

## Chair's chatter

Dear PEG colleagues

The December issue of *PEGboard* carries the last of the chapters (chats) we are reproducing from Elizabeth Manning Murphy's *Working words*. This chat – on the ethics of editing – is yet another excellent contribution from the book, and I would like to thank, once again, the Canberra Society of Editors for its kind permission to replicate the six chats we have featured in recent issues of this publication.

Elizabeth Murphy argues that 'Ethics is a serious matter, and unethical behaviour by just a few people can undermine the whole editing profession.' I agree, and know that most of you will too. It's always a good thing, amid the hustle and bustle of work and life, to be reminded about the basics of professional behaviour. This final, succinct, chat certainly does the job.

The subject of ethics also provides me with the opportunity to place on record that – for many, many months now – I have been both relieved and delighted not to receive any complaints regarding unethical behaviour by PEG members.

We have had very good feedback regarding *Working words* from some of the people who have bought it, and I strongly recommend the book for its wealth of information and its striking clarity. The chats we reproduced are from the first two parts, 'The craft of editing' and 'Editors beware: Ethical and legal considerations'; but besides many more topics under these two sections, there are six more parts to the book, all of them useful. If you feel at all shaky about the finer points of English grammar, punctuation and style, you will find the book incredibly helpful. I have added the chats to my arsenal when teaching students whose grounding in grammar varies from less than desirable to utterly hopeless. As many of you know, we were able to print the book in South Africa (by using print-on-demand technology) and sold the 100 copies we printed in a very short time. We then printed a second batch, which is selling very fast. If you live in or near Cape Town and would like to obtain a copy, please contact Ken McGillivray at [mcdcsa@iafrica.com](mailto:mcdcsa@iafrica.com). If you live in Johannesburg, please contact me at [idelvare@gmail.com](mailto:idelvare@gmail.com) for a copy. The book sells for R260.

This edition of *PEGboard* also carries an interesting, in-depth article by our immediate past vice-chair, Carin Thirion, regarding her attendance at the annual conference of the UK's Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP), held in York in September. You may find it useful to look at her list of the topics covered during the conference, and to approach the meetings co-ordinators for the Cape Town and Gauteng branches to see if they might be able to arrange talks on the same (or similar) topics. Co-ordinators' details are on the PEG website, at [www.editors.org.za](http://www.editors.org.za).

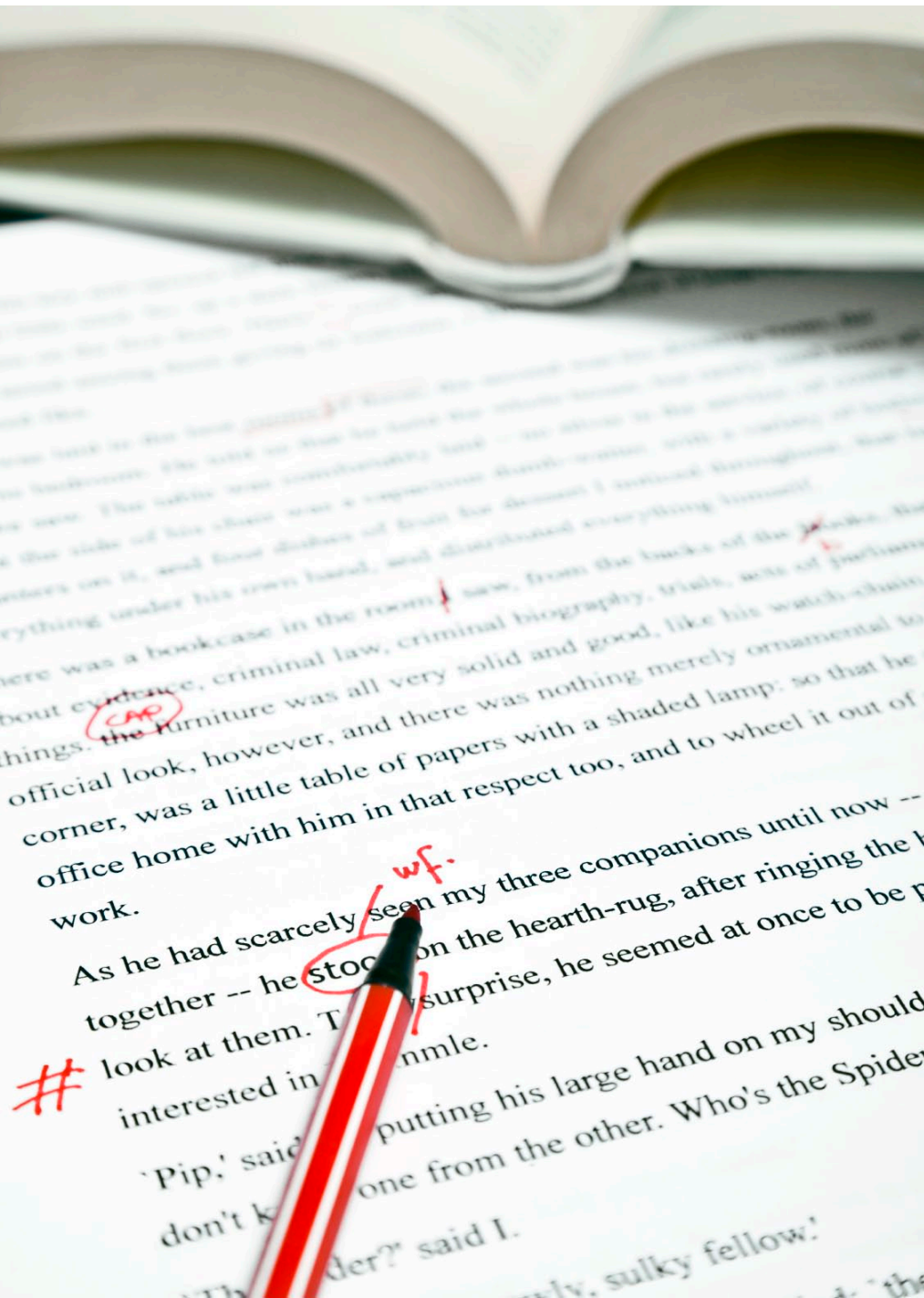
The PEG 'Editing Works of Fiction' workshop finally made it to Gauteng as promised, and was warmly received by all who attended. The workshop has been covered by Megan Chronis, one of the participants. Following on this review are some freewrite contributions on the topic of 'Editing is like... a mode of transport', made available by their authors.

