THE FOUR ARTICLES from the Hispanic constituency that came to *PMLA*’s door at roughly the same time are grouped here for their cultural and linguistic filiation; in their kinship and in their diversity, they provide evidence of the field’s impressive sophistication and of its current concerns. Even if the postmodern critical vernacular did not originate in Madrid and Lima or with their representatives in the North American academy, these communities have not, it is clear, remained deaf to its strains. Both the peninsular Spanish and the Spanish American scholarly phalanxes have welcomed and absorbed the instruments of revisionary reading. The possibilities of dialogue among those whose raw materials are in Spanish and those who deal with other languages are legion, as these four essays prove. At the same time, of course, best-selling translations from the Spanish and Spanish-language winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature have moved Hispanic culture into the mainstream of international awareness.

These essays share with one another and with the writers they scrutinize a preoccupation with how the literary artifact functions and reproduces. They pit art against its past, art against its circumstances. While recognizing art’s claims to transcendence, they bring it down to earth and invite it to teeter productively between myth and demystification. Their engagement with the literary text is, in turn, attached to the text’s engagement with underlying ethical and historical imperatives. They follow art’s dual course—on the one hand, its self-affirmation through the empowerment of discourse and, on the other, its inevitable ideological resonance—and so they at once challenge and assert its autonomous status. In short, the authors of these articles are posing the questions that beckon and beset modern criticism and are doing so in a collective idiom.

Ignacio Navarrete’s essay inserts itself forcefully into the debates on Spanish Renaissance poetics, which, as the author points out, are analogous to controversies that were raging in Italy and France. With his exhaustively researched and ingenious deconstructive examination of Fernando de Herrera’s annotations on Garcilaso de la Vega’s verses, he brings into dialogue two key Spanish poets of differing fiber and throws
light on the slippery problem of poetic succession. Indirectly evoking Benjamin and Blanchot and taking immediate recourse to Harold Bloom's theory of poetic agon, he presents a case study of the commentary as literary genre. This form, his inquiry reveals, is by nature conflictive, for it is the medium of an evolutionary flow of artistic substitution designed to neutralize threatening forebears. Navarrete's findings underscore the notion that both creation and interpretation, here coalescing in a single figure with vested interests, are acts of rewriting that resist authority. His essay offers insights about institutional power structures and about the role that the social hegemony over language plays in the process of canonization. Taking into account the markers of sixteenth-century vernacular humanism, Navarrete uses twentieth-century critical perspectives to shed light on canon formation and reformation in the Renaissance.

David Herzberger panoramically embraces the narrative of the entire period whose signpost is the Spanish Civil War. As the echoes and dualities in his title signal, he eschews traditional political and literary history and explores instead the historiographic function of a class of narrative in which history is a powerful semantic and structural force that, through its contingencies, strains against mythic paradigms. Relying heavily on Hayden White's meta-historical positions—as well as on Barthes, Gadamer, and Ricoeur—and adding evidence from major novels of the period, Herzberger describes history as a narrative engagement with experience and documents the transition from the textual control of events to the liberation of history after the disappearance of the Franco dictatorship. The representation of the psychic tensions involved in the play between past and present in contemporary Spanish letters has been widely debated, but no discussion has managed to sketch as clearly the evolution of the post-Civil War narrative's relation to history. At the same time, Herzberger's study aptly bids Hispanists and their colleagues to consider how history can best serve them in the examination of the literary text, how narrative strategies can illuminate their ever-insistent search for history, and, especially, how tenuous all historiographic assumptions are.

Two major novelists of the Latin American narrative "boom" are the subjects of a pair of articles that deal with the other shore of the Hispanic world. Carlos Alonso's compelling close reading of Vargas Llosa's *La títa Julia y el escribidor* 'Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter' not only fuels the polemics that this challenging novel incited from the moment of its publication but extracts unexpected riches from its multiple layers. Alonso attaches it to the postmodern erasure of distinctions between high and popular culture and to the equally postmodern wave of self-conscious art. He sees it, like many other narratives of its time, as an allegory of writing and storytelling and reconstitutes the ostensibly fragmented text into the coherent plot of a writer coming into being. In yet another echo of Bloom's positions, Alonso explains the formal disparities in the novel as the story of a writer's symbolic suppression of a precursor. The recurrent kinship motifs he uncovers in the narrative allow him to interpret the attainment of authorial mastery in oedipal terms. In a particularly
acute and constructively subversive turn, Alonso reverses the oedipal formula by demonstrating that in this instance the father also preempts the son's repetition of the father's transgression, the act of empowering authorship. Alonso reads La tía Julia y el escribidor as the affirmation of a self-sufficient ideology of writing that, perhaps wrongly, makes fiction the innocent and salutary counterpoint to more trenchant ideological formulations.

For Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat, a hallowed author from earlier in the century serves as an entryway to a major contemporary figure. With Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice" as his subtext and with Lukács, Adorno, and Benjamin in supporting roles, he makes his way through a late novel by the Chilean writer José Donoso, El jardín de al lado 'The Garden Next Door.' Gutiérrez Mouat's adroit collation of texts has broad implications for the current disputes about the artist's relation to society, since, as in Vargas Llosa's novel, art and writing are yet again the stuff of El jardín de al lado. Gutiérrez Mouat isolates and analyzes three levels of metafictional concern that Donoso's novel shares with "Death in Venice" and other twentieth-century texts: the tensions between pleasure and discipline in the creative act, between the bourgeois and the bohemian in the artist's persona, and between the production and the reception of the art object. His article in this respect is a model demonstration of the appropriation of intertexts as interpretive tools. It is also a commentary on the sociology of art, for he takes into account Donoso's criticism of the boom for commercializing the vanguard and retraces Donoso's trajectory of the author from cultural hero to media star.

Interpretive audacity, methodological commitment, and absorption of modern literary theory characterize this quartet of essays. By the same token, the maturity of the authors' discourse and the sweep of their vision correspond to Spain's and Ibero-America's emergence from the cultural isolation that they suffered for too long.