

# The Society of Editors (NSW)

Newsletter

P.O. Box 567, Neutral Bay Junction, 2089

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FIRST MEETING 1987, 25 February, 7 pm.

Speaker(s): Barry Dingley, Managing Director of HBJ, which recently took over CBS Publishing (Holt-Saunders), will speak on takeovers in publishing and how they will affect the lives of editors.

Cost of Meeting: \$5.00; supper optional extra (see 1987 Editors' Social Calendar for details). RSVP to Rita or Jeremy on 517 8999 by 23 February.

1987 Editors' Social Calendar The following are the dates of our regular Wednesday night meetings for 1987: 25 February, 25 March (AGM), 29 April, 3 June, 22 July, 2 September, 7 October.

The Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre will continue to offer us hospitality. However, we have been forced to move backward the hour to 7 pm. Partly as a result of this shift, and partly in response to the declining numbers of those who stay for dinner, the Committee has decided to discontinue the present catering arrangements. The following arrangement is proposed for 1987. As the later starting time will enable people to eat something before the meeting, full meals will no longer be made available. Instead, somewhat more elaborate and substantial snacks will be provided to accompany drinks. After the evening's scheduled programme, members will have a choice of staying for more talks, snacks and drinks or joining the evening's speaker(s) and Committee members for supper at a convenient restaurant.

To allow for rising costs (room hire, drinks, eats), the charge has been fixed at \$5.00 (excluding supper). The Committee hopes that this will still

be recognised as a very modest sum to cover refreshments and speaker(s).

Suggestions for alternative arrangements are eagerly sought.

LAST MEETING Massive numbers turned up at our last meeting on 22 October, attracted perhaps more by the opportunity to meet Beatrice Davis, Christopher Koch and Thomas Shapcott than to vote on the Society's name change. Heavily debated for several months, the issue was finally settled, with a comfortable majority favouring "Society of Editors (NSW)". This appellation is analogous to "The Society of Editors (Tasmania)", while the Society of Editors in Melbourne has informed us that it, too, plans to adopt this form and call itself "The Society of Editors (Victoria)".

Beatrice Davis, Christopher Koch, and Thomas Shapcott discussed fiction editing in Australia, a topic that evoked a somewhat elegiac mood. Where were they now, the days of Maxwell Perkins, and Beatrice Davis? All three speakers lamented the loss of the sympathetic in-house editor who was in a position to nurture a manuscript virtually from its inception to its publication. In the present state of affairs the pressures of marketing and production meant that fiction editing tended to take place at a late stage and usually involved free-lance editors, who were rarely brought in contact with the author and laboured under restraints of time and money. Too often in this way an editor became an impertinent stranger, invading the proper realm of an author on the publisher's authority. All agreed that dialogue with the author was of the essence, and stressed the sensitive nature of the relationship. Taking literary and technical abilities for granted, knowledge of people, imagination, sympathy were therefore some of the most desirable assets of a good editor.

Beatrice Davis felt that editors should be anonymous as far as the public is concerned, visible only by their gaffes. She would even decline her name to be mentioned in the published work, in deference to the primacy of the author's creativity. Christopher Koch, on the other hand, stressed the creative role of editors in their constant challenge of the author. But he admitted that any such challenging should be done with a measure of tact: 'stroking' was a very apt technical term. Also, the challenge should not result from a major difference in outlook. Sympathy between editor and author was a pre-requisite.

This need for basic rapport was also at the basis of Humphrey McQueen's proposal for a scheme to employ experienced authors as editors for other authors - a scheme mentioned favourably by Thomas Shapcott.

Unfortunately, the late start of the discussion caused time to run out before one very interesting aspect of the discussion could be addressed, viz. the perceived shortage of good fiction editors. Beatrice Davis believed that good editors are born, not made. If she is right, we must be content to sit back and wait for them to be born. If, on the other hand, they can be made, how do they receive their training, and where? Can a course such as the TAFE one produce a good fiction editor? Should we look to the universities to provide us with specialised arts graduates? Or are people who write fiction themselves most suitable to edit other people's fiction, as Humphrey McQueen seems to believe? This newsletter would avidly welcome any further thoughts on the subject.

CHRISTMAS PARTY The Society of Editors(NSW) Christmas Party, held on 28 November last, was as merry an occasion as Christmas parties should be. Venue was the Rangoon Restaurant, King Street, Newtown, a Burmese eatery recommended by Jeremy Fisher. During the early part of the evening things were not looking too good for Jeremy. As any other than liquid forms of sustenance failed to materialise, a widespread suspicion arose that this recommendation had perhaps been inspired only by the restaurant's location - within convenient staggering distance from Jeremy's Erskineville home. But the food, when it came, was a veritable revelation and managed to dispel quickly all thoughts of lynching.

Among the many distinguished revellers our guest Triena Ong deserves special mention. Triena was hospitably entertained as a representative of the Singapore Society of Editors.

By the end of a very memorable evening goodwill towards Jeremy had been more than restored; the party's success will doubtless earn our esteemed President a second term of office.