The editor of *PEGboard* regularly receives unsolicited reviews from members who wish to share their enthusiasm about a particular book. These are usually ignored after the briefest of acknowledgements (let it be said that the reviews seldom cover a 'worthy' tome, even less anything vaguely related to the subjects of editing or proofreading). This time it was decided to pay tribute to those PEG members who actually find the time and energy to read – and even to reflect on their reading – by turning our tendency to review into an end-of-year feature. The only proviso was that the books reviewed had to have been published this year or last year.

The year is coming to an end. I hope that all PEG members who have been working so hard – especially those labouring in the textbooks sector – will be able to take some time off, relax and recoup their strength for 2013. Thank you to all the members who took the time in 2012 to write to the Executive Committee (Exco) regarding all sorts of issues, who criticised, enlightened, praised, thanked and otherwise encouraged us. Your contributions were valued, one and all.

On behalf of Exco, I wish you all a peaceful festive season and a very good 2013. 🍀

Isabelle



# PEGboard

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## 11 The ethics of editing

And so to what could be considered one of the most important aspects of editing—ethics. As editors we have a duty to behave in a way that upholds the profession. We need to be totally trustworthy; we need to think carefully about whether or not to accept jobs that may be outside our comfort zone; we need to be reliable about meeting deadlines; and we need to be honest about our own ability to undertake jobs. Unethical behaviour is soon spotted and dealt with.

Ethics is a serious matter, and unethical behaviour by just a few people can undermine the whole editing profession.

Some aspects of ethics are fundamental and are included here. However, every profession, industry or trade has its own behavioural standards that may need to be considered. Think about further ethical considerations in your own area.

The *Macquarie Dictionary* defines ethics as ‘a system of moral principles, by which human actions and proposals may be judged good or bad or right or wrong; the rules of conduct recognised in respect of a particular class of human actions; moral principles, as of an individual’.

Ethical principles are laid down in many organisations and professions, and members are expected to adhere to them. They may be called code of behaviour, ethical guidelines, standards of conduct, and so on. They all boil down to a set of principles to help members do the right thing by their clients and fellow professionals.

In the editing profession, there are many such principles—some written and some just ‘understood’ as ‘the decent thing’.

In Australia, we have special obligations when editing students’ papers and theses. These have been agreed between all the Australian societies of editors and the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies of Australian universities. We may edit on hard copy or online; however, if we edit online, we must return the marked work in such a way that the student cannot blindly ‘accept’ alterations suggested by the editor. The student needs to decide whether the alterations are appropriate in the context or not. One way to ensure this is to send the work back to the student as a PDF file. We may not perform structural edits, but must stick to what is covered by Standards D (‘Language and illustrations’) and E (‘Completeness and consistency’) in the *Australian standards for editing practice*. Structural edits, apart from broad recommendations for attention, are the province of the student and the

student's academic supervisor. And the student must acknowledge the editing and the editor in case the examiners wish to check the extent of editing performed. It is possible that the quality of the student's work could be greatly affected by the editor's efforts, and we need to remember that it is the student's original work that is being examined. These principles are available on the websites of all the Societies of Editors in Australia and on the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) website. If you are asked to edit papers for students of overseas universities, it is important to find out what degree of editing is allowable in the particular institution. You can access the IPEd website at <http://www.iped-editors.org>. See also *Editing students' work*.

Some editors set out their ethical stance on their websites or in their expressions of interest in a job. This usually amounts to a short statement about confidentiality and privacy issues, work standards, policy on accepting or not accepting jobs, and perhaps their proposed action in the event of a conflict of interest or other difficulty. It helps the client to get a full picture of the sense of professionalism of the editor.

**Confidentiality**—It should be obvious that an editor who is a member of a respected professional society of editors would be trustworthy. However, authors are often understandably nervous about handing over manuscripts to total strangers. They need to be assured that you are not going to discuss their work with anyone other than the team working on it, and that if you don't want to undertake the work or don't get the contract, you will return or securely trash all the material sent to you. Clients are entitled to know that you don't pass on their details to anyone else for any reason. There are people who pass on such information, including mailing lists, without authorisation, and who think it is all right to chat about current jobs to other clients—this is unethical gossip.

**Work standards**—It is not possible to be skilled in all areas of editing, and your client is entitled to know that you have the necessary skills for the job under consideration. It is unprofessional to pretend to a client that you have a level of skill, or very specific skills, that you do not have. Own up, and be willing to develop skills on the job, but only if the client is agreeable.

