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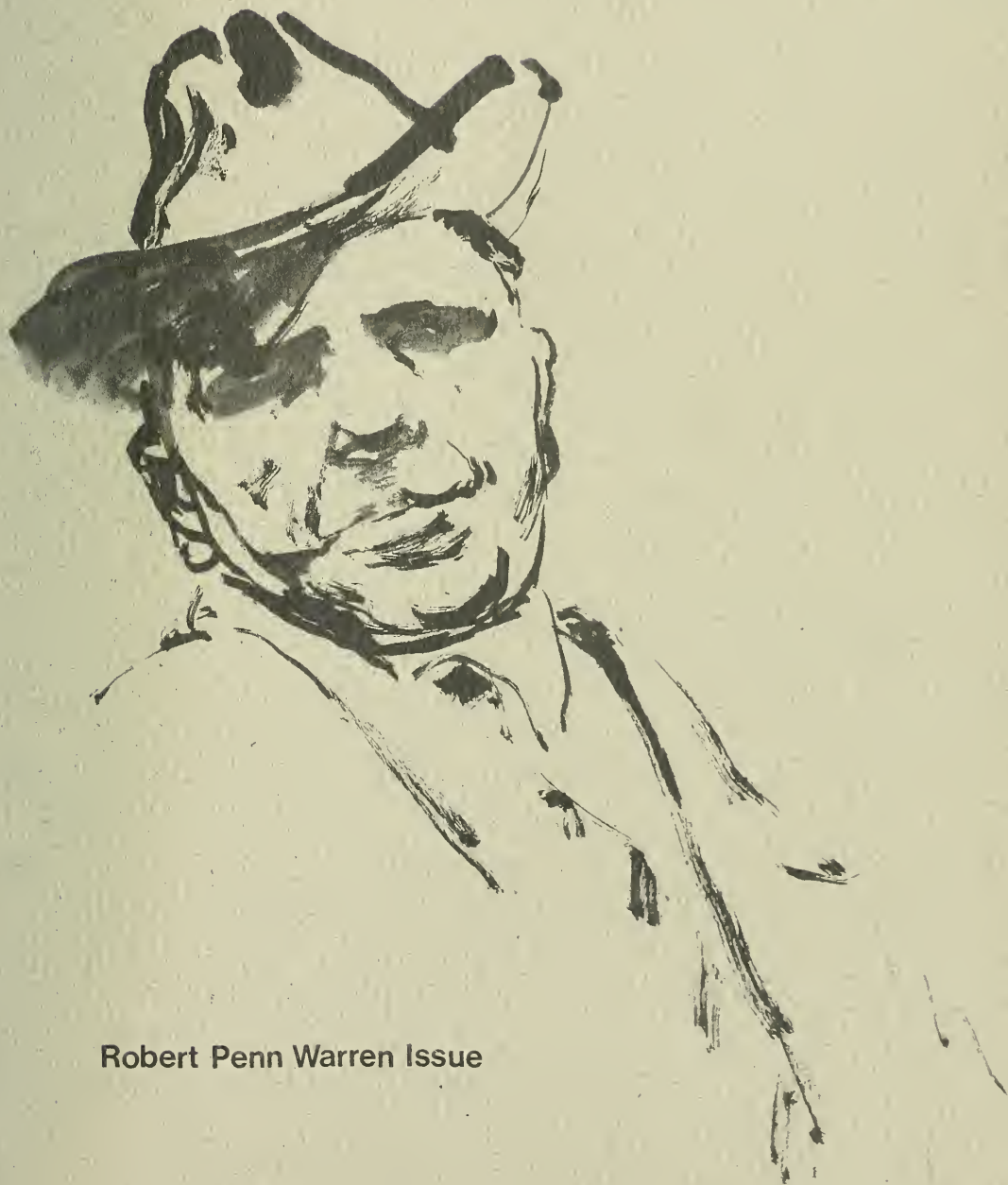
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Four Quarters




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ONE DOLLAR



Robert Penn Warren Issue



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VOL. XXI, No. 4

MAY, 1972

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Front cover: "Willie Stark"

Back cover: "Cherry Tree in the Green Glen"
by James Hanes

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Marginalia . . .

—what
Is man but his passion?
—Audubon: A Vision

Over the forty years of his career as poet, novelist, critic, teacher, editor, and essayist, Robert Penn Warren's passion has been knowledge.

In his seminal 1946 essay on William Faulkner, Mr. Warren spoke of the challenge Faulkner's technique presented to criticism, describing him as "an incorrigible and restless experimenter." For this reason, he notes, critical readings of Faulkner to date had too often been "hasty," "unscholarly," and "superficial."

It is ironic that Warren's comments on Faulkner should apply so well to himself. In his desire to know—to know himself and man's relationships to the human community, to time, and to nature—Warren too has been "an incorrigible and restless experimenter."

In "moving toward values and modifying, testing and exfoliating older values," Robert Penn Warren has moved from one literary genre to another, from one narrative technique to another, from one style of verse to another. In his restless seeking he has often confounded critics who have tried to fix him "in a formulated phrase" and leave him "pinned and wriggling on the wall" under such labels as historical novelist, Southern writer, or perpetrator of "metrical high jinks."

He remains a writer personifying the quest of our age: the search for a vision of the self capable of enduring time and tragedy. In the tradition of Hawthorne and Faulkner, he too writes of "the truth of the human heart," aware that "The recognition of complicity is the beginning of innocence . . . And the death of the self is the beginning of selfhood./All else is surrogate of hope and destitution of spirit."

* * *

This special issue of Four Quarters brings together some of the critical voices that have pioneered in the perceptive reading of Warren's poetry and prose. It is but part of a continuing effort to assess his significant contributions to American literature. To borrow again from Warren on Faulkner: such a collection "will be of slight service to (Warren), who, as much as any writer of our place and time can rest in confidence. He can afford to wait. But can we?"

—J. J. K.

A Conversation with Robert Penn Warren

• Ruth Fisher

(The following conversation was taped in Robert Penn Warren's office at Silliman College, Yale University, on November 18, 1970. Early this year, Mr. Warren reviewed the typescript, aiding me greatly in preparing a draft suitable for publication. He was most gracious and helpful at every step, and I want to express my deep appreciation here.—R.F.)

4Q: Both Leonard Casper (*The Dark and Bloody Ground*) and Victor Strandberg (*In Colder Fire*) apparently feel that many critics have approached your works unprepared and with very little perception of your method of persuasion and what you are really trying to say. Therefore, what we find in the evaluations of your works are many incomplete explanations and inadequate critical analyses by some critics. I wonder if you could give me a basic framework that could be used in the approach to your works? Are there some general assumptions about man that you feel are essential to an understanding of your works?

RPW: Let me say this. In general—and I have certain reservations about what I am going to say—if a man's work does not deliver something, there is no discussion about it that is going to make it deliver. Now, discussion, or background information, can sometimes make it possible to go beyond what had been written in the work. But you can't simply talk a good game of bridge; you have to *play* the game of bridge. Neither your intentions nor the theoretical assumptions behind your work are really relative to the work, in one sense. The work has to deliver itself. So you can't undertake to apologize for your work and try to make the apology take the place of your work. All work does need context to be fully understood. But context doesn't necessarily make the work any better. It may lead to fuller understanding, but it may lead to a fuller understanding of the errors of your work, the failures of your work.

But to answer the question, I don't want to put it on the level of apology. And I don't know how I would go about saying that there is some particular image of man that I have in mind. The books that I have written, for better or for worse, are a record of the various kinds of images of man that I have had at different times. Of course, I have changed my

notions, or at least changed my feelings about my notions along the way.

And this leads me to another point. I should think that in most cases, in most cases, anyway—I don't want to be dogmatic about this—the process of writing the novel or the poem, is a process of trying to find out what the writer thinks. He is not working deductively from a highly articulated image, a careful scheme of values; he is trying to find the values, find the ideas, by a process of trial and error, as it were. Life is a process of trial and error about our own values. We may have certain assumptions about our values. We do have them. But at a certain age, say 21, we feel one way; by the time we reach 31, we feel quite different. Our ideas have changed. They may be more firmly established by experience; they may be completely blown up by experience. Certainly, they won't be the same; they can't be the same. They will have gone through, to a greater or lesser degree, the test of experience. They can't be the same after just a little bit of living.

And the writing is the process in which the imagination takes the place of literal living; by moving toward values and modifying, testing and exfoliating older values. So, since I see the whole process as one of continuing experiment with values, I don't know how to answer that question about setting up a framework at any given moment. My ideas have changed so much over the years. My feelings have certainly changed about many things.

But critics have to set up this contextual world in order to understand the writer in question. They do this in order for the reader to better understand the work of the writer in question. By setting up the contexts, the critics may come to *like* the writer less or may come to *like* him more. But there is no guarantee that fuller understanding brings one to fuller liking.

My notion of criticism is that its purpose is to deliver the reader back to the work. All the study *about* a writer or a work, all the analyses of background, of ideas, of the structure of a work—the purpose of all this is to prepare the reader to confront the work with innocence, with simplicity, with directness. The purpose is to remove difficulties that stand between the reader and the work. Otherwise, it is busy-work and nothing more—and a job, sometimes with a pay check.

4Q: Don't you find that this happens quite often, that a critic or even a teacher will bring something into a poem or a piece of fiction that is totally irrelevant to the work being examined?

RPW: Everybody is going to make this error sooner or later. But you have to take the risk of making it. Because a critic or a teacher of literature has to try to set up this contextual world for the work in order to see the work in different perspectives. Some of these are bound to be wrong along the way.

But to return to what I was about to say. This process may lead to false tracks, but even the best tracks, the most right and fruitful, have

to be forgotten in the end.

For example, let's take a simple case. Clearly, to read Shakespeare we must learn something about the language he wrote in. We study a book on the subject. We read the footnotes to the plays. Our purpose in doing this preliminary work is to be able to read Shakespeare naturally, simply, innocently—without being *aware* that we are using a learned language. You are not worrying about the nature of the language you are dealing with. In so far as you have done your homework, you can forget the homework. It is in your bloodstream and you are simply reading Shakespeare. This is the innocence that comes from knowledge. The purpose of criticism is to bring the reader to that happy condition. It's rarely ever achieved, of course. Perhaps never achieved. But it's the ideal we aim at.

4Q: Has being a teacher of literature had much influence on the way you write? Does it, for example, encourage an analytical approach to structure?

RPW: This is a question that in one sense is unanswerable. Because I can't say what I would be if I weren't me. I don't want to dodge it on that basis, though. I won't dodge it at all. I'll try to answer. I would have to answer by saying how I would like to go at it, and how I trust that I do sometimes.

To take a preliminary notion, whatever we do—teaching or reading criticism or practicing it a little—has an effect on us. It gets inside us. We can't throw it away, except by a feat of total amnesia. Even then it's lurking in your brain somewhere, and you are different because of its presence. But to turn to the general question of how ideas may affect the process of writing—we have to recognize that they can appear at different levels of consciousness. Some writers, and some very good ones indeed, are intensely self-conscious in the practice of their art. They bring a great deal to bear at the level of “knowing.” For better or for worse, I try to forget, not remember, what little I know. I try to “feel” into the structure of my story. Literally, I want to get the kinetic sense of the plot movement, of the swell and fall of action, of the intense moment and the relaxed moment. But—and this is a big *but*—when things begin to feel wrong, that is when I try to analyze the reason why things are wrong. Finding out the reason for the wrongness will not give you rightness, but it clears the way, perhaps, for rightness to come. In general, however, I try to immerse myself in the immediate concerns of the thing I'm doing. You have to pray that what you have learned and thought in the past will, by instinct as it were, bear fruit now. But, of course, once you have a draft, you must become “critic”—must try to estimate, analyze, explain to yourself. That is in so far as things have gone wrong.

It's the same—learning to write, if you can ever say you have “learned”—as learning to drive a tennis ball. A coach can look at the action and analyze it into various stages, say body position, placement of

feet at the moment of contact, grip on racket, shoulder position, etc. All these things can be separated out as problems. Now the coach may say, "Do it again, your racket is wrong, you turned your arm too far down." In other words, he is trying to analytically break up the action. The coach wants the player to know intellectually each phase of action, because the player, left to himself and acting *naturally*, has failed to strike the ball correctly. The player failed naturally. Therefore he analyzes the failure by taking the parts of action and locating the source of error. The player may drill himself on these actions and, bang, the ball comes and he has a beautiful return. But when he hit the ball, he was not thinking; he had gone beyond thinking; it was in the bloodstream. There is total unawareness in the moment of action.

4Q: Is that how you write?

RPW: That's how you want to write. Writing is not caught in a single motion like a tennis ball. You can stop and look back and assess as you go along. But the principle is the same, I think. Certainly if you study four or five years in college and then take two years to write a certain book, you are not trying to remember everything that you learned in college. You are trying to write a good book. You think about the actual process as it exists in the moment of action. Now the moment of action in writing a book is longer than that of striking a tennis ball, but the parallels are real in the significant moment of action. You want to be able to have the right flash of "inspiration." Where does it come from? It comes from all of you, all of the things you have learned, the kind of man you have made yourself by the time you are 25 or 50. You have lived into this moment of inspiration. Let's take the case where people get total inspiration, like a revelation from on high.

Take the case of Coleridge and "Kubla Khan" and the laudanum. Coleridge takes the laudanum and goes to sleep and has a dream. The dream is both visual and verbal. He sees the things and the words are there, too. He is awakened by a man at the door, and he writes it all down. That's a lovely way to write poetry. But this doesn't happen often. How did it happen?

Let's take the case of a famous chemist. Kekulé had been working for two or three years trying to arrive at a formula for the benzene ring. He couldn't work it out. He tried intellectually for several years. One night, after working on his chemistry textbooks in a stuffy room, he fell asleep over his work. He had a nightmare about snakes biting each other. He woke up with the snake images in his head, and said, "My God! that's the formula." He spent the rest of the night working out the mathematics for the snake formula.

4Q: (Interruption) And you do this, in your writing?

RPW: Now, wait, now, don't rush me.

What happens to Coleridge and what happens to Kekulé: Coleridge can dream a poem, the chemist can dream a formula; but Coleridge could

never dream a chemical formula and Kekulé could never dream "Kubla Khan." The dream can only come out of the person who owns the dream already. The dream work is done on the material that is already available in the man. There can be no revelation to a man to whom the revelation would not be a summing up of his own experience. His conscious, intellectual efforts may have failed to solve his problem (or write his poem), but the solution thanks to all his past history and presumably recent efforts too, is "in" him and emerges fulfilled. There's nothing irrational about such a process, for the end product—that of Kekulé's formula or Coleridge's poem—embodies the law of the medium appropriate to it. This can happen because we, at the conscious and the unconscious levels, are all one piece.

Now what I am trying to get at is this, in so far as writing is concerned. You try by all your strength to be rational, to study, and to think (as well as to be open, receptive) to prepare yourself for the moment when all your work will—apparently—become superfluous. When the idea will take over, effortlessly. But as Pasteur put it, Fortune favors only the prepared spirit. The idea "comes" to him. These ideas come mysteriously. You can't say I'm going to have an idea now. You have to be in the condition to have an idea. The trick in writing is to get in a certain condition to have an idea. In other words, it won't come by logical manipulation. You have to find what for you may lead you to these happy moments. You have to learn the art of blankness. And learn to "live right." Whatever that is for you.

4Q: Do you feel that the creativity required by you as a major poet and fiction writer has enhanced your role as a critic? Is criticism as an art as creative as fiction or poetry?

RPW: You have two questions there.

It seems to me there would be one kind of advantage for a critic in having some experience of the art he was criticizing, some inside experience. For certain kinds of criticism it would be almost essential, and for others almost irrelevant. It depends upon the kind of criticism you are talking about. Let me interrupt myself to say that there are many kinds of criticism, and this is where the problem really gets a little difficult.

Any kind of criticism that has to do with the nature of the process by which a work comes to exist is bound to profit from some experience with the business of creation. Any kind of criticism that has to do with the nature of the thing created in the sense of its technical aspects, its formal aspects, is bound to derive value from such experience.

Paul Wiess, a professor of aesthetics lately retired from this University, undertook to dabble in all the arts in order to get some sense of the inside feel of the art, the nature of art. He studied dancing, for instance. Now Paul dancing is not going to become the great event of the ballet season, I can promise you that. And Paul painting pictures is not going

to drive Michelangelo off the Sistine Chapel ceiling. But Paul wants to get a feel of the art in order to understand the relationship between the hand and the thing the hand did. These are attempts to heal the gap between man's rational nature and man's emotional nature, artistic nature. And physical nature, too, for all arts depend on that physical base.

It is inevitable that if you work seriously, or dabble unseriously, in an art, it is bound to have some value for whatever criticism you do. It won't guarantee that your criticism will be good, but it may prevent certain kinds of errors. It may prevent certain kinds of intellectualism that haunt criticism. It has one limitation, though. If you are a writer yourself, it is very hard for you to free yourself of your own preconceptions born from your experience as a writer. You see, there is a liability here, too. But the liability is much less great than its advantage. In ordinary run-of-the-mill criticism, though, it may cut you off from certain writers. You can't understand them because you are too much yourself. But these are risks you have to take.

4Q: Is criticism as an art as creative as fiction or poetry?

RPW: May I criticize your question? (Yes, please do). Criticism when it really functions in the full sense of the word leads to a creative act in the sense of appreciating the work of art, whatever it is. You have to redo the work. You repaint the picture, rewrite the book, recompose the music, by going inside, if you are really experiencing it properly. You are writing the book; you are painting the picture; you feel the whole process is yours. This is clearly a creative act, and it's a very difficult creative act.

Now where do you lay the line between the creative elements of criticism and the uncreative. Sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's not clear. What I object to in your question is the phrase "as creative." It is creative possibly in its effect. It can be creative along the way when the person is analyzing the nature of the thing created or the way it can affect one. But that's being specifically creative. But it involves all other things, too, that may be in themselves not creative. It's how you approach the nature of criticism.

4Q: You were quoted at Haverford College in September as saying that in order to write poetry, you had to stop writing short stories. What are some of the obstacles that one encounters when writing both short stories and poetry?

RPW: I wouldn't draw any principle from this. It just happened. I don't fully understand it myself. There was a period in my life for ten years when I couldn't finish a short poem. I had fifty or sixty of them. They would die on me. Something went wrong with them. It was a period when I was writing a lot of fiction. I wrote a couple of novels, and a long poem in that period, *Brother to Dragons*. I wrote the best short story I ever wrote in my life in that period, but it was the last short story I ever

wrote. I wrote a novelette in that period, too, that I like very much, relatively speaking. But I was through with stories and I knew I would never write another. And as soon as I swore off short fiction, I had a new way in for writing short poems—a new relation to “subject”—to experience.

4Q: (Interruption) What was that short story, the best one you ever wrote?

RPW: Well, it was as good as any I have written, and I don't like many of my stories at all. It was a story called *Blackberry Winter*. The novelette I refer to is called *Circus in the Attic*. I believe that was in the winter of '46.

4Q: But you don't find this problem with the novel and poetry? There is no conflict there? (back to original question).

RPW: I suppose that the situation has something to do with scale. The original idea—the intuition, shall we say—for a short story might very well lead to a poem, but as long as I was dabbling with stories the story would usually preempt it—not let it grow into a poem or at least would somehow inhibit it. When I stopped writing stories, lost my pleasure in writing them, I somehow felt free to regard the little things that had seemed made for stories as now appropriate for poems. To find poetry in a more circumstantial, realistic base, with a more immediate relation to the material. And this led, I guess, to a change in style. What I am saying would not be true of the idea for a novel. Mere scale would make the difference.

4Q: Is there a difference, then, in the writer's mind in the relationship among the three—short stories, poetry and novels? What is the relationship? What is the difference in the level?

RPW: Well, I can only tell you what's in this writer's mind. Me.

4Q: Because you have written all three and quite brilliantly.

RPW: Well, thank you.

The short stories were always a kind of accident for me. All young people write stories first, so I wrote a few stories. But I wrote poems for years before I wrote short stories. I published a lot of poems before I wrote any fiction seriously. But short stories always seemed to have a way of limiting your risk in fiction. I was trying to write the best story I could, of course. I started writing novels before I wrote short stories. I wrote a novelette first, and then I wrote a novel before I wrote any short stories at all. I came to them almost . . . well, I don't know how I really came to short stories. Except maybe, I was very hard up and hoped for the quick buck. Which didn't come.

I wrote quite a few short stories, but I never had the same feeling for them as I had for poems or novels. This is me. I am not theorizing about anybody else. But for poetry and novels, I feel that they are not so distinct in certain ways. I really think of novels when I am trying to compose or conceive of them the way I think about a poem. I don't see the conception as being different even if the materials you work with are different. I feel,

for instance, about a big episode in a novel the way I feel about the question of rhythm in narrative composition—I don't mean the prose style—the relationship there of its swoops and valleys of action, the way I feel about the meter of a poem. Exactly the same way. Just another kind of rhythm. I really think of the novel as composed in the same spirit as a poem is composed. I have had cases where I started one form and went into another. *All the King's Men* was a play first, a verse play, then it became a novel. *Brother to Dragons* started—in idea—as a novel first, then a play—prose play or verse play, undifferentiated—then it became the thing that it is, another kind of thing in verse.

I don't feel the form is an absolute distinction. I tend to think of a novel in the same spirit as I think of a poem. But there is one important difference, at another level. The novels are much more objective for me. The poems have a much deeper and more immediate personal reference. This does not necessarily mean autobiography. I have been amused to see, in a few cases, critics using poems as a source of biographical material. What balls! It's very naive—for a professed critic, too.

4Q: In your novels, you use the technique of a story within a story. In *All the King's Men* you have the Cass Mastern interlude. What is the function of this technique? Is it necessary to the structural pattern of your novel?

RPW: I can tell you exactly how it happened; I remember distinctly. Take *All the King's Men*. The novel went along to a certain point in the full swing of action. The narrator of the novel then got stuck (and I got stuck) with the problem of trying to make sense of his own feelings about his role in relation to Willie Stark, the political dictator in my novel. I could have stopped the action and made my narrator, Jack Burden, have a moral debate with himself: "I don't approve of all that's going on, and I must discuss this with myself, my God, and my kindly pastor, etc." He could, in other words, have gone at the question abstractly. But this is not his character. He is in fact, trying to live a life avoiding all moral issues. But anyway the abstract way would have been death to the novel. At this point I suddenly had an idea. I gave Burden a Civil War relative (about whom he had been trying to do a Ph.D. dissertation)—Cass Mastern by name—and invented a story for Cass, in which Cass struggles for, and finds, moral awareness. The Cass story stands as a kind of mirror image for Jack, but not, I trust, merely as a device. Jack responds to the contrast, it has a part in his development. What I was trying to avoid was the abstract approach. I wanted to give the reader the sense of meaning emerging from experience. That, anyway, is the essence of fiction—the image of meaning emerging from experience.

4Q: Many literary critics and teachers regard Eliot's *Waste Land* as a kind of watershed in American literature. How do you feel about this? What effect did a poem like *The Waste Land* have on young writers in

1925, particularly the ones at Vanderbilt University?

RPW: It certainly was a watershed in my life and the lives of many of my friends. It came out in November, 1922, in the *Dial* magazine. That's where I first read it. I was completely overwhelmed by it and didn't, I promise you, understand it at all. There was no model for it. Your generation is different, much later. There were models for it and by then criticisms about it. The college students of my generation—I was a sophomore in college—my friends were all hit by it. The boys memorized it. The professors didn't like it. They came to it very slowly, if at all. Even my most revered friend and then professor, John Ransom, didn't like it. He was very tepid about it entirely. This is nothing against him or *The Waste Land*. But my generation—we memorized the poem and went around quoting it all the time. We intuited the thing as belonging to us. This generation later wrote the exegeses about *The Waste Land*. F. O. Matthiessen's book, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, came out ten years later. Cleanth Brooks' work on Eliot was written in the early thirties. Now Brooks is one of those boys who fell in love with a poem in college. This is an old story. They thought about it, worked at it, pondered about it, and they wrote the books about the poem. There were no courses about it, thank God! They took it to their hearts and minds. It came out of their experience with the poem.

4Q: So it was a big watershed!

RPW: I'm trying to get at something beyond that. How a generation should discover and appropriate certain works—as the Brooks and the Matthiessens appropriated *The Waste Land* and then wrote the books about it. If they had taken a quickie course in Eliot in the 1920's the process would have been very unnatural. What the boys did was to give each other courses in it. To pool their responses, their intuitions, the little bits of learning—and the sense of poetry they had gotten from reading Shakespeare, Keats, Baudelaire, etc. But it's very unhealthy and passive for students to want a university to do for them what they should do for themselves. Right here at Yale there are a number of students who clamor for courses about young writers—writers under 30 years old—and this to me is the height of absurdity, even vicious absurdity. The students should make their discoveries of the “young” and then tell the professors. And they shouldn't want some damned credit for this—some class certification that it is “important.” This is passive—craven—obsequious. As when a student says to me, “I can't write next year because there's no writing course for me.” Well, one thing is clear, such a student is not born to be a writer. There's a strange paradox here. This generation of college students wants independence, self-reliance, etc. But on some matters they are simply craven. They want courses even to tell them how to breathe, as though you couldn't breathe without a course, or believe breathing to be important. One university even has a course in how to date. But I want

to add something here. In general, in the last five years I've had the best level, intellectually and otherwise, of students in my life. Level, I said, not necessarily individuals.

4Q: What do you think of contemporary writers?

RPW: We have some fine ones. Many I admire greatly. There are quite a few young poets who are awfully good. If I make a list I'm bound to forget the ones I like best, but I'll name a few, at random.

William Harmon* just received the Lamont Poetry prize for a first book of poetry. This book is very impressive. He is clearly good. Ann Stevenson, one book published. It's very good. Anne Sexton, of course; she is older. She has published two or three books now. And Sylvia Plath, of course. There is Mark Strand. He is a very powerful poet. He's about 35. There are others I like very much. Let me see. I'll remember as soon as this tape is finished. Oh! There is one I just recently read. Nikki Giovanni. I think she has real talent. She is a black girl, by the way. I think she is on the wrong track in some of her poems and theory—I don't want to get into criticism here. But she has real power. Mark Strand has real power, too. W. S. Merwin, he's around 40 now and has published five or six books. But his book, *Lice*, was a very powerful book. Very original. I like other books of his, too. Then there're Adrienne Rich and Gary Snyder, John Hollander. There are lots of poets around who are good. Oh, I just mention a very remarkable work by a man who is in his sixties, Raymond Guthrie, *Maximum Security Ward*—a wonderfully strong and moving book.

4Q: Does it matter if you are young or old?

RPW: Well, I'm not talking about people who have been around for a time. People like Shapiro, Wilbur, Lowell, William Meredith, Eberhart, James Dickey: that's another generation. I'm talking about people under forty. There are a lot of good young poets around. I don't see a big single overwhelming intuition of the age, though. Why should I? No one has hit it yet. That is, to correspond to *The Waste Land*.

4Q: One that would epitomize the entire age!

RPW: No. I don't see it yet. But I don't care about that, though. In the meanwhile, there are many good poets around. Very fine poets, doing really powerful work. Some of these people are going to be awfully good poets.

4Q: In your interview with James Farmer, in *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, you were speaking of Ralph Ellison. . . .

RPW: Put me on record as saying that Ralph Ellison is a really fine writer.

4Q: Yes, he really is a fine writer. I like his work.

In your interview with James Farmer, the question was raised concerning the use of literature as a device for protest as opposed to "art for art's

* William Harmon won the prize for his book, *Treasury Holiday*.

sake." What do you think of today's black writers using their fiction or poetry as a form of protest?

RPW: This is awfully complex. I'll try to put my thoughts in order about it. The subject for poetry or fiction is what makes you feel like writing. What you can make a poem or novel out of. Good poetry or fiction comes out of something that you connect with in a very deep emotional way. It is something that matters to you in a way worth commemorating and at the same time worth analyzing, defining.

But here the problem begins to take shape. There are various ways in which you may connect emotionally—and intellectually—with a subject. There are many kinds of "mattering."

With that thought in mind let's change our approach. There are kinds and kinds of occasions. When the house is on fire, you call the fire department, grab the baby, and get out. You don't sit down and play a sonata on the way out. Certain moments in life are simply incompatible with art, and this would be true of any moment of urgent action. There is a time to murder and a time to create.

The "art" of urgent action in its simplest terms has one and only one function: incitement to a special end. Such art is an instrument used for a practical purpose, and the practical end dominates all other aspects. When the bugle is blown for the charge it is not being blown to delight music lovers by the expert performance of the bugler—even though, if the bugle is inexpertly blown, it may not serve the purpose of inciting to the charge. To put it a little differently, a certain degree of—shall we call it "artfulness"—is required to achieve the practical end, but the end has nothing in itself to do with art. This is true even if the end is worthy, moral, and urgent. And here we face the painful paradox that the good end may often be taken to justify the evil means—including the limiting or the distorting of truth. And so emphasis on the "simple truth" may often end up with the "complex lie." As good an example of this as I can think of is war-time propaganda: the enemy is always presented as a monster of all iniquities, totally dehumanized and therefore to be guiltlessly destroyed by any means available. Then when peace comes you have to start unsaying all you said, Japanese now vs. 1942.

I have been talking about the crudest and most simplistic use of art—or artfulness—to promote action. As a basis for the discussion of your question. But having taken this as a base, let me move away from it by saying that all art—like all ideas—may be said to imply certain consequences, certain eventual possibilities of action. A particular vision of life—and such a vision is what a piece of art is—implies certain particular modes of action. But in so far as the piece of art is most fulfilled as art it enlightens us about the values on which action may be grounded rather than inciting us to a specified action.

When we come down to "protest art" by blacks, here and now, I

should say that we have to distinguish between mere incitement and the incitement that is grounded on enlightenment, works in which passion and wisdom, in some degree, meet. For a practical end, mere incitement may be all an author aims at, but he should try to be clear as to what he is doing: the house is on fire and I'll do anything to get out. But enlightenment-as-incitement is something quite different. If the protest is (as it is for the black American) against injustice, then the protest that is enlightenment-as-incitement would imply something about the nature of justice—and in its artistic quality, something about the human depth of the issues involved. Ultimately, I should hope that the most powerful protest against injustice is an assertion—or implication—of human solidarity. I do not mean that the particulars of outrage are not available for art, but I do mean that they should be in context. Here let me add that powerful works of racial protest have been written by black Americans, works that are what I call works of enlightenment-as-incitement—or we may reverse the phrase, incitement-as-enlightenment. For instance, some of the work of Ralph Ellison, Leroi Jones, and James Baldwin—different as these writers are from each other.

Thinking back on what I have said, I feel I have barely scratched the surface, but I've tried to indicate the way I'd go about the question. And we must remember that the question raised by black protest starts all sorts of perennial questions about art and life. And in such cases, the beginning of virtue is, I feel, to start by making distinctions rather than judgments. Let me say something else. Passionate involvements are fundamental to strong art, and times of trouble give us our most powerful images for art. But part of the artist's job is to understand his own passion. And the fashionable, even in passions, is the enemy of all art.

4Q: When you, Mr. Brooks and Mr. Pipkin founded the *Southern Review*, you published some very fine writers. How did these writers come to your attention, since most of them had yet to make the reputation they later achieved?

RPW: Let me say one general thing first. In the thirties, there were a lot of good writers around who had a hard time getting published. Two things were in our favor. First, there was no money around—and though we didn't pay much, we paid something—and second, we didn't have to try to please a mass market. We only had to please ourselves.

