

Fellowship winner in The Big Apple

Members attending the October meeting were eager to hear Colette Vella describe her approach to winning the Beatrice Davis Fellowship and her experiences in the world of publishing in New York.

I am here today to speak about the Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship, which I undertook for three months at the beginning of this year.

The Fellowship is named after who I regard as the most famous of Australian editors—Beatrice Davis—who worked for Angus & Robertson Publishers for 35 years with the likes of Miles Franklin and Ruth Park. There's a great biography of her available by Jacqueline Kent published by Penguin in 2001 called *A Certain Style*.

The Fellowship is sponsored by the Literature Board of the Australia Council, the Australian Publishers Association, the Queensland Society of Editors and various publishing houses. It is open to those who have worked in fiction and/or non-fiction as an editor for at least five years, and it allows the recipient up to 12 weeks in the US learning more about their craft and the industry in general.

It is awarded every two years and I am its tenth recipient.

The aims of the Fellowship are:

- to offer recipients an opportunity to further develop specific editorial skills of benefit to themselves as well as Australian publishing

- to familiarise Australian editors with US editorial and publishing practices leading to a greater understanding of US markets for Australian books

- to recognise and reward editors for their contribution to Australian writing and publishing.

A written report on my time in the USA is available on the APA's website at www.publishers.asn.au.

Applications for the 2009 Fellowship will be called for in the next couple of months, so if you do have the work experience, I encourage you to apply. (By the way, I applied twice before I got it, so if you've tried before, try again!) Apart from your CV and references, you need to have a project in mind for what you'll be researching during your time in the USA.

My project

The specific research project that I pitched as part of my application was to look at the relationship between editors, authors and literary agents. My research was mostly focused on the area of literary fiction, but I spoke to those who worked in a range of genres.

The relationship between an author and their editor has traditionally always been a close one—I know that editors sometimes go to great lengths to look after their authors. Beatrice Davis herself was renowned for her very personal relationships with her authors—she always seemed to have them at her house for soirees!

Presuming that authors are just as important as they once were to a

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Next meeting: Tuesday, 2 December 2008

The Christmas Party

You and your partner are invited to Kafenes Café Restaurant for the Society's Christmas Party on Tuesday, 2 December. Join us for a fabulous feast of Greek food and a chance to celebrate the year with your colleagues.

The venue is 149 Enmore Rd, Enmore NSW 2042. 6.30 for 7.00 p.m. Cost: \$43 a head, including drinks and a Greek banquet with: country salad, dips and bread, zucchini dumplings, haloumi cheese, prawn saganaki, roast vegetable briam, moussaka and roast lamb with baked potatoes. Coffee/tea/soft drinks and dessert are included. *As a gift to members, the Society will provide wine on the night (red, white and sparkling).*

Booking is essential as places are limited. Further details are on the enclosed booking form.

Please RSVP by Friday, 28 November 2008; later bookings cannot be guaranteed. Please return the booking form to Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007. Ring Hillary Goldsmith, on 02 9752 0753 (9.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.) or 02 9388 8062 (7.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.). Or, make an online direct deposit payment to our CBA account. Account Name: Society of Editors (NSW) BSB:062172 Account Number: 00905083 Include your name and abbreviated payment description in the space provided.

February meeting: Alternative Media Group on the challenges of publishing and editing independent newspapers in Sydney; Tuesday, 3 February 2008.

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publishing house, I was interested in learning how we as Australian editors can ensure the author–editor relationship is still as vital as it once was. How far beyond a traditional business arrangement should we go? Should editors:

- foster the author’s creativity
- help to create the right conditions for an author to produce writing
- act as a sounding board for ideas
- bolster the author’s self-esteem
- act as the author’s advocate in the company
- get the author through tough reviews/tough times
- calm their nerves and ease their angst?

It is a somewhat romantic conception of the author–editor relationship but, when it is in play, for me personally it is the most rewarding part of my job as an editor.

But I wondered if our daily jobs are so tightly scheduled and commercially focused that there is barely enough time for this level of our job?

Should the nurturing process be sacrificed in a publishing world where we are trying to be more streamlined, more efficient?

Should a manuscript be fairly polished before it is actually contracted?

Is post-contract manuscript development too time-consuming a process for editors within a publishing house?

Should the author nurturing that goes on today within a publishing house be more about building the author’s marketability and profile than fostering their writing?

In today’s world of bidding wars for top manuscripts, of authors and publishing houses not necessarily sticking together, is the author now more closely looked after by their agent?