**Accepting or not accepting jobs**—There are some jobs that are just not for you. If you are asked to quote for a job that you know you will hate or that you don't have time for or that you honestly don't know how to do, forget it. If the potential client has asked you to 'just cast an eye over this for typos' and you find that the document needs a major rewrite, be honest in your appraisal. You can't do a substantive edit on a proofreading budget. And it would be unethical to do merely the requested check for typos when you know that the manuscript will fall in a heap at the next hurdle—publication. You may decide to accept a job, in good faith, and find later that there is a conflict of interest. For example, editors are often asked to edit material that conflicts with their own view on a subject. It is not our



business to try to ‘correct’ the client’s views while correcting their grammar or their writing style. If you can’t distance yourself from your own views, don’t take the job on. The ethical thing to do is to immediately inform the client and offer to withdraw from the contract.

**Meeting deadlines**—Don’t promise to keep deadlines that are not achievable for you. If you fall behind, you cause the whole publication process to fall behind. The ethical editor, faced with an honest delay because of sickness or a private emergency, will contact the client immediately, apologise, and offer to withdraw.

Apart from the points above that could be addressed in a statement of your ethical stance, there are other examples of behaviour that are, to me, unacceptable:

**Taking on work at a level at which you are not either qualified or sufficiently experienced**—We all have to start somewhere, but it is bad for the whole profession when you take on work which you have no hope of doing at a satisfactory level of competence. The client is unhappy, and is quite likely to complain to the society to which the editor belongs. The Canberra Society of Editors issues a disclaimer in its *Register of freelance editors* because it can’t be held responsible for the suitability or otherwise of an editor for a particular task. But this doesn’t mean that unhappy clients won’t make their feelings known to the Society.

**Claiming expertise that you don’t have**—Bluff will get you nowhere in the long run. We all have to learn our craft the hard way—through training in editing, through working with a mentor until we are confident, through years of practice, working up from simple jobs to huge complex jobs. Clients can see through bluff.

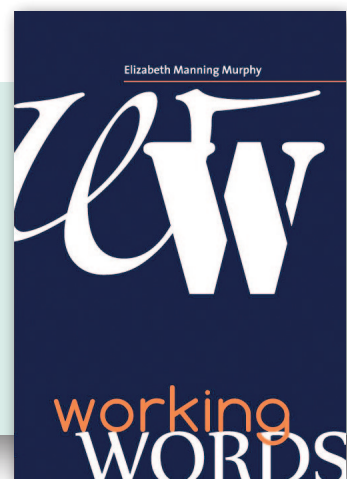
**Actually working on a document and charging a fee for a job that you know is not up to scratch**—This is downright dishonest, but it happens. Clients have brought documents to me for re-editing after an ‘amateur editor’ has failed to find even obvious grammatical errors, spelling errors, typos and so on, and has not given any advice on plainly necessary restructuring, page layout and placement of illustrations. That level of slapdash behaviour really bothers me.

**Quoting a very low fee** (or even no fee) just to get a job is equally dishonest. It downgrades the value of editing as a whole. The only ‘freebies’ should be for your favourite local charity that has no money anyway. Everything else should be paid for at a businesslike rate. This includes editing student theses and dissertations. These days, funds are often available to graduate students to help them pay for professional editing—you should charge your regular fee. If you don’t know what to charge, ask a senior editor for guidance and then work out what your effort is worth. Don’t undersell yourself—most freelance editors undercharge, but it is possible to gauge the ‘going rate’ for various jobs and various levels of edit.

Janet Mackenzie, in *The editor's companion*, sets out a number of additional areas of concern that editors ought to be aware of, including that the editor has 'a three-way responsibility to the publisher, the author and the reader'—it is sometimes difficult to meet everyone's needs, but you need to try to keep a sense of balance throughout a job.

Ethics is an enormous subject. This introduction to it may provide something to think about next time you are asked to quote for an editing job that is a bit out of your comfort zone.

*Extract from Working words by Elizabeth Manning Murphy.  
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<http://www.editorscanberra.org>. A reduction in postage costs  
may be achieved by combining individual orders.*



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# A brief international experience

Carin Thirion

*A bird's-eye view of part of the campus*



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The 23rd annual conference of the Society of Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP), which had as its theme ‘The Many Faces of Editing’, was held at the University of York in the UK from 8 to 10 September 2012. The university was established in 1963 and has expanded to more than thirty departments. Obviously most of its buildings are modern, but the campus also features the historical Heslington Hall.

John Linnegar and Isabelle Delvare had attended the SfEP conference in 2011, and had reported favourably on the activities there. As I am inquisitive and believe in continued education, I wanted to find out what I could learn.

The official two-day programme covered presentations, discussions and workshops on the following topics:

- The art of querying
- Demystifying grammar
- Making Word simpler with macros
- An introduction to XML
- Searching the web more efficiently
- Starting out as an editor
- Cookery editing
- Finance for freelancers
- Making the first move: guidance for successful marketing
- Membership and upgrading Qs&As
- Moving books and flipping files: convergence in print and tablets, and tablets and desktop PCs
- Thesis editing
- InDesign basics for editors
- Negotiating for success
- Numbers and stuff: an introduction to editing maths
- Proofreading on-screen: PDFs and web pages
- Tai Chi and Dao Yin for health and relaxation
- What is your fee?

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It seems as though English grammar cannot easily be demystified – ‘I shall’ and ‘I will’ appear to have changed places for use in England.



The following subjects were covered during seminars:

- The future of publishing training: a PTC perspective
- Plays well with others – designers and editors
- Using social media to your advantage
- What can and should editors do about plagiarism?

In addition, a panel session was held on the topic of ‘Expanding our editorial skills’.

