Inkshed

Inside Inkshed

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Inexperienced writers frequently offer texts that consist almost entirely of generalizations. Immediately, we demand examples or evidence to support these generalizations. Students resist as long as they can. In part, this resistance occurs because the students have recoiled in terror after seeing just a little into what the writing process may do to the security of their self-identities and their world views. They think they know what they believe, at least they hope they do. We claim that we will make their thoughts and beliefs clearer. They know just how profoundly those thoughts and beliefs are threatened, for they know that once the process of exemplification begins, their ideas have entered the arena of play. Exemplification cannot be completed, only foreclosed. And to them any thought or belief requiring infinite self-presentation is incomplete and therefore unbelievable. If they could stay at the level of pure generalization, they could avoid writing entirely. If they must exemplify their ideas and beliefs, they force those ideas and beliefs into the process of différance, for exemplification is serial, never complete, and always connected to other strands of examples.

> --Jasper Neel, <u>Plato, Derrida, and Writing</u>
> (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), p. 168.

Inkshed

7.4 September 1988

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Inkshed provides a forum for its subscribers to explore relationships among research, theory, and practice in language acquisition and language use. Subscribers are invited to submit informative pieces such as notices, reports, and reviews of articles, journals, books, textbooks, conferences, and workshops, as well as polemical discussions of events, issues, problems, and questions of concern to teachers in Canada interested in writing and reading theory and practice.

Inkshed is published five times during the academic year.
The following is a schedule of submission deadlines and publication dates:

31 December, for 15 January
15 February, for 1 March
15 April, for 1 May

1 September, for 15 September
1 November, for 15 November

INKSHEDDING IN RELIGION STUDIES: UNDERWRITING COLLABORATION

///Thom Parkhill

[Excerpts from] a paper prepared for presentation at the 4Cs,
March 17, 1988, but never given.

Rather than focus on how writing works in a particular Religion Studies course, I'm going to describe a writing technique called "inkshedding"; I'm going to talk about what it is and how students use it.

Inkshedding at its simplest is a process involving anonymous writing, reading, editing in a group context. Most often this process also includes the "publication" -- typing, photocopying, and distributing -- of the edited inksheddings. I've used inkshedding in different incarnations and with different names (free-writing, brainstorming-on-paper) since 1980. Sometime in the early eighties Jim Reither resurrected the name "inkshedding" to describe the process I will be talking about. Shortly thereafter, about December 1983, a newsletter devoted to reading and writing teaching and research with a name that could not be whistled in the dark was renamed *Inkshed*. This past academic year I've used inkshedding in five different courses: a full-year, first-year, 50-student introductory course, and four half-year, smaller, upper level introductory courses.

. . .

When it's time to inkshed, I ask students to take a piece of paper and something to write with. I ask them to write without their usual regard for spelling or grammatical structures. Their writing, I tell them, will be read by their class colleagues, so it should be legible. What do I ask them to write about? I'll be describing some of the foci in this presentation. To give you an idea, though -- for the first inkshedding in a course I have been asking those attending the class to respond to the "course outline," a detailed description of the course which they've just had the opportunity to read.

At first, I find it useful to set out a few ground rules: (i) keep writing, keep pen/pencil to paper and keep writing (ii) if you get stuck for something to write, write one word over and over (I often suggest the word "go" or some word connected to the focus of the inkshedding) (iii) I tell them how long they will be writing (usually 10 - 15 minutes); I tell them that in that time they might easily write a page. [In fact, I attend to the writing-mood of the class and time the writing accordingly. It usually does work out to between 10 and 15 minutes] (iv) I ask them not to sign their inksheddings.

