

Blue Pencil

Newsletter of the Society of Editors (NSW)

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Next meeting 5 October 1988

The speaker at the next meeting of the Society of Editors, on Wednesday 5 October, will be Moya Wood.

Moya was a script and story editor on film and television projects for about 15 years. These projects covered a diversity of forms - feature films, short features, documentaries, children's shows, and television plays and series. Her last television editing job was as the script and story editor on the first 200 hours of "A Country Practice".

Moya continues to do film editing but now concentrates mainly on writing, which she has done full-time since 1984. Two major projects that she has written are a feature film called "The More Things Change" and, last year, a television series, "Spit McPhee".

We look forward to hearing Moya's talk and hope you can join us at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, 16 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli, on 5 October 1988 at 7.30 pm. Wine, soft drinks and eats will be served at a cost of \$3 if you ring and book by Tuesday 4 October or \$5 if you turn up without booking.

RSVP by telephoning Shirley Jones on (02) 86 3927. Please leave a message on her answering service if she is not in.

A dual personality

At our last meeting at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre we welcomed an old friend and former president of the Society, Ms Jacqueline Kent, and discussed fiction editing, and the pros and cons of having a dual personality: Does a writer make a better editor? Does an editor make a better writer?

Jacqueline introduced the topic by referring to her own experience. While working on her two books she had had to keep the editor in her make-up well out of the way, or her critical faculty might have interfered with her natural ability to write. Her first encounter with our profession from

the other side of the fence was disappointing; *Out of the Bakelite Box* didn't seem to engage the full attention of its editor, and the jokes in the manuscript went all unnoticed along with the errors of syntax. By contrast her experience with the editing of *In the Half Light* had been pretty nice, and Jacqui learnt the pleasure of working with a good editor, one who is genuinely interested in the author's subject, and possesses skill and tact.

A dual personality?

A venerable Sydney book editor once delivered the opinion that "Editors should not write". But Jacqueline risks the opposite generalisation, and considers that a dual personality is no bad thing.

Jacqui believes that editing does not make you a better writer but that writing makes you a better editor. You appreciate just how hard writing is. More important, you are much more conscious of the process and hence are able to spot the places

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where some good editing is needed, or will improve the manuscript.

Nor is some experience of editing entirely wasted on a writer; it makes you aware of the time constraints editors generally labour under, and hence the desirability of combing through the manuscript yourself, before it reaches the publisher. Jacqueline spent only six days on the initial read-through and edit of *Four Novellas* by Michael Wilding, the most recent book she edited for Corgi and Bantam Books, and the entire procedure was finished in three weeks. It should be added, however, that in this case she feels the speed was more a compliment to Michael Wilding's manuscript than the product of exigency.

The good fiction editor

Writing fiction is in a large measure instinctive and intuitive, and editing fiction is partly so. You are very close to the author's mind, you have to get onto the same wavelength. In nonfiction, to a greater or lesser extent, the material is arranged so as to make the meaning emerge clearly. This is not so in fiction, and hence with fiction the editor needs a much more concentrated approach.

In part, editing fiction is a craft skill, and this part can be learnt and can be taught. When you've picked up by gut-feeling that something doesn't work, you must rely on your head to tell you why it doesn't, and devise something that may.

As well as possessing the right instincts and skills, it helps to be well read, and ideally to have tried writing some fiction yourself. That will give you plenty of sympathy for your author.

The reward of the good fiction editor is in lighting upon a good manuscript.

Finding a good manuscript is like finding true love; you don't know what is it, but you recognise it when you have it.

An important development in the USA is that of fiction editors being brought in on projects very early. The editor may be brought in when the book is still at the synopsis stage and work with the author for a couple of years to bring the idea to full fruition. This may be seen as not so much an innovation as a harking back to the great tradition of Maxwell Perkins.

How far can an editor go?

Authors vary a lot in both their ability and their willingness to take direction. The editor cannot force an author to adopt any suggestion, no matter how good - whose book is it, after all? Nor will all writers have the toughness required to carry out the purging advocated in the famous advice, attributed to William Faulkner, to "Murder all your darlings". But by dint of some skillful horse-trading at galley stage, an editor can hope to get rid of some of the worst "Best bits".

Question time

Asked whether she thought the fiction editor should attempt to correct the style of an author, to turn it into "good English", Jacqueline Kent replied that you might correct it to a limited extent. But some authors have a very deliberate style, which you cannot risk tampering with.

You also have to consider the type of book. With genre fiction - the thriller, science fiction, anything that is just "a good read" - you're after clarity and brisk pace. The style doesn't matter, so long as it is consistent.

With literary fiction you look at the style, the treatment and so on, to see if they work, just as you might if you were doing an exercise in literary criticism. But where they are defective, the fiction editor goes beyond the literary critic by suggesting how they can be altered to more effectively achieve the author's purpose.

Josephine Bastian

Why "Blue Pencil"?

