



# THE EDITORS

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NEXT MEETING. . . NEXT MEETING. . . NEXT MEETING. . .

The next meeting will take place at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre on Wednesday, 4 August at 6.30 p.m.

Speaker: Senator Susan Ryan

Subject: The ALP's draft policy on publishing.

RSVP: Narelle Konte, 888 2733, by Monday, 2 August.

## LAST MEETING

The subject of the last meeting was, "Do book reviews sell books?" and the answer from both our speakers was a qualified "yes".

Michele Field, Literary Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, believes that reviews can influence the sales of some new books, but that they are only a part of the necessary marketing process. In these cases, the reviews often serve as an adjunct to press advertising.

Michele provided an insight into the review policies of the SMH: the stated aim of the book pages of this paper is to encourage the publication of better books. Accordingly, the Herald tries to maintain a balance of local and overseas books, limits reviews to reasonably priced books, avoids reviewing offensive books (within reason), and reviews only books which deserve a good review. Michele freely admitted to trying to influence the book-reading patterns of the Herald's readers; the paper makes a point of reviewing books which it considers particularly worthy and unlikely to gain publicity through other avenues.

If best-sellers tend to be neglected, it is because they simply do not need the publicity; they are so heavily advertised that people will buy them anyway.

The attitudes and policies of book publishers also influence which

books are selected for review. The Herald looks more kindly upon the publications of those companies which have well-organised, early, consistent PR and which regularly provide review copies of their books.

Given these initial selective procedures, the question remains: how effective are these reviews in influencing the public to buy books? According to Michele, people who read the book pages in a newspaper are very often not book buyers. They may be busy, influential people keeping up with what is happening in the world of books, people lacking in confidence about what to read, or people who find the coverage of a subject given in a review adequate (so that they feel no need to delve further). On the other hand, Ms Field suggested that addicted book buyers know what they want and will not necessarily be influenced in their purchases by a newspaper review.

So it would seem that the Herald sees its role as one of giving exposure to those books it considers worthy, in the expectation that this will (in some cases more than others) influence sales levels.

Lesley McKay, of McKay's Bookshops, Double Bay and Bondi Junction, sees reviews as having two main functions: to act as an information system for booksellers, and as an aid to promotion and sales.

Reviews and book lists published in UK and USA magazines and papers are invaluable to booksellers who must be aware of overseas trends in order to compete with supermarkets, airports and newsagents for book sales. Australian readers are strongly influenced by reviews in overseas magazines such as Time; and booksellers must be as well informed as potential book buyers. Lesley displays reviews in her bookshops, and estimates that as many as 70% of sales have been influenced by reviews. As far as she is concerned, reviews do sell books.

On the other hand, television serialisation, tours by authors, and radio interviews can also be extremely influential. Sales of Brideshead Revisited, for example, have hit an all-time high.

The major problem Lesley experiences is that often the books reviewed are simply not available in Australia at the time of the review. This situation is acceptable and unavoidable when the review is in an overseas publication, but Lesley strongly maintains that local media have

a responsibility to review only those books which are (or shortly will be) available in the bookshops.

Publishers can help by developing good relationships with the reviewing media, and be ensuring that books are published on time. The review of a "non-existent" book breeds ill feeling against the title and the publisher.

The book-buying public also appreciates a review which states the price of the book. Failure to publish the price can, once again, create a negative attitude towards the book if the price is not what the buyer anticipated.

Lesley believes that a good review is more than just a description of a book; the book should act as a jumping off point for further discussion of the subjects raised. In her opinion, good reviews promote sales as well as helping to develop an interest in reading and books.

### Workshops

A workshop on copyediting was held on Wednesday, 14 July, when, in spite of the weather, some thirty-odd people attended.

The dates of future workshops are given below. Please note them in your diary. Topics will probably be decided by our next meeting, 4 August. Workshops are all held at the Neighbourhood Centre, at 6 p.m. and the charge is \$5.00.

Workshops will be held:

Wednesday, 25 August  
Wednesday, 6 October  
Wednesday, 17 November