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# ROBERT PENN WARREN AND THE ROMANCE

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ROBERT PENN WARREN AND THE ROMANCE

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THESIS

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Graduate School

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1978

ROBERT PENN WARREN AND THE ROMANCE

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Thesis

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English at Longwood College.

By

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1978

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## INTRODUCTION

The extended fiction of Robert Penn Warren has been variously labeled as philosophical novel, historical romance, political novel, melodrama, historical melodrama, and novel of ideas. Such a list suggests that these critical labels are an indication of the versatility of Warren in dealing with that genre broadly classified as novel. The labels also indicate the confusion of critics as to how Warren's books should be read. Adding interest and perhaps confusion to the issue is the fact that two of his books bear subtitles. World Enough and Time is subtitled A Romantic Novel, and Flood is subtitled A Romance of Our Time.

Perhaps Warren is recognizing and promoting the distinction between novel and romance in much the same way that Nathaniel Hawthorne did. Warren may be suggesting to modern readers that such a distinction is valid and even necessary in reading these works. Few critics have paid attention to the use of the subtitles, and those who do recognize the subtitles do not analyze their function in any detail. Warren's own published ideas about the romance are quite limited, yet one may, upon close reading of his criticism, find clues as to what Mr. Warren meant by the use of these subtitles and indeed as to how his fiction should be interpreted.

Before attempting an analysis of Warren's use of romance, one must understand basic assumptions about the terms novel and romance

as they have been used in the development of American literature. Central to distinguishing between the terms is the nineteenth century concept promoted by Hawthorne, who made popular the term romance. Furthermore, such recent critics as Joel Porte, Richard Chase, Stanley Bank, and Daniel Hoffman have explained the necessity for and the evolution of the American concept of romance. The purpose of this paper is to determine to what extent the fiction of Robert Penn Warren reflects Hawthorne's theory and the characteristics generally accepted as distinguishing the American romance from the novel.



CHAPTER I  
THE EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN ROMANCE

Various handbooks to literature are helpful in identifying general characteristics of both novel and romance, yet a definitive list of characteristics is nearly impossible, and distinctions between the terms vary from critic to critic. The terms novel and romance are frequently used interchangeably and are sometimes combined. In fact, Robert Penn Warren combines the two in the title World Enough and Time: A Romantic Novel.

Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman in A Handbook to Literature attribute a distinction between the terms to the "conflict between the imaginative and poetic recreation of experience implied in roman and the realistic representation of the soiled world of common men and action implied in novel . . . present in the form from its beginning."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, romance was the "tale of the long ago or the far away or the imaginatively improbable," and the novel was a story "bound by the facts of the actual world and the laws of probability."<sup>2</sup>

Certainly this distinction is the one Hawthorne made and expounded upon in the prefaces to The House of Seven Gables, The Marble Faun, and The Blithedale Romance. From the preface to The House of Seven Gables (1851) come his basic definitions of novel and romance:

When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former--while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture. . . . The point of view in which this tale comes under the Romantic definition lies in the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us.<sup>3</sup>

Later in The Blithedale Romance (1852) Hawthorne re-iterates a distinction between novel and romance when he explains that the setting which readers are likely to identify as Brook Farm is not to be read as Brook Farm but to be understood as a "theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his [the author's] brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives" (p. 439). Again, Hawthorne stresses that the romancer has "a certain conventional privilege . . .; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to everyday probability" (p. 439).

Later, Hawthorne is still concerned about the reading public's failure to comprehend fully the purpose of a romance. In the preface to The Marble Faun or The Romance of Monte Beni (1859) Hawthorne, writing in Italy and using Italy as the setting, suggests that his contemporary American readers insist upon realistic



fiction, and he cites the difficulty of handling romance:

This Romance was sketched out during a residence of considerable length in Italy. . . . The author proposed to himself merely to write a fanciful story, evolving a thoughtful moral, and did not propose attempting a portraiture of Italian manners and character. . . .

Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty in writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes, either in the annals of our stalwart republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens and wall-flowers, /Sic/ need ruin to make them grow (p. 590).

Joel Porte in The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and James says that "without Hawthorne there could be no firm theory of American romance," and he expounds upon Hawthorne's concept of romance.<sup>4</sup> Porte's own thesis is that "American romance is characterized by a need self-consciously to define its own aims, so that 'romance' becomes frequently . . . the theme as well as the form of these authors' works."<sup>5</sup> Thus, Hawthorne must necessarily work within the confines of "daydream and nightmare, fantasy and reverie, where things only 'look like truth'--that is, are only partially connected to the world as we know it publicly--because they shadow forth that world as it would look if it were acting out its own inner meaning.

Things in the romancer's world 'have a propriety of their own' since everything there is 'essentially a day-dream and yet a fact.'"6

Because, as Porte sees it, the form and the themes of romance are inseparable, he deals with the major themes in Hawthorne's works. Central to reading Hawthorne is understanding the theme of "the continuing force of past experience, especially guilty or sinful experience in the life of the present. . . . Romance battens on past or submerged suffering because to the present reason such experience seems as fabulous as romance. The task of re-evoking the reality of past pain . . . is one with the romancer's task of trying to convince us that his art has validity. In all of Hawthorne's romances, the problems of art and the problem of past suffering or guilt are commingled themes. The protagonists of Hawthorne's romances are all, in some sense, artists . . . concerned with the possibility--or desirability--of making a fresh start."<7

Porte concludes that what Hawthorne is essentially saying is that every man, attempting "to confront his secret self, duplicates the experience of the romancer or, rather, composes the romance of his own being."<8 For Hawthorne and other romance writers, the form and theme may indeed be one; the romancer's "concern with the deeper art is synonymous with his search for the buried life; and he is of necessity an evoker of ghosts and a resurrector of dead bodies."<9

To show that Hawthorne views theme and form as one, Porte cites the Custom House sketch in The Scarlet Letter. Porte calls this sketch an "apology" in the traditional, literary sense of the word, an "attempt to explain the real sources and value of his kind



of writing: romance grows out of dark meditations on guilt, sin, suffering . . . and its value lies precisely in its ability to bring out the shadows and make available for use those ordinarily shunned emotions that deepen and humanize us."<sup>10</sup> The experience, then, of coming to grips with one's deepest self is both the art of creating romance and a theme of romance.

Throughout his career Hawthorne obviously felt a need to justify the romance as he continued to write at the risk of the public's rejection. Joel Porte brings up an interesting point in his explication of The Blithedale Romance when he observes that "typical of the self-conscious American romancer," Hawthorne in The Blithedale Romance deviates from his trend and disputes the "very basis of his art."<sup>11</sup> According to Porte, the point of view (Coverdale as narrator) is the issue, and The Blithedale Romance becomes an "ironic romance: one which consistently undercuts the familiar Hawthornian notion that romance art has the power to reveal terrible truths about the human heart."<sup>12</sup> The narrator Coverdale is divided: "by his own confession 'having a decided tendency towards the actual,' he makes us feel that his largest commitment is to the normal world of social existence."<sup>13</sup> However, "he frequently views the world, even when awake, with that surrealistic eyesight which is the mark of the romance artist."<sup>14</sup> Though Porte reads the role of Coverdale as disputing Hawthorne's theory of romance, this point of view is itself inherently romantic; the entire story is, to use Frederick C. Crews's phrase, Coverdale's "imaginative reconstructions."<sup>15</sup> To re-emphasize the idea of romance, the reader has Coverdale's confession that what he thought

he heard or what he recalls thinking or seeing has perhaps been altered by his reflections over the past twelve years. If the events and the characters seem unrealistic, it is to be understood that Coverdale is reconstructing. Here, then, is Hawthorne's insistence on the necessity for a "theatre, a little removed" which he mentions in his preface. Through Coverdale Hawthorne is affirming what he has promoted all along. Crews sums it up well: "Blithedale is an effort to ignore and supersede all existing institutions and the Blithedale romance is an effort to create an aesthetically meaningful world."<sup>16</sup>

In essence, the distinction between novel and romance as Hawthorne conceived it is clear: the novel strives for representation of the "possible . . . probable and ordinary course of man's experience." The romance, on the other hand, may use fantastic, historical or realistic events and settings (such as Brook Farm) so that the writer may "improve" upon the real and present the "truth of the human heart." Within this theory of romance are also the themes of the function of the past and of the artist and of self-identity as Porte and others have noted.

Richard Chase in his study of the novel and romance expounds upon the distinctions heretofore discussed and those made initially by Hawthorne. Chase reiterates that the primary distinction between novel and romance is "the way in which they view reality."<sup>17</sup> He continues:

The novel renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. It takes a group of people and sets them going about the business of life. . . . They are in explicable relation to nature, to each other, to their social class, and to their own past. Character is more important than



action and plot, and probably the tragic or comic actions of the narrative will have the primary purpose of enhancing our knowledge of and feeling for an important character, a group of characters, or a way of life. The events that occur will usually be plausible . . . and if the novelist includes a violent or sensational occurrence . . ., he will introduce it only into such scenes as have been . . . 'already prepared to vouch for it.'<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, the romance, says Chase, "tends to prefer action to character, and action will be freer in a romance than in a novel, encountering . . . less resistance from reality."<sup>19</sup> He points out, however, that Hawthorne's "static romances" are an exception in that he "uses the allegorical and moral, rather than the dramatic, possibilities of the form."<sup>20</sup> Continuing the listing of basic traits of romance, Chase says that the characters "will not be completely related to each other or to society or to the past. Human beings will on the whole be shown in ideal relation--that is they will share emotions only after these have become abstract or symbolic. . . . The plot we may expect to be highly colored. Astonishing events may occur, and these are likely to have a symbolic or ideological, rather than a realistic, plausibility. Being less committed to the immediate rendition of reality than the novel, the romance will more freely veer toward mythic, allegorical, and symbolistic form."<sup>21</sup>

To Chase, the romance or the romance-novel is not an inferior art form but a form that is an adaptation of "traditional novelistic procedures to new cultural conditions and new aesthetic aspirations."<sup>22</sup> American romance has come to mean more than "escapism, fantasy, and sentimentality often associated with it."<sup>23</sup> Instead, American romanticists "have found that in the very freedom

of romance from the conditions of actuality there are certain potential virtues of the mind, which may be suggested by such words as rapidity, irony, abstraction, profundity. These qualities have made romance a suitable . . . vehicle for the intellectual and moral ideas of the American novelists."<sup>24</sup> This serious form that the extended fiction takes is frequently used to "express dark and complex truths unavailable to realism."<sup>25</sup>

In addition, Chase recognizes the psychological emphasis of the romance, beginning with the writer Simms, who "forecasts" with "pictures of town life, lawyers, court trials, and local customs" such modern writers as Faulkner and Warren.<sup>26</sup> However, it is Hawthorne, says Chase, who first realizes the "psychological possibilities of romance"; this he calls the "definitive adaptation of romance."<sup>27</sup> Chase further elaborates that romance is "a kind of 'border' fiction, whether the field of action is in the neutral territory between civilization and the wilderness, as in the adventure tales of Cooper and Simms, or whether, as in Hawthorne and later romancers, the field of action is conceived not so much as a place as a state of mind--the borderland of the human mind where the actual and the imaginary intermingle. Romance does not plant itself, like the novel, solidly in the midst of the actual. Nor when it is memorable, does it escape into the purely imaginary."<sup>28</sup>

