

Blue Pencil

Newsletter of
the Society
of Editors
(NSW)

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April 1992

Next meeting 5 May, 1992: The NSW Writers Centre

Adele Moy, coordinator of the NSW Writers' Centre in Rozelle, will speak about its aims and role, and the services it provides to writers. Adele will also draw on her experiences on board the Writers' Train. In 1990, the International year of Literacy, Adele spent 10 days on board the Writers Train in the company of 15 Australian writers including Thea Astley, Bruce Dawe, Rodney Hall and Tom Keneally. Travelling west from Brisbane, through Toowoomba and on to Charleville, the train and its passengers took literature to the people. Some people drove for five hours to meet writers whose work they knew and admired. Adele, who had never before ventured so far inland, was amazed to discover that isolation seems to create a thirst for literature.

When: Tuesday, 5 May 1992 at 6.30pm

Where: Rooftop Function Centre, the Australian Museum, corner College and William Streets. Walk from Town Hall or Museum Station or park in the street – free! The Museum's security officers are expecting us. Enter from William Street and take the lift to the fourth floor.

Cost: Drinks and what the society's new caterer (who also caters for the Museum Society) describes as attractive nibbles: \$5 for members and \$10 for non-members and members who do not book by 1 May.

RSVP: Friday, 1 May to the society's answering service (phone 901 9033 – leave a message) or to Janine Flew (phone 887 0177).

The society books and pays for all those who say they're coming. If you can't make it, please let us know.

Future speaker

Alan Peterson's column, *Words*, in Saturday's *Sydney Morning Herald* is compulsive reading for everyone whose business is words, their use and abuse. Despite a busy schedule, he looks like being our June speaker. More information as it becomes available.

Meeting calendar

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month. Write these dates in your calendar now and remember to RSVP no later than the preceding Friday:

May 5

June 2

July 7

August 4

September 1

October 1

November's meeting usually takes the form of a Christmas get-together. Watch this space for further details.

New venue for monthly meetings

After much research and inspection of venues ranging from those it liked but couldn't afford to those it could afford but didn't like, your committee has found an alternative to the Bowlers Club – the Australian Museum's Rooftop Function Centre.

Not only is the Rooftop quieter and almost as central as its predecessor, but it offers splendid city and harbour views from full length windows and comfortable chairs.

Come along on 5 May to find out about the NSW Writers' Centre from Adele Moy and see if you agree with a committee member who describes the Rooftop as "salubrious".

Enter from William Street and take the lift to the fourth floor.

April meeting: “Editor Agonistes” or “The Editor in a Multiplicity of Jobs”

When guest speaker Peter Newton explained he had written out his talk in full, the scribe assigned to taking notes was able to relax and enjoy Peter’s description of some of hugely varied editing jobs and tasks that have come his way – and still come. What follows is a verbatim report of some highlights of Peter’s informative and entertaining presentation.

“I own up to being a writer – poet, story teller, lyricist but not yet playwright, critic in a variety of fields, ardent bibliographer and discographer, and, for the bulk of my income, a scientific cum medical cum general editor. In summation, the compleat universalist.

Editor Agonistes is the title of this talk. (“Agonistes” is derived from the Greek “agonia” which can mean both contest and anguish. How true of editors.)

Rather than John Milton’s famous *Samson Agonistes*, I was inspired, I think by Barry Humphrey’s Sandy Stone who, on the old and now unobtainable *Sandy Agonistes*, recorded 30 years ago, plods along seemingly endless Melbourne streets, subconsciously mouthing in a mind-numbing way street names, shop names and advertising cliches.

At times I feel that some days in editing are just like that – days of mumbling anomaly, ambiguity, Fowlers English Usage, Concise Oxford Dictionary, non sequitur, elegant variation, split infinitive – with no-one listening.

Yes indeed, the editor agonises over text and context, usually unsung and frequently underpaid. But you all know that.

Where does the specialist editor, with delusions and both grandeur and universality, and overly committed to agonising, dwell in the scheme of things? The editor who is a professional must be paid as a professional irrespective of market forces. To treat this profession as a competitive cottage industry is to beat a speedy retreat into 19th Century sweat-shop mentality. Editing is a creative process and deserves to be treated as such.

To my mind, that is the answer to the question.

It seems to me that the most successful editor is the one who seeks to know the world beyond that of narrow specialisation. This does not come naturally. It must be worked at.

