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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Terry Barr entitled "In the Pursuit of Self-Knowledge: A Comparison of the Novel and Film of All the King's Men." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Charles Maland
Charles Maland, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Richard M. Kelly
Dick Penner

Accepted for the Council:

L. Evans Roth
Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

IN THE PURSUIT OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE: A
COMPARISON OF THE NOVEL AND FILM
OF ALL THE KING'S MEN

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This paper is dedicated to the memory of Michael H. Guthrie.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to compare the novel and the film adaptation of All the King's Men, in order to understand and analyze the differences in interpretation of the authors of each work.

From the premise that written literature and film have inherent qualities which clearly distinguish one from the other, the first task of the paper, in Chapter 1, is to discuss both the similarities and differences between film and written literature, noting particularly the constraints placed on each artist, filmmaker and novelist.

Following the analysis of theory in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 explores briefly the background of novelist Robert Penn Warren, and then concentrates on an in-depth study of the novel of All the King's Men itself, pointing out chiefly how the novel's structure, theme, and narrative force the reader to see Jack Burden and not Willie Stark as the main focus of the story. This conclusion is corroborated by critics ranging from Cleanth Brooks to Louis Rubin, and finally by Warren himself.

In a similar manner, Chapter 3 discusses the background and political ideology of the film's screenwriter and director, Robert Rossen, and then goes on to elaborate on how Rossen's background and beliefs caused him to structure his film around Willie Stark, portraying Stark as an American Fascist dictator. Repeated viewings of the film, along with research into the political climate of Hollywood in the 1930's and 1940's, emphasize the fact that Rossen's narrative, structure, and cinematic style all lend to his vivid

depiction of Willie Stark as a purely evil, power-hungry politician, while subordinating Jack Burden to the role of a political hatchet man.

Finally, Chapter 4, while re-emphasizing the separateness of the works, also evaluates the two, concluding that although each writer, Warren and Rossen, accomplished his objective in his work, Warren is the more successful of the two, because, through his character Jack Burden, who has come to terms with the reality of his own heritage, Warren causes us not only to evaluate and understand Burden's life, but also to evaluate and at least attempt to understand our own lives. Thus, self-knowledge, which is missing in Rossen's work, is the key to Warren's work, because it gives us an understanding of the past which helps us learn how to live in the present and future. And the essential component of this knowledge is the fact that no one is purely good or evil, that both of these qualities exist, to a degree, within each individual.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THEORIES OF NOVEL AND FILM

The basic assumption of the ordinary laymen, then, and some of the critics, is that for a motion picture to be faithful to a novel it must simply be the novel. The novel and the film are each types of fiction--they are, though, different types of fiction.

--George Linden
"The Storied World"

The epigraph above accurately describes my own sense of duality as I view a film that has been adapted from a successful novel. As I first began the research for this thesis, I was overwhelmingly convinced that Robert Penn Warren's novel of All the King's Men was clearly superior to Robert Rossen's film adaptation. It was from this premise that I wished to embark upon my comparison of the two works. I had developed what I thought was a very workable thesis: that of the two works, the novel was the better, because it instructs us not only about the rise and fall of Willie Stark, but also about the nature of men like Stark, and more importantly, about the nature of men like the novel's narrator, Jack Burden. Burden, I think, is the focus of the novel; through his experiences we learn that for any man to function efficiently in the present and future, that man must recognize and come to terms with his own past. It is precisely this point that is lost in the film, where the focus is upon Willie Stark and his ultimate downfall. The power which he strives for and achieves ends up corrupting him and all those he touches. I wondered, after viewing the film for the first time, how significant that point is for us, in the

1980's. Is this a lesson that has all too frequently been bred in modern men and women? I don't know that I've answered this question fully in my own mind, but upon subsequent viewings of the film, I almost no longer care whether its theme is applicable to today or not. What I have discovered is that Rossen took great pains (certainly greater than I first believed) in reinforcing his film's theme through not only the principal and minor characters that he used, but also through the way he framed his shots and used mise-en-scene. Through this discovery, my way of thinking has become much more in line with George Linden's and with these thoughts from George Bluestone:

What happens, therefore, when the filmist undertakes the adaptation of a novel, given the inevitable mutation, is that he does not convert the novel at all. What he adapts is a kind of paraphrase of the novel--the novel viewed as raw material. He looks not to the organic novel, whose language is inseparable from its themes, but to characters and incidents which have somehow detached themselves from language and, like the heroes of folk legends, have achieved a mythic life of their own. . . . In the fullest sense of the word, the filmist becomes not a translator for an established author, but a new author in his own right.¹

I believe that the two focal characters, Jack Burden in the novel, and Willie Stark in the film, have indeed "achieved a mythic life of their own." I believe further that when comparing adapted works, even of two different authors, one must keep in mind that these authors are not of one mind; therefore, their creations, despite the fact that one work may have been derived from the other, must be viewed as separate, distinct works of art, each having its own peculiar characteristics and

¹George Bluestone, "The Limits of the Novel and the Limits of Film," in *Film and/as Literature*, ed. John Harrington (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 149.

underlying themes. It is precisely this point that the author of the novel, Robert Penn Warren, makes as he speaks of Robert Rossen's film adaptation:

I think that it is an extraordinary good movie, with his [Rossen's] very special touch. I can praise it, for it seems to me that when a movie is made from a novel, the novel is merely raw material; the movie is a new creation, and the novelist can properly attract neither praise nor blame for it. The movie, as a matter of fact, does not mean what I think my book meant. It is Bob's movie.²

Indeed, Warren is right, for as this thesis will show, the novel and the film of All the King's Men do "mean" two different things entirely.

It is my purpose in this thesis, then, to accomplish several objectives. First of all, I believe that when comparing works of two different media, it is vital to speak of the similarities and differences of the media. These distinctions should be made early on so that one can clearly see what the novel can do that the film cannot and vice-versa. From studying this information it will then be easier to analyze the two works, considering the limitations imposed on each. Therefore, a later portion of this chapter will discuss these distinctions. The remainder of the paper will be structured so as to analyze each writer's version of All the King's Men, along with significant background information on each man. On that note, Chapter 2 will examine Warren's novel and its perceived strengths and weaknesses along with his life and career. From there, Chapter 3 will deal exclusively with both Rossen's film and his career. Finally, Chapter 4

²Alan Casty, "The Films of Robert Rossen," Film Quarterly, Fall-Winter, 1966-67, pp. 20-21.

will discuss at length why the novel is the superior work of the two.

The first and most obvious difference between the two media is of their texture and nature. The novel presents symbols in the form of words on a printed page. It is up to the reader then to form his/her own ideas as to the concepts that these symbols represent. On the other hand, Gerald Mast has defined film as "a succession of projected images and recorded sounds."³ Generally, Mast's definition embodies all of those elements of film style that another film analyst, David Bordwell, sums up as 1) mise-en-scene, 2) framing the shot, 3) editing devices, and 4) sound.⁴

To begin with, the term "projected" clearly shows not only that a film must involve a camera which visually records action and events, but also that the film the camera uses must be developed and finally viewed on a screen by means of a projector so that we, the audience, actually see the concrete images before us. Thus, as opposed to our ability to conceptualize the word-symbols of a novel, in a film we perceive the images that appear before us on the screen: the mise-en-scene--the actors and actresses; their costumes; the set; and the lighting.⁵ As Bordwell notes, "In controlling the mise-en-scene, the director stages the event for the camera."⁶ Furthermore, other

³Gerald Mast, Film, Cinema, Movie (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 111.

⁴David Bordwell, Film Art: An Introduction (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), Ch. 4.

⁵Ibid., p. 75.

⁶Ibid.

factors such as the quality of the film stock, the camera's focus and speed, the camera distance and angle, and the duration of the shot all contribute to the finished product. All of these factors contribute, then, to the overall point of view of the film.

Secondly, the word "succession" implies that a number of events and actions will occur in some sort of logical series. That these events are in succession further implies that if a logical order exists, then someone, an editor and/or director, must determine this order--must decide which shots come first, second, third, and so on, in succession. This succession can be summed up as the relation of shot to shot: the process of editing. It is this editing process that actually puts the story into its proper narrative sequence. Thus, to relate the story clearly to the audience, the filmmaker must attend to a far greater number of factors than the novelist.

The final aspect of Mast's definition is the recorded sounds. "Sound" encompasses sound effects, music, and language, and their pitch, volume, and tempo. Some sounds occur from actual sources in the story space of the scenes; these are diegetic sounds. Other sounds have no natural source in the scene; these sounds are non-diegetic. The filmmaker must consider these sound devices and their effects, whereas the novelist's words are only representations of symbols and thus do not have to be "heard." Moreover, the filmmaker must decide on the whole scope of film style, the mise-en-scene, the shot, the editing devices, and the sound, to give his work unity and clarity. With this basic delineation of film, then, we can now explore the distinctions of each medium in the particular areas of narrative and point of view;

relations and considerations of time; the author's achievement and influence; and the ultimate consideration of the audience.

Our initial consideration is the narrative technique because it is by far the most complex difference between fiction and film. The novelist has the freedom to choose either a first or third person narrator. His options are not limited to these choices, however. In either person, the novelist must decide whether his narrator will be limited in his knowledge of the events of the story or whether his narrator will be omniscient or all-knowing. Furthermore, if the author chooses a third person narrator, he might decide to have this narrator be entirely detached from the action. Other combinations from these basic situations are also available for the novelist's consideration. Also, it is up to the novelist to decide whether his narrator will describe events that are presently occurring or whether he will describe events that have already transpired. In any event, the point is that the novelist has a variety of perspectives to choose from as he sets out to tell his story. Finally, the novel usually maintains one point of view (notable exceptions are Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying); to do otherwise runs the risk of confusing the reader.⁷

On the other hand, the filmmaker is much more limited in his choice of point of view. It is virtually impossible for a film to get inside one character's mind for a very long period of time; to do so would be quite tedious and confusing, because as we view the film, we

⁷William Jinks, The Celluloid Literature (Gainesville: Glencoe Press, 1974), p. 35.

are, in fact, watching all of the characters from the eye of the camera. As William Jinks, in The Celluloid Literature, states, "In the film, point of view must always be synonymous with camera eye, for the viewer has no choice except to witness what the camera perceives."⁸ To further elaborate on the possibilities of point of view in film, Seymour Chatman says:

The fact that most novels and short stories come to us through the voice of a narrator gives authors a greater range and flexibility than filmmakers. For one thing, the visual point of view in film is always there: it is fixed and determinate precisely because the camera always needs to be placed somewhere. But in verbal fiction, the narrator may or may not give us a visual bearing. He may let us peer over a character's shoulder, or he may represent something from a generalized perspective, commenting indifferently on the front, sides, and back of the object, disregarding how it is possible to see all of those parts in the same glance. He doesn't have to account for his physical position at all. Further, he can enter solid bodies and tell what things are like inside and so on.⁹

What the novelist describes, then, is not necessarily what the reader pictures. In other words, the novelist can present a representation through words of what he feels or "sees" in his mind. The reader's mental picture of these images, though, may and often is, quite different from the author's. The words describing the events are visibly on the page of the book; the concept or "picture" that these words conjure lies in the mind's eye of the particular author and reader.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Seymour Chatman, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice-Versa)," Critical Inquiry, Autumn, 1980, pp. 132-33.

Returning to the actual narration of the piece, again, it is the novelist who has the flexibility to get inside one person's mind--to stay with this person for the duration of the novel. He can go for many pages analyzing his character's thoughts and describing that character's physical appearance and mental feelings. The filmmaker, though, is once again far more limited:

. . . the film, having only arrangements of space to work with, cannot render thought, for the moment thought is externalized it is no longer thought. The film, by arranging external signs for our visual perception, or by presenting us with dialogue, can lead us to infer thought. But it cannot show us thought directly. It can show us characters thinking, feeling, and speaking, but it cannot show us their thoughts and feelings. A film is not thought; it is perceived.¹⁰

A film can employ several devices to show us characters "thinking, feeling, and speaking"--to show us events from their point of view. One such device is the subjective shot, in which the camera focuses on a situation or event as seen from the perspective of one character. This shot is set up as though we are actually viewing the action with the eyes of this character. Another device closely linked to the subjective shot is the reaction shot, which immediately follows the subjective shot as the camera cuts back to the face of the character who has been watching the events transpire. The reaction on his/her face--joy, anger, fear--suggests that character's inner thoughts and feelings. His point of view, then, while not directly stated, is strongly implied. A film which attempted to present a consistent first person point of view was Lady of the Lake. This film of the 1940's

¹⁰Bluestone, pp. 140-41.

was photographed entirely through subjective shots. Robert Montgomery, the first person narrator, was never seen except when his image was reflected in a mirror. Although this was an interesting innovative technique, as can be imagined, the end result was a rather tedious film. Film simply is not a skillful means to present a consistent first person viewpoint. Another cinematic device that more directly states point of view is voice-over narration. This device, however, generally sees only limited use because it would become monotonous if in a two-hour film most of the minutes were filled by an outside narrator describing feelings and events: "Filmmakers and critics traditionally show disdain for verbal commentary because it explicates what, they feel, should be implicated visually."¹¹ Also, if in a film the director wants a character's inner thoughts to be heard, he uses sound devices to allow that character to explain these thoughts to other characters either through direct dialogue, voice-over narration, or by a monologue. Finally, just as in written literature, the filmmaker can use flashbacks to show us the dreams or memories of a certain character, which again can employ the sound devices of dialogue, monologue, and voice-over narration. Using these sounds clearly gives the filmmaker another option in delineating point of view that the novelist cannot use. But as Charles Thomas Samuels asserts,

. . . most novels and films give no more attention to speech than to mute items of reality. These, film presents through techniques more vivid but conceptually equivalent to those of language. Just as the formal identity of fiction depends

¹¹Chatman, p. 128.

on the existence of narrated description as well as dialogue, so the formal identity of film is dependent on its ability to describe experience through the medium of cinematography as well as to make statements about it in language.¹²

As has been implied throughout this discussion of narrative techniques, it is the camera and the sound devices which actually elucidate point of view in film. Specifically, though, Seymour Chatman states that the "camera-eye depicts" the events and action of the film.¹³ The camera is the constant around which the entire film story revolves. In this context, it is important to re-emphasize the fact that the camera only presents the information on the screen. It can pan the general setting, or it can focus on minute details. Through all of this, though, it is the audience who must concentrate on what the camera presents, and it is also the audience who must ultimately decide which details are significant to understanding the story and its theme.

A final consideration about narrative relates to a previous statement concerning the fact that in a film the camera generally stays with one character; we may not see or hear this character's thoughts, but we usually are able to identify with him or her throughout the movie. We might even be able to view this character through the subjective eyes of other characters in the film. Here, though, we have another subtle difference between the novel and the film. The novelist is capable of concretely presenting the thoughts and feelings of other characters as they pertain to the main character; the novelist may even

¹²Charles Thomas Samuels, Mastering the Film (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), pp. 12-13.

¹³Chatman, p. 128.

want to enter briefly these secondary characters' minds to view events that may or may not shed light on the central action of the story. In other words, the novelist is fully capable of digressing as he structures his work. This is not true, however, of the filmmaker, who has neither the time nor the flexibility to digress. As screenwriter and novelist Budd Schulberg puts it:

The film does best when it concentrates on a single character. It tells the Informer superbly. It tends to lose itself in the ramifications of War and Peace. It has no time for what I call the central digression. The "digression" of complicated, contradictory character. The "digression" of social background. The film must go from significant episode to more significant episode (succession) in a constantly mounting pattern. It is an exciting form. But it pays a price for this excitement. It cannot wander as life wanders, or pause as life always pauses, to contemplate the incidental or unexpected. The film has a relentless form.¹⁴

If the filmmaker attempts a digression, he not only runs the risk of destroying any sense of consistent point of view, but also faces the very real possibility of disrupting the audience's sense of continuity and consistency in watching the film. This consideration of the digression opens up another realm of distinction between the novel and the film--the consideration of time.

