

back I went into the stacks of *PMLA* (especially before 1960), the more comfortable I became with the titles of essays because they seemed to me free of the jargon of modern theory. They did not strike me as being either “trendy” or supportive of a “radical political agenda.”

What has happened in our profession that the impression of trendiness and radicalness have gained such a hold on the imagination? Part of the answer must lie in the general acceptance among literary theorists of the principle of the so-called intentional fallacy. Older issues of *PMLA* clearly rest on the reverse assumption: that it is honorable, indeed mandatory, that one search out authorial intention. Trendiness has resulted, in part, because we no longer seem to care what the author had in mind. A second reason lies in our prevailing notion, imported from European theorists in the main, that language does not mean anything certain. It is my impression that the old issues of *PMLA* do not at all support this theory; scholarly research at one time was based on the commonsense foundation that language means something definite. A third reason is the submissions policy of *PMLA*, which allows for all points of view. This policy is inevitable in such a large organization, but it means that the journal entertains the newer literary theories as though they are on an equal footing with the commonsense theories of the past.

The policy on submissions thus turns *PMLA* into a catch basin for all streams of literary thought, and the largest stream flows out of the MLA conventions, where the radically political and theoretically experimental dominate the presentations. Look at just the last two conventions, in San Diego and Chicago: where are the panel titles containing just the names of canonical authors, unburdened by radical subtexts such as “Shakespeare through the Eyes of Lacan”? Of the some twelve hundred panels of the last two years, how many deal with the canonical and not the trendy? How many place radical political agendas above simple literary analysis? How many panels, for example, have been given on William Faulkner at the last two conventions and how many on queer theory? *PMLA* has more radical content than traditional because of the flow of radical papers given at the conventions and turned into submissions.

If these impressions of mine are myths, I hope they will be struck down in a future editorial. It would be interesting to see a profile of the types of submissions over the last hundred years (or even the period 1973–92, covered in the editorial). It seems to me that if our profession no longer finds enjoyment and insight in the canonical authors it so readily shunts aside at the MLA conventions and in the pages of *PMLA*, it will not get over its malaise

by bathing in the murky waters of the trendy and radically political.

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Spanish Is Not a Foreign Language

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to John Van Cleve’s letter on the status of Spanish (110 [1995]: 266). Van Cleve’s candid question apparently has elicited no responses from the MLA’s membership.

It has been argued for some time that Spanish is not a foreign language. Hispanic Americans are an integral part of this country’s past and future. With some thirty million Hispanics, the United States is the third-largest Spanish-speaking country in the world, after Mexico and Spain. In many parts of the country, one hears Spanish constantly. The presence of Spanish is growing rapidly and is reaching parts of the country that previously had no significant Hispanic populations.

Is Spanish a regional language then? Not exactly. At least not in the sense that German was a regional language in the nineteenth-century Midwest, for example. Although especially high concentrations of Hispanics reside in places like the Southwest, Florida, metropolitan Chicago and the Northeast, Hispanics are spread throughout the entire country. Unlike nineteenth-century German Americans, Hispanics keep in close contact with their places of origin, some of which are very close to (or, in the case of Puerto Rico, part of) the United States. Moreover, as an intercontinental economy develops, national borders are becoming less important, and movement of people in all directions is bound to increase.

I personally always use the term *second national language* when referring to Spanish. English and Spanish are the main languages of the Americas, and the United States is the frontier where they meet. There is no neat border between the English- and Spanish-speaking worlds. Instead, there is a blurring of the boundaries, and Spanish is spoken with different degrees of intensity from the southernmost parts of the country to the Canadian border. Spanish, in all likelihood, will continue to increase its penetration into the northern parts of the continent.

The United States is an increasingly bilingual society. The English-only movement is merely a reaction to this undeniable reality, and its appearance is the best proof of the enormous vitality of Spanish in this country. While some citizens react with fear, many more have decided