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Some Observations on Robert Penn Warren's Bibliography*

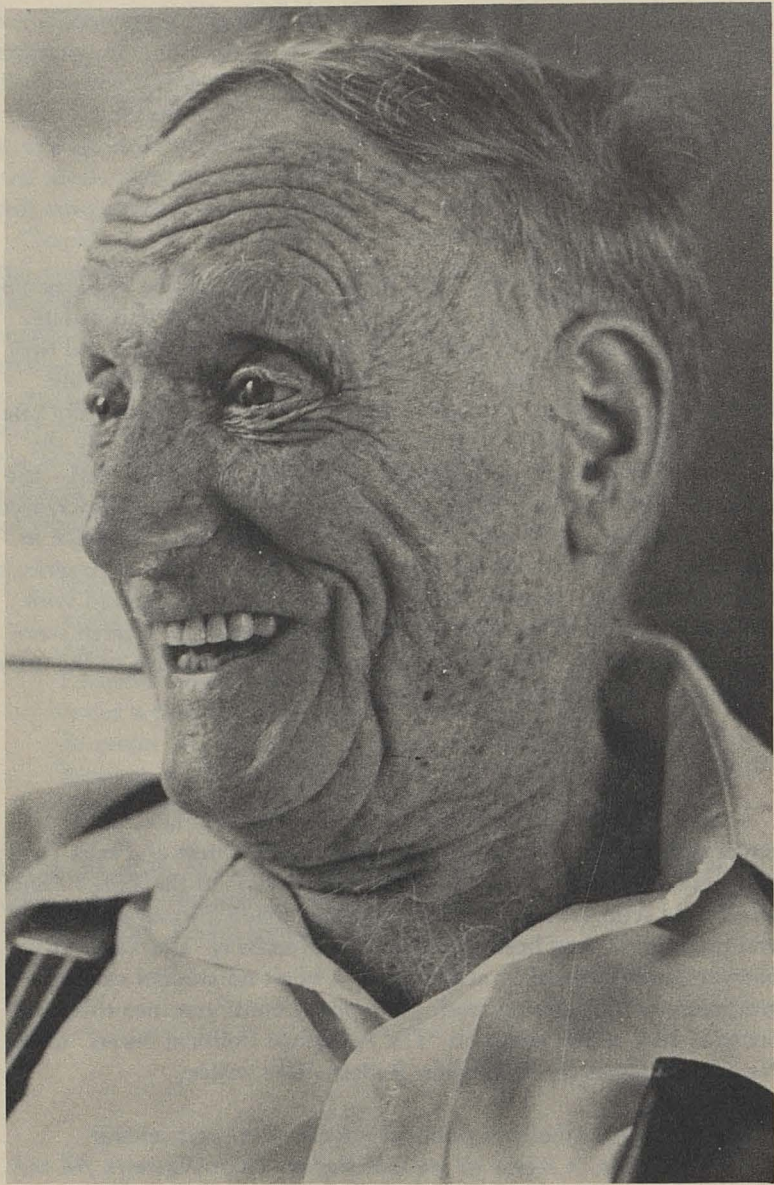
James A. Grimshaw, Jr.

The cutoff date of *Robert Penn Warren: A Descriptive Bibliography* is 31 December 1979, and already the bibliography is out-of-date. Twelve months later, an additional twenty-seven primary and fifty secondary items, as well as notices of twenty-eight forthcoming items, have appeared. Excluding reviews, that is approximately one publication by or about Warren every three days in 1980. By the time this bibliography is published—probably in late fall 1981—the number of entries waiting for a possible revision will have increased proportionately. Such statistics, however, simply lend credence to the often repeated statement that “Robert Penn Warren is America’s most productive, versatile writer,” a fact recently recognized with the presentation of the 1980 Jay B. Hubbell Medal to Warren who, the citation reads, “assiduously exemplified the vocation of the man of letters in twentieth-century America.”

