

# Blue Pencil

Newsletter of the Society of Editors (NSW)  
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April 1989

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## Next meeting 3 May 1989

The speaker at the next meeting of the Society of Editors, on Wednesday 3 May, will be publisher Kirsty Melville.

In 1987 Kirsty moved from Doubleday to the publishing giant Simon & Schuster to establish an Australian publishing division. Beginning with just herself and the odd buy-in, Kirsty began the difficult task of developing a local list.

Developing an Australian presence in the world's largest publishing house is, to say the least, challenging. Australian subsidiaries or divisions of large multinational companies often become clearing houses for surplus stock or tax losses for buoyant parent companies in New York or London. Yet within 18 months Kirsty has two best sellers – *Jenny Kee's Winter Knits* and *Babies* by Doctor Christopher Green – part of a vigorous and successful Australian list.

Kirsty will talk about the hard work of establishing and maintaining an Australian presence for Simon & Schuster in what promises to be a lively and entertaining evening. We look forward to hearing her talk and hope you can join us at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, 16 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli, on 3 May 1989 at 7.30 pm. Wine, soft drinks and eats will be served at a cost of \$3 if you ring and book by Tuesday 2 May and \$5 if you turn up without booking.

RSVP by telephoning Shirley Jones on (02) 86 3927. Please leave a message with her answering service if she is not in.



"... And I have given you a new book..." purred Virginia Woolf, as she strolled through the streets and squares of her beloved London. Making such a gift to the Metropolis – even granted you wished to make it – is harder if Sydney is your home city and you do not have the Hogarth Press in your basement, only the University of Queensland Press (UQP), 1000 kilometres away.

## Get Printed!

At our last meeting at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, Margaret Coombs told us the saga of the publication of her first book. Her style as a person is like her writing – gritty, honest and engaging – and her talk was enjoyable, as behind-the-scenes stories can be. The evening began as a standin' meeting: we had a stand-in Chair, a stand-in minute taker, and standin' room only on the small landing at the head of the stairs; fortunately Bruce Champion found the key to the usual lecture room, and enough seating.

To an outsider, Coombs might appear to

have had a rather smooth passage to publication. If not the very first, then the second, Australian agent to read *Regards to the Czar* liked it and sent it to the University of Queensland Press (UQP), which accepted and published it. If only life could always be like that! Yet even when you're winning it can feel like losing. And this was the refrain of Coombs's talk – "with your first book, it's disappointments all along the way".

She spoke of the troika that runs a publishing house – the publisher who genuinely imagines her/himself as a bold

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innovator; the marketing manager who has no need to imagine anything, being in touch with the real world; and the fiction editor who must somehow reconcile and forward the interests of all parties. It's little wonder if the author sustains a few light shrapnel wounds in all that cross-fire.

Moreover, the publishing process appears deliberately secretive. Publishers baby authors, treating them as too temperamental and precious to know all that's involved in the physical production and realisation of a book. They indulge in self-fulfilling behaviour, telling an author nothing about anything that is going on until the last moment – as a result of which, all too often the author behaves exactly as the publishers predicted, and throws a tantrum. There could surely be more direct communication and openness, and a general de-mystification of the process.

Coombs also pointed out that even though there is certainly a group of writers and readers in this country who are dedicated to new and experimental literature, Australian society is quite conservative, even provincial. To this mainstream Australian reader, “experimental” has the same bad smell as “pornographic”; once more Coombs finds herself caught in the middle. She can be called “contemporary” but hardly “experimental”, yet her mild unconventionality is enough to draw down some mainstream fire; she finds herself spending a lot of time defending her right to be experimental if she wants to be and explaining the aims and merits of experimental writing generally.

Coombs wrote the sections that make up *Regards to the Czar* as short fictions, but when put together it naturally seemed to

form a novel. Through a New York agent she'd had one section published in the USA, and the agent wrote and told her it had attracted favourable notice. Such encouragement gave her the impetus to seek publication in book form.

