

Editor's Column

I WRITE THIS column on 10 February, too soon to say much about reader response to the first issue of the "new" *PMLA*. That even at this early date we have received a number of unsolicited and, for the most part, kind comments, I take to be a good omen, for *PMLA* has never been burdened with an excess of fan mail. Equally encouraging is the fact that we have already received a number of thoughtful letters for the Forum, correspondence which suggests not only that the January issue has been read by more members than usual, but that the articles are provocative. So much for our side. On the other side, one member has expressed disappointment that the new editorial policy has not resulted in a more radical change, this member, after reading the January issue, being reminded of the old story about the woolly white dog of which, at the end of the long pilgrimage, the connoisseur's opinion was, "he's not so woolly." Maybe so, but then the new *PMLA* is, after all, still in its puppyhood, and we have every reason to expect that it will get woollier as the years progress.

Woolly dog letters are, in any case, outnumbered four to one by letters from members whose concerns are with foreign languages and literatures and who have pointed out, quite correctly, that only two of the ten January articles treated foreign authors or works, with nothing at all on German, Spanish, or Italian literature. Articles on Dante, *Paul et Virginie*, and Xhosa tribal poetry have since appeared in March, and, in this current issue, Goethe, Calvino, and *Lazarillo de Tormes* are featured. If, therefore, we ignore essays on general topics, we find that of the twenty-three articles to appear in these first three issues fifteen center on British or American and eight on foreign authors or works. That these percentages (65% and 35%) correspond roughly with the percentages of MLA members in English and in foreign language departments (68% and 32%) is perhaps irrelevant but not entirely fortuitous since we have maintained proportional representation only by pushing ahead the articles accepted on foreign authors. The problem seems to be that members who work with other than British or American literature are not submitting material that is appropriate under the new *PMLA* editorial policy, for of the ninety articles (out of more than a thousand submissions) so far recommended to the Editorial Board by specialist readers, only one is in the field of Spanish, two are in Italian, two in Slavic, three in German, and ten in French—a total of eighteen articles in the "major" foreign literatures. Of these eighteen the Editorial Board has accepted ten for publication, a percentage somewhat higher than its overall percentage of acceptances (47% in this past year). The point, however, is that *PMLA* is still the *Publication of the members of the Modern Language Association*, and as such it is and can be no better than the articles submitted to it. To all members, then, and especially to those with special interest in foreign languages and literatures, we reiterate our plea that you send us appropriate material, the white woolly kind that demands the attention of all members of our profession.

No single issue of *PMLA* could, of course, ever include enough articles to satisfy the special interests of all MLA members. Of the nine articles in this particular issue, for example, there is little or nothing on French, Slavic or Xhosa authors or, for that matter, on twentieth-century British or American authors. What, then, is there in this issue that would interest, say, specialists in Proust or Tolstoy, Faulkner or Virginia Woolf? A good deal, I think, for at very least three of these nine articles should have equal appeal for all members, whatever their specialties. This is surely true of John Fisher's "Dancer and the Dance," the Presidential Address which traditionally appears as the lead article in the May issue. One may not agree with his analysis of the MLA or of the state of the profession, but John Fisher, perhaps more than any other single individual, has been on active duty in the combat zone these past two decades, and what he has to say is well worth pondering. I would also categorize Russell Peck's essay, which concludes this issue, as one that is of equal interest to all members, regardless of specialties, for even though the essay centers on medieval poetry, its theme—public dreams and private myths—is universal, and thus Peck's analysis leads him from Middle English lyrics to William Carlos Williams. The third article I would single out as being of interest to every member of the profession is Dwight Culler's on monodrama and the dramatic monologue; to one who teaches courses in Tennyson and Browning (and will perhaps never teach them in quite the same way after reading this article), what Culler has to say is of special interest, but anyone who has ever read a dramatic monologue, or has in any way been interested in the relationship between music and poetry, will find this material fascinating.

