

An unrelenting flood

It is a troubling thought that, in this age of information overload, publishers may be producing too many books about English – and sending many of them to *ET* in the hope of a traditional review. It would be more troubling still, of course, if they *didn't* send them to us, yet the fact remains that – with so many topics to cover and only 64 pages per issue to do it in – we simply cannot review all these titles as fully as most of them deserve. Lack of time, space, money, and personnel militate against such a service. Indeed, if we did the reviewing as well and as fully as one would like (and as publishers and authors hope), there would be no time or space for the rest of the journal.

Book reviews are a beloved bane for journal editors: review copies arrive unsolicited or by arrangement, and on virtually a daily basis in our case. As they pile up, they are divided into the relevant and the rest. There may or may not be time and opportunity to sound out possible reviewers, and if contacted they may or may not be able or willing to take the work on. If they agree to do so, each book has to be posted off – which is expensive in materials, effort, and money. Such an assigned book may or may not then be reviewed on schedule or at all; if not reviewed, the reasons may or may not be reasonable, and often the book does not come back, or comes back after its immediacy has gone – in which case it probably loses its slot. If a review arrives, it may fit its periodical perfectly or may prove unsuitable – in which case a painful correspondence with the reviewer may follow.

ET has known every kind of pleasure and pain associated with book reviewing, but over the last few years the sheer weight of incoming titles has had its own effect on how things can be done, leading first to shortening conventional reviews (and wherever possible covering several titles in one discussion), then to minireviews set alongside the reproduction of pages from reference books, and finally to compact profiles arranged in themes and usually adopting a non-judgemental approach. This arrangement works well editorially and also from the publishers' perspective: their books at least get in. However, I would be glad of comments on whether it is working well for our readers – confronted as we all are by such an unrelenting flood of titles and so many other calls on our time.

Tom McArthur

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