



Carindale Writers Group newsletter

7 April 2011

Present: Rolando, Debby, Maria G, Hazel, Maria S, Hilary, Sandy S, Brian, Chip, Dawn, Nick, Dorothy, Beverley, Jeff M, Peter, Annette, Jeff P, Suellen, Marjory.

It was great to see so many members of the Carindale Writers Group take their places around the table at our new venue today in the Holland Park Library. We welcome back Hilary and Annette and we welcome new members Jeff, Peter and Suellen to our membership.

The kitchen facilities are adequate to our needs. It is recommended for future meetings that we each bring along our own requirements for morning tea; just whatever you would like to eat. Tea and coffee will be provided but you will need to bring along your own mug.

We had been concerned to fit in every member's contribution in our slightly shorter meeting time, 10am to 1pm. In the event, we rounded up earlier than usual, giving us time for a general discussion on writerly concerns. These covered sentence construction and how the old rules, written probably between fifty and a hundred years ago, can safely be ignored these days, as writing styles evolve. Any work you do helps to hone your creativity. You only have to look at what some writers produce, writers who are deemed almost illiterate. Even they can find a publisher. The story is what counts, however you write it.

When it comes to editing your work, we are often advised to pare it down to remove extraneous material. We have all read books and articles which somewhere amongst their lines contain elements of waffling or padding. This can be quite distracting but, as a device (whether conscious or not on the writer's part), such padding can sometimes lead the reader somewhere by creating an atmosphere, a feeling. However, if the piece feels 'wrong' to the writer as the work emerges, then 'wrong' it is.

It can be helpful to take a break from your writing, to let it hibernate before you revisit it. Sometimes the words flow but sometimes you have to really motivate yourself to get going. "Apply the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair" is advice given by such luminary writers as Ernest Hemingway, W. Somerset Maugham and P.G. Wodehouse. It's a good start....

Try reading your work aloud. You may be surprised to find where the emphasis falls. This activity helps to highlight punctuation and where sentence length could be altered to improve your impact.

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Work is still moving along to get Allsorts of Allshorts ready for submission for online publishing. An earlier compilation of our stories, called The Great Aussie Jigsaw, will be reformatted to bring it up to a publishable standard. See our website www.carindalewritersgroup.org

Providing encouragement through sharing and discussion

Our featured reader today was Jeff Matheson. Jeff has been writing his historical novel, *Fusilier of the Line*, for many years now. He jokes that it's nearly as long as *War And Peace* because his novel probably runs to well over 100,000 words at this stage. He has clearly done a lot of research into his story, set during the Napoleonic wars in 1805. Although his work is an adult read, Jeff would like to see it on school library bookshelves. To that end, he is conscious of using language that is appropriate for readers of all ages.

The hero Charles is a nineteen year-old Frenchman, an ordinary soldier of the line. He is so well characterised that the reader gets to see even inside Charles's mind when the *chef de battalion*, the major, orders his troops into battle for their very first time. The cadence of Jeff's work gives the reader a real feel for the marching soldiers as the drummer's beat exhorts them to advance in their columns in readiness to fight. The battle we hear about in this excerpt is a minor one, prior to the Battle of Ulm our protagonists will have to face later in the story.

To a couple of listeners, distances between opposing armies were unclear. We would like to have known how close they were to one another. This didn't detract from the animated description of the cannon balls throwing up shards of rock and earth to kill opposing gunners even when the cannon fire didn't quite hit its target.

A suggestion was made to Jeff to include in his work a glossary of terms so that readers unfamiliar with the French language would understand what is meant by the several French expressions used throughout the story, which are essential to setting the authentic French tone.

Jeff's work was commended by listeners as being up to his usual high standard. That he should do some editing was suggested to avoid repetition and to pare back the words in some of his similes. Shorter sentences in places would carry greater impact, especially to portray Charles's anxiety before the battle commenced. A greater impression would be made on the reader if Jeff as the author could show more of the tension then, rather than simply telling us 'it could be cut with a knife.'