I attended a day-long course in Project Management that was held on the day preceding the conference, and found it to be very informative. The discussions were particularly valuable, and persuaded me that I would rather get at least some in-house experience in project management before attempting to do it freelance. The ability to ascertain the skills levels of each member of the project team, and to ensure the coordination and cooperation of all team members, is essential for the smooth management of a project. These requirements may be too onerous for a beginner to handle.

Other presentations I attended were chosen on the basis of my specialist field of work and my interests. I found the presentation on plagiarism worthwhile, with the discussion and the examples cited by other members adding a great deal of depth to the topic. The debates with respect to principles adhered to in thesis editing and the different points of view in different countries were also important. The common denominator in this sort of academic editing is the fact that most students are not English-mother-tongue speakers. This is a problem that will not easily be overcome.

It seems as though English grammar cannot be demystified without difficulty – ‘I shall’ and ‘I will’ appear to have changed places for use in England. The question is – where do we stand? To me it is important never to say you know all there is to know about English grammar. The group on this topic was attended by numerous very

experienced editors, and lively dialogue took place on the different uses of words and what has become obsolete. The use of ‘that’ versus ‘which’ also found its place in the discussion!

The presentation on proofreading on-screen was an introductory session that indicated what was already possible. Many editors still work mostly on hard copy and had no knowledge of alternative methods available.

The most rewarding presentation for me was on the role of editors in identifying plagiarism and what steps to take if you encounter this problem. An important point made was that you need to ensure that you know and fulfil what your contract says about your role with respect to plagiarism. The situation may differ from client to client and this has to be taken into account. It is also important to be able to differentiate between copyright infringements and plagiarism.

I enjoyed the exposure to a number of people from different countries, and discussing differences and similarities in what they experience in editing. One delegate mentioned that she was glad that the number of younger members attending the conference had increased. This could indicate a growing trend toward self-employment and quite a number of attendees were in full-time employment contemplating going part-time.

The conference was very well organised, accommodation was comfortable and the whole experience well worth while.

The next SfEP conference, the 24th, will take place at the University of Exeter from 31 August to 2 September 2013. An important fact to take into account is that you need not be a member of SfEP to attend the conference. Anyone interested in what SfEP presents is welcome. 🍷

For more information, visit [www.sfep.org.uk](http://www.sfep.org.uk).



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# Attending the Gauteng November workshop on Editing Works of Fiction

Megan Chronis

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Oh Oscar, I thought, smiling to myself as I read the quote on a handout for PEG's workshop on editing fiction. Such a joker...

*I have been correcting the proofs of my poems. In the morning, after hard work, I took a comma out of one sentence. ... In the afternoon I put it back again.*

But after two mornings of doing precisely that myself – removing and replacing punctuation – and arguing determinedly over issues such as whether a particular character would more readily call his friend 'bru' or 'man', I can assure you that Wilde was not exaggerating for comedic effect.

PEG's fiction editing workshop, so well received by our Western Cape colleagues in May this year, had at last made its way to Johannesburg. On the first weekend in November, twelve PEG members gathered at Blandford Manor in Northriding for two days of intensive fiction editing.

Our facilitators were Joanne Hichens, novelist and short-story writer, teacher of creative writing at Rhodes and editor; and Maire Fisher, who's spent the last twenty years editing, preferably fiction and creative non-fiction, and who has herself just completed the first draft of her first novel.

Divided into two groups, we inched our way first through Maire's 'Coronation Chicken', and then Joanne's 'Fooling

Around' (written especially for this workshop), beginning with in-depth structural and content edits of both short stories in first-draft format. We then tried our hand at writing encouraging yet constructive feedback reports on each.

We wrapped up each day by taking out our editing scalpels for a few hours of intensive line editing, picking our way word by word through each writer's second draft, hunting for errant typos, wobbly point of view and wayward punctuation. Nothing was too insignificant to escape the eye of this group of professional nit-pickers.

In between editing sessions we handed over to our creative sides, doing 'freewrite' exercises designed to kick-start the flow of ideas. A useful tool for both writers and editors, five minutes of unrestrained, no-holds-barred 'freewriting' can sometimes be all that's needed to unearth new ideas and shake loose suggestions for how to navigate around problem parts of a manuscript. And so we put our heads down to write 'what if' scenarios for the stories we were editing; compare writing to fruit; and come up with metaphors for editing.

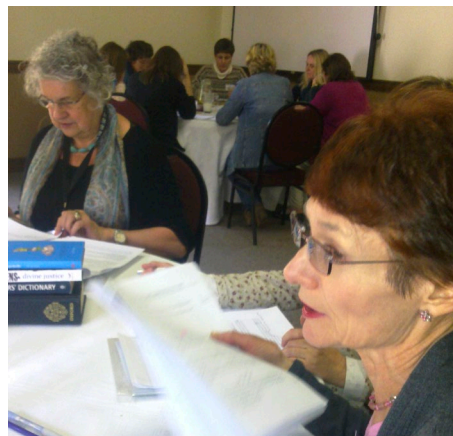
By the end of the workshop, with overtaxed brains, strained eyes and blunt pencils, we were much closer to understanding exactly what it takes to be a polisher of fiction manuscripts. It was an eye-opener for me, a commercial editor and wannabe novelist who's just finished her first draft, to see just how much thought, debate, soul-searching and attention to detail is lavished



Joanne Hichens, one of the presenters of the workshop



Delegates at work at the recent Gauteng Editing Works of Fiction workshop



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on a text by a good fiction editor. Writing a book is tough. It takes immense discipline, huge reserves of creativity, and super-human perseverance. Editing ... well, it's pretty much the same, just without the reward of seeing your name on the jacket. Now I know why the first expression of gratitude on many an author's acknowledgements page is to his or her editor.

