Inkshed

Inside Inkshed

If I understand what it means to seek democracy through language, we are
required to discover consensus, at least policy, without obliterating
our own identity. As English teachers we live among dialects, so it
falls upon us to help people be comfortable with the differences
dialects imply. The goal is not to homogenize our people, but to enable
our young both to know their own commitments and to enjoy the lives of
others. --Richard Lloyd-Jones, "Dialects and Social Grouping," paper
delivered at The Creating Word Conference, Edmonton, October 30, 1987.

Inkshed

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University of Alberta

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A primary objective of this newsletter is to explore relationships among research, theory, and practice in language acquisition and language use. Inkshed publishes informative pieces such as notices, reports and reviews of articles, journals, books, textbooks, conferences, and workshops; it also publishes polemical discussions of events, issues, problems, and questions of concern to teachers in Canada interested in writing and reading theory and practice.

Send enquiries, materials, and subscriptions to

Kay L. Stewart
Editor, Inkshed
Department of English
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB   T6G 2E5

A THIRD VOICE   /// Neil Besner

I want to engage the voices in the "Reading for Two Voices" excerpt in the last issue of *Inkshed* (6.4: 3-5). I recognize that we're only getting an excerpt, and so I may be understanding these remarks out of context, or in wrong contexts; but for several reasons the excerpt irritates me each time I read it.

To start at the top: the two voices, evidently, have two different conceptions of their topics and are speaking to two different audiences, and the description of these subjects and audiences in the opening paragraph makes me uneasy. The English teacher who is considering whether or not to send her students to the Writing Centre is asking herself and her audience a question--"wondering"--which carries along with it an assumption, since she is speaking, or asking, *first*, that someone else will answer, unless she is asking a purely rhetorical question that she will answer for herself. But since she is a speaker (rather than a writer) and since this is meant to be a dialogue (although I think it is not), we anticipate that she will be answered, as she is, by the tutor. Advantage tutor.

As far as audience is concerned, this first speaker seems to be speaking to no-one, or everyone, or herself, or to thin air, as I read the first paragraph; and yet we are currently very aware of what a sense of audience should mean for a writer or speaker. The Writing Centre Tutor, in contrast, has a much clearer sense of her subject, her purpose, and her audience: it is to explain the "process of composition as it occurs in the Writing Centre to an English Department session on pedagogy." Advantage tutor. I realize that I may be misreading or misunderstanding the audiences implied in this opening paragraph; maybe *both* speakers are meant to be addressing this session of the English Department. But it is not just my heated imagination that reads the order of presentation or the definition of subject and purpose.

Next, the teacher's voice. It does no one any good--not "teachers" as a group, not "tutors" as another, not English departments, the audience for *Inkshed*, or wider audiences beyond these groups--to vilify "TEACHER" by having her voice the battle-cry of a pedagogy long since discredited. I don't believe that there is anything like a substantial group of teachers who give "more and more assignments during class time, in defence against plagiarism. . . ." Those who do adopt this practice can and should be discouraged from doing so. My objection here is that to open the teacher's speculations with this observation is to impute transparently shallow pedagogies to teachers who have doubts or concerns about what goes on in Writing Centres. There may be *other* concerns about Writing Centres, more legitimate others; and there may be *other* ways to imagine this dialogue--more productive ones. It's difficult to take the "teacher" in this dialogue very seriously after her opening observation. Advantage tutor.

The second paragraph of transcribed "teacher's voice" is not much better. "The students who are good writers, are good writers" represents another line of "thinking" about writing and teaching writing that is outdated, to say the least. And to then draw a distinction between "truly good and deserving students" and the others introduces a pious and moralizing tone into this plaint that can only further discredit the "teacher's" speculations, before the tutor has said a word. The same goes for the rest of the second paragraph. The imagined "teacher" is mouthing cliche upon platitude upon shibboleth. And we all know this to be the case. Advantage tutor.

The next paragraph, in which the teacher "argues" about the merits of practising writing in-class to prepare for examinations, alas, has a faint ring of truth to it. I confess that I have suggested this to my own students at times; and colleague of mine suggested it to me a few weeks ago as a justification for our department's practice of including a compulsory in-class assignment, weighted with enough value to make it serious, in all our first-year literature courses (although, curiously enough, the requirement does not hold for first-year *writing* courses. . .). But the teacher's closing exhortation about standards and excellence and erosion of standards is the last straw, and the last straw dog. To characterize "Teacher" in these ways is to caricature, and to caricature is at the least suspect. There are more interesting questions for teachers to voice about the best functions for Writing Centres. There are more substantial pedagogical issues to be discussed in this dialogue.