Since the concept of time, naturally, is quite different in written literature than it is in film, we should re-emphasize the distinction of film being a recorded art while the novel is representational art, because this notion has everything to do with the

¹⁴John Harrington, ed., p. 116.

concept of time in the two media. It is the medium of film that is more constricted by the time element:

First, because film operates in real time, it is more limited. Novels end only when they feel like it. Film is, in general, restricted to what Shakespeare called "the short two hours' traffic of our stage." It almost seems at times as if the popular novel exists only as a first draft trial for film. But commercial film still can't reproduce the range of the novel in time. An average length screenplay, for example, is 125-150 pages in length; the average novel is twice that. Almost invariably, details of incident are lost in the transition from book to film.¹⁵

Because film is recorded for public viewing, the filmmaker must attend to presenting the narrative of his work in the "two hours' traffic" mentioned above. The events of the film must have some sort of logical order in time and must confine themselves to realistic time limits. Conversely, the novelist need not worry about these matters; his work can be read at leisure. The reader may read nonstop for a few days and finish the book in a unified manner. Or, the reader may spend months finishing that particular novel. In any case, the novelist and the reader, unlike the filmmaker and filmgoer, must concentrate only on the actual narrative time-frame of the novel. The novel's reader may also want to skip pages, read the ending first, or whatever else he wants to do. The filmgoer, though, is "bound by the relentless rate of a projector which he cannot control."¹⁶ He can walk in on the middle of a film or leave before the film ends, but he cannot control the means of presenting the narrative.

¹⁵James Monaco, How to Read a Film (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 29.

¹⁶Bluestone, p. 142.

Two crucial categories of time exist which directly affect the media of film and written literature: the use of tense and the actual time span of the particular work. Regarding the distinction between past and present tense in fiction and film, George Linden notes that "A novel is a remembrance of things past; a film is a remembrance of things present."¹⁷ In our reading of a novel, we naturally review the story as something past--of history--of someone else's memory of events that have already happened. Despite the fact that a film can frame past events with a present-day narrator either explaining these events to another person or simply remembering them for his own personal satisfaction, it still remains that the audience, when viewing the actual events, perceives them as occurring now--at the time of the screening. There is that special sense of "immediacy" that is simply felt more strongly in film than it is in written literature. As Linden says:

The author of the novel uses the bulge and haze of language to move the reader onto an imaginary plane. And what is imagination except seeing as if present that which is not present? The world the novelist describes may be enchanting or enchanted, but it is not now actually present in sensation. A novel is something thought, not something seen. The world the motion-picture director displays, on the other hand, is one which appears present in the visibility and urgency of immediacy. Through the rhythmic tension of images and depth, the director elicits the visibility of the actual and projects it, both literally figuratively, into an immediate probable present, not an imaginary past.¹⁸

¹⁷George Linden, "The Storied World," in Harrington, ed., p. 156.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 166.

The novelist, then, does cause us to imagine the people and places he creates, and this imagination, no matter how vivid, cannot have the force or "immediacy" as the actual scenes and faces that are in the present, before us on the screen, can. Bluestone states that in the novel we have time to glance away from the page to consider the character's thoughts. However, during a film, if we look away from the screen to contemplate what a character has said or done, we will surely miss the events to follow.¹⁹ This powerful sense of the present in film forces us to gaze continually at the picture before us, for if we close our eyes, the events on the screen will pass us by. Seymour Chatman contributes to this argument by asking: "Why is it that the force of the plot, with its ongoing march of events, its ticking away of story time, is so hard to dispel in the movies?"²⁰ Noting that he cannot answer this question exhaustively, Chatman offers the possibility that the answer may lie with the medium of film itself:

Whereas in novels, movements and hence events are at best constructions imaged by the reader out of words, that is, abstract symbols which are different from them in kind, the movements on the screen are so iconic, so like the real life movements they imitate, that the illusion of time passage simply cannot be divorced from them. Once that illusory storytime is established in a film, even dead moments, moments where nothing moves, will be felt to be part of the temporal whole, just as the taxi meter continues to run as we sit fidgeting in a traffic jam.²¹

¹⁹Bluestone, p. 146.

²⁰Chatman, p. 130.

²¹Ibid.

Another difference between written literature and film concerns the actual writing of the story. A novel is almost exclusively a solitary art, whereas commercial film is a collaborative enterprise. In the novel, one author controls the character's thoughts and actions along with the actual events and their sequence. Film, however, employs a multitude of "creators" who each contribute to the finished product. The writer, producer, director, editor, cinematographer, and a host of others all lend a hand in making the film. The screenwriter, then, definitely has less autonomy in his work than does the novelist, who may receive suggestions from his editor or publisher, but who ultimately has control over the major events of his story. This does not necessarily mean that a film is entirely mired in conflict; what it does mean is that a film is produced from a variety of perspectives, all of which, again, must be considered and eventually used or thrown out.

A final distinction between the two media, which is somewhat related to the author's control, is the consideration of the audience. A novelist is less limited by audience constraints because his livelihood is usually not extricably bound to his creative writing. Generally the novelist has another source of income, whether it be teaching, reporting, or political intrigue. Additionally, the novelist does not encounter the magnitude of expense that the filmmaker does. Thus, a novelist might lose a bit of money if his book does not sell, but usually this amount is no more than he can realistically absorb. Therefore as the novelist writes, he is able to concentrate more on what he wants to say than whether he will please an audience.

Generally, if the novel is critically successful, it will sell at least moderately, and if it doesn't, then financially, the novelist is rarely destroyed. The filmmaker, on the other hand, is in a different predicament. Returning to the premise that film is a collaborative art, an immediate corollary is that since film is collaborative, then much time and expense is spent on it. Moreover, another higher collaborator is the studio that produces and funds the film. Here we arrive at the "Big Business" factor. During the era of the late 1940's, when the film of All the King's Men was made, the filmmaker was bound by tight economic pressures. Working within the studio system the filmmaker had to consider whether or not his picture would be commercially successful, and to do so, he had to consider not only the tastes of film critics, but also the tastes of the general public, who, with their decision whether or not to attend the film, could mark the financial success or failure of that film. Furthermore, the filmmaker of the 1940's had to consider the moral restrictions of the Hays Production Code. Certainly if the public were offended by the subject matter of the film, the project would be a failure. Of course, the members of the Hays Production Code were always on hand to insure that no one's tastes would be blatantly offended. Moreover, the audience could only be expected to sit comfortably in their seats for a certain amount of time; therefore, restrictions of time were also a special problem for the filmmaker. All of the above factors create anxiety for the filmmaker. To achieve commercial success a filmmaker must conform to the demands of the studio heads, the censors, and the viewing public; this means that he must cut and revise his work down to

an accepted time. By this process of cutting, many scenes which are important to the filmmaker's sense of art may be eliminated; the novelist, in comparison, knows these constraints but to a lesser extent. In the end, the filmmaker must compromise if his studio is to produce future films and if he is to have further chances to write in this medium.

To sum up this first chapter and to serve as a prelude to the next, George Linden offers these words:

Because of the intimate organic relations of form and content, no matter how faithful the film, it can never express the content of the novel as the novel expresses it. Different materials demand different modes of expression. The novel, after all, projects a world different from words; the film presents one in images.²²

Now, on to the world of Robert Penn Warren and his novel.

²²Linden, p. 160.

CHAPTER 2

ALL THE KING'S MEN: ROBERT PENN WARREN

AND THE NOVEL

All the King's Men is brilliantly done, with magnificent set-pieces in which Robert Penn Warren writes prose equivalent to his poetry in sound and rhythm and imagery. [Although there is much] false writing in Anne Stanton's description (plus a weak ending) attained by extravagant use of Politi's famous 36 plot situations, it is the political pattern of All the King's Men that is really disturbing. It never really faces the threat of men like Long to the democratic process itself. Robert Penn Warren is fascinated by the strong man of action, as many of our war novelists were by romanticized Nazis. And the question of All the King's Men is solely whether the man of ideas can work with the dictator in the interests of historic change; whether in carrying out that change, the unscrupulous vulgarian is not really a better man than the selfish, dignified, discreet, and also immoral politicians from whom he seized power. Warren does not ask whether American tradition does not demand that we fight men like Long with the utmost means at our disposal, in order to preserve in this country and in the world, free, open, pluralistic societies in which the Individual Rights are protected by law and in which the ultimate control is inverted below in the people and not above in men like Willie Stark.¹

Such were the words of critic Robert Gorham Davis, reporting in The New York Times Book Review in 1946, the year the novel All the King's Men was released. In its lukewarm, general praise and searing, specific criticism, this review caught the tone that accompanied the advent of the novel. Clearly what was at issue was not merely the

¹Robert Gorham Davis, "All the King's Men by Robert Penn Warren," The New York Times Book Review, 18 Aug. 1946, p. 3.

success or failure of a brand new political novel; rather, the issue for the contemporary critics was much broader than Warren himself ever imagined. The real heart of the matter for the novel's critics was the world at large: the 1940's, complete with the recent repulsion of Hitler's fascism and the imminent threat of Stalin's brand of communism. If Warren were to write a novel about the take-over of an American political machine by an indigenous dictator, a domestic Nazi, these critics seemed to say, then this man must be portrayed as purely evil, and his inevitable destruction must inspire not only the other characters in the novel, but everyone who was to read the novel as well with the patriotic feeling that American democracy always wins because American democracy is always right. However, as the novel's critics, and hopefully the readers too, discovered, All the King's Men did not produce the flag-waving spirit of pride that so many wished for; and what these critics failed to see and comprehend was that it was never meant to.

All the King's Men does ask questions about our political system, the men and women who run it, and about the problems of social class. More importantly, though, it delves into the very nature of man himself, and in doing so, it comes up with the only answer available: that the answers to these questions can only be found within each person. True, Warren does not "ask" whether Willie Stark should be adored or destroyed. What he does instead is to take another character, the narrator, Jack Burden, and allow us to experience the corrupt world of southern politics through Jack's eyes: to let us answer, in the end, the question of right and wrong for ourselves, just

as in our own lives we must decide whose ideas to follow and whose to abandon. The real issue, then, in the novel is not Willie Stark's life, but rather, Jack Burden's, for it is Jack who grows in the novel, who learns about his past and from that, how to exist in the present and future. Once we learn his story, then we can decide for ourselves the questions that Warren asks and see that by not providing us with definite answers--a concrete view of Willie and politics--Warren causes us to think of and decide these issues for ourselves.

By first examining a few facts about Warren's life and career, and then by scrutinizing the style of writing Warren used, complete with his many digressions, plus the major and minor characters of the novel, we can finally realize that the novel was not primarily about the fictional politics of Willie Stark, the factual politics of Stark's supposed model, Huey Long, or any political ideology at all. Instead, the novel's focus was always supposed to be on Jack Burden and the answers that he found concerning the nature of life and of the men and women who live it.

It is understandable that Robert Penn Warren chose not to focus his novel solely on Willie Stark and blatantly picture him as a neo-fascist who gets his just desert at the hands of the democratic hero. In looking briefly at Warren's life and career, we can quickly see that Warren was not so caught up in American politics; at best he showed an ambivalence, an unwillingness to get involved and to take a clear stand on the political and social issues of the 20's, 30's, and 40's. It is not necessarily true that he was uninterested in these issues;

instead it seems that he was only interested in these issues as they pertained to people on an extremely personal level.

Warren's venture with Southern Agrarianism was perhaps his most ambitious attempt at formulating political doctrine. Yet the actual circumstances of this venture only reinforce Warren's own ambivalence. The Agrarian group, led by John Crowe Ransom, containing the membership of other southern writers like Donald Davidson and Allen Tate, was a reaction against what these men thought were "the evils of the 1920's: finance capitalism, the cultural dominance of New York City and the commercialism of the literary marketplace, the debasement of language as practiced in advertising and social science, the defeat and impoverishment of the South, the glib parlor Marxism of the period, the self-serving Babbittry of American business, the sense of dislocation, the breakdown in manners and forms, and the threat that naked and unchecked economic power posed to democratic society."² The Agrarians defined their own doctrine in I'll Take My Stand, with each man taking one specific issue and devoting an entire chapter to it. Warren, although technically a part of the group, was never really inside it. He wrote his essay while in Oxford, England, and was not as caught up in the Agrarian movement as the others were; indeed, "Agrarianism never became the central allegiance for him, either as man or writer."³ It seems that neither he nor the other Agrarians thought

²Louis D. Rubin, The Wary Fugitives (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1978), p. 337.

³Ibid., p. 328.

that his chapter, on the plight of the southern Negro, was conclusive because as Davidson put it, Warren's contribution "refused to deal with Agrarianism."⁴ Furthermore, Arthur Mizener asserts that while the Fugitive-Agrarian group had great influence on Warren, "the association of Warren with the Fugitives is misleading too. There were other important influences in his life, at California, Yale, and Oxford. His attitude was very different from either Ransom's or Tate's."⁵ Outside of this half-venture into Agrarianism, Warren's personal political involvements are rather vague. He never got involved with particular movements, even in the highly politicized atmosphere of the 1930's. His beliefs, whether political, social, or moral, became increasingly bound to his own work. In the 1930's (after I'll Take My Stand), "Warren devoted little attention to social, economic, or political themes, confining himself largely to literary criticism and poetry."⁶

These beliefs, "his preoccupation with the problems of public purpose and personal ambition, the nature of democracy and popular leadership, and the cost of evasion of ethical and social responsibility joined with his fascination with the modern political and social scene

⁴Ibid., p. 338.

⁵Arthur Mizener, "Robert Penn Warren: All the King's Men," in Robert Penn Warren: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Richard Gray (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), p. 51.

⁶Richard H. King, A Southern Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 57.

and his insight into human motives,"⁷ were all contained within his novels. Warren recognized that with the arrival of a more modern age, man would be compelled to adapt to his new surroundings. Thus, would come the problem of "how to translate into new times, changed institutions, with different social needs and wider human aspirations, the imperatives of moral responsibility that in the past had assumed simpler, more familiar forms."⁸ Therefore his novels, beginning with John Brown: the Making of a Martyr, were not one-sided political manifestos. They attempted to understand the human condition: man's need to accept the present and live in the future by making sense of the past. As Richard King says:

There is in Warren's view a movement from alienation from self and others through trials and tests to a reconciliation with self and others, a self-acceptance and hence acceptance of others. For him, Man's chief end is knowledge of the human condition--a search for identity and self, the problem of human freedom, the complex relationship between past and present. . . .⁹

As King also points out, "Warren's dominant concern is less an evaluation of the collective Southern past than, first, an exploration of the problem of power and political insurgency and, second, of self-definition and identity."¹⁰ Louis Rubin comments more extensively on this point. In Warren's fiction:

⁷Rubin, p. 351.

⁸Ibid., p. 352.

⁹King, pp. 232-33.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 236.

Each [protagonist] must learn how to hold onto moral integrity in greatly changed conditions, a feat that can be accomplished neither by an adamant refusal to accept change nor by abdication of individual responsibility, under the guise of conforming to changed conditions. For the former results in an abstract, subjective idealism that ceases to be a shaping relationship to the human life it is supposed to govern, and the latter course, in surrender of all moral judgement, removes the checks upon recalcitrant human nature that alone elevate men beyond savagery and make society possible. The choice is always difficult, for those who must make it are men and women who are subject to all the temptations of pride, ambition, appetite, avarice, avoidance of pain and moral laziness that beset human beings. It is Warren's ability to dramatize these moral issues in individual characterizations and immediate issues that makes his fiction compelling and successful.¹¹

This quotation, as we will shortly see, directly applies to Jack Burden.

Ultimately, then, if we are to garner some understanding of Warren's beliefs, we must turn to his fiction, for it is there, rather than in any piece of his speculative prose, that we see captured the whole gamut of Warren's world. And we will also see that Warren's views and themes, while they are recurring, are nevertheless extremely complex. It is particularly for this reason that All the King's Men was misunderstood by contemporary critics.

The central debate surrounding this novel is: what is its principal theme? In answering this question, we must first decide who the novel is about. Is it an ill-disguised biography of Huey Long, the 1930's governor of Louisiana? Is it about any corrupt, authoritarian dictator, as embodied by Willie Stark? Or, is it about the people

¹¹Rubin, pp. 354-55.

whose lives are directly affected by Stark and the conditions surrounding him: people like Jack Burden?

For those critics who argue that All the King's Men is "about" Huey Long, there appears to be ample evidence to support their contention. After all, the state that the action of the novel takes place in is almost assuredly Louisiana, Huey Long's home state. Then, too, Robert Penn Warren himself taught at Louisiana State University during the final years of Long's tenure as governor of the state. Robert Gorham Davis, in reviewing the novel, not only criticized the work itself, but also felt moved to judge the total structure of Louisiana politics under Long, noting that Long "had imposed a naked dictatorship of fraud and force on the state" and that Warren and other "intellectual liberals" were hired by Long to teach at the state university to prevent blacklisting by the National Education Association: "He gave them free reign as long as they didn't interfere with his politics."¹² Moreover, in Warren's own essay, "All the King's Men: The Matrix of Experience," he states that the novel would never have been written if he had not lived in Louisiana or known Huey Long. However, he also notes that this does not mean that the state in the novel is Louisiana or that "Willie Stark" is Huey Long. Louisiana inspired these creations but was not the pure embodiment of them.¹³

¹²Davis, p. 3.

