

the curious combination of proven scholar and novice teacher that I was. An academic department had to rely on me, and I still rejoice that I did not fail my colleagues. To this day, I cherish the friends, associates, and students I knew in Madison. My heart broke when I had to leave. I had briefly peeked inside the tower, and then the door slammed shut.

My experiences in Madison taught me much: I was hardworking, eager, even creative. I had the required flair with words. And I loved teaching. Surely, I hoped, someone would acknowledge my merit. Someone did at Harvard (in an NEH summer seminar in 1987), and again I thrived in a fine scholarly milieu. I finally belonged, I thought. If only I could continue writing, I would earn my niche in academe. I could surely convince others, and they would offer me a role. I never told them how much I needed that role.

I kept pulling out all the stops, adding to my vita and bibliography, soliciting references from my associates at Wisconsin and Harvard, until sometime in 1991–92. At that time, the chair of a department at another major university sought me out, urging me to apply for a position there. I was reluctant, having participated in some sham searches at the institution. (Most searches are facades: department chairs and members preselect the new associate, and only then is the announcement placed and the “search” held.) I tried to plead for a bona fide, open search, and the chair readily guaranteed an even playing field. Once again, I sent an impressive dossier. I later learned that the new faculty member was already on the scene, the procedure pro forma. How many other searches that I had participated in were predetermined? All of them? Is this what Brée means by “real bonds of solidarity” (939)? Is academe always beyond reproach, even when it destroys lives?

Since my latest adventure with academe, I have had more articles, essays, and reviews published. Having no regular access to a library, I have yet to attempt a monograph. I have proved my merit to myself, but, increasingly, I wander my own way. My ideals, values, aspirations simply diverge from the academic norm: I try to treat everyone kindly, while academic folks dwell on their egos—and admit it. I have managed to learn and still to stay the same. The experience has meant financial, social, and physical hardship and a great deal of loneliness. But academe will know my name, that I gave my all, that I did my best, that I was an acknowledged teacher and scholar, if only for one shining moment.

LANAE HJORTSVANG ISAACSON
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The Cervantine Tercentenary

To the Editor:

In his curious and enjoyable article, “The Bonds of Patrimony: Cervantes and the New World,” (109 [1994]: 969–81), James D. Fernández notes incidentally that José Enrique Rodó’s essay “El centenario de Cervantes” was “[w]ritten in 1915, on the occasion of the three-hundredth anniversary of Cervantes’s death” (969). He would more accurately have said “in anticipation of the three-hundredth anniversary of Cervantes’s death,” for the author of *Don Quixote* died in 1616, the same year that Shakespeare went to his grave. Indeed, it was supposed that they died on the same day, 23 April; and in some verses preserved in an earlier edition (11th, 1938) of Bartlett’s *Familiar Quotations*, the American poet and Hispanist Thomas Walsh (1875–1928) expresses this notion under the title “April Twenty-Third”:

Death sallied forth upon this fateful day
Through Spain and England for a mighty prey,
And struck two masters with a single blow
And laid Cervantes and Will Shakespeare low! (840)

Scholars, of course, have known that the date may have been the same although the day was not, for Spain was using the New Style calendar while England was still on the Old Style. Furthermore, it has now been determined that Cervantes likely died before midnight on 22 April rather than on 23 April, when the burial certificate was issued.

Thus, Walsh’s rhetoric belongs to fiction and falls into the same category as the words of an earlier poet, John Keats. In “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” Keats despoils Vasco Núñez de Balboa of the glory of discovering the Pacific Ocean, giving that honor to “stout Cortez,” who, as far as we know, never set foot on either side of the isthmus of Panama:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent upon a peak in Darien.

Still, 1616, and not 1615, is the undisputed year of Cervantes’s death, and Fernández may wonder that the “eagle eyes” of a *PMLA* editor did not catch the error. Perhaps he may console himself with the words of a tolerant Spaniard who once told me—in my despondence

at having committed some such mistake—that errata, like rats, are ever with us.

JOHN DOWLING
University of Georgia

Reply:

Though I am curious to know why John Dowling found my article curious, I am genuinely happy to have provided him with some enjoyment. I am even glad that my essay gave him an occasion to offer *PMLA* readers his witty string of quotations. My consideration of the history of centennials, anniversaries, and other such commemorations has taught me two things: (1) such occasions—like opportunities—are not so much discovered as they are invented or fabricated (sometimes, like Cervantes’s third centennial, over the course of years, other times in days, weeks, or months); and (2) occasionally the issues addressed on such occasions have something to do with the original event or text that occasioned them; occasionally they do not.

JAMES D. FERNANDEZ
Yale University

Is Spanish a Foreign Language?

To the Editor:

I have just returned from a conference of my fellow American Germanists at which I asked a question that no participant could answer. I am writing to solicit help from your readership. The question concerns the appropriateness of the designation *foreign language* for Spanish as a subject of instruction in the United States. This point may well be settled among American Hispanists, but the result of my one casual inquiry suggests that there has been no memorable discussion.

The observation prompting the question is surely obvious. There are millions of American citizens whose one native language is Spanish or who are bilingual. Can we, who place great value on precise speech, say in good conscience that when they speak Spanish they are speaking a “foreign” language?

At the beginning of this century, German was a regional language in the United States. In the course of the twentieth century, it has become a foreign language here. Hence an American Germanist’s sensitivity to the distinction.

We are accustomed to thinking of first the Soviet Union and now Russia as a country with many regional languages. I believe that some of those languages are spoken outside the borders of Russia. But surely within the country they are properly considered regional languages.

I can foresee dislocations that would ensue if Spanish were to be designated a regional language rather than, or perhaps as well as, a foreign language. But our mission is the pursuit of truth, however inconvenient the truth may be.

JOHN VAN CLEVE
Mississippi State University

From *Estaminet* to *Anti-Semite*

To the Editor:

Robert F. Fleissner (Forum, 109 [1994]: 1034), David Spurr (twice—“Myths of Anthropology: Eliot, Joyce, Lévy-Bruhl,” 109 [1994]: 279n10; Forum, 109 [1994]: 1035), Spurr’s colleague Ned Lukacher, and Lukacher’s seminar group (with whom the idea originated [Spurr, “Myths” 279n10]) all accept as fact that *estaminet* in T. S. Eliot’s “Gerontion” is an anagram for *anti-Semite*. All are mistaken: *estaminet* has one *i* whereas *anti-Semite* has two.

ROGER J. CRAIK
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