irritation caused (especially to the wonderfully persistent member who mailed a renewal three times before it was finally delivered). Australia Post, too, has offered its apologies.

If anyone finds their mail being returned from the Society's PO Box address, please immediately email Robert Moore at <cqv@datafast.net.au> so the Pit Bull Terriers can be set loose.

Robert Moore



Published by
The Society of Editors (Victoria) Inc.
PO Box 176, Carlton South, VIC 3053
Telephone 03 9513 6608
<http://www.socedvic.org/>

News, comments, letters and other material for publication, review or mention in the *Newsletter* should be addressed to the *Newsletter* Editor at the address on the left.

Disclaimer: The views expressed by individuals in this *Newsletter* are their own and do not necessarily represent the views of the Society of Editors (Victoria) Inc.

Society President Renée Otmar has burrowed deep into her bunker for a much-needed rest this month. In her absence, I present some timely praise for editors ... from an author

While lounging around in London earlier this year, I came across a timely article of praise for editors in the *Telegraph* Arts and Books section. I had just finished reading Hilary McPhee's fascinating book, *Other people's words*, and was interested to read that an author of Joanna Trollope's popularity and success was prepared to say publicly what so many of us think, and discuss so frequently, '... there isn't a manuscript on this earth that can't be improved by good editing'.

Joanna Trollope believes editors have been 'elbowed aside and even trampled underfoot' as the commercial viability and celebrity of a writer takes precedence over 'valuable criticism of a manuscript'. She encourages publishers and writers to see the editor as 'the third eye, reading both in harmony with the creator and on behalf of us readers'.

Editor of genius

She was inspired to write about the importance of good editing after reading a book written by Scott Berg and published in America in 1981 by Macdonald Futura, entitled *Max Perkins – Portrait of an Editor of Genius, and of the*

Literary Giants He Assembled. She describes Max Perkins as someone to whom 'literature was a matter of life and death' and to that end, he discovered and nurtured authors like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, Ernest Hemingway and Alan Paton, to name a few. Perkins, she says, had a unique relationship with these 'talented, wayward, insecure, arrogant, dysfunctional and life-enhancing writers ... that was quite as creative as the more front-of-stage role of the novelists'.

Place us on a pedestal

She implores publishers to 'place editors back on the modest but richly merited pedestal that Max Perkins occupied' and describes the arts and media world as 'glib and silly and greedy' and needing to review the editing side of any creative relationship. She asks us to remember that 'the trouble with low-key editing is that we all suffer in the end ... readers most of all. Without editors we would not have half the writers whose books have changed our lives, nor would we have those books in the form that makes them so memorable'.

I would love to read Scott Berg's book about Max Perkins – does anyone out there have a copy or know where to find one? Please contact via email: <lzsteele@melbpc.org.au>.

Discounting bookstores

If you're a paid-up member of The Society of Editors (Victoria), you receive a 10 per cent discount on the recommended retail price of any publication you purchase at the following two bookstores – all you have to do is flash your membership card!

The Technical Book Shop
295 Swanston Street
Melbourne 3000
Phone: (03) 9663 3951
Fax: (03) 9663 2094

Email: <info@techbooks.com.au>

Website: <http://www.techbooks.com.au/>

Spellbound Books
460 Lygon Street
Brunswick East 3057
Phone: (03) 9386 5044

Membership report

This month we welcome four full members: Anthea Barrett who works with RMIT in the Publications and Design Unit; Melissa Faulkner who is with Lonely Planet; and Natasha Broadstock and Deborah Stone who both work freelance. Joanne Newell rejoins us also as a full member.

We also extend a warm welcome to Jenny Alexander and Beverly Gilbert as associate members.

As you may have noticed, a new shorter membership renewal form is included in this issue of the *Newsletter* on page 9. This form can be used for renewing membership, but the two-page form should still be used for new membership applications, or applications to transfer from associate to full membership. The

two-page form can be downloaded from the Society's website at www.socedvic.org or will be emailed in return to an enquiry to <cqv@datafast.net.au>.

Helen Bethune-Moore

Newsletter advertising rates

The Society of Editors (Victoria) has a mailing list which includes libraries and universities, as well as individual members. The *Newsletter* is published once a month except December, which is combined with the November issue. The deadline for each issue is the second Wednesday of each month.

Sizes and rates (incl. GST) are as follows:

Full page: 180 x 267 mm (tall) – \$110

Half page: 180 x 131 mm (horizontal only) – \$55

Third of a page: 180 x 85 mm (horizontal only) – \$38.50

Quarter page: 180 x 63 mm (horizontal) or 87 x 131 mm (tall) – \$27.50

Inserts: \$110 (delivered to newsletter distributors, no folding)

Please contact Liz Steele on

<lzsteele@melbpc.org.au> for further details.

A failure of imagination: the 'fiction versus non-fiction' debate

The June dinner meeting



It's a rare treat for us to have as our guest speaker a famous Australian editor, writer and publisher all in one. Sophie Cunningham didn't disappoint the 55 attendees at the June meeting. The following report is a copy edited version of Sophie's presentation.