¹³Robert Penn Warren, "All the King's Men: The Matrix of Experience," in The Merrill Studies in All the King's Men, comp. James F. Light (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1971), p. 2.

This statement, of course, directly refutes Davis's contention that "Warren is writing about the real Huey Long even more frankly than Adria Locke was in . . . A Lion is in the Streets. The details of the hero's education, mannerisms, and features: of the impeachment proceedings and assassination put this beyond question."¹⁴

Other critics, though, such as Charles R. Anderson, maintain that even though the events of the novel "follow" Long's career, "it was not Warren's purpose to write a fictional biography of the Kingfish. By the device of the Narrator, he frames one story within another, so that the rise and fall of Willie Stark becomes merely illustrative matter."¹⁵ This question of whether the novel is about Huey Long takes on even more intricate ramifications, and these ramifications concern the question of which character in the story is the main character. As Louis Rubin states:

When All the King's Men first came out there was considerable debate among critics and readers about the relationship between Willie Stark and Huey Long. In general, the people who thought it was a fairly direct relationship tended to see Willie as the central figure of the novel. Others, however, disagreed, and insisted that Jack Burden, the narrator, and not Willie Stark, was the chief character in the book. Surely, now that the topical dispute over Willie's identity with Huey Long has died down, no reasonable reader can deny that it is Jack Burden, not Willie Stark, to whom the central experience of the novel occurs.¹⁶

¹⁴Davis, p. 54.

¹⁵Charles R. Anderson, "Violence and Order in the Novels of Robert Penn Warren," in Light, ed., p. 64.

¹⁶Louis D. Rubin, Writers of the Modern South: The Faraway Country (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 107.

Although Rubin seems confident of his words, he, no doubt, has good reason for being so bold. As Warren himself said in the introduction to the Modern Library Edition of the novel:

On the one hand, there were those who took the thing to be a not-so-covert biography of, and apologia for, Senator Long, and the author to be not less than a base minion of the great man. There is really nothing to reply to this kind of innocent boneheadedness or gospel-bit hysteria. As Louis Armstrong is reported to have said, there's some folks that if they don't know, you can't tell 'em. But on the other hand, there were those who took the thing to be a rousing declaration of democratic principles and a tract for the assassination of dictators. This view, though somewhat more congenial to my personal political views, was almost as wide of the mark. For better or for worse, Willie Stark was not Huey Long. Willie was only himself, whatever that self turned out to be, a shadowy wraith or a blundering human being. The book, however, was never intended to be a book about politics. Politics merely provided the framework story in which the deeper concerns, whatever their final significance, might work themselves out.¹⁷

The major importance of Warren's statement is the assertion that the novel is not about politics. If this is an accurate statement, and we surely are inclined to accept the author's own words--even though D. H. Lawrence says "trust the tale, not the teller"--then what is the story about? To answer this question, we must focus on Jack Burden. Warren has stated that "Indisputably All the King's Men is meant to be Jack Burden's story, not only because he tells it, but also because he resolves it by allegedly emerging in Chapter 10 as a kind of bridge or compromise between idea and fact. It turned out that what he thought

¹⁷Robert Penn Warren, "Introduction to the Modern Library Edition of All the King's Men," in 20th Century Interpretations of All the King's Men, ed. Robert H. Chambers (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 97.

about the story was more important than the story itself.¹⁸ This quotation sums up the essence of the novel, because as we will see later in this chapter, Jack's thoughts and perceptions of Willie's story, along with his own historical research, provide the essence of Warren's novel. What we will see is that in the way that the novel is structured--the ordering of the chapters and the central digressions that occur repeatedly--Warren is focusing on Jack. This, along with the fact that all of the characters and events relate directly to Jack, makes the novel his story. As critic Cleanth Brooks maintains:

Certainly many things in the novel remind one of Louisiana under the Long regime; but this is a novel, not a biography, and finally--despite the importance of Willie Stark--the novel tells Jack Burden's story. The story of Willie Stark finally has its importance because of the way it affects the story of Jack . . . the novel is an account of how Jack Burden came to be a man capable of understanding the story of Cass Mastern--which means, of course, ultimately capable of understanding his own life and his relation to his parents, his friends, and the world.¹⁹

The structure of the novel is interesting in itself because there is no straight chronological order to the events of the story. Jack Burden, the present Jack Burden, exists in the year 1939, as we discover on page 3 of the novel. This present Jack Burden is recounting past events, but in doing so, he does not go as far back as the history of the novel goes, at first. Instead, his first act is to recount an event that happened in 1936--the ride to Mason City.

¹⁸Jerome Meckier, "Burden's Complaint: The Disintegrated Personality as Theme and Style," in Chambers, ed., p. 58.

¹⁹Cleanth Brooks, "Experience Redeemed in Knowledge," in Gray, ed., p. 22.

This event, which is also where we first meet Willie Stark, has been caused by another event: Judge Irwin's endorsement of a political rival of Willie's. In essence, what is happening, structurally, is that each event in the novel has had a natural catalyst, and this catalyst has, of course, preceded the event. In order to understand the event, we must go backward to understand the catalyst. However, Warren does not allow us to travel backward all at once. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the characters of the novel and their problems: the tension between Willie and his wife, Lucy; Willie's early political career; Willie's conflict with Judge Irwin; Willie's command to Jack to dig up the dirt on Irwin; Jack's conflict with his mother, Anne Stanton, and Judge Irwin. In addition, Chapter 1 tells us of the deaths of the Judge, Willie Stark, and Adam Stanton. Thus, we know that tremendous problems have existed in this world and that these problems have resulted in the deaths of several people. Through each subsequent chapter, then, Warren allows us to be students of history just as Jack Burden is. We discover that every action has its source; by digging back through the past with Jack, we further discover what these sources are.

Next, Chapter 2 elaborates on Willie's early political career and his attempts at running for governor. We also see how Jack became involved with Willie, and then, other pieces of Jack's life are uncovered--but not completely. We know that there is more to discover about Jack's world and suspect that eventually we will see all. As the chapters move on, Willie's role becomes less obtrusive. Chapter 3 delineates Jack's relationship with his mother and Anne Stanton.

Willie is still in the picture, though, as we learn of his adulterous affairs, after he has become governor.

However, it is the fourth chapter which contains the heart of the novel. Returning to Willie's command in Chapter 1 that he find out the goods on Judge Irwin, Jack recounts, in Chapter 4, an earlier historical search--the Cass Mastern story. From here, we undertake a relentless excursion into the past. We discover the century-old tale of Cass Mastern, a distant relative of Jack's. We further realize that since this story comprises a whole chapter, its significance is immense. Do we really understand Cass's "Spider-web theory" though? At this time we fail to see its direct relation to Jack's life; this understanding is reserved for a later chapter. Moving into Chapter 5, we view Jack's second historical quest: "The Case of the Upright Judge." We also find out more about Jack's "father," Ellis Burden. Chapter 6 returns to 1937, discussing, mainly, Adam Stanton and his righteous morality. But more importantly, this chapter introduces a new twist: Anne Stanton's affair with Willie Stark. This surprise ends the events of Chapter 6, and immediately launches us, in Chapter 7, to a flashback to Jack's younger days, when he first fell in love with Anne. Now, we have almost hit bottom. We see how and why Jack fell in love with Anne; what happened to prevent them from marrying; how they have ended up in the roles they now have to play--he, a political hatchet man for Willie Stark; she, an aging maid, working for charitable causes and keeping Willie warm on occasional cold nights.

Finally, Chapters 8, 9, and 10 return us to a more natural order. We partake of the events leading up to the final crisis of

three deaths. We further discover that the "history" of this novel does not merely go back to Jack's love for Anne, but instead, back to Judge Irwin's affair with Jack's mother: the affair which produced Jack himself. In all of this, what happens to Willie Stark becomes secondary; Jack is the primary focus and this is manifest in Jack's relation to Willie. As Jack himself says, "They say you are not you except in terms of relation to other people. If there were not any other people there wouldn't be any you because what you do, which is what you are, only has meaning in relation to other people" (Warren, p. 128). To be sure, all of the discoveries in the novel have come from Willie and his orders. His directions for Jack to find out the dirt on the Judge, his seduction of Anne Stanton, and the world of his politics have all caused Jack Burden to find out about and re-evaluate his own life. Jack's life is virtually meaningless until Willie acts as catalyst to his historical quests. These quests, even though they bring destruction to some of the people that Jack most dearly loves, serve in the end to help Jack understand his own past, accept it, and continue on in the present and future. And by structuring the novel in this fashion, Warren forces us to discover the past as Jack discovered it--piece by piece. Each chapter, as it furthers the events of the novel, also delves backward to explain these events, so that ultimately we can fully comprehend the novel's present. In the end, Jack's past is really explored; his present is maintained. All the King's Men does not devote entire chapters to Willie. Thus, in the final chapter we return to Jack's present, 1939, which is devoid of Judge Irwin, Adam Stanton, and Willie Stark.

Another stylistic device that reinforces the premise that the novel is Jack's story is Warren's frequent use of digression. The digressions deal with such diverse topics as the nature of love; the "crib section" of town; a woman's figure that Jack once viewed from a train; parental love; and this one, concerning "the Friend of Your Youth":

The Friend of your Youth is the only friend you will ever have, for he does not really see you. He sees in his mind a face which does not exist any more, speaks a name--Spike, Bud, Snip, Red, Rusty, Jack, Dave--which belongs to that now nonexistent face, but which by some inane and doddering confusion of the universe is for the moment attached to a not too happily met and boring stranger. But he humors the drooling doddering confusion of the universe and continues to address politely that dull stranger by the name which properly belongs to the boy face and the time when the boy voice called thinly across the late afternoon water or murmured by a campfire at night or in the middle of a crowded street said, "Gee, listen to this--On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble; His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves--" the Friend of Your Youth is your friend because he does not see you any more (Warren, p. 234).

The feelings in this passage, which have been aroused by a sudden pang of remorse as Jack visits Adam one evening, serve two purposes. First, they vividly and accurately depict the feelings that most people, either consciously or unconsciously, possess, especially upon seeing an old friend. We relate to Jack's experience because we know of what he speaks. Secondly, Jack utters these words; our realization of this cannot help but link us mentally with him. And more importantly, our empathy with Jack is further reinforced by virtue of the fact that the novel is told from his first person point of view. We see events happening as the first person narrator, Jack, perceives them; we only enter Jack's mind through these digressions.

Throughout the novel, Jack's feelings and opinions, plus his reporting of events, are always at the forefront of Warren's and our mind because of the ever-intruding sense of "I." Jack comments that "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" (Warren, p. 435). This establishes that the story was more Jack's than Willie's, for it is the "I" of Jack's story that in the end overrides the third person story of Willie.

Perhaps a more deceptive piece of evidence which supports the notion that Jack is the novel's focal point, is the battle waged in the novel between the old, conservative guard of the state and the younger, poorer populist movement. By deceptive, I mean that at first glance, this point would seem to suggest that Willie is the novel's focus. After all, when he first runs for the office of County Treasurer in Mason County, he is already bucking the established order. Willie loses this election, but his loss is only momentary, for the greed and corruption of the entrenched political machine of Mason County digs too formidable a grave for itself. By throwing the bid for a new schoolhouse to an even more corrupt bricklayer, the political bosses of Mason County helped resurrect and boost Willie's own career. When the schoolhouse collapsed, because it had been made from rotten brick, several children were killed, and this tragedy provided the impetus for Willie's rekindled political spirit. Again underestimating Willie, the political manipulators of the state set him up in the gubernatorial election of 1926. Through the uncharacteristic indiscretion of Sadie

Burke, Willie learns of the plot against him, and after a drunken binge, throttles the Harrison boys, who until this time had run the state. Although he has no chance of winning this election, Willie returns in 1930 to win the governor's seat by a landslide. His strongest support in the political coup came from the "red-necks" and hill people, not from the old order of "conservative aristocracy." Even after Willie became governor, his coalition comprised these same "red-necks" plus those of the old order who wanted political favors and who were just plain scared of "the Boss"--Tiny Duffy, for instance.

Willie, though, never wins over the mainstays of the old guard: the Hugh Millers and those of Burden's Landing, Judge Irwin in particular. And this is where Jack Burden comes in. Willie, admittedly, is one of the rednecks; he has chosen a side, by birth actually, and on this side he will remain till death, building highways, schools, and hospitals for the free use of the common people. There is no dilemma here for Willie. But for Jack, the dilemma is of immense proportions, because Jack is attempting to bridge the division of order in the state, which Jerome Meckier states is "synonymous with the burden of the modern south, a south in which the descendants of Governor Stanton and men like Judge Irwin seem indefinitely separated from Willie Stark and the people who support him."²⁰

From the time of his college career on, Jack has rejected the way of life at Burden's Landing. He refuses his mother's money; he drifts aimlessly from one course of study to another, from career to

²⁰Meckier, p. 59.

career. He repeatedly refuses to allow his mother, his stepfather Theodore, or even Judge Irwin to help him obtain a "real job." He even rebels against Anne Stanton's desire that he "do something" with his life. Finally, though, while he is working as a reporter, he latches on to "the Boss"--Willie Stark. His world becomes even more divided than before, for every time he returns to Burden's Landing he is asked by his mother and the rest of the community why he works for "that man." This question haunts us as well as Jack throughout the novel. Why does Jack work for Willie, putting up with the dirty politics, seeing Willie's brutality toward the people around him, especially Lucy Stark? To answer this question, Louis Rubin offers a theory, which implies that Jack's admiration for Willie was derived from the fact that Jack saw Willie as a man who could and would act:

What was missing in Jack's life (the life at Burden's Landing) was any sense of purposeness, any feeling of engagement. In turning to Willie, Jack has sought the "real world," rejected the unreal, outdated attitudes of his class. Willie at least professes ideals that mean something for his time; Willie can act to rectify the evils in his society. Willie is living in the present, not in the past.²¹

And as Jack states as he speaks to his mother and her friends from the Landing:

Doesn't it all boil down to this? If the government of this state for quite a long time back had been doing anything for the folks in it, would Stark have been able to get out there with his bare hands and bust the boys? And would he be having to make up so many short cuts to

²¹Rubin, Writers of the Modern South, pp. 118-119.

get something done to make up for the time lost all these years in not getting something done?*" (Warren, p. 125).

So Jack knew that in order to understand himself, his past, and his future, he had to break away from the world of Burden's Landing: the world of his mother, of Judge Irwin, and of Anne and Adam Stanton. His choice was difficult, and the ramifications of his choice brought tragedy. However, he had to learn for himself, and through Willie his learning took place.

As we have indicated earlier, Willie acts as a catalyst between the rest of the characters of the novel and Jack. He is the reason that Jack must undertake the "historical research" on Judge Irwin, which in turn leads to several events: Jack's discovery that the Judge was his father, the Judge's own death, and Jack's renewed acceptance of his parentage. Furthermore, Willie's affair with Anne propels Jack into an analysis of his own feelings for Anne. Finally, Willie, by wanting to build the world's finest hospital, brings Jack's old friend, Adam Stanton, into the picture, which ultimately stages the double

*This quotation echoed Warren's own feelings about the government of Huey Long in his essay, "The Matrix of Experience." As Warren explains, the type of student who attended public school in Louisiana was for the most part, the same as students everywhere--they were all there to receive "just enough of whatever was required to get them past their minimal exams." But as Warren also relates, from time to time, a "Cajun" boy would come along from some "scrabble-farm in North Louisiana, with burning ambition and frightening energy and a thirst for learning." As Warren points out, Long's being there was entirely attributed to Huey Long alone, "For the 'better element' had done next to nothing in 50 years to get that boy out of the grim despair of his ignorance." As in the novel, Warren states that if the government of the state had not been marked by corruption and complacency of the rich, the "good families, there would never have been a Huey Long."

murders at the close of Chapter 9. Louis Rubin is accurate in arguing that "it is Jack Burden to whom the central experience of the novel occurs," and that "the chief figure in that experience is Willie Stark."²² In another essay, Rubin goes on to say that "The figure of Willie Stark [is not] the ultimate object of the novel's meaning; instead it becomes the cause of the action, upon which all of the various planes of the characters' individual existences are focused, thus giving a unity and a progression to the multitudinous scene about it."²³ What, then, specifically, does Jack learn from and about this man--Cousin Willie, "the Boss"--whom he worked for and struggled against for so many years?