On to the tutor's responses. At the risk of repeating myself, it's important to recognize that by having the tutor *respond*, and respond, furthermore, to a set of such shallow assertions, this dialogue has effectively condemned the teacher before the tutor even begins. And because the tutor responds to what is not much more than glib and pious fol-de-rol, the tutor, too, is forced to argue in less than effective ways.

I'll leave alone the tutor's two opening assertions, partly because I basically believe them, partly because I'm so irritated by the paragraph's closing sentence. If the teacher in this dialogue is a pious moralizer, the tutor, evidently, is a pious behaviourist, a scientist who "must maintain an encouraging positive tone. . . ." "Positive"? She must also "scrupulously avoid" her tendency to criticize or correct, a tendency she must recognize. Well, okay; but first, I'm not sure that anyone, no matter how scrupulous, can avoid this tendency, in Writing Centres on in the classroom; and second, I wonder about the meaning of "criticize" here. Why shouldn't tutors (or teachers, or critics) criticize? Isn't it rather the way we criticize that should be at issue? Isn't that, in part, why the tutor in this dialogue talks about "an encouraging positive tone"?

And what might be the effect of having the *Tutor* quote from an article in a learned journal? As we all know, this is called "invoking authority" in texts about argumentation and propaganda. We all do it in discussion and in scholarly writing, sure. My point here is that we cannot help but contrast the tutor's response with the teacher's remarks. The tutor knows the research; the teacher knows what she thinks, by god, and that's that. The tutor thinks about "real learning"; the teacher prattles about standards and examinations and deserving good students. The tutor articulates a detailed justification for revision; the teacher frets about plagiarism.

The report on the excerpt begins to close by observing that the co-authors "point out the dangers to students of 'being tugged one way or the other,' and the real advantages of establishing a useful dialogue between the Writing Centre tutors and the members of the English department." Amen. My irritation with the excerpt stems from my sense that the kind of exchange (it's never clear whether it *is* really an exchange at all; it might be read more like polemic from both sides) imagined in it does *not* encourage dialogue. It polarizes groups into camps.

Towards the end of the excerpt, the excerpter reports that the presenters "recommend that Writing Centres maintain a high profile, encouraging English teachers to visit the Centre . . . [so that] teachers can discover how tutors work without being lectured to." I couldn't agree more strongly. And yet the tutor in this exchange _does_ lecture, in her own way; and it might be that the very "teachers" represented by the teacher's voice in this excerpt would find the tutor's responses patronizing. And that would be unfortunate, because it's unnecessary. I'm not suggesting the dialogue needs to be polite or well-mannered or liberal or middle-class; only that it be more substantive.

I couldn't agree more strongly with the quoted conclusion of the paper (whole last paragraph about the excerpt, p. 5). But my concern remains that the effect of this "reading for two voices" might be to discourage dialogue by mixing red herrings with straw dogs (unpalatable, what?)

If I'm just being cranky in mid-semester, I apologize. And if I've offended Jacqueline Howse and Katherine McManus, I apologize. I agree with their conception of a Writing Centre, and I strongly support pedagogy that places a lot of value on revision, in or out of class or Writing Centres. But I think the arguments for Writing Centres and their tutors, and against a pedagogy that conceives of in-class writing as a solution to plagiarism, etc., can be made better.

English Department
University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba   R3B 2E9

Western College Reading and Learning Association, Sacramento, California, March 23-26, 1988

"Evaluation: Essential for Excellence" is the theme of the 21st annual conference of the Western College Reading and Learning Association March 23-26, 1988. This association, originally a forum for college reading teachers, now also addresses the related areas of learning assistance, study skills, developmental education, and tutorial assistance. Special interest groups include advanced reading, cognitive psychology, computer technology, critical thinking and problem solving, ESL, learning disabled students, and peer tutoring. Members receive the association newsletter and the *Journal of College Reading and Learning.*

For more information, write to Dorothy Gray, regional co-director, at the following address:

Academic Services
Grant MacEwan Community College
Seventh Street Plaza Campus
10030 107 Street
Edmonton, Alberta   T5J 3E4