In January in a *Sydney Morning Herald* article entitled 'Is the Novel Dead?' and in February in an *Age* article entitled 'Why Fiction Is on the Shelf', Mark Mordue put forward the thesis that fiction is in trouble and literary non-fiction is taking its place. I've edited both fiction and non-fiction, I'm the publisher of Mark's non-fiction book *Dastgah*, and I write fiction. I'm also a lover of literary non-fiction, and I concede that sales for that genre are probably more consistent than they are for fiction. However, against Mark, I'd argue that the difference in sales isn't the fault of the novel. In his article, Mark somewhat indelicately quotes me as saying, 'It's bullshit to say one is more authentic than the other.'

Insofar as fiction sales are dropping, I'd argue that this development is a failure of the wider, cultural imagination, and isn't, as many commentators argue, just a reflection of bad writers and poor publishing. In 2000, the American writer Richard Ford spoke along these lines when he made a presentation during Adelaide Writer's Week. He argued that the realm of the imagination is eluding readers more and more – that they are, in fact, irritated by it; they want facts, and when they do read fiction, they try to pin down the 'real' facts that underlie the novel. Amusingly, Ford went on to recount an anecdote about the number of people who threatened to punch him out for his infidelity after he wrote a novel in which the main character is unfaithful to his wife. We laugh at films such as the strange *Nurse Betty*, in which Renee Zellweger plays a woman who falls in love with 'Dr Greg', a soap-opera character, and persists in treating the actor as if he's the character he portrays. However, the reader does exactly this when encountering characters in novels, and in persisting, refuses to recognise that even if novelists take 'real' facts, they do something more with them.

Recently, I read Alice Sebold's wonderful novel *The Lovely Bones*. It's about a girl who's violently raped and murdered. The girl goes on to watch and narrate her family's life – from her version of heaven. I found this novel to be as powerful as it was whimsical: funny, sad, and beautifully written. In reading it, I was led to think about what it is to be 'strong', as the mother in the novel claims she is, in comparison with the woman's 'weak' husband. The point that Alice Sebold is making, of course, is that as a result of the husband's vulnerability in the face of horror, he has strength that his wife

never has. How do siblings go on to have a life not defined by loss? How do they compete with the dead, retrospectively perfect, sibling? What is heaven, and what is death?

After I read that novel, I was told that Alice Sebold had been violently raped as a young woman, and had written a memoir, *Lucky*, about the experience. *Lucky* is a painful, compelling book – but compared with *The Lovely Bones*, it's narrower and more self-obsessed in its scope. It is, in some ways, a legal drama, because Sebold was the first person in her state of America to successfully get a guilty verdict against a rapist. I think that the novel, *The Lovely Bones*, was better. That opinion aside, though, it was a different book: in writing it, Sebold had the advantage of years of distance as well as more writing experience. To quote the Australian writer Brian Castro, 'Personal experience is not a story unless a writer makes it so.'

Brian Castro has been working on a semi-fictionalised 'family memoir'. At this year's Sydney Writer's Festival, he said that in using defined terms such as 'fiction' and 'non-fiction', commentators ignore why writers write. The imagination is rebellious, and a piece of writing shouldn't be approached according to how it's categorised. Writing any story involves overhearing, mishearing, and pushing facts into and out of shape. It inevitably transcends limits of realism. In Castro's words, 'I've always found life limiting.' As Mark Mordue himself argues in the two articles cited, it's because of the blurring of genres in a lot of recent non-fiction works that they're exciting. Perhaps the issue isn't fiction versus non-fiction; it's the borderline between the two that can result in so much good writing.

In general, there's this sense that the novel is always being 'ticked off', like a naughty child, by its parents, the critics. In a separate session at this year's Sydney Writer's Festival, the Australian writer Delia Falconer responded to recent criticisms that the Australian novel isn't 'contemporary' or 'political' enough. James Hall, the books editor for *The Australian*, has asked, 'Where are our novels about politics, sport and business?', and a recent issue of the *Sydney Morning Herald* featured a critique by Malcolm Knox in which the writer asked, 'Why aren't our novelists dealing with contemporary reality?'. This is the point at which the question 'Where is the contemporary novel?' drives me crazy. In the early to mid-1990s, when a lot of novels were set in the present, the works were totally dismissed – I know, because I published many of the books in question, and was constantly being asked for quotes about 'all these "grunge" novels'. The questions I got asked included 'Where's the depth?', 'Who cares?' and 'Where's the sense of history?'.

Delia Falconer argues that the current emphasis on Realpolitik reflects Howard's rhetoric and the extremely literal culture that's grown up around all debate in this country over the past decade. An extension of this factor is the idea that a novel should bear a 'mission statement' – that it should be

'good' for us, like social realism was mooted to be in the 1930s. The Right wants control over the messages that artists put out there, and the Left, in its desperation, wants to become clear about artists' position. *Overland* editor Ian Syson, quoted by Mark Mordue, suggests something similar: 'Maybe there is also something in the Australian make-up that works against fiction. We don't reward dreamers and visionaries, but practical people. At its best, this is manifest in the position that people like Fred Hollows and Weary Dunlop hold in the national psyche. But, at its worst, it ends up being the moral and intellectual vacuum inculcated by people like John Howard and Alan Jones.'

