

}Newsletter #7



News on writing related topics from SA and UK
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Osborne Porter Literary Services

May 2011

The News channel on DSTV is now the Action channel as we witness conflict all over the world. This strife could be likened to a virus spreading in all directions. I was particularly concerned when I saw Egypt go up in flames. Our holiday there was fascinating and I became so worried that the artefacts and ancient knowledge would be destroyed. I am all for the eradication of despots and change is often painful. We thought it was only happening 'up north', but now Swaziland, which is so close to South Africa is in upheaval. Apparently once again it is about the 'haves' getting more and the 'have nots' less. I was shocked to see Johannesburg streets filled with rubbish and the threat of rats and the inherent disease on the horizon. Then the virus crept closer!

The University of KwaZulu Natal, a place I love and where I work, has been in turmoil this year. I find it difficult to believe that the first semester is nearly over. We have had so many strikes, first from students, and now the staff. Although I am not a 'comrade' in the true sense of the word, it is essential that one belongs to a union and I do. So, there I was Amandla Aweto (Power to the People) with the rest of them. I got a lump in my throat when I saw all cultures united by a common cause. But, my commitment did not last long. Whilst I do understand that costs have risen and one percent can make a big difference, what about the students? The students who want to study of course. I believe that not everyone participating was part of the student group. In order to expand the numbers people joined from the nearby shack community.

Disruption of a different sort has occurred all over the earth and in South Africa at least we do not have severe weather conditions. We heard the earth's axis has shifted by 10 centimetres. Maybe our spiritual writers can comment on that. We live in interesting times and we should spend more time on our knees in prayer!

Ginny

Ground breaking news: Ginny

In previous newsletters we have discussed two wonderful books, *Healing in a Maximum Security Prison* by Gabby Fels and *Jeshua Vol 1 A lifelong search for enlightenment* by Moon Pony. Both of these books were recently accepted by Faradawn c.c. Belinda phoned me to say that she 'devoured' the book *Jeshua* and Leslie who has 20 years experience in the business enjoyed it too. It is deeply moving and well written. Faradawn are cautious whom they take on. They carefully read the books before deciding whether to take them on or not. They know, as we do, that it is difficult to get a spot on one of the crowded shelves of the bookshops. Look out for this book in *Odyssey* magazine. Although Gabby would like every prisoner in the world to have a copy of her book, it is equally as informative and interesting to anyone involving in an energy healing modality.

Writing an Author Profile and a Synopsis: Helen

We, and most publishers and agents, will ask writers to submit the first three chapters of their book, together with an author profile and a synopsis.

The first is easy, but the second and third can present some problems and tend to suffer from various misinterpretations.

The author profile:

We need to know who you are and information on your writing experience. We do not need to know that you enjoy knitting and that you love your cat (unless perhaps your book is about cats), nor do we need to know your entire schooling and employment history. What you have written, had published, won prizes for etc., will suffice.

It helps too, to let us know what your 'qualifications' are regarding the subject matter of your book. This is not necessarily an academic qualification, such as a doctor writing about medical problems, but if you have written a book about the development of children, it helps to detail the experience you may have had in fostering, caring for, or working with, children. If your book is a fictional tale set in the African bush, let us know what aspects of the bush you have personally experienced.

Synopsis:

First and foremost – the synopsis is *not* the back page blurb. The blurb is intended to pique the readers' interest, to encourage them to buy the book, obviously not to tell the whole story or

give away the surprise ending. But the synopsis is just that.

Your synopsis needs to set out a clear outline; who the main characters are; the theme of the book, and the basics of the story. We also, very importantly, need to know how it ends.

The writer should not be coy and ask questions, such as: *He had overwhelming problems, but was he able to overcome them?* In a synopsis we need to be told: *He (Jim) faced many family-related problems, but through counselling and the enduring love of Daisy, he manages to overcome them.*

We do not need a cliff-hanger ending – we need to know that the story has a strong beginning, an interesting middle and a satisfactory ending.

The synopsis doesn't have to chronicle each twist and turn in the story... *then he did this, and then he did that, and then Aunt Mary did something else* – you have to find a way to compress these sequences into a succinct phrase. There may be passages in the book where minute details of a character's daily activities are described, but in a synopsis it's probably only necessary to say, *...after working for ten years as an exotic dancer, she...* Or *...after six years of marriage she realises she has made a mistake...*

Keep it short and to the point – this is not the arena for showing off literary prowess. Characters do have to be fully portrayed at this stage, it is not necessary to explain that your MC is *tall, tanned, muscular, raven-haired, with a dazzling smile and tattoo on her bottom*. Descriptions of places can be kept for the book itself. If the story takes place in the countryside,

this is all that needs to be mentioned, do not go into long narratives about fields and farmyards.

