

Hunter is actually just repeating part of the doxa of (post)modern theory. He asserts that it is rhetoric (using language with “style”—understood by some as the intentional deployment of words, language, jargon and by others as the operations of differential textuality) and not access to concepts that determines intelligibility. By throwing the emphasis on style, Hunter—like (post)modern theorists—erases the importance of concepts from the scene of contestation. Proceeding in a relatively unsophisticated mode, Hunter still manages to read, like Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*, so as “to succeed in shifting the signified [the conceptual] a great distance [away]” (trans. Richard Miller [New York: Hill, 1975] 67). The politics of this shifting from concepts to rhetoric becomes clear in a response to a recent accusation of sexual harassment at Syracuse University. When a student filed a grievance against a faculty member, an observer rushed in early to discount it on the grounds that the student displayed “poor writing skills” (*Post-Standard* [Syracuse] 12 Apr. 1995: A11).

Hunter’s letter is symptomatic of larger political and economic tendencies. His text on the difficulties of reading is an attempt to obscure the need for conceptual literacy and to relegate the lessons of ludic reading practices by displacing the concern for thought with the concern for style in a quiet manner (that is, without elaborate theoretical justification). At times like the present, when the workings of exploitative power are so evident (in the Gingrich era of right-wing ascendance), this kind of substitution and diversion is just what the bourgeois academy needs. This is why there is a boom in rhetoric studies—graduate students now entering the profession are diverted from conceptual work and seduced into rhetoric and composition studies. While done in the name of empowering students, this diversion is meant to prevent them from conceptually grasping the workings of power in the bourgeois academy and its underlying economic interests.

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### Diversity in *PMLA*

To the Editor:

Having just read the contents of *PMLA* for the last year (Oct. 1994–May 1995), I am concerned that the journal is losing its traditional breadth. In this period

*PMLA* published eighteen original critical essays, three commentaries, two translated essays, two reminiscences, and a Presidential Address. Of the eighteen essays, nine concern primarily or (more often) entirely texts of the past fifty years, and three more deal with texts of the previous fifty. From another perspective, fifteen essays out of eighteen concern constructions of oppositional or nontraditional identities. The contents of the largest issue and four additional essays address problems of national or ethnic identity in colonial and postcolonial societies, four pieces focus on challenges to conventional gender identities, and one discusses class identity in connection with T. S. Eliot. All these essays seemed to me earnest and instructive, and several were vibrant. I regret a prevailing ethos of argument and protest; I wish more exhilaration, fancy, or delight in discovery might emanate (as it often does elsewhere) from the advocates of liberation. Still, the overall quality remains as high as anyone should expect. Yet it is evident that the eighteen essays do not represent the diversity of our professional activities or of the ideas and experiences embodied in the texts we study and teach.

While essays now being evaluated for the special topic on the teaching of literature will diversify the offerings to some degree, the May list of forthcoming essays and the newly announced special topic on ethnicity suggest that the current concentration is likely to continue. The overall numbers are also disappointing. Submissions in 1994 were down by twenty-five percent from the previous four-year average. According to the Report of the Executive Director (110 [1995]: 417–26), the Editorial Board has recently accepted about twenty-five percent of the essays that reach it; it used to see more essays and accept a larger proportion of them. I worry that the restricted range of the published essays, however admirable they are, may be discouraging authors of other kinds of work.

The editor and the Editorial Board have no control over submissions and consultant evaluations. But they do make final selections, and diversity has been a factor in the board’s deliberations in the past. They also define special topics and encourage submissions, and the Editor’s Column (together with the Forum) can be used to express interest in various types of essays. Members of the MLA who believe in *PMLA*, as I do, should see an opportunity here. There is room for a greater variety of work. More submissions, on more topics, from more approaches, can only benefit the journal and the association.

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