All this emphasis on having novelists – and, indeed, non-fiction writers – 'do the right thing' is suggestive of critics' distrust of having readers make up their own minds. Delia Falconer again: 'If the last thirty years of literary theory have taught us one thing it is that we have no guarantee over what readers "do" with what they read. One of the most humbling aspects of working as a writer is that you can't predict the uses readers will make of your fiction. Literature can sustain readers in surprising ways, perhaps with something as simple as a beautiful sentence or experiment with form – I am always moved by stories of those concentration-camp survivors who sustained themselves with the poetry of Heine.'

Text Publishing's Michael Heyward makes a related point when he says, 'Great fiction often works in a subterranean way. Fiction writers are more capable of working against the grain of society than [are] non-fiction writers.'

In many countries, merely writing a novel is a political action – think of the work that Pen does, and of the number of writers in prison. Falconer again: 'I've always been particularly persuaded by the critic Milan Kundera's argument that the novel is a form whose sheer existence carries within it its own ontology, a radical, humorous, and anti-authoritarian way of seeing the world, that is fundamentally at odds with authority, precisely because it creates a parallel universe in which characters are fully rounded and where authorial judgment is suspended, where things slip beyond the author's grasp. It is anti-reductionist that is not reducible to a single issue. If the novel teaches the reader anything it is to be curious about others and to try to comprehend truths that differ from his own.'

It could be argued that it's precisely because the novel is so political that in the current political climate, readers don't read it.

In all this debate, the commentators are missing the skill involved in writing (good) fiction. The fact is that fiction writers have creative freedoms through which they're enabled to reach truths that non-fiction writers, constrained by facts, can't always find.

The biographers of the poet Sylvia Plath have faced much torment because of the control exercised by Olwyn Hughes, the sister of Plath's husband Ted Hughes, over the Hughes estate, and this is a point that one of Olwyn Hughes's critics makes forcefully in *The New York Review of Books*: 'Ms. Hughes is unstoppable. Having collaborated in the trashing of Sylvia Plath she is now trashing Plath's American editor. I have long ceased to take her statements of fact seriously, but for



the record, I should point out, although she is not an executor of the Plath estate, she is in fact its agent, and therefore has much to do with the use by outsiders of Sylvia Plath's writing.'

As a publisher, I've worked on many biographies, and, to be indelicate yet again, the shit always hits the fan when the subjects of the biography read the manuscript and dispute the approach that the biographer has taken. Support is often withdrawn as the book is hitting the shops, and the publisher and author lose tens of thousands of dollars in the form of lost sales. Whose truth should a biography, or any book, be?

At present, I'm working on a second novel that's based on the real life of a remarkable Russian-American woman who, for the sake of this article, I'll call Natasha. In the past, Natasha's family have been uncomfortable about having her biography written, because she led a tumultuous and tempestuous life. I'm beginning to think I could do the spirit of her story more justice by using it as the inspiration for fiction rather than by losing it in a minefield of facts that would sometimes be a distraction from the story I want to emerge: a woman's life that began with wealth, abuse and incredible beauty and that ended, some 40 years later, when, having become a Buddhist nun, Natasha died in meditation. The story I want to write is one of a spiritual journey. If the reader were to know every detail of her real life – the sex, the drugs, the rock 'n' roll – the details might detract from the larger truths as they unfold. Also, I might feel more responsible to the people with whom I've spoken in order to give their version of the truth of this woman's life.

In contemporary writing, another major hurdle for non-fiction writers is defamation, the laws of which are being used to control them these days – as, occasionally, they're being used to control fiction writers as well. Like any publisher, I could get very bogged down in my own version of the story of 'The Day I Got Sued'. Many of us have these stories to tell. Suffice it to say that litigation can be very distressing and stressful, and the threat or experience of it can lead to over-cautious publishing and low-level censorship. It's an effective *modus operandi* – and the government is 'trying it on' now with reference to the ABC.

In Mark Mordue's article, a recurring theme that I've noticed myself over the years is what the Australian writer Jack Marx

calls 'a real "us" and "them" thing going on in the publishing world: we literati versus those scummy journalists who want to be novelists'. Marx's fellow Australian writer Robert Drewe says that this polarity factor was a problem at the start of his career and that it's an edge that many journalists and non-fiction writers who are trying to move into the world of literature today still keenly feel. I think this is, to some extent, paranoia – it is tough for anyone trying to break into the industry. Robert Drewe might have felt slighted as a result of his journalistic background, but he's now one of the literati he once complained about. The same applies to Jack Marx. People, myself included, did have trouble with his approach to writing *Sorry* (the biography of the Easybeats' singer Stevie Wright), in which he writes about sharing drugs with Wright and of almost raping a woman when in the former singer's company. Sure, there's a place for gonzo journalism, but it's naive for writers to think there won't be a public interrogation of this type of approach. This isn't about literary snobbery: both fiction and non-fiction writers struggle with ethical issues, which should always be subjected to public debate.

Another point that Mordue makes is that 'the catalogue of recent local literary fiction was not up to the same consistent standard. For every big novel from the likes of Peter Carey, Tim Winton and Frank Moorhouse, there were a plethora of second-raters and wannabes, postmodern failures and hype riders beached in "grunge-lit", "chick-lit" and assorted niche-marketed clichés.' I'm sick of reading stuff like this: lots of good novels are published every year. It's possible, though, that so many novels are out there that readers have trouble identifying which ones are for them. In recent years, I've published several first novels, and I know that if I'd published them 10 years earlier, they would have done well. This isn't to say they weren't at all flawed, just that they would have been received by an enthusiastic and interested audience. These days, sales are usually very low, and I assume that the reason isn't poorer quality but greater competition.

