



The writing instrument that dominated for the longest period in history (over one-thousand years) was the quill pen. The quill is a pen made from a bird feather. The strongest quills were those taken from living birds in the spring from the five outer left wing feathers. The left wing was favoured because the feathers curved outward and away when used by a right-handed writer. Goose feathers were most common, swan feathers were of a premium grade being scarcer and more expensive. For making fine lines, crow feathers were the best, then came the feathers of the eagle, owl, hawk and turkey.

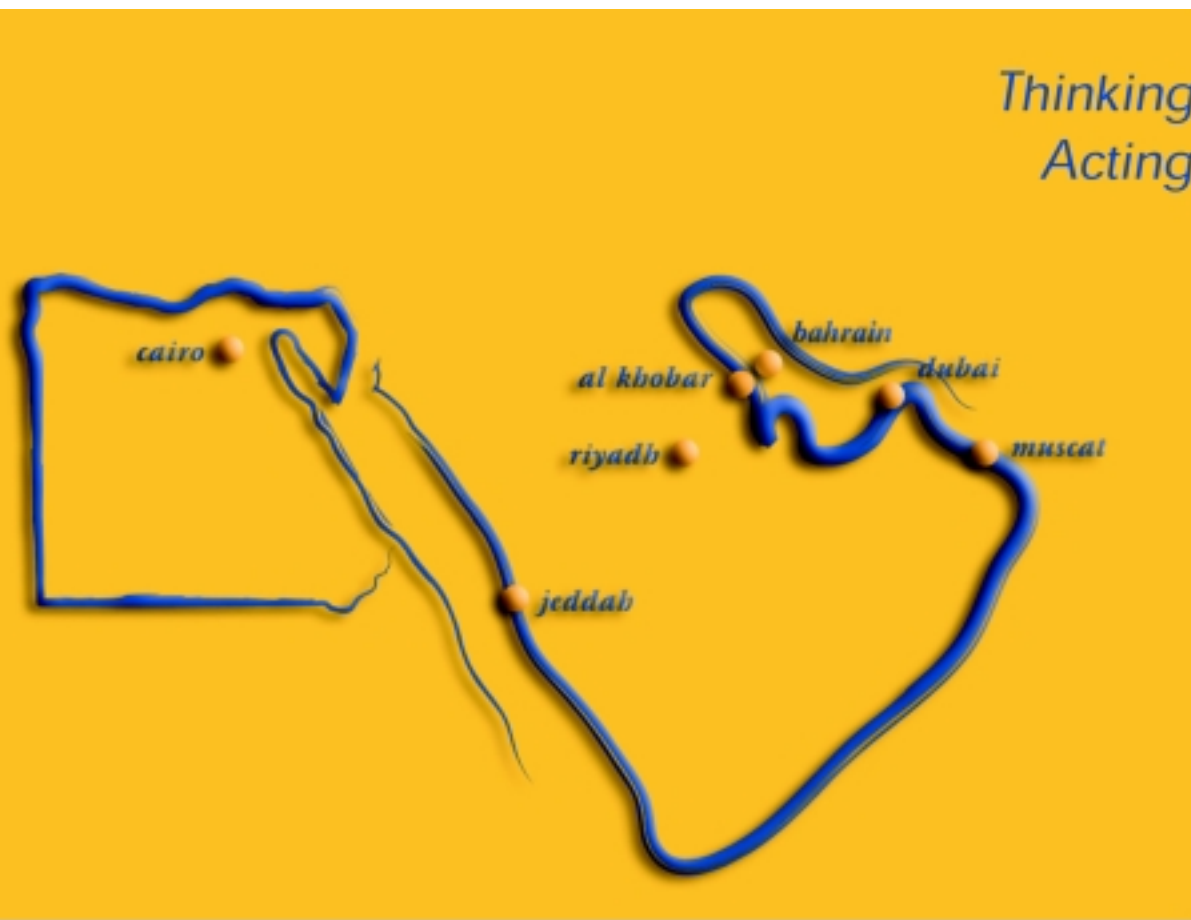
Quill pens lasted for only a week before it was necessary to replace them. There were other disadvantages associated with their use, including a lengthy preparation time. The early European writing parchments made from animal skins, required much scraping and cleaning. A lead and a ruler made margins. To sharpen the quill, the writer needed a special knife (origins of the term "pen-knife".) Beneath the writer's high-top desk was a coal stove, used to dry the ink as fast as possible.

Plant-fibres paper became the primary medium for writing after another dramatic invention took place: Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press with replaceable wooden or metal letters in 1436. Simpler kinds of printing e.g. stamps with names, used much

earlier in China, did not find their way to Europe. During the centuries, many newer printing technologies were developed based on Gutenberg's printing machine e.g. offset printing.

Articles written by hand had resembled printed letters until scholars began to change the form of writing, using capitals and small letters, writing with more of a slant and connecting letters. Gradually writing became more suitable to the speed the new writing instruments permitted. The credit of inventing Italian 'running hand' or cursive handwriting with its Roman capitals and small letters, goes to Aldus Manutius of Venice, who departed from the old set forms. By the end of the 16th century, the old Roman capitals and Greek letterforms transformed into the twenty-six alphabet letters we know today, both for upper and lower-case letters.

When writers had both better inks and paper, and handwriting had developed into both an art form and an everyday occurrence, man's inventive nature once again turned to improving the writing instrument, leading to the development of the modern fountain pen and I trust the much needed articles for the RGBB Newsletter.



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