



# *Inkshed*

Newsletter of the Canadian Association  
for the Study of Writing and Reading  
Volume 10, Number 3, February 1992



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10.3. February 1992

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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.

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# More on the “Outside Reader”:

## The Hypothetical versus the Real Rhetorical Situation

Janet Giltrow and Michele Valiquette’s “The Outsider is Called In: Audience in the Disciplines” (*Inkshed* 10.2.) is a very enlightening look at how markers use the imagined “outsider” to justify their assessments. It’s also very scary, because Giltrow and Valiquette have such difficulty identifying a consistent pattern in the markers’ sense of audience even within disciplines, let alone across them. Sometimes the student is expected to display command of the discipline by assuming shared knowledge, and is penalized for failing to do so. At other times the student is expected to expand her explanations so that they would be intelligible to an uninformed outsider, and is penalized for failing to do so. Thus the psychology student is expected to know that she should explain the Muller-Lyer Board but not explain standard deviation or random assignment. Doubtless we do exactly the same thing in our own discipline, sometimes expecting students to sound like knowledgeable rhetoricians or literary critics and sometimes penalizing them for doing so. No wonder students often feel that they are walking through a minefield when they write.

Giltrow and Valiquette infer discipline-specific patterns behind these seemingly random fluctuations of expectation. “The psychology student seems to have to learn to presuppose knowledge of procedures which are not currently in question as contributors to validity, and to learn not to presuppose knowledge of material or procedural entities with which she is attempting to construct new data.” The criminology student, on the other hand, seems to have to learn which concepts have particularly high status in the discipline and respectfully display only those. In both cases, however, this system is not revealed. Rather, the differences in expectation are disguised by the construct of the uninformed outside reader, whose appearance “seems to be a device for representing disciplinary conventions.” When the marker wants more detail than a “real” writer in the discipline would normally produce, he conjures up a confused outside reader to explain this need.

I don’t think that this construct would be very helpful to the student even if the markers did bother to explain it (which they don’t, providing only cryptic ticks and marginal grunts to justify their grades). It seems only helpful to a marker called upon to justify his grades by us nosey researchers. But I wonder if there is more behind this construct than the rather subtle discipline-specific expectations that Giltrow and Valiquette infer. I maintain sanity by a faith in a principled academic universe, and I think that we may be able to uncover a more principled and perhaps more helpful tacit system of expectations if we pry at the problem some more.

Guessing from a distance—because I don’t have Giltrow and Valiquette’s mass of data to work from—I wonder if the real system behind marking criteria is so difficult to infer because the two hypothetical rhetorical situations that Giltrow and Valiquette note are both disguises for a third, actual rhetorical situation. Students are sometimes expected to write as if they are disciplinary researchers writing to insiders (as if writing for a disciplinary journal), and sometimes as if they are disciplinary researchers writing to outsiders (perhaps as if writing for a more general, though still not “popular,” journal), but actually they are *students writing to teachers*.

This actual rhetorical situation, which markers do not publicly acknowledge, imposes some highly important extra conditions on the writer. In general she should demonstrate internalization of the discipline by assuming shared knowledge (particularly in a lab report). However, exceptions are made at those points where the real reader (the teacher) needs to know whether the student really understands the terms she is using. This could be why the psychology instructor did not demand more detail on standard deviation but did demand more on the Muller-Lyer Board. Standard deviation is not just shared knowledge; it is *old* shared knowledge, knowledge which the student can

## More on the "Outside Reader"

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be presumed to know and *is not being tested on* in this course. (The situation would be different in an elementary statistics course.) The Muller-Lyer Board is *new* shared knowledge, knowledge which the student *is* being tested on. The marker needs to be sure that the student really understands the concept and is not just parroting a term. The only way to be sure is to demand an explanation that would be slightly tedious in a truly disciplinary piece of writing. So the marker shifts the hypothetical rhetorical situation and conjures up the outside reader.

One way to verify my guess would be to compare the level of detail demanded by markers with the level of detail that actually appears in published papers in the disciplines. If the level differs markedly, then the difference is probably an artifact of the student-teacher rhetorical situation, as I have argued. If not, then it is part of the larger rhetorical situation of the discipline itself, as Giltrow and Valiquette argue, and we must look for other systems of explanation peculiar to each discipline.

