

**Michael J. LaRosa** / Rhodes College

Six years ago, María Mercedes Jaramillo called my cell phone and asked if I'd help edit the *REC*—the *Revista de Estudios Colombianos*. She was offering zero pay and a steady stream of reading, editing, selection, and dialog with scholars and a constant, bubbling arroyo of correo electrónico. I agreed to help. What I agreed to, I now realize, was the opportunity to study the literature of Colombia, and by extension, Latin America, in a more or less systematic fashion. María Mercedes had offered to me—essentially—the M.A. degree in Colombian literature.

I hold a B.A. in International Relations and the M.A./PhD in history; I studied Colombian literature, formally, for the first and only time, thirty years ago as an undergraduate student at George Washington University with Professor Pilar G. Suelto de Sáenz, a Spaniard married to a Colombian who loved García Márquez. Reading García Márquez's short stories for the first time opened a world to me that seemed distant, strange and—magical—given my upbringing in the quiet, predictable suburbs of Boston, Massachusetts.

I served as co-editor (with Lucía Ortiz) of *REC* for four years, and director for the past two years. I learned, through this experience, that we're all too discipline-specific and academe has become far too narrow, specialized and compartmentalized. Directing *REC*, as a historian, helped me to understand the links between history, literature and other disciplines and has changed the way I think about Colombia, and how I teach Colombia to undergraduate students. The history of Colombia really can't be taught without a firm grounding in Colombian literature, geography, economics and politics. And, the work with *REC* has led me to understand the blurriness between the margins of history and literature; many historic documents, those relics we seek in archives, upon which we base our texts, are quite often literary: more art than truth, more fiction than verifiable fact.

For this edition of *REC*, I've included some sections in English and I hope this journal will continue to present work in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Our "Oficio" section has been written by a young geographer at the Universidad de los Andes, Professor Claudia Leal; it's a wonderful piece that contextualizes the discipline of geography and helps the reader see the many places

where history, literature and geography meet. We have five research articles, seven book reviews and "Un recuerdo personal" dedicated to the memory of Rodrigo Saldarriaga. Our interview is with the journalist June Erlick of Harvard University, and author of *A Gringa in Bogotá*. With this number, we've tried to blend the borders between disciplines and I've sought out professors, writers and thinkers from a variety of fields.

Over the past two years, I've worked with three terrific, professional guest editors, Ángela Inés Robledo, Ariel Castillo Mier and Clayton McCarl. They provided excellent leadership, direction and advice, and they helped to produce three professional issues of this journal. We've strengthened the peer review process over the past two years, and there is general consensus that this journal should continue as a print journal because no other journal like *REC* exists. And, too many people have devoted great amounts of time and energy over the past three decades to ensure the journal's solvency, its academic integrity and publication on a regular schedule.

I'm certain that the journal will continue to flourish under the expert guidance and leadership of María Mercedes Andrade, the new Director of the *REC*, at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá. And the Asociación de Colombianistas is healthy and optimistic under the patient and perspicacious leadership of Kevin Guerrieri at the University of San Diego, in San Diego, California. So, yes I've been reading lots of Colombian literature over the past years; yet I'm most grateful for the many new friends made, and for the opportunity to work in collaboration and community with this generation of Colombianistas. Thank you.

Con paz, Michael J. LaRosa, 4 August, 2015, Boston, USA

