journal, for example, will not publish their nine-year-old articles with afterwords attached. It will ask for a rewritten version.

A reversal of the anonymous-submission policy would cause a drastic decline in submissions by excellent but unknown writers; in competition with a Fish, the cards are stacked against them, or—as the German phrase goes—"sie können gegen den Fish nicht anstinken."

Sieglinde Lug
University of Denver

To the Editor:

PMLA's practice of anonymous submission and evaluation of manuscripts suggests, as Stanley Fish notes in his guest column, a belief that ignorance of authorship " 'ensure[s] that in making their evaluations readers are not influenced by factors other than the intrinsic merits of the article' " (739). Well, we subscribers want to appreciate intrinsic merit, too. Are we being prevented from doing so by *PMLA*'s practice of providing us with the names of its contributors, as well as introductory "Notes on Contributors" that generate professional profiles?

The fact that *PMLA* withholds from its readership the "privilege" of blind evaluation enjoyed by its sequestered Editorial Board bespeaks, I think, an unconscious agreement with one of Fish's arguments against anonymity. I imagine that *PMLA* hopes its readers would recognize that (for example) Richard Levin's March 1988 article attacking feminist thematics was something different from an anonymous article attacking feminist thematics, largely because Levin, in previously published work, had helped to shape the debate on the subject. As Fish writes, "there are words that matter more than other words spoken by those who address a field that they themselves have in large part constituted" (741). To conceal authorship is to withhold valuable information about an article's context, from editors no less than from subscribers.

Grace Tiffany
University of Notre Dame

To the Editor:

I would like to take up a point made in passing by Stanley Fish in his guest column. He says that he is grateful to the Spenser Society and other professional organizations because "were it not for the opportunities made available by these organizations there would be nothing for us to do" (743). I disagree. One of the greatest weaknesses in departments of English is that most of us are only superficially aware of languages and literatures other than our own. What we should do is reward people who learn a language and its literature. Doing so would substitute greater learning for the increasingly sterile shifts we are put to. It would also reduce the provinciality of our work and ground our theorizing more firmly. It would say to the community that we are not bound by an outmoded nationalism or linguistic chauvinism, and we would be able to place our own literature in the context of other literary traditions (an activity that is not meant to be taken as theory-neutral) rather than of new interpretive modes. One can think of numerous additional benefits that might flow from my proposal—for example, more and better talk between members of the various language departments—and at least for now I can think of no drawbacks.

I do not mean to imply that there is no serious scholarly work to be done or that no innovation is possible, but I do think we have reached a point of diminishing returns when, as in my university, there are eighty or ninety "researchers" for literature in English and perhaps fifteen for all of European history. We should accept the fact that we exist in the numbers we do primarily to pass on a tradition, not to add to a body of knowledge, and we can deepen and broaden that effort in a single stroke. I propose that the MLA establish a committee (!) to look into the advantages and disadvantages of my proposal. The point of all this is to make it possible for people to be promoted for learning a language and literature. We need to expand our notion of what we should be rewarded for.

Roger Seamon
University of British Columbia

To the Editor:

It is so obvious that the merit of an essay is independent of our feelings toward the person who wrote it that Stanley Fish has to use a sleight of hand to "prove" his argument that "the identity of the men and women who propose to speak about [whatever the subject of the essay may be] cannot be irrelevant to a judgment of the merit of what they have to say" (741). He does so by first pointing out that the merit of an essay is based on criteria or standards such as "a set of authorized . . . methodologies, . . . a list of the tasks that particularly need doing, . . . arguments that are properly literary . . . " (740), which are, of course, "a product" of "professional and institutional conditions" (740), which are, in turn, created by human beings. Fish then jumps to his conclusion that since human beings create the standards by which we judge an essay, their "identity . . . cannot be irrelevant" to our judgment of the essay's merit.

The sleight of hand has two parts: First, the authors of the essays are not necessarily (or usually) the authors of the standards. Second, and more important, even if they were, the value of the standards or criteria is based