

EDITORIAL COMMENT

"I can't imagine how people producing a supposedly scholarly journal can be having so much fun." Such was the fleeting comment of the Director of the Latin American program at Chapel Hill as he passed our customarily raucous offices recently. When pressed to say what this might imply about the quality of LARR, the diplomatic genius of Federico G. Gil enabled him to move on without committing himself. At that moment, the Associate Editor was reading aloud a particularly unintelligible piece of jargon from a newly arrived book review, interspersed by peppery if not quite scatological asides; the Managing Editor was exercising her unique Armenian insights in deciphering a handwritten inquiry from one of our two Bombay subscribers (yes, there are indeed two); and LARR's secretary was struggling to replace a stubbornly recalcitrant wheel on her chair. As usual, the only semblance of sanity was contributed by the Editor, deeply immersed in feeding M&Ms to his Russian Wolfhound stretched halfway across the room from the doorway. Just another routine day in the lives of the flakiest journal staff this side of the Orinoco.

Perhaps our irreverence occasionally slips past the proofreading into the pages of LARR. For those who might make the mistake of skipping Jean Longland's delightful "World World Vast World of Poetic Translation" in this issue, I might ask where else one would find an academic publication citing (and footnoting, no less) the lyrics of Tom Lehrer. As a transplanted Yankee who most assuredly has been too long in the South, the Editor was sorely tempted to write in a reference to his own favorite, the classic "I Wanna Go Back to Dixie" ("the land of the boll weevil, where the laws are medieval").

In any event, the process of preparing and producing the *Latin American Research Review* is for all of us a delight, owing to our many contributors, referees, readers, subscribers, and critics. Even before my admonition in an earlier issue asking that we hear from you, the mail would sometimes bring striking communications of one sort or another. Let me share a few of those that come to mind.

Complaints and suggestions from subscribers are quite varied. On one occasion, a Guayaquil reader lamented the slowness in receiving LARR and proposed that it be sent in some more rapid fashion. To do so would, unfortunately, require higher subscription rates; this might have pleased one North American, however, who referred to the special

lower prices for Latin America with a terse “too much discrimination against U.S. subscribers for me—please cancel.”

The Current Research Inventory elicits a wide range of responses. Indeed, the LARR staff itself has differing views over the extent to which it meets important needs of the readership. The feedback we have received, both verbally and in writing, seems to suggest that for many it is a welcome annual feature. There are others who view it warily: “I have found that publicizing research in progress results in other investigators preempting the field. Thus I do not report it.” Or similarly: “The project is in the planning stage. I hope that it will be carried out jointly by me and scholars at ———. It is too early to publicize the plans—please do not publish this news.” The report has been duly placed under lock and key. This is not intended to poke fun at the expression of such views, but rather to observe that the profession apparently makes it possible for some of our colleagues to arrive at such unhappy conclusions.

Perhaps the most consistently lively correspondence comes from manuscript evaluations by our referees, and from occasional *ripostes* by the authors. Relatively few complaints from the latter are directed at us, although in one instance the author of a rejected manuscript closed by charging that we were subservient to the “pressures and influence of the Panamanian dictatorship.” *That* one really made our day! This leads us, however, to more serious comments about the entire process, for in some instances the opinions of several readers are such as ultimately to force the definitive decision upon the Editor.

Our practices for the evaluation of manuscripts were described in volume 11, number 2. As was suggested, the ideal situation—and by no means an uncommon one—produces a set of referees’ opinions that unequivocally decides the issue of acceptance or rejection. My own role is somewhat enlarged where acceptance is qualified or where recommendations for rejection suggest alterations that might ultimately produce an acceptable manuscript. However, these are editorial tasks that seldom create serious problems or ambiguities. More intractable difficulties arise when two or more reviewers submit highly divergent reports. These may contain superb critiques with very mixed, even contradictory recommendations, from which I must attempt to proceed with the author.

Equally difficult is the case in which reviewers are uniformly enthusiastic about the intellectual quality of a contribution, but divided as to its appropriateness for LARR. While we attempt with precision to follow the editorial policies established at the founding of the journal, in practice this is not always susceptible to easy interpretation. Not long

ago we had a piece that was judged without qualification as outstanding in intellectual merit. However, one reviewer saw it as essentially a case study, and urged its submission to a disciplinary journal. Another believed it to have generalized from the specific in such a fashion as to justify its inclusion in *LARR*. The third reader raised the same questions but deftly sidestepped the crucial recommendation. In such instances there is nowhere for the Editor to hide, and he must search both mind and soul for glimmerings of wisdom and justice.

I must repeat, with pleasure and appreciation, that our board members have proven exceptionally conscientious in meeting these obligations. Nonboard referees, equally crucial for any given manuscript, have also proven both industrious and dedicated. With them, as with those serving on the board, a follow-up is often in order where evaluations are sharply mixed. That is, I feel it important to express my debt to the referees. If it appears possible that others will persuade me to make a decision contrary to one recommendation, I want that person to understand that his views have been carefully considered. I do not request evaluations from reviewers whose opinions I do not value and respect.

Before concluding this note, let me direct retrospective attention to some of our efforts since assuming the responsibility for *LARR* in 1974. Much of this concerns the "Research Reports and Notes" section. There is little question that, in the words of a recent correspondent, "research reports and notes vary enormously in quality and interest, but I imagine you already have noticed that fact." He continues by recommending that we downplay the reprinting of programs and pedagogical materials in favor of brief reports of actual findings that do not merit the space of full-blown articles.

His points are well taken, and evoke two comments here. For one, the variation of readership interest is indeed great, unavoidably so given the disparate disciplinary and topical concerns of our subscribers. In this issue, for example, it is probable that Sheets's work on lithic analysis will attract the attention of a much smaller number than Jackson's piece about research on black themes in Spanish American literature. Yet there are clearly those whose research interests will make of the former a highly useful contribution. One advantage of brevity in "Research Reports and Notes" is the opportunity to stimulate scholars in many different areas. A second matter relates to the publication of research programs and conferences. To be sure, a few of these approach the format of mere announcements, and in most cases we forward these to the *LASA Newsletter*. However, the communication of information about such programs in Latin America—even if reporting little more than

their sheer existence—would seem to justify use of our space.

Most importantly, such news helps to strengthen the intellectual and research ties between Latin American and North American scholars. We view this as an exceedingly important responsibility, and also one most difficult to realize. Many Latin Americanists involved in field research have repeatedly learned with dismay of important work by Latin Americans, on subjects closely related to our own, about which we had been ignorant. Thus LARR will publish news about IAEAL, or about the Centro Regional de Estudios Sociales of Mendoza. We also strive constantly to elicit contributions and reports from Latin Americans.

With this purpose of reaching to the scholarship of Latin America itself, we have also tried to enlist the direct assistance of Latin American scholars in a more formal way. Beginning with the present issue, our editorial board is being complemented by a group of special correspondents in Latin America, whose names and affiliations appear on the inside front cover. It will be their task to serve as sources on what is being researched, written, published in mimeographed form, and otherwise emerging from scholars in Latin America.

LARR's longstanding commitment to the encouragement and strengthening of intellectual inquiry throughout the hemisphere has been personified by few as profoundly as Kalman H. Silvert, whose recent death startled and saddened us all. An extended eulogy in this space would be both presumptuous and pretentious. We have commissioned an article discussing Kal's exceptional contributions to the study of Latin America and will publish it as swiftly as possible. Beyond that let it merely be said, with great conviction if little eloquence, that we will long remember the legacy of both his superb scholarship and his rare spirit of humanity.

JOHN D. MARTZ