If in fact the student-teacher rhetorical situation is at work here, it seems to me that life would be much simpler if we were all more honest and shared this system with our students. We are all so embarrassed by the "artificial" rhetorical situation of student writing to teacher that we keep trying to call it something else. But if the writer *is* a student and the reader *is* a teacher, then that rhetorical situation is not artificial. Like it or not, it is really there, and the marker's real goal is not to increase his knowledge but to see how much the student knows. To disguise the situation as a seemingly random fluctuation between insider and outsider writing is merely to bury the land mines a little deeper. I think we would treat students with considerably more respect if we told them, "Look. You are supposed to be learning to write like a psychologist/criminologist/literary critic, so don't explain basic tools of the trade like standard deviation/juvenile delinquency/imagery. But when you introduce a term that we have been discussing in this course, such as the Muller-Lyer Board/Welfare Model of Justice/Burke's Pentad, I need to know that you really understand it. So give me a brief explanation as if I were a reader from outside the discipline, even though I'm not." This way, the "outside reader" becomes more than a post-hoc rationalization; he becomes a tool that the student can use to help her shift rhetorical gears.

This is more easily said than done, of course. Marking criteria are often deeply tacit, and there are still too few studies such as Giltrow and Valiquette's which seek to uncover them. And uncovering them is only the first step. They must be fed back to the markers who use them—raised from tacit to focal knowledge so that those markers are better able to post the minefields for their students. This raises important implications for Writing Across the Curriculum programs, whose job should include precisely this uncovering of tacit systems of marking criteria.

In many ways, I think that the final responsibility falls back on the shoulders of us rhetoricians, who have been so embarrassed by the student-teacher rhetorical situation that we have left it unexamined or sought to disguise it. We scoff at disciplines in which writers are not allowed to say "I"; yet we are afraid to say "You need to say more here so that I can see whether you know what you're talking about." Nonetheless, our students must live in this rhetorical situation almost exclusively throughout their years of education. Sharp students will eventually infer the laws that govern this universe by trial and error, of course, but human beings merit more explicit reinforcement than one of Skinner's rats has a right to expect. If pretending to write in other rhetorical situations is a major component of the student-teacher situation, let us acknowledge that fact and tell our students how pretending to be psychologists, criminologists, and literary critics differs in principled ways from being the real thing. To do so, we need more studies like Giltrow and Valiquette's that take a closer look at what roles instructors really ask their students to play, and why.

Doug Brent  
University of Calgary

Inkshed 10.3. February 1992

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# Teaching with Textbooks:

## A Response to Russell Hunt

Russell Hunt's essay "R Textbooks Us?" in *Inkshed* 10.1 raises questions that are central to the theme of the upcoming Inkshed 9 conference (Banff, May 3-6). Unfortunately, his denunciation of textbooks unfairly polarizes the issue into right and wrong, good and bad. For example, Hunt can hardly expect to be taken seriously when he declares unequivocally that "the textbook itself is bad" (8) and then makes no attempts to explain exactly what he means by the word "textbook." It would be easier to respond to Hunt's diatribe if he had defined this crucial term and given concrete examples. He does neither, but instead jumps from condemning the textbook to condemning classroom practices.

One of the problems with Hunt's argument is that even though the textbook receives the full force of his attack, it is really only a scapegoat for his dissatisfaction with institutionalized education in general. It is no wonder that Hunt does not offer examples of a monologic textbook, because according to him all textbooks—even, believe it or not, ones that he helped to produce—become so when they are assigned to the whole class. Hunt, then, appears to be offering us a hyper-individualistic plan of education, which not only substitutes personal reading assignments for class assignments, but regards common texts as necessarily inferior. It follows from Hunt's assertions that a book is okay as long as not everyone in the class is reading it. His fear of uniformity is a poor reason for discrediting all textbooks.