Thank you to our two facilitators, Maire and Joanne, for letting us tear apart their work, question their choice of words and punctuation, pick their brains, and corner them in the dining-room, hungry for more off-the-clock advice.

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*Megan Chronis is a member of PEG. By trade, she is a freelance writer and marketing journalist, and an editor of anything written in English. By dream, she is a chick-lit author.*

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## Editing is like...

*As explained by Megan Chronis in the article she wrote on the workshop on 'Editing Works of Fiction' held in Gauteng in November, the participants engaged in several 'freewrites' that were restricted (sometimes radically) in terms of the time allocated to them.*

*These exercises were meant to encourage participants to say a great deal in a short time (for example, when imagining an alternative ending to a story), share in the creative process and think like authors, and emerge refreshed after long periods of close editing.*

*Here is what some participants wrote during a five-minute freewrite in response to the proposition: Editing is like ... a mode of transport.*

### Editing is like riding a horse

Marita Botha



Each horse has its own personality. Each writer is like a head-strong horse. He or she looks mild and even tempered, even even-gaited, but climb into the saddle and you discover the nature of the beast. Then you need to keep your heels down, use your knees, sit solidly in the saddle, and watch for those tell-tale signs. Did the ears twitch when I used a full stop to replace a comma?

The trail can be full of unsuspected dangers or surprises. The paragraph that looks quite innocent might suddenly send a bevy of punctuation marks flying past that makes horse and rider skittish.

However, should horse and rider settle down, the trip could be most enjoyable. The rider can get an elevated and enlightened view of the part of the world in which they are travelling. The horse can learn to respond to the

Thanks to PEG for holding this extremely worthwhile workshop, which certainly gave me a great deal of insight into how to go about editing fiction. Thanks too to PEG's chair, Isabelle Delvare, who, despite assuring us that this time she was actually attending a PEG course as a participant and not as the organiser, nonetheless spent a lot of time darting up from her seat to check that everything was going according to plan.

Wilde also wrote: 'Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.' For writers of either kind, one thing is certain ... it's a blessing someone invented fiction editors. ♡

rider in a way that makes it possible to accommodate future riders too.

Even so, at the end of the trip, both rider and horse are exhausted.

### Editing is like a train ride

Jacqui Greenop



Editing is like a train ride down to the coast. The train moves off dead on time, believe it or not. Yes, yes, there's no better start than an early start. Well, OK, we're moving along quite nicely. Yes, working up a good steady pace. Then something happens just outside Heidelberg. Not really a running out of steam, more of a distraction. Perhaps the driver called in on his girlfriend somewhere along the line. Well, it appears to be a very entertaining distraction – two hours later, I'm still at it. Re-runs of *Dallas*, that is – sadly, not the manuscript.

Guilt kicks in. Like the train driver, I limp back to the manuscript. Chugging along nicely. Fairly rattling along the rails now, building up some darn good speed. A hiss, and I can feel the steam cooling. Lack of fuel – that's obviously the reason. Right, muffin and coffee time. And maybe just one more re-run of *Dallas*.

Recharged. Now we can really move out of the station.

### Editing is like cycling

Eileen Pearse



Editing is like cycling: some texts allow you to freewheel. They are the level ground and the editor can peddle gaily along, just tossing in the odd comma or question mark.

Other texts are like the Slough of Despond. They require the cyclist to dismount, pick up her bicycle and wade

through a marsh of lengthy sentences that lead nowhere and weigh the poor editor down with unrelated participles and incorrectly used prepositions.

Then there are the mountain-bike circuits. Usually fiction pieces containing interesting characters colourfully depicted through metaphors that impress. These texts are the mountains and valleys of interesting plots, where motive is hard to pinpoint and plot is circuitous, going round corners, down slopes and across little bridges where the sun sparkles on the surface of waters of ingenious language use.

Some texts are dark – and the editor has to switch on her headlamp to try and see where her author is heading with his story.

Such is the route of the cycling editor!

## Editing is like travelling on a train in India

*Libby Huggett*

Inside the train are the legitimate travellers who have bought their tickets and ensure by their support that the train reaches its destination, just as the story progresses to its end, encompassing the essential and diverse elements which give it life and substance.

There are other passengers on the train, clinging to its roof and doors. They are colourful characters, equally important and special. They create an impact on the viewer and define the train's uniqueness and colour. However, they are extraneous to the main body. They should be removed from the outside of the train, for the benefit of the whole train and for their own safety. These travellers on the roof could board another train, just as we could use extraneous details in another story. We would regret the rooftop travellers leaving the train as their presence adds colour and interest, but they are not essentially part of the train and would rob the body of its sense and cohesion.

Just so, in editing, we have to keep in mind the unity and substance of the whole and remove what does not make sense in it. Often we know that certain parts should be removed because they do not fit into the whole, but are tempted to keep them for their aesthetic quality. This is when we have to be ruthless!

## Editing is like running

*Glenda Salmon*

My legs move sluggishly. They're always heavy for the first ten minutes. My blood feels thick and my heart is pounding with the effort. Why did I commit to this? I

thought it would be stimulating and satisfying. Instead, my mind is somewhere else. I stumble. That's when I take myself in hand – I need to concentrate. It's all about self-discipline.

Deep breathing. Concentrate on the rhythm. Now my muscles are warming up. This is how I hoped it would be. My feet are pounding the tarmac. My legs are chewing up the kilometres. My breathing is deep and even. I feel strong and confident. Sentences flow easily and meaning is clear. I'm enjoying myself and I get lost in the world of somebody else's ideas, descriptions, argument and logic.

