

tion to his personal effort, he soon discovered, he could join his fellows in a communal effort and find satisfaction not only in greater production but also in a community of thought.

The natural basis of this pattern is, of course, the human family. In this single unit of human existence can be found the whole expression of the communal system and of any mutual organization. The only equality in the family is the right of each one to be loved and supported by the others, but the whole depends on each one's taking the responsibility for his "station." The thing is a mystery.

We cannot even define the mystery of a nation except that its contribution to the "family of nations" depends on the loyalty of its members and the seriousness and nobility of its purpose.

It cannot be denied that the purpose of this country of ours, from the beginning, was to form a "free society" as far as that term is capable of being negotiated with the necessity of observing the rights of others. Whenever we have failed, it has been quickly called to our attention. Efforts have then been made to right the failure, but not to change the system within which we are able to exercise free judgment. Together we have come to produce a vast enterprise composed of all the individual enterprises conceived by individual creativity and aided by those who are glad to feel themselves a part of the team—"manning their stations." And no one had to stay at his station if he chose to depart.

Wherein the heart of man is deceitful and wicked we know it has caused much sorrow among us. We know that the reformation of this single item could make the cooperative effort infinitely more concerned with attaining the ideal.

It is the human activity, then, which forms and interprets the system, although the form given to human beings (the family) is the starting point and should therefore be the ideal.

It would seem that the inspiration to interpret this ideal must be guided by something outside man himself, if he is to be "kept on course." What makes man keep the ideal in mind at all? One can say "survival," but that is not the inspiration of human culture. Man has sought the Authority for the responsibility he realizes he must take. He has set goals according to the revelations he has received, and over the ages, he has formed a "beautiful order" (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, #403) to maintain public harmony. In the times when this harmony, however faulty, has been broken, the expression of cultural thought has been temporarily suspended.

The action necessitated to restore harmony, to inspire the sacrifice necessary to insure a measure of freedom to all, has overridden the artistic expression. The description of the ugliness of suffering, as well as of the beauty of restoration, has had to wait for the

opportunity to consider the meaning of the action. The ideology, then, would seem to be the product of reflection; the critic is the last person on the scene when it comes to working for society and keeping it going. His readers, those influenced by his thinking, are a very small group indeed.

The intellectually "elite" are surely responsible for "class thinking," but there is no reason to be sad about this fact of life! What fun would there be in a world of equal talents—nothing to work for, argue about, justify in terms of a crusade! All the classes of society proudly contributing to the whole prosperity, or maintaining each other, makes a happy picture.

If literary critics could see their role as judges of talent and inspirers to nobility of thought and expression, leaving political criticism to the realm of historians and political scientists, we might be able to make use of an "esthetic" that would lift us out of the commonplace and pull our worker neighbors with us—especially since education is becoming so commonplace.

We cannot leave human thought in the mire where it seems to be today. We need a God-oriented literature to heal our wounds and set us to righting our individual lives through which society will find its proper destiny.

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In the March *PMLA*, Professor Crews will comment on the three letters printed above.

Literature and Politics

To the Editor:

In a paper delivered at the Denver convention, and printed in the May *PMLA*, Professor Rima Reck warns us from the specter of a politicized MLA, and posits instead a vine-and-fig-tree state of individual political responsibility.

The argument—that individually but not collectively we must be "critical intellectuals" possessed of "ruthless honesty"—has a certain fatal appeal. But doesn't such honesty compel us to remember that not very long ago we were urged to direct our political energies, individual and collective, toward increasing the budget of the National Endowment for the Humanities? Haven't we been urged toward political methods to keep TIAA available?

To argue that we now wish to keep our political hands clean and humanistically disinterested smacks just a bit of hypocrisy. Our self-serving interests in the Endowment or TIAA are no more "professional" than our lack of *collective, humane* interest in the war and racism and poverty that are ravaging the human spirit. We must be involved—as individuals and as an orga-

nization of individuals with common and insistent priorities.

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***PMLA* and Politics**

To the Editor:

In one respect of some importance, the announcement of an open "Forum" for comments and criticism on anything published in *PMLA* came in the May 1970 *MLA Newsletter* at a very appropriate time, in my view. For in the May 1970 issue of *PMLA* itself there appeared two essays of a kind not usual for the Association's highly regarded scholarly journal: Henry Nash Smith's "Something Is Happening But You Don't Know What It Is, Do You, Mr. Jones?" and Rima Reck's "The Politics of Literature."

I do not feel that articles of this kind have a place in the Association's scholarly journal, a feeling on my part which has a basis almost expressed in the very title of Professor Reck's article. The political affairs of

the Association as an organized group of scholars are not the kind of subject matter traditional for the journal nor the kind indicated as suitable for it in its own statement of editorial policy: "distinguished contemporary scholarship and criticism in the modern languages and literatures." The entire world community of scholars looks to *PMLA* for just such scholarship and criticism as stipulated in the statement of editorial policy. Shall it begin to find there instead discussions of the Association's internal affairs?

I do not suggest that such discussions are unimportant and have no place. I suggest, rather, that the proper place is not *PMLA*. If the Association wishes to provide a forum for such matters, perhaps it should expand the *Newsletter* or else establish some other appropriate publication. I feel—and I hope that this letter is but one of many which you will receive with similar sentiments—that the *PMLA* should be reserved for "distinguished contemporary scholarship and criticism in the modern languages and literatures."

JAMES L. ALLEN, JR.

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