When time's up, I ask them to stop, even in mid-sentence, and to pass their papers to the front. Without looking at them, I pass the inksheddings back out, asking only that if they receive their own to give it back to me. As they begin reading, my instructions are to make a

vertical line in the margin when they are struck by something; when
something they read jumps out at them, or startles them; when they agree
with something, or disagree with it. If they find themselves arrested at a
passage already marked, they should, I suggest, mark it again with another
line. Then, if I have inkshed, I settle down to read, or, if I have not, I
wait for signs that readers are finished the shedding they are working on.
Then I facilitate the swapping of inksheddings, trying to make sure
everyone gets a chance to read and respond to at least four or five
different writings. Occasionally the reading and marking goes on for some
time. After a class has done a couple of inksheddings and its members are
comfortable with each other, I find I can streamline the instructions.
I'll also mention "graffiti" as an editing option. That usually results in
marginalia sometimes more valuable than the original inkshedding.

When the reading and marking is finished, I collect the writings.
Later I will read them over, marking for keyboarding those passages which
received the most intense marking (or the most creative graffiti). I
censor only the harshest unhelpful graffiti. Once printed out and
duplicated, I distribute them, most often at the beginning of a class while
the usual class start-up business is going on. I never have to suggest
that they take the time to read them. I simply pass them out, and give
them some time. Everyone reads. It's the only written material I hand out
that I can be sure will be read.

Sometimes an inkshedding will be task-oriented or will lead to a
renewed sense of task. Sometimes one inkshedding will be the occasion for
another, that is the inkshedding process can fold in upon itself [Russ
Hunt]. Sometimes the inkshedding process will apparently "end" with the
reading of the "published" version. In fact, there are all kinds of things
which flow even from this latter type of inkshedding.

When an inkshedding is obviously task-oriented, both I and the class
are on familiar ground. Here's an example of what I mean:

At Christmas as part of the mid-course evaluations in the full-year
course with 50 students in it, I conducted "peer evaluations." The
evaluation form had one question on it: "What did you learn from _____?"
Class members' names were provided. I asked them to return the form in a
week's time. Only half the class did.

This resulted in some complaints about the peer evaluations, and I
realized that the system which had evolved in smaller classes was not
appropriate in the larger class. Thus, early in the second term I
conducted an inkshedding, -- tell your class colleagues what's wrong with
the peer evaluations; what should they look like?, I asked. There were 25
separate entries on the published version, running to six single-spaced
pages. The graffiti were extensive. On the published version I included a
covering letter explaining that while criticism of the present system was
vast, there was no consensus as to what might be done about measuring
fairly an individual's participation in the work of the groups. I
solicited proposals, received nine, photocopied them and put the matter to
a vote. The clearest, best argued proposal won hands down. In a matter of
a week or so we'd worked from the inkshedding to a new peer evaluation form
and procedure. I have no idea if the new system will work any better, but

it doesn't matter. Significant learnings around the issue of peer evaluation have already gone on. In that learning process, inkshedding helped the class find its own (written) voice (and know its own power) on an issue that most of them saw as important.

. . .

Here is an example of inkshedding reflecting on inkshedding from this past fall term. I asked the large class to reread the first two class inksheddings which were on videos they had seen. From some of their responses it became clear that some students were aware of and worried about the diversity of opinion in the class. One wrote:

> I think its interesting to see that we have points of view from the class that go from one extreme to another. Some think its ridiculous while others would even join the zazen religion [Zen Buddhism] if they could. If this keeps happening all year I'm sure we're bound to learn a lot but we'll have to keep an objective mind or all hell could break loose. [RS 100 #3]

This led me to conduct an inkshedding on commonalities and dissimilarities among the first three inksheddings. The result was the first inkshedding in this class with extensive graffiti.

What began as writing to one another about these concerns, concerns about what in Religion Studies is called "methodology", culminated in a class-wide debate on the best stance to take vis-à-vis "other" religions. The result was, remarkably, a consensus that walked a fine line between legitimating curious criticism on one hand and guaranteeing respect of others' religious visions on the other. This consensus took written form in a number of points in the class' Learning Group Covenant [but that's another paper].

There are times when the inkshedding process apparently dead ends with the students reading a published version as a class begins; the writing process seems not to lead to any tasks. Still, there are at least two significant things that flow even, or perhaps especially, from this type of inksheddings. I'm referring to the control and the coherence of the learning group. The first is something I try to give up; the second something I strive for. Inkshedding plays a role in both attempts.