Then, something else: In that period and the decade earlier, the period of the little magazine, the distinction between the little magazine and the slicks was important. The big slick magazines, things like the *Saturday Evening Post*, were totally different from literary magazines, which were out for ART. Commercial magazines and little magazines were very distinct. That's no longer true today.

Esquire, among the pants adds, would publish (they invented this thing, you know, about mixing things up) Fitzgerald and a few big names

of literary value and mix them with the pants ads, men's styles and a few pinup girls. Now this hash is all over the whole country. *Playboy* . . . the editor of *Kenyon Review* became fiction editor of *Playboy*. That's how far it has gone.

4Q: That seems almost inconceivable.

RPW: This is the world we are living in. And for better or worse, there is a less obvious role for the little magazines in contrast to the official magazines. But in the thirties there was rarely any place for a serious writer to go except to the little magazines. There were some writers like Katherine Anne Porter, who was already an established writer, but not the great name she's become since. She could have published her stories elsewhere. But she wanted to publish with us. We published five or six of her short stories and two of her best novelettes in a few years. She said, "I choose my friends." She said, "I like the company I keep, I won't publish in those magazines." Of course, don't forget, everyone wants to make a living, too, and anybody would be glad to get well paid for his work—but there was a sharp distinction then and you could get people you wanted, sometimes simply because nobody else wanted them. Also friends and the grapevine helped a lot.

4Q: Are the epigraphs used in your novels intended to set the primary theme of that novel, or should those epigraphs be used in a non-restrictive manner, more or less as a touchstone?

RPW: I can tell you what happened. That's the only way I can put it. I don't think there were any in my first two or three novels, two of which weren't published.

I remember *All the King's Men's* epigraph perfectly well. That was a period when I was deeply immersed in Dante for five or six years. And I was pretty sure that when the novel was finished, people were going to misread the meaning of my main character. The epigraph was a way of signalling my view of the thing. And I was right about the misreadings. It came out right away—this fascist stuff all over the place.

This epigraph in *All the King's Men* is from the *Divine Comedy*, "The Purgatory." Manfredi had been killed in a battle against the papal army, and his body had been thrown out—not buried in sacred ground. Therefore, Dante is surprised to find him in Purgatory. Manfredi says: "But I crossed my hands on my bosom as I died. No Pope can deny you repentance. Nobody can deny you your relationship to God." The epigraph says that there is always that little bit of green, of hope.

Now Willie Stark's deathbed reversal of feeling is like Manfredi's. I didn't think of Manfredi first. I finished the book before I thought of Manfredi. It (the epigraph) is a secret indicator of what I meant in my book.

4Q: Is that the same case with *World Enough and Time*, where you use a quotation from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*?"

RPW: Yes it is. That's a more elaborate case of trying to let the epigraph interpret the book. The hero in *World Enough and Time* is a young man trying to create a world for himself, not belonging to this world. He wants to find a cause that will justify a violent and heroic act, as it were. He wants to create a romance for himself to be in. (The book is, in a way, about the pathology of romanticism).

And Spenser talks about antique times in this quotation. Also, this reference is to Book Five, of Artegall and justice, the Knight of Justice. And this young man—of an antique time—is trying to perform justice. He is being the just avenger. So this is a little commentary on the theme of the book.

4Q: Do you have a novel that you feel embodies all the essential qualities necessary for a successful novel, both from a philosophical and a technical point-of-view?

RPW: God, no! I don't even want to think about that!

4Q: Would you say that there is one book more than any other that best exemplifies your philosophy?

RPW: Well, the trouble is you write a book, then you change yourself. I wouldn't say . . . I don't think of a philosophy as a finished product. Certainly not for a man like me. It's a way of thinking about your life as you live.

4Q: Many people feel that the philosophy espoused in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" represents your basic thinking in life. But in view of what you have just said in the previous statement, I suppose you have changed?

RPW: Well, I would be hard put to say in any three ways or five ways. But a basic change in my feeling about the nature of life would mean that if you have thought about it intellectually, then you would have to re-set it intellectually. But I honestly don't think abstractly. I wish I did think more abstractly. But the poems . . . I write the poems and the novels trying to find out what I am feeling now. This sounds romantic and I don't want it to sound romantic. A writer is trying to think that way, rather than making up a philosophy and trying to illustrate it.

4Q: So, in other words, then, critics are wrong when they place you in one particular specific philosophical position and say you are this or you are that?

RPW: No. That may or may not be the case, you see. They don't all agree, so they can't all be right. But in any case, the ideas you have expressed or embodied in your work have their place in your history. And they (critics) are right trying to explore these things. But I am always struck by the attempt to freeze any writer in a formal philosophical position when the essence of the process of writing is to constantly modify and enrich or maybe narrow or do something to it. But it's a life process, and as long as the life process is going on, there are going to be re-explorations

and modifications of the work by the writer himself.

4Q: The statement has often been made that one should not confuse the writer with his works, that one should separate the author's own philosophical views from those espoused in his works. Can a writer really separate his views from those of his characters? Or do you put into your characters what you really believe?

RPW: I can't put it into all of them because all the characters don't agree with each other.

4Q: Yes, but one of them?

RPW: No! I never think of one as speaking especially for me. Never! Never! I feel myself as, in a way, outside of my book, my characters. Though, of course, you are always using little secret bits and pieces of yourself, your friends, and your experiences, usually distorting them.

4Q: What about the idea of the whole thing? Can you separate the man from the entire book?

RPW: The idea of the book is different from any one man in the book. There is no man in the book that has the idea of the whole book. The book embodies that. I'm outside the book.

4Q: By being outside, then, you separate yourself from any one character in the book?

RPW: From any one person. You want to feel with them. But nobody is my spokesman. I never think of any one man being R. P. Warren who is saying so and so right now. I don't think that way. The book is my way of trying to "say" the idea, that is the book. The whole book. Now there are some writers who identify fully with their characters and the characters speak for them. I don't think that way at all. It's not my temperament.

Rotation of Crops

• John Hollander

For Robert Penn Warren

Farmer John wandered among his fields
Feeling a tedium of the soil
Lifted by no pious following
Of oats by peas, then of peas by beans,
And then beans by orient barley,
Or even the peaceful fallowness
Yielding what little that peace can yield,
No dew pearled rough furrows with early
Seeds of shining along their low sills.

What could revolve there was not the sun.
Twilight kept shifting between evils
—Heaviness, then alleviation;
Only Sol smoldered with tedium
In the untennanted meads above,
There, where no other kinds of light grazed.
Below, no other kinds of light grew.
“And so, and so” groaned the Farmer John
And gazed at the vagueness of his grain.

But then after dark the night itself
Shifted her ground: cerements of turf
Flung back the rough darkness threshed away
From fire toward the stars’ clear counterpane;
Hectares of millet, disgusting fields
Of vetch, acres of darkened corn, were
Turning in the starlight that seeded
Them all, while the sleeping Farmer gleaned
Mindfulls from outside the mills of light.

Brooks on Warren

• Cleanth Brooks

My first acquaintance with Robert Penn Warren began at Vanderbilt University in the fall of 1924. He was a senior, I, a freshman, but through a set of circumstances (of no consequence for what I have to say here) I happened to be rooming with a senior, Saville Clark, who was a good friend of Red Warren, of Andrew Lytle, and of several others who were about to launch themselves into literary careers. Warren had already done so, as a member of the Fugitive Group.

Warren was a tall, lanky, red-haired youth of nineteen, full of a wonderful energy and endowed with obvious genius. He appeared so at that time to my quite dazzled eyes and surely my youthful impression has long since been completely vindicated.

As a freshman I did not see a great deal of Warren except for the visits that he paid to the dormitory rooms that I shared with Bill Clark. But from the very beginning he was warm and kind to me, and even took an interest in my attempts to write English prose. I remember his looking over an early freshman theme—I had not asked him to do it—and giving it a commendation which I now value much more than I did at the time.

With the end of the first academic year, Warren was off and away, first to his home in Kentucky and then to a graduate fellowship at Berkeley. More than four years elapsed before we met again in the fall of 1929, at Oxford. I remember that I arrived about dusk on an October evening, spent my first night in Exeter College, and perhaps the very next afternoon I found, when I returned to my room, a note from Warren, saying that he had called and inviting me to come to see him. As I knew, he had been elected a Rhodes Scholar from Kentucky two years earlier, and I was gratified that he had noticed my name in the new list and with his usual kindness had got in touch immediately.

At Oxford Warren was working for a B. Litt. degree on some topic in Elizabethan literature. I decided that I would not do a graduate degree but the Honors B.A. in English language and literature, believing that at Oxford I should attempt to do the traditional Oxford degree. Thus Warren was again in a somewhat different world from mine—one composed of graduate students doing research and writing theses, whereas I was going to see my tutor once a week and ranging through English literature.

Nevertheless, we saw a good deal of each other during that year, and since Warren had several friends in Exeter College besides myself, I saw him there as well as at his digs in Wellington Square. (He was a member of New College but did not have a room in the college during that year.)

After some forty-odd years one's memory brings up flotsam and jetsam rather than an ordered array of significant incidents. Yet, since nothing particularly momentous that involved us both occurred during our year together at Oxford, it is perhaps just as well to set down here the first couple of such fragments that rise to the surface of my mind. They will at least suggest the Warren that I remember from this period of my life.

One evening at Exeter College a number of us had got onto the subject of the Civil War. It was a matter of intense interest to Red and he promised to lay out before us then and there precisely what had gone on at the Battle of Gettysburg and particularly what had gone awry for the Confederate side. His account was engrossing, not only to this Confederate, but also to our Yankee and British friends who were seated about the table. Unfortunately, just before the batteries opened up on Cemetery Ridge in preparation for Pickett's Charge, the college bell began its hideous racket, warning that one had to be in his rooms before 12:15. So Pickett's Charge was over before it began, Red was out of the room in a trice, his scholar's gown fluttering behind him as he fled.

One of the more memorable occasions at Red's place on Wellington Square was the dinner party that he gave for a friend who was going down from Oxford. The feast was to be served in Red's rooms and his landlord had assured him that he was up to not only serving the meal but preparing the particular dishes that Red wanted. Consequently, he was startled to see the landlord bearing to the table a punch-bowl filled with what proved to be rather sweet martini in which a dozen raw oysters floated. Red asked what in the world it was. The landlord's reply was "The gentleman asked for oyster cocktail, didn't he"? I was not present on that occasion, alas, but I soon heard of it, and I know exactly what the expression on Red's face was—controlled rage. I saw that expression years later when, having stopped in a roadside restaurant for breakfast while on a motor trip, Red ordered an egg, thoroughly well done. As his fork cut into it and the lovely yellow yolk ran out, there was a moment when I believe the fork came close to being plunged into the waitress's innards.

In June of 1930 Warren sailed for home and another year was to elapse before we would meet again, most briefly, in Nashville. In the summer of 1931 I had returned to visit my family in Louisiana, and broke my return journey to Oxford by stopping at Nashville, where Red was just getting settled in. He had spent the previous year teaching at Southwestern University at Memphis, but had now come back to Vanderbilt to take a post in the English Department.

In the summer of 1932 I came home from Oxford for good and started job-hunting. The depression had set in and university posts were hard to come by. At the very last moment I had the luck to get a place at the Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge. In the spring of 1934 Warren was invited to come down to give us a lecture. Shortly after that he was offered a post at LSU and our real work as associates began.

It was a highly interesting time. LSU was one of the few universities in the United States that was then actively recruiting faculty. Its net was thrown wide, and swept in all sorts of people: those who could only be regarded as so-so; those who were undistinguished but solid and useful citizens of academia; and those—they were considerable in number—who were intelligent, imaginative, and intellectually vigorous. By the middle of the 1930's there were at least 35 or 40 young family people on the campus whose talk I still remember as the most stimulating that I have ever heard. Besides Warren and a good many interesting people in my own department, there were painters, sculptors, a geologist, several political scientists, historians, linguists—the range was broad. We saw each other not only rather constantly on the campus but perhaps twice a week, some eight or ten of us would find our selves together at a dinner party or at some other evening gathering. During the late '30's and early '40's the University had attracted an unusual group of students, especially in the humanities: notable among them were such people as Robert Lowell, Peter Taylor, and the late Alan Swallow.

With the decision to found *The Southern Review* early in 1935 Warren and I came to share an office and to work at some of the same basic problems: soliciting articles, reading manuscripts, scribbling notes on rejection slips, making plans for future numbers. At about this time we also began our collaboration on our first textbook.

These activities gave me at first hand a glimpse of Warren's great gifts as an editor, a practical critic, a teacher, and an executive. Since his remarkable abilities in these fields have been overshadowed by his creative genius as a novelist and poet, I call special attention to them here. One thing that impressed me from the beginning, perhaps even more than his keen intelligence and original ideas, was the enormous energy that he possessed. The energy required to edit a quarterly review or to put together a textbook is obviously not of the same order of importance as that that goes into writing a poem or working out a novel. But there is a relationship. In fact, one can say that to know Warren in the *Review* office was to gain a further insight into his resources of power, of which the more precious creativity was simply the finest manifestation.

Another trait in Warren that I speedily came to recognize and admire was his carefulness and zeal for accuracy. At this period of my life I still retained some lingering traces of the romantic notion of a poet. A poet worked by inspiration, flashes, insights. He was therefore privileged to be

a little cavalier with facts and figures and could be forgiven if he brushed aside tiresome particularities as ultimately of not much account. In Warren the flashes of insight were clearly visible and one was conscious of his creative surge. (During just these years he was continuing to write poetry and was hard at work on his first two novels, *Night Rider* and *At Heaven's Gate*.) But for him facts were important too. If one was to edit a magazine or write a textbook or engage in any other enterprise, there were mundane obligations that had to be honored.

This little parcel of reminiscences may well conclude with an illustration of another obligation that Warren believed had to be honored—a concern for other young writers and a concern for the good estate of the republic of letters. In the 1930's we were both teaching three courses in addition to our editorial work, and we were hard pressed for time. We once calculated that we were reading something like ninety fiction manuscripts in order to get one usable story. I remember suggesting that perhaps we ought to give up publishing short stories altogether except when one came in from a writer whose quality we already knew. The selection of articles and reviews consumed far less editorial time. Some we could commission—and many of our best ones were commissioned—and those that were unsolicited presented no very great problem; one could fairly easily sort out those that had real quality. Poetry, of course, we would continue to publish, but there was not such a flood of it nor did the poems take quite so much time to sort out as the stories did. But Warren's answer was emphatic: a great part of our job as editors of a literary quarterly was precisely that of providing a publication channel for the young fiction writer, who, most of all, needed to see his work in print. We simply couldn't take the short cut, hard-pressed for time though we were. The decision was characteristic and is a measure of the quality of the man.

Warren, Huey Long, and *All the King's Men*

• Arthur H. Scouten

From various critical comments over the years (possibly associated with the view that *All the King's Men* is superior to Warren's other writings), I get the impression many people believe Warren came to Louisiana about the time of Long's assassination, listened to lurid tales, and with quick opportunism cashed in on widespread interest in the Kingfish by writing a thinly-concealed biography of the popular hero-villain in the form of a novel. This legend properly belongs to the myth of Huey Long and has very little connection with the mind and art of Robert Penn Warren. The story of the circumstances of the composition of *All the King's Men* is not without interest, even though it lacks the neatness of the myth. My own vantage point comes from having been a student at the Louisiana State University from 1931 to 1942 (where I began a lasting acquaintance with Warren after taking a course under him), from working for the athletic department and the state construction department, and from knowing members of the Long family—Huey once called me "Joe" down by the football practice field, and the name has stuck ever since. I want to begin my account by placing *All the King's Men* in the chronology of Warren's early career and work schedule; then I would like to explain what I believe interested Warren in the story of Huey Long.

In 1933, the late Charles Pipkin, dean of the graduate school at LSU, had persuaded the elderly philologist, William A. Read, chairman of the English department, to appoint as lecturer a boyish-looking, deceptively mild young man, Cleanth Brooks, the son of a Louisiana clergyman. Brooks in turn persuaded Read to hire Warren, a Southerner from Guthrie, Kentucky; and Warren arrived in Baton Rouge in September 1934, as an assistant professor in the English department. Like Blake or Boswell, both Brooks and Warren had a sense of destiny which was observed by a number of people at the time and is not a reconstruction by hindsight. Few teachers could be more affable and courteous to students, but Warren was preoccupied with time and would never stop for a lengthy conversation or bull-session; he was instead driving himself at top speed to carry out the critical and creative stirrings within him. A familiar scene to us students

was the appearance of the two men, absorbed in earnest conversation, hurriedly crossing the broad lawn from a classroom building to the *Southern Review* office in the Campanile, Brooks having to trot to keep up with Warren's long, jerky stride. With terrific bursts of energy, the two men began their famous juggling act of simultaneously defending the South against an invasion of Science and Communism (Warren wanted to entitle *I'll Take My Stand* as a "A Tract against Communism"), altering the methods of teaching poetry, revising the history of English literature, and commencing a revolution in literary criticism.

Warren began editorial work immediately, working with Henry Nash Smith on *The Southwest Review* to bring out the four issues of that quarterly in 1934-35. Meanwhile, Pipkin, an able and farsighted administrator, began negotiations to have Brooks and Warren found a literary periodical; and in February 1935, the middle of Warren's initial year at LSU, Pipkin obtained the approval of James Monroe Smith, president of the university, and *The Southern Review* was launched. This quarterly became the most distinguished literary magazine in print anywhere, and the editing made great demands on Warren's time and thought. Hence I would say that getting this journal underway took most of Warren's concentration in 1935. Meanwhile, he was engaged in several literary and cultural controversies, contributing to *The American Review*, and composing short stories and poems (his *Thirty-Six Poems* appeared in 1935). At the same time, his absorbing interest was how to read literature. During his two years at Berkeley, Warren had been appalled by bad teaching of literature. In the summer of 1935, short on funds but long on ideas, he went out to Amite, Louisiana, to visit at the home of a graduate student, John Thibaut Purser. In an explosion of activity, Warren, Purser, and Brooks put together the first of the tremendously influential textbooks with which Warren was connected, *An Approach to Literature*. The LSU Press had the work printed, but the copyright was sold in 1936 to the (then) Crofts company. Then Warren went to work with Brooks to plan out more systematically a program for teaching poetry. This even more influential work, *Understanding Poetry*, appeared in 1938. Throughout this time, Warren was teaching three courses a semester: a graduate course in the English Renaissance, an undergraduate course in Shakespeare, and a novelty—a creative-writing class.

He was also rethinking the material of his first published short story, "Prime Leaf," for use as a novel, and this study of corruption in the Kentucky tobacco war, *Night Rider*, was completed in 1938 and published in March 1939. Some time about the beginning of the spring semester of 1938 he began thinking about composing a play. This verse drama, *Proud Flesh*, presented a Southern dictator who has a tragic flaw, and it is obvious that the story of Huey Long suggested this protagonist. Warren began composition of the play in the summer of 1938 and spent much time

with it, off and on, for about three years. I have since listened to Warren complain about how hampered he was by lack of experience with the theatre and with lack of mastery of theatrical techniques. A final revision came at Breadloaf in the summer of 1940, with suggestions from Francis Fergusson, and Warren put the play aside. An examination of it shows that Warren had not yet built his concept of Jack Burden; this character appears only to speak about two sentences near the end of the play. Warren was to continue to tamper with the dramatic form, eventually composing two additional versions.¹ But in 1940 Warren was at work on his second novel, *At Heaven's Gate*, to be completed and published in 1943. It was not until this year, after the completion of his second novel, eight years after Huey Long was shot, and a year after he had left Louisiana to begin teaching at the University of Minnesota, that Warren's continuing interests in Jacobean tragedy and in corruption as found in Southern politics led him to start the work which he was to name *All the King's Men*.

What aspect of Huey Long appealed to Warren? Let me try a functional digression. In the very lively *Paris Review* interviews, we learn that young Warren didn't even go a few miles down the road from his home to attend the Scopes evolution trial; he was more concerned with reading Jacobean tragedy, he told Ralph Ellison.² Warren was fascinated by the story of Huey Long. He did listen to both legends and factual accounts of the Kingfish; in fact, he began hearing them before he ever arrived on the LSU campus. Political and economic problems of the South were of great interest to Warren. The planter/sharecropper dichotomy especially attracted him. He studied Louisiana history: for proof, see the long, tedious recital of Reconstruction politics in *Band of Angels*. The combination of the personality of Huey Long and the corruption in contemporary Louisiana did suggest the novel *All the King's Men*, but only a long time after the event. Warren was no journalist.

Thoroughly familiar with the story of Huey, Warren was more attracted by some parts than by others. Friends and former students of mine are fond of identifying me as a source for Warren's information, even going so far as to identify me as Willie Stark's chauffeur, Sugar Boy. As I fancy myself at least one stage more articulate than either Sugar Boy or Huey's actual driver, Joe Messina, I have always hastened to repudiate this attribution; in fact, it has made me take a dim view of literary identifications ever since.

I never remember seeing Warren get excited or worked up about Huey. What absorbed Warren's curiosity and concentration was the political and financial corruption in Louisiana after Huey Long's death. What

1 See W. M. Schutte, "The Dramatic Versions of the Willie Stark Story," in the symposium *All the King's Men* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1957), pp. 75-90.

2 *Paris Review*, 4 (1957), 120-21.

he fixed on was the story of the gold-plated bathroom fixtures in the new house of the state building superintendent (whose paymaster and time-clerk I was for a time). I don't remember whether I informed Warren of this detail, or whether I told Tom Thompson and he relayed it to him, or whether Warren just read about it in the local newspaper, like Will Rogers. But that was what caught Warren's poetic interest. And we see it emphatically in the novel: ". . . from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud."

Meanwhile, his chief interest over these years was in Jacobean tragedy. I am confident most of Warren's students of that period would endorse what I am saying. I vividly recall how excited he became in discoursing about Webster's play *The White Devil*, explaining how a certain character in the play was a part of another character, and how Prince Hal (*in I Henry IV*) spoke of Hotspur as being a factor of himself. At a time when stupid reviewers were saying (in 1946, upon publication of the novel) that Warren had to praise Willie Stark because *The Southern Review* received a subvention from LSU, one of Warren's former students, Alan Swallow, the critic and publisher of so much modern poetry, immediately spoke up and explained that Warren's primary concern was with the techniques and ideas displayed in Jacobean tragedy, and that Warren was only using modern subject matter for a similar psychological study.³

Consequently, the only validity of the identification of Willie Stark as Huey Long comes from the remarkable irony noted in a brilliant essay by Louis Rubin, wherein Warren's detachment and distance from his subject-matter "best captures the picture" (of Huey) because Warren is furthest away, as compared with the other novelists who were journalists and who did try for a fictionalized biography.⁴

3 U.S. Quarterly Book List, 2 (Dec., 1946), 283-93. It is strange that this review is overlooked in the scholarship on Warren, and even in the bibliographies.

4 "All the King's Meanings," *Georgia Review*, 8 (1954), 422-34.

Robert Penn Warren:

The Poetry of the Sixties

• Victor Strandberg

Since publishing *You, Emperors, and Others* in 1960, Robert Penn Warren has turned out three collections of new poems—*Tale of Time: New Poems 1960-1966*, *Incarnations: Poems 1966-1968*, and *Audubon: A Vision* (1969)—and in addition has collected most of his earlier poems in a book called *Selected Poems, New and Old, 1923-1966* (the “New” poems here are those in *Tale of Time*). While it is impossible to render a thoroughgoing discussion of all these poems in one magazine article, I should like to discuss the later three collections in some detail, and to make a few observations about the *Selected Poems* from earlier decades.

I. SELECTED POEMS, 1923-1966

Anyone interested in Mr. Warren’s poetry will find the *Selected Poems* a very useful volume, but he should bear in mind that Warren’s poetic masterpiece, *Brother to Dragons* (1953), exists separately as a book-length narrative. In addition, the true scholar will note and sometimes regret the deletions here manifest. *Promises* (1957) is the most completely represented of the earlier volumes, only its final poem being deleted. (This poem, “The Necessity for Belief,” may have struck its author as being too didactic, though its light-and-dark imagery renders its theme subtly enough, I should think.) *You, Emperors, and Others* has lost a fair dozen poems, including, again, some notable expressions of Mr. Warren’s religious imagination such as “The Bramble Bush,” with its Blakean apocalyptic vision:

And I now saw past the fartherest stars
How darkness blazed like light,
And the sun was a winking star that rose
Up the chimney of the night,
And like petals from a wind-torn bough
In furious beauty blown,
The stars were gone—and I heard the joy
Of flesh singing on the bone.

"Prognosis: A Short Story, the End of Which You Will Know Soon Enough" is a similar exercise of the religious imagination that has been deleted here. The short story is the life of a dying woman, and the prognosis is that she will die, but her dreams and intuitions are deeply sustaining in contrast to her surface existence: she, "past despair,/Dreamed a field of white lilies wind-shimmering, slow," no longer grieved "to be lost in whatever/awfulness of dark."

A favorite poem of mine deleted from *Selected Poems* is the badly titled "So You Agree With What I Say? Well, What Did I Say?" (in *You, Emperors, and Others*). In these seven quatrains Mr. Warren draws a new portrait for his extensive gallery of The Clean and the Dirty, for which Adam Stanton, the antiseptically clean doctor, and Willie Stark, the politician and (hence) master of dirt, are the prototypes. The novelty here is Warren's sympathy for the Clean man, a Bible-reading fanatic whose life of poverty and toil encompasses an absolute and lonely rectitude:

Albino-pale, half-blind, his orbit revolved
Between his Bible and his cobbler's bench,
With all human complexities resolved
In that Hope past deprivation, or any heart-wrench.

Returning, in the summer dusk, to his shack and his Book and his can of pork and beans, he would pass, oblivious, the townspeople around him getting every drop of pleasure they can squeeze from their existence. "He would move past us all"—past the boys playing baseball till "a grounder out of the gloom/Might knock out your teeth," past "the Cobb family admiring their new Chevrolet," past "Sue Cramm in the swing with her date,/Whose hand was already up under her dress, halfway." Usually Warren treats such models of righteousness with sarcasm, but here, looking back many years later ("Mr. Moody is dead long back, and some of the boys/Who played in that ball game dead too, by disease or violence"), our narrator sympathizes with the man who may have wasted his life in self-denying other-worldliness. Indeed, God deserves to be replaced by an IBM machine (its rewards being more perfectly calibrated) if He played such a cruel trick: ". . . if God short-changed Mr. Moody, it's time for Him/To give up this godding business, and make way/For somebody else to try, or an IBM." A novel way, one must concede, to justify the ways of God to men.

Similar deletions from and minor revisions of the early volumes affect *Selected Poems*, but the essential works are here: "The Ballad of Billie Potts," *Eleven Poems on the Same Theme* (complete, but scrambled), "Kentucky Mountain Farm" (showing T. S. Eliot's influence), and many others. In the organization of *Selected Poems*, Mr. Warren has reversed the normal chronological sequence, putting his recent work first

and his earliest last, probably to give his recent work greater emphasis, but also perhaps to accentuate the process of evolution that has changed his work from the 1920's to the present. Back in those early days, before the anarchic individualism of our present style had set in, Warren's metrics were generally smooth and regular, with rhymes falling neatly into place and verses marching in disciplined stanzaic patterns. He had learned his craft, it appears, from the traditional masters up through the late Victorian period and he yielded himself only gradually to the loosening effects of the Pound-Eliot revolution. Since the 1940's, when Mr. Warren stopped writing short stories (he noticed that the short stories were turning themselves into poems),¹ his narrative strain has notably affected his poetry, most often with episodes of violence being strung out in poem segments (the ambush of Billie Potts, the killing of a bum under boxcars, the attempted murder of Audubon, the suicide of Dr. Knox, etc.). The full range of Warren's style, as evidenced in *Selected Poems*, displays uncommon range and versatility. He has composed every manner of lyric, sonnet, dramatic monologue, ballad, nursery rhyme, terza rima, blank verse, and verse narrative, his tone ranging from the high dignity of Elizabethan conceit ("Love's Parable") through the rough frontier vernacular ("Billie Potts") to a child's lullaby (in *Promises*). He has been a poet of many voices.

For all his many voices, however, with verse forms and styles multiplying over the years, Mr. Warren's central themes and preoccupations have remained largely stable. Questions of man's place in the total scheme of time and nature, of his relationship to the other beings with whom he shares existence, and of his guilt and complicity in the evils that surround him—those questions, in short, that make up the problem of the search for identity in our time—recur from Warren's earliest work to his latest. Because the search for identity becomes, necessarily, an attempt to define reality, and because reality presents itself to us ambiguously—in men's heroism and depravity, in nature's beauty and horror—Warren's work most often assumes a dialectical configuration: the Clean versus the Dirty, the One versus the Many, Solipsism versus a Synthesis of Being, Time versus no-Time, Consciousness versus Dream and Intuition. Given this dualistic perception of things, Warren's is a poetry that must try to reconcile opposites, as in Shelley's classic formulation (*A Defence of Poetry*, 1821): "[Poetry] marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union . . . all irreconcilable things."

Mr. Warren's agreement with Shelley's conception is evident everywhere in his writings, but probably the most direct and articulate state-

¹ Professor Allen Shepherd of the University of Vermont told me Mr. Warren said this at a public reading, in response to a question as to why he had stopped writing short stories.

ment of his philosophical outlook is to be found in his essay, published in 1955, called "Knowledge and the Image of Man" (*Sewanee Review*, LXIII, 182-192). In essence, this essay advances two propositions: first, that the end or purpose of man's existence is knowledge, particularly self-knowledge; and second, that this knowledge—knowledge of one's ultimate identity, as it turns out—comes through a vision or experience of interrelationships that Warren calls the "osmosis of being": "[Man is] in the world with continual and intimate interpenetration, an inevitable osmosis of being, which in the end does not deny, but affirms, his identity." By seeing one's cobweb connections to all time and nature and other beings, gathered now into a Whitmanesque unity, one may gain release from the world's fear and pain, because the osmosis of being merges "the ugly with the beautiful, the slayer with the slain," into "such a sublimation that the world which once produced . . . fear and disgust may now be totally loved."

In his poems and fiction, Warren's most negative characters are those who reject the osmosis of being, like Adam Stanton in *All the King's Men* and the Harvard graduate of 1861 in "Two Studies in Idealism" (in *You, Emperors, and Others*), while his spiritual guides are those who accept it, like Blanding Cotshill in *Flood* (Signet edition, p. 353), who adds the word *mystic* to the key phrase: "Things are tied together. . . . There's some spooky interpenetration of things, a mystic osmosis of being, you might say." The most dramatic poem in *Promises*, "Ballad of a Sweet Dream of Peace," predicates its sweet dream of peace upon the osmosis process, and in doing so, it points up the mystical character of Warren's final vision of reality: "all Time's a dream, and we're all one Flesh, at last."

Having elsewhere discussed the psychological, ethical, and metaphysical ramifications of this master theme in Warren's whole canon,² I should like to focus now on Mr. Warren's recent poetry, where this concept of Time's dream and one Flesh again gives coherence and direction to the whole, constituting the "figure in the carpet" that Henry James talked about—the "primal plan" that "stretches from book to book." In *Tale of Time* and in *Incarnations*, Warren pursues the meaning of time and flesh somewhat separately, or at least with the stronger emphasis as each title implies it, although ultimately these meanings are inseparable. Most recently in *Audubon: A Vision*, he pays homage to the great artist who, in his judgment, had achieved the vision of osmosis of being before his death and who thereby enjoyed perfect peace of soul in his final reckoning.

