
From the Editors

A couple of weeks ago, I was pleased to participate in a wonderfully energizing event. The occasion?—a conference commemorating the 400th anniversary of the publication of the first part of what is arguably the most important book in western culture: Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Whether you agree that the *Quixote* is the most influential book of all time is immaterial (this is the very stuff of good-spirited arguments!).

What will always matter most to me about the conference was that it revolved around a single book that huge numbers of people readily recognize. Indeed, recreations of that wonderful novel and its characters abound, from frequent revivals of "The Man of La Mancha;" the delightful artistic representations of the impossibly mad and idealistic Don and his equally foolish but more materialistic sidekick Sancho by Salvador Dali, among many others; opera and ballet renditions; and a felicitous appropriation by the Boston Red Sox in the "impossible dream" year of 1967. And, remarkably, only a small percentage of those who know about the book will ever read it. Nevertheless, this much known but rarely read book became the occasion for drawing teachers and students from different cultures, areas of expertise, and relative levels of actual engagement with the text together to celebrate it, some of the cultural elements that contributed to its construction, and the ways it continues to be relevant to us. One

internationally known scholar on Cervantes transfixed her audience with a lecture on parallels between Cervantes' hilarious character and, of all people, Osama bin Laden. In the process of representing the tremendous influence of the Qu'ran on *Don Quixote*, she showed how the book ought to be used as a window (as she asserted that Cervantes had intended it during a time of great intolerance toward Muslims) to begin to respect cultural and religious difference. And, amid so many multi-media engagements with the Quixote, eleven students stood before a packed audience and shared insights about how Cervantes' representation of the many beautiful, talented, and resourceful women in his novel went against the grain of conventional views about women in a male-driven society. Cervantes' women, the undergraduate and graduate students all agreed, were suggesting new possibilities, expressed necessarily in a subversive way within a closed "police" state. Such a little conference, but, indeed, one with something for nearly everyone, and with significant contributions made to it by the university and the larger community. It doesn't get too much better than that. Quixote would have been proud.

So what? Well, as I was reflecting upon the adrenaline rush I was feeling while racing from my own classes with jacket and tie furled behind me to feed off the ideas of folks from very different disciplines than mine and to root hard for the success of the students, I saw a small but important connection with what we've been trying to accomplish in the *Minnesota English Journal* over the past two years. MCTE is a relatively small organization. The *MEJ* is one of several electronic "faces" of the organization, but, I think, an important one. It's not the Quixote, but it is the text that can potentially draw us together, take the measure of who we are and what we're about, and become the occasion (once each year) for sharing new ideas and encouraging meaningful interaction with them. When the *MEJ* does what it can and should, it, like the Quixote surely is, should be all about us. It ought to reflect the diversity of our interests—the full range of issues related to language; composition; reading; theory; pedagogy; literatures; humanities studies; technology; collaborative learning; assessment; and more. It should, as the

Quixote tries to do, be inclusive and inviting, as well as challenging. And it should welcome and make room for responses to issues that enliven us—perhaps by way of a “letters to the editors” page to carry on the thread of discussions initiated within some of our published pieces—but also in a section devoted to “teaching tips and assignment ideas” that attempts to move our scholarly discussions into classroom practice. I don’t know that the *MEJ* has ever been or intended to be all of these things. However, we’re hoping it will, with your good and great assistance.

In this, our second completely on-line issue, we’re far from where we want to be. The nine articles represented in the following pages show considerable variety in tackling some of those issues indicated in the previous paragraph. But we need more of them, written by more of you. These articles need to come from a greater variety of the populations that the *MEJ* aspires to represent. Those articles should include the conventional ten to thirty-five page scholarly discussions of subjects for constituencies of an organization driven by a desire to teach exceptionally as well as the one-page description of an assignment or teaching strategy or writing prompt.

But we’re gradually getting there. The journal that you’re about to read is more user-friendly. Several readers complained of an inability to download individual articles without printing the entire journal. Everyone now will be able to do that because the journal exists both as a single electronic entity and separate PDF’s for each article.

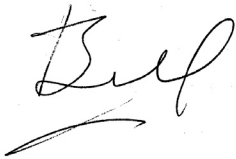
We’re also very pleased with the professional “look” and readability of this issue of *MEJ*. Plenty of white on the pages translates into an easier-on-the-eye presentation. And, consistent with our desire to privilege praxis in our pages, we’ve decided to seek our cover art not from independent and practicing professionals but, instead, from talented and highly-recommended students in Minnesota State University-Mankato’s Art Department who can implement ideas consistent with the themes we ply in specific issues while adding valuable credits to their resumes. We’ll continue that practice with your approval.

And, consistent with our declaration in last year's editorial to reward the editors' choice of the most well-written and interesting article represented in each new issue of the journal, we're pleased to announce that we'll be sending \$250 to Matt Christensen for his essay entitled "A Whodunit Teaching Unit—The Underworld of Victorian London in The Mystery of Edwin Drood." We expect to make this prize a regular feature of future issues of *MEJ*.

In order to move *MEJ* to where we want it, we'll need to solicit more interaction between MCTE's membership and the journal, between our readership and the editors, between those whose ideas and experiences in the classroom ought to be included in *MEJ*'s pages and those who could profit from reading about them. We'll encourage, then, informal and formal pieces, the short and the rather lengthy, the practical and the theoretical, the anecdotal and the formally researched.

We want you to tell us what you think of what you see here. Let us know what you need to see. Send us what you've written about what you care about related to the Language Arts and the English classroom. We promise to respond.

Respectfully,



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