Another uphill looms ahead and I slow my pace in anticipation. Progress is slow as I negotiate the tricky bits. Sometimes I have to backtrack and check ... tense, punctuation, logic. Stop! Verify factual information.

Then a pit stop is needed. Some sustenance and a change of focus. I shake out my legs, stretch my body and prepare to engage again.

This part is straightforward. I surge ahead once more, confident and enjoying the achievement. It's all about being properly trained and having a strong mind. If the rest of it is like this, I might just achieve a personal best.

## Editing is like ... instantaneous data transfer

*Jenny de Wet*

Editing is like data transport across the World Wide Web, the Internet or cloud computing.

It allows the editor's imagination to move at lightning speed to visualise what the author intends and represent the ultimate intended meaning. It allows the consolidation of information, as in Web databases, and the editor is able to progress through the mass of seemingly irrelevant or randomly placed characters just as computers do with bits and bytes, the zeros and ones.

The editor has to make sense of these randomly placed letters of the alphabet, drawings and tables and forge them into a coherent whole, just as the computer does with the random signs input into large databases. The editor has to forge the written word into meaningful language with a consistency which is like that of the output of enormous storage facilities and memories, hard drives and cloud computing.

The live brain is the editor's tool, but the editor is also able to use the computer and internet tools and storage capabilities to back up his intuition and practicality in righting his client's mass of material – using all the tools at his disposal to reveal the author's intentions in as clear a way as possible. ♪

# Over to you...

(in which some of our members review books they feel are suitable for your holiday reading)

## Letters of the lore

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*Peter Merrington speaks about his experience of being a PEG member, shares interesting thoughts about language and introduces us to some characters in his Shaman's Record series.*

I've done freelance editing on and off for some years, but signed up with PEG in September 2012 and now have almost more work than I can manage – from annual reports to theses to novels. PEG's an impressive service and, given the unsteady progress of public education in SA, global trends in language use, and the digital explosion in publishing, we PEG members will have work for as long as we need it.

I've spent all my adult life in texts: lecturing in literary studies, supervising and examining; publishing my own research articles; and, to date, producing two books of fiction.<sup>1</sup> In one sense this is personal bondage to ink and paper, or the PC. In another it is far more general – seeing the world as text, as Jacques Derrida puts it, or acknowledging that the human world as we know it is a complex filter of ideas, structures and perceptions all mediated by language.

It's about verbal imagination or what the post-Freudian post-structuralist psychologists call the 'entry into language', and the 'imaginary' – personal or communal. At one extreme we are paid to fix apostrophes and bullets. At the other it's about *logos* (not brand-logos!), world-and-word, the unlimited potential of the verbal imaginary that defines us all as human. And, in between, a sliding scale of millions of opinions, views, memes and sayings, often shaped more by habitual idiom than by objective reality. My interest is in habitual idiom, or perhaps literary convention, or social legend – the catch phrases and verbal images that govern our understanding. These differ from culture to culture and are largely automatic. We fall into use of them and, in this day and age, journalism often leads the trend.

1. *Zebra Crossings: Tales from the Shaman's Record* (2008) and *The Zombie and the Moon: More Tales from the Shaman's Record* (2011), both published by Jacana Media, Auckland Park.

But, above all, I honour and admire the translators. I don't have the skills for that. But South Africa, and the world at large, needs extraordinary translation. This goes beyond functional verbal translation, to questions of mindset, the tacit metaphors of mind and world that come with being born into this or that culture or community, issues which are crucial to a country with 11 languages and many cultural legacies. Here, and indeed globally, it is only a strong, clear-cut, progressive constitution (word as wise law – and for us more narrowly, the OED and Harvard System) that ultimately stabilises the diversity. But, alongside that, I wish that I could be fluent in at least three local languages, and not only functionally fluent but with lifelong knowledge of their metaphoric sets, their folk wisdom, and their habitual ways of speaking, valuing and interpreting the world around us.

The main character in my series of fiction (*Tales from the Shaman's Record*) is an eclectic urban shaman, Malibongwe Ngingingini. He's a sangoma and practitioner of both local and foreign therapies, mother-tongue isiXhosa but fluent in English and able in Afrikaans. His *handlanger* has a lot to learn and she acts as a foil to him in their dialogue and practice. The two of them make up my double, with far more freedom for social and cultural experiment and adventure than I can possibly achieve. Malibongwe is fed by many kinds of experience and, now in particular, he is moving towards questions of interpretation of local lore, idiom, and metaphor, while his apprentice, Anna Persens, takes lessons in poetry appreciation. Poetry is the means of pushing the limit of the verbal imaginary and testing the shape-shifting or shamanic powers of metaphor. She gets caught up in *Kubla Khan* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and Keats's infamous *Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil*. Malibongwe helps to fix the consequences. Translation, in its classical roots, also means being carried across to another state of being...

Meanwhile, back to the annual reports and the MBL dissertations and lists of references, jot and tittle. 🍷

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## Some South African female fiction authors I've read recently

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*Anne Taylor reviews three very different novels, all written by South African authors.*

I have read several novels by South African female authors lately, with immense pleasure, finding them equal to books of similar genres published overseas. Two are chick lit and the third is a crime novel.

