

we'd generate a large, tiring, and familiar catalog, but one very much in vogue.

The academic rank of a contributor is a red herring, as is the simple fact that our manuscripts are refereed. If our contributors are trendy it makes no difference whether they're full professors or graduate students; if our consultant readers and Advisory Committee members are politically motivated it makes no difference what we submit to them. They will recommend what they like. And our Editorial Board will choose from among the approved manuscripts on the basis of unifying themes, many of which strike members as less than literary.

The flaw here is the absence of any supervisory body to ensure that "a variety of topics, whether general or specific, and . . . all scholarly methods and theoretical perspectives," which we rightly invite, are indeed represented by our journal. We wish to live up to this challenge, and well we should, but few of us believe we've succeeded. A large and steadily growing fraction of members agree that *PMLA* is topical, narrow, and predictable.

We might consider the Forum here, since it is edited differently and succeeds in representing a broad range of opinions, biases, and tastes. Its editors show no fear of controversy and deliberately seek to include diverse viewpoints, even heretical ones, even ones long out of vogue. It's got a vigor and variety that the refereed articles lack.

We claim to seek diversity; we claim to value it. But when did our referee system last approve an article relying on Frye, say, or Richards? When did we last see a simple reader-response approach: two or three carefully chosen primary texts and a few thoughtful, original observations of them? Such a piece would be conspicuous now, for our typical bibliography has swollen to such vast size that we sometimes wonder whether our contributors are scholars or reference librarians. An essay of five pages appended to a list of secondary sources covering three pages is no essay at all. It's a survey of other people's ideas, and one that grows ever more tiring as the names cited grow ever more familiar. These mighty catalogs are the stigmata of the junior professor eager to show the world that he or she has read nearly everyone, and they are increasingly common. Thousands of members have noticed it: today's *PMLA* represents a stale repertoire of overused sources, biases, and methodological and theoretical approaches to reading literature.

How, then, might we establish and protect diversity in our journal? Not by following Stanton, certainly; she is proud that *PMLA*'s referees "systematically look for signs of possibly biased readings" (199). I take no comfort in that: an aversion to bias is precisely what has left our journal so spiritless. Protecting diversity requires recognizing, respecting, and even encouraging a great

variety of biases and scholarly approaches, especially those that are unpopular.

I've lost confidence in our system of refereed readings and an elected Editorial Board; if it were working as it should, the articles in *PMLA* would show a good deal more original thinking and independent writing than they do. Clearly, our referees are not recommending an adequate range of work, and the Editorial Board are aggravating the problem by further narrowing the field. Worse, our editor does not yet recognize the difficulty, I hope because she is too much occupied with administrative duties to notice it, I fear because she is satisfied with it.

We must consider remedies, for as we fail to act, we confirm by example that the original, the apolitical, and the stubbornly not hip have got no chance of publication, and thus we discourage submissions of such material. I would never alter our policy of evaluating only anonymous submissions, but I believe we ought to consider establishing an editorial supervisor or committee charged with the task of ensuring diversity in *PMLA* so that we might live up to those handsome words in the statement of editorial policy. These would be permanent, professional employees—civil servants, as opposed to politicians—who would promote, first, an editorial culture valuing good writing and rigorous arguments and, second, diversity over popular trends.

If we make a start, corrective action may well turn out self-sustaining; we can expect greater diversity in print to encourage a greater range of submissions. We have reason to be optimistic: the Forum confirms that we are indeed a diverse lot. And if the Forum can publish good copy while representing a healthy range of biases, so can the rest of *PMLA*. We only have to run it properly—that is, professionally.

THOMAS C. GREENE
Seattle, WA

To the Editor:

I recently had occasion to turn to the contents page of every issue of *PMLA* going back to 1900 in search of material for my dissertation on Milton, and what I found tended to confirm those who complain of the radical nature of the journal. The March Editor's Column nicely puts to rest the "myth" concerning submissions according to academic rank, and now may I suggest research into another claim cited in the opening statement: "the journal only publishes trendy articles that have a radical political agenda shaped by foreign theories" (199)? The further

back I went into the stacks of *PMLA* (especially before 1960), the more comfortable I became with the titles of essays because they seemed to me free of the jargon of modern theory. They did not strike me as being either “trendy” or supportive of a “radical political agenda.”

