

# Blue Pencil

Newsletter of  
the Society  
of Editors  
(NSW)

Patron: Hazel Hawke

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OCTOBER 1995

## PUNCTUATION

*An edited transcript of Josephine Bastian's introductory remarks to the punctuation workshop at the meeting of the society on 5 September 1995.*

When I first began to gather material on this subject and told some of my friends what I was doing, I encountered two reactions: 'There is no subject there at all', quickly followed by, 'Oh, that subject is far too big to deal with in one evening'. I have found the second reaction nearer the mark. Punctuation is one of those engrossingly prosaic subjects: everyone knows something about it, everyone has opinions on it. What is more, it is a very lively topic at present; good writers like Malcolm Parkes, Nicholson Baker, John Lennard, and no doubt many more, are writing about it. Its purpose, I think we can agree, is to clarify the grammar of a written text and to mark the rhythm of a text that is to be sung or spoken aloud.

Punctuation, then, is as old as reading, writing, and singing. But it has had its ups and downs since its early development in the Minoan and Etruscan civilisations. For reasons that are something of a mystery, it fell into disuse among the Greeks who simply wrote in upper case letters without spaces between words so that their pages were a solid body of text. The Romans, despite knowing better (through their access to Etruscan civilisation), copied the Greek style, impracticable as it was, and used the same solid body of letters.

There have been various conjectures why this should have been so. One conjecture is that because the scribes, being an upper class of slave, were often more literate than their masters, those masters thought that scribes should not presume to put the punctuation in for them. Perhaps they considered the text to be somewhat sacred and only a reader of aristocratic origin could, in some wonderful revelation, fathom the meaning. Funnily enough, this seems to be one more case where ontogeny repeats phylogeny because, as Nicholson Baker points out, scriptio continuo, used by the Greeks and Romans, comes naturally to children who, even though they may have

punctuated models when they are learning to write and spell, are often so engaged by the letters that they don't pay much attention to spacing the words.

Other parallels may be drawn between earlier and present-day writers and readers. In medieval times learned people who read texts, which by then had some punctuation in them, would tend to add little embellishments of some kind and might put at the end of each page, 'I, Josephine, have read this', as if they wished to have some interaction with the text and pay their tribute to the fact that the printed page had yielded its meaning to them. As we know, quite a lot of people still enjoy

**Next Meeting: Tuesday 3 October**

### **BOOKPRESS**

#### **A New Approach to Self-publishing**

Gary Burke and Judy O'Neil will give us details of their new company, Bookpress, which offers a range of services to those authors who wish to self-publish their work. See page 4 for details.

Arrive at 6.30pm for the meeting at 7.30pm in the Rooftop Function Centre, 4th Floor, Australian Museum. Enter through William Street.

We'll provide drinks and light food. To book, call the society Voicemail number (02) 552 0039 by Sunday 1 October and leave your name and the names of your guests.

Members \$10; non-members and those who forget to book before 1 October, \$12.

embellishing the text as they read, sometimes to the misfortune of those who come after. And anyone who uses Email may have come across 'emoticons' or 'smilies', attempts to show a face in profile, smiling or possibly kissing -- not to mention the ecstatic bracket hug of greeting.

Punctuation is both a changing and a personal thing. Here, to illustrate the breadth of change it can go through, is a type of punctuation that a lot of us know very well but wouldn't use ourselves, the punctuation of the Bible.

*Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble,*  
*2 He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not.*

*3 And dost thou open thine eyes upon such a one, and bringest me into judgement with thee?*

*4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.*

*5 Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;*

*6 Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.*

*10 But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?*

*11 As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up:*

*12 So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.*

*13 O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!*

There is one semicolon here, but most of the short passages are joined by colons that mark the

recurring rhythm of biblical prose.

We can contrast this with a modern example that manages to have a rhythmic similarity with the Song of Songs, but with the use of absolutely no punctuation at all.

*my love*

*thy hair is one kingdom*

*the king whereof is darkness*

*thy forehead is a flight of flowers*

*thy head is a quick forest*

*filled with sleeping birds*

*thy breasts are swarms of white bees*

*upon the bough of thy body*

*thy body to me is April*

*in whose armpits is the approach of spring*

*thy thighs are white horses*

*yoked to a chariot of kings*

*they are the striking of a good minstrel*

*between them is always a*

*pleasant song*

e e cummings

You could say that punctuation over the last century has run the gamut between the styles of Henry James and Ernest Hemingway. This passage from *A Farewell to Arms*, one of the most celebrated openings to any book, is typical of Hemingway at the height of his powers and illustrates how personal punctuation is, and how much can be achieved by using very little of it.