The first is South African chick lit: *Maha Ever After*, written by Sumayya Lee and published by Kwela Books. Born and brought up in Durban, Lee now lives in Britain, and the book, a sequel to *The Story of Maha*, gives a sympathetic picture of a young Muslim bride living with her selfish husband at her in-laws' home in Durban. As I followed the story I kept thinking that Maha ought to be standing up to her mother-in-law, but it is not until she discovers her husband's perfidy that she does so. The book gives a picture of Muslim family structure and customs, and depicts the conflicts experienced when a younger generation is torn between traditional respect and modern individualism. Maha is a well-drawn character who finds humour in her situation and, eventually, true love.

*A Million Miles from Normal*, by Paige Nick, is published by Penguin South Africa and is international chick lit. Its heroine is South African, but the setting is the New York advertising industry. The title has garnered good reviews for its light-hearted but entirely credible tale of a bright young woman trying to establish herself in the extremely competitive field of advertising, in the advertising capital of the world. Rachel Marcus was doing well in Johannesburg, but struggles after her move to America and finds that she has no status in her new home. Dubious clients, crazy characters who include deceitful boyfriends and a crummy apartment all contribute to an amusing yet sympathetic account of how to stay afloat in the Big Apple.

Jassy Mackenzie's *My Brother's Keeper*, published by Umuzi, is a crime story with a difference and a twist in the tale. The hero is no detective – he is a hard-working paramedic drawn into a web of crime that gets all too close to him. While conveying an accident victim to hospital, Nick promises to call the woman's friend, and uses her cellphone to do this. Things develop from there. Nick, an ex-mercenary, is capable of looking after himself, but his life is complicated by the defining relationships of his past. The plot has very satisfying twists and the characters are credible. 🍷

## Powerful memoirs

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*Anne Taylor spoils us by also reviewing two memoirs she found worth reading.*

The following two memoirs are engaging, worthwhile reads. They feature two courageous journalists, the first an American and the other a familiar South African.

John Hockenberry was 19 years old and planning to pursue a musical career. He was taking a 'gap trip' accompanied by his guitar and a friend when a car accident broke his spine, paralysing him from the middle of the chest down. No longer able to use the pedals on his piano despite various ingenious inventions, he changed his academic direction.

It was happenstance that made him a journalist. He was reading the news as a student volunteer at a local radio station in Seattle when he was asked by National Public Radio (NPR) to report on the eruption of nearby Mount St Helens. NPR, which had picked up on his broadcast reporting, didn't know he used a wheelchair to get the news and asked him to cover stories in his area. He became

their local stringer, moved to the NPR station and later became a foreign correspondent in the Middle East. He introduces himself in the book riding a donkey over a Turkish mountain to report on the plight of Kurdish refugees from Iraq.

Hockenberry's memoir, *Moving Violations*, is published by Hyperion. The subtitle – 'War zones, wheelchairs and declarations of independence' – hints at both the seriousness and the humour in this tale of a journalist who allowed nothing to impede his wheels.

The second memoir is Jane Raphaely's *Unedited*, published by Associated Media Publishing. It is the story of her progress, driven by a determined intelligence, from poor circumstances in a grim, north of England industrial town to a pinnacle of journalism in Cape Town.

Raphaely is perhaps South Africa's most famous editor and publisher. Rescued by her obvious abilities she attended university in London, went on to New York and then landed in South Africa, where she worked in adverti-



sing. The invitation to launch a magazine was unexpected, but what she produced became the most influential publication in the country: *Fair Lady*. Nasionale Pers didn't know what it was getting, but sales were too good for the publisher to rein in Raphaely. She weathered bannings, threats and her publisher's doubts to open doors for women and change their reading, their thinking and their lives. Later, heading her own publishing company, she

brought her public groundbreaking new magazines – *Cosmopolitan*, *Marie Claire*, *Oprah* – all of this while bringing up three daughters and a son.

The memoir, which is the first book to be published by Raphaely's company, is quite short. Let's hope she follows up with further reflections on her experiences. 🍷

## A five-star, riveting read

*Fiona Ingram reviews Tribe by James Bruno (this review appears on Amazon).*

*Paperback:* 366 pages

*Publisher:* Bittersweet House Press (2011)

*ISBN-10:* 0983764204

*ISBN-13:* 978-0983764205

*Genre:* Political thriller/espionage

Meet Harry Brennan, CIA officer and go-to guy on Afghanistan. When his mission in Afghanistan is aborted and he finds himself back in Washington, Harry starts digging until he finds out what everyone doesn't want him to know. And it comes as no surprise to Harry that it's all about money, or oil to be exact. As the Western world's need for oil increases, something must be done to break the stranglehold of the Arab world on oil supplies. A secret deal has been struck to get a US-financed trans-Central Asian oil pipeline to the Arabian Sea built through Afghanistan and Pakistan. This scenario would bring Croesus-like wealth for the oil companies and back-channel cash to politicians, and would cement American political and economic supremacy in Central Asia at Russia's expense. It would also force the Afghan allies to share power with the Taliban so pipelines could be built and US troops finally withdrawn. Harry finds himself

enmeshed in the double and triple cross of the relentless Washington political machine. In a surprise turn of events, he finds himself branded a traitor and fleeing for his life from jihadists in Afghanistan and Predator drones in Yemen, a target of his own CIA, while trying to rescue his kidnapped daughter.

