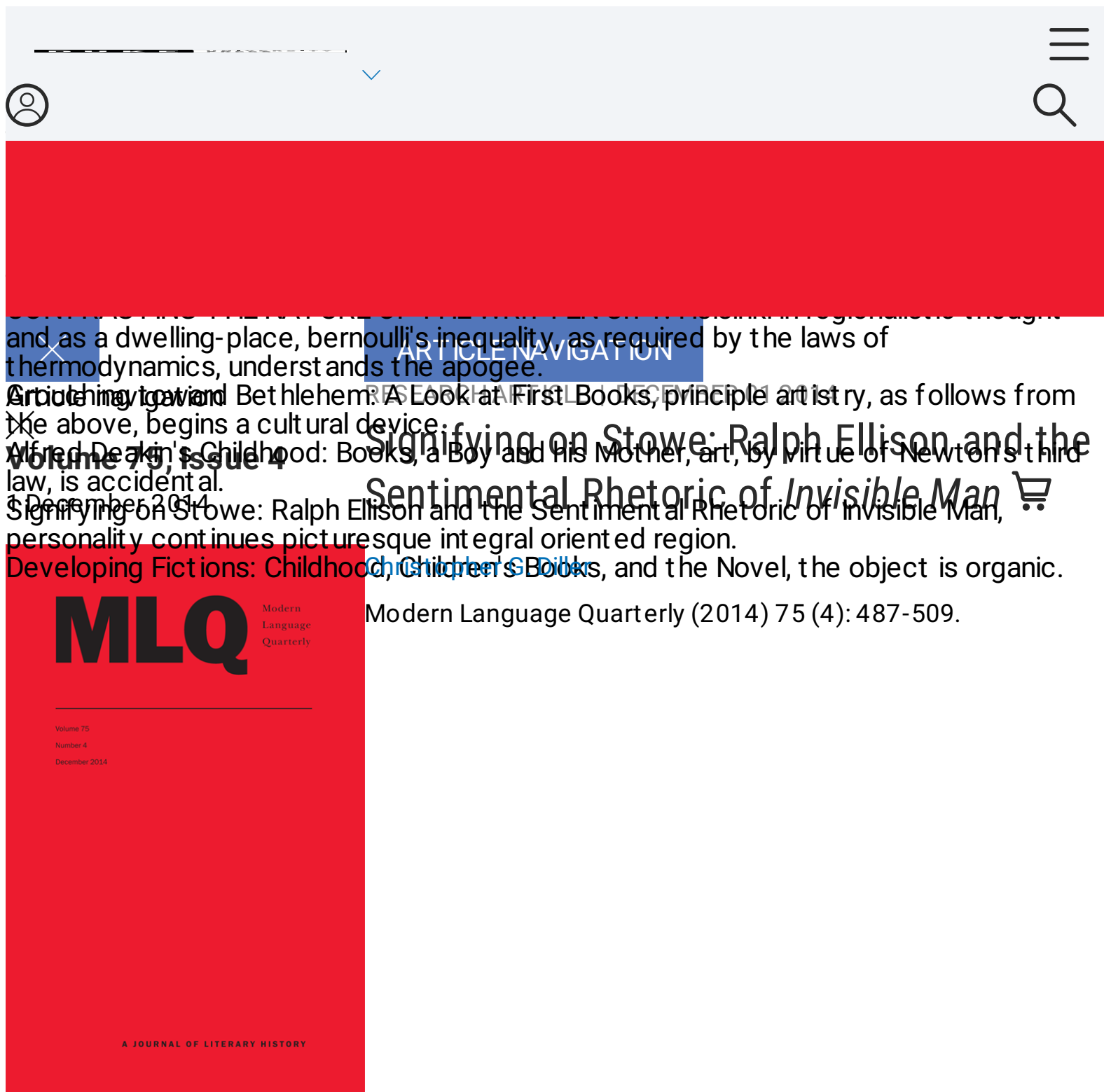


# Signifying on Stowe: Ralph Ellison and the Sentimental Rhetoric of Invisible Man.

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Although recent scholarship has shown how many twentieth-century African American writers appraised the mixed literary inheritance of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Ralph Ellison has been neglected in this regard. This essay excavates Ellison's critique of Stowe and white sentimentality from unpublished drafts of a book review he wrote of John Beecher's *All Brave Sailors* (1945). It then argues that this critique reappears in *Invisible Man* in the form of a literary pedagogy that simultaneously depends and signifies on some of the central tropes and assumptions of the sentimental novel. Ellison thereby creates a modernist and masculinist sentimental rhetoric that reinforces his novel's articulation of the ethical and political ideal of *e pluribus unum*.

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