

The SOCIETY of EDITORS (VICTORIA)

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 34 NUMBER 4

OCTOBER 2004

Next meeting

Weeds in the Garden of Words: Further observations on the tangled history of the English language

Kate Burridge

Note new date:

Wednesday, 10 November 2004

Note new venue:

**Inner-city location to be announced
closer to the meeting date.**

Check the Society's website <<http://www.socedvic.org/>>
and emails for venue details.

Kate Burridge (BA (Hons) UWA, PhD (London) FAHA), has held the Chair of Linguistics at Monash University since February 2003. Her main areas of research are: grammatical change in Germanic languages; the Pennsylvania German spoken by Anabaptist communities in Canada; euphemism and language taboos; and the structure and history of English. Kate is a member of the Australian Academy of Humanities and is also a regular presenter of language segments on ABC Radio.

Kate will speak on a range of issues, including her recently published book *Weeds in the Garden of Words: Further observations on the tangled history of the English language* (2004, ABC Books). *Weeds in the Garden of Words* looks at the way words are used and put together to create meaning, at arcane rules and infuriating exceptions, and at the vital 'living' and changing language that is English today. Kate has published ten books and is currently working on her eleventh title with her co-author Keith Allan.

She completed her undergraduate training in Linguistics and German at the University of Western Australia. This was followed by three years' postgraduate study at the University of London. Kate completed her PhD in 1983 on syntactic change in medieval Dutch. She also taught at the Polytechnic of Central London before joining the Department of Linguistics at La Trobe University in 1984.

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Please note new booking details

Due to a number of problems with bookings at the last few dinner meetings, the Society has decided to make a number of changes to procedure. The dinner meetings are organised by volunteer committee members – please assist them in this very time-consuming task by taking note of the following.

Bookings are essential.

- Book with Amanda Coverdale – email preferred – at amanda@clari.net.au or telephone (03) 8802 4482.
- **Book STRICTLY before 5 p.m. on Friday, 5 November.** Bookings received after this deadline will not be accepted.
- *People who arrive on the night without a prior booking will be unable to attend. The venue wishes to cater well for these events and is impeded by those who arrive unannounced.*
- *When booking on behalf of a group, you will be responsible for paying for each member of the group even if they do not attend.*
- State if you are a member, student, ASTC member, AusSI member or non-member.
- Give an email address or telephone number.
- If you need to cancel, please email or telephone Amanda as soon as possible so we don't waste money on catering for people who don't turn up.
- If you cancel after 7 p.m. on the day before the meeting, the Treasurer will contact you shortly after and ask you to pay as if you had attended.

Coming up: Wednesday, 1 December – Christmas celebration and the book launch of the new edition of *The Australian Editing Handbook* by Elizabeth Flann and Beryl Hill. Bookings for this event close at **5 p.m. on Wednesday, 24 November**. Contact Amanda Coverdale as listed above.



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Literary editors and Australian English

October meeting report by Anitra Nelson

Enjoying a Greek banquet at Café Mystique in Fitzroy, around 30 members attended our October dinner meeting with presentations by two editors of local literary journals: Nathan Hollier (*Overland*) and Ian Britain (*Meanjin*).

The speakers

Besides co-editing *Overland*, Nathan Hollier teaches professional writing and literary studies at Victoria University. His works on Australian culture have been published widely in Australian literary journals and newspapers. Most recently, Hollier edited a collection of essays, *Ruling Australia: the Power, Politics and Privilege of the New Ruling Class* (Australian Scholarly Press). Ian Britain has been editor of *Meanjin* since 2001. Originally an historian, Britain's research has focused on cultural and Australian studies. In 1997, Oxford published two of his works: *Once an Australian: Journeys with Barry Humphries, Clive James, Germaine Greer and Robert Hughes* and *The Oxford Book of Australian Schooldays* (co-edited with Brenda Niall).

