

## Eastern Writers Group Newsletter June 2009

At our May meeting we welcomed two newcomers, Lisa and Nick. Lisa, a professional astronomer, adds substantial strength to those in our writing group who have an amateur interest in astronomy – Pat, Brian, and, I think, Clive. I was interested in Nick’s university studies in literature, particularly “comparative” literature for which he studied that of Japan. I wonder just how much of the writing of Chekhov and other Russian authors of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries I really understand when their culture and society were so different compared to ours today.

**Our next meeting will be at 1.30pm on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June.**

### Readings, May 2009

David, passage from novel *Ocean Renegade*

Jack, poem, *Father at War*

### Another joyous book launch

Last September we launched Gwayne Naug’s novel *Seeds of Empire* and this month we are to launch Clive Chatfield’s *Lighter than Air*.

This meeting is being sponsored by the EWG, which means that those attending won’t have to pay the usual \$4. There will be just enough bubbly for a toast to the author. If you feel you need more, then it’s BYO. There will be nibbles, which the group will provide.

About the book:

Clive is using Palmer Higgs Books to issue the book. You’ll find out about the book itself by going to this website: <http://www.palmerhiggsbooks.com.au/lighter-than-air-p-4.html>

To meet the author himself (yes, I know, we’ve already met him, but it’s interesting to get another view), visit this site:

<http://www.palmerhiggsbooks.com.au/page.html?id=9>

### Mind-mapping

A couple of months ago, Clive read out part of a letter from a prospective publisher which stated that the quote did not include line/copy editing, structural editing or proofreading. My comment at the time was that Clive was unlikely to need any of these as he has reworked and polished his stories till they shine. However, Clive seemed unsure about what structural editing was, so I explained that it was more relevant to non-fiction books. Granted, the need or not for a preface and/or epilogue in a novel may be considered “structural”, as may the use of flashbacks, but I do not consider these few considerations to be what is normally meant by structural editing.

That said, structural editing or planning, by the author or someone else, is essential in non-fiction works. To use an analogy, it is rather like drawing a detailed plan for a

house before beginning construction. Start building with a vague idea in your head about what you want, and you may end up adding several rooms that are unsuitably located and which you have no use for.

So, non-fiction books and articles need a written plan before you begin writing the manuscript. One approach is called “mind-mapping”, which involves writing your central purpose or objective in a “bubble” in the middle of a sheet of paper, with topic bubbles radiating out, and sub-topics from there. That’s just the start, but it allows decisions to be made as to what goes in and what goes out, focussing your attention on producing a cohesive “shape” to your writing.

What goes in and what goes out depends on your central objective: is the book for those with little or no knowledge of the subject, or is it for those who have a fundamental or even advanced knowledge? Having made these decisions, you can then have a look at putting the topics and sub-topics into a logical order.

Another advantage is that mind-mapping can enable division of major topics between joint authors, thereby avoiding duplication of subject matter, one of the principal needs for structural editing.

Apropos to the content of non-fiction works, I watched what I thought was an interesting one-hour TV article last week on proving Einstein’s theory that the rotation of the Earth warped or skewed space time.

An American professor had devoted some forty years of his life to this project, including developing a metal sphere the size of a tennis ball for a gyroscope 10 million times more perfect than any existing one, and launching into space a satellite lined up with a distant star.

Fascinating stuff, but no one said (or perhaps my mind had wandered) just how much space time was skewed, or what purpose this knowledge could be put to. Pity someone hadn’t mind-mapped this TV article and added a balloon containing the words “what questions would viewers like answered?”

### **Fractured sentences**

One thing leads to another, and my article last month titled Learning from the Ants inspired Trevor Blüm to send the following by email:

Had to respond to your reference to the story Leiningen Versus the Ants by Carl Stephenson, p576 of "The Bedside Esquire" published by Heinemann 1941, and my reprint dated 1961 edited by Arnold Gringrich who was the editor of Esquire Magazine.

I wanted to share with the EWG group, part of the introduction to that volume:

"Any oaf can enjoy a picture. Esquire's have been cut out and hung up in Congo huts as well as American college dormitories. But it takes a mind to make the most of words."

I was tempted to insert a (sic) before the last sentence. Perhaps your members might like to comment on the propriety of beginning a sentence with "But ..." especially since it seems to me that the preceding period was unnecessary since there is continuity of the thought across the chasmic ".".

Well may you say "Who cares?"

I do, and that volume has always been an indication to me that literary excellence can be encouraged by unlikely patrons.

And you can put a (sic) after that last comma.

Cheers, Trevor

Editor (Jim): I wholeheartedly agree with Trevor that Arnold Gringrich's splitting of the sentence is grammatically incorrect. While some writers may indulge in the inappropriate splitting of sentences to avoid being accused of constructing long sentences, Gringrich may have been aiming to add emphasis to his conclusion by starting a new sentence. However, like Trevor, I do find the full stop in this instance to be disruptive to the flow of the thought.

Commentary from members by email to [easternwritersgroup@hotmail.com](mailto:easternwritersgroup@hotmail.com) is invited.

For those who think they have a problem with punctuation, my recommended reading is still *Mind the Stop* by G V Carey. This small book of not much more than 100 pages has been regularly reprinted by Penguin since the 1930s. The difference between it and other guides to punctuation is that it teaches you to think about the reason for all those flyspecks between the words.

### **Notes from Bob our treasurer, webmaster, anthologist and prime worker of our Biggest Little Short Story competition**

Our new website is <http://www.wordsatwork.com.au/> and there you will find all the details of the winners of the Biggest Little 2007, plus the top five stories for you to read.

Also featured is a selection of poems and stories from our members, but

#### **WE NEED MORE!**

Send your shorter pieces of writing to [rdalvean@bigpond.com](mailto:rdalvean@bigpond.com) for publication on our website. While you are waiting for a major print publisher to recognise the merit of your work, on-line publication is your sure-fire way of giving your writing global exposure.

### **Biggest Little Competition 2009 (closing 30 September)**

Our website has been updated to include details and entry form for our latest Biggest Little Short Story Writing Competition. Some eighteen major writing groups (including all capital city FAWs and Writers Centres) throughout all states and territories in Australia have been contacted with a request to list our competition in

their newsletters and journals. Also, former entrants from 2007 will be emailed to alert them to our 2009 competition.

Please note the restriction on entry:

Members of the Eastern Writers Group executive are not eligible to enter, nor are current members (a current member is one who has presented work at a meeting since January 2008).

**E.W.G.** 