

Blue Pencil

Newsletter of
the Society
of Editors
(NSW)

ISSN 1030-2557 PO Box 254 Broadway NSW 2007 Phone (02) 901 9033 Editor Margaret Foster June 1992

Next meeting 14 July, 1992: Adele Moy on the NSW Writers' Centre

Please note that this meeting will be held, atypically, on the second Tuesday in June, as the speaker was not available on the first.

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. The Writers' Train is again travelling through Queensland but this time without Adele who now lives and works in NSW.

When: Tuesday, 14 July 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! Enter from William Street and take the lift to the fourth floor. Anyone concerned about personal safety should discuss it with a committee member.

Cost: Drinks and attractive nibbles: \$5 for members and \$10 for non-members and members who do not book by 10 July. The \$5 levy for members who don't book is now being strictly applied.

Last meeting at bargain prices. See below.

RSVP: Friday, 10 July 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.

Meeting calendar

Meetings are usually 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:

July 14

August 4

September 1

October 6.

Freelance Register update

As the last issue of *Blue Pencil* reported, the *Register of Freelance Services* is at last going ahead.

New Hobsons Press have kindly made available all the material Hobsons Press had collected and prepared for publication but which became unavailable when Hobsons went into liquidation.

Committee 1992

Shalom Paul (President)

Ph 663 1785 (Freelance)

Sharon Paull (Secretary)

Ph 344 5691 (Editorial Connection)

Derek Barton (Membership)

Ph 929 5677 (Weldon Owen)

Margaret McPhee (Membership)

Ph 660 8461 (Freelance)

Janine Flew (Publicity and Catering)

Ph 887 0177 (Law Book Company)

Pamela Smith (Treasurer)

Ph 887 0177 (Law Book Company)

Margaret Foster (Newsletter)

Because the publication was so close to production when that happened, there's every chance it can be on the streets within a month, meeting the wishes of members at the May meeting "to publish [it] forthwith at minimum cost to all contributors ..."

There are still, however, a number of necessary steps to be completed:

1. *Design*: Hobsons had designed a cover, which can probably still be used, but the bigger job of deciding how the detailed index and individual entries should be laid out still needs to be done. Member Liz Goodman has kindly volunteered to undertake this task and is presently working on it.

2. *Tagging*: This involves assigning a "tag" containing design criteria determined by Liz to each paragraph throughout the publication. Without the expert voluntary assistance of Michael Wyatt and his clever software package this would be impossibly time-consuming.

3. *Editing and printing camera ready copy*: This is where you, possibly, and I come in. If you are a contributor and you have changed your address and/or phone number, please fax the details — old and new — to me at (02) 528 6315 no later than 1 July, 1992. No other changes can be accepted as even these mean, at least, two or more passes through the entire database. When these changes have been made, I will then laser print the individual pages in camera-ready form.

4. *Printing, collating, binding, etc.* Thanks to Xerox, this will be done at no cost to members.

5. *Distribution and sales*: Enquiries by the Society's committee indicated that previous editions of the register, which were supplied free of charge, often met the fate of junk mail. On the other hand, those who found it useful, said they'd be prepared to pay for it. Therefore, the committee has decided to charge a nominal \$9.95 per copy. Hobsons can't seem to locate the Society's distribution list, so if you know of any publishers likely to want a copy of the register, fax details — include postcode please — to (02) 528 6315.

Increased cost of meetings

From the August meeting on, the cost for members who book by the preceding Friday will rise from \$5 to \$7, and for visitors and members who don't book, from \$10 to \$12. The committee

regrets that this is necessary in order to meet costs more effectively.

Obituary Beatrice Davis

Beatrice Davis died in Sydney on May 24 at the age of 83. The following is based on a tribute by former colleague Alec Bolton which appeared on 30 May in the Sydney Morning Herald.

Beatrice Davis was the first professional book editor in Australia, and a major contributor to the development of Australian publishing over a period of nearly 50 years. Educated in arts at the University of Sydney, in 1937 she became the first full-time general editor at Angus and Robertson and was closely associated with such authors as Hugh McCrae, Norman Lindsay, Xavier Herbert, Douglas Stewart and Thea Astley. She was sympathetic to less literary writers as well and her tactful, self-effacing editing helped many to produce improved manuscripts — and in a style that was consistently the author's never the editor's.

She especially prized writing that had wit and precision, and novels that arose from creative imagination. She felt that much Australian fiction died under too heavy a weight of documentary detail.