Both speakers referred to the influence of Sidney Baker (1912–1976), born and educated in NZ, who became interested in Australasian English when questioned about his own idiom while in England in the late 1930s. He was an enthusiastic pioneer of the study of New Zealand and Australian English and particularly the study of idiom and its relationship to national character and folklore. His major work was *The Australian Language*, first published in 1945 and revised in 1966 – his other publications include *New Zealand Slang* (1940) and *A Popular Dictionary of Australian Slang* (1941).

The short history of Australian English

Hollier outlined the main themes in studies of linguistic variation and change, including accents and dialects. He started with the postmodernist or democratic proposition that places all languages on an equal footing.

White settlement in Australia and New Zealand during the nineteenth century gave rise to 'transplanted Englishes', relocated languages and accents. While one approach accentuates the 'melting pot', another focuses on a dominant or root accent or dialect, for instance 'the Queen's English'. Over the twentieth century, linguistic developments fluctuated from multiple language extinctions to a tendency to world domination, with a series of diluting influences in between associated with transmigration and trade or globalisation.

Hollier referred to the prediction that in 2100 the planet will feature only 10 per cent of today's rich linguistic diversity. Meanwhile, English is becoming the standard world language.

Does the 'global village' mean the end of regional dialects? The English language has been characterised by internal diversity at the same time as it has become dominant: professions, disciplines, and generational and social as well as regional groups all manufacture new linguistic variations of English, including appropriations from other languages.

Why does it matter?

Hollier asked why the distinctiveness of Australian English matters, arguing for a stronger than antiquarian interest in the health of its colloquialisms. For a community, language is a cultural currency, excluding the 'other' and helping define identity. However, the emotional effects of a common language extend far beyond the homogenising effect of a common money to involve kinship and 'tribal' identity.

Referring to Judith Brett, Hollier pointed out that distinctive Australian slang seems to matter to Australians at least. This seemed evident in John Howard's appeal to popular support for Tony Abbott, by referring to him affectionately as a 'bloke'. The attendant observation that the traditionally egalitarian term 'bloke' was in this instance being appropriated for non-egalitarian ends indicates the extent to which language develops and alters its meanings through use and abuse.

Hollier raised the conundrum that has faced cultural producers (writers): how far and in what ways should one indulge in or dissociate oneself from colloquial English? These questions have challenged Australian writers for over half a century and suggest a national identity crisis. Hollier argued that debaters in *Overland* had not established a firm position on such issues.

Give Australian English a 'fair go'

In Hollier's view, Donald Horne misrepresented Australians when charging them with racism and sexism. 'Where does the archetypal 'fair go' fit into this analysis?' he asked. *The Australian National Dictionary* definition of 'fair go' as fair chance, giving all equal opportunity, is a central national ideal.

In summary, Hollier complimented Sidney Baker for his appreciation of the cultural specificity of meaning. Similarly Russell Ward, in *The Australian Legend*, exalted the distinctive Australian thinking expressed through Australian English. In Hollier's view, public intellectuals should value this most significant aspect of cultural heritage more and preserve it.

Questions

The audience's response to a question about the name 'ugh boot' being patented by an American company displayed the traditional rebellious element in Australians. Hollier suggested that a Free Trade Agreement with the USA would affect the Australian culture and language in such ways.

The internal diversity of Australian English

Ian Britain drew from his eavesdropping on the conversations of passengers in public transport to discuss Sidney Baker's contribution. He emphasised three distinct strands of Australian English – broad ocker to cultivated Australian and the 'mid-path' between – and the recent decline in the gentility of our language, along with increased openness for colloquial appropriations across classes and parties.

Britain made an example of the history of the once publicly unmentionable 'f...k' that is now so ubiquitous it substitutes for punctuation. According to editor Clem Christensen, the printer had resisted printing the word in a short story by Frank Moorehouse back in the mid-1970s. The printer yelled, 'We're not fucking doing it. And that's fucking final'.

Genteel speech

Sidney Baker had an interest in the way the popular Australian degraded genteel speech and derided it. Britain commented on Prime Ministers' styles. For example, Bob Hawke altered his speech according to his audience, adopting a genteel accent when speaking with the 'poms' which he dropped in favour of broad Australian with country folk.