The profile and synopsis must not run on for pages, publishers are busy people. Keep the author profile to one page, and the synopsis to no more than 500 words.

As with everything else, practise, practise, practise... Try to write a synopsis of well known novels in as few words as possible.

The Time of the Writer: Ginny

Keeping to the topic of UKZN, we were honoured to have our author, Gerry Murphy, launch his book, *Bless me Father*, at this major event. Twenty-one prominent international writers converged on Durban for a week of thought-provoking literary dialogue. We were thrilled to hear Justice Albie Sachs speak and he received a well deserved standing ovation. I won't repeat what is readily available on the Internet. The good news emerging from this event, as far as we are concerned, is that Gerry Murphy will be considered as one of the presenting authors for next year, as well as Gustav Preller, our other client, who has two books published by Pegasus Publishers UK. Gustav's first book, *Icarus over Hong Kong*, has been selling well and we must stress that this is mainly due to the marketing expertise of Gustav. His next book is even better. The Twelfth Delegate is bound to interest many people. The story is gripping, the content relevant to current times, and the writing polished. All the makings of a good read. Cedric Sissing from Adams Bookshop in Durban gave us the good news about Gustav's possible inclusion at next year's Time of the Author. Both Gerry and Gustav are entertaining speakers which is an important attribute. Authors can no longer hide behind

their laptops writing their next best seller. Time needs to be allocated for the promotion of existing books. So, Helen will have to be here, and I hope David, editor at Pegasus, could also attend.

We really appreciate the encouragement we receive from Cedric and Peter Adams. They were co-presenters at the Time of the Writer. Their title *What will it mean to be a bookseller in 10 years' time?* provided food for thought and debate. The following is an extract from their website, Adams and Company was started in 1865 to serve the stationery, magazine and book needs of the colonial community. The business grew with the town as Durban was the port to which most people going to the interior sailed and the equipment was mainly shipped through it. During the 1930's Depression the business moved into its present city centre building, and as the city spread it opened branches. They discussed how bookshops need to strategise on how they can remain in business since the advent of the e-book explosion. A number of people in the audience mentioned how they prefer the printed version and appreciated the social aspect of drinking coffee in a bookshop's coffee shop.

The digital future in publishing was explored under the heading *Is the book as we know it dead?* with Wesley Thompson (Pan McMillan) who offered an outlook for the future publishing landscape, in light of a society that's ever advancing technologically, and the proliferation of literary blogs. We learned how numerous publishers, even those who were previously resistant, are now making books available in e-format.

Book Launch: Ginny

Gustav Preller recently launched his latest book, *The Twelfth Delegate*, at Adams Bookshop Musgrave Road. Once again his books sold well at the event and he has also launched the book at Exclusives and other booksellers. We expect it to outsell his first book *Icarus over Hong Kong*. The following text is from the blurb of *The Twelfth Delegate*.

*In seconds a brutal carjacking shatters the life of top Johannesburg banker, Pierre Joubert. Disillusioned, he vows to leave South Africa. He decides on Provence, home of his French Huguenot ancestors and epitome of civilised society – a utopian world far from his violent country. But two chance meetings in the village of L'acombe lead to unintended and terrifying consequences. He first encounters Dr Uli Maier, humanist and free thinker intent on protecting Europe's secular values against an encroaching Islam, and then Shada, a Muslim girl from an Algerian immigrant family. Daunting cultural differences cannot stop the dangerous attraction Pierre and Shada feel for each other. Casting his long, dark shadow over them all is Hassan, trapped in a Paris slum, his hatred of France matched only by his self-loathing. Four people, three missions, one deadly appointment with fate... A novel rich in irony, *The Twelfth Delegate* creates almost unbearable suspense as it moves between Johannesburg, Paris, Provence, Algiers, and the Cape winelands.*

Gustav will be visiting Hong Kong soon to promote both books. And who said authors just had to write?

Apostrophes, quotation marks and inverted commas: Helen

Where does one use an apostrophe? We have many mss submitted by writers who are clearly confused by this simple question. In order to clarify, I have set out the following rules with, hopefully, simple explanations.