CONFERENCE NOTES: THE CREATING WORD

The second Creating Word Conference was held at the Westin Hotel, Edmonton, October 29-31, 1987. This conference is organized by the University of Alberta's Continuing English Program Committee, a joint committee of the Department of English and the Faculties of Education and Extension. The aim of the conference is to allow teachers at all levels of the education system to join in a conversation about some of the most important current issues in the learning and teaching of English. Because of the eminence of some of the speakers at the conference, and the importance of the issues they addressed, we have devoted a substantial part of this issue of *Inkshed* to reviews of some of the key presentations, written by several members of the English Department at the University of Alberta. We would like to thank the co-chairpersons of this year's conference, Christine Bold and Ted Bishop, both of the University of Alberta Department of English, for their assistance to reviewers and for allowing us to set up an *Inkshed* subscription table.

J. Hillis Miller, University of California at Irvine,
"The Role of Theory in Teaching"

/// Eileen Conway

J. Hillis Miller, president of the Modern Language Association and the author of notable critical and theoretical studies, beginning with *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (1958), gave the opening address. His paper, "The Role of Theory in Teaching," is from a work in progress, a sequel to *The Ethics of Reading* (1987).

Miller began by posing a triple question: In the age of the universal, though not unopposed, triumph of literary theory, what are the responsibilities of the teacher to the text, to the student, and to the university? His exploration of these problems developed a critique of one way the university acknowledges the theoretical age: the proliferation of courses that treat literary theory as a subject of study essentially no different from any other. Whatever has caused the burgeoning of literary theories in our time (Miller cited the loss of confidence in the Arnoldian literary canon, and the complementary effort to re-think the basis for consensus on what we teach when we teach literature), the previous generation of students typically undertook the study of literary theory as an unsupervised, private, almost clandestine pursuit of illumination. In contrast, formal courses in which literary theories are taught--or worse yet, "taken"--may paradoxically become a form of resistance to theory itself, falsifying its end and nullifying its force, by making theory the object of reading instead of the means to new readings of literary texts. The value of literary theory, according to Professor Miller, is in praxis, the generating of new readings; formal study of theory does it an ironic disservice by blurring the distinction between theory and *praxis*, means and end.

More specific problems arise. Students may emerge from too-brief study of theory-as-subject with an unusably thin and randomly assembled "stew" of theoretical odds and ends. Equally unproductively, they may see literary theories as discrete episodes of intellectual history, each essentially closed off both from the others and from the reader. This is to overlook the complex ways in which theories blur into each other, yet exhibit profound internal

heterogeneities, the result of (unacknowledged, even disavowed) appropriation of axioms, definitions, presuppositions, and insights from each other. To teach literary theories historically is to tacitly assent to historicism's claim, as a literary theory, to explain other literary theories, even to explain them away; it ignores the competing claims of any theory worth considering (in Miller's words) to explain, encompass, shape, indeed make history in return. More disturbingly, the identification of literary theory as a professional specialty allows teachers as well as students to define themselves as non-theorists and their pursuits as non-theoretical. That facile dissociation from theory as an academic pursuit blinds students and teachers alike to how much of what they themselves do in reading and teaching necessarily rests on theoretical assumptions, however tacit.

Most radically, if the academic assimilation of literary theory does not rationalize it into a mere historical artefact, thereby deadening its power to stimulate new readings, a quasi-scientific respect for theory-as-theory may misrepresent literary theory as controlling, epistemologically, what will happen in the act of reading. This misunderstanding denies the essential unpredictability of all the acts that take place in the linguistic realm, the scene of reading: reading itself, the collaboration or collision of theory and reading, and teaching. Acts of reading (including teaching) may be iterable, but are not replicable. Because they are essentially inaugural, they renew theory continually by adjusting it, mutating it, "disconfirming" it in an ongoing infinitesimal calculus of mutual influence.

Miller concluded his address with a reading of Heinrich von Kleist's essay "Allerneuester Erziehungsplan" ("The Very Last Word in Educational Schemes") from the *Berliner Abendblatter* of 1810. Kleist's solemnly ridiculous persona, with his "School of Contrarieties," founded on the "Law of Contraries" (itself based upon the electrical model of repelling charges), lampoons Goethe's appropriation of the chemical theory of "elective affinities" (*Wahlverwandtschaften*) as a means of predicting human behaviour. But Kleist goes further, demonstrating finally the unwisdom of exalting any theory drawn from the phenomenal world into a predictive model of linguistic behaviour. As a metaphor, such a theory may illuminate what has happened and stimulate further activity; but it cannot predict the outcome of that activity in the scene of reading where every act, whether of reading or teaching, is radically new. The triple responsibility of the teacher must be founded in a recognition of the inescapably inaugural, unpredictable quality of what happens in reading and teaching. We read and teach not in fulfilment of existing contracts with students and university, but to prepare endlessly new engagements with all three: the work, the student, the university.

