

# Eavesdropping: 'This would make a really, really good movie!'

*At the society's August meeting, we listened in on the phone conversations between screenwriter Ginny Lowndes and producer Damien Parer as they talked through the steps of taking a book onto the television screen.*

Phone rings.

**Damien:** Hello, what is it? Oh my God. It's 5 a.m.

**Ginny:** Well I read this book as fast as I could, so I've been up all night ...

**Damien:** (Aside) Oh my God it's a screenwriter.

**Ginny:** Now it's this terrific book. It's called *The Ghost of Ludwig Gertsch* ...

**Damien:** It's what?

**Ginny:** Well it's this fantastic book. It's about this mad Frenchman called Roger Claude and this ice skating, lesbian, married, butcher called Dawn. And they

got together and formed a business partnership, and inadvertently led the whole gay rights movement and set up Oxford Street.

**Damien:** Does the world need to know about this? It sounds appalling.

**Ginny:** Well, for one thing, it's really funny and really interesting, and I think it's really terrific and it's just a really great yarn, because they were kind of accidental crooks. They didn't mean to be crooks. They set up venues for the gay community to meet in safety, and in order to do that they had to bribe everybody in history. After they set all that up, they decided they wanted every right in history, and so they went out to get them.

**Damien:** I'm not going to read it. You know I'll start getting interested. You know what happened last time. We went through this entire exercise before with our mini-series proposal *Grand Slam*, when we had that wonderful international story about Rob Laver, the tennis player, and we couldn't lose ...

**Ginny:** Yes, I know it took two years of our life, but look, it's the same sort of theme that I really like. Rod Laver and Roger Claude are really much the same. They are people who came from poor backgrounds. Roger Claude was brought up in a brothel where he learnt the tricks of the trade so to speak ...

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**Next meeting: Tuesday, 1 October 2002**

## ***Editing overseas: tips for editors with itchy feet***

Shelley Kenigsberg and Jo Jarrah have both had successful editing experiences overseas, Shelly in Indonesia and Jo (the 2001 Beatrix Davis Fellowship winner) in the USA. Come and listen to their experiences and get all the tips and hints on how to get established in another country.

Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney (between Park & Bathurst streets, near the Pilgrim Theatre and Pitt Street Uniting Church; the closest train station is Town Hall), 6.30 p.m. for 7.00 p.m. Drinks and light refreshments provided. \$13 for members; \$16 for non-members and those who don't RSVP; \$7 for holders of a current Centrelink or DVA concession card. Please RSVP to 9294 4999 (voicemail) or brhed@pnc.com.au (email) by Friday, 29 September.

**Tuesday 5 November: TBA**

## Eavesdropping

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**Damien:** I'm not going to read it. It sounds appalling. It's impossible.

**Ginny:** Well, I think it's a fantastic story, and you must have a 24-hour bookshop near you. Just pop out of bed now and go down and buy the book and just pop back into to bed and give me a ring when you've read it.

### One week later

**Damien:** Well ... I've read it. Yes, I guess there's something vaguely interesting in there. I read on the back of it 'A simple story of lust, betrayal, bribery, murder, corruption, forgery, bastardry, buggery. These and some other great themes.' There's no car chase, but perhaps there's something there. Do you realise there are 42 characters in the book?

**Ginny:** I don't need them. I'm not buying the book for the characters or anything. I'm just buying the idea.

**Damien:** Well there's chapters of a dialogue between the author and the dead person that the book's named after, which is extraordinary.

**Ginny:** I don't need that either. I won't use that.

**Damien:** Who do you think the audience is for this?

**Ginny:** Ah, women. Probably married women under 50. I don't think the gay audience will be watching because they're too busy out in the disco.

**Damien:** That's right. Everybody talks about a gay audience; but there is no gay audience. So yes, women watch drama. I'll give you that.

**Ginny:** Well, women, mainly women who are at home, want to watch relationships. And that's our demographic. That's where I think *Queer as Folk* drew its biggest audience and became such a big hit. My pitch is that what we've got here is *Queer as Folk* meets *The Sopranos*.

**Damien:** Sounds good so far. They'll like those things ...

**Ginny:** And we've got everything. We've got lust, greed (there was nobody more greedy than Roger Claude). There's betrayal, he betrayed everybody. He loved very unwisely, to say the least, or people loved him quite unwisely. And it's got money. We've got the whole seven deadly sins there. Gluttony. He couldn't stop eating. All he did was open up restaurants. And all he seemed to do

was eat, eat, burn his restaurants down, collect the money, open up the next one and have his way with three-quarters of the men in Sydney. I think it is a really good idea.

**Damien:** The next fault of many about the book is that it ranges from about the 1950s to the mid-1990s, which is the death sentence for story telling. It can turn into a rambling diary of events.

**Ginny:** I don't need that either. I'm only going to go from 1980 to 1990. I'll condense the 30 years into that 10 years. And of those 50 or 60 characters, I only need Roger Claude; Dawn; somebody called Abe, because Abe acts as their front, so when any unnatural offences with the whip occur, it's always Abe that makes the front page of the newspapers; one corrupt policeman whom we'll call Bumper; and that's about it really. And Ludwig, of course, who allegedly goes around killing everybody. When I need other characteristics, I'll concertina them into those people. So all we're actually buying is just the idea.

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### ***... and we've got everything, lust, greed, betrayal, money, gluttony ... the whole seven deadly sins.***

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**Damien:** Yeah, sure. Now, you're always going on about location. What do you mean by that?

**Ginny:** Well, I know all the actors always think they are the star of the show, but that's not true. The location is actually what people tune in to. God help anybody who went to Wandin Valley in *A Country Practice* because they always got some exotic disease and died. In *Neighbours* everybody goes to Ramsay Street. And everywhere they go is actually location. In that context, the actors can come and go, but the location remains the same. And people like the location; they have to love where they're going to be.

People will not watch their living room walls. That's just the rule, particularly in television. I've seen shows that are brilliantly researched, down to the last blood spot from battered women

in the western suburbs, die in two seconds flat because what the battered women in the western suburbs want to know is that one day they can live on the North Shore with a nice guy. They don't want to watch a battered women in the western suburbs. So location becomes the most important thing.

