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O C U S *on*

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f O C U S *on*
LITERATUR

Edited by

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From the Editor

A debate has grown around the issue of graduate student publishing. Several editorials and essays in the past year have focused on the pressure to publish placed on graduate students by the current job market. Some have been supportive, recognizing the market forces which have created the pressure. Others, the most disturbing of which was a highly editorialized announcement in last fall's *German Studies Association Newsletter*, suggest that graduate student scholarship is by definition inferior to faculty scholarship, serving only to 'clog' the review process and delay the evaluation of more deserving faculty submissions. The author of that announcement goes on to imply that devious graduate students slyly submit articles on departmental letterhead to fool editors into thinking they are faculty members: "They do not yet give themselves a false faculty rank," the text reads, "but just sign their names at the bottom" (emphasis added).¹ This unfortunate wording hints at the author's true thesis—that in the future, if not already, journals may find themselves so overwhelmed by graduate student submissions that they will be forced to reject non-faculty scholarship sight unseen. To do so would make a mockery of the very notion of scholarly debate and dialogue. Therefore, editors who have not carefully defined the mission of their respective journals may soon find themselves in an ethical dilemma.

What purpose do scholarly journals serve? Most claim the role of a forum for scholarly articles which, in the words of that lofty phrase, "contribute to the general pool of knowledge." Yet the GSA newsletter announcement predicts that "the number of journals refusing to consider students' work will increase in proportion to the increase in [student] submissions" (4). Intentionally or not, that same editorial creates a faculty = good, student = bad paradigm, characterized by two things: first, while student submissions occasionally yield a work of publishable quality, the bulk of the manuscripts are quite poor, and second, these student submissions hinder the timely evaluation of manuscripts by professors. Such thinking perpetuates the notion that the scholarly efforts of graduate students have little value, yet faculty status is no guarantor of quality. Certainly experienced professors

will produce quality manuscripts with greater consistency, but every established scholar started with a first publication. If a journal is to be truly devoted to the dissemination of new ideas, editors must grin and bear the task of evaluating every submission, without regard to its point of origin. Otherwise editors must drop the pretense of blind submissions and ask scholars to submit vitae along with manuscripts, this done at the risk that journals become the exclusive forum of an elite group of scholars.

Although graduate students today feel an ever-increasing pressure to perform, most can afford to take a great deal of time and care in preparing a manuscript for submission. There is a large incidence of self-censorship among student scholars, and as a result the *PMLA* reports that it accepts a greater percentage of submissions by graduate students than by faculty members.² That students in graduate programs are producing viable scholarship should come as a surprise to no one. Graduate students today are no longer allowed to be just students. In various ways they are also teachers, editors, lecturers, scholars, authors, administrators—in short, there are few aspects of the profession which advanced degree candidates have not been exposed to in at least some small way. In addition, with such a competitive job market people are remaining graduate students for a longer time. As a result there is often a very fine line between junior faculty members and senior graduate students. Indeed, a student who is just completing a dissertation can potentially have broader experience than many new faculty members. In the course of a graduate student career, it is even possible that one could become *the* expert on an author, particularly understudied or younger writers. Yet some people apparently do not wish to acknowledge a graduate student as an authority on a particular subject. One issue is clear, however: anyone writing an article which includes information previously published is ethically bound to cite the original, regardless of who the author is or where the original quotation was published. To do otherwise, to ignore that work, is either poor scholarship or outright plagiarism.

The increasing frequency of graduate student submissions to scholarly journals is attributed to the extremely competitive job market. Yet there is in fact no such entity as a "job market." The pressure to publish comes not from some mythological beast (although it seems that way at times), but rather from the professors who populate academic departments and job search screening committees. One unaware

member of the audience attending the "Mock Interviews for Job Seekers in Foreign Languages" session at the 1993 MLA Conference asked the panel just how important publications are for applicants. "They are expected," was panel member Renée Waldinger's emphatic reply. Hiring committees have placed a premium on candidates with publication records, and hopeful applicants these days recognize that to compete with other candidates, they must demonstrate scholarly potential. The advertisements in the most recent MLA Job Information List are peppered with phrases like "evidence of active scholarship," or "outstanding research potential" and the like. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that simply to get a job these days, graduate students must have a vita which resembles one which would have satisfied requirements for tenure twenty years ago.

The answer, of course, is a decrease in the emphasis on frantic publishing. While currents of such thought have been felt, the situation is unlikely to change as long as the paucity of jobs makes scholarship a useful determinant in the hiring process. To that end we offer *Focus on Literatur*. The contents of this second issue cover the spectrum of German-language literature, from poetry to drama to prose, from the well-established to the cutting edge. Amanda Ritchie offers an alternative interpretation of winter imagery in the poetry of Ilse Aichinger, while Catherine Marshall compares depictions of America in dramas by Egon Vietta and Ilse Langner. A structural analysis of Brigitte Kronauer's prose forms the foundation of a contribution by Dagmar Schulz, and Anke Finger teams up with Ralf Korte in a discussion of the current state of avant-garde literature in the German-speaking world. Among the eighteen titles discussed in the book review section are works by canonized figures such as Martin Walser and Reiner Kunze, as well as lesser-known writers like Doris Gercke and Ulrich Woelk. Finally, the issue is rounded out by an interview with Günter Kunert, in which the celebrated poet talks instead about his extensive prose work. It is our hope that every reader will find something of interest among these diverse contents.

J. Gregory Redding

¹ "Graduate Students Look for Faculty Positions," *German Studies Association Newsletter* 18.1 (1993): 3.

² Reported by the Executive Council at the "Welcome to the MLA: An Introduction for Graduate Students" session of the 1993 MLA Conference.