

# Inkshed

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Newsletter of the Canadian Association for the Study of Writing and Reading  
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Surrounding us wordy animals there is the infinite wordless universe out of which we have been gradually carving our universe of discourse since the time when our primordial ancestors added to their sensations *words* for sensations. When they could duplicate the taste of an orange by *saying* "the taste of an orange", that's when STORY was born, since words *tell about* sensations. Whereas Nature can do no wrong (whatever it does is Nature) when STORY comes into the world there enters the realm of the true, false, honest, mistaken, the downright lie, the imaginative, the visionary, the sublime, the ridiculous, the eschatological . . . , the satirical, every single detail of every single science or speculation, even every bit of gossip—for although all animals in their way communicate, only our kind of animal can gossip. There was no story before we came, and when we're gone the universe will go on sans story.

Kenneth Burke, Letter to the Editor, *TLS* 12 August 1983: 859.

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5.1. February 1986.

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20 April, for 1 May

5 September, for 15 September  
20 October, for 1 November  
5 December, for 15 December

A primary objective of this newsletter is to intensify relationships among research, theory, and practice relating to language, language acquisition, and language use—mainly (but by no means exclusively) at post-secondary levels. Striving to serve both informative and polemical functions, *Inkshed* publishes news, announcements, notices, reports and reviews (of articles, journals, books, textbooks, conferences, workshops); commentaries, discussions of events, issues, problems, and questions of concern to academics in Canada interested in writing and reading theory and practice.

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## **Inkshed III**

The third Annual Inkshed Working Conference (see page 5 for registration form) will be held at the Manoir du Lac Lucerne, a hotel in the Laurentian Mountains approximately sixty-five miles north of Montreal. A bus to the hotel will leave from McGill on Friday afternoon, May 9th. Details will follow in information packages to registrants.

We encourage all participants to stay at the Manoir, including those from the Montreal area. The Manoir has a reputation for excellent food and, considering its somewhat isolated location, should provide a superb environment for a working conference. In addition, our tentative schedule includes longer breaks during the day and one or more working sessions in the evening.

Finally, we remind those who plan to attend the conference that (1) the "Suggested Readings for Inkshed III" (see *Inkshed* 4.5 and 4.6) can enable participants to come to the conference already well-informed about some of the basic issues to be addressed at the conference; and (2) there will be times set aside during the conference for the reading of student work. This should be presented with some explanation of the context within which it was created.

Patrick Dias and Anthony Paré

## **The Application of the Computer to Writing**

### **Value and Change in Perception**

The great value of the computer to the writing program lies in its capacity to keep fluid the process of writing, while at the same time the process may be fixed at any point for close study. And almost by its very appearance on the scene of writing the computer has put anxiety over surface features of text into its proper place—as an afterward job of cleanup in proofreading text for submission or publication.

### **The Technology of Writing**

The computer represents a profound change in the technology of writing. For writing is a technology, requiring tools and a medium for its efficacy, whether the tool be the finger writing in sand or the electronic beam exciting the phosphorous on the screen. The maturity of the writer is found at the time at which the technology becomes transparent. When the technology does become transparent, however, the user may miss the radical change brought by the new tool. This change is worthy of examination.

The use of the computer in writing is making available for study and analysis much of the activity carried on in writing (and thinking; some writers suggest that writing is a form of thinking). At the same time, what writing is has been profoundly transformed. The writer can now see the text as a landscape susceptible of mapping; the rendering into prose is a layering process, of the writer sketching onto the page the brush strokes of ideas. It is a very forgiving canvas, too, for the writer can shape and colour and shade until the text is certain, then save or print it.

The medium in which it is stored is most ephemeral. We have all learned to make our marks in the sand; and who has never put his initial—against all prohibition—into the

irresistible enticement of wet cement? Contrast the screen of the video display terminal. Here is man's most precious discovery, the written word, tossed lightly across an orange or green page, pulled by a flashing dot, susceptible of the most instantaneous evanescence, the flick of an electric impulse.

We type, and the words appear on the screen. If we dislike them, or need to change them, a few keystrokes suffice. If we wish to keep them, a few more keystrokes, and they are in a little flat square of synthetic material that, it is said, is a magnetic medium. Magic, more like. At least you can see the sidewalk with your initials in it.