Beginning with inkshedding on "images" -- images of hunting and healing, images of "the Indian" -- is a way of sharing and examining presuppositions. Sharing presuppositions can help build trust in the learning group; examining presuppositions, which happens as a result of the publishing (and reading) stage, grounds the intellectual shift which I see at the core of academic learning. Here are parts of two inksheddings from a class that included Micmac, Maliseet and nonnative students:

> Indian -- the word itself brings to mind the Image of a Hollywood movie. The Indian being portrayed on Screen, the bad guys, almost always losing the battles to the settlers or the soldiers in blue.
> . . .

> ... what really makes me mad at myself is the images I have popping up every now and and again about the Indian and the cowboys....I am upset because the imagery has still not left my mind. [RS 2-358, #1]

I think of these first inksheddings on "images" -- presuppositions -- as a way for a class to take its own pulse. This helps them cohere as a group, to do what the groupologists call maintaining the group. [Johnson and Johnson, *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*, pp. 8ff.]

After a common experience -- usually a film or video, but possibly a field trip to the synagogue or other religious place -- I ask students to inkshed by way of response. Because I believe that inkshedding is a kind of thinkingly-writing or writingly-thinking [Al Mason?], it is a useful way to encourage reflection on shared experiences like films. Since I am showing these films with the intention that learners begin to identify the direction of their learning, the inksheddings are doubly valuable, generating a context for reflection and a shared record that can be consulted later for hints about the direction for further investigation. This example comes from an inkshedding from a student in a course focusing on the religious dimension of hunting and healing in nonliterate traditions. The film, *Magical Death*, is about the Yanamamo:

> I noticed when the shaman takes the "sickness" out of a person's body, he brings it up towards the top of the head, then out. This seems like a symbol to me that that's where the sickness originates in the head. I wonder how those people feel about people filming them. For that matter, I wonder how they feel about all kinds of people coming in to watch and record what they do. (Inkshedding #3)

I think that as the class members read these inksheddings based on shared experiences, they get some sense for who they are as a group, and in what direction they are taking the class.

. . .

Using inkshedding is not for everyone. Of my colleagues on the panel [Jim Reither, Russ Hunt, Doug Vipond], I probably use inkshedding the most. It suits my teaching methodology, my learning/teaching objectives, and my teaching persona. I use it to get certain tasks accomplished, to offer a context for reflection, and to shift control to students while promoting learning group coherence. I use it most importantly to provide a learning context in which students *experience* -- engage in -- writing for each other and reading each other's writing on matters they care about. In my experience as a teacher, that's a lot.

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HOW IT WORKS: A GROUP-AUTHORED ASSIGNMENT   /// Anthony Paré

I use the following assignment in a writing course with first, second, and third year electrical and mechanical engineering students. My colleagues and I use adaptations of the assignment with students in other disciplines as well. For our students, many of whom speak English as a second language, our course is often the first writing instruction they have received in a few years and the last they are likely to get before on-the-job training.

The original impetus for designing the assignment came from three sources. First, much of the current research on writing in nonacademic settings describes a wide variety of collaboration in the preparation of documents. That collaboration takes many forms, including individually authored sections combined into a single document, single authored documents resulting from repeated writer-supervisor or writer-peer conferencing, and actual group composition of single documents. Since my students were likely to find themselves in one or more of those collaborative relationships after (and before) graduation, it seemed appropriate to give them some experience.