I

I came to Robert Penn Warren’s works relatively late, as an undergraduate in 1962, in an American novel course at Texas Tech University. His novel was, as you might guess, *All the King’s Men*, which had won a Pulitzer Prize, had been made into an award-winning movie, had been produced off Broadway, and had already been critically praised in academia as a book no student should graduate without having read. Such praise continues into this new decade.¹ In a recent essay on “The American Political Novel” in the *New York Times Book Review*, Robert Alter writes:

Among American political novels of the last several decades, it seems to me that Robert Penn Warren’s *All the King’s Men* (1946) may still be the book that most adequately meets both these tests, providing a probing scrutiny of a political man’s character and a suggestive



Robert Penn Warren in Lexington, 1 June 1980. Lexington Herald-Leader Photo

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sense of the connection between politics and the enigmas of human existence.²

As pleased as Warren enthusiasts must be with this continued recognition of Warren's genius, Alter and others seem to me to emphasize the political at the expense of other aspects of the novel and, in doing so, not to listen to the author. Robert Rossen, director of the film version of *All the King's Men*, chose to emphasize the Willie Stark story, too, and his film bears little resemblance to Warren's complete novel. But in the novel Warren's narrator, Jack Burden, tells us:

This has been the story of Willie Stark, but it is my story too. For I have a story. It is the story of a man who lived in the world and to him the world looked one way for a long time and then it looked another and very different way. The change did not happen all at once. Many things happened, and that man did not know when he had any responsibility for them and when he did not.³

This observation, to me, epitomizes Warren's chief theme throughout his writings and the thrust of *All the King's Men* in particular: ". . . the end of man is to know."⁴ Just as too many readers of Warren's writings have slighted this point in *All the King's Men*, so too have they slighted his other literary contributions. This assertion I make with full awareness of the many medals, honorary degrees, and literary prizes which he has garnered over the past fifty years.⁵

But in 1962, I did not realize the slight. What I did notice was the tour de force of his writings, the depth of his philosophical soundings, the breadth of his historicity, and the subtle but conscious interrelationships in *All the King's Men*. For some reason, now lost to me, Warren's use of the word "yellow" in that novel activated my curiosity. Although I have nothing startling to report about that word's significance in the novel,⁶ it started me on an investigation which has ranged through a master's thesis, a doctoral dissertation, a descriptive bibliography, and into a continuing study of the most engaging author living today. For the next few pages, that odyssey will be the subject of my remarks.

II

In 1968, just after completing my thesis on *All the King's Men* and being assigned to the faculty at the United States Air Force Academy, I decided that before I could adequately begin to study Warren's works, I should learn as much as possible about his canon and about his critics' opinions of his writings. A colleague suggested that I do a bibliography since a full bibliography had not yet appeared. Little did I realize at the time what *that* entailed. Twelve years and many pleasant memories later, the final 1,033-page manuscript is in composition at the University Press of Virginia.

What prompts a person to follow such a pursuit is, and possibly always will be, an enigma. One might as well try to verbalize the inner meaning of Zen Buddhism. My ostensible purpose—and pragmatic use of the material found—is to write eventually with greater understanding about Warren's works. Discoveries such as the inconsistencies of dates and the editorial changes in words, "adjustment" (Harcourt, p. 299.13) to "alignment" (Bantam, p. 282.25), both in *All the King's Men*, may be of interest, although I do not mean to imply that I have found anything as potentially embarrassing or critical as the "soiled-coiled" discovery in Melville's *White-Jacket*.⁷ At least, I have not done so yet.

We know, however, that bibliographies are useful. As Fredson Bowers notes about their function: "Scholarship by its very nature turns to the past to preserve and then to correlate the history of culture. Moreover, scholarship requires a stable body of material on which to operate; from this material by the patient accumulation and interpretation of facts it can attempt to draw up a sound basis for criticism."⁸ Exactly. That view is similar to what Robert Pirsig has written in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, that the combining of the romantic (aesthetic) and the classical (underlying form) modes of thought provides a more complete understanding of the object.⁹ Bibliography provides the means to study the underlying form on which sound scholarship relies.

The sense of adventure and discovery which Richard Altick so dramatically describes in his book, *The Scholar Adventurers*, is present even in modern bibliography.¹⁰ From Warren's first published poem, "Prophecy," in 1922 in *The Mess Kit: (Food for Thought)*, a publication of the Military Training Camps Association, Camp Knox, Kentucky, to his most recent volume, *Being Here: Poems 1977-1980*, the excitement continues. Fifty-eight

years of publishing: 40 volumes—including limited editions such as *To a Little Girl, One Year Old, in a Ruined Fortress*, designed by Jane Doggett, Yale University, circa 1956; *Blackberry Winter* (Cummington Press, 1946); *Two Poems* (Palaemon Press, 1979); and *Ballad of a Sweet Dream of Peace: A Charade for Easter* (forthcoming)—by Warren alone; 37 items done with others or as editor; 438 poems; 16 short stories; 10 dramas; 91 articles/essays; at least 70 reviews; 89 unpublished items. Selections from his works have been anthologized approximately two hundred times and appear in translations in thirty-one foreign countries.

