

Edition

The journal of the Editors' Association of Canada, Toronto branch

NOVEMBER 2009

Past program report: Fellow EAC members swap tips of the trade at last month's general meeting

- Word on the Street 2009
in pictures
- Jane Austen's English
- EAC's Mentorship
Program: high hopes for
the revived program



Edition

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Editor's note

EVERY ISSUE OF *EDITION* GOES THROUGH A FAIRLY RIGOROUS editing process. Numerous editors volunteer to copy edit and proofread each issue. While we have all these sets of eyes reading *Edition*, sometimes errors happen. What matters is that we make every effort to ensure as flawless a document as possible. You can help us make *Edition* even better by volunteering. Assistance is far more productive than criticism.

This issue brings another Grammar Food for Thought offering from Freya Godard. She examines Jane Austen's English through quotes. It's a fascinating study and read, even if Austen isn't your thing. Where else would we be privy to such a read? And if you ever wanted the ultimate word on the forever-troubling *lay-lie-laid*, then Marlene Tash has written the piece for you!

What really excites me this issue is the past program report because it highlights some of the tips that were showcased at the general meeting in September. Nancy Foran developed a great program that night and it's wonderful that we're able to share it with everyone. If you missed out and have a tip, send it along and I'll print it next issue.

December will be our last issue until the new year when we resume in February 2010. If you have an article idea for February's issue, please note the deadline for submissions is January 10.

Take care and be well.

Alethea Spiridon
Newsletter chair
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Past program report:

Tips of the trade

THE EDITORS' ASSOCIATION OF CANADA'S TORONTO BRANCH KICKED OFF ITS 2009–10 season with a tip trade. New and seasoned editors shared their best editing tips, from software programs and tension relievers they can't live without, to dealing with telephone calls they *can* live without.

Read on for the top five tips and more!

The top five

1>

When querying the author, use the first person plural (we) or the third person singular (a reader) for the more negative comments. Use the second person singular (you) for the positive comments.

—Elizabeth D'Anjou

2>

If you're editing a book, always do the references first. Go element by element: all the author names, all the titles of the journals, etc. Never take anything for granted and check for duplications.

—Michael Peebles and Nancy Ackerman

3>

Use time-tracking software, such as TraxTime or Timeless Time & Expense, to avoid those little scraps of paper with the number of hours you've worked on a project. TraxTime also allows you to set an alarm to go off every 30 minutes, for example, in order to get out of your chair and stretch! Go to www.spudcity.com/traxtime or www.magsoftwrx.com.

—John Green and Alan Yoshioka



4> If you don't understand something a writer has written, offer a suggestion (or propose a solution). Write out your suggestion/solution, then ask, "Did I understand you correctly?" or "Am I on the right track?"

—**Cat Haggert**

5> If you're sitting at your computer all day, remember to move your wings to relieve shoulder tension. Place your hands on your shoulders and circle your arms forwards and then backwards. Repeat frequently.

—**Caroline Kaiser**

Honourable mention

* Use your editorial skills as a weapon against telemarketers: correct their grammar! You may never get another call.

—**Joe Cotterchio-Milligan** (Said in complete facetiousness)

Other tips

Sanity savers

> If you work from home, start your day by going out first (don't dive into work right away). Go for a walk. Get a coffee at your local Tim Hortons or Starbucks and read the paper.

> Remember, it helps to be courteous when dealing with writers and clients.



- Reward yourself. If you work from home, create a reward system for yourself (“If I edit 10 more pages I can check my email”) and postpone distractions (“One more hour of work and then I’ll put in that load of laundry”).
- Remind your significant other and/or your children that your home phone is also a business line. Make sure they remember to answer the phone politely. Ask a friend to call to “test” your children.
- Ask the author, client, and anyone else involved in the project the basic who, what, where, why, and how queries.



Get organized

- To be a good editor, you should edit and train all the time.
- Keep a chronological list of all your editing and writing work.
- Schedule regular (such as weekly) update sessions with authors so they won’t be calling you five times a day!
- Create a form based on the EAC Standard Freelance Editorial Agreement in Adobe Acrobat and save it so all you have to do is fill in the fields for each client project.
- When marking hard copy, don’t write any marks or comments at the edges of the pages. Leave at least a ¼ inch margin so your edit won’t be cut off when your markup is photocopied.