In April 1986 Coombs sent *Regards to the Czar* to the Sydney agent, Rose Creswell. Creswell didn't get around to reading the MS for four months, but when she did read it she loved it, and obviously knew just the right publisher to send it to. At UQP the MS hung around for another seven months before anything happened. The American agent had told her, “I can't be your agent from New York because someone has to *nurture your talent*” – yet Coombs has not observed anyone out here losing too much sleep over that.

Finally, on the last day of April 1987, the editorial board of UQP approved *Regards to the Czar* for publication. Not even aware that her book had to go through such a process and thinking UQP had taken it up months before, Coombs began to wonder just when acceptance became real. It was a further three months before she signed a contract, and felt safe.

Coombs had a very friendly relationship with her editor, D'Arcy Randall, and she responded to all Randall's suggestions and queries. Yet there was still plenty of room for pettifoggery. For instance, each and every one of the quotations used in the book required elaborate defence; long letters travelled back and forth over that 1000 kilometre gap. The UQP did not offer any helpful advice on the business of obtaining “Permission to use” for all the quotes, and it was a mammoth task for the author. She discovered to her relief that copyright fees will sometimes be waived – but only after experiencing considerable

anxiety, and paying out fifty English pounds to some Scottish publishers for a piffling three-line quote.

The blurb was another problem. Coombs *didn't* want her book to be publicised as a nice story about a girl growing up and reaching true maturity. She spent a tough fortnight (“and I’m a writer!”) trying to write something that would be satisfactory to her and to the Press, but inevitably what pleased her sounded impossible to UQP and vice versa. When the book finally appeared the blurb had nothing to do with anything she’d sent up to Brisbane; what they got in the end was, she felt, an insipid compromise.

Coombs was consulted early on about a cover design, gave her suggestion, and received a thumbs down. The UQP wanted a pretty book, and she did not. In the end the design was simply mailed to her with a note saying, “Hope you like the cover”. Luckily she did.

In February 1988 (when UQP had been in possession of *Regards to the Czar* since August 1986) Coombs received an urgent phone call, “The marketing people don’t like the title – can you think of another one by tomorrow, *please?*” She didn’t and couldn’t. She still gets a kick out of the fact that she hung out for the title she felt was artistically right.

Then there was a lot of mystification about the scheduling of the book and when it would be published – as if the author, any author, is too much of a toddler to cope with this information. Originally scheduled for May 1988, *Regards to the Czar* eventually appeared in August 1988.

This uncertainty about the publication date was a headache because Coombs wanted

A Launch, something she considered important. Her friend Kate Grenville had warned her she would more or less have to organise it herself and Coombs was prepared to – but she still had to have a reliable publication date. Having been assured ten times over that her advance copies would be in her hands by 5 July, she eventually believed, and so organised The Launch for that date – only to get one of those last-minute phone calls to say there *had* been a hang up, terribly sorry, and now her book would definitely come out in September.

Then just before she set off for Brisbane to enjoy “a real treat”, the launch the UQP had organised up there, her daughter returned from a trip up north and told her the book was out in the shops there.

Margaret Coombs was determined to have a Sydney launch anyhow. And did so, at the Ariel Bookshop in Paddington, on 30 August 1988, with *Regards to the Czar* already on the bookshop shelves. And it was really a very nice launch.

Thus came to an end the near two-and-a-half year publication history of a book that was never rejected by anyone, except for one misguided Australian agent in an obscure little southern State.

### Josephine Bastian



## Society library

Many of you may not know that the Society of Editors has a modest but useful library. Members are welcome to borrow any of the books or periodicals we hold and a list of these is included in this *Blue Pencil*. In our next newsletter we will provide you with a list of the journals to which we continue to subscribe.

If you wish to borrow material from the library please contact Juliet Richters, telephone (02) 692 4390 or write to the Society of Editors.

Books and journals can be borrowed for a period of four weeks, but we ask borrowers, where possible, to photocopy the relevant pages (provided it does not infringe copyright) so that books can be returned promptly and journals can be circulated while still current.