Our location here is concentrated in Paddington, Kings Cross, and that area, and in a particular time—from 1980 to 1990.

So the setting has to very rich and very exotic. One thing you have to remember about Roger Claude and Dawn is that who they were, the essence of their being, was illegal. Being gay was immoral, illegal and wrong, and they were hounded by the police. And these two stood up and said, 'We don't give a fig. We'll be as gay as we bloody well want to be.' And they did, and they gave courage to a tremendous number of people.

**Damien:** 'Well, you've got me to a point where I'm willing to go a bit further with it, but I'm not promising anything. At this stage, as the producer, I need to negotiate with the author of the book to get an option, which is really just a period of time in which we can exclusively develop the project.

What normally happens with feature films, or mini-series or television is that you organise an arrangement, usually for up to three years, with the author of the original work whereby you pay an annual fee, which is fairly low. So what we need to do first of all is find out if that book is available. Perhaps other film producers or other writers have already done that, so we would just have to walk away.

### One week later

I've already spoken to Sandra Harvey, the author of the book, and she says it's available.

Now Sandra's already written a book, about the Milperra Massacre, which is being developed into a feature film, and another book she wrote has already been turned into a telemovie which is being called *My Husband, My Killer*, so at least she's got an understanding of where we come from. The last thing we need, after we've done all this work, is somebody to take one of those large articles in the weekend newspaper saying everybody's ruined his or her wonderful work, and

that the film itself or the television program is nothing like the book ...

**Ginny:** Well, it isn't.

**Damien:** And that's why we pay money.

### **After the meeting with the author**

**Damien:** So, we've had our meeting with Sandra and she seems pretty sane. Otherwise, at this stage it would be a good idea to abandon the entire project. Having been through this process already, she understands our problems and how long it takes.

**Ginny:** She came across as being quite sensible, and, as we are going to put up our own money, it is essential that we have an author who understands what will happen with the adaptation.

**Damien:** So we have the legal right, at least for a year, and that's renewable, to

work on it knowing that nobody else can work on it during that period.

And while I've negotiated just a reasonably small sum for that annual renewal, I've also negotiated the final price, which is a lump sum, payable when the production actually happens. That money is usually five times more than the author makes writing the book. So most authors generally think it's a good idea. And also it tends to publicise their original work, so when the film version comes out, they sell more books.

**Ginny:** And most writers, if they're sensible, just take the money and leave it be. They accept that they wrote the book and they did not write the film. Those are two separate genres altogether.

**Damien:** And they say nice small quotable things at premieres for the press.

**Ginny:** But quite a number of them do stand there and say, 'The actor looks nothing like my mother. My book has been totally ruined. My mother would never say that. And I dissociate myself entirely from this.' Well, they did that when they signed the contract.

**Damien:** I negotiated the option to say that we had the rights to develop the work into a feature film, which could be for the cinema where people pay their \$12, or a mini-series of perhaps four hours, or even a telemovie of 90 to 100 or so minutes. So we've got that room to now break up the book into its pieces and work out where we're going.

This stage is crucial from the producer's point of view. If you're going to make a feature of this sort of subject matter, which is in fact a kind of period

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## *The Writer's Path*

*Quest for Life* warmly invites you to travel *The Writer's Path*, a five-day creative writing course with a goal: to deepen your connection with your own inner self.

**The course is fully residential and runs from 18-22 November 2002, inclusive.**

Writing, like all creative endeavour, has its source in the inner self. We can all write because that source exists in all of us. On *The Writer's Path* you will discover how to access the source of your creativity, how to connect with your own true voice. As a participant on *The Writer's Path*, you will write your inner life, recording your inner journey to date and discovering what you need to know for the next stage.

In retreat at the *Quest for Life Centre*, set in nine acres of tranquil countryside at Bundanoon, participants will be guided through graduated writing sessions, and exercises designed to access the 'right brain'. Each day will begin and end with a meditation session to nourish both creative and spiritual impulses, and counselling will be available on the course if required.

Here is an opportunity to focus on your spiritual needs. Away from your busy life, in the clean air and quiet beauty of the Southern Highlands, in the company of like minds, take the time to enhance your creative potential and refresh your inner life.

Facilitating and sharing *The Writer's Path* with you will be **Petrea King**, founder of *Quest for Life*, **Wendy Sinclair**, writer/editor and meditator and **Gavin Sinclair**, psychologist and meditator.

**For more information, please call Wendy Sinclair on 02 9904 3811.**

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## Eavesdropping

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thing, it requires an art department and a lot of other things. It's got to look right. If people pay their \$12, it's got to look fairly spectacular. And you've probably got to throw in the Mardi Gras, and a few other things, to make it work. Then you're really looking at \$5 million, and to raise \$5 million is not easy. It generally implies that you've got to have at least one overseas actor in it, and a whole lot of other things which change the scope totally—the way it's written, the way it's marketed, and everything else.

**Ginny:** Well, we've got Roger Claude, who's French; we've got Ludwig, who's South American; we've got Dawn, who's the ice-skating, married, lesbian butcher who lived in France, so we've got a lot of scope for employing overseas actors.

**Damien:** We could do that or, if we went for a mini-series, we'd be looking for at least \$1.2 million per hour to make it. The networks pay at best \$300, perhaps \$400 thousand an hour as a licence fee, but there's a huge budget gap we'd have to fill. And you've usually got to fill that from overseas. And you've got to find a fairly big interested party, like German television or UK television, to put in quite a large sum. Then the rest of the world will fill the rest if we're lucky. That's a harder path.

Probably a path we should consider is the telemovie, which means that we could probably produce it for about \$3.5 million, and get a network in Australia to come up with perhaps \$600,000 for a broadcast licence fee or something like that. Then because of the subject matter, depending which way we take it, we might interest overseas broadcasters to come in. They're the choices, but it makes a huge difference to the way it's written—thinking about the audience and what's going to work and so on. Perhaps we need to talk about what we've actually got here, besides all the buggery and vengeance and all that. One thing is the gay rights issue, isn't it?