Second, a considerable amount of research on small group work over the past 25 years has indicated that the multiple perspectives and abilities of a group produce many opportunities for learning and effective, efficient completion of tasks. Finally, I was interested in what my students would say and do in order to complete the assignment. I wanted to know how much they already knew about writing. Consequently, I gave this as the semester's first assignment (and still do), before the students had received the wisdom of my instruction. The exact wording of the assignment is as follows (more topics are listed on the actual assignment):

> Mr. Dedeke, a science teacher at FACE High School, has asked asked us to prepare some materials for his Secondary I (grade seven) science students. He is particularly interested in brief explanations of certain relatively simple mechanical and electrical devices.
> Mr. Dedeke will be using the information we provide to teach his students. Although he may supplement what we give him with material of his own, it is best to assume that the information you supply will be all that these 12-14 year old students receive on the topic you choose. After we have submitted the papers to Mr. Dedeke, we will receive plenty of feedback, in person and in writing.
> You will be working in groups of four to complete this task. Much of the work will be done in class. How your group cooperates on the writing of this paper is up to you; however, remember it is a group project.
> The following is a list of topics Mr. Dedeke has suggested. If you wish to write about something which is not on the list, check with me first.

-lightbulb	-x-ray machine	-hydraulic cylinder
-flashlight	-neon light	-block and tackle
-thermostat	-battery	-universal joint

The situation described is real. Ted Dedeke is an actual (an excellent) teacher and he does use the papers with his students. My own students receive feedback, both written and oral, from Ted and his class.

What happens? Well, first, my students display a much greater knowledge of and facility with writing than I, or my pedagogy, had given them credit for. The communicative reality of the task causes them to draw on impressive linguistic and rhetorical abilities. And the demands of group work force them to be explicit and to extend themselves. They argue, defend, explain, agree, share, and debate. They must constantly and publicly struggle with all aspects of the rhetorical situation. They brainstorm, set goals, talk about possible formats and structures, and consider their readers. The following is an excerpt from one group's discussions, taperecorded during my initial use of the assignment. They have chosen to write about the x-ray machine; in the excerpt they are considering possible approaches to the topic.

Sidney: How do we...we start at the macro level and go to the micro or...I think macro to micro is better.

Alice: Well, I think so too. Like, if you start with what happens when the technician flicks the switch and so you sort of go into a journey like inside the machine.

Sidney: Exactly.

Alice: And then it emits something - the particles, whatever - it goes to the person and you get the picture.

Andrew: Well, you can do it from that approach and then say, all right, well, how does this work? And then describe...describe sort of the microscopic properties.

Bernard: ...and the physical principles underlying...

Andrew: Because that might sort of catch their interest to begin with, you know, this interest in the application of it and then back to the slightly more dull sort of basic topics, which we all have to study.

Using their own terms, these students are discussing the advantages of moving from general ("macro") to specific ("micro"). The transcript of their discussions is filled with other examples of their surprisingly sophisticated rhetorical knowledge. When teachers began to realize that students displayed, in use, the knowledge of language which grammar instruction was intended to give them, the teaching of grammar fell into disrepute. How much of what we teach about rhetoric and the writing process is similarly redundant?

A major advantage of the assignment, predicted by research in small group work, is the amount of instruction, both about the chosen topic and about writing, which occurs in the group. Consider this exchange:

Alice: What's this? What tungsten is. I'm sure they know what tungsten is.

Bernard: No, no. We know, kids don't.

Sidney: No way they know it. Just say a material called tungsten.

Alice: A very fine wire. I'll just say a very fine wire similar to the wire or filament you see in a lightbulb. That should make it clear.

Sidney: Okay, very clear.

The students pool their knowledge and abilities. The creative and voluble but disorganized student is balanced by the quiet but more logical student concerned with sequence and form. The student whose explanations are too abstract and technical is reined in by the group member with a fourteen-year old sister. And, unlike most peer-editing conferences, in which the editor has no vested interest, students working on this assignment show a high degree of commitment in responding to the work of their colleagues. After all, their names must go on the paper too. In my experience, the finished group paper is better (more correct, accurate, and interesting) than it would be for the majority of individual students.

The emerging perspective on writing as a social act challenges much current theory and practice. Pedagogies resulting from variations on the process theory of writing continue to treat composition as the endeavour of a solitary individual. Invention is taught as self-discovery, the creative and/or cognitive exercise of a single person outside of a social context. This misrepresents to students the actual ways in which writing often occurs and robs them of the value of interaction. Given authentic readers and reasons to write and the rich dynamics of collaboration, students can produce something better than the tired term paper we so often lament.