His battle scene was deftly described, especially that part when the Hungarian cohort of the Austrian enemy troops turned and fled the scene, allowing for increasing penetration of the French army to overrun them. Here is a quote from Jeff's work:

As a boy Charles had played at building dams across gutters all for the pleasure of waiting for them to fill and then seeing them burst. First there would be a small breach which would widen dramatically as rushing water washed dirt from each side. So it was with the Austrian battle line. Both French columns had burst through. Troops on both sides of the rupture were seized by panic and joined their fellows in flight. However, it had not stopped there. The panic had fled to the next battalion and it too had fled the field. Fearing a flank attack the next White Coat battalion had swung around in a ninety degree wheel as though it was an enormous gate, to make the foot of a giant letter L. So it was that a gap three battalions wide had opened.

We enjoyed one particular light-hearted scene where the enemy is described running away. A number of soldiers diverge around a tree, all but one young man who inadvertently runs straight into it, wedging his bayonet irretrievably in the tree trunk. One of his colleagues doesn't pause in his flight but gives him a swipe across the back of the head for his foolishness.

Quite a discussion arose about Jeff's use of metaphor in 'drover.' For some listeners the word jarred a little as sounding too Australian and therefore out of place in a European scene. Jeff's research showed him that it was a word used in Scotland in earlier times, many years before it came to Australia. The word 'drover' is apparently found even in the bible, so 'drover' will remain. Another word that made us think was 'shirker.' The origin of this word is German. Although spelled differently in German and English that word too will remain, as being exactly the behaviour the author wishes to convey.

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Language appropriate for each character should be typical of the speaker's class in society at the time. One would expect Officers to be reasonably well-educated men who would use longer words and possibly more 'high-flown' language. Men of the line, from presumably peasant and farming stock, would probably use coarser language.

Readers are definitely drawn into this vivid story. The chapter ends on a note which makes us want to keep reading to learn what happens next.

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The exercise suggested for today was *The Cynic*.

1. Rolando went first with his piece, A Cynic With Hope; something of a contradiction in terms, and so his story proved. A farmer is encouraged by her vicar to pray to God to make her seeds grow, although her soil is barren. She prays, knowing all the while that they won't. The moral here is that without true belief, we have nothing.
2. Maria S. read her short story called Mirror, Mirror on the Wall. Mavis makes a death-bed visit to her brother-in-law, during which we discover that the visitor is just as cynical and conscious of material wealth as her dying relation was.
3. Chip wrote NoCynicismHere.dot.com.au in which a journalist wishes to retain his freedom to write the truth as he sees it for whatever publications he chooses. He writes about frauds perpetuated on buyers by advertisers, but newspapers who rely on the advertising revenue are not inclined to publish his articles. He writes his stories anyway and saves them, in a manila folder labelled Love's Labour Lost.
4. Annette told about the family of Tibor, his wife and three daughters. Tibor is somewhat overwhelmed by the number of females in his family and he detests what he sees as rampant sexism. A great line from him was 'How many career Barbies are there?'
5. Suellen read for us a piece about a car trip to the beach which seemed to go on forever. The family in the car consisted of several generations. Pulling in to refuel further dragged out the trip, with all the usual caustic comments made between family members on such occasions.
6. Sandy S. read her poignant story about some elderly neighbours contemplating their various health complaints. One of the ladies looks forward to visiting the 'wonderful' new doctor. Her neighbour, cynical about doctors, would prefer to put up with her arthritic knees. She and her husband have survived the Village of Doctor Death only because they would not attend that particular 'quack.'
7. Marjory presented us with a poem she wrote several years ago about getting through the vicissitudes of life. One can become a little cynical over the hand one has been dealt. Marjory's poem contained an evocative line in which she hoped to improve her rowing skills through the waters of life.

Other writers then got the opportunity to read out pieces which were not on the subject of the exercise.