Software, gadgets, & websites

- > NoteStripper strips out embedded notes in a document and lists them at the end.

www.editorium.com/15078.htm

- > Timeless Time & Expense keeps track of your time

www.magsoftwrx.com and
www.spudcity.com/traxtime

- > A Wacom tablet will help you avoid the repetitive strain injury that can occur with constant mouse use.

www.wacom.com

- > Need to translate “word is bond”?

www.urbandictionary.com

- > What does AFAIK mean again?

www.acronymfinder.com ■■■



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■ For your day planner pages

Executive meeting

November 16, 2009
6:30 PM
EAC National Office
27 Carlton Street, Suite 505
All members are welcome.

RSVP: toronto_br_secretary@editors.ca

General meeting

November 23, 2009
7 PM New members Q & A
7:30 PM Information session
7:45 PM Program: Award-winning author and editor Charis Cotter will discuss writing and editing books for children. Charis wears many hats—literally: a crown when she is Queen Elizabeth II, a spooky turban when she is the Silky Ghost, and a black veil when she is a 300-year-old polyglot. Charis will share her insights on the children's book market during what is sure to be a lively, entertaining presentation.

8:45 PM Mix-and-mingle

The Women's Art Association of Canada
23 Prince Arthur Avenue
Members free/non-members \$10

■ Welcome new members!

As of October 3, 2009, the Toronto branch has 616 members: 326 voting (including 2 honorary life members), 250 qualifying, 22 student members, 4 francophone members, and 13 emeritus members. The new members are:

Lesley Byrne	Angela Kryhul
Tara Carey	Tiees Morgan
Anne Cunningham	Leigh Nash
Greg Dalgetty	Zaria Shaw
Lin Gibson	Alison Sloan
Ashley Hisson	

Hotline and National Job Board registration

ONE OF THE GREAT BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP IN EAC IS THAT employers advertise employment and contract opportunities to members. Full-time positions are available through the National Job Board on Interactive Voice, EAC's Web forum.

To receive National Job Board postings via email, go to the National Job Board using your EAC website username and password and follow these steps:

1. Click "Forum subscriptions" near the top of the screen.
2. Select "National Job Board" under the New Subscriptions heading near the bottom.
3. Click "Subscribe selected".

Temporary positions are posted through the hotline. If you are a Toronto branch member and looking for temporary or freelance work, you can opt to receive employment opportunity notices by email as they become available. Register to receive hotline notices by sending your name and email address to toronto@editors.ca. Registration expires at the end of each month. Hotline registration begins on the first of each month.

Please contact the branch every month to be listed again.

Telephone: 416 975-5528

Fax: 416 975-5596

Email: toronto@editors.ca



Seminar chair report

By Emily Dockrill Jones

NOVEMBER MARKS THE halfway point in our seminar season, and so far, so good. Thanks to the instructors, volunteers, and participants who helped make the first five seminars a success!

Harnessing the Business Writing Process (with Paul Lima) returns for another season on Wednesday, November 18—in an entirely updated and improved version—followed by the perennial classics Substantive Editing (with Rosemary Shipton), and Eight-Step Editing (taught by Mike Tanner) on Saturday, November 21, and Saturday, November 28, respectively.

Closing out the season is Jennie Worden's Proofreading, offered Saturday, December 5.

For full seminar details or to register today using our new online registration system, visit www.editors.ca/branches/toronto/seminars/.

And keep an eye out in the new year for our winter/spring 2010 line up.

