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Strategic planning meeting

So now we've come some of the way, where is it we're going again?

Your committee wants the society to serve its members as well as possible with the limited time and resources we have available. But do we all agree what 'well' means for the society and its members?

Are you generally happy with interesting meetings, *Blue Pencil*, and a steady stream of well-attended courses? And what about the Australian editing standards project at the national level, and the ongoing moves towards accreditation, which will also focus on the professional status of editors (see the Accreditation Working Group issues paper on page 8).

There are many more things we *could* do, but what *should* we do? Promote broader public knowledge about editors and their services? Forge stronger links with other groups? Agitate for better pay rates? Something else?

We will be holding a strategic planning meeting on Saturday 18 July, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., at a venue to be announced later. All members are welcome. We'd like your input, so if you can't attend, please email ideas, points for discussion, offers of help/resources, to Shelley Kenigsberg, Michael Lewis or Bruce Howarth (contact details on page 12).

Next meeting: Tuesday 2 July 2002

David Whitbread on Border skirmishes between designers and editors

David Whitbread is the author of *The Design Manual* and was part of the team which produced the sixth edition of *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*. He will speak about the relationship between designers and editors, using examples from these and other publications.

David was the head of Graphic Design at the University of Canberra until 1999 and writes a monthly design column in *Australian MacWorld*. He was formerly the design director of the Australian Government Publishing Service and has been a publications designer for 15 years. He has run his own design consultancy, David Whitbread Design, since 1991. David has taught graphic design at the Canberra Institute of Technology and has run seminars on desktop design in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. His work has received recognition in the Australian Book Publishers Association Design Awards 1989 and the National Print Awards 1991, and he was invited to judge Design DownUnder Discovery 2 in 1998.

- Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt
- Street, Sydney (between Park & Bathurst
- streets, near the Pilgrim Theatre and Pitt
- Street Uniting Church; the closest train
- station is Town Hall); 6.30 p.m. for 7.00
- p.m. Drinks and light refreshments pro-
- vided. \$13 for members; \$16 for non-
- members and those who don't RSVP;
- \$7 for holders of a current Centrelink or
- DVA concession card. Please RSVP to
- brhed@pnc.com.au (email) or 9294 4999
- (voicemail) by Friday 28 June.

• **Tuesday 6 August: TBA**

Author speaks frankly about publishing's facts and fallacies

At the society's May meeting, Frank Moorhouse shared his thoughts about what he's learnt in his years in publishing.

I have been around publishing now for quite a long time. I used to publish my own little magazine, and then I edited country newspapers for a while. At the age of 28, I published my first book with a publishing company called Gareth Powell Associates, which only lasted for two books I think, and my book was never distributed. It remained in the warehouses in packing cases. That was *Futility and Other Animals*.

It was very well reviewed, but of course there were no books to sell. It was like putting up posters for a film that hasn't been made. I was then picked up by John Abernethy at Angus & Robertson, who published *The Americans, Baby* in 1972. *Futility and Other Animals* came out in 1973 as my second book, so I didn't have second-book nerves—my first book became my second book and it had already been well received. It was a very soft landing for a second novel.

I was with John Abernethy until he died. John Abernethy was a fantastic publisher. He took me to my first publishers' lunch which involved an expensive meal, and he bought and ordered the wine. I was in my late twenties. I remember saying to him, 'John, you must tell me how to order wines.' And he said, 'It's very easy. You always look for an author's name in the name of the wine and that's what you order.' I looked at the Langhorne Creek he'd ordered and thought, 'Hang on.' Then I said, 'Oh, right. Yes. Samuel Langhorne Clemens was Mark Twain's real name.' He said, 'You passed the test, Moorhouse', and the advance went up.

I said that I would talk tonight about some myths about publishing. That word 'myths' of course has been corrupted, hasn't it? Legends used to be stories about our ancestors and our relationship to them, and myths were stories about our relationship with the gods. But it's now come to mean fallacies or misconceptions. I don't think we can fight it, but I've changed it to 'fallacies' tonight.

The first of these fallacies is that it's never been more difficult to publish a novel. I hear this a lot from students and young writers. The second is that you have to know someone to get published. The third is that publishing is not as supportive as it once was; publishers don't support writers as they used to. And that implies another one: that there was once a golden age of publishing.

And there are more . . . That editors and agents rewrite most books. That books are under edited. Some of these are contradictory of course. That poetry has been dumped by publishers. That the short story is either dead or is the hardest and most difficult form to master; there are a number of beliefs about the short story. That starting your career from New York or London is still better than starting it from Australia. That kids don't read any more—the book is a dying art. That literary fiction is controlled by an elite. That literary fiction is a wank and there's no money in it.

The list goes on . . . That bookshops are doomed and we'll buy all our books from the Net, from Amazon and such places. That the Internet spells the end of civilized life. That the Internet is the saviour of the book—a lot of young kids think that putting their work on the Net is a way of avoiding all the pain of being edited and published, and that anyone can publish. That sex sells. And the final one I've got here is that serious authors only earn peanuts.

I don't have answers to all these perceptions. I do have answers to some of them. In some cases, I'm not sure which are fact and which are fallacy.

The absence of sound statistics

Why I don't have answers to all those questions is interesting too. One of the things about publishing is there's an absolute absence of sound statistics about the whole industry. When I won the Miles Franklin last year, the organisers talked about the huge increase in

the number of entries. I thought, 'God, I should know more about the statistics of publishing. It's the world I live in. I've been in it all my life. It's the world of writing. I should really have a grasp of this.'

Then, when I went to find out about some of the things, say, how many novels were published and how many autobiographies, biographies, how many volumes of short stories, I found that no one knew any of the answers to these questions. We just don't have comparative statistics. We all know that to ask an author or a publisher how many copies of a book have been sold is a waste of time because everyone lies—the publicist lies, the agent lies, the author lies. Things you shouldn't ask an author are how many hours a day they work, how much they make, how many copies of their book they sell, and how far they run or how many hours they spend in the gym—they'll lie about all these things.