Many writers, it seems, feel that 'the publisher will sort all this out...' I'm afraid, in these tough and competitive times, publishers will discard a manuscript that is full of errors – it's too time-consuming to correct. 'But...' I can hear you ask, 'what if the book is *really* good, surely they won't worry about such a small thing.' The trouble is, they won't get as far as finding out whether or not the book is good; if the first page is full of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors, that's where they will stop reading. We have asked publishers this question ourselves. What if they overlook the next Harry Potter for this reason – and their answer? It's the chance they have to take, they do not have the time to read right through every book they are sent.

So, let's sort out one of the worst offenders:

Possessive pronouns:

Confusion reigns over the possessive form of one – does one say, one eats one's dinner, or one eats ones dinner? According to the 'rule' applied to it, it should be the latter, but the jury's still out. Personally, in this case, I prefer one's – clearer. Other possessive forms however do not use the apostrophe.

Subject	Possessive
I	Mine
You	Yours
He	His
She	Hers
It	Its
We	Ours
You	Yours
They	Theirs

Other possessive forms and the placement of apostrophes:

- The girls put on their hats
- The girl's hat was red (one girl)
- The girls' hats were red (more than one girl)
- The hats belong to the girls (no apostrophe needed)
- His parents' home was small (he has more than one parent)
- His parent's home was small (would be correct if he only had one parent, but then it would be more correct and more informative to say father's or mother's)

Use of apostrophes in contractions:

To test if **It's** is correct... can it be replaced with **it is** or **it has**? If the answer is yes then it's correct:

It's (contraction of it is) never too late to learn

Confusion arises from the apostrophe being used as the possessive and when writing about something that belongs to 'it' people want to use the apostrophe. (Refer to possessive pronouns

above – e.g. Its door is red.) The other way to say it – It's the house with the red door – uses the contracted **It is**.

Apostrophes are used in other contractions, such as:

That's (that is)

We're (we are)

You're (you are – not to be confused with your, which means it belongs to you)

It'll (it will)

We've (we have)

He'd (he had)

Didn't (did not)

Plural/possessive of numbers:

Plural (no apostrophe):

The dress was from the 1960s

There were 1000s of them

Possessive:

The 1960's style was quirky

No. 6's door was red.

Quotation marks (inverted commas) – dialogue and quotations

Single = English

Double = American

Both acceptable, but stick to one style especially when using quotations within a sentence:

'Mom says they're "forbidden fruit" remember?'

Or:

"Mom says they're 'forbidden fruit' remember?"

It can become unwieldy when the enclosed quotation is at the end of the sentence:

'Mom says they're "forbidden fruit".'

"Mom says they're 'forbidden fruit'."

Movies, book titles, etc. do not need inverted commas – use italics:

I read *War and Peace* while I was on holiday.

Titanic was a really bad movie

Names

When writing about real people, of course one can't (contraction of cannot) choose the names, so having to talk about James's or James' (both are acceptable) book, cannot be avoided.

However, we recommend that in fiction you choose names that do not end with an S, to avoid cumbersome plurals and possessives: The Harrises' house, Ross's car etc.

Hope all this helps and that I haven't actually confused the issue even more. If you have any queries, just send me an e-mail.

South African Book Fairs: Ginny

Diarise the Cape Book Fair for 12-14 June 2012 and make your presence felt in the literary world. Organisers expect the fair to be a bumper one as there will be no event during 2011. We mentioned our disappointment in a

previous newsletter about the poor participation from key publishers and retail outlets when we visited last year. An official from PASA (Publishers Association of South Africa) said, "The council took into consideration the fact that by the time of its meeting, many big players at the fair had indicated that they would not be at the fair this year and that they preferred to come to the fair once every two years." Some booksellers feel that a biennial book fair makes no sense as the industry is so dynamic and fast changing. But, it is an affordability problem and publishers all over the globe are feeling the pinch as a number of bookshops have closed their doors. Commentary on the economy on television sounds more hopeful as they say the UK is starting to pick up again. We will be at the fair as Helen will fly in from the UK again. If any of our signed up clients would like to meet us there, please email us prior to the event to arrange it.

The Cape Town *Book Fair* is the biggest *book fair* in sub-Saharan Africa and worth a visit.

If you can't wait to attend a book fair in Cape Town then the Open Book opens between 21-25 September 2011. The event is organised by Mervyn Sloman and Ben Williams of online books portal <http://book.co.za> and includes founding partners, supporters and sponsors such as The Hay Festival of Literature, South African PEN, Equal Education, Leopard's Leap Wines, Cape Town Tourism, the Cape Times and Toby Mundy of Atlantic Books. See more on www.openbookfestival.co.za

Alide Dasnois, editor of the Cape Times, said:
"The Cape Times is proud to be associated with Open Book Cape Town, which will bring top South African and foreign writers into the heart of our city and offer the people of Cape Town the best festival of books and reading they've ever known."