If you have any suggestions or requests for the next seminar season, or if you're interested in volunteering with the seminar committee, please contact the seminar chair (Emily Dockrill Jones) at toronto_br_pd_chair@editors.ca. ■■■

Upcoming seminars

- **November 18: Harnessing the Business Writing Process: Proposals, Reports, and Media Releases (Paul Lima)**
- **November 21: Substantive Editing (Rosemary Shipton)**
- **November 28: Eight-Step Editing (Mike Tanner)**
- **December 5: Proofreading (Jennie Worden)**

Word On The Street 2009, in pictures







Grammar food for thought

An editor's observations on grammar and usage

Jane Austen's English

By Freya Godard

WHEN YOU SPEND MUCH OF YOUR WORKING life waging war against changes in the English language, as so many editors do, it can be enlightening and refreshing to notice the changes that have taken place in the language over the centuries. That occurred to me recently as I was rereading *Pride and Prejudice*,¹ which was written in 1797 (though not published till 1813). Of course, no one writer can represent the state of English at the time he or she was writing; nevertheless, it is probably safe to assume that what Jane Austen wrote would at that time have been considered standard English.

Some of the differences between her English and ours lie in a number of words whose meanings are not quite what they are today. One such word is *insipid* (and *insipidity*), which I had hitherto known almost exclusively in reference to food. But in *Pride and Prejudice*, it is used to refer to people:

[Kitty] . . . became . . . less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid (349).

"I was never more annoyed! The insipidity and yet the noise, the nothingness and yet the self-importance of all these people!" (31)

That was the only word in the whole book that puzzled me enough that I felt the need to look it

¹ All quotations are from Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Arcturus, 2009).



up in a dictionary, where the most useful definition is “lacking vigour or interest; uninteresting; dull.” Another word that caught my eye is *friend*, which, though it looks perfectly normal at first glance, must have had a slightly broader meaning than it does today. When Mrs. Bennet exclaims, “I often think . . . that there is nothing so bad as parting with one’s friends” (298) she is lamenting the departure of her newly married daughter for a distant part of England. Today, we would probably say “loved ones” or “people one loves.” The same word is used by Elizabeth Bennet when she tells Mr. Darcy,

“My youngest sister has left all her friends—has eloped” (252).

From the context, however, it’s clear that *friend* includes the people we would call family and relatives.

Another way of denoting family relationships shows not so much a simple change in the use of words as a different attitude to family life. That is the frequent (though not exclusive) use of *brother* and *sister* where we would say *brother-in-law* and *sister-in-law*, as in the following examples:

“Come, Mr Wickham [Elizabeth Bennet says to her brother-in-law], we are brother and sister, you know. Do not let us quarrel about the past.” (297) Pemberley was now Georgiana’s home; and the attachment of the sisters [that is, sisters-in-law] was exactly what Darcy had hoped to see (351).



Another way of referring to members of one’s family that struck me as distinctly odd, perhaps because of the implied formality, is the Bennet sisters’ habit, in speaking to one another, of referring to their parents, not as *Mama* or *Papa*, but as *my mother* or *my father*. Speaking to her sister Elizabeth, Jane Bennet says,

“I must go instantly to my mother” (313).

And in a letter to Elizabeth, she writes,

“My father is going to London with Colonel Forster instantly” (251).

As noticeable as the different meanings of words are the differences in syntax. One that occurs often is the use of *to be* instead of *to have* as the auxiliary verb used with *go* and *come*:

“He is come—Mr Bingley is come.—He is indeed” (311).

But when her mother was gone, Jane would not be prevailed on to go down without one of her sisters (311).



Another difference in syntax that occurs from time to time has to do with the position of *not* in interrogative sentences:

"Do not you feel a great inclination . . . to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?" (53)

"Is not it so, Mrs Bennet?" (107)

That word order is particularly interesting because it shows the origin of such contractions as *don't* and *isn't* in a way that the modern word order does not.

A usage or turn of phrase in a book written 200 years ago is particularly interesting when it would today be frowned upon or even condemned by grammarians and editors. That is the case with Jane Austen's frequent use of a reflexive pronoun as subject, object of a preposition, and object of a verb. Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, this construction is ubiquitous, both in dialogue and in the narration. The following examples are a small selection of the many that could be cited:

"Nothing could give either Bingley or myself more delight" (338).

"You will be as happy as myself" (338).

"There can be only Bingley and yourself more dear to me" (338).