In addition to Chase's study, Stanley Bank's American Romanticism: A Shape for Fiction and Daniel Hoffman's Form and Fable in American Fiction make similar, significant distinctions between novel and romance. Bank believes that the novel and romance must be considered two separate genres, "one essentially realistic



with respect to outward detail, the other unrealistic."<sup>29</sup> However, he warns against splitting hairs over the terms and thus losing sight of the reasons American writers of the nineteenth century wrote as they did: "Romanticism assumed an identifiably American form because of the relationship of the artist with his society, with himself, and with what he saw as a land without the long, honorable traditions in art which gave his European counterpart a different role in society and his own eyes."<sup>30</sup> The American writer thus established a form capable of expressing his belief that "the imagination was an important faculty," and by mid-century the romance was developed.<sup>31</sup> Bank says, "What was characteristic was not the strictures of the genre but the response to the intellectual, social and psychological forces which made it the core of a literary tradition in America."<sup>32</sup>

Bank also observes that one special quality Hawthorne gave the romance was the awareness that "some matters cannot be communicated directly without creating clinical studies rather than art."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, because Hawthorne wanted to present this truth beyond that everyday experience, he turned from the "probable and the possible" and borrowed from classical romance as well as from pastoral and Gothic; thus such Gothic elements as "the manuscript, the castle, the crime, religion, Italians, deformity, ghosts, magic, nature, knights in armor, works of art and blood" were incorporated into romance.<sup>34</sup> The crime element, Bank notes, has interesting variations in American romance as if "America had rediscovered original sin."<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, Daniel Hoffman argues that the romance is not an inferior form to the "novel of social realism."<sup>36</sup> In his book Form and Fable in American Fiction, he explores the nineteenth century writers' dependence upon "allegory, Gothicism, didactic, religious and travel writings, and traditions of folklore, popular culture, and mythology."<sup>37</sup> Hoffman argues against the opinion of some that romance is a failure of the writer to "face up to the real problems of society" and is an "avoidance of 'reality,' a dependence upon fantasy, sentiment, or melodrama."<sup>38</sup> Instead, the romance, as he explains it, leads the reader "toward an ahistorical depiction of the individual's discovery of his own identity in a world where his essential self is inviolate and independent of such involvements in history."<sup>39</sup> Hoffman recognizes additional elements of the romance; "traditions of native character, of comedy, of supernatural allegory, of human nature as both unfallen and demonic, have been peculiarly appropriate to the 'poetic,' nonrealistic character of the American romance. There they are often in tension with ritualistic and mythic themes from world culture as the American hero seeks to discover his own identity by rebelling against father, ruler, society, or God."<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Hoffman observes that the hero of American "folktale, legend, and romance is likely to go on a journey of self-discovery."<sup>41</sup>

Like Porte, Hoffman recognizes the role of the artist as it relates to the American romance and concludes his study by commenting on it, especially as Hawthorne used this concept. He says, "Our romance writers have all taken the role of the artist to be the discoverer and revealer of truth. Rarely seeking that truth



in contemporary reality, they found it disguised in the past of their ancestors or in their own childhoods or in symbol-freighted voyages abstracted from the economic and political life of their time. When they do treat social problems it is usually at a distance in time which makes the problems seem remote and 'unreal' to the contemporary reader. Such may be the effect of Hawthorne's concentration on Puritan days to demonstrate that sin of pride for which contemporary examples were not lacking."<sup>42</sup> As major themes, then, Hawthorne in his romances treats the "isolation of the individual, his rebellion against authority and tradition, his solitary confrontation of primal forces, his consequent need to discover or to redefine his own identity. Archetypal patterns derived from myth and folklore and ritual, enacted in both individual and communal experience, provide structures for their explorations of these themes."<sup>43</sup>

By no means are the romance studies of Porte, Chase, Bank and Hoffman definitive and exhaustive, but their works are sound and scholarly and enhance our understanding of both the American novel and the American romance. Consistently they recognize that the romance is a genre distinct from the novel and not inferior to it. All acknowledge Hawthorne as the primary proponent of the romance, and they analyze his concept of the romance as well as explain the evolution of the form. All identify the main theme of romance as the essential truth beyond that of everyday life, arrived at through a quest of self-identity. These critics view the romance as a form incorporating and building upon earlier forms: the pastoral, allegorical, folklorish, mythical. Finally, they reiterate Hawthorne's distinction that the aim of romance is not to present a

picture of real life but, rather, to aim for what modern readers might term psychological truths, truths not found in the presentation of realistic events of the novel of manners. Whether Robert Penn Warren subscribes to this understanding of romance in his own writings will be the concern of this study from this point on.

## CHAPTER II

### ROMANCE AND THE RECONCILIATION OF OPPOSITES

Although critics have labeled Warren as philosophical novelist or writer of myth, tragedy, or epic, they have not recognized him as a writer of romance in the tradition of Hawthorne. However, though these writers have not meant to do so, some of the points they make about Warren's technique actually suggest that the best way to read Warren's works is to read them as romances in this tradition.

When Hawthorne in his prefaces makes a distinction between novel and romance, he should be understood as offering his readers some middle ground between the genres commonly understood by readers of his time. On the one hand, readers then could expect careful attention to historical and realistic detail; on the other hand, there was pure abstract idealism and lack of realism. In philosophy, there were the possibilities that man was a product of uncontrollable forces, a puppet manipulated by biological, hereditary, environmental or social forces and himself "relieved of moral responsibility."<sup>44</sup> In contrast to this school of thought, there was the Emersonian school of idealism, a belief in the perfectability of man, man elevated to the "level of the Deity" and a denial of evil and the flesh.<sup>45</sup> Stewart observes that here naturalism was "at the opposite pole from romanticism. If romantics



like Emerson and Whitman exalted man . . . so that he became in Emerson's phrase 'part and parcel of God,' naturalists like Zola and his American disciples reduced man to the level of helplessness and ineffectualness."<sup>46</sup> Hawthorne, however, seems to be claiming a "certain latitude" in form and theme that would place him between these two schools of uncritical idealism and naturalism, offering instead works that were neither entirely idealistic nor entirely materialistic. Consequently, Chase's study refers to Hawthorne's romance as "border fiction" where the realms of the imagination and the actual intermingle.

For example, Hawthorne's story "The Artist of the Beautiful" deals with just such dialectics and is similar to what he does in his longer romances. The characters Owen Warland, artist-watchmaker, and Robert Danforth, the blacksmith, are clearly symbols of the opposites which may be labeled, variously, the ideal and the real, the ethereal and the utilitarian, the beautiful absolute and the attainable practicality. Hawthorne notes that the ideal artist "must stand up against mankind and be his sole disciple" (p. 1143). In a sense, he is necessarily alienated from the world. His "characteristic minuteness in his objects and accomplishments made the world even more incapable than it might otherwise have been of appreciating Owen Warland's genius. The boy's relatives saw nothing better to be done . . . than to bind him apprentice to a watchmaker, hoping that his strange ingenuity might thus be regulated and put to utilitarian purposes" (p. 1141). Owen himself observes the contrast: "Strength is an earthly monster. I make no pretensions to it. My force, whatever there may be of it, is altogether spiritual" (p. 1142).

In such isolation Owen strives "to give external reality to his ideas" (p. 1146) and is caught up with the desire to present this creation to Annie: "the visible shape in which the spiritual power that he worshipped . . . was made manifest to him" (p. 1149). He then fashions an elaborate and delicate mechanical butterfly to give Annie as a wedding gift. Of course, Annie, her father and her husband Robert fail to understand the gift, a situation evinced by Annie's repeated question, "Is it alive?" Owen's answer and recognition of what he has done go largely misunderstood by Annie: "it may well be said to possess life, for it has absorbed my own being into itself; and in the secret of that butterfly, and its beauty . . . is represented the intellect, the imagination, the sensibility, the soul of an Artist of the Beautiful!" (p. 1154). Annie's child ultimately crushes the butterfly, yet Owen achieves knowledge as he becomes aware of some reconciliation of the ideal and the real: "When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the reality" (p. 1156). In other words, Owen learns to create for the doing of it and not to gain favor in the eyes of the world, symbolized by Annie and her family. He knows he can impress these people who thrive on the utilitarian and commonplace by revealing the monetary value of such a butterfly: "a gem of art that a monarch would have purchased with honors and abundant wealth, and have treasured it among the jewels of his kingdom as the most unique and wondrous of them. But the artist smiled and kept the secret to himself" (p. 1155). Without adopting their view, he becomes



reconciled to it, in fact so much that when Annie's child crushes his creation, Owen himself is not destroyed. The idea has become manifest in the world even though the world does not understand.

John C. Stubbs helps to clarify Hawthorne's position. He states that romancers, unlike novelists, must have artistic distance "to order the raw stuff of human experience into the clearer mode of artifice so that the reader may comprehend the experience emotionally and intellectually."<sup>47</sup> In order to get his distance right, Stubbs says, the romancer must work with opposites: "verisimilitude and ideality; the natural and the marvelous; and history and fiction."<sup>48</sup> He says that Hawthorne worried about his fiction's lack of verisimilitude and strove to reconcile the two attitudes about realistic detail and abstract design. History thus gave Hawthorne and others the "simplest solution to the problem of artistic distance. A romance could be set off from the reader through time, with the advantage over the straightforward history of fictional shaping and vividness. . . . While the historian records facts, the romancer deals in human terms with the connection between facts."<sup>49</sup>

It becomes apparent when one reads Warren that, like Hawthorne, he subscribes to a middle road. Randall Stewart suggests but does not expound upon a similar idea. He notes that naturalism never really took hold in the South because "the doctrine of Original Sin had never been lost sight of."<sup>50</sup> Thus writers like Robert Penn Warren "have been concerned with the creation of an order of characters who . . . cannot be measured by scientific determinants.

In short, the great Southern fiction writers of our time have brought our literature back to the tradition of Hawthorne and Melville, of Milton and Shakespeare."<sup>51</sup> For both Hawthorne and Warren the romance is devoted to a reconciliation of opposites.

Important to our paralleling of Warren's and Hawthorne's themes and forms is an introductory essay on Hawthorne in American Literature: The Makers and the Making, Vol. I (1973), edited jointly by Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and R. W. B. Lewis. Warren himself wrote both the first and final draft of this essay.<sup>52</sup> In it, he notes that Hawthorne "lived in the right ratio--right for the fueling of his genius--between an attachment to his region and its repudiation, . . . between a fascinated attentiveness to its realistic texture, forms and characteristics of nature and human nature, and a compulsive flight from that welter of life towards abstract ideas."<sup>53</sup> This essay continues by explaining that Hawthorne's "matter is essentially romantic, the mysterious depth of the soul, the scruples of guilt, shadowy and ambiguous psychological and moral issues, but the style he developed was a cool, detached, sometimes pretentious art-prose. So in the contrast of matter and style is one more of the vibrant tensions in the works of Hawthorne which has made him congenial to the twentieth century sensibility."<sup>54</sup>

It seems especially important to note here the emphasis on Hawthorne's use of region and of history which Warren sees as properly balanced: Hawthorne's genius lay in having not too much emotional, nostalgic attachment and not too much detachment, in having an attraction to the past but neither worship of it nor



repudiation of it. These same points we shall see reflected in Warren's own works. Furthermore, neither author should be accused of regionalism in the narrow sense of that term. Hawthorne wrote primarily of the New England he knew as Warren does of his South, but each creates romances that transcend their regional origins.