And we all know that until this year those bestseller figures in the newspapers have been based pretty much on anecdotal and impressionistic responses from bookshops. Bookshops don't necessarily track these things.

More than 9000 titles are on sale in shops at any given time, and from this year, and for the first time, 5000 of these are being tracked by a computerised service called BookTrack Australia, owned by AC Nielsen and Whitaker. The *Australian* now takes this service from BookTrack and publishers are buying it. Not every bookselling outlet is taken into account yet; the system is still being fine tuned. But BookTrack, for the first time, gives some idea of how many of these 5000 titles are sold each week.

This gives the 10 bestselling titles which appear in the newspapers—they offer, for example, 'top 10' categories in first-release fiction, first-release non-fiction, mass-market paperback, children's books and Australian titles. These figures are more accurate than

publishing figures have ever been, but still aren't quite accurate. Random House says that their sales figures are sometimes twice as high as those reported by BookTrack.

Still, today we cannot find out much about what is called 'non-fiction'. Everything is lumped in here, from gardening books to biographies. I could not find out how many biographies and autobiographies were published this year without contacting each of the 199 publishers, let alone find comparative figures from past years. Susie Bridge, Executive Officer of the Australian Publishers Association (established in 1947), says some figures lie uncollated in the APA archives, but fundamentally the statistical ignorance about the use of books in this country is 'a shame'.

It has never been more difficult to publish a novel

The figures I researched showed that about 200 Australian novels were published last year (plus about 600 overseas novels). Of the Australian novels published, 36 appeared in hardback and 155 in trade paperback (most good fiction first appears now in quality paperback). About 1000 other fiction titles were published in what is called mass paperback, which would include republication of earlier titles, classics and books written by overseas writers and printed here (roughly 600 of these would be Australian titles).

When I began work I wanted to go back and look at how things had changed statistically during my life time. In the end, I chose two dates for backward comparison. The first date is simply egocentric—1969, when I published my first book of fiction, *Futility and Other Animals*. The other date, 1994, I chose because, surprisingly, it is the first date when comparable statistics on book publishing were gathered by the Bureau of Statistics. Before that, figures on book publishing in Australia were based on National Library acquisition figures; being a copyright deposit library, the National Library is supposed to receive a copy of every published book, journal and pamphlet. Until 1994 this was the only source of crude information about publishing.

In 1994 the Bureau of Statistics began to collect more extensive data on book

publishing. Infuriatingly, they had not quite decided their categories and mostly used sales figures in dollars, which makes comparison very difficult. Over the years they have refined their statistical categories, which again makes historical comparison over even this short period difficult.

For fiction I have also used entry numbers for the Miles Franklin prize as a guide. The prize was established in 1957. Nineteen novels were submitted that year, and Patrick White's *Voss* won it. Going to the year my first book was published, 1969, 13 novels were submitted. (Not mine, but then I didn't call it a novel and it wouldn't have got passed Leonie). In that year, according to the National Library acquisition figures, 170 works of fiction were published.

This is higher than I would have thought. My guess is that it included what was once known as pulp fiction or novelettes—westerns, thrillers, and so on which used to be published weekly or monthly—genres and publishing formats which have almost disappeared except, say, for Mills and Boon. This figure is high when compared with the figures for the Miles Franklin entries in the 1960s—which indicate that a lower number of novels were around—at least of quality novels.

So I put a question mark over this 1969 National Library figure. I mention it because on the surface it seems to go against my argument. But, as I say, it doesn't correlate with the Miles Franklin entries or with other later trends. This was in a population of about 12 million.

By 1994, the year the Bureau of Statistics began collecting data on publishing, 43 novels were submitted for the Miles Franklin Prize when about 100 novels were published (an estimate because the bureau, in this first year of collecting data had not refined its data sufficiently to tell precisely). And this year, nearly 10 years later, 54 novels were submitted by publishers to the Miles Franklin and 203 for the Vogel Award for an unpublished manuscript by a writer under 35, and 191 were published—nearly four a week. That is, the number of novels published has nearly doubled in 10 years. The entries to the Vogel have almost doubled (127 in 1992).

I will throw in another figure. Random House doesn't solicit manuscripts and

usually only accepts submission through literary agents. Yet this year, regardless, it received something like 2000 novel manuscripts. They publish about 10 novels a year. Of course, maybe we were publishing too few novels 10 years ago.

Poetry has been dumped by publishers

I hear from poets that the main stream publishers do not publish poetry. I have not looked at the lists for the mainstream publishers and compared them with times past, but I do know this: the Victorian Premier's Award for Poetry and the NSW Premier's Prize attracted over 80 volumes of poetry this year. Again, more than one book of poetry published a week. Praise the Lord, for we are a poetical nation.

But the interesting thing to note here is that this figure of 80-plus probably represents *all* the books of poetry published in Australia that year. With the novel, the figure represents only those novels thought by their publishers to be literary or non-genre fiction. Most poetry is published by small presses or by the poets themselves. And godknows how they are distributed or how many copies are sold.

The short story is dead

This year *HQ* magazine received 1292 entries for its short story competition, which is about 150 up from last year. However, there is no escaping from the hard statistical fact that the short story is in bad shape—maybe facing extinction. It has dwindled and dwindled, both as a commercial entertainment—what might be called the magazine story—and as a literary art form.

I estimate that there are about 200 paid-for new stories published a year in Australia now, including the ABC, the little magazines like *Meanjin*, the commercial magazines such as *HQ*, in anthologies, and in Christmas and summer reading supplements in newspapers and magazines. Most of these would be what we could recognise as literary short stories.

When I began writing stories while at school in the 1950s, just before TV was introduced, about 2300 short stories were published a year in Australia by 40 publications, which included the ABC, the women's magazines, commercial

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short story magazines and the daily newspapers (afternoon newspapers, now almost gone, published a short story every day). There were short story magazines such as *Future Science Fiction*, *Humour*, and *Detective Stories*.