In 1976, she was the National Book Council's Bookman of the Year, and in 1980 was made a member of the Order of Australia. She was a judge of the Miles Franklin Award for fiction from its inception in 1957 until her death. In February, the University of Sydney conferred on her an honorary Doctorate of Letters. She was the only non-writer so far awarded an Emeritus Fellowship of the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

She could never be persuaded to write her memoirs, but in 1989 the Society of Editors (Victoria) commissioned the publication of an extended biographical essay about her, *One of the First and One of the Finest*, by Anthony Bridges.

Copies of this are available from the society.

Enquiries to committee member Derek Barton.

Editor-in-residence

Irene Stevens of the Australia Council's Literature Unit reports that Robin Appleton took up her six-month appointment as editor-in-residence at Murdoch University, WA, in April. "She is

conducting a wide and varied range of activities both on campus and in the community with great enthusiasm and commitment,” writes Irene. For the 1993 academic year, the Literature Board is inviting tertiary institutions in Queensland to apply for an editor-in-residence and will be making its decision in September. As the Literature Board nominates three editors from which the successful institution may make its choice of an editor-in-residence, the board has instigated a register of editors for this purpose. Experienced editors interested in undertaking a six-month residency, either during the 1993 academic year at a Queensland university or in future years in other States, should provide the board with copies of their curricula vitae for inclusion on the register. Irene can be reached called in Sydney on 950 9000 or 008 226 912 if you need further information.

June meeting: Alan Peterson’s Words *I blithely volunteered to take notes about this meeting before realising that writing about Alan Peterson, the doyen of editors, wordsmiths and those concerned with the correct and elegant use of the English language, might leave me open to criticism if my own report was — sorry — were not as entertaining and grammatically correct as his own. [Ed. So far, Janine, no worries.] But for the benefit of those not fortunate to have been there on June 2, here is a summary.*

Alan began by observing that speaking to a group of editors is like lecturing the doctors in the temple:

- 1) It’s been done before and done better, and
- 2) What can be said that hasn’t been said already?

Alan first worked in newspapers 50 years ago, in the days when swear words didn’t get even a whiff of printer’s ink, and “contact” was a noun not a verb. He got into editing reluctantly at first, having wanted to be a reporter.

He remarked that subeditors can make sows’ ears into silk purses, the main rule of subediting being “just don’t do anything damn silly”.

Editors make many decisions based simply on sense and a feel for language which tell them that one phrase sounds better than another, as well as according to the usage, taste and grammar of the times.

All of these change constantly, as shown by the vexed question of swear words in print. Alan was in London at the time of the Lady Chatterley trial. The trendy papers printed “the word”; the tabloids had more sense. It looked coy, and Alan believes that swear words are unnecessary in print and on radio; vulgar words are a part of the language, and can show character, but most have most effect when used sparingly. Next, a list of current usages and abusages that had some members of the audience groaning and growling: “concensed” meaning a consensus having been reached; something being “deposited” meaning having had a deposit put on it; “target” as a verb; “impact” as a verb; “proactive” as anything; problems being “prioritised”, engagements “diarised”, and animals (and rich relatives) “euthanised”. Writers and broadcasters, Alan observed, are constantly pushing out the boundaries of expression, not always with accuracy or to the benefit of the language. Many readers of his *Words* column still write in, incensed about split infinitives and the correct plurals of octopus and platypus. In the middle there is a large and uncaring majority; uncaring, Alan believes, due to an education system that takes fright at grammar. “Whom” sounds pedantic even when correct. Inflections are disappearing. “They/their/them” are being used as a neutral singular form, a usage to which many people object. “Disinterested” and “uninterested” are regarded by some as interchangeable; “enormity”, meaning evil or wickedness, becomes confused with enormous size; “convince” and “persuade” get mixed up. These are points of precision Alan believes are worth saving in printed English. There has been a regular flow of US usage into Australia, mainly due to television. Australian pedants often regard all Americanisms as anathema. Alan referred to *Mother Tongue: The English Language**, in which the author, Bill Bryson, an American now living in England, lists Americanisms that have slipped happily into everyday English: commuter, bedrock, cold spell, gimmick, striptease, telephone, typewriter, radio, teenager, hangover, joyride, hindsight and even stiff upper lip. The English language is none the worse for these but Alan would like the print medium to be more selective; for example, protesting against — not

simply protesting — a decision, and sitting for, rather than sitting, an exam.

Some usages suddenly give trouble that have not done so in the past — convince/persuade, and “between 30 to 40”. These are not variants.

They’re just plain wrong!

The editorial dilemma of Latin plurals arose next.

How to treat “data” and “media” — singular or plural? And why are Latin plurals used in the nominative case when a Latin purist would say

they need the genitive? Alan leaves this up to the editors.

And many questions did indeed arise in response to Alan’s thought-provoking observations, including one concerning the anthropomorphic tendencies

attributed in recent years to inanimate objects— “This door is alarmed” and “disabled toilets” for which, Alan said, his heart bleeds.