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TWO ECCENTRIC MANUALS FOR WRITERS   /// Eileen Conway

UELAND, BRENDA. If You Want to Write: A Book about Art, Independence and Spirit. (1938) 2nd ed. Graywolf Press: St. Paul, Minnesota, 1987.

BROWN, RITA MAE. Starting from Scratch: A Different Kind of Writer's Manual. Bantam: New York, 1988.

--"A writer's life is not designed to reassure your mother." (Brown, 25)

--"What flying from it! what boredom! what drinks of water! telephoning and other evasions!" (Ueland, 49)

When I first shook the plastic popcorn off these two "different" writers' manuals, their simultaneous arrival and the tidy fifty-year gap

between their original publication dates suggested that comparison might be easy. But once the superficial labels have been paired--both authors are professional writers, both take an anti-academic stance, both are explicitly or implicitly feminist, both "sassy" (or advertised as such by their publishers)--the process of comparison temporarily runs dry. Both writers scout convention so effectually, and the scope and organization of their books are so deliberately erratic, that only the evergreen freshman solecism seems to apply to them: "These books are both different from each other." What emerges from rereading both, however, is a perception of vagrant trains of thought continually passing through the same junctions--less whimsicallly, two highly individual voices in antiphony and, sometimes, harmony, although seldom in unison. The nodes of concern that appear and reappear in the two books suggest not only the basis of a new pedagogy, but also the real value of these books to instructors and students.

In spite of both authors' emphasis on creative or "imaginatve" writing (Brown is downright rude about non-fiction), there are incidental bonuses here for even the teacher of expository writing. Besides the copious quotations Ueland uses to cajole and encourage the timid into self-expression, her handling of pre-writing processes (which she calls creative idleness or "moodling") and of journal writing (ideally "slovenly, headlong, impulsive, honest") is sensitive; her transcription of the conversation with her young niece that facilitated a theme on Thoreau repays study by any instructor wishing to refine her technique for interviewing students about their papers. As befits a Ph.D., although she claims "it hasn't done me a bit of good," Brown devotes more attention than Ueland does to the technical aspects of "The Work" (the title of the third section of her book, after autobiographical "Me" and hortatory "You"): vocabulary, especially verbs; the passive voice, about which she is very funny although slightly paranoid; the subjunctive; character development; dialogue; and plot. The section concludes with "Exercises": some are excellent fifteen-minute class-openers; others, like her advice to write letters whenever possible, are wider in scope. All, as she says, are designed to help students "climb down off Mount Rushmore and frolic a bit." The last two parts of the book are "A Literary Conservatory," the outline of study of a four-year program in creative writing; and "An Annotated Reading List" of what Brown considers the most crucial works in English and American literature from Caedmon to Alice Walker.

Where the contrast in style between the two writers is most marked, neither appears to advantage. In fact, Ueland and Brown, especially when read in large doses, come to sound like parodies of themselves, Awful Warnings of two classroom personality types, the hard-boiled (Brown: "Actually, I don't talk about my work to anyone. Put up or shut up.") and the half-baked ("I am blessed with a fascinated, inexhaustible interest in all my pupils"--Ueland). These mannerisms tend to obscure the content: Ueland sounds harmless until we catch her murmuring that "Menial work at the expense of all true, ardent, creative work is a sin against the Holy Ghost"; Brown seems comparatively uninterested in her students as long as she holds her reader/student at arm's length with rapid-fire wise-cracks, but in her final paragraphs she says, "I wish we were gathered among other working writers to read together....I will miss the discussions we aren't having."

Because neither writer tries to tell the writing student everything she needs to know, and neither has bothered to try to replace more conventional handbooks, both Ueland and Brown have freed themselves to write not only as they please, but solely about what they think is important. The apparent difference in tone between the two books can temporarily obscure the frequency with which they agree on what is important. Although I have no evidence that they ever met, Brown sounds, at times, like one of Ueland's students putting her precepts into action. "Work freely and rollickingly," says Ueland. "I've always wanted to write that sentence and now I have," says Brown. Ueland advises, "Mentally (at least three or four times a day) thumb your nose at all know-it-alls, jeerers, critics, doubters." "I am an equal opportunity offender," says Brown.