In the 1950s the vocational guidance officer came to the country school when I was in final year of high school and gave the students a list of 500 possible occupations from which we were to choose three. I went through the list and said that I couldn't find 'short story writer'. The vocational officer said reluctantly that I could add it to my three choices. I did. I had come to be attached to the story as a reader at high school; it seemed to me the most brilliant of art forms and I wanted to write them (and I was trying).

My second choice was 'expressive dancer', despite the fact that I had never seen or known an expressive dancer. As an occupation, expressive dancer seemed as far from Nowra as I could imagine. And from the look on the face of the vocational guidance officer it also revealed something about my nature which had not quite manifested itself at that point. That was to come later.

The vocational guidance officer then said, 'There is no real career called short story writer. I suggest you become a cadet journalist.' And of course the vocational officer was right. But I spent quite a few years trying to prove him wrong.

Yet, in another sense, he was wrong. As it turned out I went on writing stories and seeing myself as a short story writer, and I put together something of a living from it, in the wider sense, that is, of eventually making an income from the other work—film, journalism, grants, etc—which came to me because of my reputation as a short story writer. The vocational guidance officer was right in that the money from the sales of the stories or the books of stories alone have never given me a living.

And maybe I wasn't really ever a short story writer. Very early, I developed the discontinuous narrative—linking the stories in various combinations—accretions, tangential intersections, and fields of fragments, and fields of association.

The death of reading

Let's look at the primary fallacy. We have also been present at the pronounced death of reading. I have read statistics about growing illiteracy and the fact that the young allegedly don't read books.

There is a confusion about this sort of talk. Sometimes people say that children don't read books and are glued to the TV, or now to the computer. The Internet has replaced the book. A confusion occurs here because much Internet use requires not only reading, but *writing*. It is basically a text medium.

But what are children doing then with books?

Last year a report was produced by the Australian Centre for Youth Literature at the State Library of Victoria and the Market Development Division of the Australia Council. It is a study of the reading experiences of 10- to 18-year-olds. The fallacy that children no longer read was exploded by this report (we can only trust that the methodology of this study is sound and sophisticated). It found that most 10- to 18-year-olds are very positive about reading books.

The study broke them down into subcategories—31 per cent were classified as Avid and Confident Readers. Another 24 per cent were classified as Book Positive Rebels who found books interesting and exciting but preferred to select their own reading and resisted being told what to read. That brings us to 55 per cent who are enthusiastic readers among the 10- to 18-year-olds. Another 24 per cent were classified as Book Neutral Light Readers, less enthusiastic than the first 55 per cent, but still readers, although they tended towards magazines. And then of course there were those who found reading irrelevant to their lives and not really a leisure activity; this category represented 21 per cent of the children surveyed.

These are not gloomy figures. And I rush to say that some of my friends when I was at school and some of my adult friends are not book readers. I do not consider book reading to be a prerequisite for good company or a successful life, although I would think that those who don't read books are missing an awful lot.

While the survey found that some children saw reading as 'nerdy', the tendency to see those who did not read

as being negative—dumb etc—was much stronger. We all have a job for now.

What about the Internet?

We have lived through the Death of the Printed Word with the coming of TV, and now we are living through the Death of the Printed Word on paper and of the book because of the Internet. We now hear dire things about the Internet as it bears on cultured values, the future of the book, and the future of our children. As in all areas of human uncertainty gurus and soothsayers abound.

In an essay in *Campus Review*, Dr Snyder, a senior lecturer in language and literacy education at Monash University in Victoria, says, 'Imagine this: It is the year 2096. You're on a visit to the museum and I'm your guide. I ask you to stop at an exhibit of strange artefacts called "books". 'I explain to you what it meant to "read" before the time of hypertext. As the word reading is no longer in use.' She goes on to describe a world where 'the concept of a single work, identified by an author, a title or a genre, is not useful in this time . . .'

Net crusaders speculate that 'the concept of a single work, identified by an author, a title, or a genre' will no longer be useful in the future. All books will become one.

While I risk sounding like a book-fool, why would the boundaries of genre or the origin of authorship become less valuable because of this new technology? The Internet as technology may *permit* someone to use someone's else's text and amalgamate other people's research or ideas with their own. So does print. Or to pass off the work of another as their own. So does print. But ultimately to what end?

Why should the conventions of genre and of acknowledgment and attribution collapse? Wouldn't we lose the reliability of source. (Is this medical remedy on the net a fantasy? a folk remedy? or the outcome of years of rigorous research?) To whose advantage would it be to lose footnotes and acknowledgments? Genre is one of the ways of establishing a contract of expectation between the author and reader.

Of course, sophisticated readers acknowledge how difficult it might be to treat some autobiography as anything other than fantasy and are familiar with

the experimentation with the boundaries of genre over the last few hundred years. And there have been for quite a time books which wander across the boundaries. But there is a functional distinction separating the biographical mission, the historical mission, the futuristic mission, the fictional mission and so on. And hence in the contract and expectation of the reader.

Communication is about who is saying what to whom, on what basis, and for what purpose. The traditional design of the book is a bundle of signals and contracts about these matters. The nature of the cover, binding, and paper tell us something about the book. The blurb is the publisher's statement about the book. The preface, the introduction, the quotations of approbation from other writers are all part of a contract about what is being offered to the reader. But above all it is about the *integrity of the communication*.

In an ever more crowded communications environment with ever more choice, increasingly, it will be the integrity of the provider (the editor, the publisher, the website staff, and, if it survives, the CD-ROM, and of course, the e-book) which will guide us.

A word about the e-book. It is essentially a delivery platform for books which already exist in printed form. If it becomes otherwise—a site for first release—the reader will still have to be *aware* of the book and to have some guidance as to its nature and integrity. That is, we will still need an infrastructure resembling publishing and critical assessment before a reader will download that book.

The service of screening out the unreliable and the mind-wasting clamourers for the mind, identifying good originators, cultivating them, editing them, and successfully getting them to their rightful readers should be a very highly valued role, and this includes also the role of teachers, librarians, critics and the best book clubs. They will be more and more important and should be paid much more and more carefully selected. The problem of connecting books to their appropriate audiences remains. You are truly the gatekeepers of the intellect and imagination.

