

## Editor's Column

IT is midautumn as I write this column. The October 1984 issue of *PMLA* has been in our readers' hands for several weeks and I have received a number of letters with lines like "One of my friends observed that this was the first all-female issue of *PMLA*. Had you been aware of that?" Yes; I had noticed it as early as March, when the authors were listed in the Forthcoming in *PMLA* section. I refrained from commenting in October in order to let the all-female issue occur as a normal event, for it *is* normal now. In fact, it is almost inevitable, if women submit about half the manuscripts, if women's essays are accepted at about the same rate as men's are, if *PMLA* publishes articles in the order they are accepted or revised after acceptance, and if the number of articles in each issue is relatively small. All four conditions have been true for several years.

There was an all-male issue in January 1983, certainly not the first, but the first and still the only one since anonymous submission became our policy. Joel Conarroe commented: "You have probably noticed that all six contributors are male. Before our policy of anonymous submission went into effect this feature might have been interpreted as evidence of bias; since, however, the identity of every contributor is now withheld until a decision has been reached, the fact of a single-sex issue is purely coincidental. Some future *PMLA* may well be made up wholly of work by women scholars." Joel's prophecy has been fulfilled and the laws of probability dictate more such issues in the years to come, unless the editor intervenes. *PMLA* and the profession have progressed a long way toward equality of opportunity and fairness in procedures since that not-very-distant past when issues of *PMLA* with over a dozen articles were frequently all-male.

The October 1984 issue impressed me as much by its content as by the sex of its authors. Half the articles dealt with women writers: Marie de France, Lafayette, Welty. One essay took up a subject with obvious relations to gender studies: "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination." If *PMLA* reflects the changing interests of our profession, the early 1980s have been an age of women writers and gender studies. Between January 1980 and October 1984, *PMLA* had already published articles on George Eliot, Poniatowska, Barrett Browning, Woolf, Caballero, Fuller, Drabble, Radcliffe, and Mary Shelley, as well as numerous essays on sex roles, family structures, and sexual politics.

By contrast, in 1974 *PMLA* published fifty-eight articles, without a single one that concentrated on a woman writer. That year was something of a fluke; in the previous four years there had been essays on Woolf, Horney, Eliot, Lafayette, Charrière, Emily Brontë, Staël, and Stein. The proportion was nonetheless very low, because *PMLA* routinely published around sixty articles a year then. Moreover, the absence of women writers from the 1974 volume was all the more ironic because the May issue carried Florence Howe's presidential address, "Literacy and Literature," denouncing that very fact: "publishers, writers, and teachers . . . reflect unthinkingly the values of a patriarchal culture" (437). Florence Howe was in the vanguard of a change already under way; it had burst into *PMLA* well before anonymous submission became policy, as evidenced by such articles as Sandra Gilbert's "Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers" (May 1978), Cynthia Chase's analysis of *Daniel Deronda*, "The Decomposition of the Elephants" (Mar. 1978), Margaret Homans's "Repression and Sublimation of Nature in *Wuthering Heights*" (Jan. 1978), and Judith Wilt's bold reexamination of *Clarissa*, "He Could Go No Farther" (Jan. 1977).

The present issue offers a more typical miscellaneous collection. There are four male and two female authors. The articles come from several fields: British, American, Italian (or late Latin), German, and the Bible. No article focuses on a woman writer, but several bring to other topics a perspective informed by feminist theory and gender studies. Men as well as women now participate regularly in this critical discourse, just as they do in more traditional approaches.

Is there any evidence of a new trend in this issue? Looking back, one can sometimes see trends develop, but it is difficult. I tried recently to compile a list of authors cited in *PMLA* articles, as an index of current critical trends. When I had done the full year 1983—over nine hundred citations—I thought I had identified sixteen critics and scholars who were each cited several times, at least one of whom was cited in every article, and who therefore might be regarded collectively as our profession's intellectual sources or guides at the moment. The next two issues I examined wrecked the hypothesis totally; most of the sixteen were not cited at all, and other critics picked up enough new citations to merit inclusion in the group. We remain a diverse discipline, the new discourses overlaying and sometimes overshadowing but seldom entirely replacing the old.

