

Editors not only serve audiences but also create them. But because scholarly publication is perceived primarily as a means of gaining rewards rather than of communicating, the role of the true audience, paying and participating, has certainly declined. In the 1970s, when many of the great and lasting journals were founded, it was, I recall, common to subscribe to the journal in one's field, to read it, and to respond with submissions. While technology has threatened to make learned journals obsolete, in fact it is making audiences obsolete. True, within the reward system, the journal will always have more status than e-mail. But authors, assisted by technology, can produce more first copies of essays and submit them to more journals—inappropriate essays for journals the authors do not read.

The irony is that, while journals are at the heart of the reward system, they seldom receive any rewards themselves—most are still scratching for support, for recognition, for readers. Authors complain that their submissions are not reviewed or published fast enough; when the essays are published, we primarily hear about the “errors.”

The real crisis for journals is in support. A journal used to be a source of prestige to a department and a center of energy for students. Now, however dependent the employment process is on journals, departments seldom support them, forcing them to increase subscription rates and thus often lose individual readers. But learned journals are still the most economical means of publishing in the humanities, since most of the usually expensive labor—the editing and peer review—is done by volunteers. To have the decisions, which are free, one must have the journals, which are not—or a central clearinghouse that will validate the articles without being obligated to publish them. To keep the journals, the scholars who use them for credentials should subscribe, not just once but throughout their professional lives. And they have to recover the habit of reading whole journals rather than items selected for their immediate needs. Few journals are so random that an offprint is as good as the whole thing; editors consider their major achievements not isolated papers but organic volumes in which each article works in the context of the others. Journals in the humanities, unlike those in the sciences, do not charge authors for publication, and should not have to bear the costs of authors' rewards.

Better authors, more appropriate manuscripts, more support, better readers: these are the same priorities that journals had in the seventies. The fundamental problem then and now is also the same: if the rewards of the profession are going to depend on publication in learned journals, the journals will have to be supported and re-

warded as well, or we shall have to reconsider the whole reward system.

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To the Editor:

When I first read Domna Stanton's January 1994 Editor's Column, “On Multiple Submissions” (109 [1994]: 7–13), it struck me as simply a bit of professional curiosity, an unusually clear example of the vogue for marshaling certain fashionable abstractions rather than grappling directly with a question. I also found it strange that Stanton did not more directly dismiss the fallacy of regarding multiple submissions as even a partial solution to the general slowness of the process of refereeing manuscripts. If referees (and often, I fear, editorial offices) appear unable to respond to submissions in a timely fashion, multiplying the number of submissions that editors must process and referees must comment on can be nothing but counterproductive.

But when a concerned graduate student asked me what image of the profession I thought the column gave, I read it again and found myself focusing on the calm acceptance of the situation described by the paragraph beginning “The most often cited justification for multiple submissions is the pressure on scholars to publish and thus to send their manuscripts to as many outlets as possible, especially academics who are beginning their careers or about to undergo tenure and promotion evaluations.” The paragraph goes on to remind us that “[m]any universities require for tenure not only a book and a body of articles but also substantial progress on a second major project” and that, because of the pressure on students to finish their doctorates more quickly, dissertations now “tend to be undigested and unpolished” (8). Although few of us need to be reminded of this aspect of the state of the profession, we perhaps do need to be reminded that it is our responsibility to judge if things are the way they ought to be. It is not that a policy on multiple submissions is unimportant but rather that it deserves much less debate within the MLA than the more fundamental issues of what English departments expect their faculties to devote time to and why.

Buried in the second footnote is another comment that suggests that we indeed need to examine once again the ever-current question of “the function of criticism.” Ursula Franklin's belief that “[i]nitially . . . the purpose of publication was to benefit the readers” is described as “perhaps somewhat naive, a mythical notion that war-

rants a dose of demystification" (11). Most of us, I suspect, would agree that there is a naïveté in the belief that authorial pride and the desire for reputation, as well as for the good things of the world that go with reputation, have not always been strong motives for writing for publication. But the implication of Stanton's reply to Franklin is that the benefit to readers is distinctly secondary and that the primary purpose of publication is not to share insights and discoveries but to advertise oneself. I am not sure that that is not all too often the case today, but do we really wish to say that literary scholars and critics have little or nothing worthwhile to share and that the putative value of what they offer the reader is illusory?

The intellectual honesty and commitment to constant questioning the humanities have always laid claim to should demand debate on the more troublesome issues implied or suggested by the words I have quoted. Following are some propositions that ought to be debated:

1. The amount of publication expected for tenure and promotion is at present excessive.
2. Much of what is published consists of superficial insights dressed in pretentious terms because the authors, their eyes on the tenure clock, on promotion, or on establishing records that will allow them to move to institutions that will pay them more and require them to teach less, cannot take the time to read widely or carefully.
3. Much of what is published consists of little more than demonstrations that the author can follow others in applying portions of some conceptual scheme to portions of a literary text.
4. A great many books would be better presented as articles, and many an article could with profit be condensed into a note.
5. A great deal of published criticism and theory is essentially unread, and much of the remainder is read not for a deeper understanding of a literary text or texts but for material that can be used in whatever the reader plans to write next.
6. In order that graduate students may survive in a milieu where they must publish as much and as quickly as possible, they are encouraged to restrict their attention to those literary texts and theoretical approaches that can be quickly blended into at least the outward shape of books and articles.

Perhaps most members of the MLA are convinced that the profession and the world are really better for the ever-increasing flow of printer's ink, that granting tenure only to those who can exhibit "not only a book and a

body of articles but also substantial progress on a second major project" increases the amount of worthwhile publication and teaching, and that reading less widely in literary texts produces greater understanding of literature. But if the debates about the direction of the profession show that the majority has real doubts, the MLA should take the lead in promulgating a revised understanding of scholarly duties and priorities and in encouraging and helping departments to fight the necessary battles on their own campuses. No one would argue that university departments of literature possess sufficient autonomy to shape themselves wholly as they might wish, but nevertheless they need not simply roll darkling down the torrent of their fate.

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To the Editor:

By discussing the issue of multiple submissions to scholarly journals under the heading of "censorship," Domna Stanton distorts and, ultimately, trivializes an issue near and dear to the aspirations of many young scholars whose livelihoods now almost exclusively depend on opportunities to get ideas into print. Indeed, the issue represents an ethical dilemma of the greatest proportions, but Stanton fails to properly identify the genuine locus of this problem.

The difficulty young scholars have in publishing their work is only a symptom of a well-known larger problem pervasive in literary studies: the suffocating job crunch that threatens to snuff out the next generation of college teachers. Denying this situation is tantamount to renouncing any understanding of the profession as it exists today. *PMLA's* newly decreed refusal to consider manuscripts under consideration elsewhere, in the wake of similar decisions by other journals nationwide, merely serves to potentially exacerbate the obstacles young scholars face in their search to build professional credentials.

Stanton's specious reasoning in favor of eliminating multiple submissions implies that we should also restrict applicants for the few advertised positions in literature departments to one standing application per individual. Imagine how much fairer the hiring practices of the nation's universities would be if each candidate for a literature position could apply only to one place at a time! Senior, tenured instructors would look forward to no more tedious rummaging through vitae already being viewed by scores of literature departments across the country. No more worrying about prompt selection—