**Ginny:** Yes, we have the gay rights issue, but I think the overriding thing we have is Roger Claude. He was no mincing queen, but a very ballsey bloke who just happened to be a fruit who had a fondness for leopardskin tights and Pisces medallions, but apart from that he didn't mind stalking around the way

he looked and the way he was. I think it's basically a story about the friendship between Roger Claude and Dawn. Roger Claude could turn things into businesses, but he didn't have the business brain that Dawn had. Dawn had been a world champion ice-skater and she brought that kind of discipline to Roger Claude's life.

How she picked up with Roger Claude and how he always inspired people was really quite interesting. She really was a butcher and she really was married and when Roger Claude went in to pick up his meat order and he looked Dawn up and down and he said, 'God, with legs like those you have to be a lesbian.' Dawn nearly had a heart attack because she'd been brought up by a single mother, she finally got herself married, and she finally got herself a little business in her butcher's shop.

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### ***He was no mincing queen, but a very ballsey bloke who just happened to be a fruit with a fondness for leopardskin tights.***

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She had an awful lot to lose without Roger Claude strolling in and declaring her to be gay. He more or less said to her, 'Now look. You can either cut up chops for the rest of your life, or you can join me and we can have one whale of a time.' She tossed and turned and thought about it and finally decided to trust Roger Claude.

Roger Claude was like a lot of men in their late 30s and 40s who, when they look in the mirror, see a 16-year-old sexy guy, and this proved to be his downfall. When Dawn looked in the mirror, she saw wrinkles and impending old age, but Roger Claude didn't, and he began to attract hustlers.

They were very attractive men who Roger Claude thought were after his body, but in actual fact they were after his money. Threaded through that, we have the gay rights issue, and it's all told through the friendship of Roger Claude and Dawn.

**Damien:** Isn't this also possibly a murder mystery?

**Ginny:** Yes. There are quite a few murders.

Apart from burning everything down, Roger Claude picked up with a man called Ludwig who used to dance with Big Pretzel in the bars at Kings Cross. Roger Claude thought that Ludwig was attracted to him for his body and how great he was in bed. But Ludwig, on the side, had picked up with a solicitor who was more bent than anybody and the solicitor was planting ideas far above Ludwig's station in life into Ludwig's head.

So Roger Claude, who was the messiest character in history, died in bed scrupulously clean, nary a crumb in sight, with his arms folded neatly across his chest and apparently of natural causes.

Nobody believed that for one second, but Ludwig was allegedly strutting around saying, 'I've got all the money, nyah-nyah-nyah, and now I can be rich and famous and now I can be like Roger Claude.' Except some people tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'Give us our money back.' He said, 'No, it's all mine, nyah-nyah-nyah-nyah,' so he died. Violently.

**Damien:** We've got a lot of possible ways to go with the story. The gay rights theme runs throughout this story and eventually ends with everybody free to dance in the streets.

The Roger Claude and Dawn story is a kind of double act. It could also be just Roger Claude's story because it's so strong. There are three murders that have never been solved.

**Ginny:** And then we've got a corrupt police and bent lawyer kind of story. So what do you think we should do?

**Damien:** Well, it's like the Sopranos, because they were kind of like the Sopranos with all that relationship stuff. I think what's appealing is the relationships between all these people. Roger Claude and Dawn set out to make a bit of money and open up some restaurants and cater to the gay clientele. When the police began to hassle them and they were forced to employ Abe to handle the police, they kept getting deeper into the mire quite inadvertently. Then at one stage they had to say, 'All right, we're into crookery up to our armpits, so we're going to have to actually be crooks now,' which they did with gusto. So what's the emphasis of our story then?

**Ginny:** I think the emphasis is on Roger Claude and Dawn and their intense friendship.

**Damien:** Okay. A very very weird love story.

**Ginny:** Well, no. It's not really a love story as such. I think they were just really good friends and I think they made really terrific business partners. I think Dawn was quite protective of Roger Claude because Roger Claude always thought that he could take on the world and win all the time.

**Damien:** Okay. If we're going to talk about Roger Claude and Dawn, how much of the book are we now actually talking about in that story?

**Ginny:** About five per cent.

**Damien:** Okay. We bought the book to trigger us into finding the story. Graham Greene wrote books that translate more easily, but most works don't actually deliver that much. You have to start again and create a whole different genre.

We need development money so that you can spend eight to 10 weeks full time writing the first draft of the script. The Australian Film Commission is the federal government body that's been set up to provide development money for various things to get projects started. It will usually put up development money for the first second and third draft. Or, because we both live in New South Wales, we could go to the NSW Film and Television Office and get similar assistance. It's high risk money, but it's

not a lot. At each stage you may be looking at \$15 000 to \$20 000, so it's not a lot in terms of how many millions it costs to finish the thing.

Now, to approach one of these groups, we need to have an outline or a treatment, which would include some character notes.

**Ginny:** Yes, all these film commission-type places ask for a treatment, which is the whole story written down scene by scene, but minus the dialogue. This is a huge amount of work. If we're doing a miniseries, we're looking at around 50 or 60 pages including character notes. If we go into production, the script may have to be written up to 10 times.

An outline gives a rough sketch of what's going to happen in each scene or in each episode, so we say that in this episode Roger Claude and Dawn meet, Dawn decides to throw her lot in with Roger Claude, they merrily hare off. So we break it up like that into the four hour-long episodes.

**Damien:** You just submit enough so you don't have to do a huge amount of work, but enough for someone to be able to grasp what it is that we are getting at.

**Ginny:** We have to write the characters, but in that I would be taking a lot of the characteristics of other characters and putting them into the characters that we're using. We can't have 50 people wandering across the screen. The maximum you can have in any serial or series on television is about 16 people.

**Damien:** I think a telemovie will probably be the best way to go with this material. We're going to need to indicate some sort of broadcaster interest. Now this can be quite simple if somebody, like the ABC, says they're interested and would like to see something further. They don't have to make a big commitment at this stage. The next thing that we would have to tackle is the title, and the title *The Ghost of Ludwig Gertsch* is unspeakable. **Ginny:** What about *The Lavender Hill Mob*?