In this same essay there is the recognition of a dimension of Hawthorne's work which seems for Warren also a key tenet of romanticism, the reconciliation of opposites. Warren identifies this concept when he notes Hawthorne's balance between adherence to "the realistic texture, forms and characteristics of nature and human nature, and a compulsive flight from that welter of life towards abstract ideas."<sup>55</sup>

This essay also comments on Hawthorne's idea of the role of the artist and his use of history: "Hawthorne is saying that unconsciously--literally out of the unconscious--a writer may find the meaning and the method which later, consciously, he may explore and develop; that is, in writing, a man may be discovering, among other things, himself."<sup>56</sup> For material to be useful to Hawthorne it had to be "regarded from a certain perspective of distances"; in order to repudiate "the demand for factuality which is the present," Hawthorne turned to the past "including violence and passion, for, as he put it, poetry 'is a plant that thrives best in spots where blood has been spilt long ago.'"<sup>57</sup>

Then the essay spells out what were for Hawthorne the crucial distinctions between novel and romance:

Distance in space, distance in time, shadowy uncertainty--these are the requisites. In the 'faery precinct' Hawthorne can avoid being distracted



by the demands of an urgent present and can devote himself to tracing the inner reality, which, in that shadowy light, will be both clearer in outline--that is, more typical--and more massively ambiguous in meaning than would be true in a narrative committed to reporting the 'opaque substance of today.' . . . The novelist--at least the novelist as Hawthorne conceived him in contrast to the writer of romances--would be concerned, in large part at least, with recreating the actualities of the past, aiming at the involvement of the reader in the urgencies of the recreated world. But the writer of romance would use the actualities of the past as a means of validating and generalizing--at a distance for clarity of outline--the moral and psychological drama. The historical novelist aims, then, at converting the past into a kind of virtual present; the writer of romance aims at converting the past into a myth for the present.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, Warren's essay expounds upon Hawthorne's literary method as part of his own self-discovery and of the "obsessive concern" in his romances: "the struggle to achieve self-knowledge."<sup>59</sup> Hawthorne, according to Warren, "writes not from a predetermined meaning ('moral' in his terminology), but toward a meaning, creation thus being a process of discovery, ultimately of self-discovery."<sup>60</sup>

A more recent article by Warren, "The Use of the Past," also treats Hawthorne's use of the past and summarizes Warren's own ideas on history: "What made Hawthorne vital for us today is precisely what he achieved by turning back to his past--his past as New England and his personal past. . . . As a man, he declared that he thanked God for every year that separated him from his ancestral New England past, but in wrestling with that necessary angel he arrived at a psychological understanding and an art that speaks to us profoundly a century and a half later and is part of our usable American past."<sup>61</sup> Warren further explains that in the study of the past one discovers the self: "The truth we want to come

to is the truth of ourselves, of our common humanity, available in the projected self of art,"<sup>62</sup> Such an understanding of the past gives one an awareness of himself in relation to humanity. What seems most crucial to Warren's romances is his belief about the "creation" of the past; it is this idea most prevalent in World Enough and Time and in Flood. He concludes, "The past must be studied, worked at--in short, created. . . . Inevitably, the past, so far as we know it, is an inference, a creation, and this, without being paradoxical, can be said to be its chief value for us. In creating the image of the past, we created ourselves."<sup>63</sup>

Warren's essays "Knowledge and the Image of Man" and "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading" further enhance our understanding of his romanticism. Although "Knowledge" is not an essay on romance, it does contain Warren's most explicit statement on the theme of self-identity important to the romances of both Warren and Hawthorne. In this essay Warren says that man achieves identity through knowledge, for it alone can give man the "image of himself." In the process of knowledge and identity man "distinguishes himself from the world and from other men. He disintegrates his primal instinctive sense of unity, he discovers separateness. In this process he discovers the pain of self-criticism and the pain of isolation. . . . In the pain of self-criticism he may develop an ideal of excellence. . . . In the pain of isolation he may achieve the courage and clarity of mind to envisage the tragic pathos of life, and once he realizes the tragic experience is universal and a corollary of man's place in nature, he may return to a communion with man and nature."<sup>64</sup>



"A Poem of Pure Imagination" also relates to what we are describing as Warren's theory of romance. He explicates Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner. The following excerpt echoes what has already been said in the Hawthorne essay about the nature of truth (call it self-identity, understanding the meaning of experience or whatever) and the creative experience: "the moral concern and the aesthetic concern are aspects of the same activity, the creative activity, and . . . this activity is expressive of the whole mind."<sup>65</sup> Warren notes that "we may have here . . . the case of a man who saves his own soul by composing a poem. But what Coleridge actually means is, of course, that the writing of a poem is simply a specialized example of a general process which leads to salvation. After the Mariner has composed his poem of blessing, he can begin the long voyage home."<sup>66</sup>

In addition to the critical essays examined, various interviews with Warren offer clues to his concept of romance and novel. Warren expounded upon the use of history and his own form when questioned by an interviewer for Writers At Work: The Paris Review Interviews. The interviewer said, "It seems clear that you don't write 'historical' novels; they are always concerned with urgent problems, but the awareness of history seems to be central." To this Warren replied, "That's so. I don't think I do write historical novels. I try to find stories that catch my eye, stories that seem to have issues in purer form than they come to one ordinarily."<sup>67</sup>

Of Brother to Dragons Warren commented, "It belonged to a historical setting, but it was not a departure: it was a matter of

dealing with issues in a more mythical form. I hate costume novels, but maybe I've written some and don't know it. I have a romantic kind of interest in the objects of American history: saddles, shoes, figures of speech, rifles, et cetera. They're worth a lot. Help you focus. There is a kind of extraordinary romance about American history. That's the only word for it--a kind of self-sufficiency."<sup>68</sup>

About the past the interviewer asked, "Would you say that each book marks a redefinition of reality arrived at through a combat with the past? A development from the traditional to the highly personal reality: A confession?" Warren responded, "I never thought of a combat with the past. I guess I think more of trying to find what there is valuable to us, the line of continuity to us, and through us."<sup>69</sup>

It seems obvious that Warren's comments on his own techniques reiterate what was said about Hawthorne in Warren's own essay discussed earlier. In that essay Warren distinguished between novel and romance, commented on the importance of the past and identified the author's craft as involving both a balance between certain opposites and a creative process of self-discovery, all ideas which Warren seems to reflect in his own work.

Later interviews continue to reveal the same critical interest in Warren's craft and essentially the same answers. In response to a comment about the importance of historical events in some of his novels, Warren said, "Writing a story about an actual person and using him as a kind of model are really not the same." For example, about the Kentucky tragedy he said, "That came right out of



an historical situation. Sure, there is a relationship in almost all of my novels with something that was a germ of fact. Individual personalities became mirrors of their times. . . . Social tensions have a parallel in the personal world."<sup>70</sup> The interviewer then commented, "I hadn't realized that your use of history also involved a dialogue between the real and the ideal." Warren answered, "If I understand you, this would mean adjusting historical 'fact' to fictional need." As an illustration he tells of reversing in World Enough and Time the political parties of Col. Fort and Beauchamp so that the Old Court would be associated with Fort and the New with the young protagonist: "I had no compunction about doing this because the historical Beauchamp was merely a prototype of my hero, and besides was of no historical importance."<sup>71</sup> One is reminded here of Hawthorne's explanation of setting for The Blithedale Romance: a "theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events."

Warren's comments on the past of the South are somewhat similar to what he saw as Hawthorne's genius in the use of the past. Hawthorne used the past without too much emotional attachment to "convert the past into a myth for the present." The Southern writer must likewise come to terms with that past:

The South is a special case. It lost the war and suffered hardship. That kind of defeat gives the past great importance. There is a need somehow to keep it alive, to justify it, and this works to transform the record of fact into legend. In the process, pain, dreariness, the particulars of the individual experience become absorbed into the

romantic fable. The romance, you see, becomes stronger than the fact of any one story and changes it; even if you are only one or two generations removed from the event, it's hard to see through the romantic haze. Maybe that's one of the reasons Southern writers are so concerned with history. They've heard the stories since they were kids and later on they try to understand them in terms of their own range of experience as human beings. And in terms of scholarly history.<sup>72</sup>

Here Warren seems especially close to Hawthorne in recognizing the value of the past to get at the truth of the human heart.

From reading Warren's various critical essays and comments, one can conclude that his concept of romance and romanticism is close to that of Hawthorne. Furthermore, Warren's essay on Hawthorne in the Brooks, Lewis and Warren anthology suggests a definite influence of Hawthorne on Warren. Both Warren and Hawthorne work with a genre that claims to be neither entirely realistic nor entirely imaginary but instead some creative reconstruction of the truth of the human heart. Both draw from history to gain a certain perspective from which to present this truth. Both deal with the common themes of tradition, of past guilt, of the struggle of the individual to understand human experience or the achievement of knowledge and self-identity. Both recognize the creative process as a process of self-discovery for the artist. Finally, both use the romance as a medium for presenting the reconciliation of opposites.

Alfred Kazin, William Van O'Connor, John Edward Hardy and John Bradbury have all commented on this aspect of reconciliation in Warren's work although they do not deal with his works as romances. Kazin calls Warren's theme that of the "'true life,' of the necessary contradiction between man's nature and man's



values. . . . He refuses the sanctions of orthodox Christianity, which proclaim spiritual values as absolute truths, and of the naturalistic interpretation of values as pragmatically necessary to man."<sup>73</sup> Hardy says that Warren's principal theme is "the 'incompleteness' of man, the struggle to reconcile the idea and the need of unity with the facts of multiplicity in human experience."<sup>74</sup> William Van O'Connor speaks primarily of Warren's poetry, but the same can be said of Warren's fiction. He says that Warren's works may best be understood as "the esthetic expression of a mind in which tradition and the forces destroying tradition work in strong opposition to each other--ritual and indifference to ritual; self-knowledge and indifference to or inability to achieve self-knowledge; an inherited 'theological' understanding of man and the newer psychological or social understanding, illustrated . . . in the religious concept of evil and the liberal belief in man's ultimate power to control 'evil' forces. There are two major pulls at work in shaping his idiom, the older belief in a morally integrated human being and the naturalist belief in a being formed by ill-understanding forces."<sup>75</sup> Finally, Bradbury sees the structure of Warren's novels as a "structure of primary oppositions, expressed variously as ideal and real, or idea and fact; man and external nature; innocence and guilt; ends and means; science and religion or art; heritage and revolt, or father and son; history and the individual life."<sup>76</sup>

Of course, the same Coleridge Warren studied in "A Poem of Pure Imagination" is the ultimate origin, as far as any American romantic writer is concerned, of the concept of the reconciliation

of opposites. Coleridge provided this explanation:

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, controul (laxis effertur habenis) reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.<sup>77</sup>



### CHAPTER III

#### WORLD ENOUGH AND TIME: A ROMANTIC NOVEL

Several critics have commented briefly on Warren's subtitle for World Enough and Time: A Romantic Novel. Some dismiss the subtitle as irrelevant; some seem to misread it. For example, John W. Rathbun apparently misreads the subtitle and form of World when he says that the subtitle allows Warren latitude in "digression, personal comment, and story direction."<sup>78</sup> According to Rathbun, Warren errs when he fails to limit his philosophy: "He obviously meant this to be his 'big' novel, and the result is a self-conscious artistry that not even the sub-title can wholly justify. The reader is too much aware of the Warren intelligence playing over the novel. . . . More disquieting are Warren's deliberate intrusions into his narrative."<sup>79</sup>

Leslie Fiedler says that for a "conventional Romance, World Enough and Time is distressingly slow in getting started, full of irrelevant poetry and philosophy, and worst of all, not 'true to facts.'"<sup>80</sup> Then he adds that Warren's claim that the book is not a historical novel "means, I suppose, simply that its locus of truth is in the imagination and not in recorded 'fact.'"<sup>81</sup> Rathbun and Fiedler seem either to misread or to reject the romanticism of

Warren although Fiedler comes close to acknowledging the Hawthornian concept when he says he supposes Warren meant that the truth of the book is in the imagination.