2 An extensive discussion of Warren's "Osmosis of Being" theme appears in my essay, "Warren's Osmosis," in *Criticism* (Winter, 1968, pp. 23-40). In addition, a detailed discussion of Mr. Warren's volumes of poetry up to *Tale of Time* (1966) may be found in my book, *A Colder Fire: The Poetry of Robert Penn Warren* (University of Kentucky Press, 1965).

II. (TALE OF TIME: NEW POEMS, 1960-1966)

Tale of Time, which is mainly about personal episodes in its author's lifetime, consists of six clusters of poems, each with its own sub-heading. The first of these, "Notes on a Life to be Lived," contains ten poems, most of them organized around a contrast between daylight-innocence and nighttime-dread. Like one of Hemingway's insomniacs, our narrator is a night person, tormented unto dawn by memories of his father's death, by the present ordeal of a cancer-stricken neighbor, and by the world-wide stew of violence ranging from a cat killing a chipmunk to cannibalism in the Congo. Thus, the first poem, "Stargazing," pits the narrator's dread—"the stars/Are brilliant above the black spruces,/And fall comes on"—against the innocence of a girl who likes stargazing ("And the girl is saying, 'You do not look/At the stars'"). Many of the images of nocturnal dread in these poems are quite effective: the hawk against the sunset, the night-wind shaking the cedar, and the "cold . . . sweat on my father's mouth, dead" in "Blow, West Wind"; the "eagle . . . climbing/. . . beyond sight" in "Composition in Gold and Red-Gold"; the crow's call at dawn from the silence of deep woods in "Chain Saw at Dawn in Vermont in Time of Drouth"; and—a splendid insomniac's couplet—"I heard the swamp owl, night-long, call./The far car's headlight swept the room wall" ("Ways of Day"). (Notice all those birds—no wonder Mr. Warren admires Audubon.)

Efforts to escape or to cope with this anxiety usually resolve into the return to childhood innocence in these poems: to Time as a stasis ("that dazzle of no-Time") surrounding his boyhood home in "Small White House"; to pre-natal unconsciousness in "Vision Under the October Mountain: A Love Poem" ("we in the/pulse and warm slosh of/. . . the tide of that bliss unbreathed, bathed in/un-self which was self"); and to the daylight-innocence of his small son in "Ways of Day": "I am watching from my shade/. . . I watch you at your sunlit play./Teach me, my son, the ways of day." To recover some such innocence, though fallen into an adult's night or shade, is the narrator's purpose in the last two poems of this sequence that we shall mention. "Patriotic Tour and Postulate of Joy" shows the narrator rising to the sound of the mockingbird, late at night, and crying out "in my need/To know what postulate of joy men have tried/To live by, in sunlight and moonlight, until they died." The other poem, "Dragon-Tree," develops images of nocturnal anxiety—a faucet dripping all night, icy black water rushing through the gorge nearby, news of cannibalism in the Congo ("Human flesh is yet eaten there, often uncooked"), geese flying over insomniac ears "in dawn-light"—and yet the poem ends with the narrator asking "to just sit with the children and tell a tale ending in laughter," for although "your heart is the dragon-tree," its "new leaf flaps gilt in the sunlight. Birds sing." A nice example of the reconciliation of opposites, Coleridge or Shelley might agree.

"Tale of Time," the title of this whole collection, is also the title of the second cluster of poems here rendered, a sequence about the death of the poet's mother. In reading these six poems, one recalls some curiously personal early poems, similarly guilt-haunted and passionate, on the same theme—poems like "The Return: An Elegy," where a son traveling to attend his mother's funeral thinks, "the old bitch is dead/what have I said!"; and "Revelation," where, recalling a bitter quarrel with his mother, the grieving son learns, too late (she is now dead—"that irredeemable face"), that "In separateness only does love learn definition." Later, in *Promises* (Poem I), he had a vision of both his father and mother lying under the cemetery—"their bones in a phosphorous of glory agleam, there they lay,/Ruth and Robert"—from whence they pass him a message related to the osmosis of being, saying, "Child . . ./We died only that every promise might be fulfilled."

Here in "Tale of Time" the poet again turns to the osmosis process, beginning with its failure in Poem I ("What Happened"):

. . . my mother
Died, and God
Kept on, and keeps on
Trying to tie things together, but

It doesn't always work, and we put the body
Into the ground, dark . . .

So we have another insomniac narrator, troubled when he does sleep by "the dream of the eating of human flesh" but usually sleepless, rising after midnight to stare in the mirror and "think of copulation, of/The sun-dappled dark of deep woods and/Blood on green fern frond, of/The shedding of blood. . . ." And he thinks of Time. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, "Time is that which separates"; through death, it separates absolutely. Warren's images of Time thus tend to stress its destructiveness; he speaks of "Time's slow malediction" in *Promises* (Poem VI), of "The Turpitude of Time" in *You, Emperors, and Others* ("Mortmain," Poem IV), and of "the cold hypothesis of Time" here in "Tale of Time" ("Insomnia," Part 3).

Working against this sense of loss and brokenness, however, are two constructive factors in this sequence: first, an appeal to something Warren calls—in a later poem about a death in Vermont—"the human fabric," that network of personal relationships which holds our peculiarly human identity in escrow; and second, the poet's imagination reconstructing what is lost in poems like "What Were You Thinking, Dear Mother?" (where he relives an evening from her childhood) and "Insomnia" (where he undertakes, through a visionary imagination, to communicate with her

spirit). Among the faces making up the human fabric for mother, two in particular are evoked here. The apothecary in "The Mad Druggist," carried off to the asylum for deliberately killing (by altering prescriptions) some "folks that wouldn't be missed,/Or this God-durn town would be lucky to miss," had liked "Miss Ruth" (Warren's mother) and spared her from his list of victims. He "Had the wit to see that she was too precious to die:/A fact some in the street had not grasped—nor the attending physician, nor God, nor I." The other face in the human fabric is that of the narrator's black mammy in "Interim." This poem, divided into eight segments, begins and ends with the osmosis of being theme. The interim of the title is that time "Between the clod [his mother's burial] and the midnight" when "the heart cries out for coherence" (Part 1): "Between the beginning and the end, we must learn/The nature of being, in order/In the end to be. . . ." The next six segments of "Interim" describe the speaker's visit to Mammy, to find out what love is; herself aged and dying, she can only raise her hand feebly, touch his cheek, and say "you." Part 6 says, "There is only one solution. If/You would know how to live," and Part 8 defines the solution as an osmotic eucharist similar to the hogs devouring everyone into One Flesh in *Promises* ("Ballad of a Sweet Dream of Peace"): ". . . the solution: You/Must eat the dead./You must eat them completely, bone, blood, flesh, gristle, even/Such hair as can be forced." This accomplished, "Immortality is not impossible,/Even joy."

"Insomnia," the final entry in "Tale of Time," has four segments. The first conjures up in a broken style ("If to that place. Place of grass./If to hour of whippoorwill, I.") a night-visit to his mother's grave; the next two segments invoke an eerie communion with the departed ("What age has the soul, what Face does it wear. . . .?"); and the final section consummates the experience in a dialectic of pain and joy (his mother's ghost is the "striker from darkness"):

Come,
Crack crust, striker
From darkness, and let seize . . .
.
.
.
The heart till, after pain, joy from it
Spurt like a grape. . . .

After this, the vision collapses like the heat lightning in the last stanza, following which, "the eye/Adjusts to the new dark,/The stars are, again, born."

"Homage to Emerson, On Night Flight to New York," the third poem sequence in *Tale of Time*, does not give much homage to Emerson. (This fact will surprise no-one at all familiar with Warren's writing.) In what is probably a lapse from his best work, Warren holds Emerson's essays

in his lap on the airplane ride and complains, "There is/No sin. Not even error" (Part I: "His Smile"). Sin, perhaps Original Sin, is comically rendered through un-Emersonian recollections of masturbation in boyhood in Poem II, "The Wart" ("*Son/You quit that jack-off, and that thing go way*"). Through the next four poems, a spider, a pair of drunks in New Orleans (the narrator is one of them), the fear generated during the plane's landing in New York (the man in the next seat audibly recites the multiplication table), and the speaker's dread of the immensity of nature ("The wind comes off the Sound, smelling of/Ice," while "Eastward, the great waters stretch in darkness") all contradict Emerson's lofty preachments about man and nature. Only in Poem VII, "Does the Wild Rose," does Warren give any true homage to Emerson, here by restating the Transcendentalist's magnificent assertion in "The American Scholar" that the task of the scholar (or artist) is "transmuting life into truth." Emerson, describing how the scholar "received into him the world around," said "It came into him life; it went out from him truth." Warren says, more feebly, "there must be/A way by which the process of living can become Truth."

Tucked between the Emerson poems and the next cluster is a very fine work called "Fall Comes in Back-Country Vermont," a poem about a death by cancer in a town so tiny that the death will leave only fifteen voters. The Osmosis of Being theme is rendered here through the metaphor of "The Human Fabric" (Part 3), which mitigates losses:

[He has] died, but for now let us take some comfort
 In the fact that the fifteen surviving voters,
 Remembering his name, feel, in the heart,
 Diminished, for in this section death

Is a window gone dark and a face not seen
 Any more at the P. O., and in the act
 Of rending irreparably the human fabric,
 Death affirms the fact of that fabric. . . .

In addition, the animal imagery in the poem extends the osmotic grasp beyond the human fabric—to the bear calling its mate (like the human widow) in Part 2 ("On the mountain the moon-air will heave with that hunger"), and the lynx the cancer victim had shot and stuffed in time past: "And the stuffed lynx he shot now all night glares/At the empty room with a feral vindication,/And does not forgive, and thinks with glee/How cancer is worse than a 30.30. . . ." The thrust of time that orders these events is figured in Warren's run-on syntax, which embraces into one sentence all four sections of this poem, comprising 116 lines and thirty-one stanzas.

The final three sequences of *Tale of Time* we shall have to deal with quickly, for space is short, but they are, in the event, reasonably transparent. "The Day Dr. Knox Did It" (committed suicide) is structured mainly on a syllogism concerning the cause of suicide. "For some folks the world gets too much," grandfather explained in Poem III to the narrator—then, in August 1914, a nine-year-old boy; in Poem V, the narrator—now an adult—has discovered that "We are the world." He elaborates on what this means by reliving some epiphanies (night-fog in San Francisco, sex by the sea in moonlight) and by confessing his sins: "I . . ./have lied, . . ./have stolen small objects, committed/adultery, and for a passing pleasure,/as well as for reasons of sanitation,/inflicted death on flies. . . ." "Holy Writ" consists of two poems, "Elijah on Mount Carmel" (after the slaughter of the priests of Baal) and "Saul at Gilboa." Elijah is one of Warren's "Clean" people, a murderous fanatic like John Brown. He screams now in an ecstasy of blood-letting as he hunts down his next victim, Jezebel—"that sweet dog-bait," and his heels" . . . with blood spurts flailed/Stone, splashed mud. . . . And he screamed/. . . Screaming in glory/Like/A bursting blood blister." Ahab and Jezebel, by contrast, seem humanly appealing in their fear and their love for each other as the Hebrew king flees home to seek solace next "that soft Phoenician belly." "Saul at Gilboa" is a monologue, in nine segments, spoken by the prophet Samuel, initially Saul's anointer and later his adviser summoned up from the underworld by the witch of Endor. Narrated in a style of high dignity, directness and simplicity reminiscent of the King James Bible, this poem traces Saul's career from his anointment, in ignorance and beauty, to his final death and ignominy. The identity theme is paramount; like Oedipus, Saul fell tragically from kingship to being merely himself—in the end, a torso beheaded and desecrated on the battlefield. This is why Samuel concludes (Part 9) that "through/The enormous hollow of my head, History/Whistles like a wind."

Tale of Time concludes—strategically, one supposes—with a cluster of eight poems under the heading, "Delight." Here the lyric note decidedly predominates—mostly short lines, with much rhyme and pyrotechnics of sound effects, as in Poem II, "Love: Two Vignettes": "How instant joy, how clang/And whang the sun, how/Whoop the sea" and Look!/All leaves are new, are/. . . Bangles dangling and/ Spangling, in sudden air/Wangling. . . ." A gift unearned and unreasoned ("Nor can it be guessed"), delight strikes "suddenly," strikes "*now*" in these poems, walking "on soundless foot/Into the silence of night,/Or into broad daylight" and provoking emotions that range from the philosophically serene ("Delight may dawn, as the day dawned, calmly, today"—Poem III) to the orgasmically intense: "Look! In that bush, with wolf-fang white, delight/Humps now for someone: *You*" (Poem VI). Sometimes delight comes through the unconscious, during sleep, as in "Dream of a Dream the Small Boy Had" ("my heart

a bird singing/. . . in a foreign language, like pig-latin, or joy"); often it emanates from childhood, as in "Two Poems About Suddenly and a Rose," where the speaker learns delight from his children—"In hands of *now*, they hold/Presents of *is*"—and a Keatsian moment ensues: "Now . . . I see/Forever on the leaf the light. Snow/On the pine-leaf, against the bright blue/Forever of my mind." Having lived in delight, "The rose dies laughing, suddenly" at the end of this poem—which is presumably how delight itself dies, between epiphanies. "Finisterre" concludes *Tale of Time* with something like an artist's delight, perhaps a painter's perspective of San Francisco Bay at day's end, when the sun may "stab gold to the gray sea, and twist/Your heart to a last delight—or at least to wonder."

III. INCARNATIONS: POEMS 1966-1968

(Having already published my analysis of *Incarnations* in *Shenandoah* magazine—Summer, 1969, pp. 94-99—I naturally wish neither to plagiarize that magazine nor to waste space in this one. Rather than reword my earlier commentary, then, I shall here render a brief summary of it, together with some new observations, and refer anyone who might be interested in it to the earlier essay.)

The meaning of one's flesh, if at all comprehensible, is perhaps best contemplated via the incarnation of other beings. Working out from his Biblical headnote, "Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren"—Nehemiah 5:5, Mr. Warren gathers a wide assortment of creatures under his scrutiny, from a fish under sea ("The Red Mullet") to a hawk in the air ("The Leaf") to human beings on the point of extinction (a doomed convict and an accident victim in "Internal Injuries"). Flesh now extinct also attracts the poet's eye, from a drowned cat riding the sea swells ("Masts at Dawn") to the "clutter of annual bones, of hare, vole, bird" up in the hawk's lair, that "high place of stone" which is Nature's sacrificial altar; and among these extinct creatures are similarly anonymous human beings, nameless "bodies/. . . eaten by dogs, gulls, rodents, ants,/And fish" (in "Natural History"), ironically survived by their artifacts: "A handful of coins, a late emperor./Hewn stone. . . ." ("What Day Is"). The main beneficiary of this decay of flesh seems to be the vegetation: "and the root/Of the laurel has profited, the leaf/Of the live-oak achieves a new luster. . . ." ("Natural History"). For a D. H. Lawrence or a Henry Miller, Death's old adversary, Eros, might provide a cheering alternative to this vision of things, but Warren's "Myth on Mediterranean Beach: Aphrodite as Logos" shows Love, under Time's slow malediction, to be almost as grotesque as death itself. A hump-backed old crone whose "breasts hang down like saddle-bags" ("To balance the hump the belly sags"), Warren's Aphrodite "passes the lovers, one by one,/And passing, draws their dreams away."

This leaves only the Osmosis of Being as a possible alternative to

naturalistic loss, the conviction stated in "Night Is Personal"—"for we are all/One flesh." The most moving manifestation of Warren's Osmosis in *Incarnations* is probably the passage on his deceased father ("The Leaf," Parts C & D), reminiscent of the "blood greed" passage in *All the King's Men*, except that here the blood greed draws child towards parent rather than vice-versa: "From a further garden [the cemetery] . . ./My father's voice, in the moment when the cicada ceases, has called to me." In the momentary silence of the cicadas, however, he also hears another sound, less assuring than his father's blessing: "I can hear the appalling speed,/ In space beyond stars, of/Light, It is/A sound like wind." This sound of wind, which recurs in *Tale of Time* and *Audubon*, has become one of Mr. Warren's most important metaphors over the past decade, connoting the invisible power of nature, its thrust and immensity. The Osmosis of Being itself seems subsumed into this inhuman vastness of nature, but not quite: in the book's final poem, "Fog," a crow's call (another recurrent image) breaks the fog-bound solipsism of the speaker—"That much, at least, in this whiteness."

The meaning of incarnation is most strongly affirmed in "Enclaves," the concluding section about some epiphanies (lovers meeting, skiers observed) recollected in tranquility. Written in an elegant, sound-rich style, full of long vowels, inverted syntax and trochaic cadences, these poems evoke a tradition reaching from Dylan Thomas to the old epics: "Once over the water, to you borne brightly,/ . . . I,/Riding the spume-flash, by gull cries ringed,/Came." These epiphanies reveal, according to the subtitle of "Enclaves," "The True Nature of Time." Perhaps, in the light of Mr. Warren's lifelong preoccupation with this theme, our discussion of *Incarnations* should come to rest here.

IV. AUDUBON: A VISION (1969)

Audubon: A Vision, published in 1969, is a book whose genesis reaches back for a quarter of a century. In an interview with Jean Crawford, published in *The Vanderbilt Alumnus* (March-April 1970, p. 21), Mr. Warren stated, "I read Audubon's journals twenty-five years ago when I was reading a lot about early America. Well, over these twenty years lines came and went. About three years ago, I started re-reading the journals, and the poem began to come." This dating in the middle of the 1940's explains what might otherwise seem a curious anomaly: the fact that the poem about Audubon centers not upon the bird paintings but rather upon a brutal frontier episode of attempted murder followed by a hanging. The plot of this narrative greatly resembles that of "The Ballad of Billie Potts" (published 1944): Audubon puts up as a paying guest in a backwoods shack, inflames the avarice of his hostess by displaying a fine gold watch before retiring, and awakens to find the woman and her two sons about to kill him. Saved by three men who burst into the cabin at this moment—

men with their own grievances to settle, Audubon lingers to watch the woman and her two sons hanged the next morning. What Warren does with this material, however, is quite different from the brooding and ironic rendering of the Billie Potts tale. In the later work, he somehow extracts serenity and beauty from what would appear wholly macabre and sordid.

Audubon begins, as is so typical of Warren's writings, with an identity problem. The book's first poem, "Was Not the Lost Dauphin," dispels the most famous legend about Audubon—that he was like Twain's King in *Huckleberry Finn*, the missing son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Quite the contrary, Warren's headnote tells us, Audubon was not only common-born, he was a bastard child, the son of Jean Audubon (then a slave dealer in Santo Domingo) and his mistress, though he passed himself off as the legitimate child of his father and the wife his father had left back in France. Since he was not the person which legend or even his own imposture declared him to be, the question properly arises, who *was* he? This first poem, and the whole book, proffers the answer that he "was only/Himself, Jean Jacques, and his passion—what/Is man but his passion?" Audubon's passion was birds, obviously, and this passion, bodied forth in his unique talent, is surely enough his identity to the rest of us worldlings. It is how we know him. But as Warren has done in his poems from "Billie Potts" to the present, he uses the pretext of discussing Audubon to bring the discussion around to "you," his real target. After describing Audubon watching a heron fly across the dawn, he says: "Dawn: and what is your passion?" It is a question to be seriously considered, and perhaps the answer will divulge "your" identity, somewhat in the manner of Jesus' assertion, "As a man is in his heart, so is he."

What Audubon was, or became, in his heart is the substance of what follows this first poem, "Was Not the Lost Dauphin." There is a Part B to this poem which shows Audubon almost immersed in nature, Wordsworth-like, while watching a bear eat blueberries. As usual, Warren's command of sound texture nicely corroborates the richness of the epiphany: "The bear's tongue . . . out-crisps to the curled tip,/It bleeds the black blood of the blueberry," while "Bemused, above the fume of ruined blueberries,/The last bee hums." Osmosis with nature seems quite easy and inviting in this setting: "He leans on his gun. Thinks/How thin is the membrane between himself and the world."

What follows this pleasant experience, however, as described over the next fifteen pages in Poem II, "The Dream He Never Knew the End Of," is the harrowing tale of Audubon's encounter in the cabin. Broken in segments numbered from A to M, "The Dream . . ." begins with Audubon's first look at the cabin, "a huddle of logs with no calculation or craft:/The human filth, the human hope." Its inhabitants are not only poor but shiftless, too lazy even to chop clean wood, as the foul smoke from their fireplace testifies: "thinks: 'Punk-wood.'/Thinks: 'Dead-fall half-rotten.'"

As he raises his hand to knock on the door, the theme of identity passes over to the woman who will answer—"The nameless face/In the dream of some pre-dawn cock-crow—about to say what,/Do what?" (Part B). Though still nameless (she remains nameless, in fact), she is defined more clearly in Part C; here and in the later hanging scene, Audubon observes her face with the clarity of one of his bird paintings:

The face, in the air, hangs. Large,
Raw-hewn, strong-beaked, the haired mole
Near the nose, to the left, and the left side by firelight
Glazed red, the right in shadow, and . . .
. under the coarse eyebrows
The eyes, dark, glint as from the unspecifiable
Darkness of a cave. It is a woman.

In Part D, Audubon witlessly precipitates the contingencies that follow by displaying his gold watch, a symbol not only of time (the Dream We Never Know the End Of) but also of the woman's lifelong deprivation:

It is gold, it lives in his hand in the firelight, and the woman's
Hand reaches out. She wants it. She hangs it about her neck.
. her eyes
Are fixed downward, as though in shyness, on that gleam, and her face
Is sweet in an outrage of sweetness, so that
His gut twists cold. He cannot bear what he sees.
Her body sways like a willow in spring wind. Like a girl.

When the time comes to take back the watch, and she, "sullen and sunken," turns to fix the food, Audubon catches a warning from an Indian who is also putting up at the cabin: "the Indian/Draws a finger, in delicious retardation, across his own throat." In Part E, after the woman's two sons have come in from the night, the guest pretends to sleep but is disturbed by the sound of the woman honing a knife by the fire, and in Part F she and her sons rise toward him, acting out "the dream he had in childhood but never/Knew the end of, only/The scream." In Part G, rather than defend himself, Audubon seems transfixed by a death wish; "Now, now! the voice in his head cries out," but "now a sweet lassitude/Sweetens his limbs" and "Everything seems far away and small." Like a man convicted of sin—as perhaps he should be, because of the watch—Audubon almost welcomes his immolation: "He cannot think what guilt unmans him, or/Why he should find the punishment so precious." (This vicarious guilt marks Audubon as an "aware" character, like Jack Burden or RPW in *Brother to Dragons*; it is part of the Osmosis of Being theme). How this dream, or nightmare, might have ended we may never know, as Part H

complains, because a band of men burst into the cabin at this climactic moment and truss up the woman and her two sons to await hanging in the morning.

This hanging episode is what really imparts to Audubon his vision of identity, which comes down to the discovery, while witnessing the woman's death, that the human soul—no matter how lowly or wretched its contingent circumstances—is capable of a transcendent grace and dignity. The woman's final heroic stance, as unpredictable as that of Faulkner's Mink Snopes or Wash Jones, points up the Faulknerian verities of the heart—honor, courage, endurance, and the integrity of simply being herself. Part I shows the woman ready to die bravely, refusing the anodyne of whiskey (later she likewise rejects the anodyne of prayer), and Part J—perhaps the most crucial passage in this book—describes her stoic acceptance of death ("She waits,/And is what she is . . .") as a kind of beauty that precipitates Audubon's greatest epiphany, one that even kindles his erotic passion. Her nameless face now expresses its innermost identity:

Out of that whiteness
The dark eyes stare at nothing, or at
The nothingness that the gray sky, like Time, is, for
There is no Time, and the face
Is, he suddenly sees, beautiful as stone, and

So becomes aware that he is in the manly state.

In the poetry of years past, this woman would probably have figured as one of Warren's beastly people, like Lilburn Lewis or Big Billie Potts, acting out in animalistic style a drama of "Original Sin" or natural depravity. Here, however, perhaps because of the osmotic vision, her face declares to the artist-spectator "a new dimension of beauty" (Part K):

The affair was not quick: both sons long jerking and farting, but she,
From the first, without motion, frozen
In a rage of will, an ecstasy of iron, as though
This was the dream that, lifelong, she had dreamed towards.

The face,
Eyes a-glare, jaws clenched, now glowing black with congestion
Like a plum, had achieved,
It seemed to him, a new dimension of beauty.

That is the vision this book seeks to transmit, and it is enough to leave Audubon, in Part L, in a state of transcendent emotion, rather like Eliot looking into the "heart of light" in *The Waste Land*:

There are tears in his eyes.
He tries to remember his childhood.
He tries to remember his wife.
He can remember nothing.

Throat parched, hand clutching the gold watch, he yearns at this moment "to frame a definition of joy." In Part M, the final segment of this poem, Audubon stands studying the woman's face long after the others have gone, with only a crow call to break the deathsome silence (as at the end of *Incarnations*):

He 'thought: "I must go."
But could not, staring
At the face, and stood for a time even after
The first snowflakes, in idiotic benignity,
Had fallen. Far off, in the forest and falling snow,
A crow was calling.

Although the modern mind tends to think of death as the extinguishing of identity, Warren appears to believe that death—the end of time's dream—releases the secret of identity, or confirms it somehow. Thus the after-effects of the hanging are, through the dozen pages that remain in this book, short lyrical poems of serenity and affirmation. Poem III, "We Are Only Ourselves," asserts in its title what Audubon has learned from the experience, and Warren lapses into didacticism for a moment: "Continue to walk in the world. Yes, love it! . . . /He continued to walk in the world." Poems IV and V, "The Sign Whereby He Knew" and "The Sound of That Wind," describe Audubon's autumn of life and his death as serene and fulfilled in the light of his new knowledge. Immersed in nature almost like one of his birds ("After sunset, /Alone, he played his flute in the forest"), he sometimes hears "The jay, sudden as conscience," and this call, reminiscent of the crow's call when the woman died, is presumably the sign referred to in this poem's title ("The Sign Whereby He Knew"). In "The Sound of That Wind," he reflects on his life both in nature and in human society, and then dies easily and naturally, as befits one who has glimpsed the Osmosis of Being and who therefore has "merged the ugly with the beautiful, the slayer with the slain" until "the world which once produced fear and disgust . . . may now be totally loved":

His mind
Was darkened, and his last joy
Was in the lullaby they sang him, in Spanish, at sunset.
He died, and was mourned, who had loved the world.
Who had written: ". . . a world which though wicked enough
in all conscience is *perhaps* as good
as worlds unknown."

Audubon's death, like that of the woman, is attested by a cluster of death images, with Warren himself the artist-spectator in this instance, thinking how (when Audubon died) "Night leaned, and now leans,/Off the Atlantic, and is on schedule . . .[and] with no sound sweeps westward" across the Mississippi, where a wrecked tree, "white as bone," is "reflected in dark water, and a star/Thereby." Replacing Audubon's bird against the dawn, in Poem I, is a plane now "winking westward" in the upper darkness.

In "Love and Knowledge," the next-to-last poem in this book, Warren finally mentions Audubon's celebrated artistic achievement, but again, he is more interested in Audubon's soul, or his "passion," than in the paintings: "He slew them . . . with his gun./Over a body held in his hand, his head was bowed low,/But not in grief." What bowed the man's head was not grief but love, which Warren here defines as knowledge ((What is love? . . ./One name for it is knowledge)), thus connecting the dead birds in some way with the face of the hanged woman. The final poem in this book moves from Audubon's forte, painting, to Warren's, which is writing, but in both cases the driving motive is the yearning for knowledge. One is reminded of Wordsworth's *Preface* of 1800: "Poetry is first and last of all knowledge—it is immortal as the heart of man." "Tell Me a Story" concludes *Audubon* with two vignettes of our narrator, Robert Penn Warren himself. The first, Part A, recalls an evening in early spring, when Warren was a boy in rural Kentucky listening to the geese hoot northward in the dark; we are reminded here of the first poem of *Audubon* ("what is your passion?"): "I did not know what was happening in my heart." In Part B of "Tell Me a Story," Warren advances his notion that that is what life is, ultimately: a story. After time's dream has unfolded its design, what we have left is a story, the immense tale of time whose particles the artist, in every medium, gathers. Especially in the light of the Osmosis of Being, every particle is precious, worthy of passion, worth preserving. Warren's earlier uses of the "Story" motif may shed some light on this last poem: "Original Sin: A Short Story" (published, 1942) described a vague guilt and complicity, unshakable as "the old hound that used to snuffle your door and moan," somewhat like Audubon's complicity in the woman's death; "Prognosis: A Short Story, the End of Which You Will Know Soon Enough" (1960) is about a dying woman, whose life is the short story, the end of which she will know soon enough! and Warren's masterpiece, *Brother to Dragons* (1953), has a headnote describing history as "the big myth we live"—i.e., essentially a story. For all the pain and loss in the story's telling, *Audubon* concludes, like *Tale of Time*, in "Delight"; its last line reads, "Tell me a story of deep delight." That, Mr. Warren seems to feel, is the final meaning of the story.

V. POSTSCRIPT (1972)

In a lecture he delivered in 1966, and later published as a pamphlet entitled *A Plea in Mitigation: Modern Poetry and the End of an Era*, Mr. Warren formally acknowledged "the end of 'modernism,' that school of which the Founding Fathers were Eliot, Pound, and Yeats" (p. 1). He explained this demise in terms of two ways of *regarding* poetry, as "prophecy" and as "art":

When a new poetic period dawns, it always dawns with prophetic urgency: it brings with it the possibility of new experience. . . .

But the time always comes when the prophetic force drains away. The poetry is repudiated—quite properly, for it no longer answers the life-need for defining identity, for establishing equilibrium in change. . . . At this point of the death of the poetry of an age, . . . [the] body of poetry is torn apart and scattered but after this there may be a resurrection—a resurrection into "poetry as art." (pp. 2-3)

Every piece of art, he says, originates as prophecy, as immediate living truth for its maker: "The individual writer . . . must be 'committed.' . . . As a writer—that is, in the moment of writing—he must think of poetry only as prophecy" (p. 19). It was in this role as prophet, I think, that Mr. Warren developed his major themes: the naturalistic dread and alienation, like that in *The Hollow Men*, in *Thirty-Six Poems* (1935); the mounting identity crisis of *Eleven Poems on the Same Theme*, (1942), "The Ballad of Billie Potts" (1944), and *Brother to Dragons* (1953), where a sanctimonious surface ego tries to stave off some fearsome inherent depravity; the enlargement of the Osmosis of Being theme in *Promises* (1957) and the later books, providing some answer to both the naturalistic dread and the identity problem; and most recently, affirmations of "delight" coming on strongly.

As prophet, Mr. Warren has spoken movingly and meaningfully about some central issues of our time. But it is as art that his poetry must hope to survive—even though, as Mr. Warren observes, "any piece of art may again become prophecy" (he points to modern revivals of Donne and Blake as examples). How much of his poetry will ascend into the immortality of "poetry as art" remains, of course, to be seen, but his themes are likely to remain significant, and through a career that reaches back over a half century, encompassing schools of pre-modern, modern, and post-modern aesthetics, he has displayed both growth and consistency in his technical resources. His poetry of the sixties reflects the post-modern loosening of form now widely in practice, but with respect to the ageless

elements of poetic technique—command of metaphor, control of tone and diction, powers of organization, mastery of sound effects, and the like—he continues to maintain a “morality of style” that is true to the classic standard. Like Herman Melville, that other poet-novelist whom he greatly admires and resembles, Mr. Warren deserves to be more widely read as a poet, and probably will be.