*In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too*

*were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterwards the road bare and white except for the leaves.*

This too is Hemingway, I think you might say on the verge of self-parody, but all the same, a very typical opening of a Hemingway story.

*Often I ran out of bait because I would take only ten worms with me in a tobacco tin when I started. When I had used them all I had to find more worms, and sometimes it was very difficult digging in the bank of the stream where the cedar trees kept out the sun and there was no grass but only bare moist earth and often I could find no worms. Always though I found some kind of bait, but one time in the swamp I could find no bait at all and had to cut up one of the trout I had caught and use him for bait.*

Notice particularly the last sentence, 'Always though I found some kind of bait'. Although you may say that it is a curiously twisted structure, the rhythm carries you through so that you don't misunderstand the text.

From that we veer right away to a master who used punctuation lavishly, Henry James.

*There had been beauty, day after day, and there had been, for the spiritual lips, something of a pervasive taste of it; yet it was all, none the less, as if their response had remained below their fortune. How to bring it, by some brave, free lift, up to the same height was the idea with which, behind and beneath everything, he was restlessly occupied, and in the exploration of which, as in that of the sun-chequered greenwood of*

romance, his spirit thus, at the opening of a vista, met hers. They were already, from that moment, so hand-in-hand in the place that he found himself making use five minutes later, of exactly the same tone as Charlotte's for telling Mrs Assingham that he was likewise, in the matter of the return to London, sorry for what might be.

Henry believed that the comma could do anything, but his brother, William, found the style excruciating and wrote to him saying, 'Why for God's sake don't you say a thing once, and say it out?' James Thurber parodied this Jamesian punctuation with passages such as this:

*Amy Lighter perfectly took in, however, as, for his constant wonder, she always perfectly took in, the unmade, the wider gesture, the unspoken, the wonderful "oh." "You could, you know," she magnificently faced him with it, "run." He promptly matched, he even, for his, as he had once, falling into her frequent idiom, beautifully brought himself to say, money, exceeded her directness, pressing, for all to answer, the bell. In the darkly shining, the unfamiliar hallway, our poor brave gentleman, a moment later, found himself, for all his giving up to it, for all his, in point of fact, "sailing" into it, reaching out, as for an arm relinquished. "Let me," it was as though she softly unwrapped it for him, "save you." It needed nothing more to bring him out of it to bring him, indeed, whole, so to say, hog, into it. "Lose me!" he fairly threw it at her. "Lose me!" And managing the bravest of waves, he magnificently set his face to his prefigured predicament.*

A lot of people feel passionately about punctuation, sometimes in a positive way and sometimes in a negative way. Different parts of

speech (for instance, the semicolon) catch the attention and become a sort of bete noire. James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and Saul Bellow all hated the semicolon and Donald Barthelme said that it was 'ugly, ugly as a tick on a dog's belly'. Kurt Vonnegut thought it was a sign of weak style.

This is probably why a lot of modern writers, including Kurt Vonnegut, drop the semicolon altogether and just write short sentences joined by full stops. For a while, I fell victim to a sad passion for colons and whenever I wrote two sentences, struggle as I would, I could only join them with a colon. It was a bad case of colonitis and eventually, rather than face having to have a colonoscopy, I had to take my style to pieces and ask myself why I always wrote two sentences that *needed* to be joined with a colon. When at a committee meeting I confided this secret from my past to John he pointed out to me that the Australian author, Helen Garner, when writing *The First Stone*, might have been suffering from the same malady.

*Non-university people are sometimes puzzled by the function of Ormond resident tutors of whom there might be as many as fifty in any given year: like all residential colleges, Ormond offers tutorial classes additional to the teaching provided by the university proper, but these classes are not compulsory: they are an integral part of an old dream — the college not as a glorified dormitory but as a community of scholars.*

What are those colons doing there? The book goes on to make very liberal and rather illogical use of them. Another case of colonitis?