Everett Carter notes that Warren is too sophisticated a writer for the subtitle to be meaningless and thus sees special significance in it. He observes, "The pattern of conflict and synthesis is not only presented on the level of history in Warren's fiction; it is also presented on the level of art and the artist. On the title page of World Enough and Time there is the hint of this pattern and this purpose in the announcement that it is 'A Romantic Novel.' . . . It announces an attempted fusion between two forms of prose fiction, one that has been associated with the ideas and the ideal--the romance, and the other which has been associated with the world of social appearances--the novel. . . . He wishes it to be a 'highly documented' picture of the world, but at the same time he wishes it to be much more than 'straight naturalism.'"82

Robert Heilman finds special importance attached to the subtitle. He explains that of the several ways World Enough and Time may be read, Warren tells us how to do so by the use of the subtitle. The word romantic, according to Heilman, may be read three ways. On the simplest level, it is similar to Scott's tradition of the "romance of adventure" with its elements of crime, pursuit, trial, love story, suicide, and fights. Romantic may, moreover, be a description of the hero, a Byronic sort: "impulsive, suspicious, bitter, melancholy, devoted to an ideal, in search of the fine and noble, hoping for too much, disillusioned, . . . demonic, . . . self-questioning, self-tormenting, self-deceiving, . . . with all the anguish and



despair and nostalgia for a happiness not accessible to the 'dark' personality."<sup>83</sup> These two readings Heilman rejects, though they have merit, in favor of a third: "the book is a study of a basic kind of impulse to action. Jerry calls himself guilty of 'the crime of self'; he speaks of having acted from 'a black need within me.' . . . The kind of human motivation defined in Jerry is suggested by such terms as the self, the personality, the subjective. . . . This 'kind of impulse' may lead to both scorn of the world . . . and effort to subjugate the world. . . . If I am right in judging the ultimate applicability of 'romantic' to be the 'kind of impulse' which moves Jerry, then the author is describing the timeless by a time word, using a term of specific historical relevance as a means of concretizing the issue."<sup>84</sup> Heilman goes on to explain that there must be interpenetration of a "'subjective' and an 'objective' view of reality, of innocence, of justice--intention and deed . . . lest the idea or the world run mad."<sup>85</sup> This interpenetration is crucial to Warren's romance.

Another important critical article treating the subtitle of World Enough and Time is Joseph Frank's "Romanticism and Reality in Robert Penn Warren." Frank asserts that the central theme of World is the "necessary conflict, between the world and the idea" and that Warren subtitles the book "A Romantic Novel" because Jeremiah cannot face that conflict "with the good-humored worldliness of Marvell," whose poem provides Warren's title.<sup>86</sup> Frank seems to recognize that the theme as well as the form is romantic. Frank suggests that the perspectives from which the book is told indicate that Warren did not intend the book to be a

historical novel but chose the form he did "to express more clearly and more deeply the vision that is at the centre of his moral universe--what we have called the dialectic between Romanticism and reality. . . . How better to express the relations between Romanticism and reality than by using the Romantic literary form par excellence."87 Thus the critic says that Warren's "multiple perspectives" become clear: Beaumont "conceives of his own ideas and purposes in high, Romantic style," but because Warren does not want the reader to "accept these attitudes at their face value," he introduces other perspectives, Beaumont's diary and Warren's narration. "We might say," Frank observes, "that Mr. Warren himself plays Mercutio to Jeremiah Beaumont's Romeo."88

What Joseph Frank alludes to is, of course, Warren's own explanation of necessary opposite perspectives. In his essay "Pure and Impure Poetry" Warren uses the famous description of the garden in Romeo and Juliet, a scene Warren says is "justly admired for its purity of effect, for giving us the very essence of young, untarnished love."89 Juxtaposed to this pure scene is Mercutio, who, outside the garden wall, has "made a joke, a bawdy joke . . . witty and, worst of all, intellectually complicated in its form. Realism, wit, intellectual complication--these are the enemies of the garden purity."90 Yet, as Warren goes on to explain, "poetry arises from a recalcitrant and contradictory context; and finally involves that context."91 What Frank is saying, then, is that the very form of World Enough and Time is determined by the multiple perspectives. Furthermore, the form enhances the theme.



Carter, Heilman, and Frank, then, all provide some important ideas on Warren's romance, but each in his view fails to connect Warren's concept to Hawthorne's concept. To re-iterate, Romance for Warren has the following dimensions similar to those of Hawthorne: the theme and form become one in that the author attempts to reconcile opposites; he creates as major tensions the world and the idea as well as lesser opposites, and the structure of the work reflects this tension, a type of "border fiction" between the actual and the imaginary. Point of view becomes important, for the reader must understand that the romance is an imaginative reconstruction of experience to get at the truth of the human heart. Furthermore, the main character attempts to confront his secret self or to achieve knowledge and self-identity. The method of narration must necessarily reflect that quest. In the process, the character must attempt to come to grips with tradition or the past, evil or guilt. Frequently there is rebellion against and rejection of father, society, or God. The protagonist may attempt renunciation of the world for the idea or vice versa. The events in the plot may be highly unrealistic and will take on symbolic significance. Often the romance will attempt to connect a "bygone time" with the present, with history providing that necessary perspective. These, then, are the criteria for viewing World Enough and Time as a romance in the tradition of Hawthorne.

Let us first examine World Enough and Time as a story of a man who must reconcile the opposites of his world to know himself. Beaumont is an idealist who seeks to define himself through some noble action. His idealism is apparent: "The drama which Jeremiah



prepared was to be . . . a tragedy like those in the books he read."<sup>92</sup> As a youth, he rejects the world, tradition, and the past when he learns that his maternal grandfather refuses to name him heir unless Jeremiah renounces the name Beaumont and takes instead the name Marcher. Jeremiah reflects, "'I had seen . . . my good father die in the bitterness of worldly failure and sick hope, and I had seen my grandfather Marcher live bitterly in the midst of wealth and great place, and I came to see, though in my boyish way, that both were bound to the grossness of nature and the vanity of the world. As time passed, it came to me that I would not wish to live and die thus, and that there must be another way to live and die. Therefore I searched my books for what truth might be beyond the bustle of the hour and the empty lusts of time'" (p. 24). Thus begins Jeremiah's vacillation between the world and the idea. Soon he resorts to a rather crude form of religion and is brought somewhat back into the world of reality when he astonishes himself by engaging in sexual activity with a "snaggle-toothed hag." The narrator observes that Jeremiah thus far in his quest "had got neither the wealth of the world nor the riches not of this world" (p. 32).

The next step in this effort to reconcile the two sides of self is Jeremiah's association with Colonel Cassius Fort, who gives him "a new, if more worldly, hope" (p. 32). Having lost both father and grandfather, Jeremiah accepts as a father figure Colonel Fort, who has risen above his own poverty. Jeremiah's journal acknowledges his feeling for Fort: "'not merely the respect and gratitude I owed him for kindness, but love as though he had been a

father and good to me'" (p. 44). Byrne observes that Jeremiah temporarily finds in Fort "the realization of the ideal in terms of the world and its values," for Fort had power and could wield control over others.<sup>93</sup> Yet Jeremiah's life becomes too tightly involved with Fort's when Jeremiah's friend Wilkie informs him of Rachel Jordan's plight.

Rachel, somewhat Jeremiah's counterpart in the self-identity quest and certainly the focal point of Jeremiah's own quest, had also been attracted to Fort. She, too, had rejected her father and the past. The narrator in World questions Rachel's reaction when she visits her father's grave: "Did she feel that . . . she now was truly bereaved and alone? . . . That when you truly begin to live you must construct your own world . . ." (p. 54). Individually, Rachel and Jeremiah are involved in a quest for identity.

The event which brings Jeremiah and Rachel together is his awareness that Fort has betrayed her innocence. This betrayal forces Jeremiah to examine once more his world: "And growing in him was the pain to learn that Colonel Fort, who had been like a father to him, was not the man he . . . had believed. Colonel Fort had betrayed him as truly as he had betrayed Rachel Jordan" (p. 57). Important here is Jeremiah's rejection of the father surrogate, usually important in Warren's characters' search for identity. Thus Jeremiah longs for some understanding of the meaning of life: "Could a man not come to some moment when, all dross and meanness of life consumed, he could live in the pure idea?" (p. 57).

Once again the conflict between the real and the ideal or between the world and the idea surfaces in Jeremiah. He broods over



the affair until Wilkie (the man of fact, the man of the world and Jeremiah's opposite) concludes in his matter-of-fact way, "'You got some woman you lay with in somebody's barn'" (p. 61). Warren the narrator tells us, "Nothing was wrong except that the world was the way it was" (p. 61). It is clearly established that Jeremiah cannot cope with the world as he knows it.

Next begins a long courtship with Rachel Jordan, initiated by Jeremiah's attempts to borrow from her library and immerse himself in philosophy. Here we note his thinking that the idea must be the answer: "'Philosophy is to tell us the truth of the world'" (p. 69). Eventually he vows to right the wrong against her, and he wants to marry her. Byrne aptly notes, "His love for Rachel as a wife and as a human being is only incidental to the love he bears for her as a symbol of justice. And, in the final analysis, Jeremiah agrees to murder Fort because he must create a world of innocence, of abstraction, in which he could live above and outside the actual world which had corrupted him. That world he repudiated."<sup>94</sup> Certainly his motives themselves are romantic. He tells Rachel that he would bring her peace: "'Where there is justice there is peace. . . . For when the past is destroyed, when it is plucked out . . .'" (p. 113).

When Fort refuses Jeremiah's challenge, Jeremiah becomes "sick with self-loathing" (p. 150). For a time he has no recourse but to settle into the business of making his estate prosper. However, Jeremiah finds himself drawn into the political arena of this time, Relievers vs. Anti-Relievers, New Court vs. Old Court. At one point he is forced to examine once more who he is; asked to which faction



he belongs, he muses, "If a man lives by what he feels to be the truth in him, and discovers in a single instant that the tongue of the world says differently of him, there come the fear and shame that what he had held to be the truth in him may not be the truth after all and there may be no truth for him but the terrible truth now given him by the tongue of the world. And if a man is robbed of his truth, . . . how can he know what he is?" (p. 163). So he resolves to "show the world in the world's way" (p. 166); he therefore speculates in the West. Later he agrees to run for political office, primarily because Fort switches parties.

Joseph Frank observes that there is a connection between the political struggle that is one theme of the book and Jeremiah's own struggle:

Actually, the political conflict in which Beaumont becomes involved is intended to duplicate the terms of his personal desire to accomplish an act of perfect justice. The burning political issue of the day was the amending of the state constitution in the interests of the debt-ridden; and as Mr. Warren pictures it, this becomes a clash between the concept of law as an absolute or as a servant of man's needs. Does the individual or a group have the right to take the law into its own hands to satisfy some private or temporary ideal of justice--as Beaumont wanted to do . . . or as the party of the New Court wanted to do with the state constitution?<sup>95</sup>

Frank further explains that the two levels are drawn together, moreover, when Colonel Fort becomes an opponent of New Court (Relief) and a group puts out a handbill falsely attributed to Fort and further slandering Rachel. In fact, this handbill brings on a miscarriage of Rachel's child. At this point, Jeremiah reflects that he has erred: "He had lived so long with the idea that that alone had seemed real. The world had seemed nothing. And because

the world had seemed nothing, he had lived in the way of the world, feeling safe because he held the idea, pure, complete, abstract, and self-fulfilling. He had thought that he was redeemed by the idea, that sooner or later the idea would redeem his world.