The Fictional Voices of Robert Penn Warren

• Robert Frank Cayton

The abundant critical attention given to Robert Penn Warren's novels has focused, for the most part, on what he as a novelist has to say, rather than on the methods which he employs as a novelist. But method is of prime importance to Warren. He admits in the 1957 *Paris Review* interview that method is the essence of the novelist's art. In his recent critical work, *Homage to Theodore Dreiser* (1971), he reiterates this belief when he writes that "a novel achieves the total, inner vibrance that guarantees permanence" only by some deep coherence of the "rendered" and the "rendering." In other words, he feels that the vital rhythm of the novel is defined by the tension between these two principles of structure—the narrative and the thematic.

By definition, Warren is a philosophical novelist in the tradition of Joseph Conrad. That is, he is a novelist who seeks to define values by permitting images to rise to symbol. In 1951 Warren wrote in his "Introduction" to Conrad's *Nostromo* that the philosophical novelist is one "for whom images always fall into a dialectical configuration," and "for whom the urgency of experience . . . is the urgency to know the meaning of experience." In searching for these meaningful patterns of experience and symbolic patterns of images, Warren has involved himself in a vital and unending relationship with the intricacies of narrative technique.

Leonard Casper, in the first full-length study of Warren's works, published in 1960, for instance, recognizes this fact when he writes of Warren's choice of formidable structures. Casper says that not only has Warren long admired Tudor and Jacobean drama, but he also has admired the "kitchen criticism" of the 16th and 17 centuries. Warren calls this admiration a connoisseur's interest in "how to make the cake."

To discover the meaning of experience, Warren, the Conradian workman of art, has employed in his novels the voices of narrators as thematic agents to aid him—and the reader—in discovering the intellectual and moral implications of the characters and events in each novel. Warren believes that these voices, operating from a variety of points of view, permit him, the novelist, to maintain control of the narrative and thematic structures of each novel.

Warren's novels have not only been characterized by his concern for form and the employment of a series of voices to play the dual roles of narrator and thematic agent, but by the reiteration of one major theme in his fiction. Critics have, from the beginning, recognized this fact and have isolated this persistent theme: man's struggle for self-knowledge and fulfillment in history. While Warren's novels may be "variations on a single theme, symbolized in the polarities of violence and order," as Charles Anderson observed in an essay in *Southern Renaissance* (1953). Warren shuns perfecting a formula for reuse. Therefore, each of his novels is a fresh experiment in technique designed to reflect his rich and complex vision of man. Thus Warren utilizes point of view as a method of thematic definition as opposed to the use of point of view as a method of dramatic delimitation.

A review of the novels will demonstrate how the voices of the narrators are transformed into the voices of thematic agents.

The voices heard in *Night Rider* (1939), Warren's first published novel, are those of the omniscient author and Percy Munn, the young lawyer embroiled in the early 20th century Kentucky tobacco wars. Mr. Munn's flaw, like Hamlet's, is that he is able to take action only when it is too late. The traditional role of the omniscient author is established by the employment of intransitive verbs, such as to feel, to be, and by the introduction of the phrase "Mr. Munn thought."

Naturally, the voice also freely speaks for Mr. Munn at any time, always talking about him in the third person, and constantly taking the liberty of revealing his thoughts. But the tone of the voice is cold and impersonal. The omniscient author permits Mr. Munn to speculate upon the meaning of his impulses often throughout the novel, these soliloquies sometimes running on for pages. But the voice in these soliloquies is never fully Mr. Munn's; it remains a cool, impersonal voice, curiously unemotional, all too often clinically intellectual.

What clearly happens in the novel as suggested here is this: Warren never completely settles on being an author-observer or an omniscient author. It is apparent that he is attempting to guide the story of the novel from the point of view of Percy Munn, but, wishing to crowd in all he wants to say about the search for self-identification and self-knowledge in an alienated world, he violates the limits of either of these traditional points of view and never successfully blends them into a new application of their combined forces.

Warren's failure to maintain a consistent point of view results in the observation that the employment of point of view in *Night Rider* reveals an author in search of a method.

At Heaven's Gate (1943) is an extremely complex novel with a host of narrators. But because of the complexities of point of view, it is a richer novel than *Night Rider*. Most of the characters in the novel are

members of three Southern families, living in the state of Tennessee during the later years of the second decade of the 20th century. These families are the Murdocks, representing the middle class of the South, wealthy and ruthless in their demands for and control of political power; the Calhouns, the old Southern family (who could boast of having a governor in their ancestry) tied to the land, fighting for a new dignity in the industrialized world; and the Porsums, hill people bred of and in the dirt, always ready to take advantage of any opportunity to advance beyond the stages of the primeval struggle for existence.

The multiplicity of points of view may appear to get in the reader's way, but when the reader draws a perspective of the whole novel, he sees that the narrative structure is very neatly constructed bit by bit as each narrator takes his turn relating the story. However, he does not retell the same story as is the case with the narrators of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Rather, each of the thirteen narrators, while speaking one or more times in the 391 pages of this novel, contributes some piece of machinery vital to the forward movement of the plot.

Warren has fixed the control of the novel from the outside by assigning the role of narrator at times and places most suspicious to the exploration of the themes of the novel. Various points of view have also afforded him the luxury of an encyclopedic consideration of these themes. In *At Heaven's Gate*, Warren initiates the employment of point of view to discover the intellectual and moral implications of his work and is successful in using point of view as a method of thematic definition.

Warren, in *All the King's Men* (1946), welds the narrative and thematic structures of the novel together within the conscience of Jack Burden, a single narrator, unburdened with omniscient-authorial interference. His role as narrator in *All the King's Men* serves two purposes: that of narrator and that of thematic agent. By combining these two qualities in one narrator, Warren tips the balance of scales from the use of multiple third-person points of view to the employment of the more restricted point of view of a first-person narrator.

The voice of Jack Burden may be, as some say, cynical, inconsistent, cold and introspective. Nevertheless, it is a purposeful voice, speaking with strength derived from the narrator's experience of being very much an integral part of the story of the political Southern demigod, Willie Stark, and his followers, Sadie Burke and Tiny Duffy, among others, and of Jack, Anne, and her brother, Adam Stanton, who is Stark's assassin.

Though there may still be controversy as to the success of Jack Burden as a narrator, time has permitted the acceptance by most readers of Burden's own involvement in the story which he tells. Never before and never again will any of the many narrators of Warren's fiction be permitted by the author to impose his point of view on a novel to the degree that Jack Burden does. Thus, none of the many narrators of

Warren's fiction before or after Jack Burden are permitted by the author to control the novel itself to the degree Jack Burden does. Burden's involvement as a first-person narrator in the thematic as well as the narrative structure of the novel gives the novel its incomparably rich texture.

Warren's extravagant use of point of view in *World Enough and Time* (1950), a bizarre work of fiction, to control the novel does not succeed by its very extravagance. The novel is Warren's version of the famous 1826 Beauchamp-Sharp murder trial in Kentucky.

To tell the story of *World Enough and Time*, whose theme is the failure of the subjective being of man to find order in his world, and thereby self-knowledge, Warren returns to the use of the omniscient author, who knows all, sees all, and most important, interprets all for the reader, thus discarding the first-person involved narrator who stood him so well in the structuring of *All the King's Men*. The voice of this omniscient author speaks in any person at will. He may use the first person or he may also recount narrative passages in the third person.

But the voice is not the same as that found in *Night Rider*; the omniscient author does not feel constrained to limit his commentary, nor does he lack boldness to speak directly to the reader for Beaumont (Warren's name for Beauchamp). Neither is the voice of the omniscient author in *World Enough and Time* apparently related to any of the major voices found in *At Heaven's Gate*, whose functions were not only thematic but narrative. Neither is it the voice of a Thackeray-like author who is an intruder busily searching for bits of gossip about the characters in the novel, nor is it the voice of a raconteur in the tradition of Marlowe. Rather it is the voice of a philosopher, conducting a monologue as he sifts through the documents in a determined effort to discover the truth of the situation.

Warren, the philosophical novelist and the Hawthornesque romantic, intends *World Enough and Time* to be read as a report of Beaumont's search for self-knowledge and for the truth of justice. Yet Warren, the author, never settles for himself, or Beaumont, the conflict between the world of reality and the world of pure idea. He does not allow this conflict to resolve itself in any manner in the novel. On the contrary, he permits the conflict to dissipate itself into a series of ambiguous statements. Therefore, a clear view by the reader of Beaumont's search is impossible, and as a result *World Enough and Time*, betrayed by its technique, is a faulted experiment in the use of point of view as a method of thematic definition.

The control of *Band of Angels* (1955) is lodged by Warren in the mulatto Amantha Starr's point of view. Warren, thus, sets himself the difficult task of writing in the restricted first person of a woman narrator. In my opinion, Warren succeeds in this task because he makes every effort to establish Amantha's credibility as a narrator and to make certain it is understood that she narrates from the perspective of a mature woman,

past middle age, that is from a mature point of view.

Amantha speaks in her own voice and is deeply involved in her own revelations. Her narrative is her life as she lived it: the drama of her life finds its vortex in her narration. She speaks also without the aid of the voice of the philosopher who told the tragic story of Jeremiah Beaumont. Throughout the novel, Amantha reminds the reader—and herself—of this perspective, of wisdom gained.

Amantha often interrupts her narrative to contemplate the values of living and to examine her existence for the meaning of her life. While Amantha is fulfilling the role of the first-person narrator, she also serves in the role of thematic agent. Amantha's voice has the double quality of reality and idea encountered in the omniscient narrator in *World Enough and Time*, but in *Band of Angels* this dichotomy is embodied in the first-person narrator. In sum, Amantha's relationship to the telling of her story is to act as an agent to provide the thematic definition of her story, the search for the answer to her question, "Oh, who am I?"

The writing of *The Cave* (1959) represents a tremendous burst of creative energy. The brilliance of Warren's technical virtuosity in this novel is blinding. The employment of nineteen third-person narrators, each making his own kind of song, creates in the novel a powerful dramatic tension.

The basic element of the narrative is the fact that Jasper Harrick, a Korean War veteran, amateur speleologist, and young "heller," is trapped in a cave near his home in Jhontown, Tennessee. A virtual circus of newspaper and television reporters, praying townspeople, family and friends of Jasper spring up at the mouth of the cave. During the course of the "rescue," most of the characters in the novel, as a result of alterations in their lives caused by this crisis, are forced to a greater self-knowledge.

When compared to *Band of Angels*, with its first-person narrator, the multiplicity of third-person narrators may appear to give the effect that the technique splinters off into too many directions. But, as was the case with *At Heaven's Gate*, Warren has chosen to effect technical control of the material in *The Cave* by using multiple narrators. This number of narrators is five more than those required to tell the story of *At Heaven's Gate*, and also far exceeds the range of narrators utilized by Warren in each of the four other novels preceding *The Cave*.

While narrators of *At Heaven's Gate* recited the story in a continuous flow of action, the narrators in *The Cave* speak their stories as each absorbs the action into his own experience. These narrators have been created to be trumpeters of the theme. Furthermore, it is clear that no narrator thinks or acts without relating his thoughts and actions clearly and overtly to a thematic need.

While *The Cave* may be faulted because the voices of the many narrators tend to sound too much like the voice of the author heard at the

beginning of the novel, fortunately the voices of the nineteen narrators are able to weld the novel into a balanced whole. Warren never for a moment loses control of his material in *The Cave*.

Wilderness (1961) represents in concrete form the vision of freedom of the individual which is inherent in Warren's concern during the 1960's with the plight of the Negro as evidenced in *The Legacy of the Civil War* (1961) and *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (1965).

This simple tale of young Adam Rosenzweig's adventure in the Civil War lacks the host of wonderfully drawn minor characters, a hallmark of Warren's previous works, as well as all the entangling introspective thought of *At Heaven's Gate* and *World Enough and Time*, and the various exempla found in *Night Rider*, *At Heaven's Gate*, *All the King's Men*, and *World Enough and Time*. In fact, Leonard Casper has labeled *Wilderness* as an exemplum, which stands alone.

In addition, the rhetoric of *Wilderness* has none of the qualities of the styles of the earlier novels: there is no lushness of adjective, no adverb placed to jar the syntax, and no noun that appears to be archaic but which the dictionary says is not.

Warren dares much by compressing in the slight form of a tale the vast theme of attaining freedom through self-knowledge. But this compression is enclosed in a weak form controlled by two narrators. Adam Rosenzweig and an omniscient narrator with a poetic nature. Both of these are uncertain, both ambiguous, both unwilling to take the complete control of the novel into his hands. This is the fault of the author, and it results in a major and irreparable flaw in the novel. Warren makes the mistake of trying to blend the vastly important theme of freedom through self-knowledge with the weak voices of Adam Rosenzweig and the voice of the poet-narrator, who is enthralled by the sound of his lyrical voice.

As in *At Heaven's Gate* and *The Cave*, Warren has employed a multiplicity of points of view to tell the story of *Flood* (1964), his eighth novel. For the setting, Warren created the town of Fiddlersburg, which is being relocated because it will soon be covered by the water being impounded in a new lake. The story of alienation and search for self-knowledge is told by author Brad Tolliver, movie producer Yasha Jones, and Brad's sister Maggie, among others.

The conclusion to be drawn from an examination of the narrations of Brad, Yasha and Maggie is that the narrators in *Flood* are actually puppets manipulated by Warren. They might be likened to actors on a stage telling their stories in stage voices, pausing again and again to address the audience on the meanings of their lives and actions. None of the narrators, however, speak from the depths of their innermost beings with the power and sonority of the many narrators of *At Heaven's Gate* and *The Cave*.

I am suggesting that in *Flood* the role of the author is really a com-

bination of playwright, stage manager, and director. Each narrator's continual and unceasing examination of his every word and action for the meaning of life gives rise to the observation that the novel is simply a dramatized version on the old theme of self-discovery presented in the form of a novel. It may be added that the dialogue which the actors are called upon to speak is too ponderous with philosophical attitudes and ambiguities to provide a clear reading by any actor. The result is a stylized drama in novel form.

Meet Me in the Green Glen (1971), Warren's ninth and latest novel, has half a dozen narrators. Among them are lawyer Murray Guilfort, frustrated, fortyish Cassie, who is tired of nursing an invalid husband, fumbling young Angelo, who is seeking a refuge from the police, and an omniscient narrator who refuses total involvement in the narrative of the novel. From a remote place in time and space, the omniscient narrator compulsively comments on the thoughts and actions of the characters as they move through an uninspired story of murder. This pesky voice also appears obsessed with the reiteration of the theme of the novel: illusion is the only truth of life.

It is difficult to distinguish the voices of the narrators from that of the author, or to assign them any narrative or thematic roles. Indeed, Warren has apparently abandoned the voices of the poet, the playwright, and the philosopher. He prefers to speak in this novel directly to the reader, and as a result, the author's voice is but a parody of those rich and marvelous voices heard in the previous eight novels.

Although each of Warren's nine novels is a new experiment in form, there emerges from this short review of the novels a certain pattern of using point of view as a method of thematic definition: the transformation of the voices of narrators into the voices of thematic agents.

Warren's enormous interest in method is matched by the immensity of the basic theme of his novels. This theme is succinctly expressed in these lines from the tale in verse and voices, *Brother to Dragons* (1953):

We have yearned in the heart for some identification

With the glory of the human effort, and have yearned

For an adequate definition of that glory.

The yearning in the heart for some identification with the glory of the human effort can be represented in another way by Amantha Starr's cry, "Oh, who am I?" Each narrator in each novel struggles to find the answer to this question and thereby have knowledge, for, as Warren wrote in his 1952 essay, "Knowledge and the Image of Man," knowledge is simply a way of saying "man's right to exist, to be himself, to be a man."

These narrators, as is their fate, encountered violence and all the cardinal sins in their pursuit of self-knowledge, and never settle on a final disposition of man to be himself. If *Flood* were Warren's last novel, it might be concluded that the final answer for man is to accept without

question the Christian God that is the God of Ashby Wyndham and Brother Potts in *At Heaven's Gate*. But Warren is unable to satisfy his insatiable need to renew the journey of exploration for the final truth of man's existence. He struggles for the truth again in *Meet Me in the Green Glen* and leaves us with the same doubts, the same pressures, and the same questions which were examined 32 years ago in *Night Rider*. As Murray Guilfort learned, illusion is the only truth and that's all there is.

In conclusion, the voices of the narrators in Warren's novels are a direct result of his need to derive form from content and content from form. After all, he is the connoisseur interested in the best recipe.

The Penn Central Makes Some Connections

• Judith Kroll

Everyone is nodding on the train.
The passengers are almost asleep.

The midday sun shines straight into my eyes.

It is the air,
hot and sedative,
that fuzzes our brains.
What the train breathes out,
we are breathing in.
We realize our sleepiness
is not from lack of sleep.

Everyone
is annoyed;
a sense of community grows.
I am the one
chosen to find the conductor
who has gone to the tip of the car.
I rise and balance down the aisle.
I smile
upon each passenger, one by one,
furry and white,
sheep after sheep.
The end seems so
far.

No wonder the water is so still.

The river is sealed
by a skin of oil. The shore,
edged with rainbows,
is alive with unnatural color.

The train goes by a useful bridge;
blocks of metal,
grey stones stained,
and the water slimy, black, Smokestacks,
wrecked cars, nameless factories,
tractors, cranes,
incriminate the shores.

In the middle, in the thin
water-lane,
a college crew team practices.
Their colored hats are almost invisible.

As they lean forward and back, they are
pulling away from sickness,
but getting weaker with every stroke.

The feathers of the birds are dull.
All kinds of litter, trapped
in trapped currents,
moves up and down
as in a dream,

the dream in which I kill a girl,
for some reason,
with a knife.
No one knows I've done it,
except me: and that
should count for something.

The police have come to take her away.
I happen to be the one
to point them to her room,
not knowing who she is or where
I am; not having seen
her face.

For the funeral they blow her up again,
like a balloon.
Her cuts have been sewn;
her skin is plump and smooth
and stretched to bursting.
I cry like a relative all the way home.

I see this is some kind of school,
but I know nothing else.

I make up a list of clues:

The grass is unnaturally green.
The sky is sealed.
The air is dead. I am alive

only because I don't

breathe

Madness in *At Heaven's Gate*:

A Metaphor of the Self in Warren's Fiction

• H. D. Herring

Many characters in Robert Penn Warren's fiction teeter near the abyss of disintegration as human beings who can control their emotions and minds, and can cope intelligently with the circumstances of their existence. By the end of *Night Rider*, Percy Munn flees desperately and instinctually, reduced to a hunted animal. Throughout *World Enough and Time*, Jerry Beaumont betrays the inadequate grip he keeps on the balance of rational and irrational faculties within him: his extreme actions begin when he copulates with an old hag while he is in a religious frenzy, harden into the driving obsession to avenge his honor by murdering Cassius Fort, and conclude with his surrender of himself to sensual indulgence on the isle of the Gran Boz. Ikey Sumpter in *The Cave* shows a psychopathic cruelty and indifference in his commercial exploitation of Jasper Harrick's entrapment in a cave, the more damning of his withered humanity because an honest rescue attempt might have saved Jasper's life. Most recently and most explicitly in *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, Cassie Spottwood lapses into madness three times to cope with the pain and collapse of her world and her self.

Throughout his fiction, then, Warren has portrayed characters facing the dissolution of order and sense and reality, the components upon which a sane world is based. However, because his writing has emphasized always the individual's need of a secure knowledge of himself in his world, madness, the radical disorientation of the person that destroys the reality and the meaning in his existence, poses the most corrosive threat to the establishment of the self in Warren's novels and short stories. Conceived of as one of the important metaphors of the failure of the individual to clasp together the diverse components of himself into a unified being, madness illuminates the interpretation of individual novels and allows insight into the meaning of the fiction as a whole.

Madness has the most central role in shaping our perceptions of the characters and what their lives come to mean in *At Heaven's Gate* (1943), Warren's second novel which has been neglected despite its powerful characterizations. Through an examination of insanity in the book, a sharper

understanding can be had of the novel itself and of what Warren's fiction shows to be the deficiencies of the fragmented man and what it implies to be the powers of a whole self.

Although John Lewis Longley's statement of the theme of *At Heaven's Gate* as "the struggle of the individual soul to discover and establish who and what it is"¹ is an apt one, and his discussion of the characters in the context of sinners who have violated nature like those in Dante's Seventh Circle gives a rich religious dimension to our understanding of the work, some of the insights one can gain by approaching the characters from the perspective of psychology may help by emphasizing the importance of establishing the self, of establishing being, of defining more precisely the directions of defeat and fulfillment for the self.

The tale's characters piled together make a scrap heap of destroyed lives. Bogan Murdock ignores his wife Dorothy, dominates his daughter Sue, and manipulates the hirelings—Jerry Calhoun, Private Porsum, Sam Baker—of his far-flung financial empire that thrives on exploitation and corruption. Jason Sweetwater enslaves himself to Marxism and the cause of setting up the labor unions. Ashby Wyndham sacrifices himself and his followers to his religious zeal. The cripples, Uncle Lew and Rosemary, and the paralytic Aunt Ursula point up the grim and broken humanity in the fictional world. The characters in the novel, however, and the complex which is the world of the novel, can be better defined if one first understands the psychotic among them: Slim Sarrett.

Slim Sarrett may be the most obviously psychotic character in Warren's fiction. Knowing Slim as a radically disturbed individual rests on two events: the revelation that the elaborate tale of his life in which he pictured himself as the unfortunate child of a barge captain who had been blown to bits and of the nameless men who had been the lovers of his promiscuous mother is a lie made up entirely by Slim; and his murder of Sue Murdock after he has been exposed as a liar and a homosexual, causing Sue to see him as ridiculous, laughable, and false. The dimensions of the fabricated tale of his life—replete with details about his schooling, his days of petty thievery, his adventures as a seaman and lover—and the senseless murder of Sue because she laughs at him mark Slim as deranged, cut off from reality and rational action. The challenge, however, comes in understanding, rather than simply recognizing, Slim's madness; and in seeing how it offers a basic pattern within which the other characters and events of the book can be perceived.

One must first perceive Slim's insanity from his perspective: it represents Slim's failure to cope with his existence, to be able to establish himself firmly and securely in relationship to himself, to his past, and to

1 "Self Knowledge, The Pearl of Pus, and the Seventh Circle: The Major Themes in *At Heaven's Gate*," Robert Penn Warren, ed. J. L. Longley, Jr. (New York, 1965), p. 64.

others. A particularly informative way of seeing Slim's disintegration is in the context of R. D. Laing's theory of schizophrenia in *The Divided Self* (1959; references to the Pelican edition, 1965). Laing's writing has special value, too, because his ideas have emerged in part from existential thought and its preoccupations with authenticity, autonomy, and relatedness as characteristics of personal being—characteristics important to the presentation of the self in Warren, whose involvement in fictional ideas similar to the ones in existentialist writers has not been adequately noted and defined.

Briefly, Laing suggests that schizoid persons "come to experience themselves as primarily split into a mind and a body. Usually they feel most closely identified with the 'mind'" (p. 65). As a result of the divided way he sees himself, frequently accompanied by extreme anxiety about even the ordinary events of life, the individual creates a "false self," a facade between the world of others and his "true inner self." The false self takes over the direct relationships with the world in order to protect the real self from exposure, leaving the inner self not only at one remove from the world, but also detached from the false self it has created and continues to manipulate. Nothing can be experienced spontaneously or immediately by the inner self.

Nonetheless the gains to the inner self are significant: it is protected, uncommitted, and undefined because the false self always acts in the world. As Laing concludes, "in the world in reality, in 'the objective element', nothing of 'him' shall exist, and no footprints or fingerprints of the 'self' shall have been left" (pp. 88-89). The inner self is freed in its fantasy from the responsibility of action.

The concealed self, though, must fear always two threats. The first comes from the defense created to protect it, the false self. As the false self becomes more elaborate in its own dimensions and in its dealings with the things and people of the world, the inner self becomes more obscure, its extinction threatened by the ever more extensive encroachments of the false self that the world comes to accept as real; the true self thus may die of its own defense.

The second threat is exposure, the instant tearing away of the facade erected through the false self to conceal the inner being from the world. As long as the real person remains hidden, he is "free to dream and imagine anything" (p. 89); but, when the true self becomes visible to others, he can be confined to the boundaries of his experiences and assigned the responsibility for his acts. (Laing does note, however, that "deterioration and disintegration are only one outcome of the initial schizoid organization. Quite clearly, authentic versions of freedom, power, and creativity can be achieved and lived out" (p. 89), especially by some writers and artists.)

Usually, though, the person has sold his being—his sense that he is

real, capable of carrying out his own actions, and connected to other persons and things—for the privilege of being uncommitted and detached. Frequently, the inner self experiences its own separateness from reality, knowing that it has exchanged life for death; or, it bursts into the view of others who recognize its stunted and misshapen form.

In returning to Slim Sarrett in an effort to comprehend his shrivelled personhood, much of his behavior can be explained in the context of the schizoid individual headed inevitably for the collapse into psychosis. Slim has trapped himself initially into the fundamental split between body and mind that undergirds the erosion of unity in the self by the way he perceives himself as boxer and poet. He tells Sue that he would not want to play the role of Hamlet because acting is a "secondary" and "parasitic" art, having as its special discipline the "physical." He concludes, "And I happen to prefer to keep my special physical discipline [boxing] disjunct from my esthetic discipline—from my poetry" (p. 102). Not only does he cultivate this fundamental cleavage; but he clearly leans to the discipline of the mind, thinking of himself primarily as a poet.

Initially split, carrying within him the seed of his fragmentation, Slim nonetheless manages to conceal from others easily and successfully what they eventually come to know as the enormous counterfeit self which he has offered up to them. Sue's early comment that Slim "never claimed to do anything he couldn't do" and that he "just knew exactly . . . what he wanted to do, and that made him different from other people" (p. 4) goes unchallenged as the way the other characters see Slim. Only once does Sue even hint at any doubt about the security of Slim's self-perception; and her question about whether he fears talking about himself prompts the full account he gives of his life, so persuasively offered that no suspicion of a hidden past occurs to her.

As a result of the acceptance of the exterior self which Slim presents to the world, he is freed to develop the elaborate false self which acts for him in his contacts with other people. He justifies the fantasy he creates of himself essentially by his theory of art, tellingly set forth in the web of falsehoods he disguises as his life. He connects living and poetry directly: "Living is, metaphorically, a temporal art, like poetry or music. It is dynamic and consecutive in its structure" (p. 163). With these assumptions to support him, then, Slim can let his life become an artistic act, created freely by himself to conform to whatever changing structures he values. In the description of the "grave spiritual crisis" that he lived out while in school and under the influence of his readings in St. Augustine, St. John of the Cross, and Petrarch, Slim presents a paradigm of his method of becoming the poetic and omnipotent father of the self the world knows as Slim; for the crisis, since it is a part of his phony life history, is a lie within a lie, a drama of which he confesses to have been "author, angel, producer, director, stage manager, and cast . . ." (p. 165).

Poetry gives to Slim more than just the license to create an imagined version of himself; art is also the "traditional discipline for struggling against the stereotype . . ." (p. 167). In becoming the poet, then, Slim can envision himself as a unique being, avoiding the ordinary dimensions constricting the image of a salesman's son and hiding the everyday child that he might well have feared telling Sue about. Ironically, though, the invented child of Slim's imagination mocks his effort, since the history he gives himself typifies the Freudian stereotype of the orphaned child who finds in his poetry a substitute for the unknown father and the procreative act.

Slim's idea of art has let him become the poet who can conjure up a public self free from the bonds of his commonplace past. He has gained autonomy, for no one knows the actual history or self of Slim and so cannot hold him genuinely responsible for what he is, making the petty crimes of his fabricated youth, for example, doubly unimportant because he cannot be held accountable for what he did not do. His freedom to make up the self that encounters the world rests, though, on a tenuous advantage; for the only autonomy he has gained is the power to create his own unreality. Slim's only uniqueness is his falseness.

Even the subsidiary elements of his world confirm his separation from himself and from his experience. Slim has collected together a diverse group of intellectuals, artists, socialites, and businessmen who meet at his studio-apartment for drinking and discussions. But while he created this world, he often seemed "to be completely withdrawn from it" (p. 204). As well as withdrawing from people, Slim frequently depersonalizes them, turning them into case histories for his instant psychological analyses. Even the accuracy of his description of Bogan Murdock as "the special disease of our time, the abstract passion for power" (p. 250) does not conceal his tactic of turning other human beings into specimens for his examination. The characteristics of withdrawal from and depersonalization of others receive special mention from Laing as frequently occurring in the individual who perceives himself as split in two; he cannot engage himself personally with other human beings because the inner self is once removed from others and also fears any direct encounter that might expose it. Making the other person into a thing to be manipulated strips him of his threatening humanity.

Slim's creation of a false self nearly succeeds in giving him the freedom to make himself and to become the poet he seeks to be in both senses: the man who creates poems and creates himself as his masterpiece. As Laing suggests, the artist often comes to use the power of making up a new self in a fulfilling way. Slim does not quite achieve fulfillment however. His depersonalization of others, his withdrawal from them, and his constant need to remain aloof and detached certainly take heavy tolls on his compassion and sensitivity to others and leave him only partially

satisfied as a person. But, what strips Slim of the being he has made himself into is exposure, an intrusion from Billy Constantidopeles, who reveals without malice that Slim's parents are alive and that his father is currently selling washing machines. The simple facts of Slim's past penetrate the elaborate artifice of his fiction of the self, suddenly crumbling all of his pretended existence. Without warning, without preparation, he becomes another person unknown to the people who thought they knew him, a man without substance or history. To complete the radical transformation of Slim into an unrecognizable stranger, a member of the studio group catches Slim in a homosexual act with Billy. The result of the two discoveries leaves the inner self, formerly hidden from the world, inauthentic and baffling to Slim's friends. The world had accepted what was unreal to Slim as real; now the real Slim has no reality to them; he is dead to the world. His gains in autonomy count for nothing because he has no authenticity. His being is exposed as not belonging to existence; since it does not exist it can neither act nor relate to others.

Slim reacts by fleeing, eventually returning, but discovering that he cannot reestablish himself with his former friends; they cannot take him seriously for he no longer exists for them. When Sweetwater beats him up in front of Sue, and then later that day she shows her inability to regard him as a genuine person by laughing at him, he strangles her. The depth of his derangement emerges as he excuses himself from responsibility while committing the murder, repeating that he is Slim Sarrett. As Slim he is the exterior being who acts in the world, separating the interior self from responsibility, as well as displacing the cause for his action onto Sue's laughter. Additionally, he conceives his crime as one more artistic act, feeling "filled with a great, beautiful, elegiac pity, for her, for himself, for everybody he knew . . . for everybody in the whole world who struggles and errs and suffers and dies." (p. 362). Finally, he methodically wrecks the apartment and steals her money to obscure the reasons for the murder. His action has exceeded the bounds of tolerable behavior; his murder of Sue comes not from anger or for gain or for protection of his physical self, reasons society may understand if not condone. His act may be valid from his perspective—to protect from ridicule and destruction the vulnerable falsehood which he had made himself into—but the world calls his killing mad, an act without justification or sense. Slim's sudden visibility causes his disintegration into madness. As Laing points out, "what is called psychosis is sometimes simply the sudden removal of the veil of the false self, which may have been serving to maintain an outer behavioral normality that may, long ago, have failed to be any reflection of the state of affairs in the secret self" (p. 100).

