

THE EDITORS

P.O. Box 567

NEUTRAL BAY JUNCTION 2089

NEWSLETTER No.9

REPORT ON LAST MONTH'S MEETING

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli
Wednesday 21 May 1980

TOPIC: FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDITORS

The meeting, attended by a fair number of freelance editors as well as other members, was chaired by Barbara Ker Wilson. Guest speakers were John Croyston, Federal Drama Script Editor, the ABC; Bill Larkins of Compton Advertising (he's also Chairman of the Management Committee of the Australian Society of Authors), Graham Timms, editor of the AMP's house magazine Amicus, who represented the Society of Industrial Editors, and Basil Walby of the CSIRO.

Basil Walby spoke first. He pointed out that there are some 400 scientific societies in Australia, and that there must be many more humanistic, language and economic groups. Every statutory or government body, he said, employs at least one person who is involved in some kind of editorial work. There are 3,500 scientific magazines of one kind or another, excluding industrial journals, so there are obviously lots of editors around. Many organizations apart from publishing companies benefit from employing professional editors; this is something that not enough of them realize; commercial publishers are too prone to regard editors as a 'cost centre' rather than a 'profit centre' - but in fact a good editor can save at least his or her salary every year in costs to the company; if he or she is efficient, and professional. He then showed a horrifying example of what could go wrong in a scientific publication when the editor was inefficient (or rather, in this case, where the editor started to become 'arty'). In this case, the typography indicated that the bureau chief's message appeared to be written in blank verse

The responsibility of editors in the CSIRO includes advising the author of a book or paper, and deciding on basic design and layout. Editors should be reasonably familiar with the work of the department that is putting out the paper. They should, clearly, be sufficiently versed in production technology and be aware of the readership level for the finished product. Editors should also be cost-conscious.

There are two main categories of editors employed by the CSIRO. These at the 'coalface', divisional editors (working in research divisions) basically act as author's editors. Their function is to help the author to express himself. They also help authors place work in scientific journals if necessary. The CSIRO has a printing establishment for its own journals, but not all CSIRO's work is published by them. The editor also organizes illustrations, liaises with printers, buys typesetting, and oversees the whole project until it's finished.

The second category of editor works on CSIRO journals, books and information leaflets which are often prepared by writers employed by the CSIRO to produce in-house publications.

There is a third category of 'editor' - the publications officers. They occasionally prepare press releases, edit in-house material, and liaise with the public.

Basil Walby said that over 50 people are involved in CSIRO editorial work. The organization does employ a few 'outworkers', or freelancers, when the going is really rough, but they aim to keep all their editorial work in-house.

The next speaker was Bill Larkins, who started off by saying feelingly that advertising is a 'paranoid industry'. He said that advertising people have no idea that such an animal as an editor exists (some of the freelancers in the audience perked up at this point). Advertising copy is subbed by a variety of non-editors, from copy chief to client!

There's a lot of money in advertising; creative people are paid enormous sums for thinking up slogans such as 'I want a Tooheys or two'. However, where actual copy is concerned, there's not a great deal for editors to work on: a printed advertisement in a newspaper or magazine for a consumer item rarely has more than 100 words in it, and posters have a maximum of eleven words.

The main worry for advertising copywriters is the Trade Practices Act. It is very simple; thou shalt not publish claims or any advertisement that are false or misleading. The Whitlam government went half-way to taking a company to court over this; the company marketing a brand of soap powder, claimed that whenever you opened the packet, vast quantities of lemons came bursting forth. While this approach may sometimes seem distressingly literal, the principle still holds very firmly.

Where brochures or leaflets are concerned, copywriters work on a vocabulary of some 700 words. This means that concepts have to be stripped down to basics for the widest readership. (For instance, 'financial commitments' translates as: 'I can't pay my bills'.)

After giving us this insight into the world of advertising, Bill Larkins said no - advertising agencies do not employ freelance editors.

Graham Timms was much more encouraging. He pointed out that editors of house journals in industry exist to produce magazines as a regular service to their employees and stockholders. As any company employing an editor has to pay such things as superannuation and holiday pay, there is a growing interest in using freelancers because they're usually a more economical proposition. The question is, do they have the necessary skills? A good deal of house journal editing involves pretty vicious subbing - freelancers would have to know how to reduce 10,000 words to about 4,000 or 5,000. There's also the 'flash measure of readability', which was developed for house journals; this measures how readable a piece of copy is; it is in fact a mathematical formula which computes word syllables, the number of words in a sentence, and the number of sentences in a paragraph. A freelancer should quickly become familiar with it if he or she intends to do some work for a house journal.

Graham ended his talk with a plea: 'We need editors! Please help us!' (At this point, our freelancers began rummaging for their business cards.)

The final speaker was John Croyston of the ABC, who said that the opportunities for script editors were very limited because of the ABC's cash-flow problems. Editing for television, film or radio is a comparatively new skill in Australia. The first requirement was to know the medium. ABC editors are not working within the print medium; they have to relate scripts to the technical resources available in AM and FM radio and television. This is usually best developed through experience within the organization. Script editors are usually skilled in technology.

In the ABC at present, there is one TV drama editor in Melbourne, one in Sydney, and a children's drama editor in Melbourne. The ABC radio drama and features department has two script editors for plays and documentaries.

After some general discussion the meeting closed, and our customary buffet dinner was served.

SUBSCRIPTIONS - 1980

If your current annual subscription of \$10.00 is overdue, please pay up! Either post it to the Membership Treasurer at P.O. Box 567, Neutral Bay Junction 2089 or bring it to the next meeting.

JOB VACANCY

The Department of the Australian Government Publisher in Canberra requires an Editor with reasonable in-house experience of copy editing. Salary \$15,766 - 16,799 p.a. Removal expenses paid. If you are interested, write to The Director of Publishing, Australian Government Public Service, Canberra, ACT 2601.

NATIONAL BOOK COUNCIL - NSW

On Wednesday, 16 June 1980 the National Book Council will be having a Javanese evening between 6-8 p.m. at the Music Centre in The Rocks, featuring a Javanese Gamelan Group (an ensemble of exotic tintinnabulation!), books on Asia and refreshments. For further details contact Sue Wratten, 699.0111 (Ext.434).

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

(All to be held at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli at 6.30 for 7 p.m.)

TOPIC: AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING (25 JUNE)

Guest Speaker: Michael Greenlane, Assistant Director of Publishing for the Australian Government, who will talk about the compilation of the AGP Style Manual and the work of this Government Department in general, which is extensive and far-reaching.

TOPIC: EDITORIAL RESEARCH (6 AUGUST)

Guest Speakers: Vere Dodds, Norma Cowper, (both Chief Researchers at Reader's Digest); and Philip Geeves, Historian, Broadcaster and Journalist. We are preparing a basic editorial booklist for members in conjunction with this meeting.

TOPIC: LEGAL AND MEDICAL PUBLISHING (17 SEPTEMBER) - To be confirmed