What has happened in our profession that the impression of trendiness and radicalness have gained such a hold on the imagination? Part of the answer must lie in the general acceptance among literary theorists of the principle of the so-called intentional fallacy. Older issues of *PMLA* clearly rest on the reverse assumption: that it is honorable, indeed mandatory, that one search out authorial intention. Trendiness has resulted, in part, because we no longer seem to care what the author had in mind. A second reason lies in our prevailing notion, imported from European theorists in the main, that language does not mean anything certain. It is my impression that the old issues of *PMLA* do not at all support this theory; scholarly research at one time was based on the commonsense foundation that language means something definite. A third reason is the submissions policy of *PMLA*, which allows for all points of view. This policy is inevitable in such a large organization, but it means that the journal entertains the newer literary theories as though they are on an equal footing with the commonsense theories of the past.

The policy on submissions thus turns *PMLA* into a catch basin for all streams of literary thought, and the largest stream flows out of the MLA conventions, where the radically political and theoretically experimental dominate the presentations. Look at just the last two conventions, in San Diego and Chicago: where are the panel titles containing just the names of canonical authors, unburdened by radical subtexts such as “Shakespeare through the Eyes of Lacan”? Of the some twelve hundred panels of the last two years, how many deal with the canonical and not the trendy? How many place radical political agendas above simple literary analysis? How many panels, for example, have been given on William Faulkner at the last two conventions and how many on queer theory? *PMLA* has more radical content than traditional because of the flow of radical papers given at the conventions and turned into submissions.

If these impressions of mine are myths, I hope they will be struck down in a future editorial. It would be interesting to see a profile of the types of submissions over the last hundred years (or even the period 1973–92, covered in the editorial). It seems to me that if our profession no longer finds enjoyment and insight in the canonical authors it so readily shunts aside at the MLA conventions and in the pages of *PMLA*, it will not get over its malaise

by bathing in the murky waters of the trendy and radically political.

LARRY R. ISITT
University of Southern Mississippi

Spanish Is Not a Foreign Language

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to John Van Cleve’s letter on the status of Spanish (110 [1995]: 266). Van Cleve’s candid question apparently has elicited no responses from the MLA’s membership.

It has been argued for some time that Spanish is not a foreign language. Hispanic Americans are an integral part of this country’s past and future. With some thirty million Hispanics, the United States is the third-largest Spanish-speaking country in the world, after Mexico and Spain. In many parts of the country, one hears Spanish constantly. The presence of Spanish is growing rapidly and is reaching parts of the country that previously had no significant Hispanic populations.

Is Spanish a regional language then? Not exactly. At least not in the sense that German was a regional language in the nineteenth-century Midwest, for example. Although especially high concentrations of Hispanics reside in places like the Southwest, Florida, metropolitan Chicago and the Northeast, Hispanics are spread throughout the entire country. Unlike nineteenth-century German Americans, Hispanics keep in close contact with their places of origin, some of which are very close to (or, in the case of Puerto Rico, part of) the United States. Moreover, as an intercontinental economy develops, national borders are becoming less important, and movement of people in all directions is bound to increase.

I personally always use the term *second national language* when referring to Spanish. English and Spanish are the main languages of the Americas, and the United States is the frontier where they meet. There is no neat border between the English- and Spanish-speaking worlds. Instead, there is a blurring of the boundaries, and Spanish is spoken with different degrees of intensity from the southernmost parts of the country to the Canadian border. Spanish, in all likelihood, will continue to increase its penetration into the northern parts of the continent.

The United States is an increasingly bilingual society. The English-only movement is merely a reaction to this undeniable reality, and its appearance is the best proof of the enormous vitality of Spanish in this country. While some citizens react with fear, many more have decided