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Lee Odell, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, "Methods in
Madness: Writing and Thinking Across the Curriculum"

/// Chris Bullock

My sense of the reputation Lee Odell has established through his three edited
collections (*Evaluating Writing* (1977) and *Research on Composing* (1978) edited
with Charles Cooper; *Writing in Non-Academic Settings* (1985) edited with Dixie
Goswami) is of a research-orientated professor taking a humane approach to
subjects beloved of technocrats, subjects such as the testing of writing and
the systematic understanding of the composing process. Odell's presentation
at "The Creating Word" threw an interesting light on this reputation.

The thesis of "Methods in Madness" was that, though the thinking that goes
into composing expository writing is partly quite mysterious, it is also
susceptible to discussion in terms of method and thus of a teacher's
intervention in the process. Odell's proof fell essentially into three
parts.

The first part of the presentation was counterargument, a consideration of
the objections raised to intervention in the writing process by such
authorities as Peter Elbow, Donald Murray and James Britton, as well as of the
pitfalls of hastily researched and over-simplified models of the connection
between thinking and writing. Yet, despite the real difficulties, it was
possible to see method in thinking, Odell claimed, and he went on to describe
four cognitive processes that we can be pretty sure are involved in thinking
about a topic. These processes are *selecting and encoding* (i.e. approaching
with a focus); *relating* (i.e. selective combining and comparing); *considering
alternatives* (e.g. by brainstorming, testing, dialogical thinking); and *paying
attention to what we are doing* (i.e. metacognitive problem-solving). To
demonstrate these processes at work, Odell analysed some protocols of
discussions designed to establish the meaning of a mysterious god-figure from
a tenth grade social science class.

The third part of Odell's talk focussed on a writing-across-the-curriculum
project he is involved in with teachers from the second to the twelfth
grades. His project, he reports, established the necessity of working out
long-range goals for courses, devising appropriate writing tasks for these
goals, making sure there were a number of occasions for the same type of task,
and making sure it was clear to the teachers how writing would help them teach
the subject (for otherwise they weren't really interested). Odell then
concluded his talk by claiming that we need just enough madness to keep us
alive and just enough method to keep us sane.

As Odell's concluding epigram floated over the ether, one could almost hear
a collective sigh of contentment fill the room. Teachers who wanted a tight
model of cognitive process in writing, teachers who wanted a
cross-disciplinary functional procedure for using writing, even teachers who
hated the idea of reducing thought to a few standardised procedures, all had
had their needs recognised in the talk. It took the reviewer a while to
realise that this state of harmony was somewhat illusory, that actually the
talk has quite neatly barricaded off (from the metaphor indicated in the title
onwards) the "madness" of intuition from the "methods" of thought.

Thus the gulf between non-interventionist romantics and hard-nosed
cogntivists remains; Peter Elbow has yet to join hands with Linda Flower and
walk off into the sunset. Yet if Lee Odell did not bridge this gulf, if he is
more of a technocrat than his humane pronouncements would lead us to believe,
he is still a speaker who can recognise and acknowledge both sides of the
divide, and for that we should be grateful.

Lee Odell, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute,
Workshop on the Evaluation of Writing

/// Beverly Tetz

Recalling attempts some years ago to train him and fellow graduate
assistants to mark essays at the University of Michigan, Lee Odell admitted to
a workshop of seventy that "the process was fraught with animosity, emotion,
and all sorts of bad stuff." Odell demonstrated that the process of
responding to students' papers need not be distressing, mysterious, or subject
to assorted whims.

Odell reviewed the basic assumptions underlying the primary trait scoring
system first developed by Richard Lloyd-Jones. This system links evaluation to
specifically identified features appropriate to a given writing task. In
order for such a system to work, according to Odell, an audience and purpose
must be specified for the writing assignment; a good evaluation program must
be developed in the context of a good writing program; and adequate
description of expectations must precede evaluation. He then directed the
workshop participants to read and evaluate three descriptive essays written by
Grade 12 students. Evaluators were given a clear indication of the initial
essay assignment and were provided with a list of four primary traits to look
for in evaluating the essays.