### **Expensive But Powerful Tool**

The process of using the computer for writing represents a high state of civilization indeed. It is an expensive tool, compared to a twenty-nine cent pen and a dollar notebook. But a corollary of its expense is its power. The writer is free to suspend the process of writing; in a very small space can be stored hundreds of 'pages' of material (students when they first begin to use the computer as word processor revert to the scroll, for that is how the printer produces text); with certain software the process of writing, manipulating, and presenting text is much advanced, and the process of printing for wide distribution is changed, putting into the hands of the everyday user activities of typesetting and page design that are very sophisticated.

Beyond this of course is the paperless text.

### **Use of the Computer in Three Phases of Writing**

At present, the important uses of computers in the production of text are threefold, approximately corresponding to three stages of the writing process itself: assistance before writing takes place, assistance while writing, and assistance in post-writing. Because the writing process is recursive—that is, the writer moves to any one of these stages as the thinking-writing process develops—this three-stage picture is arbitrary, though it is useful in conceptualising the use of the computer as writing tool.

In the first stage, preparing to write, the writer may call on programs that present a series of questions to be answered to develop a necessary structure suitable to the genre the writer will use. For instance, the apprentice newspaper writer may be asked the 'W' questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why? The program would store the answers for the writer to use or move around as needed. Extensions of this idea are found in outliner programs available for microcomputers and increasingly available as part of larger communications software packages.

Many college researchers have developed software along the lines of the questioning program to assist writers in the initial stages of writing.

Other ways the computer serves the individual in preparing to write include the communications features that connect the small computer to an information collection (called a database) such as InfoGlobe. Used in large businesses for years, these are becoming so cheap that the busy academic writer can afford to make use of them.

Some of these links will connect the writer to larger programs that will assist in the developing writing stage; General Motors and U.S. Bell have for years had in-house programs to assist writers of memos, reports, and other genres, and IBM has described Epistle as a thorough writing guide. It is easy to see that if the idea-generator/sorter/filer is married to a database that instructs in form and style, the writer has been given a powerful assistance.

The most important computer tool for the writer is the word processor, for it is with this tool that the writer can put thoughts into text.

I will leave that paragraph small, for it contains a most important idea.

For the teacher of writing, a difficult task is to bring the student's attention to the page. The word processor can help immensely in this, and its very fluidity, as mentioned above, is its greatest asset. The student no longer must labour with pen and paper, nor suffer cramped fingers from tight thought. (And, too, some evidence suggests that, for writers suffering dyslexia, keyboard use bypasses the nearly impossible translation from one brain sphere to the other which must transpire before text can be drawn by hand.) The computer screen is also what business is using.

Some programs offer a thesaurus at a keystroke, so there is no longer a need to be at a loss for words. Coming soon (in 1986?) will be whole encyclopedias on a compact disc, with a million pages of reference for the writer while one page is being written.

After the writing is finished, computer software helps with proofreading, and can indicate some aspects of style that should be reviewed. Writing with a computer brings its own kind of error of course: the spelling checker finds no anomaly in a phrase like 'no anomaly it a phrase like'.

Many more programs for the computer assist the writer; I think the idea is plain. With all this assistance available commercially and in research elsewhere, the computer has a permanent place in the writing program.

I have not mentioned drill and practice in grammar and spelling. The gains to be made with the uses mentioned above are so great that drill programs have all but disappeared.

### **New Tools Imply Change**

With the broadening and extending use of the computer in the writing program, the teacher of writing has a good deal to do to remain current. But it is this burgeoning of new tools and new programs that make it an exciting time to work in the field.

### **Sources for Further Information**

There are large bibliographies published on the use of the computer in the writing program, notably the work produced out of the University of Minnesota project; see for guidance the essay by Bridwell, Nancarrow, and Ross in *New Directions in Composition Research*, ed. Beach and Bridwell (Guildford, 1984). Schwartz and Bridwell published a bibliography in *College Composition and Communication* (February 1984), but it is a little dated. A continuing bibliography is found in the *Research in Word Processing Newsletter*, published by the South Dakota School of Mines, Rapid City, SD 57701. An excellent text is Colette Daiute's *Computers and Writing* (Addison-Wesley, 1985). There is little directly published in Canada. Richard Collier's work at Mount Royal is still cited (*CCC* May 1983); Randy Smye has outlined in the *English Quarterly* (Summer 1984) the work at Sheridan College; I have summarized the work at Seneca College in *ECOO Output* (June 1985); Tom Decker, a North York high school teacher, is the first editor of the *ACE Newsletter* (ACE is the NCTE subsidiary association, Assembly for Computers in English).