Although punctuation is a very personal thing, some adherence to rules modelled on the best literature can make of it a pleasing discipline

and not a prison. Nowadays, of course, it is not always the case that punctuation is modelled on good literature. 'The bottom line' is also a discipline, which impels editors to get rid of hyphens, punctuation in acronyms and abbreviations, etcetera, etcetera -- and simply not to be over-fussy, because saving keystrokes saves time and money

As I mentioned earlier, the first use of punctuation was probably to show the structure and meaning of a sentence in the written word, and in the spoken word or in singing to help the reader pause and take a breath. One of its earlier uses was for marking the pauses in religious chanting. The expressive possibilities of punctuation have been very fully explored by many writers since then. Byron was a past master of punctuation and parenthesis to bring different voices and different moods into a single stanza of poetry. This is Byron's Don Juan, in his usual pathetic way, trying to get a woman into bed with him.

*"Sooner shall earth resolve itself to sea,*

*"Than I resign thine image, Oh! my fair!*

*"Or think of anything excepting thee;*

*"A mind diseased no remedy can physic—(Here the ship gave a lurch, and he grew sea-sick.)*

XX.

*"Sooner shall heaven kiss earth—(here he fell sicker)*

*"Oh, Julia! what is every other woe?—*

*"(For God's sake let me have a glass of liquor—*

*"Pedro! Battista! help me down below.)*

*"Julia, my love!—(you rascal, Pedro, quicker)—*

*"Oh Julia!—(this curst vessel pitches so)—*

*"Beloved Julia, hear me still*

*beseeking!"*

*(Here he grew inarticulate with retching)*

It is punctuation in the service of humour, a very complex use of parentheses, some expressing the thoughts of Don Juan, some the comments of Byron.

At the other end of the scale we have perhaps an even more celebrated example in the service of very serious contemplation. It is the end of one of the sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins, a priest who had enormous doubts about his religion as he wrestled with his God.

*That night, that year*

*Of now done darkness I wretch lay  
wrestling with (my God!) my God.  
of certain forms of punctuation*

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*(The workshop then proceeded to examine some practical problems of punctuation. These will be published in a later issue of the newsletter.)*

## OUR NEXT SPEAKERS

At our next meeting on Tuesday 3 October, Managing Director Gary Burke, of Bokpress, assisted by Judy O'Neil, will explain to members the services offered to self-publishing authors by their company.

A combination of Dymocks book stores, Dashing Printing, and P&I Printing, the new company offers on a fee-for-service basis, a complete cycle of services including editing, page and cover design, typesetting, photography and artwork, publicity, and marketing.

Bookpress uses the Docutech system for fewer than 500 copies and conventional presses for larger

runs. The author retains copyright, has complete control of the production, has access to 77 Dymocks book stores for marketing, and receives 50 per cent of the cover price for every book sold.

Self-publishing is a growing area of the publishing industry and one in which editors have an important part to play. Come along and hear the details of this new dimension of self-publishing. Information brochures and price lists will be available at the meeting.

## TO TALK OF...

Thankyou all for coming to the punctuation workshop. It is clear some editors like the 'look; or hold strong views on how to punctuate; or hold to their earlier training. However, if such editors work for specific publishers they will find that following house styles is a requirement of their employment. Some preferences expressed at the workshop are contrary to the house styles of six publishers whose house styles I have copies of (and two of these are more than 30 pages long).

Working for journals and bodies which engage in report writing can lead to editors using a preferred form. Having just completed two contracts with government departments, I have found that the project managers have been specific, even down to spaces between headers and text, let alone matters of how to punctuate and when to use capitals, hyphens, and em dashes!

With your newsletter this month is information about four matters in which the society needs your help:

### **The quorum**

This matter needs to be resolved. A ballot paper on which you can record your postal vote is enclosed.

### **Membership**

Photocopy the enclosed membership information sheet and distribute it among your non-member colleagues. If you work in-house, put a copy on the noticeboard.

### **Register of Editorial Services**

Use the enclosed form to ensure that your listing will be in the 1996 issue. See page 6 for details.

And finally, remember the **Traditional Grammar Workshop** (see page 6 and bring your colleagues.

It is now time to think about the AGM in February. The positions of President, *BP* Editor, and Caterer will be vacated so give some serious thought now to whom you would like to see on the committee for 1996. Are you full of ideas or do you know someone who is? Committee work can be time-consuming, but is most rewarding.

Robin Appleton

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### **Editing Country Style**

I worry when the Society of Editors worries about quorums and low attendance at meetings. This country member does not get there, but could not manage without the contact that *Blue Pencil* and the *Register of Editorial Services* provide.

I have been a member of the society since 1983, when freelance editing was much less normal than it is now. My living on the Central Coast at that time seemed to disconcert various managing editors in Sydney, until they found I was happy to travel into the city to discuss or deliver a job.

