

## From the Editor

*A note from the editor of  
the Wisconsin English  
Journal.*

---

Last night I re-watched *No Country for Old Men* and admired the suspense generated by the Coen brothers' cinematographic brilliance—bleak, scary, and relentlessly violent. It's a densely woven crime story made effective by a controlled stylistic perversity.

The film also spins a suspenseful tale through its absence of modern gadgetry. Unlike contemporary TV detectives who track criminals by pinpointing their digital footprints, the Coen brothers seem to argue through Sheriff Ed Tom Bell that the digital has diminished both the dramatics of daily existence and the primal resourcefulness necessary for survival.

After the movie, I paged through Turner and Hicks' new NCTE publication *Connected Reading: Teaching Adolescent Readers in a Digital World*. Still a little shaken by sociopath Anton Chigurh, with his ghastly haircut and captive bolt pistol, I pondered over how both the Coen brothers (and Cormac McCarthy as the authorial

source of this adaptation) suggest that the affordances of ubiquitous new media should be constantly interrogated in our lives as literate citizens.

In 2009, rare book collector and aficionado Stephen Gertz posted an ironic classified ad for a "professional reader" on his [Booktryst](#) blog:

To provide cogent, erudite and insightful marginalia to digital books and thus help foster social reading. Must be able to read in a crowd and accept potentially constant input and distraction. Digital sociability a must; digital loners, misfits, hermits, screwballs need not apply.

Referencing Clive Thompson's argument in *Wired Magazine* that "We need to stop thinking about the future of publishing and think instead about the future of reading," Gertz accentuates and criticizes an apparent trend. Through publishing software such as CommentPress, readers annotate in the

margins of digitally published books, which often initiate lively discussion forums, occasionally paragraph by paragraph. For example, in 2008, Bob Stein, director of the Institute for the Future of the Book, hired readers to converse over a digitized edition of Doris Lessing's [The Golden Notebook](#). Gertz found the concept abominating:

I don't know about you but I don't want a crowd with me in the sack for any reason much less reading company. Albert, my companion of thirty-four years and most successful LTR, is about all I can tolerate. Albert is a Yellow-Naped Amazon parrot. When he isn't attempting to eat whatever book I'm reading, he quietly sits on my shoulder. And though he has the ability for verbal self-expression, he thankfully keeps his comments to himself.

But perhaps Stein has stumbled upon the future of book clubs, for web sites such as [ReadUps](#) and [ReadSocial](#) deliver innovative social reading experiences.

Perhaps this is also the future of reading and writing instruction. A growing school of thought argues that various media platforms encourage reading through social engagement, particularly in studies of young adults who thrive intellectually in online communities and seamlessly flow from one

form of communication to another. Because these books furnish the pretext to conversations conducted by readers, the e-marginalia will provide great fodder for our understandings of trends in literacy practices.

Fifty years ago, when *Understanding Media* was published, Marshall McLuhan's views about technology were considered fanciful by some. But then in 2008 came the first delineation of "[The NCTE Definition of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies](#)," which included objectives on using technology, producing and analyzing multimedia texts, accessing and evaluating complex research sources, and considering the diversity of a global, wired audience. From what I understand, secondary and even primary school teachers now include these objectives in their curricula, and students equipped with these literacies have already reached college campuses, maybe even my own!

So given the impact of technology on literate lives inside and outside the academy, and the pressure to adapt to and develop new forms and genres, have we lost a little of that primal resourcefulness? How would *No Country for Old Men* have turned out if Sheriff Bell had an arsenal of drones, a GPS, and an iPad? What if Anton did?

I'll think about it while I read and annotate *Connected Reading*. Now where did I put my pencil?

From the Editor

*John Pruitt is Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Rock County, the president of the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, and the editor of Wisconsin English Journal; email john.pruitt@uwc.edu.*

*Copyright © 2015 by the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English.*