Continually extend your knowledge of the world as part of the regular acquisition of new skills and you will extend the scope for job opportunities.

That is what I have tried to do – with some success mostly spiritual if not always financial.

To give you an idea about life on the universalist’s roundabout, I will talk about some windows of opportunity that have opened up for me over the past decade, opportunities that have made my work mostly stimulating – but also have brought periods of great angst and agonising.

Arthur Capell [not William, as stated in the last issue of *Blue Pencil*. Sorry, I confused the musical Capell with the linguistic Capell. Ed.] was the doyen of Australian linguistics, having pioneered studies of

Oceanic and Aboriginal language structures that have influenced many of today’s leading academics in this field. In 1979, I was completing a linguistics honours thesis in his work in the South Pacific when I was asked to edit three major monographs by him. I then worked with him on other projects until his death in 1986, aged 84.

Studies stimulated by him led me onto the editorial board of the journal *Mankind*, the publication of a dozen research papers in the history of linguistics, and now archivist for his

papers going back to 1919 which I am preparing for lodgement with the National Library and the Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

Another spinoff was my MA honours thesis on the history of Aboriginal language studies, for which I am now looking for an editor and a publisher. Any offers?

An earlier opportunity, my first real venture into editing, started with the folding of nappies at a Childbirth Education Association meeting. After describing the event in the magazine *Childhood*, I was offered the editorship of the CEA newsletter. I held it for six gloriously contentious years, promoting the cause of natural childbirth, dads in wards and other radical issues.

The great love in my life, a love which goes back to the time I listened to black musicians in our family pub in Dorset during World War II, is jazz in all its manifestations. A good deal of my time is spent writing about it or editing other people’s articles on jazz. From 1983 to 1986, I was assistant editor of *Jazz Magazine*.

I have also compiled and edited a number of specialist newsletters, and contribute to several interstate and overseas magazines. This is my fourth year as editor of Sydney Jazz Club’s *Quarterly Rag*.

“At times I feel that some days in editing are just like that – days of mumbling anomaly, ambiguity, Fowlers English Usage, Concise Oxford Dictionary, non sequitur, elegant variation, split infinitive – with no-one listening.”

But this is a hobby, you say. Not completely. I do receive commissions and there is a substantial payment in kind – books, performances and records for review and several sponsored trips abroad.

And I sit on lots of influential committees. Oh powerful editor!

Just in case there are undercover agents from the Taxation Office, let me add that I always declare payment in kind in my yearly return. Do you?

Finally, to the most exhausting challenge – four months with the flamboyant Jim McClelland's Royal Commission on British Nuclear Tests in Australia. [Peter was seconded from his then employer, the Australian Atomic Energy Commission at Lucas Heights, for this task. Ed.]

When I arrived on the scene, half of one chapter had been written. Yet on the due date, we presented to the government a thoroughly edited 1000-page document.

The routine was that the various authors wrote and debated throughout the week while I merged updates through a team of word processing operators and continuously edited in consultation with scientific advisers. I also wrote a chapter on instrumentation and nuclear weaponry and handled literature searches for one of the commissioners.

A month before completion I was knocked down on a pedestrian crossing by a hit and run driver. I continued working in some pain which I thought was due to bruises. It was later diagnosed as a hairline fracture across three ribs. You might really class this as a case of "Editor Agonistes".

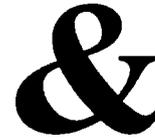
Since leaving Lucas Heights with some relief (and a sackful of rolled-over dollars) in 1989, I have had a plethora of editorial jobs, mostly for scientific organisations. But also some art catalogues.

For the past 20 months, I have been a technical editor and technical writer with the Standards Association of Australia. It has presented an array of challenges that I

will not dwell on. [Peter did, however, point out that the SAA has two and a half editors and 80 writers. Ed.]

I'll now close on a monster cliché: At the end of the day, at this point in time, the art of technical editing teeters on the edge of the abyss that still prevents us from climbing onto a level playing field.

But in the fullness of time, we too will be able to run with the ball until we have redressed the imbalance, achieved wage and social justice and embedded the ball firmly in our own court."



... more an appendage than an editorial despite the occasional pontification. Send your contribution to the society's PO box or fax it direct to the editor at (02) 528 6315. It can be news, views, shop-talk, an amusing snippet or just gossip – non-libellous of course.