"But now he knew: the world must redeem the idea. He knew now that the idea must take on flesh and fact, not to redeem, but to be redeemed" (p. 207). Jeremiah devises and follows a clever plot to murder Fort, an almost perfect crime. However, he is arrested and convicted, largely on false evidence. The narrator now comments on what Jeremiah has done: "It was not fair, for he had acted in justice, and justice was all he wanted, it was not fair to make him die for doing justice" (p. 360). His task now was "to prove to the world that it was justice" (p. 361).

After a thwarted suicide attempt, Rachel and Jeremiah, with Wilkie's help, escape. The contrast between Jeremiah and Wilkie remains clear: "He had never understood Wilkie, what was inside Wilkie. All he had understood was that Wilkie was at home in the world, was made for the world and the world for him. But the world was not made for Jeremiah Beaumont, nor he for the world" (p. 412). The Beaumonts escape to a quite primitive area. Bohner notes that the environment with its clearing and forest is itself symbolic of inner self-division.<sup>96</sup> Here Beaumont says that he finds a kind of peace "with no past and no future, the absoluteness of the single, separate, dark, massive moment that swells up fatly . . . then pops and is gone" (pp. 435-36). Joseph Frank reads this part of Jeremiah's identity quest as a triumph of world over idea: "In this dismal hiding-place, immersed in the primeval slime, Beaumont



gradually descends into the drunkenness, debauchery and animal-like existence of the other inhabitants."<sup>97</sup> He continues, "If one uses the world to redeem the idea, but refuses to accept the ensuing guilt, then there is no point at which the descent into the moral abyss can be halted: for the impenitent Romantic, the purity of his inner motives is enough to justify any crime. And by this return to nature in the literal sense, where all moral distinctions between good and evil are abolished, Jeremiah Beaumont accomplishes the destiny that had been implicit in the mystical pantheism of his youth."<sup>98</sup>

Finally Jeremiah comes to some sort of knowledge. Rachel becomes deranged and commits suicide. Jeremiah himself develops sores symptomatic of venereal disease, and he learns of Wilkie's series of betrayals--both situations that force Jeremiah to see himself for what he is. He concludes that Wilkie's face is "the mask of all the world" and knows now what he himself must do--return and face his punishment. The understanding he has reached is reflected in the following meditation: "It was a knowledge beneath knowledge, the 'kind of knowledge that is identity'" (p. 456). He sought expiation for a crime that "'is always there . . . is unpardonable. It is the crime of self, the crime of life. The crime is I'" (p. 458). Then follows in Jeremiah's journal his recognition of his three errors: "'For . . . it is the first and last temptation, to name the idea as all, which I did, and in that error was my arrogance and the beginning of my undoing and cold exile from mankind'" (p. 459). His second error he names as the belief that the world must redeem the idea: "man will use the means of the natural world, and its dark ways, to gain that end he names holy by



the idea, and ah! the terror of that, the terror of that!" (p. 459). Then the third error is "to deny the idea and its loneliness and embrace the world as all, or as he puts it, 'to seek communion only in the blank cup of nature, and innocence there. . . . For I had sought innocence, and had fled into the brute wilderness where all is innocence . . . and now I flee from innocence and toward my guilt'" (p. 459). Jeremiah now knows that even if he never achieves ultimate reconciliation or integration of self, he must go back and accept his punishment. Charles Anderson puts it this way: "Man must live in the world of violence, by whatever principles of order he can formulate and believe in."<sup>99</sup> Guttenberg sees a connection here with Coleridge:

For Warren, knowledge is the means to whatever grace man can attain, serving to reintegrate world (or nature) and idea (or mind). The reconciling process of redemption begins with the mind's becoming aware of itself. . . . Warren himself puts it in his essay on Coleridge, 'It is the primary imagination which creates our world, for nothing of which we are aware is given to the passive mind. By it we know the world, but for Coleridge, knowing is making, for "To know is in its very essence a verb active." We know by creating.' For Warren as well, to know is to create, and in knowing our wasteland world we must assume responsibility for it.<sup>100</sup>

Clearly the protagonist's quest to reconcile world and idea is romantic and thus is the story. Yet the theme of self-identity and reconciliation of opposites cannot be separated from form, nor can one without the other be fully understood, a point which Porte made about Hawthorne's romances, too. The reader must understand how Warren has structured World Enough and Time.

Leonard Casper in Diliman Review notes, "Ambiguity, the doubleness of life, is not only the subject of World Enough and Time;

it is its method."<sup>101</sup> He notes that Heilman agrees with him that the "complex points of view themselves make the theme remote and inaccessible. The literal line of action is evaluated by Beaumont introspectively and recorded by him in his journal; then the initial narrator, an anonymous historian, makes comment on that journal."<sup>102</sup> This method is by design and is certainly not a flaw on Warren's part, for he has Beaumont reflect on his life for a purpose; the narrator explains the reason for Beaumont's journal, begun in jail and concluded in the wilderness:

Even as he plunged more deeply into the 'divine frenzy and sweet blackness,' and discovered its blankness and absoluteness, he felt the need to tell his story. It was as though the passion itself, whose very meaning was its meaninglessness, its blankness and absoluteness, would lose that meaning unless he could trace the steps by which he had reached it, unless it were put in the context of the very world that it repudiated. . . . So he seized his pen, and sat down to 'justify.' . . . He struggled to know it, /truth/ to live back into the past time and know it as he had not been able to know it when caught in the toils of its presentness. . . . He would hump over the table all day long, or all night long, driving the pen forward, word after word, in its race. Or rather, this, too, was a kind of sleep, a kind of oblivion of the present world, but 'a sleep with a dream, the last dream a man must make, the dream of himself and the way he has come and how things came to be' (pp. 376-77).

Then again the narrator reflects on Jeremiah's writing the journal:

He had come to the 'knowledge,' he says. He says that, but we can scarcely believe him, for if he had come truly to the knowledge, would he have sat again the next day at his table and written down the account of all that Munn Short had said, and all that he himself had said, and the horror of his nightmare: With that knowledge what could have been the meaning of that act of recording? But he did write it, and the words are all there before us on the yellowing,



curling sheets. Or is there the paradox that even in that knowledge, even when it is truly had, man must put down the words, must make the record? For even when that knowledge of blankness comes, he is still man and must 'justify?' (p. 389).

There is the protagonist's need to make sense--to reconcile on paper or to give form to the idea--of his quest, or as Bohner observes, to try to reconcile the world of fact and the world of idea.<sup>103</sup> There is the narrator-historian, supposedly objective, providing that distance-in-time perspective whereby the reader, too, might get at the truth of the human heart as far as it might be possible to know it.

Mizner notes that the characters in World "are struggling to reconcile what Sir Thomas Browne would have called the intellectual and the nutritive souls, in a world where the question of private justice is inextricably entangled with the world of public justice. . . . They are struggling . . . to reconcile all the justices, of the land, of the belly, of the heart."<sup>104</sup> Thus, he accounts for the point of view: "In order that we may feel this dilemma for ourselves, Mr. Warren adopts the ancient dramatic device of the narrator who is retelling a story from other sources: like the Chaucer who tells the story of Troilus and Criseyde, he does not know any better than we the final meaning of his story"; and he cites the narrator-historian's remarks at the beginning of the romance: "We do not know that we have the Truth."<sup>105</sup>

Bohner identifies another function of the perspectives of this story. He says the narrator is "forever at the reader's elbow . . . hinting at the need for both detachment and sympathy."<sup>106</sup> The narrator feels the need to substantiate the story with facts such as



court records. Furthermore, Bohner says, the point of view Warren creates by this method gives "verisimilitude to events which contain a large element of the absurd."<sup>107</sup>

Still another study that attempts an explanation of point of view is that of L. Hugh Moore, whose idea is that Warren writes historical novels. However, some elements of what he calls the historical novel are the same as those described in this thesis as belonging to romance. He thus explains Warren's use of a real story told from such unusual perspectives: "we cannot understand history merely by careful research into the past, by detailed documentation, for it is greater than the sum of its parts."<sup>108</sup> Here, then, is that "theatre a little removed" and that historical perspective previously noted as important to romance. Here, too, is a kind of "border fiction" where the realms of the actual and the imaginary mingle, not only in the opposites of the protagonist's quest expressed as the world and the idea but also in the method of narration. Warren, like Hawthorne, allows the story to assume a form wherein things "shadow forth that world as it would look if it were acting out its own inner meaning."<sup>109</sup> This is what the narrator-historian calls Jeremiah's drama, a drama he must act out, then write out.

When one evaluates World Enough and Time as a romance in that it presents reconciliation of opposites in the protagonist's quest for identity and in that the form and theme are virtually inseparable, it becomes clear that Warren has used the subtitle as a definite statement as to how this book should be read. However, there are other elements of the romance which should also be pointed out in this work: the action is not realistic, it is highly colored, and

the characters have symbolic rather than realistic relationships to each other. It certainly is not realistic that Jeremiah should be preoccupied with avenging the betrayal of a woman he has never met nor that he should go to the elaborate, dramatic extent that he does. His conception of his mission is throughout histrionic; he plays his role in high dramatic style. For example, he takes with him a dark red ribbon when he sets out to kill Fort, saying that "'it is the color of blood and when you see it again it shall fly as a pennon for victory. . . . I am the only knight you have'" (p. 216).

Indeed his suicide attempt and subsequent escape are equally highly colored episodes. Old Dr. Burnham, Jeremiah's teacher, makes a long and painful trip to see Jeremiah in jail and tells him how much he has loved him. Jeremiah asks for his help in a suicide plot, so Burnham brings laudanum. Jeremiah is confident and writes out his burial instructions complete with epitaph. What he doesn't know is that Dr. Burnham has erred in failing to recognize the "emetic action" of this dose; therefore, Rachel and Jeremiah become violently ill but do not die. At this point, ironically, Wilkie Barron arrives with uniforms of militiamen, knocks unconscious the guards, enters the jail, cuts off Rachel's hair (too heavy to go under the cap that is part of her disguise), and helps them escape to the streets, where they pass for drunken militiamen. Then they are taken away by boat to the wilderness.

Next there is the wilderness episode itself in which little that is realistic may be found. La Grand Boz is what is left of a decadent pseudo-primitive culture; his only interests are power (represented by his land and the fact that all the women "belong"



to him) and sex. Here Jeremiah's death and mutilation, as well as the return of Rachel's body, are likewise sensational, gory details akin to gothic.

The return of the principals of the drama while Jeremiah is in this wilderness and the discovery of Wilkie Barron and Skrogg as the ultimate betrayers are symbolic. Wilkie, the man of the world, and Skrogg, the ultimate idealist, together betray Jeremiah. Bohner notes that these two are "projections" of Jeremiah's two worlds to be reconciled.<sup>110</sup> Other symbolic relationships are obvious. Rachel is the embodiment of Jeremiah's ideal. Colonel Fort is the father figure as well as the symbol of the past that must be killed so that Jeremiah might come to terms with his divided self.