Following Baker's focus in one chapter on accent, Britain spoke briefly on regional differences within Australia, for instance, in the pronunciation of 'plant'. Britain lamented the recent substitution of the Australian 'mate' with the American 'man', but felt comforted by the resurgence of 'dag'.

The Newsletter team thanks Anitra Nelson for preparing this report.

Victoria needs a CASE delegate – could it be you?

Are you interested in contributing to the editing profession at a national level? The CASE delegate duties are to represent the views of the Victorian Society of Editors to the Council of Australian Societies of Editors, and inform the Victorian committee about CASE's activities.

The workload is not heavy. It includes attending some committee meetings of the Victorian society, dealing with moderate email traffic from CASE of perhaps two dozen items a month, and taking part in three teleconferences each year. Previous Victorian delegates will offer advice and support.

The benefits include a wider vision of the profession's needs and strengths, and rewarding collaboration with colleagues in other states.

Applicants must be full members of the Society of Editors (Victoria). For more information, contact Janet Mackenzie at <jmack@mansfield.net.au> or Brett Lockwood at <brett@melbpc.org.au>.

Freelance Register

The deadline for entries is **Friday, 29 October 2004**.

Please note: even if you have no changes to the substance of your entry, it will need to be in accordance with the new style guide. The guide was published in the August *Newsletter*. You may find it easier to submit your entry as new text (Word document) rather than marking up your old one.

Entries should be sent to <lemur44@optusnet.com.au>. Please send a hard copy, together with payment of \$100, to Elaine Miller, Little Grey House, 24 Foam Street, Elwood VIC 3184.

Is your membership renewal overdue?

This is the last *Newsletter* that members will receive if they have not renewed their subscription. Membership renewals were due on 1 October, so they are now well overdue.

Think of the benefits you'll miss out on if you don't renew your subscription:

- employment opportunities through our regular e-list to members of job advertisements and other information
- receipt of the Society's monthly *Newsletter*
- the annual general meeting dinner, free to all members
- eligibility to be included in the *Freelance Register*, an annual directory of freelance editors (full members only)
- discounts on training courses and workshops run by the Society
- a program of monthly meetings with guest speakers
- discounts at selected bookshops
- advocacy of professional affairs, including work with societies in other states.

There are plenty of good reasons to renew your membership! A renewal form can be downloaded from the Society's website at <<http://www.socedvic.org/>>.

At this month's meeting, the committee accepted three new full members (Miriam Lang, Michael Hanrahan and Helena Piraino) and one new associate member (Louise Hobbs). We look forward to seeing our new members at forthcoming functions.

*Ron Thiele
Membership and Correspondence Secretary*

Needs a good edit

Melbourne Writers' Festival – Janet Mackenzie

At the Melbourne Writers' Festival in August, Society of Editors (Victoria) Honorary Life Member, Janet Mackenzie, debated and discussed the state of the English language with Lynne Truss – author of the internationally popular Eats, Shoots & Leaves. Janet has since become a popular author in her own right with the publication of The Editor's Companion and has given the Newsletter permission to reproduce her Writers' Festival speech here.

I'd like to begin by congratulating Lynne Truss – it's an incredible achievement to have written a best-selling book on punctuation. Congratulations on your success, and I hope that your book signals a renewed interest in language. For some time graphics and moving images have dominated our culture, but it seems that the pendulum is beginning to swing back towards text and writing.

In general I agree with Ms Truss about the importance of punctuation, as any careful writer must. Where I differ, perhaps, is in taking a more flexible and nuanced approach to the written language. Ms Truss, as I understand it, advocates Page Rage; I am more far more optimistic and relaxed.

The first point I'd like to make is that the English language is not in decline. The linguistic resources available to writers today are mind-boggling. Really, you wonder how they managed in the past. Two hundred years ago Jane Austen told us quite a lot about human relationships without once using the term *co-dependence* or even *tough love*.

Possible errors

If the language is not in decline, why are there so many errors in written English? The answer is that there are so many possibilities to make mistakes. I can count a dozen categories of error that will cause readers to recoil.