## Gone missing

Does anybody have a Society of Editors library book called *Mark My Words*, published by Editorial Experts Incorporated? If you have it, please telephone Juliet Richters on (02) 692 4390 so that arrangements can be made for its return.

## Address change

Betty McCormack, freelance editor, has moved. Her new address is:

218 Cowper Street  
Goulburn NSW 2580  
Tel. (048) 218131 a.h. or 231329.

## Excuses, excuses

Members may have noticed that since I have been producing *Blue Pencil* it sometimes reaches them only just in the nick of time (“nick” as in notch on a piece of wood – the method of measuring time favoured by shipwreck victims!), that is, a day or so before the next meeting. This is not because I want to keep you in suspense or ruin your social life (I know you have to cancel everything else when you get news of our speakers); I always have an excellent reason for running late. There was the time that, unbeknown to me, the printer held the copy up for a week so he could include a loose insert carrying a job advertisement. There was another time when the computer wiped my disk of edited, proofed copy because I had worked, briefly, on the disk using a more powerful computer – the computers were compatible if you transferred your disk from the less powerful to the more powerful computer, but not if you tried to go back again.

Last month I very nearly had the best reason ever for being late with the newsletter. I returned home from a hour-long Saturday afternoon shopping trip to find the back door open and the computer neatly dismantled and wrapped up, in my garbage bags, by the front door. No, I did not search the house brandishing my kitchen knife and demanding that the thieves give themselves up. I went straight out again and got a neighbour to come back with me, giving the thieves, if they were still there, a decent interval in which to make good their escape. Then of course we searched the house, hoping they had done the sensible thing and gone. Which they had.

Not only did our faithful Amstrad computer have to survive the trauma of being handled

by thieves, it also had to put up with the ticklish experience of being dusted with fingerprint powder. Unfortunately no clear prints were found so we will probably never know who the perpetrators of the crime, as they say, were.

Well I just thought you might like to know why your Blue Pencil is sometimes late. Next month we could be flooded, I suppose...

**Editor**

## Membership Renewals

Members who have not yet paid their fees for 1989 will have received a reminder notice. With the high cost of printing and postage, we are unable to continue sending Blue Pencil to members in arrears, and this will be the last issue sent to them.



## SOCIETY OF EDITORS LIBRARY HOLDINGS April 1989

### JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS

*Scholarly Publishing* – various issues from 1982-84.

*The Writer's News* (Australian) – monthly issues from November 1988.

*SBC News* (from Society of Business Communicators NSW) – monthly issues from April 1988 onwards.

*Editorial Eye* (from Editorial Experts, USA) – most monthly issues from March 1988 onwards, plus 1988 index.

*SSP Letter* (from the Society of Scholarly Publishing, USA) – bi-monthly issues from 1988 onwards.

*Society of Editors* (Vic.) Newsletter – March 1986 (Volume 15 Number 7, as The Society of Editors Newsletter), May 1988, June 1988, August 1988.

*Society of Editors* (Tas.) – various issues from March 1987 onwards.

*Fellowship of Australian Writers (New South Wales) Members' Bi-Monthly Bulletin* – April, October and December 1988 and February 1989.

*The Galley Club of Sydney newsletter* – most (monthly) issues from April 1988 onwards.

*The Indexer* – April 1987, October 1987.

*The Australian Society of Authors Newsletter* – every issue (usually monthly or close to it) from April 1988 to February 1989.

### ODD ISSUES OF JOURNALS AND DEFUNCT PUBLICATIONS

*Press Notes* (annually) – 1960-1964

*IASP Newsletter* – a few issues from 1983 and 1984

*The Book Magazine* – No 1 April/ May 1987

*The Macquarie Dictionary Society* – Volume 5 Issue 1 April 1988

*CBE Views* – Winter 1986 Vol 9 No 4

## DIRECTORIES

Society for Scholarly Publishing, *Directory of Members 1988-1989*

Society for Scholarly Publishing, *Directory of Members 1987-1988*

Society for Scholarly Publishing, *Directory of Members 1986-1987*

Frank Eyre, *Scholarly Publishing 1976*, Public Policy paper 8, University of Tasmania

Australian Book Publishers Association, *1988 Directory of Members*

Council of Biology Editors Inc., *Membership Directory 1987-88*

Council of Biology Editors Inc., *Membership Directory 1986-87*

*1987-88 Directory of Editorial Resources*, Editorial Experts, Inc.

Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers, *Directory of Members, 1979*

Margaret Gee's *Media Guide*, 20th edn, November 1985-March 1986

*Register of Freelance Publishing Services in Tasmania*, Faculty of Arts, University of Tasmania, October 1986

*International Literary Market Place 1982-83*, R.R. Bowker Company, New York & London, 1982

*Literary Market Place: The Directory of American Book Publishing*, R.R. Bowker Company, New York & London, 1983

## BOOKS AND ARTICLES

J.D. Painter, 'Author-printer harmony with SGML', *The Indexer*, vol. 16 no. 2, October 1988, pp. 99-100.

Plain English and Simpler Forms Program News 1/88.

*Legislation, legal Rights and Plain English*, Discussion Paper No. 1, Law Reform Commission of Victoria, August 1986.

G.C. O'Donnell, *A Short Note on Anti-Copyright*, Leksand Press, Sydney, 1985.

CBE Style Manual Committee, *CBE Style Manual*, 5th edn, Council of Biology Editors, Inc., Bethesda, Maryland, 1983.

David Sless, *Name and Address Please ... A Guide for Form Designers*, Information Co-ordination Branch, Department of Sport Recreation and Tourism, Canberra, February 1987. (2 copies)

Robert Eagleson, *Progress in Plain English*, Plain English and Simpler Forms Program, Information Co-ordination Branch, Department of Sport Recreation and Tourism, Canberra, November 1985.

Robert Eagleson, *Plain English in Official Writing*, Plain English and Simpler Forms Program, Information Co-ordination Branch, Department of Sport Recreation and Tourism, Canberra, July 1985.

Maggie Lynton, *Government Forms Testing*, Plain English and Simpler Forms Testing, Information Co-ordination Branch, Department of Sport Recreation and Tourism, Canberra, June 1985. (2 copies)

David Sless, *Form Evaluation*, Plain English and Simpler Forms Program, Information Co-ordination Branch, Department of Sport Recreation and Tourism, Canberra, November 1985. (two copies)

Colin Wheildon, *Communicating, or Just Making Pretty Shapes*, rev. edn, Newspaper Advertising Bureau of Australia Ltd, Sydney, 1986.

Janice C. Redish, *Beyond Readability: How to Write and Design Understandable Life Insurance Policies*, Committee on Consumer Affairs, American Council of Life Insurance.

Jeffrey Watson and Miriam Balaban, eds, *Scientific Publication and Communication: Vital Steps in the Development Process*, Report of the International Federation of Scientific Editors' Associations Fourth International Symposium of Scientific Editors and the African Association of Science Editors First General Assembly, Nairobi, Kenya, 26-30 August, 1985, 1986.

Sheldon Meyer and L.E. Phillabaum, *What is a University Press?*, Association of American University Presses, New York, n.d., 8 pp.

Committee on Graduate Training in Scientific Writing, F. Peter Woodford, ed., *Scientific Writing for Graduate Students*, Council of Biology Editors, Inc., Bethesda, Maryland, 1986.

Ad Hoc Committee on Economics of Publication (D.H. Michael Bowen, Chairman), eds, *Economics of Scientific Journals*, Council of Biology Editors, Inc., Bethesda, Maryland, 1982.

*Photocopying in Libraries and Archives*, Australian Copyright Council, Bulletin 52, 1985.

*Copyright Ownership*, Australian Copyright Council, Bulletin 53, 1985.

P.H. Peters, ed., *Style in Australia*, Proceedings of Style Council 86, Dictionary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1986.

*How Plain English Works for Business: Twelve Case Studies*, Office of Consumer Affairs, U.S. Department of Commerce, March 1984.

## *Contributions Welcome*

*Send letters, articles, reviews or cartoons  
about editing and publishing to:*

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