

Editor's Column

"I don't read all the articles in *PMLA*, but I always read the Editor's Column." These words by a solemn-voiced colleague of mine, as well as English Showalter's valedictory threat that he plans to scrutinize future editor's columns with an insider's curiosity, reverberate about me as I take advantage for the first time of a license that *PMLA* accords to few contributors. Alone among the association's membership, the ex-president of the MLA and the editor of *PMLA* have open access to the journal's front pages without the restraints of anonymous submission, equal opportunity, and democratic selection. (The executive director's report in the May issue occupies the climactic hinterland that the publishing trade lovingly calls "the back matter.") Whatever effect this egregious breach of the rules may have on the body politic, I am grateful for the privilege of having my musings printed here untested by *PMLA*'s rigorous and by now hallowed evaluation process.

The signature that you see at the foot of this column reflects the Executive Council's decision to separate the offices of executive director of the association and editor of *PMLA*. I join Phyllis Franklin under a new arrangement in which the responsibilities of one will not burden or distract the other. We are confident, along with those who encouraged this significant reorganization, that the new division of labor will benefit both our association and its journal and that it will produce two contented individuals rather than one split personality.

Unlike my predecessors, I have not had to leave the protective custody of the academy; I remain attached to my idyllic ivory tower, distant—to echo the words of the Spanish Renaissance poet and university professor Luis de León—from all worldly sound in my secret and secure country setting. New routines have solved the logistical challenges presented by my geographical separation from *PMLA*'s offices, and the editorial machinery suffered no hitches in making the transition. In fact, it took no more than a first contact with the headquarters staff for me to realize that the orchestra could well play without a conductor.

I cannot attribute my appointment to the editorship of *PMLA* to my two years' experience as editor of the *X-Ray*, my high school newspaper. The Executive Council was not aware of that key item in my career history. More to the point is my long association with *PMLA* itself. My initiation into the journal's policies and procedures occurred precisely two decades ago, and I have passed successively through the stages of contributor, reader, member of the Advisory Committee, and member of the Editorial Board. I have seen *PMLA* change its design (if not its colors) and its platform, and I have learned much from my apprenticeship to John Fisher, Bill Schaefer, Joel Conarroe, and, most recently and at closest hand, English Showalter. Their enthusiasm for the journal and their commitment to it despite competing administrative demands deserve our continuing recognition. My familiarity with *PMLA* has bred anything but contempt, and I step into the editorship, I must confess, with feelings of sympathy and respect: sympathy for the editorial policies of anonymous submissions, multiple evaluations, openness to articles of unlimited scope and limited length; respect for the quality of the journal. *PMLA*, I am convinced, represents the profession's highest standards, and I agree with Joel Conarroe's opinion that it exposes us to some of the most provocative essays to be found anywhere. Not the least of the responsibilities of *PMLA*'s editor, as I see them, is to maintain and proclaim the journal's intellectual integrity.

Alert readers of *PMLA*'s masthead may have noticed that in my transition from the Editorial Board to the editor's slot my name moved from near the top of the page to near the bottom. As decoders of signs, you and I may read something symbolic into this displacement, the most conspicuous evidence of my change in status. Editors of *PMLA* always feel compelled to remind their readers, as I do, that *PMLA*, unlike other journals, is the organ of an association that defines the editor's role and places constraints on him or (one day) her. The procedures for handling your submissions are in place, and I refer you to the January 1984 editor's column for English Showalter's detailed outline of the steps that we follow. The staff in New York will continue to process the manuscripts that arrive. Those that are not recommended for publication cross my desk only when it is time for me to fulfill the painful task of signing the letters that accompany the manuscripts back to their authors. Articles that receive two favorable reviews await the deliberations of the Editorial Board, at whose meetings the editor functions as one equal voice among seven and no author is identified until a final decision has been reached. Again, it is the editor who then conveys the results to the authors.

This process has already generated two issues in 1986 that not only bear testimony to *PMLA*'s ability to attract outstanding essays but, by happy chance, encompass an ample sweep of the membership's fields, interests, and critical methods. The articles that fix on the other side of the Anglophone Atlantic range from Chaucer, Milton, Spenser, and Shakespeare to Wordsworth and Joyce, while

Emerson, Hawthorne, and William Dean Howells occupy the Americanists. The often under-represented foreign language areas hold space in these numbers with studies of Ibsen, Racine, and, in felicitous juxtaposition, Barthes and Góngora. *PMLA* in its second century is off to a good start.

But undoubtedly not good enough to please all readers. Like every editor in memory before me, I issue a plea to all of you to send us your work—we can select for publication only from the material that you submit—and, as always, a special call goes out to the members who belong to the constituencies that feel marginal to *PMLA*. The significance of the Executive Council's unprecedented choice of a Hispanist as editor of *PMLA* cannot be lost on the membership. Although Hispanics and Hispanists are certainly not a voiceless and invisible minority these days, either outside the MLA or within, *PMLA* is still not given the opportunity to publicize their culture adequately, and so the sensation of marginality is fanned. What I am saying about my own extended family of course pertains to all the non-English fields and to the other groups who, though active at our annual convention, rarely find their way into *PMLA*. I am delighted that French, Scandinavian, and Spanish writers grace the pages of the first issue to bear my name as editor; but if that instance does not become a trend, if the council's signal goes unheeded, I shall be deeply disappointed.

This is an important moment for both the MLA and *PMLA*: a new headquarters, the beginning of a second century of publication, a fresh administrative arrangement. A politician would not hesitate to call it historic. Some of you no doubt expect an independent editor to produce immediate revolution. Others may recall plans that did not always come to fruition and will claim that *PMLA* has changed little during several decades of distinguished and dynamic leadership. Yet changes have taken place over the years, changes that have been not necessarily dramatic but salutary, and they should continue to come about. Special opportunities do exist at this moment, and I call for your advice and suggestions. I realize that consensus among the MLA's varied and volatile membership is impossible to achieve and that the devotees of *PMLA* who consider it a national treasure not to be tampered with are unlikely to settle their differences with those who would chuck the whole thing and start afresh. I may be courting a bruising experience, but I invite your letters, your assessment of *PMLA*'s present state, and your expectations for its future. I promise you a careful hearing. What I cannot guarantee is a May issue with a glossy crimson and chartreuse cover.

JOHN W. KRONIK