

## Editor's Column

THIS ISSUE CONCLUDES our first year of publishing articles accepted under the new *PMLA* editorial policy. Perhaps a few reflections are in order.

When the members of the Editorial Board first met two years ago and discussed the mysteries of the new policy, I think we were all more or less aware that the basic concept—to publish articles that, regardless of approach or subject, would be important enough to demand the attention of 30,000 readers—presented a challenge for both the Board and the profession. Today, after two years and eight meetings, I think all of us on the Board are even more respectful of, perhaps even intimidated by, the new policy and its implications. As I noted in the March Editor's Column, the Board does not consider itself to be a high tribunal come to bury or praise, but the more we work with submissions to this new *PMLA*, 96% of which prove to be unsuitable for publication, the harder it is to deny that we are involved in an anatomy of the profession. We assume, reasonably, that scholars who publish their work do so in order for it to be read by other scholars, and that the better the work, the more colleagues with whom they would like to share it. All well and good; this is, of course, the attraction for publishing in a journal that reaches 30,000 readers. But if this assumption is valid, then, given the size and stature of our profession, one would expect *PMLA* to be overwhelmed with truly outstanding submissions. That we are not so overwhelmed—and we are not—leads to a number of interesting conclusions.

Viewed optimistically, we might simply conclude that our “best selves” have not yet discovered the new *PMLA*, and that many, if not most, of our earthshaking articles are submitted to other periodicals, as they no doubt always have been. A less attractive conclusion is that as a profession we have become so specialized in our interests and in our research that our best work can be appreciated only by a select group of scholars, and thus we publish of necessity in specialized journals of limited circulation. The least attractive conclusion is that we have for so long been writing with the expectation that our articles would be read, if read at all, by only a handful of specialists with like concerns that we have forgotten how to present our ideas to nonspecialists. Perhaps (there is some indication of this) we are even apprehensive at the thought that our work might actually be *read* by a few thousand mysterious strangers.

What seems to be happening, then, for better or worse, is that this new editorial policy is taking the measure of our profession, and what we are finding—neither deep as a well nor wide as a church door—serves (but just barely) to fill four issues a year.

I am reminded of Auden's line, “‘Oh where are you going’ said rider to rider.” The answer is, I don't know. I do know that since the appearance of the first three issues last spring we have been receiving fewer submissions, more requests for abstract forms to accompany forthcoming submissions (many of which do not forthcome), far more letters for the Forum than we can possibly print, and an astonishing number of favorable comments on the issues published so far. And yet I can't help but feel that our best efforts, whatever that might mean, are not reaching *PMLA*. I await the next year with awe and wonder, and reiterate my plea that members, especially those who work with literatures other than English or American, send us their very best.

All of which does not mean that the articles printed to date, including those in the present issue, are not of high calibre. They are. The nine articles at hand are perhaps not earthshaking—although I suspect that the first item, Norman Holland's brilliant, provocative, and no doubt controversial essay, may cause a few tremors—but they all treat subjects, or take approaches to subjects, that should interest all members. The three articles following Holland's concern major novelists and make an interesting grouping; David Baguley focuses on structural aspects of a single novel by Zola, Howard Pearce explores a fascinating theme that recurs in a number of works by Henry James, and John Garrard uses a relatively obscure short story by Gogol to develop thoughts that raise some larger issues. It is also interesting to pair the next two articles, by Douglas Park and A. Harris Fairbanks, for both are concerned with problems of form and structure in two quite different classics of English poetry, Pope's “Essay on Criticism” and Coleridge's “Dejection: An Ode.” Next, Kent van den Berg's analysis of *As You Like It*, which treats Spenser as well as Shakespeare, explores Renaissance theories of love and the idea of theater as metaphor, and Robert Whitman's essay, also concerned with English drama, develops some interesting theories about moral ambiguity in Webster's great tragedies. Finally, in an

issue of *PMLA* that seems to have shaped itself by genre, Gerald Bruns reevaluates major prose writers in an engaging attempt to adjust our focus on the formal nature of Victorian thinking.

There is reason to suspect that in olden days only the editorial staff and members of the William Riley Parker Prize Committee read through an entire issue of *PMLA*. Since the new editorial policy went into effect, however, I have received reports from usually reliable sources that a number of members have been reading all of the articles in a single issue, and that it hasn't hurt a bit.

WILLIAM D. SCHAEFER