He who had always inspired in herself a respect which almost overcame her affection, she now saw the object of open pleasantry (351).

That last sentence is also noteworthy for the incorrect *he*, which, as the object of *saw*, should be *him*.

In a more general way, a modern reader is struck by the formality of the language, even in dialogue, caused in part by the lack of contractions and the length and complexity of the sentences. ■■■



The verb *lay* noses its way into the territory of the irregular verb *lie*

By Marlene Tash

WHEN MY PHYSIOTHERAPIST INSTRUCTS ME TO BEGIN MY EXERCISE ROUTINE BY “LAYING down on the floor,” I wonder whether this can possibly be correct (the grammar, that is, not the exercise). Descriptions of people and things “laying” in one place or another have become so common that for a moment I am not sure: Is the verb in this phrase correct or not? So I do a quick, silent check of *lie*: it is an irregular verb, its principal parts are *lie–lay–lain*, and the *-ing* participle (the gerund) is *lying*. The word *lay* appears only in the past tense and *laying* is nowhere in sight.

Sentences with the irregular verb *lie*

On Saturday afternoons, Andrew usually *lies* down and takes a nap.
The biscuits *lay* on the table for five minutes before they were eaten.
The lazy cat has *lain* in the sun all afternoon.
The final reports are *lying* on the manager’s desk.

The irregular verb *lie* means “to recline, to be situated,” and is one of approximately 250 irregular verbs in English (this number is from Quirk, 104). Irregular verbs are sometimes called strong verbs, in contrast to the regular weak verbs, which form their past tense and past participle by adding *-ed* to their base form.

Lie is intransitive and so never takes an object. Thus, Yeats wrote, “She would

not have us sad because she is lying there,” in his poem “Upon a Dying Lady.” A homophonous verb is the regular verb *lie*, meaning “to tell an untruth.” This verb has the principal parts *lie–lied–lied* and the *-ing* participle *lying*. Despite having the same base form and *-ing* participle, irregular *lie* and regular *lie* are rarely confused with each other. Thankfully, the two verbs have completely unrelated meanings.



Trouble, however, enters the picture with another regular verb, *lay*, which means “to place something on a flat surface, open to view.” *Lay* has the principal parts *lay–laid–laid* and the *-ing* participle *laying*. The meanings of the irregular *lie* and regular *lay* are similar but the two verbs, it is safe to say, are never interchangeable in a given sentence.



During the night, the dog collects her toys and *lays* them near the door.
 Tom *laid* the flowers on the kitchen counter.
 Shelley has always *laid* her briefcase just inside the door.
 The children are *laying* gifts on all the chairs.

In contrast to irregular *lie*, *lay* is a transitive verb that always takes an object. The verb is normally modified by an adverbial of place (*here, on the mountain, where the train arrived*). For example, in his poem “Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love,” W.H. Auden wrote, “Lay your sleeping head, my love / Human on my faithless arm.”

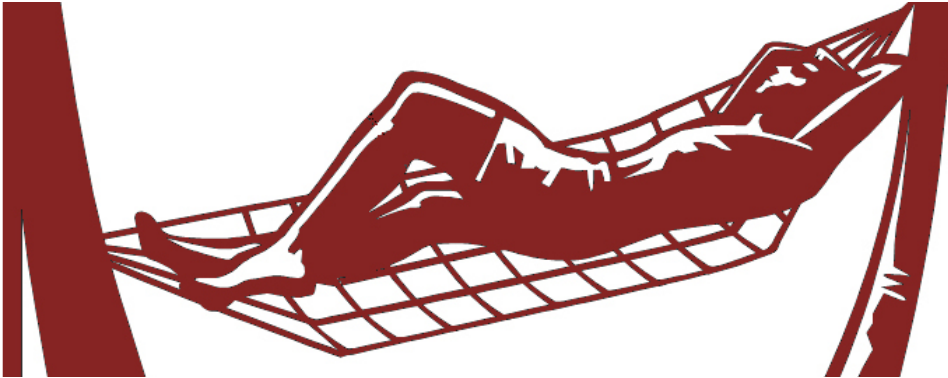
Regular verbs form their past tense and past participle by adding *-ed* to the base form. *Lay* is considered regular despite the minor spelling variation in *laid*. The general rule is to keep the *y* after a vowel, as in *played, stayed, and frayed*, but in *laid* (and also *paid*), the *y* changes to *i* after the vowel.