What of newspapers’ standard styles, if any — is the AGPS *Style Guide* used?

The reply being that every paper has its own style book that always needs revising

but doesn’t always get it, due to lack of time. The AGPS *Style Guide* should be taken into account as one of a number of standards that should be set.

What of ‘gotten’? asked someone, which is regarded by the English and Australians as another awful Americanism but is, in fact, the original form taken to America by the Pilgrim Fathers and retained there.

Ditto “programme”. The “mme” form was adopted in late Victorian times as a genteel affectation, French being regarded as a “nice” language. The *Sydney Morning Herald* decided in the late 1950s to use “program” instead, and received a lot of complaints.

Alan advocates the “~ise” spelling, and also favours, but does not expect to see accepted, the uniform “~or” spelling rather than “~our”.

One audience member noted the present use of quote marks for emphasis rather than to indicate a quote; for instance when a bakery advertises it sells “hot” pies, which would seem to cast doubt on just how hot they really are!

The issue of neutral English pronouns was raised. “He” and “him” are not universally accepted as encompassing both genders (or even, as legislation would have it “all” genders. How many are there!).

Alan responded that it is possible in most cases to construct sentences that avoid the pronoun completely. He thinks that “they” will become the accepted singular neutral form, although he does not like it for grammatical reasons.

He went on to convince (or possibly persuade) us that “whilst” and “amongst” should be avoided, considering them old fashioned and of no use today.

One member asked which dictionary he favours. The Oxford is good for etymology but needs to be rewritten in Plain English, according to Alan; the convoluted sentences needs revision but it is unrivalled for the origin of words. He also considers the Collins very practical but says he has many dictionaries and uses

them all. The Macquarie Dictionary is now encyclopaedic, and Alan considers this a good thing in a way, being useful for lazy people, one of which he cheerfully acknowledged himself to be.

“Is the adverb dying?” queried one concerned listener, pointing out that adjectives now seem to be used as adverbs; “Come quick” being substituted for “Come quickly”. Alan admitted he hadn’t noticed the growth of this aberration or illiteracy (there are so many others to keep busy with, after all) but said he would be on the look-out for it.

Is the Academie Francaise approach the way to go? Alan acknowledged this to be a difficult question. He expressed a wish that the language would stay still for a while and agreed that an academy or similar authority would be a good thing for the establishment of some grammatical and linguistic rules. Most of us, however, are a bit unwilling to be told what to say and how to say it. Dryden and Swift advocated an academy, and the



“HIT ANY KEY TO CONTINUE”

British Parliament once agreed to it, but nothing came of it. The idea has never really been taken seriously by English speakers. Did Alan think the language is changing faster now than at other times? He replied that it seemed to be so but that it's hard to tell. One reason why it is changing so quickly is that people are no longer very well informed about the character, quality and techniques of the language. Educationalists now place little importance on grammar, and linguists tend to say that what is used is the language; Alan feels this is a bit of a "cop out".

Is computer typesetting having an effect on style? It has removed the "wicketkeeping" functions of the typesetter's and proofreader's queries, Alan replied. The chief of staff tries to read everything but hasn't time. "Copy" is now ephemeral, no longer hard. (Except on Channel 10.) The final word went to sports commentators and their racy inaccuracies — the famous "forward progress" and the more recent "he's been monstered!" to describe a tackle. After all this I felt quite monstered by erudition myself. But in the best possible way. Roll on, next Saturday's *Herald*!

Janine Flew

*Janine recommends Bill Bryson's *Mother Tongue: The English Language* "to all those of us who enjoy reading on the bus in the morning, taunting our fellow commuters with exclamations of surprise, delight and sudden bursts of laughter. Published by Penguin; paperback; \$12.95. Do yourself a favour ..."

Letter to the editor

1 June, 1992

I can only assume that I was stultifyingly boring at the ABPA/Society of Editors workshop recently. I've just read the report in *Blue Pencil*, which is inaccurate on several points. None of it amounts to anything of import really, but just for the record, what was said was:

1. I'm the Editorial/Production Director of the company [Allen & Unwin] (whose title uses an ampersand). I use the slash rather than an ampersand to highlight my belief that the roles are inextricably linked, which was the case I was arguing.

2. The implication is that the women's studies list is 150 titles; it isn't, it's about 15 titles, the balance across a span of the social sciences and trade areas.
 3. We didn't initially have several editors, just one person fulfilling the editorial and production roles. Since our increase in size and my changed role to publishing as well, we've hived off print buying and shipping/scheduling as being the functions most economically carried out by one person, not several jointly.
 4. We don't edit on disc, we edit on hardcopy with the typesetter organising the transference of that editing and any necessary coding onto the disc, to previously established design specifications.
 5. The buying of print is split between Australia and overseas; we use approximately half a dozen printers in each place, counting Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia as 'overseas'. I realise it's incredibly difficult to accurately represent 20 minutes' talking in a couple of hundred words, and this seems remorselessly pedantic, but ...
- Kindest regards,

Rhonda Black.

