

Editor's Note

A lifelong entrenched Chicagoan, recently arrived at a rural eastern university, registered unanticipated existential anguish with the statement, "Here I can't even go to the movies without meeting someone I know!" That cry unsettled the local inhabitants, who were known to prize the coziness of their diminutive and convivial environment. There are, it appears, two sides to the question of anonymity.

PMLA's procedure of anonymous submission and evaluation of manuscripts was instituted almost a decade ago, in January 1980, and was reconfirmed as journal policy three years later. Heated debate preceded the initiative, both publicly and in committee, and the discussions have not subsided since its implementation. Echoing the apparent majority view among the members of the association, colleagues who have sat on successive delegate assemblies, executive councils, and editorial boards have continued to support the change. The present *PMLA* Editorial Board and the editor appreciate the arguments on both sides, but we have faith in the system and do not believe that the time is ripe for a reversal. The plan has achieved its aims; the profile of the average contributor to the journal has undergone a transformation: our pages now house more women, more colleagues from the junior ranks, and authors from a greater variety of institutions. The October issue happens to be male-dominated and includes only one assistant professor, but that roster is purely the product of chance; all five authors and their affiliations were equal—that is, unidentified—before their nine or ten referees. In a future number the proportions may be reversed, as they have been in the past. To be sure, the requirement of anonymity has had undesired side effects: for example, some of the more established members of the profession have unfortunately been reluctant to send their work to *PMLA*. Still, *PMLA* can lay claim to a review process as open and as fair as any that may be devised.

Such confidence in the system notwithstanding, all policies and procedures deserve continuing scrutiny. To question them and the premises on which they rest is a healthful activity, and *PMLA* suffers no self-subversion as it airs in its own pages members' differences about its strategies. In a Guest Column published two years ago (Oct. 1986), Myra Jehlen and Maureen Quilligan penned an eloquent and spirited defense of concealment. Engaging the psychology of anonymous evaluation from the vantage point of the judges, they reminded us "how contingent and complicitous our sense of authority is" and concluded that "it is difficult to imagine any drama more appropriate to the editorial board of a journal devoted to understanding the experience of reading."

Stanley Fish does not arrive at the same conclusions. His Guest Column in this issue, drafted at the time of the initial debate and recently updated, calls us to task for our present ways and makes a case against anonymous submissions. Those of us who have been temporarily entrusted with conducting the operations of *PMLA* in accordance with association guidelines easily become smug, so Fish's admonition is sobering. At the very least it forces us to rethink and to defend our positions as effectively as he expresses his. Fish's comments, however, reach far beyond the business of *PMLA* and encompass matters that touch us all: the practices of a humane community, the relation of institutional machinery and needs, the proper avenues for the identification of merit, the training of graduate students, the conditions of authority, the contexts of criticism, and the politics of professionalism—academic rites and rights. I would not care to predict whether in another ten years *PMLA* will have revised its policies or will have the same ones in force, but I am certain that, whatever the policy, voices will be raised in opposition and in defense. In the meantime, the Forum, which is not subject to the anonymous-evaluation procedures, welcomes your responses to any of the questions that Stanley Fish raises in his column.

JOHN W. KRONIK