The act of choosing a class text does privilege it, but that does not mean that instructors present that book as the "institutionally pre-Determined Truth" (8). When we choose textbooks we are saying to the students in our class something like "I think this will be good/ useful/ provocative for you," but that is not the same as "consecrat[ing] one text as *the* text" (9). Or at least it does not have to be. It is important for instructors to explain to students why we have selected one textbook over another and also to discuss with them its shortcomings, in order to show that the textbook itself is subject to critical inquiry.

Although Hunt does not define "textbook," he claims to know exactly what his universal reader can find in the universal textbook: "Listen to the omniscient tone, the firm certainty, the lack of acknowledgement of obligation and response to colleagues and predecessors...the absence of provisionality, disagreement, uncertainty" (8). It is ironic that Hunt can write with such "firm certainty" while denouncing the "firm certainty" with which others write. In his own essay he expresses no hesitancy, no doubt—qualities he purports to value. Furthermore, his blanket comments about the textbook provide examples of logical fallacies, such as the faulty generalization, the definition of which is available in Edward Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990, 76) or any number of rhetoric and composition handbooks.

Hunt gives readers some idea of what he means by a textbook when he refers to the example of Norton editions. In a disparaging tone, he asks us to imagine a Norton *Satanic Verses*, as if we would join him in scoffing at the idea. However, I imagine that Salman Rushdie would be greatly pleased if there were a Norton *Satanic Verses*, since that would mean that the terrorist threats directed against him, his publishers, and his translators were being ignored. In December 1991, as I write, Rushdie is publicly calling for a paperback edition, but his publishers still refuse. When the day comes that a paperback edition is available, and even a Norton edition which would frame the controversy in its back pages, a free Salman Rushdie and his supporters around the world might have reason to celebrate.

## Teaching with Textbooks

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In the meantime, I can present one example of the usefulness of this kind of textbook. The Norton *Heart of Darkness* (Robert Kimbrough, ed., 3rd. ed., New York: Norton, 1988) includes some older criticism, more recent analysis of the film *Apocalypse Now*, and essays on the current debate about racism in the novel. If Hunt is seeking "provisionality" (8), he could not find a better example than Chinua Achebe's essay, which condemns *Heart of Darkness* as "an offensive and deplorable book" (259). I would much rather give my students the chance to read Conrad with Achebe than just give them Conrad on his own.

This leads me to my final point. Hunt is misguided in opposing textbooks to books and articles. Why does he privilege the latter? Aren't textbooks often composed of articles and excerpts from books? Hunt seems to be suggesting that the use of a textbook precludes the use of other material. But often textbooks give students the information and even the inspiration to use the library and find more materials. For example, on her own initiative, one of my students in the second-year course *Women's Literary Tradition* read on microfilm the whole of Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*: the student was writing an essay based on an excerpt from *A Serious Proposal* in our textbook *The Meridian Anthology of Women Writers* (Katharine M. Rogers and William McCarthy, ed, New York: Meridian, 1987). Textbooks, in other words, sometimes do direct students to the library shelves, sometimes do involve students in intellectual debates, sometimes do give students a much needed context for their subject, and sometimes do, in short, work very well.

Deborah Kennedy  
Mount Saint Vincent University

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## Book Review

Giltrow, Janet *Academic Writing: How to Read and Write Scholarly Prose*. Peterborough, ON and Lewiston, NY: Broadview Press, 1990

Since June of 1990, I have been promising myself (and many other Inkshedders I've talked with) that I would write a review of Janet Giltrow's *Academic Writing: How to Read and Write Scholarly Prose*. Now, with requests from both Marion Crowhurst of the UBC Faculty of Education and Peter Taylor of the UBC English Department to take a look at my copy, I must make good on my promise.

I'm enthusiastic about this unique book because it not only speaks to "writing and reading, theory and practice" (Jim Reither's subheading from the first *Inkshed*) but also helps students integrate what they know about reading and writing from their own experience in and out of school with the literacy demands of post-secondary institutions.

In the Introduction, Giltrow states the goals of the book directly:

*Academic Writing* is designed to help you do the writing assignments associated with your university or college.