Among the resources available on Warren's works are a modest 22 complete books, about 124 books devoted in part to his writings, 388 essays, over 400 reviews, 103 biographical sketches, 126 news releases (an obviously conservative estimate from the following selected newspapers: *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Nashville Tennessean*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Washington Post*, plus the *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* and *State Times*); 201 theses and dissertations; and 34 checklists.

For fifty-eight years, something has appeared by or about Warren on an average of every ten days. My task of accumulation, then, was no small one. And thus, the challenge and adventure of acquisition kept my interest high.

Gradually a person becomes "hooked." So many possibilities emerge: analysis of audience, the problem of inclusion and exclusion, the question of arrangement, the nagging concern over consistency, and the anxiety over completeness. The entire process involves a myriad of decisions, fascinating to a bibliographer. I will explore briefly just the five areas mentioned above.

Audience

Who will use the book determines much about content, arrangement, and the other considerations. For me, this audience consists of students, teachers, scholars, librarians, booksellers, and collectors; that is, a heterogeneous group with diverse expectations and needs. Hence, the need for a *full* bibliography which will meet the following five requirements:

- 1) Full description of the book as a material object which is the product of a printing press [from printer to publisher].
- 2) Full description of the contents of the book as a work of literature. . . .

- 3) Full study of the transmission of text through a detailed history of impressions, issues, and editions.
- 4) . . . a study of the history of the book as a material object . . . [from publisher to market].
- 5) Full study of the relation of the author to the book both as a man of business and as a man of letters.¹¹

Content

To meet those requirements, content—what to include and what to exclude—was pretty well prescribed: omit nothing. Practicality and permission precluded inclusion of only two areas: appearances and oral presentations, which would be difficult to document except through news releases, a section already provided for; and letters, which Mr. Warren and I had discussed indirectly one afternoon in the garden of the Renaissance Club on the Yale Campus. Mr. Warren asked a rather open-ended question: "What do you think about collections of authors' letters?" "For the most part," I innocently replied, "I think they're a violation of an individual's privacy and ought not to be published." I was thinking at the time of the collections of Virginia Woolf's letters and Carl Sandburg's letters. "Yes, that's so," Mr. Warren responded in his charming southern accent. Years later when the topic of letters again came up, Mr. Warren suggested that I not include even a catalogue of locations of his letters in the bibliography, a request which I have, of course, honored.

I must hasten to add that some collections of letters have proven worthwhile. For example, Sally Fitzgerald's edition, *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, provides remarkably straightforward comments by O'Connor about her fiction. Her letters contribute to a clearer understanding of her as an author, and the selection offered is relatively free from unnecessary and unproductive gossip.

Arrangement

On the surface, the question of arrangement does not sound like much of a challenge. Divisions such as works written alone, works with others, and individual items by genre are logical and provide easy references for users. But within the descriptive chapter, the thirty-eight titles credited solely to Warren, a number of decisions arose: chronological or alphabetical? for each title, chronological or

by country? to separate or not to separate paperback from hardback?

After some rather lengthy correspondence between Fredson Bowers and me concerning advantages of different arrangements, we compromised and did it Mr. Bowers's way: chronological by country, United States and then Britain. For example, *Night Rider*, Warren's first published novel, has appeared in four U.S. and in four British editions:

- first American edition, four distinct impressions (1939, 1948, 1965, 1968)
- second American edition, first impression, paperback (abridged) (1950)
- third American edition, first impression, paperback (1956)
- fourth American edition, first impression, paperback (1965); fourth impression (1968); fifth impression (1979)
- first English edition, first impression (1940)
- second English edition, first impression, paperback (1959)
- third English edition, first impression (1973)
- fourth English edition, first impression, paperback (1975).

The three impressions listed for the fourth American edition—Berkley (1965), Bantam (1968), and Vintage (1979)—all appear to be from the Berkley imprint.¹² The arrangement suggested by Bowers makes such printing history easier to track.

Consistency

Consistency vies with completeness in importance. It includes accuracy *and* completeness of descriptions. Not wanting to become tedious in my explanation of this concern, I will simply catalogue some of these considerations: a facsimile description of each title page; inclusion of a description of each colophon; collation data—size, signature, pagination, and plates; list of contents; identification of type and size, running titles, paper, watermarks, and when possible, ink; description of the binding and dust wrapper; locations of copies; and notes concerning publication date, quantity, Library of Congress copyright date and date of deposit, British Library date stamp, appearance of excerpts, and variants. Reviews of each work are listed separately, under each title, in a later chapter since some of those lists are quite lengthy, e.g., eighty-six for *All the King's Men*.