About the the fallacy of it being harder now to get a novel published,

surely it's not a matter of comparing how many novels were published in year X and year Y, but a look at the per centage of the number of manuscripts published from those submitted at the time. I think there are very many more manuscripts being selected and there are other factors that drive that organisations other than the commissioning editors or editors looking at slush piles; publishers don't accept manuscripts any more, or they have to come via a literary agent. It's so different. A number of things could make it harder than ever to get a novel published, perhaps because of the per centage of people who think they can write.

More competition.

It's seen as a much more speculative enterprise because the big advance figures create a flurry of manuscripts. And then we've got writing centres and creative writing schools where hundreds of creative writers are generating manuscripts.

My suggestion is that it's actually not a fallacy.

That's right. I can see that.

Like any fallacy, it depends on how you look at it.

Could you tell us about your relationship with your editor or editors at the moment in how you actually relate on the written word. Do you send it to them on paper, on disk, via email? How you do repond when they come back to you with comments? What sort of comments do you expect, or respect or not like? Tell us something about that aspect of it.

Right from the beginning, nothing has changed in my relationship with the publishers as far as editing goes, that is, an editor is assigned, either in-house or out, er [laughter] . . .

I don't remember if they were freelance editors in the first years or not. There's always been an editor assigned, and we've sat down with the book and worked side by side on the manuscript to a large extent. One book, *Days of Wine and Rage*, which was an anthology with 50 per cent of my own work and 40 other contributors, was done long-distance, by telephone and by fax. It was a nightmare. That book was a nightmare. My partner

at the time would say, 'The dentist's on the phone again.'

Dark Palace was the first book I've submitted by email. I was then in France. Heather Jamieson is here; she was the second editor. I worked on it first with Jane Palfreyman, who worked at Picador on *Grand Days*. She's now head of publishing at Picador—the titles in publishing confuse me. She came down from her lofty castle and wanted to do the editing on *Dark Palace* for old times sake. We sat in her kitchen at Leichhardt and worked side by side and went out for lunch and worked over very long Italian lunches on that.

How do you respond to the criticism?

Well you can see how I responded to the criticism and difficulties of *Days of Wine and Rage*, when the editor was called 'the dentist'. That was the only long-distance editing job. For both *Dark Palace* and *Grand Days* there was structural input from the publishing company here. *Grand Days* was published in the United States, England, France and Australia. It was edited simultaneously in England and in Australia, so I worked with two editors on the same book, which was fascinating. They both said, 'There's a chapter missing; it's the second chapter.' I said, 'No, that's the book as it is.' But I went back and read it and it suddenly hit me; I could see what the problem was, that the leap between chapter one and chapter two was too great. They were right, both of them, so I knuckled down and wrote another chapter.

How important are critics in terms of sales? Do they affect writers?

They sure do. I remember *The Americans, Baby*—my second book, which came out as my first book. It was a bit of a success story for a book of short stories. The review in the *Age* was very negative. All the other reviews were pretty damn good, but that one Victorian reviewer turned against it. It took a year for the sales in Victoria to come up to the sales in other states; that one review retarded the sales of the book, and it then had to wait for word of mouth and subsidiary reviews in journals to pick up.

You can recover from bad reviews. Donald Horne claims that bad reviews don't affect his sales at all, but he would

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NOTICE BOARD

Training

Grammar for writers and editors

The society is offering a grammar workshop on Saturday 14 September, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., presented by editor and language education consultant Robert Veel, BA, DipEd, MEd. The workshop will focus on how knowledge of grammar can help writers and editors make texts more readable. Sessions will include language analysis principles, clauses and clause constituents, and punctuation, with plenty of time for questions about problems of grammar and editing that participants encounter in their work.

The workshop will be held in the Sydney Room on Level 2 at the City Tattersalls Club, 198 Pitt Street, Sydney (between Market and Park streets). The cost (\$99 for society members and \$130 for others) includes lunch, and morning and afternoon tea. A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter. For information, contact Alice Drew at <alice_drew@lycos.com>.

APA workshops

The Australian Publishers' Association has two courses coming up: Writing copy that sells—Copywriting/Blurb Writing/Press Releases on 22 July, and Managing People and Performance on 13 and 14 August. For more information, contact Libby O'Donnell on: 02 9281 9788 or email <Libby.Odonnell@publishers.asn.au>.

XML & XSLT workshop

The Australian Society for Technical Communication (ASTC) is presenting a one-day XML and XSLT workshop on Saturday 29 June. While no XML knowledge is assumed, participants with some HTML experience will benefit most. The popular editor XML Spy will be used.

The workshop will focus on specific techniques and materials to help participants become productive with XML, covering topics such as: using regular expressions to convert HTML 4.0 to well-formed XML; using XSLT to re-structure, filter and sort text; XML and CSS; incorporating frequently changing data from a database table or text or MS Excel file; integrating XML with your MS Word, FrameMaker and Help tool. Practices such as Word-to-XML round-tripping will be included.

The workshop will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Clifton & Associates, 2/200 George Street, Sydney. The cost is \$175 for ASTC members and \$200 for non-members. Booking forms are available from <www.textology.com.au/wshop.htm>.

For your forward events file

Indexers' conference

The Australian Society of Indexers will hold an international conference in Sydney on Friday 12 and Saturday 13 September 2003. Watch their website <<http://www.aussi.org>> for further information.

National editors' conference

The Society of Editors (Queensland) Inc. has started planning a national editors conference, which will most probably be held in September 2003. If you have ideas for the conference, want to speak or know a likely speaker, or if you are willing to help organise the conference, please email Robin Bennett, at <robin.bennett@detir.qld.gov.au>.

Sometime soon there will also be a conference link on the Queensland society's website <www.editorsqld.com>.

People who went to the editors and indexers conference in Canberra last year found it very useful and enjoyed themselves as well. So plan to attend the next one. We'll keep you posted as the conference gets closer.