[Ed. Rhonda Black is right. Short of using a tape recorder and then transcribing it (and even so, it usually needs sub-editing), it is quite difficult to take in what someone is saying, especially in an informal setting, and report what you think they meant with certainty. As one who wanted to attend the workshop but couldn't, I found Liz Goodman's account (entitled with what has turned out to be delicious irony "What editors get up to") informative and entertaining.]



Send your news, views, shop-talk, an amusing snippet or non-libellous gossip to the society's PO box or fax it to the editor at (02) 528 6315.

& With this issue of *Blue Pencil* is a program for Australia's largest book event on 26-28 June at Darling Harbour. However, it seems Muphry had a hand in the program and changed the date for the Australian Book Industry Awards dinner to 25 June. It is, in fact

on 26 June. At this dinner, the winner of the inaugural Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship will be announced. This fellowship, which will be awarded annually, consists of an eight to 12 week attachment for an Australian editor with a US publisher. It was initiated by the Australia Council's Literature Board which co-funds it along with the ABPA and individual Australian publishers. Call the ABPA training officer on (02) 281 9788 for more information. The award this year is made especially poignant by the recent death of Beatrice Davis who gave permission for the fellowship to be named in her honour. Anyone interested in attending the ABPA dinner should call ETA-Austravco on (02) 267 4720.

& The first Australian Linguistic Institute will be held from 29 June to 10 July, 1992 at the University of Sydney. Registrations closed 31 May but late registration is possible. Call Ingrid Schmidt-Brust in Sydney on 215 7059 or toll free on 008 028 7059 for more information.

& Do you want company on the drive to and from meetings? Or in the train or bus? Do you want someone to walk to the station with? A line or two to *Blue Pencil* might provide you with scintillating conversation on the way home, not to mention the opportunity to compare contacts and contracts, denigrate the degradation of the English language, and agonise over apostrophes and abuse of alliteration.

& Remember Love and Rodgers, Hobsons' liquidators? Seems they could do with a proof-reader, at least for their business letters, one of which arrived in the society's post box addressed to "The Society of Editions".

& But who are we to talk? The last issue of *Blue Pencil* not only made May 30 a Friday (it was a Saturday) but in blaming calendar printers for her own carelessness, your editor (a long-winded way of saying "I") left a big hole where ʔ (Shaw's symbol for "th") should have been.

& Those who use the AJA recommended rates for freelance editors (see *Blue Pencil*, April) should now refer to them as the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance rates. The AJA officially became absorbed into the MEAA (along with Actors Equity and the Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees Asso-

ciation) on 18 May. "I did my best," comments my counterpart in the Victorian Editors' Society, "to get them to call it the Entertainment, Arts and Media Union, on the ground that the acronym is much easier to pronounce but they didn't like it."

& The Galley Club attracts people in publishing, especially on the production side – you know, the kind of people who need editors. They meet monthly at the 729 Club at St Leonards and guests are welcome. Next meeting 23 June. Call Sheila Drummond on 550 2355 for more details.

& The society needs more members, especially now we have a venue for meetings that will hold more and is so, well, salubrious. Most of us know other editors, either freelance or full-time, so why not tell them about the society, our monthly meetings, our interesting speakers and especially our informative, entertainingly – if Muphrily – edited *Blue Pencil*, all of which can be theirs for \$35. And we'll throw in a year's subscription to *Australian Booksellers and Publishers* worth \$39. What a bargain! To help you help them, we're offering you attendance at one meeting totally free of charge (but still book before the due date) for every new member you introduce. See Janine Flew at the 14 July meeting, or call her on 887 0177.

& "Salubrious" is an interesting word. The Compact Oxford English Dictionary gives as a first meaning, "favourable to health" but I couldn't read on because the battery in my magnifying glass conked out. Sharon Paull came to the rescue with her Macquarie which gives as a second meaning "of a locality, attractive and prosperous". If you haven't been to our new meeting room, come and see for yourself whether it warrants either of these descriptions.

& The recently formed Special Interest Group Technical Editing aims to provide a forum for technical editors, and those interested in technical editing, to discuss their work and exchange ideas. At the SIG's next meeting at 6.30pm on Wednesday, 1 July at the NSW Sports Club, 10 Hunter Street, Sydney, the topic to be discussed is editing tables. Suzanne Wood on 936 1159 during business hours can supply more information.