Moreover, historical accuracy is not important in romance. Like Hawthorne's use of Brook Farm in The Blithedale Romance, Warren's use of a historical era and specific event does not mean that he has to stick closely to the real events. He changes the name of the protagonist from Jereboam Beauchamp to Jeremiah Beaumont, he changes the real-life hanging of the Beauchamps to Rachel's suicide and Jeremiah's attempted escape and brutal murder, and we have Warren's own explanation that he changes the political parties of the principals to suit his literary design. Moore explains how Warren uses history:

History is the raw material from which man must fashion, by an exercise of his will, human values and ideas; in so doing he must accept the evil and tragedy inherent in man's contact with history without sinking into it. That is, 'History is blind, but man is not.' But nothing in history exists in isolation; all people and things impinge, or can impinge, upon all other people and things. And this makes existence even more treacherous



to man, for it defines his responsibility as absolute and infinite. Man necessarily touches the web of history, and he can never know the full results of anything. Because written history can suggest to man only some, but by no means all, of the ramifications of actions in the past, in this sense it can be humbling. Warren's ideas on history are skillfully used in structuring the novels."<sup>111</sup>

Thus the romancer uses a real event to provide the "theatre a little removed," or according to Warren himself, "the writer of romance would use the actualities of the past as a means of validating and generalizing--at a distance for clarity of outline--the moral and psychological drama."<sup>112</sup>

Finally, World Enough and Time is romantic in its echoes of Coleridge. McDowell notes that when Warren identifies as one of the themes of the Rime of the Ancient Mariner the "'value-creating capacity' of the creative imagination, together with the disastrous results of its perverted use," Warren is identifying that same kind of ambiguity present in his works and especially so in World Enough and Time. McDowell explains, "Jeremiah Beaumont, initially misusing the creative imagination for his own selfish, criminal ends, attains final Grace for his tortured soul through its ministrating power. Sometimes . . . the perverted imagination--a fanatical, self-righteous vision--is so powerful as to annul all promptings of its creative counterpart and to blur completely an individual's discriminations between good and evil."<sup>113</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### FLOOD: A ROMANCE OF OUR TIME--THE ARTIST AS RECONCILER

In Warren's Flood, subtitled A Romance of Our Time, the reader finds romantic traits--romantic in the Hawthorne tradition--similar to those in World Enough and Time. On the most basic level there are romantic events bizarre and unrealistic; furthermore, there are themes common to World Enough and Time: haunting past guilt, the struggle of the individual to understand himself, and the struggle to understand the human experience. Here, too, as in World, the perspective itself is romantic. In World Enough and Time there was the journal of Beaumont's attempt to understand the self and the past--a journal presented by an outside narrator. Flood's perspective is that of a series of flashbacks of Brad Tolliver, who is trying to make some sense of his life and of his failure as a writer. Coupled with the perspective of Brad are those of film-maker Yasha Jones and (more limited) Maggie Fiddler and Lettice Tolliver.

The most Hawthornian aspect is, however, the idea of the creative process of self-discovery for the artist. In Flood, unlike World Enough and Time, the protagonist is an artist. In fact, two artists, Brad Tolliver the writer and Yasha Jones the film producer, are symbols of the opposites to be reconciled. One artist becomes reconciled to the world; the other only becomes aware of his need to do so.



In the Hawthorne tradition of romance, the struggle of the artist-protagonist really occurs on two levels; to create perfection or purity in art and to achieve self-knowledge. Usually the two quests blend. It is Brad's dilemma as a writer that he no longer can produce what is good; the reason that he cannot is that he cannot confront his secret self. Brad is haunted by his past, and he is unable to come to terms with it. The principal opposites created by this past and which Brad must reconcile include the world and the idea, the self and its relationship to humanity, and the artist and his creation. The protagonist himself near the end of Flood describes his situation:

For, over the years, he had run hither and yon, blaming Fiddlersburg because it was not the world and, therefore, was not real, and blaming the world because it was not Fiddlersburg and therefore was not real. For he had not trusted the secret and irrational life of man. . . . For he, being a man, had lived, he knew, in the grinning calculus of the done and the undone.

Therefore, in his inwardness, he said: I cannot find the connection between what I was and what I am. I have not found the human necessity.<sup>114</sup>

After a twenty-year absence, Brad returns to Fiddlersburg, Tennessee, to make a movie about his hometown about to be flooded because of a TVA project. Here he knows he will confront his past, a past in which his sister was raped at an orgy thrown by Brad, a past in which his brother-in-law killed the rapist and therefore has spent the past twenty years in prison. In the meantime his sister Maggie has taken in and cared for her aging, deranged mother-in-law and has continued to live in the old Fiddler home which the Tollivers had unscrupulously acquired. Knowing that he will likely encounter--starkly encounter--his past, Brad appears from the first



few pages a frustrated, somewhat disillusioned and disgruntled character bent on remaining detached and priding himself on his ability to return home without its having any profound effect on him.

The reader familiar with Warren knows at once as the protagonist drives along the concrete road, a familiar Warren motif, that the protagonist is headed for a symbolic trip, a trip into his past and an attempt to cope with that. Immediately one knows that Bradwell Tolliver will definitely be affected. As he views the Seven Dwarfs Motel, highly unrealistic, artificial and "modern" yet not without its realistic water, Brad wishes "that the water did not look real. What always worried you was to find something real in the middle of all the faking. It worried you, because if everything is fake then nothing matters" (p. 10). This reflection exposes one of Brad's main problems, his inability to separate reality and illusion. Immediately he is reminded of his first successful publication and of his divorce from Lettice, which he had "pretended to himself . . . had been a victory. . . . But waking in the night or sitting at the worktable unable to work, he had always known that it had been a defeat" (p. 17).

Driving to meet Yasha Jones at the airport, he has memories of Fiddlersburg's Old Izzie Goldfarb and vows to "take up" Izzie and bury him elsewhere before the flooding. These reflections and flashbacks are the first of many that comprise the book and must be understood as an integral part of romance, for as Brad reconstructs his past, the romance evolves. Warren's creating a protagonist of this sort, an artist who must come to terms with both his past and his art, is itself reminiscent of Hawthorne, for, as Porte explains,

in Hawthorne's romances the protagonists are all artists who desire a "fresh start."<sup>115</sup> Thus Warren employs a definitely Hawthornian technique, using the problem of art and the problem of guilt as "commingled themes."<sup>116</sup> As Brad is confronting his past, simultaneously he is trying to write the script for the movie about Fiddlersburg. Because Fiddlersburg people and events are so much a part of his past, the conflict becomes a double one, and his efforts at art are obstructed by his efforts to untangle his past and himself. Brad has come home to make a movie about the impending flood and not to confront his past. Yet his thoughts constantly shift to the past, and he cannot rid himself of frustration. "He was certainly sober now, this minute, sober enough not to have any illusion that his deft fingers were unsnarling the tangle of recollection" (p. 28). In fact, one might describe his entire experience as an inundation of memories, of guilt, of failure to return to involvement in the world. In this way, the title Flood takes on only one of several symbolic meanings. Brad is indeed flooded with experiences which he cannot put into proper perspective. Ultimately, like the town, this past will have to be flooded out.

As he returns to his home town, Brad's problem as an artist is that he cannot understand where he has gone wrong; at this stage in his life he is not successful. His earlier stories had been good and he had known it, but now he has a sense of having sacrificed--in fact, of having cheaply sold himself out--by writing for Hollywood. The crisis occurs because he cannot recapture that earlier sense of involvement. Yasha Jones, with whom he is to make the movie, requires precisely that, "'a depth and shimmer,' the uniqueness of place and



moment."<sup>117</sup> Yasha Jones expects the movie to capture feeling and, perhaps, a sense of community. Brad essentially is incapable of developing in the script something that is missing in his own life. Thus, what emerges as a kind of conflict to make a movie that both Yasha and Brad can accept serves as a medium for exposing the opposites in Brad and Yasha, who are also in some ways parallels.

Yasha, like Brad, has lost in marriage and to some extent cannot escape his past (especially the death of his wife in a car crash); he, too, has been to war; he, too, is an artist. Likewise, Yasha's point of view is important in the evolution of the romance for part of the story is clearly his attempt to understand himself better. However, the similarities between Yasha and Brad are not as important as the differences. Yasha eventually knows who he is, refuses to produce or accept art that is inferior by his standards, and by the end of the book has improved his understanding of self to the extent that he even finds love. One of the things Brad has never learned to do becomes apparent through Yasha. Yasha has learned to lose the self, to separate himself from the world, to be "self-critical and introspective" and in turn to develop excellence in art.<sup>118</sup> Here Yasha is similar to Hawthorne's Owen Warland ("The Artist of the Beautiful") who learns to create art without sacrificing to the materialistic and utilitarian world. Whereas Brad is intent on success as measured by Hollywood fame and money but discontent because he has not equalled his earlier real successes, Yasha is concerned with purity in art; once he has learned to separate himself from the world, he becomes reconciled to it. His

involvement with the people in Fiddlersburg, especially with Maggie, serves to re-enforce the idea of the universality of suffering and his place in it.<sup>119</sup>

This idea of the universality of suffering, of the understanding of the effect of the past on the present and the complicity of guilt is not a new theme in Warren. It is apparent in World and in most of Warren's other fiction and poetry. Furthermore, Warren adapts the form for presenting these ideas both from Hawthorne and from Coleridge.

Echoes of Coleridge appear in Yasha's self-awareness which is a kind of knowledge intricately tied to "knowledge in the form of love." According to Guttenberg, for Coleridge the reintegrated will "appears both as knowledge and as love."<sup>120</sup> In Warren's thinking there must be the fall "from the harmony of childhood" (or innocence and integration) into the "chaos of the world."<sup>121</sup> Then one must realize that that chaos is but "an extension of himself"; afterwards will come "involvement and responsibility, of freedom and direction, all of which define the reintegrated will and make possible a new world, an Eden which has been earned."<sup>122</sup> The contrast is apparent in what Yasha achieves and what Brad fails to achieve. By the end of the book Yasha and Maggie earn this Eden and live together on some exotic isle. In contrast, Brad only approaches a kind of awareness when he admits, "There is no country but the heart" (p. 368).

As one traces this process of self-knowledge for both Brad and Yasha, one notes that Yasha from the beginning is closer to this reintegration of will than Brad. Soon after his arrival in Fiddlersburg, Yasha asks himself, "What have I had?" (p. 90). Then



he answers:

So he told himself, that he had had most things. He had tasted the good things and found their exact worth. He had seen men do worthy things and had found that he had the gift to recognize their worth. He had worked hard and had earned a vision of the structure of the world. He had known danger and had admitted fear, and had survived both danger and fear. He had had, he thought wryly, fame, or what passed for fame in the world of time. He had had--and here he was aware of having to push himself to the admission, as though it were shameful or incriminating--love (p. 90).

The reader knows that Yasha expects a better understanding of himself. "He asked himself what he now had. . . . And now looking out westward over the moon-washed land, he felt his joy in the thought that now, even this late, he had stumbled upon this place, and its doom, and the place and doom would give him--in spite of, no, because of, his very abstraction from place and event--the perfect image of his pure and difficult joy" (p. 90). His involvement with Fiddlersburg leads him to a more complete self. "Yasha Jones had, for some years now, lived in the joy of abstraction--which means participation in all that is not yours, since you have lived past all that was yours" (p. 223). Yet by the end he has gone away with Maggie, somehow freeing both Maggie and himself.