First there are the errors of presentation – 1, typos, that is, misplaced or missing letters; 2, punctuation; 3, spelling; 4, the expression of dates and numbers and measurements; 5, typography and layout. Then there are inaccuracies, such as mistakes with names, 6, and incorrect terminology, 7, and errors of fact, 8. You might think that accuracy of facts applies only in non-fiction, but fiction draws on the real world. There was a novel about Sydney in which the lovers watched the sun set into the Pacific Ocean.

So that's eight kinds of error. The last four categories concern the guts of the writing: 9, the structure, 10, the grammar, 11, the semantics and vocabulary, and 12, very important, the sense. Even if you avoid mistakes in all these twelve categories, the writing might still be loaded with clichés, verbosity, clumsiness and repetition. If I got angry every time I saw a mistake in written English, I'd be dead of apoplexy by now.

It all depends on whether you see the glass as half-empty or half-full. Instead of a surge of fury when I see a mistake, I get a thrill when people get things right. When I see *whom* used correctly, I think 'Oh good! It's not dead yet!' A possessive with a gerund can make my day.

Registers

Good writing is writing that is tailored to the needs of the reader. And here I'd like to introduce the idea of registers, or levels of formality.

There are strong social sanctions for using the wrong register, for using language that is inappropriate to your audience. This is easy to demonstrate. If you are speaking at an academic conference and say, 'She goes, she goes, like, I shouldn't of done it. I'm like, what?', the listeners will conclude that you are not up to their intellectual level. Likewise, if your audience is, say, farmers and you come out with 'The solipsistic ontology is embedded in the reflective epistemology, notwithstanding the heuristic paradigm', they will conclude that you are up yourself. In either case, communication has failed.

Some writing is in a formal register, some is informal. We can see the different registers as a continuum:

At the bottom end are notes that you scribble to yourself, along with shopping lists and graffiti. Here the spelling and punctuation don't matter, you just have to get the gist.

One step up and we have handwritten notices, menus, postcards, chatty letters or emails to friends. This kind of writing uses short sentences, colloquial vocabulary, informal punctuation.

Next are the tabloid press, magazines, light novels. This writing is also quite close to speech, but it has, we hope, a higher standard of spelling and punctuation.

Then there is more serious writing – business letters, textbooks, broadsheet newspapers, history and biography, literary novels, all of which aim to be formally correct.

The next step up is academic journals and scholarly books.

And finally, the most formal language is used in legal documents and acts of parliament.

Let's start at the low end of the continuum. I saw a splendid piece of graffiti once that said 'Government = hippocracy.' Now if you remember your Greek roots you will realise that with this spelling the word means 'rule by horses'. The graffiti artist wanted to say something derogatory about the government, and you have to admit that the message comes across.

In general, at this end of the continuum, no one cares about your spelling and punctuation. Meaning is the crucial thing. If you write *T Paste* on the shopping list, your beloved may have to phone from the supermarket to find out whether the household needs *toothpaste* or *tomato paste*.

It's a mistake to apply the rules of one register to writing in another register. For instance, in an email to a friend you might write 'the party was terrific' and add three exclamation marks to get your meaning across, rather than finding the precise words to explain why it was so enjoyable. This is language lounging around in tracky-daks and moccies. If you were trying to convey the same idea in a short story, you'd put a lot more thought and effort into finding the right words and the correct

punctuation. You'd aim for neat casual at least, or maybe even a jacket and tie.

In writing, an inverse proportion operates – the more effort the writer puts in, the less work the reader has to do. In some situations, at the low end of the continuum, you can safely expect a lot from your readers, but in more public and formal contexts you have to do the readers' work for them. Sometimes it's enough to convey the gist, sometimes you have to be precise. It depends on the register.

Change

I've tried to explain that there are many possibilities for error, and that good writing must be tailored to suit the reader's needs. My next point is that language is not fixed – it's dynamic, it's in flux. English is no longer what you learnt at school.