The results were surprising to everyone present, except perhaps for Odell,
who has repeated this experiment many times. Even though instructed not to,
many evaluators still insisted on looking for qualities other than those
specified on the list of primary traits. Several rounds of marking were
required before the group was able to ride itself of individual, idiosyncratic
mental checklists and mark only according to the criteria supplied. Once this
was accomplished, however, this widely varied group was able to reach an
impressive level of consensus.

Also surprising were the types of comments voiced in response to Odell's
deliberately neutral question, "What did you find?" Odell was bombarded with
many competing voices anxious to tell him what was *wrong* with the students'
papers. It took some skillful, diplomatic maneuvering on his part to bring
the group around to acknowledging that yes, the students did indeed do many
things *right*.

This all-too-short evaluation seminar proved two things: English educators
in Western Canada have much to learn about how to mark more effectively and
consistently; and at least seventy have made a fine start by discovering
evaluation according to a primary trait scoring system as presented by Lee
Odell.

Jane Miller, University of London Institute of Education, "Who Is Reading?: Historical, Feminist, and Dialogic Approaches to Literacy and Literature Teaching in the Classroom"

/// Janice Williamson

Responding to a question (spoken, perhaps, in an anti-feminist tone) about whether feminist critics could divine whether an anonymous text was written by a man or a woman, Jane Miller replied that she was more interested in conversations than essentialism. In the dialogues that developed during her session, her impressive abilities as teacher and critic became apparent. While participants heard her theorization of a socialist-feminist criticism, Miller's pedagogic practice underscored her creative approach to theories of reading.

Her paper considered three issues which should concern teachers of literature. First, in response to Marxist theorists, Miller insists on the practice of reading culture and history. Reading is not an "autonomous" activity. Thus both readers and texts should be contextualized historically. Her argument was elaborated through transcripts from the sixteenth-century interrogation of Mennochio, in which this miller's reading strategies were seen to be organized ideologically: "his experience of power and his subordination to power taught him how to read." Her second critical point was specifically feminist in impulse—read not for identity or the universal, but for the articulation or obscuring of differences of gender, class and race. This demands that readers become conscious of the exclusions which circulate around "patriarchal assertions of commonality." According to Miller, to "read within our difference produces different readers." Echoing Judith Fetterley's theory of the "resisting reader," Miller pointed out how women learn to misread in order to read as men. And finally, her third point revealed another theoretical interest. While she is completing a book called *The Seduction of Theory* about the importance and difficulties of theory in the classroom, Miller discussed her attraction to Bakhtin's "dialogic imagination" and Volosinov's theories of language. Reading is a process informed by the dynamics of conversation, not a single-minded search for "coherence and wholeness." Thus teachers should interrogate not only the canon of texts, but the social relations generated by reading practices. Reading is "interactive," with the emphasis on the production, or in Edward Said's terms, the "worlding," of texts.

Her paper responds to the speech act theorist's refusal to oppose literature and the extra-literary (read: life). Thus it opens up literary studies to texts which are considered "non-literary" (such as the autobiographical narratives of children). Students and teachers should experiment with different texts and different strategies. Miller suggests reading "against the grain." While teachers of literature often focus on close reading for detail, she asks us to interrupt our anticipated readings by attempting multiple and different practices (skimming, reading beginnings, etc.)

"Reading makes significant conversations possible," concluded Miller. Her interpretation of "The Creating Word" was both provocative and useful.

Sheridan Baker, University of Michigan,
"Linguistics and Writing"

/// Theresa Skrip

Sheridan Baker began by stating that his position with regard to the issue of linguistics and writing is "that which the linguists call in the fury over *Webster III* of the traditionalist, the purist, the school-marm of both sexes, or of the self-appointed authority who knows nothing about language; in other words, anyone who is not a linguist."[1] Baker's opening statement set the tone for his entire paper, in which he maintained that "the linguistic establishment missed the creating word, missed the force of writing in creating us as thinking, literate speakers and writers of the language." Identifying twentieth-century linguists and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) as those who had "divorced writing from language and found the poor school-marm guilty of purity, [and] helped deprive our pedagogy of its most valuable instrument," he claimed that "we still assume that writing is a bad copy of speech; it is an artificial, edited necessity somewhat unattached to the living language and having little or no influence upon it."[2] Baker further stated that "we still do not see how vitally important writing is in forming our speech and thought, how important it is as a way of cognition." Although Baker has a justifiable complaint against those linguists (particularly Leonard Bloomfield, Edward Sapir, and Ferdinand de Saussure) who declared that writing is a mere copy of speech, he gave little, or inaccurate, acknowledgement to the work of other linguists and scholars, such as Walter J. Ong, who not only recognize the influence that writing has on speech, but who herald its uplifting effect on the consciousness of literate humans.