The interrelatedness that we've been alluding to is tied up in Jack's first historical search: the case and history of Cass Mastern. This case began as Jack's doctoral dissertation; he was to edit the journal of a 19th century ancestor--Cass Mastern. In Jack's view, though, this search was not successful, "because in the midst of the process I tried to discover the truth and not the facts. Then, when the truth was not to be discovered, or discovered could not be understood by me, I could not bear to live with the cold-eyed reproach of the facts" (Warren, p. 157). Ultimately Jack abandoned his research and his Ph.D. Warren comments on this in an interview:

²²Ibid., p. 107.

²³Louis D. Rubin, "Huey Long in Fiction," in Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men: A Critical Handbook, ed. Maurice Beebe and Leslie A. Field (California: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1969), p. 35.

The question about his peculiar researches is simply this. Being a very badly disorganized young fellow, he really didn't want the Ph.D. anyway. He stumbled on his family history, involving a character in his family, a couple of generations back, who had devoted his life to trying to find a moral position for himself. And this young man, without any moral orientation at all that I could figure out didn't want his Ph.D. and he didn't know what to do with himself. He didn't know his mother, he didn't know his father, and so forth. At first he couldn't face the fact that in his own blood there was a man who had faced up to a moral problem in a deep way. He couldn't follow it through, could not bear to face the comparison to the other young man, then, he couldn't face the truth otherwise, without the price of research.²⁴

What was the truth Cass Mastern faced? Cass was attending Transylvania College in Kentucky when he became friends with a man named Duncan Trice and his wife Annabelle. Their friendship endured for approximately a year until Cass and Annabelle's mutual desire for each other exploded into spasms of adultery. They kept their meetings clandestine for many months, but inevitably Duncan discovered their secret. Instead of killing them, though, or even seeking divorce, Duncan killed himself. He left a sign--his wedding ring--underneath Annabelle's pillow, however, to tell her that his death was planned, not an accident as everyone first believed. His was a suicide of despair. Unfortunately, Annabelle was not the first one to discover the ring; her waiting maid, Phebe, found it, and from that time on, Annabelle lived in ever-mounting fear that all of the servants, and eventually everyone else, would know the truth of the sordid web she and Cass had woven. So she sold Phebe; however, more problems arose. Upon telling Cass of her action, she also disclosed the fact that Phebe

²⁴Floyd Watkins and John T. Hiers, ed., Robert Penn Warren Talking (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 99.

had a husband who lived on another plantation. By selling Phebe, then, Annabelle callously separated Phebe from her husband.

Cass, who was devastated by this series of events, attempted to retrieve Phebe and reunite her with her husband, but his attempts failed. As a result, he lost one friend, one lover (for Annabelle refused him after this last act), and his own self-respect. He blamed it all on himself. His sinful act of adultery, which caused so much harm to others, is translated into the Spider-web theory of existence by Jack Burden:

Cass Mastern lived for a few years and in that time he learned that the world is all of one piece. He learned 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 but springs out to fling the gossamer coils about you who have touched the web and then inject the black, numbing poison under your hide. 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 and there is the spider, bearded black and with his great faceted eyes glittering like mirrors in the sun, or like God's eye, and the fangs dripping (Warren, p. 188).

"The lesson of the Cass Mastern story," writes Louis Rubin, "is that wholeness embodies the acceptance of evil and guilt, and it is wholeness that Jack Burden finally learns to seek."²⁵ And, "for Jack, living becomes not an involvement with lust and slavery, as it had been for Cass Mastern, but an involvement with Willie Stark."²⁶ The Spider-web theory of Cass Mastern, then, permeates the entire novel, for as we

²⁵Rubin, "Huey Long in Fiction," p. 36.

²⁶James F. Light, "Structure, Meaning, and Technique in All the King's Men," Light, ed., p. 82.

shall see, all of the events of the novel are a "whole," are of the same web and were all triggered by the "remotest" of vibrations. The reality is that the characters in the novel all acted in a certain way, and thus, the results of their actions had to transpire as they did, whether they meant to touch the web or not.

As can best be determined, the silken threads of the spider web were woven in the following manner. Judge Irwin, between the years of 1910 and 1914, fell into dire financial straits. He was forced to mortgage his home, and he resorted to a marriage of convenience in an attempt to pay off his debts. Ironically, his wife, who he thought was financially independent, proved to be as destitute as he was. But shortly after their marriage, a more fruitful financial prospect came to light. The Judge, still wielding considerable political influence, was offered a socially and financially respected job as counsel for the American Electric Power Company, if, as judge, he would go easy on the Southern Belle Fuel Company, which at the time was fighting a lawsuit. The Judge agreed to this scheme, and in doing so, he was also made a vice-president of the electric company. This act, however, maneuvered another employee, Mortimer L. Littlepaugh, out of the vice-president's job which he deserved. Littlepaugh, betrayed and despondent, exhausted every resource available to regain his proper status, and failing to do so, committed suicide. In the meantime, Judge Irwin prospered with his new wealth, paid off the mortgage on his house, and went on to engage in an illicit affair with the wife of his good friend, Ellis Burden--an affair which produced Jack Burden himself. This secret was kept between the two principal parties for some time; finally, though, Ellis

Burden somehow discerned the truth and walked out on his "family" to embark on a life of poverty and religious sacrifice.

Approximately twenty years later, Willie Stark asks Jack Burden to get the goods on Judge Irwin. And so the truth of the Judge's immoral actions forces the events in Jack's present world. Never dreaming what lay hidden on the shelf of the Judge's and his own closet, quietly waiting for the time when it would be dusted off and brought back into the light, Jack sets out on his mission. It took much digging, but eventually Jack found the truth of the Judge's affair with the electric company. Paralleling these events, Willie decides to build his glorious hospital; and to insure that it is the finest hospital around, he orders Jack to procure the services of Adam Stanton. Naturally, Adam, as an honest, hard working, dedicated physician, at first refuses to deal with the Boss. Jack brings him around by revealing to him, through Anne, the Judge's actions which had been covertly supported by Adam's father, Governor Stanton. This information enlightens Adam on the nature of the men and women around him. He can no longer view the world as purely black or white, good or evil, for those he thought pure and virtuous were in reality very much tainted. Thus he accepts Willie's offer on the condition that he be allowed a free hand in administering the needs and inner workings of the hospital.

Shortly thereafter, Jack, who is disturbed by Anne's knowledge of the hospital plan--he never told her and wonders who did--learns through Sadie that Anne has become Willie's mistress. From here, Jack's mind wanders back to the years of his late teens, when he first

discovered that he loved Anne. As with the intricacies of Judge Irwin's immoral acts, this love affair between Jack and Anne, throughout its series of hopes and disappointments and especially in its ultimate disintegration, definitely altered the course of their lives, once again as Cass Mastern's single act of adultery altered his. The summer of Jack's twenty-first year, when Anne was seventeen, was the culmination of their togetherness. Physically, they went pretty far; however, they never approached the climax of their love until one day shortly before Anne left the Landing to go off to school. On that day, Jack and Anne were left alone in his house. Silently, they ascended the stairs to his bedroom, and proceeded to undress. Anne let him undo and take off her clothes, and slowly, as he was doing so, she closed her eyes:

And at that instant when she closed her eyes, as I stared at her, my mind took one of those crazy leaps and I saw her floating in the water, that day of the picnic three years before, with her eyes closed and the violent sky above and the white gull flashing high over, and that face and this face and that scene and this scene seemed to fuse, like superimposed photographs, each keeping its identity but without denying the other. And at that instant, as I stood there with the constriction in my throat that made me swallow hard and with my body tumescent, I looked at her there on the iron bed, then looked suddenly around the big, bare, shadowy room and heard the gusty rain and knew that everything was wrong, completely wrong, how I didn't know, didn't try to know, and that this was somehow not what the summer had been driving toward (Warren, p. 295).

So for the time being, their love was unconsummated. Actually it was a lucky thing that Jack halted his rush of physical desire, for just when he and Anne would have been physically united, Jack's mother and a host of her friends unexpectedly arrived, and thus there would have been a

most embarrassing scene. If Jack and Anne had been caught in bed together, then as Jack says:

My mother and Governor Stanton would have set us up in matrimony, even if grimly and grudgingly. And then whatever else might have happened, the thing that happened to send me west [the knowledge of Willie and Anne's affair] would never have happened. So, I observed, my nobility (or whatever it was) had had in my world as dire a consequence as Cass Mastern's sin had had in his (Warren, p. 297).

This event, their failure to make love, triggered another strand of web for from this point, their love evaporated, and as Beekman W. Cottrell believes, the termination of this affair led to Jack's endeavor into historical research, which in turn led to his discovery of the Cass Mastern papers and the associated Spider-web theory itself. Furthermore, their failure to marry paved the way for Anne's later affair with Willie, which as we will see, was the final touch that sparked Adam Stanton's murder of Willie.²⁷

Jack's nobility, though, had even more profound consequences. A paternity suit against Tom Stark, perpetuated by a political enemy of Willie's, causes the Boss to put the heat on Jack again to pressure Judge Irwin, for the Judge is backing the Boss's enemy. So Jack, unwillingly, but nevertheless with a strange curiosity, confronts the Judge with his past misdeeds in the electric company fraud. Judge Irwin, never one to be intimidated, summons up this dark memory, acknowledges his wrong, but refuses to give in to the Boss. For Judge Irwin has another out. He knows that he can stop Jack from telling the

²⁷Beekman W. Cottrell, "Cass Mastern and the Awful Responsibility of Time," Chambers, ed., pp. 116-17.

Boss about the scandal in one of two ways: first, he could reveal Jack's true parentage, knowing that Jack would never "turn-in" his own father. The Judge, though, is no longer an under-handed man. Instead of this course, he opts for the other: suicide. His death, then, puts an end to one problem; however, as Jack soon discovers, it opens the door for another. Upon learning of Judge Irwin's death, through Jack's mother's "silvery scream," Jack finally learns who his real father is. This knowledge, of course, causes Jack to view his mother in a different, and ironically, a better light. He now sees her as a woman capable of love, as she explains the entire situation to him. Her love for the Judge, it turns out, was ever-constant, despite the fact that they could never be joined as husband and wife.

Now we come to the last few strands of the web. Tom Stark (ever the integral catalyst), while playing football for the State University, receives a bone-jarring blow and must be carried off the field. His injury is so serious that Adam Stanton and a specialist from Baltimore are barely able to save his life. Even in saving Tom's life, they are unable to prevent the boy from being permanently paralyzed from the neck down. This momentous and tragic accident changes Willie; he reneges on a contract to a man named Gummy Larsen for the construction of the hospital. Larsen, a political bedfellow of the Boss's enemy, MacMurfee, and a corrupt cohort of Tiny Duffy, the Boss's Lieutenant Governor, is pushed aside. Duffy, who was to receive a kickback from this deal, decides, through the urging of Sadie Burke, who herself has been dumped by Willie, to dabble in his own brand of mischief. He calls Adam Stanton--a mysterious voice in the night--and

reveals Willie and Anne's affair to Adam. Enraged, Adam confronts Anne, calls her a whore, and sets off to meet his destiny, which is a final confrontation with Willie Stark.

While this is transpiring, Anne calls Jack and pleads with him to find and stop Adam. Jack searches without success and winds up at the capitol with the Boss. As they are walking down a hallway, they see Adam waiting in the wings of the main foyer. Before Jack can assimilate the reality of Adam's presence, the latter whips out a gun, shoots Willie, and in turn is shot by Sugar Boy. Both Adam and Willie die of their wounds. At the novel's end, Jack marries Anne, and they leave this tragic part of their lives behind to venture out into "the awful responsibility of Time" (Warren, p. 438). Thus, the web is complete.

There is, however, one more incident to relate. Jack faces the choice of touching a new web, of sending more tremors up and down a different web, for as he learns of Tiny Duffy's complicity in the affair, he plots revenge on Duffy. And it would have been so easy! Meeting Sugar Boy several months after Willie's death, Jack comes terribly close to revealing Duffy's act to Sugar Boy. Jack knows that Sugar Boy's loyalty to the Boss would necessitate his revenge on Duffy. But there has been enough killing, enough useless bloodshed, so Jack withholds this last bit of information. He sees the web before he touches it, and he pulls back his foot. For Jack has learned a great deal from the tragedy that has surrounded his life. To touch the web now would permanently relegate Jack into the ranks of Tiny Duffy and

all those like him--ranks which Jack has played in and finally escaped from.

Charles Kaplan, in an essay entitled "Jack Burden, Modern Ishmael," asserts that Jack

acknowledges the presence of ugliness and evil in the universe but insists on his own separateness and aloofness from them. He does not shrink from evil, but he refuses to see that in order to be human he must acknowledge the evil and guilt within himself. Like Cass Mastern, he eventually learns that man cannot escape guilt, even an unintended guilt.²⁸

Jack does see his own guilt in the end: the guilt of refusing to accept his mother, to realize as Anne Stanton has warned him early in the novel that he has no idea "what made them (his mother and Ellis Burden) do what they did." Jack replies, "I know the truth. I know what my mother is like. And I know my father was a fool to let her get him down" (Warren, p. 106). But Jack does not know; only much later in the novel does he discover the truth about his mother--that she was capable of love; about Ellis Burden--that he had a good reason for leaving them: betrayal; and about Judge Irwin--that he was in truth Jack's natural father. Jack's guilt was one of condemnation without hard evidence to support his strong beliefs. As a supposed student of history, Jack Burden was particularly blind to many facets of his own history. Also, as James F. Light reports, Jack's association with Willie Stark causes Jack to learn of the nature of humankind. Willie's actions and the judge's actions teach Jack that there are men

²⁸Charles Kaplan, "Jack Burden, Modern Ishmael," Light, ed., p. 38.

in this world who do good, men who do bad, and more importantly, men who do both, and who gain respect in spite of the bad.²⁹

Willie Stark certainly embodies a man who does both good and bad. Through his efforts, the poor people of the state made gains. Willie promised the people that:

. . . it is your right that every child shall have a complete education. That no person aged and infirm shall want or beg for bread. That the man that produces something shall be able to carry it to market without miring to the hub, without toll. That no poor man's house or land shall be taxed. That the rich man and the great companies that draw wealth from this state shall pay this state a fair share. That you shall not be deprived of hope (Warren, p. 261).

On many of these promises, Willie comes through. He builds new roads and schools, starts a new hospital, and taxes the rich boys.

However, just as he does good, so he does evil. Willie treats his family and associates with sheer contempt on most occasions. He remains married to Lucy for convenience, so that his constituency will believe he is a sincere family man. Yet, he runs around with tinselled ice-skaters. He even keeps Sadie Burke, his first mistress, on the ropes, not two-timing her as Jack says, but actually using a different formula. He ensnares Anne Stanton, and even has thoughts of dumping Lucy for Anne. Willie also allows his son, Tom, to become a spoiled, reckless young man, who gets girls into trouble in car accidents and in the bed. Willie breaks men who rival his authority; he crushes the life out of so many of them until he crushes once too often. As Jack says, Willie fails to see men like Byram White and Tiny Duffy as

²⁹Light, p. 82.

human beings, and ultimately, in Tiny's case, he pays dearly for his callousness.

Perhaps these men deserved harsh treatment; perhaps toward the novel's end, Willie realizes that he must play fair. It appears that Tom's paralysis forces Willie back to reality. He refuses to play Gummy Larsen's and Tiny Duffy's game concerning the contract for the hospital, for as he said to Jack after he threw Duffy out, "You got to start somewhere" (Warren, p. 387), and as he reports to Jack on his deathbed, "it might have all been different. . . . You got to believe that" (Warren, p. 400). Jack does believe Willie, and we do, too. Norton R. Girault believes that neither Willie's constituency nor Jack himself ever understood the Boss: "Jack Burden cannot understand Willie Stark until Jack understands himself."³⁰ Late in the novel, Anne tells Jack that he has known Willie all these years and yet has not really known him at all (Warren, p. 325). On the next page, this statement carries Jack to the realization that he had been too close to Willie for "too long." All he saw was "Cousin Willie" from the country; never did he see Willie Stark, political giant. But in the end, after he discovers the facts about himself--his heritage--he is able to understand Willie too, that Willie was not purely good or evil, which is the same discovery that Adam Stanton made about his father and Judge Irwin.