Any language exists in tension between two impulses, conservative and progressive. The conservatives have on their side the need not to be misunderstood, the desire to be 'correct', and the fixative effect of writing. The progressive forces, on the other hand, are pushed along by technological, social and cultural changes, which are especially rapid today. Another force for change is playfulness – we find new terms for *children*, for instance, such as *ankle-biters* or *billy-lids*, and before long they respond by calling us *the wrinklies* or *the olds*. Conservatives, at worst, may appear dated and fuddy-duddy. Progressives, at worst, may appear faddish and freakish.

Spelling and punctuation and grammar alter, but they do so at a glacial pace. Vocabulary, on the other hand, bubbles with change, so it's often difficult to grasp what a word means at any one time. Not very long ago, the word *stress* was used by engineers in discussing the strength of bridges; now it now refers to any hiccup or irritation in everyday life. *Churning* used to be a purposeful activity resulting in butter; now it is vigorous, aimless activity with no butter at the end of it.

If enough people get a word wrong, or use it in a new sense, the meaning shifts. For instance, I expect most of you know that the original meaning of the word *decimate* is 'to kill one in ten'. You would think that the obvious resemblance to *decimal* would preserve this meaning, but I'm afraid it hasn't. The first definition in the *Macquarie Dictionary*, as far back as 1981, is 'to kill a great number or proportion'. If you use *decimate* in the original sense, you are likely to be misunderstood – especially by readers who look it up in the dictionary, unless they persevere to the second definition. English speakers apparently needed a word meaning 'to destroy quite a lot of something' more than they needed a word meaning 'to destroy a little bit of something'.

If you insist on the original meanings of words, *quarantine* would have to last exactly forty days, because it comes from the Italian word for 'forty'. You'd have to use all your *salary* to buy salt because that's what *salary* meant in Roman times. Etymology, the history of word meanings, is fascinating – but when you're trying to determine the current meaning of a word, it's mostly irrelevant.

Some words have definitely changed their meanings, but some words are in transition and we can't say which meaning will prevail. The dictionaries are scrambling to keep up. When the mass of English speakers make up their minds, there's not much we can do. Writers have to be aware of how

their readers use each word and of what their readers will understand.

Rules and regularity

And now I want to talk about rules. English is spoken, as a first or second language, by as many as a billion people, depending on your definitions. The only other human institutions on this scale that I can think of are the People's Republic of China and the Catholic Church. Both of them are notably hierarchical. English, in contrast, is cheerfully anarchic.

That's an important thing to understand about the English language – there is no boss. We have the *Oxford English Dictionary* and numerous rule books, but many of them are out of date and they often contradict each other. Really, no one is in charge. English is created daily, spontaneously, in the speech and writing of a billion people as they discuss everything from the meaning of life to what's for dinner.

I've said that no one is in charge, but it helps if we can agree, at least temporarily, on the meanings of words and the conventions of representing them in print. It's very difficult to formulate rules for correct English, because for nearly every rule you state, someone can always find an exception. For instance, a linguistics lecturer was explaining double negatives to his students, and he told them, 'In English a double negative always means a positive, but there is no case where a double positive means a negative.' A voice from the back of the room said, 'Yeah, right.'

Although rules about English usage are subject to exceptions, some of them do apply almost universally, and I think we should encourage regularity where we can. Let's look at the rule that says, 'A word beginning with a consonant takes the indefinite article *a* rather than *an*.' Some people like to make an exception to this rule and write *an historian*. They defend this with appeals to French, which is irrelevant, and to current English pronunciation, which is doubtful. In my opinion they're making a needless difficulty. Since English is a global language, I think native speakers owe it to the world to iron out these meaningless quirks and make the language, where possible, regular and easy and accessible.

Another example of needless irregularity is foreign plurals. To my mind, people who use Latin plurals like *curricula* and *appendices* are show-offs. After all, the word *volcano* is borrowed from Italian, but we don't talk about *two volcani*. And similarly with the plurals of other loan-words, like *veranda* from Hindi, and *typhoon* from Chinese. And what about all the Arabic words that are being adopted into English at the moment, like *burqa* and *madrassah*? These newcomers are granted instant acceptance and take a regular English plural, a final *s*. But because a few people know a little tiny bit of Latin, they insist on showing off.

