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The author considers Warren's place in American intellectual history, which is at present problematic. He argues that Warren must be seen as more than a "Southerner." Though he dealt with Southern materials and saw himself as an uprooted exile and wanderer, Warren emerged from a modernist ethos and went on to write in an existentialist idiom. His career was played out on a world stage.

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Although the textbooks he edited with Cleanth Brooks virtually defined the New Criticism, Warren's critical essays moved beyond close reading and frequently challenged the standards of high modernism when it came to assessing literary excellence. This was particularly true during the last three decades of his life, when his poetry also reflected a turn from strict modernism. His discovery of Whittier's poetry in the 1970s revealed new depth and unsuspected complexity in the work of that "fireside sentimentalist" and demonstrates how far Warren was prepared to go in fashioning a "newer" criticism.

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In choosing Willie Talos as the original name for his strongman governor in *All the King's Men*, Warren was explicitly drawing upon Edmund Spenser, but his allusion to the Faerie Queene remains puzzling. Spenser's "robotic" character would seem to have more in common with a dehumanized figure in the novel like Sugar Boy, who is often presented in mechanistic imagery. Warren's ultimate decision to change Willie's name from Talos to Stark seems a wise one.

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Letters between Warren's acquaintance Blackmur and his close friend and onetime protégé Jarrell on the state of American literary magazines enrich our sense of the literary milieu in which the three worked.

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Brother to Dragons is a poem that turns chiefly upon guilt over racism and slavery, but many of its most intense passages concern sexual guilt. The poem returns obsessively to the subject of sex because sex provides it with a way of thinking about how the highest and lowest aspect of human nature are inextricably bound together in it. The inextricable duality of love is a model for a similar inextricable duality the poem discusses in political idealism. The way the desire for purity shades into sadism is a model for the ways efforts to purify the political world also come to grief.

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