

efforts to address the pipeline issue relative to all non-white graduate students, everyone else is worse off, and the Wheatley court remains firmly in place.

Many faculty members and too many young scholars of African American literature find themselves enmeshed in a residual academic politics that predates the opening up of our campuses to these discussions. It is therefore very encouraging to hear from others, like Subbaraman, with varying cultural and comparative perspectives on the ongoing need to critique the structural realities of the academy. Regrettably, the binary character of our environment that comes through in my essay still prevails. And, as I pointed out, each time that we make a faculty appointment in our departments, in whatever area, solely on the basis of an individual's race or ethnicity (whatever that may be), we give validity to a situation we say we are trying to end. The personnel structures of our academies have a long way to go to achieve the racial and ethnic diversity that we ought to strive for and that should have been one of our major goals over the past twenty-five years. As we enter the new millennium, I am calling for renewed efforts to make that diversity a priority. English departments (and their disciplinary counterparts) desperately need more blacks, Native Americans, Asians, Chicanos and Chicanas, and other faculty members of color with academic interests beyond their own ethnic identities. Our beginning offensive line must be to recruit capable nonwhite graduate students whom we must support financially and otherwise through the difficult graduate years. These students and their white counterparts must be allowed to follow their chosen fields of study confident that they will receive fair hearing in the marketplace: that they will not be discriminated against, on the basis of race and ethnicity, when seeking any position for which they qualify. All of us need to be welcomed as equal owners of the house of American literature. I do not suggest that this is an easy task, but we cannot afford to continue to fail at it. Otherwise I fear that at the end of the next one hundred years our yet unborn descendants will find themselves, as we do now, still with the burden of solving the century-old Du Boisian problem of the "color line" that Subbaraman insightfully calls to our attention.

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A European View of the MLA

To the Editor:

Reading the letters on *PMLA* Abroad in the October issue (Forum, 113 [1998]: 1122–50), I was struck force-

fully by the realization that for most German scholars the MLA is an august institution and resource whose living quarters are in the library rather than in real life. Indeed, for researchers and teachers in European universities, the MLA primarily materializes in the shape of the bibliography or of the issues of *PMLA*. Only two of my colleagues recollected a stay in the United States during which they also attended the MLA convention.

By contrast, for a younger scholar like myself—and this applies also to a few of my best friends in central Europe—the MLA is no longer a library resource or a vague, exotic institution that lives on paper. For us younger scholars the MLA is primarily the MLA convention. Not only do I regularly attend the convention whenever I am in the United States on my sabbatical, during a fellowship, or, as this year, on an exchange; I also make a point of coming at least every third year to keep up with things. In fact, I thoroughly enjoy going to the conventions whenever possible. I find them exhilarating, wonderful academic and social events and perhaps the most worthwhile and stimulating feature of the MLA.

For one, there are the many sessions with interesting people whose books I have perhaps read but whom I have never seen in person before. I love going to session after session, absorbing the newest developments in a variety of fields. European professors of English teach practically the whole of English literature, so on a given morning or afternoon I will find myself in a session on medieval hagiography, a session on the execution of Charles I, a session on diaspora and postcolonial theory, or a session on eighteenth-century historiography—all are equal grist to my academic mill.

The second aspect of the convention that I enjoy tremendously (although it also gives me headaches) is the book exhibit. Third, but perhaps most important of all, the MLA convention is the most wonderful opportunity to see all my American friends again.

After this encomium on the MLA convention, let me briefly turn to *PMLA*. Over the past two years I have found articles in the journal to be increasingly interesting and relevant to my research. And let me not forget to congratulate you on the new cover design: so much more elegant and such a joy after that drab blue!

So my experience with *PMLA* and the MLA at large has been an uncommonly positive one. If I continue with a few suggestions for further improvement, this is because I would like to make the MLA more of a good thing than it already is. My first point concerns the *MLA Bibliography*. We all use it as an invaluable tool, and it's a wonderful resource. But increasingly over the past few years, the bibliography has developed unaccountable gaps. For one, books are not represented to the extent

that they should be. I've so frequently done a subject or author search and found that a major book that came out three or four years earlier on the topic was not cited. Also, major articles in major journals (e.g., *Style* in a particular case) are frequently not included. I realize that presses should be sending in their copies, but that is expensive, and most presses these days even refuse to send out an adequate number of review copies. Couldn't the *MLA Bibliography* personnel check all the issues of all the major journals (the ones they explicitly say are included) in the library just to make sure everything has been included? Particularly for scholars working in libraries that do not have many journals, tracking down relevant publications by themselves is often impossible.

Another problem that I have found annoying has been the difficulty of getting a session accepted at the MLA convention. The criteria for acceptance of a session are not at all clear, particularly to a resident abroad. However, it would be extremely interesting to American colleagues, I believe, to hear what foreign scholars, with their often quite different approaches, may have to say on some issues in English literature. Perhaps at this point the presence of the MLA and *PMLA* abroad is stronger than the presence of non-American scholars in the organization or the journal.

It has been suggested in the Forum that foreign scholars find it extremely hard to get papers accepted by *PMLA*. This is not a problem peculiar to *PMLA*, however, but a problem affecting all American scholarly journals. It is extremely difficult, even after perusing back issues of a journal in the library and reading descriptions of what kind of articles it solicits, to really know what type of journal to contact for a particular piece of work. This is a problem for European scholars who are working on a range of topics and periods and in a variety of methodologies. European professors of English do not grow up as eighteenth-century scholars or Renaissance specialists, and they therefore do not in their graduate education imbibe a list of some ten journals relevant to that area. I have frequently found that Europeans' breadth of approach, which should be a valuable asset, becomes a hindrance once they try to publish their work in the United States. What seems perfectly all right in Europe turns out to be too eclectic or insufficiently theoretical (it doesn't mention the big names on the first page of the article) from many American perspectives. There is no deliberate discrimination against European scholars in this but rather an unthinking expectation of a particular format for articles that, naturally, is foreign to scholars from abroad. It is therefore important, I believe, for the editors of *PMLA* and other American journals to be more aware of such diversity of content and form when evaluating

papers from non-American contributors. What European scholars have to offer the American market is, precisely, their difference from the standard American article. Here, too, *PMLA* could take a step in the right direction by encouraging more participation by European, African, and Asian scholars.

Let me close this letter by saying again how wonderful it is to be a member of the MLA, particularly if one lives abroad and has the excitement of a whiff of academia from across the Atlantic whenever the next issue of *PMLA* arrives in the mail. With *Profession* (this year a full volume even), this enjoyment has reached a new high.

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Edward W. Said's Presidency

Editor's note: The following letters bring this exchange to its conclusion.

To the Editor:

My friend Edward Said is indeed frequently intemperate in political polemic, especially when he has been attacked, and I think that it harms his/our cause. As mentioned in Jon Whitman's letter (Forum, 114 [1999]: 106), I was, in fact, the target of this polemic on one occasion (and I didn't enjoy it). Nevertheless, Said has always been able also (and almost miraculously) to maintain a strict separation between the realms of political activism and academic life, such that at the very same time that he was assaulting us in print on political issues, he was expressing strong material support for us as scholars and academics on other fronts.

Would that his adversaries in the academy could maintain such separations. Zionist academics not infrequently seek to silence the voices of anti-Zionists in the academy, especially those of us who are Jewish or work in Jewish studies. At the MLA convention, I have been told in open session that I have no right to "abuse" Israel from a position in the United States.

Whitman's letter belongs to this category of attempted suppression of free discourse and to no other.

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Reply:

In citing the disturbing record of public attacks by Edward W. Said (Forum, 114 [1999]: 106–07), I considered