Similarly, I've published second novels by writers who enjoyed great success with their first novel but haven't even had their book reviewed the second time around. If the reviews were bad, I and the authors could 'take it on board' – but things aren't even getting to that stage. A similar syndrome is occurring in the film industry, in which first films are being



feted and in which by the time the second film is released, the directors are old news.

These days, there's definitely more of a niche market for fiction and non-fiction. A point that the Australian writer Fiona Giles makes in Mordue's articles is suggestive of the problems created for some readers as a result of this factor: there's 'an obsession with being connected, often to special-interest communities'. Giles also says, 'People can be at sea with new fiction in the way they might be when they see a new painting.'

Delia Falconer cites some figures that are indicative of why so many good novels are being lost: 'Review journals of the '80s such as the *Age Monthly Review* could consider Australian writing in long articles that were not unusual in going over 10,000 words compared to the average 900-word review in today's papers.'

In *Timepieces*, Drusilla Modjeska's recent book of essays, the writer states, 'I used to read every Australian novel that came out – but, one after another, they disappointed and irritated me.' I don't believe she did read every novel that came out – no one could. However, even if she had read them, I'd suggest that the irritation she speaks of – and she isn't alone here – grows out of our discomfort with change, to do with both the world in which we live and the style in which writers write.

I recently published a novel called *Chemical Palace*, by Fiona McGregor. It's beautifully written and experimental, and it has prose that flows like music. It's about attempting to carve an alternative experience for oneself in a city – Sydney – that's being taken over by developers. Not many people are buying it, though, I suspect because they're confronted by the world about which McGregor writes. But is the novel's job to 'please'? If what readers are looking for is to be pleased, it's to their detriment. I believe that reading should be about expanding, not reinforcing, one's worldview. As an illustration of this point, McGregor's award-winning collection of stories *Suck My Toes*, which came out some years ago now, received one review in which the critic expressed boredom at being confronted with all this writing about 'S&M' and expressed a desire to read more books about lesbians trying to pay off their mortgages... Howard's Australia, indeed.

Another point that Modjeska has made recently is that 'a lot of Australian fiction feels as if it is being written for somewhere else'. Definitely, she's picking up on the globalisation of the publishing industry, and on the fact that a certain type of book is more likely to become an international success. I agree that there are too many books – both fiction and non-fiction – that have similar covers out there, all competing for our attention, and that in trying to 'hit the big time' with every book, publishers are leaning towards books that float more easily between countries and markets.

However, I'd also argue that younger Australians' sense of Australia and of what it means to be Australian has changed dramatically. This point is one of the things I've written about in my novel *Geography*: the fact that, for the middle class anyway, as a result of email, cheaper airfares, global shopping

Continued on page 7

The second edition of 'The Torch' by Deb Doyle contains the answers to the sentence exercises presented in the first edition. We have also received a response to the first 'Torch' from Janet Mackenzie, currently in the United States. Are there other members out there with other views on these grammatical issues? Please email the Newsletter – we welcome your contributions – Liz Steele

The torch

By Deb Doyle

Welcome back, all you torch bearers who read and responded to the reification rave in the first 'Torch' column. I know you can't wait for the answers to the 10 sentence exercises, so here they are. Please note that they're sample answers only – your own answers are probably just as acceptable.

- 1 The study looked at the rising incidence of diabetes among Australians.
 - In the study, the researchers (medical students, doctors, health officials) examine Australia's rising incidence of diabetes.
 - In the study, the rising incidence of diabetes among Australians is examined (by the researchers, medical students, doctors, health officials).
 - The study is an examination of the rising incidence of diabetes among Australians.
 - The researchers (medical students, doctors, health officials) undertook the study in order to examine Australia's growing diabetes problem.
- 2 Full-time employment will help you pay the bills.
 - When you're employed full time, you're better able to pay the bills.
 - When you work full time, you can pay your bills more easily.
 - Full-time employment is necessary for paying the bills.
 - To pay the bills, you have to work full time (have a full-time job).
- 3 According to Ecstasy users, the drug helps them feel affectionate and connected.
 - According to Ecstasy users, they feel affectionate and connected when they take the drug.
 - Ecstasy users say that when they take the drug, they feel affectionate and connected.
 - Using Ecstasy is a synthetic way of feeling affectionate and connected.
 - Ecstasy users reportedly enjoy feelings of affection and connectedness when they take the drug.
- 4 Walking will lower your blood pressure.
 - If you walk, your blood pressure will be lowered.
 - When you walk, your blood pressure decreases.
 - Walking is an effective way to lower your blood pressure.
 - If you want to lower your blood pressure, get out and walk!
- 5 Pressing Button B will give you an electric shock.
 - If you press Button B, you'll get an electric shock.
 - Avoid getting an electric shock: don't press Button B.
 - Pressing Button B will cause (result in) an electric shock.
 - If you fancy getting an electric shock, press Button B.