I'm not suggesting that we remove distinctions that mean something, but where these little quirks have nothing to do with the sense, I think we can do without them.

Editors and navigation

So where does this leave editors? Editors work with many kinds of writing that have different purposes and different readers. Editors must navigate the vocabulary and syntax of

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Needs a good edit

varying genres and registers, and at the same time chart a course between the progressive and the conservative, making judgements about a language that is in flux.

You might think that editors would welcome errors because we make our living from correcting them. But really, we wish that all writers would learn how to spell and punctuate so that we can get on with the interesting bits, the structure and the expression, the emphasis and the nuances.

It is difficult for a writer to think things out clearly and express them well. I'm sure you've heard the saying 'I don't know what I think until I see what I say.' In some sense, putting ideas into words *is* thinking. We create meaning as we write, and precise use of language depends on clear thought.

Editors face the further complication that they are working on someone else's writing, not their own. I have to divine the author's intention, I have to retain the author's voice. Did she write it this way because it's her considered preference, or because she didn't know any better? How would he have worded this if his linguistic resources were larger, if he knew what I know? Rather than parading my extensive vocabulary and my knowledge of grammatical byways, I use them to serve the author's purpose and the reader's needs.

It's the editor's job to save authors from making fools of themselves in print. But editors not only have the knowledge to use the language correctly, they have the sensitivity to use it appropriately. Also, in most kinds of books, the editor defers to the author. The editor may reason and persuade, but in the end it's the author's book – she gets her name on the title page, she gets the glory and she gets the flak.

In Australia there is a peak national body of editors called CASE, the Council of Australian Societies of Editors. CASE runs a program of biennial conferences – the next is here in Melbourne in just over twelve months, in October 2005, so make a note of that. CASE is also working on a national scheme of accreditation for editors. We hope that accreditation will recognise competent editors and weed out the ones who don't know their stuff.

One of CASE's notable achievements is a document called *Australian Standards for Editing Practice*, which codifies the knowledge that a competent editor brings to the job. It covers all the twelve categories that I listed earlier, and a few more. The *Standards* are the basis for my book, *The Editor's Companion*.

And here, I think, I can claim something in common with Ms Truss. Both of us are pioneers of a new genre called 'the humorous textbook'. It amazes me that most textbooks are so dull – the authors so rarely convey their passion or engagement with the subject.

The Editor's Companion contains lots of jokes and anecdotes. They are there partly to keep you reading, and partly because they are an effective teaching tool – people remember a joke better than a recommendation, they remember an anecdote better than a bullet list.

Suppose I say to you, 'In editing verbatim quotations, *sic* should not be over-used because it's distracting for the

reader.' Ho-hum. But suppose I say, '*Sic* should not be repeated *ad nauseam*'—that's not only a bilingual pun, it's also a one-liner that I hope will stick in your mind and shape your writing practice.

The future of English

So what can we say about the future of English? Language is not mathematics, it's not rigid or logical. Meanings are a matter of convention. We accept some terms that look extremely silly – we all understand what is meant by a *plastic glass* or a *disabled toilet* or *air guitar*.

The English language is resilient and it can tolerate ambiguity. For instance, take the verbs *lie* and *lay*, which are often confused. For the grammar buffs, *lie* is a strong verb and it's intransitive, and *lay* is a weak verb and transitive. Now if you happen to have studied Anglo-Saxon, you will know that the direct ancestors of *lie* and *lay* are the Anglo-Saxon verbs *licgan* and *lecgan*. People were confusing these two verbs in the ninth century. And they're still confusing them today, twelve hundred years later. The two verbs haven't collapsed into one. We didn't press a noun into service as a verb, as we did with *lend* and *loan*; we didn't dump them and get a new word, as we did with *cast* and *throw*. Somehow, despite all the confusion, enough people have been getting *lie* and *lay* right for hundreds and hundreds of years, and the two verbs survive, battered but still recognisable.

I have no fears for the future of English. The language won't fall down if I don't hold it up.

