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Introduction

Whether he knew it or not, Miguel de Cervantes provided a perfect allegory for the process of preparing a graduate student journal in Chapter 2 of *Don Quijote*:

> [U]na mañana, antes del día, que era uno de los calurosos del mes de julio, se armó de todas sus armas, subió sobre Rocinante, puesta su mal compuesta celada, embrazó su adarga, tomó su lanza y por la puerta falsa de un corral salió al campo, con grandísimo contento y alborozo de ver con cuánta facilidad había dado principio a su buen deseo[...]

After the initial enthusiasm at the beginning, one realizes that his experience and wisdom are less than what the process demands:

> Mas apenas se vio en el campo, cuando le asaltó un pensamiento terrible, y tal, que por poco le hiciera dejar la comenzada empresa; y fue que le vino a la memoria que no era armado caballero y que, conforme a ley de caballería, ni podía ni debía tomar armas con ningún caballero[...]

Nevertheless, despite our misgivings, we go forward the best we can:

> Estos pensamientos le hicieron titubear en su propósito; mas, *pudiendo más su locura que otra razón alguna*, propuso de hacerse armar caballero del primero que topase, a imitación de otros muchos que así lo hicieron, según él había leído en los libros que tal le tenían [emphasis added].

The above notwithstanding, we are justifiably proud of this 32nd issue of *Mester*. A brief glance at some of its contents will show why. In "La actitud filológica como provocación de la historia literaria," Andrés Soria Olmedo masterfully argues against a perceived dialectic that tries to "enfrentar la filología con la crítica." Sergio Ramírez, novelist and former member of Nicaragua's *Sandinista* government,

in a fascinating interview comments on the relation between literary inspiration and the utopian projects of the 20th century. Latin American literature, its genesis and intersection with memory and history are themes that run through an engaging interview with Elena Poniatowska, as well as articles on the works of Nelly Campobello, Helena Morley, and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Kelly Austin's study "Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's Society of Letters in *Viajes por Europa, África, y América 1845-1847*" shows, among other things, that issues of "nation building," "consolidation of national character" and the "founding civilized societies" are not unique to today's headlines, but were important to Sarmiento's project for Argentina. These and other articles and reviews represent the wide range of themes encompassed in this general issue.

"These are uncertain times for literary scholars," according to a recent article in the *New York Times*, ("The Latest Theory is that Theory Doesn't Matter" 19 April 2003). While the *Times* may in fact be right in declaring these "uncertain times," we hope this issue of *Mester* will be one small piece of evidence that in the area of Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian studies there is plenty of interesting and relevant work being carried out by students and professors alike.

Damian Bacich
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