Of more importance than Yasha's quest is that of Brad. In some ways it parallels Yasha's. Even though he feigns detachment, Brad is, of course, more intimately connected with Fiddlersburg than Yasha is. In the evolution of the romance at the same time that Yasha has been achieving a more integrated self, Brad has continued a similar struggle and concurrently tried to avoid it. All of his flashbacks are important and especially those about Lettice, his ex-wife.

Moreover, limited flashbacks from Lettice herself reveal likewise her inability to escape her own false being. Brad goes to Spain, and, alone, Lettice is subjected to flashes of her life, as she describes them, "plunging, mercilessly at her. . . . She thought that this reliving was a penance she would have to go through. . . . You could endure it if you clung to the thought that, somehow, sometime, at the end would be the blessedness" (pp. 120-21). She, too, longs for self-knowledge. Shortly thereafter Brad, back from battle, "would wake up at night and think about what had happened. He had been in battle. He had seen death. He had been afraid. . . . He had believed in the justice of his cause. So he did not know why he now woke in the night and felt that all his experience came to nothing" (p. 123). He concludes that he was "outside his own experience" (p. 123). Moreover, back in Fiddlersburg, Brad indeed feels alienated from his sister, from all who know him, from himself, and from his work. Once he tells Yasha, "I am here because I am full of angry lonesomeness" (p. 144).

Important in his attempt to reconcile self and to avoid this alienation are several encounters that he has even as he tries to write his script for the movie. Frequently in Warren's work the alienated individual in his self-knowledge quest encounters the primal forces or raw nature. It is not unexpected, then, that Brad will resort to such. Frog-Eye represents this primeval force. He is a backwoodsman given to free love, fishing, drinking. At one point Brad describes him as the "only free man left" (p. 102). In the past Frog-Eye has influenced Brad: it was he who revealed to Brad the circumstance of his father's crying in the mud, a scene that Brad



says caused him to leave Fiddlersburg. (Brad had thought his father went into the woods to drink and to take the women available.) Again Brad seeks out Frog-Eye, and Frog-Eye tells what he really saw on the night when Cal Fiddler shot the rapist. Frog-Eye reveals that he himself had almost raped Lettice and killed Brad. Upon this revelation Brad realizes his own responsibility for the orgy years ago and acknowledges that even Frog-Eye is "capable of moral responsibility through a sense of shared humanity."<sup>123</sup>

Another encounter important in Brad's quest is his reaction to the developments in the minister's attempt to get the black criminal to pray before he is executed. Brad's hopeless plight is dramatized when the reader learns that the protagonist desperately longs for anything with real substance: "For he yearned for the simplicity of purpose, the integrity of life, the purity of heart, even if that purity was the purity of hate, that a nigger must have" (p. 245).

Still another episode is significant in this quest to know himself, to free himself of guilt, to admit his complicity in the ill fate of all his family; he becomes involved with the lovely, blind Leontine Purtle, whom he jokingly calls the Lady of Shalott. (That label in itself should be noted for its romantic connotations.) His illusion is that she is a pure woman. Furthermore, he fancies that because of her blindness Leontine is isolated from reality.<sup>124</sup> He conceives of her as a pure ideal, someone perhaps in need of protecting. In a sense, she is the means of rationalizing and prolonging his own feelings or confirming what he wants to believe about his movie script and about his own lack of involvement. Just before his sexual relations with her, he tells himself, "But now, as

again he touched his fingers to his face, he knew where he was. And who he was. There had been a promise in that moonlight that spread over all the world westward without end. Where had that promise gone? . . . Slowly, he decided that there must be a way toward quietness" (p. 302). His idealism becomes obvious in this thought: "Something could be redeemed. Everything could be redeemed" (p. 302). It is possible at this moment that, like Jeremiah Beaumont in World Enough and Time, Brad wants to be Leontine's champion. He fantasizes during that motel episode that they are outside the world. Yet he is dramatically brought back to himself, his illusion shattered, when he learns that Leontine is not a virgin; indeed she has had numerous sexual affairs and comes to him mechanically prepared. Barnett Guttenberg notes that Brad instantly becomes cynical and when he says, "'I like you just fine, girlie,'" he considers her merely a "part of the corrupt world of experience."<sup>125</sup> The entire episode is indeed one more reflection of his idealism.

Neither the direct nor the vicarious experiences can teach Brad who he is although each one--with Frog-Eye, Leontine, the condemned man--makes its impact on him. Furthermore, Brad, if he had made himself do so, might well have learned from Cal Fiddler, who escapes from prison and on the verge of murder again tells Brad, "'Listen, and I'll tell you that time is the measure of life and life is the measure of time, and if you have not sat all day and all night and tried to measure those--those incommensurables--to measure them by each other--then you don't know anything about them. And not anything about yourself'" (p. 331). One believes that Cal Fiddler has somehow learned his relationship to himself and to others when later he tells



Brad what life is: "a sort of medium in which the you exists, like a fish exists in water, is beautiful. This is the queer part--that the you lying there crying and wanting to die suddenly knows, at the same time, that life is beautiful" (p. 344). As one observes these steps in Brad's identity quest, it becomes clear that here are several prominent traits of Hawthorne's romances: the isolation, the rebellion, the "solitary confrontation of primal forces," and the necessity for re-defining identity.<sup>126</sup>

In Brad's unintentional attempts to know himself he experiences the same problems that he has with the movie script. Yasha has called the script "expert" but has rejected it because he knows that it isn't really Brad. Brad understands that Yasha really is derogatory with the term expert. Technically it is expert; Brad himself is confident that there is not "a bolt out of place or a nut loose" (p. 285). He is proud of "the wonderful clean shape of it" (p. 285). Yet as he awaits Yasha's reaction, he is aware of the vast difference between them; he expects Yasha to say it stinks. Brad's feelings about the eighty-page script reflect exactly his failure to reconcile those aspects with which he has been struggling in his personal life: the world and the idea, the sense of humanity and his part in it. "'It is expert,'" Yasha Jones had said. 'You have done nothing more expert. . . . But . . . it is not you. It is only that you who is expert'" (p. 286). Yasha goes on to explain that Brad's script is not "freedom in a beyondness of what happened. Nor is it a plunge into what happened to find freedom. It is, to be blunt . . . a parody of what happened" (p. 287). What is missing is "the feeling," Fiddlersburg (p. 287). It is as if Brad has avoided

coming to grips with feeling; feeling is painful for him--what he cannot afford to have--for it will necessitate some kind of involvement, some kind of confession of his complicity in the evil in the world.

Yasha has explained to Brad that for artists the "last sin" is the "sin of the corruption of consciousness" (p. 113). What has happened is that he has allowed his "uncorrupted consciousness" which produced his only real success to become "romantic idealism."<sup>127</sup> Brad, according to Yasha, has definitely sinned in this way, allowing his distorted view of himself and the world to be paralled in work that he pretends to himself is successful but in truth has no feeling and therefore no substance.

Thus in the tradition of Hawthorne, Warren makes the artist-protagonist struggle on two levels; to achieve purity in art and to achieve self-knowledge. In Flood the two levels merge, and the reader feels at the end that though Brad has not become one with the world he is at least aware of the need to become reconciled. While other characters have come to grips with their past--Yasha, Maggie, Cal, and Lettice--Brad only approaches this identity.

In Flood, in addition to the primary romantic aspect of the artist in search of self and in search of pure art, there are enough of the purely "surface" romantic qualities to justify the subtitle. Of course there are realistic events; Brad rejects his hometown and stays away in an attempt to erase suffering; he deliberately does not stay in touch with his sister, to whom he has brought pain; he marries twice (both unorthodox marriages by Fiddlersburg's standards); and he sacrifices his talent to become a Hollywood success.



However, juxtaposed to these realistic events are a number of improbable occurrences that one accepts as romantic: Cal Fiddler breaks jail after Brad and Yasha have discussed such a break as a feature of their movie. (It becomes real, as Brad says.) Cal attempts to kill Yasha; Brad intervenes and is shot only to have Cal act quickly to save his life. Brad's script is shelved as a result of his hospitalization, but he sticks around anyway to see Fiddlersburg in its last days. Yasha and Maggie find ideal love and move away to some exotic isle where Yasha pursues his pure art. Lettice experiences a religious conversion and works in a nursing home. Finally all of the principals in the race against the flooding of Fiddlersburg win--Mother Fiddler dies, Brother Potts conducts the final services, Pretty-Boy is executed. Such events in a novel could not be expected for they seem to be contrived, sentimental, and melodramatic. However, they are acceptable and even expected in a romance.

These improbabilities, in addition to the primary aspect of reconciliation of opposites on several levels, make it clear that Flood must be read as a romance in the tradition of Hawthorne. Certainly there are to be reconciled the past and the present as represented by Brad's need to confront his past (as well as the need of Maggie, Yasha, Lettice and Cal to do so.) For Brad especially there is the guilt which haunts him--guilt about his causing his sister and brother-in-law pain because of the murder and guilt about sacrificing his talent as an artist. As Porte explains, this striving for self-knowledge is a main tenet in Hawthorne's concept of

romance. Brad, then is like Hawthorne's protagonist who, in confronting his secret self, "composes the romance of his own being."<sup>128</sup>

Brad's quest also reveals another pair of opposites to be reconciled, reality and illusion or the world and the idea. Though he tries to convince himself otherwise, his world is an illusion throughout the better part of the book, but finally his idealism gives way, at least in part, to acknowledging the world as it is. His art, as Yasha points out to him, lacks feeling just as in life Brad lacks the proper human interaction and awareness of his responsibility. Brad must learn that man is not capable of perfection; neither can man deny responsibility for his actions.

Warren in the Hawthorne tradition makes form interact with and work for his theme. Man must accept his complicity in the guilt (or sin) of mankind in order to live in the world, and he must also understand the world in order to create art even if the world fails to appreciate it. Alienation becomes a prerequisite to accepting responsibility in humanity. Thus Warren uses what he himself identifies as the "obsessive concern" of Hawthorne's romances, the need to achieve self-knowledge. This identity quest is revealed in a narrative that is in large part reverie, nightmare and fantasy; the action, as in Hawthorne's romances, occurs in "not so much a place as a state of mind--the borderland of the human mind where the actual and the imaginary intermingle."<sup>129</sup>



## CONCLUSION

That Warren was interested both in Hawthorne's romances and in Coleridge's theories we know. What classifies World Enough and Time and Flood as true romances, duly identified by their subtitles, is this blending of ideas derived from Coleridge and found in Hawthorne, the emphasis upon the artist as a reconciler of opposites. This idea derives from Coleridge's definition of a poet as one who reconciles opposites through the synthetic power of the imagination:

This power . . . put in action by the will and understanding . . . reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.<sup>130</sup>

As Allen Tate has observed, Coleridge attempted to define poetry in several ways, distinguishing it from scientific work, explaining its effect on the reader, and--failing in the previous attempts--finally settling on this definition of the poet as a reconciler of opposites.<sup>131</sup> This idea is certainly at work in the romances of Hawthorne, who not only reconciles opposites in form--on

some "foothold between fiction and reality"--but also reconciles opposites in theme, the "truth of the human heart." The most important of these opposites are the past and the present and the artist and society.