BOOK REVIEWS The Society from time to time receives invitations to review books thought to be of interest to members. We have in the past taken up such invitations only in a fitful manner, but we should like to mend our ways. Any books offered for review will be listed in the Newsletter and made available for review purposes to any interested member on a first-come-first-served basis. Reviews can be any length, but should be fair even when the book in question is published by competition, and genuinely appraising of the book's value to others in the writing/publishing sphere. Here is your chance to enlarge your professional library free of charge. Reviewers who submit their article before the deadline following the issue in which the announcement

appeared may keep their review copy and will receive a voucher entitling them to a free Society meeting. Reviewers who submit their article before the next deadline may keep their review copy. Reviewers who submit their review still later will probably try to keep their review copy. Newsletter deadlines are 14 days prior to each scheduled meeting (see 1987 Social Calendar).

AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW: Colin Golvan and Michael McDonald, Writers and the Law, Sydney, The Law Book Company Limited, 1986, xix, 216 pp, \$29.50.

CORRESPONDENCE Our name change brought the following reactions from the Society of Editors in Melbourne:

I would like to comment on the discussion in your newsletter on your proposed name change. Names, of course, are not nearly as important as what we actually are and do, but given that the subject is under discussion it would be good if we could achieve some sort of consistency in this. Apart from the obvious benefits of avoiding confusion in outsiders, this would also indicate (I hope accurately!) a degree of communication and co-operation between the individual state groups. The Society of Editors (Tasmania) was recently formed by a group based in Hobart - some but not all of these people are also members of the Society of Editors (in Victoria). Various of our Committee members spent a lot of time on the 'phone advising the Tasmanian group on organisation, and we flew our immediate past president to Hobart for a couple of days' intensive consultation. The benefits were of course not one-way; we have gained as much as the Tasmanians did, and of course the very interesting letter forming the middle two pages of your latest newsletter was from the Tasmanians too.

The Tasmanians adopted the name the Society of

Editors (Tasmania); as a result I will propose that we change our name to the Society of Editors (Victoria) at our AGM next year. I hope that in this we will be following your lead once again! There is of course an excellent precedent for this; our enormously successful programme of weekend workshops was inspired by your work in Sydney for example, and this is now leading to the very exciting development of a formal post-graduate course at RMIT. Our Committee members have had many occasions to be grateful for your generous advice and information, and I hope we have been able to return the favour. I fervently hope that this mutually beneficial liaison will continue; as you say perhaps this ultimately means a federal association of independent societies.

I hope that by next year there will be three autonomous Societies of Editors in Australia with common goals and names. Would you have any volunteers to get a federation going then? I do not think we should start it with a drinking competition!

Colin Jevons, President - Society of Editors

It's very exciting to see that there now exist both The Society of Editors (Tas) and The Society of Editors (NSW), and to hope that by mid-1987 we will have joined you as The Society of Editors (Vic.) . . . I hope that the different state bodies will continue to help and advise each other and share ideas and information.

We've had enthusiastic responses from several groups to the idea of an Annual Combined Newsletter; all we need now is someone to undertake the task of Production Editor - any volunteers in Sydney?

Best wishes and long life to The Society of Editors (NSW).

Teresa Pitt, Immediate Past President  
The Society of Editors (Vic)

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED The Bicentennial Bulletin, Spring 1986, of the NSW Bicentennial Council bounced into our letterbox recently. It is a neat, glossy publication, edited by Trevor Dalziell, NSW Bicentennial Council, Level 7, 4-6 Bligh Street, Sydney, NSW 2001. Phone: 221 1988. The contents consist of public relations for the celebration of the European occupation of this great southern continent. Propaganda can be well designed, well edited and well written, but still remains propaganda.

In completely different vein, we received the stimulating newsletter of the Singapore Society of Editors. They have extended an open invitation to our members to join them any time one of us is in Singapore. Triena Ong is the person to contact, at 15 Orchid Drive, Singapore 2057. The Singaporeans are also preparing a register of members, which will include a photograph of each member.

Last, but by no means least, we received the latest edition of The Society of Editors (Melbourne-based) newsletter. We always receive this, but it is not always cited, familiar as it is (in a familial way). As usual it contains lots of good reading, a small amount of gossip, and advice.

NEWSLETTER CHANGES This newsletter was written by Adriaan van der Weel and dragged to the press by Jeremy Fisher, who, though tempted, refrained from filling the role of Cato.

N O M I N A T I O N F O R M

Nominations close 25 March 1987

Only paid-up members for 1986/7 may nominate,  
second, vote and be nominated

Positions vacant and order of election are:

PRESIDENT

MINUTES SECRETARY (to record meetings)

TREASURER

1 NEWSLETTER EDITOR

4 MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE

Nominations to be delivered to:

Society of Editors  
PO Box 567  
Neutral Bay Junction NSW 2089

OR by 7.30 pm at the Annual General Meeting

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N O M I N A T I O N F O R M

POSITION .....

NAME .....

NOMINATED BY ..... SIGNED .....

SECONDED BY ..... SIGNED .....

DATE .....

Please copy this format if you wish to make more  
than one nomination.