partly because, as Patrick O'Donnell and others suggest, a lot of what I was writing had already been asked for or promised elsewhere, or was a book, or was fairly brief, but other essays I wrote sometimes required more space than *PMLA* would allow under a new policy that imposed a 9,000-word limit (it used to be 12,500). For my best work, I thought, I needed more space. Both my earlier essays had run longer than that. I could understand why the policy was adopted, but it did indeed cramp my style.

When I finally submitted a fourth article just a few years ago, I did so with misgivings. It wasn't the anonymous-submission policy that bothered me: my second essay was the first one accepted by the journal under that policy, which I still approve of; even so I always signed my reader's reports. Nor did the limit on length disturb me this time, though I would have been grateful for additional space. What worried me was my perception that the kinds of writing I liked to do were no longer in favor at *PMLA*. If "authors of high-quality manuscripts are no longer submitting their work to *PMLA*," as you speculated in the January 2001 issue (12), it's because some high-quality work may not please a new breed of advisory readers. For me, the increasing pervasiveness of new-historicist or theoretical or postcolonial or gender preoccupations made it seem less likely that formal—I prefer to say literary—analysis (not blind to history, the history of forms among others, nor entirely innocent of theoretical implications) could make it into the pages of *PMLA*. And I may have been right, about my own case at least: my article, worked over for years, was rejected outright, not recommended for revision and resubmission; the reasons given convinced me only that the readers and I held different views about literature and criticism.

Whatever my regrets about what I judge to be the direction the journal has taken, I value it still for the news it provides of professional activities, the advertisements it runs, and the addresses I need, as well as for bonanzas like the special millennial issue or some of the issues on special topics and for the occasional memorable articles it publishes, solicited or unsolicited, by brilliant young writers (i.e., under 75); and none of my strictures is likely to make me forget or undervalue the generous and gracious treatment I've received, on balance, from the MLA and *PMLA*. But it can hardly be doubted, as several letters suggest, that *PMLA* has changed since the days when articles like mine were welcome. In a number of ways it has changed for the better. It is receptive to many more kinds of important scholarship and criticism than would have been publishable in those old days, and it is less indulgent to some tedious kinds of traditional dryasdust scholarship. But it is sad to see that it long ago renounced its claim to print only articles "that are of significant interest to the entire membership of the Association" (even though one of my own essays was hanged from that yardarm), and many scholars of my generation and later evidently suspect that the journal's advisory readers and editors will be much less sympathetic to essays that try, in Auden's words, to figure out how, in all its complexity, some "verbal contraption" works than to pieces that discourse, usually at a far remove from any particular verbal text, about empowerment, hegemony, colonialism, and globalization—important and fascinating subjects, without a doubt, but not the whole story of literature and certainly not what we ought mainly to be teaching in most literature classrooms.

George T. Wright
University of Minnesota Twin Cities

Rigoberta Menchú

To the Editor:

When I published *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999), I wanted to encourage debate over representation in Latin American studies. Instead, I brought down an avalanche of ad hominem attacks, on the Nobel laureate for being a liar and on myself for casting doubt on her 1982 life story.

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My most dedicated critic is Arturo Arias, a Guatemalan intellectual who used to be associated with the same organization that Menchú was, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP). I think that he should mention this fact when he writes about the conflict. To refute my argument that the EGP's popular support was more limited than many of us supposed in the 1980s, he has accused me of being a Protestant, of interviewing Mayan peasants in the offices of the United States Agency for International Development, and of interrogating them in the presence of Guatemalan soldiers. Far from undermining his credibility, these and other spurious allegations have served Arias well. Last year the members of the Latin American Studies Association elected him their next president.

Why would many scholars be disturbed by my decision to test *I, Rigoberta Menchú* against what other survivors say? When as much killing occurs as did in Guatemala, an aura of sanctity develops around the dead. That is how the death of three members of the Menchú family became a moral platform—and an appropriate one—for a surviving daughter. It is also why her *testimonio* became a quasi-sacred text, of the kind that no one can question without upsetting the people who believe in it. As a victim who was still alive and could talk about what the Guatemalan army had done, Menchú became a source of conviction and commitment for many people.

When your peer reviewers evaluate a submission like Arias's "Authoring Ethnicized Subjects: Rigoberta Menchú and the Performative Production of the Subaltern Self" (116 [2001]: 75–88), they cannot be expected to catch every error. However, they surely know an attack piece when they see one. Since this was no obstacle to publishing it, I should point out that it is a near-complete misconstrual of my argument.