- 6 Many benefits will be provided by the new accounting system.
 - Many benefits will ensue (flow) from the new accounting system.
 - Many benefits will be provided as a result of the new accounting system.
 - The new accounting system will result in many benefits.
 - Our employees (company) will benefit from implementing the new accounting system.
- 7 Table 4.1 shows the relevant statistics.
 - Table 4.1 is a summary of the relevant statistics.
 - For a summary of the relevant statistics, see Table 4.1.
 - The relevant statistics are summarised in Table 4.1.
 - In Table 4.1, we set out the relevant statistics.
- 8 Figure A illustrates the cross-section.
 - Figure A is an illustration of the cross-section.
 - For an illustration of the cross-section, see Figure A.
 - The cross-section is illustrated in Figure A.
 - In Figure A, I illustrate the cross-section.
- 9 Donating money will make you happier at Christmas time.
 - If you donate money at Christmas time, you'll be happier during the festive season.
 - Donating money at Christmas time is one way of being happier during the festive season.
 - Be happier at Christmas time: donate money to your favourite charities.
 - Christmas time: the time for donating money and being happier for it.
- 10 Do the chairs need fixing?
 - Do the chairs require fixing?
 - Do the chairs have to be fixed?
 - Are the chairs in need of repair?
 - Should we get Joe Bloggs to fix the chairs?

Some writers and editors prefer to retain the reification because they believe it's an accepted and expected form of shorthand for conveying their message. Others prefer to retain the active voice and therefore the reification in order to avoid using the wordier passive voice. Yet others prefer to reify because to rewrite the sentence would involve increasing the number of words in it: the fewer words the better, and brevity is the soul of wit.

I believe that the one and only criterion for good writing is whether the meaning is crystal clear for the reader, whoever or however old or educated he or she is. Once you start eliminating reification, the sky's the limit: you're suddenly empowered to cut words in other sentences and to therefore keep to any word limit imposed on you. Bearing this in mind, whenever you're writing or editing, you might like to recite the following mantra: 'Reification gives me the pip.'

Rectifying reification

I welcome the discussion of English grammar and usage in the newsletter, but I was amazed to read Deb Doyle's opinions in her column, The Torch, in the April issue. Personification is not, as she claims, a problem to be 'got around' but a legitimate figure of speech, as essential as metaphor.

According to Deb, 'In any sentence, the meaning comes from the verb/s, not the noun/s.' She offers no evidence for this claim, and indeed it is easy to show that it contradicts itself.

If we substitute X for the nouns in this sentence it reads 'In any X, the X comes from the X, not the X', which is completely meaningless. It seems that this particular verb is falling down on the job.

Conversely, if we replace the verb, we get 'In any sentence, the meaning X from the verb/s, not the noun/s.' This does convey some meaning, which shows that the nouns are pulling their weight.

The truth is, of course, that a sentence is a gestalt; its meaning comes from the combination of all its elements, both words and syntax.

The 'improved' sentences that Deb recommends are clumsy circumlocutions that transgress a fundamental rule of good writing: omit needless words (Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*, Rule 13). The ostentatious avoidance of the imaginary problem also offends against several editorial imperatives:

- don't make work for yourself
- don't alter the author's meaning or emphasis
- if it's bearable, leave it
- don't antagonise the author.

The anthropomorphising of computers is hard to resist. When the technician tells me that he has taught my computer to talk to my printer, I'm delighted by the news – by the *meaning*. Of course I know that computers don't really learn and printers don't really listen, but such personification is clearer for the lay person than a correct technical explanation. We all know that Nature doesn't actually care about a vacuum one way or the other, but we find it meaningful to speak as if she did. Language, fortunately, works on levels beyond the literal, and editors recognise and utilise the power of figurative expression.

Janet Mackenzie

Do you want to get more involved?

Nominations are still open for the Society's committee. Specific roles/portfolios are discussed and decided on at our handover meeting in July following the election of the new committee at the Annual General Meeting on 2 July. You must be a full and financial member of the Society to nominate for the committee.

Nominations can be sent to the Society's postal address, PO Box 176 Carlton South VIC 3053 or via email to <office@otmarmiller.com.au> or can be taken on the night of the AGM.

Please consider becoming part of the decision-making body of your Society – a rewarding and exhilarating experience!

For more information please contact Renée at the above email address. The nomination form is also available on our website.

Continued from page 5

franchises and jobs that take us travelling a lot, our sense of place is changing dramatically – not to mention the fact that we're being reminded of globalisation's heavy hand due to workplace restructuring. I'd argue that a person living in Sydney is going to have a lot more in common with someone living in Los Angeles than with someone living in Broken Hill: it isn't always national boundaries through which we're defined. All these things are part of what's being called globalisation. It's a process I'm critical of in many ways – but it certainly informs my identity, and many people's identity, these days.

Martin Flanagan, in Mordue's article, and many other people, have talked about how difficult it is to develop a national identity when you're writing from the city. That might be true – but it doesn't mean that city-based writers aren't writing in an authentic voice. It's always been part of Australian culture for writers to hark back to the bush in their search for identity. However, if you'll allow me to use 'real facts' to bolster my argument, most Australians who've come here on a boat over the past 230 years have lived in a city. Romantics mightn't like the fact that you're more likely to find our national heartbeat in the anonymous buildings, banks and cafes of Sydney than in the red desert at the centre of our continent – but that's the thing with novelists: you can't, and shouldn't, tell them what to do or what to write about, or expect their story to be predictable. What you can ask of them is that they challenge you; that their story be well written – though even 'well written' is a highly subjective term; that they enable you to empathise with people and places you might never have known you'd like; and that they set your imagination free.

