

EDITORIAL COMMENT

It was at a bar in Tucson, I believe. Or perhaps it was Fullerton, Tuskegee, or Missoula; we Latin Americanists are uncommonly creative in choosing our convention watering holes. In any event, the *ambiente* was dimly decadent and politely polluted as participants in a "Publish or Perish" round table reconvened to exchange expressions of commiseration. Something of a travelling road show has emerged in recent years involving the editors of *The Americas*, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, and *Latin American Research Review*. Father Mathias Kiemen, Michael Meyer, and I have attempted to discuss and explain our problems and procedures in evaluating and processing manuscripts. Upon occasion we have been joined by John Harrison of the *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*; less hardened cynicism has sometimes been lent as well by such associate editors as Donna Guy and Joseph Tulchin. We have learned that in most important ways the experiences are parallel. Yet these journals' policies inevitably possess distinguishing traits of their own. Let me speak here of the view from LARR, for those readers whose peregrinations have not yet crossed ours.

There is no editorial duty as onerous and painful as composing a letter of rejection and sending it to an aspiring author. Even in the halcyon days of the 1960s, when demand for Ph.D.s on the market temporarily outran supply, the publish-or-perish syndrome was latently threatening. Today, a decade later, professional pressures are inordinately greater and even published scholars are refused promotion, denied tenure, or rebuffed in the effort to secure a teaching position. Thus the task of manuscript evaluation has become of greater intellectual and sheer human importance than ever before. This manifests itself in a variety of ways, both with accepted and rejected manuscripts. At the least, it is critical for an editor to recognize and empathize with the implications of manuscript rejection. I would posit as "Martz's Axiom Number One" the following: No person should serve as editor of an academic journal who has not received rejections of his or her own manuscripts. Immodesty notwithstanding, I must confess to being fully qualified on these axiomatic grounds.

By no means am I being facetious. Especially within the present unhappy condition in which academia is languishing, editors find themselves called upon by authors in ways that testify to the bleakness of the

panorama. By way of illustration, I have received three requests in the past few months from authors of recently *accepted* manuscripts. One asked for the earliest possible publication, that a forthcoming grant application be enhanced. A second requested a letter in support of an impending tenure decision, to assure his chairman that the article in question was truly accepted and “in press.” A third, from a person unknown to me, asked for a letter of recommendation on the basis of the one piece of work that, as its editor, I had seen. It was a pleasure to respond to such requests. In doing so, however, I could but speculate about the situation of authors whose submitted work had not been accepted.

In the case of LARR, previous Editorial Comments have discussed the two most crucial areas—those dealing with editorial policies and with the actual process of manuscript evaluation. The former revolve about LARR’s somewhat atypical, if less than unique character as a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary journal with an identifiable cultural and geographic focus. This quality leads us to an important question, the fundamental answer to which lies beyond my power to control. Where publications are being considered for the usual academic purposes, how is an article in a multidisciplinary journal valued in comparison to one appearing in the individual’s disciplinary review? Answers will inevitably vary. If the institution in question values and supports its Latin American program, publication in LARR may be weighed as heavily as, say, *The Journal of Politics* or *Comparative Politics*. However, should Latin American scholarship be regarded condescendingly as nonscientific, atheoretical, as “mere” area studies—and many of us have been fighting that battle for years—the reverse may be true. All we at LARR can do is strive for the highest possible standards of scholarship in the hope that fulfillment of this objective will be recognized outside Latin American studies per se. For the individual scholar, the court of last appeal is not an editor, but rather the dean or chairperson.

Similarly, the intellectual purposes for which LARR was created in 1965 add to the uniqueness of our enterprise. It is not uncommon to receive a manuscript that, despite evident quality, is simply inappropriate to our editorial *raison d’être*. Then I can but suggest journals that may seem to me more consistent with the author’s purposes. One implication—although by no means universal—is the fact that if a manuscript is written specifically with LARR in mind, it may be of limited interest elsewhere should our decision be unfavorable. On the other hand, dedication of an equal amount of time and effort on a political science article, for example, would produce a work that could be considered by a host of journals, at least one of which might accept it. This reality is

one that the scholar must consider—even though it could work to the occasional detriment of LARR.

