

## Editor's Column

ARE FEWER “senior scholars” sending essays to our journal than in years past? Is the recent decline in the number of essays submitted by men the result of our current policy of blind submissions? Do evaluators tend to remain anonymous now that the names of authors are unknown to them? Does the review process discourage some potential contributors from sending their work? Are articles on pedagogy included in the new editorial statement calling for papers exemplary of their kind, “whatever the kind”?

These are a few of the questions that the Executive Council raised at a recent meeting when the discussion turned, as it so often does, to *PMLA*. We all feel that a learned society such as ours should sponsor an influential journal, and we want to see *PMLA* live up to its long tradition of excellence. If some of our policies are interfering with that goal then clearly they should be changed; hence the concern and the questions.

Since I am in the habit of browsing through our bound files, I was aware as I looked around the table during our meeting that nearly everyone present, myself included, had published in *PMLA* at one time or other and that several Council members had appeared in *PMLA*'s pages more than once. I was also aware that only two of those present had sent in articles recently. During our discussion we agreed that many distinguished scholars come more and more to write only essays that are commissioned. This trend obviously influences the number of articles we receive from the “great names,” including, paradoxically, those on our own governing boards, and explains the frequent presence in these pages of work by bright but lesser-known persons. Why subject an essay to a rigorous, sometimes drawn-out review, with no guarantee of acceptance, if one can be assured publication elsewhere? Why indeed. Fortunately for all of us, well-known scholars—Peter Brooks, Nina Baym, David DeLaura, Hans Eichner, Sandra Gilbert, and many others—who could easily find publication in other journals have sent us their work; perhaps our large and special audience attracts them. I hope that other nationally visible members will consider doing so as well, not because we are unimpressed by the brilliance of our younger members, whose work we are likely to publish in any case, but because a journal such as ours really should be a showcase for the most important essays being written throughout the ranks of our membership.

One Council member felt strongly that our procedures deter some senior scholars and suggested that we eliminate the first evaluation, that we send an essay immediately to the appropriate member of the Advisory Committee and then, if it is awarded a seal of approval, directly to the Editorial Board. Why, she asked, run the risk of having one's work evaluated by an unknown, possibly unsympathetic first reader? Why not speed things up by dropping this step? Although I understand this point of view, I think it makes sense to have an essay read by a specialist before it goes to the Advisory Committee member, who, it should be remembered, must read a great many papers on a wide range of topics. I myself am a modernist, but I am not absolutely on top of scholarship on Wharton, say, or Graves. I would want assurances from an expert that the research was exemplary before I recommended a piece on one of these writers to the Board, a group of polymaths who must begin their work with the assumption that the *details* of the essays that have made it to the final step are accurate. Under our present policy, furthermore, no one person can reject an article. For each essay we try to choose a reader who is likely to be sympathetic, if not to the author's findings then at least to the subject and methodology. We would not, for example, send a paper on *The Waves* to someone who is afraid of Virginia Woolf.

Another compelling reason for sending essays to specialist readers is that our members get useful critiques of their work that are invaluable in revising. I frequently see in other journals articles that have had the benefit of our readings. A remarkable collegiality exists within the Association, and it is not uncommon for an author to receive several pages of helpful suggestions and corrections. Since we publish a small percentage of the essays we consider, many members, I am convinced, submit mainly to get the advice our procedures make possible. It is

one of the perquisites of membership. And the scores of evaluators who give generously of their time and wisdom have the satisfaction of sharing knowledge in a humane process and the stimulation of seeing, hot off the typewriter (or word processor), the sorts of work being done in their fields. I would be sorry for our contributors as well as for the pool of conscientious readers to see this dialogue muted.

Some time has passed since we last conducted a poll of our readers, and perhaps we should ask their opinions now. We would find it useful to know, for example, how many members read most or all of the essays, how many welcome the section on professional news or the advertisements, how many find currently fashionable critical language invigorating, how many keep a permanent *PMLA* file, how many joint members fight over the single copy when it arrives. Right now, though, instead of addressing these questions to all our readers, I want to direct some queries specifically to potential contributors. I would especially like to hear from anyone who, for one reason or another, has chosen not to submit an essay to our journal. What are your reasons? Are you bothered by some aspect of our submissions policy? by the evaluation procedures? by the low percentage of acceptances? by the editorial statement? by the journal's reputation for high seriousness? by all of the above? by something else? Please drop me a note (anonymously or otherwise); I'd very much like to know what you think of *PMLA* as a place in which to publish. And I will, be assured, share your comments with our Editorial Board and with the Council.

JOEL CONARROE

#### Correction

Two lines are transposed in the last two complete sentences on page 13 of Hans Eichner's article "The Rise of Modern Science and the Genesis of Romanticism" (Jan. 1982 *PMLA*). The sentences should read: "If causation only holds sway within the phenomenal world, the noumena cannot cause the phenomena, so that Kant is no better than Descartes at explaining how 'matter' enters the 'mind.' Similarly, if the noumena are neither spatial nor temporal, they cannot account for the spatiotemporal configuration of the phenomena we observe." We apologize to Professor Eichner and to *PMLA* readers for the error.