The Society of Editors (Victoria) wishes Sophie every success in her new career as a full-time writer.

Deb Doyle

ABOUT US

Kirsten Slifirski

Freelance editor



Kirsten Slifirski is currently the Society's Freelance Affairs Officer. She enjoys the flexibility of freelance work, but really wishes her computer wasn't in the kitchen. She has combined an editing career with university teaching.

What's the best thing about your job?

Those moments of luminescence, when what a writer has communicated inadequately, suddenly shines because of me.

What's the worst thing about your job?

Trying to fit it into the rest of my life and trying to fit the rest of my life into it.

What's the best thing about being an editor?

Working with people who engage with the world of ideas, having exposure to a broad range of disciplines, having to understand a lot of new information very quickly, sending a writer away confident and enthusiastic. And again, that pleasure of making it shine, freeing ideas from the fog.

What was your first editing job?

Probably one of my little sister's school essays.

How did you become an editor?

Through teaching different kinds of writing to different groups of people for different purposes: monks in a Franciscan monastery in Cracow, recalcitrant schoolgirls, university students, broadcast journalists, people who had been 'outplaced' (that was big in the eighties) ... I developed a strong interest and, eventually, an expertise in the mechanics of language and different writing genres. The thing that I finally realised was common to my disparate work experiences was the pleasure I experienced in making people's words work.

What are the essential qualities of being a good editor?

An eye for and love of detail, knowledge of languages, capacity to grasp a large volume of complex material quickly, ability to develop an intimate relationship with an author without cannibalising them or their ideas (though marriage can work apparently).

What's the most rewarding job you've ever done?

I've mentioned this before in this publication, but, again I'd have to say working as script editor on Charlotte Roseby's short film *Still Breathing*, which screened on SBS last year to great critical acclaim. Being a sounding board for Charlotte

as she shaped the film, encouraging and cajoling her through the peaks and troughs of the process was always stimulating. I came away from every discussion feeling energised and excited.

What's the most tedious job you've ever done?

Please see 'which mistake will you never make again?'

Which word will you never spell incorrectly again?

This goes back to school days: 'surprise'.

Which mistake will you never make again?

Saying 'yes, (that money is outrageous) I'd love to come and work for your (really boring) organisation (to translate incomprehensible technical gobbledygook into plain instructional English, sit in front of a bad computer screen for ten hours a days, in an unairconditioned office during the hottest summer on record, with people whose dress sense is so gender dictated they all look as if they're in drag, get into trouble for taking off my shoes before my rapidly swelling ankles cut off my circulation, drive too many kilometres from home on a freeway I can't take all the way because I refuse to pay the toll). You don't mind that I'm 38 weeks pregnant? That's so progressive'. It all ended in tears, oedema and something like hives. Venality has its price. But we do have a really comfortable, hideously expensive couch.

Do you prefer to edit on hard copy or on screen?

I love editing on screen. The cleanness, the paper saving, the efficiency, sending documents hither and thither through cyberspace. My focal length now matches the distance from my chair to the computer screen which makes me seem a lot older than I really am when trying to read the Melways. I also enjoy hard copy editing if I can do it with a really sharp 2H pencil, or preferably with one of those pens with the pencil leads inside them and satisfying push button that releases more lead when the one you're using breaks after a particularly decisive editing moment.

What advice would you give to editing students?

There are so many possibilities. Being flexible and working across a range of writing genres maximises your options when you start earning money, but think about how (and where) you really want to spend your day.

What book would you most like to have edited?

For the privilege of engaging with the virtuosity and palpable sensuality of the writing, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, which I've only just read. For its breadth of ideas and academic writing, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy's *Mother Nature*.

The Society of Editors (Victoria) Inc.

PO Box 176, Carlton South, Victoria, 3053, Australia

ABN 92 015 006 730

<http://www.socedvic.org/>

Membership renewal 2003–2004

Membership of the Society of Editors (Victoria) Inc. is open to anyone interested in the Society's aims.

Full membership is open to anyone with qualifications in editing and publishing recognised by the Society and one year's full-time experience in industry, or two years' full-time experience in industry if you do not have a relevant editing and publishing qualification. Those applying for full membership need to provide details of two referees. (Full members are able to vote at the Annual General Meeting, hold office on the committee and have an entry in the *Freelance Register*.)

Associate membership is open to anyone with an interest in the publishing and associated industries and the Society's aims generally.

Distant membership is available in either of the above categories if you live more than 50 kilometres from the Melbourne GPO.

Membership fees are due and payable on 1 July each year. Existing members who have not renewed their subscriptions by 1 October are deemed to have resigned.

To renew your membership for 2003–2004, fill in Part A of this form and also Part B if your details have changed.