Another important concern for the author whose work is *not* rejected naturally focuses on the time lag prior to publication. Here, too, I have reported in this space on another occasion, and can simply reiterate our determination to seek a *prestissimo* tempo. Yet candor requires that I note an increasingly less manageable situation. The flow of submissions has more than doubled since our early months; even with a rising rejection rate, the volume of publishable material on hand is insidiously creeping up on us. The nine-month time lag for production, moreover, is beyond our power to reduce. In early May 1977, volume 12, number 2 was mailed; at that time we were reading page proofs for 12:3 and on the verge of submitting final copy to the press for 13:1. As these words are being written four weeks later, we have fully committed 13:2 and have several accepted articles that are now in the authors' hands for final revision. If this still compares favorably with many major journals, I nonetheless find it troubling.

Yet there is little room for flexibility. We can conserve space somewhat by increasing the material printed in small type. Both aesthetically and intellectually this has its limitations; if forced to move further in this direction, it may be necessary to provide our readers with magnifying glasses embossed with autographs by the staff. In addition, we cannot go much beyond some three hundred pages per issue or the weight will increase dramatically the cost for mailing. The difficulty is now compounded by the need to incorporate materials constituting the historical record of LASA proceedings, since the budgetary situation has lamentably but necessarily forced a reduction in the LASA Newsletter. Financial constraints also mitigate against four regular issues annually; besides production costs, the staff would have to be enlarged. While Messrs. Tulchin and Martz labor for the fun of it—or the hell of it, we sometimes think (plus a slightly reduced teaching load, to be sure)—much of the important work must be done by our salaried and underpaid associates. The struggle to prevent an unduly large backlog, then, is constant and unrelenting. I can but pledge never to approach the extreme situation of my own national journal, which in its most recent issue listed no fewer than forty-nine articles awaiting space for presentation—in short, at least five unpublished issues fully committed. Unconscionable; unacceptable for LARR.

A word should also be voiced concerning intellectual feedback for authors, which we regard as one of the most vital editorial functions. Whether a manuscript is accepted without qualification or subject to revision, is rejected but accompanied by a request for major alterations

and resubmission, or turned down flatly, we make available the referees' opinions. Occasionally they may be sufficiently devastating in content or intemperant in language to require rephrasing and recapitulation in an accompanying letter. I generally add comments and suggestions of my own. There should be ample advice and guidance for the author, then, whatever the ultimate editorial decision. Only rarely is work bereft of redeeming virtues, and authors may well benefit from independent opinions. Clearly they have the right to receive full evidence for our decision, whatever it may be. Usually the reader-author-editor relationship can remain intellectually honest, reasoned, and humanely understanding. Witness that this is not inevitable came from the March 1977 *American Political Science Review*, where an author charged the editor with putting together the journal in "comic opera fashion" without reading the articles he printed. The critic continued: "Who knows? Perhaps the editor simply consulted chicken entrails." I trust that dissatisfaction over our own editorial judgment, even if justified, will not elicit comparable remarks. *Chicken entrails?*

Unwilling to close on such a note, I might respond to the trickle of mail engendered by my recent depiction of the Chapel Hill Funny Farm known more formally as the LARR staff. Readers appear curious about future installments of our continuing editorial saga of passion and conflict. We presently face several burning questions. Will the associate editor recover from his tennis-induced bucket-handle tear in the left medial meniscus in time to play with his children before they are old enough to run him off the court? Will the managing editor resist the temptation to rake off a profit from the yard sale for charity scheduled for her front lawn? Will the secretary earn a smile from the star of "Upstairs Downstairs" soon to visit the area? And will the editor's borzoi, Jascha Prince of Martov, grow insufferably disobedient after a forty-five-second walk-on role in the Playmakers Repertory Company production of Kauffman and Hart's *Once in a Lifetime*? He is already insisting on tap-dancing lessons.

Tune in again, friends, to "All LARR's Children," or follow our adventures on "As the Pages Turn." I will keep you informed. In the meantime, be assured that this simple Pennsylvania Farm Boy will try to hold things together. "Have Editorial Paranoia, Will Travel." And send more manuscripts.

JOHN D. MARTZ