

issue, which I have just received. I certainly applaud your goals and indeed am surprised by the paucity of submissions from which you must choose essays to print. My own failure to submit anything, for what it's worth, stems from the fact that I don't read *PMLA* anymore but place my work instead in publications I do read, narrowly professional ones like *Milton Studies* and *Milton Quarterly*, where it will be judged by a small group.

Indeed, I wish that you would also make a clear prose style a major issue for acceptance. When I write for Miltonists I write one way; when I write for American literature specialists I use a very different style, which would bore or irritate specialists, I suppose, but which communicates, the purpose of any writing. Every skillful and successful writer can and must do this. I complained about such unintelligibility in the Forum a few years ago (111 [1996]: 133), with obviously no effect: this January issue has an essay headed "Glocal Knowledges." I have no idea what the first word means and no way to resolve the solecism of the second. I skimmed through the first section of the essay without being enlightened. Why read further? I realize that you were not responsible for the contents of the issue.

I also query your printing material that will certainly concern only a minuscule audience, like the translation of Nuria Amat's "The Language of Two Shores" (116 [2001]: 189–97). Who is she? We learn that her novel was a finalist for (not the winner of) the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, awarded every five years. Golly gee! Let's assume that three hundred of our members really want a copy (and cannot read the original). What of the other thirty thousand? Doesn't the Editorial Board realize that the Internet is in working order? The Early English Text Society published for years for a similarly small proportion of our members, but not in *PMLA*.

I think that you would do well to find out how much of each issue is actually read by our membership. A commercial publication could not survive as ours does merely by the need for membership (as *National Geographic* once really did and now pretends to do). For me the only useful issues are the membership and program ones. With many I mourn the loss of the annual bibliography, for which I would willingly give up the other four. I'll keep this January's for a short while—unread but because of your column. I note with acclaim its subtitle, "*PMLA*

and Its Audience." But I have added to my permanent library the splendid—and highly readable—millennium issue (115 [2000]: 1713–2096).

William B. Hunter
Greensboro, NC

TO THE EDITOR:

In the January issue you wonder at the low submission rate. I will be brief. Your noble journal is dull. Dull I call it, for to define true dullness, what is't but to be nothing else but abstract theoretical jargon? MLA membership has advantages excluding *PMLA* articles that could serve as parody or as additional bad examples for George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language."

Insecure scholars "speak" theory because they never learned Latin. Perhaps *PMLA*'s Editorial Board supposes that amorphous abstraction might become the next international, interdisciplinary language of learning. Classical Latin, however, being precise and succinct and orderly, cannot be replaced by an unspeakable language wherein words shift meaning at whim.

For a quarter century now I have opened every issue of *PMLA*, peered at all titles and abstracts, and read from beginning to end perhaps a dozen articles (besides those by colleagues whose work I already knew). Of that dozen only one, on hendiadys in *Hamlet*, stimulated my mind and hence scholarship. Most recently, because my research involves visual art and oral performance, I had my hopes dashed yet again by an article on a version of *Romeo and Juliet*. A friend of mine had reported that her hairdresser, having seen that film, told her to watch for a gun with the brand name Sword. I intend no offence i' th' world to hairdressers or *PMLA* authors in remarking that the article said no more but so, embedding its one unexceptional point deep in suppositions about what various names might theorize about the film.

PMLA will never publish my research. Knowing even dialects of medieval Latin, I need not cower behind theory. Nonetheless, because I pay top-rank dues and because your refereeing process is extraordinarily efficient, I sometimes submit first to *PMLA* my scholarship on topics that span periods or disciplines (e.g., on eighteenth-century Chauceriana or the songs of Bob Dylan). I thereby take advantage of comments from the responsible, selfless

senior scholars who continue to serve as outside readers. As examples, George Economou called mine “the most original and provocative [essay] on Chaucer I have read for some time in any form or source,” and Hamlin Hill said that my investigation of Mark Twain’s use of Malory “is original [. . .] energetic and witty; and [. . .] adds a new element to our understanding of the metamorphosis of the genial humorist into the bitter misanthrope.” After I publish such rejected articles in other refereed journals, I thank each *PMLA* reader by sending an offprint and by sharing hope that reports of the death of genuine literary scholarship are greatly exaggerated.

Betsy Bowden

Rutgers University, Camden

“Globalizing Literary Study”

TO THE EDITOR:

Carlos J. Alonso’s plainspoken and persuasive Editor’s Column in the January issue seeks an explanation for the decline in the number of unsolicited articles submitted to *PMLA* (“Lost Moorings—*PMLA* and Its Audience,” 116 [2001]: 9–15). He discovers several plausible explanations. I wish to suggest that one of the articles he and Giles Gunn chose to include in that inaugural issue of his editorship could well discourage potential contributors “concerned with the study of literature and language” (A Statement of Editorial Policy).

Edward W. Said’s “Globalizing Literary Study” neither mentions nor discusses any literary work (116 [2001]: 64–68). The first part of the article decries the “Eurocentric mode” of literary study “grounded in the European and North Atlantic world of the classics, the church, and the empire, their tradition, languages, and masterworks, plus of course the whole apparatus of canonicity, synthesis, and centrality.” Said favors scholars “attuned to the non-European, genderized, decolonized, and decentered energies and currents of our time” (65). Isn’t the passage intended as parody? Alas, no. Consequently, all these clamoring catchwords call for close scrutiny, especially the widely used and abused “Eurocentric.”

Said knows as well as any of us that European culture has successfully traced its origins and its ideals to the Greco-Roman world and to the Judeo-Christian world—to Mediterranean culture and to

Near Eastern culture. The Tanakh and the New Testament do not belong to Europe or to the North Atlantic world. European history reaches deep into Asia Minor and encompasses a long series of renaissances, revivals, and reawakenings of those origins. The most recent was provoked by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls—not in Europe and not in a European language. The suffix *-centric* combines uneasily with Europe; that region developed a remarkably open and eclectic culture, which has turned outward as much as it has turned inward. “Eurocentrism” is a polemical misnomer ill-suited to the analysis of our history and literature.

The second part of Said’s article advances a harsh criticism of United States foreign policy since World War II. He cites the writings of Noam Chomsky to certify the “facts” on which he builds his case. This ideological declaration almost buries a few promising points near the end about the separation in Europe of science from the humanities and of aesthetics from politics.

Said is capable of writing eloquently on literature and literary works. “Globalizing Literary Study,” however, sets a poor example for potential contributors to what Alonso calls the “flagship journal” of an association devoted to language and literature (12). Whether Said’s article was solicited or unsolicited, Alonso would have exercised better editorial judgment in the first number of his term by declining so hackneyed a piece of writing.

Roger Shattuck

Lincoln, VT

Reply:

Roger Shattuck has no grasp of the facts. He doesn’t seem to have taken in that my article, which he invidiously says Carlos Alonso “chose” for publication, was part of a panel at the 1998 MLA convention convened by Giles Gunn, author with Stephen Greenblatt of an MLA-commissioned book on new directions in literary study, *Redrawing the Boundaries*. Gunn himself entitled the panel “Globalizing Literary Study,” hence—since I was a member of the panel along with Greenblatt, Rey Chow, and Homi Bhabha—the title of my presentation, which in its published form appears in *PMLA*.

Poorly informed about elementary matters, Shattuck proceeds to complain petulantly that I don’t