

provide the kind of reports on manuscripts that I believe association members would not be indignant to receive. I hope your column and letter campaign elicit a happier response than mine, or that the printing of letters such as this one might spark some credible stories of judicious and timely manuscript review; printing those might help dispel what I take to be a long-standing and widespread impression concerning *PMLA*'s review process.

Tim Dean

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TO THE EDITOR:

You didn't request my musings, and they may be worth about what most free advice comes to—every penny it costs. In any event, I offer them.

Biographically, I send them as a reasonably well published contributor to the literary field (some twenty books written or edited, with reviews I'm not ashamed of; fifty years plus as editor of the *West Virginia University Philological Papers*—it's not *PMLA*, but it does its duty; over a couple of hundred articles on literature, travel, education, and philately, which at least pleased your correspondent; I've even had two or three small items in *MLA* publications, and I did three years before the mast of your *International Bibliography* vessel; oh yes, and you granted my requests to chair several of my own sessions at Christmas meetings). I've also spent a term on the *MLA*'s Delegate Assembly. In short, I have served my time and still do at age eighty-six.

But I have never submitted and do not intend to submit an article to *PMLA*, much as I would feel honored to appear in its pages. Your eight-week average review time is a blessing (*WVUPP* more or less equals it, with occasional stumbles). The journal's reputation is what you claim for it. The problem is that "five percent." A chance of something like one out of twenty for professors up against recognition, advancement in rank, even retention just isn't a good bet. Multiple submissions are rightfully frowned on, so most of us try for a publication where we have better odds. There is even the suspicion that the old-boy network favors certain submitters. In all honesty I have never found this to be true, and since accusatory evidence is anecdotal, it doesn't come to much. Still, I know scholars say it and doubtless feel it, a fact that may hurt submission figures. Some of us may also feel slighted that

so many of your pages result from commissions, not unsolicited submissions. Finally, your articles are rather more lengthy than what can result from the twenty minutes granted to presenters at literary conferences. The ambitious may feel that if they have to undertake such a major effort, why not go for a whole book, a necessary success for most promotions.

All this, however true, does not detract from the high reputation deservedly enjoyed by *PMLA*, but neither does it make for easy solutions. Doubtless you really don't expect any.

Armand E. Singer

West Virginia University, Morgantown

TO THE EDITOR:

It was with considerable interest that I read the column "Lost Moorings" in the January 2001 *PMLA*. I find quite ironic the "angst" and sense of bewilderment that you bring to this column, while nonetheless I welcome your well-intentioned efforts to remedy the critical lack of submissions to *PMLA*.

I will respond by making two points. First, it is not just a question of submissions. The entire *MLA* appears to have lost its moorings. In fact, that is a common topic and has been for some time among professors of French literature. Recently, while working to assemble panels for upcoming conferences, I had to comb the Internet to learn the locations of a variety of scholars in French literature, since so many of my colleagues have apparently dropped out of the organization. I refer to senior colleagues; many of the junior ones have never bothered to join. I was unable to locate addresses in the *PMLA* Directory, which once was a close-to-perfect mirror of the profession. Having for so long turned away from what most of us consider Romance studies, *PMLA* now wonders what has happened to submissions?

Second, I would suggest you take a good look at the silliness and pretense that mark the descriptions for forthcoming *PMLA* special topics, on pages 6–7 of the January volume. I work in the intersections of literature and history, and I have recently been analyzing the historical codes that are embedded in the seventeenth-century novels of Lafayette but are often invisible to the contemporary reader. Most of the members, or disappeared members, of the association work as I do: on specific writers, on specific texts, as you well know. I cannot imagine

my work finding a home in *PMLA*, if acceptance is determined by the entirely impenetrable “standards” that appear in the description of the forthcoming topic *Imagining History*.

Once the association and *PMLA* recognize and accept that many of us are in British and western European studies, that we work on canonical authors, although not necessarily always from a traditional perspective, that this is what we teach, that we are not engaged in cultural meandering of the vaguest sort, that our work is scholarship on literary texts that have interested generations of readers and critics—and, we believe, still do—that we are not engaged in political hype as perhaps are some of the trendier nonscholarly publications, then submissions, whose lack reflects intense noninterest in the journal, will increase. It is altogether obvious that *PMLA*’s prolonged transformation away from the core interests and values of the membership has resulted in a devastating failure. The entire organization, if these practices do not change, will soon follow.

Louise K. Horowitz
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TO THE EDITOR:

I have read with interest your column “Lost Moorings—*PMLA* and Its Audience,” which seems a sincere expression of concern about a problem that I agree is real. Here, for what they’re worth, are a few thoughts on the subject.

I’ve been a continuous member of the MLA since finishing graduate school over thirty years ago. Shortly after taking my first job, I submitted an article on John Milton to *PMLA*, but it was rejected on grounds that it was “not of interest to a broad cross-section of the Association.” It may be that the reviewer who wrote that critique thought the article lacking in quality and simply wished to spare my feelings (although I don’t see why that consideration should have arisen in an environment of anonymity), but I found the response sufficiently chilling that I never tried again. And though I’m older and maybe wiser now, I can’t see myself submitting anything in the future because despite the openness claimed in the Statement of Editorial Policy (to “a variety of topics” and to “all scholarly methods and theoretical perspectives”), I—like myriad others—don’t believe that the statement means what it says.

To get specific, last month I attended the sixteenth annual meeting of the John Donne Society of America. The society has a continuing membership of about 125 scholars, of whom between 60 and 70 attend the annual convention in any given year; and these aren’t the only people reading or teaching Donne in the studies and classrooms of the world. At this conference—to mention only a couple of examples—I heard presentations on the introduction of Donne to the English curriculum at Harvard in the late nineteenth century and on sacramental womanhood in Donne’s *The First Anniversary* that I think anyone would rate among “the best of [their] kind,” yet the idea that either of these authors would submit their work to you brings a smile because these essays belong to categories of work that—whatever the Statement of Editorial Policy says—*PMLA* would not welcome.

Or take textual criticism, the particular vineyard I’ve been laboring in for the past twenty years. Though you wouldn’t know it to look at *PMLA*, there’s a vigorous scholarly subculture devoted to this area: many of its members congregate in New York every other spring at the meeting of the Society for Textual Scholarship, contend for federal funds through the NEH’s Research Division, submit their work for approval to the MLA’s Committee on Scholarly Editions, and even compete biennially for the MLA Prize for a Distinguished Scholarly Edition. And the fruits of their labors are essential to most of our other professional activities. Yet the only *PMLA* article in recent memory that even remotely touches on textual scholarship is David Greetham’s piece in the special issue *The Status of Evidence* a few years ago (“Textual Forensics,” 111 [1996]: 32–51). Textual scholars are expected to subsidize with their dues and be interested in—to take the top items from the two “Forthcoming” lists on pages 6 and 7 of the January 2001 issue—“Gender Trouble and Genoese Gold in Cervantes’s ‘The Two Damsels’” and “The Making of a Gay Literary Tradition in David Leavitt’s ‘The Term Paper Artist’”; yet their own work is never eligible for publication in *PMLA*.

To come at this another way: even though MLA membership automatically entails a subscription to *PMLA*, it’s a mistake to imagine that the parent organization’s membership and *PMLA*’s actual audience are coextensive. And if we offered an option for