

It's been obvious for many years that *CI* is an important instrument in the distribution of prestige and authority within the professions of the humanities. When I meet academics at other universities they often speak admiringly of the journal without saying much about particular arguments published in its pages. This is not surprising. The success of the journal entails some institutional status, I guess, but critical reflection on this particular function of the journal might be worthwhile. Insofar as it is an instrument of professional authority, it is probably subject to the same dynamics that drive other such institutions, despite the intelligence of its editors and contributors. If, however, the editors maintain a constant awareness of the dynamic whereby success institutionalizes ideas, texts, persons, and discursive styles, they might find opportunities to resist the marmorialization of the journal and the intellectual conformity that professional institutions tend to promote.

The main issue is probably change. Institutions resist change; they rather solidify a status quo. The editors meet regularly to assess contributions; their first job is to find the gold. But after they have identified the best manuscripts for publication, they might reflect on whether the journal is changing the professions it oversees. Is it an instrument of change or an exhibit space for the best that is thought and said in the humanities? If of change, which changes? It may be that the publication of the best essays is all that the editors need to do to keep the journal on the edge of change in the humanities. Surely the most desired changes come from the ground, from the articles submitted over the transom. I remember the pleasure in discovery when a brilliant unsolicited manuscript by someone unknown would show up. But while waiting eagerly for new, surprising manuscripts, there are some things the editors might do to encourage changes. My sense of the changes to be cultivated is only the conventional pluralistic one: bring new voices into the journal. But when the new voices themselves aspire to the authority and prestige distributed by the journal, they may not bring sufficient novelty to the journal. Professional training is essentially conformist.

CI quite effectively includes scholars from many disciplines of the humanities and from some of the social sciences, too. Over the years there has been some flux in the disciplines represented in the journal. Long ago architects were brought into the journal, and now anthropologists are more prominent than they once were. My own chief interest is in contemporary literary writing, particularly poetry. *CI* has now and then published essays pertaining to poetry, even to contemporary poetry, even essays by poets, but the journal does not have a firm grip on contemporary literary culture. One cannot find an intelligent representation of the vitality and creativity of the literary arts in its pages, despite the fact that scholars with professional appointments in literature departments probably comprise the largest segment of its readership. This is a suggestive paradox, due partly, I think, to simple embarrassment: to the notion, that is, that poets and novelists and their discourses just aren't as intellectually rich as the disciplined discourses of academic scholarship. You will remember that the journal used to indicate the exceptional status of literary writers by labelling their contributions in the table of contents as Artists on Art. It is true that the writing of most poets and novelists about literary expression and interpretation do not conform to the protocols of academic interpretation; writers often, though not always, focus on issues that do not particularly concern academic critics. It may be that *CI* can continue to thrive by separating itself from the nonacademic literary culture, and other publications will continue to cover the literary scene. *The New York Review of Books* too continues to be quite weak in its representation of the literary culture, particularly of poetry, although its first issue was put together in the apartment of Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Hardwick; that weakness has not impaired its survival. But there may be an opportunity missed

here in the acceptance of an apportionment of specialized responsibilities. It is possible that the journal might be improved, not only diversified, by more strenuous efforts to include lively, acute writing about contemporary literary culture; the range of critical questions addressed in the journal might be expanded by including more on contemporary writing, and the hegemony of the journal's discursive styles might even be a little restrained by that inclusion .

I mean to advocate not only the inclusion of a range of subject matter for the journal, but more importantly a discursive change. It would not be impossible to include in *CI* essays on the contemporary arts written by academics in a fashion that harmonizes with the other contributions to the journal, but it might be more interesting to publish essays on contemporary art, particularly the literary arts, that do not conform to the discursive protocols implied by the other essays in the journal; the editors might seek out essays that address the tasks of interpretation, analysis, and evaluation by means that diverge from the authoritative academic practices now represented so well there. One has the sense, in reading *CI*, that scholars in the humanities have developed models of interpretation that can accommodate almost any subject; the prestige and authority distributed by the journal go not just to individual authors but more importantly to the disciplines of the humanities in general. *CI* is a kind of model or chief exhibit of the global explanatory ambition of contemporary academic discourse in the humanities; I think of it as a flower of academic ideology. The journal might be improved by some cross-pollination with other discourses, such as those of the contemporary arts. My heart would be warmed if *CI* could establish a nexus between the academic and the literary cultures. The results should be beneficial in both directions.

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