Internet humour

- A good pun is its own reword.
- Energizer Bunny arrested—charged with battery.
- A man's home is his castle, in a manor of speaking.
- A pessimist's blood type is always b-negative.
- My wife really likes to make pottery, but to me it's just kiln time.
- Dijon vu—the same mustard as before.
- Practice safe eating—always use condiments.
- I fired my masseuse today. She just rubbed me the wrong way.
- A Freudian slip is when you say one thing but mean your mother.

Frank Moorhouse

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say that. I now only read positive reviews. I'm not interested in reading negative reviews. That's too sadistic. It was Joseph Conrad who said, 'You should measure the reviews, not read them.' It's the amount of space, the attention the book gets that is more important perhaps than the opinion of the reviewer. Some people dispute reviewers. Those rebel readers, I bet they don't pay attention to reviewers. I bet they have their own agenda about what books are good and bad.

What was the impetus that drove you to go from short stories to a novel?

It's a bit misleading to say I was writing short stories in a way because I created this idea of the discontinuous narrative. When I put *Futility and Other Animals* together, Gareth Powell, the publisher, said, 'The same characters are in each of the stories, but it's not a volume of short stories and it's not a novel.' I said, 'Gareth, this is a discontinuous narrative. At least that's what I call it.' So it was published as a discontinuous narrative. I was involved in a type of narrative construction that was somewhere between a novel and the short story anyway. The paradox of all this is that all my books, the 13 fiction books, are all linked. There are character links going right back to the first book. There are tangential connections through all my fiction books.

Jacque edits to keep wolf from the door

*This is the first in a series of interviews with editors. Here Pamela Hewitt talks to **Jacqueline Kent**, former president and honorary life member of the society, winner of the Beatrice Davis Editorial fellowship, which led to study of publishing in New York for three months, and author of nine books. The most recent is *A Certain Style: Beatrice Davis, A Literary Life* (Viking, 2001), winner of this year's National Biography Award, the Nita B. Kibble Award for Women Writers, and shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Prize for non-fiction.*

The first thing I encountered when *Beatrice* came out was the clichés about women. Women interviewers, more than men, said 'Oh come on, tell us about her sex life'. You'd think that 30-year-old gossip would have a very short shelf life. There was also the cliché of the editor as blue-pencil-wielding headmistress that irritated me.

It's been a bit weird, all the attention. I don't think anybody would write books for the sake of that. There are easier ways to get your 15 minutes. It does give the book a bit more life and puts Beatrice back in prominence, which is good. The prizes give the book a bit of a shot in the arm. It's a good thing for the subject, and it's nice to have written what I think is an interesting book about a really interesting subject, publishing.

That's something I tried to do in the book, explain the process while trying to draw a line between making it pedantic and intrusive. That was one of the toughest things to do. You don't want to give too much information to people who don't know about editing because they'll be bored to sobs. People who do, already know.

Editors have a characteristically humble attitude to their own writing. I think most editors are pretty good writers. You have to be. But this handmaiden attitude militates against wanting to write for themselves. It's like the analogy between editing and invisible mending. I like the joke about editing as invisible mending. It's called that for three reasons: first of all, it's done mainly by women; it's very badly

paid; and it's noticed only when done badly.

In fact, editing is a much more active engagement with the text. American editors call themselves quarterbacks, which is much more active, and right, because they control the play. They do a lot more commissioning and shaping.

The main difference between editing here and in New York is that we don't have the economies of scale. This means all sorts of differences in status and pay, but I don't know that it influences the work. Sometimes it does, but someone who's paid \$20 an hour can be a fantastic editor, and you can get someone who's paid \$80 an hour and is sloppy. There are two things I did notice, one good and one bad. The bad one is the commodification of books. At its worst, there's the feeling we have to sell *x* books to make *x* profit. They all pay lip service: 'Nobody does books just for marketing reasons.' Garbage. They do a lot of books for marketing reasons.

Editing is called invisible mending for three reasons: it's done mainly by women; it's very badly paid; and it's noticed only when done badly.

The other thing that I think is really good and that I came back with is that editing as work is taken very seriously in New York. There's more energy and focus. They're also much more collaborative. There's more trust between author and editor. It's all dependent on time and money. People know that if it's going to work, it's going to work big.

I started as a journalist and became a radio broadcaster at the ABC. I happened to hit the ABC in one of its noxious phases, so I left, went overseas and bummed around. I got a job as an

editorial assistant in London, and used the experience I gained in London to get a job here. I've been doing it for about 25 years.

I always, always wanted to be a writer. I never specially wanted to marry and have children, do all that. I knew I'd have to earn my own living and I couldn't do that as a writer—very few do—so I'd better earn my living doing something that fits with doing my own stuff: journalism, broadcasting, and then editing. It's only now, after god knows how many years (and I don't regard them as wasted) that I think 'I'm a writer who does editing to keep the wolf from the door'. It's taken a very long time to get there.

The first resistance you have to get over is your own. You've got the editor on your shoulder, the person who scribbles out what you've written before you've written it. That takes a while to get over. Then, if you write one novel, then another, then another, people regard you as a novelist. But if you refuse to be pigeon-holed, you're a bit awkward, and it probably means you don't get as much attention. If you're like me and you just like writing—young adult fiction, oral history, biography and the odd short story—it does seem that you're not considered a real writer. But that's OK. It's the work I love.

As an author, I've only had one bad editing experience and that was because the publisher was lazy and didn't want to spend any money on editing. What it meant was that somebody timidly crossed a couple of bits out in pencil, so I did the editing myself. The editor for *Beatrice*, Meredith Rose, at Penguin, is wonderful. She's a real blue heeler. She'd say 'I don't think this phrase works', I'd say 'I think it does'. She'd come back two or three times, and it always worked out. She won some, I won some. It was a really good experience. It was a book about an editor, so we would be damned, both of us, if it was badly edited.

I came in during the dying days of hot metal. Now you can put an entire book together in three weeks. In the past,

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Accreditation Issues Paper

The CASE accreditation working group has developed an issues paper on accreditation. The society will consider accreditation at a coming meeting, but the working group's issues paper is intended as a starting point for discussion. Feedback from members is welcome. Please contact Pamela Hewitt (emend@bigpond.net.au) with any comments.