This brilliant book is well-paced and well-plotted, with many interesting layers. It is clear the author has first-hand experience of the novel's politics and his encyclopaedic knowledge of the turmoil of the Middle East and Afghanistan is impressive. In Harry Brennan he has created a likeable character with a conscience that compels him to do the right thing, in a political arena where most people are doing the wrong thing. The author is a former insider and the book has undergone US government censorship, which explains the occasional 'vague' patch. However, nothing can detract from this riveting read. Harry Brennan's laid-back inner monologue adds to the appeal of the author's style. Readers will also enjoy Harry's pertinent, humorous references to the books, movies, and well-known personalities of popular culture that underscore his worn, somewhat cynical take on politics. The author has an eye for detail and a style of rich description that the eager reader can feast upon. ... Highly recommended. 🍷

## A fairer look at a maligned historical figure

*Moira Richards reviews the recently published A Triple-headed Serpent, by Marié Heese.*

'You are the serpent! I see you! You have three heads! One head ... is power. One head ... is evil. One head ... is death! See, how they weave and dart...' Many men and women were, and still are, willing to believe this description of Theodora, sixth-century empress of Byzantium. Not least among them is her contemporary and her primary biographer, the historian Procopius.

Marié Heese, winner in 2010 of the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book in Africa, has a different view. She argues that eyewitnesses are notably unreliable and describes Procopius as a clearly hostile witness. In this novel, she says, she set out to undo some of the damage he wrought on Theodora's memory.

*A Triple-headed Serpent* (Human & Rousseau, 2012) takes up the story of Theodora from where Heese left off in *The Colour of Power* (2011), her nail-biting fictionalisation of the 532 AD Nika uprising against the emperor

Justinian (shades of the rash of rebellions taking place in that region today). The sequel continues her exploration of the life of the Syrian-born striptease artist who became empress and wife of the great Justinian I, emperor of the massive Byzantine Empire. As she did in the first book, Heese places herself in the mind and the everyday life of the long-ago woman, focusing on Theodora's shrewd political sense and her influence as co-ruler of the Empire. Again, she not only studies, carefully, many of the available historical sources, but also re-evaluates, with a far less sexist mindset, the interpretations and conclusions of male historians.


Of course, acquiring and maintaining such a large empire of largely dissident people requires enormous resources of soldier-power and plundered treasure, and *A Triple-headed Serpent* also includes fascinating accounts of the famous general Belisarius, and according to some interpreters, his only 'weakness' – his love for his very capable wife, Antonina, close friend to Theodora. Interestingly, and perhaps more accurately, Heese portrays Antonina as an equal partner, confidante and administrative assistant to her husband, whom she accompanied on all his military campaigns.

From the scores of real people she researches and fictionalises, Heese creates characters to love and characters to hate. The book comes with a handy list of all these people, and with short notes at the end to explain which bits of the story are true and which are the product of Heese's imagination. You'll sometimes discover the true bits to be stranger than the fictions!

You'll also be drawn into the webs of intrigue, duplicity and suspicion that flourished in high places of power during the period: 532 AD was a time when the Christian church divided itself bitterly into two parts over a theological principle – to such an extent that people and monks with a certain 'heretical' conviction found themselves persecuted, killed or forced under duress to renounce that particular article of their faith. Theodora's efforts in helping to protect those oppressed in this way, and in attempting to bring about some sort of tolerance or legal means to end the oppression, represent just one of the fascinating threads through this book.

Another interesting strand is formed from the portrayals of the design, planning and building of world-famous and still-standing architectural marvels such as Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Heese's descriptions of the fabulous mosaic portrayals of Justinian and Theodora, set into the north and south walls of the apse of the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy, will surely send you to Google to search for images to admire for yourself.

There's also a vivid account of the 'Justinian plague', the first of history's awful waves of plague that killed thousands of people every day, faster than they could be buried by the living. The disease had no respect for rank or power, and even the emperor and his generals could not count themselves immune to an agonising 'black death'. 🍷



You'll also be drawn into the webs of intrigue, duplicity and suspicion that flourished in high places of power during the period.

## And finally, a Regency romance...

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*L. Sims reviews The Dangerous Duke by Arabella Sheraton (this review first appeared on Amazon). The author is South African.*

E-book: 229 pages

Publisher: Musa Publishing (2011)

ASIN: B005S68D6Y

Available from: Amazon Digital Services, Inc.

Rating: FOUR stars

When Fenella Hawke applies for the position of companion to the Dowager Duchess of Wyndlesham, she is concerned that her family history, or rather the scandal surrounding her father's death, will prevent her from gaining the position. But her aunt, with whom she lives, comes up with a neat plan to sidestep any questions regarding Fenella's past.

Devlin Deverell, Duke of Wyndlesham, is the most eligible bachelor of the town. For the past year his mistress, Lady Penelope Vane, has been trying to bring him up to scratch. Then just when she thinks she has him where she wants him, he has gone cold on her. Undaunted, she enlists the

help of her friend, Sir Marcus Solesby, to discover the reason for Devlin's sudden reluctance.

When Solesby reveals the existence of the dowager's beautiful companion as a possible reason, Penelope is furious, but is determined to have her own way by any means fair or foul. Although once Solesby meets the beautiful and charming Fenella, he is not so keen on playing his part in Penelope's nefarious plot. He finds to his dismay that he is falling for Fenella himself, which is quite astonishing considering his reputation as London's most disreputable rake.

This was my first read by this author. I was fairly impressed, as she has obviously done her research. The description of the Regency setting feels accurate, as does the dialogue. At first, I thought that I was not going to like this, as the characters seemed a little too pompous. But I soon found myself involved in the story. I thoroughly enjoyed the machinations of the devious Lady Vane. I did feel that the relationship between the two leads, Devlin and Fenella, could have been developed a little better. All in all an enjoyable read. ♡

When Solesby reveals the existence of the dowager's beautiful companion as a possible reason, Penelope is furious, but is determined to have her own way by any means fair or foul.