During my time in New York I met up with a range of editors and agents to look at these issues. The questions that I set out to focus on specifically were:

- What qualities and parameters define the author–editor relationship in the US?
- How loyal are authors to their publishers (and vice versa) in these days of authors chasing the highest advances? Is there still an attempt to keep and grow authors?
- Are more and more US publishing houses requiring (implicitly or explicitly) that manuscripts are fairly ‘polished’ before they are contracted

‘Has the agent replaced the editor as the author’s nearest and dearest?’

for publication? How does this change the relationship of the editor and the author? Is the literary agent now charged with nurturing writers and their writing? Has the agent replaced the editor as the author’s nearest and dearest?

- How does US practice compare to my experiences of author–editor relationships in Australia?

While on the ground, these questions morphed a bit and more questions developed as I learnt more about the industry there.

Making plans for my trip

In preparation for undertaking the Fellowship, the first thing that I did was read (or re-read) as many of the reports of the previous Fellows that I could get my hands on, and also subscribe to *Publishers’ Lunch* and *Publishers’ Weekly* online so that I could get a better feel for the industry in the US. The other source of information I found invaluable, especially for contact details, was the website ‘Everyone Who’s Anyone in US Publishing’—it is a great source of contact information.

I then set about asking a range of my Australian colleagues for their contacts, recommendations and general thoughts. I also had an opportunity to meet with two US editors who were at the 2007 Sydney Writers Festival as part of the Australia Council’s VIP program.

Which brings me to a side issue. I am not sure if you are aware of the difference in US and Australian publishing nomenclature, but just in case you aren’t, this is an important point so let me spell it out ... Basically, in the USA, a senior editor is someone who commissions books. He/she

is also expected to undertake the structural editing. The freelance editors and production editors are relegated to copyediting in the purest sense of the term and generally have no contact with the author.

I was very keen to get placements with ‘newish and fresh’ firms, or firms that were doing something a bit different. Generally I found it challenging to get placements and appointments—it wasn’t that I was met by a wall of silence (well, not too often), but often an enthusiastic and very welcoming initial response was not followed through by a firm commitment to a particular time and place—something I’ve since found out is quite a New York phenomenon. In fact, I had my highest concentration of appointments in my last week—once everyone found out I was about to leave and this was their last chance.

I made the decision quite early on that I wanted to spend the vast majority of my time in New York—apart from it still being undoubtedly the home of publishing in the USA—there was something that appealed to me about totally immersing myself in this city. I was lucky enough to have been to New York a couple of times before this Fellowship, so the logistics and physicality of the city didn’t worry me too much. And the strong Aussie dollar helped me immensely.

Spiegel & Grau

My first placement, for four weeks, was at Spiegel & Grau.

I was particularly interested in this company as it was a very new, boutique imprint of Random House, run by two very interesting women—Cindy Spiegel and Julie Grau—who had both been poached from Riverhead Books. Their list of fiction and nonfiction was particularly impressive. I was aware of the excellent reputation of Cindy in particular who, in her previous role at Riverhead, was responsible for publishing *The Kite Runner*, among other amazing books. About Julie I knew not much before I met her. In fact the two are like Chip ‘n’ Dale in the way they work together, but two more different editors you’re very unlikely to meet—Cindy is quite eccentric, scatty and sensitive; Julie is energetic, gregarious and sharp.

Before arriving for my placement I got the latest news from Spiegel & Grau’s

NEW MEMBERS

Geoffrey Ellis

Melissa Fagan

Ms Sarah Plant

very schmick website. The company had just held a very successful party which ‘launched’ Spiegel & Grau’s first ‘season’. Just as a side point, books in the US are still published in ‘seasons’—Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer—and this influences the scheduling of cover designs, cataloguing, advance promotion etc.

I also learned before I joined Spiegel & Grau about the huge success of their first book, *Women and Money* by Suze Orman, who Julie Grau brought over with her from Riverhead. The book was a *New York Times* bestseller last year, but it was propelled into number two position in the charts in the week that I arrived by an Oprah Winfrey offer that allowed a free copy of the book to be downloaded from her site for a period of 30 hours—1.1 million copies were moved. Great publicity.

I have to admit to having first-day nerves, but they soon passed when I met the very welcoming and friendly team at Spiegel & Grau. By day two, I was inspired and thrilled to have the opportunity to spend time with this amazing group of people. There’s a great feeling of camaraderie.

Apart from Cindy and Julie, there are four editors of various rankings and two editorial assistants.

Editor Mike Mezzo’s first book with Spiegel & Grau, *A Fraction of the Whole*, which was written by Australian novelist Stephen Toltz, had just been released in the US when I arrived. It was simultaneously published in Australia by Penguin...although Mike was justifiably keen to point out that it was he, not the Australian publisher, who discovered the manuscript. It came to him in a very unlikely way—a colleague said ‘I have a friend in Australia who’s a writer...’ The novel has just been put on the shortlist for the Man Booker Prize.