More and more these days, especially in

conversation and casual speech, *lay* and *laying* are nosing their way into the territory of *lie* and *lying*. According to Garner, “Some commentators believe that people make this mistake more often than any other in the English language” (401). We know that a language can change over time. Perhaps the intrusion of the verb *lay* where we should have *lie*, though still confined mainly to informal speech, foretells such a change.

This usage brings to mind Bob Dylan’s hugely popular 1969 song, “Lay Lady Lay.” The first line, “Lay, lady, lay, lay across my big brass bed,” repeated several times, has a comfortable, colloquial tone to it, and creates a lovely internal rhyme with the line





“Stay, lady, stay, stay with your man awhile.” But however lovely and mellifluous the sound, standard usage still requires *lie* in this context, not *lay*.

How can we explain this encroachment of *lay* into the territory of *lie*? An obvious reason is the dual role of the word *lay*, serving both as the past form of the verb *lie* and as the base form of the verb *lay*. If the principal parts of the two verbs are not carefully memorized, it is easy to see how one verb could replace the other in casual conversation.

A second reason for upstart *lay* usurping the place of *lie* may be the rarity of the vowel changes in irregular *lie*. Although there are about 250 irregular verbs in English, their principal parts follow a relatively small number of pronunciation patterns. For example, the vowel changes in *break–broke–broken* are shared with the verbs *choose*, *freeze*, *speak*, and *steal*. Similarly, the vowel changes in *bring–brought–brought* are common also to *buy*, *catch*, *seek*, *teach*, and *think*. But irregular *lie* is in a group of its own.

No other verb has the vowel pattern of *lie–lay–lain*. Steven Pinker, in his fascinating book *Words and Rules: The Ingredients of Language*, describes a study in which people were asked to judge the degree of naturalness of verbs and their past tense forms.

The results showed that irregular forms that belonged to larger families were judged as more natural than irregular forms that belonged to smaller groups, or to no group at all (159). Because the vowel changes in the irregular verb *lie* are an aberration even among the irregular verbs, it is not surprising that people are reluctant to use this verb, and particularly the past participle *lain*, in spoken English. The vowel changes simply do not sound natural to our ears.

A final reason for the encroachment of *lay* may be that *lay* occurs more frequently than *lie*, so that when we need one of these verbs, *lay* comes to mind first. *Lay* is part of many idioms and everyday expressions. In addition, *lay* has teamed up with prepositions and other parts of speech to form compounds such as *layabout*, *layaway*, *layman*, *bricklayer*, *layoffs*, *layout*, and *layover*. In British English there is also *lay-by*, a small area beside a main highway where you can stop for a rest and a bite to eat (called a *rest stop* or *service center* in American and Canadian English).



Idioms and expressions containing *lay*

lay a bet	lay in supplies	lay on a feast
lay a charge	lay into someone	lay oneself open to something
lay aside	lay it on	lay something at someone's door
lay claim to	lay off	lay something on the table
lay down arms	lay someone off	lay to rest
lay down the law		

In American English, *lay* occurs as a noun in the expression *the lay of the land*, referring to the topography of the land. We often use this expression metaphorically, to describe a complex situation or circumstance (in British English, it's *the lie of the land* [Garner, 403]). *Lie*, on the other hand, has not been nearly so prolific. We have expressions such as *lie down on the job*, *lie in wait*, *lie low*, *let sleeping dogs lie*, and *take something lying down*, but expressions with *lie* generally constitute a much smaller group than those with *lay*.

Lie low, by the way, is the correct phrase for “keep a low profile.” Although some people say *lay low*, most language authorities deem it unacceptable. *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* considers *lay low* to be disputed

usage and Garner dismisses it as incorrect.

