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Editor's Foreword (Volume 9)

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Editor's Foreword

Each year during the winter holidays, I still write and mail about 60 greeting cards: Christmas cards, Hanukkah cards, and for those of mixed or indifferent faith, some more or less ecumenical greeting. I do this stubbornly, regardless of the fact that much of the world has given up the practice and despite the fact that I myself rarely have time for it, since the holidays clash so miserably with the academic calendar, coming as they do right at the end of the always-frenetic fall semester. Some years, I find myself writing cards on the airplane as I am flying to Texas to visit my family, and occasionally, I am still writing Christmas cards *after* the holiday has passed. (Hanukkah affords some latitude in this regard, depending on when it falls.) Since I also write notes on many of these cards, I often find myself saying, “I hope you had a merry Christmas,” and I almost always open on an apologetic note: “Late with everything this year.” I persevere, though, and doggedly write and mail my cards.

The library-bound journal you hold in your hands is also, like the cards I send each year, both increasingly outmoded and late — very, very late. For the lateness, I offer my profound apologies — first, to the contributors, who have been exceedingly patient; and second, to you, the reader.

Initially, we simply did not have enough material to publish another volume. This dry spell coincided with the worsening economic situation in the world, and I found myself wondering if there might be some connection. Warren himself describes the impact of practical urgencies on the creative process in one of my favorites of his quips. In an interview put together by Frank Gado and first published in his 1973 book, *First Person: Conversations on Writers and Writing*, Warren says, “As the seventeenth-century poet Abraham Cowley put it, troublous times are the best times to write of but the worst to write in. When the house is on fire, you don’t sit down to write a sonnet.”¹ I wondered if some such sense of urgency had slowed the production of Warren scholarship.

Whatever the cause, the deficit of material was eventually

¹ In Floyd C. Watkins, John T. Hiers, and Mary Louise Weeks, eds., *Talking with Robert Penn Warren* (Athens, GA: U Georgia P, 1990), 68-85; this quotation p. 83.

erased: another meeting of the Robert Penn Warren Circle brought in its wake enough quality submissions to justify a new volume of *rWp*.

By this time, however, I was suffering my own sort of economic crisis. In the fall of 2009, I became chairperson of my department, in part for the extra income. I also took on several other responsibilities on my campus, *primarily* for the extra income. In a scenario that will be familiar to many, my son had entered college, and I suddenly had these large, new financial obligations. The net result was that I had less time than ever for my other obligations, such as the editing of *rWp*. My intentions were good, but we all know the storied use of those as paving materials.

In addition to my own preoccupations, though, we were beginning to wonder if *rWp* should continue in its present form. Thanks to the Internet, print publications all over the world continued to scale back, go online, or just go under. As more and more materials became available on the Web, libraries everywhere continued to divest themselves of actual, physical, hard-copy holdings, particularly journals. A library-bound, print annual was beginning to look as superannuated as a hand-written Christmas card sent via “snail-mail.” These days, people keep in touch not just periodically, but moment-by-moment, via social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, and when they do send a card, it is likely to be an “e-card.” In the realm of research, people do not walk or drive to the library to pick through card-catalogue drawers, write down call numbers, and go find books and bound journals in the stacks; they search the Internet. It seemed inevitable that we should at least have an online version of the journal, if not publish entirely online.

Eventually, we decided that there should be one more library-bound volume in the old format, and that is the volume you hold in your hands. You can feel with your very senses some of what will be lost with the end of this era, and the pathos that always attaches to the passing of vital human things. However, the object of this journal was always to make the best scholarship on Robert Penn Warren as widely, readily, and durably available as possible, and the best way to do that now is online. Our mission has not changed, only our manner of carrying it out. We

are excited at the prospect.

I cannot here delineate all of the particular changes to the journal, in part because we have not yet decided what all of them are going to be. Suffice it to say that if you want us again, look for us, not under your boot-sole, but via your browser.

In the meantime, here is some of the best Warren scholarship not only of the past year, but of the past two or three years. The depth and breadth of inquiry represented by these essays is certainly one aspect of *rWp* that will not change. The first two essays, by Joe Millichap and Tom Derrick, examine aspects of the visual arts in Warren's imagination, and those accompanying the first photographs come from the Warren collection at Western Kentucky University. Thank you to Professor Millichap for selecting these and to the Warren Library for allowing us to use them. Lev Butts and Damian Carpenter explore two very different influences on Warren's work and highlight the fact that half of our contributors are graduate students. In addition to Mr. Carpenter, Joan Romano Shifflet, winner of the 2010 Eleanor Clark Award for the best graduate-student paper at the Circle's annual meeting, Alison Vanouse, and Michael Sobiech together grace the annual's pages with a splendid group of papers that spans Warren's career from his own graduate student days to his latest work. Finally, Paula Newman Miner and Jim Perkins collaborate on an essay that brings us back to the subject with which this Foreword began, and reminds us that one of the surest ways to measure the worth of technological change is its ability to bring us together in a community of knowledge and shared, human delight. Insofar as it can do that, such change is probably good.

Since this volume marks the end of an era that began with them, it is dedicated to the original editors of *rWp*, William Bedford Clark and James A. Grimshaw, Jr.

Special thanks to the administration at Western Kentucky University for their unwavering support of *rWp*.

One final note: this will be either terribly early or terribly, terribly late, but, Happy Holidays.

Mark D. Miller
February 29, 2012