More seriously, both authors come back over and over again to two truths about writing. The first is that writing is a physical process carried out by embodied, flesh-and-blood beings. Both write freshly and candidly about the bodily experience of thinking and writing. Brown describes the pleasure of handling a favourite fountain pen or manipulating a familiar typewriter, recommends sufficient sleep and exercise, warns of the unwisdom of starting a writing project and a diet simultaneously. (Typically, she then digresses to give us her own sure-fire diet advice.) Ueland seems less muscular until we encounter her recommendation of a good five- or six-mile walk as a way of toning up the mind and working off the fidgets (her publisher reveals that Ueland set swimming records in her 80s). Not surprisingly, neither Ueland nor Brown equivocates about chemical sources of "solace and inspiration" for writers. Overeating, coffee, tobacco, alcohol, cocaine and "designer drugs": all delude and stupefy the writer in the short run and will eventually kill.

Similarly, both acknowledge the difficulty of writing while living among other people. "What a writer looks for in a relationship," says Brown, "is peace." Having explained why she decided against having children, she launches into a characteristic digression on all the things a writer can learn from observing children. Ueland advises the typical "worn and hectored mothers" in her YWCA writing classes to "shut your door against the children for an hour a day and say: 'Mother is working on her five-act tragedy in blank verse!'"

Not surprisingly, both writers see a healthy commitment to writing as reciprocally beneficial to personal, familial, and social health. For Brown, "writers are the moral purifiers of the culture": Ueland expresses the millennial hope that a nation of writers will "all talk to each other in our writing...like free men and brothers, and like the people in paradise." In the meantime, "we will have in one generation the most remarkable and glorious children," as well, presumably as a large number of five-act blank-verse tragedies. Both writers, ultimately, base their exhortations on the premise, and promise, that writing makes the writer happy; Ueland talks about "exaltation," Brown about "rapture," in spite of all the frustrations, boredom, discouragement, and blank despair encountered along the way.

Their books, finally, are worth their place on the student's and instructor's shelf not as references for everyday consultation (neither has an index, for example), but as sources of impetus at the beginning of a project, as collections of maxims, aphorisms--and some memorable jokes--which may detonate what Ueland calls "a little, silent bomb of revelation" in the mind.

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REVIEW: *PLATO, DERRIDA, AND WRITING*   /// Brian Turner

JASPER NEEL, Plato, Derrida, and Writing (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988)

Jasper Neel's Plato, Derrida, and Writing is every bit as ambitious as its title suggests. Indeed, as the author himself tells us, its purpose is nothing less than "to clear a space in which composition studies can be liberated from philosophy" and a new rhetoric established. Given such a grand claim, the book is bound to provoke some criticism for delivering less than it promises. Nevertheless, what Neel does deliver is impressive, and particularly useful for anyone seeking new theoretical foundations for teaching writing and rhetoric.

The bulk of Neel's discussion is an analysis of Plato and Derrida. In a deconstruction of Phaedrus, Plato's attack on the written work, Neel argues from historical and textual evidence that we must question both the substance and purpose of Plato's critique. How are we to interpret this written text which claims speech is the better vehicle for truth, which condemns the very medium on whose existence it depends? According to Neel, as a deceitful and illogical -- albeit shrewd -- maneuver: by foisting off fabricated dialogues as real historic events, Plato blinds us to the real nature of his text's being, conceals the contradiction between the form and substance of Phaedrus, and thus with impunity renders suspect any written attacks on his own written critique. Plato, in short, is trying by sleight of hand to have the last (written!) word, and Neel won't have it.