There are several very plausible reasons why *lay* and *laying* are making their way into the territory of *lie* and *lying*: the occurrence of *lay* among the principal parts of both verbs, the rarity of the vowel changes in the principal parts of irregular *lie*, and finally, the existence of many idioms and expressions that include *lay* as against the much smaller number that include *lie*. The movement is pervasive and is not likely to stop any time soon. The best we can do is to ensure that we are aware of the issue, that we have the principal parts of the two verbs fixed firmly in mind, and that we always double-check, especially in writing, that we have selected the correct verb. ■■■

Works cited

- The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. Edited by Katherine Barber. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Garner, Bryan A. *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Pinker, Steven. *Words and Rules: The Ingredients of Language*. London: Phoenix, 1999.
- Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvik. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman, 1985.



Mentorship program update

IN JUNE 2009, AN INFORMAL MENTORSHIP WORKING group came together, determined to build a mentorship program for the branch. After consulting with the executive and others with experience in editorial mentorship, the group drafted a plan for a program. The branch executive approved that plan in September, and on October 14 the vision became reality: five mentor-mentee pairs were matched for a three-month pilot test of the program.

The matches bring experienced editors together with new or transitioning editors seeking advice, guidance, and wisdom. Matches were based on the area of the mentee's interest and mentor's expertise. The preferred methods of communication were also taken into account—distance mentoring is part of the pilot test.

Working group members will interview our pilot participants at the end of this test run and will adjust the program based on that feedback. If all goes well, we hope to launch the formal mentorship program in February or March. If you would like more information about the program, email toronto_mentorship@editors.ca. The mentorship working group members are Maria Bergen, Monifa Colthurst, Joe Cotterchio-Milligan, Donna Dawson, Taylor Exley, and Julie Van Tol. ■■■





Toronto
Society for
Technical Communication



STC Regional Technical Communication 2009–2010 Competition:

call for entries

THE STC TORONTO AND SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO CHAPTERS are combining efforts again this year to host the STC 2009–2010 Regional Technical Communications Competition. The best chapter-level entries will be submitted in the spring to the STC International Competition. *Entries to the chapter-level competition will be accepted until December 1, 2009.* Judges are also needed to make this year's competition a success. This is your chance to see what your peers are producing, and to share your experience in writing, editing, designing, and publishing technical content. Training will be provided, so don't be shy to sign up if you're a first-timer! Visit www2.stctoronto.org/get-involved/competition for more information, or contact this year's competition manager, Vivian Aschwanden (stctoronto.competition@gmail.com). ■■■

Profiling Toronto branch members

WHAT DO YOU DO...? *Rachel Stuckey*

What kind of editing do you do? For how long?

I'm primarily a developmental editor, but I also do production editorial work and occasionally copy edit and proofread small projects. I've been working in educational publishing for five years—two years as a freelancer.

How did you come to the editing profession?

After finishing my master's, I was unable to find a job in communications, so I went to Centennial College for the Book and Magazine Publishing Program, and I've been working as an editor ever since.

What are two of your favourite books?

To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee
Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen

Have an editing/writing pet peeve?

It really bothers me when writers use hyper-sophisticated language that doesn't actually say anything. I also cringe at the sight of the idiom "in order to" when "to" will suffice.



What's a benefit to you of your EAC membership?

The most important benefit of my EAC membership is the professional community it provides me; I also believe that membership lends me a certain credibility as a freelance editor. ■■■

Networking: Your guide to what's going on

Compiled by Jordan Bargent

WRITING WORKSHOPS:

East End Writers' Group
[www.samcraw.com/Articles/
EastEndWriters.html](http://www.samcraw.com/Articles/EastEndWriters.html)

Critique Gatherings

When: Wednesday, November 25, 7–10 PM
Where: O'Connor Drive and St. Clair Avenue,
east end of Toronto
Cost: Free
Contact: Sharon Crawford at 416 750-0860 or
samcraw@interlog.com

READINGS

Art Bar Reading Series
www.artbar.org/calendar.html

This reading series typically features three
poets each night, and there is an open stage at
the close.