The knowledge that the world is not composed of purely good or purely evil people held true for the other people in Jack's life also; Anne Stanton, who commits adultery; Judge Irwin, who commits adultery

³⁰Norton R. Girault, "The Narrator's Mind as Symbol: An Analysis of All the King's Men," Chambers, ed., pp. 29-38.

and takes a monetary bribe which drives another man to suicide. These acts, when taken out of context, are purely evil. Yet, when they are woven into the intricate, complete web of being, they take on "shades of both good and evil."³¹ Finally, Jack learns a proper respect for his mother, in light of the fact that her life, too, has been filled with disappointment, pain, and a love that she could never openly acknowledge. Thus:

By lying [to his mother about the Judge's suicide] Jack shows that he has found the compassion which he previously lacked. That quality, that forgiveness for man's frailty, can make him realize that possibly those upright men who pretend to be unstained by sin are not as noble as they might wish, while those human beings--Willie Stark, Anne Stanton, Judge Irwin, even tiny Duffy--who have been soiled by sin, are still his brothers and worthy of love.³²

Furthermore, as James Ruoff states, "In the end based on his acts of lying to his mother about Irwin's suicide, and not telling Sugar Boy about Tiny Duffy," Jack has "come to see the brotherhood of man and the universality of guilt which he had seen but not completely understood in the Cass Mastern story."³³

Jerome Meckier superimposes the Cass Mastern story onto Jack's story by saying:

It is the theory of life as a spider web, an idea formulated in Cass Mastern's journals and emphasizing responsibility that demolishes most of Jack's other speculations and that gradually reveals itself as the structural principle underlying All the King's Men.

³¹James Ruoff, "Humpty Dumpty and All the King's Men," Light, ed., p. 108.

³²Light, p. 82.

³³Ruoff, p. 112.

Jack has been in search of a framework for experience, and, as he finds it, the novel itself, as narrated by Jack, seems to share in the realization. Cass's story is the spider web just as Jack's is. It is only after he has resurrected Judge Irwin's past, indirectly forced the Judge to suicide, and learned from his mother that Irwin is his real father, that the truth of Cass's spider web theory becomes irrefutable.³⁴

Thus Jack recognizes the "world-is-all-of-one-piece-theory" and can put all the pieces together, thereby telling Willie's story as well as his own. He can accept the past and present and through this acceptance, we, in turn, can accept the novel with its division,³⁵ a division between the two main characters that Richard King feels was "never satisfactorily worked out."³⁶

But it was worked out, because Jack has learned through his associations with Willie, Judge Irwin, Adam and Anne Stanton, and even his mother, of the nature of the world. Willie is not the focus of the novel; rather, he is the chief instrument of Jack's knowledge, a knowledge that is best summed up first by Louis Rubin and then by Cleanth Brooks:

. . . in the agony of his real father's suicide, which he had caused, and Willie Stark's and Adam Stanton's deaths, which in a sense he had also caused, Jack learns that honor and love are not false qualities, that expediency and rationalization are not sufficient excuse for one's actions, that human beings must accept full moral responsibility for their own conduct, and that it is not enough to subordinate one's own sense of justice and honor to the demands of any external principle of long-range, expedient good. He is

³⁴Meckier, p. 67.

³⁵Ibid., p. 68.

³⁶King, p. 240.

responsible; he must be the judge of his own morality and conduct. Only now [at the novel's end] can he understand what had baffled him before, the meaning for the conduct of Cass Mastern, his Civil War ancestor, who had faced up to his individual guilt.³⁷

The necessity for accepting the past is the dominant theme of All the King's Men. The task of making sense of history is the specific problem of its hero, Jack Burden. What Jack Burden was then [when he initially worked on the Cass Mastern story, not understanding its full implications], and how he later became something different, constitute the matter of the novel.³⁸

All the King's Men is Jack's novel because as Brooks says, he does "accept the past," and he will continue to live in the future. He has lived through the reign of Willie Stark and has synthesized the knowledge he gathered from that world with the knowledge he gained through his historical research into the Cass Mastern story, plus the dark secrets of his own heritage. And this synthesis has taught him that not only can good come out of evil or that evil can come out of good, but that the important lesson of this knowledge is that, unfortunately, the two are forever intertwined, like the silken threads of a spider's web.

³⁷Rubin, Writers of the Modern South, p. 122.

³⁸Brooks, pp. 20-21.

CHAPTER 3

ALL THE KING'S MEN: ROBERT ROSSEN AND THE FILM

The most significant thing Hollywood "did to" the book in preparing a movie script was to subordinate the role of Jack Burden. Burden is all but a supernumerary character in the film, largely the ghostly voice of the narrator offstage, now and again fitted with a form and a face to appear briefly as one of the crowd around Willie Stark. In short, the movie-makers cut short the length of the work neatly in half, reducing it to a straightforward story of Willie Stark as a man of action, indeed to what the cover blurb of one edition calls it: "the world-famous American novel of power and corruption, and the meteoric rise and fall of Willie Stark--politician." But in so doing, they accomplished something really impossible. For without Jack Burden, Willie is not the same man.¹

The quotation above raises several complex questions about Robert Rossen's film adaptation of All the King's Men. In the first place, the author of that passage was right; Willie Stark is not the "same man" in the film as he was in the novel. As was explained in Chapter 1, these two works are separate entities, written by two different artists; therefore, it is unrealistic to expect that Rossen's characters would strictly conform to their counterparts in Robert Penn Warren's work. Rossen held many ideas and values different from Warren's, and these ideas and values are apparent in his film. Specifically, his "Willie Stark" is unequivocally an American fascist.

¹John Edward Hardy, "The Dialectic of Self," in Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men: A Critical Handbook, ed. Maurice Beebe and Leslie A. Field (California: Wadsworth Pub., 1969), p. 161.

He rules his state and all the people composing it with an iron hand. He is demanding, brutal, and stubborn, but for a purpose. As the remainder of this chapter will show, Willie Stark is portrayed exactly as Rossen meant him to be, for Rossen wished to show the evils of Fascism along with the potential for man to misuse the powers of good and turn them into the powers of evil. To understand how Rossen reached this point in his filmmaking, we must first get a general idea of his background and of the climate of Hollywood in the 1930's and 1940's. Once this is done, then we can take a closer look at the film itself to see how, through narrative and style, Rossen's anti-fascist views were made manifest in his work.

The first stop on our journey back into time is the year of the film's release, 1949, so that we can get a feel for the importance of the film on a critical level. Generally, the film was highly praised by its contemporary critics. In fact, the measure of its success can be weighed by the sheer volume of awards it won. Among these awards was the Academy Award for Best Film, Best Actor (Broderick Crawford), Best Supporting Actress (Mercedes McCambridge), the Look Achievement Award for best screenwriting, the Screen Director's Guild Award for Best Director, and the Foreign Language Press Film Critic's Circle Award for best film, screenwriting, direction, and production. Moreover, the reviews of the film from virtually all of the respected newspapers and magazines were highly favorable, and this was due first of all to the brilliant acting of Crawford, but more significantly to the film's anti-fascist themes. Naturally, an anti-fascist sentiment prevailed among Western critics, and the general public too, in the

late 1940's, for Nazi Germany had only recently been defeated in World War II, and the spectra of Hitler's fascism was still fresh in most people's minds. Additionally, authoritarianism was becoming increasingly evident in America's World War II Ally, Russia, as its Premier, Joseph Stalin, was imposing a new reign of terror on an already beleaguered Eastern Europe. Consequently, the overthrow of Dictator Stark in Rossen's film brought feelings of deep satisfaction to the critics in the West and accounted for much of their praise and respect for the film. Fascism, they must have felt, would never be tolerated in the United States, and Rossen's film suitably exemplified this belief.

To get a more detailed idea of specific criticism of the film, let us examine the statements of Bosley Crowther, film critic for The New York Times. Crowther felt, first of all, that the film was "obviously based on the familiar rise and fall of the late Huey Long."² He went on to say that it "demonstrates a quality of turbulence and vitality" as it "bounces from raw-boned melodrama into dark psychological depths and thrashes around in those regions until it claws back to violence again."³ Furthermore, he added:

Mr. Rossen has assembled in this starkly unprettified film a piece of pictorial journalism that is remarkable for its brilliant parts. It clearly observes the beginnings of a Huey Long type of demagogue in an humble and honest lawyer fighting the "bosses" in a

²Bosley Crowther, "All the King's Men, Columbia Film Based on the Novel by Warren," The New York Times, 9 Nov. 1949, sec. 37, p. 2.

³Ibid.

sleepy dirt-road town. It follows this disillusioned fellow as he gets the hang of politics and discovers the strange intoxication of his own unprincipled charm. And it wallows with him in egoism, corruption, and dictatorial power until he is finally shot down by an assassin when his triumphs appear uncontrolled. Mr. Rossen, as director, has pictured all of these things stunningly. His final episode of personal violence and mob hysteria is superb for savagery.⁴

So it seems that Crowther certainly enjoyed the political issues that the film dealt with; however, upon the specifics of character development, Crowther was less enthusiastic. Noting that All the King's Men was entirely lacking in "consistency of dramatic structure--or of character revelation," he added:

. . . in [Rossen's] parallel endeavors to transfer from Mr. Warren's book some real understanding of the character, he has met with much less success. In fact, the whole middle section of the film, which is deeply concerned with the brutal impact of the fellow [Stark] upon his wife, son, mistresses and friends, is a heavy confusion of dense dramatics that is saved from being downright dull only by the variety and vigor of its pictorial detail.⁵

Crowther further noted that while Broderick Crawford's performance was outstanding--full of vitality--the others in the cast were less than adequate because of the "unresolved roles they play." While that criticism was specifically directed at Joanne Dru (Anne Stanton) and John Ireland (Jack Burden), two minor characters--Will Wright as "Dolph Pillsbury" and Ralph Dunke as "Tiny Duffy"--were praised for being "as genuine as pot-bellied stoves."⁶ Later in this chapter, we

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

will explore more fully Crowther's criticism of character and of the acting styles of the film's cast. First, however, let us examine more closely those elements in Rossen's life and the world around him which rendered the anti-fascist thrust to the film.

The film's anti-fascism was rooted in Rossen's own background and political beliefs. His career embodied 30 years of work as a director, screenwriter, and producer, and he worked within and extended the boundaries of "social realism" in his films.⁷ Born Robert Rosen on March 16, 1908, in an impoverished Jewish street section of New York's East side, Rossen grew up in a neighborhood blended with a variety of ethnic groups--Jews, Poles, Italians, Germans, and Irish. In this setting, fighting became a way of life for virtually all the children who grew from infants to adolescents within its confines.⁸ Thus, from an early age, Rossen knew and had to overcome social adversity, while still attempting to discover his own professional and intellectual worth. Although his family was considered "impoverished," Rossen still managed to educate himself at New York University. His early educational leanings were toward the theatre, and he later joined the Washington Square Theatre and other "left-of-center theatre groups" influenced by the leftist political atmosphere in New York intellectual circles after the Sacco-Vanzetti execution and the Stock Market crash.⁹

⁷Alan Casty, The Films of Robert Rossen (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1969), p. 1.

⁸Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁹Richard Kozarski, Hollywood Directors 1941-1976 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 47.

This experience, combined with his own Jewish heritage, led him to direct several anti-Nazi plays, chief among them, Birthright and Steel, which was influenced by the Worker's School and the Daily Worker, in 1932.¹⁰ Eventually, in 1936, Rossen found himself in Hollywood where his liberal leanings persuaded him to join the Communist Party.¹¹ This decision was not uncommon for young, liberal, Hollywood writers in the 1930's, for the political climate of the times was shifting as rapidly as do clouds on a windy March day. According to Richard Pells,

To many writers, the Communist Party was much more than a political movement; its psychological and cultural advantages usually had greater appeal than its ideology. The communists boasted an array of activities that no other radical organization could match. It offered writers a chance to participate in a purposeful, forward-looking, positive enterprise in stark contrast to the years they had spent as isolated and negative critics of "American life."¹²

By 1935, the political situation in Europe had reached such a feverish pitch, with Hitler and Mussolini constantly threatening lesser powers, that the Communist Party leaders of the Soviet Union, along with socialists, liberals, and other progressives from the United States and other Western countries, combined to form "The Popular Front." This movement stressed cooperation among virtually any ideology that opposed Fascism, and since the decade of the 1930's brought increasingly more suspicion and fear of the growing fascist threat, particularly to the peace and stability of Europe but also to

¹⁰Casty, pp. 4-5.

¹¹Kozarski, p. 47.

¹²Richard H. Pells, Radical Visions and American Dreams (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 168.

the rest of the world, many converts in the United States joined the Communist Party and its Popular Front. Of the Americans who joined the Communist Party and Popular Front, many were writers and other artists.*

One such writer who joined this movement was Robert Rossen. In citing his reasons for this decision in an interview, Rossen commented not only on the positive aspects of Russia, but also on the evident shortcomings of America. He called the era of the 1920's in America, one of "great cynicism and disillusionment."¹³ It seemed to him that this "disillusionment" affected the youth of America in that they felt that the American system had "failed" because "there weren't any more horizons; there weren't any more promises; we had pretty much reached the apex of a pretty materialistic society." Rossen further stated that "new horizons" were being looked for and that the Communist Party was the most effective means of reaching these horizons because "it offered every possible kind of thing to you at the time [the mid-1930's] which could fulfill your sense of idealism . . . anything that tended toward the realization of the inner man."¹⁴

Despite his membership in the Communist Party (and this is also true for many Americans involved in the Party during the 1930's), Rossen was never anti-American. He, and others like him, felt that the

*For a more detailed study of the Popular Front, see Richard Pells' book, Radical Visions and American Dreams, Ch. 7.

¹³Casty, p. 5.

¹⁴Ibid.

Communist Party offered hope, the hope that would stem the fascist tide and bring back the anti-materialist dreams that he thought were the essence of America. To this end, Russia, with its fervor over making the Popular Front work, embodied Rossen's hope. However, he was not so awestruck by Russia's promise that he was blind to the realities of Stalinism. In the Russian sense, Rossen was not a communist; he was a liberal activist who hoped to reinvigorate the common man with hope once again.

Rossen remained a member of the Communist Party until 1946,¹⁵ and the reasons for his abandonment of it were quite interesting, in the sense that the Soviet Union, which many American members of the Popular Front admired, entered a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany in August of 1939. Thus, the instigators of the anti-fascist Popular Front signed a non-aggression treaty with the most fearsome fascist country in the world, at a time when the independent countries of Europe would soon fall to Hitler one-by-one. However, as previously stated, Rossen remained a member of the Communist Party until 1946. If the Soviet Union's pact with fascist Germany was not enough to cause him to renounce his Communist Party ties, then what were his reasons for finally leaving the Party? As an answer to this question Rossen's disillusionment with and abandonment of the Communist Party was due to his "feeling that the Party was not interested in him, or any writer, as a writer." A writer, he said, developed 'this basic feeling that he

¹⁵Eric Bentley, ed., Thirty Years of Treason (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 790.

was being used and that the Party no longer cared in terms of his creative ability for growth."¹⁶ By the early 1940's, the Popular Front itself had collapsed under the double blow of Russia's non-aggression pact with Germany and Stalin's purges, which of course bore striking resemblance to Hitler's forced genocide of the Jews. These two blows, along with other suppressions of freedom in Russia, caused the liberal writers in America to begin "to discover a new respect and affection" for the "old-fashioned" virtues of liberalism--"the value," in the New Republic's words, "of free political expression for opposition under the forms of political democracy."¹⁷

Unfortunately, despite this reawakening to the virtues of "political democracy," many of the liberal artists of America faced dire consequences after World War II, when the political climate changed, from none other than the American government in the form of the House Un-American Activities Committee. And Robert Rossen was one of those unfortunate victims. Rossen's strongest beliefs were all anti-fascist, all against the power-crazed dictator of the likes of Hitler. These beliefs steered him to the Communist Party but could not hold him there. However, the damage had already been done. Jack L. Warner, of Warner Brothers Pictures, testifying before the HUAC in 1947, claimed that he had dismissed sixteen writers for alleged communist activity, among them Robert Rossen. Rossen, though, was not called at this time to appear before the committee, which inexplicably

¹⁶Casty, p. 5.

¹⁷Pells, pp. 305-309.

