A electronic milestone

• Alert readers may feel that there is something different about this issue – a milestone, in fact, in the development of ET. Our format and headings are the same, but everything else has changed, because with this issue production has become wholly electronic. ET is now the outcome of DTP: the abbreviation of that marvellous misnomer desk-top publishing.

For the techies, the facts are as follows. The text is keyed in Microsoft Word or converted into it from other word-processing systems on contributors’ disks. It is then imported into a page-making program called QuarkXPress. In the process – a significant development in the history of print – the control of page make-up has passed from the typesetter to the designer, who applies typography (here, Bitstream Charter as opposed to Linotype Plantin, as in the past), and incorporates scanned images of illustrations, and supplies a PostScript file to the printers.

Peter Ducker, our designer, now has greater control over the end-product, within the constraints of a tight budget, and can manipulate texts to achieve various special effects. We have always taken pride in our panels; the making of such information-focusing structures has now become easier still, and I hope will prove ever more effective: for example, see the box within a box on p. 63, with two text widths and authentic massed signatures scanned in from a typed letter and shrunk to fit.

• When I first commented on that rare but promising pronoun themself (in this space in ET22, Apr 90), I could hardly have foreseen the climax reached in this issue, in a letter and article from Ontario (Donald Revell et al. p. 10). Clearly, this gender-linked usage has been gaining momentum and is now well launched. I cordially invite lexicographers and grammarians to take note.

They should also take note of indefinite a before a vowel (as in an aircraft), whose progress in the US is compellingly described by Penny Stewart & Richard Fawcett (p. 18) in a report that includes many citations. This usage has made serious headway in recent years while an before h (as in an historic occasion) has paradoxically also been doing well in the US. This is certainly a odd state of affairs.

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