Because so much of academic writing is based on reading, this book concentrates on the processes by which you turn your reading into writing. (1)

She also explains how academic readers differ from other readers, what their expectations are, and what the features of academic writing are.

In my experience, many teachers in post-secondary institutions are not explicit about these differences, expecting students to already know what constitutes academic writing about history, for example. Therefore, their students flounder around through the first part of the course, trying to learn from the red marks on their essays and eventually "catching on." If students had access to this book and were able to work through the thoughtful exercises, they would achieve an understanding of academic writing more quickly and less painfully.

"Access" is an important word, since most post-secondary institutions had no place in the curriculum to use a book that deals with writing across the curriculum. I used the past tense purposely, since I know from Janet Giltrow that Simon Fraser University now has a course in which this book is the text, and UBC is planning to restructure English 100 and offer "Strategies for University Writing" as one of the five new courses.

The book's chapter headings give a good sense of its content.

Chapters One and Two both focus on summarizing as a means of making sense of reading and as a way for writers to orient readers.

Chapter Three, on "topics and readers," gives an excellent explanation of the difference between coherence and cohesion and explains why ambiguity is not acceptable in academic writing.

In Chapter Four, the focus on "topics and meaning" helps students learn how to keep the reader from misinterpreting through using connections and minor organizing strategies, like comparisons.

Chapter Five handles the use of quotations and paraphrasing. It emphasizes that providing a context for a quotation is more important than using all the formal conventions, and it recognizes the legitimacy of different types of documentation in different disciplines.

Chapter Six defines "definition" as "the development of the interpretive name the writer assigns to a cluster of data" (199) and suggests exercises in definition for students to do.

The plural title of Chapter Seven, "reader-friendly styles," underlines that there is no one acceptable style and leads students to make their styles easy to read through surrounding specialist terms with simple words, writing complicated arguments in simple language, making sentences concise, changing nouns to verbs, using the passive voice only intentionally, punctuating to help the reader follow the meaning, and including forecasts, summaries, and evaluations within the text.

Chapter Eight gives a realistic view of the scholarly style, explaining the "no-no's" (don't use slang, contractions, or "you") but emphasizing that the writer must adapt the style for audience, purpose, and context.

The final Chapter Nine helps students prepare for essay examinations and continues to emphasize that writers must keep readers in mind.

Throughout, the book is illustrated (by Giltrow) with cartoon characters who see "bubblespeak" gives examples and rephrases points the book is making. Diagrams of how readers find their way

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through texts are particularly helpful, especially when these cartoon readers articulate their puzzlement. "What is this all about? Why is she telling me *this*?" (82).

I have only two problems with the book. The first is that it is full of irritating typographical errors. I counted more than 20 before I stopped. The second is that, if you do not read it more or less all at once, you can lose track of some of the examples. In the early chapters, short passages about baboons and Japanese corporations (not together!) make important points; these passages are referred to later for other purposes, and if the reader has not kept them in mind, the references don't make sense.

Just as I meant to write this review more than a year ago, I intended to nominate *Academic Writing: How to Read and Write Scholarly Prose* for a CCCC Outstanding Book Award. I'm sorry I missed the deadline because Giltrow's book deserves the publicity of such a nomination. If the book were available to all post-secondary students, it could make their struggles adapting to reading and writing scholarly prose much easier, and their resulting academic writing would be more likely to come close to the expectations of their teachers.

Nancy Carlman  
Vancouver

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## In Time with Confucius

I have in my small library a wonderful book that I found one day as I was walking into the Education library at McGill. It was a reject, left on the table near the entrance to be picked up by anyone who wanted it. It was entitled *Three Thousand Years of Educational Wisdom* - an appropriate throw-away by a modern educational institution?