I also travelled to the society's monthly meetings, to make contact and just reassure myself that I was not alone. The society's newsletter at that time was a small leaflet.

*Blue Pencil*

Times change. Freelancing has achieved respectability, becoming the subject of training on how to manage it best, and now I am even farther out in the sticks at Goulburn.

Really, though, the distance is not important. Couriers, Australia Post, telephone, and fax substitute well for physical contact. (Next, a bus stop on the superhighway!) Software and supplies for my Macintosh I order by telephone. Telephone, courier, travelling and so on cost more than if I lived in Sydney, but are offset by the saving in living expenses and can be claimed as tax deductions anyway.

The Society of Editors and some cousins (the Society of Indexers and Women in Publishing) are my Persons Friday. Newsletters keep me in touch with what's going on in the industry, and detailed reports of workshops and talks provide useful advice. Mailing lists produce flyers advertising useful new tools.

Register entries have brought me work from Melbourne and Perth. Skill-building workshops sometimes see me, especially if held in Canberra or during the day in Sydney.

With the communication superhighway developing more and more lanes, the society may see the day when physical attendance is not important. Meanwhile, count me as an appreciative, if remote, reader.

*Anne Beth McCormack*

## YOUR AWARD'S REQUIREMENT FOR INDEXING SKILLS

The industrial award covering editors in NSW is the Journalists (Book Industry) Award 1990. Being a federal award, it applies to editors employed by organisations who are signatories to it. At present there are 41 signatories, of all sizes, so if you are working for a publishing company there is a good chance it applies to you. If you are unsure, ask your Personnel Department.

Among the industrial matters covered in the award are 'Minimum rates of payment', which prescribe the minimum weekly rate for each grade of worker, and 'Classification definitions', which describe the skills that editors must possess at each grade.

The award describes three levels of classification. Level 1 is a Trainee Book Editor; employees are expected to remain at this level for no longer than 12 months.

Level 2 is a Book Editor. This level is divided into four grades. Among the required skills for each grade are:

### **Grade, Weekly Minimum Rate & Indexing Skills Required**

1. \$508.60: Check indexes under supervision
2. \$529.50: All the duties of Grade 1, with decreasing supervision
3. \$571.20: The ability to undertake indexing and check outside indexing
4. \$612.90: A high level of proficiency in all duties and required skills

Level 3 is a Senior Editor, divided into three grades. If you are at this level, you must be able to demonstrate your competence in and knowledge of all Level 2 skills.

In addition, you are expected to be able to undertake the following:  
*Grade, Weekly Minimum Rate & Indexing Skills Required*

1. \$645.70: Communicate internally and externally with indexers
2. \$696.40: As for grade 1
3. \$800.70: Demonstrated competence in Grade 1 and 2 functions; confidence in communicating with indexers.

Are you confident that you can demonstrate your indexing ability at the level appropriate to your grade? Are you keen to upgrade your indexing skills in preparation for career advancement?

The University of New South Wales School of Information, Library and Archive Studies regularly holds courses in book indexing, aimed at both those who plan to become indexers and editors responsible for indexing. Not only are these courses held under the auspices of a respected academic institution, but they are sponsored by the Australian Society of Indexers. The components of this course are:

- Introduction to indexing
- Methods
- Analysis of text
- Selecting terms
- Principles of subject access
- Headings and subheadings
- Cross-references
- Alphabetical arrangement
- Style
- Editing for publication
- Relations between indexers and editors.

Topics covered throughout the course which are of particular interest to editors are:

- Commissioning an index
- Developing a house style
- Writing a brief for an indexer

(continued on page 7)

## BULLETIN BOARD

### Oops!

Sorry about the wrong Voicemail number in last month's Blue Pencil. The correct Voicemail number for the Society of Editors (NSW) is:

**(02) 552 0039.**

You can use it to leave messages for the secretary or for bookings for any society function.

### 1996 Register of Editorial Services

Enclosed with this copy of the newsletter is an application form for listings in the 1996 issue of the *Register of Editorial Services*. To take advantage of the register as an effective way to promote your particular skills and services, complete the application form and return it with your cheque to: **1996 Register, Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box 563 Potts Point NSW 2011 by Friday 20 October 1995.** Each listing costs \$40. Cheques should be made out to Society of Editors (NSW).

The 1996 issue will be indexed for easier location of specific services and will be available in February. The society plans to actively market it in those sections of the publishing industry where there are potential clients for members.

