

## Sherry Speaks...continued from page 9

Even as newborns, we can distinguish between sounds, and the tone and pitch of sounds (H. W. Bridges, 1961). Again, this reminds us of the importance of Speech to what we humans are, and to what we are becoming.

Human speech was indeed a great development in our history, but the invention of writing had just-as-dramatic implications. In fact, the process of recording speech through written language no doubt helped launch society toward its current hot-bed of technology. It allowed for new "efficiencies" in the way humans lived, learned and thought, some of the negative effects, such as the feared "wasting away" of natural mental faculties of memory and calculation (using paper as a notepad instead of the mind as a "notepad") were criticized by Plato in his *Phaedrus*. A more positive effect of writing was that it allowed for an unprecedented sharing and preservation of knowledge.

Of course, before the invention of writing, societies could pass on their accumulated knowledge as a legacy, but this happened mainly through the telling of legends. This form of wisdom-sharing had its drawbacks, in certain ways impeding the rapid growth of technology; first, scientific "facts" appeared masked in elaborate symbolism, so that factual content might be missed or misinterpreted by the

listener. Second, there was progressive distortion in the plots of the legends from generation to generation, because they were typically "customized" by the Storyteller of each generation; he/she would exaggerate or alter details in the story to make its events more interesting for the telling or easier to retain. So the invention of writing allowed a "stopping up" of collective knowledge, where legends most likely didn't. Writing put a plug in the technological sink; unfortunately, some would argue, we are drowning in our own bath-water.

If language has brought changes in our culture, by making it more technological, technological society has brought changes in our language. The hip mode of communication these days is to use picto-symbols. We live in a society that is pressed for time, so ways of "getting the message across" more quickly are

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We have journey a good distance from *Regarding Henry*, if only because doing good is not as simple as this film would have us believe. That becomes clear only when the human condition is assessed at its deepest level. If we ignore the religious or spiritual-if we ignore God-we can easily fool ourselves. Most important, however, is that unless we get a good grasp of our human condition, the peace, joy and

becoming invaluable.

At the moment, our language is phonetic- based on sound. In other words, when we read it, we are "thinking speech", or "hearing" ourselves think the words as we read. This takes much longer than if we were reading a string of pictographs ("picture-symbols"). A symbol (other than our conventional letter-characters) conveys a slew of words in a few *seconds*, while the same message, coded in letters, might take several *minutes* to read.

The high-tech trend of using pure symbols in communication has aptly already made its way into the computing world. Those familiar with computers know about flowcharts, "maps" which provide a picture of consecutive steps in the running of a program. Flowcharts use symbols that are universally understood by computer experts. If we were to substitute our written

celebration we all seek so desperately will eternally allude us.

This weekend we will do a lot of celebrating as we give thanks for the things we have, however small or meager. Let us ensure that such thanks is not merely directed to our own individual or communal efforts, but transcends to the God who loves us in spite of ourselves.

(phonetic) language with a system that used immediately recognizable picto-symbols, we would save a lot of time, and writers like me would save a lot of breath. Of course, for such a system to work, everyone in the world would have to be taught exactly what each symbol represented. Otherwise, (if perceptions of the symbols were wrong or confused) the language would

be worthless; as you might recall from this article, a language must be mutually understood.

To finish this article, I wish to give Steve Martin the last word. This is from his literary masterpiece, *Cruel Shoes*: "Yakkity yak yak yakkity yak yakkity yak yak yak yakkity yak yak yakkity". See me speak again (without Steve) in two weeks, kiddies.

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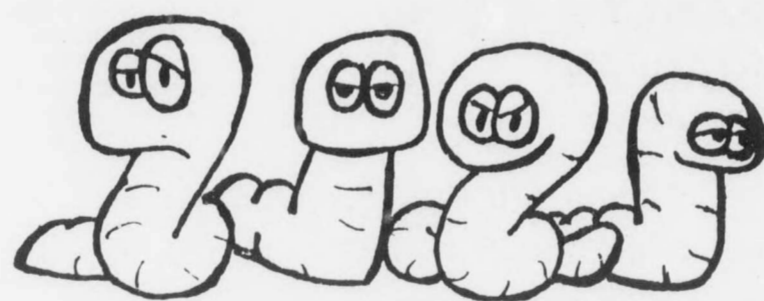
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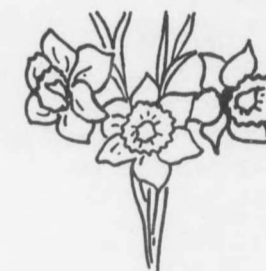


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