Completeness

Although judgment about accuracy must await users' evaluations, I can offer the following list of libraries in which I worked as an indication of comprehensiveness: the Library of Congress, the Middleton Library at Louisiana State University, Vanderbilt University Library, the King Library at the University of Kentucky, the Sterling and the Beinecke Libraries at Yale, Robert Penn Warren's personal library in Fairfield, plus the private collections of Stuart Wright and of Cleanth Brooks. Merely working with these collections does not in itself guarantee completeness, but the list suggests the lengths to which a bibliographer, attempting to be thorough, may need to go.

A bibliography is probably never complete. Although I have set a cutoff date of 31 December 1979, a date which offers a finite period of time with which to work, I know previously unlocated items will mysteriously appear soon after the bibliography is published. For instance, while Warren was teaching at the University of Minnesota in the early 1940s, he reviewed books for the *Chicago Tribune*: "Whiskey money," he called it. I had had an inkling of those reviews but had been unable to confirm their existence and to establish a time frame for them. Mr. Warren was kind enough to confirm the fact—he has an incredible memory about things he has written and an accurate sense of when he wrote them. That confirmation, which came late in the preparation of my manuscript, provided a blood-knowledge of the meaning of the words "ambivalent feeling"; I was glad to learn of the additional materials but was sad to discover them as late as I did. Coupled with that feeling has been the frustration of locating the reviews. Libraries have been reluctant to lend even the microfilm of the needed years; only through the persistence of the Academy's interlibrary-loan librarians' efforts have those microfilms started arriving. And, indeed, Warren's reviews are among them.

III

After admitting to myself that I was incurably "hooked" as a bibliophile, my odyssey continued with greater purpose and direction. In 1970, I entered Louisiana State University with prospectus in hand. Lewis P. Simpson, my advisor, watched with an almost paternal eye as my announced topic went from a

"Descriptive Bibliography" to "A Descriptive Catalogue of the First American Editions." The months of sitting among old magazines in the closed stacks of the Middleton Library paid off in the obvious ways—leads to publications, obscure essays, reviews of Warren's works, etc.—and in less obvious ways, for instance, an explanation of the history of the publishers of *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr*, Warren's first book. *John Brown* was originally published by Payson and Clarke on 2 November 1929, just four days after Black Friday. I had seen a reference in a magazine to a *John Brown* published by Harcourt, Brace and Company, but I found no corroborating evidence on any of the title pages of copies I examined. By following leads through various sources in the stacks, I was able to deduce that Payson and Clarke folded after the Crash of '29, subsequently became Brewer and Warren (no relation, I am told), and finally Harcourt, Brace and Company. The original title page was never cancelled, and the run remained small.

After 1972, my task really began: expanding the descriptions to include all works solely by Warren. My correspondence increased accordingly. I had already been in touch with Henry W. Wenning, antiquarian bookdealer with C. A. Stonehill of New Haven, Connecticut. Mr. Wenning's kind and patient letters enriched greatly my appreciation and understanding of rare books. Two other examples from the early postdoctoral period will demonstrate the extraordinary good fortune which I have had through correspondence.

The first is a letter from Mr. Harry Duncan, formerly of the Cummington [Massachusetts] Press and publisher of *Blackberry Winter*. I had written the Cummington Press as well as all the other publishers of Warren's works to request information which simply is not available from any source other than publishers' records: publication date, that is, the official date the publisher establishes for release of a title on the commercial market; dates of various printings; and the numbers of copies in each printing. I also usually asked for verification of type identification and size and for the name and address of the printer. After my inquiry to the Cummington Press bounced around for months, the following reply came from Omaha, Nebraska:

The publication date is that on the title page, "July 1946."^[13] The dates of "printings" . . . : we must have worked on setting the type, cutting the linoleum, hand

printing the sheets, and folding and collating during the winter and spring of 1946. John Marchi of Portland, Maine, did the binding, and it usually took him three or four months. There was only one printing, which consisted of less (for we've inveterately been over-sanguine about the number of fair copies we'll finally get) than three hundred and thirty copies, of which fifty were in quarter-leather and the remainder in full cloth. . . . We printed as I recall eight pages up, and there were of course additional impressions for each of the sheets with red or blue ink. . . . All the type was set by hand, and since we hadn't enough for all forty-nine pages, Mr. Warren had to read proof piecemeal.