I like to look through this book every now and then to see what words of wisdom the sages from the past had to say of the education of their day. I am amused by what I find. Three thousand, two thousand or one thousand years ago, the sages seemed to express the same concerns and issue much the same sort of advice as do our modern day sages. The following comment comes from "Record on the subject of education" by Confucius (circa 550-478 BC):

According to the system of teaching nowadays, the masters hum over the tablets which they see before them, multiplying their questions. They speak of the learners making rapid advances, and pay no regard to their reposing in what they have acquired. In what they lay on their learners they are not sincere, nor do they put forth all their ability in teaching them. What they inculcate is contrary to what is right, and the learners are disappointed in what they seek for. In such a case, the latter are distressed by their studies and hate their masters; they are embittered by the difficulties, and do not find any advantage from their labour. They may seem to finish their work, but they quickly give up its lessons. That no results are seen from their instructions, is it not owing to these defects? (21).

Who has ever had a good word to say of teachers? Last term I taught a group of first year education students who frequently complained to me via their journals that they had looked forward to university, thinking of all the exciting courses they would be taking; but now they were so burdened

with assignments and taxed with examinations, that they found no joy at all in their studies; or as Confucius would say, they have no time for "reposing in what they had acquired." If they did not hate their professors, they certainly conveyed to me that they were "embittered by their difficulties" and did not "find any advantage from their labour." They worked very hard to do all the assignments; but, like the students of Confucius' day, they did not profit from their lessons because there was no time for them to absorb the content.

Confucius goes on to explain how things were in the Great College of the ancients:

The rules aimed at in the Great College were the prevention of evil before it was manifested; the timeliness of instruction just when it was required; the suitability of the lessons in adaptation to circumstances; and the good influence of example to parties observing one another. It was from these four things that the teaching was so effectual and flourishing. (21)

With qualities like that, the teaching should have been effectual and flourishing! Sad to say, the Great College had disappeared from Confucius' world into the myths of the past, and the sage could only long for those good old days. I can imagine him sitting on his mat before a low table in front of a window, looking out on a garden and then down to his paper, and writing about the way things used to be.

But what has changed? At a Christmas party a few weeks ago, I found myself in conversation with a surgeon who believes that both medicine and education were better practised in the good old days. When he learned that I taught a writing course at McGill, he asked how many students entering McGill would profit from a writing course. A bit flippantly, I answered, "Oh, all of them."

The very answer he wanted! He told me he was not surprised because today's students were not taught to write as well as they were when he went to school. He was rather sceptical when I told him such was not my experience. In fact, I told him that I find students today are more at ease with their pens than they were even ten years ago. The reason I had said "all of them," was because the writing that students do at university is usually very different from the writing they do in high school, so of course they should profit from a writing course. I did not say - though I thought - that even a middle aged surgeon might learn something in a writing course.

As well I didn't, for I think Confucius might remind me that:

I do not open up my truth to one who is not eager to get knowledge, nor help out any one who is not anxious to explain himself. When I have presented one corner of a subject to any one, and he cannot from it learn the other three, I do not repeat the lesson.(24)

Ah, well. The next time you hear party-people proclaiming the poverty of our pedagogy, bite your tongue! Remember the good company they keep; for as they speak of us, so spoke Confucius of those who taught before us.

## WORK CITED

Confucius. (1947) Record on the subject of education. *Three Thousand Years of Wisdom*, ed. Robert Ulich. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ruth Stanton  
McGill University

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Tentative Conference Program for

# *Inkshed 9*

## TEXTUAL PRACTICES: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

Saturday, May 2nd:

5:00-6:00 p.m. Pat Dias (McGill):  
Introduction to Conference theme:  
"TEXTS, READERS, AND TEACHER POWER"

(inkshedding and small group discussion)

6:00-8:00 p.m. Dinner

8:00-10:00 p.m. Panel: "TEXTS ACROSS THE SYSTEM"

William Boswell (McGill)  
Judy Segal (UBC)  
Ann Beer/Anthony Paré/Jane Brown (McGill)  
Jim Bell (Calgary Adult Literacy Project)  
Michael Young (HBJ-Holt)

(inkshedding and small group discussion)

Sunday, May 3rd:

9:00-10:30 a.m. Panel: "ENCULTURATION OR TRANSFORMATION?"