Finally, it is noteworthy that in Ontario alone this year three conferences will directly address the issue of computers in the English curriculum: the Metro-area Colleges (CAATs) will have their third annual (low-key) discussion in February, followed by a larger conference on communications in the colleges at Niagara in June; and OCTE will host a computers and English conference at Queen's faculty of education in February. In addition, the Ottawa COTE/IFTE Conference in May will likely have several sessions on the topic.

Peter Myers  
Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology

## 4 Cs New Orleans—An Announcement & Some Reminders

1. Conferences as large as 4 Cs can be pretty lonely, even intimidating events if you do them all alone; they are greatly improved when you regularly see the friendly and familiar faces of kindred colleagues among the crowds of strangers. Getting together pre-conference to meet a few colleagues from universities and colleges across Canada ought to help us all better achieve a sense of place within that larger community.

So, if you'd like to get together and acquainted with some of those colleagues before the conference's concurrent sessions begin on Thursday morning, join me, my wife, and some other people—Inksheddors all—who will gather Wednesday evening, March 12th, at the Napoleon House (a quiet bar-lounge with classical music on its jukebox, located in the French Quarter at 500 Chartres). From, say, around 8:30? Wear something red.

2. The Canadian Caucus is sponsoring a panel session on "Writing Programs in Canada." Organized and proposed by Nan Johnson (UBC), the session is scheduled for the final day of the main conference program—Saturday, March 15, 11:45am–1:00pm. Hope to see many of you there.
3. The Canadian Caucus session is scheduled for 5:30–6:30pm Thursday, March 13, in the Royale Room of the Hyatt Regency New Orleans. Our major business last year was to support and discuss Nan's idea of the session referred to in item 2. I expect we'll want to talk about possibilities for another such session for 4 Cs 1987; I hope people will come armed with ideas for a topic that session might address.

Jim Reither

## CCTE–FICTE Ottawa (11–16 May 1986)

I've received a copy of the 'Advance Program Summary' for *The Issues That Divide Us: The Fourth Annual Conference on the Teaching of English*. I won't try to summarize the program here, but I will tell you that, as I expected, this conference promises to be the most important professional gathering in several years—perhaps since Dartmouth '66. If you have not received this Advance Program Summary, send for it immediately (Ian Pringle, FICTE, 255 Paterson Hall, Carleton University, Ottawa K1S 5B6). Then, set aside time to attend this conference, and GO.

Come join the conversation and keep the story going. Inkshed.

**Registration Form:**  
**The Social Contexts of Writing and Reading**  
(Inkshed Working Conference III)

*Dates:* Friday evening, May 9 - Sunday afternoon, May ~~10~~<sup>11</sup>, 1986.

*Place:* Manoir do Lac Lucerne, Ste. Marguerite, PQ (approximately 65 miles north of Montreal, in the Laurentians).

*Program:* Approximately 8 *working sessions*, including *Inksheddings*, plus *Social activities of the Third Kind* (details in Registration Packets).

*Registration deadline:* March 15, 1986. Limit 50 (first-come, first-served).

*Fee:* \$50.00 (except graduate students and others without full-time employment, \$25.00); fee includes transportation to and from the Manoir and all materials.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (work) \_\_\_\_\_.

Position \_\_\_\_\_.

Fee enclosed: (\$50.00) \_\_\_\_\_ (\$25.00) \_\_\_\_\_.

Accommodation requested:

Single (\$62.00/day) X \_\_\_\_\_ days = \_\_\_\_\_.

Double (\$50.00/day/person) X \_\_\_\_\_ days = \_\_\_\_\_.

(Accommodation charge includes three meals per day.)

I would like to be assigned a roommate for a double \_\_\_\_\_. Or,

I will be sharing a room with: \_\_\_\_\_.

I will travel to Montreal by car \_\_\_\_\_ plane \_\_\_\_\_ train \_\_\_\_\_ bus \_\_\_\_\_.

I will \_\_\_\_\_ will not \_\_\_\_\_ be attending *Springboards* (Montreal, May 8-9).

I will \_\_\_\_\_ will not \_\_\_\_\_ be attending *CCTE-ICTE* (Ottawa, May 11- ).

Send your completed registration form and your cheque for the registration fee only (accommodation to be paid on arrival) to:

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