

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Few of us have failed to experience frustration at one time or another over the handling of manuscripts by editors of professional journals. The mechanical and nonintellectual elements in shepherding a project from inception to the printed page are annoying, bothersome, and time consuming. There is a natural inclination—one I have often shared—to feel that, with the final refining and polishing of an article, it should immediately reach the printed page and receive the attention of one's professional peers. Yet the time lag between manuscript submission and actual publication is an omnipresent reality, one that too often seems dependent solely upon the caprice and whimsy of distant editors and faceless referees. The process need not be shrouded in mystery, however. Neither are delays in the handling of manuscripts necessarily irrational or without cause. Let me describe LARR's practices and our record to date.

When a contribution reaches Chapel Hill, an acknowledgement is immediately sent to the author. The manuscript is then reviewed in terms of its content and thrust. Occasionally it may prove inappropriate for consideration and publication by LARR, in which case the author is so informed and, where possible, suggestions as to more suitable outlets are offered. Otherwise, it is sent out for evaluation. One copy goes immediately to a member of the editorial board, from whom reports are received within one month. A nonboard referee is also chosen,* and willingness to review the contribution is secured before a copy is forwarded. Should our request be turned down, we repeat the process. Once evaluations have been received, the Editors' judgment must again enter the picture.

Often the two readers are in basic agreement, much to our editorial satisfaction and comfort. Where they differ, however, a third opinion is solicited, after which further disposition must be decided. The options

*During the period under review, the following generously contributed time and attention in reading and advising us on manuscripts: Carlos A. Astiz, Enrique A. Baloyra, Charles W. Bergquist, Thomas Bruneau, Lourdes Casal, Richard Clinton, Jack Cobb, Kenneth Coleman, Margaret E. Crahan, Harold E. Davis, Carlos F. Diaz-Alejandro, Federico G. Gil, Richard E. Greenleaf, Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Lucy L. Johnson, Peter T. Knight, Henry Landsberger, Anthony P. Maingot, Gilbert W. Merx, Gerald M. Moser, John P. Powelson, Manuel D. Ramirez, Richard Renner, David F. Ronfeldt, Steffen W. Schmidt, Phillippe Schmitter, Lars Schoultz, Thomas Skidmore, Bobbie Smetherman, Franklin Tugwell, Frederick C. Turner, Arturo Valenzuela, John Wanat, Iêda Wiarda, James W. Wilkie, Robert C. Williamson, Ralph Lee Woodward, and Sylvia Wynter.

are several: Unqualified acceptance, acceptance contingent upon specific revisions and alteration, rejection accompanied by a request to rework and resubmit the manuscript, and unqualified rejection. In all cases, readers' evaluations are forwarded to the author. Often a xeroxed copy is sent; occasionally, however, a review is sufficiently blunt or candid as to require paraphrasing its observations in a separate letter. Anonymity is, of course, preserved through deletion of letterheads, signatures, and the like. Neither the author nor reviewer is identified unless we receive explicit permission to do so.

Once an article is fully accepted, it is scheduled for publication in the earliest possible issue of LARR. It is then carefully reviewed, edited, and returned to the author for approval of our suggested revisions. These are of two types: Alterations to render the manuscript consistent with LARR's format, and stylistic revisions to clarify and improve general readability. Our role in this is rather more substantial than seems the case with many professional journals, but it is one that we regard as part of our responsibility to authors and readers alike. Thus far we have generally found these efforts to be appreciated by the authors, and certainly we fully accept their final judgment and preference. While all take a hand in this process, it reflects in greatest part the exceptional skills of Leah Florence. For the many authors who have expressed appreciation for the editorial care and attention that their work receives, it is she, rather than Martz or Tulchin, to whom they are indebted.