& A gentle reminder that membership of the Society of Editors (NSW) runs from 1 February to 31 January. In other words, if you have not yet renewed your subscription you should make out your cheque now for \$30 – \$35 for new members – to The Treasurer, Society of Editors (NSW) and post it to PO Box 254, Broadway, NSW 2007.

& The ABPA and the Society of Editors (NSW) are sponsoring a one-day seminar on the editor's roles and relationships in the publishing team on Thursday, 30 April. If you're a member of the society, it will cost you \$195, but don't delay. Call Anneke Baeten at the ABPA on (02) 281 9788 or fax (02) 281 1073 for more

AJA National Freelance Rates

The AJA recommended minimum freelance rates for 1992 are:

	<i>for book editors</i>	<i>for writers</i>
Per day	\$193	\$193
Per half-day	\$129	\$129
Per hour	\$45	\$45
1000 words or less		\$483
Over 1000 words		48.3c/word

There are also rates for freelance artists, photographers and photo reproduction.
For further details call the AJA in Sydney on 212 1511 or Newcastle on (049) 291 430.

details.

& Circumstances beyond our control (and also, presumably, beyond Australia Post's) meant that readers learned too late of the April meeting of a recently formed special interest group in technical editing. The next meeting of this group is at 6.30pm on Wednesday, 6 May on the third floor of the NSW Sports Club, 10 Hunter Street, Sydney. Two speakers will present their views of the author-editor relationship. The audience will be invited to join in the discussion, so if this is a topic close to your heart, pocket or PC go along and say your bit. The group is also working on an article for the journal of the Australian Society for Technical Communications on editing standards and the formal division of responsibilities between writers, editors and production staff. Suzanne Wood on 936 1159 during business hours can supply more information.

& Are you a medical illustrator? A call to Amanda Caswell on (02) 502 4899 could prove mutually advantageous.

& A weekend conference for published and unpublished authors planned for September will include eight specialist workshops, a keynote guest speaker and writers' feedback sessions, all for a cost of \$285. Call Patricia Blake on (03) 337 9790 to find out more.

& Kevin Halpin is the society's representative on the steering committee of Macquarie University's Graduate Course on Editing and Publishing. Kevin is the link between the committee and the society. There's a meeting in June so call Kevin on (043) 241 416 if there's any information you'd like passed on to the committee.

& The Editor & Publisher International Year Book is published in the US and, according to its advertisement, contains 500 pages of essential information on newspapers in the US, Canada, Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, South and Central America. All this for only \$50 + postage. Order from Editor & Publisher, 11 West 19th Street, New York, NY 10011.

& *Blue Pencil's* editor is indebted to John Bangsund, her counterpart in the Society of Editors (Victoria), for his discovery of Muphry's Law, the editorial application of the better-known

Murphy's Law. Muphry's Law states, in part, "that (a) if you write anything criticising editing or proofreading there will be a fault of some kind in what you have written; (b) if an author thanks you in a book for your editing or proofreading, there will be mistakes in the book; (c) the stronger the sentiment expressed in (a) and (b), the greater the fault". Among the examples John gives is a book review in which the writer criticises the proofreading while consistently misspelling Dorothy Hewett's surname. [And hands up anyone who has never misspelt "misspell". Ed.]

& One particular typo (spilt infinitive) found before this issue of *Blue Pencil* went to press convinced your editor that Muphry does indeed rule and it is not OK. Unfortunately, John's warning arrived too late for the March *Blue Pencil* in which Shalom Paul's employer appeared as Jamiga instead of Jamida where he can be reached during business hours on (02) 743 6255.

& Another example of Muphry's Law according to John Bangsund is the 18th Century Printers' Bible, so called because Psalm 119:161 reads "Printers have persecuted me without cause." Nevertheless, the printer who wrote the verses below believes printers are ultimately rewarded. God knows what happens to princes who persecute important people without cause let alone proofreaders who can't tell the difference:

*A printer stood at the Pearly Gate
His face was wan and old.*

*Meekly he asked St Peter
For admission to the fold.*

*"What have you done," St Peter asked,
"To seek admission here?"*

*"I ran a printing plant on earth
For many, many a year."*

*The gates swung sharply open
As St Peter touched the bell.*

*"Come in," he said, "and take a harp,
You've had enough of Hell."*