**Damien:** Well it has been done. It's a nice idea.

**Ginny:** *The Lilac Mafia*?

**Damien:** Lilac Mafia, yes, that's good. At least that's sayable.

**Ginny:** *Tall Pansies*?

**Damien:** Well, yeah. It's kind of nice, it's a nice Australianism, but it could be a bit of a put-down. But what's in the story itself? Is there something in there that might give us a good title.

**Ginny:** Well, Roger Claude was rogering four to five men a day in between burning things down and he bought, pardon my language, a fuck pad in Bent Street. Now the coppers were bent, he was bent, his business was bent, everything was bent about Roger Claude, so it amused him no end to find himself a flat in Bent Street.

**Damien:** Should it just be called *Bent Street*?

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## CALLING ALL EDITORS — CAN YOU SPARE AN HOUR OF YOUR TIME?

You are invited to participate in a research project undertaken by Macquarie University that is concerned with individual perceptions or thoughts about various letter characters or typeface samples.

If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to reserve about 1 hour of your time to complete a task. The task may be undertaken in your own home at a time convenient to you. You will be asked to rate 24 typeface samples according to a series of scales. A booklet containing stimulus material will provide further detail about the task.

The study is being conducted by David Harland, MAppLing. I am undertaking research in linguistics and psychology at Macquarie University, Sydney for the Honours degree of Master of Arts. Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results.

If you can spare one hour to participate please contact me on 02 9831 1542 at any time between now and the end of the year for a stimulus material booklet or to discuss your participation. Alternatively, you could write to me, providing your name and address, and I will send a booklet. My email address is [harland@zipworld.com.au](mailto:harland@zipworld.com.au).



## An 'aitch' or a 'h'? That is the question

Two for the price of one in this issue. From a correspondent:

**I've been meaning to ask your opinion of the use of two words which bug me a little. They are:**

**historic**—I prefer 'a historic', not 'an historic' (since when did the 'h' in 'historic' become silent?).

**holistic**—Have you seen the term 'holistic' used, as in 'holistic healing centre'? Why not 'wholistic' as I've very occasionally seen? After all, 'holy' and 'wholly' are very different meanings.

Good questions, both.

### Historic

There was a tradition in spoken English that, when a word begins with 'h' and the first syllable is unstressed, you'd use *an* rather than *a*. So it was customary to speak of 'an hotel', but 'a hospice'. Like so many other traditions ('thou shalt not split an infinitive', 'thou shalt not end a sentence with a preposition', and so on), there was never a good reason for it, so it died a slow but fairly painless death. But the corpse occasionally twitches.

### Holistic

This word has nothing to do with holiness. It's sometimes spelt 'wholistic'

for the very simple reason that many people find the 'correct' spelling hard to believe. It's a fascinating illustration of the rich and diverse ancestry of English. Holistic (and related terms such as *holism*) were 'invented' at a time when fairly technical terms were usually (and deliberately) derived from Latin or Greek; *holo-* (meaning *complete*) is based on a Greek element.

'Whole', on the other hand, is part of the very old English word-stock, having come from the Anglo-Saxon word *hale* (which you'll recognise in the phrase 'hale and hearty'; 'healthy' comes from

the same root). (I'm not sure why or when so many Anglo-Saxon words beginning with 'h' have picked up an initial 'w' (what, why, who, which).) I haven't checked, but I'm quite sure that the Greek *holo-* and the Anglo-Saxon *hale* both come from an even older element in what's called 'Proto-Indo-European'—an ancient language, reconstructed purely from theory, that was the ancestor of a vast range of languages including Sanskrit, Persian, Greek, and Modern English.

Michael Lewis

## Style Council conference and call for papers

Style Council, on the theme of The Digital Shift from Print to Electronic Media, will be held in Brisbane, 22–24 November 2002, at Rydges Hotel on Southbank. Conducted by the Macquarie Dictionary Research Centre and Style Council Centre, it is concerned with professional uses of Australian English.

Issues include editing documents for the screen, educational uses of the Internet, and the outlook for e-publishing, topics of interest to a wide range of professionals from such diverse fields as editing, publishing, teaching, journalism, linguistics and lexicography.

Featured speakers include Richard Walsh and Peter Spearritt. If you would like to offer a paper relating to any of the topics indicated, please send details of the proposed content in a 250-word summary by 13 September.

Early bird registration for the conference is \$250 (+GST), with full- and half-day rates available on request. For further details, or to submit an abstract for a paper, please go to [www.ling.mq.edu.au/style](http://www.ling.mq.edu.au/style), or contact Adam Smith at the Style Council Centre on email at [asmith@ling.mq.edu.au](mailto:asmith@ling.mq.edu.au) or by phone at (02) 9850 8783.

## Eavesdropping continued from page 5

**Ginny:** Yes, let's call it *Bent Street* because it rather summed up Roger Claude and the whole of what they were doing, the bent-ness of the whole book.

**Damien:** I love it. It's short, and everyone can spell it. It's good.

**Ginny:** That's a producer talking.

**Damien:** It is. Dare I raise the business about documentary truth and obligations to the truth? How far can we push this story away from what we know is probably true and how much imaginary material can we use?

**Ginny:** Well, we have to have a look at the themes of what we're doing. One of the things that made *Neighbours* work was that it was set in a really middle class suburb where people had lovely houses and nice things. I put the problems of

the western suburbs into the nice suburb so that people in the western suburbs, who are our biggest demographic, would watch it because it was happening to people on the North Shore and it wasn't happening to them.

Also, I had previously been employed with the Australian Children's Television Foundation, so I knew a tremendous amount about the demographic of young kids and could talk about what they were talking about. Again, I placed those topics in the North Shore, so I wasn't targeting them directly. I get their dialogue down by sitting at the back of the bus where all the kids are congregated. I have my newspaper, but I never read it. I listen to what the kids are talking about.