During my time in the USA I got to learn that there was much wonder over Spiegel & Grau’s ‘deep pockets’—in other words, their ability to muster up huge advances. This was fuelled mostly by the \$2 million advance that they had just paid to author Sarah Gruen for her second novel. It’s true that she had had great success with her first novel, *Water for Elephants*, published by the independent publisher Algonquin—but the thing that makes the eye-popping advance particularly extraordinary to

my mind is that it was based on a mere one-page submission! And we all know it’s hard to judge a novel on one page.

I am told the number of submissions the house is receiving is starting to sky-

‘...the eye-popping advance...was based on a mere one-page submission!’

rocket. Lucky I was there to help with these! Apart from reading manuscripts, I also attended company meetings, held one-on-one meetings with the staff and generally just kept my ear to the ground. Also, I was very excited when Julie Grau entrusted me to do a first pass edit on a manuscript that had just been delivered called ‘Orange is the New Black’, which was a memoir about a middle-class woman’s time in prison. It had come in at 150,000 words and needed drastic cutting. Luckily the writing was very anecdotal in style and so it was easy for me to find places to slash.

Another exciting thing that happened was that I was the first reader for a wonderful manuscript that Cindy Spiegel went on to acquire. It was written by a middle-aged British man, in the first person, from the point of view of a female child prostitute in India. A very hard subject to pull off authentically...but this author did it. The voice was truly amazing. The ending of this novel, mind you, was all wrong. It didn’t stop Cindy from falling in love with it; it is just that when she contracted the manuscript she first discussed with the author the things that needed attention.

Foundry Literary Agency

My next placement was with Foundry Literary Agency. In my career I have had very little to do with agents so I knew that a placement with an agency would be invaluable. Foundry had been recommended to me by US editor Sally Kim when she was here in Sydney as part of the VIP program, and I found out that an Australian editor whom I knew, Kristina Schultz, who is now at UQP, was working there, so she was a great help in facilitating things for me.

The firm opened in June 2007 and was

co-founded by agents Peter McGuigan and Yfat Reiss Gendell. It has about 80 active clients, and they do a 50:50 mix of fiction and nonfiction.

Apart from Peter and Yfat, the office comprises two agents, two assistants and a bevy of interns—boy, do they rely on these interns for reading submissions.

My time there coincided nicely with the London Book Fair, so I got a week of pre-bookfair frenzy, a week of quiet to read submissions as two of the agents were in London, and a week of post-bookfair frenzy. The office was certainly a contrast to that of Spiegel & Grau—there was often a lot of shouting of exciting news through office walls. Peter McGuigan is also quite the showman—he’d come out of his office and say something like ‘Screw the Dalai Lama, he’s useless’. Despite his brash style, he’s very likeable. He is known as an outward looking agent in that he seeks to understand and sell to the overseas publishing market, where most people in US publishing still look primarily inwards.

I spent most of my time at Foundry with the foreign rights agent, Stephanie Abou, who would often take me up to the rooftop for a smoke (I don’t smoke) and to offer me pearls of wisdom. She told me that what she looks for in a manuscript is the best that can be written in the category, with a voice that stands out, an excellent quality of storytelling, a unique or fresh approach.

She said, ‘You need to be convinced this is a great book. It’s difficult to sell something if you don’t wholeheartedly believe in it.’

Every Tuesday the team lunches together in the meeting room and uses this as an opportunity have a casual catch-up about business. Foundry works very collaboratively. On my first Tuesday there, Peter brought to the lunch table a list of editors he was compiling for a murder mystery series. He said it was important to get this right and he knew other team members might have ideas about other editors to add to his list.

Stephanie later told me that they pride themselves on these submissions lists, of targeting the right editors and making sure they know their interests and strengths.

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Tiered membership

The society's tiered membership system will work as follows.

Categories

This membership year (2008) the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. will offer members the option of three categories:

1. Existing members (as at 31 December 2006) can remain an ordinary member at the current fee (\$70/75) with the current entitlements; or
2. Existing and new members can become a professional editor member at the current ordinary fee with the current ordinary entitlements, provided you have two years experience in a paid editing role and can supply two letters confirming your experience; or
3. Existing and new members can become an associate member at a reduced fee (\$50) with reduced entitlements (an associate member cannot vote at an election, cannot become an office bearer and cannot be listed in the *Editorial Services Directory*).

Phasing in a new system

Before January 2011 all ordinary members will be asked to choose either:

1. Professional editor member status; or
2. Associate member status.

Four years should be sufficient time for those seeking professional status to gain professional experience if they do not already have it.

Experience

Professional editor members must have at least two years in-house experience as an editor or the equivalent freelance or part-time experience. For example, if you worked half-time as an editor for four years (part-time or freelance) then that would be an acceptable equivalent to two years full-time work as an in-house editor. Professional experience must be in a paid editing role. As professional members may have had career breaks, there is no limit on how long ago the professional editing experience was obtained. Professional editor members will be asked to provide details of their experience and two letters (in English) that can be checked by a subcommittee appointed for this purpose. The subcommittee will simply confirm the statements supplied by the third parties. The letters can just be a statement of the years of experience in an editorial role. See the essential **Professional Editor Membership form** for more details about requirements.