The split in Slim becomes a chasm, leaving the self in fragments chaotically disconnected, the death of the person in Warren's fiction.

Sweetwater writes the epitaph for Slim when he says, "He just didn't lie when he had to. For some purpose. He was a lie. He had to be the lie" (p. 303).

One must exercise care, however, to recognize the complexity of Slim and his experience in the novel; he does not serve simply as a case history of the ravages and destruction of madness. Indeed, a complication arises when Slim escapes to New York to begin building once again his own version of himself. The significance of his avoiding punishment for his crime and treatment of his madness, though he feels empty and insubstantial at the end, can be discovered in his critical conception of the theme of Shakespearian tragedy. Importantly, Slim cannot be categorized as a "content-absolute;" for his life points to no statement, to no conclusion about the necessities of experience. Though he is mad, destructive, a killer, he nonetheless escapes. Despite his despicable actions as a person, his ideas about art and criticism, especially Shakespearian tragedy, have the ring of power and insight. Slim must be perceived as a person in "a universe recognizably like our own" (p. 195). He rips himself apart; he denies his past; he destroys others; he evades any accountability for his crime and goes to New York where he writes fear-filled poetry about his emptiness and the threat of being discovered as a murderer and, once again, a fraud. Because he does escape, however, no easy statements can be made about the penalties of evil or the ravages of madness; no casual dismissal can throw out his intellectual acuity. Slim, unreal, still leaves in the external world items that make his existence a part of the experience of that world: his deeds, his fragmented person, his ideas. Of such complexity is experience made.

Although Slim should not be conceived of as merely an illustration, a "content-absolute," his madness does point one toward a more precise understanding of the qualities important to the firm establishment of being in Warren's fiction. The radical collapse of Slim results from a failure to knit together into a whole fragment the components of personhood, components highlighted as essential to the wholeness of an individual through their absence or incompleteness in Slim. Most obviously one must be authentic; he must be real. Slim knows authenticity undergirds the vitality of existence. He tells Sue that it is easy to make up a picture of oneself, but warns her that such falsity is "not to be alive" (p. 155). His fraudulent self, then, kills him; first for himself because he is separated from any direct or spontaneous relationship to his own experience, and then for others because he loses validity and substance in their eyes.

His death in life makes worthless the one power of being that Slim does possess. The autonomy displayed in his creation of himself brings into being only emptiness, nothingness. Autonomy, with its implications of action and responsibility, holds a significant role in the self's actions

in Warren's world; but to be genuine it must bring the person into a fuller knowledge and assertion of himself, and not be used to cloak the real self in a secrecy that enables him to escape accountability. Paradoxically, too, Slim loses his ability to enlarge his inner self because his worry about exposure restricts the possibilities of his choices and actions, for they must perpetuate his fraud.

Finally, the evolution of a false self cuts one off from direct, satisfying relationships with one's past and with others. The false being becomes the agent between the secluded self and its past and its friends. Direct relationships cannot occur because of the barrier of falsity between the external and internal worlds. Consequently, the secret self shrivels in isolation. The self's meaning must come through a balance in the individual who is aware of his own validity, but in touch with others. Slim exists alone, and Warren's writing consistently presents the isolated individual as losing his life. Slim's loss of authenticity, autonomy, and relatedness can be understood finally to be the unravelling of his being into madness, the collapse of the integrated self.

Being—the sense of aliveness, of control over one's directions and actions, of making contact with others outside the self—may in fact offer a more inclusive and suggestive concept for Warren's writing than self-knowledge alone. When the person establishes being, he knows and experiences himself as a whole individual capable of having an effect on what happens to him and what goes on in his world. When these characteristics crumble fully, the person loses his capacity to cope with his existence and goes mad. In Warren, then, as seen in Slim Sarrett, madness becomes a metaphor for the collapse of being and the coming of existential death.

In this context, one of Slim's other ideas about Shakespearean tragedy becomes useful. He writes that the theme of a work is "to be defined only by an investigation of the dynamic interpenetrations of all the metaphors . . ." (p. 196). If madness stands as a metaphor for the failure of the self to achieve being, the missing components in the metaphor of the person offer insight into the other characters in *At Heaven's Gate* who are tortured and destroyed, and into the dominant impression of the world set up in the novel.

Each of the other characters stays within the bounds of sanity, never losing fully and simultaneously his grip on reality, self-directed action, and relationships to others. Most of the characters, however, do exhibit some breakdown in the establishment of the self; and the metaphor of madness, the break up of all three essentials of fulfilling action, sharpens the visibility of the particular failures of the self revealed in each person. Ashby Wyndham, for example, truncates his relationships to others, narrowing the range and complexity of human contacts to his demands for religious zeal and fidelity, and thus exists with the need of the self for

relatedness shredded and unfulfilled. Similarly, although Jason Sweetwater feels the power of his autonomy and can locate himself firmly in the tangible realities of the society, he cannot tolerate the reciprocal involvements of relationships to others; hence, he cuts himself off from his past and his family, and he cannot entertain at all a marriage to Sue after she is pregnant with his child.

In understanding the penetration of the novel with the metaphor of madness in showing the inability to achieve being, three characters need to be singled out: Sue Murdock, Jerry Calhoun, and Bogan Murdock. For each, only suggestions can be made to show how the concern with fullness of being, and more particularly here the fragmenting of that fullness, becomes the central issue of the work.

Sue Murdock comes nearer than any of the other characters to toppling into madness as Slim did. Her most serious problems in coping with her existence arise from her inability to establish her autonomy and to maintain relationships with the people important to her. Bogan, her father, tries to manipulate and dominate her. When she eludes his grip, he willingly tries to gain control over her through Jerry Calhoun, a flattered flunky in his organization, whose engagement and marriage to Sue he encourages because it will allow him virtually direct power over her. Sue's efforts to free herself lead, however, to a vicious cycle: she tries to make Jerry become his own man by leaving her father's employ and going away with her; but when he will not, her only choice becomes fleeing from Jerry and her father into the phony world of Slim Sarrett, thereby cutting herself off from her past, her family, and Jerry—a flight that preserves her autonomy at the expense of her relatedness. In Sweetwater she finds someone to whom she can give without giving up her self; but he cannot unite with her. Alone and isolated, she cannot even exercise her freedom.

Although the need to escape the control of others while needing to keep ties with them poses Sue's main dilemma, she faces the threat too of losing the reality of herself. Because she must either submit herself to others—Bogan, Jerry, Slim, Jason—or isolate herself from them, she loses her bearings on who she is. Consequently, she adopts many disguises, especially the roles she believes she must play in the shallow society of Slim's studio. Sweetwater pinpoints her emptiness when he observes, "What she said was sure phony, and no mistake. It wasn't even her own kind of phoniness; it was somebody else's kind of phoniness" (p. 294). Sue's inability to be herself as a separate being simultaneously and equally related to others draws her into falseness where she comes near to losing herself altogether, becoming as unreal as Slim. Sue does escape the complete collapse into madness by demanding her independence and involving herself, however painfully, with Sweetwater; but she carries with her a badly damaged self, the victim finally of Slim's insanity. The garment of

Sue's being in each of its three pieces—authenticity, autonomy, and relatedness—is ragged and stitched together with frayed threads. Thus, while she does not undergo the same radical loss of her orientation within reality as Slim does, Sue's being is nonetheless empty and unrealized.

Jerry Calhoun's achievement of full personhood also remains stunted in *At Heaven's Gate*. Once again, the contrast to madness points up two special failures in Jerry: gaining autonomy and maintaining relatedness. Jerry gives himself over to Bogan Murdock, becoming a pawn in the devious and illegal financial maneuverings of his employer. One of the impulses within Jerry, though, which allows him to be so easily used by Bogan stems from his desire to sever himself from his family, especially his father whom he sees as clumsy and inept, thereby making himself vulnerable to the power of anyone promising to take him away from the legitimate origins of himself. Although Jerry's world "heaved like the sea" (p. 262) and threatened to crumble beneath him when he learned of the fraudulent foundations of Bogan's empire, he stands nonetheless as one of the persons in the work with some hope of eventually tying together the fragments of himself into a whole being. At the end of the novel, Jerry has returned home and seems to be moving toward a reconciliation with his father and his past. Madness as the metaphor for the destroyed being sharpens the perception of Jerry's fragmentation and inability to be authentically himself as long as he remains the pawn of Bogan or cut off from his earlier experiences of himself; but the metaphor also shows the firmer grounding of Jerry in a direction of action that may lead him to fullness, to wholeness, to aliveness of being.

Finally, though, for an accurate perception of what the metaphor reveals as the center of the fictional world of *At Heaven's Gate*, one must note briefly Bogan Murdock. Essentially, Bogan fits the description Slim gave of him: "the abstract passion for power, a vanity springing from an awareness of the emptiness and unreality of the self which can only attempt to become real and human by the oppression of people who manage to retain some shreds of reality and humanity" (p. 250). Bogan ensnares himself in the entangling trap of trying to secure his own being by manipulating others. Paradoxically, however, when he succeeds in controlling the other, he controls a thing, not a person. Bogan can only relate to objects, not to human beings; for human beings must be allowed their autonomy to relate to another as a person. Although he has power, he cannot establish his own authenticity because he has destroyed himself by making everyone around him into an object for his use. To be alive one must engage freely with others equally alive. Bogan lives only with things; and since things are dead, he has killed his own being by existing only in an experience founded on death. Consequently, Duckfoot Blake's summary of Bogan reveals accurately his emptiness: "Bogan ain't real. Bogan is a solar myth . . ." (p. 366).

His existence is a counterfeit, like the phony papers of his financial empire.

At Heaven's Gate can be seen finally as a world in disarray, a world in which unreality has become dominant, a world empty and based on lies beginning with the life of Slim Sarrett and concluding with the fraud of Bogan Murdock. Madness serves as the metaphor which best reveals the emptiness and phoniness in both the fictional world and the individual characters. Madness points to the chaos and deceit of the events that give the novel its texture; and more importantly, madness defines the context in which the self is lost, in which it fails to establish its being so that it becomes genuine, independent, and yet connected to its world. In Slim's collapse of self and the crumbling selves of other characters, one has a metaphor for the components imperative to the achievement of aliveness and wholeness and of the extraordinary struggle required to hold the qualities together—a metaphor useful throughout Warren's fiction.

Out

• Claude Koch

Winters without my father;
in the cellar, fire gone under;
his feet on the hobbled stairs
(memory like smoke, the ears
pleasured under the cover-
let) lumber and echo—
but gone from anywheres.

Up the stairwell in numbing
Decembers, the raking
and clamor of stoking,
chime of shovel, race
of rice coal, the glowing
bed: make blue, make gold,
my father, stoke the sun.

Tumble of nut coal, the butt
of tine on wood, a bin
of echoes and the house a box
(Pandora's joy); then mornings
he uncovers the banked
bed, live and breathing,
father, oh be thanked.

February now
evening and deep winter:
his steps through the bitter
cold drum on no
empty stairs; I bank
such meagre warmth: poor ghost
in the cellarage—what
do you want of me?

Recoveries

• Claude Koch

In my shaken heart
The blunt hands of my mother
Taking my father's part
Against the world to the end
Pinch and trim the meager
Flame of running candles
Set aright in the lead
Sconce from the Five-and-Ten;
Tending my tapers still
They fashion and husband the light
of my small celebrations.

Under the mortal moon
That gesture is over, passed
Through the Gates of Horn, gone
Like an animal's pain; now
In a cedar chest her candles could last
Forever, the hoarded lights
Celebrating a penny's gain.
Dare I remember how
On certain breathless nights
My father's shadow hastes
to their small luminations?

In my shaping heart
Such presences remain:
Father and Mother (my art,
Sulphur and wick, that holds
All hope they suspire again).
Is my measured care
Sufficient indeed for their pains?
Such as it is, it molds
Filial images. There
They do not flicker but flame
in their small occupations.

Right On!

All The King's Men

In the Classroom

• Earl Wilcox

The wide range of critical approaches given to Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* suggests that this novel is his most provocative piece of writing. Between two and three dozen articles is a conservative count of the more important essays. Perhaps, as with all successful artistic endeavors, this novel has prompted comment of such diverse variety because it seems to have a bit of everything for everyone. I think this proliferation of commentary indicates a popularity which stems, in large part, from the reception the book has received in the college and university classroom.

As almost everyone knows, Warren's is a hallowed name in some literary circles because of his co-editing and authoring several anthologies, collections of essays, rhetoric texts, and of course because of his role in expanding New Criticism. But Warren alone of the now unfashionable New Critics has succeeded as a poet, novelist, critic, editor, essayist, and as a teacher. It is fitting, then, to emphasize that one sound reason for the continuing popularity and discussion of *All the King's Men* is that it is eminently teachable. *All the King's Men* has for more than twenty years been the subject of countless discussions in the college and university classrooms and corridors. And I assume that a salient reason for this appeal lies exactly in the complex nature of the novel itself. In particular the novel insists on literary, historical, psychological, sociological, philosophical relevance. Its tone is at once satiric and humorous; its mode is both realism and tragedy. Its style, themes, and characters continue to excite both students and teachers alike.

All the King's Men is most teachable as a piece of fiction primarily because it *is* fiction before it is a tract for dictators or a thinly-veiled biography of Huey Long. (But I do not mean that the novel does not accommodate itself well to all these and other approaches simultaneously: indeed I think that it does accommodate itself to a multiplicity of approaches.) No one has yet claimed that this novel is the mythical "great American

novel" which every writer is said to be trying to write; but the novel does have literary excellence on several levels.

There is, for example, the narrator, Jack Burden. Burden is one of our finest literary creations; he is "one of us," as Hemingway's Brett Ashley would say. And, as his name signifies, Burden is a modern Everyman, an Oedipus, a naif for whom things fall apart and who tries to put them back together again. Jack is a man imbued with the kind of personality which strikes terror in the hearts of all who recognize his dilemma. For the student searching for a fictional contemporary that he can dig and who tries to cope, Jack Burden suits well. And in a formal study in the classroom, Burden's counterpart is translatable and recognizable from everywhere. Here once again is Huck Finn or Holden Caulfield or Telemachus in search of a father. Here is the romantic Don Quixote, trying for the longest while to see the world as it ought to be and not as it is. Or Hamlet, who vacillates between being and not-being. The list is long and the spectrum wide in the arena of literary antecedents upon whom the teacher and student calls for useful, insightful comparison. Since some fiction courses seem to organize around comparisons and contrasts, and such courses often proceed chronologically, identifying these literary predecessors is a helpful beginning device.

For the student, Jack Burden-as-fictional-character is, then, useful literary analogue. But, more importantly, Burden is recognizable as a human being. In the novel, Burden is a youthful, idealistic student who falls in and out of love; gets in and out of bed with his women; tries one job after another; attempts to be a scholar but finds himself being corrupted by a corrupting world; misuses his drive and energy—and so goes his youth. Many students do not know all the literary Eugene Gants, the Hamlets, or even the Hucks and Holdens who have populated the pages of our best drama and fiction. But students have no trouble recognizing Burden as "one of us." Undoubtedly his very human indecisiveness most consistently intrigues students. In Burden's tension between past and present, the present is constantly punctuated by flashbacks into the past. The past is always thoroughly idealistic: the days at Burden's Landing are captured poignantly in passage after passage.¹ "All the bright days by the water with the gulls flashing high were Anne Stanton, (p. 273) . . . And it was not like any summer which ever had been or was to be again." (p. 273) . . . That summer Adam and I would play tennis in the early morning before the sun got high and hot, and she would come to the court with us. . . . (p. 274). "But back then there was always the afternoon. In the afternoon we always went swimming, or sailing and then swimming afterward. . . . Then after dinner we would get together again and sit in the

1 Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men*. Bantam Books, New York, 1947. Quotations are from this edition and will be cited in the text hereafter.

shadow on their gallery or mine, or go to a movie, or take a moonlight swim. . . ." (p. 274)

Later, of course, Burden's Landing becomes a nightmare for Jack because Anne Stanton, Adam Stanton, Judge Irwin, Jack, and everyone else changes. The naif becomes a man. His maturation process accounts for considerable appeal which Burden-as-narrator has. This attraction is produced by the pattern woven into Burden's life: a bifurcate scheme of flight and escape into past (history) toward a belief in a deterministic world ("The Great Twitch") with a concomitant rebound into the present. Burden himself summarizes this rhythm of his life in the closing sentence of the novel: ". . . we shall go out of the house and go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time." (p. 438)

Burden-as-student, aside from his role as the mask of the narrator, deftly captures the spirit and mood of contemporary, evolving man in this flight pattern. His desire for knowledge, coupled with his constant hesitancy in light of the responsibility which that knowledge brings him, reflects the acute dilemma which students themselves express time and again. Numerous passages in the novel show Burden's disquietude. And the various names he gives to his fluctuation interest students, who are themselves great name makers. There is the sense of novelty and newness in names like the Young Executive, The Scholarly Attorney, The Case of the Up-right Judge, The Great Twitch, and The Great Sleeps. But perhaps the richest extended comment which engages students in finding a lot of Jack Burden in themselves is the reflective monologue early in the novel when Burden is listening to Willie Stark make a speech. This speech triggers an emotional awareness in Burden with the full impact of the dilemma he faces. Every man on the road to knowledge faces a similar upheaval. Appropriately, an organic metaphor—the embryo—expresses the trauma well. Burden reflects:

It was always that way. There was the bulge and glitter, and there was the cold grip way down in the stomach as though somebody had laid hold of something in there, in the dark which is you, with a cold hand in a cold rubber glove. It was like the second when you come home late at night and see the yellow envelope of the telegram sticking out from under your door and you lean and pick it up, but don't open it yet, not for a second. While you stand there in the hall, with the envelope in your hand, you feel there's an eye on you, a great big eye looking straight at you from miles and dark and through walls and houses and through your coat and vest and hide and sees you huddled up way inside, in the dark which is you, inside yourself, like

a clammy, sad little foetus you carry around inside yourself. The eye knows what's in the envelope, and it is watching you to see you when you open it and know, too. But the clammy, sad little foetus which is you way down in the dark which is you too lifts up its sad little face and its eyes are blind, and it shivers cold inside you for it doesn't want to know what is in that envelope. It wants to lie in the dark and not know, and be warm in its not-knowing. The end of man is knowledge, but there is one thing he can't know. He can't know whether knowledge will save him or kill him. He will be killed, all right, but he can't know whether he is killed because of the knowledge which he has got or because of the knowledge which he hasn't got and which if he had it, would save him. There's the cold in your stomach, but you open the envelope, you have to open the envelope, for the end of man is to know. (p. 9)

I have dwelt this long on Burden-as-human rather than Burden-as-fictional-device because students do not really care about all the literary analogues ultimately, especially not today's students. But whenever the occasion arises, it is useful to exploit Warren's sophistication by pointing out the literary allusions: there is the title (which is not a simple nursery rhyme echo, it turns out, once you start explicating its meaning): or the Dantean epigraph on the title page; and there are other literary devices which shed a good deal of light on the total picture of the complexity of Warren's narrator. For instance, the Dantean motif gives Burden's outlook a rather different cast—an optimistic one—which one sees more precisely by exploring the context of the quotation from *The Divine Comedy*.² For despite his escapist attitudes evident in many scenes in the novel, Burden finally does come to grips with his own personality. What he sees is a radically modified determinism, colored by a corrected vision of his own role in shaping his destiny. He does not conclude on a totally optimistic note, but he does more clearly know what effect he can have in shaping his own end. The rebirth and conversion motifs are prominent in the novel, and these leitmotifs are worth bringing to students' attention also in relation to these continuing revelations which Burden has about himself. As students say, this qualified determinism is about all anyone could ask for. Every teacher now sees that today's student has changed his question from a teleological *why* to a psychological *how*. The question is not *did* Humpty Dumpty fall, or *why* did he fall, or even why do things in general fall apart. But *how* are they to be put back together again. The young soldier returning home from Vietnam; the black student returning to the

² See my explication of the epigraph in *Explicator*, XVII (December 1967), Item 29.

ghetto from a college education, the WASP grappling with the implications of his history—all of today's children want to know *how* to put it back together again. They all know you can't go home again, but they will keep on trying. And they know Burden's solution is not simple, not even entirely clear. But his formulation, his articulation of a plan holds some promise. Students in today's classrooms are aware of themselves in a historical context, and they are hellbent on finding answers to questions they have about their past, present, and future.

For many readers of *All the King's Men* the more intriguing character is not Jack Burden, but Willie Stark. Such a reading inevitably points toward the Huey Long saga as background for the novel. Warren has told rather fully (and somewhat ambiguously) why the novel is not "about" Long; and, after all, one feels inclined to let the novelist's explanation stand.³ Yet certain parallels between Willie Stark and Huey Long are obvious, and any study of the novel without a nod toward these parallels is short-sighted. Some recent biographies of Long are especially useful in getting at the Long legend, as historians, political scientists, and others continue to find the Long era an engaging aspect of Americana. Exploiting the Stark-Long analogies is, however, for the short run; in the long run, Stark's role in the novel offers a more extended insight only in its primary relation to Jack Burden. Stark helps Burden reflect, redefine, and rediscover himself.

Willie Stark (as his name also signals) is a man of stark fact. He contrasts sharply with Adam Stanton, the "man of idea," as Burden calls him. These categories are partly ironic, of course, because they are indeed aspects of Burden's own personality. For it is Burden who gives himself fully to his research—the facts—whenever the Boss wants him to do so. And only when the "dirt" rubs off on Burden's own past, his own father and mother, does his idealism become tarnished.⁴ The man of fact in the society of the 70's has not as much going for him as he had in the immediate past, even as recently as the 60's. As originally conceived, Warren says that Willie Stark and Stanton were to represent the scientists of our world. Thus the curious blending of the fact-ideal world in the two closest friends of Burden presents a tension which modern students with a science-humanism orientation find themselves grappling with more and more. Burden's own tensions are mirrored in the conflict between his two friends.

3 Warren has commented on the background of the novel at least twice in periodicals. See his explanation in "A Note on *All the King's Men*," *Sevance Review* (Summer, 1953) and "*All the King's Men*: The Matrix of Experience," *Yale Review*, LIII (December 1963), 161-167.

4 In true Hollywood fashion, when *All the King's Men* was made into a movie, Broderick Crawford, who played the role of Stark was the star who won the Oscar. John Ireland, who played the role of Burden was a secondary character. Ironically, Hollywood gave Burden a kind of anti-heroic position, the ultimate role he assumes in the novel.

Perhaps Stark is finally important to us because we recognize him for his Machiavellian demagoguery.

This is not the place to list the Machiavellian demagogues that have traipsed across the stage of our little world, but undoubtedly some of the American Machiavels are recognizable enough to be painful for Americans. For notorious reasons, Southern politicians seem to bear the brunt of comparison when Stark's machinations are analyzed. And the Long dynasty in Louisiana obviously makes a comfortable parallel. Furthermore, Robert Penn Warren is by birth and some training a Southerner; and there is no little interest in this biographical fact since all of his novels have a Southern setting. (This despite the fact that Warren long ago gave up making the mint julep for making mint of the Ft. Knox variety.) Nevertheless, Willie's Machiavellian roots yield some intriguing revelations for historians and young political scientists in the classroom. What more incisive method of seeing machine politics and the Mafia orientation of today's political scene than through the philosophy of Willie Stark. Here rolled up into a neat ball is William James' pragmatism and a set of deep south godfathers long before Talese or Puzo.

Stark's philosophy is best seen in the action of the novel, for he is, after all, a man of action—not idea. (This itself is a provocative concept of the political panorama today.) But succinctly put, Stark's view of the world, God, and man boils down to an aphoristically-sounding doctrine echoing the pragmatic philosophy which guides him for good or for evil: "Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud. There is always something." (p. 157) The sardonic wit of Burden always filters our impressions of Stark, and one supposes that Stark is really worse than the naive Burden ever sees him, until it is almost too late. But Stark is not only the political manipulator, the Jacobean Machiavel: before the bloody Sunday ending of the novel, the entire political set-up is brought into sharp focus. The "Case of the Upright Judge" is the label Burden puts on his "excursion" into the past. And in that past the taintless Governor Stanton, Judge Irwin, and all the other "pure hearts, clean hands" souls are tarnished through and through. And so that we understand the inevitable link between the past and the present, Burden's ancestors, the Masterns, are shown for their own special brand of manipulation. Whenever he turns, Jack Burden's ultimate education is his understanding that all of life is political. Structurally, the Cass Mastern episode fills a neat intercalary place in Burden's education. Jack accurately links the Masterns' life with the Case of the Upright Judge, and from both cases Jack learns a lesson he tries desperately to avoid. He learns that: "... the world is all of one piece . . . that the world is like an enormous spider web and if you touch it, however lightly, at any point, the vibration ripples to the remotest perimeter and the drowsy spider feels the tingle and is drowsy no more. . . . It does not

matter whether or not you meant to brush the web of things. Your happy foot or your gay wing may have brushed it ever so lightly, but what happens always happens. . . ." (pp. 188-189.) The escape into a deterministic epistemology no longer works for Burden, though he avoids even this admission until much later:

But later, much later, he woke up one morning to discover that he did not believe in the Great Twitch any more. He did not believe in it because he had seen too many people live and die. He had seen Lucy Stark and Sugar-Boy and the Scholarly Attorney and Sadie Burke and Anne Stanton live and the ways of their living had nothing to do with the Great Twitch. He had seen his father die. He had seen his friend Adam Stanton die. He had seen his friend Willie Stark die. . . . (p. 436)

The ultimate significance, then, for the historian or political scientist in a study of *All the King's Men* is not in finding the Machiavellian parallels in the novel, but in showing how these aspects of the novel shed light on the progressive revelations the political events make on the protagonist, Jack Burden. Warren is not, furthermore, satirizing Southern politics; he is not asserting that political action is impossible in an individual with deep personal integrity: and he is not suggesting that a Calvinistic view of man is the most pragmatic approach to understanding how the modern political state operates. Too many people (notably Hugh Miller and Jack Burden himself) contradict these false assumptions which some historians and political scientists have drawn from the novel. Miller and Burden do return to the political arena, and we are left with a far more moral world than we began with in the novel.⁵ If the novel shows us anything then from an historical perspective it is that easy generalizations about the nature of man as political animal are likely to be misleading. Burden learns this lesson through much pain and suffering.

The strengths of *All the King's Men* as a teachable piece of fiction rest primarily in the implications of these two areas which I have explored here in a cursory manner: with Burden as an Everyman archetype and in the power politics of Willie Stark. I have only sketched these two aspects rather than overlisting examples from the novel and from contemporary events for illustration. Students make discoveries for themselves concerning both the role of Jack Burden and the political implications. Depending on the level of maturity of the student, these discoveries may be rather simple, or they may be profound. In teaching this novel for more than ten years, I have also found some of the following exercises fruitful:

⁵ I am indebted to Seymour L. Gross for his insights on this point. See his "The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren," *College English*, XIX (May 1958), 361-365.

- (1) *Considering the overall philosophical implications of suffering in the novel, what kind of case can be made for Jack Burden as Job? What about the similarity in the initials? Trace the Biblical parallels and allusions to Biblical figures throughout the novel.*
- (2) *How is Jack Burden an existential hero? Is he an anti-hero? Considering Robert P. Warren's classical education at Vanderbilt and his disclosures about his reading in the ancients during composition of the original play (upon which the novel is based), what kind of hero has Warren created?*
- (3) *What is the role of sports and athletics in the novel? One notices, for example, several remarks and indeed extended passages about swimming, hunting, fishing, football, tennis, and so forth.*
- (4) *Turn to the facts of Robert Penn Warren's life and consider his contributions to the Agrarian movement in American literature, particularly I'll Take My Stand. What implications are there in the fact of Warren's early writings, including All the King's Men, and his recent attitudes toward civil rights? Is there significance in the fact that no blacks appear in All the King's Men, a most realistic novel?*
- (5) *Pursuing the symbolic function of various aspects of the novel, consider the following: the eye imagery; the Dantean epigraph; the title; the rebirth imagery; uses of water and sunlight.*
- (6) *Even though, for the most part, the narrator is sombre and philosophically introspective, there are great bursts of humor laced throughout. Example: "You could hear one insane and irrelevant July fly sawing away up in one of the catalpa trees in the square." (p. 9) Or, "No," the Boss said, getting ready again to turn around, "and I don't care if it was the sainted uncut maiden aunt of the Apostle Paul." (p. 20) Or, "The gang of us sat around and moved our thighs on the horse hair . . . and stared down at the unpainted boards of the floor . . . as though we were attending a funeral and owed the dead man some money." (p. 24.) What is the function of these humorous passages? Satiric? Sardonic? Comic relief? (Note when the passages occur.)*

- (7) *Warren says he did not want to write a "straight naturalistic novel" in planning the book. What is a "straight naturalistic novel," and what is the difference in that kind of book and this novel?*
- (8) *Proud Flesh is the title of the original play that became the novel, All the King's Men. Read the play and Warren's comments about it; then discuss what has taken place in the artistic process.*
- (9) *The prefrontal lobectomy which Adam Stanton performs on a patient is in miniature the process of Jack Burden's own transformation of personality. Examine the similarities and differences.*
- (10) *Consider the novel as tragedy. What are the relationships between the tragic aspects of this novel and classical tragedy? Consider the role of fate (i.e., determinism, "The Great Twitch") versus free will as the basic ingredient in both kinds of tragedy. How does the violence motif which undergirds so much of the action relate to the contemporary fascination with violence in American movies and television?*

Too many claims for greatness have been made for too many works of fiction. A claim of uniqueness for Warren's *All the King's Men* is not the intention here. Not all readers find the novel as richly humorous, as politically exciting, or as totally pertinent to humanity as I have tried to suggest. In a final analysis, the novel resists categorizing, becoming *sui generis* since it depicts many complex matters simultaneously. But above all, the novel does go a long way toward fulfilling William Faulkner's hints about the worthiness of modern authors to fulfill their function in our time. In the Nobel Prize Speech, Faulkner suggested that writers today must continue to write about "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat." *All the King's Men* succeeds best in the classroom when one has time enough to explore more precisely how the characters, the plot, structure, tone, symbolism—indeed all of these and other elements blend into a pattern. When the multiple themes in the novel are unravelled and made pertinent to modern man, the dimensions of the novel as a work of art begin to unfold.