When: Tuesdays, November 10, 17, 24, and
December 1 and 8 at 8 PM
Where: Clinton's, 693 Bloor Street West,
Toronto
Cost: Donations appreciated

The Eh List Reading Series
www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/ehlist

A reading series at various Toronto Public
Libraries. Listed below are some of the
highlights. All events are free.

Anne Giardini, *Advice for Italian
Boys*

When: Thursday, November 19, 7 PM
Where: Runnymede Library, 2178 Bloor Street
West, Toronto
Contact: 416 393-7697

Linwood Barclay, *No Time for
Goodbye*

When: Monday, November 23, 7 PM
Where: S. Walter Stewart Library, 170
Memorial Park Avenue, Toronto
Contact: 416 396-3975

Canadian Federation of Poets,
Oakville Open Mic Event
www.federationofpoets.com/oakville.htm

An open mic format event for poets and
singing poets.



When: Thursday, November 19, 7–9 PM
(Come a bit early to register if you want to read.)

Where: Timothy's World Coffee, 321 Lakeshore Road East, Oakville (one block east of Trafalgar Road)

Cost: Free

Contact: george@federationofpoets.com

EVENTS

Royal Ontario Museum (ROM)

www.rom.on.ca

Special Exhibit: Words That Changed the World: The Dead Sea Scrolls

A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the earliest record of biblical patriarchs and prophets embraced by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

When: Through Sunday, January 10, 2010

Where: Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto

Cost: \$22 for adults; advance tickets available through the website

Contact: For details see

www.rom.on.ca/scrolls/index.php

Writers & Editors Network (WEN)

<http://wenetwork.org>

Breakfast Networking Meeting: Shane Joseph will give a talk on building the writer's audience from the bottom up, one reader at a time.

When: Saturday, November 21, 9–11:30 AM

Where: Canadiana Restaurant, Six Points Plaza, 5230 Dundas Street West, Etobicoke

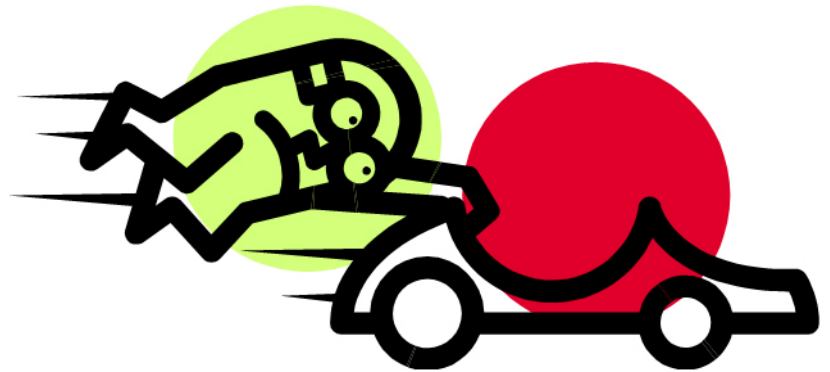
Cost: \$15 for members, \$18 for non-members. You must register in advance through the website.

Contact: Mickey Turnbull-Coughlin at 905 824-5035 or mickeytc@sympatico.ca

Wordplay

By James Harbeck

Book It



Say some guy was a crook, though he didn't look it, and he saw a chance to steal and took it: when the alarm went off he'd know he had to *book it*. Wait — what? Book the alarm? Noooo...although *book it* is a term perhaps more often known for use with tickets and other things that need to be reserved, it also has a slang use to refer to rather unreserved haste:

“Man, he was bookin’ it around the corner, and he ran right into a cop!”

It can also indicate speed in other activities: “Your essay’s due when? Six hours? Have you written it yet? Dude, you’d better book it!”

It’s an interesting usage, inasmuch as books are not always thought of as fast-moving (jacket-flap reviews notwithstanding). *Boot it* and *boost it* have clear senses, and *cook it* would seem a suitable metaphor (heat = speed); *beat it* is common enough, and of course *move it*. But *book it*? Librarians are known no more for celerity than for celebrity.

