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Yes, Another Journal

William Wasserstrom

No matter how ordinary, how unexceptionable may be the course of events leading toward the appearance of a book of this kind, the occasion itself, the ritual of inauguration, is invincibly solemn. All the more appropriate, then, that I trace its instant of origin to a conversation along a carriage path in thick woods on Frontenac Island on the St. Lawrence—a talk nearly three years ago with Volker Weiss, who would within a few weeks take up new duties as acting vice president for research and graduate affairs. More or less out of the blue he asked if I agreed with him that the immense range and vitality and variety, not to say brilliance, of scholarship, of creative work in general at Syracuse University, required a vehicle, wanted an instrument around which it could cohere. Yes: I agreed. How about a magazine, a journal? Was that too unspeakably trite, too banal and dull a notion? Not to my mind, I said. For as my good friend Volker probably knew, I'd written at considerable length about vanguard American magazines in the twenties, thirties, forties, interdisciplinary papers of literature and politics, and had in recent years served on the boards of a couple of literary journals. I was therefore predisposed to share his belief. Although we hadn't talked earlier about these matters, I had myself long held that Syracuse did in truth embarrass itself by failing to support a paper which would capture, in peculiarly striking fashion, the spirit and character and quality of work stimulated by an amorphous institution which is in a dozen ill-defined ways prodigious. The pity is, I remarked, that current and protracted bursts of activity in nearly all its branches seem to coincide with spasms of retrenchment. Not to worry, he said: I think we've got a critical mass. That *Syracuse Scholar* has in truth now come into being does therefore warrant a fanfare, mainly in his honor, chiefly of brass.

Whether or not the Scholar can maintain and monitor and modulate the chain reaction of which it is itself one vivid manifestation is of course the precise question each of us must now address. What happens henceforth is unquestionably a test of the resourcefulness of its editor as well as the determination of its board. And there's just a touch of rhetoric in adding that its survival depends in good measure on the kind of esteem in which we hold one another—depends, that is to say, as much on our amour propre as on our authority as a faculty. Having started from scratch; having established an ad hoc committee (most of whose members now constitute the Board of Editors); having consulted colleagues more experienced than we, better informed about the kind of enterprise, however vague its shape at the outset, on which we were launched: from a standing start in May 1978, we received support generous and reassuring enough to pull us through. Treating lapses of faith and disparities of taste, of abrasions of patience and asperities in debate—not a word. What we must not fail to convey, however—what has never been in dispute—is fidelity to the labor of creating an interdisciplinary magazine of ideas, a magazine in which the arts assume a featured place, and to the task of establishing *Syracuse Scholar* at the very center of endeavor, at the very heart of the heart of this most notable and improbable university.