My citation index did not produce any feminist authority figures, even provisionally, despite the abundance of feminist studies. Some venerable names from an earlier generation appeared, such as Curtius and Spitzer, but most of those on the list were contemporary literary and critical theorists. The trend they represent seems to me harder to isolate in *PMLA* than the trend toward women writers and gender studies. No doubt Fredric Jameson's prize-winning "Metacommentary" in January 1971 heralded a new orientation and *PMLA*'s policy stressing articles of general interest during the mid-1970s encouraged contributions dealing with theory, such as Walter J. Ong's "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction" (Jan. 1975), Liane Norman's "Risk and Redundancy" (Mar. 1975), Norman Holland's "UNITY IDENTITY TEXT SELF" (Oct. 1975), Michael McCanles's "The Literal and the Metaphorical: Dialectic or Interchange" (Mar. 1976), and Cary Nelson's "Reading Criticism" (Oct. 1976). One must often look carefully at the notes and the lexicons, in addition to the titles, however, in order to know what school a contributor represents.

I should like therefore to propose a trend-spotting contest to *PMLA* readers. The prizes will be MLA centennial pens, and I will offer one to the first reader to locate the earliest mention in *PMLA* of any of the following: Bakhtin, Barthes, Derrida, Freud, Lévi-Strauss, and Karl Marx. Readers may enter one or all of the contests. Entries will be opened and dated in the order they are received on my desk; the contest will end on 30 April 1985. Within an issue of *PMLA*, the lower page number will count as the earlier mention. The decision of the judge (*moi*) will be final.

ENGLISH SHOWALTER

## Notes on Contributors

VICTORIA KAHN, an assistant professor of English at Bennington College, received her graduate degree in comparative literature at Yale. She has held Fulbright and Whiting fellowships, as well as a junior fellowship at the Cornell Society for the Humanities and a Mellon fellowship at the Humanities Center of Johns Hopkins University. A book, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance*, is scheduled to be published this spring by Cornell University Press. She is currently studying commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* as part of a project on the politics of reading in the Renaissance.

MARY NYQUIST is a fellow of New College, University of Toronto, where she is coordinator of the Women's Studies Programme; she also teaches in the Literary Studies Programme at Victoria College, to which she is cross-appointed. In addition to her article here, she has published on Milton in *English Literary Renaissance*, and she expects to finish a book on Milton in 1986. An essay on Wallace Stevens will appear in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, forthcoming in April. She has also published on feminist theory and is pursuing research on British women writers of the nineteenth century.

STEVEN SHAVIRO received his PhD from Yale, where he taught until 1984, when he became an assistant professor of English at the University of Washington. He has published articles on Blake, Browning, Burroughs, and the politics of deconstruction and is at work on a book on the problem of nihilism in modern literature. Other current research includes work on Wittgenstein, Blanchot, postmodern fiction, and contemporary literary theory.

JOHN H. SMITH studied German and computer science as an undergraduate at Columbia before earning his PhD in Germanics at Princeton. An assistant professor at the University of California, Irvine, he has held DAAD and Whiting fellowships. An essay on the development of Hegel's philosophical rhetoric will appear in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* this spring, and he is preparing a monograph on traces of rhetoric in Hegel's concept of *Bildung* and essays on lesbian and gay studies, Freud and feminism, and literary and philosophical hermeneutics.

FRANK WHIGHAM is associate professor of English and European studies at the Claremont Graduate School. He earned his PhD at the University of California, San Diego, and taught at Northwestern University before coming to Claremont in 1977. He has published a book, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (U of California P, 1984), and essays on the sociology of Renaissance literary and nonliterary texts in *Renaissance Drama*, *New Literary History*,