One reason for Baker's not distinguishing between the various twentieth-century linguists, perhaps, is that they all, including the Prague Linguistic Circle, hail Bloomfield and Sapir for their work in the development of phonology. Baker condemned Bloomfield for his claim that "writing is not language, but merely a way of recording language by means of physical marks" (*Language* 21). Baker also objected to Bloomfield's claim that writing has very little effect on the forms and development of actual speech (13) and declared that Bloomfield contradicts himself in *Language* by stating that writing conventions "are more rapidly standardized and then actually influence the standardizing of speech" (486). Although Bloomfield does reduce writing to *merely* visual symbol, he is somewhat justified in his claim that writing has had but a slight influence on the forms and development of speech since writing, until the time of mass literacy, did remain "the property of only a chosen few" (13); as a result, its influence on common speech was limited to those who had experienced the benefits of literacy. Once mass literacy commenced, largely due to the development of the printing press, the influence writing had upon speech was great, and Bloomfield rightly notes this (486).

Baker was more favourable toward Sapir, who, he stated, "had noticed the . . . perfective power of writing, as if it were the ideal toward which speech had always yearned." This is a rather liberal interpretation of Sapir's attitude toward the status of the written language, which for him is "a point-to-point equivalence . . . to its spoken counterpart" (Sapir, *Language* 20). Sapir recognizes, like Saussure, that the written word might "be entirely substituted for the spoken ones," but he still considers writing to be "visual speech symbolism," a point that Baker did not mention when using Sapir as support from his own claim that writing is superior to speech (20, 19).

Baker did point out that the linguistic hostility to writing has abated in recent years. However, as I have stated, not all linguists were or are hostile to writing (see, for example, John Lyons, Victoria Fromkin, and Robert Rodman, to cite only a few). Furthermore, Baker cited Walter J. Ong as an example of a scholar who has shifted his position from prizing orality to proclaiming the virtues of writing. Although Ong does value the spoken word, especially since it comprises the primal bond between humans and God (see, for example, *The Barbarian Within* 68-87, *The Presence of the Word* 160-9, *Orality and Literacy* 179), he unfailingly recognizes the absolute invaluableness of writing. Even as early as *The Barbarian Within*, Ong writes, "I believe that there is no doubt of an intimate connection between the mental habits encouraged by medieval logic and the emergence of printing," which he states had "psychological implications" (74).

Baker, however, had this to say about Ong:

> The metal racks of typography, he believes, have locked us into linear thought. The, I quote, "alphabet and print have made language as never before, an instrument of constraint rather than openness. . . . We have yet to assess the terrible strain on the psyche which the learning of alphabetic writing always entails."

What Baker left out of his quotation is of extreme importance to understanding Ong. This is the passage from which Baker's quotation was taken:

> It is this breakthrough from quiescent to vibrant, temporally fluid sound which, I believe, constitutes the most deep-seated source of anxiety in reactions to *Webster III*. Space is the great symbol of order, and its primacy is now being compromised. The alphabet and print had made language as never before an instrument of constraint rather than openness, *and had thereby reorganized man's life world. To learn the alphabet is to impose on oneself a sense of control which we are only beginning to understand.* We have yet to assess the terrible strain on the psyche which the learning of alphabetic writing always entails, although studies of the different psychotic syndromes of literates, as compared to illiterates, have begun to alert us to the state of affairs. (7) Any teacher of a foreign language knows some of the depths that are affected by literacy: how difficult it is, for example, to re-establish among literatures an awareness of sounds as sounds--a sense, for example, that the "p" in French is not the "p" in English, and the ability to <u>hear</u> a French "p" rather than to <u>see</u> an English-sounding "p" when a French word is uttered (*Grain* 56. Italics added)

. By "constraint," Ong means that writing placed an order upon, reorganized, the open, "free-flowing" (54) world of pre-literacy, of primary orality: writing did not *restrain* the human mind. Furthermore, Ong indicates that the objections that arise to the linguistic basis of *Webster III* are largely due to the fear of losing the order that literacy imposes on language, and that order is responsible for the human mind's ability to think linearly and to reason (*Orality* 78).