Text-speak. New? Or 'old hat' : Helen

Many people find text-speak a modern abhorrence, something that is ruining the English language, but I see it as an expedient means of communication, and a bit of fun. Apart from that, it's actually nothing new... Have a look at the *Essay to Miss Catherine Jay* – written by Charles C. Bombaugh (~1847) – and see if you can decipher it. (Translation at the end of this newsletter)

New publications from OPLS: Ginny

The journey to the final publication of someone's precious manuscript can be arduous and stressful. We like to co-publish with our authors, which we feel is much better than self-publishing as we believe we contribute to the final product by pushing it up a notch or two. There are numerous print-on-demand and self-publishing companies who format and print – and that is it. Although I have noticed a number of errors (now that I look for them) in books printed by major mainstream publishers, we try our best to cut down on errors. This entails a close relationship with the author and careful proof reading.

Rose O'Flynn's delightful book *Threads*, came our way initially for an edit. We enjoyed the read and after discussions she decided to produce a short run prior to creating an e-

EMBLEMATIC POETRY.

ESSAY TO MISS CATHARINE JAY.

An S A now I mean 2 write
 2 U sweet K T J,
 The girl without a ||,
 The belle of U T K.


I l der if U got that I
 I wrote 2 U B 4
 I sailed in the R K D A,
 And sent by L N Moore.

My M T head will scarce contain
 A calm I D A bright
 But A T miles from U I must
 M~ this chance 2 write.

And Ist, should N E N V U,
 B E Z, mind it not,
 Should N E friendship show, B true:
 They should not B forgot.

From virt U nev R D V 8 ;
 Her influence B 9
 A like induces 10 dern S,
 Or 40 tude D vine.

And if U cannot cut a —
 Or cut an !
 I hope U'll put a .
 2 I ?.

R U for an X ation 2,
 My cous N?—heart and 
 He off R's in a ¶
 A § 2 of land.

He says he loves U 2 X S,
 U R virtuous and Y's,
 In X L N C U X L
 All others in his i's.

This S A, until U I C,
 I pray U 2 X Q's,
 And do not burn in F E G
 My young and wayward muse.

Now fare U well, dear K T J,
 I trust that U R true—
 When this U C, then you can say,
 An S A I O U.

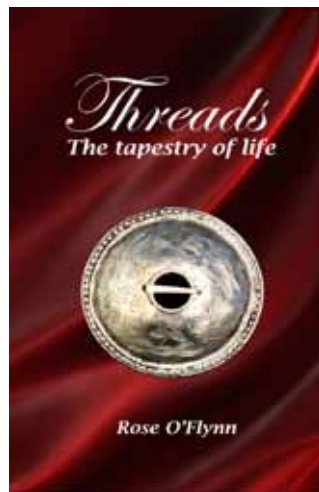
book. At least then she would have a book in paper form too for friends, family, reviewers and clients.

This is the blurb from the cover.

Three strong men, who face the horrors and loneliness of war, human brutality and the harshness of nature. Four strong women, who, left alone, endure heartbreak and incredible hardships.

This book vividly brings to life the triumph of the human spirit as the characters deal with world changing events in WWI, the Russian Revolution, WWII and Stalin's gulags. It recounts the true experiences of seven members of one ordinary family under astonishing conditions.

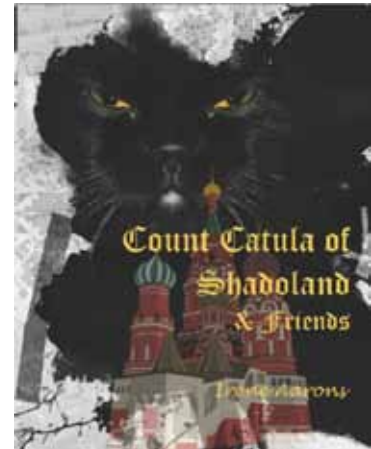
Spanning 60 years and weaving from one side of the world to the other, west to east, north to south, the intertwining threads of seven people's lives form the multicoloured



tapestry of this story. These events took place less than 100 years ago and millions of people living in Europe at that time shared similar experiences.

The book is written by a descendant who gathered her information from secret diaries, verbal records of the actual participants, and family documents.