"interrupted its hearings after the exposure of the first ten witnesses"--the Hollywood Ten.¹⁸ On June 25, 1951 (four years after he had resigned from the Communist Party and had been first publicly accused before the HUAC), two years after the release of All the King's Men, Rossen was called in to testify before the HUAC, which was for a second time investigating the communist influence on Hollywood. Rossen had been accused again of communist ties, but as he stated, "I should like to emphatically state that I am not a member of the Communist Party. I am not sympathetic with it or its aims. . . . It opposes freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and it basically is against the dignity of the human individual." However, he was adamant against revealing any of his past ties and dealings with the Party. In 1953, after two years of inactivity in Hollywood, Rossen "requested" another hearing and explained "in full detail" his activities and disillusionment with the Party. He also revealed names of other Party members.¹⁹ After these events, he was then able to turn once again to filmmaking.

This discussion of Rossen's background, involving his association with the Communist Party, was constructed to show how his political beliefs were manifested in his films. Rossen's film career falls basically into two periods. The first period, dating up to 1944, encompasses such films as Dust Be My Destiny, which deals with "a young man of the slums in the Depression, driven by forces of the times to express his energies in the wrong direction"; The Roaring Twenties,

¹⁸Casty, p. 19.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 29.

dealing with "a young man who steps all over everybody as he rises to the top of the rackets, only to meet a final comeuppance"; plus The Sea Wolf, Out of the Fog, and Edge of Darkness, which all had anti-fascist overtones. These films portrayed a realistic view of society, with the lowerclass and even gangsters portrayed as victims, and the upper or middle class pictured as "destructive forces of society."²⁰ In the middle 1940's, though, Rossen's films took on a slightly different focus--"the destructive distortion of identity and of love arising from an obsessive devotion to money and power."²¹ These films, The Strange Love of Martha Ivers, Body and Soul, and All the King's Men, and later, Lilith and The Hustler, truly embodied Rossen's own beliefs of not only the evils of Fascism but also the potential corruption of power-mad capitalists. The dominant theme, however, in all of his work is the individual's search for and abuse of power, because "Rossen's seekers reach for power, for status and wealth, violence and domination, love twisted into violation--all the illusory symbols of the self."²² This search for power, to Rossen, is stimulated by the competitive mechanisms of capitalist society. The individual, as he seeks more power, becomes increasingly more competitive until he resorts to any means at his disposal to gain and maintain that power. As Rossen himself stated shortly before his death:

. . . the drive toward power never permits itself to be naked and always needs a rationale whether it's the

²⁰Ibid., pp. 6-8.

²¹Ibid., p. 3.

²²Ibid.

rationale of a schizophrenic or the rationale of a Willie Stark. Power is such a complex kind of subject, because you see, there are certain things in power that are very human and very right and very neat--the power, let's say, of a girl singer to get on the stage and hold an audience by sheer force of her personality or voice. That's power at a given moment and a given time, but that power is a good power, that power is a creative power, that power is an expression of human personality which is primarily what we are all after and don't have now--and why we are so bugged up.²³

This "complexity" of power helps us understand Rossen's attitude toward both Hitler and Willie Stark. Hitler, with all his immense power, had the capability of achieving many goals for Germany. He did build a vast system of highways; he did instill in the German people a tremendous pride for their country. But his motive for building such an intricate highway system was to enable him to deploy his troops with maximum rapidity and mobility; his reason for instilling pride in the German people was so that they would follow him into the proverbial fire, despite all odds. Rossen's Willie Stark also commanded immense power. He wanted to build new hospitals, roads, and schools, to save the people of the state from the corrupt political bosses who had previously controlled everything with an iron hand. And he did all of this. However, his quest for power, for control to accomplish his ends, led him to abuse and step on those family members, friends, and political associates who dared hurl the slightest obstacle in his path.

This problem is the essence of Robert Rossen's world and art. In his world view, as in his art, he is concerned with power gone awry,

²³Ibid.

of men with great potential who somehow become corrupted by the very means at their disposal for doing good. His characters are possessed "of a certain natural inner force," but they cannot name or recognize this force; nor can they control the power that goes with it:

For Rossen's young men, these illusory symbols of the self are those of power, status, wealth, violence, domination, love turned inside out into violation. When he most realized their plight, these men have been Americans--rootless or dispossessed socially--with a special elan and no way or place to fulfill it within the attractions and forces of their society. Within the society's corruption, the elan turns aggressive, perverse, destructive.²⁴

For Rossen, in order to meet this man within whom power has run amuck, there must come a saving force. Just as American democracy, despite its capitalistic practice, met and defeated fascist Germany, so did the young idealist in All the King's Men, Adam Stanton--representing American democratic values--defeat Willie Stark, the fascist dictator-gone-mad. Fascism, in any form, must and will be defeated in Rossen's world. And in All the King's Men it was. This is admittedly a surface look at the denouement of the film: corrupt dictator slain by idealistic young doctor. For a more complete view of the art of Robert Rossen, we will turn to the film, focusing on how both the narrative and the film style manipulate the audience into perceiving Willie Stark, and not Jack Burden, as the film's focal point.

The film of All the King's Men resembles the novel in many ways. The main characters of Willie Stark, Jack Burden, Anne and Adam Stanton, Sadie Burke, Lucy and Tom Stark, Judge Irwin, and Tiny Duffy are all

²⁴Ibid.

there. And the functions of all these characters are likewise similar. Willie is still the country hick who, tricked by the political bosses of the state, triumphs over them by first becoming governor without their help and then a virtual dictator of the state. Jack is still the aimless reporter from Burden's Landing who latches onto Willie's coat-tails and rides them out until the end. Anne remains the romantic figure, first for Jack and then Willie. Adam remains the idealistic doctor who, because his view of the world is changed for him, kills Willie and then is killed himself. Sadie is still Willie's secretary, mistress, and general tough guy. Likewise, Judge Irwin, Lucy, Tom, and Tiny Duffy play much the same role as they do in the novel.

Despite these parallel incidents, Rossen, by virtue of his dramatic license as writer and director, has altered the relationships between some of the characters. In the film, Anne and Adam are Judge Irwin's niece and nephew, not just old friends as in the novel. Furthermore, the film's Tom Stark is Willie's adopted son, not his real son as the novel has it. Of course, a detailed rundown of all the discrepancies between the two works would not be practical; there are, however, several other integral discrepancies between the film and the novel that will be discussed after we move into a segmentation of the film's narrative.

As we discuss the film's narrative and then the style, one important point should become obvious, namely, the metamorphosis of Willie Stark from the soft-spoken defender of the common man to the hard-edged, power-hungry destructor of human lives. Of course, this metamorphosis reflects Rossen's overriding theme--that of the

corruption and obsession with power, the fascist vision of the man who had the potential to do good.

One good way to analyze a film's narrative is to segment the film, which means to break the film down by sequence. Within this narrative development conflicts are raised and resolved. After outlining the segmentation, a closer look will be paid to the conflicts in the film surrounding Willie Stark and then to Rossen's cinematic style, all of which support the anti-fascist theme of his work. The method of segmentation used here derives from the form that David Bordwell uses to segment Citizen Kane in his book Film Art: An Introduction.²⁵ Briefly, then, here is the segmentation of All the King's Men:

1. The Chronicle office--Capitol City--late 1920's or early 1930's--Jack Burden assigned to cover Willie Stark, an "honest" man running for County Treasurer.
2. Kanoma City--Jack sees Willie campaigning against the state structure/Willie's home--supper with Jack and the Stark family--background of Willie.
3. Chronicle office shortly thereafter./First trip to Burden's Landing--home of Jack's family, Judge Irwin, and the Stantons. Jack's romance with Anne revealed.
4. Chronicle office, same year--after Willie's defeat for Treasurer./Kanoma City--Willie's new law career--School-house incident.

²⁵David Bordwell, Film Art: An Introduction (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979), p. 62.

5. Kanoma City--Willie's first gubernatorial campaign, a year or so later./On the campaign trail/Upton--the turning point of Willie's career./Capitol City--after his loss.
6. Ensuing years--drifting around the state with Jack./Capitol City--Willie's second gubernatorial campaign and his victory.
7. Burden's Landing--second visit--immediately after election--Willie meets Irwin and the Stantons.
8. Capitol City--a few months later--the Inauguration Night./Montage of Willie's programs as Governor.
9. Governor's office--a year or so later--the Pillsbury cover-up and Irwin's resignation. Willie's affair with Anne Stanton revealed.
10. Burden's Landing--third visit--shortly thereafter--Jack seeks and finds information on Irwin.
11. Capitol City--Jack's hotel room, a few days later/the State U. football field where Willie and Jack watch Tom practice/Tom's car accident on "Willie Stark Highway"/Governor's Mansion--confrontation between Willie and Mr. Hale./Football stadium--Tom's second accident/Hospital--Tom's operation/the Docks with Jack and Anne/the grounds for the new hospital where we see Jack, Anne, and Adam all within Willie's grasp.
12. Capitol City--Willie's re-election campaign--Newsreel "Messiah or Dictator" shown to Willie and Jack./Kanoma

City--Willie visits his family--news of Hale's death on radio prompts vigorous state-wide action against Willie.

13. Burden's Landing--fourth and last visit--Irwin's suicide--Jack's split with Willie.

14. Capitol City--Jack's hotel room/Capitol building--impeachment proceeding--Willie's vindication by legislature and assassination by Adam Stanton.

As this brief segmentation points out, Willie Stark is the primary focus of Rossen's film.

Through the segmentation of the film's narrative, we can obtain a clearer picture of Willie's rise and fall. The events of the first four segments introduce Willie and show his early attempts to defeat the entrenched political structure of the state. Segments 5-7 further Willie's rise as he realizes the deceit of the Harrison outfit against him. Specifically, Segment 5 details the dawning of a new awareness in Willie of the potential for power within him. And in Segment 8, as he is inaugurated Governor of the state, Willie appears to have the entire world at his feet. But from this point, the remaining segments show the scandal and corruption that come to plague his administration. Little by little, as Willie reaches for more power, those close aides who have stood by him fall by the wayside. He commits adultery; he pushes his friends, workers, and enemies beyond the point of endurance; and he is directly responsible for Judge Irwin's and Mr. Hale's deaths. His brutality increases along with his power; thus, impeachment proceedings are brought against him in Segment 12. In the final two segments, Willie's power becomes so massive that he even dreams of

running for President. Yet, the film also shows the breakdown of his immediate world and his efforts to recapture his family and secure his office. The final segment juxtaposes a victory over impeachment with a defeat of life. Willie's abuse of people has finally taken its toll, and so he is murdered only minutes after his vindication. Willie Stark's rise reaches peak after peak, but after reaching the ultimate peak in Segment 8, each succeeding segment depicts further abuses of his power which finally lead up to his crushing downfall.

Apart from the structural evidence that points to Willie as the film's focal point, another aspect of the narrative that supports this contention is the central conflicts of the film and their resolutions. And as we will see, these conflicts and resolutions will also support Rossen's anti-fascist views.

Willie Stark's first real conflict comes in the film's beginning as he runs for County Treasurer. Fighting the already existing and extremely powerful state structure of Governor Joe Harrison, as embodied by Tiny Duffy and Dolph Pillsbury, Willie appears to be the honest underdog. His attempts at campaigning are met by virtually undisguised dirty tactics which disrupt his speeches and harass his workers. Willie is the outsider here, occasionally throwing a jab at his heavier opponents but winding up losing a unanimous decision. Since Willie has fought fair against the corrupt state machine, he does not suffer from this loss, but instead pursues a law degree.

The corruption of Harrison's administration, though, indirectly serves to build Willie's career, by first of all working to construct an unsafe schoolhouse. Since Willie fought the contract on this

structure, when it collapses he is deemed an honest man by the citizenry of the state. Thus the Harrison boys have a problem on their hands. However, instead of dodging Willie, they decide to meet him head-on; they set him up as a fall-guy to split the hick vote in the next election in order to insure Harrison's re-election. The real confrontation begins when Willie discovers the duplicity, and after coldly eyeing Duffy, he champions his own cause for truly the first time at the Upton Barbeque. Since he already has a huge following of the "hill-people," his honest account of his own blindness to Harrison's scheme rallies even more support for him, which, although is still not enough to win that election, serves to ultimately win him the Governor's seat in a subsequent election. So Willie looks his opposition in the eye and soundly triumphs over the corrupt Harrison forces.

After Willie becomes Governor, though, all of his conflicts place him in an evil light. He is now the machine, and he is as corrupt and power-hungry as his predecessor. His first real conflict as Governor is with Judge Irwin, who refuses to ignore Willie's cover-up of Dolph Pillsbury's graft. The Judge, representing the force of good, resigns his office of Attorney General rather than be a party to Willie's fraud. As compared to the Judge, Willie is now the evil force. Even though Pillsbury is a cheap, graft-filled politician, and even though Willie considers him sub-human, he still saves Pillsbury for fear of giving himself a bad name. Thus, his love of self takes on greater importance than his duty as Governor. The Judge's resignation temporarily ends this conflict, but the long-range conflict between the two men, which

remains dormant for a time, returns later in the form of Willie's impeachment trial.

The conflicts of the film also touch Willie's family, particularly his son Tom. At home, on the practice field, and in the locker room, Willie and Tom battle, with Tom constantly trying to assert himself and escape Willie's dominance, especially when, over Willie's objections, he admits to driving while intoxicated. Willie's desire for Tom to be a football hero and to have fun with the girls is merely another selfish desire to further his own glory. After Tom's auto accident, which has left him very groggy, Tom sits out the first half of that week's game. As the team, Tom, and Willie are booed by the angry crowd, since State U. is losing, Willie storms into the locker room demanding that Tom get on the field, totally disregarding the Coach's authority, Jack's warnings over the possible extent of Tom's injury, and Tom's own protests of grogginess. Tom and Willie even come to blows, but the end result is that Tom does take the field where he is soon seriously hurt. Willie's ego--his shame at being booed--causes him to once again abuse his power and permanently paralyze his son.

Still another abuse of power by Willie is found in the aforementioned incident of Tom's auto accident. With Tom in the car was a young woman who was seriously injured in the wreck and who eventually dies of her injuries. Out of devotion to or fear of Willie, the state troopers who initially arrive on the scene fail to mention Tom's drunken condition in their report. But the girl's father, Mr. Hale, learns the truth and confronts Willie with his discovery. Willie tries to sweet-talk and bribe Hale but to no avail. When Tom comes down and

admits his guilt, Hale is given further evidence against Willie that would certainly look bad in the public eye. To resolve this conflict, Willie, though he insulates himself, causes Hale to disappear. Later, Hale's body is found beaten to death. So again, rather than owning up to a wrongdoing, Willie uses his power to conceal a wrong and finally to kill an innocent man.

Back on the political scene, as Willie comes up for re-election, he proves that he has not forgotten the dirty tactics used against him in his campaign for treasurer by resorting to similar tactics himself. He arranges "spontaneous" rallies of support and "spontaneous slug-gings" of his opposition's workers. Clearly fearing even a remote chance of losing his office and power, Willie refuses to play fair; the office and its power are now more important to him than anything else.

Although very slight, there is also a conflict between Willie and Jack Burden. After Jack has witnessed Willie's abuse of power in trying to force Judge Irwin into abandoning his anti-Stark rhetoric by exposing the knowledge of the Judge's past crimes, which has led to the Judge's suicide, Jack quits his job as Willie's press agent and hatchet man. Yet, upon Stark's vindication, it appears that Jack will return to his former job, so the conflict between the two is not too intense.

The final major conflict of the film is between Willie and Adam Stanton. Adam, the pure idealist, has repeatedly questioned Willie's concepts of good and evil. He initially refuses to work for Willie, but upon learning that his father and Judge Irwin were also tarnished

by corruption, he changes his mind and becomes the director of Willie's hospital. Still, his earlier assertion that Willie is an "evil" man, and his later warning to Willie that he'll only accept the job as long as he is not interfered with by Stark, create tension between these two men. Finally, the knowledge that Willie has also used his power to corrupt his sister Anne, causes Adam to resolve their conflict by killing Willie. Again, Willie's abuse of power has gotten out of hand, and by using as his means of terminating Willie's life the young, democratic idealist, Adam Stanton, screenwriter Rossen has further supported not only his anti-fascist views, but also the democratic system which ultimately triumphs over the forces of fascism.

This segmentation and analysis of film narrative has suggested that Willie Stark is indeed the main focus of the film. Let us now turn to the film style and examine more closely how it helps to emphasize the film's central concern: the rise and fall of Willie Stark, domestic demagogue.