Not only does Ong recognize the value of writing and print, he also knows that speech has limitations that writing and print, the reified word (*Orality* 119) can overcome, a point Ong has made in various forms since 1967 (see *The*

Presence of the Word 92; *Grain* 9). Ong, from the beginning of his work on orality and literacy, believed in the relationship between the human mind and the worlds of chirography and typography. As Ong writes, "The human mind does not forget or put aside its former achievements, but builds on them" (*Barbarian* 174). Ong did not transform or reverse his stand on the value of writing, as Baker claimed; Ong's later work on the relationship between literacy and human consciousness is a synthesis, a deepening of his earlier work in that same field.

The linguistic basis for *Webster III* that Ong mentions in *In the Human Grain* and that Baker so strongly protested was the invitation for people to recognize the effect that language, current usage, has on word meanings. Slowly people in the field of language study came to realize the extent to which language both identifies people with their families and socializes them within their communities. Out of this realization came the NCTE adoption of "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (*CCCC*, Fall 1974, Vol XXV). Baker attacked this position, declaring it "ridiculous" and an "anti-intellectual attack on literacy." He stated that "[t]he linguistic premise that all dialect are equal, that Standard English is but one dialect among many, has retired from practice undemonstrated and undemonstrable." While "Students' Right to Their Own Language" did rest upon the premise that Standard English (NCTE referred to it as Edited American English [EAE]) was but one dialect among many, it did so to emphasize the fact that EAE was only one system among many that were equally effective systems of communication. The NCTE did not seek to annihilate EAE, or writing for that matter, from the school curriculum in the United States; despite wanting to recognize the importance of students' various dialects, they wrote, "it is necessary that we inform those students who are preparing themselves for occupations that demand formal writing that they will be expected to write EAE" (14).

Baker implied that Standard English (I presume Standard American English, since the standard varies from one English-speaking nation to the next) to be a *language* superior to the many dialects in the United States. Never mind the cultural identification that people receive from their dialects and idiolects, Baker would have all people in the United States speaking Standard American English or even, if it were possible, "Written Edited American English," as he called it: "it seems to me an absolute democratic necessity to educate our students to be fluent, literate, to be able to stand on their hind legs and not speak badly."

Setting up "the linguistic establishment" and the NCTE as those who have "divorced language from writing," Baker presented twentieth-century linguists and the NCTE as a homogenous group who have banded together against literacy and who favour "speech, change, and the immature usages of daily talk." True enough, linguists set language, more particularly "la langue," as their object, studying it predominantly through "la parole," not through texts; however, many linguists acknowledge the power writing has on human consciousness. Furthermore, unless writing had, using Ong's term, "reified the word," neither linguists nor anyone else would have identified words and language as things to be studied. We are especially indebted to Milman Parry, Alexander Luria, and Walter Ong, among others, for their work identifying the

effects that literacy had on our pre-literate ancestors; and we are indebted, again, to Walter Ong for his work identifying the effects that print and electronic technology had and continue to have on the literate mind.

Baker's hostility towards those who value speech at the expense of writing is justifiable; however, his attack on those who study speech and note how writing influences it is unfair, as is his evaluation of Walter Ong's work. Although Baker knows very much about language, his position is that of the traditionalist, the purist, perhaps even of those scholars in the Eighteenth Century who prized writing at the expense of speech.

Notes

[1]The references to Baker's paper are taken from a good-quality tape recording.

[2]Walter Ong writes, "To say that writing is artificial is not to condemn it but to praise it. Like other artificial creations and indeed more than any other, it is utterly invaluable and indeed essential for the realization of fuller, interior, human potentials. Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word. . . . To live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance. This writing provides for consciousness as nothing else does" (Ong, *Orality* 82).

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Richard Lloyd-Jones, University of Iowa,
"Dialects and Social Grouping"

/// Kay Stewart

In one of those ironies of conference schedules, I left Sheridan Baker's plenary session, still fuming, for one of the four concurrent sessions that followed to discover that in style and substance, Richard Lloyd-Jones, past president of the National Council of Teachers of English, reaffirmed the value of "Democracy through Language" that Baker had attacked.