Irene Aarons, whom we have known for many years from the SA Writers' Circle, is an accomplished poet and winner of numerous competitions. She is also known for her love of cats and we published her delightful book of poems entitled, *Count Catula of Shadoland and friends*.



Irene's book is available from ourselves but will hopefully be seen in the bookshops.

I am sure you agree that both covers are beautiful.

I won't tell you what we are working on at the moment. There are a number of very interesting books. Watch out for our next newsletter.

The importance of the cover: Ginny

The cover – it can make or break the success of your book. Authors are often tempted to put too much on the cover. This tends to make the cover look 'busy' and unprofessional. I was once in Adams Bookshop and Cedric took me to one side and said, "Clearly a book that has been self published, would you not agree?" The book had a number of colours and did not stand out amongst the other books. The title should be larger than the author name, until you are Dan Brown or J.K. Rowling when this option is reversed. Keep

away from clip art. This is a dead giveaway. You can buy excellent artwork on the Internet for just a couple of dollars. Better still, get someone with experience to design it for you. Helen and I have learnt quite a bit about the art and we also have access to artists, and layout experts.

Best Sellers: Ginny

Wikipedia is a useful site, although for academic work is not recommended (our students regularly mention it). However, go to this link to see what sells. May your book be equally blessed!

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_best-selling_books

Study this list carefully. Where does your book fit in? Get the book out the library and read it. But, please do not simply copy with a similar theme. Publishers want something new and fresh.

What it's like to be (co?)-published by OPLS: Patrick Coyne

Read a book on "How to Get your Book Published in South Africa" and you feel as if you're threading your way through a minefield. You're told that vanity-publishing is the quickest way to bankruptcy (and you're still left with a garage full of unsold books), that self-publishing can be dangerous (and anyway who's going to market the books?), and finally, that trying to get published by "mainstream publishers" makes playing liar-dice a safe, certain, sure occupation.

Well, I've been through all that, and have felt the pain. I had at least been warned about vanity publishers. But I went through the "Mainstream Mill" and back again. Then I

heard about Ginny and Helen and their OPLS. What are they? Mainstream? No. Self-publishers? No. Ginny calls what they do "co-publishing", and that's not a bad definition. Some people call it "publishing on demand". But that's not enough.

What was my problem? It was that, while the mainstream lot liked the text in my travel-book-with-a-difference, they thought my photographs were "not up to the, ah, standard to which our customers are accustomed..." and so on. One or two mainstreamers took a year just to tell me that. So, when I met up with OPLS, I told them the whole sad story. It did not take Ginny a day to come up with a compromise: "We'll put your best slides in a colour section in the middle of the book and print all the others in black and white," said Ginny. Problem solved. The result was great! A year later and we're still selling to all the major bookshops and getting stock-up orders almost weekly. Let's be practical. Up front I pay an amount to help with the printing and their admin. It's not a huge amount. Ginny does all the rest. I also help with the marketing. We've had luck. How? Well, Gary Player said you make your own luck. I can sum it up in two words: GET REVIEWS.

Important: the term "co-publishing" hints that author and publisher work together towards the same end. So true. The co-operation I've had is out of this world. I've had lots of shrewd advice. Clever tips. Down to earth suggestions. So, my advice is: If you've got a good book – and OPLS won't accept junk – go with cap in hand and ask: "Er, how about it?" You'll never regret it.

Translation of Catharine Jay poetry:
Helen

An essay now I mean to write
To you sweet Katie Jay
The girl without a parallel
The belle of Uticay (*a town in the USA - HO*)

I wonder of you got that one
I wrote to you before
I sailed in the Arcadia
And sent by Ellen Moore.

My empty head will scarce contain
A calm idea bright
But eighty miles from you I must
Embrace this chance to write.

And first, should any envy you,
Be easy, mind it not,
Should any friendship show, be true:
They should not be forgot.

From virtue never deviates;
Her influence benign
A like induces tenderness,
Or fortitude devine.

And of you cannot cut a dash
Or cut an exclamation
I hope you'll put a stop
To one question.

Are you for annexation to,
My cousin? Heart and hand
He offers in a paragraph (? - HO)
A section too, of land.
He says he loves you to excess,

You are virtuous and wise,
In excellency you excel
All others in his eyes.

This essay, until you I see,
I pray you to excuse,
And do not burn in effigy
My young and wayward muse.

Now fare you well, dear Katie Jay,
I trust that you are true
When this you see, then you can say,
An essay I owe you.

...do you agree?

*Until next time, keep
writing.*