After all these analyses have been drawn between the novel and life itself, I detect that one important—even overriding—aspect of this book often goes unnoted. The novel is finally about the power of love in the universe to change a man. Warren hints at this in the Dantean epigraph, and he develops this theme in several ways throughout the novel. As a love story with far richer impact than the brand offered in Segal's best seller,

the novel makes an important comment. Jack Burden serves as the catalyst in the objective correlative: he sees, records, and though trying not to, he reacts to his impressions. All of the "love affairs" (Jack's, Willie's, Anne's, Jack's mother's, and others) eventually amount to far more than all the political affairs. Some critics have urged that the novel ends on a sentimental note, that the essential comic ending is too easy, even weak. Perhaps one should argue that it is difficult for calloused moderns to accept readily that the power of love in the universe does radically alter the lives of those who experience it. Jack Burden learns that he has instinctively loved Judge Irwin, though Burden does not know why until long after he discovers that the Judge is his real father. Burden learns to love his mother, whom he has thoroughly despised previously. Burden finally forgives and accepts Anne with all her blemishes, knowing that she too suffers from the deep hurt resulting from her life with Willie and the unmasking of her father's life. Even the Scholarly Attorney takes on a new attraction for Burden, who finally consoles the old man in the face of imminent death. This newest role for Jack is an entirely different one, a sympathetic, compassionate sensitivity brought about by his Damascus-like conversion foreshadowed throughout the book. Popular lyrics of today's songs suggest that what the world needs now is love, love, love. If the novel ends unfashionably tame, one must remember that the comedy envisioned by Dante was a *divine* comedy. Warren is not depicting a Christian medieval world view, but he is suggesting a thoroughly moral universe. A world devoid of love, Warren seems to say, is as chaotic, as purposeless, as irreconcilable as it was before man entered it. (Warren draws the same conclusion in his most recent novel, *Meet Me In the Green Glen*.) This is man's world, and man controls his destiny, and he can "put it back together again" if it seems to fall apart. The novel is not a program for reform nor an apology for an ethical system to discover precisely how man reassembles Humpty Dumpty. But the novel does assert that so long as Eternal Love exists man can be redeemed. Who could ask for anything more.

The Earned Vision: Robert Penn Warren's "The Ballad of Billie Potts" and Albert Camus' *Le Malentendu*

• Curtis Whittington, Jr.

In his "Preface" to his *Selected Essays* volume published in 1958, Warren noted that his essays "are all cut from the same bolt of goods" since "they represent certain continuing interests and developing notions." The same statement could, of course, be asserted about his fiction and poetry. I submit, then, that the ideas developed in Warren's essays can offer us much insight into the structure of meanings of his poetry and prose since those essays grow out of the same creative impulses. I should like to examine this inter-relationship in terms of Warren's long narrative poem "The Ballad of Billie Potts." Since that poem was published in the Winter, 1944, issue of *Partisan Review* and in Warren's *Selected Poems* volume of the same year, four essays are contained in the *Selected Essays* volume which would reflect some of Warren's preoccupations between the years 1942-44, about the same time that he was working on the poem: "Pure and Impure Poetry," "Irony with a Center: Katherine Anne Porter," "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty," and "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading." While the last essay, an in-depth study of Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, was not published until 1946, it was in part delivered as Warren's Bergen Foundation lecture at Yale University in 1945. I should like to examine these four essays in terms of both the form and the specific themes of the poem. Also, I should like to examine Albert Camus' play *Le Malentendu*, which not only had its conception about the same time and was published in 1944 but also had a remarkably similar plot and developed several related thematic ideas to those of "The Ballad of Billie Potts."

One of the recurrent topics mentioned in these essays is the nature of the creative act and its effect upon the organic structure of the poem. Perhaps the clearest statement of this topic is the following one from "A Poem of Pure Imagination":

Actually, the creation of a poem is as much a process of discovery as a process of making. A poem may, in fact, start from an idea

— and may involve any number of ideas — but the process for the poet is the process of discovering what the idea “means” to him in the light of his total being and his total experience (in so far as that total experience is available to him for the purpose of poetry — the degree here varies enormously from poet to poet). Or a poem may start from a phrase, a scene, an image, or an incident which has, for the poet, a suggestive quality — what, for him in the light of his total being and total available experience, we may call the symbolic potential. Then the process for the poet is the process of discovering why the item has caught his attention in the first place — which is simply another way of saying that he is trying to develop the symbolic potential. (p. 268)

The process of creation to Warren, then, is a process of discovery and exploration of the symbolic potential of the item which had caught his attention and with which he began the poem. The organic structure or form of a poem is thus an exploratory, shaping movement through individual ideas and meanings until that movement itself is complete enough to have its own meaning. What the poet is trying to do is to make sense of experience; in the process of doing so, he makes sense of himself and sense of the structure that is his meaning. The creative act is the exploration of meaning not only to the poet but also to the reader; in the same essay, Warren notes that the organic, exploratory nature of the poem “makes of the reader himself a ‘creative being’” at the same time that it presents him with a “revelation.” (p. 211). The structure then that began as an exploration of the meaning of experience finally becomes itself an experience for the reader that is to be explored for the meaning of the structure itself. The structure of the poem is the same as that defined by Warren in the essay for the symbol: it is “focal, massive, and not arbitrary.” (p. 220). It is focal because “it is a congruence which he must discover for himself and validate for us”; it is massive because it operates “on more than one thematic level” and embodies “a complex of feelings and ideas not to be differentiated except in so far as we discursively explore the poem itself” (p. 221); and it is not arbitrary because “it has to participate in the unity of which it is representative” (p. 220) or it “*must contain in itself, literally considered, the seeds of the logic of its extension.*” (p. 223). Thus, “*in the poetic act as such . . . 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.*” (p. 253). The meaning of the structure is then itself symbolic of the poet’s “own view of the world” which has application not only to the world of the poem but also to the world of the poet: “in so far as the poem is truly the poet’s, in so far as it ultimately expresses him, it involves his own view of the world, his own values. Therefore, the poem will, for better or worse, have relevance, by implication at least, to the world

outside the poem, and is not merely a device for creating an illusion." (p. 203).

Warren further develops his ideas of poetic structure in his essay "Pure and Impure Poetry" by saying that the structure of a poem is a movement through resistances at various levels "toward a point of rest." (p. 27). The "resistances" to the forward motion, "the drama of his structure," are "ironic contrasts" such as those between "the beautiful and the ugly," between "the concrete and the abstract," or between "the formality of rhythm and the informality of language." By submitting his vision "to the fires of irony" that constitute the structure of the poem, the poet wishes to avoid "the easy statement as solution" and to prove or earn his vision in terms of "the complexities and contradictions of experience." (pp. 30-1). The same concept occurs in the "Irony with a Center" essay, in which Warren says of Miss Porter's character Miranda in *Old Mortality* the following:

She must live by her own myth. But she must earn her myth in the process of living. Her myth will be a new myth, different from the mutually competing myths of her father and Cousin Eva, but stemming from that antinomy. Those competing myths will simply provide the terms of her dialectic of living. (p. 154).

In the same essay, he comments on the ironic "detachment and contemplation" that is evident in Miss Porter's fiction:

But, I should say, her irony is an irony with a center, never an irony for irony's sake. It simply implies, I think, a refusal to accept the formula, the ready-made solution, the hand-me-down morality, the word for the spirit. It affirms, rather, the constant need for exercising discrimination, the arduous obligation of the intellect in the face of conflicting dogmas, the need for a dialectical approach to matters of definition, the need for exercising as much of the human faculty as possible. (p. 155).

Still a further development of his concept of the structure of a poem is seen in his "Love and Separateness" essay, this time from the reader's viewpoint rather than the writer's. The reader must be able to sense "some principle of organization, some view, some meaning" that is implicit in the work. The reader need not "give an abstract formulation to that principle or view or meaning" before he can experience the work, but it must be implicit in the work and act upon the reader in "immediate aesthetic terms" if he is to "get any considerable emotional impact" from the work. (p. 168).

These four essays also contain many thematic ideas that are reflected in "The Ballad of Billie Potts." In the "Love and Separateness" essay, Warren speaks of the ironic contrasts in Miss Welty's stories such as "innocence and experience" and "individuality and the anonymous, devouring life-flux" which lack any single resolution; these contrasts, he states, must

be understood in terms of "the vital effort" which is a "'mystery'" since it is "doomed to failure" although it is "essential" since it is in terms of that effort "that the human manifests itself as human." (p. 167). The determinism of that statement, the suggestion that failure is the fate of the necessary human effort, is present in the poem. Also, in the same essay, he speaks of "the fact of isolation" which "provides the basic situation of Miss Welty's fiction." This basic situation, he states, is developed into two types of drama: "first, the attempt of the isolated person to escape into the world; or second, the discovery by the isolated person, or by the reader, of the nature of the predicament." (p. 161). Both of these two types are evident in the poem. In the "Irony with a Center" essay, Warren writes of Mr. Thompson, a character in Miss Porter's *Noon Wine*, as "not knowing what he himself really is." (p. 147). The concept of the lack of a metaphysical identity or the need for self-knowledge is very evident in the poem. Also, when he writes of Miss Porter's *Old Mortality* "that it is a story about legend, and it is an easy extension to the symbol for tradition, the meaning of the past for the present," (p. 152) the statement could just as easily apply to "The Ballad of Billie Potts." The same would be true of his statement about Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* in "A Poem of Pure Imagination": "The fable, in broadest and simplest terms, is a story of crime and punishment and repentance and reconciliation. . . ." (p. 222).

Warren has revised "The Ballad of Billie Potts" for his *Selected Poems: New and Old, 1923-1966* considerably. He has cut some thirty-five lines from the original version, broken one very long line into two shorter ones, broken some of the longer stanzas into shorter and more uniform ones, removed some of the repeated lines such as "In the section between the rivers," removed many of the conjunctions and interjections that began lines in the original, omitted some words with strong connotations such as "piss" and "snot," changed some words to more definite terms such as substituting "knew" for "guess," changed some words to remove the dialect such as "it" to replace "hit" and "if" to replace "if'n," changed some punctuation, and dropped some abstract statements. The relatively simple plot of the narrative, however, is unchanged. Big Billie Potts builds an inn in the region of Western Kentucky between the Cumberland and the Tennessee rivers where he and his wife kill and rob "folks bound West" who would stop at the inn. One night Big Billie indicates a victim that is "fit to pluck" and tells his son Little Billie to seek the aid of Amos, a fellow highwayman, in robbing the victim. Little Billie decides to disobey his father and rob the victim himself; but when he tries to ambush the stranger, he is shot and runs home. His father gives him two hundred dollars, a new saddle and a horse, and some fatherly advice as he sends him away to avoid possible capture. Little Billie goes West where he has luck and is apparently successful during a

ten-year stay, and then he returns to his parents and home. He meets a friend named Joe Drew near his home and, since Joe did not recognize him, announces that he is going to "fun" his parents by not revealing his identity to them at first. The inevitable happens, and Big Billie kills Little Billie with a hatchet as he kneels to drink from a spring. After the corpse is buried, Joe Drew appears and inquires about Little Billie. Some time after he departs, the elderly couple exhume the body and identify Little Billie by a black, clover-shaped birthmark over his heart.

The simple story has a thematic density, however, that is by no means simple. In his essay "A Poem of Pure Imagination," Warren writes, "a symbol implies a body of ideas which may be said to be fused with it." (p. 218). Some idea of the metaphoric richness of the poem may be gained when the West is considered as such a symbol within the poem. To Little Billie, the West is a refuge, an escape from punishment, a fresh start, a source of luck and wealth. To the travelers who were prompted by much the same motives as Little Billie, their dream of the West became the reality of death when they stopped at Big Billie's inn. The authorial comments in the poem suggest that the West may be an attempt to gain a new identity (the "old shell of self" had been left behind) and at the same time paradoxically an attempt to lose one's identity in nature ("into the green / world, land of the innocent bough, land of the leaf"). There may be gold in the hills of the West, but the sun also sets behind those hills ("toward Time's unwinking eye"). Since the symbol is "massive" and is thus "the condensation of several themes and not a sign for one," it will bear all the connotations that can be associated with the idea. Thus the West will carry in this poem all the meanings that it had for Jack Burden in *All the King's Men*:

For West is where we all plan to go someday. It is where you go when the land gives out and the old-field pines encroach. It is where you go when you get the letter saying: *Flee, all is discovered*. It is where you go when you look down at the blade in your hand and see the blood on it. It is where you go when you are told you are a bubble on the tide of empire. It is where you go when you hear thar's gold in them-thar hills. It is where you go to grow up with the country. It is where you go to spend your old age. Or it is just where you go. (Modern Library edition, p. 286)

The West, however, was to both Little Billie and Jack Burden an unsatisfactory escape; they both returned.

The return itself is one symbol in the "tissue of symbols which emerge from, and disappear into, a world of scene and action" ("Love and Separateness," p. 167) that is part of the "intricate tissue of paradox" ("Irony with a Center," p. 143) and irony within the poem. When one considers that Little Billie had an identity in the "land between the rivers"

since the stranger he tries to rob recognizes him and shoots him in the shoulder and when one considers that neither Joe Drew, Big Billie, nor his wife recognizes Little Billie when he returns, then the over-all effect of the journey West has been the loss of identity. It is, perhaps, a change of identity, but the new identity has to replace the old. As the poem states, "Time is always the new name and the new face. / And no-name and no-face" and "Time is West." Thus the return is an attempt to regain "Whatever it was you had lost," be it innocence, childhood, or "The old shell of self, thin, ghostly, translucent, light as air" which had been shed as a natural process of growth. Little Billie's disobedience of his father's instructions, his pride which leads him to believe that he can rob the stranger alone, forces him not only to leave his "Eden" in the "land between the rivers" but also to leave his old identity as a consequence of his original sin. Thus his return, his attempt to regain his "Eden," is an attempt to regain "the meaning of the past for the present." Too, it is, as Maud Bodkin has indicated, tragic in its implications, the alienated child trying to regain the security of his former position within the family unit:

. . . the form of tragedy — the character of its essential themes — reflects the conflict within the nature of any self-conscious individual between his assertion of his separate individuality and his craving for oneness with the group — family or community — of which he is a part. The sense of guilt which haunts the child whose emerging self-will drives him into collision with his parents echoes that guilt of tribal feeling and custom; and the personal and racial memories combine in our participation in the tragic hero's arrogance and fall.¹

Thus Little Billie's rebellion and disobedience are an essential part of his maturing, are a part of life itself; his return is possibly a natural part of life itself, the migratory knowledge of the salmon who "heaves at the fall" as the Guilt-haunted Wanderer heaves "at the great fall of Time." As Ezra Pound has said, "A return to origins invigorates because it is a return to nature and reason. The man who returns to origins does so because he wishes to behave in the eternally sensible manner."² Too, if Little Billie and Big Billie have an Adam-God relationship in terms of Little Billie's original sin, then the return could be an attempt to return to God, a search for the father in the sense that Thomas Wolfe discussed:

The deepest search in life, it seemed to me, the thing that in one way or another was central to all living was man's search to find a father, not merely the father of his flesh, not merely the lost father of his youth, but the image of a strength and wisdom

1 Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 60.

2 Ezra Pound, "The Tradition," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1954), p. 92.

external to his need and superior to his hunger, to which the belief and power of his own life could be united.³

There are strong religious connotations in the poem which suggest that Warren may have had this search for a father theme in mind. Before Little Billie's return in the poem, there is a Narcissistic image of a person's kneeling by a stream to quench his thirst. The thirst that leads him to self-knowledge of the reflection in the stream leads him to self-love:

And the name and the face are you, and you
The name and the face, and the stream you gaze into
Will show the adoring face, show the lips that lift to you
As you lean with the implacable thirst of self,
As you lean to the image which is yourself,
To set the lip to lip, fix eye on bulging eye,
To drink not of the stream but of your deep identity. . . .

In this ritualistic act, the kneeling and the water have obvious religious connotations. Later Little Billie is kneeling at the spring when his father standing above him sets "the hatchet in his head." When Little Billie's mother refuses to identify the corpse of her son in her agony and grief, there is a suggestion in the scene of the Pieta. When the poem closes, there is also a suggestion of the murder as a continuing, repeated ritualistic Abraham-Isaac sacrifice:

To kneel
Here in the evening empty of wind or bird,
To kneel in the sacramental silence of evening
At the feet of the old man
Who is evil and ignorant and old . . .

The fact that the ritual sacrifice is not stopped as in the Abraham-Isaac story and the fact that Big Billie is evil are, perhaps, examples of the ironic contrasts developed within the poem. There are, also, ironic contrasts developed within the poem to the parable of the Prodigal Son. Although Warren dropped the word "Prodigal" and substituted the words "You come" in the following quotation, the connotations are the same:

You come, back to the homeland of no-Time,
To ask forgiveness and the patrimony of your crime;
And kneel in the untutored night as to demand
What gift — oh, father, father — from that dis severing hand?)

The abrupt shifts of tone within the poem from the humor of Little Billie's wetting his pants and running home fast enough that he "would do right well back on the Bardstown track" to the pathos of the parents' grieving over the body of their son are also examples of the ironic contrasts that constitute the structure of the poem. Another is that Little Billie's escape

³ Thomas Wolfe, "The Story of a Novel," *The Portable Wolfe*, ed. Maxwell Geismar (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 582.

West was a temporary escape into nature whereas his return is a permanent escape into nature; through his death he becomes "Brother to pinion and the pious fin that cleave / Their innocence of air and the disinfected flood. . . ." There are innumerable other such ironic contrasts within the poem.

Little Billie's archetypal journey and return are the same as Everyman must make. His emerging individuality manifests itself as an act of volition against his father's instructions; the act itself is a natural part of growth and maturity. However, the act is paradoxically a type of original sin also; and the guilt Little Billie incurs prompts him to seek to escape, to seek a new identity. His motives for return, ironically similar in some ways to those that had prompted him and the travelers West, grow out of his sense of loss and perhaps guilt. He sought to return to an identity that he had lost, he sought self-knowledge, he sought the family group, he sought to return to a state of primal innocence, and he sought salvation. What he found was death.

Albert Camus' play *Le Malentendu* also tells the story of a son who has been away for years and returns with similar motives to Little Billie's only to be murdered by relatives who do not recognize him. This three-act play seems to have had its original conception in 1939. An entry in Camus' notebooks for April, 1939-February, 1942, mentions a man who comes home from a long journey wearing a mask merely because he wanted "to see things behind a mask." Two possibilities of development are indicated: the masked man who is "happy" eventually takes off his mask because of "the way his wife suffers" and the masked man confronts two women, one who loves him because of his mask and then stops loving him and one who loves him in spite of his mask and continues to do so.⁴ Another entry in the same notebooks indicates that Camus had decided upon *Budejovice* (the name of a town in Czechoslovakia) for the title of the play, that he had planned the play in three acts, and that he had envisioned it as part of the "second series" of his work — "the world of tragedy and the spirit of revolt." (p. 193). When Camus' novel *L'Etranger* was published in 1942, Meursalt reads the basic plot of the play on a piece of newspaper he finds in his jail cell:

The paper was yellow with age, almost transparent, but I could still make out the letter print. It was the story of a crime. The first part was missing, but I gathered that its scene was in some village in Czechoslovakia. One of the villagers had left his home to try his luck abroad. After twenty-five years, having made a fortune, he returned to his country with his wife and child. Meanwhile his mother and sister had been running a small hotel in the village

⁴ Albert Camus, *Notebooks, 1935-1942*, tr. by Philip Thody (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1963), p. 131.

where he was born. He decided to give them a surprise and, leaving his wife and child in another inn, he went to stay at his mother's place, booking a room under an assumed name. His mother and sister completely failed to recognize him. At dinner that evening he showed them a large sum of money he had on him, and in the course of the night they slaughtered him with a hammer. After taking the money they flung the body into the river. Next morning his wife came and, without thinking, betrayed the guest's identity. His mother hanged herself. His sister threw herself into a well. I must have read that story thousands of times. In one way it sounded most unlikely; in another, it was plausible enough. Anyhow, to my mind, the man was asking for trouble; one shouldn't play fool tricks of that sort.⁵

Thus, by the middle of 1942, Camus had the details of the plot of the play in mind. He made only a few changes when he wrote the play: Jan, the man in the play, has no son; he has been away only twenty years; he is drugged and then drowned; the mother drowns herself; and the sister apparently hangs herself. An entry in the notebooks for January, 1942-September, 1945, contains dialogue for the last two scenes of the third act and shows that Camus planned for one of the characters to be a "mute-maidservant" at the time.⁶ Another later entry shows that he changed the "mute maidservant" to "an old manservant" whom he considered to be God; he apparently was thinking of *God Does Not Answer* as a subtitle for the play. (pp. 31-2). An even later entry suggests that he was considering another shift of focus in the play; he was thinking of the title *The Exile* for the play which he was then considering as a comedy. (p. 43). Two later entries show that he had settled upon the title *Le Malentendu* (*The Misunderstanding*) and that he was considering quotations from Montaigne as epigraphs for the play (the play was published in June, 1944, without an epigraph). (pp. 69 and 72). The second of these entries contains a quotation from Montaigne that perhaps suggested what he considered to be the theme of the play at the time: "This is why the poets figure that wretched Mother Niobe, having first lost seven sons and subsequently as many daughters, overwhelmed with losses, and being transmuted into a rock . . . to express that feelingless, mute, and deaf stupidity that seizes us when accidents beyond our bearing crush us." Several other entries in the notebooks of this time contain dialogue or summary of action that Camus intended to incorporate into the play. (pp. 46-7 and p. 78).

An entry in the notebooks for September, 1945-April, 1948, some

⁵ Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, tr. by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), pp. 99-100.

⁶ Albert Camus, *Notebooks, 1942-1951*, tr. by Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1965), pp. 26-7.

time after the play had been published, suggests that Jan would have destroyed the tragedy if he had identified himself, for "the height of all tragedies lies in the deafness of the protagonists." Too, this entry makes clear Camus' concept of the recognition of the Absurd and its influence upon the rebel: "What balances the absurd is the community of man fighting against it. And if we choose to serve that community, we choose to serve the dialogue carried to the absurd against any policy of falsehood or of silence." (pp. 125-6). Another entry in the same notebooks shows that Camus no longer associated the play with his "second series" on revolt but with his "first series" on the absurd. (p. 158).

The play, which as Rachel Bepaloff has noted has a "completely classic structure" with themes of "acute romanticism,"⁷ is developed by means of ironic contrasts in a similar manner to "The Ballad of Billie Potts." Jan's father's death brought forth a sense of duty in him regarding his mother and sister, and he returns home and keeps his identity hidden since he wants to observe his mother and sister "from the outside" in order to know their needs so that he can bring happiness to the two women.⁸ His return is also a search for an identity; he says, "no one can be happy in exile or estrangement. One can't remain a stranger all one's life." (p. 111). It is one of the many ironic contrasts in the play that he has been "in exile" and that he has been very happy with his wife Maria. Too, he came back searching for an identity only to find that he has lost his identity; "I was looked at, but I wasn't *seen*," he tells Maria. (p. 106) Also, it is ironic that he seeks to bring his mother and sister happiness which he seems to think will fulfill their lives although he found it insufficient to fulfill his own life; "It is quite true that a man needs happiness, but he also needs to find his true place in the world," he tells his wife. (p. 111). Jan is aware of the ironic contrast between his own condition and that of the prodigal son; his statement as he drinks the drugged tea adds dramatic irony to his own perception of the irony of his situation: "So the prodigal son's feast is continuing. First, a glass of beer — but in exchange for my money; then a cup of tea — because it encourages the visitor to stay on." (p. 138). Another example of dramatic irony is Maria's statement as she leaves so that Jan may register, "And may my love shield you from harm." (pp. 112-3). There are innumerable other such ironic contrasts within the play.

The focus of the play reflects the determinism of Warren's concern with the "vital effort" that is "doomed to failure" and is yet "essential" since it is in terms of that effort "that the human manifests itself as

7 Rachel Bepaloff, "The World of the Man Condemned to Death," in *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Germaine Bree (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 104.

8 Albert Camus, *Cross Purpose*, tr. Stuart Gilbert in *Caligula and Cross Purpose* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947), p. 107.

human." Warren's statement reflects indirectly the absurdity of the human condition as does his poem; Camus has his play centered directly on man's recognition of his alienation from both his fellowmen and God and his recognition of the absurdity of the human condition. In other words, what is implicit in Warren becomes explicit in Camus. Jan, for example, finally becomes dimly aware of his alienation. He says, "It's fear, fear of the eternal loneliness, fear that there is no answer." (p. 137). He pushes the button that summons the old manservant; ironically God comes to the threshold, but he neither comes into the room nor speaks. Jan's "vague uneasiness" causes him to tell his mother that he has made a mistake in coming to the inn and that he intends to leave that evening after dinner. (pp. 139-40). His delayed awareness of the absurdity of his situation has made escape impossible; in the interim between the scene with the old manservant and this scene with the mother he has consumed the drugged tea.

Martha, Jan's sister and the tragic heroine of the play, has avoided recognizing the absurdity of the human condition by her repeated dreams of escape from "this dreary town where it's always raining" (p. 101) to the sun and warm sand of the seacoast. She longs for a country where "Spring . . . grips you by the throat and flowers burst into bloom by thousands," a country where she can escape the "harsh, bleak spring" which she identifies as "one rose and a couple of buds struggling to keep alive." (p. 133). It is Martha who experiences the absurd as "the normal order of things" when the passport and Maria reveal Jan's identity to her. She is driven to despair and has rebelled against a world that is full of "the injustice done to man." (pp. 166-69). She tells Maria, "in the normal order of things no one is recognized" and "those blind impulses that surge up in us, the yearnings that rack our souls" are futile. (p. 167). She hates "this narrow world in which we are reduced to gazing up at God," but she refuses to bend her knee to Him. (p. 159). She smarts from the injustice done to her, she feels that she has not been given her rights, she thinks she has been cheated, and she promises to "leave this world without being reconciled." Because of her hamartia or flaw in her character, she fails to see that the value of life lies in the way it is lived rather than in its meaning which is absurd. In her blindness she suggests that Maria pray that she be hardened into a stone, that she "be deaf to all appeals" as God is deaf to man's appeals, and that she comprehend the simple dichotomy between "the mindless happiness of stones" and the only alternative which is death. (p. 168) Love, happiness, escape — all are futile. Martha has gone from the recognition of absurdity, through despair to rebellion. Her suicidal path of clinging to hope during her life has resulted in her literal suicide. In his *Notebooks, 1942-1951*, Camus indicated only two possible actions for the person who had recognized the absurdity of the human condition and had been driven to despair: suicide or confrontation.

(p. 149). Through confrontation, she might have achieved "progress toward a sanctity of negation — a heroism without God" (p. 20) and thus have found a modicum of the happiness she desperately sought in the process of living itself. The mother's suicide is similar to Martha's. The mother, who thinks of life in terms of "the anxiety of making decisions," of the "thoughts of work that must be done," and of constant "strain and stress," (p. 146) longs for and dreams of peace and sleep. Jan's death brings her, however, an incomplete awareness of the absurdity of the human condition. She knows that "this world we live in doesn't make sense," (p. 155) but Jan's death has awakened in her "that intolerable love" which she says she "now must kill — together with myself." (p. 157). She will not acknowledge that love is absurd as Martha has done; her suicide, then, is an attempt to destroy that "new-found love" and to be reunited with her son in death.

The sense of the absurd transmitted by the play reaches cosmic proportions when Maria, who has been driven to despair and an incomplete awareness of the absurd like the mother's, retains enough faith to call out in supplication in her grief, "Oh, God, . . . I place myself in your hands. Have pity, turn towards me. Hear me and raise me from the dust, oh Heavenly Father! Have pity on those who love each other and are parted." The old manservant appears, and when Maria appeals to him, he replies with the first and only word he speaks in the play, a deistic "No." It is as Martha has said; God's heart is stone, and he is deaf to all appeals of man.

Thus, it is remarkable to me that these two works conceived, written, and published about the same time should have so many similarities. The ironic method, the development of the plot by means of ironic contrasts, is remarkably similar, as are the themes of man's spiritual alienation, of his need to return to origins, and of his search for a metaphysical identity and self-knowledge. Both recognize the human situation as absurd. It is here that the source of most of the thematic differences between the two exists: it is primarily one of degree. Both Warren and Camus insist that the "vital effort" which is absurd since it is "doomed to failure" is "essential" to define what is human about life itself. They both represent what Maria calls "*une tragedie qui n'en finira pas*," "a tragedy which can never end." (p. 166).

From a Notebook

● Mark Strand

1. She did her best to starve the air by growing fat.
2. A man in Utah hates my work.
Do not disappoint him, Excellence.
3. My advice to some of the local poets:
Eat! Eat! You pigs!
And you shall be angels.
4. When I am with you, I am two places at once.
When you are with me, you have just arrived
with a suitcase which you pack
with one hand and unpack with the other.
5. When a poet loves, he loves himself.
When he hates, he hates everybody else.
6. The poet could not speak of himself,
but only of the gradations leading toward him and away.
7. What shall we do, Fine Line,
who stand between the poem and nothing?
8. A man who does not wish to be identified
said that no one he knows is happy.
9. D. writes me that he is happy.
I can't believe it.
10. The days are ahead
1,926,346 to 1,926,345.
Later the nights will catch up.

11. A man sitting in a cafeteria
had one enormous ear
and one tiny one.
Which was fake?
12. When X. was 37 he celebrated his 49th and 50th
birthdays to get them out of the way.
13. Many bad poets are incredibly ugly.
Some good ones are, too.
14. Some beautiful poets are very good.
Some bad ones are, too.
15. When X. was alone he said,
All of this is unreal.
16. Take my side
and there will be nothing left of me.
17. Poets have so little to gain,
so little to lose,
that they can afford to be jealous.
18. The self is an allegory
and the Good Knight is
the kiss of the mother
who is the father
who is the mother.
19. November 3rd: Today is no exception.
20. The first line for a play:
Are you taking your cats to Mexico?
21. If she were real I wouldn't let her into this apartment.
22. Several days later . . .
A few weeks, maybe.
No mail.
Snow.
No desire to continue.
One of my dogs was eaten by the other dogs.

Warren and The Doctrine of Complicity

• James H. Justus

When Tiny Duffy winks at Jack Burden after the death of the Boss in *All the King's Men*, Burden's recoil is immediate and visceral. This bright boy among the king's men knows the meaning of the conspiratorial gesture: it does not seal the bargain on a specific plot—say, the control of the Stark political machine—but it affirms their general commonality, especially their skill for survival. For Duffy the wink is instinctive, un-intellectualized, and scarcely formulable. For Burden, however, it is a shattering and disgusting shock of recognition, a sudden eruption of what he has heretofore kept firmly below his working consciousness—the realization that the canniness of a low-country patrician and the cunning of an up-country redneck are one, and that for all his stratagems and feints, Jack Burden is spiritually as well as physically tied to the Mason City crowd. It is a tonic moment for him, and a necessary one in his uneasy progress to moral maturity.

If for most of his life Burden resembles that hard-headed ancestor Gilbert Mastern, with his vision of narrowly conceived connections with and responsibilities to other men, the bracing verification of his brotherhood with Tiny Duffy humbles him to the point where he can accept Cass Mastern's doctrine of comprehensive human relatedness. The key to that doctrine is that the best of men are linked irrevocably to the worst. It is not difficult for Burden to cherish his links with Judge Irwin; it is somewhat harder for him to adjust to Willie Stark and practically impossible for him to see his association with Tiny Duffy or Gummy Larsen as anything more than an accident in time, a temporary quirk of history.

All the King's Men concerns the moral education of its narrator, and it is Warren's first extended fictional statement on the idea of complicity which lies at the core of that work. But reinforcing the related issue of self-knowledge, which runs through Warren's work like an obsessive, never-to-be-resolved theme, it can be found in the early verse and in truncated fashion, in the first two novels. Percy Munn (*Night Rider*) and Jerry Calhoun (*At Heaven's Gate*), who lack the will to pursue the significance of

their hazy, ill-defined selves, immerse their lives in a common "good" only to find depletion or death. *Community* can be a deceptive surrogate, and corrupting, when the self has not first faced up to its own complex nature.

