

The Advance of the Written Word

by Sarah Stodola

The printing press was invented, thank goodness, in 1436. It's generally acknowledged that this particular invention's impact on the world is too vast to be calculated. With the printing press came mass readership and, I suspect, the professional writer. More than 400 years after the printing press appeared, we were blessed with the typewriter. A century or so after this, personal computers became ubiquitous as a tool for writers. And then in the 1990s the internet exploded onto the scene, completely revolutionizing the meaning of "publishing."

So how have these advances in the technology of the written word affected the writer? And more importantly, how have they affected and changed the work that they produce? I think the answer must be in the intangibles—style, content,

choices of subject matter, and attitude.

Most writers are very particular about the way in which they write. Of course, word choice is a part of this. But what I'm really talking about here are things surrounding the writing process: things like atmosphere, mood, time of day, lighting, and background music—the optimal setting in which we can find words to put on paper. The fact is that, whether they like to admit it or not, most writers can't just sit down and write any time or anywhere. Some are more neurotic—often notoriously so—about this than others, but I imagine we would be hard-pressed to find a writer anywhere who doesn't have certain preferences in what I'll call their "writing atmosphere."

I, for example, am a morning writer with an occasional nighttime burst of creativity. I like to have music playing softly—but only certain kinds of music. I like to have a cup of coffee. And while I seldom consider the following as a part of my writing atmosphere, my computer is actually as integral a part of it as anything. I don't like to write on computers other than my own. My own keyboard is the one I feel comfort-