The first aspect of cinematic style that we should discuss is the mise-en-scene. Mise-en-scene encompasses everything that the filmmaker puts into the actual scene, including the setting and props, lighting, costumes, and acting styles.²⁶ We will turn to the particular acting styles of the cast of All the King's Men first. As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, the film's contemporary critics greatly admired Broderick Crawford's performance. His portrayal of Willie Stark certainly conveyed the fascist spirit of Dictator Stark

²⁶Ibid., p. 75.

that Rossen was striving for. Crawford's portrayal of Willie is, at the first of the film, very subdued. His manner is that of a soft-spoken, polite, and honest country man. Yet even in this period of the film, there is evidence of something mysterious, sinister, and hidden inside of Willie. Both Crawford's sly winks at Jack and his ignoring of Lucy's questions about truth cause feelings of uneasiness within us. As we watch Willie progress in the film, losing elections but gaining popularity with the people, we see Crawford growing in the role. The real turning point, of course, is the speech at the Upton Barbeque. Crawford's voice is no longer passive or polite; instead it is booming, demanding, and inspiring as he rouses the crowd below him. From this point on, Crawford portrays Willie as a dynamic, self-assured man of action. Through Crawford's performance we actually feel Willie's power growing out of hand. He manipulates people, treats them as "things," frustrates them, and finally drives them into acting against him. Despite all of this, Crawford's voice is still reasonable enough to persuade people; his style is convincing enough to give the "hicks" hope--they still have confidence in Willie, and we feel that he is capable of doing everything he says he can.

The other strong actor in the film is Mercedes McCambridge. Her "Sadie Burke" is a mannish complement to Crawford's "Willie." McCambridge creates in her character a woman who can stand up to the men in her life. Sadie is an odd, rather mysterious woman. Particularly striking about McCambridge's interpretation of the role is her disquieting laugh. As Jack slaps her, when she reveals the affair between Willie and Anne, her almost maniacal laugh trails off as the

images dissolve. McCambridge has a certain appeal, yet her hard edges keep her from being a real romantic interest to anyone. Finally, her piercing looks melt everyone from Anne Stanton to Jack Burden.

Everyone, that is, but Willie Stark.

In contrast to Crawford and McCambridge, John Ireland as Jack and Joanne Dru as Anne are the weakest actors in the film. Ireland's attempts to convey emotion are always too bland. Unfortunately for the film, his general appearance is also awkward and stiff. He certainly does not inspire any romantic feelings, and it is a real wonder that his character ever had any romantic interest at all. His eyes are consistently drowsy, and overall, he seems much too old for his part. Furthermore, he delivers his lines with a marked lack of conviction, especially in his scenes with Joanne Dru on the docks, which are probably the film's weakest moments. In Joanne Dru, certainly an attractive woman, we also see a lack of real emotion. In key scenes of torment, the only way she acts is to lean back and turn her head from side to side: this happens during at least three crucial moments of the film. Dru never convincingly displays the emotions of a woman caught in the web of romance and political intrigue, which makes it nearly impossible for a viewer to accept her character.

Another aspect of mise-en-scene is the costuming, which functions particularly well in Willie's case. When we first see Willie, he is dressed in a clean, ordinary white suit, further evidence that at that time he is a good, honest man. As the film develops, however, Willie's clothing becomes darker and more dapper. No longer is he the

honest defender of the common man; now he is more like the corrupt "fat-boys" whom he formerly fought against. This is further emphasized by the monogrammed dressing robe he wears when he is confronted by Mr. Hale. Other costuming features are the dress of the "hicks" who support Willie, whose clothes are plain and ordinary.

The use of lighting, the third aspect of mise-en-scene, is, for the most part, fairly conventional. However, one spot in particular clearly fuels the fire regarding Willie's overt fascism. Willie's inauguration takes place at night, and in order to provide adequate lighting for the scene, Rossen decided to have a number of Willie's followers carry burning torches. The glow from these torches, along with their actual presence, ominously illuminates the atmosphere with light and with the feeling that these torch-bearing supporters would follow Willie anywhere, under any condition.

Rossen also makes use of interesting props in the film. He uses newspapers, radios, and loudspeakers to provide vital bits of plot--Willie's campaign, Tom's car accident, Willie's demands to the crowd. Furthermore, campaign posters and immense banners with Willie's face looming large constantly appear during the film, bringing his presence ever increasingly before our eyes. Other less obtrusive props are the guns brandished by Willie's henchman, Sugar Boy, and the machine guns carried by Willie's state troopers. All convey the feeling of hard-armed, fascist power. Finally, the exteriors and interiors of the houses used in the film visually add much to the theme of the story. Willie's move from poor country shack to huge Governor's mansion reflects his changing personality. Also, to a lesser extent, the

comparison of Jack Burden's bare hotel room with the luxuriousness of his mother's and the Stanton's homes in Burden's Landing, serves to distinguish his feelings of alienation and separateness.

The second phase of style that we should mention concerns how the camera frames the shots. Rossen has skillfully maneuvered camera angles so as to give Willie clear dominance in the film. When we first observe Willie, he is standing on a box slightly above the crowd that is listening to him speak. We note that he is above the rest of them, but as yet, he does not exhibit the sense of dominance that he will exude later. This comes when he makes his speech at Upton. The platform he is speaking on there is much higher than any previous one he has used. At this point, Rossen's low-angle shots of Willie are employed most dramatically. Cuts of low-angle shots of Willie are interspersed with low-angle shots of the crowd listening to him. Clearly their rapt attention to him and his fiery speech to them is emphasized by camera angle. He has them in his grip at last.

Another more powerful use of low-angle shooting is the scene of Willie's inauguration. Masterfully, Rossen sets the scene with Willie perched high above the crowd on a second-story balcony, flanked by his family. Behind Willie is the mammoth banner of his face. Placed on the ground level shooting up, the camera forces us to look up at Willie--the Boss. Then, Rossen cuts to a high-angle shot and the camera pans left-to-right across the multitude of people who have turned out for Willie's inauguration.

The spectre of Willie's control over the people is further evidenced by camera angle in one of the final shots of the film.

Again, tremendous crowds have arrived at the capital to await the verdict of Willie's impeachment trial. Jack is on the scene, too, and in perhaps the single finest shot of the film, we see a low-angle shot of Jack in the foreground and the capitol building in the background. On the second floor of the building is a window of the legislative assembly room. As the loudspeaker stirs the crowd to chants of "Willie, Willie," Stark's silhouette suddenly appears at the window. The single shot of Jack, the building, the window, and Willie's image not only brings shouts of triumph from the audience but also brings a rush of emotion and admiration from any true lover of cinematic art. Again, Willie's dominance, his almost fascist control over the people, is seen through the use of low-angle camera shots.

Rossen also uses other skillful shots to force our gaze toward Willie. During the entire scene where Willie is abusing Dolph Pillsbury for his attempted graft, Willie remains sitting with his feet propped on the desk. In shots where Willie's face is right of the frame edge, his feet on the desk remain in view; thus, even his feet loom as threatening figures. Then, too the high-angle shot from the second floor landing of Willie collapsing, drunkenly, on the stairs of his mansion, illustrates not only the rise of his power, but also his vulnerability, because this scene has come immediately after the incident with Hale. Additionally, Rossen uses close-ups of Willie's face, not in abundance, but in well-timed, key spots to emphasize Willie's sinisteress. Three close-ups of his face--when he reveals the secret he has learned of "how to win"; when he ignores, then hastily assents to, Lucy's queries that "all we want is to get the

truth to the people, right, Willie?"; and lastly, when he is confirmed an "honest man" by the father of one of the dead schoolchildren--all serve to focus our attention on Willie while arousing our suspicions of him at the same time. Rossen uses still other subtle shots to focus in on the extent of Willie's power. In the impeachment decision scene, Rossen's camera captures an engraving of one of Willie's favorite slogans: "The People's Will is the Law of the State." This shot is highly ironic as it follows the voice of the loudspeaker which demands that the crowd surrounding the capital stay put until the verdict has been reached. Whose "will," we ask? One final shot also shows Willie's awakening power. When Jack brings him to the stage of the Upton Barbeque, Willie is frozen in a perfect two-shot with Tiny Duffy. Willie glares at Duffy, who has instigated Willie's frame-up. At this point, we realize who the dominant character of the piece truly is, because Tiny uncomfortably backs away.

Just as these camera shots reinforce Willie's dominance, other scenes and shots de-emphasize Jack Burden. When they are together, Willie is most always in the center of the screen, while Jack is off to one side. In confrontations between Willie and Judge Irwin, between Willie and Pillsbury, Hale, and Anne Stanton, Jack is always in the background or off to the side, looking like a useless piece of baggage. Willie clearly dominates the screen when he is present; the camera forces us to concentrate on him, and it is only in repeated viewings of the film that we really notice where Jack is. While the camera focuses on Willie most of the time, and on Jack when Willie is not in the picture, Rossen hardly ever uses subjective shots to establish

point of view. His camera acts as more of an outside force, whether it is the crowd gazing up at Willie or simply an unnamed, unmentioned observer. Thus, the first person point of view in the novel is almost completely missing in the film.

The next two cinematic devices, editing and sound, also serve to magnify Willie's dominance in the film. Most of the editing devices in the film are fairly conventional, but Rossen does make skillful use of montage, as is seen in the frequency of shots of flashing newspaper articles and in the montage of shots which allow these newspapers, and the characters working on and studying them, to give us a sense of passing time. Generally, all of these shots involve aspects of Willie's career--his election and re-election campaigns and his son's car accident. Moreover, the newsreel that is shown to Willie and Jack capsulizes his career in a series of rapid cuts, some of which we have already seen in the movie. And the montage of shots in the opening credits also conveys his dynamic facial qualities. Thus, the use of montage, on nine different occasions, serves not only to show the extent of Willie's dominance, but also the extent of time that his dominance covers. Another interesting editing rhythm is found in the Upton Barbeque scene. The rapid cutting from Willie speaking to the crowd listening underscores Willie's increased effectiveness as a politician able to incite a crowd and his recognition of himself as a dynamic force to be reckoned with in state politics.

The final stylistic device used by Rossen to emphasize Willie's story is sound, which Rossen skillfully employs to highlight Willie's fascist temper. In his beginning campaign rallies, the audience

watching him is deadly silent; however, beginning with the Upton Barbeque scene, each time that Willie speaks, his audience erupts in cheers. The inauguration and impeachment vindication scenes particularly emphasize the frenzy of the crowd and their blind devotion to Willie as they continuously scream deliriously for him. The film's musical score further contributes to its anti-fascist theme. When Willie is perceived as the honest man, the music underscores his honesty. For example, when Tom returns home beaten up after distributing his father's hand-outs, and also, when someone hurls a rock through Willie's window to further intimidate him, the music demands attention by striking a threatening note; it implies that evil forces are working against Willie. Yet, after Willie has become the power-hungry Governor of the state, the film's score works against him. In the scene of Tom's football accident, on the moment of impact the music resounds in chords of tragedy, emphasizing not only the sorrow of the accident itself, but also the sorrow of a man so obsessed with his own power that he would force his already injured son into playing a football game solely to stave off the crowd's booing. Moreover, Rossen uses sound effects to exemplify Willie's fascism by means of the loudspeakers around the capital which blare warnings to Willie's followers to stay put until Willie is cleared of impeachment. The threatening sound of the voice emanating from the loudspeaker markedly underscores Willie's control over the people of the state. Also, the narrator of the newsreel, who ends the reel by proclaiming Willie as either "Messiah or Dictator," speaks the words that form the conflicting feelings which the people in the film have for Willie. While the poor

people of the state see him as a "Messiah" because of his programs to ease their plight, other people, like Adam Stanton and Judge Irwin, see him as "Dictator" because of his cold abuse of power. Finally, the rasping quality of Willie's voice as he "ages" in the film, is also a contributing factor which noticeably affects our perception of him as a threatening force.

Overall, this chapter has been stressing that Rossen used a vast conglomeration of narrative, structural, and stylistic devices to manipulate his audience into perceiving Willie Stark as a purely evil, fascist dictator. Stark's rise to power, which included his destruction of the already existing state political machine, brought cries of joy and triumph from virtually every corner of the state. A new champion of the people had arisen out of the poor country of the state, just as other dictators have similarly risen from obscurity to power. But also like other dictators, Stark, once he gained power, forgot the purpose of his triumph over the corrupt forces in the state; he forgot that his duty was to improve the quality of life in the state. Instead, all Willie Stark ever cared about was improving the fame and glory of Willie Stark. True, he built schools, hospitals, and roads, but all of them were named after himself, as if to keep his power constantly before every watchful eye in the state. The index of his power was indeed great; however, like the other fascists with whom Rossen is comparing him, Stark's power was not absolute. Eventually, the magnitude of his power had to be challenged, as it always is, by another force, in Rossen's eyes, the force of democracy and freedom. Thus, Adam Stanton sacrificed himself to end Stark's reign of terror,

just as many other men sacrificed their lives for the sake of democracy and freedom in ridding the world of that other fascist dictator in the Second World War.

Throughout this chapter, we have directly and indirectly noted that in the film, as opposed to the novel, Willie Stark rather than Jack Burden is the focal point. We've spent time discussing Willie, but we haven't devoted much time to Jack. If he is the narrator, why isn't this his story, as it is in the novel? In 1948, as he was working on the film, Rossen commented that "'The adaptation, like the novel, is a study of corruption of power.'" In writing the scenario, he compressed the novel, he said, but he made no change except to simplify Stark's character"27 If this is true, then what happened to Jack and his early life at Burden's Landing; his early relationship with Anne; his historical research of Cass Mastern; his "father," Ellis Burden, and the affair between his mother and Judge Irwin, which in the novel actually produced him? As Casty says, "despite [the film's] plaudits, there was little recognition [to the novel] of much beyond the surface realism and politics, little attention paid to the depiction of the interaction between the personal and social levels of life."<28 Casty further stated that when Rossen was faced with the decision of what to cut out of the film for time considerations, it was the "personal relationships that got the axe."<29

27Brady, p. 3.

28Casty, p. 21.

29Ibid.

Thus, with the cutting of these "personal relationships" went any real sense of the development of Jack's character. In the film, we know that Jack and Anne have been lovers in the past, but we don't know why they love each other or how long they have loved each other, as we do in the novel. The film does show us the scene where Anne tells Jack that she wants him to "do something" with his life, and Jack begs her to wait for him, which she agrees to do. What, we ask, has she been doing all this time but waiting? We realize that Anne's drift from Jack to Willie was because Willie was a man of action; nevertheless, we have to wonder what has kept Anne and Jack apart because when we first see them they are obviously in love. We are never told, though.

We also wonder, and are never told, about Jack's real father. McEvoy, as is pointed out, is Jack's stepfather. Is Jack's real father dead, living in another town or state, or is he anonymously living somewhere in Burden's Landing? What is Jack's real heritage? Why has he been so aimless in the past?

Finally, we have to wonder why Jack endures Willie for so long. He stays through Willie's abuse of Lucy, Tom, Pillsbury, and Sadie; his murder of Hale; and even further, through Willie's attempts to crucify Jack's life-long friend, Judge Irwin. Jack even endures Willie's affair with Anne Stanton, the woman Jack supposedly loves. At this point, we must wonder if it isn't Willie whom Jack really loves. How many people would stand by and see friends and lovers, ideals and institutions, defiled, all for the sake of one man--Willie Stark? After the Judge's suicide, Jack refuses to return to town with

Willie, and further, to return to work for him. Yet, Rossen never shows us the confrontation between them that must have taken place. And after Willie is cleared of impeachment, Jack will seemingly return to work for him. Does Jack honestly believe that Willie really wants to do good, as he says to Adam? Judge Irwin has repeatedly tried to persuade Jack to leave Willie, particularly after Willie's attempt to cover up Pillsbury's graft. Is Jack loyal or stupid? Again, we simply don't know the answer because we don't know Jack--his past or present. He knows all of Willie's transgressions, and surely he realizes Willie's insatiable thirst for power. But if, during the course of the film, Jack has indeed been blind to Willie's true nature, then hopefully Willie's final words reached his previously deaf ears: "Could've been the whole world, Willie Stark. Why did he do it to me? Why?" We know why "he" did it, but we aren't sure that Jack does, or ever will.