But, now, what are all these *its*? Well, they’re rather like what you might be muttering between breaths as you *book it* to something you’re late for: they’re expletives. That is to say, they just fill out the sentence. Originally (in the sixteenth century) there was always some sort of ‘it’ in mind: *fight it out* meant ‘fight the matter out.’ The *out* was soon enough dropped and the form became a pattern with an indefinite object. Shakespeare made use of this form several times.

This phrase does have a quick sound; it has the bursting [b] of *book* and the kickback of the *kit*. (Speaking of *kick*, it’s also very similar to *bucket*; in northern British dialects, it may be a homophone.) When we look at it, we see the *boo*, which could be the scare that motivated the flight. The sequential circles of *boo* may also recall some cartoonish

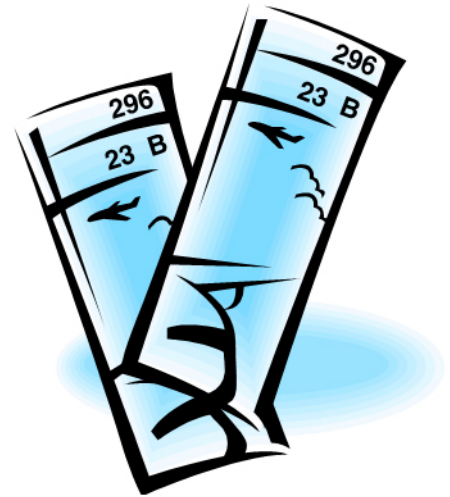


indications of motion. *Book* is a good old Anglo-Saxon four-letter word (those are so often suited to rushes), and *it* is even quicker—and thinner, and depersonalizing. No time to be nice! Shakespeare notwithstanding, this form has a colloquial feeling, and of course haste and slang go well together: it is not so dignified to move at top speed, and the use of an obviously casual form can reinforce the need not to stand on ceremony.

Where did this phrase come from? I don't know; slang can be a prodigious borrower. I'm inclined to guess that it's a reference to booking a ticket to somewhere. Truly fussy prescriptivists may be jogged to remember that this *book* is also a verbing, of the type that focuses on the destination of the act, and therefore must be an abomination unto the language (since at least AD 966).

I'm inclined to think that quite a few words would fit here, and people would still understand the intent: "It's going to rain; we'll really have to ___ *it* back home."

Fill in the blank: not every word will work—short ones are best—and it seems that verbed nouns suit especially well, but you could get away with quite a lot of words. You could practically throw a whole book at it! ■■■



Contributors

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Heather Guylar has worked in educational and feminist publishing for over 20 years. She's done copywriting, copy editing, print and Web design, and production management. Heather is now into her third year as graphic designer for *Edition*.

James Harbeck's favourite sport has always been language. Although his three degrees are in drama, he has been collecting other languages since elementary school—his bookshelf has references on more than three dozen languages—and has been taking university courses in linguistics for the past several years. He is senior editor at MediResource Inc. You can read his blog at <http://sesquiotic.wordpress.com>.

Caroline Kaiser is a freelance editor who has proofread and copy edited textbooks, fiction, academic materials, and auction house catalogues. Before turning to editing, she was an antiques appraiser for 14 years. She enjoys writing fiction, knitting, and bird watching (though not simultaneously).

Joe Cotterchio-Milligan is a freelance editor, proofreader and writer who is enrolled in Ryerson's Publishing Program. He has served as an editorial intern at Random House Canada and is a frequent volunteer for *Edition* and EAC.

Sharon O'Brien (Shar) has been the photographer for EAC since 2004, and is past publisher of NFG Magazine. Her path has been photographer to writer, to editor and publisher, to photographer. She is a mother of two writers (toughest job to date).

Cassandra Scavetta has a master's in English from Brock University, where she is the managing editor of the literary journal PRECIPICE. She also takes publishing courses at Ryerson University and enjoys baking and horseback riding when at home in Caledon.

Marlene Tash has been working with language for more than 30 years. She taught high school English and adult ESL, and trained ESL teachers. More recently, she has been working as a technical writer and editor for software companies. Marlene lives in Mississauga, Ontario.