Corporate Associates

A new category of Corporate Associates is also available. Publishing companies and other businesses and organisations that support the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.'s aims can become Corporate Associates. For an annual fee of \$400, Corporate Associates of the society will receive five copies of *Blue Pencil* each month and two copies of the *Editorial Services Directory*, five free admissions to each monthly meeting and two free admissions to special events, such as the Christmas dinner. The usual member rates on professional development courses and workshops will apply to Corporate Associates for up to five attendees.

The Committee

Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

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Bloomsbury

Bloomsbury was my last port of call for a placement. It is located in New York's famous Flatiron building, and it was a real thrill to go to work there every day. As at my other placements, I mostly interviewed staff, went to meetings and read submissions for senior editor Kathy Belden who, overloaded as editors are, was again very grateful for my help. There were still eight publishers and editors there and two assistants. But this includes the Walker Books imprint as well as Bloomsbury Press, a newish imprint that does higher end, intellectual titles.

Compared with its status in the UK, Bloomsbury is a relatively small fish in the US market. There is a definite difference between Bloomsbury and Spiegel & Grau—Bloomsbury does not have the same 'deep' pockets and has to be a bit more inventive about publishing. Publisher Colin Dickerman said that the team had the advantage of being able to move quickly because they have no editorial board to account to unlike other companies. He said that the editors read things with a sense of the possibility of what they can be. They can buy books that need editorial help, that are flawed but have got potential.

The team is definitely hungry for books to fill their next season's list, which they say is looking a little skimpy. Sales Director Sabrina Farber says that they don't have a lot of stuff 'lying around', and so they scramble to get a list together for a season. Hence they can't leave a long lead time to publish their books.

Other activities

Apart from the editors and agents I spoke to within my placements, I conducted one-on-one interviews with about 20 editors and agents from a range of other firms—the publishing

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IPEd notes

News from the Institute of Professional Editors (formerly CASE) November 2008

IPEd's first accreditation examination, held on 18 October 2008 at seven locations around the country, was not only a milestone in the professional development of editors but also a logistical triumph. Only minor hiccups were reported by invigilators, a tribute to the organisational ability and sheer hard work of the members of the Accreditation Board and its affiliates, all of whom are volunteers.

Some 171 editors took the exam, more than IPEd's target of 150. The numbers at the various venues were as follows: Adelaide 15 (14%), Brisbane 21 (13%), Canberra 21 (11%), Hobart 7 (10%), Melbourne 50 (10%), Perth 20 (20%) and Sydney 37 (10%). The percentages are the approximate proportions of the local society of editors membership numbers. Eight of the examinees were not members of a society.

It seems that, in general, most examinees were favourably disposed to the process and content of the exam. Here is one unsolicited comment:

'Making the sample exam available was very useful for us. It gave us a chance to (a) assess whether we should take the plunge, and (b) practise! I'm sure I wasn't the only one who hadn't

sat an exam for decades (nearly 30 years in my case), so it was great to have the sample exam to bring some of those grey cells back into action.'

'The exam itself was well-constructed and I thought it catered well for the wide range of skills and experience that the examinees might have had. I particularly liked the fact that we could choose which questions to answer from a number of options, as this allowed us to play to our strengths.'

All examinees gave it their best and came equipped for the task. A report from Victoria notes:

'We had a great venue and people were pleased with it and commented that the exam was good. We had some arrive with the biggest dictionaries you have ever seen, that they had lugged across town on public transport!'

For a job well done, bouquets go to the Accreditation Board, the Assessors Forum, the exam development team, the exam coordinator, the Communication Committee for promotion and Sapro Conference Management for handling the nuts and bolts of exam registrations. Marking of the exam is underway.

The initial plan was to have completed it in time to give candidates their

results by 30 November. At their recent moderation workshop, however, the exam assessors determined that they needed more time to ensure consistency in the marking of papers. Candidates will thus not now receive their results until, at latest, 15 December. The Accreditation Board apologises for this delay, as it knows people are anxious to hear their results, but is confident that all will understand the need to get things right.

It is planned to hold a second exam sometime during 2009.

In other news, we have to report the resignation of Michael Lewis as the Society of Editors (NSW) nominee on the IPEd Council. We thank Michael for his singular contribution and wish him well for the future. The NSW society will be confirming a new nominee shortly.

The Council will be meeting by teleconference on Sunday 30 November. The draft agenda for the meeting is on the website.

Ed Highley
Secretary
www.iped-editors.org

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houses ranged from the big, like Simon & Schuster, to the tiny, like Soft Skull.