Yet Neel is criticizing not only antiquated views of language, thought, and truth; he also cautions us against contemporary, extreme alternatives. If Plato's demotion of writing is flawed, so too is Derrida's valorization, his claim that writing is preeminent, that our only truths are those we write into existence. In fact, such a view is in some ways as damaging as Plato's, at least as far as writers are concerned: whereas the student of Plato's or like views may find himself exasperated by the philosophical quest for the perfect expression of some pre-existing Truth ("a quest that will never produce any inscription at all, a quest that requires writers

constantly to admit abashedly that they do not know the truth"), the student of Derrida will find herself committed to the philosophical task of deconstructing other discourses, "obligated always to work backwards in order to show that what would be required to begin a discourse is already gone." One seeks Truth; the other exposes claims to Truth: both are consumed by philosophy. As Melville put it in his study of the quest for Ultimate Answers, "How many think ye have fallen likewise into Plato's honey head, and sweetly perished there?" Neel might add, watch out for Derrida, too.

Once he has warned us of Plato and Derrida, Neel then briefly articulates the principles of a rhetoric less subservient to philosophy, a rhetoric incorporating only the best of these two overpowering commentators on writing. Such a rhetoric was in fact anticipated by the sophists Protagoras and Gorgias. They may not have agreed with Plato that truth exists, but like Plato these sophists did believe that humans can not, in any case, know it. Unlike Plato, however, Protagoras and Gorgias argued that this very unknowability of truth compels us not to reject half-truths but to accept that which is most probable. This rhetoric of probabilities also sets the sophists apart from Derrida; though the goal of finding the best available truth can be aided by deconstruction, the sophists would argue that writers and readers can accept an argument as probable even though its premises, once exposed, prove uncertain. The purpose of rhetoric, says Neel, is not to claim truth but to "make the better choice prevail." Plato's notion that we seek the truth -- restrained by Derridean deconstruction of discourses that reductively claim truth -- and Derrida's notion that we write truth into existence -- counteracted by a willingness to assent to uncertain but unlikely arguments: these together will help fulfill the purpose of Neel's new, or rather, updated rhetoric.

Plato, Derrida, and Writing is not without flaws. For instance, what Neel himself calls "the long struggle" with Plato and Derrida is needlessly long; and a more extended treatment of the sophists -- who are, after all, the real heroes of Neel's theory -- seems called for. Moreover, Neel's prefatory claim that he will "expose the rules" of his own text "at every point" seems remarkably ingenuous, especially in a study clearly indebted to Derrida and deconstruction. Yet for all its flaws, the book deserves attention. Neel's arguments, particularly in the historical analysis of Phaedrus, are at times very convincing. And what is most likely to be appreciated, at least by the writing teachers in Neel's audience, is the way in which Neel descends from the plane of abstract generalization to offer concrete examples from and practical considerations for writing classes. When he describes student writers struggling with the "disease" of Platonic certainty (often tacitly forced on them by unwitting teachers), when he sympathizes with students who fear the teacher as deconstructionist, Neel reminds us that his abstruse discussion has important ramifications in the classroom. It is at such times that Neel's book is most appealing, and his experience most in evidence.

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CCTE PUBLIC DOUBLESPEAK COMMISSION AWARDS   /// Rick Coe

The winner of the 1987-88 Public Doublespeak Award, announced at the CCTE Conference in St. John's, is Canada Post.

Canada Post first came to our attention as a public doublespeaker when they said they were going to "streamline and enhance" mail collection in Vancouver -- which turned out to mean that they intended to save money by removing about a fifth of Vancouver's mail boxes and reduce the number of collections per day from the remaining boxes. But they became a serious contender when, some time after removing the mailboxes, they took out a full-page ad in the <u>Vancouver Sun</u> to announce, among other things, "More places to...post your mail."

Canada Post representatives have also made statements like, "We are not closing post offices -- we are replacing them with something better" -- presumably the "supermailboxes." Calling something a "supermaibox" begs the question of whether people who must use such lockboxes instead of receiving home delivery will consider the boxes "super." When a post office is closed and replaced by a stamp counter or substation, it is doublespeak to claim the post office has not really been closed.

The Canadian Plain English Award went to Cy Whitely of the Law Reform commission for singlehandedly revising over a thousand government forms and documents from 39 departments and agencies so that they are understandable by ordinary people.