Hawthorne frequently uses as the protagonist of his major long works and his short stories the artist in search of purity. As the artist works toward that end, he necessarily must come to understand the self--usually involving an understanding of the effect of the past on the present as well as the problems of good and evil, of the real and the ideal, of the aesthetic and the utilitarian, and of alienation and humanity. The quest becomes, then, multi-dimensional, and the romance becomes the medium for reconciling these. In "Rappacinni's Daughter," for example, Rappacinni in his pursuit of pure science or pure knowledge (the ideal) alienates both himself and his daughter Beatrice. Millicent Bell calls this story Hawthorne's "most powerful statement of the ambiguity of knowledge," for Beatrice, "like the plants in her father's garden, is the result of an 'adultery' of intentions, a tragic mixture of innocence and corruption."<sup>132</sup> The epitome of vibrant life to those who desire her, she breathes death to those who come close enough. As Bell observes, Hawthorne is careful to point out the pure scientist's relation to the artist in search of the ideal by describing Rappacinni, who looks at Beatrice and Giovanni "'as might an artist who should spend his life in achieving a picture . . . and finally be satisfied with his success."<sup>133</sup> "Ethan Brand," subtitled "A Chapter from an Abortive Romance," emphasizes similar conflicts between the real and ideal and between alienation and involvement.



In his quest for the Unpardonable Sin, Ethan Brand completely alienates himself from mankind and learns only too late that the Unpardonable Sin "is a sin that grew within my own breast. . . . The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims" (p. 1189). Though he comes to knowledge, there is no reconciliation with mankind. No one understands. In their desire for the ideal, both Rappaccinni and Ethan Brand necessarily "barter their humanity."<sup>134</sup> Moreover, to return briefly to "The Artist of the Beautiful," one notes that the artist in search of purity, Owen Warland, never does gain the world's approval of his art. Though he might very well have compromised and sacrificed by exposing the monetary value of his intricate and beautiful butterfly to Annie and her family to gain their approval, he refuses to do so. Even the ruin of his creation is no ruin. Whereas Owen earlier had longed for Annie's (the world's) approval and had been somewhat inhibited in his efforts toward perfection, now reconciled to the world's view, he can create and then watch his creation physically destroyed without its destroying him.

Blithedale Romance is an expansion of Hawthorne's idea of the artist in conflict with society; moreover, it also presents the opposites of past and present and of reality and idealism. Though the reader eventually realizes that he is seeing the events unfold as Coverdale the artist-narrator remembers them and as he colors them in retrospect, there is nevertheless a developing story of Coverdale himself. As he recalls and weighs events involving Zenobia, Priscilla, Hollingsworth, and Old Moodie, Coverdale lets the

reader in on his own struggle with involvement in life and with the recognition of reality. Essentially his story is his effort to sort the real and the unreal and to find his place in life. His reconstruction of events that occurred twelve years earlier is the romance. What appears to be a reflection on the characters of Blithedale turns out to be Coverdale's own quest. The theme and the form merge as both reconcile opposites.

Warren makes the genre of romance work for him in much the same way. For Warren "the moral concern and the aesthetic concern are aspects of the same activity, the creative activity."<sup>135</sup> In the broadest sense, naturalism and idealism must be reconciled. These tensions must be brought into proper perspective for presentation of Warren's most important theme, the quest for self-knowledge. Strict adherence to naturalism would deny man's responsibility and involvement in humanity and, moreover, his understanding of that involvement. Uncritical idealism, with its emphasis on a morally integrated self, would fail to account for the darker aspects of self and ultimately the redemptive effect of guilt. Finding no clear-cut answers in science or religion or tradition alone but intensely acknowledging the need for the integration of self, Warren turned quite naturally to the mode of the romance in the tradition of Hawthorne. For Warren, as for Hawthorne, the past is an important part of self-discovery--not so much the past with its actualities but the meaning derived from that past for the individual. Out of the individual's reconstruction of that past emerges his understanding of the human experience. Commonly, the artist, alienated from society, becomes Warren's person through whom



such a reconciliation is established. The romance, removed from strict adherence to the actual and literal yet providing more than mere fantasy, sensationalism or escape and avoiding pure allegory, is his mode.

World Enough and Time is a romance in this tradition. Though Jeremiah is not an artist, he is alienated; he cannot separate the world from the idea, and in his pursuit of the good (pure idealism) he resorts to evil, to violence and murder. Eventually he discovers, through reconstructing the various stages of thinking that the world would redeem the idea and vice versa, that his real crime is the crime of self. In the telling of his story Jeremiah comes to knowledge. Form and theme merge in the same way that they do in Hawthorne's works.

More similar to Hawthorne's form is the form of Flood. There the protagonist is an artist in search of purity in art; his failure as an artist is paralleled by his failure as a husband, a brother, a human being in general. Like Jeremiah in World Enough and Time, Brad Tolliver must reconcile the world and the idea, and he must also reconcile the self and its relation to humanity. Among the truths he learns by reflection on the past is responsibility for his actions. Before he can return to his writing as it was in his early successes, he must find the self, reintegrate it. Among other aspects of the self, he must recognize and deal with his idealism. Moreover, as Yasha Jones tells him, without feeling, his art is nothing; indeed he is nothing.

What Warren's characters eventually realize in their quest for knowledge and self-identity, a process that creates the romance, is

that there must be a reconciliation, a reintegration of aspects of the self. The self must yield neither to complete belief in the world nor to complete belief in the idea, neither to blind worship of the past nor to rejection and denial of it, neither to denial of responsibility nor to belief in perfectability. Indeed Warren's poem "Masts At Dawn" summarizes it all: "We must try/To love so well the world that we may believe, in the end, in God."<sup>136</sup>



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature, revised by C. Hugh Holman (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 318.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: Random House, 1937), p. 243. Subsequent references to Hawthorne's works are from this edition and will be cited in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Joel Porte, The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and James (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), p. 95.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. x.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>15</sup>Frederick C. Crews, "A New Reading of 'The Blithedale Romance,'" American Literature, 29 (1957), 151.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>17</sup>Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1957), p. 12.

18Chase, p. 12.

19Ibid., p. 13.

20Ibid.

21Ibid.

22Ibid., p. 14.

23Ibid., p. x.

24Ibid.

25Ibid., p. xi.

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(New York: Capricorn Books, 1969), p. 247.

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33Ibid., p. 9.

34Ibid., pp. 10, 12.

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Oxford University Press, 1961), p. ix.

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38Ibid.

39Ibid., pp. ix-x.

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41Ibid., p. xiv.

42Ibid., p. 353.

43Ibid., p. 354.



44Randall Stewart, "Dreiser and the Naturalistic Heresy," Virginia Quarterly Review, 34 (Winter, 1958), 100.

45Ibid., p. 102.

46Ibid.

47John C. Stubbs, "Hawthorne's 'The Scarlet Letter': The Theory of the Romance and the Use of the New England Situation," PMLA, 83 (October, 1968), 1439.

48Ibid., p. 1440.

49Ibid., p. 1443.

50Stewart, p. 116.

51Ibid.

52Authorship of this unsigned essay verified by personal letter to Ann Conner from Robert Penn Warren, August 23, 1977.

53Robert Penn Warren, "Nathaniel Hawthorne," in American Literature: The Makers and the Making, eds. Cleanth Brooks, R. W. B. Lewis and Robert Penn Warren (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), I, 432-33.

54Ibid., p. 436.

55Ibid., pp. 432-33.

56Ibid., p. 437.

57Ibid., p. 458.

58Ibid., pp. 458-59.

59Ibid., p. 459.

60Ibid.

61Robert Penn Warren, "The Use of the Past" in A Time to Hear and Answer: Essays for the Bicentennial Season, preface by Taylor Littleton, the Franklin Lectures in the Sciences and Humanities, 4th series (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1977), p. 28.

62Ibid.

63Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>64</sup>Robert Penn Warren, "Knowledge and the Image of Man," Sewanee Review, 63 (Spring, 1955), rpt. in All the King's Men: A Critical Handbook, eds. Maurice Beebe and Leslie A. Field (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1966), p. 58.

<sup>65</sup>Robert Penn Warren, "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading," 1945-46, rpt. in Selected Essays, by Robert Penn Warren (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1951), p. 253.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 254-55.

<sup>67</sup>Warren, interview at apartment of Ralph Ellison, American Academy in Rome, in Writers At Work: The Paris Review Interviews, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: The Viking Press, 1958), p. 188.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>70</sup>Warren, interview February 8, 1966, in First Person: Conversations on Writers and Writing with Glenway Wescott, John Dos Passos, Robert Penn Warren, John Updike, John Barth, Robert Coover, ed. Frank Gado (Schenectady, New York: Union College Press, 1973), p. 65.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-67.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>73</sup>Alfred Kazin, Partisan Review, (Spring, 1959), p. 315, in A Library of Literary Criticism: Modern American Literature, 4th ed., eds. Dorothy Nyren Curley, Maurice Kramer and Elaine Fialka Kramer (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1969), III, 320.

<sup>74</sup>John Edward Hardy, "Robert Penn Warren's Double Hero," Virginia Quarterly Review, 36 (Autumn, 1960), 587-88.

<sup>75</sup>William Van O'Connor in A Southern Vanguard, ed. Allen Tate, Prentice Hall, 1947, p. 92, in Curley, Kramer and Kramer, p. 315.

<sup>76</sup>John M. Bradbury, The Fugitives: A Critical Account (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), p. 214.

<sup>77</sup>S. T. Coleridge, "Chapter XIV," Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross (1817; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1965), II, 12.

<sup>78</sup>John W. Rathbun, "Philosophy, 'World Enough and Time,' and The Art of the Novel," Modern Fiction Studies, 6 (Spring, 1960), p. 52.



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91Ibid., p. 7.

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96Charles H. Bohner, Robert Penn Warren, Twayne's United States Authors Series (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 115.

97Frank, p. 252.

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99Charles Anderson, "Violence and Order in the Novels of Robert Penn Warren," in Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South, eds. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 224.

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105Ibid.

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108L. Hugh Moore, Jr., Robert Penn Warren and History: "The Big Myth We Live" (Paris: Mouton, The Hague, 1970), p. 57.

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112Warren, "Nathaniel Hawthorne," p. 458.

113Frederick P. W. McDowell, "Robert Penn Warren's Criticism," Accent, 15 (1955), 174.

114Robert Penn Warren, Flood: A Romance of Our Time (1960; rpt. New York: Signet, The New American Library, 1964), p. 367. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited in the text.

115Porte, p. 96.

116Ibid.

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- 118 Allen Shepherd, "Character and Theme in R. P. Warren's 'Flood,'" Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, 9 (1967), 96.
- 119 Ibid.
- 120 Guttenberg, p. 160.
- 121 Ibid., p. 162.
- 122 Ibid., pp. 162-63.
- 123 Ibid., p. 134.
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- 125 Ibid.
- 126 Hoffman, p. 354.
- 127 Arthur Mizener, "The Uncorrupted Consciousness," Sewanee Review, 72 (1964), 694.
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- 129 Chase, p. 19.
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- 133 Ibid., p. 22.
- 134 Ibid., p. 71.
- 135 Warren, "A Poem of Pure Imagination," p. 253.
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Born in Lynchburg, Virginia, on June 14, 1944, the eldest of three children to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas William Cyrus, I was educated in the public schools of Campbell County, Virginia. I entered Lynchburg College in September, 1962, and received a B. A. degree magna cum laude in English in June of 1966. In the summer of 1974, I began graduate study at Longwood College.

I began teaching in Roxboro, North Carolina, in 1966 and moved to Halifax County the following year. Since 1967 I have taught twelfth grade college preparatory English at Halifax County Senior High School and have served as head of the English Department since 1970.

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My husband James, our six-year-old daughter Melanie, and I reside on White Oak Drive in South Boston, Virginia.

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