I also attended the PEN World Voices Literary Festival, which is run by ex-Sydney Writers Festival Director, Caro Llewellyn. I saw some amazing writers speak—those who I knew and loved, like Mario Vargo Llosa and Michael Ondaatje and Ian McEwan—but more inspiringly a heap of writers from non-English speaking countries whose work I had not encountered before.

I went to Washington to meet with staff of the Association of American Publishers, which is an excitingly political and very necessary organisation located right beside Capitol Hill—it's amazing the scope of their activities.

I also attended the New York Roundtable Writers Conference, held for two days in central Manhattan, which featured talks by some prominent editors in the industry, agents and

authors, and which was a really great way for wannabe writers to find out more about how to get published and to network.

What I learnt

There are SO many things I could talk about today but I think it's easiest if I focus here on the essence of my research project: the relationship between editors, authors and agents.

There is a profusion of literary agents in the USA: 410 members of the US Association of Authors Representatives compared to only 16 members of the equivalent association in Australia.

The vast majority of published authors in the USA are represented by agents. And the vast majority of publishing houses—even the really tiny ones like Soho Press—do not accept unsolicited, non-agented manuscripts.

Pretty much everyone I spoke to confirmed that authors generally have closer, longer-term relationships with

their agents than their editors. Agents are a constant in their lives whereas editors move around from house to house, and only the big-name editors are able to take their authors away with them. When Julie Grau and Cindy Spiegel left Riverhead Books they had to leave their authors which was heartbreaking for them.

How does this affect the workings between the agents and the editor? To answer this it is useful to summarise the opinions editors and agents have of each other.

Editors' opinions of agents

Most editors I spoke with had good relationships with most agents, and they particularly appreciated having an agent around in times of dispute—as a mediator. Julie Grau told of the time when she had developed such a close relationship with Irish author Nuala Faolain that the author fired her agent.

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‘What do I need an agent for?’ Nuala had said. Julie told me it was the worst thing that could have happened. The agent was a buffer. She allowed the boundaries to be kept. And Nuala was a needy person.

Editors appreciated agents who knew their tastes and targeted submissions accordingly.

They said the bad agents were the ones who created an ‘us and them’ situation between the author and the publishing house, which they did as an ego boost, to serve their own needs and to justify their existence.

They did not appreciate agents who got overly involved in the production process. The agents I spoke to, though, reserved the right to do this, especially with covers. While I was at Spiegel & Grau, for example, one author’s agent came in to voice his staunch opposition to a cover design even though the publisher and the author were both happy with it. The agent felt that the cover made the book look too quirky and not the ‘big’ book that it was. In the end, the cover was revised along the lines the agent wanted.

Agents’ opinions of editors

Agents felt it was important to establish good relationships with editors but, unfortunately, most editors were at the mercy of their publishing houses. A lot were powerless to make decisions.

Many agents said that editors were in a difficult position because their loyalties were divided between the author and the house.

Scott Hoffman, of the Folio Literary Agency, said there were some editors he doesn’t work with. He said:

‘I want my book with someone who is able to marshall the in-house resources. Getting sales people to focus on books is something that good editors know how to do. There is less artistry involved in editors’ jobs these days. “Editing” is not the top skill of editors any more.’

Similarly, Joe Regal of Regal Literary Agency said:

‘Editors are cheerleaders. That’s what I look for. I don’t care if they’re good editors.’

Most controversially, all agents said that most editors don’t edit any more. Certainly this did not seem to be true of the editors I spoke with and spent time with. What is true, though, is

that an agent will often do a first ‘edit’ of a manuscript before they send a manuscript out to publishing houses.

My suspicions that this was the case were first aroused when I was at Spiegel & Grau and I was reading submissions for them which were in very good shape, much better than I was used to seeing first up. They obviously had benefited from editing work before they landed on the editor’s desk.

‘...all agents said that most editors don’t edit any more.’

And when I subsequently did an internship at Foundry and interviewed several agents I found out that, yes, many agents do indeed edit to some extent. And, if they don’t edit themselves, they use freelance editors to get material in shape. Foundry, for example, prides itself on having access to a great team of ghost writers and editors. Rather than leaving the writer to go back to the drawing board alone, if they believe in the idea, they pair up the author with an editor/writer to develop the manuscript. Otherwise, one of the agents will work on it themselves.

Of course, the reason why agents put effort into getting a manuscript into shape is because they want the best chance of getting an acquiring editor’s attention in what is a hyper-competitive and crowded publishing world. They want to make it easy for the acquiring editor to notice the work and also want to ensure that the editor can quickly convince their acquisitions committee of the merits of the work.