Obligations to the truth? I'm using the truth of this situation, but I'm using it in

a dramatised way. I can tell the truth about all sorts of things if I'm not whacking somebody between the eyes with it. If you want to talk about something like the dreadful plight of the migrant, the best way to show that is to take them out of Woomera and put them in St. Leonards and make it a comedy.

We have to remember that we're in the entertainment business and we're playing with 4 or 5 million dollars worth of somebody's real money, and they want their money back. We've got to get an audience that will sit and watch it. I want to show that the way gay people were treated was horrific, so I'll use this mad bloody Frenchman trotting round with a Pisces medallion and leopard skin tights to say it in an entertaining way.

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## Hefty Oxford style guide deserves a place on any editor's bookshelf

*This review by Janet Mackenzie of The Oxford Guide to Style, by R. M. Ritter and published by the Oxford University Press, was first published in the July 2002 issue of The Society of Editors (Victoria) Newsletter.*

The dustjacket trumpets this book as 'Hart's Rules for the 21st century' and (displaying the famous Oxford list comma) 'The Style Bible for All Writers, Editors, and Publishers'.

Those who remember the handy little volume in use in the 1960s titled Hart's *Rules for Compositors and Readers at the University Press, Oxford* will be dismayed to see that it has grown into a hefty tome of more than six hundred pages. Do we really need to know so much more these days?

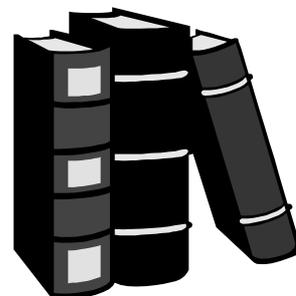
Inevitably, Australian editors will compare *The Oxford Guide to Style* with the recent sixth edition of the Australian *Government Style Manual*. The differences in the two works are the result of their different starting points. The *Style Manual* is intended for people who are undertaking a publishing project, and thus includes sections on 'Planning the communication' and 'Producing and evaluating the product'. In contrast, *The Oxford Guide to Style* is more narrowly focused on the appearance of type on the page.

In this, it is extremely successful. As one would expect, it covers the stylistic conventions relating to abbreviations, punctuation, numbers, quotations, references, indexes, lists and tables, and the use of caps and italic. The advice is detailed and sensible, and an editor with this book in hand will be able to work with confidence. Traditionalists will be glad to go against the recommendation of the *Style Manual* and claim the authority of the Oxford navy-blue to retain full stops and spaces in personal initials (R. G. Menzies rather than RG Menzies).

*The Oxford Guide to Style* also has chapters on specialist subjects such as science, mathematics, and linguistics,

and on genres such as sacred works, collections of correspondence, and translations. Again the advice is thorough and practical, and equips the editor for all likely eventualities. The section on law, for instance, covers not only English law, but also citation of cases from the European Union, the United States, and the so-called Commonwealth.

The main strength of *The Oxford Guide to Style* is the chapter on languages, which takes up almost one-quarter of the text. The information may seem esoteric—most editors do not need to know the rules for alphabetical order in Estonian, or capitals in Gaelic, or italics in Chinese. However, in an increasingly multicultural world, the spelling of names and loan words is a constant problem. The section on transliteration from Arabic is helpful for names such as al-Qaeda. If you've ever hesitated over diacritics in Vietnamese or word division in Russian, you need this chapter. It has an extraordinary range, covering European dialects such as Catalan, Georgian, and Maltese, as well as Asian, African, and Native



American languages. It will even equip you to deal with extinct languages such as Old English, Gothic, and Aramaic.

An entertaining section on American English alerts readers to the perils of what it calls 'cisatlantic translation' of words such as *knickers*, *fanny*, and *bun*, though it chastely omits *faggot*. The six-page list of American and British equivalents unintentionally provides a useful measure of the extent of American influence on Australian usage.

At an RRP of just under \$70, *The Oxford Guide to Style* costs marginally more than the \$60 [sic] *Style Manual*. A freelance editor should own and use both. Add them to your professional library and remember to claim depreciation at tax time.

## Lethal weapons from that endless source of humour called the Internet

Shotgun wedding: A case of wife or death.

I used to work in a blanket factory, but it folded.

I used to be a lumberjack, but I just couldn't hack it, so they gave me the ax.

If electricity comes from electrons... does that mean that morality comes from morons?

A man needs a mistress just to break the monogamy.

Marriage is the mourning after the knot before.

A hangover is the wrath of grapes.

Corduroy pillows are making headlines.

Is a book on voyeurism a peeping tome?

Dancing cheek-to-cheek is really a form of floor play.

Banning the bra was a big flop.

Sea captains don't like crew cuts.

Does the name Pavlov ring a bell?

A successful diet is the triumph of mind over platter.

Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.

A gossip is someone with a great sense of rumor.

Without geometry, life is pointless.

When you dream in color, it's a pigment of your imagination.

Reading whilst sunbathing makes you well-red.

When two egotists meet, it's an I for an I.

## Training courses at the NSW Writers' Centre

### **Introduction to Creative Writing, Colleen Z. Burke**

Saturdays, 5 and 12 October, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Members \$120; members' concession \$100; non-members \$180. GST inclusive. Bring lunch and writing materials.

A practical writing course for beginners as well as people with some writing experience. You will be encouraged to write short prose, stories or poetry and there will be ideas and exercises to stimulate imagination and deal with writer's block. Participants will receive positive feedback and guidance to enhance and develop their writing style. Finding a voice, techniques and the importance of editing will also be discussed.

### **Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing, Terry Dowling**

Saturday, 12 October, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Members \$60; members' concession \$50; non-members \$90. GST inclusive. Bring lunch and writing materials.

This one-day course on building worlds and creating futures in these exciting and lucrative storytelling genres will concentrate on basic themes, useful techniques and the field's special requirements.

### **Composing Multimedia Fiction From Scratch, David Reiter**

Saturday, 19 October and Sunday, 20 October, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

NSW Writers' Centre Library

Members: \$60; members' concession: \$50; non-members: \$90.