Lloyd-Jones didn't harangue; he "visited" with his audience. Indeed, he suggested that the word "Visiting" should precede his announced title, for he began by describing the social ritual whereby Iowa farmers "visit" about the weather in order to "adjust their tones, their stance toward each other, before they slip into serious visiting" about other matters. His description made clear that this is a community "bound by a set of discourse rules, extended variants of what we usually call 'dialect.'" Weather is not the only topic that is sufficiently "content-empty" to allow language to fulfill its dominant function in such exchanges--that of establishing "commonality of human concern." The hotline between Washington and Moscow, children's letters home, sports talk--these are other examples of ritual exchanges that reassure participants about the possibility of more meaningful communication. The lines are open.

Language is never purely expressive, any more than it is ever wholly free of social commitment, Lloyd-Jones went on to say. Our efforts to achieve truth, or even scientific objectivity, will always be inadequate (as Gulliver's Laputans illustrate) because "we have to depend upon representations of truth in language." In that sense, even informative language is persuasive, "an effort to convince another person of the validity of one's own vision of some shared reality." To the extent that "the writing we teach in school stresses accuracy, brevity, and clarity to the point of denying other virtues," however, we "buy into" a discourse community that devalues the social dimension of language.

To illustrate his contention that "reality is as much social as personal," Loyd-Jones described the formation of a discourse community from the sixty participants at a conference sponsored by the Coalition of English Associations (itself "an ad hoc group of eight professional societies in the U. S.). The preliminary "visiting" necessary to establish a common dialect and group identity took four or five days of the three-week conference. The rewards, according to Lloyd-Jones, "were tremendous." "We demonstrated to ourselves the value of the interactive classroom, one steeped in language--oral and written." As participants "taught each other constantly," so classrooms should be places where we as teachers become "fellow students," augmenting the group's store of knowledge, refereeing, conciliating, challenging and supporting. The emphasis on mass testing in Language Arts distorts the "insistently interactive" nature of language, however, because such testing can only sample "discrete bits of knowledge."

The Coalition Conference, Lloyd-Jones continued, chose the heading "Democracy through Language" to identify its concerns. The literature one chooses to teach has obvious political and social implications. But so do notions such as "standard" English. "Dialects all have 'standards,'" Lloyd-Jones reminded us, "and the dominant 'standard' of edited texts is simply the dialect of the highly literate people who control history if not daily life." Although democracy would seem to require accommodation of variety, schools in response to broader social pressures suppress the markers of racial and ethnic dialects, which can easily be tested *for*. More insidiously, perhaps, we as teachers may devalue certain discourse strategies by treating them "simply as options governed by the nature of the audience without asking to what extent the group is defined by the strategies." "Real human progress," he concluded, "depends on our being comfortable among differences."

I was certainly more comfortable with Lloyd-Jones's "visit" than I had been with Sheridan Baker's harangue. If only Lloyd-Jones had had the larger forum.

Inkshed and CCTE Conferences, St. John's, Newfoundland, August 1988

The CCTE is Coming of Age in 1988! The 21st annual conference, "Part of the Main," will be held at Memorial University of Newfoundland, August 14-20. Deadline for program proposals is April 2, 1988. Proposal forms and other information available from me or from

Edward A. Jones
Consultant in English
Department of Education
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
P. O. Box 4750
St. John's, Newfoundland A1C 5T7

Inkshed V will take place immediately before CCTE, from Friday, August 12 to Sunday, August 14 at Littledale Conference Centre--a former convent close to Bowring Park, one of the most attractive areas of the city. THANKS to the dozen or more Inkshedders who have written to me offering suggestions. I'm holding back on final decisions about theme and structure of Inkshed V so that all potential participants have an opportunity to contribute their ideas at this early stage of planning. Please send your comments to me as soon as possible. There will be an update in January's *Inkshed*.

Phyllis Artiss
Department of English
Memorial University
St. John's, Nfld.   A1C 5T7

Editorial Inkshedding   /// Kay Stewart

Thanks to all of you who promptly sent in your renewals. Thanks too for your
notes of support and your offers of material. To make it easier (I hope) for
you to translate good intentions into hard copy, I am proposing the following
special issues:

    January 1988   LITERACY
    March 1988   WRITING PROGRAMS:
                          PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

   Deadlines for submitting material for these issues are December 30 and
February 15. If you have suggestions for other special issues, please let me
know.

   Responses to previous pieces, conference notes, and similar material will
continue to appear as I receive them.