Thus, as the quotation that began this chapter asserts, without Jack Burden, "Willie Stark is not the same man." Indeed, Willie in the film, is precisely the "Fascist" as Rossen hoped to portray him. And he gets his just desert at the hands of the democratic idealist, just as Hitler did from the anti-fascist Allies. But without a clear perception of who Jack Burden is and how he really relates to Willie, we lose Willie to the "environment [which] turns his vitality and idealism into selfish and destructive greed for the material fruits of power itself."³⁰ And in the end, we wonder just what lesson Rossen has

³⁰Ibid., p. 23.

been trying to teach us. Granted, we must learn to recognize potential abuses of power, but shouldn't we learn more than this? What is the right way to act? Who in the film should we emulate? The answers to these questions and more are found in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 4

SELF-KNOWLEDGE: THE DECIDING FACTOR

In its comparison of the novel and the film of All the King's Men, this study has argued that differences exist not only in the nature of the two media but also in the two works themselves which make them separate and distinct. Each artist wished to fill his work with a specific meaning, and each man, Rossen and Warren, succeeded in doing so. Given the limitations imposed on film, Rossen was able to paint a portrait of a purely evil American dictator. Given the wide breadth of the novel, Warren was able to go beyond politics and finely detail the lives that touched and outlasted his misguided politician. The initial chapters of this study further discussed the intricacies of the works, how they were structured, and which character each work focused on. Subsequently, this final chapter will concentrate on evaluating the meaning of each work and to what degree each artist was successful in conveying that meaning.

It seems only fair to reiterate the earlier point that to evaluate a work, especially an adaptation, one must see that work as a complete and distinct unit. To judge a film adaptation simply by comparing it to its original source, it seems, is like demanding that the film's author must be faithful to the source. This is hardly fair. Any person desiring to take a piece of written literature and out of it make an entirely faithful film, can do so with the blessings, but not

necessarily the critical acceptance, of all. And just as this is true, so can another person choose a piece of written literature and freely adapt that work to the medium of film, incorporating and dispensing with as much of the primary source as he or she sees fit. Obviously, Robert Rossen chose the latter course. As Chapter 3 suggested, he created a film that was strikingly similar to and different from Warren's novel, as was his prerogative. It would be interesting and perhaps extremely rewarding if we could see the footage of the film that he was forced to cut for his final print. Who knows whether our perception of Jack's relationship with Anne or with his parents would be altered if we had been able to see this cut footage? Perhaps many of the questions that were raised in Chapter 3 would have been answered if Rossen, and those backing his project, had not been so constrained by considerations of audience and money. These speculations, however, are ultimately meaningless because, in the end, all we really have to go by is the finished film that we view on the screen. With that in mind, let us examine what each man, Rossen and Warren, attempted to "say" in his work.

As we learned in Chapter 3, Rossen's dominant themes in his films were, first, to present how a person who had the ability to change the system with the immense power at his disposal was corrupted by the very power he had worked so hard to gain and use, and, second, to speak out against the threat of authoritarian Fascism in the world. In his film of All the King's Men, Rossen certainly succeeds in embodying these themes in his dictator, Willie Stark. With a great degree of subtle plot intricacies and with a skillful

manipulation of camera and cinematic style, Rossen causes us initially to sympathize with Willie, who supposedly desires the welfare of the common people. Perhaps we even see some of ourselves in the early Willie, who rose from the depths of poverty to the highest seat in the state on platforms of decency and concern for the poor and average people of the state. Later in the film, with Willie's conversion to the seamier side of dirty politics, perhaps we also see the potential in ourselves to abuse whatever power we might have at our disposal. As Willie's abuses of the office he holds and of the people living with and serving him become unmanageable, even for him, he is eliminated by Adam Stanton, the democratic idealist. Rossen's moral lesson, then, is very clear: be wary of those people who hold great power, for along with this power's potential for achieving good, comes also its potential for achieving evil. It is hard to believe that any sensitive viewer could miss this point.

Equally difficult to imagine is any viewer of the film leaving the theatre feeling that Willie Stark was other than purely evil. Willie has not learned anything of the nature of humanity, politics, or the world by the film's end except how to manipulate the masses into, first, believing in his honesty and integrity, and, second, into believing that, above all else, his programs and political dealings were in their best interest. As he puts it after his first try at the governor's seat, he has learned "how to win," and for most of the film, this knowledge also includes how to maintain the power that he has gained. The corrupt power that he holds may have caused him a pang of remorse over Tom's permanent paralysis, but that feeling quickly faded

as he fought to stave off impeachment. With his victory, a resurgence in his wave of brutality and terror could be expected, and perhaps he would have eventually wound up in the White House as he had earlier predicted. Even after he was shot by Adam and lay dying on the cold floor of the capitol, his last words to Jack reflected his sincere inner aspirations: "Could've been the whole world, Willie Stark. Why did he do it to me? Why?" He wanted the whole world, as did Hitler and Mussolini, but like them, all he got was death and infamy.

But perhaps "infamy" is not an accurate choice of words. At the film's end, there are countless hoards of people who still believe in Willie. His promises, which he kept to an extent, won over many people, people who never saw his dark side, just as some people are never able to see the darker side of other power-seekers who threaten to re-make society according to their own plan. Still, we know that in filmmaker Rossen's eyes, at least, Willie Stark became a purely evil man--a fascist dictator. And if this is the feeling that Rossen wished to convey, then who, we ask, does he wish us to emulate in the film? Who, in effect, is his spokesman?

If we choose to identify with Jack Burden, the "teller of the tale," then we immediately encounter an inconsistency with Rossen's anti-fascist theme, for Jack, as we have seen, sticks by Willie through thick and thin, with a decided advantage to the thick. Through Willie's graft, adultery, intimidation, and denial of individual human worth, Jack consistently turns his head, refusing to acknowledge any wrong committed by Willie. He acknowledges Willie's "shady deals" and his "spontaneous sluggings," but he also knows that he, Adam, and even

Anne Stanton are in Willie's powerful grip. Only Judge Irwin's suicide provokes his break with Willie; however, as we noted in the previous chapter, this break appears to be short-lived at best. Upon Willie's vindication, Jack returns to the Boss's open arms, without, it seems, a great deal of hesitancy. In fact, the film indicates that Jack will back down from his decision to leave Willie after a bit of Willie's friendly persuasion. Indeed, all appearances are that Jack is back to stay. So should we consider Willie an "all-right guy" since Jack has turned the other cheek and once again forgiven him his trespasses? Should we want to embrace Jack for letting bygones be bygones and forsaking all else out of loyalty to his Boss? Is Jack Rossen's mouth-piece? Clearly the answer to all these questions is a resounding "NO!"

Viewers might choose to identify with at least three other characters in the film: the first is Judge Irwin. True, he has a somewhat shady past, as Jack and Willie discover, but doesn't he still win our hearts by admitting that he was wrong about Willie and resigning as Attorney General rather than giving at least silent approval to Willie's cover-up of the Pillsbury affair? Don't we also applaud his stance against Willie after we suspect that Willie had Mr. Hale killed? Yes, we might feel all of these things, yet is our and Rossen's voice truly found in a man who, when threatened by the public exposure of his dark past, commits suicide because he, in Willie's words, wants everyone to think that he's "a certain kind of man?" Again, we must reply, "No!"

So that leads to our third choice--a man with a small but significant role in the film--Mr. Hale. Hale, the man who stood in the crowd at the Upton Barbeque watching the birth of the real, the powerful Willie Stark, and who later saw his daughter killed by the drunken, reckless driving of Willie's son Tom, delivers perhaps the most stinging denunciation of Willie in the entire film. After Willie has tried to bribe him into keeping quiet about Tom's drunkenness, Hale says:

You're pretty good at talking. I remember when you first started talking. A place called Upton. You did a lot of talking then and the things you said made sense, to me and a lot of other people. I believed in you. . . . I followed you . . . and I fought for you. Well, the words are still good. But you're not. I don't believe you ever were.

And Hale may be exactly right. Willie may never have been any good; his words and promises may have been the only good about him, and this explains why so many people believed in him in the end. But, as Hale discovers, to meet and know Willie Stark, the man, is to learn what evil truly is. Thus, we can cheer for Hale, as the true common man. However, Hale's moral victory at this meeting is short-lived. The common man, arising out of the rabble and debris of his world, has neither the power to reach many ears, nor the power to fend off threatening blows. Consequently, Hale disappears, and is later found beaten to death. Is this man Rossen's spokesman? If so, must we, then, choose heroes who after a brief blaze of glory are squelched by the corrupt evil forces of the world? Can we not choose a champion who can endure the evil and conquer it?

Lastly, what of Adam Stanton? He argues with Willie about the nature of good and evil; he is the first character in the film to apply the word "evil" to Willie; he has compromised his own standards, after having his "view of the world" changed through the knowledge that his father and Judge Irwin were not the men he thought them to be, by agreeing to be director of Willie's new hospital; he has suffered the further indignity of having his sister become Stark's mistress. All of these factors combine to blow a fuse within Adam, a fuse that finds its outlet in several pistol shots to Willie's chest. We empathize with Adam; a man can stand only so much injustice in one lifetime. Yet is violence our only hope? Must we always resort to killing to rectify society's problems? The answer is obviously no because as they say, and as Adam finds out from Sugar Boy's gun, "violence begets violence." If Adam is Rossen's answer to solving the problems created by men like Willie Stark, then we must feel that his solution is really no better than the problem itself.

In a final analysis, despite the fact that Rossen has taught us about the evils of fascism and of the potential in men for abusing power, he has not instructed us of the proper course of action to combat these evils. Furthermore, by virtue of the fact that there is no character in the film with whom we can truly identify, we gain no self-knowledge from his work. Rossen's film simply fails to provide us with any information to guide us in our present and future lives. Hopefully, from viewing his film and reading our history books, we will recognize power-mad dictators who seek to take over the world to further their own personal dreams and ambitions. But Rossen's film

never tells us what good to recognize within ourselves or what knowledge will enable us to carry on in life. Perhaps, though, he never meant to convey such information; such a task was never a prerequisite for making his film. However, his failure to provide us with any clear self-knowledge--what is the voice of good, who in the film should we emulate, who, in essence, in the film is Rossen's spokesman?--causes his work to pale in comparison to Warren's, who was able to provide us with this self-knowledge.

Although Warren also presented the story of a man corrupted and defeated by his abuse of power, he went a step beyond and further presented the story of another man's search for and discovery of himself. Jack Burden, Warren's narrator and focal point, drifts aimlessly for much of his life. For a time he, like his counterpart in the film, was totally taken in by Willie Stark's words and promises. However, this Jack Burden is not blind to the lessons that he should be learning. As he gets deeper into his research on the "Case of the Upright Judge," he becomes increasingly intrigued with this knowledge, and by blending together the dark past of Judge Irwin with the tragic story of Cass Mastern plus adding the ingredients of his own broken heritage, he concocts the brew of self-knowledge--that he can't flee to the West or bury himself in deep sleep when problems occur. Man, as Jack learns, if he is to attain self-knowledge, must accept responsibility for his actions, and he must further acknowledge his own past by recognizing and accepting the sins and virtues of his ancestors. With this knowledge, he can exist in the present and confidently face the future, for he then will truly know himself.

In the novel, part of Jack's learning inevitably comes from his dealings with Willie Stark. Jack's association with Willie is less reprehensible in the novel because Willie himself is not the purely evil character that Robert Rossen's film portrayed him as. James F. Light states that "the Boss is no simple, purely black villain."¹ He goes on to say that if Willie

. . . is a demagogue, he can claim with some justification, that only a demagogue can be heard and be elected. If he is a destroyer . . . he is in part at least, a destroyer of a bad system: that of the exploitation of the state by gentlemen, with good manners and polite words, for the exclusive benefit of gentlemen. If he resorts to blackmail and to bribery, he at least can claim that such tactics are only realistic, men being what they are, and that the tactics are used for a good cause: the benefit medically, educationally, and socially of the many.²

After Jack has discovered that evil exists in people he thought were totally good--Judge Irwin and Governor Stanton--why then, he ponders, shouldn't good exist in evil? The answer is that it can, because Warren, too, as manifest through his character, Jack Burden, realizes that "we live in a complex world where simple black and white characters do not exist."³ Everyone in the novel acts in both a good and an evil manner, even Willie Stark. This assertion is further evidenced by Willie's dying words. Already softened and filled with remorse over the role he played in Tom's paralysis, Willie has abolished Gummy Larsen and Tiny Duffy's graft-filled hospital

¹James F. Light, The Merrill Studies in All the King's Men (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1971), p. 75.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 84.

corruption scheme. As he stated on kicking Duffy out of his office, "You got to start somewhere" (Warren, p. 387). Furthermore, he has ended his extramarital affairs and returned to his wife. And after taking a belly-full of lead from Adam Stanton's gun, the Boss--Willie Stark--while lying on his deathbed, utters his final words to Jack Burden:

He was all right. The Doc. . . . It might have been all different Jack. You got to believe that. . . . If it hadn't happened, it might--have been different--even yet (Warren, p. 400).

And Jack Burden, Anne Stanton, the others in the novel who knew Willie, and we, too, believe that it very well could have been different. Willie Stark could have been, might have become, a great man. Never was he hopelessly evil.

But the novel does not end with Willie's death; rather, it continues for a few pages more, discussing the extent of Jack's new-found self-awareness: his ability to accept his past, to show love for his mother by sparing her the news of Judge Irwin's shady deals, to love and accept the "Scholarly Attorney," Ellis Burden, and finally to go with his wife, Anne Stanton, into "the awful responsibility of Time" (Warren, p. 438). Although during the course of the novel Jack has fought hard against learning the truth, his acceptance of the truth, in the end, brings him inner peace, because as Warren himself says:

the right to exist as a man assumes the Right to Knowledge. It assumes the right because only by knowledge does man achieve his identity. I do not mean that the mere implements of knowledge--books, libraries, laboratories, seminars--distinguish man from the brute. No, knowledge gives him his identity because it gives him the image

of himself. And the image of himself necessarily has a foreground and a background, for man is in the world not as a billiard ball placed on a table, not even as a ship on the ocean with location determinable by latitude and longitude. He is, rather, in the world with continual and intimate interpenetration, an inevitable osmosis of being, which in the end does not deny, but affirms his identity. It affirms it, for out of a progressive understanding of this interpenetration, this texture of relations, man creates new perspectives, discovers new values--that is, a new self--and so the identity is a continually emerging, an unfolding, a self-affirming, and we hope, a self-corrective creation . . . the ultimate unity of knowledge is in the image of himself that man creates through knowledge, the image of his destiny, the mask he stares at.⁴

Jack Burden has to look at himself, stare himself straight in the eye, to understand from which direction his life has come and in which direction it should go. He could not have discovered the truth about himself and his heritage if he had refused to seek and understand the knowledge of the complex web of Judge Irwin's fraud, Willie Stark's corruption, and Cass Mastern's underlying spider-web theory of human existence. However, he was destined to seek this knowledge because as he stated early in the novel, "The end of man is to know" (Warren, p. 9). But unfortunately his research and knowledge have taken their toll, through death, on many of Jack's most beloved friends. The ability to truly know oneself is never earned cheaply, and this point is not lost on Jack, Warren, or us.

In reviewing the novel and the film of All the King's Men, we can point to specific aspects which make each work outstanding in its

⁴Robert Penn Warren, "Knowledge and the Image of Man," in Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men: A Critical Handbook, ed. Maurice Beebe and Leslie A. Field (California: Wadsworth Pub., 1969), pp. 58-59.

own way. But even though we recognize the separateness of each work, of its different form and medium, we nevertheless come to prefer one over the other. And it is Warren's novel, as it tells the story of Jack Burden's odyssey into the past to discover the pieces of his life which allow him to come to terms with the present and live in the future, which ultimately offers us the greater insight. We can easily identify with the novel's Jack Burden, because like him, we want to know more in our lives than merely how to recognize and defeat potential dictators. We want, in addition, to know how to make sense out of our own lives, to recognize the good and evil in ourselves as well as in everyone else, and to understand our roles in society. We want, in short, the self-knowledge which will allow us to go "out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time."

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VITA

Terry Barr was born in Birmingham, Alabama on July 15, 1956. He attended elementary schools in Bessemer, Alabama and was graduated from Jess Lanier High School in May 1974. The following September he entered The University of Montevallo, in Montevallo, Alabama. In February of 1977, he took time off from school and moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked in the U.S. House of Representatives Post Office. Returning to Montevallo in the following year, he continued his studies and in May 1979, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Political Science. In the fall of 1979 he accepted a teaching assistantship at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and began study toward a Master's degree. This degree was awarded in June 1981.

The author is a member of Omicron Delta Kappa and Phi Alpha Theta. His future plans are to pursue a teaching career. Currently he resides in Knoxville, Tennessee.