COMMENT

Techno-change

The difference over twenty years, in the making of *ET* since 1985, includes the vanishing away of paper files. In a cabinet beside my desk I have A–Z files for the many people who literally 'wrote' – that is, typed – to me on paper. I almost never consult any of those files now, and don't remember when I last added a sheet to them. Instead, *of course*, I check my email, which piles up electronically in non-real space somewhere inside this machine in front of me. And, though I strive to keep my records straight, I seldom check back very far or go into e-files of old e-mails. And, most days, whether in Cambridge or in Hong Kong, I read daily e-abstracts from my much-prized Edinburgh newspaper, *The Scotsman*, and don't recall when I last saw, leave alone bought and read, a conventional paper edition of it.

O tempora, o mores, sez I, but how many people nowadays, in the Western world, can easily manage this venerable Latin lament for the passing of the good old days. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

But to my point. Although end-products may look much the same, the difference between 1985 and 2005 in the making of *English Today* (and comparable publications worldwide) is immense. Consider, for example, keys. Not keys of the door, but typewriter keys and those little indented pads that pass for keys on my laptop – which, incidentally, I never use on my lap (and therefore think of as a portable desk-top). Indeed, it's hard now to think back to sit-up-and-beg typewriters with keys that moved and ribbons that spooled from one side to the other. But ever since my first computer, an IBM desktop that by now would be deemed pretty clunky if I still had it, I've virtually (a slippery word) forgotten the awful wasteful business of mistyping, ripping out the paper, scrunching it into a ball, and having to start the whole page again.

Haven't done that in donkeys' years. Prehistoric, in fact. But like everybody else I'm talking here about a keyboard which isn't much like a board and has no keys at all, and even it's built-in mouse isn't a mouse and has no tail at all. Yet I may still be invited to 'right-click' or 'left-click' the 'mouse', and by and large I do it without giving the matter any thought at all.

All of which has happened in the brief two-decade lifetime of *ET*, whose whole process of production now involves virtually no paper at all until first the galleys then the page-proofs appear. And finally an electronic package goes to press, and the fairly traditional format you are holding in your hand emerges – unless of course you read *ET* articles on-screen, in which case you probably don't see *Comment*.

The good news, however, is that the global range of the present issue is as wide and varied as ever, a state of affairs that I can (thankfully) describe as 'technology-neutral'. *Tom McArthur*

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