Why CASE is investigating accreditation

At its meeting in October 2001 the Council of Australian Societies of Editors (CASE) set up a working group on accreditation, comprising representatives from all the states and territories, and asked it—among other things—to set out why accreditation of editors is being investigated and the principles which should underlie any accreditation system. CASE wants to ensure that members of the societies throughout Australia are aware of the background to the accreditation issue and fully informed of its implications.

The group began its work early in 2002 with an appraisal of its complete mandate from CASE,¹ an overview of the available literature on accreditation, and a review of the recent history of this subject among the editing profession in the states and territories. It then drew up this issues paper, which, it hopes, will throw light on all aspects of the accreditation discussion for the benefit of editors of all kinds currently working in Australia, as well as individuals interested in entering the profession.

Open and informed discussion of all the factors set out below will help the membership arrive at a final decision that will be in the best interests of the editing profession in this country.

1. Potential benefits

1.1 Capitalising on the *Standards*

An accreditation system is a logical follow-up to establishment of the *Australian Standards for Editing Practice* recently hammered out by CASE and adopted by the members. For the first time the profession now has an agreed level of performance at which to aim, and an accreditation system would establish a recognised process to support that standard.

1.2 Quality assurance

An accreditation system will provide some assurance of a satisfactory level of performance. If the profession is open only to individuals who demonstrate a sufficient level of competence, it will be less exposed to the risk of shoddy work by practitioners, and much better equipped to ensure respect for accepted standards—the *Standards*. Employers will have some assurance that the people they hire can actually do the job.

1.3 Recognition and protection

Accreditation will raise the prestige of the profession in the publishing industry and more generally. If the perceived value of the editing process is enhanced, publishers and writers are more likely to decide that the use of an editor is beneficial (if not indispensable) to a particular project—an important point at a time when cost-cutting in publishing is devaluing the editing process and serious editorial shortcomings are apparent in much published work.

It is common knowledge that virtually anyone can set up as a freelance editor and start looking for work. Many of these individuals have no way of 'proving' their competence except word-of-mouth on the basis of jobs satisfactorily performed (assuming, that is, that they have been able to find any). Many people in publishing will be aware of incidents in recent years where individuals representing themselves as editors have been accused of incompetence against which—because of the unstructured, unregulated nature of the profession—no recourse was available to the client except not to use that person again. Accreditation can protect the profession against practitioners who might bring it into disrepute.

1.4 Remuneration

Accredited editors could expect improved rates of remuneration—rates genuinely commensurate with the skills deployed. Many individuals currently doing satisfactory work as editors are in fact unable to charge rates even close to that level.

2. Required principles

The CASE working group on accreditation believes that a bad accreditation system would be worse than no system. Should the membership decide to move towards accreditation, any system eventually adopted must satisfy the following criteria. They are discussed further under Issues.

2.1 Fair

The system must not only be objectively fair, but also be *perceived* to be fair by all parties, including both established editors and those seeking admission to the profession (see 3.4).

2.2 Transparent

The workings of the system must be clear and apparent to all; a systematic effort must be made to explain how it will operate (see 3.4).

2.3 Appropriate

It must recognise that editing is both an art and a craft, and allow for a variety of solutions to editorial problems (see 3.6).

2.4 Inclusive

It must cater for the needs of editors of all categories and in all genres (see 3.2, 3.5, 3.6).

2.5 Consistent

It must seek to uphold the *Australian Standards for Editing Practice* as representing the required level of competence for the profession of editor, and must produce similar results in similar cases (see 3.4).

2.6 Flexible

It must embody an appeals procedure for candidates who perceive that they have been unfairly treated, as well as a mechanism for periodic review to take account of factors such as technological change (see 3.8, 3.9).

2.7 Acceptable

It must seek, through a genuine consultative process, the broadest possible level of support among editors, the publishing industry as a whole, and all others who make use of editorial services (see 3.10).

2.8 Practical

It must be shown to be workable under all situations likely to be encountered in practice (see 3.3, 3.7).

2.9 Sustainable

The financial cost and professional commitment involved in setting up and operating the system must be able to be maintained in the long term. (see 3.7).

2.10 Accountable

It must embody procedures to handle complaints against accredited individuals (see 3.9).

2.11

Finally, the system must take account of the education and training available in editing nationally and in the states and territories (see 3.12).

3. Issues

The following points lay bare some assumptions made by the working group and identify challenges that a successful accreditation system must meet.

3.1 Terminology

The working group believes that, at least in this early stage of its work, the term *accreditation* should not be interpreted narrowly, but be understood to include *any arrangement that might provide some formal recognition or other status to competent editors* based on their experience, their academic or similar qualifications, their demonstrated skills, or a combination of those elements. Some other term such as *registration* or *certification* might eventually be chosen.

3.2 Who/what is being accredited?

The working group believes that the accreditation system should apply to individuals, rather than to courses or institutions.

3.3 Scope

Editors' job descriptions vary. Some have a comprehensive role, covering all the skills described in the *Standards*, but an individual who never ventures into project management may still be a competent editor. Similarly, editors who work exclusively on electronic publications do not need the skills required for print. Accreditation of specialist editors (fiction, science) may also have particular requirements. A tiered system, with different grades or categories, might be one way of dealing with this.

3.4 Who guards the guardians?

The perceived legitimacy of any accreditation body is crucial, both within the profession and in the eyes of the outside world. A system of accreditation based on a combination of tests, experience and completion of educational courses will carry with it the need to assess the relative weight and worth of all elements.

In particular, any assessment conducted by the accreditation body will need to stand up to the scrutiny of the general membership of societies around Australia. Members will need

to be confident that the system assesses what it purports to assess, and of the skills of the individuals involved in the process, especially over time.