Part A

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ (business) _____ (after hours)

Email _____

Category of membership (see above) (All fees include GST)

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|------|--|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full | \$66 | <input type="checkbox"/> Full (distant) | \$38.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Associate | \$66 | <input type="checkbox"/> Associate (distant) | \$38.50 |

I enclose a cheque for \$ _____ Name on cheque _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Part B

Current employment

1. Are you currently working as an editor? Yes No

2. If yes, state whether this work is:

- Freelance Type of work _____
- In-house Employer _____

For a new member application form, go to the Society's website <http://www.socedvic.org/>

The Society of Editors (Victoria) Inc. Constitution

1 Name

- 1.1 The name of the society shall be The Society of Editors (Victoria) Incorporated, hereinafter called the Society.

2 Objects

- 2.1 The objects of the Society shall be:
- to promote contacts between its members;
 - to promote the exchange of ideas and the dissemination of information on matters of professional interest;
 - to assist in establishing and maintaining high standards of editing;
 - to establish and maintain liaison with other organisations in all matters affecting editors as a group.

3 Membership

- 3.1 Full membership shall be open to anyone who has qualifications in editing acceptable to the Committee and who has been engaged professionally in any aspect of editing for publication for at least one year full-time or equivalent, or to anyone who has been engaged professionally in editing for publication for at least two years full-time or equivalent in the opinion of the Committee. Each application for full membership must be supported by two referees who are themselves full members of the Society or otherwise acceptable to the Committee.
- 3.2 Associate membership shall be open to any interested person. Associate members shall not have the right to vote or to take office in the Society.
- 3.3 Membership is at all times at the discretion of the Committee, and shall become operative on payment of the appropriate subscription.
- 3.4 Subscription fees payable shall be determined by the Committee and shall only be varied at the beginning of any financial year.
- 3.5 New members joining the Society after 1 January shall be eligible for membership rights on payment of half the prescribed fee for that year.
- 3.6 Members whose subscriptions are three months in arrears are deemed to have resigned.
- 3.7 Members living outside a 50-kilometre radius of the GPO, Melbourne, shall be entitled to a discount on their subscription at the discretion of the Committee.
- 3.8 Subscriptions shall be payable in advance and shall fall due on 1 July.
- 3.9 The Secretary shall maintain a register of members in which shall be entered the full name, address and date of entry of the name of each member and the register shall be available for inspection by members on request.
- 3.10 Any person who has given substantial service to editing in Australia or in promoting the aims of the Society may be granted honorary life membership of the Society, subject to the following procedures:
- candidates shall be nominated and seconded by

two financial full members of the Society, such nominations to be in writing and to include a statement on the eligibility of the nominee for this honour;

- nominations are to be submitted to the Committee at least thirty days before the Annual General Meeting, and the granting of honorary life membership shall be entirely at the discretion of the Committee;
- the names of new honorary life members shall be announced by the outgoing President at the Annual General Meeting, and their citations shall be read, and these names and citations shall be published in the next edition of the *Newsletter*.

- 3.11 An honorary life member shall be entitled to all the privileges of a full member, but without the payment of membership fees, but in all other respects shall be subject to the rules of the Society.

4 Committee

- 4.1 The business of the Society shall be carried on by a Committee elected by a simple majority at an Annual General Meeting. The quorum for such a meeting shall be ten members.
- 4.2 The Committee shall consist of at least five persons, who must be financial full members of the Society.
- 4.3 The President shall be elected as such, and shall not hold office for more than two consecutive years.
- 4.4 The Committee shall distribute among themselves the offices of Secretary, Treasurer and such other offices as are considered necessary.
- 4.5 Nominations for offices will be received from members by the Secretary. Members will be notified of nominations at least one week before the AGM. The closing date will be set by the Committee from year to year. Elections will take place at the AGM.
- 4.6 Postal votes will be accepted if received by the Secretary by 5 p.m. on the last business day before the AGM. If fewer than five nominations are received by the closing date then nominations can be taken at the AGM. Election will take place at the AGM.
- 4.7 The Committee may co-opt additional members as necessary.
- 4.8 A simple majority of the Committee shall constitute a quorum for Committee meetings.
- 4.9 Casual vacancies in any of the offices shall be filled by invitation of the Committee and persons filling such vacancies shall hold office until the following Annual General Meeting.
- 4.10 The office of an officer of the Society or of an ordinary member of the Committee shall become vacant if the officer or member ceases to be a member of the Society, resigns or becomes bankrupt.

5 Funds

- 5.1 The funds of the Society shall be derived from entrance fees, annual subscriptions, donations and other sources as the Committee determines.

5.2 The Society is not carried on for the purpose of profit or gain of its individual members and the income and property of the Society wheresoever derived shall be applied solely towards the promotion of the objects of the Society as set forth in the constitution; and no portion thereof shall be paid or transferred directly or indirectly as dividends, bonuses or otherwise howsoever by way of profit to any past or present member of the Society, provided that nothing herein shall prevent the payment in good faith of remuneration to any officer or servant of the Society or to any member of the Society in return for any service actually rendered to the Society.

5.3 If upon winding up or dissolution of the Society there remains after the satisfaction of all debts and liabilities any property whatsoever, the same shall not be paid to or distributed among members of the Society, but shall be given or transferred to some other fund, authority or institution having objects similar to this Society and which shall prohibit distribution of its or their income and property among its or their members.

6 Amendments

6.1 This constitution and the statement of purposes of the Society shall not be altered except in accordance with the Associations Incorporation Act.

7 Meetings

7.1 General Meetings

The Society shall hold general meetings, including an Annual General Meeting, at least six times a year.