8. Hazel continued with a short extract from her memoir telling how her brother returned home one night later than his father had decreed. He was punished severely for his transgression. This was yet one more example of her father's cruelty. The child withdrew even further from him and made every effort thereafter to keep out of his way.
9. Hilary wrote about her 'unforgettable character', the town's doctor, Dr. Pickard. His unique behavioural traits were so well-defined we could almost see him performing his work, and making his

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house calls. The townsfolk accepted that he would ask to cut through a long row of terraced houses, pushing his moped through their kitchen and family rooms, to make a short cut through to the street behind. He reasoned that it saved him time and petrol instead of driving the usual way round.

10. Peter read aloud in a clear and strong voice his creation of a song called The Green Monkey, from a musical he is writing. Written for the stage, it is a cheeky and whimsical piece, challenging the norms of reality. It will be interesting to see further excerpts from Peter's work, differing as it does from the novels, short stories and poetry we usually see at our meetings.

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Our **next meeting** at the Holland Park Library is on **21 April**. Start time **10am prompt**. We are aware that this is the Thursday before Easter and that several of our members may be away on holiday then.

Suggested exercise is **The Art of Conversation**. You may interpret this in any way you choose, as with all our suggested exercises. Write on the topic, and make it your own!

Our featured reader/writers for 21 April will be Brian Rowell. For the following meeting on 5 May, your newsletter scribe Debby Raymond will feature. Dorothy Vicary will give us her reading during the meeting after that, 19 May.

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Chip's Computer Tips

Free Internet Security Tools, Lightweight PDF Reader

Protect yourself for free with Flagfox for Firefox and BufferZone Pro; try the streamlined Sumatra PDF for basic needs.

Criminals have gotten pretty good at making fake Web sites (for PayPal, eBay, Facebook, etc.) look like the real thing. But what they can't fake quite as easily is the location of the Web server that's hosting their fraudulent site. You might be looking at a perfect replica of, say, Bank of America, but if the site is hosted in Uzbekistan, it's a good bet you shouldn't input your password. Read "Seven Hints to Stay Safe Online" for details on this sort of scam, and some ways to protect yourself. Flagfox for Firefox makes the necessary detective work simple: it determines the Web server's physical location and pastes the corresponding country's flag at the end of the address bar. Clever!

If you're wondering how it works, Flagfox bases its flag choice on the actual location of the server you're connected to, rather than just the nationality of the domain name--which may be different.

After installing the plug-in and restarting Firefox, just head to any site and you'll see the flag at the right end of the address bar. If you click the flag, you'll get a new tab containing detailed geographic information about the site.

If you right-click the flag, Flagfox pops up a list of other handy tools, including Whois, SiteAdvisor, Web of Trust, and URL-shortener bit.ly. Head to the settings (via Tools, Add-ons) for the plug-in and you'll find a dozen or so other options you can add to the list.

This is a great little addition to Firefox, one that combines convenience with added security. What's not to like?

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Writer's websites

Jane points us in this direction for helpful writers' websites:

<http://bubblecow.co.uk/2011/04/tools-for-writers-14-free-alternatives-to-microsoft-word/>

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Chambers Good Writing Guide.

Introduction p viii: **What makes a good writer?**

If awareness of an audience is important in communicating face to face in a situation such as a presentation or a lecture, it is even more important when communicating in writing, which involves an audience that is unknown and unseen. Whether this audience consists of one reader (for a letter) or several million readers (for a newspaper article), the writer still has to keep the audience in mind.

Just as good speakers are aware of the effect that their words are having and can modify what they say accordingly, so too good writers are aware of their readers... an awareness of the existence and expectations of readers will usually go a long way towards pleasing most of the people most of the time...

A good writer needs also to understand about the process of writing. The best results are rarely achieved simply by picking up a pen and keeping going to the end of the page. It will pay dividends to think about some of the techniques that can help to create good writing: how to set about writing a document in a methodical way, how to arrange what you have to say in the most effective manner, and what tricks you can use to make sure that your readers remain engaged and entertained from start to finish.

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