3.5 New entrants and established editors

At present individuals come to editing in a variety of ways, some of them more or less random: they serve an informal 'apprenticeship' in a publishing house, and/or they complete a university or TAFE course, or they simply drift into editing from areas such as teaching or journalism. An accreditation system must allow for the entry of people of diverse backgrounds and recognise prior learning in other fields. Again, a tiered system could accommodate differences.

Editors with established professional reputations have a right to expect that they will be accredited with a minimum of fuss. The system will assess competence, not excellence.

3.6 The difficulties of measuring higher-level skills

Because many aspects of editing are subjective, there is great scope for disagreement about what is acceptable and what is not. While it is relatively simple to assess the rate of correction of typographical errors and the correct use of editors' marks, structural or substantive editing has much greater scope for creative solutions to complex problems in a lengthy text. A fair accreditation system would need to ensure an appropriate weighting and evaluation of skills across a wide range of genres, perhaps incorporating associated skills such as client liaison, knowledge of the production process and ability to meet deadlines.

3.7 Set-up and operating costs

A minimal accreditation system would amount to little more than ticking boxes to identify aspects of editing that a candidate had undertaken, or courses completed. A more rigorous system would require much broader functions, possibly necessitating a permanent secretariat. The responsible body would need to devise a set of accreditation procedures, meet regularly, convene assessment panels and the like, liaise with other professional bodies, investigate the changing landscape of courses within Australia, and deal with the question of international equivalence.

Even assuming a user-pays component, the cost of such a system would be considerable. A satisfactory method of funding will be needed. As well as the cost in money terms, the members involved might have to commit time and effort that could be better spent in other areas of the profession.

3.8 Responding to change

The publishing industry has undergone enormous and rapid change in recent years. The set of skills that equipped a competent editor 20 years ago is unlikely to meet the needs of the profession today. Boundaries between editors, designers and typesetters are shifting, and this process is likely to accelerate. Should an accreditation system confine itself to core skills or embrace emerging needs, especially those heralded by technological changes? Similarly, the assessors must be alert to changes in acceptable grammar and usage.

3.9 Complaints and appeals

An accreditation system will need to provide mechanisms to adjudicate complaints about editing services and to enable aggrieved parties to seek remedies against poor performance.

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Accreditation

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Legal action could result from clients who engaged the services of an accredited editor and were not happy with the quality of work provided, or from a complaint by a candidate unsuccessful in gaining accreditation. Decisions will be needed on how high the bar should be set, and how the accreditation body will deal with such disputes.

3.10 Industry acceptance

Some editors do not see any need to develop an accreditation system, as indicated in a recent report summarising members' attitudes in three recent surveys.² If a national accreditation system is to become a useful part of the services offered by Australian societies of editors, it will need to gain broad acceptance among editors. The system will also need to be widely promoted among those who use editorial services, a major task in itself.

3.11 Membership of societies

The working group assumes that accredited status will not be linked to membership of the state/territory editors' societies. The societies will continue to determine eligibility for membership according to their constitutions.

3.12 Education and training

Without a parallel education and training framework, an accreditation system is seriously handicapped. Applicants who fail to meet the standards put forward by any accreditation body have a right to ask what they should do to meet those standards.

The acceptance and fairness of an accreditation system faces three obstacles in the area of education: the absence of a

nationally available set of courses at entry, professional and advanced levels; the drift away from in-house training; and the proliferation of tertiary courses in media and professional writing that cover editing in a superficial fashion. An accreditation system will need to link accreditation appropriately to education, and continuing professional development for editors.

Prepared by the CASE Working Group on Accreditation, June 2002:

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Notes

1. The other components of that mandate are: to research how other organisations and professions handle accreditation; and to develop a series of possible models (probably two plus the option of no accreditation) to be put to members.

2. Ann Milligan, National Notes, *The Canberra Editor*, Volume 11, No. 2, February 2002.

Jacqui Kent

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technology was much slower, more cumbersome and labour-intensive. Now it's much easier; all you need is a computer and some programs. But what hasn't changed is the amount of time you need to spend writing well and editing well. Those things were never given enough time, but it's worse now.

As an editor, the authors I'm happiest with work as active collaborators. For that reason, I prefer working on creative non-fiction.

The best experiences I've had are where I've developed a manuscript or an idea with the author and we've worked on it together. That I find immensely satisfying. I get irritated by the preciousness that occasionally creeps into fiction editing. There is a lot more worship at the shrine, being afraid to touch the work.

I did a seminar at the residential program at Varuna on the author and the writer's voice. Last time this was done, they chose canonical Australian writers, and people were invited to marvel at the writer's voice. But I used mid-career writers writing now—Tim Winton, Roger McDonald, Marion Halligan, Kate Grenville, Nick Earls—and said 'Here's the text. Is there anything we can improve?' I noticed an enormous reluctance to say anything critical. I'm not talking about going in boots and all, but quite a few editors are reluctant to own their instincts.

I love reading good writing where the balance is right, and the writing's not drawing attention to itself in any particular fussy sort of way, where the words work. One thing I do like about fiction editing is getting into the small stuff, weighing things, balancing phrases, seeing where that comma goes, the sort of thing you do when you're writing.

I've worked freelance a lot longer than in-house. One of the things about freelancing is that you can choose the degree and intensity of contact. I'm working part time in-house at the moment. You get more of an overview of what you're doing. If you're working on something you see it from go to whoa, which you don't as a freelance. It means that your knowledge of the production process has to be up to speed. That's interesting and stimulating. There's the human company, too. Most offices have at least one person you can select as your giggling companion. At the same time, I'm wanting to go back and work on my stuff now. I'll probably do that for quite a long time.

ESD update deadline

The deadline for this quarter for new entries and updates to existing entries in the society's *Editorial Services Directory* is 30 June. If you need to change the contact details in your entry or submit a new entry, contact Cathy Gray at cgray@mpx.com.au.

Between the devil and the deep blue . . .

In a singularly pugnacious—even prescriptive—mood, I’ve decided to take on something that has been annoying me for years: the abusage *between A to B*. I am usually tolerant of changes in meanings, but tampering with the meaning of a preposition is going too far.

