

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

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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