In "Original Sin: A Short Story," the best of the early poems, the solemnity of the theme is domesticated and particularized by such metaphors of familiarity as an old hound, a hobo, a child-like relative, a mother, and an old horse; and the irresistible force of the darker aspects of self is suggested by unportentious verbs (*stumbles, whimpers, wander*) and static sentences (*it stood so imbecile; With empty hands, it stood with lips askew*). Furthermore, in an idiom which foreshadows Warren's later exploitation of mixed registers, the disciplined and metaphysical ("Never met you in the lyric arsenical meadows") and the flexible and conversational ("You thought you had lost it when you left Omaha") are mutually informing. The juxtaposition perfectly accommodates the hard-earned lesson for the speaker: "Oh nothing is lost, ever lost! at last you understood."¹ What the speaker understands is the same thing similar speakers in other poems come to understand: the unitary nature of the self. That recognition means, in turn, an accommodation of man's bestiality. The necessity to slake what Warren calls the "implacable thirst of self" in "The Ballad of Billie Potts" often means confronting a shadow self as an image far more sinister than that of the old hound snuffling at the door. Billie Potts's "long return" to his fate, for example, is pegged to the natural compulsions of bee, eel, goose, and salmon; man, in this early poem, is brother to fin and pinion, just as later he is seen as "brother to dragons and companion to owls."

Jefferson, the ideological center of *Brother to Dragons*, in rage and revulsion refuses to see that his nephews' sick violence is actually part of the nature of man rather than some momentary and unfortunate aberration. Although it is to Warren's credit that Lilburn Lewis is conceived as a real and depressingly tangible man, his stature and function are buttressed by symbols and mythic attributes which make him the very embodiment of the unacknowledged secret self of Jefferson, the "coiling darkness" which must be embraced. The poem, as Victor Strandberg has shown, is studded with recurring beast imagery: the minotaur, dragon, serpent. All the variations are symbolic reminders of man's monstrousness for the moral education of both Jefferson and "R.P.W.," the ordering narrator whose calling up of his historical and quasi-historical spirits is no disinterested conjuration.

The recognition of one's full and often objectionable individuality is requisite to selfhood, and only the most determinedly naturalistic instances show the failure to strike beyond. The placing of one's self in a communal context is not only a therapeutic prescription; it is also a spiritual impera-

1 See Bibliographical note.

tive. Yoked to the imagistic strain of monstrosity, then, is the dramatic one of kinship. In this "Tale of Verse and Voices," brothers are important, literally and metaphorically, for they serve as an index to community and thus represent, potentially at least, the sanative stage in the curing of soul-sickness. Lilburn-Isham, Lucy-Jefferson, Laetitia-Brother: the sibling relationships, specifically and tangibly rendered, extend outward, encompassing all varieties of literal kinship to form a gloss on the metaphorical abstraction *brotherhood*.

The premise behind Warren's doctrine of complicity is the central conviction that none is without guilt. Lucy in her pride fails to comfort George, the luckless slave. Laetitia wills Lilburn's perverted attack. Isham, Aunt Cat, even George all use and are used by others. Psychologically, the interrelated characters act out valid patterns of attraction and repulsion; theologically, they reenact the mythic ceremonies by which man the created alternately ignores and entreats the creator. What is merely a visceral shock of recognition for Jack Burden, who receives, records, and self-loathingly accepts the wink from Tiny Duffy, is elevated to a virtual theory of behavior of R.P.W., whose notion of complicity asserts the mutuality of victim and victimizer:

How the rabbit runs to the stone hurled by the boy's hand,
And the stone's parabola and the rabbit's irrational
Skitter fulfill each other, and that fulfillment is a chord
Of music, enormous, to blacken the sky,
And the hen in the dark hen house offers her throat
To the delicate stitch of the weasel's tooth and to the lip's
Insidious suction . . .

If Lilburn needs the black George on the chopping block, George indicates his need for Lilburn when he curls himself correctly on the block to receive the axe. When rebuked by Jefferson for what seems a perverse insight, R.P.W. turns the screw still further and speculates on a paradoxical reversal of roles:

But just suppose it true, what then? The victim
Becomes the essential accomplice, *provocateur*—
No, more, is the principal—the real victim
Is he whose hand was elected to give the stroke,
But is innocent.

R.P.W.'s turn of the screw ends up as the dead-end theory of divine malevolence, in which man's will is worth nothing but for proclaiming his own innocence. But none is innocent. In perfect consequence, the mutuality of victim and victimizer in the meat-house is later repeated in the betrayal of

those two who love Lilburn most, Aunt Cat and his dog, a betrayal which is also Lilburn's "deepest will."²

This is the dark side to complicity, of course, or what would be dark if man were unable to strike through his despair when it becomes too easefully acclimated to "the way things are." Such a state is common enough in many of Warren's early poems, including "Monologue at Midnight," "Late Subterfuge," and "End of Season." Or, it would be dark if the complicity is merely spurious, a bargain struck with God on man's terms. The cocky naturalism of "The Mango on the Mango Tree," for example, strives toward a new belief, but as long as the "monstrous, primal guilt" is attributed to God and innocence to man, the mango as the symbol of a malevolent creator remains static and perverse. Only in an extreme fantasy could the mango beg "*pardon, pardon,*" which would allow man then to say "*forgive,*" and

leap and laugh and sing
And it could leap, and everything
Take hands with us and pace the music in a ring. . . .

Man's pride in his own disbelief dooms him to remain outside the redemptive possibilities inherent in that ceremonial linking of hands.

Such possibilities are more likely in two later poems, "Gull's Cry" and "The Child Next Door." A sullen Italian wife, who has attempted to abort her eighth child, produces "this monstrous other," a defective creature who is taught by a beautiful sister "to make *ciao*" with the hands. But all in the dusty yard—child, goat, man, beetle—are linked in God's creation: "We must trust our hope to prevail/That heart-joy in beauty be wisdom. . . ." That insight gathers up the poet's own children, harsh worlds of raw beauty and departed glory, imperfect neighbors, defective children, and the disturbing presence of gulls, owls, and fish. In spite of the naturalistic way the world seems to be hung, the speaker invokes the redemptive possibilities of that complicity:

let the molecular dance of the stone-dark glimmer like joy in the stone's dream,
And in that moment of possibility, let *gobbo*, *gobbo's* wife, and us, and all, take hands and sing: *redeem, redeem!*

The way in which Jack Burden's incomplete manuscript and the Master papers follow him from one rooming house to another, from apart-

² The relatively new study of "victimology" posits the theory that certain victims of assault and murder help condition, provoke, and shape the crime. Though some are masochistic or otherwise disturbed, many victims project personality traits which "offend the offender" and unconsciously invite retaliation. Not all behavioral scientists accept the theory, but its insights are fully explored in *Brother to Dragons*—and before that in Lawrence's *Women in Love*.

ment to apartment, from year to year, is suggestive of the deterministic patterns which lace most of Warren's work. Blind and "groping Godward" through "crevice, cranny, chink," the force is sometimes related to irresistible grace; but most often it is merely the agent for that grace, the agent which compels one's recognition of his own darker self. That the world is all of a piece is the lesson that comes so late and so destructively to Burden; put another way, it means that man becomes wholly man only after coming to terms with that dark nightmare self which consciousness prefers to ignore. Not ignoring his own dark zones prepares the way for man's disinterested exercise of charity, which, when freely extended in the world, can bring "blessedness," "hope," or "joy."

The source of this secular equivalent of salvation, which recurs with considerable frequency in much of the later work, can be found in Warren's essay on "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which dates from the same period during which Warren was writing *All the King's Men*. As a piece of creative scholarship, "A Poem of Pure Imagination" is rich, complex, and controversial; its governing thesis is clearly stated in terms that say as much for Warren's concerns as they do for Coleridge's:

The Mariner shoots the bird; suffers various pains, the greatest of which is loneliness and spiritual anguish; upon recognizing the beauty of the foul sea snakes, experiences a gush of love for them and is able to pray; is returned miraculously to his home port, where he discovers the joy of human communion in God. . . . We arrive at the notion of a universal charity, . . . the sense of the "One Life" in which all creation participates. . . .

That sense of the "One Life," Warren stresses, comes to the Mariner only after he has submitted himself to "the great discipline of sympathy"; his return voyage from the stark polar seas begins once he has composed a "poem" of blessing and, though scarred, he is allowed to walk again, in Coleridge's words, "with a goodly company."

So, also, ends *All the King's Men*, as a sadder and wiser Burden picks up the pieces of his life, determined to walk through the scenes of old defeats into "the awful responsibility of Time." Amantha Starr of *Band of Angels*, after thirty years of hedging, participates in the ritualistic restoration of Old Slop, the Negro garbage man, and accepts fully that "commonality of weakness and rejection" in the midst of strange headstones and markers in a little Kansas cemetery. With quite different tonal effects, many of the poems in *Promises* and *You, Emperors, and Others* celebrate "joy," "heart-joy," "blessedness," and "beauty." With a kind of astonished humility, the intellectual and mature speaker consistently discovers lessons, however puzzling and oblique, that seem to bear on his own search for blessedness—or, if that is too impossibly remote, at least a way to live that can admit the possibility of blessedness. The significant rubric

(from "Ballad of a Sweet Dream of Peace") is "we're all one Flesh, at last." The ambiguous emotions of the speaker in "Lullaby: Exercise in Human Charity and Self-Knowledge," directed toward a nameless woman, sum up the spirit of chastened and qualified hope:

For I who bless can bless you only
For the fact our histories
Can have no common bond except the lonely
Fact of humanness we share
As now, in place and fate disparate, we breathe the same dark pulsing air.
Where you lie now, far or near,
Sleep, my dear.

If one mode common to the characteristic Warren protagonist is the anguished search for the defining marks of his own uniqueness and the erection of boundaries to preserve and perpetuate those proud differences, another mode is the equally anguished drive to submerge that uniqueness, to temper individuality with community. Warren's work is filled with instances in which the individual, realizing the limiting and often negating effects of his own unique self, strives to join, by tearing down those isolating boundaries. Amantha Starr stoops to kiss the scar on Hamish Bond's leg, and Sue Murdock of *At Heaven's Gate* kisses the befouled face of Jerry Calhoun's old aunt; Willie Proudfoot of *Night Rider* gives up buffalo-killing, and Percy Munn discovers that he cannot kill his alter-ego. These are defining gestures of varying importance, but they all stamp the gesturers not as radical selves but as fragmented individuals responding to the need for human community. Jack Burden proceeds from a mechanistic view of people and things in their atomistic dispersion (like objects in an attic, discrete, functionless, inert) to Cass Mastern's vision of creation as a vast spider-web in which everything is infinitely related to everything else. In their more ponderous ways, this is also the final vision of Adam Rosenzweig (*Wilderness*) and Bradwell Tolliver (*Flood*).

The doctrine of complicity is not, as Warren would doubtless admit, an original proposition. In varying ways it has been a ground theme in orthodox Western Christianity at least since Augustine (and in more exacerbated forms in the various heresies which Augustine had to combat). But lifting it up as a doctrinal necessity is abstract; using it functionally as a part of man's experience in the here-and-now is particular. Though sometimes inclined to the very abstractness he has spoken against, Warren more often than not encloses that abstract doctrine in the specific images of man's involvement in his world. Nowhere in the canon is the joining of the abstraction and the specific human context more successfully realized than in *Brother to Dragons*, Warren's most original and possibly his most impressive book. There the full implications of complicity, its

hopeful as well as chilling aspects, are laid out in terms of measurable human consequences.

If in its darker premises, the rabbit and the stone, the hen and the weasel, George and Lilburn meet in conspiring fulfillment, there is also a brighter promise in such complicity. R.P.W., no less than Jefferson, knows the betraying weakness in every man's face—the "bleared, the puffed, the lank, the lean"—and, like Jefferson too, he believes in "virtue." Past "all appetite and alibi," he believes in that "green, crank nightmare of the dear green world. . . ." Under his querulous, sometimes petulant promptings, R.P.W. brings Jefferson, stage by stage, into realizing that only through acknowledgement of our common "coiling darkness," can there be the "incandescence of the heart's great flare." In the doctrine of complicity—akin to what Warren sees in Coleridge's great poem—are both anguish and truth: "All is redeemed, /in knowledge." And that aspect of complicity works for R.P.W. as well as it does for Jefferson. Early on, he figuratively blesses the brute-faced Mississippi catfish ("one with God") and later the Black Snake, *Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta* ("the swollen head hung/Haloed and high in light")—his own foul sea snakes. But, most important, he can now bless man—or, rather, men, in their diversity of talent and virtue: the bluster of Laetitia's brother, the common decency of Mr. Boyle, the conspiring innocence of Isham, the compromise of his own aged father.

If, as Warren believes, the Ancient Mariner can begin his return journey after he composes a poem of blessing, R.P.W. exorcises the sobering ghost of Rocky Hill through his vision of the Ohio River below the house:

And I thought how men had moved on that broad flood,
The good, the bad, the strong, the weak, all men
The drawn, the driven, the fortunate, the feckless,
All men, a flood upon the flood. . . .

Man's responsibility for every other man is possible because of the burden shared by all: his simultaneous aspiration for glory and his proneness to sin. Even if we have only "stumbled into the act of virtue," its fulfillment lies "in the degree of recognition/of the common lot of our kind." With that recognition, R.P.W., like Burden before him, is "prepared/To go into the world of action and liability."

A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

For references to and quotations from Warren's texts, I have used the original hardback editions published by Random House, with exception of *All the King's Men*, published by Harcourt, Brace and Company. Quotations from "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading" are drawn from Warren's revised version included in *Selected Essays* (New York: Random House, 1958). Anyone who writes on Warren's poetry (and I am no exception) is indebted to Victor Strandberg's fine critical study, *A Colder Fire: The Poetry of Robert Penn Warren* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965).

Intimations of Mortality

• John Keenan

That tree had stood three hundred years
and might have lived a century more
but it fell.

The day it fell was early spring:
a time to live, not die,
but it fell.

Like a sword that cut the ribboned road
I thought I knew so well,
it fell.

Like fate to block my customary way,
with guillotine finality,
it fell

not casket length from my simonized shroud.
It shook the solid ground beneath
my tired tread

and raised the dust of age in the face of spring
the dust inside me answering.

I turned the wheel with shaking hands
to retrace the route I came,
the way that led me to this almost-end.

The smell of spring was not the same.

Carrying Manty Home: Robert Penn Warren's *Band of Angels*

• Allen Shepherd

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. . . . 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.¹

. . . out of Margaret Mitchell by Mark Twain!²

The progress of *Band of Angels* (1955), Robert Penn Warren's fifth novel, suggests that of an aerialist pedaling along a wire over Niagara Falls. He is an accomplished professional, but you fear for him nonetheless. He wavers, seems almost to stop, disappears into the mist, and finally reaches the end. He then gets off his bicycle and trips over a rock. Time and again Warren saves the novel as it threatens to fall into steamy sensationalism or trite melodrama. In the end, however, he seems to lose his nerve, and the novel dives into a false and one must say sentimental resolution.

Band of Angels is in a number of ways both an ambitious and an impressive performance. The story, like most of Warren's stories, is fast-paced and exciting, the plotting is intricate yet coherent. Warren's sense of place is as keen as ever, his linguistic powers are sometimes startling, his fund of antiquarian lore is formidable, and his tragic sense often suc-

1 Malcolm Cowley, ed., *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews* (New York: Viking Press, 1959), p. 188.

2 Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Co., 1962), p. 393.

ceeds in infusing new meaning into the clichés of the historical novel. Warren's interrelated themes are for the most part familiar ones: the meaning and achievement of freedom and identity, the dangers of untutored idealism, and the necessity of integrating past and present. The principal defect in the novel, however, is a radical one: its protagonist and narrator, Amantha Starr, is notably unattractive, often insensitive, full of self-pity, given to constant evasions, practicing one betrayal after another. She is also not a credible woman, and might indeed be made to fill out an illustrative page or two in *Sexual Politics*.

Band of Angels, as a popular philosophical novel, asks to be read, in an eighteenth-century phrase, as "pleasant instruction": to be successful, it must be both. Thus the question of the novel's focus. Warren attempts to control and deepen his story by internalizing the struggle, yet fast-paced action, bizarre characters, and vividly realized setting all tend to overshadow Manty's problems, largely passive as she is. There is at times such a claustrophobic density of detail, such an insistence on background authenticity, that one loses sight of Manty. One has in *Band of Angels* an extensive and crowded panorama, from Starrwood, a small, backwoods Kentucky plantation, to pietistic, Abolitionist Oberlin, to New Orleans, to bloody African slave-gathering expeditions, to Halesburg, Kansas, in the 1830's. If some of the detail seems to come from *Godey's Lady's Book*, if some descriptions (of Manty's flight through the swamp, for instance) are rather labored, one is struck time and again by the felicity of Warren's selection of surface detail. Walter Sullivan puts the case well when he says that "in at least one way he [Warren] is as well qualified as any living American novelists to write about the past."³

A question raised by *Band of Angels*, however, is whether such richly rendered authenticity aids in or militates against the creation of a novel of ideas, which is what this novel purports to be. Allied to the physical data of Manty's story, but seeming almost to possess an independent life of its own, is Warren's unflagging concern with problems of freedom and identity, the nature of reality, the goodness of evil intentions and the evil of good ones. There is evident throughout the novel a kind of stratification in which the line of demarcation between event and the meaning of event is often distinct.

Manty forthrightly addresses herself to the novel's two principal themes on the first page: "Oh, who am I? . . . If I could only be free . . ." ⁴ The achievement of identity and freedom, as becomes evident, troubles not only Manty, but nearly all the novel's characters, indeed the

3 "The Historical Novelist and the Existentialist Peril: Robert Penn Warren's *Band of Angels*," *The Southern Literary Journal* 11 (Spring 1970), 109.

4 *Band of Angels* (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 3. Subsequent quotations from this edition will be identified in the text.

generality of men. It is on this or a related issue that Sullivan pursues his examination of the novel, concluding that the existential terms in which Manty's dilemma is cast are essentially anachronistic and that Warren is unfaithful to the spirit of her time. Had it been published ten years later, *Band of Angels* would also surely have had—along with Styron's *Nat Turner*—its ten black critics to respond.

Manty's progress to identity and freedom is tortuous and crab-like, a step forward usually followed by a half-step backward. This until the great leap forward of the novel's conclusion. Central, of course, is her half-caste status; the Civil War goes on within and without her, and the primary question is "Oh, whose side am I on?" (276) In the end, however, she is a white woman, with a white father, white husband, and white child. Never, as Leslie Fiedler observes, can she bring herself to say, "I am a Negro."⁵ Yet as Manty finally realizes, freedom does not inhere in the possession of manumission papers. "Nobody," she concludes, "can set you free, . . . except yourself." (363-364)

Prerequisite to self-hood, or the achievement of freedom, is the rejection of a number of self-enslaving alternatives. Manty, like many of Warren's characters, is not immune to the attraction of mechanistic philosophy: so long as she believes that ". . . you are, therefore, only what History does to you," so long as she thinks that ". . . everything in the world is just something that happens . . . to you," she can reject all responsibility, for her own actions, and for those of others. (112 and 309) She seeks to withdraw from the public world, the world of war and the Freedman's Bureau and the Constitutional Convention, but "the world was there creeping in like cold air under a door . . ." (257) Although her future husband, Tobias, after his first call, leaves her feeling "weak and pure . . . and ready for life," (223) Manty in a subsequent evasion, learns "the trick of sinking into the day's occupation," which she calls "the human commitment," but which is in fact a sanctified retreat from involvement. (250-251)

Frequently she reflects on the complexities of cause and effect, on Flag-Officer Farragut's fine gold braid bringing her Tobias, John Brown being responsible for her rape, the infinitely complicated causal chain of the New Orleans riots of 1866. Always the thread which she follows leads away from her. For a long time her father is a dumping ground for all responsibility, and as "poor little Manty" she proclaims her hatred for each of the men in her life. Fastening the blame for her condition on one person (her father) or on a series of people (Seth Parton, Hamish Bond, Tobias Sears) is easier than admitting that cause and effect are not precisely definable, or that one is inescapably involved in and responsible for what happens to oneself and to others as well.

Although Manty is plagued by guilt feelings, she is also troubled by

5 Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 394.

the presence of another self, "that cold-eyed *not-you*," (161) which rejoices in the avoidance of responsibility which derives from "poor little Manty's" power over others. These others—her father, Hamish Bond, Tobias Sears—are all made to feel that they have wronged her, that they are guilty. Thus after her father has apologized,

there came to me some hard sense of an advantage just gained, not to be exploited yet but held in reserve, some possibility of self-justification and of revenge. (32)

Recuperating from Hamish Bond's first attack, she seeks to "confirm my sweet advantage of having been little and precious and wronged." (162) During Tobias Sears' first call upon her, her heart leaps as she realizes that she "had touched some secret spring that gave me power over him." (224)

With each accession of power, Manty seeks a new focus of responsibility. Repeatedly she seeks freedom in flight from the past: to be "free from everything in the world, all the past, all my old self, free to create my new self." (234) In the past lies the physical cause of her bondage, her father's bankruptcy and untimely death, but also the fact which denies the rationale of her life, that her father had loved her, had not been able to consider her as less than his daughter, had not been able to bring himself to draw up manumission papers, and thereby risk alienating and losing her. In their final conversation, Miss Idell begins to tell Manty this, but she cannot accept it, since it involves not only acceptance of responsibility for her own situation but forgiveness of her father.

This forgiveness is what Manty finally achieves, and *Band of Angels* is the only one of Warren's novels which deals specifically with this problem. Manty's resolution, whatever its defects, is significant because it contrasts so markedly with much of Warren's earlier work, poems and novels, in which he found the condition of horror almost unendurable, yet not admitting of resolution. Forgiveness of her father entails Manty's acceptance of responsibility, acknowledgment of the purposiveness of her acts, the achievement of that limited freedom which is man's condition, and the recognition of her own identity.

Since virtually all of the major characters in *Band of Angels* seek freedom and identity, it would be well to consider the nature of their struggles and achievements. Their struggles are designed to complement and illuminate Manty's own, but as will be seen, they tend rather to contradict or undercut them. Miss Idell and old Mr. Sears possess a sure sense of their identities; Manty naturally hates the one and fears the other. For many men, Manty fancies, the war offers a promise of fulfillment: "Perhaps this was the deepest and dearest promise, the most secret—the brute, communal roar, the dancing, the flames leaping in darkness." (174) The war offers fulfillment to emptiness, commitment to a cause, however ill-defined, self-realization in action, much like that which Percy Munn sought in *Night Rider*. Hamish Bond seeks freedom in expiation, through bene-

volence to individual victims of the institution from which he has profited. Kindness in him is like a disease. Bond's *k'la*, or bound brother, Rau-Ru, seeks freedom through political action, a new definition in a new name, Lt. Oliver Cromwell Jones. Two idealists, Seth Parton and Tobias Sears, seek freedom through imposing pure idea on the world; "the idea," in Jeremiah Beaumont's phrase, "must redeem the world."⁶

None of them succeeds in finding either freedom or the desired identity. At his death, Bond finds himself, as he had bitterly promised his mother he one day would, "ass-deep in niggers." (324) All his life he has been haunted by his denial of his parents, even as he blames them and others for his career as a slave-trader, thinking "I didn't make myself and I can't help what I am doing." (189) It is those to whom Bond most consistently extended his kindness and protection, Rau-Ru and Manty, who preside at his hanging, each blaming the other for his death. Rau-Ru had long occupied a peculiar situation in Bond's household. As a boy, he had been saved from certain death by the intervention of Bond, then engaged in an African slave-gathering expedition. In defense of his newly acquired chattel, Bond had been wounded and lamed for life. Thus was Rau-Ru's bond established.

His owner strengthened the tie by educating him, by appointing him an overseer, by offering his friendship and protection. And it is "Old Bond being good" (271) that makes Rau-Ru hate him most. This and the beating which he receives for defending Manty, Bond's other favorite, from the advances of Charles de Marigay Prieur-Denis. This is the event—not Mr. Lincoln's Proclamation—which Rau-Ru tells Manty had set him free. Free for what, to do what? Free eventually to return, a hunted outlaw, to Bond, this time himself the master, to hang Bond, or to feel that he could if he wanted to. Yet it was Manty's presence, Rau-Ru asserts, which drove Bond to jump from the wagon with the rope around his neck. Rau-Ru cannot forgive the kind father-master, and his final gift to Manty, saying that she is, as she desperately claims, white, is more a gesture of contempt than forgiveness. Who is the victor, who the victim?

Seth Parton, the sanctified Oberlin farm boy, sought absolute purity, but ended in absolute impurity, giving up theology for the stock market. Seth, who prayed with Manty in an Ohio glade to be shown "the performance of sanctification," in New Orleans attempts a ritualistic coupling with her, after discovering that "only in vileness may man begin to seek," and finally marries the sensual Miss Idell. (52 and 284)

Tobias Sears, the most fully developed and longest enduring of the novel's supporting cast, suffers a more equivocal fate. Warren's later essay, *The Legacy of the Civil War*, provides an illuminating gloss on this student

⁶ Robert Penn Warren, *World Enough and Time* (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 505.

of Mr. Emerson. Influenced initially by his father, who in his detachment reflects the "are they my poor?" side of Emerson's thought, Sears is one of the "higher-law" men, to whom the attraction of a total solution is strong. This predilection, together with the objection of the corrupt Colonel Morton, explains Sears' embracing of total Negro suffrage and his joining the Freedman's Bureau. Sears is one of those who, as Warren observes in his "Meditations on the Centennial," "had lost what they took to be their natural and deserved role,"⁷ which is to say a traditional sense of identity. He is one of "an elite without function, a displaced class."⁸ Bereft of his class identity, and frustrated in the attempt to achieve personal freedom, Sears commits himself to the political implementation of the Fourteenth Amendment, only to conclude in despair that ". . . we undertook to do good in the world, but we had not purged our own soul." (294)

A prototype of Sears would seem to be the Abolitionist Theodore Weld, who as Warren records in *The Legacy of the Civil War*, found that "he himself needed reforming," and that "he had been laboring to destroy evil in the same spirit as his antagonists."⁹ Sears' post-war literary activities reveal the essence of his character: in *The Great Betrayal* he denounces the Gilded Age for the corruption of the ideals for which he had fought, and in his poetry, published occasionally in the *Atlantic*, he is himself the ever recurring protagonist, "dying always into the beauty of Idea, into the nobility of Truth, dying into the undefiled whiteness of some self-image." (346) This is Warren's higher-law man, who "had withdrawn, and all that was left was 'the infinitude of the individual'—with no 'connections,' with no relation to 'dirty institutions.'"¹⁰ The West to which Sears withdraws is not—and this is typical of Warren—the great good place, not Frederick Jackson Turner's land of golden opportunity, but a place in which Manty and Tobias fail and grow old. Yet Warren is not content to leave Sears in a state of moral narcissism, but rather leads him into conversion to the Thingism which he had indicted in *The Great Betrayal*.

The fervor of the convert is relieved by his sardonic realization of the depths to which he has fallen, and it is this protective self-satire which largely defines him until the end of the novel, when he is retained by Josh Lounberry, a Chicago Negro who has grown rich by selling a device to put kinks in white folks' hair (this is the sort of pointless irony which Warren unfortunately sometimes cannot resist). Lounberry's father, it develops, is Uncle Slop, the local garbage man, whom Sears and Lounberry contrive to outfit with a suit of new clothes, after washing him down and dousing him with cologne.

⁷ *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 26.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Sears is also involved (I use the word advisedly) in Lounberry's accommodation problem at the local hotel, during the settlement of which he uncharacteristically becomes involved in a fight. I provide this summary because it is necessary to the understanding and evaluation of the novel's conclusion, since little Manty (a name which she at last symbolically rejects) is much impressed by her husband's new manner, and concludes that she, too, can learn something from Mr. Lounberry, "not merely because he could honor his father, but because he could honor the father who had rejected him." (373) It would appear that in Tobias' hosing down the old man and engaging in a fistfight the reader is to perceive a dramatization of his conversion, an image of idealism consorting with mundane reality. To support the novel's resolution, some such reading is in fact obligatory. It should be observed, however, that Sears is not radically changed, that his uncustomary violence derives from his being treated as a disprized equal by Lounberry ("Then I saw the colored man looking at me. It was a look that said, plain as day: *you, too.*") (370) On the matter of the novel's conclusion, which he nicely anatomizes, Walter Sullivan asserts that "it is hard to see how she [Amantha] is much freer on the last page than she was on the first."¹¹ It is indeed, though contrary to Warren's manifest intent.

What Warren has attempted to do is to carry off a black tragedy with a white joke. The ending is forced, hurried and derives from no logical or psychological precedent. *Band of Angels* aspires to be (and often is) more than the conventional historical novel which Warren has understandably said he dislikes. Certainly he undertook to write an anti-historical novel, his subject the plight of the white Negro, that is, Manty's radical division, this plight symbolic, in Warren's formulation, of the human condition. Hanging over the novel is the aura of miscegenation, the gothic horrors of Faulkner's *Light In August* or Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, but Warren rejects the unavoidable implications of Manty's situation, so that the novel more closely resembles the barely sketched fate of Cassy, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Warren has evidently been annoyed by those critics who have asserted that *Band of Angels* is a partisan Southern statement. "One reviewer," he recalled in a *Paris Review* interview, "a professional critic—said that *Band of Angels* is an apology for the plantation system. Well, the story of *Band* wasn't an apology or an attack. It was simply trying to say something about something."¹² There have been and doubtless will continue to be comparable remarks, even from sympathetic critics; one thinks of Stanley Edgar Hyman's characterization of what we read as "the peculiar tenden-

¹¹ "The Historical Novelist and the Existential Peril: Robert Penn Warren's *Band of Angels*," 115.

¹² *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, p. 194.

tiousness"¹³ of *Wilderness* (1961), in which, he said, Warren overemphasized Northern sins.

The point is not Warren's partiality or impartiality but would seem rather to be that Manty does not know what to believe, who she is, and that her radical division cannot be healed. Her enlightened and pious education in the North has equipped her with a set of Abolitionist suppositions which are as useless and pernicious in understanding the realities of slavery and of being a Negro as the contrary clichés dispensed by Southern slaveholders. Time and again Manty's consciousness of her Negro blood drives her to repudiate the white men who try, however mixed their motives, to help her, but when she tries to join with the Negroes (teaching Negro refugees, responding to Dollie's final pleas, fleeing to Rau-Ru) consciousness of her white blood moves her, despite herself, to disgust and terror. Her situation is not amenable to Warren's solution.

The biggest chance Warren takes in the novel is in the selection and development of his narrator. Manty is not the compulsive righter of wrongs with which we are familiar; she is not roused to fury by the presence of evil in herself and in the world. She is instead a pallid and passive and egotistical sufferer. She is no match for Sue Murdock or Rachel Jordan or Cassie Spottwood, nor has she even the staying power of Maggie Toliver. Perhaps she most closely resembles May, the wraith-like wife of Percy Munn.¹⁴ She has little substance of her own and derives her being from her successive masters. For all her pondering, she remains strangely anonymous; we do not even know what she looks like.

When she is sold at Starrwood, she is a young girl, about sixteen; when the novel ends in Kansas she is in her mid-forties. Yet one has no impression of her growing older, and little evidence of maturity. Manty is articulate, or at least voluble, and indeed as first-person narrator she has to be. Warren entrusts his thematic statements as forthrightly to her as to his other first-person narrator, Jack Burden, but oh! (as Manty would say) the difference. She goes obediently through her paces, addresses herself to the problems Warren sets her, but seldom is she even a credible woman.