Department of English
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Editorial Inkshedding   /// Kay Stewart

The Inkshed Conference in St. John's, Newfoundland, was as stimulating and exhausting as ever. Presentations raised thorny questions about and provided a variety of perspectives on the conference theme of Values and Evaluation. Since the majority of newsletter subscribers were not at the conference, I would like to invite participants to send me your reflections on individual sessions or the conference as a whole for the next issue. Deadline: **November 1**. Many thanks again to Phyllis Artiss and her assistants, Jacqueline Howse, Katherine McManus, and Judy Snow, for their hard work and hospitality.

*   *   *

One Inkshedder mentioned recently that he would not like to see the Special Issues of the newsletter replace commentary and dialogue. Neither

would I. Please continue to send in your quibbles with, further thoughts on, and enthusiastic praise for pieces as they appear. 'If you don't have time for a full-scale response, write a brief one (there's always an awkward half-page to fill). With the leeway afforded by the higher subscription price, I hope never again to be in the position of having to hold material for a later issue.

With that said, let me remind you of forthcoming Special Issues:

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON READING AND WRITING   Deadline: November 1

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS   Deadline: December 31

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SEVEN TENURABLE POSITIONS

The Department of English, University of Alberta, invites applications for seven tenurable positions at the Assistant Professor level, effective July 1, 1989. The salary at the floor of Assistant Professor in 1988-89 was $33,144. Availability of the positions is subject to budgetary approval. Applicants should have a completed Ph.D. or be close to finishing it by the time of appointment; teaching experience and publications are preferred. For one of the positions, the Department wants to hire a specialist in rhetoric and composition. For the other six positions, candidates from all fields of English, Canadian, American, and Commonwealth language and literature will be considered. Candidates should ask three referees to send letters directly to

Dr. Linda Woodbridge, Chair
Department of English
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2E5

Candidates should also send to the Chair a letter of application, a complete curriculum vitae, and the names of the referees, and arrange for the Chair to receive graduate and undergraduate transcripts. Deadline for applications is October 15, 1988. Only complete applications received by the deadline will be considered; candidates are responsible for ensuring that transcripts and letters of reference are received by the Department. All applications will be given serious consideration, but the Department is particularly eager to increase its proportion of women and minority groups. The University of Alberta is committed to the principle of equity in employment, but, in accordance with Canadian Immigration requirements, this advertisement is directed to Canadian citizens and permanent residents; citizenship or residence status should be indicated in the application.

Call for Proposals

Inkshed VI

Power, Politics and Pedagogy

15-17 May, 1989
Vancouver, BC

During Inkshed V discussions grew about how relationships of power and empowerment shape and are shaped by the development of reading and writing abilities. Inkshed VI will explore this question on all levels from student-teacher relationships in individual classrooms to the politics of curriculum development, from the power implications of particular pedagogies and curricula to broad issues of ideology. We will also, as always, explore innovative pedagogies and research about reading and writing Inkshedders are now doing.

We will welcome presentations that involve participants actively and constructively, texts-in-process as well as publishable papers. We will welcome talks that present contexts for researching the interrelationships of power, politics and pedagogy; what are the crucial problems, questions, issues? what should researchers be looking for, and looking at? where and how should they be looking?

We seek presentations of varying length and format, from 10-minute informal reports on current research and interesting pedagogy, to 20-minute papers or formal talks, to 45-minute workshops or interactive demonstrations. Beyond the 10-minute reports on current research and pedagogy, all proposals should have some explicit relation to the 1989 theme.

Proposals should include name, address, phone numbers; title of proposed session, and a brief description or abstract (at least 200 words), very brief description of method and statement of aim or purpose.

Deadline: 2 December 1988
Send Proposals to:

Rick Coe, Anne Hungerford, Susan Stevenson
English Department
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, BC   V5A 1S6

[N.B., Door prizes may--or may not--be awarded to Inkshedders who idenfity the plagiarisms in this call.]