Even if agents did do some editing, all editors in New York who I spoke to clarified that they as editors did indeed edit—but inevitably this activity was performed at night or on weekends or, in the case of Cindy Spiegel, who has two children, for an hour or two each morning before work, at a secret location. Many pined for a ‘golden age’ when an editor was allowed months and months to work on a manuscript. But they still edited. Perhaps the statement ‘Editors don’t edit any more’ might be better recast as ‘Editors don’t have the time to edit any more’. It was reassuring to see that editors still edit—even if it is on the weekends! Unless an

agent was an editor before becoming an agent (which some of them were), I am not sure they have the expertise to edit fully. To pull things into shape, yes, to make them marketable, yes, definitely. But as one editor told me, we editors at least like to think that we engage with a text on a deeper level than just marketability.

Kathleen Andersen of Andersen Literary Management is one of those agents who was an editor before she was an agent. She was a Senior Editor with Norton and Simon & Schuster before she became an agent nearly two decades ago because she was sick of the conflict of interest of representing both a publishing house and an author. She wanted more direct, hands-on dealings with authors.

As part of her agency, for an extra fee, she offers a line editing service. She said, ‘it’s very time consuming, but there is nowhere an author can go for that level of work. There’s nobody to do that with them, that intensive reading over every single line.’

Australian author and New York resident Lily Brett employs her own editor to edit her work before submitting it to her agent/publishing house. She strongly feels that editors in publishing houses don’t have the time to edit properly any more.

Kathy Belden, senior editor at Bloomsbury, pointed out that the problem with the agent doing preliminary editorial work is that you’re never sure of the author’s real skill. How much has the agent intervened before you see the manuscript?

If at this stage I look back to my original list of investigative questions about the role of an editor, I think that it’s safe for me to say that in the USA agents perform the majority of these roles:

- They act as a sounding board for ideas; bolster the author’s self-esteem; get the author through tough reviews/tough times; calm their nerves and ease their angst.
- They foster the author’s creativity and create the right conditions for writing. Both are fairly touchy-feely roles and hard to measure. The one thing that is definite about the editor in the USA is that one of their key roles is to act as the author’s advocate

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in the publishing company.

- Because of the presence of agents and a super-competitive publishing world, manuscripts are indeed polished before they are actually contracted. Post-contract manuscript development is a very time-consuming process for editors within a publishing house, especially when an editor also has to work as the author's salesperson. A smaller house like Bloomsbury, though, still does this work because it's the way for them to get manuscripts relatively cheaply.

- In Australia, the situation is different. The presence of agents is not as marked. And commissioning editors here have at their disposal senior non-commissioning editors and a pool of intelligent freelance editors to whom they are willing to delegate the structural editing work.

- Willingness to delegate I think is key. On my first day at Spiegel & Grau I spoke to a harried Cindy Spiegel about finding the time to edit. She said: 'If I'm editing something, I can only work on that and nothing else.' If she hasn't got the time, does she pass it on? I asked. 'No,' was her guilty reply. She said: 'I want to be able to do it myself. It's the creative part of the job that I love.'

- It's also about expectations in the US. If an editor buys a book it is expected that they will edit it. There is cachet associated with Cindy Spiegel being the editor of a book.

The advantage of having the agent as first editor I suppose is that it keeps the publishing process more streamlined and business-like. But, as Kathy Belden at Bloomsbury said, it's a sad day when editors don't edit any more.

Is it all about the bucks?

The world of auctions was a total mystery to me and so I focused much attention on understanding the process and even watched a live auction during the afternoon I spent at Atria, which is an imprint of Simon & Schuster.

In the US more and more books are going to auction. For the right books, agents see auctions as a powerful way of getting the most money and, in the heat of an auction, editors are definitely over-paying for books.

In terms of the advance, I asked many

people if it was 'all about the bucks', if it was always about the highest bidder, and the answer was generally 'no'. The editorial approach played a big part, which was heartening. A marketing plan, a meet-and-greet of the team to see how the author likes the house and a positioning statement for the company all influence the final decision.

Colin Dickerman at Bloomsbury cited two books that he acquired recently as the significant underbidder, although mostly marketing plans will only go so far to make up for a huge difference in advances.

I think the most honest answer I got was from agent Simon Lipskar at the Writers' House. He said:

'With the big publishers, advance is significantly more important. The advance is based on what they think they can sell. That's what's relevant. I want the publisher who has the biggest vision. The author wants the most readers. You can have an editor who loves a book but they work for a publisher who does not have the same set of expectations. Vision is what gets you to that bigger place. I use advance as a metric to judge this vision.'

'But I will go with smaller dollars if there are major editorial concerns and the editor says so and I agree...this is better than going for the larger dollars but no-one is going to fix the book.'

Authors taking pride of place

And, most heartingly, authors still take pride of place as the central figure in the publishing process. Keeping an author, working with them, growing them, fostering loyalty, is still important.

