
EDITOR'S FOREWORD

One of the ironies of scholarly publishing is that it is sometimes easier to publish a book than a refereed journal article. Books may receive only one reading by an editorial consultant before acceptance for publication, while articles in journals are often read by several referees. Despite the greater prestige attached to books, it is arguable that articles in refereed journals are often of better quality than books in print. The *LARR* office receives more books to review than research manuscripts to consider for publication. Although the quality of some books is excellent, others clearly would not have passed the scrutiny given to *LARR* manuscripts. While the inverse relationship between prestige and quality control in books versus journal articles is something of a paradox, there is at least some poetic justice in that print runs suggest an article in *LARR* will be read by a far larger audience than the average book reviewed in its pages.

It has been several years since we last discussed manuscript review procedures in a foreword, and given the slow but steady turnover in readership, it may be helpful for prospective authors to review the current procedures followed by the *LARR* editors. Each manuscript received is logged in by Editorial Assistant Linda Kjeldgaard and given a code number identifying it at later stages when the author's anonymity is maintained. It is then given to *LARR* Editor Gilbert Merkx, who assigns the manuscript for screening to Associate Editor Karen Remmer or Tamara Holzapfel or to himself. A cover sheet for comments is placed on the manuscript prior to the first reading. In cases of uncertainty, the manuscript may be read by all the editors. If the preliminary screening is negative, the manuscript is discussed by the editors and returned to Merkx for a rejection letter.

All manuscripts are screened within six weeks of receipt. About half do not pass the initial screening, usually because they do not meet the criteria established by *LARR's* mandate. In some cases, rejected manuscripts represent advocacy or are "think pieces" rather than research manuscripts. Sometimes they have been published elsewhere and are eliminated by *LARR's* requiring the right of first publication. In other cases, manuscripts are too highly specialized to meet the criterion of being of general or interdisciplinary interest. More rarely, their content is viewed as not constituting an original or adequate contribution to the existing literature. Although it would be easy to pass an inferior manuscript on to referees, this course is clearly counterproductive in the long run because it would lead to a decline in referees' willingness to participate in the manuscript selection process. The editors therefore try to be fairly rigorous in the preliminary screening process.

The editor screening a manuscript recommends referees. *LARR* policy is now to request as many as five outside reviews of a manuscript, a number that frequently requires consultation with Editorial Board members, reference to *LARR's* extensive files, and examination of recent scholarly publications on the topic of the manuscript. We attempt to obtain at least three or four external reviews of each manuscript, to avoid the uncertainty that can result from a small number of evaluations with contradictory recommendations. Increasing the number of referees has tended to shorten, not lengthen, the review process because the likelihood of obtaining an adequate set of evaluations is higher when more are commissioned. Actually obtaining evaluations from our busy and unpaid referees is still sometimes problematic, but reminder letters are systematically sent out to tardy referees. The identities of the author and all referees are protected so that the review process is fully anonymous.

Once the evaluations are in hand, they are read and discussed by the editors; a decision is then made, and the editor notifies the author of the disposition of the manuscript, sending copies of the outside evaluations, with material deleted that might identify the referees. Copies of this letter of disposition, with the name of the manuscript's author removed, are also sent to the referees, together with anonymous copies of all the evaluations. Thus the referees are fully informed about the fate of the manuscript they evaluated and have a chance to compare their own evaluations with those of their anonymous peers. Since this procedure was instituted, the quality of evaluations has improved considerably, benefiting our authors as well as the content of the journal.

Most manuscripts require some revision, either prior to acceptance or as a condition of acceptance. When the revisions are required prior to acceptance, the manuscript is sent out for a second set of readings by some of the original referees and at least one new referee. In the

case of conditional acceptances requiring only minor revisions, the revised manuscripts are considered in-house by the editors. Once a manuscript has been accepted, the second phase of the editorial process begins, the copyediting.

Managing Editor Sharon Kellum carefully copyedits all manuscripts for clarity of expression and conformity with the *Chicago Manual of Style* and *LARR* style practices. This stage invariably requires close consultation with the Editor or Associate Editors. In the process, we frequently discover problems with citations, names, and terminology that require additional library research. When the first copy-edited draft is complete, it is printed in clean form and returned to the author, with queries, for correction and approval. Because authors often are attached to their prose, negotiations are sometimes required and may yield additional emendations. Our experience suggests that such collaboration between the editors and the author produces the best possible results. Despite the work involved, we view the effort required by thorough copyediting as well merited in terms of maintaining *LARR*'s readability.

Once a manuscript is in final form, it is scheduled for publication. The editors attempt to include material in each issue of *LARR* that offers a reasonable balance of disciplines and topics, while respecting the sequence in which manuscripts have been accepted. Despite the healthy rate of submissions, the selection process is sufficiently rigorous that our backlog of accepted manuscripts is adequate, but not excessive, with most delays in publication resulting from editing, composition, printing, and mailing.

Composition of *LARR* is done by the University of North Carolina Press. They now work from our encoded computer disks, an innovation that has considerably reduced composition costs. The galleys are then returned to *LARR*, which mails copies to the authors. Each piece is proofread three times: twice by the *LARR* editorial staff and once by the author. Following several more stages of corrections, the issue is then sent to our printers, Thompson-Shore of Dexter, Michigan. Eventually, about nine months after the contents of an issue were chosen, a large moving van pulls up to the UNM Latin American Institute with a two-ton load of *LARR* issues. The arrival of this truck is probably the moment of greatest psychological satisfaction for the *LARR* staff because the material product of all our labor is suddenly visible. Subscription Manager Gordon Odell, who is usually occupied with keeping track of thirty-five hundred subscribers, then unloads the truck with the help of a dolly and whatever volunteer labor can be pressed into service. The next two or three weeks are busy, as Gordon and Jim Wilson, the *LARR* Graduate Assistant, label and stuff envelopes and mail thousands of copies presorted by zip code.

The care and labor involved in producing the journal is therefore

considerable. Each article requires that we send about thirty letters to the author and the referees. All correspondence and evaluations are punched and bound in the folder for the manuscript in question. Cards are also maintained for each referee, noting the dates and nature of correspondence to keep track of past performance and to insure that individuals are not overburdened with multiple requests to read manuscripts. The sheer mass of detail required by the manuscript selection process and by the maintenance of lists—of subscribers, advertisers, publishers requesting copies of the reviews in which their books appear, and accounts receivable—is sizable. It is made manageable by the competence of the *LARR* staff and the computerization of most journal functions. The exercise of judgement in selecting and editing manuscripts, however, cannot be computerized.

I also wish to announce a change of editors for *LARR*, commencing with this issue. It is with regret that we have accepted the resignation of Tamara Holzapfel as Associate Editor, who after four years of dedicated service is freeing herself from *LARR* obligations in order to teach in London this year. It is with pleasure, however, that we announce the appointment of Enylton de Sá Rego as Associate Editor to replace Professor Holzapfel. Professor de Sá Rego, a native of Niterói, Brazil, has studied at the Sorbonne and at Louisiana State University and received his Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. Having published in the fields of Portuguese and Latin American literature as well as Brazilian popular culture, he brings to *LARR* valuable expertise that will complement the skills of the other editors. We are happy to welcome him to the *LARR* team.

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