### Dictionary Discount

The Australian Library Information Association is offering its new fourth edition of *The Australian Dictionary of Acronyms and Abbreviations* to society members at a discounted price. An order form is enclosed with this newsletter.

## Workshop

**SOCIETY OF EDITORS (NSW)**  
and the  
**NSW WRITERS' CENTRE**

**Traditional Grammar, Saturday  
4 November, 9.30am - 4.30pm**

A refresher for many and a steep learning experience for people learning grammar for the first time. Writers, teachers, students, publishing people. All welcome.

NSW Writers' Centre, Garry Owen House, Rozelle Hospital Grounds, Balmain Road, Rozelle.

Cost: Members of the Society of Editors (NSW) or the NSW Writers' Centre \$50, non-members \$70.

Bookings and payment to the NSW Writers' Centre, phone: (02) 555 9757; fax: (02) 818 1327. The centre accepts credit cards. An application form is enclosed with this newsletter

## ABPA Training Seminars

For a copy of the 1995 calendar of the Australian Book Publishers Association one-day and twilight (4pm to 8pm) training seminars, contact Robyn Lowe on (02) 281 9788.

The Sydney seminars to November are:

Wednesday 4 October . . twilight  
Business Skills for Small Publishers

Wednesday 25 October . twilight  
Job-sharing

Wednesday 1 November twilight  
Introduction to Production

Monday 13 November . one-day  
Direct Marketing.

## Printer For Sale

IBM Quietwriter II printer. It has very nice laser-quality print, but it does text only -- no fancy fonts and no graphics. \$50. Phone Rhana Pike on (02) 569 7831

## WiP Training Program for 1995

Women in Publishing welcomes all women working in publishing or related fields to its training program for 1995. Topics that will be dealt with are:

Negotiation in Publishing 10 Oct  
Finance 8 November

For details of times, locations, and costs, write to:

Women in Publishing  
PO Box 1515

North Sydney NSW 2059.

## Publishing and Editing Seminars

Robin Appleton will again present her Publishing and Editing Seminar series at the NSW Writers' Centre, Rozelle Hospital Grounds, Balmain Road, Rozelle.

The intensive six-day series of seminars will be held from 9.30am to 5.00pm on three successive weekends: 7 & 8 October, 14 & 15 October, and 21 & 22 October.

The course has been designed to meet the requirements for a structured program as provided under the Training Guarantee (Administration) Act 1990.

For further details contact the Writers' Centre, phone (02) 555 9757 or fax (02) 818 1327.

## Society Annual Dinner

Don't miss it!

- \* Tuesday 5 December
- \* Emad's, Cleveland Street (near Elizabeth Street), Surry Hills
- \* \$25 per head
- \* BYO.

Book by 17 November by ringing Voicemail (02) 552 0039.

## YOUR AWARD'S REQUIREMENT

(Continued from page 5)

- Assessing and index
- Editing an index
- Cutting an index down.

The next course to be held is a three-day Indexing Workshop on November 13-15. For further information, contact:

Maureen Henninger  
School of Information, Library  
and Archive Studies  
University of New South Wales  
Sydney NSW 2052  
Phone: (02) 385 3589  
Fax: (02) 385 3430  
E-mail:  
m.henninger@unsw.edu.au

*Michael Wyatt*

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS:

Suzanne Ainger  
M. Carpenter  
Emily Dunn  
H. E. Fry  
Angela Gundert  
Graham Maynard

## SOCIETY of EDITORS (NSW)

Membership of the Society of Editors (NSW) is open to any person who is engaged in full- or part-time editing or who is interested in promoting the purposes of the society. They are:

- \* to maintain and develop standards of editorial skills;
- \* to hold meetings, the purpose of which is to discuss subjects of particular interest to print editors;
- \* to promote the exchange and dissemination of information and ideas among print editors.

### THE 1995 COMMITTEE

#### President and Publicity

Robin Appleton

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(w&h)

#### Secretary

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## BLUE PENCIL

Copy for *Blue Pencil* and letters to the editor should be posted direct to The Editor, 49 Evans Street, Sans Souci NSW, 2219.

It should carry the author's name in the form preferred for publication, telephone number, and fax number, if any.

Printed hard copy (and even legible handwriting) faxed to (02) 529 9764 is acceptable, but is preferred on 3.5" MS DOS compatible disk in unformatted WordPerfect or saved as ASCII (DOS) text. Disks will be returned.