Bring writing materials and lunch.

Topics will include: What is literary multimedia? Key elements and tools for adding value to text. Substantive differences between reading text and 'reading' literary multimedia. The place of audience and imagination in the emerging hybrid forms.

For an overview go to <http://www.interpr.com.au/titles/SK.htm>.

### **Young Adult Literature is for Today, Susanne Gervay**

Saturday, 26 October 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Members \$60; members' concession \$50; non-members \$90. GST inclusive. Bring lunch and writing materials.

Young adult literature is confronting, humorous and relevant. It is, in effect, adult literature written with youth issues of identity, rites of passage, growing up—sexuality, friendship, family and independence versus dependence. It is the NOW literature—challenging and exciting, where authors tap into their youth, today's culture and contemporary relationships.

### **Sell Your Writing for All It's Worth: Freelance Journalism, Graeme Orr**

Saturday, 26 and Sunday, 27 October, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

Members \$120; members' concession \$100; non-members \$180. GST inclusive.

Bring lunch and writing materials.

You'd like to write articles for publication in newspapers and magazines? This seminar provides grass roots tips and hints that empower participants to take charge of their writing work.

For information about any of these courses call (02) 9555 9757, or email [nswwc@ozemail.com.au](mailto:nswwc@ozemail.com.au) or visit <http://www.nswwriterscentre.org.au>

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L E T T E R S

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## We'll only achieve professional status through solidarity

Dear Editors

Sorry I don't have time to get involved in the society's planning meeting (I'm program convener for a conference happening 31 October–2 November), but I do have a view as a member. Yes, we should be focusing efforts on raising the profile of editors to ensure our professional status. The history of the professions shows this is what professional societies, organisations, learned colleges have done. It's hard for individual editors to do. If we don't do it, our work gets subsumed into the visible stuff—the design and production.

Editors don't get trained in editing degrees the way lawyers do law, doctors do medicine and accountants do accounting. There is no Conservatorium of Editing, or National Institute. So the

society needs to work on accreditation, supporting postgrad courses and most of all, visibility for the work we do and the idea that it is a skilled, even learned, profession, not something that a bunch of young designers do on the side while they're choosing the colours for your website.

A research centre director of my acquaintance thinks a research centre doesn't need an editor because 'every academic, every graduate, should know how to do their own references' !!! Fortunately her centre does not have its accounts audited by the cleaner on the grounds that everyone should know how to balance their own cheque book.

*Juliet Richters PhD*

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## Internet humour

These are the winners of the worst analogies ever written in a high school essay contest in the Washington Post Style Invitational:

Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever. (Unknown)

His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

The red brick wall was the color of a brick-red Crayola crayon. (Unknown)

John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

## Editing: thrilling, glamorous, rigorous and sometimes downright dangerous

*When we dragged the conversation away from debates about Coetzee, Lessing and McEwan, Pamela Hewitt and Shelley Kenigsberg managed to talk about editing, training, and developments in the profession. Shelley has worked as an editor and a trainer, both in house and freelance, in Australia, Africa and Indonesia. She teaches editing at Macleay College and is the current president of the society.*

Africa, which is where I come from, is important for me. I have a huge longing for it. I just weep at what's going on in Zimbabwe. It's so desperate and so sad. And infuriating.

I'd just finished university when I left Zimbabwe. I wanted to be an actor or a singer, some kind of performer, but my father thought nice Jewish girls don't go on stage: 'Teaching's always a good fallback for a nice gel, go teaching'.

I studied African politics and history and languages and philosophy. I didn't specifically aim at teaching. It was never directed. And here comes the confession. I don't think anything in my life has ever really been directed.

I don't feel that I found a vocation and explored it. I long for that. Having said that, I continued with editing because I have a feel for it and it does something inside me. It makes me happy to do the things that I'm now skilled to do.

I had my training in house. It was fantastic, an extraordinary opportunity. I'd worked in publishing in South Africa, but as a generalist, a bit of writing, a bit of editing, a bit of typesetting on an old Compugraphic.

When I came here a friend in publishing saw an ad for a paste-up artist at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich and that became me. I persuaded them that I could draw a straight line and that I could stick bromide through a wax machine, and that was what I did for months.

Then I said I wanted to be an editor. We had weekly meetings, we had exercises, I had a mentor, it was just wonderful. After several months, they let me loose on a text.

The range was interesting. Educational from primary through to tertiary and a small list of academic monographs. The first work I did was minimal, on a book called *Optical Interferometry* by a man whose name was Hariharan Paramiswaran—it was a mass of science and data. I used to run his name through my head over and over, the thrill of the sound somehow added to the romance of the work (!) and the thrill of editing got me right then.

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***I enjoy rearranging the skeleton, putting the limbs back in the right place. You can append the clothing, the words later.***

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Starting to commission at HBJ was the next thrill, developing ideas and working with authors. That's still the biggest thrill—making something, as opposed to working on something almost made. It's alchemical. I haven't done a lot of fiction editing. I find it quite intimidating. The little bit of fiction that I've done, I've enjoyed, but I've felt anxious about it, so there's been some impediment to the untrammelled joy. I really like structural editing. I enjoy rearranging the skeleton, putting the limbs back in the right place. Later, you can append the clothing, the words. How else are you going to work with a text if it's all in the wrong place? I teach structural editing at Macleay, and I'm always surprised at other courses that don't cover it.

I'm also astonished that so many people still come to be trained, given the tightness of the industry and the difficulty in getting a viable job. Somehow, the image of glamour hasn't been eroded. I've tried my level best to puncture that one. At the beginning of the course I make it very plain that it's a difficult world to get into—and move

from, if you've chosen a particular area and want to move genre.

But the thing that resides for most who are there is the love of text. A lot of people say, 'If I only edit for myself, that's okay'. Student profiles are changing though. I'm getting a lot more writers. They want to make the best attempt they can to get published. That's an interesting shift.