One example: when Arias has me argue that Menchú's *testimonio* "could not possibly have been hers" (his p. 81), the section he's quoting (my pp. 181–88) is a careful demonstration of why the words attributed to her are indeed her own. "Contrary to the laureate's occasional statements to the contrary," I conclude, "there is every reason to believe that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is her own account of her life" (183). My book reiterates this position and since then I've found no reason to change it.

Contrary to Arias, my book never claims scientific objectivity, never indicts Menchú for a lack of authenticity, and never dismisses her recollections while vouching for the complete reliability of others. Instead, I justify her narrative strategy in the context of 1982 because of her purpose, to denounce army killing. By misconstruing me as a facts-for-their-own-sake objectivist, Arias overlooks why I felt obliged to go into Menchú's story in such detail, even though my book reiterates why from the preface. The reason is that scholars like him were so hostile to other Mayan perspectives on the violence. By being selective about which Mayas they were listening to, they protected an ideal indigenous voice in dialogue with their own concerns, a voice they could use to ignore Mayas who felt victimized by the guerrillas as well as by the Guatemalan army.

Why does it matter if Menchú never saw her brother burn to death in Chajul? In terms of the criminal responsibility of the Guatemalan army, it doesn't matter at all, as my book makes clear. Whether Menchú's story is an eyewitness account matters because of the way that *testimonio* scholars used to define the genre. Perhaps Arias has forgotten that when scholars like him began to object to my questions in small academic gatherings in the early 1990s, they were still defining *testimonio* as a first-person narrative by "a real protagonist or witness of the event he or she recounts." To continue quoting John Beverley, "[T]estimonio may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, *novela-testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or 'factographic literature'"

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("The Margin at the Center," *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, ed. Georg M. Gugelberger [Durham: Duke UP, 1996] 24–25). According to the Casa de las Américas in Havana, which first recognized *I, Rigoberta Menchú* as a leading example of the genre, *testimonio* presupposes "knowledge of the facts by the author or his or her compilation of narratives or evidence obtained from the individuals involved or qualified witnesses. In both cases reliable documentation, written or graphic, is indispensable" (Beverley 39).

So there's no reason to apologize for comparing Menchú's account with what other survivors say. Moreover, there are important reasons for doing so—first and foremost, the monumental confidence in the urban left's view of peasants that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* inspired in readers. This is a book that we knew was true because it said what we expected to hear. It made an understandable but disastrous neo-*Guevarista* guerrilla movement, led by non-Indians like Arias, look like an inevitable expression of indigenous needs. It allowed us to discount the many Mayas who did not measure up to a high-cost agenda. It enshrined forms of militancy that, in the name of serving peasants, cost them so dearly that many joined fundamentalist Protestant churches and voted into power a right-wing law-and-order party. Loopy polemics against an anthropologist will not help anyone deal with this situation. They are only an excuse for running away from it.

David Stoll
Middlebury College

Reply:

Were David Stoll's letter not so personally injurious to me, I would be grateful to him for providing an example of his rhetorical strategies to readers unfamiliar with his work. He accuses through insinuation so that his target must spend energy mounting a defense against phantom charges rather than discussing academic or intellectual issues.

Stoll exploits the unfamiliarity that most *PMLA* readers have with both the political history of Guatemala and the administrative structure of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) to imply that I was the mastermind of a terrorist organization and that my stand on the Stoll-Menchú controversy led to the LASA presidency. Although I find Stoll's tactics unsavory, anti-intellectual, and insulting, for the benefit of *PMLA* readers I will clarify the issues he raises.

One only becomes eligible for the presidency after serving on the Executive Council (EC). On election, one serves as vice president for eighteen months before assuming the presidency. I had been a member of the EC since 1995 before being nominated for the presidency in September 1999. I ran on a platform, published in the *LASA Forum* in fall 1999, that does not mention Stoll. My curriculum vitae was published along with my platform, and it was on the basis of both that I was elected vice president in spring 2000. My article on the Stoll-Menchú controversy appeared in *PMLA* in January 2001, and *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* came out in April 2001. As a dues-paying member of LASA, Stoll knows this, but he counts on the fact that most *PMLA* readers do not. His portrayal of my election is a dishonest attempt to discredit me and reduce my career to a footnote on his own c.v.

The same is true of his misrepresentation of my role in the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP). When the Guatemalan military dictatorship burned down the Spanish embassy in Guatemala City on 31 January 1980, I, like the vast majority of Guatemalans, was horrified. This event was as traumatic for us as the destruction of the World Trade Center has been for Americans. Then living in Mexico, I identified with the EGP's principles and collaborated with its diplomatic effort. I was not, however, a formal member, nor did I participate in armed activity. I simply attempted to publicize internationally the genocidal policies of the government to garner support for ending the massacres. When the EGP placed two bombs

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