The second is the following, encouraging response from T. G. Rosenthal, Martin Secker and Warburg, London:

Not only am I delighted that you should be doing this project on an author whom I admire and love only this side of idolatry, but I have to search my heart and soul to ask whether I could truthfully expect a similar communication from a Squadron Leader teaching at Cranwell. . . .

My good fortune—that element of luck about which Mr. Warren has spoken and written—continued and continues with similar pleasant, cooperative contacts and interested colleagues. The responses I receive, moreover, are tributes to Warren's reputation, his ethos among those who come in contact with him and his writings.

The year 1974 marked a definite turn in my project and in this odyssey. Through the gracious help of Lewis Simpson, I met Mr. Warren. Having as subject a man as kind, hospitable, and interested as Robert Penn Warren is a great part of my luck. He has allowed me to work in his library in Fairfield, has kept me up-to-date on new, hard-to-find publications, and has generously shared scarce and rare material with me.

Two other pieces of luck have followed, too. From a bibliographer's point of view, Mr. Warren has an incredibly accurate sense of his writing. And second, he has a wonderfully understanding wife, Eleanor Clark, who has given this errant bibliographer room and board when he has arrived on porch with 3 x 5 cards in hand. Mr. Warren's usual question begins, "Have you

seen this?" or, "Here's a 'little' something you might not have seen." Most of the time, he is correct: I have not seen the 'little' item in question. At Fairfield one of the exciting finds was *Thirty-Six Poems*, Warren's first volume of poetry, in the clear wrappers in which it was issued. A bibliographer could not ask for better cooperation and a more generous subject with which to work. I am particularly grateful for Mr. Warren's support on this project and for the opportunity to acknowledge it publicly.

During the academic year 1979-80, I was given a sabbatical and an appointment as Visiting Fellow in Bibliography at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. And just over a year ago, in the fall of 1980, I drove to Lexington to use the King Library's special collection of Warren material. In Kentucky I located in this rich collection the dust wrapper of *John Brown*, which had evaded "capture" for nine years. I also discovered an aggressive program which continues to build the University of Kentucky's Robert Penn Warren collection.

So, my odyssey continues in a way: I am still cataloguing and collecting. I am still awed by the quantity Mr. Warren produces, particularly in light of its quality. He truly deserves the title, "America's Dean of Letters."¹⁴

NOTES

*A slightly different version of this paper was presented at the Robert Penn Warren 75th Birthday Symposium which the University of Kentucky hosted 29-30 October 1980. Because of the occasion, the observations which follow are necessarily personal at times but, I hope, not tediously so. The preparation of Warren's bibliography has been a personal rather than a merely academic experience.

¹Warren has recently completed a 5,000-word introduction to a special, deluxe edition of *All the King's Men* which the Book-of-the-Month Club will publish 17 August 1981, the thirty-fifth anniversary of the original publication date. Letter received from Robert Penn Warren, 7 March 1981.

²Robert Alter, "The American Political Novel," *New York Times Book Review*, 10 August 1980, p. 26.

³Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946), p. 461.

⁴Warren, p. 12.

⁵My prejudice I readily admit; however, considering Warren's diversity—he has written well in every major genre except travel—I cannot help wondering why he has not yet received the Nobel Prize for Literature,

especially in light of some of America's other recipients, e.g., Sinclair Lewis and Pearl Buck.

⁶Somewhere in my file cabinet, I still have my now-yellowed notes on "Yellowism Research" in *All the King's Men*, complete with twenty-seven separate references to the word "yellow," with a carefully copied definition of that word, with a selected bibliography on color symbolism in literature, and with an essay on "Color Dynamics." I had even begun expanding the scope of that research to *At Heaven's Gate* and *Sanctuary*. That such a small detail could lead to so many facets in literary research fascinated me. Perhaps like Jack Burden and his research on Cass Mastern, I will return someday to that folder of notes.

⁷John W. Nichol, "Melville's 'Soiled' Fish of the Sea," *American Literature*, 21 (1949), 338-39.

⁸Fredson Bowers, *Principles of Bibliographical Description* (1949; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 357.

⁹Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), pp. 65-67, et passim.

¹⁰Richard D. Altick, *The Scholar Adventurers* (New York: Free Press, 1966).

¹¹Bowers, pp. 367-68.

¹²Printed disclaimers notwithstanding. Such information for teachers, for example, is particularly helpful if they want their students to use the same edition with the same pagination.

¹³Two dates, however, appear on title pages: 'July/1946' and 'August/1946'.

¹⁴*Newsweek*, 25 August 1980, pp. 66-68.