Agents were keen to keep the book with the same publishing house if possible and usually gave that house the option on the author's next work. Of course, though, smaller companies suffered when they made the author a success and couldn't match market advance expectations for their next book.

Rachel Kahan, editor at GP Putnam, told of the betrayal she felt early in her career when her author of six years left her for another company. I quote from an article she published in *Publishers Weekly*:

'After two more books—both bestsellers—this glorious personal relationship came to an utterly inglorious professional ending. My

beloved author got new representation, and while she claimed she still loved me, her new agent did not...I'd been dumped. It was clear that I couldn't be both an editor and a close friend—at least, not for this writer.'

'Perhaps I should have stayed cool: negotiated the deals, written the flap copy, kept a polite, but dispassionate, distance from the author. But is that really why I became an editor? Books are created with passion, and must be published with passion, even if that passion leads to heartbreak. In a world where readers and authors wail that bookselling has become nothing but a retail business, devoid of any human warmth, I can't imagine anything worse than unplugging ourselves from the source of all that creative energy.'

Colette Vella has worked as a book editor for 14 years, beginning as a trainee and moving on to become senior editor at Allen & Unwin where she was involved in several award-winning books including two Miles Franklin Award winners. She is currently commissioning editor of fiction and narrative non-fiction for Murdoch Books' Pier 9 imprint.

Membership renewals

Membership renewal time is fast approaching. You will soon receive your membership renewal notice by post. If you've moved recently make sure you notify the membership secretary, Bruce Howarth, at <editorbruce@optusnet.com.au> so he can update your postal address details.

The good news is that the Society of Editors (NSW) committee has decided not to increase membership fees, so the rates will stay the same. Fortunately the contribution of volunteers this year has meant that we can keep membership fees from rising in 2009.

Don't forget, ordinary members can apply to change their status to Professional Editor member at any time.

See page 4 of *Blue Pencil* and the relevant Professional Editor membership form for details.

2008 Man Booker Prize

Aravind Adiga has been named the winner of the £50,000 Man Booker Prize for Fiction for his novel *The White Tiger*.

Adiga is the third debut novelist to win the award in the forty-year history of the prize. His novel is described as a 'compelling, angry and darkly humorous novel about a man's journey from Indian village life to entrepreneurial success. For more information visit the website <www.themanbookerprize.com>.

New discount for society members

The Journeys Bookstore & Cafe in Annandale has agreed to offer 10% discount on books to Society of Editors members. Details will be on the voucher when you renew your membership. Journeys Bookstore & Cafe is on the corner of Booth and Trafalgar streets, Annandale; phone: 02 9552 2540.

Record crowds at 60th Frankfurt Book Fair

Attendance this year numbered 299,112 people, an increase of 5.6 per cent on 2007. There were 186,240 trade visitors, 7,373 companies exhibiting in the halls and 510 literary agents working in the LITAg centre. Fair director Juergen Boos described this year's fair as 'optimistic, lively and full of energy'. He observed that digitisation was a key aspect of the 2008 fair: 'There is a need for orientation with regards to the new business models and fields of business that digitisation brings', he said.

Freelancers do lunch, 9 February

The next freelancers' lunch will be held at Cafe Delizia, 148 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, on Monday, 9 February 2009. Mains start from about \$12. The cafe is near the corner with Liverpool Street, next to the Salvation Army and a few minutes' walk from Museum Station.

The cafe features a wonderful book-lined room so allow time for book browsing too.

The society organises these informal freelancers' lunches every second month or so. The invitation is cordially extended to other freelancers who work in the publishing industry. There is no need to RSVP. See you there!

2008 Patrick White Award

This year's Patrick White Award of \$30,000 was awarded to Melbourne playwright and screenwriter John Romeril. The Award was established by Patrick White in 1973 with the money he received as winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. The aim of the prize is to acknowledge Australian fiction writers, poets and dramatists who have not yet received adequate recognition.

Romeril has been writing plays since the late 1960s and has had a significant role in the foundation of Australian theatre.

CAL Waverly Award

The shortlist for the 2008 CAL Waverley Award for Literature, also known as 'The Nib', has been announced. This is the first year that Copyright Agency

Limited (CAL) has been a partner, providing increased prize money in the awards' seventh year (\$20,000).

'The Nib' acknowledges excellence in research in Australian literary works. This year saw a record 165 nominations drawn from all states. The winner will be announced Wednesday, 26 November 2008.