2 Deanne Bogdan (OISE)  
M. Alayne Sullivan (Columbia)  
Stan Straw (Manitoba)

(inshedding)

11:00-12:30 p.m. Panel: "TEXT USE AND CREATION: A SPECTRUM"

3 Catherine F. Schryer (Waterloo)  
Douglas Brent (University of Calgary)  
Trevor J. Gambell (University of Saskatchewan)

(inkshedding)

Lunch

8:00 p.m. on TALENT NIGHT

*Thurs. night*

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## Tentative Conference Program for *Inkshed 9* continued ...

- Monday, May 4th:** CONTEXT, ANTI-TEXT, INTERTEXT
- 9:00-10:45 a.m. Phyllis Artiss/Jean Chadwick/Jacqueline Howse (Memorial):  
"THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT"  
4
- James Brown/Marie-Louise Craven/Leslie Sanders (York):  
"AN ANTI-CANONICAL ANTHOLOGY"
- 11:15-12:30 p.m. Jannie Edwards/Jack Robinson (Grant MacEwan College):  
"AN INTERACTIVE BOOK ABOUT TEXTS" 5
- 12:30-2:00 p.m. Lunch
- MINDS, MANNERS, AND MACHINES
- 2:00-2:30 p.m. Janet Giltrow/Michele Valiquette (Simon Fraser):  
"THE PSYCHOLOGY TEXT'S ADVICE ON COMPOSITION"
- 6  
Barbara Powell (University of Regina):  
"ETIQUETTE BOOKS AS WRITING TEXTS"  
(inkshedding)
- 2:45-4:00 p.m. Walter Krajewski (Dawson College):  
video & discussion: "THE ULYSSES PROJECT"  
7  
(inkshedding and small group discussion)
- 5:30-7:30 p.m. Dinner
- 7:30-9:30 p.m. BUSINESS MEETING

- Tuesday, May 5th:** PERSPECTIVES ON INVENTION
- 9:00-10:00 a.m. Dawson C. Harms (Calgary):  
"ALTERNATIVE GESTURES IN SCRIPTIVE INVENTION"
- 8  
Jamie MacKinnon (Royal Bank):  
"INVENTION IN A MUSELESS WORLD"  
(inkshedding)
- 10-15-noon WRAP-UP, AND PLANNING FOR *Inkshed 10*

••• Kay Stewart ••• Chris Bullock ••• University of Alberta •••

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# Editorial Inkshedding

## Preconference issue

We would like to make the next issue of *Inkshed* a special, preconference issue. We welcome comment on the Inkshed conference themes (see tentative program in this issue), not only from presenters but from participants and inksheddors unable to attend. Presenters may wish to send abstracts of their presentations. Others may wish to inkshed their preconference thoughts, questions, and opinions. We never seem to have enough time at the conference, so this is one way of getting the conversation going early. Deadline for submissions will be April 3rd, 1992.

## Call for articles

The editors of *Textual Studies in Canada* are eager to receive submissions from people in rhetoric and composition. The Canada Council recently awarded the journal a generous three-year grant, and the editors are hoping to publish two issues of *TSC* next year. Send manuscripts or inquiries to:

Will Garrett-Petts and Henry Hubert  
Editors  
*Textual Studies in Canada*  
Cariboo University-College  
Box 3010  
Kamloops, BC  
V2C 5N3

## Thanks to the Dean

As everyone knows, deans are notoriously tight-fisted in these recessionary times; they fund only those projects that are essential, promising, or innovative. We are, therefore, doubly grateful that the new Dean of Education here at McGill - Ted Wall - has agreed to cover the costs of mailing the 1991-92 *Inkshed*. His support of and praise for the newsletter is extremely gratifying. Thank you Dean Wall.

## Subscription update

Approximately 180 copies of this issue of *Inkshed* are going out to people in 9 provinces (anyone have a contact in P.E.I.?), 1 territory, and 10 states. With few exceptions, subscription fees have been paid up for the 1991-92 academic year. Look on the mailing label to see if you have paid your fees; there should be a 91-92 below your address.

Anthony Paré

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### **Name Change: A Modest Contribution**

An outfit is hardly berserk  
For wanting to get down to work.  
The question instead  
Is whether "Inkshed"  
Impresses the big shots at SSHRC

**Douglas Vipond  
St. Thomas University**