

There could be simply short paragraphs, following a more or less standard form, giving date of death, name, most recent position, education, specialities and particular contributions, noteworthy students or mentors, and the period of membership in the MLA or other organizations. There is a custom that following the publication of an obituary in the London *Times*, colleagues or other associates of the departed write letters beginning, “May I add a word about [whomever]?” and mentioning specific qualities or occasions that demonstrated the subject’s character. Room might be allowed in *PMLA* for such remembrances by colleagues, students, and others. When those outside the profession of language and literature wonder about its methods or worth, such a brief accounting of what our members have done and have meant to others could speak volumes.

I’d also like to suggest that the listings be arranged chronologically—date first, followed by the name, in boldface or italics—to add to the historical march of the notations. And although it may sound callously whimsical, a chronological arrangement would also contribute to such observations as my impression that a goodly number of these faithful and dutiful members of the profession depart on their own time—during summer or interim breaks or at the beginning of the academic year. (It seemed clear to me in graduate school that at my university academics made major changes—like adopting new hair styles, growing beards, marrying, having babies, divorcing—between terms, and there appeared to be a long-established custom that some one or two would die or go mad at the beginning of a new academic year. One year this convention took the form of an overly Romanticism-influenced undergraduate’s attempted suicide by something like laudanum at the fountain and pond in the middle of the campus.) I’m sorry if this hypothesis sounds insensitive or lacking in due gravitas, but it seems fairly worth

a moment’s consideration in any weighing of the reconciliations of literature and life.

When the members are surveyed on what they like or don’t like about *PMLA* and what they read or don’t read in it, I believe you would find that a goodly proportion would follow assiduously such a regular feature, which might be placed more respectfully in the editorial pages rather than amidst the advertisements, following the “Internet news.”

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Persons’ Titles in the Forum

To the Editor:

Civility in professional discourse has become a topic much discussed, in settings from op-ed pages to professional journals. Incivility in *PMLA* manifests itself most clearly at times in the Forum. The *PMLA* house style of omitting titles before persons’ names adds to the harsh tone of too many letters.

The editor could contribute directly to a civil academic discourse by ensuring that persons are referred to first by full name and then by surname preceded by a title. For those who are neither professors nor holders of the doctorate, I would suggest inserting simply *Ms.* or *Mr.* These two titles lend an egalitarian air that counters the hierarchy of professorships. *Ms.* and *Mr.* have at least one drawback, however: a distinction based on sex. Nevertheless, this disadvantage is mitigated by the curb that the titles would place on the rancorous tone of many letter writers—a tone that some detractors of the academy celebrate.

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