Although *Wilderness* is the account of an idealist's education, it rather closely resembles *Band of Angels* in several respects: a Civil War setting, a search for freedom and identity, and the special burdens of the protagonists (Adam Rosenzweig's deformed foot and his Jewishness, Manty's pliant femaleness and her mixed blood). More significant, however, is the novel's most evident similarity: the tone of their conclusions, which is uncharacteristically affirmative. The chances of man's prevailing in Warren's

13 "Coming Out of the Wilderness?", *New Leader*, XLIV (November 13, 1961), 25.

14 Characters in respectively, *At Heaven's Gate*, *World Enough and Time*, *Meet Me in the Green Glen* (1971), *Flood* (1964) and *Night Rider*.

fiction were rather slim before *Brother to Dragons* (1953), which concludes with R. P. W. announcing his reconciliation with the world, now "prepared/to go into the world of action and liability."¹⁵

Perhaps brief reflection on the conclusions of Warren's novels antedating 1953 will suggest the extent to which they differ from those of *Band of Angels* and *Wilderness*. Percy Munn, protagonist of *Night Rider* (1939), is finally shot down like an animal, which in fact he has virtually become. At the end of *At Heaven's Gate* (1943), Bogan Murdock's empire is tottering, but he has brought about, directly or indirectly, the death of his daughter, the alcoholism of his wife, the destruction of several of his collaborators, and the subjection of his employee, Jerry Calhoun. Calhoun and Ashby Wyndham may go on, but Calhoun is weak and Wyndham finds that he cannot pray, without which he is powerless.

In *All the King's Men* (1946), the recovery of Jack Burden, in his marriage to Anne Stanton and his prospective return to politics, remains distinctly problematical. Jeremiah Beaumont, of *World Enough and Time* (1950), is murdered on his way back to the world of responsibility, and one could readily imagine, had he lived, his return to monomaniacal idealism. This is all to say that *Brother to Dragons* witnessed a shift in Warren's moral vision. Previously it might have been summed up something like this: those who have denied their place in a sinful community (mankind), out of disillusionment, pride, or irresponsibility, must learn that they cannot remain apart; they must enter into life, take up their burdens, and suffer, in the possible hope of eventual redemption. Warren, before *Brother to Dragons*, had tried on a number of meanings, held them up, examined them, criticized them, but had not committed himself.

In *Brother to Dragons*, *Band of Angels* and *Wilderness*, one has the sense that Warren intends an answer, that these works represent an advanced stage of public self-study, but that he has not found an adequate vehicle, that his paradoxes are at war with one another, that he cannot integrate the affirmative conclusions he desires. The result is a series of conclusions which tasks our credulity: always the conversion of the protagonist is suspect. So Manty's reclamation is not simply artificial, though it is that, but destructive of the tragic premises of the novel. No band of angels, alone and unaided, could ever carry Manty home.

15 (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 215.

Ark, Flood, and Negotiated Covenant

• Leonard Casper

A recurring feature in the canon of Robert Penn Warren has been the search to recover that lost sense of community so highly prized among Southern ideals. It represents a dream of solidarity compatible with separateness; a solicitude which draws on reserves of solitude. Instinct, custom, reason: all converge to require reconciliation of these apparent contraries; to achieve within diversity a unity appropriate to an immigrant culture and a confederation of equals.

Consequently, in every genre Warren has sought a rhythmic proportioning, a counter-pulse of folk idiom beating against sophisticated talk, exemplum against ordinary chronicle, chorus against citizen of the streets, reverberant voices one against the other. The impression is of man circulating among men, in a coil of vigorous motion. Early in that history of composition-by-alternating-current, representing identity's slow evolution through the rub of circumstances, the web/tissue theory of life was conveyed more often by contingencies of plot than by composite vision—until *The Cave* (1959). With the exception of *At Heaven's Gate* (1943), Warren typically had chosen one figure to set his dominant tonality: Munn, Burden, Beaumont, Manty. Even the revolving point of view which *At Heaven's Gate* adopts, by signifying the permanent compartmentalization of its characters, is only a dim foreshadowing of the participatory narration employed in *The Cave*.¹ In this later novel, no single protagonist is conceived as solitary pilgrim to redemptive insight. Rather, the partial revelations of Mac, Nick, and Jack (resisted however by Ike) accumulate until they constitute a paradigm of faith that God has his own "defect": love; and that therefore man sacrifices no self-respect by admitting to his similar need for others. Thus cross-sectional form and the theme of mutual salvation become whole functions of one another, in a perfection of applied New Critical theory.

Flood: A Romance of Our Time (1964) refines this mature develop-

¹ See the author's article, "Journey to the Interior: *The Cave*," in *Robert Penn Warren: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John L. Longley, Jr. (New York: New York University Press, 1965).

ment in several ways. The folk consciousness whose limited articulateness dominated *The Cave*, requiring Warren to rely on box-shaped objects and on hand gestures to communicate the tension between containment and enlargement, self and other, is still present in such figures as Brother Potts. But folk consciousness alternates with narrators whose habits are intellectual; and to that extent the community of *The Cave* is enlarged. At what risk? Brad and Yasha, like their predecessors Jeremiah Beaumont, Jack Burden, and Ike Sumpter, are prone to the most devious, evasive rationalizations. Yet ultimately Brad and Yasha resemble Ike, the campus opportunist, less than they do *The Cave's* more primitive, progenitive types: undoubtedly because, as creative artists, in their own way Brad and Yasha are committed to discovering a dynamic composure for the one and the many. Sometimes against their personal disposition, the professional in them insists on acknowledging the agony of gradual emergence; they know art as violent confrontation, not calm representation; like method actors, they piece out of their deepest parts the puzzles of others. Warren has never before directed such attention toward professional artists: Slim Sarrett in *At Heaven's Gate* and "RPW" in *Brother to Dragons* are faint precedents at best. But the correlation between a story's coming true and a person's coming into full being has always been implicit in Warren's work. The principal communication of *Flood* concerns man's *compulsion* to communicate; to confess, and be justified; to be shared beyond repudiation.

At the most elementary level, the "mystic osmosis of being" is presented through slant rhymes and anagrams: Lettice Poindexter/Leontine Purtle/Leon Pinckney; Potts/Telford Lott/Redfill Tellfer; Bradwell Tolliver/Calvin Fiddler/Alfred Tuttle; Mortimer Sparlin/Merl Brandowitz. Even such broken echoes are reminders that, for Warren, something of each is always index to the other. (Yasha says, "If you look at a thing, the very fact of your looking changes it.") Furthermore, each identity in itself is fluid, an ingathering through and beyond time, an assemblage of all levels of perception and comprehension at any given instant: a telling *now*. Just as anyone is always part of another, he is only some incomplete portion of himself. Lettice's warning to Maggie is wisdom for all: "you have to make your *you* out of all that sliding and brokenness of things." The search for selfhood is a full-time, lifelong project. Its fictional counterpart most naturally depends on irony, ambiguity, and open-endedness.

Warren would seem to accept this view of man, as largely unknowable and only tentatively, precariously identifiable, because all of his experience prevents him from accepting the alternative, despair: imaging man as absurd victim of pure chance. The author, like Yasha Jones, is moved to define accident as "That event . . . which gives us the deepest meaning!" As artists, neither defeatist nor doctrinaire, they proceed cautiously from vision to documentation, from prophecy to sample proof, reenacting all interpenetrations in this one. Arthur Mizener, in "The Uncorrupted Con-

sciousness," speaks of Brad's willful abuse of natural ambiguity, in order to defend himself from the need to acknowledge his defects. Brad "is using irony at once to recognize and to deny the realities of the world and himself."² He is comforted by the prospect that "If everything is false then nothing matters." But if everything *seems* false because truth (like goodness, as Willie Stark sees it) is in process: then *everything* matters. The more cryptic the world, the more synoptic the eye must be.

Flood, like so many of Warren's novels and long poems, is a fable enclosing a violent act of murder. Yet the mystery that it probes is not legal guilt so much as moral responsibility. Maggie comes to admit that hers was not a rape without consent. Cal, by shooting Brad as previously he had shot Tuttle, knows that insecure self-esteem, rather than affection for Maggie, has been his moving passion. The trauma of truth—his hate—sets him free (just as it frees Adam finally, in *Wilderness*). As for Brad, he has been the adversary/accomplice of each of these others. So too he participates in their epiphanies and, particularly, in the spirit of liberation experienced by Yasha and by Lettice. Although at the end Brad still has not found the "human necessity" which links all his history in one unremitting thrust, he no longer avoids trying to imagine it. Like the others, having survived fatality, he has outgrown fatalism.

If *Flood* is constructed around a murder case, its more profound center is the mortality of *all* men and intimations of a resurrection, a reason for having been. To be forever dead, according to a definition early in *Wilderness* (1961), is "to know that nothing would ever be different": stonecold stasis. However, the mythic Flood inevitably summoned to mind by the succeeding novel carries images of both damnation *and* redemption. Cal seems to be the common spokesman when, referring to himself and his refusal to take an overdose of morphine, he asserts: "a man must be splendid when he has lived past his own death." Several of the main characters survive literal dying and all survive that more significant figurative death, the trauma of truth whose rapture resembles sexual thrall or saintly possession. Quiet Fiddlersburg, about to be buried under masses of water, is—like the crawl-space in *The Cave*—a figurative womb to which, fortunately, Yasha, Brad, Maggie, Cal, and others return not for entombment but for rebirth. Water, with properties both fluid and solid, provides Warren with special access to all of life's dualities. The very anticipation of doomsday can arouse a sense of eventfulness, of meaningful crisis, in the most disorderly lives. Here the attempt to rescue from Fiddlersburg all those memories that constitute the momentum of one's true heritage is painfully successful. The apocalyptic prospect throws the townspeople—including Yasha, the vicarious citizen—backward toward their origins. The tableau of annihilation telescopes time. The imagination

2 Mizener, *Sewanee Review*, LXXII (Autumn 1964), 693.

crosses light-years, on waves of radiation from stars presumed dead.

Nothing, in Warren, is ever lost; even if it is not wholly discernible. Brad has returned to Fiddlersburg in order to carry away the bones of his surrogate father Isaac Goldfarb. He leaves, content not to have discovered them; content, because pious concern for the body has become less important than the resurgence of Goldfarb's spirit; and content, because that search has led him to recover—as once, like the coarse son of Noah, he had uncovered—his literal father. Both fathers belong to the land; they have earned their ease with the natural round. Returning to Fiddlersburg as his father returned to the swamp, each to his source, Brad finally can understand his father's weeping which, before, he could only exploit. Presumably Brad can also admit his part in the suicide of Telford Lott, his editor and second surrogate father, whom he had blamed for his inability to write truly. The measure of change in Brad is that he proves capable of accepting criticism from Yasha Jones (who, agelessly bald, sometimes resembles Isaac Goldfarb).

Yasha himself is rejuvenated in Fiddlersburg more successfully than he would have dared anticipate. Attracted to the honesty of Brad's early vignettes, *I'm Telling You Now*, he wants to see that fiction take flesh on its original location, even as the town becomes inaccessible otherwise. The movie is never made; instead a different coming-true occurs. As he hears Maggie's confession, both are moved beyond debilitating judgment to a renewal of innocence (love covers the naked vulnerability of the beloved); and to betrothal. Maggie's years of caring for Calvin's mother have given her strength enough to admit her weaknesses. From her, Yasha appears to learn that the worst beast in the dark of man is the conviction that man is only that beast.

It is also Maggie who sees most clearly that either Brother Potts or Calvin should be central to the movie script. Potts has the courage to be spat on, unflinching; to attempt to bring all the elements of Fiddlersburg together, even though he wonders, "Is anybody ever ready to pray with anybody?" and even though he will remain behind, with terminal cancer, after the others are relocated. Calvin in his own high-lonesomeness, his penitentiary, is similarly consoled by the solidarity of men despite their private solitudes. Through these two figures the oracular theme of *The Cave*—"Love is self-betrayal"—is repeated in *Flood*. Were this a much earlier Warren novel, the meaning of Brother Potts and Calvin would have been secreted in exempla such as the Statement of Ashby Wyndham or the manuscript of Cass Mastern. But in the mature Warren, his long-held view that salvation is a common enterprise is better satisfied by a larger sharing of whatever the logic of experience, the reasons of the heart, disclose.

In the simultaneous equations worked out by this novel, Fiddlersburg—the South—prison—the ark submissive to the destructive element—

salvage of humanity by twos—the covenantal promise that death can be undergone and overcome. The method is too asymmetrical to be debased allegory. Each element is equivocal. Its interpretation flows from choice, and choice from the necessity for order, and order from the inner need to become, be, belong: all these in a swirling flood that both threatens and invites total immersion. *Après le deluge, Moi*. Homesickness—the yearning to be larger than here/now and that small self trapped in such narrow coordinates—thrusts one defensively in every direction of there/then. One returns to his origins in order to be “relocated,” redirected toward a destination whose riddle can never be wholly reduced.

The fact that the search for self-confidence is an ordeal, in a darkened maze, tempts one to stall halfway in the journey—just as fiction can be satisfied with falsehood; with half-truth; or with the “true lie.” Leontine Purtle says that “Being you’s like being blind.” Mortimer Sparlin decides that being a Negro in the South “felt like being himself.” The image of identity as void is fearsome, yet undeniable, for both Leontine and Mortimer. For Yasha it is undeniable but consoling: “You can think of a person as definable only at the point—no, only *as* the point—where an infinite number of lines intersect in flight inward and outward. Person equals point-from-which. And point-toward-which. Which is nothing.” That thought allows Yasha to sleep: to turn off his consciousness and sink into the equivalent of Jack Burden’s Great Sleep. His guilt feelings—a loss larger than loneliness—about the death of his wife and of his combat victims requires this kind of concealed death-wish, the dissolution of despair; just as it leads to his admiring a self-sufficiency in Maggie which she does not really possess.

The view of the self as undisturbed void is shared as well by Calvin while in solitary for having shot Brad. He is tempted to “let the silence flow over, and the real *you* will ride on that flood of silence like a chip on water.” But that chip is a microcosmic ark: blazened in the dark of the head is the truth beyond dispute: “there is no *you* except in relation to all that unthinkable that the world is. And you yourself are. So you begin to cry.” All the incommensurables, in the evanescence of live permutations changing at the speed of insight, begin to put on commensurability for him. Like Brad’s father, his eyes are cleansed in a flood of tears.

Mortimer Sparlin’s self-hate limits human transactions to contemptuous seduction or stiff left jabs. He is the immobilized Lady of Shalott even more than Leontine, who yearns to know and to touch the presence of others—although the diaphragm marks the limit of her willingness to be known, to be penetrated, to be filled. Maggie, in contrast, reveals her need to be loved, in the process of confessing to Yasha her consenting part in Tuttle’s rape. Yasha is released from his own inner trance, his own moving mirrors; and shortly thereafter, on their honeymoon, Maggie becomes pregnant. Calvin is genuinely pleased with the news: he has been

purged of his hate and fulfilled by years of medical practice in a prison whose silence has now become *le silence du bonheur*.

Calvin's discovery of selfhood's true mission is similar to Lettice's. Her compassion once might have been confused with promiscuity, were elements of self-mortification rather than self-gratification not clear in such acts as her willingness to mutilate her body's beauty in propitiation for Brad's surviving Spanish typhus. She knows "how hard it is to be worthy to love anybody!" Her real identity "comes true" as a nurse in New Guinea and lay worker in Chicago. Her humane services to God's least fortunate are offered out of a profound humility which is her joy, not her penance.

During their married years Brad used to listen, like the most prurient voyeur, to Lettice's inner revelations. Yet she never becomes real for him until she explains herself by appealing to the inexplicable—the curious dream of her being found on her doomsday so dumb that she has to be "goosed to God." Brad's reasoning has long suffered from the defect of over-rationalization; so that his personal search to define and reconcile inner need and outer necessity has often been deflected. The letter from Lettice, however, because it comes as climax to the urgency in Maggie and Cal to "communicate" and strikes a chord in Brad's own compulsion to write things out, satisfies him that the inexplicable may be explanation enough. He accepts all those previous prescient moments, when the sky's light turned green, as omens of access. He submits to the possibility that "the secret and irrational life of man," submerged circumstances, may constitute human truth, and seeming absurdity be God's indirections, God's special make-believe. Brad has expected in all things a logical nexus of skeletal firmness; but he may have to settle for meaning as a series of synaptic leaps. Doubt, goosed by love ("*There is no country but the heart*"), becomes his faith. Potts' prayer is, implicitly, Brad's too: "God, make me know what I didn't have/Was the subtlest gift you gave." His is the risk of negotiating a covenant with blessedness, while grace plays mute.

Warren concurs. The writer's art, finally, is the arrangement of silences.

Love's Definition: Dream as Realty in Robert Penn Warren's *Meet Me in the Green Glen*

• D. G. Kehl

Robert Penn Warren's ninth novel illustrates once again the applicability to his fiction of his observation that Milton's poetry "presents a development, rather than a variety, of theme."¹ What Warren wrote concerning Faulkner's novels is no less true of his own: "In most novels, Faulkner has not been linear but spiral, passing over the same point again and again, but at different altitudes."² The nine novels, spanning the time of the early 1820's to the present, constitute an American epic of the self in search or denial, consciously or unconsciously, of reality. *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, perhaps surpassed as a work of art in Warren's canon of fiction only by *All the King's Men*, not only passes over the same themes at a different altitude but also presents a significant development of them, particularly of love's definition as part of "the old cost of human redemption."

The conflict of Warren's characters lies in their struggle, or failure, to harmonize or balance the dialectical elements of reality and dream, *then* and *now*, truth and illusion, and thus, through what Wallace Stevens called "an education to reality," to achieve a valid concept of reality. Warren has confirmed the applicability to his fiction of the phrase "dialectics of reality": "The main characters in my fiction," he has said, "are involved in some such project."³ Warren suggests that reality is not a word to be defined but a process, a state of being, to be experienced, that if one lacks a valid concept of reality he cannot understand the definition and if one possesses a sense of reality he does not need a definition. In his poem "Joy," Warren expresses the point well:

1 "Literature as Symptom," *Southern Review*, I (Winter 1936), 624. Reprinted in *Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence*, ed. Herbert Agar and Allen Tate (Boston, 1936).

2 "The Snopes World," *Kenyon Review*, III (Spring 1941), 253-57.

3 In a letter to me, March 23, 1965.

If you've never had it, discussion is perfectly fruitless,
And if you have, you can tell nobody about it.
To explain silence, you scarcely try to shout it.
Let the flute and drum be still, the trumpet *tootless*.

While it is unnecessary, and futile, to try to explain reality—or silence or joy—by shouting it, it is not necessary to be silent about it. About the recurring word *reality* in his fiction, Warren has remarked: “. . . The definition must inevitably vary—in any functional sense—from person to person . . . I might say that the word would point to whatever any person might think validated his existence.”⁴ Reality in Warren's fiction, then, refers to the validation, the definition, of one's existence. Rather than defining reality, one must be defined by it.

Reality, the validation of existence, comes, according to Warren, only through love. “Reality cannot be bought,” he writes in his essay on Faulkner; “it can only be had by love . . . It is possible—and necessary if man is to strive to be human—to achieve some measure of redemption through love.”⁵ “If love's anything,” Lucy tells Jefferson in *Brother to Dragons*, “it is the thing/That, once existing, may not be denied,/For it is definition, and denial/Is death. . . .”⁶ These lines summarize the underlying theme of *Meet Me in the Green Glen* and, by extension, of all of Warren's work. This novel presents, more explicitly than do any of his others, the definition of love, in the dual sense of what love is—dream as reality—and what love *does*—defines, makes real. Thus, according to Warren, the definition of love is self-definition. “*Love*,” Murray Guilfort muses at the end of the novel, “*so that is love*. To dream the fool dream like that fool Bessie Guilfort, to dream a fool lie like that fool Cassie Spottwood, to dream a lie and call it truth. . . .”⁷ He realizes too late that “*the dream is a lie, but the dreaming is truth*” (370), and for him denial of love is death by suicide, the ultimate retreat from reality. “All he had ever known” was “a dream” (367), but unlike Cassie's true dreaming of love, his is a false, loveless dream of delusion.

Like Marvell's “The Definition of Love,” the first stanza of which serves as an appropriate epigraph, Warren's novel presents love as a paradox which, in turn, resolves other paradoxes. The love of Cassie and Angelo is, like that in Marvell's poem, “begotten by Despair/Upon Impossibility.” The love which comes to “bind” them is “debarred” by fate: it is indeed “the conjunction of the mind,/And opposition of the stars.”

4 In a letter to me, May 25, 1966.

5 “William Faulkner,” *Selected Essays* (New York, 1958), p. 69.

6 Robert Penn Warren, *Brother To Dragons* (New York, 1953), p. 174. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

7 Robert Penn Warren, *Meet Me in the Green Glen* (New York, 1971), p. 369. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

Although it is "begotten by Despair," however, it eventuates in hope, for the meeting in the green glen betokens, first, that it is a love according to nature. In his discussion of Faulkner's fiction, Warren gives his definition of love: "The right attitude toward nature and man is love. And love is the opposite of the lust for power over nature or over other men . . ."⁸ "The return to nature is the discovery of love," he writes in his seminal essay "Knowledge and the End of Man."⁹ Secondly, to cite the passage from Dante which serves as epigraph of *All the King's Men*, "not by curse of theirs is Eternal Love so lost that it cannot return again, so long as hope retaineth aught of green." "The human curse is simply to love and sometimes to love well, / But never well enough," Warren writes in *Brother to Dragons* (23). But if imperfect man cannot love perfectly, he can at least learn "love's mystery," as Cassie and Angelo do—"that substance long in grossness bound / Might bud into love's accident" ("Love's Parable").

Thirdly, it is a self-defining love, one which brings rebirth, reality of self. Jack Burden's ruminations on love in *All the King's Men* suggest its significant relation to reality:

. . . When you get in love you are made all over again.

The person who loves you has picked you out of the great mass of uncreated clay which is humanity to make something out of . . . At the same time, you, in the act of loving somebody, become real, cease to be a part of the continuum of the uncreated clay and get the breath of life in you and rise up. So you create yourself by creating another person, who, however, has also created you, picked up the you-chunk of clay out of the mass.¹⁰

One becomes real, Jack suggests, only by loving and by being loved. He says, in effect, "You're nobody till somebody loves you"—and till you love somebody.

The inability of Murray Guilfort to love at all, much less to love well, reflects his deficient sense of reality. Cassie's question—"Did you ever love anybody?"—rings in Murray's head, and the word *love* rings "hollowly in his head as in a great cave" (365). Because to him love is only a "*monstrous delusion*" (369), he is, in the words of Sue Murdock in *At Heaven's Gate*, "an emotional cripple."¹¹ Like Lilburn Lewis in *Brother to Dragons*, he can neither love nor bear to be loved.

8 "William Faulkner," p. 71.

9 *Sewanee Review*, LXIII (Spring 1955), 182-192. This essay was originally an address delivered at Columbia University in 1954.

10 Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York, 1946), pp. 298-99. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

11 Robert Penn Warren, *At Heaven's Gate* (New York, 1943), p. 99.

And strange: for Love was all he asked, yet love
Is the intolerable accusation of guilt

To all the yearning Lilburns who cannot love. (113)

But love, this commitment to dreaming which is, paradoxically, true by its transcending the falseness of the dream, is no mere facile, sentimental emotion. It must be a "love submitted to knowledge," as Warren expresses it in his essay "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty." "How could you love somebody if you never even knew them?" Murray Guilfort asks in despair at the end of the novel (367). But, also paradoxically, the reverse seems to be true as well, for, Warren seems to suggest, how can you ultimately know someone if you do not love them? Thus not only must love be submitted to knowledge, but knowledge must also be submitted to love, the dialectics balanced. Love without knowledge is mere sentimentality or, worse, lust, like Angelo's "loveless hurly-burly" ("Ballad: Between Boxcars"), his mechanical coupling with Cassie. But knowledge without love is madness, the "cancer of truth, the arrogance/Of truth gone wild and swollen in the blood" (*Brother to Dragons*, 12), as in the case of Willie Stark with his "research man" in *All the King's Men*. Willie seeks to reveal sordid truths for personal aggrandizement, whereas Murray seeks to suppress truth—for example in withholding from Cassie Angelo's letter of love—but in both cases the denial of love results in death. It is significant that Murray is, by his own admission, unsuccessful: "What difference would her seeing it have made?" (365). Love, "once existing, may not be denied."

To love, really to love, and to be loved, Warren suggests, is to make real and to be made real. Real love is therefore, paradoxically, both result and requisite, both indication and instigation, of self-reality. So it is with Cassie and Angelo.

Cassie, whose love for Cy Grinder and Sunder Spottwood was unrequited, felt, when Cy fled to the West, "the sense of having no role in the world, no identity. The discovery of Cy Grinder had been her only way of discovering those things, and now that he was gone, her own reality had been withdrawn" (81-82). But her love for Angelo creates a "new self": "*It is a different me, too*" (151).

As for Angelo, Jeremiah Beaumont in *World Enough and Time* could well be describing him when he says: "'It is the sadness of love that one who cannot find the reality of himself cries out most for the reality of her whom he loves. . . .'"¹² Until the end of the novel, Angelo feels only lust, a selfish exploitation which recalls the questions of Manty Starr in *Band of Angels*: "Do we give love in order to receive love . . . or do we give with an arrogance after all, a passion for self-definition? Or do we simply want

12 Robert Penn Warren, *World Enough and Time* (New York, 1950), p. 217.

a hand, any hand, a human object, to clutch in the dark on the blanket, and fear lies behind everything? Do we want happiness, or is it pain, pain as the index of reality, that we, in the chambers of the heart, want?"¹³ These questions describe the progressive stages of Angelo's love. But in spite of his initial intent, love is not to be denied by or for Angelo. In learning from Cassie the paradoxical definition of love, Angelo is himself paradoxically defined. "He tried to think of *nothing*, but *something* kept happening in his head, and it was *everything*" (192; italics mine). In a typically succinct but pregnant sentence, Warren summarizes Angelo's "education to reality"—his progress from nothing through something to everything.

When the impulse arose in Angelo to tell *la piccola* about his work, he despaired, "for the tractor was real, the field to be plowed was real, the cows would be real, and deeply, darkly—in something like despair—he knew that you could never carry what was real, and belonged to the day, over the secret line into the world that was dream and belonged to the night" (171). But Cassie's love for him and his lust-turning-love for her—"begotten by Despair upon Impossibility"—enables him to balance the dialectic of dream and reality. "When, after leaving the house that afternoon, it had happened, it was like a dream, but at the same time it was the only thing real" (192).

Dream as reality also involves time as timelessness or no-time. The "safely boxed" walls of the Spottwood house represent for Angelo "the secret world of no-Time," the night-world of dream. But Cassie and Angelo learn that only by living in time, by balancing the dialectic of *then*—past and future—and *now*—present—, can they achieve reality and transcend time. They learn that "only through time time is conquered," as Eliot expressed it in "Burnt Norton." Initially, Angelo and Cassie, despairing of the future and attempting to repudiate the past, live in an unreal present. "Reality," Jack Burden says in *All the King's Men*, "is not a function of the event as event, but of the relationship of that event to past, and future, events. We seem here to have a paradox: that the reality of an event, which is not real in itself, arises from other events which, likewise, in themselves are not real. But this only affirms what we must affirm: that direction is all. And only as we realize this do we live, for our own identity is dependent upon this principle" (407).

Through his relationship with Cassie, Angelo began to learn the necessity to balance the dialectic of *then* and *now*. In his work about the farm "he began to create a Time of which the days would be a part, a Time in which things could exist and change, a Time that would *stretch backward and forward* and that you could think about. There were things you could do that would help make a picture of yourself in Time, and therefore make

¹³ Robert Penn Warren, *Band of Angels* (New York, 1955), p. 12. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

you real" (170; italics mine). "He would plunge into some task that would give him the sense of *time reaching back into the past and into the future too*" (130; italics mine). Angelo's growing awareness here contrasts with Cy Grinder's sense of unreality as seen in his advice to Cassie: ". . . If you could just live *now, no backwards and forwards*, you could live through anything. But a man can't. He was fiding out that a man can't" (324; italics mine). "A man can't" because *now* must be balanced with *then*, time with no-Time. Thus Cassie, "after a time . . . , seemed to have triumphed over the past, living in a calm joy" (341), whereas Cy and Murray, attempting to repudiate the past, are defeated by it. They languish in Time's "slow-chapt power," whereas Angelo and Cassie, "like am'rous birds of prey, rather at once [their] time devour."

If the dream—or the dreaming—becomes reality and if time becomes timelessness, the lie—or the lying—for love becomes truth. Cassie tells Cy Grinder, "What I wished was that folks would believe Angelo did it, and that's a lie, but my wish came true, the lie came true, and it got to be truth . . ." (319). Cassie wanted people to believe that Angelo killed her bedridden husband out of love for her. Her lie became true when his lust did in fact become love, when love enabled her to triumph over her past. "Even a lie is a kind of truth," Warren wrote in his Foreward to *Who Speaks for the Negro?* In his essay on Conrad, Warren discusses the oxymoronic "true lie" of Marlow at the conclusion of *Heart of Darkness*. Confronted with the belief and love of Kurtz's betrothed, Marlow tells her that Kurtz's final words were her name rather than "The Horror." "He has," Warren says, "literally lied, but his lie is a true lie in that it affirms the 'idea,' the 'illusion,' belief and love."¹⁴ Similarly, at the end of *All the King's Men*, when Jack Burden's mother asks him if Judge Irwin had been in trouble, Jack, out of love for her, tells her that the Judge committed suicide because of ill health. And Reverend Sumpter in *The Cave*, having told a lie to spare his son whose very life is a lie, says "I had to lie for the sake of Jasper—for the sake of living—for the sake of truth. . . ."¹⁵ The lie is "true," according to Warren, if it affirms the truth of love, if it "tells a deeper truth," to use Manty Starr's phrase (*Band of Angels*, 303). Reality is "uncapturable," says Yasha Jones in *Flood*, so "we need illusion. Truth through lie. . . ."¹⁶

Truth through illusion, transcendent reality through dream, is what Warren's *Meet Me in the Green Glen*—and every effective work of art—achieves. An artist, Santayana said, is one who consents to dream of reality. "If fiction begins in daydream, if it springs from the cramp of the world, if it relieves us from the burden of being ourselves," Warren has written, "it ends, if it is good fiction and we are good readers, by returning us to

14 "'The Great Mirage': Conrad and *Nostromo*," *Selected Essays*, p. 46.

15 Robert Penn Warren, *The Cave* (New York, 1959), p. 355.

16 Robert Penn Warren, *Flood: A Romance of Our Time* (New York, 1964), p. 50.

the world and to ourselves. It reconciles us with reality."¹⁷ The effective work of art, "the little myth we make," as Warren describes it in the Foreword to *Brother to Dragons*, is balanced with "history, the big myth we live." Reconciled with reality, the work of art becomes a heightened form of reality and thus serves to reconcile the reader with reality. It becomes, in the words of Joyce Cary, "a dream which is truer than actual life and a reality which is only there made actual, complete, and purposeful to our experience."¹⁸ Warren's fictive dream is "lie," but the dreaming is truth; the tale is illusion, but the telling is reality.

¹⁷ "Why Do We Read Fiction?" *Saturday Evening Post*, CCXXXV (October 20, 1962), 82-84.

¹⁸ *Art and Reality* (New York, 1958), p. 191.

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