

membership without the journal subscription, the truth of this would be immediately apparent. An MLA survey ten years ago indicated that at least eighty-five percent of those among the professoriat who teach language and literature continue to teach and think about our subject in fairly traditional ways (“Highlights of the MLA’s 1990 Survey of Upper-Division Literature Courses,” *ADE Bulletin* 101 [1992]: 34). These are the people who join the organization out of a sense of professional duty or because they need to attend the annual convention or because they want to purchase the bibliography or—especially among junior faculty members—because they want their own copy of the *Job Information List*. But they’re also the ones whose interests are largely not addressed by *PMLA* and who would drop that part of their membership in a heartbeat if they had the option. Some of them no doubt are not publishing anywhere, but many are. They just know *PMLA* won’t be interested in their work, so they don’t submit it.

In sum, if you and the *PMLA* Editorial Board are really interested in attracting more submissions, you might try actually following a big-tent policy rather than merely announcing one in the Statement of Editorial Policy. And this would have the added advantage of making the journal reflect the full range of interests represented among the MLA’s membership.

Gary A. Stringer
University of Southern Mississippi

TO THE EDITOR:

In response to Carlos J. Alonso’s informative report on declining submissions, I thought that, as a life member of the MLA and a constant reader, or skimmer, of *PMLA* over several decades, I would explain, for what it is worth, why I would not submit my work to it, though I did once, unsuccessfully, in the past.

1. Over the years I have grown rather weary of *PMLA*’s relentless self-praise in varying formulations, its incomparable rigor and selectivity, its restriction to “the best of its kind.” It is the University of Chicago of periodicals; the stance is not only ungracious and unmannerly, it is intimidating. Perhaps it is useful in driving off persons of my limitations, but I think it likely that not many capable scholars, especially younger ones, are supremely confident that they can meet such peerless standards.

2. Alonso seems to set less value on my time than I do. Why in the world would I spend it on a composition for a journal that boasts of a ninety-five percent rejection rate? Many of us have all we can do to meet solicited obligations for conference papers, thematic journal volumes and books, *Festschriften*, and the like. To attempt an essay for *PMLA* would be a foolish use of resources.

3. I remain fairly unimpressed by the advantages to the supplicant Alonso ascribes to the evaluation process. I neither want nor need the advice of referees, with which my overall experiences have been dispiriting. My clearest memory of the commentary to *PMLA*’s rejection of my paper is that it was cranky and petty; to be sure, that was a long time ago.

4. As to the journal’s content, I was once invited to a panel on that topic, where I ventured the suggestion that, instead of pursuing the most esoteric and rarified top of the line and leaving the expert general discourse on literature to the *New York Review of Books* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, *PMLA* might better serve the diverse membership with fundamentally informative and instructive essays on literatures and theories not our own. This talk was not well received; it was supposed to appear in an MLA publication but was “lost” in the office. Still, no one I know likes *PMLA* as it is very much; at the end of the academic year, when people are on the move, the Dumpsters fill up with it. Since it occasionally prints letters from admirers, I have concluded that it is a coterie publication.

5. Finally, I will not submit, so to speak, to anonymous submissions; on this point I agree entirely with Stanley Fish. For the same reason I decline to evaluate such submissions. To translate Lincoln into a more trivial register: as I would not be treated as an anonymous by my own professional organizations, so I will not treat others that way. If I had one piece of advice, it would be to abandon that policy, but I expect it would be futile.

Jeffrey L. Sammons
Yale University

TO THE EDITOR:

You may remember that last fall I wrote the MLA offices in protest over yet another unreadable issue of *PMLA*. You kindly responded and pointed to your statement of policy to appear in the January

issue, which I have just received. I certainly applaud your goals and indeed am surprised by the paucity of submissions from which you must choose essays to print. My own failure to submit anything, for what it's worth, stems from the fact that I don't read *PMLA* anymore but place my work instead in publications I do read, narrowly professional ones like *Milton Studies* and *Milton Quarterly*, where it will be judged by a small group.

Indeed, I wish that you would also make a clear prose style a major issue for acceptance. When I write for Miltonists I write one way; when I write for American literature specialists I use a very different style, which would bore or irritate specialists, I suppose, but which communicates, the purpose of any writing. Every skillful and successful writer can and must do this. I complained about such unintelligibility in the Forum a few years ago (111 [1996]: 133), with obviously no effect: this January issue has an essay headed "Glocal Knowledges." I have no idea what the first word means and no way to resolve the solecism of the second. I skimmed through the first section of the essay without being enlightened. Why read further? I realize that you were not responsible for the contents of the issue.

I also query your printing material that will certainly concern only a minuscule audience, like the translation of Nuria Amat's "The Language of Two Shores" (116 [2001]: 189–97). Who is she? We learn that her novel was a finalist for (not the winner of) the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, awarded every five years. Golly gee! Let's assume that three hundred of our members really want a copy (and cannot read the original). What of the other thirty thousand? Doesn't the Editorial Board realize that the Internet is in working order? The Early English Text Society published for years for a similarly small proportion of our members, but not in *PMLA*.

I think that you would do well to find out how much of each issue is actually read by our membership. A commercial publication could not survive as ours does merely by the need for membership (as *National Geographic* once really did and now pretends to do). For me the only useful issues are the membership and program ones. With many I mourn the loss of the annual bibliography, for which I would willingly give up the other four. I'll keep this January's for a short while—unread but because of your column. I note with acclaim its subtitle, "*PMLA*

and Its Audience." But I have added to my permanent library the splendid—and highly readable—millennium issue (115 [2000]: 1713–2096).

William B. Hunter
Greensboro, NC

TO THE EDITOR:

In the January issue you wonder at the low submission rate. I will be brief. Your noble journal is dull. Dull I call it, for to define true dullness, what is't but to be nothing else but abstract theoretical jargon? MLA membership has advantages excluding *PMLA* articles that could serve as parody or as additional bad examples for George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language."

Insecure scholars "speak" theory because they never learned Latin. Perhaps *PMLA*'s Editorial Board supposes that amorphous abstraction might become the next international, interdisciplinary language of learning. Classical Latin, however, being precise and succinct and orderly, cannot be replaced by an unspeakable language wherein words shift meaning at whim.

For a quarter century now I have opened every issue of *PMLA*, peered at all titles and abstracts, and read from beginning to end perhaps a dozen articles (besides those by colleagues whose work I already knew). Of that dozen only one, on hendiadys in *Hamlet*, stimulated my mind and hence scholarship. Most recently, because my research involves visual art and oral performance, I had my hopes dashed yet again by an article on a version of *Romeo and Juliet*. A friend of mine had reported that her hairdresser, having seen that film, told her to watch for a gun with the brand name Sword. I intend no offence i' th' world to hairdressers or *PMLA* authors in remarking that the article said no more but so, embedding its one unexceptional point deep in suppositions about what various names might theorize about the film.

PMLA will never publish my research. Knowing even dialects of medieval Latin, I need not cower behind theory. Nonetheless, because I pay top-rank dues and because your refereeing process is extraordinarily efficient, I sometimes submit first to *PMLA* my scholarship on topics that span periods or disciplines (e.g., on eighteenth-century Chauceriana or the songs of Bob Dylan). I thereby take advantage of comments from the responsible, selfless