

THE EDITORS

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

JUNE 1981

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

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, 24 June.

The subject for the evening will be:

Publishing for Children

Our speakers will be:

Elizabeth Fulton, childrens editor at Methuen, who
will speak on general books for children

and

Arthur McDougall, former managing director of
F.W.Cheshire and present managing director of
Bellbird Books, who will speak on educational
publishing.

VENUE: Kirribilli Community Centre.

Drinks as usual available from 6 p.m. onwards.

If you are staying for dinner afterwards, please

R.S.V.P. by Monday, 22 June to Narelle Konte: 888.2733.

Position Vacant - Acquisitions Editor

A consultant is required to help expand the educational list at Shakespeare Head Press. The position would suit a freelance editor with experience in maths and English at primary and secondary levels. If interested, contact Ian Coles, Golden Press, 2-12 Tennyson Road, Gladesville. Telephone: 890.421.

Reception

The National Book Council is holding a reception for British children's editor, Julia McRae.

Date: Thursday, 18 June.

Time: 5.30 - 7.30 p.m.

Place: Ground Floor, Queen Victoria Building, George Street.

Cost: \$3.00 per head.

If interested, phone Sarah Walters on 299.9368.

Report on Last Meeting, 13 May 1981

Our second meeting for 1981 was held on Wednesday, 13 May, and the subject was: "What makes a book successful, and how much can editors contribute to its success?"

Speakers on the subject were:

Tim Hall, freelance journalist and author of 21 books (the latest being Darwin 1942).

Bill Mackerell, Managing Director of Methuen and President of the ABPA.

Ron Abbey, well-known Sydney bookseller.

All three speakers agreed on the basic premise that to be successful, a book must be commercially viable.

Tim Hall's interpretation of a good book was one which suits any one or more of the members of the chain - author, publisher, bookseller. However, he took a realistic view of the publishing process, defining a successful book as one which satisfies all the members of the chain (as well as the buying public).

Tim claimed to be happy with the present style of publishing in Australia, and defined the editor's responsibilities as being twofold: (1) to give honest advice to authors, taking care not to exploit non-professional writers; (2) to be a loyal representative of the author.

Originally an investigative journalist, Tim considers writing to be a craft. His 21 books have been written over the last four or five years; many have been commissioned, and all have been carefully researched. Having viewed their varying degrees of success, Tim has come up with the following observations on what makes a book successful:

1. following successful overseas trends, e.g. interest in ageing, can be valuable, but it is important never to publish simply on the basis of belief that the world needs a book on that particular subject.
2. good title, jacket, use of photographs and maps, and the content of the first two pages are sufficient to sell a book, regardless of the author's name or the written content.
3. successful content matter should lend itself to a follow-up, and should stand up to a critical review.

Bill Mackerell considered our subject a complex one. However, he defined a successful book as one which sells. He agreed with Tim Hall on the importance of title and jacket, and reinforced Tim's view that the editor must be the author's friend. In examining the editor's role, Bill expressed concern as to whether editors have an adequate understanding of the market, and whether they undertake personal market research.

He felt that, in general, market research is inadequate, and that publishing is basically entrepreneurial.

In Bill's opinion, promotion and publicity are very important contributors to a book's success, while price and readability are also relevant factors.

Ron Abbey concurred on the importance of the title and jacket, pointing out that each book is competing with thousands of others for the buyers' interest. He explained that arrangement of aisles and shelving in a bookshop can easily obscure large areas of a book's jacket. Ideally, a jacket should be eye-catching, and each part of it should clearly identify the book in some way.

Ron presented the sobering facts that there are approximately 90 000 titles in Australia, made up of Australian, UK and US publications, plus English language books from other countries. He divided them into three categories:

- A. standard titles which every bookshop must carry (approximately 70% of all sales, according to an Abbey's Bookshop survey).
- B. new, promotable titles which are doing well (approximately 10% of all sales).
- C. anything else, e.g. Agatha Christie, Mills & Boon (approximately 15% of all sales).

Ron's interpretation was that a solid back list is important to any publishing company. His definition of the bookseller's role in contributing to a book's success was that bookshops must be convenient, well organised, presenting 'good value' books, and above all else, profitable. He felt that publishers' reps also had a part to play in determining a book's success.

The sixty-odd people who attended this meeting had a very stimulating evening.