Teaching's different from editing, it's a different part of me. It's also a chance to interact with 25 people, and have that ongoing collaboration. Freelancing can be very isolating. It's that sense of team I miss, the exchange of ideas that doesn't happen when you're sitting in front of a computer. I've only been freelance this time for four years, the last time for three. What drew me back last time was the isolation. There have been a few offers to go in house again, but it's hard to give up my autonomy—although it's tempting to have somebody looking after the computer and doing the photocopying.

Travel is a bit of a bug for me. I've lived and worked in Indonesia. I call Bali my spiritual home. I'm about to go next week again. I worked as a trainer on an aid project that was set up just before Soeharto was overthrown. The project was to look at textbooks, curriculum and examinations throughout the secondary school system. My role was to work with the editors, designers and writers, and to train them in production and instructional materials design. It was a fabulous time.

I arrived three weeks before Soeharto was overthrown, and we were evacuated the week before he left. It was all very dramatic ... the first time I've ever thought 'I could get knocked off here'. A friend said, 'I'm coming to fetch you in two hours, pack your bags'. It wasn't as if I had all my things there, but I did have photographs and books. I didn't have my passport because it was at the immigration department, being stamped with my visa. No travel papers. There was this very scary ride to the Australian Embassy in an armoured car with a guy with a gun on the front seat.

continued on next page

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## Shelley Kenigsberg

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I went back to the Jakarta Aid Project in another role eight months later. I think I was in a really privileged position, not in terms of status, but I was in a position of trust. Often the receptivity of people in projects is questionable. You can be seen as a walking purse. People are polite, but it's a mercenary exchange on some level. I was fortunate that the people I worked with were open to my being there, we had fantastic collaboration. It was a real exchange. There was a new mood in Indonesia, great optimism and opportunities.

I hadn't been to Jakarta before I worked there, but I liked Java. On Bali there's a huge antagonism to the Javanese. They can be arrogant and autocratic, but when you're in Java, it's different. I did quite a bit of travelling there. Just exquisite. I don't know why, but I have an affinity with the place.

What sort of change have I seen in editing in Australia? Any change has been minute. The days of invisible mending are still hailed as the good days. I'm not so sure it's such a worthy description. I'm not suggesting we come up front, but I'd like to see more

understanding of what we do, more appreciation of the possibilities of the collaboration. The thing that has changed is that there are fewer in-house editors, and there's very little in-house training. Editing is more specialised. If you're a publisher choosing between somebody who's a generalist and someone who has a specific skill, you're going to go for the specialist. If you are concerned about deadlines and time and money, you'll try to find someone who is already involved in a particular genre, so the preamble, the familiarisation has already been done.

The changes I'd like to see are more real understanding of what we do rather than rhetoric by clients and top management. There is a fairly rapid move to the American definition of editor as publisher in a lot of large Australian houses. This confuses the issue of who does the commissioning and who works on the detailed developmental editing and who is taking the text through to completion; roles are blurred.

At writers' festivals that have anything related to working with editors there's a hackneyed session where a few authors schlepp with their editors and give them some token recognition with, 'Of course,

if it hadn't been for Jo's help I wouldn't have achieved this ...' but the genuine collaboration is rarely trumpeted.

I'd like to see the relationship dealt with in a more realistic way, one that acknowledges the depth of the process. Most people aren't game to do that. I don't want to knock anybody off their perches—writers have an incredibly tough job. Olin Miller said that the only thing tougher than writing a book is wrestling crocodiles. It can be an excruciating process and I don't want to take away from that, but so is editing if you do it right. It's a rigorous pursuit and if given its due it shouldn't be seen as antagonistic to writing.

We're not all working with high fliers who won't have a word changed, and wanting acknowledgement isn't just a matter of overblown egos. Of course, the more secure a writer is in their craft or their knowledge, the happier they are to be edited. But I think people are nervous of any form of assessment or change. I think we have to approach the promotion of editing from a different angle. I haven't quite nussed out how to sell the message but I'm a bit dubious about bumper stickers saying 'Editors rule, OK'.

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## New society members since January 2002

*The society has loads of lovely new members—WELCOME. Some of you have come to meetings and we are all delighted to see so many new faces, particularly as the societies of editors around the country grapple with issues of accreditation, training and the challenges of being an editor in the 21st century.*

Aprile Alexander	Tony Giugni	Brenda Mattick	Julie Sanderson
Mara Bagaric	Sasha Gonzalez	Mark McCallum	Jen Saunders
Sandra Bassam	Lucy Gow	Janet McGaw	Gila Scheffler
Vincent Battiato	Katie Graves	Meredith McGowan	Sharon Scully
Margaret Beale	Cathy Hammer	Richard Mills	Susan Shaw
Amanda Berry	James Harvey	Catherine Milne	Michelle Shete
Sarah Blackney	Toni Hoekstra	Mary Morel	Joan Short
Eiko Bron	Karen Hopperditzel	Sharyn Oldereid	Jan Smith
Linda Bruce	Robin Hutcheon	Jackie O'Neill	Julie Stanton
Madeleine Burbidge	Carmen Johanson	Cathy Perkins	Susan Stevens
Eve Carmichael	Gill Knowles	Jenny Pittman	Nicholas Strobbe
Patrice Christie	Aileen Leddy	Sally Pope	Melissa Sutherland
Angharad Dalton	Germaine Leece	Jill Read	Therese Tan
Karen Deegan	Daniel Logovik	Dani Redmond	Kerrie Tarrant
Di Derenzie	Rae Luckie	Shelley Reid	Russell Thomson
Fiona Doig	Mary Mackenzie	Catharine Retter	Catherine Wallace
Lis Dunn	Trish Mackintosh	Wendy Richards	Marjorie Wilson
Alan Edwards	Jenny MacRitchie	Michelle Royer	Steve Womersley
Catherine Etteridge	Julie Marlow	Yousef Said Shahwan	

## Eavesdropping

continued from page 6

**Damien:** We are at the very early development stage of course. We're looking at at least four to six months writing to get to that stage in production. You're really looking at about a two-year period between this point and finishing it.

**Ginny:** And given that, we might put all that together and then have missed the market.

So, did I ruin the book? No, the book is still there. It exists in its own right, just as Shakespeare does.

