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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

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The most frequently read works published in *LARR* may not be the articles and research reports but the book review essays. Informal comments by *LARR* readers suggest that they skim a new issue for the articles and research reports related to their own disciplines, research interests, or countries of specialization. Having temporarily satisfied professional curiosity, readers then turn to the book review essays to read in depth.

Why should the book review essays be so popular? Those familiar with the hectic pace of academic life would probably argue that most readers of the *LARR* book reviews are overburdened, short of time, and trying desperately to keep up with a broad range of interests even as they are under pressure to specialize. One can also speculate that reading book reviews brings a certain guilty pleasure. It is after all easier to read about a book than actually to read the book itself. To read an essay about several books should thus be particularly gratifying.

Although *LARR* is an interdisciplinary journal, its readers are primarily disciplinary specialists. *LARR*'s book review essays offer the opportunity to delve into disciplinary or interdisciplinary themes in areas other than one's own specialization. Perhaps inside every specialist lurks a generalist, or at least the recognition that all phenomena are ultimately related. For those interested in Latin America, the relevance of the humanities and arts to developments in economic, social, and political life is so manifest as to be uncontested. Yet no one can keep up with the vast flow of information about all these fields. An efficient alternative, at least as a starting point, is to read an essay that places recent books on a given field or topic in a broader context.

As noted by sociologist Alan Wolfe in a recent essay, "The goal of those who review books should be to give readers a fair summary of the book's contents, along with reasoned judgments about its success or failure. Book reviewing also requires a set of virtues that include humility, re-

spect, and empathy.”<sup>1</sup> The book review essay as featured in *LARR* should meet the criterion of informing the reader about the content of several books but also place them in juxtaposition to one another and to their common research context. Thus while the books remain the focal point, the subject of a *LARR* book review essay is not only the books but also the broader state of research on the theme or topic being addressed.

The challenge to the author of the review essay is therefore considerable, as those who have undertaken *LARR* essays would no doubt agree. The author must read several books and then compose an essay summarizing their content and significance with objectivity and, it is to be hoped, with Wolfe’s three virtues. All this must be accomplished in a limited number of pages. It is not surprising that many of those invited to write such essays decline the opportunity and that some who accept such a commission fail to complete it. When the review essayist succeeds, however, the result can be exceptional. Thus the popularity of *LARR* book review essays may also reflect the high quality of information, analysis, and writing encountered by readers.

The mechanics of the *LARR*’s book review procedure are straightforward. Every new book received is logged in. Associate Editors Karen Remmer and Jon Tolman, who are responsible for the book review essay section, then group the books by topic. When a sufficient number of new titles are assembled, the editors look for a reviewer familiar with this research topic. The potential reviewer is offered the list of new titles. The reviewer may add other titles at the discretion of the editor, including new works published in Latin America that are not normally received by *LARR*.

A few of the review essays that *LARR* publishes are simply sent in by authors who choose their own books to review and write an essay in the *LARR* format. Unfortunately, we must reject many of these submissions because they cover books that have already been reviewed or are under review. To avoid this outcome, prospective book review essayists are encouraged to submit a proposal outlining the topic and list of books they plan to cover.

When the book review essay is received in our office, it undergoes one or more reviews for content and for conformity with *LARR* requirements of length and clarity of prose. Essays are subject to the same rigorous copyediting provided for articles and research reports. Once published, the essay will be seen and possibly read by many of *LARR*’s five thousand subscribers. The number of readers could be even higher, given that nearly a thousand copies of the journal go to libraries around the world and encounter multiple readers.

Overall manuscript submissions to *LARR* during the year running

1. Alan Wolfe, “The Solemn Responsibilities of Book Reviewing,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 24 Apr. 1998, p. B4.

from June 1997 through May 1998 dropped slightly to 118, as compared with 128 the previous year. Twenty-one of these submissions were book review essays. The remaining 97 manuscripts entered the extensive review process provided for potential articles and research reports. By the end of May of this year, 9 of these manuscripts had been accepted for publication or accepted pending revisions, 64 had been rejected, 4 were withdrawn, and the remaining 20 were still under original review or a second review following revisions. An additional 9 manuscripts from the previous report period were also accepted after having been revised and resubmitted. The publication rate for articles and research notes that completed the review process (only those accepted or rejected) was thus about 1 of 8 original submissions, with the proportion rising to about 1 of every 4 if resubmitted manuscripts are included in the overall totals.

The percentage of political science manuscripts rose somewhat to 34 percent of all submissions. History submissions remained steady at 25 percent. Sociology submissions recovered third place with 15 percent of submissions, while economics manuscripts declined to fourth place with 12 percent. Literature manuscripts constituted 3 percent, followed closely by anthropology, also with 3 percent. Other fields accounted for the remaining 8 percent of submissions. Among the disciplines represented in this category were education, film, geography, music, philosophy, and religion.

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>June 1997– May 1998</i>	<i>June 1996– May 1997</i>	<i>June 1995– May 1996</i>
Political Science	34%	27%	36%
History	25	25	17
Sociology	15	11	11
Economics	12	16	19
Languages and Literature	3	5	6
Anthropology	3	9	5
Other fields	8	8	6
Totals	100%	101%	100%

Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian authors or coauthors, including those living in Europe and North America, submitted 41 percent of all submissions, as compared with 33 percent the previous year and 39 percent from the year before that. Women authored or coauthored 29 percent of submissions, the same percentage as in last year's manuscript report. Thirty-six percent of the manuscripts came from outside the United States, as compared with 23 percent the previous year. Sixty-five percent of these non-U.S. manuscripts came from Latin America and the Caribbean, as compared with 60 percent in the preceding report period. The Latin American and Caribbean countries from which submissions came were

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Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and Trinidad. Other countries represented included Austria, Belgium, Canada, England, the Netherlands, Nigeria, and Spain.

While the submission patterns reflected in these statistics have tended to be fairly stable over time, one trend that seems to be emerging is a gradual increase in the percentage of submissions from abroad, particularly from Latin America. This trend augurs well for the health of Latin American studies, which has always been enlivened by the intellectual exchanges between Latin Americans and their colleagues in the United States, Canada, Europe, and elsewhere. This interdisciplinary community finds expression in the pages of *LARR*, whether in the form of articles, research reports, or the popular book review essays.

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