

## The Writerly Reader

Amidst contemplating writerly readers, we are reminded of African American scholar Cornell West's discussion of the racism, xenophobia, and bias stemming from a television comedy star's (Roseanne Barr) racist tweet.<sup>1</sup> He commented on one's responsibility to oneself and the need for empathy for others. Speaking on the importance of having "courage, vision," and not "conforming to the idols," he suggested we all need to:

"hope and to have ...enough courage to try to change the world... [be] in the world but not of it; [be] nonconformist in life of love, justice, tenderness and freedom.... Action takes a number of different forms...broaden it out not just by hitting the streets.... Think, be a poet—[be] true to self in term of love and integrity." (Moore, 2018)

The notion of "being in the world but not of it" and being "true to self with sympathy to others" befits what we think should be a key underlying tenet for the meaning maker. It highlights the view of the meaning maker as one who enlists, but is not governed by, the text or texts—as a creator of meaning, not a translator or recipient thereof.

### Writerly Readers: Their Inseparability

It is difficult to separate reading from writing, for as we read, we are engaged in our own meaning making, akin to writing the text. In one of our favourite articles, "Teaching the other self: The writer's first reader," Pulitzer Prize-winner and writing educator Donald Murray (1982) suggested that when writers and readers compose texts, they negotiate its meaning with "the other self"—the inner reader who continually reacts to what the writer has written, is writing and will write, or what the reader has read, is reading and will read. It is this other self that acts as the reader's or writer's counsel, judge and guide. This other self oversees what the reader or writer is trying to do, defines the nature of the collaboration or partnership between reader and author, and decides how the writer as reader and reader as writer is proceeding. It is analogous to when co-authors rework the text in accordance with their own interests. Even when one reads one's own writing, one is re-writing the text in a

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<sup>1</sup> See also Koblin, J. (2018, May 29). 'Roseanne' self-destructs with a racist tweet. *The New York Times*, p. A1. Retrieved from <https://nyti.ms/2GXOIFT>.

fashion that is akin to ongoing constructionist notions of reading. And, when we write, we are reading from multiple sources as we go back and forth formulating our ideas (see McGinley & Tierney, 1989). At times, our reading and writing involves engaging in a tug-of-war with ideas and their expression. Essentially, the writerly readers are viewed as composers as they create meanings (Tierney & Pearson, 1983; Pearson & Tierney, 1984).

The notion of a writerly reader is also aligned with the proposition offered in our notions of reading as composing. Take, if you will, our discussion of revision, in which approaches to reading are pursued in ways that encourage pauses, rethinking, consultations and revision. As suggested:

*If readers are to develop some control over and a sense of discovery with the models of meaning they build, they must approach text with the same deliberation, time, and reflection that a writer employs as she revises a text. They must examine their developing interpretation and view the models they build as draft-like in quality—subject to revision. We would like to see students engage in behaviours such as rereading (especially with different alignments), annotating the text on the page with reactions, and questioning whether the model they have built is what they really want. (Tierney & Pearson, 1983, p. 270)*

### **Characteristics and Responsibilities of the Writerly Reader**

There seems to be a lengthy list of characteristics (and responsibilities) of writerly readers as meaning makers and co-creators of texts.

#### **Agency and Planfulness.**

- Like their cousins (the constructivist and the strategic reader) in the activist family, writerly readers are agents, actively and constantly engaged in making sense of what they experience or seek to access and enlist.
- Writerly readers are contemplative and purposeful in terms of their actions and attention.

#### **Enlarging and Integrating Understandings.**

- Writerly readers are involved in the use of reading and writing to progressively enlarge understandings and help with pursuits (i.e., knowledge builders and users).

- Writerly readers are constructively arrogant as they decide if a text is sufficiently newsworthy or insightful to warrant the time, attention, and energy it takes to learn from the text, .
- Writerly readers will engage with the meanings suggested by (perhaps even inscribed in) the text as witnesses of or participants in the events and ideas presented, as a way of appreciating the author's meaning and craft and enjoying (in the spirit of connoisseurship) engaging with the author.
- Writerly readers use their newly constructed knowledge for ongoing meaning making—predicting as they read, learning from text, harnessing new understandings to store in their knowledge warehouses.
- Writerly readers pursue integrated and coherent understandings through reading and writing—understandings that are focused yet expansive rather than scattered and piecemeal.

#### **Reader-Author Relationships.**

- Writerly readers recognize their roles in their exchanges with the world—recognizing that they serve as a catalyst for meaning making and are responsible for the support and continuation of that knowledge. Writerly readers might be thoughtful to the author and to the text, but mostly they will be thoughtful to themselves.
- Writerly readers acknowledge their authorship as they engage with the ideas and authorship of others that may spur or inform their own meaning making.
- Writerly readers will consider meanings with an eye toward their perspectives and stances as well as toward the perspective and stance of the author and that of other meaning makers and processes.
- Writerly readers seek to know the author and the author's goals, approaches, and appeals—as well as their (that is, the Writerly readers') own readership and authorship in meaning-making exchanges.
- Writerly readers can shift their focus from ideas to aesthetics to appreciate both the craft and the art of the writing (and the writer) before them

#### **Layered and Linked Texts.**

- Writerly readers are always reading between and among texts—intertextually. Writerly readers cross-cross their reading and writing, enlisting them in different

ways for different purposes in a fashion that integrates ideas for layered meaning making.

### **Reading Oneself.**

- Writers are their first readers and readers of writers, other than oneself, are essentially reading their writing of the reading of another reader's writing.
- Writerly readers might pause to redevelop, rethink, revamp, or reflect upon their deliberations and future pursuits.
- Writerly readers will learn to read their own writerly reading of ideas. As meaning makers engage with their own texts or the texts of others, they are engaged in a form of transaction with themselves and others. The notion of writerly readers might be viewed as equivalent to that of a readerly writer.
- Writerly readers are aware of fellow meaning makers with whom they may contend.
- Writerly readers revise—usually as they are afforded feedback or become aware of the need to do so.

### **Inseparability and Continuity**

Reading and writing involve meaning makers' transactions across texts (i.e., those that we author as well as those authored by others). Whether we are involved in reading or writing or a combination of the two, we are engaged in continuous meaning making as we connect and negotiate with people and events, images, and conversations. Our meaning making involves transactions with our worlds as we engage with and contemplate meanings and their relevance to what we think or might do. For both the reader and the writer, meaning is never directly given. It must be created.

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