7.2 Special Meetings

Special meetings shall be called on fourteen days notice on the decision of the Committee or at the written request of at least ten members.

7.3 Annual General Meeting

An Annual General Meeting shall be held at least once every calendar year not later than the last day of July.

7.4 Notices of meetings may be forwarded to members by prepaid post or circulated in the *Newsletter* immediately preceding the date of the meeting.

7.5 Quorum

A quorum for general, special and Annual General Meetings shall be ten.

7.6 Upon a question arising at a general meeting or special meeting a member shall have one vote only, which may be given personally or by proxy, provided that in the latter case notice of such proxy has been lodged with the Secretary before the meeting.

8 Finance

8.1 A bank account shall be opened in the name of the Society. Cheques shall be signed by any two of the President, Treasurer and Secretary.

8.2 The financial year shall end on 30 June.

8.3 A balance sheet shall be presented to the Annual General Meeting.

9 Seal

9.1 The Common Seal of the Society shall be kept in the custody of the Secretary.

9.2 The Common Seal shall not be affixed to any instrument except by authority of the Committee and the affixing of the Common Seal shall be attested by the signatures of any two of the President, Treasurer and Secretary.

10 Custody and inspection of records

10.1 All financial documents and securities shall be kept in the custody of the Treasurer. All other documents shall be kept in the custody of the Secretary. All books, documents and securities shall be made available for inspection by members on request.

11 Publication of the constitution

11.1 This constitution, as last amended, shall be published each year in the Society's *Newsletter*.

[The Constitution was last amended at the 1999 AGM.]

On the Web

While searching the Net can be a tedious and time-consuming exercise, it can also turn up absolute gems of information. The two sites below may be of interest to our profession.

World Wide Words

<http://www.worldwidewords.org/>

Michael Quinion's fascinating site on the etymology and usage of the English language has been described as 'a veritable karmasutra [sic] of linguistic delights' (*Weekend Australian*, 23 May 2003). It has been going since 1996, which is almost ancient in Internet terms, and it's well worth a visit. You can also subscribe to its email newsletter to get a weekly dose of word fun in your Inbox.

Strange and Unusual Dictionaries

<http://blueray.com/dictionary/>

This site features three 'strange and unusual' dictionaries. The dictionary of one-letter words naturally has only 26 entries, but each entry lists numerous meanings (25 for the letter 'S' alone). Then there are dictionaries for all-consonant words ('krrk' and 'nnngh' spring to mind) and all-vowel (including 'y') words (such as 'euoi'). It also lists numerous other interesting dictionaries in print and online which are in a similar vein (such as 'The Word Museum' and a 'Symbols Encyclopedia'). Great for Scrabble™ players!

*Contributions are welcome – email Lan Wang
<lanwang@wovenwords.com.au>.*

Dates for your diary

July meeting

Wednesday, 2 July 2003

Membership renewal

Due on 1 July 2003



SURFACE
MAIL

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

If undeliverable,
please return to
PO Box 176
Carlton South VIC 3053
Print Post Approved
PP 349050/00019
ISSN 0311 0907

Committee 2002–2003

President

Renée Otmar (In-house) 9278 8131
(Freelance) 9866 4308
office@otmarmiller.com.au

Treasurer

Marta Veroni (Freelance) 9383 6717

Secretary/MEAA Liaison

Rob Moore (Freelance) 9534 3344
cq@datafast.net.au

Meetings

Deborah Doyle 9388 1571
deb@hotlinks.net.au

Membership

Helen Bethune Moore (Pearson Education)
hbm@datafast.net.au

Newsletter team

Editor and advertising: Liz Steele (Freelance) lzsteele@melbpc.org.au

Layout: Lan Wang (Freelance) lanwang@wovenwords.com.au

Proofreading: Anne Findlay (Freelance) afinlay@netspace.net.au

Training

Brett Lockwood (Freelance) 9480 1789

Minutes Secretary

Catherine Hunt
catherine_hunt@ekno.com

Web Manager

Ann Philpott (Freelance) 9830 0494

Freelance Affairs Coordinator

Kirsten Slifirski (Freelance)
thegirls@labyrinth.net.au

CASE Accreditation Delegate

Janet Mackenzie (Freelance) 5775 2988
jmack@mansfield.net.au

Immediate Past President

Pia Herbert (Freelance) 9380 2223

Honorary Life Members

John Bangsund, Ruth Dixon, Anne Godden, Beryl Hill, Nick Hudson,
Colin Jevons, Susan Keogh, Vane Lindesay, Janet Mackenzie, Sally Milner,
Renée Otmar, Teresa Pitt, Yvonne Rousseau, Wendy Sutherland, Basil Walby,
Lee White

John Curtain (d. 1999)

Beatrice Davis (d. 1992)

Frank Eyre (d. 1988)

Stephen Murray-Smith (d. 1988)

Membership of the Society is open to anyone engaged professionally in any aspect of editing for publication, or who has had such experience in the past. Associate membership is open to anyone interested in the Society's activities. Associate members may not vote or hold office in the Society.

Membership application/renewal forms are available from the Secretary, the Membership Secretary or the Society's website: www.socedvic.org

Subscriptions

Full membership \$66

Associate membership \$66

Distant membership \$38.50