There’s really no excuse for this, though some dictionary definitions do require careful reading. For example, the *Macquarie Dictionary* (2nd edition) says that *between* means ‘in the space separating (two or more points, objects, etc.)’, and an unwary reader might well think that ‘A to B’ identifies a ‘space separating’. But, for my money, ‘two or more’ can only be satisfied by things in an *and* relationship. So *between A and B* is the only admissible usage.

Error is most prevalent when A and B are numeric: ‘the salary for this position is between forty to fifty thousand dollars’, or ‘this office is open between 9am to 5pm’. But those are not very different from ‘Albury is between Sydney to Melbourne’, which I think (and hope) is unlikely to be heard.

A similar error creeps into matters of choice: ‘choose between A or B’. Interestingly, most grammarians regard *or* as another form of additive (sometimes called cumulative) relationship, like *and*. As far as grammatical consequences are concerned, that’s fair enough; I can’t think of any sentence where changing *and* to *or* would require any other change, to punctuation, word order, or any other aspect of the sentence’s grammar. But there’s a world of difference at the semantic level—‘A or B’ is not two things. (In any given situation, it might be: ‘Are you hungry or thirsty? Both.’ But that’s not inherent in the meaning of *or*.) So the choice must be *between A and B*: ‘you can choose tea or coffee’, but ‘you can choose between tea and coffee’.

Other difficulties arise with *between*. A common question is whether it can be used for more than two things. In general, US usage is more restrictive than Australian or British usage;

Americans tend to prefer *among* when more than two things are involved. Still, they don’t object to ‘between you, me, and the gatepost’.

Perhaps the grandest chestnut of all, though, is ‘between you and I’. I don’t get steamed up about this one because at least its origins lie in an attempt to get things right. Like so many things drummed into children by well-meaning but ill-informed teachers, it reflects only half of a truth. For most of us on most occasions, the phrase ‘A and B’ (where

A refers to someone else, and B refers to the speaker) will be used as the subject of a clause: ‘My husband and I are pleased to be here’, ‘Sally and I went to the pictures’. In object position, we will usually say ‘us’, rather than identifying the separate members of us. So we had it drummed into us: ‘Don’t say ‘me and John’; say ‘John and I’. The qualifying ‘in subject position’ was never expressed, perhaps because it was never recognised.

Michael Lewis

Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

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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 runs for a calendar year. 2002 fees are \$50 for new members (\$30 if joining after 30 June) and \$45 for renewals.

For a membership application form, phone (02) 9294 4999, write to PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007, or download an application from the society’s website at <http://www.users.bigpond.com/socednsw/>

Blue Pencil

The society’s newsletter, *Blue Pencil*, is published monthly, except for a combined January/February issue. Your comments and contributions are welcome. Mail them to the Editor, *Blue Pencil*, Society of Editors (NSW) Inc., PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007. Deadline for the July issue is Monday July 15.

Advertising rates:

Full page, \$150; half page, \$80 (horizontal only); one-third page, \$50 (vertical or horizontal); quarter page \$40 (horizontal only); sixth page, \$30 (half of one column). Inserts: \$75 per hundred for DL-sized or A4 pre-folded to DL size. Circulation: approximately 350.

Listing in the *Editorial Services Directory*

Listing costs \$40 and is available only to members of the society. The fee covers listing in both print and online versions. The online version is updated every three months. New entries should be submitted in .rtf format, using a template available from Cathy Gray at cgray@mpx.com.au. Updates can be made to contact details only for existing entries. Deadline for the next update is 30 June 2002. Contact Cathy for more information. A new print edition is due to be published in 2003.

Committee meetings

All members are welcome to attend the society’s committee meetings. Contact a committee member for details if you wish to attend the next meeting.

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NOTICEBOARD

Events

NSW Writers' Centre

<http://www.nswwriterscentre.org.au>;

Meet the author

6.30 p.m.–8 p.m., free entry, bar open at 6 p.m. RSVP to 9555 9757.

Wednesday 3 July, Jenny Williams: *Yenni: A Life Between Worlds* (Pluto Books) is the intimate portrayal of Jenny Williams' childhood in Hungary (now the Slovak Republic) during the oppressive German and Soviet regimes, the Hungarian uprising of 1956, and the many other episodes that shaped her world. RSVP by 5 p.m. Tuesday 2 July.

Thursday 18 July, Peter Bakowski: Peter Bakowski's poems have appeared in more than one hundred literary magazines worldwide, predominately in English but also in Arabic, German, Japanese, Polish and Spanish. In the past, he has been awarded the Victorian Premier's Award for . RSVP by 5 p.m. Wednesday 17 July.

Popular Writing Festival

To be held this year on 6–7 July, the NSW Writers' Centre and Selwa Anthony's Australia Voices in Print have expanded the weekend program to a double strand. For more information call the Writers' Centre on 9555 9757 or visit their web page.

Old computers

The NSW Writers' Centre is no longer recycling old computers. If anyone knows of an environmentally friendly option, please let us know (email Carey Martin or Merry Pearson; contact details at left).

Gleebooks events for July

Book launches

Tuesday 2 July: *White Out: How politics is killing black Australia*, Rosemary Neill, 6 for 6.30 p.m.

Saturday 6 July: *Mussolini*, Richard Bosworth, 5 for 5.30 p.m.

Tuesday 30 July: *Telling Lies About Hitler: The Holocaust, History and the David Irving Trial*, Richard Evans, 6 for 6.30 p.m.

Talks

Thursday 4 July: *Illegal Harmonies & Undue Noise*, Andrew Ford, 6.30 for 7 p.m.

Tuesday 9 July: *See How it Runs: Nimrod and the New Wave*, Julian Meyrick, 6.30 for 7 p.m.

Wednesday 10 July: *The Life and Adventures of William Buckley*, Tim Flannery, 6.30 for 7 p.m.

Thursday 11 July: *There's a Bear in There (and he wants Swedish)*, Merridy Eastman, 6.30 for 7 p.m.

For more information about Gleebook events, contact Michael Campbell on: 9565 4321 or email <mc@myplace.net.au>.