Editor's Column

Special Topics in *PMLA*: A Call for Articles

THE Editorial Board is pleased to announce a forthcoming new feature in *PMLA*—articles on special topics—for which we invite your contributions.

Appeals for changes in our journal come frequently and from various quarters; they stem from divergent motives and take all manner of forms. A sacrosanct monolith, however, is not easily budged, and there is risk in tampering with an object whose prestige rests visibly on its high quality. *PMLA*'s transformations have tended to be subtle, so that when an editor speaks of a "new *PMLA* " on the occasion of a shift in policy, members less emotionally tied to the journal receive such a proclamation with a measure of skepticism. In his January 1975 editor's column, William Schaefer listed a number of innovations that his Editorial Board had considered, and he predicted that one or all of these approaches would probably be tried in coming years. As its age indicates, *PMLA* has more time at its disposal than we mortals do and has no need to rush into the future, but those years have now come.

When the Executive Council separated the editorship from the administration of the association in 1985, it urged the editor to investigate possible new directions for *PMLA*. In response to this charge as well as to suggestions from readers and from the Delegate Assembly Steering Committee, the Editorial Board spent many hours at its 1986 meetings and in correspondence discussing a variety of options. One early result of these deliberations is the projected series of contributions by honorary members and fellows that has already brought Carlos Fuentes and Julia Kristeva to the pages of *PMLA*. In considering further initiatives, the board took into account the members' desire for more articles of general interest, and it sought to inject a fresh dimension into *PMLA* without altering the present contents. The solution on which the board finally settled is to publish occasional issues featuring articles on designated general topics. Both critical and metacritical in intent, these topics are to cut across MLA constituencies and to attract a wide readership. The principle of topical grouping allows several essays to stand in dialogue with one another and provides an opportunity for both depth and breadth of investigation. To implement this project, the Editorial Board devised a mechanism that would not compromise the journal's present policies and practices—in particular, the policy that governs anonymous submission and evaluation of manuscripts.

Since the Executive Council approved this proposal at its February 1987 meeting, the following procedures have been set up:

The Editorial Board will announce a series of topics in *PMLA* and in the *MLA Newsletter* well in advance of designated deadlines for submission of manuscripts. A coordinator, or perhaps two or more, will assist in the preparation of these issues but will play no role in the selection process. Interested members may communicate with these colleagues, who will be happy to offer advice. All manuscripts will be subject to *PMLA*'s operative editorial policy and format prescriptions. They are to be sent directly to the managing editor in New York and will be reviewed anonymously in the usual manner—that is, if they gain the approval of two readers, they will be sent to the Editorial Board for evaluation and final selection. In submitting manuscripts, members should indicate that their essays are to be considered for a special topic. Manuscripts may be submitted at any time before the deadline and will be processed as received.

The three topics listed below will launch the cycle. (Suggestions for future topics are welcome.) The subtopics listed are by no means exclusionary and serve merely to provide guidance and to stimulate further thoughts.

275

Afro-American and African Literature
Deadline for submissions: 1 May 1988
Coordinator: Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Cornell Univ.)
The literary anthology and the black tradition. The black women's tradition. Black nationalism and the canon. The black vernacular and the poetic tradition. Naming and narration. The tradition of the novel. Performance and drama. The Harlem Renaissance. The black arts movement. Writing a self: slave narratives and black autobiography. The black traditions in the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United Kingdom. Anglophone, francophone, lusophone African literature. Negritude. Modernism; postmodernism; literary history; the Pan-African tradition.

The Politics of Critical Language
Deadline for submissions: 1 September 1988
Coordinator: Herbert Lindenberger (Stanford Univ.)
The function of critical language in creating and sustaining intellectual and institutional networks: critical language as an exercise of power. The forms and roles of specialized critical vocabularies in different national traditions and in emerging fields. The naturalization of critical terminology during earlier periods. Contemporary critical language and postmodernist writing. Attitudes toward critical language as "jargon" within and without the academy. Critical language as a form of rhetoric; rhetoric as a repository of critical language.

Canons
Deadline for submissions: 1 January 1989
Coordinators: Margaret Williams Ferguson (Columbia Univ.)
            Domna C. Stanton (Univ. of Michigan)
The historical dynamics of canon formations and exclusions. The political and social functions of canons in different historical eras and places. The idea of the literary canon in relation to concepts of judgment, taste, and value. The significance of such terms as "classic," "masterpiece," and "literature." Literary canons and the distinction between "high" and "popular" culture. Pedagogical canons and the current debates on pluralism.

I will not be so bold as to speak of a "new *PMLA* ," but I believe that the journal will be the richer for this innovation. The success of the venture will depend on your interest and support, and I urge you once again to pick your topic and submit your manuscript.

JOHN W. KRONIK