I write in response to Josephine Bastian's questions and comments about our newsletter's name. The first part is easy: Devon Mills suggested "Blue Pencil" at a committee meeting in July or August 1987, and the rest of us immediately and enthusiastically accepted it as the new name.

The second part is harder. Despite the frequent use of red and green pencils (and pens) to which Josephine referred, a blue pencil remains the traditional editor's weapon - and not just for censoring pornography. *The Macquarie Dictionary, Concise Oxford, and Webster's* all give much the same definition of both verb and noun. I quote the *Macquarie*: "to alter, abridge, or cancel with... a pencil that makes a blue mark, as in editing manuscript, or in censoring". *Webster's* is slightly more specific about source: "to edit... with a blue pencil; - *originally of printer's copy* [italics mine]".

The *Chicago Manual of Style*, in discussing the colour of pencil or ink to be used in marking a manuscript, cautions: "remember that the traditional *blue* editorial pencil will be lost in many photographic processes".

My final quote is from a recent article in *The Australian Author* by Janette Turner Hospital writing from

Canada. "This past month, the manuscript of my new novel CHARADES was blue-pencilled by my UQP editor and dispatched to me by international courier. (*Blue-pencilled*. Is that expression current in publishing circles in Oz? Or only over here?)"

But none of this answers the real question. Does anyone out there know why the original pencil was blue?

Anne Sahlin

Christmas get together planned

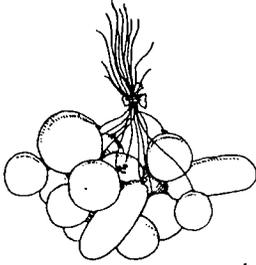
This year it is proposed that the Society of Editors celebrate the festive season with a picnic at Nielsen Park, Vacluse.

At the moment, Sunday 4 December is the suggested date for the picnic. We will probably need to meet around midday to get a reasonable position, preferably one in the shade and not too far from the beach. Blue balloons will be used to mark the spot. Members are invited to bring their friend/partner and/or children, and a picnic.

Among other attractions, Nielsen Park has an enclosed swimming area (in what is unreassuringly known as Shark Bay), barbecue areas, Aboriginal carvings and wonderful harbour views. It is also close to Vacluse House, which is, of course, open to the public and has excellent tea rooms. So if you wanted to you could combine the picnic with some historical sightseeing, or retreat to the tea rooms later to recover from the great outdoors.

As a further incentive, we intend to raffle a book voucher at the picnic. Tickets will be allocated when you book.

Booking details and wet weather procedure will appear in the October *Blue Pencil*.



Desktop publishing demonstration

Eighteen people came to the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre on 13 August to see some of the publishing packages available for IBM (and IBM compatible) and Apple Macintosh computers.

The demonstration provided an overview of the latest packages available for editors and graphic designers and an indication of the range and price of accessories such as scanners and laser printers.

Terry Ryan from Computer Designed Publishing outlined the main features of the Ventura and Pagemaker packages. Ventura, which was developed from a word processing basis, is good for long documents such as books and reports because a chosen typeface style can quickly be applied to a whole publication. Instructions for typographical features - subheads in 12 point Times bold, for example - can be keyed in at the word processing stage.

Pagemaker, a program that was originally designed for Apple Macintosh computers but is now available for IBMs as well, is more suitable as a substitute for a cut and

paste board. So it is ideal for more complex layouts such as those used in advertising.

John Stewart from The Art Machine concentrated on packages that are intended to be used by skilled graphic designers. This meant that many of the editors watching these electronic marvels would probably not be able to use them effectively, but it was fascinating to see just what is possible. These packages are designed to be used on Apple Macintosh computers.

Quark Xpress has many features that are similar to those of Ventura, but is capable of greater precision. For example, it allows the operator to adjust point size and spacing of text to typesetting standard.

Adobe Illustrator was demonstrated on a colour screen so that we could see some of the 256 pantone colour changes that it can reproduce. This system allows for colour choices made on the screen to be stored on disk and sent off for colour separation, thus speeding up production considerably. It also allows those involved in making design decisions to try out alternative colour schemes on screen, which is a lot cheaper than making changes after film has been produced.

Finally we saw how a computer can make a camera lie. Image Studio, a Letraset program used in conjunction with a scanner, can process scanned images so that they appear on the screen as photographic half-tones. These images can then be changed and/or retouched and the information stored on disk for later use.

Whether one was window-shopping or seriously weighing the pros and cons of different systems, it was a very interesting afternoon.

Jill Wilson

Change of style

Readers may have noticed that this issue of *Blue Pencil* has been typeset in Times and Helvetica instead of the usual typeface, Palatino. These changes have been made because I am using a new, in-house laser printer that at present carries only the two typefaces mentioned. I hope you will bear with all these changes; by using this printer I can speed up the production process considerably.

Editor



Contributions Welcome

Send letters, articles, reviews or cartoons about editing and publishing to:

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58 Rickard Street
Five Dock NSW 2046.





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Society of Editors (NSW)

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