**Damien:** How are you going to get around the issue of defamation?

**Ginny:** We figure that this book has already been through legals and they have been passed. We're not actually going to say that people murdered each other or did whatever.

**Damien:** You go as far as you can in this business. There'd be nothing on air if you didn't take a certain amount of chance. Nobody can sue you for saying that they're involved with nightclubs when they're involved with nightclubs. Also for someone to sue you would be a huge exercise on their part, something like five years, and they'd really want to feel certain that they'd win.

Now, we also need to think about casting the two lead characters. For Roger Claude we're going to need an actor with a terrific suntan, or at least some sort of Latin background, and who can play a range of ages.

**Ginny:** I need 10 years, so we start him off about the mid-30s and we end his life around 42 or 43, so the most the characters are going to get is a couple of little grey streaks in the side of their hair.

**Damien:** The current actor that everyone likes is Alex Dimitriades. Doesn't he have a sort of Latin look, but a bit of a worrier?

**Ginny:** Yes, he always looks worried. I like Marcus Graham. I think he has a lot of chutzpah. And that guy from *Picket Fences*, Costas Mandylor, is really good. He's frightfully handsome and he's got quite a good range as well. I've seen him play the most tender bumbling person to a bum on the street.

**Damien:** I know you like Vince Colosimo.

**Ginny:** Yes, he's called the thinking woman's sex symbol. I'd quite like him as somebody like Ludwig.

**Damien:** The networks of course have a huge input into this kind of thing. Now, what about Dawn?

**Ginny:** Well, Dawn has to be absolutely beautiful, so she has to look like somebody like Kate Fisher or somebody like that. All three of these people have to be extraordinarily beautiful.

**Damien:** Also, on commercial television you have to have named actors.

**Ginny:** Well, when we pitch it we say, 'This is *Queer as Folk* meets *The Sopranos*, and we want Costas Mandylor, Justin Melvey and Kate Fisher.' Then they can get a picture of

what we're trying to sell and how we can put it together.

*This is an edited version of an address to the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. on 6 August 2002. Views expressed are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the Society of Editors.*

*Meredith McGowan transcribed the talk, assisted by her mother, Margaret, when she became incapacitated. Merry Pearson and Damien Parer edited it.*

### Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

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### Blue Pencil

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The views expressed in the articles and letters, or the material contained in any advertisement or insert, are not the responsibility of The Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

### Advertising rates:

Full page, \$150; half page, \$80 (horizontal only); one-third page, \$50 (vertical or horizontal); quarter page \$40 (horizontal only); sixth page, \$30 (half of one column). Inserts: \$75 per hundred for DL-sized or A4 pre-folded to DL size. Circulation: approximately 350.

### Membership

Membership of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. is open to anyone working as an editor for publication (print or electronic documents), and anyone who supports the society's aims.

Membership runs for a calendar year. 2002 fees are \$50 for new members (\$30 if joining after 30 June) and \$45 for renewals.

For a membership application form, phone (02) 9294 4999, write to PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007, or download an application from the society's website at <http://www.users.bigpond.com/socednsw/>

### Listing in the Editorial Services Directory

Listing costs \$40 and is available only to members of the society. The fee covers listing in both print and online versions. The online version is updated every three months. New entries should be submitted in .rtf format, using a template available from Cathy Gray at [cgray@mpx.com.au](mailto:cgray@mpx.com.au). Updates can be made to contact details only for existing entries. Deadline for the next update is 30 September, 2002. Contact Cathy for more information. A new print edition is due to be published in 2003.

### Committee meetings

All members are welcome to attend the society's committee meetings. Contact a committee member for details if you wish to attend the next meeting.

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# NOTICEBOARD

## **Conferences 2003**

**Commonwealth Press Union Biennial Conference**

25–28 February 2003, Trans Asia Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Contact: Lindsay Ross at <lindsay@cpu.org.uk>

**Conference on the Future of the Book**

22–24 April 2003, Cairns

This international conference on the future of the book for publishers, booksellers, librarians, book printers, authors, educators, and academics will address the ‘technological, commercial and cultural futures of the book’. Funding has come from the federal Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources.

The conference advisory committee includes representatives from the Australian Publishers Association, the Australian Booksellers Association, the Australian Society of Authors, the Printing Industries Association of Australia, the Copyright Agency, the Australian Campus Booksellers Association, the Australia Council and the Australian Library and Information Association. [Editor’s note: Please note the absence of an editorial representative.]

The conference is an extension of the ‘C2C: Creator-to-Consumer’ project being run by RMIT University and Common Ground Publishing. The C2C project, which was created in 2001 with federal government funding to provide research into all aspects of the ‘publishing supply chain,’ has so far produced nine publications on publishing technology and book markets, and has a commitment to provide additional resources for skills development in the industry. A call for papers has been made.

Check the website at <www.book-conference.com> for further information.

## **Events**

**Australian Society of Authors**

Thursday, 3 October, 5.30 p.m. for 6.00 p.m. Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Macquarie St, Sydney

Joan Kersey invites you to the launch of her book *2050: A Drug Odyssey*. The book will be launched by The Hon Richard Jones, MSL.

Contacts: phone: 02 9318 0877; fax: 02 9318 0530; email: <office@asauthors.org>.

**ACT Writers’ Centre Spring Poetry Festival**

October 4–7

This festival aims to celebrate the popularity of poetry in the ACT, to present local poets in a national context, to link poetry as literature with poetry as entertainment, and to encourage a wide spectrum of our population to participate in writing, reciting, viewing and listening to poetry in its many forms.

Contacts: phone: (02) 6262 9191;  
email: <director@actwriters.org.au>;  
website: <http://www.actwriters.org.au>.

**Inaugural Universal Children’s Week Lecture**

Friday, 25 October, 6 p.m.–7.30 p.m. SAS Visions Theatre, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, Cost: \$10.

The inaugural lecture will be given by Mem Fox in honour of Walter McVitty—publisher, educator, author, and critic. Bookings essential.

Contact: phone: (02) 6208-5021.

**See page 8 for Training**