The shortlisted works are *People Like Us*, Waleed Aly (Picador); *Vietnam: The Australian War*, Paul Ham (HarperCollins); *The Dark Mountain*, Catherine Jinks (A&U); *The Memory Room*, Christopher Koch (Vintage); *Pitcairn: Paradise Lost*, Kathy Marks (Flamingo); *Australia's Birthstain*, Babette Smith (A&U). Further details at <www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library/award/>

Australia-Asia Literary Award shortlist

The five titles shortlisted for the \$110,000 Australia-Asia Literary Award are: *The Lost Dog*, Michelle de Kretser (A&U); *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Mohsin Hamid (Penguin); *The Complete Stories*, David Malouf (Random House); *Blood Kin*, Ceridwen Dovey (Atlantic Books); *Orpheus Lost*, Janette Turner Hospital (Fourth Estate).

The award is open to any book-length work published in print or electronically in the previous year, with the author residing in Australia or Asia, or setting their work in either continent.

The winner will be announced on 21 November. Information about the award is available at <www.dca.wa.gov.au/programs/arts_cultural_dev/australia-asia_literary_award/>.

2008 Society Christmas Party

Tuesday, 2 December

Don't miss a special night of good food, good fun and good company at Kafenes Cafe Restaurant in Enmore starting at 6.30 p.m. See the enclosed flyer or the website for more details and to make a booking.

RSVP Friday, 28 November.



Conference volunteers

If you believe that the society adds something worthwhile to your life, think about helping us to run it. We also need you to consider how you can contribute to the 2011 national conference to be held in Sydney. And, do not forget we would especially like to hear from all society members with a proposal for the 2011 conference theme.

Please send your theme proposals to '2011 conference in Sydney' care of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007; Voicemail: (02) 9294 4999
<www.editorsnsw.com>.

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Your comments and contributions are welcome. Mail them to the Editor, *Blue Pencil*, Society of Editors (NSW) Inc., PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007, or email the Editor at <bluepencil@editorsnsw.com>.

Copy deadline for the January/February issue is Thursday, 4 December 2008.

The views expressed in the articles and letters, or the material contained in any advertisement or insert, are those of individual authors, not of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

Advertising rates

Full page, \$375; half page, \$200 (horizontal only); one-third page, \$125 (vertical or horizontal); quarter page \$100 (horizontal only); one-sixth page, \$75 (half of one column). Inserts: \$200 per hundred for DL-sized or A4 pre-folded to DL size. Circulation: approximately 375. Please note that the committee reserves the right to decide whether advertisements are appropriate for this newsletter.

Membership

Membership of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. is open to anyone working as an editor for publication (print or electronic documents) and anyone who supports the society's aims. Membership is available in different categories.

Membership runs for a calendar year. The 2008 fees are \$70 for ordinary member or professional member renewals; \$75 for new professional members (\$45 if joining after 30 June); \$50 for associate member renewals or \$55 for new associate members. Interested organisations can become corporate associates for \$400 per year.

To obtain a membership application form go to the Society of Editors (NSW) website <www.editorsnsw.com>, phone 02 9294 4999 or write to PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007.

Listing in the *Editorial Services Directory*

The society's *Editorial Services Directory* is available online at <www.editorsnsw.com/esd>. New listings and updates can be added quarterly as follows:

- online only: July (deadline 30 June); October (deadline 30 September)
 - print and online: January (deadline 31 December); April (deadline 31 March).
- The cost is \$40 per year (\$20 for new listings received from April to September) in addition to the fee for membership of the society. New listings should be submitted using a template available from Cathy Gray at <esd@editorsnsw.com>.

Committee meetings

All members are welcome to attend the society's committee meetings, generally held each month. Please contact a committee member for details if you wish to attend the next meeting.

2008 COMMITTEE

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Professional development

Grammar Essentials

Date: Thursday, 19 February 2008

Time: 9.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.

Presenter: Pam Peters, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics, Macquarie University

Venue: City Tattersalls Club, 198 Pitt Street, Sydney

Cost: \$195 members, \$290 non-members

Editors often feel that they need more grammar, but how much is enough? The major grammars of contemporary English consist of more than 1,000 pages, with vast networks of grammatical terms. Editors probably do not need to know all of them—unless they are aiming for a career change. What they do need for the purposes of professional editing is enough grammar to:

- make the most of dictionaries, style manuals and other language references
- understand and explain the variable points of current English usage
- capitalise on language resources for cohesive writing
- enlarge their repertoire for managing stylistic change.

Special notes: Bookings close Wednesday, 28 January 2009. Cost includes lunch and refreshments.

To register for this workshop use the form in the next issue of *Blue Pencil* (January/February) or download one from the website. Details of payment options, including direct deposit payments, are on the form. For more information about the workshops, email Meryl Potter at <education@editorsnsw.com>.

Regional members living more than 200 km from Sydney may receive a 40 per cent discount on the cost of the society's workshops (excluding computer based workshops).

2009 Workshops

Preliminary information about workshops next year will be provided in the next issue of *Blue Pencil* (January/February), which will be distributed to members in the first week of January.

Copy deadline for the January/February issue of

Blue Pencil

Thursday, 4 December 2008