Having explained these procedures, the crucial question remains—What is LARR's record in handling contributions? We have reviewed our flow of manuscripts for the period from September 1974 through December 1975, during which time 115 submissions were received. The average time between receipt and notification of a decision to the author was 44 days. The longest—with apologies to its author—was 168 days. In a few instances we encountered difficulties in obtaining qualified outside readers. Where several requests must be sent before a person agrees to serve as referee, delay is unavoidable. Predictably, the summer months have posed something of a problem, given the unavailability of many potential readers. (One also entertains the lurking suspicion that some of us simply ignore our mail for three months of the year.) Overall, the 44-day average is excellent, and we are determined to maintain it. For accepted manuscripts, the average time between notification to the author and appearance of the article was nine months. With an improving capacity to move through the entire production process, this may be shortened somewhat, although we are close to the minimum, given its multistage character. At present, then, the total time for evaluation and publication of accepted manuscripts is slightly less than a year,

decidedly superior to many academic journals. Be assured that we will continue to exert a maximum effort to accelerate the process.

Our review of manuscripts provides other information on which we would like to report. The disciplinary distribution was less than ideal. Of 115 manuscripts, history led with 29, followed by political science with 26. None of the remaining 19 fields of study reached double figures. Thus we had 8 from sociology, 7 from literature, and 6 from economics. Among those with but a single submission were psychology, archaeology, geography, engineering, and library science. Given such patterns of distribution, our declared interest in increased publication of underrepresented disciplines is difficult to realize. We can but reiterate our desire to receive more submissions from such areas. With all due regard to the disciplines of the editor and associate editor, political science and history will clearly take care of themselves.

Another statistic concerns the geographical distribution of authorship. Eighty-five of the 115 submissions came from the United States and 30 from abroad (led by Mexico with 10 and Argentina with 6). Our, admittedly arbitrary, identification of regions within the United States produced a total of 23 manuscripts from the Southeast, 16 from the Middle Atlantic, and 12 from the Pacific Coast. The regions with fewest submissions were the Rockies and New England, each with 5.

Acceptance and rejection rates are difficult to calculate, given the rather fine line that must sometimes be drawn between review articles and research reports. Moreover, a substantial number of the "minor" research reports (e.g., "A Guide to Historical Documentation in Argentina" by the Colloquium of Visiting Scholars), owing to their nature, are not submitted to usual review procedures. That is, reports on such research activities are providing basic information about ongoing investigation and scholarship, rather than constituting original contributions requiring outside readings and evaluation. Of the 62 items listed in the tables of contents, 15 are review articles and 35 are "major" research reports. For the review articles, approximately one of every three manuscripts is accepted.

With *Books in Review*, a new section in LARR, we have received a total of 679 books; 478 from English language presses, 172 from Spanish and Portuguese, and 29 from other languages. Forty-two reviews, encompassing 176 separate works, were commissioned. By 1976, 9 had been received and 33 were outstanding. The number of reviews received has been increasing this year, compensating for the inevitable time lag following introduction of this section. At the same time, we have been prodding authors toward more prompt completion of review essays. Given the desirability of reviewing books within a reasonable time of publication,

such efforts will need to be continued. For those reading this commentary who have not yet sent us requested reviews, *pela el ojo!*

I would like to close with several requests. First and foremost, keep us in mind as a possible outlet for your scholarship. Nothing delights us more than receiving manuscripts; if it burdens our local mail carriers, so much the better. Moreover, send us research reports and notes about relevant professional activities. This is one of LARR's primary purposes, and we cannot effectively communicate without receiving such information ourselves. Next, let me specifically reiterate my earlier call for the regional associations to send histories of their organizations so that we may continue to present these in future issues. We also invite you to send us photographs and drawings (or other artwork that would reproduce well in black and white). We would like to have appropriate visual material on hand to enhance the written word (see especially LARR 10, number 1 and elsewhere in this issue). Include a caption and personal information as you would like it to appear in the credit line.

Finally, let us hear from you. Praise is never unwelcome, while criticism is important if we are to improve LARR and respond to your interests and needs. Thus far we have received only one explicit criticism of material that has been published. Once the authors have had the chance to respond, we will present the exchange. As my predecessor Tom McGann remarked, there are times when the LARR staff wonders if anyone is "out there" reading and reacting to the journal. Brighten (or darken) our days by keeping in touch; in short, "Write, dammit."

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