I don't particularly care whether the possessive apostrophe survives or not. Perhaps it will be like *lie* and *lay*—in the year 3000 it might be still hanging on, often misused, but understood and valued by enough people to survive. Or perhaps English writers will decide that it's simply a pain, causing confusion rather than illuminating meaning. But if it dies, I'm sure good writers will find elegant and effective ways to communicate their meaning without it. Remember that we get along just fine in speech without any apostrophes at all.

A language is the expression of a culture: as long as the culture is fertile and vigorous, so will the language be. One could argue that Western civilisation is lax and effete and decadent. In the United States you can have silicone implants inserted to replace your dog's testicles after it's been neutered, and if that's not decadent I don't know what is. Conversely, one could argue that the West is the richest and most successful and most powerful civilisation in human history. Possibly both views are true. But as long as people go on having new ideas, they will find the language to express them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by all means be a stickler, or even a pedant, if you want to. If you're going to be ultra-correct about apostrophes, you will have to reinstate them in *Queen'sland* and *Gipps'land*. But remember that excessive correctness, as we saw in the case of *decimate*, may lead to misunderstanding, it may actually impede communication. And that is the purpose of writing, that's the whole point – communication.

Expertise in the conventions of writing is just that, expertise in the conventions of writing – it doesn't make you any better or

smarter or wiser than anyone else. My spelling and grammar are just about perfect, but I'm shamefully ignorant about important branches of human knowledge, like first aid and double-entry bookkeeping.

We all have our weaknesses, and for many people the tricky conventions of written English are not easy to master. Rather than raging at these people or despising them, I take this as an opportunity for productive collaboration and support between human minds that work in different ways.

According to a recent United Nations survey, 17 per cent of the Australian population is functionally illiterate – they cannot

read and write well enough to get along in daily life. I repeat, one Australian in six cannot understand the instructions on a packet of aspirin, let alone their mobile phone contract or the policy of their credit card company.

If there's a need for action, this is it. Rather than congratulating ourselves on our superior knowledge, rather than picketing movie signs for missing apostrophes, we should be besieging the offices of education ministers and asking why one-sixth of the population can't read well enough to function in society. That's something that's worth getting angry over.

The Society of Editors (Victoria) Inc. presents
The big picture – structural editing

Trainers: Pamela Hewitt and Shelley Kenigsberg
Saturday, 13 November 2004, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Structural editing in fiction and creative non-fiction involves developing the logic and flow of a piece of writing, shaping and presenting the text in harmony with its internal progression. Editors almost always do this to some degree, but the process is often intuitive.

Beginnings and endings are crucial, at the level of the full text, section, chapter, paragraph and even the sentence. You need confidence in your judgement – some would call it gall – to overcome the fear of making bold changes, and it's important to develop the art of creative communication with authors.

- **Pamela Hewitt** is a freelance editor, writer and trainer, and proprietor of Emend Editing and Writing Services, which she established in 1996. She has developed and presented editing courses and workshops for tertiary

institutions, writers' centres, literary festivals, editors' societies and government agencies.

- **Shelley Kenigsberg** is a freelance editor and trainer. She has worked in large and small corporate publishing houses as editor, commissioning editor and publisher, and began S K Publishing (freelance services) in 1998. Shelley has developed the Book Editing and Publishing Diploma course at Macleay College, Sydney, where she is now coordinator and lecturer.

Cost: \$135 members (Soc. of Eds, Indexers, ASTC),
\$175 non-members

Bookings: Please book with Marta Veroni,
<bohemian@melbpc.org.au> by **Friday,**
5 November. Bookings will not be accepted
without payment.



The big picture – structural editing workshop
Saturday 13 November 2004

Payment is by cheque or money order, payable to 'Society of Editors (Vic.)',
and mailed to Marta Veroni, PO Box 182, Moreland VIC 3058.

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Cheque/money order enclosed for \$ _____

Dates for your diary

Next meeting (Note new date)

Wednesday, 10 November 2004

Freelance Register *applications*

Close on **Friday, 29 October 2004**

Have your renewed your membership?

If not, this will be the last *Newsletter* you receive. Renew now!



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