

# Letter from the Editor

*And what is good, Phadreus,  
And what is not good—  
Need we ask anyone  
to tell us these things?*

This question, supposedly posed by Socrates to his imaginary friend Phaedrus, was of course first written by Plato, who more than likely imagined Socrates asking it of himself. Millennia later, a man named Robert Pirsig used the English version above as a preface to his book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

Pirsig begins *Zen* by writing, "I can see by my watch, without taking my hand from the left grip of the cycle, that it is eight-thirty in the morning . . . We are in an area of the Central Plains filled with thousands of duck hunting sloughs, heading northwest from Minneapolis toward the Dakotas."

I can see by my millennium clock, without taking my finger from the left click of the mouse, that it is one-thirty in the morning. Tomorrow (today?) I'll gather this journal's pages onto a Zip disk and drive the same road, heading southeast from my house to the printer's, through an area of the Central Plains filled with thousands of quacks. I'll go unnoticed.

Pirsig's book has been on my mind a lot lately. I've made it part of the first-year comp classes I teach, so it's not like I can get away from it. But more, this journal has reminded of that journey of Pirsig's in ways I hadn't expected.

I should have known, eh? The theme of this year's spring conference in Minnetonka was "Changing Teaching for Changing Times: Transformation and Innovation in the English Classroom." The moving keynote address, entitled "Writing, Teaching and Transforming Home," was given by none other than *Multicultiboho*

*Sideshow* author Alexs Pate (see page 119). My own call for papers for this issue asked you to send your "stories" rather than asking you to "submit."

In the call I wrote I didn't like the term "submit" because ". . . it sounds so borg: You will submit! Resistance is futile, and so on . . ." Ironically, the editor of the newsletter in which it appeared (apparently not a slave to *Star Trek*) must have thought "borg" was misspelled and so corrected it to "boring." In the end, it sounded like I didn't want you to submit because it was boring. Fortunately nobody listens to me.

I know how it can happen. The call was sent via email to be downloaded and placed in the newsletter. Like many of the articles appearing here that came via electronic transfer, unintelligible computer hieroglyphics no doubt peppered the text. Dealing with it resulted in what I call a Spell-Checker Paper-Wrecker. Examples I've saved from student papers include "the American Revelation," "the difference between Catholics and predestines," and "For Indians living in reservoirs, life is difficult." You only make these kind of mistakes once. Unless you click "Change All." Then the mistake appears twice or

more and it becomes a Double-Decker Spell-Checker Paper-Wrecker. Try shouting that ten times fast in class. Ding-dong, Admin calling!

Fortunately, the articles appearing here contained few other problems besides the many hieroglyphics. To help keep my sanity while I sought and destroyed them I pretended they were comic strip swear words. It's amazing how a good strong cuss in the middle of a passionate article from a Sister at St. Ben's can reawaken even the most eye-sore of professional journal editors. And believe me, at this late (early?) hour, I'm an eyesore.

But this job entails more than deleting extra spaces and changing upper cases so we all save faces. I also wrestled with trying to make the articles conform to one style of parenthetical citation but, as more came in and none used the same, I gave up. Differences in methods of citation remain, but all are completely understandable. Who am I to issue citations? Certainly no authority.

I also fought with the placing of the articles. Should all the articles dealing with autobiography be placed together? What about those discussing Aristotle? And where should ads go? What about pictures? Ten dozen pages of solid text? Egad. If I was on *Star Trek*, it would be around this point that I shout at Captain Kirk, "Damn it, Jim, I'm an English teacher, not a journal editor!"

But that's what we all are. At MCTE we take on different roles to keep the organization running. If you're a member, thanks for realizing the importance of our combined efforts. If you're not yet a member, please consider becoming one. Membership information is included at the end of this journal. Your colleagues await you.

Autobiography, rhetoric, transformation, values. Quality. Like Pirsig's *Zen*, this journal has it all, including

arguments assailing state standards in the form of Ken Goodman's articles. The articles by Liu Wei, who has only been in our country for a year, I left mostly unedited, as much of their beauty lies in the author's valiant victories with our language. George Soule's artful treatment of Iris Murdoch's book shows us all how a master approaches reading and applies a love for writing to it. And even Pirsig would have done well to read M. J. Abhishaker's transformative article before spending ten years in India trying to fit his square western blockhead in round eastern holes. And Roseann Wolak's contribution, and Mary Jane Berger's . . . they're all so inspiring. My only wish is to get more articles from the thousands of public school English/ language arts and ESL teachers. This issue is being sent free to each of them to encourage them to join MCTE and share in the conversation of our profession.

For the most part, I've tried to keep it simple. I made the executive decision to place articles in the order they were received. For pictures I used rather generic ones like the keys above. Any relation of the photos to the articles they accompany is purely coincidental. After all this effort, I'm left with nothing but respect for the newsletter editor who screwed up my call for papers. Because now it's her turn. And yours. The printer has assured me this special 40th anniversary edition of the *Minnesota English Journal* is printed on paper friendly to red pencils. So consider yourself an editor and go to town. I do.

Thanks for reading. I hope you enjoy your journal as much as I've enjoyed preparing it for you. If you do, then it is good, and we need not ask anyone to tell us.

—Jake Oetting, *MEJ* Editor  
Labor Day, 2000

P.S. Hey, Liu Wei, now I have wicked humor, too, eh? Oops, my Canada is showing (from far, far away)!

